

*Gendered Informality:
Life, Work and the Politics of Livelihood in
Kolkata's Street Economy*

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submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur
University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Dr. TRINA
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And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree
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List of Abbreviation

AF	: Arm Force.
AFSPA	: Armed Forces Special Powers Act.
AITUC	: All India Trade Union Congress.
CPI	: Communist Party of India.
CPM	: Communist Party of India (Marxist).
CITU	: Centre of Indian Trade Union.
C.M.C	: Calcutta Municipal Corporation.
CMDA	: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority.
CHF	: Calcutta Men's Hawkers' Federation.
CSSSC	: Centre for studies in social science in Calcutta.
EIR	: East India Railway.
FRRO	: Foreigner's Regional Registration Office.
FAO	: Food and Agriculture Organisation.
HSC	: Hawker Sangram Committee.
ILO	: International Labour organisation.
ISI	: Indian Statistical Institute.
KIT	: Kolkata Improvement Trust.
PBHS	: Paschim Banga Hawker Samity.
NASVI	: National Alliance of Street Vendors in India.
NFIWMS	: National Federation of Indian Women of Manipur State.
NGO	: Non Government Organization.
NHF	: National Federation of Hawker.
RS	: Rupees (Indian Currency).

SRT	: Social Reproduction Theory.
TS	: The Statesman.
TT	: The Telegraph.
TOI	: Times of India.
VVIP	: Very Very Important Person.
WBSA	: West Bengal State Archive.
WHO	: World Health Organization.

Glossary

Amar Adhikar	My right.
Bhadralok	Well Educated People, Gentleman.
Bhara	Bhara, is refer to a price paid for certain service or space.
Bihari	A native or inhabitant of Bihar.
Bikalpa- Babostha	Different Service.
Babu	Gentleman.
Byabsar Jayga	Place of Business.
Cantonese	A native of Canton.
Chacha	Uncle.
Chamars	Chamar is a Dalit community classified as a Scheduled Caste.
Charas	Charas is a Cannabis concentrate made from the resin.
Chinepara	Chinese colony in Calcutta.
Chinepara gaan	Chinese in Kolkata have made a music video about the Chinese community called.
Chinese curry	'Bird's nest' and 'flesh with shark's fin'; Chinese-Indian dishes such as.
Chini	Sugar.
Chini badam	one kind of nut.
Chaitra sale	Shop owners try to clear their stock during the sale by giving high rebates.
Chotolok	Subltern People.
Dharna	Strike.
Dushad	The Dusadh has been considered to be an untouchable community and has historically been the keepers of pigs. "The folk hero of the Dusadhs is Chuhamal.
Gujarati	A native or inhabitant of Gujarati.

Guerrilla	A member of a small independent group taking part in irregular fighting, typically against larger regular forces.
Gully	Lane.
Hakkas	A member of a people of south-eastern China, especially Canton, Taiwan, Hong Kong, who migrated from the north during the 12 th Century.
Halwa puri	Halwa Puri is one unique comfort Indian food.
Halwa	A sweet Indian dish.
Imandari	Honesty.
Jabab	Answer.
Jhupri	Slum.
Jhuris	Busket.
Mahajan	Banker.
Marwaris	A Community Migrated from Rajasthan.
Meta history	Enquiry into the Principles Governing Historical events; the study of the philosophy of History, or of Historiography; specifically the study of the structure of Historical Narrative.
Menopause	Natural decline in reproductive hormones when women reach their 40s or 50s.
Motiyas	Porter who do the work of loading and unloading in the city markets.
Momo	A Steamed dumpling filled with meat or Vegetables.
Namasudra	A Hindu community.
Neta	Leader.
Ningon Chakoba	Celebrated in the month of November when married women are invited to their parental home for a grand feast and gifts are presented which was to come after three days.
Paneer	A kind of cottage cheese.
Peddler	who Paddles like Rikshaw.
Peshwaris	A community related from Peshawar.

Sarkari	Government.
Sepoys	Soilders.
Sweet tooth	A great liking for sweet-tasting foods.
Thana	Police Station.
Thali	A set Meal at a Restaurant.
Uchhed	Eviction.
Udvastu	Refugee.
Upadhayaksh	Vice President.
Vaishnavism	A member of a sect devoted to the cult of Vishnu.
Yams	The edible starchy tuber of a climbing plant that is widely grown in tropical and subtropical countries.
Zila Parishad	District Council.

Introduction

This is a dissertation on the institutionalisation of street hawking and the gendered and ethnic/racial production of space in the post-colonial urban context. It intends to offer a critique of trade unionism among the street hawkers by showing the terms through which inclusions and exclusions in the trade union space take place. As a means to the above end, the dissertation traces how the hawkers, and especially the woman hawkers, have struggled in a changing world, how they have experienced and negotiated that change, and how the histories of the market and the state are closely connected to the saga of their everyday lives. While scholarship in the fields of the informal economy, urban studies and labour studies have focussed extensively on street hawking and the politics of space-making, the gendered relationship involved in hawking and livelihood practices on the streets has not received much academic attention. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of selective amnesia, which is an important component of any process of institutionalisation, is quite rare. This dissertation attempts to study street hawking from the vantage point of gender and to offer a critique of trade unionism that has thrived in the sector of hawking during the last four decades.

Objectives and Scope

For this purpose, I have worked on two quite different urban contexts – in Kolkata¹ and in Imphal—to study how gender relations transform according to diverse political, social, and patriarchal cultures, and also how they shape the politics of street hawking. I have tried to integrate into a comprehensive perspective the wide variability in urban economies, governance structures, and histories of street hawking visible across different Indian cities. While the specificities of each urban context call for singular modes of analysis, certain general conclusions can be drawn on the basis of a careful selection of the context. And this is precisely where the question of choosing the urban context comes in. The choice of these two specific contexts for the present study is not an arbitrary one. The political contexts of these two cities and their relationships with the Indian nation and the statecraft have evolved very differently. This diversity offers us a wide spectrum to situate the politics of trade unionism and its relationships with the Indian nation-state. Due to its close administrative and cultural connections with the colonial state and the presence of an influential, western-educated middle-class in the city, Kolkata has always enjoyed the status of a leading metropolis in the Indian nation-state. Being the capital of Manipur, Imphal, on the other hand, has always had a fraught relationship with the Indian state. A long history of separatist militant movements seeking the creation of an independent state within the borders of Manipur, and the Indian state's violent counter-insurgency measures has shaped the image of Imphal City as a place of perpetual disturbance. Thus, like the other North-East capitals, Imphal had been pushed to the margins of the Indian nation-state and hardly features in the contemporary official discourse on urban development. Moreover, while in

¹Calcutta and Kolkata refer to the same city. As Calcutta was renamed Kolkata in 2001, I have I have used the latter to refer to events that took place after the beginning of this millennium.

Kolkata, street hawking has historically evolved as a male-dominated livelihood activity, women dominate the profession, practices and space of hawking in Imphal. This contrast between the two urban contexts offers an integrated perspective from which a study of gender and street hawking, and the complex relationship between the two, can be launched.

Although the focus of the present dissertation is on a particular group, namely woman hawkers, which is embedded in the cultural economy of the two cities, the scope of the discussion is not restricted to the urban politics of Kolkata and Imphal. As I have tried to connect the specific political articulations of a post-colonial locale with the everyday life histories of hawkers, the dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the critical literature on post-colonial urban histories and gender studies.

Through the four chapters, I have tried to present an account of the processes of institutionalisation among the street hawkers who constitute a crucial segment of the 'informal economy'. Institutionalisation in the present context is a process constituted by a dialectical exchange between the formalising impulses of governmental politics and the mobilisational impulses of organisational politics. I have attempted to examine this process in three different sites that are marked by it –the city space, trade unions, and the archive. All three sites have been examined from the vantage point of gender to reveal and critically examine the politics of exclusion in the mobilisation, organisation and collective memory of the hawkers' movement. The findings of my study show that women's role in the hawkers' activism has been generally denied and at times iconised in the discourse of trade unions. While silence is the prevalent norm when it comes to the radical activism of women in the hawkers' movement, iconisation of selective

instances acts as a component of the larger strategy of erasure of the women's role from the collective memory of the hawkers' movement.

Thus, the dissertation attempts to frame a feminist critique of the materiality and the discourses of street hawking in Kolkata. The study highlights three major themes in attempting this feminist critique. *Firstly*, it unravels the gendered nature of the space of work such as the street, the footpath and the railway platform. The two key issues on which I have focussed in this context are the constitution of these spaces in 'plans' of urban development, and the everyday engagement of different constituencies, especially women who participate in hawking, with such spaces in the context of their lived reality. In what follows, I study the ways in which the politics of a certain livelihood practice (i.e. street hawking) and the politics of public space constitute each other in the city.

A feminist critique of trade unionism has required me to understand the concrete manifestations of various social, economic, and cultural processes that shape the life and labour of the population groups that the trade union regards as its constituency. In order to accomplish this task, I have selected certain my analysis two specific areas of Kolkata where a concentration of the marginalised among the hawkers can be noticed –Sealdah, where there is a concentration of woman hawkers vending on the carriageway, who remain outside the fold of the unions; and Territy Bazaar, where a group of racially marginalised Chinese food hawkers operate, who are also excluded from the discourse and practice of trade unionism. Both these groups have had troubled relationships with the trade unions dominated by the predominantly male Bengali *bhadralok* class. In so doing, I also tell the story of the emergence of a dominant trade union in the sector of hawking in Kolkata –and subsequently in India –out of the movement against 'Operation Sunshine' (1996-97). In the course of my field study along this line, I have been

able to recover evidence that reveals an important role played by women in the formation of the said union. Further, the evidence I came across gestures towards an alternative vision of unionism in which marginal voices can be recognised and accommodated at the centre of a new horizon of solidarity. I then move on to offer a contrasting case from Manipur's Imphal, where women themselves have been running a union for decades.

The dissertation studies the kinds of alliances that were forged in the process of institutionalisation over the last few decades in Kolkata and Imphal. The discussion in this direction indicates the existence of fractures within these alliances. A research on negotiated claim-makings to the streets and urban infrastructures may enable us to understand the changing registers of rights and the politics of space production in the current global context of revanchist² urban development.³

The scholarship in this field is rich and diverse. As is well-known, Lefebvre's call for 'right to the city' has acquired a new public life in the cities of Latin America, Asia and Africa in the last couple of decades.⁴ Popular politics in these cities have demanded and sustained social rights in the face of neoliberal reforms. Thus, Article I of 'World Charter on the Right to the City' (2004) declares:

² The term 'revanchism' means a political policy designed to recover lost territories, and originated, as a term, in 1870s France. In the current global context of urban development, the term has come to be associated with urban policy, eviction and homelessness. With the failure of the liberal and the end of the 1980s financial boom in the west, the new trends in urban development became much more aggressive in terms of dealing with the marginalised sections in a city. Revanchist trends in urban policy, based on a desire to recover the lost urban space from 'encroachers' or 'undesirable' elements, is inextricably linked with trends of gentrification (the process by which an urban neighbourhood changes from being a poor area to a richer one with the influx of middle-class or wealthy people). See Smith, Neil (1996). *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. Routledge.

³ Mukherjee, Anushyama. Changing spatial practices and Everyday Negotiations: A Study of Hawkers in Kolkata. [Unpublished paper].
http://www.mcrg.ac.in/6thCSC/6thCSC_Full_Papers/Anushyama.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid.*

*The Right to the City is defined as the equable enjoyment of the cities while respecting the principles of sustainability, democracy and social justice, and is a collective right of all city inhabitants especially the vulnerable and disfavoured on whom is further conferred legality for such actions and organisation as their culture and custom suggests as a means of achieving the complete enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living. The Right to the City is interdependent to all recognised international human rights; and its conception is based on an integral view, which includes civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights enshrined in the International Human Rights Treaties. It also includes the right to liberty of association and organisation; the respect for minorities and racial, ethnic, sexual, and cultural plurality; respect for immigrants; and the guarantee of preservation of historical and cultural heritages.*⁵

However, in spite of a progressive radicalisation of the thoughts on the right to the city in the last few decades, the academic literature on urban studies has paid little attention to the ways in which the rights in question are often gendered in nature. Feminist and queer scholarship in urban studies, on the other hand, has unravelled a much more complex nature of spatial negotiations and contestations by the marginalised social groups. This brings us to the *second* key theme of this dissertation. It suggests that we need a much more subtle and sensitive approach to 'the gendered mediation of everyday experiences and should undertake 'more inclusive forms of intervention in urban space' (Beebeejaun 2017).⁶ With a view to adopting such an approach for the present dissertation, I have studied the gendered nature of the labour process in understanding street hawking. The key

⁵ Social Forum of the Americas, World Urban Forum & World Social Forum. (2004). *World Charter on the Right to the City*.
https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/World_Charter_on_the_Right_to_the_City.htm.

⁶Beebeejaun, Yassminah(2017). Gender, urban space, and the right to everyday life. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39:3, 323-334. DOI: [10.1080/07352166.2016.1255526](https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2016.1255526)

issues in this regard are the mode of business and circulation practiced by woman street hawkers; the reasons behind their concentration at a few places, and in a few commodity markets; the difference between the women's experience of street hawking and the experience of their male colleagues; the kind of everyday violence the woman hawkers have to endure and the gendered nature of that violence; and last but not the least, the ways in which women's contribution at the preparatory stages of street hawking (for instance, cooking food, producing materials for sale etc.) get marginalised in the prevailing discourses on street vending.

The marginalisation of women as hawkers in the 'economics' of street hawking is compounded by the erasure of their role as activists in the political sphere, i.e. in the sphere of the trade union. This takes us to the *third* and the most significant theme of this dissertation. In this endeavour, I track how gender difference has been inscribed in the process of institutionalisation of street hawking itself. In other words, I study the gendered modes of organising and mobilising street hawkers. In this context, I have tried to understand the relationship between those who organise and those who are being organised, and the ways in which the boundaries between the two are marked.

Moreover, what happens when one finds herself already *included* in the existing patriarchal mechanisms of the organisation? Perhaps the more important question for our purpose is: How can one make an analytical distinction between organisation and mobilisation from the vantage point of gender? Thus, the feminist critique I have attempted to frame in the present dissertation seeks to understand the gendered nature of workspace and labour processes within the paradigm of street hawking, the dual marginalisation of women in the economy of

hawking and in the politics of trade unionism, and tries to interrogate the patriarchal and hierarchical mode of functioning within the hawkers' union.

Who are Street Hawkers?

In India, the issue of urban street hawkers became a matter of public discourse since the 1970s. Street hawkers occupying public spaces such as footpaths and thoroughfares and earning a livelihood received enthusiastic public attention with the passage of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014. This piece of legislation defined street vendor/hawker as:

... a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built-up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region-specific; and the words "street vending" with their grammatical variations and cognate expressions, shall be construed accordingly.⁷

Evidently, the definition accommodates diverse and regionally varied kinds of trade practices within what Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay has called "a coherent and recognizable structure of street vending", which according to him, is "the moment of *nationalization* of the street vendor".⁸ (Bandyopadhyay 2019).

⁷Dey, Dipankar&Dasgupta, Subhendu (2010, April). Integration of an Informal Economy with the Globalization Process: A Study on Street Hawkers of Kolkata. Available at SSRN: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1584623>.

⁸Sengupta, Anwesha (2019, August 9). In Conversation with Dr.RitajyotiBandyopadhyay on How the Three Post-Partition Decades Shaped Calcutta. <https://www.sahapedia.org/conversation-dr->

Bandyopadhyay has further argued that the term street vendor was rare in popular articulation until the 1970s. In Calcutta, a hawker was well-known along with the pavement seller, footpath seller and *pheriwala* (peddler) since the nineteenth century. It was only after the partition and the sudden demographic and economic reorganisation of the city during the early post-colonial period that the hawker became visible in the city's policy circuit (Bandyopadhyay 2010). They were 'tolerated', and at times, were 'provided for' to reduce unemployment, hunger and social tension. Electoral democracy and other political changes also enabled the hawkers to form trade unions. In 1952, for instance, Hemanta Bose, a prominent leader of the Forward Bloc, organised hawkers of central Kolkata into the fold of a union. This union played a major role in the 1950s and 1960s to rehabilitate refugee hawkers in authorised hawkers' corners in different pockets of the city (Bandyopadhyay 2010). The trade unions also needed a name that could somehow manage to describe their subjects. This, according to Bandyopadhyay, was the context in which the hawkers emerged as a population and a political category. He has further shown how the term street vendor/street vending became popular with the emergence of the literature on 'informal economy'. Moreover, it was the trade unions that began to embrace the lexicon of the informal economy to articulate their objectives and orientations.

In this connection, let us briefly outline some of the 'socio-economic' details that came out of some of the surveys on Kolkata hawkers in the last couple of decades. (Dey, Dipankar and Dasgupta, Subhendu, 2010). The findings of these surveys will provide us with a more concrete sense of the population we are talking about. These surveys came out as a result of initiatives taken up by some scholars and the activists of the Hawker Sangram Committee. In 2013, Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay,

[ritajyoti-bandyopadhyay-how-three-post-partition-decades-shaped-calcutta](#). Accessed in November, 2020.

for instance, conducted an extensive survey on the city hawkers along with the activists of the said union. I had a chance to participate in the survey process and to go through the process of data formation in the field. In fact, that was my first 'academic' engagement with the 'hawkers' question'. Some of the results of the said survey will be published in Bandyopadhyay's new volume on Kolkata's streets.⁹ A few findings from the 2013 survey will be sufficient for our purpose of understanding the evolution of the hawker population in post-colonial Kolkata.

Bandyopadhyay and the HSC activists were able to take long interviews of 480 hawkers (which is not a reasonable sample) working in 21 major intersections of Kolkata between Shyambazaar and Gariahat. These are some of the important findings from the survey:

- A) Only 81 (16.87percent) hawkers reported that their parents were from East Pakistan/Bangladesh and 38 of them confirmed that they had inherited the business. The rest of the 43 hawkers confirmed that they themselves had started the business. There was a clear age difference between these two groups in this category. Of the 81 hawkers with a refugee connection, 29 lived within the jurisdiction of the city Municipal Corporation. The highest concentration of the refugee hawkers was found in three areas: Gariahat-Rashbehari Avenue (22), Sealdah (17) and Hatibagan-Shyambazaar (14).
- B) Out of the 399 hawkers, who did not report any refugee connections, 188 (39.17 percent of the total sample) hawkers reported that they were from various areas of North and South 24 Parganas. Of the 188 hawkers, 65 used to catch the suburban trains to reach their hawking area. Further, 105 (21.9 percent) hawkers migrated from Bihar and the UP decades ago, and they reported that they lived in nearby slums or would spend the night on the footpath.

⁹Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti, (2021). Forthcoming.

- C) Out of 105 long-term interstate migrants, 52 hawkers had their immediate family members residing with them, while 53 hawkers (all-male hawkers) reported that they were able to remit about 25 to 30 percent of their income back home.
- D) Out of 480 respondents, only 46 (9.58 percent) were women who were found concentrated in vegetable vending and in selling cooked food.
- E) When asked if hawking was their primary means of livelihood, 402 (83.75 percent) out of 480 hawkers reported in the affirmative.
- F) It was also found that 460 (95.83 percent) out of 480 hawkers had been to this profession for over 20 years or more, which meant that for most of the hawkers, hawking was not a transitory occupation. In some cases, brothers divided the stall's monthly income. Thus, a popular tea stall owner in Theatre Road (in front of a private hospital) transferred his stall to his three sons in 1995. Each brother took turns in every three months and would run the stall for three-monthly slots. The stall kept two helpers who would continue to work under each quarterly owner.
- G) Taking 2013 as a standard year of entry to hawking, Bandyopadhyay calculated that the hawkers' initial non-recurrent expenditure ranged between Rs. 6,800 and Rs. 13,500. That apart, they needed Rs. 1,580 to Rs. 2,020 a month to keep the business at the same level. Depending upon the monthly profits (assuming that hawkers were providing some what conservative estimate), I estimated that their daily sales proceeds would range between Rs. 6,750 and Rs. 18,000. The most conservative estimate of profits would have been higher than the minimum wage mandated by the government. Note: This estimate did not calculate if the hawkers paid entry fees to the unions, whether they bought

stalls from the previous owner, or if they paid informal rents to the regulating agencies like the police and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

- H) Bandyopadhyay also found that there was a considerable income difference among the hawkers. Those who had the locational advantage (i.e., stalls close to an office, a shopping mall, an educational establishment, a transit centre, or right at a busy traffic intersection) and reasonably long-term presence at such a site could earn up to Rs. 130,000 per month, while there were hawkers who could earn just at a level to make ends meet and to continue the trade.
- I) On the question of the source of initial funds, 394 (82.09 percent) hawkers confirmed that they depended on their family resources to start the business, while only 43 hawkers (less than 9 percent) reported debt from close family friends and parents' employers. Another 43 (less than 9 percent) hawkers took loans from *mahajans* (moneylenders) at high-interest rates. All the hawkers confirmed that they became financially self-sufficient within 3 to 5 years of being in the business. Those who failed had to make an exit from the profession. I found one such fellow who ended up becoming a *pheriwala* in a Jadavpurneighbourhood.
- J) Unlike other industrial cities, where the former industrial working class constitute a substantial segment of the street hawkers, in Kolkata, except for a few places (around industrial quarters), the majority of the hawkers came from the localities or as migrants and refugees with the agricultural and artisanal background. Only 42 (8.75 percent) hawkers out of 480 said that they had come to this sector due to the closure of a factory.
- K) Only 52 (10.83 percent) hawkers sourced their supplies from the primary producers (they were mostly vegetable sellers), while 401 (83.5 percent)

hawkers confirmed that they procured supplies from the nearby wholesale markets. The remaining 27 hawkers acted as commission agents of nearby retail shops and they were mostly found in the garment sector.

L) It was also found that 330 (68.75 percent) out of 480 hawkers employed 2 to 3 workers, besides family members, and that 42 hawkers (8.75 percent) kept 1 helper with them. 425 out of 480 hawkers confirmed that they kept 1 to 2 additional worker(s) during festive seasons (meaning even a large section of those who could not afford to employ a helper in regular periods of business, had to employ someone during festive seasons).

M) It was observed that 421 (87.7 percent) out of 480 hawkers confirmed that they were able to sell commodities at a price which was 5 to 10 percent less than the prices at regular retail shops and bazaars, and yet could make a profit to maintain a living and keep the size of business constant.

Now, let us point out a few observations for which Bandyopadhyay did not give a number to quote from the sample. These observations are purely qualitative in nature.

N) The distribution of the hawkers across the city reflects religious and ethnic patterns of settlement. Thus, in the alleys of Burrabazaar, it is difficult to find a sizeable section of Muslim hawkers. In the Central Avenue and Esplanade areas, there are places where Muslim hawkers have numerical dominance. In much of central Kolkata, a sizeable section of hawkers speaks Hindi and Urdu. In the northern and southern parts of the city, Bengali-speaking hawkers dominate the scene.

O) The exchange relations between the *mahajans* and their clients have developed along ethnic and religious lines. The refugee hawkers reported that they lacked

a source of credit from the *mahajans*, and interestingly, they were the first group to come under trade unions. The product profile, too, followed the ethnic line.

- P) When it comes to the “caste question” within each group, one fails to find a consistent pattern or numerical dominance of a group along the caste lines. However, certain services such as shoemaking and cobbling remained with the untouchable *chamars* and *Rabi Das* caste groups.

It is possible to draw at least six generalisations and extrapolations from the above survey which reinforce and extend the earlier survey of the Hawker Sangram Committee:¹⁰

- A) Street hawking was a male-dominated profession. The women hawkers were confined to the sale of certain specific commodities such as vegetables and cooked food. Several women complained that the streets lacked public toilet facilities which compelled them to find sites where they could access the toilets of some nearby public offices, rail stations, etc. The absence of toilet facilities thus restricted their mobility.
- B) Back in 2013, hawking in Kolkata did not generate sizeable inter-state remittances. The hawkers were either local residents or long-term migrants having thin ties with their native towns/villages.
- C) Hawking was a viable economic activity for a large section of city-dwellers and each establishment directly served more than 7 people (including workers and dependent family members) besides the owner/investor.

¹⁰Dey, Dipankar&Dasgupta, Subhendu (2010, April). Integration of an Informal Economy with the Globalization Process: A Study on Street Hawkers of Kolkata. Available at SSRN: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1584623>

- D) The hawkers maintained enough profit for the self-reproduction of the unit, and their own social reproduction much like the owners in Narela and Bawana. A hawker would take all measures to keep her enterprise on, keeping its size intact. Typically, she would not be able to reproduce her enterprise at an expanded scale as a capitalist does. A hawker's surplus comes from herself exploitation and from the unpaid labour of his partner, siblings, kids, and the low wage of his helper. Precisely because of self-exploitation, unpaid family labour and the low wage that go into the transformation of a commodity, a hawker can transfer the commodity to an end-user at a relatively lower price.
- E) However, the existence of wage relations in this sector meant that street hawking was not a class-homogenous economic affair. Also, there were richer hawkers and almost impoverished hawkers in the city.
- F) It is interesting to note that the surveys found a lesser number of ex-refugee population in hawking than anticipated. Some anecdotal references from Gariahat say that in the 1960s a sizeable section of the refugee hawkers came from an educated upper-caste background. When Harold Lubell conducted his study on the unemployment condition in Calcutta in 1974, he could still notice the presence of people who had received high school education and even of college graduates in footpath hawking. When Bandyopadhyay conducted this survey exactly four decades later, this population was almost non-existent. It is possible that the caste composition of the refugee hawkers began to change after 1971, with the coming of the low caste refugees known as *namasudras* who started populating the fringe areas of the city. It is also possible that refugee hawkers in general had more social and cultural capital to move out of footpath hawking after being in the business for a decade or so. Thus, hawking

proved to be a steppingstone for social mobility only for the first-generation upper-caste refugee hawkers (as a distinct social group).

The survey is convincing enough to establish the point that hawking was an employment-generating, self-financing and environmentally sustainable activity that involved local producers, local suppliers, and local consumers with a negligible carbon footprint. Footpath hawking and small-scale retail business form the backbone of sustainable local supply chains of commodities.

In the context of Imphal, the dissertation frames a critique of the politics of street hawking in a same-gender space. The work studies three different constituencies of street hawking in Imphal City. First, it highlights the history of Ema Market and the struggle of licensed vendors to save the market from perpetual demolition and eviction drives. The particular struggle of the 1980s unravels many unrecorded narratives that detail alliances and the assertion of women's agency in the market against the government's demolition drive. The study seeks to unpack the relationship between licensed and unlicensed street hawkers in the struggle for contest over the public space. Second, street hawkers in the temporary market represent another category for understanding the nature of organisational politics and negotiation in the contestation of public space. Third, the woman street hawkers form another important constituency of street hawking in Imphal. According to a study conducted by NASVI in 2012, there are 4,560 street vendors in the market.¹¹ A more recent survey conducted by the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association, Khwarimbond Keithel, Imphal, Manipur, indicates that there are a total of 7,652 street vendors in Imphal City.¹² In Imphal, the relationship

¹¹Bhowmik, S. K., & Saha, D. (2012). *Street Vending in Ten Cities in India*. School of Management and Labour Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Retrieved from:

<http://www.streetnet.org.za/docs/research/2012/en/NASVIReport-Survey.pdf>.

¹²Khetri, Tama (2018, October). Personal interview.

between these three constituencies of hawking remains dialectical in nature. As Anirban Vishal has observed in his Ph.D. dissertation in this context,

*The notion of livelihood goes close with the natural market for all vendors regardless of their legality. Revolving around this argument, the dialectics of conceived space (urban plans and designs), spatial practice (daily routines and networks of street vendors) and the desired-imagined space of the street vendors are the main cause of a series of contestations and negotiations in the market place.*¹³

The practice of vending in Ema Keithel or Ema Market started before 1700 when the male members of each family were expected to perform a form of forced labour for the king. Their prolonged absence from home compelled the women of the family to play the role of the bread-earner for the family and they started vending in the market. The market has constantly experienced drives of structuring and restructuring. In 1789, Maharaja Bhagyachandra Singh granted permission for the construction of market sheds, which were again transformed into semi-permanent structures under the British Political Agent John Shakespeare.¹⁴ In Ema market, each *potyonbi* (the term used for any women hawker) was allotted a shed called *potfam* and was thus legally recognised by the state. The survey conducted by the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association, covered areas such as Allugalli, Thangal Bazar, B.T.Road, the temporary market, Family Welfare Road, B.T. North, Naga NallahMamang, and Chingmerirong East. The survey included both categories of hawkers in its scope: first, woman hawkers

¹³Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

¹⁴Meetei, HU (2015). EmaKeithel: The mothers' market. Retrieved from: [http://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema Keithel-mother%27s market.pdf](http://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema%20Keithel-mother%27s%20market.pdf).

of the temporary market who were displaced during the construction of Purana Bazar, Laxmi Bazar, and Linthoingambi Market; and second, the street hawkers, who now share the public space with the vendors of the temporary market. The status of this last constituency becomes further complicated with the presence of multiple and overlapping categories ranging from seasonal, weekly, temporary, mobile and stationary vendors. This survey divided the woman vendors into three groups. First, hawkers who arrive at the marketplace by 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. and consist mostly of rural vendors. They are mainly of tribal origin. Second, woman hawkers who start their business from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m., consisting of rural weekly vendors. And finally, the urban woman hawkers who start their business from 9.30 a.m., and continue till 6.30 p.m. Moreover, in Imphal, the spaces conceived in 'plans, and the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' attaches with the practice of hawking an understanding of legality grounded in the lived reality of street hawkers. As Vishal Aribamhas claimed in this context, "The synonymous local specific term for Street Vendors in Manipur is the same for every vendor regardless of their legality... the delineation between a licensed vendor and a street vendor does not exist. Instead, the delineation is made on the basis of space the vendors occupy."¹⁵ This understanding explains how licensed and unlicensed woman hawkers collectively build resistance in the face of threat to their question of livelihood. Simultaneously, the study has also explored the labour relation in a same-gender space by transcending the traditional meaning of the relationship between men and women in a patriarchal social structure. It widens its reach by studying same-gender relations at work in a particular segment of the economy.

¹⁵Vishal, Aribam (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

Informality in a Capitalist World

The term “informal economy” became popular in the literature on public policy studies, labour studies, and development studies from the 1970s, to be precise, after Keith Hart’s (1973) significant research on street vending in Accra, Ghana. This research was conducted under the aegis of the ILO. Ever since, countless researches were conducted and published, especially in the context of the cities of the ‘developing world’, on economic activities beyond the ‘formal contractual regime of capital’ (Bandyopadhyay 2010; also see, Sanyal 2007).¹⁶ The question is: What is the informal economy, and why is street hawking considered a veritable instance of economic informality?

Making a sharp distinction between capital and capitalism, economist Kalyan Sanyal has stated that the latter is a combination of both capitalist and non-capitalist elements—a ‘differentiated unity’ that he calls the ‘capital-non-capital complex’—a complex coexistence of various forms of corporate and non-corporate capital along with popular sovereignty and electoral democracy.¹⁷ Sanyal has illustrated this point with aid of a precise example. Suppose, M refers to money and C refers to commodity. According to Marx, the profit-making formal sector/accumulation economy—dominated by the corporate sector—works in the following manner: $M-C-C'-M'-C'-C''-M''...$, whereas M' is $>M$, and C' is $>C$. In this circuit, Labour becomes a commodity, unpaid labour time over and above socially necessary labour time is the source of surplus-value. In this structure, a capitalist buys a commodity (say raw jute) and then employs workers (labour-

¹⁶Sanyal, K. (2007). *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism*. Routledge.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

power or C) in the factory along with machinery (say a jute mill) to transform labour-power into C' within the sphere of production which gives him more money or surplus. The source of this higher margin is the labour-power of the workers, a part of which always remains un-remunerated. A section of this surplus goes to the capitalist's self-upkeep and the upkeep of her machinery (which witness depreciation in the transformation of C-C'). Another part of the surplus is injected into the circuit for its expanded reproduction. This is how profit-making corporations work. Expanded reproduction of capital is the motive of corporate capital. In this Circuit, money remains confined to circulation and money is pumped into the realm of production.

As opposed to this accumulation circuit, Sanyal draws attention to a non-accumulation/non-corporate sphere of capital which he has called 'need economy'. According to him, need economy works as follows: M-C-C'-M' (M'-M, M), M-C-C'-M'-M-C-C'-M'.... Petty commodity production is monetised through small-credit such as micro-finance etc., and a non-accumulation economy produces petty surplus within a capitalist economy. In this circuit, a player begins with an initial stock M with which she buys means of labour, C and adds value to it through self-labour or by inviting labour-power of kin and family members and produces C' which in turn gives her M'. Out of M', she uses M to re-do the circuit and uses the surplus to buy commodities to eke out a living. In short, she cannot translate the enhanced stock into the expansion of the circuit. This is where her role differs from a capitalist whom we met in the previous Circuit. "Here", continues Sanyal, "the purpose of production is consumption for the satisfaction of the need, although production and consumption are both mediated by the circuit of money. Production is undertaken with the goal of obtaining money to purchase a consumption basket, and the money obtained must also be enough to

replace the initial stock so that the activity can be self-reproducing” (Sanyal 2007: 212)¹⁸. Put in simpler terms, a typical player in the informal economy keeps her initial stock intact and satisfies her needs by using the surplus. For instance, a player in the informal economy will take all measures to keep the size of her enterprise. Typically, she will not be able to reproduce her enterprise at an expanded scale as big corporations do in the previous circuit. Her surplus comes from my own work as a labourer in the enterprise and from the unpaid labour of my partner, siblings, kids and other kinsmen. She does employ workers at times, but this might not be a round-the-year feature of her enterprise. Because of the self-exploitation and unpaid family labour that goes into the transformation of a commodity, she can keep the commodity price low.

The initial literature on informality looked more at the economic aspects of it. Scholars studied its relationship with the formal sector, its forward and backward linkages (McGhee 1971, Dasgupta 1992).¹⁹ In the past couple of decades, however, a shift in emphasis to the politics of informality has been observed in the works of several scholars (Anjaria 2008, Bandyopadhyay 2010).²⁰ The new scholarship has begun to take an interest in unravelling the complex transactions between sub alternity, public space and resistance (Anjaria 2008, Bandyopadhyay 2010).²¹ As a result, interdisciplinary literature on street vending has developed which tells us of the ways in which vendors negotiate and resist the market forces and the state

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹ McGee, T. G. (1973). *Hawkers in Hong Kong: A Study of Planning and Policy in a Third World City*. University of Hong Kong.

²⁰Anjaria, J. S. (2008). *Unruly Streets: Everyday Practices and Promises of Globality in Mumbai*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz]. Also see, Anjaria, J.S. (2010). The Politics of Illegality: Mumbai Hawkers, Public Space and the Everyday Life of the Law. In S Bhowmik (Ed.), *Street Vendors in the Global Urban Economy*. Routledge.

²¹*Ibid.*

in various cities in the neo-liberal context (Cross 1998, Stoller 1996 and 2002, Duneier 1999, Rajagopal 2001, Popke and Ballard 2004, Stillerman 2006 and Donovan 2008).²² Thus, in the last two decades, the literature on street vending has witnessed a transition from 'a purely economic analysis to anthropology and sociology of the marginal populations and their tactics' (Bandyopadhyay 2010).²³

Literature Review

Literature on the informal economy in general, and street hawking in particular, has largely remained a province of anthropology and development studies, with a strong focus on contemporary processes. It is only in more recent times that historians too have become interested in studying questions such as informality, casualisation, non-wage labour relations etc. (Bhattacharya and Lucassen 2005).²⁴ According to Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, there could be two reasons for historians' new penchant for informality.²⁵ "First, as labour history moved to the former colonial and the postcolonial world, scholars found many inadequacies in the Western (specifically British social-historical) model of labour-capital relationship (Chakrabarty 1981).²⁶ Along with class and gender, caste too has been taken up as an analytical category in understanding working-class histories.

²²Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴ Bhattacharya, S. and Lucassen, J. (2005). *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. Macmillan.

²⁵Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

²⁶Chakrabarty, D. (1981). Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-hands in the 1890s. *Past and Present*, 1 (91), 140-169.

Second, these new histories of labour shared a temporal overlap with “the reversal of the process of formalization (in four decades since the Great Depression) with trade liberalization” (Bhattacharya and Lucassen 2005).²⁷ A group of historians have questioned the very boundary between wage workers and non-wage workers, self-employed, home workers, and a few other categories. Most notably, Prabhu Mohapatra (2005), has attempted to “historically situate the informal economy in colonial India in its interface with law, state power and market” (Bandyopadhyay 2010).²⁸

The ‘feminist turn’ in labour studies and its coalition with Marxism ever since the 1970s pointed out that the lack of accurate facts on women’s contribution to the informal economy was due to “gender bias” in relevant scholarship. Biased scholars, the feminists have argued, contributed to women’s continued invisibility in the sector (Nunez 1993).²⁹ In this context, Tinker (1987) has suggested that the existing paradigm of measurement needs to be changed to account for the woman’s “overwhelming” contribution to the informal economy.³⁰ Tinker has pointed out that facts are generally collected from workshops and enterprises where men dominate. But, if the household and the domestic sphere of life come to the focus of academic research, the facts about women’s participation in the

²⁷Bhattacharya, S. & Lucassen, J (2005). *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. Macmillan.

²⁸Mohapatra, P. (2005). Regulated Informality: Legal Constructions of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814-1926. In S Bhattacharya & J Lucassen (Eds.), *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. Macmillan. Also see, Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

²⁹ Nunez, Lorena (October, 1993). Women on the Streets: Vending and Public Space in Chile. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(44), L67-L71 & L74-L82. [https:// www.jstor.org/stable/4400348](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4400348).

³⁰ Tinker, Irene (1987). *Street Food: Testing Assumptions about Informal Sector Activity by Women and Men*. Sage Publications.

informal economy would look quite different. Tinker has asked us to measure unpaid work that women do as part of their task of social reproduction.

This view signalled the emergence of a powerful Marxist-Feminist theory known as “social reproduction theory”. According to Marx, it is the worker that produces the commodity. We have already seen this process in operation in the previous section. Social reproduction theory asks a further question: who/what produces the worker – the processes that produces labour-power as a commodity and how those processes of the production of labour-power as a commodity are connected to and imbricated with the social processes that produce the commodity. An example is necessary to elucidate the workings of social reproduction theory. Suppose a worker goes to the factory at 9 a.m. in the morning and returns home at 6 p.m. in the evening. Social reproduction theory deals with 6 p.m. and 9 a.m. – what happens when the worker is with herself: at home, at a theatre, at her dinner table with relatives, and in bed. All of these contribute to the renewal of her labour-power which she is supposed to sell for wage in the labour market. So, to go back to the question of who produces the worker, the first answer to this is obvious. She also gets psychical support from all this which prepares her mentally to go to the workplace. So, the theory is about social reproduction taking place within the private sphere, i.e., within the ambit of the family. This is one of the central ways through which the working class is reproduced. As Marx has pointed out, the question of labour is a question of life. However, the social reproduction of labour-power is certainly not the only way through which the working class is reproduced within a social context. Immigration and slavery (of various shades) are also two key mechanisms through which workers are forced into a nationally bounded territory as a labour force.

As the debate progressed, feminist scholars in the field began to emphasise how we could factor in women's role in the informal economy (Conolly 1985, and MacEwen Scott 1991).³¹ While explaining gendered segmentation in the informal economy, Scott MacEwen has emphasised on the family as the key locus and institution at the heart of petty commodity production.³² To put things in a more concrete perspective, one may see the predominance of men in Kolkata's street hawking sector. However, if we scratch the surface, we see how women at home play a significant role in not just the male hawker's social reproduction, but also in producing the commodity he is selling. In my multiple interactions with male street hawkers –especially with those engaged in the food sector–I have found that women at home play a key role in transforming ingredients into edible food items.

Despite this understanding, scholarship on street hawking has remained largely confined to male hawkers and the relationship among them. Imphal is an exceptional case. In Kolkata, women's marginality in the sector of street hawking manifests itself in trade union activities as well. In this dissertation, it is my purpose to make women's role visible in the otherwise masculinist spaces of the street and the trade union.

My second aim is to understand the question of race as a major factor in the realm of street hawking and the politics of unionisation. As my case study of the Chinese food hawkers of Territy Bazaar suggests, the complete absence of the Chinese representatives in the hawkers' unions can be connected with underlying prejudices of the leadership of these unions. On the basis of my field study, I have

³¹ Nunez, Lorena (October, 1993). Women on the Streets: Vending and Public Space in Chile. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28(44), 67-71 & 74-82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4400348>.

³² MacEwen Scott, Alison (1991). Informal Sector or Female Sector?: Gender Bias in Urban Labour Market Model. In Diane Elsm (Ed.), *Male Bias in the Development Process*. Manchester University Press.

reached the conclusion that ignorance about the Chinese community cannot solely explain the lack of initiative on the part of unions to unionise the food hawkers of Chinatown. Rather, it was a 'social construct' about the Chinese community and an attitude of institutionalised racism towards them that implicitly prevented the unions to bring the Chinese food hawkers under their banner.

Source and Method

The dissertation has a personal connection. I have been familiar with terms such as 'hawker' and *uchched* (eviction) since my childhood, even when I did not know the connotations such terms implied. Due to my father's long association with the hawker's movement from the 1970s, the distinction between field (the space of hawking) and home has blurred for me. My parents have lived in separate spaces since my early childhood. My father used to live in his union office, which virtually became his private living space. This experience has contributed to a different understanding of public and private spheres for me. Since I was five, I used to go to the union office to meet my father. It was there that I first encountered the word 'hawker'. Who were these hawkers with whom the memory of my first encounter with the term is associated? They were mainly people who used to hawk in different parts of Kolkata in the late 1980s. Many of them were from Bihar and spoke with me in broken and heavily accented Bengali. Father used to meet the hawkers from early on in the morning and would hear out their problems. I was on cordial terms with the hawkers who were regular visitors at the office. I particularly remember Chotelal da and Basanta da who used to drop me off at school. This informal connection with the subjects of my present dissertation has lent me a much wider and deeper perspective on the discourse of street hawking. I acquired some idea about the term by the age of seven. It is significant to mention here that I never saw any female member of the hawkers'

union visiting the office. Perhaps it justifies the name of the union, Hawker Men's Union, under which it was registered sometime back in the 1970s.

My understanding of the group developed with time. Father used to take me for a day-out every week. Due to the separate living arrangements of my parents, this was the only opportunity for me to be with him. These outings mostly consisted of walking around in different streets of the city where there were disputes between hawkers and government officials. I remember how my father used to speak at meetings in Hare street, Barbour Street, and Russell Street where hawkers used to sit on the pavement and would listen to his speeches. Usually, the speeches consisted of calls for action against the police for confiscating hawkers' wares and illegally evicting them. Thus, I have come to know the urban space through the city streets, and hawkers are definitely one of the major claimants of it. I should add here that the entire 'office para', and the streets of Kolkata in general, depicted the picture of a male-dominated space in the early 1990s. The social representation of the streets of Kolkata has remained masculine in nature.

As father got even more involved with the unions from 1996 onwards, our outings stopped. After 'Operation Sunshine' was launched in the city, I started to join him in various agitations and programmes against the government. *Bhukkamichil*,³³ *Ain amanno*,³⁴ and *lungi michil*³⁵ are a few instances in which I participated. It was during this period that I met Ratna Ghosh at an *Ain amanno* rally where I was

³³*BhukkaMichil*: The term literally means a hunger march. Such marches or rallies are organised to attract the attention of the government and the public to the participants' severe plight and misery, and to demonstrate that the participants are deprived of basic livelihood needs. *Bhukhamichil* was a key feature of the 'Operation Sunshine' movement in 1996s.

³⁴*Ain amanno*: A civil disobedience demonstration. As a political programme, such demonstrations are characterised by the participants' refusal to obey certain laws, demands, or commands of a government widely practiced by Hawker Sangram Committee after 'Operation Sunshine' in 1996.

³⁵*lungimichil*: The rally with Hawkers draped in lungi (a free-flowing garment, wrapped around the waist, worn by males across South Asia) was organised by the HSC in September 1997, during the movement against Operation Sunshine. See Chapter Three.

taken aback by her heroic and radical stance against the police. Apart from Mamata Banerjee, no other female leader was visible on the political scene in West Bengal during this time. As Ratna Ghosh passed away in 2000, the absence of women in the hawkers' movement became more conspicuous after her demise. From a toddler to an adult, my entire journey as an individual has thus centred around the hawkers' struggles for existence in the city. Sometimes directly and often indirectly, I have been part of their struggles. My relationship with the community has remained quite intimate with the community throughout this entire process. Consequently, ethnographic study within this community did not start from my days of academic research; rather, it has always been present in my keenness to understand the challenges and struggles of the hawkers. Moreover, due to my father's involvement with the community, the fluidity between my field and home was very pronounced. Perhaps elaborate on the complex implications of this in one or two more sentences.

With the new millennium, the HSC formed during 'Operation Sunshine' embarked on a journey of unionisation in several states of India under the name NHF. During this phase, I witnessed the transformation of the union from a movement of a particular community associated with the informal economy to that of a mass movement. From 2004, the HSC started to express solidarity with various social movements; it has been an active participant in the struggle of civil society against the state government's oppressive actions in Nandigram and Singur. Since 2004, I experienced this transition where local roots were stretched to join with socio-political movements throughout India, advocating against the globalised economy.

The methodological focus for this thesis is on ethnographic fieldwork, oral history, and archival material. The archival sources and multi-sited ethnography

were collected from January 2017 till the end of 2019. The ethnographic research was conducted mainly to go beyond the textual and/or archival representations of my subject community – woman street hawkers – and to capture their self-representation.

I used the ‘Daily Notes Files’ of the Special Branch of Kolkata Police to trace the history of several hawker eviction drives, and the instances of mobilisation associated with them, from the 1980s to 1998. I even tried to get access to classified files of the police department. However, as most of the files were in the process of digitalisation in 2018, getting hold of these files became an immensely difficult task. Most of the files connected to the role of Mamata Banerjee in ‘Operation Sunshine’ were missing. Ethnography of the archives also sheds valuable light on why and how facts get missing from the archive, and what kinds of facts are classified.

Apart from this, I have developed an understanding of the feminist ethnographic methods and exposed myself to various urban spaces to formulate a feminist critique of urban sociality with a special focus on street hawking in Kolkata and Imphal. The period of my brief stay in Imphal helped me to record a productive tension between oral histories and the semi-structured interviews and to raise questions about gender hierarchies in a same-gender space. I have closely studied the membership structures of the National Hawker Federation in two cities that have a high proportion of female members. I have taken semi-structured interviews of woman hawkers and female leaders from all the member unions of the NHF with the use of the random sampling method to ensure representative coverage.

I have engaged with ethnographic fieldwork among the ‘Mutiyas’ of Sealdah and with the residents around Latuto Para basti to record their experiences in order to

analyse their spatial claims in contrast with the woman hawkers of Sealdah. Additionally, I have used the Town Hall Library, the Archives of National Library and the Archives of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, now digitally available in Jadhunath Sarkar Resource Centre, a wing of the CSSSC, Kolkata to understand the changing landscape of Kolkata. I have also used various newspaper reports to analyse the print media's representation of the hawkers' movement at different points of time from the 1980s.

Further, my analysis and ethnography are both informed by my background and long-term association with the hawkers' movement in Kolkata. As a feminist ethnographer, I do not feel the need to erase this past association prior to undertaking academic research. Rather, I have tried to use my personal memories and past associations and to productively read them against the present. My long-term proximity to the movement allows me a rare, close reading of it. However, this advantage is also tempered by an awareness on my part of the limitations that come with the same. While attempting to establish a relationship with respondents and trying to achieve mutuality of exchange, I do negotiate with the fact that my family association with the movement probably precedes me, and might restrict what information and narratives are shared with me.

Overall, this is a thesis based on a multi-sited ethnography in Kolkata and Imphal to critique the politics of exclusion and inclusion in institutionalising street hawking. Earlier research works on street hawking showed us the process of institutionalization in the 'state-union complex' but failed to delve deep into the inside and interstices of this 'complex' to unravel the production of internal borders and margins, and repression of other identities in the developing a unified agenda for the 'hawkers' movement'. This dissertation looks at the production of

these margins through the interface of gender and race/ethnicity in Kolkata and Imphal.

Chapterisation

Chapter 1

Sealdah: Unrecorded Voices and Stories of Women Hawker

This chapter revolves around the geopolitics of Sealdah, an important transit point in Kolkata since the time of partition. In this chapter, I have portrayed pre-and post-partition scenarios in Sealdah where the presence of hawkers is ubiquitous. The key issues that form the main arguments of this chapter are first, the impact of infrastructural development on the lives of the hawkers, and second, the ways in which the struggle of unionised hawkers differs from those who remain outside the domain of affiliated unions. The chapter is divided into two large sections. The first section has attempted to historicise a movement in 1981-82 that has remained outside the purview of academic attention. This movement was triggered by the construction of Vidyapati Bridge in Sealdah which caused a deal of dislocation and displacement of hawkers in the area. The movement is significant as it was the first movement that understood the indisputable importance of solidarity among the hawkers' unions to fight against the government's move to evict them. Following the lessons of this movement, the PaschimBanga Hawkers Sangram Samity, virtually the predecessor of the Hawker Sangram Committee, was formed by various hawkers' unions in the face of 'Operation Sunshine' to resist the government's policy of eviction directed against the hawkers. The movement of

1981 witnessed the participation of woman hawkers both in large numbers and in a wider role. Their participation was mostly spontaneous, and for the same reason, remained sporadic. The significant issue here is that in spite of the high records of woman hawkers taking part in various programmes associated with the movement and taking on the role of agitators in course of the movement, they have remained outside the archive and found mention only under the collective noun 'ladies'. While studying the SB reports, I was struck by the complete absence of individual mention of women in the records. This discovery should be viewed alongside the fact that names of not only (male) leaders of the unions but even ordinary male members were recorded. This discrepancy prompts one to understand the ways in which histories of women's radicalism in hawkers' movement get erased both from the official archives and the 'community history' inscribed by the hawkers' movement.

In the second section, I have tried to study the everyday struggle of the woman hawkers in Sealdah during the post-colonial period. These women who hawk in the carriageway remain outside the fold of unionism. This section clearly indicates the difference of approach between the two groups of women towards the space of hawking. While the first group, who are members of hawkers' unions, refuses to accept negotiations with any claimant of the space, negotiation becomes the only means of survival for the second group whom I have called the new woman hawkers. The constant rivalry among the women of the second group not only puts them in a more vulnerable position but also virtually deprives them of any agency. This lack of agency makes them incapable of any resistance against the exploitation of either the agents of the state — such as the police — or other actors like local goons. This constant threat of dispossession and exploitation, in turn, reinforces their lack of agency. In the complete absence of unions from this field,

the struggle of the new woman hawkers in reclaiming their spatial rights provides an important perspective to understand the everyday negotiations of a group of non-unionised woman hawkers.

Chapter 2

Hawkers of a Different Kind: *Chinepara*

The name of the chapter suggests a different narrative of hawker's representation in the discourse of popular culture. This chapter talks about the migration of the Chinese community to Kolkata, and how gradually they were able to carve out a niche for themselves and established a Chinatown at the heart of the city. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I have studied the journey of migration of the Chinese community to the city and how they started a 'breakfast market' to fulfil their community needs in Territy Bazaar. I have tried to understand here how an informal and small-scale practice of breakfast preparation for a handful of people gradually transformed into a bustling market that only specialises in Chinese breakfast and continues to exist to date.

The next section deals with narratives of 'oblivion and otherness'. Here I have tried to indicate the lack of initiative and incentive on the part of a strong hawkers' union active around the area to unionise the Chinese hawkers of the breakfast market. Interviews with the leaders of the union revealed many-layered notions regarding the Chinese hawkers which are compatible with the representation of the Chinese community in Kolkata in the popular imagination. Though many reasons were put forward by the leaders for their inability to unionise the Chinese hawkers of the breakfast market, the ethnography narrated a different logic behind the union's lack of interest to unionise them. The ignorance about the

existence of the Chinese community had started much before the hawkers' union was formed in central Kolkata. The 1962 Sino-Indian War wiped out the entire community from popular imagination. The chapter details the tale of isolation imposed on the community by both the state and the society – the Bengali middle-class society, to be specific.

This thread of ignorance continues in my last section. In this part, I have focussed on how the Chinese remained outside the government's reform initiatives in the food hawking sector. However, it seems that apart from the government's attempt to erase the community from the social arena, the union's subtle notion of *bhadralok* neighbourhood played a major role in the marginalisation of Chinese Hawkers of Territy Bazaar. As the union always looked down upon the presence of this languished community and never thought it to be a potent player in their politics of contest over public space, its leadership never attempted to bring them under the banner of hawkers' union. As I have pointed out in this chapter, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) ACT, 2014 clearly marks out the criteria to be a hawker, and thus, the Chinese food sellers of Teritty Bazar can be asserted as the first food hawkers of Kolkata.

Chapter 3

'Operation Sunshine': The Politics of Organisational Memory

The final chapter studies how the changes in the urban landscape of Kolkata is intertwined with a story of constant contention among users of the city's public

space. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the micro-history of a movement against 'Operation Sunshine', a large-scale eviction drive launched by the government of West Bengal in 1996. The thick description of the movement, which has remained outside the realm of academic discussion, enables us to understand how the government equipped and prepared itself for the eviction drive after the fashion of war preparation. These twin objectives of this hawker eviction drive were to ensure the free movement of traffic flow and to cleanse the public space of the city (the footpaths) of encroachers. 'Operation Sunshine' was the first large-scale eviction of hawkers in Kolkata in the post-colonial period. The refugee urban poor has always constituted an important section in the vote-bank of the CPI(M) in West Bengal; however, with the onset of the era of globalisation the government was keen on giving the city a facelift, and this class now seemed to be irrelevant and unimportant to them. It displayed a decisive shift in the government's perception of the urban poor and a clear transition was visible both in terms of governance and urban development.

The second section is focussed on two premises: first, I studied the role of radical female leadership in the movement against 'Operation Sunshine' particularly in the context of Gariahat, one of the sites affected by the eviction drive. The vantage-point of gender has enabled me to analyse how hierarchies and patriarchy worked in hawkers' union, how discrimination was institutionalised by the union, and how far suppression of the role of women also formed a facet of this movement. 'Operation Sunshine' not merely became a symbol of local solidarity among the hawker's unions in Kolkata, but also paved the way for national-level solidarity. Further, I expand this section by enquiring how the movement is recalled in the collective memory of hawkers. I have tried here to probe into the nature of kind

histories the hawkers' organisations attempted to inscribe, and by extension, tried to examine the logic of exclusion and gendered nature embedded in such histories.

Chapter 4

Woman Vendors' Struggles in Manipur: A Study from Gender Perspective

This chapter studies how the relationship between license-holding and unlicensed woman vendors creates women's agency in the context of Ema Market in Imphal, where the notion of sisterhood may be analysed in terms of its complexities. The main arguments of this chapter are focused on two sections. In the first section, I have tried to reconstruct a history of the organised woman hawkers' movement in the 1980s on the basis of the memory and photographs I came across during my ethnographic field work in Imphal. The interviews and photographs refer to the pivotal role of Gita Mukherjee, the secretary of the National Federations of Indian Women at the time, in the movement of woman hawkers of Ema Market. Mukherjee visited Manipur and assisted the women of the market to form an all-women' association called the Manipur KeithelnupiMarup, registered under the Societies Registration Act. This was the first woman vendors' association in India. While the Ballygunge Men Hawkers' Union was registered as the first hawkers' union in the 1970s, Manipur was the first to organise any association exclusively for woman hawkers. I have focussed on the role of Gita Mukherjee in this chapter in order to understand two important issues: first, how she organised women's solidarity to stop the demolition of Ema Market and to preserve the distinct character of the market. Second, while using the archive to substantiate my point, I

discovered that archives were virtually silent about Mukherjee's successful attempt to save Ema Market from the fate of demolition. I found no mention of Mukherjee's role in the movement of Ema Market either in the State Archives or in the newspapers. Any reference to the movement and Gita Mukherjee's role in it remains invisible even in *Kalantar*, the organ of the West Bengal Council of the CPI. This act of invisibility is a constant thread in the dissertation. Secondly, when I interviewed several veteran leaders of the CPI to enquire about Gita Mukherjee's connection with the movement of Ema Market, many of the responses I have received implied that Mukherjee's role in preserving the age-old culture of the market and saving the livelihood of thousands of woman hawkers was not of any importance to the leadership of the party! Further, this invisibility and dearth of any records makes one wonder whether hawking was still not an issue of importance that needed to be recorded. The attitude of the CPI leadership also indicates the presence of a strongly patriarchal culture within the party which led them to ignore a significant and organised movement of woman hawkers.

The second section talks about the notion of sisterhood³⁶ whereby the leadership from Ema Market tries to forge an alliance between the licensed and unlicensed hawkers to stop the government's constant eviction drives targeted against the market. Here, I tried to interview both the licensed and unlicensed hawkers, and also the rank-and-file of the unions, to understand what kind of relationship exists between these two groups of woman hawkers. Perhaps women's agency has been generated through several united movements in which both the groups participated. But I was more interested in understanding how far authentic was

³⁶Sisterhood was a key feature of second-wave feminism, providing a collective sense of unity and purpose, and at the same time, demonstrating the solidarity of the feminist movement (Morgan, 1970). Sisterhood emphasises relationships between women that are horizontal, instead of vertical, thereby avoiding the hierarchy inherent in the mother/daughter trope. I use this notion in case of Imphal to study the solidarity between licensed and unlicensed woman hawkers, in order to understand how far the notion of sisterhood is applicable to the case of hawkers.

the notion of sisterhood upheld by the leadership of the unions to the point of celebration. My ethnographic research has revealed that the notion of sisterhood in the context of Ema Market is fractured by conflicting claims to space. As Ema Market and its surrounding areas are full of licensed and unlicensed woman vendors, it served as an ideal site to study the question of whether the patriarchal notion of trade unions organisation worked in the same-gender space. The findings of my study suggest that hierarchies are very much embedded in the unions even in a same-gender space, and even caste politics plays a crucial role in shaping the power dynamics within the market as well as in the unions.

Conclusion

The Conclusion intends to tie together the various theoretical and argumentative threads to focus on institutionalisation and the subtle process involved in this institutionalisation inscribed by the historiography of the hawkers' movement. It also tries to look at the transition that has taken place within the hawkers' organisation in the 2000s, as with the onset of the new millennium, the hawker's organisation expanded its base from local or regional level to a national one. Here I have tried to make sense of the implications associated with this expansion. In the Conclusion, I have attempted to highlight certain implications that are associated with the findings of my study. In doing so, the Conclusion demarcates certain areas that might prove to be of interest to future researchers and refers to

the ways in which the research on the institutionalisation of street hawking and the narratives of everyday lives of woman hawkers can be extended. To be more specific, on the basis of the findings of my research, I have tried to identify three major areas that contain possibilities for future academic research and are also important in terms of their implications for both academics and politics, to be precise, for both post-colonial urban history and feminist politics.

Firstly, I have argued that there is a need to focus on woman hawkers as a separate constituency active in the sector of street hawking. Moreover, as the category of woman hawkers is itself a differentiated one, it is imperative to study the mode of struggle and negotiations of those women who have been left out by the hawkers' unions. Such an enquiry can be productive for both the academic discourse on street hawking and the politics of trade unionism in the informal sector.

Secondly, as the narrative of Sealdah and Territy Bazaar in the case of Kolkata and the narratives of Ema Market in the case of Imphal suggest, the discourse on urban development is often grounded in the politics of space contestation. Moreover, with the onset of the era of neoliberal capitalist development, the infrastructural overhaul projects have become a part of popular common sense. Thus the rhetoric of infrastructural development is often couched in cultural terms, and popular perception about groups that are marginalised on multiple registers often plays out in the politics of space contestation. Thus, the popular politics against revanchist urban development should take into account other contradictions present among different ethnic, social and economic communities within the space of the same city.

Lastly, throughout my field research, I have come across facts, perceptions and attitudes that clearly indicate the presence of gender-based hierarchies and a

strongly patriarchal culture in the sphere of trade unionism. As the case study of Ema Market in Imphal suggests, even the same-gender space is not free from the hierarchies, modalities and logic of patriarchy. As I have suggested before, this makes the space of both the streets and the trade unions an essentially masculinist space leading to the dual exclusion of women from both the structure of the hawker economy and the sphere of politics. As this dual exclusion of woman hawkers have received little academic attention, there is a need to study the modes of this exclusion in various urban contexts from the multiple perspectives of labour history, gender studies and urban history. In fact, such a study calls for an interdisciplinary approach. Further, an interrogation of the politics of trade unionism from the vantage point of gender may better enable the feminist activists to understand the inner workings of patriarchy in a supposedly radical political space.

Sealdah: Unrecorded Voices and Stories of Women Hawker

In the historiography of the hawkers' movement, relatively less attention has been paid to understanding the contribution of women hawkers. This is especially the case concerning Sealdah, where the hawkers' movement is otherwise well-documented. Generally speaking, in the academic literature focussing on the informal sector, the hawker economy, and informality, women's role has largely been downplayed, often to the point of obliteration. Hence, the present chapter seeks to address this research gap by conducting historical-ethnographic research on women street hawkers in a specific transit point-cum-business centre in central Kolkata. The focus of this research is limited to a particular moment in 1981, when the said transit point, Sealdah, witnessed a massive infrastructural overhaul that led to a severe dislocation in the everyday life of thousands of street hawkers, small traders and other petty players in the informal economy, who were serving the congested neighbourhood.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will try to understand the larger dynamics of the mobilisation of hawkers in the city in the post-independence era. This section largely deals with the existing historiography on this subject, the focus of which is the post-partition re-adjustment of the population in the city. The next section will present a nuanced understanding of the neighbourhood under investigation. The third section will analyse the 1981

moment of the infrastructural overhaul. The research material for the third section has been accessed from the archives of the Special Branch of the Kolkata Police as well as through personal interviews of those who took part in resisting the eviction drive connected to the infrastructural overhaul of the neighbourhood. The fourth section will present a narrative of the post-eviction stabilisation in the neighbourhood. In short, the present chapter seeks to portray the everyday life of the urban poor with reference to Sealdah through a study of interruptions. Arguably, interruptions are the moments when records on everyday are produced, and hence, the focus here is on the moments of interruption.

Street Hawking after Partition

The problem of street hawking, especially in colonial metropolitan centres, was not unheard of. There are numerous recorded instances of tussles between street hawkers and the police in colonial Bombay (Kidambari 2007).³⁷ Bandyopadhyay has referred to a report composed in the year 1940 by Sir FL Hallyday, the police commissioner of Bombay, which states: "In a number of areas, obstruction inflicted by hawkers prevails despite our [the cops'] sincere efforts to clear the pavements for pedestrian traffic" (Bandyopadhyay 2010:137).³⁸ However, the years following the partition witnessed a period of rehabilitation and resettlement in West Bengal, as a means to manage the refugee population from East Pakistan as well as the victims of the partition of 1947. As a result of the policy of resettlement

³⁷Kidambari, P (2007). *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890-1920*. Historical Urban Studies, Ashgate.

³⁸Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

of refugees, several hawkers' corners cropped up in different parts of Calcutta, which were erected with the approval of the then chief minister Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy. "In 1955, Roy permitted to build a refugee hawkers' corner adjacent to the Jogubabur Bazar and the residence of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, in Bhawanipore. The large stable opposite to the Greek Orthodox Church in Russa Road (now S. P. Mukherjee Road) was very soon converted into 'Kalighat Refugee Hawkers' Corner'"³⁹. Moreover, through the establishment of the hawkers' corner, the state government tried to provide a stable source of income for the refugee population without inconveniencing the normal flow of road traffic in the city. As a result, instances of eviction and conflict between hawkers and the state machinery were quite frequent.

The later decades of the twentieth century witnessed several eviction drives in the city, and among them, a few were able to attract scholarly attention. Operation Hawker, an eviction drive that commenced in March 1975, has been well documented by Bandyopadhyay (2010),⁴⁰ who has sought to analyse the movement against eviction through a geographical mapping of the places where the eviction drive took place. Bandyopadhyay has succinctly described the whole operation, as well as the hawkers' movement against it, in different phases, along with the manner of the eviction. In its first phase, Operation Hawker concentrated on central Calcutta, including Esplanade and New Market in the vicinity of Burra bazaar. In these areas, most hawkers were Muslims whose mother tongue was not Bengali. In the second phase, the drive was planned in and around the Gariahat area where most hawkers were Bengali Hindus. Although the hawkers in central Calcutta faced the axe during the first phase of the eviction, the hawking stalls of

³⁹ Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Burrabazar were spared at the time.⁴¹ Findings of Bandyopadhyay reveal that the hawkers in the Burrabazar area usually sold their items of vending on behalf of wholesale retailers. However, as Bandopadhyay has observed on the relationship between small-time traders and hawkers,

... in the absence of industrial enclaves within the municipal area of the city, the commercial capital was the lifeline of the city's economy. For any government, it was difficult to undermine the pressure of such groups. Thus, a close visit to sites where Operation Hawker was carried out, even thirty-two years after the incident, reveals that those areas and neighbourhoods are also the major retailing quarters of the city, where shop owners perceived that the hawkers' stalls blocked the shop frontage, and thereby reduced the rental potential of the shops.⁴²

Even though Operation Hawker was halted by the government quite abruptly, the drive is a significant moment not only in terms of understanding the trajectory and historiography of the hawkers' movement but also in terms of analysing the dynamics of local politics in the neighbourhood where the drive took place. In other words, hawker eviction was not merely undertaken to avoid disturbances in the flow of traffic; the Operation also reflected the socio-political issues of the neighbourhood, such as the vested interests of the local bosses of the ruling party, and the attitude of local inhabitants towards the hawkers. Bandopadhyay has further mentioned in his work that the tussle between hawkers and the state is not always a mere site of a cat-and-mouse game, but is also important for understanding the nature of the alliances hawkers forge, and the negotiations they engage, with different political and apolitical groups in order to form what he has termed 'patronage networks', and to build organised resistance against the government. Most academic works on issues concerning the hawkers focus on

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

how hawkers were able to woo various political organisations in their struggle against the government's decision to evict them. The history of the struggle against hawker eviction from the 1970s to the present reveals the capability of hawkers to organise support for their struggle against different governmental forces and build a sustainable movement to this end. While analysing the techniques that the hawkers adopted in movements against various eviction drives – from Operation Hawker to Operation Sunshine – it is important to bear in mind that the concept of hawkers being a vote bank cannot be factored in to explain their success in the battle against the government. The idea of hawkers being a source of vote bank does not hold water in this context, as most hawkers on the streets of Kolkata are mobile citizens, who often venture away from their electoral constituencies to set up their shops. Thus, their eviction posing a direct threat to the ruling party's share of votes cannot be regarded as a factor in their success in resisting the government and influencing resettlement policies. However, the lacuna of the existing academic literatures dealing with hawkers lies in the fact that women are missing in these narratives, and gender dimension of street hawking has remained untouched in these expositions. In other words, women hawkers are a casualty in the homogeneous categorisation of hawkers.

Sealdah after Partition

Sealdah has a historical significance dating back at least to the eighteenth century – the area was part of the 38 villages for which the right to trade was granted to the British by the Mughal Emperor Farruksiyar in 1717.⁴³ In the ancient times, Sealdah was referred to as Shrigaladweep (literally, the Jackal Island). In 1757,

⁴³ Nair, P.T. (1990). *The Growth and Development of Old Calcutta*. In Sukanta Chaudhuri (Ed.), *Calcutta – The Living City*. Oxford University Press.

Sealdah found a more solid standing in history as it was the site of a fierce battle that broke out between 39 English soldiers and 18 Indian sepoy.⁴⁴ However, it was the construction of the famous railway station that catapulted Sealdah into a place of geographical and commercial significance. The station was one of the important transit points in colonial India, well equipped for commutation between both short and long distances. Aparajita Mukhopadhyay⁴⁵ has argued that when it came to providing food facilities for passengers at the railway station, caste prejudice was one of the detrimental factors in the preparation of food by the East Indian Railway Company (EIRC) for public consumption. It was felt that caste norms were hard to be adhered to in such a system and the authorities apprehended that the native society would reject the food provisioning system if introduced. To sort the problem of the availability of food at the station, the EIRC eventually granted permission to build rent-free refreshment rooms, where milk and sweets along with some dry food items could be sold by native vendors. The vendors hung placards both in English and in vernacular, which gave detailed information about the various available food items and their prices. Thus, “the idea of mobile vendors caught on, and eventually shouts of food vendors became a ubiquitous symbol of the railway station.”⁴⁶ However, due to corruption and the low quality of food being sold at high prices within the station premises, passengers tended to prefer the food shops run by the natives outside the station. The Sealdah station area witnessed a phenomenal transformation after the partition. Hundreds of displaced families began to dwell on the station platforms, and such a situation continued for a decade, if not more. The presence of refugees within the station premises permanently added to the existing demand for food in

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Mukhopadhyay, Aparajita (2013). *Wheels of change?: Impact of railways on colonial north Indian society, 1855-1920*. [Doctoral dissertation, SOAS, University of London].

<https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17363>. Accessed on 16 July 2018.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

the area. Perhaps, the emergence of hawking as a profession in and around the Sealdah area was a result of the government's policy to stabilise the huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan. Hence, the migration of refugees played a significant role in and is intricately linked to, hawking that led to the emergence of the 'Hawker' class in the urban history of Calcutta.

The partition and post-partition era witnessed a mammoth influx of migrants who turned to the informal sector for their survival. As Anwesha Sengupta⁴⁷ has pointed out, the refugees who came from East Pakistan tried their luck in all available vocations and vacancies, ranging from cooking to tailoring. However, street hawking appeared to those who were seeking employment as an easy entry point into the economy to eke out a living. This was perceptible in the 1951 census that estimated that 26.9 percent of the hawkers in Calcutta were from erstwhile East Pakistan. In her work, Sengupta has mentioned the case of Sadananda Pal (drawn from the latter's autobiography *EkaKumbho*), who tried his hands in various jobs including tailoring, hawking betel-leaf, making sweets, and setting up a stationery shop. Pal's narrative reveals how intricately migration history is connected to the large-scale expansion of the informal economy, particularly hawking. Further, Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay's⁴⁸ thesis has elaborated on the various measures adopted by the government to resettle the refugees and allow them to hawk on the streets of Calcutta. A huge corpus of Bengali novels including, among others, Jyotirindra Nandi's *Baro Ghar Ek Uthan* (1959), Manik Bandopadhyay's *Sarbojonin* (1952), Buddhadev Bose's *AynarModheyEka* (1968) and

⁴⁷ Sengupta, Anwesha (2017). The Railway Refugees: Sealdah, 1950s-1960s. Occasional paper. IDSK, Kolkata.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* (1987), provides a vivid description of the refugee life and colony formation, but the most interesting part is most of these novels consists of the representation of refugee women. The spatial displacement had eroded many of the social stigmas and prevalent norms, and a significant shift was noticed in these women's perception of domesticity and outside world. However, it is pertinent to mention that most of the representative figures of these post-partition 'new women', who were forced to break the shackles of traditional domesticity, are urban characters, and reside in the urban epicentre or in the vicinity of the city. What is missing in these narratives are the stories of marginalised lower-caste women who often resorted to hawking and other informal vocations in the city. Refugees who reached Calcutta in and after 1950 were mostly from the poorer sections – the *chhotolok*,⁴⁹ as they were often referred to in the commonplace urban vocabulary of Calcutta, to draw a sharp contrast to the earlier *bhadralok*⁵⁰ migrants from East Pakistan. They did not have the cultural capital, a prior connection to the city, or friends and family in Calcutta. Neither did they have a substantial property in East Bengal as their fall-back options. They required jobs and Calcutta promised to be a land of more opportunities than the small towns and villages of West Bengal. This was the prime reason on the part of

⁴⁹*Chhotolok*: While the term literally means lowly people, it is often used to refer to people who do not belong to the category of *bhadralok* (see the next footnote), and may indicate varied groups and classes ranging from lower-caste people to the labouring poor. The East Pakistani refugees of the 1950s were designated as *Chhotolok* due to their lower caste identity and poorer economic background.

⁵⁰*Bhadralok*: While this term literally means gentlefolk, it specifically refers to the English-educated Bengali middle-class that emerged during the colonial rule. Although most members of the *bhadralok* community belong to the traditional upper castes, the term encompasses all members of the rich and middle-class segments of the Bengali society. A few other markers of this class include English education, economic privilege, and social connections. The East Pakistani migrants who came to Calcutta in the late 1940s were perceived as *bhadralok* due to their upper-caste background, economic prosperity, and social connections.

the refugees for choosing a big city like Calcutta as against small towns or villages.⁵¹ Thus, as Anwesha Sengupta writes,

*Calcutta with a large and burgeoning urban underclass that had been historically very cosmopolitan was a natural choice. Here the ubiquitous refugees became the hawkers, small shop keepers, factory workers, mechanics, domestic help, cooks, private tutors and tailors. While the city elite ranted about their presence in the city, they also perceived these displaced poor people as potential low-priced labourers.*⁵²

However, the vast corpus of creative literature dealing with the refugee experience fails to take into account the existence of marginalised women, particularly the women hawkers. Thus, the migration history is intricately associated with hawking in Sealdah where the local or neighbourhood politics would play a vital role in shaping the hawker phenomenon in the later decades. Further, as Nandini Dasgupta has stated, “initially there were two major groups of hawkers, one sold fruits and vegetables the long-distance traveller could easily pick up before catching the train.”⁵³ But after the Indo-Pak war of 1971, “individuals took to street hawking in this area enhancing the product base, and pushing the frontiers of vending along some of the roads away from Sealdah.”⁵⁴ However, in the 1980s the government was no longer ready to accept new migrants to the city. On the whole, the relationship between the government and hawkers has been far from stable, and the government’s approach towards the refugee street hawkers varied from period to period. To regulate the emerging migrant force, the government sometimes provided space for hawking. However, at other times, the same

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Dasgupta, Nandini (1992). *Petty Trading in the Third World: The Case of Calcutta*. Avebury.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

hawkers were evicted on flimsy grounds without taking into account their refugee identity. Reports published in dailies such as the *Jugantar* as well as reports from the Special Branch of the city police confirm that several hawker evictions were undertaken to maintain law and order in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. As Sengupta has pointed out in the context of one such eviction drive, “There was a twelfth shack in the vicinity, owned by a non-refugee hawker, which remained untouched by the police. 19 refugee hawkers, thus, were particularly targeted.”⁵⁵ Bandyopadhyay has also provided an interesting piece of information in this regard:

*In 1952, Bidhan Roy endeavoured to evict the book hawkers along College Street so that the magnificent colonial architecture of Presidency College and the University of Calcutta could be visible from a distance. In order to keep a constant flow of books at cheap prices, the teachers of Presidency College requested the chief minister not to evict the book hawkers.”*⁵⁶

Thus, the relationship between the city and its hawkers has always been a volatile one. But, as both the accounts quoted above show, the state government’s attitude towards the hawkers was far from uniform and depended upon several other factors such as the identity of the hawkers, what kind of wares they were selling etc.

During the late 1960s, Jyoti Basu, the deputy chief minister of the United Front government, ordered the police to evict the hawkers at Gariahat junction. However, this eviction drive failed as the “United front government which claims to be pro-poor and banks on refugee votes could not afford to turn a deaf ear to

⁵⁵ Sengupta, Anwesha (2017). The Railway Refugees: Sealdah, 1950s-1960s.[Occasional paper, IDSK, Kolkata].

⁵⁶Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

the plea of the refugees".⁵⁷ The year 1972 saw the Congress returning to power in the state, and to check the rising influence of the left parties among the labouring poor of Calcutta, the Congress directed its attention towards the city hawkers. Thus, young Congress leaders like Subrata Mukherjee tried to spearhead the hawkers' movement in the Esplanade area. In the 1980s, prominent Congress leader SomenMitra provided leadership to the hawker movement against atrocities of the Left Front government's police in the Burrabazar area. However, from the 1970s the dynamics of hawker politics assumed a new dimension where the neighbourhood or local identity earned prominence over any special(that is, migrant/refugee) identity of the hawkers.

The present chapter tries to trace the growth of the informal sector, particularly the hawking, in the city, while primarily focussing on women hawkers –the movement of women hawkers in the Sealdah area at different points of time. The chapter further proceeds to unpack the notion of hawkers, and tries to analyse their different levels of negotiation based on their experiences and everyday struggles, beginning with the period when the arrival of women hawkers began in Sealdah. In this context, the chapter focuses on the movement of hawkers in the 1980s, when both participation and leadership of women hawkers in the anti-eviction movement was immense but largely unrecorded. This movement took place in the period between the two well-documented hawker movements: the movement against the Operation Hawker of 1975, and the one against the Operation Sunshine of 1996. The question that the chapter seeks to answer concerns the role and contribution of women hawkers to the growth and development of hawkers into a prominent political category. Most literary works view hawkers as either migrant or native males. This is indicative of the fact that

⁵⁷*The Statesman*, 29 November 1969.

gender identities are often dissolved under the term 'hawker', and hawkers are accepted as one homogenous community. My field of investigation, the Sealdah area, reveals that a majority of street hawkers are women. This chapter attempts to give voice to their narratives that seem to be lost in the larger history of refugee hawkers.

Basanti Mondal,⁵⁸ a woman street hawker doing business in Sealdah, came to the city as a refugee in the 1950s with her parents. Her family was forced to settle in Bongaon as they were not ready to go to the refugee camps in Odisha. Sengupta has provided a detailed description of how the authority in West Bengal handled lower class/caste refugee migration after 1948: "Trains were stopped at border stations like Ranaghat and Bongaon and refugees were asked whether they had any close family in Calcutta or elsewhere in West Bengal. If their answers were in negative, they were taken to nearby transit camps and from there to the camps of Orissa/ Bihar or to the camps in the districts of Midnapore/Bankura/Purulia."⁵⁹ After settling in a refugee colony in Bongaon, the struggle for everyday existence became harder for Basanti and her family. The struggle for survival pushed her towards the city, and since hawking required little capital, Basanti took recourse to street hawking. Sealdah, being well connected by railways and being the gateway to the main city, became her chosen spot to hawk her wares. Basanti Mondal could continue hawking on the pavement in front of Surendranath College uninterrupted until the beginning of the 1980s, though, according to her, there were instances of eviction and raid by the police on the street hawkers even during the relatively peaceful period. She faced eviction due the construction of Vidhyapati Setu, more popularly known as Sealdah Flyover, in Sealdah in the early 1980s. Her narrative

⁵⁸Mondal, Basanti (2018, July 10). *Personal interview*.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

throws light on how infrastructural development creates new possibilities in the local politics involving hawkers and influences the hawkers' movement in general. Thus, hawking enunciates constant contestation of space, an area in which the re-reading of the urban in the light of infrastructural development becomes a necessity for analysing the underlying politics.

A detailed description of the movement in Sealdah

The construction of Vidyapati Setu was completed by May 1983. The logic behind the construction of Sealdah Flyover was to allow free traffic movements at the bottleneck of the station, the location of a major city hospital, a court, two cinema halls, two large wholesale markets (Baithakkhana Bazaar and Koley Market), and three major roads. The flyover stretches from APC Road to Nilratan Sarkar Hospital. In 1977, the Left Front government came to power after defeating the Congress in the West Bengal assembly polls. This was the time when the Writers' Building in Dalhousie was the administrative headquarters of the state government. However, the stretch from Bowbazar to Sealdah was infamous for its traffic congestion and unforeseen delays in travelling. To avoid VVIP vehicles getting stuck in traffic snarls and ensure a faster commutation towards Dalhousie, the flyover was constructed. Thus, the prime motive of erecting the structure was not to ease out the traffic of all descriptions but to facilitate traffic for only a class of privileged people.

To understand the symbiotic relationship between infrastructural development and the change in the social imagination of the public space within the parameters of hawking, this chapter draws from the conceptual framework of Daniel Mains.⁶⁰ Mains has stated that he is interested in understanding how infrastructural development is interrelated with the redistribution of resources. The questions that stem from this interrelation are: Who has the right to benefit from public resources and infrastructure? How do the identities of gender, ethnicity, and age shift these dynamics? Such questions are particularly interesting when considered in conjunction with the relationship between infrastructure and ideals concerning progress. Infrastructure gives birth to power politics and hierarchies. Moreover, it is always noticed that any infrastructural project, such as the construction of bridges or railway infrastructure, primarily cause displacement of the marginalised section. The questions that are relevant in the present context are: What kind of politics did the flyover in Sealdah engender? Was the politics gendered? How did networks form to fight the eviction come into being due to the construction of the flyover? What were the techniques adopted by the agitators? How far were they successful?

The narrative of the present section has been developed from the ethnographic observations and fieldwork, and from the 'daily notes' files of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police.⁶¹ **'Operation Hawker'** and **'Operation Sunshine'** refer to movements associated with the hawker eviction in 1975 and 1996, but the movement that this chapter attempts to historicise is the one that failed to earn any

⁶⁰Lockrem, Jessica & Lugo, Adonia (26 November, 2012). Infrastructure: Interview with Nikhil Anand, Johnathan Bach, Julia Elyachar and Daniel Mains. Curated collection, *Cultural Anthropology Online*.

<https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/infrastructure-anand-bach-elyachar>. Accessed on 12 August 2018.

⁶¹Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police, SW630/80, 81, 82 and 83. Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, Government of West Bengal.

name from the government. This may be due to a variety of reasons: First, in the case of the aforementioned movements, the eviction drive by the government was conducted within a short period of time, but the drive has taken up to facilitate the construction of Sealdah Flyover continued for three years between 1981 and 1983. As Basanti Mondal's narrative clearly reveals, the usual practice for the hawkers was to re-occupy the pavement right after they were evicted. It was like a cat-and-mouse game between the police and the hawkers on the streets. This operation was difficult as the government still had to negotiate with the refugee identity, and the issue of rehabilitation was quite complicated. Moreover, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had a large number of members among the refugee hawkers in the Sealdah area, who would be rehabilitated below the flyover later. Second, the movement remained nameless as all attention was focused on the infrastructural project, namely Vidyapati Setu, which was inaugurated by the then chief minister Jyoti Basu. Seemingly, the value of the project was deemed to be more than the value of the marginalised section that was regularly evicted. Moreover, significantly enough, all attempts to evict the hawkers and clear the public space were a colossal failure. In other words, repeated government attempts to free the long stretch of road from MG Road to Bowbazar, intersecting the College Street area, of hawkers entirely failed. The success of this movement was far-reaching as shall be evinced in the latter part of the chapter.

On the evening of 5 March 1981, under the joint auspices of the hawkers' unions such as the Hawker Maitri Samity, the Unemployed Youth Federation (affiliated to the Congress-I) and the Madhya Kalikata Hawkers' Union, a rally consisting of 200 men and 100 women was held at Shraddhananda Park. Leaders like Hari Narayan Chandra, Shyamapada Das and Kanu Bose addressed the rally, criticising the Left Front government for its eviction of hawkers from different

parts of the city without making any alternative arrangement for them. The leaders addressing the rally shouted slogans such as: 1. *Bikalpa byabostha na kore sarkari jaiga theke sramajibi manush ke uchhed kara chalbena* (No displacement of the labouring people from the public space without an alternative arrangement); 2. *Hawker der upor chirna pate case byabohar bandaho karte hobe* (No cases should be brought against the hawkers). 3. *Sarkari o besarkari chakuri khetre sebanniya bekarder agradhikar dite hobe* (Priority should be given to the unemployed in government and private jobs); 4. *Sakal supermarket notun bazaar dokan ghar bekarder o hawkerder madhdye bilikarte hobe* (Space must be allocated to the hawkers and unemployed in all new supermarkets and shops); 5. *Dike dike hawker uchhed halo kano Bam front sarkar jababdao* (The Left Government must provide reasons for the eviction of hawkers in different parts of the city) etc.

The leaders also condemned the frequent eviction drives targeted against the hawkers by the police. Finally, a deputation was sent out to the state labour minister. On returning, the deputation announced that the minister had asked for a meeting on 14 March 1981 to discuss the hawkers' grievances in the presence of the minister in charge of municipal affairs and the commissioner of police, Calcutta. A Bengali cyclostyled copy of the memorandum has been obtained for this research along with a leaflet captioned *Kolkata Tumi Kar?* (Kolkata, who do you belong to?). The 1980s saw the clear beginning of a new era of urbanism where infrastructural development and various projects such as the construction of flyovers, supermarkets and inclusion of new townships within the orbit of Calcutta became one of the prime concerns of the ruling party.

This can be evinced from the words of Basanti Mondal, "*thana theke Babu eshe bollo tomader ke uthe jete hobe... bridge er kachakachi bosajabe na*" (Police officials asked us to evacuate as we were not allowed anywhere near the bridge). The Hawker

Maitri Samity, being active in the area, became the sole refuge of the displaced hawkers. It was an independent union in which individuals such as Gopal Mitra (president) Shymapada Das (deputy president) Anjan Nag (treasurer) Shibaprasad Kundu (joint secretary) and Kanu Bose (secretary) were at the helm of affairs. The police report in certain instances referred to the Maitri Samity as a Naxalite organisation as Kanu Bose was quite known for his connection with the Naxalite movement. However, the significance of Kanu Bose's leadership lays not much in his prior connection to a militant left movement, but in his ability to coordinate with and organise 300 women hawkers who regularly participated in every programme of the union. According to Basanti Mondal, although this threat of eviction was initially focussed on their area, the government gradually launched such drives throughout the city. This impressed upon the hawkers the gravity of the situation, and they came together under one umbrella front, irrespective of political banners, and organised for a unified resistance. The next entry in the report of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police, dated 25.03.1981, mentions that the Hawker Maitri Samity held a street-corner meeting on the evening of 23 March 1981 at the Shyambazar Five-point crossing. Gopal Mitra and Kanu Bose addressed the meeting, criticising the Left Front government and the police for the eviction of hawkers without providing any alternative arrangements for rehabilitation. This report reveals how eviction drives had become rampant across different parts of Calcutta by this time. The protest rallies and meetings were organised at the heart of the city, in the area between Shradhananda Park and Shyambazar.

Meanwhile, the Hawker Maitri Samity was prompt in garnering support from various existing hawkers' unions, and could successfully form the Paschim Banga Hawker Samity (Independent), registered at 26/1 Mahatma Gandhi Road, which

consisted of various hawkers' unions such as the Hawker MaitriSamity (Independent), the Calcutta Men's Hawkers' Federation (AITUC), the Bowbazar Hawkers' Union (INTUC), the Unemployed Youth Federation (Independent) and the Madhya Kalikata Hawkers' Union (Independent). The entry dated 5 July 1981 reports that at the behest of the PaschimBanga Hawker SangramSamity, a procession of 250 people, including 55 women, reached Esplanade Row (East), where it was intercepted by the police. At about quarter past five in the evening, a six-man deputation went to Raj Bhavan and submitted a memorandum containing their demands to the deputy secretary to the Governor of West Bengal. As already mentioned, a previous memorandum had been submitted to the minister in charge of the municipal affairs. The choice of appeal to the Governor instead of a state minister in this instance reflects a shift of focus from democratic representatives to the constitutional head. A careful reading of the incidents reveals that there was a gradual repositioning of the welfare-oriented nature of the state. The state was profoundly interested in making Calcutta an 'A-one city' where beautification and infrastructural development triumphed over the livelihood of thousands of marginalised people. However, to destabilise the unified movement of hawkers, the government announced that only those hawkers who had been in business before 1977 would be considered for rehabilitation. According to Bandyopadhyay (2010),

In the initial years of the Left Front government, the strategy of the CPM in Calcutta was to establish and consolidate the incumbency by strengthening and re-structuring the patronage network in the informal sector. The party sought to achieve this without risking a further radicalization of the urban poor. Being in the government, the party had begun to understand the difficulty involved in satisfying its heterogeneous clients. Therefore, the realistic step for the party was to consolidate benefit distribution through its affiliated labour unions by

restricting new membership after 1977. Consequently, the government declared that no hawker, who had occupied the footpath after 1977, would be given the vending license.

However, such a divisive policy of the government, instead of acting as an antidote, further strengthened the resolve of the unions to resist the eviction drives.

As the numerous entries in the daily notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police, dated between 8 October and 28 December 1981, suggest, hawkers' unions organised protest rallies, press conferences, and submitted letters, memoranda and alternative proposals of resettlement to the government. From March 1982 the tactics of the movement saw a transition from constitutional methods of politics to fighting pitched battles with the police.⁶² However, it was a conscious decision of the PaschimBanga Hawker Samity to not resort to violent acts like bombing and arson. Shaktiman Ghosh,⁶³ one of the leaders of the organisation, believed that the use of violent means would alienate their movement from the masses. Perhaps the deliberate avoidance of violence in any form was prompted by an urge to distance the movement from the Naxalite ideology since Kanu Bose's prior connections to the Naxals had resulted in aspersions being cast on the real nature of the movement. The leaders were apprehensive that given the slightest scope, the government would brand the movement as Naxalite and put them behind bars, disparaging the movement in the public imagination. The entries of 26, 29 and 30 March 1982 in the daily notes files are of importance if we are to reflect upon how the hawkers reacted to the eviction drives. The entries state that a drive directed against the unauthorised hawkers of College Street and Bowbazar around quarter

⁶²Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, Government of West Bengal (1996-97). Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police (SW 636/81).

⁶³Ghosh, Saktiman (2018, August 25). Personal interview.

to four on the evening of 26 March 1982 saw the gathering of 200 hawkers belonging to the Pacshim Banga Hawker Samity, who became engaged in scuffles with the police. Some Police personnel, as well as hawkers, sustained injuries in the clash that broke out and the police arrested 15 people. 29 and 30 March saw the final eviction drive in the Sealdah area, where the office of the PaschimBanga Hawker Samity on Mahatma Gandhi Road was razed along with other stalls on BB Ganguly Street after being labelled as unauthorised structure. Leaders like Saktiman Ghosh and Kanu Bose were arrested but were later released on bail. However, from the month of April, the movement reverted to its traditional modus operandi and leaflets were distributed bearing the title *Manonio mukhho mantrir kache khola chithi* (An open letter to the honourable chief minister), which was issued by Nirmalendu Bhattacharya, an advocate, on behalf of the Byabshayee Parishad, the Street Hawkers' and Vendors' Union and the All Bengal Nationalist Hawkers' Association. The leaflet clearly highlighted how, due to the construction of the flyover in Sealdah by the Calcutta Municipal Development Authority (CMDA, KMDA after Calcutta became Kolkata) and in order to assist the government endeavours in building infrastructure, hawkers were once again evicted, as is evident from the phrase *punoray amra uchhedito holam* ("we were evicted once again"). The leaflet urged the chief minister to look into the policy and system under which the stalls were to be distributed among the displaced hawkers, as huge discrepancies were noticed regarding the resettlement of the hawkers below the flyover. The real owners of stalls were denied new stalls, while members of the ruling CPI(M) were given preference. Moreover, the importance of such leaflets lies in the alliance between the traders and hawkers in the face of a common and severe threat to their livelihood. Usually, the traders tend to look down upon hawkers as nothing but a nuisance who snatch their customers away, but this alliance highlights the cause of a joint and united struggle against the

government. Going back to Daniel Mains's theory on how infrastructural development is interrelated to the redistribution of resources, it is pertinent to ask who has the right to benefit from public resources and infrastructure. As Mains has shown, redistribution of resources is often a hierarchical process, and the original candidates are often lost in the politics of nepotism and the web of political patronage. It can be adduced that the intensity of the movement slowed down as no entries were found on hawker agitations from May till September 1982 in the daily notes of the Special Branch of the city police, the reason being, this was the period of assembly elections in West Bengal. The next entry is dated 17.9.1982. On 17 September 1982, 400 male and 100 female hawkers belonging to the Paschim Banga Hawker Samity and other hawkers' unions active in West Bengal, except the union affiliated to the CPI(M), came together to protest the eviction drive of the government and demanded the right to conduct business in and around the Sealdah area during Durga Puja, the most profitable time of the year for business.

From 1983 onwards, the government became stricter against hawking in and around the flyover. Though three entries on hawkers are available from 1983, dated respectively, 11.01.1983, 16.02.1983, and 03.03.1983, it is apparent in all the three entries that torture and police atrocities against the hawkers in and around the Sealdah area increased manifold during this period. No entries are, however, available for the month of April. In 1983, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu ordered the police officials to take necessary actions to identify and evict the post-1977 entrants on the footpath.⁶⁴ At this juncture, it is imperative to probe into the question of why hawkers from the Bowbazar area were also facing eviction as part of a drive claiming to clean up only the area around the Sealdah flyover. Interviews with

⁶⁴*The Statesman*, 8 July 1983.

Badal Rakshit, the government engineer in charge of the Sealdah flyover, reveal that the original development plan of the bridge was entirely different.⁶⁵For the development of the Sealdah area, the CMDA mainly concentrated on two proposals: **a)** construction of a hump, and **b)**an extended flyover project. The hump scheme was first accepted for implementation. According to Rakshit, the construction of an extended flyover was discarded due to difficulties in relocating underground utilities and the water and sewerage line, but more so because it was not possible to undertake such a construction work in a crowded and busy area. This declaration echoes a report published in the *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette* on 30 June 1982. However, without taking into account the practicability of the plan, the marginalised urban poor began to be harassed and evicted regularly. The hawkers who occupy the streets were one of the stakeholders of the project, but were never taken into confidence or consulted about the project. Despite the government claiming that the plan to extend the flyover till Bowbazar was discarded because of the area being crowded, it can safely be assumed that the plan never took off due the presence of a large number of traders ranging from cloth merchants to jewellers in the public space. As such an extension of the bridge would inevitably mean shutting down their shops; the government would never undertake any project that could cause the breakdown of the local business economy. This instance further strengthens Bandyopadhyay's argument that local dynamics play a major role in the politics of contest over urban space. This was arguably the first eviction drive in the city instigated by infrastructural development, and the resistance movement has far-reaching significance, not least due to the role played by women hawkers. The daily notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police mention how women courted arrest without hesitation and participated in every programme of the organisation, but a closer study of the

⁶⁵Rakshit, Badal (2018, October). Personal interview.

notes also reveals that instead of being mentioned by their names, these women featured in the police report as a crowd, or were clubbed together as “ladies”. This is indicative of the fact that gender ceases to exist within the homogeneous category of a hawker, which, as a result, assumes an overarching, preconceived male identity. Basanti Mondal narrates that on a certain night in March 1982, when the police came with a bulldozer to raze their stalls and office of the Paschim Banga Hawker Samity, they resisted the attempt, fought a pitched battle with the police, and physically blocked the bulldozer. A woman named Hela Naskar lay down before the wheels of the bulldozer to obstruct its movement. On the last day of the eviction drive on BB Ganguly Street, the hawkers pelted the police personnel with bricks and stones in a last-ditch attempt to stop the eviction. However, none of these incidents narrated by both Hela Naskar and Basanti Mondal featured in the daily notes kept by the Special Branch of Calcutta Police. This demonstrates how police report systematically relegated the women participants to anonymity through their language and selective reporting. The police report of 30 September 1982 carried no detail about the scuffle between hawkers and the police. Was this a deliberate attempt to not inscribe the spontaneous acts of women hawkers in police records? The most special aspect of this movement was the spontaneous participation of women hawkers, ranging from resisting the police from demolishing their stalls to physical combat with the police. However, this movement saw some contrasting differences from both ‘Operation Hawker’ (1972 to 1975) and ‘**Operation Sunshine**’ (1996-1997) in terms of the gender aspect of the movement. Firstly, in Operation Hawker we find no mention of women or women’s participation at large. It was launched in Esplanade where the presence of women hawkers is minimal to this day. Operation Sunshine, on the other hand, is associated with names like Ratna Ghosh, Mamata Banerjee and several other women leaders, but the main essential

difference lies in the fact that a large number of women regularly courted arrest in each and every programme of the Paschim Banga Hawker Samity, which was not the case under the Hawker Sangram Committee, the umbrella organisation formed during Operation Sunshine. The movement in Sealdah, however, lacked women leaders, despite the area having one of the largest populations of women hawkers in the city. The other difference between Operation Sunshine and the eviction drive in Sealdah lies in the class and caste composition of women associated with the movement. The women associated with the movement opposing Operation Sunshine were mainly upper-caste educated urban women, who were the leaders of their organisations or political parties that had joined the unified struggle against the CPI(M) government. In the case of the movement of Sealdah, on the other hand, the main participants were essentially the women hawkers belonging to lower castes and classes. However, these women never led any rally or deputation and remained in the background, as part of a homogenised mass, that both the media and police reports referred to simply as 'hawkers'. Interestingly, most of the prominent leaders of the hawkers' movement in Calcutta belonged to the urban educated '*bhadralok*' intelligentsia, who came from refugee families and were well aware of the plights of displacement.

Perhaps, it is pertinent to mention in this context that in the 1980s, women hawkers in Imphal were waging a battle against the state to save their business centre Ema Market, also a heritage site. One of the oldest markets located at Khwairamband Bazaar at the centre of Imphal, Ema Market has witnessed several reconstruction processes. Recently, the old structures of Purna Bazaar, NupiKeithel and Laxmi Bazaar have been dismantled by the state government of Manipur, and new market buildings have been constructed on those sites to suit the modernising trends of the globalised world. After the government decision to

raze the old structure and create a multi-storied building, women hawkers of the market began their agitation. The women went for a sit-in demonstration for 24 hours to voice their grievances. However, in the case of Manipur, leaders emerged from this community of women hawkers. What ties together the movement of Sealdah and that of Manipur is the fact that both the movements were born of the need to resist infrastructural development projects that jeopardised the lives and livelihood of marginalised people. Therefore, an understanding of the concept of development associated with infrastructural projects, which impact the livelihood of the marginalised sections of the society, calls for a rereading of the city space. As David Harvey has observed in *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*,⁶⁶ "...the question what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question what kind of people we want to be, what kind of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold". Apart from the points of significance of the movement discussed above, an important landmark came in 1986 in the form of a report presented by the Committee on Petition presented in the ninth Legislative Assembly of West Bengal. The report stated:⁶⁷

The committee was chaired by Dr KP Ghosh, and its members included Sri Jadav Mukherjee and Sri Parimal Routh, and the officer was Sri P.K. Das, CH.Mpl.Engn. (Mech and Conservancy). The proceedings of the meeting are as follows: Hawkers are there on the streets and footpaths of Calcutta and possibly they will remain. In all big cities of India, this unwanted problem is there and there has been no solution yet, though there have been various discussions, meetings, decisions taken at a very high level. The reason is simple, thousands of people earn their livelihood by this profession for which they find the easiest way to encroach on

⁶⁶Harvey, David (2012). *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso.

⁶⁷Committee on Petition. (1986). *Report in the Matter of Framing Suitable Laws for Controlling and Regulating the Unauthorized Occupation of Public Lands and Thoroughfares by the Hawkers and Others in this State*. West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

footpath/carriageway. To have a practical solution on the subject, it is considered that at best we think of maintaining some discipline in this affair so that minimum disturbance is created for pedestrians or carriageways, keeping the existence of hawkers and shops. With this realistic view, the following suggestions are made:

1. To point out the areas/zones/footpaths which are attractive for hawkers and foot business.
2. To remove all others beyond authorisation zones and to select and push them in a new authorised zone.
3. To demarcate “authorisation zone” and “non-authorisation zone” and should be made clearly visible with suitable boards like “no parking board” etc.
4. To collect trade fees from each hawker/stall owner on daily basis, as of car parking fees, through authorised contractors against annual charges to be collected from contractors. (Minutes of the Meeting of Calcutta Municipal Consultative Committee, 18th September 1989, II-III).

Along with suggestions, certain regulations proclaimed by the committee are as follows:

- a) Hawkers cannot be removed unless they violate the C.M.C. rules and regulations.*
- b) They will be allowed to run their business from 9 am to 9 pm.*

- c) *They will not be allowed to construct stalls.*
- d) *They will not be allowed to occupy any space on the carriageways and junction of roads and streets and in front of the hospital, nursing homes, educational and religious institutions.*
- e) *They will get space 1Mx1MORx2Mx2M each as the case may be.*
- f) *The Calcutta Police authority will clearly chalk out the hawking and non-hawking zones of the city.*

According to this report prepared by the Petition Committee under the chairmanship of Dr KP Ghosh, certain rules and regulations were drawn to manage hawking on the streets of Calcutta, among which the most significant one pertained to 'hawking in carriageway', which was considered an illegal act.

The politics of space in Sealdah involves an understanding of migrant identity which was intricately linked to the initial growth of hawking as a profession in the city. Perhaps the infrastructural development of Sealdah caused the eviction of hawkers and transformed their migrant identity. This struggle of hawkers against the state intensified their right to that space, which in the long run would categorise hawkers as a stakeholder of the space. For so long, hawkers were regarded merely as occupiers of public places, but following this movement in the 1980s, the political vocabulary was radically transformed, consequently recognising hawkers as stakeholders and transforming the role they played in the politics of the urban space. The city takes the centre stage in this discussion, and thus the question of the legality of hawkers becomes indispensable. However, an understanding of the cityscape of Sealdah is incomplete without taking into account the present scenario. At this juncture, it is necessary to analyse the everyday struggles of new female hawkers doing business in the Sealdah area and their effort to undo their systemic erasure from all literature dealing with hawkers.

New spatial dynamics and plotting of old/new.

After the construction of the flyover over the existing tram line running from Outram Ghat connecting Bowbazar up to Rajabazaar and Nonapukur, the area from the Bank of India crossing to Koley Market was left vacant. Meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed the second phase of hawker influx in Sealdah. The hawkers who came to the city in this decade began to occupy the vacant space in the area stretching from the Bank of India crossing to Koley Market on the left side of the road, and from the Bank of India crossing up to Prachi Cinema Hall on the right-side area. It is important to mention in this context that hawkers have already existed on the right side of the road (i.e. the area between Bank of India and Prachi Cinema Hall) since the time of the partition. The new entrants in the area occupied the carriageway to eke out a living.

The second wave of hawkers' influx into Kolkata can be attributed to what Ananya Roy has called 'rural dispossession', which forced the women of the rural areas to flock to the city in search of livelihood. The geographical mapping of migration to the streets of Kolkata, particularly Sealdah, reveals how the late 1980s witnessed the decay of home-based and small-scale industries in West Bengal. Moreover, the failure of the government's benefit distribution programmes forced women from different regions of West Bengal to migrate to Kolkata in search of employment. In this section, I will not engage in a detailed analysis on reasons for

migration but will concentrate rather on how the struggle of these women who reached the city during the second wave was different from the experiences of the women who had settled in the city during the post-partition era. This section attempts to analyse the struggle by focussing on the following questions: a) What were the challenges specifically faced by women hawkers of the second wave? b) How these challenges were different from those faced by the first wave of women hawkers? c) How and whether these challenges have had different impacts on the first and second wave of women hawkers, and how do both the waves of women perceive and conceive the space where they hawk every day? This section does not merely explore the struggles of the second wave of women hawkers, but also intends to uphold the sagas of their success amidst the diverse struggles and negotiations that they experience every day.

In order to understand the challenges faced by the women hawkers of the second wave, they have been categorised in terms of the 'time' at which they arrive in the city to hawk. Time is an important signifier in the case of these women. The first category of women regularly arrives in Sealdah sharp at 9.30 am and conducts their business until 9 pm or even 10 pm every night. They commute daily mainly from South 24 Parganas. These women hail from different districts of West Bengal but have taken up temporary residence either in South 24 Parganas or in areas around Sealdah, such as Belegghata and Rajabazaar, for the ease of commutation. The second category of women hawks from 4 pm to 11 pm, and they usually spend the night at the Sealdah station. The target customers of these hawkers are office returnees, and they sell seasonal vegetables, procured from wholesale markets or directly from fields near their homes. 'Time' becomes a signifier of their hardships in this instance, as these women arrive in the city in the evening and often fail to adhere to fixed hours of business. As Durkheim has observed,

“...humans rely on collective representations in their experience of the objective (or real, natural) world”.⁶⁸ The field ethnography notices that it is mostly the women who commute from different places of the state. According to Wajcman, there is, furthermore, a crucial difference in the character of time available to men and women; whereas the former tend to enjoy more “pure” leisure time, the latter often perceive their leisure time to be interrupted by activities of unpaid work. They must juggle with different tasks, which accentuate the perception of being harried. Here, quality rather than quantity of time available plays a crucial role in the feeling of time scarcity. Wajcman, therefore, concludes that temporalities are essentially gendered while observing the “multidimensionality of the feeling of being pressed by the time”.⁶⁹ Further interviews with these women hawkers of Sealdah have unpacked various new facets of struggle that cannot be viewed with naked eyes. The erratic timing of business not only increases the working hours for these women, but the general division of labour at home also adds to their daily workload and makes their everyday struggle further complicated.

The peril of marginality continues in their case. The thick description of their lives reveals how landlessness and abject poverty forced them to move towards the city, leaving their families and other social ties behind. These women have to live away from their families at least for six to eight months in a year. This often causes a hindrance to their filial ties, as one interviewee narrated how sorely she regretted not being able to be with her children. Apart from an emotional detachment from the families, there are several examples of how they are forced to join hawking. An interesting insight was unravelled while interviewing Agina Bibi, who was forced into street hawking due to the demonetisation of the Indian

⁶⁸Quoted in Schulz, Yvan (December 2012). Time representation in social sciences. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 14(4), 441–447. <https://dx.doi.org/10.31887%2FDCNS.2012.14.4%2Fyschulz>.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

economy in 2016, as her husband lost his job as a result of the reform.⁷⁰ Her husband worked in the construction sector which was adversely affected, along with other informal sectors, by the withdrawal of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 notes as legal tender. This incident exposes the apathy of the government towards the working class and this policy pushed vulnerable women to further marginality. The ethnographic study reveals a feminisation of hawking in the case of Sealdah, as most of the hawkers are women and case studies show that failure of agricultural pursuits and inability to engage in any sustained work in the rural areas have inevitably forced the women to move to the urban space to take up hawking. Several factors like the well-connected rail routes, low level of skill, and a meagre capital required for hawking contributed to so many women turning to hawking. Academics are, however, divided on the subject of hawking being a low-skill job that requires little more than a meagre amount of capital. After personally engaging with hawkers, I have reached different conclusions. It is true that a great amount of capital and skill is not required to start hawking. However, to mature as a hawker, individuals need to learn to withstand several hardships such as the ability to work under extreme weather conditions as they hawk under the open sky. Most hawking areas do not have toilet facilities, and women are forced to ignore their bodily urges for long hours, which are extremely different when they have their menstruation cycles. The most crucial skill, however, is the ability to perform despite such hardships. According to NgũgĩwaThiong'o, "The main ingredients of performance are place, content, audience, time, and end, goal – so to speak, which could be instruction or pleasure, or a combination of both – in some sort of reformative effect on the short, audience"⁷¹. Similarly, for the hawkers, the

⁷⁰ Begum, Agina (December 2017). Personal interview.

⁷¹Thiong'o, Ngũgĩwa (1987). Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space. *TDR*, 41(3), 11-30.

footpath is the stage where they perform through their voice modulation and various kinds of antics to attract their audience, in their case, the customers. The cacophony that the hawkers create during the 'Chaitra sale' (sale at the end of the Bengali year) in Gariahatis nothing short of a performance. It may be conclusive to surmise that the ability or skills of the female hawkers are much higher than their male counterparts, as the art of ignoring the male gaze, a part and parcel of their everyday existence and struggle, is their greatest skill while 'performing'. The negotiation with the gaze is an important skill that they have to learn, and without earning expertise in it, hawking on the public space is next to impossible for them.

The everyday struggle of these women involves many narratives of dispossession, and of how they cultivate the art to cope with different disadvantageous situations. In this context, it is pertinent to mention the interview of Mehrubi Bibi, who arrived in the city in 1988, incapable of sustaining her family with the meagre income of her husband, a landless labourer in Murshidabad.⁷² She recounted how coming to the city and finding a job was replete with difficulties. For ten years, she worked as a domestic worker in a Hindu family cloaking her religious identity. According to her, a job as a domestic worker was available only for Hindus on the South 24 Parganas rail route, mainly areas from Ballygunje to Baghajatin in south Kolkata and its suburbs. After finding a relative in Sealdah, who was a hawker, Bibi shifted to hawking. In her words, this was a much more respectable profession for her. Her interview dealt a staggering blow to the *bhadralok* understanding of the caste system in West Bengal, which involves the process of internalising the caste system in our everyday practices as well as in our domestic sphere.

<http://hemi.nyu.edu/courses/sp2016-performance-and-activism/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2016/01/02102016-Thiongo.pdf>. Accessed on 28 September 2008.

⁷² Bibi, Mehrubi (2017, November). Personal interview.

The ethnographic study demonstrates that the struggle for the contestation of spaces for the second group of woman hawkers includes another level of negotiation that is more or less absent among other groups of women hawkers. The second category of women hawkers has to constantly negotiate with the local residents of the area, as they are, what can be termed, the victims of the “politics of the local”. Malti Mondal, a woman hawker hawking for over 30 years on the footpath in front of Basumati Press, alleges that the local *basti* (slum) boys cause too much disturbance to their business. She and her fellow hawkers are often asked to move from their existing place because of the frequent infiltration by new women hawkers who reside in these local slums. Her narrative clearly outlines the nature of power and control of the local people over the area. Thus, the questions which arise at this point are: Who are the local people? How have they been able to control the women hawkers? What is their source of power?

These ‘local’ people used to live in nearby slums that emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the area around Lady Dufferin Hospital. These slums were mainly occupied by Hindi-speaking people, who migrated to the city from Bihar. They are the people associated with the work of manual scavenging in the hospital. Lady Dufferin Hospital is located beside the Sealdah area and adjacent to the Bank of India crossing provides employment to these people. In the evening, the older ladies of their families used to sell freshly-caught fish on the footpath of the Bank of India crossing. Gradually, the number of women from their community increased, and they began to face competition from the existing women hawkers. In order to cut back the competition for women of their community, the local boys allegedly harass people like Malti Mondal and others by extorting money from them. Further, these boys started to ally with the ruling party in the state, more precisely, with the local leaders of the Sealdah

constituency, to wield their power over the marginalised women hawkers by asserting their spatial right over the latter. It can be called the politics of space embedded in the local dynamics.

The first difference that can be charted between the women hawkers of the first wave and those of the second wave is the presence of union amongst the former and their collective power to steer any action against the governmental apparatus. The women of the second wave have to pay up for petty charges to the police on a daily basis in order to continue the hassle-free business. More often than not, they are also made to pay a cess levied on them illegally by the police. As the women hawkers of the second wave do not belong to any union, it becomes far easier for the police to force them to pay the illegal cess. The women who launched their business right after the partition on the footpath, on the other hand, were mostly unionised, and therefore, any attack on their livelihood are protested vociferously by the unions. However, women who came to the city after 1988 occupied the carriageway, a practice that had already been declared illegal by the state government. A law passed by the state government in 1988 clearly demarcated the hawking and non-hawking zones in Sealdah, and hawking on the carriageway was declared illegal. As a result, women hawkers of the second wave failed to secure the membership of any unions. No union in Central Kolkata was ready to absorb them as members, which furthered their difficulties. Most of the unions were sceptical that if they unionised these women who sit on the carriageway, they would inevitably lose their case against any eviction. However, the field survey of various hawkers' unions in Kolkata vividly point out some anomalies that exist regarding the unionisation of hawkers who hawk on the carriageway. In the area stretching from Janbazar to New Market, one can find a ubiquitous presence of vegetable hawkers, who sit on the carriageway and hawk. The most

interesting fact is that these hawkers are unionised under the banner of the Hawker Adhikar Rakkhak Committee, one of the important allies of the Hawker Sangram Committee. It seems that the unions simply lacked any incentive to unionise these women. One of the possible reasons can be the mobility of these women – most of the women hawkers active in the Sealdah are part-timers. Another reason can be the stronghold of various powerful groups ranging from anti-social elements to political figures. This might have acted as a deterrent to unions from unionising them. Perhaps it could be that the unions tried to avoid any feud with the political parties except the ruling party. Since the late 1970s, the Sealdah constituency had been under the control of the Indian National Congress, and Congress leaders like Somen Mitra and Pradip Ghosh wielded huge power and influence over the area. Moreover, if we leave aside the unions' role in unionising the women hawkers, a more pertinent question presents itself before us: How, despite the regulation issued by the state government (Regulating the Unauthorized Occupation of Public Lands and Thoroughfares by the Hawkers and Others in this State, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1986) did the state allow hundreds of women to hawk on the carriageway? If the government had licensed the existing hawkers by singling out those who came before 1977, then why had the state not cleared the unauthorised hawkers from Sealdah? A point made by Ananya Roy is particularly significant here. As Roy has explained, the “informality is inscribed in the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized. This relationship is both arbitrary and fickle....” Hence, the relationship between the legal regulation imposed by the state government in the area of hawking and the ‘illegal’ status of women hawkers is more fraught and complex than what is apparent. It is relevant to recall that one of the main grievances of the movement of the 1980s in Sealdah was the police levying an illegal cess on the hawkers. The

hawkers of the first wave used various pamphlets and leaflets to express their grievances. Such tactics were successful in bringing justice to them, and the police stopped issuing petty cases against them. The later entrants, unable to be unionised, have to pay the police to avoid the petty cases lodged by the latter and to ensure the smooth running of their business.

The second difference between the two waves of women hawkers can be grasped well from the interview of Mehrubi Bibi, who provides important information on how women are exploited by the local powerful lobbies. Mehrubi Bibi has provided much important insight into the concept of *bhara*,⁷³ that is, the monthly fee of Rs. 600 to 900 some of the women hawkers have to pay local *Basti* people. According to Saktiman Ghosh, these local people are members of the Khatik community, mainly from Bihar, who live in the surrounding slums since the time when Bihar was part of the Bengal Presidency.⁷⁴ Entrepreneurship has helped them amass huge amounts of wealth, and they try to keep the area under their control, often with the help of local criminals. Moreover, they try to control the entire fruit market besides Koley Market and assert their power by forcing female hawkers to sell vegetables to them at very low prices. However, currents of local politics often prevent the growth of collective grievances among the women hawkers. The women hawkers of the first wave, on the other hand, share a much more cordial relationship with the local populace. Such behaviour of the locals can be attributed to the fact that the people in the surrounding areas were themselves

⁷³ The term *bhara* refers to the rent paid for availing certain services or occupying a specific space.

⁷⁴ The Khatik Community is a widely distributed community in North India, and each Khatik group has its own origin story. According to the British orientalist William Crooke, the Khatiks were a cultivating, labouring and vegetable-selling caste found all over the North-Western Provinces in colonial India. According to other caste Hindus, the Khatiks were not untouchables, but they suffered social disabilities. In the past, they were allowed to draw water from the wells of upper caste Hindus, or from one common village well. They used metal vessels as well as earthen pitchers for drawing water from the common village well. They migrated to Calcutta during pre-colonial times.

refugees, and so they shared a similar experience of suffering caused by a partition with the women hawkers of the first wave. Henceforth, compassion or empathy was a natural element that flowed in their mutual relationship. The women hawkers of the second wave are considered as outsiders, intruders and encroachers to the local economy of Sealdah, which is otherwise considered a monopoly of the local residents. The apathy of the locals towards the second wave of female hawkers arises from the competition for survival, which poses a further challenge to the latter. Thus, it is evident how the same space can produce completely different experiences for two different groups of female hawkers.

Finally, the understanding of the streetscape of Sealdah seems incomplete without taking into account the relationship of the hawkers with the Mutiyas (who do the work of loading and unloading in the city markets, and in this case, in Koley Market), as this relationship has an impact on the women hawkers' perception of the space. The study of the relationship and levels of negotiation between two groups of women hawkers and Mutiyas is important to analyse the gendered nature of the working conditions of the women hawkers. Though the hierarchy of power is inverted here, one needs to understand why a female hawker still struggles in her negotiations. The phenomenon of hawking in Sealdah cannot be comprehended without understanding the process of loading and unloading of goods in Koley Market. According to Bandyopadhyay, trading of fresh vegetables and fruits begins in Koley Market, as well as in other markets of the city, at around 12:30 am and continues till 3 am. The whole process is done in two stages: first, when the loaded trucks are brought to the respective markets and sold to the main wholesaler, and second when the goods are resold to the small retailers and small wholesalers. It is here that the role of the Mutiyas becomes important as they are the people who do the packing, unpacking, loading and unloading of bags of

vegetables and fruits. The Mutiyas usually have low bargaining capacity with the big individual parties outside the market premises.⁷⁵ As I have noticed during the fieldwork, most of these men are from Bihar, who live in groups in rented rooms in the neighbourhood. Their relationship is vastly different with two groups of women hawkers. The women of the first wave share a cordial relationship with them. While interviewing Hela Nasker, it was revealed that Mutiyas take a reasonable sum of money to bring the *jhuris* (baskets containing vegetables and fruits) from Koley Market. According to Hela Nasker, as the age-old relationship developed from sharing a common space, although for different purposes, the Mutiyas charge a lesser amount for their labour. However, the new entrants, who joined the profession of hawking in the late 1980s, are of the view that the Mutiyas charge a huge sum of money to unload the *jhuris* and transport them to the main streets of Sealdah from the market. The example clearly indicates that the struggle for the contestation of the space is far more difficult for the latter group. The perception of space differs for these two groups. The space of hawking for women hawkers from the late 1980s is just a place from where they earn their livelihood, and they do not develop any attachment or sense of ownership to the space. They perceive the space as *ByabsarJayga* (a site to conduct business from), which is bereft of any emotional attachment. However, this perception and perspective of lived space differ in the case of the first group of women hawkers. The first groups' lived experiences of the movement further strengthened their ties with the space. Moreover, it can be argued that as these women had faced dispossession during the partition, they fervently cling to their space of business; their perception of the space goes beyond *ByabsarJayga*, to *Amar Jayga*, *Amar Adhikar* (my space, my right).

⁷⁵Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2018). The Making of a Majoritarian City: Streets, Neighbourhoods and Communal Mobilization in Calcutta.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to weave together the two aspects of street hawking in the Sealdah area. The chapter began with a historical analysis of one of the least talked-about anti-eviction mobilisations taking place at a moment that is sandwiched between two well-documented mobilisations of street hawkers in 1972-1975 and in 1996-1997. As has been argued, these two movements have been narrated in the historiography solely from the male perspective, as something which apparently led to the groundwork for the emergence of a very powerful and organised political force in the city. According to my case study, the story of hawkers' mobilisation involved substantial and predominant participation of women hawkers. Hela Nasker and Basanti Mondal are just a couple of cases in point.

The second aspect of the chapter largely deals with the everyday lives of women street hawkers in the locality of Sealdah. In this narrative, the older group of women who participated in the 1981 movement continues to hawk, while a new generation of women hawkers has entered their site of business. Hence, the study takes a comparative dimension. I have studied the time dimension along with the space dimension involved in the experiences of the women hawkers in the locality. In addition to this, I have studied their places of origin and migration patterns, and also, how these factors determine their experience at the space available for business. The extensive interviews with the women hawkers reveal that the older group of female hawkers have an intense emotional attachment to their space of

hawking, and also, more robust access to the network of supply. They also have fixed hours of occupation, which largely corresponds to the normal office hours in the city. They return to their respective homes by late evening. They also have much stronger access to the political establishment and the local community, which implies that even in a transit centre, where the prevailing population is bound to be floating in character, they possess a stable clientele. Another reason for their intra-group solidarity is that they have a shared past of clinging memories of migration and movements. Most of these women come from villages and towns of North 24 Parganas, where in the 1950s the government had set up many rehabilitation settlements for refugees. The new generation of women hawkers with whom I have had a chance to interact represents a very different story of “selling the city”. Predominantly, they are products of agrarian disorders in inland West Bengal. They come from the faraway districts of Murshidabad and Malda, take rent dwellings on rent in the southern suburbs of the city, and are ready to serve the city at odd hours. A number of them gather around Koley Market according to the schedule of the wholesale delivery process. The new generation of female hawkers have less bonding with the city and the resident community as well as with the working class in and around Koley Market. In addition to many of their vulnerabilities, their working hours make it very difficult for them to establish a sustainable contact with the city. However, vulnerability at multiple layers, including the fact of their marginalised Muslim identity, makes them bond with each other very intimately.

Another point worthy of mention is that there is a strong caste- and religion-based segregation among these women in terms of their spatial concentration. Hawkers along the highly crowded BB Ganguly Street appear to belong to various Dalit Hindu communities, while the women near Prachi Cinema are predominantly

Muslims. Certainly, more research is needed to understand the modalities of organisation of these hawkers along the lines of primordial identities, as well as to deal with the question of why the earlier group did indeed find an alternative avenue to forge solidarity due to their participation in anti-eviction movements. The new generation has not yet experienced such a transformative moment. As a result, local extortion rackets find the new generation of women hawkers more vulnerable and continue the exploitative system. Local power dynamics make their struggle even more difficult. Thus, the interplay between gender, space and local power provides a new dimension to the study of female hawkers.

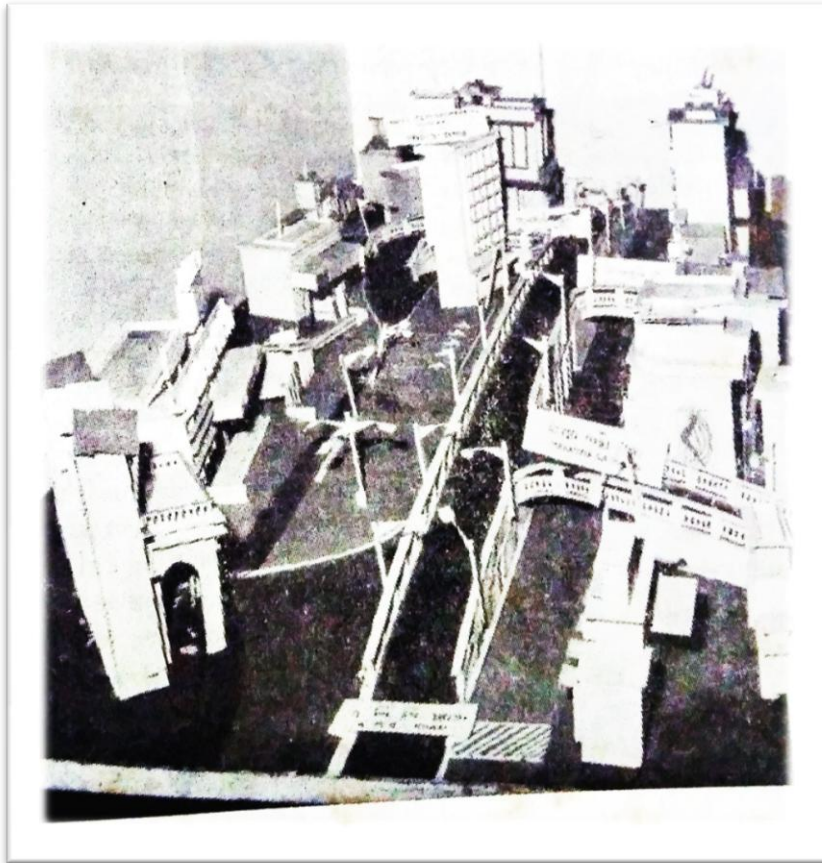


Figure I : Model Sealdah Flyover Bridge (Vidyapati Setu)



Figure II: Women Hawker Hawking on the Carriageaway

Hawkers of a Different Kind: *Chinepara*

Introduction

In the historiography of hawking, in-depth dialogue between micro-history, in all its associations with urban geography, and the trajectories of space and labour studies has remained a missing link. Generally speaking, these two domains have remained unconnected.⁷⁶ In India, the research on street hawking, urban space and informality has witnessed a robust growth since the 1970s (Bhowmik 2010), but here too, a critical approach towards meta-history is lacking.⁷⁷ Arguably, academic literature on street hawking has remained confined to anthropology and development studies. Historians are late-starters in this field, and they have not yet made any significant contribution to our knowledge on street hawking. One problem is the availability of official and archival records on street hawking. As anthropologists study continuities and changes while taking into account the micro-geographies of a phenomenon as well as its macro-structural

⁷⁶Micro, which became popular as a genre of history in the 1970s, is characterised by the small scale of historical investigation. In an attempt to go beyond the generalisations practised by the social sciences, practitioners of microhistory focus on small units in society. Microhistory has a twofold aim. On the one hand, it summarises the most significant developments in micro-historical thought, specifying the common features of diverse works and tendencies. On the other hand, it points out the basic differences among them, and illuminates the difficulties and uncertainties inherent in these kinds of generalisations. The fundamental aim of the field is to emphasise on the multiple potential viewpoints from which microhistory can be appraised. With regard to microhistory, Carlo Ginzburg has argued for making obstacles in the sources a part of the historical account. See Ginzburg, Carlo (1993). *Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about it*. *Critical Inquiry*, 20(1), 10-35. <https://doi.org/10.1086%2F448699>.

⁷⁷ The period of robust growth began with Harold Lubell's study in the early 1970s.

manifestations, a historicised treatment of the phenomenon of street hawking does not strictly come under their purview. The present study poses a historical question about the practices of street hawking and makes use of ethnographic, oral history as well as archival material to understand the dynamics of street hawking in Kolkata.

Hence this chapter wishes to address this research gap by conducting historical-ethnographic research on Chinese food hawkers of Teritty Bazar. The focus of the chapter is to trace the emergence of the breakfast market in Teritty Bazar, which may be described as a first of its kind market in Kolkata.⁷⁸ While trying to historicise the emergence of the breakfast market, I intend to analyse the transitional phases of the market – from its emergence to its gradual dissolution. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I shall try to delve into the history of the space and the ethnic community's historical journey to the present. Moreover, in this section, I will trace the history of Chinese migration to Kolkata in the colonial era. In the second section, I will present a detailed understanding of the neighbourhood under review. The third section will analyse the condition of the breakfast market in the post-colonial period. In this last section, I would like to capture the narratives of the community, particularly from the period following the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The third section shall try to understand how the experiences of 'othering' during the post-colonial period engulfed the community, which had an adverse impact on the hawker economy of Territy Bazaar.⁷⁹ In short, the chapter seeks to understand the larger dynamics of the breakfast market, associated with a very different kind of experience of hawking and in the process, interrogates both the government's and the hawkers'

⁷⁹ Hawker economy is primarily an economy that is run by small traders and retailers; it is mainly an economic activity that survives on small local producers and the lower middle-class constitutes its client base.

unions' attitudes towards the Chinese food hawkers of Territy Bazaar. Arguably, the trajectory of the breakfast market poses serious questions regarding the politics of 'exclusion', 'ignorance' and 'othering' within the framework of hawking.

Bengal has been an important centre of communication and long-distance trade since pre-colonial times and the Chinese were well acquainted with the region since then. Even during the early colonial period, various Indian ports emerged as important centres in the trade between Indian and China. Initially, Chinese tea and silk were imported to Britain through Calcutta during the colonial period. The commercial link between India and China was further boosted with the introduction of the opium trade. This colonial trade network led to the emergence of Chinese settlements in Calcutta as well as in different other parts of India.⁸⁰ India's communication with China can be traced back to ancient times, which was further exploited in colonial times with the export of tea, and later on, with the opium trade. Many literary works by Bengali writers from the early colonial period, as well as some Bengali movies, make reference to the presence of the Chinese in Bengal even before the colonial era. With this brief historical overview, the next section shall straightaway proceed to look at the historical trajectory of the Chinese community in Kolkata.

History of the Chinese Community in Kolkata

Warren Hasting, the British governor-general of India, offered Atchew, the first Chinese settler in South Asia, a large land grant in return for the tea that he brought from his native homeland.⁸¹ A Bengali novel called *Chinatown* narrates

⁸⁰ Xing, Zhang & Sen, Tansen (2013). *The Chinese in South Asia*. In Tan-CheBeng (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (pp. 205-226). Routledge.

⁸¹ Biswas, Debarchana (August 2017). *The Chinese Community in Kolkata: A Case Study in Social Geography*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22(8), 42-45.

how Atchew achieved “patronage in the aristocratic English society” in Calcutta.⁸² The patronage helped him to be a successful entrepreneur and also to become a man of influence in the local British official circles.⁸³ A sugar mill was established by Atchew, and he employed many Chinese labourers in his factory. These Chinese labourers who had migrated from China settled in Achipur, a place not far from Kolkata. However, after the demise of Atchew, most of these Chinese people moved to an area in central Calcutta known as Bowbazar. In 1837, an estimate of the population of Calcutta, done by assessors of house tax and produced before the superintendent of police, reported that 324 Chinese people resided in the city.⁸⁴ In her essay on the Indo-Chinese population in Kolkata, Rishika Mukhopadhyay has identified three distinct stages of migration of the Chinese to Bengal and different parts of India.⁸⁵ According to her, the first wave of migration was initiated with Atchew's establishment of a sugar factory. The factory required Chinese labourers who migrated to India with Atchew. The well-entrenched colonial rule was able to provide a sense of stability to this community, the homeland of which was infested with frequent uprisings and wars (Opium Wars, 1840, 1856, and the Taiping Tianguo Uprising, 1850-1860) during this phase. The second wave of migration started with the fall of the Qing (Chhing) dynasty in China. That was triggered by the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Boxer Rebellion (1900-1901) and numerous uprisings and revolts in China. About the third wave, Mukhopadhyay has observed, “the last strike on this plan came as the violent civil war between Communist and Guomindang broke off and the

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Cuthbert, Finch (May 1850). Vital Statistics of Calcutta. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 13(2), 168- 182. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2338380>. Accessed in May 2019.

⁸⁵ Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

communists came into power".⁸⁶ It should be noted in this context that the term 'Chini' (the Bengali synonym for sugar) entered the vocabulary of the Bengali language with the Chinese migration, who brought with them the first taste of sugar to Calcutta.

The Rise of *Chinepara*

During the mid-nineteenth century, the area around Territy Bazaar in central Calcutta came to be known as the first Chinatown or *Chinepara* in the city. According to Jayani Jeanne Bonnerjee, this locality "was then home to several Chinese sailors who stayed back, waiting for their ships to return. Situated in the heart of colonial Calcutta, the Chinese population added to the cosmopolitan nature of the city".⁸⁷ The growth of *Chinepara* in the 1930s saw a fresh influx of the Chinese community. Rishika Mukhopadhyay has shown that the second wave of the Chinese migration was quite different in nature from the previous one, during which only the Chinese men constituted the immigrant population.⁸⁸ The second wave of migration saw the coming of Chinese women in Calcutta, which effectively meant the migration of Chinese families to the new land. Jayani Jeanne Bonnerjee has pointed out that the coming of families from China required a settlement of a more permanent nature in Calcutta, which led to the construction

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Bonnerjee, Jayani Jeanne (2010). *Neighbourhood, City, Diaspora: Identity and Belonging for Calcutta's Anglo- Indian and Chinese Communities*. Queen Mary, University of London.

⁸⁸Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

of proper living quarters and the emergence of Chinatown in the city.⁸⁹In a nineteenth-century account, C. Alabaster has provided a vivid description of the Chinese settlement in Calcutta.⁹⁰ His account mentions different groups of the Chinese living in the city: “the shoe-makers, ship-carpenters and hog lard manufacturers”.⁹¹Further, charting the details of the Chinese temples, graveyards and opium dens in Chinatown, Alabaster has provided a thick description of the place.⁹² Apart from describing in detail such spaces of public gathering and the living quarters of the Chinese, Alabaster has also noted the presence of different groups among the Chinese living in the city. In fact, Alabaster’s account can be considered as an early example of urban’s history’s engagement with the Chinese neighbourhood or Chinatown in Kolkata. In the colonial city, *Chinepara* represented a buffer zone between the ‘white town’ and the ‘black town’; it was a settlement that may be described as the ‘grey town’. The area was largely inhabited by immigrants of different nationalities, like the Portuguese, Greeks, Armenians, Chinese and Eurasians. Keya Das has called it “the areas of interpenetration between the white and the black town – the European and the Indian town” which according to her, “represented much denser formations than areas which tended towards European exclusiveness”.⁹³

This ‘interpenetration’ created a unique socio-economic culture in which two different communities, the Chinese and the Hindustanis, coexisted as one. Rishika

⁸⁹Bonnerjee, Jayani Jeanne (2010). *Neighbourhood, City, Diaspora: Identity and Belonging for Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian and Chinese Communities*. Queen Mary, University of London.

⁹⁰Alabaster, Chaloner (1858). The Chinese Colony in Calcutta. *The Calcutta Review*, 30(January-June), 368-384.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.* Also see, Bonnerjee, Jayani Jeanne (2010): 13.

⁹³Dasgupta, Keya (2009). Mapping the Spaces of Minorities: Calcutta through the Last Century. In Himadri Banerjee, Nilanjana Gupta & Sipra Mukherjee (Eds.), *Calcutta Mosaic: Essays and Interviews on the Minority Communities of Calcutta*. Anthem Press.

Mukhopadhyay has observed the following on this coexistence: "Properly speaking, they are two distinct colonies, belonging to distinct races, carrying on distinct trades, and speaking different languages; but the community of interests, the manufacture of hogs-lard, opium-smoking, and Hindustani have almost merged them into one."⁹⁴ With time, Territy Bazaar turned into a place of living for people who dealt in rawhide. Moreover, both the Chinese and the Hindustanis living in the Territy Bazaar area consumed pork, which was considered as a pollutant by the standard of the strictly defined caste norms of the Hindu society. The neighbourhood's association with people engaged with hog-lard and pigsties has been described by Alabaster in rather derisive terms: "... being accustomed to ill smells from their infancy, they rather like them; and besides it was the custom of their forefathers to think such little matter quite unworthy of consideration".⁹⁵ Moreover, this place was perceived as polluting and unusual by the upper-caste and well-off Hindu inhabitants from the adjacent neighbourhoods.⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that the Dushadhs, a Dalit Hindu community, intermingled well with the Chinese population of Territy Bazaar. Arun Rana, one of the oldest residents of Territy Bazaar, recalled to me the spacio-geographical settings of the place in the colonial era.⁹⁷ Rana, a Dusadh by birth, was able to narrate the story of the historical migration and the journey of his clan's settlement in Calcutta. According to him, the Dushadhs were Hindu warriors in Rajasthan, and his own

⁹⁴Alabaster, Chaloner (1858). The Chinese Colony in Calcutta. *The Calcutta Review* 30(January-June), 368-384.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *PraceEtnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

⁹⁷Rana, Arun (2019, 1 January). Personal interview.

grandfather's predecessors were guerrilla fighters who migrated to East India for military purposes, but later settled in Calcutta.⁹⁸ However, Arun Rana never considers himself untouchable. Throughout my ethnographic interaction with him, I realised that Rana tried to explain and prove his community's superior position in the Brahminical social order in comparison to the so-called Chamars, another Dalit community. His claims to social upward mobility are nothing unusual and are useful in understanding the workings of the caste system in modern India.

However, the present chapter would not engage with such questions. Rather, what concerns us here is Rana's recollections of Chinatown from his childhood days and his old-age aspiration of being transported to the past. Before the 1950s, there was a market known as Bengali Babu Market at the site, where now stand the offices of the KIT (Kolkata Improvement Trust). The market consisted of wooden stalls where pork and other vegetables were sold. This market, owned by one Mr. Karnani, was later leased to YC Hang. Hang used to collect money from the stallholders on a daily basis. Around this market were many small Chinese establishments that were engaged in the hog-lard business. Rishika Mukhopadhyay has made a fitting observation regarding the transformation of the neighbourhood: "Chattawala Gully, Phears Lane and Blackburn Lane which used to be connected and ... it is hard to imagine how *chinepara* was in the 1950s by its present look, but some elders sitting in the Si-yup temple can still recall *Jhulamaidan* where they used to play during their childhood. A road has replaced

⁹⁸ The Dusadhs have traditionally been considered as an untouchable community as they were the keepers of pigs. The folk hero of the Dusadhs is Chuhamal. The Dusadh folklore narrate the victory of the community over the Bhumi-har oppressors. Historically, the Dusadhs have also been associated with martial pursuits and many fought on behalf of the East India Company during the 18th century.

the space where the community used to breathe.”⁹⁹This description of Territy Bazaar of the 1930s can be viewed alongside the one provided by Augustus Sommerville in an article published in 1929, which paints a stereotypical image of Chinatown as a place of crime. Choosing to uphold the ‘seamier side of Chinatown, Sommerville fans the imagination of Chinatown as an ‘unsafe place’.¹⁰⁰

Chinatown as an unsafe place has been a recurrent motif in the popular imagination of the Bengali middle-class, and representations in popular culture such as novels, films, journalistic accounts etc. have registered this perception time and again. Movies like *Howrah Bridge*(1958) and *China Town*(1962) were successful in depicting the neighbourhood as the most dangerous place infested with gambling dens, opium traders and prostitution. Rana personally thinks that the most appropriate depiction of Chinatown has been provided in Dibakar Banerjee’s film *Detective Byomkesh Bakshi*. The film was based on a novel Saradindu Bandyopadhyay’s first Byomkesh Bakshi mystery *Satyanweshi* that is set in Chinatown. However, despite such representations of Chinatown in popular culture, archival records do not suggest any strict association between crime and the Chinese community in Kolkata. While analysing the various categories of crime related to the Kolkata underworld, Debraj Bhattacharya has observed the following:

... the third category within the underworld was formed by those who ran the gambling dens. From newspaper reports on various raids by the police, it seems that there were many such gambling dens in Kolkata and they were not owned by

⁹⁹Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

¹⁰⁰Bonnerjee, Jayani Jeanne (2010). *Neighbourhood, City, Diaspora: Identity and Belonging for Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian and Chinese Communities*. Queen Mary, University of London.

*any particular community. We have mentions of the Chinese, the Peshwaris, the Anglo-Indians, the Marwaris and the Bengalis.*¹⁰¹

The earliest description of Chinatown in Calcutta comes from Alabaster who has illustrated in detail the everyday space of the settlement. His careful study of the Chinese community and their lived space rendered interest among many later scholars. While many scholars have written on the Chinese colony or settlement in Kolkata, very few have concentrated on the micro-history of the place, especially in relation to the historical trajectory of the breakfast market in Territy Bazaar. In his essay on the Bowbazar Chinatown, Zhang Xing has been able to identify and emphasise a few essential characteristics of Chinatown.¹⁰² His narrative moves from the historical journey of the Chinese people from their homeland to Calcutta to the devastating condition of the community and their settlement in the wake of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Xing has described how the Chinese were able to construct a colony; rather than focussing only on the opium dens and other criminal aspects attached to the space, he has focussed on the history of Chinatown by stressing its truly multi-ethnic culture. While analysing the geographical aspect of the place, he has also pointed to the rich culinary culture of the Chinese people. The history of the famous Nanking Restaurant has been unearthed by Xing, and he has highlighted the popularity of the Chinese cuisine and the association of different celebrities from Raj Kapoor to India's first Prime Minister with the restaurant. Xing holds that from the 1930s onwards, the Bowbazar Chinatown entered its golden era, as it was the time of a fresh wave of

¹⁰¹ Bhattacharya, Debraj (September 2004). Kolkata Underworld in the Early 20th Century. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(38),4276-4282.

¹⁰²Xing, Zhang (2009-2010). The Bowbazar Chinatown. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 36(3/4): 396-413.
<https://www.desichineseproject.com/post/the-bowbazaar-chinatown-by-zhang-xing>. Accessed in August 2019.

migration from China, and this fresh wave facilitated the food business of the place. As Xing writes,

*... first Chinese restaurant in Calcutta. The restaurant, frequented by local Chinese residents, Indians, and also Europeans, served Cantonese specialities such as 'bird's nest' and 'flesh with shark's fin'; Chinese-Indian dishes such as 'Chinese curry'; and some European food as well. The restaurant also served liquor, not widely available to the Chinese living in the neighbourhood. The Chinese who frequented the restaurant included the rich, the working class, as well as Chinese sailors visiting the port.*¹⁰³

Xing has further observed that the Chinese people have tried to preserve their culinary culture through the breakfast market. He has provided a vivid description of this market:

*The market opens at around 6 a.m. when the Chinese gather to eat breakfast consisting of fish and beef-ball soup, things made of sticky rice, steamed and baked buns, etc. Most of the sellers are Cantonese, who set up temporary stalls on pavements. The customers, also mainly Chinese from other parts of Calcutta, usually stand around these stalls relishing Chinese snacks and other foods. During Sundays, residents of Calcutta also frequent the morning market to have Chinese breakfast. Indeed, this is the only place where one can still have an authentic Chinese breakfast, preserving the history and food culture of the Chinese in Calcutta decades after the neighbourhood has undergone drastic changes.*¹⁰⁴

The breakfast market is at the centre of my discussion in this chapter, as I intend to link this market to the larger paradigm of hawking. While focussing on the breakfast market, the chapter intends to present the Chinese people as the first

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

food hawkers of Kolkata. In trying to do so, I would delve into the historical transformation of the market, analyse the reasons behind these transitions, and try to understand the reason behind the emergence of a breakfast market in Chinatown. Finally, I would also like to interpret the politics of 'otherness' in terms of the attitude of the government and the hawkers' unions towards the Chinese community in Kolkata. The main focus of the chapter will be on understanding two questions: First, why were there no attempts on the part of the government to save this breakfast market and preserve its unique heritage? Second, why no attempts were ever made by the hawkers' unions to organise the Chinese food sellers and affiliate them with the unions as hawkers?

The origin of the breakfast market is shrouded in mystery. No official records are available which can help one to trace the beginnings of this market; and yet, ethnographic narratives place the beginning of the breakfast market between the late 1880s and early 1900s. It should be noted, however, that the breakfast market, in its early years, substantially differed from its present composition and appearance. The early or first wave of Chinese migration led to the establishment of an all-male Chinese settlement in Calcutta. During this period, the Chinese used to keep paying guests both to earn some extra money and to support their fellow Chinese in a new land. The paying guests were also provided with meals by the Chinese families who would take them in. Alabaster has provided a vivid picture of this arrangement:

... if some morning wandering in Durumtollah [Dharamtala], you see a stout coolie carrying an enormous basket filled with vegetables, while by a string he carries in his hand several tens of pounds of pork, follow him...you follow and find yourself in a little courtyard. Quickly the Chinese cook seizes the basket, the pork is chopped into convenient mouthfuls in a moment, same with the yams and cabbages. The odoriferous onion alone detaining the active artist for a moment,

*they are stewed, and all is steaming in the iron pan which he so carefully covers with a wooden lid; he leaves them to steam ...here was the son of a father owning his cooking the breakfast of his father's lodgers...*¹⁰⁵

Thus, the practice of making breakfast particularly in the open courtyard indicates the existence of a breakfast culture among the Chinese community in Calcutta in those early days, which in later decades would assume the character of a full-fledged market. In other words, the practice of preparing breakfast for the lodgers or paying guests led to the beginning of the breakfast market. The history of the breakfast market is intricately linked with the growth and development of *Chinepara* or Chinatown. How did individuals attempt at breakfast culture assume the character of a bustling market? This calls for interrogation. However, the growth of a breakfast culture leading to the formation of a market is not an issue separate from the history of Chinatown; as the breakfast market is an integral part of the space of Chinatown. Any socio-economic development affecting the market would inevitably have an impact upon the lives and livelihood of the inhabitants of the place, and vice versa. As the space of Chinatown was infested with many opium dens, this seems to be one of the potent reasons behind the transition of individual attempts to prepare breakfast to a large-scale infrastructure that gradually took the form of an informal market catering breakfast. Observers like Alabaster has also mentioned that many of the Chinese were involved in the trade of opium or charas. Shell and Bradley, another early commentator on Chinatown, has captured a rather animated moment in his description of the opium dens of Chinatown:

¹⁰⁵Alabaster, Chaloner (1858). The Chinese Colony in Calcutta. *The Calcutta Review*, 30(January-June), 368-384.

*The smokers look mere ordinary harmless Chinamen peacefully smoking or fast asleep. There is nothing in their faces to mark them as opium fiends at all. They are just tired and weary Chinamen seeking sleep and dreams after a hard day's work. What effect it has upon them in the morning one does not see, but as one looks round upon the sleeping figures there can be no doubt about the oblivion they have purchased for the moment.*¹⁰⁶

These gambling and opium dens used to remain open throughout the night. It was quite natural for both the opium den's keeper and his customer to feel hungry early in the morning after a long night of drug abuse and gambling. Under these circumstances, individual attempts to provide breakfast to a large number of people would have failed, and thus, the need for a communitarian attempt to arrange breakfast for people mostly involved with both gambling and opium dens – as owners or consumers – could be one of the possible reasons for the growth of a large-scale breakfast market in Chinatown. The colonial opium trade also had an indirect impact on the transition of the breakfast market. According to R.K Newman,

*... opium was the Government of India's source of revenue and the Government of China's largest customs duty; it provided huge profits for the international firms and the banks and shipping companies who were associated with them, and it was part of the domestic economy of millions who tended poppies in the Indian countryside. It was also part of the lifestyle of millions of Chinese, for whom opium as a means of social relaxation, a release from pain or a temporary miserable existence.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bradley, Shelland (1924). Calcutta's Chinatown. *Cornhill Magazine*, 57(September), 277-285. Also see, Xing, (2009-2010): 396-413.

¹⁰⁷ Newman, R. K. (1989), India and the Anglo-Chinese Opium Agreements, 1907-14. *Modern Asian Studies*, 23(3), 525-560. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00009537>. Accessed in August 2019.

This increase in opium consumption due to the policies of the colonial government had a direct connection to the story of the breakfast market. Many native interviewees of Chinatown have attested to the fact that opium consumption would cause a sweet tooth. That increased the selling of *halwa-puri* (an Indian sweet dish with whole wheat bread) by Bihari mobile hawkers at around 2 a.m. The narrative seems to be an important thread of memory associated with the nightlife of Chinatown. Many old residents of the neighbourhood still cherish the memory of Bihari hawkers and maintain that Chinatown never slept during the 1930s. While trying to understand the connection between opium dens and the *halwa-puri*, I came across the recollections of Lorrence Ho.¹⁰⁸ While narrating his childhood days, Ho, one of the older residents of Chinatown, mentioned that he still remembered the shouts of an old Bihari hawker at around 2 a.m. As he recalled it, the Bihari man used to carry a wooden box on his head and would roam with a lantern in Chinatown. Ho still remembers the taste of the *halwapuri*. As he describes it, "*puri patla hota tha, aur us ke saath dark yellow colour ka halwa detet hay*" (the *puri* used to be very thin, and would be accompanied by the *halwa* of dark yellow colour). When I asked him why anyone would like to sell *halwa-puri* after midnight, he gave me a chuckle. Then he explained that the consumption of opium would increase the craving for sweet food. Ho also talked about the bun combined with *paya* curry (a curry prepared with trotters or hoof of a cow, sheep, buffalo etc.) prepared and sold by the Muslims of the locality. Thus, such reminiscences reveal that the place was not only famous for Chinese cuisine but also was a hub of different culinary cultures; Chinatown indeed embodied manifestations of a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan culture.

¹⁰⁸LorrenceHo (2019, March). Personal interview.

Thus, opium dens and large-scale gambling seem to be one of the contributing factors for the beginning of the informal breakfast market. It is also significant to understand in this context that by the 1920s, both the British and the Chinese governments were interested in checking the widespread consumption of opium. As Pijush Kanti Ray has held in his work, "... the emperor of Quin dynasty was genuinely desirous of putting an end to the import of opium and so checking the practice of opium-smoking which was already assuming dangerous proportions".¹⁰⁹ Although in its later decades, the British Raj took measures to control the opium dens in Chinatown, the attempt was mostly unsuccessful. This is because the British government never really intended to abolish the opium trade and opium dens, which constituted a source of revenue for the colonial government and a source of profit for the private players in the opium trade. However, while the opium dens in Chinatown gradually lost their glitter, I.B. reports of the Calcutta police confirm their existence as late as 1947. To illustrate this point, let me quote an extract from a secret source report(file no I.B.236/39/12.Calcutta) dated 4.6.1947: "Chang Ye, a smoker and keeper of the smoking den at Nanking gulee is completely broken. He approached a certain Chinese to finance to buy and trade in contraband opium. Chang Ye was successful in bringing it to Calcutta and sold it to the opium den keeper at profit."

Thus, this opium trade not only created a market for the keepers of the opium dens and opium smokers and became a vehicle of revenue for the government, but also transformed the notion of time associated with food consumption in the city. In other words, while the usual habit was a square meal, starting from breakfast to dinner, in Chinatown food or snacks was available even at 2 a.m. This late-night

¹⁰⁹ Ray, PijuskKanti (2002). *Kolkata Prativesi*. Information and Public Relation Department, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (2002).

meal changed the very norm or routine of food consumption for the inhabitants of Chinatown. This availability of food due to the running of opium dens after midnight or early in the morning rendered a space for the informal economy or native hawkers on the one hand and opened a space for breakfast market selling Chinese cuisine to the locals on the other hand. The market remains an informal establishment to date.

The Breakfast Market

As mentioned before, the 1930s saw the second wave of the Chinese migration, at which point the Chinese brought their wives and children to Calcutta. While the immediate reason for the beginning of the breakfast market seems to be the opium den, the second wave of Chinese migration to Calcutta can certainly be considered as an important factor behind the growth and continuity of the market. It is pertinent to understand in this context that the breakfast market was run mainly by the Cantonese people. The Cantonese who were skilled carpenters were often employed by individual contractors to work in the shipyard. Zhang Xing and Tansen Sen have described the employment of the Cantonese carpenters in the shipping sector in some detail:

Since Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Colombo had frequent maritime exchanges with the Far East, European shipping companies used these ports to undertake repair and maintenance work on their ships. Cantonese carpenters worked at these ports and received high remunerations, reportedly on par with American and European workers. The Cantonese carpenters continued to be employed at the docks in South Asia after the end of the colonial period. Gradually, they advanced from being part-time workers and contract labourers to factory owners. In the 1950s, for example, there were more than 300 Cantonese carpenters working on

*ships in the Hoogly dock in West Bengal and more than 20 Cantonese-owned carpentry factories in Calcutta.*¹¹⁰

The nature of their employment required the Cantonese carpenters to leave for work early in the morning. They needed to have breakfast by 6.30 a.m. and not all the Chinese households were capable of preparing food so early. Thus, the breakfast market was the best practicable arrangement. Further, to analyse the growth of the breakfast market, it would be potent to have a closer look at the era. During and after the second wave of Chinese migration to the city, a host of other business establishments sprang up in Chinatown. As Zhang Xing writes,

*...this rapid development of the Bowbazar Chinatown during the 1930s and 1940s was due to the arrival of new immigrants, including larger numbers of Chinese women and children. This resulted in the setting up of not only new schools but also businesses such as jewellery stores and beauty parlours. Some Chinese also set up laundry and grocery stores, pharmacies and dentistry clinics. New schools in the area included the Huaqiao School (Huaqiaozhongxue) established in 1944 and Zhongguo Primary School (Zhongguoxiaoxue) founded in 1952. Indeed, the 1940s and 1950s dramatically transformed the Bowbazar area and turned it into a vibrant and lively place inhabited by thousands of Chinese immigrants.*¹¹¹

Henceforth, thanks to the presence of the breakfast market, these thousands of Chinese immigrants, once freed from the task of preparing breakfast, could easily concentrate on their other affairs. While conducting my ethnographic fieldwork, I came to realise that most of the people who ran food stalls in the breakfast market belonged to the Cantonese community. I spoke to Ho Kam Khin, the caretaker of

¹¹⁰ Xing, Zhang & Sen, Tansen (2013). The Chinese in South Asia. In Tan-CheBeng (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (pp. 205-226). Routledge.

¹¹¹ Xing, Zhang (2009-2010). The Bowbazar Chinatown. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 36(3/4), 396-413. <https://www.desichineseproject.com/post/the-bowbazaar-chinatown-by-zhang-xing>. Accessed in August 2019.

the Nansum Club, about this concentration of Cantonese food sellers in the breakfast market. Khin quickly answered without any hesitation, “We Cantonese are best in food and no other group among the Chinese community can compete with us,” and added wittily, “this doesn't mean others can't cook, but we have a better sense of food”.¹¹² One of the reasons for the Cantonese to have a better sense of food may be that the understanding of spices is closely associated with their upbringing, as their native region in China has been traditionally associated with spice cultivation. While this traditional association of the Cantonese with a rich culinary culture explains their heavy presence in the breakfast market, the absence of other Chinese communities from the market, i.e. in the capacity of food sellers, can also be explained in terms of their traditional association with other trades. As Zhang Xing and Tansen Sen have noted, the Hakka Chinese migrants were traditionally skilled in the art of shoemaking.

*Both Ellen Oxfeld (1993) and Jennifer Liang (2007) have pointed out that the Hakka migrants were able to establish these niches as shoemakers and tannery owners due to the Hindu caste system that relegated any work dealing with leather to the untouchables. Having no such religious norms or regulations, the Hakkas migrating to Calcutta found it convenient to enter the shoemaking business ... When it became clear in the early twentieth century that the situation in China would not permit them to return frequently, these Hakka shoemakers brought their families from China and started settling down in India. They opened their own retail stores on Calcutta's Bentinck Street, known to the local Chinese as the “shoe road.” Rapidly, the number of such Hakka-owned shoe stores on Bentinck Street crossed the 100 thresholds and triggered competition among the shoemakers.*¹¹³

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³ Xing, Zhang & Sen, Tansen (2013). The Chinese in South Asia. In Tan-CheBeng (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (pp. 205-226). Routledge.

The passage quoted above may serve to explain why there are so few stalls run by the Hakkas in the breakfast market. It is clearly evident that by the early twentieth century the Cantonese have well cemented their position in the breakfast market or the food business in Chinatown. However, it does not imply that the Hakkas refrained from participating in the food business. In the Chinese neighbourhood in Tangra, some of the most popular restaurants belong to the people of the Hakka community. The basic infrastructural design of the breakfast market has remained unchanged and only the number of stalls has increased with time. No visible change has occurred in the physical space of the market – in front of the courtyard of almost every house, a small wooden table laid with different kinds of Chinese food at 5 a.m. is a common sight in Chinatown. Sipra Mukherjee and Sarvani Gooptu have referred to the breakfast market as “the only place in the country” where one can taste Chinese cuisine “as it survives in the kitchens of Calcutta’s Indian-Chinese families”. According to Mukherjee and Gooptu, “The cuisine that has come to be known as Indian-Chinese has little and often no relation with traditional Chinese cuisine though, and Chilli Chicken and (Nelson Wang’s) Chicken Manchurian are entirely Indian-Chinese creations”.¹¹⁴ The observations of Paul Chung, the president of the Indian Chinese Association, on the Chinese community in Kolkata summarise well the reasons behind the growth and survival of the breakfast market: “The Chinese are people of one family. And since very few can reach the greater family, which is all of one’s clan, one tries to connect through this smaller community. The clan has traditionally been seen as needed for self-protection and self-preservation.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Mukherjee, Sipra & Gooptu, Sarvani (2009). *The Chinese Community of Calcutta: An Interview with Paul Chung*. In Himadri Banerjee, Nilanjana Gupta & Sipra Mukherjee (Eds.), *Calcutta Mosaic: Essays and Interviews on the Minority Communities of Calcutta*. Anthem Press.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*

The 1930s wave of the Chinese migration to Calcutta escalated the very infrastructural base of the breakfast market. Besides the male members of the Chinese families, the female ones also gradually started to sell the breakfast items in the morning breakfast market. Now the presence of a woman in the public sphere in the late 1930s was an aberrant phenomenon in Calcutta. This aberration calls for an understanding of the Chinese patriarchy and family system. While the presence of the Chinese women in the opium dens and on the streets was quite a common sight in Chinatown, the Bengalis living in the vicinity of Chinatown were not quite comfortable with this presence. Hemendra Kumar Roy, a noted Bengali writer, published an account of the nightlife in Calcutta in 1923. Reading Roy's narrative as a register of the Bengali society's perception towards the Chinese community in the city, Dripta Nag has suggested: "Roy's shock at seeing a Chinese mother breastfeeding in public is primarily a product of the orthodox Bengali morality. His description of Chinatown reflects a strong judgemental perspective influenced by the conservative Bengali society of that time."¹¹⁶ Indeed, the very notion of a 'good woman' has remained central to Bengali middle-class understanding of womanhood, and for the same reason, the event of women entering the public sphere has always been fraught with ambivalent attitudes in the Bengali society. Lorrence Ho has beautifully explained the reasons for the presence of the Chinese women in the public space, a usual sight in Chinatown. He holds that in the Chinese family, both man and woman are equal partners in running the family. Moreover, according to him, the hierarchy of the family is based on seniority, and an equal measure of respect is given to the mothers and wives of the family. He mentioned to me that his own mother used to run a momo shop in the breakfast market. The responsibility of running the shop, which

¹¹⁶ Nag, Dripta (2018). Introspection in Fieldwork: Ethnographic Research in Chinatown, Kolkata. Occasional Anthropological Paper, *German Anthropology Online*. Paper No. 2, 7-01. <https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00028711>.

involve activities ranging from buying the ingredients to selling the final product, was equally assigned to the male and female members of the family. As most of the Cantonese men worked in the shipyard, it was the women who mostly looked after the shops.

However, by the 1960s the glorious era of both Chinatown and the breakfast market rapidly waned. By the 1950s, the KIT built a thoroughfare in the area, and as a result, Chattawala Gully, Phears Lane and Blackburn Lane, which were previously wound together, got fragmented. Further, the construction of the Poddar Court building and the Telephone Exchange in Territy Bazaar transformed the composition of the entire space, thereby obliterating the very essence of Chinatown. However, the final dissolution of Chinatown was caused by the Sino-Indian war of 1962. It is imperative to note at the end of this section that what prompted me to choose the breakfast market as one of the chapters for my dissertation is not only its history or its uniqueness. Rather, in choosing this particular space as a subject of enquiry, I have attempted at an understanding of the very phenomenon of the breakfast market within the larger framework of hawking and tried to unpack the politics of otherness as one of the probable reasons for ignorance about such an informal economy.

Ignorance and Otherness

The breakfast market starts at 5 a.m. and ends by 9 a.m. on weekdays, and on weekends, it lingers for two more hours. The site of the market is the pavement on Sunyut Street. After conducting ethnographic fieldwork for three months in Chinatown, I started to speak to the leaders of the hawkers' union active in the area. The Hawkers' Men Union, which has been in existence since 1978, is quite ubiquitous in its presence in Kolkata. The union has had a long history of struggle against the successive governments of West Bengal since 1979. The Hawkers' Men

union has had its offices in Bowbazar since the 1980s, which is only less than a kilometre from the site of the breakfast market. After completing my participant's observation procedure in the breakfast market, I visited the union office, where I had a conversation with Murad Hossain, one of the secretaries of the Hawkers' Men Union, regarding the breakfast market. Hossain straightaway questioned me as to why I was wasting my time in the breakfast market, as the food sellers in the market did not even qualify as hawkers. When I asked him why the Chinese food vendors could not be called hawkers, Hossain's exact words were: "*Dhur,oral bar hawker nai*" (Leave it, those people are not hawkers). His facial expression was enough to convey the sense of othering attached to the Chinese people. Further, he said that as they only opened their shops on the pavement for a few hours, the Chinese food vendors could not be classified as hawkers.

This reaction from the leader of one of the leading hawkers' unions in Kolkata calls for an understanding of the criteria of hawkers. Who can be called a hawker? What should be the criteria? The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 defines a hawker in the following terms:

... "mobile vendors" means street vendors who carry out vending activities in designated area by moving from one place to another place vending their goods and services; (e) "natural market" means a market where sellers and buyers have traditionally congregated for the sale and purchase of products or services and has been determine das such by the local authority on the recommendations of the Town Vending Committee; thus a hawker is someone "street vendor" means a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built-up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or

region-specific; and the words “street vending” with their grammatical variations and cognate expressions, shall be construed accordingly

The criteria for hawkers in the Act further state:

Every street vendor, identified under the survey carried out under sub-section (1) of section 3, who has completed the age of fourteen years or such age as may be prescribed by the appropriate Government, shall be issued a certificate of vending by the Town Vending Committee, subject to such terms and conditions and within the period specified in the scheme including the restrictions specified in the plan for street vending...¹¹⁷

Thus, nowhere in the Act has the time of vending been made a criterion for being a hawker. In her M.Phil. dissertation, Koyel Lahiri has shown how Neeladri Bhattacharya considers hawking as a full-time work by stating examples of hawkers from different regions in India.¹¹⁸ Lahiri's work deals with the concept of legality and illegality of hawking. An interview with Subhendu Dasgupta, a Kolkata-based economist, clears much of the confusion around the question of time spent in hawking.¹¹⁹ According to him, anyone who uses the public space to vend with temporary structures can be recognised as a hawker, and the question of business hours does not count here. If Murad Hossain's definition of a hawker rests on being a full-time or part-timer in the business of street vending, then it destabilises the union's policy on hawkers of the flower market in Howrah.¹²⁰ Hawkers of *fool patty* or the flower market near Howrah Bridge start their business hours early in the morning that is, at four o'clock in the morning, and end it by 9 a.m. These hawkers of the flower market were brought under the banner of the

¹¹⁷ The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, Act No. 7 of (2014). <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2014-7.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Lahiri, Koyel (2013). *“Aachhiaharthhakbo”*: Towards a Reading of the politics of the Hawker Sangram Committee. [M. Phil. Thesis, CSSSC].

¹¹⁹ Dasgupta, Subhendu (2019, February). Personal interview.

¹²⁰ Hossain, Murad (2019, December). Personal interview.

Hawker Sangram Committee in 2012 after they faced severe police atrocities and threats from local goons. It is significant to note here that the Hawkers' Men Union is a major constituent of the Hawker Sangram Committee that was formed as an umbrella organisation during the 'Operation Sunshine' period (1996-97). The Committee is a conglomeration of various hawkers' unions affiliated with different political parties. Further, Murad Hossain suggested me to focus on and write about the cloth hawkers who hawked in front of Liberty Cinema. However, it is interesting to note that the hawkers doing business in front of Liberty Cinema are also part-timers. These hawkers arrive at the spot with their readymade clothes at around 5 a.m. and leave the site by 9 to 10 a.m. During the 1990s, the hawkers of Liberty Cinema, who belong to the Gujarati community, joined the Hawkers' Men Union, which means that they are under the banner of the union and enjoy the status of a hawker. Such instances clearly show that it is not the time factor that deprived the Chinese people of the breakfast market of the status of hawker; rather, there are other factors that need to be scrutinised. This leads us to a host of questions: Why did the Hawkers' Men Union never attempt to unionise the Chinese people of the breakfast market? What can be the reason for such discrimination? Was their race a factor behind the exclusion of Chinese people of the breakfast market? Or, was it the typical Bengali middle-class abhorrence for the polluting class? As Rishika Mukhopadhyay has observed about the spatial exclusion of the Chinese community in Kolkata and its fraught relationship with the city, "These outsider communities whose lifestyle, food habits, culture etc. differed from those of the native Bengalis of Kolkata, were not allowed to settle down near the native town where the majority of Bengalis used to live".¹²¹ This

¹²¹Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *PraceEtnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

may be a minuscule and yet powerful indication of racial dominance of a majority community over a minority people. Murad Hossain's non-acceptance of the people of the breakfast market may be a result of a deep abhorrence for the racial identity of the Chinese people.

When asked why they never considered unionising these people of the breakfast market, the initial reply of Saktiman Ghosh, the president of the Central Calcutta Hawkers' Men Union, was: "*mathayaseni*" (It never occurred to me).¹²² This showcases a deep-rooted ignorance, expressed in the form of an attitude of neglect and dismissal, which requires to be unravelled. This sheer ignorance can be perceived as socially 'constructed ignorance'. To probe into the union leaders' lack of awareness about the Chinese food vendors of Territy Bazaar, I wish to use ignorance as a social category. Does ignorance simply mean the lack of knowledge of such variants as uncertainty, mistakes, negative knowledge, liminal knowledge, tacit knowledge and intuition?¹²³ The constructivist approach of ignorance as an analytical tool would better enable us to understand the cause of obliviousness towards the people of the breakfast market. In the constructivist approach, ignorance is not viewed as a lack, negative or opposite of knowledge and it is rather perceived as a separate construct far more complex and differentiated and formed through various social constructions (cf. Schütz&Luckmann, 1979; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1978).¹²⁴ Thus, ignorance as a construct may have also been created deliberately by an individual, which has sometimes been described as 'cultivated ignorance' (Rapp, 1972: 159). The 'individual ignorance' is often shaped by the environment or experiences of an individual (Schütz&Luckmann,

¹²²Saktiman Ghosh (2019, June). Personal interview.

¹²³Dornikok, DanilelDaniel (2013). What is Ignorance?: A Chronological Overview of the Discourse on Ignorance in aHistorical Context. [Unpublished paper].<http://oops.unioldenberg.de/1785/1/Dornikok-What-is-Ignorance.pdf>.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

1979: 203). Daniel Dornik has observed that "according to Weinstein and Weinstein, ignorance can also be converted into knowledge, more specifically into knowledge that is accepted as 'correct' by the society".¹²⁵ I intend to borrow from the analytical framework of individual ignorance in which ignorance is converted into knowledge accepted by society.

It is through this framework that I try to understand why the existence of the breakfast market was ignored. Why were the Chinese people, who could have been perceived as the first food hawkers of Kolkata, were never unionised? How could the union leaders be unaware of this breakfast market when it is situated less than a kilometre from their central office? More interestingly, this union has members in the same area, in a place called Poddar Court.

To understand the narrative of ignorance in our present context, it would be helpful to go to the era of the Sino-Indian War. The war of 1962 devastated the Chinese community in India. They were victims of all forms of violence, which involved events such as children with Chinese names being picked up from schools and the Chinese press being shut down, not to mention arson and economic destruction faced by the Chinese community. During this time, the Chinese property was indiscriminately vandalised and treated as enemy property.¹²⁶ Chinatown still remembers the horrors of state-organised internment and recalls stories of deportation. More than 2,165 Chinese were sent to a permanent internment camp at Deoli in Rajasthan. Despite being Indian citizens, many Chinese were made internees and were asked to leave India. Forced deportation was a common phenomenon in those days.¹²⁷ The story of atrocities

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶ GOI, MEA 1966: 113, 129–130, cited in Banerjee 2007: 447.

¹²⁷Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174.

did not end with such violence as the Chinese were further victimised through a more structural form of violence. This structural violence appeared in the form of denying their right to claim the citizenship of India under a legal arrangement called “registration and classification” (Li 2011: 9), which requires a person of Chinese descent to register and renew his name with the Indian government for each year of stay in India. Riskiha Mukhopadhyay has observed this precarious state of the Chinese population in Kolkata: “Till today hundreds of Chinese-descent women and men in Kolkata who are in the age group between 60–70, who were born in India and have lived in India for more than six decades, are “stateless”.”¹²⁸ These people are virtually deprived of any citizenship status. They need to go to the FRRO (Foreigner's Regional Registration Office) every year and pay close to Rs. 10,000 to renew their long-term visa (Chaudhury 2010). Payal Banerjee has called this form of structural violence “systematic disenfranchisement” with which emerged a discourse of exclusion that constructed the image of the Chinese as an ‘other’ in India. The violence was further aggravated by an atmosphere of perpetual suspicion and hostility that this community had to endure on a daily basis.¹²⁹ Referring to the Indian media’s depiction of the Chinese people as an enemy of the nation, Banerjee has provided a vivid depiction of this othering in the wake of the Sino-Indian War:

News reports from across the world were summarised under subtitles that portrayed the Chinese as aggressive imperialists. Subtitles such as, ‘Chinese imperialism’, ‘Reliance on force’, ‘China-a trouble maker’, ‘China’s hands full with blood’ and ‘China’s master plan of conquest’ suggested the essence of their

<https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Banerjee, Payal (2007). Chinese Indians in Fire: Refractions of Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Citizenship in Post-colonial India’s Memories of the Sino-Indian War. *China Report* 43(4), 437–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F000944550704300404>.

violent and invasive nature (GOI, EPD 1962b: 1–37). In the opening section of a 1962 publication titled ‘Menace to India’s Freedom’, China was constructed as an ‘unabashed’ aggressor and ‘unscrupulous opponent’ that ‘invaded [India’s] sacred land’ (GOI, MIBPD 1962: 1). The Chinese were not only portrayed as the violators of India’s freedom and territorial integrity but also as a threat to the non-alignment movement, ‘Afro-Asian solidarity’, international law, world peace and mankind in general (GOI, MIBPD 1963a: 7–64, 52). Coverage of world news about the war was summarised under subtitles, such as, ‘Chinese threat to mankind’, ‘Chinese threat to South East Asia’ and ‘Threat to peace in Asia’ to drive home the point” (GOI, MEA 1962b: 1–37).

Finally, the ostracism perpetrated by the society at large against the Chinese community reveals a few other characteristics of this violence. As RishikaMukhopadhyayhas pointed out, “... not only perpetrated by the law enforcement apparatus of State like the Apartheid State, but moreover it deliberately inculcated a culture of racism and separatism much like the case of South Africa”.¹³⁰ This ostracism and what Mukhopadhyay calls a ‘culture of racism’ and ‘separatism’ seems to form the very basis of societal ignorance.¹³¹ Can socially construct ignorance coupled with racial separatism be viewed as the sole factor for not being unionised? Or, are there other factors such as the internal politics of the trade unions?

The representation of the Chinese community in Chinatown and its association with hawking have been registered in several literary and cinematic works in recent times. RafeeqEllias’sdocumentary, *The Legend of Fat Mama* (2005), narrates

¹³⁰Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *PraceEtnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

the story of the breakfast market by focussing on the narrative of an elderly Chinese lady selling food in this market.¹³² While the market continues to exist in a debilitated state, the question of how and why it remained unnoticed by the unions looms large in the background. It is not very difficult to grasp the fact that this is not only about an individual or societal ignorance, but also about the politics of nationalism as such. It is also about the trade unions' allegiance to the policies and doctrines of the parties to which they are affiliated. According to Rishika Mukhopadhyay, the 1960s saw the rise of an almost aggressive nationalist fervour among Indians belonging to almost all classes, castes and communities. This nationalist fervour was characterised by an urge to fight the Chinese aggressors. As a result, political parties called off their agitation and trade unions ended their strikes. The workers were advised by the unions to do overtime, instead of raising their demands.¹³³

The 1950s and the following decades saw attempts by the successive governments of West Bengal to make the Chinese population almost invisible and non-existent in the public discourse and popular imagination of Kolkata. However, it was during the same period that the state government took various measures to stabilise and rehabilitate the refugees from East Pakistan by finding employment for them in the sector of hawking. Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay has pointed out in this context that several "refugee hawkers' corners" were subsequently opened by the government.¹³⁴ In 1951, Chief minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy declared that his government had constructed 384 stalls for the hawkers, out of which 276 had so

¹³²Ellias, Rafeeq (Director). (2005). *The Legend of Fat Mama*.

¹³³Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2), 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

¹³⁴Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

far been allotted to refugees (quoted in the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 12 May 1951). Yet the state government made no attempts to save the Chinese of Chinatown and their market. This effectively explains the attitude of othering or non-inclusion of the government towards the Chinese community. This attitude not only had a direct impact on the lives of the Chinese people in Kolkata, but also had a staggering effect on their livelihood. As a result, the breakfast market, a part and parcel of Chinatown, was on the verge of a virtual collapse. Besides, the dwindling number of Chinese in the city is a direct result of the policy of their forced deportation to the countries in Europe and North America.¹³⁵ However, to understand the causes of ignorance about the breakfast market, it is imperative to study this issue along with the history of the unionisation of hawkers in Kolkata.

Unions and the Government

Any discussion about the process of unionisation of hawkers requires a detailed understanding of political transformation in West Bengal, from the colonial to the post-colonial era. Throughout the colonial period, the concept of hawker and hawking has remained in the domain of illegality. In his doctoral dissertation, Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay has talked about several incidents from the colonial period in which the hawkers were deemed a public nuisance. He has also pointed out that the struggle between the colonial state and the hawkers was a usual phenomenon. He shows us that, as early as 1909, hawkers were found to be “engaged in a running battle with the police... at frequent intervals”.¹³⁶ In the post-

¹³⁵ Banerjee, Payal (2007). Chinese Indians in Fire: Refractions of Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Citizenship in Post-colonial India's Memories of the Sino-Indian War. *China Report* 43(4), 437–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F000944550704300404>.

¹³⁶ Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University]. Also see, Anjaria 2008.

colonial period, the terms of the continuous battle between the police and the hawkers seemed quite flexible against the backdrop of stabilising the refugee population from East Pakistan. Bandyopadhyay has further observed that during the 1960s and 1970s, the eviction and subsequent rehabilitation of hawkers was a common phenomenon in Kolkata.¹³⁷ Amidst such crisis, the Hawkers' Men Union was established in 1978. This union was mainly active in the central part of the city. By the late 1980s, the Hawkers' Men Union gained substantial ground in most of the area surrounding the central districts of the city – extending from Park Street covering Russel Street and directly marching to Dalhousie Square and stretching up to Poddar Court. The identical feature that links these areas together is the presence of the food hawkers, who have been in the business since the 1980s and cater to the need of the people who work in the offices around the area. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, most of the members of the Hawkers' Men Union were food hawkers. Again, it is essential to point out that the Hawkers' Men Union is affiliated with the All India Trade Union Congress, the trade union federation associated with the Communist Party of India or CPI. During the early 1940s, it was the CPI that exercised its control over the trade unions. However, after a split occurred in the party in 1964, the CPI and the breakaway CPI(M) started maintaining political distance from each other's jurisdiction in the sphere of trade unions. From 1977, the left Front government ruled West Bengal and tried to maintain a hold over Chinatown as part of its larger political strategy. This can be appropriately contextualised by Rishika Mukhopadhyay's comment: "... when the communist government took the regime of West Bengal, they had to show their adherence to the state government and again the portrait of Mao-Tse-tung came

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

up in their wall".¹³⁸ The fact of political control exercised by the Left Front becomes quite clear from a comment by Saktiman Ghosh. According to him, his union made initial attempts to unionise the people of the breakfast market, but the local goons or the cadres of the CPI(M) obstructed this endeavour. But it is important to ponder the question that whether local party cadres' objection was the only reason for the exclusion of the Chinese hawkers from the fold of the union, or was it the union's affiliation to the CPI that prevented them from including the people of the breakfast market in the Hawkers' Men union. Being mutually antagonistic in terms of their party line, the CPI and the CPI(M) have always maintained a political distance from each other since the schism of 1964.

In an interview, Saktiman Ghosh has pointed out a few things to explain his union's attitude of laxity towards the breakfast market. Firstly, he says that hawkers try to unionise themselves in the face of the threat of eviction either from the government or from the local goons, but there were no such instances in the case of the breakfast market. Secondly, he mentions that even during 'Operation Sunshine' (1996) (an eviction programme through which the CPI(M)-led government decided to evict hawkers from 21 places of Calcutta) the name of the market or the site where it works never featured in the government list. Thus, there is no record of eviction in the case of the breakfast market. Ghosh concludes from these facts that the motivation or the intention of unionisation on part of the union, as well as the hawkers of the breakfast market, was lacking. Moreover, no report of police torture or any other atrocities on the hawkers of the breakfast market were ever recorded.

¹³⁸Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *PraceEtnograficzne*, 45(2): 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

The explanation offered by Ghosh calls for an interrogation of a few points. The first point pertains to the lack of evidence or record of police atrocities against the people of the breakfast market. However, the reports of my field investigation indicate a different narrative. I have interviewed many people in the market, but none of them were ready to disclose their relationship with the local police station. Arun Rana was the sole exception. Rana, whose nephew runs a pork shop in the market, revealed that the food hawkers had to pay the police on a regular basis. The non-disclosure of the matter reveals an important perspective of the community towards the unions in order to keep their stalls. Lorrence Ho told me, "We Chinese people don't want to get into any further trouble, so the Chinese people of the breakfast market prefer to pay the amount the police station demands, to peacefully continue their business."¹³⁹ Although paying money to the police is not a new phenomenon in the practice of the hawker economy, what is strange about the matter is that the Chinese people do not even want to speak about it, let alone resisting the local police station's demand for money.

Secondly, in 1996, 'Operation Sunshine' targeted major and important roads of the city like Gariahat, Hatibagan, etc., and lanes were not considered important as they did not obstruct the free flow of the traffic. So the breakfast market did not feature in the list of sites of eviction firstly for its location and secondly for its time of vending, that is, between 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. in weekdays and up to 11 a.m. at the weekend. Thirdly, and most importantly, how can the government evict someone or something that is already invisible to society? In other words, since the late 1960s, the Chinese population in Chinatown has become a forgotten community. I asked members of other existing unions, active in the central part of the city, about

¹³⁹Ho, LorrenceHo(2013, March). Personal interview.

their knowledge of the breakfast market. Most of the people were surprised to know of the existence of a breakfast market in the Territy Bazaar area.

A forgotten people

The obliviousness of the government towards the Chinese community was furthered when in 1992, a study on the street food situation in Kolkata was initiated by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Government of India with support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. The two agencies that supported the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health for the implementation of the study were the Calcutta Corporation and the Calcutta Police. The main objectives of the study were to improve the quality of street food, to ensure consumer safety and to provide the vendor with access to acceptable street food handling practices. Four areas of the city (Sealdah, Gariahat, the area around the Writer's Buildings and College Street) were particularly selected for the study because of the fact that each catered to the needs of different socio-economic groups. The details of the observation included information of the area where the survey had been conducted, the numbers of vendors and customers, the quality of food, the nutritional value of the food, the socio-economic aspects, the water quality aspect, the lifecycle of the street food, the business hours of the vendors etc. The study was divided into different stages of activities, ranging from the stage of undertaking the study in activity 1, which consisted of meeting with various stakeholders, to activity 7, consisting of the formation of 'model street food corner' in the successive periods. The approaches undertaken included a preliminary discussion to bring about a coordinated approach among the authorities and the vendors/consumers. It also included a series of meetings, namely, 1. Meeting with the food inspectors of the Calcutta

Municipal Corporation, the mayor-in-council and the chief medical officers of the Calcutta Corporation, held under the chairmanship of the state's Chief Secretary; 2. Meeting with the police chief of each region in the presence of the commissioner of police; 3. Meeting with the vendors, and the representatives of vendors' unions. Finally, the advisory committee sat together and checked out the entire plan, trying to reach an interlinked and coordinated approach (West Bengal, Street food: the Kolkata Model, February 2002). The report of the study was placed at a meeting chaired by Benoy Krishna Chowdhury, the state Minister-in-charge of the land and land reforms department, and co-chaired by Prasanna Kumar Chatterjee, the mayor of the Calcutta Corporation. At the meeting Tushar Talukdar, the police commissioner of Kolkata, opined that the eviction of street food hawkers was not possible, considering the perspective of both the hawkers and the consumers. He appreciated the survey findings presented by Prof. Chakravarty, which stated that nearly 1,000 calories could be obtained from street food at a nominal cost of Rs. 6. The minutes of the meeting explicitly declared the need for improvement of the quality and standard of the food of the street hawkers, who should not be evicted due to their socio-economic condition. Dr. Subodh Dey, the mayor-in-council (Health), mentioned that "the city is presently in the grip of an acute problem of massive cases of gastroenteritis. Thus, the study and the meeting are most timely". The seriousness of the issue can be confirmed from the presence of the dignitaries at the meeting, ranging from ministers, bureaucrats to union leaders. The entire report of the meeting tried to assert the importance of food hawking in Kolkata. A major outcome of the study was the creation of model food zones.

By the late 1980s, food hawkers have assumed immense importance in the public life of the city. Indira Chakravarty has observed the following about the culture of street food:

... street food has been defined as ready to eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors and hawkers especially in streets and in other similar public places...Street foods have grown in both volumes as well as variety to cater to the variety of tastes. Street food is a quick snack, lunch or ready to eat foods and beverages commonly sold at display counters, refreshment parlours or at vending stalls by street food vendors and who are either stationary or ambulatory.

The food hawkers have been doing business in Sealdah, Gariahat, College Street and the area around the Writers' Buildings since the late 1960s. In order to stabilise the refugee population from East Pakistan, the West Bengal government granted permission to hawk in the Sealdah and College Street areas. And about the food hawkers in the area around the Writers' Buildings, Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay has pointed out,

The predecessors of the hawkers whom we find near the Writer's Buildings today must have been in place at a very early period in our temporal scale starting from the 1950s. Their settlement to such a spot must have to do with the growing trend of daily commutation among the mid to low level public sector workers with the gradual improvement of the transportation system between Calcutta and its suburbs in the 1960s. These were the people who needed lunch at a cheaper price on a daily basis.¹⁴⁰

At this juncture, I would try to unpack the reasons for the non-inclusion of the breakfast market in the study undertaken by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in 1992. To advance my argument, I intend to reveal the causes of selecting the four areas in the study. The study points out that the four areas of the city were selected on the basis of the categories of consumers. And it is precisely here that I want to situate my argument for the non-inclusion of the

¹⁴⁰Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

breakfast market in the study. The consumer profile of the selected areas shows: **a.)** the Writers' Buildings (Central Kolkata) represents consumers of the low, middle, and high-income groups who are mainly office goers; **b.)** Sealdah (Northeast-Central Kolkata) represents consumers of the middle class, low-income groups, who are daily commuters; **c.)** College Street (North-Central Kolkata) represents consumers of the middle-income group who are students, teachers, working men and women; **d.)** Gariahat (South Kolkata) represents consumers of high as well as middle-income groups who are shoppers, housewives and youth. Now the point is that irrespective of their income standards most of these groups belong to one community, that is, the Bengali community. Thus, it can be plausibly argued that the study was undertaken, among other things, to assure the Bengali *bhadralok* class of the standard of street food. The Bengali community, mostly belonging to the middle-class, has constituted the main client base of these four areas. Therefore, it seems that as the breakfast market has never catered to the Bengali working community of offices goers, students, and workers, it failed to include itself in the study conducted by the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health. Moreover, the whole study was undertaken during the rule of the Left Front government in West Bengal. It was part of the WHO-supported programme on food safety, which was conducted by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata for improving awareness of all the stakeholders of the street food sector. The imagination of Kolkata would be incomplete without its street food and it was a time to not only refashion the old city but also to change the concept of street food as such, the way it was perceived as 'contaminated' and 'unhygienic'. Bandyopadhyay has pointed out in this context that "The *bhadralok* city was to become the home of an aspirational Bengali Diaspora seeking the right amalgamation of global consumer spaces and the cultural memory of the *bhadralok* city." (Bandyopadhyay 2010). At this point, the

image of the city, including every aspect of its public life – ranging from the public space to street food that is served on the streets and caters to the public – assumed supreme importance for the ruling party as the latter was keen on improving its own image in the international arena. This *bhadralok* city has always ignored the existence of the Chinese community in Kolkata. Thus, the cultural memory of the *bhadralok* city never intended to include the outlandish Chinese community and the breakfast market was outside the cultural purview of their social imagination. However, the relationship between the breakfast market and the rest of the city has undergone a change in recent times, especially in the last two decades. This change has been caused by the transformation of the Bengali middle-class world in the post-globalisation era. Thus the erstwhile parochial attitude of the Bengali middle-class towards the people of other communities, which was characterised by profound ignorance and cultural othering, has been replaced by a fashionable interest in ‘exotic cultures’. The interest of the globalised Bengali middle-class in the so-called ‘exotic food’ has led them to the breakfast market and they take a great deal of pride in uploading pictures of their weekend visits to the breakfast market on the social media. Numerous food bloggers also write about the breakfast market. In recent times, Piya Chakravorty, who has done her M. Phil. dissertation on the food culture of the Chinese in Kolkata, has made a music video about the Chinese community called *Chineparargaan* (the Song of Chinatown).¹⁴¹ Besides, after the fashion of heritage walks in other Indian metro cities, a new trend of conducting heritage tours has started in Kolkata too. These heritage walks, currently in vogue among the younger generation in Kolkata, have also included the breakfast market in their itinerary. As a result, such heritage walks often take place in the breakfast market. While the food bloggers and the

¹⁴¹ Chakravorty, Piya (2012). *Interrogating ‘Chinese-ness’: Memories and identities of the Chinese Community in Kolkata* [M. Phil. thesis, CSSSC].

people who participate in such tours take much pleasure in the cuisine, they more often than not fail to assess the true condition of the market.

Today

In the present times, the breakfast market is in a decrepit state. Chinatown has undergone severe changes – ranging from the decrease in the number of the Chinese residents to the loss of its 'Chineseness', or the essence of Chinatown. The essential character of the breakfast market has transformed as only a few Chinese stalls exist there nowadays. In the market, hawkers from different ethnic groups who stay in the area now sell almost anything and everything ranging from vegetables to fresh stock. This change in the numerical position of the Chinese is not only due to the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War but also due to an entire overhaul of the neighbourhood. During the early 1970s, many export companies opened their city logistic offices in and around Chinatown. The opening of these offices provided the non-Bengali, and especially Bihari, migrants with an opportunity to earn their living. The Bihari migrants started to settle in the areas that were left vacant around the newly constructed buildings, such as the KIT building and the Telephone Exchange, in Territy Bazaar. Moreover, the familiar picture of Chinatown has gradually changed since the late 1960s. In her work on the Chinese community in Kolkata, Rishika Mukhopadhyay has mentioned how an old resident of Chinatown views the present state of Chinatown: “He pointed his hand in front showing the dingy road, the incessant noise of automobiles zooming through the huge thoroughfare, parked lorry, trucks and the jungle of private cars, the filth, dirt, garbage vats, open public toilet and the unusual sight of disquiet –

the lined up *jhupri* (slum)."¹⁴² The demographic shift not merely changed the picture of the landscape, but also caused an enormous metamorphosis in the understanding of the meta-narratives of the breakfast market. The history of the market and its transformation have to be studied along with the transition of the Chinese population in Chinatown. Zhang Xing has provided a comprehensive historical account of Chinatown and its neighbourhood and also portrayed the deplorable condition of the very few Chinese families who still live there. He has pointed out that the breakfast market is mostly under the control of non-Chinese people at present. While conducting the fieldwork for this chapter, I was able to identify only three to four stalls belonging to the Chinese people in Chinatown. Besides, many stalls in the market are owned by the Nepalese people. Owing to their mixed parentage, these people often claim to be of Chinese descent. Most of the delicacies that were once prepared by the Chinese are now sold by the non-Chinese people. Another essential point is that most of the Chinese who had stalls in the breakfast market now rent their stalls out to people belonging to other ethnic groups. The simple reason for this is that the younger generation no longer resides in Chinatown. One old lady whom I interviewed revealed that although she had rented out her shop, she would try to come to the breakfast market every Sunday to meet her friends. She now stays in an apartment in the Kasba area, where her daughter owns a Chinese restaurant, called the Royal Jade Restaurant, which is quite popular in the area. When I asked her whether she missed her Chinese neighbourhood, her answer was that the Chinese neighbourhood "itself is on the verge of extinction and only of a spattering of reminiscences" of Chineseness is left. According to her, most Chinese people have

¹⁴²Mukhopadhyay, Rishika (2017). Charting Ethnic Violence through the Lens of Heritage: Engaging with the Indo-Chinese Population in Kolkata. *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45(2): 161-174. <https://www.ejournals.eu/Prace-Etnograficzne/2017/45-2-2017/art/10513/>. Accessed in January 2018.

migrated to Canada or Australia, and the few Chinese who stay in Kolkata are not ready to continue any of the legacies of Chinatown. On the contrary, they feel that the Bowbazar Chinatown is almost dead. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, one thing that struck me the most is the language of communication among the Chinese residents of Chinatown. While roaming through the market, I realised that the medium of communication for most (and I can say almost all) Chinese people was 'Hindi'. Initially, I could not grasp why they did not speak in Chinese among themselves. However, after learning about various memories of the horrors associated with the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and after going through the literature on the Chinese community in Kolkata, it has dawned upon me that the sense of threat still persists amongst this community and the wounds of the violence have not yet healed. Perhaps they opt for Hindi for communication not only with other communities but also among themselves in public, in order to avoid being the target of suspicion from the rest of the population. Zhang Xing has pointed out in this context: "The most noteworthy feature of the Bowbazar Chinatown has been the inter-ethnic interactions among its various residents... some learned to speak Hindi and other Indian languages."¹⁴³ While I agree with Xing on the point that the Bowbazar Chinatown is marked for its multi-ethnic character, the question is: Why would the Chinese people speak in Hindi among themselves in public? It does not indicate reverence for other people's culture, but on the contrary, it reveals a subconsciously perceived threat that looms large even today. The people of this community live in the perpetual fear of disfranchisement. However, it is the older generation who speaks in Hindi, the population who were the victims of the 1962 war. I suppose it also explains one of the remarks of Saktiman Gosh about the

¹⁴³Xing, Zhang (2009-2010). The Bowbazar Chinatown. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 36(3/4): 396-413. <https://www.desichineseproject.com/post/the-bowbazaar-chinatown-by-zhang-xing>. Accessed in August 2019.

lack of initiative on the part of the Chinese people of the breakfast market to unionise themselves. The perpetual threat of being in a state of statelessness does not allow any people to fight for other rights.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to look at the narratives of the breakfast market from three closely linked perspectives. First, I have tried to historicise the cause of the emergence of the breakfast market and its transition along with the history of Chinatown. Here I have attempted to analyse how the growth of Chinatown led to the beginning and flourishing of the breakfast market. It is a market entirely developed by individual Chinese hawkers, especially people from the Cantonese community, in Chinatown. Moreover, with the growth of the Chinese population in Calcutta, the breakfast market also thrived in the Territy Bazaar area. The witch-hunting and social ostracism following the Sino-Indian war of 1962, and finally, the modernisation of the place by the construction of a new thoroughfare and the construction of the KIT, the Telephone Exchange and Poddar Court gradually pushed the market on the verge of extinction. In this case, the story of the breakfast market along with that of the Chinese neighbourhood involves substantial questions pertaining to otherness and tales of ostracism.

Secondly, I have tried to understand the perspective of both the government and the unions who never made any attempts to save the market and its heritage. I have mentioned how the government tried to relocate and stabilise the refugees

from East Pakistan during the 1960s. Yet, no attempts in this direction were visible when it came to the breakfast market. On the contrary, there was a continuous process of marginalisation and systematic disfranchisement of this community. The post-colonial state made all attempts to erase the history of the Chinese people from the socio-cultural imagination of the city.

Thirdly, in order to understand the reasons behind the hawkers' unions' attitude towards the breakfast market, I intended to clarify the status of the market; the Chinese food vendors are hawkers according to the criteria laid down by the Act of 2014. In this context, I asked why the union which was active in the area did not make any attempts to unionise these people. I conceived that it was not merely ignorance that formed an obstacle on the part of the unions to unionise the food hawkers of Chinatown; rather, it was a 'social construct' about the Chinese people that implicitly held back the unions from bringing the Chinese people under their banner. The culture of mistrust and suspicion is not enough to explain this phenomenon. The perception that a Chinese hawker does not match the image of a hawker as defined by the Bengali *bhadralok* class, who constitute the leadership in all the informal workers' unions, is also a crucial reason behind this exclusion. However, the picture of the Chinese man selling groundnuts was not unknown to the people of Kolkata, and thus, the Chinese can be called the first food hawkers of the city. The anti-Chinese rhetoric that was present among the Bengali *bhadralok* class since the inception of the Chinese settlement in the city has found its takers among the unions as well.

Through these three threads, I have intended to approach the micro-history of the breakfast market in Chinatown and to read the narratives emerging out of the market in the light of the hawker economy. The narratives of this chapter vividly focus on the anecdote of ignorance about this community,

thereby tracing the slow dissolution of the breakfast market. The discussion in this chapter raises important questions regarding our understanding of the nation's historical past vis-à-vis the people of 'other' cultures. Another important conclusion of the chapter is that the politics of unionisation has failed in certain realms of hawking, as the unions have not been able to free themselves from the ideological clutches of popular perception and cultural othering.

‘Operation Sunshine’: The Politics of Organisational Memory

The previous chapter delved into eviction operations concerning street hawkers in Central Calcutta in the 1970s and 1980s, outlining how some of the significant operations were conceived, planned, and executed. An in-depth conversation between the micro-history of one particular eviction drive – ‘Operation Sunshine’ – and the trajectories of the mass movement associated with it has remained outside the purview of most scholars concerned with urban landscape and eviction. Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay's (2010) work on street hawkers, urban space and informality has played an important role in provoking new discourses on these issues. However, scholarship focusing specifically on ‘Operation Sunshine’ is still few and far between, and this chapter seeks to address the issue by providing a ‘thick description’ of the operation. The period between the mid-1980s and early 2000s was particularly extraordinary in the history of the people’s movement in India. The change was much more comprehensive and palpable, encompassing many cities of India in particular and the Global South in general. Several large-scale eviction drives targeting the urban poor were conducted in Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata during the aforementioned period. This chapter will explore this particular moment of urbanism that led to large-scale eviction drives of street hawkers, slum dwellers, and squatters, and the people’s movements that developed to counter this revanchist urbanism. The first section will trace the transformation of Kolkata’s urban landscape in the 1990s, and analyse how the

change in the urban landscape created perpetual friction among the users of the public space. The second section will present a detailed description of 'Operation Sunshine', covering narratives and strategies from the government of West Bengal as well as of the leaders and participants of the anti-eviction movement. The third section will focus on Gariahat, one of the storm centres of 'Operation Sunshine'. Gariahat was perhaps the only action site of the eviction operation that witnessed an active role of a radical female leadership in the struggle of the hawkers against the policies of the state government. To further unpack the role of the female leadership, this section will discuss in detail, as a case study, the contribution of Ratna Ghosh, a female leader who spearheaded the anti-eviction struggles in this part of the city.

As already stated, the research material for this chapter came through the amalgamation of archival and ethnographic pieces of evidence. The daily notes files of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police and various newspaper reports dealing with the subject have acted as the primary sources for this chapter. Along with that, an ethnographic study involving interviews with the rank-and-file of the regime functionaries, trade union members, and street hawkers, helped to develop a sense of how 'Operation Sunshine' is remembered in the city after two decades. This section highlights the exclusion and selective documentation that have come to light while conducting the ethnographic study of Gariahat. In so doing, the chapter will specifically focus on the mechanics and politics of invisibilisation regarding how this moment in history has been recollected within the organisational structure of the movement in the subsequent decades.

Situating the 1990s

Vast corpora of literature have focussed on how, in the 1990s, a new regime of liberalisation tried to restructure Kolkata's public space (Roy 2003, Chatterjee 2004, Bandyopadhyay 2010). Partha Chatterjee(2004) states that the era of the 1990s experienced the turning of the 'tide' as West Bengal's Left Front government began to remodel Kolkata as a world-class city. However, street hawkers and pavement dwellers were largely perceived as detriments to achieving this vision (Anjaria 2007). To the bourgeois guardians of the city, hawkers are regarded as "a symbol of a metropolitan space gone out of control" (Rajagopal 2001:94). The hawkers were deemed a 'menace' that 'inappropriately' use streets and pavements, thus impeding traffic and depressing real-estate values.¹⁴⁴In the 1990s, Maharashtra tried to remake Mumbai into a "world-class" city and an international financial centre by 2013, inspired by Shanghai's comprehensive urban renewal'.¹⁴⁵In the case of Delhi, the political formulation of urban renewal began during the period of Emergency, when the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi tried to suppress all voices of dissent and restructure the entire urban society by forceful eviction of residents of slums in the Turkman Gate area in Delhi.¹⁴⁶ The restructuring of the urban space in Delhi commenced from the 1990s with large-scale eviction and demolition drives of slums along with the closure of nearly 40,000 informal industrial units.¹⁴⁷ However, in Kolkata the process of restructuring the cityscape

¹⁴⁴Anjaria, J. S. (2008). *Unruly Streets: Everyday Practices and Promises of Globality in Mumbai* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz].

¹⁴⁵Chattarji, Suhana (2012). *Shanghai Dreams: Urban Restructuring in Globalising Mumbai* [Doctoral disseration, Princeton University].

¹⁴⁶Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of theWorld*. Permanent Black.

¹⁴⁷A fact-finding report on the eviction and resettlement process in Delhi. (2007). Hazards Centre, Delhi. Retrieved from harzardcentre@gmail.com on 10 November 2019.

began in early 1994, when the Left Front government published a supplement in *Financial Times*, London, outlining the forthcoming industrial policy for the state of West Bengal. In the preamble, it declared its agenda: The Government recognises the need for improvements in roads, communication and development of Growth Centres. Since these programmes require massive investments, the Government proposes to undertake projects for the development of industrial infrastructure through the Private Joint Sector as well, wherever feasible. Subsequently, the state Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth, the CPI (M)) decided to liberalise West Bengal's economy amid controversies and debates within the party regarding the party-line.¹⁴⁸ "Calcutta's home-grown ethic of neoliberal urbanism was intimately associated with the prospective capital investment in West Bengal" (Bandyopadhyay 2010).¹⁴⁹

Ananya Roy's work explores how the state government tried to gentrify the city through the eviction of a particular class of people who uses the public space; as she has argued, "postcolonial Calcutta has been marked by process of democratisation that established claims to the 'public'".¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the public domain largely remains a hugely contested space.¹⁵¹ According to Bandyopadhyay, the city was to become the home of an aspirational Bengali diaspora seeking the right amalgamation of global consumer spaces and the

¹⁴⁸Government of West Bengal (1994). *West Bengal Industrial Policy 1994*. <https://dcmsme.gov.in/policies/state/westbengal/ipwb.html>. Accessed on 20 June 2015.

¹⁴⁹Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

¹⁵⁰Roy, Ananya (2003). *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*

cultural memory of the “*bhadralok city*”.¹⁵² Ananya Roy has explained that the 1996 eviction of the so-called encroachers to the public space conducted under the aegis of ‘Operation Sunshine’ was, in reality, an attempt to “recover a gentleman's Calcutta”. This is a city produced through nostalgia, a nostalgia “that normalises certain ways of dwelling in the city” (Chakrabarty 1999).¹⁵³ This eviction drive was hailed by the international media. In its March 1997 issue, *Newsweek* magazine carried its lead article titled, “World’s worst city was cleaning up its act”.¹⁵⁴ The regime functionaries presented this act as an endeavour to salvage the *bhadralok* Calcutta (Mitra 1997).¹⁵⁵ A somewhat similar argument has been put forward by Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay in his doctoral thesis, where he talks about the essential difference between Operation Sunshine and its predecessors. The trajectory of hawker eviction vividly indicates that before the 1980s most of the eviction drives were intended to maintain law and order, but the scenario changed since the 1980s when infrastructural development and the conception of the idea of a megacity took centre stage. The case of Sealdah, discussed in the previous chapter, is one example of this change. Eviction drive in Sealdah was designed to facilitate the flow of traffic for a certain class of citizens. Operation Sunshine was thus conceived as the administrative activism to restore order on the street. Subhas Chakrabarty, the ‘chief architect’ of the operation and the state transport minister, wrote in a publicity volume titled *Operation Sunshine: “rasta diye cholbe gari,*

¹⁵²Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

¹⁵³ Roy, Ananya (2003). *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

pothikhantben footpath dhore” (the street is meant for the vehicle, while pedestrians will freely walk on the footpath).¹⁵⁶

What set ‘Operation Sunshine’ apart from its predecessors was its *bhadralok* connection in a neo-liberal context. Nevertheless, it was not solely the “new middle class” aspiration or the “new communism” that made it different.¹⁵⁷ ‘Operation Sunshine’ had another unique feature that differed from any other hawker eviction drive in Kolkata during the 1990s. It was the first hawker eviction drive that was undertaken not by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation or the police but was planned and dispensed in its entirety by Subhas Chakrabarty, the transport minister and Kanti Ganguly, the Member, Mayor-in-Council (Conservancy) of the Corporation. The conservancy department was in charge of the entire operation, a department with the primary responsibility of which is sanitisation and the maintenance of the health and hygiene in the city. This exposes the transformation in the government’s perception of hawkers – the government began treating the street hawkers as “unhygienic filth”, of whose unhealthy presence the visible city spaces must be sanitised. This is indicative of a larger change in the state’s attitude toward its urban poor. The users of the public space now became ‘encroachers’ and were viewed as an illegal entity – the relegation of status leading to a process of categorisation of hawkers in the later period. The government’s determination to rid the public domain of the inhabitants of the public space was motivated by an urge to “cleanse and sanitise the public political arena to rid the space of citizenship of all the noise, smell and gaudiness of a publicly mobilised plebeian culture that is now being seen as an

¹⁵⁶Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

impediment to India's becoming of world power".¹⁵⁸ This sanitisation drive was not a very smooth process for the state government. Interviews with Sudhangshu Seal (Member, Mayor-in-Council) reveal the necessity for garnering a mass consensus through public meetings and campaigns on mass media. As Seal enunciates, "This was our first attempt to evict hawkers in such a large scale".¹⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that the mass consensus that the state government accumulated was mainly the views of the people who had no connection with the informal economy; they were mainly old cultural vanguards of the city who supported Operation Sunshine. A book titled *Operation Sunshine* brought together articles penned by famous Bengali litterateurs, such as Annada Shankar Roy, Arun Mitra, and Sunil Gangopadhyay, academics, vice-chancellors, artists, footballers, activists, and prominent opposition leaders.¹⁶⁰ In the context of Operation Sunshine, Sandipan Chattopadhyay, a novelist, compared the street with the "*baithakkhana* [drawing-room] in a middle-class household that needed to be kept in a proper manner ...".¹⁶¹ It is important to understand that the people who supported the cause of 'Operation Sunshine' had little stake in the street economy, and their opinions stemmed from their backgrounds of privilege and security deeply entrenched in the social status quo. However, the class that spoke in favour of '**Operation Sunshine**' blatantly ignored the needs of the very people whose service directly benefitted them in both public and private realms. Their domestic helps and drivers were the primary customers of the hawkers, and the latter's forceful removal from the market meant that the former class of people would no

¹⁵⁸ *The Telegraph*, 2006. Also see, Chatterjee (1994).

¹⁵⁹ Seal, Sudhangshu (2019, November). Personal interview.

¹⁶⁰ Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata's Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

longer be able to afford many essential commodities. Therefore, the support of the educated urban intelligentsia in favour of an eviction campaign launched by a left-leaning government exposes the complexities of class politics that need to be unpacked. As a study on street hawkers of Kolkata conducted by Dipankar Dey and Subhendu Dasgupta reveals,

... the street vendors (commonly known as hawkers) play an important role in the hawker economy by acting as a bridge between numerous small buyers and small producers. They hawk a wide range of commodities – food, agricultural products, clothes, utensils, stationery and numerous necessary items – used mainly by the middle class and poor citizens of urban centres. The hawkers buy commodities, in small quantities, from small producers at a low price and sell the same to a buyer who has limited purchasing power. With the active participation of many small producers, small sellers (hawkers) and small buyers, numerous undersized economic circuits are constructed every day. Thus, a common man's economy where hawkers play the central role runs parallel to the formal/organised economic activities.¹⁶²

Thus, the class factor remains an important vantage point in analysing 'Operation Sunshine'.

Operation Sunshine: The Context

The narrative of this section is drawn from several kinds of sources, such as newspaper reports, Daily Notes from the Special Branch of Kolkata Police, and interviews.¹⁶³ Since 1993, there have been attempts on the part of the state

¹⁶²Dey, Dipankar & Dasgupta, Subhendu (2010, April). Integration of an Informal Economy with the Globalization Process: A Study on Street Hawkers of Kolkata. Available at SSRN: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1584623>.

¹⁶³Most of these interviews were taken in 2018-19.

government to regulate or introduce changes in hawking activities in general and food hawking in particular. The gradual shift in the government's perspective regarding hawkers can be grasped from the Left Front government's industrial policy launched in 1994, which, in turn, had a considerable impact upon the international business community.¹⁶⁴ According to state government sources, the government approved 36.42 percent more proposals for investment in the first nine months of 1993 than in the same period the previous year. The Central Committee of the CPI(M) approved the new industrial policy and also affirmed that trade unions' rights had to be preserved and that the state had to interfere positively in specific core areas. Subsequently, the new industrial policy was debated within the state committee of the CPI (M); its resolution overrode the discontent of sceptic party hardliners who had to accept the Central Committee's decision that called for modernising trade unions. The party maintained its antagonism to the overall liberalisation strategy of the Congress-led central government, but agreed to liberalise West Bengal's economy as a matter of "federal compulsion". The effect was immediate. The Confederation of Indian Industry launched its centenary celebrations from Kolkata that year, acknowledging the state's shift towards neoliberal industrialisation. Several ministers and high-profile delegates from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan were invited to the business meeting.

Meanwhile, between 6 March and 21 December 1995, representatives of various hawkers' unions met police officials to discuss ongoing eviction drives in different parts of central Calcutta and the subsequent rehabilitation plans for them. Both the police commissioner of Kolkata and the transport minister tried to come up with a

¹⁶⁴Government of West Bengal (1994). *West Bengal Industrial Policy 1994*. <http://dcmsme.gov.in/policies/state/westbengal/ipwb.htm>. Accessed on 20 June 2015.

strategy to combat the impending unemployment of these hawkers, in the light of job scarcity in West Bengal. With the declaration of the election results and the formation of the fifth Left Front government in the state, Subhas Chakraborty assumed office as the new transport minister and aborted all previous projects associated with the management of hawkers in the city. On 1 September 1996, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation formed a special task force to monitor the hawkers. The state government hosted a meeting at Khudiram Anushilan Kendra, where Subhas Chakraborty declared that within December 1996 he would present a “Hawker Free” Kolkata. As Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay remarks,

*The rulers felt it necessary to rebuild Calcutta as an investment-friendly city, mobilising the bhadralok (middle-class/ gentlemanly) sentiment of ‘pristine Calcutta’ and the powerful party machine. Operation Sunshine, which was carried out between the winters of 1996 and 1997, was a product of this remaking of communism in Calcutta. Around 21 major streets in the city were chosen for the operation – all of them fell between Shyambazar in the north and Gariahat in the south.*¹⁶⁵

At this juncture, it is essential to understand why the state government had displayed a considerably mild attitude towards the hawkers during the preceding years. One of the reasons for the government’s shift in attitude can be inferred from the fact that Shyamal Chakraborty, the previous transport minister, was himself a leader of the CPI(M)’s labour wing, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), and was well aware of both the situation of the working class in India and the prevalent disposition in his own party and its workers’ wing. Differences of opinions and debates were noticeable within the party even at the later stages of ‘Operation Sunshine’. As one prominent English daily of the city reported:

¹⁶⁵Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti (2010). *Negotiating Informality: Changing Faces of Kolkata’s Footpaths, 1975-2005* [Doctoral dissertation, Jadavpur University].

Nonetheless, the mode of eviction of hawkers continues to sharpen the differences in the intraparty area of every Party right from the C.P.M. down to the Forward block, particularly those that have unions under their mass front. Calcutta district committee secretary Naren Sen has made it clear to the state Committee that the grievances among local committees must be properly given audience to.¹⁶⁶

One of the plausible reasons for this dilemma can be that from the very beginning, the CPI (M) faced some difficulty in organising hawkers. Interviews with CITU leaders reveal that the party could never ascertain the hawkers' class position; it classed them along with either the petite bourgeoisie or the lumpenproletariat. According to Shekhar Chatterjee, "It might also be that the CPI(M) is shifting its allegiance towards the upper classes."¹⁶⁷ Though the ruling party in West Bengal came to power mainly with the support of the working and labouring classes, in order to revamp West Bengal as a state keen on industrialising itself, it had to look for allies among the upper classes. However, despite all opposition from the party members, Subhas Chakraborty was successful in achieving the full support of Chief Minister Jyoti Basu to implement his plans concerning the eviction of hawkers.

Meanwhile, hawker leaders were able to anticipate the impending situation. On 9 August 1996, more than 36 unions of hawkers came together within a unique federal structure of the Hawker Sangram Committee (HSC). It was decided that the HSC would enforce certain self-regulation on hawkers and would start experimenting with kiosks on six streets of the city. However, the situation dramatically changed with Subhas Chakraborty's execution of the eviction plan in

¹⁶⁶*The Statesmen*, 17 September 1996.

¹⁶⁷*The Statesman*, January 1997

the Taratala and Diamond Harbour area.¹⁶⁸ Though the eviction did not receive much attention from the media, it was successful in making the HSC aware of the seriousness of the situation and was regarded as the harbinger of the larger scale eviction that the government was to execute within the next few months. To understand the process of the struggle waged by the HSC, it is necessary to assess the role played by the Calcutta Hawkers' Men Union (CHMU) in this collective endeavour.

The CHMU was formed in June 1970 by Saktiman Ghosh to resist an ongoing eviction drive on an intersection in central Calcutta. Since then, the Union had grown into a large body taking care of mainly the food hawkers in the central part of the city. It came into prominence during a major conflict in 1979-80 when the newly formed Left Front government undertook a massive eviction drive in Sealdah while constructing a flyover that was to connect AJC Bose Road with MG Road. The scale of eviction required a scaling up of trade union activities among the hawkers. The CHMU was able to bring together the first-ever federation of unions under the banner of the Madhya Kolkata Hawker Sangram Committee. Eventually, the federation was able to negotiate the resettlement of hawkers under the flyover. This experience proved to be a landmark victory in the annals of the hawkers' movement in particular and the people's movement at large. The successful negotiation enabled the hawkers to understand the power of a coordinated movement under a democratic and federal organisational structure. Between September and the second week of November 1996, representatives of various unions and law enforcement agencies held several dialogues, hoping to reach a solution acceptable to all stakeholders. Mass deputation programmes and rallies were organised in different parts of the city, particularly from 13 September

¹⁶⁸ *Bartaman*, 28 September 1996.

to 27 October 1996, when there were demonstrations in front of all the police stations in Kolkata. The entire months of September and October were very eventful for the HSC. On 15 September, they organised a rally at the Writers' Building, and on the next day, another huge rally was organised at Gariahat with approximately 4,000 hawkers participating in it.¹⁶⁹ On 21 September 1996, a meeting was held with Tushar Talukdar, the police commissioner of Kolkata, to present the problems being faced by the hawkers due to eviction drives.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, massive eviction of hawkers took place in Asansol in Bardhaman District on 23 September 1996, which was countered by a twelve-hour-long protest. Such protests erupting in different districts of West Bengal established further the benefits of a united struggle against the government, which was unprecedented in the history of hawkers' movement in the state. The Writers' Building Abhiyan was one such grand programme undertaken by the HSC, through which hawker organisations exhibited their power to resist the government's forces. According to a newspaper report, around "1000 vendors belonging to different unions, including INTUC, AITUC squatted on the road. Their leaders climbed atop of the vans and made fiery speeches".¹⁷¹ One of the leaders Shami Md. Bhai alleged that the Left Front government had tried to harass hawkers belonging to refugee families who had moved to the city from present-day Bangladesh. Such allegations were sure to have an impact upon the Left Front's vote-bank politics as the refugee issue was one of the main reasons for its rise to power.¹⁷² On the day of the rally, the hawkers were not allowed to move

¹⁶⁹ Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police. SW 630-690, 1996–1997. Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta. Government of West Bengal.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *The Telegraph*, 28 October 1996.

¹⁷² Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta. Government of West Bengal (1996-1997). Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police (SW 630-690).

beyond the Lal Bazar area. The leaders of the unions wanted to submit a memorandum, but no official was present to receive it. Loud slogans rang through the rally alleging that “they (implying higher officials) all ran away. Writer’s Building is empty. The Government is scared”.¹⁷³ However, this initial triumph of the CHMU quickly petered away. Despite the desperate attempts on the part of the hawkers from different parts of the city to guard and protect their stalls and voice their protest through rallies and meetings, they could not thwart the first phase of hawker eviction under the aegis of ‘Operation Sunshine’.

In the late 1980s and by the early 1990s, the government had made clear its attitude towards refugee hawkers, and it was no longer willing to placate them. This was apparent when, in the middle of this crisis, a group of hawkers in Bhawanipore area in the middle of this crisis shifted their allegiance to the rising opposition leader Mamta Bannerjee.¹⁷⁴ The government and the CPI (M) spokespersons justified ‘Operation Sunshine’ by drawing a correlation between the concentrations of hawkers at busy street crossings and traffic congestion and air pollution. The twin logic of circulation and sanitisation was deployed to reclaim the streets from the decadence of quotidian practices, restoring it to its ‘proper use’ – pedestrians would walk freely on pavements and automobiles would run uninterrupted on streets.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*

Description of 'Operation Sunshine'

The operation plan was detailed by KantiGanguly that was to be entirely executed by the CPI(M) party cadres, and employees of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and the state government's Public Works Department. Ganguly has narrated in an account how he, along with party colleagues, charted the blueprint of the operation in an office on Lord Sinha Road. In the presence of the then Police Commissioner Dinesh Bajpai, it was decided that they would take the help of NGOs, who would be in charge of making badges to identify their own action squad of about 7,000 people. The entire operation was planned for the morning of 24 November 1996. Ganguly said that he required more people to assist him in badge-making and therefore, sought help from his party members who assured him of cooperation. DGP Swapan Mahapatra, along with his family, promised to take up the task of attaching the pin on the badges. Apart from these preliminaries, Ganguly arranged for 10,000 people, 10 payloaders, 110 Lorries along with ambulances, fire engines, and water cannons. The plan was to execute 'Operation Sunshine' in Shyambazar and Hatibagan areas in north Kolkata and on Brabourne Road in central Kolkata.

Yet, from the morning of 24 November the Corporation began to make announcements in the Gariahat and Lake Market areas, alarming the hawkers and their leaders that the operation would be launched from the southern part of the city. Murad Hossain, one of the leaders of the HSC, narrated in an interview how they misconstrued the situation and tried to guard Gariahat with thousands of their members.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, at midnight the government executed the eviction operation in Hatibagan. It is quite evident that the government's ploy was to

¹⁷⁵ Hossain, Murad (2018, May). Personal interview.

engage the hawkers' unions elsewhere so that they could carry on with the eviction process unabated in their targeted areas in north Kolkata. It is important to bear in mind that the distance between south and north or central Kolkata is about 10 to 14 kilometres. Thus, by the time the hawkers and their leaders could arrive at the spot, the entire operation would have been completed. Kanti Ganguly writes that it was decided that after the night show ended in the cinemas in the Hatibagan area, they would begin to vacate the area. There would be less transport on the road at midnight, which would prevent the hawkers from reaching the eviction zone on time, and the authorities would be able to carry on their mission with little or no resistance. Ganguly has pointed out that this strategy ensured that the drive could be completed without any bloodshed or lawlessness. He believed that after the removal of stalls from Brabourne Road, the width of the pavement would increase to 100 feet and this would eventually attract industrialists to invest in the state "where Kolkata could be the next financial capital of South-East Asia".¹⁷⁶ The Left Front leaders were hopeful that "this operation sunshine would write a new chapter for urban history."¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the Ballygunge Hawkers' Association filed a petition against the eviction, and Justice V K Gupta issued a stay order of three weeks on 22 November 1996, but the government moved to the Division Bench of the High Court to challenge this stay order. This may also explain why the government planned the first phase of the eviction drive in Hatibagan and the central part of the city. Thus, the first phase of 'Operation Sunshine' brought victory for the government, and yet, in the later phase it saw collateral failure, and in the long run, this operation paved the way for an epic struggle over the control of the city's pavement. The HSC's struggle against the state government was a watershed in

¹⁷⁶Ganguly, Kanti (1997). *Shine er Age Ebang Pore*. In S. Lahiri (Ed.), *Operation Sunshine* [in Bengali]. Vishwakosh Parishad.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*

the history of unionisation of informal workers, particularly the hawkers in Kolkata, and later, in other parts of the country, and reached a new pinnacle in the coming three decades. The second phase of the eviction drive took place in Gariahat and the following section seeks to highlight certain significant aspects associated with this phase, which have been largely overlooked by a vast corpus of academic literature.

The Case of Ratna Ghosh

With the huge influx of migrants from the rural hinterland to the city before and after the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, planned urbanisation was able to draw the attention of serious academics.¹⁷⁸ Famine victims began to occupy the sidewalks, boulevards, parks, railway platforms, and other public spaces in the city. Before the tide of this phenomenal rural-urban migration receded, the streets of Calcutta were populated by refugees from East Pakistan. While the upper-caste landed groups, who migrated just after the partition, found a place in the city's formal economy, the low-caste groups migrating to the city in the mid-1960s clogged every open space of the city, often by waging violence on the existing rural-urban migrants. It is essential to note here that the transformation of a particular south Calcutta neighbourhood (Gariahat-Deshapriya Park-Lake Market area) and its central thoroughfare (Rashbehari Avenue) marked the beginning of contestation of public space. The Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) undertook a massive suburban development project in the area between Russa Road in the west (now SP Mukherjee Road) and Gariahat Road in the east for the middle class and upper-

¹⁷⁸ Das, T.C. (1949). *Bengal Famine 1943*. University of Calcutta Press.

middle-class residents of the area in the 1930s and 1940s. Back in 1914, C.H. Bompas, the first chairman of the CIT, described this neighbourhood as 'low lying', 'marshy' and 'malarious'.¹⁷⁹ As Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay has observed in this context,

*Soon, Gariahat, as the centre of this newly planned neighbourhood, began to mark the southern physical boundary of the city. The imagination that Gariahat marked the 'end' of the city persisted for long among the bhadralok. Coming from the north and west of Gariahat, for the bhadralok, was coterminous to claiming a certain rootedness with the city.*¹⁸⁰

After the partition of India, the fringes of Gariahat witnessed widespread transformations. Political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj, who spent his early years in the Deshapriya Park area, has recollected this transformation in the following terms:

*By the mid-1960s, the pressure on the city in simple demographic terms was so immense that enterprising shopkeepers who could not afford rents in properly built-up shops constructed 'temporary' shacks along the pavements of main streets to vend their slightly cheaper wares ... The small shops gradually established themselves and were regarded, by a combination of economic pressures, as part of the neighbourhood. Roads around Deshapriya Park used to have wide pavements, too wide for the park's good. Because of their width, it was possible to build relatively small shacks right next to and backing against, the beautiful ironwork railings. In a few years, the park railings entirely disappeared from view, and the entire outside perimeter became an unbroken row of shops backing onto the park, hiding it completely from view from the tramway and from pedestrians walking on the main road.*¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti et al. (2012). Zoning Crossroads: a critique. <https://www.india-seminar.com/2012/636/636> Accessed in November 2019.

¹⁸¹Kaviraj, Sudipta (1997). Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta. *Public Culture*, 10(1), 81-113.

RitajyotiBandyopadhyay has meticulously chronicled the changing landscape of Gariahat populated by street hawkers:

By the 1970s and 1980s, the number of street vendors had grown to a few thousand within a 100 m. the radius of Gariahat crossing, as had the diversity of commodities. Now on the sidewalks, along with all four directions from Gariahat crossing, stand innumerable vendors peddling the most disparate array of goods one can think of; from glass and ceramic items to mill and handloom textile products, food to pens, and envelopes to lottery tickets. Generally, hawkers set up their stalls either in front of buildings and use the walls facing the sidewalk, and opposite buildings and other shops at the curbside edge of the sidewalk, forming a corridor in the middle for pedestrian traffic. The ideal site for a food stall, according to food hawkers, is the midpoint between the municipal water tap and the drain at the curbside of the sidewalk. The chances of transaction improve with proximity to busy transit points and the hawkers' access to certain utilities such as a municipal water tap by the sidewalk. Lucrative stall spaces are also traded and rented out.¹⁸²

The thick description of Gariahat as a vending space clearly outlines its intimate connection to the informal economy in general and street hawkers in particular. The antagonism between the shopkeepers and hawkers often caused evictions in the area, and to put an end to these forced evictions, the latter formed unions. In this context, it is imperative to analyse the role played by Ratna Ghosh, a leader of the Indira Hawkers' Union mainly active in the Gariahat area, in resisting 'Operation Sunshine', and in the process, transforming the political lexicon of one section of hawkers and subsequently impacting the hawker economy in Gariahat.

¹⁸²Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti et al. (2012). Zoning Crossroads: a critique. <https://www.india-seminar.com/2012/636/636>. Accessed in November 2019.

After the first phase of 'Operation Sunshine', the attention of the state government was focused on making the get southern part of the city free of hawkers. The analysis of Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Kolkata Police from 1996 to 1997 reveals that most of the agitations, rallies and processions were concentrated in and around Gariahat during this period. The southern part of the city has a long and early history of unionisation in Kolkata (discussed in the Chapter on Teritty Bazar). To understand Ratna Ghosh's contribution towards building the *anti-eviction movement*, the present section will first focus on and analyse certain programmes and tasks that she undertook in the wake of the movement, and will then highlight her role in the absorption of the employees of the abandoned hawkers' market within the ongoing movement and in strengthening the collective base of the hawkers against the government.

Ratna Ghosh, the general secretary of the Indira Hawkers' Union, was the only woman member in the steering committee of the HSC. The absence of any record of her activities in the Daily Notes of the Special Branch of Kolkata police and only a few references to her in the print media make it inevitable to depend on the ethnographic evidence to analyse her role in this hawkers' movement. Despite Gariahat being one of the epicentres of the movement, the role played by Ratna Ghosh has largely remained unrecorded in the narrative of hawkers' struggles as well. Rather than interviewing the male leaders of the HSC, this section draws heavily from conversations with people who worked closely with her and were part of core groups along with her. Moreover, her demise in 2000 makes it impossible to add a first-hand ethnographic account of her activities. Ratna Ghosh's name has been entangled with two glaring acts of militancy – the first when she allegedly set ablaze a tram-car, and the second, when she was

accused of recapturing the seized or confiscated wares of the hawkers from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

In the midnight of 24 November 1996, when the 'Operation Sunshine' was in full swing in Hatibagan and central Calcutta, Ratna Ghosh, along with Muhammad Hazi, executed the plan of bombarding the government properties. In an interview, Muhammad Hazi narrated how suddenly, after returning from Hatibagan at 3 am, Ratna Ghosh planned an attack on the first tram visible in the Gariahat area. The first tram of the day travels on the route from Ballygungeto Tollygunge. When the tram reached near Deshapriya Park, Ratna Ghosh, riding pillion on a motorcycle, bombed the tram cars, and after some time, the entire vehicle was gutted. Hazi pointed out that they had ensured that no passengers or passers-by were hurt. This was the prime reason why the first tram was chosen for arson. Hazi said that before the bombing, they had asked the driver and conductors to leave the spot. However, such accounts remained missing in the Daily Notes of the Special Branch. One reason might have been that the event took place early in the morning, at around 4 am, and the media were busy covering the incidents in Hatibagan. Hence, this act of arson remained unrecorded and unreported. These acts of militant protest that remain alive only in the memories of a handful of leaders such as Murad Hossain have been revealed through ethnographic interviews. However, when asked about the role of Ratna Ghosh in the context of the HSC and the long-drawn struggle of the hawkers against the government, Murad Hossain made it clear that Ghosh's area of activity was geographically limited to Gariahat, whereas they (the male leaders) played a more significant role in the larger movement as members of the CHMU. In Hossain's own words, "We used to do the main work." Male leaders like Hossain tend to

relegate the lone female leader's contribution as being 'action-oriented' with no role in the process of making strategies.

As feminist scholars such as Moira Gatens (1996) have argued, the image of the body-politic is popularly masculine, thus rejecting women as active participants.¹⁸³ That the public sphere remains a monopoly of the male is evident from the fact the role of Ratna Ghosh in the long-drawn struggle against 'Operation Sunshine' found only a few mentions in the print media. No newspaper ever covered her speech in any of the rallies. It was always prominent male leaders like Saktiman Ghosh, Murad Hossain, and Bimal Ghosh whose voices and demands were heard in any news report related to Gariahat. Repeatedly, culpability has been placed at the door of the culture of traditional male unionism. Here it is useful to draw on Joan Acker's (1992) model of four interacting sets of processes in organisational gendering. First, Acker talks about the construction of gender divisions among men and women, with men almost always in the highest positions of organisational power. Secondly, he tells us how the construction of symbols and image, such as language, dress and the media image, which explain, express, reinforce or sometimes oppose those divisions. Third, he takes us to the domain of interactions among and between women and men, which include sexism and sexual harassment. Lastly, he draws attention to the gendered components of individual identity and presentation of self – the "internal mental

¹⁸³Panchali Ray has summarised the reason behind the marginalisation of the female political role in the public sphere. The modernist accounts of mind/body dualism, which locate the public realm within reason (masculine), and the private one within emotion/body/nature (feminine), construct women as irrational beings, who do not fit into political institutions which are created to exclude women's corporeality. A social body is produced that is fashioned after the individual, who is constituted through the original contract – the heterosexual male body – marked by reason. Historically, unions trace their precedence to guilds and associations that were predominantly men's domain, actively working to exclude women. This continues in union cultures, where, even when the unions admit women, they tend to institutionalise discriminatory attitudes (Ledwith 2012). For women to fit into this masculine institutional space called 'workplace' or 'union space', the corporeal must be left behind in private. See Ray, Panchali (2019). Women in/and trade unions: consciousness, agency, and (impossibilities of alliances amongst nurses and attendants in Kolkata. *Contemporary South Asia*, 27(4), 502-515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2019.1667303>.

work of individuals” as they consciously construct their own conceptualisation of the organisation’s gendered structures. According to Acker, such gendered structures encompass the question of persona and the demands for gender-appropriate behaviour and attitudes.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, as Acker has pointed out, “... gender may be deeply hidden in organizational processes and decisions ...”.¹⁸⁵

Ratna Ghosh had been associated with the hawkers’ movement in Kolkata since the 1980s. In 1988, she formed the Indira Hawkers’ Association in Gariahat with 33 hawkers. When eviction drives were conducted as part of ‘Operation Sunshine’, it was a common practice for the Corporation to seize the wares of the hawkers to evict. Interviews with Saktiman Ghosh reveal how the Jadavpur Stadium was used by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, then the home minister and in charge of the police department in the state, to dump the wares. However, when the wares were returned to the hawkers, they would often receive hardly one-tenth of the seized goods.¹⁸⁶ Interview with Suman Saha, one of the active members of Ratna Ghosh’s Union, reveals that on 11 December 1996, after the Corporation had seized the wares, Ratna Ghosh, along with Suman Saha, Hazi, and Naresh Saha, took a taxi and tailed the truck carrying the seized goods before blocking its way on Ballygunge Circular Road. They had hired another truck on which they loaded all the wares of the hawkers and secretly unloaded those in a stall in the Lake Market area, which was under the control and supervision of Hazi. Interestingly, even this episode is missing from the police record.

¹⁸⁴Ledwith, Sue (2012). Gender politics in trade unions. The representation of women between exclusion and inclusion. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(2), 185-199.
<http://trs.sagepub.com/content/18/2/185>. Accessed on 14 January, 2021.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶Ghosh, Saktiman (2018, February). Personal interview.

While eulogising her act of bravery, Suman Saha hailed Ms Ghosh as a “demi-god for hawkers of Gariahat”. On being questioned about the contribution of both Saktiman Ghosh and Ratna Ghosh to the movement, Saha emphasises that the role of these two important leaders was “not antagonistic but supplementary”. “Saktiman Ghosh worked outside Kolkata to establish a nationwide platform for the movement, while Ratnadi contributed to strengthening the movement locally to resist the atrocities of the police and government.”¹⁸⁷

Before moving on to the next premise of the present section, it is imperative to delve have a close look at the early career of Ratna Ghosh in order to make sense of her empathy with the hawkers in Gariahat. Ratna Ghosh’s family had been one of the early migrants to West Bengal and settled in Behala. Since her college days, she was associated with the youth wing of the Congress and had been an active party member. Further, her marriage in the 1970s with a person who had been strong support behind her pursuance of her political career gave a fillip to her political career and her full-time association with the informal sector. Interview with Debraj Ghosh, son of Ratna Ghosh, presents a vivid narrative of her association with hawkers.¹⁸⁸ He narrated that to sustain the family, Ratna Ghosh started a food stall within the premises of Alipore District Court. Ranu Ghosh, the then district magistrate, ordered the eviction of hawkers from the court premises in the mid-1970s. At this juncture, Ratna Ghosh played an active role in protesting the order. A few cases were filed against her during this period. This may be considered her first encounter with the struggle of the street hawkers against the regime, though this struggle was not able to achieve any fruitful result for her. Next she turned her attention to Gariahat and organised 33 hawkers under the

¹⁸⁷Saha, Suman (2019, September). Personal interview.

¹⁸⁸ Ghosh, Debraj(2019, May). Personal interview.

banner of the Indira Hawker's Union in 1988, Subrata Mukherjee, a seasoned Congress politician in the state, was the president, and she was the general secretary. During the period between the 1970s and 1988, Ratna Ghosh was able to carve out an important political position for herself in the south Calcutta wing of the Congress. In Gariahat the hawkers had been unionised since 1972. Most of them were members of the Ballygunge Hawkers' Association, whose leaders had inimical relations to the Indira Hawkers' Union. The reason is not far to seek: The former union was inclined to the Left, while the latter was affiliated to the Congress. This contradiction between the two unions in Gariahat existed even during the period of intense struggle against the state. This is evident from Murad Hossain's narration of the process of building a consensus among various unions in the city and efforts to form a common platform to fight against the eviction of hawkers. The Indira Hawkers' Union initially remained aloof. When the CHMU gave a call for a united struggle against the government in a meeting at Bharat Sabha Hall in August 1996, Ratna Ghosh herself was absent from the meeting but sent her representative. According to Murad Hossain, the mutual strife between the unions was the reason for her absence, yet, when the situation escalated, Ratna Ghosh's presence was ubiquitous.

It is imperative to note here that since men dominate the existing leadership positions in the organisation or in a movement, it follows that male leaders are more likely to encourage other men, and women where it suits gender equality rules – such women are often referred to in terms of token participation, regardless of their merit and organisational skills. The uptake of it is: Women and men may make political alliances that ostensibly may have little to do with

gender, but it can have variable effects on women's success in subsequent elections (Franzway, 2001: 66).¹⁸⁹

After the initial phase of 'Operation Sunshine' was over, the focus of both the government and the HSC was shifted towards the southern part of the city. The Daily Notes of the Special Branch and various letters and memorandums submitted to the government by the HSC show that the months between December 1996 and 29 November 1997 were a period of intense movement by the HSC. During this period, Gariahat played a crucial role in successfully organising rallies, strikes, demonstrations and mass deputations. In this context, it is relevant to mention the demographic indicator of age among the hawkers of Gariahat. Most of the hawkers in Gariahat in 1996 were within the age group of 20 to 30, which contributed to their energetic participation in the movement against 'Operation Sunshine'. The intensity of the movement aggravated with the government's seizure of generators the hawkers of Gariahat used to apply to light their stalls. The electrical connections to run the generators were often illegally hooked and the state government used this as a pretext to seize the generators to prevent the large-scale public accident. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation carried out a mass seizure of generators. By this time all other unions active in Gariahat had merged with the Indira Hawkers' Union, which was one of the key players on the larger platform provided by the HSC. This merger was initiated by Saktiman Ghosh to strengthen the movement in terms of numbers. Further, the age factor also added dynamism to the struggle against the government and intensified the movement. Though the Ballygunge Hawker's Association initially joined the HSC, differences arose later over the government's proposal on rehabilitations and the union withdrew from the HSC.

¹⁸⁹Ledwith, Sue (2012). Gender politics in trade unions. The representation of women between exclusion and inclusion. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(2), 185-199.
<http://trs.sagepub.com/content/18/2/185>. Accessed on 14 January, 2021.

From the month of August 1997, the government tried to draw up several plans to rehabilitate the evicted hawkers. Meanwhile, none of the hawkers was allowed to hawk on the pavement even with temporary carts. However, hawkers belonging to the minority religion in Rajabazar and other Muslim dominated areas were allowed to hawk. This discriminatory policy instigated agitation against the government. The leaders of the unions alleged that the ruling party patronised one section or community of hawkers, while overlooking the plight of others. The tussle over the issue of hawking on the pavements before and during the Durga Puja created further conflict, and the government was faced with severe criticism not only from the union but also from the city public. All major political parties expressed their support in favour of the demands put forward by the HSC. Congress MP Mamata Banerjee expressed her solidarity with the cause as she felt that the government failed to manage the problem of hawkers due to “the infighting in the CPM and lack of political will”, and “Operation Sunshine has predictably turned into an Operation Sunset”.¹⁹⁰

Finally, the government announced a plan to rehabilitate the hawkers. The rehabilitation project sought to allocate space for evicted hawkers of south Kolkata in hawkers’ corners below Sukanto Setu in Jadavpur and a remote area in EM Bypass. In the north, 850 stalls were set up by the government on Galiff Street as part of the rehabilitation scheme. The HSC boycotted the rehabilitation plan. However, members of the Ballygunge Hawkers’ Association, who from the very beginning were sympathetic to the Left Front government, withdrew their support from the HSC and accepted the solution. These hawkers moved from Gariahat to occupy their new stalls in the allocated spaces in the hawkers’ corners. At this juncture, a problem erupted among the employees who worked in the stalls

¹⁹⁰*The Telegraph*, 27 September 1997.

belonging to the members of the Ballygunge Hawkers' Association. Their owners were reluctant to absorb their employees in the new stalls they had got under the rehabilitated scheme, as the owners themselves were unsure of the turnover from their business in the new venue. These 10 to 15 employees were not only rendered jobless but also seemingly lost their status as hawkers as they failed to locate themselves within the heterogeneous hawker economy. Debates arose as to whether or not they could be classified as hawkers and be represented by the hawkers' unions. These debates raise an important question regarding the position of these men within the hawker economy: How do we quantify or qualify them within the heterogeneous hawker economy? Can they be called hawkers?

Notwithstanding such debates, Ratna Ghosh, persuaded by Naresh Saha, another devoted hawker devoted to the anti-eviction movement and also a member of the Indira Hawkers' Union, and Suman Saha decided to absorb the jobless employees into her union. They were allotted the same place where they used to hawk so that they could earn a living. Kala Karmakar, one of the deserted employees of the Ballygunge Hawker's Association, narrated his story of starvation and the uncertainty that loomed large on them. Bhojan Sarkar detailed his experience of dispossession and the questions that hovered around the issue of his livelihood. In Sarkar's own words, *"Kato din pare barite giya sobai mile santite ghumate parlam...jakhn Ratna di amader tar union e nilo r bollo je amra ager moto kaaj korte pari"* (When Ratna absorbed us into her union and said that we could work as before, all of us at home could sleep peacefully after ages). According to Karmakar or Sarkar, Ratna Ghosh's initiative to include them in her union came as a huge relief to them and their families and lessened their financial plight.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Sarkar, Bhojan (2019, May). Personal interview.

However, even though they were absorbed within the union, perpetual uncertainty regarding their status and position remained. Asmi Sarkar, who had started working at Ratna Das's stall in Gariahat in 1980, elaborated on how this uncertainty had caused them debilitating anxiety. Ratna Das, a member of the Ballygunge Hawkers' Association, had accepted a stall in Jadavpur, but due to the lack of customers, she later wanted to come back to Gariahat to resume her business. Suman Saha said that an unwritten agreement had been reached between the Indira Hawkers' Union and the employees, with the former assuming the latter that they could continue hawking on the same spot with the support of the union even if the original owner returned to reclaim the spot. This pact caused a transformation in employees' status as they gained their own stalls. They were now elevated to the status of owners and could enjoy the privileges that came with it. Further, the Union maintained that if it accepted any rehabilitation scheme of the government, the employees-turned-hawkers would get preference over the previous owners. This gives rise to certain unasked questions within the ambit of the informal economy: In a labour-intensive profession, how is one section or class of workers not taken into account? The experience of the deserted employees in Gariahat provokes a rethinking of the universalisation of the category of 'hawker'. Ratna Ghosh's decision was an endeavour to eradicate the binary between 'owner' and 'labourers' within the paradigm of hawking. This issue of workers or labourers who are employed by the hawkers to run their stalls has remained outside the purview of any academic discussion on the informal economy. Hawkers' unions claim no jurisdiction over these labourers, and this renders their status ambiguous. The ethnographic observation makes it clear that the issues faced by these workers, such as their minimum wages and social security, are never discussed in the unions.

It is important to understand that no other leader of the HSC would ever attempt to do absorb this labour force within their own unions, as that would destabilise the status quo between the hierarchies of labour and could also cause rapture within the unions. However, in their work *Feminizing the Unions: Challenging the Culture of Masculinity*, Cunnison and Stageman have portrayed how women's experience in trade unionism is directly linked to community life. Women's unionism, at least in the case of Kolkata, prioritises voices of the feeble and challenges the formality and hierarchies underlying the power structure.¹⁹² Ratna Ghosh's decision to absorb the employees gave preference to the hitherto unheard voices over the formality of unionism, ushering in a new era in the politics of unionism. Cunnison and Stageman have characterised this new era ushered in by the women trade unionists in terms of a "culture of femininity", an alternative culture, particularly absent among the male members of the union.¹⁹³ They have listed several unique features of women's trade unionism – placing importance on affective rather than instrumental relationships, prioritising the social over purely economic factors. Thus they have made a connection between home, employment and community, the acceptance of diversity and the belief that everyone's voice should be heard, a dislike of formality, hierarchy and top-down decision-making, and a belief in informality and the importance of grass-roots opinion.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Cunnison, S.&Stageman, J. (1993) *Feminizing the Unions: Challenging the Culture of Masculinity*. Avebury. Also see, Ledwith, Sue (2012). Gender politics in trade unions. The representation of women between exclusion and inclusion. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(2), 185-199.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258196307>. Accessed on 24 November 2019.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*

Memories of 'Operation Sunshine'

The characterisation of 'Operation Sunshine' remains inadequate without taking into consideration the distinctive feature of the movement that enunciated a new trend in the writing of labour history. This section critically analyses the various programmes, rallies, and orchestrated demonstrations that the HSC organised throughout the course of the movement. This section explores the different activities of the HSC that exposes the complexities of gender inequality and the large-scale invisibilisation in the long run. This section tries to analyse a few questions on the nature of history and memory in the context of the hawkers' movement sparked by 'Operation Sunshine': What kind of history was being inscribed through this movement? Can the memories of the movement be categorised as collective memory? Was the collective memory gendered? Further, an attempt has been made to trace the trajectory of the collective memories produced by the hawkers' movement and to focus on the transition in the nature of the movement; I argue here that the transition from the local to national and international institutionalises invisibilisation in the collective memories of the movement. In order to understand this premise, I consider three incidents to unravel the kind of memory or collective memories that were produced in the course of the hawkers' movement's history. As the history of any social movement can be retrieved from the archives of oral tradition, there is a deep connection between history and memory, especially when it comes to chronicling a social movement.

Mihai Stelian Rusu has defined collective memory in the following terms: "Collective memory is both what individuals jointly remember from their own lived experiences and what is collectively commemorated without being

personally experienced.”¹⁹⁵He has further stated about the inner workings of collective memory,

*Collective memory selects relevant symbols from the reservoir of history that it distils into identity narratives. As such, collective memory operates by extracting significant fragments from the community's past, injecting them with meaning, and then synthesising them into a narrative shot through and through with emotional undertones.*¹⁹⁶

Thus, collective memory cannot have an existence independent of individual perceptions and practices, rather, it is the “individual practices through which negotiation between collective and individual is negotiated”.¹⁹⁷ As Maurice Halbwachshas argued, “it is in society that people acquire their memory...they recall, recognise and localise their memories”.¹⁹⁸ The question that comes up here is: Why such memories are significant with regard to a social movement? Firstly, collective memory creates a sense of group identity which helps the movement to be enduring and to face the challenges of the opposition forces. Secondly, collective memory also helps “to build effective coalitions across significant differences in ethnic identity and awareness, class consciousness, generations and regions”.¹⁹⁹Similarly, in the case of the hawkers’ movement, collective memory has strengthened the solidarity base of the organisation. Returning to the premise

¹⁹⁵StelianRusu, Mihai(2013). History and Collective Memory: The Succeeding Incarnations of an Evolving Relationship.*Philobiblon*, 18(2), 260-282.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259310300>Accessed on 10 November 2019.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷Uzelac, Kristina (2015). *Collective Memory and Social Movements: An Ethnography of the War Veterans' Protest in Croatia 2012-2014*. [Master'sthesis, Central European University].

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Kohl, Benjamin & Farthing, Linda (2013). Mobilizing Memory: Bolivia's Enduring Social Movements. *Social Movement Studies*, 12(4), 361-376.

of the present section – how the movement has been remembered – it would instructive to quote an observation made by Connerton on the location and nature of collective memory. Connerton has remarked that collective memory “lays in sphere of commemorative ceremonies and following bodily practices”.²⁰⁰ Building on this particular feature of collective I try to reflect on three moments in the hawkers’ movement in order to study the kind of collective memories produced by the movement that has been inscribed in history. I have selected three specific incidents to understand the workings of the collective memory that the activism of the hawkers’ movement vested on.

First, I take up ‘Lungi Michhil’ to study what kind of performative element was represented in the experience of hawkers during the ‘Operation Sunshine’? The ‘Lungi Michhil’ in particular poses certain questions about the kind of culture the HSC aspired to encourage. On 26 September 1997, the ‘Lungi Michhil’ was organised by the HSC, in which the “hawkers draped in *lungi* [a free-flowing garment, wrapped around the waist, worn by males across South Asia] shouted slogans at a protest march in Gariahat”.²⁰¹ The programme was undertaken to highlight the discriminatory approach of the state government towards the Hindu hawkers who tried to secure the consent of the government to hawk before and during the Durga Puja. Sekhar Chatterjee has observed in this context, “Why this discrimination? Anyone can easily understand that such discrimination is a must to keep the Muslims happy as their vote has always been an election-winning factor for the Party in power.”²⁰² Saktiman Ghosh, however, feels that it was a

²⁰⁰Uzelac, Kristina (2015). *Collective Memory and Social Movements: An Ethnography of the War Veterans’ Protest in Croatia 2012-2014*. [Master’s thesis, Central European University].

²⁰¹*The Asian Age*, 26 September 1997.

²⁰²*The Statesman*, January 1997.

great blunder on the HSC's part to take up such a communal programme.²⁰³ The 'Lungi Michhil' not only manifested communal content but also gendered the very medium of agency of the hawkers, establishing hawking as a male-only domain. As Acker has suggested, "... both conscious and unconscious masculine structures have helped to develop a characteristic union consciousness" – and it is here that the essence of Acker's "deeply hidden" gender within the organisational structure can be perceived.²⁰⁴

Second, I take up the commemorative observation of the Black Day on 24 November to understand the gradual shift in the historiography of the hawkers' movement. The question that concerns us here is: How did a noticeable shift in the representation of the darkness, and blackness, occur in collective memory? Since 1996, the HSC has been observing 24 November as a black day in the history of the labour movement. As Koyel Lahiri has suggested, "... this day every year serves as a symbolic launch pad, a marker of shame for the state government, and is that which symbolically anchors and renews the struggle that HSC represents".²⁰⁵ On 24 November 1997, the Hawker Sangram Committee organised a massive protest rally. Thousands of hawkers participated and observed the day (Operation Sunshine day) as Black day with sensational protest rallies using innovative means, such as carrying 18 coffins, to remember the mass suicide of hawkers that followed 'Operation Sunshine' Bulu Podder was the first person to end his life just a few days after 'Operation Sunshine' took place in Hatibagan. The HSC organised a protest rally with the body of Parimal Das, another hawker who also died by

²⁰³Ghosh, Saktiman (2018, February). Personal interview.

²⁰⁴Ledwith, Sue (2012). Gender politics in trade unions. The representation of women between exclusion and inclusion. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(2), 185-199. <http://trs.sagepub.com/content/18/2/185>. Accessed on 24 November 2019.

²⁰⁵Lahiri, Koyel (2013). "AachhiaarThhakbo":Toward a reading of the politics of the Hawker SangramCommittee. [MPhil thesis,Jadavpur University].

suicide after losing his stall and wares. The HSC tried to create a certain visual memory in each and every programme, rally, and demonstration. The way it observes the 'Operation Sunshine Day' every year indicates that the organisation intends to write a different kind of labour history, a history that is full of visual descriptions of the struggles and everyday experiences. A clearer understanding of these commemoration programmes, of the Black Day, can be arrived at by quoting Timothy Kubal and Rene Becerra on the concept of repertoire and its relation to memory in the context of a social movement. According to Kubal and Becerra, "Tactical repertoires and cultural repertoires provide the resources needed to construct collective memories, and repertoires empower memory activists to engage the political sphere, create change, and nurture solidarity within movement organizations."²⁰⁶

Perhaps it is interesting to note that the nature of observance of 'Black Day' underwent a transformation from 2005 onwards when coffins stopped appearing in these rallies and the hawkers focussed on other social problems being faced by them. This transformation indicates that narratives harping on the movement's dark memories were gradually overshadowed by different socio-economic issues of the time. The HSC's transition from a local to a nationwide organisation also marked a shift in its narrative and chronicles. From 2000 the HSC started to engage with social movements in West Bengal, and the formation of the National Hawker Federation (NHF) at the national level enabled it to encompass the larger field of both politics and history. The process of nationalisation of the hawkers' question also signalled the beginning of global discourse on informality. As the arena of activism shifted from local to national, the HSC tried to forge an all-India alliance

²⁰⁶Kubal, Timothy & Becerra, Rene (2014). Social Movements and Collective Memory. *Sociology Compass*, 8(6), 865-875. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12166>.

with different vendor organisations throughout the country. Within a decade, the HSC was capable of organising hawkers in 20 states under the banner of the NHF. In subsequent years, the NHF played a significant role in scaling up the hawkers' cause to the national level and mobilised public opinion in favour of a national policy on street vendors. After many street-level struggles and agitations in various cities across the country, negotiations with various governments, and a long phase of legal activism by the NHF, the need for a national policy on street vendors was recognised by the central government, and the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 came into force. The emergence of the NHF in the late 1990s and the early 2000s also signalled an aggregation of disparate anti-eviction movements in different cities within a frame of comparative interrogation, in which diverse local laws, movements, and the condition of the street vendors in different Indian cities could be examined.

Lastly, in February 2020, the NHF organised a programme to celebrate 50 years of the hawkers' movement. The year 2020 had a very special significance to the hawkers, as this year marked the golden jubilee of the Calcutta Hawkers' Men Union, the silver jubilee of the Hawker Sangram Committee and the proverbial struggle of the hawkers against 'Operation Sunshine', and the completion of the two eventful decades of the National Hawker Federation. The programme was organised just before the Covid-19 pandemic decisively altered India's urban streetscape.

The programme was organised to celebrate these events amassed immense success as hawkers, academics and political functionaries from participated across the country participated in it. The programme schedule included numerous seminars discussing divergent issues such as challenges of FDI, FTA, e-Commerce and ideas of linking farmers and producers with the platform for street vendors, the struggle

of the working-class movement and the political economy of labour discourse in the realm of labour law reform, labour and livelihood in the changing concept of India. The NHF also organised several seminars with themes such as 'Dirty energy and climatic impact', 'Fight inequality: struggle against injustice and inequality, and also 'Women workers: Challenges of domestic workers, rag pickers, hawkers and Anganwadi workers. These seminars were organised in separate halls named after the important personalities who were associated with the movement, while the main auditorium was named after Ratna Ghosh. Moreover, as the hawkers who have joined the organisation after 2000 are ignorant of the struggles and contributions of earlier leaders of the movement, speeches were delivered on this occasion to remember the legacy of the movement against 'Operation Sunshine'. However, the memory of the struggle did not focus on the contribution of Ratna Ghosh. Henceforth, a mere iconisation of a female figure without making her contribution a part of the collective memory further instils a process of institutionalisation of invisibility.

The composition and style of the programme bring forth two issues. First, the change in the context of the hawkers' movement. They now have a law- Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act - in their favour, but the state's apathy towards street hawking is reflected in the protracted tendency of non-implementation and misuse of the law at the local level. In order to make use of the law, there is a need to remain organised and to devise a strategy to unify street-level struggles with policy advocacy and judicial activism. Numerous challenges are also emerging from the changing market structure. The popularity of electronic retail and the growing digitalisation of the economy has posed a new challenge. Recently, the NHF has come up with an initiative to bring street hawkers into an e-retail format, which might enable them to survive the current onslaught which is taking various names and shapes under the utopian

'National Smart Cities Mission. The change in the discourse of the hawker economy, which embraced itself in larger social and economic struggles, caused a shift in the narratives of the movement as well. The hawker's movement is no longer confined within the local or national periphery and engages its organisation with issues such as FDI in the retail sector and climate changes. Consequently, this change has set off a process of invisibilisation and exclusion of local and peripheral issues in its historiography.

The second and the most striking feature of the programme was that all the women's issues were discussed behind closed doors, in small seminar rooms in sessions led mostly by men, while all the issues pertaining to workers' rights and changing impact of capitalism were deemed to be of the highest priority and discussed on the open stage. This marginalisation of theoretical discourses on gender issues highlights the everyday exclusionism being practised within the labour movement. The transition from local core issues of hawkers to peripheral socio-economic problems created a process of institutional invisibilisation. In the context of 'Operation Sunshine', this section has tried to argue that the shift in activism from local to national has, in turn, shifted the focus of the movement and rendered a certain constituency invisible in the process.

Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the narrative of the 'City' (Kolkata) and traced the trajectory of the transformation of its urban landscape. This transformation initiated a process of hawker eviction throughout the city in late 1996. The 'Operation Sunshine' that gave rise to one of the most memorable struggles of the hawkers against the state government produced a collective memory. This chapter has attempted to problematise the kind of collective memory produced in course of the movement, which obliterated any female contribution to the movement. A unitary conception of hawkers as a community and an occupational group needs to be challenged, not only by academics but also by trade unions as they tend to exclude those inhabiting the grey areas of the street economy. The chapter has tried to establish how gender plays an important role in challenging the status quo of unionism, thus contesting and reproducing intersecting structural hierarchies as was evident in the hawkers' movement in late-twentieth-century Kolkata as well as the historiography around it (which came into being as a result of both academic studies and an endeavour by the hawkers' unions to document the movement).

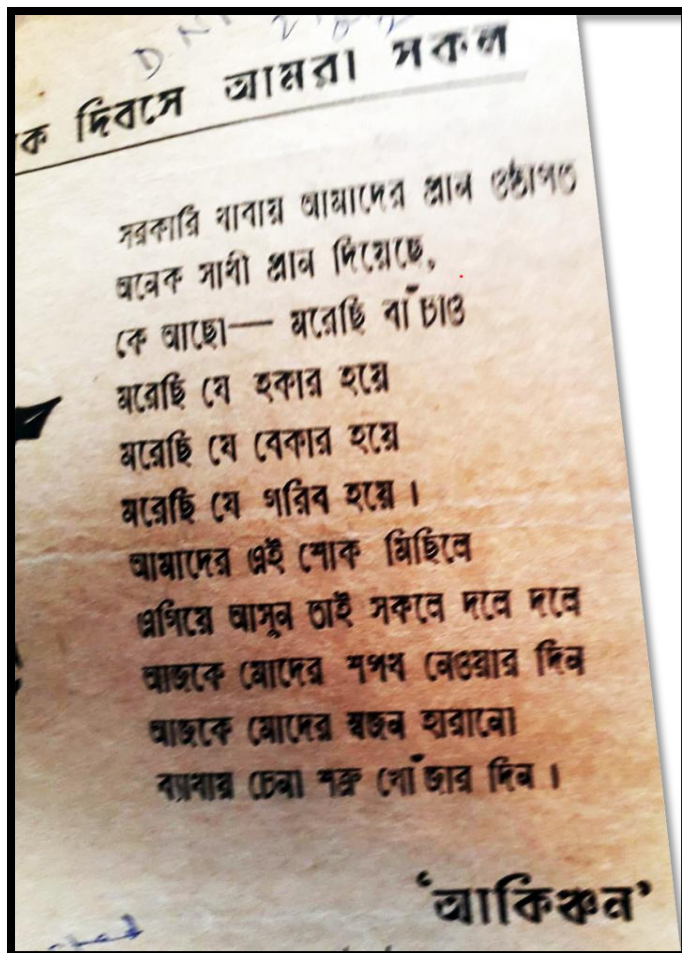


Figure III: Leaflet Recovered from Special Branch of Kolkata Police on Operation Sunshine



Figure IV: Eviction Drive on Operation Sunshine by the Left Front Government in 1996

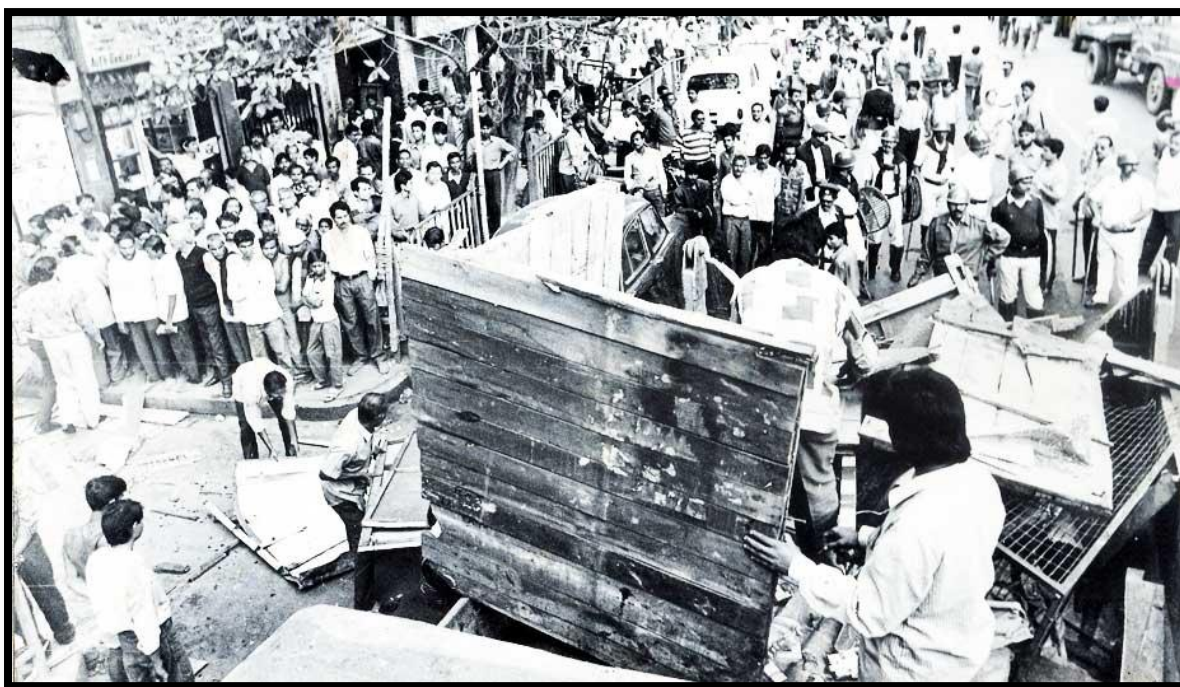


Figure V: Eviction Drive on Operation Sunshine by the Left Front Government in 1996



Figure VI: Mamta Banerjee Hawking in Protest of Operation Sunshine & Eviction of Hawkers in 1996



Figure VII: Ratna Ghosh on Observation of Black Day on 24th Nov. 1997



Figure VIII: Picture of 'Lungi Michil' organized by HawkerSangram Committee



Figure IX: Observation of Black Day on 2rth Nov. 2005 organized by Hawker Sangram Committee

Woman Vendor's Struggle in Manipur: A Study from Gender Perspective

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on Manipur is a state in the northeast of India. The Socioeconomic condition of the place provides a completely contrasting phenomenon in the practice of street hawking. In Imphal, women dominate the profession and practice of hawking as well as the public space. This chapter attempts a comparative analysis of contestation between two different kinds of groups engaged in the practice of hawking and located within the same-gender space in the post-colonial urban context of Imphal. This urban context offers a consolidated perspective to launch a study of gender and street hawking in today's India. Moreover, an understanding of contestation for space amongst hawkers within the same-gender space has very often remained outside the purview of academic or scholarly discussions. In the last chapter, I discussed how a transition took place within the hawkers' organisation in West Bengal in 2000 – with the onset of the new millennium, the hawkers' organisation transformed its base from the local or regional level to a national one. By 2002, the Hawker Sangram Committee formed the National Hawker Federation (NHF) to extend its organisational base nationwide. During this period, the NHF spread its organisation to almost all the states, including Manipur, and metro cities in the country. In Imphal NHF allied primarily with the licensed women hawker and later with the unlicensed women street hawker. The unique position of licensed woman hawkers of Ema Market, as well as un-licensed woman street hawkers

doing business around the market, contributes to narratives of collectivism and solidarity forged in guarding their respective spatial claims. In this endeavour, I have tried to historicise a mobilisation dating back to the 1980s under the leadership of Gita Mukherjee, the aim of which was to stop the demolition of Ema Market. The first section of the chapter focuses on the history of the movement in the 1980s. In doing so, I have also tried here to engage with the structural and internal dynamics of Ema Market, to explore the market's linkages with the NHF, and to look into movements and moments of solidarity that germinated to assert the female hawkers' spatial claims. I have tried to reconstruct from the scattered evidence a case of selected amnesia regarding the role of women in trade unionism.

The next section of the chapter attempts to understand different constituencies of street hawking and the ways in which they negotiate and struggle to claim their spatial rights. This section also focuses on how the leadership from Ema Market tries to forge an alliance between licensed and unlicensed hawkers despite the two groups' contesting spatial claims. As a whole, the present chapter claims to understand the processes and politics of unionisation, especially with regard to women. An attempt has been made in this chapter to understand the bonds of sisterhood among the license-holding and unlicensed hawkers, which came into being through the process of mobilisation and unionisation to claim their respective rights. As upholding the bond of sisterhood among different groups of woman hawkers in Imphal is one of the key strategies of the unions, the chapter tries to critically examine this relation of sisterhood in the context of these groups' respective spatial claims. In other words, I have tried to probe into the authenticity of the sisterhood showcased by the leaders of the movements of licensed and unlicensed hawkers. One of the findings of my study indicates that the show of

solidarity is often fractured by a culture of nepotism and favouritism. The final section of this chapter aims to formulate a critique of the same-gender space, especially with regard to the politics of trade unionism. This section aims to address the complexities involved in the politics of trade unionism by looking at the case of woman street hawkers of Imphal, who are located within a predominantly female space. Through the case study of the woman hawkers of Ema Market, this chapter seeks to highlight the perils of viewing the same-gender space as a site free of gender bias or other vectors of oppression.

Antiquity of the Market

Ema Market is situated at the convergence of two rivers, namely, the Naka Turel (the Naga River) and the Nambul River, to the west of Kangla.²⁰⁷ The market, also known as NupiKeithel (literally meaning, “women’s market”) or Khwairamband Bazaar, is supposedly the largest women’s market in Asia, and as per the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (the court chronicle of the kings of Manipur), its existence dates back to the time of Nongdalai Pakhangba (33 CE).²⁰⁸ Under the monarchical state of Manipur, every male member from each Manipuri family was expected to place his services at the disposal of the royal administration for a fixed period of time each year without any remuneration. This system, known as the *lallup* system, was a form of forced labour for men and is believed to be the reason why

²⁰⁷Kangla is the ancient capital of the erstwhile Kingdom of Manipur located at the heart of Imphal City.

²⁰⁸Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

the Manipuri women came out in public to form the market.²⁰⁹ This historical development lent the market its women-centric character, which persists to this day. As the market buildings have been structured and restructured several times, the physical space of Khwairamband Market as a whole has acquired its own historicity. In 1789, Maharaja Bhagyachandra Singh approved the location for the construction of proper market sheds (Meetei, 2015). In 1905, John Shakespeare, the British Political Agent in Manipur, converted the thatched-roofed structures into semi-permanent structures with a galvanised tin roof and iron beams.²¹⁰ The street hawkers of Ema Market, who are, in practice, differentiated from the licensed hawkers of the market only by a thin line, are located in a rather complicated position within the market's socio-spatial order. The socio-political and cultural identities of the street hawkers have entered a phase of transformation owing to issues of legality, recognition and spatial rights. A history of several moments of resistance against, and negotiation with, the state is intertwined with the market's infrastructural transition.

Ema Market and the Communist Party of India

EmaKeithel or Ema Market has been under constant threat of displacement and relocation since the British occupancy of Manipur in 1891. Through its policies, the British colonial government transformed the women traders of Manipur into petty vendors. Ema Keithel was at the centre of both the *NupiLans* (women's war),

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*

²¹⁰Meetei, HU (2015). EmaKeithel: The mothers' market. Retrieved from: [https://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema Keithel-mother%27s market.pdf](https://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema%20Keithel-mother%27s%20market.pdf).

which are important events in the history of Manipur. The women of Manipur waged two historic wars, in 1904 and 1939, against the oppressive and exploitative policies of the British colonial government. According to the cultural anthropologist Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, “Nupi-Lan, women’s war, is an important feature of Meitei society. There has been a series of organised protests by women against the colonial administrative policies at different times during this century, all of which were led by market women.”²¹¹ About the First *Nupi Lan*, Chaki-Sircar has observed, “The Nupi-Lan during colonial rule occurred in 1904 when the residence of the British Political Agent was burnt down by some anti-government people, and in retaliation, Major Maxwell, Political Agent, ordered a corvee of free labour from the people to rebuild the house. Women gathered by thousands and agitated against the Government decision.”²¹² In 1925, another agitation was showcased by the women against the government’s imposition of water tax. The Second *Nupi Lan*(1939), which initially started as an agitation by the Manipuri women against the economic policies of the Maharaja and the monopolistic practices of Marwari traders active in Manipur, eventually assumed the character of a movement for constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur. The original demands of the women who launched this movement were confined to the banning of rice exports from Manipur by Marwari traders, as this practice caused a famine in Manipur in 1939. But later on, their demands also included changes in the royal court and the administrative system. The importance of the *NupiLan* lies in the fact that it prepared the ground for the leading role the Manipuri women would eventually play in the emergence of a new Manipur after

²¹¹Chaki-Sircar, Manjusri (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. Shakti Books.

²¹²*Ibid.*

the Second *Nupi Lan*.²¹³ Apart from the historically crucial events such as these *NupiLans*, several other organised movements of women took place in Manipur during the 1960s. On one occasion, the elderly women of Khwairamband Bazaar organised a twenty-four-hour sit-in strike against the government policy of increasing the rent on market plots.²¹⁴ Again in 1975, women of the market organised a movement called the *Nishabandhi* Movement against the sale of liquor, as the male members of the Meitei society traditionally indulged in drinking, something which adversely affected the lives of women.²¹⁵ Manjusri Chaki-Sircar did an ethnographic study of women's protests in Manipur in the 1970s. During her stay in Imphal, the woman hawkers observed an eight-week-long sit-in strike at Laxmi Bazar against the government's decision to build an urban bank within the market complex. The rallying cry of the women participating in the strike was: "Get out from Laxmi Bazaar, do not disturb the Meitei women." According to Chaki-Sircar, "The women expressed their objection thus: the urban bank will have a lot of men working there. Many of them will be mayangs."²¹⁶ While I shall dwell on the subject of the *mayang* in the section on the internal dynamics of the market, my aim in the present section is to chronicle a movement by the woman hawkers spearheaded by Gita Mukerjee, a veteran leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and a parliamentarian, back in the 1980s. The narrative of this section is derived from an ethnographic study, and old photographs,

²¹³Yambem, Sanamani (February, 1976). *NupiLan: Manipur Women's Agitation, 1939. Economic and Political Weekly*, 11(8), 325-331.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4364388>. Accessed on 18 May, 2018.

²¹⁴Chaki-Sircar, Manjusri (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. Shakti Books.

²¹⁵The *Nishabndhi* Movement developed out of the Meitei women's activism against alcoholism and drug addiction. It was a precursor to the *MeiraPaibi* (woman torch bearers) social movement of Manipuri women. Although *MeiraPaibi* was established in 1977, it gathered momentum from 1980 as a protest movement against human rights violation by the paramilitary and armed forces.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

memorandum and certificates preserved by Sabita Devi, a leading participant in the movement. The interviews with Sabita Devi reflect how memories can help to reconstruct historical narratives and fill in the gaps left by written documents. The history of this period has been reconstructed on the basis of interviews, visual aids photographs, and other documents such as certificates. Before going into the narrative of the movement; it would be pertinent to explore the close and intricate relationship between the communist movement and the Ema market since the 1940s.

It is also imperative to note here that Ema Market also played a pivotal role in the electoral politics of Manipur in subsequent decades. Manipur has witnessed a rich culture of communist politics since the time of Hijam Irabot, a prominent CPI leader from Manipur. In fact, it was partly due to the efforts of Irabot that women's agitation during the Second Nupi Lan spread far and wide from the villages and got itself aligned with demands for wider reforms in Manipur. It was during and after the Second Nupi Lan that a women's organisation was developed in Manipur under the leadership of Hijam Irabot. The organisation, called the Manipur Mahila Sammelani, officially came into existence in the 1940s and started working jointly with Irabot's party, i.e. the CPI. In the 1950s, the Manipur Mahila Sammelani became affiliated to the National Federation of Indian Women, the women's wing of the CPI, and thus became the first political organisation in Manipur. The women of Manipur played a very important role in claiming their political rights through a number of strong and radically oriented communist movements. Moreover, Manipuri women were at the forefront of several movements for achieving demands, such as complete statehood, the inclusion of Manipuri language in the Seventh Schedule of the Indian constitution, and the annulment of the infamous Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur. Thus, women's activism in Manipur has always been closely linked with

specific concerns of the state and the Meitei society, and the hawkers' movement was no exception. M Kadambari Devi, one of the leaders of the Second Nupi Lan, started the second phase of her political career through the movement of woman hawkers of Ema Market against the state government of Manipur.

In the 1980s, an attempt of demolition of Ema Market met with strong resistance from the woman vendors of Khwairamband Bazaar, as they feared the loss of livelihood due to displacement. Chitra Ahanthem has provided a vivid description of this resistance movement in one of her essays:

The spectre of urbanisation has brought its share of conflict amongst the Imas and the state government. It was during the early-1980s that the women who sat in the market, spread in three different directions with all sections linked to each other, were served the first eviction notice from the state urban development authorities. The Imas had to resort to 24-hour vigils at the market, which ended only in 1992 after an official assurance from the then Governor of the state, Chintamani Panigrahi, that the market would be renovated without altering its basic structure and that lighting would also be provided in the process. The state government under the current Chief Minister, O Ibobi Singh, ordered the old market areas to be razed to the ground, forcing the Imas into makeshift sheds where the market exists now.²¹⁷

This resistance movement was channelized into an organised movement of woman hawkers due to the efforts of the CPI leader Gita Mukherjee. The history of this period has been reconstructed through oral sources largely gathered from the interviews of Sabitri Devi,²¹⁸ the president of the All Manipur

²¹⁷Ahanthem, Chitra. Curfews and the women of Ima Keithel.

<https://infochangeindia.org/human-rights/features/curfews-and-the-women-of-imateithel>.

Accessed on 10 June, 2018.

²¹⁸Devi, Sabita (2017, October). Personal interview.

KeithelNupiMarup,²¹⁹ who was primarily responsible for forging the alliance between the localised movement of female hawkers and the women's wing of the CPI. It would be interesting to mention here that while conducting my field survey and interviews in Manipur, I came across the name of Gita Mukherjee as someone who played a pivotal role in organising the women of EmaKeithel in support of their demand to preserve the old structure of the market in 1982.

As this section seeks to understand the movement of the woman hawkers of Ema Market largely on the basis of oral sources, a few words on the notion of oral history would not be a digression at this point. Oral history is about what Alessandro Portelli has called "the spoken-word" (Portelli, 2006: 64). However, oral history is more than merely the spoken word itself. Perhaps oral history's biggest contribution to the social sciences lies in the ways in which the former shapes the methodology of the latter: It involves the process of reconstructing history through oral sources, narratives, stories from *within* a given community and interpreting the shared meanings of events as reflected among the community itself. Oral history is not a homogenous or undifferentiated field and has many differences within its fold.²²⁰ But what makes the overarching bent of oral history crucial for the reconstruction of historical narrative is its commitment to people, rather than to objects or things.²²¹ The repository of the oral sources, which acts as an archive, is a collection of narratives, and by extension, we also find the inflections of these narratives. Access to these archives opens up a world in which

²¹⁹The term *Marup* means a voluntary association in Meitei. Thus, a *NupiMarup* is a voluntary association of women.

²²⁰Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat have stated precisely this point with a rather celebratory attitude. See Thompson, Paul & Bornat, Joanna (2006). *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford University Press.

²²¹The fact that Oral History must talk about people is often mistaken for what the researchers want the people to say. This is a fundamental mistake which Alessandro Portelli warns us against in his seminal essay on the concept of oral history. See Portelli, Alessandro (1998). What Makes Oral History Different. In Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (Eds.), *The Oral History Reader*. Routledge.

stories act as physical documents, people replace papers, and subjectivities enter the obstinate and rule-bound world of the historian's fact-filled collection. A word of clarification, however, needs to be added here. The history of the period under review has been reconstructed on the basis of ethnographic method and oral sources on the one hand, and secondary sources such as photographs, certificates, newspapers on the other hand. In other words, this section tries to weave the oral narratives with the other, more tangible sources such as the photographs and registration certificates of market stalls to recover the voices from the past that have remained unrecorded.

Gita Mukherjee arrived in Imphal City upon the request of the Manipur State Council of the Communist Party of India, which was informed about the ensuing problem, that Ema Market was to face, by the local community, and in turn, informed the national party council. As Gita Mukherjee was the secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women at the time, she visited Manipur. When she met the woman hawkers of the market, she was convinced of and agreed with, their demand to preserve Ema Market's heritage – of being a market managed and run solely by women. Thus, it is from this juncture that the women of the market started to work jointly with the CPI's women's wing. Thereafter, in the year 1981, women of the market formed an all-women association called the Manipur Keithel Nupi Marup, which was registered under the Societies Registration Act. This was the first association of woman hawkers in India. Prior to it, the Ballygunge Men Hawkers' Union, one of the oldest hawkers' unions in India, was the only registered hawkers' union that got registered under this Act in the 1970s. However, it was in Manipur that the first association exclusively for woman hawkers was organised. The first president of the association was Torang BomSakhi Devi. In 1986, under the leadership of Gita Mukherjee, the woman

hawkers of Ema Market sent a delegation to Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Though the Prime Minister ordered for the eviction of the hawkers to be stopped, as well as halting the erection of a three-storeyed building upon the original structure, the letter which was sent from the Prime Minister's Office to the headquarters of the state government in Manipur was misplaced. At this juncture, Gita Mukherjee put in her efforts to recover the letter, was eventually able to recover it and thus, saved Ema Market from losing its distinct character.

However, the struggle of the woman hawkers of Ema Market and the role of Gita Mukherjee in it have not received enough scholarly or academic attention. Although the period of this movement coincided with the emergence of the second wave of feminism across the globe, academic feminists in India have not paid sufficient attention to the woman hawkers' movement in Imphal. Moreover, in spite of the organisational ground provided by the CPI in the struggle of the woman hawkers of Ema Market, the party failed to assess the critical importance of the movement. One cannot help noticing the fact that Gita Mukherjee's role in the campaign demanding the reservation of one-third of the seats in the parliament for women found extensive coverage in the media during the same period. The obvious question that arises at this point is: what could be the possible reason behind this lack of academic and media attention to the movement of woman hawkers of Ema Market in general, and the role of Gita Mukherjee in the movement in particular? While exploring the official archives for my study, I encountered a striking silence about this movement in the archives, which may serve to explain this lack of attention. The successful attempt of Gita Mukherjee to conserve Ema Market remains completely invisible in the State Archives or in the newspapers and especially in *Kalantar*, the organ of the West Bengal State Council of the CPI. Perhaps the struggle of female hawkers was considered irrelevant as an

autonomous question in leftist political discourse and thus had to wait a decade to receive the attention of both the media and the academia.

The latter half of the 1990s witnessed an interesting turn of events as the older trade unions were crumbling under the impact of globalisation, and new autonomous associations and unions were making inroads into the field of the working-class politics. With the transition from formal to informal unions, the concept of labour was now much wider as it began to encompass diverse fields of work. This phenomenal development was visible when Vinodini Devi, a leader of the Manipur's newspaper hawkers' union and also a member of the CPI's labour wing AITUC, met Saktiman Ghosh, an important leader of the Hawker Sangram Committee, in 1999. Following this meeting, it was decided, at the general council meeting of the AITUC held in Madras, that the members of the trade union federation would join the NHF. The NHF is an all-India front that was formed in 2000 in the wake of Operation Sunshine, a large-scale eviction drive undertaken by the government of West Bengal to remove thousands of hawkers from the pavements of Kolkata. Thus, joining hands with the NHF indicated a growing sense that the trade unions run under the aegis of the CPI might be failing to voice their demands, and there was a genuine requirement of such autonomous non-party political formations that would concentrate only on hawkers' issues and struggle for their demands both at the state level and the national level. Vinodini Devi, who was at the time the general secretary of the All Manipur KeithelnupiMarup, was directed by her party to organise and unionise the street hawkers of Manipur. After returning to Manipur, Vinodini Devi did make attempts to organise the woman street hawkers, but she failed to register these organisations under the Trade Union Act. The labour commissioner of the state did not agree to sanction the affiliation to these organisations as trade unions, as

he was convinced that such a sanction would run contrary to the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act. Thus, after a series of agitations and negotiations, these unions were certified as trade unions functioning under the Khwairamband Keithel Nupi Marup in 2002. It is important to note here that while initially, the NHF allied with the association of licensed woman hawkers in Manipur, i.e. the KhwairambandKeihelNupiMarup, the organisation later allied itself with the struggle of unlicensed woman hawkers of the state led by Tama Devi. (The connection of the NHF with the unlicensed woman hawkers shall be discussed in the next section.) Since 2005, as many as twenty-six organisations have been formed to organise and unionise the hawkers in Manipur, and among them, the most active ones include the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association, the Young Woman Vendors' Union, the Imphal City Vendors' Union, the EmaPanthoibi Street Vendors' Union, the State Tribe Woman Vendors' Union, and the Minority Muslim Vendors' Union etc. Thus, since the early 2000s, both the licensed woman hawkers of EMA market and the unlicensed woman hawkers have embarked on their united journey of struggle and organised movements against the state government. As the NHF has both licensed and unlicensed hawkers among its members, it clearly indicates the importance of specialised labour unions for the informal sector which tie together the issues involved in the informal economy and can play an important role in leading an organised movement of street hawkers. The role of such labour unions is particularly significant as the everyday struggles and negotiations required for two different kinds of hawkers involve two different sets of challenges that exist side by side within the paradigm of hawking.

Ema Market in Focus

The construction of the three buildings that comprise Ema Market at present began in 2003, and the buildings were inaugurated in 2010. The modern structures, which were imagined as the formal spaces of vending, did bring along other subsidiary temporary structures. Although the expansion, restructuring or reallocation of certain spaces occurred during the execution of larger urban infrastructural projects (such as BirTikendrajit Flyover) in Imphal, the older, and often informal, structures (such as temporary or semi-permanent sheds of unlicensed hawkers) still exist in their new, reshaped forms, and have their own claims to historicity.²²² The position of these unlicensed practitioners of hawking needs to be explored simultaneously with that of the licensed vendors while discussing the physical structures of the market.²²³ In fact, each vendor doing business inside the formal structure has been allotted a spot known as 'potfam'. These spots have been provided with the legal recognition, and proper regulatory mechanisms have been laid down for them by the Imphal Municipal Corporation.²²⁴ The three new RCC buildings, which have retained the older names of Purana Bazaar, Lingthoingambi Market and Laxmi Bazaar, were handed over to the licensed vendors in 2010.

The narrative of this section is primarily based on ethnographic study and field survey. The narrative has been constructed through my visit to Imphal in October 2017, when I tried to study the internal dynamics of Ema Market, a subject that has remained outside the purview of academic scholarship, by making sense of the participants' accounts through personal interviews. During my field study, I have

²²²Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

²²³*Ibid.*

²²⁴*Ibid.*

tried to interrogate the space of Ema Market to understand the following questions: How is the market being run? Who are the people who control the market? How far is the same-gender space free of the hierarchies prevalent in a patriarchal society? As I sought to study the market through my frequent visits during the course of a few weeks, I have tried to present this section from the perspective of a visitor, someone unfamiliar with the cultural understanding of this particular society.

In this section, I would particularly concentrate on the inner workings of the Ema Market. In order to have a closer look at the market, it is necessary to understand its schedule first. The first day of the market visit, which began around noon, was more of an introductory visit during which I made the acquaintance of some of the woman vendors of the market. When I was introduced to and received by them, most of them mistook me as a tourist, who is part of the NHF organisation and presented me with gifts ranging from food items to souvenirs of Manipur. It is important to mention here that initially I was escorted to the market, as I preferred to visit it at around 4 a.m. in the morning when the market would start its day to study the working and performative skills of the licensed hawkers of the Ema Market. However, from the seventh day, I preferred to visit the market alone, mostly between 8.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., when the market was less bustling and I could get some time with the vendors. In Manipur, people start their day fairly early, and people can be seen on the streets from 5.30 a.m. The streets of Imphal become quite crowded and busy particularly between 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., when all schools and offices close for the day. However, the streets do not become empty before 10 o' clock at night, and the market closes for the day by 9.30 p.m. During festive seasons, Ema Market remains open from 11 to 11.30 p.m. I found the market crowded mostly in the early morning and during evenings, more specifically, from 5.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. The market starts its day around 3.30-4 a.m.

with the procurement of fresh fruits, vegetables, and livestock from the tribal women who largely come from Thombal, Bishnupur and other areas in the outskirts of Imphal. By 6 a.m. the market is ready for its customers, and the late afternoon, when the market is much less crowded, is the leisure time for the woman vendors. I noticed that during this leisure time, the women would leave their spots to move from one shed to another, and interact with each other. As most of these women reside in the vicinity of the market, they either bring their lunch with them, or somebody from home brings it for them, they mostly have their lunch within the market premises. There are also eateries in the area that provide cheap food to both the outsiders and the woman vendors. Women of the market sell everything from traditional food items to handicrafts, but an interesting point to note here is that the women who sell fresh vegetables and fruits sometimes procure the stuff from wholesalers within the market, who also act as moneylenders.

On the tenth day of my visit, I was introduced to two Bihari men who are wholesalers of vegetables. I was quite taken aback by the fact that these two men played an important role in the internal functioning of the market. Most of the hawkers address them as 'Chacha'. I openly expressed my astonishment to the woman vendors of the market at the presence of these two Bihari men, who are *mayangs* (the term for outsiders in the Meitei language).²²⁵ In response to my reaction, the market women laughed and replied that though they were outsiders, the connection of these two men with the market was more than thirty years old, and now they were very much part of their community. When I spoke to these men, I realised that their speech did not have overt traces of the Hindi accent, and they were well conversant with the Meitei language. While interviewing these two

²²⁵It is the term for outsiders in the Meitei language. It may mean a non-Manipuri Indian or a foreigner.

Bihari vegetable wholesalers, I found out that they were not ready to reveal their original names, and totally evaded the questions related to their native place. Thus, on the basis of this experience, it can be argued that in this case, the process of assimilation into the Meitei community called for the total annihilation of ties with the *mayangs'* previous community. This point may explain how, despite being outsiders to the community, the Bihari wholesalers managed to qualify them to be part of the Meitei society. According to the women of the market, these two men are like father figures who help them in times of need and have been partners in every struggle of the market. In short, the presence of these two men in Ema Market adds a new dimension to the understanding of the inner workings of the market.

Before reaching Manipur, I had planned that I would finish the interviews as well as the tour of the market by 6.30 p.m. each day, as I was told that the streets would become virtually empty in Imphal after dusk. But after reaching Imphal, the whole perspective about the timetable soon underwent a change, as I found myself roaming in the market till 10.30 to 11 at night.

It is imperative to note in this context that my visit to Manipur coincided with the observance of Black Day in the state. A brief summary of my experience in Imphal on that day might be helpful in understanding the changed attitude of the Manipuri population towards the Indian state and its institutions. On October 15 every year, the Coordination Committee of seven underground organisations observes the National Black Day to protest against the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949. As the Coordination Committee stated in a press communiqué, "India formally announced the merger of the state of Manipur with India on October 15, 1949, after the then King of Manipur Maharaj Bodhchandra was forced to sign deceitfully on the pre-drafted Merger Agreement

on September 21 of the same year”.²²⁶ In 2017, the year of my visit to the state, the Coordination Committee collectively decided to observe the day so as to generate a strong public opposition against the agreement.

Calling upon the people to support the strike called by the Committee, it further appealed to suspend normal trading activities, movement on the streets, games and sports as well as entertainment programmes on this day.²²⁷ While the streets were empty and markets were closed in Imphal on the day, I was supposed to interview Sabita Ema, the president of the All Manipur KeithelnupiMarup, on the same day. Tama Devi appeared as a saviour on this occasion and took me to Ema’s home. While travelling through the Imphal streets in Tama Devi’s car, I found that many auto-rickshaws were running on the streets. The commuters were young Manipuri boys and girls mostly belonging to the age group of 19 to 25. While standing at a street-corner near the auto stand, where I had been asked to wait for Tama Devi, I tried to talk to a few people to know their thoughts on Black Day. I was frankly surprised to discover that most of them were not even aware of the reason behind observing the Black Day. To them it was merely another day of a strike called by the insurgent groups, and it seemed to me that the history or implications of the day had very little impact on them. Even when I visited a few woman hawkers’ homes and tried to speak to their family members, including their children, I noticed that they were quite oblivious about the history of Manipur’s merger with the Union of India. What mattered more to them were the changing social and economic trends in Manipur where economic liberalisation and a global culture of consumerism were making inroads. However, politics and the socio-cultural condition is a field left for the chosen few. This may be due to a global culture of consumerism that has a numbing effect on the participants of the

²²⁶*Ibid.*

²²⁷*The Morung Express*. Retrieved from: www.morungexpress.com.

consumerist economy and diverts their attention from any form of protest. The female hawkers I talked to displayed a great deal of elation in describing how they were now able to move more freely and enjoying rights that the citizens of any other cosmopolitan urban centre of India can access. This attitude seems to be a picture of contrast when viewed against the perception traditionally prevalent in the Meitei society on the relationship between India and Manipur. This perception has been characterised by a sense of betrayal, which can be traced back to 1949, the year of accession to the Union of India. This sense of betrayal and rage against the Indian state was further spurred by the Manipuri people's struggle to achieve complete statehood, and finally, by the imposition of the AFSPA in Manipur.

It seems, however, that this perception of the relationship between Manipur and India – primarily characterised by dominance – has undergone a transformation in recent times. But this may be a direct outcome of the changing demographic pattern in Manipur. According to the census of 2011, the age distribution of the population shows that 31.4% of the Manipuri population are in the 0-14 age group, while only 7.4% are in the 60 plus age group. This indicates that the people who were direct participants in the struggle for statehood have reached the age of senior citizens. For the younger generation, on the other hand, the present situation of the state is much more relevant than the historical past of Manipur. Thus, the shift in the age profile of the population is not unrelated to the structural shift whereby forces of neoliberal capital and consumerist aspiration have come to dominate the mental world of the younger generation in Manipur. The present culture of consumerism, characterised by night markets, shopping malls and the aspiration to convert the city into a cosmopolitan hub, also adds a new dimension to the understanding of the culture of solidarity that prevails among the women of the Meitei community. To illustrate the point further, the traditional culture of

women's solidarity might be entering a new phase in this changing space of the city.

The second aspect pertaining to the temporary market indicates a culture of discrimination often practiced by the unions. In 2003, the president of the United Progressive Alliance Party inaugurated the newly constructed Ema Market, but as the construction of all the three markets has remained incomplete, the problem of allotment of the sheds to the woman vendors is still an important issue faced by the unions. However, the temporary market also consists of tribal vendors, something which clearly attests to the fact that the phenomenon of unionisation depends on the caste factor to a great extent. As Soibam Haripriya has observed in this context,²²⁸

... women certainly do not belong to a single community of women who regard their primary identity affiliation to it: class, clans, ethnic and spatial location remain more a primary identity that seems not to allow the consolidation of identities of sex or gender. The more vocal of the Lups²²⁹ are the urban-based organisations that, due to accessibility to the power centres, were the first to negotiate and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the state.

The fourth day of my visit coincided with NingonChakoba, an important festival in Manipur being celebrated in the month of November. On the occasion of this festival, married women are invited to their parental homes for a grand feast and gifts are presented to them after three days.²³⁰ In this context, a description of the

²²⁸Haripriya, Soibam (Spring & Monsoon, 2012). Agitating Women Disrobed Mothers. *Eastern Quarterly*, 8(I & II), 18–34.

²²⁹ The term *lup* is derived from *louf*, an Arabic word that means confederate. In a more modern context, it means an organisation, a confederacy, or a joint action committee.

²³⁰Chaki-Sircar, Manjusri (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. Shakti Books.

physical space of the market would be relevant, as it is important to understand the structural dimension of a given geographical space to analyse that space. In other words, the market is not only a place where trade is carried out, but from a wider perspective, it reflects the socio-political conditions of the place where the market is located. Moreover, a market can be considered as an economic indicator. Further, an analysis of the market highlights the kind of governance the place is exposed to, and how far people can connect with the governmental procedure. The chapter would not engage here in the debate of how far, or if at all, the present state government is able to serve the needs of the larger population of Manipur. But it is more important for our purpose to mention another of my discoveries: I was astonished to discover the practice of the night market mainly exhibiting food in Manipur. This change of understanding of the temporality of the market has had an implicit impact on my understanding of the place. To put the point more precisely, this changed understanding is not unrelated to my general understanding of the city. While the names of Manipur and Imphal have generally been associated with militant activism the state's counter-insurgency offensives in the imagination of the rest of India, developments in recent years show that the city itself is eager to shake off this image. I shall elaborate on this point while dwelling on the experience of my field visit in the section on the temporary market.

After the twentieth day of my visit to the market, certain questions presented themselves to me, which are directly linked to the internal dynamics of Ema Market. The arrangement of different sheds or shops within the market provides an interesting clue for understanding the internal dynamics of the market. Purana Bazaar, also known as Leimarel Shidabior EmaKeithel, on the Thangal Bazaar side is the largest among the three buildings. Main items of trade in Purana Bazaar include fish, of both fresh and dried varieties, earthen pottery and handicraft

items. There are rows of raised platforms where each spot is earmarked for a specific vendor. Most items of ritual requirement are procured from this place. The Purana Bazaar complex receives the highest number of street hawkers around its premises. Ema Market is largely controlled by the women of the Meitei community.²³¹ The pattern of shops and sheds inside the market follows a specific arrangement. The shops or sheds located near the entrance of the market sell flowers, fruits, traditional handicrafts, and jewellery; as one proceeds further, there are shops selling vegetables and fish located on either side of the market, and in the interior parts of the market, sheds of eggs and groceries can be seen. In fact, this arrangement of shops and sheds indicate an underlying reality in which the vendors belonging to the Muslim or non-Hindu communities of Manipur have been allotted shops at the backside of the market. When I asked the market women about the logic behind this arrangement, I was told that the allotment of shops had been done on a first-come-first-serve basis. But the question of discrimination on the basis of caste and religion still remains, as the explanation offered by the female vendors does not corroborate the actual facts. The list of shops I procured clearly shows that names of Muslim female vendors are at the top, which implies that they could rightfully claim sheds near the entrance of the market, and yet, they were allotted sheds at the rear of the market. It would be relevant to quote Manjusri Chaki-Sircar in order to put this fact of discrimination in a historical perspective: "In the pre-Vaishnavite period, the Meitei lived in a more or less egalitarian society except for the presence of the outcaste Loi. But over the past two hundred years, the Meitei, living in the shadow of Brahmanical caste values, have acquired a great deal of caste consciousness in their habits and

²³¹Meetei, HU (2015). Ema Keithel: The mothers' market. Retrieved from: [https://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema Keithel-mother%27s market.pdf](https://dsource.in/sites/default/files/course/visual-ethnography-designers/sample-reports/file/Ema%20Keithel-mother%27s%20market.pdf).

lifestyle.”²³² The arrangement of sheds in fact confirms the presence of a division along the lines of religion and caste in the market and shows that the fear of physical contamination still looms large in the Meitei society. Most of the woman hawkers in the market, who sell flowers and fruits and items ranging from sandalwood to other items required for making offerings to the gods, are Hindus, and they enjoy the advantage of a prominent position in the physical arrangement of the market. Another important fact in this regard is that the customers who purchase such items prefer to buy them from Hindu vendors because only the Vaishnavites sell wares related to the worship of God. Thus, complexities involving gender and caste, and the relationship between the two, cannot be ignored while studying Ema market.

The New Market or Lingthoingambi Market lies adjacently on the eastern side of Purana Bazaar. The prominent items sold here include traditional clothing such as the *Phanek* (a wrap-around skirt), *Khudei* (ethnic towels) and tribal shawls. These items of women's clothing, required and used mainly for ritual purposes and on religious occasions, are available here. A small number of hawkers specialise in ritual items apart from clothing. The smallest of the three buildings is LaxmiKeithel or LaxmiBazaar that lies across BirTikendrajit Road on the southern side of Purana Bazaar. This market specialises in traditional attires of all kinds. Shops selling earthen pottery can also be found among the stalls inside. Although all three buildings are multi-storeyed structures, only the ground floors are occupied, and there are still hawkers with a licence who were left out in the initial accommodation process. Moreover, the issue of the upper floors of the market

²³²Chaki-Sircar, Manjusri (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. Shakti Books.

buildings being not-so-lucrative for business has been raised with the authorities by the associations of licensed vendors.²³³

Although the rules of “dos and don’ts” have not been formally laid down in Ema Market, there are certain norms that one has to follow in the market. One of the important customs is that no female hawker is allowed to change her item of trade or merchandise. In other words, the market women have to carry on the vending of the same goods with which they started their business in the market. This custom is maintained to prevent the clash of interests among vendors. This enables us to understand the strong process of regimentation that underlies the organisational structure of the market. A study conducted by NASVI in 2012 reports that there are over 5,000 vendors in the market, and out of them, only 440 are licensed ones (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012). The same study reports that 88.5% of the street hawkers in Imphal are women, out of whom 65% are married and 22% widowed. These woman hawkers are also the main bread-earners of their families. An exclusive evaluation of Khwairamband Bazaar would further increase the female percentage, as vending or hawking in Manipur has been predominantly a women-centric affair regardless of its legality. The study also shows that 60% of the vendors belong to the age group of 35-60, and 55.5% of them earn less than Rs. 100 a day. The general castes dominate the streets of Imphal, occupying 97% of the ethnic composition, and the presence of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is almost negligible. This explains the dominance of the Meitei community in membership-based organisations of the licensed vendors of Khwairamband Bazaar. A possible reason behind the low proportion of women belonging to scheduled tribes in the market can be their weekly and fortnightly visits to the

²³³ These Authorities include the Imphal Municipal Corporation and its coordinating departments.

market.²³⁴ The women doing business in the market are largely above the age of 45. When questioned about the rule that dictates the involvement of only post-menopausal women in the trade, LaishramMemma, one of the oldest ladies in the market, replied that after the age of 45, they were mostly free from domestic chores and parental role, which would allow them to engage in economic activities to help their families. Chaki-Sircar has expressed a pointed opinion on the subject in her work:

... unlike some of their sisters in the western world of the U.S.A., women of Manipur do not face the so-called crisis of ageing and do not feel the need to question their self-worth in a male-oriented society. This may perhaps be best exemplified in their attitude toward menopause; Meitei women feel no less of self-worth or sexuality or any form of the depression associated in the West with menopause. On the contrary, many look forward to their post-menopause lives, free from the burden of childbearing and other biological construction... In fact, a woman, hanubi [matronly or old woman], is respectfully addressed as Ima by both sexes.

There are certain caveats to this story, however. For instance, I found three to four hawkers below the age of thirty, and one among them was below twenty. When I enquired about it, I was told that one girl who was below twenty had lost both her parents in an accident, and the women's organisation active in the market decided to hand over her mother's shop to her so that she could earn a living. The other two women are daughters-in-law of original owners who had passed away. The fourth young vendor is a divorcee, and the shed was transferred to her by her mother. The market acts as a social domain for the female vendors, a place where their identity becomes strengthened. According to Chaki-Sircar, the market

²³⁴Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

“provides a social world for both younger and older *hanubis*.” She has observed further:

The Marup is also an important institution for economic as well as social bonding. The Marup members organize feasts, outdoor picnics, pilgrimages, scripture-reading sessions, nupipala[women's religious session] groups, and other activities. The Marup at the bazaar provides an opportunity for making new contacts for women.

Different constituencies of street vending

This section consists of two different parts. The first one tries to unravel the different complex constituencies involved in street vending, i.e., hawkers of the temporary market, and street hawkers, and in doing so, it also focuses on the politics of unionisation. Particularly, in describing the temporary market, I intend to understand the inner workings of the unions. How do they control and negotiate the spatial claims made by licensed and unlicensed hawkers? The second part tries to explore the constituency of the street hawkers of Imphal in order to understand the gendered modes of organising and mobilising street hawkers. I try to understand this premise on the basis of the relationship that exists between the NHF and the street hawkers' unions of Imphal which are associated with the former.

The Temporary Market

The frequent displacements and relocations have created another category of vendors who were accommodated in the temporary market arrangement. The hawkers who were left out in course of the shifting process were later accommodated in the nearby temporary market (formerly known as HaoKeithel) that houses the specialised clusters such as YenYonfam and NgariYonfam. While Yen Yonfam translates as a place where chickens are sold, NgariYonfam translates as a place where *Ngari* (dried-fermented fish) is sold. An alternative temporary market known as Tombisana Market, located near the old Manipur Assembly building, was also arranged to accommodate the remaining vendors of Purana Bazaar, Laxmi Bazar, Linthoingambi Market and the demolished NagamapalKeithel. Although Tombisana the Market is located some distance away from the main space of Khwairamband Bazaar, the temporary market and its adjoining areas have become the ground for street vendors' contestation over space.²³⁵

From 2011, there was a wave of unionisation that tried to bring together all the woman street hawkers of Manipur, thereby trying to establish a link between the struggle of licensed vendors and that of unlicensed hawkers through incorporating the agenda of street hawkers into the domain of unionised politics. The leaders of different unions began to make claims about the allotment of spots to the street hawkers in the newly constructed market complex. They tried to eradicate the ensuing difference among the community of woman hawkers. As a result of these efforts, the legal division between the licensed vendors and

²³⁵Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

unlicensed hawkers has blurred within the community, and the community bond has strengthened. Both the license-holding vendors and unlicensed hawkers now jointly struggle for their rights. Various letters and deputations were submitted to the state government, which not only made appeals for allotment in the newly constructed market but also asked for permission to use the temporary market sheds created for license holders to be transferred to the street vendors who sit on the roadside. The temporary market, as the name suggests, was constructed as an alternative immediate solution for the vendors who were displaced during the construction of Purana Bazaar, Laxmi Bazar, and Linthoingambi Market. Later on, the demolition of Nagamapal Market and other adjoining sheds contributed to the influx of more vendors into the temporary market. By incorporating both the licensed and unlicensed vendors, the temporary market has turned itself into a ground for understanding the process of negotiations and contest over space. Thus, with the accommodation of street hawkers within the formally imagined space of this market and its adjoining areas, the notion of temporariness attached to the market seems to be fading.²³⁶

When I visited this temporary market during my fieldwork, I noticed certain aspects of the market. First, as this market was established as a temporary arrangement, it is not a well-constructed structure. The market is covered with bamboo sheds on all four corners and the central place is kept vacant. The covered space is under the control of license holders who have been rehabilitated in these sheds. In other words, the covered sheds are mostly occupied by licensed vendors, while the outside space is inhabited by the unlicensed hawkers, who are tribal women mostly belonging to the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Union. The occupants

²³⁶*Ibid.*

of the covered sheds are mostly Manipuri Muslim women, who are members of the Minority Muslim Woman Vendors' Union.

In order to understand the perspective of the hawkers' unions of Manipur, it would be pertinent to look into the career of Tama Devi, who is the president of most of these unions active among the woman hawkers of Imphal, and also the general secretary of the Minority Muslim Woman Vendors' Union. Kshetri Ascoubi Devi was the general secretary of this union till the late 1990s, and she was succeeded by KshetriMayum Tama Devi in 2000. Tama Devi is the leader of twenty-six unions at present. Recently, she has been elected the Upadhyak of Imphal East District. Tama Devi was born and raised in a middle-class Meitei family. She shared her childhood with five siblings, among whom she was the brightest student. Her father, an army official, provided her with wider exposure to education, and she received a good part of her education outside Imphal, in Hyderabad. From an early age, she has been very vocal about the rights of children and organised an association called the Old Manipur Young Pioneers, which worked for the rights of children. In 1997, Tama Devi was elected the president of the 'All India Students Federation', the students wing of the CPI, and later on, became a member of the National Council of the organisation. After coming back to Imphal in 1998, she actively participated in the struggle of the female vendors of Ema Market against the state government's decision to erect a multi-storeyed building called the New Market. According to Tama Devi, her decision to contest in the election was not solely a personal one, rather, it was the decision of her party which perceived electoral victory as a means for catering to the demands of the female vendors. Her long association with organised politics has convinced Tama Devi that "if we want to change certain things in the government, we need to be part of the electoral process and change the

government''.²³⁷ Perhaps The changed condition of Manipur was indicative, if not about the organised politics but change in lifestyle and socio-cultural perspective of the people particularly the younger generation of Manipur noticeable.

The temporary market mainly consists of tribal women belonging to the Kuki, Naga Kom and Chirencommunities, and these women commute to the market from places such as Thombal, SenapatiNompal etc. on a daily basis. They arrive at the market at 2 a.m. and conduct business till 9 a.m., and then return home. However, these tribal women, most of whom sell vegetables in the market, failed to occupy any sheds in the temporary market. Although there is a union of tribal street hawkers, the tribal women have a nominal presence inside the temporary market, and they are forced to sit on the road, where police harassment is a regular phenomenon. During the process of negotiations with the government, representatives of the State-Tribal Union played little role, and it was the leadership of the Roadside Street Vendors' Welfare Union that played the most active role in the negotiations. My survey in and around Ema Market has enabled me to understand the Meitei community's perception of the caste system. One of the important findings of this survey is that the street hawkers are mostly women belonging to tribal, Muslim and non-Manipuri communities, and a large number of them are not unionised. In other words, the underlying division or the hegemonies and hierarchies that work silently in a society could be grasped through an analysis of the field survey of the temporary market. The temporary market provides important insights into understanding the extent to which unionisation processes can be spontaneous. The corollary questions are: Who is understood as a member of the union? How far membership affiliations to unions are beneficial for the female vendors?

²³⁷ General Secretary, the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association (2017, October). Personal communication

The third aspect is that as the sheds in the temporary market provided by the government are left vacant, the concerned unions have urged the government to allow the female street hawkers to occupy the empty sheds. However, while the temporary market can only accommodate twelve hundred vendors, there are around three thousand street hawkers in Manipur, many of whom are not unionised. Thus, the question that arises here is: How did the unions choose the rightful claimants at the time of allotting sheds in the temporary market? While interviewing both the leaders and the street hawkers who now occupy the sheds in the temporary market, I found that sheds have been provided mostly to the members of the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Union. When I asked Tama Devi how the union decided upon the allotment process in the temporary market, she replied that the sheds had been allotted on the basis of seniority. However, upon repeated enquiries, she accepted the fact that preference had been given to the members of her own union. Thus, the culture of nepotism, which prevails in any patriarchal and hierarchical society, is also visible even in a same-gender space, where voices of weak and feeble fall on deaf ears, much like anywhere else. The very process of unionisation is hierarchical in nature, which reinforces the marginalisation of the socially weaker constituencies.

Street Hawkers

The focus of this section is on contextualising the practice of street hawking within the market/urban space of Khwairamband Bazaar, which gave rise to a multitude of contradicting narratives. These narratives are, however, rooted in the process of a categorical exclusion of street vendors from the spatial imagination of the market. Although the various legal institutions governing the market space define the spatial framework, the latter does not effectively align with the provisions

defined by these institutions. In reality, the spatial framework is characterised by confusion, contradiction and an ad-hoc way of managing matters in a quasi-legal way.²³⁸ The frameworks of the market are so intricate in nature that a very thin line separates the actual reality of woman hawkers from the legally or institutionally imagined one. In fact, the space conceived by the urban planners categorically excludes street hawkers from the imagination of the market space. This results in the assault of the institutional power on the street hawkers. The fact of non-recognition and non-implementation of The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 speaks volumes in this regard.²³⁹

A more detailed description of the activities of the street hawkers in Imphal is required at this point. The market authorities include the Imphal Municipal Corporation and its coordinating departments. The footpaths on both sides of BT Road, which are now overshadowed by BirTikendrajit Flyover, are flanked by women selling all kinds of goods of daily use, which include groceries, clothes, toys, etc. The surrounding areas of Purana Bazaar and Lingthoingambi Market are also occupied by similar vendors. Different groups of street hawkers reach and leave the market area during the course of the day. The earliest groups reach the market by 2-3 a.m. and stay till 8 a.m., until the local authorities start chasing them out to clear the streets and pavements. The street hawkers, who outnumber the licensed vendors, can also be seen in front of the Laxmi Bazaar building occupying the footpath and a small portion of BT Road. The largest concentration of street hawkers can be found on the Thangal Bazaar side, where the temporary market is

²³⁸ Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

²³⁹ Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

also situated. All streets around Thangal Bazaar witness the activities of street hawkers on the pavements every day. These street hawkers are from Imphal and its neighbouring districts. Therefore, they share a synergic relationship with the local vehicle-owners and this bond has a favourable effect on the street hawkers' daily market practices. Moreover, tribal hawkers from the hill districts of Manipur also come to the market on certain weekdays, and they have become an important attraction in the morning market. The practice of street hawking in Khwairamband Bazaar is constituted by multiple categories and layers constituted by the buyers and the hawkers. There are hawkers of seasonal, weekly, temporary, mobile and stationary varieties, who constitute multiple categories within the market. These categories are further complicated, and sometimes multiplied, by the spatial positions, the vendors occupy in the market.²⁴⁰ Moreover, a recent study conducted by the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Union has clearly categorised the street hawkers on the basis of the time of their arrival in the market. As the study shows, the first category of street hawkers reaches the market between 3 a.m. to 4.30 a.m., and stay till 8 a.m. A section of these morning occupants stays back even after 8 a.m. They adjust and negotiate spaces within the market and continue selling their goods until they are finished, as the items of their trade are perishable commodities. Sometimes, they also sell their goods to stationary street vendors. There are also groups of female vendors who arrive at the market around 9 or 10 a.m. and stay till late in the evening. And there are also those who reach the market by 4 p.m. and stay till 9 or 10 p.m.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*

²⁴¹ General Secretary, the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association (2019, January). Personal communication.

The morning category of female hawkers is further complicated by the presence of weekly, quarterly and seasonal vendors. Such overlapping categories pose a serious problem for associations and unions in identifying and recognising the vendors and hawkers as members. The former parking space, which has been turned into a vending space, besides the temporary market, mainly houses the stationary vendors with sheds. These vendors reach the market around 6 to 9 a.m. and stay till late in the evening. They are more settled and stable than the ones without a fixed vending spot. Another zone for stationary hawkers is near Naga drain on the Nagamapal side, to the west of Purana Bazaar. The hawkers here occupy the slabs above the drain and the sidewalks. The category of temporary hawkers who stay back after 8 a.m. is mixed up with the street vendors coming to the market around 8 to 9 a.m. These two groups jointly occupy the footpaths of BT Road, and the surrounding areas of Purana Bazaar, Lingthoingambi Market and Laxmi Bazaar. Such categories and sub-categories are not always well-defined, as they are often shaped by factors such as momentariness, consistency or the lack of it, seasonality, stability and regularity of practices.²⁴²

The approach of considering the market as a social space will provide a deeper understanding of the underlying urban dynamics that shape the process of the street hawkers' contest and negotiation over space. It is at this point that I shall try to examine the narratives of sisterhood, as indicated by the leadership of the hawkers' union, as well as a different narrative of conflict and struggle among the hawkers. While this second narrative is often cloaked by the leaders of the unions, my field ethnography has suggested different facts.

²⁴² Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

A sit-in protest was held at Khwairamband Bazarmade the headline that surfaced in one of the local newspapers' websites on 28 December 2019. The first line of the news report reads: "Vendors of Ima Keithel, who are also referred locally to as Imas (Mothers) staged a sit-in protest at Khwairamband Bazar yesterday demanding the removal of street vendors along the market area." (IFP, 2018). Such reports have become a seasonal phenomenon to the people of Manipur. The case of 28 December was temporarily resolved or negotiated through a meeting between the representatives of the female vendors and the chief minister of the state, at which the latter assured that substantive actions would be taken to address the issue by January 2019. However, the effort of the licensed vendors and the resulting conflict that broke out in the market, instead of yielding any significant changes in the arrangement of vending, subsequently went into the archives of the local newspapers as another specimen of seasonal headlines.²⁴³ The construction of new market buildings and the unfinished accommodation process of licensed street vendors have further complicated the situation, as the street hawkers are mixed up with the left-out licensed vendors in places such as the temporary market and Tombisana Market. However, it is clear that parties involved in the conflict within the market are the licensed hawkers occupying the new market buildings and the street hawkers carrying out their businesses in the surrounding footpaths and gullies of these buildings.

This clearly echoes my perception of the complex and fraught relationship that exists between licensed and unlicensed hawkers in Imphal. While conducting my field survey, the question that perplexed me significantly was: How could the licensed hawkers form alliances with the unlicensed hawkers? In reality, the street hawkers have formed a layer of vending activities around the formally imagined

²⁴³*Ibid.*

market structures, thereby affecting the daily sales of the licensed hawkers inside the marketplace. For instance, the case of Purana Bazaar seems to be worse as both the street hawkers and the licensed hawkers sell almost the same items. As the street hawkers occupy a more easily accessible location – such as pavements and gullies – buyers do not prefer to take the trouble of going inside the market buildings.²⁴⁴

Vishal Aribam, (2019) states in his work “In a personal communication, the general secretary of the Roadside Vendors’ Welfare Association, has stated that the associations of street vendors have been claiming the space of KhwairambandBazaar as a natural market for years, and the association considers the right to do business a fundamental right of every street hawker. The general secretary has questioned the logic of not allowing the street vendors to occupy the street, as, according to her, they are called street vendors precisely because they occupy the streets. She has accepted the presence of a conflict between the licensed vendors and street hawkers and stated the reason behind this conflict in the following words. ...there is a conflict there too, as no one wants to shift away from the centre of the natural market.”²⁴⁵ According to her, the hawkers would not be able to sell any goods if they move away from the market space and sit on the pavements around Kangla.

A probable reason for providing me with a picture of peaceful coexistence between licensed and unlicensed hawkers may have to do with my personal association with the movement. Being the daughter of a prominent leader of the NHF might have acted as my disadvantage, and might have prevented the leaders

²⁴⁴ Aribam, Vishal (2019). *Public Space, Urban Governance, and Street Vendors in Imphal: Contestations and Negotiations*. [Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus].

²⁴⁵ *Ibids*

of the unions from presenting me with a realistic picture of the relationship between licensed and unlicensed hawkers. However, another interesting fact in this context is that the media have started covering this conflict since 2018. It seems that the rise in the number of street hawkers and the lack of the government's plan to make an allocation for them contributed to the sharpening of the contest over space between licensed and unlicensed hawkers. Driven by the concerns of profitability, sustainability and accessibility, the street hawkers are now demanding a rightful space within the market. The counter-arguments given by the licensed hawkers, who sit in or occupy the formal structures of Purana Bazaar, Lingthoingambi Market and Laxmi Bazaar, is based on the idea of unfair competition they have been facing from the street hawkers – since the latter provides the buyers with an easier and more accessible way of procuring goods. The associations of licensed hawkers have revolted multiple times against the street hawkers and their encroachment over the adjoining areas of the market buildings.

According to the revenue officer of the Imphal Municipal Corporation (IMC), “But, the ones creating the mess in the market... making it look ugly and affecting the market are in the PuranaBazaar (in and around the built-up). The surrounding area of Purana Bazaar is the most affected by Street Vendors selling vegetables...they have occupied all the footpaths and gullies.”²⁴⁶ Thus, the perception of the civic body or the administration on the street hawkers strikingly resembles the perception of the licensed vendors and their associations.

Such narratives clearly substantiate my point that the bond of sisterhood among licensed and unlicensed hawkers, upheld by the leaders of the unions, is often fractured. It is important to note that I have conducted my field survey during

²⁴⁶Revenue Officer, IMC (2019, January). Personal Communication.

2017 when the media were not yet in the habit of covering incidents of such conflicts. This clearly gestures toward the fact that till 2017, the unions were able to cloak the conflicts and to provide a picture of solidarity among the two groups of hawkers. Most importantly, the support of and solidarity with unlicensed hawkers is a necessity for the unions of licensed hawkers to survive the constant eviction drives launched by the government. In other words, the reports of the surveys on unlicensed hawkers clearly indicate their numerical strength, which is considered absolutely indispensable for the license-holding hawkers to forge struggles against and carry out negotiations with the government. Henceforth, the structural transition of the market has created mixed vending spaces, where both licensed and unlicensed hawkers continue to hawk. The unions play an active role to maintain the status-quo between the two groups. Some of the more active associations and unions based in KhwairambandBazaar include the Roadside Vendors' Welfare Association, the KhwairambandKeithel Woman Street Vendors' Welfare Association, the PunshiKeithel Woman Vendors' Association, the Nagamapal Woman Street Vendors'Khwai, the Ima Keithel Association, the Temporary Market Woman Street Vendors' Association etc. The NHF plays a significant role in the negotiation of space claims between the licensed and unlicensed hawkers, as the organisation has unions of both licensed and unlicensed hawkers under its banner. It can be argued that the NHF is a major connecting thread between the legal and illegal claimants of the vending space in Manipur. The role of associations or collective struggles is quite significant here. The structural position of the street hawkers and the symbolic power drawn from the historical claims over the market gave enough bargaining power to the unlicensed street hawkers. This power resource, generating out of historical claims and structural position, is strong enough for the collective of street hawkers to defend its spatial rights even in the absence of institutional power.

Before concluding this section, I would like to provide here a glimpse of the style of functioning of the street hawkers' unions active in Manipur. These unions are highly regimented organisations in terms of their organisational procedure and the relationship between the leadership and the ordinary members. This became evident to me when I participated in one of their meetings at which the election of a new office-bearer was held. On the day of the election, all the woman members of the organisation gathered in a community hall in the vicinity of the market, where names of two candidates for the concerned post were declared, and the members were required to shout the name of their preferred candidate. The union follows this process of election which is called the voice vote method. According to the leaders of the organisation, this method is most suitable for overcoming the constraints of time and knowledge.²⁴⁷ According to them, as most of the hawkers are very busy throughout the day and as most of them are illiterate, it is not possible for them to use any other form of voting. The voice vote method indicates that despite a member's dislike for a candidate, she is forced to vote for the same candidate through shouting, as being quiet in front of other members may invite much trouble in the form of stigma and social ostracism. It can generally be assumed a same-gender space, especially in the context of the Meitei society where women generally play a prominent role in the public sphere, is an expression of, among other things, gender-based solidarity against oppressive structures. However, as the present case study suggests, while both the women's market and the woman hawkers' union consist only of women, it does not, by default, make the unions free of oppressive and hierarchical norms.

Conclusion

Hawkers are often defined as a subaltern category. Moreover, woman hawkers are further deprived of any agency or source of mediation. Thus, the question is: How would one categorise the female hawkers who are not within the fold of any union, or members of active unions, which initiate and participate in all negotiation processes with the state authorities. The process of mediation or agency becomes virtually impossible in their case. Therefore, how can a same-gender space be more empowering than a space where gender discrimination is the usual norm? As is evident from the hawkers' unions' showcasing of the bond of sisterhood among different constituencies of female hawkers, a same-gender space like Ema Market — which is closely associated with other, traditionally all-women, spaces of the Meitei society, such as *Nupi Pala* and *NupiMarup* — is generally regarded as a space of women's solidarity against oppression. However, as the findings of this chapter suggest, a same-gender space may not necessarily be just in dealing with gender hegemonies and contestations of public space. As Manjusri Chaki-Sircar has demonstrated in her study on the Meitei society, "the patriarchal nature of Hinduism" was adapted into the ethnic-religious culture of the Meitei society.²⁴⁸ This process is closely linked with the Vaishnavisation of Meitei culture. It seems from the present study that traditional hierarchies of the Meitei society have penetrated into the current social spaces in a reworked form. Viewed in this light, the hierarchical and undemocratic structures in both Ema Market, as well as the vendors' unions, do not seem an unusual juxtaposition on a society that is otherwise pro-women.

²⁴⁸Sircar, Manjusri (1984). *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*. Shakti Books.

To put the problem of gender hierarchy in a theoretical perspective, it can be argued that taking a resort to essentialism, universalism and naturalism particularly in the context of a same-gender space such as Ema Market may lead to dangerous implications. As Elizabeth Grosz²⁴⁹ has quite poignantly stated in one of her essays, “...any description that abstracts from the particular historical, cultural, ethnic and class position of particular women verges perilously close to essentialism”. Therefore, it would be paradoxical to assume that gender hierarchies find no place in a same-gender space. Therefore, Sangari and Vaid²⁵⁰ have pithily noted that “there is no unmediated pure” that one can discern through historical analysis, as patriarchy functions not only through institutions such as family or the state and ideological dominance over women but also permeates even those discourses that are ostensibly pro-women.

²⁴⁹ Grosz, Elizabeth (1995). *Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism*. In Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Routledge.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Tellis, Ashley (Spring & Monsoon, 2012). *Re-thinking Gender and the Northeast*. *Eastern Quarterly* 8(I & II), 2-7.

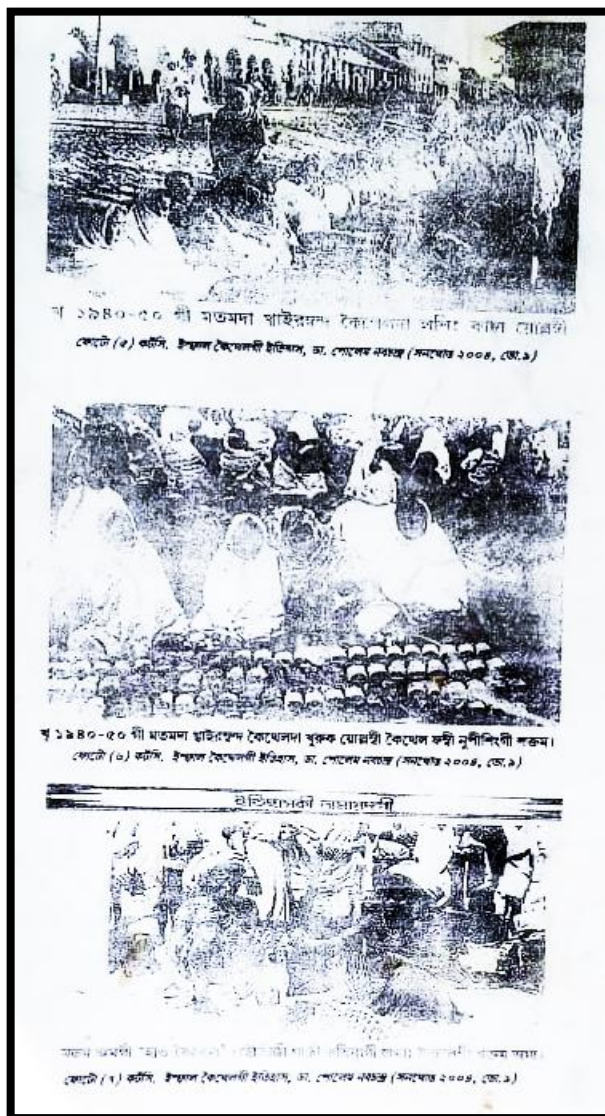


Figure XII: Picture of Ema Market in 1940's & 50s



Figure XIII: License Holder Women Hawkers with Hijam Irabot



Figure XIV: License Holder Woman Hawker inside the Ema Market



Figure XV: Tribal Women Hawker inside Temporary Market



Figure XVI: Picture of Temporary Market



Figure XVII: Women Hawker of Roadside Women Vendors welfare Association During Parliamnet March organised by NHF



Figure XVIII: Picture of Chacha of Ema Market

PROPOSE WOMEN VENDOR LIST KHWAIRAMBAND KEITHEL, IMPHAL				
S. No.	Name	Address	Age	Trade
1.	Soibam Bilashini W/o S. Kulachandra	Heinoubok		Fruits
2.	Soibam Ibccha Devi W/o S. Yama Singh	Heinoubok		Fruits
3.	Chabungbam (O) Mandakini W/o Ch. Gopapay Singh	Sagolband Langjing Achouba		Fruits
4.	Oinam. Ibethei Devi W/o O. Hemanta Singh	Kcinou Thongkha Sorok Mapal		Fruits
5.	Yumnam Mema Devi W/o Y. Yama Singh	Yumnam Khunou Maning Leikai		Fruits
6.	Ngangom Chaoibhal Devi W/o Ng. Giridhari Singh	Yumnam Khunou Sorok Maya		Fruits
7.	Loitongbam Sanahanbi Devi W/o L. Birachandra Singh	Yumnam Khunou Sorok Maya		Fruits
8.	Loitongbam Enakhunbi Devi W/o L. Biren Singh	Yumnam Khunou Sorok Maya		Fruits
9.	Oinam Mangol Devi W/o O. Chaoa Singh	Oinam Maning Leikai		Fruits
10.	Chanam Jamini Devi W/o Ch. Ibocha Singh	Kabowakching Awang Leikai		Fruits
11.	Paonam Panchami Devi W/o P. Sundar Singh	Takhel Leikai		Fruits
12.	Wahengbam Memcha Devi W/o W. Saratkumar Singh	Awang Khunou Lamkhai		Fruits
13.	Yamhem Kethabi Devi W/o Y. Bung Singh	Uripok Yamham Leikai		Fruits
14.	Khuraijam (O) Roma Devi W/o Romen Singh	Keishampat Leimajam Leikai		Fruits
15.	Konthoujam Sanahanbi Devi W/o K. Manglemjao Singh	Konthoujam Makha Leikai		Fruits
16.	Saugrakpam Sangeeta D/o (L.) S. Modhu Singh	Kwakeithel Laishram Leikai		Fruits
17.	Yensenbam (O) Naobi W/o Y. Naba	Chanam Khandrok		Fruits
18.	Thounaojam Dayabati Devi W/o Th. Subash Singh	Sagolband Moirang Leirak		Fruits
19.	Thingujam Khurai Devi W/o Th. Manihar Singh	Thoubal Kiyam		Fruits
20.	Athokpam Subadani W/o A. Jugeshwor	Waheng Leikai		Fruits

Contd/.....

Figure XIX: List of Women Hawker of Ema Market

- (2) -				
S. No.	Name	Address	Age	Trade
11.	Thounaojam Thoibi W/o Th. Loken	Naran Konjin		Fruits
12.	Sapam Raseshwari W/o S. Ibochou	Langhabal Lep Awang Leikai		Fruits
23.	Konsam Inaobi W/o K. Captain	Khurai		Fruits
24.	Mina Begum W/o Tomba Khan	Hiyangthang		Fruits
25.	L. Padamukhi W/o L. Nabakumar	Langjing Achouba		Fruits
26.	Ksh. Dhaneshori W/o Ksh. Rajbihari	Uripok		Fruits
27.	L. Mema W/o L. Rajen Singh	Tabungkhok Mayai Leikai		Fruits
28.	O. Pravabati W/o O. Santikumar	Haobam Marak Keisham Leikai		Fruits
29.	Waikhom Chitrangada W/o Danet	Wangkhei		Fruits
30.	Ng. Gambhini W/o Ng. Ibtombi	Yumnam Khunou		Fruits
31.	Wangkhem Memcha W/o W. Saratkumar	Awang Khunou Lamkhai		Vegetable
32.	K. Sanahanbi W/o K. Manglemjao	Konthoujam Makha Leikai		Vegetable
33.	Th. Nungshitombi W/o Th. Modhuchandra	Top Mayai Leikai		Vegetable
34.	L. Dhoni W/o L. Ibochou	Nambol Maibam		Vegetable
35.	M. Chandrajini W/o M. Babu	Tera Loukrapam Leikai		Vegetable
36.	K. Ibtombi W/o K. Devan	Tera Yengkhom Leirak		Vegetable
37.	M. Purnima W/o M. Ichoubi	Heinoubok		Vegetable
38.	E. Memcha W/o E. Gambhir	Khamnam Leirak		Vegetable
39.	E. Nungshitombi W/o E. Tomba	Top Mayai Leikai		Vegetable
40.	L. Ibenungshi W/o L. Chandra	Top Mayai Leikai		Vegetable
41.	L. Sakhi W/o L. Tombi	Samushang		Vegetable

Contd/.....3

Figure XX: List of Women Hawker of Ema Market

The dissertation sought to understand the process of institutionalisation of street hawking in two Indian cities in the postcolonial era. I proposed to do so by studying one central aspect of institutionalisation, i.e., trade unionism – both as an ideology and as a practice – among the footpath hawkers from the standpoint of the excluded groups – women and ethnic/racial minorities. Like any form of institutionalisation and group identity formation, trade unions are also the products of repression, boundary formation, exclusion, and subjugation. There are both the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘margins’ of a trade union’s conceptualisation and operation.

Exclusion is that which defines inclusion. This dissertation was an exercise to understand inclusion via its negation – exclusion. For this purpose, I chose several instances of exclusion in the case of trade union formation among India’s street hawkers with a specific focus on Kolkata and Imphal. I saw the politics of inclusion in the unions via a gender angle, as well as through the angles of race and ethnicity. I mobilised feminist sensibilities to identify various kinds of exclusion and built an agenda of trade unionism beyond the official narratives of the existing trade unions. My central concern has been the politics of representation in trade union practices, and to document alternative trajectories of archiving of the marginalised voices.

In Kolkata, hawkers’ unions are dominated by men – and not just men, but men bearing a Bengali identity. I have documented the process of marginalisation and repression within the process of unionisation (which is one form of

institutionalisation) from a feminist perspective. To do so, I have presented a radically different case of trade unionism in Imphal where women dictate the terms of inclusion. A feminist perspective is not exhausted by making a point about patriarchy and women's exclusion from privilege. It is also about all kinds of exclusion and interpreting the world from the standpoint of the excluded.

While sympathetic to the cause of trade unions, this dissertation calls for a major revision of the ways in which the male trade unionists have understood the world and mobilised discourses of solidarity. By means of an intimate ethnography of a particular trade union formation, the dissertation talks in terms of generality: who and what acquire centrality in the trade unions' autobiography, how does that happen, and also, how to make a case for a new vision of inclusion?

A feminist critique of trade unionism required me to understand the 'on ground' social, economic, and cultural processes that influence the life and labour of the population groups that the trade union seeks to serve. For this, I have lodged my analysis in certain areas of Kolkata where the marginalised among the hawkers concentrate—in Sealdah, where several women hawkers vend on the carriageway and remain outside the unions, and in Territy Bazaar, where a group of racially marginalised and ethnically Chinese sellers operate. Both these groups have had troubled relationships with the Bengali male-dominated trade unions. I then offer a contrasting case from Manipur's Imphal, where women themselves have been running a union for decades. In so doing, I also tell the story of how a dominant trade union came into being in Kolkata—and subsequently in India—in the crucibles of Operation Sunshine, 1996-97. I have recovered evidence to show the important role of women in the formation of the said union, and to show how an alternative vision of unionism is possible when we recognise marginal voices and bring them to the centre of a new horizon of solidarity.

How have hawkers, and especially the woman hawkers, struggled to scrape a living in a changing social world characterised by larger structural transformations in politics and economy? How have they viewed, experienced, and negotiated such transformations? How is the narrative of structural transformation of the market and the state closely connected to the saga of the struggle the hawkers have to fight in their every life? This dissertation employed the lens of gender, both as a category of thought and as a marker of identity, to arrive at an understanding of street hawking as a practice. While doing so, it also attempted to offer a critique of trade unionism, which has established itself as a force to reckon with in the sector of street hawking during the last four decades or so, from the same vantage-point of gender.

While academic literature on street hawking has thrived in disciplines like anthropology, development studies and policy studies, historians have been rather late in taking up this area as a field of research. So far, they have not done enough to extend our knowledge-base on street hawking, or to enrich our ideas on the subject. This lacuna can be partly explained by the obvious problem of the unavailability of official records and archival sources on street hawking. The anthropologist, who takes into account the micro-level geographies of a given phenomenon and its manifestations in macro-level structures, can dodge this problem. Striking a balance between the methods of a historian and those of an anthropologist, the present study has attempted to pose a historical question about the practice of street hawking through a reading of ethnographic material, oral historical sources and archival material. Through the reading of these sources, the study has attempted to reach an understanding of the dynamics, both social and political, of street hawking in Kolkata. Apart from delving deep into the individual and collective experiences of woman hawkers, the dissertation aimed at

developing a critique of trade unionism in the sector of street hawking from a feminist position. The dissertation goes beyond women's experience and develops a critique of trade unionism in this sector from a feminist standpoint. To do so, I have compared two test cases of trade unionism in Kolkata and Imphal, using one 'field context' to ask questions of the other.

Findings of the Chapters

Through the four chapters of this dissertation, I have tried to present an account of the dynamics of institutionalisation among the street hawkers who constitute a particular segment of the 'informal economy'. I have examined these dynamics on three different sites: the urban space, trade unions, and the archive. All these three sites have been scrutinised from the perspectives of various marginal voices. The scrutiny indicates at a politics of exclusion underlying the phenomenon that came to be known as the hawkers' movement. In the context of this finding, I have tried to analyse how the history of women's contribution in the hawkers' movement failed to capture the popular imagination as it was superseded and virtually oppressed by the weight of the 'community history' of hawkers. The same process resulted in the erasure of this history from the archive as well. Woman activists' role have been denied and silenced within the space of trade unions. The research reveals that the process of exclusion functions through a dual strategy of erasure and iconisation. That is to say, iconisation of selective woman figures at certain instances has only served to consolidate the process of erasure of the women's roles as a whole from the chronicle of the hawkers' movement.

Chapters 1, 3 and 4 have focussed on the logic of institutionalisation as a dialectical exchange between the formalising impulses of the state and the mobilisational impulses of organisational politics. At a general level, I have tried to study the ways in which the politics of a certain livelihood practice (in this case, street hawking) and the politics of contest over public space constitute each other in the city. The hawkers built the urban space by earning a living through it. In that sense, the hawkers are city builders. The dissertation studies the kinds of alliances that were forged, and fractures emerged in the process of institutionalisation over the last few decades in Kolkata and Imphal. To what extent can a work of research on negotiated claim-makings to the streets and urban infrastructures enable us to understand the changing registers of rights and the politics of space production in the current context of gentrification? This aspect of the research becomes particularly crucial when viewed in the current global context of gentrification and the process of re-gentrification in the sphere of urban development. A closer look at the process of negotiation of the claims to public space and urban infrastructure may go a long way in enriching our understanding of the changing registers of rights and the politics of the space production. The dissertation has also sought to study the kind of alliances that were forged between the hawkers, political parties, trade unions and other actors through the course of the process of institutionalisation over the last few decades in Kolkata and Imphal.

In understanding the practice of street hawking, I have also tried to study the gendered labour process. Through the four chapters, I have tried to examine the gendered nature of the workspace, such as the street, the pavement and the platform of a bustling railway station. In this context, I have also tried to explore questions such as how do woman hawkers and leaders participate in the exercise

of trade unionism, to what extent does the women's experience of unionism differ from that of their male colleagues. And more importantly, what kind of everyday violence shapes these women's experience of street hawking? Is there a gendered nature to this violence? I have also tried to understand how women's contribution to the movement is being marginalised in the prevailing discourses on street hawking?

Chapter One

Woman Hawkers and the Space of Hawking

The first chapter is a case study of the geopolitics of Sealdah that has been an important transit point and business centre in Calcutta since the time of partition. The focus of this chapter is on a particular moment in 1981 when Sealdah witnessed a massive infrastructural revamp. As part of this infrastructural revamp, the state government undertook a major eviction drive that had a direct impact upon the lives of thousands of street hawkers, small-time traders, and other petty players in the informal economy, who were scraping a living in this neighbourhood. The chapter seeks to understand two general questions through examining the context of Sealdah. First, what kind of impact an infrastructural development can have on the lives of the hawkers? And second, the chapter attempts to understand the difference between the struggle and experience of unionised hawkers and the everyday trials and tribulations of those who remain outside the fold of affiliated unions. Divided into two sections, this chapter first attempts to historicise a major movement of hawkers against the state government's eviction drive in 1981, which has rarely featured in academic

discussions. The second section tries to study the experience of everyday struggles of woman hawkers doing business in Sealdah in a post-colonial urban context. This movement focused on the radical contribution of women hawkers whose voices remained unrecorded. The historical-ethnographic research on which this section is based clearly hints at a difference in approach between the two groups of woman hawkers regarding the space of hawking. The first group, which consists of members of hawkers' unions and is settled in their business due to their long association with the space, is not open to the idea of negotiations with any other contestant of the space. On the other hand, the second group of women hawkers, who are newcomers to the space and are mostly migrants from the southern districts of West Bengal, survive in the area solely through negotiation. My ethnographic research shows that the second group of woman hawkers fail to exercise their agency in their space of business due to the constant rivalry among them. The constant threat of dispossession has made these women rather vulnerable and deprived them of any means of exercising their agency. As the two groups differ from each other in their social composition, background, access to organised politics, and their relation to the site, these differences also shape their perception of the space of hawking.

Chapter Two

Race, Ethnicity and Street Hawking

This chapter dwells on the ethnically Chinese food hawkers of Territy Bazaar, and the historical journey of Chinatown in Kolkata. The chapter dwells on the case of the breakfast market in Territy Bazaar (which is exclusively a market of breakfast

food and remains open for a limited number of hours during the day), as the experience of street hawking associated with this market substantially differs from the everyday practices of street hawking in other parts of the city. The chapter has sought to look at the narrative the Chinese community in Kolkata and the breakfast market in terms of three closely related aspects.

Firstly, I have tried to focus on the history of the emergence and transition of the breakfast market alongside the narrative of the transition of Chinatown. I have attempted here to show how the growth of Chinatown or a Chinese settlement in Central Calcutta led to the beginning and gradual flourishing of the breakfast market as a natural market. It is a market entirely developed by individual Chinese hawkers, especially people from the Cantonese community, who are inhabitants of Chinatown. However, following the Sino-Indian War (1962), the fate of this neighbourhood was reversed as the Chinese community in the city faced an increasing wave of social ostracism. The narrative of Chinatown, which has always been represented as a space of veritable danger in the popular cultural discourse of the Bengali middle-class, is closely linked with a narrative of ostracisation, racial marginalisation and cultural othering. While the policy of the state government and the urban development projects unleashed by the KIT (Kolkata Improvement Trust) gradually pushed the market on the verge of extinction. The finding of my historical-ethnographic research for this chapter seems to suggest that the process of cultural othering of the Chinese community is closely related to the economic fate of the breakfast market in Territy Bazaar. In short, as Central Kolkata, once a quintessentially cosmopolitan part of the city, lost its cosmopolitan character, the breakfast market run by the Chinese community also declined. This aspect can be viewed in the larger context of the transformation of the city in the post-colonial period that became a predominantly Hindu-Bengali,

majoritarian city at the cost of the marginalisation of the people from other cultures, who are now viewed as 'foreign element' in the popular perception.

Secondly, I have also tried to understand the perspective of both the state government and the hawkers' unions, none of which made any attempt to save the market from its virtual extinction. While the government attempted to stabilise and rehabilitate the East Pakistani refugees by finding employment for them in the sector of street hawking, no such attempt was ever made for an already established and thriving market run by the Chinese hawkers. On the contrary, governmental policies led to a systematic and steady disenfranchisement of community. The post-colonial state spared no effort in erasing the traces of the Chinese people from the governmental discourse as well as the popular imagination around the city of Kolkata.

Thirdly, I have also sought to clarify the status of the breakfast market and to closely examine the ambiguity surrounding this status. While the Chinese people who run the market are hawkers by the definition of the Street Vendors Act, 2014, the hawkers' unions active in Central Kolkata never made any attempt to unionise these people. I have tried to understand how the social constructs about the Chinese community prevented the unions from organising the Chinese food hawkers under their banner. The anti-Chinese perceptions prevalent among the Bengali-Hindu *bhadralok* class substantially influenced the unions' perception towards this community. In short, I have tried to suggest that owing to their racial prejudices against a community that they view as a 'cultural other', the hawkers' unions played a complicit role in the process of marginalisation of the Chinese community.

Through these three threads, I have attempted to read the micro-history of the breakfast market in Chinatown in the larger context of hawker economy. The

anecdotes dealing with the marginalisation of the Chinese community form an important part of this chapter, thereby tracing the gradual dissolution of the market. While the issues discussed in this chapter are related to larger questions such as the construction of a nation-state's historical past by the state and the process of othering and exclusion involved in it, the more immediate conclusion the chapter draws pertains to the failure of the politics of unionisation in certain realms of street hawking.

Chapter Three

Women and the Hawkers' Union

The third chapter has sought to understand how the transformation in the urban landscape of Kolkata, brought in by the developmental imperative of the government, has triggered a perpetual contest among the users of the public space of the city. The period between the mid-1990s and early years of this century marks a crucial change in the urban geography and the discourse around urban development, encompassing many Indian cities in particular and the Global South in general. This period also witnessed some crucial changes with far-reaching implications in the trajectory of the people's movement in India. However, a careful analysis of the micro-history of one particular eviction drive, namely 'Operation Sunshine', and the mass movement against the drive has remained outside the purview of academic research. In this chapter, I have attempted at precisely such an analysis. More precisely, in this chapter, I have tried to make the role of women visible in the hawkers' movement, and to analyse their participation in the predominantly masculinist space of the street and in the trade

union. I have tried to show how woman activists of the hawkers' movement played in an important role challenging the structural hierarchies prevalent in the hawkers' movement in late-twentieth century Kolkata as well as in the history inscribed by it. The case of Ratna Ghosh, a prominent leader of the hawkers' movement, is particularly significant in this context. More precisely, the case study in this chapter shows that it is possible for woman trade unionists to inaugurate an alternative culture of trade unionism, shaped by their experience as women and more accommodative of the voices of the oppressed, which is particularly absent among the male members of trade unions.²⁵¹

This chapter has traced the trajectory of the transformation of Kolkata's urban landscape in the late twentieth century, which initiated a major eviction drive directed against hawkers as well as a major anti-eviction movement of the hawkers in 1996-97. While the movement against 'Operation Sunshine' remains a memorable moment in the collective memory of the hawkers' movement, the chapter has sought to question the nature of the memory produced by this movement. The findings of the chapter show that the collective memory inscribed by the hawkers' movement has virtually erased the contribution of the woman activists to the movement. The study further shows that a unitary conception of hawkers as a community needs to be challenged, not only by academics but also by trade unions, as such a conception tends to exclude those inhabiting the grey areas of street economy – the hawker-workers as well as the woman workforce.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*

A Different Case of Trade Unionism

The last chapter focuses on the understanding of space contestation among the hawkers within the same-gender space, an issue that has largely remained outside the focus of academic discussion. Taking a close look at the case of the woman street hawkers of Ema Market in Imphal, this chapter has sought to understand their peculiar and complicated position against the backdrop of the market's socio-spatial order. I have particularly tried to emphasise on the paradox that while a thin line of difference exists between the unlicensed street hawkers and license-holding vendors of Ema Market in practice, the difference between the two groups in terms of their legal status and right to space is virtually unbridgeable. In this context, this chapter has tried to suggest that the show of sisterhood among woman hawkers put up by trade unions for strategic purposes are often fractured by the contesting claims to space. However, this suggestion does not lend itself to a claim of finality as, driven by the concrete demands of street-level politics and survival, the unions have also been able to forge some kind of bond between the licensed vendors and unlicensed street hawkers, thereby blurring the difference between the legal and the illegal.

Intertwining the history of several moments of resistance of woman hawkers against the state with the history of Ema Market, this chapter narrates a story of exclusion and the lack of agency in the same-gender space. One important conclusion of this chapter is that viewing the space of Ema Market as a site emancipated from gender-based hierarchies would be erroneous. Speaking more generally, the assumption that gender hierarchies and patriarchal practices are non-existent in a same-gender space can mislead our understanding of both gender and patriarchy. As the instance of Ema Market shows, the process of

exclusion of women (in this case, the non-unionised woman hawkers), thereby depriving them of any agency, can continue uninterrupted even in a same-gender space. To conclude, it is impossible to arrive at an understanding of the inner-workings patriarchy and gender without historicising particular groups of women in terms their social, cultural, ethnic and class markers.²⁵² Therefore, hegemony and hierarchy, which often lead to complete nullification of the woman's agency, can very well be situated even in the same-gender spaces and organisations. Therefore, how can categorisation of a same-gender space be more empowering than a space where gender discrimination is the usual norm? It is particularly important to appreciate and understand this point as patriarchy does not cease to work in putatively pro-women discourses.

Key Themes

Through these four chapters, I have tried to focus on certain conceptual themes related to street hawking, concrete narratives of gender, and the politics of trade unionism, especially in the sector of hawking.

Firstly, a good part of the dissertation has focussed on the mobilisation of female street hawkers, whose narratives remained unrecorded in the archives. Chapter 1, 2 and 3 clearly indicate how the historiography of the two crucial hawkers' movements in Calcutta has often been shaped by a predominantly male narrative. The substantial participation of female hawkers in the mobilisation of the 1980s has not only remained outside of academic studies, but also their voices went

²⁵²Tellis, Ashley (Spring & Monsoon, 2012). Re-thinking Gender and the Northeast. *Eastern Quarterly* 8 (I & II): 2–7.

unrecorded in the archives. I have tried to understand why, despite a large section of female hawkers courting arrests and taking part in various radical events of the movement, they have not found a place in the archives.

Yet another paradox drawn from my archival experience is related to the case of Ratna Ghosh, the general secretary of the Indira Hawkers' Union and the only woman member in the steering committee of the HSC. The absence of any record of her activities in the Daily Notes files of the Special Branch of Kolkata police and only a few references to her in the print media make it inevitable for us to depend on ethnographic evidence to analyse her role in this hawkers' movement. A similar absence of archival or recorded sources can be perceived in the case of Gita Mukherjee, who saved Ema Market in Imphal from losing its distinctive character by recovering a crucial letter from the Prime Minister. Although this period coincided with the emergence of the second wave of feminism, the role played by Gita Mukherjee in the movement of female vendors in Manipur has not attracted enough attention from academic feminists or the media. Moreover, while exploring the official archives for my study, I came across certain curious facts in this regard. The successful attempt of Gita Mukherjee to conserve Ema Market remains completely invisible in the State Archives or in the newspapers, and especially in *Kalantar*, the organ of the West Bengal State Council of Mukherjee's own party, the CPI. I have tried to show that histories of women's radicalism in hawkers' movement failed to capture the popular imagination, as they remained buried under the 'community history' of hawkers, and that this process is not unrelated to the absence of the women activists' narratives in the archive.

Secondly, as the discussion of the two distinct groups of woman hawkers in the first chapter shows, 'hawker' is not a homogeneous or undifferentiated category, and it is imperative to understand the nuances of gender and space involved in

the making of this category, both for the purpose of academic research as well as a political understanding. As it has been pointed out in the chapter, of the two groups of woman hawkers doing business in Sealdah, the second group, who commute from their lodgings to Sealdah by train on a daily basis and are deprived of fixed hours of business, perceive the space of hawking merely as *ByabsarJayga* (a site to conduct business from), which forecloses the possibility of any emotional investment in the space. The first group of woman hawkers, on the other hand, tend to view their lived space in quite a different light. This group, mostly inhabitants of the neighbouring area, has a livelier and more emotionally attached engagement with their space of hawking. This engagement can be explained in terms of this group's lived experience of the 1981 movement that has served to strengthen their ties with the space. Moreover, these women, mostly partition refugees who have gone through the experience of dispossession and forced migration, fervently cling to their space of business. Thus, their perception of the space is accompanied by the consciousness of rights, which make them perceive the site of street hawking not merely as *ByabsarJayga*, but as *Amar Jayga*, *Amar Adhikar* (my space, my right).

Thirdly, in the chapter on 'Operation Sunshine', I have tried to untangle the concept of 'Hawker' by problematising the question of whether or not the employee of the hawker can be called a hawker. This gives rise to certain unasked questions within the ambit of the informal economy: How would one categorise the labour? What would be the status of a labourer who is employed under a hawker? In a labour-intensive profession, how is one section or class of workers not taken into account? The experience of the abandoned employees in Gariahat provokes a rethinking of the universalisation of the category of "hawker". This issue of workers or labourers who are employed by the hawkers to run their stalls

has remained outside the purview of any academic discussion on informal economy. Hawkers' unions claim no jurisdiction over these labourers, and this renders their status all the more ambiguous. The ethnographic observation makes it clear that the issues faced by these workers, such as their minimum wages and social security, are never discussed in the unions. It is important to understand that no leader of the HSC would ever attempt to absorb this labour force within their own unions, as that would destabilise the status-quo between the hierarchies of labour, and may also cause rupture within the unions.

Thus, the dissertation has tried to question the perception of 'hawker' as a homogeneous category and sought to introduce other nuances — based on gender, the relationship with unions and the space of hawking, business hours etc. — that go into the making of different constituencies of hawkers as a diversified category. Unless the hawkers' unions attempt to understand such nuances that shape the everyday practices of different constituencies of hawkers, a large section of hawkers would remain outside the arena of trade union politics. Moreover, such nuances may also prove to be productive in interrogating the criteria determined by the state to be qualified as a 'Hawker'.

Through these key themes, the dissertation has sought to understand and analyse the ways in which the process of trade unionism, as a key aspect of institutionalisation, works in the sector of street hawking, and how it renders socially marginalised constituencies — of different kinds — invisible from the discourse on hawking.

Finally, it is imperative to mention that the dissertation has been an act of self-discovery for me. As I have indicated in the Introduction, the Calcutta Hawker Men's Union and the Hawker Sangram Committee have been a part of my upbringing. Apart from making the obvious reference to the notion of personal as political, through this personal reference, I would like to highlight the fact that my feminist critique of the politics of trade unionism has been made possible as I have been able to witness the inner-workings of these unions at close quarters. The proximity has enabled me to cross the boundary of received wisdom and to approach the questions and issues involved in the trade union politics from a critical vantage-point.

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Annexure

Daily Notes/Reports of Special Branch, Kolkata Police - Lord Sinha Road

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
Year 1980		
File no- 636/80- OR 16902	10.10.1980	"Sealdah Division Railway Hawkers Association"(Congress-i) Hawkers from Sealdah Railway stn. Crossing to Esplanade East in the Procession (50) at about 14. 10 hrs on 10.80 which was intercepted by the police there. They demonstration there demanding issuance of their Hawkers.
Year 1981		
File no- SW 336/81	12.03.81	"Hawkers Affairs" It is his of the - of Dalhousi a meeting of the Hawkers will be held in -of Calcutta Trafic Supply case running office on R.N. Mukharjee. On 14/3/81 all above 1400 has to Biswas this version Problem.Sadhan Das is Secretary of this Union.
SECRET	14.03.81	"Hawkers Affairs" At the Joint instance of the Hawkers Co-ordination Committee and Hawkers Moitri Samiti the Hawkers will hold a rally at Sredhanande Perk at about 13.00 hrs on 13.3.81 over their various Demand including stoppage of Hawkers eviction without alternative arrangement etc
File no- SW636/81	13.03.81	"Kolkata Tumi Kar" Nagari unnayan er name nirranryo hawker srenier upor pasobik atyachar, suchotur bhabe bekar yabukder bonchito kora,, gonotantrik chetone somponno manushder konthorodher chestha, sonoskritir name churanto aposanoskriti, bilas bhohul sitotap niyontrito market ar agunti panch tara hotel, e utkot paschatya nacher bivotsho awaz Kolkata ke bishakto kore tulechilo. Kolkata unnayan er name ba poriskarer

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
		ajuhate hawkerder upor atyachar kora cholbe na.
File no- SW636/81 - 3956-37	13.03.81	"Agitation by the Hawkers" Under the joint auspices of the Hawkers, Unemployed youth Fedaration, and the Madhya Kalikata Hawkers, including 100 Ladies. Was held between the Bramhananda Park.
SECRET	13.03.81	"Hawkers Affairs" The Hawkers of Calcutta under the fold of west Bengal Hawkers Sangram Samiti, the Constituent Units of Hawkers Moitri Samiti, Calcutta mens Hawkers Fedaration (CPI) Bowbazar Hawkers Asson. Unemployed Youth Fedaration and Madhya Kolikata Hawkers Union will hold a meeting at Sraddhannanda Park between 17.00hrs. and 19.00hrs. on 13.8.81 in protest against the order of the Govt. about the evicetion of hawkers from the pavement of Calcutta.
File no- 636/81 – OR 4496	25.03.81	"Hawkers Maitri Samiti" (congress-1) At the instance of the Hawkers Maitri Samiti (cong-1) Soumen Mitras Group), a street corner meeting (50) was held between 18.50 hours and 20.40 hours on 23.3.81 at the Shyambazar five point crossing.
File no- 636/81 ORs 9982-83A	05.07.81	"Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti" (independent), 26/1, Mahatma Gandhi Rd.: At the instance of the above samiti, a Procession (250 including 55 ladies) with the banners of the Bowbazar Hawkers, Association, B.B. Ganguly street, Calcutta Hawkers men Fedaration (AITUC), College street, Madhya kolikata Hawkers Union, 172, B.B. Ganguly Street, hawkers Maitryee Samity, 60 Dhirendhar Sarani and and Unemployed Youth Fedaration came to 6, Esplaade Row East and was intercepted by the police.
File no- 636/81 – OR 10952	06.08.81	"Hawkers Maitri samiti" (Ind) Under the joint auspices of the Hawkers Maitri Samiti (Ind) and West Bengal Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind), a meeting (200) was held between 19.00 hrs and 20.00 hrs on 4..8.81 in front of 26/2 Mahatma Gandhi Road.

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
File no- 636/81- OR 14182	15.10.81	"Calcutta Mens Hawkers Federations" (AITUC) During a drive against the Hawkers in front of 84, Bipin Behari Ganguli Street at about 11.25 hrs on 3.10.81, some Hawkers (A) and Prosecuted them u/s 66-iv- 66 vide Muchipara P.S. Petty C/nos. 6166 to 6173 dt. 3.10.81.
File no- 636/81- OR 16689	04.12. 81	"Sealdah Main Railway Hawkers Union" (C.I.T.U) Under the joint auspices of Sealdah Main Railway Hawkers Union and West Bengal Fruit Sellers and Hawkers Union (both CITU), a demonstration (1200) was staged in front of the office of the divisional Railway Manager, Eastern Railway Sealdah between 14.40 hours and 16.40 hours on 3.12.81 over their demands including issue of Hawking Licence to them, abolition of contract system.
File no- 636/81- OR 16832	08.12.81	"United Hawkers Congress" At the Instance of the organization, a meeting (200) was held between 17-15 hrs. And 19.00 hrs, on 4-12-81 at the crossing of Kalakar Street and cotton Street with CHINTMONI B/I in the chair.
File no- 346/81	14.12.81	" September, budhbar 1981 mahakaron abhiyan" Jamayet Canning Street O Brabourne Road sonyogsthal. Police ke bojhano hoyechilo notun kore footpath jano aborodh kora n ahoy.
File no - 636/81- OR 177225	28.12.81	"Calcutta Street Hawkers Union" (CITU) At the Instance of the above union, a Procession (200) of Hawkers, led by ANIL KUMAR PALIT, was token out from the crossing of Braburne Road and Canning st. At about 13.50 hrs on 23.12.81. The Processionists, after Parading.
Year 1982		
File no-	1.3.82.	"Hawkers Maitri Samiti (Ind):: At the instance of the

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
636/82- 2323-24		Hawkers Maitri Samiti" Belonging to the Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind) a procession (400 including 100 ladies) of the Hawkers led by GOPAL MITRA and BABLU DAS was taken out in front of 26/1, road at about 13.30 hrs on 25.2.82 which went in front of Muchipara P.S. the processionists staged a demonstration there protesting against the eviction of the hawkers in Sealdah area and their alleged harassment by the Muchipara Police.
File no- 636/82- OR 3370	25.3.82.	"Hawkers Maitri Samiti" (Ind) At the instance of the above organization, a procession (500 including 300 ladies) was taken out from in front of Surendranath college at 24/2 Mahatma Gandhi road at about 07.00 hrs. on 23.3.82. The processionists demanding non- eviction of hawkers and protesting against the police repression of on them dispersed at the point of origin at about 09.00 hrs.
File no- 636/82- Ors 3812-13	15.3.82	"Grame kaaj nei. Kolkarkhana pray bondho, rugno, lokho lokho bekar, sahargulite bidhyut er avab " Ei rajye bartoman bivinno samyassagululot modhye hawker sammoshya khubi jotil O byapok akar dharon koreche. bortoman hawker sammasya bakeri theke srishthi.
File no- 636/82 OR 3371	25.3.82.	"Calcutta Mens Hawkers Federation" (AITUC) At the instance of the above federation, a proceeding (200) was taken out from the crossing of B.T street and college streey at about 11.45 hrs on 23.3.82. The processionists, after parading different streets in the area and shouting slogans demanding stoppage of alleged atrocity on the hawkers by the police and their eviction, dispersed the place of origin at about 13.15 hrs.
File no- 636/82- Ors 3546-49	30.3.82	"Agitation by the Hawkers" Under the joint auspices of Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind) Hawkers Maitri Samiti,

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
		Bowbazar Hawkers association (cong-1), centres Calcutta Hawkers Men union, unemployed youth Federation and Sara Bangla Bekar samiti, about 200 Hawkers organized squatting and Demonstration between 11.30 hrs. and 15.15 hrs. on 26.3.82 at the crossing of college street and B.B. Ganguli Street protesting against the eviction of Hawkers.
File no-636\82-Ors 3685A	31.3.82	“Agitation by the Hawkers” During a Drive against the unauthorized structures of the Hawkers on Mahatma Gandhi road by the staff of the Calcutta corporation and CMDA in President Central Calcutta Hawkers Mens union (AITUC) AND Kanu Basu, Secretary Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind) resisted them at about 23.45 hrs. on 29.3.82. SAKTIMAN GHOSH S/o Late Dharendra Nath Chose of 199, B.B. Ganguli Street and Kanu Basu S/o. Senjit Basu of 17, Beniatola Lane, Cal- 9 were arrested vide Muchipara P.S. C/No. 90dt. 30.3.82 u/ss 143/353 IPC and the removal of the unauthorized structures including the offices of the Hawkers Maitri Samiti (Ind) and Paschim Banga Hawkers, Sangram Samiti (Ind) at 26/1A, Mahatma Gandhi road was completed.
File no-ORs 3685-85A	31.3.82	<i>Manonio mukhho mantrir kache khola chithi</i> (An open letter to the honourable chief minister), which was issued by Nirmalendu Bhattacharya, an advocate, on behalf of the Byabshayee Parishad, the Street Hawkers’ and Vendors’ Union and the All Bengal Nationalist Hawkers’ Association. The leaflet clearly highlighted how, due to the construction of the flyover in Sealdah by the Calcutta Municipal Development Authority (CMDA, KMDA after Calcutta became Kolkata) and in order to assist the government endeavours in building infrastructure, hawkers were once again evicted, as is evident from the phrase <i>punoray amra uchhedito holam</i> (“we were evicted once again”).
File no-	2.4.82	“Paschimbanga e choto O mazhari malik ebong rastar

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
636/82- Ors 3812-13		dhare stall malikder proti abedon ” Amra jami chara krishok, chatai sramik, chinnomuludbastu, sarbosanto byabsayi O bivinno rajyer khete khaoa manush- aaj hawker o feriwala. Amra bived chain a- oikyo chai.
File no- 636/82- Ors 3812-13	2.4.82	“Agitation by the Hawkers” In continuation of DN para 382 dated 31.3.82. At the instance of the Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Independent), about 300 (including 50 ladies) Hawkers led by GOPAL MITRA and KANU BASU Sstaged a demonstration between 15.15 hours and 16.55 on 31.3.82 on Mahatma Gandhi Road near surendra Nath College Protesting against the eviction of the Hawkers by the police and demanding their rehabilitation.
File no- 636/82- OR 3840	3.4.82	“Agitation by the Hawkers” At about 07.45 hrs, on 1.4.82, when some Hawkers were removing their articles from within 50 area from the crossing of B.B. Ganguly Street and Nirmal Chandra street as urged by the police, about 50 hawkers led by SAKTIMAN GHOSH, President of Central Calcutta Hawkers Mens Union (AITUC).
File no- 636/82- OR 8628	20.7.82	“Agitation by the Hawkers” At about 10.45 hrs.on 19.7.82, the operation staff were engaged in removing the unauthorized hawkers from the in pavement of Mahatma Gandhi Road near the Sealdah Flyover complex 17, Beniatola Lane, Calcutta-9, Secretary of the Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti.
File no- 636/82-OR 8628	13.9.82	“Paschim Banga Hawker Snagram samiti (Ind)”. The samiti, of Which Hawkers Moitri Samiti(Ind) Bowbazar Hawkers Association Hawkers Union. Unemployed Youth Fedaration and Sara Bangla Bekar

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
		Samiti are the constituent Gopal Mitra is the president has decided to hold a rally and meeting at Bramhananda Park at about 12.30 hrs.
File no- 636/82- Ors 11091-94	17.9.82	“Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti” Under the joint auspices of the Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Comprising Hawkers Moitri Samiti Bjp, Madhya kolikata Hawkers Union – INTUC-Somen Mitras group, Calcutta Hawkersmen Federation – AICP, Malda Hawkers Union BJP Janta party etc) and sara Bangla ba kar Samiti, a Procession (150) was taken out from Sraddhananda Park at about 13.40 hrs on 15.09.82 which went to RSM square. A Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti and Sujit Goswami of Sara Bangla Baker Samiti.
Year 1983		
File no- 636/83- OR 322	11.1.83	“Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti Independent” At the instance of the Samiti, a street corner meeting (115) was held in front of the Purabi Cinema, 40/1, Mahatma Gandhi road between 17.30 hours and 10.15 hours on 9.1.83, KANU BASU, Secretary of the Samiti, ANJAN NAG and GOPAL GHOSH, Secretary and the assistant Secretary respectively of the Bowbazar Hawkers Association addressed the meeting criticizing the policy of the left front Govt. regarding Hawkers. They urged the the state govt. to stop the eviction of hawkers and rehabilitate the evicted Hawkers. They also Criticised the Police authorities for the alleged torture on them.
File no- 680/83-	11.1.83	“Situation at M/S Sredhar Book Binding Hawkers”

File No.	Date	Daily Notes/ Reports
OR296		At 295/2/R. A.P.C. Road, Cal-9. :: At about 03.00 hours on 3.1.83, the proprietor closure of the concern over the disputes with the employees for removing some machinaries to some other place. Protesting against the decision, the employees (18) belonging to the Calcutta Book Binding Hawkers union (CITU) resorted to squatting in front of the concern demanding immediate reopening of the same.
File no- 636/83- ORS 2084-85	16.2.83	“Aqitation by the Hawkers” Pursuant to the call of the Paschim Banga Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind), about 250 members of the organizations as at (x) Led by Gopal Mitra, the President of the Paschim Hawkers Sangram Samiti (Ind) after assembling at the Sraddhananda Park Formed into aProcession at about 12.05 hrs on 11.2.83. the processionists paraded different streets in the area shouting slogans, demanding loans to the Hawkers from banks without any condition on personal bond instead of umemployment allowance, protesting against the alleged police atrocities on them, etc. later the processionists went in front of bank of Baroda (Surya Sen Street Branch), State Bank of India (Surya Sen Street Branch) and Bank of India (Bowbazar).
File no- 636/83- OR 2949	3.3.83	“Agitation by the Hawkers” At the instance of the central Calcutta Hawkers Mens Union (AITUC), a demonstration (200 including 8 ladies) was staged under the leadership of SAKTIMAN GHOSH, President of the organization in front of Muchipara P.S. between16.35 hrs. and 16.55 hrs.on 27.2.83 hawkers and demanding permission to hawk on the pavement of college street. Later, a five man deputation led by SAKTIMAN GHOSH waited upon the duty officer at the P.S. and submitted a memorandum to him who assured them that he would hand over the same to the officer-in-charge.