

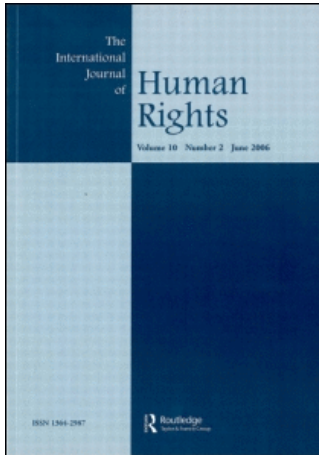
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### Space, identity, territory: Marichjhapi Massacre, 1979

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## Space, identity, territory: Marichjhapi Massacre, 1979

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This article engages with the politics of the production and representation of spatial identity in the light of one of the most violent massacres in the history of refugee rehabilitation in India, post 1947 Partition – the Marichjhapi massacre of 1979. The Marichjhapi massacre has escaped public scrutiny for almost two decades. It came to public attention as recent as the late 1990s. This paper will go beyond recollecting ghastly incidents at Marichjhapi (one of the many islands of *Sundarbans*) and highlight the relationship between politics, spatial injustice and the vulnerability of the peripheral locations within states.

The first part of the article looks at the ways in which Forest Laws were misused against the refugees. The way international debates on forest preservation appropriated the reality of the massacre of the lives of refugees in Marichjhapi is what this part discusses. The second part of the paper looks at the discourse of social injustice as an outcome of the production and representation of ‘space’ in the context of the events at Marichjhapi. Drawing from Lefebvre’s conceptions of organisation of space and its influence on social relations, I have argued that both justice and injustice become visible in the specificities of places. Thus the understanding of the interaction between space and societies is essential to the understanding of spatial injustice. Often, the politics of caste identities are at the heart of such spatial injustice as the Marichjhapi massacre testifies to. I have concluded my article with a discussion of spatial injustice from the perspective of borderlands or places located on territorial margins of the state. The materiality of a state’s presence depends on the ways its powers are defined at the borders. Thus the location of a space on the borders and its consequent representation makes it far more vulnerable to the violence of state power than it otherwise would have been. The massacre at Marichjhapi was an outcome of a distortion in the representation and definition of that power.

My main arguments are: first, instances like Marichjhapi challenge and redefine dominant discourses on state–subject relationships, providing, in the process, fresh perspectives to the understanding of such binaries as insiders/outside, inclusion/exclusion, us/them etc. Second, creation of a spatial identity constitutes the convergence of multiple, often conflicting, identities as social identities, ethnic identities and institutional identities, mostly with a fatal outcome. Third, geographical location of spaces has a lot to do with the formation of spatial identities and is decisive in shaping spatial justice. Finally, instances like Marichjhapi are subaltern narratives that are neither acknowledged by elite nationalist historiographies nor even by the existing subaltern schools. They need to be understood to be able to understand the process of nation-building.

**Keywords:** human rights; forest laws; refugees; space; identity; caste; territory; borderlands; spatial justice; subaltern narrative

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## Introduction

History has always been selective, and often parochially so, in its choice of narratives. Most of the narratives are, thus, conspicuous by their absence. These absences are the essential missing links between the fragments of memories that are read as history. The absences are a result of a discrimination that has existed in the process of deciding the 'historicity' of events. In most cases, the nominating authority is none other than an ideology for which the life of the state is all there is to history. This ideology, aptly referred to as *statism* by Ranajit Guha,<sup>1</sup> is what authorises the dominant values of the state to determine the criteria of the historic. This statism prevents our interaction with our past, commanding the nomination of 'history' and leaving us with no freedom of choice to decide our relation with our past. This choice implies our efforts at listening to and conversing with the myriad voices in civil society. These 'small voices' are those narratives, which are 'drowned in the noise of statist commands'.<sup>2</sup> These narratives, by their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed opposed to its abstract and oversimplifying modes.<sup>3</sup> The dominant Indian nationalist historiography projects the Indian elite as 'promoters of the cause of the people' rather than as oppressors and exploiters. In the process, the scramble for power and privilege, which characterise the elite, are concealed by their constructed image of altruism and self-abnegation. This nationalist historiography fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, i.e. independently of the elite. Indian history writing has largely failed to assess the mass articulation of nationalism, except for looking at them from a negative angle of being a 'law and order problem'.<sup>4</sup> They are never seen as part of the 'real' political process but as diversions of the wheels of state apparatus. Yet, they are the ones which redefine, reconstruct and retell history. Most often, they are located at the most unassuming of places, among the most oppressed of people and in the simplest of activities. Interestingly, this subaltern<sup>5</sup> domain has always existed as an autonomous domain in Indian politics and history, irrespective of the elite politics. The little-known island of Marichjhapi in the Sundarban mangrove forest area of India was one such place.

This article discusses issues of identity, territory and sovereignty in the context of one of the worst massacres in the history of refugee resettlement in West Bengal, post-independence. The aim of the article is to analyse the events that unfolded in Marichjhapi through the lenses of space representation, state–subject interaction, identity politics and borderland studies. A study of the Marichjhapi massacre is important because it is an event where all the above discourses converge in a complex matrix. Each of the above discourses can boast of their own schools of scholarship. However, there are also instances where they converge. Such instances are rarely discussed and stand as proof of the fact that each one these discourses are intertwined with the other and needs to be dealt with through an interdisciplinary approach. The significance of the Marichjhapi massacre lies in the creation of such a platform.

The article unfolds in three main sections. Section A briefly narrates the causes leading to the Marichjhapi massacre, the events that followed and their consequences.

Section B looks at the ways in which the state misused laws to appropriate local issues within larger global affairs. The actual incident which took place in Marichjhapi was lost in the worldwide campaign for wildlife and forest preservation and has, since, been lost from public memory for more than two decades. In the present context of rampant unlawful state repressions throughout the world, a study of the Marichjhapi massacre is of utmost significance.

Section C deals with the three lenses which I have chosen to understand the Marichjhapi massacre, namely *space*, *identity* and *territory*. Each of these lenses has been dealt with in

sub-sections for an in-depth understanding of their significance in understanding the narrative.

The sub-section on *space* discusses the consequences of a subversion of the implicit hierarchy of spatial representation by the state and its subjects. I have tried to understand the Marichjhapi massacre in the context of subversion, or rather collision of spatial representation. Conflicting ideas of the state of Bengal and the refugees regarding the island of Marichjhapi, I argue, led to the massacre. The study of the Marichjhapi massacre is significant because it stresses on the strength of such subtle yet decisive undercurrents, which conflicting spatial representations give rise to and which are often lost in the dominant discourses on state–subject interactions. It is also an important study for a better understanding of the concept of *spatial justice*, as it stresses the need to look at justice as a process rather than merely as an effective distribution of resources.

The sub-section on *identity* looks at the consequences of the convergence of social, cultural and political identities in certain spaces in creating a complex matrix of the state–subject relationship. For the refugees at Marichjhapi, the convergence of their caste identity of being a lowly held community; their ethnic identities of being Bengali-Hindus; their political identity of being refugees proved fatal.

The sub-section on *territory* discusses the implications of borderlands, as strategic territories, in problematising the state–subject matrix. Borders being the manifestations of the materiality of state power are often the spaces of intense state–subject conflict. Effective manifestation of state sovereignty is decided by the way its borders are defined. Thus, the importance of looking at sovereignty and citizenship discourses in the context of borders is a necessary step towards a better understanding of the process of nation-building. The significance of the Marichjhapi massacre was heightened due to its location on the Bengal–Bangladesh border. Control of the state of Bengal over the island of Marichjhapi was necessitated by its very location of the island on the border. The relationship between spatial representation, identity politics and spatial justice reached its climax in the specificity of the very location of the island of Marichjhapi.

The conclusion summarises the paper and underscores my emphasis that the Marichjhapi incident is a subaltern narrative and needs to be seen as one of the many missing links between the narratives of the dominant Indian historiographies.

The main focus of the paper is on the *interface* between state, territory and subjects, rather than on conceptual discussions of the same. Discussions on the definitions and features of concepts like state, sovereignty, space and subjects are built into the narrative of the article and have, thus, not been dealt separately.

## Section A

### *The event*

After the Partition of India in 1947, the first wave of refugees to have migrated to West Bengal from erstwhile East Pakistan was constituted mainly of the urban middle class and professionals, and rural middle class, along with a much smaller number of agriculturalists and artisans, who squatted on private and public lands in Calcutta and other areas. With the help of their friends, relatives, caste members and other influential social networks, they found a foothold in West Bengal, particularly in Calcutta.<sup>6</sup>

The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971<sup>7</sup> followed by the military coup of 1975 saw a fresh wave of refugee influx into West Bengal.<sup>8</sup> These refugees were essentially agriculturalists, who happened to be one of the many *untouchable*<sup>9</sup> castes, called ‘Namasudras’<sup>10</sup>. In and around 1975, when these untouchable Namasudras were forced to move to West Bengal



from Bangladesh, the Congress government of West Bengal was unwilling to accommodate them within the state. Apart from being small in number, these refugees lacked family and caste connections of the previous middle-class refugees, as a result of which they had to depend solely on the government for their survival. On claims of unavailability of vacant lands in West Bengal, the government adopted the policy of dispersing the untouchable refugees to other states with the intention of further dismembering the Namasudra movement. The scattering of these Namasudra refugees meant that the dominance of the traditional *tricast*<sup>11</sup> Bengali elite in Bengal politics could be enhanced.<sup>12</sup> Thus, these Namasudra refugees were forced to settle in semi-arid, rocky inhospitable lands, called Dandakaranya, in the neighbouring states of West Bengal,<sup>13</sup> with little support from the state. Their agricultural skills were of little use in the forest areas of Dandakaranya. A hostile land coupled with quarrels with the local tribal population made life and livelihood difficult for the refugees.<sup>14</sup> Besides, they were culturally, physically and emotionally removed from the environment that they had left behind in Bangladesh.

When, after independence in 1947, the Congress party formed the government in independent India, as well as the provincial government in West Bengal, the party that formed the opposition to the government in West Bengal was formed by an alliance of left parties, who jointly called themselves the Left Front. During the first phase of refugee influx from East Pakistan into West Bengal in 1947–1948, the Left Front, as the party in opposition, acted as the mouthpiece for the refugees in their fight for squatter colonies in West Bengal against the Congress government, thus creating a strong electoral base among the refugees in the post-Partition days of 1947.<sup>15</sup> The second wave of refugees in 1975 furthered the possibility of an increase in the Left Front's electoral base. The Left Front leaders took up the case of the refugees and demanded the Congress government settle them within their 'native Bengal'<sup>16</sup> rather than scatter them across India on the lands of other people, where the refugees were not even entitled to the affirmative action programmes since their castes were not recognised in the states in which they were made to settle. The leftist opposition played on these grievances to obtain a political base among these refugees of the untouchable caste.<sup>17</sup> Left leaders harped on about the utopia of a 'return to homeland' that the refugees cherished and lured them to settle in West Bengal,<sup>18</sup> especially in one of the islands in Sundarbans,<sup>19</sup> called Marichjhapi. The Left-backed United Central Refugee Council (UCRC)<sup>20</sup> together with Udbastu Unnayanshil Samity (UUS)<sup>21</sup> convinced the refugees of a prosperous life and access to unlimited resource on their resettlement on the island. The refugees sold the last of their belongings to make arrangements for their journey back to their 'own' land.

By the time the refugees embarked upon their journey to Marichjhapi in around 1977, Bengal had seen one of the most decisive political changes, post-Partition – the Left Front's victory in West Bengal in 1977. Having come to power in West Bengal, the attitude of the Left Front leaders towards the refugees took a drastic turn. Refugee resettlement policies began to be reviewed. As the Left Front now represented the government, and hence the state, the refugees now became a liability for them and the resettlement issue became a political concern. The enormity of the responsibility of resettling refugees dawned on the Left Front government. This was a burden that the government was not ready to shoulder.

The government, thus, reversed its policy of refugee resettlement within Bengal and adopted the policy of preventing the refugees from reaching Marichjhapi and resettling there. To that end, government forces attempted to stop the refugees on their way to the island. As the refugees were not residents of their state (West Bengal),<sup>22</sup> though Indian citizens,<sup>23</sup> the Left Front government in West Bengal was arguably less obligated to the refugees than to their already-existing voters, who had prior demand on the state's

limited resources.<sup>24</sup> The same Left Front that had backed the refugees' cause for return to West Bengal from Dandakaranya now considered the refugees as 'intrusions' on state resources. The government made use of police forces at the station and posts that the refugees crossed on their way to the island, in order to stop the refugees from reaching Marichjhapi.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the refugees, nevertheless, managed to escape the police resistance at the various stations and posts, and reached Marichjhapi. This was in 1978. By this time, the resistance of the Left Front against refugee resettlement in West Bengal was in full swing. The leaders of the Left Front, who were in the forefront in calling the refugees back to West Bengal from Dandakaranya, were members of smaller allies of the Left Front, namely the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and hence, lacked a strong presence as far as framing refugee resettlement policies were concerned. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth CPI(M)), as the dominant ally was at the helm of affairs. It was the CPI(M)'s decision to reverse refugee resettlement policies in West Bengal and, accordingly, not let any more refugees into the state. Thus, the smaller allies of the Left Front, despite their best efforts, could not do much for the refugees. The refugees, thus, began resettling on the island all by themselves with an efficacy that is hard to come by in the history of refugee resettlement. Over the following year, by their own efforts they established a viable fishing industry, salt pans, a health centre and schools — all without a trace of government support<sup>26</sup> and in spite of the uninhabitable environment of the island. The island, inundated with saline water, was unfit for large-scale agriculture. That the refugees, at times, had to survive on begging has been testified by the villagers of the neighbouring islands.<sup>27</sup>

In order to dislodge the refugees from Marichjhapi, an economic blockade was started in and around the island in January 1979, together with the promulgation of Forest Preservation Act, in order to isolate the refugees economically, cutting off their access to food, water and other basic requirements. The ones who swam to the nearby island to get help were massacred by police forces.<sup>28</sup> When the economic blockade failed to budge the refugees, a violent eviction policy was adopted, through blatant use of arms between 14 May and 16 May 1979,<sup>29</sup> resulting in the massacre of the lives of several refugees. Every trace of the settlement built by the refugees was razed to the ground. People were killed and their bodies thrown away into the rivers. This made the exact count of the number of deaths impossible, since there was no human settlement downstream to observe the bodies.<sup>30</sup> 'Hired' gangs were made to assist the police.<sup>31</sup> Of the approximately 14,000 families who had started on this fateful journey from Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi in West Bengal, about 10,000 returned back to their previous settlement at Dandakaranya in a state of complete destitution. Many others found themselves in shanties and railway tracks in and around Calcutta and other parts of West Bengal.<sup>32</sup> The rest of the 4,000 families were massacred in their fight against the state. There has been complete denial by the state of any firing having taken place at all.

Official records fail to throw light on the magnitude of the massacre. However, the way the state machinery came down heavily upon the refugees cannot be termed anything less than a massacre, the economic blockade itself having caused a huge amount of harm to the refugees' lives and livelihoods. Press coverage or any other intervention on the part of the citizens was successfully prevented<sup>33</sup> in spite of Marichjhapi being at a distance of a mere 75 kilometres from Calcutta, the headquarters of West Bengal. The CPI(M) congratulated its participant members on their successful operation at Marichjhapi and made their refugee policy reversal explicit stating that 'there was no possibility of giving shelter to these large number of refugees under any circumstances in the

State.’<sup>34</sup> The whole episode was pushed to the backseat where it remained unheard and unknown for more than two decades.

## Section B

### *Misuse of Forest Laws*

The official explanation cited by the government in defence of this massacre and forced eviction of the refugees from Marichjhapi was the violation of Forest Laws by the refugees. In order to make the refugee resettlement at Marichjhapi look like an illegal intrusion, the Bengal government made use of the then ongoing Tiger Project campaign and declared Marichjhapi as a part of the Reserve Forest area. The Chief Minister declared that the occupation of Marichjhapi was illegal encroachment on Reserve Forest Land and on the World Wildlife Fund-sponsored Tiger Project. He declared that further attempts by the refugees to settle on the island would force the government to take ‘strong action.’<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, on 27 January 1979, the government prohibited any movement into and out of Marichjhapi under the Forest Preservation Act and promulgated Section 144 of the Criminal Penal Code, making it illegal for five or more persons to come together at any given time.<sup>36</sup> An economic blockade was put into place in order to isolate and weaken the refugees at Marichjhapi. Access to food, water and other basic amenities were blocked.<sup>37</sup> The state government claimed that the refugees were ‘in unauthorised occupation of Marichjhapi which is part of the Sundarbans Government Reserve Forest violating thereby the Forest Act.’<sup>38</sup>

No national party was ready to take up the cause of the refugees, since the untouchables hardly implied a powerful ally in national politics. Though the Scheduled Tribes and Castes Commission of the government of India were obligated to support the refugees’ cause, they did not intervene in the matter publicly.<sup>39</sup> The restrictions imposed on the press by the government of West Bengal made it difficult for the press to publish whatever little news they could gather about the massacre.<sup>40</sup> The economic blockade resulted in a large number of victims of starvation and disease on the island between January and May 1979, even before the start of the direct police action in May 1979.<sup>41</sup>

Ironically, neither the WWF nor any of the other environmental non-governmental organisations made any declaration in support of the government’s claim of Marichjhapi being a part of the Reserve Forest areas, nor was there any official lobbying on the part of any such non-state organisation for the government to undertake such eviction policies.<sup>42</sup> Though the massacre did come to be known, if not very widely, the scale of the evicted population, estimated at 600,000, was found to be unrealistic for the NGOs to provide relief.<sup>43</sup> With no aid coming from the central government as well, the Left Front government in West Bengal found the forceful eviction of the refugees a far more effective policy than the cumbersome process of finding vacant lands in other parts of the state and rehabilitating them.

The government made use of the ongoing Tiger Project, which had international support and WWF backing. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Project Tiger steering committee, was widely quoted in support of the urgency of the project. Organisations wanting to highlight the human cost of such projects were wrongly interpreted as being insensitive to ecological concerns. WWF literature that blamed the poor for being the ‘most direct threat to wildlife and wildlands’<sup>44</sup> were widely quoted as well. True, there were reports of the refugees cutting trees and selling them to middlemen from surrounding islands. Some of the refugees themselves have been quoted as having had done the same. The profiteers of this timber business, though, were the leaders who had brought the refugees to the

island. However, these acts, instead of being seen as desperate attempts by the refugees to survive, were seen as intended encroachment. Organisational imperatives necessitated downplaying and ignoring the human cost paid by poor people for environmental preservation. Loss of life was accepted as a necessary price to pay for conservation. The refugees tried to draw attention to their own efforts at resettlement without harming the natural resource by citing examples of the 12 settlements that they had, in the meantime, built for themselves, including laid-out roads, drainage channels to prevent waterlogging, schools, dispensaries, smithies, potteries, cigarette workshops, bakeries, several fisheries, boat-building yards, numerous boats, market places and a dike system to hold back the tide.<sup>45</sup>

Eviction of people, ready to risk death, even if unarmed, has always been a difficult task for the state. Such strength and determination, which would in many instances be considered heroic, was now seen as 'anti-state, subversive, and environmentally unfriendly.'<sup>46</sup> In spite of not being directly associated with the eviction, ecotourism-promoting bodies acted as incentives for such governmental policies. The prospect of developing Marichjhapi as a profitable tourist destination far exceeded the need for refugee resettlement. The efforts of the government as an environmentally sensitive one would reap future profits as long as the massacre could effectively be prevented from being exposed.<sup>47</sup> The refugees, being falsely portrayed as environmentally unfriendly, failed to garner either aid or support for their cause.

The conflict between environmental preservation and people's rights has been, for a long time, in the heart of the trade-offs between human rights and ecological preservation. The laws that secure the Indian state's ownership and control over its forests have always been fraught with an uneasy truce with people's involvement in forest resources. During the latter part of the twentieth century, people's participation in forest conservation was being encouraged at one level while an opposing force was also at play. In the draft bills of the forest laws from around the late 1970s, 'technologies of control' were being strengthened rather than the scope for 'people's participation.'<sup>48</sup> The misuse of law in Marichjhapi was another case of this strengthening of control. First, the refugees were lured by the government to leave Dandakaranya and come and settle on the island. Then on their arrival, the government announced that the Tiger Project in Sundarban was under threat from the refugee resettlement on the island. Laws, put to misuse, not only massacred thousands of refugees, but also succeeded in covering up the incident behind the larger concerns of preservation of natural resources.

Human rights abuses may be tangential to academic interests,<sup>49</sup> but they are also important in making academic analysis meaningful. A number of academics described the Left Front government as providing "good governance."<sup>50</sup> Such applause for governance can only be possible as long as events like Marichjhapi do not come to the forefront. Debates on such massacres are especially important in places like India where justice institutions are often languid, if not non-functional. Even after the Marichjhapi incidents, the government officials of West Bengal, including the Chief Minister, made frequent trips to other parts of the world, without being questioned about the Marichjhapi massacre. Nor did the incident find any mention in any academic publications till about 1990s, more than a decade and a half after the incident. All that remained in the name of 'good governance' was a farce. All that was ever debated in the academic circuit was a half-baked misleading representation of the incident.

This, though, had always been the case, as had been rightly put by the All Bengal Namasudra Association to Simon Commission in 1929, much before the Marichjhapi massacre:

It has been seen in more than one case that British members of the Indian Civil Service, on account of their living in this country for a long time, and by coming into contact with only a section of the people, are mentally captured by the ideas of those few people who are in the position of social aristocrats.<sup>51</sup>

This statement holds true of not just the case of the Namasudras in Bengal but of the state of subaltern representations in India, especially in the late colonial and post-colonial era, which, ironically, saw a hue and cry about representation of the subalterns in Indian historiography.

## Section C

### i. Space

The misuse of Forest Laws in Marichjhapi was the more empirically identifiable of the critique of the massacre. There have been, in recent times, few academic discussions and debates on this particular state response. I would argue that there were more subtle undercurrents to the whole narrative. This undercurrent played itself out in the various ways in which the refugees in Marichjhapi questioned the power structures of the state. Taking a cue from Henri Lefebvre's discourse on the production and representation of space, I would look at the state's role as the 'decider and provider' and the refugee's role in Marichjhapi as a subversion of the same.

Social space, according to Lefebvre, is a social product and it serves as a tool of thought and action, besides being a means of production, control and hence domination and power.<sup>52</sup> The social and political forces that engender this space, on failing to master it completely, try and run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it. We see the reflection of such enslavement in the Marichjhapi massacre.

The island of Marichjhapi was caught at the crossroads of representational clash between the state and its subjects, between 'past remembrances' and 'future visions.'<sup>53</sup> The island of Marichjhapi evoked a sense of remembrance for the refugees by virtue of its proximity to Bangladesh<sup>54</sup> – a land that the refugees had left behind. It also created a vision of a prosperous future for the refugees as they imagined themselves recreating a thriving life on that island by making use of their agricultural and artisan skills.

The incident stands testimony to the way representations of space affect power relations. Where there is politics and space, there is domination and marginalisation.<sup>55</sup> The ontological triad of space, time and society, as suggested by Soja,<sup>56</sup> sets the stage for the enactment of various social responses. The response of the state towards the resettlement efforts of the refugees was a result of the clash of representation between, what Lefebvre terms 'spatial practice', 'representation of space' and 'representational space'. The island of Marichjhapi as the focal space of contention is a study in the interrelatedness of these three concepts.

*Spatial practice*, which Lefebvre defines as 'perceived' space, is the space that is readily recognised and that is 'seen' or 'sensed' as an acknowledged 'presence'. Perceived space has been materialised and naturalised, making it an empirical space to be measured and described by objectivist-materialists.<sup>57</sup> Soja,<sup>58</sup> using the term *firstspace* for this perceived space, has interpreted it as a nostalgic and passive presence.

Marichjhapi as a perceived space or firstspace was interpreted differently by the state and the refugees. For the state, the acknowledgement of the island as a part of the border between West Bengal and Bangladesh was the readily recognisable perception. The state's attitude towards the island was like any state's attitude towards its borderlands.



For the refugees, the island symbolised a possibility of their return to proximity of their homeland, even if not their real homes. Settling on the island would take them nearer to the home that they had been made to leave behind in Bangladesh. This was a sense of belonging that their stay in Dandakaranya would never have been able to offer.

*Representation of space*, as defined by Lefebvre,<sup>59</sup> is 'conceived' space symbolising the hegemonic force of spatiality. It is the imagined representation of space, which in Soja's scheme of things is the *secondspace*. Secondspace, according to Soja, is more inclined towards subjective idealism unlike firstspace. The expositions of this idealism of the secondspace are the tools of control used by institution and states in their governance through omnipresent and material surveillance. For the state, the translation of the island of Marichjhapi into a secondspace was symbolised by its existence as a borderland territory. The island was, thus, conceived as a space for wielding an enhanced spatial control. The materiality of a state's presence depends on the ways its powers are defined at the borders. Thus, the sole aim of the state, in terms of the island, was to ensure the strongest possible manifestation of its power to control. The refugees conceived Marichjhapi as a scope to rebuild their lives afresh. In their quest to find themselves a new homeland, Marichjhapi offered them the space to recreate what they have lost.

*Representational space*, defined by Lefebvre<sup>60</sup> as lived reality, is the space of resistance. Its existence is dependent on and obscured by conceived space.<sup>61</sup> This 'lived' space is the *thirdspace* in Soja's schema and is produced in direct contradistinction to the homogenising influence of conceived space. The events at Marichjhapi were the manifestation of the creation of this thirdspace. The lived reality for the refugees at Marichjhapi was their efforts at resettling themselves. The efficacy with which they created the necessary infrastructure without any state aid and the determination with which they tried to recreate their homeland on the island was symbolic of a struggle against the state's attempt at appropriating the space (the island) within its own homogenising power structure. Soja aptly describes the lived space as the hot 'margins' of struggle, the 'underground' of social life that resists the essentialising visions of cool, rationalised conceived space.<sup>62</sup> The resettlement efforts of the refugees on the island were their lived reality. For the state, maintaining a strong power apparatus on the island was its reality. The state, having perceived the island as a part of its border with the neighbouring state of Bangladesh, conceived the island as a manifestation of its omnipresent power apparatus in the same way as it visualised its own presence in any other border area. The culmination of such perceptions and conceptions of the island by the state was the state's attempt at appropriating the island within its bounded territorial sovereignty. The refugees' attempts at resettling themselves had a degrading effect on this vision of the state of West Bengal. Thus, the island was a resistant thirdspace for the state as well, for its vision of an unhindered appropriation could only be possible if the refugees could be prevented from thriving on the island. The lived reality for the state was its resistance to the resettlement of the refugees on Marichjhapi.

The logical necessity of inter-connectedness between these three notions of *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived* spaces, for the smooth movement of an individual or even the state structure from one to the other is most often the toughest to attain. Social spaces interpenetrate and superimpose themselves upon one another, rendering such smooth moves difficult. More often than not, conflicting configurations of spatial powers by the actors upset the narrative. The massacre at Marichjhapi was an outcome of such conflictual configuration of space.

The 'production of space' plays itself through domination and appropriation. The *producers*, in an act of domination of the space, lay down the blueprint for the *users* to passively experience whatever has been imposed upon them. The ways of appropriation of the space by the users ought to be of a passive nature. A reversal in this *active*



*producer-passive user* hierarchy in the context of production and representation of space is what might be referred to as a *distortion*.

The role that the refugees, as supposed ‘users’, played in Marichjhapi questioned their passive roles as receivers, in the process challenging the whole discourse of the production of such spaces of power. The irony lies in the indispensability of the first and the second spaces in the creation of the thirdspace. Thirdspaces or lived spaces cannot exist without these two other moments of social spaces. The complex interaction between the ‘perceived’ firstspace and the ‘conceived’ secondspace is manifested through the creation of a ‘resistant’ thirdspace. This, in a way, makes the distortion an obvious and integral part of the discourse of spaces. The importance of the thirdspace lies also in the emergence of the subaltern identities. It is this thirdspace or the lived reality, rather than the perceived or the conceived spaces, which unearths the voices of the subalterns and establishes their existence. The conjunctures of spaces for the state and the refugees happen in these thirdspaces, often with fatal outcomes. Such ‘counterspaces’<sup>63</sup> are witness to the manifestation of power through the production, denigration, exclusion and reproduction of the marginalised and identified ‘other’ or the ‘counterpublics’.<sup>64</sup> The trialectic relationship between the three moments of social space casts a new spatial dimension to *identity* and *difference*. This takes us to the role of class and caste identities, which had an undeniable role in the massacre.

## ii. Identity

### a) Caste

Class struggles, in all its forms, are vital in keeping the discourses on production of spaces alive. It is these class struggles that prevent the state from papering over all existing differences among the diverse repository of narratives of space representations, reducing all of them to a uniform abstraction. In India, class struggles include *caste struggles* as well. The presence of castes and sub-castes within the larger frames of class categorisations has always been an integral part of the Indian social structure. The show of resistance by the Namasudras, one of the many untouchable castes in India, in Marichjhapi highlights one of the strongest, yet unpronounced reasons behind the massacre.

Though of a similar ethnic background (Bengalis), the refugees who came to Marichjhapi were necessarily the ones belonging to the most lowly held castes of the Bengali society, the *Namasudras*. Their agrarian base coupled with their caste identities made their efforts of resettlement on the island a matter of serious discomfort for the state. Not only were they contesting the state’s role as the sole decider and provider, they were doing it as a community belonging to the lowest rung of the social ladder. Their resettlement efforts were not simply reversing the state–subject equation; it was challenging the elite–minority equation as well. For the Indian state, *cultural ‘outcastes’* have always meant a bigger threat than cultural ‘outsiders’. The Bengal government was no different. If ‘the essence of sovereignty remains in the power to exclude’,<sup>65</sup> the Marichjhapi massacre surely was sovereignty at its best. The massacre was a re-emphasis of the hard reality that the identities of the subjects are never meant to overshadow the identities allocated to them by the state. It was also a reiteration of the fact that Indian elite historiography never accommodated the subaltern narratives within its agenda of history writing.

### b) Ethno-religious cultural complex

Other strands of identity politics also seemed to have their roles behind the massacre. When the state announced an economic blockade on the island, there were a few radical groups,

based in mainland West Bengal, who came forward in support of the refugees. Since the refugees were well aware of their inherent disadvantage as untouchables, they emphasised the common ethnic origins and refugee experience they shared with many of the elite families, who had migrated before them from Bangladesh immediately after Partition in 1947.<sup>66</sup> However, these radical groups took advantage of this ethnic commonality in pursuing their own political interest, though this went against the cause of the refugees. Some of the leaders of these groups, in fact, led the refugees during their struggle against police atrocities during the blockade in January 1979 and more so during the eviction action in May 1979. This would have meant a major support for the refugees, if not for the parochial political motive of these groups. These radical groups, who called themselves 'Amra Bangali' (we are Bengalis) and Nikhil Banga Nagarik Sangha (Bengal Citizen's Group), were actually fighting the refugees' cause with an aim of creating a 'Bangalistan' or 'Bangabhumi' – land for the Bengalis. Their goal was the creation of a Bengali territory constituting parts of West Bengal and larger parts of Bangladesh at the site of the border between the two states. This land, according to these groups, would be strictly for the ethnic Hindu-Bengalis (as opposed to the Muslim-Bengalis of Bangladesh). These groups, according to intelligence reports, were opposed to the idea of certain Hindu-dominated parts of undivided Bengal being made part of Bangladesh as a result of the Partition. Their creation of a Hindu-Bengali territory would be their answer to a hasty partition of Bengal in 1947.<sup>67</sup> Volunteers from these organisations helped the refugees by distributing copies of a route map from Calcutta to Marichjhapi, and a rough sketch of the island, even before the exodus started in full swing around 1978. Their demand for a 'Hindu homeland' including parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh was corroborated by several demonstrations, which they staged in front of the office of the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata.<sup>68</sup> These groups also formed their own armed wings called 'Bangasena' (Bengal Army), volunteers of which were active members of the resistance movement formed by the refugees. Their active involvement in the incident has been corroborated later by one of their own volunteers, presently living in the outskirts of Calcutta, to a newspaper.<sup>69</sup> The involvement of such radical groups with demands of Hindu-Bengali homeland further added to the complication of the identity politics of which the refugees were already victims. The refugees were already being made to pay the price for belonging to the untouchable caste of Namasudras, in spite of the fact that the refugees were ethnically similar to the existing people of West Bengal. The refugees had no reason to be excluded from settling in West Bengal since by religion they were Hindus, as well.<sup>70</sup> Simply because they belonged to a low caste, the refugees became victims of state atrocities. The involvement of the radical ethnic groups made the situation all the more complicated. Simply said, while the refugees were trying to make use of their ethnic and religious similarity with the citizens of Bengal in claiming their rightful place on the island, these radical groups ruined this possibility by making a political agenda of this ethno-religious issue. The refugees were torn between the politics of identities, which were thrust upon them and in which they hardly had a choice.

### c) *Spatial justice*

The organisation of space is a crucial dimension of human societies and reflects social facts and influences social relations. Consequently, both justice and injustice become visible in space. Therefore, the analysis of the interactions between space and society is necessary in the understanding of social justice and injustices. Social justice is tied to the production and representation of space in complex ways. The relations between the agents involved in the construction and use of a space affect and decide the nature of the justice meted out.

Justice is not simply about an effective distribution and allocation of material things as resources, income and wealth. This implies that the essence of justice does not essentially lie in the 'distributive paradigm'<sup>71</sup> of material things. Justice concerns non-material ideas too, such as power, self-respect and opportunity. If these ideas are incorporated into the ambit of a distributive paradigm of justice, they cease to be social processes, lose their essence and tend to be considered as static material objects. If justice is understood only as an outcome of distribution of resources, then concepts of self-respect, power and opportunity fail to fit into the paradigm of justice. These concepts are the outcome of social processes and depend on various social, cultural, political and economic relationships, between state and its subjects as also between two or more subjects.

The ways certain resources are represented decide justice as well. Mere *distribution or allocation of resources* (the island, in case of the Marichjhapi incident) is an ineffective understanding of the process of justice. The gap in the distributive paradigm in defining justice was testified by the Marichjhapi massacre. The *representation of the allocated resources*<sup>72</sup> finally decided the treatment of the refugees by the state. The justice, or the lack of it, in the case of the Marichjhapi refugees, cannot be explained simply in terms of a distributive paradigm (distribution of land by the state to its subjects). *Representation* (and not just allocation) of the land by the subjects (refugees, in case of Marichjhapi) finally decided the treatment they were made to suffer. Justice would have to, thus, be seen in the context of social relations and as results of social processes.<sup>73</sup>

It is also true, that no universal theory of justice addresses the uniqueness that specific circumstances give rise to. Reflection and analysis of the specificity of certain events is necessary to understand what justice is, how it works and most importantly, why it fails. The events at Marichjhapi provide a platform for such an understanding. The complex web of interactions between the state, the people and the territory, which unfolded in Marichjhapi, is a study in the production of spatial (in)justice.

Sense of justice arises not from looking but from listening.<sup>74</sup> Listening to the narratives of the subalterns, and not merely looking at the state-projected images, is necessary in order to bring injustices out into the public sphere. The absence of the event from public debates and the lack of awareness among the people regarding the incident is proof of the fallibility of a blatant vision. The true essence of the events, I would argue, lies not *on the ground*. It is only by an in-depth analysis of the event that the subalternity of the narrative can be appreciated. Interactions with witnesses and an exhaustive understanding of the available records would yield a better fathoming of the event. The lack of any attempt to 'listen' to the victims and witnesses by the scholars, researchers, academicians or social scientists is proof of our indolence in trying to understand the subaltern narratives. Listening to the subalterns *in their own version* of things and not as interpretations of state officials or researchers, I emphasise, is the need of the hour.

#### d) *Overlapping binaries*

The Marichjhapi incident is a study in overlapping binaries as insiders/outside, inclusion/exclusion, eligible/ineligible, legal/illegal and active/passive. However, simply acknowledging the presence of binaries does not constitute an argument until one explains what is problematic about the instances in question.<sup>75</sup> The Marichjhapi massacre problematises and complicates most of the existing discourses on refugee admission policies and cultural inclusion/exclusion strategies, by questioning the very basis of the creation of such binaries. In studying the Marichjhapi massacre, we see the binaries overlapping, colliding and getting intertwined with one another to form a unique narrative. The complex matrix of

ethno-religious, political and cultural identities of the refugees questioned the existing discourses on state exclusionism based on cultural eligibility. It also corroborates the fact that positive law allows such generalised binaries to be changed at will and to be redefined through political processes. There is no finality to the binaries. In fact, it is through such instances that the distinctions among the binaries become more fuzzy. However, a fuzzy distinction is not necessarily fatal,<sup>76</sup> but in fact is the foundations for new discourses.

### iii. Territory

The materiality of a state's presence depends on the ways its powers are defined at the borders. The location of a space on the borders and its consequent representation makes it far more vulnerable to the violence of state power than it otherwise would have been. Study of borders has traditionally been limited to the study of the *consequences* of border-making, instead of looking at the *process* of border-making as a discourse in itself. Borderlines, constituting the border itself and the zone on either side of the line are a social, cultural, economic and political process. The discourses on identities, spaces and nation-building, which are at work at any other location within the state, are, in fact, at their most intense forms at the borders. Though certain generalisations on border studies have been possible, yet each border has some unique features. These features often contest and/or redefine such generalisations. The West Bengal–Bangladesh border is one such exception.

The border between West Bengal and Bangladesh has always been witness to the overlapping of socio-cultural identities. The premise for the creation of the borders could, in the first place, never accommodate the dynamics of identities (ethnically similar population on either side of the border), which underscored the process. With the passage of time, these identities manifested themselves in far more complex ways than the states were ready for. The Liberation War of 1971 in East Pakistan resulting in the creation of Bangladesh redefined the bordering process in subtle yet intense ways. Increasingly, religion as the basis for separation between the two states lost ground, with a mix of religious communities inhabiting on either side of the border. Moreover, the fact that ethnicity and language ('Bengali' or 'Bangla') were the main basis for the formation of Bangladesh further complicated the process of reinforcing the border. With people of identical ethnic background, identical language and shared social and cultural history on either side of the border, the physical reinforcement and manifestation of the state's presence at the border gained prime significance. Identities of the borderland spaces and of the people dwelling on those spaces became the crucial indices for the enforcement of the state's presence at the border. A complex connection between population and territory is at the core of governmentality.<sup>77</sup> The Marichjhapi massacre is an example of this connection.

The events in Marichjhapi highlight the importance of understanding the nuances of spatial representation and spatial identities at the borderlands. Three conflicting forces were at work at Marichjhapi:

- the (mis)representation of the island resulting in a distortion in the state-set hierarchy of spatial representational framework;
- the island was a platform for the enforcement of conflicting and overlapping spatial identities; and
- the island was located on the international border between West Bengal and Bangladesh. The location of the island on the border between the two states furthered the intensity of all the factors at work.

For the refugees, the island, located in close proximity to Bangladesh, was symbolic of their return to the homeland they had left behind. Certainly, Dandakaranya did not evoke such nostalgia. The desperation of the refugees to settle on the island had much to do with its location near the border, in proximity to a known environment.

For the state, having a control over the island was not simply about appropriating a space within its bounded territorial limits. It was about controlling the very 'limit' that defined the state. Boundaries are the state's interactive platforms with its neighbours. It is at the borders that the state's *internal* matters cross over into *external* affairs. Thus, the island of Marichjhapi, located at the border, was of extreme strategic importance to the state of Bengal.

Besides reflecting existing differences, borders, in some cases, create a new set of 'others', thus perpetuating the sense of 'otherness'.<sup>78</sup> The creation of these 'others' are unique in the sense that they are formed within the ambit of the bounded limits of the state. Thus, a 'double-othering' process is at work at certain borders – the *others beyond the border*, the *others within the border*. The whole length of the West Bengal–Bangladesh border abounds with instances of such 'othering'. Marichjhapi was one of the examples.

The intensity of the fact that the refugees belonged to the Namasudra caste was increased because of the location of the island at the border. Not only was the border of the state being redefined by its subjects, but by subjects considered as social outcasts. This was an understated yet strong undercurrent to the state's response.

The importance of studying the border narratives lies in the various strands of discourses that borders give rise to. For the political scientists, borders reflect the nature of power relations and the ability of one group to determine, superimpose and perpetuate lines of separation, or to remove them, contingent upon the political environment at any given time.<sup>79</sup> For sociologists and anthropologists, borders are indicative of the binary distinctions between groups at a variety of scales like us/them, inside/outside, etc.<sup>80</sup> For international lawyers, borders reflect the changing nature of sovereignty and the rights of states to intervene in the affairs of neighbouring politico-legal entities.<sup>81</sup> On a common note, borders determine the nature of group belonging, affiliation and membership as ways in which the processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalised.<sup>82</sup> The study of the Marichjhapi massacre, in the context of the above disciplinary approaches, creates an interdisciplinary scope, by offering different discursive prisms of analysis. The location of the island at the border furthers the dynamism of the event.

## Conclusion

It is often in the little-known events around the world that the trajectories of identity formation are inscribed. Given the prevalence of the dominant socio-cultural narratives in most of the academic discourses, a multi-approach understanding of such little-known events is the need of the hour. These events often reconstruct and redefine generalised notions on issues as state, subjects, citizenship, insider/outsider, territorialisation of identity, etc.

The Marichjhapi massacre was a classic instance of the complex overlapping of political, cultural and geographical identities. The political aspect of the event was the easily identifiable one, with the allies within the Left Front government vying for an electoral base amongst the refugees. The forceful eviction of the refugees from the island by the use of police force was projected as a necessary step by the state government towards the cause of preservation of natural resources. The massacre (whatever little of it was acknowledged) was defended in the name of the then-ongoing worldwide Tiger Project,



of which Sundarbans was a part. The loss of lives of hundreds of refugees brought about by the misuse of Forest Preservation laws by the ruling Left Front government was comfortably overlooked by other state and non-state actors who could have made a difference.

Law, at the hands of the state is a 'powerful machine' inexorable when 'it is set in motion' but readily 'paused' when so required by the state.<sup>83</sup> The Tiger Project<sup>84</sup> had been in place for quite some time then, which implies that even if the island was within the ambit of the project, the Left Front leaders, ideally, should never have invited the refugees to settle there. However, the use of the Forest Law by the same Left Front, representing the state, as an explanation for its action was, clearly, a misuse of the law machinery and a very brutal one at that. Implicit reasons for the actions were the state's fear of attracting further refugee influx into the state as well as halting the increasing influence of the allied parties<sup>85</sup> of the Left Front amongst the refugees by the biggest party within the front – the CPI(M). This was a major cause for the response of the state government towards the refugees, with CPI(M) as the most important shareholder.

The law as the state's emissary transforms 'a matrix of real historical experience' into a 'matrix of abstract legality' so that the will of the state could be made to penetrate, reorganise and eventually control the will of a subject population, creating an 'official truth' of an event already classified as crime.<sup>86</sup> The creation of this *truth* entails authoritative discourse of the law with its 'pretention of an abstract univocality' reducing a 'many-sided and complex tissue of human predicament to a "case"'.<sup>87</sup> The misuse of law in the Marichjhapi massacre was an instance of the production of such 'official truth', which reduced the Marichjhapi events merely to a 'case' of law violation.

The island of Marichjhapi was the convergence of conflicting representations of space by the refugees on one hand, and the state of West Bengal on the other. Having subverted the *active producer-passive user* roles of the state and the refugees respectively, the island became a hotbed of a fatal clash between the state and its subjects.

The discourse of conflicting space representation was heightened by the caste, religious and ethnic identities of the refugees. The refugees simply became bodily representations of a fatal merger of varying identities like *refugee*, *Namasudra*, *Bengali* and *Hindu*. The Marichjhapi massacre is a study in overlapping binaries as insiders/outsidere, legal/illegal, inclusion/exclusion.

The Marichjhapi massacre is also an understanding in the process and consequences of spatial (in)justice. The events are indicators that a distributive paradigm is not everything to the understanding of justice and that the connotation of justice is much wider than a mere allocation of resources. *Representation of allocated resources* is what finally accounts for the justice or the lack of it.

The geographical location of the island of Marichjhapi furthered the intensity of the incident. The island, located on the West Bengal side of the West Bengal and Bangladesh border, constituted a space of enormous significance for the state of West Bengal. Borderlands are sites and symbols of power of the state. As social, cultural, political and economic *processes*, borders mirror the changes that effect institutions and policies of the state, besides highlighting the transformations in the definitions of citizenship, sovereignty and national identity.<sup>88</sup> Certain events and/or places attain a greater intensity simply because of their incidence/location at the borders. As both institutions of state power and processes of social interactions, borders are often the stage for the creation of multi-layered complex narratives. The island of Marichjhapi was the backdrop for the creation of such a narrative.

In being an indication of the history, myth and legend of the state as also an indicator of the dialectical relation between people's notions of spaces and the actual conditions that they are set in, borders account for the cultural disjuncture, displacement and distress,



essential for the understanding of post-modernity. The meeting between the state and the people is often particularly visible at the borders. The consequences of such meetings are often not pleasant. It is at the borders that the inherent connection between territory, identity and sovereignty can be made because borders are the places where these three converge like no other place.

Nation-building needs to be seen as a dialectic between the *top* and the *bottom* instead of simply as a top-down decision making process.<sup>89</sup> Not just the elite nationalist historiographies but dominant subaltern schools, too, fail to recognise these processes as subaltern narratives. The absence of the Marichjhapi incident from public debate for over two decades indicates the control that a state possesses over public memory. This brings us back to the basic premise: *History has always been selective in its choice of narratives*. The unrecognised subaltern narratives are the missing links. These links need to be restored to their rightful place in history. In doing that, we cannot afford to be selective. Bringing events like Marichjhapi to public spheres are the necessary first steps to that end.

### Acknowledgements

This article owes most of its information regarding the events that unfolded in Marichjhapi as well as regarding the environmental issues to the detailed article by Ross Mallick (Ross Mallick, 'Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58(1), 2009, 104–125). My attempt in this article has been to analyse the events through the lenses of space, identity and territory.

### Notes

1. Ranajit Guha, 'The Small Voice of History', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds), *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. The word 'subaltern' has been used here to indicate those people who find the least space and agency in the so-called dominant historiography and who form the other side of the history coin. 'Subaltern narratives', thus, have been used to imply such narratives created by the subalterns. The meaning and nature of these words are still in their formative stages, drawing worldwide debates. For the purpose of this article, I have stuck to the most-commonly understood meanings.
6. Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*. (Kalyani, West Bengal: Lumiere Books, 1990).
7. The Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) resulted in the birth of Bangladesh through the renaming of erstwhile East Pakistan. The war was followed by a military coup by Zia-ur-Rahman resulting in the death of Mujibur Rahman (1975). This incident gave rise to widespread riots that made the survival of the existing Hindus in Bangladesh, mostly belonging to the agricultural class, all the more difficult.
8. Syed Serajul Islam, 'The State in Bangladesh under Zia (1975-81)', *Asian Survey* 24(5), 1984, 556–573.
9. The caste system in India had its roots in the 'varna' system of the Hindu scriptures, where people were assigned their castes in accordance with their jobs or professions. Gradually the caste system became a hereditary structure from a purely profession-based classification. Those people who were involved mostly in menial occupations were considered as the lowliest-held caste in the caste hierarchy. With the passage of time and the increasing orthodoxy of the higher castes, the caste system became rigid and the lowest of the castes begun to be considered as *untouchables* – whom the higher castes were careful not to come in contact with: hence the name. The untouchables constituted a number of lowly held sub-castes, the *Namasudras* being one of them.

10. The Namasudras were largely a hard-working agrarian community known for their agricultural and artisan skills. It was one of the biggest communities in Bengal, mostly concentrated in the eastern side of undivided Bengal (later Bangladesh) with a long tradition of fighting caste-Hindu domination, voicing their concern against various ignominies of the caste system. The 'Namasudra movement' was one of the most politically mobilised untouchables' movements in India in the pre-Partition days. The Partition of India weakened their movement by dividing the Namasudras along religious lines, leaving them as a residue at the lowest rung of the society. In the process, these Namasudras lost their bargaining power as a swing-vote bloc between high-caste Hindus and Muslims, and became politically marginalised in both India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). Information from Ross Mallick, 'Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 1, (1999), 105.
11. The three castes that were considered to belong to the uppermost rungs of the Hindu caste hierarchy are the *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors) and *Vaishyas* (merchants). The *Sudras* (the Namasudras being a sub-caste within the larger Sudra caste) were considered to be the lowest among the castes. Though in the Vedic ages, these caste categorisations depended on the kind of jobs that the people associated themselves with, later the hierarchy became hereditary and hence rigid. The Brahmin–Kshatriya–Vaishya, thus, became the elite tricaste in the caste hierarchy.
12. Mallick, op. cit. 105.
13. The region known as Dandakaranya comprised of parts of Orissa and present day Chhattisgarh.
14. S.N. Khanna, 'Dandakaranya Refugees Refuse to Budge', *The Overseas Hindustan Times*, 29 June, 2009.
15. Chakrabarti, op. cit.
16. The refugees were 'Bengali' in their ethnic origin. People of both West Bengal and Bangladesh were of the same ethnic background, that of 'Bengali'. The Partition was done only on the basis of religion, with West Bengal becoming a Hindu-majority province and Bangladesh becoming a Muslim-majority state.
17. Mallick, op. cit., 106.
18. Ram Chatterjee of Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), an ally of the Left Front, went to Dandakaranya and asked the refugees to come and resettle in Marichjhapi with assistance from the Left Front.
19. Sundarban is a delta formed by the Hugli River off the Bay of Bengal and houses a huge mangrove forest. It is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger and several other rare marine and land animal species. It consists of hundreds of islands, separated by narrow creeks and canals. The Bengal–Bangladesh border runs through Sundarban. Marichjhapi is one of the islands in the Sundarban on the Indian side of the border.
20. The United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) was the council formed within the Left Front specifically for handling refugee resettlement and rehabilitation programmes.
21. Udbastu Unnayanshil Samity (UUS) was the association formed by the refugees led by leaders chosen from amongst themselves.
22. The refugees, by virtue of being forced to settle in other states outside West Bengal, were considered as 'outsiders' by the Left Front government, the moment they came to power in West Bengal.
23. The refugees, on coming over from Bangladesh to India, were officially considered as Indian citizens. Mallick, op. cit., 114.
24. Nilanjana Chatterjee, 'Midnight's Unwanted Children: East Bengali Refugees and the Politics of Rehabilitation.' PhD dissertation (Brown University, 2009).
25. Ibid.
26. Prasannbhai, Mehta, Laxmi N. Pandey and Mangaldev Visharat. 'Report on Marichjhapi Affairs', April 18, mimeographed. Mehta, Pandey and Visharat were members of parliament appointed by prime minister Morarji Desai, despite the objections of the West Bengal government, to visit and investigate Marichjhapi prior to the eviction. Quoted from Mallick op. cit.
27. Ibid.
28. Chatterjee, op. cit.
29. Source: interview with Indian Administrative (IAS) Secretary of the West Bengal Government, in Mallick, op. cit., 110.
30. Ibid., 114.

31. Source: interview with Indian Administrative (IAS) Secretary of the West Bengal Government, in *ibid*.
32. *Ibid*.
33. Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, 312.
34. Communist Party of India (Marxist). (1982). *Rajnaitik-Sangathanik Report* (Political-Organisational Report) adopted at West Bengal State Conference 14th Plenary Session. Calcutta: West Bengal State Committee, from Mallick *op. cit*.
35. Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, 298–299.
36. Mallick, *op. cit.*, 110.
37. *Ibid*.
38. Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, West Bengal Government. (1979). “Problems of Refugees from Dandakaranya to West Bengal.” Letter from Deputy Secretary to Zonal Director, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. No. 3223-Rehab/DNK-6/79, from Mallick *op cit*.
39. Ranjit K. Sikdar, ‘Marichjhapi Massacre’, *The Oppressed Indian* 4, no. 4 (1982), 21–23.
40. Mallick, *op. cit*. 108.
41. Atharobaki Biswas, ‘Why Dandakaranya a Failure, Why Mass Exodus, Where Solution?’, *The Oppressed Indian* 4, no. 4 (1982), 18–20.
42. Mallick *op. cit*.
43. Walter Fernandes, J.C Das and Sam Rao, ‘Displacement and Rehabilitation: An estimate of Extent and Prospects’ in Walter Fernandes and Enakshi Ganguly Thukral (eds) *Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation*. (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1989), 78.
44. Pratap, Chatterjee and Matthias Finger. *The Earth Brokers* (London: Routledge, 1994), 70
45. *Ibid.*, 340–341.
46. Mallick, *op. cit.*, 118.
47. Sy Montgomery, *Spell of the Tiger* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 27–28.
48. Akhileshwar Pathak, *Law, Strategies, Ideologies: Legislating Forests in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
49. Mallick, *op. cit.*, 120.
50. Kohli Atul, ‘Can the Periphery Control the Centre? Indian Politics at the Crossroads’, *The Washington Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1996), 121.
51. Simon Commission, *Indian Statutory Commission: Selections from Memoranda and Oral Evidence by Non-Officials (Part II)*, (Delhi: Swati Publications, 1929, reprinted 1988).
52. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
53. Ricky A. Allen, The ‘Socio-Spatial Making and Marking of “Us”’: Toward a Critical Postmodern Spatial Theory of Difference and Community’, *Social Identities* 5, no. 3 (1999), 249–277.
54. The island of Marichjhapi was located near the West Bengal–Bangladesh border and hence was in close proximity to some of the places in Bangladesh from where the refugees had migrated.
55. Allen, *op. cit.*, 250.
56. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989).
57. Allen, *op. cit.*, 259.
58. Edward Soja. *Thirdspace* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).
59. Lefebvre, *op. cit*.
60. *Ibid*.
61. Allen, *op. cit.*, 260.
62. Soja, *op cit*.
63. Soja, *op. cit*.
64. N. Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, in H. Giroux and P. McLaren (eds) *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
65. James C. Clad, ‘Slowing the Wave’, *Foreign Affairs*, 95 (1994), 139–150.
66. Chatterjee 356.
67. Achintyarup Ray, ‘Bullets and Hunger’, *The Times of India*, Kolkata, 17 May, 2010.
68. *Ibid*.
69. *Ibid*.
70. The Partition of Bengal was done on the basis of religion. East Pakistan (which, in 1971 became Bangladesh) was carved out of Bengal as a territory for a Muslim-majority population and

West Bengal was officially shown as a Hindu-majority province. However, the population of both West Bengal and Bangladesh was historically of the same ethnic background – that of ‘Bengalis’. Thus religion, and not ethnicity, was the only dividing factor behind the creation of Bangladesh.

71. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).
72. By the *representation of allocated resources*, I indicate the conflicting perceptions of the space underscored by identity politics.
73. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
74. Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
75. Andrew Sayer, *Realism and Social Science* (London: Sage, 2000).
76. Ibid, 4.
77. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
78. H. Van Houtum and T. van Naerssen. Bordering, ordering and othering. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 93, (2002), 125–136, as quoted in David Newman, ‘The lines that continue to separate us: borders in our ‘borderless’ world’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 30, no. 2 (2006), 143–161.
79. P. Ganster and D. Lorey (eds), *Borders and border politics in a globalising world* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield/ SR Books, 2005), 354.
80. Newman, 147.
81. J. Castellino, S. Allen and J. Gilbert, *Title to Territory in International Law: A temporal analysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
82. Newman, op. cit., 147.
83. David Hardiman, ‘The Bhils and Shahukars of Eastern Gujarat’, in Ranajit Guha (ed) *Subaltern Studies v: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
84. The Tiger Project, which began in 1973, was a World Wildlife Fund-sponsored project aimed at the preservation of tigers of which certain islands of the Sundarban was a part.
85. Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and Forward Bloc (FB).
86. Ranajit Guha, ‘Chandra’s Death’ in Ranajit Guha (ed) *Subaltern Studies v: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
87. Guha, op. cit.
88. Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1999).
89. Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson (eds). *Border Approaches: Anthropological Perspectives on Frontiers* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994).

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