CHAPTER 3

Burma Evacuees

R. Sanyassiah, Postwar Return, and Displacement in Modern South Asia

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In August 1948, R. Sanyassiah wrote a letter to the Government of India on his observations of migration patterns from south Indian ports to Burma (Myanmar), which lay across the Bay of Bengal.[1] By his own account, Sanyassiah had lived his life split between India and Burma. Before World War II, Sanyassiah had spent thirty years in prewar Burma conducting business and employing laborers there as a stevedore contractor.[2] After Japanese military forces began a takeover of British-held Burma in December 1941, he became one of approximately five to six hundred thousand people who evacuated from Burma to relative safety in colonial India.[3] The majority of those who left Burma for India came from among the large communities of Indian descent that had established themselves in Burma from the second half of the nineteenth century onward.[4] These displaced individuals frequently referred to themselves as "Burma Indian evacuees" or, simply, "Burma evacuees."

Upon arriving in India in 1942, Sanyassiah served for several years as the president of the Visakhapatnam District Burma Evacuees Association located in the town of Yellamanchili, Visakhapatnam District, in southern India.[5] He and the other leaders of this organization claimed to represent the interests of approximately six thousand evacuees living locally.[6] After the war, Sanyassiah offered his insights to the Indian national government in Delhi, presenting himself as an expert due to his past in Burma and his experience as a displaced person and an organizer of evacuees. As his letter detailed:

> Evacuees … are at present returning to Burma indiscriminately and without due regard to their own interests whether there is hope of employment in Burma or not. Either on account of the economic conditions obtaining now in India or their anxiety to go back to serve in their familiar surroundings, evacuees both skilled and unskilled are very eager to return to Burma at any cost and they leave no stone unturned to achieve their purpose.[7]

Due to the calamitous evacuation and its financial impact, most Burma Indian evacuees spent the war years in India, often separated from family members, employment, and properties that they had been forced to leave behind. While there, they became the subjects of relief efforts organized by the colonial government, local Indian charities and benefactors, and aid associations formed by the evacuees themselves. As the war ended and Allied forces reoccupied colonial Burma in 1945, the prospect of returning to Burma to regain their lives and livelihoods became tantalizingly possible for many evacuees who had reached India in 1942.

Writing in August 1948, Sanyassiah demonstrated in his comments on the "craze among evacuees" to return to Burma that, even three years after the end of World War II, a long-term solution to the disruptions wrought by the war had yet to be found for many Burma Indian evacuees. Sanyassiah's observations were made during an important transitional moment in India's and Burma's histories. Both were in the process of decolonizing: India had won its political independence in 1947, and Burma's independence arrived in January 1948 after years of struggle. Even as both India and Burma broke away from British colonial rule, however, relations between the two fledgling governments of these neighbors still needed to be arranged.

An important part of ongoing negotiations was the discussion over what would happen to the millions of people, including hundreds of thousands of Burma evacuees, who had fled their homes and places of residence to seek safety during the war. The colonial administration of India and the various charitable organizations regularly referred to those who escaped from Burma in late 1941 and 1942 as "evacuees" and even "refugees." Administrators and aid workers perceived evacuees, in part, as victims of the war needing assistance to cope with their displacement. However, as World War II ended and political independence loomed, a different set of questions about the Burma evacuees arose. Namely, how would their lives and patterns of migration shift when both India and Burma were independent countries? Many evacuees of Indian descent had been born in India before migrating to Burma in the prewar era, though a sizeable number counted Burma as their birthplace. Some had established lives there long term, while others sought to come and go, working for a few years and saving money. Did these evacuees now belong in India, or was Burma their native or adopted homeland? In addition, would evacuees be

allowed to travel freely between India and Burma, or would they be expected to stay put in one country or the other?[8]

Part of understanding how and why South and Southeast Asian decision-makers acted in the ways that they did requires historically specific contextualization. Policies and procedures for responding to displacement did not grow out of a vacuum but were created in response to the pressures of decolonization and nation making that were happening concurrently. In addition, bureaucrats, politicians, and evacuee representatives were forced to consider existing laws and agreements governing migration, many of which dated from before the war. Therefore, the arrangements made for Burma Indian evacuees as displaced people were emerging out of a postwar moment of decolonization but also were rooted in existing colonial-era policies. Instead of imagining the postwar treatment of the Burma Indian evacuees as part of the global rise and spread of an international refugee regime, this chapter will help uncover a separate—and largely unfamiliar—history of regional and local responses to displacement.

In addition to the decision-making efforts of Indian and Burmese politicians, administrators, and bureaucrats, many people who evacuated from Burma sought to make themselves heard regarding matters related to postwar India-Burma migration policy. Through their organized campaigns and their everyday choices—to attempt the return to Burma and recoup what they had lost during the war or remain in India—Burma Indian evacuees questioned and challenged developing policies meant to settle their displacement and to govern future India-Burma migration patterns.[9] Though evacuees' campaigns were not always successful, the appeals and arguments they posed helped shape the terms of regionally focused debates over the proper treatment of displaced people and migration policy across the mid-twentieth century.

Burma Indian Evacuees and Refugee Histories

The 1940s and 1950s were an important time for the emergence of what scholars often refer to as the international or global refugee regime. The term "international refugee regime" is shorthand for the historical development of norms, practices, and procedures that determined which people experiencing displacement were classified as refugees and how those populations would be treated.[10] As is now widely recognized, these midcentury attempts to enshrine rights and protections for refugees were often limited, in effect only applying to a portion of the total number of displaced people around the globe.[11] The relatively narrow limits placed on who would be considered a refugee, including chronological and geographical stipulations, meant that the plights of millions of displaced people in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and other regions around the globe were overlooked or dismissed.[12]

The Burma Indian evacuees discussed in this chapter composed one small segment of the global populations of displaced people who received only limited attention or care from the "international community." Though they remained outside the purview of practices and policies created by international decision-making bodies, Burma Indian evacuees became the subjects of ongoing debates between administrators and politicians in the late colonial and early independence-era governments of India and Burma (Myanmar). Therefore, their histories of displacement and the details of the treatment they received during and after the war provide a convenient entry point to better understand the development of regionally specific responses to displacement.

In this chapter, I examine the debates of Indian and Burmese politicians, bureaucrats, and administrators who were deeply engaged with the question of what to do with Burma evacuees in the postwar era. I also explore letters and petitions produced by Burma Indian evacuees such as R. Sanyassiah during the late 1940s and early 1950s as they sought to negotiate their position in the changed circumstances wrought by the war. Burma Indian evacuees had already been displaced by wartime bombings, firefights, and the fear of invasion. With the war's end, however, evacuees found themselves facing new barriers to a return to their prewar lives, including migration policy, documentation requirements, and shifts in regional transportation networks.

To begin understanding these debates, this chapter will review the findings of the 1944 subcommittee appointed by the Standing Emigration Committee of the Government of India. The subcommittee was made up of Indian politicians, prominent members of Burma Indian communities, and businessmen, many of whom had evacuated from Burma to India in 1942. Its members' discussions and commentary provide insight into the most pressing issues of the day, including their attempts to determine how *laboring* evacuees (otherwise referred to as "unskilled" laborers or by more pejorative terms) would be classified and treated. The crux of these debates was a disagreement over whether evacuee laborers—who comprised the majority of all evacuees of Indian descent—should be seen as the victims of war and therefore offered some advantage on the basis of humanitarian grounds. In the context of Indian and Burmese intergovernmental relations in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the advantage at stake was the right to return to Burma and to take up the livelihoods and patterns of mobility that had structured their prewar lives. The countervailing argument was that laboring evacuees should be viewed predominantly as a body of displaced migrant workers, and therefore be made subject to existing migration policies, including restrictions placed on their ability to repeatedly traverse the India-Burma border.

As R. Sanyassiah's writings also reveal, however, Burma Indian evacuees had their own ideas about the legislation and policies that directly affected their lives and livelihoods. Their eagerness to return to Burma, as Sanyassiah de-

scribed, showed that evacuees were not passive recipients of government policy and procedures. In southern India, where large numbers of evacuees had settled, they organized into associations and relief organizations and repeatedly opened dialogues with Indian provincial and national government administrations by organizing delegations and letter-writing campaigns in the 1940s and early 1950s. These demonstrations often expressed the concerns that evacuees had about their living conditions, difficulty finding work, and inability to reclaim their prewar lives, livelihoods, and mobility.

Prewar Migration and the Evacuation

British colonial forces ruled Burma and designated it as a province of British India from the late nineteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth century. The demands of British-ruled Burma's colonial economy, concurrent developments in transportation networks, and the lure of jobs and higher wages in Burma helped create booming migration patterns between India and Burma. In addition, episodic "push" factors, including harvest failures, cyclones, floods, and droughts, led to further short-term boosts in rates of Indian emigration.[13] Migrants moving from India to Burma during this period were largely seasonal, circular migrants who worked in Burma for a few years before returning to their homes in India. Many undertook this journey multiple times in their lives. A smaller but still significant number of migrants from India settled in Burma longer term or permanently, establishing it as their main residence and starting families and businesses there.[14] Altogether, between 1846 and 1940, an estimated twelve to fifteen million passages took place from India to Burma.[15]

The large-scale population movements that had characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would not last, however. Beginning with the shocks of the Great Depression felt across the Bay of Bengal in the early 1930s, the long-standing pattern of Indian migration into Burma was reversed, with more Indian migrants leaving the province than arriving from India for the first time in several decades.[16] In addition, the economic tumult of the Depression years and the strengthening of Burmese nationalist movements in the 1930s led to intense debates about immigration and more uncertainty for people of Indian descent living in Burma.[17]

Once Burma split away from India to become a separate Crown Colony in 1935, some Burmese politicians increasingly called for an end to unrestricted migration from India. However, it was not until 1941 that the first major effort to curb Indian immigration to Burma came into effect. The Indo-Burma Immigration Agreement of 1941 proposed new controls on immigration (especially targeting the free movement of Indian laborers into Burma) and a tiered visa system.[18] The 1941 agreement was never fully implemented due to its un-

popularity among Indians and the sudden arrival of World War II in Burma in December 1941. Despite the war's interruption, however, the Indo-Burma Immigration Agreement would lay the groundwork for postwar negotiations between India and Burma on border enforcement, Indian immigration policy, the return of the evacuees after the war, citizenship in Burma, and other related issues.[19]

The eruption of World War II in colonial Burma (Myanmar) in late 1941 led to the evacuation of thousands of people of Indian descent who had settled in Burma prior to the war. Japanese imperial forces bombed Rangoon in December 1941 and took over the remainder of the colony in the following months, which ended with the fall of Myitkyina in northern Burma on 8 May 1942.[20] These attacks prompted millions of Burma's inhabitants to leave behind their dwellings: while some migrated internally, others sought to leave Burma altogether and seek refuge in neighboring territories. Approximately six hundred thousand people, the clear majority of whom were of Indian descent, set out westward toward the neighboring colony of British India, traveling by steamship, by aircraft, or on foot.[21] Evacuees faced harsh conditions and ongoing skirmishes and air raids on the trek. They often lacked supplies such as food and potable water, leading to high death tolls. Though estimates of the number of people fleeing to India varied, roughly five hundred thousand evacuees survived the ordeal and remained in India for the duration of the war.[22]

The Question of Return

Although they had sought refuge in India due to the war's advance, many evacuees desired to return to Burma once hostilities ceased to pick up the lives that they had left behind. From 1942 onward, evacuees based in India sought reassurance from the colonial administration that they would be allowed to go back, assuming that Allied forces were victorious.[23] One of the most extensive debates occurred in mid-1944 as the Government of India appointed a subcommittee of ten members, including representatives from multiple Burma Indian communities, Indian politicians, and businessmen. Subcommittee members included Raza Ali, Hriday Nath Kunzru, Dr. R. S. Dugal, S. N. Haji, S. A. S. Tyabji, A. M. M. Vellayan Chettiar, A. Narayana Rao, Dr. M. A. Rauf, M. A. Master, and R. N. Banerjee. Several of the members had evacuated from Burma during the war. The subcommittee was to respond to a draft of the Government of Burma's position on Indian immigration to Burma, including the questions of whether and how Burma Indian evacuees would return to Burma after the war.[24]

In addressing these issues, the subcommittee had to weigh both historical precedents and the pressures of the moment. Many of the subcommittee's dis-

cussions rehashed debates that had begun in the 1930s and early 1940s in the lead-up to and aftermath of the India-Burma partition. These included older determinations about cross-border migration and the composition of the India-Burma border, such as the 1935 Government of Burma Act and the 1941 Indo-Burma Immigration Agreement. The war had temporarily delayed any definitive answers to the issues of Indian immigration and the path to establishing domicile for Burma's Indian residents, but these matters had not been forgotten. Despite engaging with the past, delegates clearly were aware that their decisions would have an impact on India and Burma's futures as colonies and, eventually, as independent nation-states.

Both the Government of Burma and the subcommittee members acknowledged the special challenge posed by Burma Indian evacuees. Those who had evacuated during the war seemed to have a strong claim to return to Burma, both because of their history in that colony as well as their appeals made as the victims of war. However, even recognizing that evacuees had suffered and lost homes, family members, and sources of income during the war, there were mixed opinions on whether all evacuees should be allowed free access to come and go to Burma once the war had ended.

Since the majority of evacuees were manual laborers, it was unclear whether they would be allowed to return to Burma. The last major immigration agreement passed between the two governments had been the 1941 Indo-Burma Immigration Agreement that, among other innovations, had placed an embargo on the immigration of "unskilled," or manual, laborers from India. Though this unpopular agreement had never been fully implemented and the war had stifled migration across the Bay of Bengal, Burma's government was considering reviving the immigration agreement for the postwar era. The Burmese administration was therefore ambivalent about the return of Burma Indian evacuees, which would be providing a back-door entry through which "unskilled" Indian laborers could reenter Burma.

The subcommittee's appointees, however, argued that evacuees had left Burma "for reasons completely beyond their control. The rapid expansion of the Far Eastern war to Burma resulting in the Japanese occupation of the country . . . were events for which the [Burma] Indian community was ill prepared." As the committee's report further stated, "But for the turn the war took, almost all of these Indians would have remained in Burma today." As such, the committee felt that there should be no barrier to evacuees' return. They also pushed against a return of the 1941 ban, stating that laboring evacuees should be allowed to return freely as they were just a subsection of the larger body of the displaced:

> It will be quite unfair, if not inhuman, to place any obstacles in the way of their safe and automatic return to and rehabilitation in, the country of their adoption which is

> the only home of many of them. We are of the definite and considered opinion that the question of their return should not even admit of any dispute and we must insist on, and secure, their unconditional return to Burma.[25]

Despite the committee's call for "unconditional return," the majority of the committee recognized that evacuees' return to Burma would need to be gradual due to "military exigencies and shortage of shipping and other means of transport." Each group of evacuees would "have to take their turn according to the urgency of the functions they would be called upon to perform in the post-reoccupation economy of Burma." One Burma Indian evacuee committee member named S. A. S. Tyabji dissented from the majority position on the evacuees' right of return. Tyabji belonged to a prominent family of Indian descent and had been a well-known figure in prewar social and civic circles among Burma Indians in Rangoon (Yangon). In his statements, Tyabji argued that "the unskilled elements" among the evacuees should not have unregulated access to Burma. Tyabji believed that evacuees who conducted manual labor for a living would not be able to find employment in the changed postwar landscape of Burma. He therefore felt that the "unskilled" evacuee workers should only be allowed to return when there was a specific labor demand or a quota set by the Burmese government.[26]

Despite these caveats and objections, however, the subcommittee's findings were notable in part because they suggested strongly that evacuees, including manual laborers, should not be treated as a subset of Indian migrants to Burma. As they summarized, "We do not consider that the evacuee Indians' right to return to Burma—after the reoccupation of the country—is necessarily intertwined with the general question of Indian immigration into Burma." The subcommittee's efforts to distinguish evacuees as a separate category of migrants sought to set them apart from the general body of people wanting to travel between India for business, family ties, work, religious or cultural pursuits, or leisure. Instead, their proposition to disentangle the Burma evacuees' return to Burma from the general debate over migration was clear recognition of evacuees' suffering during the war as well as their history with and past residence in Burma.[27]

The 1944 subcommittee did not have the final say, however, and their opinions formed only a part of a wider conversation between the administrations of Burma and India.[28] As the combined Indian and British military forces retook Burma in 1945, the question of how the two governments would deal with evacuees and migrants of Indian descent remained unanswered. Still, the subcommittee's debates are important because they foreshadowed the developments of the next several years.

Beginning in December 1945, the Government of India, in cooperation with Burma's administration, arranged a distinct "repatriation" program for evacuees. According to a pamphlet published by the Government of India

Press in the same year, "It is a principle accepted by both the Government of Burma and the Government of India that all [evacuees] should be enabled to return to Burma before others who had no previous connections with that country."[29] All evacuees wishing to return to Burma could register themselves and apply for evacuee identity certificates, which were simple, passport-like documents that would serve as both proof of identity and as travel documents for evacuees. Each evacuee family was to fill and submit forms that would provide the colonial government with demographic information and details about their postwar plans.[30] The Indian administration used this information to prioritize evacuees according to their circumstances: Indians who had left behind families in Burma would have top priority for returning to Burma, followed by landholders and merchants wanting to look after their possessions.[31]

Despite these preparations to equip Burma Indian evacuees with travel documents, a large-scale return of the displaced never materialized. The war had wrought extensive damage in Burma, leading to transportation, food, and accommodation shortages and considerable destruction within Burma's infrastructure and industries. The war had taken a heavy toll, and repatriation programs stalled due to concerns that the large-scale return of evacuees would exacerbate difficult conditions in Burma.

Even without a formal, functioning government repatriation program, however, many evacuees continued to attempt to cross the Bay of Bengal into the late 1940s. As the following section will explore, evacuees migrating regionally faced a number of changes regarding their access to transportation networks, bureaucratic offices, and paperwork regimes from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. For instance, steamships that had frequented the northern Andhra coastline prior to the war no longer visited Visakhapatnam and other, smaller ports in the region. At the same time, Burmese diplomatic offices in Visakhapatnam that had outfitted intending passengers with the correct paperwork closed due to a decline in traffic by 1950. Due to these changes, multiple small ports closed altogether, further limiting travel options for those hoping to reach Burma (as well as other destinations). Finally, during the same period, the Evacuee Identity Certificate was discontinued as a valid travel document, replaced by other paperwork requirements.

These discontinuations of the late 1940s and early 1950s did not occur without opposition, and sustained campaigns arose to either reverse these changes or find alternative ways to allow evacuees to cross the Bay of Bengal. Letters and petitions on these matters provide insight into how those claiming evacuee status sought to keep hold of older patterns of movement (see figure 3.1). By coming forward to local offices to sign their names or affix their thumbprints to letters and petitions, Burma Indian evacuees were laying claim to privileges that were theirs through tradition and seeking to produce connections of accountability and responsibility between the government and themselves.

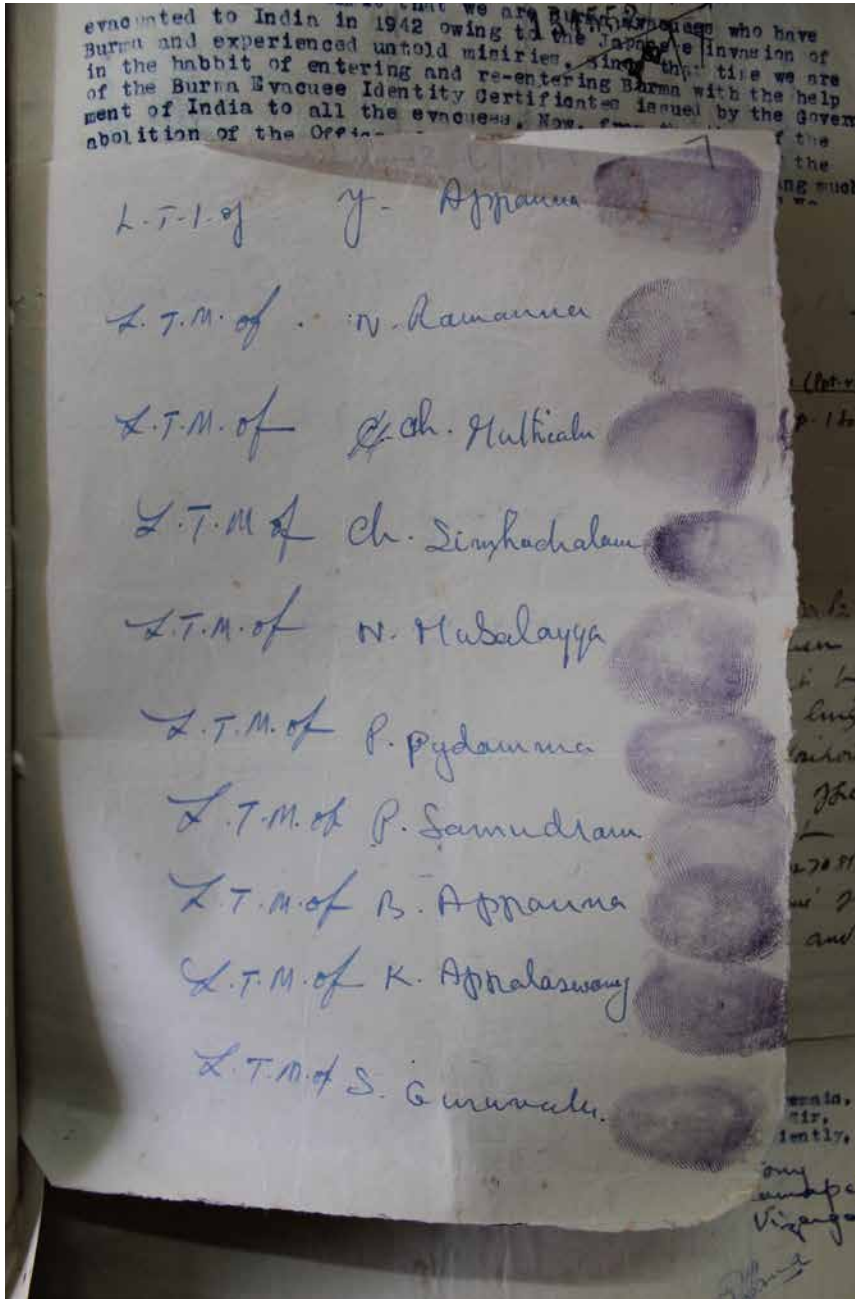

Figure 3.1. • Evacuee letters and petitions circa 1950, stored in the Andhra Pradesh State Archives and Research Institute in Hyderabad, India. © Emma C. Meyer

Postwar Arrangements

By October 1950, the Home Department of the Madras provincial government began receiving petitions and telegrams from groups of evacuees living in Visakhapatnam. The petitioners characterized themselves in different ways, including as "Burma Evacuees of Visakhapatnam District" and also as "poor people." They emphasized their long-standing connections to both India and Burma. In one letter, the "undersigned Burma Evacuees of Visakhapatnam District" wrote that they had been "in the habit of frequently visiting Burma from the last 30 to 40 years."[32] A separate letter, signed with the thumbprints and signatures of more than twenty individuals, claimed that its authors had "permanent residence" in Burma and owned properties and lands there as well. In "those olden days" before the war, the petitioners claimed that they had been forced to go to Burma due to crop failures, insufficient funds to support their families, and a lack of job opportunities in India.[33]

Their long association with Burma had been temporarily ended during the war, when the petitioners had fled "to India by the land route through hills and forests, [experiencing] horrible troubles . . . [with] a heavy loss of money and other valuables." The "calamity" of the evacuation had led to "all of us [becoming] too poor to maintain our families in India. As we were entirely depending on the business which we used to do in Burma, our financial position has become worse since we could not get proper work to do in India. . . ." With the war's end, however, the Burma evacuees explained that their situation was one of continuing movement and migration in the much-altered circumstances of the postwar era. After Burma's reoccupation by Allied forces, the petitioners wrote that they had resumed "going to Burma and we made several trips on the strength of the Burma Evacuee Identity Certificates issued by the Government of India." This travel was conducted "freely and easily from Visakhapatnam Port," which was "the convenient and nearest Port to all our villages."

By 1950, however, significant changes in transportation availability, access to bureaucratic offices, and new paperwork requirements again threatened these migrants' connections to Burma. Letters sent by evacuees to Indian provincial and national administrations were riddled with references to the closure of Visakhapatnam port for passenger traffic, the fall in the number of steamships traveling between India and Burma, the relocation of the Burmese Vice Consul's Office to Madras, and the closure of emigration offices at Visakhapatnam. Additionally, the planned phasing out of the Evacuee Identity Certificate, which was to go into effect by the end of 1950, was of specific interest to evacuees. The Evacuee Certificate was to be replaced with "passports issued by Indian Republic and entry Visas issued by Burmese Vice Consul at Madras." In addition, those intending to migrate would need a No Objection certifi-

cate obtained from the Protector of Emigrants whose office had been shifted from Visakhapatnam to Madras. Each of the letters concluded with the same three demands: reopen the Visakhapatnam Burmese Vice Consul Office, move the Protector of Emigrants office from Madras to Visakhapatnam (or prevent the Visakhapatnam office from closing), and "make arrangements to board the ship at Visakhapatnam harbour and order the shipping managements to send their ships to Visakhapatnam."

As their petitions made clear, however, Burma Indian evacuees' appeals to provincial and national administrations in India were not only about improving ease of access to travel facilities but also a matter of survival. Evacuees claimed that they could not remain in India due to poor economic conditions there. One letter attested, "We are starving here for food and raiment as the crops failed this year due to no rain in some parts and due to excess of water in other parts. We are weakened financially due to the failure of crops. . . ." Another letter also pointed to crop failures, floods, and drought, saying that "at present days we with our families are actually starving in these Districts."

These harsh circumstances compounded the effects of the recent closures and the discontinuation of the Evacuee Identity Certificate. As one letter explained:

> We beg to state our difficulties . . . increased when the new system of obtaining Indian National Passports has come into force. We are waiting since [so many] months to return to Burma. We have submitted our applications for passports nearly two months ago and we have not received anything from the authorities concerned.[34]

Traveling to port cities—whether nearby Visakhapatnam or the distant ports of Calcutta or Madras—to secure documentation and passage to Burma presented substantial difficulties for the petitioners. Evacuees living in Visakhapatnam and surrounding areas described Calcutta and Madras as big, unfamiliar cities. As one letter explained, "Calcutta Port is nearly 500 miles and Madras 500 miles. And also we do not know the language of those ports, i.e., Tamil, etc. We are all Telugu people." The trip there and back (and sometimes several trips, depending on the time taken to process paperwork, secure tickets, etc.) would cost money, as would finding accommodation during their sojourn. "If we go to Madras in these hard days," one letter concluded, the result would be "the greatest expenditures and have to be in hot sun without shelters."

The representations of Burma Indian evacuees shed light on a host of multiple, interwoven rights and privileges that evacuees sought to claim. Their customary mobility across the Bay of Bengal, for instance, could not be continued without access to bureaucratic offices, documentation, and convenient modes of transportation. In turn, mobility was not a goal in itself. Evacuee petitioners tied it to their economic strength, their ability to escape poverty or harsh circumstances, and their ability to survive in times of misfortune.

Burma Indian evacuees who came forward to local offices to sign their names or affix their thumbprints to letters and petitions, actions that took place years after their displacement from Burma, provide an example of the diverse arenas in which displaced people sought to influence decision-making about their treatment.

Conclusion: Evacuee Activism and Return at War's End

The end of the war brought few certainties for approximately half a million Burma evacuees who survived the desperate escape to India between 1941 and 1942. Both governments and nongovernmental committees debated seriously whether and how evacuees would be allowed to return to Burma, as did evacuees involved in local demonstrations. These debates and the historical circumstances and contexts in which they emerged reveal that responses to displacement in modern South Asia has regionally specific roots and cannot be understood by appealing only to the standards and practices of the post–World War II international refugee regime that developed in Europe.

Debates over evacuees' futures necessarily responded to and attempted to build upon existing colonial-era policies and procedures designed to regulate migration between India and Burma. One persistent question prefaced upon older policies was whether evacuees should be treated as part of the larger body of migrants from India or whether their wartime suffering and displacement warranted them extra rights and consideration. This question was especially asked about "unskilled" laboring evacuees, who had been banned from entering Burma by the 1941 Indo-Burma Immigration Agreement. At the heart of this debate was the broader issue of whether displaced people could be governed under general migration channels, or whether parallel systems should exist to regulate their mobility. The administrations of India and Burma innovatively agreed to allow evacuees to travel between the two colonies using their Evacuee Identity Certificates. This solution was highly local and temporary, but it proved to be a popular and durable system for at least some (but certainly not all) Burma Indian evacuees.

The accounts of evacuees (including Sanyassiah's observations), the debates of the emigration subcommittee (many of whom were Burma Indian evacuees), and the petitions and letters of evacuees in Visakhapatnam District highlight previously unexplored and undervalued archival sources. They are important because these historical accounts, fragments though they may be, demonstrate how actively engaged evacuees were in shaping policies related to their migration, documentation, and residence. In that way, evacuees resisted passive acceptance of migration policies and shaped the conversation around their proper treatment in the postwar era.

Emma Meyer completed her PhD in history from Emory University in 2020 with a thesis titled "Resettling Burma's Displaced: Labor, Rehabilitation, and Citizenship in Visakhapatnam, India, 1937–1979." Her research, which focuses on histories of forced migration between India and Burma (Myanmar) in the mid-twentieth century, traces the historical development of refuge-making in modern South Asia.

Notes

1. Although R. Sanyassiah does not give his full name in his letters that have been preserved in the Indian National Archives, it is likely that he was Reddy Sanyassiah, who is listed among the prominent Telugu-speaking residents of Burma. See Murty, *Burmaloo Telugu*.
2. National Archives of India [NAI], Ministry of External Affairs (SIM Branch), File No. 26–40/48-SIM(E).
3. Prakash et al., "Introduction," 2.
4. British Library [BL], Asian and African Studies [AAS], India Office Records [IOR], File No. IOR/V/15/232, no. 432.
5. Visakhapatnam was routinely spelled as "Vizagapatam" in English during the 1940s. To avoid confusion, I have used the newer spelling of "Visakhapatnam."
6. National Archives of India [NAI], Department of Indians Overseas, Evacuation Branch, File No. 115–6/43-O.S.
7. NAI, Ministry of External Affairs (SIM Branch), File No. 26–40/48-SIM(E).
8. Zamindar, *Long Partition*; Roy, *Partitioned Lives*.
9. Chatterji, "Citizenship," 1050–51.
10. Robinson, "Too Much Nationality," 344–45; Betts, "International Cooperation," 56–57.
11. Bhagavan, "Towards Universal," 123.
12. Oberoi, "South Asia," 37–41; Ho and Robinson, "Introduction," 263.
13. Satyanarayana, "Birds," 94, 99–100.
14. Pandian and Mariappan, *Ayya's Accounts*; Chakravarti, *Indian Minority*, xix.
15. Amrith, "South Indian Migration," 133.
16. Adas, *Burma Delta*, 208.
17. Amrith, *Crossing*, 184–85; Adas, *Burma Delta*, 204–8; Guyot-Réchard, "Tangled Lands," 4.
18. Amrith, *Crossing*, 191.
19. Amrith, *Crossing*, 216–17.
20. Leigh, *Evacuation of Civilians*, 1.
21. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 204.
22. BL, AAS, IOR, File No. IOR/V/15/232, no. 432.
23. Meyer, *Resettling*, 228–29.
24. NAI, Commonwealth Relations Department, Overseas Section (II), File No. 50–2/44-O.S.
25. NAI, Commonwealth Relations Department, Overseas Section (II), File No. 50–2/44-O.S.
26. NAI, Commonwealth Relations Department, Overseas Section (II), File No. 50–2/44-O.S.

27. NAI, Commonwealth Relations Department, Overseas Section (II), File No. 50–2/44-O.S.
28. In May 1945, R. N. Banerjee (the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commonwealth Relations) and U Tin Tut (a Burmese barrister and ICS officer), held further talks. See BL, AAS, IOR, File No. L PJ 8 214.
29. NAI, Home Department, Jail Branch, File No. 227/45-Jail/AN.
30. Pandian and Mariappan, *Ayya's Accounts*, 63–65.
31. "Return of Burma," 10.
32. Andhra Pradesh State Archives and Research Institute [APSARI], Development Department, GO 4780, 23-11-1950.
33. Andhra Pradesh State Archives and Research Institute [APSARI], Development Department, GO 4780, 23-11-1950.
34. Andhra Pradesh State Archives and Research Institute [APSARI], Development Department, GO 4780, 23-11-1950.

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