

Foreword

The Partition of India and its aftermath is still a puzzle. What actually led to the Partition of India? Was it inevitable? Who was/were responsible for it? What are the consequences of it? What were the nature and actual numbers of casualties? Is the crisis of Partition over or still in force? These are a few important questions which await proper answer. A large number of scholarly works have been done on the issue of Partition of India which, in most of the cases, had predominantly been directed to discover the causes of India's Partition and the 'high politics' behind it. However, the numerical strength of the writings on the victims of Partition of India, more vividly of Bengal, is very meager especially, when it is considered that West Bengal was one of the smallest provinces of India which experienced History's greatest influx of refugees and migrants till date. And thus, it has fittingly been argued that, '...Bengal has not received the scholarly attention it deserves'.¹ The reason might have been that most of the post-independence generations 'wish to erase the memory of a painful and brutal past.'² Thus, 'Silence became their main psychological defence.'³

Saradindu Mukherji remarked that the refugee studies in India are still at the nascent stage. However, the Tibetan refugees in India have become subjects of doctoral dissertation, though in American Universities. In fact, the Tibetan refugees numbering 100,000 have been studied by some Tibetan scholars in India as well. The 'Jumma'⁴ refugees have also received the attention of the scholars to some extent. But the bigger ones as Mukherji observed, as well as some smaller ones have been neglected.⁵ However, there are some scattered writings written by the Partition victims as well as those who took interest in this field which focused on the surviving struggle of the refugees in West Bengal. Through their writings they on the one hand expressed their year-long agony what they had kept hidden in the one corner of their minds on the other hand they had enriched the archives what may be called as the 'History of Partition Victims'.

One of the earliest works on the refugee problem in West Bengal was *Udvatsu* written by Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay who was the Rehabilitation Commissioner of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department of West Bengal in the early 1950s. He has written that book in a literary fashion based on his personal experience. Thus, it has an authenticity about how the refugees were rehabilitated. Then comes the name of Kanti B. Pakrashi who wrote *The Uprooted-A Sociological Study of the Refugees of West Bengal* on

the basis of field studies. Anil Sinha, wrote *Paschim Banglar Jabardakhal Udvastu Upanibesh* on the squatters' colonies in West Bengal. From this book an idea can be had about the establishment of the squatters' colonies and the struggle of the squatters' for their existence. The name of Saroj Chakrabarty is also worth mentioning for his two important works – *With Dr. B. C. Roy and Other Chief Ministers* and *My days with Dr. B. C. Roy*. However, the most comprehensive study on the Bengali refugees is Prafulla K. Chakrabarti's *The Marginal Men*.

In the 1990s there was a historiographical shift towards a subaltern perspective with attempts to discover the 'lived experience' of Partition largely through interviews with the people who had the first hand experience of Partition and were turned to be refugees overnight. This 'new partition historiography' highlighted the experience of the common people who had to pass through it. 'This new genre of Partition historiography was more interested in reconstructing the aftermath of Partition rather than the causes of the landmark event. It was largely related to the process of evaluating the achievements and failures of the nation-state after fifty years of its Independence.'⁶

The terms 'Refugee' and 'Migrants' have been classified from various perspectives. Sometimes, refugees are termed as asylum seekers seeking asylum in a foreign country in order to escape persecution. Thus, in case of a refugee, the victim does not have any option before him, other than leaving the place where he was residing. And accordingly, in case of the refugees the 'push' factor plays the key role. According to the definition of the 1951 United Nations (UN) convention relating to the status of Refugees, a refugee is an individual who owing to a "well found fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion or nationality or political opinion is outside country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to return because of such fears".⁷ However, later on in 1969 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) considering the earlier definition limited in scope, extended it to include the victims of aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order. This definition was further extended by the Latin American Countries in 1984 in the Cartagena Declaration of Refugees in order to include the victims of generalized violence, international conflict and serious disturbances to public peace.⁸ Thus, the refugees lack a national homeland as well as a legitimate state to provide them protection.⁹ Under the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees and 1967 protocol a signatory country must provide asylum to refugees and cannot compel

the refugees to go back to their nations of origin. However, India is not a signatory to both the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.¹⁰

On the contrary, in case of the 'Migrants' 'pull'¹¹ factor plays the vital role which draws the people to new places because of the employment advantages, handsome wages, educational and cultural dexterities for self-prosperity.

The term 'Refugee' or 'Displaced Persons' or 'Displaced Migrants' or 'Displaced Hindus' has however been used in this proposed thesis to identify the persons who have been uprooted from their country or '*desh*' i.e. East Bengal as a consequence of the Partition or '*deshbhag*' or 'division of the homeland' that resulted in communal upsurge and thus sought refuge into various states of India particularly West Bengal till 1971.¹² The scholars have also termed them as '*sharanarthy*' or '*Udvastu*'. '*Vastu*' means 'foundation' of a house and the prefix '*ut*' stands for 'out of'. Hence, the word '*Udvastu*' hints the loss of home and to the wider context homeland; as the term '*Vastuhara*' does.¹³ The displaced persons themselves also claimed to be refugees as they shouted '*Amra kara? Vastu hara*' ('Who are we? refugees').

Although, the Indian State identified those who crossed the border in the late 1946 through middle of 1948 as 'refugees' and later identified them as the 'displaced', its underlying belief was that the phenomenon was temporary. The terms 'refugee' and 'displaced' signified that once the conditions in East Bengal stabilized, Hindu minorities would have no reason to seek shelter and relief in India and would return to their homes in East Pakistan. Further, the identification of people as refugees was arguably an attempt to differentiate them from citizens of India.¹⁴ However, the refugees or displaced persons of East Pakistan who took shelter into West Bengal till 1971 were later termed as (a) the 'Old Migrants' i.e. who migrated between October 1946 and 31st March 1958 and (b) the 'New Migrants' i.e. who migrated between 1st January 1964 and 25th March 1971.¹⁵ The 'New Migrants' were considered as competent for rehabilitation benefit if they opted for the same outside of West Bengal. But the 'In-Between Migrants' i.e. those who migrated into West Bengal between 1958 and 1964 were excluded from getting any sorts of rehabilitation assistance on the part of the Government.

And the term 'Migrant' has been used here to mean the Bengali Muslims¹⁶ of Bangladesh or the people from Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet even from the other states of India who sought shelter in West Bengal in different times in different needs.¹⁷ Furthermore, the minorities

of Bangladesh who sought shelter in West Bengal after 1971 also fall in this category since most of them 'emigrate without being the victims of communal riots and there is a distinct voluntariness in their migratory behavior. They undertake this migratory venture in order to avoid abject poverty in Bangladesh'.¹⁸ As Chatterjee noted that, 'Border watchers seem agreed that displacement in the 1980s was mainly due to economic privation in Bangladesh and included Hindus and Muslims, while the early 1990s saw a rise in the numbers of East Bengali Hindu victims of communal violence following the demolition of the medieval Babri Mosque in India by Hindu nationalists.'¹⁹

Furthermore, the terms 'western Bengal' and 'eastern Bengal' refer to the geographical regions of the undivided Bengal. However, after 1947 West Bengal and East Bengal came into being as political units as a consequence of Partition. And East Bengal was renamed as East Pakistan in 1956 and Bangladesh in 1971. Thus, in the subsequent Chapters all these three terms i.e. 'East Bengal', 'East Pakistan' and 'Bangladesh' have been used unanimously to identify the eastern part of Bengal fell in the share of East Pakistan.

The whole era of twentieth century may be termed as an era of mass migration.²⁰ The building of nation states on the basis of 'narrow idealism' has resulted in the forced uprooting of the people all over the world. But Mandal argued that on South Asia the impact of the international refugee regime has been rather limited.²¹ However, the issue of mass migration took a wider shape in the Indian subcontinent in the wake of the Partition of British India in 1947 and was the biggest mass exodus in the History of mankind till date. Thus, it is estimated that in South Asia some 35-40 million people have moved across international boundaries since 1947.

The South Asian region is emerging as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished and the least gender sensitive region in the world. The causes of the exoduses of 1947-48 and 1971 can clearly be identified as violent communal conflict associated in both cases with the process of state formation. The other involuntary movements...can broadly be ascribed to human rights violations, resulting from the existence of elite-dominated political systems and a pervasive climate of religious and ethnic intolerance reinforced by high levels of poverty, landlessness and unemployment.²²

In fact, the issue of forced migration of people, displaced across the border has become a matter of deep concern to the host countries. It, on the one hand, has left a great impact on the regional security, on the other hand, disturbed the international peace. As it is told that 'every refugee or displaced person involves a case of violation of Human Rights'.²³ Various types of new incidents all over the worlds are giving birth to the refugee

movement each year and many of those situations appear to be difficult to contain and as a consequence the number of refugees is always going up. And in South Asia, the situation has taken a worst shape.²⁴ ‘The repatriation programmes carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the international community as a whole have resulted in a slight reduction in the worldwide figures for refugees but there is always new accumulation in the numbers.’²⁵

The ‘Refugee and Migration Problem’ in West Bengal was however, largely the product of its Partition in 1947. The British rule and its policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ bore special responsibility for the growth of separatist trends in Indian nationalist politics and it could succeed only because of the internal social and political conditions. Communalism was used to counter and weaken the growing national movement and the welding of the Indian people into a nation. Alongside, the activities of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha had created two opposite communal trends that paved the way for creating a communal tension and ultimately communal violence on the eve of India’s independence. This situation led Mountbatten to announce the Partition Plan or June 3rd Plan to check the wide spread communal violence and bloodshed that was ravaging the country. But the Partition of British India and therewith of Bengal could not solve the problem of communal tensions and riots in both sides of the border; rather it gave birth to a new problem which came to be known as ‘Refugee and Migration Problem’.

The proposed research work has been important from various perspectives as it on the one hand, makes an endeavor to fulfill the lacuna in the existing literature relating to the refugee and migration studies in West Bengal, on the other hand, it tries to highlight that how the refugees and migrants ultimately were accommodated in the body politic of West Bengal and above all how the refugees and migrants had created a momentous impact on the society, economy and polity of West Bengal.

The research work is based on the descriptive and analytical approach to the subject and the mentioned questions involved, attempting to arrive at certain conclusions having been drawn after a thorough consultation of the Government records, reports of the various committees, debates in the Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies, published and unpublished documents, biographies, books, articles, field survey and interviews and so on.

Notes and References

1. Tan, Tai Yong and Kudaisya Ganesh, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, Routledge: London, 2000, p.141.
2. Hasan, Mushirul, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2001, p.13.
3. Nandy, Ashis, 'The Days of The Hayena: A Foreword' in Sengupta, Debjani, (ed.), *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from 2 Bengals*, Sristhi Publishers and Distributors: New Delhi, 2003.
4. The different groups of people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are Chakma, Marma, Tippera, Tongchengya, Mru, Mrung/Reang, Bawm, Khumi, Sak, Pangkhua, Khyang and Lushai. They are collectively known as the Jumma and differ markedly from the Bengali majority of Bangladesh in respect of language, religion, culture, physical appearance, dress and farming methods.
5. Mukherji, Saradindu, 'Indian Experience with Forced Migration: Its Lessons and Limitations', Source: <https://docs.google.com>.
6. 'The Partition and the Muslim Minorities of West Bengal', 1947-1967, Sunday, August 23, 2009, source: <http://bengalpartitionstudies.blogspot.in>.
7. Adil-ul-Yasin, Upadhyay, Archana, *Human Rights*, Akansha Publishing House: New Delhi, 2004, p.100.
8. *Ibid.*, p.100.
9. Howard, Adelman, 'Refugees or Asylum: A Philosophical perspective', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 1, no.1, pp.1-3.
10. *Round table workshop Report- Refugees in the SAARC Region: National Legislation on the Refugees*, India Habitat Centre: New Delhi, 30 April, 1999, p.10.
11. The terms 'push' and 'pull' have been borrowed from Datta, Pranati, 'Push-Pull Factors of Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal: A Perception Study', *The Qualitative Report*, Volume. 9, Number. 2 June, 2004, pp.335-358. Source: <http://www.nova.edu/datta.pdf>.

12. As according to the Indira -Mujib Agreement those who entered this region, except Assam, before 25th March 1971 legally accepted as Indian citizens.
13. Chatterjee, Nilanjana, 'Interrogating Victimhood: East Bengali Refugees Narratives of Communal Violence', <http://www.pstc.brown.edu/chatterjee.pdf> accessed on June 15, 2004.
14. Roy, Haimanti, *Citizenship and National Identity in Post-Partition Bengal, 1947-65*, A Ph. D Dissertation, A Dissertation submitted to the Division of Research and Advanced Studies of the University of Cincinnati, p.16. Source: <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf>.
15. *Manual of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation*, Government of West Bengal: Calcutta, 2001, p.1.
16. However, the Muslims who migrate to India from Bangladesh are labeled as 'infiltrators' by the Indian State, Chatterjee, Nilanjana, *op.cit.*
17. 'Countries like Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Bhutan or Sri Lanka, where prolonged ethnic conflicts continuously generate refugees, surround India. Historically, India has been the natural host for most of refugee groups evicted from the neighboring countries.' Roy, Sanjay K., 'Refugees and human rights: the case of refugees in eastern and north-eastern states of India', in Roy, Sanjay K., (ed.), *Refugees and human rights-Social and political dynamics of refugee problem in eastern and north-eastern India*, Rawat Publications: New Delhi, 2001, p.24.
18. *Ibid.*, p.22.
19. Chatterjee, Nilanjana, *op.cit.* However, Datta has termed the persons who have entered into West Bengal from Bangladesh without valid document after 25 March 1971 as 'undocumented Bangladeshi migrant'. Datta, Pranati, *op.cit.*
20. 'Various groups of refugees emerged during Second World War and at the end of War there was an unprecedented influx of refugee population. Forty-four allied nations established the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) on 9 November 1943, to redress the refugee problem.' Mandal, Monika, *Settling the Unsettled-A Study of the Partition Refugees in West Bengal*, Manohar: New Delhi, 2011, p.29.
21. *Ibid.*, p.20.
22. *Ibid.*, p.46.

23. *Ibid.*, p.17. ‘Human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. These are moral claims which are inalienable and inherent in all human individuals by virtue of their humanity alone. These claims are articulated and formulated in what we today call human rights, and have been translated into legal rights, established according to the law-creating process of societies, both national and international.’ Levin, Leah, *Human Rights-Questions and Answers*, National Book Trust, India, in collaboration with UNESCO Publishing: New Delhi, 1998, p.3.
24. In Sri Lanka the ongoing conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese has compelled a large number of Tamils to take refuge in India. In Bangladesh the process of the Islamisation of the civil society is continuously forcing out the minorities such as Hindus, Chakmas, Reangs etc., of its territory. Chinese occupation of Tibet and its subsequent attempt to ideological integration of the ethnic Tibetans has resulted in the forced uprooting of many of them who took refuge into India and Bhutan. The oppression of the Nepali settlers by the Bhutanese State compelled the Nepalese to seek refuge either in Nepal or in India and the Military Junta of Myanmar has forced out the Reangs and Rohingya Muslims.
25. Mandal, Monika, *op.cit.*, p.17.