

Abstract

Amid construction and destruction of the outside world the tale of human civilization is embedded in history. The light and darkness of history carefully preserve the memory and oblivion that act silently to change the complexion of society, era and mid set. Partition of India was a tragic incident in the annals of human civilization that had casted such a long shadow. It remained as an apocalyptic event that reinforced violence and movement invoking political rupture, social catastrophe and also advocated nostalgia. The division of British India and subsequent creation of two antagonist countries was not just the splitting up of nations and their histories but also their very existence. The thesis emphasized on the fact that the partition of India purported only on religious lines creating two independent nations, viz. India and Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan had firm conviction that partition was the only way to get rid of existing turmoil.

The prime objective of the paper is to highlight specially on the refugees who migrated to North Bengal. The displaced persons from East Pakistan had to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles to pay the cost of independence. The ill treatments on a large scale were very common ways of attacks upon the Hindu minority in East and West Pakistan. In East Pakistan the chronic problem of Hindus remained unsolved, overlooked, neglected and uncared. In a word less importance was attached to their glaring problem. The social disturbances and political turmoil following partition forced people to escape from their homeland and take shelter in various corners of India. In West Bengal the migration process got a new momentum in 1971 and North Bengal was not an exceptional one. The thesis in question has focused on the fact that the socio-political canvass of North Bengal changed to a considerable extent with refugee exodus. The continuous process of migration had started mainly from 1946 in the event of the atrocious Noakhali disturbances and its continuation persisted even after 1971. There is no denying of the fact and no shadow of doubt that being apprehensive of their future settlement and survival, they ventured towards India with the fair expectation to lead a dignified life in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere coupled with security and economic stability.

West Bengal being a state adjacent to East Pakistan, its political territory shared its borders by nine districts of West Bengal including five districts in North Bengal. The migrated people flocked to different areas of North Bengal crossing the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The other wing moved towards Tripura, Assam and Manipur. The East Bengal refugees preferred to shift to West Bengal districts due to geographical proximity, linguistic, religious and cultural resemblance. The five districts of North Bengal were also crowded with the refugee influx. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda accommodated a considerable number of refugees. Apart from permanent settlement in West Bengal the Government thought positively for the all round developments of refugees. The Government and some philanthropic organizations came forward with their hands of cooperation. The thesis has also discussed about the settlement of refugees in post 1971 period in Dandakaranya and Marichjhapi.

This paper has presented the refugee reminiscences to prioritize their erasures and silences, defining the mythic structure of refugee histories and exploring its significance in constructing a specific cultural identity. The Hindu refugees from East Pakistan and later on from Bangladesh have been chosen as the central agents of such narratives. This paper has tried to explore how the East Bengali refugees projected themselves either as ill fated and passive victims of partition who designed to integrate themselves into the socio-economic fabric of India. Sometimes they have eulogized themselves as heroic protagonists who successfully battled irresistible adversities to snatch resettlement from a reluctant state. This split image of the Bengali refugee as both victim and victor has been articulated in this paper. This thesis exposed the fact that the refugee agency in post-partition West Bengal as well as North Bengal was inevitably molded the social status and cultural capital of the natives. The refugees' quest for rehabilitation along the mythic trope of heroic and masculine struggle has been analyzed in the thesis.

Centering round the partition of India the women had long been neglected and ignored in history though they were the worst victims. The study has portrayed a clear picture of the oppressed womenfolk, the constant oppression on them, humiliation, sexual harassment, physical torture and also their trauma following partition. Despite their numerous problems they have had the courage to face the untoward situation with valor, intrepidity,

perseverance, tenacity and lofty ambition. In the event of partition a problem cropped up for the massive influx of migrated individuals hailing from East Pakistan towards India particularly, in the spatial locale of West Bengal. As a revolutionary event Partition of India had spontaneously produced numerous masterpieces. The deplorable condition of refugees has been vividly depicted by thinkers, academicians, poets, dramatists and writers. Besides the valuable contributions of Bengali authors some authors of other states have contributed much on partition literature. A historical portrayal of the human tragedy following partition of India through the exploration of short stories, memoirs and histories could creatively trespass across the border between fictional and historical narratives. While some creations have depicted the massacre during the refugee migration, others concentrated more on the aftermath of the partition in terms of the troubles faced by the refugees in both sides of the borders. Even now, more than seventy years after the partition, works on fiction as well as films are being made. The event of partition along with its prelude and legacy has been the subject of different scholars has remained intact till today. The ‘self-settled’ refugee was in every respect opposite to the much-maligned figure of the Bengali refugee that pervaded contemporary administrative discourse—assertive, resourceful, fiercely independent, and too proud to be subjected to the demeaning and dehumanizing conditions of government camps. It became a key element of the self-perception of Bengali refugees in post partition decades.

As the gulf between the “private” and the “public,” was dismantled, the refugee women were able to expose themselves the outer world of men from the sacrosanct economy of confinement. It also broadened the ambit of women in the community and soon they provided succor to each other in their struggle for existence. Generally, the gendered readings of Partition represent the images of rape, violence, or the trauma, but this quiet transformation of women’s lives often remained unuttered in history. In spite of grim uncertainty, profound sufferings, irreparable wounds, psychological and emotional injuries; these women did learn to survive, adjust themselves with new environment in the new destination. The new survival strategies, which these women followed for sustenance, brought about significant socio-economic changes in their lives.