

Displacement, Rehabilitation and Resettlement: Bengali Migrants from Assam to Siliguri (1947-1991)

Sweety Paul

Abstract: *Siliguri attracted a bulk of immigrants from Assam to settle down in the region. The unnatural population-growth of Siliguri during the second half of the twentieth century indicates the influx of the evacuees from Assam into the realm. In post-colonial India, Siliguri Sub-division confronted with an unprecedented pace in its development. The mercantile amenities, the ample scope of secondary and tertiary sectors in the town helped the people to get engaged in the commercial field of the region. However, the people initiated their journey in a new way in the town through their own initiatives. A voluminous number of them were the East Bengali Hindu refugees and they should be provided with the Refugee Rehabilitation Scheme of West Bengal. But in reality, they did not find any kind of facilities for their resettlement by the Government. There was also significant number of immigrants who entered into this region to settle for their own financial interests as they wanted to grasp the mercantile opportunities of the town to live better livelihood. The words of these displaced people revealed the truth about their struggle for resettlement in Siliguri after being escaped from Assam.*

Keywords: 1947 Partition, East-Bengali Refugee, *Bongal Khedao Andolon*, Displaced People, Resettlement.

Introduction:

The joy of independence of India (1947) was followed by the Partition which made a voluminous number of East Bengali Hindus 'homeless'. The waves of the forced-migration of these Bengali Hindus shook the Assamese society repeatedly. The Assamese people already had their resentment against the Bengali inhabitants in Assam, and these repeated infiltrations of the Bengali refugees into the state gave an impetus into it. The Assamese-Bengali conflict took a new shape through the phases of language movement and the *Bongal Khedao Andolon* (drive out the Bengalis from Assam) in the state. The Bengali mass became helpless as the situation was worsening day by day and they watched out for a new place to migrate. This time a bulk of these *Bongal Khedao Andolon*-displaced people from Assam found a new epicenter, Siliguri for their next resettlement. Their immigration from Assam into Siliguri made changes in the city's demographic scenario. The article intends to review the displacement of the Bengalis from Assam into Siliguri and the population influx, their resettlement in this new arena from historical perspective.

Migration of the Bengalis into Assam during Colonial Period and Post-colonial Period:

The immigration of Bengalis in Assam during colonial and post-colonial phases can be parted into five stages. The phases were distinctive in nature. In 1826 after taking the administration of Assam the British rulers immediately started to employ the Bengali officials for their administrative purposes which caused a huge immigration of Bengali officials largely from Sylhet district of undivided Bengal. There was also continuous influx of “tea garden coolies” from adjoining Bengal from 1880 to 1930 (Dikshit, Dikshit, 1995, p.459). A large number of Bengali peasants mainly from Mymensingh district of Bengal also immigrated into Assam. These Bengali peasants gradually established their firm foothold, regained wasteland, initiated to cultivate and finally set up their own permanent settlements in this new realm. These people never went back to Mymensingh, Bengal and settled in the new province of Assam (Dikshit, Dikshit, 1995, p.459). C.S. Mullan, Census Superintendent of colonial-Assam commented on the migration from East Bengal to Assam that he could compare the immigration as “the mass movement of a large body of ants”.¹ At the end of the 19th century Assam turned into “a kind of extended Bengali district” as the Bengali immigrants entered into Assam to access the advantage of excessive lands (Ghoshal, 2021, p.122). The Partition of India in 1947 had immense affect on the immigration of the East-Pakistani Hindu refugees and the wave of refugees bit Assam through many decades (Saikia, 2015, pp.11-12). Besides the infamous *Noakhali* incident and the other obscure incidents-*Soneswar* and *Habibganj* in 1949, the persecution of the *Hajongs* in North *Mymensingh* and the repressions on the *Santhals* in *Rajshahi* and *East Dinajpur* in February and March, 1950 spread fear among the minority communities from East Bengal, East Pakistan.² It was estimated through the 1951 Census Report that during 1946 to February 1951, the number of refugees who immigrated into Assam was 2,74,000.³ In 1964 due to severe anti-Hindu Riots in East Pakistan these people found their only hope to be alive in the immigration from Eastern Pakistan to Assam or West Bengal vis-a-vis India (Hazarika, 2000, p.191). By and by the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the East Pakistan Government passed the Enemy Property (Land and Building) Administration and Disposal Order in 1966 (Trivedi, 2007, Part xiv). Professor Abul Barkhat of Dhaka University remarked that 5,000,000 Hindus lost 2,000,000 acres of land and nearly 40 percent of the Hindu families turned into the victims of the Act⁴. After 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, hordes of East Bengalis entered into Assam to be escaped from the vandalism of the Pakistani military forces. (Upadhyay, 2001, p.24). The course of immigration continued up to the 1980s

¹ *Report of the Deputy Commissioner 1937*, Nowgong on the Immigrant, Report of the Line System Committee: Question of that District, p.21.

² Baghaiwalla, R.P. (1951). *Census of India, 1951, Part I-A, Prefatory Note on Assam, Monipur and Tripura, Vol xii.*

³ *Report on the Census of India*, Government of India, Assam, Vol. XII, Part I(I-A), p. 353.

⁴ *Prothom Alo*, 4 November 2004.

when an anti-immigration movement arose in Assam to resist the flow of illegal immigration. Surprisingly, the early Bengali settlers of Assam are not considered by Professor Guha as a part and parcel of the immigrant string as they were recruited by the British administrators. (Guha,1978, p.44). Within the Assamese society the Bengalis spread 'linguistic-cultural islands'. (Gosselink, 1994, p.89).

The Resentment against the Bengalis in Post-Colonial Assam:

The migration of the East-Bengali Hindus to Assam after independence was not just a simple issue rather it was much more significant from political and cultural perspective (Saikia, 2016, pp.72-96). The continuous immigration of Bengalis brought a significant change in the demographic scenario of Assam. The massive influx changed the socio-cultural-political spheres of the state. Though the Bengalis made themselves assimilated into the Assamese society but the Assamese people became doubtful about the existence of the Bengalis in various realms of their priorities in Assam. Since the colonial period the Bengalis made themselves advantageous in the spheres of education, job-opportunity, business in Assam and the Assamese became afraid to lose their rights in Assamese society. They had been suffering from an identity crisis which gradually took the form of agitations, movements during the post-colonial era. By time the Bengalis found themselves unsecured in Assam and decided to flee to adjoining Bengal.

Assam had a predominant Bengali population towards whom the host Assamese society had an entity full of socio-cultural-economic rivalry prevailing for near a century. (Sharma, 2011, p. Introduction). Naturally attitude of the Assamese society towards the huge refugees evolving tension in the newly independent state of Assam was utmost different than the other refugee-absorbing states of West Bengal and North-East India. (Hussain, 1993, p.165). The Bengali refugees were treated as "irritants" in Assam unlike in West Bengal and Tripura. (Dutta, 2013, p.103). Sajal Nag, describes the crucial anti-Bengali strident reactions by the Assamese populace in the post-colonial decades which led to severe damages in the Assamese-Bengali relationship (Nag, 2001, pp.4753-4760). The Assamese were keenly willing to get rid of the Bengali assimilation and felt a little bit relieved with the aftermath of Sylhet Referendum in 1947⁵. But the noteworthy fact is that the Bengalis in disguise of 'Refugees' re-entered in Assam and it caused to kindle the hostility much more amongst the host-community⁶. The 'Bengali Conspiracy' theory since the colonial regime in displacing the Assamese from their autochthon places achieved triumph through the post-Partition Assamese intelligentsia. (Sharma, 2011, p.290). Within such hurly-burly, the language politics took its crucial shape in the name of 'Medium of Instruction Movement' of 1972. It can be assumed as the second landmark in the saga of the Assamese Movement. (Weiner, 1993, p.1742). The

⁵ 'Viceroy's Personal Report No. 13, dated 18th July, 1947', File nos. L-PO-6-123, Pt-1, Neg 9850 (1-105), IOR.

⁶ File nos. V-24-1033:1942-1947, IOR.

figurative words of the movement were– “Bangladeshi, illegal immigrant, and foreigner” (Baruah, 2020, p.64) which turned out the lightning rod of the insurrection. The anti-foreigner turmoil taking place for six years (1979-1985) in Assam can be shaped as the determinant in the departure of the Bengali Hindus from the state. The displacement can be categorized into two phases: firstly, the primary years of the oppression in 1979-80 and the second phase initiated with the greater antagonism centering around the Election holding on February-March, 1983 (Bhaumik, 2009, p.133).

Search for a Second Home, Next Destination Siliguri:

In this context the importance of Siliguri as a commercial town was perceived by the displaced persons and they heartily felt to move forward in the town from Assam as soon as possible. Siliguri had become strategically important due to its geographical location in the political map of India. The Siliguri Corridor connected the rest of North-East India with the entire country. They keenly wanted a sphere where they would not have to be confronted with political turmoil again in their lives and the political stable and calm atmosphere of the town acted as the pull factor for immigration while the untamed atmosphere pushed them from Assam. The evacuees started their new-journey in the burg and assimilated themselves in the prevailing society of Darjeeling Terai.

Siliguri has ever been deemed as a migrant’s town. The nature and volume of immigration have varied continuously over the post-colonial decades. The transformation from a thinly populated hamlet to a thickly populated city becomes the striking feature of this town of Darjeeling district (Das, 2011, p.80). It is a historical fact that in case of Siliguri the multiple waves of migrants shook the city throughout the post-colonial decades and the immigrants found their permanent address in Siliguri. The immigrants were identified as the Marwari settlers or the plantation workers who had come into the city in the nineteenth century. Along with this there were also a gigantic number of partition-refugees who entered into Siliguri during the mid-twentieth century (Ghosh, 2016, p.8). Samir Kumar Das relies upon a sample survey which was conducted in 1990 and through the survey it was found that 60 per cent of the immigrants had come from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The percentage of the immigrants from Bihar was 17 while 8 per cent Marwaris had come from western India who mainly controlled the wholesale trade of the region. Das also denotes that 15 per cent among the immigrants came from either South Bengal or Assam (Das, 2011, p.80). Another noteworthy thing is that the city not only grows itself rather it also helps the adjoining suburbs of the town to enhance. It helps to flourish nearly 500 neighboring villages and local hamlets which become dependent on Siliguri for commercial and various other purposes. Along with the prosperity of the town the adjoining suburbs of it like Matigara, Shivmandir and Bagdogra have also been enriching (Bhattacharjee, 2014, p.43).

The demographic index of Siliguri was not such type of high prior to the independence but after 1947 but it has witnessed startling outgrowth in its population due to continuous influx of immigrants. Though a bulk of them immigrated directly from East Pakistan or Bangladesh or a significant portion first came to Assam due to its vicinity with East Pakistan or Bangladesh and after that they were again forced to leave Assam due to the political turmoil and immigrated into Siliguri. A significant contributor of the massive influx was the over-stretching Anti-Foreigner Movement or *Bongal Khedao Andolon* of Assam. Due to the tension, anxiety arising in the minds of the Bengali dwellers of Assam a massive section of them found their new home in the Siliguri Sub-division. A question spontaneously arises why did those evacuees choose Siliguri for immigration or why did they want to re-settle here? In answer to this question, it may be said that various pull factors played significant role in this context. The pull factors may be considered as the geo-strategic location of Siliguri, its connectivity with North-East through railway-road link, the job-opportunities or the commercial importance of the town. Though the exact number of evacuees was not found but it is beyond any doubt that the voluminous number of immigrants from Assam since the 1960s took shelter in Siliguri (Saha, 2004, p.33). *The Bongal Khedao Andolon* produced frequent waves of immigration into the town which hit the town's demographic profile again and again. Siliguri with its growing importance grew spontaneously and with this massive influx the town flourished by leaps and bounds. Siliguri provided an 'urban pull' in the mass-dynamism. The business opportunities of the town acted as the pull factor for the immigration to get rid of the economic imbalances caused by Assam disturbances. A sample survey was conducted by Siliguri Planning Organization in 1966 and the report can be seen through the following table-

Table No - I

MIGRATION TO SILIGURI TOWN FOR LIVELIHOOD

Source	Less than one year	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	6-9 Years	10 Years	Total
North Bengal	17	36	38	7	73	171
South Bengal	13	36	27	8	55	139
Assam	14	30	63	22	11	110
Bihar	20	95	145	164	233	633
East Pakistan	34	112	136	161	1761	2224
Other	16	40	63	57	170	264
Places(Mainly Rajasthan)						

Source: Roy, Ranajit. 1986. *Economic Changes in Siliguri and Problems of Its Urban Development*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of North Bengal, p.160

Change in Population Structure:

The notorious Assam disturbances remained as the major cause for the infiltration of Bengalis from Assam into Siliguri (Das, 2011, p.157). The most striking feature of the population influx of post-colonial Siliguri was that when the entire state went through hardly 3 times urban population growth then this town had been witnessed with that growth over 20 times which was chiefly due to the immigration or massive infiltration (Khasnobish, 2018, p.203). Over five decades during 1941 to 1991 the mass of the town arose from only 10,487 to 2,16,950 which indicated the enhancement of 1015.19 per cent against the rate of total urban population of whole West Bengal which was 197.68 per cent only (Khasnobish, 2018, p.203). The number of souls in Siliguri Municipal Area was 65,000 in 1961 and it drastically increased nearly by 51 per cent in each decade until it extended 2,27,000 in 1991 (Ghosh, Ahmad, and Maitra, 1995, p.191). The population growth of Siliguri can be seen through the following table in order to get the profile of Siliguri's attraction for the immigrants (Choudhury, 1988, p.90).

Table No - II

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE EFFECTIVE URBAN POPULATION AMONG
THE TOWNS OF DARJEELING DISTRICT, 1941-1981**

Towns	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
Darjeeling	27,224 (100.00)	33,605 (50.85)	40,651 (30.98)	42,873 (26.18)	57,603 (23.91)
Siliguri	-	32,480 (49.30)	65,471 (49.89)	97,484 (59.58)	1,54,378 (61.09)
Kalimpong	-	-	25,105 (19.13)	23,430 (14.31)	28,885 (11.99)
Total	27,244 (100.00)	66,085 (100.00)	13,1,227 (100.00)	1,63,787 (100.00)	2,40,866 (100.00)

Source: Choudhury, Namita. 1988. *Urbanization in North Bengal in the Post-Independence Period*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of North Bengal, p.161

It is needless to say that the partition-displaced Hindu people were bound to leave their homeland and a bulk of them immigrated into this Terai region.⁷ The number of souls residing in Darjeeling Terai in 1951 was 1,16,475.⁸ According to the Census of 1961 the population increase in total of the Darjeeling district was 35.90 per cent while the Siliguri Sub-division of it had the same of 68.04 per cent (Khasnobish, 2016, p.69). During 1961-1971 the growth rate of urban population

⁷ Banerji, Amiya Kumar; Dey, Barun and Others (1980). *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*. Superintendent of Govt. Printing, Calcutta, p.106.

⁸ Mitra, A. (1954). *Census of India, 1951, West Bengal District Hand Books: Darjeeling*. West Bengal Government Press, Alipore, p.xxxiv.

in the state of West Bengal was 28.4% and it was 24.06% in case of Darjeeling district while Siliguri alone had the population growth rate during the same phase as 48.9%. It is much astonishing and surprising also as the other towns of North Bengal namely Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Bihar did not face the same increase but they were quite old rather than Siliguri (Roy, 1986, p.244).

According to the Census of 1971 the mass-increase of Darjeeling Terai reached to 301,799 people and the population-density was much more than that of the entire district i.e. 360 persons/sq. km. whereas in case of the district it was estimated only 254 persons/sq. kilometer.⁹ In case of Siliguri Police Station the population density was far greater than that of entire Siliguri Sub-division. The population scenario of Darjeeling Terai in 1971 can be seen through the following table-

Table No – III

**THANAWISE DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY OF POPULATION IN
TERAI IN 1971**

Sub-division or police station	Area in sq. K.m	Persons	Males	Females	Density per sq. K.m
SILIGURI SUB- DIVISION	837.4	3,01,799	1,67,090	1,34,709	360
PHANSIDEWA	312.4	71,885	38,252	33,633	230
SILIGURI	174.8	1,34,392	77,443	56,949	760
KHARIBARI	143.5	44,723	23,584	21,139	312
NAXALBARI	206.7	50,799	27,811	22,988	246

Source: Banerji, Amiya Kumar; Dey Barun and Others. 1980. *WestBengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*. Superintendent of Govt. Printing, Calcutta, p.98

The characteristics of rapid influx of population can be visualized through the density of population taken from the Census of 1981 in Siliguri Municipality numbering 9934 persons per km² which denotes much higher than double in case of usual district urban average (Saha, 1991, pp.02-17). The decadal changes can be revealed through the population distribution in entire Darjeeling Terai 1971-1981.

⁹ Banerji, Amiya Kumar; Dey, Barun and Others, *Op. cit.* p.96.

Table No – IV

DECADAL CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN TERAI
1971-1981

POLICE STATIONS	1971			1981			PERCENTAGE OF DECADAL VARIATION		
	TOTAL	RURAL	URBAN	TOTAL	RURAL	URBAN	TO TAL	RU RAL	UR BAN
NAXAL BARI	50,799	50799	-	81175	72467	8708	59.80	42.65	-
SILIGURI	134392	36908	97484	232610	78232	154378	73.08	111.96	58.36
PHANSI DEWA	71855	71855	-	107464	107464	-	49.49	49.49	-
KHARI BARI	44723	44723	-	51646	51646	-	15.48	15.48	-

Source: *Census of India, 1981, Series 23, West Bengal District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, 1987, Part XIII-B.* Director of Census Operations, West Bengal, p.10

The continuous influx was going on and as a result of it the urban population of Siliguri Municipal Town grew to 1,54,375 persons which indicates the growth of 56,894 added persons by the years of 1971-1981¹⁰. During the ten years of 1971-1981 the Siliguri Police Station witnessed an unnatural population growth of 111.96 per cent. It is needless to say that Assam disturbances played crucial role in this massive influx of the town. The accrual of urban population in Siliguri Municipality was 46.83 per cent in the decade 1981-1991 which helps to assume that a bulk of these immigrants were from Assam due to the ongoing turmoil in that state (Khasnobish, 2018, p.201).

Table No – V

DECADAL CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION 1981-1991
IN SILIGURI SUB-DIVISION(DARJEELING TERAI)

NAME OF POLICE STATION	1981			1991			Percentage of decadal variation 1981-1991			Percentage of urban population	
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	To tal	Ru ral	Ur ban	1981	1991
NAXAL BARI	81175	72467	8708	102537	90473	12064	+26.32	+24.85	+38.54	10.73	11.77
MATIGARA- INVESTIGATION CENTRE	77165	77165	-	84760	80057	4703	+9.84	+3.75	-	-	5.56

¹⁰ *Census of India, 1981, Series 23, West Bengal District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, 1987, Part XIII-B.* Director of Census Operations, West Bengal, p. 10.

SILIGURI	15544 5	1067	154378	22374 7	6797	2169 50	+43. 94	+53 7.0 2	+40. 53	+99. 31	+96. 96
PHANSI DEWA	10746 4	10746 4	-	14004 5	140045	-	+30. 32	+30 .32	-	-	-
KHARI BARI	51646	51646	-	64012	64012	-	+23. 94	23. 94	-	-	-
DISTRICT	10242 69	74211 6	282153	12999 19	903859	3960 60	+26. 91	+21 .79	+40. 37	+27. 55	+30. 47

Source: *Census of India, 1991, Series 26, West Bengal District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, 1992, Part XII-B*. Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal, p. xxiv.

It is needless to say that the nature of this population influx is 'Exogenous'. It means that the root of this influx lies elsewhere. The cause is migration (Dasgupta, 2010, p.45). The last decade of twentieth century attested the continuity of unprecedented growth of population in Siliguri Sub-division. Siliguri became these Bongal Khedao Andolon-displaced peoples' first choice for various reasons as discussed earlier. Before 1994 Dabgram was assumed as a separate town during the Census of 1991 which adopted spectacular population influx resulting 92.29 per cent increase of mass which reflects the immigration of the Bengalis from Assam who particularly settled in Dabgram region over the years of Assam disturbances (Majumdar, 2001, p.xi).

Resettlement and Rehabilitation:

The immigration of Bengalis from the adjacent state of Assam into Siliguri makes the town potential enough to get an important locus in the socio-economic-political scenario of West Bengal. The Bengalis from Assam tried devoutly to be diluted in the existing society of the town. The people of Darjeeling Terai also protested against the *Bongal Khedao Andolon*. The people displayed their agitation while Mr. Hareshwar Goswami, the Minister of Assam reached at Siliguri Junction on 9th July 1960 (Chattopadhyay, 2000, p.42). The burning of ambassador car, death of five people in firing, injury of 10-12 people made the environment of Siliguri argent. 'Bangla Hartal' was observed in the town on 16th July against the expulsion of Bengalis from Assam. Acharya Vinoba Bhave, renowned founder of 'Bhoodan Movement' passed through Siliguri on the way to Assam on 16th February, 1961 and he made an appeal to the local leaseholders to distribute their non-agricultural or vested lands to the immigrated people in Siliguri and many of them distributed their lands on his proposal and got entitled as 'Bhoodani'. To satisfy the commercial need of the immigrated people into Darjeeling Terai Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy former Chief Minister of West Bengal also took step for the foundation 'Bidhan Market' which now becomes as one of the biggest and most important market-place of Darjeeling Terai (Chattopadhyay, 2000, p.40). The people after leaving Assam built their new address in the various areas of Darjeeling Terai like-Dabgram Unnayan (1,2), Deshbandhu Para, Baghajatin

Colony, Subhash Nagar, BBD Colony, Adarsho Nagar Colony, Notun Para, Jyoti Nagar (2), Pati Colony, Sukanto Pally, Swami Nagar Colony, Panchanoi Colony, Lichubagan Colony, Santoshi Nagar Colony, Prantik Pally (Bharat Nagar) (Chakraborty, 2015, p.231). Through interviews it is known that many of these people were the victims of Partition of India and Bongal Khedao Movement also.

People belonging to Bengali Hindu family in newly created East Pakistan had to first leave their own primitive birthplace and then they took refuge in adjacent Assam primarily. *Dr. Nagendra Chandra Das* (Personally Interviewed at Hakim Para, Siliguri on 08/11/2020) also spent his childhood at Bajrajogini village in Bikrampur District, Dacca of East Pakistan. After 1947, he had to take shelter in India. He then joined Hatibari Tea-Estate Hospital, Rangapara, Assam in 1952 as a doctor. In 1953, he opened Nowgong Pharmacy at Nowgong. But his apparently settled life began to be affected by the political turmoil in Assam during the 1960s. During the Official Language Movement in 1960 he was wounded by a ‘*Chaku*’ (pen knife) at his chest. He also witnessed the killing of a Bengali reporter in front of him. In 1972 he was invited to join a meeting proclaiming in favor of Assamese language. There was also a demand that in the Nowgong Bengali Girls’ High School the girls from class vii would wear the traditional dress of Assam i.e., ‘*Mekhla*’ instead of Saree. He was also threatened that if he did not join the meeting then the Nowgong Bengali society would be burnt. He ultimately decided to leave Assam to protect the future of his family. He used to hide himself at ‘*Goyal ghar*’ (cattle shed) at night for many days. His family fled to take asylum at a ‘*Bangali Para*’ (The Colony of the Bengali dwellers). They used to hear from the Bengali protectors of the Para– “*aschhe, aschhe*” (coming, they are coming). In the meantime, he sold his house, clinic, car at nominal value to Dr. Barkakoti. The Nowgong Pharmacy was transformed into Barkakoti Clinic and Dr. N. C. Das’s house took the shape of Barkakoti Nursing Home. To be alive he immigrated to Siliguri in the year 1971 and set up ‘*Das Medical Hall*’ at Bidhan Road. Unfortunately, he faced the tyranny of majority Muslims against the minority Hindus in East Pakistan and then he again confronted the dogma of the Assamese against the Bengalis in Assam.

Another immigrant expressed his sorrow that how partition did not only make sections of the country but it also sectioned the lakhs of Hindu refugee families. At first, they went Assam but they could not stay there permanently and turned into a Bongal Khedao Andolon-displaced family. *Sajal Roy*, (Personally Interviewed at Sevoke Road, Siliguri on 10/11/2020) an enriched businessman of Siliguri belongs to Assam whereas his forefathers immigrated into Assam from Satgaon, Bikrampur, Dacca after the Partition. Through the link of their relatives they settled at Golaghat, Upper Assam first. But due to the Assam disturbances in 1971 they moved for Siliguri. He described that how they were financially annoyed by the *ULFA* and *Dasmohun Roy*, his elder brother got kidnapped by *ULFA*. After

providing the demand-money they readily immigrated into Siliguri in 1989 and started hardware business at Sevoke Road.

One biased incident also needs to be mentioned in this regard that only for being a non-Assamese a Bengali's name was cut from the job-list though he ranked first in the examination. He faced such type of discriminations during his days in Assam. *Samiran Chanda* (Personally Interviewed at Milan Pally, Siliguri on 14/11/2020) came into Siliguri for resettlement in 1982. He resided in Jamunamukh of Nowgong district, Assam for nearly 35 years and directly experienced the violence conducted by the Assamese anti-Bengali groups. Their house was burnt. He with his entire family had to pass seven days beside the railway-lines. For a week they used to eat only boiled arum. His sisters had to hide themselves behind cattle-shed. He came to Siliguri to get relief from such turmoil in Assam and he joined as the Supervisor of a tea-estate nearby Siliguri.

As many of these displaced people left Assam without any of their possessions these families suffered a lot in their resettlement in a new town. They shared their experience about the Assamese annoyance against the Bengalis. *Priyolal Majumdar* (Personally Interviewed at Mahananda Para, Siliguri on 04/11/2020) originally belonged to Noakhali District of East Pakistan, immigrated into Assam in 1968. He stayed in Assam for 20 years and worked as an Assistant Manager at Kulikuchi Tea Estate in Nowgong suburbs. But the Assam agitation compelled him to migrate again. The Assamese threatened to burn his abode and they took shelter behind the Kulikuchi hummock for three days. Fortunately, the Assam Military Force rescued them and they got the chance to migrate into Siliguri. Here he joined as the Manager in Saraswatipur Tea Estate near Salugara.

The cordial connection among the relatives or the neighbors earlier residing in the same locality in East Pakistan played significant role in the immigration in both cases of Assam and Siliguri. In this context *Balaram Aich*, (Personally Interviewed at Raja Rammohun Roy Road, Siliguri on 05/11/2020) an evacuee from East Pakistan to Assam was largely helped by his elder brother Late Jogesh Chandra Aich to resettle in Siliguri. After partition he settled at Lamding of Nowgong district of Brahmaputra valley in Assam. But there already had begun the Assam disturbances in 1960s. In 1962 he came to Siliguri and gradually he started 'New Variety Stores' at Hill Cart Road at only 30 Rupees rent per month.

People facing hazards by the different anti-foreigner parties of Assam were compelled to leave Assam. *Gouranga Das* (Personally Interviewed at Deshbandhu Para, Siliguri on 17/11/2020) earlier established his own sweet-store '*Mamata Sweet Centre*' and clothing business '*Shilpi Dresses*' at Dhemaji in Upper Assam in 1979. But his business was extremely hampered by the ongoing *Bongal Khedao Movement* in Assam. Many local leaders of *ULFA* became perilous for him and his business as they paid nothing after having food and buying cloths from his shop. He readily returned to Siliguri for the sake of his family and started a new business

with his lump sum amount. But here he failed to continue his merchandise activities. His children found extreme difficulties in their study in the Bengali-medium schools of Siliguri as they earlier had to study in Assamese-medium school of Assam.

A lady compared her situation with the Hindu refugees of East Pakistan as her family had to leave their home in Assam for getting rid of socio-political tensions. She felt sorry as she perceived “*Ami amar pranta Nowgong-te fele chole esechhi*” (I left my heart and soul in Nowgong). *Mitra Das* (Personally Interviewed at Church Road, Siliguri on 07/11/2020) remembered the black days of Assam disturbances. She saw that how the Assamese agitation made the apparently calm city to an untamed one. During the chaos of Language Movement the slogans like “*Bangali hathao*” (Drive out the Bengalis), “*Ahomiya Bahako Mul Baha Koriba Lagibo*” (Asamiya language should be the main language of the state) tempted the atmosphere of the city. She witnessed that the agitators threw big bolder aiming at the window-glass of their house. The anarchy in 1972 made her family bound to leave Assam. She discussed that her elder sister had to stop her study due to her mother’s sickness and she became traumatized during Assam disturbances. She remembered that she started again her education life from Siliguri Girls’ High School being admitted in the mid of the session in 1973 and initially became very shy and lonesome as she was teased by her classmates because she could not pronounce ‘A’ properly. As a result of earlier living in Assam her pronunciation of ‘A’ was like ‘O’ and her language was seemed like “*Bangal*” (the language of the primitive Bengali people of East Pakistan). She used to be scolded by her teachers in school for this reason and she gradually rectified herself. She told that though the city remained to her as a “*Praner Shohor*” (the city very close to her heart), but still today the disturbances of the city haunts her. She suffered from trauma and depression due to the displacement.

Accommodating and Searching for New Economic Arena:

It can be noted that the dimension of anti-Bengali movement in Assam was not same in the entire state. The Brahmaputra valley was more untamed than the Barak valley of the same state in the context of anti-Bengali agitations. Naturally the level of immigration from the districts of Brahmaputra valley was affected by the political turmoil going over the decades in Assam while the volume of immigration from Barak valley of Assam into Siliguri was regulated by the immigrants’ own monetary interests mainly. Many of them migrated from East Pakistan into the Barak Valley of Assam as the area was geographically nearer to them. At the first phase they immigrated into Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj etc. and then they moved again to Siliguri for grasping the better chance of livelihood in the second phase.

Another Partition-refugee expressed his sorrow about how the Hindu people in the post-partition era became stymied by the majority Muslims in East Pakistan. Many

immigrated to Bengal or the rest did the same to Assam, whichever was nearer to them. *Sanjay Kumar Paul* (Personally Interviewed at Vivekananda Pally, Bagdogra on 27/11/2020) was born in 1951 at Habiganj Thana, Sylhet district in East Pakistan. He remembered that when he was in class vii then the number of Hindu teachers and students in the school had reduced instantly. He regretted to see that the Hindu–Muslim conflict had already entered into the minds of school-students also. He entered into India through the ‘*Katlamara*’ border of the-then East Pakistan. He confessed that not all the Muslims were perilous for the Hindus in East Pakistan. However, he ultimately reached at ChhotoJalenga nearby Silchar in 1965. He showed that the linkage of relatives in the post-partition era played crucial role in infiltration of Hindu partition-refugees. He again migrated to Siliguri to earn himself. Thus, he had to go through major displacement twice, at first from East Pakistan being a Hindu refugee and then from Assam to Siliguri in search for work.

The Sylhet Referendum drastically changed the lives of the Hindus of the district. Many Hindu ‘*Sylhetti*’ families had faced with dacoities which were conducted by the Muslims and were also beaten and threatened to leave their abode. They had no chance to live furthermore in East Pakistan and being compelled they left their home, agricultural land, their possessions etc. *Late Bires Chandra Paul* (Personally Interviewed with Mrs. Usha Paul, Wife of Late B.C. Paul, Hill Cart Road, Siliguri on 29/11/2020) a ‘*Sylhetti*’ spent his childhood in East Pakistan. His family also could not remain untouched from the aftermaths of Partition. He with his brother migrated to Guwahati in 1962 and started his new journey as hotel stuff at ‘*Delight Hotel*’ in Guwahati. One by one all of his family members immigrated to Cachhar district of Barak valley of Assam as it was adjacent to their earlier residence at Dawpara village, Habiganj Thana of Sylhet district. However, B.C. Paul was offered to move forward for Siliguri where the construction of Indian Oil Pipeline was going on. Gradually in the 1960s ‘*Mahananda Stores*’ at Airview More, Hill Cart Road was established by him in which *Haripada Paul*, another ‘*Sylhetti*’ immigrant invested the requisite money. Thus, one can see that Siliguri was popular as a commercial hub among the people of Assam also. Many of the refugees like B.C. Paul turned into fortune seeker to establish themselves in the new economic sphere of this new city. Sometimes they became successful to lead better livelihood or sometimes many of them failed to gain expected economic prosperity after passing through timid life-struggle.

The situation for the Hindu Bengalis in East Pakistan was worsening day by day. The Hindu parents wanted to send their children to India by hook or by crook for at least to be alive. *Badal Kanti Chowdhury* (Personally Interviewed at Surya Sen Colony, Siliguri on 30/11/2020) shared that there was always the tendency among the Hindus to leave East Pakistan or later Bangladesh. The father of esteemed *Dr. Sunayan Chowdhury* of Siliguri has shared his immigration-journey from East Pakistan to Siliguri via Assam. He was born in 1946 and brought up in Mujaffarabad, Tarapatia, Chittagong district of undivided Bengal, India. There he

became a teacher of Govt. Primary School. He was also awarded 'Presidential Award' as a Primary Teacher in East Pakistan. But during the East Pakistan days their live became drastically changed. However, in 1973 he came to Silahati, Assam and got a job as stuff in a cloth-store. One can see here the aftermath of partition in the life of a Hindu refugee from Bangladesh. The tragedy of his life was that once the reputed school teacher of the Bangladesh turned into a stuff working at public forum in Assam. He again migrated into Siliguri in 1982 in search of better livelihood. The connectivity among the relatives also worked in this context. Though once he was an enriched person in Bangladesh but after coming to India his financial condition was deteriorating.

As many of the immigrants in Siliguri were from Assam, therefore, the people who had connection with Assam also invited the immigrants from Assam into Siliguri. Thus some of the inhabitants being connected with Assam and their relatives staying in Siliguri influenced Rajib Saha's family to immigrate into this town and the father of *Rajib Saha* (Personally Interviewed at Deshbandhu Para, Siliguri on 30/11/2020). *Mr. Rabindra Lal Saha* always preferred Siliguri as being a businessman he perceived the commercial importance of this town. He acknowledged that the marketing scope is far better in Siliguri than any other town in Northeast. Due to the town's mercantile amenities and its connectivity with Northeast he settled in Siliguri in 1989. For moving forward to live prosper economic livelihood they immigrated into Siliguri, the land full of commercial opportunities.

Conclusion:

These immigrants from Assam who settled in Siliguri can be categorized as forced and voluntary immigrants. Many families immigrated into Siliguri and surrounding areas as they found the presence of their friends, relatives in this area and their social acceptance encouraged them to leave Assam. They found social and political security, hope of peace and tranquility, more liberal society, religious tolerance and more business opportunities in this region. They migrated voluntarily. On the other hand, the lack of social-financial security, the unfavorable political condition in Assam forced the Bengalis to leave Assam. Leaving Assam these people again started their live-struggle in new way. The trauma which they had faced at first in East-Pakistan (Now-a-days Bangladesh) and then in Assam devastated their live. They had lost their mental peace and economical prosperity. They had to leave their own native land and already established financial platform. They had to face many struggles and hardships to secure their economical safety. Though many of them were refugees from East-Pakistan later Bangladesh in Assam at the first phase and then they again migrated into Siliguri but unfortunately they did not get any recognition as refugee from government and naturally they were not provided with any financial help from the government. They had to start their new journey in a new realm and gradually they diluted in a new society. The irony in the lives of these displaced people is that these people still can feel their cordial connection

with East Pakistan or later Bangladesh largely. They still give their unofficial identity as 'Sylhetti' (earlier resident of Sylhet district of East Pakistan), 'Daccaiya' (resident of Dacca district), 'Barishalya' (resident of Barishal district), 'Chatgaiya' (resident of Chattagram district) or as the sons of Noakhali district, Bikrampur of East Pakistan which shows their deep-felt affection for their birthplace. The old generation of these immigrants still prefers to establish matrimonial relationship with the people belonged from their 'desher bari' (original homeland of East Pakistan or present Bangladesh). Whenever they get chance to speak in their own local language of East Pakistan they unhesitatingly start to speak out in that 'desher bhasha'. Till now they are keenly interested to follow the traditional ethics-rituals of their earlier residence in East Pakistan during any kind of social occasions. But the picture is not same in case of the young generation of these displaced families. Thus, it can be concluded that these partition-distressed people or rather these evacuees from Assam at last finally got their shelter in Darjeeling Terai.

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