

**The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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***Abstract:** This article narrates the journey of Namasudra family from Faridpur to Malda in the context of Partition. As there is no specific destination, the overall conditions of their journey, route, and means of travel, taking shelter in various temporary refugee camps, advantages and disadvantages are highlighted here. The background of being a refugee and the incidents of refugee life in Malda, West Bengal, India, are not explained in detail on this small scale, starting from leaving the illusion of their original residence and beginning the journey, from the former Ashrafpur in Bamangola block of Malda, the village that was named Ashrampur after taking shelter of the refugees and the time period for obtaining the land title granted by the government is discussed here in detail. The current situation, the flow of events, specially the uncertain problems during the journey of the refugee families from contemporary East Pakistan can be easily deduced from this paper.*

***Key Words:** Displacement, Malda, Namasudra, Refugee, Resettlement, Travel, Shelter.*

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**Introduction**

Here is a brief account of the arrival of the numerous displaced people who entered India from East and West Pakistan due to the refugee crisis that arose as a by-product of partition and independence in 1947. Namasudra is a community belonging to the Scheduled caste. Although they are found in all parts of present India, their number is highest in East India specially in West Bengal and Assam.

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## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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Khulna, Jessore, Dhaka, Rajshahi, Faridpur, Barisal, and Pabna these districts were mostly Hindu inhabited areas. The number of Hindus here was about five million. And it is noteworthy that the number of upper caste Hindus in the whole of East Bengal was relatively low. In comparison, the proportion of upper caste Hindus in the western part of Bengal was much higher. Due to the political ignorance of the lower caste people and also their economic weakness, they were not able to leave East Pakistan and take shelter in India or West Bengal in the context of pre-independence partition and in the context of religion which gave rise to two separate nations after independence. A very few of the Namasudras left East Bengal immediately before and after independence.

However, from the 1940s to the present, the number of Hindus continues to decline significantly from present-day Bangladesh or the previous East Bengal of India or East Pakistan in the middle period. It can be assumed that either non-Muslims or Hindus entered India as refugees or infiltrators otherwise they had converted to Islam. Although these two issues are discussed here, it seems that the number of people leaving the country has increased. From the census report of Bangladesh, the picture of a continuous decrease in the number of Hindus comes to the fore. The number of Hindus in East Bengal was 28% in 1941, 22% in 1951, 18.5% in 1961, 13.5% in 1974, 12.2% in 1981, 10.5% in 1991 and 8.6% in 2011. It is expected that the number of Hindus thus reduced will now stand at 6% to 7%.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom came on the condition of partition. Refugees are created as a by-product of independence and partition. The refugee problem in the western part of India was solved quite smoothly. But in the East, that problem has been going on for a long time and it still exists today. There needs to be a discussion of why the so-called refugees or infiltrators from East Pakistan and now Bangladesh have been around for so long. Soon after independence, many politically conscious people entered India and West Bengal as refugees. Many of those who were economically strong left at this time. In this case, they left before anything happened to them.

Violence, riots, arson, daily harassment by the Muslims, insults, torture of wives and daughters, theft and seizure of cattle and calves, land, and other property are some of the factors which have driven the non-Muslims out of East Pakistan and present-day Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>. Theft and extortion, economic harassment, especially those involved in various

## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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kinds of small and large businesses, harassment, snatching, etc., forcible taking of food, calling Hindu women as ‘Bibi’<sup>3</sup>, harassment of doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, teachers, and other professionals actually insult, obstruction, and persecution become constant companions, especially in the practice of the profession<sup>4</sup>. With the declaration of independence and partition, the riots in East India and then East Pakistan, which started in 1946, abruptly stopped. An atmosphere of peace and harmony was created all around. But even without major riots or unrest, the so-called socio-economic and religious persecution in East Pakistan continues to flow from east to west.

In addition to these direct factors, some indirect factors can also be attributed to the increase in the flow of refugees. As the country is divided on the basis of religion, non-Muslims in East Pakistan will be considered second class citizens and in future, their education may be difficult in all fields including work. Instead, many leave India thinking that their education and employment will be of greater benefit to them. At the same time, it is seen that due to the rich nobility of many villages or in many cases the Zamindars families have left the country, it is not possible for the poor families to live there so many people leave the country and migrate to India<sup>5</sup>. In this context, a Namasudra refugee writer further clarify our understanding of the subject. He mentioned that, it is seen that they did not leave East Bengal immediately after the independence and partition of the country. When the riots broke out in 1950 and took horrific forms, when the true and false information about the riots came to their ears, they fled the country and came to India as West Bengal, not earlier. In other words, it can be seen here that one after another riots broke out in Noakhali, Chittagong, Dhaka, and Barisal and the rioters were being helped by the administration. Children ranging from seven to 70 years old women were not spared. The rioters set fire to villages after looting murders and rapes. When the people of Faridpur heard such false information, they decided to leave the country. And it was seen that from this popular Hindu inhabited region of East Pakistan, they either marched in groups or in any other vehicle, they moved towards India to save their lives and especially towards West Bengal<sup>6</sup>.

### **Number of Arrivals**

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## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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Now it is necessary to shed some light on the number of refugees arriving in West Bengal from East Pakistan that happened over time. The flow of refugee arrivals can be discussed in several parts. The influx of refugees from East Bengal began in the wake of the August 1946 riots, which took place before the independence of the country, when talks or conspiracies to divide India were going on. When the riots broke out in Noakhali on 16 August 1946 in retaliation for the Great Calcutta Killing, non-Muslims left their ancestral hometowns and took refuge elsewhere. It is not that the riots did not take place before, but the non-Muslims, especially the lower caste Hindus, could resist the earlier riots and gradually they would live together again. But at this time it started a much planned Hindu massacre and the Muslim League and the provincial government continued to support the riots.

However, our point here is that about 19,000 non-Muslim refugees entered India from East Bengal in 1946, in relation to the Noakhali Riot. About 14,000 of them entered West Bengal. From then until 1956, the influx of refugees in India and in West Bengal was quite high. In the year 1947, the influx of refugees in West Bengal was 258000 and it was by partition and independence. The tension that arose among the non-Muslim in East Pakistan after the annexation of the state of Hyderabad to India in 1948 led to the influx of 590,000 refugees into West Bengal that year. The communal riots in Khulna and Barisal in 1949 resulted in a total of 1364000 refugees leaving East Pakistan and entering India this year and the following year. Assume 140,000 in 1951, the bad economic situation in 1952 and especially in that year due to low crop production many left East Pakistan and entered West Bengal and their number was 152000. They said the government was not helping them. So they crossed the border and came to India so that they would not starve to death. A few days later, many of them returned to their former home<sup>7</sup>. However, this year, in 1952, the government of Pakistan introduced the passport system. That is why the Indian government also has to introduce passports. This did not have much effect on the minority community in India, but it did have a profound effect on the minorities living in East Pakistan. There was great vacillation and panic among the East Pakistani Hindus. They were of the opinion that after the introduction of the Passport system, no one would be allowed to enter India as he wished. The Passport system was introduced on 15th October 1952, but the rate of arrival of refugees from East Pakistan to West Bengal increased considerably due to the introduction of

## The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family

passports sometimes before that. In October 1952, there were 31753 refugees sheltered at the refugee camp in West Bengal. Whereas, the refugees took refuge in West Bengal's refugee camps from January to June this year an average of 2062 every month. The number of refugees arriving in West Bengal from East Pakistan in 1953 and 1954 was 61,000 and 104,000 respectively. In 1955, Urdu was adopted as the lingua franca in Pakistan, and in 1956, the Islamic Constitution was adopted. As a result, the number of refugees arriving in West Bengal from East Pakistan increased in those two years to 212,000 and 247,000 respectively. From then until 1963, the rate of migration from East Pakistan to India and West Bengal was greatly reduced. But on December 27, 1963, the Hazratbal incident in Jammu and Kashmir caused a riot in East Pakistan and the massacre of Hindus started there. As a result, the number of non-Muslim refugees arriving from East Pakistan suddenly increased dramatically in 1964, reaching 419,000 and 81,000 for West Bengal in 1964 and 1965, respectively. From 1966 to 1969, the number of refugees arriving from East Pakistan was much lower. But due to financial problems in 1970 and the ensuing elections, the influx of refugees increased again this year and the number of arrivals in West Bengal was 232,000.<sup>8</sup>

Another statistic shows the number of refugees arriving in West Bengal from East Pakistan from 1946 to 1970. The statistics are given below,<sup>9</sup>

### Committee of Review of Rehabilitation Work in West Bengal

Chronological Statement of Exodus from Earstwhile East Pakistan to India	
Year	Persons
1946	58602
1947	463474
1948	490555
1949	326211
1950	1172928
1951	47437
1952	351440
1953	76123
1954	121364
1955	240424
1956	581000

## The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family

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1957	6000
1958	4898
1959	6348
1960	9712
1961	10847
1962	13894
1963	16295
1964	693142
1965	107906
1966	7665
1967	24527
1968	11614
1969	9763
1970	251160
Total	5283324

The figures are replicated without amendment from the original from the book *The Marginal Men* of Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty, (Lumiere Books, 1960): 464

### Means of Arrivals

There is a lot of information about how the dispossessed people left East Pakistan, which way they entered India, and where they took refuge. But this was a common type of arrival. Particularly those refugees who had not been able to bring enough property or money with them, or a class of refugee families who had not much real or immovable property in East Pakistan, had crossed the India-Pakistan border on foot or by train and entered India. Needless to say, the reason for the arrival of these uprooted poor people was as much oppression as they were, in almost the same way they were tortured and plundered when they left the country and came to the West Bengal or India. When they entered India as well as West Bengal, their addresses were temporary camps set up in different regions. Accommodation arrangements have been made for a long time by the government and many voluntary organizations. It can be seen that those who came by train usually passed through Benapole-Petrapole two check posts. And after entering or entering West Bengal, they have been kept in a region near the border for a very short time or for a few days. They were then sent to a makeshift camp set up at Sealdah station. Since then they had been rehabilitated in

# **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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different areas. Many had been relocated to camps and refugee camps and then, they had been rehabilitated. This is a general outline of the arrival of refugees and the initial phase of resettlement. That is, they first left their homeland in East Bengal or East Pakistan. Since then, at any time or in any untimely manner, they had entered India by any means of transport on any road or barefooted. They had come by rail more than any other mode of transport for the convenience of communication. Many have entered India by air and it can be said that such people had vast wealth.

## **Arrivals cycle of a family**

Here are a couple of examples of this arrival cycle. Many non-Muslim families from East Pakistan entered India and West Bengal during the 1950 riots and information about one of them can be given here. The family left Faridpur as a refugee and entered India in 1950 and was eventually resettled in Malda. In the darkness of the night, without telling anyone, they sailed to an unknown destination. The family then left with the husband and wife and their two sons and a daughter. The husband was the guardian of the family. The family first reached Khulna by boat. Then they reached Benapole station by train from the Khulna platform. This was the last station of Pakistan, the border of Hindustan and Pakistan. There was what happened to them,

*“As soon as the car stopped, four or five policemen got up into the compartment. Then the order is to keep the luggage open and checking will be done. The first thing that started to check was the money, gold, and silver. They took away as much as they could. The girl had to open the little gold in her nose and ears. If not given voluntarily, they are forcibly taken away.*

*Then the body search started. Women, men, boys, girls, old men and women, no one were left out of the body search. It is better to call it barbarism than body search. Then they began the total search of things of luggage. They began to fill the sacks with whatever they could get their hands on, bronze and brass dishes, glasses, jugs, bowls, and blankets.”<sup>10</sup>*



## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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Anyway, then left the train and reached Petropol station. From there the train reached Habra station at late night. A school house very close to Habra station was arranged as a temporary shelter for all these lost shredded people by a group of volunteers. If there were people from many more districts but the population of this group was more from the four districts i.e. Dhaka Faridpur Barisal-Khulna. *“Everyone is homeless, plundered, and humiliated. It's as if one soul. Everyone is equally miserable. The boundaries of discrimination are so invisible. Everyone is equally concerned about the present and the future.”*<sup>11</sup> After staying in Habra for a few days, they were again taken by train to Sealdah. Volunteers showed the families living places on the station grounds. After entering India, i.e. after entering West Bengal, cooked Khichuri or hotchpotch was served to the refugees in many cases.

At this time the Sealdah station could be called the gate of hell for the refugees.

*“Crowds of people everywhere on the platform, in the station yard and outside the station. Infestation of feces-urine-mosquito-fly is unbearable. Where there is excrement. Its smell is unbearable. Everyday spreads bleaching powder, Phenyl. Amulya's mother can't stand even her strong smell. Above all, the smell of sweat and human skin is on the nose. The rotten smell of food is more awkward.”*<sup>12</sup>

Hearing that people would be sent to the Andaman from here and rehabilitated, the head of the family had enrolled his name to go there. But after two or three days it was heard that the sending of people to the Andaman had stopped. In the meantime, a demand was raised that the Bengalis should be rehabilitated in Bengal. But the situation of the family began to be such that they agreed to leave even if they were taken away from there and taken to hell. Because the family then thought that the condition of this place was worse than hell. The family then learned that people would be sent to Malda to be rehabilitated. Without thinking, the head of the family went and wrote the name. When the order to go to Malda was placed, the Malda special train with the refugees started running. They survived by eating molasses from the volunteers. The train once reached Sakrikali Ghat. Everyone was dropped off and taken across the Ganges by steamer and reached Manihari Ghat. From there the train came to

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## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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Katihar station. Volunteers warned everyone not to open the train door and not to let anyone outside get on the train. But somehow the locals got into a compartment and as a result, there was trouble between them and bloodshed ensued. After that problem was solved the train left the Katihar station and they reached Old Malda station. From there they were taken by train to Bulbulchandi, the last station of their destination. That is, the desired destination was brought to the city of Malda near their rehabilitation area. Volunteers from Bulbulchandi station allowed them to stay temporarily in a mango orchard. After spending two nights there, they were taken by lorry to Pakuahat. After spending the night in Pakuahat, they were taken by lorry back to their desired rehabilitation area. The name of the village is Ashrafpur. Before the arrival of the refugees, some Officers came and fixed the house for the office. And after all these refugees had arrived, the houses in that village are being provided among the refugees for them. These houses are abandoned houses of Muslims. Thus a family started their journey as refugees from Faridpur and finally got the desired home.

### **Settling of Refugee family**

One thing that must be noted here is that at this stage the village of Ashrafpur and the surrounding villages were filled with refugees. Most of these refugees belonged to the Namasudra community. After they took shelter in different villages, they started giving money for their dolls or cash dolls as 12 rupees per month for adults and six rupees for children for their living. The struggle of their new life began.

A different example should be given here. Several Bihari refugees took refuge in this village. However, they did not suffer like the people of Dhaka, Faridpur, and Barisal districts because these Bihari refugees came from nearby place of the border. Before coming, they were able to exchange all their houses and lands with the Muslims of Ashrafpur village. And when they arrived, they were able to bring their belongings in bullock carts or ox carts. So even though they were displaced, they did not suffer any major loss. In addition, they received what they left behind, in addition to the Doll money and other benefits available as refugees. However, not only Biharis but also those who were able to transfer their property as refugees from near the border took advantage of such facilities whether he is Namasudra or of any other communities' people.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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There is no doubt that the refugees at those times left their many generations homelands and come to India out of sheer fear and safety. Because if they lived there, they would not think that it was possible to protect the dignity of their daughters in the house and even to save their lives. Not even the way to get there was safe. The news that a young girl from a decent family had been abducted in Benapole would come to the authorities from time to time.<sup>14</sup>

Those who have left the country near the border between India and East Pakistan have usually crossed the border on foot and have been able to exchange property. However, there are many advantages and disadvantages to this property transfer. In this case, many times fraud has been done. It is seen that one property has been sold or exchanged in 2 or 3 ways to 2 or 3 people. For example, in Ashrafpur or after the refugees took refuge there the name was changed to Ashrampur, however, the land was allotted by the government for resettlement among the refugees at Ashrampur. Then when they were asked to record the land or when they started trying to record the land donated by the government, it was found that, this has happened in many cases, having 2 or 3 names in the same property as ownership has caused problems in recording the property. However, in this case, it can be said that many people may have intentionally sold the property to someone once and then exchanged that property with someone else in the same way. There have been times when the property may have been exchanged with someone, but when the Indian government or the West Bengal government has set or started paying a fair price for the property of those who have left the country, then those emigrant Muslims re-enter India and had taken away the value of that property<sup>15</sup>.

In other words, it is seen that a Muslim first exchanged property and moved from a border village in West Bengal to a border village in East Bengal and East Pakistan. That is, he exchanged property with someone and left. In this situation, he got the security of his property. At the very next step, when the Indian government announced that those who were leaving the country and moving to East Pakistan, their property would be paid or valued. If they want, they can come back and start living again. The system began in 1950 and lasted until March 31, 1951.<sup>16</sup>

The success of the refugee rehabilitation system depended heavily on the resettlement authorities. The name Hiranmay Bandyopadhyay comes naturally in this context. His

# **The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family**

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activism and compassion for the displaced people undoubtedly gave impetus to the rehabilitation of refugees. He has been implementing the rehabilitation plan to the best of his ability as a government official. These actions rely heavily on the personal interests of refugee resettlement officials. We see that Hiranmay Bandopadhyay, with the help of Chief Minister Dr. Roy, arranged to send about 500 widows and elderly women to the Varanasi<sup>17</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

It can be assumed that the opposite has happened to a great extent. In most of these cases, however, the success of the system depended largely on the activities of lower-level officials, especially those on the fringes, who were involved in the resettlement program for refugees. And in many cases, the rehabilitation plan was thwarted because they or those officials were not honest and hardworking. There were also cases where refugees received fewer benefits than they were supposed to receive for resettlement. In other words, a part of what they really deserved could be said to have been stolen from the middle or taken away by someone else. And that work was done through these intermediate officers who were involved with the rehabilitation plan. Many times these resettlement officers or a third party would try to take advantage of the plight of the refugees. For example, during their stay in Sealdah, many refugee women were lured into a dark alley and taken away. If we try to look at the case again in the case of a refugee resettlement village called Ashrafpur or Ashrampur, we will see that there was a Babu here whose name was Durgacharan Chatterjee. He was directly involved in the resettlement of refugees in Ashrampur. He was a Relief Officer at the refugee camp or RO. In this case, the rehabilitation of about 10 rehabilitated colonies or villages in the vicinity, including Ashrampur, was carried out from the office at Ashrampur of Durgacharan Babu. It was once observed that this Durgacharanbabu, though very little, in one case mentioned that he took advantage of the plight of the refugees. And the matter was complained to the DM or SP directly from the stage at a public meeting in Ashrampur. And in the end, the complainant had to leave the relief camp<sup>18</sup>. Again, it is common for refugees to receive less than what they were supposed to receive in cash, assistance, or, more specifically, Cashdole. That small amount of money might have been embezzled by some middle man or individual.

# The Destination towards an Unknown Land (From Faridpur to Malda): A Parallelism of Displacement to Resettlement of Namasudra Family

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