

Influx of Muslims from Pakistan (East Bengal) to the Bordering District of West Bengal

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Abstract: Bengal, both the West and East, had faced great problems since the attainment Independence in 1947. The Partition (1947) was one of the most unhappy incidents of the twentieth century, which severely affected the economic equilibria of the two states. The sudden influx of a very large number of refugees from one part to another had not only put severe strain on their respective resources, but the rehabilitation of the refugees was a huge problem as well. The geographical division separated the two states according to the religious identity ignoring the ethnic and geographical integrity, and forced a million people to leave their homes and hearths as refugees. Moreover, an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan that began in the backdrop of Partition lingers even today after 75 years after the traumatic incident. Creation of a new Muslim state. There was a large- scale influx of Hindu refugees into India, the introduction the Passport system, and communal disturbances of the 1950s motivated the Muslims to leave India. I will seek highlighted to East Bengal Muslims refugees, and their migration policy after the partition.
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Introduction

Movement of the minority communities from both Bengals began soon after the announcement of the Partition plan on 3rd June 1947, and its acceptance by the major political parties. The influx rose and fell according to the public appreciation of the Inter Dominion relationship. In the beginning, the process was a slow one when only those who had friends and relations started migrating. By October 1947, this phase was over, and a genuine mass movement began on large scale. The process further intensified with the arrival of Muslim refugees from Bihar, the victims of Calcutta riots, and evacuees from Noakhali and Tippera

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who had left their home district after communal riots in 1946. Partition thus not only destroyed the age- old social and family ties, but it also severed the economic and cultural ties that had held the Bengalis together for many generations. Several Inter Dominion Conferences were held at Calcutta, Delhi, Dacca, Karachi since 1948, and it was agreed that in the best interest of the Dominions, mass exodus of minorities should be discouraged and both Dominions should create conditions which would check such exodus and encourage and facilitate, as far as possible, the return of evacuee to their ancestral home. Press notes were issued accordingly.¹ But in spite of all such determination, the two Dominions failed to secure the happiness and well- being of the minorities. Through both the governments were aware of violations of Inter Dominion agreements and complaints of harassment and atrocities from both countries piled up, they largely refused to acknowledge such reports as dependable. According to them, all the stories of oppression and anarchies were concocted, and the press was mainly responsible for creating such stories including the communal tension.²

The high Cost of living and panic of residing in a solely Muslim state in East Bengal most likely influenced the infiltration of Hindus to different parts of India, including West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, to a considerable extent.³ immediately after the outbreak of communal disturbances of the 1950s large number of Hindus started migrating to West Bengal. Another side of East Bengal Muslims comes from West Bengal. Based on the 1951 Census of displaced persons were see that 7,226,000 Muslims migrated from Pakistan (both West Bengal and East Bengal).⁴ The Home Political Department records noted that West Bengal's over flooding population compelled Dr. B.C. Roy, Premier, West Bengal, to request through a telegram to the Prime Minister, East Bengal, Dacca, Khwaja Nazimuddin, for stopping the influx of refugees from East Bengal. **Telegram on 30-07-48** "*Large number of refugees pouring into Calcutta everyday (stop) this morning nearly thousand arrived (stop) plight of the refugees very miserable shall be grateful if you can take any step to prevent exodus particularly in such large numbers you will recall this was one of the suggestions of Inter Dominion Conferene.*"⁵ Reference to your telegrams No. 30306, dated the 18th and No. 1921, dated the 20th March, 1950.⁶ numbers of evacuees from East Bengal to West Bengal and vice versa is as follows:

1.(a) arrival of Hindus from East Bengal from 1st January, 1950 to 23rd March, 1950.

i. To Calcutta area by train – 2,86,697

ii. To Calcutta area by air - 15,724

iii. To Calcutta area by steamer – 444

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iv. To the rest of West Bengal by train and road-1, 19,763

Total- 4,22,628

2. (b) Departure of Hindus for East Bengal since the start
Of troubles at Dacca and up to 23rd March, 1950. – 54, 375
- (c) Excess of arrivals of Hindus over departures- 3, 68,253
3. (a) Departure of Muslims from West Bengal for East Bengal
from 13th February, 1950 by train, air, steamer, and road. – 2,46,737
- (b) Arrival of Muslims from East Bengal to West Bengal
from 13th February, 1950 to 23rd March, 1950. - 8,120
- (c) Excess of departure of Muslims over arrival of Muslims- 2,38,617.

The figures have been compiled from the figures of arrival and departure of evacuees by train supplied by the Inspector- General of Police, West Bengal, after actual counting. To these have been added Nos. of departure and arrival by air and by the steamer maintained by the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, the arrivals in and departures from outlying districts supplied by the Districts Officer, and the Nos. recorded at Bongaon and Ranaghat Reception centres by the Rehabilitation Department of this Government.⁷

Note an Exodus of Muslims from Eastern Pakistan into West Bengal

An influx of Muslims from Eastern Pakistan into West Bengal was noticed in recent months, and District officers were instructed to keep watch and take suitable action. It appeared from their reports and also from the report of the Deputy Inspector- General of Police, Intelligence Branch, that while in some instances Muslims came from the East Bengal to supply the seasonal labour in other instances the influx was due either to adverse economic condition in East Bengal, or was the result of a planned movement into West Bengal with the object of settlement along its Pakistan borders. A conference was held by the Chief Secretary on 12.09.49. with the Home Secretary, Commissioner, Presidency Division, Inspector- General of Police officers, District Officers, and Sub Divisional officers concerned, to discuss the problem arising out of this migration.⁸ In the conference Deputy Inspector- General of Police, Intelligence Branch, furnished the following statement of influx of Muslims during the last 6th months-

24- Parganas – 1354 Families.

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Nadia – 1000 Families.

West Dinajpur- 13 Families.

Darjeeling- 1525 Families, a large number being employed on the Assam Building Project.

Jalpaiguri – 1850 Families, mostly employed in the Tea Garden.

Observation at the Sealdah Railway Station showed that during the fortnight ending 1.8.49, 1115 families of Pakistan Muslims here and scattered themselves over the city.⁹ In the course of the discussion, it transpired that Muslims labourers who came from East Pakistan to district like Nadia to assist agricultural operations often struck up intimacy with the local Muslim.¹⁰ Later in times of difficulty these labourers came over to their old acquaintances in our provinces, who arranged shelter for them. The co- villagers of these labourers next followed them in the hope of getting similar help from their co- religionists in our province.¹¹

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24 Parganas

In 24 Parganas, there was a large influx of Pakistani Muslims in the border areas Bangaon.¹¹ leaders were externed, and as a result of other actions taken, 100 families left this area. In Barracpore, the arrivals were mostly from industrial labourers, but they were probably taken settle on lands also when they got any opportunity for it. There are reports of an influx of East Bengal Muslims in Baduria P.S. in Basirhat Subdivision and in some parts of Barasat Subdivision. There is no immigration of Pakistani Muslims worth speaking in Diamond Harbour or Sadar Subdivision in Barracpore Subdivision, the number of working men coming from Noakhali district.¹² The S.D.O.s have made it known that Pakistan Muslim immigrants are not wanted. S.D.O. Bangaon, where the largest immigration of Pakistani Muslims has taken place, reports that migration of Muslims intending to settle there has lessened greatly, and the arrival of Muslim families at Bangaon Railway station has practically eased. On the other hand, a large number of Muslims from Noakhali and Tippera are arriving almost daily at Gopalnagar Railway station between 11th and 25th August, 474 Pakistani Muslims, including 50 women, detrained here in 28 groups, 97 were from Tippera. They mostly belonged to day-labourers and to take up the agricultural work in the neighbouring Unions.¹³ It has been widely made known that Pakistani Muslims would not be allowed here. Details have been furnished by S.D.O Basirhat, and Barasat, they are follows-

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Basirhat

- a. About 100 families of Muslims migrated into this Subdivision.
- b. None of them appears to have taken settlement of the land.
- c. No lands were given to any of them.
- d. Some of the Muslim labouring them, were warned, and it appears that most of them have left the Subdivision. A few remain and work as labourers; the situation is being addressed.

Barasat

- a. 97 families have come. All such cases are in the Barasat East circle only.
- b. As far as could be ascertained, 23 families have settled down, often taking the lands.
- c. All who settled here.

With reference to Commissioner's Secret Memo No. 834-40 C., dated 13.08.49. S.D.O. **Bangaon**, reports are as follows:

Full particulars as asked in the Home Secretary's Secret, D.O. No. 116 DS dated 9.8.49, could not be supplied by me, as the time for collection of the data is short. I shall send these particulars in my next fortnightly report. I, however, furnish the following information-

1. I estimated the number of Muslim families that migrated from East Pakistan to this subdivision to be about 1,000.
2. About 25% may have taken the settlement of land.
3. Almost all the settlements have been taken from Muslims.
4. Leading Muslims of this area, who have land to lease out or wield local influence, have been personally warned against assistance to immigrant Muslims to settle here. Two settlers have been externed under order of the district. A list of a few more settlers has been prepared for their extermination. Intensive propaganda in the interior has been carried on, warning the Muslim residents of this place that they must not assist the Muslim residents.¹⁴
5. New arrivals of Muslim families to settle here has become fewer. Some families have left. Some others are preparing to leave. In a few cases, coercive measures will have to be taken and a list of such families will be submitted within a fortnight.

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Reference Notes of the following persons externed from the district of 24 Parganas

1. Abdul Wahed, S/O. L. Rahim Bux, C/O. Abdul Aziz of Ambikapur, P.S. Bangaon. Previous address (Nowtala, P.S. Chandina, Dt. Tippera). – Teacher, Sirajuddoula M.F.School, Ambikapur, joined in September 1948. Peaches, anti- dominion views. A man of extreme communal outlook. He is helping to bring Muslims from Pakistan to this area.¹⁵
2. Abdur Rahaman, S/O. L. Jebedulla of Hamkura, P.S. Bangaon. (Amirabad, P.S. Begamganj, Dt. Noakhali). He came to this area about six months ago. An ex-military man. Has recently settled in Hamkura. He is helping Doud Hossain in bringing Muslims to this area from Noakhali.
3. Syedul Haque, S/O. L, Tahim Bux, C/O. Abdul Kader of Bakaha, P.S. Bangaon. (Barahinagar, Dt. Noakhali). He came to this area about three months ago. An ex-military man. He is working as an agent of Daud Hossain of Bakaha in bringing the Noakhali Muslims to this area.
4. Abdul Matin Mia, S/O. L. Ibrahim Mia, C/O. Dr. Ransan Ali of Gorapota, P.S. Bangaon. (Srinathdhi, P.S. Sadar. Dt. Noakhali). Khatib in Gorapota mosque and a teacher in Gorapota School. He came to this area about two years ago. He is a touch with Moulana Mazammel Haque of Bangaon and preaches anti- dominion views amongst the Muslims during the religious meeting.
5. Abdul Matin Pradhania, S/O. Abdur Rahaman of Simulpur, P.S. Gaighata. (Tulpai, P.S. Kachu, Trippera). Khatib Manikhira Mosque. He came after the Partition. He is bringing Muslims from Pakistan and helping them to settle in the Gaighata area.
6. Mafisuddin Pathan, S/O. Basiruddin of Belermath, P.S. Gaighata. (Subidpur, P.S. Kachua, Trippera). Came after the Partition. He is bringing Muslims from Pakistan and helping them to settle in the Gaighata area.¹⁶
7. Haji Md. Ali, S/O. L. Token Gazi of Koipukuria, P.S. Gaighata. (Dumuria, P.S. Kachua, Trippera). Khatib Kaipukuria mosque. He came after the Partition. He is bringing Muslims from Pakistan and helping them to settle in the Gaighata area.
8. Jinnat Ali Bakawal, S/O.L. Wazuddin Bakawal of Gazipur, P.S, Gaighata. (Nabakalea, P.S. Matlab, Trippera). He came before the partition and settled at

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Gazipur. He is bringing Muslims from Pakistan and helping them to settle in the Gaighata area.

9. Omar Khan of Gazipur, P.S. Gaighata. (Nabakalsa, P.S. Metlab, Trippera). He came after the partition to Gazipur, where, in collusion with Jinnat Ali (Sl...8), he is bringing immigration of Muslims into the Gaighata area.¹⁷

The reasons for the influx are probably economic. But the possibility of a political motive cannot be overlooked. In Thanas like Bangaon, Gaighata, and Habra, where the immigration of East Bengal Muslims is tending to make the Muslims majority in those thanas into minorities. Muslims locally and in Pakistan are not unlikely encouraged by the influx of Pakistani Muslims as a countermeasure.

Jalpaiguri

In Jalpaiguri, there had been a large influx of Pakistani Muslims into certain Tea Garden areas owned by Muslims. It seemed they had a definite plan to settle in this district their coreligionists from Pakistan with an eye to the future. The Deputy Commissioner took suitable action for the removal of these Muslims from his district, at which Janab Musharref Hussain, who happened to be the owner of three Tea Gardens, made a complaint before the Hon'ble Commerce Minister of the Government of India. The position was explained in the letter written by the Chief Secretary to the Commerce Secretary to the Government of India, and the Deputy Commissioner's action was approved. Pakistani Hindus Chief Secretary observed that, although both were aliens, the Pakistani Hindus stood on a different footing. Their living conditions in East Bengal were sometimes intolerable, and at times, conditions compelling them to leave were deliberately created. Pakistani Hindus were coming as refugees and were being given shelter on humanitarian grounds. The Deputy Commissioner was taking a firm line with Muslim Tea Garden owners indulging in this practice, and was directing them to send back such Muslim labour as had been imported during the last two years and settled here. Some of the Pakistani Muslim have been brought in by contractors under the works and Buildings Department and the Railways. Home Secretary observed that West Bengal Muslims, who were inviting Pakistani Muslims and were responsible for the West Bengal exodus, acted without hesitation.¹⁸

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Nadia

Describing how the migration took place, D.I.G. Central Range said that Pakistani Muslim labourers usually come to Nadia during the harvesting period. As for Nadia, the District Magistrate reported that only 150 families consisting of 617 members had settled in Haringhata Thana. He externed 11 persons and restricted the movement of 22. Correct information was difficult to gather as the local Hindus had been thoroughly demoralised in these Muslim majority border areas. The Muslims had been the leading public men here, and the Hindus even now looked up to them for help and support. This tendency was likely to be more marked in view of the contemplated joint electorate system.¹⁹

Statement showing information on the influx of Muslims from East Bengal into West Bengal for the period up to 31.08.49.

How many Muslim families have migrated into this district.?

221 families consisting of about 797 members.

How many of them have taken the settlement of land here and settle down?

All have been settled here permanently.

How many got their land from Muslim residents of this province?

All of them got their lands from Muslims.¹⁹

Murshidabad

The Superintendent of Police reports that he has no information of influx of an Muslim families from Eastern Pakistan to this district. The S.D.O. Sadar, however, reports that some new faces of Muslims are seen in the town and villages. These people have not taken settlement of any lands or hired houses for their stay. They are living in the houses of other Muslims or in the mosque. About 3000 Muslims of this district worked in Pakistan. During the Eid, last year many of them came home with their families and then went back to Pakistan after the celebration was over. There was an impression that the Hindus were getting more sympathy and support from the administration, and Muslim *Jotdars* were naturally anxious to settle Muslims on their lands.

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Malda

In Malda, only 4 such Muslim families had come. 3 families and some members of the remaining one had already left. The others were being suitably dealt with. The District Magistrate remarked that there were many influential Muslims in the border areas where the police were extremely unreliable, and he suggested that a Circle Officer with magisterial powers should be posted to each of the border thanas and that the unwieldy border thana of Kaliachak should be spilt up into two for the convenience of administration. His suggestions are being examined.

1. The border police were extremely unreliable,
2. The Muslims in the border areas were rich and influential,
3. He suggested that for each border thana there should be a Circle Officer with magisterial powers,
4. Kaliachak thanas was unwieldy, and he suggested that it should be spoiled up,
5. He also suggested that the land of the Muslims who had left this Dominion should be confiscated or taken over, say for the Grow More Food campaign of the Government.

So far as Calcutta and industrial areas were concerned was thought that whenever there was an application for a ration card by a Muslim, the Rationing Officer might make a careful enquiry about his antecedents, and if it transpired that he was an immigrant from Pakistan, his ration card might be refused. In this connection Chief Secretary made it clear that the Pakistanis Muslims moving into this province after the Partition were definitely unwelcome except those who came in as casual labourers and went back when their work was over. Explaining why differential treatment was meted out to Pakistani Muslims and Pakistani as a result of action taken against a number of A.R.L.P, labourers were discharged. 41 families of pretty traders had come from Dacca owing to economic distress.²⁰ They were trying to earn their livelihood by setting up shops and stalls in hats and bazars. Some of the local Muslims suspected of inviting Pakistani Muslims were externed. 2 families had settled on Khas Mahal land, but they were packing up. It was being considered whether Khas Mahal holdings might not be resumed if the jotdars, instead of using the land for agricultural purposes, misused it by trying to settle Pakistani Muslims thereon.

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Alipurduar

In Alipurduar Muslim jotdars were settling Pakistani Muslims as Adhiars, and the district authorities could not stop it, as there was a scarcity of Hindu labour there. The Relief Commissioner discussed this matter and asured that he would send 1500 families of Hindu refugee agriculturists for settlement on vacant lands in Alipurduar and that he was also prepared arranged loans etc. District officers were also directed to make complete survey, during the next cold weather, of the border district areas in their districts and to a submit a statement of the influx of Pakistan Muslims, how they got land, whether they were settled on land and other relevant matters.²¹

West Dinajpur

In West Dinajpur, only 13 families had come, and 4 were externed. How many of them have taken the settlement of land here and settled down? No one has taken a new settlement of land here. But 4 families had land within this district from before and sheltered their residence to this district for permanent settlement. They were living just on the other side of the border. How many get their lands from Muslim residents in this district? Nil.

Secret. Fortnightly Confidential Report for the first half of September 1949

Darjeeling

There has been hardly any hardly influx of Muslims from Pakistan in the three 3 hill subdivisions of the district. In Kurseong, about a dozen Muslims lived within the Municipal area more or less permanently.²² and in Kalimpong and sadar, there are also a few Muslims who are more or less permanent residents. The S.D.O. Siliguri reports that so far, 41 families have entered Siliguri from Eastern Pakistan. In fact, all of them are said to be men from Decca. 11 them are said to have been brought into the Subdivision by one Kalu Mia of Napit jote, and Cherag Ali and Joynol of Bhalamashi jote. These 11 have erected temporary shelters of their own on the land settled with them by the properties. These 11 are petty shopkeepers dealing in yarn and thread, and woven cloth, and move from hat with their temporary stall.²³ ten of them are reported to have been brought to Siliguri by one Muntaz Thikadar of Bhisti Mahalla, and of whom by Abdul Wahed of Dharbanga Tully, both of them from Siliguri town.

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They are all living in the house of Muntaz Thikadars and Abdul Wahed as monthly tenants, are working as labourers. No land has been settled by them. Eighteen of them are said to have been brought here by Sherajuddin, Karim Bux, Saukar Ali Molla, and Karimat Molla. They are all small shop keepers, and are living at Matigara Hat in rented houses belonging to one Nathuaniram and Chittaranjan Manda of Siliguri.²⁴

Cooch Bihar

Cooch Bihar was a princely state until it merged with India in 1949. After partition, many Muslims from neighbouring districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi crossed into Cooch Bihar. Reasons included communal riots, fear of persecution, land dispossession, and the search for livelihood. The inflow changed the demographic balance in certain border areas. Cooch Bihar, earlier Hindu- majority, saw settlements of Muslim refugees, particularly cultivators and artisans. Many migrants settled in the border blocks of Dinhata, Sitalkuchi, Tufanganj, and Mekhaliganj. Some received rehabilitation land, but many struggled with landlessness and poverty.²⁵

Conclusion

The independence of India and resultant fragmentation were one of the most trajectory incidents in the world. The division of Bengal and its consequences not only affected the inhabitants of India, but people from the adjacent countries also experienced the changes. India gained independence, and it resulted in the division of the eastern section of India into two different regions.²⁶ despite having the same cultural identity in both Bengal. After partition, the migration started from East Pakistan in where the majority of them were Hindu. This study has focused on East Bengal Muslims, and their struggle, and the migration policy of West Bengal after partition. The economic crisis was also an important reason; at the time in East Bengal, the prices of essential commodities had increased alarmingly. The price of rice had risen to nearly 50 rupees per maund; in West Bengal, however, the price of one maund of rice was 21 rupees²⁷ The price of cloth was also much higher in East Bengal than in West Bengal. A minor aspect of the economic crisis was that, along with Hindus, some Muslims also came to West Bengal during this time. On 24 October 1948, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* carried the headlines. "Migration of people, including Muslims from East Bengal to West Bengal." The East Bengal government's statement was that the cause was not

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persecution, but rather the lure of economic prosperity.²⁸ the influx of Muslims from East Pakistan into the border districts of West Bengal after partition was not a singular or temporary episode but a prolonged process shaped by communal tensions, economic dislocation, and political uncertainty.²⁹ Unlike the relatively more visible Hindu refugee crisis, Muslim migration from East Pakistan remained less documented yet equally significant in reshaping the demographic, cultural, and socio-economic landscape of districts like Cooch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, and Malda.³⁰ These movements reflected the containing insecurities of partition, where the question of belonging, citizenship, and livelihood transcended the formal boundaries of 1947. Ultimately, this migration demonstrates that partition was not a fixed event in time but an un-folding human crisis whose reverberations deeply affected both sides of the Bengal border well into the decades after independence.

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