Chapter - 3
Forcing to Flee: Flow of Partition
Migrants and Refugees to Cachar

Partition is 'contained' within all dimensions of national politics— in territory, citizenship, bureaucracy, group identity, law, literature language, and now in history. The last hurrah of the Westminster model of de-colonization continues to echo on........ if we can speak of a law of partition, it is that partition not only de-colonizes a land, it recolonizes it.

Samaddar 2003: 21-23'

The demand for creation of Pakistan on religious basis engulfed colonial India with wild communal violence. The year before Partition was marked by an unending stream of violence that significantly contributed in the division of the sub continent. In late 1946, the communal situation steadily deteriorated in Punjab after Bengal and Bihar. The Partition of the plural landscape of India on the basis of religion dragged people into insecurity, mistrust and ambivalence that eventually led them to leave their land of birth. But the communal violence in East Pakistan in 1950 created a life-threatening situation which forced people to flee their homeland in different directions in search of a safer refuge. Consequently, a significant number of Bengali Hindu refugees migrated to largely Assamese speaking Brahmaputra Valley and overwhelmingly Bengali speaking Surma Valley in post-colonial Assam. Since a large number of refugees migrated to Cachar, which was a part of erstwhile Surma Valley, we intend to study in this chapter the factors that propelled such migration. We propose to record the experiences of the victims of the Partition in Cachar to understand the specific situation under which they were forced to migrate leaving behind their hearth and home. Since the migration of refugees to Cachar did not take place in "one-fell swoop" but in trickles, we intend to explore the different phases of
migration and simultaneously examine the reasons that generated such migration. We also propose to examine the mode the fleeing refugees were forced to undertake in the process of migration. In this chapter, we use both primary as well as secondary data to study analytically forced displacement from Sylhet/East Pakistan in general and the migration of refugees to Cachar in particular.

3.1 Causes of Migration: Literature, Newspaper Reports and Government Records

One of the reasons of migration during and after Partition was the deepening fear of debasing social status of Hindus in the changed circumstances in Pakistan. They refused to accept the reality that in the newly born Pakistan, the Muslims would be equal to them in social interaction. There was apprehension to endure the indignity of second class citizens too. The destruction and defiling of temples and shrines, threats of conversion, desire to marry Hindu women etc. were looked as attacks on the very core of the Hindu cultural life. In fact, the threat of Bengali Hindu cultural life propelled people to leave their homeland. The reasons figured out for the exodus of the upper caste Bengali Hindus immediately after the Partition was largely due to the fear of losing their dhan and man rather than pran as a numerically and politically subordinate group in a Muslim majority nation (Chatterjee 1999 PDF accessed on 25th October 2008: www.pstc.brown.edu). The Hindu refugees who came from East Pakistan during these early days were not fugitives from communal violence either. They were mostly landowning bhadralok class who migrated, as Nilanjana Chatterjee sums up, because of a fear of ‘physical annihilation, political powerlessness, social and economic deterioration, and loss of identity’ (Chatterjee 1990, cited in Bandyopadhay 2011:1). Samar Guha, a prominent political worker in East Bengal, conveyed the sense of insecurity suffered by the minorities. He observed that “A more frustrated and demoralised people could hardly be imagined than the non-Muslims of eastern Pakistan as they are today. Freezed in a morass of utter helplessness, only a ghost of their former self exists. Physically, in a state of perpetual insecurity, morally pulverised, spiritually having no value to claim as their own, socially routed, economically shattered and politically non-existent
remnants of a formerly pre-dominant non-Muslim Society are now maintaining a precarious existence in the eastern wing of Pakistan” (Guha, cited in Tan and Kudaisya 2000: 146).

Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, the then minister of Industry in Prime Minister Nehru’s cabinet observed that “in the last three months and a half it was given to me to travel in various parts of my province and of Assam and to come into direct contact with lakhs of persons who had migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal and Assam. I had addressed them at meetings, I had talked to them privately and I had tried to understand with as much openness of mind as possible as to the reasons why they had been compelled to leave their hearth and home and come away as destitute to India... I had seen all classes and conditions of people, men, women and children many of whom never knew what poverty and want were. But today they were homeless; they were hopeless. Their physical suffering was great. But what struck me as most ominous and most distressing were the moral tortures through which millions of people had passed through” (Parliamentary Debate 1950: 423).

The migration was also facilitated due to exclusion and expulsion of the Hindus in service sector, trade and business. In East Pakistan, in most cases the land was owned by the Hindus and the Muslims were the cultivators. Hence there was a deliberate attempt to systematically drive out the propertied Hindu middle class, zaminders and men in the profession. The migration of zaminders came as a moral blow to the poorer section of the society that led them to evacuate the land gradually. The Ananda Bazar Patrika focused on the boycotting of Hindu traders, intimidation of Hindus and all pervading atmosphere of fear that compelled the Hindus to leave East Pakistan (Ananda Bazar Patrika 20 October 1948) [translation mine].

The Government of East Pakistan in their drive to confiscate the urban properties passed certain property laws which perniciously affected the rights of the minorities and ultimately dispossessed them. Abul Barkat observed that one of the prime reasons of forced mass out-migration of Hindu population to India during the 1940s to the mid 1960s and onward was the impact of property laws
Initially, the Government enacted the Requisition of Property Act (Act XIII of 1948) "as a temporary measure for a period of three years, which created sufficient scope for temporary and/or permanent take over of any property that had been considered by the administration to be ‘needful for the purpose of the state’. The act was widely used against the religious minority in East Bengal".

"The East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property Act) 1951, which was enacted for administering, preserving, and protecting the immovable properties of the evacuees, also affected the Hindu elite and zamindars who were the owners of Hindu property, lands and buildings”. Another ordinance named ‘The East Pakistan Disturbed Persons Rehabilitation Ordinance 1964 (Ordinance 1 of 1964)’ had been implemented with an apparently innocent plea of speedy rehabilitation of persons affected by the communal disturbance. On 9 September 1965, the Government of Pakistan made an executive order named the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) order II of 1965 which eventually came to be known as the EPA. “The simple defacto meaning of this act is, Hindustan = Enemystan (place of enemies), and Hindu (irrespective of geographic location) = Enemy” (Barkat 2011: 92). The consequences of this legal instrument EPA/VPA according to Abul Barkat was “gross denial of freedom and liberty, institutionalization of systematic socio-cultural, economic and political deprivation of the Hindu minorities... stresses and strains, mental agonies, breaking of family ties, disruption in communal harmony, violation of all fundamental human rights etc. This act contradicted the basic premises of the constitutional provisions of equality, equity, freedom and justice for all citizens and was inherently communal, anti-human, anti-democratic” (ibid 2011:115).

C.C Biswas, Minister of State for Minority Affairs in East Bengal and B.N Mukherjee, Deputy High Commissioner for India in Dacca highlighted “a policy of squeezing of the minority Hindus in East Bengal” (Choudhury 1991: 253).

The weekly Yugoshakti also reported the nefarious drive of ousting the Hindus by requisitioning their houses in Sylhet (Yugoshakti 31 March 1950). The same paper reported cases of requisition of Hindu properties by the government.
The houses of Hindu leaders and legislators too were also requisitioned (ibid 16 July 1950). Even the Ram Krishna Mission of Maulavi Bazaar was also requisitioned (ibid 21 October 1949).

Another significant factor which forced people to migrate was the well-founded fear of possible rape, abduction, humiliation, forced marriage etc. of women in the deteriorating communal situation. As women symbolise community honour, the Muslim state posed a threat to the dignity of Hindu women. Satish Chandra Banerjee, the President of the West Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, explained to his party cadres, “that as an East Bengali himself (though living in Calcutta) he could vouch that the Hindus were leaving East Pakistan because they “prized their self-respect and the honour of their women above everything else” (Nilanjana Chatterjee’s interview cited in Bagchi and Dasgupta 2003: 5). Prafulla K. Chakrabarti in his pioneering work Marginal Men – The Refugees and the Left political syndrome in West Bengal observed that ‘there was a universally shared concern of the Hindus for saving their womenfolk from their leering Muslim neighbours’ (Chakrabarti 1999:6). The East Bengal Gazette also expressed similar concern that the honour of Hindu women continued to be insecure in East Bengal (East Bengal Gazetee 26 July 1950). Tathagata Roy observed that young Hindu women found it increasingly difficult to step out of doors for fear of jeers, catcalls, lewd and intimidating gestures by a section of the Muslim community (Roy 2003:162). Ashoka Gupta, a Gandhian relief worker of Sylhet observed that “in many cases, whole families had crossed over, with the exception of the old parents, who had remained behind in order to protect the family home. Or a young brother might have been left behind for that purpose. But no one would leave behind a young daughter or a wife. This fact itself paints a dismal picture of certain social realities of the time. It was as if one way of expressing communal hatred was through the torture and rape of women” (Gupta 2005: 24).

Suhasini Das, a legendary social worker and Gandhian activist who refused to cross over from Sylhet to India in 1947 also expressed similar concern of protecting the honour women as one of the strong motivating factors of mass-
out migration of Hindus from East Pakistan. She wrote in her diary, “The results of the referendum have been announced. The district of Srihatta [Sylhet] is to go to East Bengal. We must accept the decision of the majority. I did not know whether it would be proper to go out. I stayed at home the whole day. At night I talked with the neighbours. They were all worried that the [Muslim] League could be planning some mischief. They were especially worried about protecting the womenfolk” (Das cited in Bagchi and Dasgupta 2003:168). The Bengal Hindu Mahasabha launched a strong campaign to highlight the plight of the East Bengal minorities by exploring evidence of attacks on Hindu properties and temples as well as crimes against women (Government of India 1950).

The role of the press was significant in escalating violence in both Bengal. The Pakistan press deliberately published inflammatory speeches to incite the Muslims against the Hindus. The news was fabricated to create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity and to fan the flame of violence. “It was observed that rumours spread like wild fires drawing upon the mutual distrust between the communities. During Partition, the circulation of false information, whether intentional or accidental frightened people in a parallel way and caused stampeding and panicked evacuations” (Khan 2007:142). There was a rumour that Faizul Haq, the son of former premier of Bengal and a popular leader of Barishal Fazlul Haq was killed in Calcutta, angry mob slaughtered a large number of Hindus (Biswas and Sato 1993:41-43). Haq rushed back to Barishal at the behest of B.C Roy (Chakrabarty 1974: 155-56). He told the people of his native land not to harm the Hindus “in the interest of the Muslims in West Bengal” (Amrit Bazar Patrika 11 February 1950). There were cases of venomous press campaign against the minority Hindus that contributed most towards worsening the situation and inviting crisis and chaos (Government of India 1950). Jawaharlal Nehru in one of his letters to the Chief Ministers on 1 April 1950 expressed his concern about the irresponsible statement of Pakistani leaders as well as the press of Pakistan. “The leaders of Pakistan have been delivering aggressive and provocative speeches and constantly talking of war. Their press is even worse. It is not surprising that people in Pakistan, getting these one-sided exaggerated and even false stories, should get excited. An atmosphere is being created in Pakistan which
progressively became more and more a war atmosphere" (Nehru 1986:26). He again wrote, 'Newspapers in Pakistan write hysterically and give a completely one-sided picture. I regret to say that many newspapers in India are equally hysterical and also give a completely one-sided picture' (ibid 1986:57). The events published in the East Bengal newspaper had wide repercussions in the West Bengal press. There were reports of allegations, counter allegations and accusations regarding the publication of news which in many cases roused appetite for retribution.

The narrow and instigating role of media was echoed in Assam assembly too. The Government of India proposed to send a Good-will Mission to Pakistan. One member of the Assam Assembly argued that “... It has been said that the Prime minister of India asked the Prime Minister of Pakistan to accompany him on a Good will mission tour of both the Bengal. I do not know for what reason the Pakistan Prime minister rejected that proposal... I am constrained to say that the temper of the people of both the dominions had been whipped to white-heart fury by the mischievous propaganda and misleading exaggerating stories appearing in the press of both the countries” (Government of Assam 1950).

The East Pakistan administration could not be so geared up as to protect the religious minorities from the organized attacks of the majority. More often it was observed that the atrocities were committed in connivance with some leaders and officials in East Pakistan. As a result, there was continuous Hindu migration from the country. “In Islamic Pakistan, the minority Hindus were more directly and overtly ‘otherised’ (Bandyopadhyay 2011:14).

Chaitram Gidwani, the President of the All India Refugee Association delivered a speech under the auspices of the Sind Hindu Seva Samity on 12 March 1950 in which he expressed the similar concern. “My grief was all the more because it had been revealed in the widely circulated responsible paper like *Amrit Bazar Patrika* that all these atrocities were pre-mediated and pre-planned and that Pakistan government officers whose duty was to protect the houses and the properties of minorities, actually incited the masses to commit these atrocities” (Government of India 1950). Most of the senior posts in East Bengal
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After Partition were held by non-Bengali police officers. These officers disliked the people of East Bengal—both Hindus and Muslims but they were particularly severe on Hindus (My interface with Rajat Dey on 13 March 2006).

The corresponding census reported the abrupt dwindling of Hindus from East Pakistan. In a document “Influx” produced in 1963 by the Public relations section of India’s Ministry of External Affairs aimed to show the large scale immigration from East Pakistan into West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The document highlighted the rise of the Muslim population in those Indian states with corresponding decline in the population in the East Pakistani districts. The Pamphlet stated that the population of Pakistan as a whole increased by 23.7 percent during 1951-61, the population of East Pakistan rose only by 20.9 percent. Since there is no scientific evidence to suggest that the fertility in East Pakistan is lower than in West Pakistan, what accounts for the difference, the pamphlet said, was the “constant and successful pressure on the Hindu minority in East Pakistan to migrate to India” (cited in Baruah 1999: 120). “According to the census of 1941, the last census before the 1947 Partition, the Hindu population in East Bengal was 28 percent and immediately after Partition it came down to 25 percent. According to 1991 census, Hindus number 12.5 million and represent (only) 10.5 percent of the total population” (Tajuddin, cited in Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2007: 86).

Importantly, these Hindus who ‘stayed put’ were not upper caste and rich Hindus who had formerly dominated trade, commerce, administrative services and profession. The Hindus who now reside in Bangladesh, few are upper caste and most were low caste. Today, the socio-economic differences between the Muslims and the Hindu communities, in particular in rural areas, are ‘much less marked’ than it was earlier.

Samad 2007: 86

The poor Hindus who stayed back had to suffer harassment by the Pakistan Government as well as by the communal forces prevalent in the Pakistan
society. They realized the impact of Partition subsequently and many of them had to migrate reluctantly.

After the communal violence, in view of continuous migration around Eastern border which in many cases was like an avalanche, the Government of India convened an Inter-Dominion Conference which produced an Indo-Pak Agreement for the settlement of the problem of the minorities and for removing the fear psychosis by setting up Minority Boards in East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam. Under the State Boards, the District Minority Boards were constituted to protect the rights of the minorities. Though the Inter-Dominion Conference had indeed temporarily created some positive impact on the psychology of the minorities and the exodus thinned down temporarily but soon it gained momentum by socio-economic, political and cultural onslaught on religious minorities by the majority community in East Pakistan. Consequently, the refugees who returned back to their native home realised that the situation was totally uncongenial for permanent stay. In fact, those who intended to re-install their lives in their native land had to come back finding them unwelcome. In view of communal violence that took place in both Bengal, many held the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact was just a legal fiction which created more problems than it would have solved.

In an Inter-dominion Conference that was held at Calcutta in April 1948 where K.C Neogy and Gulam Mohammad, the rehabilitation ministers of the two states, made a joint declaration “that they are determined to take every possible step to discourage such exodus in either direction” (Tan and Kudaisya 2000: 144), the tide of migration could not be averted.

Shyama Prasad Mookherjee who was entrusted with the task of travelling in various parts of East Bengal and Assam to assess the gravity of the situation, reported in Parliament on 7 August 1950 that the Pact failed miserably to enable the Hindus to live in East Bengal fearlessly and with a sense of security (Government of India A: Cols.430). He argued that
So far as the incidents which have happened in East Bengal after the Pact, I have got a summary of them between 8th of April and 30th of June 1950. I had not been able to compile the list of occurrences in the month of July but these are incidents about which we have got the written evidence of individuals who have suffered or of families of individuals who have suffered. I shall only read a summary of this list. Between the date of the pact and 30 of June 1950, there have been 757 cases of dacoity, robbery and theft, 219 cases of extortion, 194 cases of trespass, 184 cases of assault, harassment and threats to leave Pakistan, 129 cases of abduction, rape and outraging the modesty of females, 70 cases of murder, 70 cases of grievous hurt, stabbing and looting 67 cases of arson, 21 cases of wrongful confinement and restraint, 39 cases of defiling Hindu temples and places of worship and 72 cases of illegal possession.

Government of India 1950B: Cols.432

The Minority Commission which was created to protect the rights of the minorities could not function due to anti-Hindu attitude in East Pakistan. Consequently, several Hindu leaders were arrested on false accusations. In one instance, in February 1952 Monoranjan Dhar, Member of Legislative Assembly, only member of the Minority Commission in East Bengal was in jail that prevented the Commission from functioning. In fact, Monoranjan Dhar was arrested under Public Safety Act during the State Language Movement and was released on 30 May, 1953. The non-functioning of the Minority Commissions and Boards and arrests of people specially connected with them had created grave apprehensions in the minds of the minorities (Choudhury 1997: 342).

The anti- Hindu attitude and eventual torture on the refugees was echoed in the Indian Parliament and one member argued that the Government of Pakistan had failed to secure the protection of the elementary democratic and human rights of the minorities. He urged the Indian government “to recourse firm and strong action to implement Partition Agreement and other agreements with Pakistan to secure the just rights of the minority community to enable them to live in that state with honour and security” (Government of India 1955).
The increasing intolerance and consequent atrocities on Hindus evoked a feeling of frustration and helplessness that ultimately led the Hindu leaders to submit their resignation. Kathinka-Singha Kerkhoff and Ellen Bal observed that “We found a few memoirs of Schedule-caste politicians and of other Hindus ‘who stayed put’ after 1947. It appears that due to the continuous enactment of Pakistan’s partition rhetoric, they had not only resigned from their posts but had also opted out of the nation” (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2007: 87). Notable among them were Dhirendra Nath Datta, Kamini Kumar Datta (both from Comilla), Satindra Nath Sen, Jogendra Nath Mandal, (both from Barishal), Basanta Das from Sylhet and Pravash Chandra Lahiri from Rajshahi. “All of them had to leave politics, some of them also this world, in pitiable states” (Mandal 2011: 143). Jogendra Nath Mandol, a leader of low caste people fought for Pakistan and later served as Minister of Law and Labour in the Central Cabinet in Pakistan had to resign in October 1950. Mandol, according to one account, felt horrified and completely bewildered by the intensity of the 1950 riots and ‘migrated to India in disgust, shame and sorrow’ (Lahiri 1964: 27).

Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee, M.L.A (Dacca) also resigned from the Central Cabinet in Pakistan in 1951. In his resignation letter, he narrated that

> the Pakistan administrative policy is not only anti-democratic it is also undoubtedly anti-Hindu..... Various measures, including daily tortures of pinprick nature, unprovoked humiliation, economic pressure, forcible eviction, insecurity of life and property, crime against women, onslaught on culture and religion, physical oppression culminating in mass killing in 1950 have been adopted to drive the Hindus out of Pakistan....one who watches the proceedings of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly may witness the exhibition of hideous fangs of communalism displayed by a section of Muslim League members, particularly when the grievances of the Hindus as such are discussed there. Even in the matter of ordinary legislation, despotic ways of the Government often deny the opportunity of fruitful debate. The proceedings of the House are neither correctly reported nor regularly published, and unscrupulous press and politicians take advantage of that for their sordid game.

Both of them in a statement on 15 October 1952 urged the Government of India to apply economic sanction against Pakistan to bring “her into senses” in relation to the treatment of minorities in East Bengal.

S.P Mookherjee in a public meeting on 16 October 1952 proposed that Pakistan’s attitude towards her minorities entitled India “to examine afresh the whole problem of Partition and act as any self-respecting nation would”. He demanded that the policy of appeasement of the Government of India be reversed. Meghnath Saha stated that if the enforcement of economic sanction against Pakistan failed to have any effect then “stronger remedies would have to be applied” (Choudhury 1997: 317).

3.2 Partition of Sylhet and Communal Situation

A review of some of the existing literatures on Partition along the Eastern border largely ignored violence as one of the propelling factors of migration. Meghna Guha Thakurata observed that the decision to migrate for most families along the border of Bengal was ‘deliberated slowly and in waves, within the circle of the family, a process which continues even today’ (Guhathakurata 2003: 99). According to Sanjayya, “The East Bengalis had fled the land of want and decreasing opportunity. They thought that Assam admirably suited their purpose: a tolerant people inclined to indolence and plenty of a vacant land” (Sanjayya 1980: 5). Anindita Dasgupta’s observation on migration on Sylheti refugees in Assam in her “Denial and Resistance; Sylheti Partition refugees in Assam” painfully negates the trauma of Partition. Citing the opinion of one of her respondents about the Sylheti optees she wrote .... they came like tourists, camera in hand, clicking random pictures of the city. They thought Assam was a jungle and were so excite.... ’ (Dasgupta 2001: 5). She also observed that “relocation in the Brahmaputra Valley and Cachar following the partition of Sylhet in 1947 was the informed choice of a majority of Sylheti bhadrolok.” It seems both Sanjayya and Dasgupta have ignored the historical context under which such a massive forced migration took place. The “forced” aspect of migration has remained unexcavated in the writings of these two scholars.
Mousumi Datta in her recently accomplished doctoral thesis focused on perceptions of violence to be the propelling factor of migration of East Pakistani refugees to Brahmaputra Valley (Datta 2011). Dipankar Sinha also observed generalised fear to be the propelling factor of migration along the border of Bengal (Sinha 2000:144). Contrary to what Sanjayya and Dasgupta observed both Datta and Sinha pointed out the overwhelming presence and threat of violence induced massive migration in the wake of Partition.

Interviews conducted in the course of the present study and from the census reports, we have accounted that most of the refugees migrated to Cachar were largely from the district of Sylhet. The refugees from the same district migrated to Tripura hills and Brahmaputra Valley of Assam too (My conversation with Rathindra Bhattacharjee on 23 December 2006). Since a large number of refugees migrated from Sylhet to Cachar, it is pertinent to study the communal situation of Sylhet before and after Partition.

It had been observed that Sylhet which represented a unique ambience of Hindu-Muslim amity experienced increasingly deteriorated communal situation when referendum rented the air. Given the turbulent situation, the communal forces were engrossed actively in inciting communal passion. Consequently, cases of violence were reported from various parts of the district. Nirod Kumar Gupta who fought for freedom belonged to Sankapan village of Sylhet district. He had to migrate to Cachar due to inhuman torture by ansars and police in Sylhet. He stated that incidents of violence marked the referendum. In a village called Gopsahar which was situated near Sylhet town, a youth was killed mercilessly (Gupta 1974: 231)[translation mine].

Purnendu Pal Choudhury was attacked several times by Muslim goondas with spear on his back while canvassing for referendum. Due to his enormous physical strength he could sustain multiple injuries and jumped into the river Surma to save his life from the furious mob. Later on, he was admitted to Sylhet hospital where he had to undergo long treatment (Gupta 1974: 231) [translation mine]. One of his grandsons narrated that Pal Choudhury was a body-builder who possessed enormous physical strength and mental courage. He was attacked 20
times with spear on his back which caused massive bloodshed. Due to his well-built body, he could sustain such grave injuries (My interview with Biswajit Debroy on 12 December 2006).

Reports of violence poured in from a place called Amtail near Maulavibazar when on the polling day the police fired on a Muslim mob which tried to prevent Hindus from casting their votes. Such incidents were reported from several other places too (My interview with Bimal Deb on 14 December 2006).

It was reported in *Yugoshakti* that after Partition, inhuman torture was perpetrated on lower caste people of Sylhet. The *zaminders* in connivance with the *goonda* elements and the East Pakistan military perpetrated inhuman torture on the innocent Hindus particularly on the lower caste people of Habiganj subdivision in Sylhet district. In some villages like Sanneshwar, Uluuri, Harkunji, Jogikhona, Kanishyl etc. cases of looting of paddy, rice, clothes, other household belongings, desecration of idols etc. were reported widely. In addition, they perpetrated inhuman torture on women including elders. It is pertinent to mention that rampant exploitation by the *zaminders* of both Hindus and the Muslim peasants of Louta, Bahadurpur and other surroundings led them to launch a movement against the *zaminders*. Given the deteriorating communal situation in Sylhet since referendum, the *zaminder* of Bahadurpur played the communal card to suppress the movement that had been active for quite sometime. Thus the Muslim peasants were polarised on ground of religious affiliation and the creation of Pakistan provided incentive to it. In fact, the revenge was inflicted on poor Hindus including their womenfolk (*Yugoshakti* 26 August 1949) [Translation mine]. In Sanneshwar market, the Pakistan military launched firing upon peaceful assembly of men and women in protest against killing of six peasants and in which four people were killed and several others were injured. The police arrested many people including women and tortured them even in jail (ibid 9 July 1949).

He narrated that the Partition of Sylhet temporarily polarised the Muslim community of Sylhet on communal identity. Given the deteriorated communal situation in Sylhet during referendum, the East Pakistan Government implemented all possible means to annihilate the Nankar Movement launched against the Zaminders by both Hindu and Muslim peasants. Accordingly, between 1948-49 the Hindu leaders of Nankar Movement were put into jail. In addition, the police raided the villages and inhuman torture was inflicted on the villagers. In protest, the villagers assembled in Sanneshwar market on 18 August 1949 including women leaders of the movement. But the police launched indiscriminate firings on the peaceful congregation of men and women wherein six people lost their lives and others were seriously injured (Sharma 1990: 68-69) [translation mine].

Incidents of violence were also reported from areas like Sadar, Biswanath, Chatak, Fenchuganj, Balaganj, Gopalganj, Jakiganj etc. There were cases of looting in areas like Mankipur, Jalalpur, Sengram, Ajmatpur, Daspara, Samalshasan, Sukanpur, Madhuri, Kamalkair etc. (Government of India 1959). In areas under Rajnagar police station, there were reports of widespread oppression over the Hindus. In Fenchuganj, the houses of streamer company employees were burnt down (Yugoshakti, 23 June, 1950). Torture was more intense in rural areas (ibid 14 April 1950).

Purnendu Kishore Sengupta, a renowned Congress leader of Sylhet who was one of the witnesses of the East Bengal Riot Investigation Commission submitted a report in the first week of March 1950 by collecting information from different persons from 32 villages under Chatak police station, 24 villages under Biswanath police station, 23 villages under Jaganathpur police station and 32 villages under Sadar Jaganathpur police station of Sylhet district. In all those villages, the villagers were victims of looting and conversion (ibid 1 December 1950).

A Memorandum that was submitted to the Prime Minister on 20 March, 1950 citing the incidents and casualties stated that “the troubles started in Sylhet town on the 13th February and continued till the 16th of the same month.
According to the official version, in Sylhet town itself there were 50 to 60 cases of stabbing of which six proved fatal. In this town some ten or twelve houses were reported to have been looted and burnt. Almost simultaneously troubles started in the rural areas within Sadar, Biswanath, Chatak, Fenchuganj, Balaganj and Gopalganj police station. In all these places a large number of Hindu villagers were attacked and have been completely destroyed and some Hindu girls were abducted and raped. Reports of mass conversion of Hindus of several villages have also been received" (Mukhopadhyay 2007: Annexure -3).

Suresh Chandra Biswas, in his autobiography *Bhulibe ki Pranante* narrated incidents of torture on Hindus in his village Noagha in Habiganj subdivision in Sylhet district. He highlighted that burning of houses, looting of their properties, desecration of idols, threatening etc. were perpetrated on Hindus. He also narrated his own experience of inhuman torture as well. In one of his lectures in assembly in Dacca, he exposed some incidents relating to the persecution of Hindus. Consequent to this, anonymous letters were posted to his address threatening to kill him and his family. He recounted that after 1950, communal propaganda carried out by the Muslim League reached its peak. On 21 January 1950, fire broke out in Habiganj *Fouzdari* court. Apprehending the act to be flashed in the assembly, the sub divisional officer who was the mastermind behind the incident burnt the documents in which he misappropriated Rs. 40,000 from the Jinnah Fund. He later instigated *ansars* and the Pakistan Nationalist Guards who beat Biswas mercilessly and finally put him to jail where he had to languish for years together. Some other Hindus were also accused to be the conspirator of violence and were inflicted similar punishment (Biswas 1998: 88) [translation mine].

The All India Congress Committee received letters from the Sylhet district Congress Committee elaborating several instances of atrocities committed by Muslim League and its supporters. The Sylhet Subject file contained more than 100 letters from individuals; some of them were teachers of primary schools and shop owners. The Hindu teachers were asked to leave immediately, and those who declined, were harassed and victimised, several shops owned by the Hindus
were looted and gutted as well. R.N Choudhury of Sylhet District Congress Committee dwelt on the circumstances in the aftermath of the referendum in detail. The situations in the villages were explored in the letters written by N. Biswas, a primary school teacher, and Haran Dhar, a shop owner. They were terrorized in Sylhet and sought Nehru’s intervention to get job in India since they had decided to go there (Government of India Files: cited in Chakrabarty 2004: 204). D.C Dutt, the Deputy Superintendent of Police in a report submitted that ‘the conditions in Sylhet are very insecure and general intimidation at the behest of the Muslim League National Guards ‘continues’ (1OR/R/3/1/58, 28 July 1947: ibid).

A train to Dacca from Sylhet was stopped on the middle of the bridge over river Meghna and a large number of Hindu passengers including women and children were barbarously killed by Muslim Ansars. One of the surviving passengers of the train narrated in an interface that she was a passenger of the train on that fateful night. At around 4 o’clock in the morning, she heard some rumblings in the train and rushed out of the compartment. Therein she found a group of armed men with sharp weapons proceeded towards the preceding compartment. Out of fear, she hurriedly concealed herself in the urinal of her compartment and spent hours together in panicked situation. On her exit, she found a large number of passengers brutally killed including many children. Many of them were thrown into the river Meghna (My conversation with Sailaja Das on 20 June 2006). “In Mymensingh at Bhairab Bazar Bridge, India-bound trains were detained and Hindu refugees were singled out and killed, according to some reports, several thousands of them” (Bandyopadhyay 2011: 8).

3.3 Unfinished Agenda: Communal situation in Post-colonial Cachar

Cachar experienced redrawing of boundaries with amalgamation of three and half thanas of erstwhile Sylhet district on the eve of independence. Since Cachar was also included in the proposed Pakistan scheme, there were communal outbursts in various parts of the district. A memorandum was submitted to the government by Village Welfare Society, a non-political organization based in Narsingpur Tea estate in Cachar district which highlighted
Forcing to Flee: Flow of Partition Migrants and Refugees to Cachar

a highly explosive situation developed in Cachar district as elsewhere: a matter which was purely an industrial dispute suddenly developed into a so-called communal clash of some magnitude.

The trouble in Rahmannagar Tea Estate which would have attracted little attention in normal times, suddenly kept into a communal blaze of great fury in the context of a great tension then prevailing between the Hindus and the Moslems of the locality over tragic occurrences in East Pakistan and the anti-state and provocative activities of local Moslems by Pakistan agents. A careful analysis of the occurrences on 24.3.50 and 25.3.50 reveals that at the instigation of Maulavi Amor Ali, proprietor of the above garden, unruly elements of Moslem community assembled presumably from the neighbourhood to meet any emergency arising out of a cooly rising in his own Garden over the dismissal and expulsion of one Lasman, the president of the Panchayat of the garden. But things turned out otherwise. The ignorant Moslem mob who was mostly units of the Moslem militia raised and trained for insurgent action against Bharat erroneously took into their head that it was the signal for revolt and guerilla action. They hoisted anti-state flags and gave out anti-state slogans. This might have excited the Hindus of all descriptions of the neighbourhood including peasants, labours, tribals who despaired of their assistance and that of their state. The evil elements in the Hindu community might have also instigated the simple minded illiterate tribals and labour and used them as their tools.

The situation was already very explosive and a small spark was sufficient to cause a big blaze and the trouble started. The happenings on 26.3.50, 27.3.50, and 28.3.50 followed in quick succession and in the series of revels action that came to the surface prematurely with almost unimazinable suddenness, the Moslems of Baurikandi and neighbouring villages acted purely as a measure of self-defense. By the end of March, 1950, the first phase of the Moslem insurgent action concluded in Sonai and contiguous areas.

Second Phase

From April 1950 onwards, the troubles entered the Second phase. Then came sporadic cases of house-burning followed by loot. This continued up to the month of May 1950."
Third Phase

The Third phase is perhaps the bloodiest period. Its chief characteristics being man-slaughter, dacoity, dacoity with murder along with the sexual crime perpetrated on women and cases of murder were also reported.

The police had utterly failed to address the real cause like village quacks, rather they applied palliatives in order to alleviate the external symptoms, while the real cancer was corroding within, or that knowing things fully well, they were bungling the situation to the infinite harassment of the loyal and peaceful citizens of the biggest Hindu area in Cachar district.

After the announcement of the result of Sylhet referendum, it was declared by the Pakistanis that Sylhet had gone by collective votes and Cachar would be taken by *lathi* blows. Some of the popular songs were most popular within Cachar were sung freely and with great enthusiasm:

*Amra Biswajoyi musalman*

*Amra birer Santan*

*Amra korbo Pakistan*

*Cachar korbo Pakistan*

(We are world conquering Muslims.

We are sons of heroes, we shall make Cachar Pakistan).

The Muslim League made every effort to include Cachar into East Pakistan. Here we represented another extract from a popular song very often sung by the young Pakistan elements:

*Amra holam munim Musalman*

*Akhi ultaiya korbo Cachar Pakistan*

*Amra birer Santan Amader kache achey S.P Musalman*

(We are new Mussalmans; we shall make Cachar Pakistan with simple flare of eyes. We are sons of heroes; we have behind us the S.P, a Musselman).
Arguments were raised in Assam Assembly and a member argued that “most of the Muslim officers of Cachar, Karimganj and other border districts of Assam, some of whom also opted for Pakistan in the first instance had no good wishes for the Indian republic and they had definite leanings towards their co-religionists in Pakistan, which was really a great danger to the state. From the editorial of the Ananda Bazar Patrika on 9 March it had come to light that in Cachar district the Muslim officers had connived at things and showed leniency towards their co-religionists, with the result that Pakistan Jindabad Allaho Akbar etc. were the slogans used enormously that the sub divisional officer even did not dare to face Muslim mob there” (Government of Assam 1950).

Sumanta Kumar Choudhury, a member of Shyamaprasad Mookherjee Reception Committee, Cachar wrote a letter to S.P Mookherjee during his visit to Cachar in which he highlighted that

I do feel it essential to expose the real picture of Cachar to you. Cachar is without any leader now and I fear to remark that all the so-called leaders are busy with themselves. They are running after names and fame but they take little care for real service to the nation.... I therefore request you to arrange a short visit to Bowri area (via Lakhipur) 30 miles away from Silchar, where the Muslims first hoisted their Pakistan flag and revolted against Indian dominion in order to include Cachar in East Pakistan.


Suresh Chandra Biswas narrated that after the communal violence of 1950, the Muslim League spread the rumours that inhuman-torture was inflicted on Muslims in Karimganj, Silchar, and in Assam Valley including beating by the
Hindus. In various places of Sylhet, anti-Indian speeches were delivered. This in fact turned Muslims in Sylhet ambivalent. On the other hand, some Indian newspapers, had published the news of his death which was about to create communal violence in Tripura and Cachar (Biswas 1998: 82) [Translation mine].

The deteriorating communal situation in Sylhet had its impact in Karimganj.

Trouble started in Karimganj after two lady passengers provided first hand accounts of the killing of Hindu male passengers and children. They further alleged that some were even thrown into the river under the Bhairav Bridge. Hindu and Muslim mob came into conflict and controlled firing had to be resorted in order to keep the peace. While the police were busy with the mob, there was arson and looting in the Karimganj bazaar. Minor outbursts followed at Badarpur and at Hailakandi both of which had close communication with Karimganj. False propaganda was made in Pakistan about the casualties at Karimganj and other places. The information after enquiry by the deputy commissioner of Sylhet who visited the areas was that only one person died in Karimganj in police firing and that at Badarpur, there was neither firing nor death.

(Government of Assam 1950)

Table 3.1: Composition of Bangladesh (British India, East Pakistan) population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Muslim (%)</th>
<th>Hindu (%)</th>
<th>Decreased rate</th>
<th>Buddhist (%)</th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>Others (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>28,927</td>
<td>19,113 (66.07)</td>
<td>9,545 (33.00)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>269 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>31,555</td>
<td>21,202 (67.19)</td>
<td>9,952 (31.54)</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>401 (1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>33,254</td>
<td>22,646 (68.10)</td>
<td>10,166 (30.57)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>442 (1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>35,604</td>
<td>24,731 (69.46)</td>
<td>10,453 (29.36)</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>61 (0.17)</td>
<td>359 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 shows that the Hindu population which was 27.97% in 1941 in East Pakistan came down to 9.19 percent in 2001 probably due to a series of communal disturbances and the rise of religious nationalism in South Asia. Besides, the pressure of the legal, social and psychological settings poses problems for the religious minority in Bangladesh.

Table 3.2: Reasons of Refugee Influx from East Bengal/East Pakistan to India: 1946-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reasons for Influx</th>
<th>Total Influx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Noakhali Riots</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Independence and Partition</td>
<td>334,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Police action in Hyderabad</td>
<td>786,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Khulna, Barishal Riots</td>
<td>213,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,575,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Agitation over Kashmir</td>
<td>187,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Worsening of economic conditions and persecution of minorities and passports scare</td>
<td>227,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 indicates total refugee flows into India since 1946 to 1970 with the Noakhali riots simultaneously to explain the reasons of inflow in each successive year.

Table 3.3. Refugee Influx from East Pakistan (figures in lakhs)

To West Bengal and other States of India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Influx</th>
<th>Into</th>
<th>Total Influx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>15.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Number of Hindu Refugees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2,74,455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>4,87,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>6,00,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>10,68,455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>15,00,000( estimated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India and other Government records, cited in Nag 1990: Appendix - C
Table 3.4 provides the statistics of the total Hindu refugee population from East Pakistan into Assam from 1951 to 1971. During the Bangladesh war 1971-72, the number of Hindu and Muslim refugees entering Assam and West Bengal totalled 10,000,000. Though after the war this population returned, yet it is assumed that a chunk of this population did not go back and settled in these provinces. Therefore, considering this population and the natural increase of the earlier refugee entrants, the Hindu population in Assam would not be less than 1,500,000 by 1971-72 cited in Nag 1990: Appendix C).

Table 3.5: Arrival of Partition Migrants/ Displaced Persons/ Refugees in Assam Year by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Place of Origin</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Bengal</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>6,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Pakistan</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>42,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>41,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>144,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(January and February)</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>3,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>272,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Pakistan</td>
<td></td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District origin not known</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>274,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1951A: 364

Table 3.5 provides to the number of arrival of displaced population in each successive year since the Noakhali riots up to the signing of Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact.

Table 3.6 Persons born in Pakistan, both refugees and Non-refugees in the Assam Plain (districts) in 1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division and District</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
<th>Non-Refugees</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam Plains</td>
<td>796,000</td>
<td>536,000 (67%)</td>
<td>260,000 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>37,000 (28.4%)</td>
<td>93,000 (71.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Forcing to Flee: Flow of Partition Migrants and Refugees to Cachar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>84,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(77.3%)</td>
<td>(22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>91,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(66.9%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>186,000</td>
<td>143,000</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(76.8%)</td>
<td>(23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>61,000</td>
<td>47,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(77%)</td>
<td>(22.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>173,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(77.3%)</td>
<td>(22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(73%)</td>
<td>(26.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1961 A: 252

Table 3.6 explores the population from Pakistan to the Assam Plains. It also provides the percentage of refugee and non-refugee population in the Assam Plains indicative to the correlative variation in percentage. The table indicates that the percentage of refugee population in the Assam Plains is comparatively less than the non-refugee population.

Table 3.7 Displaced Persons in Three Towns in Cachar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silchar</td>
<td>11,133</td>
<td>6,304</td>
<td>4,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>8,167</td>
<td>4,673</td>
<td>3,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>3,555</td>
<td>1,9967</td>
<td>1,588</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1951: 155

Table 3.7 explores the figure of displaced persons in three towns of Cachar and it is found that the number of displaced persons were more in Silchar than Karimganj and Hailakandi.
Table 3.8. Number of Displaced Persons to Cachar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Tract</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>Katigora, Borkhala and Udarband</td>
<td>11,745</td>
<td>6,266</td>
<td>5,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lakhipur, Sonai</td>
<td>6,072</td>
<td>3,317</td>
<td>2,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silchar</td>
<td>8,251</td>
<td>4,366</td>
<td>3,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karimganj, Badarpur</td>
<td>19,732</td>
<td>10,492</td>
<td>9,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patharkandi, Ratabari</td>
<td>17,897</td>
<td>9,444</td>
<td>8,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hailakandi, Katlichera</td>
<td>6,625</td>
<td>3,598</td>
<td>3,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi Town</td>
<td>22,855</td>
<td>12,944</td>
<td>9,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>District Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>93,177</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,427</strong></td>
<td><strong>42,750</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1951:152

Table 3.8 indicates the distribution of displaced population in rural and urban areas of Cachar. The number of male displaced persons was relatively more than the female.

3.4 Uprooting and Dividing: Experiences of the Refugees and the Displaced

Oral narratives collected from the interviews of the refugees in Cachar demonstrate the multiple realities under which the refugees had to flee to find a place of safety in Cachar.

Case 1

Nipendra Deb (80) of village Balishasra of Sylhet district migrated to Karimganj in 1950 due to an armed attack by a Muslim mob on the Hindus in his village. This incident changed the atmosphere of the village and terror intruded into the humble life of the villagers. Apprehensions gained ground of similar incidents to happen at any time. Due to life-threatening situation, the migration was decided almost overnight. Most of the villagers took a hasty flight leaving behind their houses, fields and belongings and migrated to Karimganj with utmost difficulties (Interviewed Nipendra Deb on 22 May 2006).
Case 2

Umesh Das (75) belonged to village Alamdin of Sylhet district presently located in Karimganj recollected that in his village, a person of Malakar community was killed by some Muslim goondas. Given the situation, a Muslim khansama of the village sheltered the frightened Hindus for a couple of days. In another incident, three Hindu families were also converted to Islam. These incidents panicked the villagers. Severely hit by these incidents and apprehensions of more violence in the situations of terror, the villagers decided to migrate in different directions to save their lives. His father also decided to migrate to Karimganj and hastily they reached there with tremendous difficulties (My conversation with Umesh Das on 6 June 2006).

Case 3

Abani Das (80) of Sylhet presently located in Maizgram area of Karimganj recalled that some Muslim goondas pelted stones at some Hindu houses in their village for few consecutive days. Meanwhile, one morning, his uncle was converted to Islam and his aunt was abducted. Since the family experienced such traumatic incidents, the decision to migrate came almost overnight for the safety of the other members. At the dead of night, the family migrated with the assistance of their Muslim neighbours (My conversation with Abani Das on 7 June 2006).

Case 4

Kripesh Nath (85) of Sylhet who also migrated to Karimganj due to communal violence in 1950 recollected that some Muslims plundered the property of the villagers. There was a perceived fear among the Hindus of being converted. These incidents happened at an hour of similar kind of atrocities reported from other parts of the country. The assault on the villagers and situations of panic culminated in hasty migration. His father could not sell off the house thinking that once the situation would turn normal they would come back. But this could not happen due to threat perception associated with their abandoned homeland (My conversation with Kripesh Nath on 23 June 2006).
Case 5

Jadhu Bhattacharjee (95) of village Louta, Sylhet presently settled in Karimganj town area narrated that one of his Muslim friends, a high ranking police officer of Sylhet, informed him about the possible attack on Hindus by some Muslim lawyers and asked him to leave immediately. His friend arranged his flight from his village with police escort and sent him up to Kulaura railway station. Therein he boarded an overcrowded bus from the railway station and reached Karimganj with utmost difficulties (My interface with Jadhu Bhattacharjee on 10 June 2006).

Case 6

Rasamay Chakrabarty (87) of Sylhet who migrated to Dohaliya area of Karimganj and eventually settled there narrated that a group of Muslims encroached into their village with sharp weapons. An engineer of the village was robbed of his property. After a few days, some Muslim zaminders sneaked into the village and shouted “Allah Ho Akbar” intending to convert the Hindus of the village. Sensing the gravity of the situation, the Muslim zaminder of their village used his wit and saved the Hindus from the mob intimidation. This incident left the villagers terrified and panicked. With the assistance of the zaminder they were able to go to Kulaura railway station. From there they boarded an overcrowded train bound for Karimganj (My interface with Rasamay Chakrabarty on 24 June 2006).

Case 7

Nirmal Deb (90) of Sylhet presently settled in Patel Nagar area of Karimganj recalled that after communal violence, some villagers were attacked by some Punjabi Muslims on way to paddy fields. It came as a great jolt to them for they had never experienced such happenings earlier. It was difficult to understand on their part as when and how the two communities came at daggers drawn so as to ignite communal violence. This incident created panic and an atmosphere of mistrust prevailed all around. The only option in the situation was to flee to a safer place. In that situation Cachar provided best option to them due
to cultural and geographical proximity (My interview with Nirmal Deb on 24 October 2005).

**Case 8**

Prafulla Datta (86) of village Chulkhai of Sylhet presently a resident of Karimganj recollected that the Hindu villagers were beaten up by some Muslim goondas. This led them to flee at the dead of night without informing any one in the village. Due to such unpleasant experience and sadness, they never returned back to their village to claim their properties (My interface with Prafulla Datta on 30 June 2006).

**Case 9**

Harendra Debnath (86) of Sylhet presently settled in Dohaliya area of Karimganj narrated that in their village some Muslims looted the paddy, rice etc. in broad day light. When the villagers were busy in the field, they burnt some houses too. Experiencing incidents of violence in such a situation, the elders of his family felt threatened and the decision to migrate came almost overnight (My conversation with Harendra Debnaths on 29 June 2006).

**Case 10**

Geeta Rani Pal (90) who migrated from Maulavi bazaar area of Sylhet and presently residing in Sonbeal village of Karimganj recalled that some Muslims expressed their desire to marry some Hindu girls of their village. This incident created terror in the minds of the villagers and they migrated immediately to protect the honour of the women. The process of migration was extremely painful. The family was divided --- the females were sent to Karimganj along with their younger brother and the rest of the male members stayed back in their ancestral home in Sylhet. But due to prevailing situation the remaining members eventually had to migrate except their elder brother who stayed back to guard the ancestral home (interviewed Geeta Rani Pal on 23 June 2006).

**Case 11**

Dhirendra Mohan Deb (89) of village Lakhmansri of Sylhet district presently settled in Durlavcherra area of Karimganj district recollected that the
Muslims abducted some Hindu girls on their way back from school. Due to the incident the situation became extremely tensed. In the brawl that took place between the abductors and some of the Hindu villagers, broomsticks were used as weapons and the girls were finally rescued. Meanwhile, some Brahmin villagers were also converted to Islam. They were compelled to recite *Kalma* and pray *namaz*. In the neighbouring village, some Hindu houses were burnt. Due to these incidents, there was uneasiness in the atmosphere and fear gripped the minds of the people. Initially four members of their family migrated and gradually others also followed the suit. They took shelter in Karimganj (My conversation with Dhirendra Mohan Deb on 5 June 2006).

**Case 12**

In Raout village of Sylhet district, Radharaman Baisnav (99) was looted by the some Muslims. Baisnav absconded to the jungle with his *bigraha*. After Nehru-Liaqat Ali Pact, Baisnav came back to his own house but found it destroyed. The Government *Sarpanch* and *Chaukidar* informed him that the government requisitioned his house. The farmers who used to cultivate his land were beaten up and threatened with dire consequences if they continued cultivating the land (Interviewed Radharaman Baishnav on 31 December 2006).

**Case 13**

Nirmalendu Purkayasta (89) of Sylhet who is presently located in Maizgram area of Karimganj recollected that the incidents of loot, plunder, conversion, abduction, threatening, dacoity etc. were reported from various parts of the district. Besides, some Muslim *goondas* used to steal their cows, goats etc. and destroyed their crops. His own village was looted on 9 March 1950 at 12 at night. The villagers took refuge at Biswanath *thana* for that particular night. These incidents created extreme panic in them. Fearing their life to be threatened, almost all families of their village except two migrated overnight (My interface with Nirmalendu Purkayasta on 12 June 2006).

There were some other refugees who narrated that they were not directly hit by any incident of communal carnage but the situation was turbulent. Fearing
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Communal tension that prevailed in the situation and the widespread reports of loots, conversion, abduction and dacoity etc. from various parts of country, they decided to migrate within a short span of time. In most cases, the decision to migrate was taken almost overnight.

**Case 14**

Srikanta Goswami (92) of Sylhet narrated that his village was not rocked by communal carnage as it was a Hindu village. But most of the villagers left the village at the dead of night as reports of torture, assault, conversion, looting poured in from neighbouring areas at regular interval (My conversation with Srikanta Goswami on 23 May 2005).

Likewise Grirban Kar, Ajit Nag, Abani Das, Ranjit Chakrabarty, Jyotsna Chakrabarty, Ashalata Ayan, Akhil Chakrabarty, Sudha Nath and other victims of Partition narrated that they were compelled to migrate due to fear and insecurity. Ananta Deb, a Partition victim narrated that leaders like Abani Gupta left Sylhet due to threat of their lives as the Ansars shouted slogans “*Matha chai Mundu chai* (we want your head) [translation mine]. The migration of leaders left the poor villagers defenseless and they decided to leave. Similar experience was shared by Sudhir Chandra Das of village Louta of Sylhet district. He recalled that with the migration of zaminders and leaders, the poor villagers felt demoralized and they left the village one by one. This view was shared by many other refugees too. In fact, the lower income groups continued to get financial help from the zaminders which supplemented their small income. In such a situation the migration of zaminders and leaders from the villages turned them absolutely helpless. Apprehending financial difficulties and driven by fear and insecurity in a Muslim state they eventually migrated with utmost reluctance.

Interviews and informal conversations that were conducted during the course of this study explored that among other factors, the honour of women continued to pose a serious threat that propelled forced mass-out migration of many Bengali Hindus to Cachar.
In some villages, the villagers left their village together. In some other cases the families migrated at the dead of night without informing anyone in the village. Some refugees narrated that they switched on the light of their houses before their departure at the dead of night to give an impression that they were still in their home. In the turbulent situation many of the refugees entrusted the custody of their home and field to their neighbours and friends. Some refugees narrated that the sudden decision to migrate did not leave any scope for them to sell their landed property. Many had to sell off their houses and fields at cheaper prices. This way of selling off properties may be termed as “distressed selling”.

Jogendra Mohan Das of village Bantal of Sylhet district narrated that he had to sell his cows for Rs.7 only and 80 kg of rice for mere Re.1. Some others entrusted the custody of their *kulodevota* to the village priest or to their friends or neighbours. Some could not dispose off their land or house and migrated with just a rug on their body. Some were able to sell only the furniture. But no one narrated that they intentionally left their home in order to go to a promised land where they could lead a better life.

The government servants were given the options to take up jobs on either side of the border. But the Assam Government was reluctant to reinstall the Bengalis into job. A Memorandum Submitted to the State Reorganisation Commission by the Cachar District Reorganisation Committee stated that:

About 1800 officers of the district of Sylhet opted to serve India instead of Pakistan to which Sylhet passed after the referendum. They did so on unequivocal terms guaranteed by that Government regarding uninterrupted retention of their existing terms and conditions of service including seniority. But when, after Partition, they were discharged by the Government of Pakistan, newly established in Sylhet, the Government of Assam transferred from Sylhet to the rest of Assam every Assamese but only a small proportion of others, and a vast number was either discharged on gratuity or premature pension or kept on a temporary basis as juniors to their own former juniors

3.5 Different Phases of Migration

The impending Partition and the Noakhali violence triggered a migration of population to Cachar. The carnage started on October 10, 1946. People migrated to Cachar from Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensingh, Tipperah, Chittagong, Noakhali, Faridpur districts of East Pakistan. They took refuge with their friends and relatives and in some places relief camps were set up to accommodate the refugees (narrated by Narendra Deb in an interface on 14 October 2006). They mostly belonged to the middle class population of Sylhet/East Pakistan. But the poor people of Noakhali were reluctant to migrate. Ashoka Gupta, who worked in riot-scarred Noakhali in 1946 observed, “Despite the horrific communal riots the Hindus had not fled to West Bengal, the poor tortured people of Noakhali were mostly Namasudras or scheduled castes. As cultivators, they were not willing to leave their land and go away” (Gupta 2005: 21).

Sudhir Aich a refugee leader of Cachar informed that after Noakhali riot a large number of refugees came to Cachar (Yugoshakti, 23 November 1946). Binod Bihari Pal narrated that during and after Noakhali violence the people migrated to interior places like Ram Krishna Nagar in Karimganj sub division (Pal 2001: 41). Jatindra Mohan Deb Laskar, the then President of Cachar District Refugee Conference in his presidential remark delivered on 8 November, 1954 highlighted that the terrible riot that took place in Noakhali in the month of October forced a large number of men and women of the minority community to migrate to Cachar to save their life, religion, culture and honour (Deb Laskar 1994: 72)[Translation mine].

The Census of India recorded “as many as 1,222 persons from Sylhet were reported to have come over to Assam as refugees in 1946. But this was an exaggeration because Sylhet was still very much a part of Assam and the referendum in and around the Partition of Sylhet were beyond the imagination of any person” (Census of India 1951).

The immediate occasion for the outbreak of the disturbances was the looting of a bazaar in Ramganj Police station in Noakhali district in East Pakistan following the holding of a mass meeting and a provocative
speech by the person, now arrested alleged to be the organizer of the disturbance—Golam Sarwar Hussini-arrested 22.10.46. From there the trouble quickly spread to the neighbouring villages and thanas over Ramganj police station as a whole. The western part of the neighbouring P.S of Begumganj and to the south the northern part of Lakshmipur and part of Raipur police stations were also affected during the next few days. Disturbances as such may be said to have ended in Noakhali by the 16th (except for the isolated incidents in the island of Sandwip) and by the 20th in the Dist. of Tippera where they had spread to the Southern part of Habiganj PS on the 13th following the arrival of hooligan elements from Noakhali and from there to the neighbouring police station of Faridganj and Chandipur to the West and Lakshman and Choudagram to the east during the next day or two. The trouble in these two police stations, as also in Habiganj itself, were on a minor and very much there restricted scale compared to the disturbances in Faridganj and Chandipur. Though the disturbances have ceased, the area is not as yet in a completely orderly condition. An indication of the unsettled state of affairs has been the attacks on the policemen carrying out their duties. The most spectacular of these attacks was made at the beginning of the month on a senior I.C.S officer and his police party escorting Hindu refugees to a relief camp. Firing had to be opened on the hooligans who attacked the party on three occasions and seven persons were killed and 10 wounded. For the better co-ordination of government activities in affected areas, all responsibility for directing and co-ordinating measures relating to relief and rehabilitation has been taken away from the divisional commissioners and made the responsibility of rehabilitation commissioner, now appointed. The two commissioners who have been given wide powers in their respective spheres to direct the activities of department affairs on the spot will work in the closest liason......

In Noakhali, conversion took place in mosques and appeared to have carried out in several forms. In some cases it appears to have been a fairly formal perfunctory affair involving nearly the reading of the kalma; in other cases inimical conversion has been steadily followed up and the converts have been made to say their prayers regularly as Muslims and to eat beef; in other cases, again there have been proposals
that a girl of a newly converted family should be given in marriage to a Muslim....

In Tipperah conversions have also been reported on a wide scale and have taken a number of forms including forcing converts to wear a cap on which has been inscribed "Pakistan" compelling them to wear a lungi as worn by Muslims, removing the caste marks from the forehead of girls and women making them recite prayers and forcing them to eat beef. No case of circumcision has been reported. As regards abductions, forced marriage and rape - all concerned are and will be extremely reluctant to make any complaint in respect of these matters. From present information available from Noakhali, it would not appear that abduction and forced marriages took place in any considerable scale and only one specific case of forced marriage has been brought to notice. The exact position is equally obscure in Tipperah.

(Mountbatten Papers Viceregal Office Correspondence File No 24, 1946).

Government of India.

The cases of forced marriage, rape etc were not reported perhaps due to the stigma associated with it. The Hindu Mahasabha alleged the brutality and outrage on women (Government of India 1946).

In her Noakhali Durjoger Diney Ashoka Gupta recalled (Gupta 2003: 1) how 2000 Hindus were forced to change their religion at a place called Tumchar and six were forced to marry by force and one was murdered. It had also been stated that if the people went to the local police station to complain, they were harassed by the police on one pretext or the other. The shocking events which took place at Noakhali made the atmosphere all over East Bengal so tense that the Hindu minority started feeling extremely insecure. It was for this reason that they were compelled to finally leave their home and hearth and migrate to other places (Hindu Mahasabha Papers 1946-47. F. No 108).

Sukumari Choudhury of village Debipur of Habiganj sub division in Sylhet district, who migrated to West Bengal in 1950, was in the forefront of the Worker's Movement. In an interview, Noakhali Victim turned activists'
conducted by the Research Team SWS, Kolkata; she narrated the help extended from the other community

During the riots in Noakhali, although the Muslims were in a killing spree, many of them also helped us in a number of ways. In many cases, the young Hindu women along with their children found refuge with their Muslim neighbours. Not only did they valiantly protect, shelter, and feed them, they were at the same time very polite, courteous and amicable. In fact, they enjoyed a cordial relationship with many of their Hindu neighbours.

(cited in Bagchi and Dasgupta 2003: 146)

David Gilmartin observed that “from late 1946 there is evidence that violence was often aimed not at renegotiating status and power within the symbolic frame work of a local order, but rather at “cleansing” the local community to regrind it symbolically in the territorial frameworks promised by Partition” (Gilmartin 1998: 1086).

In the first few years of Partition, migration remained fluid because creation of Pakistan on religious basis dragged people into ambivalence. Significantly, the decision of migration was shaped by a lot of considerations. The natives of Sylhet/ East Pakistan possibly could not grasp the after-effects of Partition in their homeland. In the first wave after Partition it was the well-to-do and educated middle class who migrated to Cachar. Hence, this period was noticeably marked by division and disintegration of families. In many cases, one or two of the family members were sent to Cachar to find a foot over there so that in case of any eventuality, the entire family could shift. Some others took the patronage of their relatives and friends to find out employment there. They still had a part of their family in East Pakistan and had come to explore the situation. Leaving the land was not easy because the Bengalis were emotionally related to their ancestral home and homeland. Some other refugees narrated that there was uncertainty regarding the prospect of job or employment or other avenues in the new place etc.
In 1949, the Government of India felt the necessity of conducting refugee census in three states -- Assam West Bengal and Bihar. This was in view of Bidhan Chandra Roy's suggestion that Assam should take 30,000 refugees and included Bihar also in this connection. The premiers of Assam and Bihar expressed their disagreement without further investigation. This eventually led Nehru to conduct a census of displaced persons in Assam and Bihar by the Central Government. It was decided that the Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation should visit Assam and Bihar to enquire about the prospective number of displaced persons to be settled in those provinces after discussion with representatives of the provincial government concerned (Choudhury 1990: 270).

Accordingly, an official census was taken on July 1949 and as many as 55 thousand refugees were enumerated in Cachar on July, 1949 (Census of India 1951: 357).

But the figure lacked accuracy due to a number of reasons. The Finance Minister of Assam Bishnu Ram Medhi informed in the State Legislative Assembly that the refugees were scattered throughout Assam in the refuge of their relatives and were not eager to identify themselves as refugees. On the other hand, there was a tendency among some of the local people to identify themselves as refugees to get whatsoever benefits from the government (Government of Assam 1952).

“Yugoshakti” reported that before the counting was started, a group of government officials disillusioned the refugees which prevented many of them to enroll their names. The local counting officials directed that the people who were oppressed in East Pakistan would be enumerated as refugees. Thus the definition of refugee itself was so fluid and confusing that made the actual enumeration difficult. In some centers sarpanchs did not prepare any list nor were available. Many refugees failed to enroll themselves due to the closure of counting office (Yugoshakti, 29 July 1949). There were also allegations of embarrassing the refugees by putting questions which were not included into the schedule framed by the Central government. Counting of refugees within the tea gardens was accepted by the Indian tea association but in most cases their names were not
enrolled. Moreover, in Karimganj subdivision, the counting centers were closed from 10 July to 22 July 1949. On the eve of counting it was opened only for three days. Some centers were miles away from the villages which prevented the refugees to enroll their names (ibid 29 July 1949).

In December 1949 anti-Hindu riot flared up in Khulna. A month later the trouble had spread to Barishal. It started with an incident, which occurred in village Khalshira in the Bagerhat sub-division of Khulna district in East Bengal, on 20 December 1949.

A police party went to arrest an alleged Communist suspect and, finding him absent, began to assault the inmates of the house, including the women. Attracted by the cries of the women, the neighbours ran to the scene and there was a free for all fight between the police party and the villagers. One policeman was killed and another died of injuries. Two days later, assisted by the Ansars and other rowdy elements, the police, attacked not only that village, but 22 other neighbouring villages, which were mostly inhabited by the members of the Namasudra community. There was arson and looting on a large scale, men were murdered and women ravished. There were also forcible conversions and desecration of places of worship. The residents of those villages could not escape from the scene because of a rigid cordon thrown by the armed police and others.

(Basu 2002:146-47)

Satish Chandra Dasgupta a social worker in East Bengal observed that “when the incidents of Bagerhat in Khulna district occurred in December 1949, the Government of East Pakistan denied their seriousness and their communal character. The result was embittered feeling among the Hindus who began gradually to move from there to West Bengal” (Choudhury 1990: 174). After the Khulna violence a worst communal violence took place in Dhaka in which properties owned by the Hindus were looted and destroyed. The Hindus were also threatened allegedly by Mohajirs or Bihari refugees, according to government reports. Within two days the violence spread to other districts, like Rajshahi, Noakhali, Chittagong, Faridpur, Khulna, Sylhet, Mymensingh and then to Barishal (Government of India 1950).
The February killings forced Hindus to flee their homes. On 1 February, Lakshikanta Maitra, member of Parliament from Nadia reported to the Indian Parliament about the “mass influx of refugees as a result of ruthless persecution of the minority Hindu community, such as, murder, arson, looting, abduction and other outrages on women” (The Statesman 2 February 1950). Gruesome incidents over large areas of East Pakistan in February-March 1950, led to the inevitable desertion by hundreds and thousands of Hindus in East Pakistan, especially Dacca, of their hearths and homes to seek shelter in the neighbouring districts of West Bengal and Assam whichever were nearer (Census of India 1951A: 356).

In the first part of February 1950, several Muslim leaders of Sylhet town were openly preaching that communal acts of violence and lawlessness were prevailing in West Bengal and Karimganj Subdivision of the Cachar district and as a result of that the Muslims of Sylhet must take revenge upon the Hindus. On the 10th February, which was a bazaar Day and a Friday, a big placard was hung up in a prominent light-post on the Bander Bazaar of the Sylhet town under the caption “Julums in Hindustan on Muslims” (Mukhopadhyay 2007: 194).

Most of the Muslims who fled the district during communal disturbance came back after the situation turned normal (Yugoshakti 29 September 1950). The Minority Commission was set up in Assam on 3 May 1950. Abdul Matlib Mazumdar was appointed as the representative of minorities in Assam (Government of Assam 1950). The State Minority Commission and the District Minority Boards which were set up within the framework of the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact functioned adequately and communal harmony prevailed in the state (Yugoshakti 28 May 1950). The administrative efficiency and sincere efforts of Dharmananda Das, the sub divisional officer of Karimganj was commendable in quelling violence in Karimganj. Peace meetings were held in various places of the district and a Peace Committee was set up under the aegis of the S.D.O. Consequently, things turned normal within a short time (ibid 16 April, 1950).

The Census of India observed that “The exodus which began in 1950 continued with intensity until the end of 1951. Thus in 1950 nearly one-fourth of the refugees had congregated in the three towns of Silchar, Karimganj and
Hailakandi and the remaining three-fourths of their number spreading itself in the rural areas of the district” (Census of India 1951).

The border was kept open initially to give people the option to decide their citizenship. In 1952, the government introduced passport system to seal the border. The East Bengal Hindus found in the passport system a way to carve their freedom. The government introduced 8 categories of visa to regulate migration (Yugoshakti 24 October 1952). With the introduction of the Passport Act of 1952 and its consequent regulations, the Hindus of East Pakistan apprehending restrictions on cross-border movements decided on an immediate flow to the neighbouring provinces and also Assam (The Assam Tribune 6 May 1952). A Weekly Confidential Report estimated 1259 persons consisting of men, women and children migrated to Cachar from 9 October to 15 October 1952 (Weekly Confidential Report, Government of Assam, 1952). “The persons who migrated between August 1951 and October 1952 with the introduction of the passport system of travels did not get the opportunity to obtain registration certificate. It was found that even after October 1952 a large number of people left their home in Pakistan and managed to cross over to Assam without obtaining migration certificate. In Cachar 62.2 percent refugee families in urban areas and 57.1 percent of families in rural areas were found without proof 1 (Government of Assam 1952).

From the end of 1952 to 1954 there was a continuous influx of refugees in thousands. Before a week of introduction of passport, the number of Hindu and Muslim migration took place simultaneously. A large number of Muslims who worked seasonally to bring in the harvest or transplant rice, paddy etc. and other petty works in Assam migrated in hoards.2 Due to heavy rush, the passengers had to stay at Kulaura and other railway stations. Many of them even boarded the goods train for early exit. Due to heavy rains and massive landslide, the train connectivity was disrupted at a place near Damchara in North Cachar Hills. Invariably, those who crossed East Pakistan with utmost difficulty had to face a new kind of difficulty. On 15 October 1952, eight thousand passengers including
women and children were stranded up at Badarpur and Karimganj railway station (*Yugoshakti* 17 October 1952).

The Statistical Survey Report of Displaced Persons published in 1955-56 by the Assam Government estimated that 121,852 families of displaced persons migrated from East Pakistan to Assam up to January 1956 in addition to about 200 families from West Pakistan. From February 1956 to 31st December 1956 486,000 people migrated to Assam of which more than half the numbers were in Cachar (Government of Assam 1956).

Economic crisis in East Bengal propelled the minorities to be the victims of torture and that induced their migration. It was found that turbulent flood ravaged the *Aman* and *Aush* paddy in Sylhet thereby creating a severe food crisis in the district. The spiraling price of commodities led many people to survive on tuber, banana plants etc. People were reportedly suffered from hunger in various places of Sylhet. The steady worsening situation in Sylhet led to a mounting wave of crime against the persons and property of the Hindus. In the name of recovering food stocks, the Pakistan military perpetrated torture on the innocent Hindus which led many to migrate to Cachar (Interviewed Satindra Paul on 3 October 2005: *Yugoshakti* 23 September 1956).

The refugees who migrated to Cachar in 1956 narrated in their interviews the reasons of migration as beating, looting, abduction, rape, capturing of boat, paddy extortion, threatening etc. *Yugoshakti* reported that a lot of refugees entered Assam through Karimganj (*Yugoshakti* 9 March 1956).

In view of migration, the President of the Congress Committee of Karimganj sent a telegram to the government wherein he conveyed that a large number of refugees entered Cachar who were not extended any assistance. Their plight as homeless and homeless refugees was severe. An appeal was made to the government to set up transit camps immediately and to provide them assistance (*Yugoshakti* 11 May 1956).

The next phase of migration to Cachar began in 1964. The exodus was the result of widespread killings in Rajshahi and Pabna District in East Pakistan. A
relic of the prophet Mohammad was rumoured to have been stolen from a shrine in Kashmir and this was followed by attacks on Hindus in East Pakistan and rioting against Muslims in India. About 1.8 lakh refugees entered Assam in 1964 due to communal disturbance in East Pakistan (Government of Assam 1964).

In Sylhet so far as the border areas were concerned, there were organized and determined efforts to drive out the minority communities. A large number of Christians were also driven out. The organized efforts took the shape of creating a climate of complete insecurity for the minorities. It led to large scale attacks on villages where looting and burning of houses were carried out in the bitter cold of January 1964. The rioters warned the minorities that there was no room for them in Pakistan and that it belonged to the Muslims alone (Mukhopadhyay 2007: 213).

The refugee population of Cachar at one time exceeded 2 lakhs from which it came down to 93,177 on account of the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement. Among them, 22,855 were urban refugees and 70,322 were in the rural sector (Census of India 1951). The Statistical Survey of the Government of Assam, 1955-56 determined the number of refugees to Cachar as 124,096 in which 32,770 were urban refugees and the 91,326 were configured as rural refugees (Statistical Survey of Displaced Persons from East Pakistan to Assam 1955-56).

3.6 Mode of Migration

The refugees had to face tremendous difficulties in the process of flight. In view of unending migration following the communal violence, the communication network virtually collapsed. The arrangement made by the government on both sides of the border was hopelessly inadequate. Consequently, a large number of refugees suffered in the entire flow. Though the fleeing refugees availed all possible means of communication as per the contingency of the turbulent situation, the government records did not enumerate those who migrated through water ways and on foot. The figure represented in the counting list was concerned with only those who had come through custom
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stations but not of those who migrated on foot or by boat. No statistics was kept in regard to their number (Government of Assam 1954).

The Central Government did not show any real concern for their dispersal to a safer place. The Assam government as it was largely reluctant to accept the Bengali Hindu refugees since the beginning of the migration continued to be insensible to their plight. There was no adequate number of vehicles and petrol was short in supply that created extreme inconveniences to the refugees. As the migration was almost like an exodus, the trains and buses were extremely overcrowded. Hence, a large number of refugees were stranded up at the railway station for days together. In many cases, the refugees had to board the roofs of the train. On 27 March 1950, more than six thousand refugees were stranded at the bus stand. Only four thousand were able to reach their destination (Yugoshakti 31 March 1950).

Chandra Mohan Debnath of village Purba Mayani of Sylhet migrated to Karimganj through Latu checking post by train. He narrated that the train was overcrowded and they were compelled to climb the roof of the train. Some of the refugees had no option but to bribe the police to board an overcrowded train compartment (My conversation with Chandra Mohan Debnath on 12 June 2006).

Gopika Chakrabarty of village Janaya of Sylhet district migrated to Karimganj by train. His money was robbed at the check post. Due to heavy rush in the railway station, he had to stay in the Kulaura railway station for five consecutive days. Ultimately, an acquaintance helped him to board the train (narrated by Gopika Chakrabarty in an interface on 10 June 2006). The vulnerable refugees like old, infirm, women, and children had extremely difficult time to board train or bus. Binoy Datta Gupta of village Barag of Sylhet district migrated to Karimganj by train in 1950. But his old parents could not board the overcrowded train. So they had to stay back in Kulaura railway station for days together. Finally an acquaintance in the railway department helped them to board the train for Karimganj.

It was reported that a few days before March 23, 1950, a bogie at Kulaura in East Pakistan derailed due to overcrowding and the passengers were
indiscriminately flogged by Ansars and the railway police. Bus service in the Sylhet District was suspended and passengers reached railway station on foot causing extreme difficulties for the people to board the train (My conversation with Jogendra Debnath on 1 December 2006).

There were some refugees who took multiple modes of communication to reach Karimganj. Gopesh Chandra Malakar who migrated after communal violence took multiple modes of communication to reach Karimganj from his village Kalyani of Sylhet district. He traveled some distance by bus some by train and again on foot and it took three days to cross the border to reach Karimganj.

Barindra Deb Roy of village Palopara, Sylhet migrated to Karimganj in 1950. He along with his family came by bus up to a village called Chulkhadi and walked two miles to cross through Nilambazar and again boarded a bus to reach Karimganj. Shanticharan Chakrabarty migrated to Karimganj in 1950. He traveled from Habiganj to Kulaura by bus and then from Kulaura to Karimganj by train. Sushil Chakrabarty migrated after communal violence and traveled up to Kulaura by train and then boarded an overcrowded bus. He reached Karimganj with utmost difficulties as the bus had to be stopped due to lack of petrol and consequently the refugees suffered a lot (Interviewed Barindra Debroy on 14 December 2006).

Bipin Bihari Das of Sylhet traveled by bus up to Saola checking post and then came on foot up to Sutarkandi border and from Sutarkandi they took a bus to reach Karimganj. There were 18 members of his extended family who left their home together but were dispersed in different directions. He along with some members boarded an overcrowded bus and reached Karimganj. Others took different routes to reach Karimganj in subsequent days (My interface with Bipin Bihari Das on 15 December 2006).

A number of refugees crossed the river Kushiara either by swimming or by boat. Makhan Chakrabarty of Sylhet narrated that driven by fear during communal violence he along with his family crossed the river Kushiara on boat and took shelter in Karimganj. Ashalata Ayan of village Nolsuka of Sylhet district narrated that she along with five members of her family migrated to
Karimganj by crossing the river Kushiara by boat. A Muslim boatman helped them to cross the river to enter Karimganj. The monsoon rain added further miseries to the refugees. It was declared that the refugees would be given free travel in Assam railway but in actual practice many had to pay. Passengers were searched for any hidden money and asked to purchase a ticket or two if there be any money left with them (My interview with Chandra Mohan Deb Nath on 12 December 2006). The refugees kept arriving in thousands daily in Karimganj (Assam) and relief organizations found it difficult to cope with the situation (Yugoshakti 25 March 1950) [Translation mine].

Indeed, the foot column indicated the most difficult mode of migration comprising men, women, and children, old and infirm. “Thousands of refugees migrated to Karimganj through Pathariya Hill of Putni gate on foot. They were mal-nourished, exhausted hungry and emaciated people. Many women with new born baby carried small bed holdings. They took the journey of long 50 miles. There were small children bare-footed, bare-headed with the most yearning look”. (ibid 24 March, 1950) [Translation mine].

Rajani Kanta Nath of village Palpara Sylhet crossed the border through jungle on foot and reached Karimganj. Krishna Prasanna Choudhury, the then relief and rehabilitation officer of Karimganj who belonged to Kaibarta community initiated in bringing the people of his community from Habiganj and Sunamganj sub division of Sylhet district to Sonbeal area of Karimganj. Most of them came by water route; some of them carried their country boat too.

The refugees narrated their experience of torture of ansars and policemen at the check post. The passengers in a bus on way to Karimganj were looted near Gopalganj. A policeman was also beaten up by the mob. During their flight the people of Dasgram and adjacent areas were looted near Kakardiya village of Sylhet (Yugoshakti 31 March 1950). There were many other cases of looting flashed in newspapers as well as narrated by the respondents ³. The railroute was also not safe. In Latu and Kulaura railway station, the oppression of goonda elements was predominant. Many people were threatened and whatever little money they possessed was snatched away. Women as vulnerable refugees
experienced inhuman torture and humiliation at the check post in the name of search. At Latu railway station, passengers were dragged out with luggage and detained without food and drink till the arrival of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} train, which reached almost 12 hours later.

Arguments were raised in the Assam Assembly that

the \textit{goonda} elements of Eastern Pakistan perpetrated all sorts of atrocities not only on adult male members but even on female and children. They looted everything they had and many women arrived stark naked from many places. There was no government in Pakistan worth the name... neither they could expect a real succour from the Indian Dominion nor could they get any relief from their own countrymen, at this stage when tens of thousands of people continuously made an exodus to Indian Dominion everyday by train, road, and jungle, who did not know whether they would have a morsel of food to eat and even some of the women gave birth to their children on their way.

(Government of Assam 1950: 303-4)

There was concentration of troops on the border especially between Chittaganj, Comilla and Sylhet ... a small portion of the troops were local but training were imparted to a large number of National Home Guards and \textit{Ansars}. About 5000 troops were deployed in Chittagang area and a similar number in Comilla and Sylhet border. Arms had been received in ships which had come directly from other countries and not from Karachi (Choudhury 1991: 232).

\textbf{3.7 Summary}

To sum up, the migration along the eastern border actually started during and after the Noakhali violence of 1946. The migration continued before and after Partition but it largely remained fluid. In the initial years after Partition the migration of the \textit{bhadrolok} class was shaped more by fear of cultural onslaught in a Muslim state than anything else. At this period, the migration of the poor people did not take place substantially. Significantly, this phase was marked by uncertainty, ambivalence, division and disintegration of families etc.
However, the communal violence of 1950 abruptly changed the existing environment of Sylhet/ East Pakistan wherein a life-threatening situation was created to force the refugees to flee endlessly in search of a safer space. The inherently communal anti-human, anti-democratic laws like EPA/VPA dispossessed the Hindus of their rights over property and systematic extermination from their native land. The creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state fuelled religious fundamentalism and led to the evacuation of Hindus who constituted one-third of the total population of East Pakistan. From the available literature and field study we found the propelling factors of migration of Bengali Hindu refugees who migrated in the wake of Partition and its aftermath was -- incidents of violence, generalised fear, protection of honour of women, migration of zamindars and leaders, cultural, economic and political persecution of Hindus in East Pakistan/ Sylhet. The government servants were given the option to serve either India or Pakistan.

The discourse on the migration of Bengali Hindu refugees negates the general perception of absence of violence in East Pakistan or Sylhet. Oral narratives, available literature and government records explored cases of violence in Sylhet. In the hypothesis, we stated that a large number of refugees migrated to Cachar not due to actual violence but a threat perception generated by a situation of generalised violence could not be valid. Fiercely uprooted from their place of origin to which the refugees were emotionally attached, the physical dislocation had intense psychological impact on them.

The physical relocation essentially created gulf between the communities. "The mental borders had the potential to expel "outsiders" between the Hindus and the Muslims from the nation, symbolically and literally" (Sinha- Kerkhoff and Bal 2007:78). The creation of border and boundaries brutally turned the natives of Sylhet into refugees. Since the demarcation of border was drawn arbitrarily that paid no heed to the aspiration of the people, it inflicted unrelenting sufferings to the helpless refugees both in their country of origin as well as of refuge.
In Cachar the ethnic similarity of the refugees with the local population had made it difficult to collect reliable data about the actual number of refugees. We found that many middle class refugees were reluctant to register their name as refugees due to the stigma associated with it. It is pertinent to mention that a large number of refugees migrated through water routes and on foot but their names were not enlisted in the government records. In the absence of confirmed information, estimates of migration tended to vary. Hence we have no alternative but to form rough estimates of the number of refugees who migrated from Sylhet/East Pakistan to Cachar on the basis of available records like census conducted by the Government of India, a Statistical Survey of Displaced Persons from East Pakistan to Assam 1955-56 Government of Assam, Weekly Confidential Report, Government of Assam, statistics collected by the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Cachar etc.

When migration reached its peak, the communication network virtually collapsed. A large number of the refugees were forced to undergo painful journey as a consequence. The government arrangement of migration was hopelessly inadequate. Little attention was paid to ensure the availability of food and medicine to the refugees. As a result, the refugees were almost devastated in transit.

The Partition of Sylhet and consequent forced migration transformed the demography of Cachar. The refugees contributed significantly in social and cultural amelioration in Cachar. The Bengali speaking refugees and the displaced had experienced discrimination as linguistic minorities in the largely asamiya speaking Assam. Moreover, the ambiguity between refugees, migrants, infiltrators and immigrants could not truly determine the actual position of the refugees. In many cases, their citizenship was put into question. In the absence of any national legislation concerning the refugees, the migrants at the legal level were treated under the Generic Foreigners Act 1946 and the Registration of Foreigners Act 1939. These two Acts view the refugees /migrants essentially as unauthorized foreigners who have no legal right to stay in the Indian territories (Das 2011: 51). They as victims of human rights violation had to suffer in the 'place of hope' Hence, the experience of forced migration of the Bengali Hindu refugees was deeply painful and traumatic.
Notes:

1. The number of application for migration certificates was 5,209 in October 1955 but had risen to 9,609 in November and had shot up to 11,843 in December. This indicated the increase of nearly 24% and showed the mindset of the minority communities. On January 1st 15,422 applications for migration were still pending with the High Commissioner in Dhaka (Statesmen, 29 January, 1956).

2. “Partition narratives of the mass migration of people across both borders are largely articulated in terms of Hindus (and Sikhs) and Muslims, the two major communities who were pitted against each other” (Butalia : 2007: 152).

3. “Harassment on Hindu Passengers at Latu Railway Station is reported whenever any one is found without the requisite certificate and they are, detained there. Land custom officer at Latu is reported to have accepted bribe in a few cases to allow some of the passengers who are not in possession of certificate to cross the border” (See Weekly Intelligence Report, D.I.B Branch, 1949).