INTRODUCTION

This thesis wishes to look into issues such as the making of minorities, refugees and citizens in the context of post-Partition Bengal, unfolding the somewhat elastic temporal space of the aftermath of Partition. For long Partition was considered to be an episode well over that happened at some point in history and in all the celebrations of the Indian Independence that came after a long anti-colonial struggle, Partition remained just another unfortunate event (or glorious manoeuvre) that came along with it. Partition was thus seen as the end product of a long drawn communal politics in the subcontinent. However, this work views Partition as formative – the primary event that sets into motion a series of reactions that shaped the history of post Partition India. Partition affected the lives of millions of ordinary people who though had no role to play in the decision to Partition India, suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of the border. Their native village - the only place many knew across generations – turned foreign overnight. To many, the choice was between staying on as minorities in a new India or Pakistan confronted with violence (or the fear of it) or face the challenge of being uprooted and refugee- hood as they underwent the horrors of dislocation and migration to the “right” side of the border. To these teeming millions Partition was far from over as they were left to negotiate its consequence for the rest of their lives. Partition, as it was, a single political event, unfolded through several different layers with its repercussions spread across time and space.

The work thus begins with the drawing of the Radcliffe Line in 1947. It looks into the making of minorities in East Bengal, the story of how they turned into refugees in West Bengal as they undertook migrations across the border in the first two decades after
Partition. Its aftermath, however, cannot be tied to any similar timeframe as it spills over across generations. This work deals specifically with Bengal. The borders of Bengal were redrawn several times: first when Curzon partitioned the British Province of Bengal, secondly with Indian Partition in 1947 and finally when Bangladesh came out from the dominance of Pakistan. Of these, the Partition in 1947 was marked by large-scale migration along the borders and is the primary concern of this work. It specifically looks into the aftermath of Partition – how Partition led to migration from East Pakistan and the consequent impact it had in West Bengal. It thus deals with one part of the Bengal tragedy – that of Hindus who migrated from East Bengal. Though Partition migration began with the Noakhali and Tipperra riots in 1946 and continued in waves through the 1950s and 1960s, its impact cannot be restricted to any particular time span. It is this longue duree of the Partition that this work proposes to examine.

Recent research by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay on the transition politics of West Bengal and the process of decolonization between 1947 and 1952 looks at events other than the Partition that shaped the politics in Bengal. He sees decolonisation as a ‘complex experience, rather than just a linear history emanating from one event – either Partition or transfer of power’ while, as Bandyopahyay rightly points out, decolonization cannot be understood only in terms of Partition. Yet the centrality of Partition in shaping post-Partition history of Bengal cannot be denied. Bandopadhyay himself does not deny its importance. “It is difficult,” thus he admits, “or indeed impossible, to write a history of West Bengal between 1947 and 1952 without referring to Partition or the refugees, as almost every aspect of the province’s life and economy had been affected by them and
continuous to do so.”¹ There were indeed several determinants of decolonisation particularly connected with the establishment of the Congress Raj, which from the start had to negotiate with popular agitations. Yet the manner in which many aspects of the politics of opposition was linked with the refugee questions, Partition remained the single most important event that shaped the history of post-independence Bengal. Partition led to large scale migration in the decades following it and it was this migration that influenced Governmental policies. On one hand the government devised programmes to tackle the issue internally by providing (or denying) relief and rehabilitation to the incoming migrants. On the other hand it was this large scale migration that moulded its policy towards East Pakistan. Again, it was the failure of the Government to adequately address the problems of Partition migrants that led to refugee attempts to self-rehabilitation and their involvement in political movements. All this was only a part of the impact of the Partition for the longue durée of the Partition and migration left its deepest impact on the minds of the people, on the fictional and non-fictional representation of the event in what is described as the Partition literature or in the political rhetoric against illegal infiltration from Bangladesh.

This thesis is built round two principal concerns. For one, there is an attempt to understand the process of migration from East to West Bengal in the first two decades after Partition of India. For another, there is an effort to locate the uniqueness of the Bengal experience in the context of the self-rehabilitation of the refugees and political activism of their movement, to see how it impacted the social and political milieu of West Bengal in the decades following the Partition. It goes without saying that the Partition and the resultant refugee problem remained the central political issue during the 1950s. Much

of the radicalism of left wing politics that West Bengal experienced during the decade in some way or other was linked with the aftermath of the Partition. In addition to the centrality of the Partition experience in the years immediately following independence, its memories and issues concerning permanent rehabilitation of the displaced people constituted a *longue duree* that in effect has retained the relevance of the event in the post-independence history of West Bengal. In this way, the Partition as an event has not yet seen its closure.

While Partition remains the defining event in Bengal’s post-independence history, its most apparent aftermath was the refugee crisis. It started in 1947 in East Bengal when Hindus over there were turned minorities just as Muslims in this part of Bengal. Migrations were not, however, over within a couple of years after Partition unlike the case of Punjab. It continued intermittently for around two decades. As waves of migrants arrived from time to time, new batches of “refugees” sought asylum. The terms ‘saranarthis’ (refugees) or ‘udvastus’ (uprooted) have been synonymously used in this work. In official literature the term ‘refugee’ has been most frequently used. But the Government did have its own notions about what the term connoted. As the Government felt that acknowledging a person as a refugee meant obligation on its part, it sought to restrict its usage. Thus it was declared that all those who migrated after June 25, 1948 would not be considered as refugees and were thus not eligible for Government aid. It was felt that the Inter Dominion Conference had substantially improved the minority situation in East Bengal and hence there were no reasons to accept refugees from East Bengal. This date was, however, relaxed several times till it was finally declared that only the ‘Old Migrants’ that is those who migrated before March 1958 were eligible for rehabilitation in West Bengal while the New Migrants that is those who migrated after January 1964 were to be rehabilitated on
schemes outside Bengal. Those who migrated between March 1958 and January 1964 were not recognised as refugees at all.\(^2\)

Needless to say, that this work does not accept such categorisation for refugees and considers all those who migrated ever since the Noakhali days. It tries to understand why the various classes of minorities from East Pakistan chose to cross over. It also looks at how the Government tried to accommodate those it considered eligible for its support. It further looks into the conditions of various camps. Most importantly it examines the most distinctive feature of refugees in West Bengal – their attempt at self-rehabilitation. And in all these discussions on camp refugees, colony refugees and the upper class migrants who arranged for themselves independently outside camps and colonies, the terms migrants, refugees and uprooted have been used interchangeably.

**Historical Literature on Partition**

Historical literature that has come up in the last five decades or so has created a rich historiography of the Partition. From an end game of high politics to the reconstruction of Partition as told by its victims – in its content, method and sources, the historiography of Partition has produced some fascinating historical accounts. Partition literature was initiated by officers in the British Civil Services (Alan Cambell – Johnson, Sir Francis Ticket, Sir Penderal Moon, G.D. Khosla) or nationalists leaders such as Abul Kalam Azad (*India wins Freedom*) and Chowdhury Khaliquzzaman (*Path way to Pakistan*)\(^3\). Khosla

\(^2\) See Government of India, *Report of the Working Group on the Residual problems in West Bengal, Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation*, Department of Rehabilitation, Government of India Press, 1976, Pg. 5-6. For further discussion see Chapter II

for instance has made a detailed survey of the events in the Punjab in particular. Moon’s book offers the impressions of a British civil servant about the events that took place at the hour of Partition especially in the Bahawalpur state (adjacent to Punjab), where he was an eye witness to the disturbances. Mostly documentation of events leading upto the Partition and those immediately following it, these, however, have strong personal observations that make them a valuable source to understand contemporary mind set.

Historical research on the Partition was substantially enriched with the publication of the Transfer of Power Documents and opening of the British archives. David Page’s work on the impact of the imperial policies on the changing political alignments in the 1920s and early 30s and Anita Inder Singh's insights on the political developments since 1935 leading to the Partition are essential historical works to understand the Partition. Ayesha Jalal’s work on Jinnah is considered to offer a revisionist perspective on the issue and Inder Singh and Jalal actually compliment the understanding on how the Partition actually took place. Inder Singh, as Mushirul Hasan points out, “provides us with the big picture, focusing on the national arena. Jalal explores the happenings in the provinces, linking them judiciously with all India politics.” Partition studies have been furthered and have reached new heights with researchers on the regional dynamics of the Partition by Gilmartin and Talbot on Punjab, Suranjan Das, Joya Chatterjee, Hashmi and others on


Bengal. However, important as they are, historians of this genre have concerned themselves with the socio-political analysis that led to the Partition.

A completely different history of the Partition emerged following the anti-Sikh violence of 1984. Greatly affected by the Sikh killings, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin came up with their works on the Partition of Punjab. Theirs was a phenomenal contribution as these works marked a break from the writings on the high politics of the time and reconstructed the history of the period through oral narratives. They accept the complexities of working with oral history. Memories, as Butalia puts it, are seldom ‘pure’ or ‘unmediated’. However their aim was certainly not to produce ‘pure’ history but to present the Partition as it was through the memories of the survivors and also through their reluctance to speak. Through such narratives Butalia, Menon and Bhasin try to understand the trauma of violence and dislocation, the experience of women and how they came to constitute the symbol of community honour. They also examined how women were thus subjected to violence by the other but also by her own who martyred its own women to save community honour. Gyan Pandey’s recent work Remembering Partition, Violence, Nationalism and History of India is yet another attempt at understanding Partition violence. Examining the violence in Panjab, Delhi, UP and some other parts of northern and north-western India, Pandey explores how violence and community constitute one another and how experiences of violence go towards making of a

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community. According to him, Partition and independence lead towards a process of nationalisation. The core chapters of his book are case studies of riots at Garhmukteshwar in November 1946 and Delhi in 1947-48. In the case of the Garhmukteshwar killings, Pandey shows how there were attempts by nationalists to dismiss the violence at Garhmukteshwar as local in order to disassociate such signs of deep-rooted hatred from national traditions. In the study of Delhi during 1947-48, Pandey shows how Muslims in Delhi and elsewhere in India were homogenized as a category, suspected and hunted as has been the case with the ethnic cleansing elsewhere in the world such as in Nazi Germany.

Historical works discussed above may be placed in two different time frames – the first series of writings by Page, Gilmartin and others were written after the opening up of the transfer of power documents and are mainly concerned with the events leading to the Partition and are thus not directly linked to the violence that marked the Partition. The second series of writings by Butalia, Menon and Pandey were inspired by the anti-Sikh killings and they attempted to understand the violence that accompanied the Partition. Thus, though apparently these writings focus on different time period, both try to understand the Indian Partition and communal violence in the subcontinent. The two issues on which these work cut each other is their methodology and argument. The first series of writings mentioned here mainly draw upon archival materials and thus they use more conventional sources to build up their arguments. Secondly they have tried to analyse events leading up to the Partition and have thus worked upon the causes of the Partition. Finally most of these studies look into the socio-economic and political factors that led to the deterioration of Hindu Muslim relationship to such an extent that Partition took place (hence Inder Singh argues that the Partition demand till the 1946-47 was from
above and did not have much impact on the provinces and Page looks into the colonial constitutional methods that led to the breakdown of Hindu-Muslim relations).

Pandey in his work hence strongly questions the above line in history writing. To Pandey official sources on the Partition try to normalize an event like the Partition and he thus questions “how one might write the history of an event involving genocidal violence, following all the rules and procedures of disciplinary, objective history and yet convey something of the impossibility of the enterprise.” Only recent works by Veena Das, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin has marked a significant and refreshing break that has been able to reconstruct the ‘gravity, uncertainty and jagged edges of the violence that was Partition’. Pandey has also contested the writing of history as causes and its impact. Thus a study of the factors leading to the Partition reduces the significance of the event of Partition and the violence that accompanied it. “Another disciplinary device” states Pandey “that is widely used to distance ourselves from such fearful moments of the past is that of transforming the history of its causes or origins-which thus themselves become an event. Yet again one may render the account null and void by representing the violence as a part not of this, but of some other history: an alien people or nations doing.” Finally Pandey argues violence and community constitute each other in the subcontinent thus he underplays the role of politics and economy in the making of Partition. Pandey’s work in particular is an important contribution in the realm of history writing of the Subaltern school. However this alone cannot explain why Urvashi Butalia Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin and others have preferred to use alternative sources of history rather than conventional ones. It is important to contextualize the works, locate

11 Ibid Pg. 45-46
them behind the time frame when these were written. Butalia, Menon and Bhasin have worked closely with the victims of the 1984 killings, which has been infamous for the alleged connivance of the establishment in unleashing terror. It is in this backdrop that Partition violence was studied and this perhaps explains their reluctance to accept official claims in their study of Partition violence. Indeed official claims alone cannot be a true reflection of the trauma of violence.

In the historical literature of Western India, Partition has become synonymous to violence and dislocation. However, there is more to it than the pain of violence and it is in this context that Partition historiography of Bengal needs to be studied. This is not to say that there was any lack of violence in Bengal as compared to the West. It is true that Bengali fictional literature has its focus more on nostalgia than on violence as against its western counterpart, yet this silence cannot be equated to an absence of violence in Bengal. Partition in Bengal, however, went much beyond trauma, dislocation, violence and victimhood and Partition literature in Bengal variously tries to capture this. The two earliest works on the refugees in West Bengal are *The Uprooted: A sociological study of the refugees in West Bengal* by Kanti Pakrashi and *Marginal Men: The refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* by Prafulla Chakravarti. Pakrashi’s work is based upon a statistical survey of the social background, class and caste of the

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migrants and is an extremely useful contribution for understanding the sociology of the incoming refugees. Chakrabarti’s book, one of earliest contributions to refugee studies, explores the political impact of the refugee influx and the increasing left influence in the camps and squatters’ colonies leading to the rise to power of the left in Bengal during the 1960s. Chakrabarti gives substantial evidence to show that the political ascendancy of the left in West Bengal owed a great deal to the refugees and their struggles for rehabilitation in the 1950s, arguing that while the communists provided leadership to the refugees in their struggle for rehabilitation, the migrants in return provided the left with a mass base. Though an extremely detailed research, Chakraborti’s work is a narrative of a give and take relationship between the refugees and Communist Party of India. Most importantly, the author has not been able to distance himself from the emotions associated with the human tragedy being a victim himself. As such he has perpetuated the myth of communal stereotypes even through the titles of his chapters like ‘The Quiet Bengali Hindu’, ‘The Mind and the Behaviour pattern of the Muslims,’ etc.

Several compilations of articles that have also come up since the late 1980s need mention as they have researched on various nuances in the processes of refugee rehabilitation in Bengal. The earliest among these is perhaps the study by Dipesh Chakraborty on the memories and nostalgia of the refugees based upon a series of articles that came out in the Bengali newspaper Jugantar. Apart from this, there are three other relevant compilations. The volume edited by Ranabir Sammaddar entitled ‘Reflections of the Partition in East’, is a collection of several articles by noted Bengali scholars of the subaltern school such as Partha Chatterjee, Pradip Kumar Bose, Sandip Bandopadhyay, 

Subhoranjan Das Gupta, Tapati Chakravarty, and others including the editor himself.\textsuperscript{15} The collection focuses on a range of topics such as the growth of communalism in Bengal, reflection of Partition in Bengali psyche, the nostalgia and memories of Partition, reflection of Partition in literature, drama etc. The volume also contains a few translations of noted Bengali poems and short stories based on the Partition. Being short articles by different authors on a variety of issues based on secondary literature, interviews, memories and novels, it gives a general idea on how Partition has affected various aspects of life and opens up scope for further research. The second collection of articles by the scholars of the Calcutta Research Group edited by P.K. Bose is a more comprehensive work.\textsuperscript{16} Divided into three sections, it focuses on the question of refugee ‘problem’ and government responses to it, on rehabilitation of refugees and initiative of the Bengali refugees in rehabilitating themselves and also on the memories of the Partition, migration and a lost home. All three sections have well researched articles that throw considerable light on various aspects of the settlement of the refugees and try to undo some of the common notions about the Bengali refugees as an unproductive lot with no self-initiative. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta’s edited collection too has a rich blend of analytical narratives, literary texts and reminiscences that focus on a gendered perspective of the refugees in Eastern India.\textsuperscript{17} Among these Meghna Guha Thakurta’s gender and family history and Rachel Weber’s role in the development of refugee colonies are indeed refreshing. The section on the reminiscences is a rich collection of recollections by women who saw the Partition too closely-either as a victim or as an activist. The

\textsuperscript{17} Bagchi, Jasodhara and Subhoranjan Dasgupta. \textit{The Trauma and the Triumph Gender and Partition in Eastern India}. Kolkata, Mumbai, Stree, 2003.
collection sees the Partition as not merely a history of trauma but also a history of triumph where the victims of Partition violence triumphed to rebuild their lives.

The most comprehensive work on the subject is *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* by Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisiya.\(^{18}\) This book begins with a historiographical review of the existing literature, which, according to the authors, has ‘a haute politique approach’ that ‘abounds with national chauvinism borders on the hagiographic and tends to spawn on conspiracy theories, all of which do a disservice to historical enquiry’ (Pg 14). Further, according to the authors, since the focus is on de-colonization, the fallout of the Partition has been ignored. Thus they stress the need to write the story of the aftermath of the Partition – an effort the authors recognize began with the works of Butalia, Menon and others. As a background to the impact of the Partition, the celebration of independence and the work of the Radcliffe Commission have been analyzed. This is followed by well documented chapters on the impact of the Partition on east Panjab countryside between 1947 and 1967, the half-hearted efforts at rehabilitation in West Bengal (1947-1979) and the crisis of the Sikh community. However, the most illuminating section is the imprint of Partition on the South Asian metropolitan cities. Cities like Kolkata and Karachi became refugee cities, while in Delhi, Dhaka and Lahore, along with a huge influx of refugees, there was a considerable uprooting of minorities. The economic and political consequences of the influx of refugees have thus been traced through the evolution of the cities across the boundaries in East and West Pakistan and in India in the days after the Partition.

One of the unique features of the Bengal experience lies in its political impact that had led to the overthrow of the Congress party in Bengal within two decades of the Partition. Joya Chatterji views the Partition as ‘a profoundly destabilising event for Bengal’ as she studies the social, economic and the political transformation of the state as a result of the Partition. A sequel to her earlier work on pre-Partition Bengal, Joya Chatterji in her recent work has shown through elaborate research how the Bengali Hindu elites who hoped to gain from the Partition lost out being unable to control the refugee situation and therein ushering in a socio-economic crisis in the aftermath of the Partition. The protagonists of the Partition had failed to anticipate that the formation of the new states would lead to large-scale migrations that would bring about a massive population explosion in West Bengal and a consequent enlargement of the size of the workforce in the state. “This made,” wrote Chatterji, “competition for every job fiercer, particularly in services and the skilled labour market where so many refugees sought jobs.”\(^\text{19}\) The hard hit was the middle class Hindus of West Bengal who had backed the demand for Partition in the hope to achieve ‘new opportunities’ in a state which they would ‘dominate for many decades’. But high unemployment among the middle and the lower classes, food crisis, price rise had become the main features of the urban life in West Bengal in the decades after the Partition. With a declining economy and the refugees competing with the residents for ‘jobs and homes and indeed for political influence’, there was an increasing realisation among the Hindu middle classes of West Bengal that the Partition had failed to fulfil their dreams of a promised land. Joya Chatterji thus toys with the question as to who stood to

gain from the Partition and concluded that Bengal’s Partition had thus frustrated the plans and purposes of the very groups who had demanded it.

Haimanti Roy, in her recent work, looks into issues such as territoriality, migration and citizenship in the context of Partition. Looking both into the Indian side as well as Eastern Bengal, she shows that, as a result of protracted migration in Bengal, it took a long time for the two nations to ‘delineate their territories, determine who could or could not be their citizens, and implement laws that would constitute national identities of their respective citizens.’ The routine of small scale violence and long-term cross-border movements, according to her, led to ad hoc solutions by the Government who was not sure whether those who crossed over at all required a permanent policy. She also shows how public discourse around the refugees constructed the image of a Bengali refugee as heroic but lazy, able to abandon homeland but parochial about rehabilitation outside the boundaries of West Bengal, an economic migrant under the cloak of a refugee’ and it was this identity of a Bengali refugee as victims of intangible persecution fear and as economic migrants that was perpetuated through the charity and paternalism associated with the Government rehabilitation policies. This book compliments Vazira Zamindar’s excellent work on the aftermath of the Partition in Delhi and Karachi. She looks into the histories of north Indian Muslim families during the Partition and how they negotiated Government controls as the new nations emerged.

Several new researches on the refugee experiences in West Bengal have come up in both English and Bengali that only show that debates over the refugee issue in Bengal is far

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The experience of refugees in the process of rehabilitation has not received adequate attention of the scholars. Researches have focused on memories, nostalgia and citizenship. This work tries to capture the long term impact of the Partition and it is not confined merely to nostalgia, memory or issues of citizenship. While these were important and have been taken up in the following pages, this work also looks into more concrete impact the Partition had on the migrants as they struggled through the rehabilitation policies, arranged self-settlement and took to the streets as they tried to carve out a space for themselves in this part of Bengal. The uniqueness of Bengal experience was not merely in the violence or lack of it, in the prolonged migration or in the political agitation that followed it. While these were important part of the Bengal experience, what set it apart was the fact that the resistance meted out to the incoming refugees came from its own government and own people. The Government both at the centre and the state with their ambiguous response to migration in Bengal and the resistance of the host population of West Bengal particularly of the Hindu Bengali middle class of Kolkata shaped the refugee question in Bengal. The confusion at the official level is easier to explain. The newly established Indian state could not make an estimation of this intermittent migration and were caught clueless in the act of tackling what came to known as the ‘refugee problem’. The tussle between the host community and the incoming migrants has been humoured as the ghoti- bangal issue that finds its reflection in numerous popular Bengali Cinema. However, this cannot be explained only as a cultural divide between and urban Kolkata and rustic East Bengal or in economic terms – a grab for power and opportunity in an overpopulated state. In the years following the Partition there was a complete change in the contours and nature of the city as a result of migration. With refugees stranded in

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the congested stations, overcrowded buses, men and also women queuing up in front of employment exchanges, processions, refugee agitation and lathi large, the expansion of the city in its eastern and southern fringes with the growth of squatter colonies, the city of the Babus were in transition. A lot of this was a result of the hapless refugees’ attempt at self-rehabilitation through its unique squatter movement. It is this flavor that I intend to capture in the following pages.

The Chapters

This research attempts to focus on the millions uprooted from East Bengal during and after the Partition and the impact the consequent influx had on the economy, polity and society of Bengal in the decades following the Partition. It will examine the responses of the Government and the political organizations to this sudden change in demography. It would also look into the various factors influencing the stereotyping of the migrants and the tensions that existed between the host community and the refugees. The three basic concerns of the research are: first the displacement and the trauma caused by forced uprooting and refugeehood and the manner in which the challenge was met at the level of governance, second the aftermath of the event on the Bengali society, economy and politics and finally the fracturing and redefining of identities of the displaced and the legacy it left on the post-Partition generation of migrant families. An attempt is being made in the following thematic rather than chronological chapters to deal with some of these concerns.

Chapter one looks into Partition violence in East Pakistan. It traces the journey from being a minority to a refugee in the context of the migration of Hindus from East to West Bengal in the first two decades after Partition. It also attempts to understand the
experience of making of a minority in East Pakistan, what prompted them to choose to be a refugee in West Bengal and thus examines how the state-citizen relationships were transformed with the making of an international boundary. Studying violence since the Noakhali days, through the Partition and in the following two decades, this chapter also seeks to establish that violence was an integral part of the making of the boundary between East and West Bengal. As many Hindus stayed on as minorities they were faced with alternate active and passive phases of ‘riots’ and ‘riot like conditions’ and were finally driven away by ‘violence’ or ‘the fear of violence’ through the two decades following the Partition. This indeed was crucial in making the Bengal migrations a prolonged process and also distinct vis a vis from the Punjab experience where migrations were over within the first couple of years after Partition. Unlike the western side the eastern borders proved to be more porous and the experience of migration lingered over the years. The chapter thus studies violence and migration in three phases – from the Noakhali riots though the turbulent days of Partition till the end of the decade, violence in the 1950s starting with the Khulna outbreak and finally riots in the 1960s. It examines how forms of violence changed over the years. Though East Bengal had seen several such riots the Partition riots from Noakhali Tippera, to borrow a phrase from Suranjan Das, “completed the shift from the relatively unorganized and often class-based communal violence to organized rioting with direct involvement of the organized political world.”23 The violence that characterized the Bengal experience was not a later invention of historians for this chapter recreates the minority experience in East Bengal through memories, fiction and contemporary accounts. That literature shied away from recording this violence was perhaps, as this chapter suggests a conscious attempt at forgetting. Through a study of violence, the chapter make sense as to why violence was largely

Chapter Two looks into the reactions of the Governments at the centre and the state and also the opposition to this enormous and prolonged migration. Thus this is an attempt to study the response of the powers that mattered to the coming of the refugees. This response was not only translated in formulating relief and rehabilitation policies but was also directed against the East Bengal Government for it was the worsening communal situation there that prompted migration. Thus while policies were formulated within India, agreements with Pakistan were entered upon in an attempt to check migrations and address the problem at its root. Thus after an initial period of denial, when the Government did admit that there was a substantial migration, they tried to control migrations through a number of agreements with the Pakistan Government – the most significant being the Nehru Liaquat Pact. While this reflected the Government attitude of controlling the refugee inflow, it sparked off a debate that laid bare the various visions on how the newly formed Indian state should react to the minority policy and attitude of the East Bengal Government. The second chapter also looks into the contending visions on refugee rehabilitation through the responses of the Government and opposition. The Government reactions has been analyzed through the statements of the Congress leaders, the measures taken up by the Government and the various reports of the commissions setup by the Government from time to time. This will also help to understand the evolution of the mindset of the state. Together with this, the responses of the opposition leaders as reflected in their speeches and writings have also been examined. This has been dealt in three separate sections – the initial reaction of the Government, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact with the debate around it and finally the evolution of the refugee policy of the Indian
state as reflected in the various rehabilitation reports. This chapter shows that from the initial migration in 1946-47 till the eventual closure of camps in the early 1960s, the policy towards the refugees from East Bengal evolved through various stages. When the Indian state reconciled with the fact that the refugees who crossed over wished not to return despite desperate attempts of dialogues with Pakistan, the Government’s initial policy of reaching mere relief to the refugees was replaced by rehabilitation schemes. But it was meagre and ad hoc that came too late forcing refugees to fend for themselves.

The third chapter focuses on this attempt at self-rehabilitation of refugees in Bengal- the emergence, growth and fallout of squatters’ colony. Refugee attempt at self rehabilitation was not a mere land grabbing venture. Every established colony operated through their colony committees. The committees thus setup took care of civic amenities, arranged education for the colony children, organized sports, cultural activities for the residents etc. So the refugee attempts at self-rehabilitation not only contributed substantially to the social and cultural milieu of the city and indicated the emergence of a vibrant civil society in post-colonial Bengal but also expanded the physical limits of the city and its surroundings - with colonies stretching along the eastern and western banks of the river. The squatters’ colony, however, met with stiff opposition - of the land holders, police administration and also of the legislature. As minorities in East Pakistan, the East Bengal Hindus enjoyed the sympathy of the Indian state and its citizens. But as refugees they were reduced to non-citizens – a problem for the state and co sharer of opportunity of its citizens. This was not a struggle of a religious minority against the state but was a struggle of a new sort - of the incoming refugees against a state which was to be theirs. It is this squatter movement which has made the Bengal experiment distinctive and this experience has been explored in this chapter.
While the effectiveness of the Government refugee policy, the right of the squatters over the land occupied by them as against the sanctity of private property was debated within the four walls of the Parliament and the Assembly Houses, there were parallel movements of the refugees on the streets. It is this politics of the streets that Chapter Four looks into. Refugee street protests started in the closing years of the 1940s and it geared up when the Eviction Bill was being brought in. The squatter movement was bound to provoke refugee-landlord confrontation. The Chapter will investigate how, when private attempts at evicting the refugees failed first through police intervention and then through legislation, the Government came in the aid of the landholders. Thus with the coming of the Eviction Bill the refugees took to the streets with regular clashes between the police and the refugees. There were, however, other issues, too, that provoked the refugees and this chapter thus traces the birth, growth and politicization of a refugee movement in West Bengal from 1947, through the 1950s up to the early part of 1960s. It examines the political mobilization of refugees that centred around three issues – the movements resisting eviction of the squatters colonies, the movement in support of refugees who returned from refugee camps outside Bengal particularly Bettiah and finally protests relating to the closure of camps in Bengal and dispatch of refugees to camps outside Bengal. Though the rise of left wing radicalization of politics in West Bengal had much to do with refugee activism, this chapter does not try to record the rise of the left in Bengal politics. But it tries to see, to borrow from George Rude how the ‘short term local leaders’ and ‘long-term outside leaders’ mobilized the somewhat rudder-less refugee agitation into a political movement that changed the politics of West Bengal in the later years.24 In doing so it also attempts to understand the self-perception of the migrants as reflected in

their demands that evolved over the years, how they hoped to be resettled and how they sought to legitimize their claims of citizenship in this side of the border.

Chapter Five concerns itself with the fictional and non-fictional responses of the litterateurs to the Partition in Bengal. This chapter studies how literary response on the Partition evolved – how the political developments in Bengal influenced perspectives on Partition, how stories of Partition were retold over the years in fiction and memoirs and how conscious minds of the litterateurs and creative artists chose to record the Partition. The Partition (and migration) itself, the rise of the left in Bengal, the Bangladesh liberation War (and the participation of Bengali intelligentsia in it), cross border migration in the 1980s and 1990s and the rise of Right wing forces in India in the 1990s - all influenced literature of Bengal and the way it viewed the Partition.

The Sources

This study is based upon a range of archival materials, Government reports, private papers, oral transcripts, police records, fiction, memoirs, newspapers and periodicals along with some secondary sources. Government papers, mostly Reports of the Central and State Governments cover policies and programmes adopted by the state from the beginning till the 1980s. Legislative Assembly proceedings of the Central Parliament and state legislature reflect the views of the opposition and debates over these policies. News Paper clippings, Oral transcripts, private papers, records left by social activists helped in reconstructing the minority situation in East Bengal. Intelligence branch papers housed at the West Bengal. State Archives and Special Branch files on UCRC year wise till 1959 trace the political activities of the refugees and the growth of the movement in the 1950s. Also some Institutional and Individual Papers such as Renuka Ray Papers, Shyama Prasad
Mukherjee Papers, Asoka Gupta Papers and Oral Transcripts have also been consulted. The final chapter relies heavily upon fiction and memoirs. While this fill in the lacunae that existed in archival sources, fictional literature and memoirs help in capturing the *longue duree* of the Partition. Public memory that is reflected through fiction and memoirs are ‘reconstructed by events and experiences’²⁵. Partition too has been reviewed and contextualised in literature over the years in the light of subsequent political events that affected life in the two Bengals. This changing perspective has been attempted to be captured through literature.

CHAPTER ONE

From Citizens to Minorities:
The case of Hindu minorities in East Bengal

It was 1947, at Sialkot in Pakistan. Young Kuldip and his family was firm on their resolve to stay on in Pakistan until panic gripped the Hindu community in Sialkot and on the 14th of August, the Pakistani Independence Day, they had to leave their family home for a safer shelter elsewhere in the city. Finally they decided to move to Delhi hoping to get back to Sialkot once ‘normalcy’ returned – something that was never to be. As the jeep carrying Kuldip drove along the Grand Trunk Road he saw death closely than ever before. Many years later he recollected, “It was late in the afternoon when the jeep reached the outskirts of Lahore. We were told that a caravan of Muslims had been attacked at Amritsar and that the Muslims in Lahore were waiting to take revenge. We got down and waited in fear and silence. There was some stray shooting in the distance. The stench of decomposed flesh from nearby fields hung in the air. We could hear people shouting slogans…But that was far away. We set off again.” Later he summarised his feelings on reaching India. He wrote, “It was great to be alive. There was still daylight. As I looked out, relieved and happy, I saw people walking in the opposite direction. They were Muslims. I saw the same pain etched on their faces. They trudged along with their belongings bundled on their heads and their frightened children trailing behind….A caravan from our side was going to Pakistan. We stopped to make way for them. They too stopped. But no one spoke. We looked at one another with sympathy not fear. A strange
understanding cropped up between us. It was a spontaneous kinship of hurt, loss and helplessness. Both were refugees.”

At about the same time in Bombay, little Asif was witness to some of the most gruesome incidents of communal violence. When in 1950 his father decided to move to Pakistan his family was split into two as his mother’s side of the family was determined to remain in India. Later in life he recollected, “On 3 September 1950 we left for the Princess Dock and boarded the Scindia Steamship Company’s S. S. Sabarmati. My maternal grandfather, a widower, who had brought up four sons and two daughters after the death of his lovely wife, was shattered. My mother, the elder of his two daughters, was a pillar of strength to him, and here she was grief-stricken on board a ship, which was to take her, her husband and their kids to an unknown destination.” After a long and arduous journey they reached Karachi though they kept switching between Lahore and Karachi for quite some time before they were finally able to settle in Karachi.

This was how Kuldip Nayar and Asif Noorani remembered their experience of Partition in their youth and childhood respectively. Like that of the Nayars and Nooranis, 1947 initiated a series of journeys for many. There were Muslims crossing over to Eastern and Western Pakistan. There were Hindu and Sikh Kefalas from West Pakistan to Indian Punjab and several others making their way from East to West Bengal. Thus was recorded the greatest mass migration in human history. However the journeys that were initiated with the Partition were not merely a spatial or territorial one. True, it involved crossing

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1 See ‘From Sialkot to Delhi’ by Kuldip Nayar in David Page (edited) Tales of Two Cities, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2008, Pg. 30-31.
over of international boundaries created in 1947. But it was also a journey from being minorities in one nation state to refugees in another. The Partition turned countless number of citizens of British India to minorities in their own native land. And as they decided to migrate they emerged as refugees across the border. This journey across the border and that of a minority to refugee has been variously experienced along the western and eastern frontiers of the sub-continent.

The violent, rapid virtual exchange of population limited to 1947 and 1950 in Western India and its difference with the intermittent and long drawn migration of Hindus from East Bengal has been stressed in some of the recent Partition studies.\(^3\) Migrations in the east continued through the decades following Partition and the border between the two Bengals remained rather porous.\(^4\) Official estimation speaks of some 80 lakh refugees who crossed over to West Bengal from East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) by 1981.\(^5\) To this 8 million and many more perhaps, the altered circumstances after Partition forced them to a journey from being citizens of one state to another. In the first lap of this journey they were converted from citizens of British India to non-citizen, minorities in East Pakistan and then in the second when they chose to migrate or were forced to do so, they became refugees in West Bengal. The Partition immediately made them minorities. But their transformation to refugees happened in batches as they migrated to West Bengal.

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\(^3\) See Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (ed) *The Trauma and Triumph Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, Kolkata, Stree, 2003, Pg. 2 and 3 for a discussion on the difference in the migration patterns from East Pakistan and West Punjab.

\(^4\) See Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation Trans-border migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, New Delhi, Sage, 1999, for trans-border population movement in Bengal.

\(^5\) Government of West Bengal Report, *Relief and Rehabilitation Committee Report, 1981-82*, Calcutta, Sree Saraswati Press Limited, 1982. This figure is based upon 1971 census according to which the displaced population in the various districts of West Bengal was 59, 99,475. With this were added 14.4 lakh refugees i.e., 24% of 60 lakhs, the rate at which the refugee population grew in the ten years. This estimation does not take into account the displaced squatting in post-1950 squatter colonies. Thus on a very modest scale another 2.1 lakh was added to the above figure and was rounded up as 80 lakhs. These figures are however based upon records of only those who crossed over from check posts for there is no estimation of those who crossed over through the innumerable unmanned check posts along the 1200 miles border.
This chapter tries to trace this journey from being a minority to a refugee in the context of the migration of Hindus from East to West Bengal in the first two decades after Partition. It also attempts to understand the experience of the making of a minority in East Pakistan, what prompted them to choose to be a refugee in West Bengal and thus examines how the state-citizen relationships were transformed with the creation of an international boundary. More specifically it looks at how violence or the threat of it was used as a tool to constitute minorities.

**Minority and Migration – The Case of Hindus in East Bengal**

The single most significant issue that set the Bengal experience apart was its phased migration like that of waves with alternate periods of an intense flow of refugees followed by a period of lull. This has continued over the years ever since the Partition.6 Chronologically, the Partition migration from East Bengal started with the Noakhali riots in 1946. It continued through the Partition and there was a significant increase in the inflow of migrants in the middle of 1948. In the 1950s, riots in extensive parts of East Bengal in the early years of the decade together with the introduction of the Passport system in the autumn of 1952 prompted large-scale migrations and according to estimates, in 1953 the total number of displaced persons was twenty five lakhs when the total population of West Bengal was 250 lakhs. This meant that out of every ten people in West Bengal in 1953 one was a displaced person from East Pakistan. Migrations continued steadily through the rest of the decade with the count of the displaced rising to 31- 32 lakhs in 1958 though there was no large migration till 1961. In 1961, some 55,000

migrants were admitted to camps in West Bengal though like in every phase earlier or later, these were merely official figures based on police records of those who crossed over through check posts. There was absolutely no account of those who crossed over through countless unmanned posts. Then in 1964 again there was a large influx and it continued through ups and downs till 1971. Prafulla Chakrabarti thus speaks of a four phased migration – from the Noakhali riots till the end of 1948, with the riots of 1950, after the announcement of the introduction of the passport system in 1952 and finally in the 1960s when the migration from East Bengal attained new heights.

This phased migration was much in contrast with the nature of migration of the Punjab and as a result the intensity of migration and the violence involved in Bengal escaped notice, with Punjab gaining a much greater degree of primacy. Both administrative attention as well as scholarship for long remained Punjab-centric. There was in fact a strong belief in the official circle, at least in the initial years, that the migration from East Bengal was a temporary phenomenon and what existed was the fear of violence, rumour of it and press propaganda rather than actual violence that prompted the migration. However, such intermittent migration implies that many of the migrants who came over did not do so immediately after Partition. Except for those who crossed over during Partition, others often had a long experience of staying on as religious minorities in East Pakistan before they became refugees in West Bengal. Their experience of staying on not only reflects their interaction with the state and citizens as religious minorities, but also indicates how the reactions towards the religious minorities were determined by issues, significant or minor across the border in West Bengal or in India. Hence there were many

7 Such is the impression from many of the initial Government reports and many of Nehru’s statements. Official reaction to this migration has been discussed in the following chapter.
stories of good Muslims and bad, state connivance in the violence on minorities as against
verbal assurances of protection to them, violence on one side of the border leading to
violence on the other side etc. which will be taken up in the following sections.

Riots in Bengal were, however, not an invention of the Partition. It had a fairly long
history in Bengal and has received a detailed and critical analysis by historians like
Suranjan Das. Das has pointed out that Bengal, with the highest concentration of Muslims
at the turn of the twentieth century, had the worst records of Hindu-Muslim conflict.
Despite being economically more backward in comparison to Muslims in the other parts
of the country, the Bengali Muslims were among the first to be organised politically and it
was in Bengal that the Muslim League had ‘relatively stable ministries’ in the two decades
before Partition. Das has studied riots in Mymensingh (1906-1907), in Calcutta, Dacca
and Pabna in the early 1920s, in Kishoreganj, Dacca and Chittagong between 1927 and
1931 and the Dacca riots of 1941 before finally going into the Partition riots in Calcutta
and Noakhali-Tippera in 1946. In studying the evolution of riots in Bengal, Das considers
the 1941 riots as a turning point which signalled the beginning of organised rioting with
clear links with institutional politics. “Rioting in 1941”, wrote Das, “differed from its
predecessors mainly in exhibiting a greater degree of organisation. A linkage between the
leaders of institutional politics and the subordinate social groups was also clear in 1941,
and the riot assumed explosive political overtones. The slogans raised and rumours
circulated reflected developments in the sphere of organised politics; The League also
used its political power to help the Muslim rioters. This was a novelty in the pattern of
communal violence. It became an important feature of all future major riots in pre
independent Bengal. Moreover, forced conversions and forced marriages during the 1941
outbreak underlined strong communal and religious motivation, distinct from class
attitude, in the rioting crowd. This too was a new development." The 1946 riots and the outbreaks thereafter too remained organised through strong institutional links. However riots in the days after Partition differed from earlier riots in one fundamental aspect – it triggered off fear of more violence that prompted large-scale migration from both sides of the border. This chapter studies the migration after riots in East Pakistan as a point in case.

Noakhali and thereafter – migrations in the late 1940s

Any discussion on Partition violence or migration in East Bengal must begin with a reference to the Noakhali riots. There were Hindu-Muslim riots in Bengal before this. There were several other even more organised and gruesome incidents of Partition violence in East Bengal after this from the Khulna and Barisal riots in 1949 to the Rajshahi and Pabna riots in the 1960s and many more ever since. Yet more than any other incidents of violence, Noakhali was not just a local incident of communal violence. Noakhali cannot be localised as a mere event fixed in a particular time frame but it was what Gyan Pandey (in his study of Garhmukteshwar in UP) calls ‘a metaphor for atrocities of Partition’. This is because migrations of the Hindus from East Pakistan started with the Noakhali and Tippera riots of 1946. This is because Noakhali triggered off a fear of more violence and insecurity among the minorities in East Bengal and Noakhali became synonymous to Partition violence in East Bengal. That ‘Noakhali’ is a metaphor is also partly because of the presence and involvement of Gandhi himself and other high profile political and social activists in the riot affected areas. Even before Gandhi moved to Chamuhani in November 1946, he took a keen interest about the

9 For a discussion on localising and nationalising of events and making of metaphors, see Gyanendra Pandey’s study on Garhmukteshwar in Gyanendra Pandey, Remembering Partition, Violence, Nationalism and History of India, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
Noakhali tragedy. On October 17th when the news of Noakhali had just started coming in, Gandhi in his speech after his prayer meeting referred to the tragic happenings in Noakhali. He stated that what had hurt him more than the killings was the fact that women were being carried away, abducted and subjected to conversion. “Women”, he stated, “must learn to die before a hair of their head could be injured.”

President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, Surendra Mohan Ghose, Congress President J. B. Kripalani, noted politician Sarat Bose immediately rushed to the affected areas. “We are going to Bengal,” Kripalani stated in New Delhi just before he left for Noakhali, “to see for ourselves what’s happened there. Bengal’s suffering is India’s suffering. Bengal has always borne the brunt of our national misfortune and will pave the way for a peaceful solution of this most unhappy of our national problems.”

However, this is not to state that Noakhali gained significance only due to the presence of Gandhi and the press reporting thereof. Rather Noakhali received the kind of centrality that it did due to the violence it saw. It continues to be a metaphor as it is seen as the beginning of migration of Hindus from East Bengal. To borrow from Pandey once more, in ‘Garhmukteshwar’ or ‘Noakhali’, ‘Bihar’ or ‘Punjab’, ‘Partition’ and ‘violence’ come to stand in for each other. The Noakhali riot is thus an important starting point of the events that took place around the time of Partition. These were seen as ‘retaliatory pogroms’ launched against the Hindus after the Great Calcutta Killings earlier that year. It all started with the call for Direct Action by Jinnah in July 1946. This was followed by the announcement of August 16th as the Direct Action Day in Bengal by the Muslim League Government. A public holiday was declared and in the next few days there were large scale killings of the

10 News of Gandhi’s prayer meeting was covered in Amrita Bazar Patrika, 18 October, 1946.
11 Statement made by J.B. Kripalani. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 October, 1946.
Hindus and the Muslims in Calcutta. The effect of this was felt in Noakhali and Tippera, two districts of south east Bengal, in October 1946.

Noakhali was a small district on the bank of the estuary of the Meghna River. Tippera was just north of it. An intricate network of Khals (canals) covers the two districts. Both the districts had a Muslim majority. The shortest route to these two districts from Calcutta was to take the Chittagong Express from Sealdah to Gualondo and from there in a steamer to Chandpur in Tippera. To be at Noakhali, one had to take another train from Chandpur. News of the Calcutta killings, however, reached fast enough and there were some major riots, lootings and forcible conversions. Vast areas under the Police Stations of Raipur, Lakshmipur, Ramganj, Begumgunj, Senbag, Feni and Chagalnaiya in Noakhali and Faridganj, Hajigunj, Lakshman and Chauddagram in Tippera were the most affected. Nellie Sengupta, the then All India Women’s Congress President and some of its other members such as Ashoka Gupta (who was in Chittagong at that time), Sucheta Kripalani (from Duttapara), Renuka Roy (from Calcutta) and others tried to reach help to the victims of Noakhali and Tippera from the month of October. With the arrival of Gandhi in Chamuhani on 7th November, their initiatives gained a greater momentum. Ashoka Gupta visited the entire riot affected villages of Lakshmipur police station, ten of the villages in Ramgunj and two of the villages in Begumgan. British Home Department Officers such as E.S. Simpson visited and stayed in Tippera in November 1946 and had sent a report to his Additional Secretary. The Congress President Acharya Kripalani, too, visited Chandpur
and Noakhali after the riots and their accounts have served as invaluable sources on the 1946 riots that help us in reconstructing the times greatly.\textsuperscript{14}

One of the most gruesome incidents of crime occurred in Karpara village in the Ramgunj Police Station area.\textsuperscript{15} It was 10\textsuperscript{th} of October, the Lakshmi Puja day, when the holocaust commenced. The events leading to the beginning of the holocaust in Noakhali may thus be outlined. Rai Rajendralal Roy, the zamindar of Karpara, trusted his Muslim subjects who were peasants. A President of the Noakhali Bar Association, he had made himself the eyesore of some of the locals by organising defence against growing lawlessness. There used to be in his house in those days a sadhu who was trying to revive the institution of Sitala Puja in Hindu houses. It was rumoured that the sadhu had bragged that on the forthcoming occasion he would perform the Puja with the blood of the Muslims instead of the usual goat blood. A short run from Karpara was Shampur, the headquarters of Ghulam Sarwar Hussein the main organiser of the disturbances. On hearing the news, he threatened that he would have the head of the sadhu and the Rai Saheb cut off. Incited by a speech of Ghulam Sarwar Hussein in the morning of 10\textsuperscript{th} October, Shahpur bazar was attacked. The Kali temple in the Bazar was set on fire, the sacred Banyan tree was cut off in the presence of a Ramganj thana officer, Hindu shops and bazars were looted and burnt. After the attack on the Shahpur bazar the crowd divided itself into three sections. One section proceeded in the direction of Ramganj bazar to the north west, another looted shops in Dasgharia bazar and burnt the Thakur temple there. The third attacked the

\textsuperscript{14} See Report of the Special officer Home Department to the Additional Secretary, Government of West Bengal on the condition of Tippera in November 1946, Report of Congress President Acharya Kripalani from Noakhali in Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Papers, File no 149, Installments II to IV, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), Ashoka Gupta Papers, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

katchery (office) house of Suren Bose, the zamindar of Narayanpur and mayhem followed. The very next morning the house of Rajendralal Chowdhury was attacked. When he came down to talk to the crowd, they beheaded him and then impaled his head on a spear and brandished it in the village. When later the All India Women’s Congress workers escorted by the army visited the village, Rai Saheb’s house was completely destroyed and several women of the family, of whom one was seven months pregnant and also an eight year old girl, had gone missing. A press correspondent on reaching Comilla after touring riot affected areas in Noakhali wrote that ‘burning of houses of all well to do and respectable families, murder and brutal assault on hundreds of innocent people, marriage and remarriage of married women in the presence of their dear and near ones, slaughter of domestic cattle and desecration of all places of worship are some of the ugliest features of the tragic situation in the riot affected areas of Noakhali and Tippera.”

There were innumerable such incidents in which typically Hindu houses in villages were attacked by large crowds. The modus operandi was to create a sense of fear by sheer numbers. Hundreds and in some places thousands of rioters gathered and marched to Hindu villages or Hindu houses in villages of mixed population communicating the Muslim ‘majority-ness’ in a land that was to be theirs and if numbers could speak it was a clear message to the minorities that they either added to the number through conversion or made their way to India. The crowds had their leaders and spokesmen. They first demanded subscriptions for the Muslim League and sometimes for the Muslim victims of the Calcutta riots. These enforced subscriptions were usually heavy. Even after the subscriptions were realized the victims were not safe. The same or successive crowds

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16 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20 October, 1946.
17 Report of Congress President Acharya Kripalani from Noakhali in S.P Mukherjee Papers, II-IV Installments, File no 149, (NMML).
appeared on the scene later and looted the houses and the looted houses in most cases were burnt.

Loot seemed to be an important motive in these incidents. There can be no doubt that looting was on a very wide scale and that even in cases where homesteads were not destroyed by fire, they had been thoroughly and efficiently looted. The looting was not confined merely to cash, ornaments and other valuables, but everything that could be utilized by the householders such as food grains, utensils, clothes etc., were looted. In many places the looters also drove cattle away. The victims were also often told that the murder, loot and arson that went on was a revenge for the Muslim lives lost in Calcutta rioting. All those who resisted were butchered. Sometimes they were shot, for the rioters carried guns. Thus Ashoka Gupta noticed a plan at work in most of the riot affected villages. The houses were wholly or partially burnt and the food grains and utensils were looted. Even the Dhekis, ghanis or handlooms were destroyed or made unworkable. It was not a case of a master-less crowd making the most in the chaos by snatching all the valuables that they could. But it was a pre-planned terror aimed to hit hard by destroying the means of livelihood, shelter and food mostly by fire rather than by mere looting of valuables. Thus it was not only a threat on the lives of minorities but also an attempt to cripple them by an attack on their means of living so as to force them out of their soon to be created Pakistan.

There was also a stress on conversion and if the minorities had to stay on, they would have to convert. Bibhuti Bhushan Das, one of the victims of the Noakhali riots, wrote in a

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18 Ashoka Gupta’s statement dated 23.9.1965, Ashoka Gupta Files, School of Women Studies, Jadavpur University.
letter from Tobga, “We all embraced Islam on the 10th night. All the villagers of the locality accepted this i.e., Chitkhil, Rampur, Dasghoria etc. A huge mob came and gave us ultimatum to embrace Islam or we will be burnt. Their high command is to complete the whole Noakhali district within a week. What will happen to us in future we know not. It may be the last letter. All are bodily well.”19 The trend was seen everywhere as in Shahpur bazar and Karpara in the district of Noakhali. Religious symbols became the targets of attack and images of Hindu gods in houses and temples were destroyed or burnt. Sometimes, before a house was looted, the inmates were asked to embrace Islam. However, while conversion did not give them immunity against loot and arson, looting did not ensure safety unless they embraced Islam. The ritual of conversion described by Acharya Kripalani during his visit was as follows. The Hindus were called to Friday prayers and made to recite Kalma. The married women were converted by their conch-shell bangles being broken and their ‘shindur’ (Vermilion) removed. Then the men were asked to touch the cloth consecrated by Pir. As a sign of their conversion they were supplied with white caps used by Muslims of the locality. Very often these caps were new and were stamped with the map of Pakistan with the words “Pakistan Zindabad” and “Larke Lenge Pakistan” inscribed on them.20 In some cases as E.S Simpson, a special officer of the British Home Department, noticed during his visit in Tippera, Hindu men, whose women folk had been temporarily restrained, volunteered to embrace Islam in order to affect their release and people were compelled to become “converts” under threats of death and other harm. On the other hand he found instances of homesteads still standing and untouched where the owners had volunteered to become Muslims in order to

19 In a letter to Sudhangshu Bhusan Das in Calcutta, one of the riot victims of Tobga in Noakhali wrote about their plight. This letter was released by Bengal Press Advisory Committee dated 12 October, 1946. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 October, 1946.
20 Report of Congress President Acharya Kripalani from Noakhali in S.P. Mukherjee Papers, II-IV Installments, File no 149, NMML.
save their property, their families and themselves. No instance of circumcision was, however, noticed in conversions. The formula employed in Tippera was also similar, namely compulsion to wear a cap upon which was inscribed “Pakistan”, compulsion to wear a lungi as worn by Muslims, removal of vermillion from the forehead and breaking of conch bracelets by married women, making Hindus shout Allaho Akbar and recite prayers, and an insistence on the slaughtering of cows in the presence of Hindus. Ashoka Gupta, too, portrayed a similar picture regarding conversions. Mass conversions, cow killing and feast in Hindu houses with beef was fairly common in the villages of Char Ruhita, Tumchar and Kalichar which she visited. The method of conversion was the same. Men were made to wear Lungis and sit in rows with white caps on their heads. The Kalma was read out in the mosques and the Hindus were made to repeat it. The married women were to break their conch shells and rub off their shindur. In another village in Tumchar, a man who had provided Ashoka Gupta accommodation complained that his bullock was taken away and slaughtered on the spot and twelve to thirteen Hindu families who lived in the block were made to eat the meat prepared. Ashoka Gupta also wrote about the village of Lakhsmipur where there was mass conversion of the Nath Jugis and the few who were still left in the villages were oppressed. The rituals of conversions, thus described in the different reports, were consistent throughout the villages of Tippera and Noakhali which displayed a similar plan at work. The process of conversion was also quick which seemed more political than theological for there was no fuss about religious accuracy. The aim was to ensure loyal support to the state through conversions. There was also a hurry amongst the rioters - to prove their own loyalty, to prove that they were more Muslims, more dependable and hence deserved a greater share in the newly formed state that was about to be.
The most gruesome yet the most common form of violence in all communally sensitive situations has been violence on women and Noakhali and Tippera in 1946 were no exceptions. The centrality of the female body and its violation in any narrative of communal violence cannot be denied. Women as ever acted as a medium to prove the power and masculinity of the offending community whereas it was upon the victim community to save its symbol of honour. During the Noakhali riots, for instance, Kamala Das Gupta speaks of some eighty six Hindu men who desired to marry Hindu girls who were “the victims of criminal assaults during riots.” The men perhaps intended to ‘protect’ community honour by saving ‘their women’. The body of a woman has always remained a symbol of feud between two communities, a sphere for exchange of violence and source for competition of honour. Thus the silences over these incidents are understandable. Admission of such instances of violation of one’s own women would be a violation of the masculinity of their very community, their inability to protect community honour and an admission of its effeminateness of some sort. Villagers were thus disinclined to speak of abduction or rape though they were more forthcoming in reporting other incidents of violence than that on their women. Silences were also in fear of more violence. In Lakshmipur for instance there was an incident where a couple was called to the Union Board Office on the plea of questioning. The wife was then separated from her husband and raped. This continued for a couple of days and when they finally went to the police station to complain the Muslim Officer in Charge advised not to lodge a complaint.


22 Oral transcript of Kamala Das Gupta, Acc. no 96 (NMML).
for that would only lead to more harassment. The husband was so terrified that he resisted from recording his complaint. In another incident, too, the father of a 13 year old rape victim desisted from registering a complaint out of sheer terror.\(^{23}\)

Thus Independence came in an atmosphere of fear, distrust and violence. The hatred and communal distrust that had prevailed during this time may be understood through the excerpts from a pamphlet on the Noakhali riots. It said – “What happened in Noakhali is not a communal riot but a communal uprising. The majority community rose up with all its accumulated force to effect complete extermination of the minority community…the whole technique of Pakistanisation consisted of mass massacre, mass conversion, forced marriage and desecration of places of Hindu worship and wholesale looting of properties. The fundamental idea behind was that none should remain there so as to be called a Hindu. Those who refused conversation were butchered and those who accepted conversion were spared their lives at the cost of their original identity, tradition, culture and religion. This cult of Neo-terrorism, grown out of hatred for another community, is a grave danger to the elemental genius and culture, not only of Bengal but of India as a whole. The crisis that has its symptomatic outbreak in Bengal will soon engulf whole of India and spell ruin to her National aspiration. The stage is being set for a civil war in a calculated manner and in grand alliance with these Neo-terrorists …The only way out of the present crisis is the Revolutionary way of uncompromising fight against all forces of reaction.”\(^{24}\) The administration had collapsed in these few days and was completely unable to ensure safety of the minorities. The minorities knew this too well and in a hard way. Thus E.S. Simpson, a special officer of the Bengal Home Department in his report

\(^{23}\) Ashoka Gupta’s statement dated 23.9.1965, Ashoka Gupta Files, School of women studies, Jadavpur University.

\(^{24}\) Undated Pamphlet on the Noakhali Tippera Riots entitled ‘Why this Pamphlet’ in S.P Mukherji Papers, II-IV Installments, File no 149, NMML.
to his Additional Secretary after his visit to the district of Tippera in November gave a grim picture. He wrote of the very low morale in the affected areas of Faridganj and Chandpur and the few remaining Hindu villagers were confused and terrified. The most common demand was for military protection. Thus a loss of faith in civil administration was apparent and the prevailing tendency, quite naturally, was to leave as quickly as possible for safer places. Simpson witnessed large number of refugees huddled on boats and sheltering in huts ashore and many others suffering from Bacillary Dysentery and other diseases. Yet those still in the villages refused to consider bringing back their families from refugee centres. Repeatedly what he was asked was whether Hindus should abandon the most affected areas of Faridganj and Haenchar areas altogether and endeavour to find permanent sanctuary elsewhere. This was how Simpson reported to his Additional Secretary about the complete destruction that happened in Tippera. “In the affected villages there is chaos, destruction of homesteads, an absence of any sign of movable property, despondency and apprehension; the few who have remained are anxious to leave. The destruction is so complete that except for sheets of corrugated iron - the looting of which is in progress even at present - nothing remains of the wreckage. The interiors of brick built houses have been burnt out and door and window frames have disappeared in the flames. Large numbers of small personal temple-huts have been burnt out, images have been pulled down and smashed and at least one large and ancient brick-built temple has been looted and desecrated. In some villages I visited the few remaining Hindu inhabitants were living on coconuts (dabs), bananas (where available) and what is known as kachu. The scene at refugee centres such as that at Faridganj cannot be easily forgotten. People are herded together on boats, men, women and children, structures ashore are overcrowded, there is sickness and despair. There is no confidence, sense of
security and hope for the future, so far as these people think and act.” The sense of security was low and with good reasons. There were reports of attacks on refugees even with military escort. For instance, some three hundred refugees with the Inspector of Police and several armed guards to Ramganj were attacked on 2nd November by large crowds and police had to open fire that killed thirty of the attackers. Again on 3rd November, another refugee party on its way to Lamchar with military escort was attacked forcing the military to open fire twice. The connivance of the local administration particularly at the lower level was an important factor in the lack of fear among the rioters and hence complete chaos prevailed in Noakhali and Tippera. A telegram from a riot affected area of Noakhali in the early days aptly summed up the situation, “Unconverted people are being slaughtered on a mass scale. No help is available from local authorities for rescue and protection. Full military administration is required. People are starving for want of ration.”

These riots indeed led to great fear and also intended to. “The Noakhali-Tippera riot,” wrote Suranjan Das, “completed the shift from the relatively unorganised and often class-based communal violence to organised rioting with direct involvement of the organised political world. This outbreak was neither sudden nor spontaneous but had been deliberately planned with encouragement from the leaders of the institutional politics.”

He further pointed out that there was no damage to public property such as ‘post offices,

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25 Report of the Special officer Home Department to the Additional Secretary, Government of West Bengal on the condition of Tippera in November 1946 in S.P Mukherji Papers, II-IV Installments, File no 149, NMML.
27 Telegram dated October 17, 1946 from Chaumuhani in Noakhali district to Bengal Provincial Congress Committee President Surendra Mohan Ghose. See Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 October, 1946.
28 See Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991, Pg. 201
school or Government buildings’ and ‘only Hindu portions of the village’ were attacked. What the crowd in Noakhali aimed was “to terrorize the Hindus by looting their property, dishonouring their women, desecrating their gods and forcibly converting them to Islam.” These were planned riots with polarised communal leadership on either side of the border. Das also showed how this strengthened the private armies of both sides such as the Muslin National Guard on one hand and Hindusthan Seva Dal and Rasshtriya Sevak Sangh on the other hand.

However if there was venom and hatred in the organised communal leadership, what a common person in the villages was left with was fear. The situation was indeed extremely tense even outside the areas directly affected by communal tension. In Louhajang Circle, Munshiganj in Dacca for instance there was helplessness that prompted them to seek administrative help for their protection. In a letter to the Subdivisional Magistrate they wrote about the insecurity created by the Pakistan Propaganda committee in their pamphlets. It was alleged that there were also “mischievous propaganda” among the schedule castes particularly namashudras against the caste Hindus. Several leaders of the Muslim League were also holding meetings of the Muslims ‘fomenting hatred and exciting them against the Hindus’ and were preparing them for ‘launching the fight for establishing Pakistan by violence, if necessary’. The situation of the locality, they wrote, “is such as existed in Noakhali before the outbreak of riot of that district. An atmosphere of uncertainty, apprehension and insecurity was reigning everywhere and we think it may reach the climax at any moment and disturbance may break out at once if no step is taken immediately to prevent the situation from getting worse.” Later they wrote that the

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30 Letter written to the Subdivisional Magistrate of Munshiganj, Dacca by the inhabitants of Louhajang Circle of Munshiganj. S.P Mukherji Papers, II-IV Installments, NMML
Noakhali riots had aggravated the situation and “the goondas and the lawless people seem to be encouraged from the instances of lawlessness, prevailing everywhere now in many other places of East Bengal especially in the districts of Noakhali and Tippera, to carry on their nefarious activities in this circle also. The Hindus are panic stricken and are removing their families, where possible to some other safe places.” Thus the Hindus sought military protection in order to protect their life and property and also their female members who lived alone in homes in a helpless condition.

So the Noakhali riots had sent waves of panic across East Bengal and that indeed prompted migration. The independence and the creation of Pakistan only worsened the sense of security among the Hindu minorities of East Bengal same as minorities across the border. The causes of migration remained the same after independence as before it. Bhagobat Basak, who migrated from Rajshahi in 1948, spoke of a sense of insecurity that prevailed in East Pakistan after independence. It was no use to seek redress as he felt the administration treated them as second class citizens there. Jitesh Lahiri was well settled in Rajshahi town and also owned land and property in his village. But he decided to leave in 1948. He spoke of a number reasons for that – threatening anonymous letters, daring burglaries in Hindu houses, arrest of respectable Hindus on false charges, obscene gestures to Hindu women and molestation, ban on the sale of property by Hindus, beating up of Hindu business men, confiscation of fire arms from Hindus on false charges, forcible occupation of Hindu property, desecration of temples, etc. All this created a huge sense of insecurity that forced him to migrate with his family. Khagendranath Sen had a modest living in Gorabazar in Murshidabad. He gave up his legal practise in Rajshahi town that got him a monthly income of Rs 1000 as he decided to migrate in 1948. He spoke of the ‘uppishness’ of the Muslims and the discrimination meted out to the Hindus
just after the Partition. One day a Muslim lawyer even tried to slap him in the bar library. His colleagues were even beaten up. His two storeyed house was razed to the ground on the false pretext that the land belonged to a mosque. He was thus left with little choice but to migrate. Nipendranath Bhattacharya came from Rangpur in 1948. He had some landed property but earned mostly from service. He remembered the sense of insecurity that prevailed in Rangpur after Partition. There were theft and dacoity in Hindu houses. Seeking redress was useless. Even when he was migrating he was robbed of gold and money at the Darshana border. Sukumar Roy Karmakar, a migrant who came from Pabna, also spoke of similar harassment that forced him to migrate in 1948.31

Thus the violence of the sort unleashed during the 1946 riots created a fear – a fear of more violence. It was this sense of insecurity that was kept alive and nurtured by harassment of the minorities – theft, loot, threats to women, desecration of temples - by sections of the majority community who enjoyed complete protection of the lower level administrators or were at least able to convince the minority of their being above the law. The Partition had raised hopes of a promised land for the Muslims and they had long standing grievances - of untouchability by the Hindus, economic oppression by the Hindu Zamindars, having less landed and urban property and most importantly living as minorities in the subcontinent. This is not to make a case for those Muslims who had let loose senseless violence, but once they had their promised land they wanted, they saw no space or opportunities to share. This brings us to a recollection of the days just after Partition by Indu Ganguly, one of the founders of a Calcutta colony.32 Ganguly stated that for some time after Partition, the poorest among the Muslims such as the daily wage

31 Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 3, Eye witness tabular evidence of Minority Hindus persecuted in East Bengal, School of Women’s Studies Jadavpur University.
labourers, the boat men, and the poor vegetable seller in the local hat were unable to understand the significance of Partition and feared that the Hindu migration from East Bengal would affect their livelihood adversely as they were dependent of Hindus for employment. But it was the local Muslims who were the relatively influential lot who cast their eyes on the properties owned by the Hindus and made it difficult for the Hindus to stay on in East Pakistan. It was this class, according to Ganguly, that led the young Muslim men against the Hindus particularly the women folk. Ganguly then mentions a much quoted incident of the humiliation of a Hindu woman bathing in the village pond by Muslim men both young and old who stood together in taunting her.\textsuperscript{33}

To cite another specific example of the lapse of security and the intellectual squeezing out that took place we may refer to the story of Ashalata Sen and her son.\textsuperscript{34} Ashalata Sen was elected unopposed to the Bengal Legislative Assembly from a Congress ticket. She was a Gandhian activist and as per Gandhiji’s advice she decided to stay on in Dacca and worked among the women of East Bengal. Her son Samar, who was a student in England joined her in Dacca and got himself attached to the Dacca university faculty. Soon Samar Sen had developed a strong following among his Muslim students who even visited him at their residence. This was looked at with suspicion by the Dacca Police especially after there were some demands about considering Bengali to be the national language of Pakistan along with Urdu as declared by Jinnah. The police suspected Samar to have instigated his students to make such a demand and his activities were considered anti Pakistan. Eventually the Vice-Chancellor of the University summoned Samar Sen and communicated that the police was to arrest him but that would only spread the panic.

\textsuperscript{33}This incident was mentioned by Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, Udvarstu, The Uprooted), Kolkata, Sahitya Sangsad, 1970, Pg. 15-16. It was also mentioned by Prafulla Chakraborty, The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal, Kalyani, West Bengal, Lumière Books, 1990, Pg. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{34} Oral transcript of Ashalata Sen, Acc. no 331(NMML)
among the Hindu teachers and would lead to the breakdown of the University. Thus the Vice Chancellor desired that Samar should leave Dacca. Samar Sen finally had to leave East Pakistan in 1948. Thus it was amply clear that there were fixed ideas of who was to be considered ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ state and if one failed to fit into the correct ‘paradigm’ one would have to quit despite his social influence or wishes.

The 1950s

With the turn of the decade in the 1950s there were attempts by both Pakistan and India to reinforce their political boundaries that were already created. During Noakhali and the other post-1947 disturbances after it, the states of India and Pakistan had just been created. Hence they were not in a position to assert their state-hood. In the 1950s (and therein lies its main difference with the 1940s), the states through a spate of inter dominion conferences and regulatory methods tried to address the issues of migration and violence. Thus the Passports and permits introduced tried to establish state-hood over its citizens and in the process excluded those who were found in the wrong side of the border. In anticipation of the introduction of such regulatory methods, migrations from East Pakistan kept increasing out of a fear perhaps that they would be sealed for life as non-citizen minorities in Pakistan and India. Meanwhile the Indian state tried its best to discourage and control this flow of refugees through high level Indo-Pak talks, inter dominion conferences, agreements between heads of the states, etc. On April 19, 1948 the Neogy-Ghulam Mohammad Agreement was signed. This was intended to solve problems of the minorities by putting up minority Boards in both the countries. There were also high level meetings between the Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and East Bengal to work out the agreement on the ground. After discussions
between the officials of the two countries another similar agreement was made in December 6-14, 1948. Yet completely unaffected by such ivory tower confidence building measures, there were riots and communal disturbances in both sides of the border in the 1950s and the minorities from East Bengal continued to migrate across the border.

Life was never back to normal again for the minorities in East Pakistan ever since the Partition or perhaps the Noakhali days. In a memorandum of the Congress Legislative Party in East Bengal given to the Premier Nurul Amin in December 1949, one gets a glimpse of the condition of Minorities in East Bengal.\(^\text{35}\) Briefly this memorandum drew attention to indiscriminate requisition of Hindu houses, go-downs, shops, educational institutions and other movable properties all over East Pakistan. It pointed out that in Dacca alone three thousand Hindu houses had been requisitioned. The licences of Hindus holding fire arms were cancelled and their arms were seized. Large number of houses and lands throughout Pakistan were forcibly occupied by Muslims. Temples were desecrated. Large number of reports of crimes against Hindu women were brought to the notice of the authorities but were ignored. Forced conversions and forced marriages after abduction were also mentioned. Large number of burglaries during which attacks on women had taken place had become a feature of rural life in East Bengal. Muslim mobs on the pretext of keeping an eye over disloyal Non-Muslims, raided Hindu houses. In the rural areas forcible removal of crops, plucking of fruits from trees, cutting of bamboos and catching fish from the tanks belonging to Hindus had become most common. The attitude of government officials and police towards the complaints from Hindus was completely indifferent and some district magistrates openly preached against the Hindus. The

\(^{35}\) Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India, A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry, New Delhi, 1965, Pg. 5
minority Boards agreed upon by the Neogy-Mohammad Pact were either not brought into existence or were not allowed to function. Local Boards and Municipalities where Hindus held the majority of seats were arbitrarily suspended. Thus there were severe accusations of dishonouring the inter dominion agreements.

So the Congress leadership in Pakistan expressed concerns over a general lack of security and a fear of violence among the Hindus of East Bengal. This fear of violence, however, was soon turned into real violence with retaliatory violence across the border. The time and place of its occurrence was not Noakhali but Khulna in December 1949. On the 20th December an incident occurred in village Kalshira in the Begerhat sub-division of Khulna District in East Bengal. The Pakistan police went to arrest some alleged communists in a village in Khulna district. Finding them absent, they 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 fight between the police and the villagers resulting in some deaths. One policeman was killed and another died subsequently of injuries. Two days later, the police, assisted by the Ansars and other rowdy elements, attacked not only that village, but 22 other neighbouring villages in Bagerhat, Moltarhat, Kachua and Fakirhat Police stations in Khulna district, which were mostly inhabited by members of the Namasudra community. There was arson and looting on a large scale, men were murdered and women raped. 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 maintained by the armed police and others. Even news could not come through. After about three weeks of this occurrence, some of the affected people of these villages

36 The incident received wide coverage in Calcutta Press from late January 1950. News of the incident however did not come in initially. See Amrita Bazar Patrika for regular reporting on the incident.
managed to evade the cordon and crossed into West Bengal. Despite pressures from the Indian side and the cordons created in East Bengal, migration from the Khulna area to West Bengal continued and up to the 14th February almost twenty five thousand Hindus from the affected areas came to the border town of Bongaon and then trekked a distance of 50 miles to Calcutta. 37 The Spokesperson of Government of West Bengal stated in early February that there was large scale migration from East Bengal and many refugees had already entered Bongaon, a border town of West Bengal due to disturbances in Bagerhat and other places in East Bengal. The Government had already communicated this to its counterpart in East Bengal and had drawn its attention to the disturbances that were taking place in East Bengal.38

News of the riot too was initially difficult to obtain from East Bengal. There was something like an iron curtain. Representatives of news agencies and papers, even veteran editors of local newspapers such as Durga Mohan Sen of Barisal were kept in captivity or otherwise seriously dealt with, so much so that news of grave events scarcely reached this side of the border.39 But as migrants started to trickle in, the stories of the tragedy also came out of Khulna and the violence soon spread to other parts of East and West Bengal. Somewhat similarly incidents took place in Nachole in Rajashahi District in East Bengal, an area largely inhabited by Santhals. Following a clash between the police and the Santhals, many villages were killed and up to the 3rd February, 700 Santhal families had crossed over to West Bengal. Violence and migrations continued through all the verbal and diplomatic exchanges between the two states. On the 10th of February, while a

37 Figure offered by Nehru to Parliament. See Statement of Records by Nehru in Parliament on February 23, 1950, Parliamentary Debates Volume I No 18, Parliament of India, Official Reports Part II Proceedings other than Question Answers.
38 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 February 1950.
39 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 11 February 1950
conference of Chief Secretaries of East and West Bengal was taking place in Dacca, there was demonstration inside the Secretariat at Dacca by the East Bengal Secretariat employees. The demonstrators went out in a procession to Victoria Park within the city where a meeting was held. As the meeting broke up, rioting, looting, murder and arson started and spread all over Dacca city. This widespread rioting continued for the next few days. On the 12th of February a crowd of Hindu passengers at the Karimtolla airport near Dacca was attacked by an armed mob and a large number of these passengers, including women and children, were either killed or seriously wounded. This tragedy took place within a stone’s throw of the Karimtolla military headquarters and in the presence of Pakistan armed guards. According to figures offered by Nehru in Parliament, in the large-scale migrations that continued between 12th and 21st February about 3,500 persons migrated from Dacca to Calcutta by air. Again between February 13th and February 20th, 16,000 persons migrated by trains from East Bengal to Calcutta. So a total of 19,500 persons migrated to West Bengal within just a few days.40

There was violence in this part of Bengal too. The presence of all these refugees and their stories of ill-treatment led to some incidents of retaliatory violence in Murshidabad town and nearby villages. The refugees from Khulna and their accounts of how they had suffered had indeed led to reactions in Calcutta and on 4th February a series of incidents began there. There were stray assaults on some Muslims and a number of Muslim busties were burnt. With some immediate police action and arrests, the situation improved and there were no fresh incidents of violence for a few days. But only a few days later on the 8th of February two Hindus were stabbed in front of a mosque in Ultadanga in North

Calcutta. This led to a recurrence of trouble and arson and looting took place in some of the Muslim localities. The police were given orders to take strict action and curfew was also imposed in the affected areas. There were also outbreak of violence outside Calcutta and it spread in other parts of West Bengal particularly Murshidabad. Some Hindus of a procession in Berhanpur in Murshidabad passing through Golbazar area destroyed some shops owned by Muslims. There were also incidents of burning Muslim huts in areas under the jurisdiction of Beldanga and Berhanpur police stations. The West Bengal Government claimed these to be ‘isolated attempts’ and that it had little response among the public at large who cooperated with the local authority in putting down firmly all attempts at creating trouble.41 “The problem before us”, stated Nehru in the Parliament, “is much too serious for any of us to seek to make political propaganda out of it, for it affects the future of tens of millions of people both in India and Pakistan.” Indeed Nehru took serious note of the situation in East Bengal. He thus went on to state that, “I have little doubt that what has happened in East Bengal is far more serious than what happened in Calcutta or one or two other places in West Bengal. There is no comparison between them.”42

In his speech in the Parliament, Nehru claimed that the situation in Murshidabad was rapidly brought under control. There was no death, and only a few cases of injury. Relief was given to the sufferers who were not many in number. As for Calcutta, military patrols were also brought out and it was claimed by the Prime Minister that from 10th February onwards the incidents of disturbances were greatly reduced in number and were ultimately put an end to. But owing to these disturbances there was considerable panic in some of the

41 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 February 1950
Muslim areas of Calcutta and a number of them left their houses and went to what they considered to be safer parts of Calcutta. According to a house to house census 26,112 persons moved from their houses to other parts of Calcutta. Subsequently a large number of these Muslims returned to their houses. There was some migration to Dacca as well but that was much lesser compared to the incoming refugees. From Calcutta to Dacca by air between 12th and 21st February some 2,100 persons migrated and another 3000 persons migrated by trains taking the figure of total migration to Dacca to 5,100 persons.43

CASUALTIES BOTH IN CALCUTTA AND MURSHIDABAD AREA

January – February 1950

Calcutta area (upto 17th February)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>Deaths</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
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REST OF BENGAL-INCLUDING HOWRAH

January – February 1950

(upto 19th February)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
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<td>Deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
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Source: Figures offered to the Parliament by Nehru in his speech on 23rd February 1950.

43 These figures were offered by Nehru in his speech in Parliament. See Statement of Records by Nehru in Parliament on February 23, 1950, Parliamentary Debates Volume I No 18, Parliament of India, Official Reports Part II Proceedings other than Question Answers.
Political and press reactions and also the incidents of violence heightened pitch of Government reactions. Exchanges and counter exchanges between the two states marked the following period. The Government of India lodged a strong protest with the Pakistan Government concerning the happenings in Bagerhat against the alleged incidents of loss of life, rape looting of properties of minorities and forcible conversion. The Government of West Bengal, too, immediately drew the attention of its counterpart in East Bengal to what it considered as a ‘grave situation’ and asked for information. No reply was received to this or to a personal letter written by the Chief Minister of West Bengal to the Premier of East Bengal. Reacting to the Indian Press reports, statements in the Parliament on the minority situation in East Pakistan following the incidents in Khulna, the East Bengal Government finally released a press note in which the Pakistan Government alleged that the Calcutta Press indulged in irresponsible anti-Pakistan propaganda. The press note further stated that the propaganda received impetus from the speeches of the Hindu Mahasabha leaders particularly in the Mahasabha Congress which challenged the very existence of Pakistan. Mahasabha leadership and some other organisations too demanded retaliation of the happenings in East Bengal in their public meetings and pamphlets. The press note on its part highlighted attacks on the police in Khulna and alleged that those who crossed over spread stories on communal atrocities and instigated retaliation. The Government of East Bengal thus blamed the communal disturbances in West Bengal to this inflammatory propaganda. “The Government of East Bengal”, noted the press statement, “learn with concern reports of a series of communal incidents that have been

44 The Statesman, 4 February 1950.
occurring in West Bengal since January 24 and the consequent heavy influx of the Muslim refugees from Murshidabad and 24 Parganas.\textsuperscript{45}

The West Bengal Chief Minister Dr B. C. Roy replied to this by stating that what happened in Murshidabad were ‘isolated incidents’ that were ‘promptly dealt with the help of the help of the members of the Hindu public and all possible help and relief were made available to the suffering who were only a few in number’ and claimed that complete peace was restored. As for incidents in other places, the Chief Minister completely denied incidents that was said to have taken place in Ultadanga, Bagmari Road, Muchipara areas of Calcutta and dismissed them as allegations with ‘no foundation what so ever’. He even questioned the sources of the East Bengal Government of what he described as ‘imaginary incidents’ mentioned in East Bengal Press Note.\textsuperscript{46} In one of his letters to the Chief Ministers Nehru noted, “This development in East Pakistan is a dangerous one. If it spreads, it will only lead to enormous suffering, but also to large migrations. We are trying to deal with it in cooperation with the Pakistan Government as well as the Provincial Governments of Bengal, East and West.”\textsuperscript{47} On 1st February, 1950, the Government of India suggested to the East Bengal Government that a joint enquiry by the officials into the communal disturbances should be held and immediate steps should also be taken to control the situation.

A section of the Press too reacted sharply and in defence of Roy, coming up with severe criticism of the East Bengal Government. In its editorial Amrita Bazar Patrika stated,

\textsuperscript{45} Press statement issued by East Bengal Government. See The Statesman, 4 February 1950.
\textsuperscript{46} In response to the East Bengal Press note the Bengal Chief Minister Dr B.C. Roy issued a statement. See The Statesman, 5 February 1950.
\textsuperscript{47} G. Parthasarathi (ed), Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letters to the Chief Ministers 1947-64 Vol. II. Letter dated 2\textsuperscript{nd} February, 1950, Pg. 18.
“What is happening in Khulna districts and some other parts of East Bengal? Reports have it that the Hindus are being systematically assaulted, their houses burnt, property looted and even their womenfolk molested and abducted...The East Bengal Government Press note of February 3 on the Khulna incident is a feeble attempt at explaining away a grave situation fraught with possibilities of considerable harm to both parts of Bengal. The hectoring tone of the press note sufficiently proved the weakness of the East Bengal Government’s case which has been sought to be bolstered up by the strategy that offence is the best form of defence...The East Bengal Government had specially blamed the Calcutta newspapers and East Bengal refugees for stirring up communal enmity in West Bengal. That these charges have no legs to stand upon have been shown by fact and figure by Dr B.C. Roy. On the other hand East Bengal newspapers as Dr B.C. Roy pointed out have been putting forth fire and venom against India and West Bengal for months together.”

But the Calcutta press also criticized such retaliatory violence in this part of Bengal in categorical terms and raised some pertinent questions. “Can violence be checked by counter violence or one wrong be righted by another? No sane person will believe it and none but mischief mongers would advise such a consequence. What sense is there then for making the Muslims of West Bengal scapegoats for the wrong perpetrated by co-religionists on the Hindus across the border?” stated an editorial of a leading Daily.

If one looks deeper into the riots, it would seem that there was an attempt at intellectual squeezing out in order to make room for the Muslims. So far as East Pakistan was concerned, largely land, industries and business were controlled by the Hindus. Similarly

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48 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 February 1950
49 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 February 1950.
the professional classes like lawyers, doctors, school teachers and civil servants were Hindus. Muslim land holders were content to live on the income of their properties and had not much interest in industry, business or even profession. According to one estimate, even after the establishment of Pakistan, in Dacca about 59% of the total population was Hindus and about 85% of the properties in the city belonged to Hindus. In most of the other towns too Hindu inhabitants were in majority. After, 1950 killings the Hindu holdings of properties fell to 12.7% and nearly 90% of the Hindu citizens of Dacca had migrated to India. There was a similar decline of Hindu students from the schools in Dacca. Of the 2,000 school students who remained in Dacca after Partition most of them migrated between February 1950 killings and December 1950 and the number of students were reduced to 140. Similarly there were about 2,100 Hindu girls in Schools before Partition of whom 1,200 girl students remained in Dacca after Partition. After the large-scale migrations between the February 1950 incident and December 1950 only 25 girl students remained by. The number of Hindu College students fell from 65% at Partition to 7% in January 1950 and at the end of 1950 only 12 students remained. Similarly there were about 1500 Hindu shops at the time of Partition and at the end of 1950 only 157 remained.\(^{50}\) Thus the 1950s saw the migration of the educated and the propertied Hindus from East Bengal and migrations continued unchecked even after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed in April 1950 to control the migrations.

The Hindu Mahasabha in its Booklet “East Bengal Tragedy: The Delhi Pact and Thereafter” denounced the Nehru Liaquat Pact and narrated several incidents of violence

\(^{50}\) *Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry*, New Delhi, 1965.
on minorities in East Bengal. This provided records of several such incidents of violence that took place in the days following the Pact. Dr. Jatindra Nath Banerjee, Medical officer of Kanakadia Charitable Dispensary of Banaphal Post Office of Barisal narrated his plight. He stated, “My married daughter Satirani Ganguly, aged 18 years was forcibly taken away on 16.4.50, that is, after the recent Pak-Bharat Agreement, by Kazi Serajul Haque, Tehsildar of the Dacca Nawab Estate, from my quarters at Kanakadia at about 10 p.m. in the night. While going in a boat he was arrested. Both the abductor and the girl were sent to Jail Hazat, prayers for my custody were refused by S.D.O., Patuakhali. On one Sunday both of them were released from Jail taking advantage of my absence. The court was closed and it was no date for hearing of the case. Opportunity was given to the abductor to seize the girl again. Nearly 250 people were waiting at the Jail gate. She was seized and taken away in a carriage and the mob went to the house of a pleader in a procession in broad daylight. She made a statement to a magistrate. She has not stated that she had embraced Islam or she had married the abductor. Still the S.D.O. is taking keen interest about the case and is refusing father’s custody of the girl each time. I sent a telegram to D.M., Barisal but to no effect. I have sent letters to Chief Minister and to the Secretary, Minority Board.” Life in East Bengal had indeed become extremely unsafe for the minorities. Similar incidents of crime particularly on the women were recorded. In May 1950, for instance, a Hindu widow was abducted by the local Muslims in Kagdia of Faridpur district at night from her residence. Next day when the Hindu neighbours were going to lodge a complaint to the local police, they were confronted on the way by the miscreants who threatened that if they lodged any complaint to the local police station, they would be killed. The Hindu neighbours out of fear did not proceed.

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51 *East Bengal Tragedy and Thereafter* Published by Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in S.P.Mukherji Papers, Installment I Refugees and Minorities File 10, NMML.
further and returned. The next day the miscreants who kidnapped the Hindu widow performed a nika in the Registrar’s office. The Hindu widow was taken to the Registrar’s office in a Borkha. After the nika marriage her name was changed to Momina Khatun and she was taken out of the court with great ceremony. The Hindu widow was forced to live with the Muslim abductor and the pleadings of her old mother to see her daughter was of no avail. Again in another incident a twenty year old married woman, Devi Rani, daughter of Surendra Nath Mazumder of Kumarkhali was abducted by some Muslims. She had come to her father’s house a few days before in connection with a ceremony. It was not possible to rescue the girl out of the fear of the Muslims. These incidents, it was alleged, happened under the leadership of the Secretary of the local Muslim League. It was reported that she was going to be re-married to the League Secretary who was also the President of the Union Board.\(^{52}\) In another incident a fifteen year old Hindu girl was abducted from a house in the village Bodhkhana in Jhikargacha Police Station of Jessore district. She was rescued from a jungle after an hour’s search by the Hindu residents of the village. The police were informed. The girl recognized one of the culprits and stated so before the police, but no action was taken though the culprit was in his house for more than a day after the incident was reported to the police. With such prevailing violence, all attempts of migrants to return to East Pakistan again after the 1950 Pact had failed. It was reported that some Santhals, Kurmis, and Rajbanshis returned to their village in Dinajpur. But they were no welcome in their own village and they were once more forced to return to West Bengal. One Mr. Ghosh of Hilli wanted permission from Pak Police to go back home at Khatta on the authority of the Agreement. The Thana Police Officer laid down two conditions of his return. He must first make arrangement for housing the Muslims

\(^{52}\) These incidents were mentioned in a Hindu Mahasabha pamphlet. See ‘East Bengal Tragedy and Thereafter’ Published by Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in S.P.Mukherji Papers, Installment I Refugees and Minorities File 10, NMML.
who have occupied his house during his absence. Secondly, he must bring the grown up girls of the family to stay there. Khudiram Bhakat of Pirganj in Rangpur returned home after the Pact with his wife, parents and children. But on their way they were arrested by a group of Ansars who looted their property and assaulted them. The Police being informed remarked. “You have left Pakistan, so it is natural that your property should be taken by the Ansars”. Monoranjan Mukherjee of Dacca said that some Muslims had been sheltered in his house in spare rooms. He stated that the Muslims indulged in such revelries and indecencies that he is compelled to leave the premises. The Gouripur House in Mymensingh had been occupied by the Muslims during the riot. When the owner requested the Police to allow them possession, the Police refused to interfere. One Congressman, Dr. Harendra Kumar Ghosh, returned home in his village at Goalgram, Sylhet with his wife and children against the warnings of his friends. He was assured by the District Authorities and local Muslims that he would be protected as there was the Agreement to assure safety to the Hindus. As soon as he entered his house, a group of Muslims attacked him and caused severe wounds and he succumbed next day in the local hospital. Amiya Bala Basu returned to her home at Dhobali under Abhoy Nagar Police Station of Jessore district. But the Muslims who had occupied her house refused her possession. Ramesh Chandra Majumder of the same village had been refused possession of his house after the agreement.

There were several other such incidents recorded by the Mahasabha. These accounts cannot however be questioned as propaganda literature as they correspond to other accounts of violence.\(^\text{53}\) Benode Behari Sarkar, a cloth merchant from Dacca migrated in

\(^{53}\)Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 3, Eye witness tabular evidence of Minority Hindus persecuted in East Bengal, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.
1954. He spoke of the general insecurity and the absence of protection from the administration. He recalled the SDO who instead of redressing their grievances stated that the Hindus might as well go to India. Sarkar further stated that the Muslims were asked not to buy property from the Hindus. Looting and arson was common in the countryside and the writing was clear on the wall – either accept Islam or go to India. Adhar Sarkar, a trader by profession, came to India from Mymensingh in 1955. He spoke of general insecurity to the Hindus from the beginning of the creation of Pakistan. But what intensified the fear beyond repair was a mass attack on a train on a Bridge where the Hindu passengers on board were killed and the bodies thrown into the river. He was in the train but saved himself by jumping into the river. The police rejected the complaint by discarding it as false designed to embarrass the Muslims. Paresh was a migrant from Kalna, Dacca who came to India in 1951. With the creation of Pakistan, not only was there a general sense of insecurity, but property, trade, business and honour were all at stake. He speaks of a Lalit Das whose daughter was abducted and also states that the number Hindu houses destroyed was beyond any calculation. He also spoke of temple and idol demolition, of over familiarity with Hindu girls and indecent proposals, insistence on cow slaughter etc. Hriday Chakraborty came from Chittagong in 1950. He first removed his family to the Chittagong town as life and honour was at stake in the village ever since the creation of Pakistan. His brother’s sister-in-law was abducted one night by 400 armed men who then set the house on fire. There was also constant pressure for conversion. He spoke of several other incidents. In one incident four to five hundred people gathered and abducted two girls aged 17 and 14 killing a gentleman who resisted it. At Bidyakut another such incident was reported. In all cases, the reluctance of the police to register complaint was common. While on his way to India in 1950 they had
been detained for several days at Kaluara station. There were constant announcement by Pakistani officers of abducted Hindu women.

Even after the minorities decided to migrate they were not spared and thus there were several train and steamer attacks on their way. For instance, Down Chittgong Mail between Poradah and Chuadanda was attacked in the same place by armed Muslims three times in eight days. Their technique was to pull down the danger signal, to put out the light, to call for Muslim passengers to come down and then to rob the Hindus of their cash, jewellery and belongings. Another night train running between Mymensingh and Baigunbari is said to have been attacked by a group of non-Bengali Muslims who entered into the train and looted Hindu properties. Some of the Hindu passengers protested and they were assaulted. Fifteen of the victims were in the Hospital at Mymensingh. Two of the victims had succumbed. Yet another train was attacked on 1st May 1950 after it started towards Calcutta with passengers from Faridpur. The Muslims pulled the alarm chain, extorted money and property on point of dagger. The Passenger Train between Amingaon and Lalmonirhat was attacked by Muslim passengers on 25th May. The Hindu passengers were stabbed and one of them was thrown out of the carriage. The other common trend was attack on temples. The temple in the house of Pran Hari Roy Burman of Rangpur was attacked as the deity was reported to have valuable ornaments. Rajgiri Roy Burman, the old father was killed, the deity was removed and ornaments taken away.

The Burra Siva temple of Dacca had also been closed and Muslim refugees had been accommodated in the temple. The temple of Chhinnamasta at Paltan area had been defiled. Sadananda Das of Hasenga complained that his family God had been defiled. The

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54 East Bengal Tragedy and Thereafter Published by Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in S.P.Mookherjee Parers, Installment I Refugees and Minorities File 10, NMML.
famous Saraswat Asram of Kaliganga too was looted, Swami Premananda, the priest was assaulted and Rs. 500 had been taken away. Several temples and idols at Senhati were also attacked such as the Siva Temple, Basudev temple, Kali Bari, the Siddheswari Kali Bari where the images were broken. There were also innumerable recollections of personal places of worship being attacked in individual Hindu houses. Another memorandum submitted to Liaquat Ali Khan in 1950 illustrate the severe discontentment within the minority leadership in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{55} The memorandum spoke of the ‘tragic state of things’ in East Bengal where ‘Muslim mob violence with the direct connivance of and in collusion with the police and Ansars, with the knowledge of the district authorities even, broke out against the minorities on fairly large scales, letting aside many minor ones.’ It spoke of the atrocities Bianabazar and Berlekha of Sylhet in 1949 where some villages were raided by a large band of Muslim villagers in company with the police and Ansars, of the incidents in Bhandaria, Barisal where persecution of minorities took place in the whole village and the neighbouring areas apparently under the instructions of district authorities, of the Muslim mob attack and forcible occupation of Putia Rajbari in Rajshahi town and of course the incidents in Bagerhat and Nachole. Allegations were thus made not only of mob violence but also of state connivance. There were also allegations of not letting the opposition voice itself in the East Pakistan Assembly. “We,” it was stated, “sought to discuss the situation by means of adjournment motions in the Assembly on the 6\textsuperscript{th} February over the incidents of Nachole and Bagerhat. The motions were disallowed. Thanks to the adverse attitude of the majority party and the Government, that legitimate attempt of ours was thwarted.” There were thus, severe complaints against administration in East Pakistan yet also a hope of redresses from within and hence an

appeal to the Pakistan Premier. It was with this hope perhaps that despite large scale migrations there were minorities still stayed on in Pakistan.

**The Second Decade after Partition – Migration in 1960s**

The next phase violence and migration took place between 1960 and 1965. The migrations were a result of violence in the districts of Rajshahi and Pabna in 1962 and later in Khulna, Dacca and other districts in 1964-65. The riots of 1961-62 were mainly in Rajshahi and Pabna following large-scale killings in Darusha Hat in the end of April 1961 (12 Baishakh). Eye witness accounts of the riots narrate the trend vividly. Bhupendranath Sarkar was eleven years old when he migrated from Rajshahi. On 16th Baishakh 1369, mass killing of Hindus, arson murder of his own family compelled migration. Gopal Chandra Das another agricultural labourer from Rajshahi migrated when three members of family were killed. Satish Sarkar migrated from Rajshahi in 1962 following the mass massacre of Hindus 16th Baishakh 1369 by local Muslims. Hemanta Ghosh migrated from Rajshahi in 1963. Local Muslims attacked and looted his house. He was refused shelter by his long time Muslim neighbours. He thus fled to the jungle. There were no religious freedom and temples were forcibly entered into ever since the creation of Pakistan. But the Darusha hat massacre was the last straw. When their neighbours turned enemies they were left with little choice but to migrate. Srikanta Ghosh’s house was looted and his family murdered at Darusha Hat. Ramkumar Das also speaks of the mass murder at Darusha Hat village where Muslims demanded ransom and threatened to abduct his wife and daughter. Desperate to save himself and his family, he decided to migrate. Harassment was far from over as they were robbed enroute. Harendra Ghosh had his mother and elder brother murdered in the same riot and was also looted enroute. Haripada
Ghosh stated that around 2000 thousand people were killed in the Darusha Hat massacre. His own sister was a victim. Uddhav Dhar speaks of looting started on 12th Baishakh. Many family members were killed in the riots and he himself was severely injured. According to Prafulla Ghosh, looting started in Baishakh. Muslims burnt Darusha Hat and killed seven members of his family. Kalipada Das repeats the story of mass murder of Darusha hat. Even before the riots, stated Das, Hindus were discriminated against and there was no security of life and property. Harendra Mandal stated that attack on religious rites, burning of crops and molestation of girls started with the creation of Pakistan. Even the Muslims of his own village attacked them during the mass murder of Darusha hat. Charubala Dasi refered to interference with religion, damage of crops, abduction of women, etc. even before riots but Darusha hat mass murder left them with no choice but to migrate. The riots were thus mainly engineered by local Muslims that led to near extinction of minorities either by killings or through migrations.

The 1964 riots that started in Khulna and spread to other places was far more planned and engineered by Non Bengali Muslim mill workers with a strong defence put up by the Namashudras. It all began with Hazratbal incident that took place in Kashmir. There was a rumour that a relic of the Prophet Muhammad was stolen from a shrine in Kashmir and this was followed by attacks on Hindus in East Pakistan followed by rioting against Muslims in India. It all started in Daulatpur, a newly emerging industrial town in Khulna where the Hazrat Bal day was to be observed. On January 2, 1964 as a mark of mourning for the loss of the sacred relic from Hazrat Bal Kashmir, Hindus were prevented from wearing shoes, using umbrellas or riding Rikshaws. Sabur Khan, an East Pakistan

For eyewitness accounts of Rajshahi riots see Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 3, Eye witness tabular evidence of Minority Hindus persecuted in East Bengal, School of Women’s Studies Jadavpur University.
Minister, who played a key role in the 1964 riots in Khulna addressed a meeting at Daulatpur on January 3, 1964. This meeting was attended by a large number of Mill workers. All Mills were closed on that day. The Mill hands of Daulatpur 20,000 strong took out a procession after the meeting and obstructed the rail and road traffic and went on beating and killing Hindus on their way to the Khulna town. They reached the town in the evening and what followed was unchecked arson and loot of Hindu homes and killing every Hindu who crossed their way. Several cases of rape and abduction of women were reported. The workers of Daulatpur then spread out in different directions working similar havoc wherever they went. Troubles soon spread to Dacca. It began on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of January at Adamji Mills\textsuperscript{57}. The brother of the General Manager of Adamji Group was rumoured to have been killed in Calcutta and it was declared that the mills of the group were to remain closed on 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} of January. There were a few thousand workers in this group. They were provided with daggers and other weapons to attack the Hindus. They were soon joined by workers of other mills such as Demra and Baswani Jute Mills, Karim Jute Mills, Shermin Textile Mills etc. Late at night on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of January, villages near the Mill were set on fire. Not only the villages but also the Mills owned by Hindus such as Chittaranjan Mills, Laxmi Narayan Cotton Mills, Dhakeshwari Mills were attacked. Most of the Hindu workers and their families who had taken shelter in these Mills were attacked. There were some typical methods involved in the attacks. Mob of even thousands, mostly non-Bengali Muslims Mill workers would gather and devastate Hindu houses of the villages near the Mills. Then they would attack the Mills of the Hindu owners. Typically they would attack the Managers’ Bungalow followed by the labour barracks and Hindu staff

\textsuperscript{57} For accounts of riots in Khulna and other places in 1964 see \textit{Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry}, New Delhi, 1965

65
quarters. Finally they would attack the Mills targeting not only the Hindu Mill workers but would also destroy the stores, go-downs and the machinery.

The riots then engulfed entire East Bengal. In Barishal for example there were innumerable voices speaking of gruesome crimes. Gopali Baidya stated that one night a gang of Hooligans entered their house and demanded money. When her husband was unable to satisfy them he was hit hard and he died on the spot. The goons even hit her and her baby and they felt unconscious. When she regained consciousness everything they had was looted. Her complains to the Union Board was pointless. So she finally decided to migrate. Nani Gopal Samaddar of Sohagdal was left with little choice but to migrate when his house and shop was forcibly occupied by local Muslims. Monojendra Brahmachari was kept captive by a local Muslim and threatened to be killed if he did not transfer his property in his name. Accordingly, papers were prepared and he was forced to sign after which he left Pakistan for safety. Like in previous cycles of violence, there were several allegations of administrative failure. In Barisal town for instance when the riots broke out, Mr S Nur Muhammad, a Bengali district Magistrate took swift action and got several of the offenders arrested overnight and imposed Section 144 to control the spread of violence. The local influential Muslims who found the situation inconvenient held a secret meeting and sent a joint petition to the High Command demanding S. Nur Muhammad’s immediate removal on the plea of siding with the Hindus at the cost of good Muslims. Within a couple days the transfer was made as demanded by the local influential Muslims. The new Magistrate not only withdrew Section 144 but also released the arrested goons. The results were only too predictable – attacks with a renewed fury, Hindu shops looted

58 Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry, New Delhi, 1965.
and burnt and several more Hindus murdered. Chaos reigned supreme in the town with Hindus left completely defenceless.

There were stories of good Muslims particularly in the 1964 riots. Prafulla Kumar Biswas\textsuperscript{59} had received prior information, from a Muslim friend, of a planned riot and had left Mangala Port which was the epicentre of the Khulna riots. Mohander Dhali\textsuperscript{60} of Hogalbhunia village who was proceeding to Khulna gave a vivid description of the riots at the Khulna Launch Ghat on January 3 and also had a story of a good Muslim who saved his life. Dhali was travelling in a first class cabin of a launch, with two others a Hindu doctor and Faik- Mia, a Muslim of local repute. They sensed trouble as they reached Khulna at seven in the evening. There in the dark they saw with a torch at least 50 men waiting in the Jetty with daggers in their hands waiting to kill all the Hindus who arrived in the Launch. As soon as the launch stopped, to quote Dhali, “they came up and asked all who were Muslims- men and women-to disembark. We wore lungis for it was unthinkable to move in public in Khulna in Hindu attire, and could not be distinguished if not told. We begged Faik Mia to save our lives at any cost.” He then went on to describe the havoc that went on in the launch. When they finally managed to slip out of the launch, they tried to make their way through a different route without much success. “There in the defused light,” he stated, “suddenly I saw lying all around innumerable dead bodies. I was at the point of fainting. And then came two notorious Goondas of Khulna – Ajit and Mahashin- and Faik too now lost all hope for us. Ajit and Mahasin threatened Faik to leave us in their hands and abused him filthily for his siding with us. Faik begged them to spare us for we were much known to him and took us again to the upper deck of the launch. Some rioters

\textsuperscript{59} Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry, New Delhi, 1965 Pg. 62-63

\textsuperscript{60} Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry, New Delhi, 1965 Pg. 67-68
came there and started snatching away things. I had a valuable wrist watch with me. One pulled at it. I tried feebly to protest when another cut me on the left side of the neck with a dagger. Had it not been for Faik again, who caught the daggar in motion, I would have been slain there in the spot.”

The nature of the 1962 and 1964 riots have been excellently summarised by Saibal Gupta in his statement to the Commission of Inquiry in 1965. “The lowest instincts find vent in killing and abduction and raping women. Hindus apply for police help, and not getting any, panic and fly to the jungles for safety, many being cut-off or wounded in the way or carried away to satisfy some people’s lusts. The authorities, as if caught unaware, came afterwards and assure that everything would be all right from now. In some case, when panic stricken people have all gathered in or been brought in central place on promise of safety they leave the place with the assurance that all was well. The moment their back is turned the goondas return in large numbers, surround the place, spray petrol and burn people to death, stabbing and butchering those who try to escape. This is what happened at Rajshahi in 1962 and Dacca and Khulna in 1964. The special feature of 1964 is that the non-Bengali mill hands of Jute and Cotton Mill of Narayanganj and Daulatpur took the lead and are all similarly dressed and armed – their employers having declared a paid holiday for the day on some pretext or other.”

Concluding Remarks

The refugees thus started pouring in from before Partition from the Noakhali riots. The

61 Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 10 - The Commission of Inquiry, The Exodus of Minority in East Pakistan, The Statement of the Chairman Saibal Kumar Gupta on 9.11.65, School of Women’s Studies Jadavpur University.
trauma that saw in the making of a minority in East Pakistan was thus replaced by the trauma of their making of refugees in what was meant to be the ‘right side’ of the border for them. On their arrival after a long and arduous journey across the border, those who lacked any substantial means for subsistence were housed in the camps set up by the Government. At several interception points of the border, migrants crossing over were questioned and subsequently issued interception slips to qualify them as refugees. Some refugees who were not dependent on Government assistance used these slips as proofs of their being refugees and this enabled them to claim certain other benefits. The rest, who were completely dependent on the Government aid for their lively-hood, were issued special interception slips which entitled them to admission in camps. They were asked to report at the nearest reception centres where they were once again checked and shifted to transit camps. With the introduction of the Passport system in 1952, some modifications had to be introduced. Migrants since then had to equip themselves with migration certificates, to be obtained from the Deputy High Commissioner for India at Dacca and thus the issue of interception slips at border stations had been discontinued. Migrants asking for admission to camps reported to the reception centre at Sealdah. From there they are sent to one of the four transit camps then functioning near Calcutta. The Babughat transit camp was for unattached women’s families only. Other categories of migrants were sent to the Ghushuri, Cossipore or Reliance camps. 62

The maintenance grants in these camps were meagre. In 1953 the maintenance grants included food grains and cash the total value of which amounted to a weekly grant of Rs 3 for an adult and Rs 2 for a child and a family could draw up to a maximum of Rs 60

62 This was in the early 1950s. See They Live Again: Millions Come from East Pakistan, Published by the director of Publicity, Government of West Bengal 1953.
irrespective of the number of family members. Blankets, clothing and milk to children below five years and expectant mothers were, however, provided. After a short stay they were moved to worksite and regular camps. The old infirm and the unattached women were clubbed as the permanent liability of the state and they found their way to the P.L. Camps or the Permanent Liability Camps. Women with children were also provided with shelter and other maintenance assistances in Permanent Liability Camps till the children grew up in age and attained the capability to earn their own livelihood. In January 1956 there were 128 camps with a total population 1.94 lakh persons. Another additional 34 camps also came up in the same year with 12 camps in West Bengal, 19 in Tripura, one in Charbatia (Orissa), one in Bettiah (Bihar) one reception centre in Assam. Admission and dispersal to camps indicate (illustrated in the table below) that only 25 percent of the displaced migrants from East Bengal till 1958 passed through these camps.

**Admission and dispersal from camps in West Bengal up to March 1954**

Figures in lakhs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Influx</th>
<th>No. of persons admitted to camps</th>
<th>No. Dispersed</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upto 1950</td>
<td>29.60</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-54</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.80.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-58</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Estimates Committee Report 1959-60 (96th Report, Second Loksabha)*

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63 *They Live Again: Millions Come from East Pakistan*, Published by the director of Publicity, Government of West Bengal 1953, Pg. 22.

64 Government of India, *Department of Rehabilitation- Annual Report 1956-57.*

As the migrants turned into refugees they were merely ‘numbers’ and ‘tabular data’ the government had to deal with. Ashalata Sen recalling the times when the Partition took place stated that the Congress when they accepted the British plan for Partition thought that this would hasten the transfer of power and help prevent bloodshed. This was not to be and Punjab witnessed unprecedented violence. As for Bengal she stated bloodshed was minimised.66 This was a commonplace and strong impression that Bengal was spared of violence. Fictional literature as well as historical analysis has underplayed the occurrence of violence in Bengal. Joya Chatterjee too subscribes to the view that it was the fear of physical attack than violence itself that prompted migration from East Bengal. She pointed out that ‘people left East Bengal for a variety of reasons, not always because of an immediate threat of violence.’ Admitting the violence that took place in Noakhali and thereafter, Chattejee remarks, ‘the decision whether to stay on in Pakistan or to leave for India hinged on several factors. The fear of physical attack was of course one important consideration. In contrast to the Punjab, where post partition killings in some places assumed genocidal proportions and drove minorities out in huge tidal waves, in East Bengal the violence was more contained.’67

It has been one of the aims of this chapter to demonstrate that violence was an integral part of the making of the boundary between East and West Bengal. Violence on one side of the border had its repercussion on the other side. There were notions about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ side of the border and accordingly victims and perpetrators of violence emerged. This chapter engaged in the forms of violence that were seen in East Pakistan. The minorities, mostly, Hindus, were required to prove their loyalty and Muslims had to prove

66 Oral transcript of Ashalata Sen, Acc. 331 (NMML).
they were more Muslims. It goes without saying however that the fact that the victims were largely Hindus whereas the perpetrators largely Muslims was a result of high politics that decided upon the territorial division. It was through this violence, retaliatory violence and fear of more violence that newer categories such as minorities, migrants and refugees gained significance, influenced and even determined state politics. Noakhali occurred before Partition and due to intense activity of Gandhi and his presence in Noakhali led to a temporary stoppage of violence. But there was undoubtedly a general sense of insecurity and a fear of violence with the coming of the Partition. This chapter demonstrates that ever since the Noakhali days, through the Partition and the following decades there was no dearth of violence. But because many Hindus stayed on as minorities they were faced with alternate periods of ‘riots’ and ‘riot like conditions’ and were driven away by ‘violence’ or ‘the fear of violence’ over the decades. The significant difference between Bengal and Punjab Partition was that migrations in Bengal were a prolonged process and as such minority experience in East Bengal had both active and passive phases.

Yet what has surprised generations of historians is the silence over the violence in East Bengal particularly in literature. Silences in recollections over issues of violence on women are linked to masculinity and honour of a community. This is common in all episodes of communal violence and can be explained. As for Bengal, there is certainly no lack of contemporary non fictional accounts of violence. Violence has also been recounted in oral accounts or through letters to of enquiry committees or in reports of activists. Thus these accounts were voices of victims and activists who speak of violence and thus admit its occurrence. With such a strong presence of accounts of violence in contemporary recollections, silences in contemporary fictional literature are rather surprising. There is of course a difference between fiction and oral recollection to enquiry committees. The later
was either victim accounts of what they faced personally as individuals, families or communities or were what the activists, British Government officials or Congress office bearers saw in their survey. They were mostly haphazard immediate recollections of what was witnessed mostly in forms of reports. Fiction on the other hand was a planned representation of the Partition – accounts that were to be passed on to the future generation. In this sense fictions performed a certain normative service in which accounts of such brutal violence was best forgotten and not worth passing on to the future progeny. Gyan Pandey speaking on the mentality of Partition survivors wrote that they often felt that incidents of violence were not worth being retold to the future generation as the survivors of these violence thought, “What is the point in telling today’s children about these things?” or they felt that, “All that has nothing to do with their lives or their problems”\(^68\). However this cannot explain fully the silences in Bengali fiction on issues of violence especially if one takes into account the fact that violence has been the central theme of fictional literature on Partition in Punjab. It would be indeed naïve to suggest that Bengal didn’t produce litterateurs like Manto or Intizar Hussain. Bengal in both sides of the border had a rich tradition of fictional literature. This literature however remained occupied itself more with nostalgia than violence.

I would like to suggest that Bengali intellectual tradition since the First Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi days of 1905 took great pride in the unity of Bengali community, Hindu-Muslim Unity etc., though there have been a lot of writings on the inability of the Swadeshi Movement with its Hindu symbolisms to reach the Muslim masses. The Bengali intellectuals were perhaps a community in denial. They could not accept the fact that the unity of Bengalis, the inter-communal harmony they fought for and took pride in was

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proved erroneous in less than fifty years not by mere high-handed political decision to Partition, not by the communal few who were responsible in the foundation of the League in 1906 but by the common people in the streets who indulged in communal frenzy dividing the Bengalees into ‘us’ and the ‘other’. This was perhaps what fictional representations considered to be episodes best forgotten and kept harping on the nostalgia of the golden days that was disrupted by the ‘political few’ who decided to Partition and the ‘communal other’ who instigated migration.

There have also been recent writings on the nature of Partition violence, its difference with pre partition violence, the element of spontaneity in such episodes of violence etc. Partition violence it is held was a pre-planned violence that occurred in connivance with the state machinery aimed at ethnic cleansing. This chapter tries to show that pre-planned violence with state connivance that led to large-scale migration is what occurred in East Pakistan. It is important to lay stress on this. This is not motivated by any designs to expose the nature of a communal Pakistan or hold it guilty for some crime it committed. This kind of violence prompting migration has been the case wherever communal and ethnic clashes were linked to Partition. I stress on preplanned partition violence in East Bengal for any denial of this would imply that the migrants crossed over out of choice and hence could return to East Pakistan – and hence were not justified in their claims at rehabilitation in this side of Bengal. Stripping violence out of Partition migration from East Bengal trivialises it and relieves the Governments in India of its responsibility of accommodating for the migrants. I have thus tried to argue that the migrants were not Saranarthis (refuge seekers) begging for shelter or Jabardokholkaris (forcible occupiers, squatters) who were guilty of forcible occupation of territories but udvastus (uprooted) who were forced by violence to cross over.