

A Review Study of Refugee Problem in Bengal

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Abstract: *There is darkness under the lamp. A real example of this proverb can be seen in the case of Bengal. It was prevalent about Bengal, "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow", this astonishing image of Bengal even became helpless when Radcliffe Border broke the hearts of Bengal and our Bengalis at a time when India was on the verge of introducing itself as an independent country in front of the world. The border drawn over Bengal and Punjab based on religion has left many Hindu and Muslim families homeless, identity less overnight. As a result, along with independence and partition, the word 'refugee' or 'displaced' entered the history of India as well as Bengal. Just as many Hindu families left East Pakistan and came to West Bengal due to partition, so did many Muslim families leave West Bengal and migrate to East Pakistan. The State Archive can be used to search for real information and truth about the struggle of refugees for the study of refugee issues in Bengal, and the interview method is also quite effective. The collection of Oral History of many refugee families came from East Bengal who took shelter in West Bengal, could play an important role in this regard. Also, one more topic worth mentioning in this study is the perspective. The gender Approach has emerged in the research nowadays. The tendency to look at any topic from a feminist point of view has nurtured. In this case, many of the refugee women coming to a different country should be considered sensitively keeping in mind their helplessness, their struggle to achieve security and meet their basic needs. With all this in mind, the methodology will be determined in the present study.*

Key Words: Cyril Radcliffe, Partition, Bengal, Punjab, Refugee, Displaced, Dandakaranya, Relief, Rehabilitation, Dol, Methodology, Gender Approach, Lahore, Marginal Men.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 1947, after a long period of rule and exploitation in the whole of India, the filth of the British was gone forever, and as a result of which India was broken up and a new state Pakistan was created. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the chief commissioner, quickly broke up Bengal and demarcated the boundary between East Bengal and West Bengal.¹ This is rapid division of boundaries resulted in complications in both the Bengal. Because the country was divided based on religion and Sir Radcliffe also divided Bengal based on religion.² He only saw which Police station had a Hindu majority or which had a Muslim majority. On that basis, the Hindu-majority police station was drawn in West Bengal and the Muslim-majority police station was drawn in East Bengal. The district-based division was of no importance to him. As a result, the Indo-Pakistani border was drawn over the districts of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Nadia, etc. in West Bengal. Sir Radcliffe Commission's Police station-based division has led to the breakdown of long-standing good relations between the people of both Bengals.

With the partition of India, the partition of Bengal and Panjab also became inevitable. A miserable way of life began to descend into lives of the common people of these two states. Two images emerged in India in 1947. There was a tidal wave of the joyous celebration of independence by breaking the shackles of two hundred years of subjugation in contrary to it; on the other hand, there were countless, homeless children, men and women screaming desperately with broken hearts. Just as the partition of this country resulted in the influx of people from West Punjab and East Bengal to West Bengal and East Punjab, so innumerable people migrated from West Bengal and East Punjab to West Punjab and East Bengal. As a result, the words '**Refugee**' or '**Displaced**' became part of Indian history. The refugee problem in Punjab was solved within a certain period (1947-1950) and it was possible to solve this problem through the exchange of population, but the influx of refugees to West Bengal after the Noakhali communal riots in 1947 continues till now. The Hyderabad operation in 1947, the massive communal attacks in Barisal and Khulna in 1950, the introduction of the passport system in 1952, etc., kept the trend of asylum seekers unchanged in the fifties and sixties. During 1954, 1962, etc., the number of refugee arrivals from East Bengal increased further.³

1.1 DEFINATION OF REFUGEE:

"A person forced to flee their country because of violence or persecution."

By-The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁴

“A person who has been forced to leave their country or home, because there is a war or for political, religious or social reasons.”

By- oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary

From the above definition we understand that refugees are forced to leave their homes, countries for any special reason, be it for political reasons, social reasons, and communal reasons. We see a similar situation in Bengal and Punjab.

1.2 TYPES OF REFUGEE:

Most of the refugees from East Bengal are scattered in Kolkata and its surrounding districts. Besides, a large number of refugees had taken refuge outside Kolkata in Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and other districts. There were three classes of people who took refuge in and around Calcutta. First, one group of people sought refuge in self-sufficiency and managed to earn a living. Second, those who occupied land and houses were also under the protection of the government. Third, those who had nothing lost everything and were completely dependent on the government. The situation of those who were seeking government assistance became like life and death seems to be equal.⁵ Apart from those who were helpless, many refugees began to return to normalcy by forcible rehabilitation. The rest have to go to Dandakaranya outside West Bengal or taste death in government asylum camps.

Later, the refugees went through many struggles to rehabilitate themselves. In this struggle came up the “UNITED CENTRAL REFUGEE COUNCIL” (UCRC). The movement of these refugees was further strengthened by the Communist Party of India. Later, the refugees started taking advantage of opportunities, relief, rehabilitation, etc. in the government camps. Then they started getting the government jobs, dols, clothes, vocational training etc. With the help of government, land for living, agricultural land, loans for small artisans, many government projects, schools, technical training centres etc.⁶

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

For this study we are considering Interview method, Archival study, study of Oral sources and use of secondary sources as the methodology. Our social system has been patriarchal since ancient times. As a result, an important aspect of the social structure involved in the formation of the state is neglected. If we perceive society in a very deep way, then we can see both men and women are important elements of society. Both of them used to play important role to form a society. So at present Women Studies has come up in gender-based research, which has brought a new spectacle to historians in the style of historiography.⁷ Through which we can have a glance at the history that depicted their glorious role in forming today’s society which has been neglected.

There may also be an attempt to follow specific procedures for discussing the impact of partition and refugees in post-independence West Bengal. Before discussing methodology in terms of topics, I would like to draw your attention to several books that have raised the subject of research. One of those books is that Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty, in his remarkable book - 'Marginal Men', has thoroughly reviewed the problems of refugees in the post-independence period of India.⁸ He mentioned that the minority Hindu classes in East Bengal have been affected in many ways by the riots. That is why they were forced to move to West Bengal to protect the dignity and safety of themselves and their women. He also pointed out the mental torture inflicted on them in East Bengal and the atrocities perpetrated on women by the rioters with the help of the administration. The author also mentioned in his book how they got entangled in more complex problems even after coming to West Bengal. Many of those who left East Bengal had to take refuge in government asylum camps. But their shelter did not become comfortable at all. They did not get any employment, accommodation, education, etc. for many years. For which they had to fight for a long time. When their lives in the government asylum camps became miserable, they started forcibly establishing colonies in various places in and around Kolkata. Later, through the establishment of the United Central Refugee Council, Nikhila Banga Bastuhara Karmaparishad, etc., legalization of their land occupation, rehabilitation, anti-refugee eviction, etc. played an important role in changing their situation. Again, using the refugee problem as a tool, the Left gradually entered the politics of West Bengal.

It was these leftists who formed a massive anti-government movement. Another notable book is Hirenmoy Bandopadhyay's 'Udbastu'(Refugee). In his career he was a senior government official.⁹ He witnessed everything from the partition of the country to the arrival of refugees and their problems. He was the official representative of most of the large colony governments that had to be formed for the refugees in West Bengal such as Dhubulia, Kupers, Ranaghat etc. The influx of refugees at different times posed a great challenge to the then West Bengal government. Due to which the government was forced to build Dandakaranya outside West Bengal. In another well-known book, “The Spoils of

Partition” by Joya Chatterji, the author has very logically highlighted the problems of the refugees and the rise of the Left front in the politics of West Bengal.¹⁰ Not only the arrival of refugees, but she also showed that many Muslims from the Nadia district of West Bengal had to leave the country. It also provides detailed discussions on how relief, rehabilitation, livelihood, education, etc. are provided to the refugees through many struggles.

The official archives can be very helpful for current research to move forward. Valuable material stored in State archives can help the researcher to know the facts related to this matter. These elements include letters, reports, contemporary papers, debates in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly kept in the Government Archives. If we have a look at the correspondence, it can be seen that in the books of Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty, Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, etc., there are references to many letters written by the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy to the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. According to Dr Roy's letters, the massive influx of refugees from East Bengal to West Bengal created a major problem in the state. An example of this is what Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy wrote to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on December 1, 1948, that- "You are under the impression that your government has given us a huge grant for 'relief and rehabilitation'. Are you aware that the amount of grant received from your government for this purpose for two years in 1947-49 and 1949-50 is a little more than three crore rupees and the remaining five crore rupees has been given as a loan? Don't you realize that the amount of money spent on refugees is insignificant compared to that of West Pakistan? Because with the help of this 26 lakh refugee people can be given only twenty rupees per head for two years!..."¹¹ (Translated from Bengali book). Besides, various government and private reports can be used, e.g. Census of India, Office of the Refugee Rehabilitation Commissioner, Estimate Committee, Relief and Rehabilitation Development to the District Magistrate, Ashok Mitra's Report, A Handbook of Government Policy and Plans for the Resettlement of Refugee Population (WB) etc. Joya Chatterjee, in her book 'The Spoils of Partition', with the help of Census of India's Reports, has beautifully described how Muslims have been living in Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Medinipur, Hooghly, Howrah, 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts had left India after partition.¹² She further mentioned that a large number of Muslims had left Nadia and Calcutta. We can also go through contemporary Newspapers. Newspapers serve as a link between the government and the people. Therefore, the periodicals contributed a lot to the writing of history. For example, Anand Bazar Patrika, Amrit Bazar Patrika, The Statesman, Times of India, Hindustan Standard, The Nation etc. can make important contributions in the field of research. Joya Chatterji quotes The Statesman in her book, "The Spoils of Partition". She highlighted the plight of refugees in Nadia, Murshidabad, West Dinajpur and Kochbihar. Moreover, her writings show that in 1948 and 1971, about one million refugees took refuge in these four districts. She also mentioned the impact it had on the economy.¹³

Another important tool of the methodology is the interview. The interview is made up of a series of oral questions. Through which the interviewer can collect the necessary information directly from the interviewee. The interview is much more flexible than other methods and allows for adjustment and interpretation depending on the situation. The interview method can be very valuable to a skilled interviewer for gathering information compared to other methods. That is why the interview method can play an important role in gathering valuable information in this regard. With the arrival of refugees from East Bengal, the problems faced by them with the local people can be found out through this interview method. For example, Urvashi Butalia in her book "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", gave an interview on the life of Damayanti Sahagal before and after the partition of the country.¹⁴ Damayanti Sahagal was a resident of Lahore, Pakistan. Her uncle was the commissioner of Lahore province. Damayanti Sahagal has described the riots in Amritsar in front of the writer. There are details of how people were killed by stopping the train through her interview. She also highlighted the long struggle to leave Pakistan. There are several refugees in many parts of West Bengal. I have some personal experience with refugees. The sons of those refugee families work in the garage at their tender age. Whose age is about 10-12 year. They have to do work in those garages only because of their basic needs. After the partition of the country, they came to this country as refugees, so many years have passed, but still, their economic situation has not improved. After the launch of NRC (National Register of Citizenship of India) in Assam a couple of months ago, its panic spread in West Bengal as well. Fearing the NRC, the people of the area gave up all work and engaged themselves day and night to collect old documents. Today, the shadow of that deep terror of displacement haunts their next-generation of all those people who was uprooted and emigrated from the country in 1947 again through the NRC.

The present study relates to the partition of the country in 1947. As a result of the division of the country based on religion, many people had to migrate from the country. They had to leave the birth-place, house, furniture, etc. all belongings. Observations and data collection of historical evidence, such as the remains of a house or a shop or used items, can now serve as an element of historiography, which is an interesting subject for history readers. This methodology of history can also become especially important in the context of the research.

Recently, a new approach has emerged in the field of research with methodology. Since the structure of our society is patriarchal, there is an impression of this patriarchal structure in all cases. The same footprints are followed

even in the case of historiography. Our society is made up of both men and women. The role of both men and women in the formation of society is undeniable. The history of a state is usually written from a nationalist or colonial point of view. But in the present age, when it comes to writing history, researchers demand to consider the Gender Approach when reviewing an event by turning the pages of history with a different angle. One of the questions that can be raised in this connection is what thousands of women, with their children in their laps, had to endure in the throes of a completely uncertain future after emigrating from their homeland. That is, what effect does the refugee problem have on their daily lives? How difficult was it to fight for their lives in this crisis? In this situation, they think that the issue of their security and resources was taken into consideration. Mentally and physically, this woman class has been the most persecuted in various riots before or after the partition.¹⁵ In this context, it can be mentioned how the women of Myanmar became prey to the greedy eyes of the administration on the refugee problem. They are constantly being physically and mentally abused, they have been raped, their husbands and children's lives have been taken away in front of their eyes. We are in the age of Gender Sensitization, so if we expand our vision a little, we will be able to know these neglected histories in a new way and these issues will be better understood. Oral Source will serve as a significant component of this research. Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty also mentioned how young women were trafficked from Sealdah station to different parts of the country. Gender Approach will be able to present the true history of the subjects and an unseen chapter will be unveiled.

3. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the use of State archives and interviews may be the appropriate methodology mainly for this topic. However, the remnants of emigration during partition, various interviews taken earlier, various journals, speeches and poetry, literature, songs, dramas, films, whatever includes the subject all are parts of the research work.

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