

## **A SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL PROBLEM IN WEST BENGAL: REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS**

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**ABSTRACT:**The aftermath of India's partition remains a mystery. What were the true causes of India's partition? Is it possible that it was inevitable? Who was/were accountable for the situation? What are the repercussions? What kind of harm was done, and how many people were killed? What's the latest on the Partition crisis? These are some of the most pressing questions that need to be answered. Research into the reasons of India's Partition and "high politics" underlying it has been a major focus of several academic publications. Even though West Bengal was one of India's tiniest states at the time, it saw one of the world's largest influxes of refugees and migrants ever recorded in history. As a result, it has been suggested that, Bengal has not gotten the scholarly attention it deserves. Many people in the post-independence generations "want to obliterate the memories of a sad and brutal past." This might be one explanation. As a result, they turned to silence as their primary psychological weapon. In contrast, the "pull" component is critical when it comes to "Migrants," who are attracted to new regions by the work opportunities, high incomes, and educational and cultural acuity necessary for self-prosperity.

**KEYWORDS:** Refugees and Migrants, Problems, West Bengal, Illiterate, Humanitarian, Descendants

### **INTRODUCTION:**

India and Pakistan's 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent caused one of the world's most significant migrant crises. It was Punjab in the north-west and Bengal on the eastern border that were most affected by these migratory issues. Two million people died and close to fifteen million were displaced. Despite the high level of violence along the western border, the situation was stabilised within a year or two. However, unlike the large population exchange in 1947-48 and until 1950 on the western border, the flood of refugees on the eastern border of India persisted for many years following partition and continues in various forms [1]. As a result, the movement of people from East to West, from Bangladesh to West Bengal, is still taking place. The Bengali Hindu exodus from East Pakistan is an ongoing phenomenon, however some factors have caused the exodus from East to pick up speed.

The Hindus of East Pakistan have been subjected to a number of hardships, including the desecration of their faith, the demeaning of the elderly and women, and the forced removal of cows, goats, and even crops. There is a glimmer of hope for the Hindus that if they could invade West Bengal, not only would they be able to live with honour but they would also be able to provide their children with an education and a place to settle down.

"The fourth pillar," or the "core pillar," of humanitarian assistance is education, along with food, shelter, and medical care. It is important to remember that children are both fragile and dependent and develop physically, cognitively, and emotionally throughout their lives. Disruption in families, community structures, and the physical and mental health of refugee children are profoundly impacted by the quick onset and violence of calamities and the devastation they cause.

There had been hopes for political recognition and autonomy within the state of Bangladesh after the liberation of Bangladesh, but such hopes were dashed. In 1997, a peace pact was signed between the indigenous people and the government after 22 years of conflict. A considerable number of CHT residents were forced to flee to eastern India, particularly Tripura, as a result of the unrest.

An agreement to return the refugees was established in 1987 between India and Bangladesh; however, the Indian government halted the scheduled repatriation in response to multiple appeals from international human rights groups.

### **THE PARTITION OF INDIA 1947:**

As a result of Sir Cyril Radcliff's work as the head of the Bengal border committee in 1947, Nandy claims that the lives of the people of undivided Bengal, as well as Assam, have changed forever. East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was a major source of migration to India in the 1940s and early 1950s because of the division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan on the basis of religion [2].

In order to segregate Muslim and non-Muslim portions of Pakistan and India, the two countries were divided by a border that was not meant to separate Hindus and Muslims from one other. The issues that occurred as a result of the division persist to this day—the emergence of two nations — India and Pakistan.

The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League's involvement in the riots was the primary cause of the Hindu-Muslim riots during partition. Large-scale migration occurred as a result of the disturbances on both sides [4].

In his Preamble Note to the report on the 1951 Census, R. P. Vaghaiwalla, the Assam Census superintendent, noted that the largest immigration into Assam during the 1940s was the flood of Hindu refugees from Pakistan. The gradual and ongoing flight of Hindus from Pakistan to Assam began after the Noakhali riots in East Pakistan in October 1946 and the partition of India in 1947. Cachar, which is located close to Sylhet, was the region that received the most refugees because of its closeness [5]. Cachar had 93,177 migrant residents in 1951, according to the census. 44,967 refugees arrived at Goalpara, followed by Kamrup (42,871), Nowgong (386), Darrang (188), Sibsagar (74), and Lakhimpur (73). With 5,990 arrivals in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills division, followed by 5,072 arrivals in Garo Hills and United Mikir as well as North Cachar Hills (1,943).

There were 24,600 displaced households in Assam in July 1949, according to the census of 1951. This equates to around 114,500 people (Census, 1951) [3]. Despite the fact that these are official numbers, many people may not have registered as refugees for fear of deportation. Others may have entered Assam illegally via less obvious means.

The flight of a significant number of Hindu as well as other minority populations from East Bengal was attributed to a variety of incidences (or circumstances). The atrocities against the Santhals in Rajshahi & East Dinajpur in February and March 1950, as well as the subjugation of the Hajongs in North Mymensingh in 1949, are just a few instances. 500,000 Hindus were forced to flee their homes in East Pakistan, including the country's capital of Dacca (now spelled Dhaka), due to reports of horrific acts of violence. They sought refuge in either West Bengal and Assam, depending on which state was the closest. Vaghaiwalla claims that more than half of the Assamese migrants arrived in 1950. From 1946-1951, the Indian Census

Authority claimed that Assamese refugees had arrived in the state on an annual basis. Refugees from other countries (such as West Pakistan and unspecified regions in India) were recorded as a lump sum for the whole time because the overall number of refugees was tiny.

### **INDIAN-PAKISTAN WAR ATROCITIES OF 1964-1965 AND 1965:**

Assault, abduction, theft, and atrocities on women were commonplace during anti-Hindu riots in East Pakistan in 1964. In North East India and West Bengal, these people found a new home. According to Hazarika's claims, there were anti-Muslim backlashes in certain sections of India, and they even stretched to the northern Indian state of Bihar.

The unrest was so bad in both nations that the Indian and Pakistani interior ministers met in New Delhi to discuss it. The expulsion of East Pakistani migrants in Assam was in full force at the same time. Former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pleaded with Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha to limit or stop deportations, but the latter refused, claiming that halting deportations would irrevocably alter Assam's population and culture. The Delhi discussions broke down as a result of this. Fortunately, the bloodshed soon came to an end.

When India and Pakistan went to war in 1965 over Kashmir, a huge number of East Pakistani refugees fled to India. Assam and West Bengal, two neighbouring Indian states, were the obvious destinations for these migrants. In addition, they had the benefit of cultural and language affinities to lean on. A million individuals, 920,000 of them Hindus, are said to have crossed the border illegally into India as a result of the pogroms in East Pakistan in the late 1960s and the 1965 war.

Nearly immediately following Bangladesh's victory in World War II, Pakistan passed the Enemy Property Act, which is today known as Bangladesh's Vested Property Act (VPA). It grants the state the authority to seize the property of minority deemed to be enemies of the state under this law. It had a severe impact on Hindus, leading to widespread exodus.

### **THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR AND THE INDIAN-PAKISTAN WAR OF 1971:**

As a result of West Pakistan's dominant political power structure, which aimed to subjugate East Pakistan to the West, the Bengali language and culture were systematically suppressed in the East. As a result of their belief that they were being ignored and discriminated against by West Pakistan, the people of East Pakistan were disgruntled with the central administration. Angry and disillusioned, they formed an alliance with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League, which went on to become Bangladesh's first prime minister. Even though Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League party achieved a landslide victory in the elections, the country's political elite resisted appointing a prime minister from East Pakistan. The East Pakistan wing of Pakistan's civil war, which began in 1970, demanded more autonomy as a result. As a result of this demand, civil upheaval erupted in Pakistan, and the country's unity was destroyed. About one to 2 million people in Bangladesh were slain and 200,000 girls and women were ill-treated as a result of the civil war in East Pakistan, according to Samantha Power's book, 'A Problem from Hell.' At the time, this was the world's greatest refugee population.

India's administration had to deal with both security concerns and the influx of East Pakistani migrants. A refugee camp was built in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura by May of 1971.

In the months of March to December of 1971, during the Bangladesh war, the total number of refugee camps in various Indian states is shown in Table-1. According to the government's report to Parliament in June 1971, India was sheltering 4.7 million refugees; by the middle of July that year, there were 1,000 camps housing 6.9 million refugees.

State	No. of Camps	No. of Refugees	No. of Refugees on their own	Total
West Bengal	492	4,849,786	2,386,130	7,235,916
Tripura	276	834,098	547,151	1,381,249
Meghalaya	17	591,520	76,466	667,986
Assam	28	255,642	91,913	347,555
Bihar	8	36,732	-	36,732
Madhya Pradesh	3	219,218	-	219,218
Uttar Pradesh	1	10,619	-	10,619
<b>Total</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>6,797,615</b>	<b>3,101,660</b>	<b>9,899,275</b>

Table 1: Refugees in India from 1970 to 1972.

As a result of the independence of Bangladesh as well as the India-Pakistan conflict in 1971, large numbers of people fled to India's various states. According to New York Times, the overall number of refugees in Assam was 147.5 thousand, however the Bangladesh Genocide Archive reported that more than 300 thousand people were fleeing the country. Similarly, there is a large disparity in West Bengal. In general, the New York Times projections are less.

India went to great lengths to guarantee that Bangladesh, also known as East Pakistan, had the right to self-determination. During a two-week battle in December 1971, India and the Mukti Bahini (liberation fighters) destroyed Pakistan's army, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the group's leader, was freed from a Pakistani jail. In 1974, Pakistan also recognised Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state.

After Bangladesh was established in December 1971, the issue of returning refugees emerged. Before Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's demand for an independent Bangladesh on March 25, 1971, all refugees who arrived in India before that date were permitted to stay in India under the Indira-Mujib Accord of 1972. About 80 percent of the total refugees returned to Bangladesh as a result of this. After returning to their new nation, several refugees discovered that someone had already moved into their homes. They had no choice but to return to India after a year or two.

The Indira-Mujib deal could not be executed since there was no effective mechanism in place to prevent future infiltration, and as a result, a significant migration of Bangladeshis into various states throughout the country continued unabatedly. Despite the Union Ministers' occasional expressions of worry, no one in authority ever made a concerted attempt to stop the infiltration.

**WEST BENGAL HAS A SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, & POLITICAL PROBLEM:**

People who have been forced to leave their homeland, East Bengal, as a result of the Partition or 'deshbhag' or "division of the homeland" have been referred to as "refugees," "displaced persons," "displaced migrants," and "displaced Hindus" in this proposed thesis. In addition,

academics have referred to them as "Udvastu" and "sharanarthy." It means "foundation" in Sanskrit, while "ut" means "out of." Udvastu, like the name "Vastuhara," suggests both a loss of home and a larger sense of "homeland." "Amra kara?" ("Who are we?" "Refugees") was chanted by the displaced people themselves, who claimed to be refugees. Indian authorities labelled individuals who crossed the border from late 1946 to mid-1948 as "refugees" and later as "displaced," but their underlying assumption was that the situation was only going to last a short time. Hindu minority will return to East Pakistan as soon as things eased in East Bengal after using the phrases "refugee," "displaced," and "displaced." It is possible that the label "refugees" was used as an attempt to distinguish them from Indian citizens. Refugees and displaced individuals from East Pakistan that entered the Indian state of West Bengal between 1946 and 1971 were afterwards referred to as either the "Old Migrants" or the "New Migrants" since they arrived between January 1, 1964, and March 25, 1971. If they chose to do so outside of West Bengal, the "New Migrants" were deemed qualified for rehabilitation benefits. "In-Between Migrants," on the other hand, individuals who entered West Bengal between 1958 and 1964, were denied any government support for rehabilitation. People from other parts of India, such as Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet, as well as those from Bangladesh, have all been referred to as "Migrants" since they sought refuge in West Bengal at various periods and for a variety of reasons. It is also worth noting that the Bangladeshi ethnic minorities that fled to West Bengal after 1971 did so of their own volition and were not forced to flee persecution in the wake of communal unrest. They travel to Bangladesh in order to escape the squalor and deprivation they face back home. The early 1990s saw an increase in the number of East Bengali Hindu victims of sectarian tensions following the demolition of the mediaeval Babri Mosque by Hindu nationalists in India, as noted by Chatterjee. „Border watchers seem mutually decided that displacement in the 1980s was due to the economic privation in Bangladesh and also included Hindus and Muslims.

Furthermore, the geographical sections of Bengal, as a whole, are referred to as "western Bengal" and "eastern Bengal," respectively. However, as a result of Partition in 1947, the states of West Bengal and East Bengal were formed as political entities [6]. From East Bengal, East Pakistan was formed in 1956, and Bangladesh was established in 1971. To avoid confusion, the eastern half of Bengal has been referred to as both "East Bengal" and "East Pakistan" as well as "Bangladesh" throughout the following chapters. It's safe to say that the twentieth century was one of tremendous migration. In order to construct nation states based on "narrow idealism," individuals have had to be uprooted from their homes across the world. The influence of the international refugee regime on South Asia, on the other hand, has been rather minor, according to Mandal. However, with the Partition of British India in 1947, the issue of mass migration exploded across the Indian subcontinent, resulting in the largest collective exodus in human history. Since 1947, an estimated 35-40 million individuals in South Asia have crossed international borders.

In truth, the host nations are deeply concerned about the issue of forced migration. One hand, it had a significant impact on regional security; on the other hand, it had a disruptive effect on global harmony. A violation of human rights affects every single refugee or displaced individual, as the saying goes. Every year, a slew of fresh events throughout the globe give rise to the refugee crisis, and because many of these events look intractable, the world's refugee population continues to grow [7]. The situation in South Asia has deteriorated to an even worse degree. Although the number of refugees in the globe has decreased slightly as a consequence of UNHCR and the international community's repatriation efforts, the number of refugees continues to rise.

However, West Bengal's "Refugee and Migration Problem" was primarily caused by its Partition in 1947 [8]. British control and its strategy of "Divide and Rule" contributed significantly to the rise of separatist movements in Indian nationalist politics, but only because of the country's socioeconomic and political circumstances. As the Indian people began to unite as a country, communalism was utilised to undermine and weaken the movement. As a result of the operations of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, two opposing communal tendencies were developed that set the way for building a communal tension and ultimately a communal violence on the eve of India's independence. Partition Plan or June 3rd Plan was announced by Mountbatten to stop the widespread communal unrest and murder in the country. However, the problem of religious tensions and rioting on both sides of the border was not resolved by the partition of British India and Bengal, which gave rise to a new crisis known as the "Refugee and Migration Problem."

In addition to filling a gap in the existing literature on refugee & migration studies in West Bengal, the proposed research aims to demonstrate how refugees and migrants were eventually integrated into West Bengal's political system and, above all, how refugees and migrants had a significant impact on the state's societal fabric [9].

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The proposed research work is significant from a number of perspectives: on the one hand, it attempts to fill a gap in the existing literature relating to refugee and migration studies in West Bengal; on the other hand, it attempts to highlight how the refugees and migrants were eventually accommodated in the political class of West Bengal; and, above all, it attempts to highlight how the refugees and migrants had created a monumental impact on the society, economy, and polity of West Bengal.

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