

THE FIRST STAGE OF MIGRATION: THE REFUGEES OF NADIA DISTRICT AFTER PARTITION

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ABSTRACT

India became free on the 15th day of August, 1947 and simultaneously, a large part of the Muslim-inhabited region of India was seceded and a separate state came into being PAKISTAN by name. In connection with the afforested secession, two provinces of India Bengal and Punjab were divided. East Bengal and west Punjab were included in Pakistan and west Bengal and East Punjab remained in India. The minorities Hindus of East Bengal become refugees and they had been coming to the different adjoining border provinces of India for having shelter since the partition of India. The majority of the refugees of East Bengal took shelter in West Bengal. In view of the numerical facts of rehabilitated refugees, Nadia district won the remarkable position in all the district of West Bengal.

KEYWORDS: East Bengal, Minority, Refugee Rehabilitation, Refugee Camp, Cooper's Camp, Chinese Mission Camp, Rupashree Pally, Dhubulia Camp, Taherpur, Benapole, Petrapole, Relief, Rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

*"Teler Shishi Bhanglo Bolee Khukur Poree Rag Koro,
Tomra Je Sob Buro Khoka Bharat Bhenge Bhag Koro,
Tar Bela?"*

[You become angry with a little girl for having been broken the oil bottle by her,

What sort of punishment should be inflicted when mothered boys like you have partitioned India?"]

The meanings of the said well-spread lines of a Bengali poem composed by Annada Shankar Roy are simultaneously profound and significant. Especially, in the later period of the partition of India, the subject of the partition of the country to the minority Hindu community of East Bengal is very heart-trending. The control idea of the author-quoted lines of the poem have distinctly highlighted a truth that the then decision of the partition of India was as like as the indiscriminate activity of an unreasonable child. Perhaps the tremendous aftermath of the above noted decision failed to touch the hearts of the leader, but it made the lives of the minority community of East Bengal unbearable. In termination of the after-said decision, the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Christians belonged to the minority community of East Bengal had been coming to the border provinces of eastern India for the sake of their lives and religions since the partition of India. Immediately after the independence in 1947, the minority Hindu community has been cut down by the root from East Bengal i.e., the then East Pakistan began to take shelter in West Bengal like the course of water of a sea. The current

of the advent of refugees had been glowing for at least last twenty five years. The majority of the refugees coming from East Bengal took shelter in West Bengal. The pressure for rehabilitation of the refugees of the different district near the eastern border of West Bengal was the greatest of all the districts. The district of Nadia was one of those border districts.

Once upon a time before partition, the population of Nadia district began to decrease gradually due to many causes. But after partition, a large flow of refugees exhilarate the district.¹ The lives of the refugees of Nadia district were full of adversities in various ways. Their lives were devoured by misery at several times and in various ways. Different types of incidents like to be victim of communal riot in East Bengal, to flee the homestead loud, to Duffer from indescribable miseries on the way to the border, to pass the days through starvation at the station and the footpath arriving in West Bengal, to become prey to distress taking shelter at the compos of Nadia district, to bear with the shocking deaths of relatives or deaths of very near and dear ones before the eyes, to become poverty-stricken, to pace the hardship and so on reduced the means of livelihood of the refugees of Nadia district to an indescribable stale of calamity. The wounds of partition affected this district so much deeply which other districts did not face.²

Penniless, poor people cut down by the root arrived in West Bengal in files, leaving East Bengal and Vacant godown, ground floor of deserted building, shall of steamer, footpath and different nasty place became the temporary resort of the refugees. Many refugees chanced to get shelter at the footpaths near the Howra and Sealdah Railway station, a special reception. Many refugees were lucky to shelter at the jute godowns of Babooghat, Cassipur, Ghushuri, Ultadanga and so on. The refugees who were selected to be rehabilitated elsewhere by the Govt. were sent to the different camps. Dhubulia camp of Nadia district, Cooper's Camp of Ranaghat, Chandmani Camp, Chamta Camp etc. were regarded as prominent camps. In all of the afore noted camps, Dhubulia camp was the largest refugee camp of all the camps in West Bengal. The Dhubulia Camp had sheltering capacity of 60,000 refugees. The Cooper's Camp of Ranaghat was next to the Dhubulia Camp in size. Most of the refugees of the said camp were rehabilitated onside West Bengal.

The said refugee camps of Nadia district faced different problems soon. Though a large number of refugees were sheltered at those camps, the sufficient infrastructure of the above-noted camps was very scanty and quite unfit for living. The supply of want and ration was very insufficient. There were unhygienic habitations in those camps. Many dreadful diseases broke out after the use of those unhygienic habitations for some days. The death rate of refugees living in those camps on account of various diseases began to increase by leaps and bounds. Above all, the immoral activities of the dishonest Govt. officers entrusted to conduct the camp made the deplorable condition of the encamped refugees more complex. Most of the refugees present in Nadia district were the villagers of East Bengal. Those refugees were the inhabitants of the remote villages of East Bengal and therefore, most of the cities of East Bengal including Dacca were unknown to them. Despite the fact they had to surpass unknown long route after being homeless and at last they arrived at the unknown destination of Nadia district going beyond the border of India. Being cut-down by the root from East Bengal most of the refugee families had to suffer seven hardships and gather pathetic experience during their arrival at Nadia district. Most of the refugee families were have-nots and penniless at the time of leaving the country. During their long journey they had to tolerate boundless suffering and miseries. Thousands and thousands of refugee families of Nadia district gathered same experiences during the conversation with the aged people of the district. They sometimes mentioned the bitter experience gathered of the time of leaving of country, which were nothing but the reminiscences of poverty-striking lives full of seven hardships.

A large number of help and resources less child, young and aged refugees reduced to a skeleton took shelter at the refugee camps of Ranaghat in Nadia district. A refugee Pareshnath Moulick by name has been living now in the village of Natapuly under Chakdah Police Station in Nadia district from the village of Singra under Gopalgunge sub-division in Faridpur district of East Bengal. When young Pareshnath set out for West Bengal from his home in East Bengal in 1954, the song composed of the adventure of songs recorded in the Ramayana had been brought sung on the stage in the courtyard of the house of his next door neighbor. He narrated that the bearing of the aforesaid song wanted to clasp his mind with eight arms like Octopus with a view to staying at his first place. Thinking over the ongoing practical situation of Pakistan, he left his birthplace. When Paresh Babu accompanied by his two friends, set out for West Bengal, all their resources were snatched by the Muslims on the way. They were somehow released from the hands of the snatchers after making an earnest appeal to them. Having snatched all their resources, the plunderers indicated the way to Helencha in West Bengal and also advised them to behold yonder - the electric light which was located at Helencha (under North 24 Parganas) in West Bengal. Following the indication of electric light Paresh Babu and his companions walked the whole night and at last they reached Halancha school at dawn. One local inhabitant gave rice to eat to the hungry strangers. Having eaten rice, they again set out for Chakdah city of Nadia district.³

Once Gouranga Das had been the inhabitant of the Cooper's Camp of Ranaghat and he came to the Nadia district from Barishal district of East Bengal as a refugee. He has given a statement regarding the period of his arrival here. He said *"My family was compelled to come to West Bengal, leaving East Bengal in 1949. Then I was 18 years old. At first, we arrived at Barisal from our village by a boat and then we boarded the steamers. About 2000-3000 families Women co-passengers were also left the country. When we reached the Benapole border, a border slip was given us, at every step it seemed to us that we should come back home. Crossing the border, it was noticed that many Relief and welfare centres were established by the different social welfare organizations."*⁴

Manab Sen has reminisced his experiences about the arrival at Nadia crossing the Petrapole Border in his essay 'Jibaner Dairir Pata Theke', *"Riots are occurring, houses are burning, people are fleeing. Panic is on the increase.... My grandfather had been the Govt. employe. He decided not to go anywhere leaving the state of a dwelling houses inherited from his ancestors. The year was 1950. Neighbors were having homestead lands one by one. The mental strength of my grandpa was broken down. At night the sharecropper of one three successive generations was called. Having been entrusted everything to him we set out for the untraced journey. At the dead of night, our pet dog was running along the riverside road, crying bitterly. None accompanied our pet animal. Now, he became shelterless When the train was coming near the border, leaving Petrapole, conchs were being blown in every compartment. The new country was as like as dream land! But the dream came to an end after arrival out Bongaon Railway. Station. Innumerable human heads got their lost resorts under the open sky."*⁵

Aged refugee Dilip Chaki of Tahnpur in Nadia district told me a woeful tale of a missing family. Perhaps in the year 1955, 50 refugee colony of Taherpure just came into existence, a gentleman came to Taherpur colony from East Pakistan and he was searching for his older sister and nephew named Bhabesh Sarkar all day long. In the meantime, he went to the different refugee colonies of Nadia district in search of them. When he was on verge of future of finding out Bhabesh Sarkar at Taherpur all day long, one pedestrian, said to him after evening, *"come with me, one Bhabesh Sarkar has come here from East Bengal and he lives at the end of the hamlet. Now! Identify him whether he is your nephew or not."* In the meantime, a thief stole a pumpkin from a house and was fleeing with pumpkin catching sight of the scene,

neighbors ran after the thief and made a hue and cry. The thief got fear and ran, speedily in the dark and the thief chanced to meet the gentlemen on the dark road. The thief was very sly and all on a sudden he dropped the stolen pumpkin before the gentleman and began to beat him severely. Running people came to the spot including Bhabesh Sarkar. Suspecting the gentlemen to be a thief, the mob including Bhabesh Sarkar, the nephew of the injured gentleman started to hit the maternal uncle of Bhabesh Sarkar in the dark who was not at all a thief. After some time few kind hearted men came forward and saved the wounded person. They wanted to know his introduction. The injured person replied that he came here from Pakistan. He came to Taherpur after surpassing many colonies in search for his elder sister and nephew Bhabesh Sarkar who had been lost due to communal riots in Pakistan. His nephew Bhabesh Sarkar was present there and he could recognize his uncle in the light of lantern and finally, took him to his dwelling house. The family of Bhabesh was passing through severe poverty and so, he could not render necessary medical treatment of his wounded uncle. As a result his uncle became very feeble on account of fever for some days. Despite the fact his uncle somehow came round and came back Pakistan. Bhabesh Sarkar received the death news of his uncle after 15 days.⁶

Many of the bards of East Bengal took shelter in Nadia district as refugee. Refugee bard Surendranath Sarkar came to Nadia from Faridpur and he composed some verses related to the distressed lives of refugee families. The misery of the encamped life in Nadia and the pathetic tale of their setting out for distant land for the cause of their survival were revealed in the words of his verses.

“Amra jara bastuhara, ekebarei sarbahara,

Tader annachinta chatmatkar.

Tara kew jhopee-jangalee, Keu ba tanbur tolee

Keha poree talbetalee, achhee aj Nainitalay.

Keha ba duto anner jonya royechhe Dandakaranye.

Keho ba bina khunee giyechhee Andamane.”

[We are homeless, we are have-nots fully.

Our thinking of food is magnificent

Some are in jungles and bushes dreadfully,

Some are now under tent miserably.

Misguided few are now at Nainital

Some for a handful of rice are at Dandakaranya

Some have gone to the Andaman, Killing none.”]

The repressed Hindu refugees of East Bengal began to take their shelter at the different place of Nadia district including refugee camps of Ranaghat often the partition of India. Though they wished to remain secured here the black images of communal tortures in East Bengal sometimes chased the refugees. Refugee leader of this area Harinarayan Adihikary has written, “Many of the refugees became disappointed to see the flag of Pakistan flying in the air now and

then. Many supporters of Pakistan would opportunely lift up the national flag of Pakistan at the different places near the railway stations like Ranaghat, Majhergram, Bongaon etc.”⁷ Poet Samarendra Sengupta, the chief Editor of the ‘Bevab Potrika’, upholding the history of his arrival at Sealdah Station in 1951 as refugee in his incessant memoirs entitled ‘Ekbachan-Bahubachan’ of the ‘Bharat Bichitra Patrika’, has written, “I can recollect the day when I got down at the Sealdah Station for the first time. The platform became over crowded with refugee families. My heart was sprained to see the faces of hungry crying babies. What an in describable situation it was!”⁸

Gouranga Das of Ranaghat Cooper’s Camp has told me, “We went to Sealdah Station from Bongaon. We passed about 15 days time. Few lass of refugees took shelter there. One Marwari Relief Society started a ‘Langar Khana’ (a temporary Charitable cooked food distribution center’), under such a situation my grandfather wished that we should go back home (in East Bengal)”.⁹ Rabida has highlighted in his essay in titled ‘Nabaganga thekay Adiganga, Bhuinphoreder Sulook-Sandhan. Chapter I’ that about ten member of their family who left thin motherland went to their maternal uncle’s house in Calcutta directly from Gedye Railway Station near border of Nadia. “But everybody’s uncle had not remain alive, their address were the vast ground situated in front of the Sealdah Station and other places. He has also written, “When I used to wander about the premises of the Sealdah railway station. We would notice the business of housework. Countless cooking earthen pots were placed on the furnaces made of three bricks and rice was boiling with a bubbling sound. When the setting sun was in the west gust behind the dwelling house of Bidhan Roy and the hording of Hindu cinema were profusely floodlighted all on a sudden, catching hold of enameled white or grass plates in their hands hungry people with expanded eyes were counting waiting-time in rows before every temporary shed for cooking.”¹⁰

Refugee leader of Ranaghat Harinarayan Adhikari has mentioned that during the World War II some military barracks were built in India for the allied force and few of such important military barracks were located in Nadia district. He has also written that forcing soldiers built up some outposts at the different though those places were very important from two standpoints of defense. The allied forces encamped at Ranaghat, Dhubulia, Chandmani (now Kalyani, Gayeshpur, Katagunge etc.). The military authority constructed rail line, runway for landing of aero planes, roads, strength pucca go downs of keeping stores of grain and other goods for the army, barracks roofed by hemp, tiles and woods over the metalled floors for the residence of army, medical centre and innumerable pucca floors for rigging up tents.¹¹ After the end of the war the allied forces left the barracks and so those barracks, became desolated. After the partition of India the refuges were sheltered at the abandoned go-downs at the first phase. Therefore the Govt. built up the refugee camps there.

Before the partition of India communal riot occurred at Noakhali in 1946 and consequently, the repressed refugees of Noakhali began to arrive at Ranaghat in Nadia district. In the month of November, 1946 twenty-three refugee families took shelter at first in ‘Chinese Mission Camp’ of Ranaghat. But after the partition of India a large number of started to arrive at Ranaghat every day. As a result from the aforesaid period the Govt. took initiations to shelter the refugees. Having been authorized by the Govt., Jamini Sarkar as a Deputy Dispersal officer and some higher officers as his assistants arrived at the Chinese Mission camp of Ranaghat on the 17th day of November in 1948. Phani Bhusan Chakraborty was an important assistant of Janimi Sarkar among the assistants who were entrusted to look after the encamped refugees of Ranaghat. When the pressure the said Chinese Mission Camp was converted into a Transit Camp. The dimension of the land possessed by the Chinese Mission Camp was twenty two bighas and the said area which was ‘full of shawl, Simul tree, through bushes and kush plants was surrounded by prickly iron were under the direction of the intruded Govt. offices.¹² It may be remarked that thus the captive life of the refugees sheltered at the Chinese Mission Camp surrounded

by prickly iron were ensured.

It became urgent to take the permission from the Principal of the camp for entrance into the Chinese Mission Camp' surrounded by prickly iron way. There were three ways for entrance into the Chinese Mission Camp and those ways were under constant guards surveillance. The Govt. offices, who were entrusted to look after the refugees living in Chinese Mission Camp, decided to name of the Camp anew. "*East Bengalis a variegated complexion of glamorously beautiful land of folktale. The presence of the sign of beauty or the handsome complexion of beauty of East Bengal is also noticed in body, mind, education and culture of the refugees coming from the different districts. The Govt. authority has upheld the precedence of their likings in the case of naming the Transit Camp. The person, who has chosen the name of the Transit Camp by which the memory of East Bengal infect through naming of the said camp and the life of the transit camp can be forgotten, have unfolded their artistic outlooks. In the month of December, 1948 the Chinese Mission Camp was named 'Rupashree Pally'.*" In such a way the naming of other camps and different Blocks was started by producing harmony between the natural resources of East Bengal and their deeds of naming- e.g.- 'Meghna', 'Padma', 'Yamuna' etc.¹³ After 1949-1950 the influx of refugees in Nadia district became more intensive and under such circumstances other refugee camps including Ranaghat, Dhubulia gradually came into existence. From the afforested point of view it may be said that the refugee camp of Rupashree Pally established first in Nadia district was the pioneer of the initial resort of the uprooted displaced persons in West Bengal. Harinarayan Adhikary wrote that "*Rupashree Pally was the transit camp or the elementary centre for kerning or displaced persons. Before completion of the elementary learning of refugees life they were sent to the different camps came into being in West Bengal. The refugees of Rupashree Pally were sent to the rehabilitation center of Gayeshpur, Katagunge of Nadia for rehabilitation. Many refugees were also sent to Andaman from Rupashree Pally. Up to 1949 coming and going from Rupashree Pally had been running at a stretch.*"¹⁴ All these are the first stage experiences of the refugees came to Nadia district. Later on more and more refugees from East Bengal came to this district and this district actually became a 'refugee colony'.

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