ISPaD Partition Center
Journal 2018
ISSN 2377-7567

Editor: Sachi G. Dastidar, Ph.D.
Published by
Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project (ISPaD)
Established: 2009
Jamaica, Queens, New York City
# The Table of Contents

## 2017 Conference Report
Shuvo G Dastidar  
Page 1

Akkaraju Sarma  
Page 2

### People, Embodied Experiences, Collective Intergenerational Memories: An Overview of ‘The Partition’ in South Asia
Anup Shekhar Chakraborty  
Page 5

### August, 1947
Karabi Sen  
Page 11

### The 1900s: The Century of Women’s Transition in Bengal and India
Sachi G. Dastidar  
Page 15

### Partition Angst in Annada Shankar Ray’s Nursery Rhyme
Monish R Chatterjee  
Page 20

### NRC: Hindu Bengalis at a Crossroads in India
Jyoti Lal Chowdhury  
Page 24

### 'Gandhi Smriti Ashram' is Losing Glory
M. Jashim Uddin  
Page 29

### Why the Partition Is Not an Event of the Past
Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar  
Page 31

## The Guadeloupean Model
Jean S. Sahai  
Page 35

## ISPaD Information
Sponsors:  
Pages 39–60

---

*Cover Picture:* Photo of Samadhi of Ganga Ram in Punjab, Pakistan sent by Haroon Khalid. Viewing of the memorial is not open to public. Ganga Ram, a Hindu, is considered to be the builder of famous buildings of 20th Century Punjab. Khalid is the author of a book on Ganga Ram.

© ISPaD Project Inc. NY

Date: October 2018
Editor: Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar

Availability: ISPaD Office, 85-60 Parsons Blvd, 1st Floor, Jamaica, NY 11432

Phone: 917-524-0035  
Email: ispad1947@gmail.com  
Web: www.ispad1947.org

All the papers in the Journal reviewed by the Editorial Board: Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar, Editor, New York; Dr. Ali-reza Ebrahimi, Long Island; Dr. Edislaw Manetovic, New Jersey; Dr. Saradindu Mukherji, India; Dr. Mohsin Siddique Maryland and Dr. Caroline Sawyer, Wisconsin.

Price: $5 Dollars; $6.50 by mail
Synopsis of the ISPaD Partition Center’s 2017 Conference

Shuvo G. Dastidar**
Partition Center Project Coordinator

The 2017 Partition Center Conference summary captures this year’s program of presentations that lead to panel discussions as well as question-and-answer interactive dialogue with those present at the Conference. The event brought together individuals engaged in research of partition of the Indian Subcontinent – as well of other regions of the world – to the North American continent. As has been the case in previous conferences, ISPaD has Partition of the Indian Subcontinent as its focal point but the Partition Center Conference has always endeavored to illuminate partition/divisions throughout the globe. Every discussion had to review the role of Partition in promoting public policy developments, expand capacity to address current and future development challenges in a global context. The conference also provided a valuable networking opportunity and set the stage for further cooperation among writers and researchers engaged in the issues of separation and union. The Conference began with opening remarks by the Conference Chair and member of The ISPaD’s Board of Directors, Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar, who first introduced the Board and the 2017 Journal Editorial Committee. It continued on with a set of presentations that all described emotional, noteworthy instances relevant to the Conference theme: matters then and now as they have been affected or precipitated by Partition. Quite interesting was that the presentations focusing on extremely significant personal experiences was complemented by presentations with other foci.

Mother Nature was very kind to us as it was relatively warm for a fall morning making a trip to the conference enjoyable.

Opening remarks by Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar at ISPaD’s 2017 Partition Center Conference

Immediately following the opening remarks was the official release of the 2017 Partition Center Journal by Dr. Dilip Nath, a Board Member of ISPaD, a political activist, a high official at a SUNY campus and a graduate of SUNY Old Westbury. The number of submissions with the aspiration of being published is staggering when compared to the number of papers that could be accepted and therefore were indeed included in the Journal. The 64 page 2017 Journal contained 9 articles from over dozens submitted and reviewed by the editorial committee. This year’s theme picture was a 70-year partition-affected abandoned home of generations of (Hindu) Raja Bahadur (king) Shyama Sankar Roy located in Teotha Village of Manikganj of pre-partition Hindu-Muslim mixed East Bengal, now Muslim-dominated Bangla-
desh. The Journal contains articles by Samriddha Datta, Tathagata Roy, Sittangshu Guha, Badrun Nahar, Hasan Ferdous, Syed Badrul Hasan, Saradindu Mukherji, Sachi G. Dastidar, and this writer. It is available from Partition Center office. Then guests were welcomed by Usama Shaikh, Assoc V.P. of SUNY Old Westbury and Dr. Barbara Hillary, Dean of School of Arts & Sciences.

In commemoration of 70 years of Partition, the first session started with viewing a short video on Radcliff Line aka Bloody Line drawn in days’ notice by Sir Cyril Radcliff causing tens of millions of displacement and millions of deaths whose effects continues till today. This was followed by harrowing firsthand narration by Dr. Jagan Pahuja, a physician in Long Island, as to how as a 11-year old Hindu boy got almost killed at Multan Station in Punjab on the night of August 14-15, 1947 while saved by the efforts first by a Hindu station vendor, then by two Muslim individuals, one of whom took a dagger in his body for Jagan while the other took him to his home in the dead of night never to be seen again. (Please check YouTube Ispad1947 channel for his story.) Dr. Swati Sarkar, along with two co-authors, presented “Overview of Age Related Religious Demographics of India – Urban and Rural” highlighted with data, charts and graphs the loss of indigenous Indic – Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh – populations. The session was chaired by Dr. Larry Krause and commented upon by Mr. Sittangshu Guha, a journalist of New York and Bangladesh. His comments with his personal experience of his family in his homeland brought tears to many eyes. The second session comprised reading from their own books. Readers were Mr. Pradip Dasgupta who read from his book “Stories from Far and Near” covers his family’s experience who were spread over from today’s Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Journalist Hasan Ferdous read from his book “Ekattar, jevabey shuru” (71, How it started) is a one part book of a three part series on partition of Pakistan and independence of Bangladesh. It covers of Islamic identity politics of Pakistani leadership and resistance by pro-tolerant Bengali secularists. The last book was “Memoirs of Homeland – Refugees of 1947 Bengal Partition in India” was read by Dr. Shefali S. Dasatidar of a book jointly authored with Sachi G. Dastidar. The book contains 21 stories from about 100 interviewed from 1984 through 1986 in the U.S. of Hindu and Muslim, male and female, East and West Bengalis. The session was moderated by Professor Dr. Alireza Ebrahimi and Mr. Ramen Nandi of New Jersey.

In the last session chaired by Professor Dr. Edislav Manetovic. Dr. Caroline Sawyer discussed her work on “When herds are Divide: Impact of Partition on Punjab’s Water Buffalo Industry.” She discussed fears among many agro-economists and veterinarians that the huge buffalo industry may get harmed through inbreeding as partition divided the livestock. This was followed by all the attendants briefly sharing their ideas and queries of the partition studies and its effects on our knowledge.

---

Shuvo G. Dastidar, edits both Partition Center Newsletter and Probini Digest where he writes columns on a regular basis, and writes in social media.

**********************************************************************

Prafulla C. Mukherji’s [PCM 1885-1982]
Important Roles in Helping Indian and South Asian Causes; 1960’s and 1970's.

Dr. Akkaraju Sarma*

Prafulla C. Mukherji (1885-1982) was from Bengal, India who adopted USA as motherland without losing track of Indian roots at heart. And a great humanitarian.
He came to the University of Pittsburgh as a student. He went on to pursue a successful career as a research metallurgist with US Steel and Firth Stirling Steel Company. He retired in 1956 and moved to New York City. He was executive secretary of the Tagore Centenary Committee for America, organized the celebration of the 100th birthday anniversary of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1961, later 1971, he helped plan the bicentennial anniversary program for Raja Rammohun Roy. He helped many persons when getting US Residency was difficult. He worked hard to get Tagore Stamp thru USPS. His wife, Rose, an academic in NYC was also active in community organizational activities.

Namaskars (greetings) to all readers. As I present you this write up, let me begin with an introductory part, then in brief a note on one-on-one meeting with him followed by a summary of some of his documents that he graciously shared with me in person (June 28, 1977 in his apartment in Brooklyn, N.Y.)

Mukherji in 1940

**Introduction:** My interests have been to explore the contributions of Indians and South Asians to US Mainstream culture over last few decades. As a background, in 1976, the City of Philadelphia as well State of Pennsylvania sponsored “Project Bicentennial 1776-1976” in which I presented a keynote presentation “India's Contribution to American Culture and Science” (April 30, 1976), then

Tenured Faculty member at Temple University, Philadelphia. In researching for information which was scant (then generic concept of Internet Search Engines was non-existent, it was page-by-page look into journals and private records). After the presentation at Project Bicentennial, on June 28, 1977 I had the privilege to spend an evening with P.C. Mukherji (PCM) and at the conclusion of three hours plus one-on-one session, he gave me copies (to keep) of some materials to help write a note or two on issues he verbally told me. I am unsure where these originals might be. Thus, I was privileged to receive a few copies of Sri.Mukerji's contributions to our South Asian Cultural History. PCM is an American Original in our adopted motherland, par none! His path has not been a carpeted walkway but clearly a bed of roses but glorious one. He had a great humanitarian streak besides, time and again in his life in adopted motherland in that many people in those days of immigration struggles.

**Immigration History for Indians:** Here, we do not want to tread upon the "barely existent" history of Indians (South Asians) in USA, except to point President Lyndon Johnson’s change of immigration law enabling non-Europeans to come to the U.S. Rest is History. Prior to that, the main route for immigration (probably the only one legal) was to come in to USA as a graduate student (PCM did come to PSU and studied metallurgy), then secure gainful employment and then to become a naturalized citizen (PCM did in 1920) after many years of wait time. Many others came via commercial ships then went AWOL, many others came to Mexico and then crossed the Rio Grande which was barely bigger than a few fordable feet at most places (that now have all these borderline security points). They then blended into communities, married locally and so on. A
mentor of PCM was Dr. Taraknath Das (TD), a vehement anti-colonial person, working for Indian independence. PCM and TD had roots in Undivided Bengal. TD took a unique route, going to Japan entering USA as Sanyasi (Religion Propagator) to spread word on "righteous approaches" and eventually built the support for Indian Independence movement into great prominence. TD was declared persona-non-grata till 1952 when he could revisit to India, after 40+ years of exile.

PCM and His Contributions Years 1958 and 1959: I am the first to admit the limitations in this brief presentation. The fact that I had access to some of correspondences for the above years, have been able to present these vignettes to the readers. Those with whom PCM interacted is a who's-who of doyens in US Political Spectra: Senator (later President) John Kennedy from Massachusetts; Ambassador Chester Bowles; Senator John Sherman Cooper, KY; Senator Jacob Javits, NY, Emanuel Celler, Congressman from NY; William Fulbright, Senator from Arkansas; Herman Badillo, Congressman from NY; Charles Rangel, Congressman from New York; and Frank Thompson, Congressman from NJ.

India: A Developing Third World Country: PCM’s Pleas for Support. From the beginning of 1958, PCM reached out many in US Congress and Senate.

Trade was disproportionately unfavorable to India, as India's imports exceeded by 125% than its exports. In key areas PCM made crucial contacts and got supports from many powerful leaders of both houses of the US Congress. Around Aug 8, 1958 John Sherman Cooper's and JFK's support for the five-year plan subsidies to India was sent as a letter to the Editor of New York Times. Senator J.F. Kennedy, Senator J.S. Cooper, and Congressman Chester Bowles gave unconditional supports for subsidies to India and helped five years plans head into right direction. In a letter addressed to PCM, dated March 11, 1959, Ambassador Chester Bowles replied positively supporting US financial subsidies. Chester Bowles also referred to a lecture that he gave at Georgetown University supporting aid. PCM was concerned about India being a Third World country development cannot be sustained at the same footing as First World countries. PCM recognized that even though India had very ambitious Five-Year Plans, it was not possible for increased GDP, as long there is as a financial shortfall in production combined with a limited infrastructure. PCM recognized that India needs financial grants and loans to overcome heaviest of odds. The good news, now
with 20/20 hindsight, India did get the grants and funding besides food (imports of wheat and rice mainly) with legendary Public Law - 480. In later years the PL 480 loans were written off by US Government with a proviso that the money has to be spent within India, by Indian Government, a boon to academia and educational improvements without forgetting improvements in social institutions. On March 19, 1959 JFK replied indicating strongest support to India Aid and through presentations JFK had on the subject.

**Humanitarian PCM: Just One Case History Here out of Many!**

PCM was a kind and considerate human being looking for welfare of fellow Indians (South Asians). Mr. X (name given in identification) was a young man who married to an U.S. Citizen in early 1958. The young mother passed away leaving an 18-month-old baby in the hands of a single surviving parent. In those days, immigration for Indian and other Asians was nearly impossible; immigrants counted on yearly basis at finger tips. Senator David Reed, an attorney by profession, resident of Pittsburgh, was a Pennsylvania Senator (1922-1934) co-sponsored immigration Act of 1924. Key points: Restrict Southern and Eastern European Immigration. Plus prohibit Asian Immigration altogether. When we look back, how closed mind that this man had! We thank President Lyndon Johnson for changing this, becoming a diversified country with more noble laureates, more scientists, and other distinguished professionals, all these are folks outside the radar of closed minds of David Reed's. PCM took particular interest in the tragic case of lost mother, wrote to Senators John Sherman Cooper (Republican from Kentucky) and others, who, sponsored a bill S2405 in 1959 and the X's family was provided the help needed, in this fashion: that X’s father and Mother were able to get U.S. visas and were taken care of. In similar fashion, PCM was deeply involved in getting Tagore Birth Annual Event become mainstream in USA. was less successful in getting a USPS stamp be issued in 1959 as that year Mahatma Gandhi's stamp was issued (restriction being that a country or region can have one stamp periodically but never two in the same year). The parents in this case arrived and rest is history in that they have thrived well in our adopted mother-land. If PCM did not pursue this with senators this family would have suffered immensely.

*Akkaraju Sarma, MD. FAAFP. Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania; Dr. Sarma has Academic and Health Care Professional Experiences in USA. He was a Recipient of Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2016.*

-------------------------------

**People, Embodied Experiences, Collective Intergenerational Memories: An Overview of ‘The Partition’ in South Asia**

Dr. Anup Shekhar Chakraborty*

The specter of ‘The Partition’ and lived intergenerational memories continues to looms large over the construction of the collective victimhood and pain/
hurt in South Asia. The Partition, bifurcated identities in the sub-continent and thus as an event came to be known and portrayed as a compromise solution aimed at appeasing both sides and imposing order in dystopia. Numerous studies have acknowledged that the experience of the partition could never have been the same for all people in the sub-continent and that the associated markers transported temporally and spatially would invariably result in a multiversal competing meaning making project. A little over 70 years the specter of the Partition continues to uncalm the collective intergenerational memories of South Asia. The discussion in this article would attempt to provide an overview of the Partition in South Asia.

Bhisham Sahni’s ‘Tamas’, Khushwant Singh’s ‘Train to Pakistan’, explores the horrors of partition victims and displacement of millions people. The population movement itself was one of the largest in recorded human history and the echoes of ‘The Partition’ reverberate past 70 years across South Asia. ‘The Partition’ has thus become a “topic of much myth-making, intense polemics, and considerable serious historical research.” (1)

The Partition resulted in the birth of a ‘People’ often labelled as “Victim Diasporas”, ‘Partition Refugees’, ‘Refugees’, ‘Bastuharas’, etc. All these nomenclatures intensely signify the rootedness to territoriality and population movements. The ‘Partition Refugees’ across South Asia provide different readings in ‘Partition Experiences’; indeed, the experience in the case of India can be categorized as ‘Northern India’ and ‘Eastern India’ experiences. The former covered the partition experience of the province of Punjab and North West region. (2) The latter covered the partition experience of Bengal, Assam and the North-East, characterized mainly by a population change of Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims and Bihari Muslims between India and East Pakistan (Bangladesh). (3)

The case of ‘Partition Refugees’ also becomes ‘a case in itself’ because exchange or movement of population in both the cases was anything but orderly; however, it did involve significant government intervention and resettlement and rehabilitation efforts, with refugee populations often occupying the homes and businesses of their departing counterparts. The governmental initiatives of intervention and rehabilitation for instance, led to the birth of Chandigarh and greater areas of the national capital New Delhi so much so that they began to be called “city of refugees,” particularly of Punjabi Refugee or Diaspora. (4)

The Partition experience in both instances reflect a different story all together for instance, in Eastern India, the Partition was not just violent, but occurred as part of a much more gradual, ongoing and cyclical process, and with far less population exchange or governmental intervention. Interestingly, the Eastern Experience of ‘Partition’ shows two phases namely the first British Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the second in 1947. The Partition, then, was a very different phenomenon in north western and eastern India. In other words the experience of the same event in history produced customized outputs in terms of ‘coping with realities of life’, adjusting to new situations, ‘retaining and erasing memories for survival’, response of the state in terms of providing shelter or refuge or rehabilitation or ethics and care etc.

Refugees in the northwest, some critics argue, were the prime beneficiaries of government aid and attention from the post-colonial Indian state and following the legacy of an inherited loss academic inquiry, popular literature, and cultural representations etc., focused intensely on Partition narratives from the north. The
partitions at different stages in the East were conveniently subsumed by the operational differential treatment of refugees not only within the subcontinent, but within the separate regions themselves. This is to say that disparities exist not only between the treatment of north western and eastern subjects of partition but within and amongst the East Bengali refugees themselves. This differential experiences in ‘partition phenomenon’; and also governmental initiatives or responses to the same, substantiates the argument that ‘partition refugees are a case by itself’.

Again within the homogenous construct of ‘Northern’ and ‘Eastern’ ‘Partition Refugees’ lies the internal demarcations revealing the multifold layers within such constructs. For instance, from the 70s onwards the terms “refugee” and “displaced” had increasingly been replaced in official language by “migrants.” Indeed, the Government of West Bengal today draws a clear distinction between “new” and “old” migrants:

(a) Those who migrated between October 1946 and 31 March 1958 are known as ‘Old Migrants.’ (5)
(b) Those who came between 1 January 1964 and 25 March 1971 are known as ‘New Migrants.’ (6)

Such definitions reflect the growing distrust and suspicion with which the Indian Government at the Centre, the state authorities in West Bengal, and a sizable section of middleclass and elite Bengali society viewed the ongoing population flow from East Pakistan. Nilanjan Chatterjee’s article ‘The East Bengal refugees: A Lesson in Survival’ (7) challenges the ‘Official Discourse’ ‘which perceives refugees as objects of assistance and as such a “problem” group’. If the early years of Partition had elicited sympathy for the horrors that the survivors of violence were fleeing, by the 1960s many policy makers and politicians wondered aloud whether refugees were in fact fleeing violence or merely leaving a stagnant local economy for brighter prospects in the western half of the former Bengal. It is undeniable that the massive and ongoing influx of refugees was a tremendous drain on social services and had a considerable impact on the political and economic structure of both the state of West Bengal and the city of Kolkata. Similar fissures get reflected within the monolithic-homogenous construct of ‘Eastern Partition Refugees’ in terms of ‘Eastern (Bengali Hindu) Partition Refugees’ and ‘North-Eastern Partition Refugees’ (8). The category of ‘North-Eastern Partition Refugees’ ranges from Bengali Hindu to Bengali Muslim settlers or Sylethi to Chakma to Reang refugees and many more conveniently clubbed under the category of ‘trans-border tribes’.

Another aspect of the Partition Refugees that substantiates their case as a distinct category altogether or a class apart from other Refugees or other categories of Displaced Persons is in the context of ‘Memories’ and the construction or ‘Birthing’ and ‘Mothering’ of ‘Nationalist Discourse’ against the backdrop of western perceptions of ‘nation-states and boundary system. For the ‘Partition Refugee’ whether ‘Hindus’ or ‘Muslims’ or ‘Sikhs’ or ‘Chakmas’ or any other, the national borders or the elaborately created new geographical entities post 1947 symbolized by the ‘Radcliffe Line’, remained merely ‘cartographic and political divisions’ or to use Priya Kumar’s words ‘the Shadow Lines.’ (9) Such emphasis on ‘spaces’, ‘borders’, ‘security’ reflected for the ‘Partition Refugees’ mere symbolic images of the projected of territorial power (s) of the State in question, while at the same time their mental make-up con-
stantly purged these lines of the modern nation-state.

The ‘Sense of Uprootedness’ serves as another level of understanding the ‘Partition Refugees’ as a distinct case. The ‘Partition Refugees’ found it very tasking to reconcile the fact of the ‘loss of territory’ or ‘native land’. This sense of ‘loss and uprootedness’ became embedded in the memories of the ‘Partition Refugees’; and doubled as their hallmark and navigated their construction of their social realities and identities. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s ‘Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition’ (10) brings to the fore the arguments that the nostalgia of the ‘Desh’, ‘Bari’, ‘Vastuvita’, ‘Gram’, ‘Home’ or ‘Native land’ continues to haunt the lived in reality of not just the immediate ‘Partition Refugees’ but also their future generations. Saadat Hasan Manto’s writings on a similar plane often questioned the intellectual underpinnings of the state-centered national histories: most of his characters, especially ‘Toba Tek Singh’ symbolized the traumatized ‘Partition Victims’ who could not reconcile with the event of ‘The Partition’.

The ‘Partition Refugees’ also stand a class apart in context of the legal framework provided by the ‘1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees’ which restricts the definition of a ‘Refugee’ to an individual “outside the country of his nationality.” (11) For instance, Chimni (12) mentions that ‘India not being a part to the 1951 UN Convention or 1967 the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees has not enacted special national laws on refugees. India has adopted an ad hoc mechanism to deal with the issue of refugees at political and administrative levels essentially through the Foreigners Act of 1946’.

The East Bengal refugees ‘simply moved away from the troubled spots in East Bengal to join their co-religionists, blood relatives and inmates in West Bengal. Truly speaking, they were no refugee; they were displaced people from one socio-political environment to another…’ According to this interpretation, the term ‘Refugee’ would be synonymous with displaced people from East Bengal who migrated to West Bengal as a result of the Partition during 1947-48; and would convey the same stereotyped images of a ‘Ghotis’ (West Bengal) versus ‘Bangals’ (East Bengal) in everyday lived reality of life in West Bengal more specifically in the city of Kolkata (Calcutta). (13)

The fore mentioned works explores the issues of partition by focusing on the Partition of British India in 1947 and highlights some of the complexities in identifying diasporic groups as unified or monolithic communities. These works attempt to provide a multiversal understanding of the ‘Partition Refugees’ by focusing on particular distinctions of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, and religion play in constructing the narratives, experiences, and imaginations within the larger ambit of state responses in the form of Relief and Rehabilitation. Besides all these thematic, the Partition discourses also serve as a strong defense for substantiating the understanding that the ‘Partition Refugees’ are ‘a case by itself’; and reaffirm at the same time the situated differences in ‘Experiences’ of ‘The Partition’ in South Asia. The contemporary engagements with events in time and the inability to arrive at healing/reconciliation and closure; and also the indelible intergenerational connects that the Partition weaves with the peoples of the region strongly narrate the complexities in the highly gated nationalist envisions operative at two tier: one, how societies remember? and the other, how societies forget?
Bibliography


Endnotes:


The Partition of India was in full swing.
I was almost five years old. I did not quite understand what all the excitement in the air was about. There was tension, fear, anger, grief over some impending loss about to take place as also joy over some long-anticipated outcome. Everyone around the house bore marks of unstoppable excitement. Everyone went about their ways hurriedly, whispered in little groups with much agitation, in the kitchen, in the balcony, in the courtyard, the landings of the staircase, the living room, the streets. Everybody appeared to be getting ready for something very important to happen. I could see it, feel it, share in it and be confused by it. But overriding it all was my own personal excitement over the soon to take place birth of a sibling expected in less than two weeks. I knew that this baby would rob me of my mother’s arms, dislodge me from my special place as the baby of the family.

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & Political Studies, Netaji Institute for Asian Studies (NIAS), Kolkata and member of Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (MCRG), Kolkata, India

***********

August, 1947

Dr. Karabi Sen*

The Partition of India was in full swing.
I was almost five years old. I did not quite understand what all the excitement
August. Mother rushed us through the morning milk and toast and deposited us with a trustful household help. Then she took up a permanent post in the front verandah, leaning on the rails of the cornice, looking anxiously at the streetways. Someone came up the stairs and whispered something in the servant’s ear. He tightly held my hands and that of my older sister, who was seven at the time, and looked into our eyes. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “No one will be able to get past me and lay their hands on you. As they come up these stairs, I will chop off their heads one by one.” Saying this, he let go of our hands and picked up a horrifyingly looking axe in his hand and stood guard at the top of the staircase. A woman subsequently came by and took us to the front verandah where our mother was still standing, her uncombed and unwashed flowing hair let loose on her back, heavily pregnant. She glanced at us absent-mindedly and then turned her eyes away again towards the streets. She saw a crowd of people coming towards our house carrying somebody on their shoulders. The office peon who stood next to her exclaimed, “That’s our Huzur!” He was referring to our father, who was then posted as the SDO or Sub-Divisional Officer of the Maldah sub-division in Bengal. Everybody around thought that father had been killed in the riots that were raging between the Hindus and the Muslims in the town over the partition of India. The Muslims wanted Maldah to go to East Pakistan whereas the Hindus wanted it to remain a part of India.

Soon there was a throng of people that swarmed the front of our house. They were shouting some slogans that were easily understood even by me as hostile, deadly threats. They were carrying spears in their hands and the tops of the spears danced up and down brushing against the cornice of the verandah. The people who were there at the house to protect Huzur’s family decided that it was no longer safe for us to be on the second floor. They dragged us on to the roof-top. The spears did not reach up that high. People stood guard at the door of the attic with lathis, knives and axes.
there were streams of people marching down the streets singing patriotic songs like *Vande Mataram* (Bow to the Motherland), *Sare Jahan se Achchha Hindustan Hamara* (My India is the best land in the universe) and *Dhana Dhanye Pushpe Bhar* (Land if full of wealth, grain and flower). Soon we all came down from the roof-top. The fate of our father was still unknown.

But not for long. A huge roar of *Vande Mataram* was heard close to our house. We rushed to the balcony. A crowd was approaching our house. Father was seated atop the shoulders of the people in the crowd and was tossed from one pair to another. It was clear that it was not a procession of despair or anger but one of joy and victory. My mother got life back into her body. Soon father was reunited with us.

Evening brought merriment and celebrations. From out of nowhere appeared *laddus* and other *mithai* or sweets. Some carried in huge cauldrons of biriyani and chicken cooked Mughlai style. Nobody appeared to remember that those were the culinary specialties of the arch enemy of Hindustan. It did not matter anymore. Now that Maldah was not handed over to Pakistan, now that it was clear that the people of Maldah would not have to turn over to Pakistan their Himsagar and Fazli Aams (local varieties of delightful mangoes special to Maldah), the people of Maldah could be generous enough to embrace all residents as brothers and sisters and bury the hatred as a thing of the past.

In place of the line of spears twinkled strings of lights of many colors and hung garlands of flowers. The fragrance of incense, sounds of songs and pleasant conversation filled the house. An important businessman came in as a special guest to express his gratitude to my father for saving his life and home that day from the looting rioters. He gifted my father a formidable looking gun. Later, my father sold that gun and bought my mother a sewing machine with the money from the sale.

When things calmed down, I moved my attention to my own pet anxiety. When was the little demon of a sibling going to arrive? We had to wait another three weeks. Then my little brother was born, announcing his late arrival by a howl of indignant screams. The alarmed midwives rushed to rub honey into his tiny mouth and then his voice fell to what were but whimpers of a dying rage. Then he was all quiet. A little later they brought him out to show us---a little bundle wrapped in an old dhoti of our father, sleeping so peacefully.

So in the span of a few days I witnessed two new births, that of a free nation and a brand new baby. Both required conquest of fear and hostility plus a call for harmony. Perhaps welcoming or even accepting anything new must go through this process.

As the years passed, the ramifications of partition became clearer. Refugees streamed into the country fleeing killings. Some exchange of properties took place, but mostly people lost everything, arriving with no more than life or a small bundle on their heads. The Sealdah Station in Calcutta, the main connection to the east, was flooded by them. Efforts for rehabilitation were on their way but individual efforts had to be there as well. Landlords in Calcutta often offered to rent their homes at half the price; ration cards were put in place to ensure a minimum supply of course rice, oil, kerosene and clothing to all and limit excessive consumption by the rich. As a result, smuggling of goods, especially of better quality rice, ensued. Ironically, the smugglers were mostly refugee women, sneaking into trains and homes to do their business. Many came to work as domestic help. They were not always considered trustworthy.
My own children were raised by women, Altamoni (1), from a refugee family. They were a mother and a daughter duo. The son-in-law was run over by a train in Sealdah while vending spicy *murri* (puffed rice).

Altamoni with Baby

My grandmother, uncle and aunts had arrived with their entire families. Luckily, they were able to exchange property and settled down reasonably comfortably. Yet the many sorrows of being forced to leave the homeland stayed with them for generations.

The wave of nationalism, however, lingered for years to come. The patriotic spirit was enhanced even more by the assassination Mahatma Gandhi which so swiftly followed the Partition of India. It helped to somewhat tame and rein in religious intolerance between Hindus and Muslims. I remember the day my father came home from work early, threw himself on the bed, buried his face in the pillow, sobbing uncontrollably. We heard him say, “Gandiji has been killed.” We ran to the balcony to watch the streets for that was the internet back then.

There we witnessed the great scene, the river of humanity, moving silently through the thoroughfare, to mourn the death of Gandhi. No slogans, no speech at all, just silent walking, propelled simply by grief. It was as if they were moving not knowing what their moving would accomplish, marching like automaton, just because they were programmed to do so by something within over which they had no conscious control. They just had to go somewhere.

The partition was followed by nation-building. There was noticeable enthusiasm towards that. Nehru had his “Five Year Plans” for development. Dams and canals were built. Schools turned “multipurpose”, teaching various skills, not just academics. The government started “import substitution” policies, founding Research Institutes. Scientists would design manufacturing commodities in India, replacing imports. Jobs for engineers grew. Expatriates returned home. The passion was palpable. My husband quit Imperial Chemical Industries to join the new Fertilizer Corporation of India and the Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute. Salary was halved but the pride associated was immeasurable.

My father worked in the B.C.S. (Bengal Civil Service) cadre for the British Raj. The pay was poor. Those who could went to England to take the civil service test were in the I.C.S. (Imperial Civil Service) cadre with a much higher pay. In free India, most B.C.S. officers were first transferred from East Pakistan to India, then promoted to form a new cadre called I.A.S. or Indian Administrative Service with a substantial pay hike. I.C.S. was abolished as a cadre. I remember our family was then able to buy a ceiling fan, and eventually a refrigerator.

The plight of the refugees, slowly but surely, subsided. Gradually, people gained a footing, as they generally man-
age to do, unless crushed by circumstanc-
es.

Note:
(1) My nanny, Altamoni, a refugee from
the 1947 partition, arrived at Sealdah and later
moved to Bolpur-Santiniketan to work as a
household worker. Her stay with us continued
for multiple generations. She died a few years
after we had moved to the United States. Alta,
along with her daughter Gauri, helped raise all
five of my children. She lost track of one of
her daughters whom she left behind in East
Pakistan in the chaos of the exodus. Daughter
Gauri’s husband was run over by a train in
Sealdah while changing bogies in a moving
train in a bid to sell spicy muri or puffed rice
in different compartments of the train.

* Dr. Karabi Sen, former (Retd.) Prof. &
Head, Dept. of Philosophy, University of
Burdwan, Burdwan, West Bengal, India; and
Resource Specialist (Retd.), Modesto City
Schools, Modesto, California.

*******************************

The 1900s: The Century of Women’s
Transition in Bengal and India

Sachi G. Dastidar*

In March of 2018 social activist Mr.
Khorshedul Islam of New York while
organizing a Women’s Day event asked
me about writing on women of Bengal.
As I have been working on partition of
Bengal and India and subsequent change
I thought of focusing on women of a
family that covers the entire century,
1900, which witnessed sweeping changes
in Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh)
and India; First Partition of Bengal in
1905; Bengal Reunification and Indian
Swadeshi (Self-reliant) Movements of
early 1900; Reunification of Bengal in
1911; Second Partition of Bengal in 1947
with independence of India and Pakistan;
Rise of Islamic, then Nationalist Move-
ments in East Bengal, East Pakistan, and
Bangladesh, and the Rise of Left Extrem-
ism and anti-Left Movements in West
Bengal; Reorganization of Indian states
and expansion of West Bengal in 1956;
Bangladesh Liberation War and inde-
pendence of Bangladesh in 1971; and
colonization of tribal Chittagong Hills of
Bangladesh by Bengali Muslim settlers in
1970s. Thus came the idea of a family of
Bengal and Indian State of West
Bengal of Mrs. Ghosh, whom people
called Mashima or Maternal Aunt and
her mother Mrs. Basu-Roy-Chowdhury
(BRC) – neighbors called her Didima or
Maternal Grandma. Parts of women’s
emancipation was not only in taking
charge of family finances – the proverbi-
al Goddess Mother Lakshmi, which Ben-
gali/Indian women managed for a long
time by carrying all house keys at one
end of her sari. Women also had claims
to formal education with the presence of
Mother Saraswati, the Goddess of Learn-
ing, at every home shrine. Finally 20th
Century witnessed women joining labor
market. In another role women are keep-
ers of family tradition. (1)

In some way the image of Bengali
women is the image of ten-handed Moth-
er Goddess Durga, doer of multiple tasks. How-
ever, it doesn’t mean all is well in
Bengal, Bangladesh and India for women
which simultaneously witnesses extreme
oppression and subjugation.

For millennia Bengal of eastern Sub-
continent has been a flat fertile riverine
delta crisscrossed by dozens of rivers.
Except on the northwest where its border
Bihar state of India, rest of the flat land is
bordered by series of hills and moun-
tains: in the north by Himalayan range, in
the east by Chittagong Hills, Tripura,
Sylhet, and Cachar hills, and in the south-
west by the hills of Jharkhand State of
India. Bengal is one of the most linguisti-
cally homogeneous areas on earth as well
as one of the most densely populated. On
the other hand Bengal, today’s Bangla-
desh and West Bengal, from the middle
of last millennia had a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims, with small number of Buddhists mostly concentrated in the southeast around Chittagong. Small number of Bengalis follow Christianity who are spread in some rural pockets in East Bengal, now Bangladesh, and in and around the City of Kolkata (Calcutta), and in north West Bengal around tea gardens.

In 1900s Bengal witnessed first change in 1905 when the Colonial British Administration divided Bengal into a Muslim East Bengal and a Hindu West Bengal when there was no demand for partition either from the Muslims or from the Hindus. British brought a non-native Urdu speaker Salimullah from northern India to Bengali-speaking east Bengal; gave him a title of Nabwab or Prince, paid him hundreds of thousands of rupees to start the Muslim League Party to promote Muslim separatism and divert attention from Indian independence. (2) Opposition to that British communalism came from the pro-independence nationalists. A Bengal Reunification Movement began in 1905 that gave rise to the Golden Era of Bengal and India as all Indians participated in that struggle transforming into Swadeshi or Self-Reliant Movement. Colonial masters reunited Bengal in 1911 but the Hindu-Muslim divide that Britain institutionalized became a permanent feature of Bengal and India. The symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity, the first Premier of Colonial Bengal Province, Mr. Fazlul Haq, a Bengali Muslim yet a non-Muslim League Party member proposed in 1942 a resolution (3) of Muslim League Party of partitioning of India along Muslim-non-Muslim religious line. Bengal and Punjab Provinces of India were partitioned in 1947 bringing a catastrophe to the Hindu Bengali population of East Bengal (later also oppressed were Buddhist, Christian and tribal minorities), then called East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, so that by 2001 barely 53 years after partition, her Hindu minority population in Muslim-majority East Pakistan/Bangladesh came down from 30% to 12% with a loss of over 49 million from the Census. (4) On the other hand in post-partition Hindu-majority West Bengal’s minority Muslim population increased from 18% in 1947 to about 30% by 2000 in spite of huge migration of tens of millions of Hindus from their Bangladesh homeland. (5) Both Mashima and Didima, and their families, would be affected by the 1947 partition.

Another catastrophe in otherwise a joyous event of the Bengali was the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The minority of Pakistan’s i.e. then West Pakistan, would declare a war against the Bengali majority of East Pakistan. Three million innocent Bengali were murdered by the Army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and its Bengali Islamist allies, yet East Pakistan would emerge as an independent Bangladesh. (6) Hundreds of thousands of girls and mothers were abused. (7) That is a huge cost to pay in nine months’ of struggle. Even heavier price would be paid by her Hindu minority when the entire community, then 22% of the population, down from 30% at 1947 partition, would be targeted for killing and “extermination.” (8) No world leader...
would demand prosecution of war criminals – rulers of Pakistan, Bengali Islamists and the Army of Islamic Republic of Pakistan – except for a dedicated group of activists in Bangladesh, but not by their liberal brothers across the border in West Bengal. But that is a separate story.

Our Women:

So what happened to our women? Mrs. Ghosh exemplifies the entire Century. She was born in 1905, the year of Partition of Bengal or Banga-Vanga, and passed her last breath in December of 1999. She was born in Kashipur, Barisal District in eastern Bengal, now Bangladesh, at her maternal grandma’s home, to a highly educated Bengali Hindu family. Her parents lived in Ulpur village and in Madaripur town both of Fridpur District of east Bengal, now Bangladesh. Family history in Ulpur goes back to tens of generations. Yet she would die in Kolkata (Calcutta) in Indian West Bengal State, not in her beloved east Bengal. Young Ghosh went to school in early 1900s when increasingly Hindu girls went for formal education. Yet very few of her Muslim neighbors headed to school because of taboo on education. Two stalwarts of Muslim education Mrs. Begum Rokeya(9) and Haji Mohsin(10) both tried but failed to attract a following among Muslims. Mrs. Ghosh even got the highest mark in the statewide Chhatra-Britti (middle-school) exam (see below). Supporters of girls’ education cheered while opponents thought she was “taking prospects away from the boys”! In the 1800s and early 1900s one of the acts of the Indian independence movement was to open schools for boys and girls in all corners of India that colonial British rulers never cared about. Ghosh’s father and in-laws opened schools in both Faridpur and Barisal districts but unfortunately those schools closed soon after 1947 partition for lack of student and teacher as Hindus fled to India after successive pog-
Her mother, Mrs. BRC or Didima, born in late 1800s was homeschooled among a group of girls taught by her Master-Moshai as was the common practice where girls’ school didn’t exist. Yet she made sure her two daughters go to school and beyond. BRC’s life would change not only with the birth of her first child, a daughter, Mrs. Ghosh in 1905, but her husband’s anti-British and pro-Indian independence activism. In the post-1905 (Bengal Partition) BRC joined both Swadeshi and Bengal Reunification Movements as a silent partner by providing food and shelter to the workers and activists. Soon she would join other women in peaceful non-violent protest courting arrest, at times carrying a toddler in her arm, for civil disobedience and for proclaiming publicly “Bande Mataram” or Glory to Mother (India). Her activism with her husband will take her not only to cities of east Bengal but also to west Bengal, especially then Bengal’s capital Calcutta i.e. Kolkata. A typical rural housewife would be transformed into an activist. She would be sent to prison along with her lawyer husband and two college-age sons. Eventually she would win her battle against the British but lost her homeland through a British communal masterstroke of partitioning of Bengal. Her home in Faridpur District fell on the Muslim-majority Pakistan meaning her national hero Hindu family became an instant outcaste who could be sacrificed at no cost. (11)

Because of the family’s contribution of educating Muslim (and Hindu) children, providing food and shelter at her home to many Muslim (and Hindu) boys going to school in town and for their other social work Muslim League Party was kind enough to give them a 48-hour notice to leave their home of many generations instead of just slaughtering them. They ended up in a bamboo hut in an (illegally-occupied) jabar dakhal refugee colony (12) in southern Calcutta. Incidentally earlier a proud BRC had joined other women in Calcutta for anti-British civil disobedience acts. Yet after fleeing from her homeland and before moving to their bamboo-walled hut, a dejected refugee BRC family would first find shelter at her daughter’s rented home in Calcutta which became the first shelter for many hapless Hindu refugees.

Mrs. Ghosh at age 71

A typical dharma hut like that of Mrs. BRC in the Refugee Colony of South Calcutta
Then there is the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Ghosh, Shonali, who was born when Bengal and India was being torn apart through partition violence. Just as Mrs. Ghosh Shonali’s mother Niharika too fled her Barisal District village home soon after anti-Hindu pogroms started in post-partition East Bengal/Pakistan. She found shelter in a remote corner of West Bengal only to die without any family support in new land leaving her six kids behind. This is how partition took many lives. Yet one of the toddlers, Shonali, went to school aided by her teenage sister, who became the mother of the family. Shonali continued Mrs. Ghosh’s tradition of education and work joining one of India’s best colleges, then a technological university, ending up with a doctorate from the U.S. all the while self-supporting. She also worked in a distant Indian state as a single woman just as she came to a university in the U.S. a single woman wearing sari. Shonali would teach at many universities in the U.S. while raising a family, sending her daughter to a noted university graduating in 1999 a few days before her grandmother Ghosh passed away. Thus by the end of 20th Century Bengali women joined the forces of Mothers Lakshmi and Saraswati – prosperity and learning – and soon work force. In politics Bengali women would soon follow the forces of demon-killer Mother Durga by electing female leaders heads of both Bangladesh (since 1992) (13) and West Bengal (since 2011.) (14)

References:


Dastidar, Sachi G. *Empire’s Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent’s Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities*, Firma KLM, Kolkata, 2008


Ibrahim, Dr. Nilima, *Aami Birangana Bolchhi* (I am the brave woman speaking), Jagriti Prakashani, Dhaka; 1998


www.mayerdak.com a Bengali monthly published from Kolkata, India

Notes:


3. “Resolution of the Muslim League at Lahore, 24 March, 1948” op cit Amalendu De, p 251-253

4. Dastidar, Sachi G. *Empire’s Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent’s Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities*, Firma KLM, Kolkata, 2008; 51 & 52

5. Ibid 67

6. Dr. Sukumar Biswas. *Ekattarer Badhayabhumi O Ganakabar* (Killing-spots and
Mass-graves of Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971), Anupam Prakashani, Dhaka, 2000; 16
(7) Ibrahim, Dr. Nilima, Aami Birangana Bolchhi (I am the brave woman speaking), Jagriti Prakashani, Dhaka; 1998; and Imam, Mrs. Jahanara, Ekattorer Dinguli (The diary of 1971.) Jatio Sahitya Prakashani, Dhaka, 1993


(9) Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880 – 1932), see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begum_Rokeya


(11) Many of these ancestral homes built over many generations were declared “Enemy Property” first by Pakistan Govt., then Bangladesh Govt. just because it belonged to a Hindu minority. See Barkat, Abul, Shafique uz Zaman, Md. Shahnewaz Khan, Azizur Rahman, Avijit Poddar, Shaful Hoque and M Taher Uddin, forwarded by Justice Mohammad Gholam Rabbani, Deprivation of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh: Living with Vested Property, Pathak Samabesh Book, Dhaka; 2008


(13) Mrs. Khaleda Zia was elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 1992 after Dictator Gen. Ershad was toppled. Since then Mrs. Zia and Mrs. Hashina Wazed have been running one of the largest nations on earth.

(14) Ms. Mamata Banerjee became Chief Minister of West Bengal after defeating Communist-Marxist Party government in 2014.

---

**Distinguished Service Professor, State University of New York, Old Westbury, and Chair, Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project Inc.**

*******************************

**Partition Angst in Annada Shankar Ray’s Nursery Rhyme**

_A translation of Annada Shankar’s Teler Shishi by Monish Chatterjee with commentary_

Dr. Monish R Chatterjee*

**The Jar of Oil**

Annada Shankar Ray

Little Khuku breaks a jar of oil,
And here you are fighting mad
Yet you, grown-up kids, breaking up,
dividing our Bharat (India)
You say ain’t half as bad
Well, what then? What then? What then?

There you go, breaking up districts,
breaking up counties
Breaking up holdings and farms,
homes and shanties
Willy nilly you break up jute mills and silos of grains
Factories that bring products, and tracks that carry trains

Well, what then? What then?

What then?

Coal mines, tea estates, college classes, office spaces

Chairs, tables, fixtures, wall clocks and book cases

Peons who labor at odd jobs, police who keep the peace

Even professors imparting knowledge, pushed over the precipice

Warships, fighter planes, battle tanks and armored cars

Rocket launchers, camels and horses, these too you grown-ups parse

Taking apart and divvying up, looting but a work of art

Well, what then? What then? What then?

The Bengali novelist, poet and social commentator, Annada Shankar Ray (1904-2002), ASR, lived right through the most intense years of the Indian struggle for liberation from British colonial rule. While that struggle historically dates back to the mid-1700s, beginning with the occurrence and aftermath of the infamous Battle of Plassey (1757), and a century later, the historic Sepoy Mutiny (1858; also known as the First War of Independence) leading to the subcontinent coming under British imperial rule—it was after the annulment of the original Partition of Bengal proposal put forth by Lord Curzon, in 1905, accompanied by extensive popular action and demonstrations across Bengal (then undivided) which created the greatest ferment around the nation in terms of fighting against the colonial oppression with a united front across ethnic and religious boundaries. Even before Gandhi, upon his return from South Africa, took over the primary political lead of the movement, figures such as the peerless poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, had already offered up highly effective yet hauntingly simple verses highlighting people’s innermost desires and defiance of official edicts of divisiveness.

Tagore’s history-making role in walking the streets of Bengal in the effort to bring all of Bengal’s brothers and sisters together in communal harmony defying the official edict is especially memorable for the song, Banglar Mati Banglar Jal (Bengal’s soil, Bengal’s water) which is remembered with great fondness to this day. This potent song, along with Bidhir Bandhan Katbe Tumi (You’ll break the Bondage of the Fate), have great historic relevance to the human and social implications of the trauma of partition which has plagued the colonized world for centuries. I shall discuss this aspect based on Tagore’s work elsewhere.

The subject of politically and geographically engineered partitions of a people, usually an outcrop of purely racist colonial machinations (whose evidence is scattered across the world to this day), is understandably vast and has uncountable shades of interpretations. Not surprisingly, the partition of India, and specifically of Punjab and Bengal (two provinces which in my judgment exhibited some of the most intense protests against British colonial occupation of India, and perhaps for that reason alone, were in the cross-hairs of the colonial masters for a back-handed retribution when finally withdrawing from the zone of two centuries of relentless exploitation and loot, including the creation of a ghastly famine in Bengal in 1942) has been portrayed and discussed in a great many literary and socio-cultural tracts.

In this article, I shall attempt to provide some contextual perspectives by simply limiting myself to the socio-political implications scattered across the apparently innocuous nursery rhyme of the Bengali
Of special note here is the clear layering of partitioning and divisionism laid out in casual tones in ASR’s anti-partition rhyme. Of course, to set the tone for the rhyme, he first places the grown-up world up for accountability for their seemingly childish, yet infinitely more destructive behavior in literally breaking up entire communities of people at will, and yet moralize little children for minor infractions or accidents. This is an indictment of clearly pre-mediated and ultimately immoral adult behavior.

In the second stanza ASR highlights fallouts from any large-scale geographic partition: the large scale fragmentation immediately leads to further fragmentations in terms of regional districts and counties, farmlands and holdings; of course, homes and even the shanties of the poor are not spared from the resulting carnage. It is fragmentation and displacement of the highest order, from the largest to the smallest scales (much like turbulence eddies studied in science).

ASR then goes on to apply the connective thread of jute mills and grain silos to this disruptive listing. It remains an absolute fact that even in post-independence India, the previously thriving and prosperous jute and cotton mills of Bengal (which accounted for much of the prosperity of Bengal among Indian provinces through the entire Mughal period and even through much of the British occupation) went into sharp decline, and in most instances simply evaporated. And perhaps most ironically a great many industrialized cotton mills ended up in Gandhi’s backyard, Gujarat (where the latter’s biggest platform during the entire freedom campaign had been khadi and home-spun, and the symbolism of the charkha, the spinning wheel). In a simply rhyming couplet ASR has highlighted this devastation from which definitely the Indian part of Bengal (post-partition West Bengal) is still reeling in many
ways. The grain silo analogy could well apply to the Punjab, India’s granary or bread basket, also partitioned, and also disfigured. Note also how the factory floors and train tracks also strongly resonate with partition-based segregation. The factory floor under religion-based partition obviously connotes serious disruption of any interaction between ethnic communities in secular spirit. Several partition-related stories and narratives have dwelt on the disruption of the railroad across the divide (e.g., Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*). In the Indian experience, this happened on both the Western and Eastern fronts. To this day, on the east side, there is a complete lack of direct railroad transportation between Bangladesh (the erstwhile East Pakistan) and the Indian states, including West Bengal, Tripura and Assam which border the artificially carved out nation. I experienced this first-hand in 2013 when, faced with a possible flight cancellation out of Agartala, Tripura to Kolkata, West Bengal, to my utter dread I learned that the only alternative to the 2-hour flight was a harrowing 3-day train trip along the perimeter of the divide.

In stanza 3, ASR extends partition’s disruptive outreach to more common areas of human activities. Herein, we find broken up coal mines (whereby the mining sources and the processing facilities could well get separated and disconnected by the political fragmentation) and tea estates (once again creating severance of the symbiosis between neighboring plantations and harvesting areas), classrooms with reduced diversity and intercultural stimulation, office spaces with much more homogeneity and much less watercooler talk. ASR takes this consequential picture down to spiteful divvying up of personal holdings even in an office setting, including office furniture, clocks and bookcases. Such, in ASR’s description, is the divisive pettiness of the adult world. Special mention is also made of those in the workforce who by the very nature of their work have an integrative effect on the community- the peon (mailman), the policeman, and also the professor in the classroom- all habitually in contact with a cross-section of the population. Clearly, partition adversely affects these integrative elements within a community.

The final stanza sums up the divisiveness and intolerance which drive the psychology of partition; ASR portrays here the outright aggressive stance of divided communities (political, geographic, religious, ethnic). Mistrust, xenophobia, and zealotry lead to the accumulation of more instruments of warfare- fighter planes, warships, battle tanks, armored (add to this lethal list the far more deadly nuclear and chemical weapons which have proliferated by since ASR’s time. Sage advice and words of warning from a visionary who spoke to the partition-wielders giving voice to the multitudes shocked into silence by the carnage which followed August 15, 1947.

**Related Bibliography:**


India’s National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a normal way of registering or updating the names of citizens in any state or union territory of India. But, incredibly in Assam, it’s very name evokes fear and panic in the minds of people, particularly belonging to the linguistic and religious minorities. In all other states, NRC whenever taken up for update has never been a controversial issue. The last NRC updated in Assam was in 1951. Neither any question nor any eyebrow was raised. But, when the Central (Federal Government in Delhi) Government decided to update NRC in 2010, it was vehemently opposed by All Assam Minority Students Union that resulted in police firing and deaths. The protest lent credence to the emerging fact of them being dropped from the list and declared foreigners. It also strengthened the general assumption that a large number of people entering the state illegally might get enrolled in the NRC. The assumption was and is not unfounded: that Assamese-speaking people will be reduced to the status of refugees (minorities) in their own land. The six year long (1979-1985) agitation of All Assam Students Union (AASU) against foreigners was a damp squib, no doubt, but culminated in signing the Assam Accord in 1985 with Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi.(1) The Clause 6 (A) of the Accord clearly spelt out to protect the identity and culture of Assamese people.

In all fairness, the demographic structure of Assam has been going through topsy-turvy after the Independence (1947) due mainly to unabated influx of aliens from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The ruling Congress party of the state became a great patron of their vote bank just for the sake of remaining in power. The enactment of Immigrants Migration (Determination by Tribunal) [IM (DT)] Act of 1983 by the Congress Government at the Centre to detect and deport Bangladeshis turned out to be counter-productive. The Act was designed to protect the illegal immigrants since the onus of proof was not on the foreigner but on the complainant who in turn was to deposit Rs.50 as fees in the nearest police station and then face the ordeal of cross-examination himself.

Realizing its grave implication, the present Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal, who was then a frontline leader of Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), approached the Supreme Court of India and got the malafide Act scrapped in 2005. But, much damage has already been done as the number of illegal immigrants by then swelled to 5 million and the then Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia of the Congress Party himself admitted on the floor of the House on April 10, 1992, that the number of illegal aliens to be around 3 million. How many more have been added till date will never be known officially, but can easily be calculated. Of the 33 districts in Assam, 9 are now Muslim majority and 2 more districts are on the way of being swamped by the illegal immigrants. The decline of Hindu population in the state as a whole is in the process.

Way back during British colonial rule C. S. Mullan, Census Superintendent of India, in his report of 1931 warned, “The
unchecked influx would alter permanently the future of Assam and Sibsagar will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home.” (2) The projected population of the state by the Statistical Department of Assam itself is alarming which speaks of the state becoming a Muslim majority by 2081. Questions have been raised about the functioning of 100 Foreigners’ Tribunals, another offshoot of Assam Accord, to put on trial all the suspect citizens. But these Tribunals in operation since 1986 have proved to be a white elephant. This is clear from the statement of Parliamentary Affairs Minister of Assam, Chandra Mohan Patowary, on the floor of the Assembly on December 31, 2017. As of that date only 90,020 Bangladeshis have been detected and during the last 10 years only 769 of them have been sent to Bangladesh. Significantly, there is no extradition treaty with Bangladesh. This is on record that those detected make vanishing tricks only to reemerge through the porous border.

In 2005, another agreement was signed involving the Centre, the State and All Assam Students Union (AASU) which mandated update of NRC. Though the then Tarun Gogoi Government started the update in 2010, the exercise had to be kept in abeyance after violence broke out in Barpeta in which 4 people were killed and over 50 injured in a clash between the police and the protestors. Assam Public Works, NGO, petitioned the Supreme Court of India for NRC update which ultimately intervened and directed both the Centre and the State to complete the process in a free and fair manner by June 2018. Ultimately, the NRC update process was set in motion in May 2015. The modalities for verification of documents to establish citizenship were fixed by the Cabinet Sub Committee of the state in 2010.

The two Judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman is monitoring the progress of the update. Prateek Hajela, State Coordinator, NRC Assam, has been keeping a watch on the update process in coordination with the Deputy Commissioners of all the districts to ensure that the NRC is error free and no foreigner is included in it. But, ever since the mega exercise began, Hindu Bengali refugees in particular have been at a crossroad. The cutoff date of March 24, 1971 has put them in a jitter. It is well known following their religious and political persecution in East Pakistan, now

Bandana Das wept inconsolably in Karimganj police station.

Bhupendra Paul, Manik Das, Repati Das and Titilabala Das - branded as ‘D’ voters.
Bangladesh, and in the wake of the Liberation War of 1971, thousands and thousands of Hindus have taken shelter in India.

Many came to Assam. But, the migration of Hindus under compulsion and repression has been a continuous process since the partition of the country in 1947. Not only have they lost their hearths and homes but also all that they possessed including valuable documents. It is not difficult to understand the predicament of these most unfortunate people. They have been living under the specter of another demon called ‘D’ voters. It became a sort of witch-hunting as even genuine Indian citizens were branded ‘D’ (Doubtful) on their voters’ lists and sent to detention camps. Think of these few tormenting cases. Manik Das, a Hindu-Bengali-Assam native, banana vendor of village Thaligram of Cachar District, a Bengali Hindu-majority district of Assam since 1947, branded D voter by police and without serving any notice on him taken to Mahisasan border and pushed back. He however came back and challenged the arbitrary action of the police and could prove that he is an Indian citizen. Another pathetic tale is of Bhupendra Paul (65), a Hindu-Bengali, of Dhalcherra village, also in Cachar who too was harassed by police but could prove that he was not a “doubtful” citizen. The family members of two rickshaw pullers, Monotosh and Sontosh Sabdakar of Paikan village in Hailakandi district, had to spend sleepless nights and undergo nightmarish experiences after police one day picked both the brothers and pushed them to the other side of the border without even verifying their citizenship. A 102 year old Mr. Repati Das and his wife Titilabala Das, Bengali Hindu, have also become victims of ‘witch hunting’ by police despite their valid documents like legacy data of 1966 and names on electoral rolls of the even year. Repati Das was not only detained by police but also sent to detention camp.

Hindu Bengali Refugees from Muslim-majority Bangladesh, nowhere to go?

None can understand better the mental and physical agonies of these unfortunate victims of partition than the persons themselves. In order to give relief to Assam’s indigenous Hindu Bengalis, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) Government led by Mr. Narendra Modi came out with Notification on September 7, 2015 which speaks of providing citizenship to those who entered Assam till December 31, 2014. But, it could be of little help. Mr. Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister, when asked about the efficacy of the Notification pushed the ball to the court of the State Government. Interestingly, the High Courts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Punjab have disposed of the cases of persons entering the states from West Pakistan favorably on the strength of the Notification. The question is being raised in competent circles why the same notification cannot be given effect to in Assam.

Assam which has turned into a boiling pot with illegal immigrants is no doubt in a tight situation. The Sonowal Government of Assam of the Bharatiya Janata Party, as that of the federal Prime Minister Modi, has all the sympathy for the Hindu Bengali refugees. After all the NRC update is under the direct supervision of the Supreme Court of India where
the executive has no role to play. And their hangs the tale. The list of harassment is long. Satyendra Paul (Hindu) of Karicherra village with legacy data of 1966, Irsad Ali (Muslim) of Badlabadli enlisted in NRC 1951, both from Hailakandi district, Bandana Das (Hindu), mother of BSF jawan Ripon Das, of Kukithal, Paresh Das of Thandapur, Krishna Sen of Borkhola, Pratima Roy and Bidhan Chandra Deb of Salganga, Dhiren Das Malakar of Mohanpur, Nima Dey of Bakrihowar, Gauranga Paul of Algapur bazaar, Suchandana Goswami of Silchar — all Hindus, and many others from different parts of Barak Valley were detained and put in camp. Bandana Das was simply picked up from her home and locked up in Karimganj police station where she wept inconsolably. Still most pathetic 101 year old Chandradhar Das of Dholai Boraibasti was not spared. He remained confined in detention camp for years until human rights and legal activists came forward to get him released, all in Hindu-majority southern Barak Valley of Assam.

And what is the condition inside six detention camps of Assam? It is clear from the observation of Harsha Mandar, social activist and former federal administrative IAS officer, specially deputy by Human Rights Commission, New Delhi, to have an on the spot study of the condition of detention camps and the detainees. After going round the detention camps, he found gross violation of human rights and submitted his report to the Commission last January 2018. He resigned as no follow up action was taken up by the HRC on his report. Not only that United Nations Human Rights early this July shot off a letter to Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, Union Minister of External Affairs, drawing her attention to gross violation of human rights during the NRC update process. Now the President of India, Hon. Ram Nath Kovinda, on receiving disturbing reports about the harassment of minorities in Assam has sent a letter to the state government on July 14, 2018 seeking detailed report on it.

The harassment of citizens becomes more stinging with the verification of family tree of the applicants for NRC. This has sent shivers down the spine of many, rich and poor, the latter being put in acute distress. The call for verification from NRC Seva Kendras (serving centers) to individuals is not only from the home districts but also from distant places of the state. Think of the families who have to live from hand to mouth. In fact, NRC continues to be the cause of mental and physical harassment for applicants who are worried about the final outcome of this process. Indiscriminate issue of notices on both male and female members to prove their family tree linkage continues. The notices direct them to go to distant places not only inside this Barak Valley but also to Brahmaputra Valley. Numerous cases have been brought into focus in the media. Mrs. Mandira Nandi, well known educationist and former principal of RabindraSadan Girls’ College, Karimganj, has been asked to report at Dolabari in Sonitpur district for verification despite her falling health. The case of Mr. Sukomal Deb who works in Arunachal Pradesh is also intricate. His brother Bhaskar Deb has been asked to report at a Seva Kendra of Karimganj district to be present along with his brother within 24 hours of the receipt of the notice. (That journey may take over 24 hours!) There is no end to his anxiety as to how his brother could be present all the way from Arunachal Pradesh.

This is the way notices have been and are being served on citizens. According to a report, around 6,000 citizens in the border district of Karimganj alone have been served with such notices which direct them to report at different Seva Kendras within 12 to 24 hours. Many notices
have been served on citizens of this district from different districts of Tinsukia, Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Karbi Anglong, Guwahati and other places to report within a short time. Such notices have led to deep resentment and anger among the people in general. Mr. Ranjit Kumar Laskar, nodal officer of NRC, admitted he has come across such allegations which he attributed to technical glitch or problem. Efforts are being made to rectify them.

Ms. Sushmita Dev, MP Silchar, took up the matter with Sailesh, IAS, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, in New Delhi for arranging video conferencing of individuals within the district after Mr. Prateek Hazela, NRC state coordinator, was unresponsive on the matter. This would save them from endless harassment. Delayed serving of notice has created a perplexing and confusing situation. One could easily understand what happens to a person of Barak Valley when he or she is asked to report at Tinsukia, Barapathar, Shilapathar, Guwahati, Nagaon, Baksa and other distant places. Even the old, infirm and sick are not spared. Apart from all the stress and strain of telling heavily on their health, there is also the financial hardship. From all account, family tree verification has become synonym with extreme harassment, both mental and physical. In many cases, it has also become an acronym of mockery.

Of the total 33.9 million applicants for NRC update, 19 million names have found place in the first draft. Of them again 150,000 names have been dropped from the list on their being “Doubtful Citizens.” What fait waits for the remaining 23.9 million applicants, particularly belonging to Hindu Bengali Refugees, is any body’s guess. A look at what S R Darapuri, former Director General of Police of the northern Uttar Pradesh state, who led a fact finding team under the banner of NGO ‘United Against Hate’ to Assam to know all about the NRC update, said at a press-meet in New Delhi on July 13, 2018 “it is an arbitrary, whimsical, partisan and one sided exercise in which bureaucrats, officials, high and low, and even Foreigners’ Tribunals and a division bench of the Gauhati High Court” referred to by name “are playing questionable role.” During their 6 day study tour, the fact finding team found glaring examples of communal approach of NRC officials towards linguistic and religious minorities. S R Darapuri also apprehended a volatile situation in Assam as the names of 3,500,000 applicants will be dropped from the final draft. It will lead to serious human crisis.

Many applicants whose names have appeared in the first draft of NRC published in the midnight of December 31, 2017 are not at peace as they are being dragged to Seva Kendras centers to testify of their family lineage. The final draft is to come on July 30, 2018. What will be the fate of those whose names do not find place in it? Will the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 to accord citizenship to Hindu Bengali refugees find passage in the Parliament? Will the re-
port of Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) favor the Citizenship Bill? In fact, on all these questions hinge the very fate of Hindu Bengali refugees in Assam and in India.

**Note:**
(1) Then ruling l, the at the Federal level, the Congress Party of India of which Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister.
(2) Most Assamese are Hindu though there are many who follow Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and other religions. In Assam though, there are indigenous Bengali, Bodo and other linguistic groups.

* Former Head, Department of English, Silchar, Assam, India and journalist

***************

'Gandhi Smriti Ashram' is Losing Glory

M. Jashim Uddin*

Barisal Gandhi Ashram is losing its glory due to the lack of maintenance and patronage. Gandhi Smriti (Memorial) Ashram was established in the name of Mahatma Gandhi in Babaj village of Bakerganj Upazila (sub-district) of Barisal in pre-partition India.

The Ashram was established in 1946. Since 1994 it is being operated by a ten member Trust Committee, said Mr. Manabendra Batabayal one of trustees of the Ashram.

Barisal (Barishal) District
Locally called ‘Gandhi Ashram’ is located at Bebaj village in Kalashkati Union (village cluster) under Bakerganj Upazila. For a long time it is in ruined and undeveloped condition. Only left standing now are a 50’ feet tin structure and an under-construction one story building, a primary school and three ponds.

Mr. Mohammad Alauddin Howlader, 78, a Trustee and eye witness of Ashram founding said “Satindra Nath Sen was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He was also a revolutionary leader in Barisal and Patuakhali districts against British rule and he wanted to build an Ashram for
people’s welfare. He and his associates Mr. Binod Kanjilal, Mr. Sailesswar Chakrabary, Mr. Kedar Nath Samaddar, Mr. Debrendra Nath Dutta, and Mr. Nirmal Chandra Ghosh purchased the land at Bebaj village and started ‘Gandhi Seba (Service) Ashram.’ Mr. Kanu Gandhi grandson of Mahatma and his wife Ava Gandhi visited this place after its recent (re-) inauguration.

“After the death of Mr. Satindra Nath Sen at Dhaka Jail during Pakistani rule in 1955 (1), the Ashram was renamed ‘Satindra Smritee (Memorial) Gandhi Ashram,” added Howladar.

“We were then little, but prayed with our leaders and followers with Mahatma Gandhi’s singing ‘Raghupati Raghob Raja Ram…..’”

Local Barisal freedom fighter (against Pakistani atrocities), and Ashram trustee Mr. Nironjan Mistri said “Pakistan Army attacked the ashram, then damaged and torched some structures.”

“Some villagers were killed who lived adjoining this Ashram” Mistry added. After Liberation of Bangladesh (from Pakistan) in 1971, Ashram built the Bebaj-Kalashkati road and founded a girls’ school at Kalashkati Union. Mr. Ram Chattapadhya, Secretary of Gandhi Ashram founded Kalashkathi Girls’ High School. In Pakistan period the Ashram was damaged during (anti-Hindu) riots, said Mr. Ranajit Dutta, another trustee of the Ashram.

A primary school was established at the Ashram ground in 1963 named “Bebaj Amrita Smriti (Memorial) Primary School.” Free Bangladesh Government rededicated the school in 1973 as “Bebaj Amrita Smriti (Memorial) Government Primary School.” Now it has a two storied building. Young (Hindu) Amrita was killed near the Ashram area by Pakistan Army. He was the son of ex-Secretary Mr. Shyam Lal Halder.

Recently Mr. Ranjan Dutta, a worker of Gandhi Ashram, Joyag, Noakhali District, Bangladesh was sent here to train residents for bee keeping, making of hand-spun (charka) clothing, duck firming and more. From 1946 through 1980 bee keeping, spinning and clothing, and other activities continued.

But after 1990 all the activities almost closed due to the death Mr. Ram Chattapadhya, Secretary of the Ashram, said Mr. Ranajit Dutta, one of trustees of Ashram. “Once Upon a time, this Ashram had a glorious part of the local development and peoples’ welfare. We appealed to the government and affluent individuals for donation to the Ashram for it’s development,” he added.

After visiting this Ashram it was found that, this Ashram was the first ashram in Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan,)
named after Mahatma Gandhi. Yet no development funding by the government and non-government groups came through, and no regional, economical and social program were held here after 1990. As a result, Ashram turned into a jungle of 12-acre property.

Ashram authority leased the ponds and paddy field and earned fifty thousand takas (about $700 US dollars at 2018 rate — ed) to continue the necessary maintenance work, said Ashram sources.

“I heard the news of Gandhi Ashram. Already we sanctioned some of money to build one storied building. But this Ashram needs huge development funding,” said Mr. Mohammad Joynal Abedin, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Sub-district Administrative Officer), Bakerganj Upazila (sub-district).

“The Ashram is a glorious part of public welfare. We want it to try for a come back. So we are applying to all the people for developing the Ashram and join with us,” said Mr. Tapankar Chakrabarty, Secretary of the Ashram.

Director of the Noakhali Gandhi Ashram (Jayag village, Noakhali District, Bangladesh) Mr. Nabo Kumar Raha said, “that support for such a pacifist and human welfare organization needs to come from the public and the private sectors for its continued prosperity.”

Note:
(1) Sen also spent time in British prison for India’s independence activism.

*Journalist, Barishal, Bangladesh

Why the Partition Is Not an Event of the Past**

Dr. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar*

*Without a historical sense of the powerful ideas of nationhood that underpinned partition, we cannot recognize what is at stake for the here and now — and the stakes have never been higher.*

Partition violence was genocidal not just in scale, but also because of its intent. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

If the twentieth century was an “age of extremes,” as Eric Hobsbawm described it, then where do we place the promise of decolonization on the one hand and terror of Partition on the other?

“I did not want India to be partitioned, and it has been partitioned,” Mahatma Gandhi lamented at one of his multi-faith prayer meetings as Partition violence spread from Punjab to Delhi in September 1947. For a man who had dedicated his life to the anti-colonial struggle, Partition was an unbearable price for independence, the undoing of the centuries that Muslims and Hindus had lived together and a compromise of his concept of true swaraj, or self-rule, which he had once argued was impossible “without communal unity.”

Despite his anguish and his age, Gandhi was tenacious. He walked, prayed and fasted, drawing upon his well-worn strategies of non-violence once used to humble an arrogant and racist empire, to
now abate and salve the terror and violence from within. But the violence of Partition was not just another Hindu-Muslim riot, and its scale was unprecedented in the subcontinent’s modern history.

In divided Punjab (and Bengal), the British government at the time timidly put the numbers at around 200,000 deaths, but others who bore witness to the killings placed the figure closer to two million. (1) Over the years, it became standard practice to say a million died in “Partition violence,” to capture in some way the enormity of what had happened.

Two studies have been led by Harvard University faculty to give greater numerical precision to the human toll by using local, district-level data. Prashant Bhardwaj, Asim Khwaja and Atif Mian calculate that 3.7 million people went “missing” during the violence and most of them could be counted as those who died. Jennifer Leaning and colleagues estimate 2.3-3.2 million deaths in Punjab alone.

These numbers are just one kind of accounting, but it is important for they demand of us an account that can measure up to the scale of what happened, not just in the subcontinent’s history but also in the larger 20th century that shaped it. However, as W. G. Sebald wrote about looking back at Germany’s fascist past—that “we are always looking and looking away at the same time”—this has not been an easy task.

Over the last two decades, a great deal of research and writing has been simply breaking the silences around Partition, by collecting oral histories from a passing generation that lived through it, and by scavenging for documents in official and family records. And while there is now a deluge of attention on Partition’s memories, a willingness to speak of its traumas comes with a looking away when it comes to questioning the division itself, as if the violence and the political ideas that engendered the violence are entirely separable.

The question is not simply whether Partition should or should not have happened. But without a historical sense of the powerful ideas of nationhood that underpinned it, we cannot recognize what is at stake for the here and now – and the stakes have never been higher, and not just for South Asia but for nationalism around the world.

When the British conquered India, they understood and governed the country as divided by its many religious communities, with Hindus and Muslims forming the two largest ones. Thus when the struggle against imperialism began to be mobilized at the beginning of the 20th century, the unity of the different religious communities was seen by nationalists as essential to the anti-colonial struggle, and it is here that the idea of a nation as a fundamentally plural political community was forged. Even before Gandhi returned from South Africa, it was Muhammad Ali Jinnah – now regarded as the founding father of Pakistan – who took leadership in the nationalist struggle as the champion of Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi too sought out and built intimate ties with Muslim leaders, and communal unity became integral to swaraj, to a nation striving for freedom.

To understand the extraordinary nature of this particular Indian ideal of inclusive and plural nationhood, it is important to turn to Europe in the same period. As the ravaging Great War drew to a close, US President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points for peace became a clarion call for those seeking national self-determination around the world. It became a driving force at the League of Nations as new nation states were carved out of the former polyglot, multi-religious and multi-ethnic empires on Europe’s eastern borderlands.
But existing nation states, such as those of Western Europe, had hitherto been imagined only in mono-ethnic, monolingual or mono-religious terms and presumed the homogeneity of peoples it claimed to represent. It was an exclusive understanding of nationalism, and when it was imposed in this “belt of mixed populations” it unleashed the dark side of nationalism – the homogenizing, assimilating and even annihilating impulses of majoritarian nationalism in the face of heterogeneity in society at large. Can you imagine large Armenian populations in Turkey today, or Jews as integral to the Hungary of today, or historic Muslim and Christian communities of Greece still living together?

The League of Nations did try to grapple with this dark side of nationalism and its experiments were followed closely in India. For one, the League imposed minority treaties on the new multi-ethnic Eastern European states and created national minorities whose differences were not to be expunged but rather protected by the Paris Treaties. During the interwar years, Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Leader of Muslim League Party of pre-Partition India and Founding Father of Pakistan, spoke often of Czechoslovakia in particular as it was the most similar to India’s Muslim demographics, with an ethnic German minority that formed a substantial one-third of the population, with concentrations in the Sudeten borderlands.

The abject failure of the minority treaties in actually addressing minority grievances and the rise of fascism and Hitler’s annexation of Sudetenland in 1938 certainly gave the Indian ideal of an inclusive and plural nationalism a grave jolt from the outside. It transformed minorities into a threat, marked the international failure of minority rights to maintain plural politics, and this failure formed the backdrop to Jinnah’s Pakistan resolution in 1940 that set the stage for Partition with the proposition that the diversity of India’s Muslims was no longer to be regarded as a minority but rather a separate nation in need of a separate nation state.

However, it is important to remember that even as minority rights were feared to be inadequate, there could be no illusions that to create any kind of homogeneous nation state in a historically multi-religious society could only be a very violent process. While forced expulsions of unwanted people was not a new phenomenon, the League of Nations made it legal with two “transfer of populations” agreements between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, under the treaties of Neuilly and Lausanne in 1919 and 1923. The Greek-Turkish exchange of people along religious lines forced approximately two million people out of their homes. Even though it was an internationally sanctioned, legalized and planned form of ethnic cleansing, few reports of the time, including Zionist studies of the legal “transfers” for envisioning a Jewish state without Palestinians, could evade the enormity of the suffering it had caused.

In keeping with ideas of the time, the 1940 Pakistan resolution only tentatively asked for a consideration of “transfer of populations,” and instead demanded minority safeguards for substantial religious minorities that it imagined would remain a part of both Pakistan and India.

When compared to other twentieth-century partition plans in the British empire, namely those of Ireland and Palestine, it could be argued that these plans were meant to simply bestow majoritarian national status to renegade minorities, and were not invitations to ethnic cleansing in of themselves. The Indian case was quite unique because here, an anti-colonial experiment in plural nationalism had been undertaken which had attempted to solder both Hindus and Muslims as integral to the idea of India. And for all
those who had believed and invested in that experiment, Partition on a religious basis undermined the very ethos of pluralism and threatened to make Muslims outsiders/aliens to the very idea of India. As such, the years and days from 1940 to 1947 were full of historic angst, debate and detours, and even Jinnah momentarily relinquished the Partition as late as 1946 for a plan for united India. However, at the same time, the idea of Partition unleashed far more extreme ideas than even those of the Pakistan resolution itself. Hindu groups successfully lobbied the Indian National Congress to divide the provinces of Punjab and Bengal district by district (despite Jinnah and Gandhi’s ire at this proposal). Others called for the total “transfer of populations” along religious lines to create “pure” Muslim and Hindu states, and although this was vehemently opposed by most leaders, a “transfer of populations” agreement was adopted by the two new nation states for divided Punjab when Partition violence had already forced people on the move.

Partition violence was genocidal not just in scale, but also because of its intent. This was a gruesome district by district “weeding out” of unwanted religious communities, unraveling centuries of living together. The way in which the enormity of this violence has come to be narrated in literature and in people’s memories is often through the theme of madness, as a collective loss of reason: the whole country had gone mad. The metaphor of “weeding out” is important for it comes from the work of the philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. He had argued in the 1980s that the Holocaust should not be considered an aberration of modern history, but rather that it stemmed from as ordinary an impulse as weeding the garden. Visions of ethnic purity turned groups in society into human weeds to be systematically regarded as dangerous, contagious, to be separated, and if necessary, ultimately killed. Mass murder was not the result of a collective loss of reason or uncontrolled passion; it instead drew upon a set of ideas, vision and planning that re-organized society in both mundane and catastrophic ways.

In that sense, Partition is not behind us. It is not an event of the past. It is rather like the Zahir in Jorge Luis Borges’ story, an object that slowly distorts all reality in relation to it. These slow and accumulating distortions, in school textbooks, monuments, mainstream media and so on, have had a mundane effect of transforming public common sense into narrowing nationalisms. And it is only when these narrowing nationalisms become catastrophes, with the killing of marked minorities, that there is episodic outrage. But we need more than episodic outrage.

Seventy years on, most people in both India and Pakistan have retired to the view that while the violence of Partition was regrettable – and could have been avoided if the British had handled their exit with less shameless haste and self-interest – Partition itself was a good thing. It is no longer a subject of debate as it was in its immediate aftermath. And yet this is precisely the moment when we need renewed scrutiny of the kind of nationalism that Partition conceded, and whether it is indeed the “evil” that the poet Rabindranath Tagore once lectured against – a devastating surrender of humanity’s capacity for humanity.

**Note:**

(1) This was mostly focused on the West, i.e. Punjab, (not east, i.e., Bengal and Assam.)

*The writer is an associate professor of history at Brown University and faculty fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies.*
**Dr. Zamindar’s slightly different version of the article appeared in Daily Dawn of Pakistan.**

**************

The Guadeloupean Model**

Professor Jean S. Sahai*

Guadeloupe, an archipelagic outpost of France in the Caribbean, is, like her sister island of Martinique, a kaleidoscope of skin colors, facial features and ethnic praxes in the paradisiacal French West Indies. Most of the 500,000 or so inhabitants descend from freed African slaves. Some eight percent, 70,000 or so, are of Indian origin, and many thousands are mixed along all possible lines.

In 1854, after slavery abolition, the French and British brought Indian indentured workers from the Malabar coast, southwest India, Pondicherry, a French colonial territory in Tamil southeast India, and Hindi-speaking Uttar Pradesh and Bihar of north and east India, via Calcutta port. They have since imbibed French culture and all education levels, but also kept rituals with strong remnants of Indian folk and religious traditions. In contrast to diasporic places like Trinidad & Tobago where the Hindu culture has been maintained, and politics have separated the people along ethnic lines, more and more Guadeloupeans of any origin will wear Indian clothes, enjoy Indian food, listen to Indian music, or take trips to India.

Just as the Colombo, a Creole variation of Indian curry, called Kolbu in Martinique, from a Tamil word, is the favorite food of every family on both islands, called the ‘national dish’ by all, people of Indian origin can be found among leaders of all persuasions, political parties, trade-unions, press and television people, popular singers and musicians, etc.

The distant Creole islands of Mauritius and Reunion in the Indian Ocean have similar situations, with much higher Indian percentage. In Martinique, Indians number much fewer than in Guadeloupe and they are, astonishingly enough, still called kouli (coolies or porter), a word considered a slur in Guadeloupe. But just as in Guadeloupe, their work in Indian dance is well-respected and officially acknowledged and supported in the field of the Arts. Consuelo Marlin-Bernard, a chabine (mixed of white and black ancestry) is a full-fledged Bharat Natyam dancer and teacher, trained at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London, and in Chennai. The renowned Negritude writer and poet Aimé Césaire had chosen Mr. Serge Letchimy as his successor as the mayor of Fort-de-France, the main town of Martinique. Such examples abound in the French West Indies, so much so that they are rarely noted as special.

Most people of Indian descent in the French West Indies are Catholics, or belong to Christian groups, i.e. Jehovah’s Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventist. In a coup d’état of devout ecumenisms, the Virgin Mary has been for long worshiped with Hindu rituals. In the last thirty years or so, many cultural groups for the promotion of Indian culture have developed. Leaders like Jacques Sidambarom have
been networking with GOPIO (Global Organization of Peoples of Indian Origin) International and other Indian cultural societies, especially in Trinidad and Tobago, Réunion Island, Mauritius, Pondicherry… or Paris.

Groups that have coalesced over the years are over 30-year old “Les Amis de l’Inde” (Friends of India), presided by Mr Eliézère Sitcharn, ACECI, GOPIO, various Hindu religion or yoga groups, classical or Bollywood dance companies, or devotees of Transcendental or Siddha Yoga Meditation, not necessarily Indian-headed.

The CGPLI, Center for Guadeloupe Promotion of Languages from India, led by Mr Fred Negrit, a dedicated high school teacher whose grandmother was Indian, has taught Hindi and Tamil to hundreds of students of all origins, and has been inviting renowned Professors from India and other countries, like Prof. Appassamy Murugaiyan of Paris University, to teach and lecture on the island.

In 2013, Jean S. Sahai, a professor of English, published a well-acclaimed 266-page book in French called “Adagio pour la Da, les Indiens des Antilles, de Henry Siddambarom à Aimé Césaire”. Diaspora readers are yearning to see the English version out, as the opus contains a whole chapter on the life and work of Henry Siddambarom (see later). Another interesting feature of the book is an analysis of the “indianity” of Martinican Negritude Poet Aimé Césaire. Raised as a baby by a Tamil maid, Césaire gifted this author with his own Paris-bought Tamil-English Dictionary, signed with a comment mentioning Tamil as being a part of the French West Indies linguistic heritage.

In 1997, J. S. Sahai had taken the helm as host of then Guadeloupe’s FM popular two-hour radio program called Musique à l’Inde that lasted over two years. The program would feature classical and modern Indian music, as well as discussions on Indian philosophy, history and culture.

Back in 1996, public radio had announced that Diwali would be celebrated for the first time, earning the festival a place on the Guadeloupean calendar as a requisite popular holiday. The news delighted locals and tourists attracted to Hindu philosophy, yoga, music, fashion, food and temples in Europe, the USA or India, and they turned out in large numbers for the 1997 festival held at Le Moule. Let there be light! Besides private observances, only very few small groups like the one led by pusali (priest) Jocelyn Nagapin had been celebrating Diwali. His grandfather from India had passed onto him his knowledge of Indian scriptures, inspiring him to hold on to his heritage. Another pusali, Marguerite Périan, wanted to participate in the revival of Diwali rituals. He had to learn some Tamil, as his ancestors had forgotten it, due to the French acculturation.

The real impetus came from a Kerala engineer, Mr. Mohanan Vaddakekara, sent to Guadeloupe in 1992 by the European construction company he worked for. In 1996, Vaddakekara issued a directive to Guadeloupe Indians, unequivocally declaring, “This is the year we must celebrate Diwali!” And Diwali was celebrated in Saint-François, a seaside resort town whose then mayor was Mr. Ernest Moutoussamy, and home to a significant Indian population. Some 400 people gathered for the festival. There was a hitch, though. They had no diyas, the small clay lamps that are critical to any festival of lights. Like a Hindu Olympic torch, diyas darted over from Trinidad via Federal Express, just in time. Enthusiasm and wherewithal fructified in 1997, and Diwali was celebrated in the city of
Le Moule, where a great number of Indian Guadeloupeans live. The Mayor, Madame Gabrielle Louis-Carabin, assisted in securing the use of an attractive open-air venue by the sea.

With guidance from apt builder Vaddakekara, a small Kerala-style wooden temple was built by volunteers working till 2:00 am. Eighteen bamboo poles were raised with multicolored OM flags, along with a special flying Lakshmi flag, delivered from Trinidad. Laksmi puja was performed. Many bought diya to illuminate the arena and a cultural fête followed the religious act. The Mayor, Madame Gabrielle Carabin, performed the lighting of the kuttuvilaku oil lamp. She gave an insightful talk on the value of Diwali for all Guadeloupeans, as an occasion for rejoicing and celebrating the virtues of tolerance and cooperation. She commended the Indian community for their high values and active role in society, and was presented with many gifts, including a CD of Indian music, Mahatma Gandhi’s Autobiography and an Indian scarf, by two too-cute, sari-clad girls. She thrilled the audience when she revealed that her daughter’s fiancé was Indian, and that she was contemplating a visit to India.

The sea breeze blowing out the diya could not darken the mood. Instead, people had fun running and relighting them. Over 1,000 people of all origins and religions came. The press and television, gave substantial coverage. There was lavish food - laddus (sweet balls) and other Indian sweets by Mohanan’s wife and volunteers, vegetarian meals by Maharajah Monty restaurants, rotis (flat wheat bread) by an Indian family following their great grandmother’s recipe. A successful table of books on Indian culture and Indian music gave attendees a chance to learn more… and there were fireworks for the biggest Diwali ever on the island. Vaddakekara then saw this as the fledgling beginnings of the recently awakened community. He related, “Last year, we built a simple altar with banana trees. This year, the Deities were housed in wood. In ten years, we’ll have gold - how can this not come true?”

Indian culture has indeed now grown as a well-acknowledged commodity in the French West Indies. With official money and support, Celebrations of 150 years of Indian Presence and Contribution were held with enthusiasm in 2003 in Martinique, and 2004 in Guadeloupe.

In 2013, we commemorated the 150th anniversary of the birth of Henry Sidambarom. This Indo-Guadeloupean fighter, the son of Tamil workers, was the champion who secured French citizenship and civil rights for the descendants of indentured workers of Guadeloupe in 1923, after a non-violent legal battle of nine years with the French Government. A year later, these privileges were to be extended to the Indian inhabitants of all French Overseas Territories.

With time, patience, heart and hard work, the winds of annoyance and timidity have relented and vanished. Being Indian or having Indian family has become just another respected hallmark at all levels of the proud Guadeloupean Model.

* Professor and author, Guadeloupe, French West Indies

** Article written for Hinduism Today Magazine (February 1998); revised and updated in February of 2018 for the Partition Center Journal

*******************************
Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project Inc.

ISPaD Needs Help from Y O U

Several Bengali-Americans in New York, individuals whose families were victims of partition of the Indian Subcontinent – especially of former British-Indian Bengal – formed a partition documentation project called ISPaD or Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project Inc. to save the history and experiences of lost and displaced individuals and families, their villages, their life, and of survivors and that of protectors.

The Project has received not-for-profit status from the Departments of Education and State of New York State and a 503-C tax-exempt status from the I.R.S. (of the U.S. Government). ISPaD is open to all.

The purposes of the project are:

a) Document information from the people affected by the partition;
b) Collect historical records;
c) Study and document demographic and social changes caused by the partition;
d) Create a center to disseminate and share the information with the public and civic groups and rights organizations engaged globally in such activities;
e) Interact with the concerned governments and international bodies to raise awareness about the plight of the victims of ethnic cleansing and support the needy;
f) Organize meetings, seminars, conduct scholarly research, and publish journals and books.
g) Solicit funds to support the above activities.

ISpad is looking for individual and family stories, documents, pictures, narratives, deeds, artifacts, books, family history, stories of refugees, survivors, protectors and that of the lost ones, tapes, films, videos of Bengal and Indian partitions – from 1947 through the present.

I'm pleased to help Partition Documentation! Here’s my gift!

Please make checks payable to ISPaD: The Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project Inc.

Donation Amount $______ [ ] One time; [ ] Yearly ________ ; [ ] Monthly ________ (Approx. Date)
Name __________________________________________________
Address __________________________________________________
Email ____________________________________________________
Phone ____________________     __________________________

Mail to: ISPaD, 85-60 Parsins Blvd, Jamaica, NY 11342;
Phone: 917-524-0035; www.ispad1947.org; ISPaD: Indian Subcontinent Partition Documenta-
tion Project Inc. and Check on YouTube Ispad1947, Channel; email: ispad1947@gmail.com

Board of Directors: Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar (Distinguished Professor & Author, NY); Mr. Pratip Dasgupta, (Social Advocate; NY); Mr. Ramen Nandi (Engineer; NJ;) Dr. Dilip Nath, (IT Specialist & Activist; NYC); Dr. Tom Lilly (Attorney & Professor; Long Island); Dr. Shefali S. Dastidar, (City Planner, NYC); Dr. Rudra Nath Talukdar (Physician and Activist, Texas); Project Coordinator Mr. Shuvo G. Dastidar.
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal
October 13, 2018

Bhola N. Banik,  M.D., F.A.C.C., F.A.C.P., P.C.
Diplomate American Board of Internal Medicine
Diplomate American Board of Cardiovascular Disease
1097 Old Country Road, Suite 103, Plainview, NY 10803
Tel: 516-931-3131; 516-933-1999
Office Hours by Appointment
Wishing a Successful 2018 Partition Center Conference and Journal

Amitabha & Keoly Chattterjee
New Jersey

Wishing a Successful 2018 Partition Center Conference and Journal

Alireza Ebrahimi
Long Island

Wishing a Successful 2018 Partition Center Conference and Journal

Ms. Laura Healey, Long Island
Ms. Linda Rennie, Long Island
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Kumar Kanti Das, M.D. (U.S.A.)
Silchar, Assam, India
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Seshadri Gupta, P.E.
New York City
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Shuvo G. & Sumedha J. Dastidar
Queens, New York
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Bijoy (M.D.) & Aparna S. Roy
Plattsburgh, New York
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Dr. Tom & Teresa Lilly
Long Island
Congratulations to ISPaD
The Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project
(Of course to all the Board Members, Volunteers, and Supporters as well!)

For your commitment & contribution in documenting our Partition-era (South Asian) previously undocumented history. Thanks to ISPaD's novel and unique efforts at documentation, you all have been working to ensure a crucial segment of global history does not vanish.

Best Wishes for
The 2018 Partition Center Conference

Dr. Dilip & Dipa Nath
New York
Wishing a Successful

2018 Partition Center Conference and Journal
Priyotosh Dey
Vidya Dham Panchatatva Gitapith, Queens, NY
& Jamaica Hindu Community
646-643-3668

Wishing a Successful

2018 Partition Center Conference and Journal
October 13, 2018

Prof. Jill Hamberg, New York City
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Jay S. Hyman, C.S.W.
Social Worker
718-207-7101
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Jagan (M.D.) & Asha Pahuja
Long Island
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Prabal (P.E.) & Swapna (P.E.) Mukherji
Long Island
HAF IS YOUR POLICY ADVOCATE

Working with policymakers to ensure Hindus worldwide are free and safe

HAF is a non-profit advocacy organization that seeks to improve the public understanding of Hinduism and Hindus and advance the well-being of all.

For more information, please visit:
www.HAFsite.org

Follow HAF on social media:
@HinduAmerican
Wishing a Successful

Partition Center Conference and Journal

October 13, 2018

Drs. Sachi G. & Shefali S. Dastidar
Queens, New York
Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities

A Humanitarian & Human Rights Organization

An NGO in Special Consultative Status with UN
Wishing a Successful
2018 Journal & Conference

Rudra Nath Talukdar, M.D.
Texas
email rudranath.talukdar@ahpac.com
We need your support for rights protection!