ISPaD Partition Center
Journal 2019
ISSN 2377-7567

72 Years of Partition & Independence

(Introducing: Ulpur Basu-Roy-Chowdhury Family History; 1938)

Editor: Sachi G. Dastidar, Ph.D.
Published by
Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation Project (ISPaD)
Established: 2009
Jamaica, Queens, New York City
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© ISPaD Project Inc. NY Date: October 2019

Editor: Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar

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

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Web: www.ispad1947.org

All the papers in the Journal were reviewed by the Editorial Board: Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar, Editor, New York; Dr. Alireza Ebrahimi, Long Island; Dr. Edislav 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 2018 Conference

Shuvo G. Dastidar**
Partition Center Project Coordinator

On Saturday October 13, 2018 the Partition Center (ISPaD) Conference was opened by Professor Dr. Alireza Ebrahimi of the State University of New York at Old Westbury. In his brief introduction he reminded the participants as how his family is divided among many nations with difficult-to-bridge boundaries. He reminded the participants as to the goals and aspiration of the Partition Project, among others, saving historical documents, reconciliation and bridging among divided societies. Thus this year’s theme was: Division, Reconciliation and Union. Professor Ebrahimi was followed by Mr. Usama Sheikh, Vice President of SUNY Old Westbury who welcomed the guests to the campus. He told the story of how one of his ancestors of Sind Province became a minister in the first national government in Pakistan in 1947 after partition of India.

Dr. Ebrahimi then released the first copies of the 2018 Partition Center Journal to the following distinguished guests: Dr. Kumar Kanti Das of Assam, India; Mrs. Apala Egan of California and two of ISPaD’s supporters from its inception, Ms. Laura Healey and Ms. Linda Rennie, both of Long Island. This year’s journal contains ten articles from the U.S., India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They are: “Prafulla C. Mukherji’s [PCM 1885-1982] Important Roles in Helping Indian and South Asian Causes. 1960’s and 1970’s” by Akkaraju Sarma, “People, Embodied Experiences, Collective Intergenerational Memories: An Overview of ‘The Partition’ in South Asia” by Anup Shekhar Chakraborty, “August, 1947” by Karabi Sen, “The 1900s: The Century of Women’s Transition in Bengal and India” by Sachi G. Dastidar, “Partition Angst in Annada Shankar Ray’s Nursery Rhyme” by Monish R Chatterjee, “NRC: Hindu Bengalis at a Crossroads in [Assam State] India” by Jyoti Lal Chowdhury, “Gandhi Smriti [Memorial] Ashram’[in Barisal, Bangladesh] is Losing Glory” by M. Jashim Uddin, “Why the Partition Is Not an Event of the Past” by Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, “The Guadeloupean Model” by Jean S. Sahai and “2017 Conference Report” by this writer. The cover and theme picture is that of the Samadhi (Memorial) of Ganga Ram in Lahore, Pakistan sent to ISPaD by Mr. Haroon Khalid of Pakistan who is the author of a book on Ganga Ram who is the master builder of colonial buildings of Punjab, Pakistan.

Dr. Alireza Ebrahimi, left standing, releasing the first copy of 2018 Partition Center Journal to, from left, Mrs. Apala Egan, Dr. Kumar Das, Ms. Linda Rennie and Ms. Laura Healey, standing.

This was followed by a session on “Since Partition Bengali Hindu Refugee and Bengali Muslim Migration: Assam, Northeast India, and recent National Registrar of Citizens in Assam, India” with presentations by Dr. Kumar Das, Physician and Activist, Silchar City, Assam State, India and an Assessment by Arijit Aditya, Journalist of Assam, India. The
round-table session was joined by Dr. Bijoy Roy and Mrs. Aparna Roy, both of Assam and Plattsburgh, and Dr. Dilip Nath of New York City. The session was chaired by Professor Edi Manetovic an expert on ethno-nationalism and ethno-politics. Before the full-fledged discussion Sachi Dastidar made a brief introduction of the “Assam Issue” going back to colonization of Assam by the British in early 1800s, then the colonizers’ divide-and-rule policies creating an identity politics and demographic issue. Assamese-speaking sectarian nationalism rose with continuous flow of Muslim-persecuted Bengali Hindu minority as well as illegal migration of majority-Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh into Hindu-majority Assam. After decades of activism by Assamese-speaking nationalists Government of India created a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam in 1980s which found five million “Doubtful ‘D’ Citizens”, deleting them from voter list, but not deporting to Bangladesh (or to Nepal.) The question raised by the papers of Das and Aditya as to where can the hapless Hindus go when their homes and hearth were forcefully taken over by Muslim thugs in Bangladesh. A lively discussion followed the presentation.

Next session “Conversation with Mrs Apala Egan on Dandakaranya (Oppressed-Caste East Pakistani/Bangla Hindu Peas-
unleashed a terror on the minority Hindus with huge loss of life and property, and abduction of thousands of mothers and minor Hindu girls.

Mrs. Apala Egan, right, speaking on Dandakaranya Refugee Rehabilitation Project and 1946 Noakhali Pogrom, with Dr. Shefali S. Dastidar in conversation.

Some of the commentators included Mr. Jay Hyman, Mr. Prabal Mukherji, Mr. Shuvo Roy, Dr. Aniruddha Sen, Mr. Shadeed Stephens, Ms. Nahid Fathi, Muhammed Sihabudheen Kolakkattil, among others.

The refreshments at the conference was provided by Mrs. Sumedha Dastidar, Mr. Usama Sheikh, Ms. Laura Healey, Ms. Linda Rennie and by Dr. Ebrahimi.

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

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PARTITION OF INDIA, THE UNHEALED WOUND

Dr. Atanu Sarkar**

The partition of India in 1947 as a price paid for its independence is such a bleak, ghastly, bloody, gloomy and terrorizing episode in the history of the entire Indian subcontinent that even now after 72 years of attaining ‘Independence’ the entire subcontinent constantly bleeds to compensate the expense of the said price and thus the ‘Independence’ has proved itself to be an imagined state of existence which has lost blood of millions of lives of the freedom fighters for about 200 years till 1947, and even more lives of unarmed common citizen especially women and children in a mere span of few months. Thanks to the brutality of the outbreak of communal riot during the partition which is still continuing with the blood-bath of the defense personnel posted at the borders in each country, no one knows if it ever is going to cease.

The world during the partition of India creating Pakistan had witnessed the biggest ever forceful migration in recorded human history. It was an act of ethnic cleansing imposed by the British Government who ethnically belonged to neither part involved in the said act. British officials employed to accomplish this task and British and American journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps reported that the riot killing had outnumbered that of the Nazi death camps¹.

A letter from the ‘Viceroy’s House’, located at Raisina Hill, Delhi was sent to Jawaharlal Nehru on 6 August, 1946. Before receiving the letter on the next day in a small town Wardha, Nehru had encountered an accidental death of a 5-year-old village boy². When he finally received the letter which probably announced the upcoming freedom of India along with Nehru’s being proposed as the prime minister his mournful mood was hardly able to cherish the excitement; rather the blood-spots of the dead boy in his white kurta metaphorically symbolized the blood-bath that the future generation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were going to witness for years. Even the militant attack on Phulwama, south Kashmir on 14 February 2019 too was
probably written between the lines in that ‘letter’. Nehru’s ‘Tryst With Destiny speech’ on the august occasion of India’s freedom perhaps ironically acknowledged this loss and forecasted the one that was to follow, “We rejoice in that freedom, even though clouds surround us, and many of our people are sorrow-stricken and difficult problems encompass us. But freedom brings responsibilities and burdens and we have to face them in the spirit of a free and disciplined people.” Sir Cyril Radcliffe, British architect of partition was appointed as the Chairman of the Boundary commission for the two nations and was entrusted to equitably divide a landmass of 450,000 square miles with 88 million inhabitants. Before this appointment he had neither visited India nor had any knowledge about its locale. Moreover, he took only six weeks to make his research before publishing the border line that was going to decide the destiny of uncountable citizens for generations to come. He could have hardly been able to visit the places physically where on map he drew his line. Such a notion of triviality could only be maintained because to Britain, India was nothing more than a mere asset, where ‘Indians and Dogs’ made no difference. At this the legendary Indian politician Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had protested and had mockingly said that he himself could easily visit the Great Britain on a vacation and return after making it a combination of several small countries.

The result of this impudent act was horrible. States like, Punjab in the western India and Assam, and Bengal in the eastern part had a direct scar on their body by the Radcliffe line and suffered terrible communal violence as an obvious aftermath of the partition made on communal separation ground. A free India was born when the secular India was torn through the torn out limbs of dead bodies, the torn relationships of inter-religious lovers, the cut out breasts of women, and the smashed fleshes of fetuses taken out from live woman’s wombs and so on. Houses and shops were burnt; blood flooded the streets like drain water. Trains carrying migrants between India and Pakistan either way bore only dead bodies, slaughtered on the way. Women of both the communities of Hindu-Sikh and Muslim were allowed by their own family members to commit suicide as this was a better choice of death than having suffered brutal rapes followed by mutilation of body by the fanatic male creatures of other community. Yes, I deliberately prevent calling them as ‘men’; they were not even as compassionate as beasts.

In Khushwant Singh’s path-breaking novel depicting a true account of the trauma during partition Train to Pakistan a character remarks where on earth except India a man’s life would depend on whether or not his foreskin had been removed. It would be laughable if it were not tragic. But since this typical bodily identification system was unavailable for women there had been many ironical cases where a woman had been mistakenly molested and butchered by people from her own community. Thus it proved that the excuse of community was a mere tool being operated by diplomats from India, Pakistan and Britain – and the pointless slaughtering of people was a mere collateral damage as human beings are invariably born to die. Phillip Talbot describes a gloomy picture from the bleakest days in Calcutta riot, “Burnt-out automobiles stood across traffic lanes. A pall of smoke hung over many blocks, and buzzards sailed in great, leisurely circles. Most overwhelming, however, were the neglected human casualties: fresh bodies, bodies grotesquely pleated in the tropical heat, slashed bodies, bodies bludgeoned to death, bodies piled on pushcarts, bodies caught in drains, bodies stacked high
in vacant lots, bodies, bodies.”

Responsibility to this massacre should be taken not only by Radcliffë, but by many. Archibald Percival Wavell, the then Viceroy of India had feared that the furies released in Calcutta would quickly spread and realized that the only preventive measure left was to cast a compromise in the proposed idea of partition. And both Congress and Muslim league would share equal power and authority in free India. Wavell hinted that in the absence of a deal, he might have to withdraw the offer to let Nehru form a government. But at this the normally pacifist Gandhi erupted and resisted, “If India wants her bloodbath she shall have it!” Jinnah, on the other hand was an equally adamant seeker of the partition and to become the chief authority in a free Muslim country Pakistan. In his personal life he was deserted by all except an unmarried aged sister. Both of his wives had died. The second wife Ruttie had left him out of disgust quite a long time before her death. Once Jinnah had expressed his grief about Ruttie to one of his friends, “She drove me mad,…She was a child and I should never have married her” His daughter never left India for Pakistan. In fact, there are many controversies saying that Jinnah himself was much deviated in his lifestyle and demeanor from the principles of Islam. He had hardly any personally close ally in his party. Still his agenda on a Muslim state was firm. Due to this the sufferings of riots were extended even farther. Probably Calcutta was the first to face the fury in 1946 in the great ‘Calcutta Killing’. It was the same province that exhibited tremendous sense of communal unity in the name of a unified sentiment of Bengal in 1905. But such was the crucial political twist that the glory of 1905 of united Bengal remained a mute spectator when Bengal was burning in 1946. This led to another riot pogrom in Noakhali soon and was on the verge of igniting many more; only possible solution it seemed was to finally execute the partition. Bengal was then ruled by Muslim League Party. Thus still people of these affected regions bear the scar of genocide with their memory of independence. Some would call it ‘ethnic cleansing’, but the process and impact of the said was deadly and not every part of the country had faced it equally.

What all the partition-makers did not bother to think was that India was a communally mixed country and people of both the communities of Hindu (non-Muslims) and Muslim used to live in places even 1000s of miles away from the Radcliffe line. Not only they would find it hard to cross the line safely leaving their ancestral homes for ever, but also they would forcefully form a multi-lingual, multi-cultural community. Quite invariably the East Pakistan, in a later period started protesting against making Urdu as official language suppressing their mother language Bengali. As noted by Major General (Rtd.) Tozammel Hossain Malik in his memoir of his tenure in East Pakistan in 1950’s and 60’s, the Bengali natives, due to their non-Urdu preference and poor economic status were looked down upon as ‘niggers’ by the West Pakistanis. This burning issue yet again had sprouted into a havoc of bloodshed. Finally, after a glorious battle for linguistic and cultural independence, in 1971 they separated from Pakistan and formed an independent country, Bangladesh.

Along with a critical historical discussion, in order to show how in present day too the partition affects us, I would like to add my own experiences of both the east and western parts of India in 2016-19.
In my visits to Bangladesh in 2016 & 2017 as a theatre performer I had encountered weird situations. Although they have successfully attained victory over linguistic domination, yet an undercurrent of the opposite fundamentalist force is strongly active there and any free thinker or artist or writer always bears the risk of receiving a tragic death in their hands that too in public places. On 04.04.2016 in Bogura, north Bangladesh, our team enjoyed the hospitality of a local political leader who shared with us his plight for being a member of Hindu minority community trying to sustain as a citizen as well as a politician in Bangladesh. We had performed in Rajshahi, north Bangladesh bordering India, on the next day i.e. 5 April 2016 and the brutal killing of Rezaul Karim Siddique, Professor of English in Rajshahi University took place just after 18 days on 23 April 2016 in a crowded bus stoppage in the same city. However, during our next visit in March 2017 we had received round the clock security from Bangladesh Govt. because in between on 01.07.2016 in Dhaka the ruthless Gulshan killing had already taken place. Though I returned home unharmed, many instances of terrorist killing are regular news in Bangladesh today.

Secondly, on the occasion of my first marriage anniversary in February, 2019 we two were to go on a romantic trip to the heaven on earth, the snowclad beautiful Kashmir via a small visit to Amritsar, a western bordering city in Punjab, India. It was again co-incidentally 100th year of the Jallianwalah-Bagh massacre by the order of the wicked British General Dyer, in Amritsar itself. Ironically it was the Valentine’s Day too. However, during the famous Flag down ceremony in the afternoon in Wagah border, Amritsar spectators from both sides of the border were shouting either ‘Hindustan Jinda-bad’ (Long live India) or ‘Pakistan Jinda-bad’ (Long Live Pakistan). Somehow I was unable to spiritually participate in this celebration of partitioned nationalism and was contemplating about an ‘Anti Radcliffe movement’ in future leading to the birth of a superpower nation named ‘The United States of Indian Subcontinent’.

When we reached Amritsar railway station in the night to catch our Jammu bound express train at 12.50 A.M the spine chilling news came to us about the militant attack in Phulwama in the same afternoon that had taken away lives of 42 young Indian soldiers. He who killed never had known the identity or religion of the victims; still hatred worked on him...
for want of free Kashmir; yet another still burning abscess as an indirect impact of partition.

Flag down ceremony of India and Pakistan at Wagah border

In the freezing winter night in open platform we stood awestruck; the train arrived, but we did not board; it left vacant to the world of dead’s, to the bleeding heaven on earth, fresh blood and warm flesh on thick white snow – presenting a delicious supper to partition-makers. Yes, my anniversary trip was undoubtedly marred. So was the rejoicing of ‘independence’ marred for Gandhi too who had finally refused to attend the ceremony; the rejoicing was marred for Nehru too with the blood spots in his white kurta. Every time any sport happens between India and Pakistan and we rejoice for less our victory and more their loss the Radcliffe line digs deeper into our soul. In spite of the poor economic condition of India we invest a lion share for defense system to stay safe from our neighbor who once might have fought together with us against the British rule and thus the Radcliffe line digs deeper. The wound is not healed, but leading to cancer; we are slowly being eaten by maggots– our former colonizers rejoice to witness the successful remote detonation of their communal explosive device.

Notes:


2. ibid PP-19.


5. op cit Nisid Hajari,

6. ibid PP-33.


8. “Islamic State claims responsibility for murder of Bangladeshi professor,” Daily Times. April 25, 2016,


9. Marszal Andrew & Graham Chris, “20 hostages killed in ‘Isil’ attack on Dhaka restaurant popular with foreigners,” The Telegraph, July 2, 2016,


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Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, Volume I. Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1949, Government of India.


As the National Registrar of Citizens (NRC) update process in Assam inches forward to its catastrophic finale, the Bengalis in this state in the north-eastern part of India sharing Bangladesh, sense another Partition looming large over their vulnerable existence. A Partition undefined, undeclared. The 1947 debacle left them homeless, but yet, the truncated Independence had an iota of assurance that they had a shelter, an address on the other side of the fence. Seventy years later, the NRC, in the truest sense, would leave them stateless, silently but surely as the Indian nation, the government, the judiciary have not yet defined any specific plan for the rehabilitation of those whose names would fail to make it in the final document. NRC is being prepared to identify the illegal immigrants who intruded into Assam after the creation of Bangladesh. March 25, 1971 is the cut-off date for detecting the illegal foreigners. But significantly the State has till now prescribed any specific guidelines for the status as well as the future of the NRC left-outs. Will these millions of Bengali-speaking people be stateless? Will they be hurled in jail? (1) What would be their status in the Union of India, the promised land of all the Partition-cursed victims? Will they be pushed back to Bangladesh? How? Where?

The present Hindu nationalist government in Delhi, in its previous term had initiated a legal process, though obscure and confusing to accord citizenship to the persecuted non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This has triggered a massive protest in Assam as all the communities, political parties, outlawed outfits, pressure groups cutting across confronting isms, jingoistic Assamese media and even a large section of Muslims, who actually belong to East Bengal origin, have resorted to large-scale agitation against ‘Hindu Bangladeshi.’ Hindu Bengalis in Assam are now, in the truest sense, the enemy of the
state. The move however met a futile death and though the party returned to power with thumping majority, the fate of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, which it had initiated in its earlier chapter, is clouded in uncertainty till to date.

In this uncertain, vulnerable backdrop, the Bengalis, particularly the Hindus in Assam, as all the field sources indicate that the Hindus would be majorly excluded from the final list, find another Partition in the form of NRC. In 1947, the country was divided on the basis of religion; after seven long decades the NRC leads to another Partition, this time on the basis of language.

**Optimism vs. Skepticism**

In the initial stage of the NRC updating process, Bengalis were both skeptical as well as optimistic. Skeptical, because they were apprehensive that the process would ultimately turned out to be another mechanism, like the branding of D voters, to harass Bengalis. On the other hand, the finely and scientifically designed software of the NRC instilled a sense of optimism, for the first time for a government mechanism aiming in detecting illegal immigrants, with the feeble belief that the process would finally exonerate them from being branded as ‘Bangladeshis’, an abhorred tag they desperately wanted to be get rid of.

But as the process began to roll on, the constantly-changing guidelines issued by the NRC authority and eventually endorsed by a bench of Supreme Court headed by a judge who himself is an applicant in the NRC, and hence had his own share of interest, gradually made the optimism overshadowed by the skepticism. And with the publication of the first draft on midnight of 31 December 2017, the Bengalis were dumb-struck with disbelief as merely 33 per cent could figure in the part document in the minority dominant districts.

**District wise nrc PART draft**

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Source: Daily Dainik Jugashankha

And with the publication of the complete draft on 30 June that showed more than 4 million (40 lakhs) could not make
it in the document, the Bengalis now began to believe that the process actually aimed at disrobing them off their citizen status and simultaneously establishing the four decade long claims of the Assamese chauvinistic forum that at least 4 to 5 million (40 to 50 lakhs) Bengali intruded into Assam after 1971 from the newly born Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan which liberated itself from the tyrannical Pakistani regime. On June 22, an additional draft was published which showed names of another 102,000 thousand (1.02 lakh) were chopped off from the complete draft, published on July 30, 2018, which excluded 4,007,707 out of 32,900,000 (3.29 crore) applicants.

Myth vs. Reality

For last four decades, the society and politics of Assam has been regulated by a fallacious theory that hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis had intruded in to the State. The society in general, has tremendous abhorrence against Bengali refugees, fearing the original inhabitants would be outnumbered, their culture and language would perish under ‘Bengali aggression’ and with the inevitable demographic swings the refugees would usurp the political reins too.

The mass movement in ‘80s, finely orchestrated by All Assam Students Union, the all powerful student wing representing Assamese chauvinism, stupendously succeeded in garnering the utmost support of the Assamese society as well as the sympathy of the mainland Indian intelligentsia. The BongalKheda (Drive the Bengalis Out) movement of the ‘80s succeeded in establishing the fallacy as a fact that all Bengali speaking of Assam, even though residing since time immemorial, are illegal intruders. This erroneous perception is still prevalent in the mainland India.

Yes, it is indeed a fact that the presence of Hindus in Bangladesh has been in a descending mode, but that phenomenon continued even much prior to the bifurcated Independence officially signed in 1947. But contrary to the popular belief, the trend of decline in Hindu share has an interesting twist in it. During 1974-81, Hindu share declined by 1.37 per cent, next decade the share of declining was little bit higher at 1.62. But since 1991, with both governments in Delhi and Dha-ka started to share a cordial relation and the sane, liberal voice of Bangladesh intelligentsia, the trend of Hindu exodus tended to drop by 1.31 per cent during 1991-2001 and 0.24 during 2001-2011 and it even increased in 1.11 per cent during 2011-2015. (2)

NRC is being prepared on the basis of Assam Accord and the Accord, deemed as sacrosanct in the Assamese society and politics; prescribes that one should prove that his forefathers had been residing in the State prior to 1971. Now the mass exodus from the East Pakistan, as evident in all available sources made it clear that Partition-cursed Hindus as well as the victims of the tyrannical Khan Sena (Army Soldiers) of Pakistani rulers mainly crossed the fence prior to the creation of Bangladesh. An Indian government survey points out that in between 15 March and 15 December 1971, only 347,555 refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, entered Assam where West Bengal was flooded with refugees numbering 7,235,916. (3) An Assam government survey in 1955-56 on the refugees showed that almost 55 per cent of them did not possess any paper that could be the proof of their persecution. (4)

The advocates of theory that post 1971 saw a constant influx from Bangladesh opportunistically are oblivious of the fact that after 1961, Assam has never been a
safer haven for the intending Bangladeshi infiltrators as May 19, 1961 saw 11 Bengali speaking people, vowing to protect their mother tongue, were killed by State’s Police in Bengali-majority Silchar railway station in a gruesome unprovoked firing and in subsequent periods of time two more Bengali youths were murdered in Bengali-majority Barak Valley.

Bengali Hindus in Assam had terribly failed in convincing the mainland India that they are also Assam’s sons of the soil. On the other hand, Muslims in Assam had succeeded in convincing that the NRC, under the regime of the Hindu right wing party, aimed at disrobing only the Muslims off their citizenship. But as the field survey suggests, Bengali Hindus, because of lack of proper document, will suffer majorly as maximum of they were under the impression that since they were Hindus, they did never consider themselves as intruders, rather, as they trusted that, they migrated from one place to another place of the same country which was truncated to attain independence of the whole nation.

Statistics also clearly establish that the myth of continuous exodus of Bengali speaking people from Bangladesh has no real ground. Government had adopted various mechanisms to detect and deport the illegal Bangladeshi intruders which ultimately violated the basic human rights of the people of a particular linguistic community. Even the Election Commission of India in 1997 directed that names of all such persons whose cases have been referred to the appropriate tribunal may be provisionally included in the voter lists, but before final verdict, ‘D’ (for Doubtful) may be prefixed against such names to denote that the citizenship status is doubtful or disputed. Again the Commission by another order in 1998 directed that all persons against

NRC generated another myth among the so-called liberal intelligentsia of the mainland India. Even the international forum like UN is also influenced by the partial theory that the NRC is being prepared with the sole aim of deporting the Muslims only. Various Muslim bodies had succeeded in convincing that only the religious minorities are being targeted as evident from the recent intervention from United Nation Human Rights Special Procedures (Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups). On June 11, 2018, the Group in a letter to Indian Foreign Minister expressed serious concern and sought immediate intervention of Indian government. As they write, ‘the NRC update has generated increased anxiety and concerns among Muslim minority in Assam, who have long been discriminated against due to their perceived status as foreigners, despite possessing the necessary documents to prove their citizenship while it is acknowledged that the updating process is generally committed to retaining Indian citizens on the NRC, concerns have been raised that local authorities in Assam, which are deemed to be particularly hostile towards Muslims and people of Bengali descent, may manipulate the verification system in an attempt to exclude many genuine Indian citizens from the updated NRC.’(5)
whom ‘D’ had been marked would not be allowed to cast their votes and enjoy civil rights so long as the citizenship status of such person is not determined by the appropriate Tribunal in his favour. The relevant statistics show how the decision of the Commission spelt misery for the Bengalis. In between 1996 to 2010, 221,936 people were marked as D voters. Out of these, 83,471 cases were disposed of during the long period of 13 years. Out of these 83,471 disposed cases only 5,577 (6.5%) persons were declared to be foreigners liable to be deported. It means 93.5% declared Indians were deprived of their voting and other civil rights. Moreover, majority of these 5,577 persons were declared foreigners as ex parte as they could not appear in time due to factors like illiteracy, poverty or non receipt of summons from court. A study suggests that 80 per cent of D voters are Bengali Hindus.(6)

The curse still continues. And NRC is the newer tool to harass the Bengalis of East Bengal origin. According to a field study by Citizen for Justice and Peace (CJP), a human rights organization, 57 cases of suicide relating to citizenship have been reported in various police stations across the state since the start of the process of NRC back in 2016.(7)

The recent spate of deaths started from 26 June with Noor Nehar Begum, a 14-year-old girl from Rawmari Chapari, a village in a sand bar of Brahmaputra river in Darrang district, committed suicide.

Noor, daughter of a daily Muslim, wage earner, was too stressed about a possible exclusion from the NRC after an additional list of exclusion was published. Unaware of the fact that the list sums up only those who are excluded in the final NRC and thus brings a possible inclusion for the rest in the final list, Noor took her life after her father went to an NRC Seva Kendra to check her name in the list. The case is a bloody instance of how intriguing the entire process of NRC is.(8)

A week later another person, identified as Jaynal Ali, 40, a Muslim, of Abhayapuri sub-division of Bongaigaon district hanged himself on 3 July, after he was allegedly told by his friends that he needed to pay a hefty amount of money to his advocate and NRC officials in order to get his family members' name enlisted. Unable to manage the sum, Ali hanged himself in a tree near his house in the night.(9)

On the night of 5 July, Rahim Ali, 37, a Muslim, another wage earner from Bantipur village of Barpeta district hanged himself after five of his children were mentioned in the exclusion list published on 26 June. (10)

On the same day, Amar Majumder of Silapathar of Dhemaji District in Eastern Assam hanged himself for allegedly making it to the exclusion list. His family members alleged that Majumdar was excluded despite having all valid documents.(11)

Fifty-nine-year-old Ambar Ali, a Muslim, from Chunpura village of Baksa district committed suicide by jumping in front of a moving train after 22 years of
fighting a case of D-voter. A financially and emotionally distressed Ali took the extreme step on 8 July after the names of his family members were listed in exclusion list as he was a D-voter. (12)

Bereaved Hindu family of Bhaben Das

In June Bhaben Das, an oppressed caste Hindu ended his life after a failed struggle to get his names included in the draft NRC. Interestingly thirty years back, Bhaben’s father Brajendra Das also committed suicide after he was declared a foreigner by the IMDT Tribunal. Legacy of harassment, thus, continues for the Bengalis whose forefathers were victims of Partition. (13)

Madhubala Mandal, Hindu, after being released from Kokrajhar detention camp

Major Sana Ullah, a decorated officer who served the Indian Army for thirty years was sent to jail by Assam Police, where he himself presently deputed as Sub Inspector in the Border branch on the allegation that he was a Bangladeshi. However the Assam Police subsequently admitted, after the Army authority stepped in, that arrest was made erroneously as the foreigner notice was actually issued against another Sana Ullah. Innumerable incidents are there in Assam where people, with their only ‘crime’ that they speak in Bengali, are victims of clear human right violation, by none other than the State itself.

Wife of Sana Ullah, Muslim, with her husband’s photographs adorning uniform

Fractured Identity

Owing to Partition, Bengalis in Assam is a community of fractured identity. Fractured broadly in four distinct categories; Bengali Hindus, Bengali Muslims, Bengalis of Barak Valley and Bengalis of Brahmaputra Valley. And all these four factions have their own hopes and aspirations, problems and miseries. NRC has once again unmasked the fractured identity of the Bengalis in Assam.

Bengali Hindus, in the initial stage of the NRC, had an unexplained belief that the process would ultimately detect Bengali Muslims as foreigners and the names of the Hindus would be inducted smoothly. Further they had tremendous faith in the Hindu nationalist governments both at Federal as well as in the State. Muslims, on the other hand, sensing the gravity of the process, were more alert as various Muslim organizations and NGOs, even from outside the State systematically functioned to help their community in completing the formalities. Hindus, particularly, in Brahmaputra Valley, do not
have such organizational base and strength. In the Bengali dominated Barak Valley, too, there was no visible movement, in the initial stage, to make the fraternity aware of how to complete the formalities. The publication of the part draft came as a shocker as names of more than 67 per cent in the Bengali dominated areas did not figure in the document. However, in three districts of Barak Valley, the number of draft left-outs was restricted within four lakh.

There was naturally a spurt of protest among the Bengalis. But, the crisis could not act as a binding force to bring the four factions of the Bengalis of Assam in a common platform. The men who matter in Barak Valley, mostly Hindus, for best reasons known to them, chose West Bengal, to vent their ire and frustration against the NRC process, but least bothered to build up a common platform with the Bengali Hindus of the Brahmaputra Valley to place their points in the proper forum.

NRC has also unmasked the hypocrisy of the Bengali Hindus. It is a fact that after the creation of Bangladesh, the Hindus, mostly middle class and affluent section, chose West Bengal or the other parts of the globe to shift to as Assam was never considered a safer zone where the State’s police could gun down 11 Bengali Hindus who raised voice for their mother tongue. Those who crossed the border after 1971, mainly belonged to weaker section, particularly fishermen community or lower caste Hindus who did not have the means to take shelter other than adjacent Assam.

After the publication of the part draft, there was massive protest among the Bengali middle class and elite section only because a good number of their community could not find their names in the document. Barak Valley saw a spurt of protest, concentrated mainly on the urban arena, and little endeavour could be seen to spread the agitation among the oppressed castes or to the village, who actually faced the threat, because of their ignorance and lack of education and financial strength. And with the publication of the complete draft, the agitation almost started to wane as the maximum names of the middle class Bengali Hindus were included. A major part of the left-outs are from the oppressed castes and economically backward section. NRC, once again proved that refugee issue is primarily a class fight which the Bengali Hindus of Assam could not rise above.

**Conclusion to a never-concluding tragedy**

1947 is a nightmarish curse to both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis, but the ultimate sufferers are the Hindus. Muslims also did bleed profusely, they were also rendered homeless, but ultimately they could achieve a country of their own where they can speak in their own mother language unhesitatingly and practice the religion they believe in fearlessly. But Bengali Hindus of East Bengal (Bangladesh)-origin is stripped off this freedom—both in Bangladesh and in some parts of India. They are constantly chased away in the North East. The Partition had left a deep scar on their existence, and blood still continues to ooze out from it, often visible, but psychologically constantly. New generations of Partition victims venture out in different corners in the globe leaving behind no home to come back at the dusk of their lives. Future of Bengali Hindus in Assam is very bleak, as the new generation of the educated youths finds no avenues in the State and venture out to other parts with little or no plan to come back to their roots. The vacuum will be usurped by some lumpen element among the Bengali society and politics.
NRC is the ultimate ordeal for the Bengali Hindus of Assam, the seven decade old ordeal the 1947 Partition had thrown them in to.

Explanatory Notes:

1. National Register of Citizens (NRC) contains names of Indian citizens of Assam. The NRC was prepared in 1951, after the Census of 1951. The present spell of NRC update across Assam includes the names of those persons (or their descendants) who appear in the NRC 1951, or in any of the Electoral Rolls up to the midnight of 25 March 1971, the date of Bangladesh Father Mujibur Raman’s declaration, or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to the midnight of 54 March 1971, which would prove their presence in Assam on or before 25 March 1971. The NRC (1951) and the Electoral Rolls up to the midnight of 25 March 1971 together are collectively called Legacy Data. For inclusion in the updated NRC, there are two requirements - existence of a person’s name in Legacy Data or any one of the admissible documents issued up to midnight of 24 March 1971 and proving linkage with that person. The complete draft NRC, published on July 30, 2018 showed names of 4,007,707 out of 32.9 million applicants were deleted. An additional list was published on June 22, 2019 which excluded 102,000 names which figured in the previous draft.

2. D Voters: On 17 July 1997, the Election Commission of India issued a circular to the Government of Assam directing it to remove non-citizens from the electoral list. This was done during Congress Party rule in Delhi as well as in Assam. Following that, an intensive revision of electoral rolls began in Assam, involving door to door survey in order to enlist only genuine Indian citizens. The persons who could not provide evidence in favor of their Indian nationality were marked with D in the electoral rolls, to indicate doubtful or disputed status of their Indian nationality. During the survey, the absentee voters too were marked with D. Around 370,000 persons were thus declared as D voters by the Election Commission of India. The persons marked as D voters were barred from contesting the elections and casting their votes. The Election Commission of India further directed the D voters to be put on trial before the Foreigners Tribunals set up under the Foreigner (Tribunal) Order of 1964 during Congress Party rule.

3. The Indian Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed in Lok Sabha on July 19, 2016, amending the Citizenship Act of 1955. If this Bill is passed in Parliament, illegal migrants from minority communities like Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christians coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will then be eligible for Indian citizenship, excluding people from the Muslim community. The Bill relaxes the requirement of residence in India from 11 years to 6 years for these migrants.

4. Bongal Kheda (oust the Bengalis) refers to an organized campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Bengali Hindus in undivided Assam, that originated in the Brahmaputra Valley in the late 1940s and continued into the 1980s. In 1960s this movement of Assamese-speaking citizens was joined by Bengali Muslims in persecuting Hindu Bengalis.

5. The Bengali Language Movement in Barak Valley, Assam was a protest against the decision of the Government of Assam to make Assamese the only official language of the state even though a significant proportion of population were Bengali people. In the Barak Valley, the Sylheti-dialect speaking Bengali population constitute the majority. The main incident, in which 11 people were killed...
by Assam State police, took place on 19 May 1961 at Silchar railway station. Incidentally, Bengali-speaking Sylhet district was supposed to go to India. However, its then Assamese-speaking Chief Minister forced Colonial Britain to have the only plebiscite during Partition. East Sylhet joined India, and west Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

**Endnotes:**

1. See Jyoti Lal Chowdhury, “NRC: Hindu Bengalis are at a Crossroads in India,” ISPaD Partition Center Journal 2018, 24-29
3. Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian Parliament) proceedings, July 28, 2015
5. Letter from United Nation Human Rights Special Procedures (Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups) to the Foreign Minister, India
6. Assam NRC; 6 kill self in 13 days; Firstpost, July 12, 2019
7. NRC claims another life as girl commits suicide; 29 June, 2019; (Bengali Daily) Dainik Jugasankha
8. Preface written by Advocate HRA Choudhury; D: When the State Violates Human Rights; 2017 by Arijit Aditya, July 12, 2019
9. Assam NRC; 6 kill self in 13 days; Firstpost, July 12, 2019
10. Assam NRC; 6 kill self in 13 days; Firstpost, July 12, 2019
11. Son follows father, commits suicide, NRC claims another life in Assam; June 10, 2019, Ei Samay
12. NRC noose; Youth kills self in Silapathar; 9 July 2019, Staff Reporter, Guwahati, Dainik Jugasankha
13. Kargil war veteran declared foreigner: Probe report fabricated, allege witnesses; India Today; June 4, 2019

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Glimpses of the uprooting and resettlement of my family during the 1947 partition of Punjab, India

Prof. Dr. Mohindar Singh Seehra**

**Synopsis:** The events leading to the uprooting and resettlement of my family during the 1947 partition of Punjab, India are described. Brief descriptions of our family life before the partition along with three-week road journey to east Punjab and the problems associated with resettlement are presented. The roles played by family unity, personal courage and hard work, resilience, faith, and assistance provided by the Government in the resettlement are stressed. These aspects of personal life are shared to pay tribute to my elders and to provide historical glimpses of that time period.

**Life before the Partition:** In 1947 I was 7 years old and the elders in our family were my grandfather, uncle, aunt and my mother. I learned from my elders that my father (Bakhshish Singh) died in 1943 due to severe asthma. My only recollection of my father is placing a piece of wood on his funeral-pyre. My siblings included three older brothers, one older sister and one younger brother. The head
of our family was my grandfather (Pala Singh), known as Bapu-ji. We called our mother Bibi-ji, our maternal aunt Masi-ji and our uncle Bhayia-ji, the “ji” used for respect. The pictures of the family members are shown in Fig. 1.

Bapu-ji was born around 1870 (Father; Sobha Singh) in our ancestral village, Sirhala, located in District Hoshiarpur in eastern Punjab, now in Pakistan. After basic education, he enlisted in the British Indian army. Specifically, he was involved in the Tirah Expedition of Afghanistan during the 1890’s and also served in the Middle East and China in subsequent years including the First World War. The medals he received for bravery (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3), provide evidence for this exemplary service. He retired around 1920 at the rank of Havildar.

On retirement, Bapu-ji received a pension and was awarded a 25-acre land plot in District Montgomery (now Sahiwal, Pakistan) of Punjab which the British decided to develop as farmland using canals from river Sutlej. Bapu-ji used to tell that initially the land was just a jungle and that he burned down all the bushes and trees to make it suitable for farming. The new villages (chak in Punjabi) were simply named with numbers and our village was Chak No. 299/E.B. According to Google maps, these names are still valid. The largest nearby town is Burewala. Eventually, the two sons of Bapu-ji, Wattan Singh (wife: Gurmail Kaur) and Bakhshish Singh (wife: Rattan Kaur) joined him sometimes during the 1920’s. Bakhshish Singh and Rattan Kaur were blessed with five sons and one daughter in the following order: Bhagat Singh (1930), Ajit Singh (1932); Harbhajan Singh (1935), Ajit Kaur (1938), Mohindar Singh, the author (1940), and Surinder Singh (1943). My uncle and aunt did not have any children but lived with us in a joint family. Our grandmother died in 1941.

Our village had about 20 farmers, mostly Sikhs with military service. The houses built mostly with mud/straw composites, were quite large with separate
sections for family, servants, storage rooms and cattle. Our house had one big room built with bricks and this room was used as drawing/guest room. The source of drinking water for the village was a well in the center of the village. The Sikh farmers of the village built a two-story Sikh temple (Gurdwara) with a big hall which became the center for both social and religious functions. Our farm was about half-mile away with a nearby canal which was the source of water for the farms. The land was very productive with cotton, wheat and corn being the main crops. The farmers used to take their produce loaded on bullock carts to Burewala about six miles away for selling and I recall going there on some occasions. Bapu-ji used to take a trip annually to our ancestral village Sirhala in east Punjab where we still had a house and a few acres of land. I recall accompanying Bapu-ji and Masi-ji on one such trip using buses and trains and going through the cities of Lahore and Amritsar and visiting the historical Golden Temple at Amritsar.

Overall, ours was a middle-class family, despite the loss of my father. How our mother felt the loss of her husband was only rarely brought up as she was comforted by the joint, stable family. Although our family was settled in Chak. No. 299/E.B., the roots of our relatives were really in the Hoshiarpur district of eastern Punjab, India. Besides our ancestral village, my mother’s parents were living in the village ‘Golian’ about a mile from Garhshankar. The town of Garhshankar was one of four Tehsils of the Hoshiarpur District, Punjab, India with court system and police station and it was home to Government High School which four of us brothers attended after partition and resettlement. These towns can be located using Google map. Other notable pre-partition events for us were marriages of my sister, Ajit Kaur, in 1945 to one Beant Singh belonging to a family in Garhshankar and brother Bhagat Singh in 1946 to a girl belonging to a family in the village “Basiala” located on the Garhshankar-Nawanshahr Road. These marriages were arranged by elders and consummated much later after the boy and girl came of age. Marriages at young ages were common then. In our case, Bapu-ji likely felt the need to complete these responsibilities because of the death of our father.

Ajit Kaur (Circa 1981)

The high school in Chak. No. 269/E.B., about a mile away from our village, covered the grades 1 through 10. So, I and my three older brothers attended this school, walking daily to and from the school. Our sister received some early education in Punjabi language locally since the schools were not co-educational then. Bhagat Singh completed his high school and after a special diploma in the Punjabi language, got a job as a teacher in the same school. So, in April 1947, Ajit Singh had completed grade 9, Harbhajan Singh grade 7 and I grade 2. The medium of instruction was Urdu, the official language of Punjab, and English was introduced in grade 5. But only Punjabi was spoken at home. The school again opened in mid July 1947. But by
then, the hot winds of partition started were blowing.

The exodus and the journey to east Punjab: I became aware of the impending crises when one day at school in July 1947, we were asked to rush back to our homes because an attack by Muslim groups on the school was likely. I along with my brothers and other students from our village literally ran home. At our village, we were met by a group of Sikh men, armed with swords and other homemade weapons, on the entrance to our village. We were asked to go straight to the Gurdwara where women and children of the village were already assembled. The rest of the day was spent there fearing an attack but fortunately, no attack occurred that day. After that day, small caves were dug at some places in the house and children were asked to hide there if an attack occurred. As our future became uncertain, it was decided that Bhagat Singh should go to east Punjab for safety reasons and live with his in-laws in Basiala till the situation settles down.

Eventually August 15th came and the border lines for the new Pakistan were drawn and it became evident that our area will be a part of the new country of Muslim-dominated Pakistan. So, there was no alternative left for the Sikh families to pack and head for east Punjab which remained with new India. The families loaded the bullock carts with food, valuables and other necessities and gathered the cattle outside the main gate of the houses. I recall Bapu-ji putting a lock on the main gate and stating something like: ‘someday, we will return’. Looking back, it must have been emotionally gut-wrenching for our elders to accept this reality of tremendous loss and way of living which they had built for the past about 25 years.

According to brother Ajit Singh, our exodus to east Punjab began on August 20, 1947 and it took us about three weeks on the road to make it to the home of my maternal grandparents in east Punjab. On the first day of this journey, this caravan (kafla in Punjabi) of bullock carts, cattle and people from our village moved towards Chak. No. 269/E.B. where it was joined by similar groups from other villages. Clearly this was all arranged and coordinated between the elders in these villages. Chak No. 269 /E.B. is situated on the main road towards Burewala. However, we did not go to Burewala but half-way we turned right to head northeast to the city of Pakpattan on our way to India. Most of the times, myself, my younger brother and my sister were riding on the cart since we were just too small to keep up with the adults. The task of caring for the cattle largely fell on my two older brothers, my uncle and grandfather.

The first day was miserably hot and some cattle had to be abandoned who could not tolerate the heat. By the end of the day, the kafla camped on the side of the road. The women made chula (wood oven) to cook food and the adults armed with swords etc. went to the nearby fields to gather feed for the animals. There were many corn fields nearby and, in this emergency, there was no choice but to cut and steal the corn stalks for feeding the cattle. In the following days, some rain started to fall which not only provided relief from heat but also provided drinkable water since many of the wells along the way were either poisoned or filled with dead bodies. This was the usual routine day after day and typically we perhaps only travelled about 25 miles per day. I often heard the complaint of lack of military protection to the kafla.

This journey took us through the city of Pakpattan and about half-way, we
crossed the new border with India, marked by the river Sutlej, near the city of Fazilka on the Indian side. The bridge over the river was quite small and so only one bullock cart was allowed to cross at a time. I recall crossing the bridge on-foot myself. Finally, when every family reached the Indian side, we roared the Sikh salutation ‘Bole so Nihal, Sat Sri Akal.’ In the camp that night, I heard that all the nearby wells were full of dead bodies. Next morning, as we resumed the journey, the kafla began to split up since the families decided to head towards places where their relatives were located. We headed to my maternal grandparents in the Hoshiarpur district taking us through the cities of Ferozpur, Moga, Ludhiana, Phillaur, Phagwara, Nawanshahr and finally Garhshankar. Fortunately, all the roads were paved except the 6-mile dirt road from Nawanshahr to Garhshankar which was quite muddy. The images of going through the cities of Ferozpur, the high bridge over the railway tracks in Ludhiana, and last day of the journey through Garhshankar is particularly frozen in my memory. Near Garhshankar, I saw people camped on both sides of the road and I was told that they are Muslims from nearby villages who will take the reverse journey to the new Pakistan.

Resettlement in the village Panam: Our stay for several days in the village Golian with my maternal grandparents was quite difficult because of our large family and cattle. So, my elders were anxious to locate a suitable village nearby to resettle quickly. The village Panam, about four miles from Golian on the south side of Garhshankar was chosen after clearance from the courts at Garhshankar. Previously, the land in this village was owned primarily by Muslims who had already left for their journey to west Pakistan. So, houses and land was available for occupancy, initially on first-come first-served basis. At first we occupied a few rooms built with mud/straw composites because most of the brick-built houses were already taken. For farming, we managed to acquire a few acres here and there. The first two years with meagre output from the few acres were financially very hard and I often heard Bapu-ji complaining about the situation. Also, I began to see increasing strains on my mother’s face. I often heard that the family received some grants and loans from the government to get by. It will take nearly two years for the authorities to allocate land and houses based on what people had left behind in Pakistan. Eventually, we got a brick-built house along with some additional rooms built with mud/straw composites. For land we received a 25-acre plot of essentially barren land which was previously used only for cattle grazing. Since there was no well on this land, Bapu-ji got a government loan for a well; the well was dug and fitted with an artisan system pulled by bullocks to water the land. It took us many years of very hard physical labor to make this land productive.

Our mother was very insistent that all of us resume our education despite the financial difficulties. So, brothers Ajit Singh and Harbhajan Singh joined Gov-
The Government High School at Garhshankar in grades 10, and 8 respectively. This school covering the grades 5 to 10 was about 3 miles away from Panam and all students from Panam walked to the school. Bhagat Singh managed to get a teaching position in a high school at the village Sahiba about five miles away and he moved there with his wife. I joined grade 3 in the one-teacher primary school in Panam and I was made Monitor of my class. The role of the Monitor was to manage the class in the absence of the teacher. In subsequent years, I continued in this role through grade ten because I was a very good student. I joined the Government High School at Garhshankar in grade 5. In grade 5, I started to learn English which became a compulsory subject, along with mathematics. In grades 6 and 7, we also learned Hindi and Punjabi languages. I got tuition waiver throughout high school because my good academic performance. Bhagat Singh often helped to purchase books for me at the beginning of each school year. Eventually Surinder followed my steps from primary to High School.

Gandhi had played in the Independence of India. Another important event of 1948 for us was the high school graduation of Ajit Singh and his subsequent recruitment in the India Air Force. The money he sent to our mother from saving from his salary was very important for addressing some of financial needs of the family. In 1950, Harbhajan Singh graduated from high school. He was, however, not successful in securing a similar position in the Indian army. So, for the next five years, he became full-time farmer and his hard work on the farm made the land we had received quite productive. During these years, I regularly assisted him and the family on farm-chores during weekends, after school hours and summer vacations. One of my frequent jobs was to take the cattle out for grazing and to the village pond for a dip and watering. I also learned to plough the fields, plant, weed and harvest crops such as wheat, corn, and rice. This was all very physical work because in those days farming was done with manual and cattle power.

In 1954, Bibi-ji became ill and bed-ridden. Brother Ajit Singh was home on his annual leave. Since there were no medical facilities in Panam, she was taken to the civil hospital in Garhshankar and Masi-ji stayed with her at the hospital. However, her lung capacity had gone down considerably,
and she died after a few days at a relatively young age of about 45. Ajit Singh told me that overwork and exhaustion made her body too weak and the inadequate medical facilities available then did not provide any relief. Her death came as a shock to all of us. The task of cooking for family and managing other household affairs then fell on the shoulders of Masi-ji with assistance from my sister. That summer, I recall Masi-ji telling Ajit Singh that time has come to send my sister, then 16 years old, to her in-laws and for that appropriate dowry needs to be prepared. Also, by then, my sister’s husband, Beant Singh, had graduated from high school and was now working with his father in the construction business. Later that year, my sister went to live with her husband and they eventually settled in the capital city of Delhi where she lives today near her three sons and their families. Her husband, Beant Singh, died about 15 years ago.

5. “Son, you should be in college”

I graduated from high school in June 1955 at age 15, topping my class and securing a scholarship. There was no college in Garhshankar but unaware to me, a new college (Arya College) had opened a year earlier in Nawanshahr about six miles away from Panam although they were still using a few rooms of a high school for classes since the building for the college was not yet complete. One day in mid-July 1955, a stu-
dent from the college came to our house and told me that the Principal of the Arya College wants to see me and that he will come tomorrow morning and take me on his bicycle to meet him. Next day, I went with him and visited with Shri Nand Lal, the Principal. His first words to me were: “Son, a bright student like you should be in college”. Apparently, he knew that I was a topper from the Garhshankar High School. When I told him about my inability to pay the college fees, he assured me that I did not need to pay anything then since the college will deduct the fees on receiving my scholarship. He immediately called his clerk and told him to admit me and told me to go and attend the classes since the new year of college had already started about a week back. That is how my college education started. For the first several months I walked to college, six miles each way, till Bhayia-ji help secure me an used bicycle for commuting to the college. I often wonder what if the Arya college at Nawanshahar had not opened or I was just an average student?

Military medal of our grandfather Havildar Pala Singh (Bapu-ji)

In 1959, I completed four years of college with B.Sc. degree with a very high first division. Surinder had joined the same college in 1958 and my UGC (University Grants Commission) scholar-ship was enough to cover his expenses also. To do M.Sc. which was required to become a college professor, I had to go away from home and I did not have sufficient funds in 1959 to cover the cost of hostel, food and other expenses. So, I decided to interrupt my studies in 1959 and accepted the open job of a lecture demonstrator in Chemistry in the Arya College, hoping to save enough funds in a year to continue my education. This also helped Surinder to continue his second year of college. In July 1960, I joined Aligarh Muslim University, in Uttar Pradesh State, for M.Sc. degree in Physics which I obtained in June 1962 topping my class. During the 1960-1962 period, my elder brothers agreed to provide funds to Surinder to continue his education and he received his B.Sc. degree in first division from the Arya college in June 1962. In July 1962, I joined Jain College, Ambala City as a lecturer and Surinder joined Aligarh University for M.Sc. (Physics) program with assurance of financial support from me. He completed the degree in June 1964 and later taught Physics as a lecturer in colleges in Punjab for three years. I want to pay special tribute to Masi-ji who got up early every morning during these years to prepare food for me and Surinder so that we could go to our school or college on time.
Leaving India: During my M.Sc. degree, I often thought about going to the U.S. for a Ph.D. degree. So, during my job as a lecturer at Ambala City in the 1962-1963 year, I applied to a number of universities in the U.S. I got admission letter from the University of Rochester, Rochester (NY) with research assistantship and tuition waiver. This was then a top-25 university in the US for research. I accepted this offer and left for the U.S. at the end of July 1963 after getting married in May 1963 arranged by my family. For the first two years, the focus was on the course work and I cleared the Ph.D. qualifying exam in May 1965 and began my research with Prof. Castner in the area of magnetic resonance. My wife joined me in March 1965, and she got hired as an instructor in Hindi in August 1965 for one year. The funds she earned would come handy in later years. My years at Rochester involved long days of very hard work in the laboratory and in the library. In May 1969, I defended my Ph.D. dissertation and joined West Virginia University (WVU) as an Assistant Professor in July 1969. By then we were also parents of two daughters. I stayed at WVU for the rest of my career, becoming an Eberly Distinguished Professor in 1992. I retired in August 2016, still keeping some activity research and writing. On June 7, 2019, I was inducted into the Order of Vandalia “for distinguished service to West Virginia University”. Surinder left India for England in 1967. After getting an M.S. degree in semiconductors there, he got hired in Aerospace Industry. In summer 1978, he came to the U.S. and after working for a few months with me, he was hired by RCA Space Center in NJ, which was later acquired by GE and then by Lockheed Martin. He completed his career there working on space satellites, retiring a few years ago and now lives in NJ with his wife of 47 years.

Military medal of our grandfather Havil-dar Pala Singh (Bapu-ji)

Epilogue: The brief summary given here on the lives and careers of us five brothers and one sister also provides a glimpse of the time-period before and after the 1947 partition of Punjab. The important role of support from family in getting us through the difficult years and our own hard work and determination to make a success of our lives based on God-given talents is also stressed. The positive role of the Indian government in helping us resettle after partition was also very important. The story has a positive ending in that I and my siblings had successful careers and stable families lives and each of us are grandparents now. In this story, there are likely some lessons for our descendants and for other readers of this article.
Dr. Mohindar Singh Seehra is educated in India and the U.S. He is an Eberly Distinguished Professor of West Virginia University, and numerous award recipient.

Tutamandra Sarajubala Girls’ High School, Bangladesh: Influenced by Pan-Indian Nationalism, Muslim Nationalism, East Pakistani Nationalism and Bengali Nationalism (1)

Prof. Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar**

The present-day Bangladesh, especially its southwestern Faridpur-Barisal-Khulna-Jessore districts witnessed intense anti-British, anti-colonial nationalism to free India of her Colonial-Christian masters.(2) A part of that nationalism was passionate pride of their old glorious history and tradition, emancipation of women (3), and of rural and oppressed-caste Hindu and Muslim populations. Thus arose building of schools for boys and girls in remote corners of that sub-region. One pioneer in that field was Hindu saints Hari Chand and Guru Chand who in 1800s singlehandedly opened over 1,400 schools in remote corners of that agrarian region. One of the slogans popularized by Sri Sri Guru Chand was “khaas ba nakhaas, chele meyeke schooley paathas” (Whether you are able to eat or not, send your boys and girls to school.) Incidentally both the saints rose from the most oppressed castes to become Hindu saints.

During India’s independence movement there were many luminaries who not only pushed for removal of the British from India, but also women’s emancipation. Some of those luminaries from the area were Aswini Kumar Datta of Barisal, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Roy of Khulna, lawyer Girindra Nath RoyChowdhury (4) of Faridpur (now Gopalganj) and many more.(5) During this British period communication was difficult, yet funding from the professional class, mostly Hindu, came in as pro-independence activists were eager to help schools get funding from private sources. This was possibly a golden age of girls’ education. As a matter of fact, Hindu elites in the 1800s and 1900s competed with each other in opening new schools and colleges throughout Bengal. (6) Thus Tutamandra was no exception.

A poster at school entrance “khaas ba na-khaas, chele meyeke schooley paathas” (Whether you are able to eat or not, send your boys and girls to school) by Sri Sri Guru Chand of early 1800s

This sentiment was in line with luminaries like Raja Ram Mohon, Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra, Brahmo Samaj,
Bengal Renaissance, Indian Renaissance and Hindu Renaissance movements, all of early 1800. Among Muslims, Mrs. Begum Rokeya, was a shining light in pushing for girl’s education, women’s emancipation, and against “parda-pratha” or anti-veil campaign, though emanating from the capital Calcutta. Thus in 1930s when an education secretary in Colonial British India’s Bengal Province was visiting Faridpur District – now Gopalganj District as Gopalganj was then a subdivision of Faridpur District – from the provincial capital Calcutta (now Kolkata) some local leaders took that opportunity to open up a girls’ school in Tutamandra village of Gopalganj Subdivision naming it after the wife of the secretary, Mrs. Sarajubala. Thus in 1942 was born (7) the Tutamandra Sarajubala Balika (Girls’) Bidyaloi (School). Tutamandra is rural agrarian area. Even in 2019 it takes almost a day from the capital Dhaka for that 200-mile journey.

After British-mandated Muslim-Hindu Bengal Partition in 1905, then was reunited in 1912 after an intense nationalist swadeshi movement. The announcement was made in 1911, but Muslim separatist nationalism was on the rise, eventually receiving mandate to govern the state in 1940s, before Indian independence and partition in 1947. Partition gave the area a jolt and educating girls took a back seat. Soon anti-Hindu riots began when many of the local Hindus started to flee to India thus advancement of Tutamandra Sarajubala school fell in dismal state. (8) Thus when this writer visited the girls’ school in 1990s the classroom had uneven mud floors; though not the adjacent boys’ school. In post-Partition era came intense Muslim nationalism of the pre-partition (1947) era. United Bengal in British India championed partition led the Muslim League Party. Bengali Muslims joined enthusiastically partition debate and in 1945 in Colonial British India voted overwhelmingly for Muslim League Party to bring them to power in apartheid-like Muslim-non-Muslim separate voting with Mr. Husain Suhrawardy as the Premier of the province in governance in the capital city of Calcutta. (9) Among others, under his rule came the infamous August 1946 Hindu-Muslim killing in Calcutta, followed by an anti-Hindu pogrom in the remote Noakhali district of eastern Bengal starting in October of 1946 to prove to the Colonial British masters that Muslims and Hindus (non-Muslims) can’t live together.

The School Classroom (before upgrade), early 2000s

Then came Independence of India in August of 1947, creation of Pakistan, and Partition of Bengal into East Pakistan/East Bengal and West Bengal and displacement of tens of millions of refugees from their homes. And more. Even with many pogroms Tutamandra area of Gopalganj (Faridpur) remains Hindu and poor-peasant majority. And many locals attributed their school’s destitute status on the neglect of the minority by the majority ruling elites of Pakistan and Bangladesh, when this writer first visited in 1990s. More later. But elites denied that.

Yet, immediately after the creation of New East Pakistan in New Pakistan began the rise of East Pakistani Bengali nationalism for equal treatment in united Pakistan, and the Muslim League Party was almost gone by early 1950s, soon
after engineering Partition. It must be one of the quickest downfall of a sectarian movement. Yet the brutality of the Muslim League Islamism won’t be complete until the rise of Bengali nationalism to liberate East Pakistan to become Bangladesh in 1971. During Bangladesh Liberation War over 3 million Bengalis were killed with mass-killing of Hindu minority, secular Muslims and pro-independence Awami League Party activists, and abuse of over 250,000 girls and wives by the Army of Islamic Republic of Pakistan and her Bengali-Islamist allies. This Bengali nationalism was similar with pre-independence Indian nationalism which included Muslim and Hindu and other religious-cum-linguistic groups. Nevertheless, funding for the education took a backseat in the early years of the nation. Even after 30 years of independence Sarajubala was limping along. The area is also famous as the ancestral home of Bangladesh’s Founding Father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. And people in this Hindu-majority area of the Muslim-majority nation proudly points out that they have voted for many top national (Muslim) leaders.

Once Probini Foundation of New York had built a few school buildings and dormitories i.e. hostels, in various parts of Bangladesh and India they learned about that through grapevine and sought assistance from a Hindu monk whose old school dorm, ashram, temple and residences – also the result of Indian nationalist movement of educating boys and girls – were destroyed by Pakistan Army and their Bengali Islamist allies. During Probini’s annual meeting in Dhaka in early 2000s, at the invitation of the Hindu monk, a delegation from the school including the headmaster of the school came to plead with the group for possible funding of a girls’ dorm as many of the girls have to walk home for hours and it becomes difficult to commute especially in winter and during monsoon forcing them to drop out of school. Probini helped building the girls dorm as Probini has done in eight other places in Bangladesh, one more in Christian-majority Mizoram State of India, and one more is in the pipeline in PaschimBanga (West Bengal) State of India. In addition, Probini helps another two dozen schools in Bangladesh and India.
This was the era of governance of Muslim/Islamist rule of Bangladesh. Life for Sarajubala Girls’ School and the Hindu minority and secularists from the majority Muslims were precarious at best. Education was not a priority, especially for secular education and for girls.

The New School Building

Situation turned towards better with the rise of pro-independence and pro-secular forces in 2008. These are the forces of secular Bengali nationalism that gave rise to Bangladesh from Islamic Pakistan. Funds for the expansion of the dorm didn’t come, but importantly, funds came for improvement of the classrooms from tin-shed, mud-floor to standard brick-and-mortar building, much like the structure built by Probini Foundation. To the locals it felt more like a renaissance of the 1800s that all Bengalis and all Indians are so proud of.

Endnotes:

(1) For additional information please see https://empireslastcasualty.blogspot.com/2019/01/

Bari, Dr. Abdul, Agnijug O Sasastra Sangram (Age of fire and militant struggle), Gaangchil Sahitya Sanskriti Parishad, Madaripur, Bangladesh; 2012; and ____ , Bismrita Bangali Naari (Forgotten Bengali women), Gaangchil Sahitya Sanskriti Parishad, Madaripur, Bangladesh; 2012

See https://empireslastcasualty.blogspot.com/2008/02/ulpur-gopalganj-faridpur-district.html for Girindra Nath’s village home.


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Several refugees discuss this as the reasons for leaving their ancestral homestead. Many had hoped that this “partition effect” will be temporary, and they’ll “go back home.” That never happened. See Sachi G. Dastidar and Shefali S. Dastidar, Memories of Homeland: Refugees of 1947 Bengal Partition in India, Firma KLM Publishers, Kolkata, India, 2005

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See https://empireslastcasualty.blogspot.com/2019/01/bangladeshgopalganj-tutamandra.html

Check www.probini.org
Borderland Narrative of the Bengal Partition

Sudipto Das**

Refugee is much more than just a ‘crisis’, as it’s generally relegated to in popular narratives in media or intellectual discourses. There’s a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and there are the United Nation’s 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Refugee Protocol. It’s not that the world is not all ears to the wails of the refugees, but perhaps only a refugee knows the real pain of being a refugee. No convention or protocol can ever do justice to a refugee. Few lines from a popular poem by the Bengali poet Krishna Chandra Majumdar might be apt: Always pleasure loving, someone seldom feels the agony of distress. How will he know how painful the poison could be, if he has never been bitten by a scorpion?

The Bengali word for refugee is ud-bastu, which loosely translates to homeless in English. The word “bastu” or “vastu” in Sanskrit derives from the root “vas” – akin to the English “was” –, which signifies not only a dwelling, but also existence. So “ud-vastu” would mean someone without existence, not just homeless, and that’s perhaps the word which conveys the real meaning of refugee, only to some extent though. There might not be ever a complete remedy for a refugee’s real agony and trauma, but still, if she got someone who could empathize with her, listen to her stories, make her feel that she’s no longer alone in the new world, that would surely act as a soothing balm, calm her down a bit. The biggest enemy of a refugee is not the perpetrators who has raped her or uprooted her from her home. Her biggest enemy is perhaps the feeling of loneliness, the loss of her self-confidence and trust on others. The only way anyone can help a refugee is by gaining her trust, reviving her confidence in herself. And hearing her stories, feeling her pains is perhaps the best way to let her know that that someone is there for her, that she’s not alone any more.

The voluminous narratives about the Jews in the popular culture, art, literature and movies over the past hundred years perhaps created the most effective support system for them, while they struggled to cope up with their bereavements, uncertainties and fear for the unknown in newer lands. The very fact that the whole world has wept for them gave them a sort of psychological security, even though they might not have got any real support from anyone in their lonely struggles to create their worlds anew, from scratch, bit by bit. The most unfortunate thing about the seven to eight million Hindus
(1) of East Bengal, who became refugees after the partition of India in 1947, and the many millions more who wanted to flee East Pakistan and then Bangladesh later, there was no one even to empathize with them, because their very existence remains unacknowledged till this day. It is, as though, they never existed.

Whenever anyone talks about or refers to the partition of India, it’s always the Punjab side of the story – it’s seldom the Bengal side. There’s a total lacuna in the awareness, and also information, about the Bengal side of the narrative, except for the extensive oral traditions, which have survived even after a few generations among the East Bengali Hindus worldwide. I myself grew up with a staple dose of stories from the hallowed homeland of my family in East Bengal. Even though I never visited East Bengal, now Bangladesh, I still have a vivid idea of our home and village, over there, the rivers, the vast green fields, the floods, the flea markets, the village fairs, the crops, the festivals, and of course the horrific conditions under which my father’s family had to suddenly flee their homes, leaving behind everything. The sad part is that, these stories were never heard outside Bengal. Not only that, there has been always a concerted effort at various levels to brush the Bengal side of the partition narrative under the carpet. This particular aspect needs to be talked about.

Let’s rewind a bit and see what exactly had happened in 1947, when India was trifurcated into three moth eaten parts – with India at the center and the disjoint West and East Pakistan at the two sides. The idea was to carve a Muslim majority Pakistan out of the undivided Indian subcontinent. The original Muslim League demand was for a Pakistan comprising the whole of the five Muslim majority provinces, the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to the west and Bengal to the east, and also, curiously enough, Assam, a Hindu majority province, adjoining Bengal in the northeast. But, given that Punjab and Bengal had considerable proportions of non-Muslims – mainly Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab and Hindus in Bengal – and the serious concerns looming ahead about their wellbeing in the totalitarian Muslim regime, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, in the interest of the non-Muslims in these two provinces, convinced the British government to partition the Punjab and Bengal and retain the non-Muslim majority portions in India. Accordingly, the Punjab and Bengal provinces were partitioned. The western part of the Punjab, comprising the contiguous Muslim majority districts, became a part of Pakistan, retaining the eastern part in India. A similar formula was applied for Bengal. The Muslim majority East Bengal, designated presently as East Pakistan, was attached as an appendage to Pakistan, separated from the western part by more than 1,000 miles of Indian landmass, which retained the Hindu majority West Bengal.

**Figure 1:** Partition of India - 1947

The extraordinary misfortune of the Hindus in Bengal started with the boundary itself, of the partitioned province. Some facts and figures here would make things clearer.
Oscar Spate, an eminent geographer and an unofficial advisor to the Muslim League, especially on the matter of the desired boundary of the Pakistan side of the Punjab, said in the paper The Partition of the Punjab and of Bengal, published in December 1947 in The Geographical Journal, "I favor the Muslim case in the Punjab ... and in Bengal my leaning is towards the other side." (2) In the same paper he elaborated why he said so.

The proposed boundary in the Punjab left 3.5 to 4.5 million minorities on either side. Western Punjab had a population of 15.8 million, of whom 11.85 or close to 75% were Muslim, and the rest 25% predominantly Hindu and Sikh minorities. East Punjab had a population of 12.6 million, of whom 4.4 million or roughly 35% were Muslim minorities. Presently, both sides have only around 3% minorities. Almost the entire minority population changed sides soon, amidst the fast deteriorating atmosphere of insecurities and brutal violence of unthinkable magnitude inflicted upon the minorities on either side. Enough has been written about this violence and the Punjabi, Hindi and English literature have a significant volume of poignant narratives of the horrors of this chapter of the partition.

The boundary of the partitioned Bengal was unduly favorable to the Muslim side. For example, whole of Khulna district with 52% Muslim population was awarded to Pakistan, for reasons even Spate couldn’t figure out. West Bengal had a population of 21.2 million, of whom only 5.3 million or roughly 18% were Muslim minorities, whereas East Bengal had 39.1 million people, of whom a staggering 11.4 million or roughly 30% were predominantly Hindu minorities. Presently only 8% of East Bengal, now Bangladesh, is Hindu, whereas West Bengal is still 27% Muslim, compared to 18% at the time of partition.(3) The Chittagong Hills was 97% non-Muslim, with Buddhist and Hindu tribes.

By 1948, as the great migration drew to a close, more than 15 million people had been uprooted, and between one and two million were dead. (4)

Anything between seven to eight million of millions Hindus were forced (5) to flee East Bengal or East Pakistan and seek refuge in West Bengal and other parts of India, over the years, in a staggered way, during which there was formidable resistance even from the newly formed India government in accepting them, or even acknowledging their status as displaced people, forget settling them respectfully. On the contrary, as pointed out by a Bangladeshi writer in an article published in the New York Times during the seventieth anniversary of the partition of India, “only 700,000 moved to East Bengal (but most of then returned to West Bengal after 1950 Nehru-Liaquat Ali Treaty of Prime Minister of India and Pakistan)... Bengali Muslims suffered less violence than other groups. For many of them the move was voluntary, indeed opportunistic... [in the] hope of a better future, rather than the mere search for a safe haven.” (6) We will try to figure out the plausible reasons behind this later. For now, let’s put the numbers in perspective.
**Figure 3**: Bengal Partition and other major Refugee Crises in the World

The World War II created something between 11 to 20 million homeless people, displaced from their original homeland. (7) Indian partition created 15 million, (8) out of which only the Hindus from East Bengal (“Bengal 1947” in Figure [3]) comprise a staggering seven to eight million. What’s interesting is though the fact that the latter gets almost no space in the entire narrative about Indian partition both in India and elsewhere, as if, they never went through anything called partition, whereas they might be the second largest displaced community in the world, only after the Jews. Again, let’s take some examples here, to understand what I mean.

![Major Refugee Crisis in Past 100 Years](image)

There were a number of articles in the Indian and western media in August 2017, commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the partition of India. One in the Washington Post, 70 years later, survivors recall the horrors of India-Pakistan partition, (9) doesn’t mention anything about the Bengal partition, even as a passing comment. Another in The Guardian, ‘Everything changed’: readers’ stories of India’s partition, (10) and one in Daily Mail, The children of Partition remember the bloodshed and heartbreak 70-years after India-Pakistan split, (11) also have no reference to Bengal. Even *India Today*, in an article published in its August issue in 2017, True-life tales of families separated during Partition, (12) gives Bengal a total miss.

Not only in the media, the art and literature too give the Bengal partition a near total miss. A list of the 25 best books about Indian partition, compiled by Penguin in August 2017, (13) includes the likes of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Ismat Chughtai’s *Lifting the Veil* – a collection of his Urdu writings, Nisid Hazari’s *Midnight’s Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India’s Partition*, Kamleshwar’s Hindi novel *Kitne Pakistan* (How many Pakistaners?), Krishnan Baldev Vaid’s autobiographical Hindi novel *Gusra Hua Zamana*, translated into English as *The Broken Mirror*, three translations of the Urdu works of Sadat Hasan Manto, Bhisham Sahni’s Hindi novel *Tamas* and Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, among others, most of which deal only with the Punjab side of the partition. The obscure The Train to India by Maloy Krishna Dhar is the only one in the list which deals with the Bengal side of the partition in a similar way.

Given the prolific Bengali literature and the epoch creating works by some of the finest writers of our times who have lived through the partition, it’s indeed very unusual why none of them wrote anything on the horrors of the partition. Sunil Gangopadhyay’s three volume magnum opus *Shei Samay* (Those Times), *Pratham Alo* (The First Light) and *Purba Paschim* (East & West), about the history and evolution of Bengal, the Bengalis and the Bengali culture and geopolitics over the past two centuries, spans through the period of the partition of Bengal in 1947 and the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, but surreptitiously bypasses the horrors of the partition, thus depriving the Bengalis and the Bengali literature of the partition narrative so
poignantly created by the likes of Krishna Baldev Vaid, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam Singh and Sadat Hasan Manto in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

In the review of Krishna Baldev Vaid’s Broken Mirror in India Today, (14) the reviewer points out, “Nearly every Punjabi writer, from Bhisham Sahani to Amrita Pritam, has at least one opus about the horrors of Partition. It is the Indian genre of civil war writing, a geopolitical literature which is no doubt the compulsive muse of any aspiring writer of that particular cultural experience.” It’s indeed a big exception that not a single contemporary Bengali writer found the Bengal partition an experience moving enough to be chronicled. The victims of the Bengal partition, predominantly the Hindus of East Bengal, are deprived here too.

The prolific Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak’s partition trilogy Meghe Dhaka Tara (The Cloud Capped Star, 1960), Subarnarekha (The Golden line, 1962) and Komol Gandhar (E-flat, 1961) are among the best works in Bengali touching upon the problems created by partition.

But here too, Ghatak bypasses the horrors, violence and genocide during the partition and rather deals with the agony and trauma of the refugees, their insecurities, nostalgia for the homeland they had to leave and their struggle to sustain their existence in the alien land they are trying to make their homes. So technically, his works are refugee narratives, not partition sagas. Even more correctly, as pointed out by Anustup Basu, faculty of English, Media & Cinema Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC), at a panel on Borderland Narratives of the Bengal Partition, organized by UIUC in April 2019, Ghatak’s trilogy, and many other movies in the 50s and 60s in both Hindi and Bengali were “filled with different kinds of loneliness.” In Basu’s words, they were “melodramas of loneliness. That of negotiating loneliness in a strange and alienating city.” (15)

In this context, Basu invokes an apt line from Rahi Masoom Reza’s memorable 1966 novel Adha Gaon (Half Village). In rough English translation, it goes like this: “In short, with independence, several kinds of loneliness had been born.” Basu also refers to Bhaskar Sarkar’s book on the Partition and Indian Cinema, Mourning the Nation, where the author says that “in the first few decades after independence, there was very little cinema made, either in Bombay or Bengal, that directly addressed the Partition”. Sarkar forwards a Freudian explanation for this – a culture needs some time to absorb, work through trauma before it can start talking about it.

Looks like, the Hindi cinema overcame the trauma and the loneliness of partition, but the Bengali didn’t. Or is it that, the intellectual and over sensitive Bengali film makers pretended to have never overcome the trauma, and just kept silent?

Now, let’s delve into why the Bengal partition has been totally neglected in all spheres – politics and arts. We need to again do a rewind.

The Government of India Act 1935 gave a good amount of autonomy to the 11 provinces of British India and paved way for the first Provincial Election in 1937. Congress got majority and formed governments in eight of the 11 provinces. The secular Unionist Party representing the interests of the feudal class of the Punjab and supported by the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, formed the government in the Punjab. Congress with 54 seats, was the single largest party in Bengal, but didn’t get a majority. AIML, All India Muslim League, led by Jinnah, later
the first President of Pakistan, failed to create government in any province. But it got 85% of the total Muslim votes across all the provinces, vindicating its stand and claim that it was the only party representing the interests of the Muslims. This implied that the Congress was not the party of the Muslims, as claimed by Jinnah. This also implied that the Congress, in contrast, was the party of the Hindus – notably, apart from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, there was no other prominent Muslim leader in Congress either. This was not acceptable to the Congress, which, under the idealistic Gandhi, couldn’t swallow the Hindu tag. (16)

Muslims became suspicious of Congress’ intention and agenda. To top it up, Jinnah raked up enough fear among the Muslims against their fate in a majoritarian Hindu regime under Congress. So neither did the Muslims get attracted to the Congress, nor was the latter ready to be seen as a Hindu party. Such was the zeal to remain ‘secular’, that the Congress didn’t want to form a coalition government in Bengal even with Fazlul Haq’s Krishak Praja Party (Peasant’s Party), which had 36 seats, one less than the League. It was as though, entering into a coalition with a ‘Muslim’ Party would have branded Congress as a counter ‘Hindu’ party. In doing so, as Tathagata Roy points out in My People Uprooted: The Exodus of Hindus from East Pakistan and Bangladesh, (17) (18) the Congress lost a golden chance of keeping at bay the League hardliners like Suhrawardy or Nazimuddin, who later became Prime Ministers of Bengal and inflicted irreversible damages to the social and political structure of Bengal. We’ll come to that soon. Fazlul Haq, who didn’t have good relations with the League, felt betrayed by the Congress, and went ahead reluctantly to form the government in Bengal with the League, which remained in power till the last day of the undivided Bengal.

In the next provincial election, in 1946, the League formed governments in Bengal and Sind, and the Congress in the rest of India. In the Punjab the Congress entered into a coalition with the Unionist party and formed the government. League’s Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Bengal.

As a part of the process to handing over India to the Indians, the Cabinet Mission came to India early 1946, for setting up an Interim Government to form the Constituent Assembly, which would be creating the constitution of the free India. In its “16 May” statement, the Mission proposed a three tier structure, where the “Provinces” would be at the bottom, Hindu and Muslim “Groups” of provinces would be in the middle and the “Indian Union” at the top. It was proposed that the five Muslim majority provinces – the Punjab, Bengal, Sind, Baluchistan, NWFP – and, curiously again, the Hindu majority Assam, could merge into two Muslim-majority “Groups” in the Union.

Jinnah accepted 16 May. Congress didn't.

Jinnah declared Direct Action Day on 16th August 1946 – “Direct Action” to achieve Pakistan. Mr. Rajmohan Gandhi, in his magnum opus Mohandas, [11] quoted Jinnah as saying, “Today we bid goodbye to constitutional methods.” What ensued was mayhem in the streets of Calcutta, killing thousands of Hindus. On 20th August the British owned The Statesman reported, “The origin of the appalling carnage – we believe the worst communal riot in India’s history – was a political demonstration by the Muslim League.” The Great Calcutta Killing, as the daily reported it as, unleashed the chain reaction of communal riots in India, something which would attain more sinister forms in the next hundred years.
The Suhrawardy government in Bengal did literally nothing to stop the killings in Calcutta. That was the beginning of the Hindu genocide in Bengal, something which would be very soon brushed under the carpet.

The Great Calcutta Killings left 7000 to 10000 dead, both Hindus and Muslims. In the Noakhali riots more than 5000 Hindus were killed, villages after villages were burned, innumerable Hindu women were raped and many were forcefully converted to Islam. In Bihar 2000 to 3000 Muslims were killed. The Noakhali riots were so horrific that Gandhi had to camp there for months, to get things under control.

When the partition finally happened in 1947, East Pakistan had a staggering 11.4 million Hindus, who by now, had realized that they wouldn’t be safe, for sure, in what had already become East Pakistan. Unlike Punjab, here it was not possible for such a huge population to flee East Bengal overnight. As they trickled into India slowly, over the years, carrying with them never heard of horrific stories of one sided Hindu genocide of massive proportions.

**Figure 4:** Comparison of Demographics in the Punjab and Bengal - 1947 & Now

Proponents of secularism often try to underplay the one sided nature of the violence against the Hindus in East Bengal by highlighting sporadic cases of Muslim killings and violence against them in West Bengal during the partition. There’s no denying the fact that there was indeed some amount of violence against the Muslims too, but that didn’t create an atmosphere of mass exodus of the Muslims from West Bengal to East Pakistan. The present demographics in West Bengal corroborate the same. The proportion of the Muslims in West Bengal during partition was 18% (19) and now it’s actually more, 27%, whereas the proportion of Hindus in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) has come down from 30% (20) during partition to 8% now.

Nehru, very smartly, tackled everything with a single master stroke, by giving an impression to the rest of India and the world that things in East Bengal were so favorable to the Hindu minorities that they were returning to their “home”. Much to Nehru’s relief came the Bengali intelligentsia, the writers and the poets, most of whom had left leanings, and felt the same about the Hindu-Muslim parity. For them too, the acknowledgement of the plight of the Hindus in East Pakistan would conflict with their utopian idea of Hindu-Muslim equality. So, no one uttered a single word, and a big part of the narrative of the Bengal partition was consciously brushed under the carpet. Not surprisingly, India didn’t sign the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and subsequently, the Bengal partition escaped the attention of the world.

Even a rumor of theft of a holy relic from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar, in Kashmir, lead to killings of Hindus in 1963. Hindu genocide, on any pretext, continued for years, and it culminated in 1971, during the Bangladesh war of liberation, when over 2.5 million Hindus were killed by the Pakistan Army. (21) Compare that with the five to six million Jews killed in Holocaust.

**Figure 5:** Hindu Genocide by Pakistan Army and its Bengali Islamist Allies in 1971, only in 9 months, & other Genocides in the recent past
Unlike the population migration in the Punjab, which happened in one shot, the Hindus left in East Bengal, and then Bangladesh, have been trickling into India continuously, over the years, till this day, being constantly under the threat of violence and genocide. They were always unwanted and never accepted properly, or rather legally, by Indian government.

The complete denial of the plight of the Hindus in Bangladesh, and more shockingly, the banning of Taslima Nasrin’s books about the same in secular India, seems to be in continuation of the leftist zeal of finding a Hindu-Muslim equality, something which has been in vogue for a long time, as we’ve seen earlier. That’s the reason why one of the biggest genocides in modern human history – that of the Hindus in East Pakistan and Bangladesh – has been thoughtfully and very consciously sunk into oblivion.

Something even more curious is the case of creating the myth of Hindu Terror. The CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury has recently said that Hindu mythologies like Ramayana and Mahabharata prove that "even Hindus can be violent".

It’s important to delve into the real narrative of the Bengal side of partition, not with an agenda to create communal divide, but to know the truth. Suppressing facts to serve a particular agenda, to align everything to one particular narrative, is not secularism – it’s as totalitarian and majoritarian as being extremely communal.

Notes:
(2) ibid
(3) ibid
(4) William Dalrymple, Jun 22, 2015, *The Great Divide, The violent legacy of Indian Partition*
(5) op cit Spade
(7) Wikipedia, Largest refugee crises
(8) op cit Dalrymple
(9) Vidhi Doshi and Nisar Mehdi, August 14, 2017, 70 years later, survivors recall the horrors of India-Pakistan partition
(10) Anna Leach and Guardian readers @avleachy, Mon 14 Aug 2017 15.26 BST, ‘Everything changed’: readers’ stories of India’s partition
(11) *Mailonline India and Associated Press*, Aug 2017, The children of Partition remember the bloodshed and heartbreak 70-years after India-Pakistan split
(12) True-life tales of families separated during Partition
(13) 25 Must Reads On the 70th Anniversary of Partition
(14) Tackling Partition horrors, Ravi Shankar, October 31, 1994, Book review: Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Broken Mirror*
(15) Transcript of “Borderland Narratives of the Bengal Partition”, April 25 2019, Knight Auditorium, Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
(16) Rajmohan Gandhi, Mohandas
from East Pakistan and Bangladesh
(18) Chhanda Chatterjee, June 30, 2017, Some Aspects of the Bengal Partition
(19) op cit Spate
(20) op cit Spate
(21) Shrinandan Vyas, Hindu Genocide in East Pakistan
(22) Hindus are violent, Ramayana & Mahabharata are proof of that: Siteam Yechury, head of Communist Party of India-Marxist

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Bangladesh: why Pakistan buries its head in the sand

Prof. Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy**

Before 1971, there was a grand pretense. It’s one that we arrogant West Pakistanis – the ones who grew up in the 1950’s and 1960’s – knew well in our hearts. East and West Pakistan were formally one country, but only formally and not in fact. Young Pakistanis today are completely unaware of the rampant anti-Bengali racism among West Pakistanis then. With much shame I must admit that, as a thoughtless young boy growing up in Karachi, I too felt embarrassed about short and dark people being among my compatriots. Victims of a delusion, my friends and I knew that good Muslims and Pakistanis were tall, fair, and spoke chaste Urdu. Some schoolmates would laugh at the strange sounding Bengali news broadcasts from Radio Pakistan. They sounded terribly feminine in our macho world.

Today’s Pakistanis only know that Pakistan broke apart because of some grand conspiracy hatched by India and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Agartala, and that General Yahya Khan’s penchant for double malt whisky and beautiful women made it difficult to fight a war. And, of course, it was the diabolical Bengali Hindu who ultimately was responsible.

One textbook used in the late 1980’s says: “The same Bengali Hindu was responsible for the backwardness of East Pakistan. But, hiding the story of his two-century old sins, atrocities, and pillage, he used ’Bengali nationalism’ to punish innocent West Pakistanis for sins they had not committed.” (1) An ex-chief justice of the Lahore High Court, Justice Shameem Hussain Kadri, wrote of ’diabolical Hindus’ and ’Hindu conspiracies’ in his officially circulated book.(2) The Hamood-ur-Rahman report on the atrocities of the West Pakistani army was partially released in 2000 but most of it remains classified even today.

Decades later, on the occasion of the 39th anniversary of the fall of Dhaka, an in-depth newspaper report simultaneously details what young Bangladeshis and young Pakistanis are being told about that part of their history.(3) Curiously, in the popular perception (4) of Bangladeshis, it was not the massive imbalance of power that sparked the move towards autonomy and independence. Rather, it was the attitudes that Muhajirs and Punjabis were perceived to have towards their language, Bangla. Neither group spoke Bangla, nor sought to learn it. Instead they expected Bengalis to learn
Urdu, a “proper” Islamic language built upon Arabic and Persian while Bangla rested upon Sanskrit. One proposed solution was to have a Roman script for Bangla so that its ‘Hindu’ character could be removed. (5) There were also suggestions to create a new language – Pakistani – out of the mixture of Urdu and Persian and Arabized Bangla, to serve the needs of the country.

A controversy over which languages could be spoken in the Constituent Assembly soon erupted. (6) A resolution tabled by a representative from East Pakistan demanded that the Assembly’s proceedings allow for Bangla, together with Urdu. On 25 February 1948, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, an Urdu-speaker, rose up to sternly reject the demand. Mr. Jinnah decided he would settle the issue once and for all. He was all-powerful now, holding simultaneously the positions of governor general, president of the constituent assembly, and president of the ruling Muslim League. Flying in from Karachi, he arrived in Dacca on 19 March 1948. It was his first – and last – visit to the East Wing. Over a total of 9 days, he gave several speeches, the biggest one being on 21 March when he addressed a crowd of many thousands at the Racecourse Ground. Jinnah was fluent in only one language – English – but he had come to argue the case for Urdu, the Islamic language that would bind East and West together.

The crowd that had gathered was adulatory at first. Few could understand Jinnah’s sophisticated English, spoken with his inimitable accent. Nevertheless they kept cheering until some of the educated ones figured out his message. The welcome turned to sullenness, and then to anger. There were reports that “people broke down a gate, destroyed a picture of the Quaid and protested against the Quaid’s pronouncements.” (7) Unfazed, he repeated his message on 24 March at Curzon Hall in Dacca University. Before he left Dacca on 28 March, he delivered a speech on Radio Pakistan once again insisting on his Urdu-only position. The normally shrewd Great Leader had badly miscalculated; he had accused an entire people of disloyalty. In effect, he had sealed Pakistan’s fate.

These facts are unknown in Pakistan today. In fact there’s one topic that never comes up in any political conversation – and that’s 1971 and East Pakistan. But some in today’s political class have become aware that the people they used to view so pityingly have far outstripped them. Bangladesh is not a basket case, Pakistan is.

**Overtaking Pakistan**

Why did Bangladesh overtake Pakistan? The mega surrender of 1971 made West Pakistanis eat humble pie. But, even as the Two-Nation Theory went out of the window, their overwhelming majority was loath to change its thinking. The west wing renamed itself Pakistan, many assuming this was temporary. They said Bangladesh could never survive economically and would humbly ask to be taken back. It was a flight of fantasy.

To be sure, Bangladesh has not become some Scandinavian heaven. It is poor and overpopulated, under educated and corrupt, frequented by natural catastrophes, experiences occasional terrorism, and the farcical nature of its democracy was exposed in the December 2018 elections. But the earlier caricature of a country on life support disappeared years ago. Today some economists say it shall be the next Asian tiger. Its growth rate in 2018 (7.8%) put it at par with India (8.0%) and well above Pakistan (5.8%). The debt per capita for BD ($434) is less than half that
for Pakistan ($974), and its foreign exchange reserves ($32B) are four times Pakistan’s ($8B).

Much of this growth owes to exports which zoomed from zero in 1971 to $35.8 billion in 2018 (Pakistan’s is $24.8 billion). Bangladesh produces no cotton but, to the chagrin of Pakistan’s pampered textile industry, it has eaten savagely into its market share. The IMF calculates BD’s economy growing from $180 billion presently to $322 billion by 2021. This means that the average Bangladeshi today is almost as wealthy as the average Pakistani and, if PKR depreciates further, will be technically wealthier by 2020.

Other indicators are equally stunning. East Pakistan’s population in the 1951 census was 42 million, while West Pakistan’s was 33.7 million. But today Bangladesh has far fewer people than Pakistan – 165 million versus 200 million. A sustained population planning campaign helped reduce fertility in Bangladesh. No such campaign – or even its beginnings – is visible today in Pakistan.

The health sector is no less impressive – far fewer babies die at birth in BD than in Pakistan. Immunization is common and no one gets shot dead for administering polio drops. Life expectancy (72.5 years) is higher than Pakistan’s (66.5 years). According to the ILO, females in BD are well ahead in employment (33.2 percent) as compared to Pakistan (25.1 percent).

How did West Pakistan’s poor cousin manage to upstage its richer relative by so much so fast? It’s all the more puzzling because BD has no geostrategic assets saleable to America, China, or Saudi Arabia. It also has no nuclear weapons, no army of significance, no wise men in uniform running the country from the shadows, and no large pool of competent professionals. At birth East Pakistan had, in fact, no trained bureaucracy; it received just one member of the former Indian Civil Service.

Others optimistically imagined that the 1971 disaster had taught Pakistan a profound lesson making change inevitable. Responding enthusiastically to the popular roti-kapra-makan slogan, they believed Pakistan would shift from pampering its hyper-privileged ones toward providing welfare for all. Equally, it was hoped that the rights of Pakistan’s culturally diverse regions would be respected. None of this happened. Instead, we simply got more of what had been earlier.

Thirsting for vengeance, Pakistan’s establishment could think of nothing beyond wounded honor and ways to settle scores with India. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s secret call for the nuclear bomb led to the famed Multan meeting just six weeks after the surrender. That centralization of authority breeds local resentment remained an unlearned lesson. In 1973 Bhutto dismissed the NAP government in Balochistan and ordered military action, starting a series of local rebellions that has never gone away. In doing so, he re-empowered those who ultimately hanged him.

In a nutshell, Bangladesh and Pakistan are different countries today because they perceive their national interest very differently. Bangladesh sees its future in human development and economic growth. Goal posts are set at increasing exports, reducing unemployment, improving health, reducing dependence upon loans and aid, and further extending micro-credit. Water and boundary disputes with India are serious and Bangladesh suffers bullying by its bigger neigh-
bor on matters of illegal immigration, drugs, etc. But its basic priorities have not wavered.

For Pakistan, human development comes a distant second. The bulk of national energies remain focused upon check-mating India. Relations with Afghanistan and Iran are therefore troubled; Pakistan accuses both of being excessively close to India. But the most expensive consequence of the security state mindset was the nurturing of extra state actors in the 1990’s. Ultimately they had to be crushed after the APS massacre of 16 December 2014. This, coincidentally, was the day Dacca had fallen 43 years earlier.

Bangladesh is conflicted by internal rifts. Still, being more multicultural and liberal, its civil society and activist intelligentsia have stopped armed groups from grabbing the reins of power. Although elected or quasi-elected Bangladeshi leaders are often horribly corrupt and incompetent, they don’t simply endorse decisions – they actually make them. Ultimately responsible to their electorate, they are forced to invest in people instead of weapons or a massive military establishment. Not having nuclear weapons is a blessing for the people of Bangladesh; having these weapons inspires wild megalomaniacal thoughts so easily among those who possess them.

For Pakistan, these are lessons to be pondered over. CPEC or no CPEC, it’s impossible to match India tank for tank or missile by missile. Surely it is time to get realistic. Shouting Pakistan Zindabad from the rooftops – while obsequiously taking dictation from the Americans, Chinese, and Saudis – has taken us nowhere. Announcing that we have become targets of 5th generation hi-tech secret subversion inflames national paranoia but is otherwise pointless. Instead, to move forward, Pakistan must transform its war economy into ultimately becoming a peace economy. It’s time to make sure that the Baloch, Pathans, and Sindhis stay invested with the idea of Pakistan.

Note:
(1) Azhar Hamid, et al., Mutalliyah-i-Pakistan, p.32.
(3) In-depth: What students are being taught about the separation of East Pakistan, Misha Husain (Dhaka) and Huma Imtiaz (Karachi), 16 December 2010.
(4) Misha Khan, op cit.

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North Korean Christian Refugees and the Cold War Politics in Seoul, 1945-50

Dr. Youngsoo Kong **

Introduction
A period between partition and the Korean War from 1945 to 1950 was critical to national transformation in terms of demography, geo-politics of two Koreas. It was a time that Korean peninsula underwent the Cold War in full swing. Seoul as a capital of South Korea became a main place of such changes. North Korean Christian refugees in South Korea were active players of the Cold War poli-
tics during this time as they vehemently spearheaded anti-communism. Therefore this paper aims at analyzing the resettlement process and the role of North Korean Christian refugees toward growing anti-communism atmosphere in Seoul during the period.

**Seoul as a haven for Christian Refugees, 1945-50**

From the partition of Korean peninsula in August 1945 till June 1950 of the Korean War, Seoul underwent major political changes – the US military government rule (1945-48) and the establishment of the separate South Korean government (1948). Meanwhile there was a drastic change of its demography due to outgoing and incoming refugees in the city. It brought significant alterations in cultural, economic and political profiles in Seoul. At the time of independence in 1945, Seoul stood at 900,000 people. Some 200,000 Japanese left Seoul after liberation. However, in 1949 the population went up to 1,410,000. This sudden rise is attributed to the influx of overseas Koreans and North Korean refugees. The number of North Korean migrants to Seoul in three years (1945-1948) was around 350,000. By 1948 it was estimated that approximately 100,000 northern refugee Christians settled in the South, of which Seoul sheltered nearly 70 percent or 70,000.

Refugee rehabilitation and resettlement became a social issue after partition as their numbers increasingly shot up. However, due to a lack of planning and the spontaneous influx and settling of refugees, unauthorized shacks were erected in many parts of the capital. At the foot of Namsan Mountain, an unauthorized shantytown called, ‘Haebangchon’ (3) formed by North Korean refugees became “a symbol of northern refugee town” within the capital. It was hastily established without planning on a first-come, first-serve basis. It was the ideal location for the refugees in that the Namdaemun market, Seoul railway station and the US military base were within a walking distance, providing a close proximity for potential future work.

In the middle of Haebangchon the northern refugee Christians established a church called, Haebang church, which became a spiritual centre of the refugees. Such scenes were typical of refugees’ habitations at the time. It is noteworthy to mention that refugee churches acted as a spiritual comforter-cum-meeting hub of refugees. Youngnak Church, founded near Namsan Mountain in 1945, was another refugee church. It soon became the biggest church among refugee churches in South Korea and later it became Korea’s biggest church. For example, as early as January 1946, a couple of months after its foundation, the membership reached 1,000. Even non-Christian refugees visited the church to seek help by associating with fellow northern refugees. The church was a meeting place for fleeing Christians as well as “a house of mutual solace for refugees.” As a result, Youngnak Church became a social hub for northern refugees. Likewise new refugee churches in Seoul sprang up rapidly. It was not only through growing numbers of Christians fleeing south, but also through their proactive proselytizing work among the non-Christian refugees. According to a statistics, the churches newly planted by northern refugees in Seoul and the vicinity numbered 19 by October 1948, and 44 by October 1949. With a help of the US military government, the refugee Korean church leaders took over “vested properties” which the Japanese had owned before the liberation and built churches there. Simultaneously, new members were added and its numerical strength drastically increased. The increasing influence of the church in Seoul could be symbolically...
explained with an incident that the main Shinto shrine in Korea known as the Meiji Shrine, located on South Namsan Mountain was torn down, on the site in 1946 an Easter sunrise service was conducted.(10)

On 15 August 1947 some twenty northern clergymen founded Ibook Sindo Daepyohoe [the Association of the North Korean Christians] and through this association they expanded their influence in the South. In September 1948, they petitioned to the Presbyterian Church of America for helping the northern Christian refugees in the South and the call was answered. By the end of 1948 the northern Christians established themselves as a powerful political, social, and religious force. Furthermore American missionaries in Seoul, with a help of the US military Government in South Korea tried to rescue Christian leaders who had fled from the North.(11)

Growing Christian Influence in the Cold War Politics in Seoul

Those Christians who had fled from the north because of the communist persecutions became ardent anti-communist activists. They dreaded the prospect of unification under communism. These northerners would not support politicians who sought compromise with either the communists in the north or leftists in the south. Nor would they tolerate such views within their churches.(12) Their testimonies about the communist north influenced the churches in the south, causing many church leaders to become politically more anti-communistic. Interactions with refugees had a critical impact on the Christian opinion of communism, causing many church leaders to shift to the right and become more politically conscious. The northern Christians’ fervor and their harrowing tales of persecution swayed many southern Christians to join their crusade, so that even native southern Christians became anti-communists.(13) These anti-communist Christians criticized and even physically attacked leftist elements within the church. For example, Kim Kyushik led moderate Christian youths’ meeting was disturbed by the rightist northern Christian youth through physical attacks. Kim was opposed on the ground that he tried to compromise with the communist atheists though he was widely known and respected as a Christ’ nationalist leader.(14)

Seoul had been the most crucial city in modern Korean history as a capital throughout the twentieth century. Whoever controlled Seoul commanded the political direction of the rest of the country. The influx of northern Christians, together with other rightist elements, rapidly transformed the political, social, and religious landscape of Seoul, favoring the cause of the rightists. These Christian refugees were the main supporters of rightist youth groups such as Sobuk Chongnyonhoe [Northwest Young Men’s Association] founded on 30 November 1946 in Seoul by northern refugee youths for the purpose of effective anti-communist activities.(15)

Political and social atmosphere provided opportunities for the northern Christians to be seen in their favors. Korean Christian elites were the few English-educated groups who could work in the US military government (1945-48), securing their special privilege and continued to retain this in the following government. Rhee Syngman, the first President of South Korea (1948-60), Christian himself, a strong upholder of anti-communism and the Christian faith. His political ideas were backed by the US foreign policy at the time. He linked Churches and Christian institutions together as a local network for his political gain.(16)

During the early period of his presidency, and with very limited funds, Rhee’s publicity team in Washington sought the support of church leaders and Christian
journalists to lobby the American government and to publish information about Korea. For example, as part of his efforts to obtain a defense commitment from the US prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, Rhee specifically mobilized the Korean Church to demonstrate and write petitions to the American Christians.(17)

On 15 August 1948, after the inauguration of the Republic of Korea, Christians were able to seize political hegemony. 44 out of 208 National Assembly members were Christians while 42.8 percent of the first Cabinet ministers were Christians. Their successful inroad to the politics was phenomenal that less than 5 percent of the population were Christians in South Korea at the time.(18) They finally settled well as a powerful group in Seoul before the outbreak of the Korean War.

**Conclusion**

Christian refugees from north to Seoul were influential community among northern refugees in South Korea during the period between 1945 and 1950 before the outbreak of the Korean War. Their demographic concentration and religious expansion in Seoul grew rapidly. Simultaneously their eagerness to assist otherwise initiate anti-communistic activities of both the government and non-state organizations. It was partly due to their nature being theists against atheistic communists, but more due to their past experience of persecution under the communist regime in North Korea. With a help of anti-communistic US military government (1945-48) and the South Korean government (1948-50), they secured both religious freedom and political shares. This newly set up environment provided them to grow in their influence politically as well as religiously. Therefore, Christian refugees successfully established their religious and political powerhouse in Seoul at the dawn of the Cold War politics in Korean peninsula.

**Notes:**


2. ‘Petition from the Association of Christians from North Korea, 14 September 1948’, Record Group 140, Box 16, Folder 29, Presbyterian Church Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Population differs from various sources as official census took place much later. For another source, in the periods of between the end of 1945 and the early 1950 it was estimated that a little less than 80,000 refugees were Christians, which comprised almost 40 percent of the North Korean Christian population as well as more than 30 percent of the entire Korean Christians at the time. In Incheol Kang, Hankook Kidokkyowa Kookka, Siminsahoe, 1945-65 [The Korean Christianity, the State and the Civil Society, 1945-65] (Seoul: The Inst of Korean Church History), p280.

3. Haebangchon literally means a “liberation village”.


6. ibid p. 63.

7. Interview with Jinho Jang at Seoul, South Korea on 4 July 2014. Jang was in his early twenties when he fled from Wonsan, North Korea in 1946. He was a retired elder of Youngnak Church at the time of interview.


9. All those properties Japanese had owned before the liberation were taken by the USAMGIK as “vested prop-
erties” for disposition. According to their previous uses, the properties were requisitioned to Koreans. For instance, if one had been a religious property, it will be given a priority to buy or freely given to any religious organization. Since the churches had quickly established the connections with the USAMGIK, their shares were greater than other religious groups. See details in Incheol Kang, Jong-sokkwa Jayoo: Daehanminkookui Hyungsungkwa Jonkyojungchi [Subordination and Autonomy: the Making of the Republic of Korea and Religious Politics] (Seoul: Hanshin University Press, 2013), pp. 145-219.

(10) Harry A. Rhodes, ‘A Meeting with Korean Educators, 3 May 1946’, Record Group 140, Box 18, Folder 11, Presbyterian Church Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

(11) Dr. Fletcher, ‘A Letter to Dr. Reischauer, 8 September 1946’, Record Group 140, Box 18, Folder 10, Presbyterian Church Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.


Interview with Jinho Jang at Seoul, South Korea on 4 July 2014.


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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.

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Congress leaders wanted Governor Burrows & Wavell to wake up from deep slumber & rescue the riot stricken people. Burrows said, Hindu women are beautiful, that’s why they are getting raped!

2019 Partition Center Conference and Journal

Seshadri Gupta, P.E.
Manhattan, New York
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October 19, 2019  

Sri Jay S. Hyman, ACSW  
Anath Bandu Awardee, Registered Social Worker  
718-207-7101  
Brooklyn, New York
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Prabal (P.E.) & Swapna (P.E.) Mukherji
Long Island, New York
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Drs. Sachi G. & Shefali S. Dastidar
Queens, New York
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