

INVITED PAPER

REFOCUSING THE AFTERMATH OF THE
PARTITION, 1947: A CASE STUDY
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Keywords:Partition, Refugee, Colonial,
Imperial, *Chaturanga*, Bengali**Abstract:**

The partition of Bengal in 1947 brings forth significant changes in the society, culture, economy and politics that have long term consequences. The article offers a deep insight into one more dimension associated with the event – the psychological metamorphosis of the common people which is still alive and controlling the socio-economic-political landscape of the West Bengal. The present article views the emergence of the 'New Bengal' which is analyzed not only by the contemporary historical sources and statistic but from the ground realities experienced by the author.

I

'Partition is difficult to forget and dangerous to remember'

- Urbashi Butalia, *a leading women activist,
practicing historian & partition holocaust*

The vivisection of the sub-continent has already passed threescore and twelve years but still, it is the most momentous event in India's four thousand years *kaleidoscopic* history. Historically, it is a past thing but socially, economically and finally psychologically

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it is a living thing. In every moment the people particularly the partition – affected old – aged generations as well as the post-Midnight's children feel the curse vis-à-vis the blessing of the holocaust. Keeping in mind- Henry Miller's thrilling book '*Remember to Remember*' I have tried to relocate the partition tragedy in the form of a post-mortem. The breaking and making of '*New Bengal*' i.e. West Bengal will be analysed here not only on the basis of contemporary historical sources but also on ground realities, with no malice or preconceived bad intention, I am writing this paper. My first, second and last objective is to relook the matter from beyond the historical data and statistics. Because history, on many occasions, appears as a skeleton, not as a body. The body is built by the builder in accordance with his or her mental make-up. Here mental make-up means not only the social profile but also ideological inclination. This was very much explicit in the writings interpretations of the leftist-minded committed historians, academicians and connoisseurs of history and social sciences of the post-colonial phase. What was pity is that due to the contemporary political situation, the left had received tacit support from the newly independent Government of India. It is true that the open-minded and genuine disciple of Cilo, the God of history did not give free passage to the leftists. But at the time of tug-of-war between the leftists and the Cilo's disciple, the Government had extended her support to the former not the latter. This is the general trend of Indian historical study and research in the post partitioned and post-independent phase.

But the mind has been changing since the change of the Government. All these are very unpleasant observations, but these are true. It is in this psycho-political setting, I will try to highlight the different facades of the effects of partitions upon West Bengal. Needless to say, for different reasons, I will try to confine my discussion upon West Bengal only, nor the Punjab, nor even the next-door neighbour Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya etc. Though in many ways, the effects of partition upon these regions are very much identical with West Bengal, still technically the effects are different.

II

Honestly speaking, Bengal particularly the West Bengal had never seen such a type of topsy-turvy situation in her thousand years of a historical journey. It was an unprecedented event in the annals of Bengal. Neither in hoary-past nor in distant-past, had Bengal experienced such trauma. In fact, to the Bengali Hindus, the partition was like an earthquake. I have consciously used the vocabulary- '*Bengali Hindus*'. Because the Bengali Muslims had demanded a separate state and they got it. They had given their verdict in the election 1946. Recently some historians, social activists and post-midnight children of three countries i.e. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh opined that the voting right was confined to the tax-payers only, so the verdict was not the reflection of all the people. Of course, this is absolutely true. But the truth is a faulty one. Say, the three respective Governments arrange a referendum on the revocation of partition and re-unification of three countries what will be the result? The result of the referendum will be a disappointing one. And this is quite natural. But the theorists will present various logics in defending this result by discarding the ground realities. Whatever may be, partition was a blessing to them but to the Hindus, it was a curse. It is an ending curse. Even after the passing of the nearly seven decades of the partition, we do not find any sign of disappearing the curse. Rather, the curse has been increasing day-by-day like the law of increasing returns.

In this connection, I would like to draw kind attention to the learned readers to an important issue. The issue is the birth of Bangladesh. Apparently we will not find any

direct connection between the partition of Bengal in 1947 and the partition of Pakistan in 1971. But if we ever scan the events of East Pakistan since 1947 we can say without any hesitations that the partition of Bengal in 1947 unconsciously or subconsciously had sowed the seeds of the birth of Bangladesh? Had there been no partition of Bengal in 1947, there would have been no Bangladesh in 1971? and also, the emergence of Bengali as an international language.

The celebrated partition historians Jaya Chatterjee, Ayesha Jalal and several others have been engaged in research on pre-1947 Bengal and they always blatantly accusing '*Hindu Bhadralkes*' (i.e. a kind of elite people from the Hindu religious community) for the division of Bengal. Even in some cases, they have nakedly violated the '*Lakshman Rekha*' (i.e. limitations) of writing historical treatises. However, I have a humble request to them. The request is that the way they have researched the partition imbroglio, in the same way, they should start a research on the post -1947 East Pakistan nay Bangladesh? If they do it, the readers, as well as the writers, will get a composite and comprehensive picture of history, mentality, social bigotry of the *Hindu Bhadralkes* of the pre-1947 and *Muslim Bhadralkes on Ashrafs* (i.e. sect of Muslim community) of the post-1947 East Pakistan turned-Bangladesh. Otherwise, the post-Midnight's Children will express their no-confidence upon the impartiality, fairness and objectivity of their write-ups upon the partition of Bengal in 1947. It is neither a challenge, nor a counter challenge; it is a simple request from a historical perspective. Honestly speaking, my only intention is to know the mentality of the counterpart of the *Hindu Bhadralkes*, the *Muslim Bhadralkes on Ashrafs* on the educated community of the post-partitioned East-Bengal, East-Pakistan-Bangladesh in regard to the hapless second category citizen of the East-Bengal-the Bengali Hindus on the Hindus general. Don't try to find any bad intention in it.

Even not to mesh or politician, the issue into the bandwagon of religion. Because, the effort of the partition of Bengal did not end with the creation of East-Pakistan-Bangladesh? So for the greater interest of the Bengalis as well as to prove their academic honesty, it is urgently needed. As a poor student and an ordinary of history and *Non-Bhadralkes* and *Non-Brahmin's* refugee son, it is my heartiest request to the celebrities and others who have always been accusing that the catastrophe of the sub-continent nay Bengal, in 1947 was taken place are the *Bangali Hindu Bhadralkes*?

It is an acknowledged historical fact that the political earthquake of 1947 had largely shattered the social and economic fabrics and at the same time the intellectual and moral-ethical backbone of the *Bengali Hindu Bhadralkes*. Frankly speaking, the spectacular decline of civilizedness in public behaviour was exhibited in ugly form. The days of the *Victorian gentleman* was bygone matter. The *Bhadralkes* of the yesteryears became the refugees and evacuees of the present day. Here I am drawing a special attention to the history-mind readers to the word- 'evacuees'. We are acquainted with the word 'refugees' but not the 'evacuees'. The lexicographical meaning of the two words is almost the same. But the 'refugees' are the much-used word, not the evacuees. The word 'evacuees' was found in the dictionary, but not in practice. It was coming out from the pages of the dictionary to real-life during the Second World War and the post-World War-II phase. It was connected with the *Burman Bengalis* departure from Burma in the said period. The *Burman Bengalis* were called the *Burman Bengali evacuees*. Like the *Hindu Bengalis* of East Bengal-East Pakistan, the *Burman evacuees* had lost all material things minus physical assault of men and raping of the woman which was like an epidemic in East Bengal-East-Pakistan. Till today, I do not find any comprehensive book and monograph on the hapless evacuees of Burma. It is to be noted that Burma was the only country in the world where the Bengalis had settled largely. It appears from the census of

Burma that the Bengalis was the largest majority group amongst the Indian settler in Burma, Unfortunately, the historical literature on the *Burman Bengalis* and the *Burman Evacuees Bengalis* are extremely short.

Be that as it may, the partition of Bengal was not merely a geographical and religious one, it is more than that. Its Effects was not like a pain-killer which gave the sufferer a relief. *Bengali Bhadralkes* first and then the hopeless lower-castes or subaltern castes people have been suffering chronic pain. No medicine or balm will give them any permanent recovery but temporary relief. The fate of the Bengalis of West Bengal irrespective to caste, section and religion can be compared only with a Greek mythological bird. According to the myth, the bird will collect food at night and become a healthier one. When the sunrises, the other birds tortured her and take her flesh and blood for their food. This is the regular way of life of the bird. The memories of the *Refugees Bengalis* of West Bengal to some extent like the mythical bird. Now, I am coming to the epicentre of the title of the theme.

III

India was partitioned and achieved her freedom in 1947. But Bengal was partitioned four times-1834,1876, 1905 and 1947 respectively during the hundred ninety years of Company Colonial Imperial Rule. No other region or territory of India had been partitioned four times. Here the terminology is used in a limited sense. The dictionary meaning of 'partition' excerpts limited sense. The dictionary meaning of 'partition' is 'bifurcation or trifurcation or vivisection of the geographical territory of a region'. This is not like this. Here partition means separation of some area from Bengal or Bengal Subah or Bengal presidency by the Company Colonial Imperial Government. This continuous separation of territory made Bengal i.e. West Bengal in the present size. It is stated that the Company Colonial Imperial Government for administrative convenience or strategic reasons or 'divide and rule' policy had squeezed the size of Bengal. In 1834, the East India Company had separated Arakan from Bengal and merged it with the Lower Burma. But both historically and linguistically, Arakan has had close ties with Bengal since time immemorial. This event is described by a section of Bengali historians as well as the people of the present North-East India as the First partition of Bengal. Most of the historians, perhaps, are not well acquainted with the geography, history, culture and language of the Arakan Raj Darbar. But it is a hard historical fact that today's Rohingias problem of Myanmar (Burma) is directly connected with the separation of Arakan from Bengal. Had the Arakan been not. Included with Burma in 1834, the problem of the Rohingias might not have been originated? The second partition of Bengal was taken place in 1874, while the Crown's Government on the British Indian Government had created a new Chief Commissioner's province Assam. At that time Goalpara of the Brahmaputra valley and Kachar and Sylhet of the Surma Valley which is predominantly Bengali speaking areas were merged with Assam. This event is described by some historians as the second partition of Bengal. The third partition event is described by some historians as the second partition of Bengal. The third partition was taken place in 1904-1905. And it is known by almost all. The last and the Fourth partition took place in 1947. So my view, the effects of the Fourth or the last partition will be incomplete unless we bring the discussion canvas the past three partitions of Bengal

It is historically true that the modern Bengal for which the Bengalis expressed their proud was largely the gift of the Company Colonial Imperial Rulers. It was for the Britishers, the '*Gharkuno Bengali*'(inlander) became the *Indianized Bengali*. It is for this reason Sir Henry Cotton, a civilian used to say that Bengali rules from Peshawar to

Rangoon; It means the *Gharkuno Bengali* became *International Bengali* during the colonial Rule. But her transformation is meteoric like. This rise and fall of Bengali are sarcastically called by the non-Bengalis as like '*Sapludo*' i.e. fallen from pinnacle to ground. How sad and bad it was? Since then, she has been struggling for existence, nor for progress or expansion. Today, her position in the history of India is like as footnote, not in the main text - the farewell from the heaven.

IV

Anyway, it is true that the refugees who came after the partition was really '*Sarbahara*' i.e. they had lost their material property. But some of them had brought their intellectual property which definitely enriched the creative world of West Bengal nay India. 'Refugee' doesn't mean refugee in all sense, at least not in the intellectual and creative field. Professor Ratan Lal Chakraborty of Dacca University has shown in one of his books that after the partition there was a dearth of the teacher in different faculties. Out of one hundred twenty teachers, one hundred eleven had left the university and took shelter in West Bengal, Assam and elsewhere. Same happened in the case of medical practitioners. Naturally, this professional intellectual class had greatly contributed to the development of West Bengal. The Bengal-East-Pakistan was wretched due to the mass out-migration of the professional classes, particularly the teachers and doctors.

Unfortunately, this enriched creative and intellectual World of West Bengal did not last long. Within two decades, a new finely political ideology challenged everything. Naturally, the 'hope of winter' was turned into a 'season of despair'. The '*Sarbahara Udbastu*' did not get any space and time for the recovery. The political deluge rapidly affected every aspect of West Bengal's human life. I have no intention to enter into any semantic debate on this dreaded political affair. But it is true that this new political horrendous had shaken the very foundation of the intellectual world of west Bengal. The meritorious students from both the 'haves' and 'have not' families had deeply drank the spirit of this new political alien ideology. As a result, we found a vacuum in the realm of the intellectual of West Bengal and this indirectly had led to the birth of the '*Madya Medha Raj*' (i.e. the dominance of middle-level intellectuals). Time has come to review the decline of West Bengal and the Bengalis in all spheres of life. Simply by giving example from the effects of globalization, we cannot get the full answer. We always show our keen interest in the debate, not to show our knowledge to understand the depth of the problem. As a result, the '*Madhya Medha*' has given the birth of the '*Nimna Medha*' (inferior quality intellectuals) in the intellectual arena. Or other words we can say intellectually, subaltern pupil and people are gradually becoming dominating in the intellectual society, institution etc. This is undoubtedly an alarming atmosphere. I am becoming nostalgic while writing this paragraph. Because, myself, was the product of that turmoiling rather nightmarish phase of West Bengal. Sometimes, I think, what we have received from the ultra-left political ideology? Now, I am the fag end of my creative life. Had the ultra-left been not came, partitioned and tattered West Bengal could get time for build-up her economy, education and intellectual life? Alas! That was not happened.

V

The topsy-turvy situation of the post-partitioned West Bengal was really unimaginable. The nightmarish experience of the East Bengal Hindus is unbelievable. We

can't find any parallel in world history particularly in regard to collective and community organized rape on Hindu women of all ages. This was one of the most obnoxious events of the history of the post-partitioned East Bengal – East Pakistan. History tells us that rape was as old as civilization. But the organised collective and community rape was unprecedented in the annals of the past world. I don't like to elaborate it. It is an epic issue. Neither space nor time will allow me to discuss it in detail. So, leave it. Anyway, what I want to say in straight leave it. Anyway, What I want to say in straightway that despite such an inhuman massacre in East Bengal – East Pakistan, the lion's section of Hindu mentally were fiercely libertarian and egalitarian in outlook and in practice. The classic example of such of outlook was the results of the first Assembly Elections of the post partitioned West Bengal in 1952. Had the Bengali Hindus or the *Bhadraloke Hindus*, whom we accused every moment for partitioning Bengal, been communalized; the Jana Sangha has definitely emerged as a majoritarian political party of West Bengal? It is to be noted that the founder of the Jana Sangha was less than a person like Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who was popularly addressed by the people as the '*Bharat Kesari*'. Apart from this, it is believed by most of the people that Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was the creator of West Bengal as well as the survivor of the Hindus. In contemporary West Bengal, a proverb was massively used by the people. The proverb is that 'Jinnah had partitioned India, but Shyama Prasad had partitioned Bengal?' In spite of all these, the '*Hindu Bhadralokes*' and the Hindus, in general, did not cast their vote in the box of the Jana Sangha? However, I don't find any worthwhile academic discussions on this important issue by the institutional academicians, intellectuals and the political '*Gurus*' (i.e. leaders) and their '*Chelas*' (i.e. followers). In Bengali vernacular on the contrary, the ideological tools. The so called intellectual Czars of the post-partitioned phase particularly the sixties and seventies of the past century have been trying to study the problems of West Bengal from theoretical discourse such as modernist, post-Modernist, post-Colonialists, Structuralistsetc, keeping aside the ground realities and peculiar a geo-historical backdrop. But such kind of stream roller of the frame is unsuitable for understanding the bizarre problems of the post-partitioned West Bengal. Many countries have been partitioned or.

Vivisected in different times for various reasons but the problems of Bengal and the Hindu Bengalis were very much one. The result is that even today neither in history or history textbooks nor in literature or painting we found any graphic picture on the social, economic and cultural effects of the partition of Bengal. They are caught in the dilemma of history must stay or History must fall. This psychological dilemma of the frame –centric or ideology centric historians or pseudo-historians has given a birth of a new branch of historical writing popularly known as '*tailood history*' or '*manufactured history*'. So, the historical prognostication is not above suspicion? Marx, Foucault, Bakhtin and Derridian Model, in most cases, are unsuitable for writing a comprehensive history of the post partitioned West Bengal with a special reference to her social, economic and cultural segment. In support of my contention, I will present here only one example from the social side. The self-styled 'secular and progressive' Bengalis have shouted much against apartheid in South Africa but were not vocal in practices against the much-hated, much-taken, much-discussed Caste System. Asoke Mitra, I.C.S. turned social scientist had explicitly analyzed the issue in '*Chaturanga*', a front ranked leading vernacular periodical. Regarding the economic nay industrial situation, I will quote only a comment of Noble Laureate Amartya Sen who himself professes in different interviews of his Left-tilt mentality. He has commented that left are very much interested in organizing Trade Union, not the survival of the trades and industries. This comment, he made, in regard to the Left-front Regime's industrial policy. But, before the advent of the Left-Front in political power, the man who lead the destiny of the radarless and leadless partitioned

West Bengal, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy who is regarded as the maker of 'New West Bengal'. This is not eulogy; this is hard-truth of History. Dr. Roy, an Asia-famous Physician had re-ignited the mind of the homeless, stateless *Sarbahara Udbastu* or Refugees despite the incessant opposition and the opposition parties and splinter groups. The establishment of the State Transport Corporation the new urban hubs - Kalyani and Durgapur etc had opened a new avenue in the sphere of employment. Thousands of young refugee boys and girls got employments. At the same time, the opening up of the foot-path or street markets also provided an opportunity for self-employment for the refugees in the small-business sector. Anyway, at the fag end of my writing, I must confess that the discussion is an incomplete one. This is natural. The partition of Bengal and her far-reaching effects is an epic affair. It is impossible to bring the trauma of half-crore people within ten or twelve pages. But my hands are tied. This is an analytical paper or write-up only, not a full-fledged book. The enlightened and rational readers will forgive me for an unfinished discussion.

[Acknowledgments: At the time of writing this write-up, I have frequently exchanged my views with Dr. Ratan Lal Chakravorty, *Former Professor of Dacca University, Bangladesh*, Professor Smiriti Kumar Sarkar, *Vice-Chancellor of Burdwan University*, Dr. Bimal Kumar Saha, *Principal-in-Charge, Acharya B.N. Seal College, Cooch Behar*, Dr. Papiadatta, *Assistant Professor, Shyamsundar College, Burdwan*. However, they are not responsible for observations, comments which I have written in the paragraphs of this article.]

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তথ্যসূত্র (বাংলা)

১. ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর : দেশবিভাগ - ল্যাডলী মোহনরায় চৌধুরী
২. ভাঙ্গা পথের রাঙা ধুলায় - সুখরঞ্জন সেনগুপ্ত
৩. স্বাধীনতা ষাট : প্রসঙ্গ ছেড়ে আসা মাটি - আনন্দ গোপাল ঘোষ
৪. উদ্বাস্তু - হিরন্ময় বন্দোপাধ্যায়
৫. চতুরঙ্গ পত্রিকা, অক্টোবর ১৯৯০ এবং সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯৯৯
৬. সমতট পত্রিকা, জুলাই - সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯৯৭
৭. ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ইতিহাস, দু-খন্ড - ড. রতনলাল চক্রবর্তী