Wounds Of Partition: Condition Of Women- Refugees In Bengal

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Abstract
Partition in Bengal has been long term process, and migration happened in a long, persistent trickle rather than in a single torrential movement. Independence of India of 1947 produce two disparate phenomena- amrito (ambrosia) as well as goral (poison), boundless pleasure as well as death of humanity, rootlessness and genocide. I would like to particularly focus on psycho sexual ramification caused by portion with special reference to women refugees. The ghost of partition and communal riot still haunts us and well go on to haunt forever. It is great blemish on the Bengali culture that will never be erased. Bengal saw the great exodus of Hindu from East Pakistan to West Bengal. It endangered so many crisis – identity crisis, socio – economic crisis and psychological crisis. All the refugee researchers have admitted that, the refugee women were the faced the biggest problem. It was found that women from refugee families were the waste affected. It is true that the government has initiated several programs for the social protection of the refugee women, but it was not enough. Overall, the social status of women was very traumatic.

Keywords: Refugee, Partition, Women, Cinemas, Refugee Camps.

Introduction
Independence of India in 1947 produce two phenomena- amrito (ambrosia) as well as goral (poison), boundless pleasure as well as unbearable pain, birth of hope and desire as well as death of humanity, rootlessness and genocide. I would like to particularly focus on psycho sexual ramification caused by portion with special reference to women refugees. The ghost of partition and communal riot still haunts us and well go on to haunt forever. It is great blemish on the Bengali culture that will never be erased. Bengal saw the great exodus of Hindu from East Pakistan to West Bengal. It endangered so many crisis – identity crisis, socio – economic crisis and psychological crisis.

The picture of refugees from East Pakistan (East Bengal) was very painful. They were out of their daily ordered life. They had been living such a life for almost thirty years (from 1947-1970). That scenario has changed a lot. Two types of refugees can be seen, one is the economy upper class refugee as well as upper caste refugee and other is lower caste refugee. Women were the wretched on earth during the portion. But the degree of wretchedness was condition
by socio economy nexus. The condition of women belonging to upper caste (such as Brahmin, kayastha, baiddya etc.) was not the same as the women belonging to lower cast; a great chasm existed between their two types of victims (Pal, Madhumay, 2011, P.P. 212-213). It has been portrayed in many novels, short stories, poems, dramas and cinemas. Many refugee camps were made by charitable organization, political parties. All these failed to protect women from losing their honor. Many upper-class Hindu women had left East Pakistan as well as East Bengal before the declarer action of Radcliff and started living in rented house in south 24 pargana, Kolkata, Howrah etc. Fortunately, they did not have to undergo such inhuman sexual assault and harassment. Women belonging to lower caste had to undergo sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape and enforced marriage. Jatinbala’s “Sikor chenra jibon”, Hironmoy Bondhypadhya’s ‘Udvastu’ etc. depict how Hindu women had been raped by Muslims. It forced them to desert their ancestral houses and land assists and the subsequent great exodus of Hindu from East Bengal to West Bengal.

There were as many as 1172928 refugees in west Bengal in 1950 (Chakborty, P.K.,1999, P. 464). That number increased in 1954. A major portion among them belonged to lower caste. They took shelter in many refugee camps- Ranaghat cooper camp, Mohitnagar colony, Bijoygharh colony, Jotin colony, Baigachi colony, New Alipore berak etc. cinemas like Nimay Ghosh’s ‘Chinnomul’ (1951), ‘Meghe Dhaka Tara’ (1960) by Ritwik Ghatak, ‘Komol Gandhar’ (1961), ‘Suborno Rekha’ (1962) etc. neatly depicts how women were assaulted physically day by day. To make meager living women had to do many odd jobs such as manufacturing bidi (small cigarette), collecting fuel wood, cow dung, making mat with date leaves etc. Participation of women in Kolkata refugee conference and all India Refugee conference in July, 1950 is noteworthy. In such conferences women became vocal about thus problem of saving honor and insecurity. Mahila Atma Raksha Samati (MARS) was central women’s organization, which is set up by communist women in 1943. The organization constantly demands to the government for protection of the refugee women (Chakrabarty, Gargi, 2005, P.58). So, there is many a doubt about fact that the problem of refugee women was of a different degree. It is much more poignant and painful than men.

In August 1947 the Boundary Commission drew a straight line and divided India, as a result, the country is wounded and thousands of people lost their lives and lots of women have been abused. Many refugee families have found shelter, but raped and abused women did not get their chastity back. Historian Prafulla Kumar Ckakraborty has described with mathematical numbers that, what the condition of refugee women. According to his data, the number of refugees from East Pakistan to Bengal between 1946 -1970 was around 1584000, and between 1946 -1951 there were 880 refugee colonies in Bengal alone. In addition, separate colonies have to be created for women. (Chakraborty P. K., 1999, p.p. 477 – 491). The colony of refugee women was Pandapara colony in North Bengal, Mohitnagar colony and Fatapukuri colony in Shiliguri, Gurusaday road colony, Kalyangarh colony, Vijayagarh colony, Ashoknagar colony etc. in Kolkata, there was also Sodpur colony, Baigachhi colony, Gayeshpur colony etc. Many colonies were established at Kalna and Katwa in the bang of the river Ganges in Burdwan district. In addition, several colonies were created for women only, which were Majherchar
colony in Hoogly District, Titagarh colony in Kolkata, Ranaghat colony in Nadia District and Hamidpur colony, Chandmari colony etc. The refugee camps on the bank of the Jalangi River in Nadia District were made for women. The widows, helpless women, raped women and elderly women were sheltered to above mention refugee camps. However, there is clear evidence that the refugee women could never live with security and dignity in women’s colonies. The evidence of this is found in several novels and literature.

After partition, the Hindu women were mainly tortured and raped by the majority Muslim man in East Pakistan. Refugee researcher Madumay Pal has given clearly explains on his book. He described the journey of many refugee families who came to West Bengal in 1952. One such family experience is those who live at 19/1 Dr. Suresh Sarkar Road, Kolkata -14, an elderly woman is reminiscing there (in Bengali) … “Ma bolchen. Tui jokhon chair maser. Babai koilo aaji raitie jamuga. Moniruddin babostha koreche. Beshi rait aibo. Lokjon kemun jen takayi. Dor lage. Ar na. thakur thakur koira raier rasta paraira station aichi. Tore kole joraiya rakchi. Sorishar balish tor mathai. Ekta ansara churi diye balish ta khunchiya dilo. Vablo sona dana ache. Sob sorisha jhorjorie porilo. Ektur lege banchlo tor matha. Ki je hoto, thakur rokkha koreche…” (In English… Mother says when you are four months old. Father said I have to go tonight. Moniruddin has made all the arrangements. The car will come late at night. How people look very scary. No more. That night we crossed the road and came to the station with God’s blessing. I hugged you. A stranger smashed the pillow on your head with a knife. You survived for a while, God has saved…) (Pal, Madhumay., 2011, P. -3). This description implies that woman have been directly affected in East Pakistan in the aftermath. This description also shows that going out on the streets during the day was not safe for the woman.

The women of the refugee families, who have left their homes, have also been harassed and raped on the way. There is no detailed account of the number of young women abducted and raped at the Benapole railway station in Bangaon area (present Bangladesh). Eminent author Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay has mentioned several incidents in his book. He described that, (in Bengali) “… Ek din ati pratyuse pahararato policebahini rater kartabya sesh kore ghati te ferbar pothe ekti modhyobayaska mohilasoho tui apraptabayaska balika abong ekti balok ke amader simanter modhe abiskar kore. Prosnore kore tara bujhte pare era Khulna anchaler ek hindu parbar manush. Ma, dui meye ar chele. Ai holo tader somporko. Poribare sokolei chole esche kintu pita ase ni. Policier kache rahasyamaya thekechilo…” (In English … One morning some police man returns to the base camp, after completing their night duty then they see two minor girls and a boy, including middle - aged woman. The police talking to them understood that this family was Hindu, they came from Khulna. The guardian of this family is not with them. It was mysterious to the police) (Bandopadhyay, Hiranmoy,1970, P.P. 90 -91).

The reason for their being refugees was very tragic. Talking to them, the police came to know that, a fifteen-year-old daughter of the Hindu refugee was forced to marry a Muslim boy. The Muslim family said they could not stay in East Pakistan without the marriage. The girl’s mother was shocked to hear of this arrangement and father was forced to consent to the marriage. The girl decided to leave East Pakistan at night with her mother and siblings and go to India as well
as West Bengal. This incident shows that the women were not safe in their own home. There are hundreds of stories of such atrocities against women. It is also seen that the many women have been harassed in the refugee camps in West Bengal. Author Hiranmoy Bandhyopadhyay has given multiple descriptions on his book ‘Udbastu’ (Refugees). He has visited several refugees’ camp in north Bengal. After visiting the refugee camp, he described that, a member of the inspection team asked the refugee family, why they left the country? Then one householder from the refugee family replied very angrily. He said that it is no longer possible for a Hindu girl to go to bath in a pond in Pakistan. He said excitedly that when Hindu girls go to bath in the pond, people from the majority Muslim community stand on the bank. Among them there are young people and there are also old people, standing there they said, (In Bengali) “Pak Pak Pakistan… Hindur bhatar Musalman…”

In English …It was psychological torture on Hindu women. At the same time an old man began to speak (In Bengali) “…O bibi, bela j bere challo. Ar deri keno? Ebar ghore chol…” and “…Ore, tor chachir paye bujhi khil dhoreche. Uhte kosto hoche. Hat dhore tule nie ai…” (In English …It was an extreme mental torture on Hindu women. Here the old Muslim man is addressing the young that your auntie’s legs are hurting; bring it out of the pond by hand…). These real events make it clear that it was very difficult to protect the dignity of the women and there was physical and mental torture on the women. Other hand the famous historian Deepesh Chakraborty has described in his book ‘Vastuharar Smriti O Sanskar: Chere Asa Gram’. “Those who were forced to leave the country after partition, to them the incident was really very traumatic, there is no way to deny. Forced eviction, physical abuse, sexual harassment, humiliation and insult women – their experience was very bitter.” (Ghosh. Semanti, 2011, P. 157). It is clear from the above statement that there was no social protection for Hindu women in East Pakistan. The reason for the migration of Hindu families from East Pakistan was to protect the dignity of girls. (Ghosh, Semanti,2011 P. 102).

It has been observed that psychological abuse of women was ubiquitous. Refugees, who were living in ranted houses, the women of this family were also victim to mental abuse. Eminent refugee researcher Madhumay Pal mentions on such instance of Suresh Sarkar Road in Kolkata. Here a few refugee families live in ranted houses. Their landlord had no respect for the tenants. The owner of the house thought that, “Banal manusya noi” (Refugees are not human beings), and the mistress of the house always had to be addressed as ‘Didimoni’ (Madam). Tenants were always told they had a separate world and they do not belong to the same culture. (Pal, Madhumay,2011, P.P. 1-2). So, the women of the refugee families always had to endure this humiliation. Another eminent refugee researcher Monoranjan Bapari have described on his article, ‘Ananta ratri chandal’, that at the time government officials treated inhuman behaviors to the refugee women. He described the situation of refugees in 1952. Thousands of refugee families lying on Sealdah railway platform were brutally torture when they were shifted to the Bishnupur camp in Bankura district. The author explains that three hundred refugees from the Sealdah railway platform were taken together in a truck to the Bishnupur camp. The refugees had to go to the camps with extreme unbearable hardship, an
old woman died on the way and a pregnant woman give birth to a baby girl in the truck. The author describes her as ‘unfortunate mother’, because the future life of the refugee daughter will be very miserable and insecure. The author has also described in his research that, (in Bengali) “Je meye ekdin mukhe rong mekhe beshyaparai golite dewale helan diye darabe. Presidency jaile female ward e thakbe. Ghrinno rog syphilise ponchbe abong sob sese trish bochor perobar age more kalohater shmsnhe electric chulli te dhuke purbe.” (In English … Refugee girls will have to prostitute themselves in future. If caught by the police they have to stay in the female ward to the Presidency jail. The disgusting disease will rot in Syphilis. Finally, she will die before thirty years and will be cremated in an electric chulli (furnace) at the crematorium in Kalighat) (Pal, Madhunay. 2011, P. 209). From this explanation the readers can get a clear idea about the social condition of the refugee women. According to a survey by the Anthropological survey of India, the social status of Hindu refugee women was the most vulnerable.

However, it is true that the government initiated several programs for the social upliftment of refugee women. In 1947-49, at this time the number of refugees in West Bengal was around 326211 and about 70000 refugees have been rehabilitated in the camp (Bandhopadhyay, H., 1970, P. 46). Of these, eight districts had the highest number of refugees, these are 24 Pargana, Kolkata, Nadia, Coachbighar, Jalpaiguri, Dinaipur, Burdwan, Hoogli district, during this time, chief minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy arranged for the rehabilitation of 12500 abused and helpless refugees’ women to the different area of West Bengal. Also, immediate settlements of refugees are providing under section -3 of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs Foreign Act 1946 (Annual report, 1971 -72, P. 4). Later the Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi declared that as many as 1.5 million people have migrated from East Pakistan to India Under the oppression of the Pakistani army. It is important to arrange for the rapid rehabilitation of these refugees (Anandabazar Patrika, Culcutta, 5 May, 1971).

These initiatives certainly deserve praise. But out of this number there were several thousand more raped and abused refugees’ women, which had no official record. Evidence of this can be found in various literature, stories, novels and movies. It is especially reminiscent of the incidents of Marichjhapi and Dandakaranya. After 1947, the Rehabilitation department of West Bengal Government set up separate home (camp) to provide for physical and social protection to refugee women, which were, Nari Colony, Ananda Ashram, Nari Seba Sangha, All Bengal Women’s Home etc. These were location mainly in 24 Pargana, Nadia, Howrah, Hooghly etc. districts. In addition, the women formed their own cooperative Societies for their own betterment. One of those shots was the ‘Nari Seba Sangha’, which was established at the house of Fazlul Haque on Syed Amir Ali Avenue in Kolkata. A residential school for women was established here under the supervision of Sita Chowdhuri and another was ‘Udayvilla’ have under supervision of Bina Das (Bandhopadhyay, H., 1970, P. P. 99-100). The Vocational education was imparted in this residential school. Such as making cloth, making Tasar, teaching accessories from Chinese clay, sewing etc. There were also notable women’s camp at Titagar and Kartikpur in 24 Pargana district, Ruposhree Palli at Ranaghat in Nadia district, in Bhadrakali, Bansberia, Utterpara and Dhubilia of Hooghly district, Auckland and Regent’s
Park in Kolkata etc. The women in these camps were not fully protected as they had multiple grievances. It seen that, resident women protested when the Governor Dr. Katju was visiting the camps (Bandhopadhyay, H., 1970, P.87).

The traumatic aspects of refugee women are illustrated in various dramas, literature, novels, stories and cinemas. Jyotirmoyee Devi’s short story ‘Epar Ganga Opar Ganga’ depict that the Muslims community in Noakhali are undergoing mass conversions and forced marriages. The story revolves around Sudam and his wife Durga, where Durga is being physically abused by a Muslim man. Another story is ‘Udbastu’ written by Debesh Roy, he has described that, Enamul is raping Anma. In the novel ‘Shuklapaksho’ written by Narendranath Mitra, here he shows that the teenager Seba is being humiliated by Muslim and she has to move to Kolkata to a relative’s house and she also abused there. In Prafullo Roy’s ‘Keya Patar Nouka’ little Jhinuk had been raped and came to Kolkata with Binu. Literary Sunil Gangopadhayaya has narrated of the oppression of refugee women in his several books. In the ‘Purba- Paschim’ novel, he highlights the various problems of refugee life and other novels such as ‘Ardhek Jibon’, ‘Basudha O Tar Meye’, ‘Arjun’ etc. has described to mental and physical torture of the refugee women. Besides, Atin Bandypadhyay’s ‘Nilkontho Pakhir Khoje’ Narayana Gongapadhyay’s ‘Baishe Shrabon’, Narayana Sanyal’s ‘Bakultala P.L. Camp’ etc. novels have been narrated to the women social life.

I think the partition of the country was very traumatic. It had huge impact on the society, economy and culture of our country. Our country, especially in West Bengal, the society and culture became practically divided. It was found that women from refugee families were the worst affected. It was not enough that some government initiatives were taken for the social protection of women. It can be said that even after 75 years of Independence the refugee problem persists in our state.

References:


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Additional References:


