

Illegal Migration and Undeclared Refugees – Idea of West Bengal at Stake

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I

Idea of West Bengal: Eroded from the Very Emergence

West Bengal was created as a non-Muslim majority state in 1947. On 20 June 1947, Bengal Legislative Assembly got divided into East Bengal Legislative Assembly and West Bengal Legislative Assembly. In the West Bengal Legislative Assembly all the non-Muslim assembly members including the Communists favoured for the creation of this truncated state.¹ One of the two Communist members was Shri Jyoti Basu. After the experience of ten years of Muslim-dominated coalition rule in Bengal between 1937 and 1947 and a series of riots for last three decades, particularly the Noakhali pogrom, the Hindu Bengal was not ready to go with Pakistan². A well-known Left historian had to comment about the September riot in 1918 in Kolkata, which took place followed by a publication in Anglo-Indian newspaper the *Indian Daily News*, as

'(that riot) anticipated many of the trends in future Muslim rioting in Calcutta – the mosque as an important rallying point, the upcountrymen as the main component of the violent crowd, the Marwari merchant as favourite target of attack, and the vernacular press as the main forum for expressing communal animosities'.^{3, 4}

The idea of West Bengal was to have a secular democratic entity quite different from what Pakistan was thought to be. Muslim-majority Pakistan and later Bangladesh became Islamic countries while West Bengal emerged as a part of the country with non-religious constitution.

No Exchange of Population

There was no exchange of population in Bengal as it happened for Punjab. Though Punjab passed through the initial months of mayhem, for following 60 years there has been no Hindu-Muslim problem or Sikh-Muslim problem in either parts of Punjab. East Punjab (Indian part of Punjab) had 33.09% of Muslims in 1941 which got reduced to 1.8% in 1951

¹ As per the plan, on 20 June the issue of Bengal partition was decided upon by the members of the Assembly. Several rounds of voting were held. On the question of joining the 'present constituent Assembly' (ie, the Indian Union), the division of the joint session of the House stood at 126 votes against the move and 90 votes in favour. Then the members of the Muslim-majority areas (East Bengal) in a separate session passed a motion by 106-35 votes against partitioning Bengal and for joining a new Constituent Assembly (ie, Pakistan) as a whole. This was followed by the separate meeting of the members of the non-Muslim-majority areas (West Bengal) who by a division of 58-21 voted for partition of the province. It must be mentioned that a single majority vote in favour of partition by either notionally divided half of the Assembly would have decided the division of the province under the rule. (http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/P_0101.htm)

² Hiranmoy Karlekar, *Bangladesh – The Next Afghanistan*, pp 38, Sage Publications 2005

³ Suranjan Das, *Communal riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* pp 74-75, Oxford University Press 1993.

⁴ Interestingly same pattern is still followed, as on 6-9 February 2009, the Muslim rioters targeted the Statesman, one of the oldest dailies in the country, in Kolkata because of a published article. The violence continued for 3 days, however no press or electronic media reported, the Bengali intellectuals remained silent.

and has not increased much.⁵ In fact it was B. R. Ambedkar who categorically stated long before partition in 1940 that

*'That the transfer of minorities is the only lasting remedy for communal peace is beyond doubt'*⁶.

The Muslim population which stood at 29.5% in 1941 in West Bengal got reduced to 19.5% in 1951, has shot back to 25.5% in 2001. We shall later deal with these figures in a greater detail and its significance for West Bengal. Going back to the advise of B.R. Ambedkar on this issue of numbers:

*'What do these figures indicate? This distribution of the Muslim population, in terms of communal problem, means that while without Pakistan the communal problem in India involves 6 ½ crores of Muslims, with the creation of Pakistan it will involve only 2 crores of Muslims. Is this to be no consideration for Hindus who want communal peace? To me it seems that if Pakistan does not solve the communal problem within Hindustan, It substantially reduces its proportion.....'*⁷

Nehru-Liaquat Treaty 1950 and Two Resignations

After the partition of India in 1947, within a year the situation started to settle down in Western border. It is generally expressed that Eastern part was relatively calm, and initial migration on both sides of Bengal were expected to stop in the coming years. But the situation in East Pakistan (and now in Bangladesh) always remained as a status of 'gentle push' even when there is no major pogrom. A simple method is to harass the Hindu neighbours, tease their women, violate the sanctity of their household by polluting their worshipping areas. Many a vivid accounts are available in Bengali writings.⁸

On 8th April 1950 Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India and Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, signed an agreement between two countries to 'ensure to the minorities throughout its territory complete equality..' which included 'freedom of movement'. **Shyamaprasad Mukherjee**, the minister of Industries and Supply in Nehru's cabinet, resigned over this issue. In his statement in the Parliament on 14 April, 1950, he said

'The fact thus remains that inspite of two Inter – Dominion Agreements as many as 16 to 20 lakhs of Hindus were sent away to India from East Bengal. About a million of uprooted Hindus had also to come away from Sind. During this period a large number of Muslims also came away from Pakistan mainly influenced by economic considerations. The economy of West Bengal received a rude shock and we continued as helpless spectators of a grim tragedy.

'Hindus will continue to come away in large numbers and those who have come will not be prepared to go back. On the other hand, Muslim who had gone away will now return and in our determination to implement the agreement the Muslims will not leave India. Our economy will thus be shattered and possible conflict within our country will be greater.'

Like Ambedkar's prophetic comment, Shyama Prasad's comment is true for today. We shall discuss more about it later.

Within a few months another minister from Pakistan government also resigned. Mr. **Jogendra Nath Mandal**, the minister of Law and Labour, of Liaquat Ali Khan's cabinet sent

⁵ Census data in Religious Demography of India – Centre for Policy Studies Chennai, 2003

⁶ B.R.Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, pp 116, Babashaeb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol8, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990.

⁷ Ibid pp 118

⁸ Prafulla Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*, Lumierre Books, Kalyani, 1990

his resignation on 8 October 1950. Mr Jogendra Nath Mandal was the leader of Scheduled Castes in Bengal who was the flag bearer of Scheduled Caste –Muslim unity in Bengal.⁹ After partition he was rewarded with a Ministership in Pakistan cabinet. After riots in 1950, such a trustworthy person of Muslim League and a minister of the country had to run away from his promised heaven within three years to the 'Brahminical' Hindustan and send his resignation from there. Some excerpts from his resignation letter can be useful for this discussion and for the proponents of Dalit-Muslim unity of today. Mr. Mandal wrote:

'Now this being the overall picture of Pakistan so far as the Hindus are concerned, I shall not be unjustified in stating that Hindus of Pakistan have to all intents and purposes been rendered "Stateless" in their own houses. They have no other fault than that they profess Hindu religion.'

Mr. Mandal foresaw the bleak future

'After anxious and prolonged struggle I have to come to the conclusion that Pakistan is no place for Hindus to live in and that their future is darkened by the ominous shadow of conversion or liquidation. The bulk of the upper class Hindus and politically conscious Scheduled Castes have left East Bengal. The Hindus who will continue to stay in that accursed province for that matter in Pakistan will, I am afraid, by gradual stages and in a planned manner be either converted to Islam or completely exterminated.'

Two leaders of with so vast ideological differences shared this in common, a bleak future. But the mainstream political parties, Congress and Left and the refugees themselves ignored it to pave the way for today's scenario.

Leftists Control of Refugee Movement and Stoicism of Upper Caste Refugees

The refugees in '50s were mostly from Caste Hindus. They were sure that they had no future in Pakistan and left for good. Even that meant staying in a thatched hut on a marshy land leaving the huge farm house in East Bengal. Their desperation for a good living in this new land made the refugee movement slowly more violent. The Communists used this anger to take control of this movement. A very detailed description of events have been documented by the historian Prafulla Chakraborty.¹⁰ The Left leadership could channelise the movement to their 'anti-imperialistic' goal, suppressing the atrocities of Islamic rule in East Pakistan. So the UCRC (United Central Refugee Council) processions started to raise slogans totally irrelevant to refugee problem, like the slogan against Imperialism in Korea or slogan for peace not war and against Anglo-American imperialism.¹¹ Not only that, one UCRC convention in 1952 adopted a list of resolutions which included:

*'vii) Exploitation of the country by foreign powers and discrimination against Russia and China in the field of international trade must be ended
vii) Equipment should be imported from Russia for the improvement of indigeneous heavy industries.'*¹²

⁹ Mr Mandal said in a meeting in Delhi on 5 November, 1946 – 'The scheduled castes will prefer to live with freedom and dignity under Muslims or other nations rather living under Hindus'. Or 'I bow down my head to Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah, President of the Muslim League, for his sacrifice for the cause of Scheduled Caste'. From *Mahapran Jogendranath – Jagadish Mandal Vol1* pp 221 & 239. Quoted in *Bharat Bivajan Jogendranath O Ambedkar – Bipadbhanjan Biswas*, 2003 and *Muslim Rajniti O Jogendranath Mandal* Padatyag – Debojyoti Roy, 2008.

¹⁰ Prafulla Chakraborty, *The Marginal Men*, Lumierre Books, Kalyani, 1990; Besides the description of different events, the book contains a specific section titled 'Refugee Power and the Left' pp 329-404

¹¹ Ibid pp 94.

¹² Ibid pp 142

The Left-influenced refugee movement not only suppressed the continuous harassment of the Hindus in East Pakistan, they even went ahead in support of Pakistan. On 18 October 1952, UCRC meeting at Wellington Square condemned Shyama Prasad Mukherjee for demanding sanctions against Pakistan.¹³ On 7 April 1953, UCRC had a big demonstration and presented a charter of demands to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. Significantly it had one of the demands as 'Rehabilitation of displaced Muslims and grant of interim relief to them'¹⁴, but no mention of refugees themselves for safely returning to East Pakistan in accordance with Nehru-Liaquat Pact. The betrayal of the upper caste refugees about their own people in East Pakistan ensured the future illegal migration and continuous flow of today's refugees, who are mostly what is considered as Scheduled Castes by Indian Constitution. This caste difference sealed the fate of the Hindu refugees for later years, an expression of upper caste Hindu leadership in Left, right and centre and their indifference.

The one-way flow of Hindu refugees continued during the existence of East Pakistan till 1971. Except in 1964 when some riots took place in West Bengal as retaliation to major rioting against Hindus in East Pakistan¹⁵, West Bengal accepted the fate of Hindus in East Pakistan as normal. Throughout 60's and 70's, the political scenario in West Bengal was a race towards a communist revolution. The politically conscious people of different left stands were busy in engaging in violent actions against class enemies to bring revolution. The leftists slowly have conquered the total intellectual gamut of Bengali Hindus. The situations of the Hindus in East Pakistan never became any issue of discussion amongst left. Nobody mentioned that even after massive migration of the Hindu refugees in West Bengal, the proportion of Muslim population is on the rise.

Bangladesh War and the end of the legal Refugees

Awami League won the election in East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared independence on 26 March 1971. It was one of the quickest liberation struggles in history, thanks to Indian intervention. However Pakistan army carried out a genocide within nine months. Though many Bengali Muslims were killed, there was a plan to kill as many Hindus as can be done. Hamoodur Rahman Commission, chaired by Hamoodur Rahman, Chief Justice of Pakistan, revealed explosive documents which include written order to kill Hindus.¹⁶ R. J. Rummel, the researcher on killings by the state authorities, described a chilling genocidal ritual, reminiscent of Nazi procedure towards Jewish Males:

*"In what became province-wide acts of genocide, Hindus were sought out and killed on the spot. As a matter of course, soldiers would check males for the obligated circumcision among Moslems. If circumcised, they might live; if not, sure death."*¹⁷

Bangladesh was liberated mostly on the dead bodies of Hindu Bengalis. Then there were nearly 10 million refugees, about 13% of then East Pakistan's populations. There were 6797615 refugees in the government camps and 3101660 were on their own as per

¹³ Ibid pp 143

¹⁴ Ibid pp 151

¹⁵ 1964 pogrom against Hindus started in East Pakistan after the alleged theft of Prophet Mohammad's hair from Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir, 2000 kilometers away from East Pakistan and it had nothing to do with the Bengali Hindus. Interestingly nothing happened in West Pakistan, the neighbour of Kashmir, probably because there were not enough Hindus to be killed. The blame is generally heaped on Biharis Muslims. However in 1990 and 1992 when Babri Mosque issue took place in Ayodhya, 1500 kilometers away from Dhaka, again there was mass rioting against Hindus in Bangladesh. This time there were no Bihari Muslims to be blamed.

¹⁶ Taghat Roy, *My People Uprooted* – pp 227, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 2001.

¹⁷ R. J. Rummel, Irving Louis Horowitz, *Death by Government*, pp 323, Transaction Publishers, 1997

government record. Out of the refugees in camps 92.7% were Hindus.¹⁸ It can be assumed that the refugees on their own will be mostly Hindus taking shelter in their relatives homes. This makes the total number of Hindu refugees as 9176627. Now Bangladesh census of 1974 shows the number of Hindus as 967300. This means nearly all the Hindu population of East Pakistan took refuge in India. This shows who were the real target of Pakistan Army and its Bengali Muslim collaborators.

However Bangladesh war only brought some nostalgic emotions about their lost East Bengal to upper caste Hindu refugees who were then mostly getting settled in West Bengal. This horrible aggression on their own brothers and sisters and their brutal killings evoked no angry response in West Bengal. The West Bengal was getting ready for new types of migration – Illegal migration and Undeclared refugees.

II

Indifferent Community, Invitation to Illegal Migration and Undeclared Refugees: Barrier to critical research

Stunned eerie silence

The left influence on the Bengali Hindu mind was always strong. It has attracted Bengali youth from the days of the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association). By 60's the West Bengal intellectual world was totally overwhelmed by leftist ideas. The '68 student rebellion in France, Vietnam War and Cold war between United States and Soviet Union, made the socialist liberation a dream for the youth in the world. Communist Party of India's prominence (much due to refugee power), the revolutionary zeal of Naxalite movement and the support of the writers, academics, film directors, musicians to all these political movements – all practically turned West Bengal in a leftist state without the state power.

After so much upheaval in a society in such a small period, there is nearly no books, films or literature on this subject of forced migration of such a large number of people. There have been only stories and films made on the misery of refugee lives but never mentioning who made them refugees. Celebrated film maker Ritwik Ghatak's films are its best examples. Its not the refugees have forgotten their past, rather they flaunt their link with East Bengal ceremoniously. There is a famous football club named 'East Bengal' which is religiously supported by the refugee youth and old. There are many societies named after different former districts of East Bengal e.g Chattagram Sammilani (Chittagong Association), Mymensingh Sammilani etc. They organise different programmes but never never they would touch upon any subject related with happenings in East Pakistan or today's Bangladesh. You may go to any refugee organisation's meeting, hear fiery lectures about the government's apathy about the refugees' demands but never any discussion about their past or the present situation of their own brothers and sisters in Bangladesh. Tathagata Roy sums it up nicely as:

'In such circumstances one would expect the exodus of Hindus from East Bengal to be a hot issue in the state of West Bengal. One would expect hundreds of books to be written on the subject, articles appearing in the newspapers every now and then, research being conducted on the political, sociological and economic reasons for the exodus, as well as the fallout in these fields, debates on the question

¹⁸ Refugees from Bangladesh: Facts of the Refugee Problem, *Bangladesh Documents*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Printed at B.N.K. Press, Madras (Chennai), 1971, pg.81 & 446. Quoted in *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, Chandan Nandy, Brandeis University, 2005

*Indeed one is greeted with a stunned, eerie silence. The subject is never discussed in polite society, never debated, never written about. If it ever comes up in the course of a discussion, people squirm uncomfortably until the subject is changed, almost in the same manner as they would in a case of incest in the family. Books on the subject are rarer than dinosaur's eggs, and few that are there have largely gone out of print.'*¹⁹

No news from Bangladesh is good news

Trend is same today. Average Bengali has no idea about the situation in Bangladesh or about the undeclared refugees. So when Bangladesh changes its secular constitution adopted in 1972 after liberation war in 1977, (known as 5th Amendment) to include "Absolute trust and faith in Allah as guiding principle of all state activities" in Fundamental Principles Clause 8 (1) and removes the whole Clause 12 on Secularism, it is no news in West Bengal. Then in 1988, Bangladesh constitution was amended (known as 8th Amendment) to declare Islam as state religion. In 1990 after an attack on Babri Mosque (it was not demolished then, just hundreds of people climbed it), a countrywide rioting took place in Bangladesh. The Bengali Muslims not only damaged hundreds of temples throughout the country, looted Hindu shops and houses, also famous temples like Dhakeswari Temple in Dhaka, Kaibalyadaham in Chittahong were damaged and ransacked.²⁰ The pogrom of larger scale took place in 1992 after Babri Mosque was destroyed. 28000 houses, 3600 religious places and 2500 commercial establishments were destroyed. 13 people were killed.²¹ None of these news ever reached the West Bengal people. The newspapers observe a self-censor about the Islamic violence. Even the killing of Humayun Azad or assault on Shahriar Kabir did not find any mention in the West Bengal media. A study by BRAC Researcher summed up the situation as '*violence against minority was in the process being institutionalized in Bangladesh*'.²²

Average Bengali newspaper reader and now TV viewers have no source to know about these incidents. After the election of BNP-Jamat coalition under Begum Zia in October 2001 a massive onslaught came down on the Hindu community. Several lakhs of people fled to India. Hundreds of women were raped days after days. The atrocities on the Hindus continued for next three years. Ekattarer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee (Committee for Resisting Killers and Collaborators of 1971) have published a three volume report on it edited by eminent human rights activists Shahriar Kabir.²³ A case has been filed in The Supreme Court Of Bangladesh in 2006.²⁴ These were never any news about such on going ghastly incidents in West Bengal though thousands entered West Bengal to take refuge. A 10000 strong procession by those refugees in Kolkata and demonstration in front of Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata made no news in print or electronic media. No human rights organizations ever even gave a press statement on the issue.

¹⁹ Tathagato Roy, *My People Uprooted* – pp 292, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 2001.

²⁰ Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council – Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents, pp 431-435, Dhaka 1993.

²¹ Ibid pp 479-482

²² Mohammad Rafi, *Can We Get Along*, pp 201, Panjere Publications, Dhaka 2005

²³ Ekattarer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee – White Paper: 1500 days of Minority Persecution in Bangladesh – 3 Volumes, Dhaka 2005

²⁴ In The Supreme Court Of Bangladesh High Court Division, (Special Original Jurisdiction), Writ Petition No. 3380 Of 2006 BY Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM), Bangladesh Chapter, Represented by its President, Advocate Rabindra Ghosh and Human Rights And Peace For Bangladesh (HRPB) Represented by its President of the Executive Committee, by Manzill Murshid – For details see Cry for Justice – Campaign Against Atrocities on Minorities of Bangladesh (CAAMB), Kolkata, 2006.

Migration Research: Questionable 'Objectivity'

In this mindset any research on the subject of Illegal Migration and Undeclared Refugees which no doubt would involve the Muslims and Bangladesh is a taboo in West Bengal. When even eminent historians like Amalendu De, an expert in Islamic History and ex-President of The Asiatic Society writes on infiltration, he finds no publisher and had to do with unknown little publisher.²⁵ Similarly Prafulla Chakraborty, well known for his books on European History, could not find publisher for his seminal work 'The Marginal Men' and had to print himself. The most striking aspects of this source book published in 1990 that it has a very brief bibliography – simply because there is hardly any work on this issue. In last decade there has been some work on the issue of migration and refugees due to international funding on this subject. But still the researchers are very careful not to cross the sacred line what is known as 'secularism'.

Chandan Nandy, the author of one of the few extensively researched treatises on the subject. States:

*'I had to approach the field research with extreme caution lest I ended up "taking sides", especially because the pernicious debate between the left, centre and right of the Indian political spectrum invariably casts researchers as either "communal" or "secular"..''*²⁶.

It is difficult to survive in academic field and also get research funding if you are once branded as 'communal', especially in Left-run West Bengal. A detailed study of transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal by Ranabir Samaddar provides human stories, theories, some useful data but very careful not to put any attention on the communal nature of Bangladesh. But such a massive reality could not be hidden so he provided a generous subsection 'The vanishing Hindus of Bangladesh' in which only Vested Property Act has been shown as the reason for such vanishing trick.²⁷ Enough literature on the worst riots of 1990, and 1992, the rapes of hundreds of women of Bhola and others were easily available, but you cannot survive in the academic field if you mention those unmentionable which would drag the issue of Islamic violence. So Samaddar was much annoyed when a BSF hindi-speaking jawan reminded him to read 'Lajja',²⁸ to understand the illegal migration. Samaddar was not happy that BSF jawan besides guarding the border should also know about *Lajja* and its impact.²⁹ Of course for Samaddar, these riots or vanishing Hindus is a *normal historical process* which he welcomes as he writes in the introduction of his book,

*'My argument here is that though the human flows are very much a part and product of globalization, they also indicate a return to history, to local history and a past narrative of community, in short, they signal continuity.'*³⁰

And

*'Here I argue that the nation as a configuration is being continuously redefined, not the least through forces such as population flow.....'*³¹

²⁵ Amalendu De – *Prasanga Anuprabesh* (On Infiltration) – Barna Parichay, Kolkata, 1993.

²⁶ Chandan Nandy, *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, pp XV, Brandeis University, 2005

²⁷ Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation*, pp 92-94, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1999.

²⁸ *Lajja* is a novel in Bengali by Taslima Nasrin which for the first time depicted brutal torture on Hindus during the riot in Bangladesh. She has been banished from Bangladesh and then also banished from West Bengal by the rioting Muslim mob, the demand supported by all the major political parties in West Bengal e.g CPI-M, Trinamul Congress and Congress. The 'civil society' also remained a mute spectator

²⁹ Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation*, pp 11-112, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1999.

³⁰ *Ibid* pp 21

³¹ *Ibid* pp 13

So Mr Samaddar is waiting to see formation of a new nation in West Bengal, we shall see later what the face of that new 'neo nation' would be.

On a similar line a paper from Indian Statistical Institute on 'undocumented migration' the researcher tries to avoid the religious issue in a peculiar manner. She writes that 'It is to be borne in mind that Bangladesh is not a secular state. Religion does play a role in migration' but then goes on to say about the *political and economic causes only responsible* for four phases of migration from Bangladesh.³² The paper mentioning religious issue in several parts of the article had identified the Five 'Push Factors' in Bangladesh to be Economic, Demographic, Social, Political and Law and Order.³³ She covers up religion under the wrap of 'law and order'. Reacting to this article another academic comments,

*Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal has been a continuous process since 1947. The reasons are historical, political, social, cultural, economic, geographical and environmental.*³⁴

Note the list of factors for migration again, citing everything except religious or communal factors.

III

Needed: Differentially Defining Illegal Migration and Undeclared Refugees

Definitions

Let us first clarify the terms 'Illegal migration', 'Undeclared Refugees' and 'Infiltrators'.

There have been many discussions on the issue of migration and its legality including the unfettered right of migration of people. Any such theoretical debate is avoided here. It is simply that whoever enters a country without proper legal papers or reside without legal permission after entering legally is an 'illegal migrant'. There should be no ambiguity in that. How that illegal migrant has to be treated is a different issue altogether.

A Refugee is defined in Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention as amended by the 1967 Protocol as:

"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.."

However India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are not signatories to this convention or protocol. So by international law there have never been any refugees in between these countries. The 2005 UN data shows that in India there are 77200 refugees from China, 50730 from Sri Lanka, 9700 from Afghanistan, 1471 from Myanmar and 104 from Somalia. So UN keeps no data on the refugees of the subcontinent. Recently on 19 June 2007, a minority rights group Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities has filed a writ petition at Calcutta High Court on June 19th, 2007 appealing that Government of India should grant

³² Pranati Datta, *Push-Pull Factors of Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal: A Perception Study The Qualitative Report* pp 348-349, Volume 9 Number 2 June 2004 338-339

³³ Ibid pp 348-350

³⁴ Refugee Watch Issue No. 18, April 2003

Refugee status to Bangladesh Minorities, who took shelter in India to escape violence in their country.³⁵

So the term refugee is considered here following the definition UN convention though India or Bangladesh is not a signatory. By that definition the Hindus from Bangladesh are entitled to be considered as '**Refugee**'. Till 25 March 1971, the Hindus who crossed over to India from East Pakistan were issued a receipt of their entry into the country. This receipt or slip was the proof of their 'refugee' status and they were subsequently granted citizenship of the country. These people are considered as legal refugees. Even Government of India's notes also refer them as 'refugees'.

On 29 November 1971, Government of India through its Under Secretary C.L.Goyal issued an Express letter No. 26011/16/71-10 to the Chief Secretaries to all State Governments and Union Territories Administrations. Its Subject: Grant of Indian Citizenship to refugees from East Bengal who have crossed over to India after 25th March 1971. Instruction that application from such refugees for Indian Citizenship should not be entertained.³⁶

According to the Sec 5.1(a) of Citizenship Act 1955, persons of Indian origin who are ordinarily resident in India and have been resident for five years immediately before making an application for registration;³⁷. The refugees from East Pakistan naturally became Indian citizens afterwards.

The situation changed from 26th March, 1971, the category of '**Undeclared Refugees**' came into being.

So the 'illegal migrants' other than 'the undeclared refugees' can be termed as 'infiltrators'. By this definition infiltrator is a Bangladeshi Muslim as others like Hindus, Christians, Buddhists or Ahmedias can claim the status of a refugee due to religious persecution.

Citizenship Act 2003 and Undeclared Refugees

Though the provision of obtaining citizenship for these undeclared refugees were stopped by a notice, it was thought to be a temporary affair as there was still no legal bar from obtaining the citizenship. The act has been amended seven times. Till 1986 anyone born in India had the right to be an Indian citizen. Sons and daughters of the 'undeclared refugees' could therefore be Indian citizen. After 1986, only son or daughter of an Indian citizen can be a citizen. So the refugees who entered after 1986, not only they but their future sons and daughters are to be all illegal migrants.

The scenario changed further after the passing of Citizenship Act 2003 by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA Government. The act aimed to please NRI Indians by providing them a chance of dual citizenship, but in the process, this party preaching Hindutwa caused a major harm to the Hindu Refugees from Bangladesh coming after 25 March 1971. It further restricted the chance of getting citizenship for this undeclared refugees by stating that if the father or mother is an illegal migrant, their son or daughter is also illegal migrant. So several millions of undeclared refugees from Bangladesh have lost all hopes of citizenship

What was the reaction for such a devastating act and that too done by 'communal' NDA? At the intervention of the state of Gujarat and Rajasthan, citizenship have been given to the

³⁵ See <http://www.hrcbm.org>

³⁶ Debojyoti Roy – *Keno Udbastu Hote Holo* (Why we had to become refugees) – pp 175, Vivekananda Sahitya Kendra, Kolkata 2001.

³⁷ See Citizenship Act, 1955

several thousands Hindus displaced from Sindh residing in those states following the guidelines of section 18 of the Act and subsequent rules of 2004.

But West Bengal remained silent. The Act which has been passed for 5 years but till now no worthwhile discussion on this life and death issue of millions of undeclared refugees have appeared neither in print media or electronic media. Hundreds of Bengali 'little magazines', considered to be heart of Bengali intellectualism, which brings out special issues on 'Palestine' to 'HIV Aids', never touched such an important issue.

IV

The Numbers: Demographic Disaster in West Bengal and Ethnic Cleansing in Bangladesh.

Demographical Disaster

Let us start with some of the most easily available statistics of change of Hindu and Muslim population in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Tables of growth of Hindu and Muslim population in Bangladesh and West Bengal are provided in details below:

Table 1
Hindu and Muslim Population Growth in West Bengal & Bangladesh, 1951-2001

	Religions	1951 Total Population (%)	1961 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1951-61	1974 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1961-74
Bangladesh	All Religions	41933	50840	21.24	71478	40.59
	Hindus	9239 (22.0)	9380 (18.5)	1.53	9673 (13.5)	3.12
	Muslims	32227 (76.9)	40890 (80.4)	26.88	61039 (85.4)	49.28

	Religions	1981 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1974-81	1991 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1981-91	2001 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1991-01	Growth Rate (%) 1951- 2001
Bangladesh	All Religions	87120	21.88	106315	22.03	123851	16.49	195.35
	Hindus	10570 (12.1)	9.27	11179 (10.5)	5.76	11379 (9.2)	1.79	23.16
	Muslims	74587 (86.7)	22.20	93881 (88.3)	25.87	111079 (89.7)	18.32	244.68

	Religions	1951 Total Population (%)	1961 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1951-61	1971 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1961-71
West Bengal	All Religions	24810308	34926279	32.80	44312011	26.87
	Hindus	19462706 (78.45)	27523358 (78.80)	41.42	34611864 (78.11)	25.75
	Muslims	4925496 (19.85)	6985287 (20.00)	41.82	9064338 (20.46)	29.76

	Religions	1981 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1971-81	1991 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1981-91	2001 Total Population (%)	Growth Rate (%) 1991-01	Growth Rate (%) 1951-

								2001
West Bengal	All Religions	54580647	23.17	68077965	24.73	80176197	17.84	223.16
	Hindus	42007159 (76.96)	21.37	50866624 (74.72)	21.09	58104835 (72.47)	14.23	198.54
	Muslims	11743259 (21.51)	29.55	16075836 (23.61)	36.89	20240543 (25.25)	25.91	310.13

Table 2
Districtwise Demographic Change In West Bengal 1951-2001
Population Ratio in Percent (%)

Region		1951	2001	% Change
West Bengal	Hindu	78.45	72.47	-5.98
	Muslim	19.85	25.25	+5.4
Darjiling	Hindu	81.71	76.92	-4.79
	Muslim	1.14	5.31	+4.17
Jalpaiguri	Hindu	84.18	83.3	-0.88
	Muslim	9.74	10.85	+1.11
Kochbihar	Hindu	70.90	75.50	+4.6
	Muslim	28.94	24.24	-4.7
Uttar & Dakshin Dinajpur	Hindu	69.30	60.22	-9.08
	Muslim	29.94	38.47	+8.53
Maldah	Hindu	62.92	49.28	-13.64
	Muslim	36.97	49.72	+12.75
Murshidabad	Hindu	44.60	35.92	-8.68
	Muslim	55.24	63.67	+8.43
Birbhum	Hindu	72.60	64.69	-7.91
	Muslim	26.86	35.08	+8.22
Bardhaman	Hindu	83.73	78.89	-4.84
	Muslim	15.60	19.78	+4.18
Nadia	Hindu	77.03	73.75	-3.28
	Muslim	22.36	25.41	+3.05
North 24 Pgs*	Hindu	77.26 (1971)	75.23	-2.03
	Muslim	22.43 (1971)	24.22	+1.79
South 24 Pgs*	Hindu	72.96 (1971)	65.86	-7.1
	Muslim	26.05 (1971)	33.24	+7.19
Hugli	Hindu	86.52	83.63	-2.89
	Muslim	13.27	15.14	+1.87
Bankura	Hindu	91.16	84.35	-6.81
	Muslim	4.40	7.51	+3.11
Puruliya*	Hindu	93.13 (1961)	83.42	-9.71
	Muslim	5.99 (1961)	7.12	+1.13
Medinipur	Hindu	91.78	85.58	-6.2
	Muslim	7.17	11.33	+4.16
Haora	Hindu	83.45	74.98	-8.47
	Muslim	16.22	24.44	+8.22
Kolkata	Hindu	83.41	77.68	-5.73
	Muslim	12.00	20.27	+8.27

Source: Census of India, 2001

* Adjusted Data

Exept Kochbihar, all districts had increase in Muslim Population

Maldah , a Hindu majority district has been turned into Muslim majority
South Dinajpur district is on the verge of turning into Muslim majority
Border districts of Maldah, Murshidabad, Uttar & Dakhsin Dinajpur, South 24 Parganas and Kolkata & Howrah have high increase.

Let us look the data carefully. Remember what Shyamaprasad Mukherjee told in 1950 while resigning from Nehru's cabinet. The unusual growth of Muslim population during 1951-61 bears out his warnings. While Hindu population growth is very high of 41.42% due to huge influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan³⁸, Muslim population growth was higher at 41.82%. No natural growth can explain this except massive coming back of Muslims back to West Bengal. Remember the role of UCRC, demanding rehabilitation of the Muslims and criticizing Shyamaprasad. Though the Hindu refugee influx continued³⁹, the Muslim growth rate still surpassed that. It is a puzzle nobody bothered to look into. The worst demographic disaster happened during the height of rule of Jyoti Basu, the CPIM's and country's longest serving chief minister. West Bengal's population growth rate was higher than the Indian national average till 1971 due to high influx of refugees. During 1971-81, for the first time West Bengal population growth rate went below the national average. During 1981-1991 again West Bengal population growth rate became above national average. During that period Hindu growth rate decreased from previous decade (you must keep in mind that influx of Hindu refugees never stopped), the Muslim growth was a phenomenal 36.89%. If there were any normal atmosphere of research and study in West Bengal, this abnormal population scenario should have been a major issue of debate, academic study, election issue, planning, environment etc. However it was silence as ever. Only a respected historian like Professor Amalendu De, once a member of Communist Party who married into the family of Fazlul Haq, the legendary leader Bengali Muslim peasantry, braved to write a small book on infiltration which was criticized in CPI(M)'s daily.⁴⁰

In 1991-2001 the growth rate reduced but still had a large gap with the growth rate of Hindu population. So from 19.85% in 1951, Muslim population in West Bengal shot up to 25.85% in 2001. Remember Ambedkar's visionary comment on numbers, this became the reality after 50 years of creation of the state of West Bengal.

Compare the overall growth rate in 50 years in two parts. In West Bengal, Hindu population growth rate was 198.54%, Muslim growth rate was one and half times higher at 310.13%! In Bangladesh, Hindu population growth rate was 23.16%, while Muslim population growth rate was more than ten times, at 244.68%. A comparative study of the population and the growth details of these two countries can be found in Bimal Praminik's well-researched book.⁴¹

Worst Ethnic Cleansing in Peace Times

One can have a comparative look at the situation in Bangladesh. It can only be called '**the worst ethnic cleansing in recent history**'. We have mentioned before the 'gentle push' and 'violent riots' as the reasons for Hindu exodus. The other major reason was the 'Enemy Property Act, 1965' which was in fact an evolution of different earlier acts to grab the

³⁸ Amalendu De pp 3-4

³⁹ Ibid pp 5-7

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Bimal Praminik, *Endangered Demography – Nature and Impact of Demographic Changes in West Bengal 1951-2001* Kolkata 2005. The updated Bengali version is named – Paschimbange AshaniSanket.

properties of the Hindus.⁴² The Enemy Property Act of Pakistan was renamed as Vested Property Act after the emergence of Bangladesh. Abul Barkat, Professor of Economics in Dhaka University, has done seminal work on this subject. Even after the Pakistan regime is gone, Vested Property Act is still used to grab Hindu properties, an interesting example is given by Prof Barkat in the preface of his book:

The tales of prominent persons who have been affected by the VPA are well known. For example, Mr. Dharendra Nath Dutta, the veteran politician from Comilla, freedom fighter against the British Raj, and a member of the then-Pakistan Constituent Assembly, raised the first voice of protest in the Parliament against imposition of Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan and demanded Bangla be recognized as a State Language. After dedicating his whole life to the people and fighting to his last breath for the cause of the country, Shaheed Dharendra Nath Dutta was brutally tortured and killed along with his son Dilip Dutta by Pakistani Armies in 1971 in Comilla Cantonment. The tiny, token village property left to his family after he had donated the rest of his landed property for welfare and educational purposes in his village Ramrail in Brahmanbaria District was grabbed by a group of people under the pretext of 'vested property.' In response to the case filed by his family members in the Subjudge Court of Brahmanbaria, the Court demanded that the family produce Shaheed Dharendra Nath Dutta's death certificate, an impossibility in the case of a liberation was martyr, Other eminent personalities such as Masterda Surjya Sen, who dedicated his life to the freedom struggle against the British Raj, Mr. Amal Sen, a veteran leader of peasant movement in British India who because of his involvement in the political struggle for freedom and democracy spent about twenty years in Pakistani prison, and Mr. Barin Mazumder, the renowned classical artist who devoted his life to developing the music and culture of this country, had their properties listed as enemy properties by the Pakistani administration.⁴³

In his later work, he estimated about 6.3 million missing Hindu population during 1971-1991. These are our undeclared refugees. If two third of these people settle in West Bengal, the number of undeclared refugees will be 4.2 million. Let us see in details about Prof Barkat's estimation:

'According to the 2001 Bangladesh Population Census, the total size of the Hindu population in Bangladesh was 11.4 million. Assuming the 1961 population share of the Hindu population (18.4%), the absolute size of the Hindu population in 2001 would have been 22.8 million instead of 11.4 million as reported in the census, i.e., the actual current (2001) size is half (50%) of the expected size, Mass out-migration of Hindu population (mostly of India) during mid-1960s and onward is a reality beyond doubt. Among the various factors responsible for such out-migrations of the Hindu population, the effects of the Enemy / Vested Property Act were important ones. The exact effect of all these factors (e.g., communal riots, Indo-Pak War of 1965, Enemy and Vested Property Acts) is difficult to quantify due to lack of relevant reliable information. Thus, an attempt has been made to estimate the mission Hindu population during 1964-1971, 1971-1981, 1981-1991, and 1991-2001 using appropriate assumptions.

According to the information in the Population Census, the average annual growth rates of the Muslim Population was 3.13 percent for 1961-1974, 3.08 percent for 1974-1981, 2.20 percent for 1981-1991, and 1.7 percent for 1991-2001 periods.

⁴² Abul Barkat et al – *Political Economy of Vested Property Act in Rural Bangladesh*, pp 19-44. Association for Land Reform and Development, Dhaka, 1997.

⁴³ Ibid pp xi-xii.

Assuming a 13 percent lower fertility rates for the Hindus compared to the Muslims, the average annual growth rates of Hindu population in “no out-migration” situation would have been 2.72 percent during 1964-1971, 2.68 percent during 1971-1981, 1.92 percent during 1981-1991, and 1.48 percent during 1991-2001.

By extrapolating the above rates, the Hindu population in 1971 would have been 11.4 million instead of 9.6 million as reported in the official documents. The Hindu population would have been 14.3 million in 1981 instead of 10.6 million, 16.5 million in 1991 instead of 11.2 million, and 19.5 million in 2001 instead of 11.4 million. Therefore, there were some 1.8 million missing Hindu population during 1964-1971, 1.9 million missing Hindu population during 1971-1981, 1.6 million missing Hindu population during 1981-1991, and 2.8 million missing Hindu population during 1991-2001. Thus the estimated total missing Hindu population was 8.1 million during 1964-2001, i.e., 218,919 Hindus missing each year. In other words, if out-migration of the Hindu population is caused mainly by communal disharmony resulting from the Enemy / Vested Property Acts, the approximate size of the missing Hindu population would be 600 persons per day during 1964-2001. The approximate size of the missing Hindu population was as high as 705 persons per day during 1964-1971, as against 521 persons per day during 1971-1981, decreasing to 438 persons per day during 1981-1991, and rising to 767 persons per day during 1991-2001.⁴⁴

Interestingly, though these missing population have come to West Bengal, the Economics Departments of various Universities in West Bengal never cared to carry out research corresponding to what Prof Barkat has done. The reason is well known. Now we proceed to the numbers from the Indian side.

Infiltrators - how many

What is the number of infiltrators? Government sources do not segregate between the illegal migrants and the undeclared refugees, only sometimes some figures are given. Let us go by some initial government statistics and the reactions by the Congress and the Left parties.

Home Minister Shri Indrajit Gupta in reply to a question in Parliament on 6th May, 1990 stated that the number of illegal immigrants in India was about one crore. So by 1990, a figure of 10 million comes into discussion. Now see the reaction of Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, an important Congress leader from West Bengal:

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I heard in the last two occasions this particular debate on this resolution. Before I participate in the discussion on the resolution, I had the privilege to hear the distinguished Home Minister Shri Indrajit Gupta the other day while replying to a question. I do not know the reason and the logistics which provided him the strength to admit in the House that about ten million foreigners are now residing in India. Having said so on the floor of the House that ten million foreigners are in the country at the moment and also admitting the fact that the people who are to prevent their entry from across the border, are not performing their jobs very efficiently, it really gave a handle to those who have been creating a lot of hue and cry on this issue and to a great extent had communalised this campaign as Shri Banatwalla said just now.

So mentioning the number of ten million of infiltrators irritated Mr Dasmunsi very much. What more to please the infiltrators waiting to enter. Mr Dasmunshi continues:

⁴⁴ Abdul Barkat et al – *Deprivation of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh- Living with Vested Property*, pp 66-68, Pathak Samabesh, Dhaka, 2008.

Sir, it is a fact that historically when India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were together during the days of freedom struggle, when we were all one against the British empire, our cultural, social, and political aspirations and our emotional ties were one. Be it a Muslim in Bangladesh, be it a Muslim in Pakistan, their dreams for this sub-continent in the days of the struggle against the British and their cultural, religious, emotional passion, are the same today also. Let us take stock of our border States and Provinces. Jammu, Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat border with Pakistan. Whether you like it or not, if anything goes wrong in these four States, a habit has developed in this country just to doubt and cast aspersions on the Muslims of this area, as the agents of Pakistan. If there is a war again, the spies of the Government will start finding out whether the agents might not be anybody other than the Muslims. Let us try to understand in what manner we are cheating them day in and day out.

Do you need a Jamat or Muslim league anymore in India while Dasmunshis are there? Mr Dasmunshi goes on even encouraging to violate the Indian Citizenship Act standing in Indian Parliament:

Thirty years ago, a daily wage earner of the agricultural field, may be his name is, Shri Ramatulla Khan, could not thrive in his own part and maybe on the side of Tripura or West Bengal or Assam, the big landlords whether Hindu or Muslim, asked Shri Ramatulla Khan during agriculture season to come and work in the field and to give support to agricultural production. Shri Ramatulla Khan went and stayed there for long with his family and children. Now when the time has come to identify, we do not go to the background as to how Shri Ramatulla Khan came in. We go straight to the child and tell like this: "Look here, your father came here as an illegal immigrant. We have enough documents because Rahmatullah used to stay in a village till 16th August 1947 or till such and such a date of August 1950 or August, 1960. You are his child and get out from here." This is the kind of an attitude we have always adopted throughout the country.

A Member of Parliament standing inside Parliament telling the administration not to disturb the infiltrator family! And then Mr Dasmunshi introduces his background. –

I was born in Bangladesh..... One night I came out and found that there was a trouble. My father, mother and sister were staying in the House and the house with all the property was lit. The next day morning, I found that the gentleman and his brother, who escorted us safely to cross the border, were Muslims. After having successfully crossed the border, myself, my mother and my sister arrived by train at the border of India. After seven days, we gathered the news that the great Muslim family which helped us had been killed at the hands of some fanatics. I still remember it..... When I became a Minister, I went to visit their family. What a contribution they have made for promoting brotherhood!

A fantastic account from a refugee boy! The so much celebration of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. But then why the Dasmunshi family came from East Pakistan and stayed back in India. In some incident, his family house might be burnt, they also could take shelter in another place for a few days but why they did not go back to his ancestral home again!!

The issue of infiltrators also dogged the days of Shri Jyoti Basu, whose government was responsible for this invasion to begin. In an article published in CPI-M's Bengali daily *Ganashakti* on 11 October 1992, on the Infiltration problem Jyoti Basu wrote:

..From 1979 the Muslims are also coming to India. Between 1977 to 1992, BSF has identified and pushed back 2,35,529 Bangladeshi infiltrators. Amongst them 68472

*were Hindus and 1,64,132 were Muslims. At the same time between 1977 to 1992, Mobile task Force has pushed back 2,16, 985 Bangladeshi infiltrators. Amongst them 56342 were Hindus and 1,69,795 are Muslims.*⁴⁵

So we find during 15 years about 4.5 lakhs of infiltrators were pushed back and 73% of them were Muslims. If we consider that only 30% of the infiltrators are caught, then this itself is enough to quantify the problem of Muslim infiltration in West Bengal.

On July 14, 2004, in reply to a question in the Parliament, the Congress Minister of State for Home Affairs Sri Prakash Jaiswal informed that there 1 crore 20 lakhs 53 thousand and 950 illegal Bangladeshi in the country. Out of that West Bengal has 57 Lakhs of the illegal Bangladeshi. The list is given below. As usual when the pro-islamic 'secular' media raised a hue and cry, the minister had to say that 'the reported figures were not based on any comprehensive or sample study but were based on hearsay and that too from interested parties. Therefore, no realistic figures can be given for illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Assam. In the case of West Bengal also the figures are based on unreliable estimates and are incorrect'⁴⁶ The figure also show that there are 3,75,000 Bangladeshis in Delhi and this may mean that there are more Bangladeshi Bengalees in National Capital than the Indian Bengalees. This also shows the incompetence of BJP governments who ruled both the Delhi State and the Central Government in recent times.

Table 3
Bangladeshi Migrants in India - 2004

State	Estimated Number
Arunachal Padesh	800
Assam	5000000
Bihar	47900
Gujarat	100
Haryana	550
Madya Pradesh	700
Maharashtra	20400
Meghalaya	30000
Nagaland	59500
Orissa	30850
Punjab	150
Rajasthan	2500
Tripura	325400
UP	26000
W Bengal	5700000
Andaman & Nikobar	3000
Delhi	375000
	11622850

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Prasanga Anuprabesh* – Amalendu De, pp 125-26. Barna Parichay, Kolkata 1993.

⁴⁶ Chandan Nandy, *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, pp 132-34, Brandeis University, 2005

Chandan Nandy has done excellent work by tracking the infiltrators and their modous operandi, both in West Bengal and Assam, by direct field study and from secondary sources.⁴⁷ He provides one nice example:

The fact that West Bengal has been and continues to be a favourite destination for Bangladeshi migrants is testified by the results of a pilot project that the Government of India launched in 2003 in the Murshidabad-Jiaganj belt of Muslim-majority Murshidabad district, believed to be home to hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi migrants, as part of its larger scheme to issue multi-purpose national identity cards to citizens. The work on the ground was to be executed by the district administration. The Murshidabad-Jiaganj belt was chosen along with a few other areas in some of the border states of India as a feasibility project whose objective was “quick identification and deportation of illegal migrants in the country as also a credible identification system for multifarious socioeconomic use...that would involve a massive exercise of compulsory registration of all citizens and non-citizens”. Although the final report is yet to be submitted to the government, the provisional findings of the Murshidabad-Jiaganj project came up with startling results: Of the 255,000 people covered under the project, only 9.4 per cent or 24,000, could produce “at least one supporting document” of their Indian nationality; 90.6 per cent or 231,000 could not produce even one of the 19 prescribed documents. The newspaper that broke the story had this to say: At first glance, the revelation seems to confirm what critics of the Left Front government have been alleging – that the state machinery has papered over the existence of a huge mass of populace which does not belong to the country but has been allowed to stay on as captive vote bank.⁴⁸ Those who could not produce any of the prescribed documents – land deeds, ration card, drivers’ licence, voters’ identity card to name a few – have been put under the category of “citizenship in suspense”. One junior bureaucrat said that over the years, Lalgola

The reaction of the CPI-M was, not surprisingly, similar: “It is a sensitive issue and not possible for the state alone to combat it...But your figures are absurd.”⁴⁹ Neither the West Bengal government nor the CPI-M agrees that the estimated number of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in the state is ‘no fewer than 10 million’.

So the unprecedented scale of the infiltration and undeclared refugee influx is a case in point, though it never received an iota of legitimate attention.

V

Impact: Secular Democratic Society At Stake

Though we do not know the exact figure of either the infiltration or undeclared refugee influx but the scale is clearly perceptible. Abul Barkat’s estimates provide 4.5 million undeclared refugees. Some of them have come with regular visas but mostly without any documents. We find from previous discussions that the Muslim infiltrators are nearly three times the Hindu refugees trying to sneak in to India. Taking that figure, the number of

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp 125-147,

⁴⁸ Purohit, Devdeep, Bengal’s Masses Without an Identity, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, August 11, 2005,

⁴⁹ Biswas, Anil, West Bengal CPI-M Secretary and Politburo Member, Quoted in Our Bureau, Government, Party Shed Influx Blinkers, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, August 12, 2005.

infiltrators will be around 12 to 14 million. We have an illegal population of say 15-18 millions of which many are not recorded in any registrar. So West Bengal's real population may be between 80 to 90 million, not 80 million recorded in Census 2001. But as the numbers are not specific, the impact can be predicted only qualitatively.

The impact of an unrecorded population of such a magnitude cannot be ignored at social, economic, political or environmental level. Let us first take the issue of any planning for the state which include Food, Shelter, Sanitation, Education – the basic needs. West Bengal is already one of the most underperforming states. NSS 61st Round, July 2004-June 2005 showed that the percentage of rural household not getting enough food every day in some months of the year was the highest in West Bengal (10.6 per cent).⁵⁰ So when you have a large number of unrecorded people it is difficult to plan. From environmental point of view, West Bengal already is the most densely populated state in the country. It is impossible to take more people in it. We have already seen that land is such a scarce resource in West Bengal, it has become the focal point of all development issues. Already the issue of land in Singur and Nandigram villages have caused a political turmoil in the state which has further economic impact in terms future investment of industrial capital in West Bengal. So if these influx of infiltrators and undeclared refugees continues unabated, the problem will intensify in the coming days.

The alarming increase of population put excess pressure on the natural resources. More the people are poor, more they depend on direct natural resources for livelihood. It can be water from the ponds, wood from the jungle or other house building materials. All these have direct impact on environment and public health. The undeclared refugees living along the train tracks connecting Kolkata to the eastern border town of Bangaon are already creating a havoc on environment and public health. The infiltrators residing on the border villages or working in the towns also face similar problems due to poverty. A poor state like West Bengal is often helpless in the face of such influx.

Planning with a large dose of financial help can mitigate the economic problems to some acceptable level, but the cultural, political and social environmental impacts are often irreversible.

Expansion of Madrasas and Assault on Secular Education

After coming to power in 1978, Left-front government went full steam ahead to encourage madrasa education. Their yearly list of successes always include the success of spreading more madrasa education with ever-larger state funding. While students of various other religions study under different non-religious educational boards (West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, Central Board of Secondary Education, Indian School Certificate Examination etc), the Muslims have to study under a Islamic educational board, the rationale is never questioned. This is not a place of detailed discussion on it but these madrasas are the cradles of Islamic fundamentalism. This was publicly admitted by Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, the Communist Chief Minister of West Bengal, while commenting on attacks on US Centre in Kolkata in January 2002. Of course later he had to eat his own words, saying he was misquoted.⁵¹

Again remember the number game mentioned by B R Ambedkar. As the number of Muslims without any progressive leadership increases, there is always an ever-expanding space for bargain for orthodoxy. Now **all** the political parties from CPI-M led Left Front to

⁵⁰ D. Bandyopadhyay, On Poverty, Food Inadequacy and Hunger in West Bengal, 19 June 2007 Mainstream

⁵¹ Indian News On Line, Feb 11, 2002- <http://news.indiamart.com/news-analysis/west-bengal-madrasas-4439.html>

Trinamul Congress or Congress – compete with each other promising more Madrasas. Few years back when the case contesting the ban on Taslima Nasrin's book 'Dwikhondita' was being heard in Calcutta High Court, very young boys from different madrasas wearing Palestinian scarfs used to be brought in hundreds to shout insulting slogans against Taslima Nasrin, the rebel writer banished from Bangladesh.

Rise in Muslim Population and Electoral change of West Bengal

As discussed earlier, demographic danger is already a reality. Recent change of electoral constituencies in West Bengal show the impact. While the Hindu-dominated areas have lost the constituencies, seats have shot up in the Muslim-dominated areas. Kolkata, which earlier had 21 state legislative assembly seats now has only 11 seats. Again, Hindu-dominated Purulia and West Medinipur districts loses two constituencies each, one each in Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum and Hooghly. Muslim-dominated areas e.g in Murshidabad, the number of seats increased by three and for both North Dinajpur and Nadia the increase was by two seats each. Malda, and South Dinajpur gained one each. Now see the demographic change at the 0-6 year level. The amazing 2001 census results show that while the Muslim population in state is 25.25%, their children (0-6 years) constitute 33.17%. Ambedkar's prophecy came to be true.

Table 4
Religious Proportion of Children (0-6 years) in 2001

Region		Population %	Children %	% Discrepancy
West Bengal	Hindu	72.47	64.61	-7.86
	Muslim	25.25	33.17	+7.92
Darjiling	Hindu	76.92	76.18	-0.74
	Muslim	5.31	8.26	+2.95
Jalpaiguri	Hindu	83.3	80.44	-2.86
	Muslim	10.85	13.8	+2.95
Kochbihar	Hindu	75.50	69.82	-5.68
	Muslim	24.24	30.0	+5.76
Uttar & Dakshin Dinajpur	Hindu	60.22	51.67	-8.55
	Muslim	38.47	47.0	+8.53
Maldah	Hindu	49.28	43	-6.28
	Muslim	49.72	56	+6.28
Murshidabad	Hindu	35.92	29.35	-6.57
	Muslim	63.67	70.27	+6.6
Birbhum	Hindu	64.69	58.42	-6.27
	Muslim	35.08	41.15	+6.07
Bardhaman	Hindu	78.89	75.0	-3.89
	Muslim	19.78	23.62	+3.84
Nadia	Hindu	73.75	66.71	-7.04
	Muslim	25.41	32.55	+7.14
North 24 Pgs*	Hindu	75.23	65.52	-9.71
	Muslim	24.22	34.0	+9.78
South 24 Pgs*	Hindu	65.86	55.41	-10.45
	Muslim	33.24	43.85	+10.61
Hugli	Hindu	83.63	78.94	-4.69
	Muslim	15.14	19.53	+4.39
Bankura	Hindu	84.35	81.8	-2.55
	Muslim	7.51	10.0	+2.49
Puruliya*	Hindu	83.42	81.62	-1.8
	Muslim	7.12	9.26	+2.14
Medinipur	Hindu	85.58	81.36	-4.22
	Muslim	11.33	15.36	+4.03
Haora	Hindu	74.98	64.81	-10.17
	Muslim	24.44	34.68	+10.24
Kolkata	Hindu	77.68	70.24	-7.44
	Muslim	20.27	27.81	+7.54

Source: Census of India, 2001

A Colluding State, Shariat courts and Assault on Democracy

The rising numbers, violent methods and a colluding State has made the practice of democracy in state at stake. The share of Hindu population in border areas of West Bengal

are decreasing day by day. Bimal Pramanik has studied the issue of four border districts in details.⁵² His findings show the massive population growth, particularly that of Muslim population in these districts. His extensive interviews also show that the Hindus are living in fear of life, property and dignity. There is a limeric commonly going around in these areas:

Garu Rakhbi Campe, Taka Rakhbi Banke, Bou Rakhbi Kotahy?

[You May Keep Your Cows In Camp (BSF camps), Your Money in Bank, But where can you hide your wife?]

Listen to the admission of a district official,

*Village after village in Murshidabad, which were earlier Hindu dominated, are now Muslim dominated. Take Char Nirmal as an example. It has been completely taken over by Bangladeshis. Elsewhere in Bhagawangola block, Hindus have either sold off their property and left the villages for small towns and urban agglomerates or they have been pushed to the fringes of the villages. Barring the towns, where they have some presence, the Hindus are in a minority in practically all the villages of Murshidabad. The writ of the immigrants runs strong, especially in the border villages. The local administration is practically run by them. They are more vocal in their demands. On the other hand, the Hindus seem to have meekly given in. A section of them, though, is seething at the sudden assertiveness of the Muslim immigrants.*⁵³

The Shariat court is now common in these areas. The Islamic fervour is so strong that such a court in end July 2008 ordered and executed the beheading of a Hindu man. The wife of the man was a local Muslim girl who went to work in Mumbai and met the boy there. They had a son. While the couple came to the girl's village in Murshidabad, after knowing the religion of the person, the village court ordered to kill him.⁵⁴ Muslim girl being lashed for unwed pregnancy (Murshidabad, April 2004) or Muslim bride being nailed into the knee for a claimed adulterous relationship in the absence of her husband, all are verdicts from the shariat courts (Murshidabad, October 2006). These are the tips of the iceberg, could filter through to the national dailies.

In fact the show of Muslim muscle power as mentioned in the beginning, is becoming a common sight. There was a clash between Hindu and Muslims on 8 January 2009 at Medinipur town, during Muharram procession. Medinipur is a Hindu dominated area. Fear of Muslim violence was so serious that three weeks later, holding of Saraswati Puja in the town, a big festival for Hindus, was kept in hold, and was permitted just few days before the puja.⁵⁵ The experience of Chandan Nandy during his study can throw more light on the borderlands:

'In my travel in the West Bengal and Assam borderlands, the "considerable" mushrooming of mosques and Islamic seminaries, funded by money funneled from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in West Asia, Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan and Bangladesh, was evident and backed up by government documentation which claim that these places of worship and learning have become hot-beds of fundamentalism and anti-India propaganda. When I met an 18 year-old maulana³⁵ at Fakirerbazar in Assam's border district of Karimganj, who carried a book titled How Sweet and Beautiful it is to Embrace Death, it was evident how easy it is to label Muslims as fundamentalists ready to die in the cause of jihad. The easy availability of audio

⁵² Bimal Pramanik, *Endangered Demography – Nature and Impact of Demographic Changes in West Bengal 1951-2001*, pp 65-108, Kolkata 2005.

⁵³ Chandan Nandy, *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, pp 169-170, Brandeis University, 2005

⁵⁴ The Telegraph - Sunday, August 3, 2008

⁵⁵ Dainik Statesman, 25 January, 2009

*cassette tapes of Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami clerics like Delawar Hussein Saidi, preaching anti-Hindu and anti-India sermons, and taped eulogies of Osama bin Laden, only reinforce Hindu and official belief of growing Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh out to create a Brihot Bangladesh or a Greater Bangladesh carved out of the territory settled by its Muslim population. As one Indian writer explains: "Some of the Islamic militant groups of Bangladesh like the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami, Shahadat-al-Hikma, Jamait-ul-Mujahideen and the Islami Manch make no secret of their aim to establish a transnational Islamic state comprising Bangladesh, Muslim majority districts of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and the Rohingya Hills of Myanmar."*⁵⁶

Expulsion of Taslima Nasrin probably signals the beginning of the last days of a democratic secular West Bengal. The Communist government imposed a ban on 'Dwikhondito' by Taslima Nasrin, Calcutta High Court rejected the appeasement of Islamic fundamentalists by lifting the ban. While the Calcutta High Court could thwart the Left Front governments' attempts to Muslim appeasement, the mighty force of fundamentalist violence took law and order in its hand to throw Taslima out of West Bengal. A day-long violence on 21 November 2007, virtually supported by all the major 'secular' parties and 'secular' intelligentsia showed the shape of society to come.

This 'neo nation' again flexed its muscle between 6-8 February 2009 at the heart of Kolkata. It went on rampage by attacking the office of the Statesman, one of the oldest newspapers in the subcontinent. The Statesman published an article by veteran journalist Johann Hari of The Independent, London, on 5th February, 2009, which criticized all religions. To protest, the Muslims started violence and continued for three days.⁵⁷ No print or electronic media published any news about it. The Statesman editor was arrested and released later, but there were no sign of any human rights group or journalist's organization to protest. Of course no political party had the courage to say anything and as usual State colluded with the arsonists.

This is probably the future of West Bengal. And those undeclared refugees, hounded out from home by a violent society and now hounded by a State, see it like this:

*'I had thought that my family and I had seen the last of Islamic fundamentalism in my village in Pirojpur in Bangladesh. But I can't say the same now that I am here. When we moved here, we had felt we had come to a secure place. Now I find the same Muslims, who raped our daughters and sisters, grabbed our land and homesteads, stole our cattle and agriculture produce, and persecuted us as my neighbour. We find the mosques blaring the same prayers that we had hated. We are told these mosques have now become the centres of fundamentalist activity in India. We are being overwhelmed again, by greater numbers of Muslims. Where will this all lead to? A time will come when we will no longer be as meek and timid as we were in Bangladesh.'*⁵⁸

The author, on his campaign experience for last seven years, have heard similar views from so many undeclared refugees.

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⁵⁶ Chandan Nandy, *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, pp 173-174, Brandeis University, 2005

⁵⁷ See www.thestatesman.net

⁵⁸ Told by Babul Boral, at Dakshin Chatra, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, on July 10,2005. to Chandan Nandy - *Illegal Immigration From Bangladesh To India: The Emerging Conflicts*, pp 175, Brandeis University, 2005