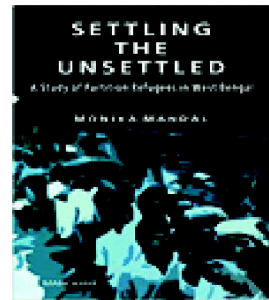


Book Review-2

Settling the Unsettled: A Study of Partition Refugees in West Bengal, Monika Mandal, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2011, P. 286

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The concept of historiography has been expanding its periphery over time. Many historians have shifted their focus on 'refugee studies' in their regional, national and world context of historical writings. This is an emerging field of historiography that mainly deals with the experiences of refugees; the question of security, statelessness, citizenship, etc. The global refugee crisis came to the surface for the first time just after the First World War when the League of Nations appointed a High Commissioner for Refugees in 1922. But the concept of 'displaced persons' has developed immediately after the Second World War to define those people who were forced to migrate from their lands. As a South Asian country, India also faced traumatic experiences of partition and massive refugee exodus in east-west frontier provinces after her emancipation from the colonial chain. In the eastern side of India, West Bengal received a huge number of refugees. Researchers worked hard to portrait the awful scenario of the refugee crisis in West Bengal with their skillful manner. Scholars like, Hiranmoy Bandopadhyaya (Udvastu, 1970), R. Ray (The Agony of West Bengal, 1972), Santosh Kumar Biswas (The Rootless People, 1995), and many others have their great contribution to this field of study. However, the classic work of Prafull Chakraborty, titled The Marginal Men (1999) inspired many researchers to spotlighting the Bengali refugees. His work was the first analytical endeavor to this field and further developed by many other scholars like Pradip Kumar Bose (Refugees in West Bengal, 2000), Jaya Chatterji (Spoils of Partition, 2007), Haimanti Roy (Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947-1965, 2012) and many others. The mentioned book of Monika Mandal is a dynamic edition in this field to delving deep to find out new ideas, facts, about the refugee crisis of West Bengal in the post Partition era.

The book under review comprises seven chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion. These chapters as follows, "A Comparative Framework: Situating West Bengal Refugee Problem Within the International and South Asian

Perspective", "Historical Background to Issues of Migration", "Refugee Crisis in West Bengal", "Refugee Exodus in West Bengal and Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact", "Reflection of Refugees in Bengali Literature and Cinema", "Bengali Identity: East Bengal Refugees and Their Rehabilitation in West Bengal" and "Relationship between East Bengal Refugees and the Local Population in West Bengal: A Case Study of Refugees in Malda District". The volume begins with a discussion on the refugee-related issues worldwide and the contemporary refugee crisis in South Asian countries like India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Myanmar. The author then mentions the historical background of the refugee problem in India. She explains how the Separatist movement led by the concept of Muslim nationalism partitioned the province. However, she points out the main cause of migration was the religion (mostly Hinduism in Eastern India) of the refugees they practice, and the poor condition of the minorities in Eastern Pakistan. Two-way traffic of displaced people across the border occurred and both the central and state government took responsibility to rehabilitate this large number of displaced people. The volume reveals the inefficacy of the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact to remove communal tension between Hindus and Muslims on both sides of Bengal. The author examines the reflection of forced migration issues on literary works and cinemas with a historical perspective. The social and cultural context of these literature and filmic works reveal how the refugee experience extends its influence to post-Partition Bengali cinemas. This massive population movement had a deep impact on the social, cultural, economic and political sphere of life in the newly formed state. The book analyses the poor condition of the camp and non-camp refugees in West Bengal. The addition of a case study on the Malda district further enhances the quality of the book.

This innovative study looks at the partition event as part of a process that continued to shape the project of nation-building in post-chiseled India. With the Bengal partition as its focus, the author reveals the key incidents, individuals, and organizations responsible for this irreparable loss. The book provides us interpretive accounts of various communal disturbances involving Hindu-Muslims in both the West Bengal and Eastern wing of Pakistan during and after the Partition of India. Relying on archival records, contemporary accounts and oral histories, she explores the linkage between nation-building and refugee resettlement measures in the state. The book analyses the official policies towards Hindu refugees from eastern Pakistan to reveal the stepmotherly behavior by the Central as well as the State government. Drawing on the extensive research, the author shows how the biased national refugee policies affected the lives in this frontier province. According to Ms. Mandal, many refugees tried for self-settlement and organized their social and cultural resources to build urban 'squatters' colonies, while the indigent helpless lower-caste refugees had no other choice but to be a peasant or live with government aids. Equally important, she has pointed out that refugee organizations like Nikhil Vanga Bastuhara Karmaparishad (NVBKP), United Central Refugee Council(UCRC) acted as a weapon against the ruling power and played a crucial role in the party- politics

of West Bengal. Different political parties, especially, The Communist Party of India (Marxist) took advantage of the pathetic condition of the refugees and united them to use as their vote bank to grab the power of the state. The book also reviews the interaction and amalgamation of the Bengali-speaking erstwhile refugees with the Bengali-speaking local community. In a passionate and stimulating new interpretation, Monika Mandal reframes not only the expanding field of partition studies but also narrates the struggle of the refugees in an unknown environment that influenced the social, cultural and economic life in West Bengal. Besides, she also critically examines the rehabilitation measures towards the single and widowed displaced women which marginalized them as 'permanent liabilities'.

This intellectual account extends the concept of refugee studies in the Malda district. While talking about refugee history and their culture in Malda, the book examines their cultural identity as a social sub-group 'Bangals' (whose families came from the Eastern part of Bengal). They were different than that of 'Ghotis' (families originated in West Bengal). There was no amity between these two sub-groups. But the situation has changed in the past few decades due to education and marital relations, which gradually reduced the social distance between these two groups.

The book thus adds a new variation to the study of Bengali refugees by undertaking the contexts of 'Reflection of Refugees in Bengali Literature and Cinemas' and 'A Case Study of Refugees in Malda District'. Although, the book has some good qualities, yet we cannot say that it is completely unquestionable. This book only concentrates on some of the refugee-affected districts like Kolkata, undivided 24 Paraganas, Nadia and Malda. But there were other districts too, which were also affected by the refugee waves. This is why anyone can raise questions on the naming of the book. However, references are very well mentioned at the end of each chapter. Some statistical data, maps, few tables, an excellent index, and an extensive bibliography add the value of the work. Ms. Mandal deserves appreciation for finding and delving deep into this challenging task. Finally, the volume is a welcome edition for scholars to explore new areas of research on Bengali Refugees.