

Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmelan and the role of Hemanta Biswas and Jogen Mondal (1953-1959)

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Abstract

The partition and independence came to India simultaneously. Those who were placed on the wrong side of the border rushed to West Bengal. Actually after the partition, two nations were born: India and Pakistan. There was an exodus from East Pakistan to West Bengal through various phases. After 1950, the journey of Namasudra refugees started. In the 1950s, refugee organizations grew up. Communist Party of India dominated United Central Refugee Council was formed. In 1953, Praja Socialist Party wing of refugee organization Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmelan was formed. Most of the Namasudra refugees joined SBBS except Hemanta Biswas. He joined UCRC. Later he was disillusioned with the leaders of UCRC and ultimately joined SBBS. He followed a new policy for the camp refugees- the forcible occupation of land(1959). On the other hand, in 1950, the ex-minister of Pakistan, Jogen Mondal, came to West Bengal. But the refugees did not accept him easily. Ultimately he joined SBBS in 1957-58. But Mondal left this organization and formed his own organization, East India Refugee Council, in mid-1958.

Keywords: Partition, Namasudra, Refugee, UCRC, SBBS, Jogen Mondal, Hemanta Biswas.

Introduction

Undivided Bengal experienced partition and freedom from colonial rule more or less simultaneously. Thus it became difficult to disassociate the trauma of partition from independent Bengal. Bengal was divided into East Bengal in East Pakistan and West Bengal in India. And Punjab was similarly divided into two halves. In the midst of changing processes, two nations were born- India and Pakistan. Those who were placed on the wrong side of the border began to cross it, migrating to East Punjab and West Bengal. Actually partition was followed by displacement of millions of people who lost their homes and became refugees.¹

In case of Eastern India, the refugee influx spread over two decades. The refugees came through various phases. The different phases of exodus were related to class, caste and character of the refugees. While analyzing the case of the refugees, a very pertinent question arises. The upper and middle class refugees arrived after 1947. Panic and mass hysteria acted as push factors, especially in case of the women migrants.²

According to Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, around 1949-1950, the wave of refugees, who came to West Bengal consisted of cross section of population. They were artisans, agriculturists, and others from the lower middle class. All of them were affected by economic situation in East Bengal. These refugees moved toward economic freedom. In practice, it was difficult to find out any cause or factor responsible for migration. There was a "penumbra of reasons, all entangled in a complex psychology gripped by terror,

¹Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees, Dispersal and Caste Question 1950-1965*, Kolkata: Sreejoni, 2019, p.1.

²Prafulla Chakrabarti, *Marginal Men, Refugees and Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Kalyani: Lumier Publications, 1990, p.7.

apprehension and hope". Communal violence broke out in 1950 and a fresh wave of refugee migration began.³

After 1950, the lower caste and class of people came to West Bengal. After the riot of East Pakistan in 1950, nature of refugee influx changed. Men in power were now confronted with a different type of problem; as refugees now belonged to the lower strata of the society from countryside as well as the urban side.⁴

Historiography

So far the question of the camp refugee is concerned, the pioneering work was *Marginal Men* by Prafulla Chakrabarti. He allotted two chapters on the camp refugees.⁵ Any future scholar will be able to start from that point. But this work lacks full-fledged description and analysis of refugee movements of 1957/8-1961. In the relatively recent years, Joya Chatterji in her book *Spoils of Partition* tried to depict how Bengal was affected by partition during the period 1947-1961. Apart from other factors she mainly stressed on the question of the refugees.⁶ But here too there is no discussion on camp refugees. Chatterjee in her two articles "Right or Charity"⁷ discussed the issue of the camp refugees. She demonstrated that the Government viewed the question of rehabilitation as 'charity' and the refugees fought for the same as their 'right'. In another article Chatterjee made a comparison between the conditions of the Government sponsored camps at Jeerat and refugees' own settlement at Azadgarh. She depicted that the life and the miserable condition of the refugees in the camps.

In early 1990's, another significant work on the subject came from Nilanjana Chatterjee. Chatterjee dealt with the question of rehabilitation of the refugees in her doctoral thesis.⁸ Chatterjee's work contained some technical discussions relevant to the study of refugee migration from East Pakistan to West Bengal. Nilanjana Chatterjee emphasized on the life of the camp refugees but Chatterjee mainly focused on the self-made, self-sufficient refugees. Those refugees built colonies without the government's help. According to her, Marichjhapi was only such a colony. She saw it as a part of government's policy of eviction. Nilanjana Chatterjee in another article described the process of influx of refugees- how the government categorized the refugees into old and new, how the caste and time played important role during the time of migration. This according to her in course of time influenced the process of rehabilitation. In this article⁹ she showed the beginning of the establishment of colonies and camps. It also focused on rehabilitation process. But nowhere have we found the process of opposition by the refugees. The study of scheduled caste with special emphasis on the refugees is recorded in *Partition of India and its Impact on Scheduled Castes of Bengal* by Rup Kumar Barman.¹⁰ Another book covering the life of the Scheduled Caste refugees may be mentioned here- *Atrocities on Dalits since the Partition of Bengal* by

³Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia, Meaning of Freedom in Post-Independence West Bengal 1947-52*, London New York:Routledge, 2009, p.37.

⁴ T. Y. Tan and Gyanesh Kudaiysa (eds.), *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, Routledge, London New York, 2000, p. 147.

⁵Prafulla Chakrabarti, *Marginal Men, Refugees and Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*.

⁶Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition, Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁷Joya Chatterji, "Right or Charity- Debate over rehabilitation in West Bengal" in Suvir Kaul edited *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001. See also Joya Chatterji "Dispersal and Failure of Rehabilitation of Refugees, Camp Dwellers and Squatters' in West Bengal" in *Modern Asian Studies*, No. 41.5 CUP, 2007.

⁸Nilanjana Chatterjee, 'Midnight's Unwanted Children: East Bengal Refugees and Politics of Rehabilitation', 1992, Unpublished thesis of Brown University.

⁹Nilanjana Chatterjee, "The East Bengal Refugees: A lesson in Survival" in S. Chaudhuri edited *Calcutta: The Living City*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, ND.

¹⁰ Rup Kumar Barman, *Partition of India and its Impact on Scheduled Castes of Bengal*, New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2012.

Dilip Halder.¹¹ The Thesis¹² on Jogendranath Mandal is important from the respect of camp refugee's movement and the role played by Jogen Mandal. The author covered the years of the camp refugees' movement in the years 1958, 1959, 1960 and 1961. In the above mentioned years the refugees under the refugee organizations participated in the refugee Satyagrahas. Sen mainly focused on the role of scheduled caste refugee leaders like Jogen Mandal. Mandal's involvement in post 1950 refugee politics also showed a wide range of camp refugee politics. From the perspective of Mandal, Sen treated the struggle of the camp refugees. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in his book *Decolonization in South Asia*,¹³ treated the problem of East Bengal refugees in various sections of the book. In *Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India* by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay¹⁴ we get a special chapter on Namasudras who came to West Bengal after partition. There is another important work on the subject titled *Maranjayi Sangrame Basutuhara* by Tushar Singha.¹⁵ Two Bengali books written by Jagdish Mandal throw light on camp refugees' struggle and the leadership of Jogen Mandal, titled *Mahapran Jogendranath Volume 1*. The second book titled *Marichjhapi Antarale*¹⁶ by the same author focuses on the refugee politics in the wake and aftermath of the Marichjhapi disaster. The first book remains the source on the struggle of the camp refugees while the second traces the history of Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi.

Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmelan and the role of Hemanta Biswas and Jogen Mondal

Growth of refugee organizations: From the early 1950s, when the refugees started to rush into West Bengal, refugee organizations on the other hand grew up in West Bengal. United Central Refugee Council was established in 1950. Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmelan was established in 1953 under the leadership of Suresh Chandra Banerjee. SBBS was mainly the refugee wing of Praja Socialist Party. CPI dominated UCRC.

The 40 percent of all the refugees, represented three quarters of East Bengal's Hindus. One in four Hindu families, belonged to the Scheduled Caste or tribal people. The lower class people, migrated under different circumstances. In practice, the peasants according to Joya Chatterji, fled from Pakistan after 1950 when they became, the victims of great communal violence in rural areas of Khulna, Jessore, Barishal, Faridpur, and left when the communal violence put pressure on the land.¹⁷

Rush of Namasudra leaders: After 1950, some Namasudra leaders such as Hemanta Biswas, Apurbalal Majumdar, P.S.Thakur became individually important. But they did not have political experience for sustained political movement necessary for them. They had to seek political help from the refugee organizations for conducting movements in the streets of Calcutta and other towns. Most of the leaders did not want to work with UCRC as the latter would erode their individual influence over the organization. Only Hemanta Biswas worked with UCRC.

Early career of Jogen Mondal: In 1950, Jogen Mondal, returned from Pakistan to Calcutta. He was an exhausted and exasperated man. Once the clamor surrounding his resignation subsided, he found an accommodation albeit with some difficulty at 64 Southern Avenue.¹⁸

In later years, he moved to a slum. In his autobiography he mentioned several times, the need to stay at home and out of public affairs. His life was apparently in danger. The Calcutta Police, advised him to

¹¹Dilip Halder, *Atrocities on Dalits Since The Partition of Bengal*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2008.

¹²Dwaipayan Sen, 'The Emergence and Decline of Dalit Politics in Bengal, Jogendranath Mandal, The Scheduled Caste Federation and The Partition', 1932-1968, Unpublished thesis of Chicago University, December 2012

¹³Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia*, 2009.

¹⁴Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹⁵Tushar Singha, *Moronjoyi Songrame Bastuhara*, Kolkata: Dasgupta's, 1999.

¹⁶Jagdish Mandal, *Marichjhapi Naishabdher Antarale*, Kolkata: Sujana Publication, See also Jagdish Mandal, *Mahapran Jogendranath Volume*, Kolkata: Mahapran Publishers', 2003.

¹⁷Joya Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition, Bengal and India*, p.118.

¹⁸*Jogendranath Mondal, Oprokashito Atmakatha*, pp.324-326, cited by Dwaipayan Sen, 'The Emergence and Decline of Dalit Politics in Bengal; Jogendranath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste Federation and Partition, 1932-1968', Department of History, Chicago Illinois, December 2012, p.246.

maintain a low profile including avoiding proximity to the windows of his house. He did not wish to risk inflaming any case of simmering communal tension. He was according to many responsible for partition. Even many of the Namasudras who migrated to West Bengal, held him responsible for their plight. Security forces at the border between Western and Eastern Bengal told them in transit that their leader's promiscuity with the Muslim League was the root cause of their crisis.

Mondal or, so the argument in large part was responsible for the partition of Bengal and thus many of the Namasudras migrated to West Bengal. They held him responsible for their plight. They had risked their hearts and homes to arrive at an inhospitable state. The security forces at the border informed the leader's promiscuity with the Muslim league was the root cause of the Namasudras' troubles. Mondal wrote that partition became a reality when Congress conceded the League's demands.¹⁹

Although initially Jogen Mondal kept at a distance from UCRC and SBBS, Mondal was eventually drawn into refugee mobilization. A meeting was held at Bagjola camp near Dumdum. Following the invitation from Hemanta Kumar Biswas and Mahadev Bhattacharya, the secretary and president of the meeting, Mondal went to the meeting, coming out of his self-imposed exile. He planned to speak last at that meeting. According to him those who had assembled at the meeting, would not speak, but depart after hearing his address and prior to listening to other Praja Socialist Party leaders.²⁰

From late 1957 onward, Mondal became actively involved in SBBS's various meetings and plans. In late February 1958, he delivered a lengthy speech in the number two Uttar Tilpara Camp in Sainthia. There, he requested the audience to cast away their suspicion that he was responsible for the partition of their country. These people were almost all Scheduled Caste Hindus of East Bengal and among whom he worked in pre-partition days,²¹

One of Mondal's starting premises on his involvement in the refugee movement in the late 1957 and early 1958 was that the prospect to rehabilitate camp refugees in location outside West Bengal was a great betrayal of the assurances extended by Congress and Hindu Mahasabha prior to the partition.²² A meeting of SBBS was held on 6th February 1958 at Raja Subodh Mallick Square. Jogen Mondal charged the Government with the breach of promise.²³

In the following weeks Mondal toured the refugee camps that the Government had opened throughout rural West Bengal; for instance in the districts of Burdwan, Howrah, Hooghly, 24 Pargana, Murshidabad, Bankura.²⁴

At a meeting, under his presidentship, the SBBS working committee and representatives of the camp refugees, decided to submit a memorandum to the Chief Minister Dr B C Roy, listing their various demands. In case of non-acceptance of their demands, they would undertake a Satyagraha. Dr Roy refused to concede their primary object- rehabilitation within West Bengal.

Early career of Hemanta Biswas: Hemanta Biswas on the other hand was a Namasudra leader who at the beginning of his career joined UCRC. Thus it is necessary to emphasis on his earlier career. Hemanta Biswas was a member of UCRC till the end of 1957. He was one of the distinguished leaders of Bagjola camp. He was an inmate of Keshtapur camp. He came in touch with communism in West Bengal. He worked under the umbrella of UCRC from 1955. But toward the end of 1957, he became disillusioned with UCRC and left it to join SBBS.²⁵ Biswas and some other leaders worked in the worksite camp. As a result the government became apprehensive. Consequently the government tried to create a cleavage between the refugees

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰ *Jogendranath Mondal, Oprokashito Atmakatha*, pp.303--304, cited by Dwaipayan Sen, 'The Emergence and Decline of Dalit Politics in Bengal; Jogendranath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste Federation and Partition, 1932-1968', p.249.

²¹West Bengal State Archives, IB File No. 1483/32, IB Department.

²²WBSA, IB File No. 353/24, IB Department.

²³Ibid.

²⁴ *Jogendranath Mondal, Oprokashito Atmakatha*, p.309, cited by Dwaipayan Sen, 'The Emergence and Decline of Dalit Politics in Bengal; Jogendranath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste Federation and Partition, 1932-1968', p.256.

²⁵ WBSA, IB File, IB Department.

and the local people.²⁶ In the meantime Biswas along with some other refugee leaders were arrested. He was released on 25th February 1956. Hemnata Biswas was disillusioned with the activities of leaders of UCRC. Thus toward the end of 1957, Biswas left UCRC and by the beginning of 1958 he started to work under SBBS.²⁷

Role of SBBS and ultimate satyagraha: Prior to the Satyagraha, SBBS was engaged in various other activities. Refugees formed processions and came to Wellington Square on 16.15 PM on March 10th 1953. The processionists criticized the Congress Government. SBBS was against the policy of Government toward the refugees of Sealdah and Howrah. The slogan of SBBS was “Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmelaan zindabad. Bastuharader dabi mante hobe. Congress sorkar dhongsho hok” . They also demanded resettlement of refugees within West Bengal.²⁸

On September 14th 1954, SBBS demanded for a regularization of squatters’ colonies, industrialization of Government’s sponsored colonies. Thus it is evident that from 1954-58 SBBS was involved with problems of various kinds of refugees. From 1958, SBBS mainly concentrated on the camp refugees. This counter-action manifested in a long sustained Satyagraha movement.²⁹

On March 8th , a convention of SBBS was held at PSP office. It was successfully presided by Suresh Chandra Banerjee and Shibnath Banerjee. A number of resolutions were adopted at this convention. 1. Continuance of dole which was stopped on account of refusal to go outside West Bengal. 2. Distribution of the waste lands in the state among the refugees. 3. Employment of the refugees in the spinning mills proposed to be opened in the state. 4. Rehabilitation of refugees, within West Bengal. 5. A committee was formed with Dhiren Bhawmik and others. 6. In the same convention it was decided that a statewide Satyagraha which should also include Calcutta, would be launched with effect from March 17th 1958.³⁰

Satyagraha of SBBS and role of Jogen Mondal: For the Satyagraha of 1958 which was an important struggle of the refugees, conducted under the SBBS, refugee front of PSP, an action committee was formed by the SBBS. The members of the action committee were Shibnath Banerjee, Hemanta Biswas, Jogen Mondal, Bidyut Bose, Dhiren Bhawmik, Indra Narain Ghosh, Mahadev Bhattacharya. In this meeting it was decided that the movement will start from March 17th 1958. On March 18th, a Satyagraha would be offered under the leadership of Jogen Mondal. Regarding the movement , one important decision was undertaken that within four days 10000 Satyagrahis should be arrested. It should be done to form a good opinion about the movement. After a span of four days, the movement would be intensified in the districts, rather than in Calcutta.³¹

Prior to that, Jogen Mondal expressed his view, wanting to lead the movement. But he could not establish his credibility but by courting arrest he could successfully erase the earlier conception about him from the public minds. Secondly if he was arrested , ordinary satyagrahis would be encouraged to court arrest. ³² His credibility was questioned because of his association with Muslim League. In the next meeting on March 17th March 1958 , on 19.30PM , Pabitra Roy was selected for the Satyagraha of March 19th and Dhiren Bhawmik for the next day.

In this context, it was noticed that satyagrahis who were arrested by the police were not always taken to the jail. Conversely, they were dropped at places far away from Calcutta. The leaders were worried that such policy on the part of the Government would make the leaders difficult to collect satyagrahis in the future. Jogen Mondal held that if the Government was on a platform of nefarious stand, the refugees

²⁶ WBSA, IB File 1483/32, IB Department.

²⁷ Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, “Role of Some Prominent Scheduled Caste Leaders in 1950s”, *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. LIV , No 1 & 2, April – September 2014, p. 172.

²⁸Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees*,p.170.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.166-167.

³⁰ WBSA, IB File No. 820/46, IB Department.

³¹ WBSA, IB File No.353/24, IB Department.

³²Jagdish Mondal, *Mahapran Jogendranath*, Kolkata: Mahapran Publishers, 2003, p.24.

should make their movement violent. But Shibnath Banerjee was not ready to take violent means at that point of time.³³

SBBS failed to reach a consensus on a particular point regarding the tactics of the future of the movement. Shibnath Banerjee, Bidhyut Bose, Jogen Mondal, and some other held that after three or four days of movement in Calcutta, similar movement would be launched all over West Bengal. But Mahadev Bhattacharya, Dhiren Bhawmik, Hemanta Biswas and others wanted that movement should be continued in both Calcutta and other parts of Bengal simultaneously. Similar movements should be launched all over West Bengal. But Mahadev Bhattacharya, Dhiren Bhawmik, Hemanta Biswas, and others said that the movement should be continued in both Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. In practice, it was discovered that the movements at the district and sub-divisional level started after three or four days of the movement of Calcutta was over. From March 17th 1958, to 21st March 1958, movement under SBBS was conducted in Calcutta.³⁴

Satyagraha movement of SBBS at the district of Burdwan : Satyagraha movement under SBBS, had spread to Burdwan.³⁵ Jogen Mondal had already been arrested in Calcutta on the first day itself. Therefore his role in Burdwan was nil. In Burdwan a large number of Satyagrahis courted arrest. The movement took a violent twist. The refugees started to brickbat the police. Similarly they threw shoes at the police personnel. This incident was followed by use of lathi-charge and tear gas by the police personnel.³⁶ Jogen Mondal was incarcerated at that time. Therefore it was not possible for him to participate in Burdwan satyagraha.

Satyagraha of SBBS at Murshidabad: SBBS conducted satyagraha took a distinguished mark in Murshidabad. In Murshidabad, the main leadership of the movement was provided by Sailen Adhikari(PSP). Thus in Murshidabad also role of Hemanta Biswas and Jogen Mondal was not very important. They played an important role in the Calcutta satyagraha. The Murshidabad satyagraha started from Baghora(Jiyaganj), Kurmitola transit camps. Sailen Adhikari, Mohima Ranjan Goswami under the aegis of PSP, led the movement. Satyagraha movement Sailen Adhikari continued throughout March 1958. Ultimately the case number dated 188/224/164 IPC and under section 11 of West Bengal security act began over the 'disturbances' created by S.N. Adhikari and Pratap Chandra Halder of Kurmitola camp. They were arrested.³⁷

Satyagraha of SBBS at the subdivisions and role of Hemanta Biswas: The movement of SBBS reached the sub-divisional level- 24 parganas(Bongaon), Howrah(Uluberia), Nadia(Ranaghat). SBBS and UCRC joined together at Bongaon, to reconstitute an action committee. The joined movement of SBBS and UCRC started from March 26th 1958 with a joint meeting at Town Maidan Bongaon. During this period Jogen Mondal was in prison. So he could not participate in the struggles at sub-divisional level.³⁸ A meeting was held on April 5th 1958, presided by Mahadev Bhattacharya(PSP). Anil Kumar Singh, Hemanta Biswas and Balahari Mondal were also present in the meeting. One important aspect of the future policy of SBBS came up at this meeting. Biswas expressed that even if the government refused to pay heed to the refugees' demand, SBBS would continue the movement and change the trajectory. They would urge the camp refugees to forcibly occupy the government lands.³⁹

Forced occupation of land by refugees under SBBS: From March 31st 1958, UCRC also started its satyagraha movement. In the meantime, on March 29th 1958, the twelfth day of the satyagraha movement under SBBS, a meeting was held at Subodh Mallick Square at Calcutta. This meeting was important because of the change of policy of SBBS. Here it was declared that unless the government changed its policy of dispersal, the SBBS would recourse to agitation of occupation of land. This policy was

³³WBSA, IB File No.353/24, IB Department.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ WBSA, IB Serial Number 202/28, File No. 32/28, IB Department.

³⁷WBSA, IB File No.507/32, IB Department.

³⁸ WBSA, IB File No. 88/39, IB Department.

³⁹ Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees*, p.174.

in later years implemented by the refugees of Bagjola area.⁴⁰ On April 15th, SBBS, organized a meeting, at Subodh Mallick Square, Calcutta. Many leaders of PSP such as Asim Majumder, Shibnath Banerjee, Byomkesh Banerjee, spoke before the refugees. These refugees had come from Bagjola, Sonarpur, Ghusuri, Sealdah. Shibnath Banerjee asked the refugees to discuss the matter of satyagraha- whether they were satisfied with the promises of B.C.Roy. Shibnath Banerjee further asked the refugees to discuss the matter with their respective leaders. They decided to meet at party office on April 17th 1958. Although there was a declaration on the part of B.C.Roy, the satyagraha continued as usual. On the very day, one hundred and fifty satyagrahis under the leadership of Atul Dey offered satyagraha at Esplanade East. The movement continued unabated till April 17th 1958.⁴¹ Regarding the withdrawal of the movement, UCRC and SBBS, did not rely on each other. UCRC thought that if they withdrew before SBBS, its status would be lost. Same was the case with SBBS. SBBS did not send any volunteers on April 18th. The leaders of the opposite camp, met on the same day.⁴² Ultimately the movement was withdrawn on April 20th 1958. The Government promised that no refugee would be forced to go outside West Bengal without their consent. SBBS was conscious and worried. It suggested that a joint committee, looking for surplus land, should be formed.⁴³

A Disillusioned Jogen Mondal: In the second half of 1958, a new phase of struggle started in the organizational life of SBBS. Jogendranath Mondal was behind bars in March 1958. . But when he was incarcerated, he became disillusioned with the leadership provided by SBBS. Thus he started thinking of breaking away from SBBS and forming a separate organization. Leaders of the camp, had inspired him in this respect. It is pertinent to mention here, at that point, in June and July a new refugee politics developed.

On July 10th 1958, a conference of East Bengal refugees was held. The conference was held at Mahabodhi Society Hall, under the successive chairmanship of Hemendranath Das and Professor Haripada Bharati. Debaprasad Ghosh(J.S) congratulated the refugees for having found a genuine and sympathetic leader in Jogendranath Mondal. He further assured Mondal, at a recent discussion, his full support and cooperation of Jana Sangha. However Jana Sangha had one condition. Mondal must free the refugees from the clutches 'unscrupulous' political parties.

In the same conference, Mondal observed that he himself was a refugee. Thus he knew the bitterness of refugee life. Mondal further added that, for a long time he was planning to start a movement which would not be exploited by CPI or PSP for political ends.

Jogendranath Mondal recollected his experience of working with SBBS during the last satyagraha movement. He expressed regretfully that no one could work sincerely in the organization because every step was dominated by party consideration. The interests of the refugees were never a priority and were subordinate to all.⁴⁴ Mondal thus took it upon himself to found the East India Refugee Council (EIRC). This organization in course of time emerged as the sole organization of the camp refugees.⁴⁵

A notable feature was the appointed of N.C.Chatterjee as EIRC's president. Chatterjee was now a member of the Indian parliament. He was one of the leading figures in the movement of partition of Bengal in 1947 and was associated with majoritarian political ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha. Mondal spoke quite caustically on numerous occasions. Various contemporary writers like the writer of Yugobani, found it inexplicable. According to Dwaipayan Sen, "One might hazard the proposition that because Chatterjee and his Hindu rightists associates insisted that East Bengali Hindus would be welcomed in West Bengal

⁴⁰*Swadhinata*, March 31st 1958.

⁴¹ WBSA, IB File No. 353/24, IB Department.

⁴² Prafulla Chakrabarti, *Marginal Men*, p.190.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁴⁴WBSA, IB File. No. 238/42, IB Department.

⁴⁵*Jogen Mondaler Aprakishito Atmakatha*, pp.312-313, cited in Dwaipayan Sen, 'The Emergence and Decline of Dalit Politics in Bengal; Jogendranath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste Federation and Partition, 1932-1968', p.257.

during the partition, agitation, in 1946-47. Mondal's reaching out to him was one of the last remaining avenues available in the broader political context of the late 1950s to make good on such promises".⁴⁶

The development of the refugee politics, is clear from a DIO Report. It stated that members of the Parisad (EIRC) under the leadership of N.C.Chatterjee, made efforts to bring the refugees under the fold of the organization. The Report continued that the working president of the EIRC Jogendranath Mondal had built up a great influence amongst the refugees. On July 25th 1958, a meeting of the Parisad, was held at Bagjola camp, 24 pargana. According to Sudhangsu Ganguly, Mondal's personal influence helped them to convince the refugees to bring them under the aegis of the Parisad. Some members of the SBBS tried to disrupt the meeting held by Mondal. Disturbance was created mainly by Hemanta Biswas. Police prevented the disruption.⁴⁷

Hemanta Biswas and protests against the Government: In 1959, SBBS fought against the Government policy of dispersal.⁴⁸ There were eleven camps for the refugees in the Bagjola area. The refugees were employed as laborers for the construction of canals. They excavated four miles of canals. The SBBS selected mauzas such as Mahiara, Mahishgoal, Yatragachi, Panchuria, Kadampukur, Thakdari of Rajarhat for rehabilitation. The government received acquisition orders for the refugees which were later withdrawn. In the meantime, camp refugees under SBBS, prepared themselves for the next step. The fourth annual conference was held at Bagjola camp. There resolutions were passed regarding the future of the camp refugees. One of these resolutions is mention-worthy. This resolution was for economic rehabilitation of the refugees around Bagjola camp and Dhapa and Manpur area. Hemamta Biswas held a conference at Sullenguri. The refugees of Sullenguri, Jatragachi, Ghurni, attended the conference.⁴⁹

Lands of Sullenguri mauza was not requisitioned by the Government for the rehabilitation of the refugees. Different people such as Smt. Nandarani, Badshah Miyan, Kanai Nandi, Jiten Mondal, Nishith Roy, Sailen Mitra, and ten others purchased land in Ghurni mauza. There they became involved in a skirmish with an adhiar named Nagen Mondal of Krishak Samiti(CPI). As a consequence, the situation became quite tense. Police picket was stationed in the farm house of Jiten Mondal. During the same period, the refugees became active and took up the program adopted at the earlier annual conference. The head constable Bhupal Singh, on July 3rd 1959, received information from one Amulyacharan that the refugees had occupied lands in Sullenguri at Rajarshat police station. A case was lodged – case no two, dated July 3rd 1959 under section Indian Penal Code. The head constable went to check the refugees. But the refugees continued to progress unabated. The officers in charge of Dumdum and Rajarhat were intimidated. The process of erection of huts by the refugees continued as usual. Prior to this incident, police had received information that the refugees planned on taking some strong measures. So the police had to take some precautionary moves. On June 12th and June 17th the police implemented such measures. But the refugees did not take any action in practice on those days. Again on June 22nd 1959, DIB of 24 Pargana, received the information that the refugees were getting prepared under the leadership of Hemanta Biswas. The refugees had kept the date of action a top secret. The DIG of 24 Pargana informed the officers in charge and CI. Hemanta Biswas suddenly made a move on the night of July 3rd 1959. Naturally section 144 of criminal proceedings was promulgated in the whole area. Biswas was asked to appear before SDO in connection with the incident. But he took the plea of ill-health and did not appear before the SDO.⁵⁰

Meanwhile some families deserted the eleven camps of Bagjola. When they left the camps, they took some camp property with them like tents. Seven cases of 'theft' were lodged against them by the camp authorities. On July 4th 1959, additional SP (North) came for a spot inspection. SDO of Barasat came along with him. The fact was, no cultivable land was occupied by the refugees. Instead they had occupied high lands (embankment lands) of Sullenguri. Immediately section 144 criminal code was promulgated. Police

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.258.

⁴⁷WBSA, IB File of 1930, IB Department.

⁴⁸WBSA, IB File No. 50/17, IB Department.

⁴⁹WBSA, IB File No.353/24, IB Department.

⁵⁰ WBSA, IB File No, IB Department.

was posted at Sullenguri. The leading figure of the refugees was Hemanta Biswas. Biswas warned the refugees that he should at once leave the place. He wanted to keep himself ready for even graver consequence.⁵¹

Hemanta Biswas eventually took a counter-action. He told the authorities that he had some papers in his possession. These papers would reveal that the lands were used for rehabilitation of the refugees. This prompted the refugees to go there. It was decided that a meeting would be arranged between local landlords and Hemanta Biswas at the SDO of Barasat's bungalow. New developments took place. But the local zamindars lodged complaints of losses against the refugees. Thus cases under 147 Indian Penal Code were lodged and started against the refugees. Case number 2(7)/59 under section 143/447 IPC was lodged against Hemanta Biswas and nine other people, on the complaint Amulya Mondal of Rajarhat. They were all arrested. Eight cases under section 379 IPC was started at Rajarhat police station on the complaints of different camp superintendents for the 'theft' of tents by the refugees. The refugees who had gone to the new site, had carried a revolutionary spirit. They were not ready to succumb to the Police's torture. They received support from the followers of Hemanta Biswas. Refugees from other places joined with the followers of Biswas. Biswas stopped constructing the program in the area after the declaration of promulgation of 144 criminal procedure code. His attention diverted toward Dhaka and Manpur. Meanwhile the PSP leader Shibnath Banerjee, visited the new site on July 7th 1959. The police force had prevented the females from constructing bathrooms on the plea of prohibitory order under section 144 criminal procedure code. Shibnath Banerjee praised the refugees for their heroic struggle and he expressed his total support.⁵²

The refugee sentiment was very well reflected. According to them the land occupied by them were acquired by the government. Thus they had optimistic view that such forcible occupation of land was probably a right course of action. They claimed that they shared the goodwill of local people and the leaders of SBBS. According to Nagen Mondal(local adhiar), the government had paid no heed to their earlier threats of forcible occupation of lands. Their move had two dimensions. It achieved a straight forward victory. The police had been dismantling the huts of the refugees. The refugees' agenda would draw the attention of the government toward this fact. At the new site, refugees were arrested. As a protest they decided to launch a satyagraha and start a hunger strike. Refugees from other camps would come with dao, spear, tangi. The refugees armed themselves with these weapons in apprehension of future police action.⁵³

Suresh Chandra Bandhopadhyay, the secretary of SBBS wrote a letter to Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy. The Chief Minister in reply to the letter wrote about the Government's process of initiative taken for refugee rehabilitation. He further wrote about the attempt of some political parties to fail it. Eventually the recent leaders of SBBS met CM for a discussion.⁵⁴

The movement of the camp refugees for occupation of land was the first attempt on the part of the camp refugees.⁵⁵

A meeting was held at Dakshinpara. The speakers such as Shibnath Banerjee, Haridas Mitra spoke on the issue of Bagjola refugee camp and forcible occupation of land. Hemanta Biswas said that he and other refugee families, who had forcibly occupied Sullenguri mauza would not vacate the area under any circumstances. He further added that squatterers would die if they were evicted from the land.⁵⁶

Mainly under Hemanta Biswas refugees forcibly occupied lands in the Bagjola area. This forcible occupation of land created trouble amongst local people who were mostly bhaag chasis. The local people including the zamindars approached the CPI leaders. Abu Taher of Haroa, Badshah Miyah of Ghurni, decided to launch an agitation over the issue of forcible occupation land by refugees. The local congress

⁵¹ WBSA, IB Report, IB Department.

⁵² WBSA, IB File No. 353/24, IB Department.

⁵³ WBSA, S B Officer's Report, dated July 9th 1959.

⁵⁴ *Jugantar*, dated July 14th 1959.

⁵⁵ *Jugantar*, dated August 2nd 1959.

⁵⁶ WBSA, IB file of 1959, IB Department.

workers, like Ahi Bhusan Bhattacharya, Khogen Bhawmik, Ashwini Pramanik, supported them. Thus in this area, politically, local people received the support of CPI and Congress. Refugees on the other hand fought under the umbrella of PSP.⁵⁷

Bitterness which had developed between the local people and the refugees continued till 1960s. On June 26th 1960, a serious incident took place Sullenguri. On 26th June 1960, a violent 'commotion' between the refugees and local people occurred at Sullenguri, Rajarhat thana. Local people's unrestricted firings caused the deaths of a sixteen year old female refugee, along with three others. The villagers even attacked the police. In order to defend themselves, police retaliated. Consequently two villagers were killed. According to Jugantar Patrika if the government had performed its duty in time, despite the provocation from political parties, these 'unfair' incidents could have been avoided.⁵⁸

Failure of the refugee leaders to address the caste question: Jogen Mondal for a long time remained behind bars. He realized that working under such a refugee organization guided by political parties, would not help to raise the question of scheduled caste refugees. Most of the refugee organizations were dominated by political parties. The influence of the party would always hang over them. Jogen Mondal eventually thought of non-political refugee organization and in mid-1958, he found a non-political refugee organization called EIRC. Similarly Hemanta Biswas left UCRC but he was disillusioned. Thus no organization or party spoke on behalf of the scheduled caste refugees.⁵⁹

Conclusion

After the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, two nations were born- India and Pakistan. From 1947, the process of migration started. In case of the East Pakistan to West Bengal, the refugee migration took a number of phases. After 1950, lower class and caste refugees came. In the meantime various refugee organizations gradually grew up. CPI controlled UCRC was established in 1950. In 1953, SBBS (refugee wing of PSP) was established. Initially Namasudra refugees, were attracted toward the SBBS. Hemanta Biswas was the exception. He joined UCRC. He worked for some years for UCRC (worksite camp) but being disillusioned after 1956, he left UCRC and eventually joined SBBS. He never changed his allegiance from that point in time. He implemented a new policy for the camp refugees- forcible occupation of lands. Jogen Mondal on the other hand came to India in 1950 but he could not participate directly in any refugee politics because of his earlier Muslim League connection. He had to wait nearly eight years for first direct connection with SBBS. He participated in Calcutta Satyagraha of SBBS. Unlike Biswas, Mondal after the satyagraha left SBBS and formed his own organization-EIRC.

⁵⁷WBSA, IB Officer's Report dated July 7th 1959, IB Department.

⁵⁸ *Jugantar* dated July 6th 1960 cited in Jagadish Mondal, *Mahapran Jogendranath*, p.116.

⁵⁹ Swati Sengupta Chatterjee, "Role of Some Prominent Scheduled Caste Leaders in 1950s", p.172.