

“Let’s Return to Our Own Home”: Muslim Return Migrations in Post- Partition West Bengal 1947–64

By

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Jugantar in 1950, published a cartoon with the title “*Fire Chal Apon Ghar/e*” (Let’s Return to Our Own Home).¹ The cartoon had the image of two families, visually that can be identified as Muslims and Hindus walking in opposite directions from the Indo-Pakistan border in West Bengal through the Benapole, Darshana, Bangram, and Banpur border outposts. During the initial years of the Partition of India, refugees crisscrossing the border was a common phenomenon and with the passing days it became a matter-of-factly incidence that remained the baseline of population transfer, i.e., Hindus will move to India and Muslims to Pakistan. But this cartoon was an anathema to the commonly accepted understanding of the refugee movement as unlike the popular pattern of refugee route, the Muslim family was returning to West Bengal through the Banpur and Bangram border and the Hindu family to East Pakistan/East Bengal through the Benapole and Darshana borders. The news column next to the cartoon, while providing the statistics of the arrival of refugees at Sealdah station in Kolkata, mentioned that out of the incoming flows of refugees, sixty-two Hindus and fifteen Muslims returned. This act of inflow and outflow of the refugee population is spelled by *Jugantar* as “*udbastu gomonagomon*” (the unbridled refugee crossings) and without any hesitation indicates the realities and possibilities as well of reverse/return migration tendencies of the refugees born out of the Partition of India and the cartoon title specifying the desire to return to their own “home” brings into analysis the significant caveat in Partition refugee studies of reversal tendencies migration or voluntary repatriation. Following Partition, a significant number of Muslims left West Bengal for East Pakistan for various reasons including communal riots, economic hardship, patriotic ideals etc. However, often, their initial decision to migrate changed and many Muslim refugees returned to

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West Bengal after a while. This paper focuses on the return migration of Muslims from East Pakistan to West Bengal in the aftermath of Partition and tries to understand the logic of the return migration: Why did they return? How did the West Bengal government and the Indian government perceive these returnees? How were their lives after returning? The story of this return migration to their “homes” is not only preserved in the government communication in the archives but also has been vividly detailed in the then newspaper reports and has remained as memories etched in the lived experiences of the returnees.

Return Migration: The Magnitude

The Partition of British India triggered a two-way migration of religious minorities across the Bengal border. Though the Partition literature has overwhelmingly focused on the patterns of migration among the Bengali Hindu refugees from East Pakistan to India,² a substantial number of Muslims did move in the opposite direction. According to the 1951 Pakistan Census, East Bengal had 699,079 Muslim refugees of which 486,000 were from West Bengal. By the end of 1960s, according to historian Joya Chatterji’s estimation, around 1.5 million Muslims had left West Bengal for East Pakistan.³ Partition migration, however, was not limited to a one-time border crossing. As the existing scholarship has shown, it took varied forms, particularly in East Pakistan and eastern India, involving internal displacement,⁴ dispersal,⁵ desertion,⁶ and return. Return, the most understudied form of Partition induced migration, was perhaps the most significant one in terms of magnitude. Between 1950–52 newspapers widely reported the figures related to return migration in East Pakistan and West Bengal and the governments routinely announced the official figures. The numbers provided by the newspapers and the provincial governments did not always match. But they help us to make sense of the phenomenon of return migration. According to the estimates of the East Pakistan Government, between February 1950–May 1950, 360,000 Muslim refugees came from West Bengal to East Pakistan. On the other hand, about 45,000 Muslims returned to West Bengal by 25 May 1950.⁷ For the period between May 6–June 30, 1950, the West Bengal government provided the following figures for the returnee Muslims by train and air and did not include the data of the returnees who took alternate transports like steamers to cross the border or walked through the border to return back.

Table 1. Muslim Return Migrations to West Bengal, May 6–June 30, 1950

Date	By Train	By Air	Total
06.05.1950	2035	–	2035
07.05.1950	1302	–	1302
08.05.1950	1988	–	1988
09.05.1950	1098	100	1198
10.05.1950	3487	140	3627
11.05.1950	1909	76	1985
12.05.1950	2508	82	2590
13.05.1950	1316	93	1409
14.05.1950	1694	–	1694
15.05.1950	2501	–	2501
16.05.1950	2054	–	2054
17.05.1950	2909	86	2995
18.05.1950	3446	73	3519
19.05.1950	2683	75	2758
20.05.1950	2088	90	2178
21.05.1950	3287	–	3287
22.05.1950	2407	55	2462
23.05.1950	3394	94	3488
24.05.1950	3072	76	3148
25.05.1950	3032	88	3120
27.05.1950	2835	67	2902
28.05.1950	2232	–	2232
29.05.1950	1605	–	1605
30.05.1950	3383	–	3383
01.06.1950	3427	47	3474
02.06.1950	2033	–	2033
03.06.1950	1625	–	1625
05.06.1950	2133	53	2186
07.06.1950	2973	–	2973
08.06.1950	2180	–	2180
14.06.1950	1758	62	1820
23.06.1950	2454	57	2511
30.06.1950	1770	60	1830

Source: The statistics were published in the Press Note of the Government of West Bengal in *Jugantar*, daily between May 6–June 30, 1950, compiled by Author.

The next set of numbers is from the August 31, 1950, issue of *Dawn*, a leading English daily published from Karachi.

Table 2. Incoming and Outgoing Migrations between India and East Pakistan, April 1950–August 1950

Months	Incoming Migration		Outgoing Migration	
	India to East Pakistan		East Pakistan to India	
	Hindus	Muslims	Hindus	Muslims
April	79,183	43,498	1,32,185	6,580
May	1,58,763	90,440	2,04,102	28,913
June	1,62,943	77,239	1,77,977	53,454
July	1,34,552	1,00,410	1,64,486	55,594
August	1,68,866	58,806	1,51,985	53,442
Total	7,04,307	3,70,391	8,30,735	1,97,963

Source: Dawn, August 31, 1950

From the above statistics, it is known that between April 1950 and May 1950, a total of 3,70,391 Muslims migrated from India to East Pakistan and a total of 1,97,963 Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan returned to India during the same period. On the other hand, more Hindus were on the move, compared to the Muslims, during this period. This figure considers only the traffic along Darsana and Benapole borders. There were other entry and exit points between the two Bengals. On February 8, 1951, the Governor of Bengal, K.N. Katju in his speech to the Legislative Assembly said,

Out of 35 lakhs of refugees who had come into West Bengal, it is estimated that 12 lakhs have gone back to their homes in East Bengal. Similarly, out of 11 lakh Muslims who had migrated from West Bengal, it is estimated that 7.50 lakhs have returned to their homes here. These are welcome developments, and I hope that they will continue.⁸

Throughout 1951, similar figures were published by various newspapers and the governments of East and West Bengal shared their figures as well in the Assemblies and in press bulletins. In 1952 return migration seemed to remain an important part of the cross-border migration in Bengal and the intensity of return migration increased in the second half of the year as India and Pakistan introduced the passport-visa system for crossing the Bengal border. Immediately before the introduction of the passport system on October 15,

1952, a large number of migrant Muslims returned to West Bengal. They feared that they could no longer be able to return to West Bengal once the passport system was introduced. This seemed to them to be the last chance to return to their homeland. As a result, return migration increased in West Bengal. Md. Rafik’s brother Abbas Razzak, a resident of Mayureswar in Birbhum district, used to work in a bank in Khulna in East Bengal. Abbas was in East Pakistan for several years after the Partition. After the riots of 1950, Md. Rafik wrote to his brother requesting him to return to West Bengal. Finally, in 1952, Abbas Razzak returned to his hometown of Mayureswar in West Bengal just before the passport system was introduced. When the passport system was introduced, his brother could not come back.⁹ According to the figures published in *Jugantar* in the first week of October 1952, a total of 19,421 Muslims returned to West Bengal.¹⁰ It was a period of intense cross-border movements between India and East Pakistan as many were afraid that the new paper regime would make border crossing immensely difficult. Therefore, the refugees and the returnees rushed to the other side. Return migration of Muslims continued in the years after the introduction of the passport system. But after the introduction of the passport-visa system, it was difficult to legally migrate particularly for a Muslim coming from East Pakistan to India. Migration now needed the government’s written approval in the form of a visa or migration certificate. Therefore, many Muslims came secretly and settled down in Muslim majority areas to become invisible.¹¹ The Indian government remained suspicious of the Muslims coming from East Pakistan, even if they were returnees. Hindus and Muslims continued to cross borders as refugees and returnees, at times despite huge risks.

Governments and the Right to Return!

Though the Partition of British India triggered massive cross-border migration of the religious minorities, both the Indian and the Pakistani governments had categorically promised that they would be fair to all citizens alike, irrespective of their caste, class, and religion. Except for Punjab, where there was an agreement on the total transfer of population, minorities elsewhere were asked to stay put and those who had already migrated were encouraged to return. Thus, from the beginning, both the dominions granted the right to return of the Partition refugees. In the context of Bengal, Jawaharlal Nehru initially thought that Hindus from East Pakistan had taken temporary shelter in West Bengal because of the unstable communal situation, and he sincerely believed they should go back to their country. In 1948 Prime Minister Nehru said in the Parliament that “the policy of the Government has been to create conditions in East Pakistan itself to stop the exodus of refugees from there and also encourage those who have come to go back.”¹² At the Inter-Dominion Conference in April 1948 held in Calcutta, the governments of both the Bengals agreed on various aspects of minority safety and encouraged the refugees to return. The Neoghy-Ghulam Muhammad Agreement was signed at this conference by which the representatives of the two Bengals agreed on the security of the minorities as well as on the needs of

the return migration and form the Provincial Minorities Board and the Evacuees Property Management Board in West Bengal and East Pakistan for “protecting the interests of the minorities, removing fear from their minds and inspiring confidence in them.”¹³ The term “evacuee” was explained in the Agreement as “a person who has left the province in question on or after 1-6-1947 and who declares his intention to return as soon as normal conditions are restored.”¹⁴ Thus, the very use of the term acknowledged the right to return of the refugees.

However, the agreements signed at the Inter-Dominion Conference failed to remove the uncertainties and concerns regarding the safety of minorities. Minorities of both Bengals felt insecure, and migrations continued across the Radcliffe Line. The communal situation deteriorated particularly towards the end of 1949 and by the early months of 1950 riots spread across East and West Bengal producing new waves of migration. The riots triggered massive cross-border migration once again bringing the leaders of the two dominions to the discussion table. On April 8, 1950, after six long days of discussions, the Prime Ministers of the two countries signed the Nehru-Liaquat Pact also known as the Delhi Pact to protect the rights of minority Muslims in India and minority Hindus in Pakistan.¹⁵ It was agreed that the governments would not forcefully stop the ongoing migration, rather would attempt to ensure the freedom and security of their minorities and would encourage refugees to return to their own countries. This was highlighted in the ‘E’ part of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact 1950 which mentioned,

In order to help restore confidence, so that refugees may return to their homes, the two Governments have decided (i) to depute two Ministers, one from each Government, to remain in the affected areas for such period as may be necessary; (ii) to include in the Cabinets of East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam a representative of the minority community. In Assam the minority community is already represented in the Cabinet. Appointments to the Cabinets of East Bengal and West Bengal shall be made immediately.¹⁶

In addition, Section 5 of Part B of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact mentioned,

Rights of ownership in or occupancy of the immovable property of the migrant shall not be disturbed. If during his absence such property is occupied by another person it shall be returned to him provided that he comes back by the 31st December, 1950. Where the migrant was a cultivating owner or tenant, the land shall be restored to him provided that he returns not later than the 31st December 1950. In exceptional cases if a government considers that a migrant’s immovable property cannot be returned to him, the matter shall be referred to the appropriate Minority Commission for advice.¹⁷

Thus, the authorities assured that by migrating, the refugees would not lose their property rights. The governments of East and West Bengal and Assam also promised to be more sensitive toward the needs of the minority communities living in their territory. They promised monetary aid and assistance to the returnees as well. Unlike previous bilateral agreements, the

governments of both India and Pakistan seemed more earnest in implementing the Nehru-Liaquat Pact. The Pact instilled some confidence among the refugees and many of them began to return to their homelands, even if temporarily to make arrangements for their properties. The governments routinely published the numbers of returnees along with the refugees.

In 1951, the Evacuee Property Act was passed in West Bengal to rehabilitate Muslim returnees. This Act can be called the direct and effective result of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact. The West Bengal Evacuee Property Bill, of 1951 was introduced in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on February 21, 1951. While introducing the bill, Rai Harendra Nath Chowdhury said that “this Bill is being brought forward to implement the provision of the Indo-Pak Agreement regarding evacuee property.”¹⁸ It made the provision of return of properties to any Muslim who had left West Bengal during the 1950 riots, provided they returned within a stipulated period of time. This policy of the West Bengal government to return the property of the returning Muslims was praised by the Muslim members of the Legislative Assembly. For example, Janab Mudassir Hossain, a Muslim member of West Bengal, said,

I congratulate the Government for bringing forward this Bill though it was a bill belated...it fulfils all the conditions under which it would enable an evacuee who had be rehabilitated in his own home. That is the main object of the Bill. This is a commendable measure.¹⁹

The main objective of the Act was the management of evacuee property and its restoration to the returnees. It stated,

An evacuee may at any time after he returns to West Bengal but not later than the appointed day [31.3.1951] apply in writing to the Committee for the restoration of any of his evacuee property of which the Committee has taken charge.²⁰

The Evacuee Property Act (1951) also contained a separate provision that was made for those evacuees who could not return by March 31, 1951. Thus, an evacuee who could not return by the given date but had made it before December 31, 1953, could still apply in writing to the Committee for the restoration of his property. Thus, the return of the refugees was accepted and facilitated, at least on paper. The official position encouraged many refugees to return. According to the official documents, before March 31, 1951, as many as 32,000 Muslim migrants returned to West Bengal from East Pakistan and were reinstated in their properties that were recovered from the possession of the Hindu refugees.²¹ Out of these 32,000 returnees, 28,000 were from Nadia district, a border district that was severely affected by the recent communal disturbances. In a note dated September 26, 1951, the Government of India informed the Government of Pakistan that by May 1951, a staggering number of 234,450 Muslims had returned from East Pakistan and 149,240 had been rehabilitated in their abandoned property.²² According to the data presented by Renuka Ray in the State Legislative

Assembly in 1953, after the formation of the Evacuee Property Act (1951), 12,320 of the returned Migrant Muslims had applied for restoration of their property, while 1,547 were rehabilitated in their abandoned property and 4,933 applications were rejected as the applicant did not return within the specified time or they had already exchanged their property.²³ The Annual Report of the Ministry of Rehabilitation (1956–57) stated that,

[t]he Government of West Bengal took steps to restore property of 12,400 returning Muslim families. In 15,500 cases, restoration has been effected by private negotiations, making a total of 27,900 cases of restoration. Only 800 cases now remain in which the property of returning Muslims has to be restored and even in these cases effective action is being taken to ensure speedy restoration.²⁴

In December 1966, the West Bengal government sent a report to the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India on the rehabilitation of returning Muslim migrants. According to that report, till June 1965, nearly 35,364 returnee Migrant Muslims requested for return of their evacuee property, 12,606 of them were reinstated in their abandoned property and 22,696 applications were cancelled due to various reasons, whereas 60 applications were still pending.²⁵

Table 3. Restoration of Properties to Returning Muslim Migrants in West Bengal, up to June 1965 [Under West Bengal Evacuee Property Act, 1951]

Districts	No. of Valid Applications	No. of Cases Rejected	No. of Cases Restored to Possession	No. of Cases Covered by Sec 5 (3) of the Evacuee Property Act	No. of Cases Pending
Bankura	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Birbhum	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Burdwan	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Calcutta	1,416	923	493	Nil	Nil
Cooch Behar	4,704	563	4,141	Nil	Nil
Darjeeling	131	113	18	Nil	Nil
Hooghly	96	40	55	Nil	1
Howrah	1,241	1,149	91	Nil	Nil
Jalpaiguri	1,197	926	271	Nil	Nil
Malda	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Murshidabad	105	12	93	Nil	Nil
Midnapore	35	35	Nil	Nil	Nil
Nadia	23,755	16,640	7,115	Nil	Nil

24 Parganas	1,550	1,321	169	1	59
West Dinajpur	1,134	974	160	Nil	Nil
Total	35,364	22,696	12,606	1	60

Source: File No. P(P-IV)-286(1)/65, Pak II section, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Refugees Versus Returnees

The bilateral agreements and the number of returnees, however, tell a partial story. They seem to give us an impression of a government sympathetic to the plights of the returnees. The reality, however, was different. Though some of the returnees did get back their properties, many did not.²⁶ For them life was immensely difficult. In many cases, the houses and properties of the displaced persons were in the possession of the refugees who had come from the other side of the border. On their return, a clash of claims was often inevitable between the original owner and the new residents. This kept the cycle of migration on. For instance, after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed, some Muslims returned to their homeland Sonadanga in the Nadia district, but they were tortured by local Hindus and they again migrated to East Pakistan.²⁷ On June 4, 1950, 14 Muslim families returned from East Pakistan to Sahinagar village under Kotwali police station in Nadia district.²⁸ But again, a Hindu refugee group attacked and stabbed them and looted their property. After this incident, eight returnee Muslim families again migrated back to East Pakistan.²⁹ The files of the Intelligence Bureau are full of such incidents from various parts of West Bengal. Often political parties like the Congress and Mahasabha sided with the refugees in driving away the returning Muslims. For example, Congress leader Bikash Ray said in a public meeting at Hanskhali in Nadia district that, “*kono Muslim ke elakai probesh korte deben na*” [do not allow the entry of any Muslims in the locality].³⁰ Similar allegations were raised in other border districts and villages of West Bengal against the Hindu refugees for preventing the return of the migrant Muslims. There was a widespread consensus among political activists, bureaucrats, refugees, and the local Hindu community regarding the logic of Partition. Their understanding of Partition made Pakistan a Muslim country and India a Hindu country. Therefore, when Muslims tried to return to their own houses in India, they often faced resistance, and often fiercely.

The failure to restore the properties to the returning Muslims became a point of conflict between the governments of the two Bengals. Pakistan complained that the “West Bengal Government is not agreeing to resettle returning Muslims migrants on their properties in West Bengal.”³¹ The Pakistan government also reported that Hindu refugees have settled permanently in houses and lands belonging to the Muslims in many border villages of West Bengal.³² All these allegations were denied by the West Bengal government as “[n]either is it a fact that this Government have been systematically settling Hindu refugees in lands and houses in the border

villages of this state.”³³ Based on the West Bengal government’s report, the Indian Foreign Ministry wrote to Karachi,

The policy of the Government of West Bengal, on the contrary has always been to restore their properties to returning Muslim migrants desirous of re-occupying the same, and in pursuance of this policy, that Government has evicted many Hindu refugees found in occupation of lands or building of Muslim migrant. That Government has also finalised the draft of the legislation proposed on the subject in Clause VI of Part B of the April 1950 agreement and action in accordance with it will be taken by them as soon as the law comes into force.³⁴

On the other hand, the Foreign Ministry of the Government of India complained that the Hindus who returned to East Pakistan after the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact were tortured and forced to migrate again to West Bengal. The Indian Foreign Ministry sent a telegram to the Pakistani government mentioning three such incidents soon after the Pact was signed.³⁵ Thus, the blame game continued.

Indeed, neither India nor Pakistan was enthusiastic about the returnees. Though on paper return of migrants was encouraged by the governments of East Pakistan and West Bengal in the immediate years after Partition, the reality was different. The returnees were seen as potential law and order problems and economic liabilities. The economic logic was crude—a nation-state could not provide room for an indefinite number of people, it was argued. Therefore, there should be some check or method of choosing who could enter a country and who could not. According to the logic of Partition, a Muslim always had less right to enter India than a Hindu, even if the former was from India. Nehru himself wrote the following lines in one of his fortnightly letters addressed to the chief ministers,

We...face return of considerable numbers of Muslim who had gone over to Pakistan but who wishes now to return to India. This is a welcome indication that conditions in India have improved and are better than those prevailing in Pakistan. We have encouraged people to return. But if all these traffic is one way only, obviously this leads to great difficulties and comes in the way of rehabilitation.... our general policy now is not to prevent people from coming back if they wish to do so, but to point out the difficulties they will have to face in regard to accommodation and business or occupation.³⁶

Nehru himself was most accommodating towards the Muslims of India both who stayed put and those who were returning. His other colleagues and the bureaucracy, however, were more reluctant to make room for the Muslims coming from East Bengal. In May 1949, in a letter, C.N. Chandra, the Secretary of the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, wrote to the Chief Secretary of the Government of West Bengal,

The Government of India attaches great importance to their early rehabilitation . . . Return of Muslims from Pakistan is bound to [retard] the rehabilitation of displaced persons. In the circumstances it is hoped the

Provincial Governments will not allow permits for permanent settlement to Muslims wishing to come back to India till the displaced persons have been satisfactorily rehabilitated.³⁷

The Government of West Bengal shared the sentiments of the letter quoted above. They tried to come up with effective measures to prevent the arrival of these Muslims from East Bengal. Local Muslims were kept under surveillance in several districts of West Bengal. The district administration was instructed to regularly inform Calcutta about the local Muslims who hosted people coming from Pakistan regularly at their homes. The district administration was also instructed to take action against the local Muslims who invited and sheltered these Pakistani Muslims in 24 Parganas and Nadia districts.³⁸ There was a widespread fear among the officials of West Bengal that,

Pakistan Government is encouraging the landless Muslim population to come over to this end as such embarrass the economy of this province as to strengthen the predominantly Muslim areas in the border to justify a demand for annexation of fresh territories to that dominion on the basis of communal percentage in order to counter any such demand from this end.³⁹

While apparently government’s problem was with the Pakistani Muslims entering West Bengal, and not the returnees *per se*, it was almost impossible to distinguish between a returnee and an immigrant Muslim at a time when citizenship rules were yet to be formulated and passport system was yet to be introduced. Such bureaucratic mindset complicated the process of return.



Figure1. Passport Check-post at Banpur Station in Nadia District, West Bengal
Source: “Yatrider Namaiya Diya Sunyo Trainer Pakistan Hoitey Bharate Agomon,”
Jugantar, October 19, 1952, 1.

After the riots of 1950, things changed for a while, and border crossing, in whatever direction, became easier. The immediate task of both

governments was to ease the communal tension in their respective territories and the least that they could do was to allow free passage across the borders. But no government could imagine people shuttling between the two territories for an indefinite period of time. Hence, Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan decided that December 31, 1950, would be the final date to return if the returnees wanted to claim their rights over the properties left behind. The date was extended later to March 31, 1951. The border remained open till October 1952. Then the passport-visa system was introduced from midnight on October 15, 1952, to monitor border crossings on the Indo-Pakistan border and passport check posts were set up at various entry points in West Bengal such as Banpur [Pic.1], Gede, and Pirojpur in Bangaon to check the passports and visas of train passengers arriving from East Pakistan.⁴⁰

After the introduction of the passport system, Muslims entering West Bengal without any valid documents were considered illegal. On October 15, 1952, the Barisal Express with a total of 340 passengers entered the Bangaon border of West Bengal, of which 263 Hindus were allowed to enter India but 44 Muslim passengers were not allowed to enter India.⁴¹ Many Muslims were arrested for entering West Bengal. In November 1957, the police filed a case against 21 Muslim returnees in West Dinajpur, eight in Jalpaiguri and several in Coochbehar for violating passport rules.⁴² Moreover, an individual crossing the border with Pakistani passport and Indian visa had to return once the visa had expired. If after 1952 a person had to travel from Pakistan to India (or vice versa) with the intention of settling down either she had to establish herself as an Indian citizen or had to have migration certificate. For a Muslim coming from Pakistan, whether a returnee or an immigrant, obtaining migration certificate was almost impossible as it was only given to people who were at risk. The India government, following the logic of Partition, did not consider Muslims in Pakistan to be at risk. On the other hand, proving citizenship was also equally difficult for most, particularly if s/he had migrated to Pakistan without any document.⁴³ Therefore, a common way for the intending returnees was to get a Pakistani passport and Indian visa but to continue to stay on in India even after the visa had expired. For instance, Obaidur Rahman who returned to West Bengal in the early 1960s did so. At the time of Partition, he migrated alone to East Pakistan with the hope of a better future. He settled in Dhaka where he got married and started practicing law. However, after his divorce, he returned to West Bengal on a Pakistani passport. After his visa expired, he refused to return to Pakistan and tore up his Pakistani passport. His family, friends and relatives were in West Bengal. He was staying at his birth place. Pakistan was a foreign land where, after his divorce, he had nothing to look forward to. He said, “*ami Pakistan jabo na dekhi apnara amake ki kore deshantorito koren*” (I will not go to Pakistan, let's see how you deport me).⁴⁴ But he did not get Indian citizenship and could not practice law in West Bengal. Though he was not pushed back to Pakistan by the concerned authorities, every Monday he had to go to the police station to give “*bajira*” or routine enquiry. For the rest of his life, he lived in his hometown in Birbhum without citizenship. Thus, Partition turned

him into a stateless person. The experiences of return, however, were diverse. Muslims belonging to different class, with diverse educational and occupational skills, and networks returned to West Bengal for different reasons. Their lives after return also varied considerably.

Narratives of Return

The Optees

During the Partition, the Partition Council gave the option to all government officers and employees who worked in the colonial administration of India to join either the Government of India or that of Pakistan as per their own wishes. In most cases, Hindu/Sikh employees chose India, and Muslim employees chose Pakistan. The Hindu officers from East Pakistan opted for West Bengal and Muslim officers from West Bengal opted for East Pakistan as their workplaces. In the communal atmosphere of that time, the Muslim officers felt protected in East Pakistan and the Hindu officers in West Bengal. The Partition Council however recognised that for many employees it would be rather difficult to make the final decisions immediately, particularly if their birthplace and choice of workplace based on their religious identity did not match. Hence, the Partition Council gave them two alternatives i.e., they could mark their decision as final or as provisional. Those who would mark their option as provisional could change it within six months. Not surprisingly, many did so as they needed more time to decide which government they wanted to serve and in which country they would want to live. Whether they would prioritise their religion or their birthplace as their country of work. Thus, they kept the option of return open. Take the case of Yair Mohammad for instance.⁴⁵ He was an employee of the undivided Bengal government. Before Partition, his posting was in Suri, Birbhum district. He was the assistant of the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) of Suri. He was from Murshidabad district. He opted for East Pakistan during the 1947 Partition hoping that being a Muslim majority district, Murshidabad would also be included in Pakistan.⁴⁶ That would mean his ancestral home and workplace would be in the same country. But three days after Independence, Murshidabad was declared to be a part of India. As an optee, Yair Mohammad had to go to East Pakistan. He was posted in Khulna. But his family remained in Murshidabad. He could not adjust to the new circumstances in East Pakistan. He suffered from illness. Finally, he came back to West Bengal as he had marked his choice as provisional. The Indian government allowed him to join the services and he was posted in the Kandi subdivision of Murshidabad in 1948. Many others who opted provisionally for Pakistan returned to West Bengal within six months. Some of them, however, did not get their jobs back as their posts were already filled with Hindu refugees from East Pakistan.⁴⁷ Moreover, even when the six months term was over, some of the optees asked the government for permission to return. For example, in 1949, some optees working in East Pakistan demanded to go back to India as they were allegedly mistreated by their colleagues and their loyalty to Pakistan was always

suspected.⁴⁸ They also said that they were originally from India, and they had relatives in India, so they wanted to return. They even staged a procession on the streets of Dhaka with these demands, but the government did not pay any attention to their demands.⁴⁹ But by giving the government employees the six months window to rethink their choice of option, India and Pakistan both acknowledged their right to return, provided it was within the stipulated period.

The Hesitant Migrants

In addition to the optees, many Muslims had migrated hesitantly.⁵⁰ Some of them left their homes and lands under someone else’s supervision, had taken leave from their jobs but did not resign, and crossed the border to understand the feasibility of permanently settling down there. Many of them thought Partition would be a short-lived affair. Hence, they did not think it would be prudent to leave their jobs and sell properties in India. For example, Nebur Ali Sheikh was a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old boy in 1947. His father, who then was an employee of the Customs Department, and his two brothers who worked in the Public Works Department, decided to migrate to East Pakistan after Partition. Nebur Ali recalled that the Muslim overseer of the PWD department, Asram Hossain, advised his brothers to go to Pakistan. Also, the atmosphere of his locality was communally charged; two Muslims were killed near the railway station during that time. They migrated to Bagura in East Bengal. But life was no better there. Nebur Ali did not get admission to any school. His father too did not manage to do much. They rented a house there. But his father had not left his job when he left India. He did not come as an optee, he came on leave. After six months of their stay in Bagura, his father decided to return and join his office.⁵¹ Since the passport system was yet to be implemented, return was relatively easy for Ali. Being a Muslim with a job in India was preferable to him than being an unemployed refugee in East Pakistan. In East Bengal, if he had got a job, his sons had got admission to schools and colleges and his family had settled down, he perhaps would not think of returning. But leaving a stable job and the homeland for an uncertain future seemed too much of a risk to take. Also, the fact that their locality was by then more or less peaceful and free from communal violence gave them the courage to come back.⁵²

Another example is the case of Ahmad Ilias who migrated to Dhaka in 1950, but a few days later he had to return to Calcutta.⁵³ In March 1950, after receiving a letter from his friend, he left Calcutta for Dhaka. His friend wrote to him to come to Dhaka “because you are a Muslim and Pakistan is a Muslim country. So, there will be no problem to get education free here.”⁵⁴ He came to Dhaka after the riots of 1950, but at that time the registration of refugees in Dhaka had stopped. So, he stayed for three days in a refugee camp with his friend. The incharge of the camp then told him that he could not stay there any longer as he had no refugee card. He then decided to return to Calcutta again. If he had got a refugee card, he perhaps would not think of

returning. After returning to Calcutta, he continued his studies. However, three years later he moved to Dhaka again and settled there. Thus, the decisions to migrate and to return were often shaped by mundane needs and everyday realities of individuals rather than larger ideological concerns. Moreover, Partition did not mean one single border crossing and many of them shuttled between two countries in search of better opportunities, a safer environment, and relative stability.

The Temporary Returnees

Molla Basirul Haque, a resident of a village named Ichapur in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal, decided to migrate to East Pakistan during the riots of 1950. After arriving in East Pakistan, his family stayed on the platform of the Shantahar railway station, Bogra for three days. Later, a gentleman gave them shelter in his house in Sherpur, Bogra. For some time, he and his family lived as refugees in East Pakistan. He then rented a house in that village and started living there. He returned to West Bengal in 1951 after the Evacuee Property Act was passed. But his return was temporary. The main purpose of his return was to settle the immovable property that his family had in Burdwan. On his return, he gave his land and property to his two daughters who had remained in West Bengal and then migrated permanently in 1953. In this context, his son Molla Fazlul Haq said,

Indian government has enacted a law that if those who had left their property and moved to East Pakistan did not return to India within a specified time, the government would acquire that property. Then my father decided that he would return back to West Bengal because if he did not return, their land would be gone.⁵⁵

Some of the returnees also returned to India to complete their education. For example, Syed Anwarul Hafiz, who migrated from Calcutta to Barisal in 1947 with his father,⁵⁶ returned to Calcutta and was admitted to Calcutta Medical College. He then moved back to East Pakistan during the riots of 1950 and returned to Calcutta after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed. Migration had been an emergency and temporary measure for him. He needed to remain in Calcutta to complete his education. After completing his medical studies, he practiced at Calcutta Medical College for three years. In 1953, Syed Anwarul Hafiz went to England for higher studies with an Indian passport, and in 1961 he surrendered his Indian passport and took a British passport. Then in 1962, he went to Dhaka and there he surrendered his British passport and took Pakistani citizenship. By then India and Pakistan had become further acrimonious to each other. Therefore, it was difficult for an Indian citizen to acquire Pakistani citizenship. Being a British passport holder made it easier for Hafiz to become a Pakistani. Thus, Partition did not mean a linear trajectory of migration for many. Individual stories help us to complicate the idea of migration and return in the context of Partition.

The Returning Exchangers

After Partition, a large number of Muslims from the border districts of West Bengal exchanged their properties with Hindus and migrated to East Pakistan. Between 1950–57, large-scale exchanges and subsequent migrations took place from the border villages of the undivided 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. Many Muslim families who had migrated returned to their homeland subsequently. A few border villages in 24 Parganas witnessed large-scale migration of Muslims and a significant rate of return.⁵⁷ For instance, Alimuddin Gazi’s father Dhamo Gazi migrated to Kalipur in East Pakistan after having exchanged his property with that of Dhiraj Ghose. After four years in East Pakistan, Alimuddin Gazi returned to West Bengal. But his father remained in East Pakistan. His father had sold part of his land in 24 Parganas to his uncle for Rs.1,200 but it was not registered. After he came back, Alimuddin paid Rs.1,200 to his uncle’s son and reclaimed that land. The family house of Alimuddin was originally near a local school in one of the villages, but now they were residing in a more developed area of the adjacent village. He said, “now we have to work hard unlike earlier, my father had twenty bighas of farmland which produced good crops. Those days were very different.”⁵⁸ Alimuddin Gazi said that the reason for his return to West Bengal was that his father repeatedly asked him to return. But while talking to him a few other factors came up. Before going to East Pakistan, he got married and his in-laws had not migrated to East Pakistan. Alimuddin Gazi returned and took accommodation at his in-law’s house. Though he did not mention this, one reason for returning seemed to be his wife and his in-law’s desire. Alimuddin Gazi was the only one of his eight brothers who returned with his family to West Bengal. His parents and seven brothers stayed back in East Pakistan. Partition not only divided the land but also broke up families. Alimuddin Gazi said, “if we had not gone then with our eight brothers and their children, we had been a *para* (locality) by ourselves.” Even after returning to West Bengal, Alimuddin crossed the border every year to visit his family member. Later, he could no longer visit them as he did not have a passport. His brothers, who had passports, visited him a number of times. At present three of his brothers are still alive while his parents and four other brothers are no more.

Another such returnee was Shovan Gazi. In early 1957, he migrated to East Pakistan with his father and family due to fear of future riots. Before they migrated, his home was at Madaskati village in the Hingalganj block near Jogeshganj Bazar. Shovan Gazi’s father Meher Ali Gazi, and his three brothers had exchanged their family property with the family property of Jyoti Doctor, a resident of Fulbari in Satkhira district of East Pakistan. Meher Ali Gazi’s family property had an area of 200 bighas of agricultural land and a residential house. On the other hand, Fulbari resident Jyoti Doctor’s family property had 180 bighas of farmland and 15 bighas of residential property. After staying at

Fulbari village for almost a year, Shovan Gazi returned to West Bengal with his brother and sister. They came back because they could not adapt to the environment of the new and unknown places. Currently, one brother stays in Sarberia in the South 24 Parganas district. His father, mother, two younger sisters. And younger brother stayed back in East Pakistan. After returning to West Bengal, Shovan Gazi had to take shelter at a relative’s house. This was because his family had already exchanged their home and property. Partition not only divided his family but its far-reaching impact can be observed in the present condition of Shovan Gazi. He lives in a house made of mud and cultivates land with an area of one bigha. Shovan Gazi lamented that,

over there (Fulbari, East Pakistan currently Bangladesh) our residential property had an area of 15 bighas, and you can see the condition of my house here. I came back because this is my birthplace and that has a different kind of attachment.⁵⁹

Mian Ghazi moved with his family to Paranpur in East Pakistan from 24 Parganas district in 1964 because of communal riots. Mian Gazi sold 12 bighas of his land in 24 Parganas to his brothers and bought 18 bighas of land in East Pakistan. The land that he bought, however, was a contested property. When he went to pay the tax, he realized he was paying taxes in the name of some Pandit who was the original landowner. As a result of which he did not get possession of it. After staying there for two years, he returned to West Bengal primarily because he could not get proprietary rights to the land to which he was entitled.⁶⁰ The younger brother of Mian Gazi said,

I was in class seven when my brother migrated to East Pakistan. He sold his land in West Bengal to his other brothers and bought 18 bighas of land in East Pakistan, but unfortunately, the land he bought was already in the name someone else so he could claim nothing. When my brother tried to claim the land, he and his family had to face many tortures and so he returned to West Bengal.⁶¹

Once again, we can see that migration or return was not always determined by grand-national events or national loyalties. Everyday insecurities and needs often shaped their decision to migrate.

Conclusion

The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) under its provisions on the right to freedom of movement (Article 12.4) says that *No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country*. India became a party to this covenant in April 1979 and Bangladesh did the same in December 2000. But, as the paper shows, the right to return to one’s own country was recognised in Partitioned India from the beginning for the people who were displaced by the communal violence of the time. The Indian and Pakistani governments ensured, at least theoretically, the rights of minorities in their respective countries as well as the right to return of the refugees who had left the country. This context was highlighted in the Nehru-Liaquat Pact

and after it came into effect many Muslim refugees returned to West Bengal from East Pakistan. But encouraging the refugees to return was often limited to speeches and reports. The government failed or was unwilling to ensure an atmosphere conducive to return migration and therefore return remained an unfinished project. In other words, recognising the right of the migrants and the refugees to return in a way go hand in hand with safeguarding the rights of the minorities to live in their homeland with their own religion, language, culture, and habits. It is equivalent to recognising their right to be different yet to be able to share the same territorial space. Neither India nor Pakistan was able nor willing to ensure equality of their citizens irrespective of their caste, creed, and religion. The riots of 1964 in East Bengal and in eastern India among other cases attest to this fact.

As a result, return remained a very limited process. The governments of India and West Bengal wanted the refugees to go back but were not too keen about the Muslim returnees. Same was the attitude of the Pakistani government. Partition marginalised everyone who was on the “wrong” side of the border. Whether they chose to stay put or decided to migrate and whether they remained as refugees or chose to return, they were unwanted people everywhere. Nonetheless, the theoretical acceptance of the right to return had some positive implications. By acknowledging the possibility of a return migration, the government discourses in a way tied the refugees to the place they originally belonged to. It recognised the fact that the refugees too had a home and a country to call their own. It also gave them the hope that they could return if nothing worked out for them. Thus, one may say, to approach the refugee issue through the possibility of their return was not inherently faulty in the context of Partition. But when it came to implementation, it failed to address the plight of the people because of the lack of goodwill at various levels of the state machinery and society. Moreover, unfortunately, it gave the provincial and the national governments the space to make only stopgap arrangements for the refugees at least in the initial years after Partition, and the refugees, the minorities, and the returnees remained the nowhere people in this part of the world.

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Notes

¹ Kafi Khan, “Fire Chal Apon Ghar/e,” *Jugantar*, May 19, 1950, 1. Kafi Khan *alias* Prafulla Chandra Lahiri born in 1930 was associated with the Barisal College and later became the staff cartoonist with *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* and *Jugantar*.

² Prafulla Chakrabarty, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Kolkata, Naya Udyog 1999); Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1999); Samir Kumar Das, “Refugee Crisis: The Response of the Government of West Bengal,” in *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Practices and Contested Identities*, eds. Pradip Kumar Bose (Calcutta: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2000), 106–51; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 32 (August 1996): 2143–51; Kanti B. Pakrasi, *The Uprooted: A Sociological Study of the Refugees of West Bengal* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1971); Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, “Exiled to the Andamans: The Refugees from East Pakistan,” in *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Practices and Contested Identities*, ed. Pradip Kumar Bose (Calcutta: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2000), 130–41; Gyanesh Kudaisya, “Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India, 1947–79,” in: D.A. Low and Howard Brasted (eds), *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1998), 105–31.

³ H.H. Nomani, Provincial Superintendent of Census East Bengal, “East Bengal: Report & Tables,” *Census of Pakistan 1951*, vol 3 (Karachi: Manager of Publications, Government of Pakistan, n.d), 39; Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, 166.

⁴ Joya Chatterji, “Of Graveyards and Ghettos: Muslims in Partitioned West Bengal 1947–67,” in *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, eds. Mushirul Hasan, and Asim Roy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 222–49.

⁵ Udit Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 115–60; Anwesha Sengupta, “Moveable Migrants, Laboring Lives: Making Refugees ‘Useful’ in Post-Colonial India,” in *Work Out of Place*, ed. Mahua Sarkar (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2017), 121–47.

⁶ Sengupta, “Moveable Migrants, Laboring Lives,” 121–47

⁷ “*Choddo Lokkadbik Hindu Udbastu Purb Banga Hoity Pachimbange agomon*,” *Jugantar*, May 25, 1950, 5.

⁸ K.N. Katju, “Speech by His Excellency,” *West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, February 8, 1951 (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1951), 3.

⁹ Md. Rafik, Interview by Author, Birbhum, February 16, 2020.

¹⁰ “*Goto Ek Soptababe Purbobanga Hoite Prai Ek Lakho Udbaster Agomon*,” *Jugantar*, October 8, 1952, 1.

¹¹ “Secret Fortnightly Report for the First Half of November 1957 for West Bengal,” Home (Political) Department, GB IB File No. 1210–48(4), West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

¹² *Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers*, Starred Questions and Answers: Oral Answers, August 1, 1948 (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1949), 11.

¹³ Purshattam Tikramdas, and I.N. Shroff, *Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India: A Report to the Indian Commission of Jurists by its Committee of Enquiry* (New Delhi: Indian Commission of Jurists, 1965), 321–24.

¹⁴ Tikramdas, and Shroff, *Recurrent Exodus*.

¹⁵ “Nehru-Liaquat Agreement,” April 8, 1950, INDIA Bilateral Treaties and Agreements, vol 1, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <https://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA50B1228.pdf>.

¹⁶ Nehru-Liaquat Agreement, 246.

¹⁷ Nehru-Liaquat Agreement, 244.

¹⁸ Rai Harendra Nath Chaudhuri, *West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. III, no. I, February 21, 1951 (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1951), 257.

¹⁹ Janab Mudassir Hossain, *West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, vol. III, no. I, February 21, 1951 (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1951), 266–67.

²⁰ *The West Bengal Act V of 1951: The West Bengal Evacuee Property Act 1951 as modified up to the 1st February 1964* (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1964).

²¹ Samir Kumar Das, “State response to the Refugee Crisis: Relief and Rehabilitation in the East,” in *Refugees and the State Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947–2000*, ed. Ranbir Samaddar (New Delhi: SAGE, 2003), 118.

²² *India News Bulletin*, October 16, 1951.

²³ Renuka Ray, *West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. VII, no. I, February 7, 1953 (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1953), 304.

²⁴ Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, *Annual Report 1956-57* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1956), 11.

²⁵ “Restoration of Property to Returning Muslim Migrants in West Bengal,” File No. P(P-IV)-286(1)/65, Pak II section, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1965.

²⁶ After signing the Delhi Pact in 1951, Dr. Sorfuddin returned to Siliguri from East Pakistan hoping to get back his property. But police arrested him on suspicion of being a Pakistani infiltrator. He was later released on conditional bail. However, the houses left behind by these displaced people and the lands once owned by them were now someone else’s property or were under someone else’s supervision. Getting them back was often difficult, at times impossible. Let us go back to Nebur Ali Sheikh’s experiences once more. When they left India, they asked their relatives to look after their home and other properties. But when they came back, they found that their relatives had registered the properties in their name. They had appealed to the local leaders and had gone to the court, but the matter remained unresolved. See, Tridib Chakraborty, Nirupama Roy Mandal, and Paulami Ghosal, *Dhwangsho o Nirman: Bangyo Udbastu Samajer Swakathito Bibaran* (Kolkata: Seriban, 2007), 87–9.

²⁷ “Report of D/C Kotwall PS Dt. August 25, 1950,” Home (Political) Department, GB IB File No. 1809-48 (Nadia), West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

²⁸ “Weekly Report by the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation on Relief and Rehabilitation of East Bengal Refugees: Report for the Week Ending 11.06.1950,” Home (Political) Department, GB IB File No. 1838-48, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

²⁹ “Weekly Report by the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation on Relief and Rehabilitation of East Bengal Refugees: Report for the Week Ending 11.06.1950,” GB IB File No. 1838-48.

³⁰ “Report of D/C Kotwall PS Dt. May 06, 1950,” Home (Political) Department, GB IB File No. 1809-48 (Nadia), West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³¹ “Express Letter from Foreign, New Delhi to West Bengal, Calcutta, Dated June 19, 1950,” Home Department, File No. CR 874/50, ‘B’ Proceedings, No.216-226, August 1950, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³² “Express Letter from Foreign, New Delhi to West Bengal, Calcutta, Dated June 19, 1950,” File No. CR 874/50.

³³ “To The Secretary, MEA, Govt. of India from Deputy Secretary West Bengal, Dated June 19, 1950,” Home Department, File No. CR 874/50, ‘B’ Proceedings, No.216-226, August 1950, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³⁴ “Letter from MEA, Govt. of India, New Delhi to Foreign, Karachi, Dated August 3, 1950,” Home Department, File No. CR 874/50, ‘B’ Proceedings, No.216-226, August 1950, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³⁵ “Letter from MEA, Govt. of India, New Delhi to Foreign, Karachi, Dt. August 3, 1950,” File No. CR 874/50, ‘B’ Proceedings, No.216-226, August 1950.

³⁶ G. Parthasarathi, ed. *Jawaharlal Nehru: Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947–1949*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti Bhavan, and Oxford University Press, 1985), 108.

³⁷ “Letter from C. N. Chandra, Secretary, Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, to the Chief Secretary, Government of West Bengal, Dated 9 May 1949, GB IB File No. 1210–48(4), in Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, 186.

³⁸ See Proceedings of the Conference on Influx of Pakistani Muslims held in the Cabinet Room on 12.09.1949, Home (Political) Department, File No-351/49, 1949, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata; GB IB File No. 1686-48, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³⁹ “Report: Influx of Muslims from East Bengal to West Bengal,” Home (Political) Department, File No-351/49, 1949, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

⁴⁰ “*Yatrider Namaiya Diya Sunyo Trainer Pakistan Hoitey Bharate Agomon*,” *Jugantar*, October 19, 1952, 1.

⁴¹ “*Passport Byatita Samoyike Gomonagomon Somporko Korakori*,” *Jugantar*, October 16, 1952, 5.

⁴² “Secret Fortnightly Report for the first half of November 1957 for West Bengal,” GB IB File No. 1210–48(4).

⁴³ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar has shown how the Muslims of North India and West Pakistan were affected by the permit and passport system that was introduced by both countries. She argued that the Indian government started the permit and the passport system to stop the return migration of Muslims from Pakistan to India. She also discussed the importance of the document since the introduction of the permit and passport system and raised questions about the citizenship of Muslims in India. See, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Interview Ekram Ali, an eminent novelist and columnist with Aajkal Patrika, in Rituparna Datta, *The Quest for Bengali Muslim Identity in the Post-Partition Years* (Unpublished M.Phil diss., University of Calcutta, 2014).

⁴⁵ Abdul Kasem Fazlul Haque, Interview by Danish Hussain, Nagpur, *The 1947 Partition Archive*, December 17, 2018.

⁴⁶ Haque, interview.

⁴⁷ “Muslims in West Bengal: Their Woes and Apprehensions,” Home (Political) Department, No-File No./ 1948, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

⁴⁸ File. No- 3R-3/49, Date: 19/10/1949, Political Branch- Records, Bundle No 2, National Archives of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

⁴⁹ File. No- 3R-3/49, Date: 19/10/1949.

⁵⁰ After migrating to East Pakistan, many migrant Muslims returned to West Bengal as they could not adapt to the new environment. In 1948, many Muslims from West Bengal migrated to the Rajshahi district of East Pakistan. But after a while many of them returned to West Bengal. Hossnia Ara Begum, a resident of Rajshahi, said, “It took some time for the refugees from India to merge with us (with the people of East Pakistan), many of them returned [to West Bengal].” See, Hossain Ara Begum, Interview by Hasiba Akter Sabnur, Rajshahi, *The 1947 Partition Archive*, April 14, 2019.

⁵¹ Chakraborty, Roy Mandal and Ghosal, *Dhwangsho o Nirman*, 87–9.

⁵² Chakraborty, Roy Mandal and Ghosal, *Dhwangsho o Nirman*, 87–9.

⁵³ Ahmad Ilias, Interview by Farhana Afroz, Dhaka, *The 1947 Partition Archive*, January 15, 2012.

⁵⁴ Ilias, interview.

⁵⁵ Dr. Molla Fazlul Haq, Interview by Farhana Afroz, Dhaka, *The 1947 Partition Archive*, November 15, 2012.

⁵⁶ Syed Anwarul Hafiz, Interview by Farhana Afroz, USA, *The 1947 Partition Archive*, February 4, 2012.

⁵⁷ The two border villages of 24 Parganas district (now North 24 Parganas) are in the Basirhat Sub-division. Before 1947 they were dominated by Muslims, but in 1947 after Independence and Partition, many Muslims settled in East Pakistan. Between 1950–57, exchanges of properties and migration took place from these villages. East Pakistan was right across the river and therefore easily accessible. Moreover, one of my respondents mentioned. That exchange was profitable: there were chances of getting more land in Pakistan.

⁵⁸ Alimuddin Gazi, Interview by Author, North 24 Parganas, November 5, 2019.

⁵⁹ Shovan Gazi, Interview by Author, North 24 Pargana, February 18, 2019.

⁶⁰ M. Bibi, Interview by Author, North 24 Pargana, February 23, 2019.

⁶¹ K. Gazi, Interview by Author, North 24 Pargana, February 23, 2019.