Hindu-Muslim Relations during the Long Partition of Bengal:
The Case of Noakhali, 1946-65

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctorate

in Public History

Middle Tennessee State University

July, 2024

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Abstract

Just before the British Empire relinquished its Indian colony in 1947, riots swept across India's Hindu-Muslim territories. On October 10, 1946, riots erupted in Noakhali, a Muslim-majority district of East Bengal where some Muslims targeted, and other Muslims protected, the Hindu minority. Mohandas Gandhi visited soon after the riots, but his mission of peace was not enough to stop the splitting apart of this community before, during, and after the official Partitioning of India in August 1947. The primary questions my dissertation seeks to answer are: What were Hindu-Muslim relationships like when the world around them was being torn apart by religious violence and Partition? What transpired when their socio-agricultural relationships and ways of being were transformed by riots, displacement, and the establishment of separate nation-states?

I examine these questions about how the riots, Gandhi's visit, and the larger processes set in motion by Partition reshaped the social and intellectual life of Bengali Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali, beginning with the 1946 riots and ending with the 1965 India-Pakistan War—which led to the permanent separation of Muslims from their workplaces in Calcutta. I argue that Noakhali's Hindus and Muslims had a shared history and shared material interests (e.g., with respect to abandoned properties) that enabled them to transcend their religious differences during Partition and after. Using oral interviews, artifacts, and archival research, I show that the

experiences of the common people were far more complex than narratives of simple, inevitable religious hatred suggest. Questioning the dominant notion that religious differences inevitably produced animosity between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, my research demonstrates how displaced Hindus often retained deep ties to the Noakhali community, even when conditions deteriorated. I further demonstrate that the permanence of Partition – and the severing of communal ties – was not fully evident until 1965, nearly two decades after Bengal was officially split in two.

Contents

Acknowledgments

To Mark Doyle, the perfect advisor, who seamlessly fitted balance of guidance and intellectual freedom. Professor Doyle was very accommodating and encouraged me to follow my own intellectual inquires and style. He also kept a close eye on where sources overly influenced my perceptions and inspired me to maintain and add my own academic voice to historical discourse.

To Martha Norkunas who provided enough directions to conduct oral interviews and later to use them for fashioning a narrative. Jonathan M. DiCicco gave important feedback on the drafts of the chapters, and Pankhuree Dube provided inspiration when the project started growing. To Tariq Omar Ali, who carefully read the drafts and provided comments and invited me to discuss on chapter three over a lunch in Dhaka.

Dipesh Chakrabarty and Nazmul Sultan were extremely helpful in commenting on the chapters. Tahmidal Zami has always been encouraging and flexible in offering his time for unending conversation about Hindu-Muslim relations in Dhaka. Gemini Wahhaj provided comments on third chapter. The friendship of Mahmud Dipu, who living on the other side of the Earth, has been faithfully available with his midnight conversation when it is noon at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. At the Dhaka University, I received suggestions from Iftekhar Iqbal, Asha Islam Nayeem, M. A. Kawser, S.M. Rezaul Karim, and Sahidul Hasan. Priyam Pritim Paul, Salimullah Khan, Azizul Rasel, Mizan Rahman, Shamsuddoza Sajen, Ehsanul Habib, Karl Mujib, Mehedi Hasan, Afzalur Rahman, and Imran Gazi were true support.

A full list of acknowledgements would need to refer a very large number of individuals. But some particular help must be recorded. I could not have achieved anything without the support of Ashely Riley Sousa, Emily Baran, Lisa Pruitt, Christoph Rosenmüller, Jacob Whitehead, Chris Parker, Michaela Wegman, and Annalysia Grayson, and Makayla.

My sister Ferdowsi Akter Popy is very proud of my educational achievements, and my brother Rasel is happy for me. Above all, to my parents, Parvin Akter and Bajlur Rahman, I have no words to express my gratitude to them. They have pushed me to pursue my interest, and nothing would have been possible without their relentless and unconditional support. I dedicate this dissertation to them for their love and support.

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Abbreviations

KKP	Krishak Praja Party
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
EBLA	East Bengal Legislative Assembly
NAB	National Archives Bangladesh
NAI	National Archives India
BLA	Bengal Legislative Assembly
DUL	Dhaka University Library
BAL	Bangla Academy Library
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
NMML	Nehru Memorial & Museum Library

Introduction

Shortly before the Partition of India in August 1946, the Great Calcutta Killings were the genesis of political change due to the deaths of Noakhali's Muslims during the riots. The Noakhali riots (also known as the Noakhali-Tippera riots) erupted within the Hindu-Muslim community on October 10, 1946, in the south-eastern district of Bengal as Muslims retaliated against Hindus in Noakhali. The Muslim population of Noakhali was just over 600,000, with 200,000 Hindus. The riots quickly spread to the adjoining district of Tipper on October 13 and reached other neighboring areas, particularly Sandwip, Faridganj, Chandpur, and Hajiganj. Almost two hundred Hindus perished in the Noakhali riots. The minority Hindus became homeless and destitute because of violence, which resulted in many leaving their properties behind to take shelter in refugee camps and migrate to Calcutta. A Muslim leader and Member of the Legislative Assembly, Golam Sarwar, used inflammatory language that caused the beginning of the Noakhali riots and panic amongst the minority, Hindus. Almost forty villages of Noakhali were known to have been attacked by Muslims. The champion of non-violence and the great leader of the Indian anti-colonial movement, Mahatma Gandhi, sojourned to Noakhali on his 'peace mission' on November 07, 1946, to promote communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. He believed that if he could mend rifts in Noakhali, it would have a beneficial effect on the whole subcontinent After the news of his visit spread into the surrounding areas, the situation changed in the Noakhali district. No arson or hooligan activity has been reported since then.

Stepping into Noakhali, Gandhi stated: "I have come to stay here with you as one of you."[1] Deploying his volunteers in the rural villages and visiting over forty-seven villages, Gandhi spent time with both Hindus and Muslims in the areas where violence flared up. He preached his non-violence message in a soft and reconciliatory tone. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims joined his prayer meetings. However, he was criticized by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier, over his choice of coming to Noakhali over Bihar, a place that was also experiencing communal violence against Muslims. While Gandhi acknowledged the heightened fear caused by the riots in Bihar, where Muslims constituted a minority of 17%, since he was a Hindu, he preferred to solve the communal problem in a Muslim-concentrated area.[2]

In terms of the political advancement of India, the Noakhali riots occupied an important place in the discourse surrounding solutions to the minority question. Partition opened a new challenge on the Indian subcontinent— concerning the Hindu minority to stay in the community as well as questioning how the government should handle the minority exodus caused by communal violence. The Partition transpired with "remarkable suddenness" and violence, fracturing Hindu and Muslim trust.[3] East Pakistan inherited this problem and had to move forward with fragmented communal ties.

Before I outline my argument, I want to briefly provide a definition of the Bengali Hindu-Muslim relationship during the riots and Partition. The Bengali Hindu-Muslim relationship was

[1] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, 1999), vol. 93. P-8. All references to Gandhi's works will be abbreviated as CWMG.
[2] CWMG, vol. 93. P. 12.
[3] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. (Cambridge University Press, 2001). P. 2.

defined by intercommunal agricultural dependency and a syncretic religious bond. Hindu or Muslim—socially constructed selves—cannot separately be explained without reference to the other. Recognizing this entangled relationship, I treat the two as a single community, while at the same time elucidating the difference between them. These presumed separated entities of Hindus and Muslims were woven into a complex and intertwined existence that is often ignored in the current Partition literature.

The Partition of India in 1947 was accompanied by the slicing of two big provinces of British India: Bengal and Punjab, where Muslims formed the majority. The Bengal Partition failed to fully or immediately sever Hindu-Muslim relationships, which continued even after riots and the distrust and fear was spread by politicians. Although previous scholarship understands the mass exodus and riots as the entirety of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims of Noakhali, I argue, based on oral history, artifacts, and archival research, that the Hindu-Muslim relationship was sustained after the riots and Partition. The bureaucratic norms had certainly produced a lot of minority problems, but local Hindu-Muslim relationships transcended political and geographical boundaries. Historians have researched the Noakhali riots and Partition through the communal lens of violence, arson, rape, conversion of Hindus to Muslims, and mass exodus during riots and after Partition.[4] I examine both the Noakhali riots and the years following Partition through the Hindu and Muslim relationship, not the binary opposition: the interconnection of Hindu and Muslim identity. This helps to understand how Hindus and Muslims continued their conversation after Partition due to their intertwined

[4] Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Border and New Identities* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

agriculture interdependency and socially integrated ties in the areas of property, prosperity, and suffering.

I ask two questions: What were Hindu-Muslim relationships like when the world around them was being torn apart by religious violence and Partition? What transpired when their socio-agricultural relationships and ways of being were transformed by riots, displacement, and the establishment of separate nation-states? I address these questions through the private memories of the rural Hindu-Muslim community, artifacts, and archival research beginning with the Noakhali riots in 1946 when the social fabric of Hindu-Muslim tore, and ending with 1965, the year Bengali Muslims were fired from their workplaces in Calcutta due to the war between India and Pakistan. The first chapter explores Gandhi's visit to Noakhali and how he wanted to solve the minority problem in 1946. The second chapter proceeds to the problem of the state-making process that required legislation to be implemented and shows how the central government's acts impacted the properties of the minority in outlying districts. The third chapter will discuss how the Bengal Hindu-Muslim corresponded from either side of the border and the time when the hope to return home for Bengali Hindus evaporated. The final chapter explains how Bengali Muslims felt the Partition in 1965. This chapter argues that for the Bengali Muslims the loss of employment in Calcutta in 1965 was the emotional moment they understood Partition as the division of the Hindu and Muslim cultures of the subcontinent.

The oral interviews I conducted in Noakhali's Hindu-Muslim communities over seven years revealed how the narrators remembered the riots and partition, and show how they continued their previous agrarian relationship afterward. It also exposed how communal riots and

a new state reshaped citizens' lives, prosperities, and well-being. The Bengali Muslims' experiences were also examined through artifacts which retells their return journey from Calcutta and how they endured riots, violence, and job layoffs during the India Pakistan War in 1965. A study of Gandhi, government acts, Hindu-Muslim property settlements, and the return of Bengali Muslims to Noakhali from Calcutta will provide an opportunity to gain a deeper knowledge of Noakhali and Partition. With every new interview, our understanding of these communal ties becomes more nuanced, while the discursive structure surrounding these events becomes more elaborate. This is the right moment for a study of this sort before the dwindling generation that experienced the events of Partition takes their memories to the grave.

The Historiographical Standoff

The historians of India and Pakistan brought the prevailing Partition literature of South Asian History into public discourse. The desire to record this history by these two groups is understandable due to the fact that the two nuclear-powered countries have engaged in several wars since the rivalry resulting from Partition. The historical debates fall into the categories either Hindu or Muslim who partitioned the mother, India. This led to different opinions pushed by those historians from India and Pakistan. Bangladesh, then known as East Pakistan, mostly identified as a footnote between those spectra. However, recent historians also examined East Bengal through the lens of mass migration. Bengali short stories are filled with the migration, nostalgia, and displacement.

In the 1980s, a requirement of the reevaluation of high politics behind the Partition came through historian Ayesha Jalal in her monograph.[5] Jalal confronted some of the long-standing orthodox historiography which accused the Muslim League led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who partitioned India and consciously fashioned the two-nation theory: religious nationalism, Muslims deserve one separate country for their own. Challenging the teleological perspectives of Muslim politics, Jalal unraveled how Jinnah used the idea of Pakistan—amorphous and ambiguous until Partition—as a tactical move and indeed a bargaining counter to gain a political parity with majority Hindu in the Muslim concentrated areas. Less than a decade later, Joya Chatterji shifted the Partition literature to focus on Bengal in her book.[6] By situating the Bengali Hindu *Bhadralok* (respected person) at the center of Bengal Partition, Chatterji examines how upper-class Hindus politics turned from nationalism to communalism which resulted in carving out a land for upper-caste Hindus that made division inevitable in Bengal. Both monographs visit high political terrain during the critical as well as dramatical decades leading up to Partition to provide clear and convincing interpretation on complex political, existential, and unyielding choices.

In the years just before the end of the 1990s, Partition literature moved in a new direction with two moving accounts came from the feminist historians about the painful private stories, which centered women in the heart of Partition. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin book explore how women were associated with gender and religious identity and subjected to the Partition violence.[7] Hindus and Muslims both raped the other groups' female member and widespread

[5] Ayesha Jalal, *The Solo Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: 1985).
[6] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[7] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Rutgers:1998).

violence against women became a tactic to attack the opposite religious group. In the similar vein, Urvashi Butalia used feminism as a lens and oral interviews as method in her book.[8] Her work asked, 'What was Partition meant to achieve and what did it actually achieve? She documented how widespread violence beleaguered women, children, and ordinary people. It was estimated that about 75,000 women were thought to have been abducted and sexually assaulted by men of the opposite religious group. Butalia centered previously silenced women's trauma to retell the story of Partition. She delicately portrayed how women's bodies are seen as holding and nurturing culture. These two books shared one common theme: that Partition took place on women bodies.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century can be seen as the heyday of Partition literature. Historians and independent scholars found within Partition history more stories to be told, accompanied with new significance of cultural-local stories as well as with the new access to unseen archival documents. Two important books intervened to elaborate on that historical documentation of Partition. This growing literature is yet to be finished, but it shifts from the singular lens of political narratives to refocus on the journeys of regular people's painful, traumatizing experiences of state-sponsored violence. Yasmin Khan's book is a gripping historical account that delves into the multiple factors including the colonial legacy and religious extremism which led to not only the legal Partition but also the social Partition accompanied by human casualties, displacement, trauma, and extreme distrust.[9] Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar examines how post-colonial states were involved in the process of displacement,

[8] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of the Silence* (Duke: 2000).
[9] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making India and Pakistan* (Yale: 2008)

shaping the everyday life of ordinary people.[10] She shows how bureaucratic violence through the Evacuee Property Act ousted people from their homes.

Bengali Muslims are not heavily researched or discussed in the Partition literature and is indeed being over-shadowed by studies or conversations of Indian Empire/History. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, an attempt was made to write about the literary culture that shaped the Bengali Muslim political consciousness.[11] However, ordinary people are not the topic of this research. Historians, mostly from West Bengal, examine the experiences of Bengali Hindu refugees, borderlands, suffering, displacements, border migration, and specifically stories of the Hindu-upper class.[12] These studies failed to produce a parallel narrative on Bengali

[10] Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (Columbia: 2010).
[11] Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[12] Uditi Sen, Citizen *Refugee: Forging the India Nation after Partition* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). Anindita Ghoshal, Refugees, *Borders and Identities: Rights and Habitat in East and Northeast India* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020). Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (Anthem Press, 2005). Sukanta Chaudhuri, (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City* (Delhi, 1990). Tai Yong Tan and G. Kudaisya, (eds.), *Partition and Postcolonial South Asia: A Reader* (London, 2008). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in post-independence West Bengal* (London, 2009). Prafulla Chakraborty, *Prantik Manob* (Calcutta, 1997). Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, *Udvastu* (Calcutta, 1970). Tushar Sinha, *Moronjoyee Sangramey Bastuhara* (Calcutta, 1999). Shemonti Ghosh, (ed.), *Deshbhag: Smriti O Swobdhota* (Calcutta, 2008). W. van Schendel, 'I am not a Refugee', *Modern Asian Studies*, 37:3, (2003). Annu Jalais, 'Dwelling on Marichjhapi', *The Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth EPW), 23 April (2005). Ross Mallick, 'Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves and Marichjhapi Massacre', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 58:1, (1999). Pabitra Giri, 'Urbanisation in West Bengal 1951–1991', *EPW*, 21 November (1998). Rahman Md M, Van Schendel W. 'I Am Not a Refugee': Rethinking Partition Migration. *Modern Asian Studies*. 2003;37(3):551-584. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 August 1996), 2143–51; Gautam Ghosh, ''God is a Refugee'': Nationalism, Morality and History in the 1947 Partition of India,' *Social Analysis*, 42:1 (1998), 33–62; Manas Ray, 'Growing Up Refugee: On Memory and Locality,' Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing, 1:3–4 (October 2000–March 2001), 148–98. Niaz Zaman, *A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1999); Tazeen M. Murshid, 'Nations Imagined and Fragmented: Bengal,' in: Willem van Schendel and Erik Jan Zu¨rcher (eds), *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 85–105; and Meghna Guhathakurta, 'Families, Displacement, Partition,' in *The Fleeing People of South Asia: Selections from Refugees Watch*, edited by Sibaji Pratim Basu (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 304-310.

Muslims, at least not uniformly, which remains an understudied area from the local context because the total number of Bengali Hindus displaced was so much larger than the total number of Bengal Muslims and the fact that the Bengali Hindus left in waves following each riot.

Historians mostly discussed Noakhali riots through mass exodus and victimization of Bengali Hindus. And Muslims were given little attention, not even getting a focus on their social-integrated relationship with Hindus. Moreover, East Bengali Muslims, who worked in Calcutta, were driven out due to riots following the problems of India and Pakistan. This has not been fully documented in the historical record. Furthermore, one commonality in the Bengali Partition literature should be a chapter on the Noakhali riots and certainly an examination of Gandhi, violence, and mass exodus. Historians thus far have drafted almost identical narratives to one another. No Bengal Muslim voice was heard in these narratives, only sketches of stories of violence. This trope of the violent Muslim is ubiquitous with Bengal Partition history.

The present work will consider all of those categories: Gandhi, violence, Noakhali, Hindu-Muslim relations, border, refugees, and displacement. Recentering the local archives and giving voice to the overlooked, it will portray how local people continued to provide a more nuanced perspective of the Hindu-Muslim relationship before and after Partition and will provide a fuller understanding of those categories currently silenced and unexplored. The research is also about how locals experienced collective violence, mass exodus, and refugee properties issues through regional prism considered less secular and more violent. My research will contribute to the recent studies on the larger Bengal population as a subset of India's Partition focusing on

how the large-scale national issues failed to accurately portray a view encompassing the lived local experience of Hindu-Muslim interactions.

Writing on the India Partition of 1947 with a specific consideration on East Bengal has always been difficult because of the dearth of sources—the small number of fragmented sources—which is tough for using any complete modes of interpretation. Moreover, what makes writing history on a specific area in East Bengal more challenging for any historian is to write a local history through regular people's perspectives because they often remained indifferent and did not care to file their experience somewhere during the time of riots and Partition. It is thus more challenging to historicize Noakhali, a relatively young alluvial deposit and southeastern district in Bangladesh.[13] Noakhali is famous for so many things ranging from lush green paddy fields to the communal riots that transpired in 1946 known as the Noakhali Riots. The history of Partition cannot be remembered, scrutinized, and, perhaps, articulated without riots and mass exodus, the key features that characterized experiences of Indian people, their way of being, and the Partition of two British Indian provinces: Bengal and Punjab. These were the two provinces which became the epicenter of riots and were later sliced into two by a British official named Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a cartographer given only forty days to redraw a map of a continent he had never visited. The Partition of Bengal was arbitrary and abrupt. People had to cross the border in a matter of weeks with the belongings they could carry and leaving the properties to their neighbors.

[13] John Edward Webster, *Noakhali* (Allahabad: Printed at the Pioneer Press, 1911)

Motivation for this study came from the necessity to house oral stories due to the realization that the first-hand accounts are only available from elders close to death. This study should have begun a couple of decades earlier. For example, the Noakhali community members often put forth a new name of someone during their interviews who had recently died that had experienced the riots and Partition. This problem was heightened with the Covid-19 pandemic as the individuals I interviewed during Covid are no longer alive. The archival work I did in the community sets the base for me to write a history on Noakhali's Hindu-Muslim relationship from below eschewing the grand political narratives.

Why Noakhali?

Following the Noakhali riots, 1800 troops and 620 armed police were deployed in addition to the unarmed police belonging to the police stations in the affected areas.[14] A total of 254 rioters were detained; 31 were killed in action by police and military with 39 others injured. Communal violence spread across approximately 300 square miles within 1650 square miles of the Noakhali district. Biased stories have been told and retold from the Hindu and Muslim perspective, but no study has dealt with the entire situation of Noakhali before the riots and the Hindu-Muslim relationship after Partition in Noakhali. The current Indian Government has galvanized the Hindu majority with incomplete information on Bangladesh; therefore, this is the right moment to write a dissertation on Noakhali that elucidates omitted information regarding the Hindu-Muslim relationship in Noakhali throughout the historical period of 1946-1965.

[14] Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal,* pp. 192-93.

Prior to conducting interviews, I pondered on these questions as I reflected on the idea of Partition: How is Noakhali represented in Partition literature? Why do we care about Noakhali at all? What is the worth of writing about Noakhali riots after almost 78 years? Do people care about it, why do they care or not? Does the community remember it? Based on this reflection, I sought to understand the people rather than the riots. Based on this, I asked interviewees: What stories do they have? Did they kill Hindus or shelter them? What did they witness during the riots? Did they ever or do they still hate each other? What did they do when riots erupted? What was economic status of Hindus and Muslims? Who witnessed Gandhi? Why did they join Gandhi's prayer meeting? What did they learn from Gandhi? I started with these questions and based on responses formulated follow up questions to the villagers.

I identified those people from the areas in Noakhali where riots broke out and houses were burned to ashes. I also interviewed people who just witnessed Gandhi even if no riots happened in their community. Allowing Hindus and Muslims to share their personal stories led to an unraveling of a lot of mere factual information about the riots, societal belonging, agricultural dependency, the love-hate relationship between Hindu-Muslim, and most importantly how they continued their relationship after Partition. While Partition historians continue to obsess over the riots, violence, Gandhi, and Muslim perpetrators, a wide range of stories get buried under the grand narrative of political parties. People's stories hardly get a chance to be told and no proper attempt has been made so far to listen to those people who lived through those historical events. Noakhali has been an incredibly misunderstood region.[15] People

[15] Dinesh Chandra Sinha & Ashok Dasgupta, *1946: The Great Calcutta Killings and Noakhali Genocide: A Historical Study* (Calcutta: Thina Prakashani, 2011).

only remember it through the Hindus executions, mob fury, displacement, and mass exodus. This narrative, though illuminating, is not the whole story of Noakhali.

The second trend I noticed was that partitioning histories are only written from India and Pakistani perspectives and Bengal Muslims were never included as part of any narrative. The Bengali Muslims accounts were never considered a part of it nor were there stories being taken seriously. Decades have passed without these stories being collected. Bengali Muslims mostly remain a passive part of the documentation of the entire event. This study is a modest attempt to fill those gaps and also aims to add new stories to the existing literature. The people who perpetrated riots were a small part of the whole community's record and yet Noakhali is measured with this yardstick. Stories exist of emotional bonding between the two groups sustained during the riots as Muslims provided shelter to Hindus. Interviews, conversations, letters, legal documents, pictures, and other artifacts provided information regarding how the two groups of people perceived each other and illustrated how their existence was intricately woven together through their shared past.

Riots can only temporarily damage their relationship, but, due to their shared history of agricultural social dynamics, they approached, helped, and maintained ties even from the other side of the border. Muslim community members still know where in West Bengal their neighbors settled and remember how many times they visited each other after Partition. Within the collective memory of both groups, the community's relationships continued beyond the Partition. Other scholars ignore the everyday experiences of Muslims living through the Partition of India. However, in relationship to that gap, I demonstrate through a quantitative historiography how

Hindu-Muslim relations are remembered through their lived community experiences during the riots, Partitions, and years up to 1965. No study has given detailed examination the relationship of Hindus and Muslims within Noakhali, which would add a new and essential dimension to historical studies of the Partition of India. The neglect of stories from Noakhali offers a study to fill in the gap of Partition as looked at from a micro-historical perspective. The oral histories that I have conducted in Noakhali in addition to other sources is worthwhile to compose a narrative of Partition outside the focus of Indian political parties and the political elites. A multi-layered perspective of personal narratives will not omit India's political complexities, since they also influenced people's lives. Acknowledging the importance of political elite and parties, this study will shed light on the Hindu-Muslim community of the local level in Noakhali by giving voice to the people.

Contextualizing Noakhali

The Hindu-Muslim community followed different rituals and separated themselves within daily life. For instance, Hindus and Muslims used different ponds to collect water for cooking. They also used distinct tube-wells for their drinking water. Muslims also had strict rules for passing Hindus zamindars'(landlords) houses, which required them to walk barefoot and to hold their umbrella inside their armpits, even if it was raining. Moreover, if a Muslim came to a Hindu house, he/she was served in the veranda, a structure adjoined to the entrance of the main house, with separate utensils. After having the meal, these utensils were kept in a space separate from the utensils used by the Hindu family. Being peasants and subjects of the Hindus, Muslims rarely had Hindu visitors in their houses. Hindus were the landlords, Muslims the cultivators of those

lands. The communities also led separate public lives. At the end of the harvest season, Muslims had to go to a British-appointed Hindu landlord to pay taxes, but Muslims were not allowed to sit down in front of Hindus while paying.[16] However, Hindu-Muslim also shared a syncretic religious bond.[17] In 1894, a British civil surgeon in Dacca, James Wise remarked, "The dargahs, or shrines, of these holy men are annually visited by hundreds of pilgrims, both Muhammadans and Hindus, who often undergo as much exposure and fatigue in reaching them as the strict Hindus on their pilgrimages to the sacred places of Jagannath, or Brindaban."[18] Both Hindus and Muslims also believed those holy men possessed miraculous powers such as the ability to cure disease, to make sterile women conceive, and in the case of Shah Karim in Tippera, "to raise from the dead, to cause rain to fall when and where he pleases."[19] Additionally, the communities shared recreational experiences like watching plays hosted in Hindu landowners yards.

No clear delineation exists in the Hindu-Muslim relationship recognizing where one culture ended and the other began due to the rich, diverse, shared past. However, the Bengali Muslims political consciousness began to form in the early twentieth century and culminated in the election of 1937, the first election with extended Muslim voters and seats in the Legislative Assembly, and Muslims on the ballot. The British Government undertook a major change to their Indian provinces and arranged an election under the India Act of 1935. A. K. Fazlul Huq, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), which was based on an agrarian program, formed the government by winning the largest number of seats and emerged a major political force in the

[16] Interview with Suroz Mia, July 24, 2019.
[17] Asim Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal (Princeton University Press, 2016).
[18] The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal.' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LXIII, Part III, no. 1. 1894. P. 37
[19] Ibid.

Bengal Parliament in 1937.[20] But in some areas, including Noakhali and Tippera, independent political personalities defeated the other parties. While these elected officials were independent, they were influence by the Muslim League, a party led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah—who is considered the national father of Pakistan. Through the meteoric rise of Huseyn Shahed Suhrawardy, the Muslim League subsequently gained a momentum in Bengal and outperformed KPP. This political change enabled Muslims to legally revise their imbalance power relationship with Hindus.

In the late 1930s, the Hindu-Muslim relationship became increasingly hostile due to communal tension in Noakhali. Although they had coexisted primarily in peace for many generations, their political differences influenced by their religious values led to dispute around this time. The way the relationship unfolded in 1939 was multi-layered and also varied from individual to individual, and involved a nuanced understanding of time, space, their daily interaction, and most importantly their sense of community. The variables that contributed to the communal rupture were monetary, political, and rooted in fundamental cultural power-dynamic conflict. The Muslim peasants, which formed the bulk of Bengal population, became increasingly conscious of their marginalized position in Noakhali and resented the deep-rooted power of the Hindu wealthy class. As further explanation, the following two excerpts are necessary to encapsulate the Hindu-Muslim relationship in Bengal:

[20] Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dacca: Sunny House, 1972)

> He (Golam Sarwar) described the Hindu Goddesses as "prostitutes" and said—those who offer puja with flowers to such prostitutes, how do they dare rebuke a Muhammedans student calling him "*haramjada* (bastard).[21]

> Muslims were not allowed to sit in front of Hindus in *Kachari*, (the courthouse). Bengali Hindus addressed elder Muslims with *'tui'* but not *'apni'*, as Muslims approached in courthouse. *Tui* is a term used to show no respect to seniors and address older people who belong to lower in social class or age, but *apni* is used to shows respect.[22]

This first excerpt appeared in a letter written to Gandhi, by Manoranjan Chaudhury, the vice president of Noakhali Congress on September 20, 1939. Being the Hindu Congress leader, Chaudhury accused Sarwar who, during a larger public gathering in Noakhali, demanded an apology from the Hindu school teacher named Kshitish Babu for his name-calling Muslim student, *haramjada*. Sarwar said if the matter be not settled, he would socially remonstrate the Headmaster and Babu with such insults that they would not be able to show their faces in public. The second passage is taken from the book of a political satirist named Abul Mansur Ahmad, who noticed this social relationship between Hindu landowners and their Muslim peasants. This example demonstrates the reaction of Muslim political empowerment to the accumulated feelings from the historical lack of respect from Hindus towards Muslims.

Both the Hindus and Muslims charged, challenged, and countered one another during this phase of political conflict before Partition. Both groups tried to shift the blame to each other, thus

[21] List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p. 2.
[22] Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amr Dekha Rajnitir 50 Bachhor (Fifty Years of Politics as I Saw It* (Dhaka: Khoshroz Kitab Mahal, 2013), pp. 5-8.

contributing to the strife in their geographical area. The Hindu leaders argued that the entire administrative departments—magistracy, the judiciary, and the High Court— all favored the Muslims, and hence supported the Krisak Samities, Muslim peasant organizations authored by A.K. Huq. The Hindu leaders termed their allegations as the "Muslimification" of Noakhali. Thus, Noakhali became the center of political debate where Hindu political leaders accused the Muslim Ministry of an indifferent attitude towards the Hindu cause.

In this politically charged situation, the Hindus blamed the Muslims. One headline, from the Hindu editor of Congress and Hindu Mahasabha supported newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, addressed the debate as "What Is Wrong with Noakhali." In this article, Dr. Syama Prasad Mukherjee, a Hindu leader, recognized the present Ministry of Bengal and its baneful effects on the legitimate rights and interests of Hindus in the provinces, which included instances of the oppression on Hindus by Muslim peasants in Noakhali. In response, the Muslim newspaper wrote an opposing headline declaring "Nothing Is Wrong with Noakhali" and Muslim leaders who were not convinced by the charges made by their counterpart."[23] This headline battle reveals that Muslim leaders, who claimed the Hindus' assertions were invalid and without base, persistently refuted the allegations hurled against them by their Hindu parliament members. The animated debate between the leaders actually stemmed from the charges of repression inflicted on the Hindu minority in the Noakhali district. The smoldering fire within the community could have spread throughout their area, if not for an inquiry called by the government, as remarked by the Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, a Hindu congress leader. However, the inquiry did not happen, and Hindu-Muslim tensions grew.

[23] Hindustan Standard, February 17, 1940.

What happened was quite eye-opening as Hindu leaders claimed that during the days of the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movement of 1921 that Muslim religious leaders from the Pirs, Moulanas, Maulavis, and Munshis unconditionally supported the Indian National Congress. The seismic changed occurred when Congress supported on Rashik Chandra Charmaker, an illiterate Hindu cobbler, and two illiterate Muslims Hotelwallas (proprietors of Boarding House). They defeated Rai Bahadur Jashoda Kumar Ghosh, a Hindu leader, and two Khan Bahadurs by so wide a margin of votes that their deposited money was forfeited. The Hindu leaders claimed, when the Civil Disobedience Movement resumed against the British government in 1930, the Muslims no longer supported the congress. A Muslim leader, Choudhury, implemented a wedge between the Muslim and Hindu communities by manipulating the bulk of the Muslims who were agriculturalists and not difficult for a clever and resourceful man like Choudhury to turn the Muslims against Hindus. These actions organized the Muslim majority against Hindus.

The Bengali Hindus also saw the rise of another Muslim leader, Golam Sarwar, as daring, unscrupulous, and frantic because he drew thousands of Muslims to public meetings. When approached by national leaders, Sarwar framed this movement as socialist and yet called it a "Pan-Islamic" when addressing the peasants Muslim community. However, Hindus considered it neither of those but a rank communal movement. To curb his power, Hindu community approached Gandhi that they were dispossessed from their lands and fields. The crops of the Hindu middle classes were stealthily cut off at night so much so that in Ramganj thana plots belongings to Hindus could easily be distinguished from those of Mohammadan. Additionally, the Hindu community claimed that Hindu women were verbally abused and sextually assaulted

by Muslim men who were unpunished by the courts. This correspondence with the Pakistan movement and growing sentiment for a separate political and geographical state for the Indian Muslims. Ultimately, the rise of Muslim political consciousness during the time in Noakhali caused new divisions in cultural and community that deepened the political split resulting the opposition headlines in 1939. It was until 1946 when riots erupted against Hindus as a retaliation of the Calcutta riots where Muslims were persecuted. Gandhi made a sojourn to Noakhali with his peace-mission to bring Hindu and Muslim community into one.

Chapter Formation

In chapter 1, I examine how Gandhi's sojourn to Noakhali has been written for quite a long time from independent scholars and historians. They discuss what Gandhi did in the community how he preached his non-violence and wanted to bring Hindus and Muslims together. However, authors of Partition and riots ended up inflicting a communal assault on the Muslim majority throughout Gandhi's visit, often leveling accusations of Muslims as communal, irrational, perpetrators of riots, and occupiers of the minority's properties. I reconstructed his visit through a different reading arguing how on the one hand, Gandhi presented himself as a minority leader, but on the other, wanted to set an example for the rest of India, a Hindu-Muslim coexistence. Noakhali worked as a test lab of his non-violence. This chapter proceeds with a debate between Gandhi and Bengal Premier Husain Suhrawardy regarding Noakhali and Bihar riots. This helps to understand how he provided a concrete roadmap of the minority problem through debating the plans from the Muslim League leaders. However, after 1947, Suhrawardy continued to work in the same philosophy shown by Gandhi. This chapter explores Gandhi's

ideas about containing the riots between the Hindus and Muslims, his debate with Muslim legislatures, his strategies to restore community trust, as well as his reason to go to Noakhali rather than Bihar.

In chapter 2, I explore the stories of Hindu-Muslim relationships that have not yet been explored to tease out the local Hindu-Muslim tension in Noakhali before Partition and after which will provide an understanding of the often-complex national political transformation of East Pakistan. I argue that the formative years of Pakistan after Partition were a question of property rights which intertwined with long-standing Hindu-Muslim identity politics which started before Partition and shaped the Hindu-Muslim relationship after. To uncover this complex narrative, this chapter will first begin by discussing a small but important story in Noakhali in 1939, when a riot seemed inevitable. Then, it will concentrate on the formation of East Pakistan, particularly the abolishing of the Zamindari Act in 1950 along with other acts. These two events, the Noakhali Hindu-Muslim conflict and the land settlement acts after Partition, will offer insight into the intellectual and political history of East Pakistani during its formative years. Reading the local politics and how they intertwined with national concerns is important because they reshaped Hindu-Muslim coexistence in ways that still impact the relationships.

In chapter 3, I look at how the Partition of India in 1947 created a great upheaval, leading to an unprecedented exodus of Hindus and Muslims to the new nations designated for each religious group. Amid the tempestuous Great Calcutta Killings and the corresponding riots in Noakhali in 1946, many Bengali Hindus living in Noakhali departed to Calcutta, leaving their properties behind. Though many of them longed for home, I argue that displaced Bengali

Hindus' who hope to return, died in the mid-1950s. After describing the historical background of the massive displacement of Bengali Hindus, I illustrate the longing for home, safety, and security experienced by Bengali Hindus. The following section explores Bengali Hindus' post-partition memories of Noakhali before moving on to an examination of epistolary rhetoric of their experience during the Noakhali riots. To exemplify this argument, I examine a rare family archive of letters exchanged between Jogendra Roy, a Hindu landowner, and Oli Mia, his Muslim neighbor in Noakhali. Twenty-six letters sent from Jogendra to Oli document his desire to return home and later his disappointment when this hope was never realized. This dying hope of Jogendra coincided with the East Pakistan government's decision to take possession of lands left by those displaced through the East Bengal State Acquisitions and Tenancy Act of 1950. This chapter concentrates on the complex relationship between Hindus and Muslims, exploring issues of nostalgia, identity, property, hope, and the irony of fate, revealing the slow acceptance among displaced Bengali Hindus of the (im)possibility to return.

In chapter 4, I focus on how the much-discussed Muslim political identity and idea of Pakistan has eclipsed the personal stories and Bengali Muslims' Partition experiences. Bengal Muslims who had returned from Calcutta after the separation were not taken into consideration and therefore their stories have been a neglected theme of Partition literature, let alone a study of their journey from working places to Noakhali after Partition. Three waves of returning journeys had taken place: the first occurred after the riots of 1946 and Partition followed by communal riots in 1950s, and the final wave during the India-Pakistan War in 1965. Bengali Muslims in Calcutta began to trickle following two decades after Partition and culminated in 1965, where they were fired from their jobs in restaurants, bars, tea factories, jute mills, Hindustan Unilever, Shalimar Paint, railways etc. The intricate relationship between the working place of Calcutta,

their return journeys, and the living space within Noakhali is an important area of research because it offers insight into how Bengali Muslims' lives were shaped by Partition yet found no articulation within the Partition literature. This chapter argues that Bengali Mulis felt Partition viscerally in 1965 when they were sacked from their working place and never allowed a chance to return. This return journey is revealed through oral interviews, letters, and archives. It portrays how the entire journey was conditioned by violence beginning in 1946 and ending in 1965.

Chapter 1

The Last Trial of Non-violence: Gandhi, Suhrawardy, Nehru, and Noakhali Riots in 1946

Mahatma Gandhi sojourned in the district of Noakhali in the South-eastern part of East Bengal on November 7th, 1946, and spent approximately four months in a Muslim dominated area, working to bridge the communal gap spurred by riots between Hindus and Muslims. Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Primer of Bengal, demanded Gandhi's presence in Bihar, a province in eastern India where Muslims were heavily persecuted by Hindus rather than in Noakhali where Hindus were victimized by Muslims. Gandhi, *the half-naked fakir* as Winston Churchill referred him, went to Bihar rather unwillingly on March 3rd, 1947. At first, neither Muslim villagers nor politicians exuberantly welcomed the unexpected yet timely visit of Gandhi's delegation to Noakhali. However, it has continued to reverberate throughout the literature of the India Partition, primarily in research on the Noakhali riots, which created a gap between Hindus and Muslims before the divide. Sumit Sarkar defined Gandhi's visit as 'the Mahatma's Finest hour.' Sarkar also stated, "Increasingly isolated from the Congress leadership, the old man of seventy-seven with undiminished courage decided to stake his all in a bid to vindicate his life-long principles of change of heart and non-violence in the villages of Noakhali, followed by Bihar and then the riot-torn slums of Calcutta and Delhi." Having reached Noakhali, Gandhi exclaimed, "I have come to stay here with you as one of you."

[1]This statement encompassed his goal in Noakhali.

[1] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (*New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, 1999), vol. 93. P-8. All references to Gandhi's works will be abbreviated as CWMG.

I first aim to rethink Gandhi's Noakhali visit as it is recorded in Partition literature. Most historians who sought to understand Gandhi in Noakhali resulted in analysis about the riots, which often employed terms like 'Muslim terrorists,' Muslim fanatics, the organized fury of Muslim mob,' who perpetuated riots, and therefore they failed to touch Gandhi himself as person, philosophy, and purpose in Noakhali.[2] These were frequently used words that described a community and its stories; and yet, the entire Muslim community did not participate in riots and Muslims members sheltered Hindus, offered support, and fought with other Muslims due to their protection of Hindus. Gandhi, the great anticolonial leader, felt the pulse of community and had never used pejorative language in his descriptions of Muslims; he however, stepped in Noakhali to ameliorate both the targeting of the Hindu minority and also address the condition of Muslims in Bihar.

Second, most of writings on Gandhi consciously focuses on his other visits that mirrored his anticolonial movement and philosophy which started from South Africa to Birla House, where he was assassinated.[3] However, by the time scholars arrive at the coverage of 1946, a mere four months of Gandhi in Noakhali before Partition, their narrative often failed to unravel Gandhi's ideas about the minority question of how Hindus and Muslims can coexist peacefully. No doubt, Mahatma's political career was devoted to driving the British from India and fostering Hindu-Muslim communal harmony. Thus, he insisted on addressing the Hindu-Muslim problems in Noakhali. Prior to his visit, for example, Gandhi had previously demonstrated his desire to end British rule through inclusion of the Muslim population when he worked with Muslims in the

[2] Geoffrey Ashe, *Gandhi* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), p. 365. See Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-1947* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2005), Chapter six.
[3] Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2018).

Khilafat Movement and the Non-cooperation Movement in 1920s. The Hindu or Muslim minority question had posed a real problem orchestrated by British colonial 'divide and rule' system. However, no other opportunity had extended Gandhi the chance to tackle and uproot the questions surrounding the Hindu-Muslim relationship as directly as Noakhali.

On the surface, this short period of time is often regarded as an attempt to heal Hindu-Muslim relations in the riot-ridden areas of Noakhali. However, I argue that Gandhi's visit to Noakhali tested his philosophy of nonviolence at the point of the political impasse of the Hindu-Muslim problems within India and was the final chance to avoid the Partition. I also argue how Gandhi wanted to set the minority question for the rest of the India through his debate with Suhrawardy. I posit that, though Gandhi was no less dedicated to the minority question, he is viewed a politician of the Hindu majority. I supplemented my argument by stressing Gandhi's presence in Noakhali was more far-reaching and timelier than many of his other visits as Gandhi believed that if Bengal plays the game, it will solve all India's problem.[4]

This chapter begins with a background history of Gandhi's visit to South Africa in 1893 and how it resonates with his visit to Noakhali. Then, the heart of this paper is the debate and difference between Gandhi and Suhrawardy regarding the riots in Noakhali and Bihar. To further support Gandhi's concern over minority issues, I will briefly go over the conversation between Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, and Suhrawardy. I conclude with how Suhrawardy ultimate agreement with Gandhi during Partition resulted in a shared attempt to stem the Muslim minority exodus from Calcutta. Suhrawardy, who initially had a huge difference with

[4] CWMG, p 65. Volume 93.

Gandhi about solving communal problems, was so influenced by Gandhi's ideas that, when the prophet of nonviolence was no more, Suhrawardy used his philosophies to address the Hindu-Muslim minority problem in both sides of Bengal after Partition. Through analyzing Suhrawardy arguments with Gandhi, I aim to understand the beginning of new Hindu-Muslim problem in East Bengal and not absolutely questioned Suhrawardy's entire political career. His political career outperformed any other Muslim political leaders in Bengal and indeed in the entirety of Pakistan second only to Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Even though Gandhi had big difference with Suhrawardy regarding the Hindu-Muslim riots in Noakhali and Bihar, he trusted Suhrawardy more than anybody and never lost of a reaching agreement.[5]

After reaching Noakhali, Gandhi had to struggle with, and indeed was disheartened by, one issue. This again had to do with his presence in Noakhali rather than in Bihar. Suhrawardy did not like Mahatma's stance on the communal issues, where Suhrawardy apparently accused him of downplaying the riots in Bihar, where 5000 Muslims perished and exceeded the figure of 200 Hindus in Noakhali.[6] Gandhi saw the problem through Hindu-Muslim rather than number of casualties of the groups. In his entire career, Gandhi had always been unorthodox and took decision on his own way. Contrary to Suhrawardy assertion of Gandhi's bias toward Hindus, Gandhi instead wanted to set an example to the rest of India through his own acceptance as a Hindu by the Muslim community in Noakhali to show how both groups could have co-existed

[5] Gandhi entrusted Suhrawardy with solving the problems in Noakhali. Gandhi said that 'the best men are supposed to be elected by the people' for a public cause. He also insisted that electors should not assume they would not generally make mistakes as he acknowledged that they were also hypocritical and selfish. Gandhi believed that Suhrawardy as the right person to help the Hindus and Muslims out of this situation. Even though they differed in their opinions, Gandhi realized Suhrawardy understood the people and the area and could provide guidance as knowledgeable leader. For Gandhi's idea regarding political leaders, see M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Gujarat: Navajivan Publishing House: 1938), p. 28.

[6] Parvez Rahaman, "Gandhi's sojourn in Noakhali." *The Daily Star*, Oct 3, 2022. https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/in-focus/news/gandhis-sojourn-noakhali-3133786

throughout India before the Partition was enacted. He ventured to Noakhali (17% Hindu) rather than Bihar (14% Muslim) as a test lab where the final trial of nonviolence took place. Finally, the purpose is to understand Suhrawardy and Gandhi and how they acted when both were caught up in an extraordinary situation.

This chapter primarily examines the correspondence between Gandhi and the Muslim League's leaders, especially with Suhrawardy to see how minority questions continued to dominant before and after Partition with the onset of two new nation-states. This began from Noakhali. Their disagreements led to condemnation for both Gandhi's choice to stay in Noakhali along with information about Bihar collected through others. These concepts regarding the best practices or tactics to resolve communal disturbances were, despite the questions of one-sidedness towards Hindus, impartial and focused entirely on accepting and supporting perceived opponents. However, in the wake of Partition, Suhrawardy persuaded Gandhi to combine effort in Calcutta to provide a hope to the Muslims. This study is not concerned with Hindu-Muslim animosity because it has been well and exhaustively written about. Instead, the effect of Gandhi's ideas and suggestion need to be examined: how he set the tone of minority problem from Noakhali to rest of the Indian people while differing with Suhrawardy? Not only did the discussion expose the ongoing struggle between Hindus and Muslims, but it also had lasting impact and changed the ways political leaders in Bengal approached the Hindu-Muslim conflict, as shown with how Suhrawardy had a change of heart about Gandhi's approach.

Backdrop

Historians have largely overlooked Gandhi's visit to Noakhali. Within historical discourse, when the visit is addressed, it has been heavily misconstrued and misinterpreted. However, the scant number of attempts historians have made is confined to simple comprehension of this visit as a mere peace-making trip. Therefore, due to superficial coverage, both academic and individual writers have failed to grasp Gandhi's philosophical message toward the Hindus and Muslims of India. On the other hand, the people who accompanied Gandhi to Noakhali wrote about his visit, but those accounts were given from a general perspective, no historical lens was used.[7] The aim of this research is to provide an argument of Gandhi's Noakhali visit as an ideological address of the Hindu minority problems.

In his essay "Gandhi as Mahatma," Shahid Amin recounted the 'tumultuous welcome' that Gandhi received in Gorakhpur in February 1921. Amin discussed how Gandhi, as an idea, invigorated the peasants' consciousness, and their "obstinate quest for his darshan," the experience of being in Gandhi's presence was indexed by 'fantastic rumors.'[8] Amin situated Gandhi in the rural India circa 1920s, as a man who had the miraculous power to remove all problems, just like working as a panacea. He moreover locates Gandhi's *Pratap,* power or glory in the historical juncture which helped to produce a different image of Gandhi in popular beliefs, and the polysemic word Swaraj or 'Gandhi Swaraj' was perceived by the local peasants' consciousness as a hope which would exempt them from British rents.[9] Amin stated that peasants' "ideas about Gandhi's 'orders' and 'power' were often at variance" and their actions

[7] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1974). Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, 2 volumes (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1956-1958).
[8] Shahid Amin, Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-22 in *Subaltern Studies 3: Writings on south Asian History and Society* (eds). Ranajit Guha. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p 5. See also Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (Columbia University Press, 2012). Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948* (Allen Lane: 2018).
[9] Shahid Amin *Gandhi as Mahatma*, p 51.

derived legitimacy from "the supposed orders of Gandhi."[10] The version of Gandhi that inhabited the cultural zeitgeist of the rural peoples allowed the production of a thread which knitted rural minds togethers in defiance of the incumbent British colonial power. Gandhi's well-received message in Gorakhpur in 1921 contrasts with his initial lack of support from the Noakhali Muslim leaders in 1946 where he was constantly questioned about his relevancy in the area. In Noakhali, Gandhi's visit was not welcomed by a large crowd as opposed to Gorakhpur where a crowd of almost two-hundred thousand people came for the darshan of Gandhi according to Amin. Moving to a Muslim concentrated area in the south-eastern part of Bengal, Gandhi was sailing the boat of non-violence against the wind. It was much more difficult to motivate the people with his message of nonviolence in a place he barely knew, especially one where he was not well-received by Muslim League leaders. However, through this work the community people joined him in thousand numbers.

Suranjan Das noted that "even the League Leaders of Fazlul Huq's stature indulged in a personal vilification campaign against Gandhi." Huq questioned why Gandhi went to Noakhali and how Gandhi's peace could even be tolerated for so long by the Noakhali Muslim because his visit negatively amplified Muslim action in the area. How does the 1946 image of Gandhi survive under constant attack? Das furthermore insisted that Gandhi was compared by Muslim League leaders to "an insect known as *gandhipoka* which emits an odious smell."[11] Not focusing on Gandhi's presence in Noakhali from the perspective of the Indian communal question, Das fails to understand that Gandhi's struggle to bring Hindu-Muslim harmony deserves historical attention: particularly, when he had to work in a very adverse atmosphere. Due to happening

[10] Ibid, p 54.
[11] Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 202.

mere months before the Partition and confronting the historical problem of Hindus and Muslims getting along, Gandhi's guidance in Noakhali deserves more scrutiny than of Mahatma's other public messages.

Many scholars grapple with the historical value of ideas and approach to dealing with riots, and the invaluable messages Gandhi disseminated for the Hindu-Muslim community. Most of the lenses were used to see a simple visit to contain riots and focused on his works in the villages without providing an analytical explanation. Historian Sugata Bose remarks that the cry of outraged women's voices called Gandhi to Noakhali. Bose's Gandhi reading is shallow and fails to situate him within the bigger Hindu-Muslim question.[12] Anwesha Roy largely focuses on Gandhi's peace strategy of walking in the village to provide relief. She, however, notes that if the communal question could have been resolved in Noakhali, then it should have been solved in the rest of India.[13] Neeti Nair writes about Gandhi's tour in the riot-ridden community in Noakhali. She writes, "At his prayer meetings, Gandhi reiterated that he was in Noakhali to do or die; he would either bring peace to Noakhali and save India."[14] Though she briefly mentioned, "Noakhali and Bihar became test cases for Gandhi's experiment in nonviolence," but she did not fully develop Gandhi's ideas of staying in a Muslim concentrated area to set an example for the rest of the Indian people[15] However, I argue it was not Bihar, but Noakhali where his nonviolence was on trial, placing himself in a position to be accepted in the Muslim community. He was given the last opportunity to prevent the riots and perhaps even a chance to repeal the

[12] Sagata Bose, *The Nation as Mother: And Other Visions of Nationhood* in chapter Unity or Partition (Delhi: Penguin, 2017)
[13] Anwesha Roy, *Making Peace, Making Riot: Communalism and Communal Violence, Bengal 1940-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Chapter six.
[14] Neeti Nair, *Hurt Sentiments: Securlarims and Belonging in South Asia* (Harvard University Press: 2023), p. 22.
[15] Ibid. p. 24. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (University of Minnesota Presse, 1993), Chapter four.

Partition. Gandhi's Noakhali sojourn can only be understood through this discussion and difference with not only Muslim League leaders but also with his collaborators' perception, for his followers immediately requested him to transfer the Muslim polices or to create a pocket area in Noakhali so Hindus can find a refuge. However, Gandhi provided a new perspective on how to deescalate from the riots and address the pressing situation peacefully. Noakhali was his return to his early visit in South Africa.

Gandhi, the minority leader: from South Africa to Noakhali

Gandhi's Noakhali visit mirrored his earlier political activism in South Africa. The beginning of Gandhi's mission in South Africa shares the same challenge that he experienced near of the end of his mission in Noakhali: both places elicited huge controversy surrounding his plan from Hindus in the former and from Muslim in the latter visit. Historian Faisal Devji notes one argument advanced by Nathuram Godse, Gandhi's assassin. Devji remarks that just like South Africa Godse saw Gandhi's "concession after concession to its Muslim minority so as to lead a unified nation…. that only exacerbated religious rivalries and finally resulted in the Partition of India."[16] Gandhi was accused of bias towards Hindus in Noakhali. During his first decade in South Africa, most of the people Gandhi worked with were Indian Arabs: an immigrant merchant community from Arabic countries located in the Malabar coastal region of Southwest India, now the Indian state of Kerala, with extensive links of trade between Indian and Arabs. After establishing additional business in South Africa, the British Empire restricted Indian Arabs voting license, their ability to buy land, and their trade regulations. The Indian Muslim community hired Gandhi as a lawyer to fight against the racial discrimination expressed by the

[16] Faisal Devji. *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674068100. p. 41.

white population in legislation and social convention that threatened to engulf their community.[17] In South Africa, Mahatma organized the Indian neighborhood and approached important high rank British as a representative of Indian community. Eventually, the South African government agreed to a compromise with the India community.[18] However, Gandhi was accused of paying disproportionate attention to Arabs by a Colonial born Indians who wrote to the press in 1897:

> The petition sent to the Govt. are mostly signed by Arabs, rather than Hindoos, and Madrasees, or colonial-born Indians…When Mr. Gandhi left India, the promise he made there was, that he would do everything he could on behalf of the Indians in Natal, but I find our Indian barrister (Mr. Gandhi Saheb) doing more for his countrymen (Arabs) than for others. A colonial-born Indian thinks that Mr. Gandhi should help colonial-born Indians more than those who come from India, Natal being their native land.[19]

These South African-born, Indian Hindus inaccurately accused him of being a Muslim leader. However, Gandhi campaigned on the general questions of trade licenses and immigration restrictions that were coincidentally associated with the Muslim community. The situation spiraled, unintentionally breeding a horror of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. In an attempt to avoid being misunderstood, Gandhi immediately asserted that his life was 'devoted to demonstrating that Hindu-Muslim cooperation was an indispensable condition to India's salvation.'[20] The British were trying to divide the Indian community along religious lines, both in India and in South Africa, so it is important to be united. Gandhi insisted on Hindu-Muslim

[17] Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). P. 2.
[18] Ibid. p. 3.
[19] Ibid. p. 9.
[20] Gandhi letter to Ameer Ali on September 6, 1909. https://www.gandhiserve.net/about-mahatma-gandhi/chronologies/chronology-1909/.

cooperation and coexistence. One quotation from Gandhi is quite important because it gives a roadmap of the Indian anticolonial movement.

> India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions lived in it. In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals; but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity, if one for their own interest. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.[21]

In Noakhali, Gandhi again enacted this sentiment by pressing for tolerance among the diverse group regardless of the religious difference. His stay in the Muslims majority community could set an example for Noakhali and for the rest of India. Apart from that, just before the Partition of India, Gandhi had a chance to bridge the Hindu-Muslims difference by visiting Noakhali and living in a Muslim community to imply that Hindus and Muslims must be united. The Noakhali riots became a case study for him through which he would apply his philosophy of nonviolence one more time to stop the mass exodus that he presumed would accelerate like a wildfire. He quite understood impending exodus crisis just after his arrival in Noakhali and started working with the community. Historian Judith Brown remarked regarding South Africa, Gandhi was propelled into action by the pressure of the situation he found himself in. Remembering his experience in South Africa, he took similar actions in Noakhali, deploying his team members in nooks and crannies throughout the villages to dispel fear within Hindu and urged everyone to do their jobs and give aid to the situation. Gandhi was interviewed by a Hindu about the

[21] M.K.Gandhi, *Hind* Swaraj. p. 62-63.

government's support to the hooligans in Noakhali with bayonet, but he shared the experiences of South Africa was also odds due a handful number of Indian community among the overwhelming majority of Europeans and African people. The Indian community, Gandhi pressed, had no arms but the weapon of Satyagraha (the power of truth).[22]

However, despite Noakhali's similarities to South Africa, Gandhi was under significantly more pressure to calm the communal violence in the minority areas due to the imminent British withdrawal. Noakhali was the last chance for Gandhi to not only prove his nonviolence worked but also the moment to avoid the Partition that would reinforce the British Empire's wrong characterization of Hindus and Muslims in India as a community that is different and requires separate space. Though Gandhi was completely misunderstood by Suhrawardy, but Gandhi never rejected Suhrawardy as someone who could help him in this journey as a member of the Muslim community. Through their debate that spilled over into public sphere, I wanted to unravel who Gandhi was in Noakhali and why analyzing that visit is important in comprehending Hindu-Muslim question in an all-Indian perspective. I cannot do so without delving into the pivotal debate between Suhrawardy and Gandhi. Their combined effort eventually navigated the minority situation after Partition.

Why Noakhali not Bihar?

When Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramulllah asked regarding the 35 million Muslims who were going to be left to their fate in the Indian Union, Suhrawardy replied: "I was not an all-Indian leader, I was the leader of the Muslims of Bengal only, and in Pakistan I had envisaged, Bengal would

[22] CWMG, p 03. Volume 93.

have remained an entity and the Muslims would have been in a majority there. They alone were my concern."[23] This was the position Suhrawardy held in the eve of the formation of Pakistan after riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, and Bihar. Suhrawardy had already endured the most venomous insults in connection with the Calcutta riots since, at the time, he was Bengal's Chief Minister and the only person in a position to keep the country's law and order. People thought that he planned and orchestrated the riots in order to pressure the British to comply with the Muslim League's demands, especially leaders from the Congress and Hindu Mahashabha.[24] He was also a staunch advocate for a united Bengal prior to the country's division, but this goal was never achieved since Sir Cyril Radcliffe (1899–1977) drew a line through Bengal's center.[25] In stark contrast to his position prior to the impending creation of Pakistan and the Partition of India, Suhrawardy actively participated in the safety of Muslims in Bihar, which did not fall in his constituencies, and engaged Gandhi in a letter-writing debate about why Mahatma should stay in Noakhali instead of traveling to Bihar, where rioting had significantly targeted Muslims. While attempting to control the rioting in Noakhali, he grew increasingly concerned about the atrocities meted out to the Muslims of Bihari. Gandhi's visit to Noakhali rather than Bihar and his difference with Suhrawardy is rooted in this context. Suhrawardy did not miss any opportunity to argue with Gandhi ranging from his philosophy to visit Noakhali to his indifferent of the Muslim cause in Bihar.

Gandhi's immediate presence during the Noakhali riots in 1946 was questioned by the other Muslim League politicians because Gandhi was seen as sympathetic to Hindus rather than

[23] Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p 59-61.
[24] Manmath Nath Das, *Partition and Independence of India: Inside Story of the Mountbatten Days* (Vision Books, 1982) Chapter three.
[25] Begum Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed,* pp.62-63.

Muslims. Noakhali Muslim League leaders wondered whether his presence in Noakhali was for the Hindu peoples' cause which would downplay the similar problem that Muslims were facing in Bihar, a place sunk by the weight of the riots. His consideration of Noakhali rather than Bihar was viewed as an out-and-out rejection of the Muslim problem—inconsiderate and somewhat indifferent to his fellow Muslims' who were also suffering from communal disturbances. The choice to enter Noakhali situated Gandhi in a place of moral dilemma, which was seen as biased by the Muslim League leaders, especially from the view of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy; Gandhi had not faced this kind of vehement rejection at any point in his life. I argue that this situation made him appear to be a communal character which he constantly rejected by mentioning his presence not as a Hindu but as someone who had felt similar pain—as much as a Muslim did.[26]

The India National Congress increasingly failed to be a party that represented all Indian people regardless of religious affiliations; it had been considered a Hindu party.[27] This perception resonated, indeed rooted itself, in the minds of the Muslim people in Noakhali in a time when riots broke out against Muslim people across India. Not only did the Muslims lose their trust in other Congressional leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru at the time when India was

[26] The Bengali Muslim newspaper published articles on opposing Gandhi's presence in Noakhali. These accounts protested that he was acting as a deterrent to the Hindu-Muslim cordial relationship because it bought discredit upon the League Ministry in Bengal. However, Gandhi replied that his intention was to bring greater unity after two groups had become estranged. If it was done to a satisfactory level, he would no longer prolong his stay. He also insisted that he had no intention to embarrass the League Government in Bengal and other officials, and yet, he personally felt that the work he had undertaken in Noakhali was of the greatest importance for all India. "If he succeeded in his present mission, it was bound to have a profound influence on the future of India, and, if he might be permitted to say so, even on the future peace of the world, for it was to be a test of faith in non-violence." CWMG. p.182-83. To the insistence of the Muslim League leaders, Gandhi argued that he could exercise his person influence effectively from a distance. He also understood if the description that the League had given of Bihar were true, then he must have been misled by the false assurance of his friends. Thus, if he found the League's statements to be accurate, he would leave Noakhali and proceed to Bihar. Gandhi confessed that even what was being said was half true, then the life his in his present body was now over and there was no longer any room for him in the land of the living.

[27] Ayesha Jalal, *The Solo Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: 1985)

about to split, but they also felt indignant at what had happened to the other parts of the India where violence was inflicted on Muslims. If any Congressman could win an iota of trust from the Muslim people in Noakhali, it was none other than Gandhi. Clearly, Gandhi's presence in Noakhali as an attempt to bridge the gap between Hindu and Muslim gap was a far wise decision than any other nationalist leaders could think of. While situating the problem in the orbit of politics and implicitly sidelining religious issues, Gandhi also criticized the Indian National Congress. He said, "Do you not see that they think that the Congress is a purely Hindu body? And do not forget that I have no watertight compartments such as religious, political and other."[28] Now I can show how he addressed Bihar while rooted himself in Noakhali.

Staying in Noakhali, as he constantly pushed on 'to be one' with the Muslims, Gandhi also kept his own eyes to the communal situation in Bihar, and his criticism of Bihari Hindus' behavior justified his physical presence in Noakhali. It is easy to assume that his presence in Noakhali than Bihar does not matter as long as he kept tracking the situation. Gandhi stated,

> Biharis have behaved as cowards. Use your arms well, if you must. Do not ill-use them. Bihar has not used its arms well. If the Biharis wanted to retaliate, they could have gone to Noakhali and died to a man. But for a thousand Hindus to fall upon a handful of Mussalmans—men, women and children —living in their midst is no retaliation but just brutality.[29]

Gandhi's scathing criticism towards Biharis pointed out that inflicting violence on a minority group was an act of cowardice, regardless of religious affiliation; thus, he alternatively condemned the similar violent actions that Muslims undertook in Noakhali. He interchangeably

[28] CWMG, p 25. Volume 93.
[29] CWMG, p 4. Volume 93.

used Bihar and Noakhali when discussing the problem, and expected a reciprocal behavior from the Muslim majority, who had a tightening grip on the power, to protect the Hindu minority. Calling people cowards and defining what constituted an act of cowardice became one of Ghandi's tools for healing the communal problem from both sides. Much of the literature now available about Gandhi's sojourn to Noakhali flows from the typical explanation of Gandhi's mission to stop the riots and violence, which were derived from an assumed mutual hate between the religiously distinct communities. However, hammering the unscrupulous acts of Biharis with his discussion, he indirectly questioned the violence that Muslims perpetrated towards Hindus in Noakhali.

Gandhi's ulterior aim was to be accepted into a Muslim community as a 'Hindu,' where religious problems widened in a more significant way than they ever had before. While walking in the community, Gandhi immediately realized that the Hindus and Muslims entangled in agrarian relationship. He believed that if he could live in a Muslim community as a 'Hindu' rather than Gandhi, it would show the rest of the Indians that Hindus living amongst Muslims would be possible. Whereas, he would not have any difficulty being accepted or trusted in Bihar, where the Hindu majority would have openly welcomed his presence.[30] This defined his preference of Noakhali, which he considered as a testing ground for his non-violence, as a double-edged sword. On the one hand he would test the non-violence policies on a Muslim community which held a religious indignation against Hindus; on the other hand, it would dispel the fear that loomed larger in the Hindus' minds who lived in the Muslim concentrated area.

[30] Gandhi already visited Bihar in 1917 and had a chance to demonstrate the non-violence technique in Champaran. In 1946, he preferred Noakhali to Bihar because he had received many letters concerning Hindu-Muslim relationships. CWMG. P. 4.

Debate: Suhrawardy with Gandhi

Gandhi's correspondence with Suhrawardy revealed that they were diametrically opposed to each other regarding the situation in Bihar and Noakhali. As a chief minister of Bengal, Suhrawardy insisted on the fragile condition of Bihar which made Gandhi's decision to go to Noakhali unnecessary. Moreover, Suhrawardy felt like the communal atmosphere in Noakhali was much better, not requiring Ghandi's presence as a healing or big personality. While acknowledging the problem, Gandhi also wrote to Suhrawardy that the condition in Noakhali was no better, and therefore needed much greater effort to overcome the plight of Hindus who lacked sufficient access to food and protection. A letter Gandhi wrote to Suhrawardy said,

> The refugees here do not get even half their rations and the rice they get is unfit for consumption. They have nothing to cover themselves with during winter. Their houses are damaged, the situation is unsatisfactory.[31]

As Suhrawardy was busy with the 'Pakistan movement' in the years preceding Partition, it was not unusual that he would be more concerned about the Muslims. Therefore, any problems that they faced would ultimately give a blow to his endeavor to bring a new land to Bengali Muslims. Suhrawardy focused on a particular angle of the Hindu-Muslim problem, whereas Gandhi had seen it from a far wider perspective at an all-Indian level. He kept saying, often referencing the Chief of Muslim League Jinnah, that Hindus were supposed to receive the same respect in Pakistan as they would elsewhere; Pakistan cannot be established by force or by throwing away the Hindu community. Here, he stroked the crux of the communal problem, which made an unbridgeable gap between the communities who had lived together for generations. The main

[31] CWMG, p 17.

problem was whether the Hindu minority would be able to live in Pakistan as Muslims could in India. Gandhi insisted that, in Pakistan, Hindus would enjoy the fullest "security of life, property and honor just as the Mussalmans themselves, nay, even greater."[32]

The point that fractured the relationship between Gandhi and Suhrawardy was that they drew upon different aspects of conflict in Noakhali and Bihar respectively. They had challenged each other concerning the issues that pulled them apart. While Gandhi was completely stunned by the rosy picture that Suhrawardy painted of Noakhali, he responded to the chief minister by highlighting the ongoing problems that Hindu refugees were facing—the continuing exodus, people refusing to return to their village, and abducted women who have not all returned. Not only did Gandhi constantly communicate with the local Muslim Leaders, but he also made efforts to convince Suhrawardy that the Government was unable to provide enough protection for people. He remained consistent regarding both communities to open Suhrawardy's eyes to the problem where it was rooted. Gandhi was determined, and was even willing to die, to bring confidence to the community through non-violence, which was going to be rigorously put to the test in Noakhali. Suhrawardy provided official security for Gandhi's protection, which he was thankful for, and Gandhi did not forget to mention that the work was to bring the mutual trust between the communities.

Their accusations of and complaints for each other had been exposed in a letter that Gandhi wrote on December 12, 1946. This letter is important because it shows the heated debated and dissimilarity of their approaches to the riots. Suhrawardy consistently claimed that

[32] CWMG, p 30.

Gandhi's presence in the rural landscape of Noakhali was a biased approach. While asserting himself as sympathetic to both Hindu and Muslim problems, Gandhi answered Suhrawardy's detailed objections of his choosing Noakhali. In responding to the objections from Suhrawardy, wherein he believed Gandhi broke his fast after being misinformed that Bihar returned to normal, he replied by implicating that Suhrawardy did not take the time to read his letters and only quoted them from memory. Gandhi mocked Suhrawardy, who was proud of his memory. Gandhi reproduced the letter again to point out to Suhrawardy why he resumed his normal diet, as the communal problems reduced significantly, if not completely. While not altogether rejecting Suhrawardy's points, Gandhi was loath to reject the witness of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who were previously sent to Bihar to help bring violence under control, when they said the situation was much better contained. Additionally, Gandhi wrote that the Government of Bihar was also working to subside mob fury. Gandhi said to Suhrawardy, "There too you will pardon me, will you not, for not taking your statements as gospel truth."[33] Gandhi also gave assurance that if Suhrawardy's statement was right, Gandhi would need to revise his plan since that statement, if true, would force him to seriously question where he stood. He sharply denounced the callous behavior of Bihari government and the violence of the Bihari Hindus; he believed that it was a bad day for Hindus as they were not behaving as Gandhi would have hoped.

Suhrawardy did not like Gandhi's way of gathering information from Nehru and Prasad. Suhrawardy wrote, "I was a little bit taken aback to read in your letter that having heard something from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Rajendra Prasad you thought that nothing

[33]CWMG, p 174. Vol.93

had taken place in Bihar to justify your presence there."[34] Suhrawardy did not believe Nehru and was strict to his statement about Bihar. Gandhi assured Suhrawardy that he was collecting as much information as he could from those who came to him from Bihar. Gandhi became heartbroken when Suhrawardy wrote "I do not know . . . whether they said that there had been no murders, loot, massacre, rape, abduction, conversion or cruelties of unimaginable bestiality and brutishness." Gandhi was concerned with the phrase "unimaginable bestiality and brutishness."[35] Suhrawardy sent a copy of the Bihari Muslim report to Gandhi to show a different perspective. This report contradicted information sent to Gandhi, including a letter he obtained from Pandit Dhanraj Sharma, who visited Gandhi from Bihar. The Muslim League report, Gandhi believed, failed to provide an impartial lens to the problems of Bihar. Gandhi did not stop there; he proceeded to read the report from the Bihar Provincial which was referenced in the Muslim League report. Previously, he asked Suhrawardy for an impartial commission to investigate the Bihari riots, but Suhrawardy did not reply.

The relationship continued to deteriorate between them, as Suhrawardy claimed that Gandhi failed to address Muslim issues in Bihar. What made Gandhi disappointed were the two big statements made by Suhrawardy; the first being "It is true that it is the Muslims who have suffered in Bihar and not Hindus." Here he was trying to say that if there had been a Hindu cause in Bihar, then Gandhi would have visited earlier. The statement pointed out that Gandhi was someone who was more concerned about Hindus than Muslims. Then Suhrawardy insinuated, in the second statement of note that "therefore, perhaps, your going to Bihar will not have any effect in re-establishing confidence amongst Muslims but the problems are by no means

[34] CWMG, p 175. Vol. 93
[35] CWMG, p 175. Vol. 93.

dissimilar."[36] Gandhi reproduced these sentences in the letter he wrote that was opposing Suhrawardy. In the very letter, Gandhi seemed to be dejected and, once again, claimed that he was not overlooking the Muslim problem while lamenting the fact that Muslims were suffering in Bihar as he had always been. Gandhi's ultimate goal was to rebuild a Hindu and Muslim relationship in Noakhali to the extent that police presence would not be necessary.

Gandhi clearly argued that the distrust that Suhrawardy put forward was simply baseless. Gandhi also deplored the fact that the entire Muslim League administration was working against him and insisted on his leaving. Gandhi could not understand why his presence in Noakhali offended Suhrawardy, and even asked Suhrawardy to watch him closely to help dispel this disbelief. Gandhi made it clear that he would be happy to accept criticism if Suhrawardy found Gandhi's approach to restore confidence to be wrong. He insisted on his endeavoring to dispel the fear that was persistent in Hindus' minds and had no intention to sow dissention between the communities. Suhrawardy had the feeling that the progress of confidence and rehabilitation was finished in Noakhali and thus required no need of Gandhi's presence. However, Gandhi refused to accept that assertion and acted to convince Suhrawardy that he was working for both communities.

Of many conversations between Gandhi and Suhrawardy, one letter that Gandhi wrote on December 24, 1946, deserved special attention since it answered some questions that Suhrawardy raised about Bihar. Apart from the issues that they were posing to each other in a confronting way, the letter revealed how Suhrawardy had given suggestions that Gandhi's place

[36] CWMG, p 175. Vol. 93

was in Bihar rather than in Noakhali. Gandhi extracted some paragraphs of Suhrawardy's letters with the intention of answering them within his understanding of the conditions of Noakhali, and his regular correspondence with Bihar. Suhrawardy complained about an anonymous Hindu young man who hurled firecrackers and fireworks at Muharrum processions, which Gandhi condemned at the very beginning of his specified letter. Suhrawardy also pointed out the condition of Bihar, which he thought Gandhi failed to understand, particularly the behavior of the Hindus who attacked Muslims in that area.

Both firmly believed and implicated that what they said was misunderstood by their counterpart and insisted on their own views. It was true that Suhrawardy did not have first-hand knowledge of events in Noakhali and neither did Gandhi about Bihar, but Gandhi was informed from Nehru's firsthand accounts, whom he trusted.[37] Gandhi was focused on the physical work while Suhrawardy kept complaining about Bihar's condition and Gandhi's presence. Gandhi believed that Suhrawardy overstated the severity of the situation in Bihar. Gandhi was determined to bring the violence under control as early as possible; he believed that overstating something would ultimately exacerbate the situation. Gandhi also accused the Bengali Hindu of the hyperbolic presentation of their vulnerable condition; he firmly believed that their inappropriate treatment of their predicament would make more Bengali Hindu refugees, and nothing would change the situation. While he was in an opposing view with Suhrawardy and his remarks, Gandhi also said he would send a copy of Suhrawardy's complaining letters to the Prime Minister of Bihar for reference.

[37] CWMG, p 108-109.

Gandhi differed with Suhrawardy over some other key issues, particularly in the process of their carrying out the work to fix the communal problem. By involving officials, Gandhi strove to efficiently and practically address issues and formulates solutions without focusing on the bickering. Gandhi demanded effective work rather than laborious work. He wrote that he was reminded of the moment of when he met with Suhrawardy in Faridpur: "If I remember rightly, you were the only one sitting in front of me spinning assiduously, though you were unable to pull an even or fine thread." This implied that even though one could be laborious, they could still fail to be productive; the product demanded on the quality of work. This applies also to Suhrawardy's effort in Noakhali—many efforts and lots of labor but without a premise of success. Gandhi again repeated to Suhrawardy that he should have focused on Bengal and not Bihar because the reports from the Bihari Muslim League did not always hold the truth. He did not forget to mention if Bihari Hindus would not stop their cruelty in whatever form, he would begin to fast in protest. Gandhi believed that Suhrawardy's urges for him to go Bihar would not do any good for the problem, even if Suhrawardy wholeheartedly tried to solve it in Noakhali.

Meanwhile, Suhrawardy threatened to stop the rations for the refugees if they refused to return to their homes. It was Gandhi who argued that it is inhumane to treat refugees this way; pushing people to go home while they are still fearful due to violence is short-sighted and unemphatic. To induce people to return required complete food security as well as warm clothes for winter. However, some people complained that the effort or amount of help offered to rebuild their destroyed houses was still inadequate. Gandhi pressed on that it was the government's responsibility to provide decent habitation to the refugees; if it had failed to do so, then philanthropists would be called forward. He directly questioned Suhrawardy's dealings with the refugees' problems. Without dispelling the fear that occupied the refugees' minds, announcing

the cutting of rations implied irresponsible behavior. Being a Chief Minister of Bengal, Suhrawardy was also guardian to both communities, which included being held accountable for the protection of the Hindu community. It was plausible that one could not single-handedly solve the problem. What Gandhi wanted was a holistic approach and enormous leadership; the problem needed the active involvement of government, so Gandhi requested a responsible minister deployed by Suhrawardy who would solely focus on the public issues. Gandhi believed that an overall approach could handle such a massive task.

Gandhi had to deal with another Muslim League politician named Hamiduddin, who initially was a staunch supporter endorsing Gandhi's work that encompassed Hindus and Muslims together rather than being biased toward Hindus. Gandhi acknowledged and mentioned that Hamiduddin understood the sincerity and usefulness of his presence in Noakhali for both communities. However, Gandhi was taken by surprise when he learned that Hamiduddin abruptly changed his position and wrrote an article in the Bengali Newspaper *Azad* on December 14, 1946. It appeared that Hamiduddin joined other Muslim League politicians such as Suhrawardy who continuously urged Gandhi, indeed advised him, to leave Noakhali and go somewhere else. Thus, Gandhi requested Hamiduddin explain the allegation made in the article or explicate the grounds which made him change his opinion. Gandhi questioned, "How can I test the efficacy and soundness of my ahimsa except in a place where even the loudest proclamations of trust in my professions can be so short-lived as in your case?"[38] He reiterated his relevancy in Noakhali again and reproduced Hamiduddin statement in his response: "In Mr. Gandhi's opinion, the condition in Noakhali is not yet such that Hindus can shoulder the

[38] CWMG, p 198. Vol. 93.

responsibility of returning to their home."[39] Gandhi pressed that Hindus proved deficient in personal courage and reluctant to go back to their homes because the peace committees that were supposed to be established had not yet been organized, and officials had made no effort to observe the situation. He also mentioned that he did not come to East Bengal to hold an inquiry but to make a humble contribution to a lasting and heartfelt peace between Hindus and Muslims. To further clarify, he stated that if he can produce the right atmosphere in Bengal, then the rest of India will follow. This reinforced his conviction that staying in Noakhali to accomplish peace there could be as effective as leaving Noakhali and working in Bihar.

Gandhi wrote to Suhrawardy on December 22 that, "I observe that Bihar is still on your brain," and on December 24 I wish you had Bengal on the brain rather than Bihar. Assume the truth of all that has been said in the Bihar provincial Muslim League's reports. . . . You do not want to satisfy yourself by thanking God for Bengal being as bad as Bihar." Through both of these statements, Gandhi meant that Suhrawardy should focus on Noakhali's issues rather than worrying about Bihar. Moreover, Gandhi questioned the satisfaction with the assumption that every was good in Noakhali and bad in Bihar. Even though Gandhi disagreed with Suhrawardy, he had a huge affection for him. Gandhi said, "if I remember rightly, when I applied to you some distant adjective of affection, you corrected me by saying that you felt as a son to me. I would like to think still that you are the same Shaheed and to feel proud that my son has become Chief Minister of Bengal."[40] The calm tone Gandhi used to convince Suhrawardy that they were on the same journey and any rift between them would bring no good for either Muslims in Bihar or Hindus in Noakhali. Thus, Gandhi affirmed their bond as people and leaders.

[39] CWMG, p 198-199. Vol. 93.
[40] CWMG, p 184. Vol. 93

Gandhi's plan in Noakhali

Before I discuss Gandhi's ideas about Hindu-Muslim relations, I want to shed light on how his idea of nonviolence is discussed in other works. Judith Butler extensively wrote on nonviolence. Butler stated, "To Preserve the Life of the Other," by asking several questions: "What leads any of us to seek to preserve the life of the other…why do we seek to preserve the life of the other?"[41] Butler stresses on the point of people who preserves the lives of those who requires "preserving." She says, "Who belongs to the group who does the "preserving," and who is imagined as having lives in need of "preservation"?[42] This preservation of the "other" group, Butler says, creates a group labeled "vulnerable" which "it gains a status that enables it to make a claim for protection."[43] This categorization essentially creates two groups, vulnerable and invulnerable, where the former is distinctive and can only survived on the obligatory power of latter, who protects them. Categorization creates a social hierarchy. Butler argued that the loss of life would be "marked and lamented, and that this would be true not only of this and that life, but every life."[44] To preserve the "other's" life is a moral duty of humanity, and it would come in a reciprocal way; if I preserve the life of the other, he or she would think in the same way to protect my life. It is in the same vein of equality without social hierarchy of worth that I approach Gandhi's nonviolence.

Gandhi's philosophies of solving Hindu-Muslim violence in Noakhali has recently become a fashionable topic, particularly in the writings of scholars who inundated the post-

[41] CWMG, p 67. Vol. 93.
[42] CWMG, p 69. Vol. 93.
[43] CWMG, p 71. Vol. 93.
[44] CWMG, p 76. Vol. 94.

colonial thought.[45] When the Noakhali riots are examined, Gandhi's philosophies are not often given adequate attention. Much has been written on his 'peace-mission' in the rural corner of the Noakhali's villages, but there are additional stories that need to be told. Nothing would elucidate the implicit message he gave to tackle the communal problems. Therefore, the present concern is to unearth how Gandhi understood the problem and what he professed; in other words, to decode Gandhi's solution to the riots along with his speeches in prayer meetings. It is true that Gandhi had always looked at the communal problem through his non-violence, which would work as a tool to fix the issues in the Hindu-Muslim community. However, it is also evident from his personal conversations that he tried to deal with the situation philosophically, which was much deeper than most historians believe. He problematized the Hindu and Muslim conflicts, which were also entrenched in their understanding of either community.

Gandhi's speeches in prayer meetings have given a fascinating lens to understand how he located the problem within Muslim belief. While claiming himself as someone who was both a servant of the Gods of Hindu and Muslim beliefs, he did not overlook the problem of either community. He said, "The proverbial philosophers' stone is said to turn iron into gold. That is not always desirable. For instance, if all the rails of the railway track were turned into gold by the touch of the stone, the trains would not be able to run over them: you would need iron for the rail, because it is the right material. But the touch of God purifies the soul. That is always desirable."[46] He used the 'philosophers' stone' as a metaphor, which he used to imply the core

[45] To understand Gandhi's ideas on political realism, rather than just mere moral idealist see Karuna Montena. "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence." *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455–70. For understanding Gandhi's ideas on the transformation of the imperial adversary into universal addresses of action. Nazmul S Sultan. "Moral Empire and the Global Meaning of Gandhi's Anti-Imperialism." *The Review of Politics* 84, no. 4 (2022): 545–69.
[46] CWMG, p 17.

problem of the Muslim community. In his sermons, he believed that religious variation was needed for a unilateral and just society. A person or community cannot hold the entire good of the community. It is the process of the social contract, an unending exchange among the people of different religious groups. Therefore, no philosophy or opinion, based on a monomorphic view, would create a viable society. This issue directly connects to the bigger problem of the Muslim community, which he believed would worsen the communal problem and beget hate against 'the other community.' The idea of being a good Muslim seemed to be rooted in converting the non-Muslim to be Muslim; they believed it would save the non-Muslim from the pain and suffering of the 'after life.' Gandhi argued that a monomorphic view is not always desirable but will bring new problems. He understood that the forced conversion of Hindu to Muslim, even though this sparsely happened, was rooted in this paradox.

A notion that seemed to have worked on the Noakhali Muslim was the 'religious sentiment' of Muslim conversion which they believed would work as a philosopher's stone for the rest of the community members belonging to a different religion.[47] Gandhi tried to capture the atmosphere through his philosophic perception and conversations with Noakhali Muslim. The ideal life that Noakhali Muslims believed in during that time was an 'all-inclusive' community, which would work to deter religious diversity. I define 'all-inclusive' to mean that Muslim would convert different religious people into Muslims. However, diversity in a community is much needed to pave the way for a vibrant and thriving society. For example, if in a village all people hold one profession, let's say doctor, the society will not work. A society constitutes multiple components which work together to run itself. In addition, a symbiotic

[47] William K. Wright, "Instinct and Sentiment in Religion" *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan. 1916), 32 pp. 28-44

relationship would only be created if a diverse exchange would take place among the components. On the same token, a community will form out of the diverse religious groups which would give the change to create a reciprocal relationship in the community. While this seems as if the blame lay entirely upon Muslims beliefs, he also disparaged the caste system of Hindu.

Gandhi was against religious intolerance, which was rooted in the Hindu caste system and has practiced in an exclusionary manner; as Akeel Bilgrami writes, "the social psychology of the Hindu caste system consists of an exclusionary attitude. For each caste, there was a lower caste which constituted the other and which was to be excluded from one's way of life, again by the most brutal physical and psychological violence."[48]

Reaching Noakhali on November 7, 1946, Gandhi had heard the condemnation from the Muslim League of his visit to Noakhali; among all of the leaders he specifically mentioned Suhrawardy's name. Rather than complaining or comparing the riots between Noakhali and Bihar like Suhrawardy, Gandhi was more interested in containing it. Again, he said 'I have not come here to excite Hindus against Muslims; all I wanted to do is to bring peace and bridge the gap between communities.' Meanwhile, he started pondering how to solve the problem. He set the conditions of the situation of Noakhali violence through medical science terminology. He compared the riots to an infectious disease, which needed to be cured in the earlier stage, otherwise it would spread in the entire body. He said, "sickness only marks crisis. Convalescence must precede to cure. You see I am a nature-curist."[49] What happened to Noakhali was a disgrace for Islam, and he said we are passing the convalescence stage which may take time to proceed to

[48] Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher." *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) 38 (39), p 4162.
[49] CWMG, p. 2.

the cure state. Gandhi knew that riots or killings had happened in human history, but how to come out from the tempestuous situation was his first priority. He was more concerned that the riots might have extended to the other parts of India where Hindu-Muslim lived together.

Gandhi explained the importance of "fear" which undermined the confidence of Bengali Hindus. He says, "What can I tell you on my silence day? The more I go about in these parts, the more I find that your worst enemy is fear… Till fearlessness is cultivated by the people there will never be any peace in these parts for the Hindus or for the Mussalmans."[50] He was against the Hindus' fear which drove them away from the villages. Fear exaggerates exceedingly and exponentially; it creates mutual distrust and hijacks friendship. Fear was working as a negative factor, which spread quickly. Gandhi suggested discarding the fear from hearts of the Hindus. He also argued that God is on the side of the fearless. Gandhi wanted Hindu refugees, who had feared to return to their homes, to face the problem by themselves; they had to help themselves. Fear undermined their confidence to live with their Muslim neighbors, which incapacitated the Hindu who felt that they were living under constant threat. Fear does nothing for healing, it only exacerbates presumed threat. The Hindu could not be able to live if they were won by fear.

Gandhi seemed to suggest that we must create stories—specifically good stories where they could say Muslim people rescued Hindus from communal dangers— to encourage people to come forward to assist one another. What he noticed about Noakhali was the lack of good stories, such as if a Muslim helps a Hindu, as opposed to stories that recount the violence and deaths of the area. Changing the narratives shared would build community trust. If a Muslim could risk his life for a Hindu, it would set an example for rest of the community. A good story

[50] CWMG, p 40-41.

of community love such as this was needed to change the community understanding, which believed no friendship would happen. Setting an example would bridge the community gap, spread positivity, and would encourage another Bihari Hindu to follow. Nazmul also notes using Gandhi's metaphor, "one drowning person cannot save another, the best one can do is to learn how to swim and set an example for other."[51] If Muslims were considered the beast for Hindus, and conversely, Muslims could make an example risking their life for Hindus, it would also encourage Hindus to come forward to do the same things for Muslims in other places where they constituted minority. Risking life for other communities was needed to dispel the fear. Communities mush learn about how to collectively work for peace.

The Noakhali Hindus came to Gandhi to discuss whether it was practical to go back to villages in Muslim concentrated areas, and if the lack of people had become a problem to support Hindus who wished to return. Gandhi believed that there was no need to have a huge number of people work on the issue. The only thing that the Noakhali residents could do would be to learn how to set an example by embracing the other and just a few people's courage would change the atmosphere. There was no need for the hundreds of thousands of people who flocked to help his cause. Gandhi agreed on a "peace committee," which would give respect and fair security for life and property. He said that of course, Hindus had to learn to return without enough safeguards—if the Hindu people would have installed enough courage, they would not have to depend on anybody but God. He refused to believe that for all problem, the *goondas* (hooligans) were responsible. However, the Hindus had to stop being cowed down. He dealt with the Noakhali riots in a practical manner. It is usual that people would die in wars or in riots. Harkening back to

[51] Nazmul S. Sultan,"Self-Rule and the Problem of Peoplehood in Colonial India." *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 1 (2020), p. 91.

the medical metaphor, to come out from the situation depended on the treatment that was given. Therefore, if a supportive treatment would apply, it would not last long; a specific measure was required to heal the wound. What he meant by this measure was to magnify the courage instead of the fear itself, and therefore abandoning community would be a superficial treatment of the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Around 100 people from Srirampur had come to meet Gandhi; they said they would form a *Rakshi Dal* (Village Protection Groups) which would work to protect Hindus and their causes. Gandhi declined to approve the Protection League since he had uniform experiences that those who set up committees to protect the other by perpetuating violence ended up turning into oppressors themselves.[52] Meanwhile, compliant reached to Gandhi concerning the creation of the Peace Committees members because those Muslim committee members who wanted to join, were the main perpetrators of the riots and claimed that they were not reliable. Later, separate Peace Committees were formed after a conference of thirty representatives of both communities in Ramganj Dak Bungalow. As the Hindu questioned the included Muslim members of Gandhi's committee earlier, this time they had been given choice to select Muslim members whom they felt could be trusted.

However, a controversy appeared pertaining to the Muslim members of the peace committees. Gandhi averred that not many people were needed to work for the community—two good brave men, one from Hindu and one from Mussalman— would be enough for embracing non-violent courage. These two individuals would either melt into the hearts of oppressors or wish to die while standing surety for each village. Nazmul Sultan remarks, "What binds the

[52] CWMG, p 138.

individual with greater entities is their willingness to "perish for the village." Indeed, the "law" that would govern "every villager is that he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village's honor."[53] If the people had the requisite courage, they would depend on none but God and their own strength of spirit for their defense.[54] Therefore, he transformed the idea of 'protector' into *Sevak* or servant of the population willing to die for peace. In Bihar and Bengal people had to be strong and brave. He wanted to touch the hearts of the people who were considered the human monsters; he believed none were beyond redemption and all of India's problems would be solved as a byproduct of Noakhali's success. He addressed the problem from multiple angles and provided diverse views to bring the communal harmony.

One of Gandhi's perspectives was also embedded in Hindus sharing space with their Muslim brothers. He said, "Indeed, I am in search of a League Muslim member who will harbor me in his house as a member of his family."[55] He believed that if he were accepted as a Hindu and allowed to share the house of a Muslim, it would bridge the gap that had emerged. His works in the field level focused on dispelling the idea that Hindus and Muslims would not be able to share space. He believed if one invited another to their place and felt comfortable to share the room, then it would cement their communal friendship. He believed a shadow had occupied and obscured the sky of the Hindu-Muslim's space. He wanted to dispel the darkness by the light of nonviolence. A group of his friends offered to work with him, but he dissuaded them understanding that a group effort might overwhelm rather than assist the work toward peace. Gandhi chose to initiate the process alone until he himself saw the light through the impenetrable darkness.

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[53] Nazmul S. Sultan, *Self-Rule and the Problem*, p. 91.
[54] CWMG, p 66.
[55] CWMG, p 43.

Gandhi was also against the transfer of populations segregating the people along the religious lines, which, he thought, would aggravate the problems because other states would follow the same route. Moreover, in discussion with Nirmal Chandra Chatterji and Debendranath Mukherjee, President and Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, Naren Bose, brother of Suren Bose, Gandhi gave unconditional support to Suhrawardy. These leaders discussed segregating the Hindu population in Noakhali for purposes of safety. However, Gandhi absolutely rejected this division by saying, "Put yourself in Mr. Suhrawardy's shoes; do you think he would favor it, or even the Muslim residents of Noakhali? For it would be interpreted as a preparation for war. But if you believe that this is the only workable scheme, you can go ahead with it."[56] Gandhi disallowed the proposition from Hindus and showed no intention of pursuing those ideas that would separate the communities from one another. Determined to return the people to their villages, he had preached the importance to be a courageous Bengali Hindu. He mentioned previous achievements of Bengali bravery to motivate Hindu to return. Gandhi felt that there was no other way but to return to their homes. Gandhi understood that if the transfer or any sort of separation started anywhere, this method of separation by religious belief would spread to the rest of India. He also asserted that if Pakistan were to be created, it would give the same respect to minority communities; a mass migration of people based on religious belief would mar the true essence of independence.

Suhrawardy and Nehru

[56] CWMG, p 113. Vol. 93

The debate of the Noakhali riots had not been limited to discussion between Gandhi and Suhrawardy. Nehru also was eventually involved. The first prime minister of India, Nehru, visited Bihar and wrote to Suhrawardy. Nehru was not only a credible source of information for Gandhi, but he also had to write Suhrawardy to ensure Congress's rigorous attention about what transpired in Bihar. Gandhi convinced Suhrawardy that he had an eye on Bihar. Nehru, influenced and informed by Gandhi, had written about Bihar's situation to Suhrawardy with the knowledge he possessed. This cooperation was a monumental moment as the politicians were often suspicious of each other. It created an uproar among other political leaders regarding their approach to contain the riots in both Noakhali and Bihar. Suhrawardy was concerned about the tragic news gleaned from multiple sources that reported that Muslims in Bihar, who tried to return to their homes, were being indiscriminately murdered and harassed. Nehru confronted Suhrawardy about his estimations, concerns, and accusations that "From all the reports I have received then and from alternate official sources, I have no reason to believed that the dead exceed 5000. This surely is terrible enough."[57] Nehru further insisted in a contentious tone, "I am quite sure that the Muslim League estimates, usually based on refugees' accounts, are grossly exaggerated."[58] The entire situation was exacerbated because none of the men trusted each other.

However, it is true that the number of casualties was greater in Bihar than in Noakhali. Both the Congress and Muslim League leaders had their own accounts of causalities, often trying to convince others of their vulnerability and making accusations against one another to win the argument regarding the number of Muslims killed and the extent of the violence. For example,

[57] List of the Papers of M.K. Gandhi, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (Pyarelal Collection, XIII). Sub file 22. P-27).
[58] Ibid., p. 28.

Nehru proclaimed that the information given by Suhrawardy was a wholly unbalanced and not based on truth. Suhrawardy had made a similar claim to Gandhi in a letter written on March 1, 1947, where he stated, "the desire to go [Bihar] has arisen because suspicion has been created in my mind that all is not well in Bihar so far as Hindu behavior towards the Muslims of Bihar is concerned. The cause in either cases, in Bihar or in Bengal is identical." In the same letter, he also asserted, "There was consternation among the Hindus yesterday when I announced my intention of immediately proceeding to Bihar."[59] Within the political circumstances and obviously in the shadow of riots, politicians were concerned that their counterparts failed to take matters seriously and often pushed their version of the truth.

Nehru also vehemently attacked the Bihari Muslim League for their treatment of refugees and used them to highlight the cruelty of the Hindus. He also maintained that they did not want refugees and evacuees to receive aid from the government and instead they kept them in unsanitary conditions until an outbreak of cholera forced the Bihari Muslim League to revise their policy. Nehru also reported to Suhrawardy in the same letter, "The impression I gathered was that Behar League was more interested in making political capital than in helping the evacuees to find suitable accommodation etc. That impression has persisted and has been strengthened by subsequent reports."[60] While saying that, he also acknowledged that the argument among the political leaders did not lessen the horror that engulfed Bihar for a week or more. He maintained that the League report and resolutions were exaggerated in their assertations. Nehru was adamant about considering the source of the reports as he did not believe the extent of the atrocities since the reports had potential biases and ulterior motives. Finally, he

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid p. 28.

proposed to create a committee which impartially inquired into the occurrences in Noakhali and Bihar.

Like Suhrawardy, Nehru was not immune in believing the false accounts from the people. The Congress leaders, both local and central, met a number of villagers to investigate the incident and found out that the fire caused Muslim causalities; the estimation from the deaths took a place in Nagarnausa during the afternoon and evening. It was difficult to figure out the precise number of deaths in the area; however, the most conservative estimation was 80 people. And yet, the report that has been examined on the Bihar disturbances stated that the fire and looting might have been done by the Muslim evacuees as they were leaving the villages. While this caused Suhrawardy to further mistrust Gandhi, they had to unite after Partition for the benefit of the Muslims who were left in Calcutta as minorities. This antagonism between Suhrawardy and Gandhi seemed to be evaporated.

Suhrawardy hands Gandhi in Calcutta

The Muslims of Calcutta had no idea exactly what would happen to them because as they would not be included in the newly formed Pakistan. Despite the fact that they had been living in Calcutta for many generations, the city had recently become overrun with animosity towards them, which seemed to be driving them out of the area where they had, for the most part, coexisted peacefully with Hindus. On August 10, 1947, Gandhi made a stopover in Calcutta en route to Noakhali, where he intended to spend the day once India gained freedom. Suhrawardy had arrived in Calcutta on August 12, 1947, and went over to see Gandhi at Sodepur. He said to

Gandhi, “You are needed here. Why are you going to Noakhali? Your place is here?[61] Gandhi replied, “I’m going to Noakhali to be with the Hindus, there has been riots there a little while ago, and they are afraid that now, when there will be a full-fledged League government.” Suhrawardy stressed that, “They will not suffer, I give you my word, but you must stay here.” Gandhi responded, “If I stay here you will have to stay with me, and live as I live.”[62] Both leaders had come to an agreement even though they had been on opposite sides since the beginning of the Noakhali riots.

Suhrawardy camped with Gandhi and consented to stay with him in a run-down home in Beliaghata, one of Calcutta's poorest slums. A Hindu mob gathered outside the home and reportedly attacked Suhrawardy, who stayed there for as long as Gandhi did. Suhrawardy followed Gandhi's example by sleeping on a mat on the floor and eating similar meals. Despite being a gourmet, Suhrawardy had to put up with it. His cousin Shaista Suhrawardy once asked, “How is it going?” Suhrawardy replied, “It’s going fine but the food is awful with making a wry face.”[63] After Partition, all these significant disputes and accusations against Gandhi were dropped, and Suhrawardy stayed in Calcutta despite having almost no official influence in East Bengal. Gandhi maintained that “the Hindus flourished under Moslem sovereigns and Moslems under the Hindu. Each party recognized that mutual fighting was suicidal, and that neither party would abandon its religion by force of arms. Both parties, therefore, decided to live in peace. With the English advent quarrels recommenced.”[64] Gandhi always believed that Hindu and

[61] Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p 65.
[62] Ibid. p. 66.
[63] Ibid. p 67.
[64] M.K.Gandhi, *Indian Home Rule* (Gujarat: Navajivan Publishing House: 1938), p. 64.

Muslim are brothers who fight amongst each other and then make up with each other. Suhrawardy grew more vociferous in his attempts to persuade Muslims to remain in Calcutta and support India by becoming obedient subjects. Moreover, he assuaged the growing concern about Muslim rights by reiterating firmly that the state would protect them and would not abuse Muslims' allegiance to India. Suhrawardy praised Nehru as a leader and requested Muslims to pledge their fidelity to his government not just as mere lip service, but as devoted citizens. To persuade the Indian Muslims to remain in India, he went so far as to glorify Nehru as being a man of exception and mighty stature, possessing of great moral qualities, and capable of commanding admiration and loyalty from all.

Suhrawardy had now reiterated Gandhi's philosophy on Hindu-Muslim migration and delightedly offered homage and tribute to him. He emphasized that Gandhi, the shining beacon in a gloomy world, had made extraordinary efforts for peace and unity to build the magnificent reign of reciprocal friendship, benevolence, toleration, and cooperation. To guide the Muslim community in Calcutta, he asserted that the Muslims in India must strive for unity amongst their communities.[65] The Muslims in India should not expect Pakistan to fight for their rights because the two Dominions were not one community states; instead, they expected their own country to act as a custodian of their rights.

Suhrawardy also employed Gandhi's ideas, used in Noakhali riots, regarding the minority issues in Calcutta. Just a year prior in Noakhali, Gandhi said there should be a mixture of two people one from each community who would be ready to sacrifice their life in protecting against

[65] Arun Ghosh (ed.) *The Moment of Bengal Partition Selections from the Amrita Bazar Patrika 1947-48* (Calcutta: Seribaan: 2010), 73-74.

all kind of communal disturbances. Gandhi discouraged bringing in a large group of people to resolve problems, but instead said that they just needed one Muslim and one Hindu. Thus, a reciprocal behavior emerged out of these two communities to set the example for the rest of India. Along the same line, Suhrawardy said, “If you are just and generous it is bound to evoke a corresponding response everywhere. Can we not urge that we begin from Bengal, where such good feeling has been established between the peoples of the two Bengals.”[66] He also went on, “I am leaving the Punjab’s out for the time being on account of their unsettled condition; but I believe Sind Government could very readily commence by associating representation non-Muslims in its Ministry and setting an example to the rest of the country. If this is done, I think it will certainly expediate the restoration of confidence in the Punjab and will be followed in all provinces of India and Pakistan.”[67]

Suhrawardy mentioned in a conference held at his Calcutta home that he would soon travel to East Bengal on a peace mission in the name of intergroup harmony. In addition to saying that "the Muslims of Indian Union have made India their home and are determined to stay as a loyal citizen," like Gandhi, Suhrawardy implied that he expected East Bengal's Hindu population to adopt a similar attitude of loyalty and determination to East Bengal. He spoke extensively about how Gandhi's views had influenced him as he offered his perspective on the issue of minorities. He says, “Gandhiji, a few days before his assassination told me that it was essential for the peace of India that there should be no disturbances or ill-will or panic in the two Bengals and that the minorities in the two Bengals must stay in their respective homes, that interchange of population must be avoided and people who had migrated from one side to other

[66] Ibid. p. 76.
[67] Ibid. p.76.

must be sent back to their original home."[68] When Gandhi traveled to Noakhali, he shared this concern that if a population exchange or exodus begins at a very small scale, it could ignite instability that will affect all of India.

Suhrawardy also asserted that those who have migrated must return. Minorities should return, no security and future problem would be appeared. He went on to say, "Have courage, you will carve your own security and your own future. An individual can only have a limited scope, but if everywhere men of goodwill were to arise and spontaneously adopted and carry out the suggestions that I am making we shall have gone some distance in achieving our objective."[69] During his 'Goodwill Mission Tour' to East Bengal, Suhrawardy also asked a Hindu leader named Sudhir Roy Chowdhury to speak to the residents of his home district in Jessore. In Suhrawardy's sincerity, Sudhir was persuaded of his "goodwill mission drive." Sudhir also added in his concluding remarks that, "Let us come forward with a clear heart, forgetting the past and do our best to see that peace and harmony is maintained in both the Dominions in the name of humanity and let us be ready to give our lives, if necessary, for this noble cause."[70] Suhrawardy attempted to bring both communities together as the country was divided, not the people. Even though, he made several attempts by tripping both Bengal and Punjab and yet, a mass exodus ensued. East Bengal slowly started to form along the line of unresolved minority question but more importantly the land questions had shaped of Hindu-Muslim relationship in the following years after Partition.

[68] Ibid. p 196.
[69] Ibid. P. 198.
[70] Ibid. p. 211.

Conclusion

The Noakhali riots, preceded by the Calcutta riots, which was accompanied by violence and displacement, brough about a change in the community. This change was the formation of a nation-state of the majority population. But this also left a huge minority people who had not migrated. Riots left an undeniable mark on the Hindu-Muslim relationship and resulted in mass exodus of the minority Hindu from East Bengal. Gandhi immediately understood the relocation of Bengali Hindus to Calcutta was justified due to the sheer fear of disturbances. However, he preferred that rather than relocating to Calcutta, minority instead learn to defend themselves with the help from the neighboring people. He stated even though the riots shattered the communities, the Hindu minority must live side by side with Muslims, and no exodus would happen and in no cases women and children be touched. Regardless of the riots, relocating would only make the situation worse and it would not benefit the communities of India and Pakistan. Hindu and Muslim, for Gandhi, had to rebuild trust and hope. He had been informed about the Noakhali Hindu-Muslim problem in 1939, but he did not respond until 1946 when he visited the area with a mission of fixing communal problems in the Muslim concentrated areas. He also sent Nehru to geal information about Bihari Muslims and went on fasting due to the targeting Muslims by Bihari Hindus.

Even though riots were widespread in India, Gandhi focused on one location to solve the crisis. Gandhi and Suhrawardy had different opinions of how to deal with the situation, however, Gandhi still felt Suhrawardy was the right person to put in charge of dealing with the mass exodus. While they debated the Hindu and Muslim problem, neither of them had stopped

addressing the uncertainty. Gandhi wanted to set an example in Noakhali by brining both communities into one and demonstrate to the rest of the India that Hindus and Muslims can get along. This was the most pressing problem during Partition, and people who had never thought of abandoning their communities were forced to depart. However, the new nation-state inherited a lot of problems from the British colonial rule, particularly with land. The colonial administration had allotted the land to mostly Hindu known as Permanent Settlement in 1793, who would collect revenue from the peasants and held the power of managing it. After Partition, the formation of East Pakistan conflicted with the erstwhile colonial system and enacted laws to abolish the property rights enjoyed by upper-class Hindus. The new country was now ready to take away the land from Hindus through abolishing the zamindari system, which reshaped the minority identity and citizenship. The complex process of making a strong economy had revealed a new process of minority question in the formative years of East Pakistan. Although redistributing the land was necessary in the formative years of East Pakistan, the Hindu landowners felt they were being targeted as minorities. They often resisted this process in the parliament and government had to resort to force.

Chapter 2

The Making of East Pakistan: Property Acts and Minority Question

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored Gandhi's ideas about containing the riots between the Hindus and Muslims, his debate with Muslim leaders, his strategies to restore community trust, as well as his reason for going to Noakhali rather than Bihar. This chapter will discuss the stories of Hindu-Muslim relationships in 1939 that have not yet been explored and tease out the local Hindu-Muslim tension that existed in Noakhali before Partition. This will provide an understanding of the often-complex national political transformation of East Pakistan when the government enacted laws that redefined the Hindu-Muslim relationships. The deteriorating Hindu-Muslim communal problem in Noakhali in 1939 and the land settlement acts after Partition were debated on a national level which showed how Hindu and Muslim parliament members questioned each other's loyalty, engaged in communal disputes, and perceived one another as enemies during the late 1940s and early 1950s. These events will provide idea of the consequent complex relationship between Hindu and Muslims after the formation of the new nation. I argue that the formative years of Pakistan after Partition were a question of property acts that intertwined with long-standing Hindu-Muslim identity politics starting before Partition and shaping the Hindu-Muslim relationship after. The East Pakistan was built through enacting laws that forced the Hindus to negotiate their identity and compromise their freedom of choice.

To uncover this complex narrative, I will begin with a small but essential back story of Noakhali's Hindu-Muslim relationship in 1939, when a riot seemed inevitable. Then, I will

concentrate on the formation of East Pakistan, mainly examining three acts: the East Bengal (Emergency) Requisition of Property Act, 1948; the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act, 1951; and the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. These three acts were discussed and debated between Hindus and Muslims within the parliament. I will use those debates, oral interviews, and records from the Inter-Dominion conference. Finally, I briefly dwell on how the debates over the land acquisition acts spilled over into the public sphere and entangled with the idea of making Pakistan into an Islamic state, along with how Hindus protested them. The discussion will offer ideas on the intellectual and political history of East Pakistan during its formative years. It will also help to comprehend how the Hindu minority identity was contested and negotiated with the new country of East Pakistan when negotiations attempted to uncover if the idea of an Islamic East Pakistan was being developed out of sincere religious conviction or as a political maneuver to undermine the land claims of the Hindu minority.

The zamindari system empowered Hindus with social hierarchy and privilege that allowed them to dominate Muslims through land ownership. This system was the common denominator of various historical conflicts and is the key to understanding the formative years of Pakistan. The Hindus became the landowners of Bengal through the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 which was enacted by the East India Company headed by Governor General Lord Cornwallis. This act enabled educated, upper-class, Bengali Hindus to draw revenue from the peasants who were primarily Muslims in Bengal. After Partition, the Muslim-dominated East Pakistan Government had embodied its sovereign power through acquisitioning the land from Hindu landowners and became the sole authority of the new country. This led to the process of abolition of the zamindari system, permanent settlement. Almost a decade after partition, in

1956, the Zamindari was ended through state-level parliamentary debate and the enactment of a new law known as the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950.

When Pakistan became a reality, it aimed to be a country for all communities regardless of religion, political party, or social class. Following Partition, the vision of this state was clouded by the contrasting opinions about whether to make Pakistan a religious or secular state. Meanwhile, the Hindus realized that non-Muslims would suffer in Pakistan. The Bengali Hindu leaders met the chief minister Khawaja Nazimuddin of East Pakistan to reaffirm their support for the newly formed country. However, Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee, a Hindu, was infuriated in parliament about that how a prominent Muslim politician spoke of creating Pakistan, an Islamic state. Bhattacharjee quoted the account of the Muslim politician in parliament, "I therefore call upon every Muslim man and woman in Pakistan to build up, so that before long it can justify its position as the largest Islamic State in the world."[1] This frightened the Hindu minority for they had no representation in this bold vision. The Bengali Hindus believed when Pakistan was formed the question of communalism had evaporated: no distinction remained between who was Hindu and who was Muslim. However, the rebuilding years of Pakistan had woven into a complex process addressing the minority question and at the same time acquiring land from Hindu landowners.

This chapter will engage with two key historical events—the deteriorating Hindu-Muslim communal problem in Noakhali in 1939 and the land settlement acts after Partition on a national

[1] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, First session, 1948 (Government of East Bengal, 1948), p. 19.

level. It will also provide an understanding of the evolution of Hindu-Muslim politics, which was related to agrarian economy. Let me start with a quote from Joya Chatterji,

> When Curzon partitioned Bengal in 1905, this elicited a storm of protest which forced the government to rescind his decision within six years….
>
> In 1947, Bengal was partitioned again, following horrific clashes between Hindus and Muslims. On this occasion, however hardly a voice was raised in protest. On the contrary, the second and definitive Partition of Bengal was preceded by an organized agitation which demanded the vivisection of the province on the basis of religion.[2]

Joya Chatterji's remarkable clarification rests on the political trajectories of Bengali Hindu bhadralok, respectable people, who, she argues, in less than forty years carved a land for their own, minus the Bengali Muslims. However, the interdependency and intricate relationship of Hindus and Muslims took years to settle or separate from one other and the process cannot be understood without taking into consideration of a brief history of pre-Partition in Noakhali.

Noakhali in the late 1930s

The 1930s was a relatively harmonious decade for both the Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali. Though there were economic and social problems existed, and they confronted each other over several points, ranging from mundane affairs to highly contested areas of boycott, the number of riots was decreasing throughout the 1930s. The closing years of this decade segregated the two religious populations into distinct and antagonistic communal units. Hindus and Muslims faced

[2]Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1.

each other on several points including land issues, but no tension arose in regard to Muslim loyalty to Hindus. To justify this claim, Nazimuddin provided the number of riots in Noakhali during his tenure at the parliament. The number was quite low in compared to years before he came to the power and continued to decrease during his term.

Table 1.1 The Crime Figure of riots of Noakhali, Dinajpur, Bankura, and Bakarganj [3]

Districts	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Noakhali	30	28	20	19	10	21	12
Dinajpur	17	27	16	12	10	17	19
Bankura	8	7	4	7	8	10	14
Bakarganj	94	56	68	83	76	81	90

In Parliament, Nazimuddin provided these figures as compared with those of other districts to argue that Noakhali's situation was better than what had been claimed by Hindu leaders. However, due to the India Act of 1935, Muslims secured the majority seats and formed the government in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937. The Muslims who had accepted the social hierarchy without question now found themselves in a position to reverse the social balance of power. Although riots had lessened in number, the change political power led to a

[3] The Bengal Weekly on January 22, 1940. P. 3.

communal tension in Noakhali. Hindus unwillingness to accept the change in politics that led to a shift in perceived social dynamics aggravated the discourse between the two communities.

"Mahatmaji [Gandhi], it now appears to be a 'wrong without any remedy. By persistent communal propaganda which the Muslim Ministry of Bengal is not checking, the Hindus of Noakhali have become demoralized and many are leaving the Congress to the Hindu Mahasabha. The ladies are in perpetual fear of losing their honor and we are feeling helpless."[4] This excerpt appeared in a letter on September 9th, 1939, from the Hindu Vice-President of Noakhali District Congress Monoranjan Choudhury to Gandhi. This delineated a communal tension in Noakhali between Hindus and Muslims. From the Hindu's point of view, their people were under constant threat by the Muslims who wanted to overthrow the power balance. However, when compared with the Muslims' account, it becomes clear that Choudhry painted a lurid picture of the Hindus' imaginary plight. In the late-1930s, there were no riots in Noakhali due to this problem, and yet, Hindu-Muslim communities fractured because of the skirmishes caused by the constant accusations from Hindus towards Muslims' activities and the gradual risk of Krishak Samities, a peasant organization that protested the Hindus' exploitation of Muslims. Muslims challenged the colonial power structure, and the Hindus found themselves in an unfamiliar predicament. These conflicting parties realized that the sacred power of Hindus was no longer invincible. The Muslims began adamantly voicing their own way of life, indeed, to unshackle the chains of Hindu oppression.

[4] List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p. 2.

The Bengali Muslims' idea of freedom and ownership of land was rooted within the local problematic, unbalanced Hindu-Muslim relations.[5] This was to gain the ownership of land that would bring freedom. The social rift occurred when the British Empire colonized Bengal in the mid-1700s and disrupted the previously balanced power dynamic between them. The Muslims, who the British perceived as backward fools, and the Hindus, which primarily consisted of educated, upper-caste landowners, coexisted together but followed separate rituals and customs. Muslims held a more prominent role before the advent of the British rule, which resulted in the replacement of Muslims officials. Thus, Hindus became the arbitrators and the controllers of society. A brief excerpt from William Wilson Hunter's *Mussalmans of Bengal* gives a poignant picture of their social history:

> The power had virtually passed into British hands after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, but the shadowy figure of the Muslim Emperor continued to remain in the Red Fort of Delhi, and the fiction of his rule was maintained by the meticulous observances of protocol. The Mutiny of 1857, put an end to this game of make-believe, it dealt a shattering blow to the Muslims of India, their pride was humbled, their prestige as ruling class laid in dust. For the Hindus it merely meant a change of masters, for the Muslims it meant becoming the ruled instead of the rulers.[6]

[5] Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha* Rajnitir Ponchash Bochhor (Fifty Years of Politics As I saw it (Khoshroz Kitab Mahal, 2016), p. 147. Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as A Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994). Rajat & Ratna Ray, 'Zamindars and Jotedars: a Study of Rural Politics in Bengal', *Modem Asian Studies*, IX, 1975, pp.100-102. Also Rajat Kanta Ray, The Crisis of Bengal Agriculture, 1820-1927: the Dynamics of Immobility', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, X, 1973, 3, pp. 244-79. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*, (New Delhi 1987), pp. 210-14; Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947. The Land Question*, (Calcutta 1984), pp. 172-80. Humaira Momen, *Muslim politics in Bengal: a study of Krishak Praja Party and the elections of 1937* (Sunny House, 1972).
[6] Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), P. 31.

The Muslim people, the tillers of the land, belonged to the subordinate strata of the social hierarchy dominated by Hindus, the ruling class. The animosity between Hindus and Muslims was rooted in these societal dynamics and grievance accumulated through years of insults and harassment of the former by the latter. While around 98 percent of Muslims were land cultivators, 99 percent of the moneylenders and 90 percent of landowners were Hindus.[7] The following table elucidates the strength of the economic power of Hindus through the number of excise licenses granted to Hindus, Muslims, and others:

Table 2.1. Statement showing the number of excise licenses granted to Hindus, Muslims, and others.[8]

	Hindus	Muslims	other communities
Total Number of licenses belongings to different communities before April 1937	3,932	472	131
Total number of licenses granted to members Of different communities during period April 1937 to December 1939	307	96	14

[7] Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal* (Impex India: New Delhi, 1976), chapter one.
[8] List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III. P. 87

Government date from the period shows, "that out of 188 member of the Excise Licensing Board 100 are Hindus and 71 are Muslims, the remaining 17 belonging to other communities."[9] As landless workers, Muslims lived in abject poverty and were typically unschooled. Their illiteracy left them vulnerable when negotiating and signing contracts or other documents. Muslim peasants did not have the education to read and understand complex legal agreements, and thereby frequently paid much more than they owed. Exploiting these social dynamics benefitted Hindus. To further consolidate their power, the Hindu members of the Council passed the Tenancy Act of 1938, which allowed them to accumulate more power within the region. However, the problematic power hierarchy between Hindus and Muslims was never uneventful. The Krishak Praja Party (KPP), predominantly Muslims, campaigned to abolish the Permanent Settlement. The KPP wanted to abolish it without compensation to the landlords and further argued for Muslim cultivators' property rights over land. Manzur Ahsan notes that the KPP's election manifesto in Dacca in July 1936 contained fourteen points which included lowering land rent and nullifying the landlords' rights.[10] The following paragraphs will trace the history of this party.

In 1929, to protect tenants right, a primarily Muslim peasants' political party, named Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti, was founded with A.K. Fazlul Huq as the president and Maulana Akram Khan as its secretary. In a broader sense, the social uneven condition between Hindu and Muslim foregrounded this organization, not the political leaders themselves. This formed the

[9] Ibid.
[10] Manzur Ahsan, Fazlul Huq & Making of the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act of 1938, *Indian History Congress*, vol. 59 (1998), pp 514-15.

foundation stone of what would later be known as the Krishak Praja Party.[11] The opportunity came to reshape the social construction in the mid-1930s when, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the British provided all Indian provinces the ability to form constitutional assemblies with their own elections. The KPP, led by Fazlul Huq, won thirty-nine seats in the January 1937 Bengal Legislative Assembly, the elections giving Muslims a majority. However, Fazlul Huq failed to satisfy the demand of the peasants to abolish zamindar he had committed to abolish in his political campaign, and, in its place, his administration favored special interest to the landlords. Hence, the rhetoric of political slogan of Huq appeared a mere political tactics to secure votes in the minds of Muslim peasants. Huq was condemned due to his broken promise and the Bengali Muslims turned their faces away from KPP and instead entrusted the Muslim League, the mouthpiece of the Pakistan movement, to navigate them in these turbulent years leading up to Partition. Bengal politics now entered to a stormy phase, and squabbles exploded between Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali and many other parts of Bengal. Historian Azizul Huque insisted that the mere solution of land settlement may not be a 'panacea of all its evil and the chains of intermediaries must be wiped out by stroke of pen' between zamindars and peasants, but I argue it was the abolition of zamindari that would have been economically beneficial for government and its economic uplift.[12] Because, East Pakistan suffered from economic strength and the government had to take revenues out of the landlords jurisdiction. Just before Partition, a charismatic leader was indispensable in the course of the history of East Bengal.

[11] Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as A Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994), Chapter six. See also Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question*, Volume one (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company, 1984).
[12] M. Azizul Huque, *Man Behind the Plough* (Calcutta: The Book Company Ltd, 1939), p. 344.

With the political change, the Bengali Muslims found a leader Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who navigated the idea of political freedom of Bengali Muslims through the next decade.[13] The Muslim peasants dream of self-owned land was encapsulated in Ahmad Kamal's portrayal of Pakistan as "the land of eternal Eid" which draws on a popular Bengali poem of the 1940s.[14] The day would be as eternal Eid, referring to a celebration after the fast, and the nigh would be Shab e-Barat, when Allah descents to the lowest point of heaven closest to his follower's and listens to their prayers to grant them mercy for their sins. This was the time of meteoric political rise of Suhrawardy, who served as the secretary of the Muslim League, a political party centrally spearheaded by Mohammad Ali Jinnah who is considered the father of Pakistan. During this time Suhrawardy, who was originally an Urdu speaking person, attempted to learn Bengali to reach out to the common people, the bastion of his power. As no party succeeded in an absolute majority in the Bengal election, a coalition Ministry was formed between the Muslim League and the KPP, resulting in the passing of six Parliamentary Acts, which eventually curtailed the power of Bengali Hindus and the prerogatives of the zamindars in 1938.[15] The rise of the Muslim Ministry in Bengal created an automatic challenge to the power structure that placed at its pinnacle the Hindus, who exercised the unrestrained dominancy embedded in their status as the moneyed class.

[13] Mohammad H R Talukdar, *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987).
[14] Ahmed Kamal, "A Land of Eternal Eid—Independence, People, and Politics in East Bengal," *Dhaka University Studies*, Part A, 46(1), June 1989. The source of this study was a poem of Golam Mostafa "*Pakistaner Bhatiyali Shongeet*," which was reprinted in Sardar Fazlul Karim, *Pakistan Andolon o Muslim Sahitya*, pp. 162–63. See also for Muslim literary culture, Neilesh Bose, "Purba Pakistan Zindabad: Bengali Visions of Pakistan, 1940–1947," *Modern Asian Studies*, 48(1), 2014, pp. 1–36.
[15] Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p. 39.

While the Muslim government came to power in the central legislature, the translation of this power in the local areas which was drawn from center is quite eye-opening from a historical perspective. The local Muslims believed that they had finally attained a position of economic freedom because Muslim Ministry had acquired a legislative authority based on the turnout of Muslim votes. The Muslim poor, who had previously had no political voice, envisioned taking steps to uplift the impoverished tenants, relieving them of their loans, helping to educate their children, providing them with a chance to acquire land, and most importantly giving young Muslim people an opportunity to holds jobs. This shift in power also implied the ability to confront the Hindus who had held social power which Muslims had not been able to enjoy. The prominent local Muslim figures, like Sarwar, reckoned this as a heralding to recuperate the lost power of Muslims against the Hindus. Golam Sarwar was a Muslim politician and was a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA). He was also from a pir family, a holy family, and locally both Hindus and Muslims went to worship at his family's shrines. Through the religious and political affiliation, he was already an iconic figure for Muslims due to both political and religious reasons. He argued that Muslims were dethroned due to the ascendency of the British in Bengal who were replaced with Hindus. His confronting tone was clear in this statement.

Prior in Bengal, Muslim peasants intermittently confronted the Hindus zamindars' oppressive behaviors and unfair treatment, but this constitutional power enhanced a layer of confidence of the previous fragmented, fragile, and sporadic attempts to curtail power of Hindus. Not only did local leaders like Sarwar wait for the proper timing to defy this behavior, but also, he pulled enough Muslim on his side to work for this collective cause and set to undermine the hitherto power of Hindus. Monoranjan Chowdhury, a Hindu Congress leader, recorded Sarwar's activities and secretly reported to Gandhi that the local Muslim leaders delivered communal speeches, with one of the most notable leaders being Golam Sarwar. In the meetings at Lamchar

in Ramganj thana (police station), Sarwar addressed local issues that were both social and political, which had national implications:

> The headmaster of the local Lamchar H.E. School had given some stripes to a student of class VII of his school for having insulted his class master Kahitish Babu. The student concerned gave out in the village that Babu has rebuked him, and the headmaster has punished him without justification. In course of his speech in this meeting Sarwar referred to that incident, got excited and made ill-attack upon Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus. He described the Hindu Goddesses as "prostitutes" and said—those who offer puja with flowers to such prostitutes, how do they dare rebuke a Mohamadan student calling him "haramjada (bastard)." Continuing he said—it is reported that Kshitish Babu while teaching history lectures about Gandhi and Subhash Bose. Had Kshitish been before me now, I would have pulled him by the ear and asked him where he has gotten the names of Gandhi and Subhash Bose in history? He said that Kshitish would be dragged round the streets with shoes round his neck. He then began to rebuke the headmaster in filthy language and said unless the school authorities beg an apology of him by Thursday, he would affect strikes in the school and will not hesitate to resort to violence for the purpose if necessary.[16]

This quote depicted one of the many events that occurred in Noakhali which indicated a shift in the social dynamic. Muslims were encouraged and felt represented by Sarwar, who had given the first blow to the Hindus stronghold. It revealed a newfound high tension among Hindus. It is important to accurately document quotations and what these prominent leaders have said because it illustrates how oppression is not black and white: there are no clearcut victims nor oppressors. While Muslims had recently gained political power in the central government, which made the

[16] List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p. 2.

local leaders more confident, Hindus still held economic power in local areas, but they were smaller in numbers. The back and forth between these powers swing often resulted in intimidation. The Vice President of Congress in Noakhali, Monoranjan Choudhury encapsulated this tense situation under the title "the Hindu-Moselm relations in the District of Noakhali, Bengal." Choudhury was completely befuddled by how a Muslim local leader dared to boldly challenge Hindus, a community that held the 'sacred power (unquestioned power)' which was deep rooted and consolidated from a position for over 200 years. However, Choudhury also provoked Gandhi to take steps against Sarwar and silence this person who attacked Hindu Goddesses with filthy and, to their culture, extremely disrespectful language. Chaudhury wanted to maintain the status quo that was questioned by the Muslims, which is why he wrote to Gandhi.

In addition, Sarwar said, "oppression will not be confided to the school only but will be extended to the Hindus as well. He will create such a situation so that Headmaster and Kshitish Babu cannot get out in streets."[17] Choudhury also informed Gandhi that at any point Sarwar might harass Kshitish Babu, indicating that this situation could escalate to riots. This letter written to Gandhi further underscored how the Muslims still depended on working Hindu houses; any boycott of products from Hindu owned Bazars would lead to a collapse of the Hindus' financial strength. Their land-based economic power held the entire social structure intact. Muslims tried to gain ownership of the land so that they could have that stable economic power.

[17] Ibid.

It was also shown in the letter that Sarwar had already made mention of not being afraid of police as the present chief Minister of Bengal was a member of Muslim League. To further explain his immense power, he made a Hindu, Mr. Mitra, I.C.S. District Magistrate of Noakhali, a clerk in the Writers' Building because this Hindu had created trouble for him; despite his claims, there was no verification on this statement, so no one actually knows if that happened.[18] Even if it was not true, people believed him which made his rhetoric more effective and his position more powerful. This was a very microlevel political issues amongst Muslims who were struggling to stop Hindu exploitation. This was not an isolated incidence but a moment when Muslims gradually formed a collective identity. Sarwar tried to exert confidence to his people who never sought to venture that far because he needed that public support to maintain a balance between Muslim and Hindu communities. The Muslim community strived to challenge Hindus oppression but could not without a unified communal support. However, with people like Sarwar, they were energized to establish their agency.

For Hindus, they also often used exaggerated rhetoric to suit their purposes or to maintain the status quo. Because they were a smaller number and did not have grassroot support (for exploiting the peasants of the grassroot level), they looked up towards high profile political spearheads, like Gandhi. Choudhury requested Gandhi not to believe Subash Chandra Bose, another neutral Hindu leader, who contested Choudhury's account. To prove his honesty, he also implored Gandhi to trust him as he employed the rhetoric of being a humble worker who left college in 1921 and had been touring round the villages ever since. He eventually mentioned names as a reference to believe him such as Honorable Mr. S.C. Mitra, M.L.C. President Bengal

[18] List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p.7.

Council, Dr. Shamaprasad Mukherjee, and Mr. H.K. Sur, a M.L.A (Member of Legislative Assembly) Noakhali. Local Hindu-Muslim issues delineated how the societies fractured among the communal lines of assumptions that the opposite group was a threat to their own existence.

The situation further worsened in the community, especially with the intensification of assertations by Muslim peasants that some of their rights were contrarily interpreted by Hindus. During the days of the non-cooperation and Khilafat movement of 1920s, some Muslim workers of Noakhali including Pirs, Maulanas, Maulvis, Munshis (all of these people were educated at Islamic schools and locally powerful due to their religious affiliation) joined the congress. However, after the Bardoli decision (the government of Bombay Presidency had raised the tax rate by 30%), they left congress and joined Krishak Samiti that became prominent within the villages because the Samities served as the spokespeople for the peasant Muslims. The Hindu-Muslim tension heightened to the point that local Muslim leaders lambasted the zamindars for their exploitation which Hindus interpreted as a dark force released from the Muslim community to trigger riots. Another prominent leader, Mr. Nurnabi, an I.C.S. and the district magistrate of Noakhali, helped to organize Krisak Samiti in Noakhali. These samiti raised through the *Mustibhiksha* (house to house weekly fistful collection of rice) and the selling of which paid the salary of the Imam, who led prayer in the mosque. However, the Hindus interpreted this as a plot against congress and a policy to fund wrong doers in the community. The samitis also interpreted that the congress would crush the Muhammedans by standing against the interests and success of the Muslim masses.

Sarwar did this because he took up the cause of the Muslim people and was supported by Muslim peasants. Although riots did not immediately happen in Noakhali as a result, the contemporary daily newspaper featured local small-scale Hindu-Muslim conflicts. This was a time when Muslims realized they must regain their natural position in the society, which they had not enjoyed since the ascendence of British power in India. In Noakhali, Muslims primarily engaged in manual labor which included the cultivation of land, gathering wood, plying boats, digging earth, and selling vegetables and milk. The Krisak Samities (peasant organizations) urged laborers, predominantly Muslims, to boycott wealthy Hindu landowners. In addition to withdrawing their labor, Muslims also refused to buy daily necessities from Hindu-owned markets and Muslims started openly selling beef in the markets in defiance of Hindu religious strictures.

The beef-selling notably occurred in bazaars like Raipur, a massive market in East Bengal, Duttapara, Nandigram, Karpara, and Lamchar; such actions deeply offended the Hindu community. This challenged the power structure of the Hindu community. Moreover, the upper-caste Hindu lost support from the lower-castes because they were not allowed to have social interactions with lower-caste Hindus. The impoverished lower-caste Hindus, who showed little sympathy for the upper-caste, were caught between religious sections. Thus, being outside of the political dichotomy and not being as impacted by Muslims, the lower-caste Hindus felt more aligned with the political consideration of the Muslims than of the upper-caste Hindus. Congress leaders communicated to Gandhi that Sarwar, a prominent political figure, held numerous meetings that were characterized as unscrupulous and fanatical and sought to mobilize people towards a Pan-Islamic Movement. Hindus leaders also brought Gandhi's attention to the areas

where Krishak Samiti Programs were negatively challenging the Hindu community. Hindu leaders catalogued a list (the following items have not been verified as true) for which they wanted to draw Gandhi's support:

1. Land belonging to the Hindus middle classes was remaining fallow for want of labor. There was no cultivation and no crop in many places,
2. Hindus were dispossessed from their own lands.
3. Crops of the Hindu middle classes were stealthily cut down off at night.
4. One money lender of the weaver community in Lakshmipur was murdered and burned in his own house before police arrived at the scene.
5. Hindus lawyers and mukterai were boycotted by Muslims clients.
6. False cases were brought against Hindu police officers. They were harassed, and some Hindu police officers were warned to report against Muslims—some were punished, and one police officer was dismissed from service.[19]

This list included the significant allegations brought against the Muslim ministry as well as Krishak Samiti, which the Home Minister, Sir Nazimuddin, debunked with facts and figures. Therefore, the Bengal Assembly debated and ruled against every allegation. The point was important because these allegations and counter-allegations shaped the communal relationship in the years leading up to the Partition. The gap between Hindu and Muslim politicians persisted until the 1946 riots and Partition as they accused one another of causing problems for their respective communities.

[19] List of the Papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p. 8.

In addition, Hindus spread the news of a woman being raped all over India in an effort to mislead the public and create a feeling of distrust against the Bengal Government. But the case took place sometimes in early 1934 or 1935.[20] Hindus brought it to the parliament in 1940. Khaja Nazimuddin refuted it by saying it was caused by a combination of Hindus and Muslims boys who committed this unfortunate crime, for which they were most severely and drastically punished. Both the Hindu and the Muslim boys had already been sentenced to around four years in jail.

The home minister argued that there was no communal due to this problem that ensued recently and indeed this case occurred under a prior government. He stated that the allegations against the Muslim Ministry were largely made to malign, attack, and undermine the Muslim government. To further clear himself, he countered that the account of Das and the news that was published in the paper about Krishak Samities of Noakhali. These Samities had taken up the cause of the poor, oppressed tenants who had been suppressed for generations by the Hindu zamindars and mahajans of Noakhali. He also asserted that the Samities were the most organized, bona fide, and genuine Krishak of Noakhali. While Hindus claimed that Samities were communalists who went against the payment rents and all legal dues, Nazimuddin insisted that this was entire false.[21]

Furthermore, the Home Minister illustrated that Noakhali was a district where the people realized that they needed to stop acts of injustice. Although Samities had taken up the constitutional method of representing their grievances and resisting the illegal exactions, there

[20] Ibid., p. 2.
[21] Report of the Bengal Weekly on January 22, 1940. See the editorial page of 6 and report: Nothing Wrong with Noakhali.

was no evidence that they had resorted to violence or tried to resist the authority of law. Nazimuddin maintained that when the zamindars and mahajans in Noakhali found that they now were unable to oppress and exploit the tenants in the manner in which they used to do in the past that they brought false claims to parliament. The Hindu landlords claimed Krishak Samities were guilty of all kinds of crimes, and the Hindu representatives in the parliament consistently pushed the government to take steps to suppress the Samities.

In the tenure of Muslim Ministry, the Hindu upper class felt that the government challenged the Hindus' legitimate rights and interests. The landowning Hindus protested the ministry by making a joint statement with the entire Hindu community, arguing their rights to rule peasants were no longer possible due to the communal oppression being inflicted on them. Being the inheritors of land, Hindus suddenly found the Muslims to be trespassing, and brought up charges, adding stress over the issues which had never happened before in the local areas. This altering of power dynamics was the moment of change that would impact future relationships between Hindus and Muslims and continued to shape their relationship following the Partition.

This was led by some Muslim pirs who used the term Pan-Islamic Movement of Bengal, a vocabulary that was employed in local politics during the Khalifate Movement in the 1920s. During this late-1930s that a new political landscape formed, which reduced the power of Hindus, and replaced it with that of the Muslims. Furthermore, the Hindu political leaders went so far as to protest that the Muslim ministry changed Bengal to Muslimification. The new Muslim Ministry brought the dormant fears of Hindus into the open. The Hindus were not ready

to accept the new political ascendency of Muslims. Chowdhury Muhammad Ali remarked "If the two communities had been evenly matched in numbers, wealth, education, and influence, it might have been easier to find a solution… Muslims were greatly outdistanced by the Hindus in practically every field of social and economic endeavor, and the Hindus had come to regard this state of inequality as their birthright, due to them by virtue of their superior education, social status, and economic strength."[22] It was true that it could have been easily solved the Hindu-Muslim question if both groups of people became equal. However, if a group's identity is developed in opposition to another group's identity, finding resolution to differences becomes difficult to find common ground for solutions.

Muslims felt massive disappointment towards Hindus and vice versa. Hindu politicians portrayed the Muslim Ministry' inability to contain Muslim communalism against Hindus. C*ommunalism* was a term that had been used in Bengal prior to this, and yet Hindu community had now reinforced this term to explain this Hindu-Muslim power-balance as an unprecedented circumstance of Bengali politics, communalism now came into frequent use, alongside the words 'Muslimification' and 'Pan-Islamic.' In the late-1930s, Hindus began to use these words to blame Muslims for worsening social relations.

Despite the increasingly tense atmosphere, nothing serious occurred in Noakhali until the riots of 1946, when Muslims retaliated against Hindus over the riots against Muslims in Calcutta. Gandhi, along with his follower, Sri Reddipali Satyanarayan, sojourned to Noakhali to heal the communal scars of these riots and tried to stop the massive Hindu exodus. Satyanarayan ended

[22] Chowdhury Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York: 1967), p. 9.

up dedicating his life to promoting Hindu-Muslim unity in Noakhali after Gandhi.[23] However, the parliamentary arguments of abolishing zamindars between the Hindu and Muslims had now erupted. The East Pakistan government positioned its authority of the country onto acquiring the land to become sole authority over landlords. A new course of history unfolded in the formation of East Pakistan.

The formative years of East Pakistan

After a long political impasse, British India was sliced into two: Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. When West Bengal seceded from its eastern part and joined with India, East Bengal inherited many problems ranging from a fragile economy to the loss of industrial centers in West Bengal. This left eastern Bengal to its fate as an economic region primarily based on an agricultural economy. On top of that, the landowners, predominantly Hindus, were still the collectors of the revenues in East Bengal. The government was not sovereign and, therefore, centered its focus on acquiring land to become the unquestioned power of the country. It was only possible with a radical land reformation, which would remove the power from individual landowners to government and, most importantly, would make government sole receivers of revenues. Having been bereft of capital and no proper industrialization, East Bengal had an uphill challenge to craft a new minority-safe country out of nothing. The formation of the new state required a major land reform to be the receiver of all the revenues, which would necessitate the transfer of land ownership from Hindus to peasants to produce surplus food.

[23] Viswa Ranjan Sen & Jharnadhara, eds. Choudhuri. *Noakhalitey Gandhibrater Setubandha: Sri Satyanarayanji*. Calcutta: Sarvodaya Prakashan Samily, 1987.

Before the going into the East Pakistan Government acts after Partition, let me briefly tell the land settlements under British rule. The land was distributed to the individuals (zamindars) through a system which called the Permanent Settlement Act 1793—the British East India Company put into place a land tenure system—a which was headed by Cornwallis, the Government General.[24] This regulation, enforced during the British colonial rule, applied in the regions of West Bengal (now part of India), and East Bengal (Bangladesh), Bihar, and Orissa. Under this system, the East India Company set zamindars or landlords to collect revenues indefinitely—these were mostly Hindus. While the zamindars were obliged to dispatch these dues to the British Government within a specified timeframe. This system mirrored the creation of a landed aristocracy like the one that already existed in Britain. It was an example of how a foreign system adopted on the Indian subcontinent failed to yield the same outcomes.[25] But the land system left an unresolved problem for the new dominions after 1947.

The new country had already inherited a Hindu-Muslim problem from its long anti-colonial movement, which was now more tense than ever, particularly the relationship between the Muslim government and the Hindu minority. Needless to say, Hindus mostly supported the Indian National Congress, a political party which supported the Hindu landowners before Partition. Muslims supported the Muslim League, the party that had served as a vehicle for the ideas of a Muslim home, that became Pakistan. The following paragraphs will provide a brief background knowledge of Hindu-Muslim economic relations in Bengal.

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[24] Sirajul Islam, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal: A Study of its Operation 1970-1819* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1979), Chapter one and two.
[25] Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Duke University Press, 1996).

Shaista Ikramullah noted that Muslims in Bengal had "reached an abysmal depth of backwardness," under British rule.[26] The Muslim peasants of Bengal were relegated to landless laborers when the Permanent Settlement assigned Hindus as the collectors and landowners. This forced them to relinquish the courtly power they enjoyed during the Mughal period. They grieved the fact that they lost their positions and over the treatment by Hindus. Bengali Hindus abused their power over the Muslim peasants and demeaned and treated them as lower-class citizens. Even though there was a class difference between Hindus and Muslims, the British created policies that created and perpetuated Hindu-Muslim divisions to sustain their colonial power.[27] This grief accumulated over the years and was vented through communal violence and class politics between Hindus and Muslims. It culminated in the late-1930s in Noakhali when Golam Sarwar challenged Hindus to beg for an apology because a Hindu school teacher called his Muslim student as *haramjada* (bastard) as discussed earlier. He exploited this circumstance in his favor and drew a huge Muslim gathering. It was not until 1946 when riots broke out in this community led by Sarwar. The Muslims killed Rajendra Lal Roy, a Hindu and the first person of the Hindu community. Throughout my interview, I learned that people in Noakhali still firmly believed that Sarwar, a politician from Muslim league, and Rajendra Lal Roy was the staunch supporter of Hindu Mahasabha. They did not like each other and had always been at daggers down due to the problem of exercising power in the local Hindu-Muslim politics. In addition, the main political parties at center, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League,

[26] Begum Shaista Ikramullah, Huseyn Shaheed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 35.
[27] A. J. Christopher, 'Divide and Rule': The Impress of British Separation Policies,' *Area*. Vol. 20, No. 3 (Sep. 1988), pp. 233-240.

exacerbated the polarization of Hindu and Muslim communities in Noakhali through their local representative.

However, Partition offered an opportunity for the Muslims to make a new country along the line of equality. They sought to take the land in order to make a strong economy for East Pakistan. However, the process spanned more than a few months; it crossed ten years. The state's attitude towards Hindus was to acquire the land with compensation as it happened in India as well. But it conflicted with the Hindu landowners' prerogatives who wanted to stay in East Pakistan without relinquishing their lands to the government. The government was tasked with building a system without erasing Hindu communities because Pakistan was filled with many wealthy Hindus that sought to be represented in the new country alongside Muslims. The government was determined to acquire land, which would essentially make Hindu landowners as an ordinary person. The process of acquiring land was difficult and controversial because Hindus felt being the minority they were subjected to this process of land acquisition. The East Pakistani Parliament discussed, debated, and defined the bill of the land in session after session of parliament to enact a law to abolish permanent settlement, but it failed several times due to the vehement opposition of the Bengali Hindu landowners to specific clauses. Land acquisition was enmeshed with the minority question. They protested that they were exploited for being Hindus and, at the same time, minorities. Hindus were afraid to lose their equal treatment with Muslims because they would be designated as minorities without land.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam and the creator of Pakistan, while addressing the Constitutional Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947, stated that, "We are all citizens and equal citizens of one state (loud applause). We should keep that in front of us as our ideal that in

course of time Hindus will cease to be Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense but in the political sense as citizens of the nation (loud applause)."[28] This indicates how he envisioned the new state which will encompass the identity of both Hindus and Muslims, making the country democratic.

This statement provides us a specific idea of how Pakistan's founder conceptualized the nation and would register its majority and minority citizens within its womb. Nevertheless, when Jinnah passed away, he left a legacy of paradoxical speeches relating to the role of Islam in Pakistan polity, and obviously did not have time to settle the land question. At the Karachi Bar Association he said, "Islamic principles… are as applicable to life today as they were 1,300 years ago."[29] At the opening ceremony of the State Bank of Pakistan he also shared, "An economic system based on true Islamic concept of equality of manhood and social justice."[30] These statements, if taken collectively, were still as much ambiguous as they were puzzling. His claim for political equality between these two groups was not called into question because he framed the future of Pakistan and the minority question in Islamic principles. Though not a clear path, the political idea of Pakistan at least provided some indication of the future of a new country where all communities would enjoy an equal partnership as citizens. Regardless of Jinnah's statement, he envisioned a democratic Pakistan where both communities would transcend their religious identities. He died before the constitution was drafted and did not have a chance to make his thoughts a reality. Following politicians walked away from his principles and tried to impose their own ideas of Pakistan which had immense impact on minority Hindus.

[28] Shamsul Huda Harun, *The Making of the Prime Minister H.S. Suhrawardy: In an Anagram Polity 1947-1958* (The Institute of Liberation Bangabandhu and Bangladesh Studies: 2001), p. 25.
[29] Ibid., p.25.
[30] Ibid.

I will now discuss the process of how East Pakistan was formed by enacting the (Emergency) requisition Property Act 1948, the Evacuees' Property Act 1951, and the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 (abolishing the Zamindari Act). This will provide a roadmap of how Pakistan emerged as a country through acquisitioning houses and land for its administrative and economic purpose. It was a very complex, complicated, and turbulent process. The politicians of Pakistan engrossed themselves in forming the new state, which produced many laws from requisition houses to land reformation; and upper-class Hindus primarily suffered. Dissatisfied with the law, upper-class Hindus did not like the government supporting the requisition laws. This entire process contributed to the wide difference between Hindus on one hand and government on the other, particularly when the former tried to delay, challenge, and finally prolong the acquisition acts installed by the latter. Analyzing these requisition bills chronologically will allow us to understand how this country's foundations were formed. First, we will focus on the East Bengal (Emergency) Requisition of Property Act, 1948.[31]

Following Partition, East Pakistan politicians legislated the East Bengal (Emergency) Requisition of Property Act in 1948 because "an emergency has arisen due to Partition of Bengal which rendered it necessary to provide for special measures for the requisition of property in connection with the administration and development of East Pakistan." The act stemmed from the immediate need for government offices and infrastructure. This new law was applied to the entirety of Pakistan and remained active for twelve years. The administrative development of East Pakistan necessitated this property requisition act to improve towns, ports, construction of

[31] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, June, Second Session, 1948 (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1951).

roads, waterways, and development of commerce. This was essential for community life, and the Provincial Government ordered in writing that requisition was conducted in the interest of the public purpose. The legislation also stated that the properties requisitioned under the act should be compensated; the amount of which shall be determined by the District Magistrate or in an agreement. Therefore, the act empowered government officials to requisition houses in the district areas, which created massive uproar particularly within the Hindu communities. The term 'public purpose' was a flexible term and could easily be exploited by government officials. On top of that, the High Court refused to interfere until the act was unreasonably used. Thus, the District Magistrate were then authorized with determining which properties were requisitioned for public purposes and how much owners would be compensated. Of course, the protest from the Hindu community was instantaneous and centered on certain word use.

On behalf of the Hindu community, Gobindalal Banerjee offered scathing criticism towards the government centered on their irresponsible behavior. He argued that the government promised to provide advantage to the industrialists and appropriated three houses from a Hindu private factory owner and ejected some other people from their homes which reduced them to the status of wandering refugees. In addition, after requisitioning houses, the government paid no rent to the owners and government officials took no accountability. Tafazzal Ali avowed that if Banerjee could bring specific cases as evidence, the government would take action against officials and would not discharge them from their improper behaviors. He also requested the Hindu community rely on the government regarding the process, for their intention was to develop a new state from nothing. Nonetheless, the Hindu community further informed the government to clearly mention the threshold of the power of the officials, who were already given enormous power; and it should be detailed how far they can go. Banerjee also requested an

amendment of the word in clause 3, in line 11, after the word "public" the words "or by private persons" be inserted. This entire conversation exposed the gap between the two groups.

The bill that the Muslim League Government introduced to requisition caused fierce debate between Hindus and Muslims in the parliament. The marginalized Hindus shared their suffering and perceived that they were being treated poorly due to this new emergency requisition act. When the debate of enacting the law took place, aside from focusing on the clauses of the bill, the Hindus tried to explain that the bill discriminated against them and enabled the looting of their homes by local Muslims. This debate in parliament focused on the constant violence that unfolded on the outskirts of the villages. When the law was finally used by government officials, Hindus stressed that these officials misused this act and inflicted violence on minorities which was intentional and embedded in the idea of overthrowing them from their land. Without having the power to stop government officials' harassment, the Hindus turned their attention towards revising the wording within the bill itself. For example, Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee wanted to revise the wording in clause-2, sub-clause (2), in line 2, after the word "property" by inserting the words "residential quarters, places of worship, ground for cremation or burial."[32] This specific wording would protect sacred Hindu locations from being reacquired by the Muslim Government.

The word 'requisition' had given enough ground to the government officials to abuse their power and seize almost a thousand Hindu homes. Muslims houses were also taken, but in smaller numbers since Hindus owned the majority of the property in the urban areas. To

[32] Ibid., p. 63.

elucidate this debate, a Muslim parliament member provided this following table of the houses requisitioned:

Table 3.1 Statement referred to in in reply to the starred question no. 13.

Houses requestioned up to February 15, 1948.[33]

District	Hindus	Muslims	to accommodate Officials	Non officials	forcibly occupied
Dacca	530	214	733	11	nil
Mymensingh	54	11	65	nil	nil
Faridpur	98	14	112	nil	nil
Bakarganj	71	24	95	nil	nil
Chittagong	100	81	179	2	nil
Noakhali	2	nil	2	nil	nil
Tippera	120	18	143	4	nil
Sylhet	59	24	83	nil	nil
Dinajpur	37	1	38	nil	nil
Rangpur	75	1	76	nil	nil
Pabna	70	8	78	nil	nil
Bogra	6	nil	2	4	nil

[33] Assembly Proceeding: *East Bengal Legislative Assembly, Second Session*, June 1948 (East Bengal Government Press, 1951), p. 60

Rajshahi	69	11	80	nil	nil
Jessore	68	17	72	3	nil
Khulna	93	6	93	nil	nil
Kustia	28	2	30	nil	nil
Chittagong Hill Tracts	nil	nil	…	…	…

To argue against the requisition, Ganendra questioned the government at the parliament that some houses in Ward no. 7 were forcibly occupied by some people. He wanted to know whether the District Magistrate would help restore their houses if the owners approached them.[34] The government said they were not aware of the requisitioned. Ganendra then used the word 'people' instead of just Hindu, who suffered from this requisition. In his argument at Parliament, he sought to garner more empathy from the government for both communities than one minority group. However, it was a complex process due to the fact that there was no government establishment before Partition in the area of East Pakistan, so the government had to repurpose for their offices and courts. Hindus asserted that government officials forcefully ousted people while requisitioning houses for their purpose. To argue against government acts which seemed discriminatory to the Hindu community, Ganendra claimed that "the place of worship and cremation ground and burial ground" should be omitted from the clause. He made this claim because this bill had already taken multiple Hindu worship houses in Dacca and would have taken more if not revised. He questioned, "Did it hurt your religious sentiment?"[35] He endured a

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

fierce debate to remove this section out from the bill so that their worship houses would be protected from government appropriation.

From the government side, Tafazzal Ali, a Muslim parliamentarian, opposed this line of argument and held that after the word "property" the words, "residential quarters, places of worship and grounds of cremation of burial" were just merely included. He went on to say that in clause 3 the government had already provided, "that no property used by the public for the purpose of religious worship [graveyard and cremation ground] shall be requisitioned," and that the government does not intend to acquire properties of this nature. To answer the question of requisition of worship places, Ali further made it clear that:

> As far as I know, no public place of worship has been acquired by the Government. If by public place of worship my honorable friend means a particular room or rooms in which deities are kept or in which a Muslim says his prayers, then, Sir, it will be impossible for the Government to acquire either any Hindu house or a Muslim house. If there is a genuine case where a public place of worship has been acquired. I can assure my honorable friend through you, Sir, that the Government will take proper steps to prevent such acquisition of de-requisition a property of this if requisitioned.[36]

Finally, the phrase of the bill was revised so that it was not misinterpreted and used against minorities. Even after that, Government officials often overstepped their duties, harassed educated Hindus, particularly when they searched Hindu houses for owning an allegedly

[36] Ibid., p. 63-64.

unlicensed weapon. Various decisions from the High Court made it clear that the act created opportunities for malpractice among the government officials.[37] The entire policy of requisition revolved around majority and minority issues. Muslim politicians determined to make the country as sovereign as possible which could never happen without control of portions of land already possessed by landowners. The Hindu members of parliament, while ready to give away their land, thought that the government should acquire offices to perform its activities, and they wanted to make sure, as in the case of requisition act that the wording of the 1948 Requisition of Property Bill, should be as transparent as possible. After Pakistan came into being, the government made steps towards enacting bills to build a country which were then vetoed by Hindus that lost their properties. The tension emerged due to the fact that Hindus owned most of the houses in the vicinity of the districts and fell prey to the requisition. At any rate, the government did not stop there and understood that any problems that would arise in the future should be settled in the present. They were determined to gain a strong foothold over the new country and the minorities endured it. It was also true that after Partition many Hindus found little prospect in East Bengal and allowed their houses and businesses to be requisitioned with compensation. They chose to relocate to Calcutta and still filed fake complains through the West Bengal to the East Bengal governments as their houses were unfairly acquired.[38] It is exceedingly difficult to determine which sides were right. The following stage of Hindu minority question with the problem of enacting the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable) Act, 1951.

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[37] Abul Barkat (ed), *An Inquiry into Causes and Consequence of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act: Framework of Realistic Solution* (Dhaka PRIP Trust, 2001). P.19.

[38] Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings, Bundle no. 15 (CR1I-83/50) of March 53. pp. 24-31. This was extract from the booklet "Now or Never" published by the Council for Protection of Rights of Minorities, Calcutta.

Government passed the East Bengal Evacuees Act to protect the Hindu minority properties thought the régime had attempted to address this minority problem from the beginning of the Partition. For instance, in April 1948 the Inter-Dominion Conference held in Calcutta between East and West Bengal decided to set up District Minorities Boards and the idea again resurfaced that same year in the Delhi Conference. The purpose of these Boards was to protect interest of the minorities, remove fear from their minds and inspire confidence in their ability to remain in their local areas within Bengal, and that the grievances of the minorities had been promptly brought to the notice of authorities and satisfactorily dealt with.[39] Nonetheless, the entire scenario had changed due to the Bagerhat-Khulna Riots in February 1950 in East Bengal and the retaliation in Calcutta which is explored in chapter four. The fear induced by these riots of 1950 led to a massive exodus from both sides of the Bengal. This abrupt crisis called for a new policy to protect minorities from being displaced.

To restore the properties and deescalate the tension of minorities on both sides of Bengal, the Delhi Agreement of April 08, 1950, was signed between Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, and Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan. Suggested by the agreement, the East and Bengal Government drew up drafts for setting up an Evacuee Property Management Committee and negotiated with each other to resolve the difference between the two drafts. Both drafts were discussed by the Chief Secretaries Conference in Calcutta, Dacca, and Shillong to find a compromise agreeable to both governments. Finally, after revision on some points, the West Bengal Government turned over the revised document to East Bengal at the August 29-30,

[39] Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings, Bundle. 4. List. 119 (File No. CR I9-490/49) of May 1951. Title: Inter-Dominion Conference of the Provincial Minorities Board.

1950, conference in Dacca.[40] The outcome of this process was the evacuees act in 1951. Nevertheless, this did not alleviate the problem and instead was the beginning of another layer of distrust between both sides of Bengal. Because the riots had occurred before the document was being negotiated, the embedded distrust was not mitigated through the governmental response.

After the riots, almost 1.6 million Hindus left East Bengal and a similar situation happened in West Bengal where a large concentration of Muslims refugees had taken shelter in Park Circus, Calcutta.[41] The main provision of the Delhi Agreement was to restore the confidence of minorities through legal agreements that communal incidents would be treated as a crime against person or properties. In August 1950, East Bengal received a lengthy list of alleged incidents of the requisitioned minority properties from the Government of West Bengal. The orders issued to the East Bengal District Officers for expeditious investigations of alleged communal problems where if a report were found to be true, the miscreants could be punished and if false, the report could be dismissed. The instructions also said, "As crime against women is one of the most potent stimulants of communal passions and is also a favorite theme of the propagandists in the press and elsewhere in Bharat (India), the most stringent and energetic action should be taken to put down this form of crime."[42] Regarding the houses of the refugees, East Bengal accused West Bengal and Assam of not enforcing the law and allowing all Muslim migrant's houses in urban areas and most of the houses and properties in rural areas to be taken by Hindu refugees. Also, East Bengal requested West Bengal ejected persons inhabiting

[40] The entire report of Government of East Bengal. Home political (CR), (File No. CR. 2E-1) of May 1951.
[41] P.N. Luthra, *Rehabilitation* (Publication Division: Government of India, 1972). P. 19.
[42] Government of East Bengal, Express Letter, Dacca August 22, 1950, p. 3. Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings, Bundle. 4. List. 119 (File No. 5P1-24/50) of May 1952. Title: Possession of the houses were restored to the owners and the allegations of assault were false.

unlawfully possessed properties while also instructing its District Magistrates to de-requisition all houses of Hindus.

Regarding evacuees' property, West Bengal accused East Bengal of lying to the District Magistrates. Although the 'East Bengal Evacuee Committee was formed, but they had no office nor even a clerk, and that they had so far held only two preliminary settings.'[43] Due to this act, the East Bengal government started taking over a lot of houses and properties that had technically not been abandoned since a massive number of Hindus temporarily left behind their houses after riots. They also often visited to Calcutta to see relatives or other reasons. Although the law was intended to protect minority property rights, in practice it gave the government in both countries enough power to abuse their authority. Due to the minority population on both sides being victimized by the government of their home country, the minority identity in both countries was reshaped through stripping their rights as citizens. Apart from evacuees' properties problem, the East Bengal Government had been working to repeal the zamindari system. The process enraged a debate in the parliament between Hindu and Muslim, the former to enact the law and the latter protested not to abruptly pass the law.

The Hindu-Muslim relationship further deteriorated due to their arguments around the abolishment of zamindari in parliament as well as the local harassment of minorities by Muslims. To put it into a context, this land system reformation started in 1940 when Bengal Muslim Ministry tried to enact a law and failed. Following Partition, Majibur Rahman, a Muslim, strongly stated in parliament that the system was meant to dissolve before Partition, and he

[43] Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings, Bundle. 4. List. 119 (File No. CR 2E-1/51) of May 1952. The East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act, 1951. P. 152.

questioned how this system had survived, claiming that zamindars sucked the blood of the tenants. Gobindalal Banerjee, a Hindu, argued that, if the government wanted to take the control of the national economy through abolition of the zamindari, they must be efficient and should not be corrupted as the settlement operation was underway.[44] Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan, a Muslim, however, was angry at the government since zamindaris were supposed to be abolished before Partition and still no progress had been made. He decried that these zamindars exploited the tenants, enjoyed a lot of titles from the British government, and drank whiskey all day.[45] Due to this, the peasants were slowly dying because they were working all day and not reaping any of the benefits.

In 1949, Hamidul Huq spoke in parliament and said that the process of abolishment had taken over a decade due to simulated support from the groups of people who would be economically impacted by abolition. He said, "it so happens that all classes, while they go before the public, try to take this attitude that they are for abolition of zamindari, but in parliament, they were not eager because they wanted to retain their power."[46] After Partition, the Pakistani Government was still fragile because of this parliamentary struggle to abolish the zamindari and create a new national economy. They were shackled by their inability to force control over the zamindari because it was important to be transparent and fair, allowing all groups to engage in parliamentary discussion about the bill. The Hindus argued to make sure the law was equal and clearly written for all, regardless of religion so that Hindus would not need to seek help from the majority community or any government officials to feel like equals. This would help them to

[44] Ibid., 63-64.
[45] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, March Session, 1948 (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1948), p. 7.
[46] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, March Session, 1948. P. 8.

regain their equal footing with the Muslims and potentially protect them from being discriminated against.

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950

The land reformation controversy climaxed when the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 was introduced in Parliament to abolish the zamindari system. This law ignited fierce debate between Hindus and Muslims which was exacerbated by the protest from the Hindu politicians, who wished to prolong the abolishment of the zamindari act.[47] I will now discuss this act and the debate around it, as well as the minority problems that stemmed from the political situation that unfolded in East Pakistan after Partition to understand its complicated issues. Historian Neeti Nair argues how Jinnah's inaugural address to the Constitution Assembly of Pakistan where he supported the equality of religious minorities and reinforced that religion, caste, or creed has nothing to do with the business of the State. However, the future leaders misquoted and annotated his words for greater effect to their own purposes and censored the minority, thus taking the idea of Pakistan from its original purposes. She centers around how the idea of Islamic Pakistan relegated and blurred the certitude of safeguards for religious minorities. She pursued the argument of high politics which foregrounded the minority community to be second class citizens in both Pakistan.[48] However, I will follow how controversy was created during the parliamentary debate about the abolishing zamindari act and further sowed the distrust of Hindu and Muslim to each other.

[47] See. Assembly Processing, vol. IV. No. 5. pp. 72-78.
[48] Neeti Nair, Hurt, *Sentiments: Secularism and Belonging in South* Asia.

In 1940, the land reformation was introduced in Bengal Legislative Assembly, but failed to be enacted due to World War II and the Partition. In 1948, the Governor General, Nazimuddin Ahmed, reintroduced the bill to the parliament. It was not approved until May 16, 1950, due to the long divide between Hindus and Muslims. It was officially named as the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950. Following Partition, the Hindu parliamentarians, who were or affiliated with zamindars or, objected some clauses which delayed the proceedings. The Muslims accused Hindus of not being sincere to the law and rather wanted to hold the power and enjoy its revenue. However, the Hindu cabinet members claimed that they were on the same page with the Muslims to enact the law but some of the controversial clauses needed to be revised. Thus, rushing the bill for the enactment will essentially create anomalies and will demonstrate the vindictive spirit of government.

To counter the point of revision, Mr. Sharfuddin Ahmed, a Muslim member of parliament, held that the memories concerning the Land Revenue Commission appointed under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud were still vivid. It happened in 1940.[49] Ahmed also reminded the Hindu parliamentarians that after the recommendations of the commission were adopted, the bill was introduced in the undivided Bengal Assembly in 1947 but due to the Partition of the province it failed to be included in the Statute Book. More importantly, the Muslim League promised in its election manifest that the abolition of zamindari was one of their principal aims.[50] The commission spent ten years investigating the whole question, examined a number of witnesses, recorded the evidence in a number of volumes, and then they submitted a

[49] Report of the Land Revenue Commission of Bengal (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1940).
[50] Assembly Proceeding: *East Bengal Legislative Assembly*, Fourth Session, 1949-50 (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1951), p. 112-16.

long report to abolish the zamindari. The Government accepted the report long before Pakistan was founded. Another infuriated Muslim parliamentarian, Hamiduddin Ahmed asked, "How long had it been taken to implement it if zamindar continued to revise it? Did they not get enough time to review it?[51] This debate was not simply focused on land, but it exposed the accumulated grief that each group had for other involved in many issues. I will come to that issue but let me give a brief account of their disputed points.

Dhirendra Nath Datta, a Hindu parliamentarian, first argued against the bill in the legislative assembly. He detailed how flawed the compensation of the zamindari which would be paid in 40 annual installments after occupying the land. He particularly mentioned sub-clause (2) of clause 35, "The amount of compensation so payable shall be paid in cash or in bonds or partly in cash or partly in bonds. The bonds shall be negotiable and payable in not more than 40 annual installments to the person named therein or his successor-in-interests and shall carry interests at 3 percent per annum with effect from the date of issue."[52] He insisted on expedited payments to the zamindars. He claimed that it was in the state's best interest and any failure by the government in paying the installments would result in compounded interest. The faster, the better. However, one Muslim parliamentarian wanted to make forty annual installments in 40 years without the interest, which Datta found a mockery of the payment plan due to the length of time between installments. The state wanted to buy the zamindari out and it would be the sole authority to collect the revenues instead of those hitherto zamindars. It can be safely assumed that government would pay the installments for longer 40 years to the zamindars with the money that would be generated from land.

[51] Ibid., 79.
[52] Ibid., 75.

The second point he made in regard to Chapter IA which focused on the report that the zamindars had to prepare the legal record of rights. This included the total area and description of the states, taluk, and tenure with respect to the interest generated from the tenants. In addition, tenants' names and addresses were catalogued. If any person failed to comply or provided incorrect information in concern of any estate, taluk, and tenure, he would be liable to a fine imposed by the Revenue Officer. Datta said it was preposterous and was impossible to accomplish by a private zamindar.

The third point he made was on jotedars (rich peasants), who will be able to retain 100 bighas of land or 10 standard bighas of land per head. He argued five standard bighas per head in a family would be the fair quantum, and the maximum quantity of land allowed to be retained should not exceed 100 bighas. Unless this was done, a family consisting of 20 members would be entitled to retain 200 standard bighas. He made this point due to the fact that it would give the opportunity for jotedars to retain more land while being harsh to those who could not retain it. Every point he bought up the parliament solely focused on the interests of zamindars and safeguarding their economic loss. However, the bargaining caused disagreement between the Muslims and Hindus in the parliament for Hindus meticulously dissected each point of the bill to protect zamindars from being affected and avoid passing the bill which allowed them to continue to enjoy their land revenues.

Hamiduddin Ahmed, a Muslim, responded harshly to the zamindars, who were always opposing, tooth and nail, the abolition of the zamindari system. He further vented that, "Why are

they so anxious to retain their power? Why are they so anxious not to allow even by legislation the taking away of the right of their zamindari even after payment of compensation. Their interest is so much linked up with the zamindari system that they cannot easily or willingly give up that right."[53] He blamed this on zamindars taking residence in Calcutta and thus hardly knew what people demanded. A special committee was formed to make recommendations to the House for giving some sort of compensation to the zamindars once the land was taken over.

Ahmed also accused Mullick, a Hindu, of making an "unholy alliance with the zamindars" and questioning specific clauses before the house in order to delay the passing of this important piece of legislation. Mullick claimed that the Bill would be passed in haste, but Ahmed doubted his claim since the initiation of the abolition of zamindari system had begun a decade before, sarcastically asking, "Did they not find enough time to make representations against the measure?" He noted that Mullick was a minister of undivided Bengal when the British government appointed the Floud Commission to examine the land tenure system, spurring the beginning of the zamindari abolition. Ahmed maintained that zamindars manipulated the law and delayed the process by routinely calling for reevaluation of its financial implications. Ahmed ridiculed Hindus by questioning, "how many occasions will they come before the House" with the suggestion to examine the financial aspect over and over again. Ahmed also pressed Dhar, another Hindu affiliated with the Congress, a party opposed to the creation of Pakistan.

In summation, it can be safely argued that the zamindars wanted to prolong the abolition in the hope that the Partition may not last, sparing them from having to give up their land. The

[53] Ibid., 78.

zamindars were at risk of losing income once they let go of their land, so they were reluctant to support the law. Paradoxically, the idea of Pakistan was built on the abolishment of the zamindari. The Muslim government was not ready to wait any longer. This led to a disagreement between Hindus and Muslims, not only related to land but also various other concerns that added pressure against those in favor of passing the law. After Partition, Hindus wanted to be part of the new country and contribute to the creation of a new state, but the zamindars were not ready to give their land over to the government to support the economy.

Even though certain clauses within the Bill affected Hindus' economic power, discussion was not limited to the readjustment of such; land related debate and arguments spilled over to the areas of Hindu-Muslim relationships where they blamed each other for their indifference to their own suffering. For example, while Hindus maintained that through making a new country Muslim officials put disproportionate economic burdens on Hindus. Muslims retorted this by insisting that Hindus were not ready to relax their power over the land and wanted to destabilize the country. The Muslim government wanted to establish sovereignty over the region through controlling the whole country, which was not possible if Hindus still held the ownership of the land. A dark cloud of distrust permeated the Hindu-Muslim communities and complicated coexistence in an area where they had previously lived peacefully for generations. The politicians of both communities agreed to rescind the zamindari; however, Hindus continued to caution against rushing the Bill, because the clauses unjustifiably impacted their economic and social status and would be a detriment to the country's economy. It was also true that some clauses of the bill were not expressed well, but the Muslim parliamentarians were not ready to wait longer for the abolishment of the zamindari since they felt it had hampered their economic

development. Hindu politicians raised the issue of harassment incidents against minorities in scattered parts of the country in the parliament. They seemed to have believed that the Muslim League Government employed the tactic of harassing Hindus in order to send a message and to overthrow the zamindari as quickly as possible. Despite this, Muslim parliamentarians asserted that they worked to establish a strong Pakistan. Abdus Sabur Khan, a Muslim member of the parliament from Khulna, stated:

> By the virtue of Radcliffe's Award, we have been driven out from a capital like Calcutta to place like Raman, to construct capital over there. Most of our district headquarters are not connected without capital and most of the subdivisions are more or less so many isolated units. Particularly speaking, Sir, there was a time when the capital or the head of the administration, could not get any effective control over the outside elements or others component parts of the province. Very frankly speaking, for these days I had to issue orders to the Civil Supplies Officers and to the police on various occasions, in the name of the State of Pakistan. The situation, sir, was brought about by virtue of the Radcliffe's Award and no responsible officers was available in the district headquarters at that time.[54]

Two perspectives were prevalent at this time. First, this statement laid out the problem that the government faced; they were not efficient enough to assist the Hindu minorities. Though East Pakistan was a country, it was not very organized because it was young and lacked a capital and officials. It is hard to pinpoint exactly how the government intended to address the minorities' daily problems and oppressions from a distance. The entire country was un-integrated which

[54] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, First session, 1948 (Government of East Bengal, 1948). P. 27.

hindered the ability for administrative forces to reach local areas where civil disturbances and minority harassment emerged. However, the Hindu's argued a second perspective that, despite lacking resources, the officials still conducted searches within the homes of minorities to collect guns. A member of parliament from the Hindu community, Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee, accused government officials of harassing Hindus while they searched their houses which he argued revealed the weaknesses of the current government. The Muslims and Hindus reached another stalemate, as the Muslims believed that they lacked resources to help minorities and the Hindus pointed out they still managed to find enough resources to search their houses.

While the debate was at its peak in the parliament, Israil, a Muslim parliament member, infuriated that minorities should show their love towards this new state through more than lip service.[55] Responding to the minority issue of East Pakistan, he said that the Muslims departed from Calcutta and were forced to abandon houses and came to East Pakistan empty handed. He brought up a case in the United Provinces in India, where a Hindu politician named, Gobind Balleb from the United Province, India asked Indian Muslims to show their love to India by working for the country. Thereby, Israil suggested that Hindus should do the same in Pakistan. East Pakistan also experienced extreme chaos; minorities were threatened and departed; arsons and dacoities increased which led to panic and insecurity. On top of that, the government moved on with passing the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950, a big blow for the zamindars and their heirs.

[55] Ibid., p.23.

According to the act of 1950, the cultivators were granted permanent and transferable tenancy rights. This also gave the ryots (peasants) rights to occupy land in East Bengal. From then on, the cultivators could work their land as they liked. However, the zamindars collectively sought to challenge the bill before it could become law. They writ it in the High Court. Even though the law was passed in 1950, it took time to implement it due to the election of 1954. The zamindars, 83 in total, challenged the reformation ordinance and Acquisition Act on April 2, 1956.[56] This went to court to postpone the law into effect until the next hearing occurred. The hearing was finally held on April 13, 1956. Chief Justice Amin Uddin Ahmed and Justice Hasan issued a directive not to requisition the land of Zamindars. The last hearing happened on June 11, 1956, and the verdict was given on August 7, 1956. The final judgment was in favor of the government. The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 became law and provided the government with the power to acquire the zamindars' land.

In addition, Hindu leaders met the Muslim prime minister to discuss whether their rights would be protected by the government following Partition. They checked whether they would be able to live as equal citizens. The Government assured them that it would maintain minority rights, but as the time passed, it turned out to be a different scenario from Hindus' perspectives. Immediately following Partition, during a parliamentary session and in a point of order, the Hindu parliamentarian named Dr. Pratap Chandra Guha Ray insisted that chaos and disorder had taken over the administration, which required a quick response from the government. He reiterated that the Hindus would wholly confer their support and approval for the prosperity and success of Pakistan, using their energy, labor, and finally accepting her as their own country. He

[56] The Daily Ittefaq, 14, 15 April 1956. And also see Ittefaq on 12 and 15 June, and 8 August, 1956.

likewise asserted that the Hindu community had a 'just right' to live in Pakistan (their birthplace) and they also were dedicated and struggled to rid the region of British rule.[57] The people gave their blood just to extricate themselves from the imperial shackles of Britain. While they fought against colonial rule, nobody planned on what government would replace the British. Throughout the debate, the Hindu politicians appealed to the Muslim Government about their vulnerability which stemmed from the fact they were now a minority. Their demand for security was discussed and they even had to confess their love for the country. They were suspected of being traitors who worked to undermine Pakistan. The government, as Hindus claimed, were in fear and sunk in danger due to the surge of communal harassment, occupying Hindus' land through the government requisition act, robbing the houses in the villages, and so on.

Dr. Guha Ray raised the issue of the infringement of civil rights of minority citizens to his question about whether Hindus would be able to be equal to their Muslim counterparts. While inserting his opinion in the parliament, he touched on issues ranging from the insurmountable anti-colonial struggle to the current oppression and pain inflicted upon the minority community. The Hindu minority saw a bleak future in East Pakistan, being targeted from the administration and forced to depart the country. Despite this, Dr. Ray also made clear the unflinching support and sacrifice the minority was ready to make for the success and the prosperity of East Pakistan. Dr. Roy, as a leader of the Hindu minority group, reinforced this promise during this meeting with the prime minister immediately after Pakistan came into being. In asserting Hindu minority struggles, he brought up the surge of incidences of theft and also pointed his finger to the Subdivision of officers (S.D.O.). They were raising a 'Jinnah Fund' with coercive action and

[57] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, First session, 1948 (Government of East Bengal, 1948), p. 5.

with no receipts being issued whatsoever. One of his demands, he said, was that the government investigate the reasons for the minority exodus. He demanded an answer to the reasons for the requisition of houses owned by minorities. However, Nazimuddin opposed this line of argument by saying that "every instance of theft is made into a question of oppression to the minority by the Muslims." He also held that "there is no country in the world where there is no crime."[58]

However, the Muslim parliamentarians argued that the big question was about sustaining Pakistan. They thought this state was not immune to a hard blow, perhaps afraid of the country's collapse and reunion with India. This incredibly difficult task of putting Pakistan together made it tough for the government who had to work to concentrate the power of the new country in its hands. Making a country through abolishing zamindari was Pakistan's first priority which would give economic stability and devolve the power to the state rather than zamindars. In doing this, the people and their minority problem became less important than the major issue surrounding land and building a new state. The development of state, as Majibur Rahman argued in the parliament, required securing land from the landowners, which was a continuous process running as early as 1940 when Bengal was united. And yet, right after Partition, to acquire land was still a process that would make the economy stable. As the proceeding of abolishing zamindari unfolded in the parliamentary debate, the League accused that the Hindu were the complete opposite to the spirit of Pakistan; if a state did not have enough sovereign power, Hindus held the land and befooled the government by pretending to be loyal to Pakistan and, most importantly, hurting the youth who were suffering from job crisis at the hands of zamindars, the controllers of the economy. To abolish the zamindari would empower the government which could make a

[58] Ibid., P. 44.

viable job market for the unemployed youth. The debate over abolishing zamindari also spilled over into the areas of recurrent riots and how Hindus failed to get enough support and commitment from the government.

Islamic State

The Hindu zamindars, while debating in the parliament about abolishing the zamindari system, were also frightened by the communal overtones of the idea of an Islamic state. A Muslim parliament member often addressed the masses by stating that he wanted Pakistan to an Islamic state.[59] Jinnah declared that Pakistan would be a democratic State based on Islamic principles of social justice, where the legitimate interests of minorities (including religious and cultural interests) should be safeguarded, and all fundamental human rights should be guaranteed. After Partition, Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee protested by stating that, according to Jinnah, "the Muslims by word, deed, and through will make sure no oppression is done to the minority."[60] He also mocked Nazimuddin's statement that said, "Pakistan is not the State of Muslim alone, it belongs to the peoples and communities who live in it."[61] Whatever the idea behind the movement of Pakistan, just after the Partition the Muslim League affirmed that "the government of Pakistan will give the fairest deal to all minority communities and give them every opportunity and facility not only to live with peace and honor but to have full share in the development of the State."[62]

[59] Ibid., pp. 6-10.
[60] Ibid., 21
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

However, Muslim parliament members often stated the duty of only Muslims to rebuild Pakistan, which made no mention of minorities. Things worsened once the Muslim Prime Minister declared that "A true Muslim never forgets his duty…. To us has been entrusted by Providence of Tremendous task of creating and maintaining a flourishing state."[63] According to the minister, the responsibility of making a flourishing state was the responsibility of the Muslim majority. The circumstances were if the minorities were not allowed to help create the state and discouraged them from being involved in it, then there would be no place for them in the country. To add an insult to injury, the minorities who did not belong to Islam were completely ignored at a time when the minority needed more affirmation of their existence within the state. Bhattacharjee also asserted on a Muslim parliament member named Abdur Rab's explanation of the Islamic State: An Islamic State was a State where equality between man and man, toleration, and social justice were strictly maintained. Bhattacharjee insisted on a democratic explanation of Pakistan, which would ensure the rights and privileges of minority communities living in Pakistan instead of Islamic definition. His points stemmed from the fact that the government had already acquired many minority properties. The government explained obtaining it.

When Pakistan became a reality, it required an extensive requisition of buildings for a nation-state to perform bureaucratic activities. No state was in place before Partition, no bureaucratic offices existed, and no banks or other public institutions were established. This made it difficult to form a country and execute its work due to the lack of government offices. Furthermore, when Pakistan was about to form in the north-east side of India, Hindu government officials opted out to serve India. Following Partition, the government started requisitioning

[63] Ibid.

houses to set up their offices and ended up taking away the Hindu community's houses. However, as the Muslim parliamentarian Israil noted not only were the Hindu houses appropriated by the government, but Muslim houses were also seized.[64] Since there were more Hindus who lived in cities and could afford homes, their houses were more often requestioned than Muslims'.

Along with the houses, the government officials often disturbed the minority community, which Hindus brought up in the parliamentary debate. Israil denied these allegations from Hindu parliamentarians but agreed that the oppression of minorities was a concern. To address the minority community, he mentioned that the police had arrested young Muslims who were involved in minority harassment, and they brutally whipped them at the police station.

Conclusion:

The formative years of Pakistan, as a new territorial expression for Muslims, were filled with a lot of uncertainties and debate between Hindus and Muslims, which started in the late 1930s. When Gandhi was assassinated, his successor, Suhrawardy, tried to carry out the daunting task of instilling peace in the Hindu-Muslim local community in Noakhali—an effort undertaken by Gandhi himself during the Noakhali riots. The government tried to address the problem of the Hindu exodus and assured them of safety and security. But it complicated the situation with its new policies taken in forming the country marginalized Hindus. Following Partition, Hindus and Muslims coexisted together in the fledging country of East Pakistan where minorities' identities

[64] Assembly Proceedings Official Report: East Bengal Legislative Assembly, First session, 1948 (Government of East Bengal, 1948), p. 23.

were contested, suspected, and tangled up in political discourse. The question of Hindu minorities' safety was a pressing issue as it emerged right after the territorial Partitioning of Muslim minorities across India. The problem initially began as suspicions between Hindu and Muslim politicians, with Muslims accusing Hindus of destabilizing the country and Hindus charging Muslims who tried oppressing them. The entire issue peaked before and during the parliamentary debate on the enactment of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. The Zamindari abolition law was enacted almost a decade after the Partition. These culminated events led Hindus to depart the country. The problem of citizenship and identity for Hindus was irreconcilable with the idea of Pakistan as an Islamic State, whose inability, perhaps, unwillingness to safeguard the rights of Hindus coincided with its determination to end the zamindari system and dispossess Hindus of their land. Although Hindu minorities had to negotiate their identities in East Pakistan, the local level Hindu-Muslim relationship continued from both sides of Bengal.

Chapter 3

Jogendra's Properties in Noakhali: Displacement and the Death of Hope

When British withdrew their power from India in 1947, the subcontinent was divided into two independent nation states, India and Pakistan, conceived along religious majority lines. Following Partition and the ensuing sectarian violence, a mass exodus transpired: around 15 million people fled the right 'nation' and between one to three million people died.[1] The Partition of India entailed the split of the province of Bengal. The eastern part of Bengal became East Pakistan, established as a Muslim-majority state, while the western part of Bengal was absorbed into India. There was sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims in the border provinces of Punjab, in the northwest part of India, and Bengal. As a result of this violence and the thought of further escalation, Bengali Hindus living in Noakhali, East Bengal departed to Calcutta because they feared the massive violence in Punjab would also occur in Bengal.[2] However, their connection to their ancestral homes was not untethered. They still hoped to return to their abandoned properties.[3] I argue that their hope of return home died when the 'East Bengal State

[1] Nilanjana Chatterjee, "The East Bengal Refugees a Lesson in Survival," in *Calcutta: The Living City, Volume II: The Present and Future,* ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 70-71. Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The refugees and the Left Politics Syndrome in West Bengal* (Calcutta: Naya Udyog, 1999). See also, *Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Decolonization in South Asia: Meaning of freedom in post-independence West Bengal, 1947-52* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) Chapter 1.

[2] Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998). See also Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Duke University Press, 2000). Arun Ghosh, *The Moments of Bengal Partition: Selection from the Amrita Bazar Patrika 1947-1948* (Calcutta: Seribann Publication, 2010), pp. 34-35. Ghosh notes that the migration was escalated by the fear of the honor of their women, who felt unsafe under the Government of East Bengal.

[3] A sense of Bengali Hindus' nostalgia for their villages in East Bengal was captured by a displaced Bengali Hindu named Dakshinaranjan Basu, who wrote several essays for the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar*, which were later collected and compiled into a book called *Chere Asha Gram* ('The Abandoned Village'). See, Dakshinaranjan Basu, *Chere Asha Gram (The Abandon Village),* (Calcutta: Popular Library: 1972). Those essays delineated the Bengali Hindu memories of the idyllic and sacred villages in East Bengal where Hindus grew up with Muslim neighbors from whom they were separated, willingly or unwillingly, due to Partition violence. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay notes that the lower-middle class had been affected by the economic situation, which was marked by the high prices of rice and other necessities of life. It led to the massive exodus of Bengali Hindus to West Bengal. *Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Decolonization in South Asia* p. 37.

Acquisitions and Tenancy Act of 1950 was enacted. For Bengali Hindus, the act, which permitted the acquisition of their landed properties in 1956, marked the real Partition. To prove this, the following research will provide general background information on Partition and the nostalgic significance of the concept of 'home' within Bengali identity. Then the next sections will provide an idea of how the Bengali remembered Noakhali and the epistolic rhetoric between Indian and East Pakistani officials regarding the alleged forcible occupation of homes and properties. Finally, the interpretation will discuss a series of letters exchanged between a displaced Hindu landowner, Jogendra from Calcutta, and his Muslim neighbor, Oli Mia from Noakhali, as they communicated across the divided Bengal. The letters, which I discovered, add another piece to the puzzle by offering an account of friendly, neighborly, and sometimes tense relationships that were exhibited between Hindus and Muslims. This is important because it questions the grand narrative of the political parties which argues India was a country of two forever feuding factions.

Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote about Bengali Hindus' remembrance, nostalgia, and sentiment that revolved around native villages, pictured as both sacred and beautiful based on *Chere Asha Gram* ('The Abandoned Village') published in 1970.[4] Following Partition, Chakrabarty quotes, "For eons we have lived next to them (Muslims) sharing each other's happiness and suffering, but did they feel the slightest bit of sadness in lettering us go? …no Musalman neighbor told us not to go, the day we, driven by the need to save our honor and life and with no fixed destination,

[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 32, 1996, pp. 2143-45. See also Anasua Basu Raychaudhury, 'Nostalgia of 'Desh', Memories of Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 39, no. 52, 2004, pp. 5653-5660.

left for ever the sacred land."[5] Chakrabarty's sources centre the Bengali Hindus' narratives, which were shared to garner Calcutta natives' sympathy and acceptance towards East Bengali refugees in Calcutta. In doing this, they blamed Muslims for their adversity. However, the Muslim voices were missing in those essays. These stories are true, but they are nonetheless one-sided and stained by the bitterness of the communal conflict they had witnessed in 1946. The next few paragraphs will underscore the voices of both Hindus and Muslims.

In the wake of the Noakhali riots of 1946, which arguably expedited the Partition of Bengal, some Bengali Hindus exchanged or sold properties when they decided to leave their homes in East Bengal. A portion of them left their homes with the understanding that they would return. Often, they left someone such as a widow, relative, or trustworthy person to watch over their properties until they could come back.[6] Some had to leave without appointing anyone to look after their holdings. Thousands of petitions were forwarded from the Chief Secretary of the Government of West Bengal, India, to his counterpart in East Bengal regarding alleged forcible occupation of Hindus' houses and properties. The petitions ranged from the payment of arrears to government requisition of the houses, cutcherry, etc.[7] The newly formed countries circulated letters to each other to inquire into the cases. Although it is true that Bengali Hindus sought help from the state to ensure that their properties were safe and secured, there were some other cases of mutually arranged property exchanges between Hindus and their Muslim neighbors. Government records tell a story which portrays an antagonistic relationship between Hindus and

[5] Chakrabarty, "Remembered Village," pp. 2144-2145. See also, Gautam Ghosh, 'God is a Refugee": Nationalism, Morality and History in the 1947 Partition of India', *Social Analysis,* vol. 42, no. 1, 1998, pp. 33-62.
[6] Often widows refused to leave due to religious rituals and being less targetable from the majority community.
[7] Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department. Proceedings of Confidential Reports. This section of the Bangladesh National Archives, Dhaka houses all of the letters and petitions that were forwarded from 'West Bengal, Assam and other regions' to the Secretary of East Bengal.

their Muslim counterparts. That portrayal, however, is not representative of the common Hindu-Muslim relationship of the era; records of direct correspondence between the Hindus and Muslims provide a much more nuanced perspective—though there was occasional antagonism, most relationships were respectful and affectionate.

The Bengali Hindu landowners who departed to Calcutta initially entertained the hope that they would be able to return and reclaim their lands and homes after the Partition of India in 1947. However, when they listened to the news of the recurrence of violence in the years following Partition, they realized that they were not going to be able to return to their ancestral villages and thus they unwillingly extricated themselves from their familial inheritance, selling or relinquishing their property rights forever. This paper documents the initial hope of the displaced landowners and their gradual abandonment of their hope to return. To be specific, this paper examines twenty-six letters, dated from 1948 to 1956, between Jogendra and Oli Mia. Jogendra's story unfolded in a long conversation through letters over the years following Partition. The early letters contain the hope and explicit plans that Jogendra had of returning home and reclaiming his properties. However, the later letters depict him selling parts of his properties to villagers, including Oli and Gani. The rest of his properties were eventually requisitioned by the government in the middle of the 1950s through the East Bengal State Acquisitions and Tenancy Act. This case study suggests why so many Bengali Hindus—including among the first 14,000 who crossed the border immediately after the Noakhali riots and the Partition—lost their hope to return home by the mid-1950s. This correspondence between a Hindu and his Muslim neighbor provides a microscopic view of the dwindling hopes to return in post-Partition. While historians have a grasp of the communal violence of the era, I

posit that they lack a microscopic understanding of the individual experiences, particularly on the relations between Hindus and Muslims before and following Partition. There was more to Hindu-Muslim relationships than violent antagonism.

Gyanendra Pandey argued that we should see Partition, "as a history of struggle—of people fighting to cope, to survive, and to build anew; as a history of the everyday in the extraordinary."[8] I demonstrated the longing and accompanied struggle of Bengali Hindus, who migrated to West Bengal and waited for their chance to return to East Bengal. However, historians of Partition have largely neglected to examine the personal struggles of individuals who were affected by the Partition. Thus, it is difficult to get an idea from Partition literature of how the Bengali Hindus' inability to return to their homes in East Bengal became a fait accompli in the middle of the 1950s, as they were no longer considered the natural citizens of the Muslim state. Following Partition, new national identities were constructed in both India and Pakistan based on religious identities. Pandey discusses about, "the test of loyalty," required from Indian Muslims, who were not considered the natural citizens of the state as per the construction of Indian nationalism in the post-Partition era.[9] He writes about Muslims' loyalty to India after Partition.

This study aligns with the work of Vazira Zamindar's exploration of the post-Partition Muslim and Hindu displacement from Delhi and Karachi respectively, which changed the

[8] Gyanendra Pandey, 'India and Pakistan, 1947-2002*', Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 37, no.11, 2002, p. 1030.
[9] Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1991, p. 611. Pandey states after Partition the minority Muslims were not considered natural citizens. On 14 January 1948, Niranjan Bose wrote to Beer Savarkar that they (Muslims) who stayed back in India were nothing but the spies of Mr. Jinnah. See also, *Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Decolonization in South Asia,* Chapter 2, p. 53.

demographic map of both cities as well as the state policies regarding the refugee crisis. Zamindar emphasizes how states intervention functioned as a catalyst for the colossal displacements of Partition. She finds that displaced people tried, and failed, to return home, and state agencies produced more dislocated people by reallocating abandoned properties.[10] There has been a great deal of historiography on Muslim refugees in East Bengal. A recent study by Joya Chatterji focuses on Muslims who had migrated to the Bengal delta for working purposes before Partition and crossed the border into the 'right nation' as refugees of East Bengal after Partition.[11] Uditi Sen examines the aftermath of the Bengali Hindu crisis of the rehabilitation of refugees and their negotiations with the local governance. However, none of these studies pay any attention on the Bengali Hindu refugees in West Bengal who wished to return to their homes in East Bengal.[12] More needs to be understood about Bengali Hindus' desire to, and expectations of, return to their homeland in East Bengal.

Background

Oral histories and private correspondence provide surprising insight into the relationships between Hindus and Muslims before and after Partition.

> Upper-caste Hindus, Talukdars, oppressed Muslim peasants; we used to work as their subjects. We can't go to the bazar with shoes on. They [Hindus] often humiliated us....

[10] Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
[11] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais (eds), *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2016), Chapter 1 and 2.
[12] Uditi Sen, *Citizen Refugees: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also Anindita Ghoshal, *Refugees, Border and Identities: Right and Habitant in East and Northeast India* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), Chapter 2.

> But not all of them were bad. During Hindu festivals, Muslims were able to go and collect food for the families for a couple of days. Hindus also established community health centres, post offices, and lots of modern facilities that Muslims could enjoy. We often joined in the theater that started in the Hindu landowners' yard. These plays lasted through the night until early morning.[13]

This account was shared by a Bengali Muslim named Suroz Mia, who is now 102 years of age. He formerly worked in Arun Roy's Grand Tower Hotel Restaurant in Calcutta and was forced to return to Noakhali during the time of the Great Calcutta Killings. He was helped by Roy, a Hindu neighbor and manager from Lamchar, Noakhali who had a business in Calcutta.

In another account, a Muslim headmaster of a primary school in Lamchar, named Mokhles Khan says, "Jogendra doctor (Doctor Babu) was generous person and loved my father so much. We were so poor, my father used to work in their house, and they looked after us. This house was also given by Doctor Babu based on *Dakhila* (rent-receipt)."[14] This exemplifies a friendly Hindu/Muslim relationship, especially between upper-caste Hindus and lower-class Muslims. Other correspondence between Hindus and Muslims after Partition documents that Bengali Muslims watched over the abandoned property of exiled Hindus in an unwritten agreement. I will come to this later in the article.

First, it is necessary to contextualize Lamchar, Noakhali within the Hindu-Muslim relationship in the backdrop of the nationalist movement. Statistically speaking, the total

[13] Suroz Mia interviewed by the author: 18 December 2020. Ramganj, Lakshmipur.
[14] Mokhles Khan interviewed by the author, 18 January 2021. Ramganj, Lakshmipur, Bangladesh.

population of Noakhali, the southeastern district of Bangladesh, was 1.7 million in 1940. According to J. E. Webster, a British civil servant who compiled statistical data in 1911, "the district takes its name from that of the river, the Origin of Noakhali Khal (or new channel) on which the headquarters is stationed."[15] The information about Noakhali District is provided below:

Table 4.1 Information about the demography of Noakhali District and literacy.[16]

Area of the District	Sadar Sub-division	Feni Subdivision
1581 Sq miles	1178 Sq miles	340 Sq miles.

Total population:	17,06,719
Hindus:	3,66,391
Moslems:	13,39,055
Christians:	795
Buddhists:	475

Literate	**English Education**
Hindus: 66, 058	Hindus: 12, 523
Moslems: 18, 006	Moslems: 13, 342

[15] J. E. Webster, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Noakhali*. (Pioneer Press: Allahabad, 1911), p. 2.
[16] Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. List of the papers of M. K. Gandhi (Pyarelal Collection), III-IV, inst, subfile. 22, p. 27.

Of the Muslims, "98% were tenants and debtors," while all the moneylenders and Talukdars came from the Hindu community.[17] Among the Hindus, "about 10% were from landlord and money lender classes, while the vast majority were indebted agriculturists" like the bulk of the Muslims.[18] Narrowing the focus on Lamchar, in one of the few villages in Ramganj, Noakhali, we see that in 1911 (the only data available regarding the villages of East Bengal) Hindus made up majority. Unlike the adjacent village that had a Muslim majority, Lamchar had a total population of 931: 286 Hindu Males and 325 Hindu Females, and 165 Muslim Males and 155 Muslim Females.[19] The Lamchar Choudhury Bari was special due to the inhabitants of upper-caste Hindus who were the Talukdars. They celebrated the Durga Puja, the commemoration of the annual victory and unfathomable power of the goddess Durga over the demon. The Bengali Muslims came together to participate in the festival. Mokhles Khan, my interviewee, shared that even after Partition the celebration continued for a couple of years.

Partha Chatterjee notes that despite the fact that some people see the history of India as being defined by Hindu religion, there were, in fact, many others who viewed Indian history as a story of fraternal association between Hindus and Muslims.[20] Chatterjee quotes a Bengali text that stated Hindus are considered India's biological son and Muslims are therefore her adopted children; the bond of fraternity between the two was permitted by the laws of any religion.[21]

[17] Ibid., p. 4. This data was given under the title, "Genesis of the Present Communal Movement at Noakhali."
[18] Ibid., p. 4.
[19] Census of Village Tables. Noakhali Collection, vol. I. Acc. No. 426. P 101.
[20] Partha Chatterjee, 'The Second Partition of Bengal', *in Reflections on Partition in the east*, (ed.) Ranabira Samaddara (Delhi: Vikas, 1947), p. 38.
[21] Ibid., p. 38.

Tapan Raychaudhuri writes that hundreds of people had come to enjoy puja from far distant villages in Barisal.[22] Sumit Sarkar notes that, "sometimes zamindars offered their respects to the *dargas* (tomb of Muslim saint) of Muslim pirs."[23] Hindu-Muslim fraternity began to decay in the decades before Partition, but it did not disappear entirely. Sugata Bose stresses that the Great Depression led to a disintegration of the Hindu-Muslim 'symbiotic social network,' rendering Hindu creditors powerless and redundant.[24] Yet there was still a residue of relationships between them that continued even after riots and Partition. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay mentions that, "there was a long procession in Calcutta on 26 August 1947 in which Hindus and Muslims participated and chanted slogans like 'Hindu-Muslim Zindabad' (Long-live Hindu-Muslim unity)."[25] He notes that due to Gandhi's fasting, all of the political parties' leaders came to a consensus to not allow strife in their communities.[26] Ilyas Chattha argues that the property settlements benefitted the Muslim factory owners in Gujranwala, who regarded themselves from laborers-turned-proprietors.[27] Utilizing oral histories as a source, his study reveals that property relations were one area in which Hindus and Muslim showed signs of cooperation and interdependence, and religious festivals like Eid and Diwali were another.[28] My sources confirm and expand upon this idea.

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[22] Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bangalnama (Memoirs)* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers), p. 45.
[23] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House 1973), p. 419.
[24] Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, social structure and politics, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 182.
[25] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-Independence West Bengal, 1947–52* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 10
[26] Ibid., p 11.
[27] Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot, 1947-1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 190.
[28] Ibid., p 191.

For the most part, researchers have focused on the high politics of the Partition. Although there is a small body of literature that focuses on the experience of ordinary Bengali Hindu refugees, this research does not address the shared relationship between Hindus and Muslims in the areas of property settlements, cultivation, and the selling of land after Partition. More important, Bengali Muslims' voices are not heard; as a result, they are seen as acting antagonistically towards Bengali Hindus. Nationally important political events were recorded and preserved by powerful individuals and institutions, but rural communal records and individual experiences have been more difficult to recover. Political changes did not necessarily or immediately change personal relationships. Agrarian relationships between Hindus and Muslims persisted beyond the Partition; they engaged in economic transactions that included financial support, property settlements, and sustained communication over farming and land use. However, it is also true that there is evidence of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali pre-Partition. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Coalition Ministry (virtually the Muslim League Ministry) in Bengal 'curtailed the power of the landlords and the prerogative of the zamindars, who were mostly Hindus.'[29] This created moments of conflict and political tension within the communities, particularly between Muslim and Hindu politicians.

Even though these strained moments did not define the personal relationships between individual community members, the standard narrative of Partition in Noakhali focuses on violence between Hindus and Muslims and principally on the Noakhali riots that followed the Great Calcutta Killings in 1946.[30] As the news of the Calcutta riots reached Noakhali, violence

[29] Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.
[30] The Great Calcutta Killings occurred on the 16 August 1946 as Muslim League decided to celebrate "the direct action day" to achieve the Pakistan at any cost…it was not against Hindus but against the British. Huseyn Shaheed

broke out in the Hindu community on 10 October 1946 in retaliation and continued for weeks.[31] While there were grievances among Muslims towards Hindus prior to 1946, it was the political pogrom of Muslims that caused the violence with the incendiary speech of Golam Sarwar as a catalyst.[32] Sarwar, the perpetrator of the riots, contrived the plan to oust Hindus from their homes if the demanded tributes were not fulfilled, an idea executed by his adherents.[33] On 6 November 1946, almost a month after the riots, M. K. Gandhi visited Noakhali to bring communal peace and worked towards restoring friendship between the Hindu and Muslim communities.[34] Out of fear, many Hindu families moved to the temporary refugee camps opened by Gandhi in Noakhali.[35] The conflict culminated in Hindus' distrust and fear of their Muslim neighbors, among whom they had lived for generations, which led to a massive displacement of Hindu landowners.[36] While India was divided along religious lines, it was also true that there was no available protection for the Hindu community in East Bengal, where they were no longer considered natural citizens with an inalienable right to their land. Following Partition and the attendant communal violence, Bengali Hindus in Noakhali rushed to the border with no other

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Suhrawardy, the prime minister of Bengal, declared that the 16 of August a government Holiday. A meeting was scheduled in Calcutta's Garer Math" for Muslim to join. While coming towards the meeting place, they forced the Hindu-owned shops to be closed. It led to the Calcutta riots. Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman, *The Unfinished Memoirs* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 65-72. See, Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bangalnama* (Memoirs) (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers), pp. 150-158.

[31] Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 6. The Muslims of Noakhali were killed. They perceived their own brothers had been slaughtered in the violence. The 'retaliation' written about is the response from the Muslims concerning their fallen brothers.

[32] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 69.

[33] Sir Francis Tuker, *While Memory Serves* (Bristol: Cassell and Company Ltd.,1950), pp. 138-144.

[34] M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi; Publications Division Government of India,1998), volume 93 & 94. See also, Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi: Pearson, 2014), pp. 373-376.

[35] Syed Abul Maksud, *Gandhi Camp: A Chronology of Noakhali Events 1947-49* (Dhaka: Mahatma Gandhi Smarak Sadan, 2014), pp. 20-24.

[36] Besides riots, Hindu landowners also willingly left their ancestral homes; it was a prestige issue and unthinkable for them to live under a Muslim majority in an Islamic state, being the Hindu upper class. *See,* Sekhar Bandyopadhyay*, Decolonization in South Asia*.

option, while Muslims from West Bengal relocated to East Bengal. A refugee problem ensued immediately on both sides of the Radcliffe Line—the border that separated India and Pakistan.[37]

Many Hindus either sold or lost their ancestral property in East Bengal, and as a result were forced into a lower standard of life and suffered prolonged hardship as a displaced people in West Bengal.[38] In some cases, these families returned later to reclaim their occupied property. In other instances, Bengali Hindus were in a rush to leave and so left the land to their neighbors. Some Hindu and Muslim families exchanged their properties in their respective countries of migration.[39] This type of property exchange was prevalent in the urban areas surrounding Dhaka and Chittagong and in specific regions along the border where Muslims migrated to East Bengal and Hindus relocated to the West Bengal.[40] Bengali Hindus in Noakhali could not exchange property in Noakhali due to its rural location and the unanticipated riots in that area, which forced urgent and unplanned migration. A high number of Hindu landowners in Noakhali made a hurried decision, selling a portion of property and appointing to their Muslim and Hindu neighbors to take care of the rest until they returned.

The first Hindus who fled were landowners, businessmen, and traders, who were at the pinnacle of the economic hierarchy and had regular communication with Calcutta before

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[37] Joya Chatterji, 'The Fashioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947-52', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 33, no. 1, 1999, pp. 185-242.
[38] Uditi Sen, 'The Myths Refugees Live by: Memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 48, No. 1, 2007, p. 38. See also Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, *Udbastu* (Refugee) (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1970).
[39] On displacement by exchange see Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugees': Rethinking Partition Migration," *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 37, no. 3, 2003, pp. 569-575.
[40] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, Annu Jalais (eds.) *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (Routledge: London and New York, 2016), p. 52-53. On exchanged properties, see William van Schendel, *Reviving a Rural Industry: Silk Producers and Officials in India and Bangladesh, 1880s to 1980s* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1995), pp. 105-14.

Partition. Chatterji argues that "wealthy Hindus with property in West Bengal were best placed to make the move since they had homes to go to in the west: most substantial landlords in East Bengal owned considerable 'town houses' in Calcutta."[41] Many of them had a safe space in which to seek refuge.

Statistical data produced by the Indian and Pakistani governments attempted to ascertain this uncertain cost of Partition. Often, the facts and figures they published were not reliable because they were produced to place blame on the other side. According to anthropologist Nilanjana Chatterjee, the 'unending trail' of migration began with the Noakhali-Tippera riots in 1946 which saw 14,000 Hindu people displaced.[42] However, the Government of India produced data that sets the figure at 19,000 Hindu people being displaced. On the other hand, the East Pakistan government undercut the Indian Government's claim with their own figure of 15,000, and they further state that 3,750 minority community members had since returned to Noakhali.[43] The scope of the economic displacement of upper-caste Hindus is subject to speculation because the scale of the migration makes it difficult to get a definite grasp on the fate of their abandoned properties. This situation was further complicated by the fact that people travelled back and forth between their abandoned properties in Noakhali and their new shelter in Calcutta.

Table 5.1: Reasons why refugees fled from East Bengal. 1946-1970

(figures in lakhs (100,100s))[44]

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[41] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 113.
[42] Nilanjana Chatterjee, 'The East Bengal Refugee: A lesion in Survival, in *Calcutta: the Living City: Volume II: the Present and Future*', (ed.) Sukanta Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1990), p 72.
[43] Inter-dominion migration figure. Govt. of East Bengal. Dept: Political (C.R). B Proceedings. Wooden Bundle No. 03. File SL. 125-167. Year 1948-51. List no. 119. p 26. File Title: Exodus—facts and figure (Brief for the Delhi Inter-Dominion Conference of December 1948).
[44] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition,* p. 112.

Year	Reasons for influx	Totals	Into West Bengal	Into other States
1946	Noakhali Riots	0.19	0.14	0.05
1947	Partitions	3.44	2.58	0.86
1948	'Police action' by India			
	In Hyderabad	7.86	5.90	1.96
1949	Communal riots in Khulna			
	and Barisal	2.13	1.82	0.31
1950	Ditto	15.75	11.82	3.93
1951	Kashmir agitation	1.87	1.40	0.47
1952	Worsening of economic conditions			
	Persecution of minorities; passports			
	scar	2.27	1.52	0.75
1953		0.76	0.61	0.15
1954		1.18	1.04	0.14
1955	Unrest over declaration of Urdu			
	as *lingua franca*	2.40	2.12	0.28
1956	Adoption of Islamic constitution by			
	Pakistan	3.20	2.47	0.73
1957	_____	0.11	0.09	0.02
1958	_____	0.01	0.01	-----
1959	_____	0.10	0.09	0.01
1960	_____	0.10	0.09	0.01
1961	_____	0.11	0.10	0.01

1962	_____	0.14	0.13	0.01
1963	_____	0.16	0.14	0.02
1964	Riots over Hazratbal incident	6.93	4.19	2.74
1965	_____	1.08	0.81	0.27
1966	_____	0.08	0.04	0.04
1967	_____	0.24	0.05	0.19
1968	_____	0.12	0.04	0.08
1969	_____	0.10	0.04	0.06
1970	Economic distress and coming elections	2.50	2.32	0.18
Totals		52. 83	39.56	13.27

Sources: P.N. Luthra, Rehabilitations, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 18-19

There is some research on the economic displacement surrounding Partition. For example, Ilyas Chattha focuses on the Muslim refugees who moved to West Pakistan. In Gujranwala, Punjab, many Muslims had good relationships with Hindu businessmen and worked for them, then they took over the businesses when the Hindus fled in the huge tidal waves that drove Hindu minorities from West Punjab once and for all.[45] However, the East Bengali Hindu migration was a lengthier process that corresponded to patterns of disturbance within their places of origin. My research suggests that some Hindus consciously maintained the relationship with their agriculturalist Muslim caretakers and did not completely desert their properties. Some sold their properties to their Muslim neighbors and others gave away properties to Muslims without

[45] Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality,* Chapter 3.

charging money. But some Bengali Hindus refused to sell their property to people whom they did not like. Furthermore, it was quite a difficult process from both ends, which required the exchange of letters between Calcutta and Noakhali and for landowners to give others power of attorney to act in their stead.

The problem also heightened with the governments' failure on the either side of border to come to a consensus. Much ink has been spilled over the failure for Indian state policies to address Bengali refugees' needs following Partition, because the federal government was focused more on Punjab's refugee settlement than Bengal's.[46] When the massive exodus from East to West Bengal started, an inter-Dominion talk was held between K.C. Neogy and Ghulam Mohammad in Calcutta on 13 April 1948 to discourage displacement and to create conditions for minority safety in East Pakistan.[47] This conference, which aimed to stop refugees from pouring out of the country, did not bear fruit. The initiative failed to stem the tide, and serious communal riots occurred in 1950 which aggravated the situation. The continuing riots only further exasperated the existing problem of displacement following Partition. Furthermore, the provincial West Bengal government failed to handle the myriads of issues regarding refugees and the rehabilitation process for these displaced.[48]

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[46] Punjab was stained by the fratricidal violence and a little more than one million people crossed out of the Pakistan to India by March 1948. See, Horace Alexander, *The New Citizens of India* (Oxford University Press, 1951). Talbot and G. Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapter 4. Bengal is still an understudied area; there are other parts after Bengal that requires attention, such as Bihar, and Assam.

[47] Gyanejsh Kudaisya and Tan Tai Yong, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 142. For details see, Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge University press, 2007). Chapter 3.

[48] Joya Chatterji, 'Dispersal and the Failure of Rehabilitation: Refugees Camp-dwellers and Squatters in West Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 41, no. 5, 2007, pp. 995-1032. Joya Chatterji extensively analyzes the difference of Jirat refugees' camp and the Azadgarh colony. She looks at the refugee camp situated in a malarial swamp miles away from the nearest town as opposed to the colony which was situated closer to Calcutta. This afforded the refugees jobs and markets to ply their trades in the quest to survive. Chatterji draws her points from Dr. B.S. Guha work's *Memoir No. 1, 1954. Studies in Social Tensions among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan,* (Department of Anthropology, Government of India Calcutta, 1959). Dr. Guha's anthropological work was done immediately after the Partition in

When Bengali Hindus left East Bengal, they remained hopeful that they would return; they assumed that it would be a temporary shelter until communal troubles at home blew over. However, the situation deteriorated after the Government of East Bengal passed the Requisition of Property Act of 1948 that alienated the people from their lands.[49] The legislature undertook another action that concerned the administration of properties by enacting the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act of 1951, which asserted that any person, including his legal heir, that fled after Partition "would be considered an evacuee" and their properties would be turned over to the Evacuee Property Management committee for leasing and letting, requiring a declaration from any persons wanting to return within six months."[50] If anyone failed to declare their intent to return within that timeframe, all of their holdings would be forfeited to the government. This legislation ensured that the committee could repossess and distribute any land belonging to evacuees without prior consent if they did not return in time. Separate accounts were kept of the properties, making it easier for the board to have joint control of the land. It is not clear whether or not the board would wait before selling the land, and, if so, if there was any way for a landowner to reacquire their property.

The above accounts illustrate that after Partition the state of Pakistan treated Hindus as questionable citizens who did not have a natural right of return to their property and land. India

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order to examine the social tensions among the refugees who crossed the border. See also Anindita Ghoshal, *Refugees, Borders and Identities: Rights and Habitat in East and Northeast India* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), Chapter 2.

[49] It should be noted that due to paucity of government officials and also because the capital was loosely connected with rural areas, bureaucratic pressure did not feel equally in every knock and corner of the country. See Assembly Proceedings of East Bengal Legislative Assembly. Frist Session and Second Session, 1948.

[50] Abul Barkat, *An Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh Through the Vested Property Act: Framework for a Realistic Solution* (PRIP Trust: Dhaka, 2001), p. 19.

was acting the same way towards its Muslim population. This was the case for historian Rohit De's example of Mohammed Yasin, a vendor whose rights were infringed upon for being from a minority even though he was constitutionally equal.[51] De remarks that "…[The] state was beginning to expand and intervene in everyday lives in an effort to achieve social and political transformation."[52] This demonstrates how the state of India was abusing its power to discriminate against the religious minority.

The second problem emerged from the agreement that was adopted in the Council of the Pakistan Muslim League meeting held at Karachi on the 08 October 1950. It appeared that league increasingly became a more communal party as its council embraced two clauses where no space was given to Bengali Hindus to be part of the new country. The council agreed to (a) safeguard and promote the religious, cultural, social, educational, economic and political interests of the *Muslims of Pakistan* (emphasis added); and (b) strengthen the bond of brotherhood between the Muslims of different units of Pakistan and to promote cordial relations between all sections of her citizens and to safeguard the *legitimate rights* of the minorities in Pakistan (emphasis added).[53] The League's ideals centred on the Muslim people and their betterment, and excluded other religions. In addition, the League now brought the issue of '*legitimate rights'* to the forefront, which made it more challenging for minority communities to return home.[54] By utilizing the easily manipulated word 'legitimate,' the Muslim League was able to throw doubt on Hindus' claims to their own lands.

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[51] Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 1.
[52] Ibid., p. 10.
[53] Mohammed Yusuf Khattak, *Constitution & Rules of the Pakistan Muslim League* (Karachi: The Time Press 1950), p. 2.
[54] Mohammed Yusuf Khattak, *Constitution & Rules of the Pakistan Muslim League,* p. 3.

The problem of East Pakistan also arose from the crisis between Delhi and Karachi. On 14 July 1948, the government of India unilaterally introduced the permit system, which required anyone entering the country across its western frontier to obtain a permit. In retaliation, the West Pakistan government put its own permit system in effect by 15 October 1948 and wanted to extend this to East Bengal. The East Bengal government objected with concern to the thousands of Bengalis that consistently had to cross over to West Bengal for business purposes.[55] The East Bengal government did not implement the permit system on its side. However, in 1952, the passport was introduced for border-crossing, and according to Zamindar this put the real Partition into effect.[56] However, I argue the Partition came into being for Bengali Hindus through the passing of the land acquisition act in the mid-1950s, not because of implementation of passport.

Home: Identity and Nostalgia

The concept of home relates to the issue of safety and security, but it also relates to the development of personal identity through dwelling. According to Heidegger, we only build in order to dwell. Since the time and energy, we invest in building leads to a relationship with the things that physically surround us. For Heidegger, dwelling as it relates to home involves a spiritual connection that helps to formulate an identity for those who live there, "To be a human

[55] Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition,* 95-102. There should be further research regarding these policies between East and West Pakistan after the Partition, as East Pakistan was ruled and dominated by the West. Thus, any problem between Delhi and Karachi may have been effected with the Hindu and Muslim problems in East Bengal. See also, Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1994).
[56] Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, Chapter 3. For borderland insights in East Bengal see Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell."[57] He says to dwell means that we take shelter in a specific space. Home is a space that facilitates the activities that reveal to a person where they belong, evoking a personal identity.[58] Iris Marion Young emphasizes that home can have a political meaning as a site of dignity, resistance, and privilege. She stresses, "Home is a concept and desire that expresses a bounded and secure identity."[59] Home has many aspects ranging from belonging to dignity.

When Bengali Hindus were displaced from their homes and became refugees in Calcutta, they lost their personal identities. Although they were dwelling somewhere else, they no longer had access to their original living spaces where they had invested resources to build their identities. The expectation of returning to their original home in East Bengal, and the making a temporary space in Calcutta after displacement, conflicted with the essential interplay between immanence and transcendence. Consequently, Bengali Hindus longed for the homes they left behind. Stuck in Calcutta, they maintained a spiritual connection to their homes by dreaming and imagining it. It also signified a metaphysical relationship between 'belonging' and 'identity.' When the Bengali Hindus found themselves unable to return to their physical homes in East Bengal, the places they had left behind took on a greater nostalgic meaning for them. By abandoning their homes, they nurtured their spiritual connection to the places, cultural identities, and permanent ties to their homeland. For Bengali Hindus, their dwellings had been synonymous with their identity.

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[57] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thanking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 147.
[58] Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton University Press, 2020), p.154
[59] Young, "*Intersecting Voices*," p. 157.

A large body of Partition literature deals with the creation of home in the imagination of the displaced Bengali Hindu and the traumatic and nostalgic memories of a lost homeland in East Bengal of the educated, upper-class Bengali landowners who were forced to leave their homelands because of Partition. As was true for displaced Bengali Hindus from other parts of East Bengal, the Hindu landowners who left their villages in Noakhali became nostalgic for their homes back in Noakhali.[60] For Bengali Hindus, *ghar* (home) connotes a place of identity, security, and longing. Devika Chawla stresses that, "home is not just a physical location, but also a space of the imagination."[61] She refers to Gaston Bachelard's notion of home as a place which allows us to dream. It is this dwelling place of the past that remains with us in the present.[62] The idea of home for them encompassed not only the house, which appeared in its rightful place in the cosmos, but it was also about the trees, paddy fields, jute, and community bonding.[63] Being evicted from their homes left them with a longing for the places they were born, the houses they built, the trees they planted, and even the smells from their memories. This is what the epistolary rhetoric of Bengali Hindus reveals in particular: the exodus did not mentally separate the homeowners from their former physical space. Although Bengali Hindus fled to Calcutta, they

[60] Mahbubar Rahman and Willem Van Schendel note that one category of Partition literature has often dealt with the "Bengali *bhadralok* (the educated upper and middle class) traumatic and nostalgic memories of a lost homeland in Eastern Bengal." See Mahbubar Rahman and Willem Van Schendel, 'I Am Not a Refugees': Rethinking Partition Migration', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 37, No. 3, 2003. p. 556. This statement is true but not complete. Based on the primary sources that I have discovered it can be safely argued that not all of the nostalgic memories solely stemmed from the Bengali Hindus in isolation. There were Bengali Muslims who were part of the society, and a Hindu self cannot be remembered without the connections to Muslims in the Eastern Bengal. One line of Spinoza from Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 5. "If the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, then when the Mind subsequently imagines one of them, it will immediately recollect the others also." As this suggests, Hindu nostalgia is not isolated but is, instead, always related to those surrounding and integrated in the memories discussed in Partition literature. This bizarre absence is what I believe makes these accounts incomplete.

[61] Devika Chawla, *Home, Uprooted: Oral Histories of India's Partition* (Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 26.

[62] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 6.

[63] I have used Gaston Bachelard term in order to articulate the border sense of the specific idea of home for Bengali Hindus.

did not immediately consider Calcutta their home, showing that for the immigrants, what was left behind remained an integral part of the sense of self, composed of dreams and a longing to return.

Bengali writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri grew up in the ancestral village (Bari) named Banagram but spent part of his life in Kishorganj (Basha), a large urban district. Chaudhuri's distinction means that irrespective of how affluent a person was in a city, they carried the village in their heart:

> Banagram influenced us by contrast, by being totally different in appearance and spirit from Kishorganj. It was present with us even at Kishorganj. The ancestral village seemed always to be present in the minds of the grown-ups. Most of them had acquired extensive properties at Kishorganj. They had also acquired some sense of citizenship. Yet I hardly remember one single adult who thought of his Kishorganj life as his whole life, who considered it [to be] anything but a sojourn. In our perception of duration Kishorganj life was ever the fleeting present, and the past and the future belonged to the ancestral village.[64]

Chaudhuri stresses on the importance that the villages can hold for someone. Dipesh Chakrabarty spots the distinction of *basha* and *bari*. He writes, "*Basha*, no matter how long one spends in the place is always a temporary place of residence, one's sense of belonging there is transient. *Bari,*

[64] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 49-50.

on the other hand, is where one's ancestors have lived for generations."[65] This idea can be seen in other Bengali Hindu writings about recalling Noakhali.

Remembering Noakhali

This article focuses on a Bengali Hindu landowner, Jogendra, who moved to Calcutta from Noakhali in the wake of Partition and appointed a Bengali Muslim neighbor as caretaker of his properties until his expected return. Jogendra lived in a village called Lamchar, a village approximately two miles from the heart of the Noakhali riots. His house, Lamchar Chowdhury Bari, and the surrounding areas are particularly significant because they were known as harmonious Hindu-Muslim communities.

Reminiscing about Noakhali, Buddhadev Basu writes, "To me, childhood means Noakhali, Noakhali means childhood. Noakhali was blessed with fruits and girls washing their faces with coconut water. Densely green land lies near the sea, embracing the estuary of the demon Meghna."[66] Jogendra seems to have felt a similar longing as he could still remember and shared with Oli what kinds of trees he had planted in his gardens after almost a decade. Remembering his home in a short story named Noakhali, an anonymous Bengali writer conveyed his emotional longing for his abandoned village:

[65] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Village', pp. 2144-45. He also views that "Bari would also be exchangeable with the word desh, signifying one's native land." p. 2145.
[66] Shankha Ghosh (ed.), *Buddhadeva Bosur Prabandha Samagra* (Complete Essays of Buddhadeva Bosu). (Kolkata: Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi, 2009), pp. 372-373.

> I still remember the moment in the early morning at five o'clock, when our steamer was blowing a whistle for departure to an unknown destination. That day, as if the morning star in the eastern sky faded with shame, fear, and arrogance, I was affectionately looking back at my motherland for the last time, but my tears clouded everything. Even mother lost its beauty. Over the sound of the engine, it seemed to me that mother was telling me come back. Come back. Come back to your home! I noticed that the surroundings were indicating to return—the call not to let go. Noakhali! The youngest daughter of Mother Bengal. It feels proud to have been touched by Gandhi's feet. Consisting of the entire Bengal's infinitesimal bit, my Noakhali stands, looking over the sea beach. In its womb lies my baby village, Dhahogram.[67]

In the above passage, the author expresses his emotional turmoil by linking his departure from his hometown, Noakhali, to a baby being ripped from their mother's womb. All these memories culminated in the Noakhali riots and the immediate departure of the Bengali Hindus to Calcutta. Due to Bengali Hindus' spiritual connection to their hometown, their physical separation from their village was unbearable for them. In their recollections, they fondly reminisced about childhood, then they lamented their loss. Writing about this place and their memories of it helped build a spiritual connection, an invisible thread that tied to their old homes and emphasized their deep desire to return.

Post-Partition Epistolary Rhetoric

After 1947, there were many letters and petitions exchanged between the office of the Chief Secretary of the Government of East Bengal (Dacca) and the office of The Deputy High

[67] Basu, *Chere Asha Gram,* pp. 23-24.

Commission for India in Pakistan (Dacca) regarding the alleged forcible occupation of Hindu houses and the looting of Hindu properties. Secretaries sent these letters and applications to the district magistrate in East Bengal for his help reclaiming the properties. In some cases, the property claims in these letters were found to be false. Other times, necessary actions were taken and reported to the owners. Baroda Charan Chakraborty's situation is a significant case. He was able to return to his home despite all the challenges, only to find out that his house was occupied by a neighbor. Chakraborty wrote to a magistrate on 5 February 1951 that, "He is an inhabitant of Alipur, Noakhali and his house was forcibly occupied due to his absence. Both Hindu, Kali Krishna De, and Muslim, Azibul Hossain, occupied his home. Hossain, a Sub-Inspector for the police department lived in his home in April 1949."[68]

Chakraborty's letter indicates that he was forced to leave with the hope that he would one day return. His son appealed to the local magistrate about the inspector's occupation. The magistrate told the son that he had to give the current occupant at least one year to vacate the property. At the end of Chakraborty's letter, he complained that the occupant did not vacate the house after the time limit expired and he had to seek to evict him. In response to Chakraborty's petition, the Office of Noakhali magistrate wrote to the Indian High Commission to inform them that they felt Chakraborty's claims were false. He claims, "The allegation that Azibul Hossain forcibly occupied the house has been found to be totally false. This was actually leased out by

[68] Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings (CR 5P1-3/50) of May 1952, Bundle-4. Petition of alleged forcible occupation of houses and properties in Noakhali and it was referred to the Assistant Secretary to the Gov. of East Bengal.

the petitioner's son. Azibul Hossain and his three brothers had rent receipts that were granted to them regularly."[69]

According to the magistrate, Chakraborty left his house some fourteen years before the Partition of Bengal and Chakraborty admitted it in a letter. However, while there was no evidence of an incident of arson in Chakraborty's village or near the area, the magistrates' claims that Chakraborty and other landowners had left voluntarily were exaggerated. He publicly denied that any expropriation occurred in this village. To make things worse, he contradicted himself by saying that Chakraborty left fourteen years earlier, but the occupants were willing to vacate, a manipulation of the truth.[70] Another individual, Sri Hem Chandra Roy, suffered when his house and shop were broken into. The robbery took place directly next to the police station and, again, involved members of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. It is quite challenging to determine from accounts of the incident who was telling the truth, who forged the context to take advantage. All these victims' petitions were forwarded to the local magistrate in charge through the office of the Deputy High Commissioner for India in Pakistan, Dacca. The Assistant Secretary to the Government of East Bengal forwarded the cases to the District Magistrate, Noakhali. These documents were passed among many government offices prior to any action.

The examples above show that correspondence from government officials warped the truth and manipulated the context, and indeed, were written to blame each other. The letters from West Bengal to Dacca appear to twist the truth to fit the narrative of allegations against Muslims.

[69] B. Proceedings (CR 5P1-3/50) of May 1952. See also, Bundle -3. Depart Political. B-Proceedings. (CR N-1/49) of January 1951. Petition from the Sri Krishna Sundor of Noakhali district for his safety against petition.
[70] This not only indicates bureaucratic tendency to disregard exiled citizens' concerns, but also highlights their attachments to arbitrary statements. B. Proceedings (CR 5P1-3/50) of May 1952.

Since the letters came through the government offices, the narratives followed the same tone and arguments, almost as if someone waited for them so that he could make a case. The letters analysed in the next section offer a different perspective on Hindu-Muslim relations in East Bengal because they were not written in order to pursue any political or policy agenda.

Jogendra's Letters to Oli Mia: A Microhistory View

When Bengali Hindus left their homes behind, uncertain whether they would be able to return, they had to correspond with their neighbors—who they had entrusted with their properties. Twenty-six letters that were exchanged between Jogendra, a Bengali Hindu displaced from Noakhali, and his former neighbor Oli Mia, a Muslim caretaker, demonstrated both an emotional and pragmatic correspondence. In his letters, Jogendra intimated to his former neighbor that his life had been disrupted by the communal violence he had suffered, which led to fear and uncertainty. The letters reveal both economical and psychological losses; they demonstrated Jogendra's dependence on his lands' income on the one hand and also how he longed for his home, a part of himself he had left behind in the past where things were familiar on the other. His letters show that he wanted to return and claim his properties in Noakhali, but an opportune time never presented itself. I was only able to obtain access to the letters Jogendra wrote to Oli Mia, and so my argument relies on an analysis of just half of a conversation. However, the tone of Jogendra's letters speak volumes regarding the complex relationship between Hindus and Muslim during the period.

Like many relationships, the agricultural interdependency between Hindus and Muslims helped to shape their friendships. Even after the communal violence of 1946, some fraternal relationships persisted between Hindus and Muslim in Noakhali. Jogendra held many properties that included: fishing ponds, large gardens, a house, and paddy fields (some of which were entrusted to Oli). The letters, which have been collected from legal records, concern those properties that were held within Oli's jurisdiction. Oli's grandson, Shamsul Alam, in consultation with his mother, Shamsun Nahar, agreed to share these letters. However, his mother was hesitant due to their sensitive content and initially stated, 'No, No, we don't have letters or anything.' Oli's family members preserved the letters with the land records. They bundled the documents in polythene bags and kept them safe within a metal trunk in case they encountered contention over the property. That indicated the importance of the letters, suggesting they carry as much importance to the family as their land documents, because they prove their connection with Jogendra more than any oral claim. Anthropologist Naveeda Khan captured in a similar fashion the caring of the Land Records of *Chauras* in Bangladesh, writing that they, "were kept as safe as possible, wrapped in plastic bags, sometimes even laminated, and put in metal trunks with large locks to protect them from water, mice, and insects more than from other humans."[71]

We had common acquaintances and close family friends, and Shamsun Nahar agreed to share the letters with me. All the letters are handwritten and complete. They are not in pristine condition—some of them are torn and discoloured from age—but they are all legible when patched together. I was told not to share the letters with anybody else in the village, and I kept that promise. I was only given permission to scan them and use them for research.

[71] Naveeda Khan, *River Life and the Upspring of Nature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023), p. 31.

I translated Jogendra's letters from Bengali to English in a way that captures their emotional content and stayed true to their original meanings. Each has a salutation of "Sri Oli Mia" or "Kalyaniyesu," and Jogendra signed the letters with "Your uncle Jogendra Roy Chowdhury." The first few letters were from Shyambazar, Calcutta, and the later letters were from Netaji Nagar, Calcutta. Almost all the letters were two to three pages long. Seven letters have been selected for this article; however, all of them are worthy of study. The selected letters encompassed money, community, his desire to return, and the irony of fate. Following Partition, Jogendra and Oli became very dependent on each other. The letters show that Jogendra had relied on Oli to cultivate his land just as much before the Partition as after his departure. Oli did not have land and continued to remain a sharecropper of Jogendra. That agricultural relationship between Jogendra and Oli did not go away with the strike of Partition.

Jogendra's Overriding Concern with Money

The first letter showed the ups and downs of their relationship along with how two neighbors missed each other when they were apart. It narrates Jogendra's attempts to get his money back from Oli, to whom he had given a loan prior to his departure for Calcutta. Jogendra was relating the financial struggle he was already facing in Calcutta, which he said was only made worse by the delayed payments. This letter is a prime example of how vulnerable a landowner was at the time of Partition, as his land and money fell into the hands of a neighbor. The loss of his property was hard for Jogendra, who had devoted his life into the maintenance and care for it. The loss was not just a monetary hardship, but an emotional one as well.

In addition to facing financial problems, the eastern Bengali refugees were called *Bangals* (referring to their identity as refugees from East Bengal) by people in West Bengal and were mocked for their accents and regionalism.[72] In India, no policies were initially drafted to address the refugees' economic struggles, and they lacked proper citizenship status. Though Jogendra was not a refugee, he was a displaced-Bengali Hindu and was identified as *Bangal* as well. His letters failed to show what it was like in Calcutta, but some anxiety and suffering emerged. He did not have a place to call "home" in Calcutta and initially lived in a rented place in Shyambazar and later in Netaji Nagar. The letters demonstrate Jogendra's strong attachment and anxiety for his home he had left behind, especially since he was unable to physically oversee his belongings. A letter written on 26 December 1948 read as follows:

> Oli, Lately, I have written to you in great detail, and I was really disappointed that I did not receive an answer from you. Hopefully, you and your family are well. I gave you a loan of 25 taka (the official currency of Bangladesh and will be written as tk. throughout the paper) along with some other money that I received from my land in 1355[73] [Bengali calendar year, corresponding to AD 1948]. I have constantly written letters and insisted through personal acquaintances that you send me the money. But still, I have not received a response from you. Can you tell me what the problem is? I have, over the years, tried to ensure that you and your family have a good life, and if you do not consider my situation and problems, that would be extremely disappointing.[74]

[72] Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Village', p. 2147.
[73] Jogendra used both Bangle and English date. I translated Bengali to English for my readers and for the chronological examination.
[74] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 26 December 1948 (Shamsul Alam's family archives).

Jogendra was persistent and demanded his money in multiple letters to Oli. The language that Jogendra used in the letters were reminiscent of bargaining with Oli as is typical for momentary dealings. He also wrote in the same letter, "However, send me the money as soon as possible without any further delay. If I get the time off, I will come to the village. And once I come to village, I will discuss the land properties in detail and get everything settled."[75] It is safe to say that Jogendra was angry with Oli when he took time to respond. But the letter additionally revealed that geographical division failed to separate them. Jogendra did not forget how Oli was a good neighbor and a trusted person who wanted to improve his life.[76] Simultaneously, the excerpts above illustrate how the relationship between the Hindu landowner and his Muslim sharecropper, which had always been intertwined with land settlements, continued from either side of the newly created border as Oli continued to act as caretaker for Jogendra's property. The trust between the two men contradicts the common historical conception of animosity between Hindus and Muslims.

In the same letter, Jogendra shared that he intended to return to Noakhali and negotiate the land issues. He was desperate to return to his properties because the people who cultivated his lands, some of whom had once been his good friends, did not share the revenue with him. He was physically separated from his land, but he was keenly aware of its worth. His fixation on cultivating his land and reaping the rewards of his harvest became a site of his desire to return to Noakhali and led to much anxiety about the (im)possibility of that return.

[75] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, P. 2.
[76] Jogendra brought up their prior familial connection to affectively prompt Oli for the anticipated letters and money.

Despite his trust in Oli, Jogendra at times articulated a specific vision of how the finances should be managed within the complicated system of money-transfer in post-Partition Bengal. In another passage written on 7 September 1951, Jogendra writes:

> Oli, as I informed you before, I have received the 50 tk. that you sent through money order to my brother-in-law, Dr. Sri Hemendra Kumar Das, in Jessore. Both Sri Gani and Kazol Khan are fine. They have available cash-on-hand to give me. If you gave money to Burjuk Ali in his house in Noakhali, and if Ali acknowledged it and wrote to Sri Gani and Kazol Khan in Calcutta, then they would be able to hand over the money to me. Now decide what you are going to do. One thing you were not clear about was the price of the land. For this reason, I wrote to you to come to Calcutta. You wrote to Ali and Gani about our discussion regarding the land. I was informed that the price would be anywhere from 1500tk to 2000tk, or to 2500tk. Therefore, I assumed that you would sell my land for at least 2000tk.[77]

To make ends meet after migration, Jogendra had to take out a loan from his Muslim neighbors in Calcutta (these neighbors were originally from Noakhali, but they had already been working in Calcutta and had stayed in Calcutta for work after Partition). He hoped that he could pay them back with the payments from Oli, who would sell his land in Noakhali. As Jogendra was overextended by his loans, he requested that Oli make the payment to Burjuk Ali (another Muslim neighbor), who would expedite the payment to Jogendra's Muslim neighbors. Jogendra also gathered information about the value of his land from other villagers. It seemed that he had an eye on the ground about his property's value and that he intended to hold Oli accountable for

[77] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia 7 September 1951.

payment from the sale of his extra land, which would help sustain him in Calcutta. By conveying that information via letter, Jogendra told Oli not to consider him ignorant. Since Jogendra had large tracts of property scattered across multiple areas, he needed to communicate with Oli quite often to make sure every piece of land was managed properly. In a letter dated 7 September 1951, he asked:

> What happened to the money that I was owed for this year? You promised that you would pay me the full amount in *Bhadro masa* (Bengali month of Bhadro which marks the beginning of Autumn). What happened to that? Moharram Ali wanted to sell his land near his house. You can pay me by selling the land. Discuss what needs to be done with Burjuk Ali and the others. If you and your brother wanted to buy my land, I would be happy. I pray for you and your family to live happily. We do not know yet whether Dhirendra will sell his house or not. If he wants to sell the house, he must inform everyone. He can't whimsically do whatever he wants. Kazol Khan suddenly wanted to go home. I have asked him to drop my letter for you. You will know more details if you discuss with him. Tell Kazol Khan what you decide so he can deliver the message to me.[78]

This portion of the letter reflected their intimate and friendly social relationship. Jogendra discussed with Oli as if he were in Noakhali and having a face-to-face conversation with him. He expressed affection towards Oli and his family and how he preferred to sell his land to his family because of their close friendship. As he wrote, "If you and your brother wanted to buy my land, I would be happy." There were preferences for buying and selling land. Even though selling meant completely disowning, there was a visceral satisfaction if it was sold to someone you had a

[78] Ibid., p.2.

friendly relationship with. While Jogendra trusted him, Oli sometimes kept him in the dark or miscommunicated about affairs of the land. In a letter to Oli, on 1 May 1950, Jogendra wrote: "You are cultivating two pieces of my land. What did you cultivate this year? Jute? There is an agreement between Pakistan and Hindustan so hopefully, there will be a better price in the next year. I depend fully on you. Now do what you think is right."[79] Here Jogendra sounded anxious and impatient because he was not informed what crops were cultivated. However, his trust in Oli showed in the closing sentence of the letter as he wrote, "do what you think is right." This expression of trust was also a way to ensure that Oli had control over the lands with Jogendra's permission and felt responsible for the proper cultivation of the land.

Jogendra wrote to everyone in the community— both his Muslim neighbors in Noakhali as well as Muslims from East Bengal who still worked in Calcutta following Partition. Besides meeting them in Calcutta, Jogendra's Muslims acquaintances maintained a regular correspondence with him that included detailed discussions about the land settlement. The Muslims who worked in Calcutta also acted as messengers; they carried Jogendra's letters to Oli when they travelled back home. In his letters to other villagers in Noakhali at the same time, Jogendra took an interest in what was happening in the village and actively participated in decision-making from Calcutta, particularly in selling the land of his neighbor Dhirendra. Jogendra exercised his authority in Noakhali to make sure that he received his portion from the sharecroppers who cultivated his land. The fact that Jogendra had so many relationships with the villagers in Noakhali, and that he continued to participate in village life from Calcutta, strengthened his belief that he would return to his home. Jogendra wrote several times that he

[79] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 1 May 1950.

would like to return home to settle his land and visit his neighbors; however, because of political turmoil, that never happened. Since Jogendra was forced to conduct all his land dealings from afar, he became even more involved with his Muslim neighbors. Jogendra sought Oli's advice about every aspect of land management. Although Oli communicated infrequently, he helped Jogendra sell his land and strengthened his trust by taking care of the property. Jogendra wrote on 1 May 1950:

> Oli, I have not received any letter from you for a long time. Hopefully, you are well with your wife and children. A few days back, I sent a letter regarding the details of the land, but there has been no response from you. I told this to Gani. Anyway, I hope to receive your letter—containing news of your health—in the next post.[80]

The above letter demonstrates that Jogendra continued a relationship of accountability with Oli and other Muslims in his village in Noakhali despite his absence from home and his inability to return home. For example, in his letter to Oli above, he mentioned twice that he had not received an expected response and implied that Oli should write immediately by stating "I hope to receive your letter […] in the next post."[81] Additionally, he let Oli know that he had reported his negligence to Gani. That sort of statement was to let Oli know that he would be held accountable to others and not just Jogendra, and that he was being watched by other members of the community. However, Jogendra also repeatedly expressed his good wishes for Oli and his family—even amid his apparent distress. Of course, careful use of language care may be seen a rhetorical move to encourage Oli to respond out of love and act out of a sense of personal duty.

[80] Ibid., p. 2.
[81] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 1 May 1950.

However, it could also be seen as a genuine statement of concern for his caretaker—showing that Jogendra felt emotionally attached to the community he had left behind and not just financially attached to his property.

In his letters, Jogendra was insistent, he pushed Oli and at times seemed to overreach. He was anxious as he wondered about his land and the overarching cultural conflict that unfolded around him. This period was the most tumultuous time for people on both sides of the border. Besides Jogendra, Oli also received complaints from Gani, his Muslim neighbor who lived in Calcutta for work. Oli's grandson confirmed that his grandfather did not know how to write. That deficiency may explain Oli's late response to Jogendra. Oli would have had to enlist the assistance of a third person who did know how to write a letter on his behalf.

The period following Partition was a turbulent time in East Bengal. During those chaotic circumstances, everyone tried to take advantage of the situation regardless of whether they were Hindu or Muslim. In one of the letters, Jogendra states that a neighbor, not mentioned by name, borrowed, or bought some possessions from a Hindu named Harkanta Roy.[82] Perhaps Harkanta was preparing to leave Noakhali and sold his land for a cheap price, or perhaps he had allowed this neighbor to stay on his property as a guest. But the letters indicate that Harkanta's possessions were not returned. That betrayal created chaos within the community. Harkanta wrote a letter to Jogendra explaining that his items were taken, the value of which amounted to 20/25tk. But in a later letter, Harkanta changed the amount from 20/25tk. to 70/75tk.[83] It is apparent from Jogendra's letters that he often mediated property issues between Hindus and

[82] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia 30 January 1956.
[83] Ibid., p 3.

Muslims. In another letter, Jogendra assured Oli that he, Jogendra, did not owe any money to Harkanta; Harkanta might have demanded some money from Oli because Jogendra had borrowed from him.[84] Jogendra also stated that Shamod Ali, a Muslim, did not send some of his possessions to Chandpur, which Jogendra believed was an infringement of his trust. It is clear from the letters that both Hindus and Muslims tried to capitalize on the chaotic situation over abandoned properties and absent landlords in the wake of the violence to benefit themselves.

Continued Interest in Community

Since Jogendra was unsure of the profit Oli earned from the cultivation of his land, he occasionally questioned Oli's use of the income but did not make any moves to change their friendly relationship. Almost every letter from Jogendra started with a discussion about his properties and land and ended with an expression of love, respect, and he inquired into the welfare of his neighbors and what they had been doing. Thus, even though Jogendra was frequently frustrated with Oli, overall, he chose to remain close to him.

In one short but important letter, the deepening friendship between Jogendra and Oli is noticeable. In this letter, written on 26 December 1948, it was evident that Jogendra still cared for his community because he reminded Oli that "in the upcoming month, I must arrange my part of thakur puja for five days. For this we need 25 kilograms of rice. You must keep the same amount of rice from where we reaped from my land. You have not told me how much you received from the land till now."[85] Thakur puja is a Hindu religious festival that aims to bring

[84] Ibid., p 3.
[85] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 26 December 1948.

blessings from a Hindu god or lord (Bhagwan[86]) through specific offerings to uplift villagers' wellbeing for the coming year. Even though he could have participated in religious ceremonies in Calcutta where he lived, Jogendra wanted to give importance to this particular festival in Noakhali, and he asked his Muslim neighbor to ensure his donation was made. This request had a bigger implication than just religion: it indicated the strong bond Jogendra felt with his home in Noakhali.[87] Despite his absence, Jogendra contributed 25kg of rice to his Noakhali community to ensure they could enjoy the Hindu celebration.[88] By contributing rice, he was both trying to do something beneficial for his neighbors as well as to confirm Hindu practices persisted within the community. It was a ritual that had been performed for generations and he did not want to see it end. He felt that the puja would ensure the blessing of God and would touch everyone regardless of religious affiliation, which was why he wrote, "Have all my blessing. I pray to God that He will make you safe."[89] This suggested that he believed in one God for both Hindus and Muslims. Further, his wish for thakur puja to be performed with his contribution spoke of his love for his neighbors.

In the same letter, Jogendra asked about the welfare of several Muslim neighbors, seven of whom he inquired by name: "How is Ahmed and Shahbaz Ali? Is Samad Ali, ok? Are Bande and Burjuk well? How is Rakhi and Mandira?"[90] Rakhi and Mandira were the two female

[86] This Bhagwan refers to the lord or God *Krishna*; it often uses as an abstract concept or supreme being.
[87] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal: 1920-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 30-31.
[88] Sumit Sarkar also quotes from the Bengal Gazetteer that "the regular practice of low-class Muhammedans to join in the Durga Puja and other Hindu festivals." Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House 1973), p. 419. See, A.E. Porter, *Report on the Census of Bengal, 1931* (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1931), p. 382. See also, Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton University Press, 2014).
[89] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia on 26 December 1948.
[90] Ibid, p.2.

members from his household. He was confirming that they were also fine. I argue that if Jogendra bore ill will for the Muslims in his village because of past experiences of communal violence, he would not have taken the time to ask about their well-being. Furthermore, his expression of care for so many neighbors showed that Jogendra was deeply absorbed in his community.

In a letter written on 1 May 1950, Jogendra confided in Oli about his own family: "Kanu is infected with smallpox. So far, the rest of the family members are good. But there is no space in our house. We are in pain and have problems."[91] Perhaps Jogendra shared this information with Oli to make an emotional appeal to Oli to consider Jogendra's critical situation and do what he could to alleviate the pain and problems Jogendra's family was facing.

Many Muslim neighbors from Noakhali, who lived in Calcutta after Partition helped Jogendra concerning the land settlement issues. Jogendra often communicated with them. Those villagers often visited him, which made him confident that he could collect information through multiple means about Oli and his properties. In a letter written on 3 October 1952, Jogendra wrote about a neighbor named Gani:

> Oli, I have sent you a letter folded within Gani's envelope, and hopefully you have received it. I accepted the 50tk you sent me through Gani. I did not understand what year and what land-related transaction the money stemmed from. According to my estimation, you must pay me two years' arrears. What about the other money that you were supposed to pay me? In addition, I have not

[91] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 1 May 1950.

> forgotten you and your mother. Gani also visited me in weal and woe. I am in much trouble which has prevented me from going back to *desh*(country).[92]

Scribbled at the very bottom of the same letter, Jogendra wrote that he was deeply concerned about other members of the former community: "How is Samad Ali? How is Shahara Ali and the others? Is Ahmad Ali alive?"[93] Here Jogendra may have used rhetorical strategies of showing concern for his former community members to ensure that they continue to send him his monthly income from the cultivation of his agricultural lands. But these lines also show deep bonds and may be indicative of genuine concern for his former friends and how he longed for his homeland, Noakhali.

Longing to Return

In a letter dated 1 May 1950, Jogendra began to explicitly describe his feelings of hopelessness, and showed his emotional pain with Oli:

> All this time I have wished to return to Noakhali, and I always think of you. But now I am in a situation where I cannot go anywhere. I have told you to come to Calcutta before the turmoil. I am suffering much sorrow.[94]

In the letter, Jogendra conveyed his desire to return home and implied that even though he constantly put pressure on Oli, he was also aware that Oli did not have an easy life as a cultivator

[92] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 3 October 1952.
[93] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia, 1 May 1950.
[94] Ibid., p. 2.

of his property. Often, when people signify that they are thinking of others, it is because they themselves are in a terrible situation, and to feel better will choose to remember their friends that brought them happiness in the past. With 'I am suffering from multiple pains,' Jogendra admitted that it was hard for him to live a life of sheer uncertainty. It was painful for him to not see his home and the people he lived with. I speculate that there were three possibilities that stalled his return: first, the home of Jogendra was not very far from the place where the riots first erupted in Noakhali, he might have been fearful that he would be targeted (especially fueled by the news of communal troubles within the national newspaper); second, Jogendra had a single daughter whom he could not leave alone in Calcutta for a few days to visit Noakhali; third, the relationship between India and Pakistan was not pleasant and he was awaiting a better time to return. Throughout the letters, Jogendra projected his suffering from displacement through Oli and emphasized his struggle to adapt to his new *incomplete* home in Calcutta.

The mental pain that he suffered could be associated with the loss of the space he once created. Jogendra often asked about the supportive community of people who lived in Noakhali, which showed that he thought of and cared for them. He wrote in the same letter, "Please write me in the next letter about you and *desh*."[95] The word *desh* means one's native land and community; Jogendra's use of the word here indicated he wanted information about the people of his community, not just his property. If he wanted information just about the land, he would have used the word *jami* (land). Jogendra's situation was indictive of lots of people's experiences at the time, which is important because it shows that it was not just about the country's religious/political fights, but it was also about the people who went through all of the pain.

[95] Ibid., p. 2.

Oli was not the only person looking after Jogendra's properties. For some of his properties, he also authorized a Hindu named Sri Josna Roy, a member of his *Bari* (house), to look after his home and the trees around it. One letter, dated 14 November 1955, was written not directly to Oli but rather to other Muslim community members named Khoaz Mia, Shona Mia, Lokman Mia, Burjuk Ali, and Bande Ali.[96] They were respected leaders in the village. Jogendra complained that Josna cut his trees and bullied him for no reason. However, Josna claimed he was owed 300tk. from Jogendra, and in an attempt to get his money back, cut trees from Jogendra's properties. To protest, Jogendra wrote to Oli that he did not owe even three-half pice to Josna, let alone 300tk.[97] He now wanted to shift the responsibility of the property entirely to Oli. He sent a couple of registered letters: one to these village leaders, one to Oli, and another to Josna Roy, to ensure that Oli from then on would take responsibility for his property and would perform the religious rituals on his behalf. He requested the authoritative community members to keep an eye on Josna, who could make unnecessary problems. In the same letter, he also shared that he would come back to his home when he felt the time was right. He wrote, "I did not give up the hope to return and am waiting for the proper time."[98] This correspondence shows how much he was determined to return to ensure that Josna or any of the other villagers would not exploit his property. Jogendra was infuriated at Josna, his Hindu neighbor who damaged his property. Jogendra also explained to the Muslim villagers that his properties should not be exploited. He made it clear to both the Hindus and Muslims alike not to take advantage of the fact he was separated from his belongings.

[96] To guarantee the settlement of his newly arranged property, Jogendra Roy wrote three letters on 14 November 1955 to respected villagers: one to the local villagers collectively, one to Oli, and the third to Sri Josna Roy.
[97] Jogendra to Oli, 30 January 1956, p. 3.
[98] Jogendra Roy to respected villagers, 14 November 1955.

Historians often assert that riots between Hindus and Muslims broke the trust between the two groups. But that was not the case in the relationship between Jogendra and his Muslim community. In fact, in 1955, eight years after they had started corresponding, Jogendra decided to entrust more of his properties to Oli, a Muslim, despite his religious beliefs and consistently late payments. Jogendra feuded with Josna, so there was no relationship of trust between the two Hindus, unlike with Oli. Jogendra believed that Oli would not destroy anything, like Josna had, even though Partition put economic burdens on Oli: he managed Jogendra's properties, sent money to Calcutta that was generated from the land, and ensured that no one had cut down trees or stolen anything from Jogendra's lands. Jogendra never forgot to show his care in his letter to Oli, particularly when he penned the command, "Have my blessings."[99] Jogendra questioned the very heart of the concept of Partition, based on the imaginary religious division between Hindus and Muslims.

Although Jogendra was afraid and had every right to be angry, he never addressed Oli with aggression in his letters. The language he used to convince Oli was soft and humble. He addressed himself as an uncle and said he wished for Oli to have a successful life. He pressed upon Oli's morality and ethics to make the right decision and pay back what he owed. Having no other option than to depend on Oli, Jogendra's language reflected a position of powerlessness, of being entirely at the mercy of his former neighbors. In Calcutta, he struggled financially, and he was dependent on the income from his properties in Noakhali. The relationship between the two men occasionally appeared shaky, beginning with how often Jogendra had to bargain for his

[99] Jogendra to Oli Mia, 14 November 1955.

money which did not come in due time. Still, Jogendra continued to express a belief that Oli would do the right thing. It challenges the notion of political narratives that perpetuate that Hindus and Muslims always fought each other and were never capable of caring for their neighbors. However, Bengali Hindus had tried to sell their land to their Muslims neighbors.

Land registration

Suroz shared in our interview that Jogendra did not complete the land transfer to Oli, the government took his land eventually. Through the letter, Jogendra discussed the land he wished to sell to Oli. If Oli were not capable of taking it, he could buy the land together with Kajal and Gani. Jogendra insisted that Oli had shed a lot of sweat for this land. If he bought it, there was no question of selling it to other person. Jogendra ultimately made an agreement to sell the land to Oli and Maharam Ali. On May 15, 1955, he acknowledged that he received 300tk from Oli and Maharam Ali, the two buyers, as partial payment for the land. He also inquired: What happened to the rest of the money? He also suggested payment of the rest of the money as early as possible. Jogendra wrote that his son, Amar Roy, would travel to Chandpur, a mere forty miles from his house in Noakhali, to pick up his wife the next week. Jogendra would give Amar the power of attorney through the district collector office in Noakhali. This would cost at least 20/25tk., and Jogendra informed Oli to pay that expense. Jogendra then made a list of expenses including power of attorney, land registration, and the remaining money Oli was bound to pay for the land. He also warned Oli that he must complete the procedure in seven days. In addition, Jogendra also asked Oli to help Amar in every aspect so he would not face any trouble. The land registration through Amar had failed. However, in another letter on November 11, 1955,

Jogendra informed Oli (285tk) and Maharam Ali (60tk) to manage and hand over the money to the Amar's father-in-law, who would then help them to register the land.

However, it was 1955, just a year before the government acquired the land through the State Acquisition Act. Jogendra was aware that they had no time to waste due to the fact that the government's land acquirement procedures were almost complete, and any procrastination would destroy their effort to transact the land. However, I learned through Suroz that they failed to register the land again and Oli and Ali's families did not get it. Suroz anticipated it was the fault of Jogendra, but the letters implied the problem was due to Oli and Ali not offering the entire amounts they owed along with the difficulties of the complex land registration process through a third person. Jogendra had consistently pushed Oli to finish the procedure. However, it seemed to have been impossible for Oli to attain that large amount of money within such a short period of time. Oli was a farmer, and it was difficult for Oli to deposit 300tk and later 285tk in the first half of the 1950s. All of the money Oli had given to Jogendra to buy the land was a futile effort. Jogendra urged Oli to expediate the process because he had already realized it was tough to complete the land-related complexities within the short time remaining. I'm not sure whether Jogendra returned the money to Oli or not.

Irony of Fate

A three-page letter written by Jogendra to Oli on 30 January 1956 indicates that by that stage, Jogendra concluded he would be unable to return home. It is difficult to pinpoint when he came to this decision, because he never stated it outright. There are some earlier clues that indicated

Jogendra was not interested in coming home and had been struggling with fragile health which he mentioned in other letters written between 1951 and 1953. I conclude that his decision was made in the middle of the 1950s. The letters that he wrote in the years of 1955 and 1956 are concerned not only with money, but also with land registration complications and expenditures. He decided to sell some of his important land but not the house. His son, Amar Roy, visited his father-in-law's house in Chandpur, which was about forty miles from his home in Lamchar, Noakhali. Jogendra gave power of attorney to Amar in new rules to sell his land, because Jogendra was still in Calcutta.[100] Jogendra's letter at this time implied that he would not be interested in returning to his old house, which he had cherished from afar for almost a decade.

Three points from his letter dated to 30 January 1956 revealed what was going on in his mind. First, Jogendra began to use the address Netaji Nagar, Calcutta instead of Shyambazar, his previous address. When considering how calm his handwriting was compared to the older letters, which look like they were frantically written, it seems that he was more confident in his new living arrangement. And yet, Jogendra did not stop thinking about his old home back in Noakhali. Even now, he did not indicate that he wanted to sell his house, although by that time he had sold other properties. Rather, he asked Oli to erect a fence around the house so that the furniture and other items inside would be protected from theft. Regarding the trees, he particularly mentioned that the "southern part of the western side of Bose's land is mine. In that corner, the Tamarind tree, which is on both of our land, is theirs."[101] It had been almost a decade since the Partition, and he was still acutely aware of which trees belonged to whom. That showed he had an extraordinary attachment to his home.

[100] Ibid., p.1.
[101] Jogendra Roy to Oli Mia 30 January 1956, p. 2.

A second indication that he had decided not to return home was that he pushed Oli in this letter to register the land in Ramganj, Noakhali in his name and lamented that it was too late already. Jogendra had never insisted on this before and was racing against time. He wrote, "If you procrastinate paying the registration fee, which you are supposed to do early, and if you take time to register or not registering it at all, I will not be responsible justifiably, religiously, and legally."[102] Along with his push for Oli to take over his property, Jogendra also provided him a detailed account of the rest of his properties. He also provided instructions on spiritual matters, for he notified Oli to consider a Hindu man named Rajani Babu, rather than Josna Roy (who cut down his trees), regarding information about the religious festivals in the community. Finally, it appeared that the religious festivals would continue in the community whether he returned or not.

The third point, perhaps the more important one, is that he blamed his circumstances on the irony of fate and delivered his final message by stating:

> What can I do? The irony of fate. I have fallen in a condition that even if I want to do something I can't do it as I wished. You should all try to cooperate together. Try to do your best to follow the path of honesty.[103]

It appeared he lost hope to return home, as India and Pakistan were at odds with one another at the time. He was almost completely exhausted by his own hopes, which had repeatedly betrayed

[102] Ibid., p. 1.
[103] Ibid., p. 2.

him. Every time he had tried to return to Noakhali in the past, something had prevented him from doing so. He was plunged into a 'not-now' moment. There were so many troubles in his life. Family members, as he previously mentioned, were suffering from smallpox, and he himself suffered consistently fragile heath. By referring to his '*odrister porihas* (irony of fate),' and his lack of agency, Jogendra demonstrated that he had lost all hope of return. In the last two sentences of this letter, it became clear that he was giving his final message to his neighbors and friends, which indicated an end of his hope by the middle of the 1950s of ever returning to his homeland.

What Jogendra's Letters Say about Partition?

Jogendra's letters to Oli provide a unique understanding of the Hindu-Muslim relationships in the years following Partition. These letters challenge the commonly held belief that the two religious groups were deeply divided by depicting a Hindu landowner who depended upon his Muslim friends and tenants to assist him to manage his properties, as well as to help him maintain social and cultural bonds with the community he left behind. The new political border had created an imagined binary of who was friend or foe, and who was to be kept in or out of a region. Political propaganda and rhetoric heavily suggested that without such a constructed political border, both groups' access to freedom, self-determination, and properties was at risk. Colonial rule forced the Hindus and Muslims of India, particularly Bengal, to subscribe into that fallacious narrative. Jogendra's letters showed that a border would not, at least in the short term, rip the communal ties apart or force people to see each other as enemies. Years after Partition, the people of the area were still emotionally tied to one another.

An interview with Mokhles Khan, who was a Muslim neighbor and brother of Kazol Khan with whom Jogendra had a good relationship, indicated that the community continued to hold a great respect for Jogendra. Khan stated that he never saw Jogendra after Partition, but he did see his son Amar Roy, who came in the late 1950s to see their old neighborhood for the last time and sell the *ghar* (house). Khan also reflected on the changes in his community and mentioned the Hindu *Puja ghar* (the worship house). The worship house reminded him of happier times when some other Hindu families still lived in the community. Khan was incredibly open regarding Jogendra and their relationship. He plainly acknowledged the influence that the Bengali Hindu had on his family. His voice became soft, and eyes filled with tears. He shared, "There is one hospital named Annadacharan Memorial Hospital which was also established by a Bengali Hindu in Lamchar."[104] The riots and Partition fractured the community to the point of being irreparable, but they failed to have a severe impact on their collective sense of belonging.

The letters convey the feeling of helplessness Bengali Hindus experienced when they lost their economic hold and became displaced, but Bengali Muslims also suffered from the exodus of Hindus, as their village economies fell into chaos. They struggled to maintain huge properties for displaced Hindus who eagerly awaited the proper time to return. Khan recollected that "They [the Hindus] did not initially sell all of their properties in the hope that they would return again when the situation would get better."[105] But the waiting time dragged on, and their exile persisted. Jogendra waited nearly a decade, and he was slowly accepting that he could not return.

[104] Mokhles Khan, interviewed by the author, 18 January 2021. Ramganj, Lakshmipur, Bangladesh.
[105] Ibid., p. 3.

His letters also delineated how much Hindus and Muslims were knitted into a shared history as Jogendra projected his sense of displacement onto Oli, suggesting that they shared an equal loss.

The final blow to any hope for the Bengali Hindus' return came in 1956 when, after six years of litigation, the East Pakistani government won a case against 83 landowners and enacted the East Pakistani Land Requisition Act in 1956, which marked the withdrawal of the permanent settlement.[106] The government seized their land and finally put an end to their hope of return. Presumably, this is why Jogendra stopped writing.

Conclusion

The predicament of displaced Bengali Hindus from East Bengal has been written about widely; however, historians have overlooked the desire of relocated people from East Bengal to return home to their villages after Partition. Bengali Hindus' 'home-coming' remained uncertain because of their fear of recurring violence. The Bagerhat riots of 1950 worsened the communal fracture in East Bengal, and more of the minority Hindu population in East Bengal deserted their homes at the time.[107] False propaganda from the West Bengal press claimed that Hindus were being persecuted in East Bengal contributed to the exodus in this period.[108] Contrary to the

[106] In 1793, the British East India Company introduced permanent settlement, which resulted in the emergence of the property-owning classes in Bengal. It lasted around one hundred sixty-three years and ended around 1956 in East Bengal. See Sirajul Islam, *The Permanent Settlement of Bengal: A Study of its Operation, 1790-1819* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1979). Also, SM. Rezaul Karim, *The Emergence of Bangladesh and Politics of Land Conflicts, 1885-1971* (unpublished dissertation).

[107] It is estimated almost 1.6 million people departed East Bengal; but there is a significant lack data in regard to the diasporic movement of people who returned and who made a permanent departure. Chatterji *The Spoil of Partition,* p. 112.

[108] See Objection Publication in the Jugantar. Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Political, B. Proceedings (CR 3N14-1/52) of September 1952. For the propaganda of East Bengal, see the Complaint of the Government of

claims made by publications in West Bengal in this period, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, the Finance Minister of the East Pakistani Government, gave a speech in parliament in which he urged Hindu landowners not to hurriedly sell their lands and relocate to the other side of the border. To persuade the Bengali Hindus to return to their homes in East Bengal, he promised to ensure their security.[109] It was also declared in the parliament that many protections would be extended to landowners who had left in the recovery of their lands from trespassers. However, it is also true that the Hindu and Muslim parliamentarians in East Bengal blamed each other for the mass exodus and the periodic riots that prevented Bengali Hindus from returning to their homes in East Bengal. For example, Hindu politician Ganendra Chandra Bhattacharjee accused Muslim politicians of turning East Bengal into an Islamic state where they would not be safe, and Muslim politician, Mujibur Rahman, accused Hindus of being loyal to India.[110] The final blow came through the East Bengal Land Acquisition Act of 1950 which changed the entire environment for the returnees as the land was acquisitioned by the East Pakistan government through the abolishment of zamindari. For the landowners who had left their properties behind in East Bengal, their hope to return came to an end in the mid-1950s when the legislation was enacted, and the government acquired the land. Although the exodus of Bengali Hindus to West Bengal began in 1946, the East Bengal Land Acquisition Act of 1950 marked the final blow of Partition for Bengali Hindus and thus ended their hope to return.

West Bengal against the "Zindegi," a daily newspaper of Dacca (Bundle 6). Government of East Bengal, Home (Political), B. Proceedings (CR 1P3-2/49) of July 1952.

[109] Assembly Proceedings: Official Report, East Bengal Legislative Assembly March Session, 1948 (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1951), p. 11.

[110] Assembly Proceedings: Official Report, East Bengal Legislative Assembly First Session, 1948, vol. 1, no. 2. (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1948), pp. 19-32.

This article provides a new insight into the relationships between Hindus and Muslims in East Bengal, arguing that the relations between Hindus and Muslims in East Bengal were more complex than simple enmity. The need remains for more research that considers how the displaced Bengali Hindus landowners longed for their old homes and communities and the deep feelings of loss like that expressed by Jogendra in his letters to his caretaker and Muslim neighbor Oli. The popular narrative in the Partition literature is that Muslims occupied the land of Hindus. The example of the relationships Jogendra had with his Muslim neighbors should raise questions about such narratives.

There is a vast body of important research on the communal violence surrounding Partition that led to the mass exodus of Hindus from East Bengal, establishing the narrative of the role of Muslim Bengali politicians in Partition, and the violence of Bengali Muslims that forced Hindus to migrate. However, the existing literature focuses too narrowly on one narrative and the single lens of communal violence, erasing the complexity of this history. There is still much to be discovered concerning the quality and intensity of relationships between Hindus and Muslims during and after Partition. This study suggests that the prevalent notion that religious differences in the area fueled animosity between the two groups was not universal. In taking these into consideration, we can shed light on the complexity of people's experiences alongside the current narrative. In doing so, we may even change the narrative about the eternal clash of Hindus and Muslims that perpetuates current religious violence all over South Asia. To attain peace in the region, it is important to liberate people on both sides of the border from narratives that eternalize the Hindu-Muslim universal animosity. Now, I'm entering into the struggle of Bengali Muslims returning journey to Noakhali beginning from the Calcutta riots and ending

with the India-Pakistan War in 1965. Many East Bengali Muslims trickled back from their working places in Calcutta to Noakhali. Their struggles have not been recorded or examined in the Partition literature.

Chapter 4

Bengali Muslims:
The Return to Noakhali from Calcutta

The history of Bengali Muslims' return journey to Noakhali has been neglected in Partition literature because there was no iconic imagery associated with this specific journey (unlike in Punjab or in Bengali Hindus over to the Radcliffe Border, where images of makeshift huts in train carts provide a powerful depiction of refugees dislocated from their homes). Perhaps there were no expatriate camps for the Bengali Muslims that portrayed their suffering from Partition. The Bengali Muslims were not considered refugees because they had a home. However, Calcutta was a hostile environment for them, which accounts for their unseen suffering. They were targeted in the Calcutta Great Killings in 1946 and had to return to Noakhali. Therefore, this shows that they were completely unwanted and undesirable in their host city, which they believed to be partly their own. With that, another blow came due to riots in 1950. Still, a substantial number of Bengali Muslims fearfully clung to the 'enemy' country due to the status of their employment until 1965, when they were ultimately fired from their jobs.

I argue that the Partition for the Bengali Muslims did not conclude until 1965. The process took two decades and had three different stages: the first round was due to the Calcutta riots in 1946, the second was during the riots in 1950, and the last individual moved in 1965. I maintain this marks the Partition for Bengali Muslims. The inadequacy of Partition literature is often attributed to the lack of attention to the experiences of minority Muslims who did not have cultural capital i.e., education, financial support, to start a new life in the new countries and had experienced Partition through their return journeys.

This chapter will proceed with providing an importance to the city of Calcutta, which was claimed by Bengali Muslims as their own since this city provided opportunity and freedom to work for them who had not had formal education and still can earn by working as subalterns. During the British period, Calcutta drew more industrial areas, particularly mills and factories which hired a lot of Bengal Muslims from the Eastern side to make a living. As soon as Calcutta was absorbed by India, no city remained for unschooled Bengali Muslims for dream of opportunities for earning. Economically, because no manufacturing developed in East Bengal, the legal separation from employment in Calcutta was devasting for the Bengali Muslims population. Then, I bring three case studies through which people slowly returning to Noakhali due to riots and Indian state policies.

Looking back

Joya Chatterji, who is a prominent historian of the Bengal Partition, wrote on the people who had survived the horror of the riots in Calcutta and Bihar. They decided to put their skills to use in the new state of Pakistan's service. She mainly focuses on the people who had monetary resources to migrate from Bihar and West Bengal to East Bengal, along with networks that had played a crucial role for successful migration.[1] Anwesha Sengupta examines how people hardly remember how Muslims, once an important and integral part of Calcutta culture, were either waning from the city or ghettoized in a few areas like Park Circus, Raja Bazar, and parts of

[1] C Alexander, J. Chatterji, & A. Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim migration* (1st ed.). (Routledge 2015). Chapter two. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315660066

Central Calcutta.[2] Anindita Ghoshal argues that the refugee identity was 'multi-layered' even in the case of Muslims who were supposed to be naturally accepted in Pakistan from Indian but instead they faced hazards and discrimination policies of new state of Pakistan.[3]

These studies are very important to the historical account for the experience of the residents of Calcutta. However, these studies focus on people originally from Calcutta, however, this chapter intends to focus on the less documented people from Noakhali in East Bengal. The difficulties and sometimes dangerous experiences of these normal, everyday people from Noakhali are often overlooked by the literature on the Partition. Rather Noakhali is seen as a part of Gandhi's intervention of containing riots, which erupted there. It is important to discuss these people's experiences not only to expand on current Partition literature, but also to give these people a voice and a chance to tell their story.

Muslims in West Bengal were divided by various factions, such as ethnic origins or occupations, while the Eastern Bengals were more homogenous and were more of an agrarian people.[4] Chatterji notes that Partition dismantled the extraordinarily diverse Hindu-Muslim community to such an extent that writing a historical account is difficult due to the scarcity of primary sources to analyze and interpret the past. It is even more challenging to write about Bengali Muslims from East Bengal, who began to depart from Calcutta immediately after the Great Calcutta Killings and Partition. Chatterji remarks that like an earthquake, Partition drove

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[2] Anwesha Sengupta, "Becoming a Minority Community: Calcutta's Muslims after Partition," *Calcutta Stormy Decades*, edited Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 434-458.
[3] Anindita Ghoshal, The Invisible Refugees: Muslim 'Returnees' in East Pakistan (1947-71) *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Hum.), Vol. 63(1), 2018, pp. 59-89.
[4]Joya Chatterji, "Of Graveyards and Ghettos: Muslims in Partitioned West Bengal 1947-67," in *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 225.

the Muslim population out of Calcutta. Partition also dramatically changed the profile and redistributed their locations towards the border and beyond.

Regarding Calcutta's Muslims who migrated to Eastern Bengal, Chatterji notes that half of the refugees moved into urban centers, mostly Dacca and Chittagong, and the rest of the people resettled in clusters on the Pakistani side of the predominantly rural border. She stresses that the Bengali-speaking Calcutta residents had the mobility capital to decide when and where to go.[5] Zolberg notes the secular formation of nation-states produced minorities and stateless and thus required the human rights to protect their interests.' [6] This exemplifies the residents from Noakhali, who worked in Calcutta, were forced to return after partition and yet were not considered 'refugees.' The term 'refugee' has not always encompassed the experiences of all involved and impacted by Partition. Noakhalians had no social and cultural capital and depended on peripatetic work in Calcutta but returned due to a strenuous labor environment. Historians Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel remarks in the similar vein that even though Partition refugee has been studied well but still do not fully capture the scope of population mobility over the Partition border.[7] All of them did not leave together but on a contingent nature based on Hindu-Muslim issues, beginning from the Calcutta Great Killings in 1946 to the India-Pakistan War of 1965. The first reason was due to get attacked in Calcutta riots where a lot of Muslims from Noakhali died and a substernal number of Muslims returned to Noakhali. The second came in 1950 riots when the Government of Calcutta fired those Muslims who were still

[5] Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (Routledge: 2016), 54.
[6] A.R. Zolberg, 'The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467. no 1 (1983) p. 28
[7] Md. Mahbubar Rahman, and Willem Van Schendel. "'I Am Not a Refugee': Rethinking Partition Migration." *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003), p. 554.

working on in the jute mills but took refuge in East Bengal. They were never given a chance to their position even though the East Bengal Government made a huge effort. The final phase happened due to the India-Pakistan war, which led the dismissal the remaining Muslims in Calcutta and Partition completely took place.

Hannah Arendt, a German-American political theorist, emphasizes that the transition from an empire to a nation-state contributes to an increase in refugee-production, highlighting the interwar period in Europe. Though Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, stated that the creation of Pakistan had nothing to do with religious motives, the fact of the matter is that enforcing sovereignty can be absolute in the areas of "emigration, naturalization, nationality and expulsion."[8] Within this democratic idea of Pakistan, the people who were religiously different fell prey to this sovereignty. This led to the mass exodus of Bengali Hindus to the 'right' nation. Like Pakistani Hindus, India was also going the same way for their Muslim population. Historian Rohit De's example of Mohammed Yasin, a vendor whose rights were infringed upon for being a minority individual in December 1950 even though he was constitutionally equal.[9] Before the Supreme Court's verdict arrived, Yasin and his friends hired Nanu to beat his drum to declare that the public had won a case against the town. Thus, people disseminated their own interpretation of the constitution after Partition and an individual's complaint against the state was translated as collective public win. In the case of my interviewee, Abul Gani who was an East Pakistani worker by Partition and lived in Calcutta as Muslim, was caught in the crossfire of the riots. It was just like having his foot in two different antagonistic countries.

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[8] Hannah Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (Mainer Book, 1973), 278. See also, Aristide R. Zolberg, "The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process," *The annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.* vol 467 (May 1983), pp. 24-38.
[9] Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 1.

Partition historians such as Chatterji, Anwesha Sengupta, and Anindita Ghoshal deal with the Calcutta-born Muslims, but left the Eastern Bengali Muslims' return for separate treatment. I want to start with three quotations from my interviews, letters from family archives, and field works conducted in Noakhali. These quotes will help me to contextualize the Bengali Muslims' return journey back home.[10]

These were the experiences of Bengali Muslims about Calcutta, a city they dreamt of living in, but ended up escaping surreptitiously to survive. I will come to this part in due time. Let me dwell on something that will help us to see how Calcutta became a point of dispute between Hindus and Muslims in the wake of the Partition and then three case studies through which this chapter shows how the return journey of Bengali Muslims occurred due to the communal violence in their working places in Calcutta.

The history of Partition is intertwined with exile, displacement, violence, and the relocation of people.[11] Historians have written about Partition which has occurred along religious lines and resulted in the largest migration in human history—almost 15 million people were

[10] People who have not visited Calcutta were not yet to be born" (Suroz Mia)." My father and cousin hid in Jogendra's house in Calcutta wearing Hindu dresses *duti* (sarong that outwardly looks like a trouser), which would make people think they were Hindus instead of Muslims (Calcutta Riots in 1946)" (Shufia Khatun). "I need to get a job in Dacca; otherwise, I can't leave Calcutta. What would I eat if I retired from Calcutta and came back to Noakhali?" (Abdul Gani Mia, 1951).

[11] Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947-1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011). Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The refugees and the Left Politics Syndrome in West Bengal* (Calcutta: Naya Udyog, 1999). See also, *Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Decolonization in South Asia: Meaning of freedom in post-independence West Bengal, 1947-52* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) Chapter 1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 32, 1996, pp. 2143-45.

displaced.[12] Hindus and Muslims had to leave within a matter of weeks, and for Bengali Muslims until 1965, to the 'right' nation and left their belongings behind to escape the violence.[13] In some cases, they exchanged property to move in their shared religious community. Partition literature has produced extensive narratives to conceptualize the pain it inflicted on people who happened to be on the wrong side of the border. The feminist notion of Partition literature also encapsulates the trials that women endured such as rape, forced conversions to other religions, honor killings by their family members, or dismemberment of their bodies, just like Partition fought over women bodies.[14] However, this literature did not do justice to the pain and struggles of Bengali Muslims' return journey to Noakhali from Calcutta, a city absorbed into India.

East Bengali migration into Calcutta

Before delving into the stories of the return journey of East Bengali Muslims, it is necessary to examine Calcutta's importance and meaning to Bengali Muslims. At the end of the Great War in 1918, Calcutta ranked second only to London among the premier cities of the British Empire.[15] Europeans and a small number of non-Bengalis controlled trade and industry, while Bengali Hindus comprised of most people in the professional and clerical classes. On the other hand, the East Bengali Muslim workers worked in the dock district of Kidderpore and lived in ramshackle

[12] Joya Chatterji, The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967 (Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also, Sukanta Chaudhuri, Calcutta, the Living City: Vol 2, the Present and Future (Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter Ten.
[13] Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (Columbia: 2010).
[14] Veena Das, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990). Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998). Ritu Menon and Kamal Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: How Women Experienced the Partition of India* (Brunswick, N J: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
[15] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), p-1.

slums and stalls. Calcutta was a diverse city with a wide range of ethnicities and religions. This included Bengalis, Hindus, Punjabis, Muslims, Tamils, Christians, Afghans, Pathans, Chinese, Armenians, Biharis, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Eurasians, Italians, Persians, Jews, Jains and Buddhists.[16] Calculating the number of eastern Bengali Muslims working in Calcutta is impossible. However, the total number of Muslims was approximately 205,000 out of a population of nearly 900,000 in 1918. Though in 1837, the city census counted 45,000 Bengali-speaking Muslims against 20,000 Muslims who spoke other languages.

In the early twentieth century, weavers from the up-country sought work in the jute mills along the Hooghly River to survive. They were commuters who shuttled themselves back and forth between rural areas and the teeming city. They were unskilled Eastern Bengali Muslims who were drawn by the prospects of jobs in Calcutta, being the commuters between the village and urban world.[17] In 1918, the population was largely of migrant origin, who mainly worked in the jute mill operatives in the newly established to the south of the city, and other migrants were the boatmen and laborers of the dockyards and ghats. These Bengalis were a small and unobtrusive part of working-class society in Calcutta.[18] Calcutta signified a place of plenty and readily available work. For example, Gopal Halder was raised in Noakhali and was a self-conscious *mofussilite* (resides in countryside) who migrated to Calcutta, and aptly wrote that every Bengali has two homes: one is the place where he was born, and the other is Calcutta.[19]

[16] Ibid. p-7.
[17] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal: 1920-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31.
[18] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 4-5.
[19] Gopal Haldar, *Rupnaraner Kule*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1992), 32.

As Bengali Hindus were landowners and educated citizens in rural areas, Calcutta was a favorite destination for them because it was renowned for being the cultural capital of Bengal. Being educated, Bengali Hindus served in the courts and in institutions, initiated businesses, and entered professions where education was the primary requirement. On the other hand, the Muslims moved into jobs without any formal educational requirements, such as street hawkers, washermen, weavers, domestic servants, day laborers, market gardeners, and Muslim *Laskars* (sailors from Sylhet and Eastern Bengal). Additionally, Calcutta was a hub of culture and community, often with ethnic enclaves where people of various backgrounds lived together. Calcutta was just as important for Bengali Muslims on the eastern side as it was for their fellow Bengali Hindus because if Partition happened, they would be out of capital. On top of that "stripped of Calcutta and western Bengal," Ayesha Jalal stresses, "eastern Bengal was reduced to the status of an over-populated rural slum, capable neither of being defended from external attack nor of being developed as an equal partner inside a Muslim state."[20] Tariq Omar Ali also notes that the Muslim League did not have any official branches outsides Calcutta.[21] Tariq writes that prior to the 1946 election, Calcutta based Muslim Bengali cultural and literary organization popularized the idea of Pakistan through debate and discussion.[22] M.A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, also stated "what is the use of Bengal without Calcutta, they had much better to remain united and independent. I am sure they would be on friendly terms with us."[23]

[20] Ayesha Jala, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.
[21] Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute & Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 169.
[22] Ibid. p. 169
[23] Ibid. p. 170.

These statements made by these political leaders offer a sense of what Calcutta signified for the people on the eastern side of Bengal. Before Partition, the city was a center of political disputes over which part of Bengal it should belong to. There was a moment when anything was possible, a moment of uncertainty about the fate of Calcutta. The crux of the matter was that the British had not yet decided whether Calcutta would be a part of Pakistan or remain as part of India. However, Nazimuddin declared Dacca the capital of newly formed East Pakistan when the debate about Calcutta reached its peak. Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, indicated in his memoir that the abrupt announcement that had been made without consulting with other political leaders. Thus, in effect, this decision undermined the chance of getting a fair share of Calcutta and the ground on which a bargaining point had been stretched further. This blunder, indeed, helped the British to settle this contentious issue and walk away from making it a 'free city,' which was a rumor for a brief period. Mujib also grieved that if leaders make mistakes the people have to pay for it, for we [Bengali Muslims] had given up willingly the Calcutta that had been built with the money derived from the people of East Bengal.[24]

Keep Calcutta Movement

With the loss of Calcutta as capital, after Partition East Bengal became a collection of rural districts not connected to each other. This loss of a centralized power contributed to the inability of Bengali Muslims in East Bengali to contain riots that targeted Hindus for it was more difficult to send police forces to the periphery or collect information about what was going on in remote villages. The loss of connection to Calcutta affected East Bengal in another way. East Bengali Muslims who had been working in Calcutta had to suddenly leave Calcutta, a city which they

[24] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Oshomapto Attojiboni* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2012.), p. 79.

claimed as theirs but that became increasingly hostile to their Muslim identity beginning in 1946. This mass exodus from Calcutta extraordinarily reduced the living standard of Bengalis in East Pakistan and increased unemployment in a new country that was still economically unstable. In summary, the loss of Calcutta was a devastating blow to both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis in East Bengal. Being the capital of British Empire until 1911, Calcutta was culturally rich, diverse, and a prime center of education.

Enamored by its veiled beauty, Gopal Halder, a Marxist author, writes that it takes time for people to discover the city's beauty—standing on the roof, watching the sun's rays play with the house in the sky, or feeling the sunset at the shore of the river Ganges.[25] As such, Calcutta is a city whose true beauty can only be appreciated and understood through the experience of its unique culture, history, and geography. Apart from the natural beauty of Calcutta, another glamor it held was its 'intellectual beauty.'[26] Bengali is the language of the city. The great Bengali poet Tagore said in the 1920s that to keep out Bengali and adopt any other language will emasculate the independence of our mind. A host of literary personalities moved to Calcutta in their formative years, including the writers Dinesh, Das, and Halder. For generations, Hindu landowners had made Calcutta their dream city, building homes and opening businesses. It was the city Hindus would never negotiation with Muslims, even with what happened to the rest of the India with the withdrawal of British power.

At the time Bengal was partitioned, Calcutta became a point of contention between Hindus and Muslims, who were both claimed the city as their own. East Bengal wanted Calcutta to be included in its territory, even though the idea and spatial definition of Pakistan has always

[25] Gopal Halder *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. II. Calcutta, 1981. P.1.
[26] Ibid.

been amorphous. The newspapers *Azad* and *Ittehad*, which functioned as the mouthpiece of the Muslim Student League, regularly drew maps and charted statistics to explain their rational claim over Calcutta as a part of East Bengal. Through this propaganda, the citizens and politicians of East Bengal began to view Calcutta as a part of their territory. The debate and speculation spread further confusion on both sides of the yet to be created border and delayed people's decision about whether they would leave or stay.

Just before Partition, East Pakistan claimed Calcutta because the city was the center of political activities for Muslims, which included political offices, political rallies, propagandistic newspapers, and the leaders' residences. Muslims considered Calcutta the epicenter of their political identity, and they fought to keep the city in East Bengal. Under no circumstances would the Muslim League imagined a territory of Pakistan without Calcutta within it. As the Partition of India became a reality, the Bengali Muslims doubled their efforts to claim Calcutta. Anwesha Sengupta notes that, based on political satirist Abul Mansur Ahmed's book, not only were rallies for Calcutta and meetings organized by Muslims students behind this claim, but it was argued by people that the majority part comprised of East Pakistan carved from an undivided Bengal would become the sole container of this city. According to Sengupta, another option was to make Calcutta a 'common' and 'shared city' between Hindus and Muslims. Ahmed's book accused West Pakistan of not being sincere about East Pakistan's desire to keep Calcutta. However, Ahmed also argued that East Pakistan should make sacrifices, even if it meant the loss of Calcutta and a united Bengal to ensure the creation of Pakistan.

Even though Ahmed's book is quite powerful and influential in its argument regarding the effort of Muslims in their desperate attempt to keep Calcutta as part of East Bengal.

Conversely, if the entire landscape of the politics and how it unfolded is taken collectively, it was quite impractical to claim Calcutta from the Muslim side. Ahmed became irritated with the political leaders who failed to make a persuasive bid on Calcutta. However, Hindus made up the majority and a point subsequently was discussed among the Muslim League and Congress leaders that there would not be a democratic appeal process if the Muslim League continued to push the demand. Muslim leaders believed that this push for Calcutta might lead to a confrontation, and perhaps unleash violence in a politically charged environment in Calcutta. I argue that it would never be a Muslim city even though the Muslim leaders of East Bengal fought for it. Hindus held the economic power in Calcutta, which meant that they had the last say over who got Calcutta. For the Bengali Hindus, Calcutta was an inseparable part of their existence, thus they were willing to sacrifice anything to keep the city.

When the Partition of Bengal was discussed, Hindus wanted a land of their own, Calcutta became the heart of those who held the majority in. However, the neither the question of East Bengali Hindus was not considered with the idea of Bengal Partition nor the status of the minority Muslim residents in Calcutta. East Bengali Muslim politicians demonstrated for Calcutta being part of East Bengal through political movements that contextualized the argument. Hindus were ready to pay anything for Calcutta, claiming it almost as non-negotiable. The battle over Calcutta can be compared to the claim over Delhi, a city that West Pakistani Muslim residences in Delhi claimed to be part of Pakistan after Partition. Muslims were emotionally attached and economically dependent upon both cities and wanted them to be part of Pakistan. According to some Muslims residences of Delhi, this city was as closely connected to Pakistan as Allah—an invisible being and yet reality—to Muslim souls. “Must we know what

Allah Almighty is all about? Nobody has even seen Allah. And yet everyone believes in him."[27] They were connecting this idea to Delhi: just because people do not see Allah that does not mean he does not exist. Likewise, Delhi will eventually be part of Pakistan. The same goes for Calcutta, which would go to Pakistani territory after Partition; the fact that Delhi was not considered as a part of Pakistan before Partition, does not mean it cannot be. Rotem Geva notes on Delhi that Siddiqi, a Muslim, never thought of or truly conceived of departing Delhi when Pakistan was formed. These two cities reflect each other in the major political imagination of the common people during Partition. Therefore, Muslims considered it crucial to hold the city of Calcutta as part of Pakistan for without it they would face economic devastation.[28]

In the following few paragraphs, I demonstrate why the claim on Calcutta from the Muslim League was not *feasible* and worked instead as a *bargaining chip* for Muslims (a phrase taken from Ayesha Jalal). The Hindu leaders, particularly Syama Prasad Mukherjee, a conservative leader from Hindu Mahasabha, wanted to have a homogenized space based on Hindu identity without the influence of Muslims in power over which they would have absolute control, and Calcutta had become the heart of that idealized state. By claiming Calcutta, Hindu leaders also essentially took the responsibility of all Hindus of East Bengal for they did not care how Hindus who were not a part of West Bengal and lived in the outskirts of East Bengal would get to Calcutta nor how they would survive outside of the enshrined Hindu state. By demanding Calcutta, they uprooted Bengali Hindu and indirectly forced them to abandon everything they

[27] Rotem Geva, *Delhi Reborn: Partition and Nation Building in India's Capital* (Stanford University Press, 2022), p. 67.
[28] Both cities had a vast Muslims presence, were the center of political activities and protests, and the heart of the political convention. For Pakistan's claim to be sustained, Muslims of Delhi and Calcutta were required to participate during the political campaign. Thus, Muslim League leaders were able to harness the surge of enthusiasm among the people of both cities consistently; people from miles away gathered and persistently unfurled their flags and sang.

had established in the eastern side: their culture, their homes, properties, and their history. Suddenly, claiming Calcutta was a way to rewrite these people's history, who had sacrificed the most leaving everything behind, because it tied Hindu identity to Calcutta and the lived experience of Hindus. Despite this refusal to give up Calcutta, Bengali Hindus who moved to Calcutta were culturally abused because they did not fit what an ideal Calcutta Hindu should be.

Before Partition, self-conscious mofussilite migrated to Calcutta, a place known as the cultural capital of Bengal. Not only is Calcutta considered the capital, but it was also seen as a glorious city. David Ludden stresses about Hindu's who owned land in the eastern Bengal, saying "most major zamindars in the east were invested in Calcutta and thus in the continued flow of wealth there from eastern Bengal."[29] Over the British period, Calcutta resonated the identity of Hindus, who were spearheads of nationalist movement against British Empire. Muslims had also political activities, presses, educational institutions in Calcutta but not on equal foot with Hindus. Obtaining Calcutta was not viable for Bengali Muslims, not only was it culturally so important to Hindus, but also, as majority, Hindus had already made the final decision about a state of their own. Bengali Hindus determination was symbolized by their offer of 33 corer taka to Bengali Muslims. This demonstrated Hindus willingness to give up anything to retain Calcutta.[30] In 1946, there were riots in Calcutta (the prime minister was Muslim) that also made Hindus determine to have a Hindu government. However, it was not possible due to majority of Muslims in the entire Bengal. While Calcutta absorbed Bengali Hindu refugees, West Bengali government slowly expelled the Bengali Muslims to replenish the jobs with

[29] David Ludden, Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (May 2012), p. 505.
[30] Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bochhor* (Fifty Years of Politics as I saw it) (Dhaka: Khoshroz Kitab Mahal, 2013). P. 2013.

Hindus. They did so through social pressure, and it made the Bengali Muslims feel unsafe and unwelcomed.

However, the Muslim Leaguers were unsure about their claim long before it became a political debate. Muslim League leaders claimed Dacca as the political capital twice, which inadvertently undermined their political bid to claim Calcutta. First, on June 3rd, 1944, Shaheed Suhrawardy envisioned Dacca as the capital of Bengal's Eastern region, essentially abdicating Calcutta. The second time, in 1946, Nazimuddin explicitly declared Dacca as the capital as he was ascending to power. The defeat of Shaheed to Nazimuddin was in its twilight year of the "Keep Calcutta Movement" because it solidified the direction of the Muslim League to Dacca instead of Calcutta as their new capital, which allowed Hindus to maintain their claim on Calcutta.

Calcutta became a *bargaining chip* for the Muslim League to ensure there was more portion of land for West Pakistan. As Ahmed noted, the boundary commission met without Suhrawardy, the leader of Muslim Bengalis, but included someone from United Province. The commission sold Calcutta to ensure Lahore belonged to Pakistan. This point is worthy of some discussion because the problem did not emerge with the campaigning of the "Keep Calcutta Movement" but started even before that. In his presidential address to A.L.M.L in December 1930, Iqbal, the famous poet-philosopher and the ideological architect of Pakistan, called for the creation of a Muslim India, a state in the north-west consisting of the Muslim majority regions of the Punjab, Sind, the N.W.E.P. and Baluchistan. East Bengal, which later constituted East Pakistan, was not imagined within Muslim India, but was later included as the Muslim League needed to gain foothold in the legislative assembly through the majority. Ahmed argued that East

Bengal worked as the vote bank for the entire Pakistan, a region that consolidated the movement. The point is also noticeable when the formation of the Boundary commission was taken into consideration.[31] To watch over the interest of East Bengal, Jinnah had appointed an advocate as a member of boundary commission from the United Province without any prior knowledge, neglecting the famous and local advocate Huq and Suhrawardy. Jinnah, the architect of the new nation, took eight months to visit East Pakistan after the country came into being, a gesture from top leadership that exposed the inherent discrimination against East Pakistan. West Pakistan, being the dominant partner, was considered more important, being that it was the original counterpart of India. While the Muslim League did not support the formation of a separate province in Bengal bereft from Calcutta, the League also remained silent and refused to make any statement when the Bengal Partition of 1905 was annulled. I will now explain in three different stages how Bengali Muslim left Calcutta from the beginning of riots in 1946 to the end of India Pakistan War 1965.

First Phase of Return: Following the Great Calcutta Riots in 1946

After the Great Calcutta Riots in 1946, the villagers trickled back to Noakhali to find refuge, for some of them were killed in the Calcutta Riots. The Muslim minority had been targeted in the riots by Hindu extremists. The story of Suroz Mia, a Muslim and a resident of Noakhali, reveals the shift for Bengali Muslims in Calcutta due to riots that targeted and discriminated against them on the basis of their religion. Suroz Mia's journey uncovers how he risked his life traveling

[31] One thing is not researched by historians was the position of West Pakistan during the negotiation of the boundary between India and East Bengal. West Pakistan did not support Calcutta becoming part of East Pakistan. Because Calcutta has a Hindu majority, if it was attached to East Bengal, then West Pakistan would not have a chance to control and exert their power on the East side due to educated Hindus who would not allow them to do so. Thus, West Pakistan remained indifferent to the keep Calcutta movement and implicitly and consciously ignored it. The two sides never came to an agreement or understanding where West Pakistan could help East Pakistan retain Calcutta.

to Calcutta alone, a city he had never visited in his teenage years during the 1930s. What was the motivation for which he took this massive adventurous excursion unknown to his family members in Noakhali? Upon interview, he shared:

> When I went to Calcutta, I was 17 years old. Muslims were the poorest citizens of this part of the country. I went to Sonapur Bazar, Ramganj, Lakhimpur, a place for selling miscellaneous articles, to sell red chilies with my father. As I was going, I came to know from one of my peers who was saying people who have not visited Calcutta were not yet to born. He repeatedly pushed me several times by using sarcasm saying things like, 'Beta (son), you have not seen Calcutta yet, you're still in your mother's womb. Then I gave the sack of chilis to my father that I was to be selling, and as he walked ahead of me, I quickly disappeared into the crowd to hide from him, stepped into a boat bound for Chandpur, and from Chandpur, purchased passage to Calcutta.[32]

Suroz had not visited the mother city of Bengal, Calcutta, the incredibly beautiful center of the British Empire. His friend teased him which was a strong motivation for Suroz to visit Calcutta as he was seeking a job and opportunity to support his family. Suroz decided that he would go to Calcutta that day for the opportunity to work and possibly to acquire a fortune. This was one of many stories about how people from East Bengal moved to Calcutta for freedom and opportunity.

For people of Noakhali, stories of the stunning architectural grandeur of Calcutta and the opportunities of earning daily bread inspired their desire to travel. In addition, they knew that there were people from their community at the time that had settled in specific pockets of Calcutta. In Noakhali, commuters from Calcutta often discussed the beauty and opportunities in

[32] Interview with Suroz Mia in Ramganj, Lakshmipur, May 22, 2022.

the city, and the word spread quickly through the gossip in the village. The British colonial rulers desired to make Calcutta the imperial capital of an emerging empire, resulting in a unique example of British colonial urbanism. Colonial spatial order transformed it from a 'City of Huts' to 'City of Palaces'.[33] Along with witnessing the beauty of the great city and the capital of the British Empire up until 1911, Bengali Muslims saw Calcutta as a city of fortune with take ahold of the opportunities to pursue economic advancement significantly better than that of Noakhali or Dacca. The stories of experiences of people who were working or had worked in Calcutta motivated others to visit the city and take ahold of the opportunities. Muslims ended up working in different places, such as restaurants, jute mills, dockyards, and a portion of them eventually became subaltern workers in the Calcutta Corporation. The Hindu landowning villagers who had businesses in Calcutta before the Partition commonly favored their impoverished Muslim neighbors as they managed their job offerings. As the interview proceeded on, Suroz shared how he got into Calcutta,

> I reached Calcutta at 9pm. I immediately went to the Grand Tower Hotel and Restaurant which is located at 24 Acharya Prafulla Chandra Rd. Kolkata, India; it is a bar with restaurants. Around 17 of our villagers worked in this hotel. My uncle, Fazal Bepari, was one of these villagers. He noticed me, walked over to my direction, and slapped on my face he approached me. My uncle already realized from my gesture that I did not tell my family I was coming here. He then threw me towel, soap, and napkin to take a shower. I did and came down to the corner of the stairways and as people were crossing me, people gave me money. Some were handling over fifty annas, and four annas, and a person gave 1 taka. I could not understand what was going on. Then, my

[33] Siddhartha Sen, *Colonizing, Decolonizing, and Globalizing Kolkata: From a Colonial to a Post-Marxist City* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 232-236.

> uncle asked me why I was there as I was asked to sleep. I replied that I tried to sleep, but I couldn't.[34]

Without doing anything, Suroz received 2.13 taka in total. People had mistaken him as a waiter and were providing him tips, a foreign concept to him. The fortune of Calcutta became a reality on his first day. The hotel was a place that harbored all Bengali Muslims from Noakhali, and they considered it their place, just like an ethnic enclave in a diverse city. Arun Babu owned it and is still fondly remembered in the Noakhali communities. He cared for all his community members by providing an entry-level job in his hotel. These Muslims would meet with each other, collect information, and even send money back home to their families.

Not only did this hotel house all Bengali Muslims, but it also functioned as a transitioning place to get them on their feet by providing them opportunity for work such as entry-level jobs in the Calcutta Corporation or working in the bar and restaurants. Whoever came to the hotel for the first time was vetted by Arun Babu by their familial ties. He would recognize people mainly through their fathers' name because Arun Babu also owned land and a house in the village of Lamchar in Noakhali district which was mostly cultivated by the relatives of the workers. Babu collected information about the village and the crops cultivated on his land in Noakhali and provided opportunity from those reputations. As the hotel became a community place, it felt like a mini Lamchar had been built in Calcutta, a kind of ethnic enclave such as that of China Town or mini-Bangladesh in New York.

After three days without a job, Suroz was standing in the entry of this very hotel and around 8:15 p.m., he says, Arun Babu sees me. I had seen him before in *desh'e* (village). Arun

[34] Interview with Suroz Mia.

asked Suroz where he lived in Lamchar and what his father's name was. Arun left to go to the kitchen upon hearing his answer and coming back, grabbed his hand and took him to the manager, named Rames Babu (from Dacca). Arun asked Rames to give him a table to learn how to serve food and liquor.[35] Instead, Suroz goes, "the manager assigned me to be an assistant to another waiter name Baubon from Bardoman, India."[36] Arun Babu expressed to the manager that Suroz will learn the work quickly/few days and seemed like a smart boy. He will be able to serve and control one single table in short time."[37] Bengali Muslims mostly worked in those places which did not require formal education.

Suroz had earned 9 takas at the end of the month and "people who were working for a long time, were jealous of me because I just joined a month back and learned the work quickly." After three months, Arun Babu called me, and asked me to stand in front of a table. He then asked Rames Babu whether or not I was qualified to work a big table." Then came a test. The whiskey in the restaurant was to be served at 1.5 taka per serving, and the bottles were placed in a line on a table.

This was Suroz's opportunity to move to a higher position as a 'real waiter'. In our interview, Suroz related this dialogue as follows:

Arun questioned Suroz, "what were these?"
Suroz replied, "Wine/whiskey."
He then pressed, 'Would you be able to tell what their names were?'

[35] Interview with Suroz Mia in Ramganj, Lakshmipur, May 22, 2022
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

Because everything was written in English, this opportunity for Suroz was crucial and he excelled.

Suroz explained that he started with the London one. “This is white level, white horse, white Tuscan. This is red level, this is Brenne Ten.”

Arun smiled back to Ramesh and said, “He is astute.”

During our interview, Suroz was giggling for a moment and so was I. Arun finally relented and gave Suroz full-time employment.”[38] Suroz worked for nine years without any problems, until the riots broke out in Calcutta in 1946. The Muslims were consistently frightened by the possibility of violence, as they knew they would be targeted from the Hindu mob. Andre Beteille mentioned that Hindu young men went in search of weak, isolated and defenseless Muslims in order to settle scores.[39] He had also witnessed the sky lit up by fires in several places throughout the city. Suroz said he had seen the dead bodies of Muslims and decided to retaliate, along with seven Muslim hotel employees. When asked about his role in the riots, he shared that, “there were glass bottles around 100 in one case. We threw bottles from the second floor of a house adjacent to the main road. As people were crossing the road, they threw the bottles causing them to shatter and glass shards to hit people.”[40] They participated from Monday night to Tuesday. These riots in the country defined who was Hindu and Muslim and acted as an example of asserting religious identity through violence and terror. After three or four days, Suroz and all Muslims villagers were instructed to leave the city because their pictures were taken in these acts of retaliation, and now a case could be filed against them. Arun then came at 9p.m. with a car having darkly tinted windows, so they would not be visible to the Hindu rioters and dropped

[38] Ibid.
[39] Andre Beteille, *Sunlight on the Garden: A Story of Childhood and Youth* (Penguin Book India: 2012). P. 23.
[40] Interview with Suroz Mia.

them at the rail station. Suroz continued, “we almost lost our lives during the riots, but Arun showed utmost humanity by helping his neighbors to cross the border.”[41]

In the time leading to Partition religious identity isolated Muslims in Calcutta, who tried to retaliate in Calcutta even though they did not have many resources to aid them. Suroz participated due to the fact that Muslims were being brutally killed and mutilated. However, as the interview progressed, he clarified that his participation was not intended to kill anyone, but he was also burning with the fear that Muslims would eventually be wiped out in the city. The riots were so extreme that workers thought they would not be spared from violence. This led to a change in the population demography of Calcutta. Indeed, Bengali Muslims’ time in this city came to an end as they slowly departed forever, leaving behind memories and dreams of supporting their families through employment in Calcutta. This was a moment just before Partition when Hindus and Muslims made sure their destiny did not intertwine.

One particular name that Suroz mentioned on his journey back to Noakhali was A.C. Lal, a Hindu who was also from Lamchar and happened to be Jessore due to business. This station has been (and still is) a place of importance, which both Hindu and Muslim communities had to cross in 1946. After the riots, as people crossed into Jessore they were able to breathe a sigh of relief because they had reached safety. On their way home from Calcutta, Suroz and his villagers stopped at this station. Suroz gives an account of an interaction with Lal when he says, “We had just got off the train in Jessore. We would not be able to navigate well in the dark. As we were trying to figure out what to do, Lal came out and saw us.”[42] Since it was so dark outside, and unsafe due to the riots, Suroz and his cousin were scared and lost. Lal saw them and asked who

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

they were looking for. Suroz told him they were not looking for anyone and they just wanted to go home. In conversation, they discovered they were from Lamchar and Lal introduced himself to them. Suroz was baffled that he had been coincidentally helped by two different Hindu people from his hometown. He took a minute to express gratitude before continuing forward to his destination in Noakhali.

Due to the lack of data, the specific number of people who returned to East Bengal and specifically to Noakhali from Calcutta is unclear. However, roughly between 3 to 4 million relocated to East Bengal from West Bengal, but no data was collected about the population who were migrant workers originally from East Bengal and returned from 1946-1965 nor does the data include the trajectories of relocation within East Bengal. Due to this gap in the data, Suroz's story of return does not fall within the collected information because he was originally from Noakhali and not a permanent resident of Calcutta. However, those 3-4 million people had their own struggle as Anwesha Sengupta also gives an example of people who like "Mijanur Rehman, who became a noted author and cartoonist of Bangladesh, left Calcutta in 1948."[43] He missed the grandeur of Calcutta; settling down in Dacca was more about everyday compromise and demoralizing experience.[44] Dacca was not as cosmopolitan as Calcutta, which was advanced in terms of municipal services. Some Muslims willingly shifted their jobs to serve a new East Pakistan in the hope of rebuilding the nation, but others were forcefully displaced. However, both groups ever remembered the convenience of living in Calcutta, a city where a wide variety of amenities were available.

[43] Anwesha Sengupta, "*Becoming a Minority Community*, p. 453.
[44] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya *The Defining Moments p. 22*. Sabyasachi notes that Calcutta not only had all the advantages of being a provincial capital, but it also became the center of Muslim leadership in the first decades of 20th century

After the Partition (and indeed for the last time), Suroz went to Calcutta in 1948 hoping to continue his previous job. The city proved to still be unsafe, and he reluctantly returned to his new life in East Bengal. However, Suroz was perplexed by the lack of infrastructure of Dacca because he was not familiar with this city and was shocked at the immense contrast between the cosmopolitan prospects of Calcutta and Dacca. Dacca was a bucolic place, with no roads or city lights. He only mentioned a few places where he saw buildings and houses in the areas of Islampur and Nawabpur, the area referred to now as old Dhaka now. The Gulistan, the center of the general post office of Dacca now, was the paddy field. People across Bengal looked up to Calcutta, for it had been built during the time of British Empire and before. However, people like Suroz had nothing to rebuild and were forced to separate from a city of opportunities and dreams. People who had cultural capital, such as education and money, found it easier to cross the border and create a new life.[45] But, Suroz had no education or skills that he could employ to support his family. Whatever skills he learned as a waiter in Calcutta did not bear any fruits once he returned Noakhali.

These stories show how difficult it was for those people to rebuild their lives in East Bengal after Partition. Stories like these have never been documented. They were lost in favor of the common stories of relocation about those born in Calcutta. On top of that, Partition literature favored the Hindus' stories over the Bengali Muslim stories. Recording the narrative of the East Bengali Muslims provides a more nuanced understanding of Partition. After Suroz, still a substantial number of people worked in different industrials jobs, such as jute mills or tea factories, continued in Calcutta after Partition. These Muslim working groups had slowly

[45] C Alexander, J. Chatterji, & A. Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora.* Second chapter. See also, Anindita Ghoshal, The 'home-coming' of the refugees: Narratives of Partition-induced forced migration in South Asia (1947-1971) in Karen Jacobsen & Nassim Majidi (ed). *Handbook on Forced Migration* (Elgar 2023, Chapter 19.

subjected to the state policies of India and lost their livelihood because of the retaliation of riots in Calcutta. They were the most destitute people and compared to the Muslims. Now let's focus on their Partition and parted histories from Calcutta after riots in 1950 in Bagerhat Khulna.

Second Phase: Bagerhat Riots and the Return from Calcutta in 1950

The riots reflected the daily thought process of both the Bengali Hindu and Muslims. To build popularity within their base, political leaders used stochastic terrorism with inflammatory language to instigate righteous action in some people and install fear in others. The political leaders regretfully informed Hindus and Muslims that the minority groups of their people in opposite respective regions were suffering, exaggerating their misery to inspire action. They invited riots in their community implicitly through their actions and explicitly by accusing the other side of harassment. Although minor disturbances had occurred in the Hindu minority community, these occurrences had not escalated. Thus, the finance Tafazzal Ali protested in the parliament by explaining "people of East Bengal until recently maintained an unbroken record of communal harmony and peace ever since Partition, a record unparalleled in this sub-continent."[46] He identified as the sources of misinformation an organization named the Council for the Protection of Rights of Minorities that collaborated with the West Bengal press to paint a lurid picture of the imaginary plight of Hindus in East Bengal. Further, Ali also said that the All-India Hindu Mahasabha made inflammatory language after conference on December 24-26, 1949, by repudiating Partition of India and advocating a forcible annexation of Pakistan to restore *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) and what they called the "nationalization" of Indian Muslims.[47]

[46] *Assembly Proceedings, East Bengal Legislative Assembly, Fourth Session, 1949-50* (Dacca: East Bengal Government Press, 1952). p.182
[47] Ibid.

During a speech in parliament, Ali accused Sardar Patel, the India's Deputy Prime Minister in Calcutta, who made references to the Muslim League as the perpetrator of "Direct Acton," "the tragedy of Noakhali," and the "blood bath." The East Bengal emphasized that the communal peace was broken due to fact of those accusatory language and exploited an incident occurred in Bagerhat nearly a month ago. In this speech, Ali also provided some facts about the genesis and nature of the communal riots in Bagerhat and Khulna in 1950 that resulted in massive migration from both sides of Bengal.[48]

Explaining the Bagerhat riots in 1950, Ali described that on December 20th, 1949, a police party consisting of one Assistant Sub-Inspector and three constables, of whom only one was armed, went to search the house of one communist named Joydeb Brahma of Kalshira in Bagerhat.[49] They were attacked by a communist-inspired mob. The armed constable was murdered on the spot; the other members of the party were assaulted and chased and escaped death only by the timely interventional of the Ansars (paramilitary group) and villagers from the neighboring areas. After this attack on the police party, rumors were immediately spread by certain communists and other interested persons regarding the likelihood of police reprisals, and, in consequence, many people from Kalshira, Jhalordanga, and neighboring areas deserted their homes, taking with them whatever property they could carry. Since there was nobody remained to look after these deserted houses some bad characters of the neighborhood, both Hindus and Muslims, took advantage of the situation and helped themselves to some of the property left

[48] Around 1.6 million Hindus departed to West Bengal and a substantial undocumented Bengali Muslims crossed to East Bengal from their jobs in West Bengal.
[49]Ibid., pp.181- 185.

behind.[50] Additionally, Ali claimed that two women were sextually assaulted. However, the other version of the account says that having failed to find the suspect, the constable tried to rape Brahma's wife. When she cried out, Braham and his companions attacked the two constables, one of whom died on the spot.

Immediate repercussions from this incident happened in Calcutta with the Hindus harassing Bengali Muslims working there. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay notes that, "full-scale anti-Muslim riots started from 8 February, engulfing large parts of north and central Calcutta…. Muslims were attacked, their slums torched, shops looted, and the trains raided for Muslim passengers."[51] The Muslims properties were demolished. The Muslim workers took refuge in East Bengal to save their lives and waited for the situation to diffuse to return to their jobs, but that became a fait accompli. This communal disturbance made both Muslims and Hindus question the sincerity of the 'helpful' efforts of the opposing political leaders, as riots started in East Bengal and retaliation began in West Bengal, which was the mirror image of the riots that moved from Calcutta to Noakhali in 1946.

The 1950 riots more than anything created another layer of distrust and differences leading to a tightening of the surveillance in the borderlands and inside both countries which culminated in mass migrations of Hindus to West Bengal and Muslims to East Bengal. Up until this time, Bengali Hindus were still travelling back and forth between Calcutta and East Bengal—rethinking of their decision and whether they would really relocate or stay on their

[50] Ibid.
[51] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Calcutta, a City in Transition Expectations and Anxieties of Freedom, 1947–501," in T. Sarkar, & Sekhar Bandyopadhyay eds., *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (Routledge, 2017), p. 376.

property in East Bengal. However, following 1950, both sides of Bengal surveilled their people which resulted in displacement, harassment, and discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. For a substantial number of Bengali Muslims, displacement from Calcutta meant joblessness as they waited for both sides of the government to come to a consensus that enabled return to work in Calcutta.

For these Bengali Muslims who were industrial workers, the Partition's most unexpected impact was a change in their livelihood and quality of life. They were counting the days and hoping to return to the industries, farms, and mills in West Bengal once the situation stabilized. The government stance regarding Partition forced Partition into the Bengali Muslims lives by monitoring the workplace and the autonomy of their movements. It was impossible to safely return without the government's help and commitment for further safety, and the government was involved in maintaining and disrupting the working people's livelihood. It was to make sure they would continue to work, and some assurance of normalcy from the West Bengal Government was anticipated. This bureaucratic procedure forced workers to wait for those two governments' consensus.

During the premiers' conference in Dacca on May 15, 1950, both sides of Bengal agreed that the industrial workers from East Bengal, working in factories, businesses, and other establishments would have the chance to return to their previous posts. Even though the Chief Minister of West Bengal Dr. Roy made the promise to re-instate the workers to their former position, but they procrastinated the appeal by citing a lack of information regarding the workers. The concern of resettlement of industrial workers first appeared in the re-installment of Muslim

Industrial Laborers in their old jobs in West Bengal in East Bengal's confidential report in 1950. The East Bengal Relief Commission had published and sent the particulars of 6,980 workers to West Bengal in 25 lists, who sought refuge from 05.30.50 to 08.29.50 in East Bengal. However, West Bengal told East Bengal no in their letter. 4164/CR dated 08.26.50 stated that the Labor Commission of West Bengal had made inquiries into 214 workers out of the 6,980 documented.[52] For the rest of the workers, it was necessary to make a new inquiry. Employers were unable to furnish any information because of a lack of particulars relating to their identification numbers and the names of different shops to which they were attached. However, the Relief Commission of East Bengal made another revised list from 09.21. 50 to 02. 27. 51 which contained token numbers and other required particulars of an additional 2575 such industrial workers.

During this time, West Bengal appointed 'Badli (substitute)' workers to replace the employment of returning migrant workers. To validate this policy change, West Bengal replied that, "understanding orders in force in jute mills, a workman was liable to be dismissed for absence without leave for more than 10 days."[53] The mills waited for a reasonably long period for workers who had left during the disturbance and continued re-employing workers from other parts of India in the posts of the missing East Bengali workers, who were victims of communal

[52] The question of resettlement of industrial workers in West Bengal who migrated to East Bengal during the disturbance has been taken up at the Chief Secretaries' conference with the Government of West Bengal. Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department. B. Proceedings (CR 1.1-18/83) of November 1955. P. 1-6.
Bundle no. 56. Year. 1948-1958. List. No. 119. P. 15.
[53] Ibid., p. 15.

disturbance. West Bengal now stated that it was impossible to discharge these newly employed workers, and the government saw no justification in interfering with the decision.[54]

The West Bengal Labor Commissioner further released an official statement asserting that they had been trying their hardest and using their power to negotiate with the Mill officials to allow the Muslim employees who were refugees in East Bengal to return, but West Bengal Labor Commission had not met with much success. Following the disturbance, the mill authorities in West Bengal made a quick decision to resume production by filling most of the vacancies. The Jute Mills and other factories were severely affected by the shortage of jute and were even considering retrenchment instead of re-engaging those who had left. More importantly, the Chief Secretary of West Bengal, reinforced that under the existing circumstances the return of Muslim Bengal laborers to East Bengal might lead to recurrence of communal trouble in the mills' area, which they were trying to avoid. The official statement made by West Bengal differed from the evidence. Although they said they were trying to negotiate with the mills to allow the workers to return, they also said the return of these workers might lead to civil unrest. The perceived outcome was that West Bengal was seeking every way possible to get rid of the Muslim workers of East Bengal.

East Bengal proposed two requests: first, open a Labor Liaison Office at Calcutta, and second, sending a representative of a few workers to negotiate with the mills' owners where they were formally employed.[55] West Bengal agreed with the first suggestion but showed no interest

[54] Govt of East Bengal. Home (Political) Department. B. Proceedings (CR. File No. 1.1-18/83) of November 55, Bundle no. 56. P. 15.
[55] Ibid., p. 4.

in the second, which might lead to an interference with the internal administration of the mills. Against this, West Bengal stated that it would inform East Bengal in advance about the probable number of Badli vacancies. East Bengal responded that it was impractical due to Badli workers serving in permanent positions. However, in the meantime, the West Bengal Government stated around 20,000 returning Muslim migrants had been reemployed by the industries in West Bengal, and another 3000 resigned from their positions and had been paid gratuities. West Bengal clarified their position, stating that the restoration of jobs was not a part of the Delhi Agreement. On the contrary, East Bengal held that under section of VII of the annexures of the 15th of August 1950 to the Delhi Pact of the 8th of April 1950, it was agreed that the Government of West Bengal, Assam, and East Bengal would persuade employers of industrial labor to reinstate returning migrants their old jobs.

East Bengal stated that those 20,000 were the workers who fled to other parts of India because of the disturbances, not those who came over to East Bengal. They were recruited Muslims from Bihar and the United Province in India. The editorial article entitled “There and Here” published in the Morning News Dacca, dated the 1st of December 1950, claimed about 30,000 vacancies were caused by evacuation of Muslim workers during the disturbance in February and March 1950. The industrial concerns have taken about 20,000 returning migrants. 3,000 of these 20,000 had been either resigned or paid off with gratuities. This article agreed with the assessment of East Bengal that 20,000 were taken from U.P. and Bihar, not from East Bengal. The Government of West Bengal claimed that a number of Muslim workers who had migrated to East Bengal did not contact their employers for months, even after conditions had returned to normal. Ultimately, around 10,000 workers from East Bengal lost their jobs in the

mills and factories. The economic struggles faced by East Bengal during this time were exacerbated by the absence of the industrial workforce, as factories were predominantly located in West Bengal. The return of Bengali Muslims had a profound and unexpected impact on their quality of life, employment, and the overall economic situation in East Bengal.[56]

The Final Phase: Following the India-Pakistan War in 1965

Shufia Khatun's father, Abdul Gani Mia, was a practicing Muslim and as such he did not drink alcohol; therefore, he did not regularly visit the Grant Tower Hotel in Calcutta, a community hotspot. All the young Muslims from Lamchar in Noakhali went there to find work to support their families. She shared, "My father was a pious Muslim, and Grant Tower Hotel is a bar and restaurant where all the young people partied and drank. He lived a little far, but everyone went there to meet and exchanged information about their relatives back in Noakhali."[57] The fathers of those young Muslims from Noakhali often visited the hotel to see what their sons were doing. Khatun also shared that her father had a job at the Calcutta Corporation for many years but left in 1965 during the time of the India-Pakistan war and never returned to Calcutta. However, when the Calcutta riots in 1946 broke out between Hindus and Muslims and disrupted his life and his livelihood. She further added that during the riots, her father had planned not to come back to Noakhali, yet he was forced to return following the riots and Partition. Gani later returned to

[56] Shufia Khatun shared that her father had to come back in 1950. The entire family suffered due to financial problems. After the Partition, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay notes an unprecedented food crisis throughout India, particularly in West Bengal. East Bengal was no different, especially when the major industrial areas of the entire Bengal became part of West Bengal. Sarkar, T., & Bandyopadhyay, S. eds. *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (Routledge, 2017). Chapter sixteen.
[57] Interviewed with Shufia Khatun, Ramganj, Lakshmipur, May 23, 2022.

Calcutta to continue working as a peon in the Calcutta Corporation until the India-Pakistan War in 1965.

She shares, “I was in Calcutta with him during the Calcutta riots of 1946. Often, during the time of riots, we closed our windows and doors and could not cook for a long time due to fear that the smoke would attract the Hindu mob. Fortunately, no one attacked our house, but the house in front of ours that belonged to a Muslim was burned to ashes.”[58] Those experiences they witnessed made them believe that they should return home once and for all. Her older uncle Rustom Khan had a terrible cough, and it was thought to be infectious. He came to Gani’s place in Calcutta, stayed inside a room, and could not go out since he constantly coughed. Rustom had planned to return the following morning but felt unsafe. Shufia started crying to return with him because she was scared. After two to three days, she began her journey to return to Noakhali with her uncle Rustom and left her father to his fate.

She and Rustom came to Noakhali through Jessore with only the bags they could carry. Shufia also shared that Gani briefly returned to Noakhali later, but when the situation improved, he again returned to Calcutta and would write letters to her. She would write to him asking for money and inquiring about the people who surrounded him but remained in Noakhali living in her uncle’s house. () During this time, due to concerns over dangers in Calcutta, Muslim families were separated as they sought to maintain both livelihood and familial safety. Shufia explained to me how the many contingencies added to the confusion over what to do and where to live. She also shared:”[59]

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

> I was not very intelligent and only finished class three. My father married my mother in Calcutta (first marriage) and took her to Noakhali so she could help my aging grandmother, who was suffering from illness. My sister and I were ready to return to our father in Calcutta after our mother and grandmother died in Noakhali. My cousin, Kajal Khan, was working in the defense force in Calcutta and took a few days off. He came to Noakhali when he saw us struggling with our safety. It was a time of rampant poverty; our pantry was almost empty, and we did not have any land or property. On the other hand, Calcutta was not safe, my father had to risk his life for his job. After I returned, my uncle arranged my marriage. I married at the age of 12. I used to write letters to my father and inquired how the community was doing. I provided information regarding the house and requested that he send money.[60]

Shufia also shared one crucial story regarding her father's time in Calcutta after her return to Noakhali. Her cousin Kajal Khan was an underprivileged person, who was later married to her sister, Rabeya. I will come to Rabeya's story later in this chapter. Khan's father, Rustom Khan, requested that his brother Gani Mia, who worked in the Calcutta Corporation, help Kajal get a job in Calcutta. With Gani Mia's help, Kajal was employed in architectural department within the Calcutta Corporation. After this, Gani and Kajal, while in Calcutta, had to hide at Jogendra's letters were explored in the previous chapter through Hindu-Muslim relationship. She further explained a particular incident when her father and cousin took refuge in Jogendra's house for a couple of days once and wore Hindu clothing (duti), which hid the fact they were Muslim. If people asked Jogendra, he said that these are our guests. Another time her father and uncle were

[60] Ibid.

attacked, and they were quickly handed Hindu clothing to wear, but she was not sure where this second episode took place. This behavior was necessary to avoid being killed.[61]

Both Bengali Hindu and Muslim had to communicate each other due to their grave situation. Even being in public as a Muslim was dangerous not just due to Hindu mobs but also due to police profiling of Muslims. One day, when Kajal was in public talking with his Gani in Calcutta, they were both arrested by the police. It was unclear why they were arrested. I presume that it was during the time of riots in Calcutta, and they were suspected to be rioters. They were approved for bail after a few weeks. (citation)

Shufia also recounted that her father and cousin (Kajal) finally permanently relocated to Noakhali in 1965 and never return to Calcutta again. She spoke about the people who were forced to return after the second India-Pakistan war in 1965, a war that lasted for seven days which was sparked from the borderline issues in the Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan. It was preceded by a riot in 1964 where Hindus attacked Muslims. The riots were a result of a rumor that a religious relic was stolen from a mosque in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The entire circumstances were compounded with the war and riots and resulted in the dismissal of Bengali Muslims workers. The journey to return to Noakhali was difficult and risky. Her father and cousin panicked and hid themselves from the Hindu rioters. They began to pack quickly, and the bag's weight was as much as they could carry in their hands. The personal stories of Gani and Kajal exemplify the cultural narrative that unfolded within the larger community.

[61] Ibid.

She returned to the stories about the two bags and added, "They could barely walk, did not have a chance to eat, and were starving. [Her] father had a trivial salary in the Calcutta Corporation; however, things were not expensive since you could buy foodstuffs and other necessary items with that salary."[62] She also shared, "When [her] father finally returned, he seemed helpless like a tiny baby and appeared that he had lost everything. He was empty-handed with only one piece of clothing on. He arrived through Jessore, where his uncle used to work." In a follow-up question, she explained that after her father's arrival that he just went to Mosque, recited from Quran, engaged with people to tell the stories of Calcutta, and finally lost the sight in one of his eyes. We tried to fix it using an operation, but it did not work. He came to visit me in my husband's house as he suffered from starvation due to a bad paddy harvest season. I gave him food and let him stay in my house for a few days. My husband was not rich and worked as a peon at a Towshil office, with no handsome salary, only 1200taka.[63]

Through Gani and Kajal's life stories, this study, like Suroz, shows how Bengalis travelled to Calcutta to make a living. With ups and downs, they were actively involved in Calcutta to help their Hindu neighbors sell and settle properties in Noakhali. By this time, the Bengali Hindu had settled in Calcutta due to riots and Partition. Gani and Kajal interacted with them regarding their properties because the Hindus sought help from Muslims. Gani and Kajal acted as eyes and ears for Jogendra and other Hindus, and I will cover to this discussion in this chapter in the Land Settlement between Hindu and Muslim.

[62] Ibid.
[63] Interviewed with Shufia Khatun, Ramganj.

I interviewed Rabeya, the wife of Kajal and the sister of Shufia, to explore the problem Bengali Muslims faced in Calcutta. Rabeya shared the same stories as her sister regarding her father's time in Calcutta. Gani had a life and belongings in Calcutta, but his family members insisted that he return to Noakhali, and he finally yielded."[64] Once Gani told her that he will not return whether he was killed or survived."[65] He also thought about his job. If he left Calcutta, his position might be terminated. However, the corporation did not help them during the riots, and he was not even offered any compensation after he departed.

During this interview, Rabeya also emotionally sighed over her father's and husband's miseries since they unwillingly came back twice: once after the Calcutta riots in 1946 and the final time during the India-Pakistan War in 1965. In 1965, out of work and unsure about the future in East Pakistan, they left behind a small amount of gold and belongings. Khan lived in a rented room with Gani and had gone through fearful days when riots broke out in 1964. He feared being killed by the mob, and seemingly anything could happen—at any time. The peaceful city suddenly erupted into widespread violence as Hindus targeted Muslims over the way they dressed. They both lived close to the corporation for commuting convenience, and if they were targeted, they could contact the office for help.

When the war broke out as they were returning to Noakhali, they felt confident that their employment with the famous Calcutta Corporation would provide them some safety even as violence erupted in the environment. They could use their identity card to save them. During this return journey, they just wanted to cross Jessore rail station, the transition point of East Pakistan

[64] Interview with Rabeya Akter Ramganj, Bangladesh. May 22, 2022.
[65] Ibid.

and India. They believed that if they could reach Jessore, they would be safe after they reached the East Pakistan side. When the mob turned into chaos and commenced brutally killing people, they escaped with rapid speed, believing reaching Jessore and the rail station would not be very far from Calcutta, but the distance seemed to be an unending journey when the rioters lost their sense of self and reason.

Around the early-1950s, Rabeya also shared that her uncle, Rustom Khan, requested that Jogendra give him a piece of land. Jogendra refused and assured him that he was not going anywhere and would give him some land later. Before the mid-1950s, Hindus were still hoping to reclaim the land and did not relinquish their properties early, as explored in the previous chapter. It was before the abolishing of zamindari system as Hindus expected that they would continue their lives with the land after Partition and did not want to hurriedly sell large pieces of property. Hindu and Muslim maintained a relationship with each other for their purpose. Jogendra approached Gani to send a message to Oli and to share other community affairs. At the same time, Gani started purchasing land from Jogendra and took refuge in his house when he was targeted. Between 1946 and 1965, Gani's life in Calcutta was not uneventful as Bengali Muslims who worked in Calcutta started buying some of the land from the refugee Hindus and helped them sustain themselves in Calcutta. There were struggles and hopes. Before coming to the return of Bengal Muslims to Noakhali, going over how Hindus and Muslims discussed their property related issues in Calcutta will illuminate the relationships within the community.

Land Settlement Between Hindus and Muslims before 1965

Kajal Khan and Gani went back to Calcutta again after the environment was improved because the riots were slowing down. Following the Partition in 1947, because the passport was not put in place until 1952, the frontier was open to almost all Bengali Hindus and Muslims. At least the two sides of the Bengal regime did not put any political restrictions on the border. However, over time, the borderlands became a place of national security which were subjected to nationalistic concern. Thus, as part of the protection of East Pakistan's sovereignty, the government inserted all kinds of modern surveillance and political norms, such as who was allowed to come in and who was forbidden and marked as potential threats. Historian of Partition, William Van Schendel, says, "Right after Partition politicians and bureaucrats made borderland an overarching security discourse, which has been defined as "sensitive."[66] The passport was not an obstacle for all East Bengali Muslims to collect to travel to Calcutta. Both governments required passports as a document to travel legally, as populations were not completely separated from their belongings and properties. During that upheaval, Gani collected his passport which took about three-to-four months to process and showed the new document to his daughter. Waiting on the passport put stress on his family and was detrimental to Gani's work because he could not go back quickly. As he rejoined his office in Calcutta, he maintained regular communication with Noakhali's displaced Hindus and his previous neighbors from Lamchar, who were all in Calcutta. They helped each other to maintain the properties, selling, buying, and often bargaining with parties who wished to purchase.

Both Gani and Jogendra's letters explicitly mentioned how Muslims visited their Hindu landowners' houses; what these occasional visits meant to both these groups of people are a question that requires an analytical description. For the point of Gani, this communication and

[66] David N. Geller edit. *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia* (Duke University Press, 2013), 267.

relationship went through some other extraordinary circumstances such as riots, Partitions, more riots, and finally passport regulation for almost two decades. During these riots and communal upheavals in Calcutta, Gani relied on Jogendra and other Hindu members of their villages in Noakhali as a network of mutual support for each other. For Gani, Jogendra was his hope and confidant to get support during the communal disturbances in Calcutta. The relationship between Gani and Jogendra went beyond just two people. It was defined by the difficulty of their circumstances, as the former sought security from the latter. Also, for Jogendra's land in Noakhali, he depended on Gani for pivotal information and having Gani keep an eye on his land. Even in these extreme circumstances, these two men depended on one another to maintain their incomes. Gani relied on Jogendra to stay safe in Calcutta, and Jogendra depended on Gani to assist in maintaining his properties in Noakhali.

To visualize the scenario of a Muslim life Calcutta as a case in point, I share some excerpts from one of my interviewees named ATM Huda. Because Huda's story gives an understanding of the difficulty that Bengali Muslims faced during their time in Calcutta, this can give us a better understanding Gani's experiences. The story of the vulnerability of Huda's family also provides an example of the sheer uncertainty and helplessness faced by Bengali Muslims as seen through Huda's family vulnerability in post-Partition Calcutta and how existence within the communal violence plagued the lives of the Muslim minority. In the riots of 1950, his family members' house in Baliganj was forcefully occupied by Hindus. The family moved to a rented place near Park Circus, Calcutta. However, they then fled by a plane to then East Pakistan because they could have been killed at any point in time.

Huda shared, "We flew to Dacca…our plane landed in a paddy field. There was no arrangement at Dacca airport, and few rooms were made of thatch. Then, my family had almost contacted a Hindu family in Kamlapur, Dacca, to exchange their house in Calcutta. The Hindu family was interested and said they could eject their occupant from their house in Calcutta since the owner had the original paper."[67] His mother desperately wanted to settle in Dacca and voiced for an exchange, but due to her probably being a woman, young, and not experienced, her ideas were ignored. They returned to Calcutta, and their family was divided on leaving or staying. The situation had exacerbated to the extent that even educated Hindus held communal feelings and implicitly insinuated that Muslims should leave. "From 1950s riots," he stated, "all massive houses belonging to Muslims were taken forcefully and were ghettoized in the specific places where they constituted the minority."[68]

In Calcutta, the family lived mundane life almost below the poverty line. The final blow came in 1964 when significant riots occurred in Calcutta. This led to a massive number of Calcutta residents as well as East Bengalis to move to the other side of the border. One night, Huda's uncle hurried into the house and shouted to everyone to close the doors and windows as a Hindu mob was marching to their home. They decided to move to a Muslim five-floor house within 200 feet of where they lived and hide due to fear of the riots. This shows how Calcutta changed after Partition but still Bengali Muslims had to stay and were helped by their Hindu neighbors. Even during this time of rising sentiment for Muslims to leave India, East Bengali Muslims and East Bengali Hindus still worked together maintaining a bond of neighborliness transcending religious boundaries due to their shared Bengal cultural history.

[67] Interview with ATM Huda from Dacca, Mirpur on October 5, 2020.
[68] Ibid.

Huda and his family's experience reflects that of Jogendra and Gani during the disturbances in Calcutta. Returning to Gani's story, after Partition, their relationship shifted to the maintenance of Jogendra's properties and some other Hindu landowners in Noakhali. Oli cultivated and helped Jogendra to sell his land. Gani, on the other hand, navigated communication between his neighbors in Calcutta to ensure that no problems arose in Noakhali. Within the blink of an eye, Partition happened, and there was confusion about what would happen with their properties. It took years for the settlement of land to return to a stable condition, though the society had drastically changed with Muslims purchasing land that Hindus were selling. This agricultural interdependency is reflected in Oli and Jogendra's relationship in the previous chapter. Oli cultivated Jogendra's land for a long time, and Gani would collect information for Jogendra while being in Calcutta concerning the potential buyers and the price of the land. Jogendra's relatives had traveled back and forth from East Pakistan to Calcutta and could not help him. A complicated legal process was required for Hindus to sell their land, which included lawyers, purchasers, power of attorney, and the court. Ensuring all these aspects were in order was difficult because their correspondence was solely through letters, which resulted in miscommunication and trust issues.

This is quite a complex relation from both ends. The constant migration flow made settling things once and for all more challenging. A complete reordering of inseparable issues related to property transfer often needed perseverance with uninterrupted correspondence. First, the Muslim community required to locate a buyer who was ready to provide a decent price and then notify the Hindu owner through correspondence. The entire process had happened through

Muslims in Calcutta and Noakhali and writing letters from one to another. For example, when Hindus left the village, their land was cultivated and purchased by Muslims in Noakhali and other Muslims who were working in Calcutta and accumulating money to buy the land. Still, the amount of land the Muslims wanted to purchase was a tiny part of the vast properties of the Bengali Hindu landowners. Moreover, some of the Hindu community remained in Lamchar but maintained a monetary relationship with their exiled community members which complicated land sales to Muslims. The abrupt Partition kept their complicated relationship unentangled for the next few years. Muslims and Hindus had been intertwined within this inescapable societal interaction. Though Gani and Oli had tried to maintain regular communication by instructing which land would be sold, the potential buyers should be someone the displaced Hindus preferred. The triangular communication among Oli—Gani—Jogendra often caused miscommunication and created tacit resentment. This trying situation was compounded by being informed long after the decision was made in Noakhali about the price of land. As the letters often took time to arrive in Calcutta, this communication of Hindus selling land spawned mistrust derived from the post offices, which was slow, inconvenient, and impractical.

I translated a letter written on August 11, 1951, by Gani from Calcutta to Oli in Noakhali. This letter exposed a lot of complicated situations related to the land information, money paid to Jogendra, land measurement, crops being cultivated, etc. The letter portrays how in Noakhali the Muslims helped their Hindu neighbors who were in exile in Calcutta. During this time, both Bengali Hindus and Muslims had long conversations about the land and community, mainly if Bengali Hindus did not receive their money promptly. In one excerpt, that shows this exchange of money, Gani wrote, “I can hand the money over to Jogendra Babu…. Also, write to Paresh

Babu…I also met Doctor Babu [Jogendra] and had lengthy discussions. He has received your 50tk. Don't worry about it…. You should not be concerned regarding any matters. If possible, deposit money to my brother as often as you can. Here Kalu [Kajal Khan] has given 260 tk. to Doctor Babu."[69] One important matter was that during this turbulent period, Bengali Muslims purchased some land from Hindus, who needed the money to sustain their lives in Calcutta. Although this arrangement was complicated, both communities benefitted because Muslims wished to buy land and could afford to do so with the money they earned working at Calcutta, and Bengali Hindus were eager to sell some of their sprawled-out properties.

However, this process was disrupted around this time as Bengali Muslims also began their preparations to leave Calcutta which had become unsafe for Muslims. In the last sentence of the same letter on August 11, 1951, Gani wrote, "I have not received any letter from Dacca, so I can't retire from here. My eldest brother insisted that I do not return until I get a job." Gani wanted to make sure he had employment in East Pakistan prior to leaving Calcutta. Bengali Muslims' time in Calcutta was contingent on their safety, which led to emotions ranging from frustration to confidence. 1951 was rough for Gani and other Muslims in Calcutta due to the 1950 communal riots in West Bengal that led to further discontent and retaliation. From this letter, I also posit that the people were in a state of anxiety as they were trying to sort out their possessions and their lives following the Partition. This dramatic event altered one's livelihood, including property, residence, and family well-being. An amalgamated "Indian Civilization," no longer existed and a new one had emerged that divided the people by religion along a border.

[69] Letter Gani to Oli Mia on August 11, 1951.

People on either side of that border created a new life and identity within their communities. The situation was gravely dire—their homes were occupied, and they were coerced to move.

The whole situation left those involved feeling helpless. The letter captured a moment when Hindus and Muslims desperately needed each other's help. However, the Partition literature has failed to capture this Hindu-Muslim relationship and the correspondence among them. Researching how the Partition affected people is like an octopus because it has many different arms. The Hindus left their properties to the villagers, particularly Muslims they trusted. Muslims, who happened to be in Calcutta with a government job or some other regular occupation, slowly began to buy as much land as they could afford from Hindus. If the Indian government had not fired the Muslims from their jobs in Calcutta, the Hindus who needed to sell their land Noakhali would have benefitted. However, after being fired, the Muslims no longer had the financial strength to purchase property.

Gani had survived the tricky situation of Partition, and through this connection to Jogendra, he and Kajal bought land from Hindus who were away in Calcutta. Jogendra consistently attempted to settle his affairs in Noakhali and wrote letters to gather important information. The micro-level communication was positively sustained throughout all these ups and downs in the India-Pakistan national relationship. Gani was alienated as he waited for a proper job to be able to return to Noakhali from Calcutta. Before returning to Eastern Bengal, he also wanted to make sure he could purchase land upon his arrival. A narrative surrounding the property-related transactions accuses the Muslims of intimidating Hindus into leaving homes and belongings. However, these letters tell a completely different story, unveiling the situation of

how Hindus and Muslims in the predicament of Partition still tried to help each other. This depicts the path both communities followed during the riots when they were not hostile and instead relied on each other.

Along the line of trust, there were some suspicions amongst the Muslim and Hindu neighbors. Oli still needed to receive Gani's previous two letters. Gani writes, “Just a few days back, I have written two postcards to you, and it is unclear why you haven’t received them.”[70] Two possibilities may have caused this situation. The first possibility is that Oli may have received the two letters but deliberately ignored Gani either because he was trying to hide information or because he was exhausted from attempting to gather information. A second possibility for why Oli had not received these letters may have been a civil service shortage in Pakistan’s new formed postal service. Jogendra also missed letters from Oli, which he mentioned when he wrote to Oli. Gani and Jogendra questioned Oli about not receiving letters that were sent to him. Inquiring over why the other party had not received the letters was typically interpreted as distrust. Gani's livelihood was in Calcutta, and he needed help to readily visit Noakhali to make himself aware of what was happening. This situation was worse for Jogendra because he was a Hindu and could have potentially been targeted. Noakhali Hindus experienced riots and violence against Hindus, which made Jogendra feel unsafe to visit there. Relations continued between Calcutta and Noakhali between Hindus and Muslims with homes regarding their new normal.

[70] Ibid. p. 2.

Gani wrote another letter to Oli on September 09, 1951. This letter provides insight into how sincere and trustful Jogendra was towards his neighbors when he wanted to sell his land. Distrust often appeared due to distance. Debate, bargaining, and frustration emerged within the Bengali Muslim community between those in Calcutta and Noakhali. For example, Gani was so annoyed with Oli because he failed to deposit the money. Gani wrote, "Why have you not even given the money in Noakhali to the person I assigned? Instead, you asked me to give Paresh Babu 50 tk. Will you give it to my brother or someone in my house there in Noakhali in the future? Don't write to me without paying money."[71] It shows that Oli did not listen and carry out the task Gani asked of him. Furious, Gani warned him to behave appropriately.[72] During the turbulent period of violence and harassment, Gani and Jogendra settled the issue by helping each other.

The Bengal Hindus were also struggling economically. To support the livelihood of Bengal Hindus in Calcutta, Bengali Hindus, whose finances were paralyzed by Partition, Hindus sold some of their properties. Muslims who had been in Calcutta during the occupation maintained a consistent connection with their Hindu landowners and exchanged needed information. In Gani's letter, he mentioned that he went to Hindu houses in Calcutta with the money, along with another Muslim friend, to pay for the land they bought in Noakhali. The entire scenario was complex; Hindu landowners appointed Muslims in the village to oversee the

[71] Ibid.
[72] The Partition literature has filled with nostalgia, which indirectly echoes some of the concerns of Muslims occupying the land of Hindus right after Partition or in the absence of a proprietor. There are no universal persuasive documents to prove which of these two sides tells the true. However, from the letters and correspondence between Hindus and Muslims in Noakhali, these two communities and their bond continued in the years that followed Partition.

land and bargained with the Muslim buyers to ensure Hindus received a decent price. When price was fixed, Gani approached the Hindus in Calcutta to hand over the money. He wrote:

> After receiving your letter, Mannan and I went to Paresh's place but could not find him; instead, we waited for three to four hours and then returned. His house is not very close to where we live, just a distance from our house in Noakhali. I have to spend 1.1 tk. for the Tram and Bus. I had given him a letter to stay at his home two days before, but I went there with money and almost stayed until midnight.[73]

This incident elucidates the frustration within the Muslim community. Aside from the selling the land, information regarding Noakhali was now crucial for displaced Hindus such as Jogendra, Paresh, and Khoka. Transparency and accountability were needed, which reflects some of the words that Gani delivered to Oli. Gani always wanted to ensure that Jogendra received the right price for the land and pushed Oli for a maximum bargain. Gani said, "If you can fix a slightly higher price, that will be great." Even though the Hindu landowners were trapped in Calcutta, Muslims routinely encouraged trust by circulating information to their Hindu neighbors that the price was not compromised due to the exiled Hindus' inability to attend physically. From the Muslims' side, along with seeing their Hindu neighbors in weal and woe, they also did not take advantage of the situation but instead paid the appropriate land price to the Hindus in Calcutta, as was the case of Gani and Mannan. Another part of their stopover in Calcutta was for *adda* (gossip), but at times the land sale and gossip were intertwined. This gossip involved serious discussion concerning land, the people, prices, payment, and Noakhali.[74]

[73] Letter Gani to Oli Mia on September 09, 1951.
[74] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000). Chapter 7. Add: A History of Sociality.

Since these conversations continued within the familial sphere and among the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, much was going on in Gani's life that was not visible. Still, elements of his life can be found in the scattered manner of diverse letters Jogendra wrote to Oli. To provide a better grasp on the situation. In one of Jogendra's letters, he mentioned that Gani was unwilling to stay in Calcutta any longer and was looking for opportunities in Dacca or in Chittagong. Jogendra wrote, "Gani will travel to *Bari* (Eastern Bengal) after 15 or 20 days. He is not keen to stay in Calcutta any further or in the future. If he gets a job in Dacca or Chittagong, he will stay there for the rest of his life."[75] This statement was made probably as early as the 1950s. The dilapidated condition of the letter makes it a challenge to figure the exact date it was written. However, compared to other letters written around the same time and about the same person, the coloration of the letter makes it seem as though it was written around that time. However, it was also the moment of conspicuous restlessness in Gani's life, who had once wanted to die in Calcutta but now felt sinister shock from the situation of the riots and how the city made him feel as a Muslim. This forced him to realize that he needed to leave.

Jogendra also informed Oli that Gani and his son-in-law Kajal Khan had visited his house a few days back and were well. Gani had insisted that Oli buy a plot of his land. If he couldn't afford it alone, he could take it jointly with Kajal Khan and Gani Mia. Jogendra wanted Oli to buy his property and did not want to offer it to anyone else because Oli spent a lot of time and energy as a sharecropper for this piece of land, which was close to where he lived. In another part of the same letter, Jogendra confessed that Gani did not want to stay longer and insisted Oli

[75] One letter from Gani to Oli on August 11, 1951, has already made similar statement that Gani was expecting a confirmation letter of a job from Dacca so that he would retire from Calcutta.

visit Calcutta as long as Gani was there. This letter shows that the land and their prolonged discussion were part of their relationship. He was informing Jogendra about the problem of sending money. Oli felt nervous about carrying cash with him on the way to Calcutta. He could carry a little amount of money with him if he were to come to Calcutta. Oli did not go to Calcutta.

The two decades of Bengali Muslims in Calcutta spans from the Great Calcutta riots in 1946 to the India-Pakistan war that began in 1965. No hope was left when they were fired based on their East Pakistani citizenship which labeled them as people of an "enemy country." Rabeya confirmed that Gani's return to Noakhali was accompanied by abandoning his belongings and whatever money he gathered from the job he had. She also explained that Gani once returned to Noakhali and started writing letters to the corporation and the people he was acquainted with to see if he could get his job back. However, he did not receive a response from Calcutta Corporation.

Rabeya thought I was working on the compensation that workers should get from the Indian Government. She was busy pulling out her secret box, where all these documents were safely preserved in case any opportunity came in the future to receive some money. She shared a leaflet and a letter from the Calcutta Corporation, along with her husband's passport and work authorization paper in Calcutta. The elderly lady continues to hold onto all the documentation in the hope that someday she might receive money. This interview provided support for the argument that the final Partition for Bengali Muslim happened in 1965. Because through war and sacking from works, the displacement of Bengali Muslims from Calcutta was complete.

This leaflet in 1979 indicated a formation of ex-Pakistani Workers of India who were fired between 1964 and 65. The action committee argued that the workers from East Pakistan were discharged without receiving a penny and would be considered to receive compensation. The dismissed workers of TATA in East Bengal pursued the Bangladeshi government to provide a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India who was coming to Bangladesh. In 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. In 1979, the government of Bangladesh decided to submit the memorandum during the Indian prime minister's visit to the country through the President of Bangladesh. Therefore, all workers were requested to submit their papers and assemble them. Many workers who were fired from the Calcutta Port Commission, R.N.S. Company, Shipping Industries, Metal Box, Hindus Liver, Union Carbide, Shalimar Paint, Railways, Calcutta Corporation, Postal Division, Tabaco Co. Jute Mills, and Cotton Mills had already submitted their papers.

The letter from the Corporation of Calcutta on February November 1, 1965, to further emphasizes my argument of why 1965 was the year that acts as a fulcrum for the completion of Partition for the Bengali Muslims. Kajal Khan, who had been working as a peon City Architect's Department of the corporation and was requested through letter to join his workplace. It says:

To Whom It May Concern

> This is to certify that Sri Kajal Khan, Peon, son of Lat Rustom Khan, vill: Lamchar, P.S.-Ramgunge, Dist.-Noakhali, East Pakistan is a permanent employee of the City Architect's Department where he has been serving since 1947. He was out of employment under Foreigner's order 1948 (as amended by notification No. F6/50/64 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of

India). He is now permitted to rejoin his duties in this department as instructed by the Govt. of West Bengal, effective 01.11.65.

The letter clearly indicated that Kajal was fired in 1965. It also says he has been working since 1947; therefore, even though Partition happened in 1947, it was in 1965 when the Indian state expunged the potential threat and border line between India and Pakistan became watertight. Zamindar notes that, "the 1965 war between the two states led to complete closing of the Khokrapar border, as well as train services that connected Karachi and Delhi via Jodhpur….Even after 1965, travel from Calcutta to Dhaka remained relatively easier than travel across from western frontier."[76] However, I argue traveling between Bangladesh and India has always been easy due to the geography and decent relations, but the 1965 Indian states officially obliterated the opportunity of jobs, which marks the Partition for the Bengali Muslims. The process began in 1946 and continued for almost two decades to reach the finish line. Although a few workers like Kajal were offered positions and allowed to return, after returning to East Pakistan and creating union groups, few accepted. During my conversation with the Muslims from Lamchar, they still remembered 7 *September war* (indicating 1965) as a watershed moment and for few weeks the telegraph circulation ceased to work. Any letter from India had to travel to London first and came back to East Pakistan second.

Conclusion

[76] Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, p. 235.

The first stream of return to East Bengal is represented through Suroz, who rushed to Noakhali after the Great Calcutta Riots in 1946 and returned to Calcutta in 1948. Yet, Suroz felt unwelcome and moved to Dacca. The second stage was triggered due to communal disturbance in 1950, which resulted in Bengal Muslim workers being sacked and replaced with other workers from within India. The final stage took place in 1965, after almost two decades of Partition, when the India-Pakistan war broke out. The Indian Government fired all Bengali Muslim workers in different parts of India. These three separate stages hold one common theme which was the rapid discharge of Muslim workers as quickly as possible from India. In every single event, riots or war, the Indian Government targeted workplaces driven by the mistrust of Bengali Muslim rioters from East Pakistan despite the fact those workers were not involved in the conflicts between India and Pakistan and merely sought to support their families.

Even though many Bengali Muslims planned to return in 1951, many held off until 1965 as the prospects were not promising in East Bengal. Their days in Calcutta were difficult following Partition, and their Hindu neighbors helped Bengali Muslims during extreme moments of riots and disturbance. Over time, Bengali Hindu and Muslim relationship were involved in the purchasing and management of properties. However, stability came to an end in 1965 when they were sacked because they were Muslims from East Pakistan. This marked, I argue, the Partition for Bengal Muslims, which came to be realized in 1965. The first round of Bengal Muslims returned to Noakhali during the Calcutta riots, the second round during the riots in 1950, and the last individuals arrived in 1965. This was a prolonged process and was accompanied with turmoil that occurred. From either riots or political tension between India and Pakistan, East Bengali workers left West Bengal once and for all.

Conclusion

South Asia is still under the shadow of Partition, the agency of minorities within India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh has been a contested issue that emerges frequently to attribute the failure of national integration. Hindu and Muslim are two categories suspected to possess internalized allegiance to the countries where they make up the majority. Therefore, the areas where minorities had been living for generations were not indicative of their origin. Hindus and Muslims often see each other through the religion, and not their citizenship. Due to their religion, Hindus or Muslims, often reflect an alternative version of the majority's history following Partition. Hindus or Muslims failed to uphold the core values of majority, which will represent the mainstream of the nation. The minority perspective of history would be damaging to the majority's version. Historian Faisal Devji remarks, "every Muslim becomes, at a certain level, symbol of national frustration and insecurity. This is how he or she enters into the history of independent India."[1] This is applicable for Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The sin of being a minority 'could' only be atoned through perfect correspondence with ideals of the majority. In other words, state coercion is applied to naturalize the citizen.

Hannah Arendt reflects that, "since the Peace Treaties of 1919 and 1920 the refugees and the stateless have attached themselves like a curse to all the newly established states on earth which were created in the image of the nation-state."[2] After World War II, this was exemplified when the decolonization of India resulted in a massive number of displaced: people whose identity misfit that of the newly formed nation-states where they lived. Arendt also stressed that,

[1] Faisal Devji, Hindu/Muslim/Indian. *Public Culture*. Vol. 5. No. 1. (1992). pp. 1-2.
[2] Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 290.

"sovereignty is nowhere more absolute than in the matters of emigration, naturalization, nationality, and expulsion."[3] Within South Asia, the minority populations were subjected to policies enacted by the majority government to protect national sovereignty. The Partition was conditioned on resolving minority problems, but it backfired when the flames of riots caused confusion within communities where subgroups had to decide whether to stay in a country they felt did not align with their identity. They often had to show their loyalty to their country.[4] The communal question was handled through religious categories and the administration of new country that was assigned to settle this 'an anomaly.'

The state was to have two stringent categories Hindu and Muslim which had been constructed through a rigorous process of British polices and knowledge.[5] The advancement of the new nation state had cast a shadow over the identity of the minority regarding their legal status: whether they would be equal citizens and enjoy as much freedom as the majority or not. This problem intensified in the years following Partition and was shaped by the riots and the relationship of India and Pakistan. To ease the minority tension, Pakistan and India adopted policies to protect interest of the marginalized and yet, these rules resulted in more displacement and added another layer of fear and distrust. The East Bengal government justified policies to protect the minorities' freedom, but the seeds of distrust grew due to the riots after Partition and abuse of the laws by government officials.

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[3] Ibid., 278
[4] Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1991, p. 611
[5] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

The Bengali Hindus also resorted to exchanging their property with the property of the Muslims who were permanently departing India. Often, the property issues were complex and ended up being fraudulent on both the Hindu and Muslim's sides. Moreover, the local relationship of Hindus and Muslims deteriorated due to the formation of the new country. To address that, the East Bengal government intervened in the private relationships between Hindus and Muslims by investigating petty theft cases with communal color (for example, catching of fish from tanks and plucking of fruits from trees) even if the minorities might not resort to formal complaints at the police station.

The combination of East and West Pakistan was a serious territorial problem and cultural conflict. Apart from the religious similarity, no cultural resemblance existed between either Pakistan. Bengali Muslims were still searching for their national identity within the West Pakistani dominated bureaucracy, and also did not quite understand the discrepancy between the Pakistan they fought for and the country they received. East Pakistan faced serious territorial security problems in 1965 when war broke out between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. Due to being geographically separated from West Pakistan where the military was deployed in Kashmir, East Pakistan was defenseless. In this situation, East Pakistan questioned the arrangement of the Partition and became rebellious, wanting to gain sovereign political control. They initiated instigated movements against West Pakistan that culminated in "large meetings and students processions ending in clashes with the police, but this time there were also mob attacks on police stations, banks, government buildings and the offices of pro-government newspapers."[6] However, the tension between the East and West invited more restriction on minority properties.

[6] Willem van Schendel. *A History of Bangladesh*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. P. 145.

Due to war in 1965, the East Pakistan government's military declared a state of emergency, based on the Defense of Pakistan Ordinance, which permitted them to take steps to, "gave unquestioned and wide-ranging powers to the country rulers. Having the unquestioned and wide-ranging power, the government enacted the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965. This act declared India as an enemy country and confiscated the property of nationals/Hindu citizens. However, on September 22, 1965, the India and Pakistan war concluded with the Tashkent Declaration. This absolved the emergency declaration on February 16, 1969; yet the law remained in effect on minority Hindus until the beginning of the liberation War on March 26, 1971. After the liberation war, the Bangladesh Government implemented the Bangladesh Vesting of Property and Assets Order, on 26 March 1972 (order 29 of 1972). The properties left behind by the Pakistanis and additional Hindus became entangled in a single unit. This however also authorized the government to gain arbitrary control over the properties.

The most distressing factor was the government's surveillance of the minority which could easily violate the human rights that Arendt called 'inalienable.' The government forcefully ensured the minority assimilation which was thought to be a security problem. Furthermore, they damaged social integration under the guise of national advancement. The policies coincided with the constitutional government, putting new rules of settling properties that targeted marginalized citizens. This problem began when the British announced their withdrawal from India.

When the announcement of the Partition appeared on June 3, 1947, both the Hindu and Muslim minorities across the Indian subcontinent understood they would not be part of India and

Pakistan, particularly for the Hindus in Noakhali and Muslims in Calcutta. Gandhi was already aware of the most pressing issue which was to protect the minority during this turbulent period of communal riots throughout India. When asked about how he would celebrate the Indian independence, he replied with his intention to stay in Noakhali and fasted for the Hindu-Muslim communal harmony. A dark cloud had obscured the sky of the Indian Hindu-Muslim relationship. Gandhi was on his way to Noakhali on August 10, 1947, just a week before the Partition knife cut through the heart of the Indian subcontinent. However, Suhrawardy who had a debate with Gandhi in Noakhali regarding the comparative vulnerability of Hindus in Noakhali and Muslims in Bihar riots requested Gandhi to replace his plan to visit Noakhali and stay in Calcutta. Gandhi had already informed Suhrawardy that the minorities in Noakhali were suffering. He assured Gandhi that the Hindu minority in Noakhali would not suffer and requested that he stay in Calcutta where the conditions were more dire.

These influential leaders had spent a lot of time bargaining, arguing, and debating over the riots in Noakhali and Bihar, but now they understood the severity of the situation and how important it was for them to work together. Gandhi instructed that the minorities were to give enough security and protection to shed their fear and bestow them courage to continue their lives in the majority areas. In other words, he asked Bengali Hindus not to abandon the properties and instead learn to live amongst Muslims. Gandhi had been considered a majority Hindu leader, nonetheless he risked standing by the notion that violence on minorities Hindu or Muslim, either in India or Pakistan, would no longer be tolerated. The children and women must not be touched. While the country was divided along the line of religious majority, it left a huge question mark on the future status of the minorities in the new countries. The debate between Gandhi and

Suhrawardy revealed how much they both cared about the minorities, though Suhrawardy misunderstood Gandhi in Noakhali and questioned his logic of standing for Hindus. He reflected on Gandhi's lesson when he stood for Calcutta's Muslims after Partition.

In the first chapter, I argued how Gandhi's sojourned to a riot-ridden community in Noakhali made him a minority leader, and his vision for the protection of the Hindu or Muslim communities where they were marginalized. He was embroiled in a debate with the Muslim leaders pertaining to the concern of the Bihar riots, which targeted the Muslims. His debate with Suhrawardy disclosed his intention and determination to stay with the minority, whose future became unpredictable in the wake of the decolonialization. Every sentence that Gandhi delivered in Noakhali provided an understanding of how to dispel the fear from the minds of the minority communities in Noakhali and Bihar—he referred to the two places interchangeably. His attempt had not been initially and unquestionably accepted by the Muslim leader and yet after Partition, Suhrawardy, with whom Gandhi had a fierce debate adopted the lesson he learned throughout his arguments with Gandhi. To his utmost sincerity and seriousness, Gandhi convinced Nehru to write letters to Suhrawardy to gain a clear idea of the grey areas of Hindu and Muslim violence in Noakhali and Bihar. The concerns in Noakhali were met by a joint effort of Suhrawardy and Gandhi in Calcutta where both leaders spent time providing a hope to the minority.

Suhrawardy and Gandhi spent time together in the riot-ridden areas of Calcutta, especially in the Muslim slums. Regardless of their differences, their efforts changed the atmosphere in Calcutta. The combined slogan Hindu-Muslim in Calcutta was the result of Gandhi's actions in Noakhali where he physically resided before but mentally, he was proving a

concrete roadmap of the minority issues for the rest of India. The requirement from Gandhi at this point was to be a minority leader more than ever. During the wake of the Partition, India suffered from the minority leader and Gandhi realized the problem and philosophically shifted to being the last protector of the Hindu-Muslim relationship. Suhrawardy continued Gandhi's unfinish work in a similar way, discussing with minorities and visited the places of potential disturbance. However, as the new countries emerged from the disintegration of the British Empire, India and Pakistani leaders took the steer in their hands and enacted laws which formed new set of problems. Though Gandhi tried from his position to set the tone of the minority people in India and Pakistan, the formative years of Pakistan after Partition revised the priorities to pursue a robust economy and sovereignty power.

In the second chapter I argued how the rebuilding of the state of East Pakistan caused the enaction of laws that contested, negotiated, and often discarded the minority identity. This led to a debate in the parliament between Hindu and Muslim members which bred controversy around the sincerity of the state in protecting the minority in the outskirt districts where they were subject to harassment, fear, and displaced from their properties.

Bereft of Calcutta, which was accompanied with a weak centralized power, East Bengal had now seemed a collection of regions rather than a solid integrated government. On top of that, the entire state formation was now beginning with the acquisition of houses in the metropolitans' areas which Hindus owned predominantly in numbers. This brought the question of minority to the fore of the Pakistan government concerning the treatment of minorities who were forcefully ousted to the streets from their properties. A blame game ensued both in and out of the

parliament. The government side had been promising to provide the enough security to the minorities and yet occupied their houses to set up government structures which they argued lacked formal foundation. However, from the Hindu minority leaders, though they met with the majority leaders after Partition, constantly protested that their houses were requisitioned, and no rent was provided: they were not treated as equal citizens. However, occupying the houses and buildings, the government had made a clear instruction to the processes and reparation extended to the owners, and yet government officials overstepped their duties and often paying no attention to occupied sensitive places like Hindu worship sites.

This problem was heightened, quite predictably, concerning the drafting of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950, which empowered the government to take over the land from the landowners. This ended the Permanent Statement of 1793, a settlement between the British East India Company and Bengal's landlords to draw the land revenue based on agricultural productivity by the latter on behalf of former. The withdraw of British rule coincided with the process of abolition and led this law to become the sovereign power of the country. This process met with controversy around the Hindu-Muslim relationship. Predominantly Hindu landowners slowly moved to West Bengal after losing their land. But it had not happened until the middle of the 1950s when the government was able to enact the law after years of litigation. During the entire process, at the local level, Hindus and Muslims relationship sustained through writing letters from each other on both sides of border.

In the third chapter, I argued how Bengali Hindus' return to Noakhali died a natural death through the abolition of the Permanent Settlement in 1950. Immediately after Partition, Bengali

Hindus relocated to Calcutta and continued their previous agrarian relationship. During this time, Bengali Muslim continued to send money to their Hindu landlords and initiated the selling of some land on behalf of Bengali Hindus. This entire process was complex and went on writing letters from Bengali Hindus to their Muslim caretaker in Noakhali. This chapter challenged the predominant notion that the Bengali Muslims forcefully occupied and ousted the Bengali Hindus from their properties. However, the relationship between these groups was friendly and cooperative which was sustained even after Partition. To exemplify this chapter, I examined a rare family archive of letters exchanged between Jogendra Roy, a Hindu landowner, and Oli Mia, his Muslim neighbor in Noakhali. Twenty-six letters sent from Jogendra to Oli document his desire to return home to Noakhali and later his disappointment when this hope was never realized. This dying hope of Jogendra coincided with the East Pakistan government's decision to take possession of lands left by those displaced through the East Bengal State Acquisitions and Tenancy Act of 1950. This chapter concentrates on the complex relationship between Hindus and Muslims, exploring issues of nostalgia, identity, property, hope, and the irony of fate, revealing the slow acceptance among displaced Bengali Hindus of the *(im)possibility* to return. Partition literature has not paid much attention to the Bengali Muslims return from Calcutta, a city that they believed as their own.

The fourth chapter explored the three different stages and waves through which Bengali Muslims returned to Noakhali: it began with the Noakhali riots in 1946 and Partition, then communal riots in 1950, and finally the India-Pakistan War in 1965. This period holds an important time for Bengali Muslims in Calcutta who began to trickle back into Noakhali, but they did so unwillingly. The last groups of Bengali Muslims departed Calcutta during the India-

Pakistan War in 1965, when they were fired from their jobs in restaurants, bars, tea factories, jute mills, Hindustan Unilever, Shalimar Paint, railways, etc. The intricate relationship between the working place of Calcutta, their return journeys, and the living space within Noakhali is an important area of research because it offers insight into how Bengali Muslims' lives were shaped by Partition yet found no articulation within the Partition literate. I argue that the Bengali Muslims felt Partition viscerally in 1965 when they were sacked from their working places in Calcutta and were never allowed a chance to return. Before 1965, they still had a hope to continue working in Calcutta, but the war reinforced the boundary between India and Pakistan and reinstated the religious identity of the Bengali Muslims.

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