

The Journey towards the Unknown: Making of Minorities, Refugees and Citizens in Bengal 1947- 1961

Sutapa Rani Das Gupta
Department of History
St Paul's Cathedral Mission College

“It was late in the afternoon when the jeep reached the outskirts of Lahore. We were told that a caravan of Muslims had been attacked at Amritsar and that the Muslims in Lahore were waiting to take revenge. We got down and waited in fear and silence. There was some stray shooting in the distance. The stench of decomposed flesh from nearby fields hung in the air. We could hear people shouting slogans...But that was far away. We set off again.” – Kuldip Nayar

Source: ‘From Sialkot to Delhi’ by Kuldip Nayar in David Page (edited) *Tales of Two Cities*, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2008

“It was great to be alive. There was still daylight. As I looked out, relieved and happy, I saw people walking in the opposite direction. They were Muslims. I saw the same pain etched on their faces. They trudged along with their belongings bundled on their heads and their frightened children trailing behind....A caravan from our side was going to Pakistan. We stopped to make way for them. They too stopped. But no one spoke. We looked at one another with sympathy not fear. A strange understanding cropped up between us. It was a spontaneous kinship of hurt, loss and helplessness. Both were refugees.” - Kuldip Nayar

Source: 'From Sialkot to Delhi' by Kuldip Nayar in David Page (edited)
Tales of Two Cities, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2008

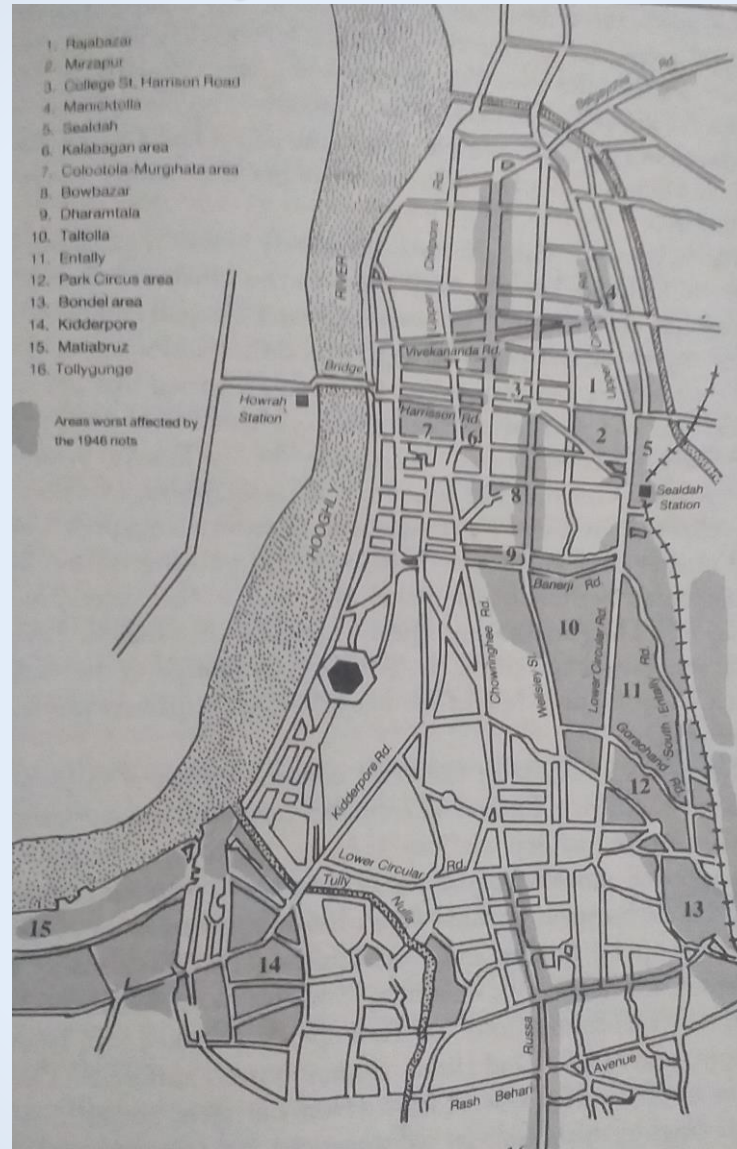
“On 3 September 1950, we left for the Princess Dock and boarded the Scindia Steamship Company’s S. S. Sabarmati. My maternal grandfather, a widower, who had brought up four sons and two daughters after the death of his lovely wife, was shattered. My mother, the elder of his two daughters, was a pillar of strength to him, and here she was grief-stricken on board a ship, which was to take her, her husband and their kids to an unknown destination.” - Asif Noorani

Source: ‘From Sialkot to Delhi’ by Kuldip Nayar in David Page (edited) *Tales of Two Cities*, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2008

Phases of Migration

- Started with the Noakhali riots in 1946.....continued through the Partition till the middle of 1948.
- In the 1950s, riots (Khulna, Barishal and other places) and the introduction of the Passport system in 1952 prompted large-scale migrations
- In 1961, some 55,000 migrants were admitted to camps in West Bengal though like in every phase earlier or later, these were merely official figures based on police records of those who crossed over through check posts.
- Then in 1964 again there was a large influx and it continued through ups and downs till 1971

Areas Affected by Riots In Calcutta 1946



Source US State Dept Files , See Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991, Pg 173

According to the 1971 census the displaced population in the various districts of West Bengal was **59,99,475**.

These figures are however based upon records of only those who crossed over from check posts for there is no estimation of those who crossed over through the innumerable unmanned check posts along the 1200 miles border

District-wise break-up of post-50 squatters' colonies

Sl. No.	Districts	No. of colonies	No. of families	Approx.area of land (in bighas) involved (1 bigha=14,400 sq.ft)
1.	Calcutta	63	5,712	784.06
2	24-Parganas	305	28,543	7,687.00
3	Nadia	73	7,040	3,785.50
4	Hooghly	49	2,868	651.50
5	Howrah	55	6,183	812.48
6	Murshidabad	57	4,551	5,375.00
7	Jalpaiguri	13	1,065	485.75
8	Midnapore	10	1,250	315.60
9	Burdwan	49	4,035	1,013.57
10	Bankura	44	3,237	17,652.00
11	Maldah	38	3,629	6,892.00
12	Birbhum	29	1,445	6,353.00
13	Darjeeling	12	1,287	192.00
14	West Dinajpur	1	59	6.75
15	Cooch Behar	9	1,616	1,736.00
		807	72,523	53,740.21