Last year the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB) of Kolkata and Goethe-Institut of Dhaka launched a joint project to find out and understand how the memory of the partition of India (1947) is retained by the third generation of evicted Bengalis. The grandparents of the respondents had fled from one part of Bengal to another. My report focuses on those who left erstwhile east Bengal (which after partition became East Pakistan and, subsequently, in 1971 Bangladesh) to come to West Bengal. Selections were made so that the respondents' social, cultural and economic locations cut across class and caste-lines and there was equal representation of men and women.

Those interviewed on our side were:

- Pintu Das (a social science researcher, a Dalit by caste and comes from the mangrove areas of the Sundarbans in the southern most corner of Bengal)
- Rajlakshmi Ray (runs a stall in a south Kolkata bazaar and is of working class background)
- Somnath Rudrapal (a clay idol-maker from Kolkata's proverbial Kumortoli, the centre of this trade)
- UtpalBasak (a weaver from Phulia in Nadia district)
- Sukanta Biswas (a teacher-cultivator from Dhubulia in Nadia district)
- Sanchita Bhattacharya (a librarian of a research institute in Kolkata)
- Anushree Biswas (a Master's student in Kolkata)
- Saswati Roy Choudhury (a teacher in Kolkata)
- Shan Bhattacharya (a doctor who is working on his photographer father's archive)
- Shraboni Ghosh (a middle-class homemaker at Salt Lake, adjacent Kolkata)

The interviewers made a judicious combination of a set of common questions – like why at all and when did the family decide to cross the border, the journey, family memories of violence, the initial years, whether they retain the dialect, what does desh (loosely translates as Heimat) mean to them, etc – but also made sure that the interviews progress in a free-flowing manner with minimum interventions. The interviews gesture at violence and economic insecurity as the two main reasons for the forced migration. By all indications, the level of everydayviolence and insecurity have only increased after Bangladesh came into being, especially since 1975, though spectacular riots are much less than during the immediate decades following the partition. Sukanta Basak talks of systematic purging of Hindus and destruction of Hindu temples as late as in 2000. Pintu Das describes in graphic detail the violence in Noakhali much after the formation of Bangladesh. The common story is, if the local Muslims would get a hint of the planned departure, they would take away all that can be taken. The booty, of course, includes women. So even if hurriedly done, each family had chalked out a careful strategy for departure. Anushree, for instance, recalls her grandmother recounting how she fled with part of the family jewellery tucked inside her hair-bun. But along with violence, there was also help, almost inevitably, from benevolent Muslim families, the good Samaritans, that is.

In terms of early years hardship, what comes out from the interviews is that the refugees from both working-class as well as middle-class backgrounds stood up to the challenge remarkably well. SukantaBasak, a weaver by trade, recounts how in the mid-70s, on having been thrown out of Bangladesh, his father and uncle worked in other peoples' households as servants, but gradually invested their savings in buying land and then setting up a weaving unit, which is now doing very well. In fact, the refugee workers very often quickly outdid the local residents, leading to initial antagonism. Somnath Rudrapal talks of how the refugee idol-makers took no time to outdo the local ones, because they used to work as whole-timers,

while the latter came from Nadia only during the seasons. This led to fights, so much so that the police had to intervene. Now that is all settled and the styles of the east Bengal idol making have mostly won over the local styles. The settling of tensions has also got to do with intermarriages between these two communities. The middle-class migrants utilized an existing network of relationships and friendships on this side of the border, which was not so much available to the working class.

The proverbial ghoti-bangal rivalry (ghoti, as the vessel, stereotypes the native residents of Kolkata, and bangal for those who crossed the border) has lost its earlier affective charge and remains mostly as a frolic, entertaining the young crowd. The upward mobility of the 'bangals' and the overall hegemony they have achieved, have made the early strives between these two groups of Bengalis irrelevant. It is because of this settled hegemony, Anushree could humorously mention the stereotype of Bangal wives as quarrelsome and irreverent. And there has been osmosis of culture too, mainly through intermarriages. For the working class though it might not be so settled a scenario, as the reminiscences of Pintu and others indicates. By all indications, however, this tension is subsiding and means little in today's Kolkata. As for the East Bengal dialect, it is apparent that the middle-class third generation has lost it; so confident they are of their hegemony that they one and all embrace the 'Kolkata standard dialect'. Of the ten respondents, the two who spoke in the dialect are Sukanta and Rajlakshmi. In the case of Sukanta, the reason it survived could be due to trade, habitat and distance from Kolkata.

Even though working-class has less time for nostalgia, it seems that erstwhile refugees across class remember life on the other side of the border remarkably well. In their reminiscence, the solvent sections privilege the post-arrival mobility and their affluence back in what used to be east Bengal. Along with memories of riots, killings, arson and abductions, there is also a desire for past plenitude, which the third generation has inherited from their grandparents and which comes in the form of bountiful landscape. Usually, it is the grandmother who functions as the repository of rituals and, of course, culinary specialities. Worship of Manasha, the snake goddess, so prevalent in the erstwhile east Bengal, is now observed mostly by working class refugees. Interestingly, none of the respondents admit that they might have been worse off on the other side, though there is ready admission that coming to the metropolis has offered them better opportunities. Even as almost all respondents identify violence of the Muslims as the main reason for departing from East Pakistan or Bangladesh, it is rather from an existential standpoint than a strictly communal one. However, only one respondent (Pintu Das) talks of the virtual apartheid that the Hindu upper castes practiced vis-à-vis the toiling Muslims as the reason for the partition and subsequent violence. Those, whose families came after the partition of 1947, remember the partition strife and life before partition better than those who were ousted after the War of 1971, though with the tellers, the tales of life prior 1947 are also going away. In cases where such tales are remembered, it is for their idyllic, pastoral quality. Even memories of violence at times have a film-like effect, as in Sukanta's reminiscence of the invasion of dacoits. Interestingly, no respondent talks of left movement in the decades following the partition, though it is common knowledge that the phenomenal rise of the Bengal left comes from providing leadership to the refugee movement. This could be a reflection of the present loss of credibility of the left.

Migrants, it seems, have a fairly realistic approach to border and agree to its necessity. Perhaps because Anushree was brought up next to a small river which functioned as the border, she retains a mystique about the whole phenomenon. So does Pintu who lives in the riverine Sundarbans, close to the border. For all the respondents, desh is emphatically India, though the scale and scope of geography vary at times with the locality where one lives

casting a shadow on the concept.

In an interview situation, important is the subject position of the interviewer. For instance, Pintu, throughout acts the budding social scientist, at times at the cost of contradicting himself. Among all the respondents, only Shan Bhattacharya is concerned about visual archiving of partition memories. If the second generation is post-memory, I would like to call the third generation post-forgetting, that is, remembering after it has been ordinarily forgotten. All these interviews in different ways gesture to a deeper query: what it means to remember the partition for those who have not witnessed the partition (in most cases, even their parents have not witnessed)? They have heard tales from their grandparents or parents, seen films and read novels about lush landscape, the time of plenty, violent ouster, initial hardship and gradual mobility. But does that make partition live in them? What do the traces of everyday mean after the affective bonds ceased to be?

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