

## FORCED MIGRATION AND RECONSTITUTION OF FAMILY HISTORY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FOCUS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines and analyses the reconstruction of family histories of the East Bengal (EB) refugee-migrants who have resettled in West Bengal (WB), India. In-depth ethnographic case-studies of two refugee-migrant families reveals the changing family structures and values, decline of traditional marriage practices and intra-regional conflicts between refugee-migrants and WB locals. A transition has taken place towards the western-type nuclear family from the traditional joint-family norms. These changes are pronounced among the second-generation migrants. Adherence to 'Kolkata Culture' by the refugee-migrants has substantially contributed to the reconstruction of their family histories.*

**Keywords:** *Forced Migration, Family History, refugee-migrants, West Bengal, Kolkata Culture.*

### *Introduction*

On the event of the second political partition of undivided Bengal during 1946-47 was distinctively evidenced through the massive involuntary migration of East Bengal (EB) Hindus to West Bengal (WB), Kolkata in particular (Azad 1960; Chatterji 1996; Das 1993; Jalal 1985; Raychaudhury 2003; Zakaria 1996). The dynamics of EB Hindu migration in South Kolkata *Udbastu* (displaced population) settlements have been significantly reflected in the EB Hindus' process of reconstructing their family histories (Gangopadhyay 1964; Kolenda 2003; Sharma 2003; Thakurta 2002). Detailed case studies of two EB migrant families are chosen as the methodological basis for understanding the progression of rebuilding the family histories in the social setting of Kolkata city.

The reconstruction of the migrants' family histories, as conceptualised, has basically centred on individual family identity in newly encountered social situations

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is to a large extent based on primary data collected through the participant-observation methods (narratives and oral history) in Kolkata, India.

(Khan 2006; Thakurta 2002). This can be expressed by looking at the life histories of migrants who have been abruptly disempowered due to political events beyond their control. Concurrently, these migrants have endeavoured to retain their own family values in their attempts to adapt to a new social environment. Therefore, the reconstruction of family histories tends to provide a conceptual framework towards the dynamic aspects of EB Hindu migration.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the brief family histories of Amar Pal (Dhaka district) and Ajoy Roy (Faridpur district) in the East Bengal region. The principal motivation of this study is that no previous research has been undertaken in this area. Hence, it is expected that this study will fill an empty space in the literature along re-making family epitomes as a consequence of forced migration.

### *Methodology*

Primary and secondary data sources were utilised for this research. Employing a qualitative research method, primary data were obtained from *Bijoygarh* area of south Kolkata during 2000-2001, 2004 (11 months in total). Qualitative techniques included participant-observation, in-depth interviewing and case studies. Considered useful written materials in order to address the legitimacy of qualitative inquiry and interpretations of both traditional and post-modern perspectives relating to the issues dealt in here (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Eisner 1991; Marshall and Rossman 1999; Rossman and Rallis 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Due emphasis was given in view of documenting EB Hindu migrants' expressions of subjective experiences towards communal strife, uprooted from parental homes-forced migration, family displacement, resettlement efforts and manifestation of regional-cultural identity.

Case studies were set off to explain how the family structures and values were constructed and negotiated. Looking at the reconstitution of family histories, these two case studies would enable us to understand the insights of family composition, marriage practices and regional conflicts between EB Hindu migrants and WB local Hindus. The two families presented two contrasting patterns of involuntary migration. This comparison of the families was highlighted in Table 4.

The structure of the paper is as the following:

Section I discussed the migration of Pal family following the communal riots and partition of undivided Bengal.

In Section II, discussion was carried on the migration of Roy family during the second wave of Hindu migration from East Pakistan (formerly EB) in 1971.

Section III explained the contrasting family structures and economic background of the two families prior to migration.

In Section IV, resettlement efforts of two families in Kolkata were discussed.

Section V narrated the marriage patterns of Pal and Roy families.

Section VI was summarised and concluded by demonstrating the efforts of the two families in reconstructing their family histories.

### I. Migration of Pal Family in 1947

Amar Pal, the Head of the joint-family, was interviewed to elicit information about his extended family. Mr Pal's family lives in *Bijoygarh 'JabarDakhal Udbastu'*<sup>2</sup> colony of South Kolkata. Amar Pal narrated in brief, the reasons for their migration in the following manner:

#### *Communal Violence and Migration*

Soon after the creation of Pakistan in August 1947, we the inhabitants (Hindus) of EB became strangers in our own homeland in the newly emerged province of East Pakistan. We suddenly felt out of place. In fact, the chaotic political situation and severity of communal violence forced us to migrate involuntarily. Initially, I migrated to Kolkata in December 1947. After six months, three of my school-going brothers and only sister joined me. In late 1948 my parents also migrated to Kolkata. Forced migration rendered us insolvent while we were quite well off in Dhaka (Interview: 2000).

#### *Repatriation of Property and Temporary Settlement*

Amar Pal's parents migrated after selling their land and mutually exchanging their house with a Muslim family who migrated to Dhaka from WB. His parents risked their lives while exchanging their property during volatile communal violence. Prior to partition, mutual exchanges of immovable property were informally arranged between potential migrants (WB Muslims and EB Hindus) and such exchanges surged during 1946-1947, at the height of communal riots.

### II. Migration of Roy Family in 1971

The case-study of Roy family is based on primary sources gathered through recorded interviews. Additional information was obtained via note-taking on several occasions, oral histories through open-ended method and researcher's direct participant-observation. Debatable and contradictory statements were verified through "Key Informants" and "Informal Group Discussions" following ethnomethodology techniques (Babbie 1998; Jorgensen 1989; Mason 1996:60; Sanjek 1990; Stake 1995; Wolcott 1994).

#### *Dual Migration*

Like many displaced EB families, the Roy family also crossed the Indian border and temporarily took refuge with relatives in central Kolkata. The nature of migration and the pattern of Roy family's resettlement in Kolkata were unconventional as compared to earlier EB Hindu migrants. The reasons are first, this family fled to safety in Kolkata after the Pakistani Army crackdown in 1971.

<sup>2</sup> The uprooted refugee migrants established their habitat by forcibly occupying waste government lands, ill-maintained military camps, and some Muslim-owned old buildings in Southern Kolkata.

Secondly, the Roy family returned home in 1972 after the liberation of Bangladesh. Thirdly, they consciously migrated once again in 1975 after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a military putsch. Unlike other refugee-migrants, the Roy family did not take shelter in refugee camps and temporarily lived with relatives in Kolkata. Therefore, the migration pattern of the Roy family was different.

### *Initial Settlement*

The Roy family initially lived with relatives in various locations of central Kolkata. Though spatially dispersed, the Roy family remained an undivided family having regular contacts with each other. Gradually, they were being exposed to 'Kolkata Culture'<sup>3</sup> and they embraced it expeditiously. Therefore, the process of reconstruction of the Roy family appears unconventional. The transitional phase of the Roy family and its reconstruction within 25 years was a successful metaphor compared to family histories of the migrants of post-partition Bengal.

## *III. Contrasting Family and Economic Structures*

### *III.1. Profile of Pal Family Prior to Migration*

Amar Pal and his family lived in a village about twelve kilometres away from Dhaka. The village was situated on the bank of '*Buri-Ganga*'<sup>4</sup> river in Keraniganj suburb of Dhaka district. His uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces also lived in the same ancestral precinct but they all had separate dwellings with cooking facilities for each family. There were several family members in each family unit. This was not a joint-family structure in the strict sense because of the co-existence of same blood-kindred group that can be construed as the extended family structure blended with the traditional family bondage.

In this family environment, the mode of interaction between members of each family unit was based on biogenic principles rather than socially divided dwelling structures and kitchen facilities. The notion of such distinct family interactions arose among the members of the Pal family at an early stage of their family evolution. This brought about a complex set of family traits and values in the matrix of Hindu joint-family structure in Bengal.

Amar Pal's parents had no formal education. His father Shukhendu Pal owned cultivable lands and ran a shop with a '*Gudam Ghar*'<sup>5</sup> in a nearby Bazaar. His mother Indrani Pal was a housewife. They belonged to the '*Sudra*'<sup>6</sup> caste. Despite being a *Sudra*, the Pal family had a pre-eminent socio-economic status and thus provided leadership in the village.

<sup>3</sup> 'Kolkata Culture' epitomises the traits of a mega city which implies the urbanised character of the city dwellers with impersonal relationships.

<sup>4</sup> A river claimed by the local people that it had the oldest root from the river 'Ganges', because the Bengali word '*Buri*' means old lady and '*Ganga*' is the Bengali word for Ganges.

<sup>5</sup> A large godown for storing various food grains and cash crops.

<sup>6</sup> A category of Varna meant to be understood as the lowest Hindu unit of social division in caste system.

My field observations indicated an insignificant concentration of higher caste Hindus in EB villages. The high concentration of low caste Hindus in EB had been a historical specificity despite a high incidence of conversion of low caste Hindus into Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. However, the spread of Buddhism, the Muslim invasions and spread of Christianity did not affect the number of high caste Hindus (Karim 1956; Das 1993; Desai 1948).

Amar Pal proudly spoke about the naming of his village 'Dharmendrapur' after his great grandfather Dharmendra. He narrated his family history thus:

People of our locality trace our ancestry to the '*Pal Bangsha*' (Pal dynasty in Indian history). The Hindus were in majority in our village. The Muslims (mainly peasants and labourers) lived in the low-lying areas. Because of our family pelf and position, we wielded power and respect. We performed philanthropy and charity work for the poor. We regularly maintained links with Dhaka for business, education, medical treatment, political activities and recreation. Therefore, what we have left behind is beyond comprehension! (Interview: 2000).

Amar Pal's family did not encounter economic hardship prior to the riots of 1946. They were in dire straits after their material wealth were plundered and pillaged by the rioters<sup>7</sup>.

A detailed description of the composition of Pal family before migration to Kolkata in 1947 is based on intensive interviews, key informant's report and participant-observation.

#### *Description of Parental Home*

Pal parental home was '*pakka*' (house made of bricks and concrete) and semi-*pakka* (floor is made of bricks and walls made of corrugated iron). The household was spread over 1 acre that included gardens, ponds, playground and pasturelands. This parental home consisted of 3 family units where Amar Pal's father and 2 elder uncles lived. All units had separate cooking arrangements. There was a big '*Boithakkhana*' (male meeting hall) in front of the house, which was detached from the '*Andarmahal*' (female quarters with restricted entry for male outsiders). The *Boithakkhana* was the meeting place for all males and guests. The male guests and outsiders had restricted entry to the '*Andarmahal*' for privacy and family prestige. This particular style of rural dwellings is a unique representation of wielding economic power and social honour. This signifies the rural status high-ups such as the prestigious role play of the '*Matabbars*' (village elders in rural Bengal). There were only a few families in the villages of such standing.

From among the three family units of the extended Pal family, I would concentrate on one family unit in this case study on purpose for the research convenience. This purposive sampling was mainly considered on the ground that the availability and accessibility of the interviewees / respondents, key informants and group discussants could be ensured. Table 1 show the composition of the core family members who migrated to Kolkata.

<sup>7</sup> EB riots were triggered by 'Calcutta Killings' and 'Bihar Riots'.

Table 1

Composition of Core Pal Family Members in 1947-1948

Name	Male / Female	Age	Relationship	Occupation	Year migrated
Shukhendu Pal	M	55	Father	Business	1948 (late)
Indrani Pal	F	43	Mother	Housewife	1948 (late)
Amar Pal (case)	M	18	Eldest son	College student	1947 (late)
Bimol Pal	M	15	2 <sup>nd</sup> son	School student	1948 (early)
Shubha Pal	M	11	3 <sup>rd</sup> son	School student	1948 (early)
Prakash Pal	M	09	4 <sup>th</sup> son	School student	1948 (early)
Sulekha Pal	F	08	Daughter	School student	1948 (early)

Source: Field-study on involuntary migration of EB Hindus and their resettlement in Kolkata (2000-2001).

### III.2. Socio-Economic Background of the Roy Family

#### Family Background

Ajoy Roy's grandfather Atul Roy was a small *Zamindar*<sup>8</sup> of “*Bhanga Sadard*” in Faridpur district of EB. *Zamindars* exercised political power and enjoyed high social status. Atul Roy subsequently lost his *Zamindari* but his social status and class position remained intact due to his past affluence and influence.

With the cessation of *Zamindari*, Atul Roy moved to Shibchar (also in Faridpur) and operated a business in medicines and drugs. His flourishing business restored his pristine family status. Roy family's social status and political eminence prevailed until the partition in 1947.

Ajoy Roy's family lived in their parental home-made of bricks. This was atypical dwelling structure in the villages where the majority people lived in mud houses with roof constructed of corrugated iron. Evidently, Roy family was economically solvent and exercised rural leadership in EB during the pre-British period.

Atul Roy's family consisted of his wife Anupama and sons Abinash, Animesh, Ashish and daughter Parama. After Atul Roy's death in 1943, Abinash Roy assumed family responsibilities by conducting his father's business as per the Hindu joint-family customs. After Anupama's death in 1946, majority of her children (Animesh, Abinash and Parama) migrated to Kolkata. Their migration occurred after the “Calcutta Killings” in August 1946 and the contagion communal violence.

The Roy brothers transferred money by liquidating their shares in business and property. The youngest brother, Ashish Roy, inherited the remaining parental property and continued to live in Bangladesh (formerly EB) until 1975. Because

<sup>8</sup> A landed potentate entrusted by the British for revenue collection.

of Roy family's benevolence and pre-eminence in society, Ashish Roy was less alarmed by the communal problems.

Ajoy Roy (son of Ashish Roy) and his extended family members were intensively interviewed. His youngest sister Anu Roy (spinster), widowed mother and widowed mother-in-law live with him. These widowed ladies have occasional contacts with their sons, daughters and other relatives in Kolkata. Ajoy's eldest sister Anita Ghosh has been living in Kolkata since 1969. His eldest brother Bijoy Roy is a doctor and practices in Kolkata.

Table 2 shows the composition of the Roy Family encompassing the periods of pre-partition Bengal (before 1947), post-partition Bengal (1947-1971) and post-liberation of Bangladesh (1971 onwards).

*Table 2*  
Description of Roy Family Composition

Name	M / F	Year Born	Relationship	Occupation	Migration Status
Atul Roy	M	1885	Grand father	Business	Did not migrate
Anupama Roy	F	1896	Grand mother	Housewife	Did not migrate
Abinash Roy	M	1916	Uncle	Business	Pre-partition migration
Animesh Roy	M	1919	Uncle	Medical doctor	Migrated after partition
Ashish Roy	M	1921	Father	Business	Migrated in 1975
* Shefalika Roy	F	1930	Mother	Housewife	Migrated in 1975
Parama Roy	F	1927	Aunt (father's sister)	Housewife	Migrated after partition
Anita Ghosh	F	1950	Eldest sister	School teacher	Migrated in 1969
Bijoy Roy	M	1951	Eldest brother	Medical doctor	Migrated in 1971
* Ajoy Roy	M	1953	Self	Journalist	Migrated in 1975
* Dipa Roy	F	1956	Wife	Business (part-time)	Migrated in 1975
Anu Roy	F	1966	Youngest sister	Business (part-time)	Migrated in 1975
Aditi Roy	F	1980	Daughter	Uni. Student	Born in Kolkata
Aparna Roy	F	1987	Daughter	School student	Born in Kolkata

\* denotes: Persons Interviewed



#### IV. Resettlement of Pal and Roy Families in Kolkata

##### IV.1. Resettlement of Pal Family

As alluded earlier, Amar Pal migrated involuntarily due to communal violence, political instability and social/physical insecurity. Amar Pal migrated to Kolkata in December 1947. At the time of migration, Amar Pal was a first year commerce student of Jagannath College, Dhaka.

Amar Pal came to Kolkata by steamer after bribing a Muslim *Dalal* (agent) for his safe passage. On arrival, Amar Pal sought shelter in his relative's residence at Shyambazar in Kolkata. Amar Pal could not continue his study because of economic hardship. Soon he took up a part-time job in a soap factory with a salary of Rs.100 / – per month. Mr. Pal said:

I could not imagine that I could earn such a fantastic amount. In those days, an adult required a maximum of Rs.70 / – for a modest living in Kolkata. In the meantime, my brothers arrived in Kolkata and I admitted them in a school. My second brother Bimol left for Bihar and studied there (Interview: 2000).

Bimol lived with a *Mohajan's* (small businessman) family in Bihar free of cost. In November 1948, Amar Pal's parents migrated with limited material resources (cash and kind). Along with part-time work, Amar Pal continued his studies in *Bangabashi* College. Because of his innate political proclivity, he associated himself with leftist politics in WB. In 1950, Amar Pal actively participated in resettlement struggle at the *Bijoygarh* area along with other EB Hindu refugee-migrants and political comrades. This was the beginning of the establishment of '*JabarDakhal Udbastu*'<sup>9</sup> Colonies in South Kolkata. Later, Amar Pal started a flourishing timber business at Bijoygarh.

Within a year, Amar Pal occupied a block of land at Bijoygarh and constructed a one-storey house there. Amar received substantial support from his family members, friends and political co-workers. Later, Amar Pal constructed a second floor.

The following account of the Pal family at Bijoygarh colony shows a reconstructed family structure under the changed conditions. Shukhendu Pal (father) and Indrani Pal (mother) died within 6 months of each other. Sulekha Pal, the only sister of Amar Pal was married to a small businessman and lived adjacent to *Shaktigarh* colony.

Shukhendu Pal was the titular head of the household during his lifetime. Amar Pal assumed the headship as per the tradition of the Hindu family norms after the death of his father. The various occupations of the family members are shown in Table 3. The list of people in this joint-family structure included both the 'first generation migrants' and the 'second generation migrants' who were born and raised in Kolkata.

<sup>9</sup> Creation of colonies by the EB Hindu refugee-migrants by forcibly occupying private and public lands in the *Jadavpur-Bijoygarh* area of south Kolkata are known as *JabarDakhalUdbastu* colonies.



*Table 3*  
Composition of the Resettled Pal Family in 2000-2001

Name	M / F	Age	Relationship	Occupation	Description
Amar Pal	M	70	Eldest brother and Head of Family	Timber business	First generation migrant
Lakshmi Pal	F	58	Wife of Amar Pal	College teacher	First generation migrant
Bimol Pal	M	67	Second brother of Amar Pal	Business	First generation migrant
Ruhini Pal	F	55	Wife of Bimol Pal	Housewife	Not migrant, born in Bihar. Bengali speaking.
Prakash Pal	M	63	* Fourth brother	School teacher	First generation migrant
Binita Pal	F	52	Wife of Prakash Pal	Housewife	First generation migrant
Sulekha Pal	F	62	Youngest and only sister	Housewife, lives in in-law's place	First generation migrant
Mahendra Pal	M	32	Eldest son of Amar Pal	Business	Second generation migrant, born in Kolkata
Shibani Pal	F	28	Only daughter of Amar Pal	NGO Worker	Second generation migrant, born in Kolkata
Abinindra Pal	M	20	Youngest son of Amar Pal	Student	Second generation migrant, born in Kolkata
Sulata Pal	F	19	Only daughter of Bimol Pal	Student	Second generation migrant, born in Kolkata
Bikash Pal	M	14	Only son of Prakash Pal	Student	Second generation migrant, born in Kolkata
Kalyani Pal	F	31	Wife of Mahendra Pal	College teacher	Born in Kolkata and original inhabitant of West Bengal

*Source:* Field-study on Involuntary migration of EB Hindus and their resettlement in Kolkata (2000: 2001).

*Note:* Third brother Shubha Pal (65) is not included in this table because he lives separately. Amar Pal (70): With a commerce background, Amar Pal currently runs a timber business based at *Jadavpur-Bijoygarh* area of south Kolkata. Amar Pal provided a detailed statement of the problems of their family resettlement in Kolkata.

### *Involvement in Politics*

His political involvement started during his school life in EB. Amar Pal was involved with '*Anushilon Samity*' (People's association for firm determination in life), an organisation that was philosophically linked with the anti-British movement. He narrated his experience:

When I was a student of Year 9, I secretly delivered pamphlets to some selected persons in adjacent and distant villages. These pamphlets contained information and future programs on '*Anushilon Samity*' for anti-British movement. Since I was young, nobody doubted my clandestine activities (Interview: 2000).

At the time of interview, Amar Pal has been the Secretary of West Bengal unit of the Socialist Party of India. Also, his active role as the head of the joint-family was focused.

During his sojourn in Kolkata, Amar Pal has perceived an impression about the local people's attitude towards the refugee-migrants. Mr. Pal expressed his feelings in the following words: We came to WB and forcibly established colonies in the Bijoygarh area in 1951. The local populace of South Kolkata could not tolerate our presence. In other words, they were hostile and critical towards us. We could gauge their jealousy and resentment towards us since we came to their country and resettled on their land. Moreover, they believed that their social equilibrium and economic stability were threatened by our presence. Further, our active participation in building '*Udbastu Colonies*' created consternation among the local Hindus. They felt threatened on the ground that they would be losing jobs, business and trade, agriculture, education, health care and transport facilities and culture. Over time, we flourished in obtaining jobs, business and trade. Thus, we made valuable contributions in all spheres of socio-economic and political lives as compared to the WB locals. Also, we have contributed to the political development of WB, which helped the cause of common people. Therefore, as refugee-migrants we have settled quite well and became successful in all spheres of life (Interview: 2001).

### *IV.2. Resettlement of Roy Family*

A profile of the Roy family was obtained after interviewing members of the Roy family. All the members of the Roy family could not be interviewed, as they were unavailable during the interview period. However, vital information about them was elicited through these interviews.

Ajoy Roy (47) was interviewed regarding his experiences of migration and consequent family resettlement. He lives with his wife Dipa and their two daughters.

### *Migration under Duress*

Mr. Roy reminisced as follows:

Due to unstable political and communal situations in 1971, it was unsafe for the Hindus to live in East Pakistan. In such a volatile situation, it was impossible to cross the border *en masse*. Later, we were united as a family unit in Kolkata (Interview: 2001).

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 by the military, Ajoy's family finally migrated to Kolkata. In contrast, Ajoy consciously migrated and settled in Kolkata. Ajoy added that:

When Sheikh Mujib was killed, it is hard to comprehend that Bangladesh will be ever a peaceful abode for any minority (Interview: 2001).

After migration in 1975, Ajoy struggled a lot to establish himself as a TV journalist in Kolkata.

#### *Class and Vocation*

Ajoy stated:

Prior to migration, we belonged to a middle class family. My father was a businessman. My elder brother was a medical practitioner who graduated from Calcutta Medical College. Our two sisters were married in Kolkata. My younger sister lives with me and assists us in our photography business (Interview: 2001).

#### *Love and Marriage*

Ajoy further stated:

Dipa and I were in love and married in Dhaka in 1975. My elder brother married in 1977 after completing his internship in medicine. Nowadays, it is difficult to have a good match in Kolkata unless there exists a tacit "understanding" between men and women (Interview: 2001).

In Bangladesh, the concept of love affair denotes close "understanding" between boys and girls to their family members. The elders prefer the term "understanding" since love affair is socially stigmatised. Free mixing before marriage is culturally despised and is not endorsed by the elders. They regard love affair as beyond etiquette while dealing with marriage contracts.

#### *Effect of War of Liberation (1971)*

In 1971, Ajoy was a student at the University of Dhaka. He actively participated in Bangladesh liberation war. He recalled:

Our houses were burnt, property pillaged and looted by the Pakistan Army and their quislings. We lost our hearth and home and were forced to migrate to India as refugees. Majority people suffered the wrath of the occupation army. Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India and in East Pakistan have been a regular feature from the historical past. Frequently communal riots erupted in Khulna, Barisal, Dhaka and other places of East Pakistan barring Faridpur (Interview: 2001).

Ajoy's eldest brother went to Kolkata in early 1960's for higher studies. Ajoy's eldest sister was also sent to her uncle's residence in Kolkata because of insecurity of young Hindu girls in East Pakistan. Both brother and sister temporarily returned in 1969 and again moved to Kolkata in 1971.

Ajoy said:

During the liberation war in 1971, we faced extreme hardship in Kolkata. I had to discontinue my studies. We returned to Bangladesh in 1972. We never

confronted any communal violence, but we always lived in constant insecurity. Even in independent Bangladesh, many Hindus felt unsafe. The anti-Indian sentiment struck deep roots amongst the Muslims of Bangladesh. Hence, many Bangladeshi Hindus migrated to Kolkata for a safe haven among their co-religionists (Interview: 2001).

#### *Social Marginalisation in Kolkata*

Like all Hindus of East Pakistan (EP), Ajoy's father was offended by the derogatory term "*Malaun*" (a rebuke), hurled at 'Hindus' by EP Muslims and non-Bengali Muslims. Hindus desired to erase this constant harassment by moving to India. Contrarily, Ajoy's father suffered from identity crisis in Kolkata. He felt aggrieved for the denial of his recognition amidst professionals, businessmen and early residents. Ajoy lamented:

"This state of social marginalisation was so severe that my father had massive heart attack which led to his death in 1978. It was a costly and colossal sacrifice of life for avoiding the rebuke of "*Malaun*" in Bangladesh" (Interview: 2001).

#### *Misfortune and Crises*

Following the death of his father, Ajoy's family suffered many set-backs. His sister was disfigured in a fire accident while attending a marriage ceremony. To make matters worse, critical differences of opinion emerged between the brothers over the share of parental property and sharing of household expenses. Ajoy's eldest brother moved out to avoid further confrontation. The situation aggravated with the involvements of their wives. These events severely depressed Ajoy which made him fatalistic. However, he overcame his depression by resorting to Hindu religious rites in the form of sacrifice of animals (*Bolidan*) and offerings to deities (*Arghya*).

#### *Community Support*

At the time of migration, Ajoy's family encountered enormous financial crisis as they could not repatriate enough material resources from Bangladesh. His family had uncertain refugee status in India for many years. They lived in a small room on the roof-top ("*Chila-Kotha*") in their maternal uncle's house in Kolkata. The accommodation was inadequate for his family and it was not at par with his living in Bangladesh.

Ajoy's friends provided assistance in getting employment. His neighbours rendered excellent community support in Kolkata since they were early migrants from EB. He did not suffer from insecurity as his neighbours were helpful, cooperative and cordial. Ajoy's trauma about the communal disturbances was reduced to a great extent. Because of his skills in journalism he never encountered immigration problem as a refugee. The WB government welcomed him for his skills and past economic background.

Although Ajoy left Bangladesh in 1975, his Bangladeshi Muslim friends frequently visit him in Kolkata which smack of a congenial Hindu-Muslim relationship. In contrast to Ajoy's feelings, the second-generation migrants have no emotional attachments for Bangladesh. They cannot conceptualise the pangs and perils of communalism since they did not experience the strife and stress of Hindu-Muslim relationship. All that they know are 'hear-say' from their parents.

From the participant-observation with Ajoy, we can perceive that Ajoy is nostalgic about his birthplace. Despite the nostalgia, the Roy family is now forward-looking, as all the members of the family (including extended family members) have succeeded in all spheres of life in Kolkata.

#### *Attitude on Caste*

Ajoy is pragmatic on caste and marriage. Caste hierarchy and caste-matching in marriage contracts are irrelevant parameters in socio-cultural life. He believes that liberal education can overcome the prejudices of caste barrier and can transcend beyond the caste boundary in modern societies. Though Ajoy was not prejudiced with the caste hierarchy, his brother Bijoy was married to a higher caste woman. Caste matching in marriage is overridden by economic reasons in the case of Dr. Bijoy.

Dipa Roy (44): Ajoy's wife Dipa was born in Madhabchar in Faridpur district which was adjacent to Shibchar (ancestral village of Ajoy). Anecdotaly, Madhabchar and Shibchar villages grew from the river named after Hindu god *Shib* (*Shiva*). Dipa was born in a Kayasthya (a unit of caste between Vaishya and Sudra) family. Her father Parimal Nag was an affluent school teacher owning huge cultivable lands.

Dipa Roy said:

I crossed the border with Ajoy within five months of my marriage. We settled in central Kolkata after a struggle. I taught in a school for two years after my graduation. My daughter Aditi was born in 1980. My daughter Aparna was born in 1987. Currently, Aditi studies at the *Jadavpur* University while Aparna studies in a convent school. In 1985, I started my photography business which is located close to our house. This helped me combine family and business conveniently. We try to forget our past by remaining busy with work and be happy in Kolkata (Interview: 2001).

In Kolkata, Dipa observed a lot of differences in marriage rituals, religious functions and other cultural activities compared to those in Bangladesh. She opines that the EB culture was more pragmatic than the WB culture. Dipa believes that there has been a radical transformation among the social divide of EB and WB due to the influence of 'Kolkata culture'.

Shefalika Roy (70), mother of Ajoy was the last member of the Roy family interviewed. She lives with her younger son Ajoy. She visits her eldest son Bijoy and other relatives regularly. Shefalika feels at ease with Dipa than with Chitra (Bijoy's wife) since Shefalika's EB culture converges with Dipa's EB mental set-up and poses no cultural maladjustment between the two. Shefalika narrated her experience while migrating to Kolkata in 1971. She said, Our trusted Muslim

neighbours betrayed us on the eve of our departure to Kolkata. Incredibly, these neighbours grabbed our belongings including landed property, gold jewellery, cash and other household materials. Moreover, they held us as virtual hostage and demanded ransom. These people were exceedingly communal and can be termed as armed robbers. We survived this ordeal by the grace of God (Interview: 2004).

Like other members of the Roy family, Shefalika had strong reservations about the WB attitude. After several meetings with her, we have elicited that Shefalika is under-prepared to adopt, adapt to and assimilate with the WB culture. On several occasions, she referred to the EB-WB cleavage as 'we and they', 'us and them' and held the view that 'South and North Pole could never ever meet'.

Interestingly, Shefalika once disclosed how EB refugees obtained employment by deception. She stated:

A 'quota system' for employment prevailed in India for the scheduled caste (lowest caste Hindus). In a competitive job market, the EB migrants occasionally concealed their higher caste identities and introduced them as scheduled caste in Kolkata. I knew of at least five persons who obtained jobs by concealing their caste status. They included my own nephew and niece (Interview: 2004).

The necessity of crossing Indian border by the Roy family and experiences they gained thereof, presents a very interesting case of a migrants' family history. The interpretation and analysis of the reconstruction of Roy family histories, however, addressed a significant aspect of the microcosm of family sociology (Desai 1964; Freed and Ruth 1969; Hartley 1995; Kapadia 1982; Marjoribanks 1979; Narain 1975; Yorborg 2002). The level of cooperation and intimacy among the family members tended to show their interpersonal relationships, even though all members of the Roy family did not live under the same roof. Thus, it proves their extent of family relationships exists beyond physical proximity.

## *V. Marriage Patterns of the Pal and Roy Families*

### *V.1. Pal Family*

The marriage patterns of the Pal family members can be viewed from three major aspects of their resettlement. These include: 1) maintenance of regional identity;

2) caste-matching; and 3) economic factors. The following statements of the extended Pal family members will reveal the above distinctive aspects.

Lakshmi Pal (58), wife of Amar Pal holds a Masters in Psychology and teaches in a college. She migrated from Dhaka to Assam in 1951. After marriage she moved to Kolkata. Lakshmi narrated the nature of regional differences in the form of EB-WB relationship, their peculiar and distinguishing nature of marriage and religious rituals.

The WB locals perceive the EB migrants as truly rural. They believe that we are culturally backward. Our spoken Bengali language is not at par with them and thus it lacks sophistication. Over time, such attitude of the WB residents has changed substantially.



On the contrary, we think the WB locals are superficial in all respects. They are deceitful by the use of sweet words to hide their true feelings.

Previously, there were few inter-marriages between the EB migrants and WB locals, because of the prevailing prejudices between them. The EB migrant's concept of marriage stresses the 'union of two families' whereas the WB locals' concept of marriage centres on the 'union of two individuals' only (Interview: 2001).

Lakshmi believes that the joint-family system is necessary for resettlement. She expresses the importance of sustaining joint-family as follows:

We encountered hurdles for our resettlement in a new social set-up that included the apathy of the Indian government, non-cooperation from the WB residents and our economic vulnerability. Thus, for a successful resettlement, maintenance of joint-family was a necessary condition for our family unity. The joint-family system renders economic support to each constituent unit through utilisation of domestic labour force (Interview: 2001).

Bimol Pal (67), younger brother of Amar Pal, passed his Matriculation examination from Bihar. Having failed to make his fortune in Bihar, he returned to Kolkata and joined the timber business of his brother. After being away for a long time in a different social setting, Bimol's experience of interacting with the WB locals suggests the significance of reconstruction of family values and traditions. He narrates:

We are always careful in associating with the WB people since we differ from them in marriage and family types, food habits, clothes and even in hospitality. These differences in conjunction with the emerging trends in marriages and family structures made us to think about reconstructing our family values and traditions (Interview: 2004).

Bimol believed that their family structure changed since migration and it was reconstructed in the process of resettlement. The traditional family values and norms no longer dominate the present scenario of family structure and motivations of individual family members. In the resettlement process, they were united for the purpose of survival and hence tried to sustain joint and extended family pattern. This 'jointness' lasted for three decades until the maturation of the second-generation migrants. The second-generation migrants, however, were more inclined to opt for a nuclear family.

The expansive economic goals in line with consumerism and globalisation instilled a stream of modern family lives instead of traditional values. Along with the nuclear family values, the choice of inter-caste, inter-regional and inter-religious marriages are taking place in Kolkata. At present, the incidence of civil marriage has also come in vogue in Kolkata. Thus, the traditional EB migrant family structure is in a state of flux and need to be reconstructed as per the emerging family values and norms.

Ruhini Pal (55), wife of Bimol, is a Bengali speaking woman who was born and raised in Bihar in a joint-family. Her family arranged her marriage. Here, regional identity is overlooked but caste-matching is taken into account. Bimol and Ruhini are of the same Sudra caste. Ruhini's family knew Bimol prior to their marriage. Being raised in a joint-family, Ruhini says:



I keep myself busy in the kitchen by cooking and caring for all family members. I am not concerned about the dynamics of family life but I am happy living in a joint-family. I love living together and sharing necessary responsibilities with each other (Interview: 2000).

It appears from Ruhini's statement that she believes in sharing responsibilities with the family members living in a joint-family. Her statement also indicates the traditional views on joint-family life.

Shubha Pal (65), younger brother of Amar, is a science graduate and works in a chemical factory in Kolkata. He migrated with his brothers at the time of partition in 1947. Shubha lives separately with his wife and son in north Kolkata. His identity can be characterised as a member of an extended Pal family.

Our field observation revealed that Shubha isolates himself from his parental family in *Bijoygarh* colony since he lives in a posh locality of Kolkata. North Kolkata city elites look down upon the refugee migrants of southern Kolkata *Udbastu* colonies. Even Shubha is influenced by the north Kolkata snobbish attitude. Subsequently, Shubha dissociated himself and reconstructed his family along north Kolkata style.

Prakash Pal (63) is the youngest brother of Amar. He holds an MA degree in History and teaches in a high school. He migrated from Dhaka to Kolkata in 1948 and narrated the historical background of forced migration and termed this as a political game of vivisection of Hindus and Muslims in India on religious ground. Prakash categorically mentioned the differences between EB and local WB Hindus in all spheres of life. In this regard he said:

In the first 20 years of migration to Kolkata, I felt myself as an alien among the WB local residents. All around in Kolkata (in school, college, bus, tram, train, office, market place, playground, restaurant, social functions and festivals etc.) I was always taunted as EB refugee-migrants by the WB locals. After living together for 30 years or more, we both communities can get along well on many issues. Hence, differences between us have reduced to a large extent (Interview: 2000).

Prakash also emphasised the status of changing family structure as a result of migration. Prakash said:

I strongly feel the necessity of reconstructing extended Pal family structure, given the emerging sociocultural situation that has grown out of the expansion of consumerism in Kolkata. I also think that the reconstruction of Pal family is on the way. It can no longer hold on to its previous joint and extended family norms along with the rapid growth of urban-industrial way of life and a continuous progression of the second-generation migrants. Both urban exposure and pragmatic roles of the second-generation migrants are aptly conducive to family reconstruction (nuclear family) at any rate. I would like to add that this situation primarily addressed the incidence of inter-caste, inter-communal, inter-regional and limited instances of inter-religious marriages (Interview: 2001).

Binita Pal (52) is the wife of Prakash and looks after the household. She is an Arts graduate. Both regional identity (EB Hindus) and caste-matching (similar caste group as Sudra) are considered in this marriage. She migrated from Sylhet to Kolkata in 1954. She differentiated cultures of EB and WB with regard to

marriage, language, food habit, dress and even in performing cultural festivals and other social and religious norms and rituals. Binita said:

I have noticed some cultural differences between us (EB) and them (WB) relating to marriage rituals. For example, at the very outset of the ceremony, the bridegroom will send gifts (sarees and dresses etc.) to the bride's sisters, cousins and grandmothers. WB locals send gifts only to the bride's own sisters and younger brothers if any. I have never known EB Hindu marriages where 'fried fish' was not served. In majority WB's marriages, meat and other delicious foods were served but without 'fried fish'. Our elders recommend that fish must be served in the marriage ceremonies because it is regarded as the symbol of fertility. Further, a low-caste "*Purohit*" or "*Thakur*" (who leads and performs religious functions) cannot lead and perform a *puja* (Hindu religious ceremony) festival in the house of a higher caste (than him) in WB, but it was not the case in EB. In our culture, *Purohit* of any caste can perform at any place regardless of high or low caste (Interview: 2004).

It is gathered both from the group discussions and from the key informants that Binita is not comfortable living in a joint-family. In discussing about the family dynamics with her, she emphasised on the liberty, freedom of speech and liking and disliking of individual member in the family. Her preference for joint-family system and living in such family environment was affected by the emerging globalisation and her exposure to urban way of life in Kolkata. Now living in a joint-family, therefore, Binita's viewpoint on family dynamics addresses a new dimension towards the reconstruction of Pal family history.

Sulekha Pal (62) is the youngest and only sister in the Pal family who migrated with her 3 brothers in June 1948. She passed her matriculation examination. Sulekha is married to a similar caste group and is living with her in-law's family in *Shaktigarh* colony beside Bijoygarh.

#### V.2. Marriage Pattern of Roy Family

Ajoy Roy married Dipa after a prolonged love affair. Dipa belonged to a higher caste Hindu family in EB. In this marriage regional identity is retained while the caste-matching is ignored. Ajoy's brother Bijoy Roy is a doctor and practices in Kolkata. He is married to a high caste Hindu girl of WB. In this instance, both regional and caste preferences are ignored since Bijoy had a prestigious professional background.

Ajoy's eldest sister Anita Ghosh has been living in Kolkata with her husband since 1969. Anita and her husband (Alok) are of the same caste and hailed from E B. The youngest sister Anu Roy is still unmarried since she was severely disfigured in a fire. Her brothers sincerely wanted her to get married but could not manage the high dowry demanded by the potential bridegrooms.

#### Second-Generation Migrants

The second-generation migrants are those who were born in Kolkata or were infants while their parents migrated to Kolkata. The experiences of the second-generation migrants are different to their parents as can be seen from the following narrations.

Amar Pal has two sons and a daughter. His eldest son, Mahendra Pal, is a M.Sc. in Botany and runs a pharmaceutical business. He is married to Kalyani, a M.Sc. in Physics. Kalyani teaches in a college. She belongs to a higher caste than Mahendra. But both of them have the same regional background since their parents migrated from EB. Mahendra and Kalyani are living with the joint-family of Amar Pal under the same roof. They own a car and have separate cooking arrangement in the same house. Therefore, they tend to follow a different routine in their parental home. This indicates a change of joint and extended family trend among the EB refugee-migrants.

Amar Pal's daughter Shibani is an Arts graduate and is married to an engineer Ashit Das. Shibani and Ashit belong to the same caste (Sudra), but Ashit hails from WB and hence they have different regional identities. Shibani is working in a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). The youngest son of Amar Pal, Abanindra is studying electrical engineering in Bangalore, South India. Bimol Pal, brother of Amar Pal, has only one daughter Shulata. She studied up to Higher Secondary Certificate. Amar Pal's youngest brother Prakash Pal has only one son Bikash who is a 9<sup>th</sup> grade student in the South Point convent school.

Similar picture emerges about the Roy family's life in Kolkata. Ajoy Roy's two daughters, Aditi and Aparna, are attending university and missionary school in south Kolkata. It appears from the profile of the second-generation migrants that they are becoming economically advanced and educationally enlightened. Hence, they are progressing upward in the social ladder.

A range of variability in this research following the preceding descriptions, interpretations and analyses, a schematic comparison of the two case studies during pre-migration and post-migration phases is shown in table 4.

Table 4

Schematic Comparison of Pal and Roy Families: Pre and Post-Migration Phases

	<b>First- Generation</b>	<b>First- Generation</b>	<b>Second-Generation</b>	<b>Second- Generation</b>
	<b>PAL family</b>	<b>ROY family</b>	<b>PAL family</b>	<b>ROY family</b>
Time of Migration	1946-1947	1971 & 1975	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Reason of Migration	Insecurity	Insecurity	N/A	N/A
Assets carried	Nil	Limited	N/A	N/A
<b>Family Background prior to Migration</b>				
Type of family unit	Joint & Extended	Joint	N/A	N/A
Caste	Sudra	Kayasthya	N/A	N/A

	First- Generation	First- Generation	Second- Generation	Second- Generation
	PAL family	ROY family	PAL family	ROY family
Economic condition	Less Affluent	More Affluent		
<b>Place of initial settlement</b>				
Family and friends	Limited	Yes	N/A	N/A
Forcible occupation of public and private land/building	Yes	No	N/A	N/A
<b>Early Problems</b>				
Financial	Yes	Yes		N/A
Accommodation	Refugee camps	Limited	N/A	N/A
Assistance from Government	Nil	Some	N/A	N/A
Social Discrimination/Cultural Maladjustment	Yes	Some extent	N/A	N/A
<b>Views on Marriage &amp; family</b>				
Caste-matching	Yes	No	Negative	Negative
Regional preference	Yes	No	Negative	Negative
Nuclear	No	Yes	Positive	Positive
Joint-extended	Yes	No	Negative	Negative
<b>Post-resettlement phase</b>				
Financial Better	Better	Relatively better	Ambitious	Ambitious
Educational	Not backward	Advanced	Income-oriented	Income-oriented

## VI. *Summary and Conclusion: A History of Family Reconstruction*

Based on critical observations and primary data on the Pal and Roy families, we can generally trace the reconstruction of the migrant families in Kolkata. It has been found that after a considerable period of their migration, the history of both Pal and Roy families underwent a phase of reconstruction. These include inter-caste marriages and steady decline of joint and extended family values. In the continuing course of resettlement, the refugee-migrant families in Kolkata have gradually attained the status of 'settled conditions' in their socioeconomic and political lives. At this point in time, however, the nature of family structure is also in a state of transition, particularly with the second-generation migrants.

Regardless of refugee-migrants' background, the second-generation migrants grew up differently from that of the first generation. In the process of resettlement, after about five decades, the family structure of the second-generation experienced a transition from traditional to modern. This can be viewed as a point of departure from the first generation migrants in Kolkata.

The second-generation did not have to struggle for their resettlement. They were exposed to metropolitan 'Kolkata Culture' along with other local residents' right from the beginning of their social, economic, political and ecclesiastical lives. The 'Kolkata Culture' usually meant to understand one's participation and commitment to the spirit of consumerism, impersonal relationship among the city dwellers, modern approach towards family life and marriage, and free of caste prejudices in all respects.

The second-generation migrants are more exposed to urban way of life in Kolkata city as against their parent's rural and agricultural backgrounds in EB. This younger generation possesses a relatively similar mode of life style as those of other Kolkata city dwellers including the local WB residents. Here, the life style indicates the younger people's food habit outside home, use of common clothing, participation in politics, sports and recreation, limited social services and some community activities. Although, the first-generation migrants were conscious about their EB identity, the second-generation migrants give no weightage to this regional identity issue in their practical lives.

In marriage deals, the second-generation migrants are more flexible and are less attentive about the traditional Hindu marriage rites and rituals. This is in contrast to the first generation migrants who still tend to uphold the family and marriage as institutional values. The family patterns and marriage systems as observed in cases of the second-generation migrants revealed the incidence of inter-caste and inter-regional matrimonial contracts.

The inter-caste and inter-regional marriages are not common between both EB and WB communities, but it happens according to convenience. The second-generation migrants and the younger people from the WB community claim that they are not prejudiced to caste pride and regional superiority. These cohorts of people emphasise more on the current global issues than the traditional Hindu

caste hierarchy and EB-WB regional divide. Therefore, the younger generation of Kolkata tends to reconstruct their own history by looking at the social transition.

The relative decline of joint and extended family structure among the first generation migrants and the higher incidence of nuclear families among the second-generation migrants indicate a change in attitudes towards family life. This nature of family dynamics reflected the propensity of reconstructed family histories of the EB Hindu refugees-migrants settled in Kolkata.

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