

OCCUPATION CLASS, MIGRATION AND FAMILY
STRUCTURE AMONG THE REFUGEES OF
WEST BENGAL, 1947-48*

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(Received on 6 July 1966)

Abstract. The refugees of West Bengal, 1947-48 have been studied with respect to their affiliation to different occupation classes in highlighting their differential behaviour towards migration and family organization.

THE historical event of partition of undivided Bengal in 1947 was significantly responsible for engendering mass displacement of Hindu households from erstwhile East Bengal (East Pakistan). Of the displaced persons, those who came to take shelter especially in different districts of West Bengal were surveyed by the Indian Statistical Institute in 1947-48. A sample size of 17436 refugee family-units was originally within the purview of this investigation. But due to incomplete recording, not more than 16156 family units were found useful for the study in view. On further scrutiny it was gathered that in only 11880 out of these 16156 units, each and every member had migrated from East Bengal. As such, 11880 units only had been taken into consideration in the context of the present study. The details of the sampling procedure adopted in this survey are obtainable from the Report of the Institute¹.

In earlier studies of these refugees of West Bengal attempts were made to study the modes of migration and family organization among the people concerned in general² and also in particular in terms of the caste-groups³ ascertainable among

* This is the revised version of the paper submitted to the Anthropology and Archaeology Section, 53rd Session of The Indian Science Congress, 1966.

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them. An examination of specific characteristics associated with the issues mentioned above has largely helped in understanding some important aspects of social behaviour of an evicted Hindu group, the members of which were thrown out of their regular homeland with abnormal rapidity and had to experience tremendous societal/familial disorganization. In this paper specific study has been undertaken to examine if the central economic ties of the principal family-supporters who were, prior to migration, engaged in different sectors of gainful occupational activities did exercise any discriminating influence on their behaviour after displacement. Again, we have also tried to find out if the refugees belonging to different occupation-classes in East Bengal behaved differently in consolidating disrupted family organizations in rural and urban places of destination within West Bengal. Contextually, special emphasis has been laid on the exposition of the salient features of the family structures that were found to exist among the refugees *immediately* after their migration in the State in 1947-48.

For the purpose of the present study, the refugee family units have first of all been sifted to place them under four broad occupational groups in accordance with the vocation of the principal supporter of the respective unit before migration. Occupations of allied nature give rise thus to the following four groups:—(i) Agriculture and allied vocations, (ii) Trade and Commerce and allied activities, (iii) Service and allied jobs, and (iv) Others, including callings that are not included in any one of the first three groups. These groups conform, in fact, to the major sectors of gainful pursuits (Industry) of the country. It is to be noted that 281 out of 11,880 family-units showed no pre-migrational attachment to any gainful occupation in East Bengal and, as such, these units have been left out of consideration for the present. Before proceeding to discuss the importance of the findings as well as of the conclusions derived from the same in the paper, it is to be pointed out that the present attempt is restricted to the consideration of only seventy-two per cent of the 16,156 refugee family units. Nevertheless, it is expected that the paper would

be of some use in highlighting the trend of occupation-class-wise migration and family formation among the refugees of West Bengal.

From the standpoint of migration from East Bengal, the refugees of the occupation-classes in question presented certain notable features which are as follows (Table 1); (a) The refugee households which were dependent on Agriculture and its related work for subsistence came, as it should be, mostly but not wholly from rural areas of East Bengal (35%). It is interesting that in as many as 16% cases, the constituent-members resided exclusively in urban areas but earned their livelihood from agricultural sources; but their constituent members did not reside exclusively either in urban or in rural areas, but remained partly in villages and partly in urban centres of East Bengal. It is most significant that less than one-third of the total refugee families surveyed were connected prior to migration with agriculture and allied vocations. This means that agriculture-bound families and persons did not form the dominant group among the refugee population in question at the time of the survey. (b) Secondly, it is observed that the migrant families which earned livelihood from trade and commerce and allied activities in East Bengal migrated in equal strength (36%) from rural and urban areas. In relatively lesser strength (24%) were those families whose members lived scattered partly in rural and partly in urban areas before migration but depended on trade and commerce. Though only a little more than one-third of the total refugees dependent on trade and commerce in East Bengal, yet quite significantly, such families and persons constituted the single dominant group among the refugees of West Bengal in 1947-48. (c) Thirdly, the principal earners who were engaged in service or bureaucratic professions were associated most remarkably with those families whose members resided before migration partly in rural and partly in urban areas (48 per cent), whereas the families which migrated with all members from only rural areas depended least on the sources of bureaucratic occupations (18 per cent) in East Bengal. From these facts it appears strongly that the earners of the families belonging especially

to the bureaucratic professions resided very largely in urban areas, while keeping their family dependants in rural areas. At the time of migration, the earners of urban areas together with their rural dependants came away in large numbers. As a result, such singular concentration (proportional) of the families concerned is met with under the category of 'rural-urban areas' of migration. On the other hand, the number of refugee families depending on services but living only in urban areas of East Bengal were, of course, not insignificant among the displaced population of the State. (d) Lastly, the refugees depending on miscellaneous types of occupation other than agricultural, trade and commerce or bureaucratic services were most conspicuously the members of those families which came very dominantly from rural areas (12 per cent) of East Bengal.

On further examination, it is found that the refugee families which migrated exclusively from rural areas of East Bengal were in the majority associated with trade and commerce rather than agriculture, whereas those moving out of urban areas were dependent on bureaucratic services rather than on trade and commerce. On the other hand, the migrant families whose members resided prior to migration partly in rural and partly in urban areas, were dependent exclusively on bureaucratic services of the earners.

In general, it is important that only 30 out of every 100 refugee family units were actually agriculture-bound units to be disturbed in East Bengal by the riotous situation of 1947-48. In that initial phase of mass migration, Hindu families and persons depending particularly upon trade and commerce became the chief victims, and they were next followed by those who were in bureaucratic services in East Bengal. It is significant that the bulk (60 per cent) of the refugees who came to West Bengal in 1947-48 were non-agricultural people.

In contrast to their journey from East Bengal, the movements of the refugees within West Bengal have also been examined in order to gather some facts of sociological significance (Table 2).

(1) Families which were dependent on agricultural occupations had conspicuously concentrated in village areas (37 per cent) of West Bengal; but the magnitude of such agriculture-bound families and persons in city areas of the State (32 per cent) was, no doubt, of a special interest in any consideration of the refugees under reference. In towns of the State, the displaced persons who belonged to the same occupation-class of agriculture were in comparatively small numbers. Under the circumstances, it is understandable that with their previous intimate attachment to agriculture and allied jobs, the refugee families concerned would feel like seeking in large measure village environs in the receiving country. But when a sizable portion of the migrant people belonging to the same occupation-class prefer to stick to city environs, the social situation becomes doubly infested with many pressing problems.

(2) It is of interest to learn that the displaced family units which were primarily linked with trade and commerce came largely to city areas. Their degree of concentration thinned out from town to village in West Bengal. Refugee families and persons linked with trade and commerce preferred to settle down significantly in the non-rural areas of the State. Actually, 72 out of every 100 families of this occupation-class were found to have concentrated in towns and cities of the State at the time of survey.

(3) Migrant families maintained by bureaucratic professions in East Bengal were found in maximum strength in towns (29 per cent); their least concentration being in the villages of West Bengal. On the other hand, though the bureaucratic families migrated in lesser strength than those depending on either agriculture or trade and commerce, yet they gravitated more towards urban areas of the receiving country. As a matter of fact, it has been found that while only 10 out of every 100 family units belonging only to the bureaucratic services had gone to seek shelter in villages of West Bengal, 13 out of 100 family units depending on trade and commerce only went to the same rural areas. In contrast, 20 out of every 100 agricul-

tural family units moved into villages of the State of West Bengal.

(4) Refugees dependent on occupations other than agriculture, trade and commerce and services were present to the extent of 19 per cent in villages and 5 per cent in the cities of West Bengal.

In addition to the above findings, it was also observed that among the refugees surveyed particularly in rural areas of the State, though the single majority was formed by those who came from agricultural families, non-agricultural families and persons actually outnumbered people belonging to the agricultural class. On the other hand, among the displaced population enumerated in town areas only of the State, the majority was formed by those who depended on trade and commerce in East Bengal. Interestingly, in towns, of all the refugee families, agricultural families formed a little more than one-fourth cases only. Again, among the refugees who came to city areas only of West Bengal, were principally men who depended on trade and commerce in East Bengal. It is however equally significant that the agricultural refugee families occupied the second place in the city areas of the State.

Refugees belonging to four distinct occupational groups in East Bengal showed several characteristics in regard to migration in 1947-48. These are: (1) non-agricultural Hindu families and persons migrated in greater numbers from East Bengal in general. Even from East Bengal villages such non-agricultural Hindus came in greater numbers than Hindus dependent on agriculture. (2) The bulk of the migrant Hindus took shelter in urban areas of West Bengal, and in doing so the agricultural families and persons made a significant appearance among the city-bound refugees from East Bengal.

Under the circumstances, these displaced Hindus were found to have different forms of corporate living in various co-resident and commensal kin-groups. A study of these kin-groups that the refugees maintained immediately after their migration from East Bengal to West Bengal constitutes in the

present context, an important task. Accordingly, analysis has been made to examine how the refugee Hindus belonging to different occupation-classes in question behaved to organize family structures in the State (Table 3). From the examination it is revealed that (i) among the refugees those who were exclusively living alone by themselves in different places of West Bengal were mainly dependent before migration on agriculture (10 per cent) and the fewest were connected with trade and commerce (7 per cent). As the very presence of such non-familial single-member units (males and/or females) testifies significantly to the process of family disintegration, it appears from the above that the agricultural Hindu families of East Bengal suffered relatively greatest disintegration. In general, among the refugee population in 8 out of every 100 units dominance of non-familial single members was quite conspicuous in indicating the extent to which the migrating families in question suffered disorders in kinship integrity.

(ii) On the other hand, it is noted that the refugees who were dependent in East Bengal on miscellaneous non-agricultural vocations showed relatively the strongest disposition (32 per cent) after migration in favour of non-extended family organizations with and without any complex-constituents (patri.and/or matri-kins of unit's head). But, those who were linked with trade and commerce and bureaucratic services in East Bengal organized such non-extended family structures almost in equal strength after migration.

(iii) Again, it is interesting that irrespective of the character of their occupation, the refugee Hindus concerned presented no sharp differentiation among themselves in organizing joint families in the new social environment of West Bengal. The very fact of the existence of joint family units in 47 out of every 100 co-resident and communal units was singularly important in the context of the question of the continuing viability of kinship solidarity among the migrating Hindus under the exceptional situation of West Bengal in 1947-48.

Occupation-class-wise variations in migration and family formation have been separately marked among the refugee population in question and several interesting features have

come to our notice. But to appreciate the result of the combined effect of the three major social attributes, namely, (i) family structures, (ii) pre-migrational identity in occupation class (agriculture/trade and commerce/services) and (iii) mode of migration (from East Bengal to village/town/city areas of West Bengal) on the migrating refugee group as a whole, further observations were made (table 4). Several notable features that have significantly emerged out of this examination are placed below.

(a) Among the refugees those who were primarily dependent on agriculture and allied vocations only in East Bengal maintained the following forms of family living after moving to different places of West Bengal. Single-members living alone in non-familial units concentrated most dominantly in villages, though their occurrence in cities was not negligible. Again, in respect of their movement to village/town/city areas of the State the Hindus of this occupation-class organized conjugal and elementary family units without any complex constituent almost in equal strength ; but those who formed the same non-extended family units together with complex-constituent moved dominantly to villages and least to city areas. On the other hand, those who were living in extended (joint) families without any complex constituent migrated significantly to city and town areas in equal strengths. In general, it is of interest to learn that the refugee Hindus who were particularly required to maintain some patri- and/or matri-kius (complex-constituents) together with all primary family members in joint or non-joint units went mostly to villages of West Bengal in search of settlements.

(b) Secondly, with respect to the displaced Hindus who depended principally on trade and commerce, the undernoted trend in the family formation has been observed to occur in different places of West Bengal. Concentration of the refugees (male and female) who were living alone by themselves was relatively highest in city areas. Again, those who were living in non-extended conjugal and simple units together with and without complex constituents migrated significantly more to

rural than to urban areas. On the other hand, those who lived in joint family units without any complex constituents preferred mostly to settle in city areas and least in village areas. But, those who were in the joint family units along with some complex constituent migrated in maximum strength to towns and not to city areas of the State. In general, joint family units were more maintained in urban areas and especially in city areas of West Bengal by refugees who lived by trade and commerce in East Bengal.

(c) Thirdly, the bureaucratic Hindus from East Bengal maintained the following forms of family in West Bengal. Among them those who led non-familial single member's life moved to seek shelter in city areas in largest numbers. On the other hand, the refugees who organized non-extended conjugal and elementary units without any complex constituent went more or less in equal strength to villages and towns; but distinctly in lesser strength to city areas. Further, it is quite interesting that those who formed particularly joint families with and without complex constituent migrated mostly to towns and least to villages. In general, the refugee Hindus of this occupation-class maintained simple (non-joint) families most conspicuously in villages rather than towns or cities after migration, whereas they formed joint families in town areas rather than in city or village areas of West Bengal.

In summing up the important trends of social developments in the life of the displaced Hindus of West Bengal in 1947-48, it may be pointed out significantly that (1) at the time of the present survey (1947-48) among the refugees concerned dominant group was formed by those Hindus who were primarily depending for subsistence on various non-agricultural avocations in East Bengal. This means that in the early stages of communal disturbances, Hindus associated with agriculture and allied activities were prompted in lesser degree to part permanently with their homes and hearths. In general, it appears that with the very start of the social calamity in their places of regular residence, the Hindu families who depended on trade, business and allied commercial activities or

on bureaucratic occupations reacted more quickly and took far-reaching decisions in favour of migration for good from East Bengal.

(2) After reaching the soil of West Bengal, the Hindu refugees behaved distinctly differently in new means of living or in the matter of settlement. The most significant development was with the people belonging to the occupation-class of agriculture. Among them, majority was formed by those who preferred to settle in villages in consonance with their previous tradition but a sizable portion settled down in the cities of the State. The non-agricultural refugee families and persons living by trade and commerce, went to city surroundings for obvious reasons; only a little more than one-fourth of them selected villages for settlement. But the refugees who lived by bureaucratic services went in a majority to the towns and not the cities of the State, though a fifth managed to stick to Calcutta and Howrah, perhaps in the hope of some form of employment. Such developments are, indeed, of utmost importance in any sociological appraisal of the migrant groups in question.

(3) Notwithstanding their variation in terms of occupation, in overt behaviours affecting pattern of migration beyond East Bengal or within West Bengal the refugee Hindus under study presented in general unquestionably a significant development in maintaining joint families in singular strength (46 per cent) among themselves immediately after migration. That the refugees could maintain kinship integrity of such a high order even after migration to the completely new socio-cultural setting of West Bengal was, indeed, a unique development in the face of the social disruption which had taken place. Sociologically it is of immediate interest to learn that in spite of utter disorder leading to total uprootment from social and economic life in erstwhile East Bengal, the Hindu refugees succeeded thus in resisting the worst effects of family disintegration.

Thus in the final analysis, it emerges that the persistence of the cultural form of the Hindu way of family living was most

likely the essential determinant in preserving ultimately the kinship solidarity in as high as 92 per cent of all the total family units surveyed.

(Thanks are due to Professor R. Mukherjee, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, for the facility of the present work he accorded kindly to the author).

R E F E R E N C E S

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TABLE 1

Percentage distribution of the refugees by occupation-classes and areas of migration in East Bengal, 1947-48.

Occupation-class	Area in East Bengal from where migrated			Total
	Rural areas	Urban areas	Rural urban areas	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Agriculture	84.68	16.15	23.30	29.62
Trade and Commerce	36.00	35.74	23.98	35.19
Services	17.60	40.01	48.09	24.78
Others	11.72	8.10	4.63	10.42
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Number of units)	(8148)	(2717)	(734)	(11599)

Value of chi-square = 909.801 with 6 d. f. ; probability = less than .001

TABLE 2
*Percentage distribution of the refugees by occupation-classes
 and areas of migration in West Bengal, 1947-48.*

Occupation-class (1)	Area in West Bengal to where migrated			Total (5)
	Village areas (2)	Town areas (3)	City areas (4)	
Agriculture	87.27	26.72	81.84	29.62
Trade and Commerce	27.91	84.57	41.78	35.18
Services	15.42	98.78	20.91	24.78
Others	19.40	9.93	5.47	10.42
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Number of units)	(1881)	(7011)	(2707)	(11599)

Value of chi-square 463.410 with 6 d. f. ; probability = less than .001

TABLE 3
*Percentage distribution of the refugee families and persons
 by occupation-class in West Bengal, 1947-1948*

Family structure (1)	Occupation class				Total (6)
	Agriculture (2)	Trade and commerce (3)	Services (4)	Others (5)	
Non-familial unit (man)	7.94	6.40	7.45	5.62	7.03
Non-familial unit (woman)	2.44	0.51	0.80	3.39	1.46
Conjugal	3.88	4.34	3.24	6.45	4.00
Elementary (simple)	82.07	84.51	85.28	86.64	34.20
Extended (joint)	37.78	39.09	38.41	32.26	87.83
Non-familial (man)-complex*	0.64	0.41	0.81	0.41	0.46
Non-familial (woman)-complex	0.38	0.32	0.24	0.50	0.34
Conjugal-complex	0.87	1.25	0.80	2.40	1.15
Elementary-complex	5.62	5.25	5.29	5.71	5.41
Extended-complex	8.88	7.92	8.18	6.62	8.18
All structures (Number of units)	100.00 (8436)	100.00 (4080)	100.00 (2874)	100.00 (1209)	100.00 (11599)

Value of chi-square = 179.253 with 27 d. f. ; probability = less than .001

*Complex—constituent of a family refers to any female patrikin and/or matrikins of the head (Ego).

TABLE 4

Percentage distribution of the refugee family structures by the occupation-class of Agriculture/Trade and Commerce/Services and areas of migration from East Bengal to village/city/town areas of West Bengal, 1947-48

Family structures	Refugees migrating from East Bengal to West Bengal into			Total
	Village areas	Town areas	City areas	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Agriculture-occupation class</i>				
Non-familial units (man and woman)	13.27	9.02	11.25	10.45
Conjugal and elementary units	86.38	34.70	36.54	35.50
Extended (joint) units	28.81	40.04	40.14	37.78
Non-extended family and non-familial units with complex	10.56	7.00	6.27	7.54
Extended units with complex	10.98	9.24	5.80	8.73
All structures (no. of units)	100.00 (701)	100.00 (1873)	100.00 (862)	100.00 (3436)
Value of chi-square=53.140 with 8 d. f. ; probability=less than 0.001				
<i>Trade and Commerce occupation-class</i>				
Non-familial units (man and woman)	7.43	5.94	8.75	6.91
Conjugal and elementary units	43.24	38.70	37.67	38.89
Extended (joint) units	33.14	89.15	42.35	89.27
Non-extended family and non-familial units with complex	8.95	7.38	5.84	7.16
Extended units with complex	7.24	8.83	5.39	7.67
All structures (no. of units)	100.00 (525)	100.00 (2442)	100.00 (1181)	100.00 (4080)
Value of chi-square=37.123 with 8 d. f. ; probability=less than 0.001				

Family structures	Refugees migrating from East Bengal to West Bengal into			Total
	Village areas	Town areas	City areas	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Services-occupation class</i>				
Non-familial units (man and woman)	8.62	7.04	12.87	8.25
Conjugal and elementary units	39.66	38.55	36.40	38.24
Extended (joint) units	35.17	38.65	37.98	38.17
Non-extended family and non-familial units with complex	8.62	6.89	6.71	6.68
Extended units with complex	7.98	9.87	6.54	8.66
All structures (no. of units)	100.00 (290)	100.00 (2018)	100.00 (666)	100.00 (2874)
Value of chi-square = 22.971 with 8 d. f. ; probability lies between .01 and .001				