

## On Some Aspects of Family Structures of the Refugees of West Bengal 1947-48\*

Kanti Pakrasi

Act of partition of undivided Bengal and subsequent forced exodus of thousands of rural and urban folk belonging to Hindu community from East Bengal (East Pakistan) may be treated as one of the important events of the decade of 1941-50. Under the spell of riotous situation leading to uprootment from homeland of regular residence the Hindus had to endure, it was obvious, in varying degree stresses in the inner organization of their respective family on their way towards different places of destination beyond East Bengal. In the back-drop of this fact it is hardly known how the immigrants behaved to be held together in individual family level by their inner kin-bonds immediately after their migration in West Bengal (1947-48).

To enquire into social and economic condition of the refugees the Indian Statistical Institute carried out a comprehensive survey in West Bengal from May to September, 1948. With regard to a suitable technique for sampling the procedure of stratified sampling was adopted and accordingly the whole of West Bengal was divided into three broad strata and seven sub-strata. *Stratum I* included three sub-strata of Calcutta (Corporation) area, Howrah City and Industrial suburbs of Calcutta. *Stratum II* consisted of three sub-strata of larger towns, smaller towns and townships and other towns and townships, and *Stratum III* included one sub-stratum of Rural areas not covered by the above. Refugee colonies and concentration camps were, of course, excluded from the sample survey. Moreover, variable sampling fractions were precisely adhered to to provide with suitable representation of the refugee families in different sub-strata in question. Thus, from Calcutta and Howrah city areas 5051 family units, from town areas including industrial suburbs 9950 family units, and from rural areas 2435 family units were taken into consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Though a sample-size of 17436 refugee families was originally within the scope of the survey, ultimately data related to 16156 fami-

---

\*This is a revised version of a paper contributed to the Anthropology and Archaeology Section, 50th Session, Indian Science Congress, 1963.

lies could be taken into account at the time of study. Most of the rejections were due to incomplete recordings in the schedules concerned.

In the present study an attempt has been made to examine structural characteristics of those refugee families only whose all members were displaced *directly* from East Bengal to West Bengal. In this context data<sup>2</sup> related to structural compositions of the families of the rural Hindu folk of undivided Bengal (1946-47) have also been utilized to make certain comparative examinations.

A careful study of the nature of migration of every member of each one of the total 16156 families reveals that in as many as 11880 families (74 per cent) the members concerned migrated due to partition directly from East Bengal to West Bengal. Place of migration-wise break-up of this 74 per cent families shows that 52 per cent and 17 per cent came directly from rural and urban areas respectively of East Bengal, while in 5 per cent cases only came those families whose members lived before migration partly in rural and partly in urban areas of East Bengal. This note deals with 11880 refugee families only.

A look into the modes of organization of kinship ties by the refugee members having face to face relationships shows that a very large number among them maintained family life in both extended (joint) and non-extended structures. Uni-member units of persons living only by themselves without any kind were found to have concentrated in 8.61 per cent cases only, the non-familial female individuals being less dominant (1.57 per cent) among the refugees in question. It is to be noted that immediately after their arrival in West Bengal (1947-48) the refugee immigrants continued to maintain family-units like conjugal, elementary and extended (joint) in 91.39 per cent cases. They formed extended (joint) units with and without 'complex'-constituents\* in as many as 45.60 per cent cases (Table 1).

With regard to the mode of family living in *undivided* Bengal (1946-47) it has been observed that the rural Hindus organised relatively more extended (joint) families with and without 'complex'-

---

\*Complex-constituents may be female patrikins or matrilkins of the head of the family/non-familial unit concerned. *Female Patrikins* refer to all married and/or widowed female agnates and affines related only through them to the 'head'. *Matrilkins* refer to all males and females genealogically connected with some female married into the family of the 'head'.

elements (51 per cent). And eventually the norm of patrilocal-patrilineal joint family living was still paramount among the majority of the Hindus concerned. Concentration of elementary (simple) families with and without 'complex'-elements was available in 35 per cent cases only. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that just before the act of partition Bengal villages were not lacking in those persons who lived singly by themselves without any kin. Total strength of these non-familial single member units was in the order of 5.06 per cent only, female single members alone being dominant in 3 per cent cases.

As the presence of the 'complex'-constituents in a family organisation testified to a complementary process of integrative extension of one structure at the expense of disintegrative shrinkage of another, classificatory importance of familial and non-familial units with or without such complex-constituents is obvious. Analysis of the rural Hindu family organizations of undivided Bengal in terms of complex-constituents indicates that in 19 out of 100 cases occurred structural breakdowns — temporary or otherwise — of some families to which the 'complex'-constituents belonged before they were articulated with the families under consideration. Incidentally, it may be noted here that among the refugees in question articulation of complex-constituents was found to have occurred in only 16 out of 100 units studied.

Relevant findings related to the proportional occurrences of different non-familial and family structures within and between the rural Hindus of undivided Bengal (1946-47) and the displaced Hindus (1947-48) under study have been incorporated in Table 2.

Again, in examining the distributions of different family and non-familial structures particularly among the Hindus of rural East Bengal (1946-47) and the refugees migrating from rural East Bengal (East Pakistan) to West Bengal (1947-48) certain interesting features are available (Table 3).

While the rural Hindu-folk in question organised in pre-partition period extended (joint) families with and without complex-constituents in 53 per cent cases, the refugees migrating from villages of East Bengal showed such extended (joint) families with and without complex-constituents in only 45 per cent cases. On the other hand, non-familial units (males and females) concentrated in about one-twentyfifth cases among the rural Hindus of East Bengal, but among the refugees concerned such units concentrated in slightly less than one-tenth cases. That the rural refugees in question maintained, after

migration, relatively more non-extended family and non-familial structures than the rural Hindus of East Bengal (1946-47) remains perhaps a significant fact of sociological interest.

Contextually, a separate examination of the distribution of different family structures as found to have occurred among the rural Hindu autochthones of West Bengal (1946-47) and the refugees migrating from rural East Bengal (East Pakistan) to rural West Bengal (1947-48) helps to pin-point certain notable features. In contrast to the proportional occurrence of non-familial structures as found among the said Hindu autochthones (5.4 per cent) the refugees in question showed such non-familial units in 10 per cent cases. Male refugees who lived alone by themselves were especially maintaining a higher concentration. While the Hindu autochthones of pre-partition times organized extended (joint) families with and without 'complex'-constituents in as good as 49 per cent cases, the refugees showed such family structures in only 39 per cent cases. Moreover, the refugees showed those units which only had 'complex'-constituents in relatively lesser strength (Table 4). It is significant to note that while the refugee immigrants concerned maintained non-extended family and non-familial forms in substantial volume (61 per cent) in rural West Bengal after partition (1947-48), the Hindu autochthones of rural West Bengal (1946-47) were found to have formed such non-extended units relatively in lesser strength (51 per cent).

Lastly, an attempt has been made to examine mutual interactions of three factors related to (1) family structures—non-familial units (males and females), non-extended family units with and without complex-constituents and extended (joint) family units with and without complex-constituents; (2) areas (rural and urban) in East Bengal (East Pakistan) from where the refugees migrated; and (3) refugees' present residence or location (village/town/city areas) in West Bengal after migration and in this connection some statistical tests (chi-square) have also been made (Table 5 and 5.1). It appears clearly from the features analysed that (i) occurrences of any type of family structure among the refugees concerned were independent of the influence of their modes of migration from rural or urban areas of East Bengal, but (ii) occurrences of any type of family structure among the refugee immigrants in question were highly significantly associated with their post-migrational locations or residences in village or town or city areas of West Bengal. (iii) In the next instance, irrespective of the over-all non-existence of association between the factors of the area in East Bengal from where a family migrated and its ultimate structure in present residence in West Bengal after mi-

gration, proportional differences in structures are observed among the refugee families of the village areas (West Bengal) according to their respective area (East Bengal) from where they migrated. The proportional differences are relatively more marked in the cases of non-familial units and extended families.

Thus, in summarising the highlights of the findings of the present study it is sociologically interesting to note two distinct structural patterns in the formation of families among the Hindu autochthones of rural West Bengal (1946-47) and the refugees migrating from rural East Bengal to rural West Bengal (1947-48) due to partition. The refugees in question formed relatively more non-extended structures in West Bengal whereas the Hindus autochthones of rural West Bengal were found to have maintained relatively more joint (extended) families with and without 'complex'-constituents in 1946-47.

The tables (1-5.1) have been appended in the paper.

(Thanks are due to Dr. R. Mukherjee, Professor of Sociology, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, for his guidance in the preparation of the paper).

#### REFERENCES

1. Chakravarti, N. C. (1949): *Report on the Survey of Refugee Population in West Bengal*, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.
2. Pakrasi, Kanti (1962): *A Study of Some Aspects of the Types of Households and Family Organizations in Rural Bengal, 1946-47—The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. XV, No. 3, pp. 55-63.

Table 1. Distribution of family structures among the refugees migrated directly from East Bengal to West Bengal, 1947-48)

Family structure	frequency	percentage
(1)	(2)	(3)
non-familial unit (man)	836	7.04
non-familial unit (woman)	186	1.57
conjugal	475	4.00
elementary	4083	34.36
extended	4459	37.53
non-familial (man)-complex	56	0.47
non-familial (woman)-complex	45	0.38
conjugal-complex	136	1.15
elementary-complex	645	5.43
extended-complex	959	8.07
all structures	11880	100.00

Table 2. Percentage distribution of family structures among the rural Hindus of undivided Bengal and the refugees of West Bengal.

Family structures	percentage distribution of family structures	
	rural Hindus of undivided Bengal (1946-47)	refugees migrating from East Bengal to West Bengal (1947-48)
(1)	(2)	(3)
non-familial unit (man)	2.06	7.04
non-familial unit (woman)	3.00	1.57
conjugal	6.36	4.00
elementary	30.03	34.36
extended	39.08	37.53
non-familial (man)-complex	0.40	0.47
non-familial (woman)-complex	0.85	0.38
conjugal-complex	1.39	1.15
elementary-complex	5.24	5.43
extended-complex	11.59	8.07
all structures	100.000	100.00
total number of units	2234	11880

obtained value of chi-square=169.203 with 9 d.f.; probability =less than 0.001

Table 3. Percentages distribution of family structures among the Hindus of rural East Bengal and the refugees migrating from rural East Bengal to West Bengal

Family structure	percentage distribution of family structures	
	rural Hindus of East Bengal (1946-47)	refugees migrating from rural East Bengal to West Bengal (1947-48)
(1)	(2)	(3)
non-familial unit (man)	2.00	7.06
non-familial unit (woman)	2.44	1.83
conjugal	5.33	4.34
elementary	29.56	34.50
extended	41.78	36.92
non-familial (man)-complex	0.56	0.47
non-familial (woman)-complex	0.56	0.42
conjugal-complex	1.33	1.21
elementary-complex	5.33	5.38
extended-complex	11.11	7.87
all structures	100.00	100.00
total number of units	900	8332

obtained value of chi-square=57.430 with 9 d.f.; probability=less than 0.001

Table 4. Percentage distribution of family structures among the Hindus of rural West Bengal and the refugees migrating from rural East Bengal to rural West Bengal.

Family	percentage distribution of family structures	
	rural Hindus of West Bengal (1946-47)	refugees migrating from rural East Bengal to rural West Bengal (1947-48)
(1)	(2)	(3)
non-familial unit (man)	2.10	7.09
non-familial unit (woman)	3.37	3.15
conjugal	7.05	6.97
elementary	30.36	35.40
extended	57.26	30.49
non-familial (man)-complex	0.30	0.73
non-familial (woman)-complex	1.05	0.30
conjugal-complex	1.42	2.42
elementary-complex	5.17	5.33
extended-complex	11.92	8.12
all structures	100.00	100.00
total number of units	1334	1650

obtained value of *chi-square*=80.499 with 9. d.f.; probability= less than 0.001

Table 5. Percentage distribution of family structures among the refugees migrating from rural and urban areas of East Bengal to village/town/city areas of West Bengal, (1947-48).

family structures of the refugees after migration	migrated from rural areas of East Bengal with present residence in West Bengal in (1947-48)				migrated from urban areas of East Bengal with present residence in West Bengal in (1947-48)			
	village areas	town village areas			town city areas		city areas	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	
non-familial units (males & females)	10.24	7.85	10.63	4.88	5.37	11.36	8.54	
non-extended family units with and without 'complex' constituents								
-constituents	51.15	45.15	45.07	47.56	48.41	42.39	46.29	
extended joint) units with & without 'complex' constituents								
-constituents	38.61	47.00	44.30	47.56	46.22	46.25	45.17	
all structures	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
total number of units	(1650)	(4950)	(1702)	(164)	(1640)	(1012)	(11138)	

obtained value of chi-square=554.469 with 12 d.f.; probability=less than 0.001

Table 5.1 Analysis of component chi-squares in relation to the factors

in Table (5)			
comparison—chi-square—Probability.			
between M and L	266.1180	2	less than 0.001
between L and F	62.2335	4	less than 0.001
between M and F	5.9099	2	in between 0.05 and 0.10
between M and L and F	220.2078	4	less than 0.001
t o t a l	554.4692	12	less than 0.001

Note: M refers to areas in East Bengal (East Pakistan) from where migrated L refers to present residence in West Bengal after migration F refers to family structures of the refugees in West Bengal.

\* Author appreciates Sri S. Bandyopadhyay, ISI, for his suggestion of the procedure of chi-square analysis.