

**When Memory is Traumatic: A Critical Study of Bangla Autobiography  
*Dandakaranyer Dinguli***

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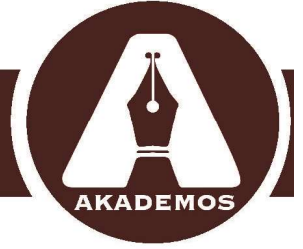
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**Abstract**

Autobiography is a valuable repository of memory, both personal and collective. It encompasses familial accounts of happiness and suffering; and at the same time its narrative remains a faithful representation of a whole community. Besides, it covers up social and political timeline as well. In this respect, an autobiography is not simply a family saga; rather its narrative accounts for understanding contemporary social situations. Partition of Bengal into East Pakistan and West Bengal in 1947 was such a cataclysmic event in modern South East Asian history that its deadly aftermath is still being felt by the victims. To contextualize it, political cataclysm creates an identity crisis among its victims that the victimhood leads to formation of traumatic memory. *Dandakāranyer Dinguli* (Days of Dandakāranya) is one of the many Bangla autobiographies written down by Sudhir Ranjan Haldar. It is a valuable repository of traumatic memory. The present paper focuses primarily on theoretical dimension of traumatic memory; and examines two important issues in the selected text: traumatic memory of Namo community being refugee in India; and traumatic memory of Namo community within a vicious circle of caste-based discrimination in their migrated life in refugee camps. An individual's personal narrative by the virtue of its representational dimension for entire community becomes a collective utterance; it brings out a common ethnic identity and commonly felt ethnic trauma running through the individual author and other community members in an unmistakable manner.

**Key words: Partition, Trauma, Memory, Refugee, Caste discrimination, Autobiography**





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There is no life without trauma. There is no history without trauma. Some lives will forever be overshadowed by violent histories, including colonial invasions, slavery, totalitarianism, dictatorships, wars, and genocide...Trauma...violently halts the flow of time, fractures the self, and punctuates memory and language.

–Gabriele Schwab<sup>1</sup>

Memory and trauma seem to have an inseparable communion in human survival. Memories or storage of past incidents in human brain bear varied contexts in which they take place. Some contexts are familial, some professional, and some contexts social or political. Each context develops its structural framework for creating respective memory. In other words, childhood memory of happiness in familial context is quite different from traumatic memory of casteist/racist discrimination in professional context; and the memory of political unrest such as Naxalite period in Kolkata in 1970s in political context is certainly different from memory of being victims in Hindu-Muslim riots in and after 1947 in communal context. The narrative of memory recollection whether oral or verbal is, therefore, seen bound with contextual impact. Modern-day Jews feel it unbearable to hark back the cursed days of the Holocaust, that global Jews community live with the traumatic memory of Nazi operation till date. Following the same logic, although utterly painful and heart-wrenching, memory of lost homeland to millions of Namō<sup>2</sup> community in the Partition is inseparable. In modern South East Asian history the Partition of British India into Secular India and Islamic Pakistan that eventually divided undivided Bengal into Muslim-majority East Pakistan and Hindu-majority West Bengal was perhaps the most destructive political cataclysm that laid down the foundation of a ceaselessly violent socio-political catastrophe across the two sides of border that is sustaining till date. This socio-political crisis was so potentially destructive that it forced millions of people to migrate from one side of the border to another and in this way made them homeless, utterly helpless and

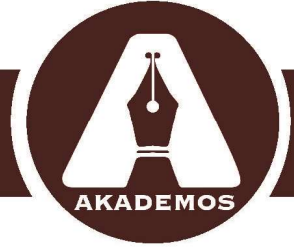


politically and socially very vulnerable in later periods. Speaking especially of Namo community members, they being the worst victims of partition are still suffering from an identity crisis even after more than seventy years. The entire trajectory of the Partition and its deadly aftermath has given rise to what can be termed as ‘traumatic memory’ among the community members, both first generation victims and successive generations. Memory stained with trauma, or *traumatic memory* therefore has become an essential psychic component in their reminiscence of the past. The selected text *Dandakāranjer Dinguli* (Days of Dandakaranya), by Sudhir Ranjan Haldar, a member of Namo community, who along with thousands of fellow community members migrated in the aftermath of the Partition from erstwhile East Bengal-turned-East Pakistan to Dandakaranya, India in 1965, narrates the traumatic memory of his life and simultaneously of his victimized community in his autobiography in quintessential manner.

OED<sup>3</sup> defines trauma as a “psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed; an internal injury, esp. to the brain, which may result in a behavioural disorder of organic origin” (441). OED records early commentary of trauma by some of the prominent practitioners of psychology such as William James who says that trauma denotes “certain reminiscences of the shock fall into the subliminal consciousness where they can only be discovered in ‘hypnoid’ state” (441). Henderson and Gillespie’s *Textbook of Psychiatry for Students and Practitioners* (1969) puts the following definition of trauma that it is a “mental symptoms in one of the two ways. Either it causes structural injury to the brain, or it causes emotional disturbances” (qtd. in OED 441). On the other hand, OED defines memory in multiple ways, such as “the faculty by which things are remembered; capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past”; or “The recollection (of something) perpetuated amongst people; what is remembered of a person, object or event”; or “The length of time over which the recollection of a person or a number of persons extends” (596-98). To analyze aforementioned definitions of both trauma and memory, it can be deduced that ‘traumatic memory’ is primarily the recollection of traumatic experiences either by an individual or by a group the manifestation of which can be found through oral and verbal narratives, although other mediums of cognitive ability, such as archaeological evidence, photography, documentary, oral archive also help us develop the narrative of loss of cultural past.

Psychic trauma as a psychological property of human consciousness has been a subject of research and investigation to psychologists and clinical practitioners for over a century. Pioneered by British surgeon Sir John Eric Erichsen (1818-1896) who studied trauma as a disease of mind, psychic trauma and its varied manifestations have been studied by psychologists, such as Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Joseph Brever (1842-1925), Ivan

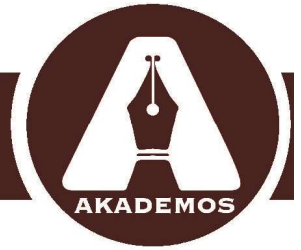




Petrovich Pavlov (1849-1936), Morton Prince (1854-1929), Sigmund Freud (1859-1939), Alfred Adler (1870-1937), Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) Paul Oppenheim (1885-1977) and others. According to Ruth Leys, the early psychological study of trauma is predominantly underlined as “wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock. The emphasis began to fall on the hysterical shattering of the personality consequent on a situation of extreme terror of fright” (4). One of the early psychological formations of psychic trauma is developed in Breuer-Freud cathartic method<sup>4</sup> that was based on hysteria in which reminiscences occupy a crucial role. Although psychological investigation and research on hysteria and other sorts of mental depression have long been recognized by practitioners as vital resources to study traumatic memory in individual self, treatment and research of trauma outside psychology has been pioneered by many cultural theorists and historians, such as Cathy Caruth, Dominic LaCapra, Elaine Scarry, Marita Sturken, E. Ann Kalpan, and Ruth Ley. Seminal texts, such as *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1995), *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (2001) and *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in the Media and Literature* (2005) have paved the way for research of trauma and memory in Humanities. Maurice Stevens explicates how trauma turns into a cultural essence in human life: “At its base is the notion that trauma is not simply a concept that describes particularly overwhelming events...but is a cultural object whose function produces particular types of objects, an predisposes specific affect flows that it then manages and ultimately shunts into political projects of various types” (20). The function of trauma as a cultural object shifts our attention from it purely being a psychological disease, almost hysteric to lived experiences of either an individual or an entire community, the experiences which consequently turn the shape into both oral and verbal narrative. These narratives provide readers with what Maurice Stevens calls critical trauma studies (Stevens 25). If memory is the human faculty of remembering the past incidents irrespective of its effective function whether romantic or traumatic, the lived experiences grown out of traumatic incidents an individual or a community witnesses or goes through become memory’s contents. In other words, the psychological domain of human memory keeps all traumatic incidents along with incidents of other effects stored in it to be shared or told later on.

The study of traumatic memory both individual and collective travels through history of cultures. In human history, the history of traumatic incidents and based on it the recollection of traumatic memories has been dominated by war, mass destruction, genocide, colonial intervention, ethnic cleansing, communal riots, partition, political unrest, nuclear war and in 21<sup>st</sup> century the cyber war. To take examples, the Holocaust in 1930s and early 40s and the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the communal riots, ethnic cleansing and forced migration on the wake of the Partition in Indian since 1947, the Pakistani Army’s heinous crime of rape and





massacre in 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Marichjhanpi<sup>5</sup> massacre in 1978-79 by Communist government in West Bengal are some of the contemporary socio-political cataclysms the experiences and memories of which form what has already been mentioned as 'traumatic memory.' According to Gabriele Schwab trauma "is concerned with what happens to psychic life in the wake of unbearable violence and focuses on irresolvable...loses that occurred under catastrophic circumstances that bring us to the abyss of human abjection" (3). In this respect, recollections and remembrances of the victims who suffer from all sorts of catastrophe and violence become the primary sources to studying the construction of traumatic memory that usually turns into a cultural property in the sense that narrative of such memories got transmitted from source generation to next generations. This trans-generational transmission of traumatic experiences of first generation is inherited by the successive generations in the form of oral narrative or verbal narrative. The way grandparents and other elders of a family narrate folktale to young boys and girls, memory sharing takes the similar sort of transmission. In this respect, trauma becomes the content and memory the form of entire narrative structure. These narratives have tended "to focus on the trauma and related...memories of victims and victimized people" (Schwab 22).

It has to be noted that an individual traumatic memory very often becomes representative oral or verbal narrative for an entire community. An individual self does not grow in isolation. She/he grows up in a family and in a large community. Throughout this growth right from childhood she/he learns language and family culture. Following the same imitative process her/his mental growth is traceable in constant interaction with others because it is through imitation of other family members as well as community members the individual's psychic growth keeps the sense impressions in the mind. Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), a noted sociologist who pioneered the study of *mémoire collective* or collective memory observes on individual memory that "individual recollections [are] those recollections in which every individual retrieves his own past, and often thinks that this is all that he can retrieve...each family member recollects in his own manner the common familial past" (54). Although Halbwachs puts much emphasis on the collective matrix of familial memory (61), he considers that family constitutes "the essential social unity" (64). Looking beyond family matrix, the germination of collective memory that germinates in the family stretches its wings beyond the family. An individual's constant interaction with the society brings forth a new dimension in the formation of an individual's personal recollections of past, i.e. it gets merged with recollections of same cultural, social and political phenomena taken place in this society, that can be called collective memory. When a survivor of Holocaust speaks in TED talk, hearing this person's memoir other survivors and fellow Jews can instantly relate the trauma. Following the same



logic, when an aged member of Namo community narrates the lived experiences while leaving homeland behind and migrating to an unknown world, many other Namo members who have gone through tumultuous Partition and its deadly aftermath can identically relate this personal recollection with their lived experiences. In this sense, it can be said that what is known as personal or autobiographical memory, traumatic in this case, can also become collective memory.

Traumatic memory with oral and verbal narrative is an essential resource to scholars of Humanities to study the history of cataclysm that resulted in such mental wound; it also occupies a crucial place in formulating cultural identity among respective members of the victimized group. As already discussed that autobiographical recollection of past is personal as well as collective in respective contemporary socio-political history and community-oriented identity formation, autobiography as written document is the closest and most authentic record to study the making of traumatic memory both personal and collective, to interrogate and then to explicate the respective socio-political context in which the people become victims, and to assess the text's cultural importance among its people and at the same time among general readers. The present paper now discusses the selected text, the historical context and textual/thematic analysis of selected excerpts to justify traumatic memory as the central theme of the text.

The primary text *Dandakaranyer Dinguli* (Days of Dandakaranya) is a Bangla autobiography written by Sudhir Ranjan Haldar, first published in 2014. Haldar was born in 1946 in village Moishani, of Barishal in erstwhile East Bengal that became East Pakistan after the Partition of British India into Secular India and Muslim Pakistan. East Bengal being Muslim-majority was curved out of the undivided Bengal with the other part being Hindu-majority West Bengal. Born in a Namo community, Haldar qualified Secondary School certificate from Sekherhat High School in 1963 in erstwhile East Pakistan. While studying Science at local College, he witnessed raging flame of communal riots between majority Muslims and minority non-Muslims<sup>6</sup> including Namo community in adjacent villages and in other districts throughout East Pakistan. Along with many others, Haldar migrated to West Bengal, India in 1964. After a temporary settlement there, he migrated to Dandakaranya. Dandakaranya<sup>7</sup> is a physiographic barren, hilly region in east-central India. Its landmass comprises of almost 35,600 square miles. It spans about 200 miles from north to south and 300 miles from east to west. It is consisted of some parts of Chattisgarh, Odisha, Telengana and Andhra Pradesh, an intersection of lands taken from different adjacent states. Its longitudinal and latitudinal measurements are 82°05'00"E and 19°05'00"N respectively. It is located in such intersection because it has been created so for specific purpose.



Physical Map of Dandakaranya region; Courtesy  
<https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+dandakaranya>

The history of Dandakaranya goes back to refugee resettlement in 1958 and for soil conservation in 1947. Thinly populated by some indigenous Tribes, Indian government arranged this intersectional location for resettlement of thousands of refugees who started pouring into West Bengal and other Indian states from erstwhile East Pakistan right after the Partition. The refugee resettlement in Dandakaranya has taken place in different phases. The first phase began from 1947 and the second phase from 1971. Throughout these phases, migration and resettlement of thousands of Namo community people formed the background of this autobiography.

In the autobiographical writings of Namo writers there are two broad socio-political themes dealt with: social marginalization in the caste-based hierarchical system in Bengal; and



politics of the Partition and their victimhood. Despite the fact that research and publications on the Partition historiography<sup>8</sup> have been continuing over a long period of time, the questions respective Namo community writers and scholars raise remain neglected in the popular Partition historiography. The binary of Hindu-Muslim seems to be too dominant to let other enquiries creep into the intellectual space. The three central questions raised by Namo writers, scholars and historians are: 1. Despite the fact that Muslims and Hindus divided their respective landmass for themselves in the name of East Pakistan and West Bengal in 1947, why were Namo-populated districts of Faridpur, Khulna, Jessore, Barishal kept outside Hindu-majority West Bengal? 2. What are the reasons that only Namo community refugees were sent to Dandakaranya, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and other far-off places in refugee resettlement programs in different phases after 1947 and after 1971? 3. Why were only Namo community members massacred in deadly Marichjhanpi by Brahminical Communist government of West Bengal in 1978-79? Nakul Mallik in his lecture delivered at the BAMCEF<sup>9</sup> Program held in Nagpur on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2005 exposed the political conspiracy by Bengali upper castes. He pointed out that despite the foundation of Muslim League in 1906 the large number of Muslim population of united Bengal didn't raise the slogan of creating a separate nation, even Muslim leaders Suhrawardy and others demanded the creation of a united Bengal in 1946.<sup>10</sup> Namo writers and scholars hold Syamaprasad Mukherjee as the chief propagator of Bengal partition (Basu 42-62). The present text not only narrates the lived experiences of the author and other fellow members, but also raises these three issues and provides us a clue to understand the politics of caste-based hierarchy even in the Partition and in refugee distribution and resettlement programs thereafter. A cluster of Namo scholars and historians, such as Dr. Oneil R. Biswas, Dr. Upendranath Biswas, Dr. Gyanprakash Mandal, Dr. Atul K. Biswas, Mr. Swapan Kumar Biswas, Dr. Sunil Kumar Roy, Dr. Manoshanta Biswas; and writers, such as Manohar M. Biswas, Jatin Bala, Nakul Mallik, Jagatbandhu Biswas, Kalyani C. Thakur and others have done a considerable research on Partition and its aftermath. Dr. Manoshanta Biswas argues:

Independence and the Bengal partition in 1947 were not quite a favorable phenomenon to many marginalized communities, such as Rajbanshi and Namasudra. The Bengal partition in 1947 weakened the impact of independently-built political movements of both communities and at the same time divided their political ideology and consensus by dividing the population into two lands. "Transfer of power" was carried out based on the communal demand of Hindus and Muslims. The religious-political demand of the marginalized communities was beyond the calculation. (my trans.; 262)





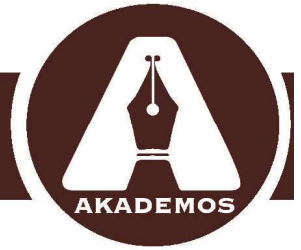
Autobiographies written by Namo writers, such as *Dandakaronyer Dinguli* (Days of Dandakaranya) by Sudhir Ranjan Haldar, *Smritir Pata Theke* (From the Leaves of Memory), *Amar Bhubone Ami Benche Thaki* (Surviving in My World) by Manohar M. Biswas, *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (Interrogating My Chandal Life) by Manoranjan Byapari, *Shikor Chhenra Jibon* (Uprooted Life) by Jatin Bala and others interrogate all these questions and to a great extent critique the caste-based hierarchy that was initiated behind the Partition. All these autobiographical writings highlight two interrelated themes: traumatic memory emerged out of their refugee life; and traumatic memory emerged out of caste-based discrimination in refugee camps. *Dandakaronyer Dinguli* adds another dimension, i.e. it depicts the refugee life of thousands of Namo community people in Dandakaranya that is a far-off land from West Bengal. The readers come to know that not only in different refugee camps and colonies in West Bengal, but also in Dandakaranya too, Namo refugees became the victims of dual marginalization in which caste-based discrimination played a crucial role.

The text *Dandakaronyer Dinguli* is a literary product of the author's superannuated life, hence overloaded with reflective strain of words and expressions that are too emotional and that influence its readers by travelling back to 1950s and 60s to visualize the mass exodus crossing the border of East Pakistan and pouring into an imaginary flux known as West Bengal with a blazing hope that it would be their destination, no matter how illusory their hope would be. The images or photographs of mass exodus of refugees to West Bengal through Gede border or Petropole<sup>11</sup> border kept in West Bengal State Archives or made available in Google homogenize the author's verbal presentation of refugee life. Sudhir Ranjan Haldar begins his autobiography with not only with an acute feeling of homesickness, but also with a possible anticipation of illusion of future life:

With the turbulence in my mind that bulged up on the eve of forsaking my birthplace, I set off onto my marathon long ago; this is almost forty years that I am still sprinting on the circular court of my life's marathon. The turbulence has not been weakened yet, nor terminated my sprinting. I really don't know how long I have to run to reach to my destination.

Following the unstoppable sprinting, I reached Dandakaranya as if a floating water hyacinth; it was that place where I have seen millions of refugees floating in and getting ashore—all of them were the innocent victims the Partition. (my trans.; 7)

The memory of bygone days has taken the shape of a verbal narrative that is charged with a feeling of anguish and regret. That sort of beginning of an autobiography has provided a hint to readers that right from the beginning the author writes on behalf of an entire victimized



community that got displaced from their homeland in the Partition of Bengal. On the other hand, it sets the tone for rest of the text that will keep readers well-grounded on the thematic treatment. The factual details the author puts along with authentic narrative of refugee resettlement is also helpful to locate the time and place of the entire narrative. It bears its historical authenticity as well by eliminating too much fictitious narratology.

The author explains the background why thousands of minority non-Muslims fled East Pakistan in 1950s and 60s. It primarily focuses on two interrelated situations: religious and political. Since East Pakistan was Muslim-majority, the Islamic Law for non-believers (known as Kafir) justifies the increasing incidents of rape, molestation on non-Muslim women, mass killing and loot on non-Muslim settlements in the name of holy Jihad. On the other hand, political instigation by Urdu-speaking West Pakistani government in Lahore worsened the minority crisis even more intensely. The author gives us the following account of Islamic atrocities on minority non-Muslims in the following way:

There was a great humdrum going on in East Pakistan at that time. At the beginning of the year a deadly riot took place around our locality. Killing, loot, rape, setting houses on fire—they chose only Hindus, Buddhists, and other non-Muslims and relentless torture was carried out almost with the support of the government. Many non-Muslims already fled from East Pakistan to save the dignity of their women and their life at large. (my trans.; 8)

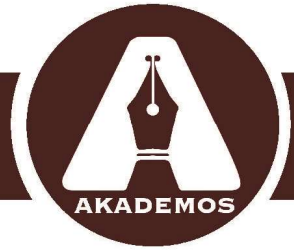
Two issues, i.e. the dignity and respect of non-Muslim women and the safety of non-Muslim life were their major preoccupation. The mental tension of a father for his young daughter or of a young man for his newly-married wife, or a mother's deep concern for her young son or a young wife's mental unrest for her husband in such terrorized, religiously and politically hostile environment—all these became inseparable part of their daily living. It shows how traumatic their living was during the initial decades followed by the Partition. Their memory was submerged by the unbearable weight of terror and trauma.

As it was mandated in the religious bifurcation that Pakistan with its West and East provinces was a political entity for Muslims, the mind of minority non-Muslims was naturally and desperately craved for India, especially West Bengal that was supposed to be the final destination. In this part of the text, especially the episodes of communal riots and political provocations highlight authentically how inhospitable the native land turned and how insecure thousands of non-Muslims, especially Namo community members were. It remains the background of their forced migration to West Bengal in 1950s and 60s. It has to be noted that Namo community is traditionally agrarian, having inseparable link with the soil. Dr. Manoshanta Biswas's research shows how difficult it was for them to terminate their traditional



livelihood and migrate to West Bengal overnight. On the contrary, only upper castes who were politically and financially privileged managed to settle to West Bengal before the burning flame of communal riot could affect them badly (265-66).

The text focuses next on the narrative of refugee life that in many ways multiplied their trauma and identity crisis. In other words, if religious terror changed their peaceful living in their motherland into unbearable trauma and extreme form of insecurity, their refugee life in West Bengal and later on in Dandakaranya exposed them harshly in the refugee camps. The text documents this new phase of their life authentically and visually. The episode of Dandakaranya begins with a mythical account of this place that this place was the famous forest in which prince Rama, his wife Sita and his brother Laxmana spent their exile as it was narrated in Sanskrit epic the *Ramayana* (30). As already mentioned, this place was peopled by a few Tribes who might have been described as demons in the epic. The author's first encounter with this new place and its inhabitants was of strange feeling because a man born and brought up in fertile land of East Bengal or East Pakistan found quite difficult to cope with his new environment and new language. Unlike many other Namo refugees who have been resettled in different parts of West Bengal, the Namo people documented in this text found for themselves a barren, forest land with unknown people and language, as if a fish out of the water. His first arrival was at Ambagura by bus. After staying a few days there, he headed toward Malkangiri. At Malkangiri, he found around himself the typical hill and forest for which Dandakaranya was well-known. There he encountered first what was like being a marginalized despite being refugee along with others. He searched for a hotel for temporary shelter. When he contacted the officials at Dandakaranya Project office headquarter, he met with one Kalidas Som, a clerk in the office. The office clerk arranged for him a temporary shelter before he finally shifted to new Tribal village as an appointed teacher. One day, he and Kalidas Som were talking about the prospect of new schools and education policy. On hearing that the author would be appointed as a teacher in one primary school in a nearby village, Kalidas Som expressed his concern: "How do you stay over there as a teacher? You know this place was occupied mostly by all uncivilized castes, such as Namo, Pod, Jele, Malo<sup>12</sup> among others—all of them are Scheduled Castes, all quite dirty and uncultured. Do you know how many teachers already fled from these places?" (my trans.; 32-33). This observation of Kalidas Som who indirectly hailed him as belonging to higher than those Scheduled Castes who are traditionally considered as 'Untouchables' by Brahmins and other Twice-born castes in Hindu society was the very first incident where caste became a determinant factor for judging the social status of any particular community. This observation by Kalidas Som was the first such incident the author witnessed at Dandakaranya that the thousands of refugees despite being homeless, utterly helpless in a foreign land couldn't get any respite from caste-



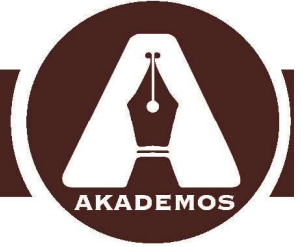
based social identity, a system that puts some castes higher and some castes lower. The very first caste phenomenon in the refugee settlements add a new dimension to this autobiography that caste-based hierarchy is inseparable no matter how helpless and hopeless people might be in any situation.

There are many such passages with reference to caste status of the refugees. In another incident the author witnessed how castes, like Brahmins, Kayasthas hated Namo and other marginalized castes. A fellow teacher, Shyamsundar Paul while talking about the refugee settlements told the author: “What will happen if students don’t turn up in your school? All refugees settled here are Scheduled Castes, all are uncivilized, uneducated. Caste Hindus haven’t come here as a refugee that education will be valued. All refugees belong to Namo, Pod, Jele, Malo and other castes” (my trans.; 42). This episode gets extended to more than four pages and throughout the narrative the author raised the invalidity of such statement and at the same time protested against such casteist slur. What is unmistakable here is the names of different castes into which refugees are divided, such as Brahmin, Kayastha, Namo, Pod, Jele, Malo. What is more evidential is the social hierarchy that Namo, Pod, Jele, Malo and other castes who constitute majority of refugees in different camps throughout Dandakaranya have been assigned a low status. Being refugee is not enough; what is added with this fate is ‘lower caste refugee.’

In his *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Dr. Ambedkar explains that despite the fact that division of labor is found in every civilized society, the Hindu society has elevated it onto division of laborers the categorization of which is based on caste-based identity:

The caste system is not merely a division of labourers ... it is an hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above the other ... Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of efficiency...This principle is violated in the caste system ... as ... individuals ... selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents. (263)

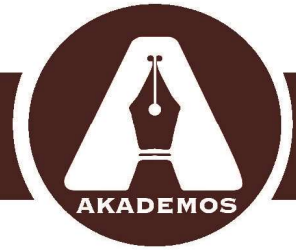
Such insightful commentary helps us see that underlying dual structures in all professional spaces in India. If teaching and sweeping are two professions found in a school in India, this division of labor gets naturally divided between two professionals, for teaching the common employee is either a Brahmin or anyone from Twice-born<sup>13</sup> castes, whereas for sweeping the employee is usually someone from Once-born<sup>14</sup> and ‘Untouchable’<sup>15</sup> castes. That sort of analysis can be decoded in the present case where the dual structure of identity is evident: refugee identity and ‘lower caste refugee identity.’ The text suggests that Kalidas Som, Shyamsundar Paul and author Sudhir Ranjan Haldar were refugees. But as the caste-based hierarchy is exposed, the author and his thousands of fellow Namo community members were



not only refugee, but to a great extent 'lower caste refugee.' The concept of double marginalization in which Namoo, Pod, Jele, Malo castes suffered in refugee camps add a new dimension of such autobiography.

*Dandakaranyer Dinguli* is an important social document in another respect. It gives us an authentic description of Marichjhanpi massacre carried out shamelessly by the Communist government of West Bengal in 1978-79. Throughout a large section of the text, the author provides us how Communist leaders, such Samar Mukherji, Jyoti Basu frequently visited refugee camps in Dandakaranya and convinced them if Communists would form political power in West Bengal, they would arrange resettlement for them at Sundarban (133-34). There was a time when thousands of Namoo refugees migrated to Dandakaranya from West Bengal at the initial period of refugee settlement programs. In 1977, the Communist government came to power in West Bengal. Consequently the refugees in Dandakaranya under the leadership of Satish Chandra Mandal asked the Communist government to fulfill their promises. The author narrates another great episode of mass exodus, this time from Dandakaranya to West Bengal: "Right from the beginning of the year 1978, thousands of refugees started returning to West Bengal. More the time was passing away more number of refugees were vacating different camps of Dandakaranya. About seventy percent of refugee population already vacated Dandakaranya by the end of that year" (my trans.; 134). They were resettled first at Hansnabad camp before they were deported to Marichjhanpi. Refugee camps at Hansnabad turned into unhygienic as the government refused to help them with basic amenities. The author writes: "I have personally seen the helplessness of thousands of refugees who are heading towards Marichjhanpi. Since there was some transport problem in making their way to Marichjhanpi, the refugees first settled at Hansnabad camps. They settled along two sides of the railway track, in bushes, in jungles wherever they managed" (my trans.; 134-35). Rest of the incidents has become stained with blood of thousands of innocent people who had fallen victims in the hand of Communist government. It is known in history as the 'Marichjhanpi Massacre of 1978-79' in which only Namoo refugees were terribly victimized. The author gives us a ground report of the barbarous act of rape, murder and butchery inflicted upon thousands of Namoo refugees who were asked by the government to settle to Marichjhanpi from Dandakaranya:

They set up schools, constructed roads, markets under the guide of *Udbastu Unnoinshil Samiti* (Refugee Development Association) at Marichjhanpi. They started business by setting up small scale industries, as if they created their own new world. With their tireless effort they made large fishing pond, tobacco factory, biscuit factory. Had they got government's support they would have flourished there at Marichjhanpi. But instead of helping them out, the Communist



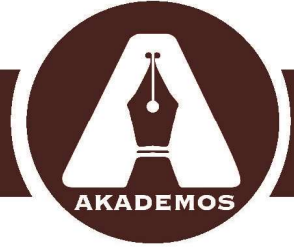
government with their police and cadre raped women, looted their resources, set their houses on fire, killed them mercilessly, massacred women and children and in this way drove them away from Marichjhanpi again. (my trans.; 135)

Throughout this trajectory of the Partition the arm-chair politicians as Wilfred Owen famously said in the context of World War I controlled the magic wand in their hands at the direction of which they were engaged in the playfulness with the fate of millions of people who by large didn't know why they suffered. The suffering began around 1947 and it has been continuing till date with NRC<sup>16</sup> as a new proposed political scheme of forced displacement. The entire historiography of the Partition vividly historicizes the saga of homelessness and identity crisis. The major thematic interpretation of traumatic memory as a deep-rooted psychological feeling shaped under specific socio-political contexts that forced millions of common people to go through a series of traumatic and horrified experiences has been elaborated and explained with sufficient textual support in this paper. The autobiography *Dandakaranyer Dinguli* contextualizes the Partition of undivided Bengal in 1947, connects the political conspiracies intended to marginalize Namo and other populous communities, documents the deadly aftermath in the form of rape, loot, mass killing, forced displacement of thousands of Namo community members, exposed the political eloquence of Hindu identity, and describe the plights and suffering of thousands of refugees who have been deported to Dandakaranya. Throughout this epical dimension, the autobiographical narrative of Sudhir Ranjan Haldar justifies conceptual implication of double marginalization of Namo community refugees: one, their identity being refugee and second, their identity being lower caste refugee. This double marginalization multiplies their traumatic memory that got transmitted through generations. *Dandakaranyer Dinguli* is one of the few texts that weave the very complicated and delicate 'traumatic narrative' of a community's victimhood in the historic context of the Partition of their beloved East Bengal.

### **End Notes**

1. Gabriele Schwab is a noted literary scholar, focusing on Holocaust and trauma in her writings. See Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York, Columbia UP, 2010, P.42.
2. In this paper instead of using Namasudra, Namo is used to refer to this community. The original argument behind this is, a cluster of scholars and activists of this community do believe that a great political conspiracy was played by Brahmins to influence the British government to introduce a new combined word Nama+Sudra in 1911 census to forcibly include a non-Aryan, non-Hindu ethnic group within the Hindu fold. Now-a-days, many





- scholars and activists of this community introduce themselves as 'Namo.' They do not acknowledge Namasudra. See Roy, Sunil Kumar. *Itihase Namojati*. Kolkata, Lalmati Prokashon, 2019. Biswas, S. K. *Untouchable Chandals of India: The Democratic Movement*. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2013. Roy, Sunil Kumar. *Nirbachito Probondho Sonkolon*. Kolkata, Janomon, 2015.
3. Oxford English Dictionary
  4. Breuer-Freud cathartic method is a psychoanalytic study on hysteria. Joseph Breuer's famous case of Anna O. was seminal for the study and development of Psychoanalysis. See Breuer, Joseph and Sigmund Freud. *Studies in Hysteria*. Translated by Nicola Luckhurst, London, Penguin Books, 2004.
  5. Marichjhanpi is an island situated in the mangrove forest of Sundarbans, in the district of South 24 Pargana, West Bengal. It is located at [22°06'25"N 88°57'04"E](#). It has an average elevation of 6 meters (20ft.). It is approximately seventy-five kilometers away from Kolkata. The Communist government of West Bengal under the leadership of Jyoti Basu invited thousands of Namo refugees from Dandakaranya to settle at Marichjhanpi in 1978-79. It was followed by what is known as Marichjhanpi Massacre. Jagadish Chandra Mandal has done an authentic research work on it. See Mandal, Jagadish Chandra. *Marichjhanpi: Noishobder Ontorale*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Kolkata, People's Book Society, 2018. To study the Marichjhanpi massacre through poetic representation, see "Portrait of the Massacre: Two Dalit Poems on Marichjhanpi" (in collaboration with Madhabi Karmakar) *Perspectives on Indian Dalit Literature: Critical Responses*, edited by Dipak Giri, Bilaspur, Bookclinic Publishing, 2020, pp. 142-156.
  6. In this paper, non-Muslims are referred to those who do not follow Islam, such as Matuas, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Hindus. In India there is a peculiar tendency among general scholars to categorize someone as Hindu if she/he is not a Muslim by faith. In the name of Hinduism, many non-Hindu groups of people have been forcibly registered as Hindu. In specific case, Namo people are not Hindus. In this respect, see Biswas, Manoshanta. *Banglar Matua Amdolon: Somaj, Sanskriti, Rajniti*. Kolkata, Setu Prokashani, 2016.
  7. The refugee rehabilitation program was a key political issue to the then Congress government. Since thousands of refugees were pouring into West Bengal from erstwhile East Pakistan, Dandakaranya was prepared to resettle refugees as well. See Elahi, K. Maudood. "Refugees in Dandakaranya." *The International Migration Review*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1981, pp. 219-225. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2545338](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2545338). Accessed 13 June 2021.



8. Partition historiography has been grown out of great number of researches on the Partition in 1947. Indian and foreign scholars have equally contributed to it. Writers from Hindu and Muslim sides have focused on it over decades with their respective ideological standpoint. What has to be mentioned is that the proposed Hindu-Muslim binary in Partition historiography cannot help us understand the suffering of millions of marginalized communities. In the present case, recent research and publications by writers and scholars of Namo community show that the impact of anti-caste movements and the political rise of many marginalized communities, especially the rise of Namo politicians such as Mukunda Behari Mallik, Bhisnadev Das, Jogendranath Mandal have been silenced by all caste Hindus in this historiography. See Biswas, S. K. *Untouchable Chandals of India: The Democratic Movement*. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2013. *SojaKotha* magazine edited by Mr. Harashit Sarkar has brought out a special issue on Bengal Partition, Summer, 2020. Many Namo scholars and writers have contributed in this issue. Mr. S. K. Biswas, Nakul Mallik, Mrs. Madhabi Karmakar, Mr. Dilip Gayen, Mr. Dulal Krishna Biswas, Mr. Mihir Sarkar, Mr. Jyoti Biswas have interpreted the Bengal Partition from a new perspective in which Brahminical caste system and the political conspiracy have been explained. See *SojaKotha, Bangla-Bhag Special Issue*, edited by Mr. Harashit Sarkar, 5<sup>th</sup> year, vol. 1, 2020.
9. BAMCEF is an acronym for “The All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation.” This organization looks into the issue of caste or racial discrimination in employment in India. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAMCEF>
10. To know Nakul Mallik’s critical observation on the politics of Partition, please watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKmfzfcfOA&t=391s>
11. Two international gateways in West Bengal connecting inter-border passage to Bangladesh. Since 1947 these gateways have been common entrance point to refugees to come to West Bengal, India.
12. Names of some castes that have been marginalized by Brahminical caste system in Bengal.
13. Germinated in the *Rigveda* and canonized in the *Manusmriti*, Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya are three caste groups that have been elevated onto the position of higher social and cultural level by allowing them to have been ordained through an initiation ritual known as Upanayana or awarding with sacred thread. This ritual is believed to be giving them a new birth in cultural sense. With their biological birth and this new cultural birth, their social status is fixed as superior.





14. Sudra caste group has been denied the privilege of having any right to Upanayana, hence one-birth with fixed inferior social status in Hindu society. Read it along with note 11.
15. There were many non-Aryan communities, such as Chandala, Nishad in ancient India. The cultural superiority of Aryans resulted in social marginalization of such communities. Based on the concept of purity of castes, they were degraded as untouchables by Brahminical society.
16. National Register of Citizens is a legislative Act of registering all Indian citizens by Indian government first constituted in Citizenship Amendment Act, 1955 and amended later in 2003. It has been implemented in Assam in 2013-14. NRC right from its implementation in Assam has sparked debates that its purpose is to not registering Indians, but to disqualifying many Indians who have migrated to India from neighboring countries, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan on the religious line. But Namo scholars and writers have studied disqualifying people in Assam. They have found that the BJP government is targeting not Muslims as it was politically propagated so, but many marginalized castes including Namo. They fear that similar disqualification process will be initiated in West Bengal too to weaken the anti-caste movements.

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