

The "Biharis"

The "Biharis" or non-Bengalis of East Pakistan came to be a much-maligned community, especially during the insurrection of the Awami League in 1971. The peculiar name jumped all of a sudden into prominence and acquired global notoriety, thanks to the coloured reportage of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Voice of America as well as the Western Press.

In fact, these media of propaganda presented the conundrum to the gaping people of the world as to why these "Biharis" were made the victims of ghastly murders and a "pogrom" which could shame any anti-Jewish massacres of the last century in Europe in its ferocity and viciousness. Some of the most remarkable victims of this propaganda were the West Pakistanis, of all others.

"The Muhajireen in West Pakistan", said a Pakistan Army Major in April 1971, "have merged themselves with the local population. Why couldn't you?" he asked.

While the Western press asserted that there must be something very much wrong with the 'Biharis', their own countrymen in the other wing looked askance at the absence of cultural and lingual uniformity which could not be attained by these people in East Pakistan. It is tragic that none of these critics had a coherent and logical view of the situation as it developed in the eastern wing after independence in 1947.

It would have been apparent from the previous pages that Indian machinations in East Pakistan did not allow, from the very outset, the growth of a proper nationalistic outlook amongst the natives of that province and that the biggest stepping stone of their propaganda in rousing their antipathy against the West, was difference of language and economic exploitation. The "Biharis" in this context were made to appear as the thin end of the wedge on behalf of the West Pakistanis. In fact, right from the beginning they were dubbed with the contemptible appellation of "Pachhim-Pakistaner Dalal" or "agents of West Pakistan".

One of the most important points to be understood is, that most of the Biharis (or non-Bengalis) who migrated to East Pakistan had gone there filled with a spirit of making the ideology of Pakistan a success, fired as it were with great enthusiasm. Very few of them had actually been pressed out by conditions of civil war or massacres, as in the case of East Punjab or parts of U.P. The Bihar riots which had taken place in 1946 were forgotten and many of the families of that Indian province, who had left their hearths and homes, had actually long since gone away, mostly to Karachi.

A greater part of the so-called Biharis were those who had actually migrated from Calcutta which had been a cosmopolitan city since its very birth and could boast of a vast Urdu-speaking population sucked in from the provinces next to Bengal and also from all over the subcontinent. And most of them were capable of making good in a struggle against odds. They could do so in Calcutta, and more so in East Pakistan where the backward native population could hardly match their intrinsic worth.

An example of the remarkable struggle for survival waged by these people in East Pakistan after their migration would be that of a highly educated and gifted person who moved to Chittagong in 1947. Unable to find any prospects in a sorely undeveloped region, he put his natural talents in music, learnt as a hobby, to good use. He began by teaching art to a bunch of ladies of the red-light area and hired an abode in a Bhangi colony close-by. From that most doubtful situation, he gradually expanded his activities to giving entertaining demonstrations in the restricted official circles of the Railway and the Port, until the growing activities of Shipping in the harbour, opened fresh possibilities of work for him as a cargo-broker. In this profession he made good, built a house for himself and was a man of substance in slightly more than a decade. He set an example in the dignity of labour, ingenuous use of capacities and taking chances as they came his way, to improve his fortunes. He was a poet and a litterateur and so was his worthy wife. His activities were fully known and he was admired for his pluck, and his house later became a centre of polished

society. Unfortunately he died in the 1960's and his family migrated to Pakistan after the establishment of Bangladesh.

Such were the ways in which many of the Biharis built up their careers in East Pakistan, struggling against odds and making good. In the first instance, they came with the full knowledge that careers in the new country of their selection would not be beds of roses and they arrived with the will to survive in an alien atmosphere and some sort of equipment, in terms of cash, education or technical know-how, and backed by these, succeeded, but not without a hard uphill climb.

The charge that they were assisted in their success by the non-Bengali officials who manned the majority of the administrative jobs in the province, is completely false and based on mere presumption. The boot was really on the other leg. These officials, with rare exception, for personal reasons or for political, usually gave a most step-motherly treatment to the migrants and would not consider even their most justifiable cases in the normal way unless backed by Bengali Ministers or officials.

In 1947-48, establishment of migrant colonies was considered. The civilian officials, just to prove their *bona fides*, selected sites for these which were logistically untenable. Nearly all of them were situated miles away from the main towns, without any buses or bus-routes connecting them at that time. The towns were the only areas where these migrants could find a wage-earning job. This put them to great hardships. It was due to their influx, on the other hand, that prices

of real estate and house-rents began soaring. Landlords demanded Rs. 150 for accommodation for which they were receiving Rs. 15 only. In that early period, the difficulties of paying these exorbitant rentals to mean and illiterate landlords, created a lot of bad blood between the migrants and the local landlords and their relatives. The so-called "traditional Islamic welcome" either is a figment of the imagination of many, or did not last more than two or three months—until a proper appreciation had been made of the profitable potentialities of the influx. There were doubtless isolated cases of remarkable affection and sacrifice displayed by some, but they were so few or far between that they failed to provide any succour to the migrants as a whole.

One of the most important section of the "Biharis" consisted of Railwaymen. The Bengal and Assam Railway covered practically the whole of East Pakistan prior to independence and the majority of its employees, especially in cosy office jobs consisted of Hindu Babus. Most of them left East Pakistan on partition, as a part of the overall plan to destroy the province at its birth. While among those who had voluntarily opted for Pakistan from the Muslim employees of the Indian Railways, there was a glut in field jobs, there was an overall shortage in others. The Governor General of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, had to issued an appeal to Muslim Railwaymen in India to opt out for this country with the assurance that their service conditions "would be guaranteed". This appeal was published in the Pakistan Gazette. In response many gave their

option.

As a result, those who came to East Pakistan were more than the required number. About three thousand of them were packed off to West Pakistan in 1948 or 1949 and promptly discharged from service. The Quaid-e-Azam was by now dead, and this was the way his promise put in the official gazette was carried out!

Soon after the others had been absorbed, disputes broke out between the union representing the former B & A Railway employees and the Administration on the question of seniorities. Representing the optees, Pakistan Railwaymen's League sought to give evidence before the Tribunal, but were denied the right. The Award of the Tribunal, however, when given, was made binding on all the employees of the Railway, perpetuating an injustice which had no parallel in the history of labour-employee relations. Incidentally, all this unilateral action was taken by non-Bengali officials who have been accused by the foreign as well as West Pakistani press of favouring the "Biharis".

Going back in the matter of time, a very interesting situation had developed quite early which brought about a confrontation between the optee railwaymen and the local population. Most of the checking staff consisted of optees. They insisted on performing their duties most assiduously and honestly. At the time, a lot of the native population took it for granted that national independence also spelt out their freedom to travel without having to pay for it. The latter considered checking by the optee staff an act of enmity and there were many quarrels erupting as a result of this peculiar situation. One could hardly expect the check-

ing staff to be diplomatic in the performance of their duties which they considered sacred and were determined to perform without fear or favour. All the more reason, they argued, that the letter of the law should be strictly adhered to now that Pakistan was independent. They quoted the Quaid-e-Azam's advice in the matter of obeying the law and maintaining of discipline, and they were right. Only it helped in building up that wall between the migrants and the Bengalis which later on proved so disastrous. Some of the anti-Pakistan elements and especially the Communists took every chance to start or encourage such quarrels.

But the "Bihari" Railway staff suffered untold hardships in the performance of their duties. There were not enough quarters to accommodate them and their families. Many lived in open railway wagons at big stations with sidings. On wayside stations, they had to make temporary arrangements on platforms or in bamboo *bashas* which were to them a novelty. These were most troublesome, as they had no amenities or comfort nor any privacy in them. But all these travails were suffered by these migrants in the interests of putting their shoulder to Pakistan's efforts to get up on its legs.

It has been accepted by devotees of truth among the historians of the period, that the Railway at least could not have run if these migrants had not come in such large numbers as "optees". There is the case of the riverine transport. A large part of the internal trade of East Pakistan was carried on the rivers, on boats, and dhows which were as old as the pyra-

mids. The mechanised transport of the province consisted of steamers and "flats" run by a single British company, the Joint Steamer Companies (combination of the Indian General River Navigation Co, and the British India Steam Navigation Co.). Due to the exodus of the Hindu staff and there being no "Biharis" available to replace them, their service was cut down to a single internal link between Narayangunj and Goalundo. This company refused to cooperate with the aspirations of Pakistan and did not care to train any new personnel to assist them. They maintained the very existence of the company for two reasons : firstly, they had to look after their cargo services from Calcutta to Assam which had to pass through East Pakistan rivers for a considerable length of their journey with men and materials for their tea-gardens, and secondly, for their own tea-estates within East Pakistan, especially in the district of Sylhet. This they managed somehow to carry on with Hindu staff whom they persuaded to stay on.

Entry of the "Biharis" to services was blocked for one reason or the other from the very outset. By 1953, their recruitment in Government jobs had come to a stop. Naturally, many of the "Biharis" took to business and used their ingenuity to the fullest extent to make good, resulting in greater prosperity to them than in service. As a new generation came into the field, restrictions were placed on business also, to which the "Biharis" replied by taking Bengali partners and doing business in their name. This led to some corruption among the officials which was but natural.

A word has to be said about "cultural integra-

tion" which the foreign press especially is very fond of specifying. So far as the original migrants are concerned, it was difficult for them to take to the manners and customs of the Bengalis right from the start. In the first instance, "culture" is not something which can be picked up and donned as a robe ; it is acquired as a gradual process, and includes not only the language but also habits and customs. So far as language was concerned, the "Biharis" did not let much time to elapse before they could speak Bengali as fluently as the natives. It was, however, difficult for them to bring habits and customs to conform to those of the Bengalis, twisted and demeaned as they were by two hundred years of crushing Hindu domination. The "Biharis", generally came from an urban background while the Bengali Muslims from a rural one. Language could not prove a remarkable barrier. For, if it was, it had been demolished in the first few years of stay of them migrants in their new habitat.

The new generation, including children of the "Biharis" of the migration time, acquired a remarkable proficiency in the Bengali language. There are quite a number of "Bihari" young men who took their Master's degree in the Bengali language, also a number of poets in it. There were frequent inter-marriages and the gradual process of assimilation was taking its course with a greater rapidity than in other parts of the world. It would have been faster if the process had not been obstructed by the abandonment of "Muslim Bengali" and taking recourse to Sanskritized Bengali in East Pakistan which was a master-stroke of the Indian subversionists.

At the time of independence, the general trend was that anecdotes, idioms and proverbs quoted by the Bengali Muslims were from Hindu mythological sources, while the "Biharis" were used to similar quotes from Islamic history or from Persian or Arabic sources. As all were Muslims, this jarred on the non-Bengali feelings. But, gradually, Bengali Muslims were adopting the ways and modes culled from an Islamic background, and were proud of it. A lot of observances, as during marriage ceremonies, at the time of Muharram and Eids among the Bangalis which had been copies of Hindu rituals, were abandoned and in their place ceremonials brought by the so-called "Biharis" with them adopted. This was not wholly due to the migrants of East Pakistan but also followed a stay of the native East Pakistanis in West Pakistan. Alternatively, quite a number of local families became anglicised as students returned after long residence in the United Kingdom or America.

But, at the same time, there were marks which distinguished the non-Bengalis from their local brethren. In the first instance, a tall and well-built man was invariably taken to be a non-Bengali, even though there were a lot of tall persons among the Bengalis themselves. Also, the "Biharis" could never countenance propaganda against the Pakistan ideology, and this was the major factor which led to their being victims of bloodshed in March 1971 and later.

The struggle for survival was hard for the "Biharis". There were no short-cuts for them, and their success was an achievement for which they must be given credit. But, this credit was not given even

by the people of West Pakistan. The Karachi and Lahore newspapers selected Bengalis as their correspondents and the latter fed them with their own variety of propaganda material, bringing about false notions that the "Biharis" were socially incompatible and that the Bengalis were "exploited" by them as by West Pakistanis. This was a totally incorrect assumption, based on a false premise from the very outset that a Bihari settled in East Pakistan was only an East Pakistani and, therefore, not a Pakistani at all. This was Pakistan which had been named as the homeland of the "hundred million Muslims of the sub-continent", and therefore the legal and logical homeland of the Bihari. He was, however, certainly the odd man in Bangladesh !

Considering the enormous difficulties and hurdles faced by the "Biharis" in East Pakistan, where they were scattered, and had no single point of concentration where they could be in a majority, like the migrants of West Pakistan, who had Karachi, it was not uncommon for them to become nostalgic. They had given up voluntarily a homeland of their own and settled in a new one, on the call of the founding fathers of Pakistan, and they were being put into the position of second-class citizens. There was certainly nothing wrong in the objectives of the Quaid-e-Azam and his colleagues, but for its incorrect and false application put into motion by their successors. The fault lay with the successors not with the founders, along with the seeds of alien propaganda carried on surreptitiously.

We have mentioned the political anomaly of this in the foregoing pages. At the time of independence,

Hindus in East Pakistan before their migration to India were 24 per cent and they had their representatives in the National and Provincial Assemblies. After the situation had been so defined and accepted officially, nearly 90 lakh Hindus migrated to India. Some of their representatives (elected on the basis of separate electorate), however, sat in Pakistan's law-making bodies while their electors were being rehabilitated in India. In fact, a proper number of seats, conforming to the number of Hindus who had migrated, should have been cancelled and in their place earmarked for the "Biharis" in proportion to their actual population. This was not done. The "Biharis" could not have a political voice of their own and this further slashed at their position of equal citizens in Pakistan.

It should have been recognised from the very outset that the migrants, not having their roots in the places where they had settled, would be at a disadvantage against any other local person, who had a long background of stay in the area, and their capabilities could hardly be enough to earn for them more than a few votes. By not giving them the right to contest elections on reserved seats, they were permanently deprived of their democratic right. It may be said to the credit of the "Muhajireen" that in the interest of the development of a uniform national community in Pakistan, they did not press for such seats. But, unfortunately, not only was a uniform national community not allowed to develop, the rise of provincialism confirmed their permanent exclusion from the democratic process. With the rise of provincialism in East

Pakistan, the voice of the "Biharis" was totally lost in the din of hatred, this minority unable to express its point of view in any forum.

On the other hand, a vast Hindu community who had migrated to India and was living there permanently, continued to have its representation in the national Parliament and the Provincial Assembly of East Pakistan. This contradicted the very concept of democracy which was being set up on the lines of the West without any social parallels here.

According to the census figures of 1961, if there were 2.1 million Urdu-speaking "Biharis" in East Pakistan, they should have had about 3 per cent seats earmarked for them in the provincial and 1.75 per cent in the central legislatures, that is, at least 5 seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan in a House of 300 while in the East Pakistan Assembly the number of seats given to them should have been 11. Actually they had none. Nor could they be elected to any general seats.

While the "Biharis" took their chances on an equal plane with the others in the provinces, there was indeed, one section from the migrants which could be said to have really built up the edifice of exploitation. The same section had been exploiting West Pakistan as well in a similar manner. This community consisted of the business people mostly from the Kathiawar and Bombay provinces of India. Their homes being closer to Karachi most of them had moved on to Karachi, and had established their branches in East Pakistan. They controlled enormous financial resources, including Banks, and they only knew how to

make the maximum profits irrespective of where and how. Their activities were helpful to Pakistan in the beginning, since they provided the initial nuclei of capital formation for the eventual industrialisation of the country, both West and East, but it was their extremely exclusive and profit-generating outlook which eventually did the greatest harm to Pakistan.

Since their main seat of activity was Karachi, their operations in East Pakistan were given the name of "Exploitation by West Pakistan". Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, for the first time, had the courage to point out in his election campaign in 1970, that both East and West Pakistan were exploited by the same section. This was the real truth, though some people refused to pay much attention to this part of his assertion.

This section of the migrants was not only distinct from the "Biharis", it chose to remain confined to its own shell most of the time. Few of them mixed socially with the "Biharis" and, in fact, exploited them as brazenly as they did the Bengalis. It was actually their sins which were paid for by the "Biharis." It suited them for their own reasons. It, however, helped the case of India for subverting East Pakistan. Prior to the elections in 1970, this business community tried to "purchase" not only its safety but a measure of preferential treatment in case Mujib came to power, as it was becoming clear that he was going to. They contributed enormous amounts of money to the Awami League's political coffers.

The business principles which this section has followed are completely contradictory to the principles laid down by Islam. They follow the Jewish ground

rules, though in some ways more Jewish than the Jews themselves. They consider no dishonest means to make a penny on the side to be against social rules of conduct. Jews built for themselves a world monopoly in trade and industry by building up confidence in their deals through a measure of honest conduct and adherence to national interests in their countries of adoption. The Pakistani business community did neither. Its motto has been "maximum profit and today". They would refuse to fight for their rights, even if there were ample grounds, but take recourse to bribery and other backdoor methods. They stuck to those lines from the very outset and have been weaving their own rules, to be adopted by others to such a degree that social standards today have thoroughly degenerated in the whole of Pakistan.

It is a fact that during the massacres of March/April 1971 which accounted for more than 200,000 "Biharis" there were very few of the members of this commercial section who were killed. Even after the fall of East Pakistan, there were very few of them who lost their lives or were jailed. They restarted their business right after the fall, and many of the firms gave sizeable advertisements in the newspapers that they had "no other business in Pakistan" and were loyal and sincere citizens of Bangladesh only! Actually all of them have extensive business in this country and it did not hurt their moral values to give such a palpably false declaration.

The "Biharis" had not even suspected that a terrible fate awaited them in March/April 1971. After

the Awami League had won the elections, they tried to submit memorandums to Mujib, signifying their loyalty to the political destiny of East Pakistan. These declarations were of no avail. The fate of "Biharis" had been sealed; for it was known that they could not but at heart be loyal to the Pakistan ideology and that they would prove *helpful to the Pakistan army in its efforts to put down the insurrection.*

During the period from March 25 to April 21 of 1971, they were subjected to a mass massacre all over East Pakistan. Certain concentrated pockets, and the Bihari inhabitants of Dacca, escaped being destroyed for local reasons. In Dacca, for example, the army had moved pretty fast and opposition had been crushed within a few hours. In Chittagong, while 12,000 including women and children were heinously murdered, some of the colonies were not attacked because of rumours that they had plenty of arms to protect themselves. In Bogra, the Biharis escaped for reasons not yet known, though within the district, at Santahar, a flourishing colony was wiped out to the man. The same situation was repeated at Dinajpur, while in Rangpur only isolated killings took place. In Kushtia, where the insurgents were led by Colonel Ataul Ghani Usmani, they were thrust into the jail and thus escaped massacre.

The horrors perpetrated during this period were unimaginable. In Chittagong, people were brought to a number of butchering centres where each person was either put to the knife or all his blood drawn with huge syringes, leaving the victims to die a horrifying death. In Dinajpur, they were

taken in herds to the riverside and there subjected to machinegun fire. In Kalurghat—an industrial area seven miles from Chittagong, high officials of a jute mill and other men were tied to trees and butchered, their women then forced to serve the members of the East Bengal Regiment in the nude before being massacred to every single person on the point of the Regiment's withdrawal on the advance of the Pakistan army. In Bibirhat, near Chittagong, again, they were shoved into a mosque and pelted with hand-grenades followed by bursts of machinegun fire.

The Pakistan Government published a white paper in 1971 giving details of the people killed without, of course, going into the manner of the killings. The story has partly been re-told in a book published in Pakistan in 1974 which depicts a large number of cases in which there was someone or the other left to tell the story. There were, however, hundreds of others in which there was no survivor or eye-witness left. For, most of the people who escaped were at the time themselves stalked with fear, and in hiding, and could have only seen fleeting glimpses of what was happening around them. There were other cases, of persons who showed an inclination to utilise treachery to save their own skin, and survived by cooperating with the groups of murderers and vandals. Their stories, obviously, have to be taken with a pinch of salt, since they cannot be retold without colour to justify their own attitude.

There is, however, ample evidence to prove that mosques were desecrated, copies of the Holy Quran

were kicked and torn, people were killed while saying their prayers, or while reading the Holy Book. People of East Pakistan were basically more religious than those of the West and they have had an inbred fear of the unknown which keeps them from committing acts of desecration. The killings were generally committed by soldiers, and civilians were only rarely involved and when they were, it was by fear or force. The conclusion, therefore, is inescapable that those who indulged in the massacres were, as a rule, Indian infiltrators who had a particular hatred for the religiosity of the Muslims and since Islam formed the basic factor joining the two wings of Pakistan.

The White Paper, or other published records are, however, silent over one point. In the melee, while people were being killed and the 'Biharis' were running about for their lives, thousands of young girls were carried away to India and sold there. The then Superintendent of Police of Bogra, a gentleman originally hailing from Jaunpur (in U. P.) himself expressed a certainty that not all of the Biharis of Santahar were killed, but women and young girls were taken away in large numbers to India and sold. This fact was never considered in all the talks which took place with India or mentioned in the despatches by foreign correspondents. As a result, all these Muslim girls and women have been forgotten and might even now be leading a life of horror in Indian brothels or forcibly kept by people in that country to a life of ignominy and shame. In Calcutta, some Muslims had formed themselves into a society or association to dig out such cases on their own but, for obvious

reasons, they could not have been encouraged by their Government.

Following similar happenings in 1947, both India and Pakistan had set up official organisations to search out kidnapped women and repatriate them for a reunion with their parents or relatives. But, at that time India had a stake too, with a number of Hindu and Sikh women being left behind in West Punjab. This time it was all a one-way traffic, and Pakistanis have proved themselves without that basic nationalistic ego which forces men to look for their womenfolk as the keepers of their honour and self-respect.

The massacre of the Biharis was a pre-planned affair, a part of the military strategy of the insurrectionists. Those who talk of it being the result of any absence of integration or due to hatred generated over the years, either show a complete ignorance of facts or are moved by the publicity device to give the whole of the rebellion a colour of spontaneity which belies the real forces behind it. The proof of it is that in practically every case, the civilian population kept away from the killings unless called upon to take part in it when they only did so out of fear for their own skins. In many cases the civilians even tried to prevent the massacres and many of the 'Biharis' have survived because of their timely intervention. Of course, a large number of bad characters or goondas among the civilians did take part in the looting and killing, as such groups always do, but primarily for gain and not out of hatred.

If a thorough analysis is made of the events of the time, it would be apparent that the strategists for the

rebellion were practically correct in their assessment of the Bihari role in the struggle. For, the latter did lend a helping hand to the armed forces against the rebels in every place in the province.

It is also surprising that the Pakistan Government did not raise the question of *genocide* of the Biharis in the United Nations when Bangladesh applied for its membership. For, it is quite apparent that while the Pakistan Army could not have planned the destruction of 75 million Bengali Muslims, as stated by the representatives of Mujib's Bangladesh, the eradication of a linguistic minority of 2 million was certainly planned and a good deal of it was also carried out. That India was also fully involved in the game would be apparent from the fact that when a number of Biharis tried to cross the border, they were promptly clapped in jail, where some of them are still rotting.

It is patent that the case of the Biharis has gone by default. It appears that the Pakistanis themselves have been, by and large, victims of the propaganda of the enemies of Pakistan and its ideology. Others have tried to suppress facts because they ran counter to their ideological way of thinking. The "Communists" or the "scientific socialists", had persuaded the People's Party not to treat the Biharis except on terms of a regional minority as their being considered as victims of a false nationalism was bound to clash with the Soviet line. The Jamaat-e-Islami tried to whittle down facts as they had ambitions of working out their own party line in Bangladesh, and it completely falsified their own analysis of the situation in the former East Pakistan. Both of these parties have been in the habit of playing

down the Pakistan ideology within the sub-continent in pursuance of their own political objectives.

To take up the thread of the story again, the Biharis, true to their ideological moorings, proved their loyalty to Pakistan, by coming to the assistance of the Armed Forces which had to deal with the insurgency every where in East Pakistan. In Dacca, they offered to look after the northern and western sides of the Airport while the Army were busy mopping up opposition in the South, in the main city. In Jessore, they provided the way through a colony of theirs to the Forces surrounded on all sides by the insurgents, at a grave risk to their own lives. In Chittagong, they provided a stirring welcome to the small section of the army which had arrived from Comilla after four days of gruelling marches disturbed by armed attacks. In Saidpur, they kept the insurgents at bay with crudely manufactured heavy guns. The story was repeated everywhere, and it cannot be dismissed simply by saying that they did so for their own protection. Bengali Muslims, devoted to the cause of Pakistan, aligned themselves with the insurgents out of fear alone. There is no doubt that after the fall of Dacca, many of them were shot dead, refused to shout "Jai Bangla" as demanded of them, but it was rather late in the day, though credit is due to them for their heroism.

The Biharis could have given a better account of themselves, had the Yahya regime taken steps to enable them to do so. The uncertainty which lasted till the end of the "talks" played havoc with the fate of the Urdu-speaking minority. For, they were not sure as to what was going to happen and when on March 24 and

25, District authorities asked them to surrender their arms, they did so meekly, and when killings started on March 26, they were without arms and any reasonable way to defend themselves.

After the devastation to their population and properties had taken place and the Pakistan Army had re-captured East Pakistan inch by inch, Maj. General Rao Farman Ali asked them for volunteers, and within a week from the call, they put forward nearly 15,000 of them, promptly enrolled in the Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, given a short-training of a few days only and sent to the borders. They served their country to the best of their ability, all through the nine months, from the period of insurgency upto the fall of Dacca.

It was only in the months of June and July that Razakars and the *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams* were recruited from amongst the Bengalis to assist the army. The Jamaat-e-Islami, a political party of Pakistan, has gone into ecstasies in eulogising the services of the *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams* which they were instrumental in organising, but they did not have a single word of praise for the EPCAF, which was also a volunteer organisation. The *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams* who claimed to be nearly a hundred thousand strong, were given the responsibility of putting their finger on Indian infiltrators in the rural areas and assisting the army in mopping up—a responsibility in which they practically failed to perform with credit. For, after the general amnesty of August, 1971, there was such an influx of the Indian commandos that law and order went completely overboard. But, since it is always difficult for an alien army to go on operating behind enemy lines for a very long period, and there

was the danger of the infiltrators being wiped out to the man, that the Indian Commander-in-Chief had to advise his country's Prime Minister either to attack East Pakistan or withdraw them. Still, it should have been comparatively easy for the *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams* volunteers to pick the infiltrators out as they came. This they failed to do, as they pursued local objectives, of their own personal and family vendettas.

While it is not intended to denounce or condemn the volunteers, one is forced to point out the sectarian attitude of the Jamaat in only extolling the virtues of their own men as against the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces who have not even been mentioned in their records of defence. On the other hand, on surrender the EPCAF personnel were not even informed of the event and were left to fend for themselves. Out of 15,000 only about 2,500 were taken prisoners of war and eventually repatriated to Pakistan. The others, completely at sea as to what they should do, were either killed by mobs or had to run from place to place to save their lives.

Parents and relatives who had so happily offered these young men to give their lives in the defence of Pakistan, were not even aware of their whereabouts, and were, in their own place, victimised for "collaboration" with the Pakistan Army after the fall of Dacca. Many were killed, or their properties snatched away, reducing them to beggary.

After these remnants who had been taken prisoner by India were repatriated to Pakistan in 1973-74, they were first subjected to a gruelling interrogation to find if they were not "plants" by the Indians (which some

could be) and when their *bona fides* were established they were placed at the disposal of the Cabinet Division of the Government of Pakistan, to be treated as civilians, not even paid arrear salary for the period of incarceration nor any special help provided to rehabilitate them. Many of them still have their families in East Pakistan, not yet repatriated because of lack of clearance by the Cabinet Division.

So far as the civilians are concerned, it was decided after the Delhi Pact that 1,40,000 of them, or about 28,000 families would be repatriated under the auspices of the United Nations. Adding those who were repatriated through Nepal, or via other routes, the total number of families brought to Pakistan would not be more than 40,000. It could hardly be a difficult task to absorb these into the economic stream of the country where about 1.4 crore families lived. Still there were voices heard from various political sources complaining against their "burden" on Pakistan.

While these 40,000 families came to this country wading through a veritable sea of blood, after living through a period of three years of horror inside and outside the jails of Bangladesh leaving behind their savings of a lifetime, a most luke-warm attitude was shown to the matter of their rehabilitation. Not more than 1,000 houses have since been built for them on very small plots of land, out of the money donated by friendly Islamic nations, and all of the cash given on their arrival to launch them to a new life here, did not exceed Rs. 300 per family. The rest of the 39,000 families repatriated were left on their own to fend for themselves on an alien and turbulent sea. There were

no appeals to the friendly world community, especially the Muslim lands, to assist in their resettlement, no use made of vast amounts of "refugee tax" collected in the name of rehabilitating such very migrations, no schemes were drawn up for their rehabilitation. It was certain that, with excellent relations existing between Pakistan and the Arab nations, Pakistan and RCD nations, any number of such schemes could have been prepared, and if targets publicised along with appeals, enough cash would have been contributed by the friendly countries as well as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, till recently presided over by a Muslim.

It was a sort of jealousy which governed the treatment of these flotsam and jetsam of humanity coming over from the former East Pakistan. This jealousy was not restricted to the Government alone. Important sectors of the public were also affected by it. The "Biharis" were given the greatest sympathy by the public of the Punjab, who loaded them with gifts as they arrived here. Surprisingly enough, this milk of human kindness was absent in Karachi where the Urdu-speaking population mostly lived. As these people landed in that city, they were given a very cold shoulder from the very moment they set their foot on Pakistani soil. A large number of so-called philanthropic organisations which had sprung up overnight in their name, only looked for business opportunities, especially in betel-leaves which were being brought with them by each family and was purchased on the airport for half the prevailing price in the market. Others setup shops in Orangi to "register" allotments

of land which was not theirs to give, against Rs. 10 for each family. A good deal of material given by really charitable persons disappeared en route.

Political organisations made their own capital out of the misery of these people. The Jamaat-e-Islami would give help only to those who were already its supporters or were prepared to enlist themselves on the party books. So did others, but not so openly or actively.

As soon as repatriation started and the Biharis began to pour into Karachi, house-rents were raised. Many, who had close relations (*e.g.* brothers) and were repatriated in the category of "divided families", received the most lukewarm welcome from their own kith and kin. Many were refused support for more than a few days and forced to seek out their own way without any help or direction. What the Biharis saw, on their arrival in Pakistan, was a most curious phenomenon in which the old adage that blood calleth unto blood seemed to have proved palpably untrue.