

## **“Those forgotten after Partition”: Migration and Identity in Debesh Roy’s Select Works.**

In the popular imagination, the picture of the Partition consists of people on the move across newly formed borders in Punjab and Bengal. This memory of migration has been given a redemptive value in history through the stories of resettlement that symbolize the tenacity of those previously colonized and uprooted to create a postcolonial identity as a nation. Owing to the violent nature of the Punjab Partition, it is theorized a great deal as opposed to the relatively less documented impact of the partition in Bihar, Bengal or the Northeast, in Assam or Tripura. In particular, the impact of migration on those already present in these lands remains to be studied.

As Sujata D. Hazarika has studied, after the partition, most of the lands in North Bengal were bought by affluent Bengali and Marwari immigrants from the Koch and Rajbongshi community members, the original landowners in the Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri region. This displacement further added to the marginalization of these communities by the “Babu” culture of the urban Bengali “Bhadralok”.

While the elites of the Koch and Rajbongshi communities could afford to maintain distance from the Bengali immigrants, calling them “Vinnajati”, the Koch-Rajbongshi common mass, many of whom were compelled to sell their lands, bore a greater impact of the inflow of immigrants after the partition and the 1971 Bangladesh war. This displacement in North Bengal remains largely unnoticed in the mainstream historical and cultural narrative as no border was directly involved in this movement.

This paper attempts to understand the social aspects of the demographic changes in North Bengal brought about by the Partition and the 1971 war of Bangladesh through its reading of select works of Debesh Roy- primarily *Mafassali Brittanto*, which was serialized from 1974 till 1980, and *Tista Paarer Brittanto*, first published in 1988. These works portray the interactions of the members of the Koch-Rajbongshi communities with the state and the society and their marginalization that is catalyzed by their loss of landed property. Thereafter, the paper seeks to historically contextualise Debesh Roy's works in the land rights movements of the autochthonous communities in North Bengal.