

'Witnessing the Birth of a Nation': Narrative Frames of Refugee and Relief in the Liberation War 1971

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"Co-seeing, if it were to happen, happens in the destruction that will be.

The seen, or what is presumed as such, has intact eyes but those who claim to see, and therefore have allegedly seen, have almost-eyes."

-Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

In the long twentieth century while the world polity was creating its own discourse on migrants and refugees arising out of the inexorable complications of nation-state formations and identity politics not only primarily at temporal chronological junctures but the steady flows helped create a living figure of the refugee as suffering-self that needed protection, care and governance was slowly evolving in its glocal variations but invariably appeared in the vortex of loss as a summative category of not only home and homeland but of dignity and rights stepped in death, debility, disease and doles became the primer of humanitarian assistance catered to by the host institutions. While the newly formed Indian State was already grappling with the issue of refugee and rehabilitation arising out of the mass exodus in its tryst with destiny of a severed nation since 1947 the beginning of the Bangladesh Liberation War in March 1971 with the military crackdown through 'Operation Searchlight' of Yahya Khan once again heightened the rates human influx through already established routes and networks across West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and the invisibilities in denial of refugee migrants in India once again attracted the attention of the global polity as existential crisis of humanity through its daily reportage in print media. This paper tries to analyse the comparative gaze about the visions of a nation in making in South Asia which was encountered through the trope of refugee dislocations in India and the industrious responses that the neighbouring state and the global community offered in providing relief to the suffering masses fleeing the genocide in East Pakistan. This comparative scale based on qualities of displacement, health, hygiene, sanitation, physiognomy of the biopolitics of the docile suffering of the migrant bodies and how it became the quantifier of 'refugeedom' at times steeped in deep sense of shame and humiliation of unsettling '*desh*' and on the other broader spectrum as a by-product of unshackling the vestiges of bondage and dominance and creating democratic independent desired identity in national reckoning of the 'making' of nation. The continued reportage of the events of the liberation war and subsequent refugee influx into India in newspapers and broadcasts is argued as a 'feel tank' that generated emotions and parallels of haptic proprioception of the already living realities of the coming out of the partition in 1947. The descriptive frames of refugisms in the liberation war generated an 'emotional mobilization' where the refugee bodies became the site of cultural production of retributive subjection of transgressive militancy of West Pakistan and the entangled lingua franca used to portray this suffering substantiated by the visual imageries created definitive spaces of emotional consumerism capitalising the refugee pain. The depictions are looked upon as a liminal space that transcribes beyond being descriptive categories but offers a window into the lifeworlds where the private became the public generating newer emotions what Wolf-Sontag highlights as the pain of others through 'felt' mechanisms in understanding and outreaching the wellbeing in the passage of wait generating solidarity networks of speculation about the potential future of these refugees. The study borrows from Bakhtin's Heteroglossia in developing the approach of 'thinking

through paper' where the lingua franca itself was a passive sculptor of the amorous image of the refugee and will try to map a social attitude distance between Arendt's 'We Refugees' and Wolf's 'We' seeing the refugees. Here the visual tool of co-seeing is used as the central trope of analysing the combinatorics of the event through representation of the fleeing masses and genocidal horrors creating sensual qualities of the mental spaces that invoke the global responses of the requirement of care and protectionisms not as abstractions but as considerate spaces rationally/morally cognized within the empirical intuition of the global socio-political consciousness.

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