ATTITUDE OF THE HOST SOCIETY VIS-À-VIS THE EAST PAKISTANI HINDU MIGRANTS TO THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL: EXPERIENCE OF THE MIGRANTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF CALCUTTA

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of

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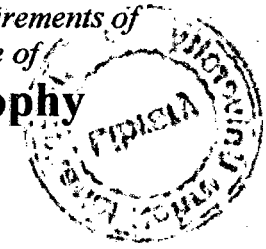

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Certificate

Certified that the dissertation entitled ***Attitude of the Host Society vis-à-vis the East Pakistani Hindu Migrants to the State of West Bengal: Experience of the Migrants and their Impact on the Socio-Cultural Life of Calcutta***, submitted by **Subhasri Ghosh** is in partial fulfulment of the requirements for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** degree of this University. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree of this or any other University to the best of our knowledge.

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Subhasri Ghosh.

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INTRODUCTION

The main focus of my dissertation is the refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan who crossed over to West Bengal following the calamity that had befallen them in the wake of the Partition of India in August 1947, their experience in face of the treatment meted out by the host society, their efforts to strike roots in their new environment as also their impact on the socio-cultural contours of the capital city Calcutta.

The historiography of Partition history, in my opinion, can broadly be divided into two categories: (i) those dealing with its causes; (ii) those dealing with its impact. The first essentially analyse the genesis of Partition that led to the creation of two new sovereign nations – culminating in the dismemberment in August 1947. Ayesha Jalal's The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan (Cambridge, 1985) and Joya Chatterji's Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947 (Cambridge, 1994) are some of the outstanding works of this field.

It is, however, with the second set of writings, more precisely, with those that deal essentially with the "forced migrants", that I am concerned with – how it has evolved and contributed to the broadening of our knowledge.

The dissection of Punjab and Bengal, led to the forced migration of minorities, on either side of the border. The similarity between the two perhaps ends here. With the transfer of power Punjab witnessed the

unleashing of violence on an unprecedented scale – loot, rape, arson, murder. Bengal, on the other hand, enjoyed relative peace.

In Punjab, the uprooting was effected in one swift swipe through massive pogroms on both sides of the border. The unprecedented violence in Punjab, coupled with the decision of the Prime Ministers of the two Dominions resulted in a virtual exchange of the minority population of the two nations. A Military Evacuation Organisation (M.E.O.) was created in September 1947 to handle the delicate and dangerous operations connected with planned minority evacuation. Shri Meher Chand Khanna, Minister of Rehabilitation, pointed out that an inflow of 49 lakhs from West Pakistan was matched by an outflow of 55 lakhs from East Punjab and its adjoining areas.[1]

West Bengal, in contrast, presents a diametrically opposite picture. The Government of India, in case of the East, denounced the idea of an exchange of population. Referring to this issue, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his letter dated 25 August 1948, to the West Bengal Premier, made it aptly clear:[2]

> The fact that a man is a Muslim, does not make him a non-national. He may have evil designs in his heart. If so, as an individual we can deal with him. But to say of a group of Indian nationals that we shall push them out because some people elsewhere are not behaving as they should is something which has no justification in law or equity. It strikes at the root of the secular state that we claim to be. We just can't do it whatever the consequences.

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1 Jugantar, 10 May 1955.

2 Quoted in Saroj Chakrabarty, With Dr. B.C. Roy and other Chief Ministers: A Record up to 1962 (Calcutta, 1974), p.109.

Nehru reiterated his stand in his speech on the floor of the Parliament in 1950:[3]

> ...it (exchange of population) is fantastic and impracticable and that this Government will have nothing to do with it.... If you want to have an exchange of population, then you must change the whole basis of not only this Government but of all that we have stood for these thirty odd years and during the movement for freedom in this country.... Therefore, let us be quite clear that these proposals are fantastic and impracticable not only because they involve war or something approaching war but also because in trying to work them out you will destroy the minorities, uproot millions of others and spend the rest of your life and that of the next generation in trying to rehabilitate them.

The whole process of migration from the East, in the case of Bengal, sparked off by the Noakhali Carnage of 1946, was a long protracted process that continued in spurts over the years. At times, the migration lashed West Bengal in the form of formidable breakers, while sometimes it subsided into a trickle. But it never really stopped.

Hence migration and refugee movement in Bengal and Punjab differ and the situation of one cannot be equated with the other.

With the arrival of these forced migrants, came the question of adaptation and accommodation of the displaced persons in their new setup. The general assumption is that the Punjabi migrants became a part of the local milieu within a decade or so after migration, while their East Bengali brethren are still struggling for a firm foothold. The reason, in case of the

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[3] Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches: Volume Two August 1949-February 1953, (New Delhi, June 1967), Speech in Parliament on the Motion: "The [redacted] Bengal Situation with References to the Agreement between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan signed on 8 April 1950, be taken into consideration", 7 August 1950, p.160.

former, is the availability of a substantial amount of evacuee property in the form of land and houses for rehabilitation of the West Pakistani migrants. The total acreage of agricultural land left by Muslims in East Punjab was 43,58,784 acres.[4] Properties left in East Punjab amounted to 1,10,732 houses, 17,542 shops and 1,495 factories.[5] Hence their assimilation did not pose much of a problem, since the feeling of "outsiders infringing on our rights, occupying our property and making life miserable for us" was absent. In Bengal, on the other hand, the land left was an insignificant 500 bighas.[6] Since 60% of the displaced persons from East Pakistan were agriculturists, their rehabilitation thus posed a problem.[7] The absorption of the bulk of the migrants into the social fabric, was like the very nature of migration, a time-consuming process stretched over the years.

Another potent cause cited by the early historiographers like U. Bhaskar Rao is the ingrained character of the refugees themselves:[8]

> In the Western region they were tougher, more resilient of their spirit and much more adaptable. It was easier for them to turn their hands

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4 Constituent Assembly of India – Appendix I, (November-December 1949) – Agricultural Land left by Muslims in India and Acceded States, Statement laid on the Table of the House, 28 November 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), p.16.

5 Constituent Assembly of India, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers, 24 February 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), p.1012.

6 Ibid.

7 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), Ninety Sixth Report (New Delhi, 1960), p.20.

8 U. Bhaskar Rao, The Story of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (New Delhi, 1967), p.147.

> to any job that came along. With them, therefore, the problem of assimilation into their new surroundings was less difficult than it might otherwise have been.

Bhaskar Rao, in fact, finds it difficult to restrain himself from singing the praises of the Punjabi refugees:[9]

> They carried on regardless of the inclements of the weather with a stoicism that took our breath away... their toughness, their sturdy sense of self-reliance, their pride that would not submit to the indignity of living on doles... tens of thousands of them disdained Government help... remember hundreds of them had seen affluent days in the homes they had abandoned, but they would not stoop to accept charity; never would their proud hands be stretched out to receive alms... no work, however seemingly low would they despise... rehabilitation, in their case, was easy for they met Government's efforts more than half-way... the refugees mostly sought to rehabilitate themselves... no helpless dependence on governmental relief.

The East Bengali refugee on the other hand being:[10]

> ...exposed to devitalising, demoralising forces than his western counterpart... was competely shattered in body and spirit, all initiatives all capacity for self-adjustment drained out of him.

Juxtaposing the two, the picture that emerges is that of an enterprising, vivacious, enthusiastic Punjabi refugee community which successfully overcame all hurdles to be a part and parcel of the existing setup, as also that of a devastated, unenterprising, indolent Bengali refugee community, dependent at every stage on government support, a crippled class of people who needed the crutch called 'Government' to take a single step.

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9 Ibid., p.39.

10 Ibid., p.148.

Prafulla K. Chakrabarti in his masterpiece, The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal (Calcutta, 1999) challenges this rather demeaning portrayal of the Bengali refugee. Himself hailing from the "other" side and having crossed over to "this" side following the Partition, Chakrabarti feels that this standardised version was coined in the official discourse as a buffer to hide its own inefficiency in tackling the issue of rehabilitation in the East. Passing the buck on to the refugees, the government perhaps, sought to justify the unsolved problem in the East. Assimilation, in the East, Chakrabarti feels, was hindered by the apathy of the people as also the government to the plight of the 'Bangal barbarians': "The refugees were unwanted in West Bengal. The people of West Bengal looked upon them with contempt and the Government did not know what to do with them."[11]

He dispels the notion of an unenterprising Bengali refugee by penning a day-to-day account of the foundation of the squatters' colonies in the outskirts of Calcutta – a triumph of their never-say-die attitude. "These proud migrants scorned the uncertain government doles and did not care for any other form of government assistance."[12] Is this not what Bhaskar Rao has said about the Punjabi migrants albeit in a different language? By delving into hitherto unprobed archival materials, interviews with the dramatis personae behind the foundation of the squatters' colonies and leftist leaders who

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11 Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.405.

12 Ibid., p.35.

backed the squatters, Chakrabarti shows how these self-rehabilitators, were determined to carve out a niche for themselves. They defiantly withstood the bullets of the government forces and the hoodlums employed by the landlords to evict them from their precious possessions. Not to be cowed down, they erected and re-erected their ramshackle huts time and again and clung to them like limpets. The squatters were lathi-charged and teargassed but they organised themselves into resistance groups under the leadership of the Communists to stave off eviction and displacement for a second time. Is it not proof enough of their enthusiasm and enterprising attitude?

The less helpful attitude of the Government of India towards the East and the failure of the Government of West Bengal to effectively implement the rehabilitation programme, hardened the attitude of the refugees. They took to the streets in demand for the redressal of their just grievances – throughout January 1949 protest demonstrations were organised in different parts of Calcutta. Police opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators; in retaliation, the protesters – refugees and students – burnt tramcars and state buses. To quote Prafulla Chakrabarti – "The bedraggled, mendicant refugee suddenly showed the other side of his Janus-face."[13] Surely they did not carry on with "...their old simple, graceful ways of living, as if nothing had ever disturbed the even tenors of their existence",[14] but can they still be termed as beggars and not the same "breed of heroes" as the Punjabis?

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13 Ibid., p.53.

14 Rao, op. cit., p.38 (He said this in reference to the Punjabi refugees).

Prafulla Chakrabarti's is a seminal work in the field of refugee studies in the East. It provides the basic framework, the starting point of any study of the said topic.

Taking the cue from Prafulla Chakrabarti, another brilliant scholar, Joya Chatterji '(Right or Charity? The Debates over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947-50' in Suvir Kaul, ed., The Partitions of Memory: The Aftermath of the Division of India (New Delhi, 2001) shows how the central and the state government, time and again, took recourse to defining and redefining the term 'refugee' in order to shirk the responsibility of rehabilitation – "The essence of the policy was to whittle down, by one device or another the numbers eligible for help from the state."[15] Basing her argument mainly on the Intelligence Bureau files of the Government of Bengal, Chatterji shows how the Bengali refugees have been defined in the official discourse as 'victims' who "...had a duty to accept with humble gratitude whatever crumbs he was given."[16] Her writing echoes what M. Mamdani wrote in 1973:[17]

> A refugee is in fact more akin to a child: helpless, devoid of initiative, somebody on whom any kind of charity can be practised, in short, a totally malleable creature.

The refugees were seen as displaced persons – ready to return to their original homeland and not as uprooted persons – whose roots have been

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15 Chatterji, op. cit., p.77.

16 Ibid., p.84.

17 Quoted from Barbara Harrell Bond, "Refugees' Experience as Aid Recipients" in Alistair Ager, ed., Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration (London, 1999), p.143.

severed from one setup and needs to be transplanted in another. This justified the government's role of dishing out ad hoc assistance, in stark contrast to that of Punjab.

The government (both the centre and the state) acted the role of the patriarch in determining and laying down conditions for receiving relief and rehabilitation, rather, charity. The 'assistance programme' did not follow any set principles as time and again, the government arbitrarily and unilaterally stopped doles and threatened the closure of camps. Especially towards the able-bodied males, the government's 'ire' was directed. They and their families were the main sufferers of the government's highhandedness, when the government decided to stop their doles and shunt them to the work-site camps.

In the end what comes out from Chatterji's argument is that the act of giving is not simply mechanical – the gift defines the status and power relationship between the giver and the taker, in this case the government and the refugees, and the relationship that emerges is a patron-client relationship where there is a one-way flow of goods and services. The state, in the official construct, was the patron – the philanthropher, the fountainhead of charity; the refugees – victims, mute recipients with no right to demand, no right to complain or crib. The father knows what is best for the family and the others should blindly adhere to his principles without so much as a question.

The popular belief circulating in the corridors of power of a helpless, listless Bengali Hindu refugee shorn of all initiative, all interest in life and

surviving on the shoulders of the government has been put to rest by the researches of these two brilliant scholars. How the government (even after being a democratically elected one after 1952) has acted as an autocrat with regard to refugee policies has been driven home by them.

It is this, and not the lack of enthusiasm on part of the refugees that has prevented their adaptation, feels Chakrabarti. By keeping them perpetually dependent on them, the government reveled in the role of a just patriarch.

The other factor, which Chakrabarti identifies as contributory to their non-assimilation, is the imperviousness of the local inhabitants to the plight of the East Bengali Hindus. The misfortune of the Bangals, Chakrabarti says, failed to touch a chord in their hearts – "superior culture-conscious people of West Bengal... deliberately kept themselves aloof from these 'Bangal' barbarians.... It prevented the assimilation of the migrants in the social fabric of West Bengal..."[18]

Dipankar Sinha ("Adjustment and Transition in a Bengali Refugee Settlement: 1950-1999" in Pradip Kumar Bose, ed., Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Practices and Contested Identities, Calcutta, 2000) amplifies this point through his survey of the residents of the Samargarh Colony in Barisha and the Batwara Biddhasta Upanibesh in West Putiary. The older residents of the settlement, he says, are unanimous on the point

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[18] Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.406.

that the relation between them and their non-refugee neighbours in the initial years of settlement (c. 1949-50) was "less than cordial" and devoid of any explicit manifestation of 'sympathy wave'. Although with the passage of time, the residents were addressed less as 'refugees' and more as 'colony-people', both sides agree that the colony stamp is too strong to be erased out in the future even – a glaring testimony that difference between the two communities still persists. Marital alliance between the two communities, (which Sinha sees to be a practical solution to the problem of assimilation) was an absolute no-no in the sixties and seventies in the two settlements and even now it is not preferred very much, but many unwillingly do compromise when a suitable match is not found within the community. But even then, certain pre-conditions are looked into – the other side should not have overt Ghati traits.

Thus, Sinha concludes, the residents do have taken a few steps towards assimilation through matrimonial relations by shedding some inhibitions, but in the true sense of the term, absorption and mutual acceptance perhaps still eludes them.

It is perhaps this imperviousness of the government and the people, that has led the East Bengalis to look back time and again, and lament for their good, old days spend amidst the lush greenery of East Bengal. "They loved its broad rivers, canals and creeks, which entered into every

conceivable opening they could find"[19] – says Prafulla Chakrabarti. Nostalgia seeped into the innermost core of their beings:[20]

> The endlessly spread out paddy fields undulated in gentle breeze with their burden of golden corn... the entire sky would be filled with the cries of birds... its great rivers – the Padma, the Meghna and the Brahmaputra.

Thus, as Chakrabarti pointed out, "The immigrant Bengali mind... is obsessed with the idea of a final home-coming, of a return to take rest on the lap of the mother. The immigrant never accepted a final break with the mother country."[21] Sandip Bandyopadhyay, through a series of interviews, substantiates this issue ("The Riddles of Partition: Memories of the Bengali Hindus" in Ranabir Samaddar, ed., Reflection on Partition in the East, Delhi, 1997). Snehalata Biswas of Tangramari village in undivided Nadia took several years to understand that they would never return. In her own words:[22]

> My husband assured me that we would return after sometime. I therefore buried all the utensils in our courtyard. But we never went back. More than forty years have passed. My husband meanwhile died. I can however still see the home, we left behind.

This failure to reconcile to the fact of Partition, Bandyopadhyay shows, is a common feature in the narration of the refugees, which has not allowed them to settle down in their new environment among their co-religionists.

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19 Ibid., p.35.

20 Ibid., p.34.

21 Ibid., p.208.

22 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p.65.

The existing historiography has dealt with the problem of adaptation from different angles – how the government treated the Bengali refugees as pariahs, how the local people preferred to look the other way, how the nostalgia of a lost paradise and a yearning to return conditioned the complex phenomenon of assimilation. It enlightens us and definitely adds to our knowledge for a better understanding.

Even so, the existing gamut of study on the refugees in the East, does have certain loopholes, and offers scope for further modification. Chakrabarti, Chatterji and Bandyopadhyay – the three of them – bring to the fore only one side of the whole issue.

In case of Prafulla Chakrabarti, the overall flaw that mars the flavour of the book is its overt biasness towards the refugees which led him to conclude that in the field of rehabilitation, "government work... was one of non-performance".[23] In doing so he does not specify whether he refers to a common position of the central and the state government (Congress was in power in both) or any one of them. Joya Chatterji too does not make much of a distinction between the two: "The policy of the Centre and the state of West Bengal may have differed in emphasis, but more significant is the measure of consensus between them...."[24]

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23 Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.xxiv.

24 Chatterji, op. cit., p.80.

It is true that the state government being dependent on the centre for necessary funds and resources had to sing the same tune quite often. But a politician of the stature of Dr. B.C. Roy, nevertheless, often refused to see eye to eye with the decisions taken on behalf of West Bengal in Delhi. In fact, Chakrabarti, does refer to this in the beginning of his "The Marginal Men". But, somehow, he does not amplify this point. So in his writing also, the term 'Government' is monolithic.

That Dr. B.C. Roy had a better understanding of the situation and refused to toe the official line is evident from his volley of letters and replies directed to the Prime Minister. Thus, although Jawaharlal Nehru had "...been terribly anxious throughout to prevent this (migration)....",[25] Dr. B.C. Roy, as early as in 1948, had justly assessed the situation and was convinced of the fallacy of such a policy. That he refused to toe the official line is evident from his reply to the Prime Minister – "you suggest that we should make every effort to prevent the exodus of people from East Bengal... it is no use thinking of that."[26]

Dr. Roy's exasperation at the centre's indifference is also evident from the letter he shot off to Nehru on 1 December 1949.[27] That he persistently fought against the maltreatment and highhandedness of the Government of

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25 Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., p.107.

26 Ibid.

27 Refer to Chapter III.

India is evident from the fact that in 1960 when the Union Minister of Rehabilitation, Sri Meher Chand Khanna, unilaterally declared the stoppage of doles to the camp inmates without arranging for proper rehabilitation benefits, Dr. Roy protested against such arbitrary decision and for the time being at least the decision was reversed. In fact, overriding the centre's decision, Dr. Roy declared in April 1960 that the system of cash doles would be reintroduced and issuing of notice to the camp families as also winding up of the Ministry of Rehabilitation would be postponed for the time being.[28] Can we doubt his good intentions? Thus it is quite evident that he came out quite strongly in favour of his province. Chatterji has completely overlooked this, while Chakrabarti, although touches upon the aspect, gives less importance to Dr. Roy's stand.

If at all anybody is to be blamed, perhaps the central government should take the lion's share for being oblivious to the refugees. The nascent state of West Bengal suffered from certain insurmountable, infrastructural problems, as also certain other teething problems.[29] Being dependent on the centre for funds, it could hardly act independently. The central government on many instances refused to concede the state's demands: when the state demanded grants for the setting up of 15 new colleges, the centre gave the

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28 Jugantar, 7 May 1960.

29 Refer to Chapter III of my dissertation.

same only for six, or when the centre refused to sanction funds for the development of the squatters' colonies.[30]

However, the blame should not be shouldered entirely by the centre. The state can also be accused of some wrong-doing. In many cases, even when the fund was there, the state government failed to utilize the same effectively, to put to practice the rehabilitation programme to good use. But if a balance-sheet is drawn the centre's responsibility for mismanagement is perhaps more than the state, manifested more so by its decision to terminate the Ministry of Rehabilitation in 1960 and terming the refugee problem as 'residuary' when even in 1960, influx continued and as per the reports of both the central and the state governments, there was an increase from the previous year's figures (although figures quoted by both varied).[31] Earlier writings gloss over this. Not only the government of the state, the people, too, surely cannot be put to trial for their callousness. Surely not everybody was indifferent to their misery and in many cases the refugees themselves proved to be dishonest and cheaters. No body can be expected to sympathise with all of them.[32]

The humiliating tag of a 'victim' attached to the refugee, Joya Chatterji has shown is an official construct of this side – an 'official definition'. But the process of victimisation can be traced to the pre-migrational days in East

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30 Jugantar, 6 May 1955.

31 Refer to Chapter II.

32 Refer to Chapter IV.

Pakistan, when they were at the receiving end of the government-sponsored persecution.[33] In this context also, one should distinguish between the situation in the East and the West. In case of the latter, the violence that ensued was the handiwork of the three communities – Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. No one particular community can be earmarked as victims only. Victims on one side turned to retaliators on the other side of the border – no one endured the beating lying down. Attacks were engineered by all the three communities. All communities were ready to perpetrate violence on their perceived enemies given the opportunity and resources. Large demobilized soldiery of Punjab mainly belonging to the Sikh and Muslim communities perpetrated violence of all kinds on each other. Attacks on non-Muslims in the Attock district of West Punjab were reportedly led by retired Muslim army officers. Similarly on this side Akali jathas were organised in many districts.

The official view on the Pakistan side was that that carnage unleashed in August 1947 in East Punjab was part of a plan to liquidate the entire Muslim population of East Punjab and bring in Sikhs from West Punjab in order to lay claim for the formation of a Sikh state. The Governor of Punjab Sir Evan Jenkins claimed to have noticed a similar commitment among the Muslims of West Punjab, especially in the Rawalpindi division, to exterminate non-Muslims in their districts.[34]

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33 Refer to Chapter II.

34 Mohammad Waseem, "Partition, Migration and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of Pakistani Punjab" in Ian Talbott and Gurharpal Singh, eds., Region and Partition (Oxford, 1999).

In Sialkot district, women were abducted by refugee men whose own women had been taken by the Sikhs in East Punjab. On the Pakistan side, refugee trains were systematically attacked between Lahore and Lyallpur, particularly at the Sheikhurpura railway station, where large stabbing took place.[35] On the Indian side, between Ferozepur and Bhatinda, Sikhs methodically held up and attacked trains, looting its passengers and then butchering those who refused to leave.[36] Revenge and retaliation were the key sentiments expressed by all communities. Thus when trains packed with Muslim refugees, all of them murdered during the journey, arrived in Pakistan with messages scribbled "A gift from India", the Muslims sent back train-loads of butchered Sikhs and Hindus with the message "A gift from Pakistan". A non-Muslim refugee train which left Pind Dadan Khan on 19 September 1947, on its way to the Indian side was attacked at three different points of its journey and the loss of life and property suffered was considerable. Near Chalisa the train was stopped by a Muslim mob which carried away nearly two hundred women and killed a large number of men and women.[37] It was attacked a second time near Mughalpura and a third time at Harbanspura.[38]

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35 Gopal Das Khosla, Stern Reckoning: A Survey of Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India (New Delhi, 1989).

36 Kirpal Singh, The Partition of the Punjab (New Delhi, 1991).

37 Khosla, op. cit., p.228.

38 Ibid.

In retaliation on the evening of 22 September, a Muslim refugee train on its way to Lahore was held up and attacked at Amritsar. It is feared that the loss of Muslim life was very heavy.[39] Thus the attitude on both sides of the border were mirror images of each other. Identity of the victim changed on the other side of the border, when he turned into a blood-thirsty retaliation.

But in the East, the Muslims were the perpetrators and the Hindus – the victims. A clear distinction can be drawn. No large scale killing, arson, loot, rape or abduction was reported on the Muslims in West Bengal, in retaliation of the attacks on the Hindus in East Bengal. Following the February Riot of 1950 in East Bengal, there was some retaliation in Calcutta with reports of Hindu-Muslim clashes. The casualty amounted to:[40]

Casualties in the Calcutta Area
(up to 17 February 1950)

	Hindus	Muslims
Injured	83*	123
Deaths	11	20

(*16 were injured by police-firing).

But compared to the carnage in East Pakistan, it was nothing.[41] It was essentially a one sided affair with no effective retaliation on the other side.

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39 Ibid., p.286.

40 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Speeches, Vol.Two, p.140.

41 Refer to Chapter II.

Hence, the Hindus of the East, unlike their counterparts in the West, were victims only, not retaliators. The process of victimisation had started, thus, in the pre-migrational days. In fact, many of the refugees themselves considered themselves as victims: [42]

> We are now aliens in the country where we have spent our childhood, our adolescence, our youth. The inhuman torture that we have been subjected to there, testifies to the narrow mentality of the perpetrators of the violence. Like a norwester that sweeps away the dried leaves, we, too, were swept away from our country much against our wishes. Our eyes moisten when we think how we were victimised, and made the scapegoats of the violence.

Official policy may have further reinforced the notion of a 'victim' but surely it was not entirely a brainchild of the government of this side.

Chatterji, too, like Chakrabarti, indulges in some harsh criticisms of the Government. She criticises the policy of closing down of relief camps and shifting the able-bodied males to the work-site camps. But, refugee pamphlets, themselves denounce the relief camps and advocate for work-site camps:[43]

> The non-permanent liability camps have outlined their existence and should be abolished as early as possible. Those who are in those camps, should at once be sent to work-site camps or rehabilitation places. New-comers should be directed to work-site camps or colony camps from the interception stations.

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42 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., Chhere Asha Gram (Calcutta, December 1975), p.228. Translations mine. (These writings were first published serially in the Bengali daily Jugantar. Later compiled and edited by Basu).

43 The East Bengal Relief Committee, Memorandum on the Rehabilitation of the Refugees from Eastern Bengal (Calcutta, no date), p.6.

So, in a sense, government policy was attested by those for whom the policy was formulated. Is it right to condemn the government in this respect? Moreover, when she hauls up the government for denying relief to the able-bodied males, she should not have spared it either for redefining the category 'permanent liability', to ease its burden. In the initial stage, the term 'permanent liability' referred to the following persons:

(a) **The Old:** The old [redacted] are those over the age of 60 years in the case of men and 55 years in the case of women, and have no able-bodied adult son, or other male relative in a position to support them.

(b) **The Infirm:** The infirm are those who suffer from a permanent disability which makes them unfit for work and who have no adult able-bodied son or father or any other, male relative in a position to support them.

(c) **Unattached Women:** Unattached women are those who have no adult able-bodied son, father or father-in-law or any other relative in a position to support them.

(d) **Orphans:** The category includes unattached boys up to the age of 16 and girls until they are married, or gainfully employed whose parents are dead and who have no adult relative in a position to support them.

(e) **Dependents:** These imply to dependents of persons in categories, (a) and (b) entitled to gratuitous relief. These are wives, unmarried daughters and sons up to the age of 16 years as also dependents of category, (c) which include unmarried daughters and sons up to the age of 16 years.

(f) **Hard Cases:** These are not strictly covered by the above categories but may be admitted into the Homes at the discretion of the head of the state women's section.

But in 1952, the government coined the terms 'partial permanent liability', 'complete but terminable liability' and 'complete permanent liability'.[44] Complete permanent liability denoted those displaced persons who due to age or infirmity cannot do any useful work and who had none in a position to support them at present or in the future. 'Partial permanent liabilities' were those, who after some training, became partially responsible towards their own maintenance and of their dependents while 'complete but terminable liability', were the dependent children of unattached women (those who had no adult able-bodied son, father or father-in-law or any other relative in a position to support them), ~~were~~ and orphans included unattached boys up to the age of 16 and girls until they were married or gainfully employed.

The Central Advisory Committee, in a meeting held on the 21 February 1956, advised the Government of India to modify its policy regarding the children of those single mothers who ceased to be the responsibility of the government because they were earning but whose income was not sufficient for maintaining their offsprings. The Committee was of the opinion that

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44 Asoka Gupta Archives, File 3, Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Letter No.RHAW-97(1)/52, New Delhi, dated 18 August 1952 (School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta).

children of such working mothers whose earnings were between Rs.60/- to Rs.100/- per month should be admitted.[45]

In a meeting held on 27 June 1956, with the Central Advisory Committee, the Union Minister of Rehabilitation pointed out:[46]

> ...the Government was already committed to the maintenance and care of a very large number of displaced persons living in homes and infirmaries... once Government accepted the responsibility of looking after children of working mothers, living outside homes, our commitments would be indefinite... only cases of children of widows, who themselves were otherwise eligible for admission to homes but were living outside and were not able to maintain all their children from their meagre income might be considered for maintenance by Government.

In fact, the government adopted a policy of gradual liquidation as also reduction in overhead charges in respect of administration, sanitation, lighting, medical relief and education etc. in the Homes. At the same time, it decided to encourage private organisations to open homes and infirmaries to ease its own pressure. The government also declared that admission to P.L. Camps should be limited to exceptionally deserving cases, and each case should be thoroughly enquired into. Screening of inmates of the P.L. Camps should be made in the initial stage in order to weed out the non-eligibles

As per the rule, during screening, families with boys who have attained the age of 18, were declared ineligible, but it so happened that the earnings of these boys were often not enough to maintain their families.

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45 Asoka Gupta Archives, File 2, Meeting of the Central Advisory Committee held on 10 January 1957.

46 Ibid.

Government's high handedness became evident in the case of these otherwise helpless displaced persons. Thus Joya Chatterji's definition denoting only infirm, women and children as permanent liability is rather incomplete. The government made distinctions amongst them also.

Sandip Bandyopadhyay's and Prafulla Chakrabarti's portrayal of the refugees' failure to come to terms with migration and their failure to understand it as the final journey tells only one side of the story. During the course of my interviews I have come across people like Smt. Dutta, an erstwhile resident of Chittagong, who at the moment of migration, realised that she was setting out for a journey of no-return. To Sri Mondal of Khulna migration brought a sense of relief since to him it meant a journey from the insecured environment of East Bengal to a safe place. Not everybody is immersed in the nostalgia of their erstwhile homeland and many now treat themselves as inhabitants of West Bengal with conviction. Previous studies fails to bring this aspect to the fore.

The existing historiography offers us a wealth of information on the Eastern tragedy. But it does suffer from certain limitations, which when modified and supplemented with adequate data and information, offer scope for further study. But as a launching pad, the wide range of study at hand, offers ample scope and opportunity.

In the foregoing paragraphs, I have outlined some of the major works dealing with the East Bengali refugees. Now I come to what I, myself propose to do in this dissertation.

In line with the emerging trend, I, too, have tried to highlight on the experience of the refugees. Hence I begin by defining the term "refugee" since he is the fulcrum of my dissertation. Derived from the Latin word 'refugium', the word originally meant "shelter, security, a haven."

According to Sir John Hope-Simpson – 'a refugee is one who finds himself deprived of legal action, mutual support, the access to employment, and the measure of freedom of movement which happier mortals take as a matter of course.'[47] In an ordered world this legal protection and mutual support constituting what might be called social security is enjoyed by the nationals of a sovereign state. Security is extended to them, not only at home, but when they move around the world in other countries. The refugee has no such security but exists in any country on sufferance.

As per the UNHCR stipulation:[48]

> A refugee is a person who owing to persecution or well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, colour, religion, political belief or membership of a particular social group
>
> a) Leaves the state of which he is a national, or the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, of which he is a habitual resident; or
>
> b) Being outside such state or country is unable or unwilling to return to it or to avail himself of its protection.

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47 Quoted in Jacques Vernant, The Refugees in the Post-War World (London, 1953), pp,4-5.

48 United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Basic International Legal Documents on Refugees (New Delhi, 1999), p.140.

Stephen L. Keller defines a refugee as the "epitome of the transitional man, a man whose roots have been torn out of the soil of his traditional life."[49]

Keller divides the whole gamut of refugees into three broad types: those who have become refugees due to economic causes; those who have become refugees due to war, and those who owe their refugee status to political, religious or ethnic reasons. It is this third category which corresponds to the refugees studied here.

Keller defines this third category of refugees as:[50]

> Those people who as the result of a new government or new politics find themselves a threatened minority in a hostile environment merely because of some characteristic of their identity. It may be that their ethnic or religious community is out of harmony with a new governing majority or because of certain political beliefs held by some members of the community. Because of this dissonance, they leave the environment for safer shores.... They generally head for some territory they view as safer, often a neighbouring country where their group rules.

At this juncture, one needs to differentiate between a refugee and a migrant. Although the terms are often used as synonyms, technically their meanings are different. Every migrant is not a refugee, but every refugee is a migrant. Migration may or may not be voluntary, but becoming a refugee always involves an element of compulsion. Refugees are a particular variety of migrants – they are 'forced migrants'.

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49 Stephen L. Keller, Uprooting and Social Change: The Role of Refugees in Development (New Delhi, 1975), Preface, p.XVII.

50 Ibid., pp.7-8.

Charles Tilly identifies five types of migration:[51]

i) **Colonizing migration**. In its pure form this means the expansion of the geographic range of a given population by moving intact segments of the population into territories they had not previously occupied. Tilly cites the example of European farmers who moved to the American frontier, often en bloc.

ii) **Coerced migration**. This entails obligatory departure, forced severing of most or all ties at the place of origin, and little or no personal connection between the migrants and people at the destination. Migrants of the post-Partition era, bears some resemblance to this category.

iii) **Circular migration**. This means creation of a regular circuit in which migrants retain their claims and contacts with a home base and routinely return to that base after a period of activity elsewhere. East Bengali Hindus in the pre-Partition era, who came over to Calcutta, in search of jobs and education but had their base in East Bengal, falls into this category.

iv) **Chain migration**. This involves sets of related individuals or households who move from one place to another through a set of social arrangements in which people at the destination provide aid,

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51 Charles Tilly, "Transplanted Networks" in Virginia Yans Maclaughlin, ed., Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology and Politics (New York, 1990), p.88.

information, and encouragement to the newcomers. Tilly cites the example of the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who travelled in such chains.

v) **Career migration**. This involves individuals and households that move in response to opportunities to changed position within or among large organisational structures, such as corporations, states, and professional labour markets. Tilly gives the example of American medical services which draw doctors and nurses from overseas through professional networks and multinational corporations

These five types clearly overlap, but Partition-induced migration, bears some resemblance to Tilly's "Coerced Migration" and the refugees may hence be termed as 'coerced migrants' but that too, in the special sense of the term. It is possible to regard people who go abroad in search of job opportunities, because suitable opportunities are not available at home, as 'forced migrants' also. What sets apart a refugee from other types of 'forced migrants' is his refugee experience – the psychological trauma that the refugees often suffer during and after migration. Moreover, many of the refugees from East Bengal, were fortunate enough to have acquaintances, friends or relatives in West Bengal. Hence, the refugees from the East, loosely pertains to Tilly's definition of 'coerced migration'.

After reaching the destination, comes the question of adaptation. Psychological problems may play a major part, in adaptability and so does the refugee experience conditioned to a large extent by the interaction between

the refugees and the members of the host society which either amplify the state of shock and depression and the dependency syndrome that the refugees tend to acquire; on the other hand, it may be converted into a healthy atmosphere, with both sides interacting and exchanging ideas.

Michael Banton identifies a step by step process of adaptation, based on the concept of power. The refugees are a less powerful group vis-à-vis the host society.[52]

Acculturation, Banton points out is mainly a one-way process where the less powerful group sheds its cultural values and traditions in order to become more like the group in power, and in the process perhaps lose their identity. Banton next coins the concept of 'integration' where racial distinctions are disregarded or are given only minor considerations. Integration means interaction between the groups at most levels in housing, schooling, employment, in interest groups, in friendships, and in social relationships such as marriage.

Assimilation or amalgamation which comes next, refers to inter-racial marriage and its variations including intimate social interaction and living in harmony. Assimilation can occur without acculturation and is often regarded as an inevitable consequence of interaction. Once a group enters freely into the social clubs, cliques, organisations and institutions of the other group on a peer basis, intermarriage and other levels of assimilation will generally follow.

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52 "Race Relations" in H.L. Kitano, ed., Race Relations (New Jersey, 1980).

Adaptation among the refugees, depends on a large extent to the 'survival syndrome', that is a will to survive come what may. Furthermore, in the adaptive mechanism, the proper adjustment and integration of any migrant community into the receiving society depends on certain other factors like pre-migrational characteristics including economic ones. This includes the worldview and the way of life of the migrants as well as the degree of traditionalism. For the receiving society, the degree of urbanisation, industrialisation and demographic composition of the society would determine the extent of adjustment and adaptation process. For the process of adaptation we have to look from the both perspectives, i.e. of the refugees as well as the host society, which would include the government and the local people. Only through these would one be in a position to observe the extent of reciprocity, intermingling and interpenetration. The adaptation process depends on the interplay and interaction of both the communities.

I have tried to observe these interactions with regard to the experience of the East Bengali Hindu migrants who came over to the state of West Bengal, with special reference to some particular areas within the state which roughly correspond to the Calcutta Metropolitan District (or CMD). "A Metropolitan area consists of two or more urban centres having independent local Governments together with the adjoining semi-urban areas and those non-urban areas which will be affected by the expansion of the urban centres

in question within the foreseeable future."[53] The Calcutta Metropolitan District includes the core city of Calcutta and some portions of the districts of Twenty-four Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and a small part of Nadia in the north. As per the 1974 modifications of the CMD boundary, the Calcutta Metropolitan District covers an area of 540 square miles and comprises of 33 municipalities, two corporations, thirty-seven non-municipal urban units and five hundred and forty-four rural mouzas.[54] I have however included the whole of the four above-mentioned districts for a better understanding of the subject since, as I have pointed out later on, Twenty-Four Parganas and Nadia accounted for a high percentage of refugee concentration. In fact, Twenty-Four Parganas, as per a survey conducted in 1950, recorded the highest percentage of refugee population, Calcutta came second, followed by Nadia. Among the districts of South Bengal, Howrah and Hooghly came next.

In writing my dissertation I have used government documents, namely Legislative Asembly debates, Constituent Assembly and Parliamentary debates, Estimate Committees Reports, Annual Reports of the Ministry of Rehabilitation and various official publications. I have also used newspapers, creative writings of the period, journals, interviews, memoirs and autobiographies, and pamphlets of the refugees.

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53 United Nations, Planning for Urban and Regional Development in Asia and the Far East (New York, 1971), p.79.

54 Government of West Bengal, Calcutta's Urban Future (Calcutta, 1991), p.114.

All these no doubt help in offering an insight into the topic. The government documents are a treasure-house of information and provide a thorough understanding of the various policies formulated and implemented. While the debates on the floor of the house and the government pamphlets help us to understand the government's point of view, the Estimates Committee reports, newspaper reports, contemporary journals and pamphlets of the refugees offer a critical analysis of the government's performance in the implementation of those policies. The data provided in the Annual Reports of the Ministry give an overview of the Ministry's performance in the stipulated year.

The rest of the sources which I have taken recourse to, i.e., interviews, autobiographies and memoirs fall within the category of what Louis Gottschalk calls "personal documents".[55] Gyanendra Pandey believes History – "...as one kind of practice of recollection".[56] This 'practice of recollection', he feels "form an important part of the historian's sources and the basis indeed of much of the historical record."[57]

Creative writings, too, fall within this category. They can be looked upon as the 'lived experiences' of the past. "Novelists", points out Ian Talbot,

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55 Louis Gottschalk, ed., The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology (New York, 1945).

56 Gyanendra Pandey, Memory, History and the Question of Violence: Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition (Calcutta, 1999), p.24.

57 Ibid.

"have fully addressed the human agonies which accompanied Partition."[58]

Hence, one should take cognizance of these aspects also. Government records and documents deal with one side of the story. They do not reflect the mentality, the psychological scar, the trauma, the pain, the anguish, the sufferings of the common man who, in these accounts, is nothing more than a mere number in the sea of figures. It is necessary to supplement these facts and figures with these so-called personal documents. Thus creative writings, autobiographical accounts, interviews broaden the scope of the historians to understand the human dimension of Partition.

However, one should be careful in accepting the informations at face value, because as E.H. Carr has warned, "No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought."[59]

Hence all documents in a sense, fall within the category of subjective documents. The statistics and data supplied by the government may be doctored and manipulated to suit the government's purpose. In fact, it so happens that information contained in the government reports and that in the

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58 Ian Talbot, "Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition" in D.A. Low and Howard Brasted, ed., Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence (New Delhi, 1998), p.39.

59 E.H. Carr, What is History? (London, 1961), p.16.

newspapers do not tally. While the Government of India claimed to have forwarded loans to the tune of Rs.54.60 crores, between 1947 and 1958[60] newspaper reports put the amount at Rs.47 crores, for the same period.[61]

"Personal documents", on the other hand reveals "the participant's view of experiences in which he had been involved."[62] He will tend to see things from his own perspective. A 'forced migrant' from East Bengal, while writing his memoir, or during the course of an interview will highlight and emphasise on the humiliation and insult suffered at the hands of the Muslims after the creation of Pakistan. He will, however, remain reticent on the fact that being the prosperous of the two communities in the pre-Partition days, the Hindus may have treated the Muslims with contempt.

Thus as Carr advises, "The facts, whether found in documents or not, have still to be processed by the historian before he can make any use of them...."[63] Unless this is done, a holistic view of the subject concerned, may not be possible.

Chapter I of my dissertation tries to look at the relationship between the people of East Bengal and West Bengal in the pre-Independence era, with the city of Calcutta as the backdrop. This is necessary in order to

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60 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report 1960-61 (New Delhi, 1961), p.114.

61 Jugantar, 7 April 1960.

62 Gottschalk, op. cit., p.177.

63 Carr, op. cit., p.16

understand the relationship in the post-Partition years. This chapter is not based on any hard core data or statistics, but on popular beliefs, general assumptions, personal recollections and creative writings.

Chapter II deals with the causes and magnitude of the exodus from East Pakistan in the years following Partition. The main problem that I faced in writing this chapter is the paucity of a variety of sources. The main channel of information is the refugees, who crossed over to this side. Audio-visual media was not developed and the print media not that advanced and probing as it is today. Hence, even newspaper reports, too, tend to be based on the information supplied by the refugees. It seems that the East Pakistan Government effectively blocked the leaking out of incidents of persecution. As Nehru himself acknowledged, "A kind of iron curtain fell on East Bengal...."[64] Even the Indian Deputy High Commissioner stationed in Dacca was not in a position to travel freely throughout East Pakistan and collect information on the atrocities to prepare a report and despatch it. When he wanted to proceed to Barisal to study the situation there, the East Bengal Government informed him that it needed to consult the local authorities before it could give a definite reply and that it would take sometime. The permission never came. Hence informations can be gleaned only from the personal memoirs and recollections of the Hindu refugees and surveys conducted on the condition of the minorities in East Pakistan by a few individuals and organisations (both Hindus by religion and minorities by status). Individuals

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64 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Speeches, Vol.Two, p.137.

who came over, gave particulars of ghastly occurrences and it goes without saying that people who had gone through great ordeals are not in a position to give a correct account of their experiences and are apt to exaggerate.

After the Nehru-Liaqat Pact of April 1950, situation, as far as the availability of information is concerned, improved a bit. With the setting up of the Search Service Bureau and some relaxation in the movement of the Deputy High Commissioner, regular reports were sent to India which were tabled in the Parliament.

Even then we get to know only one side of the story. We see the whole episode of persecution from the looking glass of India. There is not much source on hand that would have helped us in understanding the viewpoint of the 'other side'.

Chapter III looks at the attitudes of the local people in Calcutta and of the Government towards the refugees. It discusses now this shaped the future course of events. I have tried to make a distinction between the Government of West Bengal and the Government of India wherever possible. But unless specified 'government' refers to Government of West Bengal. The period covered in this chapter is from 1947 to 1958 since in mid-1958, Government of India categorically declared, that any fresh migrant would not be eligible for any rehabilitation assistance from the Government.

Chapter IV covers the period from mid-1958 to 1960 the year the Ministry of Rehabilitation decided to terminate its tenure. It is an attempt to analyse the concluding phase of the ministry's work.

Chapter V focuses on the aspect of adaptability of the refugees and also how their presence reshaped the socio-cultural life of Calcutta.

I, finally, pull together the different strands to weave a Conclusion.

CHAPTER-I

BANGAL AND GHATI IN CALCUTTA SOCIETY: PRE-PARTITION YEARS

India was sliced into two separate dominions by their colonial masters in August 1947 - Indian Union and Pakistan. The latter was carved out after the dissection of mainly the Muslim-majority areas of Bengal and Punjab. The eastern part of Bengal – christened as East Pakistan – comprising near about two-third's of the former area of Bengal proper, passed on to Pakistan, forming the Eastern wing of the new state. The western part which came to be reborn as West Bengal and was practically little over one-third of the area of undivided Bengal, remained with the newly independent Indian Union.

But although emerging as separate political entities only after 1947, the concept of East Bengal and West Bengal has existed in the common Bengali psyche from the pre-Partition days. The river Ganges is the great divider. Bengalis usually look upon themselves as hailing from "this side" or "that side" of the river. The river, itself, assumes different names on either side. What is Hugli in West Bengal, is Padma in the east.

The relationship between the Bengali-speaking Hindu population of the Eastern part of Bengal and that of the Western wing – 'Bangal' and 'Ghati' in common parlance -- is guided by the notion of the 'self' and the 'other' where

the 'other' is always viewed through the looking – glass of 'self' and its virtues are extolled, often exaggerated, to lend an aura of superiority.

But why this distinction? Are not the bonds of race, language and religion strong enough to iron out such apparently 'trivial' differences? It is true that given the ties of kinship, cultural values and community behaviour, the notion seems somewhat ambivalent to an outsider. But if one cares to lift this veneer of unity and take a closer look, the reality is that, behind this facade of apparent oneness, can be located some fundamental differences in food habits, customs, rituals and above all dialect, which set apart the 'self' from the 'other'.

Let us start with, by delving into the origin of the two nomenclatures -- 'Bengal' and "Ghati". But for this, one needs to have a broad overview of the historical and geographical lineaments of the area of Bengal.

Till the later half of the fourth century A.D., the area that later became Bengal, was essentially a loose conglomeration of semi-autonomous provinces namely Pundra, Banga, Samatat, Radh, Tamralipti, Harikela etc. In the late fourth century A.D., it was the conquest of Samudragupta probably the greatest of the Kings of the Gupta dynasty that helped to lend a semblance of unity to these autonomous provinces. This process of territorial integration, flagged off by Samudragupta, reached its culmination in the eighth century AD under the aegis of Pala rulers -- the first dynasty to concretise the concept of hereditary rule in Bengal.

The geographical contours of Bengal, down the ages, have been subjected to several bouts of addition and subtraction. In 1572, during the heyday of Mughal rule, Orissa was annexed by Emperor Akbar. In 1719, the domain of Bengal, by then the most fertile and prosperous of the Mughal provinces, further expanded with the annexation and inclusion of Bihar. The end of the Mughal era and the beginning of colonial subjugation did not diminish the importance of Bengal. She became the fulcrum of the British Indian empire, – the richest and the most prosperous of the provinces, nestling the imperial capital at Calcutta.

However, two centuries later, this jewel in the crown of the British Empire in India, fell from grace in the eyes of her colonial masters due to the surging tide of nationalist feelings, that posed a direct threat to imperial dominance and supremacy. The punishment – administered by the then Viceroy Lord Curzon -- was the partitioning of the province on the false pretext of administrative convenience, that was meted out in 1905 – the real 'motive' being to break the back bone of the political aspirations of the natives as also to wage a schism between the Hindus and the Muslims, in line with the avowed principle of Divide and Rule. But their much deliberated, debated and carefully thought out plan failed. Partition in fact boomeranged acting as a catalyst in abetting anti-colonial agitation, and opening up new vistas of protest like Swadeshi and Boycott.[1] The Government had to bow before the

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1 For details, see Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-08 (New Delhi, 1973).

mounting pressure, but not before dealing a last blow. The annulment of Partition in 1911 was accompanied by the transfer of the Imperial capital to New Delhi and the reduction in areas by chopping away of Bihar and Orissa, which together now formed a separate state. The term Bengal after 1912, thus came to denote the region lying between Bihar on the west, Assam on the east and the foot of the Himalayas on the north, and Orissa and the Bay of Bengal on the south. It is this area that was further partitioned in 1947.

We now enter into a discussion on the origin of the two terms. The root word of the term ' Bangal', is 'Banga', (that can be obtained after omitting the alphabet 'l'). In the ancient period, the term Banga roughly corresponded to the geographical area of what we subsequently, i.e., after 1912 referred to as 'Purba Banga' or Eastern Bengal. Any resident of Banga, was denoted as a Bangal.[2]

The genesis of the word 'Ghati'; on the other hand, can be traced to the title 'Bandyaghati' conferred on the Brahmins of the Rarh region. A somewhat shortened version of the original word 'Ghati' was used to denote the Brahmin inhabitants of the region. Gradually, with the passage of time, the word acquired a wider connotation to symbolise any and every resident of Rarhdesh or West Bengal.[3]

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2 Bhattojee, "Ghati-Bangal Chingri Ilish" in Amitabha Chaudhuri, ed., Desh (Calcutta, April 2000), p.38.

3 Ibid.

Moti Nandy offers an interesting and amusing explanation as to how the 'Calcatians' i.e., the original inhabitants of Calcutta, came to be labeled by the tag 'Ghati'. In the nineteenth century, when water taps were unknown in every home in Calcutta, most of the households had its own well. The pots and buckets used for drawing water would often fall into the well. In the afternoon, some men would do the round of the neighbourhood with a rope and a hook, shouting, 'Ghati tulben?'. i.e., 'Want the pots taken out?' Finally they abbreviated their call to just shouting 'Ghati!'. The East Bengalis who lived in these areas at that time heard this daily shout and assumed that the locals were referred to as 'Ghatis'. Hence their reference to the West Bengalis as 'Ghati'.[4]

Against this backdrop, I now identify the areas of difference between the two groups. Dialect is perhaps the most fundamental of the factors that separates the 'self' from the 'other'. Bengali, the common mother tongue, has certain regional varieties or dialects. The main features of the Bangal tongue are:[5]

I. Retention of epenthesis

II. The vocals 'e' and 'o' are pronounced as 'x' and 'u'

III. Nasalised vowels are turned to oral vowels.

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4 Moti Nandy, "Football and Nationalism" in Geeti Sen, ed., The Calcutta Psyche (New Delhi, 1967).

5 Subhadra Kumar Sen, "The Origin of Bengali" in B. Chattopadhyay, ed., Culture of Bengal through the Ages (Burdwan, 1990).

IV. Aspirated stops are replaced by recursives

V. In Pronunciation 'e', 'ch' and 'l' becomes 'its', 's' and 'z' respectively, redial 'h' phonetically unrealised, the sibilants 's' and 'sh' becomes 'h' (e.g.: *aaj* or today becomes *aaiz*; *shona*, i.e., to hear becomes *hona*).

VI. Verbal ending-lam is used (*karlam* or have done)

VII. Lack of certain phonological phenomena in East Bengal dialect such as Vowel Harmony, Umlaut etc. make their prounciation more akin to the standard Sadhu Bhasa or the chaste Bengali spelling.

The Ghati tongue is identifiable by the following peculiarities:[6]

I. Changes resulting from umlaut and vowel harmony

II. In pronunciation 'd' becomes 'o'.

III. Use of the endings - *lum* first person singular and - *le* for transitive and intransitive third person singular (E.g. '*Korlaam*' or have done in first person singular is pronunced as *karlum*').

In this connection one is reminded of several amusing anecdotes. In the light of our present discussion, one such humorous piece will not be out of context.

The children of Padma and Ganga have two separate terms for 'home' or one's place of residence. What is 'Bari' to the former is 'Basha' to the latter. Confusion arises when one enters the East where ' Basha' essentially means

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6 Ibid.

a bird' nest. The story is that when a Ghati once innocently enquired about a Bangal's 'basha', the latter became livid with anger and retorted: "Is my father a scavenger, a crow or vulture that I will have a 'basha'?" The East Bengali is sure to feel insulted when one asks the whereabouts of his 'basha' which to him signifies a cramped and claustrophobic place.[7]

Food habits too differ on either side of the river. Bangals are the self-proclaimed connoisseurs of good food, who could never let go an opportunity to boast of their culinary skills. A Bangal usually prefers a generous helping of spices in his palate. The epicurean Bangal, feels the right combination of spices and herbs could work wonders to transform any dish into a gastronomical delight. Ghati items on the contrary, are bereft of such spicy ingredients. A lavish sprinkling of sweeteners is the trademark of any West Bengali recipe. A Ghati thus dismisses a Bangal dish as too spicy and consequently not good for health while to a Bangal tongue a Ghati preparation tastes bland and insipid.

The caste system, too, shows shades of variations. The Kayasthas of Bengal are divided into Kulins and non-Kulins or Mouliks. But the surnames that denote Kulinism in West Bengal, may not signify the same thing on the other side. The Mitras are Kulins in West Bengal but Mouliks in East Bengal, whereas Guhas are Mouliks in West Bengal but Kulins in East Bengal. Boses and Ghoses are all Kulins in West Bengal, but some of them have become

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7 Bhattojee, op. cit., p.38.

degraded into Mouliks in East Bengal while the rest are Kulins. Among East Bengali Kulins there is no fixed rule that the eldest son must marry a Kulin girl, but in West it is compulsory for the eldest son to marry a Kulin.

Bangal-Ghati intermarriage, in those days, was a rare phenomenon. In his epic novel, 'Purba-Paschim' (The East and the West) Sunil Gangopadhyay, through his portrayal of the character of Supriti, brings out the plight of an East Bengali girl married into a West Bengali family. Even after thirty years of marriage, Supriti remained a 'Bangal bari-r meye' to her in-laws. Within a few months of her marriage, Supriti, willingly and consciously erased out the East Bengali tone from her speech and adopted the Ghati tongue, got used to having less spicy Ghati dishes, but even then she could never win over her in-laws. To them, she always remained the outsider.[8]

The Bangal-Ghati divide in the Bengali society can be traced right back to eighth century – the time of Charyapada. One of the contributors, Sarahapada chides a friend of his for marrying into an East Bengali family. Another of the contributors, Bhusukapada laments the ill-luck that his wicked and crafty East Bengali wife has brought upon him. The great Vaishnava leader Sri Chaitanya in the fifteenth-sixteenth century, reportedly once entertained his mother after his travels in the East by deliberately mimicking the manner of the speech of the Bangal.

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[8] Sunil Gangopadhyay, Purba-Paschim (Calcutta, 1988).

This tradition surfaced in Calcutta in the mid-nineteenth century when the city expanded with the consolidation of the British rule. Being the citadel of British Indian power and boasting of India's first university (University of Calcutta set up on 24th January 1857) as well some premier educational institutions, Calcutta, from mid-nineteenth century emerged as the happy hunting ground for fortune-seekers from outside. The energetic and enterprising children of the Padma were no exception. Better prospects of job and education lured many middle class East Bengali Hindus to Calcutta. Boarding houses, bearing the names of their hometowns in East Bengal-Sylhet mess, Comilla mess, Dhaka mess-mushroomed in Calcutta.

Presidency College, Calcutta Medical College and Hospital and Calcutta University of yester years boasted of creme de le creme of the students from "that" part of Bengal. It was from amongst them, came one Jadunath Sarkar, and one Meghnad Saha. In undivided Bengal during the pre-Partition era, the general level of education among the middle classes was higher in the eastern part in comparison to western part. Manas Roy reminiscences that among the few precious belongings that his parents managed to bring during their cross-border migration following the Partition in 1947 were large volumes of Greenwich Encylopaedia, a testimony to the intense love of learning in the East.[9] Smt. Nalini Mitra, too, narrates a similar

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9 Manas Roy, "Growing Up Refugee – On Memory and Locality", in Pradip Bose, ed., Refugees, p.176.

experience. When her family decided to leave East Bengal, she packed her books in her hold-all leaving all other household items.[10]

But the legacy of Sri Chaitanya, that is, looking down on the people of the East and mimicking and making fun of their dialect, continued. Sunil Gangopadhyay brings this out through the experience of Pratap, one of the chief protagonists of 'Purba-Paschim'. A student of the Ripon College (later renamed as Surendranath College) in Calcutta in the early 1940s, Pratap was insulted on the very first day of his college life, because of his English pronunciation. His teacher, Prof. B.D. Aich, sarcastically questioned him, "Where is your home? On the other side? Please do not insult the English language by your horrible pronunciation." R.N. Sen reminiscences that boys studying in Calcutta at the beginning of the century heard the jingle – "Bangals are not human beings/they jump onto trees/although they have no tails."[11] An erstwhile resident of Barisal recollects that during his college days spent in Howrah, there was only one East Bengali family in their locality, originally hailing from Faridpur. That particular house bore the brandname "Bangal - der- Bari" or "House of the Banglas" christened by their Ghati neighbours.[12] Sri Bhattacharya, a student in the early 1940s, recalls that the

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10 Excerpts from Interview, June 2000.

11 R.N. Sen, In Clive Street (Calcutta, 1981), p.4.

12 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

locals of Dhakuria, where he used to stay in his maternal uncle's house, used to tease him by calling names.[13]

They remained the butt of jokes, being often assumed to be uncultured, rustic country bumpkins unfit to be a part of the "urbane" society of Calcutta. Everything associated with them – their dialect, their custom – were looked down upon and joked about. A few, popular rhymes among the Ghatis, were:

> Du char lathi parle ghare, tabe
> Bangal bujhte pare.[14]

Another one goes like this![15]

> "Dhopa jaane konjon kangal,
> Shekra jaane konjon Bangal.

The cleavage perhaps widened with the setting up of the East Bengal football club in 1921. With the name conjuring up the nostalgia of their homeland, the Bangals immediately joined its fold, the Ghatis having already reposed their faith in the Mohun Bagan Club founded in 1889. The Ghati - Bangal divide now spilled over to the football stadium. Racing pulses, sleepless nights, throbbing heartbeats preceded any Mohun Bagan-East Bengal match. In the evening after a football match, prices of prawn and hilsa

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13 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

14 Sushil Kumar Dey, Bangla Prabad (Calcutta, Ashwin, 1352, October 1945), p.97. Bangals are so dull that even elementary things are beyond their grasp.

15 Dey, op. cit., p.49. Just as a washerman can easily identify a pauper by a look at his clothes, a goldsmith knows who is a Bangal among hundreds of his customers, since it is very easy to hoodwink a Bangal.

rose or fell depending on the results of the game. (prawn for Mohun Bagan, hilsa for East Bengal).

A feeling of division and separatedness arose. The Ghatis feared that the energetic Bangals would leave them far behind in every sphere of life and would make life difficult for their children. The Ghatis used their pretensions to keep themselves apart. Thus the feeling of East and West, of them and us was very much a part of life in undivided Bengal.

It is in this context that the relationship between the millions of East Bengalis who were uprooted from their ancestral homes and swarmed across the border in post-1947 to crowd West Bengal in search of a safe haven amidst their co-religionists, and the people of West should be studied.

CHAPTER-II

REASON FOR THE EXODUS AND MAGNITUDE OF THE EXODUS

"It was the best of times it was the worst of times" – this Dickensian depiction of the situation in France during the tumultuous days of the Revolution, holds true for India of August 1947. While India rejoiced on 15 August 1947 at gaining freedom from nearly two centuries of colonial rule, she also shed tears for paying the costly price of Partition. The vivisection of the eastern and the western flank of British India led to the uprooting and displacement of millions of people from their ancestral homes in Bengal and Punjab. Eastern Bengal and Western Punjab, together now formed the new province of Pakistan – the land of the pure. Punjab and Bengal bore the bitter consequences of Partition, as the surging tide of uprooted mass lashed the shores of these two maimed and dismembered states.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In Section-I, my focus will be on the factor that abetted the process of uprooting from East Bengal christened as East Pakistan after 1956, and in Section-II, the magnitude of the exodus.

SECTION-I

REASON FOR THE EXODUS

The East Bengali Hindus have the reputation of being home birds, deeply attached to their hearths. It is true that better prospects of job and

education have lured many middle class East Bengali Hindus to the other side especially to Calcutta long before Partition. But even then they could not get over the hangover of their ancestral home. It is the vision of an otherwise insignificant tiny hamlet with a small rivulet flowing by, the sound of the blowing of conch-shells in the evening, the lilting tunes of the agomoni song the endless vista of golden harvests, that sustained the East Bengalis amidst the humdrums and the drudgeries of city life. A typical recollection:[1]

> Every night before going off to sleep, I strike out the date in the calendar and count the days when I will start off for home. One of my classmates once sarcastically asked me – 'why do you always run off to the village during the holidays? What attracts you to the village life? What is there – except mosquitoes, malaria, jungles, nothing but a monotonous life.' How can I make them understand the charms of a village life? How can I make them understand the joy, the pleasure that one can derive by plunging into the waters of the Ichhamati, by inhaling the scent of 'siuli' during the festive season in autumn? How can I make those, who have not seen our village resplendant with the first ray of the sun, understand what is there in my village? The moment I step onto the banks and touch the ground, my whole body starts shivering with excitement. At least, I will be able to spend a few days in peace and tranquility away from the mechanical city life.

Hence the question is: in the wake of Partition what compelled them to abandon the pleasure and security of their ancestral home – their beloved Sonar Bangla? This question is more intriguing in view of the fact that as per one survey non-Muslims were the most predominating people in East Bengal, though they constituted only 30% of the total population.[2] More than 70% ordinary government services and nearly 80% higher offices in East Bengal

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1 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., op. cit., pp.13-14.

2 Samar Guha, Non-Muslims Behind the Curtain of East Pakistan (Dacca, no date), p.16.

were held by non-Muslims.[3] Nearly 80% national wealth of East Bengal belonged to non-Muslim minorities.[4] Majority of buildings and properties in each town of East Bengal, in some cases more than 85% of the town holdings were owned by the Hindus.[5] All noteworthy industrial concerns of East Bengal, namely nine cotton mills, two glassworks, four match factories and one cement manufacturing work, were organised financed and controlled and were still owned (at the time of Partition) by non-Muslims. Four important banks which greatly influenced economic life of Bengal as a whole, were established and controlled by the Hindus and had their head offices in East Bengal.[6] East Bengal had 1,290 high schools, 47 colleges and 68 girls' schools and institutions which were privately organised and financed by Hindus and 90% teachers from University to high schools, were Hindus.[7]

Therefore, we ask the question again and again – how can just one line drawn on the map change the fate of millions of East Bengali Hindus and reduce them to the ranks of "udvastu" or "sharanarthi"? The question assumes significance, when one bears in mind that unlike the carnage in the west, Bengal witnessed no large-scale killings immediately after

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3 Ibid., p.30.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p.31.

7 Ibid.

Partition.Rather the riots which preceded Partition gradually petered out after the proclamation of Independence.

The answer, to put simply, is the deliberate and sustained mental torture which the East Bengali Hindus were subjected to by their fellow Muslim cohabitants in collusion with the administration in the years immediately after Partition, roughly till 1950, when situation turned violent. Anthony Mascarenhas has described in his article in the Sunday Times of London, Islamabad's policy with regard to East Pakistan:[8]

> When the Hindus have been eliminated by death and flight, their property will be bait to win over the Muslim middle class. This will provide the base for erecting administrative and political structures in the future.

Why did the Government of East Pakistan embark upon a policy of Hindu elimination? To find an answer to this, it is necessary to look back to the pre-Partition balance of power in East Bengali society tilted heavily in favour of the Hindus. The result – an overwhelmingly prosperous Hindu community and in comparison, a somewhat backward Muslim community. The Hindus took advantage of this dichotomous situation in exploiting the Muslims who were often treated as untouchables.

If a pariah dog entered a Hindu household, the drinking water, stored in the earthen pitcher, was thrown away, but when a Muslim had the 'audacity' to cross the courtyard and enter the house, not only the water, but

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8 D.R. Mankekar, Pak Colonialism in East Bengal (Bombay, 1971), pp.24-25.

the whole earthen pitcher was summarily disposed off. An erstwhile Hindu resident of Barisal recalls that once convicted of stealing some fruits (although there was no eye-witness), a Muslim subject was punished – the punishment being the uprooting of his beard.

The Hindus moved about with a superior air in those days and often incited Muslim passion by provocative acts like playing music before the mosques. Being subjugated and trampled upon, it is but natural that their pent-up grievances would burst forth with the creation of Pakistan, on religious lines. For them, 15 August 1947, perhaps signified liberation not only from British rule, but also from the stranglehold of the Hindus.

In fact, in many cases, Hindu migration was prompted by this fear of retaliation, even before any actual occurrence. Sunil Kanti Mukhopadhyay acknowledges this – "We were besieged with fear – once upon a time, we had beaten them mercilessly for incidents like stealing coconuts. Now, if they do the same!"[9] Rabindranath Banerjee narrates that his father, a lawyer by profession, made up his mind to leave, when, one day, while returning home, he noticed an elderly Hindu gentleman being forced to do sit-ups for some misdoings of his son.[10]

It is this disrespect, this exploitation, perpetrated in the pre-Partition days, that triggered the process of elimination in the post-Partition days.

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9 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, Deshbhag: Smriti aar Satta (Calcutta, 1999), p.17 (Translation mine).

10 Excerpts from Interview, March 2001.

Tension has been brewing right from the 1920s. Relation between the two communities was not that cordial as is often portrayed in the conventional discourse which projects the picture of a happy and tolerant co-existence. It is true that, to some extent, camaraderie, marked the relation between the two communities. Smt. Manju Bandyopadhyay reminiscences that even in 1946, they had played Holi with the Muslim girls on the streets of Faridpur town[11] while Smt. Nalini Mitra recalls that the Nawab of Dacca used to lead the Janmashtami procession, in which Muslims spontaneously participated.[12]

But beneath, this picture of amity, all was not well. From the middle of the 1920s, situation started deteriorating. Trouble broke out in Dacca University in 1925 when Muslim students of the University objected to the practiced custom of decorating the dais with earthen pots during annual functions, as indicative of Hindu hegemonic domination. Riots broke out in Dacca, for the first time in 1926 and as Nalini Mitra recalls, interaction with the Muslim families lessened.[13] It is true that at that stage, the Hindus could not foresee what the future had in store for them – migration was a never-thought of and never-heard of phenomenon.

But situation worsened between 1926 and 1930 and the schism between the two communities widened. The accumulated tension of the pre-

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11 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p.13.

12 Excerpts from Interview, June 2000.

13 Ibid.

Partition days found expression in the post-1947 period when the exploited, i.e. the Muslims, turned exploiter.

So it seems but natural that the table would be turned in the changed scenario and the Muslims would employ all possible means to avenge the maltreatment. Seen from this angle, the behaviour of the Muslim people and the administration, seems to be a necessary corollary of the Hindu wrong-doings of the earlier days. However, even then, one should condemn the spiteful attitude of the Muslims as also their unjustified exploitation at the hands of the Hindus.

Immediately after Partition, socially conscious Hindus Samar Guha says, came to be dreaded by Karachi as "sworn enemy" of Pakistan likely to undermine the basis of the state by fomenting troubles in East Bengal and creating bad blood between the people of two disjointed wings of Pakistan.

The government employees of undivided Bengal were given the option of serving either India or Pakistan. Most of the Hindus opted for West Bengal and the Muslims for East Bengal. With the Muslimisation of East Bengal administration, the misery of the Hindus increased. Exorbitant amount of money in the name of tax, were extorted from the Hindus. An LMP doctor from Mymensingh who used to pay Rs.1,000/- annually as income tax was suddenly assessed at Rs.4,000/- and asked to pay another Rs.4,000/- as

contribution to the Jinnah fund. He paid both from his life's savings and quitted East Pakistan in 1948.[14]

Ethnic cleansing was unleashed. Hindu families in general came to be ostracised and boycotted. The government issued notices for requisitioning the houses of well-to-do Hindus, ordering them to vacate the premises within twenty four hours. Sri Pratul Chandra Rakshit's ancestral home in the heart of the Dacca city came to be forcibly occupied by the East Pakistan Government on 17 August 1947 evicting his aged uncle and his family.[15] The Council for Protection of Rights of Minorities who visited Dacca in April 1948, discovered that between August 1947 and March 1948, the Government had requisitioned over 1,100 houses of the Hindus.[16] By 30 June 1949, 5,024 houses had been requisitioned by the Government of East Pakistan, of which only 853 were owned by the Muslims and the other 4,171 by the Hindus.[17] According to the estimate of the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dacca, another thousand Hindu houses have been requisitioned since June.[18] Till

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14 Asoka Gupta Archives, File 3. Report on Deposition before the Commissioner of Enquiry (Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan), Calcutta, 9 November 1965 (School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta).

15 Pratul Chandra Rakshit, Periye Elem (Calcutta, 1992), p.137.

16 Council for Protection of Rights of Minorities, Review of Condition and Treatment of Minorities in East Bengal (Calcutta, 1949).

17 Ibid.

18 Constituent Assembly of India, Part I: Question and Answers, Starred Question and Answers, Oral Answers, 22 December 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), pp.655-56.

1950, 230 houses had been requisitioned in Jessore alone.[19] Those who showed exemplary courage in holding fast, especially those in prime locations were implicated in false cases and sent to jail while in their absence, the government requisitioned their property. Like what happened to Sri Makhanlal Saha, a pleader of the Dacca Court and a resident of Distillery Road. His was the only remaining Hindu house in the area, the others already having been requisitioned by the government. Quite mysteriously, the police unearthed four sets of catridges from his house. Mr. Saha was taken into custody along with his aged father and two younger brothers. When produced in Court, the magistrate rejected their bail application and they were sent to jail.[20]

The situation turned more nightmarish with each passing day. Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner of West Bengal had an interview with some refugee gentlemen who narrated their tales of woe. They narrated how Muslims violated the sanctity of their homes and harassed their women folk.[21]

Women became the prized target of the Muslims. Hindu women found it difficult to get out of their homes to take baths in the pond, avoiding the

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19 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Started Question and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 26 April 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.3614.

20 Pranatosh Datta, ed., Mashik Basumati, Vol.2, No.2, November 1949 (Calcutta, 1949), p.1356.

21 Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, Udbastu (Calcutta, 1970).

lascivious, leering gazes of the neighbouring Muslim menfolk. Whenever, a Hindu woman went to the pond for her daily ablution, Muslims – young and old, would gather on two sides of the pond and start passing lewd comments at her.[22] Smt. Anima Dhar recalls that it became well-nigh impossible for young, unmarried Hindu girls to venture out alone as they became the innocent victims of all sorts of vulgar passes.[23]

A large number of reports of crime against Hindu women, particularly in village areas, were placed before authorities but these went unheard. In many cases, when an abducted girl was produced before court, she was found to profess her loyalty to Islam and to her abductor, now her husband, under cover of "Burkha" and through a Muslim lawyer.

Samar Guha cites two examples. A Muslim medical student of Dacca, abducted a minor Hindu girl from Santinagar – a suburb of Dacca. The girl when produced before the court, declared through a Muslim lawyer her profession of Islam and her marriage to her abductor, now elevated to the status of her husband. The abductor – the real culprit as a result, was acquitted.[24]

In another case, the daughter of a Hindu clerk of Rangpur was abducted by one of his subordinate Muslim employees. Both the girl and her

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22 Ibid., p.15.

23 Excerpts from Interview, October 2000.

24 Guha, op. cit., p.72.

abductor, after some time, were arrested from Dacca and produced before court, when the same drama was enacted. Guha further goes on to illustrate how those girls were given in marriage to their abductors in the very court compound attended by many responsible Government officials and Muslim League dignitaries.[25]

In every sphere of life, the effort towards Islamisation spelt misery for the once prosperous Hindu community. Their inclusion in high positions in Government services became practically nil. In the police department, no non-Muslim was recruited after Partition. The Hindus were not legally debarred from seeking employment in the security organisation but recruiting officers were specifically instructed to avoid such induction. Government holidays for Hindu festivals were drastically curtailed.

In the sphere of education Karachi spared no efforts to Urduise Bengali language and literature by replacing Bengali script with Arabic and introducing Urdu words for it. They emphatically decalred that there is only one state and that is Pakistan and there will be one Lingua franca. On 24 March 1948, Qaid-e-Azam while delivering the convocation address at the Dacca University declared:[26]

> "There can be only one state language if the component parts of this State are to march forward in unison and that language, in my opinion, can only be Urdu."

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25 Ibid.

26 Pakistan Publications, Qaid-i-Azam Mahomed Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor General of Pakistan 1947-48 (Karachi, no date), p.91.

Smt. Hasna Saha recalls that her father, a respected and revered teacher of Arkandi village in Faridpur, overnight took the decision to migrate when the Maulvi of the school, where her father was the founder-principal, informed him – "Master moshaai, you will now have to learn the Islamic language, Urdu."[27] (The efforts of the Pakistani Government to impose Urdu as the state language, in fact, drew in sharp criticisms from the Bengali-speaking people of both the communities in East Pakistan, and coalesced into a broader movement for gaining priority of the Bengali language. The upshot was the demonstration on 21 February 1952, in which several pro-Bengali protesters were slaughtered. The attempt to make Urdu the only national language of Pakistan was abandoned in 1954 after strong opposition from the Bengali-speaking populace and both Bengali and Urdu were recognised as national languages.)

In the Bengali text book Sahitya Parichiti prescribed for the matriculate students, out of the 11 prose pieces, only two were by Hindu writers – Rabindranath Tagore and Jagadish Chandra Bose which dealt with secular subjects.[28] On the other hand, out of the nine pieces of Muslim writers, two dealt with Arabs and Mecca, two with Islamic history, one with a Muslim saint and one with a Muslim politician.[29] Out of 352 books including English and Bengali readers, and history and geography, approved by the Director of

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27 Excerpts from Interview, June 1999.

28 Guha, op. cit., p.51.

29 Ibid.

Public Instructions, 348 go to Muslim author and publishers and only four to Hindus.[30]

Hindus were often implicated in false cases. After the death of Jinnah, on 11 September 1948, one Hindu landlord, in whose house, funeral rites of a departed family member was being solemnised, was arrested on the ground that he was "celebrating" the Qaid-i-Azam's death.[31]

In rural areas, too, Muslim mobs were given a free hand and they went on the rampage. Forcible removal of crops from the fields of Hindu peasants, the plucking of their fruits, cutting bamboos, catching fish from their ponds and similar law-breaking acts received the tacit support of the administration. An erstwhile resident of Barisal recalls how the Muslims set fire to their haystacks. This prompted their decision to leave.[32] Ramprasad Nath from Tipperah laments:[33]

> I am a peasant. I supplement my income by catching and selling fish. The Muslims forcibly carried away the standing crop from my field. On several occasions when I went to the village market, the hooligans looted all the fish I had and reminded me that such things would happen in Pakistan.

The case of Dacca provides an example. As per Samar Guha's survey, before Partition nearly 58% of the total population of the city were

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30 Ibid., p.52.

31 Prabhash Chandra Lahiri, Pak-Bharater Ruparekha (Calcutta, 1980), pp.159-60.

32 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

33 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 8 October 1948.

Hindus.[34] Of the 17 elected commissioners of the city, 10 were Hindus and 7 were Muslims while more than 85% of the properties of the city belonged to the Hindus.[35]

Non-Muslim Holdings in Pre-Partition and Post-Partition Years[36]
(Exclusively Hindu Elakas)

Name of Places	Before Partition (Total Hindu Holdings)	After Partition		Total Hindu Holding at Present (c. 1949)
		With Family	Without Family	
1. Tikatully and Gopibag	430	6	21	27
2. Gandaria	731	12	22	34
3. Armanitola and Nalgola	773	6	12	18
4. Nawabpur Road	274	8	4	12
5. Banagram	272	58	29	79
6. Lalchan Mukim Lane	74	Nil	8	8
7.Thatari Bazar	133	Nil	15	15
8. Malitolla and Purana Mughaltuly	251	Nil	Nil	Nil
9. Juginagar	91	Nil	14	14
10. Dakshin Maisundi	182	14	12	26
11. Swamibag	77	Nil	Nil	Nil
12. Wari	450	12	35	37
13. Purana Paltan and Segun Bagicha	252	1	7	8
14. Kulutolia	110	52	12	64
15. Banianagar	360	42	26	68
16. Lalbag Elaka	580	80	26	106
17. Bairagitolla	214	29	25	54
18. Pyaridas Road	97	16	15	31
19. Goalnagar	83	35	6	41
20. Tantibazar Elaka	573	108	50	158
21. Sangatolla	49	3	6	9
22. Singtola	68	25	Nil	25
23. Digbazar	35	3	2	5
24. Laxmibazar Elaka	78	9	1	10
25. Sankhari Bazar	936	54	17	71
Total	**7,175**	**573**	**347**	**920**

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34 Guha, op. cit., p.7.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p.8.

Thus, we see that by 1949, only 12.7% were in the possession of the Hindus.[37] Nearly 90% of the Hindu citizens of Dacca, by that time had migrated to the Indian Union.[38] Those left behind were the aged guardians who after sending their children to other side of the border, stayed back themselves clinging to the hope that the golden days of peace and prosperity would once again come back.

Dacca University had 2,257 students in its roll in January 1950, of which only 162 or 7.1% of the students belonged to the Hindu community, whereas in the pre-Partition days nearly 65% of the students belonged to Hindu community.[39] In Medical and Engineering Schools and Colleges, one would not find even half a dozen students who are non-Muslims, during the said period.[40]

Before Partition, members of the Dacca Bar numbered 310, of which 280 were Hindus. At the time of the February Riot of 1950, the Bar's strength reduced to 160, of whom 96 were Hindus.[41] Thus although the Hindus still retained the overwhelming majority, the fact remains that out of the 96,

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37 Ibid., p.9.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., p.11.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p.12.

excepting four or five gentlemen, all have shifted their families to Indian Union.[42] In other words, they had already taken a step towards migration.

The religious life of the Hindus in Dacca was practically snuffed out. The city boasted of as many as 100 Vaishnab temples, as well as many Kali temples and Gurudwaras.[43] To Vaishnabs, Dacca was second "Brindaban". A large number of these temples were destroyed, defiled or looted. Some 26 important temples, including the well-known Tokani Pal's temple, Madan Gopalji, Shamrajji, Gopinathji, Balaramji and other temples came to be occupied by the Muslims.[44]

The Janmastami, Rathayatra and Jhulan used to be celebrated with pomp and grandeur in the pre-Partition days. The Janmastami procession of Dacca can be traced back to 300 years. During the celebration of Jhulan, Hindu localities used to reverberate with music, dances, and Kirtans. The Rathayatra – another special occasion of the Hindus witnessed the pulling of nearly 45 rathas or chariots on the streets of the city.[45]

But all this had to be abandoned in the very first year of Pakistani rule. The hostile attitude of the Muslims compelled the Hindus to give up their

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42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p.14.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

century-old religious customs. One unfortunate resident of Dhamrai village of Dacca district recollects:[46]

> Dhamrai was famous for the Rathayatra festival. The chariot was five-storey high – perhaps the one of its kind in the whole of Bangladesh... its peak could be seen even from the outskirts of the village. Nearly a lakh visitors thronged Dhamrai on the occasion of the Rathayatra. A fair was held that continued for three weeks.
>
> But alas today! The chariot stands still; under the stringent implementation of Shariyati law, fairs and festivities have stopped. The sacred and holy village of Dhamrai now stands forlorn and deserted – the air no longer reverberates with kirtans, sound of conchshells or drumbeats.

On the Bijoya Dashami day of 1948, many Hindu houses were set on fire – nearly 750 families were rendered homeless as a result of the carnage.[47]

Such a situation prevailed in many areas of East Pakistan where Hindus became the victims of religious fanaticism. However, one should bear in mind that not all and sundry who has migrated, were directly hit by Muslim vengeance. As I have pointed out earlier, fear psychosis played a major role. Many were beset with the fear of what if a dose of their own medicine is now administered to them. Rumours also induced people to migrate. Noakhali being still fresh in the minds, rumours of large-scale massacres, led the Hindus to scurry across the border for shelter.

Till 1950, the root cause of migration remained the persecution of the administration in the form of arbitrary requisition of houses, absence of Hindu

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46 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., op. cit., p.26.

47 Ananda Bazar Patrika, 16 October 1948.

representatives in the decision-making bodies, a partisan police force, rumours of massacres, threats like "Now that Pakistan has been formed, remember that we are no longer your subordinates"[48] or "whenever we feel, we will hack you to death"[49] or persistent anti-Hindu propaganda carried out in the press and the media to incite the masses against the Hindus in East Bengal. They came to be branded as "kafirs", "fifth-columnists", "a danger to our state".[50] All these created a claustrophobic atmosphere, in which the Hindus found difficult to breath.

However, there was no large-scale massacre of the Hindus, till 1950. Hatred, from 1950 onwards, came to be manifested in a violent manner, with the merciless slaughter of the Hindus.

The watershed was the February Riot of 1950, which though sparked off in Dacca, soon spread like wildfire to the other districts. The reasons, as cited by Sri Jogendra Nath Mandal, Minister for Law and Labour in the Central Cabinet in his resignation letter, were five-fold:[51]

i) To punish Hindus for the daring action of their representation in the Assembly when two adjournment motions on Kalshira and Nachol affairs were disallowed. (On 20 December 1949, an incident occurred in the village of Kalshira in the Bagerhat sub-division of Khulna District in East Bengal. A police party went to arrest an alleged communist. Failing to find him, they started to assault the inmates of his house,

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48 Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., pp.14-15.

49 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p.15.

50 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Speeches, Vol.Two, p.138.

51 Kedarnath Chatterji, ed., The Modern Review, July-December 1950, Vol.88 (Calcutta, November 1950), p.345.

including the women. The neighbours ran to the scene and a fight ensued in which a policeman was killed on the spot and another died of injuries subsequently. Two days later, the police assisted by the Ansars and some rowdy elements attacked not only the village but twenty-two other neighbouring ones inhabited mostly by the Namasudra community – men were murdered, women raped, places of worship desecrated. Incidents somewhat similar took place at Nachole in Rajshahi district an area largely inhabited by Santhals following a clash with the police, many villages were ravaged.)

ii) Dissension and difference between the Suhrawardy group and the Nazimuddin group in the League parliamentary party was becoming acute.

iii) Apprehension of launching of a movement for the reunion of East and West Bengal by both Hindu and Muslim leaders made the East Bengal Ministry and the Muslim League leaders nervous. They wanted to prevent such a move. They thought that any large-scale communal riot in East Bengal was sure to create repercussions in West Bengal where Muslims might be killed. The result of such riots in both East and West Bengal would prevent any move for reunion of both Bengals.

iv) The feeling of antagonism between Bengali Muslims and non-Bengali Muslims in East Bengal was gaining ground. This could only be prevented by creating hatred between Hindus and Muslims of East Bengal. The language question was also connected with it.

v) The consequences of non-devaluation and the Indo-Pakistani trade deadlock to the economy of East Bengal were being felt most acutely both in urban and rural areas and the Muslim League members and officials wanted to divert the attention of the Muslim masses from the impending economic breakdown by some sort of jihad against the Hindus.

Violence broke out on Friday, 10 February 1950, after the Jumma Namaz. The epicentre was the Secretariat Building in Dacca. A meeting was convened in its compound. Later, a procession was taken out, which shouting anti-Hindu and anti-Indian slogans moved along the Nawabpur Road plundering and looting the Hindu shops on the way.

Meanwhile, some Muslim women dressed as Hindus with vermillon marks on their foreheads, conchshells on hands and stains of 'blood' on their

clothing, were presented before Sri Sukumar Sen, Chief Secretary of West Bengal, who was there to attend an inter-dominion conference, as proofs of Hindu 'atrocity'.[52]

The whole city of Dacca and its suburbs resembled a battlefield. Sri Haran Chandra Ghosh Chowdhury, an MLA from Noakhali, was an eyewitness to some ghastly massacres. Standing in the balcony of the Central Bank of India building, Victoria Branch, he could do nothing but watch helplessly the gruesome killing of a Hindu neighbour. On 12 February, a crowd of Hindu passengers was attacked at the Karimtolla airport near Dacca by an armed mob and a large number of intending passengers, including women and children, were killed or seriously wounded. This tragedy took place within a stones throw of the Karimtolla military headquarters and in the presence of Pakistan armed guards.[53]

Reports of massacres flooded in from other parts of East Bengal. In Mymensingh, trains to and from Comilla and Chittagong were stopped on a railway bridge – the Anderson Bridge on the river Meghna. Hindus were singled out from among the passengers and hacked to death in cold blood. Their bodies were thrown into the Meghna. In the Santahar Station in Rajshahi, a similar gory drama was enacted.

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52 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Speeches, Vol.Two, p.140.

53 Ibid.

Large-scale violence against the Hindus was reported from Bianibazar and Barlekh police station of Sylhet district, Putia in Rajshahi, Bhandaria in Barisal, Bagerhat in Khulna, Kalashkathi in Barisal, Nachole in Rajshahi, Habibganj in Sylhet, Comilla in Tipperah and Feni in Noakhali.

Perhaps the worst-affected was the district of Barisal. As per the estimate of Mr. Mandal, the casualty list touched nearly 2,500.[54] Total causalities in the East Bengal riots were estimated in the neighbourhood of 10,000 killed.[55] Sri Sukumar Mukhopadhyay of Rajpur village, Barisal, lost his uncle and niece, along with nine others of the neighbouring family. In his own words:[56]

> My uncle was burnt to death, while my niece and the neighbours were mercilessly slaughtered and the severed heads placed on each step of the staircase....

However, the silver lining was that not all Muslims lost their sanity. Benudhar Ghose acknowledges that the Muslims fed them and protected them while they took refuge in the forest in the outskirts of their village Muladi in Barisal when it was attacked by an armed gang of Muslims in March

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54 Kedarnath Chatterji, ed., The Modern Review, July-December 1950, Vol.88 (Calcutta, November 1950), p.345.

55 Ibid.

56 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p.18 (translation mine).

1950.[57] Gita Sengupta, too, remembers that the local Muslim villagers, pleaded them not to leave.[58]

But these are exceptions. By and large, the situation was not conducive for the Hindus to carry on life in normal pace.

Did the Government of India remain a mute spectacular to the bestial torture meted out to the minorities on the other side of border which had a direct bearing upon the migration process? An Inter-Dominion Conference was held in April 1948 and an agreement was signed. It provided for the setting up Minorities Boards in both East and West Bengal. It was further stipulated that the Government of both Bengals would enact legislation for Evacuee Property Management Boards in districts or areas from where the bulk of the migration had taken place.

Between 1948 and 1949, there was a drop in migration figures (whichever figure you look at, the drop becomes evident, although figures vary and the percentage of fall, too, differs). But between 1949 and 1950 with conditions deteriorating again, there was a huge avalanche of migrants.

In a bid to stall the seemingly unending exodus, the Delhi Pact or the Nehru-Liaqat Pact was signed on 8 April 1950. As per the provisions of the Pact, the governments of both the countries pledged to facilitate the repatriation of the refugees and to help them to settle down on their return by

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57 Ibid., p.29.

58 Excerpts from Interview, June 2000.

restoring their abandoned properties and also to safeguard the rights of the minorities. While out of the 7 lakh Muslims who had migrated from West Bengal to East Bengal, 5 lakhs returned to West Bengal and were extended all possible help by the Government of West Bengal, the East Bengal Government refused to reciprocate the same with equal urgency.[59]

Till the beginning of December 1950, 31,933 families of returning Muslim migrants of about 1,13,211 persons have been rehabilitated in West Bengal. They were given an ad hoc sum of Rs.200. Up to the end of 1950, the Government of West Bengal had spent nearly Rs.9,81,000 for resettlement of the returning [redacted] migrants.[60]

The Ministry of External Affairs issued a note stating that out of the 30,000 workers who had left for East Bengal, 20,000 have returned and 9,000 have been reinstated. The note further stated that:[61]

> ...houses in urban areas are being restored to the owners immediately on their return. In rural areas also lands and houses are being restored to the owners except in cases where the owners had not returned by the commencement of the sowing season and the lands, were, therefore, temporarily settled with migrants. The State Government have made it clear to the temporary, allottees that they will have to vacate the lands at the end of the season. These migrants who are returning during the crop season and to whom their lands cannot be restored immediately are being given relief on the

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59 Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal (Calcutta, 1956), p.1.

60 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers: Oral Answers to Questions, 7 June 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.5058.

61 Parliamentary Debates, Appendix I, Annexure No.17 (November-December 1951) (New Delhi, 1952), p.123.

same scale as refugees; and they are also being provided with alternative accommodation. Further, it has been arranged, that when the standing crop is harvested, one-third share of the crop will be given to the owners.

About 2,34,450 Muslim migrants from West Bengal to East Bengal had returned to West Bengal till the end of May 1951 and nearly 1,89,240 of them have been rehabilitated.[62]

But on the East Bengal side, the Government of East Pakistan, refused to take steps on behalf of the repatriates to vacate the premises illegally occupied by the Muslims. Mrs. Amiya Bala Basu, on her return to her home at Dhobali in Jessore district on 11 May 1950, found her house under the control of a local Muslim family who refused her possession.[63] Jatin Deb of the Mulali village of Sylhet district was killed when after the Pact he returned to take possession of his home.[64]

Desecretion of temples continued unabated. The much revered Saraswat Ashram of Kaliganga was looted by Muslim hooligans on 17 May 1950, Swami Premananda, the head priest was assaulted, and five hundred rupees taken away. A few days before this heinous act, the temple of

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62 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 10 September 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.1125.

63 Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, The East Bengal Tragedy: The Delhi Pact and Thereafter (Calcutta, 1958).

64 Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, ed., Prabashi, 50 Year, Vol.I, 1 Issue, Baisakh 1357 (Calcutta, April 1950), p.2.

Chhinnamasta at Paltan area of Dacca, too, was defiled on 6 May 1950.[65] Lands belonging to temples and places of public worship of the Hindus at Chittagong were served with notices of acquisition or of requisition by the District Magistrate of Chittagong. The Government of East Bengal issued a detailed press note on 20 June 1951, in which it stated that land belonging to the Ashrams have been acquired or are proposed to be acquired for a 'public purpose'. The note categorically stated that the Government does not accept the view that every piece of public worship, even though it is not required for its own use, must be considered sacrosanct, and must not be taken over by Government for any public purpose, however urgent.[66]

The abduction and harassment of Hindu women continued. On the very day of the signing of the Pact, two young girls – Malakshmi and Rajlakshmi Pal – came to be molested at the hands of the Ansar – a government-sponsored militia. In their own words:[67]

> Just as we were about to cross the border, we came to be surrounded by four men who forced us to accompany them, and hand them everything that we had. We gave ten rupees. But, instead of being satisfied, they ordered us to disrobe. When we refused to comply, they stripped and molested us.

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65 Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, op. cit., p.16.

66 Parliamentary Debates Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers: Oral Answers to Questions, 28 August 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.709.

67 Ananda Bazar Patrika, 11 April 1950 (translation mine).

On 16 April, the eighteen year old daughter of a medical officer of Barisal was abducted by Muslim miscreants.[68] In another village in Barisal on 15 May, a 20 year old girl named Debirani was abducted by the supporters of a local Muslim League leader who wanted to marry the girl.[69]

Another Hindu girl of the same district, kidnapped on 15 May 1950, was more fortunate in the sense that she was rescued after an hour's search by the Hindu residents of the village. The police was duly informed. The girl recognised one of her abductors. But no arrest was made even when the culprit was in his house for 26 hours after the information had been passed.[70]

A Hindu widow was abducted by the local Muslims in Kagdia village in Faridpur district at around 10.30 p.m. on 25 May 1950, when she was going from kitchen to another room. Next day when the Hindu neighbours were on their way to lodge a complaint, they were threatened with dire consequences by the miscreants. Fearing for their lives, the Hindu neighbours did not proceed further and returned to their homes. On that very day, a nika marriage was performed in the Registrar's office and the widow's name was changed to Momina Khatun. The helpless girl was forced to live with Muslim

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68 Pranatosh Dutta, ed., Mashik Basumati, 29 Year, Volume I, Number 3 (Calcutta, 1950), p.472.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p.15.

miscreants and the pleadings of her aged mother to see her daughter fell on deaf ears.[71]

On receipt of information from the MLA Sri D.N. Datta, a Hindu girl Santi Rani Kar was rescued from the house of a Muslim armed constable on 31 May 1950 in Comilla. But the constable was allowed to go scot free.[72] On 8 June, in the Dhanagram village of Faridpur district, a few Muslims broke into the house of Kedar Das and raped his 13 year old daughter.[73] On the same day, in Dhankuria village of the same district, a gang of Muslims forcibly took away the daughter of one Sri Ganguly.[74] On 10 June, in the Rajshahi district, the Muslims broke into one Hindu house and raped the landlord's wife.[75] On that same day in Goalando village of Faridpur district, a minor girl, Lila Choudhury was abducted by the Muslims.[76] On 11 June, a Hindu family on their way to West Bengal was attacked by Muslim hooligans and kidnapped two girls of the family.[77] In the Dinajpur district, Muslims broke into one Hindu

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71 Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, op. cit., p.14.

72 Ibid., p.10.

73 Pranatosh Dutta, ed., Mashik Basumati, 29 Year, Vol.1, No.3 (Calcutta, 1950), p.473.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

household and kicked one pregnant woman in the stomach. She died from excessive bleeding.[78]

From April to July 1950, the Search Service Bureau, West Bengal, registered 78 cases of abducted and 172 cases of missing women on information supplied by refugees from East Bengal. In addition to these, seven cases of abducted and missing women were reported to the East Bengal Government by the Indian Deputy High Commissioner at Dacca.[79]

As per a survey carried by the Hindu Mahasabha, the list of crime against the Hindus during the month of April, i.e. the month in which the Pact was signed proves the futility of the Pact:[80]

	Nature of the Crime	**Number of Cases**
1.	Murder	13
2.	Dacoity	137
3.	Robbery	109
4.	Theft	15
5.	Extortion	127
6.	Arson	18
7.	Abduction	12
8,	Outraging of female modesty	9
9.	Tresspass	17
10.	Assault	22
11.	Harassment	13
12.	Wrongful restraint	9
13.	Defiling Hindu Temples	5
	Total	**505**

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78 Ibid., p.474.

79 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Question and Answers, Starred Question and Answers, Written Answers, 1 August 1950 (New Delhi, 1951), p.48.

80 Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, op. cit., p.11.

Crime List from January 1950 to May 1950[81]

	Nature of the Crime	Number of Cases
1.	Murder	32
2.	Abduction	38
3.	Rape	5
4.	Missing girls	5
5.	Outraging of female modesty	6
6.	Dacoity	203
7.	Robbery	35
8.	Theft	76
9.	Extortion	15
10.	Arson,stabbing and grievous hurt	57
11.	Harassment	16
12.	Wrongful restraint	2
13.	Defiling Hindu temples	16
	Total	**645**

A comparative study of the two lists shows that there has been an escalation of the rate of crime against the Hindus immediately after the Pact defeating the very purpose for which it was signed. In August 1951, the Government of India received reports from the Deputy High Commissioner in Dacca. The Deputy Minister of External Affairs, Dr. Keshkar, informed the House:[82]

> The reports are not very reassuring and indicate that there is still a lack of sense of security of property and honour amongst the minority community in East Pakistan.

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81 Ibid.

82 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 7 August 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.29.

He further went on to inform the House that between June and July 1951:[83]

> There have been a number of requisitioning of Hindu houses, many times without giving any valid reason. The number of such requisitioning has been increasing. There have been more cases of abduction coming to our notice which we have brought to the notice of the East Pakistan authorities. The policy of the East Bengal Government with regard to education is more and more hostile to the Hindus. There is a tendency to Islamise education and try to run down the culture and traditions of the minority community.

The Minister's statement shows that although one year has elapsed after the signing of the Pact, conditions prevailing in East Bengal still remains grave and grim. In August 1951, the Prime Minister lamented in the Parliament:[84]

> ...much still remains to be done in East Bengal, under the Agreement, in order that its purpose may be fulfilled...normal conditions were not restored.

In October 1951, the Government of India received reports from the Deputy High Commissioner that money was being extorted from the non-Muslims as contributions to Ansar Fund, National Defence Fund, Civil Defence Fund etc. Passengers proceeding from places like Karimganj by

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83 Ibid.

84 Parliamentary Debate Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers: Oral Answers to Questions, 31 August 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.836.

motor buses were being forced to pay a contribution to the Sylhet District Ansar Fund at rates varying from annas four to one rupee per head.[85]

Persecution continued unabated. In July 1952, news trickled in that in Sylhet district, non-Muslim tea labourers were not being enrolled in the draft electoral roll. Pressure was brought to bear upon employers not to employ non-Muslims in business concerns.[86]

In this charged atmosphere, the Hindus suffered. Businessmen suddenly found his field limited, the educated classes found employment becoming almost impossible, the landholders found themselves being gradually "relieved" of their burdens by a heavily biased and one-sided legal process and parents with marriageable sons and daughters found it increasingly difficult to arrange marriages. So the Hindus were left with no other option but to move elsewhere. The Hindu lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests and preachers, who usually depended on the others as clients were consequently forced to take the plunge in the wide world of India.

In addition to the reign of terror unleashed by the East Pakistan administration, the other factor that encouraged cross-border migration was the rhetoric of the Indian politicians.

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85 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers: Oral Answers to Questions, 5 October 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.2014.

86 House of the People, Part I: Questions and Answers, Written Answers, 24 July 1952 (New Delhi, 1953), p.2089.

Dr. Syama Prosad Mookerjee said on the 20 July 1947:[87]

> I have repeatedly declared that partition of Bengal and the creation of West Bengal must not be meant for saving the people of that area alone. We have a great responsibility towards the Hindus in East Bengal and that must be discharged both by the Government of West Bengal and the people of this province. If they fail to do so, they will be guilty of the grossest betrayal.

While presiding over a convention of East Bengal Hindus held at University Institute in the month of August 1947, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee sounded a warning to the West Bengal Hindus:[88]

> It was their moral responsibility to extend help and succour to the Hindus of East Bengal in whichever circumstances they require them. Any shirking of that responsibility will be an act of treachery.

Dr. Pramatha Nath Banerjee, President, Indian Association, on 5 August 1947, stated:[89]

> ... It is... the duty of West Bengal people to render fullest measure of assistance to their brethren resident in East and Central Bengal in their hour of need.

Mr. N.C. Chatterjee in his presidential address at the Bengal Provincial Hindu Conference at Tarakeswar, on 4 April 1947, said:[90]

> ...the Hindus of East Bengal, whether caste or schedule, should rest assured that every Bengalee Hindu will be counted as a citizen of the new State. The East Bengal Hindus will enjoy the same rights and privileges in respect of Education, Administration and Industry as the people of West Bengal. If an East Bengal Hindu is ever persecuted in

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87 Asoka Gupta Archives, File 10, Manoranjan Chaudhuri, "Partition and the Curse of Rehabilitation" (Calcutta, 1964), p.1.

88 Ibid., p.2.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

> any way by the Government or the members of the majority community of that province, the new province of West Bengal as well as the Central Government should consider it as an act of hostility against the State and should take adequate reprisals.

In August 1947, Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in his message to the East Bengal Convention held at University Institute, Calcutta, under the presidency of Hon'ble Dr. Syama Prosad Mookerjee, said:[91]

> We cannot fully enjoy freedom that we have got until and unless we can share it with the Hindus of North and East Bengal. How can one forget the sufferings and sacrifices which they cheerfully endured for freeing our mother-land from foreign domination? Their future welfare must engage the most careful and serious attention of the Government and people of Indian Union in the light of development that may take hereafter.

The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on 15 August 1947, announced:[92]

> Our hearts naturally go out to those who were of us and with us so long, but who are now going to be separated. Few can realise the bitterness and sorrow which partition has brought to those who cherished unity but lived to fashion its details. But let not our brethren across the border feel that they are neglected or forgotten. Their welfare will claim our vigilance and we shall follow with abiding interest their future....

The Hon'ble Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our Prime Minister, in his message to his countrymen on 15 August 1947, said:[93]

> We think also of our brothers and sisters who have been cut off from us by political boundaries and who unhappily cannot share at present in the freedom that has come. They are of us and will remain of us

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91 Ibid.

92 P.N. Chopra, ed., Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Volume XII (1 January 1947-31 December 1947) (Delhi, 1998), p.165.

93 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches, Volume One, September 1946-May 1949 (New Delhi, 1967), p.28.

> whatever may happen, and we shall be sharers in their good and ill fortune alike.

Mahatma Gandhi himself on 21 July 1947, in his post-prayer meeting, said:[94]

> My friends ask whether those who being mortally afraid or otherwise leave Pakistan will get shelter in the Indian Union. My opinion is emphatic on this point: such refugees should get proper shelter in the Indian Union and vice versa....

It is this contrasting picture of despair on one side and hope on the other that produced the phenomenon of migration. To many, the pain of leaving one's ancestral home was lessened by the hope of finding a safe heaven among their co-religionists on the other side of the Radcliffe Line.

SECTION-II

MAGNITUDE OF THE EXODUS

Accurate estimates of these displaced people do not exist. Estimates vary because there was no exactly defined period of migration, since people started migrating to India even before Partition was actually effected and continued to do so for many years after 1947. The official norms that apply to a "border" took some time to come into operation in case of East and West Bengal. Parliamentary debates show that as late as September 1950 (i.e., three year after Independence and Partition) a finality could not be reached in respect of boundary demarcation. Hence the boundary line being fluid, it was difficult to keep track of migration. Moreover, many refugees crossed on foot

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94 Manoranjan Chaudhuri, op. cit., p.3.

at countless unmanned points. Thus rigorous account of those crossing over could not always be maintained.

According to Estimate Committee Report between October 1946 (Noakhali massacre) and December 1958, 41.17 lakh displaced persons migrated from East Pakistan into India. The bulk of them, 31.42 lakhs, went to West Bengal. The rest went mainly to Assam and Tripura.[95]

Between October 1946 and December 1958, the urban-rural breakup of displaced persons in West Bengal was:[96]

Number of displaced persons in rural areas:	15,72,600
Number of displaced persons in urban areas:	15,70,000
Total	**31,42,600**

Up to the end of 1947, the number of immigrants in West Bengal was estimated at about five lakhs. It rose to eight lakhs at around the end of March 1948.[97]

Between September and October 1948, the number of daily arrivals averaged around 600. The reason behind the influx being the fall of Hyderabad to Indian forces. In retaliation, anti-Hindu propaganda was stepped up. In early October, a fresh wave began when for a few days nearly

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95 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), p.1.

96 Ibid.

97 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 June 1948. Information supplied by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commmissioner of West Bengal.

1,000 people arrived daily. The total for 1948 was put at 5,90,000 and for 1949 1,82,000. By January 1949, approximately 30 lakhs of Hindu refugees were there in West Bengal.[98] During question hour in Parliament, Sri Mohan Lal, Saksena, Minister for Rehabilitation, informed the House that the number of refugees from East Bengal stood around 18 lakhs.[99] As per a report published in The Statesman on 6 February 1949, the Government of West Bengal put the number of East Bengal refugees at between 1,50,000 and 1,60,000.

Between 1 April 1948 and 30 April 1949 in the Greater Calcutta Area, the number of migrants increased from 6,10,974 to 9,70,187.[100] The total for the whole of West Bengal increased from 8,03,016 to 16,22,781 during the same period.[101] A census of displaced persons from East Pakistan was held in July 1949, as per which there were 10,91,100 refugees in West Bengal.[102] While addressing a public meeting at Laudaha in the Asansol sub-division of Burdwan district on 25 September 1949, the West Bengal premier Dr. B.C. Roy iterated that over 15 to 16 lakhs of people had migrated from East to West Bengal.[103] Mrs. Renuka Ray, Honorary Advisor for Rehabilitation,

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98 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 31 July 1949.

99 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 February 1949.

100 Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Review, No.1, January-April 1949 (New Delhi, 1949) Table 21, p.65.

101 Ibid.

102 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 29 November 1949.

103 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 26 September 1949.

Government of India, disclosed that nearly 25 lakhs of people had crossed the border of East Bengal.[104] Amrita Bazar Patrika of 16 November 1949, reports that out of 12 crores Hindus left in East Bengal, after Partition about 1.5 crores left their home to seek shelter and sustenance in West Bengal. Up to December 1949, as per Rehabilitation Ministry's report 13.78 lakh displaced persons sought shelter in West Bengal.[105] Up to December 1950, the total for West Bengal was put at 29.60 lakhs. Between 7 February 1950 and 8 April 1950 (i.e. on the eve of the Nehru-Liaqat Pact of 9 April 1950), the number of Hindu migrants from East Bengal to West Bengal was 5,47,049 lakhs and after the agreement between 9 April 1950 and 25 July 1950, it was 9,99,290.[106]

Weekly arrival of Hindus from East Bengal to West Bengal from 13 February 1950 to 23 July 1950 is as follows:[107]

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104 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 14 November 1949.

105 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.18.

106 Constituent Assembly of India, Statement laid on the Table of the House, Figures of Migration between East Bengal and West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, Figure No.19, 22 December 1949 (New Delhi, 1950) p.36.

107 Parliamentary Debates, Appendix I-IV, August 1950, Annexure No.20 (New Delhi, 1951), p.38.

For the Week Ending	Arrival in West Bengal from East Bengal
19.2.1950	10,555
26.2.1950	40,635
5.3.1950	35,420
12.3.1950	56,909
19.3.91950	80,257
26.3.1950	115,008
2.4.1950	135,317
9.4.1950	120,979
16.4.1950	87,067
23.4.1950	80,729
30.4.1950	96,194
7.5.1950	85,493
14.5.1950	66,959
21.5.1950	54,656
28.5.1950	54,431
4.6.1950	49,355
11.6.1950	51,966
18.6.1950	49,772
25.6.1950	58,620
2.7.1950	58,504
9.7.1950	57,094
16.7.1950	55,587
23.7.1950	50,313
Total	**15,51,820**

The table proves that there has been a drop in the influx following the Pact. From ~~crores~~ lakhs, it reduced to ~~lakhs~~ thousands. The number of Hindus who have migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal during the period from 8 April 1950 to 4 November 1950, is 16,26,276,[108] that is between 24 July and 4 November 1950, nearly 74,456 people had migrated. Between February and July, the monthly average, as can be calculated, was around 31,364.

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108 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Written Answers, 15 November 1950 (New Delhi, 1951), p.29.

Between July and November the monthly average fell to 18,614. Thus the Nehru-Liaqat Pact did, to some extent, bring down the exodus.[109]

The Census Report of 1951 stated that roughly one-third of the refugees in West Bengal settled in Calcutta or its immediate surroundings.[110] The Report puts the figure for total displaced persons from East Bengal to West Bengal at 20.99 lakhs. As per the same report 27% of Calcutta inhabitants, i.e. 6,85,672 people were born in East Pakistan and 4,33,288 or 17% were settled as "displaced" in the city. However the Calcutta Corporation records show the number of displaced persons residing in Calcutta being no less than 5,76,614 for the same year, i.e., in 1951.[111]

Up to 1952, the number of refugees amounted to 25,17,204 lakhs.[112]

Estimate from 1953 – July 1956[113]

Year	Number of Fresh Arrivals
1953	60,647
1954	103,850
1955	211,573
Till 31 July 1956	199,410
Total	**575,480**

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109 Parliamtnary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Unstarred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 7 August 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.29.

110 Asok Mitra, Census of India, 1951, Volume VI, Part III: Calcutta City (Calcutta, 1953), p.VII.

111 Ibid.

112 Government of West Bengal, Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons, p.1.

113 Ibid.

As per another estimate till 31 October 1952, out of total population of 2,48,10,308 in West Bengal, the refugee population amounted to 25,85,974, i.e. 10.4% of the total strength.[114] According to another report, between 1951 and March 1958, migration figures were:[115]

Period	Number of Fresh Arrivals
1951 to 1954	5.87 lakhs
1954 to 1958 (March)	5.70 lakhs
Total	**11.57 lakhs**

Of the 39.5 lakhs of refugees who have come over to the Eastern zone by the close of 1956, nearly 30.9 lakhs have come over to West Bengal.[116]

Chronological Account of the Influx of Refugees from East Pakistan into West Bengal as given in the Government of India records:[117]

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114 Ibid.

115 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), op. cit., p.6.

116 Rao, op. cit., p.147.

117 Compiled from Committee of Review of Rehabilitation Work in West Bengal (Cited in Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.464; and Joya Chatterji, op. cit., p.103).

Period	Number of Fresh Arrivals
1947	4,63,474
1948	4,90,555
1949	3,26,211
1950	11,72,928
1951	47,437
1952	5,31,440
1953	76,123
1954	1,21,364
1955	2,40,424
1956	5,81,000
1957	6,000
1958	4,898
1959	6,348
1960	9,712
Total	**40,77,914**

Chronological Account of the Influx of Refugees From East Pakistan as given in the records Of the Government of West Bengal[118]

Period	Number of Fresh Arrivals
1947	2,58,000
1948	5,90,000
1949	1,82,000
1950	11,82,000
1951	1,40,000
1952	1,52,000
1953	61,000
1954	1,04,000
1955	2,12,000
1956	2,47,000
1957	9,000
1958	58,000
1959	24,000
1960	34,000
Total	**32,73,000**

118 Government of West Bengal, Calcutta's Urban Future (Calcutta, 1991), p.443.

The data provided by two tables show a discrepancy of nearly eight lakhs.

From the labyrinth of such mind-boggling statistics, it is very difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the number of refugees in West Bengal. But, even then one can gauge the magnitude of the influx-mammoth and gigantic in dimension and proportion that changed the very contours of every aspect of life in West Bengal.

CHAPTER-III

THE GHATIS, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SQUATTERS, 1948-1958

The main focus of this chapter is the attitude of the host community to the refugees and how this shaped the course of events. This chapter is divided into five sections. Section-I deals with the reaction of the people of this side, Section-II with the reaction of the central and the state governments, Section-III is a critical analysis of the rehabilitation programme of the Government of West Bengal, Section-IV looks at the constraints of the state government and the local people and Section-V deals with the foundation of the squatters' colonies.

Against the backdrop of the enactment of one of the great tragedies known to human history, let us analyse the reception accorded to the refugees by the local people and government. It is but natural that "with a common background of Bengali tradition, a pervasive Hindu religion, ties of common national kinship, similar systems and cultural values and familiar pattern for community behaviour, the displaced concerned should not have any formidable hindrance to resolve problem of accommodation and assimilation".[1]

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1 Kanti B. Pakrasi, The Uprooted (Calcutta, 1971), p.133.

What was the ground reality? Did the divide between the Bangals and the Ghatis inherent in the Bengali society widen or begin to diminish or at least did such a process take-off in the first ten years after Partition(1948-1958)? And how sympathetic was the government (both the centre and the state) towards the refugees?

Let us deal with the reaction of the people of "this" side first.

SECTION-I

> 'It is extraordinary how passively West Bengal accepted after partition the uprooting and the near extermination of an entire people who participated almost to a man in the Indian struggle for freedom'.

– laments Dr. Triguna Sen.[2] The East Bengali refugees were treated as creature apart. They were often held in derision and contempt. The frightened, frustrated, dislocated and confused refugee was given the cold shoulder by the West Bengalis. The latter looked upon the former as a liability. While the refugees struggled for life, the West Bengalis remained impervious to their struggle. Sri Mondal of Khulna and Sri Biswas of Faridpur point out that those crossing the border who had perhaps paid the highest price for the nation's liberty, were looked upon as economic migrants out to make merry of the opportunities offered by the government and not as minorities forcibly displaced from their ancestral home due to persecution and harassment. The Calcutta elite believed that the refugees were a tremendous economic liability and that their rehabilitation would make enormous demands

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2 Dr. Triguna Sen, "Foreword" in Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.XV.

upon the meager economic resources of the nascent province and jeopardise its prosperity and future development. They increasingly nursed the view that "generous" relief and compensation on the part of the official agencies would act as a magnet in attracting more refugees. For them the simple equation was that more the amount of relief measures more will be the number of refugees. A vicious circle would thus be created from which the state would find it hard to disentangle herself.

The lacerated hearts of the refugees craved for sympathy – warm and full blooded – from their fellow brethren which was cruelly denied to them. The sentiments find echo in the narration of Smt. Dutta of Chittagong. To put it in her own words – "We felt like aquatic weeds floating from one place to another. People here were oblivious of our hardships, our sufferings and consequently devoid of any fellow feelings, love and compassion".[3] Sri Ashim Ranjan Guha of Barisal said that such indifference stemmed from the local's fear that the more energetic Bangals would leave them far behind in every sphere of life and make life difficult for their coming generations.[4] The refugees, he felt, were perceived more as competitors than fellow brethren desperately in need of their healing touch.

The locals thus chose to ensconce themselves in a shell of cultural 'superiority'. This exclusiveness, Prafulla Chakrabarty points out was the

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3 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

4 Excerpts from Interview, September 2000.

defense mechanism of the traditional West Bengali society against the inroads of the "uninhibited children of the Padma".[5]

The local population questions – why should we sympathise with them when they themselves show no affinity to West Bengal, consciously and constantly harking back to their "glorious past"?

The locals refused to understand the refugee mind – "a tormented psyche"[6] which needed attention and care. A child is attached to his mother through the umbilical chord, which provides all the necessary nourishment. But even after the umbilical chord is severed the sense of belonging of closeness, of warmth, of exuberance never dies. So it is but natural that the forbidden shores would exercise a "cruel" charm upon them (perhaps they still do). As Edward Said has rightly pointed out "once you leave your home, wherever you end up, you simply cannot take up life and become just another citizen of the new place".[7] For that you need time. How can you forget your own mother and overnight start calling somebody else as your mother? Thus it is but natural that the people from East Bengal would carry "their 'homes' on their back.".[8]

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5 Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.406.

6 Address by Dr. Prafulla Kumar Chakrabarti, International Conference on Forced Migration in South Asian Region: Displacement, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Centre for Refugee Studies, Jadavpur University, 20-22 April 2000.

7 Quoted by Pradip Kumar Bose, "Memory Begins Where History Ends" in Samaddar, ed., Reflection on Partition, p.74.

8 Manas Roy, op. cit., p.182.

Appearing in the widely read Bengali journal "Prabashi" a highly provocative article titled "Satyam Priyam" by Sri Vishnu Sharma[9] (presumably a pseudonym), offers a glimpse of the mentality of the West Bengalis. Writing nearly three years after the catastrophe, it is interesting to note that he still refers to the refugees as *Atithi* or guests who as per the norms of a guest-host relationship, should be forever grateful to the locals for providing them with refuge and shelter. A one way flow of goods and services should be matched by a reverse way of obligations. But the author laments , that such courtesies were seldom shown by the rustic East Bengali country bumpkins whose behaviour often hinged on rudeness.

The author then goes on to unleash a tirade against the government. He ridicules the government for dissipating its precious time and money in refugee rehabilitation, at the cost of the welfare of the older residents. Their province being taken over by the outsiders, they have been elbowed to the background. He felt that the outsiders with the blessings of the government had besieged the province, while the West Bengalis were being reduced to non-entities.

Through this article, the author urges the locals to agitate against this one-eyed policy of the government. Sri Vishnu Sharma urged the West Bengalis to shed their image as the epitome of tolerance. Instead of welcoming all and sundry with open arms or remaining mute spectators to the

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9 Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, ed., Prabashi: 50 year: Part 1, 1 issue, Baisakh, 1357 (Calcutta, April 1950), pp. 462-65.

heinous plan of their province being bartered away to the Bangal barbarians they should act decisively. Drawing their attention to the charged situation in Assam where the atmosphere was heavy with anti-Bengali agitation Sri Vishnu Sharma egged on the Ghatis to behave similarly. If they want to ensure a secured future for posterity, it is high time that they take suitable action to thwart the plan of gifting West Bengal to the Bangals. The bottom line of the whole essay is West Bengal for the West Bengalis, and they are not willing to give an inch without a fight.

In his editorial article in the same issue of 'Prabashi', Kedarnath Chattopadhyay,[10] urged the minority Hindus to cling to their *bhita* at all cost – as if the East Bengali Hindus were forsaking everything out of their own free will. He accused them of being cowards and not showing enough courage to face the challenge. Come what may, he wrote, migration is not a solution to the problem and instead of fleeing the scene of battle they should stay put and fight it out. The article criticises the Hindus, on the other side, as escapists, ready to flee at the slightest pretext.

Another instigating article appearing in the Bhadra edition of the same year[11] reminded the natives that "three years of freedom" has brought no good to the real children of West Bengal. Independence was a bane instead of a boon since it has resulted in the pauperisation and impoverishment of the

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10 Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, ed., Prabashi, op. cit., p.98.

11 Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, ed., Prabashi, 50 Year, Part I, 5 issue, Bhadra 1357 (Calcutta, September 1950).

locals 'pushing them towards disaster and complete annihilation'.[12] Instead of showing humane feelings towards the victims, the time was ripe for some soul-searching and introspection by the West Bengalis, so as to take stock of their own miseries and seek redress of what they felt were just grievances.

Another essay harshly condemned the government policy of giving preference to refugees youths in matters relating to promotion and employment, often flouting the established set of rules.[13] The local youths were a neglected lot. No body was there to sympathies with them, to stand by them in their hour of need, or to safeguard their interests. If this continued for long, the article warns, a showdown could not be ruled out in the near future.

Such unreceptiveness is also evident from the various surveys conducted amongst the refugees by individuals and institutions. A survey by Dipankar Sinha conducted amongst the refugees of the Samargarh colony and Batwara Biddhasta Upanibesh – both squatters' colonies on the southern fringes of Calcutta – shows that the residents of these two settlements have been treated as "outsiders par excellence" by the non-refugee neighbours of their respective locality, the relation being "less that cordial" and bereft of any explicit manifestation of "sympathy wave".[14]

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12 Ibid.

13 Hemanta Kumar Chattapadhyay, "Desher Katha" in Jaminimohan Kar, ed., Mashik Basumati, 29th year, Part I, Ashad 1357 (Calcutta, June 1950), p.436.

14 Dipankar Sinha, op. cit.

B.S. Guha's study, carried out on behalf of he Department of Anthropology, Government of India in the Jirat settlement and Azadgarh colony, shows that in their time of distress these unfortunate souls hardly received any sympathy from the local people.[15]

Examples can also be gleaned from Bengali novels, depicting that tumultuous period. These are full of instances that portray this lackadaisical attitude often bordering on hatred. Take for instance persons like Sibaprasad Gupta.[16] Maintaining an outward façade of sympathy, they cashed on human misery to amass huge fortune. To them the refugees are not human beings but the golden egg-laying hen to be killed at the end of the day out of greed for more profit. To them, everything comes with a price tag. Even human misery. But alas! The price is too low to demand any attention. With land prices sky rocketing to an abnormal high in the post-Partition years, since living space was the main crunch (land worth Rs 50 per acre are being sold for Rs.500/- per acre)[17], these hawk-eyed land-hungry gluttons without a hint of regret, without a tinge of remorse, under the cover of darkness, razed down the makeshift tenements of the refugees – perhaps the only roof over their head – for selling the empty plots at exorbitant prices.

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15 B.S. Guha, Studies in Social Tensions Among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan, Memoir No.1 (New Delhi, 1954).

16 Bimal Mitra, Ekak Dashak Shatak (Calcutta, 1962).

17 Jugantar, 1 April 1955.

Manoj Basu's Setubandha deals with the behaviour of the host community towards the refugees. As per his portrayal, the ordinary people in West Bengal are quite unaware of the problems of Partition and that of the people who are uprooted from their homes. They are busy with the nitty-gritty of their own lives. Some like the local youths are absorbed in their frivolous life-style whiling away precious time in meaningless talks, standing in queues for cinema tickets, eve-teasing, in other words not caring a bit for the world around them.[18]

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's Madhab O Taar Pariparshik too portrays this indifferent attitude. Arriving penniless on this side with his good-for-nothing father and epileptic aunt, the young refugee boy Madhab, who had come to ask for some help, was driven out from the local landlord's house because of his refugee identity. Leave aside the residents – even the servants of the house had the audacity to call him an outcaste; not fit to cross the threshold of the house and violate its sanctity. As per the rituals, the courtyard, where Madhab had stepped in, was thoroughly washed after his departure, since he had desecrated the place through his presence, and it needed to be purified.[19]

Human sufferings brought out the beasts in them. Their attitudes portray the Mr. Hyde shade of human character. It was as if the refugee

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18 Manoj Basu, Setubandha (Calcutta, 1999).

19 Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Madhab O Taar Pariparshik (Calcutta, 1987).

status was of their own making – a cover for hoodwinking the government to grant favours, as if they have "invaded" West Bengal with the ostensible desire of usurping the wealth of the province.

The picture that emerges from the foregoing paragraphs is one of ungenerous reception accorded to the refugees. To many of them the painful decision of separation from their ancestral home, to some extent may have been eased by the belief of finding a safe haven in West Bengal, far removed from the persecution of the Muslims, from the tension of living in perpetual fear "when a tap on the door could mean death or for women, rape."[20] But unfortunately, it seems, their hopes were belied. Reality dealt a massive blow to their already sagging morale.

SECTION-II

Let us now turn to the reactions of the government. Did it too follow in the footsteps of the people? This can only be known through a careful dissection of the various governmental policies.

Relief and rehabilitation of persons displaced from their original place of residence by reason of the setting up of the Dominions of India and Pakistan is a subject in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India, that is, it is the responsibility of both the centre and the concerned state.

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20 Meghna Guhathakurta, "Families, Displacement, Partition" in Ranabir Samaddar, ed., Refugee Watch, (Kathmandu, September 1999).

The basic defect was that central government action was conditioned on the faulty understanding of the situation. As a result, the government harboured the mistaken notion that the influx in the East, unlike that in the West was a temporary one and that the refugees would return to their real homes across the border once the situation reverts to normal – that the in-migration will be matched by an out-flow of at least the majority, "...the policy of the Government has been to create conditions in East Pakistan itself to stop the exodus of refugees from there and also encourage those who have come to go back."[21] The Prime Minister wrote to the West Bengal Premier on 25 August 1948:[22]

> I have been quite certain right from the beginning that everything should be done to prevent Hindus in East Bengal from migrating to West Bengal ... Running away is never a solution to the problem.... To the last I would try to check migration even if there is war.

Sri Mohun Lal Saksena reiterated in the Parliament that it is the policy of the Government of India not to treat the refugees from West Pakistan and from East Bengal on the same footing as regards relief and rehabilitation.[23]

Thus in sheer contrast to its role in Punjab, where central government action was swift and prompt, West Bengal languished from "neglect", since

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21 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers, 30 August, 1948 (New Delhi, 1949), p.640.

22 Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., p.109.

23 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers, 30 August,1948 (New Delhi, 1949), p.640.

the people at the helm of affairs being unable to gauge the gravity, dished out relief measures not backed up by a supplementary programme of rehabilitation – "the questions of rehabilitation is being considered, but we always live in the hope that many of them may be able to go back because of conditions arising which would enable to go back."[24]

Hence while the Government expenditure on rehabilitation of the refugees under the headings of rural loans, urban loans and loans to students amounted to Rs.1,14,41,384; Rs.44,12,425 and RS 14,56,776 respectively in case of the West Pakistani refugees migrating to East Punjab and Shimla, the account of West Bengal shows a paltry 1,92,257 rupees (rural loans) and 90,050 rupees as loans to students with no effective expenditure on urban rehabilitation.[25] The discrepancy becomes all the more glaring when a comparison is drawn between East Punjab and West Bengal as to the progress of rehabilitation in these two provinces. Whereas in East Punjab 21,48,000 refugees have been resettled by the first half of 1948, in West Bengal, the number was a meagre 1,00,000.[26]

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24 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answer, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers, 19 February 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), p.772.

25 Constituent Assembly of India, Appendix I-VI, 1948-1949, Appendix IV: Annexure No.10 (New Delhi, 1950), p.179.

26 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates Part I, Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers: Written Answers, Statement II: Showing Progress of Rehabilitation in Provincess and States, 9 August 1948 (New Delhi, 1949), p.33.

The state government's efforts, too in the initial years, showed laxity with regard to permanent rehabilitation. While the East Punjab and Delhi government had submitted schemes for constructing houses for rehabilitating the West Pakistani refugees, the West Bengal Government lagged far behind – evident from the fact that by the first half of 1949, 4,000 houses in East Punjab and 3000 in Delhi had already been completed. The West Bengal column shows nil, the government having sent such a proposal only in March 1949.[27] Thus the stress in the initial years was more on relief (which involves "provision of food, clothing, accommodation"),[28] rather than or rehabilitation (which involves "permanent treatment").[29] Mr. Mohan Lal Saksena instructed the representatives of Tripura, Assam Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal to restrict government work to relief (i.e. Trankarya) rather than to rehabilitation (i.e. Punarbashan).[30] That the stress was mainly on ad hoc assistance is evident from the following table:[31]

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27 Contituent Assemby of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Question and Answers, Starred Question and Answers: Written Answers, Houses Built for Refugees from Pakistan, 31 March 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), p.772

28 Ibid.

29 Constituent Assemble of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Question and Answers, Ministry of Finance (Relief and Rehabilitation Division) : Note on Financial Assistance to Provinces, 30 August 1948 (New Delhi,1949), p.642.

30 Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p.59.

31 Government of West Bengal, Five Years of Independence, August 1947-August 1952 (Calcutta, 1953), p.70.

Year	Relief (in Rs.)	Rehabilitation (in Rs.)
1947-48	4,08,929	Nil
1948-49	1,94,19,452	11,12,453
1949-50	1,61,87,750	31,13,535
Total	3,60,16,131	42,25,988

It was only when the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950 failed to deliver the goods i.e. to facilitate a two way repatriation of the migrants – its expressed purpose – did the reality sink in that the refugees are here to stay . Till then the refugees languished in the hellish atmosphere of the camps (hardly any of which attempted at rehabilitation) or left to rot on the platform of the Sealdah Station – "the Gateway to Hell" – amidst disease, hunger and pestilence, struggling to find some meaning of their wretched existence "abandoned" as they were both by the people and the government alike.

A first-hand account:[32]

> "On Thursday I spent hours with the refugees at Sealdah Station where they detrained and spent several days before moving elsewhere .... An area of 39 x 36 sq. ft has been carved out by rope fencing which the refugees are entitled to use till they are transferred to the camps. Imagine in that space over 5 to 6 thousand men, women and children huddled together and spending their days and nights. There are only three taps which supply drinking water to those people and only two latrines for women and about twelve latrines for men.
>
> While they stay in the station they are given free "chira" (puffed rice) and 'gur' (molasses) as ration by the Government ... There ends the responsibility of the Government ... If a man fall ill, it is nobody's look out. If a woman is in birth pangs she can expect no other help except those offered by her neighbours. When I went to the South station, the very first sight was the body of a naked man, a skeleton to say rightly,

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32 Amrita Bazar Partika, 8 October 1948.

passing stool and dying beside the steps which are used by thousands of daily passengers....

How do these refugees spend their days and nights on the station platform? Imagine young women taking their bath in the open with thousands of people around. Imagine again sleeping in a place a few feet away from a room which is used by thousands as a latrine and which remain unserviced for days together. Imagine, again, cooking your food on three bricks with rubbish as fuel on the street along which pass hundreds of motor cars, lorries and other kinds of vehicles. This is how they spend their days."

Another news paper report highlighting the miserable plight of the refugees:[33]

"More than 1000 refugees are now stranded at Sealdah station making the South and Main station platforms their temporary abode. West Bengal Government vans visit the station everyday and remove about 300 refugees daily but fresh batches come in and fill the vacuum. The platforms are packed with refugees presenting a serious problem to the passengers. With their small belongings here and there and shabby bedding spread all around the sanitation condition of the station has been made horrible. Cases of cholera, influenza, diarrhea, indigestion and dysentery have already taken place and there have been half-a-dozen cholera death during this week".

By the end of 1948, all the refugee relief camps and centres in West Bengal, were filled to capacity. For the maintenance of the refugees, the government provided a system of dry doles and cash doles of Rs.15/- a month per adult and Rs.10/- per child. The number of camp refugees numbered around 40,000 and the government was giving dry and cash doles to two lakh refugees accommodated in various centres in the province.[34]

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33 Amrita Bazar Partika, 20 October, 1949.

34 Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., p.110.

List of all Refugee Camps in West Bengal Till 1949:[35]

Name of the Camp	Population	Date
District Calcutta:-		
1) Bahirsura Road Camp	998	31 October 1948
2) 55, Harish Chatterjee St.	78	"
District Burdwan:-		
3) Nawabnagar	4,109	31 October 1948
4) Salkuni	1,259	"
5) Kashipur	2,828	"
6) Oregram	329	"
7) Ramchandrapur	196	"
8) Jamboni	147	"
9) Mahiata	313	"
10)Gopalpur	3,282	"
11)Bogra	1,503	"
12)Khandra	2,194	"
13)Lawdaha	387	"
14)Jowalbhanga	1,001	"
15)Pandaveswar	299	"
16)Bijaynagar	880	"
17)Nundanga	468	"
18)Kendulia	2,801	"
19)Chanda	517	"
20)Ratibati	1,120	"
21)Moira	2,582	"
District Bankura:-		
22)Basudebpur	3,966	31 October 1948
District Midnapur:-		
23) Digri	1,283	31 October 1948
24) Salboni	4,821	"
25) Salwa	3,120	"

35 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Written Answers, 3 February 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), pp.235-43.

District Howrah:-		
26) 65 Rest Camp	625	31 October 1948
27) Belur C.D. Home	208	"
28) Andul Road Camp	658	"
29) Munshirhat Destitute Home	31	"
District Hooghly:-		
30) Bhadrakali Camp	1,305	31 October 1948
District 24 Parganas:-		
31)Santoshpur Camp	736	31 October 1948
32) Chandmari Camp	7,600	"
33) Goshala Camp	1,125	"
34) Halishar Camp	1,271	"
35) Bengaon Transit Camp	353	"
36) Patabhuka	89	"
37) Lakhikantapur Camp	228	"
38) Baiganchi Camp	266	"
39) Sonarpur	80	"
40) Canning	180	"
District Nadia:-		
41) Dhubulia	5,487	31 October 1948
42) Chinese Mission Camp	361	"
43) Amghata Camp	200	"
District Murshidabad:-		
44) Balarampur Camp	1,240	31 October 1948
45) Mankara Camp	3,000	"
District Jalpaiguri:-		
46) Batiagela Camp	425	31 October. 1948
47) Belacoba Pallimangal Camp	150	"
48) Pandapara Camp	70	"
49) New Assam Building Camp	45	"
50) Katalguri Camp	17	"
51) Tatakpuri Camp	250	"
52) Tishtaghat Camp	65	"
53) Gatipetgola Camp	36	"

54) Pilkhana Camp	125	"
55) New Hat Camp Alipur Duar	134	"
Total	69,700	

However, the distribution of doles in the government run relief camps was irregular. The inmates of the Belur Camp in Howrah district received no doles from 15 October 1949 to 29 October 1949.[36] Consequently some of them had to starve; and it became impossible for the children to bear it.

The fall-out can be illustrated by the sufferings of a sixty-year old evacuee lady – Smt. Giribala Bhattacharya. Goaded by the agony of her grandson, she approached the supervision staff begging for help which was promptly refused. She then went to the neighbouring ration shop with the same plea and then the local Congress office, narrating her plight. The Congress office brought her back to the camp. In the meantime the camp authorities called the police and handed her over them. She was arrested and kept in Jail Hajat where she went without any food from 29 October to 1 November, because as an orthodox Hindu widow of sixty, she would not eat jail cooked food.

In December 1949, it was decided by the state government under advice of the Central Ministry of Rehabilitation, to close down all the camps. Only the old and incapacitated people and unattached women and their children would be continued to be looked after. The total population in camps

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36 Amrita Bazar Partika, 8 November 1949.

and homes had been brought down to 30,000 persons, a majority of whom were in homes.[37] But a fresh cycle of exodus of nearly 16 lakhs following the February Riot of 1950, forced the government to think other wise. In March 1950 only, 75,000 people crossed over, while in May nearly 27,000. On an average at this stage, nearly 5,000 were leaving East Bengal, a day.[38]

Between August and December 1950, the number of people seeking refuge in relief camps:[39]

August	-	35,514
September	-	14,563
October	-	4,754
November	-	9,543
December	-	6,589
Total	-	70,963

In a conference in Calcutta in March 1950 convened by the Central Ministry of Rehabilitation, it was decided that the new refugees (those migrating following the Riot of February 1950) should be treated separately from the old ones and accommodation and maintenance through work schemes should be provided. The government did realize that dollops of monetary assistance – a policy so long resorted to – has only complicated the

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37 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.18.

38 Government of West Bengal, They Live Again: Millions Came from East Pakistan (Calcutta: 1954), p.10.

39 Ibid., p.11.

problem, by producing a class of perpetual, professional, legalised beggars. And as the maxim goes – an idle brain is a devil's workshop. In the absence of any gainful employment, the able bodied youths in the camps indulge in eve-teasing pimping and other nefarious activities. The Minister of State for Rehabilitation Shri Ajit Prasad Jain rightly pointed out, "A man who begins to live on doles without doing anything in many cases becomes reluctant to go out to settle and to work",[40] thus becoming permanent liabilities of the government. Hence it is high time that a composite programme of relief and rehabilitation be chalked out and implemented. Minister of State for Rehabilitation Shri A.P. Jain made a declaration in the Parliament, to the effect for the first time "Relief measures were contemplated only in the initial stages of the exodus; but in March 1950, it was decided to give rehabilitation facilities as well",[41] thus modifying the official policy resorted to so far.

Even Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledged: "I agree with you (Dr. Roy) that we can no longer drift and we must come to clear decisions as to the policy to be adopted."[42] But even then that the Centre did not have its finger on the pulse of the real problem is evident from the fact that a fresh date for the closure of the camps was set – April 30, 1951, thereby implying that the task

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40 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers to Question, 1 August 1950 (New Delhi, 1951) p.134.

41 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Written Answers, 1st August 1950 (New Delhi, 1951), p.56.

42 Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., p.157.

of rehabilitation and settlement would be over within the target date – a wishful thinking no doubt. It had to backtrack on its decision in the near future and the setting and resetting of deadlines became a hallmark of the government's policy towards the East. In fact, it was "only sometime in 1955 and thereafter, that the Government of India settled down to tackle the problem of displaced persons from Eastern Pakistan on a rational basis."[43]

Unlike in the West, where the Central Government itself formulated and implemented the various schemes of rehabilitation, the policy adopted in the East was that the state administration would chalk up the programme and send the same for approval to the centre, which if satisfied would sanction the requisite money. The allotments were earmarked by the Government of India for particular purposes and when the money thus earmarked cannot be spent within the financial year, the amount reverted to the Central Exchequer. The onus of putting the programme to practice would rest on the state government.

The refugees who continued to flood West Bengal, in spurts from 1946 onwards had been classified by the Government of India into two categories:[44]

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43 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), p.15.

44 Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Report of the Working Group on Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal (New Delhi, March 1976), p.1.

a) **Old Migrants** - I) Those who migrated between October 1946 and March 1958; II) Those who migrated between April 1958 and December 1963.

b) **New Migrants** –Those who came between January 1964 and March 1971.

The government's policy of rehabilitation was destined both for those who had taken refuge in the relief camps and non-camp inmates. But the camp inmates were under the direct supervision of the government. The responsibility of rehabilitating them rested entirely with the government. It is to be made clear at the outset, that at any given time, the rate of admission in the camps far outstripped the number of people rehabilitated:[45]

Period	Influx (in lakhs)	Number of persons Admitted to Camps	Number of dispersed (in lakhs)	Balance in lakhs
Up to 1950	29.60	4.68	4.66	0.02
1951-54	5.84	2.54	1.74	0.08
1955-1958 (March)	5.70	3.03	1.33	1.70

Thus it would be seen that only about 25% of the displaced persons migrating to India from East Pakistan passed through camps, and that the rate of dispersal slackened progressively.

The problem of the refugees was classified into two heads – initial relief and subsequent rehabilitation. At important points along the border,

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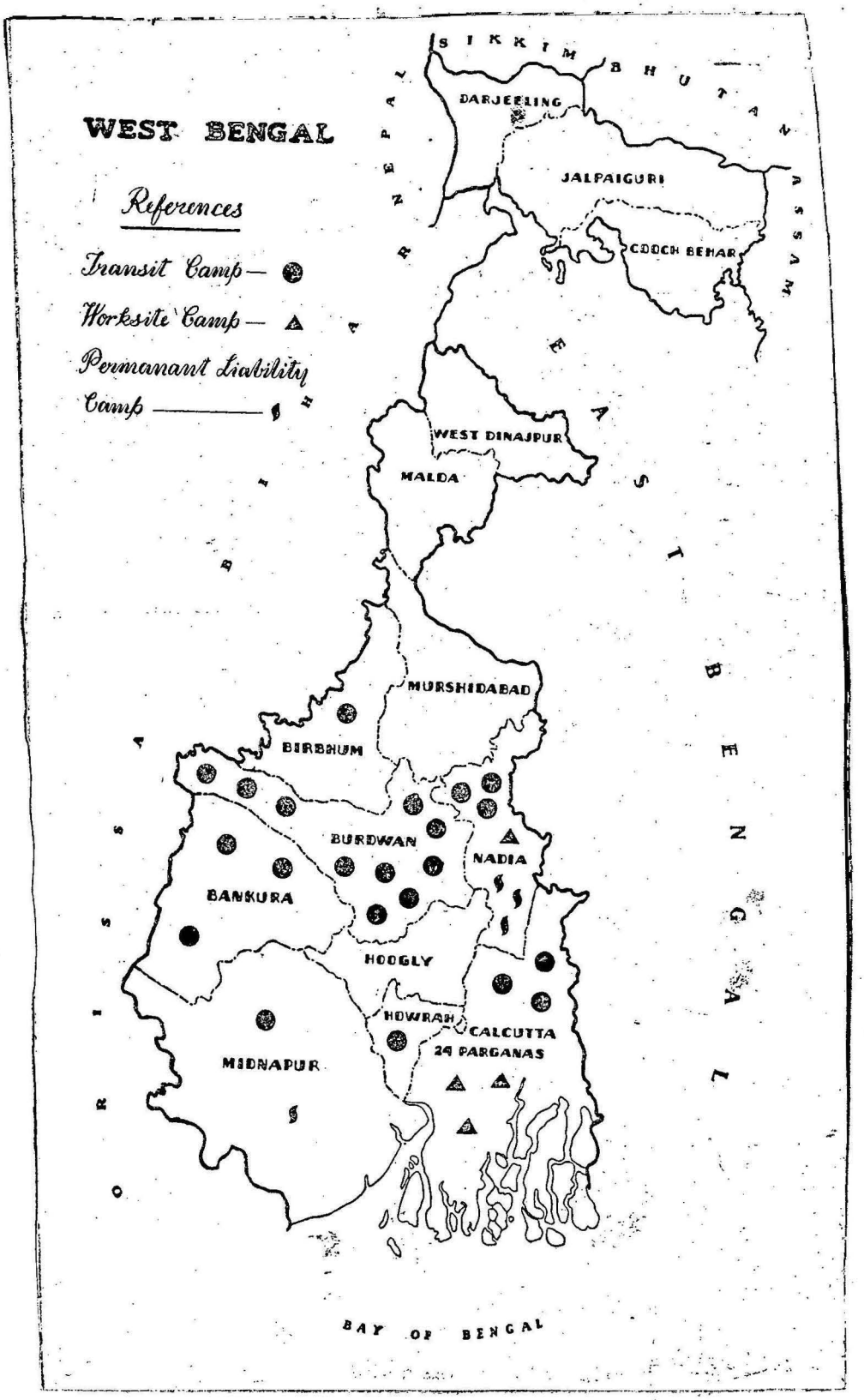
45 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), p.6.



REFUGEE CAMPS IN WEST BENGAL

interception centres were opened where refugees, as they arrived, were questioned and on satisfactorily establishing their claim of fresh arrivals, were issued with interception slips to qualify themselves as refugees. Some refugees did not have to depend on Government for shelter and food. To them these slips were useful as proof of their being a refugee for certain other facilities like procuring house building loans, trade loans.

To those dependent entirely on Government for food and shelter, a special type of interception slip was issued which entitled them to admission in camps. They were then asked to report to the nearest reception centres, where they were further checked and moved to the nearest available transit camp. Here they were again questioned, classified according to their profession or occupation and given cards entitling them to live in relief camps and draw their maintenance grants.

Accordingly, the refugees after enumeration were dispersed to the Relief Camps, Permanent Liability Camp and Colony Camps. The Permanent Liability camps were earmarked for the aged, the infirms and the invalids, widows or families with no able bodied male members. As the very name suggests, their welfare became the long-term responsibility of the government. The Colony Camps were essentially set up by the government to develop sites for housing the displaced and also townships. There were five types of colonies set up by the Government:[46] (a) Urban colonies for

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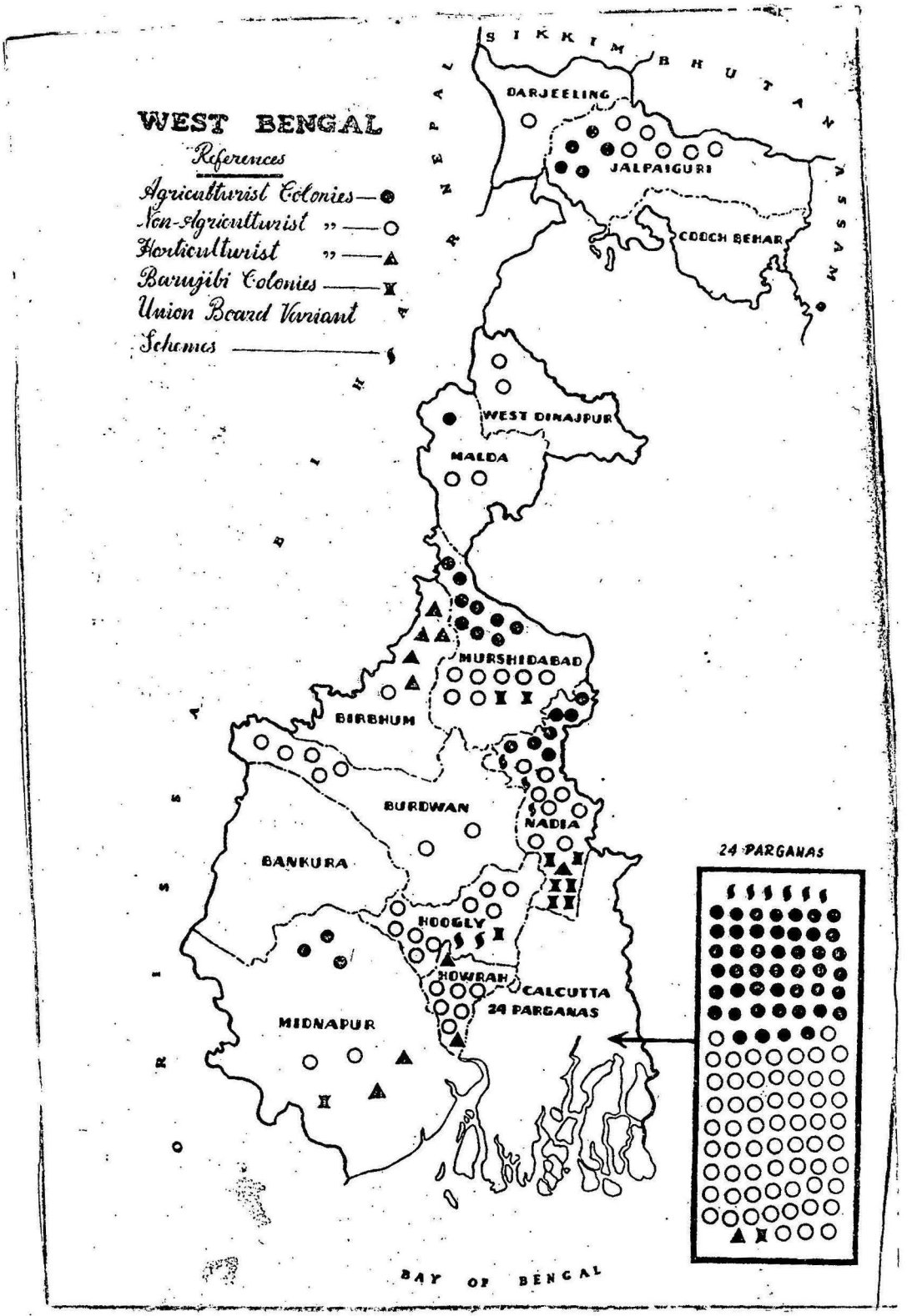
46 West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 March 1953, pp.1053-54 (henceforth referred to as WBLA).



REFUGEE COLONIES IN WEST BENGAL

middle class refugees, (b) Rural colonies for non-agriculturists, (c) Rural colonies for agriculturists, (d) Barujibi colonies, (e) Fishermen's colonies.

By 1955, there were 294 Government refugee rehabilitation colonies in West Bengal:[47]

District-wise Distribution

Districts	Number of Colonies
24 Parganas	163
Nadia	30
Howrah	11
Midnapur	8
Bankura	1
Hooghly	22
Jalpaiguri	11
Cooch Behar	6
West Dinajpur	2
Maldah	5
Murshidabad	18
Birbhum	7
Burdwan	88
Darjeeling	2
Total	**294**

The central government, by 1950, gave the green signal for the setting up of six townships in West Bengal – (i) Fulia (Nadia), (ii) Habra (Twenty-Four Parganas), (iii) Gayeshpur (Twenty-Four Parganas), (iv) Bansdroni (Twenty-Four Parganas), (v) Goria (Twenty-Four Parganas), (vi) Jirat (Twenty-Four Parganas), with a total capacity of 6,580 families.[48]

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47 WBLA, 5 September 1955, pp.286-88.

48 Parliamentary Debates, Part I, Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 15 November 1950 (New Delhi, 1951), p.4.

With the announcement for the introduction of passport and visas for Indo-Pakistan travel from 15 October 1952, there was a huge onrush of migrants from mid-1952. They were now required to equip themselves with migration certificates to be obtained from the Deputy High Commissioner for India at Dacca. The previous system of the issue of interception slips at border stations was discontinued and the interception centres closed. Only the one at Sealdah remained in operation.

Migrants, seeking admission to camps, reported to the reception centre at Sealdah from where they were dispersed to any one of the four transit camps functioning near Calcutta. The unattached women were sent to the Babughat transit camp while the rest to Ghusuri, Cossipore or Reliance camps.

As regards this new set of refugees who came after July 1952 and were admitted to camps, a change in the policy for their accommodation and relief was introduced. It was stipulated that no gratuitous relief will be granted after 31 August 1952 to any displaced person, irrespective of the category to which he or she may belong, outside the Homes/Infirmaries. The able-bodied men, among them, while awaiting rehabilitation would be occupied in useful work like the clearing of jungles and water-hyacinth, repairing roads, developing rehabilitation sites. A new type of camp was added to the existing lexicon – work-site camps.

There were two types of work-site camps. One type of work-site camps are those where reclamation of once water-logged areas were done

and where the refugees would settle once these were drained. The other types were for those who still had not found any kind of land in West Bengal. They were engaged in projects of the Central and the West Bengal Government. In both types of camps, adult males and females within certain age limits worked and their dependents and the rest of the family got subsidy. Their average earning was Rs.1-6.[49]

But camp-life did not entail permanent jobs. Here came the question of rehabilitation. The first step towards rehabilitation was the provision for a permanent shelter for a refugee family.

For this the Khas Mahal lands were placed at the disposal of the Refugee Rehabilitation Department, for settling the refugees. Another scheme for rehabilitating the refugees on lands acquired by the government was also launched. Under this scheme a preliminary survey of available fallow or unused land was made and on the basis of this survey, land acquisition proceedings were initiated under the Land Development and Planning Act 1948. As soon as the land became fit for habitation, a layout was prepared and a provision for drinking water was made by sinking tube-wells or building masonary wells. The refugees were then moved to the site and given temporary accommodation in tents. Their services were then enlisted for clearing jungles and marking out plots and developing the land, for agricultural as also for homestead purposes. A survey was carried out in

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49 WBLA, 8 February 1955, p.303.

1946-47 to assess the acreage of cultivable waste land by the Government of West Bengal, as per which there were around 18 lakh, 28 thousand acres of such land in West Bengal, with 1,83,000 acres, available in Twenty-Four Parganas, 53,000 in Hooghly, 13,000 in Howrah and 1,35,000 in Nadia.[50]

Another programme directed for this purpose was the Union Board Scheme and its variant. Each Union Board comprised of several mouzas or villages capable of absorbing in its economic setup a few families of artisans or cultivators. The variant of the Union Board Scheme retained the same essential features, the only difference being that instead of dispersement in small numbers in different villages, a large block of land was available for resettlement in a convenient place. The refugees were encouraged to go and inspect the place, and if they agreed to settle there, the government arranged for their transport to the site and for advance of various loans.

Camp people were classified into rural and urban and separate sets of programmes were formulated for them. For the rural folks, further subdivided into agriculturists and non-agriculturists two separate set of schemes were in operation. While the agriculturists were provided with lands for homestead as also cultivable lands, the non-agriculturists were provided with lands for homestead along with loans of various types in order to help them to settle themselves by starting small trades.

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50 Manoranjan Chaudhuri, op. cit., p.5.

Loans up to Rs.75 per family were provided for purchase of homestead plots, while in rural areas a family was entitled to house-building loans up to a maximum of Rs.500.[51] Each agriculturist family was forwarded a loan of Rs.600 for purchase of cattle, seed and manure and a further loan of Rs.50 per acre for development of land, where admissible, and a maintenance loan for six months at the maximum rate of Rs.50 per month.[52]

To the non-agriculturist rural families, business or small-trade loans to the tune of Rs.500 per family, with a maintenance grant for a month up to a maximum of Rs.50 per family per month were advanced.[53] The weavers could claim a loan of Rs.600 for a handloom, with guaranteed supply of yarn from the stock maintained by the Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate.[54]

Middle class rural refugee families were entitled to horticultural loans – one bigha and a half of horticultural land, a loans of Rs.630 and a maintenance loan of Rs.200.[55]

The urban displaced families were forwarded a variety of loans – house-building loans, professional loans or business loans. Each family is entitled to a house-building loan of Rs.1,250.[56] Professional loans are

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51 Government of West Bengal, Five Years, p.78.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., p.79.

56 Ibid., p.76.

essentially meant for medical practitioners and lawyers. The former can claim a maximum loan of Rs,2,600 for equipment and subsequent maintenance, while for the latter, a loan of Rs.2,100 is earmarked.[57] Those intending to start small businesses in Calcutta Area can submit an application for loan to the State Refugee Businessmen's Rehabilitation Board (set up on 26 July 1948), which if, satisfied after verifying the necessary details, will sanction a loan up to Rs.5,000 for the same.[58] Within the district, the District Magistrate was empowered to grant such loans within their jurisdiction.

Cutting across urban rural classification, government formulated a comprehensive policy providing educational and medical facilities. The former included the setting up of newer schools, colleges and technical institutes as also provision for stipends and assistance to the refugee children. With regard to the latter, the government maintained free beds in the hospitals for their treatment.

Details of beds reserved for displaced T.B. patients in the hospitals/sanatoria in West Bengal:[59]

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57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.39.

Year	Number of beds reserved
1950-51	170
1951-52	250
1952-53	250
1953-54	250
1954-55	250
1955-56	427
1956-57	473
1957-58	589

Displaced T.B. patients and their families living outside the camps are provided financial assistance:[60]

a) A patient who is awaiting admission as an indoor patient to a hospital is granted a monthly allowance of Rs.20.

b) A cash allowance of Rs.5 per mensem is granted to the patients while undergoing treatment in hospital.

c) On discharge from the hospital, the patient is granted an allowance of Rs.20 per month and free medicines for a period of three months.

d) Dependents of a patient, who is admitted to a hospital/sanatorium for treatment or is awaiting hospitalisation are granted maintenance allowance at the rate of Rs.15 per month per adult and Rs.10 per month of Rs.30 per mensem for the entire family.

The scheme provided for financial assistance at the above rates was to be given for a period of six months before hospitalisation and three months after the recovery of the patients. However, at the request of the state

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60 Ibid.

Government this period was subsequently extended even up to two years in deserving cases.

With regards to educational facilities, the central government gave the green signal for the setting up of six new colleges in West Bengal. By 1956, the Ministry of Rehabilitation sanctioned the construction of twelve degree colleges.[61] One of these, started under the auspices of the Ramkrishna Mission at Narendrapur in the outskirts of Calcutta, is a residential college and caters to about 300 students of the Honours Degree standard. The remaining 11 colleges have an average capacity of 600 to 800 students each. Two of these are for women only.[62]

Norms for the grant of stipends for the different category of students are the following:[63]

1. **Primary school stage:** Freeships to all displaced deserving students. Cash grants @ Rs.5/- per annum to 50% of displaced students in the state whose parents/guardians' income did not exceed Rs.100/- per month.
2. **Middle school stage:** Freeships to 50% of the displaced students in the state. Cash grants @ Rs.20/- per annum to 50% of displaced students in the state.

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61 Jugantar, 6 May 1955 (the state government had however demanded for 15).

62 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.33.

63 Ibid., p.30.

3. **Class VII and VIII:** Freeships to 50% of the displaced students in the state. Cash grants @ Rs.30/- per annum limited to 50% of displaced students in the state.

Till these stages, the entire concessions were admissible only to those displaced students the income of whose parents or guardians did not exceed Rs.100/- per month. In the case of displaced girl students however, the income limit of parents/guardians had been relaxed up to Rs.200/- per month.

4 **High school stage:** Freeships to 40% of the displaced students in the state.

The income limit at the High School stage was Rs.150 per month. In the case of displaced girl students, the income limit of the parents/guardians was relaxed up to Rs.200/- per month.

College Education:

Intermediate: Stipends of Rs.30/- p.m. to those displaced students who had secured not less than 50% marks in the previous examination.

Degree courses [B.A. etc. and B.Sc. (Agriculture)] or *Degree courses* in Veterinary Science: Stipends @ Rs.40/- p.m. to those who had secured not less than 50% marks in the preceding university examination.

Post Graduate courses: Stipends of Rs.50/- p.m. to the deserving students who had acquired not less than 50% marks in their previous degree examination.

Technical and Professional courses: Stipends at the rate varying from Rs.30/- to Rs.60/- p.m. to those deserving displaced students who were able to secure admission in recognised technical and medical institutions.

In April 1956, the scheme was also extended to displaced blind, deaf and dumb students. The rates of stipends sanctioned were as follows:[64]

Day scholars – Tuition fees plus Rs.5/- per annum for books.

Boarders – Rs.40/- for blind students and Rs.30/- p.m. for deaf and dumb students.

Sri Subhas Bhattacharya, a refugee student, who migrated with his family from Pabna in 1948 and a resident of Naktala, clinched the top slot in the school final examinations (class X finals) in 1955.

Another important aspect of the government sponsored rehabilitation programme was the dispersal of the refugees outside the state. Paucity of agricultural land as also the mounting pressure of unending exodus, forced the government to think in terms of rehabilitating them in a few faraway locations like the Andamans as also distributing them in the neighbouring state of Bihar and Orissa.

SECTION-III

Unfortunately, however, the rehabilitation programme, as envisaged by the Government of West Bengal suffered from some serious lacunae. It was

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64 Ibid.

well-nigh impossible for the government to keep a watchful eye on such an all-encompassing programme. Hence degeneration soon set in. For all practical purposes, the various types of camps soon lost their original relevance and degenerated into relief camps. The management of the government run camps left much to be desired as they became dens of vested interests of the officials in charge who usurped the relief materials especially foodgrains, only to release them at the payment of a price. Sanitation were poor, living conditions often unhygienic resulting in the outbreak of infectious diseases. An example:[65]

> I live in a relief camp. Some inmates have been infected with cholera. A refugee child succumbed to the disease in the morning. I had received only a handful of puffed rice in the morning. That is all. I do not dare to go to the Relief babu (the man-in-charge). He gets irritated if we request for anything.

In the Reliance Camp in North Calcutta in a huge godown, a large number of families were cooped up without walls or screens. There were fifteen tuberculosis patients among the inmates. Out of the nine tubewells in the Camp, five were in an unserviceable condition.[66]

What is more alarming many of these camps became the hub of immoral trafficking and prostitution where young refugee girls were picked up and sold in the flesh market. Insufficient monetary assistance forced many of the women to smuggling huge bags of rice and other grains. They led a hunted life travelling hidden under train bunks, ticketless, chased by petty

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65 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., op. cit., p.51.

66 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), p.7.

policemen who perhaps would be kind enough to release them in lieu of the right to enjoy their body.

Moreover, although the avowed aim of the government was to carefully enunciate the previous status of the refugees, in many cases, such considerations were overlooked. It so happened that the agriculturists were sent to non-agricultural colonies and vice versa due to wrong classification. Most of the colonies set up in great haste lacked careful planning and survey. The result – in the midst of West Bengal's third largest urban area – Burdwan – a rural colony was set up. Vested interests were at work during the requisition of land for setting up these colonies. In the Bhattanagar area of Liluah, Howrah, the Rehabilitation Department in connivance with the district administration requisitioned thousands of acres of arable land with the expressed purposed of setting up a colony, on behalf of a gentleman who in turn wanted to sell this land at an exorbitant price. Sri Sudhir Kumar Bandyopadhyay complains that his small plot of land falling under the jurisdiction of the Barasat Municipality has been usurped by the officials under the "Refugee scheme", leaving aside that of the neighbouring bigwigs who had the resources to bribe the officials. The Municipal Gazette of 12 April 1951 clearly state that his land had been restored to him. But the reality tells a different story. The government through a letter, informed him that his land will not be released since it has been requisitioned for rehabilitation purposes.[67]

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[67] Jugantar, 3 June 1955.

A survey of the government sponsored colonies and townships carried out by the Jugantar Patrika in the different districts of West Bengal shows the majority of them in a pathetic condition.

Take the case of the Media government colony in Twenty-Four Parganas – a non-agricultural rural colony.[68] Set up in 1951 with nearly 1,400 families of the Dhubulia Camp, the colony at the time of the survey was in a sorry state. The refugees were cartloaded to the open field and forwarded with six cottahs of land, five hundred rupees as house building loans, seventy five rupees as the price of the land, five hundred rupees as small trade loan,a total of Rs.1,075.[69] An aged resident of the colony informed that it took nearly a year's running from pillar to post to procure the house-building loan. Out of the 30 tube-wells in the colony, 20 were out of order, leading to an acute shortage of drinking water.[70] No proper medical facilities were available, except for a mobile medical unit that visited thrice a week. Scope for higher education was nil, since the colony had no full-fledged secondary school – only 3 primary schools and one junior high school.

There were about a hundred heads in the colony, equipped with education ranging from matriculation to graduation and around another thousand with elementary education but the government had made no provision for employment. Forwarding of loans does not solve the problem

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68 Jugantar, 17 February 1960.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

there should be at least some infrastructure within which the loans may be utilised. On top of it, the government was pressurising them for repaying the house-building loans.

The Gayeshpur township, too, presents a dull picture. Located nearly five miles from the Kanchrapara railway station – the nearest station – the township by the end of 1950 was inhabited by nearly 2,700 refugee families.[71] But poor infrastructural facilies saw nearly 800 of them deserting the township by 1952.[72] The unmetalled roads, during the monsoon season, turned into stretches of mud and slush. The lands in the vicinity, were not arable; located far from locality in an isolated place, there was not much scope for small traders or business.

But these did not deter the government from dumping another 500 families from the Cooper's Camp.[73] By 1955, there were nearly 2,400 families with a total population of 14,000.[74] Out of these, only a handful were employed – 100 in the teaching profession, another 100-150 as rickshaw-pullers and nearly 500 others as wage labourers. The rest were unemployed.[75]

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71 Jugantar, 10 January 1955.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

There was only one tubewell per 40 families, and one toilet per 6 families.[76]

Lack of coordination among the different departments of the government heightened the woes of the refugees. The monsoon of 1956 spelt doom for the refugees settled in Habra in Twenty-Four Parganas. They lost practically everything including the roof above their heads. When they requested for compensation, the Relief Department refused them on the ground that since Rs.500 has already been given to them as house-building loan they are not entitled to any further money. They were shuttled to the Refugee Rehabilitation Department since as refugees, if they are at all entitled to any money, they will get it from the Department created specifically to cater to their needs. Ms. Renuka Ray, in charge of the Department, however, felt otherwise. According to her the refugees are not the sole victims of this natural calamity. It has affected each and every resident of that area. So why should it be the responsibility of the Refugees Rehabilitation Department to compensate for the loss? The Relief Department should come forward. Baffled at the inter-departmental tussle, the refugees were at a loss as to whom to turn.

The pace of dispersal of the camp inmates was extremely slow. There were many caged in the camps for "over an year or almost about an year

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76 Ibid.

without any attempt at rehabilitation being made",[77] admits the Minister of State for Rehabilitation Shri A.P. Jain. This in fact is an understatement. An analysis of the population of the camp in 1958, revealed that out of the 48,000 camp families screened, nearly one-third had been in these camps for periods ranging from six to ten years.[78] As per government reports, around October 1953, the number of refugees was around 25,85,974 out of which only 2,92,435 have been rehabilitated, the percentage as can be calculated is a meagre 11.3.[79] The Fact-Finding Committee set up by the Government of India in 1950, makes the starting declaration that even among those dispersed, not more than 14% have received proper rehabilitation benefits, that would have helped them to rebuild their future.[80]

In fact, government spend more on the non-camp inmates than on the camp inmates. Till the end of 1958, expenditure on non-camp inmates was nearly three times that of the camp inmates – Rs.48.5 crores to Rs.18 crores.[81]

Land reclamation schemes as undertaken by the government, did not register much progress, as is evident from the Blue Book on Relief and

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77 Parliamentary Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers Oral Answers to Questions, 23 August 1951 (New Delhi, 1952), p.582.

78 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), op. cit., p.10.

79 Ibid.

80 Jugantar, 1 April 1955.

81 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), op. cit., p.18.

Rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal, issued by the West Bengal Government in December 1958. As per its report, till the middle of 1958 only 62,614 acres had been reclaimed – an idea of its dismal performance.[82]

The educational policy of the government, too, has certain loopholes. In general, a monthly income of around Rs.100 or less entitles a student for grants. But imagine a situation where a family of three – a man, his wife and their son – with a monthly income of less than Rs.100 is entitled to such a grant whereas on the other hand a huge family of eight to ten where the head of the family has to bear the cost of five to six school going children is not eligible for the benefit just because his monthly income exceeds the stipulated amount. The government should have come up with different sets of policies to meet the challenges of such paradoxical situation.

SECTION-IV

However, one would be offering a partial and biased view if the inhabitants of West Bengal and the Government alike are condemned in one voice for their indifference and callousness.

The resident population cannot be whole-heartedly accused. It is true that in many cases they displayed insensitivity and hostility to the victims of the great calamity. Threatened with the loss of privileges and conveniences, so long enjoyed, this is but a natural reaction. One should spare a thought for

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82 Manoranjan Chaudhuri, op. cit., p.7.

them also. The overall scenario was too grim, circumstances were too adverse for them to welcome this unending trait of people with open arms.

In fact, not all were impervous to the suffering of their less fortunate brethren. One erstwhile resident of Barisal fondly recollects, "the Ghatis extended all possible help, and stood by us like a true friend during those dark, despairing days."[83] Arriving almost penniless in Bakrahat in Twenty-Four Parganas, it was in fact the locals who paid the rent on behalf of her family. "We enjoyed a very cordial relationship"[84] she sums up.

The refugees too, in many cases proved to be a problem group. It is true that many took the initiative to fend for themselves, whereas many were incapable of taking care of themselves on their own. But at the same time, there were many able-bodied young men who refused to accept any gainful employment offered by the government, seizing the slightest opportunity to boast of their glorious past. As long as you earn money in an honest way by shedding your own sweat, no job is below your dignity. But the refugee youths refused to acknowledge this. They were wary of losing their doles. The claustrophobic atmosphere in the camps blunted their facilities and crippled their outlook and mentality. They fight like they never did, use foul language, spend their time in eve-teasing, pimping and other anti-social activities.

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83 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

84 Ibid.

In many instances the refugees themselves were dishonest. They would not pay rents of their flats, or pay for their electricity, even when they had the means. In fact the "pathetic" story[85] of a gentleman coming to the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee office that his landlord was driving his family out on the street, was later on found out to be fake.

Even the state government's work in the field of rehabilitation should not be denounced as "one of non-performance".[86] One has to bear in mind that, it had to work within the parameters of certain limitations which often proved detrimental to the carrying out of the duties of a welfare state.

Partition had reduced West Bengal to one-third of its previous size or 36.4% of the area of the parent province, and at the same time saddled it with a huge population.[87] The average density of the city of Calcutta (area 32.33 square miles) was around 88,953 persons per square mile or 139 persons per acre[88] – a whopping increase from 751.2 persons per square mile in undivided Bengal.[89] Moreover, the province now has a smaller percentage of rainfall resulting in low productivity. Consequently she is deficit in most crops – food as well as cash crop – jute, sugarcane, mustard and what is more

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85 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 14 February 1949.

86 Prafulla Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.XXIV.

87 WBLA, 17 February 1948, p.18.

88 Asok Mitra, ed., Census, 1951, p.VII.

89 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Question and Answers, Oral Answers, 8 March 1948 (New Delhi, 1949), p.1738.

alarming in rice also, the staple diet of any Bengali. In 1949, production of rice was estimated at 31,99,100 tons as against the required 36,00,000 tons. The West Bengal premier Dr. B.C. Roy declared that West Bengal has a food deficit of 2,00,000 tons of rice and cereals.[90] The deficit in the production of different food crops, vegetables and other essential food items as in 1950 is:[91]

Item	Deficit (in tons)
Sugar	399000
Potato	33400
Fruits	96500
Milk	266000
Fish and Meat	1776000
Egg	7.5 crores
Ghee, Butter, Mustard Oil	409000

By 1957, the state was facing a food deficit of 1.2 million tons.[92]

In revenue sphere, Partition dealt a severe blow as an undue proportion of the proceeds of the jute-duty and income tax dried up. In March 1948, the central government informed the West Bengal, that the share of the income tax receipts has been reduced from 20% to 12% or in other words, Rs.6 crores worth share was cut down to Rs.3.5 crores, the remaining 2.5 crores being distributed to other provinces.[93] Bombay with a population of 29

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90 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 4 June 1949.

91 Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, ed., Prabashi: 50 Year, Part I, Vol.2, Jaistha 1357 (Calcutta, May 1951), p.250.

92 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 April 1958.

93 Saroj Chakrabarty, op. cit., p.141.

millions received, an enhanced share from 20 to 29% whereas West Bengal with the same population or perhaps a little more got her share reduced from 20% to 12%.[94] Deficit was the buzz-word all around. The Government of undivided Bengal had a succession of mainly deficit budgets during the few years before Partition. This will be proved by the following table[95] –

Years	Surplus (+) or Deficit (–) In Rs.'000
1941-42	-56,76
1942-43	-32,76
1943-44	-2,73,67
1944-45	-4,80,14
1945-46	+4,96,43
1946-47	-2,74,78
1947-48	-7,81,88*

* Figures relate to pre-Partition period.

On the date of Partition, leaving aside the cash in treasury chests, the account of the late Government of Bengal with Reserve Bank of India showed a debit balance of over Rupees Five crores. This debit balance by mutual agreement was allocated in equal proportions to East and West Bengal. Accordingly, the Government of West Bengal started with a debit balance of Rupees Two and half crores in the Reserve Bank partly counterbalanced by the cash balance in treasuries amounting to about half a crore. In other

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94 Ibid.

95 Compiled from Government of India, Statistical Abstract of Indian Union, 1950 (New Delhi,. 1951).

words, it started with a net negative balance of Rupees Two Crores.[96] This was followed by a majority of deficit budgets in the next ten years:[97]

Year	Surplus (+) or Deficit (–) (in Rs. '000)
1948-49	+3,65,67
1949-50	+3,83,28
1950-51	-3,32,20
1951-52	-1,20,75
1952-53	-1,48,13
1953-54	-6,86,96
1954-55	-6,50,62
1955-56	-10,72,93
1956-57	-13,58,94
1957-58	-1,89,94

Under such circumstances, even any well-meaning state government would have found it a daunting task to find an amicable solution to the refugee problem because it itself was in no position to generate the much-needed resources. The state had to fight tooth and nail with the centre for necessary funds and resources. The central government on the other hand enjoyed successive years of surplus budget with the exception of 1949-50.[98]

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96 WBLA, 17 February 1948, p.22.

97 Compiled from Government of India, Statistical Abstract of Indian Union, 1957-58 (New Delhi, 1959).

98 Ibid.

Year	Surplus (+) or Deficit (-) (in Rs.'000)
1948-49	+47,58,36
1949-50	-1,12,46,99
1950-51	+53,76,80
1951-52	+1,26,39,38
1952-53	+39,91,90
1953-54	+8,64,44
1954-55	+32,40,68
1955-56	+41,69,55
1956-57	+88,63,11
1957-58	+42,99,28

Right from 1948-49, the Premier was crying hoarse for money from the Central Government – from Prime Minister to every other ministry concerned with relief and rehabilitation – when he found that his state was not getting the same deal with that of those others suffering from border migration from the West. Dr. B.C. Roy expressed his exasperation to the Prime Minister in a letter dated 1 December 1949:[99]

> You are under the impression that your Government gave us a 'large grant' for the purpose of 'relief' and rehabilitation. Do you realise that the total grant received for this purpose from your Government in the two years, 1948-49 and 1949-50 is a little over 3 crores, the rest about 5 crores was given in the form of a loan? Do you realise that this sum is 'insignificant' compared to what has been spent for refugees from West Bengal? ...I do say that the 'grant' so far given is insignificant for 16 lakhs displaced people because it works out at about Rs.20/- per capita spread over two years. Will you call it magnificent?....
>
> ...For months, the Government of India would not recognise the existence of refugee problems in East Pakistan, and therefore, would not accept the liabilities on their account. The Provincial Government had to carry on as bests as they could. And for these refugees, a magnificent sum of Rs.20/0 per capita has been granted by the Centre in two years.

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99 Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., pp.140-42.

In fact, Dr. Roy was determined to "...fight for my Province so long as I feel it is my responsibility to do so...."[100]

In fact, as early as March 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru himself in a letter to Dr. Roy promised that "If they come over to West Bengal, we must look after them."[101] But in reality, a proper 'looking after' of the refugees did not materialise.

The step-motherly treatment meted out to the East Pakistani migrants is evident from the following table:[102]

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100 Ibid., p.145.

101 Ibid., p.106.

102 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.114.

Table: Expenditure On Displaced Persons 1947-48 to 1957-58

(Figures in lakhs of rupees)

Year	Establishment			Grants			Loans except Housing & R.F.A.			Housing			Total
	West Pak. D.Ps	East Pak. D.Ps	Total	West Pak. D.Ps	East Pak. D.Ps	Total	West Pak. D.Ps	East Pak. D.Ps	Total	West. Pak. D.Ps	East Pak. D.Ps	Total	
1947-48	5.78	--	5.78	272.09	--	272.09	0.71	--	0.71	--	--	--	278.58
1958-49	13.37	--	13.37	1654.85	185.48	1840.33	478.23	--	478.23	577.78	--	577.78	2909.71
1949-50	16.15	--	16.15	1627.45	148.49	1775.94	931.77	87.88	1019.65	973.49	227.76	1201.25	4012.99
1950-51	18.37	--	18.37	723.36	649.90	1373.26	398.95	302.51	701.46	966.37	235.86	1202.23	3295.32
1951-52	15.81	3.04	18.85	573.18	586.76	1159.94	167.68	478.52	656.20	1177.24	430.55	1607.79	3432.78
1952-53	16.69	2.91	19.60	523.50	427.63	951.13	125.27	478.76	604.03	837.32	271.16	1108.48	2683.24
1953-54	15.54	3.19	18.73	647.62	429.67	1077.29	95.61	243.72	339.33	462.70	143.85	606.55	2041.90
1954-55	16.77	4.20	20.97	511.20	463.10	974.30	111.22	352.34	463.56	426.30	334.73	761.03	2219.86
1955-56	20.51	7.87	28.38	428.45	758.44	1186.89	127.27	459.13	586.40	304.02	372.15	676.17	2477.84
1956-57	27.57	10.67	38.24	527.84	1104.55	1632.39	89.17	521.63	610.80	100.00	660.45	760.45	3041.88
1957-58	28.23	11.68	39.91	584.09	1026.64	1610.73	51.40	374.98	426.38	106.85	273.77	380.62	2457.64
Grand Total	194.79	43.56	238.35	8073.63	5780.66	13854.29	2577.28	3299.47	5876.75	5932.07	2950.28	8832.35	

Thus it evident that up to 1954-55, the West Pakistani refugees remained the blue-eyed boy of the central government. It was only from 1955-56, that the East Pakistani migrants enjoyed at a bit of a upper hand.

The grand total for ten years when added up to shows that except for 'Loans except Housing R.F.A.' throughout these ten years, the West Pakistani were a privileged lot.

Moreover, apart from being the favoured son so far as relief and rehabilitation is concerned, the refugees from West Pakistan received hefty compensation for the properties left in Pakistan. A refugee in Punjab, has got a house for a house and cash compensation for the cash loss sustained by him as per his declaration. All in all nearly 4,83,840 West Pakistani displaced persons received compensation to the tune of Rs.1,46,14,65,937.[103] Their East Pakistani brethren were, however, not so fortunate.

SECTION-V

All said and done, a feeling of being betrayed and cheated by the government and the people alike was rife among the refugees. However in spite of the 'laid-back attitude' of the people and the "failure" of the government, the refugees refused to play the role of guinea pigs in the various experiments of the government. It is true that many were battered in mind and body, having lost the urge to live to its fullest, but there were

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103 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, op. cit., p.124.

enterprising enthusiasts who were determined not to be dragged into the vortex of politics and remain mute spectators to their fate being sealed.

Thus originated the squatters' colonies which are basically unplanned colonies whereby the refugees infringed upon and occupied the marshy and fallow lands in the outskirts of Calcutta. This process of collective takeover has been immortalised by the term "*jabardakhal*" – forcible seizure. At night individual plots were marked off and shacks erected and hogla leaves were used to thatch makeshift roofs. These areas were usually undeveloped, low lying and marshy jungle and forest lands, prone to monsoon flooding. As the city of Calcutta attracted millions of refugees, a large number of colonies emerged within the Calcutta Corporation area itself. The foundation of the squatters' colonies, the majority of which cropped up between the end of 1949 and the first half of 1950, resulted in a severe law and order problem as it signalled the beginning of a three-pronged struggle between the government, the locals and the refugees whereby the government swung like a pendulum between the two communites – one who never paid the cost of crossing and the other for whom the cost was perhaps too heavy. In their urgent need to have a roof, above their head, the squatters made no discrimination between government or private lands. The landlords, absentee, in most cases hired local goons to evict them. In the initial years, the government forces, too, threw their weight behind them.

One can take the example of the Azadgarh colony, located in the Jadavpur area as a case-study. Indubaran Ganguly, one of the founding

fathers of the colony pens a day to day account of its inception in his memoir – "Colony Smriti".[104]

A very interesting feature of the Azadgarh Colony is that instead of selecting the dead of night, it was in broad daylight – around 9 or 10 a.m. that the division of plots began. The day – 17 January 1950. Only those East Bengali refugees, who possessed no land anywhere in West Bengal, were eligible for a plot in the colony, for which they had to pay Rs.10. The size of a holding was roughly around three cottahs. By afternoon, division was complete and many of the plot holders started construction work.

From then onwards, for three years Sri Ganguly led the life of a fugitive as nearly a dozen arrest warrants were issued in his name. The police went to the extremes to arrest him – cordoned off his residence, barged into his house at odd hours – but to no avail. He successfully managed to dodge them. Finally, it was in 1953, during the food riots that he was arrested.

The original owner of the plots Sri Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, did not sit quiet as his land was being illegally encroached upon. He arrived at the site with two armed bodyguards in tow at about 4 a.m. on 25 January and started his demotion drive in ward no.3 of the colony. But in face of stubborn resistance from the colony dwellers, he had to beat a hasty retreat.

Such tussle between the landlords and the refugees became a common feature. The latter won a major victory when the High Court, in reply

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104 Indubaran Ganguly, Colony Smriti (Calcutta, 1997).

to a writ petition filed on behalf of the squatters, by the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC, founded in 1950) passed a landmark judgement that in case of continuous residence in a plot for three months, no criminal proceedings can be initiated. Only civil suits can be filed, but the very nature of the civil suit itself was a great deterrent.

The government now stepped in to pay the role of the mediator and passed the *Eviction of Persons in Unauthorised Occupation of Land Bill* in 1951. The Bill stipulated that any landlord on payment of a nominal court fee of 50 paise can lodge a complaint with the Competent Authority for the eviction of the unauthorised occupiers and provided for compensation for the period of unauthorised occupation. But at the same time in order to protect the interests of the refugees the Bill sought to legalise their occupation in certain cases. The squatted areas were divided into high priced and low priced areas. Section 5 of the Bill empowered the government to secure land offered by the owner for sale. But such a policy would be valid only in case of the low price lands. It was highly unlikely that the owners would offer the high priced areas for sale and the government itself was not willing to buy those lands at inxorbitant prices. The Bill called for the vacation of those lands. But at the same time it also provided for alternative accommodation as near as possible to his occupied land.

The central government declared in the Parliament:[105]

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105 House of the People, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers to Questions, 4 March 1952 (New Delhi, 1953), p.474

any local authority). In case of such 'unauthorised occupation', the owner may send an application to the Competent Authority (Competent Authority means a judicial officer not below the rank of a District Judge appointed by the state Government in consultation with the High Court) which would make relevant enquiries and issue show cause notice, asking him to furnish an explanation within thirty days of the service of the notice. If the authority is not satisfied with the reply, as to why the unauthorised occupier would not vacate the land and pay to the owner, compensation for unauthorised occupation, the Competent Authority by order would direct every person, in respect of whom it was satisfied that he was an unauthorised occupant, to vacate the land within the thirty days from the date of the issue of the order and fix the amount of compensation to be paid. The aggrieved party may appeal to a Tribunal appointed by the state government which was empowered to quash, modify or uphold the order of the Competent Authority. The orders of the Tribunal would be final and could not be challenged in any higher court, tribunal or authority.

The Act failed to settle the problems of eviction and occupation amicably as the question of eviction, UCRC complained, still loomed large. Between 1951 and 1954 many such notices were issued by the Competent Authority but under the directive of the UCRC the so-called illegal occupants ignored them and valiantly resisted any effort at eviction.

In 1954, the central government appointed a Committee of Ministers which recommended in its report for the legalisation and regularisation of 149 squatters' colonies set up till 31 December 1950.

Squatters' Colonies established till 31 December 1950:[107]

District	Police Station	Number of Settlements	Number of Families	Total Area (in acres)
Twenty Four Parganas	Jadavpur	58	12,879	1073.26
"	Behala	4	412	34.40
"	Dum Dum	40	6,807	453.80
"	Belghoria	3	2,543	228.50
"	Baranangar	7	1,171	97.58
"	Noapara	4	362	30.10
"	Khardah	15	2,707	225.60
"	Naihati	3	718	59.40
"	Bijpur	4	333	27.90
"	Titagarh	1	155	12.90
"	Jagaddal	4	388	32.30
"	Habra	2	412	34.20
Hooghly	Srirampur	3	809	67.43
Howrah	Bally	1	160	13.30
		149	29,856	2390.64

As it can be seen the fringe areas of Calcutta like Jadavpur in the south and Dum Dum in the north came to be infiltrated by the refugees. The pre-1950 squatters' colonies as it can be seen came to be located mostly on the East Bank of the Hooghly river.

The question of legalisation of plots still remained an unsettled issue. The report of the Committee of Ministers advised the government to modify its stand regarding the fixation of the upper price ceiling, since the Supreme

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107 Anil Singha, Jabardakhal Colony (Calcutta, 1979), p.4.

Court had already directed the provision of fixing land prices at 1946 rate, null and void.

The government however did not venture to modify its policy.

There thus ensued a tussle with the process of regularisation. The UCRC demanded that since the faulty policy of government's dilly dallying with the refugee issue had resulted in the birth of the squatters' colonies, it is the moral duty of the government to acquire the lands on behalf of the settlers, and bestow the ownership over their holdings. The government, on the other hand, envisioned the process of regularisation in a different manner. Between 1952 and 1957, Smt. Renuka Ray was the Rehabilitation Minister of the State. Instead of acquiring the lands on behalf of the refugees, she handed out 'arpanpatras' by which each squatter was entitled to two and a half cottahs of land. But at the same time each plot holder would have to pay Rs.1,875.50 to the owner of the land in instalments as stipulated by the government. If anybody is found to be in possession of more than the prescribed area, he would have to pay additional amount stipulated by the government.

But such regularisation did not bestow title-deed to the squatters. This was unacceptable to the UCRC. It only made them authorised occupants of the land or tenants. But the government did not take any further step towards fulfilling their demand of making them the owners of the lands.

The process of regularisation was a cumbersome one. Preliminary steps like enumeration, measurement etc. took much time. On the

completion of the process, the government issued "arpanpatras" to the families who had occupied land till 31 December 1950, on production of proof of their refugee status. All the occupants were not bona-fide refugees. Hence it took time to establish and select the genuine ones, and hand out the 'arpanpatras'.

Some of colonies thus could be partially regularised – Jatindas Nagar, Deshapriyanagar of Barrackpore, Prafullanagar of Belghoria, Bejoynagar of Naihati. Out of all the pre-1950 squatters' colonies, investigations were carried on in 120 colonies and 20 colonies were completely and 21 colonies were partially regularised by 1956.[108] Till 1957, in and around Calcutta 69 colonies were regularised.[109]

After the partial or full regularisation of the squatters' colonies, the state government undertook schemes for the development of the concerned colonies by aiming to provide proper sanitation facilities, widening roads, electrification, education facilities and employment opportunities. The state submitted plans for the sanction of the same to the centre, which if satisfied would grant finances for the said project. It was a prolonged process and in many cases the all important money was found wanting. The result – regularisation did not bring about much change in the life of the squatters in terms of better living conditions.

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108 WBLA, 13 March 1956, pp.151-58.

109 WBLA, 10 July 1957, p.276.

Take the example of Sahid Colony – a partially regularised colony located on Barrackpore Trunk Road about 10 miles from North Calcutta.[110] Around 150 families were settled there.[111] The development programme, undertaken by the government, was erratic. There were only 5 tubewells – four provided by the government and one by the local municipality.[112] There was only one primary school. The government was not interested in upgrading it into a secondary school. Even the primary school had not received any sanction from the government and consequently languished in neglect. The overall picture of the colony is grim and the residents' hope of a better future has been dashed.

The situation in a fully regularised squatters' colony like the Bapuji Colony of Ichhapur in Twenty-Four Parganas is no better. A settlement of 130 uprooted families, the plot holders were granted 'arpanpatras' in 1956.[113] But from then onwards it was a long wait. In 1958, the government did undertake schemes for development like widening the roads, digging tubewells. But the poor quality of the materials used heightened the miseries of the settlers. The roads are full of potholes, the drainage system is in a pathetic condition – the open drains remain unserviced for days resulting in their blockade due to the accumulation of garbage. Out of the seven

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110 Jugantar, 2 March 1960.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Jugantar, 9 March 1960.

tubewells, five are not working.[114] The sole primary school, for want of funds, is housed in a rickety building which might collapse any day.

Squatters' colonies set up after 1950, were not considered for regularisation. Between 1950 and 1960, nearly 50,000 families have forcibly seized nearly 10,000 bighas of land.[115] All in all, out of the 149 squatters' coilonies, 136 were shortlisted for regularisation of which only 87 could be regularised by 1958.[116]

It is in the light of these kaleidoscope of events, that sometimes went in their favour, sometimes against them, that the experiences of the refugees, their mentality, their behaviour pattern, their assimilation have to be studied.

The attitude of the host society, seen from the point of view of the refugees was not a favourable one. The Bangal Ghati division persisted while the governments could not decide the ways and means to tackle the problem. The measures, derived for their welfare, in many cases backfired. But then, the other side, too, had constraints. Thus during the first decade, problem remained a problem

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114 Ibid.

115 Jugantar, 9 May 1960.

116 WBLA, 7 July 1958, pp.131-44.

CHAPTER-IV

MINISTRY OF REHABILITATION: CONCLUDING PHASE

The main focus of this chapter is the events from 1958-60 -- the year in which the Ministry of Rehabilitation was finally lowered down to rest in peace.

In fact right from the end of the 1950's the Government of India was seriously thinking in terms of winding up the Ministry. Set up in September 1947 to tackle the "gigantic problems of mass migration consequent of the partition of the country and the orgy of communal trouble...",[1] the Ministry started showing a narcissist attitude by beating its own trumpet and patting its own back:[2]

> With the increasing attainment of the objectives for which it was created... this Ministry encouraged by the work already accomplished, proceeded during the year under review (i.e. 1960-61) to undertake with confidence measures for its own liquidation.

It was in this context, that the Union Rehabilitation Minister in his speech in the Lok Sabha on 11 April 1959, observed, "I feel that the greatest achievement that this Ministry can achieve is to liquidate itself."[3] In a press-note dated 17 June 1960, the Prime Minister's Secretariat expressed the high

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1 All India Congress Committee, Third Year of Freedom, August 1949-August 1950 (New Delhi, 1950), p.95.

2 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.1.

3 Ibid., p.3.

hope that "the major part of the work of the Ministry of Rehabilitation will be over within a period 12 to 15 months."[4] The work, yet to be done, was stated to be 'residuary' in nature and that this residual work would be distributed to other Ministries/Departments of the Centre/State Governments and the Ministry of Rehabilitation would permanently be put under lock and key.

Accordingly, the work of transfer began:[5]

Items of Work		Name of the Ministry	Date of Transfer
1.	Financial assistance to displaced students	Ministry of Education	1.4.60
2.	Reservation of T.B. beds for displaced persons	Ministry of Health	1.9.60
3.	Rehabilitation Industries Corporation	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	1.9.60
4.	Maintenance of displaced orphan children's institutions and orphanages in West Bengal	Ministry of Education	1.10.60
5.	Maintenance of displaced persons in homes and infirmaries in states other than West Bengal	-do-	-do-
6.	Stipend to displaced students in polytechnics in West Bengal	Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs	-do-
7.	Technical training of displaced persons in the erstwhile D.G.R.E. centres in West Bengal, Assam and Orissa	Ministry of Labour and Employment (D.G.R.E.)	1.10.60
8.	Maintenance of displaced woman and their dependents etc. in homes in West Bengal	Ministry of Education	1.12.60

4 Quoted in ibid., p.1.

5 Ibid., p.2.

9.	Training of displaced school teachers in West Bengal	-do-	1.4.61
10.	Financial assistance to displaced T.B. patients and their dependents (outside the camps)	Ministry of Health	1.4.61
11.	Maintenance of displaced persons of long term liability categories from East Pakistan outside homes/infirmaries	Ministry of Education	1.3.61
12.	Setting up of medium, small scale and cottage industries	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	1.4.61
13.	Government sponsored degree colleges in West Bengal	Ministry of Education	1.4.61

In fact right from the end of 1950's wrapping up of the Ministry became the be all and end all of all government policies, in complete oblivion of the unending influx in the Eastern zone, especially West Bengal.

At the Rehabilitation Ministers' Conference in Calcutta convened on 4 July 1958, it was decided that all the Camps would be closed by July 1959 and the system of doles be discontinued. (The decision was later reversed and it was decided to close the camps in West Bengal by October or November 1959 at the latest.) Those whom the government has labeled as old migrants category number (ii) were not eligible for any rehabilitation benefits from the government. Camp inmates, i.e., old migrants category number (i) numbered around 35,000 families on 1 August 1958[6] (30,000 agriculturists, and 5,000 non-agriculturists).[7] The total number of persons

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6 Jugantar, 24 April 1960.

7 Ibid.

was roughly 1,58,000.[8] As per the decision of the Conference, the onus of rehabilitating 10,000 will rest on the Government of West Bengal, while the rest, i.e. 25,000 would be dispersed outside the state mainly under the newly-conceived Dandakaranya scheme.[9] Each family will be given a time-frame of two months to decide whether to accept or reject the government's scheme of rehabilitation. Those who will renounce the proposal of the government, will be given a one-time dole of six months, after which they will cease to be the responsibility of the government.[10]

A fresh meeting was held in August 1959, in which it was decided to issue a notification to the non-agriculturist camp families that if within ninety days from the day of the issue of the said notification, they refuse to accept the government-planned rehabilitation scheme or make their own arrangements under the Byananama Scheme, their names would be struck off. In September, similar decision was taken with regard to the agricultural families also.[11]

However, Sri Prem Krishen, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rehabilitation, clarified in January 1960, that the camps would not be shut down till all the inmates are rehabilitated.

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

For the rehabilitation of these 10,000, several ambitious programmes were launched with a bang but unfortunately many of these faded without a whimper. Low land reclamation schemes in Bagjola, Sonarpur-Arpanch and Sundar bans in Twenty four Parganas and high land reclamation schemes at Salanpur and Midnapur were taken up. The first two were carried out with the help of the refugees themselves who put in back-breaking toil in the hope of a patch of land.

In case of the Sonarpur–Arpanch scheme nearly 48 camp families each were allotted six acres of land.[12] However they were not destined to enjoy the fruits of their labour for long. The local land less peasants could not reconcile to the fact that these "outsiders" would be allotted land in their home turf, while they will be left in the lurch. Thus trouble ensued and the "outsiders" were summarily evicted from their possessions. The refugees, therefore, were once again back to square one – government responsibility ended once the refugees had been "rehabilitated" on paper. Thus instead of ameliorating the miseries of the refugees, the government pushed them further to the brink of disaster – the doors of the camps were forever closed for them since they have been "rehabilitated" while in reality, rehabilitation still eluded them. Caught in the web of government apathy and the hostility of the local people, a bleak future now stared at them.

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12 Jugantar, 5 February 1960.

The story of the Bagjola scheme is a photo copy of the Sonarpur-Arpanch scheme. By the lure of rehabilitation, nearly 1500 families were made to toil, under the aegis of the reclamation process and it was hoped that 38,000 acres of new land will be available at the disposal of the Government.[13] But local hostility prevented them from putting an end to their misery, while the Government remained indifferent to their plight.

About 1200 acres of land had been reclaimed for rehabilitation purpose.[14] Even title deeds or "arpanpatras" were presented to nearly 100 families each of whom were given 6 bighas.[15] But strong objections by the locals shattered their long-cherished dream of settling down. The locals went to the extent of filing a petition in the High Court who issued a decree in their favour. The government now abandoned the proposal but assured the inmates that they will be rehabilitated within the state.

In July, 1959, 186 camp families deserted the camp and got hold of a nearby vacant land which soon became the bone of contention between the two communities – the insiders and the outsiders.[16] Both were backed by rival political parties, adding a new dimension to the whole scenario. Nearly 400 families had been deprived of all camp facilities and they were eking out a

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13 WBLA, 27 February 1954, p.342.

14 Ibid.

15 Jugantar, 28 June 1960.

16 Ibid.

living through their own efforts.[17] The area falls under Sulunguri Mouza of Rajarhat police station in Twenty-Four Parganas.[18] By June, 1960, nearly 212 deserting families from the Bagjola Camp along with 88 other families from Cooper's camp, Sealdah station and Bongaon station, squatted on the area.[19]

Trouble erupted on the morning of 26 June. In the scuffle that ensured between the locals, the refugees and the police, 4 were killed and another 25 injured.[20] The residents of the nearby areas – Krishnapur, Ghuni, Patharghata, Chakpathuri, Mahishbathan, Jatragachi and Chandiberia – incensed at the daring attitude of the refugees organised a huge battalion of 300-400 and attempted to recapture the land which they demanded to be theirs.[21] The other side resisted and violence broke out. Brick-bats were hurled mercilessly. The police dispersed the mob by tear gas, but the local political leaders incited both the parties by instigating speeches. Fire arms were freely used in the next phase of clash that begun around 9-30 AM. An aged lady of the colony became the first casualty. The mob attacked the police force, too, and could be brought under control only after a few rounds of firing.

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17 Ibid.

18 Jugantar, 27 June 1960.

19 Jugantar, 30 June 1960.

20 Jugantar, 27 June 1960.

21 Ibid.

Land being the essential prerequisite for agricultural pursuit, it was a fight to the end for both the groups. The locals feared that the refugees would slowly encroach upon their tracts and dispossess them, while the refugees , disgusted at the government's dilly-dallying, decided to take matters in their own hands. For both, it was a struggle for existence, a fight for survival, a battle to keep their identity afloat. The government should have been more forthright from the beginning that would have prevented the whole episode from being stretched to the extremes. What is more alarming in both these cases – the Sonarpur-Arpanch and Bagjola – the government not only backtracked from its promise of rehabilitation within the state, but increasingly began to pressurise them to migrate outside the state under the Dandakaranya Project. Their stern refusal was met with an even sterner answer from the government in the form of stoppage of cash doles and other camp facilities.

In fact any and every camp inmate who refused to comply with the government's notification of opting for the barren tracts of Dandakaranya, faced this punishment. The unwilling families would be given a one-time dole for six months, after which they would cease to be the responsibility of the government. Nearly 252 families of the Nandannagar Camp near Belghoria in Twenty four Parganas was meted out this punishment from 25 January 1960 onwards.[22] Although the government had sanctioned nearly Rs. 1,80,000 for the reclamation of wasteland in the area nearly seven years back, lack of

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22 Jugantar, 16 February 1960.

planning and goodwill on part of the Rehabilitation Department defeated the very purpose for which the money was sanctioned.[23] Had the Department been a little more responsible in discharging its duty, the camp inmates would not have faced such a situation. Out of the 400 camp inmates, only 119 families have been rehabilitated till date near the Sodepur-Ghola Road.[24] This is what the government claims. But reality tells a different story. It is true that the government spent nearly 11 lakhs for the purpose of settling them down but the area being prone to monsoon flooding, careful survey and planning was called for.[25] The government as usual was caught napping, as a result of which the monsoon of 1959 wreaked havoc, wiping out the only shelter they had over their heads.

96 of the rest had been shifted under the Bon Hooghly scheme.[26] All in all , 215 families have been rehabilitated, till date.[27] For the rest, the government had issued the ultimatum – either shift to Dandakaranya or face the dire consequence of closure of camps.

The government from the end of the 1950s had instituted the policy of "screening" in order to weed out the unnecessary, unwanted elements from the camps so that the benefits percolate to the genuine needies. The

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23 Ibid.

24 Jugantar, 5 May 1960.

25 Ibid

26 Ibid

27 Ibid.

expressed purpose is laudable no doubt, but under the garb of screening many in urgent need of help were left out, converting the whole exercise into a farce. A few women of the Titagarh orphanage in Twenty-four Parganas, became the victim of government's whims, for no fault of theirs.[28] The residents of the Reliance Camp in Daspara in North Calcutta, too, because of their participation in demonstrations for redressal of their just grievances, faced the ire of the government who summarily stopped their doles.[29]

On the persistence of the West Bengal Chief Minister, Dr. B. C. Roy, the Ministry bowed down a bit and Sri Meher Chand Khanna declared that the cash doles of those, which have been discontinued on the plea of their unwillingness to take "advantage" of the Dandakaranya scheme, will be restored and the back logs cleared, for the time being upto 15 April.[30] However, in spite of the official directive the inmates of Sonarpur Camp no.4, Barnaberia, Rampur, Panchpota, Baltia – all in Twenty-Four Parganas, 39 families of the Ghusuri Camp in Howrah. Coopers Camp in Nadia and Cossipore Camp in Calcutta, had not received their doles.[31]

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28 Jugantar 16 February 1960.

29 Ibid.

30 Jugantar, 20 March 1960.

31 Jugantar, 3 May 1960.

But in line with the original policy, Sri Khanna categorically stated that after 30 April , cash doles of nearly 10,000 unwilling refugee families will be stopped.[32]

Not only cash doles, the government blackmailed the inmates by discontinuing the related facilities also. In the Chandmari Camp , the special diet of the tuberculosis patients was stopped. The sole primary school and the only health centre of the Nandannagar Camp was closed down when the residents refused to budge in face of government pressure.[33] It further came to light that those who 'opted' for rehabilitation outside West Bengal, were often forced to do so. Nearly 29 families of the Reliance Camp who boarded the train for U.P. on 20 January 1960, confided to Jugantar, that their name was included in the list without their expressed approval.[34]

The non-camp inmates too, came under government hammer. The tuberculosis afflicted patients among them were deprived of the grant, so long enjoyed by them.[35]

The government also drastically slashed down its budget on previously launched schemes behind the smokescreen of modifying them. Take the example of stipends provided to the refugee students. It was stipulated that

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32 Jugantar, 16 April 1960.

33 Jugantar, 5 May 1960.

34 Jugantar, 29 January 1960.

35 Jugantar, 10 March 1960. Information supplied on the floor of the Assembly by Sri Hemanta Kumar Basu.

from October 1958, financial assistance will be curbed by 20%.[36] From 1959-60 onwards, the government spelt out its new rules and regulations, governing the grant of stipends.

For the college-goers, it was stipulated, under the new law, that only those whose monthly income does not exceed Rs.200 and at the same time could maintain a percentage of 60 would be eligible for grant that would cover their tuition fees and purchase of books. Assistance with regard to hostel facilities was discontinued.[37]

For the secondary level students, an eligible candidate has to have 45% marks as also the monthly income should not exceed Rs.130.[38]

For the primary level students, the eligibility criterion was that the monthly income should not cross Rs.80.[39]

At the post-graduate stage, the government decided not to fund any fresh face.[40]

On the whole, the Government of India curtailed grants under various heads in the field of education by nearly 35%. A grant of Rs.23 lakhs was

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36 Jugantar, 25 March 1960.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

sanctioned during 1958-59, which decreased to Rs.12 lakhs in 1959-60.[41]

However, in face of severe criticism, Sri Khanna had to eat his words. He had to reverse his previous decision of discontinuing doles to nearly thousand refugee students receiving vocational training. The Central Government also sanctioned a loan of Rs.7 lakhs for setting up a girls college in New Barrackpore. [42] The state government petitioned for and was obliged with a loan of Rs.25.50 lakhs for setting up another three colleges exclusively for girls at Habra, Alipurduar and Krishnagar.[43] Apart from this, the state government, through its own initiative set up colleges at Jadavpur, Barisha, Baishnabghata, Bon Hooghly, Dum Dum and Narkeldanga. The central government, was however, prompt in forwarding loans for all the above mentioned colleges. Apart from that, it also promised to give financial assistance of about Rs.42 lakhs towards meeting the recurring expenditure on these colleges. [44] These were basically Government-sponsored colleges. The central government also came forward with monetary help to private degree colleges in different districts of West Bengal. The following colleges received financial assistance:[45]

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41 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.36.

42 Jugantar, 8 April 1960.

43 Jugantar, 12 June 1960.

44 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, op. cit., p.46.

45 Ibid.

Sponsored Colleges	
Name of College	**Capital grant (Rs. In lakhs)**
Location:	
1. Jadavpur College, Jadavpur	5.79
2. Vivekananda College, Barisha	7.59
3. Dinabandhu Andrews College, Vaishnavghata	7.78
4. Brahmandanda Keshab Chandra College, Dum Dum, Bon Hooghly	7.44
5. Sarojani Naidu College, Dum Dum (for women only)	7.53
6. Gurudas College, Narkeldanga	12.26
7. College at Habra	6.45
8. College at Alipurduar	8.44
9. College at Krishnanagar	3.80
10. College at New Barrackpore	6.98
Total	**74.06**
Other Colleges:	
A) **Calcutta**:-	1.60
1. Gokhale Memorial Girls College	1.12
2. Victoria Institution	0.30
3. Sanskrit College	0.05
4. Woman's College	3.05
5. Muralidhar Girls College	6.12
B) **24 Parganas**:-	
1. Barisha College	
2. Motiheel College, Dum Dum	2.28
3. Barasat Government College	3.87
4. Taki Government College	2.32
5. Dinabandhu Mahavidyala	2.33
6. Gobardanga Hindu College	1.63
7. Rishi Bankim College, Naihati	1.54
8. Vijoygarh Jyotish Roy College, Jadavapur	0.89
	0.34
C) **Howrah**:-	
1. Ramsaday College, Amta	
2. R.K. Mission Vidyamandir, Belur	1.10
3. Uluberia College	1.66
	0.65
D) **Nadia**:-	
1. Ranaghat College	
2. Santipur College	2.23
3. Bagula Srikrishna College	2.12
4. Dinhata College	1.07

5. Vidyasagar College	0.70 0.35
E) **Hooghly**:-	
1. Bijoy Narayan Mahavidyalaya	2.02
2. Uttarpara College	0.05
3. Hiralal Pal College	0.34
Total	**39.73**

The central government gave the nod to the state government to purchase fifty double–decker buses with the avowed aim of appointing drivers, conductors and other workers from among the refugees and sanctioned a sum of Rs.25 lakhs for the said purpose.[46] In the same breath, the government also decided to convert some of the loans granted, to assistance. The scheme would benefit 8 lakhs of refugees and the amount worth was nearly Rs.Five crore fifty lakhs.[47]

Loans to educational institutions, specifically established to cater to the need of the refugees, were to be treated as financial assistance. Those forwarded to private institutions, also were remitted to a large extent – to a tune of Rs.1 crores.[48] Trade loans, agricultural loans and house-building loans in the suburban areas became easily repayable with the relaxation of their norms – under the new set of rules – trade loans were to be repaid

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46 Jugantar, 19 February 1960.

47 Jugantar, 6 April 1960.

48 Ibid.

within a period of 10 years, while agricultural and house building loans within 20 years. [49] Previously, one had to repay them within 6 to 10 years.[50]

Government's performance in the regularisation of the squatters' colonies was nothing to be proud of. The state government paid no heed to the UCRC's demand for entitling the refugees as the owners of the squatted plots. It carried on its previous programme of regularisation through authorising the occupation in lieu of payment.

As per government estimate the number of squatters' colonies was 149. Out of them 142 would be regularised. But till the end of 1960, only 95 have been regularised in full and 13 in part. From 1958 onwards, the state government started levying corporation taxes on the squatters' colonies of the Tollygunge-Jadavpur-Dhakuria belt. In the first phase, notices were issued for the payment from April-June 1958. Fresh notices were issued in January 1960 for recovering the taxes from July-September 1960. Irony is that most of the colonies of this belt were not or could not be regularised at the time of the issue of the notifications (in Tollygunge Municipality, 11 colonies could not be regularised. Though 92 were regularised by 1959 , in most of the cases out of the total number of plots only a few could be given 'arpanpatras').[51]

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Jugantar, 16 January 1960.

From mid-1960, the state government issued notices to the colony people to cough up compensation for the grabbed land. The residents of Sonar Bangla colony located by the Belgharia-Agarpara rail line were handed a notice to pay a compensation of Rs.10 lakhs at a rate of twelve to fifty rupees per year on per plot holder and fifty rupees a year on the primary school.[52] May be the state was devising ways and means to generate resources. But, even then one cannot agree with the government, since the state, for two consecutive years – 1958-59 and 1959-60 – enjoyed a surplus budget:[53]

Year	Surplus (+) Or Deficit (–) (in Rs. '000)
1958-59	+5,75,99
1959-60	+1,03,28

As regards, the state government's ambitious plan of rehabilitating 10,000 families within the state and 25,000 outside the state, all it can be said is that the latter scheme did not click to the extent, it was expected. However, the state government's overall performance in keeping its promise of rehabilitating 10,000 families within the state, was in fact more than satisfactory. Within a time span of twenty months – between July 1958 and

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52 Jugantar, 29 June 1960.

53 Compiled from Government of India, Statistical Abstract of Indian Union, 1962 (New Delhi, 1963).

March 1960 – the government not only fulfilled its quota of rehabilitating 10,000 but in addition to the promised lot, provided rehabilitation to 1,086 more families.[54]

But the scheme of dispersal outside the state left much to be desired. Number of Displaced Persons dispersed from camps in West Bengal to other states for rehabilitation during 1960:[55]

I	Dandakaranya	4,369
II	Uttar Pradesh	4,852
III	Madhya Pradesh	210
IV	Andamans	819
	Total	**10,250**

The pathetic state can be gauged from the fact that only 10,250 persons were dispersed outside the state within the stipulated time frame, against the promised 25,000 families. Thus the number of persons falls miserably short of even the prescribed number of families. During the whole of 1960,only 10,000 families from camps in West Bengal were dispersed for rehabilitation.[56] The displaced population at the end of 1960 in camps and homes:[57]

Camps	0.89 lakhs
Homes	0.39 lakhs
Total	**1.28 lakhs**

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54 Jugantar, 20 April 1960.

55 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, p.7.

56 Ibid., p.15

57 Ibid.

One should be reminded that on 1 August 1958, i.e. immediately after the conference, camp members were 1.58 lakhs. Out of these, thus only .79 lakhs have been dispersed. Of the total number, the majority, thus, still languished in the camps.

On the whole, a stock-taking of the performance shows little reason to celebrate. Out of the total 441 camps and colonies set up by the government for the expressed purpose of relief and rehabilitation, only 44 were fully developed and 24 partially. The rest, i.e. 373 languished in neglect. Although the West Bengal Government had placed a blue-print for development for the approval of the centre, the latter remained indifferent, sanctioning a paltry 18 out of the total.[58]

Till March 1959, the central Government's expenditure on doles amounted to 43 crores, 71 lakhs of rupees, incurred on the camp inmates and those awaiting rehabilitation for 8-10 years. The central Government under the garb of the screening declared 70% of them to be "unfit" for rehabilitation.[59]

For the purpose of rehabilitation from 1947 to 1958, the Government spent nearly 19 crores, 28 lakhs as assistance, 47 crores, 33 lakhs as loans, which taken together comes to about 66 crores.[60] Had the government been

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58 Jugantar, 7 April 1960.

59 Ibid.

60 Jugantar, 7 April 1960.

more judicious it could have utilised the huge amount of money spent simply by forwarding doles, that ultimately hardly benefitted the recipients to better purposes that could have helped to justify the name of the Ministry, set up for the purpose – Ministry of Rehabilitation.

However in spite of having its hands full so far as rehabilitation was concerned, the Ministry was determined to wind itself.

The first step towards this was the dissolution of the Rehabilitation Finance Corporation, even though about Rs.3 crores of loans were yet to be recovered. The decision to this was taken on 10 June 1960 and it was communicated to Dr. B.C. Roy by Sri Khanna.[61] The organisation would become defunct with effect from 30 June 1960.[62] In consonance with the official policy, the government initiated a programme of stream lining the Rehabilitation department by retrenchment. It was decided that throughout March 1960, 800-1000 workers would be given a golden handshake and this will continue for the next three or four months, and ultimately by the end of the year, the Ministry would cease to exist.[63]

And this is what precisely happened. One by one the state departments were terminated. The Rehabilitation Department in Orissa was

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61 Jugantar, 11 June 1960.

62 Jugantar, 23 June 1960.

63 Jugantar, 3 March 1960.

closed with effect from the 1 April 1960,[64] followed by the relevant Department in Tripura on 30 September 1960.[65] The Rehabilitation department in Bihar was closed on 28 February 1961.[66] Even the Rehabilitation Minister of West Bengal Sri Prafulla Sen declared, "In reality there is no longer any refugee problem in West Bengal."[67]

In 1969, Sri P.C. Sen declared that the doles of those camp inmates who refused to comply with the state's programme of opting out of West Bengal, have been stopped. They are no longer the responsibility of the state. Other rehabilitation schemes like the recovery of fallow and waste lands, too, have been abandoned.

For the completion of the 'residuary' work in West Bengal, the state government in 1969 demanded Rs.21 crores from the centre which in turn informed West Bengal to recover the loans forwarded to the refugees and finance the 'residuary' work. In other words, the central government put its foot down so far as financing schemes was concerned.[68] By the end of 1960-61, the entire Ministry, was wound up leaving the task of rehabilitation unfinished.

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64 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, op. cit., 'Introduction'.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Quoted in Anil Singha, Jabadakhal Colony-r Daliler Sangram (Calcutta, no date), p.3 (translation mine).

68 United Central Refugee Council, U.C.R.C. Shorosh Sammelan O Subarna Jayanti Utsav: 1950-2000 (Calcutta, 2000), p.26.

Government policies were fraught with inconsistencies. For example, while on one hand it advanced loans to educational institutions and converted some of these loans into grants, on the other hand, it cut down on the overall educational budget. On the whole the Government of India by forwarding finances may have succeeded in some fields in easing the plight of those who sought its help. But there still remained lots to be done and by deciding to terminate its tenure, the Ministry of Rehabilitation left the whole process of rehabilitation so far as West Bengal was concerned in a state of flux. The state government, too, followed in the footstep of the centre by declaring the problem to be over.

As regards the attitude of the people, as portrayed by the Sonarpur-Arpanch and the Bagjola schemes, they are not ready to compromise where their own interests were concerned, which is but a very natural reaction.

CHAPTER-V

REFUGEES: ADAPTATION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT

Having so far dealt with the response and reaction of the host community, i.e. the government and the local people, I now move on to the other end of the spectrum, to the people at the receiving end – the refugees.

The main focus of this chapter is to assess how the refugees coped with the dislocation, what did they have at hand to deal with the trauma that accompanied the uprooting, how far they have adjusted to their new homeland, how they rebuilt their lives and what part they played in reshaping the various aspects of the city where they had settled.

The chapter is divided into two sections: Section-I looks at how far the migrants have adjusted to their new setup while Section-II deals with their impact on the socio-cultural life of Calcutta.

Against the backdrop of this unprecedented influx from across the border, to understand these issues, one has to take into account, the peculiar lineaments of the migration process.

As I have pointed out earlier, unlike Punjab, where uprooting was effected in one swipe, in Bengal it was a long protracted process. In the vast river of migration, there were high tides and low tides, but the river never dried up.

In the wake of the division of Bengal, convoys of refugees trekked across the frontier to West Bengal to begin their 'tryst with destiny'. Among the states contiguous to Eastern Pakistan, West Bengal was the largest recipient of refugees because of her physical and natural proximity. Over 72% of the refugees came over to West Bengal – their concentration being largest in the three districts of the (then undivided) Twenty Four Parganas, Nadia and Calcutta, in order of preference, the percentage with respect to the total population of the concerned districts till the end of 1950 being 41.2, 33.0 and 13.2 respectively.[1]

Refugees from the border areas in East Pakistan migrated mostly to districts in West Bengal which are contiguous to their original home districts. Migrants from the interior of East Pakistan mostly came to Calcutta, Twenty Four Parganas and Nadia.

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1 State Statistical Bureau, Government of West Bengal, Report on the Sample Survey for Estimating the Socio-Economic Characteristics of Displaced Persons Migrating from Eastern Pakistan to the State of West Bengal (Calcutta, 1951), p.1.

Total number of Migrant Families from various Districts of East Pakistan in West Bengal (till 1950)[2]

Name of District	Number of Families	Percentage
Dacca	76,732	17.9
Faridpur	49,750	11.6
Barisal	45,750	10.7
Jessore	29.939	7.0
Mymensingh	27,078	6.3
Rajshahi	26,103	6.1
Khulna	23,817	5.5
Tipperah	21,144	4.9
Rangpur	19,695	4.6
Noakhali	18,140	4.2
Pabna	17,070	4.0
Chittagong	7,987	1.8
Bogra	7,615	1.8

For some, migration was a matter of conscious choice like those in the government service who were given an option by the government to take equivalent work on the other side. This was the case for Sri Saibal Kumar Gupta, ICS, posted as the District and Session Judge in Chittagong who decided in favour of West Bengal. For some others, the decision to migrate was taken almost overnight, since they became the victims of Muslim ire. Like one erstwhile resident of Barisal whose family had to take the painful decision when the local Muslims set fire to their haystack – a signal that this is just the beginning and that the worst is yet to come. Or the brother of Sri Saibal Gupta. A leading lawyer of Barisal, he along with his family left their homeland for good, in the clothes they were wearing, because he heard one

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2 Ibid., p.2.

afternoon that his arrest was imminent due to his association with the local Hindu Mahsabha.[3] But for most families, the decision to migrate was deliberated slowly and in waves within the circles of the family. People of the East had for long made Calcutta, the temporary home because of the opportunities it offered in terms of education and jobs. Hence many migrant families were blessed with contact on this side – albeit a remote one. But in many cases, the Calcutta-based relatives refused help to their less - fortunate brethren from across the border in their hour of need. Maybe they did not have the means and the resources to shoulder this gigantic responsibility of sheltering and caring for these helpless mortals, maybe a constant fear gnawed them that once they offer refuge to one, it will signal the beginning of an endless stream of friend and acquaintances, may be they were apprehensive of taking in their fold an uprooted family with grown-up daughters, who they feared might invite trouble, may be the thought that "once you offer them a roof above their head and clothe and feed them, they will tend to become permanent residents" lurked at the back of their mind – reasons may be varied and diverse.

But those who were lucky enough to take advantages of such connections, usually send their adolescent girls and children to the other side. The menfolk and representatives of the older generation clung, hoping against hope that things will revert to normal, that the good old days will be

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3 Asoka Gupta Archives, File No.3, Report on Deposition before the Commissioner of Enquiry.

back again and that they will be able to die in peace in their own *bhita* (ancestral home). Like Smt. Anima Dhar, who along with her younger brother came over to Calcutta and found shelter in their uncle's house. Her mother stayed back along with other relatives in Chittagong. It was only in1986, that her mother finally came over to settle down on this side. In this respect, one is reminded of an old women in Nimai Ghosh's flim "Chhinnamul" who clutched to the bamboo pole of her home, declaring in her determined voice, "I will not go". Some like Sri Ashim Ranjan Guha could transfer cash to West Bengal over a period of three years from 1947 to 1950, thus having something to fall back on, some like one erstwhile resident of Jessore settled in Kalighat among the Bangals of Jessore and hence did not feel that much out of place, while some others, with no acquaintance, no kith or kin whatever, found themselves at sea, once they crossed over.

Till 1950, "those who have come belong to what may be called the middle classes and they generally are from amongst the lawyers, government servants and other such persons."[4] As per the information supplied by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, West Bengal, of the 1.1 crore migrants who had crossed over by June 1948, 3,50,000 belonged to the urban middle classes, 5,50,000 to the rural middle classes, and a little over 1,00,000 were agriculturists and a little less than 1,00,000 artisans.[5] From 1950 onwards,

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4 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, Part I: Questions and Answers, Starred Questions and Answers, Oral Answers, 24 February 1949 (New Delhi, 1950), p.1099.

5 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 6 June 1948.

there was a surge of scheduled caste migration like the Namasudras, who were agriculturists by profession, mainly from the districts of Faridpur, Khulna, Bakhargunge and Jessore.

76.4% of the total number of migrant families were Hindus other than scheduled castes, 20.8% were scheduled castes, 2.5% were scheduled tribes and 0.3% belonged to other categories.[6] Caste Hindus came in large numbers from all the above mentioned districts, except Sylhet, Hill Chittagong, Malda (Pakistan) and Jalpaiguri, Scheduled Caste migrated mostly from Faridpur (14,495) families), Nadia (10,987 families), Dacca (10.209 families), Jessore (9,636 families), Rajshahi (7,447 families), Khulna (6,214 families), Rangpur (6,124 families), Barisal (5,827 families), Pabna (5,100 families),[7] while Scheduled Tribes came mostly from Rajshahi (5,174 families), Dinajpur (3,237 families), and Bogra (1,338 families).[8] All in all, as per the report of the Estimates Committee, till 1959-60, 60% of the displaced persons from East Pakistan are agriculturists.[9]

As per a survey conducted by the Government of West Bengal till 1950, 48.2% of the total number of migrants of all ages were literate.

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6 Ibid., p.3.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ministry of Rehabilitation, Estimates Committee (1959-60), p.20.

Level of Education[10]

Standard of Education	Percentage
Just Literate	11.8
Up to M.E.	19.8
Up to Matriculate	10.4
Matriculate	3.6
Undergraduates	1.1
Graduates	0.1
Engineering Education	0.1
Medical Education	0.2
Other Standard	0.1
Otherwise qualified on account of experience in crafts	0.2
Agricultural Training	0.8
Total	**48.2**

The percentage of total earners was 27.4 and that of non-earners 72.6.[11] The percentage of earners was comparatively low in the districts of Howrah, Calcutta, Hooghly and Twenty-Four Parganas being 21.1, 22.3, 22.3 and 23.9 of the total refugee population respectively, indicating that in these areas persons of higher educational standard had migrated.[12] The literates preferred migrating to the areas adjacent to Calcutta because of the urban influence of the metropolis which could offer opportunities in terms of employment. The illiterate mass tended to gravitate more towards the far-flung distsricts essentially rural in nature. Among the literate population around 60.3% migrated to the urban areas while amongst those who migrated

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10 Ibid.

11 State Statistical Bureau, Report, p.4.

12 Ibid.

to the rural areas 73.2% were illiterates.[13] In districts like Nadia the percentage of earners among the refugee population was comparatively satisfactory, 31.5 indicating a preponderance of agricultural people amongst the refugees who it is presumed, found some occupation on land.[14]

Cutting across government classification, I have classified the migrants into three categories based on the degree of dependence on the government:

i) Non-camp, Non-Squatters: These who neither look up to the government for help, nor 'usurped' others' property, but carved out a niche for themselves by sheer determination and hard work.

ii) Squatters: Those irritated at the apathy of the government and the common people, occupied fallow lands in the outskirts of Calcutta and entered into direct conflict with the establishment.

iii) Government Camp and Colony Dwellers: Totally dependent on the government for their subsistence and survival.

SECTION-I

At the outset, it should be made clear, that each migrant family, however well-connected in West Bengal, faced some teething problems, but the degree of difficulty varied with each group. Some could overcome the obstacles with more ease than the others.

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13 Pakrasi, op. cit., p.154.

14 Ibid.

The general reaction of the migrants at the initial stage was one of shock and disbelief – they could hardly come to terms with the fact that they could be cut adrift from their natal setup, that their 'desh' (home country) has become 'bidesh' (foreign land) Benumbed with grief, the metropolis of Calcutta and its surroundings, seemed to them a hostile city whose heart had turned to stone.

This is best portrayed in the writings of the refugees themselves, as in "Chhere Asha Gram" (The Abandoned Village)[15] – a collection of nostalgic writings of the inhabitants of the different villages of East Bengal, overnight whose status in the eyes of their Muslims co-habitants changed from friends to foes of the country of their birth, by virtue of just one line drawn on the map of the united Bengal. It was perhaps a cathartic attempt by the marginal men to find solace in their sufferings by giving an outlet to their pent-up feelings and emotions as also "creating a positive emotional response in the city".[16] The particular words that echo through all the writings are "abohelito" (i.e. ignored), and "abanchhito" (i.e. unwanted). Not that these words appear specifically in print in all the essays, but when one goes through these, the feeling of isolation, of alienation can be easily detected.

A refugee from the Sabhar area of Dacca district compares himself to a fallen star. Another unfortunate soul from Dhamrai laments that by a

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15 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., op. cit.

16 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition", in D.A.Low and Howard Brasted, eds., Freedom, Trauma, Continuties, p.134.

strange twist of fate the Bangals – the connoisseurs of good food – who took great pleasure in throwing lavish feasts, are themselves wandering from door to door with their begging bowls to gather two square meals a day.

A few selected lines from their writings will offer a better insight –

> Being a sharanarthi' (one seeking 'sharan' or refuge), I spend my days in one corner of the city. When I first arrived in Calcutta, the great city turned its face away from me and tried to push me away from its 'angina' (precincts) My wants are limited to a few bare necessities... All I crave for is a roof above my head and a decent livelihood that could allow me to live like a human being and not as a parasite.... But the cruel city has rejected me time and again.... Lost amidst the teeming millions of the great city nobody spares a minute for me to inquire – 'Yes dear, how are you? After all, I am not a native of Calcutta, I am a 'sharanarthi' an 'udbastu' (i.e., refugee).[17]

> ...pleasure, security, peace, love and affection have also left the land with us. On all four sides exist the filthy picture of mean intrigues.[18]

> Only a true human being (perhaps taking a dig at the people of West Bengal) can appreciate the miseries of an udbastu (refugee).[19]

> Leaving my prosperous village homeland, I now spend my nights on pavements of Calcutta in abject poverty roaming from door to door with my infant son begging for food.[20]

> There is hardly a soul in independent India who sympathise with us – the victims of political power game.[21]

They spend a lot of time regretting what they had lost, envying those around them "who had always been at home near their loved ones, living in

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17 Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., op. cit., pp.69-73 (translations mine).

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. (translations mine).

20 Ibid. (translations mine).

21 Ibid., p.28 (translations mine).

the place where they were born and grew up without even having to experience not only the loss of what was once theirs but above all the torturing memory of life to which they cannot return".[22]

They remained prisoners of the memories of their homeland – the Padma, Meghna and Arialkha, the beauty of nature, the relaxed village life, the atmosphere of peace, tranquility and camaraderie, i.e., an idyllic life torn to pieces by the tornado called Partition.

Perhaps, it is this life that they sought to recreate once they moved across the border. In this context one is reminded of Satish Ghosh – the protagonist in Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's novel "Jaal" (The Web)[23] – who tried to replicate the ambience of his "desher bari" within the three and a half bighas of land that he could manage to buy in the outskirts of Calcutta. Surrounded by mango, jackfruit and betelnut trees, Satish Ghosh sought, through his dedication and through his hard work, to transplant the environment of a small village home, tucked away in one corner of the Dacca district.

All said and done, it is impossible and perhaps to some extent unpractical to seek for such a life amidst the sprawling metropolis of Calcutta. Hence what was required of them was to redirect their lives in a new channel

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22 Quoted from Pradip Kumar Bose, "Memory Begins Where History Ends" in Ranabir Samaddar, ed., Reflection on Partition, p.74.

23 Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Jaal (Calcutta, 1985).

more suitable to the present environment. This, however, does not imply that they should erase out all memories of their erstwhile homeland, but what it essentially means is that, in order to adapt themselves to the changed scenario, they should come out of the sea of nostalgia and try to start life afresh – convert the trauma into triumph.

Assimilation is a complex phenomenon with several ramifications – social, economic, psychological. These are intertwined at one level, as one leads to the other, but this should not be taken as a general rule, as at another level, they retain their distinction. Social assimilation may or may not lead psychological assimilation as is amplified by the refugee experience testifies.

The first group, i.e. those who did not go around with a begging bowl, was determined to make the best out of the worst situation on their own. Their efforts often escaped notice and largely went unappreciated.

The case of Sri Rabindra Kumar Dutta is a pointer to this effect. Arriving in Calcutta after many trial and tribulations in February 1950, from his ancestral village of Subhadhya in Dacca, he was determined to eke out a living for himself and his huge family of three brothers and three sisters, apart from his parents. At the same time he steadfastly clung to his principle not to knock at the door of the government for help. Feigning his age, so as not to be disqualified as underage, he appeared for an interview and found employment as a factory worker in the Bata Shoe Company in Batanagar in the outskirts Calcutta. Side by side, his academic pursuits, continued. His

family built a roof about their head in Maheshtala in Twenty-Four Parganas. Surrounded by locals, who despised them as outsiders, his family did face a tough time but eventually their never-say-die attitude won the respect of the neighbours. Mr. Dutta's school final results earned him a government scholarship. But in his own words, "I deserved it, it was not a gift from the government."[24] He went on to pass I.Sc. and B.Sc. with flying colours. His professional life continued uninterrupted. Juggling the two was no doubt a daunting task but his courage and indomitable spirit helped him to tide over those difficult years.

From a non descript factory worker, he rose to occupy senior managerial positions, being posted in various countries across the globe. A successful self-made man, Mr. Dutta, has indeed come a long way in climbing the social ladder from his refugee status. Looking back on his eventful life, he felt that his assimilation was facilitated by his determination to stand on his own feet. The locals appreciated his attitude, lauded his efforts and accepted his family. He thus harbours no ill-feeling towards his surroundings.

But at another level, Subhadhya still casts a spell on him. Hence, soon after the bus service between India and Bangladesh was introduced, he grabbed the opportunity to visit his hometown specially the house where he had spent the better part of his childhood, the nook and corners of which still echo the happy memories.

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24 Excerpts from Interview, March 2001.

But his ancestral home in present Bangladesh, being taken over by the Muslims, perhaps at the same time, helps him to come to terms that it will no longer be possible to revert to those happy days and his abode on this side is now his home. This realisation helps him to enmesh himself in his present surroundings and be a part of the local milieu.

Another person, belonging to this category, Rabindranath Banerjee, a retired professor of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, voices the experience of undergoing through similar hardships in the initial years after his family's migration from Mymensingh in 1949. His assimilation, he feels was facilitated by what H. L. Kitano terms as a bicultural outlook, which implies that a person is comfortable with both the dominant culture and with his or her own ethnic heritage. Such a person would appreciate various languages, enjoys various foods and would have friends in several cultures. He could speak the local tongue quite fluently and hence could mix well with the natives who too accepted him without any inhibition.

He now considers himself an integral part of the West Bengali society, and unlike Sri Dutta, does not even wish to even visit Bangladesh. For him past is past and there is no point in dwelling in the past. Perhaps his only connection to his erstwhile homeland is his support of the East Bengal football club. But in his opinion and his outlook, he is now very much a Calcuttan.

Their feelings can be juxtaposed with those of one erstwhile resident of Barisal and another from Faridpur.

The former, a government servant, exercised his option to obtain a posting on this side. So he cannot be termed as a helpless, directionless refugee. But even after fifty-four years (he came over in 1947), in his own words, "*Ami bastuhara*".[25] (I am without a home). Now living a retired life in Santoshpur, he considers the house there, as nothing more than a shelter of brick and cement. He is still bathed in the nostalgia of his mansion at Parashkathi in Barisal district – surrounded by gardens and orchards on all four sides, a pondful of fish, huge courtyard. Home, to him, cannot be short of anything than this. Compared to what he had lost, he believes that he has gained nothing. Even today, he yearns to go back and settle and refuses to accept that it is nothing more than a daydream. He lives and relives this loss day after day. For him the pain and the scar are perhaps as raw as it was in 1947. His mental make –up has not allowed his psychological assimilation- Materially, he might be well-off compared to many others who had come to this side. But his material stability has not helped in easing the trauma of the loss. Psychological assimilation still eludes him and perhaps will continue to do so. He cannot treat himself to be a part of Calcutta, a part of its society.

The latter from Faridpur, echoes the same sentiment. He, too, cannot still reconcile to the fact that he will never again walk along the banks of the Padma, will never have the opportunity to plunge into its waters. When he came over in 1952, he expected a similar ambience here, but unfortunately instead of the Padma, he discovered a concrete jungle. That he has lost

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25 Excerpts from Interview, May 2000.

something forever and that the loss is irreparable played on his mind. With the loss of his motherland, he lost a part of his own self forever.

He, too, thus considers himself to be "*bastuhara*" (homeless). Although he does not crave to return to Bangladesh, he still longs to catch up with his old friends and ruminate about those golden years. He, too, personifies the sense of loss. Physically, he might belong to this side, but mentally he is still an Easterner.

It was perhaps the squatters, who by far had the most bitter experience in terms of mixing and mingling, since they came in direct conflict with the local people as also the government. Sri Nripendranath Acharya of Bapujinagar colony in Jadavpur in South Calcutta, recalls that even after government recognition of their colony, the neighbours prohibited the use of the nearby pond – the lone source of water.[26]

B.S. Guha's survey of the Azadgarh Colony, reveals that 30.8% of the males were tensional, i.e. showed an unfavourable attitude towards the locals while in case of the females the number was nearly double, the percentage being 60.4.[27] Among the females, 72% of the higher castes were hostile to the locals.[28] Responses of the women reveal that the attitude towards local people had a gender dimension. The manners and behaviours of the local

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26 Ganashakti, 1 January 2000.

27 B.S. Guha, op. cit., p.83.

28 Ibid.

people towards the women were highly provocative, as it seems from their responses. This genderisation of attitude may be due to the fact that women, who usually stay at home and carry on the day to day chores, come in contact with the non-refugee neighbours to a greater extent than their male counterparts who venture out of the colony for employment.

Survey conducted by Dipankar Sinha in the Samargarh colony shows that non-refugee neighbours around the colony treated them as outsiders par excellence, being bereft of any explicit manifestation of the sympathy wave and the overall relation was less than cordial. Even in the early sixties, amalgamation in the sense of interaction and marital alliance between the two communities was still elusive.[29]

Smt Gargi Chakrabarti, a resident of the Jadavpur in the early 1960s recalls that irrespective of whether a migrant after 1947 or living for two generations in Calcutta, East Bengalis all and sundry were denounced as "refugees" where the alphabet 'g' was deliberately pronounced as 'z', in mockery of the East Bengali dialect. Smt. Sukla Ghosh, too, narrates a similar experience. Originally hailing from Faridpur, but with a father who himself was raised in Calcutta, she recalls that as a student of Bethune School in the early 1950s she has to very consciously conceal her East Bengali identity, which if exposed, would surely meet with ridicule. Even if the real identity somehow leaked out, she remembers that, in order to cover-up, she quickly added that

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29 Dipankar Sinha, op. cit.

her family had been residing in Calcutta, for generations, that by virtue of living in Central Calcutta, encircled by the Calcuttans, she right from her childhood, is more of a Calcuttan that an East Bengali. She reminiscences that whenever she visited her best friend's house in the vicinity in the early 1960 her friend's grandmother questioned her as to her real identity – 'Bangal' or 'Ghati' the word 'Bangal' being pronounced with distaste. The famous Bengali novelist Sunil Gangopadhyay, too, narrates a similar experience:[30]

> Since my father was employed as a school teacher in Calcutta, we were based in the city from the pre-Partition days. Thus we were saved from the misfortune of being forced migrants. But even then from that day onwards (i.e., 15 August 1947) we became rootless. Our neighbours previously used to call us 'Bangals', now they called us 'refugees'.

Manas Roy, in his excellent autobiographical article,[31] in which he narrates his experience of growing up in Netaji Nagar – a squatter's colony in South Calcutta – rightly sums up that just as Calcutta decontextualised them, they also decontextualised Calcutta. As he points out, "Harmony, haphazardness, curves, bends, the dialects, the proverbs, stories of our roots: all this gave the place its nativity a structure of feeling – and we were serenely mirthfully cocooned in it".[32] Through memory they sought to preserve their

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30 Sunil Gangopadhyay, "Ardhek Jiban" in Amitabha Choudhury, ed., Desh (Calcutta, January 2000), p.22.

31 Manas Roy, op. cit., pp.162-99.

32 Ibid., p.182.

distinctiveness, their identity, their "place in the world, from a Calcutta eternally trespassing, eternally kept in abeyance".[33]

But, at one level Calcutta exercised its charm on them also – "perhaps a bit of desire for them as well".[34] They thus led a dual existence where one part of their being yearned to be a part of the social fabric while the other part put a check on that desire by constantly engulfing them in the nostalgia of their *bhitamati* (home and hearth). Manas Roy, exemplifies this through the portrayal of Naru's father, who goes to work in the city – "Calcutta to him must have been like a magic lantern show from which he returned to the magic of his restored bhita in the evening, seemingly unscathed."[35] Caught in the web of this inner struggle, the 'colony-people', as they came to be known in the later years perhaps an elevated status from the tag 'refugee' – remained ensconced within themselves.

The government camp and the colony dwellers were perhaps the worst of the lot since they were used as guinea pigs in the various experiments carried out by the government in the name of rehabilitation – some of which were successful while the others faltered. Battered in mind, with no effective contacts on this side, they had looked up to the government as "ma-baap" or father – figure to help them piece together their shattered existence. Their hopes were belied when the government failed to address their issue

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., p.183

effectively and in turn pressurised them to opt out of the state under the ill-conceived Dandakaranya Project. Manoranjan Byapari a Namasudra refugee from Barisal recalls:[36]

> Government experiments at rehabilitation were aimed to discover how long the refugees could survive after enduring untold hardship... in the relief camps, the refugees were given something resembling rice which had a sour taste and after eating it the stomach would start to growl. It was rumoured that from the same godown three truckful of rice was despatched – one to the zoo, the other to the jail and the third to the relief camp... two years passed by, we suddenly started noticing that people were being herded in the lorries and taken to an unknown destination for rehabilitation. Chhidam Master, one of the camp inmates, used to say, 'not for *punarbashan* (rehabilitation), but for *punah nirbashan* (exile) to Dandakaranya of the Ramayana fame.

Fifty years down the line Manoranjan is still leading a cursed life – a life which knows no peace, which is engrossed in the struggle for existence, a miserable life, still groping for a firm foothold. The settlers around the Bagjola Canal have not yet received their ration cards or voter identity cards which are proofs of bonafide citizenship.

The problem of assimilation often takes on a gender bias. As home makers, it is the women who find it difficult to reconcile to the loss of their precious home. It is their homes that are ravaged and destroyed and it is they who are often left with the task of making both ends meet in a new setting. Menfolk, who have a professional life of their own, perhaps could get over the trauma (however one should not generalize. Even among them, those who lead a retired life and stay at home, tend to brood about the past). But for

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[36] Manoranjan Byapari, "Abhishapta Atit" in Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., pp.44-47 (translations mine).

those women, for whom home meant everything, the sense of loss of one's home which in a sense means the loss of an identity, still causes immense pain.

Smt. Anima Dhar's eyes, even forty years after migration (she migrated in 1958) moisten at the mention of Madarsa village of Chittagong. Hailing from a family of doctors, this housewife, laments that if they could have stayed back, by this time they would have been able to form an identity of their own – a respectable identity. And here, she is nothing more than a nameless, faceless entity in the sea of people. Although she does not crave to go back, 'home' and 'motherland' to her means Madarsa village and East Bengal, present Bangladesh.

It is but natural that from a housewife, to whom 'home' means everything, who nourishes and nurtures the home through her sweat and toil, this will be the reaction. But even amongst many working women, who put in backbreaking toil to gather two square meals a day for their family and sacrificed every luxury and comfort they were used to in their previous lives, the pull of the motherland perhaps seemed as strong as it was on the day they bid adieu.

Smt. Hena Chaudhuri, who worked for the Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, emphatically points out – "I am still steeped in the nostalgia of my motherland".[37] Although fifty-one years have

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37 Excerpts from Interview, June 2000.

elapsed, the desire to go back has not waned a bit. The carefree days of village life still haunt her, make her heart heavy, urges her to seek refuge in the lap of her motherland.

For both these housewives and working woman, East Bengal still pulls a chord in their heart and has not allowed them to accept reality. It is interesting to note that both have spend the better part of their lives on this side and strictly speaking have very vague recollections and smoky memories of their villages and homes. But they live with these, have added to these and conjure up the concept of 'ideal life' amidst the sylvan surroundings, which may sometimes be imaginary.

Thus we see assimilation is a complex phenomenon. It does not follow any general rule. Very loosely speaking it may depend upon the attitude of the host community, i.e., the people and the government of the receiving state and the degree of adaptability of the refugees, i.e., their ability to adjust to the new environment. But then how do we explain the pain of the government servant of Barisal as also Smt. Anima Dhar who found shelter and care in her uncle's home and who built up her own family on this side? Both of them, in general terms, found material happiness on this side. In case of the former – a well-paid job, a family, a house of his own and in case of the latter – a well-earning husband, a loving family and a self-owned home. But even then there is 'something' amiss in their lives – perhaps in the lives of thousands of such souls which urges them to look at the other side of the river for a home, that never allows them to settle down in peace. Studies by S. Bandyopadhyay

and K. Chattopadhyay show that 26% (i.e. 603) of the 4,482 displaced households which were surveyed in West Bengal still considered themselves as refugees.[38]

In the end, the process varies from person to person. For some, the process may be complete, for some it has not yet taken off, for some it is part complete.

SECTION-II

The presence of these teeming millions threw up dimensions of great magnitude in the realm of the socio-cultural life of West Bengal, as also that of its capital Calcutta – the erstwhile capital of British India. As Gyanesh Kudaisya points out –

> "Cities and towns in particular, were transformed in the varied roles they played as capitals, ports, transport hubs, trading marts and pilgrim centres. There are, at least, three distinct aspects of this overall transformation.... The most obvious was physical, due to the expansion or contraction which cities and towns experienced as a result of refugee movements.... Equally important were social and cultural transformations brought by change in the composition of the city's inhabitants."[39]

In 1938, L. Mumford envisaged a "social disruption" the accumulated physical and social results of which are – ravaged landscapes, disorderly urban districts, pockets of diseases, patches of blight, unending line of

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38 S. Bandyopadhyay and K. Chattopadhyay, Displaced Persons from East Pakistan Some Findings on their Social Assimilation (Proceedings of the 53rd Session of Indian Science Congress, 1965).

39 Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Capital Landscapes" in Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, ed., The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia (London, 2000), p.24.

standardized slums warming into the outlying areas of big cities and fusing with their infectural suburbs. In short a general miscarriage and defeat of civilized effort. Calcutta of this period, panting and gasping for breath, resembled Mumford's vision of an urban disaster.

H.B.M. Murphy says – "when population are uprooted and moved to some distant land, the process has lasting effects on society."[40] Stephen Keller too views the refugees "as an important group because their presence is often correlated with political, social and economic change."[41]

The family is the basic unit of the social structure and the entire family structure was shaken and dislocated during this abnormal and calamitous situation. Stability and security of Hindu families were at stake. The result was an "immediate familiar disorganisation"[42] in the aftermath of the Partition days. Joseph E. Trimble, too, in his discussion of the consequences of forced migration, refers to the disruptive changes that occur in the family structure and in the social organisation.

The system of extended or joint family – the bedrock of the Bengali Hindu family structure was the most significant casualty. The train of events, brought about by the Partition, signaled the beginning of the dissolution especially among the refugee families of East Bengal, of the joint family

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40 Keller, op. cit., Preface, p.xvi.

41 Ibid.

42 Pakrasi, op. cit., p.66.

system. "The upshot was quick dispersions of the affected families the members of which were forced to readjust inter-personal relations within and without each family."[43]

On the basis of a study carried out by the Indian Statistical Institute in 1948 among 16,156 refugee families, it can be shown that wherever in the East Bengal areas of undivided Bengal on the eve of Partition, joint family structure with or without complex elements constituted nearly 53% of the then existing family set-up, the refugees migrating from East Bengal showed such an extended family structure with or without complex constituents in only 45.6% cases.[44]

At a glance a fall from 53% to 45.6% may not seem to be a very sharp one. But since anything above 50 signifies more than half of the total, one must take into account that from dominating more than half of the family set up in pre-Partition days, extended families comprised less than half of the set-up in the post-Partition days amongst the refugees.

That the displaced persons suffered unavoidable disintegration in their joint families due to their dislocations from regular residence in East Bengal is further attested by the rise in the percentage of elementary or simple families – 30.03% to 34.36%.[45]

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43 Ibid., p.67.

44 Pakrasi, "On Some Aspects of Family Structures of the Refugees of West Bengal 1947-48", Sociological Bulletin, Vol.I (Bombay, 1965), p.15.

45 Ibid.

Since, in the pre-Partition days it was the later day East Bengal part of undivided Bengal (especially the rural areas) that boasted of the highest concentration of joint family units compared to that of later-day West Bengal. (52.89% in 1946-47 to 49.18% during the same period- survey carried out amongst 900 families of East Bengal and 1334 families of West Bengal)[46] – a beginning of breakdown of this age-old set-up among them, under duress, heralded the beginning of a significant social change in the post-Partition days.

Joint-family system among the non-migrant Hindus of later day West Bengal survived to some extent. Although maintaining a somewhat lesser percentage of joint-family units in pre-Partition days – (49% as against 53% of that of later day East Bengal)[47] – they organised more complex family structures in the post-Partition days, in comparison to the migrant families – 49.18% to 38.61% suvey carried out among 1334 families of East Bengali families).[48] However, in those days of spiralling inflation, unemployment and refugee influx, situation was not very conducive even among the local inhabitant of West Bengal to uphold the much-cherished joint family structure. Whatever finally remained of the set-up in the subsequent years was preserved more by the West Bengali Hindus than their refugee counterparts from across the border.

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., p.19.

Thus in its social structure, Calcutta witnessed the popularity of the concept of nuclear families. Huddled in dingy shanties or in government relief camps and subsisting on paltry government doles, it was, for all practical purposes, becoming increasingly impossible for the emaciated Hindu patriarch to keep his extended family of kith and kin under one roof. Under the pressure of circumstances, the plinth of the joint-family system was badly shaken.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that joint-families in the years immediately following Partition, remained only a fond dream – an ingredient for rumination. The percentage of decline as shown by Pakrasi's study is not so steep as to bring about a sea-change in the family structure. In fact, as per Pakrasi's study in spite of the decline in percentage, in 1947-48 joint family system survived to a greater degree among the East Bengal refugees than elementary units – 37.53% to 34.36% (survey carried among 11880 refugee families).[49]

But at the same time a 4% rise in the organisation of elementary of units from 30.03% to 34.36%[50] proves that the idea of nuclear families was steadily gaining ground though slightly among the East Bengali migrants. With the exception of a few opulent families of West Bengal, even among them also, the advantages of maintaining a small nuclear family of single –

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49 Ibid., p.18.

50 Ibid., p.19.

digit members seemed promising. Thus although surviving the initial browbeating unleashed by Partition, joint families increasingly became a relic of the past in the subsequent years, the happy memories treasured in the minds of its inhabitants and reminiscenced time and again.

Ramkrishna Mukherjee conducted a survey on the breakup of joint families between 1946 and 1966 – 53.66% families were nuclear families in West Bengal, 3.90% small joint families and 13.44% big joint families.[51] The Census of 1951 shows that the size of a family on an average came to 3.9.[52] This is clearly the picture of a nuclear family. From S.N. Sen's Survey, it is found that in the 1960s, the proportion of small nuclear families of two or three member came to 32%-33%, that of 4-6 members, 40%-42% that of 7-9 members and above only 8%.[53] Sen found only 20% of the families to be joint families in 1960.[54]

In a partitioned Bengal, thus although family as a unit survived the calamity (the refugee immigrants who suffered familial disorganisation continued to maintain family units in 91.39% with non-families or uni-member units constituting not more than 8.6% of the cases among the males and

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51 Ramkrishna Mukherjee, West Bengal: Family Structures 1946-1966 (Calcutta, 1977), p.29.

52 Asok Mitra, ed., Census, 1951, vol.xvi.

53 Satyendranath Sen, The City of Calcutta: A Socio-Economic Survey, 1954-55 to 1957-58 (Calcutta, 1960), p.6.

54 Ibid.

1.57% among the females)[55] a new vocabulary found a permanent place in the dictionary of family structure – the nuclear family. From the 1940s onwards under the impact of famine, inflation and finally Partition, joint families began to crumble. The end did not come in one swift move, but was a gradual one. Thus joint families were increasingly relegated to the background and the collective security, and joy of a joint family's caring and sharing for each other gave way to the self-supporting nuclear families.

The breakup of the joint family structure had its impact on the expectations of all its members, including the women-folk. Pushpamayee Basu reminiscences that while previously the main objective of most girls was to acquire a modicum of education which would help them find a suitable match in the marriage market, the post-Partition years saw these same girls planning to use education as a means of seeking gainful employment to supplement the income of the men folk of their families.[56] In many cases, the women were the sole bread winners of the family in the absence of any adult or able-bodied male members in the family when she was left with no option but to knock from door to door in search of jobs for the most pressing need – to balance the family budget. Like Smt. Gita Sengupta. They are a family of five – consisting of her parents and three sisters, she being the middle one. Coming over to Calcutta from Mymensingh after 1950, an uncertain future

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55 Pakrasi, *On Some Aspects*, op. cit., p.14.

56 Bharati Ray, "Women in Calcutta: the Years of Change" in Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., Calcutta: The Living City: Volume-II – the Present and the Future (New Delhi, 1990), p.36.

started at them. It is precisely at this stage that Srimati Sengupta and her elder sister took up the reins of the family. The latter found a teaching post in the Patna Government College while at the tender age of sixteen, Smt. Sengupta entered the job market as a primary school teacher of Shishu Vidyapith on a pay scale of Rs.40 per month. Thus began their combined struggle for survival not only of themselves but their whole family.

Even after her marriage in a middle-class politically conscious family, she remained the steering force behind her in-law's family of nearly 15 mouths. Her husband having lost his job because of his leftist orientation, it was solely on her income as a school teacher, that her family was dependent on. Gita Sengupta had to sacrifice her academic pursuits – her university career being cut short as she had to leave her studies mid-way and devote herself towards maintaining her family – she smilingly bore with all these, her only motivation, her only goal being to feed the hungry souls, to clothe the bare bodies.

The purdah or veil that had so long confined the fairer sex to the inner quarters of the household was swept away by the strong currents of Partition. Rabindranath's vision of Bimala in "Ghare Baire" now came true. But whereas Bimala only crossed the threshold of *antahpur* (inner quarters) and did not step out of the household, the modern Bimalas ignored the frownings of the society to enter public life to fend for their families.

As in all other social calamities, it was the women who were at the receiving end during the post-Partition years – "It is their homes that are

destroyed, their bodies violated, their men killed and they are left with the task of rebuilding the community."[57]

For every fire that is lit it is the job of the women to rise from the ashes like a phoenix and build a future for their beloveds. Having been rendered homeless once, they were determined to set up a new home amidst the new setup and protect its sanctity at all costs. Hence we find the women rendering yeomen's service in the setting up of the squatter's colonies. Like Renu Saha's mother – a resident of the Azadgarh Colony. The police in order to evict her from the land, hurled abuses at her, threatened her with dire consequences and even once kicked her on the back. But she refused to be intimidated and clung steadfastly to her shack of *muli bansh* and *hogla* leaves. Another unforgettable name, in this respect is Smt. Sandhya Banerjee of the Sahidnagar Colony. She used to drive the women out of their homes and organise protest marches. Using ordinary ladles, knives and choppers, they staged a defiant battle against the nefarious agents of the landlords.

Over 18,200 women applicants were registered in the Government-managed Employment Service Organisation in 1948.[58] Women successfully made forays into the male bastion. To quote Jasodhara Bagchi, "Calcutta

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57 Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender on Women's Agency during Partition", Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay, 24 April 1993).

58 The Statesman, 7 February 1949.

was no longer a city of male elites in which women also ran.'[59] She sees from 1947 an unprecedented acceleration of the earlier trends and attempts at women's emancipation.

Shedding all inhibitions, she now fought shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts in the work place, to feed the hungry mouths at home. She sacrificed her pleasures – many remained unmarried to support their families. The option of marriage, supposedly a part of "normal" society, was closed off for them. Like the talented and versatile actress of Bengali celluloid – Smt. Sabitri Chatterjee. She had to come out to earn like any other refugee girl, at the tender age of 12. She recalls, "I was caught up so intensely in that race to exist that I did not pause to think about myself, about my own family which I could have raised perhaps."[60] Similar is the experience of the elder sister or "didi" of Smt. Hena Chaudhuri. She had to perform the duties, a son was expected to do, as a result of which she could never have a life which she could call her own. Or Smt. Jyotsna Dutta, the famous performer of Bengali 'jatra'. Arriving penniless on the Sealdah station in 1949, Jyotsna joined the world of Bengali 'jatra' at the tender age of seven to fend for her family. But alas! The very family for whose sustenance she struggled day and night, shunned her, for in their eyes she is a 'nati' (a derogatory term roughly meaning a nautch or a dancing girl). A spinster, Jyotsna leads a lonely

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59 Jasodhara Bagchi, "Women in Calcutta: After Independence" in Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., Calcutta, p.43.

60 Sabitri Chatterjee, "Reminiscences" in Dulendra Bhowmick, ed., Anandalok (Calcutta, 1990), Translations Dr. Subhoranjan Dasgupta.

secluded life – "I have attained name, fame and money. But at the end, what did I gain? I live with the stigma attached to the name nati."[61] As Subhoranjan Dasgupta rightly points out, "They performed the pre-ordained function of males in an otherwise male-dominated society and in the process snuffed out their own feminine longings. They stamped out gender discrimination in order to survive."[62] The "working women" found acceptability in society – a society which after years of ignorance realised that in order to maintain the family it is necessary to liberate the women from the shackles of bondage.

However, this apparent speeding up of the emancipation of women has a darker side also. In those years of the rising unemployment curve, when able-bodied educated you men had to run from pillar to post for a job, can the marginal women expect to find enough opportunities which would help her to get a respectable job? The answer is an emphatic No. It is true that many did work as stenographers, telephone operators, as also in the Food Rationing Department. In fact compared to their male counterparts, the girl steno enjoyed higher pay, good increments, conveyance and other facilities.[63]

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61 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p.37 (translations mine).

62 Dr. Subhoranjan Dasgupta, Partition – Narrative: Women's Trauma and Triumph (Calcutta, 2000), p.9.

63 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 January 1949.

But what about the rest? – especially those illiterate mass living in shanties, who too had an equal number of mouths to feed, who too could not tolerate the cries of hunger of her near and dear ones. Pangs of hunger forced her to cast aside her principles, her ethics and morality. From honest housewives, they turn into selling the only asset they possessed – their bodies. Smt. Hasna Saha, working with the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, recalls the names of Bibha Biswas and Anima Das, who used to disappear for days, abandoning their kids at the relief camp and were suspected to be engaged in flesh trade.

Even literate Hindu girls, coming from solvent families of erstwhile East Bengal driven by compulsion and in desperation took to prostitution. Maintaining an outward façade of respectability they engaged in the trade, often in full knowledge of their family, who knowingly preferred to turn a blind eye to the source of income (since on many instances the girl was the sole earner in the family). As long as they can subsist, the family has no qualms of conscience. Take the case of Purnima – one of the many minor characters in Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel Arjun living in Deshapran Colony, one of the many squatters' colonies in the eastern fringes of Calcutta at Dum Dum. Once used to leading a respectable life in East Bengal, compulsion has forced Purnima to take up world's oldest profession. Pretending to work in an office in Dharamtola (the office area of Calcutta), she waits in a tea-stall for prospective customers. Her father, a seasoned gambler, dissipates the money earned by his daughter's physical labour without a tinge of regret.

So how can we say that the post-Partition years saw the acceleration of the process of Women's emancipation, already set in motion at the beginning of the century? It is true that many women did come out of the precincts of the four walls of their houses and chose a living. However, even they could not ignore their obligations and responsibilities as mother, daughter and wife.

Asok Mitra pens a moving picture of the plight of such working women caught in the tug-of-war between the home and the workplace.[64]

She has to cook, wash and perform other household chores before venturing out to work. In between her only nourishment is perhaps a bana and a cup of watery tea. She gets up between 4.30 and 5.00 in the morning. One of her brothers leaves for work at 6.15, so whatever cooking has to be done, has to be done by 6.00. After serving tea and some refreshments to her mother and the other brothers she hurriedly gets ready. Two tuitions have to be crowded in before 9.00 a.m. Hurrying back, she quickly finishes her frugal lunch, arranges things for her mother and with silent, rapid efficiency completes the bulk of washing. Next, a run for the bus-stop. If her work place is way north and she stays in some colony in the south like Garia or Jadavpur, she will have to change buses. By the time she reaches her workplace she might be fifteen minutes late, from then on it is an exhausting exercise. On her way back, she finishes her paltry shopping and with fatigue

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64 Asok Mitra, "Take a Girl Like Her" in Calcutta Diary (London, 1976).

dust and perspiration, fights her way back home in the overcrowded bus. Back home without any respite, it is the repetition of the same household routine of washing, cleaning and cooking.

There is hardly any variation in this day-to-day theme. She has nothing to look forward to, nothing to plan for, except the short term arithmetic of how much to borrow from which neighbour or which friend, this week, the following week, in fact week after week.

Karuna Chanana says that the ideological framework which emphasises virginity, parda, early marriage, dowry, son-preference, etc. and tended to keep women within the home did not undergo much change even when they went out apparently encouraged by the families. The traditional "feminine role model" of a daughter, wife and mother persisted.

Emancipation which does not allow the women to lead a respecteable life, which converts house wives and innocent girls into whores can never be called a true emancipation. So long accustomed to being at the receiving end, she is thus still rooted to the same status. Work, "financial independence" (if at all it can be called so since she never got to enjoy the fruits of her hard-earned salary) has not changed her fate; her destiny. She acts as a shock-absorber, sheltering and protecting her family against all odds. The transformation from home to the workplace has in fact only helped to heighten her exploitation. She is now doubly exploited – in the home as well as in the workplace (in case of the latter exploitation often amounts to sexual harassment, although maybe in an indirect manner). For instance,

Savitri Halder (a very insignificant character of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel Atmaprakash). She works as a telephone operator to fend for her family. Given the slightest opportunity, the middle aged and young officers make dirty and lewd passes at her.

But putting their dignity, their chastity at stake, the refugee women strove hard to keep the family wheel running by supplying the all too essential lubricant. In all fairness this much can be said that the post-Partition years witnessed a "greater visibility of women in public life."[65]

The ladle called "refugee" which stirred the social scenario did the same in the cultural field too. In fact the very decade of the 1940s because of the happenings at the national (Quit India Movement of 1942, the Great Famine of 1943, Direct Action Day of 1946) and international level (the end of Second World War, advancement of Communism) had a profound impact on the cultural scenario.

Partition ushered in a new and perhaps a more mature and realistic era in the celluloid world. One of the prominent deficiencies of Bengali cinema of the 1930s and early 1940s was its imperviousness to the momentous political events and mass upsurges taking place during this period, i.e., its detachment from the surrounding reality (exceptions being films like Charu Ray's "Bengalee" of 1936 portraying with authenticity and sincerity the sentiments and problems of a middle class Bengali family).

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65 Jasodhara Bagchi, op. cit., p.43.

Partition came as a big jolt for the Bengali cinema. An extensive and lucrative market of Bengali films was lost with the loss of East Bengal. However, quite paradoxically, the film industry, seemed to have entered a period of expansion. In 1947, the number of films produced jumped to 33 from 15 in 1946. In 1948, it rose to 37 leaping to an unprecedented 62 in 1949.[66]

The reel life now increasingly came to reflect the real life. The credit for this metamorphosis from the mythological world to the real world largely goes to a man named Nimai Ghosh (1914-1988) who moved by the misery and sufferings all round came out into the open with his camera, collected a paltry fund and gathered a group of non-professional actors including refugees to picturise a first hand account of the miseries of these children of the lesser God. A good part of his film was shot in the platforms of Sealdah railway station. A failure in terms of box-office collection, Chinnamool or the Uprooted (1951) one of the earliest *nouvelle vogue*[67] films, is an authentic portrayal of the city trying to cope with cross border migration, with its limited resources. It was an altogether new experience for a minority of spectators so long fed on a diet of mythological tearjerkers embelished with umpteen songs and dances. (In fact one of the reasons cited for the failure of Chhinnamool is the absence of songs. Ghosh's logic was "...How can they

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66 Kiranmoy Raha, Bengali Cinema (Calcutta, 1990), p.35.

67 Jasodhara Bagchi, op. cit., p.42.

sing while they are dying.").[68] A genuine realism come on to its own for the first time in Bengali, as a matter of fact, in Indian cinema and it developed henceforth in that direction. The era of so called parallel cinema or art film had truly began. Ghosh for the first time brought to the fore the hitherto neglected common man with his myriad shades of emotions and sufferings and gave voice to his inner struggles. "Chhinnamul was the precursor, of realism in Bengali cinema and a sign that a new wave was soon to break tumultously on its shores."[69]

The torch ignited by Ghosh was successfully carried on by Ritwik Ghatak, a director par excellence, a maestro of Partition films. Himself a migrant, who arrived almost penniless with his family on this side, he could thus vividly portray the pathos, the pangs of being separated from motherland, more precisely from mother. A bohemian in search for his roots, to Ritwik, Partition became the source of all negations, all evils, all ills plaguing the society. The psychological crisis of the Partition victims has been immortalised in his trilogy – Meghey Dacca Tara (1960), Komal Gandhar (1961) and Subarnarekha (1962).

The portrayal of the sufferings of the refugees reached a new height through the depiction of Nita – the central character of Meghey Dacca Tara (a film centring around a refugee family tragically disintegrating under the

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68 Samik Banerjee, "The Early Years of Calcutta Cinema" in Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., Calcutta, p.300.

69 Raha, op. cit., p.42.

burden of conflicts and tensions of social and emotional charged personal clashes) whose struggle to gather two square meals for her family has been beautifully juxtaposed with her passion for life. Afflicted with tuberculosis, Nita's heart wrenching cry of "*Dada, ami kintu bachte cheyechilam, ami bachbo*" (Oh! brother, I want to live) echoing through the mountains can be equated with the voice of the refugees in general – their urge to live life like normal human beings and not like parasites, their fierce desire to live a new life, in a new land.

Komal Gandhar and Subarnarekha, too, look at the severing of the traditional roots by an imposed political decision. Especially touching was the scene of "Komal Gandhar" in which the lovers – Anasuya and Bhrigu – standing by the railway line on the banks of the mighty Padma were reminiscing about the bygone days.

Bengali cinema had truly come of age in the post-Partition era. The new Indian cinema was born. People living in the comfort of their homes increasingly became aware of these hitherto unknown facts. The celluloid world helped men to take stock of their surroundings, to rethink the plight of such marginal men and women and spare a thought for them.

The trends in the world of drama, too, resembled that of the silver screen. The ball was already set rolling in the mid-1940s with the setting up of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and its staging of Bijon Bhattacharya's "Nabanna" in 1944 (a vivid portrayal of the misery inflicted by the man-made famine of 1943). The post-Partition period saw the formation

of groups like Bahurupee, Little Theatre Group whose plays acted as the mouthpiece of common man – he was the pivot around which the whole play revolved. It was increasingly realised that drama is not merely a form of entertainment, it is at the same time a medium for rousing the political and social consciousness of the people.

The field of Bengali literature was stirred deeply by the Partition. Partition produced one of Bishnu Dey's finest poems "Jal Dao" (Give me water). It is in the context of Partition that Annada Shankar Ray wrote these famous lines that have become immortal: *Tele-r shishi bhanglo bole/khuku-r pare raag karo/Tomra je shab buro khoka Bharat bhenge bhaag karo/Taar bela*?[70] In the field of novels, the fifth decade seems to be the most important one, and can be described as the most challenging one for the novelists, whose writing of the future decades took root in this crisis decade. Bhabani Mukhopadhyay feels that Bengali novels of the past fifty years show a marked difference in their subject matter, form, ideas or literary technique.[71] The emphasis in the past was on events, the expressions were tautological and consisted for a large part of moralistic sermon. The present generation of novelists use a more direct fashion of story telling.

Bengali literature of the post-Partition period shows a profusion of novels and short stories where the "refugee" is the central theme. Some of

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70 You scold the young one for breaking to pieces a glass bottle. But what about you? You elders have tom the country to pieces. How about that?

71 Bhabani Mukhopadhyay, Prabodh Kumar Sanyal-er Rachanabali, Vol.3 (Calcutta, 1975).

the best Bengali fictions belong to this period and were inspired directly or indirectly by the upheavals of the period. The themes ranged from working women (Manik Bandhyopadhyay's Swadhinatar Swad or Taste of Freedom), the breakdown of the joint family system (Ashapurna Debi's Mitter Bari or the Mitra Family) and the breakdown of old barriers and taboos, the vestiges of which however still remained, as portrayed admirably in Abataranika or Prologue[72] by Narendranath Mitra that depict the conflict between the current necessity of womenfolk to work and old prejudice of keeping her confined to her old role of daughter, wife and mother. Partition, in fact changed the whole temper of Bengali literature. Gone was the dreamy romanticism, the needs of the time awakened the creative writes to deal with more crucial, more existential and more humane aspects of life.

The educational world was thrown out of gear by the Partition. Of the teeming millions of refugees, students numbered around a lakh.[73] By the end of 1950, students of all ages numbered around 204,323.[74] Their demand for education, (since they realised the hard way that they would have to fight for every inch in West Bengal and in this fight their only weapon is education), brought the whole network of higher education to the verge of breakdown. A few exceptional institutions, Sukanta Chaudhuri, points out, may have

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72 This short story was later made into a film by Satyajit Ray named *Mahanagar* or the Great City.

73 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1 February 1949.

74 State Statistical Bureau, Report, op. cit., p.5.

benefited from the extra influx of good students (like the Presidency College which looks back to the 1950s as a "golden decade"). But the overall scenario was grim.

The existing colleges expanded their classes and consolidated the system of shifts; it became a common practice to have what are three colleges operating from the same building: morning, noon and night. Examples abound – in North Calcutta – Maha Rani Kasiswari College (morning), Maharaja Manindra Chandra College (noon), Srishchandra College (night), similarly in South Calcutta – Jogomaya Devi College (morning), Asutosh College (noon), Syamaprasad College (night).

Formal education, especially college education now became an accepted fact for girls and women. By and large education enabled them to step out in the narrow physical senses and has also enlarged the feminine social space. As Karuna Chanana points out, education was viewed as an investment for future utility, not to develop their self worth or for independent training as to break out of the patriarchal mould.[75] In order to deal with a crisis situation, the parda system gave way to investment in daughter's education.

Partition, in fact, was a great stimulus to female education – be it in schools or in college. One can get a clear picture from a careful perusal of the all India scenario, with regard to school education of the girl child

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[75] Karuna Chanana, "Partition and Family Strategies: Gender-Education Linkages", Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay, 24 April 1993).

especially in relation to the boys. In 1947, 83% of all girls enrolled in the education system, were in primary schools, almost half of them in class I. Only 7% were in secondary schools. In 1950-51 the position with regard to girl's school education changed dramatically. There were 39 girls for every 100 boys in Class I to Class IV. This went up to 55 for every hundred boys in 1966.[76]

After Independence and Partition, the colleges and universities turned into "degree factories". The University like a man who has drunk too much and is being sick, throws out a large number of students. Most of the established private colleges enlarged their custom to an undesirable and undeniable detriment of standards. Calcutta inherited two new universities in addition to the Calcutta University – Jadavpur University in 1955 and Rabindra Bharati University in 1962.

The sports arena, especially the Calcutta soccer field, was set ablaze by the Partition. After Partition, Calcutta football saw a new flood-tide with the upsurge of the East Bengal Club, founded in 1921, the real impetus of the Club came with the arrival of millions of uprooted people from eastern Bengal. For these ravaged masses, the one source of hope, pride and victory lay in the triumph of the club named after their abandoned homeland. Nripendranath Acharya recalls that the common meeting point of his friends from 'apar Bangla' was the East Bengal ground. They always made it a point

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[76] Promila Kalhan, "Women" in S.C. Dube, ed., India since Independence: Social Report on India (New Delhi, 1977), p.219.

not to miss a single East Bengal match. The clash between prawn and hilsa produced many a storm in the tea-cup. Relations were made and unmade on the basis of club affiliations. Days preceding any Mohun Bagan-East Bengal match witness provocative statements by both sides to stimulate the flow of adrenaline. (The tradition continues till date. Mohun Bagan President Tutu Bose made an instigating statement on 21 March 2000, on the eve of a Mohun Bagan-East Bengal encounter, denoting the Bangals as foreigners and equating the match with the Kargil War.) The triumph of the red and yellow jersey over the maroon and green brigade in those days, was identified as the victory of the marginal men against their obstacles. To quote Nripendranath Acharya:[77]

> The triumph of the East Bengal Club was the symbolic protest against the maltreatment meted out to the uprooted masses of opar Bangla.

Partition brought about a sea-change in the political culture of the present state of West Bengal. The red and yellow jersey of the East Bengal Club merged with the red flag of the Communists. East Bengal fought its battle in the field and its supporters, the refugees waged their war against the Congress Government outside. The war of the football field and the political war on the streets of Calcutta merged in the 1950s.

Prafulla K. Chakrabarti in his seminal work, "The Marginal Men" deals in great detail with how the leftist ascendancy in West Bengal owed a great deal to the refugees and their struggles for rehabilitation in the 1950s. It

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77 Ganashakti, 1 January 2000 (translations mine).

maintains that it was the refugees who performed the vanguard function in West Bengal, catapulting the Communists to power and that "the refugee movement coalesced in a broad movement of the left and democratic process which reached a point of crystallization during the general elections of 1967."[78]

The surge of Leftism in Calcutta politics saw the student community gradually drifting into its fold. They now became a pliant tool at the hands of the Communists. At the instigation of the Communists they took to the streets protesting against the establishment. Turmoil now overtook Calcutta's academic world. Clashes between students and police became a common occurrence in the University area. A few newspaper headlines will suffice to prove this:

Police clash with the students in the University;[79] Demonstrations by Students before Darbhanga Building – Police use teargas; Calcutta varsity classes closed sine die;[80] student demonstration before the residence of the VC;[81] Presidency College closed;[82] Dr. B.C. Roy's house stoned (by about 200 Communist led student demonstrators).[83]

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78 Chakrabarti, op. cit., p.405.

79 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 January 1949.

80 Amrita Bazar Patrika 10 September 1949.

81 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 14 September 1949.

82 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 17 September 1949.

83 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 20 September 1949.

Students bewildered by the changes in their social, political and intellectual environments, and by the incapacity of the present systems and values to respond to the new changes, increasingly believed that in the present setup the defiance of authority will yield immediate and rich individuals. This feeling was exploited by the Communists.

The influx of the refugees cast the contours of the state and its capital in a new mould. This refugee migration can be treated as a hallmark in the socio-cultural life of Calcutta. The phenomenon of "migrating to Calcutta" is not a post-Partition or for that matter a post-Direct Action-Day-incited-communal-carnage event. Being a primate city, Calcutta, for long has acted as a magnet for the fortune-seekers. But nothing could match what the truncated province of Bengal witnessed after 1947 – the process having already begun from 1946 onwards sparked off by the Noakhali riots.

The shifting of the imperial capital in 1911 marked the beginning of the end of colonial Calcutta. She no longer remained the jewel in the crown of the Empire. Partition and associated exodus resoundingly tolled the bell. The city of parvenu wealth and easy living, the city of white town and native town of genteel prose and lyrical poetry of colonial civil services and nationalist revolutionaries was finally lowered down to rest in peace with the epitaph: "Herein lies the former capital of British India – Calcutta, 24 August 1690-15 August 1947."

In its place, a new city is born – a city of self-centred nuclear families of you and me, a city of increasing number of working women, a city of red

citadel. It is the exodus of people who brought with them a new culture, a new dialect, in fact in many ways, a new way of life that contributed no less in shaping the future of Calcutta as India's city.

CONCLUSION

In the end, can we arrive at a definite conclusion regarding the experience of the East Pakistani refugees which in turn would promote or hinder the process of adaptation? Who should be credited or blamed for success or the failure of the process – the refugees or the alien society which plays host to them, or both.

The Government of India did set up a Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation in September 1947 (in 1949 the word 'Relief' was dropped to emphasise on the aspect of rehabilitation) to look after the interests of the refugees but its role was limited to channelising money and other resources to the refugees. "Rehabilitation", as defined in one government publication, "is the process of reinstating or re-establishing one in the esteem of others."[1] The role of rehabilitation administration was over once the refugees were given land and other resources. Whether the necessary infrastructure exists for the utilisation of these resources, whether the refugees were in a position to make good of those resources – none of these bothered the government, thus making a mockery of the definition of 'rehabilitation' endorsed by the Ministry. It was not the headache of the government whether the refugees could redeem their self-esteem. The government created an image of 'the refugee' in such a way that as 'experts' it could take custody of them. "Individuals are made into 'clients' by being categorised impersonally. Policy

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1 Rao, op. cit., p.48.

is decided deductively and unilaterally, with little input from refugees themselves... there is a standardised prescription of how experts should act in order to ensure their clients' salvation."[2] The refugees, in the government discourse became nameless numbers, not faces.

The rehabilitation policy of the Government of West Bengal operated in three phases. First, refugees were transported to camps, and given relief. During the second stage, they received loans and equipments and were allocated plots of land. During this period, they were expected to be motivated to work – to get on to their own feet quickly. The government warned them that there would be a gradual phasing out of relief and help. In the third stage, aid was withdrawn on the ground that by this time, the refugees would be self-sufficient and capable of eking out a living on their own.

But in between the second and the third phase, i.e., the period of receiving assistance and withdrawal of assistance the 'dependency syndrome' often became entrenched. The 'survival syndrome', i.e., the determination to fight against all odds and survive, peters out and was substituted by the 'dependency syndrome', i.e., the longing for getting help without having to sweat.

The government was working on the assumption: "The more you give, the more dependent people become". All human beings are dependent on

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[2] Harrell Bond, op. cit., p.139.

others to a greater or lesser extent; the issue is not being 'helped' *per se*, but the extent of dependence. To reduce this element of dependence, the government formulated schemes for self-sufficiency. The problem was that the government failed to strike a delicate balance between providing assistance and making them self-sufficient. Too much assistance and the refugees would refuse to work for themselves; too little assistance and the government would be blamed for failing to carry out the duties of a welfare state. The government unfortunately failed to solve this equation. Had it been able to do so, rehabilitation in the East, perhaps would not have dragged for so long. Partly due to the laxity of the central government, due to the infrastructural difficulties of the state coupled with its own bungling of the policy, the process remained in a state of flux and for those who became the victims of a 'dependency syndrome' because of this, retained the identity of 'refugee'.

It is to be remembered that out of the total influx, only a small fraction sought shelter in the camps and were thus under direct government control. Hence, one shudders to think what would have happened had the majority sought its help. In this sense, the government, an integral part of the host society, can be faulted for failing in its duty.

But, seen from the perspective of the government, it had its limitations. The state government was not in a favourable position to generate its own resources. The central government, on the other hand, linked the whole process to the Kashmir problem: "The particular issues of Bengal and

Kashmir... are linked together in my mind."[3] Hence Nehru could not agree to the idea of an exchange of population in the East that, would have simplified the problem. The Government of India had to think in terms of wider national interest over regional interest. War with Pakistan and the dispute over Kashmir gave the problem a new complexion. Hence to project its image as a secular nation, Nehru refused the idea of a population exchange. The only wrongdoing the central government committed, as a part of the host society, was an ungenerous allocation of funds, when it was enjoying a succession of surplus budgets and could divert funds to the West.

The other component of the host society, the people, i.e., the Ghatis, by and large, carried on the tradition of the Bangal-Ghati rivalry. Areas like Jadavpur, Santoshpur, Garia, i.e, the southern fringes of Calcutta came to be termed as Bangal refugee settlements. However, as I have shown, not all remained ignorant and passive, but in general, there was a feeling of indifference.

Within the refugee community, those who had something to fall back upon, were no doubt in a better position to start afresh than those who arrived empty handed. At least, many of them could find some means of material sustenance than those in the relief camps. That for many of them material happiness did not bring about a feeling of oneness with the host population is an altogether different issue.

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3 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Speeches, Vol.Two, p.146.

As I have already pointed out, being at the receiving end does not imply that the refugees were always a very docile and submissive group. They, too, in many cases behaved badly.

Our study shows shades of grey, instead of giving a definite result in black or white. The people of the East did have a profound impact on the host society, affecting both the social and cultural setup, but in spite of that many still remained the 'people from the East'. The reason for the persistence of this identity varies from person to person and does not follow any rule.

Over the years, has the situation changed? Although the terms Bangal and Ghati are still very much a part of the Bengali vocabulary, they are no longer treated as pejorative terms but rather as simple, one-word synonyms for the people of East Bengal and West Bengal.

With the passage of time the attitude of the West Bengalis have mellowed. Hardly anybody today considers the Bangals as outsiders. (Comments by persons like Tutu Bose branding the Bangals as foreigners should be brushed aside and condemned by all right thinking Bengali as reflection of his narrow mentality.) Moreover, in this era of blindly aping the West, when many upstart Bengalis are themselves forgetting their language and culture, hardly anybody cares if the person sitting next, comes from "this" side or "that" side.

It is true that the East Bengali dialect is still spoken in many homes. Even there, the tradition is mostly carried on by the older generations – a

rapidly disappearing lot. Intra-senior conversations hinge on their own dialect but in most cases, interaction between the older and the younger family members are carried out in standard Bengali (ironically, the dialect of the 'outsiders', which being more akin to Sadhu Bhasa or chaste Bengali, has modified the tongue spoken by the people of "this" side and is now spoken in Calcutta). The younger lot of such households usually speak the standard Bengali, often with a generous sprinkling of English words. To them, their only identity is that of an out and out Calcuttan. They might be aware of their ancestral lineage and homeland but that knowledge may not have any important bearing on their cosmopolitan outlook.

Perhaps the only time when the Bangal-Ghati distinction comes up even in present days is during negotiations for matrimonial alliances in which it is customary to mention one's ancestry, one's lineage and original homeland.

In case of marriages being arranged by the brides and the grooms themselves, such distinctions, may have lost their relevance. But in case of marriages arranged by the seniors who go through all the customary rituals the East Bengal-West Bengal identity still retains its importance. A typical Ghati family or even some East Bengali families like those hailing from Dacca or Barisal, having a narrow mindset, consider it a taboo to marry their son or daughter to any household originally hailing from Noakhali, Comilla or Sylhet. But for all practical purposes Bangal-Ghati distinctions have faded, to a large extent.

What about the government? In 1967, the United Front government in West Bengal, recognised the demand for rehabilitation of the ex-work-site camp inmates. With regard to the squatters, the rehabilitation minister Sri Niranjan Sen handed out 'entitlement deeds' which entitled the holders of such deeds to obtain title-deeds of the occupied lands whenever a decision to this effect would be taken by the centre.

Between 1967 and 1974, no concrete step was taken. In 1974 the Congress ministry of Sri Siddhartha Shankar Ray, with the approval of Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi decided to issue lease deeds for 99 years without any payment in lieu. However, certain clauses were attached to it. At the expiry of the lease, the decision for renewal would rest entirely on the state government. Moreover, without the approval of the government, the land could not be transferred, and the occupant, if found guilty of any anti-government activities, would be evicted from his possessions.

It goes without saying that this was unacceptable to the UCRC. The Left Front Government having come to power in 1977, by drawing rich dividends from the refugee vote bank, took up the cause of the refugees in right earnest Chief Minister Sri Jyoti Basu, in a letter to the Prime Minister dated 7 October 1980 requested Smt. Indira Gandhi to bestow the gift of ownership of plots to the occupants. But in her reply dated 25 November 1980, Smt. Gandhi turned down the request.

But the state government was determined to have its say. In 1982, it decided to grant lease deeds of 999 years to the colonies situated in its lands.

But under the pressure of the central government, it was forced to revert to its original policy of 99 years.

In a letter written to Prime Minister Sri Rajiv Gandhi dated 21 March 1985, Sri Basu requested him to reconsider the centre's decision. But the central government was unflinching.

The state government was, however, determined to go ahead with its plan and on 12 November 1986, Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu handed over title-deeds to 404 families of Netaji Colony in Baranagar.[4] On 5 December 1986, central minister, Buta Singh, through a written communication empowered the state government to bestow ownership on the occupants. The state government, accordingly, issued a proclamation on 29 January 1987, declaring that all plot holders of the squatters' colonies would be given ownership right.[5] Till mid-2000, the occupants of 939 colonies had been issued title-deeds by the state government. The residents of another 998 are still awaiting their turn.[6]

Thus, in a sense the process of integration, still continues.

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4 Ganashakti, 13 August 2000.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

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