

### **CHAPTER III**

#### ***Migration after Partition: refugee crisis and rehabilitation in West Bengal with special reference to North Bengal***

Partition of India purported on religious lines creating two independent nations i.e. India and Pakistan. This bifurcation was a great upheaval causing forced migration in Punjab and Bengal. The Partition of India generated extensive movements between India and so far as East and West Bengal was concerned. Both the Hindus and the Muslims crossed new borders. Following the division, the Hindus for their safety and security crossed the border seeking asylum in West Bengal. This process of migration to West Bengal continued unremittingly over the next couple of decades, while the migration in Punjab was almost completed by 1949. Now the vital question arises whether the border crossers were refugees, migrants or bona fides citizens of India and whether the refugees would be accommodated with temporary relief or permanent rehabilitation. These were the most vital issues on the part of the Indian policy makers. The building of new nation was a 'refugee generating process' and Partition of India on the basis of religious division was a brilliant example of this process. "Efforts to create homogeneous nation states change some subjects into minorities who find themselves on the 'wrong' side of new borders or in the 'wrong' State, with the 'wrong' ethnicity, language or religion. Minorities are made to feel they should belong somewhere else, that they should be 'nationals' of some other new state made up of 'people like them'." <sup>1</sup> The term 'Refugee' is often treated as interchangeable by the term displaced. The 'Refugee' is a person who had fled his home or native country forever, where as displaced persons means the person who had been removed or deported from their abodes following war or as forced labour. Actually the minorities were compelled to consider themselves to somewhere else. The nation made the minorities to seek asylum to other countries or to remain in the same country having the status of second class citizen. <sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact 'the refugees are the end result of complex articulation of colonial and national power, ...' <sup>3</sup>

The Partition of India triggered off large scale cross border migration both in West Bengal and Punjab. West Bengal is a state adjacent to East Pakistan, the borders of the state are bounded by nine districts of West Bengal VIZ. Darjeeling, Jalaiguri,

Coochbehar, Malda, West Dinajpur now divided into North and South Dinajpur), Murshidabad, Nadia, 24 Parganas ( now North and South) and Calcutta. Due to this geographical propinquity bulk of partition refugees migrated to those districts of West Bengal. They mostly settled in border districts of Indian Territory. The exodus of people from East Pakistan flocked to different regions of India. One wing crossed the Bramhaputra and Barak Valleys due to its proximity to East Bengal. Another group moved towards Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur. As a matter of fact the uprooted people wanted to settle in contiguous districts where the geographical features were more or less identical with them. The refugees from Jessore mostly went to be settled in Nadia while those who came from Dinajpur went Jalpaiguri and West Dinajpur. Tribes and communities like the Santals, the Rajbansies, the Hajongs and the Garoes however moved to Meghalaya from the northern areas of East Bengal, particularly from the districts of Mymansingh and Rongpur.<sup>4</sup>

During the episode the surging tide of exodus lashed the shore of East Pakistan and West Bengal. From 1947 onwards and till 1950 s Calcutta was the recipient of bulk of the migrants from East Pakistan. From the middle of 1950s refugee exodus in West Bengal gradually thinned out. Again the Bangladesh crisis in 1971 accelerated the trend of migration from East Pakistan. This demarcation of periods of migration is not a total one; migration caused in 1949-50 due to communal riots in Khulna and Barishal. In 1956, the adoption of an Islamic constitution by Pakistan spurred more migration. Again in 1964 due to communal violence following the Hazratbal incident a million left East Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The most pertinent reasons for fleeing to West Bengal was its physical and natural proximity coupled with the ties of language as well as religion. Almost 72% of the refugees escaped from their ancestral homes sensing impending violence and danger. In quest of a safe heaven they marched towards West Bengal. Following Partition almost 15 million people crossed the new border that is known as the greatest mass exodus so far recorded as yet. The Hindu population in Bangladesh was gradually declining from the period of Partition. At the time of Partition the Hindus constituted around 31% of East Pakistan where as in 1951 the Hindu population decreased to 24%. Further mass exodus occurred during the military campaign of 1971.<sup>6</sup>

Migration is a global phenomenon and was one of the most burning issues throughout the universe. Migration of people may be from actual place to alien land, from village

to town, from one state to other or from one country to another due to social, economic, political or cultural reason. Migration is a common trend continuing throughout the ages. The partition of India triggered of large scale migration from East Pakistan as well as from West Pakistan. It was nothing but a forced migration. The causative factors for the forced migration have been categorized by the academicians broadly into three categories, VIZ conflict induced displacement, development induced displacement and disaster induced displacement. The main reason of displacement of a number of migrations is conflict. According to the United Nations Convention on Refugees in 1951 described a refugee as a person residing outside his or her country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return because of a “well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a political social group or political opinion”.<sup>7</sup> Forces of forced migration of the minority communities from East Bengal to West Bengal were actually generated with the rapid growth of communal violence since the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’ of 1946.

A never ending flow of clandestine migrants in Indian Territory in general and West Bengal in particular started following the vivisection of India in 1947. It brought about immense miseries and sufferings to millions of people who were compelled to quit their sweet abode with heavy hearts and tearful eyes. Owing to the vivisection of the subcontinent of India huge number of people crossed the western borders between India and Pakistan in both directions. A large number of Hindus crossed India’s eastern borders into the new state of West Bengal and also into Assam and Tripura. After two decades of the partition, approximately a million and half Muslims quit West Bengal, Behar, Assam and Tripura and proceeded towards East Bengal. According to the statistics stated by Radcliffe in the process of Bengal division, the new state West Bengal consisted of 21 million people of whom 25 percent or 5.3 million were Muslims. On the other hand the population of East Bengal was 39 million, there were 11 million Hindus.<sup>8</sup> Those Hindus became the subjects of the eastern wing of newly created independent Pakistan. By 1951, the Hindus constituted only 24% of East Pakistan’s population due to large-scale migration to India where as in 1947 they formed around 31%. Again in 1971 at about 10 million refugees from East Pakistan fled to India. A section of Bengali Hindu people from East Bengal had migrated to Calcutta even before the partition in pursuit of jobs and higher education.

They used to live in rented houses or boarding houses which they used to call *basha* (temporary residence) which was distinct from their *bari* (ancestral house) of their *desh* or native land.

### **Noakhali and Calcutta riot:**

In the month of August 1946 Calcutta witnessed atrocious communal disturbances and riots where a sizable number of participation of both Hindus and Muslims was visible. The Calcutta riot spread like wild flames in different parts of India like Bombay, Noakhali in East Bengal, Bihar, Garmukteswar in U.P and Punjab.<sup>9</sup> The Calcutta riot of 1946, also known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’ continued for four days. This massive Hindu-Muslim riot took place in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal. As a consequence of this communal riot at least 5000 to 10000 people were brutally killed and at least 15000 people were seriously injured. The duration of this riot was from 16 to 19 August, 1946. Those riots were probably the most notorious single massacre during the period. Horrified violence and communal disturbances broke out in different parts of India. However this ‘Great Calcutta Killing’ was the most appalling event and deadly episode in the history of Calcutta. The victims mercilessly assaulted, killed and they were also grotesquely mutilated. Thousands of Hindus were massacred and volunteers of Muslim League carried plenty of petrol to set ablaze the houses of the Hindus.<sup>10</sup>

The process of migration virtually started even before the division of Bengal, violence erupted in the shape of riots, rape and abduction of women in the areas like Noakhali and Tripura. The consecutive unabated brutal attacks on Hindu minorities especially on women created fear, anxiety and panic of insecurity on the minds of womenfolk. Gandhiji for the restoration of peace and tranquility in the restive areas immediately after the riot rushed to Noakhali and went round the villages. His message to the people was – “We have to enter the minds of the people”. Communal riots were often provoked by the spread of rumour that ‘Muslims were being butchered in Calcutta’.<sup>11</sup> Different reports available in some leading the then news papers narrated the stories of forced marriages between Hindu girls and Muslim boys. Abduction of Hindu girls and conversion to Islam became rampant and regular features. Muriel Lester observed “...worst of all was the plight of the women. Several of them had to watch their

husbands being murdered then be forcibly converted and married to those responsible for their deaths.<sup>12</sup> Those women had a deadlock. It was not despair, nothing so active as that. The Calcutta and Noakhali riots completed the convergence between elite and popular communalism which were to some extent different from all Hindu-Muslim conflicts of previous days. Truly speaking the memories and bitter experiences of Partition was nothing but another historical amnesia which became evident. Practically Partition came in the wake of freedom and there was hardly any study on the experiences as well as in the perceptions of freedom in the early days. So according to Sekhar Bandopadhyay Partition had a rival connotations of freedom. This freedom meant for Hindus as a freedom from a 'perpetual domination' of the Muslims. On the contrary, freedom meant for many Muslims in the East as the freedom from Hindu oppression.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Migration after independence:**

The most heart rendering event in respect of the Hindus of Eastern Pakistan was their inflow to India after the division in 1947. Following the partition 15 million people crossed borders; this has been called as the greatest mass migration ever recorded. It was a story of the process of uprooting the bondage of love, affection, attachment with their mother land and their kith and kin. What was done in Punjab, it was not followed in case of East Pakistan. The process of exchange of population was completed within a stipulated period in Punjab. On the contrary the situation was altogether different in case of Hindu refugees of Eastern Pakistan. The condition of Hindus was like captive birds in cages. The Hindu people of Eastern Pakistan were forced to leave their motherland being tormented, humiliated and intimidated. Their properties were confiscated and plundered; rape and murder became rampant and the dignity of women was at stake. Adversely, Punjab did not witness wild violence like East Pakistan and at the same time they were not forced to leave their ancestral home. Political circumstances owing to Partition, the Hindus of East Pakistan came to India but the Muslims of India remained in an unmoved condition. The inflow of Hindu exodus became a regular event since 1974. This never ending flow of Hindu exodus to India continued unabated excepting few years of Mujibar Rahaman's administration.<sup>14</sup>

On March 1948, the total number of migrants was 10 lacks. In the month of June of the same year the number mounted to 11 lacks. Among them 3 lacks and 50 thousand came from the middle class families of the urban areas and 5 lacks 50 thousand migrants came from middle class of rural background. Among them, more than 1 lack people were cultivators in profession and less than 1 lack people were engaged in agriculture based activities.<sup>15</sup> The second phase of migration started in 1950 followed by unprecedented cases of murder, violence, arson, rape and attack on unarmed, innocent and destitute people of East Pakistan. The situation became more complicated due to the inflow of frequent migration. In the occurrence of riots of East Pakistan in 1950, a mammoth number of refugees began to move towards West Bengal and naturally the growth of refugee population accelerated rapidly. The census report of 1951 revealed that the number of migrants reached to 3.5 millions in West Bengal.<sup>16</sup> The first wave of refugees from East Bengal consisted of the elite people who had education also possessed some amount of assets. But the majority of the Hindus in East Bengal comprised peasants, agricultural labourers and sharecroppers. Most of them belonged to the lower castes, had only their tiny landholding in their possession. They did not have resource, education and skill or family connections in West Bengal that could help them to settle over there.<sup>17</sup> By the end of May 1948 the refugee influx from East Bengal to West Bengal increased by over 2000 per week and from that period onwards the Government was rather compelled to open camps in airfields in different districts side by side with military huts in Calcutta.<sup>18</sup> Census of 1951 revealed that most of the refugees coming from East Pakistan ended up in three districts like 24 Parganas, Calcutta and Nadia. Of the total 2,099,000 refugees hailed from East Bengal in 1951, total 1,387,000 refugees settled in those three aforesaid districts. The remaining part came and settled in West Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Burdwan districts. Afterwards, the census of 1961 represented the same picture.<sup>19</sup>

The pity of whole thing was that the Nehru-Liaquat Delhi Pact of 1950 could not stop the flow of migration from East Pakistan to West Bengal. The pact assured the refugees of both the borders of India and Pakistan would be entitled to return their respective homes. The displaced also got assurance that their abandoned assets and properties would be returned back to them. With the declaration the Nehru-Liaquat pact the exodus was tried to be stopped for the time being. But it left no permanent

impact. Rather the Pact created an adverse effect in respect of the Muslims. Those Muslims who left West Bengal and Assam previously, returned back to their respective abodes. The most surprising fact was that the Indian Muslims returned back along with the Muslim members of East Pakistan though they were the citizens of Eastern Pakistan. But unfortunately the displaced Hindus of East Pakistan expressed their unwillingness to return back to their ancestral houses in East Pakistan. They were more concerned with their future safety and security. It is worth mentioning that, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact, signed in April 1950, failed to provide the way for the return of the refugees to their homeland. Later on, when the passport system was introduced for traveling from Pakistan to India from 15 October 1952, it opened new scope for migration. The refugee exodus again started after 1960-61 and reached to its climax during 1964-65. Finally, another massive exodus was noticed when the rulers of West Pakistan followed the means of genocide to make the Bengalis in East Pakistan mute. Although after the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact the violence on Hindus decreased to a considerable extent but the flow of exodus continued even after. In the year 1950 alone 1.75 million refugees migrated to India. The emigration process continued unabatedly up to 1956.<sup>20</sup>

The discourse of the uprooted minority Hindus of East Bengali reflected acute sense of insecurity with regard to wealth, life and honour.<sup>21</sup> The reason for the emigration of elite class immediately after the partition, was largely due to a fear of losing wealth and prestige rather than life as they were numerically and politically subordinate group in a Muslim-majority nation. Though Nehru Government did not find any communal or caste conflict behind the massive exodus from East Pakistan to India, still it is fact that there was no doubt that a fear psychosis was clear among Hindus of East Pakistan. Shankar Ghosh, an eminent journalist of the Anandabazar Patrika was of the view that moral extermination of Hindus was responsible for the emigration of Hindu minority from East Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> A very small section of these people was able to sell their property in East Bengal or to exchange their property to acquire capital to reinvest the same in private industries. Within a short period, they became integrated with the local population. There was also a large educated middle class, who, though, did not have enough money with them but had enough potential for their survival. Some of them found jobs, or could restart their medical or legal practice again. Almost all the Hindu government servants serving in East Bengal gave

an option for settling in India.<sup>23</sup> The uprooted millions were in an appalling mental state. They were ousted from their ancestral home under conditions of inexpressible terror and misery. Most of them did not get much time to plan their evacuation. They had actually no option but to accept their grim destiny. They had witnessed their near and dear ones were hacked before their very eyes; their houses were ransacked and set ablaze by their own neighbours. “They had no choice but to seek safety in flight, filled with wrath at what they had seen, and full of anguish for numberless missing kinsmen who were still stranded in Pakistan and for their womenfolk who had been abducted”.<sup>24</sup>

In the year 1951, in the month of June it was noticed that the trend of exodus was hastened and continued incessantly. In the meantime the passport system was introduced between India and Pakistan in 1952 under the initiative of Pakistan and consequently India agreed to introduce the same. In the year 1960-61 a massive number of Hindu refugees of East Pakistan entered into West Bengal, it was undoubtedly the third phase of fresh migration. From 1961-65 more or less 10 lacks Hindu refugees crossed the borders on their way to West Bengal. In 1962, 1964 and 1965 an organized brutal violence broke out in the districts of Rajshahi and Dhaka respectively. Innumerable Hindu minorities were slaughtered. Noted Canadian journalist Mr. Montriell reported vividly the act of genocide. As a result of that horrible violence and assassination, according to Mr. Montriell 10 thousand Hindu minority people were brutally killed in and around the city of Dacca. Both U.S.A and Pakistan tried to conceal that act of genocide. The mysterious silence of those two nations was really questionable. Many houses of Hindus were gutted, mud dwelling houses were torched, in the walls of dilapidated houses of Hindus were decorated with Urdu writing. The Bengali meaning of that Urdu writing was “this house belongs to Muslims”.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy in this connection that seriously injured persons following the violence were shifted to different hospitals in open trucks. The medical staffs were not adequate enough to treat the wounded persons. Foreign physicians and surgeons extended their hands of cooperation for the treatment of those injured persons but their appeals were summarily rejected and ignored. 2.70 lacks Hindu refugees hailed from East Pakistan in empty hands. Such influx of refugees was unheard and unprecedented in recent history. In the meantime under the inspiring leadership of

Seikh Mujib-ur Rahman the people of East Pakistan launched a brave fight against the autocrat Pakistan government for their emancipation and creation of a new independent state which was popularly known as Bangladesh. Overcoming all sorts of hurdles the long cherished desire and sweet dream of independent state was eventually materialized through a war known as ‘Mukti Yuddha’ (War of liberation)<sup>26</sup>. After much hardship, obstacles and healthy opposition undaunted Mujib-ur-Rahman created his dreamland ‘Bangladesh’ in 1971 and Mujb-Ur-Rahman became the supreme head of newly created state Bangladesh. From that time onwards a new trend cropped up regarding the migration of the minority Hindus. Not only Bengalee Hindus but also the Buddhists and the Christians were compelled to leave their homeland. So, the process of migration was a continuous and never ending process.

As a matter of fact the persecution on minorities in East Pakistan intensified the fear of future harassment on them. The communal disturbances prepared the ground of mass exodus to West Bengal. In initial stage it was observed that most of the migrants from East Pakistan to West Bengal belonged to elite Hindu society and at the same time from the educated upper and middle class families. They could only bring with them their skill and education. The Partition of India and the refugee problem especially in Bengal had turned out to be a continuing process from 1947-1950.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, displacement and migration from East to West Bengal is still “an inescapable part of our reality.”<sup>28</sup> Even Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, confessed in a press conference at Nagpur on January 1, 1950 that, “West Bengal has suffered more from Partition and its after-effects than any province or any part of the country. The Punjab also suffered, but it suffered more in the sense of mass killing of the people, while economically West Bengal has suffered more...”<sup>29</sup> Nehru's letter to the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Roy reflects this quandary: “It is wrong to encourage any large-scale migration from East Bengal to the West. Indeed, if such a migration takes place, West Bengal and to some extent the Indian Union would be overwhelmed... If they come over to West Bengal, we must look after them. But it is no service to them to encourage them to join the vast mass of refugees who can at best be poorly cared for”.<sup>30</sup> Fifty years after Partition, the review of the Central Government on the refugee rehabilitation agreed that the policy towards

refugees of East Pakistan was not only inadequate but discriminatory in comparison to its policy towards the refugees of West Punjab.<sup>31</sup>

The uprooted and displaced Hindus migrated in quick succession from East Pakistan to West Bengal. The first group of refugees arrived after the Noakhali riot and riot in Tippera in 1946. The flow of exodus continued uninterrupted till the end of 1949. Those evacuees who sought shelter during this phase, mostly belonged to the upper and upper middle strata like the landowning, merchant and professional classes. The next major influx began following the massacre in several districts of East Bengal, particularly in the village called Kalshira in the Bagerhat subdivision of Khulna district on December 20, 1949 and then Rajshahi, Faridpur and Barisal in February 1950. Those refugees who crossed the border were very poor, mostly agricultural labourers. Those displaced peasants and agricultural labourers possessed almost nothing except the capacity of rendering manual labour. The constant intimidation and threat made them puzzled which life forced them to leave their country.<sup>32</sup> Most of the labourers belonged to so-called lower castes, like Namasudra, Mahisya and Sadgop communities. Initially they were in a fix to quit their motherland. There were two major vital reasons behind their unwillingness to leave their country; firstly, they did not want to detach themselves from their original profession of agricultural labourers and secondly, under the ebullient guidance of their leader Jogendra Nath Mondal, who held the portfolio of Law ministry under the Government of Pakistan at that time, the uprooted people decided to stay back.

There was an unholy understanding between Muslim League and J.N.Mondal. The Namashudras of East Pakistan were assured that if they would support the League they would not be ousted from their homeland. Following which the Namashudras did not quit their motherland immediately after the Partition. Dhananjay Keer in his book 'Dr. Ambedkar Life And Mission' stated that "Jogendranath Mandal, Law and Labour Minister of Pakistan, who had asked the Scheduled Castes in Pakistan to look upon Jinnah as their savior and had been asked them to wear a badge blatantly suggestive of Islamic Associations".<sup>33</sup> Before 1950 following communal riots that broke out in Eastern Pakistan thousands and thousands subaltern Namashudra people and other people belonging to Scheduled Castes were compelled to quit their sweet homeland. Finding no other way out, the Law and Labour Minister Jogendranath Mondal, being

apprehended of his personal security decided to leave for Calcutta from Karachi. On September 3, 1950 he tendered his resignation to the Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. The very incident clearly proved that due to lack of insecurity for the minority Hindus was the vital reason behind the inflow of Hindu minority exodus. But it was obvious that the people, who finally decided to leave their motherland and to cross over to the other side of the border for their safety and security, also contributed much to the development of their alien land.<sup>34</sup> The riot of 1950s had given a clear indication that there was no other way out but to quit their homestead.

Bengal had to face unprecedented brutality after partition of India. The hard task of rehabilitation of the refugees in the post-partition Bengal continued unabated in the midst of diverse problems. Besides the inadequate state assistance, the community network had a pivotal role. All the districts of the state of West Bengal were equally affected by the exodus. In major cases, the uprooted persons from the western parts of East Pakistan trekked to the adjoining districts of West Bengal, whereas, the displaced people of the central and eastern parts of East Bengal preferred to resettle in 24 Parganas (undivided), and in and around Calcutta. At the same time the refugees from the northern part of East Bengal tried to settle in the neighboring districts of North Bengal viz. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, West Dinajpur etc, The Annual Report of the Department of Rehabilitation of the Government of India pointed out that, in the first phase of the refugee exodus during the year 1946 to 1952, 2.52 million refugees arrived in West Bengal, the year between 1953 and 1956 were marked as crucial (See Table-3. 1). Gradually, by December 1957 the refugee influx reached the highest point in the East. The number of the refugees crossing the international border went up to 3,16,000.<sup>35</sup> The under drawn table gives clear indication of the scale and magnitude of the post-partition displacement from the East to West.

**Table - 3.1****Migration from East Bengal to West Bengal since 15 October, 1946 to 15 January 1951(Outside Camps)**

Sl. No.	District	Number of families one or more migrants	Number of persons including migrants	Total migrants since 15 October 1946 to 15 January, 1951	Migrants since 31 December 1949 upto 15 January 1951
1	Burdwan	24616	106514	100805	39777
2	Birbhum	2655	12351	11524	5545
3	Bankura	2294	10223	9814	6017
4	Midnapur	6058	31797	28722	5581
5	Howrah	16827	92778	86444	49094
6	Hooghly	12115	68666	63334	28636
7	24 Parganas	100564	598833	541720	265966
8	Calcutta	76078	476759	415970	178799
9	Nadia	84913	411733	403804	267872
10	Murshidabad	14424	67763	65578	32170
11	West Bengal	27305	138448	134756	109875
12	Malda	14876	70201	68197	56806
13	Jalpaiguri	20596	107178	100675	65234
14	Darjeeling	3425	18910	17643	8757
15	Cooch Behar	22526	95890	94242	80350
16	Total	429272	2308044	2143228	1200479
17	Percent			100.00	56.00

Source: Government of West Bengal, Report on the Sample Survey for Estimating the Socio-economic Characteristics of displaced persons migrating from East Pakistan to the state of West Bengal, 1951 (Calcutta: State Statistical Bureau)

**Table 3.2**  
**Month-wise Break-up of Refugee Influx to West Bengal**

Month	1953	1954	1955	1956
January	5,248	4,077	15,674	17,011
February	5,961	5,710	22,848	42,360
March	7,507	5,821	26,503	15,167
April	6,900	6,002	15,070	18,039
May	6,032	6,656	18,190	34,657
June	4,798	6,354	21,146	24,734
July	5,026	6,208	22,957	27,442
August	4,147	8,127	13,813	
September	3,223	10,644	9,371 -	
October	4,379	10,352	13,757	
November	3,212	11,073	11,535	
December	4,214	22,776	18,709	
Total	60,647	1,03,800	2,09,573	1,79,410

**Source:** *Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal* (Calcutta: Home [Pub.] Department, Government of West Bengal, 1956), p. 17

**Shelter crisis and forced occupied (*Jabar dakhil*) colonies:**

From the late 1940s to early '50s the refugees who crossed over to West Bengal from East Pakistan were mostly from the upper or middle class families. The popular destination was Calcutta and its surrounding districts. They trekked over here in quest of suitable jobs or other professional opportunities. In Calcutta, many of their friends,

relatives and acquaintances initially extended their hands of cooperation and assistance with a view to providing them with accommodation and employment. In a way, a social network system of those evacuees played a vital role to reconstruct their lives in the alien land. The persons migrated during this phase were reluctant to go to the relief camps. Even those who belonged to the middle class and economically not so affluent still did not want to settle in the refugee camps mainly because of their sense of honour and dignity. It is worth noting in this context that by 1949, the housing option in Calcutta became inadequate. As a result of the huge influx of refugees into Calcutta, the economically affluent persons could manage rented house for their accommodation, whereas, the relatively poorer sections were rather compelled to take refuge in slums. The uprooted persons who came initially were able to manage land for constructing their own homestead in Calcutta and its contiguous localities. Many of them occupied houses deserted by the Muslims who shifted to East Pakistan for their own convenience. The abandoned military camps were also occupied by the migrants. A number of refugees in the initial stage did not even want to be identified as 'refugee' and helpless partition victims. They 'silently merged' into the city.<sup>36</sup>

Following incessant inflow of displaced persons of East Pakistan the opportunities for new settlement became reduced to a considerable extent. Against this backdrop, the squatters' colonies mushroomed that played a very important part of the life and landscape of West Bengal.<sup>37</sup> In some cases, where the land was acquired through legal means and procedures, the government termed the areas of refugee settlement as private colonies. But, in some other cases, vacant lands, owned by the government or by big landowners, was occupied forcibly by the refugees. This process of collective procurement of land was known as *jabar dakhil*.<sup>38</sup> There was practically no other option but forcible occupation of vacant and deserted lands mainly in the periphery of Calcutta and the nearby areas. A huge number of people crossed into West Bengal in 1950. One section of people crossed the railway station at Darshana and entered the state where they were temporarily at the camp in Banpur. The other group coming from the South-Western areas of East Pakistan ended in the camp of Bongaon. On and from 1949 Calcutta witnessed the beginning of squatter movement, but in other parts of West Bengal, in the squatters' colonies flourished in December 1950. During the period 1950-51 when the State Government was under the crisis, the refugees made

up their minds to take the problem in their own hands. They used to undertake forcible occupation of land and began to establish squatter colonies.<sup>39</sup> About 149 squatters' colonies grew up in Calcutta, 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts. A group of 500 refugee families took possession of vacant army huts in the Dhakuria Lake area of South Calcutta in the month of June, 1948.<sup>40</sup> Later on approximately 80 families followed the path of the earlier group of refugees to take over possession in the military camp area of Ballygunge.<sup>41</sup> The existence of these squatters' colonies was found in the south-eastern portion of the Calcutta Metropolis, especially in the areas like Jadavpur, Tollygange, Kasba and Behala. Approximately 40 such colonies were set up within 1950.<sup>42</sup>

When the influx continued unremittingly hardly could find any shelter in Calcutta and suburbs. Those migrants scorned uncertain doles of the Government and they did not bother about the assistance of the Government. These uprooted persons took the law into their own hands and started the unauthorized occupation of land owned by the Central and State Governments.<sup>43</sup> The refugees built up their own shelters in these areas virtually without any help from the government. The colonies were mainly set up in the vicinity the towns or industrial areas in order to link the habitation with livelihood. The squatters' colonies were confined within the cities and suburbs. The first such colony was Vijoygarh, founded in the southern suburb of Calcutta under the leadership of freedom fighter Santosh Dutta. They occupied various military barracks and there after within a short span of time refugee colonies mushroomed there. Ofcourse it was not a squatter's colony in truest sense of the term.<sup>44</sup> Vijoygarh was private land which was unauthorized and occupied illegally. In rural areas, the refugee peasants occupied the uncultivated deserted lands. Such lands were acquired not only for habitation, but also for urpose of the pcultivation. This type of agricultural colonies were established in Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore, Burdwan, Nadia, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas, West Dinajpur, Malda, Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts.<sup>45</sup> Almost 8930 families were squattered in more than 100 Government sponsored colonies in those aforesaid districts. Among those 8930 families 8717 families had documentary evidence of being refugee where as rest 213 families were non refugees belonging to West Bengal or other states.<sup>46</sup>

**Table-3.3**  
**Details of Refugee Squatter colonies up to 31 December 1950**

District	Police Station	No. of colonies	Total families	Population	Land area
24 Paraganas	Jadavpur	58	12879	64,395	1073.26
„	Behala	4	412	2,060	34.40
„	Dum Dum	40	6,807	34,035	453.80
„	Belghoria	3	2,543	12,715	228.50
„	Baranagar	7	1,171	5,855	97.58
„	Noapara	4	362	1,810	30.10
„	Khardah	15	2,707	13,535	225.60
„	Naihati	3	718	3,590	59.40
„	Bijpur	4	333	1,565	27.90
„	Titagarh	1	155	775	12.90
„	Jagaddal	4	388	1,940	32.30
„	Habra	2	412	2,060	34.20
Hooghly	Sreerampur	3	809	4,045	67.43
Howrah	Bally	1	106	800	13.30
	14 P.S	149	29,856	1,49,280	2390.64

Source: Paschim Banger Jabardakhal Udbastu Upanibesh, Anil Sinha, 1979

It became obvious to the shelter-seekers in the forced occupied colonies that they had to ventilate their demands to get justice about the relief and rehabilitation. Anil Sinha called the situation as ‘the epic battle of Kurukshetra’ in order to attain legitimate demands.<sup>47</sup> Sinha argued that the *jabar dakhal* colonies were classic examples of the organised hatred of the refugees of East Pakistan against the rehabilitation policies of the Congress government. In 1948, with the formation of the Nikhil Banga Bastuhara Karma Parishad (All Bengal Refugee Council for Action), the agitation among the refugees of the squatters colonies took a concrete form.<sup>48</sup> In the preliminary stage, the Parishad consisted of two groups of members: the pro-Congress group and the other group comprised mostly Left-minded members. The pro-Congress group wanted

permanent rehabilitation of the refugees without antagonizing the Central and the State government. The NBBKP took initiative in the squatting process in the city and also actively pressurized the state Government on the issue of refugee rehabilitation. In 1949, the Left-minded members took over the leadership of the Parishad.

The United Central Refugee Council developed as a federated body of several refugee organizations to address the issue of rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal in the aftermath of the partition. It was founded in 1950, about three years following the beginning of heavy refugee influx.<sup>49</sup> The UCRC played a pivotal role in negotiating with the Government for rehabilitation of the refugee squatters in and around Calcutta. The roots of the UCRC however, lay with the already large number of refugees who had taken the initiative in establishing squatter colonies and in working collectively amongst the refugees through the formation of colony committees.<sup>50</sup> This council mainly dealt with the refugee colonization process in Calcutta and its neighbouring areas. According to Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay the government was well conversant with the problem of illegal occupation of land, but the Government did not intervene regarding the encroachment issue taking into view the miserable plight of the displaced persons hailing from East Bengal.<sup>51</sup>

In January, 1949 NBBKP organized 15000 refugees on a mass deputation to Raj Bhawan. But the Police fired and lathicharged indiscriminately to disperse the rally. Prominent leaders belonging mostly to the refugee sections were arrested for the participation in this massive rally. This incident had a tremendous impact upon the people of all sections, the students of Calcutta University in particular. A State wide strike was called to voice their protest against Police repression on refugees. Sarat Chandra Bose addressed a meeting in the Sraddha Nanda Park, Calcutta where he clearly declared that on behalf of the ill fated refugees that a state-wide protest would be demonstrated against the indifference of the Government if no steps for the rehabilitation of the refugees were made. The Chief Minister of West Bengal assured the refugees with a promise to make immediate arrangements for the settlement of the refugees. The leftist leaders also played a vital role among the refugees to create a mass base among them. Under their able leadership and guidance of the leftists the refugee movement became oppositional in character.<sup>52</sup> The exodus of refugees followed by a series of communal disturbances. The rapid influx of refugee

population caused manifold problems like unemployment, lack of shelter etc. Afterwards Dr. Meghnad Saha on behalf of the East Bengal Relief Committee took initiative in providing 'refugee slips' to the border crossers that ultimately helped the refugees in getting the refugee certificate. Gradually a process of politicization of refugees of East Pakistan took a concrete shape in India. This also helped in securing the rights of the hapless refugees. The burgeoning refugee population had a great impact on the urban structure of the city and subsequently helped in the growth of city in all directions.<sup>53</sup>

**Table- 3.4**  
**Refugees in West Bengal up to 1958**

District	No. of Camps and Homes	Population in camps and homes	No. Govt. colonies	Population in Govt. colonies	Refugees outside camps and colonies	Total refugee population
Burdwan	30	43127	8	6895	108481	158503
Birbhum	17	17400	6	1775	4375	23550
Bankura	7	11165	2	50	4796	16011
Midnapur	11	16838	38	4390	22654	43882
Hooghly	11	18013	38	21580	65017	104610
Howrah	7	7779	16	7575	75781	91135
24 Parganas	45	43284	209	105345	714161	862790
Calcutta	7	5059	-----	-----	571555	576614
Nadia	7	53160	32	61640	539730	664530
Murshidbad	8	12709	21	9945	53443	76097
Malda	----	-----	12	2939	69004	72924
WestDinajpur	1	989	111	3865	158095	162949
Jalpaiguri	-----	-----	9	7850	142306	150156
Darjeeling	-----	-----	2	3375	26668	30043
Cooch Behar	1	1159	12	6550	222118	227827
Purulia	-----	-----	-----	-----	1332	1332
Total	152	240682	389	243765(?)	2778506	3262952

**Table-3.5****Share of Refugee population in total population of West Bengal, 1951-1971**

Year	Total population	Refugees from East Pakistan	Percentage of Refugees to total population
1951	26299980	2104241	8%
1961	34926279	3068750	8.78%
1971	44312011	4293000	9.68%

Source : Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Govt. of West Bengal

**Eviction Bill:**

The refugees from Eastern Pakistan had to face consecutive burning problems in their new abode in West Bengal of India. They were under the constant pressure of fear of eviction. With the active support of the police the landlords were always determined to regain their lost property. More so they also used to hire notorious hooligans to evict the unauthorized occupants of their lands. To voice their demands and to establish their claims the refugees became united to lodge a massive movement for their survival, security and livelihood. It would not be out of place to mention that landlord time and again demolished the flimsy houses built by the refugees, but on the contrary the refugees rebuilt their dwelling houses with new vigour and energy. To avoid this untoward situation as well as to pacify the landlords the Government issued a Gazette notification with a caution to the refugee squatters to vacate the colonies within 15 days. But it became abortive. A radical change came over when a court order was issued regarding the issue in question. Following the court verdict it was decided that only civil suit would be instituted against the illegal occupation extending for more than three months. No police intervention and criminal charges would be brought against the refugees.<sup>54</sup> The attitude of the refugees for occupying more private and government land became so irresistible that the Government was compelled to bring about a new bill, known as 'Eviction Bill'. The Eviction Bill with some modifications became an act which was known as Act XVI of 1951, which

envisaged any landlord on payment of court fee of fifty days would be able to file petition in the court of competent authority for eviction from unauthorized land.<sup>55</sup>

The act triggered of the politics of demonstration of the refugees against the anti-refugee policies of the Government. The Government became aware of the fact that normal legal action would not be able to solve the unauthorized acquirement of both lands both private and government, requisitioned by the Central and State Government. But, Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, made it clear that the Government possessed virtually no power to evict a squatter from unauthorized occupation of land or premises except through a prolonged process of legal action and also through enactment of the Bill that could reconcile the demands of law with the needs of the refugees.<sup>56</sup>

In the meantime the Eviction Bill came into force through an act in 1951 and from that time onward the role and leadership began to expand extensively by the representatives of refugees from East Pakistan. The base of the organization spread beyond the squatter colonies of the early 50s. The various camps and the centres of rehabilitation in West Bengal as well as other states consolidated under the banner of UCRC. It was founded in 1950 as a central body of several refugee organizations. It played a pivotal role as an instrument of the refugee organizations. Importantly the unauthorized colonization process continued with more influx of refugees. With the announcement of the Eviction Bill the split between the UCRC and the RCRC came out in the open. Opposition to the bill came from different fronts. Two different protest meetings were held on 28<sup>th</sup> March; one under the banner of RCRC and another led by UCRC.<sup>57</sup> The RCRC rally was led by Dr. Suresh Banerjee, Lila Roy, Soumen Tagore and others. But the organized political movement of the refugees was spearheaded by the UCRC. But the Government expressed its willingness to compromise and to incorporate some of the suggestions that were made including the change of the title of the Bill.<sup>58</sup> Within the period from 1951-1971 approximately 766 more colonies were established that scattered over West Bengal both in rural and urban areas. With the expansion of organizational base the movement became strengthened. Regular meetings were arranged and organized in different colonies to motivate the refugees for protesting against the implementation of the Act. According

to UCRC the Act failed to safeguard or secured the refugees in the colonies specially those on private land.

**Table-3.6**  
**Refugee Influx from East Pakistan, 1946-70**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Reason for Influx</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>West Bengal(in lakhs)</u>
1946	Noakhali riots	19,000(0-19)	0.14
1947	Partition	344,000	2.58
1948	Police action by India in Hyderabad	786,000	5.90
1949	Khulna, Barisal riots	213,000	1.82
1950	Ditto	1,575,000	11.82
1951	Agitation over Kashmir	187,000	1.40
1952	Economic conditions, passport scare	227,000	1.52
1953		76,000	0.61
1954		118,000	1.04
1955	Unrest over Urdu in E. Pakistan	240,000	2.12
1956	Pakistan's Islamic constitution	320,000	2.47
1957		11,000	0.09
1958		1,000	0.01
1959		10,000	0.09
1960		10,000	0.09
1961		11,000	0.10
1962		14,000	0.13
1963		16,000	0.14
1964	Hazrat Bal incident in Kashmir	693,000	4.19
1965		108,000	0.81
1966		8,000	0.04
1967		24,000	0.05
1968		12,000	0.04
1969		10,000	0.04
1970	Elections in Pakistan	250,000	2.32
Total		5,283,000	39.56

Source: P.N. Luthra, *Rehabilitation*, Publication Division, New Delhi, 1972, pp.18-19.

A migrant's recognition as "refugee" was the prime clause for the rehabilitation assistance in India. A "refugee" or a "displaced person" was he who was originally the resident of East Pakistan and due to political turmoil, panic of civil disturbances and following the vivisection of India he was forced to quit his birth place.<sup>59</sup> But while acknowledging that fear of persecution or violence as a valid and justified reason for migration, the official definition was inaccurate regarding the preconditions of fear. It was also imprecise on the fact that to what extent it would be implemented by the Government for allotting refuge in India. The Indian government under the aforesaid circumstances took a tactical policy ignoring the complaints of everyday insecurity of East Bengal refugees and diverted attention to spectacular worse-case scenarios in Pakistan. The Government instantly declared that it was unaware of the fact that the Hindus of East Bengal had problems or it was totally ignorant of those incidents in East Pakistan which were responsible for the massive displacement.<sup>60</sup>

The Government of West Bengal issued a declaration in 1948 stating that the cause of the then exodus was due to economic reason. So the proper Identification of a migrant as a refugee was really essential because this would help the refugees with relief and rehabilitation from the state According to Bengali public discourse the words *Udbastu* and *Bastuhara* carried two different connotations, *Bastu* was related to ancestral background where as the word *udbastu* referred to the loss of home; as was in the case *bastuhara*. Both these implications not only indicated the shelterless condition but presented the pang and agony of Partition. When the displaced from East Pakistan were awarded with the right to franchise the displaced had switched over their allegiance to the Left in order to redress their grievances. They voiced their demands with the slogan *Amra kara? Bastuhara!* (Who are we? Refugees!). In later period those displaced persons continued to identify themselves as "refugees".<sup>61</sup>

It was reported that Hiren Sanyal and Umesh Chandra Roy were found distributing a Bengali leaflet styled *Deser Garib Janasadharan o Bastuhara Bhai Boner Prati Nikhil Banga Bastuhara Karma Parshader Ahwan* among the refugees of Kaiarpara and other colonies. It was noticed that the ho.... Were received by Badal Sarkar (Socialist Party) from Sibnath Banerjee, (MLA), for distribution amongst the refugees. The leaflet contained some demands to be taken up at the meeting of the Refugee Council of Action at Sradhdhananda Park on 25 November.<sup>62</sup>

On April 9, 1958 the refugees assembled in small batches at the foot of the monument. The refugees consisted of 300 members including about 100 women marched towards Writers' Buildings under the ebullient and inspiring leadership of Somnath Chatterjee to highlight the genuine demands of the refugee migrants. In the said meeting Tara Dutta instigated and inspired the refugees to go ahead unless and until their 21 points demands were redressed with immediate effect.<sup>63</sup> North Bengal, under the period review, occupied a unique position in the Indian sub-continent. It consisted of a separate social, economic and religion perhaps due its peculiar geographic position. North Bengal was such a queer area of Bengal which has no trace in the geographical atlas of India by its name. Though North Bengal is an integral part of India, still it had its own peculiarities, characteristics and identity. It can rightly be claimed that North Bengal represented a separate social dimension in Bengal so far as Indian subcontinent was concerned. The name 'North Bengal' a popular terminology describing five (now seven) northern districts of West Bengal was being used by historians, social scientists, researchers, writers and so on for a long period. In the historic past there was no existence of a region or territory as *Uttar Banga* or 'North Bengal'. There was no recognized geographical identity in the name of North Bengal. Even in administrative unit and overall official records there was no official approval of the region as North Bengal. There was no reference available in previous history, mythology and above all the literature on the name 'North Bengal'. But this non-historical name gradually became the most popular and commonly used name. "It is really a historical as well as psychological puzzle".<sup>64</sup>

North Bengal consisted of five districts of the northern part of West Bengal, the number of district recently raised to seven in number. The discussion is confined within the periphery of previous five districts as the thesis in question emphasizes on the period between 1947 and 1979. On and before the attainment of independence a trend was noticed among the East Bengal people to move towards India with an anticipation of their future insecurity and permanent shelter in Indian soil. The migration of refugees from East Pakistan to North Bengal was an important phenomenon. Migration in pre and post independence period to some extent depended on the strategic position of North Bengal. Added to it, the historical importance of the region was one of the pertinent reasons for mass departure. It is worth noting in this context that refugee inflow was there even from the very beginning of twentieth

century. But the number was really microscopic. The number drastically rose high from the year 1946 and onwards. Huge number of people left their ancestral abode with a view to settle in a safer place either being directly victimized, or might be due to fear of carnage or brutality. They came to the districts of North Bengal to lead a peaceful life in the other side of the border.

North Bengal especially Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling were at the junction of North East India and being a Himalayan borderland attracted the people from different parts of India and from beyond the border. It would not be out of place to mention here that until sixteenth century almost all the centres of political importance situated within the geographical fringe of North Bengal. So the existence of some centres of political significance naturally encouraged the immigration of people in large scale. Even after the downfall of Gour kingdom, the emergence of Koch-Kamta kingdom motivated the process of 'invited migration' <sup>65</sup> A sizable section of people from various walks of life was amalgamated with the royal kingdom of Koch Behar from the very establishment of the monarchy. During the colonial period the rapid growth of communication, establishment of tea industries as well as the administrative and military necessities accelerated the process of migration especially in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. Later on atrocities in East Pakistan, political turmoil of Assam and Nepal added a new force to the migration process of North Bengal.

### **Cooch Behar:**

Cooch Behar was a princely state before the partition. Through an agreement (Merger Agreement) with the Government of India Cooch Behar was converted into 'C' graded state and from September 12 onwards it was treated as a state under the administration of Chief Commissioner. On and from the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1950 Cooch Behar State was transformed as a district of West Bengal. The district is situated in the foot hills of the Himalayas. Cooch Behar is bounded by Jalpaiguri in the North, state of Assam in the East and the international border in the form of India-Bangladesh boundary in the South and in the West. The district has a 549.45 K.M. long Indo-Bangladesh border. Cooch Behar district consisted of a different social structure. There was no doubt that Cooch Behar had a glorious past and dignified heritage. The erudition and farsightedness of the then Maharajas of Cooch Behar

specially Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and his gifted wife Sunity Devi, daughter of Bramhacharya Keshab Chandra Sen, paved the way for the modernization and women advancement. So far as the as women education was concerned they had a key role in this respect. But the scenario had gradually changed due to gradual influx of refugees from East Pakistan. The thesis in question would try to ventilate and throw light to bring out the untold, unsung, unwritten tales of sufferings of those unfortunate victims of the partition specially the women who by dint of their leech like tenacity and dogged perseverance became victorious confronting all sorts of eventualities.

Trend of inflow of the people of East Bengal to Cooch Behar started even long before the Partition. In the year 1951 Kolkata, 24 Parganas, Nadia, West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar were the major recipient of refugees from East Pakistan. The census report of 1951 revealed that 4.66% of total refugee population took refuge at Cooch Behar. In the years 1961, 1971 the percentage of exodus at Cooch Behar mounted gradually from 8.24% to 13.49%. Before the merger of Cooch Behar State with West Bengal the rate of population growth was very insignificant. But the population growth rapidly increased from the very date of merger. It is worth mentioning in this respect that in 1950 the total number of refugees who took shelter at Cooch Behar was 94,242. Subsequently it rose to 12,4700 in the year 1955.<sup>66</sup> At the end of 1958 there was one transit camp in Cooch Behar and 284 families comprised 1,159 members. A camp was set up in a place known as Lichubagan within the compound of the Cooch Behar palace for the time being. The total population in Government colonies in Cooch Behar was 6,550 where as the number of refugee population outside camps and colonies was 2,22,118.<sup>67</sup> Between 1 January 1951 and 25 March 1971 there were 13 squatter's colonies in urban areas and 13 squatter's colonies in rural areas. Total number of displaced persons was 2511 among them 542 persons were from urban background and 1969 persons from rural sectors.<sup>68</sup> Virtually this process of migration from East Bengal started after the Noakhali riot. A sizable number of the refugees came over Cooch Behar after Partition were primarily the inhabitants of the districts of Mymensingh, Rongpur and Rajshahi. A good number of migrants moved towards Cooch Behar in the first phase after 1946 were basically from urban middle class families like land owners, merchant and various professional classes. They migrated not only because of violence but a feeling of insecurity was always there which prompted them to come over here. In a report of Ananda Bazar Patrika, 1<sup>st</sup> March,

1948 it was stated by the Secretary of Relief and Rehabilitation, Mohanlal Saxena that out of total 16 lacks uprooted persons 10 lacks could be rehabilitated. But rest 6 lacks of refugees would be sent to Assam, Bihar, Odissa, Tripura and Cooch Behar. It was decided that 50 thousand refugees would be sent to Cooch Behar.<sup>69</sup>

**Table- 3.7**

**The district wise refugee exodus from East Pakistan to Cooch Behar from 1946-1951**

	District (East Pakistan)	Male	Female
1.	Kustia	58	119
2.	Jessore	226	113
3.	Khulna	232	17
4.	Rajshahi	344	719
5.	Dinajpur	1,197	695
6.	Rongpur	23,512	20,362
7.	Bagura	1,238	1,425
8.	Pabna	1,382	923
9.	Dacca	5,375	4,019
10.	Mymensingh	16,789	13,708
11.	Faridpur	1,293	1,255
12.	Bakharganj	417	287
13.	Tripura	459	392
14.	Noakhali	324	211
15.	Chittogong	175	320
16.	Syllet	100	60
	Total	53,121	44,625

Source: Census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Cooch Behar.

The main reason behind their migration to Cooch Behar was its geographical proximity with their motherlands. From the reports of Refugee Rehabilitation Department of West Bengal it was evident that in the year 1950 the number of Upper

caste Hindus from East Pakistan was 78,322; number of scheduled caste migrants was 15,337; scheduled tribes was 426 and beyond these three categories 157 migrants came to Cooch Behar. Moreover availability of cultivable lands also prompted them to settle over here.<sup>70</sup> Most of them came over here through the Gitaldaha border, an area under Dinhata subdivision. Initially, the refugees flocked over here took shelter in various camps. Afterwards many of them took refuge in houses of relatives. It is not out of place to mention here that the local people of Cooch Behar extended their hands of cooperation towards those uprooted persons.<sup>71</sup> The most vital and principal cause behind the inflow of massive influx of the uprooted Hindu minorities of Eastern Pakistan towards the district of Cooch Behar was due to its physical and natural proximity to Eastern Pakistan. The ethnic identity and identical language of Bengalis facilitated the communications between the people of Eastern Pakistan and the inhabitants of Cooch Behar specially the Rajbansis. The religions of the displaced Hindu refugee minority population and the inhabitants of Cooch Behar were alike. Their culture, tradition, and rituals were almost the same in comparison to the populace of Cooch Behar. Geographical immediacy coupled with cultural, social, religious adjustment had great importance upon the lives, activities and livelihood of the unfortunate uprooted persons of East Pakistan. Cooch Behar was one of the major recipients of the refugees. The peaceful atmosphere and the hospitality of Rajbanshi communities had a tremendous impact upon the lives of the displaced persons. Abundance of cultivable agricultural land, enormous quantity of land meant for human habitations were cheap and available. Owing to lack of agricultural knowledge and technical knowhow the farmers belonging to Rajbanshi communities could not yield sufficient amount of crops including paddy and other seasonal crops and vegetables. More so, the well to do Rajbanshi landlords voluntarily donated their lands for the settlement of the refugees free of cost. The above mentioned facilities extended to the refugees lured the other displaced persons of East Pakistan and they had to expedite their flow towards Cooch Behar.

Reminiscences of some displaced persons hailing from East Pakistan to the soil of Cooch Behar provided a vivid picture of the period. The researcher has had the opportunity to come in contact with some displaced persons from East Pakistan who settled over here at a colony called Vidyasagar colony under Cooch Behar Sadar Kotwali. One of the aged residents of the said colony is Mohanbansi Barman who

migrated from Mymensing district of East Pakistan. He was born and brought up in the lap of East Pakistan but under the pressure of adverse political turmoil and communal violence he along with his family members compelled to migrate to Cooch Behar district of West Bengal and settled over here. He first took shelter in Muruganj camp at the vicinity of Cooch Behar. He provided a clear picture so that the researcher could take the stock of the real scenario of refugees in different parts of Cooch Behar districts. It is worth to be noted here that immense paucity of authentic records in respect of refugee settlement the exact pictures of the refugees is difficult to draw. Mr. Barman narrated the real picture of the refugee colonies and their inhabitants. According to his version the Government with a view to meeting the requirement of the refugees for their homesteads purchased lands from the land owners and handed it over to the refugee rehabilitation department for distribution to the refugees. The Government of West Bengal allotted 10 *kathas* of land to the refugees residing in the rural areas where as in urban areas 3-5 *kathas* of land were allotted. Moreover they were provided with loans for the construction of houses. According to his statement the local Rajbansi community extended their hands of cooperation spontaneously and generously in the act of settlement and for the purpose of cultivation through donation of lands free of cost. More so they helped them financially for the aforesaid purposes. They displaced persons were really indebted to them.<sup>72</sup>

Cooch Behar was a place which was earmarked as an area of surplus food production. According to the budget reports as revealed in 1949 that the amount of total revenue in Cooch Behar was one crore and eleven lacs of which four lacs were surplus. So, there was no doubt that Cooch Behar was a place which was economically sound and affluent.<sup>73</sup> From November, 1949 the process of rehabilitation started in full swing. 3469 refugee families with their members consisting 21,209 members were rehabilitated in different parts of Cooch Behar. It was decided that those people from East Pakistan living in Cooch Behar for a long period would be given the right of citizenship. Previously there was a restriction imposed upon the non-residents of Cooch Behar not to acquire *khas* land. But now, the previous restriction was lifted. The refugees were allowed some agricultural *khas* lands for cultivation. Eligible refugees were given preferences regarding getting jobs in Government sector.<sup>74</sup> Leaving behind the sweet memories of by gone days they are still seeking a peaceful abode of their own. It is worth noting in this context that after hailing from

East Pakistan to Cooch Behar those displaced women also served as a source of inspiration to those non immigrant women who were long been deprived due to lack of education. It would not be out of place to mention that a sizable number of women enjoyed the privilege of education even long before the partition. But it was concentrated among the limited few hailing from upper class. Exodus of displaced women, their trauma, their long struggle and ultimately their success directly or indirectly helped the local backward women to establish themselves keeping at bay the age-old conception. The uprooted women infused upon the innocent, simple and uneducated women of North Bengal the sense of self consciousness. The wave of migration continued until the Bangladesh war of liberation in 1971 and even after.

There are a good number of unlisted colonies or non-recognized colonies in Cooch Behar before 1971 as The following Table shows.

**Table-3.8**

**The non recognized or unlisted colonies in Cooch Behar before 1971**

Sl. no	Name of the colony	P.S	Mouza	Year of establishment
1	Kharimala Khagrabari-I	Kotwali	Kharimala khagrabari	1970
2	Kharimala Khagrabari-II	Kotwali	Kharimala khagrabari	1970
3	Vidyasagar	Kotwali	Sahar Coochbehar	1968
4	Sukantapally	Kotwali	Sahar Coochbehar	1966
5	Newdhabri-II	Kotwali	Sahar Coochbehar	1965
6	Collegepara Udvastu	Dinhata	Dinhata	1954
7	Kharimala Khagramari Nazrulpally	Kotwali	Sahar Coochbehar	1964
8	Indira Nagar Udvastu	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1965

9	Kasaiabari	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1964
10	Malgudam	Kotwali	Sahar Coochbehar	1955
11	Babupara Udvastu	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1964
12	Bidan Nagar	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1966
13	Aurobinda Nagar	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1964
14	Melar Math	Haldibari	Bara Haldibari	1965
15	Tala company	Haldibari	Bauxiganj Andaram Khajbos	1961
16	Doribosh	Dinhata	Dhaksin Kharija Gitaldaha	1950
17	Uttar Rampur A Block	Boxirhat	Rampur	1964
18	Uttar Rampur B Block	Boxirhat	Rampur	1970
19	Ghabhanga Chatbhalkar	Boxirhat	Rampur	1969
	Shyamsundar II	Kotwali	Ghuriahati	1966

Sources: The department of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, Cooch Behar.

### **Jalpaiguri :**

According to the declaration made by Sir Cyril Radcliffe some regions of pre partition Jalpaiguri some areas viz. Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Debigunj and Pathgram were shifted to East Pakistan. The geographical boundary of Jalpaiguri was like this: Darjeeling and Bhutan was on the northern side; Cooch Behar and Rangpur was on the southern side; in the western side were the Purnia district of Behar and Darjeeling; East Pakistan and Goalpara of Assam were on the eastern side. Due to this division the area of the district reduced to 2,378 sq. mile from 3,050 sq. mile. The economic stability of the district suffered a lot following the exclusion of the aforesaid region. It

is worth mentioning in this context that the land of the said areas was fertile in character. Paddy, rice, jute and tobacco production glorified the economic stability of Jalpaiguri which was fondly called 'Granary of Jalpaiguri'. The reminiscences of partition in regard to Jalpaiguri inhabitants were not at all pleasant According to the verbal statement of Ajit Datta, a senior citizen of Jalpaiguri that inclusion of Tetulia with East Pakistan was undoubtedly a blow upon the economy of Jalpaiguri. Tetulia played a vital role to ease the communications among Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar. Tetulia was considered as a bridge between North Bengal and West Bengal.

In pre partition period Jalpaiguri was a part of Rajshahi division, so the majority of the population of the district was Muslim. But if viewed from the district separately the Hindus were majority in Jalpaiguri district. That's why Muslim League demanded the district to be included into East Pakistan. The Muslim League leader Nawab Musaraf Hossain took active initiative for the implementation of the demand. According to the census of 1931 and 1941 respectively some tribal people of Jalpaiguri were enumerated as 'animist' instead of Hindu. Taking the advantage of the situation Muslim leaders tried to show the Muslim majority there and strengthened the demand of inclusion of Jalpaiguri in East Pakistan.<sup>75</sup> The authentic historic documents of an outstanding researcher Hiranmoy Bandapadhyay had vividly depicted the true pictures of refugee hailing from East Pakistan. Fortunately Mr. Bandapadhyay was entrusted with the herculean task of settlement of the refugees when he was in charge of Jalpaiguri administration. As a result of partition the eastern part of Dinajpur, the southern part of Jalpaiguri and at the same time the western part of the same district was isolated from India and became the integral part of Pakistan. The Hindu migrants maintained their steady inflow towards Jalpaiguri. It became a continuous process. The two categories of Hindu migrants came over to Jalpaiguri-one category of people belonged to affluent communities where as the other section belonged to middle class. The existence of other communities was also available who were known as lower middle class. The lower middle class had no financial stability to purchase lands of their own. The middle class people could have the ability to reside in a rented house. There was a subdivision known as Alipurduar where most of the elite migrants were eager to settle.<sup>76</sup> Before independence, Alipurduar was not densely populated. After partition the refugees from East Pakistan settled over here. They occupied many

barren lands and they also filled up ponds for habitation. Afterwards those displaced persons braving all restrictions imposed by Government wholeheartedly tried to ameliorate their economic condition. With this aim in view they involved them in various professions. At the initial stage of their migration they built houses in a scattered way, but gradually the incessant inflow of migrants led to the formation of a number of colonies at Alipurduar.<sup>77</sup>

Alipurduar was situated in the eastern part of Jalpaiguri district by the side of a small river Kaljani. Alipurduar was a town only in name. No brick built houses were found except houses of tin shades. Some small cottages were built by the Marwari communities which were ultimately distributed among the refugees as rented house. When the uprooted people specially the womenfolk were asked the reasons behind their leaving dear mother lands they cited copious incidents. The Hindu ladies and girls feared to take bath on the ponds. They had to hear the filthy comments of the Muslims. The Muslims uttered that “Muslims are the husbands of Hindu ladies” (*Hindur bhatar Musalman*). The aforesaid remark made it clear that for the safety, security, chastity, inhumanity and atrocities compelled the refugees to take adieu from their mother land and relations apprehending impending catastrophe upon the Hindu refugees. Such people crowded Jalpaiguri town and district as a whole within a short period.<sup>78</sup>

Economically sound migrants after obtaining *khas* lands from the government began to construct dwelling houses. Those who could not afford had to face numerous problems. The dilapidated and deserted houses left behind by the Jalpaiguri Muslims were occupied by the migrants for habitation. In the western part of Jalpaiguri by the side of the river Teesta a vast land was allotted to the displaced individuals and tents were supplied free of cost by the Government for their temporary settlement. For the supervision of relief works a committee was instituted for the betterment of the migrants. It was seriously observed that some able bodied displaced persons both men and women despite their physical ability depended upon the charity of the Government intentionally. It was resolved by the committee that able bodied persons both men and women would be accommodated with jobs. In the vast areas of tea plantation a sizable number of migrant labourers of both the sexes were engaged. The workers prepared baskets for containing the tea leaves and the women specially were appointed for plucking green leaves of the tea plants. The most of the workers hailed

from Chhotonagpur, they were not the migrants of East Pakistan with few exceptions if any.

Those migrants who took shelter in Jalpaiguri district and Alipurduar subdivision were classified into two categories. One section belonged to non-agriculture group whose main function was to engage them in small business. The other section belonged to agricultural group. They were provided with lands for the growth of food crops.. Some landlords voluntarily donated lands to the migrants free of cost. It will not be out of place to mention here that Fatapukur was the first refugee colony not far away from Jalpaiguri town, was established with the active initiative of the Government. A proposal was adopted for the creation of the colony meant for agriculturists. But besides agriculture the people of different communities belonging to different professions like the teacher, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, potters were permitted to reside in the aforesaid colony.<sup>79</sup> Total 250 farmers from East Pakistan initially settled here. Each agriculturist was allotted one *bigha* of land for his family.

The most remarkable feature of Fatapukur locality was its unique plan of establishing new colonies under the supervision of the Government of West Bengal which was quite unprecedented in the history of refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal. The Fatapukur colony could feel pride for this achievement. It was established under the direct supervision of West Bengal Government on co-operative basis in 1948. At the initial stage, two principles were adopted for the settlement of the displaced. Firstly to accommodate the refugees on Government khas land and Government's *Hukum Dakhal* land. The whole Jalpaiguri district was under *Khas Mohal*. Most of the refugees were provided in those khas lands. A good number of refugees were interested to settle at 24 Parganas and Nadia district of West Bengal because the 24 Parganas was situated within a stone throw distance from the industrial belts of Calcutta and they also became interested to occupy the houses which once were under the possessions of the Muslims. Following the partition the Muslims of the locality left for eastern Pakistan Excepting two districts viz. 24 Parganas and Nadia settlement of refugees were conducted by the Union Board of the districts. From North Bengal point of view, the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri followed the principle of 24 Parganas and Nadia in respect of rehabilitation of the refugees. In the eastern portion of Jalpaiguri town beside the river Teesta some refugee families took their shelter in

huts. In the vicinity of Jalpaiguri town there was a prominent locality known as Panda Para where a scheme was approved to construct a colony for the settlement of the colonies. In Panda para a colony was established on the *khas* land. About 8 kilo meter from Jalpaiguri town a colony was established with the refugees other than cultivators at Mohit nagar colony.<sup>80</sup>

The census report of 1951 showed up that almost 99,000 refugees trekked to Jalpaiguri district and that number reached to 4,20,598 according to census of 1961. Out of this 4,20,598 a huge number of migrants rushed here at Jalpaiguri from other states, the number of which was 1,58,912.<sup>81</sup> Due to continual influx of population there prevailed an untidy situation in Jalpaiguri. There was no necessary arrangement for rehabilitation. They were temporarily given shelter in a building known as Bhatia building. The refugees were rather forced to settle in some deserted land. They also stated working as labour under landed gentry or the local *jotedars*. Previously there was only one municipality in Jalpaiguri sadar. The number rose to eight (along with the areas beyond municipalities) in 1971. There was a huge demographic change in Jalpaiguri in between 1951 and 1971, that accelerated the process of urbanization.<sup>82</sup> In consultation with the central minister Mohonlal Saxena majors were adopted to minimize the grievances of the refugees, the refugees with the monetary assistance of Government along with their own initiatives began to built houses at Jalpaiguri in North Bengal and the other districts of South Bengal viz. Bankura and 24 Parganas.<sup>83</sup>

A philanthropic organization known as Kamarpara Bastutyagi Hitaishi Samiti of Jalpaiguri came forward to redress the miseries of the displaced persons hailing from East Pakistan brushing aside all political differences and ideologies. The organization also made proper arrangements for their settlement in different parts of Jalpaiguri.<sup>84</sup> The Municipality of Jalpaiguri did not lag behind in establishing the uprooted persons for the maintenance of their livelihood. The then Chairman of Jalpaiguri Municipality Shri Satyendra Prasad Roy issued a notification for constructing shops on roadsides of Jalpaiguri in order to help the uprooted persons to become self sufficient.<sup>85</sup> The contribution of the inhabitants of Madarihat should in no case be overlooked. The local inhabitants instituted a committee known as *Madarihat Udvastu Sahajya Committee* with a mission to rehabilitate the distressed persons. The committee supplied the agricultural facilities and other advantages for their settlement. Shri Sudhir Ranjan Das, a social activist rendered a valuable contribution

to the displaced persons of the locality through distributing lands measuring one *bigha* per family in lieu of small amount of money.<sup>86</sup>In this respect an advertisement published in the *Janamat* news paper of Jalpaiguri is worth to be noted here. In the said advertisement The *Hindu Mission* of Dooars made an appeal to the refugees that the organization was ready to extend their help and cooperation in worshipping the domestic deities and performing other religious rituals of the uprooted persons. More so, the organization assured them to provide help for performing the marriages of their unmarried daughters in all possible ways.<sup>87</sup>

**Table- 3.9**

**District wise statistics of migration hailing from East Pakistan to Jalpaiguri: year 1946-51**

Sl.	District (East Pakistan)	Male	Female
1.	Kustia	426	383
2.	Jossore	784	653
3	Khulna	451	379
4	Rajshahi	676	546
5	Dinajpur	9,662	7,829
6	Rongpur	13,584	11,759
7	Bogura	671	553
8	Pabna	2,185	1,910
9	Dacca	9,005	7,147
10	Mymensingh	9,296	7,741
11	Faridpur	2,540	1,953
12	Bakharganj	1,056	902
13	Tripura	985	729

14	Noakhali	974	648
15	Chittagong	689	467
16	Syllet	280	248
	Total	53,264	43,847

Source: Census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Jalpaiguri

The above table gives clear indication that the massive influx of refugees were from Rongpur district. Apart from Rongpur, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Dacca occupied second, third and fourth positions. The impact of partition had a tremendous influence upon the lives of Jalpaiguri inhabitants. The new coinage ‘Refugee culture’ or Udvastu Sangskriti shaped the life style of Jalpaiguri people to a large extent. In 1950 forceful occupation colonies (*jobar dakhla*) got affiliation of the Government. There were nine colonies in Jalpaiguri till the year 1958. Those were Rajganj, Fakir para, Mandal Ghat, Alipurduar, Panda para, Fatapukur etc.<sup>88</sup>. In Jalpaiguri till 1958 1,50,156 refugees migrated but only 5850 people got shelter in government colonies. There were huge number of colonies both Government and private. The names of the colonies in Jalpaiguri district are being appending bellow:

Bhakti nagar colony (1&2), Harekrishna colony, Sarat Pally Colony, Bankim Nagar Colony, Shital para colony, Thakur nagar colony, Ananda Nagar colony, Mahamaya colony, Dacca udvastu colony, Dhumdhangi colony, Bijoy nagar colony, Dhakeswari colony, Surya sen colony, Niranjana nagar colony (1,2,3,4), Netaji Nagar colony, Nouka ghat colony, Shanti nagar colony (1&2), Ashoke nagar (1&2), Ajoy Ghosh pally colony, Banarhat adarsha colony, Mal Netaji vastuhara colony (1&2), Bagha Jatin colony, Ramkrishna colony, Indira Gandhi colony, Rabindra nagar colony, Aurobinda nagar colony, Hamilton ganj( Rabindra nagar), Bidhan pally, Ananda nagar, Bholar dabri , Rabindra nagar, Chitta Ranjan, Khar dangi, Purba nagar thali, Uttar Nagar thali, Chhoto Doldali and Gochamari, Subhas colony, Kunja nagar, Jeevan mohini Ghosh park, Kalyan nagar colony, Rammohan colony, Shri Shri Ma Sarada pally, Raja Rammohan pally, Joi Hind polly, Pranta pally, Subhas pally, Niranjana Sen pally, Ranjan pally, Sarat pally, Dinesh pally, Congress pally (1&2), Hiren Sarkar farm Refugee colony, Badal pally, Ramkrishna colony, Nazrul colony, Manikpur Subhas colony, Purba phoolbagan colony, North Phoolbagan colony,

Birnagar colony, Bagha Jatin E block East, Vidya sagar colony, Krishna koli colony, Herobhanga scheme-2, New Rabindranagar, Bagha Jatin colony (new), Nabapally Surya Sen nagar, Binoy pally unnayan samity, H. L.Sarkar Road glass factory colony., Dinesh nagar, Janata colony, Adarsha nagar colony, Binoy-Badal-Dinesh pally, Bankim pally, New colony and Kalimata colony. Beside those colonies there are some primary and secondary schools specially meant for refugee boys and girls for their education. More so some colleges were established primarily for the refugee students both boys and girls so that through higher education the students of Jalpaiguri can take active initiative in shaping the society.<sup>89</sup>

### **Darjeeling:**

The unprecedented atrocious communal violence that broke out in 1946 at Noakhali of undivided Bengal just on the eve of independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 was a red letter day in the history of undivided India. Noakhali was the epicentre of communal riot and centering round Noakhali the flame of communal unrest scattered throughout Bengal. The Partition of India and achievement of independence paved the way of inflow of refugees in different parts of India, especially in the territory of West Bengal which the uprooted individuals considered to be their happiest and peaceful abode of settlement after being migrated in the soil of West Bengal. Immediately after leaving behind their dear motherland, enormous valuable properties and near and dear relations; they started their journey of uncertainty in search of peace, safety and security.

During the period from 1947-1971 the rash of refugees accelerated in the districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia, Hooghly, Burdwan, Birbhum, Howrah, Murshidabad, Midnapur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Dinajpur, Malda and Darjeeling. Approximately there were five hundred refugee camps in West Bengal. At least there were four refugee camps in Darjeeling districts and Bankura had only one camp.<sup>90</sup> The refugee inflow in the district of Darjeeling was mainly confined within the plain areas of Darjeeling district. Darjeeling district consisted of four subdivision viz. Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kallingpong and Siliguri. As the displaced persons hailed from East Pakistan, they preferred to settle in the plain areas of Siliguri subdivision. The displaced persons were not accustomed to accommodate themselves in the hilly regions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kallingpong following uncongenial climate of the hilly localities. More

so there was no industry excepting tea industry. On the other hand Siliguri was a big city of commercial importance. It was also called as the gate way of Northern India. Easy and frequent communications with neighbouring states and countries like Nepal and Bhutan were available especially through roadways, railways and air lines. Nepal and Bhutan were the two most trusted neighbouring countries of India. Sikkim depended entirely on Siliguri for their daily essential commodities. So its importance could not be over looked. Up to 1958 there was no camp or home in Darjeeling district, only 2 Government colonies were there. Those two colonies were Mohitlal colony and Phansidewa. Those two colonies comprised 3375 refugees. But the total number of refugees including outside camps and colonies in Darjeeling was 30,043.<sup>91</sup>

**Table-3.10**

**The district wise refugee exodus from East Pakistan to Darjeeling from 1946-51**

	District (East Pakistan)	Male	Female
1.	Kustia	305	272
2.	Jessore	291	241
3.	Khulna	186	153
4.	Rajshahi	197	168
5.	Dinajpur	1,118	877
6.	Rongpur	1,237	991
7.	Bagura	360	245
8.	Pabna	635	516
9.	Dacca	2,163	1,675
10.	Mymensingh	996	665
11.	Faridpur	578	416
12.	Bakharganj	161	149

13.	Tripura	167	83
14.	Noakhali	172	107
15.	Chittogong	188	135
16.	Syllet	48	48
	Total	8,802	6,740

Source: Census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Darjeeling.

Following identical understanding and proximity of similar culture, religion, customs, rituals, habits and life style, they decided to settle down in the lonely isolated rural areas of Siliguri suburbs. The following recognized refugee colonies were set up at Siliguri. They were :Dabgram G.S. Colony(1), Dabgram G.S Colony (2), Chowpukaria G.S. colony, Matigara G.S.colony, Pati Colony, Baghajatin Colony, Mahakal pally, Adarsha Pally, Jyoti Nagar 2, Nutan Para, Adarsha Nagar, Subhas Nagar, Durgadas Colony, Prantik Colony, Shramik Nagar, B.B.D Colony, Das Colony, Debashis Colony, Dabgram Unnayan-1, Dabgram Unnayan -2, Deshbandhu colony and Udayan Unnayan etc. The following were the refugee colonies situated on the railway lands, viz. Prankrishna colony, Harizon-Masbur colony, Matangini colony-1, Matangini colony -2, Chittaranjan colony, Raja Rammohan Roy colony, Sraban nagar colony, Khudiram colony, Promod nagar colony, Swami nagar colony, Rana basti colony, Lichubagan colony, Parimol colony, Suryasen colony, Howckers' corner market, Vivekanandanagar colony, Panchani colony, Sarbohara colony, Ambedkar colony, Jyoti nagar colony -1 and Durga nagar colony.<sup>92</sup> In Dainik Basumati, a report was available that the refugees who built huts and small cottages by the sides of the main roads of Siliguri town for running small business, the Government of India extended monetary assistance if Rs. Three lakhs were granted for the construction of new markets at Siliguri town. The Sliguri administration had to face adverse criticism regarding the construction of the markets.<sup>93</sup> The rehabilitation ministry of West Bengal did not pay due attention to the problems of the refugees of Siliguri. The suffering people were consolidated to voice their grievances and demands before the Siliguri court. They alleged that the authority failed to keep their commitments in mitigating the grievances of the refugees.<sup>94</sup>

### **West Dinajpur:**

Dinajpur was under the Rajshahi division before bifurcation of India in 1947. The partition of India in 1947 made Dinajpur to be divided into two parts and in the name of 'West Dinajpur' a new district came into existence. There were ten police stations viz. Roygunj, Itahar, Bansihari, Kushmondi, Tapan, Gangarampur, Hemtabad, Kumarganj, Kaliaganj etc. came under the purview of West Dinajpur. On the eve of Partition the percentage of population of Hindu community was 49.80%, where as the percentage of Muslim population was 50.20%. As a result excluding eight Police stations.(Parbatipur, Phoolbari, Khansama, Chirbandar, Nabab ganj, Ghora ghat, Patnitola and Porsa) the rest twenty two Police stations were claimed by West Bengal, But actually it did not happen. There were three Police stations out of ten where the Hindu population was more than the Muslims. Those Police stations were Bodaganj, Birganj and Kaharul etc. But unfortunately those police stations went under the administration of East Pakistan.

Following Partition the area of Dinajpur was reduced to a great extent and railway communications with North Bengal as well as West Bengal was disrupted. More so the railway communication of North Bengal districts such as Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur came to a halt. According to noted educationist Dr. Charuchandra Sanyal, " In 1947 the partition of the district left the present districts' roads and means of communication grievously cut in all directions. The use of the Punarbhaba, Atrai and Jamuna was suddenly and entirely stopped. These rivers are flowing through Pakisthan Territory for the rest of their southward passage. The Gangarampur- Hili Road stopped at Hili. Before the partition there was little occasion to use the Malda-Gajol-Bansihari-Balurghat road. After the partition this road became the life line of the district. The Katihar-Raiganj-Radhikapur-Dinajpur-Parbatipur metre gauge line was cut by the partition line of Radhikapur. Thus in 1947 after the partition, the district started its career with a most lamentable disorganization of communication"<sup>95</sup>.

The partition of India was not only the geographical partition; broadly speaking the partition was physical and emotional division. After partition the incessant flow of refugee exodus towards West Dinajpur became vibrant and the growth of population rose leaps and bounds. An atrocious communal riot broke out at Santahar of the then

Rajshahi district in the year 1950-51 and as a result the influx of refugees towards West Dinajpur became frequent and regular. A microscopic Muslim population of West Dinajpur migrated to East Pakistan. During the period 1948-51 fourteen thousand Muslims left for East Pakistan but most astonishing was that 12,375 came back within a short period where as 1,15,510 Hindus migrated towards West Dinajpur. West Dinajpur occupied forth position among the refugee recipient districts after 24 Parganas, Calcutta and Nadia. According to the report of the district collector of West Dinajpur total 1,12,906 East Bengal evacuees from East Pakistan rushed towards West Dinajpur among which 59,631 were male and 53,275 were female. In spite of steady flow of East Pakistan refugees to this district there was only one camp till 1958. The camp and colonies accommodated 4854 refugees out of total 1,62,949 refugees who took shelter in West Dinajpur. But only 989 refugees were provided shelter in the camp.<sup>96</sup>The rest of the refugees were deprived of getting the Government attention. The flow of evacuees from 1946-1951 has been appending in the below.

**Table-3.11**

**District wise migrated population at West Dinajpur from the year 1946-51**

Sl.no	District (East Pakistan)	Male	Female
1	Kustia	186	246
2	Jossore	207	214
3	Khulna	381	368
4	Rajshahi	19,006	17,126
5	Dinajpur	14,011	12,745
6	Rongpur	2,084	1,830
7	Bagura	10,822	9,339
8	Pabna	3,750	3,546

9	Dacca	3,729	3,300
10	Mymensingh	3,247	3,050
11	Faridpur	1,096	925
12	Bakharganj	1,056	902
13	Tripura	147	100
14	Noakhali	174	125
15	Chittogong	171	88
16	Shyllet	22	10
	Total	59,631	53,275

Source: Census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, West Dinajpur.

Following the census report of 1961 the surplus population owing to the entry of uprooted Hindu refugees to West Dinajpur was 97,839. As a result the total population from 1951-61 was 2,13,349. According to the statement made by Jaya Chatterjee “The census of 1951 discovered that most of the refugees from East Bengal ended up in just three districts of West Bengal, the 24 Parganas, Calcutta and Nadia in 1951 of a total of 2,099,000 refugees recorded by the census 1,387,000 or two- thirds were found in this three districts”. “Four other districts West Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Burdwan absorbed much of the remaining third”<sup>97</sup>. Before 1951, 1,15,000 refugees settled in West Dinajpur, 1,00,000 in Cooch Behar, 99,000 in Jalpaiguri and 96,000 in Burdwan.

In the year 1950-51 a large number of refugee colonies of West Dinajpur were recognized by the Government of India. Those colonies were established on unauthorized land commonly known as *'jabar dakhil'* (forced occupation). The names of the approved colonies are given below:-

Pirpukur colony, High road kalitala colony, Netaji pally colony, Shakti nagar colony, Shilpi nagar colony, Kalipara colony, Ma Manasa colony, 1 Paschim aptari colony,

Subhas colony, Deshbandhu colony, Santoshima colony, Karbala colony, Teyab bagha colony, Drivers' colony, Parapatiram Haldar colony, Padmapukur colony, A,K. Gopalan colony, Chhinnamosta pally colony, Pabna colony, Dhiagarh colony (Nayadas para), Haptia gachh udvastu colony, Jayaguri jayapura udvastu colony, Hulamu gachh udvastu colony, Man gachh udvastu colony, Chaku subid hermen colony, Sanyas colony, Khadimpur malde para dest colony, Atri colony, Bhatpara colony, Dangi dakhkhin colony, Dangi pathar ghata colony, kamalpur Netaji colony, Atair colony, Namadanga colony, Durgapur bastuhara colony, Jorapani udvastu colony, Subandhigachhi udvastu colony, Ratugachh udvastu colony, Tinmile road udvastu colony, Tinmile Rail station udvastu colony, Adraguri (south) udvastu colony, Congress colony, Congress colony 2( Jyoti nagar colony), Chhatra gachh Niranjana pally udvastu colony, Ariagao Narayanpur udvastu colony, Ananta nagar Milan pally udvastu colony, Niranjana udvastu colony, Promod udvastu nagar, Dakhkhin kasba Rabindra udvastu colony, Harichad colony, Shakti nagar colony and Shilpinagar colony.

The inhabitants of East Pakistan moved towards Balurghat and at least 2000 Santals were settled in West Dinajpur. A sizable number of Santal refugees beside taking accommodation in Government refugee relief camps took shelter in the lodges of their relatives and many of them were settled at Balurghat, Hilli, Kaliaganj and Roiganj relief camps. A group of 5000 Santal refugees took shelters in different parts of West Bengal through West Dinajpur district.<sup>98</sup> Increasing inflow of East Pakistan refugees to West Bengal, the Government faced acute financial embarrassment. The monthly inflow of refugees mounted to be 12000. In the event of introduction of pass port system the migrants being apprehended, tried to cross the border of West Dinajpur where 400- 500 people entered there.<sup>99</sup> The people of East Pakistan and the district of East Dinajpur witnessed that the people of villages of East Dinajpur 4000 or 5000 per group took shelter in West Dinajpur. The majority of the refugees were Palbhuisali, Palia Santal and Christians. A huge number of refugees took refuge under the trees of Monoharpur, Madhya Gourpur, Mirzapur, Dhabujhuri, Sadakat etc. The steady inflow of refugees from East Dinajpur villages like Manbari, Bhawanipur, Jagannathpur, Madhabpur, Politibid and Madhabari was visible in West Dinajpur and the region became flooded with refugee exodus.<sup>100</sup>

During 1950-51 total 349 refugee families were entitled to get agricultural loan. More than twenty refugees of the region was awarded commercial loan, eighty families received loan for small industries. Loans were also granted for the construction of residence of the displaced persons. More so loans for seeds and other equipments relating to agriculture were granted. From academic point of view eight higher secondary schools, 16 secondary schools, 73 junior high schools, 26 junior basic schools and 949 primary schools were established in West Dinajpur, Apart from those institutions four tolls, six Madrasahs were also established. In the year 1960-61 ten higher secondary schools were established including two for the girls' students only, number of secondary schools increased to twenty seven. After partition when the new district West Dinajpur was created then a college was established at Balurghat and in 1948 a college was established at Raiganj. The influx of refugees in the territory of West Dinajpur it experienced revolutionary changes in all aspects. Politically, socially, economically, educationally and culturally the local population became extensively benefited. As a result, the district of West Dinajpur has occupied a dignified position of its own.<sup>101</sup>

### **Malda:**

The words 'Migration' and 'Refugee' became intermingled after the Partition of India in 1947. The problems of migration and refugee had become more vibrant at Malda along with the other districts of North Bengal. Inflow of refugees began from East to West Bengal following the outbreak of the Noakhali communal unrest, disturbances and atrocious riot. The flow of refugees from different parts of East Bengal became incessant with an alarming extent in the district of Malda with a view to settle down here permanently. The inflow of refugees continued till the end of 1949. Till 1949 the number of refugees who settled over here was 15,971. The influx of refugees reached to its highest peak in 1950. From 1946 to 1951 total number refugee exodus in Malda was 60,198 among which 30, 218 was male and 29,280 was female.<sup>102</sup> There was no camp in Malda district upto 1958. At the initial stage the refugees who came over here belonged to the upper and upper middle classes. Their migration actually was not a threat to district administration. The refugees of first phase were wealthy as well as educated. They easily could get job or had the capacity to start a new business with the help of near and dear ones.<sup>103</sup> A sizable section of refugees of Malda mainly came from Rajshahi district. A sizable section of refugees also came from Faridpur, Pabna,

Bakharganj, Dacca and Dinajpur and few from rest of the districts of East Pakistan. The main reason behind their migration, according to Asok Mitra was not only due to large scale violence but also the petty extortions, threats and also economic boycotts of the Hindu businessmen and professionals.<sup>104</sup> There were only 12 colonies opened in Maldah at the initial stage. Out of 72,924 refugees of East Pakistan only 2939 refugees were accommodated in those colonies.<sup>105</sup>

**Table 3.12**

**District wise migration from East Pakistan to Malda from 1946-51**

	District (East Pakistan)	Male	Female
1.	Kustia	17	19
2.	Jessore	141	281
3.	Khulna	385	417
4.	Rajshahi	21,919	20,613
5.	Dinajpur	955	1,654
6.	Rongpur	223	207
7.	Bagura	299	281
8.	Pabna	1,627	1,429
9.	Dacca	708	636
10.	Mymensingh	484	380
11.	Faridpur	2,432	1,877
12.	Bakharganj	1,179	1,164
13.	Tripura	170	140
14.	Noakhali	144	157
15.	Chittogong	88	79
16.	Syllet	13	8
	Total	30,784	29,242

Source: Census, 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Malda.

Most of the refugee colonies were situated by the bank of the river Kalindi in English Bazar and Mahananda in Kaliachak. During post-1950, 38 squatter's colonies were set up between the periods spanning from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1951 to 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1971. Those colonies were set up under the police station in P.S Malda 7, in P.S English Bazar 3, in P.S Gazole 10, in P.S Habibpur 14, in P.S Bamongola 2 and in P.S Kaliachak 1. There were six underdeveloped government sponsored colonies outside CMD urban area, nine under developed Government sponsored colonies outside CMD rural area and forty two private colonies outside CMD rural area. Gazole PS had six Government sponsored colonies. Non-camp refugee dwellers came to Malda after 1950, were of two categories.<sup>106</sup>

The first category of refugees was provided with employment, in the railways and army. The Police personel, serving in India and whose families were in East Pakistan made up their minds to shift their homes permanently and brought their families in the respective places of their service and posting. There was other type of refugees came to West Bengal resided with their relations and camps for a brief period, they were provided with jobs in the State Government departments in Malda districts. More over the refugees who were agriculturists were gradually settled in the district of Malda. A group of refugee families joined their hands together and decided to purchase lands themselves from the private owners and set up colonies in different places and localities.<sup>107</sup> In the long run the purchaser shifted elsewhere deserting their purchased lands of the colonies for better establishments.

In rural areas of Malda the refugees from East Pakistan mainly settled in different places like Gour, Baldiaghat, Risipur, Rampara, Kendua , Aiho and Mobarakpur More over the refugees who belonged to Namashudra caste mainly took shelter in a camp on the East of Bardwari.<sup>108</sup> The Government extended its hand of cooperation to the uprooted people who took shelter in different camps. In urban areas a good number of refugee families made their own arrangement for constructing their own houses though the Government provided various type of assistance which included house building loans, trade loans or professional loans.<sup>109</sup> In Malda district the Government provided trade and business loans to near about two hundred families up to the month of September, 1953.<sup>110</sup>

The refugees of Malda had to face multifaceted problems apart from rehabilitation and resettlement problem. They suffered from various diseases like fever, dysentery, small pox etc. In almost every camp those diseases spread like epidemic. Inadequate medical facilities added to their crisis.<sup>111</sup> The name of colonies established in post 1950s were as follows.

**Table –3.13**

**The colonies established in post 1950s in Malda**

Name of colony	location	No. of displaced families	Rural /Urban	Public /Private land
Mangalbari Colony	Mauza Mangalbari Samandi, Malda	60	Rural	Khas land
Khaihata ,,	do	33	do	do
Gandhi ,,	do	69	do	do
Charlaxmipur ,,	Mauza Mubarakpur,PS Malda	101	do	N.E.R.land
Khanpur ,,	Do	35	do	Khas land
Bagalabagi (Ranir Garh) ,,	Mauza Baglahagi,JL No.55,Malda	85	do	do
Fuldanga ,,	Mauza Fuldanga, PS Malda	25	do	Private
Bilbari-Nazir khani ,,	Mauza Nazir Khani Bilbari Colony PS English Bazar	37	do	do
Buraburitala Krisha pally	Mauza Pirojpur.PS English Bazar	263	Urban	do
Paschim Sarbamangala pally	Mauza Maheshmati PS English Bazar	25	do	CAD Govt. of India

Colony				
Adina ,,	Mouza Adina JL NO.39, PS Gazole	279	do	Khas land
Uttar Mahimnagar & Kanchan Nagar Colony	Kanchan GP, PS Gazole	46	Rural	do
Gobindapur ,,	Do	28	do	do
Duba Khokson ,,	Chaknagar GP,PS Gazole	60	do	do
Kadubari ,,	Do	70	do	do
Chandrail ,,	Bairgachi GP (1) PS Gazole	25	do	do
Bolbari ,,	Ranigunj GP, PS Gazole	25	do	do
Kutubsahar-golghar ,,	Mouza Kutubsahar,PSGazole	140	Rural	Khas land
Ghosani Bag ,,	Do	111	do	do
Kutub sahar ,,	Mouza Kutub sahar,PS Gazole	56	do	Khas land
Dalla,,	,, Dalla,PS Habibpur	539	do	do
Parbati Danga	,, Chakli,PS do	248	do	do
Agra ,,	,, Agra, PS do	79	do	do
Telnai ,,	,, Telnai,PS do	89	do	do
Harishchandrapur &Aragachhi ,,	,,Harishchandrapur & Aragachhi ,PS do	149	do	do
Nanda Garh & Poali ,,	,,Partharnandagarh&Poali,PS do	45	do	do
Pathar sasuli ,,	,,Pathar sasuli,PS do	62	do	do

Kuchiamore ,,	,,Kuchiamore,PS do	77	do	do
Kendua ,,	,,Kendua,PS do	100	do	NF Railway land
Choitangacchi Madhyam Kendua (Diary Farm) ,,	Do	114	do	Khas land
Bulbul Chandi rice mill (Kendua) ,,	Do	117	do	do
Bakshi Nagar ,,	,, Bakshi Nagar	73	do	NF Railway land
Joydebpur ,,	PS Habibpur	25	do	Khas land
Digalbari ,,	,,Harinandanbari,PS Bamngola	52	Rural	do
Barawandanga ,,	,,Nandinadaaha,PS do	85		do
Bhanatola ,,	,,Lakshmipur,JL No,36,PS Kaliachak	250		NF RailwY land
Dharanda & Jugi pathar ,,	,,Dharanda & Jugi pathar,PS Habibpur	25	do	Khas land
Chini danga ,,	,, Pandua,PS Gazole	38	do	Private land

Source: Government of West Bengal, Manual of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, vol.1, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department

From 1948 onwards the Government decided to provide assistance to the displaced persons through the distribution of lands. The quantum of lands depended upon the number of members of the families. It was three *kathas*, five *kathas* and fifteen *kathas* respectively according to the size of the family members. House building loan of Rs. 500 per family was granted. An amount of Rs. 1000 to 1250 per family was also granted for purchasing cultivable lands and for small trade. In the latter period the Government waived off the loan. The following is the list of the displaced persons

squatter's colonies in Malda district. The sources have been procured from the Manual of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, vol.1, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal.<sup>112</sup>

**Table-3.14**

**Registration of Refugees week ending 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1948**

Districts	Families	No. of certificate issued
West Dinajpur	1,516	5,004 up to 15 <sup>th</sup> October
Malda	448	1,881 up to 31 <sup>st</sup> October
Jalpaiguri	Not reported	15,000 up to 17 <sup>th</sup> June
Darjeeling	1,140	1,225 up to 15 <sup>th</sup> October

Source: Collected from West Bengal State Archive (IB)

**Table -3.15**

**Registration of Refugees week ending 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1949**

Districts	Families	No. of certificate issued
West Dinajpur	2571	9383
Malda	604	3921
Jalpaiguri	5453	31,481
Darjeeling	1, 635	9,361

Source: Collected from West Bengal State Archive (IB)

**Table -3.16****Displaced persons (New) getting relief**

Number of displaced persons in receipt of gratuitous Relief for the week ending 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1950

Districts	In camps	outside camps
West Dinajpur	NIL	7440
Malda	NIL	7611
Jalpaiguri	NIL	992
Darjeeling	NIL	483
Cooch Behar	1,249	2334

Source: Collected from West Bengal State Archive (IB)

**Table-3.17****Refugees in North Bengal up to 1958**

District	No. of Camps and Homes	Population in camps and homes	No. Govt. colonies	Population in Govt. colonies	Refugees outside camps and colonies	Total refugee population
Malda	----	-----	12	2939	69004	72924
WestDinajpur	1	989	11	3865	158095	162949
Jalpaiguri	-----	-----	9	7850	142306	150156
Darjeeling	-----	-----	2	3375	26668	30043
Cooch Behar	1	1159	12	6550	222118	227827
Total	2	2148	46	24579	618191	643899

(In and outside Government camp and colonies)

Source: Government of West Bengal, *Relief and Rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal* (1958), Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

**Table-3.18**  
**Refugees in some districts of North Bengal in 1961**

Districts	Total	Rural	Urban
Cooch Behar	252753	227628	25125
Jalpaiguri	218341	171617	46724
West Dinajpur	172237	125155	47082

Source: Census of India, 1961

Uprooted persons who migrated to different districts of North Bengal established Squatter colonies. In Malda 38, Darjeeling 17, Cooch Behar 26, Jalpaiguri 39 and in West Dinajpur 52 squatter colonies were set up in between 1 January, 1951 – 25 March, 1971.<sup>113</sup>

**Table 3.19**  
**Number of squatters colonies in North Bengal from 1 January, 1951 to 25 March, 1971**

Sl. No	Districts	Number of colonies		Total no. of D.P Colonies
		Urban	Rural	
1.	Malda	2	36	38
2.	West Dinajpur	11	41	52
3.	Jalpaiguri	5	34	39
4.	Darjeeling	17	Nil	17
5.	Cooch Behar	13	13	26
Total		48	124	172

Source: Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty , *Merginal men: The Refugees and the left political syndrome in West Bengal* (Kalyani:Lumiere Books,1990)

Between 1941 and 1951, there was an increase of 96% in urban population in districts of North Bengal. This influx was due to coming of refugees from East Pakistan. During this period Siliguri was urbanized to a great extent. A comparative data on growth of population in five districts table shows

**Table- 3.20**  
**Growth of population in North Bengal during 1951-1971**

Districts	Area Sq. Km	1951	1961	1971
Darjeeling	3,386	459.6	624.6	781.8
Coochbehar	3,075	668.0	1,319.8	1,414.2
Jalpaiguri	6,245	916.7	1,369.3	1,750.1
West Dinajpur	5,206	976.9	1,323.8	1,857.9
Malda	3,713	937.6	1,221.9	1,612.7
North Bengal	21,625	3,959.7	5,549.4	7,418.7

Source: Census reports of 1951,1961,1971.

### **Reaction of the native people:**

In post-partition West Bengal following the tumultuous and traumatic division of India there was incessant inflow of uprooted persons from East Pakistan which had an enormous effect on the political, economic and social life of the region. The sudden appearance of refugees from East Pakistan to social canvas of West Bengal was an important issue. As a matter of fact when the uprooted persons came over to the region the reaction of local populace was not at always favourable. They were not cordial and accommodating with the refugees. 'The refugees were regarded as intruders. Their East Bengal patois, their fights and quarrels for scarce drinking water

and their soiled bodies excited the derisive scorn of the West Bengal people. These loathsome creatures hardly looked like humans. Indeed they were nothing more than a group of locusts who used to eat scarce food in West Bengal.<sup>114</sup> But in North Bengal a contrast picture was available, where the original residence of North Bengal mainly Rajbansi community, majority of them accepted them whole heartedly. From the perspective of the interviews, individual conversations and other sources that it was the Rajbansi community demonstrated their cooperation and assistance in various ways to the uprooted individuals in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Their simplicity, innocence and catholic outlook had vividly projected through their activities. The Rajbansis especially at Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Roynunj addressed the refugees fondly as '*Bhatia*'. A good number of local populace also showed their hostile attitude towards the refugees with an apprehension that their age long tradition, culture and their hegemony would be at stake. From the "Gourdoot", the local newspaper of Malda it was noticed that the attitude of the local people in certain localities in Malda was rather antagonistic towards the refugees. The news paper also asserted that in Bulbulchandi area of Malda the native people held the refugees responsible for the miseries of the local people.<sup>115</sup>

Refugees of North Bengal after coming from East Pakistan had to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles. They were in appalling condition in different camps initially meant for them. Those people crossed over the newly founded boundaries between India and Pakistan forced to live the lives of a refugee. The Refugee Rehabilitation department was forced to build necessary arrangement to provide shelter to them as the refugees were in a dreadful condition in different camps. During this period various voluntary organizations like Ramkrishna Mission, Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Marwari Society extended their helping hands towards the partition victims. The Ramkrishna mission set up a relief camp in Gitaldaha. Gitaldaha was an Indo Pak border region two kilometers away from East Pakistan border was within Cooch Behar district. From 15 March of 1950 this relief camp took the responsibility of distributing relief materials including food grains to over five hundred destitute refugees. The R.k.Mission also shouldered the heavy responsibility of providing milk to the infants.<sup>116</sup> Marwari Society rendered valuable services throughout West Bengal and also in North Bengal. A relief camp was opened at Jalpaiguri with the initiative of Marwari society which facilitated distribution of relief materials to the victims of the

partition.<sup>117</sup> There is no shadow of doubt that the migration from East Pakistan to the districts of North Bengal had a tremendous impact on the demographic graph of the region. In other district of Darjeeling there was highest percentage of urban population. But in Malda and Cooch Behar the proportion of urban people was lower than the average of North Bengal. So the process of urbanization was very slow in comparison to other districts.<sup>118</sup>

### **Life in the refugee camps:**

The cross-border migration continued unremittingly during 1950s and the vulnerable, uprooted people firstly rushed towards the Sealdah station. They were subsequently sent to different transit camps from Sealdah. Many of those refugees were supposed to be sent to other parts of India, instant arrangements were made for their shifting. In case of North Bengal the evacuees had migrated crossing Hili border of West Dinajpur and Gitaldaha border of Cooch Behar etc. They mostly came through streamers, bullock cart, buffalo carts and others vehicles available. Many of them were also pedestrians. To accommodate the refugees with instant help a number of relief and transit camps were set up in different corners of West Bengal including North Bengal. The government mainly set up three kinds of camps, viz. women's camps, worksite camps and Permanent Liability (PL) Camps at the peak of the inflow of immigrants from East Pakistan,. The women's camps comprised mostly those women and children who had no male member with them to take their responsibility. Such women's camps were set up in Bhadrakali and Bansberia in Hooghly and in Ranaghat in 24 Parganas. With the passage of time many inmates of the women's camps were rehabilitated permanently with their family members sometimes within the camps or some cases around the camp areas. In order to do away with the disappointment and frustration of the competent male members, the government took initiative to engage them in different developmental works, where those able bodied men were supposed to be rehabilitated. Afterwards 32 worksite camps were constructed in various areas of West Bengal viz. Bagjola camp and Sonarpur R5 scheme in 24 Parganas. The refugees were also appointed in some Central Government-aided projects like the Damodar Valley Corporation. Refugee orphans were admitted to the institutions of two categories: State Welfare Homes and aided welfare homes, those were run by non official organizations.<sup>119</sup>

Another category of camp called PL camps meant for those refugees who were old, infirm and orphans. The inmates of the camps who were considered unfit for any sort of work could be rehabilitated here. Those PL camps were set up in the areas like Bansberia, Dudhkundi, Cooper's Camp, Chamta, Chandmari, Dhubulia, Ashoknagar, Habra and Titagarh. No such scheme was implemented anywhere else so far as North Bengal was concerned. On November 30, 1952 the total population of those camps and the homes was estimated at 34,000, including the population of the orphanages. The number soon increased to 37,000. According to a report of the Relief and Rehabilitation of the displaced persons in West Bengal in 1953, the total number of refugees enrolled themselves in camps was 10,474, whereas in 1954 the number was lifted to 46,904. Again in 1955, the number of refugees increased to 1,09,834.<sup>120</sup> The iron made tunnel-shaped huts constructed during the World War II for Allied soldiers were used as refugee camps. The military barracks were also used for the said purpose. Thousands of displaced persons crossing borders arrived in India either by train or by truck were given shelter in these camps. Sometimes, those camps became overpopulated with the uprooted people and the government could not accommodate them with shelter. Then the Government made separate arrangements for the settlement of those surplus inmates in tents to live in.

The camp life was not at all pleasant and sometimes subhuman in nature. In those camps the occupants were allotted a small space for dwelling. Each family determined the area of the allotted land with pebbles and stones. Often, they had to face acute non-availability of sleeping place. Four members of a family were allowed to stay in a single tent and each family member exceeding four could avail more than one tent to live in. The word privacy and secrecy was quite unknown to them. The scarcity of adequate drinking water, dearth of proper medical facilities and irregular supply of rationing were the main constraints that made their lives unbearable. Under such a untidy situation, many children died of dysentery and other epidemics in the camps. Dead bodies of children were seldom buried due to paucity of funds. The inmates of the camps were often compelled to throw the dead bodies of the babies into jungles. The government sanctioned only Rs.16 for the cremations of a body.<sup>121</sup> Some death reports were available from different relief camps of North Bengal. Most of the refugee inmates died following different types of ailments mainly the babies died of malnutrition. They also became the victims of stomach problems, fever and

inflammation of bodies etc. Reports were available from Rajshahi camp of Jalpaiguri where death of thirteen children was reported and recorded. It was assumed that the deaths occurred due to starvation.<sup>122</sup>

### **Relief and different policies of rehabilitation:**

In the initial stage the Government had no judicious plan for the rehabilitation of camp refugees. From 1955 onwards the Government of India changed its attitude towards displaced persons and began to consider the problem of the refugees from rational point of view.<sup>123</sup> The Indian Government provided *ad hoc* assistance to the refugees between 1947 and 1955 that enabled them to be resettled under the Byanama Scheme. According to the scheme, the camp refugees were opted to choose land to purchase with the monetary assistance of the Government. Depending upon the occupational background of both urban and rural refugee populace the Government decided to provide loan for rehabilitation. Irregularities regarding the sanctions of loan had become a regular phenomenon and regular feature.

Majority of the camp dwellers were cultivators by professions. But when loan was available the scarcity of cultivable lands became a major hindrance. The unavailability of cultivable land for a long period made them annoyed. Following the scarcity of cultivable land coupled with the poor living conditions, the grievances of the refugee peasants of the camps grew leaps and bounds. Moreover, the situation became more critical and complex due to irregular supply of food and cash doles. Both active and passive resistances became rampant in many refugee camps. In the meantime, the Government of India took the decision to abolish the camps in the eastern region by July 1959. The camp dwellers voiced their protest against the government decision. On the contrary the Government of India realized it well that the Himalayan problems of refugee issues would be extremely difficult to solve. As it was hardly possible for the Government to provide shelter to all the uprooted persons, so it would be judicious to select some of them who could not be rehabilitated in the economy in West Bengal, they would be sent to other parts of the country.<sup>124</sup> In such a situation, the incoming refugees from East Pakistan were the additional burden for the Indian Government.<sup>125</sup> Against this backdrop, the Government decided to consider the refugee issue totally on a national level.<sup>126</sup> It is interesting to note the statement of

Sucheta Kripalini in this connection. She stated that this country was partitioned not on the decision of West Bengal; it was partitioned by a decision of India. So it was a national problem and all the states should pull their weight in rehabilitating the refugees. This was perhaps the main spirit which prompted the Government to send the excess refugees to Dandakaranya and also to Andaman. The majority of the displaced persons who were shifted to the aforesaid regions belonged to the so called lower caste.<sup>127</sup>

The measures that were taken by the Government of West Bengal can be classified in terms of relief and rehabilitation; firstly, enumerating them taking into account of their social and economic status; secondly, providing them with doles and monetary assistance and other sorts of facilities and thirdly to make them prepared for their future settlement. There were two different strategies in rehabilitating the refugees both in urban and rural areas. In urban areas the refugees were allotted house building loans, loans towards trade and commerce, cooperative loans and professional loans etc. On the other hand the refugees of rural areas were granted cultivable and homestead lands for the purpose of agriculture<sup>128</sup>. This scheme became very successful in Jalpaiguri district.

The policies of the Government rehabilitation were two-fold i.e. rural and urban, depending on the occupational background of those for whom they were formulated. In rural areas four types of schemes were chalked out for the displaced agriculturists, viz. Type Scheme, Union Board Scheme, Barujibi Scheme and Horticulturists Scheme. According to the Type Scheme refugees were sanctioned Government acquired land or they could purchase lands for themselves at their own initiatives and could get loan. Under the Union Board Scheme there was a plan to rehabilitate displaced persons in different mouzas. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of North Bengal along with Nadia and 24 Parganas were excluded from the Union Board Scheme. The Government took it into account that Darjeeling was not suitable for rehabilitation. Jalpaiguri was also excluded from the plan because the said district was crowded with refugee population.<sup>129</sup> In case of Barujibi Scheme two *bighas* of land were allotted to them for cultivation and eight *kathas* of land were allotted for the construction of homesteads. The fourth scheme was meant for the displaced persons who were not at all acquainted with agricultural knowhow. They mainly belonged to

the middle class.<sup>130</sup> In urban areas the uprooted people were given pecuniary assistance for house building, trade and commerce etc. The Government also introduced certain loan schemes like business loan, professional loan, cooperative loan etc. for the refugees residing in urban areas.

The camp refugees had a strong conviction that the organizations of the squatters' colonies would participate in their movement to make it stronger. But in reality was not fulfilled. The squatters' colonies were pre occupied with their own problems. The members of the organization of squatters' colonies kept themselves away from participating in the camp refugee movements. Moreover, when the government took the decision to recognize 133 squatters' colonies in the beginning of 1948, the camp-dwellers became disappointed and felt somewhat isolated. During this period under the pioneering leadership of Anil Singha of CPI some refugee sympathizers took active initiative to set up a united refugee organization. As a result two hundred representatives from forty three refugee organizations assembled together at Commercial Museum Hall in Calcutta 4h June, in the year 1950. This united effort paved the way for the birth of United Central Refugees Council (UCRC). The main force acted behind the organization was the CPI, though the organization was the combination of different political parties.<sup>131</sup>

The role of UCRC was very significant at this juncture. Since its inception, the activities of UCRC were mainly confined within the periphery of squatters' colonies. Initially, the leadership of the UCRC was not whole-heartedly accepted by the camp-dwellers. As many of the camp-dwellers were of so-called lower caste Namasudra community, naturally the preferred the leaders like Jogen Mondal, Hemanta Biswas, Apurbalal Mazumder and P.R.Thakur their own community who were believed to look after the interest of the lower caste people. Beside the role of CPI, the other political parties and organizations viz. the Proja Socialist Party (PSP)-led organization Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan (SBBS), All Bengal Refugee Conference, Bastuhara Kolyan Parishad etc. had payed ldominant role in the camp politics . In course of time, the 'politicization' and 'unionization' of the refugee movement inspired these uprooted, helpless people to become a part of the larger movement against the Union and State Governments.<sup>132</sup>

Most of the displaced persons were disenfranchised because the Government of India had declared 25 July, 1949 as the cut- off date. The refugees who would arrive after this date would not be allowed the right of Indian citizenship, as long as an act of Parliament making a special provision for acquisition of citizenship. Healthy opposition from Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee convinced the Home Minister Sardar Ballavbhai Patel and he summarily agreed to offer them citizenship. But it is a matter of great regret that the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru rejected the voting right outright on the plea that the electoral role at the late stage would delay the election. The refugees were not entitled to exercise their franchise, they had to apply for it and many of them could not manage it on time. The venture of Dr. Mukherjee and the 'Jan Sangh' remain unabated<sup>133</sup>

### **Life rolled on with shattered dream: experiences of the partition victims in North Bengal:**

Life of refugees West Bengal after the partition of India was not a bed of roses. Though their tales were not lettered with black and white yet their narratives bore the testimony of the struggle they had gone through for the reconstruction of their lives. The uprooted persons from East Pakistan who flocked to West Bengal could not avail the opportunity of Government assistance of all sorts like that of their counterparts in West Pakistan. Very few of the uprooted persons from East Pakistan by dint of their virtue and fortune could materialize their dreams into reality. But the dream for new life of large number of their fellow travelers remained unfulfilled. Now they took it to be granted that they would never be able to return back to their ancestral house.

Through interviews and individual conversations a number of victims described their own experiences of the horrible days of partition. Mr. Jagadish Sarkar of Malda while interviewing about the partition days became emotional and remained silent for few seconds. Then spontaneous outburst of memory made the atmosphere melancholic. He dramatically represented the fearful atmosphere of East Pakistan. He surprisingly observed the changing attitude of the Muslim neighbours who were closely associated with them and stood beside them through thick and thin. It was beyond the common gaze that those intimate Muslim friends abruptly changed their ethical outlook. It shocking enough for Mr. Sarkar that they indirectly taught the minority Hindus that

Muslims were the supreme authority of East Pakistan and the Hindus were nothing but their subordinates. In this connection the reading of Mr. Arabinda Dutta, a resident of Islampur who originally hailed from Tangail elaborately described the eventualities which he faced in his young days. He was hardly 15 years when the partition took place. Moreover he described the circumstances leading to the migration towards Islampur which was at that time in Bihar. Later on it was amalgamated to West Bengal. He also made identical observation like other migrants in different perspective but the main issues remained unaltered. In the course of his discussion he mentioned about his agricultural lands, orchard and ponds which he nurtured were ultimately forcefully occupied and the crops, fruits and fishes were looted in broad day light by the majority Muslim miscreants of the locality in full public view.<sup>134</sup>

Mr. Nogendra Nath Boral, now a resident of Siliguri narrated the story of his struggle after coming from Barishal and settling over here at Siliguri. He came in North Bengal in 1964 at a very tender age. He had confessed that East Pakistan was no longer a place to live in. While he was asked the reason of delay to get himself migrated to West Bengal he stated openly that his family expected eagerly that the turmoil situation would be changed after few days, but in vain. Finding no other means his family was forced to shift towards North Bengal. Initially for the maintenance of livelihood he acted as compounder for a brief period. It was worthy to note here that procurement of suitable job was not an easy one. Another resident of Siliguri Mr. S. Ghosh recollected the days when he first came to Siliguri from as a refugee. He had given a vibrant and elaborate description of the helplessness of thousands of people around him. He was lucky enough that he along with his family took shelter in one of his relative's house. He made it clear that immediately after partition those who shifted from East Pakistan to North Bengal mainly stayed in the houses of near and dear ones and also in the shelter of distant relatives. In some occasions that were found that the local people voluntarily came forward to accommodate them in their own residence from the point of humanity.<sup>135</sup>

The authenticity of the fact mentioned above was also reflected in the version of Joyeswar Barman of Bhetaguri, a place within a stone's throw distance of Cooch Behar town. During the course of conversation with him he wanted to ventilate that

how his family observing the measurable plight of partition victim refugees spontaneously donated lands free of cost for inhabitation and also made suitable arrangements for the maintenance of their families at the initial stage. Similarly the other neighbour of the locality also followed their step<sup>136</sup>. Such attitude of local people did not last long because of incessant inflow of refugees. Coming in touch with the people of contemporary period the authenticity of the statement was verified. According to the statement of Dipen Chanda of Coochbehar whose family members are still the bonafied citizens of Bangladesh where the Muslims extended their hands of cooperation with the minority Hindu communities. Mr, Chanda came over to Cooch Behar for higher studies and after securing job he made a permanent settlement here. His family members are not at all eager in coming over to India. From his version it was crystal clear that The Muslim atrocities were not prevalent in all parts of East Pakistan as well as in Bangladesh. It was nothing but an illicit generalization that all Muslims were communal in nature.<sup>137</sup>

Keeping away the pang, suffering, misfortune of the refugees of East Pakistan, their venture in search of a new life and their relentless struggle for survival came into forefront through the dialogue of Ramala Datta of Moinaguri subdivision of Jalpaiguri district. Following the statement of his dialogue he made it clear that in the midst of profound misery and misfortune the womenfolk also had got the courage and conviction to accommodate themselves with a changing socio- political and economic scenario on the perspective of the prevailing situation. They were determined to prove their efficiency, ability and capacity of empowerment<sup>138</sup>. It became clear that the women of elite, middle class and also economically sound families who came to different districts of North Bengal did not feel any necessity of going outside in search of job. On the contrary, the women of lower strata of society who had no economic solvency were compelled to go outside in search of suitable works for livelihood.

Arpita Chakraborty, a resident of Cooch Behar, in course of conversion intimated the atrocious incident that took place before the very eyes of her grandfather in his ancestral home Mymensingh of East Pakistan. He also witnessed the gruesome murders of his close relatives by the Pakistani hooligans. She alleged according to statement of her grandfather that the assassinated relations were forcefully tied with the trees and fired indiscriminately before the helpless villagers. They were nothing but mute spectators and innocent onlookers. The horrible murders of her relatives made one of

his relations insane. This trauma totally made them perplexed and perturbed. They became their wit's end and they miraculously deserted their homelands and crossed the turbulent river at dead of night when the whole locality was in deep slumber. The family then shifted to a village name as Premer Danga in the Mathabhanga subdivision of Cooch Behar district. The local inhabitants greeted them cordially and allocated lands for their settlement<sup>139</sup>. The other sensational incident could not be lost sight of in this connection. Santu pal, a resident of Haldibari cited another deadly incident. He narrated that in his ancestral home in Pabna some his female relatives used to hide in a pond themselves to avoid military oppression and molestation. They used to throw their valuable articles in the ponds so that the valuables could not be looted. Due to oppression and fear of further impending oppressions they unanimously resolved to start journey towards an uncertain future. From Pabna district they crossed through the Nilphamari border to move towards Haldibari of Cooch Behar district for habitation. East Bengal refugees were going away gradually to the native districts being unable to maintain themselves in East Pakistan for want of food and money.<sup>140</sup>

At a meeting held on 12 April at Baishnab Nagar High English School, police station Kaliachak under the president ship of Sri Suresh Chandra Das, a Relief Committee for the East Bengal refugees was formed with Pramatha Nath Thakur and Sri Hari Das Chaudhuri as President and Secretary respectively.<sup>141</sup>The Darjeeling district student Congress (Anushilan) had taken up the census of the refugees in the district in order to rehabilitate and help the refugees, it had already approached the SDO, Siliguri, Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling.<sup>142</sup>The local Refugee Rehabilitation officer J.Bhattacharya was trying to settle the Khatriya refugees from Rangpur in preference to others coming from other districts of East Bengal being guided by some members of 'Hitasadhani' group. There were instances to show that East Bengal /Pakistan refugees who came much earlier were nor rehabilitated where as Kshatriya refugees from Rongur who came much later were rehabilitated. As a result there has been a general dissatisfaction amongst the refugees of other district.<sup>143</sup>

A procession of 400 Hinu refugees particularly from Rangpur organized by 'Udvastu Samiti' came to Jalpaiguri. It was reported that on 28.11.50 a meeting of the refugees was held at Kharia Porapara under the president ship of Nirmal Kumar Sarkar, local S.P.I workers Sachin Basu, Anil Guha Neogi and Nikhil Ghatak addressed. The

meeting making particular reference to the rehabilitation measures; distribution of the state crops etc. Resolutions were adopted assuring the people not to give any share of the produce to the Government and also exhorting refugees not to vacate the houses occupied by them.<sup>144</sup> At a meeting of the *Bastuhara Samiti* held on the night of 26 November, 1950 at Jalpaiguri town. The speakers including president Rajen Ghosh discussed about the introduction of the proposed ordinance which according to report warned adversity affect the refugees. They protested against the ordinance and shouted anti ordinance slogan.<sup>145</sup>

After coming over here the refugees incessantly worked hard for their different demands. One of the well known refugee from Kurigram commenced fast unto death from 23 May, 1949.<sup>146</sup> Another important aspect of the refugee movement in Raiganj of West Dinajpur may be mentioned here. The district Forward Bloc leaders during this time started an organization styled 'Subhas Kristi Sangha' in Raiganj with a view to establish contact with the refugees. At the same period Kaliaganj Bastutyagi Kalyani Samiti was formed where the leaders often contacted Mrs. Lila Roy.<sup>147</sup> Apart from West Dinajpur in Jalpaiguri the Socialist Party organized a procession of three hundred refugees on 24 September, 1950. They held a meeting at Arya Natya Samaj Hall which was attended by five hundred persons. The speaker exhorted the refugees not to vacate the Muslim houses occupied by them. So long as they were not accommodated elsewhere and also suggested them to take possession of barren lands of the Government. After few months the refugees in Jalpaiguri stated demanding loan and they also decided to start hunger strike on 1 October, 1950<sup>148</sup>

About 100 refugees living in different camps in Cooch Behar town saw Deputy Commission on 21 September and demanded ration for able bodied male refugees which has since been stopped. On refusal they left place in a body<sup>149</sup> With a view to come close with the refugees to extend the party influence over them the local R.S.P have deputed Pravat Kumar Bhaduri, Krishna Bandhu Das and Promod Basu to organize refugees in English Bazar. In Balurghat town of West Dinajpur, a procession of the refugees set out shouting usual slogan. It actually produced no reaction in the town.

The local RSP workers of Alipurduar were organizing frequent meetings of refugees with a view to bring them under the party fold over the issues of food scarcity, free

distribution of rice and blankets to the refugees. The local Socialist Party workers held a conference on 9 November at Jalpaiguri town. The speakers criticized the Government for their alleged indifference towards the refugee problems and urged to be united to compel the Government to accede to their demands.<sup>150</sup> At a meeting of about one hundred refugees held on 29<sup>th</sup> October at Kamarpara, Jalpaiguri town under the chairmanship of Dr. Jogendra Nath Banerjee advised the refugees to unite and join the Hitaishi Samiti Kamarpara for moving the Govt. to redress their grievances regarding loan, ration etc<sup>151</sup> The refugees of Jalpaiguri town and its suburbs were trying to work up and agitation over the issue of loans, shortage of cash dole etc. under the leadership of Prafulla Bakshi, Sachin Basu and others.<sup>152</sup> At the instance of local RSP leaders the refugees of Alipurduar about 150 organized a demonstration before DC on 30 September, 1950 to demand rice.<sup>153</sup>

Coming in touch with different interviewers of Different localities of North Bengal a question very often plays in my mind what was the utility of this long cherished desire of independence? Lacks of people from different walks of life of different states became martyrs for the cause of emancipation and subjugation of the British colonialism. Lacks of people were thrown into prisons, thousands of people were hanged and innumerable people became the victims of oppression of British imperialists. Women also did not lag behind. After successive tremendous efforts of all sections of people independence was achieved. Was such independence was expected where the people became landless in their own land, became isolated from their kith and kin and lost their beloved ones? The so-called independence till today is an eternal question to those who were virtually the victims of such circumstances.

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