

**In Quest of a New Destination: A study of Refugees,  
Resettlement and Rehabilitation in North Bengal  
with Special Reference to Women (1947-79)**

**A Thesis Submitted To The North Bengal University  
For The Award of Doctor of Philosophy**

**In  
Department of History**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled 'In Quest for a New Destination: A study of Refugees, Resettlement and Rehabilitation in North Bengal with Special Reference to Women (1947-79)' has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Dahlia Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of the Department of History, North Bengal University. No part of this thesis has formed for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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## Abstract

Amid construction and destruction of the outside world the tale of human civilization is embedded in history. The light and darkness of history carefully preserve the memory and oblivion that act silently to change the complexion of society, era and mid set. Partition of India was a tragic incident in the annals of human civilization that had cast such a long shadow. It remained as an apocalyptic event that reinforced violence and movement invoking political rupture, social catastrophe and also advocated nostalgia. The division of British India and subsequent creation of two antagonist countries was not just the splitting up of nations and their histories but also their very existence. The thesis emphasized on the fact that the partition of India purported only on religious lines creating two independent nations, viz. India and Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan had firm conviction that partition was the only way to get rid of existing turmoil.

The prime objective of the paper is to highlight specially on the refugees who migrated to North Bengal. The displaced persons from East Pakistan had to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles to pay the cost of independence. The ill treatments on a large scale were very common ways of attacks upon the Hindu minority in East and West Pakistan. In East Pakistan the chronic problem of Hindus remained unsolved, overlooked, neglected and uncared. In a word less importance was attached to their glaring problem. The social disturbances and political turmoil following partition forced people to escape from their homeland and take shelter in various corners of India. In West Bengal the migration process got a new momentum in 1971 and North Bengal was not an exceptional one. The thesis in question has focused on the fact that the socio-political canvass of North Bengal changed to a considerable extent with refugee exodus. The continuous process of migration had started mainly from 1946 in the event of the atrocious Noakhali disturbances and its continuation persisted even after 1971. There is no denying of the fact and no shadow of doubt that being apprehensive of their future settlement and survival, they ventured towards India with the fair expectation to lead a dignified life in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere coupled with security and economic stability.

West Bengal being a state adjacent to East Pakistan, its political territory shared its borders by nine districts of West Bengal including five districts in North Bengal. The migrated people flocked to different areas of North Bengal crossing the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The other wing moved towards Tripura, Assam and Manipur. The East Bengal refugees preferred to shift to West Bengal districts due to geographical proximity, linguistic, religious and cultural resemblance. The five districts of North Bengal were also crowded with the refugee influx. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda accommodated a considerable number of refugees. Apart from permanent settlement in West Bengal the Government thought positively for the all round developments of refugees. The Government and some philanthropic organizations came forward with their hands of cooperation. The thesis has also discussed about the settlement of refugees in post 1971 period in Dandakaranya and Marichjhapi.

This paper has presented the refugee reminiscences to prioritize their erasures and silences, defining the mythic structure of refugee histories and exploring its significance in constructing a specific cultural identity. The Hindu refugees from East Pakistan and later on from Bangladesh have been chosen as the central agents of such narratives. This paper has tried to explore how the East Bengali refugees projected themselves either as ill fated and passive victims of partition who designed to integrate themselves into the socio-economic fabric of India. Sometimes they have eulogized themselves as heroic protagonists who successfully battled irresistible adversities to snatch resettlement from a reluctant state. This split image of the Bengali refugee as both victim and victor has been articulated in this paper. This thesis exposed the fact that the refugee agency in post-partition West Bengal as well as North Bengal was inevitably molded the social status and cultural capital of the natives. The refugees' quest for rehabilitation along the mythic trope of heroic and masculine struggle has been analyzed in the thesis.

Centering round the partition of India the women had long been neglected and ignored in history though they were the worst victims. The study has portrayed a clear picture of the oppressed womenfolk, the constant oppression on them, humiliation, sexual harassment, physical torture and also their trauma following partition. Despite their numerous problems they have had the courage to face the untoward situation with valor, intrepidity,

perseverance, tenacity and lofty ambition. In the event of partition a problem cropped up for the massive influx of migrated individuals hailing from East Pakistan towards India particularly, in the spatial locale of West Bengal. As a revolutionary event Partition of India had spontaneously produced numerous masterpieces. The deplorable condition of refugees has been vividly depicted by thinkers, academicians, poets, dramatists and writers. Besides the valuable contributions of Bengali authors some authors of other states have contributed much on partition literature. A historical portrayal of the human tragedy following partition of India through the exploration of short stories, memoirs and histories could creatively trespass across the border between fictional and historical narratives. While some creations have depicted the massacre during the refugee migration, others concentrated more on the aftermath of the partition in terms of the troubles faced by the refugees in both sides of the borders. Even now, more than seventy years after the partition, works on fiction as well as films are being made. The event of partition along with its prelude and legacy has been the subject of different scholars has remained intact till today. The ‘self-settled’ refugee was in every respect opposite to the much-maligned figure of the Bengali refugee that pervaded contemporary administrative discourse—assertive, resourceful, fiercely independent, and too proud to be subjected to the demeaning and dehumanizing conditions of government camps. It became a key element of the self-perception of Bengali refugees in post partition decades.

As the gulf between the “private” and the “public,” was dismantled, the refugee women were able to expose themselves the outer world of men from the sacrosanct economy of confinement. It also broadened the ambit of women in the community and soon they provided succor to each other in their struggle for existence. Generally, the gendered readings of Partition represent the images of rape, violence, or the trauma, but this quiet transformation of women’s lives often remained unuttered in history. In spite of grim uncertainty, profound sufferings, irreparable wounds, psychological and emotional injuries; these women did learn to survive, adjust themselves with new environment in the new destination. The new survival strategies, which these women followed for sustenance, brought about significant socio-economic changes in their lives.

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*Madhuparna Mitra Guha.*  
7.12.18

Madhuparna Mitra Guha

## Preface

“Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought”. The sweet memories of mine were mixed with sad saga of Partition of India. The immature vision of my childhood days had been intermingled with painful memories told and narrated by my grandmother along with other elderly and uprooted women with whom I was closely, intimately and affectionately related. The physical and natural proximity to the northern districts of East Pakistan prompted the exodus of Hindus refugees to the districts of North Bengal. North Bengal, the northern part of West Bengal occupied a unique position in the Indian sub-continent. North Bengal was such a queer area of West Bengal which had no trace in the geographical map of India by its name, but it is still well known in India. Most of my relations had specially migrated from the districts of Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rongpur, Bagura, Pabna, Faridpur, Dhaka and other adjoining districts to Jalpaiguri, Darjeelong, Dinajpur (now North and South), Malda and the then princely state of Cooch Behar.

My house was the mid-day meeting venue of the displaced women under the patronage of my grandmother. The women hailing from different districts of East Bengal narrated their stories and practical experiences following the Partition of India in 1947. Those atrocious stories, stories of abduction, arson, plunder; inhuman tortures upon the minority communities, rape, looting, unauthorized and forceful occupation of dwelling houses had become regular events and rampant. I heard all the stories with a vacant and innocent look but with intense interest and curiosity. Those ladies were not well educated but they had enough knowledge and experiences regarding the political scenario prevailed during the period. They held responsible the political leaders who were autocratic, unwise and who took hasty decision for the vivisection, bifurcation and partition of India that caused endless sufferings of the Hindus and the Muslims alike.

I left no stone unturned to procure sweetness from the sad songs of the million innocent masses. Those unfortunate men and women became the puppets in the hands of some so called politicians who threw them in the world of profound darkness of uncertainty. From that time onwards I took a sacred vow to unearth and unveil their relentless endeavours

for existence, survival, security and empowerment. Now the question arises what were the main causes behind the massive influx of Hindu exodus from East Pakistan to West Bengal? The simple answer was that West Bengal was the only state which was dependable and trustworthy friend of uprooted Hindus. West Bengal was the largest recipient of the uprooted and displaced persons for the reasons of geographical immediacy to East Pakistan. Following the same reason the Hindu refugees from East Pakistan, specially the inhabitants of Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur and other districts of East Pakistan preferred to migrate to the neighbouring district of North Bengal viz. Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Dinajpur (undivided) and Malda. As my research paper deals with the refugees migrated from East Pakistan to North Bengal, my interest is primarily focused on the different districts of North Bengal. The valuable interview relating to the partition acted silently which in the long run inspired and encouraged to think more and more of the miserable plight of the uprooted individuals, especially the womenfolk were concerned.

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## Abbreviations

AIML	All India Muslim League
AIWC	All India Women Congress
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BDO	Bloc Development Officer
BSS	Bharat Sevashram Sangha
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
DKSBS	Dakkhin Kolkata Shahartali Bastuhara Samity.
EIRC	East Indian Refugee Council
INA	Indian National Army
INC	Indian National Congress
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
MC	Migration Certificate
NBBKP	Nikhil Banga Bastuhara Karma Parishad
UTUC	United Trade Union Congress
UCRC	United Central Refugee Council
RCRC	Refugee Central Rehabilitation Council
RR&R	Refugee Relief & Rehabilitation
UN	United Nations

## Glossary

<i>ansar</i>	a semi police force of East Pakistan
<i>ashram</i>	home for destitute
<i>babajan</i>	grand father
<i>babu</i>	superior and respected person of a family
<i>bagh nokh</i>	nail of a tiger
<i>bairagi</i>	a vagabond traveler
<i>banga bandhu</i>	prestigious award conferred on Shaikh Mujib-ur Rahman
<i>bari</i>	ancestral house
<i>basha</i>	temporary residence
<i>Bhadralok</i>	gentle man
<i>bhatia</i>	original inhabitants of East Pakistan migrated to West Bengal
<i>bhatia khyadao</i>	oust the East Pakistan refugees
<i>bidi</i>	a type of indigenous cigarette made of tobacco leaves.
<i>dalil</i>	deed
<i>desh</i>	native land.
<i>desh bhag</i>	division of home land
<i>dhatri</i>	nurse
<i>dhilani</i>	stone thrower
<i>jabar dakhil</i>	forced occupation

<i>kacharibari</i>	outer house
<i>kantha</i>	a warm wrapper made of cotton cloth
<i>khali or patit</i>	vacant or abandoned
<i>khas</i>	lands under Govt. possession
<i>khas mahal</i>	office deals with Govt. khas lands.
<i>korta</i>	master of the house
<i>mukti yuddho</i>	war of liberation
<i>purda</i>	veil
<i>rajbanshi</i>	primitive inhabitants of North Bengal
<i>shakha</i>	conch shell
<i>sharanarathi</i>	shelter seeker
<i>shital pati</i>	cool mat
<i>sindur</i>	vermilion marks
<i>thonga</i>	a paper made container for carrying things
<i>Tulsi plant</i>	a sacred plant of the Hindus and also medicinal plant
<i>vastu</i>	land
<i>vita</i>	home land
<i>udvastu</i>	landless

## ***CHAPTER I***

### ***Introduction***

History survives in accidents, catastrophes, massacres, bloodsheds, mutilations and genocides. The incessant cries of the dispossessed, relentless agonies of the disenfranchised and the misgivings of power saturate the climate of history. The history of humanity is thus demonic and dehumanized; contrary to the Hegelian conjecture of history as progress, it inevitably arrives as a history of loss, a history that is dismembered, fragmented and far removed from the telocentric ideal of a unified homogeneity. This partition of Indian subcontinent is a seminal episode which has caused one of the greatest human convulsions in history. The British quit India bifurcating the country into two nations. The division of British India and subsequent creation of two antagonist nations was not just a surgical metaphor or dismemberment of territories; it created a fissure both in heads and hearts of millions of unfortunate displaced persons. The dark legacies of partition of 1947 has cast a veil of shadow on the lives of the people of India, Pakistan and subsequently of Bangladesh. The borders which were determined in 1947 and were redetermined in 1971 not only divided the nation and its histories but also created a void among the families, friends, kiths and kin. Partition has remained as an apocalyptic event which resulted violence, movement and also ascertained the resettlement of refugees. On one hand, immediately after the World War II, the erstwhile British colonies were decolonized while on the other, their political liberation took to a fractured shape. The minority communities of Punjab and Bengal became the worst victims of partition. Millions of people were uprooted, thousands were brutally tortured and slaughtered and countless families were isolated in the tumultuous event of the partition. The partition of the Indian subcontinent uprooted from huge number of people from their ancestral homeland.

The schizophrenic moment of partition was not just a moment of National rupture but also brought about the strong traces of molecular fragmentations like partition from the perspective of family, neighbourhood, village as well as city. The shadow of partition was noticed among gender, communities, political parties and above all the among different organisations.<sup>1</sup> Common people in general and women in particular

had made tremendous efforts for getting new identity. The pathetic saga of migrated women from East Pakistan who had to confront unpredictable and innumerable challenges of new life style or pattern of life across the border of Bengal. They had to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles. The thesis in question has tried to ventilate the saga of victimized refugees, specially the women who settled in the districts of North Bengal hailing from East Pakistan, were exploited and assaulted in every possible way. The researcher would like to focus on the lesser known images of the refugee women—identifying the latent violence on women in East Pakistan not only as victims but also survivors in this cataclysmic event. The focus is on the similarities and differences in the experiences of the refugee women from the East Pakistan to West Bengal as well as in North Bengal in 1947 and 1971 and their subsequent rehabilitation and resettlement.

According to Ranabir Samaddar, Partition is linked to a transition- a transition from colonialism to post colonialism, from nationalist secularism to communalism and separatism and also from united entity to vivisection<sup>2</sup>. For Punjab exchange of population was made and thereafter the Hindus began to migrate from Western Punjab of Pakistan to India and the Muslims began to shift from East Punjab of India to Pakistan. But it was not peaceful and voluntary one. The pity of the whole thing was that in East Pakistan the chronic problem of Hindus remained unsolved, overlooked, neglected and uncared. In a word, no importance was attached to their glaring problem. Migration is a universal fact and a burning issue throughout the world. From India's perspective the Refugee movement took place in both sides of the borders after partition. However, the social disturbances and political turmoil following partition forced people to escape from their homeland and to take shelter in various corners of India. The innumerable involuntary and unprecedented migration caused communal riots, massacres and atrocities of all kinds on both sides of the borders. The country was filled with huge number of refugees who were rendered orphans by the storm called Partition. This event caused the barbarity of most dreadful kind.<sup>3</sup> Almost 12 million people were displaced and a million died. There was widespread sexual savagery and about 75 thousand women were abducted and raped.<sup>4</sup> In West Bengal and more specifically in North Bengal the migration process got a new momentum in 1947. The socio-political canvass of North Bengal changed to a

considerable extent with refugee exodus. North Bengal became a destination of refugees of East Bengal. The fear of persecution and violence compelled a large number of Hindus to flock to Indian Territory in quest for shelter and security. The massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan to West Bengal was one of the major outcomes of the rapid growth of population.

The continuous process of migration had started mainly from 1946 in the event of the atrocious Noakhali disturbances and its continuation persisted even after 1971. There was no denying the fact and no shadow of doubt that being apprehensive of their future settlement and survival, they ventured towards India with the fair expectation to lead a dignified life in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere coupled with security and economic stability. They were forced to quit their motherland after the Partition of 1947 and subsequently during the war of liberation in Bangladesh (Mukti-Yuddha) in 1971. The long standing deprivation, exploitation and agony made the refugees confident enough that helped them to be triumphant in the task they had undertaken for the fulfillment of their dormant desire and aspiration. To cross the border was not an easy job. The migrants had to face copious obstacles to adjust themselves abruptly with the new situation alien to their culture and mode of living. The natural climate, the existing social traditions, rituals of daily life, pattern of livelihood and their dialect were by and large different from those of West Bengal. The refugees from East Pakistan were known as *Bangal*. Despite remarkable differences, the refugees, irrespective of men and women of East Pakistan, weathered themselves patiently, intelligently and continuously with the prevailing social system of West Bengal and in the long run brushing aside all adversities they got courage to face the hard reality. Subsequently they marched forward acquiring self reliance and came out with flying colours.

The thesis has primarily highlighted on the refugees of East Pakistan and special stress has been imposed upon the womenfolk who were treated to be inferior and insignificant. The unwanted, unrecognized and unidentified women were always kept in the darkness of oblivion. The women were treated to be nothing else but subaltern. In this respect the path breaking article of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak 'Can the subaltern speak?' is worth mentioning. Spivak argues that the experience of the subaltern in expression is essentially mediated by the hermeneutics of representation.

Representation, as Spivak substantiates it, is politicized in its discriminative nature of inclusion and exclusion, in its relentless endeavor to segregate between the useful and the redundant. As such, within the paradigm of representation, the subaltern experience is mediated reality, carefully governed by the symbolic order of language. What is more, the represented reality of the subaltern often becomes a discursively formulated truth, which is not essentially contingent /coherent with the lived reality.<sup>5</sup> Kristeva, in her formulation of the choric, alludes to the essentially phallogocentric nature of the symbiotic order of language and speculates that the possibilities of a true and unmediated expression of the feminine lies not in the established contours of the symbolic order of language but rather in the spontaneity of the 'semiotike chora'. The 'semiotike chora' (Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva argues), is essentially an order of expression that is precultural and prelinguistic.<sup>6</sup> The feminine, in its alienation from the symbolic order of language, characteristically places itself in the sanctified ritual of representation called 'semiotike', where recollections and renderings of trauma, mutilation, violence and other experimental realities become the medium of expression for the subjugated and violated selves. It is the non-systematic and spontaneous renderings of such experiential realities through which the feminine subaltern can affirm her agency.

Memory, as a discontinuous and incoherent schema that exists as an essential prerogative to history, is that semiotike through which the repressed self seeks expression. The hermeneutics of history has often been suspicious of the authenticity of memory, so much so, that historiographers have considered it as an impediment to the objective eye of history. However, the claim to objectivity has been increasingly jeopardized by poststructuralist historiographers, who have all insisted on the tryst that history shares with power. Memory for them is not a redundant imaginative conjuncture that is invalidated as the 'telos' of canonical historiographic enquiry, it is the experimental reality of memory which can resist grand narrative of history. Hence, memory becomes a foundational logos around which the dispossessed subaltern (in this case of woman subaltern) can consolidate her voice. Not the reliabilities of hermeneutic and validated history, but the imperfect histories of memory become essential to the subaltern as a possible means of self affirmation and consolidation of subjectivity.

Spivak's essay is foundational in the sense that it tries to overthrow the binary opposition between subject and object, self and other, centre and margin, occident and orient, language and silence and the canon and the unacknowledged. In Spivak's opinion, the historically validated conjectures of representation are obtruse as a representational medium for the subaltern and her essay works on the historical and ideological factors that obstruct the possibility of being heard for those who inhabit the periphery. Hence, the 'semiotike' as the ungoverned mode of representation becomes the only possible voice for the subaltern, which like memory, is authentic in its disbelief, is credible in its lack of credibility.

This thesis has tried to outline the history of partition and refugee crisis in North Bengal from a gender sensitive standpoint. We are well conversant with the fact that the fair sex was the worst victims of partition. Those trauma and agony of women indirectly offered positive energy to the women for their future settlement. But the main stream historiography did not pay heed to those neglected segment of the society. Despite weak institutional base women's history got a new impetus very recently. Many feminist writers contributed a lot in this regards. This prompted the researcher to represent some untold tale of refugee women of North Bengal whose saga were lost into the labyrinth of anonymities.

The experience of partition in recent past presented and stressed expressively on the status of women in Indian society and also of the nationalist tradition. The female body was the main target of violence in many ways during the partition of India. It was the reason behind the gendered violence that figured prominently in partition narratives by women themselves. The women had become the passive sufferer of partition history and remained unrecognized as sufferer or even of 'martyrs'. From various accounts of partition it was apparent that women had become the object of communal violence that became an example of ugly incidents of the nations. But those unfair incidents had remained unacknowledged by nationalist history. The miserable corporeal truths of women which were deep rooted in agony, displacement and rupture, were excluded from the narrations of the nation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Objectives of the study:**

The prime objectives of the proposed study are as follows:

1. The proposed dissertation intends to throw light on migration in West Bengal and more specifically on districts of North Bengal after Partition of India.
2. The study attempts to unveil the sufferings and bitter experiences of refugee women from East Pakistan who migrated to West Bengal and so far as the districts of North Bengal are concerned, has not yet been discussed widely.
3. The proposed work tries to describe the nature of exodus from East Pakistan in 1947 and again during 1971, at the time of Bangladesh War of Liberation.
4. The paper aims to reveal the ceaseless struggle of displaced women and their ultimate triumph in diverse fields of society.
5. The proposed research tries to examine the fact that the role of uprooted people hailing from East Pakistan had a tremendous impact upon the socially, educationally and economically backward native people of North Bengal.
6. The proposed study intends to illustrate the all-round development of West Bengal as well as North Bengal following the migration.

### **Key questions:**

The following key questions will be examined and assessed in the proposed research work

1. What factors prompted refugees of East Pakistan to take refuge in West Bengal as well as in North Bengal?
2. What were the differences in the nature of migration between 1947 and 1971?
3. What sorts of obstacles had the Hindus of East Pakistan faced?
4. How did the displaced people, more specifically the women, take the challenge to cope with the new environment and atmosphere in West Bengal and specifically in North Bengal?
5. How far was the War of Liberation (Mukti-Yudha) of East Pakistan for the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 was responsible for Hindu exodus to West Bengal especially in the soil of North Bengal as new migrants?

6. Did the influx of displaced persons of East Pakistan pave the way for developmental process in the district of North Bengal?

### **Hypotheses:**

The following hypotheses have been penned down which are to be tested during the course of research work:

- The trend of migration from the then East Bengal to West Bengal started during the late colonial period.
- Migration was not a new phenomenon in the perspective of North Bengal. It was still in vogue during the period when Cooch Behar was a princely state.
- Following partition, the Hindu women were mercilessly tormented, publicly humiliated, ruthlessly behaved with and their chastity was outraged. To uphold their dignity they were forced to bid adieu to their ancestral abode. They became the sources of inspiration for the generations to come.
- Uprooted Hindu refugees who played a pioneering role, tied over all adverse circumstances by dint of their courage and self confidence.
- Following the footsteps of the previous migrants the new migrants left no stone unturned to adjust themselves with the new scenario of West Bengal so far as North Bengal was concerned.
- The exploitation, sufferings, pang and pathos made the displaced women confident enough for their future empowerment and subsequently their struggle acted as a model for the local women.

### **Partition Historiography:**

The consequence of the Radcliffe Line and the Partition of India could not be predicted by the political and administrative heads of India, Pakistan and so far as United Kingdom was concerned. Each country has had the firm conviction that Partition was the only way out of the virus of communalism, which had torn the nation. Ramachandra Guha, the eminent historian of international acclaim, has rightly commented that generally works on history end on the precise date of 15th August

1947. The domain of ‘History’ ends with India attaining Independence, and where history ends political science, civics and economics begin. Guha argues that this is a wrong assumption—history persists, and hence there should be more works on post-Independence India.<sup>8</sup> Guha makes reference of the writing of Krishna Kumar who writes “for Indian history itself comes to an end with Partition and Independence. As a constituent of social studies, and later on as a subject in its own right, history runs right out of content in 1947... All that has happened during the last 55 years may filter through them easily civics syllabus, popular cinema and television; history as formally constituted knowledge of the past does not cover it”.<sup>9</sup> Sekhar Bandopadhyay on the other hand echoes the same version of Guha , “We may perhaps further add that while the Historians finished their inquiries on 15th August 1947, the political scientist and sociologists did not quite begin until the 1950’s—that is not until the new institutions had taken proper shape in India and started functioning effectively”.<sup>10</sup> This thesis focuses on a history of Partition by looking beyond the event itself. It looks at the very first task set for the newly independent Indian state—the rehabilitation of the refugees coming over to West Bengal from East Pakistan. Sekhar Bandopadhyay in his book *‘Decolonisation in South Asia’* mentions “The fifteenth anniversary of Indian independence became an occasion for the publication of a huge body of literature on post-colonial India. The discussion of 1947 in this literature is largely monopolized by the Partition, its memories and its long-term effects on the nation.”<sup>11</sup>

Partition historiography has passed through various stages, each having a different area of focus. In good number texts both of early and modern periods, the event of partition has been constructed in a dichotomous framework like hero versus villain or victor versus vanquished that devoid of any circumstantial compulsion as well as prevalent trends. These texts are nothing but an exaggeration of personal behavior, biasness and prejudices. If partition is viewed from narrow prism it will be evident that its limitation is not confined within the periphery of history alone but at the same time encourages a type of neo-nationalist historiography both in India and Pakistan. The approaches of the historians towards partition in both sides of the border are still pole asunder. The difference of approach and attitude has brilliantly been brought out by Krishna Kumar through his comparative studies of history text books of India and so far as Pakistan is concerned.<sup>12</sup> In spite of belonging to a same period before

partition, both the countries have picked up selected events and formulated them according to their sweet political, ideological and cultural needs. So the story of the freedom movement has been reconstructed and reinterpreted in a new fashion.

In India and Pakistan, the partition is often served as a model for the reinvention of national history. In the midst of various national interpretations, partition has been presented as the ‘momentous culmination of an anti colonial national struggle’ that agreed to accept partition for the sake of Indian unity as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Partition history can be categorized into some phases. The first phase in Partition historiography deals with the ‘why and how’ questions related to Partition. Asim Roy describes this earliest phase in Partition historiography as the ‘High Politics’ debate.<sup>14</sup> In this phase of history there are factual description of the sequence of events that preceded Partition. Sometimes the Partition history is based upon the nationality of the author and naturally a prejudiced account of Partition has been presented. The earliest works on Partition include the work of the British, Indian and Pakistani politicians and administrators.<sup>15</sup> Compulsive emphasis of the early historians on high politics that heralded the event of partition, now have shifted to explain that why partition occurred and to impose responsibilities on the negotiation between the British and the Indian political parties like the Congress and the Muslim League. More so, they also held the political personalities viz. Mountbatten, Nehru, Jinnah and Patel responsible for the political disaster of 1947.<sup>16</sup> Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee and Sucheta Mahajan in their book *Struggle for Independence* raise the question of ‘why’ and ‘how’ the Congress accepted partition, eventually come to the conclusion that it was the failure of the Congress to reconcile with the Indian Muslims. The book reveals that political stalwarts like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel had no other alternative but to accept the inevitable partition of 1947 as the Congress failed to involve the Muslim masses in national movement and could not stop the surging waves of Muslim communalism which increased from 1937.<sup>17</sup> Bipan Chandra comes to the conclusion that the acceptance of partition in 1947 was nothing but the only final act in the process of step wise concession to the League for its stubborn supporting of a sovereign state .<sup>18</sup>

The British authors however focused on the Partition as an inevitable event, and took pride in having solved this great Indian conundrum with surgical accuracy, where as

the authors of India and Pakistan altogether differed and in their arguments there were tendencies only to blame each other. Blame-game of the writers became the regular practice of the then historians. It will not be out of place to mention in this context that the report of Lord Mountbatten in respect of Partition primarily aimed at shifting blame from the British to the Indians and the Pakistanis. According to him 'I was determined that so far as possible the decision whether to have Partition or not should rest on the shoulders of the Indian people themselves; and that the accusation against the British of having divided the country should thus be avoided.'<sup>19</sup> He also accused the mishandling due to the 'lack of adequate and competent civil administration', i.e. both the Indian and Pakistani government had not taken up the services of the British officers, hence the problems. The report was nothing but a self-congratulatory one in appreciation of the task being performed to the best of his efforts, and that he had always opposed Partition, but in the face of the adverse communal situation, it was the only solution.

The diplomats of both India and Pakistan presented an adverse view, accusing each other for their stubborn attitude on Partition. Dr. Rajendra Prasad in his book, *'India Divided'* has held the Muslim League totally responsible for persisting in its demand for Pakistan. He also believes that the foundation of Pakistan is based on the two-nation theory. He opines 'The grounds on which separation is claimed are thus either unsubstantial or such as are not likely to be accepted as a just and fair basis for separation.'<sup>20</sup> According to Prasad, Partition is a 'solution of despair'. He also foretells the bitter legacy it would leave behind: 'Its enforcement is bound to be followed by ebullient, joyous exuberance on one side and sullen, smoldering resentment on the other....we should be prepared for the aftermath and not hug the delusion that thereafter all will be plain sailing.'<sup>21</sup>

Scholar like Tara Chad holds the British, the Muslim League and the Congress responsible for partition, though the British according to him shared the major chunk. He states that in the tripartite essay the British, the most powerful party, constantly exercised full force in one direction. As a consequence, other two parties failed miserably to combine or to deactivate that force. Tara Chad is critical towards the stand of the Congress in the episode of partition because he considers that Congress had underestimated Jinnah and Muslim League or sometimes became over

considerate keeping at bay their potentials as well as aspirations. Moulana Azad however observes that ‘it would not perhaps be unfair to say that Vallabhbhai Patel was the founder of Indian partition,’<sup>22</sup> Azad also admits that Sardar Patel accepted partition because Muslim League made the working of the interim Government almost impossible. Azad accuses Patel for being totally responsible for partition and at the same time blames League and the British for the tumultuous incident of partition.

On the other hand the Pakistani politicians have justified their view in favour of creation of Pakistan which according to them was the only means to safeguard Muslim interests. They also have made both Mountbatten and the Congress leaders responsible for depriving Pakistan of its rightful territorial and economic resources so that the country might be economically unsound and paralyzed. Thus, there is a sense of triumph in these works which seek to present the picture that in spite of the policies of Mountbatten and the Congress, Pakistan had survived. Chaudhuri Mohammad Ali mentions that the Hindus and the Muslims, though lived together for decades, still differences persisted among them. The differences were so acute that there was no way out to cement the relationship. So the formation of two separate nations was inevitable and settled fact.<sup>23</sup> He states that actually the gulf was further widened under British rule, i.e. the ‘divide and rule’ politics. He alleges the discriminatory policies of the Congress in pushing the League to isolation. Therefore, he is of the view that for the sake of the Muslims and their interests, the League demanded a separate state ‘Pakistan’. *Muslim Politics 1906-1942* of Humayun Kabir, *The Communal Triangle in India* of Asoka Mehata and Achhut Patwardhan gave importance on communal politics of Muslims in India, it was nothing but the offshoot of the policy followed by the British for weakening the nationalist struggle.

After these ‘first-hand’ accounts and memoirs, the works of later day scholars and academicians have further developed the understanding of ‘High Politics’. Those include the works of David Page, R.J Moore and Anita Inder Singh. A.I Singh believes that the divide and rule was the main object of the imperialist rulers. The British policy in India, mainly after the birth of the National Congress aimed at creating a dividing line between Hindus and the Muslims. The British administrators passively and fanned the flame of anti-Congress Muslim opinion against Hindu

nationalism advocated by the National Congress.<sup>24</sup> Singh opines that India was partitioned at the behest of the Muslim League and also for the British interests. So, even though the Congress was opposed to it till the very end, yet it had to give in finally on account of the mounting pressure from the Muslim League demanding a sovereign state for the Muslims, and the British agreed to it, keeping in mind the prevailing circumstances. She adds that “the long term strategic interest of the British counseled them against partition, but that their short term tactics contributed to its fruition”.<sup>25</sup>

However, revisionist historiography has challenged the blameworthiness of the Muslim League behind the event of partition of India. Ayesha Jalal’s work *‘The Sole Spokesmen: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, is a sharp departure from the prevailing concept. Her argument is that the demand for Pakistan was never meant to be what it actually resulted in, i.e. a full-fledged sovereign nation for the Muslims. Rather it was to be seen merely as a ‘bargaining counter’ or a ‘tactical move.’<sup>26</sup> Some have argued that Jinnah was ‘hoist with his own petard’, ‘he fell captive to his promise of separate statehood for six provinces and was left by the partition with the truncated state that was alone consistent with the concept of a nation defined by the religious map of the sub-Continent.’<sup>27</sup> But Jalal points out that Jinnah was rather compelled to accept the ‘moth eaten Pakistan’ offered by the 3rd June plan, the only alternative available to him.<sup>28</sup> Her contention is that Jinnah was not in favour of Partition of India, but he was rather pushed towards using this tactic to safeguard Muslim interests. Jalal is of the view that it was the Congress and the British who pushed the League to take on this separatist tendency. Thus, question of ‘high politics’ continues to be debated, assessed and reassessed. Recent works have again brought out this debate into light.

H.M. Seerval, a hardcore supporter of Jinnah and Muslim League opines that Jinnah started harping on unity among Muslims of India after 1937 and also their socio-economic and cultural development so that they could stand on their own feet.<sup>29</sup> Hector Bolitho, the first official biographer discusses how Jinnah hardened his attitude towards the Congress in order to defend the rights of Muslim minority. Bolitho believes that Jinnah advocated the theory of separate state for the Muslims as a reaction to the policy of the Congress. Like Bolitho, Ayesha Jalal implicitly agrees

that both Jinnah and Muslim League had responsibility for partition through their reactionary policies towards the Congress. Jalal believes that the ‘circumstantial weight’ resulted Jinnah’s advocacy for Pakistan and the acceptance of the congress leaders the event like partition. She agrees that in the midst of uncertainties, ambiguities and also indeterminacies of the late colonial politics the partition was the ultimate goal, not only for the Muslims but also of the communalist trends.<sup>30</sup> The first official biography of Jinnah by Hector Bolitho highlights the fact that how Jinnah has made reactionary pronouncements and toughened his attitude towards Congress, in defense of the rights of the Muslim minority. According to him Jinnah advocacy for a separate state for Muslims was nothing but the reactionary expression of the Congress policy.<sup>31</sup>

A new trend in Partition historiography has focused on the regions which were actually affected i.e. Punjab, Sind and Bengal. Thus the concern has now shifted from the all-India perspective to regional and provincial contexts. To cite one example of how the regional perspective has enhanced our understanding of the Partition politics Joya Chatterji’s book *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* is worth mentioning. According to Chatterji, Partition was desired by the Bengali *Bhadralok* community itself because the Macdonald Award (1932) and the Government of India Act (1935) had greatly reduced the presence of the Hindus in the local assembly, where the Muslims occupied a dominant position therein. This isolation of the Bengali *Bhadralok* was not restricted to the state level alone, rather during the period under consideration; the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee was snubbed at even at the national level of politics where suddenly Bengal was sidelined. Chatterji traces on the vital role of the *Bhadralok* community of Bengal in spearheading the campaign in a significant way for the division of 1947. The elite Bengali community was not mute spectators to promote the Hindu communalism.<sup>32</sup>

The focus on regional studies has certainly enhanced the knowledge on this topic as it has brought about a more nuanced analysis of the entire politics involved, and that too, from the states actually affected by the decision to vivisect the continent. Sucheta Mahajan, however, has a critique to offer against such regional studies. She finds such works as ‘denigrating nationalism’— ‘The form of the diatribe has altered every few years. The Cambridge school has come a long way from its direct, frontal assault on

nationalism in the 1960's, when the politics of the early nationalist arenas was described derogatorily as a "cockfight".<sup>33</sup> More recent historiography lays importance on the underlining the meaning of Partition for the people who were the victims of circumstances. Thus, now the Partition history emphasizes upon the theme of refugees and their relentless striving for their gentle survival and peaceful existence in the alien territory and in the new abode. In the works represented by the early historians there was an effort to establish party prejudices and to either legitimize or contest the Partition of India based upon their respective biases.

The next set of works has described Partition as an event, not in political terms. To them it is a history of violence, a history of immense suffering and finally a history of the triumph of indomitable spirit. The works of Gyanendra Pandey and Urvashi Butalia are significant in this regards. Both Butalia and Pandey describe Partition in a manner different from conventional historiography. Rather, their focus is on the incalculable violence of that time and its impact on the human society. Butalia's works are chiefly based on oral testimonies that presenting the human dimension of the event. She indicates it more clearly that the Independence Day is nothing but the reminiscence of the violence which victims of Partition experienced. Gyanendra Pandey's work has narrated a similar theme, and thus it also differs from the earlier representations of Partition. His work has emphasized on the fact that the Partition of India and the violence that accompanied, was as much a reality as is its Independence from British rule. However, in this phase of Partition historiography, historians observe complete silence and remain absolutely mute on the 'Partition in the East'.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Aftermath of partition:**

In the next phase in Partition historiography, academic scholarship has shifted away from pre-histories of partition to aftermath of partition, not on the victimization alone, but rather survival in the face of adversities i.e. from causalities to 'lived experience'.<sup>35</sup> The works during this phase, look beyond the politics of Partition and instead focus on the politics after Partition. Those works stress exclusively on the partition repercussions on the refugees and their tales of ceaseless struggle. At the same time, it not only looks at the subject as merely passive victims, rather as active participants in the whole process of rehabilitation. Collective as well as individual

memories of the horrific acts of violence have been mediated in gendered line also. Truly speaking, the marginalized refugee women are the worst victim of atrocities relating to Partition. *'Borders and Boundaries: Women in Indian Partition'* by Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin opens a new horizon in Partition studies. Gargi Chakravarty's book *'Coming Out of Partition'* categorically emphasizes on the 'refugee women' and their constant efforts for survival during that period of turmoil. The book stresses on the hardships that experienced by the women in the aftermath of the Bengal partition. Their struggle for shelter, food and jobs has become part of the wider women's movement. Gargi Chakravarty describes the tremendous challenge faced by the refugee women in rebuilding their lives in a new environment. The writer traces on the lives of uprooted women who faced immense challenges for rebuilding and reshaping their lives. She also emphasizes how and why the Hindus were compelled to quit their ancestral abodes. She also indicates the transition in the lives of refugee women.

Post-Partition rehabilitation is another often ignored aspect in Partition studies. By making a comparative analysis of the rehabilitation measures adopted by the government of India vis-à-vis the refugees from Punjab and Bengal. One notices an imbalance and a consequence deprivation of one set of refugees for the privilege of another. The difference in the treatment meted out to the refugees is also reflective of state ideology regarding its area of responsibility. By deciding who was to be included in the rehabilitation policy and who was not, and also by showing a sense of urgency in one case and that of restraint in another, an understanding of nation-making can be derived. Thus, the preceding paragraphs have traced the various aspects covered so far in Partition historiography, and also mentioned the purpose of this dissertation.

### **Studies on the settlement of the East Bengal refugees:**

The earliest works which have discussed the rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal are the works of Nilanjana Chatterjee<sup>36</sup> and Jhuma Sanyal Chakravarty<sup>37</sup>. Both these works have made the Bengali refugee their main subject. Chakravarty's work specifically looks at rehabilitation policies in West Bengal. Rich in detailing the struggle and survival of the Bengali migrant in West Bengal, this work however, does not look at rehabilitation beyond 1954.<sup>38</sup> This is because as per the Government of

India guidelines which were followed by the Government of West Bengal immediately, rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal was not encouraged after 1954. They were dispersed to the neighbouring states.

The next set of pioneering studies in this field has been that of Joya Chatterji. Chatterji has dealt with the theme of Partition of Bengal, by far, in the most complete sense. Whereas her dissertation, later published as *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932- 1947*, falls in the domain of the first phase in Partition historiography in discussing what led to Partition, her subsequent works discuss the aftermath of Partition. The main area of focus for Chatterji, however, remains the politics in the post-Partition era in West Bengal. Her discussion on refugees primarily has the purpose of showing how the growing discontent among the refugees forced them away. According to Chatterji, the Partition of Bengal was much desired by the Hindu *Bhadralok* themselves who feared a complete Muslim domination of the state and hence demanded Partition<sup>39</sup>. As a follow up to this argument, Chatterji in her next article 'The Fashioning of Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and the Bengals' Border Landscape, 1947-52' discusses how the Radcliffe line was highly ill-conceived, completely disregarded and was totally oblivious of the internal boundaries based on geography, economics and most importantly that of everyday routine. But the next part of the argument shows that the boundary commission was not all that aloof of the greater political considerations as it was presented to be. Once again, here the debates of the Bengali *bhadralok* who tried to include their states/districts into the Indian side of the border are used by her to show that Partition was desired by the *bhadralok* themselves keeping in mind the fears of Muslim domination and the resulting loss of power<sup>40</sup>.

That such calculated moves actually backfired with the *bhadralok*, was losing ground in both the Bengals is the subject of Chatterji's later works, especially 'The Spoils of Partition' (2007). This memorable book by an acknowledged expert on the subject assesses the social, economic and political consequences of partition. Using convincing sources, Chatterjee shows that the unprecedented upheavals, massive shift of population created the unexpected transformations of the political landscape in Bengal as well as in India. The book also reveals how the spoils of partition, which the Congress of Bengal had expected from the new boundaries, were squandered over the

twenty years that followed. This is an intriguing and challenging work whose findings subsequently changed our understanding and its consequences for the history of the subcontinent. In the scholarly articles authored by her, she brings to light the policy of denial adopted by the government vis-à-vis these refugees, and the efforts of the refugees to rehabilitate themselves in spite of the hostile conditions.<sup>41</sup> Through comparative analysis, the differential treatment meted out to the refugee in the East has elaborately been done.

Edward Said makes a distinction between exile, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. According to him the origin of exile is actually an ancient practice of deportation which stigmatized the exile as a form of rejection. He observes that refugees are the byproduct of modern state and political innocents united in bewilderment. Expatriate shares the same condition like that of exile but they are free to return their homeland in spite of having chosen to leave the homeland. But the émigrés though experience of exile, may have created a national identity away from their national origin.<sup>42</sup> Despite the above stated differentiation, it cannot be denied of that the displacement aftermath of the partition was nothing but one kind of exile. They were all foreigners, though their nature differed from each other. Naturally, the uprooted persons had no other alternative but to cope with the alien land. Their efforts for rehabilitation have also been discussed in detail in this dissertation. The main argument of this dissertation is that the rehabilitation of the refugees was the first task for the nascent nation-state.

However, the State laid the foundation for the differential treatment meted out to the refugees migrating from West and East Pakistan. Where the State agreed that the incoming migrants were the victims of the most gruesome violence, there the state agreed its role as the protector with promptitude and efficiency. But where the incoming migrants were considered as victims of ‘psychological fear’ and not ‘real violence’, there the state adopted the policy to restrain the inflow of refugees. Thus, migrants from Punjab were seen as the worst victims of Partition violence, and hence, relief and rehabilitation was provided with a sense of urgency. But migrants from Bengal were not identified as victims of such ‘real violence’<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the responsibility of the State was reduced. In fact, as is commonly observed in official correspondence of the time, the minorities in the East were constantly referred to as ‘Pakistani minorities’ who were the responsibility of the Pakistani state, thereby denying them any legitimate claim to the citizenship of the Indian state<sup>44</sup>.

This thesis looks at the function of the State for the improvement of rehabilitation process. This dissertation also questions two important presumptions derived from a study of the rehabilitation of refugees. From the point of view of the State, the blame for the failure of rehabilitation in the East was rested upon the static Bengali migrants who could not utilize the opportunities like their counterpart in the West. This hypothesis simply overlooked the faults of the State policy and this false assumption actually became the hindrance in the way of prompt granting of fund rehabilitation. It was nothing but a miscalculation of the magnitude of the problem which was regarded as temporary and this caused the lack of adequate rehabilitation facilities. From the point of view of the refugees it was stated that while the refugees from Punjab were seen as victims, but the Bengali refugees were not given due attention and recognition from the point of view of victimization.

Discussions on the forced immigration of the minority Hindu community from East Pakistan to West Bengal in search of own abode and their tireless endeavour to adjust in new land started since 1950, although it got the attention of historians on those issues only since 1990. Studies on the refugees of East Bengal previously were initiated by the Union Government and West Bengal Government just for the administrative requirement. Since immediately after the Partition, state capital so far as its suburban areas were concerned, were flooded with refugee exodus from East Bengal.<sup>45</sup> Concentration of the displaced persons were becoming more and more acute in those places which were comparatively easily approachable.<sup>46</sup> During this period Government of India had instructed Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) for collecting information on those uprooted people from East Bengal. Kanti. B. Pakrasi's remarkable work titled "*The Uprooted: A Sociological Study on the Refugees of West Bengal in 1971*" which was based on the survey conducted by ISI during the period 25 May to 9 September, 1948. B.S. Guha edited a book named '*Studies in Social Tension among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan*' which was based on the survey report of Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) published in 1959.<sup>47</sup> N. Chakborty in 1951 submitted 'Report on the Sample Survey for Estimating the Socio-Economic Characteristics of Displaced Persons Migrated from Eastern Pakistan to the State of West Bengal' which throws light on various aspects of refugee life. Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, a notable personality and a civilian (ICS) of the then British period,

procured vast experience as he was in the supreme administrator to deal with the problems of the exodus from the then East Pakistan to Indian Territory. He has elaborately discussed and analyzed the roles of Government of West Bengal and Central Government. He also has expressed his apprehension that after the attainment of Independence the problem of refugees especially who migrated from East Pakistan remains unsolved. From that point of view the book '*Udvastu*' (Refugee) can be treated as the basement of partition history<sup>48</sup>.

*'The Marginal Men'* is a conspicuous evidence of the refugee exodus in West Bengal and its impact on the Bengal politics. The deplorable conditions of the refugees, their pang and pity, their intrepidity, their incessant struggle to adjust with new environment, their entrepreneurship have been depicted in an artistic way. The process of establishment of new colonies and subsequently establishment of new organization for the rights of refugees gave birth to a new modern idealism. According to the author these movements laid the very foundation of the future leftist movement of West Bengal. The book vividly represents the deplorable condition of uprooted in various camps, their '*satyagraha*' movement, their strife for rehabilitation, their demand for formulating new development policies, their participation in the movement for food, movement for fare hike of tram etc<sup>49</sup>.

Apart from the theme of rehabilitation of refugees, other areas of focus in this phase of Partition historiography involves two themes — border area studies and the troubled question of citizenship and loyalties in post-Partition India. Willem van Schendel and Ranabir Samaddar present pioneering works in this direction. They argue that a study of borderlands is important because Partition left the maximum impact on those areas and still bears a continuing legacy. Samaddar brings in to light the continuing migration across the Indo-Bangladesh border. In his opinion this migration, which has been termed as illegal is due to the creation of this arbitrarily drawn border. In this region several enclaves used to exist, which were actually islands of Indian Territory in Bangladesh and vice versa. The plight of the residents in those areas beggars description. They are harassed by the local population and at the same time are often arrested for their attempt to unlawful entry into Indian soil as illegal migration. Partition is an enduring fact, living in the present as much as in the

past. Partition led to the rise of a new social arrangements, new consciousness and also of new subjectivity.<sup>50</sup>

The focus of Post-Partition studies moved away from the violence to trauma. The trauma of Partition became the other area of study by the recent scholars. At the initial stage the Partition studies had remained confined within the periphery of events concerning 15th August 1947— seldom moved beyond that date. More importantly, even though individual refugee made his/her appearance, yet they remained stagnant in time. The refugees were viewed as living testimonies of this tragic event, often asked to recollect those days of unrest, turmoil and anarchy. Refugees were seen as passive agents in an event where apart from being the victims of this ‘greatest human tragedy’. Josodhara Bagchi, Subhoranjan Dasgupta & Subhasri Ghosh, edited book *The Trauma and the Triumph, Gender and partition in Eastern India* discusses the partition in eastern region and focuses on East and West Bengal. The book incorporates the Muslim voices and their experiences on the other side of division i.e. East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. At the same time the book deals with Muslim women residing in West Bengal. How did the face the grim reality of vivisection has vividly analyzed in the said book. This book is a glaring testimony of the memories, experiences, recollections of some refugee women; their unending struggle and ultimately of their victory against all possible odds.<sup>51</sup>

Ganesh Kudaisya’s book *Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India 1947-79*, ‘*The Changing Profile of a Province*’ of Chittabrata Palit and Ujjal Roy; *Changing Borders, Shifting Loyalties: Religion, Caste and the Partition of Bengal in 1947*; *Remembered villages: Representation of Hindu Bengali memories in the aftermath of the partition* by Dipesh chakraborty are some important works in this field. Pradip Kumar Bose’s *Refugees in West Bengal* critically analyzes the two major influx of the immediate aftermath of Partition so far as the liberation war of East Pakistan is concerned. The book comprises a number of articles regarding the refugees of West Bengal. The author of the book raises issues of cultural dimension of refugee hood. The book also covers the question of refugee rehabilitation. Bose tries to incorporate the refugee concept with socio-cultural milieu.

Memoirs like *Chhere asa gram* of Dakshina Ranjan Basu, *Udvastu* of Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, *Dayamayeer kotha* of Sunanda Sikdar, *Desh bhag o desh tyag* of Sandipan Bandopadhyay contributed a lot in the field of partition studies. Josodhara Bagchi, and Abhijit Sen's *Shatabarshe Ashalata*; Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay's *Ja dekhechhi*, *Udvastu*, Atin Bandopadhyay's *Deshbhager Dinguli*; Prativa Basu's *Jibaner jalchhabhi*, Nirenbdranath Charaborty's *Bhite chhada*, *Nirbindu*, Nirad C. Chaudhry's *Aji hote shatabarsha age*, *Amar debottar Sampatti*; Bina Das's *Srinkhal Jhankar* ; Hena Das's *Smritimoy Dinguli*; Ashoka Gupta's *Noakhali Durjoger Smriti*; Shyamaprasad Mukherjee's *Leaves From A Diary*; Ashok Mitra's *Tin kuri dosh* (part II& III) Tapan Roychowdhury's *Ramanthan Athaba Bhimroti Praptir Paracharitcharcha*, *Banganama*, etc. are the valuable contributions of the writers of West Bengal.

One sided interviews and one sided recording of incidents also have not disclose the violence on this side of the border. Focus on Partition violence brings to light only one aspect of the State—either as one who was held responsible for this violence or as the one who tried to quell the violence once it started spreading infinitely. The true nature of the nascent state in the immediate aftermath of Independence and Partition needs a closer analysis which has not come through in the above mentioned studies. Also, in the first task set before it, the State was trying to define its territories, responsibilities, and also its 'rightful' subjects. Finally, the coming of age of the refugee also has not come across from these studies. The refugees have tried their level best to make the alien land their homeland with or without the support of the State and the original inhabitants is an aspect which can come through only after a study of the lacuna in the Government-sponsored rehabilitation policies.

This work seeks to bring into light the fact that rehabilitation in the East is primarily the work of the refugees themselves, whereas, in the West the contribution of the State is equally significant if not more. This argument stems from a direct comparison of the policies of the government and the self-initiative of the refugees coming from West Pakistan and East Pakistan. It is also based on the fact that though conflict between the refugees and the State was not altogether absent in the West, it was outshined by the magnitude of this conflict in the East simply outshone any similar conflict in the West. It is this differential treatment that the dissertation focuses on.

Lots have been spoken about the partition by different eminent scholars, academicians, historians, politicians and statesmen from different angles and perspectives.

**Research gap:**

The massive influx of refugees into West Bengal attracted the attention of a number of researchers. The causes and effects of partition, its impact on common mass, the pathos and trauma of displaced persons have been widely discussed by the researchers. There is no doubt that division of India was a central point of focus in post colonial history. A large number of immigrants came to North Bengal from East Pakistan and on the contrary from West Pakistan to India for refuge. Their stories, experiences, day to day hardships were really beyond description. Their miserable plight was described vividly by different academicians. Virtually there is no dearth of material on partition history. As a matter of fact the refugee problem has been the centre of discussion for decades together. *Udvastu* of Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, 'The Marginal Men' of Prafulla Chakraborty, *Coming out of Partition* of Gargi Chakraborty, *The Trauma and Triumph* edited by Josodhara Bagchi provides some details of refugee crisis of West Bengal. Very recently Monika Mondol in her work has discussed refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal with special emphasis on Malda. Taking into account the refugee of North Bengal, it is found there is a lack of serious discussion and academic introspection. The memory of violence, bloodshed, troubling realities that accompanied partition in North Bengal have remained blanketed in silence.

A bulk of women population of East Pakistan has to struggle a lot along with their male counterparts. But their efforts for survival and attempts to cope with the new situation have not given due importance. The history of displaced persons and their quest for new shelter in the districts of North Bengal has remained almost untouched. The main focus of the thesis is on the refugee exodus in North Bengal. The purpose of the dissertation is to unearth the miseries of the displaced women who migrated over here in the perspective of Partition of 1947 and Bangladesh war in 1971 consecutively. North Bengal being an integral part of West Bengal has constituted a separate social structure perhaps due to its peculiar geographical position and multiple

characteristics of population. So the nature of hardship that the men and women had to confront was to some extent different from Bengal as a whole. 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 partition, specially the women who by dint of their leech like tenacity and dogged perseverance had confronted all sorts of eventualities. The Partition of 1947 was an event when the Hindus, Muslims as well as Sikhs were involved in the violence and women became a symbolic target of all communal violence. They were the worst sufferers of Partition. The sexual brutalities that women of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities suffered in this turbulent time by the rioting mobs were really heart rendering. Beside this humiliation, violence and sufferings that had been inflicted upon those women, another aspect of their lived histories remain unacknowledged i.e. their silent sacrifice to save their families. Of course those memories have been expressed by Ritu Menon and Urvashi Butalia in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, and *The Other Side of Silence: Voice from the Partition of India*. A number of feminist writers have produced their own narratives in their writings.

To throw light on the hidden history of womenfolk of North Bengal, both migrant and non-migrants, is one of the principal objects of the project in question. The true and authentic pictures of those migrated unfortunate women have not been brought into light, not narrated and have remained unearthed. The untold tales of humiliated women community have been thrown into profound darkness of oblivion. The miserable predicament, incessant struggle and unpleasant experiences of the refugee women who migrated over here after the War of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 also have not got adequate attention of the researchers. The proposed study of dissertation has intended to bring those facts into light. This thesis on refugee exodus in the districts of West Bengal as well as of North Bengal will perhaps fill up the vacuum of previous incomplete and inadequate researches for the expedition and cultivation of further micro level studies.

The second chapter has enlightened on the fact that the partition of India purported on religious lines creating two independent nations, viz. India and Pakistan. This bifurcation caused a great upheaval in Punjab and Bengal. The consequences of the Radcliff line and the partition of India could not be predicted by the political and administrative heads of India, Pakistan and so far as United Kingdom was concerned.

Both India and Pakistan had firm conviction that partition was the only way to get rid of existing turmoil. As a result of the partition, the displaced residents of Punjab were accommodated with the active help and cooperation of the Central Government. They were accommodated in different parts along with employments or extending business facilities. Exchange of population was their major achievement, while the refugees from East Pakistan were often been physically assaulted and mentally tortured. Apprehending further atrocities, the refugees, specially the women became cautious to protect themselves from sexual abuses and promptly decided to move towards West Bengal districts. They preferred to migrate to West Bengal districts due to the geographical proximity and the identical mother tongue. The untold sufferings of those unfortunate Hindu minorities beggared description. This inflow of refugees was still in vogue even after the creation of independent Bangladesh in 1971 under the inspiring leadership of Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman.

The third chapter has focused on the rehabilitation of refugees hailing from East Pakistan in West Bengal as well as in North Bengal. West Bengal being a state adjacent to East Pakistan, its political territory shared its borders by nine districts of West Bengal including five districts in North Bengal. The migrated people flocked to different areas of North Bengal crossing the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The other wing moved towards Tripura, Assam and Manipur. Most of the refugees from Jessore moved to settle in Nadia. West Bengal districts lured the refugees as the districts were well to do and prosperous. The East Bengal refugees preferred to shift to West Bengal districts like 24 Parganas, Hooghly, Nadia, Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Howrah, Midnapore and Murshidabad for permanent settlement. The surplus refugees were sent to other states viz. Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Assam etc. The five districts of North Bengal were also crowded with the refugee influx. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda accommodated a considerable number of refugees. Apart from permanent settlement in West Bengal the Government thought positively for the all round developments of refugees both for men and women. They were provided with loans for various purposes. Traders were allotted trade loans, cultivators were granted free lands and free seeds, cattle were also supplied. For the protection of health and nourishment, the Government and the philanthropic organizations came forward with their hands of help and

cooperation. Schools of different categories, including technical schools were set up for the purpose of education.

The fourth chapter of the thesis has emphasized on the inflow of evacuees from Bangladesh to West Bengal after 1971. In 1971, following a successful war of liberation with Pakistan, East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh. Both political and economic factors were the underlying causes behind the migration in post 1971 period. The successive inflow of fresh refugees owing to the war of liberation of Bangladesh, West Bengal had to face fresh troubles in all respects. Political instability, fear of riots and terrorism in Bangladesh, inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders, absence of democratic rights prompted the Bangladeshi Hindus to shift to India. During war of liberation lacks of people from Muslim and other communities also took temporary shelter in India, more specifically in the border districts of West Bengal for months together. The religious fundamentalism, religious instigation by political leaders and above all a feeling of insecurity of the Hindus were the major crucial issues behind leaving their ancestral abode. The influx of evacuees from Bangladesh continued to rock West Bengal even few years back. The scarcity of land for settlement in West Bengal forced the West Bengal Government to take prompt decision to enable the Bangladeshi Hindu refugees for their settlement in Dandakaranya of Madhya Pradesh and other states also. Afterwards a huge number of displaced persons were provided in Marichjhapi of Sundarban. These aspects have been illustrated in this chapter thoroughly.

Within the hermeneutic of patriarchy the women are often considered as the embodiment of the honour of her own community. During the period of ethnic, religious or other violence and even in the state of communal frenzy, the fairer sex become the major target of attack. Attack on a woman's body always signifies an assault on the family and the community. Rape has always been a powerful weapon in humiliating and disenfranchising the foe. The fifth chapter has ventilated the psychological convulsion over migration and violence, hardship and trauma that the women in West Bengal as well as in North Bengal had confronted with. Centering round the partition of India the women had long been neglected and ignored in history though they were the worst victims. The chapter has portrayed a clear picture of the oppressed womenfolk, the constant oppression on them, humiliation, sexual

harassment, physical torture and also their trauma following partition. Despite their numerous problems they have had the courage to face the untoward situation with valour, intrepidity, perseverance, tenacity and lofty ambition. The women refugees in India so far as Bengal was concerned, were destined to undergo through various obstructions and social hurdles from the very early period of partition. With the frequent changes of social scenario, the outlook, the vision, the aptitude, the consciousness, the attitude and the destination of women also changed gradually. A sizable number of refugee women tried to explore and exhibit their prowess and excellence after coming over in India. The most striking feature of the period was the Bengali women developing an inclination towards political consciousness and thus a new dimension opened. The political and social thinking of women, their sentiments and observations, their mind-set and propensity towards society and politics took a concrete shape.

‘The pen is mightier than sword’. In the event of partition a problem cropped up for the massive influx of migrated individuals hailing from East Pakistan towards India particularly, in the spatial locale of West Bengal. As a revolutionary event Partition of India had spontaneously produced numerous masterpieces. The deplorable condition of refugees has been vividly depicted by thinkers, academicians, poets, dramatists and writers. Besides the valuable contributions of Bengali authors some authors of other states have contributed much on partition literature. While some creations have depicted the massacre during the refugee migration, others concentrated more on the aftermath of the partition in terms of the troubles faced by the refugees in both sides of the borders. Even now, more than seventy years after the partition, works on fiction as well as films are being made. The event of partition along with its prelude and legacy has been the subject of different scholars has remained intact till today. The fictions, short stories, poems, memoirs, dramas, films on partition have been projected in the sixth chapter.

### **Methodology:**

For the preparation of the present dissertation materials from various sources has been procured. The research work classified in to two parts- primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of archival sources, census reports, district

gazetteers, state and district level archival materials, reports from refugee rehabilitation, administrative reports and above all interview of those women who were the victims of partition and women who migrated in 1947 and after. For the collection of secondary sources various relevant books both contemporary and recent; journals and periodicals; articles, some personal records, memoirs have been consulted. For the concrete paper both primary and secondary source have been utilized. Oral sources have acted as an important source for preparing the research paper. Data has been procured from valuable experiences of the refugee women as valuable information. Along with field study, data has been gathered from reports of various girls' school, souvenirs to reach at a logical and substantiated conclusion. Oral history or the personal narrative in the form of an open-ended extended interview with persons directly and personally witness to or victims of traumatic events has been tried effectively as a research technique in several recent works on Partition. The present research paper has also utilized it. The outstanding virtue of this technique is that it presents a personal, perhaps emotive, insight into the life story of the interviewee. He/she is not treated merely as a source or object of information but as a subject who is intrinsic to the story he/she tells. Each such story is a living history to be read on its own merits. The interviewees were allowed to narrate their story at their own fashion.

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## **CHAPTER II**

### ***Historical background of Partition of India and issues of migration***

Construction and destruction; addition and subtraction; ups and downs; rise and fall; hopes and despair-all these are the regular and unavoidable events of the universe. These events though relevant in nature and in the similar way these are adequately appropriate and also properly applicable in the history of human civilization of different countries of the globe. A good number of reasons are playing key roles in this respect; it may be political reason, social reason, ethnic reason, religious fanaticism, motivated interests of some political personalities and economic reasons also. In respect of India the division of India was such an unprecedented phenomenon that was the outcome of copious reasons. Partition of India in 1947 was a cataclysmic event of history that constituted and reconstituted different communities. Despite vehement successive healthy protests and strong oppositions from various avenues of India, the goodwill mission of nationalist and patriotic leaders of India received a serious blow through the vivisection of India. Some political opportunists, orthodox communities and separatists capitalizing religion brought about significant changes. Since 1947 Indian subcontinent had witnessed the triple partition of India viz. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in quick succession. The nationalist Indians after being consolidated and united voiced their demands against the separation of Indian subcontinent. The honest efforts of the nationalist leaders were ended in smoke. They were compelled to surrender meekly to the separatist forces. Brushing aside all odds the British imperialists showed green signal in materializing the act of division of India in 1947. It could rightly be argued that Partition of India was a turning point, after 1947 the atlas of India was fractured and re-drawn.

After the decline of Rome, Europe was plunged into darkness; on the contrary the economy of Indian subcontinent was fast developing. Culturally India was also flourishing which lured the foreign invaders from Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan also from Europe. In spite of incessant invasions India did not budge an inch from its multidimensional development. Gradually with the advancement of modern science and technology some superior powers like Dutch, Portuguese, French and British further invaded India in the form of colonialism. Particularly the British imperialists

became successful by executing the policy of 'Divide and Rule' in a skillful manner. After long standing subjugation of the Indians under the British colonialism, a new wave of nationalism became vibrant. The Indians started to organize movement to emancipate themselves from the bondage of British rule. Their ceaseless and successive agitations and protests paved the way of achieving independence from the British rule. The British quit India dividing the country with the serious wounds and planted the poisonous trees of rivalry and communalism.

### **Reasons behind the division of India:**

The partition was the 'political earthquake' that rocked Bengal and the Punjab. It is more than seventy years since India was divided, but the reasons behind that vivisection are still keenly and hotly debated. Partition is "a concentrated metaphor of violence, fear, domination, difference, separation, unsatisfactory resolution of the problems, in one word past".<sup>1</sup> First of all, the division of India occurred on the basis of religion, more clearly the Partition was a logical and inevitable outcome of the irreconcilable antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims. According to some historians the major reasons of Partition of India was the unwillingness of the Hindus to accommodate with the Muslims. The conflicting religious outlook of the Hindus and Muslims was one of the prime hindrances on the way of their peaceful coexistence.<sup>2</sup> During the British regime in India the Muslims comprised of approximately 25 percent of the total population of the country. However, the racial discrimination between the Hindus and the Muslims were getting more pronounced. The Muslims, though differing in ethnic character and language were scattered across the country, especially in the erstwhile Bengal and Punjab regions where they had formed a majority of the population. The Muslims also varied in their societal and economic status ranging from solvent businessmen to urban and rural poor class. However the religious differences between the Hindus and the Muslims despite their co-existence had been marked. Such religious differences also translated into sharp social differences. The Muslims were apprehensive of the fact that they would suffer a lot if the constitution and governance of India were being controlled by India after the attainment of Independence. They also became afraid that the Hindu majority would severely interfere on them. It can't be denied that the Hindu communalism came into

effect probably from 1930 onwards.<sup>3</sup> The political set-up in late 40s was proceeding towards a deadlock very hastily. Very soon an atmosphere of mistrust began to grow among the people of both the communities.<sup>4</sup>

The pertinent question was who was responsible for partition? Whether the Congress or the Muslim League 'obstinacy or the concluding behind the scene act performed by Louis Mountbatten that led to this undoing?'<sup>5</sup> These questions remained unanswered for over seventy years of independence. According to B. R. Nanda there was a tendency to search for the main cause partition in any particular episode in the months and years preceded the event of partition. He argued that partition was a culmination of a movement of the Muslim separatism which became strong from the very foundation of M.A.O. College in 1877. Syed Ahmed Khan, the founder of the college vehemently opposed the Indian National Congress from its very infancy.<sup>6</sup> Syed Ahmed laid down the idea of separation of India. Syed Ahmed in his early life was a non communal and open minded person. In a lecture delivered in 1884 he made it clear that he wanted to serve the nation with cordiality, earnestness and sincerity. The 'nation' according to him was both the Hindus and the Muslims. To him the meaning of nation was nothing but the Hindus and the Muslims as a whole.<sup>7</sup> But for the reasons unknown a magical and mysterious change came over his attitude and philosophy of life. This radical change was undoubtedly an evil omen for future India. This attitude of isolation of Syed Ahmed paved the way of British administration to fulfill its mission of divide and rule that expedited the act of partition.

Sir Sikandar Khan, the Premier of Pakistan expressed the view that there were several schemes on the part of Pakistan. Chaudhury Rahmat Ali's scheme was P for Punjab, A for Afghanistan including Pathanistan i.e. the North West Frontier Province, K for Kashmir, S for Sindh and 'tan' for Baluchistan. In 1908 Mohammad Ali in a public speech stated that the interest of the Muslim was far different from the interest of Hindus and the Muslims would be in trouble if they accompany Hindus in their political agitation. He firmly admitted that Muslims were not supposed to become martyrs for the sake of Indian unity and they were not to be left at the mercy of Hindu majority.<sup>8</sup> With the introduction of separate electorates in 1909 the question of safeguards for Muslim community got momentum. The National Congress headed by Parsi leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Firozshah Mehta, and Gokhale hastily noticed

in themselves the end of the wedge, and realized that it would bring asunder for Hindus and Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

When Rahmat Ali proposed a separate state for Muslims, at the same time Iqbal also placed an identical proposal in 1930. According to his proposal he wanted to establish a separate state for the Muslims including Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Sindh and Kashmir within or outside the British Empire.<sup>10</sup> Iqbal presided over an annual conference of Muslim League in Allahabad in December, 1930 where in presidential address he uttered the demand for separate and independent Muslim state. He stated “The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is originally related to the social order which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the others. Therefore the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim”.<sup>11</sup> In the same speech Iqbal asserted that the Muslims were of seven cores in number and they were more homogenous in comparison to other communities of India. According to him the true definition of a ‘nation’, was applicable only for the Muslims. So their demand for separate state was lawful, reasonable and legitimate.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. S.A.Latif formulated another scheme which had elaborated in his book ‘The Muslim problem in India’. It was a scheme for the unification of India on natural lines and the outlook was entirely from Indian’s perspective. It also sought to have a federation of culturally identical states for India for the formation of a nation at least in the type of Canada where two different races could work together for a common country, while living in separate areas of their own.<sup>13</sup> In short he was in favour of establishing a minimal federation through the inclusion of homogeneous cultural zones.<sup>14</sup> In 1913 Moulana Muhammad Ali proposed a totally different scheme to hand over the Northern India to the Muslims and the remaining portions be handed over to the Hindus. Similarly Mohammad Gul Khan, a Pathan, proposed to establish a motherland for the Muslims extending up to Agra. In 1890 Abdal Halim Sharar assumed that if the Hindus and the Muslims failed to accommodate themselves to live in peace and respect, then separate states for both the communities and exchange of population was the only solution.<sup>15</sup>

Jinnah's political mission has elaborately discussed by Joshwant Singh. He threw a very pertinent question that how far Jinnah was responsible for partition. According to him Jinnah who was intimately involved with the Indians for over the first forty seven years of his life; Jinnah was acknowledged as the ambassador of the Hindu- Muslim unity; it was none but Jinnah who was acclaimed as the 'sole spokesman' by Ayesha Jalal, how a drastic transformation came over his long political career? It is still in mystery. Why he was considered to be solely responsible for the creation of a separate Muslim state known as Pakistan? In this respect the lectures of Loyed and Susan Rudolf may be cited. The lecture stressed on the fact that Jinnah was generous, patron of multi culture attitude and true advocate of secularism. Jinnah was committed towards India's unity and was described by Viceroy Lord Linlithgo as the 'Congress more than Congress'. Then a debatable question arose in the minds of general public why the partition took place which was totally unthinkable even in the early years of 1940s.<sup>16</sup> There was no shadow of doubt that bifurcation was a national disaster and the British colonialists were frequently blamed for their inability to retain peaceful atmosphere and at the same time to maintain the fervour of national integrity in the Indian subcontinent. A good number of reasons were highlighted in support of partition and it was also stated that the event of partition could have been averted. On the other hand Pakistan believed that partition was imminent and settled fact. It could in no case be averted. Pakistan had strong conviction that Muslim nationalism was active and predominant prior to partition and they made a correlation between Muslim nationalism and creation of a Muslim nation.<sup>17</sup>

For the first time, Partition as a political device along with communal implication, was applied in case of Bengal in 1905. The colonial Bengal was divided into two separate provinces, i.e. Eastern Bengal and Assam and West Bengal. Apparently it was an administrative arrangement for the convenience of the colonial Government. Bengal was indeed a big province which comprised 78 million populations and was considered to be administratively unwieldy. Due to this unmanageable size the division of Bengal Presidency was considered to be an act of necessity. So Lord Curzon mooted the idea of partition of Bengal in 1903. Despite widespread and vehement agitation from all walks of life the final form of the proposal was announced on 19 July, 1905. It was decided that a new province of the East Bengal and Assam would be carved out in which the Muslim consisted of 18 million out of

31 million total population, so it would become a province with Muslim majority. The remaining portion would be known as Province of Bengal where the total population would be 54 million. Out of the existing population 9 million would be of Muslim population. If the Hindi and Oriya speaking people were to be amalgamated then Bengali speaking people would be outnumbered in this province.<sup>18</sup>

This was obvious that the main purpose of the partition was to spoil the rising tide of nationalism among the Bengali *Bhadralok*. The real motto of partitioning Bengal was not only to weaken the hold of Bengali gentlemen but also to prop up Muslim community against Hindus. The bulk of the Muslims were landless labourers and they had grievances against Hindu landlords and money lenders. This resentment of the Muslims was capitalized by the British to implement their policy of 'Divide and Rule'. It is needless to mention that this proposal of partition of Bengal was not accepted by upper caste Hindu educated gentlemen. They staged state wide massive demonstration against Curzon's evil design of division of Bengal. This anti-partition movement paved the way for the outbreak of Swadeshi movement. A good number of intellectuals participated in anti-partition movement. Ultimately the decision of partition was annulled in 1911. Actually things were not going in a right direction on the part of Muslim League. The euphoria of Muslim League centering round the introduction of separate electorate soon radically diminished and with the annulment of partition of Bengal the pro British passion of Muslims reduced to a considerable extent.<sup>19</sup>

The peasantry in East Bengal mainly comprised the Muslims where as the landlords were predominantly Hindus. According to the historian Badruddin Umar partition of Bengal "became possible because of the presence of certain non-antagonistic contradictions by the British rulers".<sup>20</sup> Renowned historian Sugata Bose had expressed a well researched view on this argument. He mentioned that the Muslim majority districts comprised of peasantry. This peasantry had a 'symbolic relationship' with the Hindu landlords, moneylenders and with the traders who supplied the basic needs of credit in a highly monetized agrarian economy. The prolonged depression of 1930 had destroyed all those rural credit, lending etc, and shifted the balance of class power in favour of the peasants.<sup>21</sup> The conflict of agrarian class that broke out in eastern Bengal from 1930 onwards was used by the self serving

politicians for their own ends, “Operating in higher level political arenas communal constituencies, the gift of government’s successive constitutional reforms, these politicians unflinchingly used religion to mask an essentially economic conflict”.<sup>22</sup>

Previously both the religious communities were relatively less organized and less connected with the institutional politics. Later on owing to a strong class character those communal conflicts showed two kinds of convergences viz. the class and communal identities tended to converge and the communalism of elite tended to converge. This created a polarization of the entire population in two communal blocs. Each bloc was led by the respective elites succeeded in mobilizing the mass.<sup>23</sup>. Joya Chatterjee had made an argument about the Hindu population. Chatterjee commented that “communalism in Bengal was essentially a Muslim phenomenon” and that “a parallel Hindu communalism did not emerge, or that if it did, it was too limited and peripheral to have contributed in any significant way to the conflicts that led to Pakistan.”<sup>24</sup>

The polarization of Hindus and Muslims occurred during just a couple of decades of twentieth century. By the middle of the century the both sides realized that it was hardly possible for adherence of two religions to coexist peacefully. The Hindus and the Muslims turned on each other during the chaos unleashed by the Second World War. In 1942 the Japanese seized Singapore and Rangoon and trekked rapidly through Burma towards India. The Congress Party of India lodged a campaign for the Quit India movement. Prominent leaders including Gandhi and Nehru were arrested. While they were thrown into prison, Jinnah, who was loyal to the British, accumulated opinions behind him as the best protector and saviour of Muslims against the Hindu dominance. Meanwhile the war was terminated and the Congress party leaders were released from their imprisonment. Although Nehru and Jinnah knew each other for three decades, the disagreement between them became intensely personal. Nehru thought that League represented “an obvious example of the utter lack of the civilized mind”,<sup>25</sup> and Gandhi calling him a ‘maniac’ and ‘an evil genius’. Violence broke out in open streets between the Hindus and Muslims following which the people moved away from, or were forced out of mixed neighbourhood and took refuge in increasingly polarized ghettos. Tensions were often heightened by local and regional political leaders. H.S. Suhrawardy, the ruthless Muslim League nominated chief Minister of Bengal, made confrontational speeches in Calcutta provoking riots against

the Hindu populace writing in the newspaper that “bloodshed and disorder are not necessarily evil in themselves if resorted to for a noble cause”.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile a congenial political atmosphere was created between the Congress and Muslim League. So they could act through joint front. The Act of 1909 created a void of disappointments among the moderate leaders. At the same time the demises of Congress stalwarts like G.K.Gokhale, Firozshah Mehta etc. created a vacuum. Only the ray of hope was Tilak. In the meantime the Bombay Congress of 1915 under the president ship of S.P.Sinha passed a resolution demanding the measures of constitutional reforms in order to give people effective control over the governance. The Bombay Congress authorized All India Congress Committee and Muslim League to develop a scheme on constitutional reforms. The draft prepared by the joint committee of Congress and Muslim League was approved in 1916 in the Lucknow Congress. As Lucknow Pact was inked in 1916 and the Congress leaders believed that it was final settlement of political differences between Hindu and Muslim. Tilak and Annie Besant had a key role in bringing Congress and Muslim League in an agreement with an aim to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity. It is worth noting that the Pact was motivated with a view to wipe out the fear of minority from the yoke of majority dominance.<sup>27</sup>

Under the backdrop the issue of Khilafat came to the fore front. In 1919 Gandhi became the elected president of Khilafat conference. Gandhi started his non cooperation programme on August 1, 1920. The moderates and the extremists made a ready response to the call of Gandhiji who perceived the idea for attaining the long cherished dream of Swaraj within the empire. The Hindu-Muslim unity apparently acquired by Gandhi in 1920-21 proved to be unrealistic in nature without changing the mind set and attitude of the two communities.<sup>28</sup> When the impact of non cooperation movement was in a declining stage, the age long conflict between the two communities re-emerged. Now the Muslims turned their attention to their previous goal of attaining individual or communal facilities through the act of cooperation with the Government. In this respect Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his presidential address in the annual session of the Congress held in Canada in December 1923, expressed the opinion that the comparative advantages of cooperating with the Hindus and the British Government for achieving Pan-Islamic objectives.<sup>29</sup> There was no possibility

of retrieving the spirit of cooperation between two antagonist communities despite earnest appeal of Jinnah.

Pakistan's political history began with the birth of the All India Muslim League in 1906 to protect Muslim interest, in the midst of neglect and to oppose National Congress. In 1930 Sir Muhammad Iqbal called for an autonomous new state in north-western India for Indian Muslims. Later on Muhammad Ali Jinnah of Muslim League advocated the Two Nation Theory of Sir Sayed Ahmed and as a consequence the League adopted the Lahore resolution of 1940. The Resolution actually demanded the formation of an independent state in the East and West of British India. The tireless efforts of Jinnah eventually made him triumphant. Jinnah in his inaugural speech of the Muslim League council in Bombay on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1946, made it clear that the demand of Pakistan was the only way out open to the Muslim League. The Muslim League Council after discussing the matter for three days summarily rejected the proposal of Cabinet Mission and passed a resolution. For achieving 'Pakistan' the council decided to resort direct action.<sup>30</sup>

From 1923 onwards communal riot broke out which vitiated the political scenario of India. Apart from a sense of distrust and suspicion, various factors were equally responsible in keeping the two communities as two separate entities in spite of staying together in India for more than seven centuries.<sup>31</sup> There were series of communal riots in different parts of India from 1923. There were instances of communal riots in Peswar in 1910, Ayodhya and Faizabad in 1912, Agra in 1913 and Behar in 1917. The Simon Commission report estimated about 112 major communal riots between 1922 and 1927.<sup>32</sup> The brutal frenzy of killing each other among the Hindus and Muslims continued in various corners of the state reached to its climax through Partition.

In the annual session of Muslim League at Lahore in March 1940 Jinnah addressed that Islam and Hinduism were different and distinct social orders. They could never evolve a common nationality and democracy which was unsuited to India.<sup>33</sup> The Muslims "must have their homeland; their territory and their State".<sup>34</sup> As a matter of fact the seeds of separatism were sowed and British reaped the harvest through 'Divide and Rule'. The Hindu dominated Indian National Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru was in favour of United India. This was, of course, a very probable political

claim on the part of Nehru. Following the impending emancipation of the country it was crystal clear that the Government to be formed would have an overwhelming majority of the Hindus. As the Muslims were scattered all over the country, the British Government was in a tough situation in deciding that how sovereignty could be granted to the Muslims, keeping in mind the demands of Muslim League and Jinnah. Punjab proved to be a difficult proposition where Muslims were a prominent majority and Hindus a minority.

The British Government tried its best to make an amicable and mutually acceptable proposal between I.N.C and the Muslim League after a long deliberation. The British had arrived at the blue print of the allocation of power between the Hindus and the Muslims. It was a complicated political arrangement under which Minority Muslims in different states of India would be granted sovereignty and autonomic functions. Jinnah readily accepted and agreed with the proposal where as the Sikhs of Punjab refused to agree with the proposal because the Sikhs expressed their reluctance to be under the Muslim sovereignty. Initially the I.N.C agreed with the proposal but after much rethinking Nehru thought the agreement as politically unsound. Such an attitude of Nehru left on Muslim League and Jinnah a sense of distrust. India by this time sitting on a bed of gunpowder of communal violence, witnessed the conflict reached to an alarming extent. The disturbance reached to a flashpoint on August 16, 1946. The Muslims identified and marked the aforesaid day as 'Direct Action Day'. The activities of the 'Direct Action Day' announced as apolitical demonstration degenerated quickly into a communal riot. At the initial stage those disturbances were in form of sporadic looting and murder. After that arson began and spread gradually, the role of the Pakistan Ambulance Corps in Calcutta during this period of turmoil was really highly communal in character. A report published by the Government of Bengal described that the riot assumed the character of a civil war'.<sup>35</sup>

Ayesha Jalal in her famous book 'The Sole Spokesman' highlighted the fact that the horror dipped in inhumanity performed on the black letter day i.e. Direct Action Day. Jalal presented Jinnah as blameless leader who hardly had an idea of communal frenzy and mishap. Her own version was "16<sup>th</sup> August was the day the League had nominated for 'direct action'. Forty eight hours before, Jinnah had urged Muslim to remain calm; 'direct action' day should be a day of peaceful reflection, not a day 'for

the purpose of resorting to direct action in any form or shape<sup>36</sup> Jalal remained mute regarding the role of Suhrawardy in this regards. There was no doubt that Suhrawardy was directly involved with the entire period of massacre Actually Jinnah had called the 'Direct Action Day' as a mark of protest against the British because of their denial to recognize Pakistan. According to Nitish Segupta when riot broke out in Calcutta the British were rather in a safe position.<sup>37</sup>

Joya Chatterjee in one of her noted works *Bengal divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932- 1947* presented a deeper insight on the dreadful climax that Bengal had reached during the period of turmoil. In the book the role of Hindu communal forces as well as the preparedness of the Hindu community for strong vengeance was emphatically emphasized. She argued that Hindus of Calcutta considered Direct Action not as a well planned strategy or not as a distant negotiations at all India level to do with interim governments and constituent assemblies, but as a threat close to them which they were ready to confront till death. "This was the context in which the Great Calcutta Killing took place. The rioting, in which at least 5000 died, was not a spontaneous and inexplicable outburst of aggression by faceless mobs. Both sides in the confrontation came well-prepared for it. Direct Action Day in Calcutta was not a flash in the pan but a product of developments which had long been coming to a head. In part it was the outcome of the growing arrogance of the leadership and rank and file of the Muslim League, heady with their success in the recent elections and confident of their ability to get for Bengal some form or other of Pakistan; and in part it flowed from the determination of the Hindus to resist what they regarded as 'Muslim tyranny'".<sup>38</sup>

The Quit India movement sponsored by Gandhiji in the year 1942, the rebellions of the Indian National Army, the rebellion of the Navy, the spiraling unrest in India and above all the cost of the war were the vital reasons behind the prompt execution of the partition of India. When the World War II came to an end, the premier of Britain Mr. Attlee of Labour party decided to get out of India as soon as possible. Taking the advantage of the decision made by the Labour party Premier Mr. Attlee, Jinnah and the Muslim League did not hesitate to voice their demand for separate Independent state for the Muslims. Following the changed circumstances the Congress High command took active initiative to hold negotiations with Jinnah of Muslim League

and the British Government in London as well as in Delhi.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately Hindu spoke persons from Bengal were not allowed to take part in the Negotiation table. In the month of May, 1946 the Cabinet Mission proposed to give more power to Muslim provinces. In apprehension *Bhadralok* community arrived to a unanimous decision to divide Bengal for securing a Hindu majority state. The bifurcated territory for the Hindus would be treated as West Bengal state within Indian Territory. It was the grim irony of history that once Bengal was the province which boldly foiled Lord Curzon's plan to divide Bengal, but in 1947 the complexion of the situation changed altogether, In 1947 Bengal moved forward to translate into action another plan of vivisection. But the main reasons of the two partitions were totally different, where the first was due to political reasons but in 1947 the partition was due to communal divergences.<sup>40</sup> Virtually after the atrocious and shocking riots in Calcutta in the month of August 1946 and in retaliation a colossal and hideous riot broke out at Noakhali. Thence forth campaign for the partition of Bengal got a momentum.<sup>41</sup>

Supporting the demand for separate entity for the Bengali Hindus various organizations and people from different corners of the state extended their hands of cooperation for the fulfillment of the desired dreams of the Hindu Bengalis. The noted political personality Sarat Chandra Bose, a renowned political personality of the time, launched a strong protest against the partition of Bengal and he made an earnest appeal to different political party leaders to stop the process of partition of Bengal. But they turned deaf ears to his appeal and proposal and it failed miserably. At a press conference, reported on 1 October 1947 that Bose described the idea of transfer of population as 'suicidal', ill advised and wholly unprincipled'. He also pronounced that it was no remedy for the 'blunder of partition'.<sup>42</sup> The Congress accepted it with some unwillingness. Finding no other alternatives on March 8, 1947 the Congress Working Committee declared that if India was to be divided the Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and the Punjab would have to be partitioned. Both Mountbatten and Attlee on behalf of Royal British Administration clearly asserted that there was no way out except the vivisection of India.<sup>43</sup> But this division of India opened a social, historical and geographic wound that has yet to fully heal.

It was said that Mountbatten initially was not agreeable to shoulder this responsibility. But ultimately he had to take over the charge with a prior condition that within the specific period the heavy task of transfer of power would have to be performed.

Mountbatten acted accordingly. He set foot on India on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1947 and decided to declare the partition on 15<sup>th</sup> August of the same year. The interim period of few months were not at all a pleasant one. He realized that India was practically covered with darkness and if he could not initiate immediate steps then civil war could have been broken out. In this connection Mountbatten was not practically instructed that after execution of the partition the transfer of power could not be performed. In the month of May Mountbatten announced that he was against all sorts of divisions. He also stressed that he did not want to apply force. He also said that Indians were entitled to take exact decision of their own.<sup>44</sup> According to his statement it was nothing but an act of insane. As a result the economy of the country would be hampered. He also asserted that he was ready to divide India on the plea of communal fury.<sup>45</sup> Mountbatten executed perfectly the important task braving all adverse criticism. At last, the much awaited independence of both the countries was achieved but it created a permanent wound bifurcating the country into two nations.

So the birth of Pakistan became inevitable and Pakistan appeared as a separate country in the world atlas. Radcliffe line became the official border between Pakistan and India on August 17, 1947. Pakistan borders India in the east, Afghanistan and Iran in the West and China is on the north. In the long run the creation of Pakistan came into reality and awarded separate country on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. At last the fateful moment appeared in 1947. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June of the same year Attlee declared that the British would quit India in ten week's time. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, transfer of power would be executed from the British Indian Empire to two successor states viz. India and Pakistan. Lord Mountbatten decided the day to bring down the curtain finally. But it was not so easy task to transfer the power to both India and Pakistan on the same day. So it was decided that Pakistan would be given freedom on 14 August where as India was given freedom on the midnight of 14 August. The provinces where majority of India's Muslims lived were in Bengal and the Punjab, so those two provinces would also be partitioned. Adjoining districts of Bengal and the Punjab with Muslim majorities would be handed over to Pakistan. The provinces with their non Muslim majorities would retain in India.<sup>46</sup> The ugly memories of dreadful event of partition were imprinted in the minds of the millions. The partition has sowed the seeds of enmity, bitterness, mistrust and suspicion between the two neighbouring countries.

Though seventy years have already been elapsed, the complexion of the situation remained static and unaltered.<sup>47</sup>

The Muslims for the first time made their presence visible in India as invaders. Due to passage of time they started to live together with the Hindus which were a sort of adjustment. The pity of whole thing was that those Muslims adopted hostile attitude and animosity against the Hindus and was eager to set up a separate state for themselves. India accommodated with the Muslims of Middle East and they were intermingled with Indians. Eventually they became part and parcels of India. It was a matter of bewilderment that in spite of India's philanthropic attitude towards the Muslims they remained as invaders and nothing else. If true unity persisted during the period it was not possible for Jinnah to utter that 'Muslims are separate nation'. Mr. Jinnah has had the political ability to stop the partition of India. There was a long history behind it and Jinnah was the supreme head of speculation. The non-communal movement as sponsored by Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Abul kalam Azad, Badshah Khan and Subhas Chandra Bose under the leadership and guidance of Gandhiji. If Jinnah along with his political leaders shook their hands with Gandhi and others, the curse of partition of Indian subcontinent could have been averted.<sup>48</sup> But alas! It could not. Jinnah could not overcome the prevailing circumstances. More so, he made it more complicated. Gandhi was compelled to surrender meekly to the situation.

### **Boundary Commission:**

Through the initiation of British Administration and under the leadership of Sir Cyril Radcliffe a committee was instituted to chalk out the process and criteria in the herculean task relating to the division of Indian Territory. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a London barrister was given only five weeks to draw the new border. There was no instance and no outline relating to division planning. He alone was responsible for the entire scheme resulting armed conflict which still persists today. He had never been to India before and never returned after completion of the task of demarcating boundaries. He confessed his guilt through his utterance "I suspect they'd shoot me out of hands, both sides". He candidly admitted his inability to one of his interviewer.<sup>49</sup> It was also known to Mountbatten that the Radcliff Award would not

satisfy any of the parties. The whole Himalayan task took even less than five weeks to complete. Bengal got Radcliff award on 9<sup>th</sup> August where as Punjab got it on 11<sup>th</sup>. Radcliff returned back to his country on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 and it was published after six days i.e. on 17 August. The Viceroy even did not go through the whole document. Actually the Boundary Commission was ready by 12 August but Mountbatten decided to make it public after the Independence of India.<sup>50</sup>

The leading English journal of Calcutta ‘The Hindustan Standard’, explicitly noted in an editorial column that the setting up of the Boundary Commission had been ‘meaningless formality’ and ‘it would be misleading to describe it as the impartial decision of the tribunal; for the entire schemes Sir Radcliffe alone is responsible’(Hindustan Standard,1947, The Award’, 20, August,<sup>51</sup>. Radcliffe became, almost overnight, the poster boy of the hypocrisy of the British Authorities. Different News journals expressed their views in different ways. The Amrita Bazar Patrika commented it ‘A departing kick of British imperialism’. The Hindustan Standard opined it ‘Self contradictory’ and The Dawn considered it to be ‘Territorial murder’<sup>52</sup> N.C. Chatterjee an outstanding member of the Hindu Mahasabha lodged a strong protest describing it ‘an outrage on the principle of self determination and all canons of political morality’ and maintaining that it had ignored the cultural and economic needs of the people of Bengal.<sup>53</sup> A speech by N.C. Chatterjee, at University Institute Hall). It will not be out of place to mention in this context that the Royal Government of England empowered such a person like Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a retired civilian who had practically no knowledge or little knowledge about the boundary of Indian subcontinent.

The boundary Commissions of Bengal and the Punjab consisted of panels of four judges under the chairmanship of Radcliffe. All those judges were politically appointed and nominated by the Congress and the Muslim League. The ‘Official’ Bengal Congress chose judges upon whom they could rely to serve on the Bengal Boundary Commission.<sup>54</sup> Cyril Radcliff quickly chalked the boundary line of 2,736 kilometres. This drawing of boundary line ‘redrew the personal geographies of lakhs of East Bengalis’.<sup>55</sup> In accordance with the Boundary Commission’s terms of reference it was clearly stated that the western districts of Bengal would be merged with Indian Union. Khulna, a non-Muslim majority district was proposed to be transferred to western Bengal. The local Muslim League of Malda district where

majority thanas were densely Muslim populated had dared to hoist the Pakistan's flag. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, after a couple of days the Malda district was handed over to Indian Territory. In a similar fashion Hindu community of Khulna unfurled Indian flag in retaliation. Two days later, after the announcement of independence, the Boundary Commission announced its pending decision on August 17, 1947. Apprehending and sensing impending civil war the British Administration handed over the constitutional control to India. To accommodate 35.14 percent of population in almost 36.36 percent of land of West Bengal was earmarked. On the contrary East Bengal was allotted 63.6 percent of land to accommodate 64.85 percent population. Both the states possessed equal number of majority and minority population. The approximate ratio ascertained or measured was 70:30.<sup>56</sup>

The Boundary Commission had segregated five districts of Bengal VIZ. Jessore, Dinajpur, Nadia, Malda and Jalpaiguri. The district of Murshidabad played a key role in this connection for the survival of the Hooghly river system and it was assigned to West Bengal. On the other hand Khulna which was initially allotted to West Bengal was finally granted to East Bengal.<sup>57</sup> The Commission selected non-contiguous portions of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri to be annexed with West Bengal. The Commission awarded the non-Muslim territory of Chittagong Hill areas to East Bengal where as Calcutta remained as an integral part of West Bengal as expected. The two princely states of India, Coochbehar and Tripura were also under India's authority. Surrounding sixteen districts of East Bengal were brought under the Independent, Sovereign administration of India. East Bengal was rendered to be the longest international boundary of India. After the attainment of independence India had got 130 enclaves. On the other hand East Pakistan and Pakistan got 95 enclaves within Indian Territory.<sup>58</sup> The inhabitants of those enclaves were regarded as 'State less people'. It can be mentioned in this respect that the long standing struggle and strife of the enclave dwellers for their peaceful settlement, identity, security and above all the citizenship became fruitful after a long meaningful discussions and conferences among the Government of India under the guidance of Prime Minister of India Norendra Modi, Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, the premier of Bangladesh and the active cooperation of Miss Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The most notable and historic event was that the enclave dwellers of Indian Territory after acquiring Indian citizenship exercised their franchise on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2016.

### **Migration problem in Pakistan and West Bengal:**

After three hundred years of foreign subjugation the British in India finally determined to quit India through declaration of Independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. After the bifurcation of Indian sub-continent into two Independent nation states: Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan emerged. Thence forth the movement of refugees became frequent in both sides of the border. The partition of Indian sub-continent in 1947 has been the single most important factor in determining the destiny both India and Pakistan. The influx of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan was a major crisis in Indian history. The trickle commenced in the year 1946 and became deluged after the partition of the country. The average arrival of refugees in West Bengal after 1950 was 4000 every day.<sup>59</sup> The number presumed to be a catastrophic proportion in April, as the figure showed that refugees trekked to West Bengal on 1<sup>st</sup> April 4000; 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2350, 4<sup>th</sup> April 3600, 5<sup>TH</sup> April 4480, 7<sup>th</sup> April - 4500 and so on.<sup>60</sup>

Marked by the twin features of massacre and migration, Partition did not mean the same thing for Punjab and Bengal. The vivisection of Punjab was a onetime event that was marked by a two way exodus. Whereas Partition of Bengal was a continuing process, the migration happened there pre-dominantly in one direction i.e. from East to West Bengal. In other words there was more or less equal exchange of population on the western border in 1947 which was not applicable in case of West Bengal. Secondly, compared to the nature of border and boundary in the West where political, strategic and military consideration converted the entire Punjab region into two rigid divisions. The dividing line in the East remained permeable and flexible and it also facilitated the refugee movement. The third and the most important difference regarding the nature of partition of both Punjab and Bengal was the attitude of the centre towards the problem on both the borders at the time of its happening.

After the formation of Pakistan the most crucial problem emerged in the socio political canvass of Pakistan as well as India was the migratory problem. Immediately after partition of India the history of one of the greatest migrations started, millions of Muslims marched to West and East Pakistan while millions of Hindus and Sikhs headed towards opposite direction. Across the Indian subcontinent, different communities coexisted for almost a millennium but it was a matter of great

bewilderment that they attacked each other through terrifying outbreak of sectarian violence, with Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other, an unexpected and unprecedented gruesome act of genocide broke out in Punjab and Bengal provinces which were neighboring to India's borders with West and East Pakistan respectively. The carnage was intensified with massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions and savage sexual violence. Ayesha Jalal, a renowned historian has called the Partition "The central historical event in twentieth century South Asia". She also writes "A defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, Partition continues to influence how the people and states of post-colonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future".<sup>61</sup>

There was no large scale uprooting of people from their homelands and no exchange of population in the Eastern borders. Those who came did so out of political convictions and also in anticipation of what they felt would be a second class treatment in Pakistan. Thus, the specter of violence which dominated administrative and scholarly imagination in the West would become a factor in the East only in 1950 and once again much later in 1964. It was this difference in experience of violence which led to a difference in state policy towards the refugees from East Pakistan. Likewise, in the scholarly works as well, it was this difference which had led to the pre-dominance of a Punjab-centred analysis of Partition and its aftermath.

After the partition of India the Muslim majority from East Punjab of India marched towards West Punjab of Pakistan. It is worth to be mentioned that on the eve of the partition of India, Punjab was divided into two parts, East Punjab, where the population mainly consisted of Hindus and Sikhs, and the West Punjab was mainly Muslim populated. During the Partition, the civil and military official of the Punjab were given the opportunity or option to choose between the two states. Naturally most of the Hindu and Sikh officers shifted their alliance with East Punjab; on the contrary the Muslim officials expressed their views to stay in West Punjab. As a result Hindu and Sikh officers were empowered in charge of the administration of East Punjab and Muslim officers were appointed in charge of West Punjab. Kamala Patel, a noted Social activist and the follower of Gandhi observed that those who were deployed in charge of maintaining law and order in West Pakistan were in favour of creating Pakistan. They indirectly or intentionally encouraged the rowdy element in their state.

Whereas Hindus and Sikhs who had vehemently opposed the formation of Pakistan. Following which a massive massacre broke out, brutal display of organized violence, atrocities, loot of property became rampant and the Police officer turned a blind eye.<sup>62</sup>

The terms 'refugee' and 'displaced' are often treated as identical, create much perplexity. In post Second World War period, the term 'displaced persons' was used to categorize those people who had been deported from their abode due to war, more specifically those nationals who were removed from their homes as forced labour. But the term refugee is defined as a person who flees from his native country, will not return back to his native place, at least not to that circumstances which compels him to run away.<sup>63</sup> There was a mass exodus just after the partition in the eastern region of India and the Government of India termed the shelter seeker as 'displaced' as a displaced person is one who had entered India and who he left or rather compelled to leave his ancestral home in East Pakistan on or after October 15, 1947 due to disorder or fear of turmoil or may be for setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan".<sup>64</sup> The Hindus, who escaped from East Pakistan due to communal frenzy before 15 October, 1947, were excluded from the aforesaid definition. Though the passport system was not introduced so far- it was considered as exclusively a special case since the refugees had citizenship right of both the states. For that reason the Indian Government might have considered the term 'displaced' more appropriate than 'refugee'. The access of the migrants to avail rehabilitation assistance depended totally on their recognition as 'refugee'. When fear of persecution and impending violence were considered as the justified reasons for mass exodus, the official definition was also imprecise regarding the preconditions of fear which the state would recognise for providing necessary shelter in India.<sup>65</sup> It was reported in the Amrita Bazar Patrika that "The public are well aware that there is great panic among the Hindus of North and East Bengal and there is general exodus to West Bengal because they fear that what has happened in Punjab may also happen in East and North Bengal. It is difficult to blame persons who are leaving their hearths and homes because they are afraid that neither their lives and properties nor what is more precious the honour of their women are safe under the Government of East Bengal".<sup>66</sup>

The High Commissioner of United Nations for Refugees opined that "A Refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race,

religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality." As India was not a signatory in United Nations Convention for Refugees in 1951, the refugees in India did not come under this category. In India the refugees were treated under the Indian Passport Act of 1967 And the Foreigners Act of 1946 because of the absence of any domestic law. For many south Asian countries, India was a host nation. People from Tibet, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka used come to India as refugees in quest of a safety and security.<sup>67</sup>

The government of India paid heed to some specific cases in Pakistan and had a deaf ear to the allegations of 'everyday' regarding insecurity. Government declared quickly that it was totally unaware of the fact that the Hindus of East Bengal had problem and also ignorant of any 'incident' that was justified for population displacement.<sup>68</sup> Afterwards those displaced people were identified as 'migrants', which was further divided into 'old migrant' and 'new migrants'.<sup>69</sup> The term 'Incident' was used to mean an incontrovertible and life threatening violence. State as a matter of fact wanted to make a distinction between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migrants.<sup>70</sup> The poverty, struggle and insecurity imprinted on the life of those people to such an extent that the term 'refugee' became a disparaging word to judge the social status of the people. The Government also started using the word 'displaced people' instead of using the derogatory word 'refugee' from 1950s. But the use of the word 'refugee' continued and the term became more derogatory as they created pressure on the urban life and destroyed the peaceful ambience.<sup>71</sup> Many uprooted persons marched towards West Bengal from 1958-1964 were excluded from the definition of migrants. A good number of people came over to India from East Pakistan with migration certificates, were treated as refugees. Sometimes they were given shelter in camps as they were in urgent need of relief and rehabilitation.<sup>72</sup>

The refugee crisis in Punjab was considered to be a national emergency, to be tackled almost in utmost promptitude because the communal violence turned into genocide in the West. The Government considered it to be its moral and sacred responsibility to arrange prompt rehabilitation measures for the migrants. This sense of urgency was totally lacking on the Eastern border as the magnitude of the violence was not the

same as in the West. The Hindu minorities in the East Bengal were not considered to be in grave danger, on the other hand the movement of refugees to westwards was regarded mostly as the product of imaginary fears and unjustified rumours. It was the firm conviction of Nehru that exodus in the East could be stopped if the Government in Dacca could be persuaded to deploy “psychological measures” to restore confidence among the Hindu minorities.<sup>73</sup> This difference in attitude and perception of central Government regarding the nature of crisis facing the two borders translated itself strikingly into the expenditure on refugees in the West and the East.<sup>74</sup> A difference in the way of dealing with its refugees would have permanent and awful for the state of West Bengal.

In India the Central Government had extended its maximum cooperation for the relief, settlement and over all rehabilitation of nearly six million refugees hailing from Pakistan, who had deserted their properties and near and dear ones. The crucial predicament to rehabilitate the refugees from West Pakistan had been fully and almost successfully managed by 1951. But the difficult task of rehabilitation and resettlement of the refugees from East Bengal was a far more complicated one. The fleeing of the Hindu refugees from East Pakistan unremittingly persisted for decades together and continued even after 1971. On the contrary a sizable number of Hindus in East Pakistan was rather forced to remain there in the initial years after partition. The structured and systematised violence against the Hindus that broke out in East Pakistan resulted relentless flow of evacuees. In case of East Punjab, the migrants hailing from West Punjab of Pakistan occupied a vast lands, properties and assets left by the Muslim emigrants from East Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. From the point of linguistic resemblance it was convenient for West Punjab and Sindhi refugees to settle in western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi.

In West Bengal the picture was quiet reverse. The resettlement of the refugees from East Bengal could take place only in Bengal and to some extent in some parts Assam and Tripura. As a result, a very large number of people who were engaged in agricultural occupations before their displacement from homeland were compelled to seek shelter in semi urban and urban context as the underclass. West Bengal however became the destination of uprooted persons from East Pakistan due to geographical proximity, cultural similarity and above all linguistic resemblance. In the first phase of the exodus during 1946 -1952, the number of refugees came over West Bengal was

2.52 million. The number of evacuees reached to its highest point in West Bengal in 1957 was 3,16,000.<sup>75</sup> Initially, the Government of India attempted to discourage the migration of refugees from East Bengal to India. It became evident from the instruction given by Mohanlal Saksena, the then Rehabilitation Minister of the Government of India to the representatives of Tripura, Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. In a meeting, held in the Writers' Buildings on March 2, 1950, it was clearly stated that the Government's work would be limited within the relief measures rather than rehabilitational tasks. Virtually Saksena was interested in establishing the relief camps in the border areas in order to ease the way of the refugees for quick returning to their home. But in the East the problem of refugee failed to make any significant headway even in the threshold of 1950s. As an immediate effect of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact (1950), a large number of Muslims who had left West Bengal before March 31, 1951, returned back to West Bengal. They reclaimed their deserted lands and property which were already captured by the Bengali Hindu refugees from East Pakistan. It is worth to be mentioned in this respect that the Muslim evacuees returned to West Bengal from East Pakistan, but on the contrary, there was scarcely any reverse population flow of the Hindus from West Bengal to East Pakistan. The refugees who left for West Punjab were much more in number than those who came to East Punjab. Of the 49 lakhs of refugees who migrated from West Pakistan, only 24 lakhs settled themselves in East Punjab while 40 lakhs left for Pakistan. But in West Bengal 30.9 lakhs came in the eastern zone by 1956 and 2,58,117 Muslim evacuee who had migrated to East Pakistan came back by 1952.<sup>76</sup>

The partition of India caused a massive migration from East Pakistan to West Bengal. The new state of West Bengal comprised 21 million population and approximately 25% or 5.3 million were from Muslim population. "A mere stroke of the cartographer's pen reduced the Muslims in West Bengal from being part of a ruling majority into being a much reduced and vulnerable minority". On the other hand among the 39 million in East Bengal the Hindus consisted of 11 million. Overnight those Hindus converted into subjects of the independent state of Pakistan. Both the Hindus in East Pakistan and the Muslims in West Bengal could contemplate a future as minorities with any equanimity. They had to face a harsh and unpleasant choice whether remaining on unprotected or differentiated against by their new

administrators or to move towards a new destination as refugee leaving everything. In East Bengal Hindus were not a homogeneous community and their population was unevenly distributed. The bulk of the Hindu population used to live in the southern part of East Bengal which ‘historically had been the strongholds of Hindu chief stains, broad tracts of territory which included Khulna and Jessore, North Borishal, South Faridpur and Dacca’.<sup>79</sup>

A sizable number of Hindus lived in the northern part of East Bengal i.e. the districts of Rongpur, and Dinajpur. A good number of Hindus belonged to Rajbanshi community who were mainly agriculturist by profession. In the northern towns the presence *babu* community was noticed everywhere.<sup>80</sup> Where as, the other parts of East Bengal were inhabited by nomadic tribal people like Santals in Dinajpur and Rongpur, Chakmas in Chittogong hill tracts, Tippera and Mymensingh. During the period of 1941 census the aforesaid tribal people were enlisted as Hindus. For the huge migration of Hindu population from eastern Pakistan threw a question of dilemma among the Hindus. There were also some relevant reasons behind their leaving the country and the fear of persecution was one of the vital issues in support of their questions of staying or leaving. It is worthy to note here that the Hindus who were compelled to move towards Indian Territory even after the creation of Bangladesh, could not forget the fear of persecution.

From the initial stage of migration of refugees from East Pakistan, the national leadership was hesitant regarding its responsibilities toward the Bengali Hindu refugees. Nehru’s letter to Bidhan Chandra Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal reflected that kind of ambivalence. To quote him: “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>81</sup> It made one thing obvious that the Indian Government’s policy toward rehabilitation of the Bengali Hindu refugees was not only inadequate, but also discriminatory in nature.<sup>82</sup> Prafulla K. Chakrabarty, the author of *The Marginal Men*, and a major chronicler of the partition refugees in the East, identified two basic reasons behind the biased attitude of the Indian Government. Firstly, as the regions

where refugees from the West Pakistan migrated were more contiguous to Delhi, the capital of India; any difficulty on their part could destabilize the Government, whereas the geographical remoteness from Delhi however placed the refugees in the East in a vulnerable condition, Secondly, as most of the Punjabis belonged to Indian army and other armed forces there were every possibility of a military mutiny, if their near and dear ones were neglected.<sup>83</sup>

The Planning Commission's report on the Rehabilitation of the refugees revealed that within the First Five Year Plan the hard task of rehabilitating the displaced persons of West Pakistan was completed. If we make a comparative analysis of distribution of funds and other facilities extended towards both East Pakistan and West Pakistan refugees we find a sharp disparity and step motherly attitude of the Central Government of India. The West Pakistan refugees derived extra facilities and monetary advantages where as East Bengal refugees were deprived of enjoying facilities as enjoyed by West Pakistan refugees. In the Second Five Year Plan a handsome amount was allotted for the purpose of further rehabilitation of the refugees. There were ample scopes for getting funds easily for the completion of approved housing schemes, and for mitigating the problem of unemployment of the displaced persons through setting of new industries. A report available from the Planning Commission at the end of the First Five year plan stated that the incessant flow of evacuees from East Pakistan to West Bengal created a chronic problem. Though the Second Five Year Plan provided Rs.668 million for the rehabilitation of the displaced persons in the eastern states, but in the third year of the Second Five Year Plan the Government of India decided to review the financial provision. In this respect the Government also assured to provide more funds if required.<sup>84</sup> It was hardly possible to tackle and solve the entire refugee situation in West Bengal with limited and inadequate funds allotted for the purpose.

By and large, the gravity of the refugee problem got immediate recognition in the Western India. Immediately after the Partition of India the central Government took the entire responsibility for rehabilitating the refugees hailing from West Pakistan. Initially refugees from West Pakistan were granted the scheme for the construction of their dwelling houses in an around Delhi. In order to rehabilitate permanently the displaced persons new townships were planned in Faridabad, Gandhi Dham, Rajpura,

Nilokheri, Tripuri, Sardarnagar, Ullasnagar, Govindapuri, Hostinapur and Chandigarh. Work centres and industries were also set up in those areas with the government aid. Basic amenities, like schools and health care facilities were also provided for them. In C.R.Park a huge number of plots were allocated among the refugee applicants in a minimum price.

East did not witness any such development. The attitude of the Central Government in respect of refugees from East Bengal was quite reverse in respect of West Pakistan refugees. It was observed that in 1952 the East Bengal refugees with the monetary assistance of the Government built 1.51 lakh houses were built by themselves. The Central Government provided grants to the West Pakistan evacuees whereas East Bengal refugees were allotted loan. It was quite evident from the statement of the former minister of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of India that the Central Government was not at all interested for the settlement of East Bengal refugees. "Mr. Mohonlal Saxena, the then Minister of state for relief and rehabilitation in the Central Government publicly declared in course of his visit to Calcutta of Feb. 16, that Rehabilitation of East Bengal Hindu migrants was not an obligation of the Indian union, as they were Pakistan nationals".<sup>85</sup> The reception centres for the refugees in the West were of better in comparison to their counterparts in the East. The cash dole was provided in a standardized form in the West but it was totally reverse in case of East. In West each home was a complete unit provided not only residence but also imparted education, professional or practical training and also employment for at least a short period. But the East lacked such facilities available in the West.

To compare the rate of grant a sharp disparity was there between East and West. The grants allotted for West was also in a way more openhanded in comparison to that in the East. It was fixed at the rate below Rs.30 per month, seldom at a higher rate in accordance to the chosen professional training or courses. The rate of grant in the East was almost the identical but numerous categories were excluded from this advantage. Women refugees who were engaged in a course of training or in teaching or nursing in recognized institutions or hospitals were not entitled to enjoy the facility of stipend. They were even debarred from attending the vocational training centres mainly set up for the refugees. In addition to the stipends, the Government allotted shelter also provided establishment and equipment cost and a revolving cost of raw materials in

the West. On the other hand, except in Titagarh and Gariahat work centres, the grants for women under these heads in West Bengal were very insufficient.<sup>86</sup> In short, both the Governments (Government of India as well as the State Government of West Bengal) were slow in responding to the refugee crisis in West Bengal. Under the circumstances, relief and rehabilitation process was mainly restricted to those, who registered themselves in the official records and took shelter in relief and transit camps.<sup>87</sup> In other words, the problem as a displaced was sometimes more acute for those who crossed over to West Bengal in the early years of the partition.<sup>88</sup>

In 1964 a large inflow followed by a massive exodus again in 1971. An estimated fifty eight lakhs refugees marched towards India by 1971, excluding those of 1971 exodus who stayed on. The census report of 1971 revealed that the population of the displaced persons in the state was nearly sixty lakhs as reported by the Planning Commission in 1974 by the Government of West Bengal. According to the Refugee Rehabilitation Commission's Report the number was assessed at eighty lakhs in 1981. The district and sub-division Relief and Rehabilitation offices were set up earlier to cope with the sudden influx of exodus from erstwhile East Pakistan. In the earlier stage, the government considered the partition to be the main reason for refugee influx of 1947. "Communal riots" were recorded as the official reason for the migration of 1950.<sup>89</sup> However it was revealed from the statement of refugees themselves that each episode in the massive and protracted flight from East Pakistan was related to a different cause. From the accounts of refugees' it was evident that the main reason of their displacement was *desh bhag* i.e. the division of the homeland. To them the lack of security of Bengali Hindus in East Pakistan was the principal reason behind the massive exodus. Actually the Muslims became very arrogant after the Partition. There was huge number of instances relating to the atrocities of the Muslims of East Pakistan upon the minority Hindu communities. Those incidents had been vividly narrated by refugees who were the victims of the said circumstances. The Hindus of East Bengal left their ancestral homes for contingencies of a number pressure due to riots, fear of riots and apprehension of persecution. The cultural insecurity, economic hardship and political mileage were vibrant for the massive exodus from East Pakistan. The existence of family as well as business connections in India from pre-partition period prompted the minorities to quit their homeland.

Hironmoy Bandyopadhyay described an encounter with an East Bengali refugee while touring a relief camp in Jalpaiguri in 1948. He asked the man why he left East Bengal when there were no outward signs of unrest. The man burst out: "It is true we have experienced no beatings or murder, but all people do not have the same degree of endurance." He then recounted his reason for leaving East Bengal. One evening, he had heard a loud call outside his house, *Ho korta* (master of the house)! Are you home?" Thinking it was a neighbour or distinguished member of the village he stepped out and was surprised to see a Muslim tenant. The man smiled, "Korta, the English have left, the country is free, and we have our Pakistan. So I came to make friends with you." Angered by his tenant's loud tone of voice and familiar manner, the man remembered how, not too long ago, these very same people would have stood ten yards away to pay their respects. But it was "the time of Pakistan," so he pretended pleasure. The tenant proceeded to walk right in to the man's home "as if the house was his own property--and not to the sitting room outside, but right inside to the sleeping quarters." Sitting down on the man's bed without his permission he said in an unmistakable tone of threat, "Korta, this is Pakistan. Don't forget (and he no longer used the respectful *apni* but the familiar *tumi*) we are no longer your inferiors (chhoto). Remember, from now on we have to be friends as equals." The refugee exclaimed accusingly to Bandyopadhyay that after all these incidents it was beyond their imagination to stay in Pakistan.<sup>90</sup>

For the elite community escape from East Bengal seemed the only way to avoid humiliation and so far as to avoid adjustment with those who used to judge them as socially substandard. The gentry of meagre earnings and even the people of lower strata like Namasudras also had to encounter the Muslim audacity and atrocities. In some cases the Muslims used to place proposals in support of inter community marriages violating the Hindu rituals and customs like touching their bodies, their food and water, or entering their homes or in their places of worships. Sometimes the minority Hindus were compelled to take proscribed food e.g. beef, All these above mentioned practices turned out to be regular complaints against the Muslims in East. The destructing and polluting the temples and deities along with constant threat of conversion were nothing but an attempt to destroy the identity and integrity of the Hindus. These bitter experiences of Hindu community compelled to lead them thinking that they had become the second-class citizen in Pakistan. The Hindus also

emphasized their sense of religious subordination by referring to themselves as zimmi--to denote subject hood, and to communal riots as jihad. According to a pamphlet issued on behalf of the refugees from Noakhali in India, "Repeated declarations that Pakistan is an Islamic State make both the Hindus and the Muslims think alike that Pakistan is ultimately meant exclusively for the Muslims"<sup>91</sup>. The implication of this was evident that the migration of the East Bengali Hindus was a settled fact.

Apart from religious point of view, the Hindus of East Pakistan became suspicious that their other elements like identity, history, cultural heritage and achievements would be jeopardised with the Islamic influence. The Hindus began to consider Pakistan as a betrayer of secular nationalism and aspirations. Pakistan was labelled as a theocratic state trying to destroy the culture and nationalism of the Hindus and to glorify Muslim victories. The chastity Hindu women both married and spinster symbolized the honour and dignity of their community. The Hindu minorities complained about the violence against women which featured widely the wild-treatment on women in Pakistan. This ill treatment was also a matter of grave concern in West Bengal. The sexual possession of Hindu women by Muslim men was seen to stand for Muslim domination, i.e. "miscegenation," the loss and humiliation of the (male) Hindu self.<sup>92</sup>

Migration to India was therefore an important phenomenon that precipitated the aspirations of the East Bengal Hindus for the national reconstruction in postcolonial era. Historian Jadunath Sarkar in his speech at the University Institute Hall in Calcutta in 1948 told the audience that like the Jews, the paradigmatic refugees who would convert Palestine to "a spark of light in the midst of the mess of Muslim misgovernment and stagnation," the East Bengali refugees would revitalize West Bengal's decadent culture and economy. Drawing positive analogous between the East Bengali diaspora and the migration of English Puritans to Holland and France, and then to Massachusetts; and of the French Huguenots to Holland and England, he declared that their going was a loss to their native countries and a boon for their countries of asylum.<sup>93</sup> "However crushed and benumbed they may look when they are unloaded from their third class wagons at Sealdah Station yard, the refugees are the most valuable elements of the population of East Bengal," he said, and urged West

Bengalis “...to engraft this rich racial branch upon its old decaying trunk and rise to a new era of prosperity and power”.<sup>94</sup>

East Bengali refugees who sought shelter in India presented themselves as victims of Muslim communalism. They also claimed humanitarian assistance and the prompt recognition of refugee status. The rehabilitation of the refugees was a long drawn process. Due to dubious policy of the Government, a large number of frustrated refugees under their own initiative and enthusiasm started vigorously for their resettlement by squatting unoccupied and unused lands. Those available lands used for the settlement of the refugees ultimately led towards the construction of colonies. A large portion this occupied land belonged to the state, but for the major part the refugees settled in privately owned property including that belonging to local Muslims West Bengal. Particularly in the areas around the city of Calcutta, many refugee settlements were established on land “formerly inhabited by Muslim labourers and artisans” who were “replaced by displaced Hindus from East Pakistan”.<sup>95</sup> Many Muslims were dispossessed of their homes in the city leading to their “ghettoization” in a few neighbourhoods.<sup>96</sup> There was no doubt that the East Bengali refugee settlement across West Bengal affected the minority Muslim community most adversely.

In between 1949 and 1951, especially in the event of disturbance in Khulna about 1.5 million took shelter. 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 used to arrive after this date were not to be offered Indian citizenship, as long as an act of Parliament making a special provision for acquisition of citizenship by such displaced persons. 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>97</sup> Afterwards, the refugees and their organizations were striving hard for their rights. The demands of different refugee organizations had similar attitude with the left front parties relating

to the right of citizenship. At last, the long struggle of acquiring citizenship of the refugees came into reality. In 1952 through general election the refugees exercised their franchise.

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### **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 refugees

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 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 acquisition 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 Bandopadhyay had vividly depicted the true pictures of refugee hailing from East Pakistan. Fortunately Mr. Bandopadhyay 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 Niranjan pally udvastu colony, Ariagao Narayanpur udvastu colony, Ananta nagar Milan pally udvastu colony, Niranjan 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 Bhanu 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 Vallabhbhai 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 Rangpur 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 Hindu 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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## **CHAPTER IV**

### ***Migration and settlement issues: from 1971-1979***

In July 1905 it was announced by the viceroy of India that the first partition of Bengal would be executed. But, in 1911 the proposal of partition of Bengal was annulled to appease the Bengali sentiment. But the British sowed the seeds of future division of India and ultimately reaped the harvest of division of India in the year 1947. The founding fathers of partition did not find any cartographic absurdity in it. The two wings of the new country were separated by a massive land i.e. India, had no corridor or connection other than religion which served as a link between the two wings. It is the grim irony of history that where religion is supposed to bind people together, but now the bond turned to be fragile. East Bengal came to be known as East Pakistan from 1947 and in 1971 became the independent state of Bangladesh after a successful war of liberation with Pakistan. The name Bangladesh means “country of Bengal” in Bengali language. It is bordered by India on the north, west and east and it faces Bay of Bengal to its South. Due to political exclusion and linguistic discrimination by the politically dominant western wing an agitation grew. Total economic neglect was also another reason. The agitation gave rise to a secular, cultural, nationalist movement. These causes led to the declaration of Independence and Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. As a result of the war a new state endured poverty, famous military coups and political turmoil. The country faced a number of major challenges, including over population, corruption and vulnerability to climate change. But gradually the country increased life expectancy and achieved gender parity in education. It reduced the growth of the population and improved maternal and child health. Dhaka and Chittagong are the country’s two largest cities and they have been the driving force behind much of the recent growth.

Curzon’s partition of Bengal in 1905 was one of the legends of freedom movement. Legends and myths arouse protective emotions that shield people from scrutiny. A noted Bengali writer, Ashoke Mitra, raises the question “If the partition of 1905 were allowed to stand?”. The crisp answer was that eastern Bengal might not have followed Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s line. Curzon’s original decision, whatever its motive had

offered hope of rapid economic and social progress to Muslim masses in Bengal. They bore the brunt of under development of agriculture and the economy in general, under British colonial rule, besides the suffering of the repression and oppression let loose by the Hindu *zamindars*. Had the decision to divide Bengal been allowed to stand, the spread of education amongst the Muslims would have led to the quick emergence of a sensitive Muslim intelligentsia with a heightened and social consciousness. Perhaps from within this category there would have sprung an exciting crop of thinkers and ideologues which would be inclined to define objective reality in terms of class and not divide on the basis of the religion. Had all these things happened the Muslim League would have become cropper even as the bigoted Hindu oligarchies were stopped in their track? To sum up if the partition of 1905 was allowed to stand there would have been no partition of either Bengal or India in 1947. For that matter Calcutta might well have continued as the country's capital. The most affected ones as a result of partition were none other than women<sup>1</sup>.

The creation of Bangladesh was the greatest achievement for the people of the then East Bengal. Their relentless struggle for the creation of Bangladesh under the inspiring leadership of Sheikh Mujib-ur- Rahman a new chapter of history was opened and Mujib-ur, architect of Bangladesh, became the father of the new nation and bestowed with the prestigious reward *Bangabandhu*. The seed of creation of Bangladesh remained dormant since 1947 after the attainment of independence on the basis of religion which was known as Pakistan and East Bengal was converted politically into East Pakistan and became the integral part of Pakistan. The distance between West Pakistan and East Pakistan was nearly about 1200km. It was crystal clear that an independent country based on religious fanaticism could in no case be survived for a pretty long time. The slogan "All Muslims are brothers" was nothing but the slogan of hypocrites. Following that heinous hypocrisy and conspiracy, the glorious tradition and dignity of Bengalis of East Bengal was shattered into pieces. East Bengal was converted as East Pakistan which was governed by the orthodox Bengali haters of the Western Pakistan leaders. Within the span of seven months after the attainment of independence the dark cloud of uncertainty engulfed the political horizon of Pakistan. On 19 March, 1948 the so called Father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah visited East Pakistan and delivered a speech on 21 March in the Race course Maidan. He announced with confidence that Urdu would be the state language

of Pakistan. The announcement of Jinnah was instantly rejected by the thousands and thousands of Bengali Muslims. The air was rent with the slogan “no no no” as a result Mr. Jinnah was puzzled, annoyed and apprehensive regarding the repercussion of his statement.

On March, 24, the obstinate Mr. Jinnah on the occasion of convocation in the Curzon Hall of Dacca University reclaimed the demand of Urdu to be regarded as national language of Pakistan. The whole auditorium simultaneously shouted against the introduction of Urdu as the National language of Pakistan and it was highly applauded. Jinnah diplomatically tried to humiliate the dignity and glorious tradition of Bengali literature, culture and tradition through introduction of some Urdu words instead of Bengali words. The united efforts of Bengalis foiled their conspiracy and evil design. In 1952 the united patriotic Bengalis took a sacred vow to uphold the dignity of their mother tongue and mother land. They shouted slogans to introduce Bengali as national language of Pakistan instead of Urdu.

In the general election of Pakistan in December 1970, the opposition political party Awami League strengthened the demand of autonomy of East Pakistan. They got absolute majority. But the president of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan, disagreed with the demand of the League. Mujib-ur Rahman was not allowed to form Government in East Pakistan. The situation worsened when Yahya Khan suddenly stopped the dialogue with the League and sent troops into the streets of Dhaka. Meanwhile Mujib-ur declared the independence of East Pakistan over a clandestine broadcasting system. Yahya replied with army.<sup>2</sup> In the year 1971 the whole East Pakistan was consolidated under the banner of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman. Finding no other alternative the inhabitants of Eastern Pakistan waged war against the autocratic administration of Pakistan. This war of liberation was known as ‘Mukti Yudhdha’ ( War of Liberation). At the cost of lives, property, abduction, rape, humiliation and atrocious tortures of Pakistani soldiers the patriotic Bengalis launched war against Pakistan with active help and cooperation of Indian soldiers.

The war lasted for about nine months and the cherished desire of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman was translated into reality and independent country known as Bangladesh was created. Mujib-ur declared with confidence and pride-“This may be my last message. From today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of

Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh and final victory is achieved.”<sup>3</sup> During the august visit of Mulk raj Anand, the academician once appealed to the people of Bangladesh in this fashion that the heart rendering tragic incident that took place in their country it was rather shameful. He also advised them that they once took up sword instead of ink, but now they should leave the sword and take pen. If the occurrences remained unventilated and unpublished their sorrows and grievances would never be honoured in future and would be in mystery.

Partition was followed by sectarian violence in 1946 which prompted the two-way movement of Hindus to West Bengal and Muslims to East Pakistan. In Punjab, however, the exodus of Hindu refugees eventually overtook that of Muslims and has continued sporadically through the brutal civil war in Pakistan in 1971 The partition brought about a national disaster as well as individual trauma for the victimized. The appearance of over 8 million refugees from East Bengal irrevocably shaped West Bengal’s political economy <sup>4</sup> The disputed schematization of Government of India about the population displacement from East Pakistan helped the refugees to assess their predicament. 9 million Hindu and Muslim refugees from the war of 1970-71 in East Pakistan were not included in the aforesaid schematization.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations estimated that the majority of these refugees returned home.

### **Who were the refugees?**

According to the traditional theories regarding migration it was the dynamics of population flow in post-partition period in South Asia, more specifically from Bangladesh to West Bengal, can be a frustrating exercise. According to Ranabir Samaddar this frustration is more acute in the context of persistence of the differential notions of refugees, migrants and displaced persons. The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1968) considered migration and refugee as totally different subject. William Peterson considered the UN definition of migration (1953) as arbitrary and misleading because it excluded deliberately refugees and refugees constituted a large portion of total population movements.(William Peterson,286-292),. In 1953, Jacques Vernant opined that “a refugee is someone who has been compelled to abandon his home”<sup>6</sup> So it is evident that the refugee may be the victims

of earthquake, flood, war and also of persecution.<sup>7</sup> Here in case of India and more specifically of West Bengal it was found that different factors like political disorder, economic stringency and natural calamity so far as the fear of violence provoked large scale migration in West Bengal from Bangladesh. The illegal migrants were defined in this study as those who had entered West Bengal from Bangladesh without valid document in the post 1971 period. Since Bangladesh is not a secular state religion does play a role in migration.

Actually it was difficult to distinguish refugees from migrants. Even 'violence' cannot effectively make a difference between the refugees and migrants. Samaddar raises a vital question that if the refugees are absconders from violence then what about those migrants those were the women sex workers from Bangladesh or those women were engaged in different forms of sweat labour? They have migrated to India due to fear of 'endemic violence' from males of their family as well as the men folk of outside world.<sup>8</sup> The refugees of East Bengal were very anxious about the retaliatory recurring nature of the violence on either side of the border. The personal experience of a noted journalist of East Bengal Prafulla Kumar Chowdhury highlighted the communal violence in East Pakistan. According to him the Muslims right from the time of the League tried to create a separate Islamic state for their identity. They formed the provincial government in 1946 at the period of the Great Calcutta Killing. In 1950, after the creation of Pakistan, it was alleged that Muslims were being murdered in India and as revenge they started murdering the Hindus in Barisal, Dacca and Chittagong. Journalist Chowdhury in an interview with Nilanjana Chatterjee, an Anthropologist, mentioned the papers like 'The Azad' where it was narrated that Hindus in no case be trusted, they would even kill their parents and they would also strangle Muslims to death. In the pretext of burglary of a relic from Kashmir in 1964 instigated communal disturbances in Khulna. Again in 1971, during the war of independence of Bangladesh, the army of West Pakistan earmarked Hindus as anti-nationals. Mr. Chowdhury asserted that even after the victory of the Awami League, the Muslim communalists took upper hand upon the Hindu minorities.<sup>9</sup>

The political factor was the main reason for migration in West Bengal up to 1971. Migration caused by political factor forced most of the Hindus to abandon their native

place. But both political and economic factors were the underlying causes of migration for post 1971 period. After coming over to West Bengal they had to undergo various problems including acute financial stringency. As single income was not enough for the poor family, female members tried to look for job in unorganized sectors. Easy availability of information for job from those who already engaged in West Bengal was very much helpful for them. Those women could engage themselves as flowers and vegetables sellers. They could also be engaged at lowest possible wage. Political instability, fear of riots and terrorism in Bangladesh, inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders, absence of democratic rights, religious fundamentalism, religious instigation by political leaders, insecurity feeling of Hindus etc. were the major crucial issues that worth to be mentioned as political push factors. About 80 percent of the respondents interviewed in course of research were of the opinion that due to domination of religious fundamentalists, due to insecurity of the minority group or due to discriminating law and order against Hindus might be the factors that motivated the Hindus to migrate from Bangladesh to West Bengal.<sup>10</sup>

The most of the refugees interviewed during the course of the study, moved towards West Bengal not only due to monetary stringency or to fulfill their dreams for settling over to West Bengal as it was a land of opportunity. Following political disturbances they were forced to abandon their sweet abode in quest of certainty in Indian Territory. This political development had created a psychological impact. That is why most of them decided unanimously to settle down in West Bengal state of India leaving behind their ancestral relations. A sense of insecurity and uncertainty prevailed among the minority Hindus of Bangladesh. Not only the communal turmoil but the fear of physical assault instigated them to be migrated. For the safety and security of their daughters the Hindus made a prompt decision to take asylum in the safely abode of West Bengal. It is worth noting in this context that the Hindus hailed from East Pakistan just after the partition belonged to the upper class i.e. *bhadralok*. They had some previous connections with West Bengal. Some affluent businessmen also came to settle in West Bengal who by dint of their economic solvency could easily establish themselves in the alien land. After few years mostly middle class people shifted over here in West Bengal. They mostly belonged to small business. People of some professional classes also came over to India.<sup>11</sup>

A general opinion was that the non-Bengali Muslims were the real perpetrators behind such violence and brutality. They used the tools of communalism to shatter the unity among the people of East Bengal and tried to obstruct their struggle in sake of social justice. Muslim nationalism and motivation for statehood were solely responsible for the genesis of Pakistan and subsequently the birth of Bangladesh. From the narratives of refugees the experiences of victimhood, the violence they were subjected to was painfully articulated in course of conversation with the researcher. The general impression derived from the interviewees was that most of the Muslims could not be trusted though some of them were beyond average Muslims.

A major cause of displacement from East Pakistan was diplomatic ruptures in Indo-Pakistan relations and also the tensions between East and West Pakistan which finally terminated in the east's separatist movement for Bangladesh. The tussle between Hindus and Muslims in each nation sparked retaliatory hostility in the contiguous countries. This was a depiction of events that clearly indicated that the partition was principally based on religious lines. The migrants of post-1971 were earmarked to be ineligible for having settlement assistance in India. But the clandestine inflow of evacuees in subsequent decades remained affected despite the prevention policy of the Government. All the Muslims who migrated to India from Bangladesh were labeled as "infiltrators" by the Indian state.<sup>12</sup> The prime reason of displacement in the 1980s was economic hardship in Bangladesh that involved both Hindus and Muslims, while in early 1990s the Hindus of Bangladesh became the victims of communal violence following the demolition of the Babri mosque in India. Those who roamed the streets of Dhaka seeking support for the partition could not even visualize that as a reward for their gesture to agree for leaving, they would be forever labeled 'refugees', a word that was more violence to the idea of a home than any other in any language.<sup>13</sup>

### **Historic Rights:**

The Refugee Central Rehabilitation Council (RCRC), was a refugee wing of the Revolutionary Socialist Party in West Bengal organized a refugee convention and issued a pamphlet adopting a resolution for strengthening their position. It also resolved to establish their entitlement for the protection and assistance in India as an incontrovertible right. That very right was not dependant on the pity of host people or

government's mercy or whim. The persons migrated from East Pakistan tried to build their own abodes in Indian soil depending upon their own right and they also decided not to take any undue advantage from the local people. They were not *sharanarthi* (supplicants) but *kshatipuraner dabidar* (claimants to compensation for losses)<sup>14</sup> This quote was displayed in a pamphlet entitled “Oitihashik Odhikar” or “Historic.Rights”. It was published by the East Bengal Minority Welfare Association advocating the refugee rights for post 1971 migrants.

*The partition left us homeless, bereft of everything. We did not fight for independence in order to lead the lives of beggars. Those of us who cannot remain in East Pakistan are not doing anything wrong by seeking shelter in India. Why should the police push us back? Why should we live in hovels next to rail-tracks? Why should we be the object of people's mercy? ... it is only right that those who struggled and sacrificed for independence be repaid.*<sup>15</sup>

### **Refugee problem after 1971:**

Refugee exodus was inter-twined with the history of post partition India and West Bengal.<sup>16</sup> The exodus of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan continued unremittingly even after the birth of Bangladesh. This refugee exodus virtually became natural in the context of post colonial history of India. But if we take into account the record of migration from East Pakistan to West Bengal of Indian Territory it surpassed all previous records. The exodus of Hindus from East Pakistan was undoubtedly a continuous process but it became slowed down gradually in post partition period. Again influx of evacuees from East Pakistan started from 1970 and continued to rock West Bengal. From 1947-71 Bangladesh was a province of Pakistan. Since 1947, the Hindu population in Bangladesh has been reduced from 30% to less than 10% because of religious persecution and political terrorism. The migrants from East Bengal could enjoy the advantage of rehabilitation assistance in India after being duly recognized as ‘refugees’.<sup>17</sup> According to the assessment made by Sucheta Kripalini in a seminar, 1971 “We have welcomed refugees many times in the past 22 years; but this time there is an unending streams of refugee coming in”. This remark is aptly justified and appropriate because she was closely associated with this post partition refugee problem.<sup>18</sup>

The constant migration from East Pakistan after 1970 acquired a new name 'infiltration'. Actually a partition refugee or displaced person was he who was a habitant in the territories belonged to East Pakistan migrated to India due to civil disturbances or due to the vivisection of India.<sup>19</sup> West Bengal is still struggling over the refugee issue till today. In the first three years of partition the Government of India had to confront with the exodus problem of East Pakistan amounted almost 5 million. The number was 2.3 million by 1950.<sup>20</sup> In 1950, refugees in West Bengal at one time totaled 3.5 million.<sup>21</sup> The number went down drastically when almost 1.2 million returned to East Pakistan following Indo-Pakistan agreement on minorities in April 1950.<sup>22</sup> Afterwards a considerable number of refugees came back to West Bengal. From that time onwards refugee influx became an endemic feature of West Bengal so far as the eastern India was concerned. According to Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, commissioner of the Refugee Rehabilitation Department, West Bengal, around 2.7 million moved into West Bengal till 1954.<sup>23</sup> According to a publication from Government of India it was clear that 2.8 million refugees came over to West Bengal in 1951 and around 4million in 1956.<sup>24</sup> By 1970 the number of refugees from East Pakistan shot up to 5 million.<sup>25</sup> Up to 1971, over 4.7 million Hindus had sought asylum in India, especially in West Bengal. The volume of reverse flow of Muslims from India to East Pakistan was unknown. But in 1971 due to military junta of Pakistan 10 million people crossed border to come to India.<sup>26</sup> Fear of Persecution was another justified reason for migration over India and more specifically in West Bengal. But the official definition was not clearly defined regarding the preconditions of fear on basis of which State would accept in meriting shelter in India.

Again due to the political turmoil in East Pakistan the exodus once again sparked off in March, 1971. Over 3 million refugees crossed the border within two months following March 26, 1971. But consequently during August 71, a military violence broke out in East Pakistan following which 8 million people pushed to India within a span of 5 months.<sup>27</sup> According to P.N. Luthra, the then additional secretary of the Department of Labour and Rehabilitation 70 refugees migrated in a minute, 1700 refugees every hour and in the month of May one hundred thousand every day and in June 68000 refugees daily came over the Indian territory!<sup>28</sup>

The following table presents a distinct picture of refugee influx during March to December, 1971.

**Table-4.1**  
**Month wise rate of influx**

Month,1971	Rate of influx
March 26-31	17000 daily
April	40000 daily
May	3.5 million
June	6 million
July	7.1 million
August	8 million
October- November	9 million
December	9.9 million

Source: Sandip Bandopadhyay, "Millions Seeking Refuge: The Refugee Question in West Bengal:1971", in Pradip Kumar Bose(ed),*Refugees In West Bengal :Institutional Processes and Contested Identities*, Calcutta:2000, Calcutta Research Group,p.34

The refugee exodus in 1971 disrupted the normal life of West Bengal and also brought about a drastic demographic change in four border districts, viz. West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. By August 1971, 6.3 million refugees stepped into the territory of West Bengal while in Meghalaya the number of refugees increased to a considerable level and the number was 36 million.<sup>29</sup> Those uprooted people who entered India in 1971. West Bengal was the sole recipient of 76% refugees from East Pakistan. As a matter of fact West Bengal bore the main burden of the exodus which resulted in an increase of the density of population, e.g. In West Dinajpur the density of population rose from 507 to 600 persons per square kilometer. In the border districts of West Bengal the refugees at one point of time constituted 32% of the total population.<sup>30</sup>

India declared war on Pakistan formally on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1971. Long before the breaking of war between India and Pakistan on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1971, India took active initiative in providing shelter to the refugees of East Pakistan. Luthra, the then

Additional Secretary of the Department of the Labour and Rehabilitation, was entrusted with the charge of the Secretariat set up in Calcutta. Luthra was given full liberty in exercising his power in implementing various programme concerning the refugees according to the demand of the situation.<sup>31</sup> So far as the policy of providing shelter to the refugees was concerned it was made clear by August 1971 that 5.7 million refugees out of 8 million could be rehabilitated in makeshift camps and the rest would have to live with their friends and relatives.

After 1947, another major refugee crisis happened during Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, when millions of refugees migrated from the country to India. This brought about a sudden spike in population in the states bordering Bangladesh. The massacre in Bangladesh escalated an estimated 10 million refugees fled to India. 1971, India had formulated a massive rehabilitation programme on an emergency basis to accommodate the refugees hailing from Eastern Pakistan to West Bengal. Taking into account the gravity of the situation the Government of India entrusted Mr. P. N. Luthra with the charge of the Secretariat and was awarded responsibilities for planning a programme as situation demanded. The first and foremost concern of the secretariat was to provide foodstuff in various places. Eight additional magistrates were engaged in the border districts of West Bengal to cope with the burden of influx of population due to incessant flow of migrants from Bangladesh. In other states additional secretaries and directors were appointed by the Secretariat. Refugee departments were also set up in different states. The Government of India allotted huts to the 50% of the refugees and the rest were accommodated in camps and in tents. Out of 8 million refugees came over to West Bengal, 5.7 million of them were provided with provisional camps, whereas the rest of the refugees took refuge in the houses of friends, relations and near and dear ones. In West Bengal 500 camps were set up out of 825 camps of India in mid 1971.<sup>32</sup>

### **Migration in the districts of North Bengal after 1971:**

The incessant inflow of migrants for over few decades in North Bengal brought about a drastic change in the demographic index of the region. This migration was mainly due to partition of India and also due to Bangladesh war of liberation. Moreover a huge number of people from other states migrated over here.

**Table- 4.2**  
**Growth of population in North Bengal during 1971-1981**

Districts	Area Sq. Km	1971	1981
Darjeeling	3,386	781.8	1,024.2
Cooch Behar	3,075	1,414.2	1,771.6
Jalpaiguri	6,245	1,750.1	2,214.8
West Dinajpur	5,206	1,857.9	2,404.9
Malda	3,713	1,612.7	2,031.8
North Bengal	21,625	7,418.7	9,447.6

Source: Census reports of 1971, 1981

After the massive exodus of 1947 again in 1971 West Bengal experienced clandestine evacuees from East Pakistan which continued unabated for decades together. The Government of Bangladesh after its creation committed safety and security of the common people that to some extent decreased the inflow of migrants from Bangladesh. After the establishment of military of military jawans the relentless inflow of Bangladeshi migrants continued unremittingly. Some miscreants of Bangladesh used to cross Indian border forcefully at night in spite of tight security. Those regular affairs created a situation of anarchism. Those intruders looted the properties of innocent dwellers of boundary regions and decamped with the valuables. They also stole cattle and send those to Bangladesh unlawfully. The border areas like Chengrabandha, Shitalkuchi, Berubari, Hemkumari were badly affected by the chaotic activities of Bangladeshi miscreants.<sup>33</sup>

Even after the creation of Bangladesh the minority Hindus crossed boundaries due to fear of more communal violence. The Muslims used to exploit the minorities in every possible way. To kidnap ladies from Hindu families became rampant. The news paper 'Trishrota' pulished from Jalpaiguri cited an example of a family of Bagura that was the worst sufferer of Muslim torture. It was also reported that almost every day in 1979 a sizable number of migrants came to India through Jalpaiguri border. Some agents took active initiative to allow them to step into Indian Territory in lieu of money. This continuous migration from Bangladesh had worsened the economy of

West Bengal so far as India was concerned. It had a far reaching impact for the days ahead.<sup>34</sup>

Due to torture of militants of Pakistan during the reign of Yahhia Khan nearly ten thousand people both Hindu and Muslim communities came from Nilkhamari, Dorwani, Dosh mile khuti etc and marched towards Dewanganj, Haldibari and Manikganj in the month of April, 1971. It was found that many orphan infants were lying on the courtyard of many buildings in Haldibari town crying in starvation. Many were found to take shelter under the trees.<sup>35</sup> In the early period of the same year the Pak militants started their massacre in the northern districts of Eastern Pakistan viz. Nilkhamari, Rongpur, Dinajpur, Pochagarh, Boda, Debiganj, Thakurgao etc. The militants torched specifically the houses of the Hindus who were the supporters of Awami League. The Hindus were brutally assassinated and following which the Hindus abandoned their home and hearth. Movements of Hindus in thousands towards India became a regular feature along with their small household belongings and domestic pets like cattle and goats.

The reign of terror prevailed in the area. Crossing the borders the affected Hindus both male and female moved towards Haldibari and Dewanganj of North Bengal. They also arrived at Manikganj after crossing the border. They were accommodated temporarily in the premises of Manikganj High School, two schools of Haldibari, rail storehouse, rail platforms, markets, the storehouse of Dewanganj, Halkhola, Netaji Vidyapith of Torol para and in the camp of Ghugudanga school.<sup>36</sup> Those who were accommodated in the camps were allotted Government assistance. Those who failed to be accommodated were deprived of getting any sort of assistance from the Government. More so the paucity of space in different camps were the vital reasons to stop fresh entrants. When the Government failed miserably to provide the people in camps they were forced to take shelter under trees, under open sky, on the vast fields and by the sides of the Highways. Torrential rainfall made their lives more complicated and unbearable they had to face new problems. Sanitation problem became more acute.<sup>37</sup>

The refugees of Rongpur were accommodated at Sitai, Mathabhanga, Dinahata, Haldibari, Mekhliganj, etc. According to the reports as available from the Ananda Bazar Patrika during the war of Independence at least 5000 refugees took shelter in

Cooch Behar from Lalmonihat. Rabindra Nath Trivedi in his book accumulated statistics from the Government of India, nearly one crore refugees took asylums in different relief camps of India. According to his report the refugee population in Assam was 3,13,000, Behar 9000, Meghalaya 6,88,000, Tripura 14,13000 and West Bengal 74,93000.<sup>38</sup> The refugee inflow in Cooch Behar from Rongpur, Maymensingh, Tangail etc. were 3,93,106 excluding those who took shelter in places other than camps.

**Table-4.3**

**Refugee inflow to Cooch Behar from Lalmonihat**

Sl no.	Sub division	Number of camps	Number of refugee
1	Cooch Behar Sadar	15	18,316
2	Mekhliganj	14	42,778
3	Mathabhanga	39	1,20,563
4	Dinhata	36	1,91,289
5	Tufanganj	7	20,160

Source: Dr. Muhammad Manirujjaman 'Char shatabdir Lalmonirhaat'(2008).p.237 cited in 'Mukti Juddhhe Rongpur',Rangpur Gabeshana Parishad,2013,p.244.

With the frequent attacks of Pak militants in different localities in East Pakistan and in border districts of both East Pakistan and India were equally affected. Following barbaric attack of the Pak terrorists upon the people of Bara sashi a region just two miles off from Berubari of Indian border, the terrified people of the locality trekked towards Indian Territory.<sup>39</sup> A sizable number of evacuees took refuge in Alipurduar subdivision of Jalpaiguri district. The number of evacuees rose to almost twenty thousand till 10 May, 1971. They were accommodated at various camps namely Barabisha, Kamakhyaguri, Buxa camp etc.<sup>40</sup> In those days of migration the bulk of refugees whose who entered to the Indian Territory through the borders Haldibari and Berubari carried with them their domestic animals like cow, buffalo, goat etc. But when the strangers were shifted to various camps they failed to keep their domestic animals with them. Some miscreants and touts taking the advantage of the helplessness of the new comers compelled them to sell their domestic animals at a very cheap price. Even their valuable utensils were purchased at Rs. 10 per kilo gram.

In this way they lost their last penny which they acquired.<sup>41</sup> Out of lacks of displaced persons from East Pakistan just few months before the *Muktiyuddha* at about one lack of people took shelter in Duars in the first ten days of the month of May in 1971<sup>42</sup>. Among them three thousand refugees were provided in Buxa camp. Rs 1.25 paisa was allotted per head and they were provided with 400 gm rice, few potatoes and a small quantity of salt. As the camp was situated in the hilly areas so the place was not suitable and congenial for the people of the plain. Due to many other problems they might be shifted to Dangi, Sonapur and in Jayanti camps.<sup>43</sup> Among the districts of North Bengal West Dinajpur was the recipient of major population of refugees. One of the major reasons of refugee inflow towards West Dinajpur was that the said district was surrounded by the borders in three sides. According to the assumption of the reporters of Janamat nearly 15 lakhs of people from East Pakistan entered into Balurghat. As the Hili border was ultimately converted into a military station the refugees had utilized the two other borders to enter into West Dinajpur. Almost all the educational institutions were packed with the new comers from East Pakistan. Besides, some relief camps were also built to meet the requirements of the incomings distressed. Apart from the camp dwellers a considerable number of migrants were forced to stay outside owing to acute dearth of accommodation in the camps. Those who were accustomed to lead a peaceful and comfortable life, all on a sudden within a short span their dreams and aspirations were shattered into pieces.<sup>44</sup>

Dhupguri of Jalpaiguri district had a miserable experience regarding the toiling masses of Hindu migrants who happened to come over in Dhupguri. Not far away from Dhupguri motor stand there was place known Daukimari *Hath* where a camp for the evacuees where two hundred tents were set up for the provision of nearly three thousand people. It was noticed that the tents were not adequately prepared to protect the inmate of the tents during rainy season. The local B.D.O of that period Sudarshan Nandy requested the Government that the residents of the camp would be benefited if the existing tents were replaced by tin shades. The other camp under the Dhupguri Police station was Rangati camp situated in the bank river Rangati where nine hundred tents were built. Each and every tent was situated within the distance of seven to eight feet. There was a wide road passage of twenty feet in between two rows of the tents. There were approximately eight thousand people in the Rangati camp. In two miles distance from the Rangati camp there was another camp near Lakhmikanta

Bagan with a population of two thousand. There were three more camps within the ambit of five or six miles from the camp near to Lakhmikanta Bagan. Near about fifteen thousand people were allotted refuge.<sup>45</sup> On November 18,1971 the then President of India V.V.Giri visited two refugee relief camps namely Balaram hat and Bandhu Nagar of Jalpaiguri district. During his brief stay at those aforesaid camps he delivered a speech expressing his sympathy towards the displaced persons. He also expressed the inability of the Government to face such a Himalayan problem. He was also optimistic that the inmates of the camp would soon be able to go back their motherlands when the situation would come into normality.<sup>46</sup>

The refugees who were denied of accommodations in camps were in a pathetic condition. It was a matter of great bewilderment that despite pressure of adverse circumstances how they could survive. Following malnutrition and inadequate medical facilities they were often afflicted by infectious and epidemic diseases like diarrhea, small pox, chicken pox etc.<sup>47</sup> They also suffered from virulent types of fever and malaria.<sup>48</sup> In West Dinajpur the deadly disease cholera was broken out among the inmates of the camps.<sup>49</sup> In different refugee camps the infants were the worst sufferer of malnutrition and lack of medical treatment. Most of the infants of the relief camps were the chronic patients of dysentery, blood dysentery, diarrhea, bronchitis, fever, ache on shoulder etc. whereas the adult female members of the camps were suffering from anemia<sup>50</sup>. Deaths for cholera were regular occurrences of the camp life. The temporary refugee camps Salsalabari and Patkapara of Alipurduar witnessed the death of five persons within twenty four hours on 18 June,1971 was reported and published in a local news paper named The Janamat. In the Dangi camp of Alipurduar almost fifty thousand people took shelter. A huge number of deaths due to cholera and other contagious diseases in the camp were reported. The alarming incident which was shocking to note that due to non availability of funds the guardians of the deceased could not make arrangements for their cremation, as a result the wild animals took the bodies into the jungles and disfigured the bodies which were beyond recognition. The camp dwellers had to pass their days under such pathetic circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

The migrants towards North Bengal districts due to their helplessness and ignorance about the environment of the new territory they became the targets of some anti socials and miscreants. They applied different tricks in cheating the new comers. Most of the people were made tempted in involving them in gambling and as a result they

became totally penniless. In the act of conversion of currency they sold the currency of Pakistan in cheap rate, where as they purchased the Indian currency in higher rate. It was also a kind of deprivation.<sup>52</sup> Not far from Moynaguri a daring robbery took place in the office of the Bloc Development Officer (BDO) and looted the relief materials kept for the refugees were looted. Such inhuman activists engaged themselves in such crimes for the fulfillment of their own interests.<sup>53</sup> In the railway stations and adjoining places like Alipurduar, Hasimara, Dalgaon, Odlabari, Siliguri Junction, Malbazar etc were infested with anti-social elements. Those places became the epicentres of anti socials.<sup>54</sup> The Government of India had to incur a massive expenditure for the uprooted persons. The amount would have been estimated more than two crore per day.<sup>55</sup> It was quite evident that India had to face acute financial stringency for the cause of the refugees migrated from East Pakistan on a phased manner from 1947 -1971.

The March 28, 1971 a huge number of refugees of Rongpur who took refuge in the adjoining border districts of West Bengal, specially at Cooch Behar. Primarily they settled at Sitai locality. The new comers in the midst of extreme sorrows and suffering set up cultural organizations known as the '*Biplabi Sangskritik Parishad*' and '*Bangladesh Sangskritik Mukti Parishad*'. Literary personalities, poets, writers, musicians, theatre personalities and other social activists were the active members of the organizations. They published a news paper the '*Saptahik Ranangan*' that ultimately renamed as the '*Mahakal*' and again the '*Dabanal*'. It should be remembered that the genocide that took place on April 3, 1971 accelerated the movements of the Rongpur refugee to West Bengal<sup>56</sup>

### **Relief measures:**

The spontaneous inflow of the hungry and panic stricken people from Bangladesh became a regular phenomenon. Due to dearth of dwelling places the refugees, sometimes were forced to take shelter even in the circular water pipe. They took refuge in school buildings and in office buildings. Those buildings were almost converted into camps. They had to live in an unhygienic atmosphere and suffered from epidemic diseases like cholera, enteric etc. By October 1971, 1100 medical centres were set up by the Secretariat to eradicate the diseases on war footing. Various

voluntary organizations extended their hands of cooperation to provide medical assistance to the refugees who were the worst victims of various diseases.<sup>57</sup> Several voluntary organizations like Ramakrishna Mission, Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Abhoy Ashram, IMA, Red Cross Society, Oxfam etc came forward with their helping hands for relief works. Those organizations individually helped the refugees and sometimes they assisted the officials for functioning.

The Ramakrishna Mission played a pioneering role by establishing 13 camps in 4 border districts of West Bengal along with medical centres. The Ramakrishna Mission spent 2,73,000 for the relief of the refugees. R.K. Mission also provided relief of Rs. 1,70,000 refugees.<sup>58</sup> Since 19 April, 1971 Ramakrishna Mission launched a massive programme in serving the destitute individuals of East Pakistan in the event of the atrocities and turmoil that nakedly broke out in East Pakistan. To render relief to the destitute a relief camp was set up in the school premises of Manikgunj of South Berubari. The camp comprised three thousand people. The Ramakrishna Mission distributed per head 400 gm. Rice, 200 gm pulse, 25 gm mustard oil, spices of 10 paisa and 200 gm potato. The mission acted continuously and silently for those suffering human beings.<sup>59</sup> The Ramakrishna Mission made arrangements for the relief of the destitute from East Pakistan on the eve of Bangladesh war of Liberation. The mission established their relief camp in Radhikapur in Dinajpur border in order to extend their help in different ways. The Mission authority made earnest appeal to the general public to donate generously with money and kinds for the welfare of the distressed people through their Mission.<sup>60</sup> The Ramakrishna Mission of Jalpaiguri, after the war of independence of Bangladesh, made arrangement of relief for the uprooted persons of Bangladesh. During the aforesaid period shouldered the responsibilities of a relief, situated in the border of East Pakistan at Sakati village. At about 38,000 evacuees were accommodated in the said camp.<sup>61</sup> Ramakrishna Mission of Cooch Behar also generously helped the evacuees who took asylum in and after 1971.<sup>62</sup>

Most of the people who came over to North Bengal in 1971 belonged to poor peasant community. They came here empty handed. To accommodate them with all sorts of help such as food crops, clothing, warm cloths and other essential commodities were

distributed among them by different voluntary organizations. The Bharat Sevashram Sangha established 14 camps and provided food and other daily essential commodities and necessary articles to the uprooted persons.<sup>63</sup> The Akhil Bharat Vivekananda Jubo Mahamondal of Maynaguri of Jalpaiguri district took a leading role in collecting and distributing cash and kinds to the displaced persons. Accompanying the people of all ages the organization arranged to collect clothing and other things through singing the patriotic song composed by Tagore '*Amar sonar Bangla ami tomay bhalobasi, chirodin tomar akash tomar batas amar prane bajay bansi*'. This organization also made arrangements for the nutrition of the babies in camps where the government supply of milk powder was alleged to be not suitable for the babies. So they shouldered the responsibility of supplying barley to the infants of different camps.<sup>64</sup>

The Red Cross Society opened medical units in the border districts. The Red Cross Society also helped the patients through medical assistance and through vaccinations. The organization also supplied milk powder and medicines and precautionary measures were also taken. The organization also supplied milk to the infants in different camps of North Bengal. They had made wonderful job in Dangi camp of Alipurduar. The members of other organizations like Oxfam, Baptist Mission came forward with their helping hands in this camp. They rendered a valuable service in various camps of North Bengal.<sup>65</sup> Different organizations like Lions' Club, Women's coordinating council gave financial assistance to the refugees.<sup>66</sup> There were instances of providing pecuniary help to the 80,000 helpless migrants in Madhyamgram and Salt Lake areas of North 24 Parganas by Oxfam. As a matter of fact the Oxfam offered monetary help to some relief organizations like Abhoy Ashram and Bengal Rural Welfare Societies. The Oxfam in collaboration with Gandhi Peace Foundation in Tripura and Balurghat in West Bengal worked for the migrants. It also supplied medicines to the displaced persons and organized workshops in order to train the young doctors who treated the uprooted persons.<sup>67</sup>

**Effect:**

Rationing system was introduced in Cooch Behar for the evacuees who took shelter in the houses of relatives other than camps. The constant agitation demanding to

introduce rationing system among the new comer migrants in Cooch Behar residing in different places other than the camps ultimately crowned with success.<sup>68</sup> The local schools, colleges and local clubs took active initiative to assist the uprooted evacuees from Bangladesh. The colleges and universities also joined hands with several relief committees to expedite the speedy disposal of the articles meant for the migrants.

There was no doubt, due to excessive flow of evacuees from East Pakistan and afterwards from Bangladesh created a number of problems in West Bengal as well as in North Bengal, scarcity of food was one of them. Exchange of currency became a profitable business for one section because after coming over to India they had to make their currency exchanged following which some Indians became more financially benefited. In this critical juncture, the menacing price hike of food grains was noticed particularly in Balurghat. Previously rice was sold at Rs. Twenty five to twenty six per mound. But with the influx of refugees the situation changed altogether. The price of rice decreased considerably as the evacuees carried with them sufficient quantity of rice for their daily consumption. During the period of political turmoil some interested traders collected rice from the border areas of Pakistan and sold it in the Indian market with considerable profit. In the meantime with the intervention of border security force this illicit trade was hampered to a great extent. Due to spiraling price hike the general public could not make both ends meet.<sup>69</sup>

### **Rehabilitation outside West Bengal:**

The refugees of the Andamans were accorded cordial reception in Portblairs. The refugees of Eastern Pakistan were granted temporary accommodation in the Andamans for six months. Kalinpur, Manpur, Hamifresganj, Monlutan, Naya sahar and wondur were earmarked for their habitation. There were vast areas of cultivable lands. Those lands would be distributed among the refugees. Initially the Government itself would bear the expenditure of their livelihood and a committee was instituted for the purpose.<sup>70</sup> It was decided that 83 families would soon be deported to Andaman Islands. People of business communities and ordinary general public were selected to be sent to Andaman Islands. In the meantime 350 families were sent to Andaman. Many applied for Andamans but a few were allowed to go. Out of 350 families only 20 families expressed their unwillingness to return.<sup>71</sup>

Innumerable uprooted persons with a view to searching refuge in the territory of West Bengal rushed towards the state in thousands uninterrupted. Punjab in the western boundary witnessed and experienced the same eventualities like their counterparts of East Pakistan. During the war of liberation, Bengali Muslims of Eastern Pakistan, by the pressure of adverse circumstances had to come over to India as refugees or shelter seekers. After the attainments of independence most of the Bangladeshi evacuees returned back to their newly created Bangladesh. It was noticed with bewilderment that the population specially the Hindus who migrated from Eastern Pakistan to West Bengal during war of Bangladesh independence almost remained unattended and uncared by the Government of West Bengal. The Government of India also remained inactive, passive and disinterested of the massive exodus. The former chief ministers of West Bengal Dr. Prafulla Ghosh and Dr. Bidhan Roy apprised the Government of India relating to the pathetic conditions of East Pakistan refugees. But the Government of India lent deaf ears to their appeals.

The left parties of West Bengal took a pioneering role in minimizing the sufferings of the refugee populations. In the mean while the Government of India without making any discussions with the different political parties decided to send the migrated Hindu refugees to Dandakaranya of Madhya Pradesh. On the eve of creation of Bangladesh due to the relentless flow of Hindu migrants the West Bengal Government finding no other means decided to shift them towards Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya state. They were sheltered in different refugee camps of the aforesaid states. The Government of India extended their hand of cooperation by supplying daily essential commodities, food and medicines free of cost to ameliorate their distress.<sup>72</sup> The India Government also decided to send the 'excess' refugees outside West Bengal to places like Dandakaranya of Madhya Pradesh and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Number, approximately more than one lack displaced individuals of Bangladesh being denied of securing homesteads in West Bengal territory were compelled to move towards Dandakaranya of Madhyapradesh. They had to move towards Dandyakaranya according to the sweet will of the Indian Government. The greatest hardship was faced by those who were transported to the places outside West Bengal. Those uprooted came to West Bengal again were transported from Bengal.

It was decided at the executive level that the refugees belonging to the so called lower castes like Namasudras, Kshatriyas, Pundra Kshatriyas were compelled to go to Dandakaranya as they took shelter in the refugee camps receiving doles from the Government. According to Prafulla Chakraborty “the agriculturist, petty traders and craftsman in government relief camps who were under sentence of deportation to Dandakaranya”.<sup>73</sup> However, the refugees were reluctant to go to the dry, ‘alien land’ of Dandakaranya. The Government, finding no other alternatives stopped their doles temporarily. When the refugees were again forced to push back to Dandakaranya by the Government, the refugees unitedly made demonstration and revolt. They launched massive civil disobedience movement in the Gandhian way and as a consequence more than 30,000 camp refugees were arrested. Though the movement was short lived, still it left a major imprint on the psyche of the refugees. It helped them to come out of their shell. The refugees who were deported to Dandakaranya or Andaman had to face more hostile environment in comparison to that place where they were before.

Shaibal Kumar Gupta, the Chairman of Dandakaranya project assumed the charge of the project in 1963 opined that in the year 1959 for the first time refugee rehabilitation programme was executed in three villages of Pharasgaon. Till the year 1964 the number of old refugee families comprised 7500. Among them 7261 families were rehabilitated in agricultural land.<sup>74</sup> Dandakaranya the Mana transit camp was the biggest one. It was constructed long before. Under the Mana transit camp there were many other camps like Mana, Manabhata, Kendri, Kurud and Naogaon camps. Except Mana the other camps were set up after coming of the refugees from East Pakistan in 1970. All those camps lacked minimum needs of life. The male inmates of the camp were engaged for the building of villages, construction of roads, reclamation of jungle areas etc.<sup>75</sup> Virtually up to 1954 the number of refugees in camps of West Bengal rose to 5,57,544 and after that it was beyond the capacity of the camps to accommodate the refugees any more.<sup>76</sup> Even after that the clandestine flow of refugees from East Pakistan continued unabated. ‘Dandakaranya project’ was meant for the rehabilitation of the peasant class from East Pakistan. The surplus displaced person from Eastern Pakistan were booked for Dandakaranya for their rehabilitation. The uncongenial atmosphere, unhygienic surroundings, scarcity of cultivable land, acute scarcity of drinking water, non cooperation of the local public, inadequate supply of food, non availability of the food for the infants were the main problems that they had to face

for years together. Amidst various problems the inmates of the camps had to face the deaths of their near and dear ones following mal-nutrition, lack of medical treatment, scarcity of medicines and acute monetary stringency. It was reported heaps of dead bodies were kept in a big field for mass cremation.<sup>77</sup>

To minimize the long standing grievances of the camp dwellers in Dandakaranya a committee was formed in 1973 known as ‘Udvastu Unnyanshil Samiti’ under the initiative of Satish Mandal and Rangalal Goldar. Under their leadership the camp refugees were united to voice their demands.<sup>78</sup> They decided to go back to West Bengal. The inmates of Naogaon camp first proceeded towards West Bengal and they were intercepted at Kharagpur railway station by the police and were forcefully deported to Taota project of Madhya Pradesh. Following the incidence 144 was enforced in camps of Dandakaranya. Police patrol was intensified and red alert was sounded in the camps.<sup>79</sup> The refugees became the victims of frequent changes of station without the fault of their own. Apart from the aforesaid camps there were other places in Madhyapradesh viz. parulkot and Jamri of Bastar district where refugees were rehabilitated. Beside Madhya Pradesh Orissa was also a recipient of refugees. In Koraput district there were three zones viz. Umakot zone, Raigarh Zone and Malkangiri zone for the rehabilitation of refugees.<sup>80</sup> 24 villages of Umakot and other 24 villages of Raigarh were set up. In Umrakot 1240 refugee families were provided where as in Raigarh 2546 families were also accommodated.<sup>81</sup>

### **Marichjhapi operation:**

The noted poet Subhas Mukhopadhyay opined that there were the children of cow dung collectors, where they went they were treated harshly, the doors where they used to go were treated ruthlessly. The real pictures of those displaced persons were just like the cow dung collectors. In 1977 when the Left Front Government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu came to power, the settlers of Dandakaranya saw the ray of new hope and dream to settle in West Bengal. The displaced persons unanimously decided to go to ‘Morichjhapi’ of the Sundarbans. Before their departure towards Sundarban’s Morichjhapi some refugees were settled in some areas of Orissa, some parts of Maharashtra and some parts of Andhra Pradesh. The refugee centre ‘Morichjhapi’ was established in Dandakaranya. The slogan ‘Sundarban cholo’

became the slogan of protest of the refugees. A prominent refugee leader Shri Satish Mondal enrolled himself to be the leader of Sundarban movement. The 'Bharat Sebashram Sangha', a philanthropic organization, came out with their helping hands. No arrangements for the distribution of relief materials to the refugee victims were made by the Government of West Bengal. The above said reports were available from the reporters of different journals of that period.

The refugee migrants entered and occupied without any resistance in the areas viz. Bagna, Kumirmari etc. It is worth to be noted here that the minister of that period Radhika Banerjee conveyed the message to the Central Government to grant Rs. 50 lacks for helping the refugees. The total number of refugees at Hasnabad was 11,106. The refugee population of Chor Hasnabad was 16,929 and at Kumirmari and Bagna was 5000. Defying 144 a strong crowd of 6000 refugees crossed the Ichhamoti river and took shelter at Hasnabad. The next day the local administration imposed 144 and debarred the refugees from entering Hasnabad. Consequently in the presence of ministers, District Magistrates, superintendent of Police, 30 additional superintendants of Police, and few companies of reserve Police were deployed but the turbulent crowd bravely encountered the challenge and they began to construct dwelling houses with bamboo structures. They spread oil papers over their roofs and began to live.<sup>82</sup> The then Chief Secretary of West Bengal Mr. Amiya Kumar Sen expressed his view in regard to the refugees of East Pakistan before the reporters that " I am looking in to the situation, I am watching where the refugees want to settle then I shall take step. The State Government does not want bloodshed in this matter ". The Chief Secretary in his interview with the news papers reporters that 1200 refugees had taken temporary shelter on the Burdwan railway station, they did not seek any assistance from the Government. At least 500 refugees reached to the Shealdah station but they flatly expressed their denial to be shifted to any other refugee relief camp. During this period 50 individuals swam across the river and their destination was Bagna locality.<sup>83</sup>

The Morichjhapi operation was completed, the police administration of West Bengal claimed the operation as a complete and successful operation which would have never been possible by the military operation of India. The ill fated innocent people of East Pakistan, on the plea of seeking refuge at Morichjhapi were immediately arrested by the police and transported to other refugee camps through launches. The victims were

considered as the thieves, dacoits and criminals so they were mercilessly treated and inhumanly tortured by the police authorities. The Government planned to transport the refugees forcibly to Dandakaranya again. According to Atal Behari Bajpayi that in each and every day at least two thousands uprooted persons crossed the border braving the red eye of the police.

It is a matter of great disgrace and humiliation that following the apathy of both State and Central Government the innocent refugee victims became the puppets in the hands of the government. They were forced to move from one corner to other corners of India like shuttle cocks. The successive denial of settlement of the uprooted persons particularly in the Andaman Islands, Dandakaranya and Marichjhapi the problem mounted gradually. Now the most vital questions arises who was responsible for this catastrophe? But the question remained unanswered and it will remain unanswered to the generations to come. Since the very inception of Bangladesh in 1971 India had to confront with copious diplomatic problems, economic problems, social and ethnic problems consecutively. So, creation of Bangladesh had a tremendous impact upon India. India took a pioneering role of a saviour of Bengalis of East Bengal from the grip of brutal military administration of Pakistan under the inspiring leadership of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Only for her active initiative Bangladesh was created and got international recognition as an independent state.

During the period of struggle for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, sizable residents who fled to India remained in Indian soil. About 10 million escaped from Bangladesh to India but after the war majority of the migrants returned back to their original residence. At the same time a good number of migrants remained permanently in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and other North Eastern States.<sup>84</sup> In a report it was stated that the estimated 15 to 20 million illegal migrants, approximately eight to ten million have settled in West Bengal, six to eight million in Assam and the rest in Tripura and North Eastern States and other major cities as Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad. In 1971 the concentration of Bangladeshi migrants had totally altered the demographic scenario of the border districts of Assam and West Bengal. The chief Minister of West Bengal had once said 'Bangladesh is a threat to India'. In Lok Sabha Shri Dinesh Singh highlighted the fact that the Indian Government had already got 7 million refugees till July, 1971 and there was a possibility of having five million

refugees from East Pakistan. He suggested that a well thought plan should be implemented for resisting that incessant flow.<sup>85</sup>

The then Governor of West Bengal Gopal Krishna Gandhi once uttered that the illegal immigration was 'a time bomb'. Sensing the alarming affairs of India and specially the West Bengal Bibal Pramanik said that not only the intruders but also unplanned parenthood of the Muslims, there would be explosion of children by 2018. Muslim population in West Bengal would be accelerated by 33,17 percent. So the creation of Bangladesh was a great challenge to India. An Italian writer and diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli said during sixteenth century that sending immigrants was the most effective way to colonized countries because it was less offensive than to send military expeditions and much less expensive.

The creation of Bangladesh was an epoch making event in the historical ambit of the world. With the creation of the new independent state the whole political complexion of South East Asia changed radically. Within a span of few decades partitioned India witnessed the creation of a new state amid bloodshed, horrible carnage and inhuman atrocities of the Pak militants upon the common mass, armless inhabitants and helpless individuals of the eastern Pakistan. Misfortunes were the shadow companion of the East Pakistan people. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 and on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947, two independent states viz. India and Pakistan were born. At about two crores of people rendered homeless. It was unquestionably the biggest human convulsion. The Pakistani citizens considered themselves superior to their counterparts of East Pakistan. In 1948, the father of Pakistan nation and the Governor General of Pakistan Md. Ali Jinnah attended a meeting at Curzon Hall of Dacca University on the occasion of annual convocation boldly announced that 'Urdu' would be the state language of Pakistan. The very announcement had a tremendous impact upon the common people of East Pakistan and student's community in particular. They shouted the slogan demanding 'Bengali' to be declared as the state language of Pakistan instead of 'Urdu' as announced by Jinnah. As a protest the students and the other young people to voice their demands assembled on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1952 to disperse the irate mob. The Pak militants fired indiscriminately and killed in gruesome manner the promising youths like Barkat, Soleman, Rafik, Jabbar, Safik etc. They became martyrs for the cause of motherland and mother language. The most dominant feature of the movement was the spirit of nationalism, love towards motherland, patriotism,

upholding the dignity of mother language acted as the guiding principles of the movement. The question continuously strikes us that what was the outcome of that long struggle? Those who roamed from one corner of India to other aimlessly and became puppets in the hands of the Governments, what did they achieve? Peace, certainty and happiness? All the questions remained unanswered for decades together.

It was reported in a news paper named Janamat that evacuees from East Pakistan moved towards India through the borders of Malda, West Dinajpur and Cooch Behar during 1970s. With the large number of refugees some spies of Pakistan also availed the golden opportunity of entering into Indian Territory. From confession of some arrested agents an indication of imminent communal riot in West Bengal was evident. From the version of some refugees who migrated to Islampur from the northern districts of East Pakistan it was clear that there was a possibility of communal disturbances in Pakistan and eventually there was a possibility of torture upon the Hindu minorities. Perhaps the prime reason behind the mass exodus from Pakistan.<sup>86</sup>

#### Notes:

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3. Jahangir Alam Jahan, *Mukti Yudhdhher Itihas*, p.66.
4. Nilanjana Chatterjee, "Interrogating Victimhood: East Bengali Refugee Narratives of Communal Violence", <https://swadhinata.org.uk>, p.4., last accessed 29.7.2018.
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17. Monika Mandal, *Settling the Unsettled: A Study of Partition Refugees in West Bengal*, New Delhi: Monohar, 2011, p.13.
18. Sandip Bandopadhyay, “Millions Seeking Refuge: The Refugee Question in West Bengal: 1971”, in Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees In West Bengal : Institutional Processes and Contested Identities*,p.34.
19. Monika Mandal, *Settling the Unsettled: A Study of Partition Refugees in West Bengal*, New Delhi: Monohar,2011, p.113.
20. Hianmoy Bandopadhyay, *Udvastu*, Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad,1970,p.94.
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42. *Janamat*, 17 May, 1971.
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44. *Janamat*, June 14, 1971.
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46. *Janamat*, November 22, 1971
47. *Janamat*, May17, 1971
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49. *Janamat*, June 14, 1971.
50. *Janamat*, June 21, 1971
51. *Janamat*, August 16, 1971
52. *Janamat*, July 19, 1971
53. *Janamat*, August 23, 1971
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## *CHAPTER V*

### *Psychological convulsion over migration: violence, hardship and trauma of women in West Bengal as well as in North Bengal*

Women have a dual relationship with history as they are simultaneously present and absent in the historical accounts that have come down to us. For a long period they had been considered as supplementary to male action. From feminist standpoint women are invisible in history but they are relatively visible from nationalistic point of view. Thus the task of the feminist historian today is doubly difficult. Unlike many other parts of the world where women have had to be inserted into history, here history has, in a sense, to be rewritten. Historians in the last few decades have shifted their focus on the neglected segments of our society broadening its ambit. Under the new focus, a gender sensitive history has now begun. But if we take into account and make an elaborate analysis of Partition of Indian subcontinent, we can safely conclude that the miserable plight of women centering round the event of partition has long been neglected and ignored though they are the worst victims of the Partition of the Indian. “If we were to look for a de-nationalised, people’s perspective on that epochal event, we would find it elusive and patchy, mostly fictional, mostly male.”<sup>1</sup> Women have remained a closed chapter with the ‘high-politics’ of Partition dominating all administrative and scholarly imagination. Recent historiography emphasizes on the ‘human’ dimension of this tragedy and the women have finally found their rightful place in Partition historiography<sup>2</sup>. Previously focus was on the changing trends in presenting women’s experiences where emphasis was solely attached on the theme of women victimization. But at present scholars concentrate more on the constructive role of the women in the process of rehabilitation.

‘The Other Side of Silence’, the path-breaking book of Urvashi Butalia, probably is the first to have documented the experiences of the women on Partition. The author confesses herself that it has covered only the experiences of the Hindu and Sikh women coming from West Pakistan. Butalia mentions in an issue of the ‘Seminar’ in August 1994 “A serious gap is the omission of experiences in Bengal and East Pakistan (Bangladesh). But these require detailed attention of their own: better not to pay lip service by including an interview or two”. The focus, therefore, is on the

theme of women as victims of partition. It is essential to look on women not from the point of victimization due to the 'greatest human tragedy', but also to represent 1947 as a period much beyond that. The way of rebuilding their shattered lives and accommodating with the nascent nation-state is the main focal point of the recent scholars. Another remarkable book '*Borders and Boundaries*' by Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin emphasizes on the gender accent of Partition Narrative' but confined its discussion within the provinces of West.<sup>3</sup>

Memories and experience of the most vulnerable section of the society like women got special attention from the historians since 1990s. The issue of womenfolk related to the partition of India began to be highlighted with the publication of the articles and book by Urvashi Bhutalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin on Punjab. The experience of women has been explained by Ritu Menon in her work, '*Borders and Boundaries*' (1998). The other two important writers are Bashabi Fraser and Ayesha Jalal who have given a clear depiction of sufferings of women and children. Women's experience of the partition was marked by large scale rape, forced marriage and abduction. Particularly in 1990s, a good number of scholars depicted their interest in bringing out these horrors to the society. It has received special attention of many scholars for the last few years. They have tried to understand the experiences of women during partition in terms of gender and patriarchy. Patriarchy has constructed women in a strange way - her sexuality is a threat to her; her respectability is determined in coherence with her chastity and her body is not her own. It is not only the question of her own honour and respect but also of her family and community. Every woman represents her community and she is the repository of her community's honour. Therefore in a situation of conflict, rape becomes a symbolic form of dishonouring the community. This act very often happened at the time of partition too. Rapes are accompanied with large scale abduction and forced marriage. It is on the bodies of women that the new national border is marked out; the edifices of the two nation states in South Asia are constructed. There was a compelling similarity between the experiences in Punjab and Bengal that in both states the women became the target and prime object of persecution.<sup>4</sup>

It was only with the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century that trained historians started investigating into the historical aftermath of partition and its consistent effect on Bengali women. Historian Joya Chatterji in her book '*Bengal divided: Hindu*

*Communalism and Partition*' (2002) investigates the political vision that the large and powerful section of Hindu society i.e. 'bhadrak' in Bengal insisted that for forming and creating a separate Hindu homeland. The book clearly explains the motivation behind the partition of India and in particular of Bengal and its consequences Bengal's partition lived to face the consequences, which was largely an outcome of their miscalculations. Chatterjee has written with verve and revealed the truth intriguingly.<sup>5</sup> In an article on the boundary award Joya Chatterji exposes the follies and worse of two commissions over which Cyril Redcliff presided over to demarcate the boundaries of the divided provinces of Bengal and Punjab. Another famous journal named 'Seminar', which was published from Delhi interrogated the historical reality of partition of Bengal in from the perspective of gender. Later on, articles of the issue was published as an edited volume named 'The Trauma and Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India' in the year 2003. The book focuses on the experiences of women who experienced the tragedy of partition. Gargi Chakravorty's 'Coming out of partition: Refugee women of West Bengal' emphasizes on the 'refugee women' and their struggle for survival during that period of disorder. The book also stressed on the adversity experienced by the women in the aftermath of the partition. Jill Didur is yet another writer who wrote about Bengali women law and the importance of citizenship in her work.

### **Violence, the women experienced in 1947 and in 1971:**

The partition of India in 1947 is still considered as the largest human migration that history has ever witnessed. "Violence was inextricably linked to the Partition...Partition stories have become so poignant because of the direct or indirect violence associated with them".<sup>6</sup> The impact of partition on the people from East Bengal is maximum, especially the womenfolk who unfortunately have become the refugees in their own state which was previously united. The story of Partition and displacement was accompanied by the story of rape, abduction and widowhood of large number of women in both sides of the borders. When thousands of refugees flocked towards Indian Territory from East Bengal every day after the February Riot in 1950, the women of East Bengal had to pay the cost of independence by their chastity, through the sacrifices of lives of their husbands and their beloved children. During the turmoil concerning the partition of India Women became the most

common targets of attack. Forced marriage, intimidation, rape and abduction of women became the order of the period. Those maltreatments on a large scale were very common ways of attacks upon the Hindu minority women. The refugee women were humiliated and inhumanly tortured on their way to West Bengal under the facade of search by the Pakistani customs officers and staff.<sup>7</sup> The impact of those untoward occurrences is still in vogue in today's society. This research paper intends to investigate and analyze the sufferings underwent by refugee women settled in North Bengal from East Bengal at the time of partition of India.

To protect their honour and dignity the thousands of women of minority communities left their homes overnight. Contemporary news papers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* recorded the arduous journey of women across the borders. Streams of women clutching their babies on one arm and their small belongings on the other were seen walking down the rail tracks. Many died on the way.<sup>8</sup> Figures show that in the interim period between August 1946 and December 1947 millions of Hindus poured in prolific numbers in eastern India alone in to the states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, altering the lives of the people and socio-economic profile of the states forever. The refugees who were ousted from their '*Bhita*' (homeland) and expatriated to a different land following the exchange of population after the partition indeed faced a 'grave misfortune' in their new country. They realised that the natural surroundings, social customs and the daily rituals of the people were sometimes starkly different from their own. Sometimes, even their dialect and intonations of speech became an object of ridicule, often mimicked to evoke slapstick humour.<sup>9</sup> For instance, the arrival of the migrants from the villages of East Pakistan to a big city like Calcutta gave birth to several jokes, which were mostly variations of the clinched encounter between a country bumpkin and a sophisticated urbanite or a village simpleton's awkwardness with stylish standard of living of the city.

An eminent economist Dr. Asoke Mitra espouses in an article in *Economic and Political Weekly* that initially in West Bengal "The widely publicised make-belief was that it was all a temporary upheaval and the refugees would soon return home. A life of alternating insecurity and hope prompted a large section of the refugees to shuttle back and forth between East and West Bengal, wanting to make the best of both worlds but ending up with worst of both"<sup>10</sup>. The predicament of the exile in the

hellhole of these transit rehabilitation camps almost reminds us of the abysmal life-in-death situation of the concentration camps in Europe. Yet those people were better off than those who were thrown in the shelter of railway platform. The Amrita Bazar Patrika described Sealdah station, swarming with flood of refugees as the ‘Gateway to Hell’. Kolkata became a suffering city for refugees who were afflicted with innumerable ordeals in their new abode.<sup>11</sup>

Noakhali was the epicentre or breeding place of communal violence. The Noakhali experience was shocking for both men and women alike. A large number of cases regarding forced marriage between the Hindu girls and Muslim boys, forced abduction of Hindu women, and conversion to Islam became a regular feature. In many cases incidents of abduction complaints could not be reported following sheer terror. Women had to watch the atrocious murder of their husbands.<sup>12</sup> ‘Vermilion marks’ (Sindur) were forcibly erased from the foreheads of women and conch shell bangles broken. The leading news paper ‘The Hindustan Standard’ on November 5, 1946 published a report stating that 300 women were raped in Noakhali and further intimated its readers about 400 rape cases of defenseless women in another area.<sup>13</sup> ‘The Noakhali violence marginalized women, who became victims of male chauvinism.’<sup>14</sup> On 15 November 1946, Sucheta Kripalani on her return tour to Calcutta from Noakhali reported that: “Molestation of women, intimidation and encirclement are still continuing in the affected areas of Noakhali districts”.<sup>15</sup>

The paramilitary forces like Ansars incited Muslim hooligans in this disgraceful act. In Kurmitala air port, which was situated near the military head quarters of Dhaka, a large number of Hindu passengers including women and children were brutally killed or seriously injured.<sup>16</sup> On 11 and 12 February 1950, a large number of murders took place on Chittagong Mail and the Surma Mail. Reports showed the systematic attacks of trains in Bhairab bazaar. The train was stopped over the Meghna Bridge and passengers were attacked.<sup>17</sup> The steamer ‘Ostrich’ was attacked on its way to Calcutta where thousands of refugee passengers mostly women and children were forcibly taken down at Rajkhara. No information was available about the ill fated passengers of the steamer<sup>18</sup>. At Darshana station 500 Ansar troops looted the belongings of the migrants on the pretext of custom checking and at the same time they robbed the women’s ornaments. When one lady refused to offer her ornaments she was made

captive in a locked room. In this connection it may be mentioned that when the Barishal Express reached Shealdah station on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1950, it was found that the train was empty.<sup>19</sup>

Women's organizations of East Bengal staged demonstration in protest against the humiliation on women. The Chittagong branch of the AIWC under the chairmanship of Mrs. Nellie Sengupta, arranged a meeting on 21 October 1946 and constituted a nine member sub-committee to rescue and protect the abducted women. In the event of Noakhali riots, thousands of refugees began to move out. 12000 moved to Chandpur and Comilla; 3000 to Raniganj and 1000 shifted to Calcutta. The Noakhali riot created massive reactions in the remote villages of East Bengal. The places like Rajpur, Ramganj, Lakshmipur and Bebunganj in Noakhali and Faridganj, Chandpur, Hajiganj Laksham and Choudagram in Tippra were most affected.<sup>20</sup> It was clearly revealed from different interviews that school going girls were lifted from their institution during this period of turmoil. Even the girls of Faridpur district would go to their institution armed with a compass like weapon which they used to call 'Baghnakh'.<sup>21</sup> Those incidents prepared the ground for the truncated settlement because only after seven weeks the wave of Partition riot began.

The grim irony of fate was that there were only two options open before the women; one was to embrace glorious death in the hands of their kin which was considered to be the act of martyrdom and the second option was violation of their honour at the hands of the 'other'. However, the experience of violence was not always so explicit and direct. There were other forms of violence which were often dismissed as mere 'psychological fear'. Such instances of violence were vivid through many of the later day narratives and memoirs of the refugees who flocked from East Bengal. To honour their chastity and womanhood the Hindu refugees from East Pakistan were determined to shift themselves to safer and secured abode in West Bengal. A good number of women at the time chose to commit suicide in order to thwart the corporeal holocaust.<sup>22</sup> Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, the then Rehabilitation Commissioner for West Bengal, narrates in his *Udvastu* that often when the women went to take a bath in the pond, some Muslim men would remark, '*Pak Pak Pakistan, Hindur Bhatar Mussolman*' [This is Pakistan, the husband of a Hindu will be a Musalman]. The author cited another example in this connection that Muslims teased the ladies even in sanctified private spatial paradigms such as the bathing places '*E bibi, byala je bede*

*chole. Aar deri kyano? Ebar ghore cholo.*’ [Oh Bibi, its evening now, why delay any further, lets go home.] Bandopadhyay arrives to the conclusion that one of the main reasons for migration was psychological fear—‘*manoshik nipiron*’.<sup>23</sup> It became obvious from that period onwards that it would no longer be possible to stay in the beloved motherland in such a filthy environment and untoward situation. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin are of the view that “..all of them treat women’s bodies as territory to be conquered, claimed or marked by the assailant”.<sup>24</sup>

Social activist Mrs.Asoka Gupta and her husband Saibal Gupta collected documentary evidences on many East Bengal refugees for submission of the report to the Enquiry Commission. In those testimonies, the narratives of refugee women were also included. Most of the women who were interviewed had their origins in farmer’s families. They spoke of their horrible experiences of the gruesome violence which prevailed during that period of turmoil. They presented the vivid description of various factors that compelled them to quit their motherland. The regular abduction of women, ‘pollution’ of temples, destruction of idols, washing beef in their wells, throwing the carcasses of pig in the courtyard were few of the many xenophobic malpractices that tended to threaten the Hindu minority in the newly conceived Islamic Pakistan<sup>25</sup>. Those accounts revealed the extent of insecurity of the Hindus in East Pakistan, and yet, their real fears were dismissed as a mere psychological construction. As pointed out by Nehru, that Honourable Members have said that people in East Bengal had not been led to come away because of newspaper articles or by public speeches, that there were other causes. Of course there were other causes. Who said any newspaper speech or an article could make a million people come away? “... but when there is this huge upset in people’s minds and people are frightened and are full of fear, then every little thing counts... we are dealing with not only an economic upset or social upset but a psychological problem of the greatest magnitude”.<sup>26</sup>

Countless evacuees leaving behind their mother land proceeded towards West Bengal and to the districts of North Bengal again during the political turmoil of 1971. The horrible picture of oppression upon the fair sex of the Hindu minorities had been published through the different Medias of the period. Though the inflow of people was equal in all districts of North Bengal, yet West Dinajpur surpassed all the

districts. The voiceless innocent teenagers, newly wedded women, mothers and senior women citizen were equally assaulted and raped by the miscreants. The most alarming incident is recorded to have happened in Hilly railways where two railway compartments were packed naked physically abused and mentally tortured women. Such brutal display of an organized violence was unprecedented in the annals of recent history. The people of Dinajpur witnessed the atrocities of the militants and miscreants where they were nothing but mute spectators. Only tears and lamentations were their silent protests.<sup>27</sup>

The State recognized mass abductions, sexual violation and forcible conversion as 'real violence'. Only those women who were exposed to such violence became the immediate responsibility of the State. They would be the first beneficiaries of State 'benevolence'. Thus, women coming from East Pakistan would have to face more hardships for they were not always seen as victims of such ghastly violence. During the period of disturbances, the oppression on women in Rongpur reached to an alarming extent. The Rongpur cantonment and the Arts council building became the centres of women captives. They were ruthlessly tortured by the Pak militants. Sayedpur High School of Nilphamari and Darul Ulum Madrasah were converted to be the cells of women oppression.<sup>28</sup>

### **Journey towards unknown destination:**

The passage of uprooted women towards the unknown destination was not a passage founded on roses. It was riddled with thorns and hurdles. Rampant looting, indiscriminate arson, atrocious murders and abduction of women became the distinctive characteristics of the riots during 1950 and onwards. The migrant women travelled on overcrowded steamers, motor launches, trains etc. A huge number of refugees walked a long way through jungle bare footed. Most of their properties were left back in their homeland to which they would never return in future. They could only bring few clothing or a small trunk with them.

After much maltreatment and distress, the refugees migrated over to West Bengal where there was none to entertain their settlement. They had to face various problems every now and then. A large number of uprooted persons of East Bengal had to stay at

Sealdah railway station where they would spend days, weeks, even more than a month. The refugees were asked to stay in open station compound. A huge number of refugees rushed to North Bengal through different borders adjacent to their place of residence. As a matter of fact the West Bengal Government was not prepared for such a massive exodus of people. At first the uprooted persons were inoculated and then they were asked to present themselves as a 'family grouping' to an officer from the Relief and Rehabilitation Department. The idea of 'family grouping' perplexed the migrants. They actually belonged to the joint families and it was beyond their imagination to be grouped as smaller and nuclear units according to the order of the officer. This ultimately broke the joint families into male headed groupings.<sup>29</sup> Women, who were accustomed to stay indoors, were now driven to the discomfiting, unfamiliar outside which laid beyond the purview of their safe homes. It was beyond the dream on the part of the uprooted women. They were exploited, maltreated, humiliated, physically and mentally assaulted in different places including Sealdah station itself. Their innocence, ignorance, simplicity and helplessness were sometimes capitalized by some interested persons. During the period of disorder following partition, forced marriage became rampant and common feature. To accept and recognize the abductors as husbands were unthinkable, painful and pathetic in the truest sense of the term. The central and state government had launched ventures to bring back those affected unfortunate women and to send them back to their parents. But it was not an easy task. The initiatives rendered by the Government to rescue the affected women failed miserably.

But if we discuss about the migration of refugees to the districts of North Bengal we find that they marched through the Gitaldaha border, Hili border, Mohendraganj border of Meghalaya, Murshidabad border etc. There is no doubt that mainstream refugee exodus took place through Sealdah station. A huge number of migrants who could not find their shelter in and around Calcutta and suburban areas flocked towards the districts of North Bengal. They mainly took refuge in various camps meant for the refugees. A sizable number of uprooted persons from East Pakistan took shelter in the residence of near and dear ones and also in houses of distant relatives. In some cases inhabitants of a particular area instead of knowing the refugees personally made necessary arrangement for their habitation. From different interviews it was clear that local people in different districts of North Bengal also gave land to the displaced

persons for cultivation. People of Rajbansi community helped these uprooted people through monetary assistance. During this period women refugees became compelled to involve themselves in agriculture and agriculture related professions.

Refugee families came to North Bengal from Khulna, Chattagram, Mymensingh, Rongpur, Faridpur, Dhaka, Barishal, Rajshahi, Pabna districts of East Pakistan. The migrant women from East Pakistan to Malda, Jalpaiguri, West Dinajpur, Siliguri and Cooch Behar who have been interviewed in different times reacted with bitterness. All of them, though hailing from different districts, different social and family background, are of the same opinion unanimously that the places they left are not places worth living in. When the migrants in the districts of West Bengal were asked the reason for migration, there has been a universal admittance of the fact that East Pakistan had become a heaven for the people Islam by religion. The main concerns for women and children were perhaps best reflected in Rameshwari Nehru's analysis of the situation "... these women and children were the victims of partition and its subsequent upheaval, it is, *in the opinion of all right thinking people, obligatory on the part of the Government to provide for their maintenance and care.*" In its declaration of policy, the Government has acknowledged this responsibility, and the Prime Minister also has given repeated assurances to the people, that *unattached destitute women and children would be fully looked after by the State.*<sup>30</sup> In fact she felt that such women should be dealt with as one would deal with victims of war and hence suggested that they should be categorized as 'war-widows' and 'war orphans'.

### **Rehabilitation of refugee women:**

The act of recovery and the scheme of restoration of abducted women in the East were not as adequately planned like that of West. It was the misconception of leaders that the women in the East were not real victims of 'direct' violence. Such a projection could have possibly had two latent motives, firstly toning down the act of violence with a view to discourage migration and secondly, a general apathy of the State towards the plight of the minorities in the East, which in turn was governed by the economics of rehabilitation.<sup>31</sup> For the restoration of confidence among the minorities on both sides the Delhi Pact was inked by the two Governments. Following

this pact the Search Service Bureau in Calcutta was set up. Along with it a Search Service Section/ Liaison Office attached to the Deputy High Commission in Dacca was set up. It is here that the Dacca Transit Home was started by Mridula Sarabhai. The main object of the office was to provide shelter to the unattached and other women of the minority community. The Home was set up with the exclusive purpose of providing a secured home for the women who felt threatened. 'No definite information was available about the number of women abducted in East Bengal or the number of women converted to Islam. In this regard The West Bengal Search Service Bureau registered 78 cases of abduction and 172 cases of missing women in East Bengal. Apart from these, 7 cases of missing and abducted women were reported to the East Bengal Government by the Deputy High Commissioner for India at Dacca. The East Bengal Government sent to the West Bengal Government the 12 cases of missing women. In a press conference the East Bengal Relief Commissioner claimed that 23 women had been recovered except one who was then in prison custody. In this regard 75 cases had been carefully examined, where it was subsequently found that 56 women who were missing or abducted were found living with their kin. One woman died a year ago, 5 were killed in the disturbances, the identity of 9 remained unestablished.<sup>32</sup>

It will not be out of place to mention in this connection the recovery and restoration programme in the West where the State itself would take the decision in context of women migration. The women had no option of their own to take decision to migrate or not. The abducted women were not allowed to stay long in a particular place of a state with the apprehension that the abductor's family members would try to influence either the officials in getting her back, or the mere presence of the woman in the same state could influence her decision in favour of staying back. Hence, almost as soon as they were recovered, these women were quickly shifted to the Transit camp, and thereafter, restored to their families. As observed in the records, very few women would seek refuge in Dacca Transit Camp. The Government of India made frequent instructions and orders for immediate shut down of the home. But the Deputy High Commissioner summarily rejected the proposal on the plea that the closure of this Home would create repercussion and would leave 'a demoralizing effect not only in the minority community in East Pakistan but it would also become the object of criticism of the public in India.'<sup>33</sup>

In post 1950 the Migration Certificate (MC), was the only legal means to enter India from East Pakistan, but obtaining these Migration Certificates (MC) was difficult. It was much easier for women in procuring the migration certificate because the State itself was in favour of certain categories of women. As a matter of fact, both the Central and State governments discouraged migration across Eastern borders. Both the Governments simultaneously agreed that the minorities did not confront any real threat in East Bengal. Therefore few restrictions like passports, migration certificates, doles etc. were imposed upon them. But the bona fied refugee women were treated differently from their male counterparts. In certain cases priority was given in issuing Migration Certificates to the women considering the magnitude of the issue in question.<sup>34</sup> The following categories of women were given priorities: Unattached women and widows with no livelihood in East Pakistan; Wives joining husbands in India; Families living in areas considered unsafe, for example, in isolated pockets or where there is apprehension about abduction of girls and elopement under influence; Adult girls going to India for marriage. These facilities were not applicable to the others members of the family.<sup>35</sup> The refugee women worked day in and day out with their male counterpart in their relentless effort for proper rehabilitation. As a consequence, after a long run, those women became the protagonists of professional independent women. Many refugee women played vital role in setting up various refugee colonies working hand in hand with the male folk. Manikuntala Sen opines that the refugee womenfolk form the majority of the working women of West Bengal. They are now engaged in different jobs according to their efficiency. It is a glaring example of the struggle of uprooted women who once had lost everything.<sup>36</sup>

#### **State-sponsored Rehabilitation Programme:**

During the whole period of migration a dual role was played by the State, serving on the one hand as a protector and on the other a benevolent patriarch. As the protector, the State recovered the women from the 'enemy' territory, and also restored the 'other' women. In its role as that of the benevolent patriarch, the State took the responsibility of rehabilitating the single or unattached women in the special homes. Some production-cum-training centres were set up for the recovered women. Kasturba Niketan in Delhi and Uday Villa in Kolkata became the most prominent of such Homes for women. The main purposes of those homes were to enable the women to come out of the trauma of partition and victimhood, and also to encourage

them to be self dependent. Initially, those homes were meant for destitute, single refugee women, but ultimately other refugees were also entitled to join those training centres.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the State shouldered the heavy responsibility of rehabilitating the refugee women through various promising social-welfare schemes. It was decided by the Honourable Minister in the conference on 9.5.1955 that every effort should be made to rehabilitate those young girls *through marriage*.<sup>38</sup> Once settled in this manner, they would no longer be the responsibility of the State unless, they were the inmates of the Permanent Liability camps.

### **The Women's Home in the East:**

The Government of India became concerned with the issue of rehabilitation of refugees coming from East Pakistan in the post-1950s. Simultaneously for the improvement of the pecuniary stability and honorable settlement of the refugee women, the state government took an active initiative. In fact the state government was quite watchful in its approach towards the issue of Homes or Infirmaries. The State Government was well conversant with the fact that in case of a wrong move the whole responsibility of maintaining these refugees would be rested upon the Government. Hence, in a meetings of the Central Advisory Committee for Homes and Infirmaries in the eastern region, a proposal was placed urging to omit the term 'Permanent Liability' used to describe such Homes and such refugees; instead insertion of the phrase 'Camps for unattached displaced women or old and infirm displaced persons' was advocated. But this was not approved as it would have been hardly possible for the state government to claim reimbursement of expenditure incurred on the maintenance of the refugee women without specific sanction from the Government of India.<sup>39</sup>

Abala Basu was the main motivating force behind the home 'Uday Villa'. This project for displaced persons began with ten resident women members. Abala Basu's aim was not only to provide vocational training but also to open a production centre.<sup>40</sup> Another point to note here is that two rehabilitation schemes for displaced women were also sanctioned both by the West Bengal Government and the Government of India at that period. Under that scheme Uday Villa obtained financial assistance for the adult women worker. The Art Department of Uday Villa was inaugurated in 1954.

Arrangements were made for providing training to the women who had natural talent for artistic cottage crafting. Attempts were also made to revive the folk-motifs. Under the active initiative of Dr. B.C. Roy and Renuka Roy, the Rehabilitation Department of Government of West Bengal arranged a stall at the Kalyani Congress Exhibition in 1954 where handicraft produced in Uday Villa were exhibited. From then onwards Uday Villa received regular orders from Khadi Gramodyog Bhaban as well as from the Cottage Industry. In an exhibition at Jahangir Art Gallery of Bombay in 1959, articles worth 5 Lac were sold in a single day that eventually increased the demand of artifacts of Uday Villa within short span of time.<sup>41</sup> In the districts of North Bengal a number of refugees were interviewed, could not tell about the existence of any recognized home with certitude.

The advisory committee regarding the unattached women formulated some programme with a view to make the displaced women hailing from East Pakistan self dependent in various ways. This committee also stressed on imparting vocational, professional and practical training. Initially almost 900 women were given training on child education, social works in rural sectors, cooking, domestic works, making toys and also rehabilitating the young girls through marriage. The report stated that the above mentioned policies for the purpose of rehabilitating such women and families became successful in reducing the number of dependent families.<sup>42</sup> According to their age and ability to work women were grouped at first and only then they were granted rehabilitation assistance. The Homes for women were set up in a hurry in the available military barracks which were in appalling condition. Also, the water and electric supplies in the Homes were inconsistent. The report highlighted the inequitable scales of financial assistance provided to the homes in the East through statistical data. There was no shadow of doubt that rehabilitation was the only possible normal desired way to get rid of the camp-life and subsequently merge oneself with the general stream of the society<sup>43</sup>.

In the eastern region, however, it was seen that rehabilitation and other facilities were difficult to get for the trained, able bodied sons, where as in Western region the able bodied sons of women were entitled to get financial assistance. In East even women with sons were forced to live in those dilapidated Homes, while in the West the sons of the rehabilitated women, immediately after getting assistance, left the Homes for

constructing their own abodes. However women in West who had daughters were denied of such financial opportunities. For now, it would suffice to say that the Homes in the western region were much better equipped to handle the issue of permanent rehabilitation of the permanent liability category.<sup>44</sup> In North Bengal, there are scarcity of records which can validate the existence of such Home for women. It can be said with certitude that the women who migrated over here were not in such a helpless condition like that of the other districts of West Bengal. As the refugees from affluent families settled in the districts of North Bengal, they did not confront severe problems like their refugee compatriots in West Bengal.

### **Other Aid Given to Women:**

Apart from opening vocational training centres for the women, there were other facilities provided to them as well. The Employment Bureau, which had been set up for the exclusive purpose of providing employment opportunities to the displaced persons, attempted to secure employment for the refugee women as well. According to the statistics provided by the Directorate of National Employment Service, West Bengal, it was observed, had witnessed increase in the demand for employment among women in the post-partition era. This survey, while commenting upon the trends in female employment, shows that as soon as the refugee family was in a relatively better position the traditional norms of the family came back into existence and women were withdrawn from the work scene. It also shows that the maximum number of women employed was unmarried, and post-marriage these women often left their jobs.<sup>45</sup> For the development of women in all respects, an advisory committee was formed with the female members so that they could earn something with their own efforts. 900 women were deployed in different technical and vocational institutions to get adequate training for nursery, social works, art of cooking, maintenance of cleanliness in various areas, ability to perform domestic works, engage them in cottage industry like handloom, toy making and cane industry. The period of training was fixed from six months to one year. Training for social awareness was also imparted.<sup>46</sup> Ideal centres for the training of refugee women were created with the purpose of enabling them to be self sufficient. 13 centres were built in this connection. The trained women were recruited from Dhubulia, Bagmari and Ranaghat refugee colonies. Majority of them hailed from Dacca. Mymensing,

Faridpur and Jessore. Trained students were awarded stipend of Rs. 25 per month for their food and lodging.<sup>47</sup>

During 1954-55, for the rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal, the central Government sanctioned Rs. 1 crore and 18 Lac loan for each district. Rs. 28 Lac 4 thousand was granted to the refugees of Government colonies and Rs. 90 Lac were granted to the refugees who were outsiders and not the inmate of the camp colonies. For the training of the refugee women through private organizations an amount of 10 Lac 4 thousand was awarded to 250 refugee women. 1 Lac 10 thousand was granted to Belur women Home. 95 thousand was spend f or the technical training of the women in Assam.<sup>48</sup> A report was available from the esteemed news paper Jugantar that in the urban areas of West Bengal, about 21500 refugees were put up at Government colonies. Those colonies which were situated near urban localities got more facilities. In the year 1952, 70,500 refugees were sanctioned trade loans. An amount of 91 lakhs and 34 thousand were granted for the purpose. More so loans were also allotted to lawyers, doctors, Ayurveda practitioners etc. In this connection 1,047 families were benefited. 'Uday villa', a training centre for women played a vital role. Training camps for the women were established in Habra and Hooghly. 200 refugee women were trained per session. In Siliguri and in Bongaon new markets were set up.<sup>49</sup>

### **'Coming out of Partition':**

In Asok Mitra's 'Take a Girl Like Her'.....narrates the position of refugee women in the alien land. The woman who has to take up the burden of the rest of her family, she who must give up all marriage proposals till her family is in a position to fend for itself, she who is the one who has to sacrifice her wants and desires to ensure her family is not deprived of theirs—she is the typical refugee girl<sup>50</sup>. Mitra poignantly points out how such women just got entangled in the labyrinth of life and could not enjoy even a moment for their own sake. Their income was so essential to the dying family that for many,...'Whoever takes on the load of responsibility for once gets stuck with it forever.... Everybody, mother included, took it for granted that the girl would go about earning the extra money'.<sup>51</sup> Describing the tedious life of a refugee girl, Mitra writes—

... there is no variation in the theme from day-to-day. She has nothing to look forward to, she has nothing to plan for, except the short term arithmetic of how much to try to borrow from which neighbour or school colleague... [brothers would waste away the money earned by her in expensive restaurants, but she could not] for she was the *leading earner* in the family, and the entire salary she meticulously hands over to her mother. Nobody cares to ask how many saris she has... There is no question of marriage... you need a minimal glow of health even for *divertissements* like that. This Bengali girl is nobody's desire... she has nothing to look forward to, spinsterdom, give or take a few years, is going to set in early...<sup>52</sup> Such were the difficult circumstances of those times which demanded this sacrifice from the women. The similar view is reflected in many of the interviewees that the country's independence has limited impact women. They actually have not got anything apart from the unalterable slide towards pauperization. Much more than any of the rest of the family, the female member of a family is the one who has suffered the most. Yet, there is certain inner courage in them, that has enable them to sail through the remorseless process of history much better than the rest of the household.

There persisted some internal class differences regarding the rehabilitation of urban and rural refugee women. It was observed that the main concern of the State was the suitable rehabilitation of the urban refugee women. All the production-cum-training centres were located in the towns and cities. The market for the goods prepared was also in the city itself. The idea of vocational training was in fact carefully thought out especially for these women. For the rural refugee women, neither education nor vocational training was thought out as an option for their rehabilitation. In North Bengal region, there were some training schools after 1971. Prior to this period perhaps, the said region lacked such facilities for the womenfolk. They were settled in the countryside to work on the fields or even if in the city, then they were employed more often as domestic help. The most visible change brought about by this disruption was the increased participation of the women in the public sphere. Even though under the aegis of Gandhi, women had come out in public and participated in the national movement, yet in the post-partition period coming out of the seclusion was not simply a matter of choice, but of survival. Often women chose to participate in the post-partition rehabilitation work because it was in such social work that they found some

means of succour for their lives which had been torn apart by the violence of partition.<sup>53</sup>

A report published by the Directorate of National Employment Service in 1958 reflects on the aspect of marriage taking a backseat in the life of these refugee women. Partition of India has struck a severe blow to the family life of several millions of Bengalis in East Pakistan who were compelled to migrate to India leaving behind their sources of income in land and properties. They had been landed in such a plight that joint efforts of male and female members were needed in most cases to retrieve their fallen fortunes. There were numerous families which, in the absence of male earners, had to depend entirely on one or more of their female members. All these factors had tended to progressively increase the number of women job-seekers.’ The report further mentions the increase in the number of women seeking employment— ‘In 1953 the average number of monthly women registrants with the employment exchange of India was 4256 per month. While in 1957 it rose to 8563 per month, i.e. there was a 100% increase during the last five years.’ Thus, it is evident that the women began to take up this role earnestly out of the emergent compelling factors. But once this role was taken up then it became important to set aside the thought of marriage. This was the most important break from the past for the Bengali women.<sup>54</sup>

The refugee women from East Pakistan had much to struggle for. It was not a smooth passage for them as they were often ignored as victims of ‘genuine’ violence and thus were blamed for migrating to India without any ‘genuine’ reason. Refugee women from Punjab were treated to be the worst victims of violence and were consequently considered as the responsibility of the state. The State tried to do the most for these women. The responsibility to recover abducted women rested upon the officials of both India and Pakistan. Some women volunteers also shouldered the heavy responsibility to rescue and rehabilitate those abducted women. The young women from Delhi School of Social Work came forward.<sup>55</sup> The rehabilitation strategies often forced these women to Indians by their penal transportation from homes in Pakistan to India. Though in the process there were some arbitrary decisions taken up as well, but the point of consolation was that the rehabilitation of refugees coming from Punjab was not a matter of struggle between the state and the refugees. Rather, here the two worked in tandem with each other and this healthy cooperation resulted

in the successful story of rehabilitation in the West. The Refugee women in West Bengal asserted their political rights with the same intensity and intent as their counterparts in the west. The fortnightly reports in the Police Records from Kolkata had a regular column on the activities of ‘refugees’, and also of ‘women’ and that highlighted how actively the fair sex participated in protests, marches and movements demanding for the provision of basic necessities in the camps—roofed accommodation, food, water, cash doles etc.<sup>56</sup> The means used by the women were fasting, participation in mass rallies, demonstrations in front of the homes of politicians, and submission of memorandums were the means used by women. Women participated in such processions often of their own accord and in many occasions, as an expression of solidarity towards their male counterparts.

But what eased the way for the refugee women coming from West Pakistan to assert themselves was the fact that they were the valid citizens of this country. This was so because the principle of the exchange of population had been accepted for the western borders. The borders in the east were however maintained as soft borders, and the refugee influx was hence regulated strictly. Only a specific category of women were permitted entry from East Pakistan into Indian Territory. Women would be treated in much the same way as the other refugee families in the east were being treated, unless they were the victims of violence, or those who had lost the male guardian in their family. It was in such circumstances that one observes a greater participation of refugee women in rehabilitation politics in Bengal. Their role here was therefore, all-round— economic, political and social. That could be available in the varied personal memories of the refugees. In Punjab those refugee women sacrificed their lives to protect family, community and honour of the state were remembered and immortalized, where as in Bengal, migrants had a silent pride was noticed among the living folks as they spoke about their women who ably supported their families sacrificing their own personal desires. The ultimate proof of the lack of adequate State aid in the East was that the Homes existed for a long period and its inmates awaited rehabilitation assistance even after many years of partition, which was a stark reminder of the ‘incomplete’ job done in the East.

### **Experiences of the East Bengali refugee women during the partition:**

Many of the abducted women considered the recovery operation conducted by Governments as a second uprootment. At the same time many of them lodged protest against the recovery operation and expressed their unwillingness to return to their parents or relations. They were quiet conscious about their destiny in the days to come. They were confident enough that their affectionate parents and sweet relations would not accord their returns cordially. In some cases they were forced to come back leaving behind their infants. The eternal question of motherhood was left unanswered by the male protagonists of recovery operations. Instead of protecting the abducted women, the recovery measures increased their agony and suffering. Those women were certainly fortunate who have had the opportunity to avoid abduction during the time of riot or on the way to West Bengal. They also suffered a lot in different manners. The women in question who had lost their male guardians were tortured and abused in their dwelling camps and colonies also. Undoubtedly they had the potential to live a normal life if they were provided with the opportunity. But by the grim irony of fate some rescued women were sent to Ashrams (homes) as they were not accepted by their families. A scanty number of women had the opportunity to lead a much desired family. Sometimes in private Homes, the refugee women were forced to marry unknown persons from other provinces.<sup>57</sup>

The women who were attached to their families had to shoulder the burden of displacement simultaneously with their male counterparts. In Bengal women were regarded as '*Annapurna*', one entrusted with the task of providing food to all family members. It was nothing but a long standing tradition of Bengali womanhood. Due to acute scarcity of food the women community had to undergo tremendous psychological pressure. Many of them committed or attempted to commit suicide for not being able to perform their expected duty properly. The women in their daily life and activities and in their struggle for survival and existence with their male members were nothing but shadow companions of the men. To add to their misfortune, even the local women looked down upon them. They were treated as untouchables, irrespective of their caste and creed. The local people thought that the women of East Bengal had been exploited by the Muslims. The refugee women were denied collection of drinking of water from the public water supplies. The successive deprivation of the displaced women gradually developed a sense of dignity, self-reliance and capability

among them. In the long run this helped the refugee women to attain success in the teeth of healthy oppositions and insurmountable hurdles.

### **Effects of Partition on womenfolk:**

West Bengal was a place where the refugees were badly affected with countless ordeals in their new place of uncertainty. A sizable section of those refugee families who took refuge in station and camps were later cramped into shanties in extremely narrow space. Sealdah station of Calcutta and the adjoining areas got overcrowded with refugee exodus. Those refugees had to depend entirely on small doles, they were compelled to stay at station premises for months together till they were shifted to relief camps.<sup>58</sup> As a consequence of this scarcity of space in the slums the strictness of several orthodox rituals, particularly those stringent customs relating to purity and cleanliness, became almost impossible to be observed. With the introduction of new amendments, the long standing belief and customs of the refugees underwent through a radical socio-economic changes. This gradually altered their personal outlooks and also brought about change in their mind set. The women could not maintain their privacy in a single-room apartment. Prior to the Partition, the women could enjoy and maintain their privacy in spacious rooms meant for them. But after migrating to West Bengal the scenario changed altogether due to overcrowded population of the colonies. Following scarcity of space the women had to share “their space with men, sleeping in the same room with their in-laws and brothers-in law”<sup>59</sup>. As the gulf between the “private” and the “public” narrowed down, the refugee women were able to expose themselves to the outer world of men. This gesture brought them into contact with new ideas, including the business and political issues what the men discussed.<sup>60</sup> It also strengthened their bonding with the other women in the community and soon they provided assistance to each other in their struggle for existence. Generally, the gendered readings of Partition represent the images of rape, violence or trauma, but this transformation of women’s lives often remains unuttered in history. In spite of grim uncertainty, profound sufferings, irreparable wounds, psychological and emotional injuries; these women did learn to survive and adjust themselves with new environment in the new destination. Most of the women had no previous experience of going outside for work and when their professional journey actually started, they realized that it was not an easy task. And yet these new survival

strategies, which these women followed for sustenance, brought about significant socio-economic changes in their lives.<sup>61</sup>

In the “post-Partition turmoil,” Gargi Chakravarty alludes to a new phenomenon: “daughters started to be gradually looked upon as sons. In those post partition days the fathers of many teenage daughters considered their daughters as their ‘eldest son’.

Indeed, managing different avenues of earning with steadfast hands, the women not only uplifted “that impossible crowd” in the railway station to organize themselves “into a cultural and political entity, not merely a population to be brought under governance”<sup>62</sup>. They also contributed in some ways towards bolstering a collapsing. In this circumstances, many displaced women like kamala Dutta from Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), for instance, were forced to take up jobs in a small coal shop in West Bengal along with numerous works like making *thonga*, stitching *kantha* in leisure time to refurbish the appalling condition of their family. The emergence of a new class of working woman in schools and offices to small-scale industries such as pickle/jam making, tailoring or weaving was a new phenomenon altogether, as women were seen for the first time taking on the entire financial weight of the family on their shoulders and even actively participating in Labor Movements, demanding their rights. Matching shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, refugee women participated whole-heartedly in the agitation. This was a great morale booster for their male colleagues. A new category ‘refugee woman’ that owed its birth to the partition. Now the women were forced into new public and political sphere.<sup>63</sup>

### **Traumatic memories of partition:**

The event of Partition has created a lively and vivid scar upon those who were the worst victims of the Partition. Memories, both horrifying and joyful, have been consequently handed over to the incoming generations. Partition has managed to survive in the after generations who had experienced Partition as an after history. The generations who were not originally or basically linked with East Pakistan, yet the episode in regard to Partition had a tremendous impact upon their minds also. The settlement of the migrants in question here in West Bengal more specifically in the district of North Bengal, was as old as the event of Partition itself. Their memories,

old bonding, sweet tales related to family and relations are still in vogue and automatically transmitted among the young generations. “As the nation state create and preserve its collective memory, the displaced and dislocated create a memory of their own, that survives in many different forms”.<sup>64</sup> Partition accompanied by terror, violence and sufferings, left a shadow of torturing memory of life. Such memories of violence could not restrain themselves of the sweet memories of their deserted days of childhood of their village. The sweet memories of those days would often flash suddenly in their mind. The trauma of violence could not shatter their nostalgic feeling for their dearest motherland. Prafulla Kumar Chakraborty, the victim of Partition used the term ‘nostalgia for a paradise lost’ to describe the state of loss.<sup>65</sup>

It is still possible to trace out those victims after the lapse of successive seventy years of the attainment of independence. The practical experiences and lived realities of the survivors of Partition have their impartial observations have elaborately been discussed and narrated through their oral testimonies and visual description of grim pictures of those turbulent days. Ranajit Guha, an eminent subaltern historiographer in an interview published on 15th August, 2007 in ‘The Anandabazar Patrika’ opined that ‘Memory’ itself is liar’. With the passage of time truth may be totally suppressed under the debris of lies. On the contrary Guha is of the opinion that ‘memory is an archive’. This archive of memory is documented with different observations, perceptions and outlook of different personalities. According to Guha memory is that unreliable present that cannot reach to an actual truth.<sup>66</sup>

On the contrary, Ranabir Samaddar in his book ‘The Marginal Nation’ prioritizes the memories as an integral part of human experience. He also expresses his opinion that in case of Partition historiography while recollecting reminiscences of Partition the remembering subject often try to attach stress on their political views consciously or in a subconscious state of mind. It is quite natural and not unusual that memory follows oblivion. Again Samaddar is of the view that ‘Historicized memory kills pure memory and becomes another history’.<sup>67</sup> While, Dipesh Chakraborty, an outstanding historiographer points out in one of his articles that it is more important to a person to decide what he wants to remember or what not to remember. Truly speaking, a person can face the bitterness and wounds of his mind in the midst of oblivion. Now a vital question arises among the historians that how to trace out the wounds of Partition from the depth of both memory and oblivion. In the midst of for and adverse criticism

regarding memory and oblivion, efforts are being made to draw a true picture of those uprooted destitute both men and women, and their sufferings during partition and post Partition period.

Discussing the partition victims of North Bengal so far as the women victims are concerned the thesis is enriched with stray interviews from the women of different walks of life. They have retold the narratives relating to Partition from different angles and different perspectives. A sizable number of women who happened to be victims of Partition were selected and chosen for interviews. In course of interviews the victimized women narrated their saga in such fashion that they were not speaking to the interviewer but was engaging in an introspective monologue with the self. Amidst the womenfolk a number of women in North Bengal, where such women victims are invisible who did not venture to retell their stories of exploitation, humiliation, intimidation and act of atrocities meted out to them through interviews. Each and every victimized woman had their own stories, but at the same time there were many women who had no such potentiality to be extraordinary, though they had their own stories. Their pang and pathos, agony and ecstasy, relentless struggle for existence, survival and empowerment were in no case less important. Their hard struggle in the new environment, in a new country as well as in the new abode got a new momentum when they settled. While interviewing they presented themselves in different moods. Sometimes their silence and stillness indicated a clear manifestation of their long cherished grievances. While narrating the violence of the time they sometimes became impatient, irritated as well as excited too. In many cases during the course of conversation they were found cheerful while expressing their stories of triumph after a long battle for dignified existence in the alien country.

**Reminiscences of few refugee women during partition and during Bangladesh war of liberation:**

The thrilling stories and tales narrated by Amiya Guha relating to the Partition of India and subsequent atrocities that broke out during the period upon the Hindu minorities by the Muslims of the then East Pakistan, those memories are yet fresh and vivid in the mind's eye of the researcher. Her husband was a Zaminder in the village of Belta popularly known as Guha Belta, situated within a stone's throw distance from the palace of the Maharaja of Santosh of Mymensingh district. The abolition of

Zamindari system and the Partition brought about a tremendous catastrophe in the family. She narrated her practical experiences of the violence of the majority Muslims of East Pakistan upon the innocent and helpless Hindu communities, According to the statement of Amiya Guha her family had possessed three big ponds, two in front and one at the backside of the house. According to her, taking the advantage of the insecure position and helpless condition of the family members some Muslim hooligans who were once the loyal subjects of the *zamindars*, raided the residence in broad daylight. They also netted fishes from the ponds without seeking any permission from the owner. She also narrated that there was an orchard from which local Muslim hooligans forcefully took away the fruits. The lady also told with a heavy heart that she had three houses in the life centre of Tangail town. Thereafter said houses were unlawfully occupied by the Muslims. Moreover, constant threats, intimidation, humiliation, disrespect towards women, forced elopements and marriage made the situation more complicated. Finding no other alternatives they decided to bid adieu. During the course of her narration she sometimes became indifferent, looked vacant and became speechless. Spontaneous droplets of tears began to roll down from her eyes. The very pathetic moment had a tremendous impact upon the researcher.

After coming over at Cooch Behar, a new struggle for survival started. One of the distant relations accommodated the distressed and displaced family in their residence for the time being. Her husband was a highly educated person but owing to grim irony of fate his merits and talents were not duly recognized. His vigorous endeavours for employment proved abortive. He began to coach students of different classes of different schools and she began to engage herself in the act of cooking for all the members of the family. The lady in question who was born and brought up in an affluent family and who had the financial capacity to engage cooks for her family but was herself compelled to take cooking to please the distant relation for giving her shelter. When the distant relation expressed his inability to accommodate the members of her family in their residence, she arrived to a decision to shift their residence in a rented house. The researcher have had the opportunity to unveil the struggle which remained unrevealed, unuttered and untold.<sup>68</sup>

An interview was recorded of Mrs. Jayanti Ghosh, wife of Shri Santosh Kumar Dey, now a retired teacher of Bengali language and literature of New Town Girls Higher

Secondary school of Cooch Behar town. She originally hailed from erstwhile East Pakistan. She passed her childhood days in her motherland in Chittogong. Her father was a renowned professor of Mymensing and her Mother Snehalata Ghosh was a gifted lady. She had played a pioneering role to shift her minor children in quest for security and safety to India. It was stated by Jayanti Ghosh that they left East Pakistan at dead of night when the locality was in the grip of silence and the people were in deep slumber. As her father was a teacher of repute he was equally loved and respected both by the Hindu and Muslim student alike. The Muslim students came forward with their helping hands to enable their teacher and his family escape the borders. It was also stated by Jayanti that her elder sister also accompanied them in their journey to India. According to the statement by Jayanti, the political instability of Pakistan, hatred towards Hindu minorities, inhuman oppression on men and women, sexual abuse, fear of outraging chastity of women compelled them to quit Pakistan in no time. She recollected the experiences she gathered on the way of her journey on boats. Her brothers and sisters passed their days in half starved condition. Some sympathetic people helped them on their way to India.<sup>69</sup>

Renuka Ghosh of Berabochna village of Tangail district of East Pakistan migrated to Cooch Behar in 1950. Coming over here at Cooch Behar, she along with her minor children took shelter in a relative's house. It was revealed from her statement, that most of the uprooted persons of that period who migrated here belonged to upper castes and they felt no necessity to take shelter in refugee camps because their relatives and distant relatives provided them with accommodation. The moderate educated uprooted people could easily be provided in different jobs according to their ability. But subsequently with the incessant flow of refugees the entire complexion of Cooch Behar changed drastically. In course of conversation she asserted that from her very childhood she was inclined towards reading the novels of eminent novelists and poets which created a tremendous impact upon her tender mind. She had the habit of writing poems and stories from her adolescence period and some of her writings were also published. After settling in Cooch Behar she could not resist the temptation of writing poems and stories. The paucity of fund, acute poverty and other hurdles could not stop her to fulfill her mission. Sitting on the floor of a mud house when her children and other family members were asleep, she began to write in the light of lantern. Some of her compositions were published in the local magazines named

*'Meyeder Kotha'*. Pathos of refugee life could not damp the ardour of her creative mind set, on the contrary it had enriched her poetic fervour<sup>70</sup>.

'We first came here as refugees in 1947,' says the octogenarian Abha Das, tears were rolling profusely from her eyes due to smoke that emitted from fire of cowdung which clouded her bamboo- mud room. She recollects that cow dung was used as fuel in her girlhood days and the same practice is still in vogue even after coming over to India, admitting that nothing has really changed for them. When her family fled from East Bengal to the district of Cooch Behar in North Bengal 70 years ago she along with others was allotted temporary tents near Cooch Behar station. For the past 60 years, she lived in her own house amidst various adverse situations. According to her, most of the displaced persons who came over to Cooch Behar were allotted lands for habitation and for cultivation. During the period, women refugees who came to Cooch Behar did not engage them in any other outside activities excepting domestic and agricultural works. There might be some exceptions with which she was not acquainted. She also admitted that the refugee women who came towards North Bengal after the creation of Bangladesh were more self sufficient. They engaged them in various works through which they could earn something for maintaining the livelihood of their families.<sup>71</sup>

For the first time the researcher met Kamalabasini Ghosh in 2000 when she was 79 years old. She was reluctant to talk on partition. She did not show any enthusiasm over sharing the experiences of the catastrophe of partition. But due to the keenness of the researcher for knowing her experiences of the turbulent period she eventually shared her experiences. She hailed from Khulna district of East Pakistan. She was the eye witness of Muslim atrocities right from 1946. She was of the view that in the immediate aftermath of partition, the attitude of the Muslims changed drastically. They often taunted the girls and young women, sometimes proposing marriages to them, they reminded their Hindu neighbours that it was their country where minority Hindus had no alternative but to accept their supremacy. In the context of the anarchical situation, her family took decision to shift to India. As her near relatives were in service in Siliguri sub division from pre partition days they moved towards Siliguri with their small belongings. Their journey towards unknown destination was

riddled with obstructions. They fled with other villager who accompanied her family in their way of uncertainty.<sup>72</sup>

Mrs. Sujata Dutta was interviewed a long before. She was also a partition victim and shifted to Jalpaiguri district from Pabna after couple of years of partition. Her statement clearly reveals the inhuman torture as experienced by the Hindu women and girls in East Pakistan by the Muslim hooligans. The narrator also narrated vividly the horrible picture of miscreants' attack on the houses of the Hindu dwellers and the subsequent jumping of young women into the ponds to protect their dignity.. Apprehending the attacks of the Muslim miscreants for looting their valuables, the inmates of the house threw their ornaments, utensils and other essential commodities into the ponds. Such successive tragic incidents had paralysed the physical and mental strength of the minority Hindu communities, following which they were compelled to adopt unanimous decision to leave East Pakistan at any cost. Sujata Dutta with her kith and kin through Lalmonihat, crossing the border of Gitaldaha, reached Dinhat subdivision of Cooch Behar district and registered their names in the refugee camps. After few days, they abruptly changed their mind and proceeded towards Jalpaiguri town to honour the request of their relatives. From there a new chapter of struggle began in their new abode in a new country, where Sujata had to sacrifice a lot for the wellbeing of the family. After coming over as refugee due to acute monetary stringency, she sometimes kept herself hungry for the sake of her children<sup>73</sup>.

A number of interviews taken from the uprooted women who came over to North Bengal during partition and post partition era expressed identical statement that a sizable number of migrants took shelter in relative's houses or in the houses of acquainted persons of their own. They initially stayed in the camps purely on temporary basis. Reports of untoward incidents and harassments in the refugee camps of North Bengal were not available from those women interviewed in course of the study. The Hindu refugee women who belonged to educated, elite and economically sound families did not like to engage themselves in outside activities. Most of them remained at home in spite of monetary stringency. The women refugees could not wipe out the age long tradition of remaining indoors but afterwards this attitude had changed altogether. An important point to be mentioned in this context is that most of the refugees who migrated immediately after partition to the districts of North Bengal,

engaged themselves in various jobs with Government assistance. They also built their dwelling houses with their own efforts and initiative. There was another section of women who had lost their husband in the early age, or who had no male guardian and were not economically well-off. Sometimes they were compelled to engage themselves as domestic help. Some of the refugee women used to stitch *kantha* (a type of wrapper) and also engaged themselves in making *thonga* after the completion of their household works. Sabita Pal, a widow with five children, moved towards Siliguri at a very tender age. She used to make clay pots and supplied to the sweet shops as container. Beside this, she made essential domestic articles, clay models and show pieces with varied ornamentation for commercial purposes. Through adverse circumstances she reared her children. In the later phase of her life she with her own initiative started a small pottery industry in her locality. In some refugee families, in absence of any capable male member, the eldest daughter had to shoulder the responsibility of a son.<sup>74</sup>

But a gulf of difference was noticed while interviewing the uprooted women who came to North Bengal before and after the Bangladesh War of Liberation. During the afore said period, due to scarcity of land the new migrants in most of the cases were compelled to stay in camps and afterwards they started living in colonies, both Government sponsored colonies and forcefully occupied colonies. Minati Roy came to Cooch Behar in 1971. She once came to Alipurduar in 1950s and returned back to her village in Jamalpur of East Pakistan with a fair expectation to pass her days peacefully. But her desired peace was short lived. She was the silent witness of the brutality of the Pakistani hooligans. She vividly narrated the violence of the period. In course of dialogue with Minati Roy it was stated *Musalmanra lathi sota niya amago gyarame paray paray bari chhrar jonya humki dito. Taratari na chhairle lash phyalaner bhoy dekhaito. Emonki maiya gulare nika korar humki dito. Ora tuila niya jaite pare ei bhoye maiyara ghorer baire jhabar sahas paito na*(The Muslims accompanied by lethal weapons cautioned the Hindu inmates of the locality to leave the country immediately, if not they were threatened to be murdered. Moreover they dared to place marriage proposal for Hindu teen age girls. The teenage girls did not venture to go outside the houses out of fear of elopement.)<sup>75</sup>

Mrs. Ilarani Tarafder of Raigunj of West Dinajpur fled from Mymensing after the *Mukti Yudhdha*. When her interview was taken in 2013 she was 66 years old. She briefly apprised about the then political and social scenario of East Pakistan before and after the creation of Bangladesh. She highlighted that though the Muslims were not in favour of Hindu community but for their own interests they made the Doctors captive so that they could not leave the country. As most of the doctors were Hindus the local Muslims and other citizens were completely dependent upon those doctors. After her coming over here at Raigunj, she asserted, that though she had no experience about the colony life, still she had maintained a close association with the female members of the colony. The inmates of the camps out of poverty would sell their ornaments, utensils and other domestic articles among the well to do businessmen, gold smiths and other wealthy families of the localities at a cheap price. The authenticity of this occurrence was also available in a book authored by Paresh chandra Das of Cooch Behar. He expressed his experience of displacement and rehabilitation which followed the Bangladesh war of independence when he along with his family members came over to Balarampur, in Tufangunj subdivision of Cooch Behar and they were accommodated in a relief camp in Balarampur. He has shared identical experiences with that of the experiences of Mrs. Tarafdar.<sup>76</sup>

Late Prafulla Bala Chanda of Chorkhaoria village of Bakshiganj in Jamalpur subdivision of Mymensingh district settled in Cooch Behar after 1971. Decades ago she shared her experience and stored memories of both partition of India and its successive eventualities with the researcher. From her version, it was revealed that following partition, she with her family members had made a brief stay in the house of her relatives at Cooch Behar. But ultimately she returned back to her ancestral residence. During the course of her conversation she in her own Bangladeshi dialect presented before the researcher a vivid and living description of the atrocities, oppression, humiliation and constant threatening to the minority Hindu communities to leave their country and also forced them to dispose of their properties to the Muslims at a cheap rate, if not their lives would be at stake. Defying constant intimidation they had to stay. But when the oppression and threatening reached to its peak, her family members took an immediate decision over night to leave the motherland. With the help and cooperation of some of the Muslim neighbours who were loyal to them and who hired some boats to cross the turbulent river

Brahmaputra, the family escaped through Mahendraganj towards the state of Meghalayas. In the state of Meghalaya, Tura was a district where her close relatives used to reside. From there on her way to Cooch Behar she stayed for sometime at Dhubri. The lady spent the major portion of her life in domestic works. The word partition and refugee was quiet new to her. She was quite ignorant of the social and political turmoil and the saga of victimization through partition and subsequently by the Bangladesh war of Liberation. The journey of her new life was not a smooth one. She was compelled to stay in tents with her children. As she lost her husband in East Pakistan, she had to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of the entire family. Almost two decades later of her coming over here at Cooch Behar she lamented with tearful eyes and vacant look about her golden days which remained dormant and silent. Sweet memories and saga of her motherland were carefully treasured in her neglected solitary apartment of life which clearly unveiled and manifested during the interview.<sup>77</sup>

In course of study, the researcher had to come in contact with female refugee individuals who settled in and around Malda district. Most of the individuals expressed their personal experiences of violence and ferocity of the majority of the Muslims of East Pakistan upon the innocent, helpless and unarmed Hindu population. Moreover they made it clear that under the pressure of political turmoil and social instability that prevailed during the period of partition they were forced to migrate. The Hindu community took it to be a settled fact that they would never be able to stay in their original homesteads. Some of them opined in different perspectives. Mrs. shubhra Sarkar of Malda referred that fear and apprehension of impending calamity forced them to shift from Bagura to Malda. She started her new journey from a refugee camp in Malda. In her narration, she elaborately stated that initially the displaced persons were accommodated on a vast vacant land where tents were not available, supply food was inadequate and scarcity of drinking water became the regular feature. The local people were deeply moved viewing the pathetic condition of those displaced persons and out of sympathy and compassion they voluntarily extended their assistance in all possible ways.<sup>78</sup>

A good number of migrated female migrants were almost illiterate and had to work as domestic help. They were also engaged to look after the ailing persons in well to do

families. Some were also engaged for taking care of the kids of the wealthy. Many of the interviewees served as female *bidi* workers after 1971 and onwards. Many female workers were engaged in cottage industries to prepare different types of baskets made of bamboo which were specially used for carrying and containing tea leaves in the tea plantation areas of North Bengal districts. More so, baskets were also used for carrying vegetables and other commodities from one place to another. The *Sital pati* (cool mat) of Cooch Behar is still a well known and reputed industry in West Bengal and India. Dipali Das of Ghughumari, Cooch Behar interviewed in her residence, informed that a huge number of women who migrated from Bangladesh have engaged themselves in the cottage industry of *sital pati*.<sup>79</sup> Those mats are exported to foreign countries. A huge number of women migrants helped their male members in preparing the mats. The women also prepared different types of handicrafts with jute. Sadhana Dutta of Jalpaiguri, a migrant from Bangladesh, took up the profession of making different types of articles with jute and within a short period she became an artisan and was the source of inspiration to other women.<sup>80</sup> In this respect, the Government had made suitable arrangement for the women in different training school. It may also be cited that an individual Mrs. Binata Das of Jalpaiguri, had proved her worth as a cane artisan. Through her exhibitions in different festivals and fairs in West Bengal and other neighbouring states, she had made the cane industry a popular and acceptable industry.<sup>81</sup> Last but not the least, there was another section who were called the vagabonds. They were not interested to involve themselves in any activity. They preferred to beg from door to door for alms. Latika Das and Jyotna Roy, two beggars came of Cooch Behar after 1971, approved the authenticity of the above noted statement.<sup>82</sup>

There were some fundamental differences between the partition refugees and the refugees after the Liberation of Bangladesh. The attitude of the migrants who settled over to the districts of North Bengal after 1947 was sharply different from the compatriot refugee brothers and sisters who came after 1970. After 1947, a good number of uprooted persons who set out for safety and security in Indian Territory, belonged to elite class. But due to changing circumstances, they became habituated to cope with the new environment. The female refugees at that period of crisis did not venture to go outside in search of employment or to involve themselves with other activities. They preferred to remain indoors. They were conservative in nature and

could not get rid of the long standing traditional mind set of women folk. It cannot be denied that the refugees specially the female members of the refugee camps, brought about a magical change in their outlook and consequently their conservative viewpoint was on the way of gradual decay. As a matter of fact, they could realise the grim reality of life. Still they could not wholly or fully isolate themselves from the age long tradition of their predecessor. A number of exceptional cases were also prevalent. The women who lost their husbands in early age had no other alternatives but to engage them in various activities outside their houses for the maintenance of their children who were mostly minors and for the betterment of their future establishment. Less educated and illiterate women who had no earning male member in the family or any other sources of income were forced to work as domestic help in affluent families. Sometimes, the women possessing agricultural lands engaged themselves in the activities related to agriculture.

A new dimension was opened following the migration of refugees towards North Bengal for settlement after the War of Liberation of Bangladesh, Due to frequent political and social changes the attitude of the new migrants also changed drastically. Most of the migrants in that phase belonged to lower caste strata society. In their own motherland they had practically no asset of their own. Most of the people were daily wage earners. A significant number of people were carpenters, gardeners, potter, masons, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, tailors, ricksow pullers, bullock cart drivers, horse cart pullers, farmers etc. These uprooted persons from East began to act as per their profession for survival. The female members of the family did not seat idly like that of the women refugee who came previously. In the districts of North Bengal the scarcity of employment was not so acute after partition but with the incessant exodus the scenario changed altogether and complexities became more alarming. The female members, putting at bay all sorts of social hurdles and conservative outlook came forward with undaunted courage and conviction to make themselves financially sound.

During the period of 1970s, with the political horizon of East Pakistan was clouded with troubles, the minority Hindus prepared themselves to move towards the neighbouring state of India i.e. West Bengal, following the footsteps of the refugees of 1947. Taking the advantage of political uncertainty, instability and turmoil

following the creation of a new state named Bangladesh; West Bengal had to encounter a fresh burden of new migrants. Different political parties, taking into account the helplessness of the new migrants came forward to help them in all respects. They tried to be their friends, philosophers and guides. Different political parties specially the Left viz. The CPI, CPI (M), Forward Bloc, RSP etc. assured the displaced persons assistance in fulfilling their demands to the Government. They also emphasised and requested both State and Central Government to allot suitable lands for habitation and agricultural land for cultivation. More so the political parties also appealed to the Government for granting relief with cash and kind for maintaining the livelihood of the uprooted distressed persons. At the same time the political parties tried their best to involve the womenfolk in the struggle for legitimate right of the women. They also tried to make the women politically and socially conscious regarding their rights and responsibilities. Under the banner of CPI(M), branches of the Ganatantrik Mohila Samiti were established almost in all the corners of Bengal. They wanted to bring refugee and other women of the society under the umbrella of Left parties specially the CPI (M). The Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti not only dealt with the problems of refugee women singularly but simultaneously they kept their eyes vigil for the all-round development of the neglected women of our society. The leaders of the Samiti took sacred vows to make them politically conscious, socially aware, economically sound and educationally vibrant as that of their male counterparts. In a word, the erudite leaders left no stone unturned to elevate the dignity and ability of womenfolk in all spheres of life.

Following the war of Liberation of East Pakistan a political uncertainty and catastrophe clouded the horizon of East Pakistan and as a consequence thousands of people from East Pakistan, irrespective of race, colour, caste, creed and religion preceded towards India for their survival. The people of Rongpur began to move towards the neighbouring districts of West Bengal like Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. A large number of evacuees were from rural background and most of them were illiterate. The Muslim evacuees of West Bengal who set their foot on East Pakistan were comparatively accomplished and educated where as the Hindu migrants and other communities were less accomplished and less educated. The educated Muslim migrants of India to Rongpur brought good fortune for the people of Rongpur. In the event of partition of India in 1947 a large number of educated Hindu women left

Rongpur. The Muslim migrants of West Bengal, specially the womenfolk, contributed a lot in the fields of female education in East Pakistan. In the meantime the consecutive movements of East Pakistan became more vibrant and more frequent. Through movements the people of East Pakistan with the active assistance of enthusiastic students' communities tried to uphold the dignity of Bengali language and longed for replacing the 'Bengali' to be the state language of East Pakistan instead of 'Urdu'. The Bengali Muslims who came over to West Bengal were Bengali speaking. They were not well conversant with Urdu. So, the movement for 'Bengali language' got new dimension with the arrival of East Pakistan Muslims.

The nature of migration in North Bengal in 1947 and again after the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 was different in nature. The oppression, physical assault and gang rape upon women were regular features of partition of 1947, whereas, in 1971, during the war for separate state 'Bangladesh' the women of Hindu minority were treated brutally which they had already experienced in 1947. In the first phase of partition the migrants were from elite class societies. They came to India for the protection and safeguard of their dignity and social identity. But the struggle of the migrants from Bangladesh in and after 1971 was to some extent different. The migrated people from Bangladesh to the districts of North Bengal did not suffer so much like their predecessors.

It is noticed with amazement that the said women had to come out braving all sorts of obstacles. The most remarkable feature in post-partition of West Bengal was the coming out of the refugee women from the private domain to the public. Defying the confinement within four walls they ventured to come out in public domains. Educated women set out in quest of employment especially in educational institutions, private firms, government and semi-government offices. Those who were educationally unsound engaged themselves in various domestic works; Most of them capitalized upon their training in household activities for commercial purpose. They prepared pickles, papad, varieties of food items and other cooking articles. A large number of them were engaged in preparing paper packets and rolling *bidis* (a type of cigarette). Some took up a more challenging and unconventional job as hawkers. Some became wardens in the female wards of the jails in West Bengal. Refugee girls from lower middle and middle class took up a career in acting in Calcutta film industry and in commercial theatres. After much struggle against odds and uncertainties, a few of

them became successful heroines to come out of the trauma of partition. Thus, partition had some positive effect on Bengali migrant women in North Bengal. The breaking up of traditional structures might have possibly led to space of greater agency for women.

After the migration to West Bengal, the refugees became inclined towards left politics for their own uplift. Under the supervision of RSP and few local Hindu Mahasabha workers a meeting of about three hundred refugees were held on 7 June, 1950 where the refugees were exhorted to be united for the fulfilment of their demand. After couple of day in 9<sup>th</sup> June almost three hundred refugees assembled near the Kotwali police station in Cooch Behar. They were accompanied by a good number of women along with children. They staged demonstration demanding the release of two RSP leaders who were arrested previously. They paraded on some of the streets of Cooch Behar town shouting slogan demanding their release.<sup>83</sup> At the insistence of local RSP leaders about one hundred fifty refugees of Alipurduar organised a demonstration before DC on 30/9/50 to demand rice. A peaceful procession of 200 refugee women and children entered the Alipurduar court compound on 15/10/50 at 11.30 hrs and demanded release of Suresh Talukdar and Ganesh Mohanta arrested on 11.10.50 for staging an anti-famine agitation on 9.10.50. On October 9, 1961 a colossal conference was held at Andaran Phulbari of Tufangunj subdivision of Cooch Behar district where more than 700 women took part in. In that meeting Mrs. Renu Chakraborty delivered a speech emphasizing on the social problems of the women and regarding their empowerment. She also stressed upon the utility of creating women organizations and appealed to the women to come forward to face the problems and to solve the problems of their own. In the said meeting, a sizable number of women, specially the *bidi* workers were present. This meeting created a tremendous sensation in that very locality.<sup>84</sup>

Food movement at Cooch Behar was recorded to be a heinous crime in the annals of food movements. Immediately after the attainments of independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 and annexation of Cooch Behar, the erstwhile princely state with Indian union and the West Bengal state was the most eventful episode. Thenceforth Cooch Behar was treated to be a district instead of state since its merger. Traditionally, Cooch Behar was a surplus area in respect of food production. The then princely state joined

with India on 1 January, 1950. In the month of April 1951 rice was being sold at Rs 60-70 per mound (82 lbs). A mammoth demonstration of a hungry mob took out a procession and assembled before the Secretariat (Lansdown Hall) in the western side of the Sagardighi to voice their demands before the administration on April 21, 1951. The irate hungry crowd demanded that the district of Cooch Behar be brought under full rationing system. The police administration, finding no other means, fired indiscriminately upon the humble 'hunger marchers'. Following the agitation people of all walks of life and the teenagers of both the sexes were brutally assassinated in broad day light and in full public view at the bank of Sagar dighi. Kabita Bose (18), Bakul Talukdar (7), Bandana Talukdar (16), Satish Debnath (23) and Badal Biswas (22) met heroic deaths and became martyrs. 35 people sustained serious injuries and were admitted to local M.J.N. Hospital in critical condition.

The news of such atrocious incident consequently spread like wild flames in the sub divisions of Dinhat and Mathabhanga. A martyr tomb was erected in the southern part of Sagar Dighi known as '*Shahid Bagh*'. Residents of Cooch Behar spontaneously protested against the brutal incident. Black flags were flown in every house, a formidable procession of almost a mile length heading towards Deputy Commissioners Office. Women participants took prominent roles in leading the procession. The most remarkable feature of this brutal incident was that out of five martyrs two were teen aged girls and one girl. This food movement clearly indicated a monumental valour in social and political consciousness of the people, specially the women. This was owing to the migrants of East Pakistan developed to a large extent and it was evident through the food movement. Through the struggle for existence and survival at Cooch Behar, people silently nourished their social and political consciousness which were manifested through this movement.

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## *CHAPTER VI*

### *Women in Partition literature, films and memoirs*

The partition of India is one of the most debatable questions in the South Asian history. This tumultuous event has shaped the lives of millions of people in many ways. Popular sentiment and perception regarding partition has been reflected in different arenas of literature, though some has registered the issue of partition with anguish or annoyance and profound unhappiness. There are few texts that have depicted the various psychological, political, economic and social effects of partition. Partition and its accompanying violence have inspired many creative minds to generate a literary depiction of such a tragic incident. The historic event of partition of India's subcontinent has enriched Bengali and other literatures to their highest peaks. It has dealt mainly with two factors: firstly, they have been based on the tales of tremendous grief and distress of the uprooted people and secondly they have been represented as the stories of determination and never ending fight of the refugees for their survival on the foreign land against all odds and riddles. A good number of rootless persons have also rendered valuable contributions for the enrichment of Bengali so far as other Indian literatures are concerned. Truly speaking, Partition of India has been such a revolutionary event that spontaneously produced numerous masterpieces. While some creations have depicted the massacre during the refugee migration, others have concentrated more on the aftermath of the partition in terms of the troubles faced by the refugees in both sides of the borders. Even now, more than seventy years after the partition, works on fiction as well as films are being made on that frenzied event of partition. The event of partition along with its prelude and legacy has been the subject of different scholars.

The word 'holocaust' which is a European term and had a direct relation with history and the agony of holocaust, was also intimately connected with the history of partition of India. The euphoria of emancipation buried under the debris of fear, torture, killing, insecurity and uncertainty. Very recently, a new trend of comparing the partition with the holocaust has commenced. Apart from it, with the growing importance of subaltern studies and marginalized languages in history writing, the experiences of individuals have come to the fore front. With the advancement of this trend, the

separate and sporadic experiences of riots, agony of displacement and the relentless struggle for survival have intermingled with other fragmented histories of the time. In reality this history cannot be termed as a totality; but a conglomeration of the pang-pathos and wound of individuals. All these sagas of sorrow, miserable plight of individuals give rise to a new definition of history and have brought about a radical change in the trend of historiography.<sup>1</sup> In this periphery of experience based history the stories related to partition stealthily entered. This paradigm of experience based history has given a permanent room to fiction. The characters of fictions may be fictitious, but their pain is not imaginary. It is history and nothing but a history. According to Anita Desai, "In India, the past never disappears. It does not even become transformed into a ghost. Concrete, physical, palpable-it is present everywhere. Ruins, monuments, litter the streets, hold up the traffic create strange islands in the modernity of the cities. No one fears or avoids them-goats and cows graze around them, the poor string up ropes and rags and turn them into dwellings, election campaigners and cinema distributors plaster them with pamphlets-and so they remain a part of the here and now, of today".

Partition of India was not merely the division of the countries like France and Germany; it was division of a subcontinent. So the division was among the provinces also, i.e. Bengal and Punjab. The Indian literature had no separate entity of its own; it was the accumulation of various literatures of various languages. That was termed as Indian literature. The Punjabi language and alphabets were to be treated as most affected one owing to partition. The language of Kashmir was the third victim after Punjab and Sindhi. It is really astonishing that due to partition Urdu and Bengali literature became enriched and occupied a healthy position in comparison to other languages of other states. Following partition another epoch making event took place and that was the movement for recognizing Bengali literature in East Pakistan. This movement subsequently led to the birth of Bangladesh<sup>3</sup>. If we penetrate deep into the partition literature it would be evident that being the doyens of the Bengali literary arena some writers exhibited their silence and apathy towards partition literature. The opinion of Satya Guha was very pertinent in this perspective. In his thought provoking composition '*Ekaler gadya podya andoloner dalil*' he once expressed that those litterateurs who claimed to be renowned writers or the main path finder for enrichment of Bengali literature were devoid of any human feeling and sentiment.<sup>4</sup> In

the Sealdah station along with other stations and also in the transit camps of India innumerable civilized people became uncivilized. But Tarashankar, Banaphul, Buddhadeb Basu or other writers of pre partition era did not pay heed to the matter. Of course some accounts were there that only expressed the torture on womenfolk, nothing else. Eminent poet Amitabha Dasgupta made a valuable comment that after the massive destruction over partition no adequate number of discussion and writings were available over chaotic issue of partition. Manik Bandopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay were not as vocal in their writings over the partition as expected.<sup>5</sup>

The Womenfolk occupied a significant position in partition literature of India as well as East and West Bengal was concerned. The selfless sacrifice of womenfolk in diverse fields of society, their incessant struggle with new situation and also the violence they suffered were presented from different perspectives by different scholars. It was beyond question that this massive holocaust of partition brought about a radical change in the attitude and philosophy of life of the women. This change was really different in character. The litterateurs recorded and painted their women character from their own viewpoint. Not only the partition of 1947, again in 1971 when Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation, from that period onwards a new perspective of partition literature opened. The memory of bloodshed, violence, degradation of human sentiment became a scar that was oozing still. Those incurable wounds of humongous event were vividly represented in the compositions of different litterateurs of Punjab and both the Bengals. A historical portrayal of the human tragedy following partition of India through the exploration of short stories, memories and histories could creatively trespass across the border between fictional and historical narratives<sup>6</sup>.

The same spirit was also reflected in contemporary Bengali novels, poems, memoirs and films. As the effect of partition in Bengal was significantly different from the sudden cataclysmic division in Punjab due to a number of historical and socio-political reasons; so the Bengali literature based on partition experience was also different especially from the point of view of the responses to 1947. The issues relating the gender, livelihood and ways of struggle had different impetus on the Bengali novels and stories of partition.<sup>7</sup> The outstanding contributions of different eminent personalities, litterateurs, poet and short story writers of West Bengal,

Pakistan and specially Bangladesh had pioneering roles in depicting sad tales of displaced persons mainly hailing from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal of India and from West Punjab to East Punjab of Indian Territory. Untold stories, untold agonies, pathos, mass abduction, genocide, unabated rapes, molestation, physical tortures, sexual abuses and the helpless conditions of displaced persons, specially the womenfolk, have been vividly described by those literary personalities which were distinctly and elaborately presented and revealed through their valuable creations. The main themes of their artistic explorations were to represent the fact that the Bengalis though became politically and geographically isolated but emotionally and culturally were united and indivisible. The realist discourses of art and literature could not reflect the historical reality of partition.

The voices from different angles viz. the marginalized landless peasants, land owing middle class Hindu refugee, abducted women etc. constructed a wide range narratives. Various narratives of Bengal from late 1940 to 1970s ventilated and depicted how refugees confronted and articulated the violation of social as well as personal space.<sup>8</sup> The then volatile political condition created such a situation for the writers of both West Bengal and East Bengal and later on Bangladesh to revisit the past. Most of the writers were politically conscious and had composed a number of short stories and novels about riot and partition, though their works were varied and eclectic in thematic and artistic content and their responses were elliptical.

Reputed historian Urvashi Butalia in her invaluable contribution in '*The Other side of Silence- Voices from the Partition of India*' has conducted some interviews with the victimized Punjabi women of Partitioned India and has observed minutely the wounds of women of Punjab in the event of Partition. The women endured the oppression silently. Butalia has tried to bring out those hidden wounds of the women in full public view through her observation and investigation. Many historians who dealt with and researched with the Partition history considered that the "Silence became their main psychological defense"<sup>9</sup>. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in their book *The Borders and boundaries- Women in India's Partition* analyze it from the dynamics of the morality and aesthetic attitude. The uprooted women of Punjab remained silent and tight lipped. Taking the advantage of Partition, some miscreants belonging to other communities, religions and states dared to outrage the modesty and dignity. The

troublesome question of women's sexuality i.e. impure, polluted etc. insisted on women's silence ' through the attachment of shame and stigma to this very profound violations of self'.<sup>10</sup> Refugees, the women in particular became the silent victims of oppression, suppression and molestation. During this period of partition the two nations viz. India and Pakistan experienced unprecedented brutality, bloodshed, slaughter and travesty of human values that remained in the collective memory as a 'vivid scar' still oozing the blood of millions'.<sup>11</sup>

#### i) NOVELS

The writers of Bengali literature remained silent and dormant when the Partition took place. However, in due course different novels, poems, films on partition ventilated the emotion, pang and pathos of rootless people. The hardship and trauma of refugees were the source of inspiration behind the outstanding creations of the period. Though history is always accompanied by the male aggression which is in fact overlooked in the patriarchal set up, still it cannot be denied that the women during partition were compelled to pay the cost crime as they were the worst victim.<sup>12</sup> Those trauma of women community and their relentless endeavour in coping with changing time were manifested in different fictions which detected various injustice at the heart of the vivisection.

A sizable number of Bengali novels were written on the back drop of the dreadful events of partition. In this regard reference could be made of the following novels viz. *Nilkantha Pakhir Khoje* of Atin Bandyopadhyaya; *Rani Palanka* of Bijan Bhattacharjee, *Jalpahiati* of Jibanananda Das; *Epar Ganga*, *Opar Ganga* of Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Lal mati* and *Bidisha* of Narayan Gangopadhyay, , *Banga Bhanga O Sampradayik Rajniti* of Badruddin Umar, *Arjun*, *Atma prakash* , *Purva Paschim*, *Jyotnakumari* of Sunil Gangapadhyay, *Jal pare pata nare*, *Protibeshi* ,*Prem nei* of Gourkishore Ghosh, *sarbajanin* Manik Bandapadhyay ; *Samudra Hriday* of Prativa Basu; *Khandita* of Samaresh Basu, *Lajuklata* of Devi Rajlakhmi; Elias Aktaruzzaman ; *Garh Shrikhanda*, *Nirbus* of Amiya Bhusan Majumder , *Titas ekti nadir naam* of Adwaita Mallabardhan, *Keya patar nouka*, *Nonajol Methemati*; Prafulla Roy, *Hasu Banu* of Probodh Kumar Sanyal, *Badwip* of Sabitri Roy, *Bangla desher Hriday hote* of Tarapoda Roy etc. Some novels were composed by the authors of East Pakistan and later on Bangladesh. Those were: Kayes, Ahmed's *Nirbasito*

*ekjan*; Abu Ishak's *Surjyo Dighal Bari* ; Taslima Nasreen's *Phera*, Selina, Hossain's *Katatara Prajapati*, *Japito Jivan* etc.

Following the shocking event of Partition of India in the year 1947, few academicians, scholars and writers contributed to the development of Bengali literature both of West and East Bengal. Refugee women and their stigma, their relentless endeavour to adjust with changing time had vividly been sketched by authors from different angles. The trials and tribulations of the refugee women had been differently articulated by innumerable novelists in their own fashion. Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* was first published in 1967 under the title '*Itihasey Streeparva*' in a reputed Bengali periodical called *Prabasi*.<sup>13</sup> This novel was superb in its qualities, it threw light on the character of Sutara, the heroine of the novel. After being displaced, she is proposed by her intimate friend Sakina to be a member of Sakina's family through the bondage of marriage. Sutara summarily rejects the proposal with a plea that as Sakina's community is responsible for the deaths of her parents and abduction of her elder sister she is not mentally prepared to accept the unholy proposal. In the realm of partition literature Jyotirmoyee Devi had the courage to break the silence of women through the protest of Sutara. This fiction composed by Jyotirmoyee Devi on partition is nothing but a representative text of women's experience of social hostility and oppression after being rejected in their home as well as in their respective communities.<sup>14</sup>

However, in Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel *Purbo Paschim*, Pratap's sister Supriti is also characterized as a victim of refugee activities. Her husband was killed in the process of trying to free his land from the refugees who have forcibly occupied it. Supriti's in-laws, who are of West Bengal origin, held her East Bengal roots responsible for all the problems that fell on the family. She was now forced to lead a life of penury; restricted to just one single room in the house and denied any source of livelihood. Eventually, not able to bear this kind of treatment anymore, and specially to ensure a better future for her daughter, she moved out of the home into her brother's home. Keen to get her daughter educated, she used whatever little she had been able to bring from her in-laws' home and thus refusing to be a burden on her brother. Eventually, her daughter also started giving private tuitions to earn some extra money for her education. She grew up to become a successful doctor and settled

in London<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the similar motifs of primacy to education and to work for a living are visible in this case of the West Bengal women as well, dispossessed of their lands by the refugees. This displacement never the less widened their mental horizon and proceed towards a self- reliant identity.<sup>16</sup>

Amiya Bhushan Majumdar, an acclaimed novelist, composed *Garh Srikhanda* set in a time span of four years between the famine of 1942 and the partition of 1947. The novel presented 'the lives of the landless, land- hungry, land-greedy and land-occupants'. There are many human characters but the protagonist is none but the *Garh Srikhanda* (Srikhanda, the fort).<sup>17</sup>. Unprecedented outbreak of the famine, communal frenzy and vivisection of India's subcontinent were the main sources in depicting the pathetic conditions of the people of a particular area which was situated near the border of Bengal. The untold pathos, the suffering of the destitute have become the main features round which the novelist Amiya Bhusan has sketched neatly, distinctly and perfectly through the different characters of his masterpiece novel *Garh Shrikhanda* Majumdar drew the vivid pictures of the art of livelihood and the sufferings of the downtrodden humanity belonging to the lower strata of the society. Moreover, middle class people of the society also suffered a lot. The simultaneous and successive occurrence of famine, partition, communal disturbances brought about a dramatic change in the whole atmosphere of the country. The complexion of society, politics, country and its economy came to a total halt. Availing the advantages of disrupted condition of the country, a section of opportunists thought otherwise.

The unfortunate distressed men and women of both the communities brushing aside their religious bondage and caste system consolidated under the banner of humanity. They faced the impending troubles united and with firm determination. In season or out of season both the communities came forward with their helping hands. The tragic end of abortive amorous affairs between Suro and Madhai ended in frustration. Tepi was compelled to adopt the profession of flesh trade and Tepi's mother was forced to be the companion of a vagabond traveler or *Boiragi*. Amiya Bhusan's farsighted and penetrating insight towards human psychology had perfectly been depicted through the characters of the above mentioned personalities. Here lied the erudition of a great novelist like Amiya Bhusan Majumder.<sup>18</sup>

The name of the novel *Arjun* authored by Sunil Gangopadhyay is worth mentioning here in connection with the saga of partition. *Arjun* is dedicated to the freedom fighter of Bangladesh war.<sup>19</sup> The novel focuses on the life of the title character Arjun. Arjun, an educated fellow is compelled to take refuge in the refugee camp of Dumdum after partition. The agony and ecstasy of the uprooted persons, their incessant struggle for survival, their plight and pathos, even their frantic attitude puzzle Arjun to a great extent. Life is nothing but a conglomeration of truth and that truth is the main element of life. So our claim for true livelihood can at any case be unrealistic. The partition had snatched away the boyhood of Arjun. He has to undergo the relentless struggle for existence even in the post partition era. His struggle for livelihood is unending and continuous. His struggle takes a new shape in his newly settled colony. At that junction of life Arjun becomes suspicious over the existence of religion. The religion which is meant for protection of mankind and which escorts human being to the way of a new consciousness and realization, that very religion absorbs the complexities of new civilization and due to this complicated and complex evolution of time religion also fails to convey the message that the 'Road was not meant for any particular one'.<sup>20</sup>

Famous poet and novelist Jibanananda Das authored one of his best compositions i.e. *Jalpaihati* in the year 1948. The novel is based on the lives of the Hindus of the village named Jalpaihati. The writer highlights on the fact that previously the Muslim people dared not to enter the house of the Hindus but during the period of turmoil due to partition the Muslims who were so long considered as underlings do not hesitate to enter even in the bed rooms of Hindu houses. Even they do not vacillate to ask for *bidi* or to give marriage proposal to Hindu women. This novel exposes the socio religious in cultural practices that was prevalent in the then society which was attacked by the reversal of rituals. Jibanananda's struggle with this cultural problem is best seen in his inherent identification with the plight of the *bhadra mahila*.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, he attempts to resolve the issue through marriage of Wajed Ali to Hindu girl, Sulekha.

In some of the Bengali fictions of the post partition era marks of disgrace and disrespect towards womenfolk are aptly reflected. Prafulla Roy's *Keya Patar Nouka* is

a tale of an ill-fated sexually abused lady named Jhinuk, In Atin Bandopadhyay's *Nilkantha pakhir khoje* Malati attempts to commit suicide out of her utter frustration and despair.<sup>22</sup> However, Kumu, the heroine of *Bakultala P.L.Camp* writes a letter to her elder sister that she has summarily rejected the proposal of Abdul Gani to share his bed and being insulted, she sacrifices her life jumping on the river Dhaleswari.<sup>23</sup> Three female characters Anjana, Khanjana and Ranjana of *Neel Agun*, the victims of partition, come to Shealdah station as refugees. They belong to three different families. The novel *Neel Agun* by Saroj Kumar Roy Choudhury reveals how the struggle for existence and survival of the refugees that take place in years together. These above noted girls are ready to go to any extent for their survival. With the passage of time and due to the coercive milieu of adverse circumstances, for the maintenance of their livelihood they are unwillingly forced to involve themselves in the business of flesh trade and ultimately they have to accept the profession as their means of livelihood. Initially the sufferings of those three ladies are different in nature, but at the end of the story we see them to be united and surrendered themselves completely to the profession of prostitution for the means of their bread earning.<sup>24</sup>

Atin Bandopadhyay's celebrated novel *Nilkantha pakhir khoje* is a marvelous and splendid historical document in which pang and pathos, sorrows and sufferings, frustration and humiliation have perfectly and neatly been depicted by the author himself. The pathetic situation of the uprooted East Pakistan refugees has been manifested in a roundabout manner and through allegory. In this novel, the author Bandopadhyay tries his best not to prioritize the political complexities of the age but tries his utmost to highlight its appeal towards humanity, towards love and affection, towards universal brotherhood and sings the song of the triumph of human feelings and humanism. According to the *Puranas*, after the completion of Goddess Durga's emersion ceremony a bird known as *Nilkontha* was appointed to act as a harbinger to convey the message of arrival of Goddess Durga to the house of in laws at the *Koilash*. Following the absence of *Uma* the whole *Koilash* becomes pale and lifeless. Listening to the news of *Uma*'s arrival a joyous atmosphere prevailed over the *Koilash*. In a similar way the unfortunate destitute of partition victims even in the midst of profound melancholy still dreamt the sweet dream of reunion of two separate states into one. The displaced persons have had firm conviction that the fulfilment of

their sweet dreams was not at all far ahead.<sup>25</sup> The sad tale of shattered life of the uprooted persons through the allegorical fiction was presented by the author very proficiently. The myth of the Padma Puranas was also available in the aforesaid fiction. The old Mahendranath said to the wife of his insane son Manindranath “My life itself is the *Padma Puran*. I am Chand Sadagar and you are Behula”. Insane Manindranath is the main pivot of the novel. He is a true visionary. He moves frantically with a vision of to searching his beloved fiancé. He continues his quest for the dream girl among the flock of the *Nilkontha* birds, the symbolic representation of peace and union.<sup>26</sup>

In the novel *Nilkantha pakhir khoje* the main female characters Joton, Jalali and Malati are the symbols of two countries. Joton and Jalali are the symbols of Pakistan where as Malati and her elder daughter-in-law is characterized as symbols of India. Jalali’s life is full of struggle, ups and downs. But when after her demise she gets a piece of land, Jalali seems to become very happy. She has her rebirth through the *kash* flowers on the land of her graveyard.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary Malati, another tragic character of the story is abducted and raped by Muslims and then is thrown in jungles, Returning back to home she becomes so frustrated that she condemned her own body as her family members consider her dirty and impure. But the divine honour (Pir) is showered on her. In the Islam the honour of *Pir* is only rewarded and enjoyed by the male. But the author intentionally violates the traditional idea by offering the honour of *Pir* to Joton, which symbolize the birth of a new nation-Pakistan. Bandopadhyay has selected Malati and Joton as icons of two nations.<sup>28</sup>

A number of novelists, writers, poets and essayists have illustrated through their compositions the differences of the attitudes between the Hindu and Muslim communities. *Prem nei*, a remarkable novel authored by Gour Kishore Ghosh, points out the prolonged religious differences between the two communities. Bilkis and Togar are two intimate friends. But despite their intimacy Togar throws water from her pot and refills it if she is touched by Bilkis at the time of procuring water. Bilkis becomes perplexed and looks at Togar vacantly. Being puzzled, Bilkis has an innocent look on the water thrown by Togar. The very line of water thrown by Togar is considered by Bilkis as a line of division between the two communities.<sup>29</sup> In *Epar Ganga and Opar Ganga* it is found little girl used to play among themselves and

collecting mangoes together. However, with the onset of the social reality of partition, a sense of alienation develops in there and the idyllic childhood gets contaminated as alienation creeps in like a shadow. One Muslim girl warns another Muslim girl to be aware of behaving with the Hindu girl with the utterance '*Bhai Ora Hindu, amader etho disni. Oder Ma bokbe*' (Brother, they are Hindus, don't give them our tested food. Their mother will scold them). The social distance of real life revealed through various literary texts of the period. In *Nilkontha pakhir khoje*, Fatema offers a sweet to a little boy Manindranath with her hands. The very occurrence makes Isham, a Muslim by religion, totally perplexed. In the said novel it is witnessed that a Muslim woman Joton makes all arrangements for the preparation of food for Malati who is raped by Jabbar. But Joton does not touch the cooked food because Malati may lose her caste.<sup>30</sup> But in the novel *Pratibeshi* of Gour Kishore Ghosh a character of an old Hindu lady is sketched who is far from the ambit of caste system. She is liberal in outlook as she utters '*Rail-e jokhon uthis tokhan ke kon jat tor songe jachchhe, seta ki tora bhabis?*' (When you board at railway compartment then do you think what sorts of passengers accompanying you?). In the train compartment all the humane is the only identity that the passenger has and it is beyond the premises of caste and religion.<sup>31</sup>

In the novel *Bindu bindu jal* by Shekhar Das, a gloomy and dark picture of partition is presented. The novel centered round a mentally retarded lady named Basumoti. She is the burning example of pathetic saga of riot and partition. During the period of political turmoil and communal riot, she runs away from her house but instead of rescuing her son, she carries away the side pillow, mistaking it to be her son. When she returns back to rectify the mistake, she finds the house was set ablaze. This pathetic incident and sudden big shock make her totally insane. She searches her son frantically everywhere. She becomes the prey of some miscreants. She begins pelting stone out of anger. So everyone call her '*Dhilani*' (stone thrower). All of a sudden she meets an orphan boy and she feels the existence of her deceased child Ratul through the orphan child whom she comes across in her life. Basumoti regains her consciousness for the time being and encourages the boy '*Ratul jore chhot re baba*' (Ratul, run fast baba!). Basumoti becomes the brilliant symbol of oppressed and depressed womanhood. In the said novel there is no point of ending, it could not be and hence the ending is elliptical.<sup>32</sup>

It is observed that in all literary works the struggle of refugee women are represented in an artistic style. Acute pecuniary stringency and other prevailing circumstances prompt them to come out from the confinement braving hurdles and difficulties. They get themselves involved in different professions and their journey is not at all pleasant and covered with roses. Their intimate involvement with the outer world and their efforts for establishing social identity bring about a sacred message of women emancipation. Some authors, in their works, try to ventilate the self confidence of refugee women, who in the midst of profound sorrows and sufferings shoulder the responsibilities like the male members. A novel authored by Narayan Sanyal under the caption *Balmick* ventilates the relentless struggle of the refugee women in coping with the new environment. In the novel *Namita* is a teacher by profession. She is associated with many constructive activities of the colony. Her sudden demise brings about a magical change among the colony dwellers. They become united and determined to finish the unfinished task of their beloved Namita.<sup>33</sup>

In the novel *Bidisha* of Narayan Gangopadhyay a horrible picture of partition is sketched. The heroine of the novel, *Bidisha*, had two young sisters. Gangopadhyay composes the pathetic saga of their troublesome journey from Dhaka. Three sisters in their way toward India are accompanied by their guardian Suprakash. But suddenly Suprakash is attacked by a violent mob in the airport premises and is severely injured. But the three sisters are deprived of the opportunity to cast a last glance on Suprakash for a single moment.<sup>34</sup> Bhavani Mukhopadhyay's *Kannahasir dolay* remind us the days of turmoil of mid and late forties. The independence of India is a long cherished dream of Joyanta and Minati and they are the prime characters of the book. The riot, bloodshed and death of Joyanta in the riot perplex the author no doubt but at the same time he does not confine the plot within this disillusionment and depression. The novelist is always in favour of positivism and the novel concludes with optimism. In *Agunmukhar Meye* of Nurjahan Bose a vivid picture of post 1950 riot is available. She has also recollected her own experience where she herself was subjected to different types of subjugation.<sup>35</sup>

Satinath Bhaduri's story *Gana nayak* is based on the tension and uncertainty of both the communities of the border area in Tetulia of Jalpaiguri district. Bhaduri has based his story on the life of Rajbansi priest of Tetulia police station. The central figure of the story is Pora Gosai of Bajorgaon who becomes exceedingly glad hearing the news

of non transfer proposal of Bajorgaon to Pakistan. The priest ultimately decided not to go to Pakistan. It was unthinkable and beyond his dream to move towards Pakistan. This nostalgia was visible in *Gananayak*.<sup>36</sup> In Shankha Ghosh's superb novel *Supariboner sari*, Nilu's grandfather uttered with painful heart that the row of beetle nut trees behind the *Kacharibari* (outer house) trees were planted by him. Here lies the tomb of his father, mother and grandfather where evening lamps were kindled by the women inmates of the house. He laments that how the sweet memories of those golden days are to be left behind.<sup>37</sup> *Nirbas* by Amiya Bhusan Majumder depicts nostalgia in the characters for the river Padma and its nearby territories. The characters of *Nirbas* have firm conviction that the land where the river Padma flowed, beyond this, there are unexplored abysses of nothingness but not countries. Through these partition literatures, nostalgia towards motherland has distinctly been revealed.<sup>38</sup>

*Hasubanu* is a novel authored by Probodh Kumar Sanyal, is an important partition centric fiction. Samaresh Basu, a renowned Bengali writer who writes about partition in his book named *Suchader Swadesh Jatra*. Samaresh does not recognize and approve the partition of India. In the fiction of Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's *Jaal*, the references of refugees are also available. The political and social activist Manikuntala Sen in her *Sediner Kotha* represents before the readers the untold miseries of the uprooted personnel.<sup>39</sup> Two novels of Sabitri Roy named *Badwip* and *Swaralipi* represented the relentless struggle of refugee women. *Swaralipi* was composed in 1952 and its purview of discussion was confined within the period of 1947-51. The fiction stressed on the changing scenario of socio economic and socio political institutions. It demonstrates the break of traditional ties of both the Bengals. *Swaralipi* brilliantly described the agony and anguish of uprooted people in India and the problems faced by the retainers of Hindu zamindars in Pakistan.<sup>40</sup> By the time when Emergency was proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in 1975, the Naxal movement was petered out. When the CPI(M) came back to power to form the Left Front and the euphoria was towering, the Marichjhapi massacre took place. The presence of Left Front Government could not prevent the tragedy. Shaktipada Rajguru's novel *Dandak theke Marichjhapi* was written at a time of assessment, after the violence was over. In the novel the efforts of the Namashudra refugees to change their status and livelihood is visible.

Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh occupies a unique position in the realm of Bengali literature so far as Bangladesh is concerned. She voices her demands against the oppression on the harmless and innocent female counterparts of the society by the male dominated members of the families. For her philanthropic outlook and humanitarian activities she had to face criticism and was even ostracized from her own country and community and she was also deprived of citizenship from her own motherland. Virtually she has been regarded as the citizen of the world. She is the true representative and mouthpiece of the oppressed and deprived women of the globe. In alliance with her lived realities she defined the word 'Refugee' from wider point of view. In almost all her novels she dwelt on this theme, sometimes with regard to communalism forcing a large number of populations to migrate to the alien lands where they were constrained to live the lives of refugees, unaccepted and unacceptable to the native people. Sometimes the women remain homeless in their homes. The women are not geographically isolated and refugees but from social and emotional view they remain as refugee.

In *Phera*, Taslima Nasreen underlines the issues related to religious fundamentalism and ventilated the fact that how inter-personal relations become affected because of communalism. Kalyani, the central character of the fiction *Phera* was uprooted from her birth place and shifted to Kolkata. Her family shifted to Kolkata for safety from the threat to honour. In spite of living in Kolkata physically, Kalyani's heart and soul have always remained in her place of birth. Her bosom friend was Sharifa to whom Kalyani had once promised to return. After thirty years she got an opportunity to revisit her place where she passed the valuable childhood days. But ironically, when Kalyani returns to her lost homeland, Sharifa's family eyed her with suspicion. They actually failed to gauge the intensity of the passion of Kalyani for her place of birth, for her childhood friends and above all her memories of childhood. This fiction is a tale of one's yearning for roots. The writer deftly captures the trauma of a refugee who at her wit's end questions to herself that where her home was, whether in India or in Bangladesh<sup>41</sup>.

In his masterpiece *Agun pakhi*, Hassan Azizul Haq sketches the painful story of partition from a different angle. He was brought up in Burdwan and he spent his precious childhood there. Later, he went to East Pakistan. This story carried the eloquent testimony of Haq's own lived realities and reflected his suppressed

consciousness. It appears that he expresses his own view through the character of an uneducated old lady of a rural background, who is uneducated and have stayed for her whole life in West Bengal. In the midst of leading a family centric life she had to witness some contemporary incidents like riot, famine, Partition etc. From within the ambit of her small family life she remains mute spectator of the tragic events of the time. Though she knows it well that Partition of India is a settled fact but she is not in position to accept the fact from core of her heart. Her near and dears went to Pakistan but she does not. Every one of her family left for East Pakistan but she stays here in India alone. However she is not alone. Her son who died in a tender age was buried here in India. So she was determined to stay here.<sup>42</sup>

The old lady of the novel raises a question on the utility of the partition. The lady has had the courage to denounce the Two Nation Theory.’ She uttered in her mother tongue “*kyane aleda ekto dyash hoyache, ei dyashti kyane amar loi*” (Why a separate state has been created? Why the country is not mine?). She also lamented “*I dyash chhere kotha jabo ami kichhutei bhabte parlam na. Amar khali mone hote laglo, kyane jabo keo amake bujhiye dik. Bujhie delei ami jabo, jekhane jete bolbe sekhane jabo. Oto Mosolmaner dyash r eto Hiduder dyash bole ar keo amar kachhe par pabena. U ji michhe kotha, u ji shoytaner kaj ta ayakon mone mone sobai janchhe*”<sup>43</sup>(I can’t imagine where to go from this country. Let someone explain to me why I should go elsewhere. Then and then only I would quit this country, anywhere they would dictate. I won’t spare anybody who would advocate this country is for Hindus and that country is for Muslims. It is a dam lie, it is the plot of demons, it is known to all). A simple question of an innocent and uneducated woman opens before us a humanitarian appeal. The whole episode of partition appears to be a matter of bewilderment in the eyes of the woman. She could not take it for granted that the two countries having same soil, same language has been isolated from each other simply on religious issues. Despite vivisection of India the sky overhead remains unaffected and undisturbed. The author makes this saga of Partition more appealing by his outstanding and penetrating insight.

Salman Rushdie’s magnum opus ‘*Mid-night Children*’ occupies a permanent position in the world of partition literature. *Midnight’s Children* waves its narratives based on the children born with the ability full of magic on mid night. Another fiction, ‘*Freedom at Mid Night*’, a non-fiction in character worked by Larry Collins and

Dominique Lapierre that chronicles the events surrounding the first Independence Day celebration in 1947. The work is for being a noted surrealistic fiction, full of satirical references to the event of partition and Independence. The 'Mid-night' alluded to in the title is the moment at which partition and independence become a settled fact.<sup>44</sup>

Amitav Ghosh's celebrated novels *The Hungry Tide* and *The shadow lines* represent Partition of India as black history. Apart from the immeasurable loss of lives and properties, dislocations and conflicts were also noticed. Ghosh emphasizes on the plight of the displaced persons who were forced to migrate from known to unknown destination which were full of insecurity and uncertainty to the migrants. The historical reality of Partition becomes an integral part in Ghosh's creation. Amitav Ghosh presents partition from the eyes of ordinary characters like Thamma (*The shadow Lines*) and Kusum (*The Hungry Tide*). In *The Hungry Tide*, the author sketches the Partition and the subsequent migration of refugees from Bangladesh. The migrants who could not be accommodated in West Bengal were compelled to settle down in Dandakaranya of Madhya Pradesh. The West Bengal Government promised them to be accommodated in West Bengal afterwards. But they failed to keep their promise. As a result of which the irritated settlers of the region moved out of Dandakaranya and settled in Sundarbans.<sup>45</sup> Ghosh ventilates these unfair treatment of the Government through his penetrating insightful novel. The character of Thamma and her trajectory that moved from Dhaka to Calcutta and back to Dhaka again as Ghosh depicts is identical with the journey of large number women who experienced the pathetic saga of Partition. Thamma's ultimate bitter realization in her revisit to Dhaka, her birth place is evident from her own lamentation "Yes, I really am a foreigner here". This lamentation of Thamma is nothing but a symbol of frustration, disappointments and non-fulfillment of the long cherished sweet dream of all other uprooted persons about their mother land.

Literature describing the human cost of independence and partition comprises of Khuswant Singh's *A train to Pakistan* (1956), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, Balwant Singh Ananda's novel *Cruel Interlude*, G.D. Khosla's *Stern Reckoning*, *The price of partition* by Rafiq Zakaria, etc. Saadat Hassan Manto, is a talented writer of extraordinary brilliance. His fiction represents the tragedy of partition and the

sectarian violence that expressed the hollowness of the morality of the middle class. Some of his widely criticized touching stories are branded as obscene and he is accused for propagating pornography. His fictions bring into sharp focus the tragedy of Partition and the violence that followed. Manto has the courage to present with utmost authenticity the reality of his milieu.<sup>46</sup>

The women community also had memories of the events of partition and they were rather compelled to suppress the fact or to stifle but the literature can somehow liberate these stories from hiding. As the devastating stigma of 1947 still attached to some women who were perceived to have been sexually contaminated by men of 'other' community during the sectarian violence that accompanied the partition, it was unlikely that they would ever testify about their experience. In the face of this silence it may well be the task of literary historiography to unveil, uncover, liberate from silence and oblivion, these women's stories.<sup>47</sup> It is a matter of great pleasure that a trend was noticed among the budding writers to come out with their writings of memories and non-fictional contribution on partition. Anis Kidwar's *In the shadow of freedom* (1955), Urvashi Butalia's *The other side of silence* (1988), Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon's *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), Kamala Patel's *Torn from Roots: A partition Memoir* (2006), Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) etc, are worth to be mentioned in this pretext.

Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is one of the most remarkable contributions on partition. The plot is centered round a Muslim lady Laila, the protagonist of the novel, who lives at Ashiana (Lucknow), the family house, with aunt Abida, aunt Majida, a widow and her daughter Zahra. Babajan, the Grandfather, a rich land lord belonged to the influential and powerful class of the Muslim *talukdar*. From her very childhood Laila is restless and she resists the conventional system of livelihood. The personal, social and political divisions caused by partition are elaborately projected in the novel. She is intolerant of conventional standards. In the meantime Laila marries Amir, a youth of her choice. Subsequently due to Amir's death, the trauma of partition and division of the family a new Laila emerges. The personal distress, national disaster fails to dump her courage and energy.<sup>48</sup>

The narrative of partition in Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* was first published in 1956. Singh's version of the partition is a social one providing diverse and detailed human accounts through the persona of characters where each had unique points of view, indicating that everyone is equally at fault and the blame was irrelevant. Woman victimization is one of the evils confronting women all over the world and this evil is further compounded if they are placed in unstable political societies or events. Women being extremely vulnerable are easy targets of any form of oppression, humiliation, deprivation and discrimination. Partition literature explores the sexual trauma, sufferings and painful experiences of women during and after the Partition. This in many ways substantiates the fact that inequality of sexes is neither a biological fact nor a divine mandate but a cultural construct. The novel *Train to Pakistan* is certainly about the innocent victims of the Partition where the village of Mano Majra provides the base for the different social, economic, federal and political thread work required to illustrate the suffering. The social sufferings such as Partition from the beloved, the trauma of leaving the homeland have been dramatically presented. The suffering part of the victims in the train is provided as a cause for the initiation of the chaos in the village. Partition in entirety is presented to show the human dimension of the momentous event.<sup>49</sup>

A renowned novelist Aktarujaman Ilias, in his *Khowab nama* interrogates into the prime reasons on the part of the Hindus to quit their motherland and infer their identities as Zamindars (landlords) while the Muslims as their subjects, Muslims are the clients where as the Hindus are the advocates, the Hindus are the lender and the Muslims are the borrowers, Muslims are the students where as the Hindus are the teachers, Hindus are the doctors while the Muslims are the patients.<sup>50</sup> *Lajwanti* one of the earliest literary account by Rajinder Singh Bedi, focuses on social stigma while facing the abducted women after their returning back to home. Bedi's version is that for a long moment the abducted women and their relative looked at each other just like a stranger. 'Then heads bent low, they walked back together to tackle the task of bringing new life to ruined homes...' There were some abducted women whom their husbands, fathers, mothers, brothers and sister refused to recognize. They used to curse them! Why did they not die? Why did they not take poison to save their chastity...They were cowards who basely and desperately clung to life"<sup>51</sup>There is no

doubt that community responded well to other rehabilitation activities, but there was a problem to rehabilitate them in hearts<sup>52</sup>.

## ii) SHORT STORIES

The writers from West Bengal composed different short stories that vividly portrayed the trauma of partition and the after struggle in the new abode with their penetrating insight. Mention may be made of some short stories written by Manabendra Bandopadhyay *Bhed Bibhed*, Satinath Bhaduri's *Gananayak*, Alok Bhalla's *Stories about the Partition of India* ; Imdad-Ul-Haq Milan's *Desh bhager po*, Debesh Roy's *Raktamanir Hare*, *Udvastu*, Tarapada Roy's *Galpa samagra*, Prafulla Roy's, *Anuprabesh*, Kamalesh, Sen's *Danga Birodhi Golpo*, Ramesh Chandra Sen's *Panther Kanta* , Dibyendu Palit's *Alamer nijer bari* etc.

In the story *Morok* composed by Ritwik Ghatak , the central figure of the story Israel goes to East Pakistan. In this connection it may be mentioned of two Bengali short stories composed by Ramapada Chowdhury i.e. *Angapali* and *Karun Kanya*. The central characters of those two stories are two abducted women named Sabita and Arundhuti and both women are recovered along with their illegitimate babies. Both the women of those two different stories experience the tragedy of partition. Family members of those two women are not ready to accept the baby. In the story *Angapali*, Sabita was the mute spectator when she looks at her mother who is taking bath after touching the baby because the baby does not belong to their family. In the story *Karun kanya*, Arundhuti is advised by her mother to send her baby to the orphanage. Suddenly Arundhuti met Subimal, her former fiancé. But he is not mentally prepared to accept her. More so Subimol and his family even did not accept his abducted sister Madhuri. Finding no other alternative Arundhuti has to return back to her abductor husband who has no objection to accept Arundhuti. These two stories are nothing but the reflections of hard realities of that turbulent time. The recovery operations in post partition period are considered to be as second uprootment of eloped women. Many of those ill-fated women express their unwillingness to return back to their families apprehending to be ostracized. Sometimes they are compelled to abandon their illegitimate issue behind the screen. The universal question of motherhood became suppressed, concealed and unanswered by the male protagonists in the act of recovery operation. Ramapada Chowdhury portrays the misfortune of women who are being

caught in between the crossfire of communal violence.<sup>53</sup> The most vital point in this connection is that women have to face abduction not only from the people of the other communities but the people of their own communities are involved.

Manik Bandopadhyay in his writings elaborately depicts the picture of a Muslim family who is forced to live for East Pakistan in the event of riot. Manik Bandopadhyay in his story *Upaye* (Final Solution) has made a comment that the predicament of the exile in the hellhole of those transit rehabilitation camps echoes the appalling life in death situation of the concentration camp in Europe. According to the author, the Jews in concentration camps were better off than those who take shelter in the railway platform of West Bengal. Mallika, the protagonist of the story, her body becomes the only medium through which she can transcend the conditions of oppression. Her sexuality is no longer confined within the possibilities of governed transgression through which it can turn into her means of sustenance. Her body has become her final solution to the situation which partition has ushered her into. A good number of Bengali fictions, short stories and other accounts were composed on the basis of partition. The rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims are revealed through atrocious riots. The first story of Narendranath Mitra on the context of partition is *Pataka*<sup>54</sup> In another story titled *Jaibo* the writer sketches the character of a Hindu woman named Sudatta who was raped just before the partition and was not allowed for abortion because her scientist professor husband Mriganka Majumdar wants to make a guinea pig of the baby to watch the influence of environment during conception on the formation of the child's personality. The freedom after partition which the woman is supposed to enjoy in the newly created India appears to be a nightmare to her. The raped woman of the story considers herself to be an object of a scientific experiment.<sup>55</sup> Narendra Mitra's short story '*Payasangka*, projects the picture of division of Indian territory. The very dialogue is very touchy and emotive.

Narayan Gangopadhyay composed a considerable number of short stories and novels where the problems and crisis of uprooted individuals hailing from East Pakistan have an authentic reflection. The saga of partition refugees have been ventilated through his short story *Simanta*. The story narrates that the coming of people in flocks from both sides of the neighbouring borders. Fazle Rabbi, an important character of the story is in a fix over the grim irony of fate of Doyal Mondal who has sacrificed his

life for the sake of his country. The vital question comes over the mind of Rabbi that why in spite of Doyal's devotion towards his country he is rendered to become an outsider in his own county. Samarendra Ghosh's superb writing *Bhangchhe shudhu bhangchhe*, a story of destruction caused by the turbulent event of Partition. Surajit Basu's *Darabar jaiga* is another important creation on partition. The writers of both previous and present generations composed different stories on partition from their own perspectives. The never ending wounds created following partition still alive in modern era. Beside the stories mentioned above the stories like *Kath Golap* of Narendranath Mitra, *Batasi* of Atin Bandopadhyay, *Epar Opar* of Monoj Basu, *Achaya Kripalini Colony* of Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay etc. create a tremendous impact upon the minds of modern readers that cannot be lost sight of. Apart from these writers some modern and promising writers had made valuable contribution in the genre of partition literature. The story *Janma bhumi* of Asis Sanyal, *Bela Obela* of Samir Rakshit, *Bhager Ma* of Ahana Biswas, *Anya Ihudi* of Kapil Krishna Thakur and many others stories of modern writers highlight the event of partition.

Manikuntala Sen finds a sort of struggle for existence and new awakening among the refugee women. A huge number of women for the sake of themselves and the livelihood of their families crossed borders and migrated to India, more specifically to West Bengal. The lives of those women were confined within the four walls till then, now engage themselves in new assignment<sup>56</sup>. In the story *Mahanagar* written by Narendranath Mitra and directed by Satyajit Ray reveals the fact that the daughter in law of a refugee family is compelled to engage herself in a job. In the story *Pasharini* by Samaresh Basu, Puspa, the daughter a school master named Nirapada, has to sell self-made dolls in the railway compartments. She is called in an insulting address *Putuler Ma*. The episode of partition actually suppressed and shattered the dreams of thousands of vulnerable Bengali women who are rather forced to sacrifice their dream of a sweet nest. Their only identities are their profession like *Putuler Ma*.<sup>57</sup> In a short story of Dipankar Das titled *Rrin* Renuka fails to accommodate herself with a suitable job. Her father can't tolerate the pang of separation following the partition and he frantically moves towards his deserted place in East Pakistan in quest of his lost abode. Renuka has to shoulder the heavy responsibility of the whole depressed family with the act of preparing *thonga* (a paper made container for carrying things). She is bound to struggle relentlessly with the ups and downs of the situations and eventually

she is forced to commit suicide. Through the tragic suicidal act of Renuka, the author tries to represent the whole woman community who become the victims of such tragic deaths in millions leaving behind no reliable history and evidence.<sup>58</sup>

There are also a huge number of short stories from the writers of East Pakistan and afterwards from Bangladesh. Those stories not only exhibit their literary calibre, but their intense feelings and sentiment over the heart rendering event of 1947. Salam Azad's *Desh Bhager Galpo*, Akhtar Hasan Hussain's *Sampradayikatar Biridhi Galpo*, Azizul Haq's *Rarh Banger Golpo*, Syed Walliullah's *Ekti Tulsigachher kakini* etc. are worth noting in this context. The number of Muslim refugees who crossed border and migrated to East Pakistan from India was no doubt microscopic in comparison to the Hindu refugees migrated from East Pakistan to India. The violence of partition and the trauma is manifested in different wings of literature. The pang and pathos of partition are vividly portrayed in *Gayatri Sandha* of Selina Hossain. The heroine of the story is Pushpita, who flees with her husband to East Pakistan. She is willing to give birth to her baby in East Pakistan and consequently her son is born in Rajshahi. He is named Pratik (symbol) Ahmed. The birth of the baby indirectly indicates the birth of Pakistan. The name Pratik signifies the birth of a new nation (Pakistan).<sup>59</sup> This optimistic attitude is one of the salient features of the partition literature of East Pakistan.

*Ekti tulsi gachher kahini*, a short story composed by Sayed Walliullah throws light on the other aspect of partition. Right after the partition a sizable group of homeless Muslims from Calcutta occupies a deserted house in Dacca. But, their joy of finding the new asylum is short-lived. All of a sudden a *Tulsi gachh* (tulsi plant) is discovered in the courtyard. The very *tulsi* plant indicates clearly that a Hindu family had lived there previously. Surrounding round the *tulsi* plant a hesitation comes over the minds of migrated Muslim inmates. Modabber wants to uproot it. But Motin, another inmate of the house contemplate about the woman who used to light a lamp and prayed before the *tulsi* plant stained with blood-red *sindoor*. In spite of Modabber's order to uproot the plant no one come forward to pull the plant out.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately the holy plant remained untouched, unharmed and conspicuous; moreover someone is found taking care of the plant because the almost dried leaves began to flourish green. The very incident shows the religious tolerance and respect of some Muslims towards the rituals. This story rather questions the very basis of partition.<sup>61</sup>

Another story by Hasan Azizul Haq named *Atmaja O Ekti Korabi Gachh* is a repository of the ordeal of partition. A helpless penniless aged father has to depend on the income from flesh trade of his daughter for livelihood. The dependent old father always keeps the poisonous seeds of the *karabi* flower with him. He just thinks that when his pang and pain will cross the limit of tolerance then he will consume the poison leaving behind the false independence derived from the partition. The dream to live a trouble-free life in the new abode in East Pakistan from West Bengal has become a nightmare.<sup>62</sup> The bifurcation of India and the miseries followed by Partition is the central theme of the story *Ekti Nirjola Kotha* by Hassan Azizul Haq. The lady of the story bears the scar of partition. She is totally indifferent towards the cause and effects of partition. In this story the woman is rather forced to come over to a new territory called East Pakistan which is totally unknown to her. But the heroine of the novel *Agunpakhi* of Hassan Azizul Haq is obstinate in staying in West Bengal braving all sorts of eventualities.

According to some scholars, Bengali literature on Partition cannot be compared with the works of Saadat Hasan Manto. Without ignoring the sheer brilliance of the stories of Manto it can't be denied that Bengali writers have contributed lot on the traumatic event<sup>63</sup>. Copious short stories such as *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hassan Manto, *Short Stories on Partition*, edited by Bhallar are the extra ordinary collections. The banned controversial stories are *Cold Meat*, *Black Salwar* and *Khol Do* (open it). Through the stories the readers can experience the reality that social transformation demanded, which include not only the emancipation of female subjects but also the radical reconstitution of masculinity is concerned<sup>64</sup>. *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* are a collection of stories composed by Saadat Hassan Manto. The majority of the stories by this Urdu writer from Punjab revolve round the end of the Raj, partition and communalism. 'Manto was not the only one to whom Independence came packaged in genocide, necrophilia, ethnic cleansing, massive uprooting and the collapse of a moral universe<sup>65</sup>. The stories *Thanda Gosht*, *Khol do*, *Toba Tek Singh*, *Iss Manjdhar Mein*, *Mozzalle*, *Babu Gopinath* etc have written by Manto . Some of the characters the author created- become legendary.

## iii) POEM

Poems written by the poets of West Bengal on partition and refugee crisis are as follows: Bishnu De's *Hasnabadei*, Jal Dao -Shankho Ghosh's *Gandharva Kabita Guccha* ; Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Keu Katha Rakheni*, Achinta Kumar Sengupta's *Pub Paschim* etc.. Some poems from East Pakistan and as well as from Bangladesh have composed poems on partition and refugee problem, viz. Ahsan Syed Ali's *Amar Purba Bangla*, Sikander Abu Zafar's *Bangla Chharo*, Shamsur Rahman's *He Amar Balyo Bandhugan*, Taslima Nareen's *Asvikar, Bhanga Banga Desh* etc,

Two distinct streams are found in the poems on the episode of partition i.e. "the conscience of the poet paralyzed by an unwarranted retributive justice called the 'riot' or euphoria out of an image of a braver, newer world"<sup>66</sup>. The writings of Subhas Mukherjee, especially his poems like *Agnikoner, Ekti kobitar jonya Tallat jure* celebrated the bowing and scraping, while Jibanananda, an outstanding poet and a man of manifold qualities presents through his classic poems, his ardent love for his mother land. Jibanananda came from East Bengal and procured varied experiences in consequence of Partition. His experiences and realization have been aptly reflected in his superb literary creation. He is rightly adjudged as the greatest Bengali poet after Rabindranath. The unique creation of Jibanananda is his *Rupasi Bangla*. During the war of liberation of Bangladesh the brave fighters of Bangladesh considered the poem *Rupasi Bangla* as their source of inspiration and encouragement. Another famous poem of the poet is *Banglar mukh ami dekhiyachhi* (I have seen Bengal's face). These two poems give clear indication regarding the beauty, harmony and peace of the undivided Bengal where the blessings of nature, the myths and legends have been intermingled.<sup>67</sup>

The superb and outstanding contributions of some noted poets of West Bengal and Bangladesh depicting the untold sufferings of East Pakistan Hindu exodus have been conically analyzed from different purview and from different angles. One of Subhas Mukhopadhyay's famous poems *Parapar* the picture of undivided Bengal has been represented. Mukhopadhyay contemplated that, were the two stars in the eyes of Bangladesh and on the midway there stands a hindrance of corridors and borders. The poet ventures to cross the borders despite hindrance through his dream and imagination. He tries to unlock the locked windows removing obstructions of the

clear views of both the countries of West Bengal and Bangladesh. The cherished sweet dream of unification between the two countries is represented through his verse *Parapar*. It also stresses an emotional attachment rather than physical detachment.

Sunil Gangapadhay, a creative writer and poet per excellence migrated from East Pakistan and his memory of partition is vibrant in his poems also. Sunil Gangapadhyay's poignant poem *Dhatri* (Nurse) is one of his saddest poems on partition. An old refugee woman burdened with overage was found sitting on the Sealdah railway station stretching her hands for alms. She was a woman of seventy two. She was seeking helps with her trembling hands from the pedestrians. At the very sight of the old woman the poet tried to recollect memories of his childhood days. Just after his birth the woman in question took charge and care of him when his mother was in a critical condition. The lady in order to quench the thirst of milk fed the poet with the milk of her own breast. For days together the poet extorted blood from her body. She used to rub the child with oil sitting upon the sunny morning under the open sky with care and affection. The poet himself heard the story from his mother and maternal aunt. During the period of poet's illness of profuse vomiting the woman at dead of night set out in procuring *gandhabadali* leaves and also promised to offer *amla* at *Dorga*. The tragedy of whole thing is that the poet is searching a ten paisa coin instead of four *anna* coin from his pocket. The poet questions himself why the old refugee woman poured drops of rose water in his eyes to open the eyes to enable the poet to see the vast and beautiful universe? The poet also laments and cries aloud why he is allowed to take birth in this world only to see the pathetic condition of his dear Dhai Ma. The poet accuses the lady for his survival in this world and also apprehends the impending danger and catastrophe that would come in the way of her future life.<sup>68</sup>

Poet Nirendranath Chakroborty has published his book of poems *Neel Nirjon* in 1954. In this book there is a poem known as *Taimur* which is composed in the background of riot and its impact. Another prolific writer of the period Tarapada Roy in his first book of poems *Tomar pratima* (1960) deals with partition. In the second edition of his book published in 1972, he has made the poems more relevant with reference to the Bangladesh war of liberation.<sup>69</sup> Poet Birendra Chattapadhyay's *Visa officerer samne* and *Mahadever Duar* also depicts the stories of sufferings. The Poems of Bishnu Dey, Shangkha Ghosh, Amitabha Dasgupta, Mongalacharan Chattapadhyay Arun Bagchi,

Biredra Chattapadhyay, Joy Goswami, Shakti Chatopadhyay, Arun Mitra, Mandakranta Sen, Niladri Sekhar Basu and others contributed deeply towards the enrichment of partition literature. Poems like *Subhas ja dekhechhen* by Birendra Chattapadhyay, *Jamunaboti*, *Swadesh swadesh koris kara*, *Purarbasan*, *Lampost* by Shankha Ghosh, *Shakha bhanga hat* by Anitabha Dasgupta, *Satbhai Champa*, *Sandiper chor*, *Jal dao* etc. by Bishnu Dey, *Ese dekhe jao*, *Shukno much uskokhusko chul* by Mangalacharon Chattapadhyay, *Duswapna* by Joy Goswami etc were composed on partition, violence, riot, genocide and above all the trauma and triumph of partition.

A few poets of Bangladesh also composed a number of poems relating to the partition episode and Bangladesh War of liberation. The poets like Bande Ali Miah, Al Masud, Abdur Rasid Khan, Samsur Rahman, Taslima Nasrin, Rudra Mammad Shahidullah and others have expressed their grievances, agony, experiences, sentiments and attachment due to partition. But the numbers of poems exclusively on partition were not adequate. One of the popular poets of East Pakistan Bande Ali Miah composed a poem named *Bastu bhita*. The miserable tragedy of partition was the main theme of his poem. In the poems of Al Masud the incidents of partition and the war of Bangladesh liberation were sounded. In the poem *Ullapara station* poet Abdur Rashid Khan recollected the memories of lost love, partition, war and famine.<sup>70</sup> In the poems of Samsur Rahman the events of partition and independence frequently appeared. Rahman's poems *Tomake paoar jonya*, *hay swadhinata*, *Swadhinata tumi*, *Ekhane Dorja chhilo*, *Tumi bolechhile* carried the message of dignity of mother tongue, revolt against the autocracy of Pakistan and also independence. The other literary genius and personality who originally hailed from Bangladesh was Taslima Nasrin. Such undaunted lady of Bangladesh made a valuable contribution in the Bengali literature in the event of Partition through her poems, novels, short stories and through other significant works. The two masterpiece poems by Taslima Nasrin *Bhanga Banga Daesh* and 'Aswikar' depicted the cause of Partition and her nostalgic attitude had been clearly revealed and reflected through her poetic imagination.

It is worthwhile to mention that female writers through their literary contributions represented the partition from a gendered angle and stressed on the feminine view point. The prevalent idea was that the women were destined to be the victims of

sufferings and sexual contravention. This sexual transgression was the violation of their deepest feminine self. The female writers never characterized the women as the unassertive progeny of victimhood and instead characterized them as personages of flesh and blood having with the efficiency in resilience and agency. The veil of silence over the gendered violence was unveiled and unmasked by the female writers. Breaking the traditional patriarchal roots, they tried to divulge the hidden truth of real history of partition. In the male narratives however the male personages were characterized of pursuing action exhibiting an attractive attitude accompanied with valour and heroism. On the contrary, the views of female narrators and the women protagonists had the courage to reject the traditional image of 'self-sacrificing womanhood' and to live a life avoiding the benchmarks or parameters of 'honour and shame'. It was set up under the patriarchal frame. The female protagonists of the novels by female litterateurs questioned the unbiased and pretended impartiality of history. Jyotirmoyee Devi, Anita Desai, Baldwin and many others tried to deconstruct the patriarchal version of history through their powerful and penetrating insight of woman psychology and their treasured grievances.

#### PAINTINGS

Celebrated painters like Bikash Bhattacharjee portrayed a sketch named 'Freedom' and another outstanding artist of Bangladesh Bulban Osman in his sketch 'Divided Bengal' revealed the pathetic saga of displaced persons. Another internationally renowned artist Somnath Hore of Shantiniketan sketched the portrait under the caption 'Udvastu'. These artists through their emotion, imagination and artistic excellence painted on the theme of partition from different perspective.

#### iii) DRAMA

There were only a scanty number of dramas written and staged in Bengal on partition and refugee problems. In Digindra Chandra Bandopadhyay's drama *Bastu bhita* it was observed that middle class Hindu affluent people are forced to leave their villages out of frustration, depression and apprehension. The local Muslim leader Sona Molla vehemently protests against leaving of the Hindus to Indian Territory. On the other hand other communal Muslim leader Yasin conspires against the Hindus to leave the

country. These contrast pictures of two opponent groups are demonstrated through the drama.<sup>71</sup> Tulsi Lahiri, a dramatist, gained fame due to his celebrated play *Chhera Tar*, directed another drama *Banglar mati*. In that drama he dramatized the mass Hindu exodus from East Pakistan. Ritwick Ghatak, well known film director wrote, directed and performed in the play *Dalil* (deed)<sup>72</sup>. He did never tolerate the most unwise decision of the partition of India. The immeasurable sufferings of the uprooted and innocent individuals hailing from East Pakistan always made him perturbed and perplexed. Its manifestations were revealed through his films and plays. *Dalil* is not an exception. The police fired indiscriminately upon the silent female procession in Boubazar locality of Calcutta resulting in the deaths of three women- Lotika, Pratibha and Amiyaa. This horrible scene was recorded by the director himself as a theme of his drama.

*Nutan Yehudi* (The new Jews) is a remarkable drama which made significant contribution in presenting the immeasurable sufferings of East Bengal refugees. The play *Nutan Yehudi* was masterly composed by Salil Sen. The first performance of this act was staged in 1951 and it was published in 1957. It was one of the most and noted plays over the Partition of Bengal. Although it has been forgotten and plunged into profound darkness of oblivion, today the play still stands as unparalleled owing to its success and popularity in the fifties. The uprooted, displaced, shelter less, unwanted, innocent and helpless people of East Bengal has been referred by the author as Nutan Yehudi. Their relentless struggle for survival and existence, their abject poverty, apprehension of uncertainty and their agony has been dramatized in a true and realistic manner.<sup>73</sup>

#### ,iv) FILM

At the beginning of 1948, a group of talented directors ventilated the crisis, dilemma, saga and struggle of East Pakistan refugees through their superb creations. A number of films focused on detailed socio- political tension of the period. Nimai Ghosh's *Chhinnamul*; Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komol Gandhar*, *Nagarik*, *Subarnerekha*, '*Jukti, Takko ar Goppo*', '*Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*'; Sukumar Dasgupta '*Ora thake odhare*'; Shantipriya Mukherjee's *Refugee* Agradut's *Bipasha*( Tarashankar Bandapadhyay); Bimal Basu's *Nabarag*. Srijit Mukherjee's *Rajkahini*, Masi Uddin Shaker and Sheikh Niamat Ali's *Surya Dighal Bari*, Tanvir Mokammel,

*Chitra Nadir Pare, Zahir Raihan Jibon theke neoya, Humayum Ahmed's -----  
-----.etc.*

Nimai Ghosh's *Chhinnamul*, the first film to have interrogated into the refugees quotient relating to the partition of India.(cm,73) Author cum director Nimai Ghosh has sketched a picture of the helpless and pathetic condition of an uprooted migrants in his film *Chhinnamul* (uprooted). Unfortunately, the said film remained unacknowledged to success. Despite the commercial failure of the film, the film itself is yet considered to be the path breaker, showing a new trend in social realism<sup>74</sup>. According to eminent director of international acclaim Mrinal Sen, 'Truly speaking *Chhinnamul* was a marvelous exception in the world of films'. The main theme dealt with how a single political decision brought about a shattered picture of Hindu migrants of East Bengal's. That very decision of partition not only created a scene of chaos and anarchism but also changed the subsequent trend of history. It is a proud privilege for the readers and the admirers of Ritwik Ghatak that the film maker himself acted in a vital role. Besides some thespian personalities like Bijon Bhattachaya, Shova Sen and Charuprokash Ghosh played important roles. Famous Soviet film director Pudo Vokin and the actor Chercashav observed that Nimai Ghosh performed a realistic picture in a masterly skill.<sup>75</sup>

Some creations of outstanding film directors basically based on the partition of India are very important in this regards. Ritwik Ghatak was an ardent observer of Bengali culture and it was evident in his films. His films express a unique viewpoint of post-independence Bengal. It is unique in the sense that he explored "the fall out of the 1947 Partition of India on Bengali society, and has been influential because he set a standard with his films for the newly emerging 'alternative' or 'parallel' cinema directors"<sup>76</sup> Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* can be chosen as a single film which depicts the trauma and tragedy of the Bengal partition with unparalleled power of sensitivity without asking any question. Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The star veiled by cloud) is a masterpiece and classic creation of Ritwik based on a simple story. Here the sad tale of an uprooted, young refugee girl Nita has been neatly, perfectly, skillfully and masterly sketched by Ghatak in an artistic way. Nita becomes the victim of abject poverty, uncertainty and insecurity, struggling relentlessly for the survival of her displaced parents. The classical music lover and indifferent elder brother Shankar and the younger sister Gita are poles asunder in their nature and

outlook in comparison to Nita. Nita, the protagonist, sacrifices everything for her family. Braving all adverse circumstances she shoulders the heavy responsibility of the bread earner of the distressed family. Although partition is never explicitly mentioned in the film, the plot was set in a refugee camp in the outskirts of Calcutta and concerns an impoverished genteel Hindu *Bhadralok* family and the problems they face because of partition. Nita, the central character of the film, has been presented as a deathless symbol of Partition. She cares much for the survival of her family and cares less for herself. The ceaseless struggle of an undaunted lady, who has left behind everything and also become uprooted which has been skillfully screened by the director.<sup>77</sup> Her piercing cry and dying utterance “Dada Ami Bachte Chai” (I want to live Brother) still brings tears in the eyes of millions. When Ghatak starts this aforesaid film he never speaks of political unification. The cultural segregation has caused by politics and economics is not reconciled by him because he always thinks in terms of cultural integration.<sup>78</sup>

Another unique and superb creation is *Subarnarekha*. It is a realistic portrayal of development in the aftermath of Partition and refugee coping with it. The trauma of refugee life and its piercing political cry form the basis of the film *Subarnarekha*. The film stresses on a further understanding of the neo colonial Indian society after the transfer of power in 1947. The narrative revolves around Ishwar Chakraborty, a refugee, who stays in a colony with his sister Sita. Ishwar discovers an abducted boy Abhiram in the colony and give shelter to him. Ishwar, after getting a job settled in the bank of river *Subarnarekha*. Ishwar is conscious of Abhiram’s lower caste origin, so he opposes the marriage proposal of Sita with Abhiram. But Sita runs away with Abhiram. But it is a grim irony of fate that Abhiram gets himself involved in an accident and is killed by the mob. For the sake of her only son Binu, Sita sinks into harlotry and finds drunken Ishwar as her first customer. As a result Sita commits suicide. Frustrated Ishwar started his journey with Binu. The film ruthlessly exposes the ecological waste of post independent society.<sup>79</sup>

Apart from *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha* Ghatak has made tremendous contribution in the film industry through his creation like *Komol Gandhar*, *Jukti, takko ar Gappa* and *Titas Ekti Nadir Num* etc. The main theme of the film *Komolgandhar* is based on the internal tussle in a group theatre. But the drama specially revolved around the partition, its distress and agony of the uprooted persons

who have flocked to West Bengal from East Pakistan. The director of drama constantly and frantically thought over the partition. Although at present the true citizen of West Bengal, he, the director believes himself to be the true citizen of East Pakistan. This characterization of the drama director in the film *Komalgandhar* is to some extent identical with Ritwik Ghatak's personal life. It has been inferred often that *Komalgandhar* is the autobiographical accounts of Ritwik himself.<sup>80</sup>

*Bari theke paliye* is one of the renowned films of Ritwick Ghatak. The film is specially made for children. In this film Kanchan, the son of a village school teacher, flees away from his house and arrives at Calcutta with a long cherished dream of constructing a dwelling house. But his lofty ambition ultimately proves abortive due to his refugee status.<sup>81</sup> Ghatak focuses on detailed visual and aural commentaries of Bengal in politically as well as socially turbulent period from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. Twice during his life time Bengal is physically set apart –first in 1947 by the event of partition and in 1971 by the war of Bangladesh liberation.<sup>82</sup> (Sumit.Sarkar, *Sadashi Movement in Bengal: 1903-8*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1973). Ritwik Ghatak who is known to have 'gone mad over partition' is perhaps the only one who has attempted to grasp this phenomenon in his series of films and all of them are popular. A deep study will reveal Ghatak's partition trilogy as the psychological crisis of the uprooted persons residing in different colonies.

Another magnum opus of Ghatak is *Titas ekti nodir nam* though the film is not directly associated with the event of partition. The film deals with the diverse problems that accompanied the partition and displacement. The life of a fishing community and their panic due to change of river course is the main theme of the story. A civilization grows up surrounding the river Titas. As the river Titas starts shrinking the fishing community had to face with financial stringency. A section of landlords, being tempted tried to evict the fishing community but their attempts initially prove abortive following the unity of the fishing community. Afterwards, the traders hatch upon a plan by investing an enormous amount to enable the fishermen to make a voyage to the far rivers for catching fish. In this way they hurled a serious blow upon their unity and most of the fishermen quit their village.<sup>83</sup> The film ends with a big question mark whether the civilization is really declines? But the prompt answer is that civilization in no case can be destroyed and can only be transformed.

After a long period the Titas gets back her lost glory through the growth of green fields. At the fag end of the story the viewers witness the final tragedy and the grim irony of this change is witnessed by a dyeing women and a naked child running through the paddy field playing with a leaf whistle.

Apart from these films of Ghatak, Shantipriya Mukherjee's *Refugee* makes a valuable contribution in the realm of Bengali movies. Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's famous book on the Partition of Punjab *Bipasha* is directed by Agradut highly acclaimed. ,Bimal Basu's '*Nabarag*', Masiuddin Shaker and sheikh Niamat Ali's *Surja Dighal Bari* and Tanvir Mokammel's *Chitra Nadir Pare* are the leading novels on Partition have been adapted in the screen.. A popular Bengali film *Bipasha* was released in 1962. The heroine Bipasha is an orphan who lost her parents during the riot. Crossing the border she has migrated to Punjab and settled over here. Hero of the film Dibyendu knows that he is also an orphan. On the very day of their marriage Dibyendu comes to know a hard reality that he is the son of a whore. Being puzzled and upset he reaches Allahabad in search of his mother. Gradually he begins to consider himself as polluted one whose life is totally meaningless.

*Alo amar Alo* is a popular film directed by Pinaki Mukhopadhyay is based on the background of partition and refugee evacuation. This film was made during the period of Bangladesh war of liberation and was released after the war of liberation. The commoditization of womenfolk during that period of catastrophe is cinematized through *Alo amar alo*. *Nabarag* is another classic film directed by Bijoy Basu, deals with the frustration and mental anguish of Narayani who comes over to Calcutta from East Pakistan and gets married with an industrialist. Eventually, however, they get separated due to the immoral activities of her husband. Narayani hands over the charge of her son to a teacher who has migrated to Calcutta from East Pakistan. After a long interval she becomes united with her husband through her son. The most striking feature of this tale is the frustration of Narayani due to the experience and sweet memories of her abandoned motherland. 'Head Master', a film directed by Agragami, based on a short story of Narendranath Mitra, deals with post partition scenario of Bengal, was released in 1959.

Very recently veteran film director Goutam Ghosh has made one of his masterpieces *Shankhachil*. Though the film is not directly involved with Partition but 'border' has

become the central theme of this film. Goutam Ghosh is perhaps the sole director who contemplates and executes the theme upon border.<sup>84</sup> The film *Shankhachil* reflects the dream of free border and at the same time the tale of disillusionment. The teacher Muntasir Chowdhury Badal lives in the Bangladesh border happily with his wife Laila and the only daughter Rupsha. All of a sudden the heart disease of Rupsha is detected. The treatment of the disease is not available in the border area in Bangladesh. Finding no other alternative the teacher trespasses the border for the sake of treatment of his ailing daughter. With the assistance of the local relations they proceed to Calcutta for better treatment after having sold the ornaments of his wife. But their efforts are futile; his daughter breaths her last in Calcutta. The most tragic end of the story is that after the death of his only daughter his family members are accused for the violation of international law on the plea of infiltration and they are arrested by Border Security Force. Accompanying the dead body of their only daughter they sail towards Bangladesh border over the *Ichhamoti* River. The *Shankachil* is a symbolic representation freedom. It does not bother about the geographical boundaries which is totally man made. Ghosh used the allegory of *Shanachil* in the title remembering Jibanananda's depiction of *Shanachil* in his poetic acts. Goutam Ghosh does not directly engage with trauma of partition on screen but in his film border has served as source of disillusionment to the inhabitants of two adjoining countries.<sup>85</sup>

A very recent and popular movie *Raj Kahini* by Shrijit Mukhopadhyay has exhibited a marvelous performance on border due to partition. Begamjan, the central figure of the film is actually the owner of a brothel house. Eleven women are under her direct supervision. Begamjan is quite ignorant regarding country and politics. Her future revolves round circling the brothel house. In the meantime India attained freedom and following partition the areas of Debiganj and Haldibari which were identical in status got separate entity for the resettlements of borders. But due to the border demarcation of Radcliff the half portion of Begamjan's brothel was under India and other half was in Pakistan. Naturally when the boundary of two countries was being constructed the brothel became the barrier. Finding no others means the decision to demolish the brothel house was taken. Then Begamjan stages a massive resistance against the authority. She is the living embodiment of protest and a symbol of intrepidity<sup>86</sup>.

Within the ambit of fifteen years from 1947- 1962 at least two thousand films were made in Hindi and Urdu language. Among the above noted figures only fifteen films

are based on partition. The under noted films deal with the theme of partition- *Lahore* of M.S.Anand(1949),*Nastik* of I.S.Johar(1954), *Chholia* of Manmohan Desai (1960) or *Dharmaputra*(1961). There are other relevant films, viz. *Agg* of raj Kapur(1948), *Dhul ka phool* of Yosh Chopra(1959), *Owaqt* of Yosh Chopra(1965).*Tamas* is not only a film on partition and riot, it is a realistic form of document of the political situation of undivided Punjab. It can be termed as a political deed. Director Govind Nihalni tried his utmost to avoid the debatable question that who were actually responsible for the creation of new states and the subsequent miseries of the people.

From late 1990 onwards more films on the theme were produced including several main stream films viz. *Earth* (1998), *Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Hey Ram* (2000),*Gadar: Ek prem kotha*(2001), *Pinjar*(2003), *partition* (2007) and *Madrasapattinam*(2010). Concerning a fact of a partitioned Muslim family the film *Garam Hawa* of M.S. Sathyu was really remarkable. The outstanding cinema personality Satyajit Ray expressed his remarks over the film as an honest, strong and having multifaceted qualities. The film was quiet incomparable. The main theme of the story dealt with the problems of both the Hindu and Muslim refugees who became victim of circumstances. Not only the Hindus but also the minority Muslims of India has to confront such problems of the period.

#### v) MEMOIRS

Memoirs are an important source for reconstructing the partition history. After coming over here in India from East Pakistan, a process of construction and destruction acted silently in the minds of the uprooted persons. If it was observed with open eyes it would be evident that immense agony, anguish and frustration were preserved in the hearts of the uprooted persons. A sizable number of migrated persons being displaced from their ancestral homes stored their experiences and memories which were vividly manifested in their compositions. A good number of partition victims, both from West and East Bengal made valuable contribution to the partition literature by their memoirs. Through those memoirs of partition victims some undiscovered and unknown facts which remained dormant came into full public view. *Shatabarshe Ashalata* by Josodhara Bagchi and Abhijit Sen, *Ja dekhechhi and Udvastu* by Hiranmoy, Bandapadhyay, *Deshbhager Dinguli'* by Atin Bandapadhyay, *Chhere Asa Gram* edited by Dakshina Ranjan Basu, *Jibaner jalchhabi* Prativa Basu,

*Bhite chhada*, *Nirbindu* by Nirenbdranath Charaborty, *Aji hote shatabarsha age*, *Amar debottar Sampatti* by Nirad Chandra Chaudhry *Srinkhal Jhankar* by Bina Das, *Smritimoy Dinguli* by Hena Das, *Noakhali Durjoger Smriti* by Ashoka Gupta, *Leaves From A Diary* by Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, *Tin kuri dash* by Ashok Mitra (part II& III), *Ramanthan Athaba Bhimroti Praptir Paracharitcharcha* and *Banganama* by Tapan Roy chowdhury etc. are works by the writers of West Bengal. There are some memoirs from the writers of East Pakistan and Bangladesh. In this connection mention may be made of Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* by Abu Mansur, *Ethnic Cleansing* by Salam Azad, *Kakhono Champa Kakhono Atasi* by Ranesh Dasgupta, *Jeevan Maran* by Rashid Karim, Kiranshankar.Sengupta, *Challiser Dekha Dhaka*, *Jeevan Sangram* by Mani Singha; *Etodiner Smriti* Abul Kalam Shamsuddin.

An important compilation of essays: *Chhere Asa Gram* by Dakshina Ranjan Basu comprised some memories of different villages. The essay illustrated the sense of tragedy followed by the bifurcation of India. The essays are a nostalgic remonstrations of the childhood days.<sup>87</sup> The Hindu Bengali refugees were rather forced to start a new journey for survival in their new abode. The way of their journey in West Bengal, more specifically in Calcutta was riddled with hurdles. The nostalgia for the villages they left were sketched in an artistic manner. In the very beginning of the book he wrote “I have brought back from our country something of great value, could you possibly guess what it is? The friend placed a tiny box of earth in my hands....Deeply ingrained in this earth are the memories of all my ancestors of yore ... cried out my helpless heart.<sup>88</sup> Basu remembered nostalgically the Hindu Muslim unity, the joy of Muslims in Durga puja, the songs of boatmen of his childhood days. According to Dipesh Chakraborty ‘the nostalgic folksy image of the village never died’.<sup>89</sup> *Chhere Asa Gram*, composed shortly after partition, is a testimony of the struggle of uprooted refugees surprisingly free of animosity. The recollection is fixed on the calm and peaceful past of the undivided Bengal leaving apart the nightmare. This remembrance presented with lamentation the termination of the communal harmony that persisted in prior to the Partition.<sup>90</sup> An opinion of Dipesh Chakraborty is relevant in this regards “The native village is pictured as both sacred and beautiful, and it is this that makes communal violence an act of both violation and defilement, an act of sacrilege against

everything that stood for sanctity and beauty in the Hindu Bengali understanding of what home was”<sup>91</sup>

A memoir on partition of India *Dayamayeer kotha*, has written by Sunanda Sikdar. The author recollects her childhood days in her ancestral house in Dighapait, a village of Mymensingh in East Pakistan. She elaborately presents her pleasant experiences among the Muslim friends and well wishers. It was beyond the purview of her speculation that she would have to move towards India forever leaving behind her intimate friends, countrymen and well wishers with whom she enjoyed her childhood days happily and merrily. Due to political unrest and communal disturbances she clearly visualized a gradual change come over the locality. She observed minutely the people in queue proceeding towards India in processions shouting in lamentation ‘*O go, Choli , jammer moto jai, R kono din dyakha hoibo na go. Koto oporadh korchhi map koira dio*’ (We are going, going forever. We shall not meet again. Please forgive us for our misconduct’. On the contrary she also witnessed the people of Hindustan moved towards Eastern Pakistan especially from Cooch Behar and Malda. Doya, the central figure of these autobiographical accounts of Sunanda Sikdar asks a touching question to her mother that why she will have to leave the country. She preferred to stay here instead of going there. But she had to leave forever and hence surrender herself to her own destiny.<sup>92</sup>

Partition is nothing but an offshoot of religious fanaticism which is penned in the novel *Bishad Brikkha* of Mihir Sengupta. This religious fanaticism was due to the diplomacy of political leaders to establish their political supremacy. This resulted in severe riot. This riot was accompanied by the exploitation on the women by men folk. The character of Masi in this novel is an abducted by Muslim dacoits and her husband was burnt alive. Masi then was compelled to take shelter to a Muslim family. The character of Kuttidi sketched by the author is also the symbol of helpless womanhood of Bengal who has become the object of male voracity. As a matter of fact, materiality and the feminine become synonymous and the woman has become an object that can be portended\_and\_exploited\_from that point of view there is no difference between Malati and Kuttidi.<sup>93</sup>

In a similar way two noted memory-centric novels of Shanta Sen are *Pitamohi* and *Jonmer mati* composed in 1934 and 2007 respectively. The grandmother (Pitamohi)

was fondly called *Mago* (Oh! Mother). After partition she came from the village of Moukathi of Barishal in her tender age and died after coming to India. Author Shanta Sen based the book on the lived reality of her grandmother depicting the mass exodus during the period of partition. The writer during the period of her maturity again went to revisit the deserted country to renovate the sweet memory of the bygone days.<sup>94</sup> In her memoir *Ujan srote*, Nilima Datta heaved the sigh of relief after setting foot on Indian soil from Burma during pre partition era. But again she became compelled to quit the country during the partition of 1947. The narrator Nilima Datta cited a story in this regard. She experienced a terrible experience when a loyal Muslim subject appeared before them and informed them to quit the house immediately because a conspiracy had been hatched to torch their house. So the prevailing circumstances compelled them to come forward leaving behind their valuables and sweet relations.<sup>95</sup> Nilima Dutta also narrates the continuous efforts of her family members to arrange an abode of their own. She describes the memories of her by gone days and also the untiring struggle for existence in alien land.<sup>96</sup>

*Nilkontha pakhir khoje* is a reflection and reminiscences of Atin Bandopadhyay's own memory. Another memory based novel is *Manusher ghar bari* which emphasizes on the inexorable struggle of refugees for their resettlement in different parts of West Bengal. The central character of the novel is Bilu, the author himself. He along with his co-warriors is trying to construct their dwelling houses near Bahrapur through reclamation of jungle areas. The accounts of the struggles of the *bangal* families are the main focus of the novel. Hardships of the family members of the novelist along with his personal depression, disillusionment, identity crisis are represented in a unique fashion.

Indubaran Ganguli in his book *Colony Smriti* expresses his reminiscences on the days of his colony life. Noted artist Prakash Karmakar in his memoirs *Ami* divulged the fact that a model of his artist father was *Moulavi* so he was brutally assassinated in a gruesome manner before the very eyes of young Prakash. This merciless attitude of the Hindus left a deep imprint upon the immature mind of Prakash Karmakar.<sup>97</sup>

Madhumoy Pal in his reputed collection memoirs named *Deshbhag- Binash O Binirman* has represented before us the glaring memories of different narrators in post partition era. In each and every memoirs the pang of separation, memories of

childhood days and relentless struggle for existence and survival was most effective and remarkable. The living memories of twenty one writers had been presented. Some of the narrators moved towards East Pakistan and West Bengal. Renowned poet Naresh Guha, was a poet of nostalgic outlook and in his works he expresses his doubt that how few lines in the atlas had transformed his motherland to an alien land. The poet's view was that the importance and the valuation of his sweet home was far more superior in comparison to the Taj Mahal. After having lost the home and hearth the writer still could visualize the deserted house, his kith and kin, near and dear relations, hearing the sweet melody of the bird *bou kotha kao* and could hear the distinct call of Dukhiram *Babu Jage!*<sup>98</sup> (Babu, please get up)

Bishnu Bose left Dacca during the period of independence. He happened to come to Mouri gram, a remote village in Howrah. The sweet memory of the golden days glittered brightly in his mind's eye. But the memories of Dacca remained deep into his mind as before. He had unveiled this truth through his memoirs *Smriti diye dhaka*. Another reminiscence of partition was *Surjyer muhurta kono din* by Nagendra Dash was not merely an individual statement but it reflected the political turmoil, the tussle between the Hindus and Muslims and thus the riot of Noakhali were projected in his recollection. He was the inhabitant of both Barishal and Noakhali. Thousands of people who migrated from Barishal were not humiliated in all cases, but minority Hindus being apprehended to be the object of oppression decided to leave for India. He came over to India in the year 1964, and hence he was an eloquent witness of many ups and downs of East Pakistan and so far as West Bengal was concerned.<sup>99</sup>

A book on memories of partition compiled by Rahul Roy presented the personal memories of the refugees who were compelled to move towards East Bengal leaving behind their sweet home, childhood friends and memories in West Bengal. A line sketched by Radcliff made a huge number of Muslims of West Bengal uprooted. Suddenly everything changed within a short period of time. The book consisted of thirteen articles of noted personalities who were born and brought up in India, more specifically in West Bengal. Their nostalgia and emotions for place of birth have been expressed through their memoirs. The articles of Hasan Azizul Haq, Bulbul Osman, Hussain Mohammad Ershad, Badruddin Umar, Mubarak Hussain, Sharmili Ahmed etc. highlighted their nostalgia for India, their native country. After so many years of partition all the memories of their childhood days were vivid in their minds.<sup>100</sup>

## NORTH BENGAL: PARTITION LITERATURE

The influence of the partition on literary sphere of North Bengal is scanty. There is a vital reason behind it; the refugees who settled over here in North Bengal did not suffer as much as of those refugees who marched towards Kolkata and were rehabilitated there and other adjoining areas. The refugees settled in the districts of North Bengal did not confront any massive problem except monetary stringency. The more or less peaceful atmosphere of North Bengal immediately after partition might fail to flourish the affinity towards literary activities. Following which the writers did not feel any spontaneous urge to write on this unprecedented catastrophe. Among the scanty few writers and novelists, some established themselves in the arena of partition literature of North Bengal.

Amiya Bhusan Majumdar is a dazzling star among the star studded arena of Bengali literature, so far as the domain of North Bengal is concerned. In his copious outstanding compositions the partition and refugee problem occupy a unique position. His fictions like *Nirbas*, *Garh Shrikhanda* are worth mentioning in this regard. Discussions regarding his above mentioned fictions have already been mentioned. His mastery over short stories is really superb in the truest sense of the term. In some of his short stories the miseries and struggle of the refugees are revealed. In this context his short story *Sanyalder Kahini* commands great appeal. Through his other short story *Sada Makarsha* he pens down the relentless struggle of the refugees and their dream to return to their ancestral fatherland to quench the thirst for peace and tranquility.<sup>101</sup> The psychological problem of Badan master, a refugee has skillfully been portrayed in his fiction *Dukhiar Kuthi*. In this fiction Badan becomes a stoic philosopher, mute and disinterested about his very existence. This pessimistic outlook of Badan is also vibrant among the other victimized uprooted persons.<sup>102</sup>

Narayan Gangapadhyay is an outstanding literary personality and a giant educationist in the realm of Amiya Bhusan Majumder. Gangapadhyay's contribution towards partition literature of North Bengal cannot be ignored or overlooked. In this context a question may arise why and how Gangapadhyay has been intimately involved in the literary domain of North Bengal specially in partition literature. The answer is quiet simple and authentic. Though the writer hailed from Barishal but he was brought up in the lap of undivided Dinajpur town. He commenced his professional career as a

professor of Bengali language and literature at Ananda Chandra College of Jalpaiguri. The major portion of his literary creation was basically based on the history of *Barendra bhumi* () The rivers, the scenic beauty, the population of different tribal areas did not lose sight of the author. The writer in the truest sense of the term was a bonafied refugee following his matrimonial relation with Asha Debi, the daughter of Jalpaiguri. The renowned novelist presents the atrocious murder of Suprakash when the three sisters under the guidance of Suprakash started towards Tejgaon airport with a view to going India. Suddenly a gang of hooligans armed with deadly weapons attacked the innocent air traveler Suprakash and subsequently he succumbed to the injuries. The terrified sisters could not have the scope to see the dead body of Suprakash.<sup>103</sup> The background of the story is based on Malda.

Bimal Ghosh popularly known as Chomang Lama, in his article *Ei Alo Ei Andhar* vividly describes the untold sufferings of refugees. During that period of turmoil following partition countless refugees rushed towards India. The flow became an unending event. Initially two places were earmarked to rehabilitate the refugees in West Bengal. They were also provided in Siliguri town also.<sup>104</sup> The accomplished writer Dinesh Chandra Roy, the elder brother of Debesh Roy, in his story *Kulapati* narrates the struggle of a refugee family to adjust himself with other families. The pathetic tale of adjustment has skillfully and artistically being reflected in the said story. His most remarkable novel concerning the refugees is *Sona Padma*. It is undoubtedly one of his best creations.<sup>105</sup>

After Amiya Bhusan Majumder, perhaps the true representative of partition literature of North Bengal is Benu Dutta Roy, a poet per excellence. His original name is Dr. Suranjan Dutta Roy. In the course of his discussions and in his memoirs, in his verses, in interviews and above all in his writings the untold sufferings of refugees have been sketched. Benu Dutta Roy in his personal expressions through compositions and regarding the homeless occupy a major part of his creation. In his reminiscences, the fond faces of his kin, the blue water of the river Dhaleswari and Meghna, the whistle of the streamer of the Goalnanda ghat are still alive in his mind. Benu Dutta Roy of Netrokona subdivision of the then Mymensingh district is the true mouthpiece of the refugees.<sup>106</sup> Dutta Roy in his memoir *Jala Kallorer Din* discloses that how the torture of Muslim League compelled the Hindu inhabitants to flee from East Pakistan. The writer also came to Jalpaiguri as a refugee.<sup>107</sup>

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay is one of the brightest stars among the star sprangled galaxy of Bengal's literary horizon. He hailed from the district of Mymensingh and procured varied experiences during the course of his travel in different parts of Bengal following the transferable job of his father who was a railway service holder. He started his academic career at Missionary school of Cooch Behar town. From there he got himself admitted in the Victoria college of Cooch Behar town. Though he is a refugee still tied the nuptial ties in Cooch Behar. His celebrated novel *Phera*, through this novel the pathetic condition of a refugee girl Bithi has masterly been sketched. India had just become independent; the author himself was not matured enough. He happened to come in contact with a raped refugee girl in a dilapidated house of a cottage. The simple and innocent raped girl Bithi frankly discloses to the author that as she is a raped girl she has no moral right to dwell with other inmates. She wants to know from the author the proper place of such a rotten girl. But the author remains mute and fails to answer the query of the raped girl. The sagas of such helpless girls like Bithi remain buried under the debris of oblivion. The celebrated novelist Shirshendu has have the efficiency and proficiency to unveil and unearth the treasured sorrows and sufferings of hundred of girls like Bithi.<sup>108</sup> Shirshendu's another book *Madhab O tar Pariparshik* deals with partition and its impact on common mass.

Dinesh Chandra Dakua of Mathabhanga subdivision of Cooch Behar district is a veteran political personality and ex Minister of Left front Government of West Bengal, his composition *Uttarer Golpo* gives a clear picture of the pathetic condition of East Bengal refugees in the soil of Cooch Behar. According to his authentic statement in his writings it is clearly stated that the Rajbansis of Cooch Behar looks down upon the refugees of the adjoining districts of East Pakistan like Rangpur and Dinajpur. The pity of whole thing is that the Hindu Rajbansis of Rangpur and Dinajpur according to the sentiments of the Cooch Behar Rajbansis were not to be treated as refugees because they were the feathers of the same bird. More so, the refugee Rajbansis were considered to be their relatives, their brothers and sisters and their kith and kin; whereas, the refugees from other districts were treated to be the refugees, to be the foreigners and also as *Bhatiya*<sup>109</sup>.

Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh, a reputed writer in his book *Swadhinatar sat: Prasanga chhere Asa Mati* makes an elaborate discussion about the pre and post events of partition. Initially he started with the sixty years of completion of

independence and also about the Radcliff line and its impact on North Bengal. He also made discussion about refugees, their rehabilitation and resettlement in different corners of West Bengal. He also illustrated and pointed out the gradual development of North Bengal in all spheres of life. The impact of Partition on the North Eastern states did not lose sight of his discussion. In another chapter of his book he dealt with the manifold aspects of partition literature of India. He specially stressed on the Bengali literature that presented the partition related refugee crisis and the trauma and turmoil of the period. The author also ventilated the sincere efforts of different people who in order to satisfy their nostalgic feeling named various places after the names of their deserted ancestral abodes in East Pakistan.<sup>110</sup>

Dr. Jyotnendu Chakraborty of Jalpaiguri town is one of the most gifted literary personalities. Most of his stories and writings are based on Mymensingh, his motherland. In his widely read short story *Bagh O Harini Sambad* (Tale of a tiger and deer) he depicts the miserable condition of a Hindu family. The author in his said story expresses his agony and anxiety about his teen-aged daughter. He thinks less for his property but more for his daughter. Taking the advantage of the helplessness of the minority Hindus the Muslim hooligans targets the house of a Hindu middle class family Nitai Sarkar. Nitai being worried regarding the fate of his dear daughter comes at his wit's end. In the meantime the Muslim miscreants intimidate the family of Gour Master. The hooligans demand Rs. Five lacks to the said family to be paid within a week. At the said moment the daughter-in-law of Gour is just returning from the bathing *ghat*. Eying her, the notorious persons change their decision and indirectly hints Gour that they are ready to forgo their demands in lieu of his daughter-in law Chapala This remark of 'Hat kata' Munna gives sufficient indication of the future of Gour. On the other hand Nitai Sarkar with his wife and daughter escapes from motherland at mid night with the help of agent.<sup>111</sup>

*Barama Brityanta of Jeevan Sarkar* is an eloquent testimony of the story regarding the life and livelihood of refugee individuals. The father of the author still bears the sweet memory of bygone days of his motherland. Every food item he consumes reminds him the superb and heavenly taste of different food items of ancestral land. The author laments that the indigenous people always blame the *Bangal* for their misery and inconveniences but they never praise their excellence. The *Bangal* can produce

consecutive harvest at least three times in the same land instead of one. The book gives clear account regarding the pain of separation from the ancestral house. To them this separation is nothing but the synonymous to death. This book is the lamentation of the displaced evacuees who move from one corner to other like shuttle cock. They are leading rootless and aimless life for a long uncertain period.<sup>112</sup>

Jeevan Sarkar's noted poem *Dhaleswari* is a glaring example of nostalgia and urge for eternal heavenly peace. It also emphasizes his affinity and urge to return back on the bank of Dhaleswari which is still flowing. He portrays-*Swapna Dekhi / Kala Gachhe Ghera Dhaleswari parer/ Sei Bagan Barite Achhi/ Ilishier Jal Nie/ Dhaleswarite Bhasie Dei Nao/...Kotakal Shunina/ Jhup Jhap Par bhangar Shobdo/ Biswas Hoina Na/ Mone hoi / Ajo Dhaleswarir Parei/ Rayechhe Amar Ghar*<sup>113</sup> (I dream/The Dhaleswari is surrounded by banana trees/ I assume that I am there/ carrying a net for catching Hilsa fish/ I float a boat on the river Dhaleswari/...I don't hear for a long the shattering sound of river banks/ I still believe, my nest is on the bank of the river Dhaleswari). The writer Sarkar is not a popular face in the literary arena of North Bengal. Yet, his desire to return to the *bhita* of East Bengal though impossible, still it survives in his mind's eye, which has intermingled with the longing of thousands of refugees.

Subhas Choudhury, a retired teacher of Jalpaiguri, composes a book *Jalpaiguri Shaharer Itibritya* where he highlights the problem of the refugees hailing from East Pakistan and their struggle to cope with the alien land, more so their relentless endeavours to resettle in a foreign land and they decide hastily to reside in the area of Maskolaibari under Jalpaiguri district. Each refugee family was allotted ten *kathas* of land and sometimes 7.5 *kathas* of land along with Rs, 12,500 only with a view to constructing dwelling houses.<sup>114</sup> The author is also the writer of another book *Purba Banger Korcha*. The central character of the book is Vikramjit, a refugee. The writer narrates the nostalgia of the refugee people through the characterization of Vikramjit. Despite lapse of several years his dreamy memories childhood days of Pabna is still vivid in his mind.<sup>115</sup> Debashis Chakraborty, a bank officer, is a well known story writer. He composes a book named *Abhijatya*. The family members of the composer migrated from Dinajpur of East Pakistan to the other side of the border. According to his statement the displaced individuals by the pressure of adverse circumstances were

compelled to sell their belongings in a cheap price.<sup>116</sup> Biren Saha, the former director of Akashbani Kolkata, a poet of repute, settled in Mathabhanga of Cooch Behar districts. Two of his poems 'Dhaleswari' and 'Satghoria' memorize the reminiscences of his motherland. Dhaleswari, a river of East Bengal occupies an important place in many of his compositions.<sup>117</sup>

Besides poems he authors an outstanding novel known as *Shutungar Dotara* which brilliantly narrates the tussle between the local inhabitants and the migrated evacuees. He reaffirms the fact that how *Bhatiya Khyadao* movement takes a violent shape. Through the conversations of the characters of the novel the author depicts his longing for ancestral place. He is optimistic enough that everything will be as before, the dark cloud of catastrophe will soon be subsided.<sup>118</sup> From the writings of Biren Saha a clear picture of society, social relations as well as picture of social crisis become evident. The writer also throws light on pre and post partition period in one of his famous novels *Bas Parabas*. He sketches the picture of the family members who are the worst sufferer of devastating riot. The theme of the novel gives a clear indication that how the ill fated members of a refugee family becomes the victims of grim irony of fate.<sup>119</sup>

Kamal Acharya in his story *Iswar Nirakhekho* presents a remarkable story on uprooted individuals migrate after partition. Govinda Ghosh, a protagonist of the story, flees to India for safety and security. At the middle age he is compelled to quit accompanying Madhab and Shefali. In his tender age Madhab realizes the heinous attitude of his miscreant Muslim neighbours of East Bengal. To humiliate the Hindu women in different ways becomes the order of the period.<sup>120</sup> An eminent essayist and poet of Balurghat is Amal Basu, authored a book of poems named *Udvastubasi*. A talented poet from Kaliaganj in North Dinajpur in one of his poems *udvastu* he represents the sufferings, agony and distress of the displaced persons. He writes-  
*Amra Udvastu/ Vastu Achhe Tabu Vastuhin/Kul Achhe Tabu Okul/Mul Achhe Tabu Chhinnamul/Ma Achhe Tabu Matrihin/Amader Nei Kono Sikriti/Amra Prithibib Jaroj Santan.*<sup>121</sup> (We are refugee/ we possess home, still homeless/We have rim, still rimless/We have root, still rootless/We have mother, still motherless/We have no recognition/We are the illegitimate children of the Earth.

The prominent leftist writer and editor of Siliguri Pallab Kirtonia, has composed a poem *Khulnar Madhumoti Nadi* where he depicts the character of a refugee who hails from Chor Shivpur village. The poet synthesizes the remembrance and reality through this thought provoking creation.<sup>122</sup> The experience of forceful occupation of the properties of Hindus, rape, elopement, convulsion and also the painful experience of displacement have artistically been portrayed by Pushpajit Karmakar in his book *Naya Basat*. He has migrated from Rangpur to a village named Sihal in South Dinajpur district. At the beginning of the book the author writes ‘Kichhu Kotha’ where he narrates different aspects of Hindu exodus, the intimidation which the Hindus suffer, rape and molestation on the women along with inhuman torture on general people in 1965 during India Pakistan war. The author narrates that Mita is running, she is running undressed, wild wolf like men were following him. It was not a scene of a film, it is a grim reality.<sup>123</sup>

A renowned poet and story writer of Malda district, Partha Sarathi Jha, composes a story *Bhitemati* where he presents the deplorable condition of the refugees. The lady character of the story narrates how they flee, how their religious sentiment found outlet and how they save their chastity. In spite of all these shortcomings the pang of separation from motherland has not disappeared.<sup>124</sup> Another veteran poet of Chopra, at the vicinity of Islampur town of North Dinajpur, Narayan Chandra Mandal writes a book of poems under the title *Mongal Shankha*. In one of the poems from this collection titled *Chokher Jol* he poeticizes the story of a teenage girl who becomes the victim of severe injustice of fate. The poet highlights the fact that how the new foreign country creates a despair in her immature mind.<sup>125</sup> Other poem of the poet is worth to be mentioned in this connection is *Banga Bibhajan* that represents communal frenzy, genocide, bloodshed experienced by the Hindu community in East Bengal. The poet throws the question that why such a catastrophe takes place, why these ordinary people are compelled to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles of insecurity, uncertainty and disillusionment? Nayayan Chandra Mondal laments with his deep insight about the barbaric attitude of violent Muslim mob through every line of his poems.<sup>126</sup>

The nostalgia for motherland has been expressed in the poem *Setu* of Arabinda Kumar Maji. He writes *Radcliff chhuri diye kete phelte parbe /Amader eki rokter*

*prasaban?/Anarir chhuri diye korechho angachhed,/Satchallishe Padma, Ganga, Meghna Rupnarayane/Bhasiyechho bhatrityer raktakta lash.*<sup>127</sup>(Radcliff, can you vivisect the blood circulates within us?You have immersed the dead bodies of blood wet brotherhood in the rivers of Ganges, Padma, Meghna and Rupnarayan) A note worthy writer Dr. Brindaban Bagchi, migrated from Pabna to Royganj as a refugee. His momentous work *Char dashaker Ganit* portrays a vivid picture of atrocities during the period of turmoil. His emotional representation is really heart rendering. When the bulk of Hindu population is moving towards India- all of a sudden some Muslims armed with deadly weapons forcibly come into the train and let the Muslim passengers to get down. But the Hindus are not allowed to vacate the train. The terrorists shout *Tum log kapher hain* (you are the enemy of religion), a fierce tussle takes a violent shape. The whole train is flooded with blood.<sup>128</sup>

A noted writer of rhymes and also a well known actor of *Yatra* (a type of theatre)Ajit Roy settled at Jalpaiguri district as a refugee. Through his unparalleled numerous rhymes he memorizes sweet memories of motherland. In one of his rhymes *Bastuhara* the poet makes a rhythmic presentation of the refugee exodus and their subsequent struggle for survival.<sup>129</sup>In another poem under the caption *Bastu Bhite* poet describes his urge and passion for the lost homeland. The poet writes- *Sahar theke anek dure/Chhotto ekti gram/Shanta shital sabuj prantar/ Moyna tar num/Sat purusher vastu vita/Chhilo sei grame/Swarane tahar dunoyane/Asru dhara name*<sup>130</sup>.( Far away from the town there was a small village named Moyna with full of cool peaceful green meadows –there was the ancestral house of seven generations. The reminiscences of that olden days cause tearing. *Atit Kotha Bole*, in that rhyme writer Ajit Roy artistically mentions different food and fruits of East Bengal with which the poet has an emotional attachment, as he mentions in the lines –*Jawar bela hoye elo/ghaniye ase sanjh/Atit diner koto kichhui/Porchhe mone aj/Pangsha gramer nokshi kodma/Kumar khalir khaja/Phatullapurur chirar sathe/Lagto khete moja...*<sup>131</sup>(The time of farewell is fast approaching. The sweet stories of bygone days flash in memory. *Naksi Kadma* i.e. one kind of sugar made product of Pangsha village, *Khaja* i.e. one kind of sweet made of wheat of Komarkhali was delicious and palatable with *chira* i.e. one kind of pressed rice of Phatullapur).

Meenakshi Majumdar, a teacher by profession resides at Alipurduar town, has writes a poem named *Desh*, which is based on the memory of motherland. Sitting on the verandah of a flat Sarama the protagonist of the poem finds herself within a cage. There was no pomp and gaiety in her ancestral home but still the memoirs of those golden days are vivid in her mind. Though the houses were ordinary and not well built and not luxurious but happiness persisted. The very question of Khoka -*Desh ki Ma?*(Mother, what is country?) shakes the very existence of Sarama.<sup>132</sup> *Lal Pagri* of Asit Ranjan Dutta is a different type of composition. The author after completion of his job as a police officer in East Pakistan joined in University of North Bengal as a security officer. He represents his experiences as a police officer in this aforesaid book. What he writes is derived from his own practical experience, nothing fictitious has been written. He elaborately discusses the ruthless assassination of the Hindus in East Pakistan and the Hindus were forcefully driven out at the point of guns in 1950. In this way the Hindus were ousted from Dacca and other parts of the country.<sup>133</sup>

Khitish Mukherjee, an octogenarian resident of Sivmandir, in the vicinity of Siliguri town, expresses his reminiscences in his memoir *Kanna Hasi*. He articulates the pathetic helplessness condition of the refugees who left their *bhita* in Pabna and Tangail which were enriched with many charming memories.<sup>134</sup> Poet Bipul Saha in his illustrious poem *Jeevan Jua* symbolizes the emotional attachment towards the lost territory of deserted Bengal.<sup>135</sup> Prolific writer and poet Rana Chattapadhyay spent his childhood days at Cooch Behar. In his memoirs *Bangla Amar Bangla* he frankly confesses that he does not find any communal attitude among the local residents and migrated individuals of Cooch Behar during the period 1952-53, which is unthinkable in Calcutta and its surrounding districts. This universal brotherhood is really praise worthy.<sup>136</sup> Ratan Das settled in Balughat from Barishal. In his memoirs *Album* a clear picture is available of his journey towards uncertainty and struggle for survival leaving behind all the lost memories of golden days. He is leading a life of a displaced and merged with the main stream of refugee exodus.<sup>137</sup>

Mani Bhusan Roy, a resident of pre partition Jalpaiguri divulged many unknown incidents of the time in his reminiscences *Ei janame ghatale mor jonmo jontantor*'. He used to live at Debiganj of Jalpaiguri before partition. By one stroke of pen of Radcliff five police stations of the district fell in the territory of East Pakistan. But the

grim injustice of fate was that the house of the writer was no longer within the Indian Territory. Then the author started his struggle to cope with the environment of new country and he began to consider himself as the citizen of that country. In his memoirs he uttered that once he was sentenced capital punishment on the plea of advocating anti Islamic view in school. The allegation levelled against him was that he taught a story from *Sita Ram* written by Bankim Chandra. This incident along with others prompted him to leave his motherland. This memorization was nothing but becoming foreigner in his own land.<sup>138</sup>

*Mukta simanter sesh rat*, a memoir of Satyendra Prasad Biswas of Alipurduar was a unique composition. The author stated in his article with a confession which he made in The Anandabazar Patrika on 14 August, 2005 that he was repentant of leaving wounded Nami in Darshana station, and then the writer moved towards Barnpur by Dhaka mail. Namita or Nami was a co passenger of the author. She requested the author to guide her towards Ranaghat camp. When the writer was in a deep slumber the train had already reached to Dashana, the last station of Pakistan border. After awaking he found that Nami was not there. When he enquired about Nami to another co passenger the reply was *Ansar ra niye gechhe* (Ansars had taken her away). The train left but Nami did not come. But what was a matter of great astonishment that after fifty years Nami being alive came across the confession note of Satyen Biswas and wrote a letter to him at the address of the Ananda Bazar Patrika that she was alive because that day by mistake she was thrown to the mail train loaded with dead bodies. After many ups and downs of life she was in an old age home. This memory of Satyendra Prasad Biswas bore a living example of the tremendous crisis of the period.<sup>139</sup>

Hemanta kumar Roy Barma, a local resident and a high official under Royal administration has penned his memories of 1947, is a valuable document for the construction of the history of refugee exodus in Cooch Behar and adjoining regions. *Amar Jeevan O Amar Rajnity*, a memoir by the leftist politician of Dinhat subdivision of Cooch Behar Kamal Guha, is intimately related to the life of the refugees. He was not a refugee but his book is an important document of refugee resettlement.<sup>140</sup> An auto-biographical work named *Jeevan Nadir Bake Bake* of Amar Roy Pradhan, a renowned politician, has discussed the communal fury in different

parts of East Bengal that resulted mass exodus of uprooted persons.<sup>141</sup> Manarnjan Das of Alipurduar made an autobiographical work *Swadeshe Porobasi* highlights on the ill-fated refugees from East Pakistan and also expresses his personal feelings for their own motherland.<sup>142</sup>

Shubhasish Das of Dinhata subdivision of Cooch Behar composed a poem *Udvastu* where the poet laments how the displaced persons following partition compelled to change their names, address and also their very existence. The independence has gifted them with the title *udvastu*.<sup>143</sup> A veteran poet of Royganj Kallol Bandapadhyay's rhyme *Ek Brinte Duti Kusum* is an imperative composition. He writes-*Epar Bangla Opar Bangla/ Modhyikhane Kantatar/ Phele Asa Chhinnamuler/Swapne Ghera Smritibhar*.<sup>144</sup> (A fencing in between Bengal of this part and Bengal on the other side of fencing. All these are wrapped with the dream of memories of uprooted persons) This nostalgia towards motherland also available in a book of poems named *Nirab Prithibi* by a poet Niranjan Dey Sarkar, a resident of Dhupguri of Jalpaiguri district. In one of his poems *Udvastu Jantrana* he utters -*He Kolam Itihaser Smritite phire Jao-/Dekhini Deshbhag, Dekhini Udvastuder Jantrana./Parechhi Itihas, Shunechhi janma theke Gurujonder jantranar Smriticharan/...Ajo lahkha lahkhaa pran nribhite kande atmadogdhotay*.<sup>145</sup> (Dear Pen please go back to the memory of history. I've never seen partition, never witnessed the agony of uprooted. I've read history, heard the memorization of pain from elderly persons...Till today lakhs of uprooted soul weeping silently in self affliction.)

Biswanath Roy in his story *Bahe Chole Madhumati* presents the oppression of the Muslims upon the Hindu minorities through the utterance of the character of 'Kakima'.<sup>146</sup> Professor Dr. Prakash Adhikari is the author of many verses on the partition of India and refugee life. In this respect his *Swadhinatay Harano Gram* is worth to be noted. An accomplished educationist of Alipurduar Dr. Shipra Sen Dhar composed a poem named *Desher Barir Lok*.<sup>147</sup> The other writer of Alipurduar, Arati Kahali Goswami writes a story in the name *Basati* where she deals with the struggle for existence of a namashudra uprooted family of Netrokona in their alien land.<sup>148</sup> Ranajit Kumar Sarkar hailing from Rajshahi settled at South Dinajpur. He writes two poems titled *Janmasthan* and *Swad*.<sup>149</sup> Santosh Basu of Cooch Behar writes

an essay ‘Sharanartha Shibire Tindin’ in his book *Phire Dyakha*. He portrays a picture of incessant refugee inflow towards India and the subsequent harassment and sufferings of the uprooted people.<sup>150</sup>

Parul Mandal of Dinhatra subdivision of Cooch Behar in her novel *Sonar Bangla* deals with the displaced persons following the India-Pakistan War of 1965. Professor Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay in his essay ‘Desh Bibhag, Swadhinata: Phire Dyakha’ also represents the inhuman torture on the minority Hindus on their way to India.<sup>151</sup> Debashish Chakraborty, a writer and essayist of Siliguri, has composed innumerable stories and essays on partition of India. Among those mention may be made one of his stories *Mati Daser Shunani*.<sup>152</sup> Chakraborty in his story *Saral Satya* presents a reverse picture of Muslim refugee exodus from India to East Pakistan. The writer tries to describe that the disillusionment of Indian Muslims are identical in comparison to their Hindu refugees.<sup>153</sup> Mandira Bhattacharya, retired professor of the University of North Bengal in *Oi Dyakha Jaye Bari Amar* ushers light on her childhood days in East Pakistan, on the sweet bonding of Hindu-Muslim neighbours, about partition and also on the memories of deserted ancestral abode.<sup>154</sup>

The Rajbansi community of North Bengal does not lag behind in composing the chronic problem of refugees of East Pakistan in their own Kamtapuri language. The name of Mani Bhusan Roy, an educationist of Rajbansi community is worthwhile to be mentioned. Much information is available from his various writings. Param Lal Singh, composes the biography of Kalindra Nath Barman where copious valuable and authentic information are available relating to partition and refugee resettlement.<sup>155</sup> Harimohan Barman in his article ‘Rajbanshi Samajer Sei Kal Ar Ei Kal’ highlights the fact that the Rajbansi community comes forward with their limited resources to help the destitute refugees of East Pakistan who came over to North Bengal for safety and security and to have a peaceful abode.<sup>156</sup> The above noted writers, poets, essayists, novelists with some special exceptions are not familiar in the wider Bengali literary world. Still their authentic, realistic and practical experiences help us to a great extent in accumulating the valuable information of the uprooted individuals of East Pakistan.

The partition of India had created a massive impetus upon Bengali literature and Bengal literary personalities from the very dawn of separation. On the contrary, the

Bengali literature and its literary personalities had no remarkable contribution in narrating and analyzing the pang and pathos, sufferings and humiliation of the displaced individuals hailing from West Bengal to East Bengal which subsequently converted into Bangladesh in 1971. According to an eminent research scholar and critic Rafikul Islam the huge number of Bengali Hindu minorities who was compelled to abandon the country was much more less in number in comparison to Muslims who left West Bengal and moved to Eastern Pakistan, instead of, a large number of non-Bengali Muslims entered into the territory of West Bengal. As a result the problems of humanity remained suppressed and lost its gravity and utility.<sup>157</sup> The academicians and the elite community of Bangladesh did not deem it fit to ventilate the grievances of the displaced persons of eastern Pakistan. Truly speaking, the refugees of East Pakistan were virtually free from all sorts of hurdles relating to the partition and rehabilitation. They had not to face any problem as the evacuees of East Pakistan confronted in India and so far as West Bengal was concerned. So, the men of letters of East Pakistan as well as Bangladesh did not have the opportunity to think seriously about the lives and livelihood and other activities of the displaced. Majority of the evacuees of East Bengal were financially sound and well to do in status. They had enormous valuable assets which they left behind before leaving the country forever. As a result the Muslim refugees of East Bengal were greeted with ready accommodation providing all sorts of facilities. In a sentence it may be asserted that the problem of migrants of both the countries were poles asunder.<sup>158</sup>

Sixty years ago the women migrants of East Bengal moved towards Calcutta and other districts of West Bengal as evacuees after being thrown out by the Muslims of East Bengal. The lives of the unfortunate women were plunged into profound darkness of uncertainty and insecurity. The writers and academicians of both the Bengals considered it to be their sacred responsibility in writing about the displaced women. They tried their level best to manifest their grievances, pang and agony. The bifurcation of country was a blunder in the truest sense of the term, which had a tremendous effect upon the lives of the East Bengal migrants, particularly the women were concerned. The women who remained ignored and neglected in the realm of novels and fictions became the central figures of discussion by the authors of both the Bengals. In the event of the partition, the women, especially the uprooted women of East Bengal had to confront irreplaceable loss in their own social arena. The partition

literature brought about a magical and radical change in the lives and activities of the depressed women. Partition literature concerning women paved a new trend of representing women in order to cope with the new changed circumstances.

Partition was a significant event and had a significant role in the lives of the uprooted women. It was not only a historical event, nor a social event, but was a challenge of the woman community to adjust themselves with the prevailing circumstances occurred by the aftermath of partition. Women of all walks of life were more or less affected by the partition. After the total destruction of the peaceful nests of East Bengal they were striving hard to reconstruct their disturbed nests and to revive the lost glory and dignity of their previous lives. Following partition women had to face several hurdles, physical and mental hardship, carnage, rape, molestation, humiliation and outrage of modest had become a regular event by the neighbouring inmates of our country. Successive oppression, consecutive depression and brutal assassination transformed the woman community to be vocal and vibrant. Fight, fight and fight was the true idealism which inspired the women to a great extent. Those activities, determination, conviction, self reliance and intrepidity of womenfolk had been skillfully depicted by the authors of both the Bengals. It was undoubtedly a wealthy treasure and asset of Bengali literature.

It may be ascertained with certitude that none of the partition litterateurs of Bengal could have had the ability like Sadat Hossain Manto to portray the lively documents of the pathos, tragedies and the untold sufferings of millions uprooted individuals from both sides of the borders. It was a matter of great misfortune on the part of Bengali literature that it was deprived of availing the magical touch of any writer like Manto. In actuality, the Bengali literature and film on partition brought about a continuing human consciousness. So the event of the partition cannot be historicized as an event of past. There is no denying the fact that 'past' is eternally digging into present. The characters of different wings of literature are also history. The characters in fictions so far as partition literature is concerned give a clear picture on intricate relationship between individual and history. Within this relationship the individual is nothing but an ethical subject of a history that cannot be comprehended nor denied.

**Notes:**

1. Ghatak Suchandra, "Sahitye dhora pore Itihaser Satya' *Bitarkika*, Kolkata: Setu, October, 2013, pp.110-111.
2. Anita Desai, Attia Hossain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Penguin India, 2009, (in introduction)
3. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, "Bharat Bibhajan O Bharatiya Sahitya, *Uttarer Hawa*, Sharadiya, 1406(BS), p.28.
4. Satya Guha, 'Ekaler Godya Podya Andaloner Dalil' cited in Ananda Gopal Ghosh, "Bharat Bibhajan O Bharatiya Sahitya, and p.28.
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## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Conclusion**

“There is a big certainty, that the excessive loss of the Hindus and Muslims of India caused by the partition, whether be compensated with the next hundred years’,

Louis Fisher.

The British Raj created severe scar sowing the poisonous seeds of communalism and abandoned India forever dividing it into two independent countries. The partition of India is the unavoidable outcome of the conflicting antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims. In 1947, with the transfer of power there was a great holocaust. From East and West Pakistan and from India to the two wings of her new neighbours flared a two-way trail of blood which mounted monstrous angry dimension. Following the division of India the problem of refugee population of West Pakistan were settled and integrated into the mainstream of Economic life in India. It is doubtless to say in this context that the irreconcilable religious outlook of the Hindus and the Muslims was one of the major obstacles on the way of their peaceful coexistence. Ranabir Samaddar is of the opinion that the Hindu communalism came into effect probably from 1930 onwards. The political set up in the 1940 was proceeding towards a deadlock in haste.<sup>1</sup> It was a long debated question which was the guiding force behind the vivisection of Indian subcontinent. A lot of criticism and debates have been made upon this Himalayan problem. Different critics and debaters view the problem from their own perspectives. But none could have reached to a definite conclusion about the persons who could be accused or blamed for the partition of India. It had destroyed our lives, robbed our liberty and shattered our unity. Mr. Penderel Moon rightly said that “the dawn of Indian independence was marred by massacres and migrations in the Punjab on a scale unparalleled in world History in time of peace’. Noted personality and historian Frank Morace expressed similar view regarding the Partition of India. According to him “The freedom of the country brought partition as well as a holocaust of blood and fire”.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Divide and Rule' policy of the British administrators was the principal weapon which they initially applied it in the year 1905. Due to the pressure of adverse circumstances the evil design of the British Raj proved abortive. In a word, their attempt to divide Bengal failed miserably. The British rulers with a view to ease their smooth running of administration created a mysterious hostile attitude between the two communities. It was crystal clear that the main objective of the British was to divide Bengal in 1905 and at the same time they decided to curb the spirit of nationalism and sentiments of the Bengali elite class. The policy of the British Government widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims, which was next to impossible to be bridged. In the meantime some unavoidable circumstances made the situation more complicated. None could try to get rid of the prevailing circumstances and at the same time taking the advantage of their indifferent attitude the British applied their secret skill and became triumphant. Mahammad Ali Jinnah, the uncrowned leader of the Muslim League, wanted to translate into action the 'Two Nation Theory' of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan. Jinnah placed a demand claiming for a separate state entirely for the Muslims which ultimately came into force through the formation a new independent country known as Pakistan. Finally on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1947 Attlee, the British Premier declared the decision of the British Parliament to leave India within ten weeks. Attlee hurled a departing kick through the execution of partition of the Indian subcontinent. Before the transfer of power a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril Radcliff was entrusted with the heavy responsibility of demarcating the borders of India. But the impartiality, ability and efficiency of Radcliff were not beyond question and out of criticism. He chalked the boundary line of 2,736 kilometer without any practical experience and knowledge about India.<sup>3</sup> The people of both the countries after achieving freedom are still paying their compensation for the hasty, immature, inhuman, undemocratic, unethical and arbitrary decision of Radcliff. The lives and prospects of countless persons of both the countries remained buried under the debris of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The surging tide of exodus following partition lashed the shore of both India and Pakistan. The episode triggered off large scale cross border migration in West Bengal and Punjab. Due to geographical proximity bulk of refugees from East Pakistan migrated to the adjoining districts of Calcutta, 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia, Murshidabad including the districts of North Bengal. Most of the uprooted persons

were migrated and settled in the border districts. It could undoubtedly be asserted that the majority of the displaced persons made their flow of journey uninterrupted towards Calcutta which was treated to be the major recipient of uprooted individuals hailing from East Pakistan. Following the tumultuous event almost 15 million people were recorded to be migrated in Indian Territory and it was also termed as the greatest mass exodus as recorded ever.<sup>4</sup> The Hindu minorities anticipated that the communal turmoil of Noakhali and Calcutta gave a clear indication and a clear signal of impending danger and catastrophe that might make their future lives miserable and uncertain. They also foresaw and heard the sound of bugle of approaching misfortune.

In the first phase of migration the so called wealthy personalities of East Pakistan who were mentally prepared to protect their dignity, wealth, honour and identity took ready decision to move towards metropolis. Subsequently, in the later phase, the Hindu minorities both lower and middle class delayed their movements due to several factors behind. They were not economically sound so they did not venture to move towards other safer places in empty hands. More so, they were not well conversant with the new environment and new associations. They also had no previous experience of camp life and tent life. So they were at their wits end. Putting at rest all speculations, they finally decided to move towards safer destinations ignoring inevitable obstacles and uncertainty. The lower middle class Hindu families who had practically no asset of their own in East Pakistan were in a dilemma. As the majority of the people of East Pakistan belonged to lower class and they used to maintain their livelihood through manual labours and a good section of people depended upon their heir family trade and family professions. So they took unanimously the brave decision to move toward India.

The refugees of the northern districts of East Pakistan preferred most to move towards North Bengal districts due to geographical propinquity and linguistic similarity. The other factors that lured and inspired the refugees of border districts of East Pakistan to the different districts of North Bengal were their social likeness, religious affinity and cultural resemblance. Just after the partition who migrated from East Pakistan to West Bengal were more or less educated and well established personalities, so they had not to face much more disadvantages in procuring jobs and other employments and also permanent settlement for their habitation. Another vital point may be added in this

connection that primarily the migrants of East Pakistan were not cordially received by the local inhabitants of North Bengal. A movement popularly known as 'Bhatia khyadao' (Oust the 'Bhatia' means the East Bengal refugees) started. But gradually an astonishing change was noticed over the attitude of the local people.

Most of the inhabitants of North Bengal belonged to Rajbanshi community. A lion proportion of cultivable lands were under their possession. From 1950s a revolutionary change in the demographic scenario of North Bengal was visible. Due to rapid increase of population the equilibrium of agricultural economy shattered altogether. The scarcity of land became a chronic problem. During this time the slogan *Langal jar jami tar* became very popular. Apart from it the religio-cultural tussle took a complicated shape. The socio-religious movements gradually transformed in to a political movement. The reason for the rapid growth of population was different from other regions. The first step towards economic change was visible in post-independent period through the abolition of Zamindari system in 1953. In these circumstances some Government high officials and some affluent people occupied the places of landed gentry. The Rajbanshi community had no other alternative but to surrender to the sweet will of the outsiders. Naturally North Bengal inundated with new and a radical change in the realm of agriculture.

From 1967 a new horizon was opened in the land reform movement in North Bengal. The land reform movement ruined the supremacy of the landed gentry. In the socio-economic spheres of the region this period was marked as a period of transition because land reform movement was in vogue and on the contrary the period also witnessed the outbreak of Naxalite movement. 'Operation Barga' in 1977 was another epoch making event of North Bengal. To get peasants (Bhag chasi) registered and to convert excess private lands in to *khas land* were the prime objectives of the land reforms movements. The said movement had an adverse effect upon the Rajbanshi communities. They started movements relentlessly to acquire economic right and stability and at the same time to elevate their social dignity. In order to eradicate the long standing economic deprivation and discrepancies the Rajbanshi communities set up their first ethnic based organization to fulfill their desired objectives. It opened a new vista in the political movements of North Bengal. In major cases the movement originated in urban areas and it had to spread like wild flames in each and every

corner of rural areas. The Uttarakhand movement was such a movement which was basically originated from rural areas based on economic as well as psychological conflict.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting here that the Rajbanshi communities started losing their social as well as political hegemony due to the influx of refugees from East Pakistan. Studying the dynamics of Rajbanshi societies we found that with the migration of East Bengal refugees in the region of North Bengal, the Rajbanshis lost their economic control. This ultimately led to the Khatriyaisation movement. The Rajbanshis had developed a kind of social integrity through the social reform movement conceptualized as Khatriyaization<sup>6</sup> Migration of the uprooted persons from East Pakistan to West Bengal, more specially in North Bengal naturally created a pressure on land and agriculture. More so, establishment of different tea gardens had created pressure on agriculture. As a consequence many Rajbanshi peasants were compelled to work as agricultural labourers on their own lands. Some of the Rajbanshi peasants had no other option but to sell their own lands to the people who came over here after the tragic event of partition, It was a grim irony of fate that some of them became labourers of those lands which were once under their possession.<sup>7</sup>

Since 1967, under the guidance and leadership of the left front Government of West Bengal land reform movement started initially. In the event of the land reform movement socio-economic backbones of the landed gentry were at shattered condition. The simultaneous and joint movements sponsored by the Land Reforms Act and the Noxalite movement were undoubtedly a period of transition in the annals of West Bengal state. In 1977 a new phase of movement started with renewed vigour and encouragement. 'The Operation Barga' was a historical event in the socio-economic scenario of West Bengal. From that time onwards a trend towards upward mobility with a view to securing economic stability through the attainment of political supremacy grew up among the deprived Rajbanshis of North Bengal. A movement known as Uttarakhand was cropped up in the rural and urban sectors of North Bengal.

The War of Liberation of Bangladesh was an epoch making event in the global history. Even before 1971 due to military rule of Pakistan 10 million people crossed border for shelter in India.<sup>8</sup> Fear of maltreatment, harassment and violence were the justified reasons behind the fresh refugee migration over India and more specifically

in West Bengal from 1970s and the districts of North Bengal were flooded with Bangladeshi Hindu evacuees. As most of the evacuees were economically handicapped, were compelled to occupy the *khas* and vacant lands for constructing their dwelling houses in a particular area which was known as '*jabar dakhhal*' (forced occupation) colonies. No Government approval of the lands was accorded instantly. But in the long run in, 1987 those colonies got Government approval. From that time onwards the Government took active initiative to train male and female uprooted persons simultaneously with a view to enabling them to support themselves and their families through their earnings. The objective of the Government was to train the uprooted individuals specially the women to make them self sufficient. Thence forth, it could minutely be observed, the womenfolk had the tendency and aptitude to earn with their own initiative and at the cost of their own endeavours. This was stated to be the greatest achievement of the refugee women. This positive spirit was found among the generations to come. Hence, refugees in the West Bengal were categorized as 'infiltrators', 'Pakistani minorities' and 'fugitives'. Such categorization was made with the assumption of the State regarding the nature of this migration. The State believed it was temporary phenomenon and with the contemplation that the normalcy would soon be restored and pave the way of their return back. Nehru himself had firm conviction that the situation in East Bengal had not created severe and permanent danger to its Hindu minorities.<sup>9</sup> From the Government's point of view it was stated to be a 'psychological' fear or phobia of the migrants which would not be entertained or indulged.

In East Punjab, the State took up measures for rehabilitation of the refugees on a war-footing, while in West Bengal, the picture was quite reverse. They were also advised to go back to their respective homeland. Since 1950 the Government of West Bengal began to draw the attention of the Central Government towards the burning issue concerning refugees. Thereafter, the rapidity of rehabilitation slackened and was stopped after 1958, until a fresh communal violence broke out in 1964. The modern conception of a state was not in favour of the continuing influx of migrants. Naturally the migrants from East Pakistan were taken to be the responsibility of Pakistan and not of India. The migrant in the West Bengal wanted stubborn protests and mass movements as the only remedy to their predicament. That anti-State attitude of the refugees completely outshined the constructive role of the migrant in the process of

self-rehabilitation. Without taking any financial assistance from the Government the migrants set up colonies and initiated other developmental works i.e. setting up of schools, colleges, libraries, clubs, health care centres, parks etc within the premises of the colonies under their united efforts and guidance. As mentioned in the dissertation, the Government at first did not recognize these colonies and when they finally recognised they made it clear that regularization would not entail any development works herein. Thus, much was left upon the shoulders of those migrants. Not only the residents of colonies exhibited their resourcefulness, even the camp residents were also made to work in various State-sponsored development projects. The projects like construction of roads and dams, clearing of forests, reclamation of waste land etc. were executed with their assistance. A sizable number of migrants were sent out of West Bengal and recruited in the difficult regions of Dandakaranya, Marichjhapi and to the islands of Andaman and Nicobar. Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay in his noted book '*Udvastu*' clearly indicates that the refugees who returned back to West Bengal during this phase have to depend upon themselves for their rehabilitation and resettlement as they did not get any Government assistance.<sup>10</sup> Such unique contribution of the migrants failed to get recognition and appreciation from Government level and it was not officially approved and no official records were available.

The gender sensitive history on partition is a recent phenomenon. The women were absolutely neglected chapter in the partition historiography. But with the passage of time the old conception regarding the fairer sex changed in a phased manner. In the initial stage of gender based history of partition the refugee women were projected from the point of view of victimization due to partition but in the later period scholars stressed more upon the constructive role of the refugee women for the cause of their settlement, survival and above all the empowerment. Urvashi Bhutalia played a pioneering role in depicting the untold sorrows and sufferings of women who were the worst victims of partition. Her path breaking book '*The Other Side of Silence*' unearthed the bitter experiences of those refugee women that were plunged in the profound darkness of oblivion. In the subsequent years Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin produced an epoch making composition on the greatest human tragedy of partition from women perspective in their book '*Borders and Boundaries: The women*'. The question, do women have a country? Is often followed by are the full fledged citizens of their countries? Recent feminist research has demonstrated how

‘citizen’ and ‘state subject’ are gendered categories by examining how men and women are treated unequally by most states but especially post-colonial states - despite constitutional guarantees of equality. The integration of women into modern ‘nationhood’ epitomized by citizenship in a sovereign nation-state somehow follows a different trajectory from that of men.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of partition and the violence was extreme on womenfolk. They had to pay the cost of independence giving up their chastity and also through sacrificing their lives silently. During the period of turmoil the women became the common target of all attacks. Sexual assault, abduction, forced marriage, intimidation became regular feature. The women came over from East Pakistan to West Bengal as well as in North Bengal, were humiliated and tortured in every possible way in their ancestral place and also in their new abode. To protect their chastity and to uphold their dignity their family members forced to leave their motherland. Coming in contact with many victimized women the researcher has come to know that each and every woman left the country following the communal violence. It cannot be ascertained with certitude that all of them were the victims of direct violence but a psychological fear also played a vital role behind their migration.

A good number of women engaged them in various activities for the wellbeing and betterment of their family and family members. In East Pakistan the female inmates of the family could not even think of going outside for outer activities but under the pressure of circumstances their old conception and attitude changed abruptly. In the meantime with a view to fulfilling their requirements some women made them socially and politically aware in meeting the challenges ahead. They set exemplary evidence before the inhabitants of North Bengal to move forward with a view to establishing their social dignity and to ameliorate the condition especially of the womenfolk. The new entrants in West Bengal in the event of war of liberation of Bangladesh were more upright, more energetic and more practical in their outlook. As a matter of fact, as the previous migrants hailed from East Pakistan mostly belonged to elite class, the female members of those families did not feel it deem to earn something for their families besides a few exceptional cases. On the contrary, most of the new migrants from the newly created Bangladesh belonged to lower strata of the society. They were physically and mentally prepared to face the new challenges they

were going to encounter. They preferred to honour their family professions. As a result they did not hesitate in performing their works as their predecessors performed. A sizable number of the women who came after 1971 engaged themselves as domestic help and lady attendant in hospitals and in financially affluent families to look after the kids and ailing persons.

The Partition of India, with all its ramifications, for more than seven decades remained as central point of discussion for historians and social scientists of all possible shades. The partition meant mass migrations but the women reacted from the depths of their being at the idea of leaving home. Many literary narratives brought out this agony. Demolishing the tussle between personal and political and also demonstrating it in the experience of women, the feminist historiography has validated the significance of experiential dimension in analyzing the event of partition.<sup>12</sup> In the patriarchal system of India the women were always confined to domesticity and it perhaps symbolized their world of living and the outer world was prohibited for them. Due to that reason the womenfolk reacted sharply to the idea of leaving home. In the normative structure of society, a woman was complexly identified with the home and woman fixed her identity securely within the framework of her family confined to the four walls of house. If displaced from such a format of existence, she was shorn of the basic marker of her identity and with that she dies an unnatural psychic death. Women were certainly affected by the partition though their experiences varied. Amidst forced migration, violence, abduction, recovery and readjustments, most of them lost their identities, which were subsumed by identities like community, religion and nationality. In their memory, the predominant picture was one of confusion, dislocation and severing of roots, as they were forced to reckon with the implication of Independence, which to them meant partition.<sup>13</sup> A number of women could never recover themselves from partition, where as some women viewed this rapture as a moment of unexpected liberation for womenfolk.<sup>14</sup>

Partition was a tangled event that changed the lives of millions of people in different ways. The event of partition not only compelled the evacuees to leave their home and hearth but also made them politically isolated, socially degraded, economically crippled, morally weakened and psychologically paralyzed. Their pang, pathos, agony as well as ecstasy, trauma and ultimate triumph made a tremendous impact upon the

outstanding creative thinkers. Their penetrating insight depicted the untold sufferings of the refugees specially the women who were the worst sufferers and victims of partition in both Bengal and Punjab. The women had occupied an important position in the domain of partition literature. The litterateurs like Saadat Hossain Manto, Khuswant Singh, Attia Hossain, Jill Didur, Rajinder Singh Bedi etc. have recorded and pictured the characters of the women victims of the partition. They attached less importance upon sentiments and emotions but more importance upon the genuine struggle of the women against violence, atrocities, bloodshed, ferocity and inhuman torture upon the innocent armless and helpless depressed women, the holocaust of partition had created incurable wound that still oozing.

The literature of Bengal did not lag behind in portraying the pathetic saga of displaced individuals both male and female from East Pakistan to West Bengal. A number of promising writers, poets, novelists and dramatists contributed a lot in the arena of partition literature. Their writings offered detailed and elaborate narration of partition, refugee exodus, violence, suffering of womenfolk, physical and mental torture, abuse, sexual harassment and above all their struggle for resettlement and empowerment. A good number of Bengali novels, memoirs, short stories, poems, films have presented the refugee women as true representatives of social injustice and deprivation bearing the eloquent testimonies of human sufferings from gendered angle. The female characters of the partition literature of Bengal reveal their determination and tenacity for combating the evil designs of the anti- social elements and established their social identity despite their deprivation to avail the legitimate facilities of the society, which was considered to be their greatest achievement. But at the same time it was also noticed that majority of women who remained within the periphery of four walls could not venture to come forward to snatch their legitimate right. They remained contented accusing their own destiny. It was the true picture of common uprooted women who made selfless contribution silently for the well being of respective families.

Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, a high ranking Government official of the period, acted in different districts and different capacities, laments that the valuable efforts of talented personalities were not deployed for the all-round development of the state. According to him it was nothing but the lamentable wastage of talents. The heavy loss they

incurred could not partially been compensated that made them perplexed. The migrants could not adjust themselves with the unpleasant situation they were in. They could not keep away their nostalgic reminiscences from their life. So, truly speaking, the uprooted people could not accept whole heartedly the suicidal attitude of the immature politicians who brushing aside the hopes and aspirations of the Hindus and the Muslims bifurcated the country. The famous poem of noted poet Annada Shankar Ray projected before readers through his poem '*Teler shihsi bhanglo bole*' through which he held responsible of the leaders who divided the country. He also tried to ventilate the grievances, anger, frustration, agony and hatred of the common people over the unprecedented and unpredictable episode of partition of India.

*Teler shishi bhanglo bole*  
*Khukhur pore raag koro*  
*Tomra jei sob buro khokha*  
*Bharat bhenge bhag koro.*  
*Taar bela!*

(As the little girl breaks a bottle of oil, you scold her .You the veteran persons when divide the country, what of that?)<sup>15</sup>

The vital reason behind the creation of a separate state was nothing but the manifestation of protest of the local Rajbanshies against the supremacy of the outsiders. The successive movements of Khatriyaization, sanskritization and Hinduization wanted to strengthen the Rajbanshi movement but the above noted movements failed to produce any permanent effects upon the Rajbanshi communities. They also demanded Kamtapur state and voiced their demands to give prompt recognition of the Kamtapuri language. Subsequently in 1987 a party known as Kamtapur People's Party (KPP) came into existence. They were plunged with profound darkness of illiteracy, superstitions and were quiet indifferent to advancement of other countries. Initially the uprooted migrants were not cordially accepted by the local population. But with the passage of time the Rajbanshi community realized it whole heartedly that the presence of refugee population would bring about more benefit for their life style. The people of North Bengal especially of rural sectors and women in particular became indebted to the refugee women. They were indebted to their female counterparts of East Bengal for promoting their political

consciousness, social awareness and necessity of education. The displaced refugee women tried their level best to elevate the social positions of the Rajbanshi women.

To know the unknown, to see the unseen, to visit the unvisited, to explore the unexplored were beyond the range of their imagination and in this respect the initiative of refugee women were really praise worthy. In previous years major rural population of North Bengal absolutely depended on agriculture and agricultural produce. The modern technique of production and different superior qualities of seeds of crops were unknown to them. They blindly followed the traditional technique of production. Few limited crops were available in the market in specific season. But with the advent of refugees the whole complexion of situation changed in phased manner. The local farmers were encouraged to be acquainted with the modern scientific technique to grow unfamiliar crops of various types. Now-a-days variety of fishes, vegetables and fruits are available in the market in all seasons throughout the year. More so North Bengal districts have had the ability and capacity to import surplus commodities in different neighbouring districts and states which were unquestionably a fair indication of economic growth of respective districts.

From academic point of view the people of North Bengal lagged behind to a lamentable extent. With a view to educating the uneducated people in North Bengal mainly in the rural sectors schools of different categories, primary, secondary, higher secondary, colleges and universities for higher education were established. They also advocated for vocational training schools, technical schools to make the boys and girls technically sound. The Hindus of East Bengal were homeless in a Muslim dominated nation in the truest sense of the term. Refugee rehabilitation was considered to be a national responsibility by the postcolonial Indian government. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made it clear in a public meeting that the welfare of the displaced was not merely a humanitarian responsibility on the part of the state alone, it was a pragmatic one on which the future and welfare of India depended.<sup>16</sup> But the primary object of the Government was make arrangement for the resettlement of refugees from West Pakistan. The national leadership was ambivalent regarding its responsibilities toward East Bengal refugees. They were unwilling and unable to block migration altogether, but afraid of “inviting” millions of East Bengali Hindus into the country and alienating Pakistan as a result, undermining India's foundational principle of secularism, and burdening the fragile economy.<sup>17</sup>

A bulk of population of East Pakistan had to struggle a lot along with their male counterparts. But their efforts for survival and attempts to cope with the new situation were not given due importance. The history of displaced persons and their quest for new shelter in the districts of North Bengal is almost untouched. North Bengal was flooded with exodus from the pre-partition period. The migrated people afterwards mingled with the local people. It was evident from various census reports that from 1901 some people from East Pakistan came to the districts of North Bengal. The number rose to an alarming extent after the partition. These migrated people ultimately strengthened their position in various spheres of life after a long strife. The migrated womenfolk from East Pakistan gradually involved themselves intimately with various activities with the local people.

It is worth noting in this context that after hailing from East Pakistan to North Bengal 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 people to establish themselves keeping at bay the age-old prejudice and blind conception. The uprooted persons infused upon the innocent, simple and uneducated people of North Bengal the sense of self consciousness. The wave of migration continued until the Bangladesh war of liberation in 1971 and even after.

The partition of India dismantled the difference between public and private sphere of refugee women ushering into an epoch of modernity. Practically, the violence followed by partition contaminated the sanctity of private arena of womenfolk which actually evoked their emancipatory possibility. The opinion of Partha Chatterjee may be cited in this regards. In his work *Nation and Its Fragments* illustrates the hegemonic nature of Indian modernity and nationalism. He opines that though the Bengal Renaissance brought about a new era of modernity but still the difference of *andar* and *bahir* was to some extent compromised.<sup>18</sup> Partition as a historical phenomenon had altered the trajectory of Indian modernity as it dismantled the sanctity of private life to a considerable extent.

The women question was to be found in keeping with framework of the traditional values of the indigenous culture in Bengali society. Chatterje notes a distinct reluctance on the part of the nationalist and social reformers to allow any colonial intervention specially in the domain of socio-cultural reforms and more specifically the position of women in colonized society, by the end of nineteenth century. Education was encouraged as a mark of cultural refinement of women because they were considered as the embodiment of cultural values and sentiment. They were entrusted with the responsibility to keep intact the sanctity and inner purity. Actually the Bengal Renaissance talked about the emancipation of exterior subjects giving the female members the necessary education but without compromising the persona of feminine self. The de sanctification of private life due to violence was never the less responsible in dismantling the binary of the sacred interior and the trivial outside. Economic emancipation of the womenfolk was one of the visible characteristic of partition. Coming out of the age long tradition they became economically self dependant. The displaced persons more specifically the women were rather compelled to work outside the purview four walls. From this period some women were entrusted with the responsibility of eldest son. This process of ungendering is an important phenomenon of post partition Bengali society. This tendency to shift from traditional stereotype set up opened a new horizon in partition studies.

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### Map of India before and after Partition



# Appendix – B

## Map of Bangladesh



## Appendix - C

### Pictures of two refugee families





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## Note from the Editor-in-Chief

On behalf of the Department of History, University of North Bengal It is my privilege to present to the readers the Volume 10 (2017) of the Karatoya: North Bengal University Journal of History. The journal has incorporated the research papers from ancient Indian History, Medieval Indian History and Modern Indian History and contemporary as well. The Volume 10 is being published after all the articles having been refereed and peer reviewed and with the ISSN 2229-4880. The Karatoya: North Bengal University Journal of History is a UGC Approved Journal of Arts and Humanities with Serial No. 42512

The editor of the journal do not judge for the facts stated, opinions expressed and conclusions reached, it is entirely that of the authors concern and the editor of the journal accepts no responsibility for the same.

It is my solemn duty to express my gratitude to our Honorable Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Finance Officer for their generous concern on Academic Endeavour. I am thankful to my colleagues of the Department of History for their warm encouragement and necessary cooperation for publishing this journal. Mr Varun Kr. Roy, associate editor of this volume deserved huge appreciation for his constant help in publishing this volume.

I am also grateful to all the contributors for providing valuable research papers. Last but not least, the Officials and the Staffs of the North Bengal University Press deserved heartiest thanks for their cooperation in printing the journal within limited span of time.

Dr. Sudash Lama

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## PARTITION AND THE SAGA OF UPROOTED WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL: A REVIEW

Madhuparna Mitra Guha

### *Abstract:*

*The partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 was a shaping event which caused one of the greatest human convulsions of history. The partition of British India and subsequent creation of two antagonist countries was not just a surgical allegory or an operation; it was a line of division inside our heads and hearts too. The dark legacies of partition have thrown a long shadow on the lives of the people of India and Pakistan. If an elaborate analysis of Partition of India is made then it can safely be concluded that the miserable plight of women centering round the event of partition had long been neglected and ignored, though they were the worst victims of the Partition.*

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Noakhali, Annapurna, honour, Bhadrakol

The womenfolk remained a closed chapter, with the 'high-politics' of Partition dominating all administrative and scholarly imagination. Recent historiography emphasized on the 'human' dimension of this tragedy, the women have finally found their rightful place in Partition historiography<sup>1</sup>. The impact of the partition on the women from East Bengal was excessive and they unfortunately became the refugees in their own state which was united just before August, 1947. When thousands of refugees flocked towards Indian Territory from East Bengal every day after the February Riot in 1950, the women of East Bengal had to pay the cost of independence by their chastity, through the sacrifices of lives of their husbands, as well as the lives of their beloved children too. The victimized women hailing from

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<sup>1</sup> Asstt. Professor, Department of History, University B.T & Evening College Cooch Behar

East Pakistan were exploited and assaulted in every possible way. Almost 12 million people were displaced; a million died; 75 thousand women were abducted and raped.<sup>2</sup> But brushing aside all adversities they got courage to face the hard reality and subsequently marched forward acquiring self reliance.

### **Objective of the paper**

The prime objectives of the paper are:

- \* To throw light on the migration of womenfolk to West Bengal especially after Partition of India.
- \* To unveil the sufferings and bitter experiences of the women refugees from East Pakistan who migrated to West Bengal.
- \* To describe the nature of hardship that the women confronted with and their ultimate success in coping with the new environment.

### **Methodology**

For the preparation of the present dissertation materials from various sources have been procured. For the concrete paper both primary and secondary sources have been utilized. Oral sources have acted as an important source for preparing this paper. Data procured from valuable experiences of the refugee women as valuable sources. Memories and experiences of the most vulnerable section of the society like women got special attention of the historians since 1990s. The issue of women related to the partition of India began to be highlighted with the publication of the articles and book by Urvashi Bhutalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin on Punjab. 'The Other Side of Silence', the path-breaking book of Urvashi Butalia, probably first documented the experiences of the women on Partition. The focus, therefore, was on

the theme of women as victims of partition. The way of rebuilding their shattered lives and accommodating with the nascent nation-state is the main focal point of the recent scholar. Another remarkable book 'Borders and Boundaries' by Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin emphasized on the 'gender accent of Partition Narrative' confined its discussion within the region of West.<sup>3</sup> They tried to understand the experiences of women during partition in terms of gender and patriarchy. Patriarchy constructed women in a strange way - her sexuality was a threat to her; her respectability confirmed the degree to which she was able to retain her sexual purity, moreover her body was not her own. It was not only the question of her own honour and respect but also of her family and community<sup>4</sup>. Every woman represented her community and she was the repository of her community's honour. From the point of view of Bengali women in partition of India got touch of the trained historians only with beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Historian Joya Chatterji in her a book 'Bengal divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition' related how a large and powerful section of Hindu society i.e. 'bhadrak' in Bengal insisted that their province by deciding to create a separate Hindu homeland.

The partition of India in 1947 is still considered as the largest human migration that the history has ever witnessed. During the turmoil concerning the partition of India Women became the most common targets of attack. Forced marriage, intimidation, rape and abduction of women became the order of the period. Those maltreatments on a large scale were very common ways of attacks upon the Hindu minority women. The refugee women were humiliated and inhumanly tortured on their way to West Bengal in the plea of search by the Pakistani customs officers and staffs.<sup>5</sup> Thousands of women of minority communities left their homes overnight to protect their honour and dignity. They were allowed to carry minimum requirements with them. In 1946,

contemporary news papers like the Amrita Bazar Patrika recorded the arduous journey of women across the borders. Streams of women clutching their babies on one arm and their small belongings on the other were seen walking down the rail tracks. Many died on the way<sup>6</sup>. Figures showed that in the interim period between August 1946 and December 1947 several millions of Hindus poured in prolific numbers in eastern India alone in to the states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura altering the lives of the people and socio-economic profile of the states forever. The partition of Bengal not only killed thousands of people, but also uprooted and displaced millions from their traditional homeland, their desh.<sup>7</sup> The refugees who were ousted from their 'Bhita'(homeland) and expatriated to a different land following the exchange of population after the partition indeed faced a grave misfortune in their new abode. They realized that the natural surroundings, social customs and the daily rituals of the people were sometimes starkly different from their own. For instance, the arrival of the migrants from the villages of East Pakistan to a big city like Calcutta gave birth to several jokes, which were mostly variations of the clinched encounter between a country bumpkin and a sophisticated urbanite or a village simpleton's embarrassment with elegant life style of the city.

The predicament of the exile in the hellhole of these transit rehabilitation camps reminds us of the terrible life-in death situation of the concentration camps in Europe. Yet those people were better off than those who were thrown in the shelter of railway platform. The Amrita Bazar Patrika described Sealdah station swarming with flood of refugees, the 'Gateway to Hell'. Kolkata became a suffering city for refugees who were afflicted with innumerable ordeals in their new abode<sup>8</sup>. Partition stories have become so poignant because of the direct or indirect violence associated with them". Violence lied not only in shooting or putting daggers through people or

raping them, which was also found in the strict prescription of the people irrespective of their own feeling in the matter<sup>9</sup>. Noakhali was the epicentre or breeding place of communal violence. The Noakhali experience was shocking for both men and women alike. A large number of cases regarding forced marriage between the Hindu girls and Muslim boys, forced abduction of Hindu women, and conversion to Islam became the order of the day. In many cases incidents of abduction complaints could not be reported following sheer terror. Women had to watch the atrocious murder of their husbands.<sup>10</sup> 'Vermilion marks' (Sindur) were forcibly erased from the foreheads of women and conch shell bangles broken.<sup>11</sup> In the leading news paper 'The Hindustan Standard' on November 5, 1946 published a report that 300 women were raped in Noakhali and about 400 cases of rape of defenseless women in another area were recorded<sup>12</sup>. 'The Noakhali violence marginalized women, who became victims of male chauvinism'.<sup>13</sup> The paramilitary forces like Ansars incited Muslim hooligans in this disgraceful act. In Kurmitala air port which was situated near the military head quarters of Dhaka where a large number of Hindus passengers including women and children were brutally killed or seriously injured<sup>14</sup>. At Darshana station 500 Ansar troops looted the belongings of the migrants on the pretext of custom checking and at the same time they robbed the women's ornaments. When one lady refused to offer her ornaments she was made captive in a locked room. In this connection it may be mentioned that when the Barishal Express reached Shealdah station on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1950 it was found that the train was empty<sup>15</sup>. The grim irony of fate was that there were two options remained open before the women; one was to embrace glorious death in the hands of their kin which was considered to be the act of martyrdom and the second option was violation of their honour at the hands of the 'other'. During the discourse of partition victimhood of the Hindus of East Pakistan a sense of insecurity regarding *dhon* (wealth), *pran* (life)

and maan (honour) reflected<sup>16</sup>: However, the experience of violence was not always explicit and direct. There were other forms of violence which were often dismissed as mere 'psychological fear'. Such instances of violence were vivid through many of the later day narratives and memoirs of the refugees who flocked from East Bengal. To honour their chastity and womanhood the Hindu refugees from West Pakistan were determined to shift themselves to safer and secured abode in West Bengal so far other places of India were concerned. A good number of women at the time chose to commit suicide in order to thwart the corporeal holocaust.<sup>17</sup> Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay, the then Rehabilitation Commissioner for West Bengal, narrated in his 'Udvastu' that often when the women went to take a bath in the pond, some Muslim men would remark, '*Pak Pak Pakistan, Hindur Bharat Mussolman*' [This is Pakistan, the husband of a Hindu will be a Mussalman]<sup>18</sup>. It became obvious from that period onwards that it would no longer be possible to stay in the beloved motherland in such a filthy environment and toward situation.

The journey of displaced women towards the unknown destination was riddled with troubles. Extensive looting, indiscriminate arson, horrible murders and abduction of women became the distinctive features of the riots during 1950 and onwards. The migrants' women travelled on overcrowded steamers, motor launches, trains etc. A large number of refugees traversed a long way through jungle areas bare footed. They had no other alternative but to bring few clothing or a small trunk with them. The mass movement of the people on foot, by bus, train, and car left women, children, the aged and infirm, the disabled particularly vulnerable'.<sup>19</sup> During the 1947 partition of India, an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted by the

members of other religious communities. Some of them were raped and murdered or sold into prostitution, or forced into marriage.<sup>20</sup>

The economist Ashok Mitra espoused in an article published in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Nov. 3, 1993) that initially in West Bengal "the widely publicized make-belief was that it was all a temporary upheaval and the refugees would soon return home. A life of alternating insecurity and hope prompted a large section of the refugees to shuttle back and forth between East and West Bengal, wanting to make the best of both worlds but ending up with the worst of both"<sup>21</sup>. The object of such heinous crime created a traumatic situation. After much maltreatment and distress, the refugees migrated over to West Bengal where there was none to entertain their settlement. As a matter of fact the West Bengal Government was not prepared for such a massive exodus of people. At first the uprooted persons were inoculated and then they were asked to present themselves as a 'family grouping' to an officer from the Relief and Rehabilitation Department. The idea of 'family grouping' perplexed the migrants. They actually belonged to the joint families and it was beyond their imagination to be grouped as smaller and nuclear units according to the order of the officer. This ultimately broke the joint families into male headed groupings<sup>22</sup>. The Women, who were accustomed to stay indoors, abruptly came out of their homes. It was beyond imagination on the part of the uprooted women of East Pakistan. During the period of anarchy following partition forced marriage became rampant and common feature. To accept and recognize the abductors as husbands were really unthinkable, painful and pathetic in the truest sense of term. The central and state government had launched ventures to bring back those affected unfortunate women and to send them back to their parents. But it was not an easy task. The initiatives rendered by the Government to rescue the affected women failed miserably.

The act of recovery and the scheme of restoration of abducted women in the East were not as adequately planned like that of West. It was the misconception of leaders that the women in the East were not real victims of 'direct' violence. Such a projection could be defined in two ways, firstly toning down the act of violence with a view to discourage migration and secondly there was a general apathy of the State towards the plight of the minorities in the East, which in turn was governed by the economics of rehabilitation.<sup>23</sup> For the restoration of confidence among the minorities on both sides the Delhi Pact was inked by the two Governments. Following this pact the Search Service Bureau in Calcutta was set up. Along with it a Search Service Section/ Liaison Office attached to the Deputy High Commission in Dacca was set up. In this office the Dacca Transit Home was started by Mridula Sarabhai. She was very closely associated with the refugee relief operations in Delhi also used to get daily reports from Congress workers of Bengal. She came to Calcutta in March 1950 to oversee operations and report on the prevailing circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

It will not be out of place to mention in this connection that the recovery and restoration programme in the West where the State itself would take the decision of migration in respect of woman. The women had no option of their own to take decision to migrate or not. The abducted women were not allowed to stay long in a particular place of a state with the apprehension that the abductor family would try to influence either the officials in getting her back, or the mere presence of the woman in the same state could influence her decision in favour of staying back. Hence, almost as soon as they were recovered, these women were quickly shifted to the Transit camp, and thereafter, restored to their families. As observed in the records, very few women used to seek asylum in Dacca Transit Camp. The Government of India made frequent instructions and orders for immediate shut down the home. But

the Deputy High Commissioner summarily rejected the proposal on the plea that the closure of this Home would create repercussion and would leave 'a demoralizing effect not only in the minority community in East Pakistan but it would also become the object of criticism of the public in India.'<sup>25</sup>

In post 1950 the Migration Certificate (MC), was the only legal means to enter India from East Pakistan, but to obtain these Migration Certificate (MC) was hard task. It was much easier for women in procuring the migration certificate because the State itself was in favour of certain categories of women. In certain cases priority was given in issuing Migration Certificates to the women considering the magnitude of the issue in question. The following categories of women were given priorities. Unattached women and widows with no livelihood in East Pakistan; Wives joining husbands in India; Families living in areas considered unsafe, for example, in isolated pockets or where there is apprehension about abduction of girls and elopement under influence; Adult girls going to India for marriage. These facilities were not applicable to the others members of the family.

During the whole period of migration dual role played by the State, on the one hand the role of a protector and on the other a benevolent patriarch. As the protector, the State recovered the women from the 'enemy' territory, and also restored the 'other' women. In its role as that of the benevolent patriarch, the State took the responsibility of rehabilitating the single or unattached women in the special homes. Some production-cum-training centres were set up for those recovered women. Kasturba Niketan in Delhi and Uday Villa in Kolkata became the most prominent of such Homes for women. The main purposes of those homes were to enable the women to come out of the trauma of partition and victimhood, and also encourage them to be self dependant. The Government of India became concerned with the

issue of rehabilitation of refugees. In fact, the state government was quite watchful in its approach towards the issue of Homes or Infirmaries. Abala Basu was the main motivating force behind the home 'Uday Villa'. This project for displaced persons began with ten resident women members. Abala Basu's aim was not only to provide vocational training but also to open a production centre.<sup>26</sup> Under this scheme Uday Villa obtained financial assistance for the adult women worker. The Art Department of Uday Villa was inaugurated in 1954. Arrangements were made for providing training to the women who had natural talent for artistic cottage crafting. Attempts were also made to revive the folk-motifs. Under the active initiative of Dr. B.C. Roy and Renuka Roy, the Rehabilitation Department of Government of West Bengal arranged a stall at the Kalyani Congress Exhibition in 1954 where handicraft produced in Uday Villa were exhibited. In an exhibition at Jahangir Art Gallery of Bombay in 1959 articles of worth 5 Lakhs were sold in a single day that eventually increased the demand of artifacts of Uday Villa within short span of time.<sup>27</sup> Apart from opening vocational training centres for the women, there were other facilities provided to them as well. The Employment Bureau, which had been set up for the exclusive purpose of providing employment opportunities to the displaced persons, attempted to secure employment for the refugee women as well. There were many women who did not find accommodations in these camps were forced to seek refuge in Kashi or Brindaban. Even after 29 years of the creation of Bangladesh there were 2910 Bengali women struggling for survival in Brindaban<sup>28</sup>

Many of the abducted women considered the recovery operation conducted by Governments as a second uprootment. Following Partition 30 lakhs refugee came over to West Bengal by 1960. In the 1970s the state witnessed another massive exodus from East Pakistan during the period of the formation of Bangladesh. At the

same time many of them lodged protest against the recovery operation and expressed their unwillingness to return to their parents or relations. They were quiet conscious regarding their destiny in the days to come. They were confident enough that their affectionate parents and sweet relations would not accord their returns cordially. In some cases they were forced to come back leaving behind their infants. The eternal question of motherhood was left unanswered by the male protagonists of recovery operations. Instead of protecting the abducted women, the recovery measures increased their agony. Undoubtedly they had the potentiality to live a normal life if they were provided with the opportunity. But by the grim irony of fate some rescued women were sent to Ashrams (homes) as they were not accepted by their families. A scanty number of women had the opportunity to lead a much desired family life. Sometimes in private Homes, the refugee women were forced to marry unknown persons from other provinces.

The women who were attached to their families had to shoulder the burden of displacement simultaneously with their male counterparts. In Bengal women were regarded as 'Annapurna', entrusted with the task of providing food to all family members. It was nothing but a long standing tradition of Bengali womanhood. Due to acute scarcity of food the women community had to undergo tremendous psychological pressure. Many of them committed or attempted to commit suicide for not being able to perform their expected duty properly. In their daily life and activities, the struggle for survival and existence with their male members was just like their shadow companion. The pity of whole thing was that even the local women of their own sex looked down upon them. They were treated as 'untouchables' irrespective of their caste and creed. The local people thought that the women East Bengal had been pulled by the Muslims. The refugee women were debarred from

collecting drinking water from the common water points. The successive deprivation of the displaced women gradually developed a sense of dignity, self-reliance and capability among them. In the long run this helped the refugee women to attain success in the teeth of healthy oppositions and insurmountable hurdles.

In the early hours focus was on the changing trends in presenting women's experiences, where emphasis was solely attached on the theme of women victimization. The time is ripe to look on women not from the point of victimization due to the 'greatest human tragedy', but also to represent 1947 as a period much beyond that. The present scholars concentrate more on the constructive role of the women in the process of rehabilitation. Common people in general and women in particular had made tremendous efforts for getting new identity. They had to traverse a long way riddled with hurdles. It is noticed with amazement that in spite of utter uncertainty, deep pain, irreparable wounds, and emotional strains said women had to come out braving all sorts of obstacles. The most remarkable feature in post-partition of West Bengal was the coming out of the refugee women from the private domain to the public. Defying the confinement within four walls they ventured to come out in public domains. Educated women set out in quest of employment especially in educational institutions, private firms, government and semi-government offices etc. Those who were educationally unsound engaged themselves in various domestic works; Most of them capitalized their training in household activities for commercial purpose.

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