

CHAPTER NINE

REFUGEE PROBLEM , 1947-1953 : SOME ISSUES

The history of Malda after independence and partition can hardly be understood without taking into account the massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan. The inflow had a profound effect on the political, economic and social life of the district.

THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES: A BACKGROUND STUDY

The partition of Bengal not only killed thousands of people, but also uprooted and displaced millions from their traditional homeland, their *Desh*¹. Large number of people, either being directly victimized, or due to fear of violence, left their homes, hoping that they would find peace and security on the other side of the border.

In the case of Punjab, exchange of population was more or less settled once and for all. However, for Bengal, the influx continued in different forms for many years after partition. It has correctly been indicated that, while "the partition of Punjab was a one-time event with mayhem and forced migration restricted primarily to three years (1947-50), the partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process"².

In spite of the fact that the independence of India and Pakistan, accompanied by a large - scale population movement, was an important historical event, the number of refugee studies for the subcontinent is limited to a handful³. It seems to be true that refugee issues have not attracted much scholarly attention in comparison with partition itself. In particular, Bengal has been given relatively little scholarly attention⁴.

In this historical backdrop, our study proposes to understand the experience and identity of refugees from East Pakistan who settled in a border district namely Malda, on the northern part of West Bengal. By tracing the process of movement and settlement of partition refugees in Malda, we will attempt to illustrate how such factors as policy and measures taken by the

Government, the geographical condition of migration, the choice by refugees, and caste affiliation interrelated with each other, and had a combined effect on the identity of refugees. Another concern of our study is that it will focus on the relation between refugees and hosts and more particularly, the attitude of different political parties of the host region towards the refugees.

In the next section, we will look at the chronological process of refugee influx from East Pakistan and review the policies and measures taken by district administration.

9.1 REFUGEE INFLUX INTO MALDA AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

9.1. As table 9.1 shows, the uprooted and displaced people came phase by phase from East Pakistan to Malda.

Table 9.1 : The year-wise influx of refugees into Malda, 1946-1951

Year of arrival in Malda	No. of displaced people		Total
	Males	Females	
1946	105	86	191
1947	2,307	1,978	4,285
1948	2,536	2,685	5,221
1949	3,233	3,041	6,274
1950	22,243	20,992	43,235
1951	494	498	992
Total	30,218	29,280	60,198

Source : Asok Mitra. Ed. *Census of 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks : Malda*, New Delhi, 1954, pp. 72-79.

The first batch of refugees arrived in Malda after the anti-Hindu riots in Noakhali and Tippera in 1946, a year before the actual partition. The shelter-seekers continued to trickle in until the end of 1949⁵. Those, who came during this phase, mostly belonged to the upper and upper middle strata like the landowning, merchant and professional classes. Up to 1949, about 15,971 people came to settle in Malda⁶. The reason for their exodus was not so much large-scale violence but petty extortions, threats and, above all, economic boycotts of Hindu traders and professionals⁷. The first arrival of refugees posed no great problem to the district administration. It was not necessary for the district administration to establish refugee camps⁸. Most of the refugees at this stage were well to do. A small section of these people was able to sell their property in East Pakistan or arrange property exchange with Muslim property owners who were leaving Malda. The educated segment either found jobs or could restart their medical or legal practice again. Government servants posted in East Pakistan accepted the Indian 'option'. A number of refugees brought some money and started business with the help of their relatives in Malda⁹.

However, the picture changed from December 1949 and the influx of refugees in Malda reached its peak in 1950. Anti-Hindu riots in Khulna, Rajshahi, Faridpur and Barisal compelled a large number of people to cross the border. As table 9.1 shows from December 1949 to December 1950, more than forty nine thousand people arrived in Malda¹⁰. The Nehru - Liakat pact¹¹ (April 1950) failed to provide the way for the return of the refugees to their homeland. The refugees who came to Malda from 1950 onwards were mainly displaced peasants and agricultural labourers. This time those who crossed the border were very poor and possessed very little except their labour powers. Most of them belonged to the so-called lower-castes, like Namasudra, Sadgop and Malos¹².

The experience of the refugees of 1950's was considerably different. They did not have access to the social networks of the *bhadralok* who preceded them¹³. For the lower caste and class refugees, there were very few jobs to compete for. They were largely unable to acquire on their own initiative land

on which to rehabilitate themselves. It was this section of refugees who went through the real pain, trauma and agony of the partition¹⁴.

As the Table 9.2 shows, the bulk of the refugees in Malda mainly came from the adjacent Rajshahi district of East Pakistan. A sizeable number also came from Faridpur, Pabna, Dinajpur and Bakharganj:

Table 9.2 : Place of origin of the refugees

Sl. No.	District of origin in East Pakistan	No. of persons
1.	Rajshahi	42,532
2.	Kusthia	36
3.	Jessore	322
4.	Khulna	802
5.	Dinajpur	2,609
6.	Rangpur	430
7.	Bogura	580
8.	Pabna	3,056
9.	Dacca	1,344
10.	Mymensingh	864
11.	Faridpur	4,309
12.	Bakharganj	2,343
13.	Tipperah	310
14.	Nokhali	301
15.	Chittagang	167

16.	Sylhet	21
17.	Others	179
<p>Source : Asok Mitra. Ed. Census of 1951, <i>West Bengal District Handbooks : Malda</i>, New Delhi, 1954, pp. 72-79.</p>		

RESETTLEMENT OF THE EAST PAKISTAN REFUGEES IN MALDA :

In the initial stage, the most difficult problem faced by the district administration was the scarcity of land in Malda able to be utilized for the rehabilitation of refugees¹⁵. The number of evacuees to East Pakistan was less, and more importantly, evacuee properties were not available in Malda because the Muslims who left for East Pakistan were relatively poor and did not possess substantial land holdings¹⁶. As has already been stated, the coming of the first batch of refugees prior to 1950 posed no serious problem to the district administration, as they were few in number. The district administration did not find it necessary to set up any refugee camp. Moreover, there was no clear thinking at the Government level, as to whether the refugees needed relief, which was a temporary affair, or rehabilitation, which was long-term. It was hoped that the refugees would eventually return to East Pakistan and that short-term measures would be enough to cope with the situation¹⁷.

However, by the end of 1950, when the influx of refugees into Malda reached its peak, the district administration was forced to augment relief and rehabilitation efforts. The administrative efforts may be discussed at two levels: urban and rural.

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION IN URBAN AREAS:

A large number of refugees coming mainly from adjacent Rajshahi district of East Pakistan started to settle in the municipal area of Englishbazar. The Commissioners of the Municipality mentioned scarcity of water, electricity, proper drainage system and crisis in other municipal facilities due to the influx of refugees repeatedly¹⁸. Due to the continuing influx of the displaced

persons from East Pakistan, the population of Englishbazar was rocketed up. As Table 9.3 shows, the population of Englishbazar town was nearly doubled during the years 1941 - 1961.

Table 9.3 Growth of population in Englishbazar Town, 1941-1961

Census year	Male	Female	Total Population
1941	12,816	10,518	23,334
1951	16,348	14,315	30,663
1961	24,496	21,494	45,900

Source : J. C. Sengupta, West Bengal District Gazetteers, Malda, 1969, P. 23

In 1951 the Municipality leased out land on cheap rate to the refugees coming from East Pakistan at Mokdumpur¹⁹. The refugees began to settle in the peripheral areas of the town like Sadarghat, Fulbari, Banshbari, Singatala, Pirojpur, Ramakrishna Pally and Haidarpur²⁰. It was a time of troubles for Englishbazar town. The town was groaning under the load of refugees²¹. Scarcity of vacant land was visible in the centre of the town, which was thought to be detrimental to environment and public health²². The number of hawkers in the town was increased to a considerable extent due to the pressure of distressed people and lack of alternative employment²³.

In urban Malda, many refugee families settled on their own. They were given various types of rehabilitation assistance, which included house-building loans, trade loans or professional loans. Government sponsored colonies were also established. There were three such colonies with 600 families²⁴. Up to September 1953, about 200 families were given trade and business loans²⁵.

Steps were also taken for education of refugee children. It was decided that every refugee school-going child should receive free primary schooling and the more deserving among them should get free secondary education²⁶. The

state Government also sanctioned the opening of a new secondary school (Umesh Chandra Bastuhara Vidyalaya) and the expansion of some existing schools to take in some refugee students. Promising refugee student were granted stipends for prosecuting higher education²⁷. Malda College, was established in 1944, received grants from the Government for its infrastructural expansion to accommodate refugee students²⁸.

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION IN RURAL AREAS:

In rural areas of Malda the refugees settled mainly at Gour, Kendua, Baldiaghat, Aiho, Rishipur, Bulbulchandi, Rampara and Mobarakpur²⁹. At Gour the refugee populace concentrated in three camps set up by the district administration:

- a) At the northwest of Bardwari where refugees from Kansat and Sibganj of Rajshahi district settled themselves up³⁰;
- b) The refugees belonging to Namasudra caste from Pabna and Faridpur concentrated in the camp on the East of Burdwari³¹;
- c) At the camp located on the South bank of Choto Sagardighi resided the refugees belonging to upper caste³².

The Malos coming from Pabna were helped to build up their settlement at Bulbulchandi. These Malos from Pabna were very efficient in fishing. Owing to them, a local newspaper informs, the price level of fishes was coming down at Bulbulchandi³³. At Baldiaghat the refugees were predominantly Namasudra in caste. They were excellent cultivators and fishermen³⁴. They were some 15-29 thousands in numbers and came from Faridpur. They were given land, cash money and agricultural equipment by the district administration. At Aiho, Rampara, Rishipur, Kendua and Mobarakpur numerous refugees were settled³⁵.

The editor of a local newspaper, Gourdoot, visited most of the refugee settlements in person³⁶. He made a report on the state of the refugees, their problems and Governmental and Non-Governmental steps to assist them.

The Government officials came forward to assist the refugees in establishing their settlements. They had been doing their best, the Gourdoot reports, to lessen the sufferings of the refugees. At Gour the Government granted them land and cash money and helped them to build up their cottages. At Baldiaghat, the refugees were given land, cash money and agricultural equipments. Moreover, the district administration granted about 250 boats to the refugees for which the Government had to incur an expenditure of Rs. 1500/-³⁷. The editor of Gourdoot felt that a school should be established at Baldiaghat for the continuation of education of the refugee children. At Rishipur a market place and a free M.E. school were established. The administration set up a Rishipur an agricultural office from which seeds, paddy and agricultural equipments were allotted to the refugees. The Gourdoot informed that the Government had spent some three lakhs of rupees for the rehabilitation of the refugees up to July, 1950³⁸.

LIFE IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS

After briefly considering the efforts of the district administration for relief and rehabilitation, let us now turn our attention to life of the displaced people in some of the camps that were set up in Malda to provide shelter to the incoming displaced persons. As the cross-border influx continued interminably in the 1950's, the helpless, uprooted people reached reception and interception centers at the Englishbazar town. From there, they were subsequently sent to the transit camps. The relief and transit camps were set up in different parts of Malda district to provide immediate help to the displaced people³⁹.

The sufferings of the refugees at several refugee camps in Malda came rather prominently in the realm of discourses of the editor of a contemporary local newspaper, the Gourdoot. The memoirs of Lalbihari Majumdar⁴⁰, Bhaktibushan Roy⁴¹ and Sibendu Sekhar Roy⁴². The first problem which confronted the refugees was the insufficiency of medical facilities. A very small number of doctors and paucity of medicines added to their misery. As a result various diseases, namely fever, dencery, small pox etc. became almost epidemic in every relief camps⁴³. The dencery was mostly caused by

putrid 'atta' (ground wheat) doled out to them and contaminated drinking water of the tube-wells⁴⁴. While narrating his experience in a refugee camp at Aiho, Balaram Das (76) said, "The refugees definitely got shelter far way from their home and communal hatred, but scarcity of water, lack of proper health care, irregular supply of ration (dry doles) made their lives unbearable" ⁴⁵. Prafulla K. Chakraborty, a major chronicler of the partition refugees of East Bengal, has narrated the same story at Dhubulia as well as at Cooper's and Kasipur camps, "Camp life soon made the displaced people forget that they were once human beings. Scarcity of water, woeful shortages of sanitary arrangements, inadequate supply of rations called dry doles, which were often putrid, very little milk for children, and complete absence of privacy made life insupportable for the inmates who were usually accustomed to subsist on very little. The Government gave them shelter and straightway threw them back to a Hobbesian State of nature. Life became 'nasty, brutish and short', and almost promiscuous"⁴⁶.

Along with the setting up of refugee camps, the important task of the district administration was the development of refugee colonies. Like other refugee inhabitant areas of West Bengal, there were three categories of colonies - 1) urban and rural; 2) squatters' colonies; and 3) private colonies⁴⁷.

The government colony was the outcome only a small proportion of refugee families. Table 9.4 shows that the majority of refugees in Malda as well as in entire North Bengal lived in settlements that were not developed and maintained by the government.

Table 9.4. : Refuges in North Bengal in and outside government camps and colonies.

Districts	No. of government colonies	Population in government colonies	Refugees outside camps and colonies	Total refugee population
Malda	12	12,339	69,004	72,924

West dinajpur	11	3,865	1,58,095	1,62,949
Jalpaiguri	9	7,850	1,42,306	1,50,156
Dajjeeling	2	3,375	26,668	30,043
Cooch Behar	12	6,550	2,22,118	2,27,827

Source : *Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal (Statement issued by the Government of West Bengal on 15 December 1958)*, cited in P. Chaudhuri, *Refugees in West Bengal : A Study of the Growth and Distribution of Refugee Settlements within the CMD*; Occasional Paper No. 55, Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta, 1983.

Most of the refugee colonies in Malda lacked the basic civic amenities. These colonies provided for the settlers little more than makeshift shelters. They lacked good approach roads and pathways for feeder roads, sanitary latrines, pipe-water supply and electricity. The government colonies were actual and potential slums⁴⁸.

It has been pointed out earlier that a small segment of refugees took shelter in government camps and colonies. The great majority of refugees who settled in West Bengal between 1947 and 1955 thus did so largely or solely through their own efforts⁴⁹. At first, many refugees stayed with relatives or friends or took shelter in camps. But these devices were temporary⁵⁰. Refugee families had to find a place to stay more permanently which would give them some dignity and privacy and was close enough to a town or a city where they could find some work. Such space was in short supply.

It was this combination of pressures which encouraged many refugees simply to grab any free land they could find and to squat upon it⁵¹. Against this backdrop, the squatters' colonies, an important part of the life and landscape of West Bengal, mushroomed. 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 other cases,

apparently vacant land, owned by the government or by big landowners, was acquired through forcible occupation. This process of 'collective takeover' was known as *Jabar dakhla*⁵². Most of these squatters' colonies were established in Calcutta, 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts. These were inhabited mainly by middle-class and working class refugees from East Pakistan⁵³. The refugees built up their own shelters in these areas virtually without any government aid. In order to link the habitation with livelihood, the colonies were set up near the towns or industrial areas.

But, the squatters' colonies were not limited to the cities and suburbs. In rural areas, the refugee peasant took over the uncultivated waste land. Such land was seized not only for habitation but also for cultivation. This type of agricultural colonies was established in Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore, Burdwan, Nadia, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas, West Dinajpur, Malda, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts⁵⁴. It has been argued that, these '*jabar dakhla*' colonies were classic examples of the organized resettlement of the East Pakistani refugees against the rehabilitation policies of the congress government⁵⁵.

The following is the list of thirty eight squatters' colonies set up in Malda in the post 1950 period⁵⁶.

List of the post-1950 displaced persons' squatters' colonies in Malda.

1. Mangalbari Colony.
2. Khaihata Colony
3. Gandhi Colony
4. Charlakshmipur Colony
5. Khanpur Colony
6. Bagalbagi Colony (Ranir Garh)
7. Bilbari-Nazir Khani Colony
8. Buraburitala Krishnapally Colony
9. Paschim Sarbamangala Palli Colony
10. Uttar Mahimnagar and Kanchan Nagar Colony

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| 11. Adina Colony | 12. Gobindapur Colony |
| 13. Duba Khoksan Colony | 14. Kadubari Colony |
| 15. Chandrail Colony | 16. Bolbari Colony |
| 17. Ghasani Bag Colony | 18. Kutubsahar - Golghar Colony |
| 19. Kutubsahar Colony | 20. Dalla Colony |
| 21. Parbatidanga Colony | 22. Agra Colony |
| 23. Telnai Colony | 24. Nandagar and Poali Colony |
| 25. Harishchandrapur and Aragachi Colony | |
| 26. Dharanda and Jugi-Pathar Colony | |
| 27. Pathar Sasuli Colony | 28. Kuchiamore Colony |
| 29. Kendua Colony | 30. Bakshinagar Colony |
| 31. Chhaitangachi Madhyam Kendua (Diary Farm) Colony | |
| 32. Bulbulchandi Rice Mill (Kendua) Colony | |
| 33. Jaydebpur Colony | 34. Digalbari Colony |
| 35. Barwadanga Colony | 36. Bhangatola Colony |
| 37. Fuldanga Colony | |
| 38. Chhaitangachi Madhyam Kendua Colony | |

Living conditions in these fast-growing and densely inhabited settlements were primitive. Since they had grown in an entirely unplanned way, illegally and without license from the government, most did not have even the most basic amenities: drains, electricity or running water⁵⁷. Kshitimohan Roy⁵⁸, a resident of Dalla Colony, who came from Pabna of East Pakistan, said: "The area was full of snakes. There were least possible public amenities. We had to carry drinking water on our own as there were initially no tube-wells in the

area. We were quite well-off there in our *desh*, and here we had to start our lives again like beggars living in a *basti* (slum) - like area”⁵⁹.

THE ATTITUDE OF LOCAL POPULACE TOWARDS THE REFUGEES

Everywhere in West Bengal the attitude of the local populace towards the refugees were not favorable. As one bitter account by an author (whose family was displaced) puts it : ‘The refugees were regarded as intruders. Their East Bengal patois, their fights and quarrels for scarce drinking water and their begrimed bodies excited the derisive scorn of the smart West Bengal people. These loathsome creatures hardly looked like humans. Indeed they were no more than swarm of locusts eating away the already scarce foodstuff in West Bengal’⁵⁹. News was published in the West Bengal Press which ascribed the scarcity of foodstuff to the presence of these unwanted mouths⁶⁰.

It was against such a sentiment that Sir Jadunath Sarkar, in his Presidential address at a conference of East Bengal refugees at the University Institute Hall, uttered his memorable warning : ‘I warn West Bengal - do not spurn away such a rich racial element when seeking shelter at your doors. They alone can make you great if you utilize these human materials. Let our independent province of West Bengal engraft this rich racial birch upon its old decaying trunk and rise to a new era of prosperity and power’⁶¹.

In the case of Malda, the reaction was one of apathy, if not of disdain. We get a clear picture of the attitude of the local populace towards the refugees from the memoirs of Lalbihari Majumdar, local literati as well as the editor of a contemporary local newspaper, namely the Gourdoot. The Gourdoot informed that at few localities, particularly at Bubbulchandi the attitude of local populace towards the refugees was rather hostile. They regarded the refugees to be intruders to their native land. They held the refugees responsible for their sufferings⁶².

The refugees, on the other hand being uprooted from their native land in East Pakistan, were very keen to settle at a new place. As a result a tension cropped up between the natives and the newcomers⁶³. This attitude of the

natives was criticized by the editor of *Gourdoot*. He appealed to local residents to be sensible and generous to the problems faced by the displaced persons. The editor asked the local population to keep in mind the fact that these refugees had their own land and home a few days back. But they were used as pawns on the chess-board of political leaders and were thrown to an uncertain future⁶⁴.

The editor reminded the natives that thousands of men had left this district for Pakistan. Most of them were agriculturists. So a new problem came on the surface – the shortage of agricultural people in the entire district. As a result there arose a possibility of large-scale transformation of arable land into waste land. In the opinion of the editor, the newcomers might be utilized to fill up this vacuum. By rehabilitating them in different places from where large-scale migration took place and by giving them abandoned land to cultivate, the editor thought, this new problem could be solved⁶⁵.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES TOWARDS THE REFUGEES

Partition transformed Bengal's political landscape. Having lost two-thirds of its territory to Pakistan, West Bengal was left with only 89 of the 250 constituencies in the assembly of undivided Bengal. This upset all the old balances and changed the standing of every political party in the new state, often in quite unintended ways⁶⁶. In the 1950s, it became clear that partition had irrevocably transformed West Bengal's society and had profoundly changed every aspect of its political life. The factional fight within the Congress rank to grab the power in the newly independent province had already tarnished the party's reputation. With the influx of refugees a serious inner-party quarrels cropped up⁶⁷.

Atulya Ghosh and his Hooghly faction, in their bid to destroy East Bengal's influence in the Congress, deliberately unleashed potentially dangerous 'sons-of-the-soil' sentiments⁶⁸. In October 1947, a number of prominent Congressmen of the Hooghly faction met at the Tamluk Memorial Football Stadium in Midnapore. They pilloried the refugees as rude upstarts, country

cousins who had ignominiously run away from home. In his tirade, Nikunja Maity, the Mahishya leader from Midnapore, denounced Prafulla Ghosh's ministry for 'following the old politics of the Muslim League ministry by taking no interest in West Bengal people'⁶⁹. Jadabendranath Panja from Burdwan insisted that 'West Bengal people were not in a position to give shelter to all East Bengal Hindus' and even branded the Eastern Bengal refugees as potential fifth columnists⁷⁰.

This type of ambivalent attitude of the Congress towards the refugees had its imprint in the political canvas of a northern Bengal district, namely Malda. The Gourdoot, a contemporary local newspaper, highlighted the vacillating policy of the local Congress. Subodh Misra, the District Congress President, categorically opposed the 'infiltration' of the displaced people into the district. The unprecedented food crisis of Malda, according to Misra, was a direct outcome of the refugee migration into the district. By publishing several pamphlets he demanded their immediate expulsion from the district⁷¹. The local Communists and the R.S.S. strongly opposed his view. Even the attitude of Subodh Misra did not find favor with a section of the local congressmen, including Sourindra Misra⁷².

At this juncture Mr. Abdulla-al-Mahmud, the Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan, came to Malda to meet the prominent personalities of both Hindu and Muslim communities⁷³. At this meeting he praised the effort of the district administration and local people to tackle the communal problem. But Subodh Misra, then the District Congress President, made a scathing criticism of the district administration for failing to tackle the communal problem effectively. He stated - when some Hindu anti-social elements attacked some people belonging to minority community at Gajol, the administration reflected an apathetic attitude. He further stated that the volume of oppression in the district of Malda upon the minority community was of most severe nature. The local prominent personalities present at the meeting protested vehemently and the District Magistrate asked him to give evidence. Subodh Misra however, refrained from making further statement⁷⁴.

The editor of *Gourdoot*, after narrating the incident informed that a section of local people believed that the real cause behind Subodh Mesra's statement was the attempt to capture votes from the minority community. We thus notice that the attitude of the local congress towards the refugees created dissatisfaction among a section of the local people. The communists made an attempt to capitalize the situation. They started campaigning among the displace people against the hostile attitude of the local congress party⁷⁵. The dissatisfaction gradually turned into resentment.

In such a situation Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, the state congress leader, came to Malda to meet the congress workers and local people. At a meeting with congress workers held in 26 June 1950 Prafulla Chandra Ghosh rebuked the congress workers for their selfishness and love for power⁷⁶. An open meeting was convened next day which turned into a total pandemonium. A huge uproar began from the very beginning of the meeting. Some people occupied the dais, raised slogan against the local congress leaders, snatched away the microphone from hands of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and pushed Subodh Misra and Sourindra Misra down from the stage. They demanded the immediate expulsion of Subodh Misra from the congress as he had taken a rather inhuman attitude towards the helpless refugees. The meeting had to be postponed⁷⁷.

In the opinion of the editor of the *Gourdoot*, the communists might have exploited the situation, but at the same time he admitted that the resentment of the local people was justified. The congress attitude towards the refugees hurt the sentiment of the local populace. These local congress leaders succeeded, the editorial of *Gourdoot* ran, in sparking off resentment and hostility, not only among the refugees themselves but among a public increasingly sympathetic to their plight⁷⁸.

Thus, centering round the issue of refugee infiltration, the local political scenario became complicated. The division in the congress rank came on the surface. The congress attitude towards the refugees was condemned by a section of local intelligentsia⁷⁹. A group of local congress leaders contemplated that the resentment of the people was more against some

individual leaders than the congress party. It was very disappointing that, the editorial of Gourdoot ran, within a few years of independence some narrow-minded politician began to fulfill their own selfish interests⁸⁰.

In such a situation the District Congress, bowing to public pressure, had to take some measures to placate the public sentiment. A Committee to Aid and Rehabilitate the Displaced Persons was formed in congress initiative⁸¹. In Gourdoot the proceedings of the committee from April 2 to June 15, 1950 was published. From it we know that during this period the committee had raised funds up to Rs. 4,204/- from donation. The expenditure of the committee in this connection was as follows :

Table 9.5 Total Expenditure of the Congress Committee

Aid and expenditure	Expense in Rs.
Aid in clothes	1,049
Aid in cash	112
Aid in rice and crop	95
Aid in rehabilitation	81
Aid to displaced students	18
Travel expenses	30
Expenditure for printing & campaigning	252
Office expenditure	49
Postal expenses	40
Total	1,726

This statement of expenditure was editorially criticized in Gourdoot and it was alleged that the collected sum for assisting the refugees was not properly utilized⁸². In the first place, the editor stated, the total collection fell well short of the estimated amount when no less an organization than the District Congress was involved in the venture. Moreover, the editor wrote, the fashion in which expenditure was incurred, smacked of poor thinking. While the refugees got only Rs. 95/- and Rs. 81/- for food and rehabilitation respectively, the congress committee had expended Rs. 252/- for printing and campaigning. It was, in the opinion of the editor, too much and absolutely unnecessary⁸³. The editor referred to other instances where expenditure was grossly unreasonable. The committee had expended Rs. 49/- as office expenses, Rs. 30/- as travel expenses, Rs. 40/- as postal expenses; whereas the refugee students got only Rs. 18/- to buy books and other study materials. The committee stated that it distributed 168 pairs of clothes among the displaced persons. The area-wise distribution of clothes by the congress committee is shown below :

Table 9.6 Area-wise distribution of clothes among the refugees by the Congress Committee.

Thana	Clothes
Bamongola	46 pairs
Habibpur	55 pairs
Old Mada	55 pairs
Kharba	9 pairs
Harischandripur	3 pairs
Source : The Gourdoot, July 27, 1950	

The editor indicated that this 168 pairs of clothes, distributed among the refugees, cost the committee of Rs.1049/- which in the prevailing price rate was sufficiently high⁸⁴. The editor alleged that the congress committee

simply squandered away money in the name of aiding the refugees. He stated that the local public opinion was in favour of an impartial enquiry into the whole matter. According to the editor, the relief activities of the Women's Committee to Aid the Displaced Persons and the Refugee Aid Committee were more organized and reflected rather sensible approach than their congress counterpart. The Congress could make its achievements more impressive in serving the destitute, unfortunately hailing from East Pakistan. However, factional squabbles within the congress fold rendered everything impossible and congress performance was finally very dismal⁸⁵.

The local communists, for their part, were initially suspicious of the refugees. They assumed that refugees were deeply infected by the communalism from which they had fled⁸⁶. Moreover, the early refugees were, at first, anxious not to offend the congress, which held power both at the level of the state and the centre and from whom they expected help⁸⁷. Gradually, a bridge was built between the party and the refugees. The refugees, on their part, became increasingly disillusioned with the local Congress party for its policy⁸⁸. The refugees could see that the the local congress party had neither the will to give the refugees the help they wanted nor any intention of doing so. The local communists, on their part, realized that they could not ignore such a potential force like that of the refugees. Manik Jha and Naren Chakraborty, the local communist leaders, threw themselves actively into the project of bringing the refugees behind the party⁸⁹. Their activities got a new impetus when in August 1950 the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), organized mainly by the communists, was formed in Calcutta⁹⁰. The local communists protested vigorously when the Congress-led government passed the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act in 1951⁹¹. In this way, the local communists came in closer to the aspirations and demands of the refugees. The refugees of camps and colonies proved a fertile base of support for the local communists in later years⁹².

OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS TO HELP THE REFUGEES

It was reported that several organizaions came forward to help the displaced persons. The first among them was the Refugee Aid Committee. It operated under the supervision of the Rashtriya Swayam Sebak Sangha (RSS). The Secretary of the ommittee was Subha Narayan Giri, a rich businessman. It requested local populace to extend generous help to the refugees⁹³. From the report of the committee it was known that it had collected money, rice and clothes for distributing among the refugees :

Table 9.7 Collection and distribution of relief items among the refugees, 1950

Collected	Distributed among the refugees
Rs. 3,255	Rs. 2,249
113 seers of rice	103 seers
216 piece of clothes	180 pieces
Source : The Gourddot, June 15, 1950	

It was further reported that on March 4, 1950 a Women's Committee to Aid the Displaced Persons was formed. Mrs. Tarubala Sen, a prominent congress worker, became its Secretary⁹⁴. Upto 5 June 1950 it collected Rs. 4823/- to help the destitute. The organization spent a sum of Rs. 2500/- to build up cottages for the refugees at Ramkeli. It also planned to establish a primary school there. From its headquarter at Gandhi Dharamshala at Malda town, the workers of the Women's Committee distributed rice, barley, soap, soda etc. among the destitute everyday. Moreover, the committee also distributed some two hundred pieces of clothes among them. The editor of Gourddot spoke high of the efforts of the Women's committee in this regard in unequivocal terms⁹⁵.

The Gourddot reported that the Malda Ramkrishna Mission was also active in organizing relief works among the refugees. The Mission opened a relief

camp at Singabad station in collaboration with the Malda Red Cross. From this camp dry food, milk, sugar etc. had been distributed. Moreover the Mission had established free medical centers at five places of the district, namely (i) Singabad Station ; (ii) Rishipur ; (iii) Chanpur Village at Bamongola ; (iv) Golapganj ; and (v) Gandhi Dharamshala⁹⁶. Nearly 1386 patients received medical treatment from these centers upto 31 May 1950. The Mission had to spend some Rs. 200/- per month to run these free medical centers. It also distributed text books among 43 displaced students and extended financial help to some students to continue their education. The Ramkrishna Mission provided financial assistance to ten refugee families for building up cottages⁹⁷.

In spite of these efforts, most of the refugees who settled in Malda led extremely hard lives and suffered great privation. In fact, society in West Bengal as a whole was profoundly affected by absorbing millions of displaced people. A scholar has recently argued that though the refugees from East Pakistan had a language, culture and religion in common with their hosts, they were not 'assimilated' or 'rehabilitated' in West Bengal in any meaningful way, and for decades after they arrived in India they remained on the margins of society⁹⁸.

In the case of Malda one noticeable feature was that unlike Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar the number of Muslims who left the district for East Pakistan after partition were relatively small. So there was scarcity of vacant cultivable land. It has already been discussed that in Malda the refugees who took shelter in the camps were mostly cultivators. Therefore, a lack of access to the cultivable land for a long period of time increased their grievances. In fact, this was the picture of West Bengal as a whole. By the time of the first general election based on universal franchise in 1952, the refugees had become a force that no party could ignore. Many researchers, in fact, are of the opinion that the constant pressure of the refugees for land and rehabilitation played a crucial role in the abolition of Bengal's zamindari system in 1953⁹⁹.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Dipesh Chakraborty has translated desh as 'foundational homeland'. See Dipesh Chakraborty, *Remembered Villages : Representation of Hindu Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the partition*, Economic and political weekly, Vol. 31, No. 32, August 10, 1996, p. 2144
2. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta ed., *The Trauma and The Triumph : Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, Kolkata, Stree, 2003, p. 2
3. Tetsuya Nakatani, *Away from Home : The Movement and Settlement of Refugees from East Pakistan in West Bengal*, in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *State, Society and Displaced people in South Asia*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2004, p. 80
4. Gyanesh Kudaisya, *Divided Landscape, Fragmented Identities : East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India, 1947 - 79*, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 17 (1), 1966, P. 25. Concerning the partition refugees of East Bengal, some studies that reflect recent scholarly interests have been made since the mid - 180's. For example, see Prafulla K. Chakraborty, *The Marginal Men : The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Calcutta, Naya Udyog, 1999; Dipesh Chakraborty (1996), op. cit.; Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds), 2003, op. cit.; Ranabir Samaddar, *Reflections on Partition of the East*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1997; Nilanjana Chatterjee, *The East Bengal Refugees : A Lesson in Survival*, in S. Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta : The Living City*, Calcutta, Oxford University Press, 1990; Sanjay K. Ray (ed.), *Refugees and Human Rights : Social and Political Dynamics of Refugee Problem in Eastern and Northeastern India*, Jaipur, Rawat, 2001; Samir Kumar Das, *State Responses to the Refugee Crisis : Relief and Rehabilitation in the East*, in Ranabir Samaddar (ed.), *Refugees and the State : Practices and Asylum and Care in India, 1947 - 2000*, New Delhi, Sage, 2003; Anil Sinha, *Pashchimbanger*

Udbastu Upanibesh (in Bengali), Calcutta, Book Club, 1995; Pranati Choudhuri, *Refugees in West Bengal : A Study of the Growth and Distribution of Refugee Settlement within the Calcutta Metropolitan District*, Working Paper, No. 55, Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1980; Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition : Bengal and India 1947-1967*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2008

5. Asok Mitra, *Census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Malda*, (hereafter Census 1951), New Delhi, 1954, p.72
6. *Ibid.*, p.78
7. Asok Mitra, *Tin Kuri Dash (in Bengali)*, Vol. III, Kolkata, Dey's Publishing, 1993, p. 33
8. *Ibid.*
9. Asok Mitra, *The New India 1948-55 : Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1991, p.16; Ratan Dasgupta, *Pourasabhar Karyabibaran Engrej bazar Sahar: 1900-2000 (in Bengali)*, Kolkata, Pragatishil Prakashak, 2004, p. 21
10. Asok Mitra, *Census 1951, op. cit.*, p.78
11. The Nehru-Liakat Pact was signed on 8 April 1950. By it, it was decided that those people who had left their homeland to other country would be encouraged to come back to their native land and the government would restore the abandoned property to them.
12. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Maldaha Ablambane Jibansmiriti, op.cit.*, Gourdoot, 14 July 1951
13. *Ibid.*
14. Pia Oberoi, *Exile and Belonging : Refugees and State Policy in South Asia*, New Delhi, Oxford, 2006, P. 64

15. Asok Mitra, *Census 1951*, *op. cit.*, p.80
16. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, *op. cit.*, *Gourdoot*, June 15, 1950; That comparatively less Muslims had left for East Pakistan was common to other parts of West Bengal also : see Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Demographic Upheaval of Partition : Refugees and Agricultural Resettlement in India, 1947 - 67*, South Asia, Vol. XVII, Special Issue, 1995, p. 89
17. Asok Mitra, *The New India*, *op. cit.*, p.20
18. *Proceedings Book of Englishbazar Municipality*, (hereafter *Proceedings Book*), December 10, 1951
19. *Ibid.*, May 10, 1951
20. *Ibid.*, Special Meeting, April 30, 1951
21. *Ibid.*, November, 28, 1953
22. *Ibid.*, December 3, 1953
23. *Ibid.*, December 6, 1950
24. Asok Mitra, *Census 1951*, *op.cit.*, p.84
25. J.C. Sengupta, *Malda District Gazetteer*, *op. cit.*, p.76
26. Asok Mitra, *The New India*, *op. cit.*, p.24
27. J. C. Sengupta, *Malda District Gazetteer*, *op. cit.*, p.79
28. *Proceedings Book*, Malda College Governing Body, 8. 7. 1951
29. *Gourdoot*, June 15, 1950
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Gourdoot*, June 15, 1950

33. *Ibid.*
34. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay provides a detailed account of social and political life of the Namasudras in Bengal : see S. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India : The Namasudras of Bengal 1872-1947*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996
35. *Gourdoot*, June 15, 1950
36. *Gourdoot*, July 13, 1950
37. *Gourdoot*, June 15, 1950
38. *Gourdoot*, July 27, 1950
39. *Ibid.*
40. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Maldaha Ablambane Jibansmiriti* (in Bengali; Published serially in *Gourdoot*, during 1950 - 54)
41. Bhaktibushan Roy, *Ek Udvastur Dinalipi* (Unpublished), p.32
42. Sibendu Sekhar Roy, *Amar Dekha Maldaher Udbastu Jiban* (in Bengali; unpublished), p.42
43. *Gourdoot*, July 13, 1950; Sibendu Sekhar Roy, *Amar Dekha Maldaher Udbastu Jiban*, *op.cit.*, p. 25
44. Bhaktibushan Roy, *Dinalipi*, *op. cit.*, p. 15
45. Based on the interview of Balaram Das with the author on 8 January 2008
46. Profulla K. Chakraborty, *The Marginal Men*, *op.cit.*, p.56
47. The Government sponsored colony was a settlement where the government acquired land and prepared a layout plan, and then refugees in transit camps were brought squatters' colonies emerged as refugees sought shelter by illegally occupying vacant land and

these colonies received no government aid, private colonies were set up by the refugees themselves, with or without government assistance, mostly through legal means, i.e., by acquiring or purchasing land - see Pranati Chaudhuri, *Refugees in West Bengal : A Study of the Growth and Distribution of Refugee Settlement within the CMD*, Occasional Paper No. 55, Calcutta, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, pp. 14-30

48. Based on interview of Manik Jha with the author on 5 July 1996
49. Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition : Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, First South Asian edition, 2008, P. 141
50. *Report of the Working Group on the residual problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal*, Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation Development of Rehabilitation, Government of India Press, March 1976, P. 6
51. Joya Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, P. 141
52. Pablo Bose, Dilemmas of Diaspora : Partition, Refugees, and the Politics of 'Home', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 10, 1999
53. Anil Sinha, *Paschimbanger Udbastu Upanibesh* (in Bengali), Book club, Calcutta, 1995, P. 3
54. *Report of the Working Group on the Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal*, Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, Department of Rehabilitation, Government of India Press, March 1976, P. 11
55. Anil Sinha, *op.cit.*, P. 20
56. Prafulla K. Chakraborty, *The Marginal Men*, *op. cit.*, Appendix - E, P. 485

57. Based on interview of Gokul Das, Rampada Sarkar of Buraburitala Krishnapally Colony, Dharani Sarkar, Mani Biswas of Adina colony, Rasbehari Choudhury, Madan Gopal Karmakar of Dalla Colony, Harendra Nath Mondal, Kanai Sarkar of Kendua colony, Nitai Das, Abani Sarkar of Bhangatola colony. The conditions of such squatters' colonies were similar in other refugee populated parts of Bengal as well - see *Report of the Working Group on the Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal*, p.11; '*Report on Rehabilitation of displaced persons from East Pakistan squatting on Government and Requisitioned Properties in West Bengal*', Committee of Review of Rehabilitation in West Bengal, Ministry of Labour Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India Press, May 1970, pp. 39-40
58. Based on the interview with the present researcher on 22 June, 2008
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 30 June 1948
61. *ibid.*, 18 August 1948
62. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, *op.cit.*, Gourdoot, July 2, 1951
63. *The Gourdoot*, July 13, 1950; Sibendu Sekhar Roy, *Amar Dekha Maldaher Udbastu Jiban*, p. 25
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition*, *op.cit.*, p.221
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, pp.221-222
69. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 June 1950
70. *Ibid.*

71. *The Gourdoot*, 4 July 1950
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, Anil Sinha, *op.cit.*, p. 20
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Maldaha Samachar*, 30 June 1950
78. *The Gourdoot*, 8 July 1950
79. *Ibid.*, 27 July 1950
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Maldaha Samachar*, 2 August, 1950
82. *The Gourdoot*, 27 July 1950
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Maldaha Samachar*, 3 August 1950
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. Bhktibushan Roy, *Dinalipi*, *op.cit.*, p.25
90. In August 1950, Communists organized the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), which brought to its standing committee representatives of the Forward Block, the Socialist Unity Centre, the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (rebel group), the Democratic

Vanguards, the Bolshevik Party, the Socialist Republican Party and even the Hindu Mahasabha - see Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*, op.cit.P.76

91. 'Memoir' of Manik Jha (unpublished), one of the founder members of the local Communist Party.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *The Gourdoot*, 15 June 1950
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. Joya Chatterjee, *The Spoils of Partition*, op.cit., p.150
99. Prafulla K. Chakraborty, *The Marginal Men*, op.cit., p.259