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**Post-Partition Rehabilitation of
Refugees in India**

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Post-Partition Rehabilitation of Refugees in India*

Pallavi Chakravarty

Introduction

This paper analyses the very first task set for the nascent nation-state of India—the rehabilitation of a vast number of displaced persons who were rendered homeless in the wake of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Partition created two groups of displaced persons in India—those coming from West Pakistan and those coming from East Pakistan. This paper looks at the government-sponsored rehabilitation policies implemented for these displaced persons, and draws out a comparison of the treatment meted out to them. It also looks at the role of the displaced persons (West and East) in the task of rehabilitating themselves in the new homeland.

In looking at the aftermath of partition with a special focus on an often ignored aspect in partition studies, i.e., post-partition rehabilitation, this paper focuses on the impact of partition in greater detail. A comparative analysis of the rehabilitation measures adopted by the government of India vis-à-vis the refugees from Bengal and Punjab brings to light the issue of deprivation of one set of refugees and privilege to another. This is an aspect often pointed out by political commentators and scholars as well, but by making a direct comparison I present this contrast in clearer terms. The difference in the treatment meted out to the refugees is reflective of the state ideology regarding its area of

* Lecture delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 6 November 2012.

responsibility. That is to say, 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 in India has been attempted here.

Historiography

Partition historiography has evolved through various stages, each having a different area of emphasis. Thus, whereas, the earlier writings focused on the ‘why and how’ questions, now the emphasis is upon the theme of refugees and their survival stories. Three distinct phases can be identified in the evolution of partition historiography—study of ‘high politics’,¹ a description of partition and its meaning, and finally, the study of the aftermath of partition.

Works on ‘high-politics’ discuss the ‘what-and-how’ questions related to partition, i.e., such works probe in detail the cause, course, and consequence of this most tragic event. Depending upon the nationality of the author and his/her degree of involvement in the event, one finds in these works a prejudiced description of the factors responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. Thus, whereas, the British authors focus on the theme of partition as an event which was inevitable, and take pride in having solved this great Indian conundrum with surgical accuracy, the Indian and Pakistani authors blame each other for this ‘greatest human tragedy’. However, even this trend in partition historiography has witnessed a revision of arguments. Thus, from a complete demonization of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his party, the Muslim League, a more nuanced understanding of the issues, people and regions involved has introduced significant alternatives within this strand of partition historiography.

Hence, the next trend in partition historiography looks at describing the event as experienced by the people who were actually affected by the Partition of the subcontinent and the corresponding violence and displacement. Partition here is described in a manner different from

¹ Roy. A. 1990. ‘The High Politics of India’s Partition: The Revisionist Perspective’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 24(2): 385–408.



the way it has been done in conventional historiography: timeline of events leading to partition, causes, course and consequences. Rather, here the focus is on the immeasurable violence of that time and its implications in the present-day lives of the people of the subcontinent. Thus, for these scholars partition is as much the truth of the subcontinent history as its Independence is. Further, while, Independence is still a reality today, the ghost of partition too survives and is revoked whenever necessary to stir communal passion.

Yet, both these trends in partition historiography have one common limitation—works on ‘high-politics’ and on the description of the event have their end point in 1947–1948. The need is to go beyond this time period. This is the area explored in the most recent works on partition—its aftermath, its continuing legacy and its long-term impact. These works seek to look beyond the politics of partition and instead focus on the politics after it—rehabilitation policies and the debates around it, and the struggle of the refugees in finding a place for themselves in the new land as its new citizens. Apart from the theme of rehabilitation of refugees, two other important areas of focus in this phase of partition historiography include—border area studies, and the troubled question of citizenship and loyalties in post-partition India.

Within this recent trend in partition historiography, it is the less explored area which is the focus of this paper—looking at the Partition of India from the perspective of comparative analysis. The comparative approach has been adopted on an even larger scale before while focusing on the numerous ‘partitions’ that have occurred in the 20th century.² As stated by Jassal and Ben-Ari, ‘By deploying the comparative imagination, comparative perspectives and the set of approaches comparison involves, [the book] seeks to stretch our understanding of partition as a phenomenon of modernity as well as a set of organizing principles.’ Theirs is a comparative analysis of the

²Jassal, SmitaTewari and Eyal Ben-Ari (eds). 2007. *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts*, New Delhi: Sage Publishers; Deschaumes, G. and RadaIvekovic. (2001). *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Talbot, Ian. (2006). *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar, 1947–1957*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.

three partitions which took place at about the same time—India/Pakistan, East/West Germany and Israel/Palestine. At the level of politics, it is seen that in all the three cases, partition came to be used as an exit strategy of the colonial powers; at the level of experience, similar notions of displacement and homelessness are observed.

This paper, thus, looks at the Partition of Punjab and Bengal, and draws out similarities and differences in the post-partition rehabilitation of refugees. The attempt made here is to look at the first task present before the newly independent state of India, i.e., the rehabilitation of refugees and its handling of it. The paper looks at the rehabilitation policies as introduced by the government of India for the refugees coming from West and East Pakistan. The purpose is to elaborate upon an aspect which is either misrepresented in the official discourse, or mentioned as a brief footnote in the works of the more discerning later-day scholars. This is the aspect of the East–West difference in the program of rehabilitation. By elaborating upon the acts and policies of the State, this paper probes the problem of rehabilitation in greater detail.

Brief Overview

India was, and still is, not a signatory to the 1951 United Convention on the Status of Refugees, or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.³ Hence, refugees in India are dealt with on an adhoc basis, and from time to time legislative policies are passed pertaining to the needs of the refugees. In the immediate aftermath of partition, it was such legislative policies which were implemented to rehabilitate the ‘partition-refugee’. This paper deals with such policies and brings to light its varied application to the refugees from West and East Pakistan. In the process the following themes are covered:

- Defining the displaced persons
- Evacuation and Migration
- Policy on relief and rehabilitation

³Chimni, B. S. (2003). ‘Status of Refugees in India: Structural Ambiguity’, in Ranabir Samaddar, *Refugee State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947–2003*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 443.



Defining the Displaced Persons

The importance of looking at the definition of the displaced person lies in the fact that it was the first step taken in the rehabilitation programme, i.e., identifying the people who were to be ‘justly’ entitled to state-sponsored rehabilitation in India. In the transition from being identified as victims of partition to that as the citizens of the State, a great number of people were included and many excluded.

The initial stand of both the governments (India and Pakistan) was that the nation would be divided but the people would stay where they were. Thus, appeals to stay on were made by Jawaharlal Nehru (India) and Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Pakistan) to the people who were caught on the ‘wrong’ side of the border. They were promised equal status and no discrimination on the basis of religion. But, unprecedented violence in the west led to large-scale migration and this effected a shift in the attitude of the government towards migration of the displaced persons into India (and Pakistan). Such violence necessitated prompt action from the government and, so evacuation of these displaced persons became its first task. It is from here that the origin of the word and concept of the displaced person in the Indian context began.

One of the earliest instances of the use of the term displaced persons occurs in the Resettlement of Displaced Persons (Land Acquisition) Ordinance in 1948.⁴ Here the displaced person was defined as—

any person who, on account of the setting up of the Dominion of India and Pakistan, or on account of civil disturbances, or the fear of such disturbances in any area now forming part of Pakistan, has been displaced from or has left his place of residence in such area after the first day of March, 1947, and who has subsequently been residing in India.

⁴ Applicable to Delhi region. But there was a similar Act passed for the Punjab region as well. The East Punjab Refugees Rehabilitation (Buildings and Building Sites) Act, 1948.

This definition was further modified in one of the most important acts of Parliament for the benefit of the displaced person—The Displaced Persons (Claims) Act (1950)⁵—in the following manner:

... any person who, on account of the setting up of the Dominion of India and Pakistan, or on account of civil disturbances, or the fear of such disturbances in any area now forming part of Pakistan, has after the first day of March, 1947, left or been displaced from, his place of residence in such area and who has been subsequently residing in India, and includes any person who is resident in India and who for that reason is unable or has been made unable to manage, supervise or control any immovable property belonging to him in Pakistan.

It is observed that modifications were made to the definition to cater to the particular stage of rehabilitation. The earlier definition dated back to 1948 and was representative of the initial phase of rehabilitation which was restricted to the provision of relief. The second definition of 1950, and specially the very act from which it is taken, is representative of the government's intention to provide compensation for the losses suffered by the displaced persons and also to permanently rehabilitate them. Government policy regarding the displaced persons from now on was not only about relief, but also about rehabilitation. Along with the Administration of Evacuee Property Act (1950), which also used the same definition for the displaced persons in addition to introducing a new category of persons—the evacuee, this definition also shows that permanent rehabilitation would mean the displacement of one section of the population to accommodate another.⁶

⁵ 'An Act to provide for the registration and verification of claims of displaced persons in respect of immovable property in Pakistan' Acts of Parliament, 1950, Ministry of Law.

⁶ 'Evacuee' was a person who was leaving or assumed to be leaving or in some cases forced to leave their original homeland and migrate to the other side. In India, the Muslims were taken as evacuees and likewise it was Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan.



Going back to the definition of the displaced persons (as used in the Claims Act 1950), we can deduce a number of points. The cut-off date is set at 1st March 1947. This is so because that is when the riots are presumed to have started in Punjab. The definition includes all the people who moved out of ‘*any area now forming part of Pakistan*’ into India on account of ‘civil disturbances’, or, even ‘the fear of such disturbances’. This point is worth noting, since, by this definition then, it is clear that the State does not demarcate between migrants from West Pakistan and those from its eastern flank. Also, the State recognises displacement of the people not only on account of direct ‘civil disturbances’, but also on account of ‘fear’ of such disturbances. But while categorisation of the ‘displaced person’ remained uniform, yet at the time of application, it was accompanied by certain riders which prevented the migrants from East Pakistan from availing benefits which should have been meant for both sets of refugees.⁷ Hence, it can be said that definition-wise, from the very beginning it was affirmed that refugees from West Pakistan would be here to stay; consequently permanent rehabilitation was only a natural corollary to the whole process of identifying refugees and aliens.

The definition of the displaced persons in the east was markedly different. It was in Calcutta and Noakhali that the arc of partition violence actually began, yet, as noted by Sumit Sarkar (‘Mahatma’s finest hour’ in *Modern India (1885–1947)*, Macmillan, New Delhi) the Mahatma, by his mere presence, had managed to quell the storm for a relatively long enough period. It was on this account that violence in the east was much less compared to the west. This provided the authorities a glimmer of hope. They felt that the heavy influx in the west could be prevented from being repeated in the east and hence made all efforts to stop the influx there. Such was the context in which the displaced person in the east was defined. A close observation of

⁷ For eg: The very Act from which this definition has been derived (Displaced Persons Claims Act, 1950), is applicable to only West Pakistan migrants by virtue of a provision in the Act which clearly mentions— ‘West Pakistan’ means territories of Pakistan excluding the Province of East Bengal; and that the ‘claims’ to be made only by those who have immovable property in West Pakistan.

the various definitions of the displaced persons in the east shows that the definitions were based on the following factors—event of violence, time of arrival, and degree of rehabilitation.

Definition based on the Event of Violence

One of the earliest definitions of the displaced person in the east was as follows:

‘Displaced Person’ means any person who in the opinion of the competent authority—

1. was ordinarily resident in East Bengal but on account of communal disturbances occurring after 1st day of October 1946, *left East Bengal and arrived in West Bengal on or before the 31st day of December 1950*; and,
2. *has no land in West Bengal of which he is the owner*; and,
3. has affirmed in an affidavit filed in the office of the competent authority that *he does not intend to return to East Bengal*.⁸

The main problem with this definition was that even though it included the victims of Noakhali violence, yet, despite the persistence of migration no provisions were made for those migrants who came after the ‘31st day of December 1950’. Therefore, a revised definition of the displaced person was adopted in 1955 which was far more inclusive. The displaced person was now defined as follows—

a person who was ordinarily resident in the territories now comprised in East Pakistan, but who on account of civil disturbances or on account of the Partition of India has migrated—

- a) in the case of persons migrating from the district of

⁸ As defined in the Rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951. This was, in effect, the first major act applied by the State Government to benefit the displaced persons.

Noakhali or the district of Comilla now forming part of East Pakistan, on or after the 1st October 1946, and

- b) in the case of persons migrating from any other area in East Pakistan on or after the 1st June 1947.

to the territories now included in the Union of India, *with the intention of taking up permanent residence within such territories.*⁹

This made room for the perpetual influx of migrants from East Pakistan. However, increasing the dateline did not really mean increasing the liability of the government vis-à-vis the refugees as the eligibility criteria for receiving rehabilitation benefits were crafted suitably to eliminate quite a few of them. To obtain any rehabilitation benefits from the State, the migrant would have to produce necessary documents as evidence of migration from East Pakistan—Migration certificates, Citizenship certificates, documents proving the option taken in case of an optee is Government servant. If these were unavailable then the following could also be used as a proof of migration—Refugee Registration certificate, Border slip, border ration slip, certified copy of National Census Register. And in case these were also unavailable, then ‘their status as displaced persons would be determined on the basis of circumstantial evidence by an officer not below the rank of a sub-divisional Magistrate’. In any case, the final decision taken was that ‘no person migrating after 15th October 1952 should be recognised as a displaced person unless he produced a migration certificate’.

Finally, the second qualifying statement mentioned in the definition above was the need to declare before a competent authority the clear intention of not ever going back to East Bengal. Whereas, the earlier definition mentions this clearly, the revised definition hints at it—‘with the intention of taking up permanent residence...’¹⁰ This reflects the

⁹ Ministry of Rehabilitation, Annual Report, 1955–56, definition as decided upon in the Conference of the Rehabilitation Ministers from the Eastern States held at Darjeeling, 20–22 October, 1955, pp. 86–87. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ See definition mentioned in note 9.

perception of the Indian State that migration in the east was a temporary affair, and that when the situation would improve in East Pakistan the migrants would go back. Such a perception dictated the rehabilitation policies for the migrants coming from East Pakistan, limiting it to relief. It was only later that it was finally realised that the migrants were here to stay.

Definition based on Time of Arrival

A phase-wise migration pattern was a peculiarity in the East, and it is this factor which resulted in a phase-wise categorisation of the migrants.

Those migrants who came during the first phase of migration (1947–1958) were referred to as the ‘old migrants’. They were identified as refugees coming out of genuine grievances of a political nature and were hence, accepted as government liability. These refugees were mostly rehabilitated in West Bengal and some were sent out to the neighbouring states as well. However, to put an end to the perpetual influx, 31st March 1958 was chosen as the cut-off date after which migration from East Pakistan was considered illegal.

The migrants who came during the period 1st April 1958–31st December 1963 were considered ‘illegal migrants’ because the Indian state saw no ‘valid reason’ for migration in this time of normalcy other than for purely economic factors. These migrants were denied any kind of State aid and had to be sustained on their own sources and abilities. Evidences from archival records show that these migrants were often referred to as ‘infiltrators’ and ‘fugitives’.

There was once again a fresh influx of refugees in 1964 in the wake of the Hazrat Bal mosque riots. This migration was seen as justified by the State on account of the real violence experienced by the refugees. However, the earlier policy of providing rehabilitation outside West Bengal was strictly adhered to and these ‘new migrants’ were given just two-three days dole in the camps and sent off to Dandakaranya (a dense forested region spread across Chattisgarh and Orissa—primarily Bastar region of Chattisgarh and Koraput of Orissa)



for rehabilitation. Those who refused to go were denied any form of State aid after the distribution of an advance dole of six months.

Definition Based on Rehabilitation

Refugees were also classified on the basis of their potential to be rehabilitated. Thus, there was the Rehabilitable Group and the Permanent Liability Group. The former included those able-bodied refugees and their families who could be employed in some productive work—urban or rural, thereby making them independent of government aid. The Permanent Liability group was defined as those ‘inmates/families who are physically and/or mentally handicapped, who are too old (70 years and above) and infirm and who will remain on doles in the homes permanently till death’.¹¹ A further categorisation was that of the ‘Provisional PL’ category, i.e., those who ‘may go on rehabilitation if the rate of rehabilitation loans and assistance is increased. In fact many of such PL category families with the changed circumstances change their minds also and opt for rehabilitation and dispersal from the homes’.¹²

The screening committee, however, noted that even among those who were grouped as PL, there were a few who could be rehabilitated if government could provide some aid to them in the form of loans etc. Therefore, this committee categorised the PL group further as follows—‘rehabilitable group’, or the RG group, the ‘permanent liability’, or the PL group, and finally, the ‘border-line cases’, or the BLC category:

Border line case families are those who vacillated during screening whether to opt for rehabilitation or for being PL. They could not make up their minds though many were willing for rehab (sic). They could not dare so because of some family-difficulties were presently existing. Neither the

¹¹ Problems of Refugee Camps and Homes in West Bengal (The Screening Committee Report, 1989), Government of West Bengal: Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate, 1989. p.8.

¹² Ibid. p. 8.

Committed (sic, meaning Committee) could think it wise to determine their status finally and hence declared them BLC.¹³

Then there were the ‘deserter refugees’. As noted above, many among the ‘old migrants’ and all ‘new migrants’ were provided rehabilitation outside of West Bengal in the neighbouring states of Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and even as far as Andamans. However, in the light of inhospitable conditions and hostility of these states and the locals therein, many of them returned as deserters. Following the argument that they had willingly deserted the camps arranged by the government for their rehabilitation, they were no longer considered eligible for State aid. The duty of the government vis-à-vis these ‘deserter refugees’ was nil. These refugees merged with the urban poor and destitute of the city. The more enterprising among them either found some odd jobs or business for survival, or set up *Jabardakhal* (‘squatter colonies’, established by refugees in Bengal after forcible occupation of vacant land without required permission) colonies.¹⁴

Apart from the ‘deserter refugees’, there were the ‘ex-camp site refugees’ as well. After April 1961 all camps in West Bengal were closed down. The inmates of these camps were given two options—either to move out of these camps to the site of rehabilitation [which was very often outside West Bengal] or to take up six months dole in advance and leave the camp. Either way, after the appointed day all facilities provided in the camps would be stopped—food, water, electricity, medical aid etc. Those who refused to move out of the

¹³ The report also states how the BLC cases would be granted rehabilitation. ‘BLC’s may be readily granted rehabilitation on written prayer... As such re-categorization from PL to RG or vice-versa and from BLC to PL should be under the approval of the Dy. Refugee Rehabilitation Commissioner only.’

¹⁴ A famous example is of the noted painter Ganesh Halui who described the pathetic life in Rajmahal Camp in Bihar and how, upset with the sheer neglect and state apathy, he alongwith the many other inmates of this camp returned to Howrah Station. He of course made it to an Art school in Kolkata, but many of his counterparts simply disappeared in the crowd of urban poor.



camps and stayed on even after the facilities were withdrawn were called 'Ex-campsite refugees'. The Bagjola ex-campsite was the biggest and survives to this day.

Thus, refugees in the East were defined in terms of time of migration and category of rehabilitation; the normal categorisation 'urban' and 'rural' migrant refugee encapsulated under temporality. In comparison to the definition of the migrants from West Pakistan, a notable difference is the lack of any timeline being assigned to the latter. This was due to the difference in the migration pattern, but it can also be argued that the Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan were already seen as the natural responsibility of the government of India. It is only in the post-1965 period that finally an undertaking was demanded from a migrant coming into India from West Pakistan that he will not claim any rehabilitation benefits from the government of India and that he has the necessary support of some family member to look after him in India without being a liability on the Indian government.

Such a difference in the official definition of the refugees coming from West and East Pakistan notwithstanding, the refugees themselves, had a common vision regarding their plight. These refugees preferred to be called as *pursharthis* (self-made), *udvastu* (uprooted) and *bastuhara* (lost his homeland).¹⁵ They did not consider themselves as refugees, *panahgirs*, *sharanarthis* and all such words which highlighted only their helpless condition and portrayed them as one who desired state benevolence and pittance. Rather, they saw themselves as the ones who had sacrificed the maximum for the country, come away from their home and homeland and were now looking to find a footing in this country. Aid from the state, therefore, for them was not a matter of benevolence but their right.¹⁶ While it was for such rights that the refugee from East Pakistan kept fighting for all his life, those from the

¹⁵ A detailed explanation of these terms and their implications is discussed in my PhD thesis, *Post-Partition Refugees Rehabilitation in India with Special Reference to Bengal, 1947–71*, Department of History, University of Delhi (2013). pp. 189–192.

¹⁶ Chatterji, J. (2001). 'Right or Charity? The Debate Over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal 1947–50', in Suvir Kaul (ed). *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, pp. 74–110. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

West diminished the value of the state support that they had received during relief and rehabilitation and highlighted only their own role in ‘rising from the ashes’.¹⁷

Evacuation and Migration

Initially, both governments had tried to prevent such largescale influx of displaced persons. While on the one hand they provided assurances to the ‘threatened community’ regarding security and equality, on the other hand, in terms of action, the Punjab Boundary Force (PBF) was set up specifically with the intention to maintain peace and ensure safety of the masses. But none of these policies worked and, thus, began the greatest migration in the history of the subcontinent.

In this pattern of migration, too, we observe a difference on the two fronts—West and East. The western borders saw a one-time migration during the period 1947–48 and it was almost an exchange of population here. But the eastern borders saw a phase-wise migration pattern like the ebb and flow of the tide—the high points coming on account of either communal violence or arbitrary policy decisions being taken by the government in East Pakistan which pushed out the resident Hindus from there. The following five phases of migration can be identified:

- 1946–48 : Noakhali Riots and the immediate aftermath of the Partition.
- 1950 : Riots start at Bagerghat (East Pakistan) in December 1949 having grave repercussions in the rest of East Bengal and West Bengal during the latter part of the year reaching a peak in February 1950.
- 1952 : Introduction of passports.

¹⁷ Kaur, R. (2007). *Since 1947: Partition Narratives Among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



- 1964–65 : Hazrat Bal mosque incident in Kashmir—riots in Rajshahi and Pabna districts and Dhaka.
- 1971 : Creation of Bangladesh.

Therefore, evacuation work or even the decision to allow the minorities a smooth passage into India from the eastern borders was highly discouraged. Unprecedented violence in the west, however, had made it clear that the state would have to take up an active role in evacuating the minorities there. Therefore, when the PBF failed in its task of maintaining law and order both the governments moved to dissolve this organisation on 31st August 1947. In its place the Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) was set up at Amritsar on 1st September 1947 with Brig. Chimni as its commander. The Military Evacuation Organization was charged with the duty to evacuate the non-Muslims from West Pakistan. The evacuation programme involved the setting up of Transit Camps for collecting the refugees in the other dominion, transporting these refugees either on foot or by rail/motor transport (a privileged few would be entitled to evacuation by air as well—the government servants and wealthy classes), and finally, settling them in the relief camps established in the country of their destination.

While such elaborate plans were made for the west, nothing similar was worked out for the east. From its inception, migration in the west was seen as inevitable while that in the east was seen as one that could be prevented.¹⁸ Hindus in East Bengal comprised nearly 42% of the total population of undivided Bengal, and some regions had an overwhelming Hindu majority. It was perhaps for this reason that it was believed that the conditions would not be unfavourable for them—‘Was it not reasonable, then, to expect them to find their feet in the

¹⁸ U.B. Rao describes this perception of the Government of India in the following words, ‘The partition in the East was nourished on the illusion that there would be no significant disturbance of the population on either side. If any similar illusions were ever entertained in the West, the pre-partition riots had demonstrated its utter futility... The efforts to persuade the minorities to stay on in West Pakistan had to be abandoned as hopeless.’ Rao, U.B. *The Story of Rehabilitation*. (1967) New Delhi: Government of India. p. 141.

new state and make their legitimate contribution to its growth and progress?’¹⁹

The official correspondences between Nehru and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (Chief Minister of West Bengal) regarding the attitude of the Central government towards the migration in the east are instructive in this regard. Nehru opposed strongly any such migration from East Pakistan:

I have been quite certain, right from the beginning that everything should be done to prevent Hindus in East Bengal from migrating to West Bengal... If as you suggest things have gone too far already then naturally we shall do what we can but I shudder at the magnitude of the misery that will come in its train. To the last I would try to check this migration even if there is war.²⁰

Also, since migration in the east persisted even after independence, the Indian state had to be cautious in its approach towards this issue lest any strong action taken by it be seen by its opposite number as a transgression over the latter’s ‘internal’ matters.²¹ Instead of recognizing the palpable issue behind the migration, the Centre chose to attribute this migration to mere fear and panic. Eventually the doles being given to these migrants came to be seen by the state as an ‘incentive’ which, it believed, led to further migration—‘The economic conditions in Pakistan are bad and deteriorating and probably the chief cause now for people trying to come over...’²² When the option of evacuating the non-Muslim population from East Pakistan was suggested to Nehru, his opinion was as follows, ‘Personally, I think

¹⁹ Ibid. p.141.

²⁰ Nehru to Roy, dtd 25/08/1948 [Chakrabarti, S. (1974). *With Dr. B.C. Roy and Other Chief Ministers: A Record upto 1962*, Calcutta: Benson’s. p. 109]

²¹ Hence we find the rhetoric of the State insisting that minorities were the responsibility of the State they were living in. It is adopted in the post-Delhi Pact era, and even more vociferously in post-1964 period, the last phase of ‘legal’ migration into Indian Territory.

²² Nehru to Roy, dtd. 25/10/1952, in Chakrabarti, S. (1974). p. 116.



that the business of shifting millions of people is entirely beyond our capacity...'.²³ The government of India was then clearly averse to migration in the east which in turn had a bearing on the rehabilitation policies that were formulated and enforced in the east.

Thus, it is seen that there were serious differences in the whole programme of bringing in the migrant into Indian territory as well. It is from here onwards that one can observe very clear differentiation between the treatment meted out to the refugee coming from the west and the one coming from the east. It also formed the basis for the varied pattern of relief and rehabilitation.

Relief and Rehabilitation

The next point of analysis is the actual relief and rehabilitation programme as undertaken by the state for these refugees. Present in this paper is an assessment of the priorities and plans made by the state and only a brief summary of the legislative policies and acts passed by the state. This will highlight the variations in the programme as carried out in the east and west.²⁴

Case in West

With the evacuation programme coming to a close by 1948 and the MEO wound up soon after, the focus shifted to the provision of relief and rehabilitation to the displaced persons. The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation was set up in September 1947 with Mr. K.C. Neogy as its minister. The situation in the west demanded immediate attention as the refugees coming from West Pakistan were victims of the most gruesome violence. This acted on the rehabilitation programme in two ways: the State ordered that the issue of relief and rehabilitation should

²³ Nehru to Roy, dtd. 17/02/1950, in *ibid*, p. 73.

²⁴ A more complete discussion of the Acts and their impact is part of my PhD thesis Chakravarty, Pallavi. (2013). *Post-Partition Refugees Rehabilitation in India with Special Reference to Bengal, 1947–71*, Department of History, University of Delhi. pp. 189–192.

be considered as ‘urgent’ and ‘immediate’,²⁵ second, the refugees also found sympathisers among the local people and also political parties with vested interests.²⁶ Further, the evacuation of refugees from West Pakistan had eased the rehabilitation programme to some extent—the number of people to be rehabilitated was now known and fixed with a determined number. Therefore in the west, we can observe a more-or-less distinct phase-wise rehabilitation programme wherein the evacuation of migrants (1947–48) was followed by a relief phase (completed by 1950) and which in turn was followed by permanent rehabilitation and finally compensation for material losses suffered.

Each and every displaced person from West Pakistan was entitled to relief and rehabilitation benefits. Accordingly, at least 90% of the migrant population received these benefits in some form or the other.²⁷ The remaining were in a position to help themselves. This sharply contrasts with the situation in the East, where only a small minority actually received any rehabilitation aid from the State, and that too in an amount so negligible that quite a few chose to refuse it altogether.²⁸

The concern of the State vis-à-vis the issue of rehabilitating the migrant from West Pakistan involved housing, education, and employment. It is in this context, specially regarding the first, that steps

²⁵ As noted by Nehru, ‘the problem of rehabilitation of refugees from Western Pakistan, always an important and urgent one, had now assumed a new urgency... Having more or less completed this evacuation, rehabilitation had now to be taken in hand, not spasmodically and casually but in a planned way.’ Discussions at a Cabinet Meeting, 10th January 1948, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 5. p.137.

²⁶ Albeit, this sympathy from the local population was temporary, and that too, it should not be generalized. CID records show certain cases where the local population in Delhi was not happy with the incoming Punjabi refugees. Apart from links with old neighbours, the issue of vested interests dominated, especially when lands were being requisitioned for the use of the incoming refugees and other such issues. Hindu Mahasabha started three refugee camps in Delhi for the purpose of providing relief to the refugees. But it is now a known fact that these camps were also the breeding grounds for prospective RSS volunteers.

²⁷ Chakrabarti, P. (1990). *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Kalyani, West Bengal: Lumiere Books.

²⁸ Chatterji, J. (2001).

were taken by the State which often, in its final form, implied the accommodation of the migrants at the expense of others. Most often the 'other' was the north-Indian Muslim.²⁹ A detailed analysis of the Resettlement of the Displaced Persons (Land Acquisition) Ordinance, 1948 and the Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950 shows how the margins of the society (Harijans, landless tenants) and the Muslims were being gradually replaced by the incoming migrants. The Claims Act, 1950, and, the Displaced Persons (Rehabilitation and Compensation) Act, 1954 shows that by granting migrants compensation for material losses suffered the State had made these migrants' claim to citizenship of India a natural right which would not be contested or questioned as it would be for those coming from East Pakistan.³⁰

The Resettlement of the Displaced Persons (Land Acquisition) Ordinance, 1948 empowered the government to acquire any land for the purpose of housing the displaced persons. Some compensation would be provided to the owner of the land and if he/she had any objection to this acquisition it would have to be notified and accordingly a decision would be taken. But most often the decision was in favour of the government, and hence, quite a few people stood to lose their land and were compensated quite inadequately. Where this created maximum problems was the displacement of the marginal classes, especially the Harijans or poor Muslim tenants who worked on such land—while the owner was compensated for the acquisition of land, these tenants were simply thrown out as they were not owners and hence not entitled to any compensation. A case in point is that of the residents of Tihar village as mentioned in official documents.³¹ The

²⁹ A very detailed analysis of the process by which the north-Indian Muslim got systematically displaced from his homeland and was pushed into Pakistan is the subject matter of Zamindar, V. (2007). *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁰ A more detailed discussion of the Acts and their implications is to be found in my PhD thesis cited already.

³¹ In F. No. RHB/55/2/53 'Payment of compensation for the lands acquired—Consolidated reference from the State Government.' National Archives of India (NAI).

original residents strongly opposed the acquisition of their land by the government as they were not happy with the land which was being given to them as compensation. But apart from these owners of the land, the objection of the Muslim and Harijan tenants working on this land is also found. All such objections were overlooked by the government as it went ahead in its acquisition of these lands to build what it called satellite townships for the displaced persons in not only Tihar but also Mehrauli, Kalkaji and Sheikh Sarai.

The Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950 was another Act introduced to help in housing the displaced person. It gave the displaced person the power to identify 'evacuee' property and notify it to the Custodian of Evacuee Property. He would be given the first preference over such property and could not be evicted till he was provided suitable accommodation. Such powers to the displaced person likewise led to the creation of difficulties for the 'evacuee'. The definition of the 'evacuee' was problematic as with the evolution of the Act it apparently led to almost every Muslim being brought under its purview. It was becoming very difficult to prove oneself as not evacuee, and even if one could prove it, chances of regaining property were feeble.³² The clause of the 'intending evacuee' made each Muslim a suspect in the eyes of the government. The act came into effect despite much opposition by Prime Minister Nehru. The result of Nehru's criticism was that the intending evacuee clause was removed and finally in 1954 the act itself was abrogated. However, the damage done was irreversible. Muslims who had been dispossessed could rarely come back.

Under the Claims Act and the Displaced Persons Compensation and Rehabilitation Act the displaced persons were asked to file their claim for obtaining compensation on account of material losses suffered due to the Partition of the country. The government had thought of the principle of compensating the refugees from West Pakistan as early as in 1949 itself. Thereafter, a press communiqué issued on 12th September 1950 declared, 'the Government of India[']s] desire

³² Zamindar, V. (2007).



to assure all concerned that the Displaced Persons will be recompensed to the extent possible for their losses—the extent of the recompense depending necessarily upon the total assets that became available for distribution.’ Its chief proponent was N. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar. In a note drafted by Ayyangar it was stated that the compensation amount would be derived from a ‘compensation pool’ which in turn would comprise the ‘properties left in India by persons who have migrated to Pakistan, the amount which might have been received from Pakistan as compensation, and such contribution from the government of India as might be possible taking the general financial position into account’.³³ Eventually it was only evacuee property and contribution from the government that was put to use to compensate the displaced persons. The act is thus representative of the intention of the government regarding its efforts to rehabilitate the migrants from West Pakistan. Being the last and final phase in the rehabilitation programme for these migrants, it was, in the eyes of the government, a logical conclusion to the whole process vis-à-vis the migrants from the West. Interestingly, no such act was introduced in Bengal, which marks a noted difference in policy followed for the two groups of displaced persons.

It can be concluded that the Administration of Evacuee Property Act (1950), introduction of passports to control movement along the border (1952), and finally, the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act (1954) had given the task of rehabilitating the displaced persons coming from West Pakistan a certain degree of finality, a consequence of which was that these refugees became the ‘no-questions asked’ citizens of India.³⁴

Case in the East

On the eve of partition, the situation in the East was exactly the opposite of that in the west—peace had prevailed. At least for the

³³ ‘Papers and Correspondence with A.P. Jain (M/o Rehabilitation) relating to the rehabilitation Scheme and Grant of Compensation to Displaced persons from West Pakistan (1952–53)’ S. No. 64 N. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar Papers, NMML.

³⁴ To borrow this description from Professor Shahid Amin.

next two and half years there was no major communal conflagration in both the Bengals, and migration of the minorities was not alarming enough. Such a situation had perhaps provided some hope to both the governments (India and Pakistan) that a large-scale displacement of population like in the west and the corresponding refugee problem could be prevented in the east. Hence, the primary aim of both the governments was to prevent any similar population displacement in the east. This explains the toning down of the experience of violence in the east by the State and also the tendency to discourage migration of the refugees from East Pakistan. The means adopted to discourage migration in the east included—limiting rehabilitation of refugees to adhoc relief measures in the hope that they would go back, restricting entry into Indian territory to only those who possessed the necessary documents, and finally, dispersal to states other than West Bengal where conditions were quite inhospitable.

Another factor which influenced the rehabilitation programme in the east was that by the time the problem here became a serious cause of concern, the Indian State had finalised its Constitution whereby the rights of the minority had to be safeguarded. At the same time, the Hindus of East Pakistan were seen as the minorities of Pakistan and as a corollary, the responsibility of that country. Hence, all means were employed to reassure the minorities of equal citizenship rights and also to safeguard their life and property. This very ideology is the background of the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact (1950).

Therefore, unlike the planned, phase-wise rehabilitation programme as carried out for the migrants from West Pakistan, in the East we only observe a cyclical programme of relief followed by regulation and relief again, so much so that the process still remains incomplete till date. The Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate in West Bengal still exists whereas the central Ministry of Rehabilitation has been long since wound up (1964).

The defining State policies in this direction included the following acts—the West Bengal Land Development and Planning Act, 1948; the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Khan Pact, 1950; the West Bengal Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1951; and the Rehabilitation



of Displaced Persons and the Eviction of Persons from Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951. The Nehru-Liaquat Ali Khan Pact mentioned above generated much controversy while the others were seen as anti-refugee and were hence, strongly opposed by refugees and the political groups representing them. Rehabilitation in the east, therefore, involved conflict more than cooperation—be it between the governments (centre and state, state and state) or that between the refugees and the government (centre and state). It is this aspect of lack of cooperation which further made the rehabilitation in the east a failure. Let us analyse them in greater detail.

The West Bengal Land Development and Planning Act, 1948 provided for the acquisition of land by the State for the ‘public purpose’ which in turn included providing land to the incoming refugees for housing purpose, though not exclusively for it. A few of the refugee townships were established through this act. However, this was not a law passed exclusively for the refugees. A more specific refugee policy involved the passing of a few schemes—Union Board Scheme, Type Scheme—for the rural and urban refugee.³⁵ However, these schemes were a failure, and had catered to only a small number of refugees, i.e. those who came before 1954.

The defining policy for the situation in the east was the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Khan Pact. The Nehru-Liaquat Ali Khan Pact, more popularly known as the Delhi Pact, was signed on 8th April 1950 in New Delhi. The basic idea was to create such conditions in both the countries where the minorities would not feel insecure and not think of migrating to the other country. In fact, it was hoped that those who had come would go back. This was to be taken as the measure of success of the Pact. A closer analysis, however, shows that the pact failed in providing the much needed security to the minorities. Nehru was wrong in assuming that by proposing such palliative measures the problem in the east could be simply wished away. In broad terms, the pact addressed three issues primarily—provision of equal rights to the

³⁵ A more detailed discussion of these schemes and their failures are to be found in Chakrabarti, P. (1990).

minorities, the recovery of the abducted women, and finally, the issue of property left behind by the migrants. The direct consequence of this pact was the passing of the following acts—West Bengal Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1951, and the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and the Eviction of Persons from Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951.

The West Bengal Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1951 tried to be faithful to the spirit of the pact whereby it was provided that the management of the evacuee properties should be taken care of by a body constituted by the State (Evacuee Property Management Committee) as long as the evacuees were away, and that it should be restored to their rightful owners upon their return. This was welcomed by the representatives of the Muslims in the West Bengal State Legislative Assembly but rejected outrightly by the representatives of the refugees in the Assembly as observed in the Assembly proceedings. While the former felt that it gave those Muslims, who had proceeded to East Pakistan for fear for their lives, a chance to return to their homeland without losing out on their property, the latter believed that this act harmed the refugees who had settled on such evacuee property without giving them an alternative residing option, hence, a case of double displacement. Therefore, the refugee leaders strongly condemned this act. As a result of their opposition as well as the tendency of refugees to hold on to their acquired properties (be it evacuee or government or other private lands) the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and the Eviction of Persons from Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951 was passed.

This was meant ‘to provide for the rehabilitation of displaced persons and eviction of persons in unauthorised occupation of land’.³⁶

³⁶ The Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and The Eviction of Persons from Unauthorised Occupation of Land Act, 1951 (as modified up to 1st April 1962), Government of West Bengal: Law Department, West Bengal Act XVI of 1951. [all citations of the Act in this section are taken from here].

The Act came into force on 15th June 1951 and was originally to remain in force till 31st March 1957. But with two subsequent Amendments in 1954 and 1961, it was extended first up to 1961 and then finally till 31st March 1964.



In the face of stiff resistance from refugees and their leaders,³⁷ a very significant rejoinder to the act was introduced in the form of Section 4. As per this clause, the refugees would not be evicted or asked to pay any compensation until the State Government provided them with alternative accommodation. Yet another provision in this act which sought to protect the refugees, was in the role accepted by the State government to ‘acquire any land or any part thereof for a public purpose’.³⁸ Such acquisition was to be made under the West Bengal Land Development and Planning Act (1948). The inclusion of Section 4 was, therefore, the first victory of the refugees against the government. The refugee leaders were happy to a great extent with the inclusion of this clause. But the representatives of the Muslims voiced their opposition to the changes. Their opposition was on the grounds that it violated the ideals set in the Delhi Pact (1950) and that it created a conflict of interest vis-à-vis Muslims on the one hand and incoming Hindu migrants on the other. This in turn brought the problem of loyalty and consequently the rights to citizenship of India, i.e., who was to be seen as more loyal and thus a rightful citizen of India—the incoming Hindu displaced person from East Pakistan, the internally displaced Muslim (who had left his home temporarily and migrated to some other place but within India in search of safety) or the returning Muslim (who had crossed over to East Pakistan in search of safety but was now returning after the reassurances being made by the Delhi pact)? Condemning the Bill as a ‘Black Bill—just like the Rowlatt Bills’, Janab Muddassir Hussain, one of the members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, stated that,

... the gentlemen who have come here from one region— from East Pakistan are displaced persons and you have made provisions for them. But for the other persons who are still in their homeland, in their motherland and who are citizens

³⁷ A specific group—the Refugee Eviction Resistance Group—was formed under the leadership of Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Suresh Banerji to oppose any such eviction of refugees from lands which had been illegally occupied by them for the purpose of resettlement in West Bengal.

³⁸ As per the Act, ‘public purpose’ meant rehabilitation of refugees. This was yet another hotly contested provision of the Act with the Muslims members arguing how the rehabilitation of refugees coming from another country could be deemed as ‘public purpose’ in this state.

of India are—*bona fide* citizens of India—no provision has been made in this Bill... This is a defect which I cannot forget and *in rehabilitating the refugees from the other State, you make others who are your own people, who are your own kith and kin, who are your own citizens, homeless and who are wandering like vagabonds.*³⁹

Thus, a heated debate continued over who were to be included as citizens of India and who were not—partition, migration and rehabilitation had much to do with it.

The Act, however, prevailed and the successful agitation of the refugees and their leaders had ensured that the refugees were here to stay. However, this was through a battle won by them, not by active cooperation of the State. The several *jabardakhal* colonies and their foundation histories bear testimony to this struggle of the refugees vis-à-vis the state.

The Delhi Pact was the one policy most elaborately framed for regulating influx in the east. However, it was neither the first step in this direction nor the last. There were other means of regulating influx of the migrants from East Pakistan introduced periodically—introduction of passports (1954), setting deadlines for relief and rehabilitation benefits, and, sticking to relief measures rather than complete rehabilitation.

Thus, a detailed look at rehabilitation policies shows that the government can be seen to have favoured the refugees at some times (acquisition of lands, regularisation of squatter colonies, and providing basic relief and rehabilitation measures) and hindered the progress at other times (the Delhi Pact and its fallout, the periodic restrictions on entry to the Indian side, and the dispersal of refugees to states out of West Bengal against their wishes, but more importantly without any real and genuine efforts at rehabilitation in those sites). In understanding these differing policies, especially when compared to those followed

³⁹ Janab Mudassir Hossain, 11th April 1951 West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, p. 278. Emphasis added.



for the refugees coming from West Pakistan, the break from the norms and the lack of a sympathetic attitude of the State towards these refugees can be observed. In fact, by government's own admission, as noted by former chief minister Jyoti Basu, up to the first phase of rehabilitation measures (1948–1957) for the refugees from the east, barely 14% of refugees had been rehabilitated—

As far as refugees are concerned my point is that there is an admission by the Government that only 14%—if you talk of rehabilitation even in a limited sense—only 14% have been rehabilitated during these number of years. Is that the pace, is that the speed of development and is that the time-table you have adopted in rehabilitating the entire lot of refugees? I do not know how many ages it will take if this kind of speed is maintained.⁴⁰

Later, P.K. Chakrabarti also noted that by the process of elimination and exclusion the government had very few refugees to actually rehabilitate. But even this restricted number was not rehabilitated adequately. According to Chakrabarti's calculation, between October 1946 to March 1958 a total of roughly 32 lakhs migrants came into India. Of these, as per government policy discussed above, only those who sought shelter in government camps were eligible for relief and rehabilitation benefits. Thus, of the 32 lakhs only 8 lakhs sought refuge in the camps with the remaining 24 lakhs left out of the ambit of proper rehabilitation by the government. Still 15 lakhs of these non-campers did receive Type loans.⁴¹ Hence, in all 23 lakhs refugees got some kind of rehabilitation benefits. After calculating the total net increase in population of refugees and further influx in the post-1964 period, it was observed that of the total 80 lakhs refugee population (taking an average growth rate of 2%) only 23 lakhs were given some rehabilitation benefits, i.e., just 28% of the total refugee population which was far less compared to the rehabilitation of nearly 90% refugees coming from West Pakistan.⁴²

⁴⁰ Jyoti Basu, WBLA, 5th June 1957, p. 67.

⁴¹ Loans to purchase Homestead plots, agricultural lands, tools, implements, cattle, and for house-building small trade and business loans as well.

⁴² Chakrabarti, P. (1990).

Not only were fewer refugees rehabilitated in the east, but also that rehabilitation started here very late. Even by the government's own assessment, as observed in the annual reports, it is stated that any serious attempt at rehabilitation in the eastern region started only in the post-1957 stage.

Keeping all this in mind it can be deduced that rehabilitation in the east was essentially the work of the refugees themselves—be it the struggle to get recognized as refugees or be it in fighting for a better deal in rehabilitation—it was largely the product of self-rehabilitation. It is not to suggest that the role of the refugee in the west was marginal, the conclusion being arrived at is that the refugees there had the close cooperation of the State while in the east it was more of struggle for the 'right' to rehabilitation.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at an important aspect in partition studies—the post-partition rehabilitation of refugees. So far this aspect had remained primarily in the domain of Annual Reports of the Ministry of Rehabilitation or other government-sponsored publications. Recent scholarly works have shifted the focus from politics behind partition to politics after it. This paper brings to light a fact which, though mentioned in the official publications and scholarly works, has not yet received the kind of attention it has deserved: the differential policy of the State vis-à-vis the refugees coming from West Pakistan and those coming from East Pakistan. In official publications it is not the policies which are seen as different, rather, it is the difference in attitude and efforts of the migrants in the two regions which is identified as the cause for complete rehabilitation in the west and continuing problem of rehabilitation in the east, in the scholarly works such an assumption is rejected, but the differential treatment meted out to the refugees by the State is not explained. This paper seeks to propose three possible explanations for this. A crucial factor was violence. It was the unprecedented and gruesome violence in the west which compelled the political leadership of both Pakistan and India to reconsider their earlier decision against the evacuation of minorities. This reversal of policy, however, was limited only to areas which suffered such massive

violence. Therefore, initially only for Punjab, and later with much pressure for the whole of West Pakistan, an official evacuation policy was framed in India. Hence, it was a specific form of violence which both the States recognized as 'direct' or 'real' violence, and felt compelled to defend these hapless victims of such State-defined violence. But for the east, which had remained silent on the eve of partition and for the next two years after as well, the State did not find any justification for a large-scale migration. The State did not recognize the subtle forms of violence which the minorities were exposed to in their everyday life in East Pakistan. Such violence was dismissed as 'psychological' fear, and migration had to be discouraged. Likewise, the migrants coming out of no 'real' experience of violence but out of 'psychological' fear were not treated on an equal footing with the 'genuine' victims of violence in the west. It is for the latter that the State took up measures on a war-footing, while for the former, persuasive means were used to compel them to go back. It is only after the 1950 riots that the east got serious attention of the centre. Thereafter, the pace of rehabilitation slackened and was stopped after 1958, till once again the ghost of communal violence revisited Bengal in 1964, and rehabilitation measures gained some momentum.

The second reason for such a policy could well be the one factor which loomed large over the issue of rehabilitation in general, i.e., the economics of rehabilitation. Rehabilitating a million population being added to the tally of a newly independent nation was certainly not the first task which the government had envisioned for itself. But while it could not be altogether avoided for those coming from West Pakistan, considering the massive violence the minorities there were exposed to, the temporary peace in the east provided a glimmer of hope to the nascent State. Hence, ignoring all indications (direct and indirect) to the opposite, the State believed that there was no reason to migrate and it was sought to be prevented at all costs. Therefore, it was relief and not rehabilitation which the migrants were to be provided with the hope that as soon as the conditions normalized, they would go back. Permanent rehabilitation was seen as an 'incentive' for the migrant to stay on in the more 'prosperous' West Bengal (compared to East Pakistan) and, hence, it was to be avoided. At all times the constant fear that loomed large over both the state and central governments

was the nightmare scenario of large-scale violence similar to what happened in the west. If all members of the minority community decided to come over, it would be a huge burden on the State. Thus, economics of rehabilitation was a prime factor in persisting with adhoc relief measures so as to discourage migration from the east.

The third factor is representative of how the State was conceptualized by our founding fathers. They had envisioned a secular state where members of all religious communities would live in complete harmony. Nehru's idea of a secular state was also significant in the construction of the image of India on the world stage. The exchange of population across the western borders was a principle he reconciled with after much deliberation and most reluctantly. Similarly, as shown before, he was most disturbed by the pushing out of Muslims in north India and the 'evil act'—the Administration of the Evacuee Property Act (1950). It is precisely a repeat of such a situation in the east which he probably wished to prevent and thus, such draconian laws and policies were never implemented on paper for the Muslims in the east. The ground realities were, however, different and Muslims were forced to migrate to East Pakistan. Yet, a considerable number remained behind—evacuee homes and property formed a small share in the overall rehabilitation programme in the east. It was the vacant lands belonging to private owners (Hindus and Muslims) and the government (Union and State) which were squatted upon and colonies were built and the vast majority of refugees rehabilitated themselves.

The equation Hindu/Sikh: Muslim = refugee: evacuee, applicable in the immediate aftermath of partition in the west got transformed into that of Hindus: Muslims, Majority: Minority in the east. In the west the Hindus and Sikhs became the unquestioned citizens of the nation by virtue of their violent displacement from their homes and homelands, their counterparts in the east, who far from being a welcome presence in their original homeland were not accepted in the adopted land as well. Contingency of economics and secular ideals required that the minorities in the east should be seen as the responsibility of the State they belonged to originally. Thus, a strict monitoring of migration was made mandatory. So, refugees in the east had to contend not only with these strict regulations but also with being categorized as



‘infiltrators’, ‘Pakistani minorities’ and ‘fugitives’. Such regulation was based on the assumption of the State regarding the nature of this migration. The State believed it was temporary and that with conditions normalizing, the migrants would return. In the west, any such hope was quashed at the very beginning, once again based on the unprecedented violence experienced there.

Migration in the east persisted even two decades after partition. From the point of view of a modern state, it was simply impossible to accept the continuing influx of migrants, as also the reverse, i.e., efflux of its own citizens (migration of Muslims to East Pakistan, eg. during 1964 riots). It is at such times that the incoming migrants were seen as the responsibility of Pakistan and not India.

Thus, a varied definition of violence and concern regarding the economics of rehabilitation and the presentation of the ‘secular’ image of the country worldwide were factors which explain the difference in rehabilitation policy for the migrants coming from East Pakistan.

It can be said that partition created more problems than solving any and the worst affected remained the displaced persons who lost their home and hearth for simply no fault of theirs. But their struggle did not end there for they had to make the long journey to a distant land and an uncertain future. For the migrants in the west, the onward journey upon arrival in India was facilitated to a great extent by the State which identified them as the genuine victims of a most ghastly violence, and hence, the rightful recipients of State benevolence. For those in the east, the long partition did not seem to end. To this day, third generation refugees queue up in the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department trying to either get the Free Hold Title Deed or to get their colony regularized. The fact that the department still persists, with no equivalent in any other state of India, is a stark reminder of the unfinished work in West Bengal.