ABSTRACT

This thesis looks into the making of minorities, refugees and citizens in the context of post-Partition Bengal and examines the immediate and long-term dynamics of the aftermath of Partition. It views the Partition as the primary defining factor of the events that followed independence that was closely associated with the process of decolonisation in the subcontinent. This work deals specifically with Bengal. It looks into the narrative of post-Partition violence and the making of minorities in East Bengal. It also looks into the journey from being minorities in East Pakistan to refugees in West Bengal as they undertook migrations across the border in the first two decades after Partition and was greeted with ambivalent government response in this part of Bengal. It specifically looks into the aftermath of Partition – how Partition led to migration from East Pakistan and the consequent impact it had in West Bengal. The aftermath, however, cannot be tied to any similar timeframe as it spills over across generations. Though Partition migration began with the Noakhali and Tipperra riots in 1946 and continued in waves through the 1950s and 1960s, its impact cannot be restricted to any particular time span. It is this longue durée of the Partition that this work proposes to examine. This thesis is thus built around two principal concerns. For one, there is an attempt to understand the process of migration from East to West Bengal in the first two decades after Partition of India. For another, there is an effort to locate the uniqueness of the Bengal experience in the context of the self-rehabilitation of the refugees, the political activism of their movement and the long term impact of the Partition in West Bengal. Studying the case of Hindu Bengali migrants from East Bengal, this thesis tries to break certain myths, address some of the debates that are associated with the impact of Partition in Bengal. It stresses on how the events in Bengal after independence redefined the meanings of Partition and how Partition was reinvented in the minds of the people of Bengal in the context of the socio-political changes that the state saw over all these years after independence.