Chapter IV
The Refugees Respond

So you no longer seem to recognise us...
Still we came.
You have given us a new name “refugees” and
stamped it on us as our hallmark,
Driven out from our land, despised and disgraced
in our new habitat
We are the valueless price
paid for you(r) acquisition of dominion Delhi and Dacca...

Jyotirmoyee Devi ‘We Are the Valueless Price’
Translated from Bengali by Saibal Gupta¹

The above lines aptly summarise the plight of the migrant from East Pakistan. They had lost their home and homeland and come to this country in search of shelter. But they felt that they were received with much hostility from the host society and the State. This chapter looks at the response by the refugees to the ad hoc rehabilitation measures provided by the State.

The preceding chapters have described in detail the Government sponsored rehabilitation programmes for the refugees coming from West Pakistan and also those coming from the East Pakistan. The purpose was to show that whereas rehabilitation in the West was well-planned and reaching completion by mid-1950, the position at the Eastern extremity of the nation had been very different. Government effort in the East had been negligible and migration from East Pakistan was discouraged. This led to the rise of the refugee ‘movement’² in the East. This chapter, therefore, looks at refugee self-initiative in the long-drawn process of rehabilitation in the East.

In the first section I deal with a redefinition of the official understanding of the term ‘displaced persons’, i.e. defining the refugees as they saw themselves. This section sets out to show that contrary to the assumption of the central Government the threat to the minorities in the East was not merely ‘psychological’. The next section looks at the ways in which these refugees rejected the paltry rehabilitation assistance provided to them and

¹ Asoka Gupta Papers, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.
² Refugee agitation or refugee movement is commonly abbreviated as ‘Andolan’ or ‘movement’ by the refugee leaders and refugees themselves. Source: interviews with Haripada Das (founder of Tirtha Bharathi Colony, Shodepur) , Deepak Bhattacharya (RRRD, G/o West Bengal, but also active follower of UCRC activities).
their resistance to some of its most arbitrary provisions. In the third section the focus is on showing how the refugees made the most of the resources available to them in order to rebuild their lives away from their original homelands. The final section looks at the end to this entire struggle—the refugees winning their rights to citizenship of this country and thereby moulding themselves into the folds of this nation.

**Why I am not a Refugee**³

The ‘Partition refugees’ saw themselves as distinct from the conventional definition of the term ‘refugee’. They were not ‘fleeing’ from one country and seeking refuge in the other; it was the country that had been divided, and as a result their homes had fallen on the wrong side of the Radcliffe line. Therefore, they had to migrate to the side where they were assured safety of their lives. The following are then, the ways in which the ‘refugee’ in the East saw themselves.³

**The Trope of Sacrifice**

The ‘Partition refugees’ saw themselves as the ones who had made a supreme sacrifice for the Independence of their country. Their demands for adequate rehabilitation benefits and, more importantly, their unquestioned rights to citizenship were premised upon this inherent pride. It is this point which is highlighted over and over again in the letters addressed to the Congress President Acharya Kripalani, the President of India Rajendra Prasad, the Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru while requesting for some rehabilitation assistance. For example, in a letter to Prime Minister Nehru, Shri Annada Charan Banerjee, uses the trope of supreme sacrifice to draw the attention of Nehru towards the dismal rehabilitation assistance received by him from the State—

… I am not a professional beggar but the circumstances created by the almighty have compelled me to turn to a pauper beyond all human conception in this ripe old age… [Government and society must do something] to ameliorate the conditions of these refugees who have been compelled to come over here from East Bengal for no fault of

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⁴ Note that the ‘refugee’ in the West [i.e. coming from West Pakistan] too, did not see himself as one who was at the mercy of the State, rather as one whose right it was to claim rehabilitation from the State for the creation of which he had made the highest sacrifice.
theirs—uptil now I have not seen any activities in this direction either from the Government or from the public…

Yet another example which highlights the use of this notion of supreme sacrifice is found in the resolutions passed by the East Pakistani Hindus and which were sent to either the Congress President Acharya Kripalani or Prime Minister Nehru. To cite one example—

Whereas the non-Muslim of the Pakistan Dominion, who gallantly fought for the achievements of the freedom of India have been thrown into a very awkward position for no fault of their own, due to the Partition of India into two Dominions it is resolved that the non-Muslims of the Pakistan Dominion, desirous of acquiring Indian citizenship in the Indian Dominion be given such right whenever they make a declaration to that effect, irrespective of their birth and land qualifications, provided they intend to settle there.

The contribution of the incoming migrants was acknowledged in the speeches of the leaders of this country. To cite a few examples:

Prime Minister Nehru noted the plight of the minorities on the eve of Independence itself in his famous Tryst for Destiny speech—

We also think of our brothers and sisters who have been cut off from us by the political boundaries and who unhappily cannot share at present the freedom that has come. They are of us and will remain of us whatever may happen and we shall be sharers in their good and ill fortune alike.

The Congress Working Committee adopted the following resolution on 25th November 1947:

The Congress is bound to afford full protection to all those non-Muslims from Pakistan who have crossed the border and come over to India or may do so to save their life and honour.

The Government did recognise the sacrifice of the refugees, yet, by providing them the necessary rehabilitation it was simply performing the function on humanitarian grounds. Also, in the process, India was making a strong political statement. The refugees, on the

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5 From Annada Charan Bannerjee (Calcutta) to Nehru (New Delhi) dtd: 19th March 1948, G5/1947-1948: East Bengal Refugee Problems [AICC Papers], NMML.
7 The following collection of quotations have been taken from The East Bengal Tragedy: The Delhi Pact and Thereafter, Kolkata: Debendranath Mukherjee of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (1950). In Serial No. 39. Ashutosh Lahiry Papers, NMML.
8 This was made stronger with the fact that India was going to rehabilitate the refugees without any foreign aid, entirely using its own resources. It is this point which is highlighted in all the Government-sponsored
other hand, refused to be seen as objects of charity. They had sacrificed a lot for the Independence of this country; it was now the duty of the State to support them in their time of grave deprivation. When this was not coming through smoothly, they felt betrayed.

The Uprooted

The majority of the refugees concurred with the fact that migration was not their first option. They would have continued in their original homes had they not been ‘violently uprooted’ from their homes and villages. Maninder Singh Batra, a Punjabi migrant from Rawalpindi, mentioned that but for his Muslim friends who compelled him to leave convincing him that he was no longer safe in his home there and that they would be unable to provide him further protection, he ‘would have happily continued to live in [his] home even if it meant being a Pakistani.’

Similarly, in the East, too, the sense of being uprooted from the ancestral homes was felt very deeply. As noted in all the memoirs of the refugees, it was the land of the ancestors—saat-purusher bhite mati—which had been left behind and which was very dear to them. Indubaran Ganguly, recreates this lost homeland in a very succinct manner in the following words—

we have left behind the land of our ancestors and become refugees here… when we look behind, then the image of our lost homeland comes across clearly—rivers flowing by and greenery all around. There is a strong and unspoken psychological pain that we experience… for our homeland left behind.11

In perhaps a classic description of the refugee, Debobrata Dutta, noted—

Those who only gave and received nothing, they only started crowding the Sealdah Station platform. They are the uprooted. On 15th August 1947, the historic moment when Independence was declared, they were the ones who were sacrificed. They who had contributed the maximum (the Hindus of East Bengal), they only had to come over in batches in a pathetic state and had to adopt a new identity. They are the uprooted… One manuals describing the rehabilitation of refugees. See Rao, The Story of Rehabilitation, (1964), Luthra, Rehabilitation, (1974) and Millions on the Move (Undated) etc.


11 Translated by me from the original in Bengali— Ganguly, Colonysmriti, p.1
day they had everything and now—no food to eat when they are hungry, no clothes to wear, no place for shelter. No arrangement for education.\textsuperscript{12}

It is in Dakhsinaranjan Basu’s \textit{Chede Asha Gram}\textsuperscript{13}, that this sense of being uprooted from home and land is most profoundly spelt out. There are reminiscences of each and every district of East Bengal. Like the metaphor of ‘supreme sacrifice’, the migrants used the notion of ‘being uprooted from their homes’ to further their cause and stake a greater claim to the nascent nation state.

\textbf{The Sense of Betrayal}

The refugees felt that they were the victims of a political game and the ones who had been betrayed by their leadership. They talk of how the promises of the leaders had been belied in practice. This point was used by the opposition parties as well in their scathing attack against the Congress and its policies vis-à-vis the refugees. A classic example of such a critique can be noted in Shyama Prasad Mukherjee’s following comment where he points out to the questions raised by the East Bengali Hindus most often in utter despair—

\begin{quote}
They mention their names and ask [us] “Have they forgotten us? Do they not think of us? Who gave them freedom? They are today occupying positions of power and authority in Delhi. Who made them what they are? Do they remember that we also contributed to the freedom of the country and gave whatever we had without expecting anything in return? And today when we are in this troubled state, when we are being hounded out like cats and dogs, without getting any protection which any civilised Government worth the name is bound to give, are they not thinking of us?”\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

In sum, the first attack of the refugees with regard to Government policies was in the very definition of the term refugees.\textsuperscript{15} The term they preferred to use for their lot was \textit{udvastu} or \textit{bastuhara}, translated in English it means ‘uprooted from the home/homeland’ or ‘one who has lost his homeland’. The term has a deeper meaning as well—reflecting the violent uprooting and a strong sense of attachment with the lost homeland. Thus, the

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\item Text translated by me from the original in Bengali—Dutta \textit{Bijoygarh: Ekti Udvastu Upanibesh}, Kolkata. p.17.
\item Dakhsinaranjan Basu, \textit{Chede Asha Gram}.
\item SPM speech in SPM papers, S. No. 31, NMML.
\item I, too, observed this resentment towards the term in my conversations with some of them. I sensed that this resentment was premised on the belief that ‘refugee’ meant a state of destitute, helplessness and was also derogatory to some extent. In fact, even in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates, the refugee leaders strongly opposed the use of the word ‘refugee’.
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popular slogan of the refugee movement in the East—‘Amra Kara, Bastuhara’ [Who are we—the ones who have lost their homes].

It is worth stressing that the archetypal image of the refugee was quite diverse and varied. For the Government, however, displaced persons simply meant people coming over out of fear or actual persecution, and the need to stop this. That they comprised those who were forced to leave their settled lives and their homeland behind was seldom a concern for the Government once it came to power. Thus, very often Nehru and the others seem to be at pains to show the decline in influx using statistics which clearly belied the real situation.

Hence, though the use of the term refugee is not accepted gladly by them, this dissertation has used the term ‘refugee’ for the sake of convenience in place of the more apt but rather longer term ‘displaced persons’ or the Bengali variant ‘udvastu’ or ‘bastuhara’.

‘Real’ versus ‘Psychological’ Threat
This section revisits the factors which led to the migration in the East. Though the reasons for migration have been discussed in some detail in the previous chapters, this chapter uses evidences from oral testimonies, newspaper reports and memoirs, and even official archives to bring out the reasons from the point of view of the refugees themselves.

16 Md Habibur Rehaman and Willem van Schendel, ‘I am not a refugee’ discusses the varied groups which qualified as ‘refugee’ in the broad sense of term.

17 Note that there were promises made by all the leaders of our countries assuring these people protection and a warm welcome if and when they came over. Now it was merely attempts to discourage the migration. Nehru’s constant emphasis that the situation was improving, even when it was not, is a case in point. The following letter from Nehru to L A Khan dated 6/3/1948 shows this attitude in very clear terms—
‘It is hardly possible for the non-Muslims there to carry on their normal vocations. They are being squeezed out… We have tried our utmost to prevent them from migrating and in fact we have even avoided giving any publicity to this. [yet migration continues].’ Nehru further adds that though there has been a demand for the appointment of a DHC in Dacca, ‘I have postponed this appointment because I did not wish to give any impression in East Bengal that conditions were very abnormal. [even if we do appoint a DHC there] our instructions to him would be to advise people not to migrate and not encourage complaints as far as possible.’
And, as the previous chapter has shown, this indeed was the function of the DHC in Dacca! SWJN, Vol 5, pp. 102-103.

18 Thus, the disclaimer in all such statements by the Government of India that the statistics on influx exclude those who have migrated undetected and have not registered themselves at the border check-posts.
Underlying this exercise is the need to contest two assumptions of the Central Government regarding migration in the East which in turn affected the rehabilitation programme there. These two assumptions were—first, that this migration was not based on any ‘real’ threat to life or property, and second, that it was of a temporary nature, i.e. when conditions normalised the migrants would go back. Thus, whereas the first point denied the migrants any ‘genuine’ reason to migrate and, as a corollary, to be entitled for any rehabilitation benefits unlike their western counterparts who had been identified by the State as genuine victims of violence requiring immediate attention\(^{19}\), the second assumption led to even more serious consequences. It was this false assumption regarding the migration in the East as temporary which never let the relief phase progress towards that of rehabilitation as it had in the West.\(^{20}\) It was further assumed that it was the lure of doles which was influencing the migration in the East. In his letter to Dr B C Roy, Nehru made the following observation—

> Presumably most of the people who are coming over now are doing so because of the very bad economic conditions prevailing in Eastern Pakistan. … This relief business is becoming far too, great a burden on India to bear and there is a danger of our having to give it up… [need for productive work rather than doles only] Once you allow refugees to do nothing and get the dole in money or kind, they deteriorate very rapidly and there is not enough urge even when work comes to them… No-work-no-help should be a definite policy… Doles without work will lead to people getting out of the habit of work and expecting a permanent dole.\(^{21}\)

The need to maintain the image of a secular India where the minorities were treated on par with the majority community, and the need to prevent another deluge of refugees which would be a burden on the finances of the nation, were factors which forced the State to take such a stand in the East. But from the point of view of the refugees, the threat to their lives was ‘real’. It is this ‘real’ threat that this section looks at in some detail.

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\(^{20}\) All the government sponsored publications (Rao, Luthra, Mohanlal Saxena etc) use this point to explain the difference in rehabilitation patterns.

\(^{21}\) Nehru to Roy, dated 29.9.1948, SWJN, p. 71-73. Note this is an observation made by Nehru re: the first batch of refugees. As mentioned in the previous sections, this first batch of refugees rarely took any government help. Whereas, Nehru believed they had come on account of economic conditions, Bandopadhyay showed that their reasons were more out of political factors.
The First Phase

The experience of direct violence was not a major factor in this first phase of migration in the East.\(^2\) The reason for migration in this first phase was more politically motivated. These migrants belonged primarily to the Bhadralok classes. They had participated actively in the Indian National movement, and had all the time visualised a united Bengal and a united India.\(^3\) But when the Radcliffe Line cut across all their hopes and aspirations, it was simply difficult for them to accept the Muslim League and the impending ‘Muslim rule’ associated with this party.

Here the symbol of the national flag held immense significance. Pravash Chandra Lahiry, a Congress party member and one who stayed back in East Pakistan until 1964, describes how upset he had been when he saw the unfurling of the Pakistani flag in place of the Indian flag in his home district to commemorate the first and the subsequent Independence Day celebrations in East Pakistan.\(^4\) But it is not only in personal memoirs that the unfurling of the flag held significance. In fact, even for the Intelligence Bureau, Government of West Bengal, the respect shown to the Indian national flag was a significant proof of loyalty to the nation. Those who abstained from showing such regard to the national flag were invariably classified as ‘suspicious’ or ‘anti-national’. One such instance is recorded in the fortnightly report sent by the SP (Nadia) to the DIG (Police) Central Range, West Bengal.\(^5\) The SP noted—

> The loyalty of the Muslims in this district, about which I often expressed my doubt in my previous DO’s came up for a crucial test on the occasion of Independence Day anniversary celebrations. Nowhere in the district, except possibly at Santipur, Muslims

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\(^2\) Even though the ghost of Noakhali violence too, had majorly influenced migration to West Bengal, it was not the predominant factor.

\(^3\) Joya Chatterji has shown how the Partition of Bengal was desired by the Bhadralok themselves in order to free themselves from domination by the Muslims. Hence, all the memoranda and petitions which she has cited do clearly show the demand for those districts to be included in India and not Pakistan. Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*. So even if it was not a united Bengal that they could get, it was on the Indian side that the Hindu Bhadralok had desired to be on. Hence, the Radcliffe Line came as a shock to many who simply could not accept their homes falling on the Pakistani side.

\(^4\) Lahiry writes—[the Presidents of both—INC and ML of the Rajshahi District came to jointly host the national flag of Pakistan on 14\(^{th}\) August 1947] ‘The President of the District Congress Committee is, so to say, rather roped in to hoist thr flag with the President of the Muslim League, it seems only to humiliate the organisation which stood for the independence of united India… This certainly grieves the fighters of freedom who actually suffered for the cause.’ Pravash Chandra Lahiry, *India Partitioned and minorities in Pakistan*, Calcutta: Writer’s Forum Private Limited (1964), p.1

\(^5\) Extract from SP (Nadia) to DIG (Police) Central Range dtd 4\(^{th}\) September 1948. 1238-47 Mohammedan Affairs: Pakistan activities on the border of West Bengal, Nabadwip. GB IB Records WBSA, Kolkata. Emphasis is mine.
chose to participate in the ceremony. Even those that attended the ceremony either as
bystanders or onlookers showed scant regard for the National Flag or the National
Anthem. On the contrary there was clear and unassailable proof of leading Muslims
inhabiting the border regions, crossing over to Pakistan to celebrate the day. Hordes of
Muslims were seen marching to that territory to profess their allegiance to Pakistan in
preference to the Indian Dominion. The two notable gatherings in Pakistan on the border
of Nadia were at Meherpur and Baidyanath Tola. ASI's attached to the border outposts
could furnish lists of but a few of these traitors because others were not known to them
nor their particulars be collected.

Thus, not only from the point of view of the migrants, but also from State perspective, the
National Flag held immense symbolic significance. Whereas for the State it was ‘a
crucial test’ of loyalty, for the incoming migrants it was their deep sense of attachment
and their aspirations which the flag symbolised. These migrants could not identify with
the Pakistani flag and other such symbols of Pakistani rule, so they migrated.

But apart from such political factors, there were certain social factors too, which had
compelled the Hindu Bhadralok to migrate. Constantly being reminded of their inferior
position now that Pakistan was created, the Bhadralok Hindus of East Pakistan chose to
leave their homeland.26

The Second Phase

The second phase of migration was a result of the direct experience of violence and
communal rioting in 1950. The Government of India finally awoke to the situation in the
East. The Nehru—Liaquat Ali Pact was signed with the intention to discourage further
migration and in fact encourage the return of the migrants to their homeland. Whereas the
previous chapter has shown that the Delhi Pact failed since the influx persisted, this
section will show why inspite of all the assurances given to the minorities they still
migrated.

The purpose of the Pact was to ensure the safety of life and property of the minorities.
But in actual fact this principle was not followed. The only positive contribution of the
Pact, according to Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, was that—‘fears and troubles in coming to
India minimised and people are enabled to come without the former inhuman

26 It should be remembered that the Hindu Bhadralok comprised the more economically and even socially
powerful elites of Bengali society. We note the dominating influence of the Hindu Bhadralok over their
Muslim subordinates (tenants, servants, artisans etc) in a very subtle manner in the memoirs of the Hindu
Bhadralok as recorded in Chede Asha Gram. Hence, for such dominant classes it was simply difficult to
adjust to the impending second-class treatment in a Muslim dominant State.
experiences. [but the] Main purpose was not fulfilled.” On every other aspect the Pact had failed to deliver—be it the safety of life and property, women’s honour, theft and dacoity, desecration of temples and places of worship, or loot in the fields and orchards belonging to Hindus.

As noted by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in his note on the East Bengal Refugee Problem, the immediate fallout of the Pact in East Pakistan had been—

1. Complete economic breakdown of the Hindus by boycott;
2. Increase in loot, arson, dacoities and other crimes—incidence [sic] on Hindus;
3. Abduction has been replaced by asking Hindu women for the night and returning them in the morning;
4. Ansars going strong and asking a few Hindus to join them;
5. Moslem residents asking the Hindus to go away, although top-ranking few Moslems are giving assurances to the Hindus to stay on;
6. No change of policy of the Pak-Govt (sic) in the matter of
   1) Requisition of Hindu houses;
   2) Return of arms to Hindus;
   3) Employment of Hindus in Govt. service;
   4) Granting of [arms] licenses etc to the Hindus; and
   5) Giving facilities of education to the Hindus.

Keeping these points in mind, Mukherjee concluded that the Pact had been a failure and that ‘No Hindu can live in Pakistan with self-respect, security and peace of mind, although the Pact is there…. ‘

As mentioned before, the report of the Enquiry Commission set up by both the Governments was never published, hence, the experiences of the Muslims in West

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27 Undated report authored by Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, later some of its findings have been published in a pamphlet titled Delhi Pact Has Failed (Calcutta: 1950) issued by his organisation—Bengal Rehabilitation Organisation. This note, however, is from SPM Papers collection II-IV Installment, F No. 160.

28 Ibid. The following points have been quoted from the Note itself.

29 Ibid. In the note he mentions that it is from his experiences as an ex-member of the Cabinet and one who has traveled among the refugees for the last three years to gather ‘first-hand knowledge from: refugees in camps in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, refugees who returned but have come back frustrated, Hindu employees of Pakistan Government and Hindus who are still living there’ which are the source material for the preparation of this note.
Bengal have not been documented. For now, it shall suffice to bear in mind that similar atrocities were inflicted upon the Muslims in West Bengal as well leading to their exodus from the Indian part of Bengal.

The critique of the Pact came not only from political leaders but also from the migrants themselves which further attests the failure of the Pact in building confidence among the minorities. The Mymensingh Convention of East Bengal Hindus passed the following resolution pointing out towards the failure of the Pact—

This Convention regrets to note that in spite of the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement to rehabilitate the returned migrants in their original homes, most of the migrants, on return, are getting no help from the authorities and are living in pitiable, deplorable conditions, without any shelter, without any means of subsistence. Their own houses are under occupation of Muslim refugees from India and the arable lands of these evacuees have been distributed to them. The efforts of the members of the District Minority board and the Minority Commission have so far been fruitless, and the indifferent attitude of Government is causing immense hardship to the returned people.30

Such was the ‘real’ threat posed to the Hindus in East Pakistan. Fortunately, this threat was recognised by the State as a cause for genuine concern. Hence, these migrants were found ‘eligible’ for State aid.

The Third Phase:
The next major phase of influx coincided with the introduction of passports (1952) and the priority-wise distribution of Migration Certificates (1956). Immediately after the introduction of the passport system, Nehru noted a decline in the influx from East Pakistan. Nehru believed that this was a positive effect of the passport system which had confirmed once and for all the loyalties of the national to the Nation. But he was once again proved wrong.

A strong critique of the passport system came from Jogendranath Mandal, the only Hindu member of the Cabinet in East Pakistan who had stayed on in Pakistan inspite of being ridiculed by his fellow Schedule Caste members. It was only in 1950 when he too, like the many other Hindu political representatives, decided to migrate to India. His critique of the passport system, thus, arises from the position of one who was a part of the

30 Dated 13th June 1950. Cited by SPM in undated speech of SPM, S. No 31, SPM Papers, NMML.
East Pakistan Government, and also as one who had willingly chosen to stay on in Pakistan post-Independence. Commenting upon Nehru’s analysis, Mandal wrote—

The influx of refugees from East Bengal was bound to stop since the introduction of passport system because the intending migrants, 99% of whom are poor and rural people, are not in a position to secure passport and visa for want of money and proper knowledge of passport rules. That there are not many people now coming over from East Bengal, as has been said by the PM is no indication that either the situation has improved or that confidence of the minorities has been restored. The real situation is this: there is not a single Hindu in East Bengal today who feels that his life and honour are secure there. There is not a single Hindu who does not want to leave East Bengal. But the reason that has compelled him to stay there is his apprehension of uncertain future in his new land of migration.31

Such a dilemma of the refugees is most graphically represented in the following illustration which appeared in the newspaper Jugantar.

![Jugantar illustration](image)

**Mahendrakhoner Apekhey**: Pak Pradhan Mantri Dhaka-ye boliyachen je Bharat-Pak passport-er tarikh tini ekhuno southik koriya bolite paren na.

[Mahendrakhoner refers to an auspicious time according to Bengali customs, hence, the title implies—Waiting for the Auspicious Moment: Prime Minister of Pakistan has stated in Dhaka that he is unable to state the exact time when the Indo-Pak passport system will be introduced.] The passport is depicted as the guillotine in this illustration awaiting its fall on the helpless lady upon whom ‘Bangali’ [Bengali] is inscribed. Which means the introduction of passport would mean a total severing of ties in the two Bengals. It also represents the hardening of the ‘soft border’ which had been maintained so far. The fact that it is a lady being brought under the guillotine and not any typical Hindu or Muslim representation is demonstrative of the fact that inherent in the sentiments was a tremendous loss of shared culture which seemed now an impending possibility with the introduction of passports. What is being guillotined is not a Hindu or a Muslim, rather it is the ‘Bangali’ who is being sacrificed here.

Source: Jugantar, dated 9th October 1952

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31 ‘Real Situation in East Bengal: Shri J N Mandal on Nehru’s Analysis’, Hindusthan Standard, 10/11/1952.
The letters of the refugees to the Government representatives clearly show that the people wanted to migrate but the process of obtaining the passport was extremely cumbersome. To cite an example:

The present cessation of the inflow of immigrants from East Pakistan is mainly, if not solely, due to the heavy barrier created by the imposition of the passport-visa system which, inspite of assurances and promises of all facilities and prompt attention, actually costs an applicant in East Pakistan 25-30 rupees and in some cases even more, in hard cash and 3-6 weeks of waiting and returning to and fro...it hardly requires much imagination to appraise what it means for the unlettered inhabitants of the remote villages of East Pakistan to negotiate Dacca and to take out a passport therefrom. And this is the real cause of this abrupt waning of evacuation from East Pakistan.

If there be any doubt about it in any quarter, let the barrier be removed, say for a fortnight and the result will certainly dispel all doubts.

Nonetheless, the migrants came, and came in droves even after the introduction of passports. Apart from coming into India ‘illegally’ by simply crossing over on foot from the many unmanned entry points in the long eastern border or by bribing the men at the check-posts, there were other ways which displayed far greater ingenuity.

One such way of entering Indian Territory was the use of the Pakistani passport with Indian visa on it. Some of the East Pakistani Hindus migrated to India on the strength of Pakistani passports with Indian visas on it. Once in Indian Territory, they offered to surrender the Pakistani passport and requested for the grant of Indian citizenship. The Government of India was not in favour of such migration for two reasons: permitting such migration would once again lead to an increase in influx from East Pakistan which was to be avoided at all cost, second, as per Government policy, the minorities were seen as the responsibility of the country they were in, i.e. non-Muslims in East Pakistan were seen as the responsibility of Pakistan and Muslims as that of India. The Indian Government did not want to jeopardise this arrangement and hence, the principle of coming over on Pakistani passport with Indian visa and then surrendering it was discouraged.

32 Letter from President (All Bengal Dislodged Minorities Association, Calcutta) to Nehru dated 13th November 1952. SPM Papers, Serial No 40 (1st instalment) NMML, New Delhi. Emphasis added.

33 This was a point reflected in the following observation made by the Ministry of External Affairs in the note dated 7th April 1953 which read as follows—

'[so far Hindus in Pakistan] have been treated by the Government of Pakistan or their officials almost as if they were Indian nationals. Charges of disloyalty are often made against Hindus in Pakistan. Since the passport and visa system has come into force, there has been a very slight, but welcome change. Once a person takes a Pakistani passport and travels using that, even junior Pakistani officials tend to regard that as
The final decision taken was that such migrants would be allowed entry, however, they would not surrender their passports. Instead, they would be given indefinite extensions on the visas and would be permitted to travel all over India with due permission of the State and without any hindrance till citizenship rules came into force whereafter the migrant would be granted the citizenship of India.

From the intense discussion on this issue, as found in the files, yet another point which comes to light is the concern over migration of Muslims to India. As mentioned before, there was a wide gap between political rhetoric and actual practice. Thus, whereas on the one hand Muslims were being encouraged to stay and those who had left were being encouraged to come back, yet, the following statement shows, at the bureaucratic level there was a strong desire to prevent the return of Muslims—

… this Government are inclined to think that liberal extension of visas/period of stay, as proposed in the second alternative, to such persons will cover all genuine cases and will enable this Government to exercise certain amount of control over undesirable elements trying to take advantage of the system… it will be difficult to work our passport rules in such a manner as to allow only Hindu citizens of Pakistan the facility of surrendering their passports and not the Muslim citizens who might also wish to do so.

Whereas this was the view of the Government of West Bengal, that of the Government of Bihar was even more terse—‘The State Government have no objection to Pakistani proof that he has definitely made up his mind to stay in Pakistan and to that extent there is a slight lessening of animosity towards such persons. If now by any action of ours [i.e. agreeing to the surrender of such passports by these migrants] we give Pakistan to understand that the taking of a Pakistani passport may in fact be only equivalent to a migration certificate, we shall give a severe jolt to the nascent idea that a passport is a definite proof of not only present nationality but of future intention.’ F. No. 11/53-PSP MEA PVIII Branch—‘Hindu residents of east Pakistan who came to India on Pakistani passports and Indian visas and subsequently wish to settle down permanently in India.’ NAI, New Delhi.

34 The reason given was first, that in no international law such an arrangement could be made; and second, in case the migrant wished to go back for whatever reason (even if temporarily) to Pakistan he could be arrested and the Indian Government would not be able to interfere because he was not an Indian citizen in this intervening period.

35 Technically the Muslims could return by 31st March 1953 to regain the ownership of their properties. See West Bengal Evacuee Property Act (1951) discussed in Chapter III.

36 The first alternative was to allow such migrants to surrender their passports and wait for Indian citizenship laws to materialise till they can take up the same, whereas the second alternative suggested in this case was to give these migrants indefinite extensions on visas. It was the second option which was unanimously agreed to by all the states and the one which was finally adopted as well. In this letter, the deputy secretary to the G/o West Bengal is conveying the decision of the Government to the MEA, G/o India in favour of the second alternative.

37 From Deputy Secy (G/o WB) to Secy (G/o India) dated 1st March 1953, F. No. 11/53-PSP MEA PVIII Branch—‘Hindu residents of East Pakistan who came to India on Pakistani passports and Indian visas and subsequently wish to settle down permanently in India.’ NAI, New Delhi. Emphasis added.
Hindu nationals, holding Pakistani passports being given facilities to continue in India till they acquire citizenship under the Indian citizenship law, when enacted.\textsuperscript{38}

Therefore, though the practice was not acceptable, yet, the Hindu migrants were not pushed out.\textsuperscript{39} As mentioned before, they were allowed to stay on the strength of extended visas till finally the Indian Citizenship Act was passed.

The Fourth Phase

In 1964, West and East Bengal were once again engulfed by unprecedented communal violence. This marked the next phase of migration in the East. This was also the second phase which saw a tremendous surge in influx. This was also the one where the migrants were recognised as victims of genuine violence, and hence, the State recognised their need to migrate to safety. These ‘new migrants’, however, would not be rehabilitated in West Bengal.\textsuperscript{40}

As pointed out in Chapter I, a Commission of Enquiry was set up to look into the reasons for migration. And though this report was also not published, Saibal Gupta [ICS officer and Chairman of Dandakaranya Project] and his wife Asoka Gupta [noted social activist] unofficially maintained statements of the incoming refugees recorded by them as part of this enquiry. These statements include testimonies of refugee men and women. Most of them point out to ‘minor’ incidents as factors which compelled their migration. Thus, abduction of women, burning down of crops in the fields and loot and arson remain some of the points made by these witnesses.

Thus it can be said that the Hindus from East Pakistan were not always welcome unlike as in the West. In the Western region, the official evacuation policy ensured that the majority of the Hindus and Sikhs were already in Indian Territory. Those who remained, too, could move in gradually without any hurdles on their way.\textsuperscript{41} It was only in

\textsuperscript{38} From Passport Officer to Government of Bihar to Deputy Secy (MEA, Calcutta, Branch Secretariat) dated 5th August 1953.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘I really see no reason why persons wishing to migrate to India should not do so on a Migration Certificate. If they do happen to come to India on Pakistani passports and then decide to settle down in India, I would not dream of forcing them to go back to get a Migration Certificate and come again on the strength of that...’ In official note dated 7th August 1953, Ibid. [emphasis added]

\textsuperscript{40} This has been discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{41} This was also so because the number of such later-day migrants was never alarming enough as it had been in the East, hence, never a cause of concern.
1965 that finally a major restriction was put up in the Western Border whereby one could migrate on the strength of the Migration Certificate only if he/she took an undertaking that they would not request for any rehabilitation assistance from the State and that there was some family member here who would take up the responsibility of sustaining them in India.42

Having looked at how the refugees redefined their status, and also having shown that their reasons for migration was real, the next two sections focus on the attempts of the refugees at self rehabilitation. First we will look at the resistance of the refugees to the inadequate and arbitrary rehabilitation measures introduced by the Government and then look at their own efforts at rehabilitation.

**Refugees Respond to State-sponsored Relief and Rehabilitation Programmes**

The daily newspaper *Statesman* published a six part series titled ‘Six Refugees’ on the successful rehabilitation of the refugees with Government aid and refugee initiative. Apart from narrating the experiences of the refugees from East Pakistan it also included the stories of a refugee from West Pakistan rehabilitated in Delhi and of a refugee woman from East Pakistan.

Take the story of Jatindra Nath Biswas.43 He moved out of East Pakistan in January 1948 after winding up his shoe-business there.44 Upon reaching Calcutta he took up a rented accommodation and applied for a small business loan (Rs 1200). With this money he set up a small factory and employed eight refugees to work here in the various departments—woodwork (manufacturing wooden heels for ladies’ shoes, coat hangers, handles for cloth bags etc), marble-work (marbles for schoolboys, cement platter for rolling chappatis), candy-machine, tailoring machine, and a machine to make hairpins and knitting needles. His wife was incharge of the tailoring unit, as well as the candy making unit, and here also 12 refugee women were employed. The business earned profits and soon they became prosperous. The correspondent noted—‘He has by the grace of God and a benevolent Government been able to rehabilitate himself.’45

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42 Annexure I.
43 ‘Refugee Portrait: A Self-Made Man’ in *Statesman*, 25.4.1950
44 Most of his clients had moved out and he also felt it was unsafe for the women of his family to stay on in East Pakistan.
In yet another example cited in the *Statesman* the courage of a refugee woman is narrated. Mrs Nihar Kana Debi came to Calcutta in 1948. Her husband was suffering from tuberculosis, and hence, all the money they had brought along was spent on his treatment. But to no avail, he soon died. Nihar Debi did not lose hope and joined a Government-run Training Centre for refugee women. She received a business loan of Rs 2500 from the Refugee Businessmen’s Rehabilitation Board after the training and established a hosiery business in Park Circus. The business did well and she was able to employ six refugee men and also pay her home rent.

Thus, training centres and rehabilitation loans were helpful to a great extent to the refugees. But all of this shows the individual enterprise of the refugees as well—a point noted in all these stories of successful rehabilitation. In the previous chapter, we noted how even the State acknowledged its failure in most of the urban and rural rehabilitation schemes—Type Scheme, Barujibi Scheme, Horticultural Scheme, and worst of all, the Union Board Scheme.46

The rate of desertion was highest in those areas where the Government was directly involved—the Government-sponsored Type Scheme and the Union Board Scheme. But where the refugees had the choice of choosing their own land and settling down (the Private settlement Type Scheme) the rate of desertion was significantly lower. As stated by Prafulla K Chakrabarti—

… percentage of desertions from government sponsored colonies was higher than from private settlements. In case of private settlements the refugees selected the sites themselves, keeping in mind the prospect of rehabilitation at the place of settlement. But in the case of government sponsored settlements very little attention was paid to the selection of sites, the main object being to hustle the refugees out of the camps.47

Another noteworthy point is that the rate of desertion in the Union Board schemes in both the cases, too, was very high. This shows that local support for the refugees was not easily forthcoming.48

48 As discussed in the previous chapter, the success of the Union Board scheme depended upon the cooperation and assistance of the officials and the local population. Both of which not forthcoming, the scheme failed and in the process proved how the refugees would have to tread the path all alone.
Thus, the refugee in the East had to deal with a state policy which insisted on preventing this influx and encouraging the migrants to go back. This was something the refugees in the West did not have to face. The task of the refugee in the East was two-fold—one, to oppose the arbitrarily implemented policies of the Government, and second, the constructive role of refugees in the process of self-rehabilitation. This two-fold task of the refugees is described by veteran Communist leader and refugee activist Samar Mukherjee in the following words—‘Andolan-er dooti padhati grihit hoye. Ek dike poonorbashon neeti paribortoner udeshyo janmat sangreho, sabha, michil. Oono dike, nijoshvo udjog-e jomi dakhal-er madhyome poonorbashon bebostha poton.’\(^49\) [The refugee movement has a two-fold task. One is to bring about a change in the rehabilitation policies by mass demonstrations, gatherings and marches. Second, is the more constructive role of self-rehabilitation.]

**Resisting the Denial of Rehabilitation Benefits**

The next step of the Government was to selectively deny rehabilitation benefits to a large number of refugees, often on very flimsy grounds.\(^50\) But such means of denying the refugees their rightful claim to rehabilitation was strongly contested by them. The most common way in which the refugees expressed their anger was in their refusal to move out of the camps. This created an exclusive category of refugees in the East called the ‘Ex-Camp site refugees’.

**Bagjola group of ex-camp sites:**

With all camps being closed down after April 1961, the Government gave the refugees two options—rehabilitation outside West Bengal or 6 months dole in advance and no rehabilitation assistance thereafter. The refugees were, however, undeterred. They took the second option and that is how the camps persisted, renamed as ex-camp sites. The largest among these camps were the Bagjola group of ex-camp sites, located in the very posh Alipore subdivision and housing 1065 families. The refugees were brought here

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\(^{49}\) Samar Mukherjee, ‘*PaschimBonger Sharanarthi Samasya*’ in *Smaranika* [a commemorative issue published by the UCRC in memory of the Bagjola Camp revolt] date of publication not mentioned [2007?] This issue has a collection of articles written by famous refugee leaders describing the plight and struggle of the refugees.

\(^{50}\) Discussed in Chapter III, pp. 168-173.
sometime in 1954 with the aim of settling them down in the land reclaimed by them in this area. However, once the reclamation process was over, the locals of the surrounding area claimed their rights over this land. In order to avoid any conflict, the government chose to relocate the refugees and they were settled in these camps.

But when the camps were to be closed, the refugees refused to move out and this created a problem for the State. However, the State went ahead with its plan for closing down the camps leaving these refugees at the mercy of fate.

Tushar Singha, well-known refugee activist, narrates one of the most violent police attack on the camp inmates of Bagjola which took place in January 1961. About 100 well-armed policemen surrounded the entry point of the Camp. The police called for the refugees to leave the camp premises but the refugees refused to do so. The police then resorted to three rounds of firing in the attempt to disperse the refugees and break the hunger-strike of a few others. In the process, 27 refugees were injured and 5 were killed. Tushar Singha, well-known refugee activist, narrates one of the most violent police attack on the camp inmates of Bagjola which took place in January 1961. About 100 well-armed policemen surrounded the entry point of the Camp. The police called for the refugees to leave the camp premises but the refugees refused to do so. The police then resorted to three rounds of firing in the attempt to disperse the refugees and break the hunger-strike of a few others. In the process, 27 refugees were injured and 5 were killed.51 This was one of the worst attacks of the police over the refugees. The United Central Refugee Council (UCRC)52 immediately came to their rescue and expressed its widespread condemnation of this incident. Jyoti Basu, too, came out in support of these refugees and held a massive rally in their support. In the years of the first Left Front government in West Bengal, the Committee of Review for the Rehabilitation of Refugees was set up under the Chairmanship of Shri N C Chaterjee to look into the problems of these ex-camp site residents. The most important recommendation made was that this land should be developed and refugees should be settled in and around this area.53 The recommendations still await fulfilment!

Resisting Dispersal
In the post-1954 phase, the refugees were offered rehabilitation in states outside West Bengal. Refugees, on their part, resisted such arbitrary dispersal to hostile states.54 Even

51 Tushar Singha, ‘Bagjola Camp Atiter Pata Theke’ in Smaranika, pp. 81-84.
52 United Central Refugee Council, the main refugee organization set up in 1950. Discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the chapter.
54 Bandopadhyay cites a good example to explain the cause behind such mass-scale desertion. He states that often in the case of two brothers, if one of them is not doing well he will come up and take refuge with the other
those who moved out came back after a few months. These refugees were the ‘deserters’. The Government simply refused to take up their case for rehabilitation upon their return, on the plea that they had been provided rehabilitation benefits in other states which they had refused, and hence, they were no longer the responsibility of the Government. Even for the new migrants, this policy was maintained—6 months dole in advance and no rehabilitation benefits thereafter or full rehabilitation assistance in Dandakaranya. Either ways, stay in the camp was to be limited to a few days only. The majority of the refugees opted for the first option, and even those who chose the second, many of them came back.

To cite the case of one such ‘deserter’, Ganesh Halui had migrated to West Bengal in 1950. He, along with other refugees, was first sent to Ranghat camp and then to Rajmahal camp in Bihar by a special ‘refugee train’. Halui described the camp-life in Bihar as even worse than Ranaghat with nothing to do and simply relying on doles—'Ranaghat-er chaiye shasthir jeebon. Karnaheen. Alosyabhora.' [A harsher punishment than even Ranaghat. Without any work. Lethargic.] Upset with the state of affairs he left for Calcutta in search of work. He was an artist and he felt he could develop this craft with proper training in Shantiniketan. But without fees he could not apply for the courses there. Disappointed, he came back to the camp in Bihar. From here they were once again shifted to another camp where they were to stay permanently. Some refugees built makeshift homes with whatever they could find and tried to settle down. Yet, there were others who decided to go back to Calcutta. Halui joined them and they came to Howrah station. The platform became their home for some time. He started going to an art college and applied for a refugee scholarship to fund his studies. Finally he got it, but not without much delay. Finally, he became a painter after all this struggle and lived to tell the story.

brother. But if that brother is hard-pressed for resources and cannot take the burden of another family, he might ask his brother to move out to a distant brother’s home. Unwillingly the distressed brother might even go to that distant brother’s home, but on the slightest ill-treatment or taunting behaviour, he will come back and be willing to bear with the ill-treatment or taunts of his own brother rather than that not of his blood. Such was the plight of the East Bengal refugee who came to seek shelter with his brother in West Bengal but was packed off to States which were not so welcoming like Bihar, Orissa and Maharashtra. A common complaint he heard from all such deserter refugees was—‘Ora je amader chaye na.’ (p.162) [They do not want us.] Also, ‘tara shoja uttor dei ora toh amader apon bhaiyer moton noye.’ (p. 162). [They are not like our own brothers.]

But, as he points out, there were many who lost hope, and also lives, in these difficult days of subsistence which left an indelible mark on him and his art.

In the preceding paragraph, an individual instance was noted. But that such desertions did occur on a mass scale is proved in the now famous Bettiah Satyagraha.

The Bettiah camp in Bihar was the largest of the refugee camps outside West Bengal. But in terms of facilities, like all other refugee camps outside West Bengal state, it was simply pathetic. What made matters worse was that the Government of Bihar was not at all sympathetic to the cause of Bengali refugees. The following suggestions were made by Anil Singha (refugee leader who visited Bettiah as part of an official Action Committee Team) for improving the conditions in this camp:

- The camp refugees should be housed in mud-walled thatched houses instead of tents,
- A team of adequately-equipped Bengali doctors should be immediately sent to Bettiah to bridge the communication gap between the refugee patients and poorly trained Bihari doctors,
- The refugees in Bettiah camp should be moved elsewhere for economic rehabilitation.

These points show how neglected the refugees in these camps were. Besides, there were other problems as well—doles not being distributed regularly, camp conditions absolutely sub-human, and hostility of the local Bihari population. Dying in dozens, the refugees decided to go back to West Bengal as a final resort. Thus, trainloads of refugees came back and settled in Howrah and Sealdah station once again. They first resorted to peaceful demonstrations and when that did not work out, following the principles of

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56 It should be borne in mind that post 1955 there is the State Re-organisation Committee which was looking at redrawing State boundaries within India. The files of this Committee for the Eastern state show much serious correspondence vis-à-vis the redrawing of the borders of West Bengal. Accommodation of refugees was one of the main points given in favour of extending the borders of West Bengal. Naturally this extension would affect the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa in particular and also Assam to a great extent. Note these very three states are the ones where the refugees were most ill-treated. Possible reason could be suggested that there was the concern of large parts of these states getting included in West Bengal and hence the hostile attitude towards Bengali refugees. This is seen in the fears of Andhra Pradesh which backs out in the last moment from the Dandakaranya project. Also, the hostility in Assam merits a separate chapter of its own.


satyagraha they courted arrest in batches. Finally, however, many had to go back for the
government refused to provide rehabilitation in West Bengal. However, it did promise
better rehabilitation in the same States again. Thus, while some refugees went back, yet,
others who refused to do so simply got lost in the crowd. They were not provided
rehabilitation in West Bengal since they were the deserter refugees, and as per
government records they had already been given their due when they left for the states
outside West Bengal.

Thus, this was the first Satyagraha of camp refugees. The Bettiah camp deserters’
satyagraha brings to light two aspects of the refugee movement:

- The stiff resistance offered by the refugees to the arbitrary dispersal policy of the
  State.
- The internal conflicts within the refugee movement between the ‘camp refugees’
  and ‘colony refugees’.

Regarding the first point it can be said that though the refugees were not successful in
getting their demand for rehabilitation in West Bengal accepted by the government, yet,
the resistance movement and the leadership of these refugees had succeeded in winning a
few concessions for those who chose to go back to these camps: improvement in living
conditions in the camp, sending of refugee families to permanent rehabilitation sites by
March 1958, a twenty percent increase in cash doles, opening of fair-price ration shops
for cheaper rations, establishment of two training-cum-production centres, release of all
the arrested satyagrahis and withdrawal of cases against them.

The second point is noteworthy. The fact that the colony refugees did not participate
in this resistance movement depicts the internal divisions among the refugees. Two
reasons for their aloofness to this problem have been cited by Chakrabarti. One, the camp
inmates had abstained from participating in the Anti-Eviction movement of the colony
dwellers. Likewise, the latter also did not participate in a movement which was not
affecting them directly. The second is a more important observation, and it pertains to the

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59 Earlier in 1951, the resistance movements of the refugees were strictly restricted to the squatter colony
refugees against eviction from these colonies. Naturally, camp residents did not have any direct interest in
this movement hence abstained from participation. Therefore, this satyagraha is referred to as the first for
the camp refugees.

60 P K Chakrabarti, *The marginal men* p. 175.
class bias evident among the refugees. Chakrabarti notes that more than 70 per cent of the camp inmates were Namasudras or belonging to other lower classes, the chotolok, whereas, colony dwellers belonged primarily to the bhadralok classes. This was one major inhibitory factor for a joint movement of the two classes of refugees. Even the UCRC failed to bring the two together.

Similarly, Indubaran Ganguly noted the existence of a class bias in the setting up of the Bijoygarh colony. He mentions how the leadership of the Jadavpur Association clearly maintained that only the Bhadralok would be given plots in this area. To implement this policy, an Actioners’ Committee was also set up to ensure only bhadralok refugees applied for membership here. Manas Ray also points out to such discrimination in his recollection of Netaji Nagar in the following words—‘The vast majority of those who came were middle-class people with some urban exposure. Those who did not fall in this bracket—fishermen, carpenters, hut-builders, masons, barbers—tended to concentrate in two adjacent wards lying at one end of the locality.’

This can be explained in two ways—Partition might have been a watershed in many aspects but even this movement of religiously marked collectivities did not lead to changes in perception of class biases. Secondly, by drawing a line of distinction with these lower classes, the Bhadralok Hindus were probably trying to find a common ground with the local population so that they were not clubbed as one and the same. As stated by Manas Ray—‘If Calcutta invested us with its terrors, we did the same to the people we thought were peripheral, infusing them with the terrors we were so familiar with… The internal boundaries settled, we felt comfortable with our habitat.’ Thus, such distinctions did exist among the refugees.

**Dandakaranya: A Project of Ultimate Failure**

A study of the Dandakaranya project brings to light the following flaws in the rehabilitation programme in the East which was prevalent in all the schemes for these migrants:

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61 Indubaran Ganguly *Colonysmriti*, p. 35.
63 Ibid. p. 155
• Lack of proper planning (re: land chosen, distance from main nerve centres, selection of suitable refugees etc)
• Lack of communication between states
• Lack of communication between the Central Government and West Bengal

I discuss the critique of this project as presented by the Chairman of the Dandakaranya Development Authority—Saibal Kumar Gupta. Gupta and his wife, Smt Asoka Gupta, had worked actively in this region to bring some relief to the refugees. But both, in the end, complained of government high-handedness, and did not refrain from criticising the state of affairs in this region. In fact, after a period of ten months in the office as Chairman of the DDA, Saibal Gupta resigned from the job in protest.

Lack of Proper Planning:
A critique of the project comes from Asoka Gupta’s on-site analysis of the project and its functioning. She describes how the area was getting overcrowded, and yet nothing was done to improve the situation—

The unending flow of refugees to Mana⁶⁴ with its limited accommodation has perplexed the Dandakaranya authorities… with the present rate of influx, they have no other alternative than to put the new migrants straight under the sun as the flow still continues. Nearly a thousand families are put up in single fly-tents⁶⁵ … Other families are under shamianas at Mana and at Kurud…⁶⁶

Refugees reached Raipur (in present day Chattisgarh state) in ‘refugee specials’ from Calcutta. From Raipur they were brought to the Mana transit camp in buses and trucks. Thereafter, their names were registered and family details entered in records. After a preliminary medical examination they were provided with items of immediate necessity—buckets, mugs, hurricane lanterns etc. They were given cooked meals on the first day of their arrival, but thereafter, it was dry rations for all. This system, according

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⁶⁴ The Transit camp in Dandakaranya where the refugees coming in ‘refugee special trains’ were received from Calcutta and then dispersed to the actual site of rehabilitation—Pharagao (the first settlement built up in this region), Umerkote and Paralkote.
⁶⁵ Two families in each and four families in the big Army tents.
to Asoka Gupta, kept the refugees busy and hence, presumably made them forget their trauma as they got more and more involved in the daily routine of life.

However, as mentioned before, she was highly critical of the unhealthy environment in the camps. She noted that medical facilities were inadequate with just one 16-bedded hospital in Mana. Further, with so many refugees clustered in a small area, spread of diseases was only natural—‘the children and even the elderly people defecate anywhere they like. The women are cooking food out in the open as kitchen blocks have yet to be constructed, throwing dirty water or garbage everywhere… Due to this insanitation, fly nuisance has become a detriment to public health.’

Lack of Collaboration between States:
Saibal Gupta points out how Dandakaranya had become a battleground of sorts for the Central Ministry, Government of West Bengal and the other state governments (Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and in the initial stages Andhra Pradesh as well). Whereas, earlier it was decided that land would be acquired from the three states—Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh—Andhra Pradesh backed out of the project at the last moment. The reason cited by the Government was that the land offered there was not suitable for agriculture.

But Gupta argued that though this may have been one prime reason, yet, the other states as well, did not release land of better quality. Hence, the other explanation for this refusal to release land for the project, as suggested by Gupta, was the assumption made by the state governments that this project would lead to the creation of a vast stretch of land under the control of the Bengalees—

_Theek ki karone shesh porjonto Andhra Pradesh beke boshlo, bola shokto. Kintu ekta anuman samhav bole mone hoye. DNK-er anukale monobhabh shristi korar jono bangladeshher gorar dike mukhe mukhe ebong khborer kagoje ekta kotha kramoshoho chalu hochilo je ekhane ekta swatantra desh ba angrajya parinoto hote pare, arthat sheta jeno hobe Paschim Bonger bahire ekti notun bangla desh._

[Why exactly did Andhra Pradesh refuse to part with land at the last moment is difficult to say, but one possible reason could be the false rumours being spread in newspapers or the mass propaganda to jeopardise this project wherein it was stated that this land would be a separate state created out of West Bengal for the Bengalees.]

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67 Ibid.
68 Point made by N R Hota, unpubd dissertation, The dandakaranaya project, IIPA.
Even the other states which did give land for this project, parted with only indifferent lands which were barely cultivable. Thus, Kalahandi area of Orissa and Bastar zilla of present day Chattisgarh, which were not the most productive regions, were set aside by these states for the refugees. Refugees were spread far and wide in these regions fearing the possible repercussions of a Bengali collective in politics and culture.

Also, the Government of West Bengal wanted a greater stake in the administration of this region but the other states felt it was their domain and would not encourage any trespassing. Thus, the Government of the refugees was denied any major say in the working of the project, whereas, the ‘alien’ Government, was concerned simply with development of the region, and hence, looked at the refugee issue with little or no consideration.

Lack of Coordination between Centre and State:
The administrative apparatus of the Dandakaranya Development Authority (DDA) was flawed from the very beginning. There was very little power given to the Chairman of the project, and it was the subordinate officers who took the call on all important decisions.

Saibal Gupta noted that the Ministry refused to take orders from one who had not been appointed by them, i.e. the Chairman and relied more on the ‘loyalist’ Chief Administrator who had been appointed by it—

When the ministry was forced to accept a Chairman of somebody else’s choice and to verbally concede the substance of autonomy and full powers to the Chairman it did so with considerable mental reservation. A strong and independent Chairman, insisting on semi-autonomous powers would constitute a threat to the hold that the Ministry had over the DDA and which it was unwilling to relax. A Chief Administrator with earlier links with Ministry and well-known loyalties was a safer bet.

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70 As noted by Gupta, distance between refugees settled in Koraput and Umerkote was about 20 miles.
71 Vote banks
72 Bengali dominance in language and literature.
73 The post of the Chairman was permanently sanctioned by Nehru only after 1960 till when this post was simply honorary in character and the main powers lay in the hands of the Chief Administrator who was the appointee of the Ministry. After Fletcher left this honorary Chairmanship citing the differences with Khanna as the prime reason for his resignation, Nehru and B C Roy decided to make the post of Chairman a permanent one (salaried post) and Sukumar Sen was signed on upon the recommendation of Roy and Nehru. After Sen’s death, Saibal Kumar Gupta was appointed and this appointment too, was done at the behest of the G/o West Bengal. This was not acceptable to the central ministry which saw it as a threat to its powers. Hence, it was the Chief administrator who was given the absolute powers and the Chairman had to do with advisory powers alone. Here then lay the problem of Centre v/s State and as a result of such antagonisms the highly ambitious project failed miserably.
74 Ibid. Emphasis added.
A final point made by Gupta in his critique of the DDA was that the Chairman and the Chief Administrator catered to two different interests. Whereas, for the Chairman it was the welfare of the refugees which held prime concern, that for the Chief Administrator was the government servants recruited en masse for this project—

In the Dandakaranya project there are primarily two kinds of interests involved. One concerns the refugee families (over 7000 now\textsuperscript{75}) for whose benefit and rehabilitation the project has been primarily concerned, the other concerns the large class of officers and employees (mostly non refugees and now numbering about 6000) who find Dandakaranya a happy hunting ground for jobs with salaries and allowances which they did not get elsewhere. The interests of these two classes always do not coincide. If the Chairman is inclined to sympathise with one group and the Chief Administrator with other friction is inevitable…\textsuperscript{76}

Thus, many faults can be picked out in this project which had been visualised as the ultimate solution to all the problems of rehabilitation in the East. Right from political road-blocks to administrative inefficiency to the wrong selection of land\textsuperscript{77}, everything went wrong. Hence, refugees were left with two options—either to work with all these difficulties, or, desertion.

The former option was adopted by a not so inconsiderable number of refugees and their struggle for surviving against all odds is one that has yet to be documented. Once again the role of women was noticeable. Mahila Samities were started where women were provided vocational training. There was some provision for education, and a Balwari was also run by the Samity in each of the main centres—Pharasgaon, Umerkote and Paralkote. As noted by the Samity, its objectives were ‘to train the distressed poor women of this locality as well as refugees who are coming from East Bengal in education, sewing and embroidery, weaving etc and try to make them stand on their own

\textsuperscript{75} Likely dated 1965.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} That the land was barely cultivable has been stated over and over again by many contemporary research studies as well. Saibal Gupta has described the findings of a soil-study done in this region in his three part article on Dandakaranya—A Rehabilitation Survey: State of Agriculture (Economic Weekly, 2\textsuperscript{nd} January 1965, pp. 15-26.
feet so that they can earn something which will help them to maintain their family expenses.\footnote{Letter from Dr Sandhya Guha (Treasurer, Kondagoan Mahila Mandal, Konadagaon, Bastar, MP) to Chairman (Democratic Federation of Women, Calcutta, WB) dated 14th November 1964. Asoka Gupta papers, NMML, New Delhi.}

Post-1977 the Left Front came to power in West Bengal raising some hope among the refugees. But they were in for a rude shock when their own party asked them to go back. The reasons cited by the Left Front for its inability to rehabilitate the refugees in Bengal were just the same as the one cited by their predecessors: West Bengal is full!\footnote{The Moricchjhapi incident is probably the most classic example of this betrayal.} Hopeless and now tired of this pathetic situation many returned to these resettlement sites and struggled to make ends meet once again.

But, there were still many who had deserted their camps and gone back to West Bengal, even if it meant being stripped of any rehabilitation assistance by virtue of being branded as deserters. Yet they were punished for doing so, as noted by Saibal Gupta—

\begin{quote}
Udvastu shibir guli ki Concentration Camp-er dhorone parichalito howaye dike jhukche? Kanta tarer bera koto khani unchu? 144 dharar proyog keno hoye, kothaye hoye, kokhun hoye?... Kono udvastu jodi shibir tyag kore... tobe Bharat-er protirokha behoto hoye kina ebong ei khetre Defence of India kono dharar proyog ain songoto kina?
Are the Refugee Camps being transformed into Concentration Camps? High rising barbed wires around the camps? Use of section 144 why, when and where? If a refugee wants to leave the camp, how does that threaten the country so as to use the Defence of India rules on him?\footnote{Saibal Kumar Gupta, ‘Eder Kotha Bhulbe Na’ [Do not forget them (meaning those who were sent to Dandakaranya)], Compass: 21st November 1964, pp.14-15, SWS, JU, Kolkata.}
\end{quote}

Thus, Dandakaranya was an experiment which was criticised not only by the refugees. For the first time a very strong criticism of Government policies comes from within the Government itself. The preceding paragraphs have highlighted the failure of this experiment as seen by one who had been associated with it very closely. Saibal Kumar Gupta, then, presents the view from the other side, and as noted above the scene wasn’t pleasant from there either! Rehabilitation in the East was a programme gone totally awry and Dandakaranya was in every way a metaphor of this failure.
Refugee Self-Initiative
The Founding of the Jabardakhal Colony

So far we have seen the refugees’ response to the inadequate rehabilitation assistance provided to them by the Government. This section deals with the attempt of the refugees to rebuild their lives in the new State and new homeland. With Government aid being minimal and the refugees being left to fend for themselves, there emerged the most characteristic symbol of rehabilitation in the East—the jabardakhal colonies built by the refugees.

The refugees made their intentions clear by setting up these colonies in the heart of the capital of West Bengal: they were here to stay. This act was seen as illegal by the Government. All means—legal and illegal—were used to evict the refugees from such properties which had been forcibly acquired by them. The owners of such private property employed lathails or local hoodlums to get rid of the refugees and the Government simply looked the other way. Prasanta Kumar Sur, resident of the Netaji Nagar Colony and widely acclaimed UCRC leader, narrates how such attacks were resisted by the refugees—

_Ei kotha jotheshto jor diye bolte pari je oi biler birudhe andolan emon jordar hoyechilo je rajyer kothao kono jabardakhal jomin theke udvastu-der uched kora sambhav hoyeni… Kokhuno kono jomite ba elakaye police hajir hole shonghe shonghe ghoroa astra, lathi, da ityadi niye dole dole udvastu purush o mahila-ra eshe hajir hoye jeto._

[It can be said most confidently that not a single such forcibly occupied land was successfully released by the police from refugee occupation. This was the success of the movement. Whenever police came to these colonies—men and women—jointly fought them with their home-made weapons.]

Citing his personal experience, he recollects how one day even as students were appearing for the examinations in a school constructed on such occupied land, the police came in and tried to evict them. Upon the arrival of the police, a ‘sanketik dhwani’ (alarm) was called out, and within minutes men and women appeared on the scene and fought against eviction, so much so, that as noted by Sur, ‘… _shei dino manusher milit protirodher police oi school theke ekti udvastu keyo uched korte parlo na._’ […] even that day, on account of this joint attack of the refugees against the police, none of the refugees

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could be evicted.\textsuperscript{82} It is to defend these dwellings that the first organised refugee movement sprung up in West Bengal. The United Centre for Refugee Council (UCRC) was born in such circumstances.

Now to note an important difference from the situation in the West: the incoming refugees were given virtually a free hand in acquiring all evacuee property and even that of the dubious category of the ‘intending evacuee’. Though Nehru was firmly against such blatant seizure of property by the refugees, at one time, he, too, admitted—'\textit{I am not quite sure if I would not be taking possession of an empty house in their position}'.\textsuperscript{83} And hence, even though his correspondences with Gopalaswamy Aiyyangar shows how strongly opposed he was to the Evacuee Property Act (1950), yet, in the face of stark reality he did not use his power or influence as the Prime Minister of India to annul this Act immediately. The reality was that there were millions of people who had come over to India from West Pakistan; they had been displaced and they had to be rehabilitated. However, resources at the disposal of the Government were meagre and hence, evacuee property became an important constituent of the ‘compensation pool’ for the refugees coming from West Pakistan. Police Records in Delhi show that not only evacuee property but also the sprawling lawns in the homes of a few ministers, some Government offices and a few private property were squatted upon by the refugees.

But there is an important difference to be noted—whereas one can find reference of squatters and their resistance to their eviction from the lands squatted upon, the concept of a ‘squatter colony’ never really comes across in any such record. One possible explanation is that the number of squatters was never alarming enough unlike in the East, and second, invariably they were always provided alternative accommodation by the Government. Townships, colonies and evacuee homes were the alternatives to squatter

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. Such narratives of protests against eviction abound in all the memoirs of the refugees and are far too, numerous to be cited. What is important to note in all these narratives, however, is that men and women jointly fought the police and/or the goonda-bahini. Often women formed the frontline of defence. They were made to lie down on the entry points of the colony to prevent the road-rollers from demolishing the semi-pucca homes of the refugees in the colonies. And when not in the frontline, the women stood atop the roofs of their homes and pelted stones and bricks upon the police. Also, some colonies actually made a defence committee comprising of the youth and strong men. Younger boys and girls were posted in what may be termed as ‘checkposts’ from where they were the first to report any such entry of police or the lathails.

\textsuperscript{83} Letter from Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena (Minister of Rehabilitation), 4\textsuperscript{th} October 1948, SWJN, vol 7. pp. 50.
colonies in the West. But when such accommodation was hard to find in the East the
refugee initiative had to go beyond establishing private colonies by legal means. Forcible
acquisition of vast acres of wastelands, bagan bari, unused or vacant State Government
and Central Government lands were then the last resort for these refugees. It is here in
such ‘patit jomi’\textsuperscript{84} that the characteristic jabardakhal\textsuperscript{85} colonies were set up.

This movement started towards the end of 1949. The fresh influx of refugees, post-
Khulna riots, was too large a number for the State to handle, and hence, there was little
that they could do (or wished to do). It is in this context that the first squatter colonies
were established. An account of the establishment of such ‘unauthorised colonies’ was
published in the Statesman. The correspondent noted that nearly 5000 people ‘claiming to
be refugees from East Pakistan’\textsuperscript{86} trespassed over vacant plots of land in suburban
Calcutta and built ‘planned settlements’ therein. Describing the setting up of such
colonies the reporter wrote:

The squatters follow what is clearly a well organised plan. When they move to an open
piece of ground, a small office is established there and plots of land are given out on
payment of small sums of money as registration fees. Huts then spring up line after line,
built by the squatters themselves. They are temporary structures built with hogla and
bamboo… While the settlement is being formed, volunteer units are raised by the
squatters for security purposes.\textsuperscript{87}

The correspondent was referring to the founding of the Netaji Nagar colony on 155
bighas of Government land in Baranagore. At the time of his visit, two surveyors were
measuring the land which was being divided into plots. This encampment had started in
the midnight of 22\textsuperscript{nd}-23\textsuperscript{rd} October 1949 when 400 people carrying hogla and bamboo
poles arrived on the chosen land and began putting up huts under the glare of acetylene
lamps and hurricane lanterns. By the break of dawn the work of setting up encampments
was completed and the new refugee settlement was thus, born—Netaji Nagar Colony.
Some two hundred volunteers were made responsible for the defence of the colony. The
secretary of the colony committee openly confessed to the reporter that they had not

\textsuperscript{84} Literally, abandoned lands or lands lying vacant.
\textsuperscript{85} Literally, ‘forcibly occupied’
\textsuperscript{86} This is worth noting since as seen even in the assembly debates the Government defence for eviction of
these refugees was that many of them were not really bonafide refugees.
\textsuperscript{87} ‘5000 People Trespass on Vacant Lands: Unauthorised Colonies in Suburban Calcutta’, Statesman,
10.11.1949.
obtained any permission from the Government for establishing this colony. However, he added, ‘We hope that the Government will recognise our moral claim for colonisation and settle this land with us on reasonable terms.’ Most of the residents of this colony were registered refugees and had also managed to find some work in Calcutta. So far they had been living in ‘overcrowded rooms and huts’ in the camps. They now desired ‘more comfort’. Hence, they justified their acquisition of such vacant property on moral grounds and not as an act which had the intent of land-grabbing. The DM of the area visited this settlement and urged the refugees to move out, but the refugees remained adamant in their decision to stay on.\(^{88}\)

The movement for the establishment of such squatter colonies had, thus, become a regular feature in the post-1949 phase of influx. Bijoygarh is considered to be the pioneer in this direction.\(^{89}\) According to Bandopadhyay, Bijoygarh could compete with Nilokheri and on many accounts even win the contest, the prime reason being that the former was entirely built by refugee self-initiative whereas the latter was built up entirely by government support, i.e. ‘[Bijoygarh] sampoornaroope be-sarkari chesthaye, sarkerer shahajo na niye uthechilo. Nilokheri sampoornabhabe sahajapoosth hoye gode uthechilo.’\(^{90}\)

To understand the establishment of a genuine jabardakhal colony, the setting up of Azadgarh would be an interesting case in point. More so, because as argued by its founder, there was much politics involved in the founding of this colony—specially the conflict between the people of Bijoygarh and Azadgarh.

Founding of the Azadgarh Colony:
Azadgarh represents the quintessential jabardakhal colony in Kolkata. At the same time there are significant departures which are noteworthy:

\(^{88}\) Ibid.
\(^{89}\) However, that it was the first true squatter colony is highly debated for it had the support of Dr B C Roy and his government to a great extent. Nonetheless as a colony built up on refugee initiative, it deserves merit.
\(^{90}\) Bandopadhayay (1970), p. 76.
- It was not singularly for the bhadralok, rather anyone who fulfilled the basic eligibility criteria set by Indubaran Ganguly [its founder] could own a plot in this colony.91

- It was not intended to displace the local Muslims, rather both the communities did coexist for a long time after the setting up of the colony but soon the Muslims left upon being threatened by the neighbouring refugee colonies.92

- The colony also represents a case of internal conflicts. Bijoygarh was not seen favourably by Azadgarh residents.93

Indubaran Ganguly (a veteran freedom fighter and now refugee) was asked to lead the movement for setting up a new colony in the Jadavpur area by a set of refugees who had deflected from the group that formed the Bijoygarh colony. The process began on 17th January 1950 with the clearing of the forests in the chosen plot in Jadavpur. Everyone had to donate a sum of Rs 10 and bring their own bamboo and hogla leaves to start the construction of the hutments immediately. The Bijoygarh residents were alarmed by the coming up of this settlement at such a close proximity to their colony. Ganguly cites numerous instances when the Bijoygarh leaders tried to acquire some of the land of this colony and also tried to incite the locals, especially Muslims of the adjoining area, against the Azadgarh people. In one particular instance, Ganguly mentions how a plot earmarked by them for the development of a playground became a major point of conflict between the two colonies. The Bijoygarh boys constantly provoked the Muslims to prevent the construction of this playground. The Muslims eventually had to leave the place as they felt threatened by the refugees.94

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91 The three criteria were: should be in a position to build up a home in the plot, upon getting the plot would have to build up the home then itself, and finally, would have to move into the home immediately. Ganguly Colonnysmrity (1995), p. 63.

92 In fact, it is only for this colony that there is the mention of a Shanti Dal (peace maintaining society) which strove to restore peace between the two communities.

93 In the book, Ganguly makes a strong critique of the Left parties and the iconic Bijoygarh colony, which is seen to epitomize the success of the UCRC and the Left collaboration. In fact, though a Communist himself, Ganguly is all praise for Roy and his government, whereas regarding the role of the left he is highly critical, specially in the Moricchjhapi betrayal. p. 28.

94 Details in the last section of this chapter on refugees and citizenship issue. Incident noted in Ganguly Colonnysmrity (1995), p. 58-59.
However, overcoming all hurdles the colony was established. In fact B S Guha’s study shows how this colony was far more successful than the government colonies formed.\textsuperscript{95}

**Against Eviction**

The preceding paragraphs discussed the setting up of the *jabardkhal* colonies in the face of much opposition from the property owners, and even the Government. In fact, the Government even contemplated the passing of the Eviction Bill in 1951 to aid the property owners. It was only the widespread protests of the refugees and their first successful united agitation against the Government which ensured that the original intention of the Bill was altered and that it became more favourable for the refugees.\textsuperscript{96}

The first step in this movement was the coming together of the refugees as a united opposition to the Government’s eviction programme. Thus, was born the UCRC on 13\textsuperscript{th} August 1950. The agenda of this organisation and its objectives were spelt out clearly in the pamphlet which was distributed across Calcutta to garner support for this organisation.\textsuperscript{97} The following were the objectives cited by this refugee organisation:

- Unity of all the refugees
- Stop eviction of refugees
- Rehabilitation benefits demanded
- Government atrocities and slackness will not be accepted
- Down with the vested interests of the property owners who are antagonistic to refugees
- Release of prisoners of our movement.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{95} His study makes a comparative analysis of the rehabilitation in a government colony and the private squatter colony—Azadgarh. A scholarly assessment of the findings of this study has been made by Joya Chatterji, MAS (2007).

\textsuperscript{96} The discussion on this Bill [Rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons and Eviction of other Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act, 1951] has been done in great detail in Chapter III, pp.

\textsuperscript{97} Annexure II: The First UCRC poster.

\textsuperscript{98} Translated from the UCRC poster cited in Annexure II.
Braving Police Atrocities:
Often these protests were dispersed by the Government using coercive means. The following picture shows a very tragic scene of peaceful protestors being beaten up by the police in order to disperse them. This march was headed by the Refugee Eviction Resistance Committee head and Krishak Proja Party leader Dr Suresh Chandra Banerjee along with Smt Leela Roy. The area was under Section 144 of the Cr P C and hence, mass gatherings were not permitted. The leaders (Banerjee and Roy) broke the cordon and proceeded, but the large number of refugee men and women could not and hence, they decided to squat upon the area. At this moment, it was reported, a few of the refugees threw brickbats on the police. It is this incident which sparked off the repression by the police. Twelve refugees were injured including a refugee woman, whereas thirty-five policemen were injured by the brickbats. A couple of arrests were also made. In the end, the refugees simply squatted in the Esplanade area shouting slogans and demanding rehabilitation.

‘Police making a lathi-charge on refugee processionists in Esplanade area on Wednesday afternoon. A contingent of mounted police is seen advancing.’

But it was not only in such rallies that the refugees faced repressive action of the police. In fact, the police was involved even in the eviction process. Apart from the police, there
was the private militia (if one can say so to the local goondas hired for this purpose) who, too, tried to evict the refugees from the property of their employers. But to no avail. It was as a result of such organised movement that the threat of eviction was repelled to a great extent. Even today these colonies survive and it is their stubborn existence which has compelled the Government to not only regularise these colonies but to also start some development programmes therein.

**Rebuilding Lives**

The preceding sections have brought to light the archetypal depiction of the refugee in the East—resistant and rebellious. That the refugee in the East too, might have contributed positively towards rehabilitation just like his counterpart in the West is an idea seldom focussed upon in official publications.

In the East, migration was seen as temporary for most of the time, and the migrants too, were seen as doubtful citizens who might just go back when situations normalised across the border. The border itself was comparatively far more permeable which kept the to and fro movement of the migrants alive till 1971. As a corollary, rehabilitation measures too, followed an on and off pattern. It was such paltry rehabilitation assistance which forced the Bengali migrant to rebel. But simply rebelling against the inadequate rehabilitation measures did not solve the problem. This brings into perspective the second image of the Bengali migrant—that of the self-rehabilitating refugee. As noted by Anil Sinha,

*Sadharonoto andolan, gana-sangram probhriti samporke ekti dharonai samporke ekta dharono suprabhrito.*

*Meeting koro, michil koro, gherao koro, su-uchh konthe dabi ghoshna koro ba police-er songhe sanghorshe jao. Eii podhoti-guli-keyi onekeri “sangram” akhya diye thaken. Kintu srijanosheel gothamnoolk karyokalap sangathit koratao je sangram ebong*

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99 Annexure III shows one such eviction notice that was served to a refugee resident in Bijoygarh colony.

100 Note the comments of U B Rao who is the author of the State-sponsored publication, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, ’there was the character of the refugees themselves. In the Western region they were tougher, more resilient of spirit and much more adaptable. It was easier for them to turn their hands to any job that came along… But refugees in the East came from a different milieu… East Bengal was a comparatively poor agricultural region, with an economy less diversified than West Punjab’s… the person displaced from East Pakistan had been exposed to devitalising, demoralising forces much longer than his western counterpart had been. When he finally escaped to asylum in India he was completely shattered in body and spirit, all initiatives, all capacity for self-adjustment drained out of him.’ p. 148.

101 Thereafter even though the border in the East is not the most highly surveyed border and not the one difficult to cross over as well, however, officially all migrants from Bangladesh are treated as illegal migrants. More on the eastern border and the continuing influx, see Willem van Schendel, *Bengal borderland*. 
Some of the refugee colonies brought out souvenirs to commemorate 50 glorious years of their existence. It should be remembered that there was no policy of development agreed upon by the State Government for these squatter colonies in the initial phase. Thus, all responsibilities for construction of road, sanitation facilities, drainage and water supply was taken upon by the refugees themselves.

The proud members mentioned their struggle in bringing up and defending these colonies. To cite one example, Haripada Das, the founder of Teertha Bharathi Colony in Gholo, Shodepur, proudly mentioned how the land where the colony now stands was a barren land but it was only the determination of the refugees themselves who under his leadership made the place as it is today: a colony bustling with activity and one which boasts of permanent homes, two schools, a playground and a clinic.

Indubaran Ganguly takes the point further when he remarks that in the process of such colony-formation, the refugees were helping the nascent nation to overcome the major problem of refugee rehabilitation.

Debobrata Dutta, too, discusses in detail the formation of the school, Bijoygarh College, Dental Clinic and Post-office in Bijoygarh colony.

These are simply pointers towards the degree of self-rehabilitation in the East. Violent protests were backed up by such constructive activities of the refugees, the advantages of which are being taken by the successive generations of these very refugee families. This also left an indelible mark on the urban landscape of Calcutta city. It is this change that the next section looks at.

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103 Regarding the development of squatter colonies, it was noted, 'Development of these colonies may take a long time because a) even the acquisition of land for regularisation of the colonies has not been completed in many cases and b) after acquisition, shifting of some of the families to alternative plots in the colonies would be necessary in order to have proper alignments of roads, drains, etc.' In a meeting held in the Ministry of Rehabilitation in Calcutta on 16th February 1961. Development of these colonies was considered as part of 'residuary work.' Understandably so, because the work of Rehabilitation had come to an end in the West and the Ministry of Rehabilitation was being wound up. F. No 8/3/61—R II, 'Review of residuary problems of development of colonies in West Bengal'. Ministry of Rehabilitation, NAI.
104 Dutta, *Bijoygarh* (2002). Pictures of the Balika Vidyalaya and Vidyasagar College are attached in Annexure V.
The City of Calcutta

‘I have seen foxes playing at the Ballygunj station. Behala Tram Depot was a wide lonely area. It took the Partition for the city to grow… all the suburbs you see today… Behala, Jadavpur… were the result of the struggle of refugees like me, we made Kolkata what it is today.’ This was told to Debjani Sengupta by her father as he recollected the Calcutta of the past and the present. But that this was a common feeling among the refugees in West Bengal, is what I realised during my fieldwork. The sense of pride in coming out of Partition on one’s own abilities and inspite of State ignorance, and sometimes even opposition, is a common thread binding refugees across Calcutta city.

Haripada Das showed me around the colony proudly recollecting how the school was built or homes were constructed. Similarly, Debrata Dutta, too, noted with a deep sense of pride how his father had single-handedly set up the Bijoygarh colony. The tremendous sense of pride in being imprisoned or beaten up by the police while resisting eviction is highly dominant in all refugee narratives. In fact, the pride is much too similar to what the freedom fighters of our National Movement for Independence had in the pre-Independence era. Note this pride in Indubaran Ganguly’s words—‘Amake o aamaar stree Sadhna-ke grepter korlo…Police ono sokole thana theke chede dileyo amake chadlona. Amake thana-e niye giye anyano police-officer-der deke amake dekhiye bollo, eii shei lok jinni bochorer por bochor amader hoyeran koreche.’ [My wife (Sadhana) and I were arrested… Sometime later many of whom were arrested were released except me… The police showed me off to the other police officers and told here is the man who has been troubling us over so many years.] Thus, colony-making held a place of immense pride for their founders as also their residents.

From being the Imperial Capital for the greater part of the British rule and then the capital city of the newly created state of West Bengal in the post-Independence era, Calcutta had come a long way. As pointed out by Manas Ray—‘The city that was affected most by this sudden and vast traffic of people—by any estimate the biggest

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105 Now Kolkata
107 Interview with Hariapada Das (January 2009) and Debrata Dutta (February 2011).
instance of human displacement—is Calcutta.'\(^{109}\) Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya also concur—‘Among all the capital cities affected by Partition, it was Calcutta which suffered the most severe disruptions and received the largest number of refugees.'\(^{110}\)

Now to see the impact of this grave disruption—Partition, and its resulting consequence—influx of refugees and establishment of squatter colonies in the absence of any concrete rehabilitation programme in the East. Pranati Chowdhury analysed the settlement pattern of refugees in a nuanced manner and observed that of the 501 refugee settlements in Calcutta Metropolitan District, 268 (i.e. 63\%) are squatter colonies. She argues that ‘the higher number of squatter colonies bear evidence of the fact that the refugee settlements grew up in a more haphazard manner than in a planned way.’\(^{111}\) She also noted that whereas, 50\% of the Government-sponsored colonies were located in the rural areas, only 28.3\% of the squatter colonies were similarly located. Thus whereas the Government was keen on dispersing the refugees outside Calcutta, the refugees, however, tried to establish themselves in the city since the source of their everyday livelihood was to be found in the city itself. She also observes that whereas the Government sponsored colonies were more evenly distributed, the squatter colonies had a tendency to concentrate in a few areas, once again keeping job prospects in mind.

Regarding the changes which Partition and refugees brought to the city, she comments, ‘The refugee population pioneered in extending the horizon of metropolitan living beyond the limits of existing settlements… The urban areas have become denser and the vacant marshy areas have come under habitation, due to the impact of migration from East Pakistan.’\(^{112}\)

Two decades earlier, the Gandhian sociologist, Nirmal Kumar Bose\(^{113}\) wrote about not only the changes in the urban landscape of the city, but also about the corresponding area-wise population changes. Identifying the ward-wise habitation pattern of high-caste

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\(^{110}\) Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, p. 172. In fact, they name Calcutta as the ‘dying city’ in their book. This phrase was used by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as well, though it was perhaps more politically motivated keeping in mind that the city had become a left bastion and Congress presence was next to nil here.


\(^{112}\) Ibid. p. 35

Hindus, lower caste Hindus, refugees and Muslims, Bose showed how changes in population distribution came about in the years following Partition. Regarding the refugees, Bose makes the following observation—‘Refugees are now settled in nearly all Bengali residential wards; but there are some wards in which they live in larger numbers.’ It is also significant that many of these wards were formerly inhabited by Muslim labourers and artisans. Thus, hinting at a redistribution of the Muslim population in the wake of influx of refugees from East Pakistan.

That Muslims were displaced from their original homes is reflected in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates where many of the leaders spoke in favour of finding refuge for these internally displaced Muslims. But inspite of their protests, Muslims of Calcutta city had to leave behind their homes and either move out of West Bengal to neighbouring districts, or even further to East Pakistan itself. Thus, formation of Muslim ghettoes was not a phenomenon restricted to the states of north India only. Even Bose noted this tendency among the Muslims to concentrate in certain areas to develop a sense of security—‘There is a fairly large concentration of such Bengalis who have moved into some of the wards of Calcutta.’

Colony founders like Indubaran Ganguly, too, have mentioned how Muslims either moved out of their own free will (?) or were pushed out by the incoming refugees. Citing one example, Ganguly writes that the Muslims in the area where they were setting up the colony actually were not against them. But it was the Bijoygarh refugees who created differences between them. One day, one of the homes belonging to a Muslim was looted in broad daylight. Muslims of the area realised that they could not stay here with any sense of security, and so they left. Even though Ganguly and his fellow compatriots tried to re-assure the Muslims of their safety, they still left—‘udvastu-der ekatshor acharane Muslim-ra chole jaovai thik korlen. Sheher dike amrao aar badha dilamna jokhun shoonlam Bijoygarh-er RSS-er kichu tarun majhe majhe eshe udvastu-der ekatshoke

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114 North and North-East and some eastern and southernmost wards.
115 Bose (1968), p. 33.
116 These debates have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter while discussing the West Bengal Evacuee Property Act and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction from Un-authorized occupation of land act. Chapter III, pp. 152-167.
117 Joya Chatterjee, ‘Of graveyards and ghettos’ in Hasna nd Roy, Living together separately.
118 Bose, Calcutta: 1964; A Social Survey (1968), p. 39
nana rokom ushkani dichhilo.’"

[based upon the behaviour of a few refugees, the Muslims decided to leave the place. After a point, we too, did not prevent them from doing so for we heard that in a few RSS youth from Bijoygarh had been trying to incite the refugees in our colony (even the loot at the Muslim home was found out to have been carried out by them) so we let them go.]

Therefore, the city changed in its urban landscape and there was a change in population distribution as well. Another change was in the political landscape of the city and West Bengal as well—the rise of the left in West Bengal. And even though it still remains debatable as to whether the refugees were simply cannon-fodder for the left or whether it was the refugees who used the left to present their demands in a more organised manner, what remains is that West Bengal became one of the strongest bastions of left-wing politics, a tradition which lay undisturbed for over three decades. This close association of the refugees and the left is most visible in the hand-in-glove relationship between the CPI and the UCRC which exists to this day as well!

Apart from bringing a change in the urban landscape and political culture of the city, social changes came about as well. The age-old distinction between the culture of the West Bengali ghoti and that of the East Bengali bangal has been one which made the smooth adaptation to the new habitat really difficult for the latter. To cite one instance of this distinction, Chitrita Banerji highlighted the East/West divide in culinary tastes in the following words—‘Food, cooking styles and eating habits of rival communities were the most common topics for insults—jocular or vicious.’

Pointing out specifically to this East/West divide, Banerji notes:

Rice, of course was the staple. But in the house of my Bangal friends, there could be no meal without the obligatory fish stew or macher jhol, no matter how early the departure [i.e. leaving home for daily routine]… But in a ghoti household like ours, eating a meal without fish was quite common.

She notes that whereas a day without the ‘sacrosanct macher jhol’ implied grave deprivation for the Bangal, her parents, representing the archetypal Ghotis, dismissed this tendency as that of the ‘unsophisticated lot that came from hinterland, had the

121 Ibid. p.50.
uncontrolled appetite of peasants, and needed potfuls of *macher jhol* to mop up mountains of rice.\(^\text{122}\)

Pointing towards other such differences in taste, Banerji also recollects how even in the time of escalating food prices in the 1960’s in West Bengal, the *Bangal* took pride in the fact that they still had rice and not the *chappatis* (wheat-flour) which had been made mandatory.\(^\text{123}\) Not only was the food preference different, but so also the cooking styles. As noted by Banerji, the *Ghoti* trademark was the ‘discernible sweet undertaste in the complex veg preparations’ which for the *Bangals*, on the other hand, was strict anathema. Taking at a dig at the sweet tooth of the *Ghoti*, the *Bangal* explained, ‘[they are] sissies, sweetening dishes that were meant to be hot, spicy, salty. If you want a sweet taste, why not eat dessert?’ In reply, the *Ghotis* sneered at the *Bangal’s* preference for chillies and rich oily sauces which according to them ‘deadened the palate and left no room for subtle tastes.’\(^\text{124}\)

Banerji’s own conclusion on this divide, however, is interesting: ‘There is a greater degree of adventurous inventiveness in the cooking of East Bengal!’ This she attributes to the East Bengal terrain which is ‘untamed, crisscrossed with the great rivers of the Bengal delta, [rivers that change course erratically] blithely destroy human settlements, and throw up intensely fertile silt deposits that produce rich harvests for new settlers.’ By extension, it can be argued that this very quality of the East Bengali migrant—‘adventurous inventiveness’ and a pre-history of coping with such vagaries of nature—enabled them to acclimatise themselves to the new habitat and survive. There are several anecdotal references of how the East Bengali migrant adjusted to the local dialect of West

\(^{122}\) Ibid. p. 50. The real reason, however, for this passion for fish, as Banneji points out, however, was the fact that East Bengal had far more rivers, and hence, fish had become the staple food in East Bengal. Note the still famous ‘*Padma Ilish*’ [the Ilish (a fish specie) of the river Padma (river Brahmaputra in East Bengal)] and the debate often over this Ilish being far more superior to the *Ganga Ilish* found in West Bengal!

\(^{123}\) In the years of acute food shortage, also when ‘food riots’ became commonplace, the State Minister P C Sen introduced wheat and tried to encourage rice-eating Bengalis to change their preference to wheat. As noted in his interview, he stated that this was by far the most unpopular measure he had introduced for which he had to face the brickbats. Oral Transcripts, P C Sen, NMML.

Bengal even though it was far more different than his own. This quality of the migrant has been widely acknowledged in all such references.\textsuperscript{125}

It is, once again, this very quality of adventurism which gave them the courage to establish the squat ter colonies and also valiantly defend them. Indubaran Ganguly notes that the spirit behind such a brave effort of the refugees was the belief that what more could one lose who has already lost their all—

\textit{Apnader goddi-te boshate giye amra choddoh purush-er bhite-mati hariye sarvahara huye rastaye ghure berachi. Er cheyo ark i bipod ache apnader bhandar-e. Apnara ebala obala jomir daam bariye beboshar name phatak phelben, aar amra rasta ghate station-e ghure morbo, ta hobe na! Jomin patit pelei amra ta dakhal kore amader jeebon pratishtha korbo.}

[to bring you in power, we have left behind the land of our forefathers and come here roaming in the streets like vagabonds. What more problems can you create for us? You are engaging in land speculation and hence trying to evict us so that you can sell the land at higher prices, we will not let you do so. Whenever we find any vacant land, we will occupy it and establish ourselves.]\textsuperscript{126}

It is this spirit which kept them fighting for their rights. It is with this spirit that overnight hundreds of such squatter colonies sprang up in Calcutta altering the urban landscape with a degree of permanence. What began as a desperate means to survive against all odds, has now become a mark of pride for their creators. Over the years these colonies developed even more and have today totally merged with the surroundings so much so that it is difficult to believe that many years ago these colonies were nothing but a collection of semi-pucca homes built of hogla leaves and bamboo sticks, and that in the years following their establishment they were the battleground where determined refugees resisted all the attempts made—legal and illegal—to procure their land.\textsuperscript{127}

Manas Ray describes this change (read development) in Netaji Nagar colony in very succinct terms—‘When I visit the place, a strangeness overcomes me. It is quite a differentiated place now.’\textsuperscript{128} Describing this ‘sense of displacement’ (!), Ray writes—

\textsuperscript{125} Manikuntala Sen mentions how the in the reserved compartments for women in the local trains she often heard the ‘refugee women’ going to the workplaces speaking in their local Barishal dialect but equally comfortable in the Calcutta one as well. Sen, (In Search of Freedom). Manas Ray, too, mentions how his sister too, quickly picked up the Calcutta dialect which proved to be useful in her workplace. Ray (Growing Up Refugee).

\textsuperscript{126} Ganguly (1995), p. 70.

\textsuperscript{127} A popular slogan raised at that time—‘\textit{Pran debo, kintu jomin debo-na!’ [Will die but not give up our lands!]}

The households have become self-sufficient and the infrastructure of the locality is on par with the rest of Calcutta. This has eaten deep into the roots of the once-valued colony solidarity. … [people] have moved away from the colony committee, once the nodal point of sociality, which in its turn has taken on an increasingly bureaucratic role and become a surveillance centre for the party apparatus… the local schools, once the focal point of community’s moral posturing, have disintegrated. Sending children to such schools is beneath people’s dignity… [people have got legal ownership of their land—lease deed which had a far-reaching impact on the local landscape with real-estate sharks moving in] After retaining a village-like look for four decades, Netaji Nagar since the early nineties has suddenly started growing tall.129

The old residents of Calcutta too, recollect with nostalgia the city of pre-partition/refugee influx days—‘once upon a time, Calcutta was very different from what it is today. The streets used to be washed early in the morning by the bhishtis (water bearers) there were wide open spaces and exquisite bangaan-baris of the famous Bhadraloks of Calcutta. All this was destroyed with the coming of refugees who simply settled wherever they found some place and Calcutta became the vast urban slum that it is today.’130

Calcutta became a city of grave disappointment for many refugees as well who thought they would be welcomed with open arms and that this city of opportunities would enable them to find a foothold in the new land. This disappointment is best noted in the following verses of the poet Tarapada Roy, who too, came to this land of opportunities with starry eyes and a dream, but felt betrayed by the city’s aloofness—

It was a thrill, my dream city,
My first tram-car, my earliest first-class,
First class Kolkata,
Where pet clouds hover over every roof…
Sometimes I feel,
I am no longer within your limits,
Nowhere can I find that city of mine…
These twenty years,
I have found nothing in common with you Kolkata.131

Such then has been the history of the other ‘refugee city’—Calcutta.

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129 Ibid. p.175-76
130 Interview with Shri Majumdar, 83 year old resident of the very posh Park Street, Kolkata, 29th December 2009.
Reinstating their Rights as the Citizens of India

Refugees coming from West Pakistan were invariably brought into the folds of the nation almost immediately upon their arrival in India. In the beginning, however, there was a time when this migration was sought to be discouraged. But all such doubts were removed in one stroke with the raging communal fires. Evacuation was, therefore, accepted as a principle for the Western border. However, in the initial few years, the identity of these refugees as ‘outsiders’ was not altogether forgotten.

When a delegation of the East Bengal migrants first met Nehru at the Jaipur Congress Session in 1949 and presented their woes before him for his kind consideration, Nehru asked them to contact the Foreign Affairs department for he believed their grievances came under the jurisdiction of that department and not of the Home department. It was this incident which actually changed the very direction of the refugee movement in the East. This delegation was headed by Amritalal Chatterjee, a Gandhian Congressman and unanimously elected leader of the Nikhil Bango Bastuhara Karma Parishad (All India Refugee Council of Action, the first refugee organisation of the East). Such a response from Nehru disappointed Chatterjee to such an extent that he gave up the post of President of this organisation and from that day Gandhian means to acquire their rights were discarded and the leadership passed on to the radical left-wing leaders.\textsuperscript{132}

As discussed in the previous chapter and also in the preceding sections, migration from the East was sought to be discouraged from the beginning itself. Thus, refugees were seen as the ones who were the responsibility of the other nation.\textsuperscript{133} But when, inspite of all wishes of the Government, migration persisted then action had to be taken to include the refugees as our own people. Datelines were immediately issued for the purpose of registering oneself as a refugee and as a corollary, a potential citizen of the country.

Thus, with India becoming a republic on 26\textsuperscript{th} January 1950 the first general elections were also announced. Correspondingly the first census operations in independent India also began. What is noteworthy here is that for the first time the issue of nationality of a

\textsuperscript{132} P K Chakrabarti, \textit{The Marginal Men} (1990), p 48.
\textsuperscript{133} Recollect the section on minorities in Delhi Pact and the repeated requests made to the minorities to stay on by the Prime Ministers (India and Pakistan) are pointers towards such an attitude.
person was determined with a sense of finality.\textsuperscript{134} Regarding the displaced person, however, certain datelines were set. Hence, the migrants coming after Independence but before 19\textsuperscript{th} July 1948 were included as citizens if ‘he or any of his parents or grandparents were born in undivided India (including Pakistan), and he has been ordinarily resident in India since his migration.’ But those who migrated after 19\textsuperscript{th} July 1948 but before 25\textsuperscript{th} July 1949 (the last day after which refugee registration certificates would not be distributed) would be accepted as citizen only ‘if he has applied for and obtained registration as a citizen and possesses a citizenship certificate.’ Finally, it was clearly mentioned that ‘No person who migrated from Pakistan to India on or after 25\textsuperscript{th} July 1949 can be an Indian citizen’.\textsuperscript{135}

Such injunctions were protested by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who wrote to Nehru, Patel and Ambedkar asking them to rectify this flawed eligibility criteria for Indian citizenship. In his letter to Dr B C Roy, he wrote—‘No exception could have been taken to this clause if we had been living in ordinary times and in normal state of relationship with Pakistan. But in view of the extraordinary situation now prevailing in the country and in view of the settled policy of Pakistan government to squeeze out Hindus from their territories, those migrants who have come to the Indian Union to live and settle here should be given the benefit of citizenship of India. Otherwise a large section of men and women would not be citizen of India or Pakistan.’ He insisted that the ‘only criterion for admission of citizenship should be whether the migrants intend to live in Indian Territory or return to Pakistan.’\textsuperscript{136}

He elaborated further on the problem of having a fixed deadline for East Bengal migrants to be declared as Indian citizens in a letter to Nehru: ‘Since, however, the question of grant of citizenship to refugees from Pakistan, especially East Bengal, will be a continuing problem, I suggest that a date limit need not be fixed, for that would necessitate passing of another law by parliament at a later date to cover the cases of those refugees who may come to India after the date so prescribed now.’\textsuperscript{137} This comment of Mukherjee showed his tremendous foresight and a better understanding of the East

\textsuperscript{134} See Annexure IV.
\textsuperscript{135} Enumeration Handbook Census 1951 West Bengal and Sikkim, Calcutta: Government of India Press (1950), p. ix. In SPM Papers, 1\textsuperscript{st} Installment, F. No. 39, NMML.
\textsuperscript{136} From SPM to B C Roy dated 22/8/1950, S. No. 33 1\textsuperscript{st} installment, SPM papers, NMML.
\textsuperscript{137} SPM to Nehru dated 30\textsuperscript{th} November 1950 in ibid.
Bengal minority problem. He had realised that the problem would be a continuing one and that the migrants, contrary to the belief of the Union Government, were here to stay. Nehru’s reply to this letter points out how gravely he had misread the situation in the East. He rejected the policy of removing deadlines for the purpose of registration, as he felt it would ‘bring many complications [and] upset our whole scheme of elections’. The next part of the letter shows explicitly Nehru’s [mis]understanding of the situation in the East—

The greater number of migrants or refugees from East Bengal will of course be included and in fact have been included in the electoral rolls. The new question relates only to such persons as have come more or less recently. These people [i.e. refugees from East Pakistan] have been moving about very much and a large number of them have gone back to Pakistan. More are going back from today. Therefore, their position is exceedingly fluid and it is very difficult to say who is a permanent resident of India and who is a ‘temporary sojourner’. ¹³⁸

Finally, after much deliberation, with the passing of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1955 some relief was given to the displaced persons. Those who came after the prescribed date too, could be granted Indian citizenship provided they had completed one year of residence in India. Eventually, even this criterion was further reduced to that of six-month residence only. For the intervening years, i.e. between 1950 and 1955, Roy in his personal capacity had given the following assurance to Mukherjee that the Census Superintendent would have a separate column to show those persons who came before 19th July 1948 and those who came after that date. The latter column would have a separate note attached whereby it would be mentioned that these people would be included as citizens only after the Parliament legislation to this effect. ¹³⁹ Thus, once again proving that only those who were in Bengal had realised the real plight of these migrants.

The next hurdle in the course of citizenship of these migrants came in the post-1952 years when the travel by Passport and Migration Certificate was made compulsory. Regarding the Migration Certificate, it was argued that possession of the MC was proof of the fact that the person concerned had left the country of origin for good and with no intention of returning. This was so because when a person came in on the strength of the

¹³⁸ Nehru to SPM dated 1st December 1950, in ibid. Emphasis added.
¹³⁹ Roy To SPM, dated 5th September 1950.
MC, he has no other document from the country of origin and will, therefore be unable to return to that country should he later wish to do so unless he obtains a Repatriation Certificate or the permission to re-enter the country of origin. But it is also known that it was really difficult to obtain the Migration Certificate. Hence, migrants used other means of circumventing this problem—forged MC’s, ‘illegal’ entry by escaping the check-posts, and entering on Pakistani passport with Indian visa and then overstaying were the many means employed as discussed in great detail in the previous sections of this chapter. Thus, in brief, there were three categories of migrants in the post-1950 phase—

- Those that came before the introduction of passports, i.e. before 15\textsuperscript{th} October 1952. They came without any travel documents.
- Those that after the introduction of passports on the strength of Migration Certificates.
- Those that could not successfully apply for the MC and hence, came on Pakistani passport with Indian visa.

These three were the problem cases in the post-1950 period for the West Bengal government as well as the Union Government. Their right to citizenship was hotly debated. Y K Puri, representing the Ministry of External Affairs, was of the view that the intention of those coming with the MC’s was absolutely clear—they were here to stay for their repatriation would not be an easy task for reasons mentioned above. Those who came without any travel document, too, were seen by him as having clear intention to stay on gauging by the rush to enter India in the months before the introduction of passports. But for the third category, Puri argued, representing the viewpoint of his Ministry, that ‘in case of a person who came on a Pakistani passport, so long as the passport remains valid, the intention to settle down in India is not irrevocable, nor can we terminate his Pakistani citizenship by any means permissible under the existing law.’

140 Priority categories were decided and only after scrutiny could one obtain the MC.
141 As mentioned before, it was easier to get the Pakistani passport with Indian visa, whereas grant of MC’s were strictly regulated keeping in mind the economics of rehabilitation.
142 File Note dated 7\textsuperscript{th} January 1953 signed Y K Puri, Deputy Secretary, MEA in File No. 11/53-PSP, MEA ‘Hindu Residents of East Pakistan who come on Pakistani passports and Indian visas and subsequently wish to settle down permanently in India.’
Puri, however, was of the view that such persons should be given indefinite extensions on their visas till the Indian Citizenship Act was passed. So it was not really the question of preventing these migrants from getting Indian citizenship, rather the point was to come into India through ‘proper channel’. A closer reading of the argument, and one that was represented in Badruddin F H B Tyabji’s comment on the issue, shows that once again it was the economics of rehabilitation which was influencing this discussion. Tyabji wrote—‘Some difference must be made between those who leave East Bengal definitely with the intention of migrating to India and becoming Indian citizens irrevocably; and those who come with an unsettled mind on Pakistani passports and wish to keep a foot in both camps.’ He noted further, ‘We do not wish to encourage migration from East Bengal into West Bengal, unless the circumstances impelling the person are really such as cannot be endured. If they are such, he should come on a Migration Certificate, and not on a Pakistani passport. If he takes advantage of a Pakistani passport, he must suffer some of the disabilities which the bearer of such a travel document has to endure in India: he cannot have it both ways.’¹⁴³ The final decision, however, was in favour of these migrants being treated as ‘potential citizens’ on parity with the first two categories and being granted liberal extensions on their visas till in 1955 finally the Indian Citizenship Act was passed.

In the next phase, i.e. between 1st April 1958 and 31st December 1963, migration to India was considered altogether illegal. The migrants who still came were termed as ‘fugitives’, ‘illegal migrants’ and even ‘infiltrators’. This has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. Not entitled to any rehabilitation benefits whatsoever, these migrants were the worst sufferers as they were simply ignored by the State. Yet they came and tried to find a foothold in the ex-camp sites and squatter colonies, whichever option was more feasible. Eventually, after long years of suffering they too, became Indian citizens.

Finally, the last phase for struggle for citizenship was in the post-1964 years. Once again, influx from East Bengal reached a high on account of the 1964 riots in East Bengal. The Government of India was compelled once again to open its doors in the east to the migrants. As a corollary, the grant of MC’s were liberalised with four new priority

¹⁴³ BFHB Tyabji, file note dated 8.1.53 in ibid.
categories introduced and the process was also paced up. The four new categories introduced in 1964 were the following:

a) Girls of marriageable age, unattached women and orphans who may have no sponsors in India as well as girls approaching marriageable age;

b) Families seriously affected due to arson, looting and killing;

c) Petty traders who have lost their wherewithal as well as industrial labour; skilled or unskilled, who have been badly accepted;

d) Cases for DHC’s discretion this would also take care of borderline cases.\(^{144}\)

However, these additional categories were withdrawn at the end of 1964 since it was believed that the ‘special conditions of stress’ which had necessitated the introduction of these categories ‘no longer prevailed’. Therefore, ‘categories (b) and (c) above were withdrawn and the extra-liberality generally allowed for obtaining MC’s also ceased to be operative.’\(^{145}\) Also, ‘From 1.4.1965 it was decided that persons who tried to enter India without travel documents and who had previously been allowed in would not be allowed to do so. This was also decided upon in view of the more normal conditions prevailing in East Pakistan and our policy to discourage unchecked migration.’\(^{146}\)

Hence in the post-1965 period, MC’s were ‘issued after the normal security precautions are taken and the bonafides and needs of the intending migrants are verified. \(\textit{This is in accordance with our established norms, namely of assisting distressed cases without departing from our general policy that the minorities must look to their own government for protection.}\)\(^{147}\)

Yet, inspite of all these restrictions the migrants came. Even if it meant being labelled as a ‘fugitive’ or an ‘infiltrator’ or making the declaration that they would not seek any government aid in rehabilitation\(^{148}\). Not only did they enter Indian Territory, but by establishing their little hutments and settlements in the capital of West Bengal, these migrants asserted their rightful place in the Indian state. Today, it is only those who came

\(^{144}\) Cited as note for supplementaries in F No. P(PIV)125/59/66, MEA ‘Rajya Sabha Starred question no. 448 for 16.8.66 by Shri Chitta Basu re: entry permit to East Pakistan minorities.’

\(^{145}\) Ibid.

\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) Ibid. Emphasis added.

\(^{148}\) As was required for person seeking the MC out of the priority categories.
after 23rd March 1971 who are seen as ‘infiltrators’—the Bangladeshi immigrants. They have not been recognised as Indian citizens and to this day lead a life of uncertainty. But all those who came before this date—the migrants of East Pakistan—have managed to assimilate themselves into the folds of the Indian state.

However, the issue of citizenship of these migrants was not subject simply to these arbitrary deadlines issued by the state. Rather, it was also in a way related to the issue of citizenship of Muslims.

A study of the working of Delhi Pact in Nadia district shows how the minorities in India too, did not fare all that well.\(^{149}\) Ghosh observes the population changes that came about in the Nadia district which even after Independence had remained a Muslim majority province, with Muslims forming 52.65% of the population compared to 45.07% of Hindus. But this changed in the post-1950 years rather drastically. Thus, in 1951 whereas the Hindus comprised a whopping 77.03%, the Muslim population was vastly reduced to a meagre 22.36%, depicting the high rate of efflux of Muslims from this district. In fact, Nadia district recorded the highest emigration of Muslims for the whole of West Bengal—2,23,250 Muslims left the district in the intervening years of 1947-1951. The resulting change in the social composition of this district did not go unnoticed in the official records. Ghosh cites from the IB records on Nadia district—‘The district on the date of Partition, had a majority of Muslim population. There has been a reversal of the position by the influx of Hindu population from East Bengal.’\(^ {150}\)

Why were Muslims leaving West Bengal? Ghosh cites numerous incidents in a chronological manner as obtained from IB records to prove how even in the first month (April 1950) of the signing of the Pact, the policy did not match up with actual practice. Ghosh suggests that like the Hindus were being pushed out of East Bengal, in much the same way, the Muslims too, were exposed to small and big acts of violence in this district. To cite one example—on 26th April (barely a fortnight after the signing of the Pact) Hindu refugees from the Dhubulia camp raided the fields of a Muslim in the adjacent village (Tatla) to catch sheep. When the Muslim residents showed some


resistance, a large crowd of Hindu refugees and locals gathered and set fire to the houses of the Muslims in that village. The Muslims had to flee for their lives leaving behind their land and homes.\textsuperscript{151} Ghosh notes that in all these cases strict action was seldom taken against the Hindu locals and refugees, hence, the confidence which was supposed to be instilled in the minorities remained lacking.

But it seems Nehru was keen not to repeat the ill-treatment meted out to the Muslims in north India and hence, to a great extent, the Muslims in West Bengal fared better than their counterparts in the Western front. Thus, the ‘evil act’—Administration of Evacuee Property, Act (1950)—was applied to the eastern states in a very different manner. It was intended that the migrants leaving West Bengal for East Pakistan would retain the ownership of their property in perpetuity. The Evacuee Property Management Board would administer it on their behalf. On account of this Act some Muslims got back their property. However, an essential distinction was made between the internally displaced Muslim and the Muslim who returned from East Pakistan. The former never really got back their lost property, for legally no law was applicable to their case. The latter however, did get back his land else he was provided alternative rehabilitation.

**Summing Up**

This chapter has looked at the response of the refugees to the rehabilitation assistance provided by the State. We asked the question to what extent did the Government help in the cause of rehabilitating the refugees in the East. By comparing the adhoc measures provided by the Government for the rehabilitation of refugees coming from East Pakistan\textsuperscript{152} with the planned and time-bound rehabilitation programme for refugees coming from West Pakistan\textsuperscript{153} the intention was to draw the stark contrast in clearer terms and show how the refugee in the East was left to his own sources for the purpose of rehabilitation. The refugee in the East, unlike his counterpart in the West, invariably found himself in the Intelligence Bureau records of the Government of West Bengal as ‘fugitives’, rebels, ‘infiltrators’, and anti-social elements set to disrupt the law and order.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid. p. 857.
\textsuperscript{152} Chapter III
\textsuperscript{153} Chapter II
situation in the State. For resident West Bengalis, they became an object of contempt. P C Chakrabarti summarises this predicament of the refugees in the following words—

At Sealdah station the refugees had a foretaste of the life or life-in-death which lay in store for them in West Bengal...The heartless city went about its way, careless and indifferent. The thousands of commuters, who daily poured into the platforms of Sealdah station, barely noticed the faces blackened with grime and sweat. They carefully avoided contact with the dirtied bodies of this unwanted crowd of men, women and children. Who were these men? Or were they really men? Squalor, dirt and complete absence of privacy had already removed from them the veneer of civilization.\(^\text{154}\)

Though the refugee in the West too, was an object of surveillance in Police Records and initially disliked by the locals, yet, this agony of the refugees did not last long enough. The Government immediately took up their responsibility and set a time-bound rehabilitation programme for them, which enabled these refugees to get absorbed in the local polity, society and economy sooner than later.

Not only was rehabilitation dealt with differently in the East, the corresponding factor of citizenship was also handled in a significantly different manner. As pointed out early in this chapter, the Government introduced various ways of preventing migration and denying rehabilitation to the incoming migrants. In this way not only was migration and rehabilitation being denied to the migrant in the East, rather in the process, these migrants were also being denied their right to Indian citizenship.

In the East, the State simply refused to recognise the latent violence which justified seeking refuge. When it did take the shape of a actual violence, the State took up the responsibility of the migrants, but also kept fixing deadlines for migration and even persuaded the migrants to go back. Just as in the earlier books on Independence and Partition, the State too, believed that 15\(^{th}\) August 1947 was the final deadline for sorting out the issues related to Partition. That the ‘long Partition’ would continue so long in the East was unthinkable and also not wished for. Hence, the emphasis was laid on the Delhi Pact according to which the minorities were the citizens of their respective country and also their responsibility and not of the other country.\(^\text{155}\) The Government policy vis-à-vis


\(^{155}\) The Lok Sabha Debates show how this Pact was seen to be working even as late as 1965. Singh states—'... it is true that unfortunately the policy that has been persistently followed by the Government of Pakistan is not in accordance with the N-L Pact and the requisite amount of security which they must provide is not being provided to people in East Pakistan and this has been a matter of grave concern for us... [they should honour the Pact] in the meantime in hard cases we should continue to provide the
the East Pakistani migrant was always that they were the responsibility of Pakistan, and hence, a cautious approach towards their rehabilitation was taken so as to not divest Pakistan of their responsibilities. In an answer given to Chitto Basu regarding the removal of restrictions for entry of East Pakistani minority communities into India, Sardar Swaran Singh [Minister of External Affairs] stated—

[entry into India permitted only with Migration Certificates as issued by the DHC, Dacca]
This is in accordance with our established norms, namely of assisting distressed cases without departing from our general policy that the minorities must look to their own Government for protection. The attention of the Pakistani Government has been repeatedly drawn towards the responsibilities it must discharge for the welfare and protection of its minorities.¹⁵⁶

When this was the adopted policy, it is not difficult to identify the causes for the slackened pace of rehabilitation in the East. And when such was the policy of rehabilitation in the East then it is not difficult to realise the need for a greater role of the refugees in the process of rehabilitation. And this greater role is what this chapter has dealt with in detail. Thus, the conclusion that can be arrived at is that where the role of the State was prompt and greater, the refugees had a much lesser role, and more importantly, a role not much in conflict with the State. But where the State had a minimal role in the process of rehabilitation, the role of the refugee had to be greater, and conflict was only natural. But in this chapter we saw not only the image of the rebel refugee, as has been the most common depiction of the refugee, but also that of one who played a constructive role in the process of rehabilitation.

¹⁵⁶ Supplementary note to answer the question raised by Chito Basu on 16/8/66 in Ibid.
Annexure I

Application for Migration Certificate by Migrant from West Pakistan

This is the application for Migration Certificate received by the High Commissioner for India in Pakistan in r/o Pessimal.

APPLICATION FOR A MIGRATION CERTIFICATE
(ONLY TO BE FILLED BY MINORITY COMMUNITIES LIVING IN Pakistan)

Name (block letters) : Pessumal
Father’s name and occupation and full address: Mr Sanwaldas
husband’s name and occupation:
(in case of married lady)

Permanabet address in Pakistan: Village Visrewahan Distt Sukkur Sind West Pakistan

Date of birth: 1937 age 30 years

Are u holding a pak passport? NIL
If so, number date and issued at

Are u staying in pak since march 1947? Yes
If came to Pakistan after partition, state the date and route by which u entered Pakistan.

Did u come to Pakistan on passport or permit? No

Have u been to India after partition? if so state.
Place visted approx date of visit reasons for visiting India

Occupation; labourer

Why do u want to migrate to India? To settle with my relations in India

Pty (immovable) left in pak. Nil

Mention the pty owned by u in India. Nil

Mention the near relatives in India.
S.No. Name of relatives occupation relationship address
1. Sakhimal business bro-in-law block no 422-A sardarnagar Ahmedabad

Place where applicant wants to settle in India with full address
c.o Sakhimal Sirumal, Block no. 422A Sardarnagar Ahmedabad

two references in India to whom the applicant is fully known and their full address (not relatives)
Sakhimal Serumal Block no. 422A Sardarnagar Ahmedabad
Kewalmal Serumal Block no. 422A Sardarnagar Ahmedabad

Did u migrate to India from Pakistan after partition? Nil
If so state the date of such migration.

Members of family who will return to India, with him/her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Name of Family members</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>visible distinguishing mark</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Gomibai</td>
<td>wife</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Harchumal</td>
<td>brother</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lilabai</td>
<td>bro’s wife</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Ashok Kumar</td>
<td>nephew</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I hereby declare that the expenditure for the passage from Karachi to India will be borne
by me for myself and my family shown above.
Yes

Signature of applicant

Three copies of my own photographs and the members of my family are enclosed.

I hereby declare that all the statements made in this application are true to the best of my
knowledge and I realize that should any of them be found to be untrue, false or incorrect,
the MC given to me will be declared null and void and I will be subject to such penalties
as may be described by the laws of India.

I will report to the nearest police station within 24 hrs of my arrival in India.

Date: 8.4.67
Place: Karachi

Signature of applicant

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Box made here where pic of family pasted
5 members shown as mentioned above

Migration certificates issued on the ________________, ________________
With____________________ family members

Copy forwarded to Superintendent of police__________
(VISA OFFICE)
After this application is received by the HC, he sends for a clearance to the Chief Secy of the State where the migrant wishes to reside. The Chief Secy of the respective State then asks for a clearance from the Intelligence Branch of the State. Finally, an enquiry is made regarding the financial capability of the host family in India vis-à-vis their ability to sustain this family. This family, too, had to submit the following affidavit whereby it was stated that they were in a position to maintain the incoming family.

**AFFIDAVIT**

I, the deponent Sakhimal son of Sirumal, Hindu, Indian, aged about 27yrs, occupation business, residing at block no… hereby state by solemn affirmation and take oath as under:

1. that I am an Indian national and permanently settled here at Ahmedabad alongwith my family,
2. that as I have a vast business here and as my bro-in-law Shri Pessumal son of Shri Sanwaldas is at present residing with his family at village Visrewahan, taluka and distt Sukkur Sind (W Pak) and as being my natural blood, I desire to have them here permanently to control and assist me in my running business and as such I undertake for their whole and sole rehabilitation and all kind of their responsibilities.
3. that I as well as the below detailed members will not be a burden on the state and the Central Government and will not make any demand for loan etc.
4. that I also undertake to vouch and furnish all kind of correct info being required by the government at any time and from time to time and also hereby undertake to bear repatriation charges and expenses for the said whole of the family members mentioned below:
   i. Pessumal s/o Sanwaldas Age 30 yrs my bro-in-law
   ii. Gomibai w/o Pessumal age 25 yrs
   iii. Harchumal s/o Sanwaldas age 25 yrs
   iv. Lilabai w/o Harcumal 20 yrs
   v. Ashok Kumar s/o Harchumal 3 months

It may be noted here that my above both bros-inlaw form a joint Hindu family and both are join in all respect. Therefore this affidavit is being made for granting Permanent migration permit for the above all 5 members to proceed to India of whom I undertake responsibility. What is stated above is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Solemnly affirmed at Ahmedabad on this 16 day of March, 1967.

Identified by me                                         signature of deponent

Taluka Magistrate
Ahmedabad.

After all such clearance only the MC is then issued to the migrant as it was done in this case.157

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Annexure II
The First UCRC Poster

Source: Smaranika an issue to commemorate 47 years of the establishment published by Sammilito Kendriyo Bastuhara Parishad (United Central Refugee Council)
Annexure III

The Eviction Notice
The name of the refugee to whom the notice is served is Dwijen Rai of No. 1 Bijoynagar Colony. He is asked to appear before the SDO, Barackpore on 4th July 1951. He has been charged under Section 420/32B IPC.

The next photograph is of the Notice served to him which gives more detail of his ‘crime’. He is being asked to vacate the land under the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons Act 1951. As per the notice he is has been asked to show cause as to why he should not be evicted from the land of the person (name) or as to why he should not pay any compensation. He has to reply within 30 days of issuing of this notice. If is he is able to prove that he is a refugee the Government will provide him alternative accommodation and till then he can stay on. But if he is not a refugee he will be evicted, by force if necessary.
Annexure IV

Determination of Indian nationality

In determining whether a person enumerated is an Indian citizen, please apply the following tests and make your decision. This is decided by the West Bengal Government in Circular No. 799/3(41)-AR/R1OE. 1/50 Pt., dated 24th May 1950:

“Find out whether he belongs to any of the following classes of citizens, A, B and C. If he does, he is an Indian citizen.

A. Citizenship under Article 5 of the Constitution.—A person would be a citizen if he had his domicile in India on 26th January 1950 and if

(a) he was born in India (as now understood), or
(b) any of his parents was born in India (as now understood), or
(c) he has been ordinarily resident in India (as now understood) for not less than 5 years immediately before 26th January 1950.

For practical purposes “domicile” should be taken to mean the place where a person has his fixed habitation with intention to reside there always. (Domicile of a person of legitimate birth is the place where at the time of his birth his father was domiciled. But a man can acquire a new domicile at another place if he has taken up residence there and intends to reside there permanently or for an unlimited period.)

Ask if he has fixed habitation in India or has permanently taken up his residence in India (as now understood). If he has, and if he also satisfies (a) or (b) or (c) above, he is a citizen.

Citizenship for persons who migrated from Pakistan to India before the 25th July 1949:—

B. A person who migrated from Pakistan to India before the 19th July 1948 would be a citizen of India if—

(a) he or any of his parents or grandparents was born in undivided India (including Pakistan), and
(b) he has been ordinarily resident in India since his migration.

C. A person who migrated from Pakistan to India on or after the 19th July 1948 but before the 25th July 1949 will be a citizen if he applied for and obtained registration as a citizen and possesses a citizenship certificate. If he has a citizenship certificate, ask to see it. (Registration as citizens is different from registration as refugees.)

(No person who migrated from Pakistan to India on or after the 25th July 1949 can be an Indian citizen.)”
Annexure V
Bijoygarh Photographs


The picture below is of the original temporary school structure built in 1949. Adjacent to this old structure is the new building, much bigger and better equipped.
Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College

The college as it stands today.