Conclusion

This dissertation focuses on an important aspect in Partition studies— the post-Partition rehabilitation of refugees. So far this aspect had remained primarily in the domain of Annual Reports of the Ministry of Rehabilitation or other Government-sponsored publications. Recent scholarly work has shifted the focus from politics behind Partition to politics after it. This dissertation brings to light a fact which, though mentioned in the official publications and scholarly works, has not yet received the kind of attention it deserves: the differential policy of the State vis-à-vis the refugees coming from West Pakistan and those coming from East Pakistan.

Whereas in the official publications it is not the policies which are seen as differential, rather, it is the difference in attitude and efforts of the migrants in the two regions which is identified as the cause for complete rehabilitation in the west and continuing problem of rehabilitation in the East, in the scholarly works such an assumption is rejected, but the differential treatment meted out to the refugees by the State is not explained. It is in the regional studies on rehabilitation in the East where this discriminatory treatment is highlighted. Even then the purpose is to analyze the larger argument regarding the rise of the Left in West Bengal. To identify the possible reasons behind such difference in treatment of the refugees and the impact of such differential policies upon the refugees, the Muslims who stayed on, and the West Bengal state itself, needed further elaboration which this dissertation has sought to do.

It is only through an analysis of the policies that a conclusive answer can be arrived at. This dissertation found three possible explanations for such a differential treatment meted out to the migrant coming from East Pakistan. The most crucial factor was that of violence. It was the unprecedented and gruesome violence in the West which had compelled the political leadership of both Pakistan and India to reconsider their earlier decision against the evacuation of minorities. This reversal of policy, however, was limited only to areas which suffered such massive violence. Therefore, initially only for Punjab (P), and later with much pressure for the whole of West Pakistan, an official evacuation policy was framed in India. Hence, it was a specific form of violence which both the States recognized as ‘direct’ or ‘real’ violence, and felt compelled to defend these hapless victims of such State-defined violence.
For the East, which had remained silent on the eve of Partition and for the next two years after as well, the State did not find any justification for a large scale migration. The State did not recognize the subtle forms of violence which the minorities were exposed to in their everyday life in East Pakistan as violence enough. Such violence was dismissed as ‘psychological’ fear and migration had to be discouraged. Similarly, the migrants coming out of no ‘real’ experience of violence but out of simply ‘psychological’ fear were not treated on an equal footing with the ‘genuine’ victims of violence in the West. It is for the latter that the State took up measures on a war-footing, while for the former, persuasive means of persuasion were used to compel them to go back. It is only after the 1950 riots that the East drew some serious attention of the Union Government. Thereafter, the pace of rehabilitation slackened and was stopped after 1958 till once again the ghost of communal violence revisited Bengal in 1964, and yet again rehabilitation measures gained some momentum.

The second reason for such a policy could well be the one factor which loomed large over the issue of rehabilitation in general, i.e. the economics of rehabilitation. Rehabilitating a million population being added to the tally of a newly independent nation was certainly not the first task which the Government had envisioned for itself. But whereas it could not be altogether avoided for those coming from West Pakistan, considering the massive violence the minorities there were exposed to, the temporary peace in the East provided a glimmer of hope to the nascent State. Hence, ignoring all indications (direct and indirect) to the opposite, the State believed that there was no reason to migrate and hence, migration in the East was sought to be prevented at all costs. Therefore, it was relief and not rehabilitation which the migrants were to be provided with the hope that as soon as the conditions normalized, they would go back.

Permanent rehabilitation was seen as an ‘incentive’ for the migrant to stay on in the more ‘prosperous’ West Bengal (compared to East Pakistan) and, hence, it was to be avoided. At all times the constant fear that loomed large over the Union Government and the State Government was that if a situation similar to that in the West occurred here and all the members of the minority community decided to come over, it would be a huge burden on the State. Thus, economics of rehabilitation was a prime factor in persisting with adhoc relief measures so as to discourage migration from the East.
The third factor is representative of how the State was conceptualized by our founding fathers. They had envisioned a secular state where members of all religious communities would live in complete harmony. Nehru’s idea of a secular state was also significant in the construction of the image of India on the world stage. The exchange of population across the western borders was a principle he reconciled with most reluctantly and after much deliberation. Similarly, as shown in the dissertation, he was most disturbed by the pushing out of Muslims in north India and the ‘evil act’—the Administration of the Evacuee Property Act (1950). It is precisely a repeat of such a situation in the East which he probably wished to prevent and thus, such draconian laws and policies were never implemented on paper for the Muslims in the East. The dissertation has argued that ground realities were, however, different and Muslims were forced to migrate to East Pakistan. Yet, a considerable number remained behind—evacuee homes and property formed a small share in the overall rehabilitation programme in the East. It was the vacant lands belonging to private owners (Hindus and Muslims) and the government (Union and State) which were squatted upon and colonies were built herein, and it was in this manner that the vast majority of refugees rehabilitated themselves.

The equation Hindu/Sikh: Muslim = refugee: evacuee, applicable in the immediate aftermath of Partition in the West got transformed into that of Hindus: Muslim = Majority: Minority in the East. Whereas, in the West the Hindus and Sikhs became the unquestioned citizens of the nation by virtue of their violent displacement from their homes and homelands, their counterparts in the East, who far from being a welcome presence in their original homeland were not accepted in the adopted land as well. Contingency of economics and secular ideals required that the minorities in the East should be seen as the responsibility of the State they belonged to originally. Thus, a strict monitoring of migration in the East was made mandatory. Hence, refugees in the East had to contend not only with these strict regulations but also with being categorized as ‘infiltrators’, ‘Pakistani minorities’ and ‘fugitives’. Such regulation was based on the assumption of the State regarding the nature of this migration. The State believed it was temporary and that with conditions normalizing, the
migrants would return. In the West, any such hope was quashed at the very beginning, once again based on the unprecedented violence experienced there.

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

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

The next issue elaborated in this dissertation is the challenge to the twin myths regarding the image of the Bengali migrant. First, the image of the lazy and immobile Bengali migrant which is projected in the official publications, the depiction of him as one who lacked any self-initiative and simply relied on government largess is the one which has been challenged in many scholarly works of late. This dissertation has elaborated it further using the evidences as obtained from the comparative analysis of government policies, by highlighting the flawed and inadequate application of policies in the east.

The second myth pertains to the image of the migrant in the East as a mass of combustible elements who sought violent protests and mass movements as the only recourse to their predicament. Thus, the image of the refugee as anti-State and also that of an anti-social element is the one which has completely overshadowed the more constructive role of the migrant in the process of self-rehabilitation. The setting up of colonies and their planned development initially without any aid from the Government and the setting up of schools, colleges, libraries, recreation clubs, health centres, parks and playgrounds in the colonies are works seldom attributed to the individual initiative of the refugees. As mentioned in the dissertation, the Government at first did not recognize these colonies and when they finally did they made it clear that regularization would not entail any development works herein. Thus, much was left upon the shoulders of the migrants themselves.
It is not only the residents of the colony who showed such ingenuity. Even the camp residents were recruited in State-sponsored development projects like construction of roads and dams, clearing of forests, reclamation of waste land and other construction projects. These were the migrants who were sent out of West Bengal and made to work in the difficult terrains of Dandakaranya or to the far-flung islands of Andaman and Nicobar. Hiranmoy Bandopadhyay cites the example of the *path* (jute) cultivators who restarted their business of *taat* production and flourished much on their individual initiative. Such contribution of the Bengali migrant seldom finds mention in official publications which are more keen to cover up the flaws in the State policy and lay the blame for this failed rehabilitation in the East upon the refugees themselves. Bandopadhyay, a functionary of the very same government, acknowledges with despair how the labour of those who could have been the most valuable asset for the State was never utilized and instead these people and their talents lay wasted.

This dissertation does not deny the equally constructive role of the migrant in the West in the process of his rehabilitation; it has only shown how rehabilitation was an issue which was best solved when the State and the affected population jointly collaborated. Where such collaboration was lacking the latter suffered and the former would inevitably face the flak, as in the case of the East.

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

The sense of loss deepens even further when the migrant is unable to regain at least a part of the lost ground. The hostility of the State, the locals and the vain existence in
West Bengal made the migrants long for the home and the lifestyle left behind even more. They simply could not reconcile to the hopeless situation they were in, and hence, the nostalgic reminiscences in the East simply do not precipitate.

It is the immortal lines of the great poet Annada Shankar Ray that capture with great ease the feelings of anger, frustration and sorrow of the average Bengali over the vivisection of his motherland, India, with which I conclude this dissertation:

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

[You make such a hue and cry when a little child breaks a bottle of oil, But when the wise men divided our India, What of that?]*
Camp Life

Humayun’s Tomb Camp for Muslim Displaced Persons:

Tents being pitched up for Muslim Refugees in Humayun’s Tomb.

A view of the Muslim refugees’ camp at the Humayun’s Tomb.
Kingsway camp for Hindu/Sikh Refugees:

Kingsway Barracks where refugees from West Punjab found a shelter after being evacuated from Pakistan. Photo taken on 27/9/1947.

Kurukshetra Refugee Camp for Hindu/Sikh Refugees:

Picture showing household belongings of Hindu refugees. They await allotment of a place in the refugee camp where they have arrived.
Refugee Registration and Transportation to the Assigned Camps:

Refugees just arrived from West Punjab line up to get their names registered before being admitted to the respective camps.

Refugees being taken to their respective camps in buses.
Refugees waiting outside Wavell canteen.
Photos taken 27.9.1947
The Camp at Purana Qila for Muslim Displaced Persons:

Vehicles and furniture brought by Muslim refugees into the Purana Qila Camp.

A Doctor examines the sick ladies in the camp for Muslim refugees at Purana Qila.
Abducted Persons:

The Notice along with this photograph read as follows:
Photograph of a deaf and dumb boy age about 15 years who has been received from Pakistan through the DAV College camp Lahore in October 1951. It appears that the Pakistan authorities admitted this boy into the camp after releasing him from jail. Being illiterate in addition to being deaf and dumb, he is unable to convey his identity but from his facial features and dress he seems to belong to Bikaner side. If anyone recognizes him, information may be passed on to the Central Recovery Organization ‘P’ Block, New Delhi.

Women social workers along with a few of the “rescued” non-Muslim women who arrived at the Ganga Ram Transit Camp in Lahore in February 1948 from Campbellpur and Punjab Refugee Camp in Pakistan for evacuation to India under military escort.

“Rescued” women at the Ganga Ram Transit Camp in Lahore in February 1948 cooking their own meals.
Refugees Coming from East Pakistan: Sealdah Station

Photo taken on 23/6/1950 shows East Bengal refugee women arriving at the Sealdah railway station with their children after the riots and disturbances.
Rehabilitation of the Refugee in the East:

Habra-Baigachi Township

Gayeshpur Colony 40 miles from Calcutta.
Rehabilitation of the Refugee in the East:

Jadavpur (Calcutta) refugee Colony. Photo taken on 22.6.1950 shows a refugee making his cottage in the colony.

Jadavpur (Calcutta) refugee Colony. Photo taken on 22.6.1950.
Refugee Women:

*Karol Bagh centre for displaced women workers and trainees.*

*Lahore Sheds Displaced Women’s centre.*
Home for Children at Ram Bagh, Delhi.
Claims and Compensation:

Claimant getting petition prepared by professional petition writer outside Claims Office, Delhi.

Photo shows portion of record room of Chief Claims Commissioner where verified claims and other connected papers were stacked.
Refugee Squatters in Delhi:

Refugee families living on pavements of Elgin Road, Daryaganj.

A Bazaar set up by refugees near Kingsway Refugee colony, New Delhi.
Rehabilitation of Refugees coming from West Pakistan:

A view of the permanent quarters built near Kingsway Camp, New Delhi by the Ministry of Rehabilitation for the refugees coming from Pakistan.

Some of the pavement shops for refugees built by the Ministry of Rehabilitation near Kingsway Camp, New Delhi.