Introduction

The full impact of the Radcliffe Line and the Partition of India was not anticipated by the political and administrative heads of India, Pakistan and United Kingdom. Each had their own reasons to believe that Partition was the only solution to the virus of communalism which had torn the nation apart. These justifications will be discussed in detail when we look at the evolution of historiography on Partition. For now it will suffice to say that it is only after Independence and Partition that the impact of this man-made crisis upon the people and the two nations was felt. What was then considered as a victory of the Indian national movement resulting in the transfer of power, proved to be anything but a smooth transition. The fears of those who opposed Partition came alive and a country was torn apart with massive repercussions: millions became homeless, lakhs died in the communal outrage, and those who survived were forced to lead a life of penance in a new country. The Partition Committees which were set up to look into the whole aspect of division of assets and liabilities simply could not foretell the ‘human dimension’.¹

Ramachandra Guha has rightly noted that generally works on history end on the precise date of 15ᵗʰ August 1947. The domain of ‘History’ ends with India attaining Independence, and where history ends political science, civics and economics begins. Guha argues that this is a wrong assumption—history persists, and hence there should be more works on post-Independence India.² Taking this argument further, Sekhar Bandopadyay writes: ‘We may perhaps further add that while the Historians finished their inquiries on 15ᵗʰ August 1947, the political scientist and sociologists did not quite begin until the 1950’s—that is not until the new institutions had taken proper shape in India and started functioning effectively.’³ This dissertation focuses on a history of Partition by looking beyond the event itself. It looks at the very first task set for the newly independent Indian state—the rehabilitation of the refugees coming over to India from Pakistan. It does so from a different point of view. Here the attempt is to draw a

¹ The Transfer of Power series Vol. 11 discusses the many correspondences between the members of the Partition Committees regarding such a division of assets and liabilities. See also the six volumes of Partition Proceedings for the detailed reports.
comparative analysis of the rehabilitation policies as introduced by the Government of India for the two sets of refugees—those coming from West Pakistan and those from East Pakistan—and to note how there were significant differences and inherent similarities as well. The differences are to be found more in the attitude of the Government which is reflected in the designing and implementation of policies. The similarities are observed in the common predicament of the refugees—both were victims of forcible uprooting from their homes and homeland for no fault of their own, and consequently forced into a life of abject dependence upon State benevolence. Yet another similarity noted among the refugees is their will to succeed even in adverse conditions and hence, slowly but surely to merge with the local population thereby completing the circle of total rehabilitation. The important difference, however, lies in the fact that whereas in this endeavour to rebuild their lives the refugees coming from West Pakistan were ably supported by the Government of India, for those coming from East Pakistan it was an unending fight for their rights, one that continues to this day since rehabilitation in the East is not yet over.  

**Partition Historiography**

Partition historiography has evolved through various stages, each having a different area of focus. Thus, whereas, the earlier writings focused on the ‘why and how’ questions, more recent historiography focuses on area studies or in underlining the meaning of Partition for the people actually overwhelmed by it. Thus, now the emphasis is upon the theme of refugees and their survival stories. The following section looks at this evolution in Partition studies in detail.

**Debating ‘High Politics’**

The first phase in Partition historiography dealt with the ‘why and how’ questions related to Partition. Asim Roy describes this earliest phase in Partition historiography as the ‘High Politics’ debate.³ In these works, one finds a factual description of the sequence of events that preceded Partition, and based upon the nationality of the author and his/her

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³ It is only in West Bengal that the Department of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation still persists, and it is only here that we find work related to refugee rehabilitation still in progress (regularization of colonies and providing for the surviving camps).

degree of involvement in the event, one also finds a prejudiced account of the factors responsible for it. The earliest works on Partition are, therefore, the biographies, autobiographies and memoirs of those who participated in this political event. This includes the work of the British, Indian and Pakistani politicians and administrators.⁶ These works represent their party prejudices and try to either legitimize or contest the Partition of India based upon their respective biases. Thus, whereas, the British authors focus on the theme of Partition as an event which was inevitable, and take pride in having solved this great Indian conundrum with surgical accuracy, the Indian and Pakistani authors beg to differ. Their arguments are directed against each other. They focus on the blame-game issue with each trying to prove that it was the other who was responsible for this ‘greatest human tragedy’.

Mountbatten’s report, for example, is primarily aimed at washing off the blame from the British onto the Indians and the Pakistanis— ‘I was determined that so far as possible the decision whether to have Partition or not should rest on the shoulders of the Indian people themselves; and that the accusation against the British of having divided the country should thus be avoided.’⁷ He justifies the shift in the date for the transfer of power by stating that the country was in total chaos with the rioting, looting and plunder and that even though, ‘every effort had been made to bring the danger of the situation home to the top rank political leaders, and they were fully aware as I was out of the danger which threatened. But not one of us, and indeed, so far as I know, no one in India, Pakistan or the UK anticipated the exact form and magnitude of what was to follow.’⁸ Yet the decision was agreed upon by common consensus. Over the question of handling

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⁸ Ibid. p. 284
the situation, he once again blames the mishandling due to the ‘lack of adequate and competent civil administration’, i.e. both the Indian and Pakistani government had not taken up the services of the British officers, hence the problems. The report also appears to be self-congratulatory, in appreciation of the task being performed to the best of his efforts, and that he had always opposed Partition, but in the face of the adverse communal situation, it was the only solution.

Indian and Pakistani politicians and officers, however, presented a different view with each blaming the other for their stubborn stand on Partition.

Rajendra Prasad in his book, *India Divided*, blamed the Muslim League for persisting in its demand for Pakistan. According to him, the foundation of Pakistan rested on the two-nation theory. Prasad firmly opposed this theory and added that even large groups of Muslims opposed it. Basing his arguments upon the vast statistical data regarding division of population, economic resources, territory etc, he concluded that, ‘The grounds on which separation is claimed are thus either unsubstantial or such as are not likely to be accepted as a just and fair basis for separation.’ Prasad then went on to show that every positive step taken by the Congress to accommodate the Muslim League and its demands were spurned by it. So, whether it was C. Rajagopalachari’s Plan or the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, the League insisted upon Pakistan and its sole right to represent the Muslims. According to Prasad, Partition was a ‘solution of despair’. He also foretold the bitter legacy it would leave behind: ‘Its enforcement is bound to be followed by ebullient, joyous exuberance on one side and sullen, smouldering resentment on the other….we should be prepared for the aftermath and not hug the delusion that thereafter all will be plain sailing.’

The Pakistani politicians have, on the other hand, not only justified the creation of Pakistan in terms of it being the only means to safeguard Muslim interests, but have also criticized Mountbatten and the Congress leaders for depriving Pakistan of its rightful territorial and economic resources in the hope of making the country unviable economically. Thus, there is a sense of triumph in these works which seek to present the

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10 Ibid. p. 371.
picture that in spite of the policies of Mountbatten and the Congress, Pakistan had survived.

Chaudhuri Mohammad Ali’s work perhaps best highlights this point of view. First, he mentioned the differences between the Hindus and the Muslims, and stated that despite living together for so long the differences persisted, so much so, that they indeed formed two nations— ‘The encounter between the Hindu and Muslim cultures that began over a thousand years ago has profoundly influenced both….yet they have remained distinct with an emphasis on their separateness. They have mixed but never fused; they have coexisted but have never become one….’. 11 He stated that this gulf was further widened under British rule, i.e. the ‘divide and rule’ politics, and also utilized by them for sustaining the empire. Thereafter, he mentioned the discriminatory policies of the Congress in pushing the League to isolation, and therefore, for the sake of the Muslims and their interests, the League demanded a separate state— Pakistan.

After these ‘first-hand’ accounts and memoirs, the works of later day scholars and academicians further added to the understanding of ‘High Politics’. These include the works of David Page, R.J Moore and Anita Inder Singh.12

A.I Singh’s book surveys the political developments during the period 1935-47. By analyzing these developments and the negotiations involved therein, she concluded that India was partitioned at the behest of the Muslim League, and British interests too, played an important role, thus making Partition inevitable. So, even though the Congress was opposed to it till the very end, yet it had to give in finally on account of the mounting pressure from the Muslim League demanding a sovereign state for the Muslims, and the British acquiesced to it, keeping in mind the prevailing circumstances (World War II and strategic interests in South-Asia). According to Singh, the Muslim League could hardly claim a substantial mass following prior to 1945-46. They not only lacked the support of the Muslims, but also that of the British administrators. However, the Second World War changed the equation— with the Congress proving to be uncooperative in the British war

efforts, the latter now turned for support to the Muslim league. Thus, to avoid any question of transfer of power at this critical juncture, the Britishers attempted to strengthen the Muslim League (initiating the Lahore Resolution, giving a virtual veto to the Muslim League at the Simla Conference, involvement in provincial politics as in Punjab etc.) and in the process the demand for Pakistan grew till Partition became inevitable.

However, revisionist historiography has challenged the culpability of the Muslim League in bringing about the Partition of India. Ayesha Jalal’s work makes this path-breaking departure. Her argument is that the demand for Pakistan was never meant to be what it actually resulted in, i.e. a full-fledged sovereign nation for the Muslims. Rather it was to be seen merely as a ‘bargaining counter’ or a ‘tactical move’— ‘The Lahore resolution should therefore be seen as a bargaining counter which has the merit of being acceptable (on the face of it) to the majority province Muslims, and of being totally unacceptable to the Congress and in the last resort to the British also. This in turn provided the best insurance that the League would not be given what it now apparently was asking for, but which Jinnah in fact did not really want.’

Thus, her contention is that Jinnah never wanted the Partition of India, but was pushed towards using this as a tactic to safeguard Muslim interests. He was in favour of a weak centre in a united India with provincial autonomy. The uncertainty and vagueness in the Lahore Resolution, the rejection of the Cripps offer by Jinnah which had allowed for the provinces to opt out of the Indian Union and thus in policy giving sanction to the principle of Pakistan, the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan, his last minute acceptance of the 3rd June Plan, his desire for getting the constituent assemblies of Pakistan and India to meet simultaneously in New Delhi on the eve of Independence, and, finally, the League’s opposition to Hindustan adopting the title ‘Union of India’, all reflect Jinnah’s desire for a united India. Therefore, Jalal is of the view that it was the Congress and the British who pushed the League to take on this separatist tendency.

Roy’s final assessment of this conventional-revisionist debate in Partition historiography reflects the truth underlying all historical research: as and when more and

more sources are made available, even the revisionist efforts will get ‘elevated to the status of orthodoxy’, i.e. ‘Undeniably, not all doubts can be answered at the present stage of our knowledge, and again, not all answers given are, in themselves questionable.’ Thus, question of ‘high politics’ continues to be debated, assessed and reassessed. Recent works have again brought out this debate into light. Thus, whereas, D N Panigrahi (India’s Partition: The Story of Imperialism in Retreat) blames the British (Linlithgow and Wavell specifically) and Jinnah for Partition, Sanjay Singh Narila (The Shadow of the great Game: The Untold Story of India’s Partition), cites records from the India Office Library to show that it was British military interests in South Asia and the perceived Russian threat that had influenced the speedy transfer of power and also the Partition of India.

A new trend in Partition historiography has been the focus on the regions which were actually affected: Punjab, Sind and Bengal. Thus the concern has now shifted from the all-India perspective to regional and provincial contexts. As pointed out by Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, this ‘welcome development’ of the 1980’s addressed a range of themes: analyzing the roots of Muslim separatism and the electoral and mass support it was able to display in the 1930’s and 1940’s, looking at how power-sharing arrangements work (especially in Bengal and Punjab), and also unravelling how millenarian and peasant movements coalesced with the larger mobilization for Pakistan.

To cite one example of how the regional perspective has enhanced our understanding of the Partition politics let us look at Joya Chatterji’s book— Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932- 1947. According to Chatterji, Partition was desired by the Bengali Bhadralok community itself because the Macdonald Award (1932) and the Government of India Act (1935) had greatly reduced the presence of the Hindus in the local assembly, with the Muslims occupying a dominant position therein. This isolation of the Bengali Bhadralok was not restricted to the state level alone, rather during the period under consideration, the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee was snubbed at

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14 Ibid, p. 130
even at the national level of politics where suddenly Bengal was sidelined. Post-1937 elections, the Hindus got a glimpse of what ‘Muslim rule’ would lead to, for the Krishak Proja Party-Muslim League government followed discriminatory policies against them. Thus for a brief period, the Hindus drifted towards the All India Hindu Mahasabha, which promised them some respite from this ‘oppression’. This further alienated the command of the BPCC, and thus the demand for Partition arose. Such was the desire to maintain the Hindu dominance, that the United Bengal movement, too, could not garner enough support, and thus the phrase ‘Hindu Communalism’.

The focus on regional studies has certainly enhanced our knowledge on this topic for it has brought about a more nuanced analysis of the entire politics involved, and that too, from the states actually affected by the decision to Partition the continent. Sucheta Mahajan, however, has a critique to offer against such regional studies. She finds such works as ‘denigrating nationalism’—

‘The form of the diatribe has altered every few years. The Cambridge school has come a long way from its direct, frontal assault on nationalism in the 1960’s, when the politics of the early nationalist arenas was described derogatorily as a “cockfight”. When this did not wash, assault was mounted from another battery, positioned in the province and locality. All-India history was given up as it allegedly dealt only in generalities. The emphasis on provincial and local arenas indirectly suggested the bankruptcy of all-India politics and national concerns.’

In my opinion, though we should not loose out the bigger picture, the study of the provinces hold equal importance because it was in these regions where the impact of Partition was actually felt. Therefore, a regional perspective is much required and needed.

However, one common point of note in all these works is that the focus here remains on the politics of Partition. The starting point invariably is from the 1940’s and ending in 1947. Therefore, Partition is seen as a culmination of political negotiations or struggle, and, then suddenly brought to an abrupt end on 15th August 1947 with the inauguration of the two new nations—India and Pakistan. Thus, in the main revolving around the issue of ‘high politics’, with the focus remaining on the people in power and the ‘quest for power’. Hence, it ignores the ‘human dimension’ and the impact upon the people affected by the event. The need to move beyond 1947 was only recently realised. The later works,

therefore, bring to light the other aspects of this event—the violence associated with it, the suffering and resurgence of the Partition victims, the political and social implications of these after-effects of Partition, among other themes, are the new areas of interest.

From the Perspective of the Persecuted
The next set of works focus on describing Partition as an event, not in political terms, rather in terms of what it meant to the people themselves: a history of violence, a history of immense suffering, and finally a history of the triumph of the indomitable spirit of humankind which manages to survive in the most difficult of situations. This is seen in the works of Gyanendra Pandey and Urvashi Butalia. Both Butalia and Pandey describe Partition in a manner different from conventional historiography: timeline of events leading to Partition, causes, course and consequence. Rather, their focus is on the immeasurable violence of that time and its implications in the present-day lives of the people of the subcontinent. Thus, according to them, one can draw analogies between Partition violence (1947) and in the recurrent communal strife in present-day India—Sikh riots of 1984 and Babri Masjid (1993).17

Butalia’s work relies heavily on oral testimonies, and presents before us the human dimension of the event. She notes that for the victims of Partition, Independence Day is more reminiscent of the violence that accompanied it. Gyanendra Pandey’s work narrates a similar theme, and thus it also differs from the earlier representations of Partition, which saw it either as non-narratable, or merely looked at the causes leading to it, or saw it as a freak occurrence, i.e. localizing the violence. His work thus emphasizes the fact that the Partition of India and the accompanying violence was as much a reality as was its Independence from British rule. This history of violence cannot be ignored, especially in the light of the present day scenario where communal violence has become a normal and routine phenomenon, often revoking the ghosts of the Partition violence.

In fact, according to Butalia, there is a distinction to be made between the ‘general’ and the ‘particular’, i.e. whereas the earlier works revolving around the theme of the

politics behind Partition belong to the former category, the focus on what she calls as the ‘human dimensions’ would belong to the latter category.

To ignore this history and focus only on the issue of high politics would be missing out the complete picture. Therefore, whereas we must acknowledge the contribution of the great leaders in bringing about the coveted Independence of the country, and, also that of faceless plenty who too, at the call of high patriotism sacrificed their lives for the Independence of our country, it is equally true that Independence of India also brought with it the Partition of the subcontinent. Thus, Partition is as much the truth of the subcontinent history as much its Independence is. Further, whereas, Independence is still a reality today, the ghost of Partition too, survives and is revoked to life at every attempt at communal disharmony. That the metaphor of Partition is used to this day to describe every such unpleasant moment of misery, helplessness and communal tension is probably best shown by Butalia, who states that in the course of the interviews taken by her of the 1984 riot victims, many of them said that those riots reminded them of the Partition violence. Even in the Babri Masjid riots, the Hindu fundamentalists invoke the metaphor of Partition while taking a solemn pledge to send back every single Muslim to Pakistan.

However, in this phase of Partition historiography, there is almost an absolute silence on the ‘Partition in the East’. This is so because the ‘Partition in the East’ cannot be described in much the same way as the ‘Partition in the West’. Even though it was the Calcutta riots (1946) followed by that in Noakhali which sparked off the arc of Partition violence, yet, the experience of violence in the East was almost negligible in the first three years following Partition. There was no largescale uprooting of people from their homelands and no exchange of population in the Eastern borders. Those who came did so out of political convictions and also in anticipation of what they felt would be a second-class treatment in Pakistan. Thus, the spectre of violence which dominated administrative and scholarly imagination in the West would become a factor in the East only in 1950 and once again much later in 1964. It is this difference in experience of violence which led to a difference in state policy towards the refugees from East Pakistan. Likewise, in the scholarly works as well, it is this difference which has led to the pre-dominance of a Punjab-centred analysis of Partition and its aftermath.
The Aftermath of Partition

Nonetheless, the lacuna in the historiography up till this point has been its sole focus on Partition alone— either the description of the causes or describing Partition, i.e. what it implied (violence). So, even though these works have successfully enabled the theme of Partition to become more than a mere footnote in the grand narrative of the Indian National Movement, they have not looked beyond Partition, i.e. what after Partition? This is what the next phase in Partition historiography focuses on— the ‘Aftermath of Partition’, i.e. not on the victimization alone, but rather survival in the face of adversities. This includes a wide range of scholarly works on this theme.¹⁸

These works seek to look beyond the politics of Partition and instead focus on the politics after it—rehabilitation policies and the debates around it, and the struggle of the refugees in finding a place for themselves in the new land as its new citizens. Thus, these works draw the focus towards the refugees and their stories rather than looking at the ‘great men’ and their histories. At the same time, it also does not look at the subject as merely passive victims, rather as active participants in the whole process of rehabilitation.

The image of the surviving refugee as opposed to that of the refugee as a victim (passive bystander in the whole process of rehabilitation) is spelt out even more convincingly for the marginalised refugee woman who has always been seen as the one who was the worst victim of this violent carnage that was Partition. That she played a significant role in post-Partition rehabilitation is brought out very significantly in Gargi Chakravartty’s book Coming Out of Partition. Her chief focus is on a new social category— the ‘refugee women’ and the efforts made by them to survive during these hard times. In her book, the theme of victimization is not neglected, but instead she chooses to present before us the contribution of women in the home and outside as well— their becoming bread-winners and also participating equally in the politics of agitation. Thus, stating that though the Partition brought in its wake irreparable damage,

it also provided the women a few opportunities to participate in the sphere of employment and politics which had so long been dominated by the male. Here she draws the contrast between the women from East Bengal and those from West Bengal. Trying conditions had brought the former out in the open in the quest for survival, which in turn made them role-models for the latter. She points out that though Partition allowed for the emancipation and empowerment of the Hindu women, for the Muslim women it was reversed. Partition left the few educated Muslim women in the eastern half, as a result of which their sisters in the west suffered. In sum, the work brings up the theme of survival as an important area to focus on. In her words, ‘Too often, women’s experience of Partition becomes a story of loss and victimhood, of violence and oppression. While the focus is valid and deeply relevant, it does somewhat marginalize other areas of experience that are no less relevant. These relate to the ways in which uprooted women have faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding and reshaping their lives in alien conditions and how some of their concerns evolved into a new women’s movement.’

Apart from the theme of rehabilitation of refugees, other areas of focus in this phase of Partition historiography involve two more themes which hold immense significance in post-Independence India, and probably South Asia as well. These two themes include—border area studies and the troubled question of citizenship and loyalties in post-Partition India.

The study of border areas and the impact of the Radcliffe’s Line cutting through it is one area which has gathered immense significance. Willem van Schendel and Ranabir Sammadar have presented pioneering works in this direction pertaining to the Bengal Frontier. It is their argument that a study of these borderlands is important because it is here where Partition left the maximum impact, and still bears a continuing legacy. Writing on the relevance of borderland studies, Schendel states that ‘The pain of Partition fell disproportionately on the new borderlands. Here disruption was overwhelming and almost all people were directly and personally affected. The borderland experience of Partition was immediate and acute and therefore differed from the experience of Partition

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Samaddar brings to light the continuing migration across the Indo-Bangladesh border. In his opinion this migration, which has been termed as illegal by the Indian state, is nothing but regular business-as-usual, and has now come under the scanner only on account of the creation of this arbitrarily drawn border. To this day there exist in this region several enclaves which are actually islands of Indian Territory in Bangladesh and vice versa. The plight of the residents in these areas can only be imagined—on the one hand they are being harassed by the local population on an everyday basis, and on the other, upon making an attempt to enter India, they are arrested as illegal migrants.

The effect of the creation of the border in the everyday life of the people in these regions is a valuable area of research. An interesting account is provided in Sanjoy Hazarika’s, *The Rights of Passage*. Here Hazarika, by way of citing the example of his domestic help who quite frequently makes the illegal journey to and fro from Assam to Sylhet (Bangladesh) very easily, shows that it is very difficult to break the erstwhile bonds by merely drawing up a border. Also, the ill-planned border in this way cuts across through essential lifelines and families in this region, thus making the border actually quite redundant, and instead requiring heavy surveillance in this region. Interestingly, though similar implications are applicable to the western borders, yet, the study of the western border is almost negligible and thus, begs for further research.

Thus, there is a need to move beyond the focus on merely the violence experienced across the western frontier, and instead, to look at the continuing implication of Partition and the creation of the border in the west as well. It might be argued that the conditions were different in the East and West and therefore, the impact of the creation of the borders too, was different. That is to say that while there was a total exchange of population across the Western frontier, there was only a piecemeal migration in the East. This stage-wise migration, and later the creation of Bangladesh, made the situation in East much more different and complicated as compared to the West. Nonetheless, the borders in the west are not impermeable and what is termed as illegal migration carries on here as well. In a few cases, however, just like in the East, hereto, it may be only

everyday business which is now disturbed by the creation of borders, and as a corollary to it, also that of citizens and aliens.

That brings us to the other area of recent focus in Partition historiography— the making of citizens and aliens. Gyanendra Pandey first highlighted this issue in his article, ‘Can A Muslim Be an Indian’. By a detailed discussion on permits and passports and also the Administration of Evacuee Property Act of 1950, he makes the point regarding the construction of the class of citizens and the other—

Partition and Independence (not only in the form of divisions on the map, but of divisions on the ground and in the mind—the uprooting and looting, the rape and the recovery operations) marked a moment of enormous uncertainty in the political and social life of the people of the subcontinent. There was no knowing in 1947, nor for some time afterwards, who would belong where when things "finally" settled down. There was the redesignation of local castes and communities: those who had long adhered somewhat loosely to the label of Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh were now categorically named as one or the other.22

This discussion has been carried forward by Vazira Zamindar in greater detail.23 She shows how the state, using its bureaucratic tools, inscribed upon the person his/her status of nationality, i.e. citizen or alien. She elaborates upon the concept of permits and passports which became a permanent marker of citizenship. The Administration of the Evacuee Property (1950) and the arbitrary way in which the Muslims of North India were displaced from their own homes further reflects the disastrous impact of Partition upon not only people directly affected by the creation of the border, rather, the after-effects were to be faced by even those much away from the actual site of action, only because they happened to belong to a particular community. Her work marks a departure from the others since it is one of the rare works involving cross-border research.

In the case of Bengal, the situation was slightly different. Bengal had a porous border for a long time (1947-1952) till it was finally sealed with the introduction of passports and compulsory use of travel documents for legal entry into India. This transparency in the border for the first five years post-Independence affected the State response to the incoming migrants, and as a corollary it also affected their claim to the

citizenship of India, which was put under a constant scanner unlike as for their counterparts in the West. This principle difference must be borne in mind as the following dissertation will elaborate upon this in the subsequent chapters.

Yet another far less researched area of study in Partition history involves the use of comparative analysis. This is the theme which this dissertation looks at—a comparative analysis of the rehabilitation policies as formulated by the Government of India for the two sets of refugees: those coming from West Pakistan and those coming from East Pakistan. The comparative approach has been adopted on an even larger scale before while focusing on the numerous ‘Partitions’ that have occurred in the 20th century. As stated by Jassal and Ben-Ari, ‘By deploying the comparative imagination, comparative perspectives and the set of approaches comparison involves, [the book will] seek to stretch our understanding of Partition as a phenomenon of modernity as well as a set of organizing principles.’ Their work makes a comparative analysis of the three Partitions which took place at about the same time—India/Pakistan, East/West Germany and Israel/Palestine, and thereby brings out the similarities in all the three experiences. At the level of politics, it is observed that in all the three cases, Partition came to be used as an exit strategy of the colonial powers, and at the level of experiences, similar notions of displacement and homelessness can be observed.

This dissertation makes a comparative analysis within India itself—that is to look at the Partition of Punjab and Bengal and draw out similarities and differences therein. In looking at not merely the political circumstances which led to Partition, but also at the aftermath of Partition with a special focus on another often ignored aspect in Partition studies, i.e. post-Partition rehabilitation, I focus on the impact of Partition in greater detail. By making a comparative analysis of the rehabilitation measures adopted by the government of India vis-à-vis the refugees from Punjab and Bengal it is the issue of deprivation of one set of refugees and privilege to another that comes across. This is an aspect often pointed out by political commentators and scholars as well, but by making a direct comparison I present this contrast in clearer terms. The difference in the treatment

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meted out to the refugees is also reflective of state ideology regarding its area of responsibility. That is by deciding who was to be included in the rehabilitation policy and who was not, and also by showing a sense of urgency in one case and that of restraint in another, an understanding of nation-making can be derived.

Thus, the preceding paragraphs have traced the various aspects covered so far in Partition historiography, and also mentioned the purpose of this dissertation. The next section emphasises upon the points of departure made in this dissertation.

Rehabilitating the Refugee

Post-Partition studies have focussed on various aspects as mentioned above. The one aspect which has dominated is the study of Partition violence. This seems natural because Partition violence was unprecedented. When, however, the focus moved away from the violence, the trauma of Partition became the other area of study by the scholars. This theme allowed for the incorporation of an interdisciplinary approach in Partition studies. But even then, Partition studies remained just that—Partition studies, i.e. once again the study was restricted to the events of 15th August 1947—seldom moving beyond that date. More importantly, even though individual refugees made an appearance, yet they remained frozen in time. Asked to recollect ‘those days’ and asked to recount their experiences, the refugees were viewed as living testimonies of this tragic event. Such a view is not without its problems:

- Refugees were seen as passive agents in an event where apart from being the victims of this ‘greatest human tragedy’ there was precious little that they did.26
- The definition of Partition violence was limited.27 This made Punjab as the model for Partition studies, and Bengal, the other Partitioned state, was the exception to this model.28

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25 Oral history methodology gave voice and a face to the ‘chief sufferers’ of Partition.
26 Or were at least visualized as such. This is more in the case of women in Partition. Vast amount of scholarly works are dedicated in presenting the image of the refugee woman as the one who was exposed to the most gruesome violence. That she became in many families the sole breadwinner is seldom noted.
27 The silent suffering of the millions in East Pakistan was seen as an exception to the norm and did not call for much attention when Partition violence was discussed.
28 That the sufferings in Bengal were not different from that in Punjab except in the magnitude of immediate violence is what this dissertation seeks to present.
• One sided interviews and one sided recording of incidents also do not disclose the violence on this side of the border.²⁹

• Focus on Partition violence brings to light only one aspect of the State—either as one who was held responsible for this violence or as the one who tried to quell the violence once it started spreading infinitely. The true nature of the nascent state in the immediate aftermath of Independence and Partition needs a closer analysis which does not come through in these studies. Also, in this first task set before it, the State was trying to define its territories, responsibilities, and also its ‘rightful’ subjects.

• Finally, the coming of age of the refugee, too, does not come across from these studies. That is, the refugee making this land his homeland with or without the support of the State and the original inhabitants is an aspect which can come through only after a study of the lacuna in the Government-sponsored rehabilitation policies.

Thus, the earlier focus on Partition violence creates the image of the refugee as one who was simply a passive victim in the process and thereby denying it any agency of its own.

The questions raised, thereby, are answered only when one looks at the rehabilitation policies of the Government in greater detail. The first scholarly work addressing these questions was by Satya Rai, Partition of the Punjab: A study of its Effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I): 1947-56.³⁰ She looked in great detail at the entire process of rehabilitation in Punjab and its after effects on the politics in the state as well. Right from discussing rural rehabilitation to urban rehabilitation, Rai critically analysed the rehabilitation policies to bring out the role of the State and the refugees in the process of rehabilitation. Thus, the focus of her work was strictly post-Partition rehabilitation in Punjab with only a background reference to the ‘High Politics’ and Partition violence. Thus, as was prevalent in all phases of Partition historiography, once again it was the

²⁹ It is only when while going through some of the arbitrary rehabilitation policies that the latent violence on the minorities on this side of the border comes across. For eg: the ‘bureaucratic violence’ experienced by the north-Indian Muslims in post-Partition India as pointed out by Vazira Zamindar, The Long Partition.

Punjab model which set the foundation for such studies as well. The exceptional case of Bengal was mentioned but not elaborated as yet.

The earliest works which discussed the rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal were of Nilanjana Chatterjee\(^{31}\) and Jhuma Sanyal Chakraborty\(^{32}\). Both these works made the Bengali refugee their main subject. Chakraborty’s work specifically looked at rehabilitation policies in West Bengal. Rich in detailing the struggle and survival of the Bengali migrant in West Bengal, this work however, does not look at rehabilitation beyond 1954. This was so because as per the Government of India guidelines, and one which was followed by the Government of West Bengal immediately, rehabilitation of refugees in West Bengal was not encouraged after 1954. They were dispersed to the neighbouring states.

The next set of pioneering studies in this field has been that of Joya Chatterji. Chatterji has dealt with the theme of Partition of Bengal, by far, in the most complete sense. Whereas her dissertation, later published as *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*,\(^{33}\) falls in the domain of the first phase in Partition historiography in discussing what led to Partition\(^{34}\), her subsequent works discuss the aftermath of Partition. The main area of focus for Chatterji, however, remains the politics in the post-Partition era in West Bengal. Her discussion on refugees primarily has the purpose of showing how the growing discontent among the refugees forced them away

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\(^{34}\) And in this she makes a most original contribution in presenting an alternative view on the causal factor. According to Chatterji, the Partition of Bengal was much desired by the Hindu Bhadralok themselves who feared a complete Muslim domination of the state and hence demanded Partition. As a follow up to this argument, Chatterji in her next article ‘The Fashioning of Frontier. The Radcliffe Line and the Bengals’ Border Landscape, 1947-52’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 33,1, 1999, discusses how the Radcliffe line was highly ill-conceived and totally disregarding internal boundaries based on geography, economics and most importantly that of everyday routine. But the next part of the argument shows that the boundary commission was not all that aloof of the greater political considerations as it was presented to be. Once again, here the debates of the Bengali bhadralok who tried to include their states/districts into the Indian side of the border are used by her to show that Partition was desired by the bhadralok themselves keeping in mind the fears of Muslim domination and the resulting loss of power. That such a calculated move actually backfired with the bhadralok loosing ground in both the Bengals is the subject of Chatterji’s later works, especially *Spoils of Partition* (2007).
from the Congress which had totally betrayed them. It is in such a scenario that the left started gaining power. Thus, her precise argument is that the Hindu Bhadralok had envisaged a great role for themselves in the post-Partition state of West Bengal, but all such ambitions were totally shattered with Bengal becoming a problem state—‘Partition, they believed, would lead them out of the wilderness and deliver them from the tyranny of a Muslim majority. They expected Partition—by creating a small, manageable, Hindu-dominated state of West Bengal inside independent India—to restore a lost golden age of bhadralok power and influence.’ However, ‘these designs, like the proverbial plans of mice and men, went hopelessly awry…. It had become clear that their strategy was fatally flawed. In their desperate bid to restore a world they had lost, the authors of Bengal Partition failed to anticipate the changes which Partition and Independence would bring in their train.’

In the scholarly articles authored by her, she brings to light the policy of denial adopted by the government vis-à-vis these refugees, and the efforts of the refugees to rehabilitate themselves inspite of hostile conditions.

This work the story further. Using the methodology of comparative analysis, the differential treatment meted out to the refugee in the East is elaborated. The idea is to look at how the same state had a varied response to the similar situation of displacement. By analysing the government policies, this stark contrast will be made even clearer by seeing how the same policies of the Government were either variably applied in the case of Bengal or not applied at all. For this purpose, this dissertation has used the following parameters for making the comparison—

- Facilitating the entry of the migrants
- Rehabilitation measures adopted
- Compensation for losses awarded

This is from the point of view of Government policies, and hence, policy decisions on identifying the refugee, aiding evacuation of the refugees, and, the acts passed for the purpose of rehabilitating the refugee will be analysed.

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35 Chatterji, Spoils of Partition, p. 314.
But there is no denying the agency of the refugees themselves. That the refugee played an important role in the process of rehabilitation is also looked at in detail in this dissertation. The main argument of this dissertation is that the rehabilitation of the refugees was the first task for the nascent nation-state. However, by identifying only a particular form of violence as violence enough, the State laid the foundation for the differential treatment meted out to the refugees coming from West Pakistan and those from East Pakistan. Where the State agreed that the incoming migrants were the victims of the most gruesome violence, there it accepted its role of the protector State with greater promptness and efficiency. But where the incoming migrants were seen as victims of ‘psychological fear’ and not ‘real violence’ the policy adopted was to prevent this migration. Thus, migrants from Punjab were seen as the worst victims of Partition violence, and hence, relief and rehabilitation was provided with a sense of urgency. But migrants from Bengal were not identified as victims of such ‘real violence’. Likewise, the responsibility of the State was reduced. In fact, as is commonly observed in official correspondence of the time, the minorities in the East were constantly referred to as ‘Pakistani minorities’ who were the responsibility of the Pakistani state, thereby denying them any legitimate claim to the citizenship of the Indian state.

This work looks at the role of the State in the process of rehabilitation and the resulting consequences of this limited role vis-à-vis one set of refugees. By making this

37 The four Acts under consideration are—act on land requisition and acquisition [for Delhi (1948) and West Bengal (1948)]; the Administration of Evacuee Property [Delhi (1950) and West Bengal (1951)]; the Claims Act [only for West Pakistan refugees—1950] and the Compensation and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons Act [only for West Pakistan refugees—1954]. In West Bengal, there were other acts and polices followed as distinct from the West—a stiffer implementation of the Nehru–Liaquat Ali Khan Pact (1950); the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction of Unauthorized Persons from Illegal Occupation of Lands Act (1951); and the constant restrictions in influx by setting deadlines or by making eligibility criteria difficult for migration.

38 It was only in 1949-1950 that the first major communal riot (after the 1946 Calcutta and Noakhali riots) wreaked havoc in East Bengal. What is noteworthy is that it was only after this riot that the Government of India took a serious note of the matter. This is discussed in detail in Chapter IV and Chapter V of this dissertation. Thus, it was only such direct violence (repeated in 1964) which compelled the Government to take note of the problem in the East.

39 ‘Terms of Migration to be eased: India has moral duty towards Pakistani minorities’ in Statesman, 30.1.1964. This article notes the findings of a three member Fact Finding Committee (Nehru, T T Krishnamurthy and Mohanlal Saxena) who do accept that the conditions in East Pakistan were totally hostile for the ‘Pakistani minorities’ and that the Indian state did have a ‘moral duty’ towards them; yet it was agreed that there was no ‘constitutional obligation’ towards them and also that they were the responsibility of Pakistan.
argument, this dissertation also questions two important presumptions derived from a study of the rehabilitation of refugees. First, from the point of view of the State, the blame for the failure of rehabilitation in the East was laid upon the ‘lazy and immobile’ Bengali migrant who did not utilise the opportunities presented before him like his counterpart in the West. This assumption simply overlooks the flaws in the State policy itself—delays in the grant of rehabilitation, a miscalculation of the magnitude of the problem which was seen as temporary, and lack of adequate rehabilitation facilities. Secondly, from the point of view of the refugees, the amnesia of the refugees coming from West Pakistan regarding the highly evident role of the State in their immediate relief and rehabilitation process.

This work seeks to bring to light the fact that rehabilitation in the East was primarily the work of the refugees themselves, whereas, in the West the contribution of the State was equally significant if not more. This argument stems from a direct comparison of the policies of the government and the self-initiative of the refugees coming from West Pakistan and East Pakistan. It is also based on the fact that though conflict between the refugees and the State was not altogether absent in the West, the magnitude of this conflict in the East simply outshone any similar conflict in the West. It is this differential treatment that the dissertation focuses on.

Chapterisation
The dissertation comprises five chapters.

Chapter I:
This chapter discusses the first step in the process of rehabilitation—the influx of the migrants. By comparing the pattern of influx, this chapter shows how a variation in this pattern was responsible for the varied response of the government to the issue of evacuation, and as a corollary, to that of relief and rehabilitation of the migrants as well. Thus, whereas in the West it was one swift-swipe across the borders on account of the unprecedented Partition violence therein, in the East, the situation was significantly different. The influx in the East occurred not as one major deluge, rather, it occurred in phases. The four important phases of influx have been identified and described in detail.
At the same time, this chapter also identifies the different categories of migrants to show that the incoming migrants were not an undifferentiated mass of people. Rather there were among them sections of the privileged category (rich and influential people as well as the Government optees) for whom the passage was not as cumbersome as it was for the other section of the not-so privileged category (the middle and the lower classes and the Harijans) who would totally rely on Government aid—the *tabaah-o-barbaad* category of migrants in the West and the *daridra* migrants in the East. Unattached women, in the East and West, formed a separate category of their own with intense debates over the question of ‘ownership’ over them. What is noteworthy is that the intensity of these debates was far reduced in the East since the Government was interested in playing down the anxieties and fears of the migrants therein. However, it was the rehabilitation of the ‘unattached women’ which remained the only area which was treated by the State in equal terms for the East and the West.

It was the degree of violence then which affected the pattern of migration and it is this pattern of migration which eventually decided the pattern of rehabilitation. Thus, whereas violence in the West made it absolutely clear that the minorities would have to be evacuated, the slow rate of influx in the East provided a glimmer of hope to the State that perhaps yet another deluge could be prevented, and that the secular foundations of the Indian State could well be maintained, at least in the East. Hence, a policy of persuasion was adopted to prevent the influx of minorities. Once official evacuation of the minorities in the West was acknowledged as a principle and carried out in practice, it automatically led to the resulting consequence of a planned relief and rehabilitation programme designed for them. But in the East there was no official evacuation policy. Instead the constant appeal to stay back kept the numbers unknown, and also reduced the official responsibility of the State as a provider of rehabilitation benefits. It is seen that it was the state government which under the leadership of the Chief Minister Dr B C Roy provided some succour to the stranded migrants. Whatever evacuation (in the post-1950 and post 1964 years) occurred was primarily a state government initiative. Similarly, rehabilitation too, was very much the initiative of the state government.

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40 This was so on two accounts—the numbers of the incoming migrants was now known and second, since it was a State-sponsored evacuation, the State held itself as responsible for the rehabilitation of these migrants.
Chapter II

This chapter looks at the rehabilitation of the refugees coming from West Pakistan. Rehabilitation in the West followed the pattern as depicted in the equation below:

Evacuation—Relief—Rehabilitation—Compensation

In this chapter all the phases mentioned above have been discussed in detail. The four main acts that have been discussed in this chapter are:

- The Delhi Land Requisition and Acquisition Act, 1948
- The Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950
- The Claims Act, 1950
- The Compensation and Rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons Act, 1954

It was for the migrants from West Pakistan that rehabilitation in the most complete sense was envisaged. Looking at the city of Delhi, the chapter seeks to argue that rehabilitation for the migrants from West Pakistan was well-planned because at the heart of this urgency was the fact that Delhi was the capital city of the nascent nation-state and that it was the image of India to the world outside. Conversely, with Delhi being the seat of power, the refugees could present their demands even more articulately and press for their realisation right before the powers that be. Hence, the centrality of Delhi in stark contrast to the erstwhile capital of British India—Calcutta—was another reason for the lackadaisical approach of the Centre towards the refugees in the East.41

The role of the refugees in the process of self-rehabilitation is also discussed. Their conflict with the State in demanding better rehabilitation, their individual initiative and the image of the phoenix rising from its ashes is discussed. In the process, the marginalised community—Muslims—and their predicament, as ones who were being pushed out of their homes, is also discussed with a view to see how the process of rehabilitation of one invariably meant the displacement of the other.

41 In fact it was for this reason that a separate Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate (later Department) was inaugurated in 1950 to look into the matters of the refugee problem in the East to avoid the unnecessary delays involved in the correspondence between Delhi and Calcutta.
Chapter III
The chapter discusses the rehabilitation programme in the East. Unlike as in the West, rehabilitation policies followed the ebb-and-flow pattern of the migration in the East. Thus, often it was relief to rehabilitation, yet, on other occasions it was a reversal of this policy. In the later periods, a policy of regulation was introduced to stem the tide. Hence, there were some policies which favoured the refugees\textsuperscript{42}, and yet others, which sought to discourage influx and were thus antagonistic to refugee interests.

The chapter compares the rehabilitation in the two fronts on the following accounts:

- Facilitating entry of migrants
- Defining the migrant
- Application of the same Acts in a different form

Chapter IV
I analyse here the response of the refugees in the East to the rehabilitation policies as introduced by the government. It looks at the dual image of the refugee—the refugee as a rebel, and second, that of a constructive worker. Whereas, it is the first which seems to have pre-dominated all official and often scholarly imagination, the latter was a role much less appreciated and acknowledged. It is this two-pronged response to the hapless situation that the refugees were in which is discussed in detail in this chapter.

Thus, from looking at how the refugees sought to define themselves to elaborating upon the response of the refugees to the antagonistic and favourable policies of the government, and from looking at their own initiative in the process of self-rehabilitation to highlighting their struggle to be accepted as the citizens of this country, this chapter seeks to show that rehabilitation in the East was largely by the efforts of the refugees themselves. Towards the end, Calcutta city as it emerged in this post-Independence and post-Partition stage is described.

\textsuperscript{42} Introduced mostly at times when the State identified migrants as ‘genuine victims of violence’ and hence, saw their migration as legitimate. At other times these policies also reflect the success of refugee protest against arbitrary rehabilitation policies, and thus, a silent acknowledgement of the refugee self-initiative.
Chapter V

Here the discussion revisits the predominant arguments made in the context of the women in Partition. It presents the much less publicised role of the refugee women in the post-Partition rehabilitation programme. By specifically focussing on the refugee women in the East, this chapter questions the two most dominant strands in the historiography on women in Partition:

- The definition of violence, as per official view, held the Punjab model as ‘real violence’ and hence, did not find a parallel in the East. Thus, the silent plight of women exposed to routine violence was largely ignored with only women who were abducted, raped and converted seen as the ‘chief sufferers’. Consequently, it is the plight of such women who became a subject for intense research by later day scholars as well.

- As a corollary to the point made above, yet another consequence was the typecasting of the image of the women in Partition as mainly the worst victims of this gruesome violence. However, it is the other image of the women in Partition which deserves equal attention. The image of the refugee women who actively contributed towards the process of rehabilitation along with her male counterparts. Once again this is the one image which comes across specifically after an analysis of the rehabilitation of refugees in the East.43

I focus then on these two lesser known images of the refugee women—identifying the latent violence women in the East were subjected to and the image of the refugee woman not only as victims but also survivors in this cataclysmic event. The focus is on the similarities and differences in the experiences of the refugee women in the East and West as well as in their rehabilitation programmes.

Thus, this dissertation elaborates upon an aspect which is either misrepresented in the official discourse or mentioned as a brief footnote in the works of the more discerning later day scholars. This is the aspect of the East-West difference. Whereas the former lays

43 This is so because the massive violence in Punjab totally overshadowed for a long time any discussion on this other aspect of the refugee woman in the West. Also, as argued for refugees in general, since the state recognized these women as victims of real violence, hence, it took up the cause of their rehabilitation even more promptly. Therefore, refugee women in the West did not face similar hindrances on the path of rehabilitation and self-reliance as did the women in the East.
the blame primarily upon the Bengali migrant himself for this travesty of sorts, the scholarly works are more sympathetic to these differences which according to them were a result of the exceptional case of Bengal—pattern of violence and the resulting pattern of influx—which in turn affected a lukewarm response from the State.

By elaborating upon the Acts and policies of the State, and the self-initiative of the refugees this dissertation brings the East-West difference to the centre of the argument in Partition studies. In this way this dissertation seeks to contribute further in Partition studies, and thereby critically analyse the role of the State, refugees and locals in the post-Partition state of West Bengal.