CONCLUSION

The drawing of the partition line between India and Pakistan constitutes the saddest chapter in the history of the country. Communal tensions in their most violent forms caused an exodus of millions of people to traverse the length of hundreds of miles. This was a march in search of a new homeland in an alien environment.

The roots of this partition can be traced to the burgeoning gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims as a consequence of their economic disparities which had been created due to socio-cultural conditions where the Muslims began to face economic disparity when the Hindus, willing to accept English education began to get better job opportunities while the economic standards of the Muslims began to fall. The rise in national consciousness and the threat to colonial rule brought out a new policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ by the British Government. The concept of partition of Bengal in 1905, separate electorates of 1909 drove a wedge between the two communities. The act of 1919 further widened this gap. The fundamentalists led by M.A.Jinnah began to get sceptical about their minority position in an independent India. The demand for partition grew and they were unwilling to compromise on this issue. Communal riots and violence could be seen even before partition. The Muslims tried to focus on their separate identity from the Hindus socially and culturally. Finally, the partition was accepted and a boundary commission under Sir Radcliff and four eminent jurists (two Hindus and two Muslims) constituted the Punjab Boundary Commission. Population factor was stressed upon for Assam, Bengal and Punjab but disagreement persisted as the Muslim populations were, essentially, of a floating character whereas the Hindus and the Sikhs played a stellar role in the development of industry, commerce and trade and the Award of the Punjab Boundary Commission could not but be controversial.

With partition, the leaders’ preoccupation with the division of assets and liabilities of the country thrust the more pressing issue of planned exchange
of population onto the back-burner. Such large scale migration had not been foreseen and communal riots, loot, arson, rape and abduction further aggravated matters. The formation of the Punjab Boundary Force could not yield the desired results. The political masters at the lower rung overtly and covertly helped in the purchase and accumulation of arms by both sides. And, not for nothing, the causality figures stood at half a million. Naturally, Lord Mountbatten was blamed for having hurried through with partition. The police and the judiciary also showed bias and let the banal notions cloud their saner senses. The end result was the orgy of violence, rape, loot and arson. Around one lakh women were kidnapped on both sides, villages ransacked and men slaughtered. The sky was painted red and the soil lay soaked in innocent blood of the inhabitants. The haggard, shattered and hapless migrants’ trains and convoys were attached and looted and women kidnapped. Utter mayhem prevailed as migrants covered hundreds of miles to reach safer havens- their new abodes. It was no child’s play for the government to provide food shelter and clothing to such a mass but the government and some voluntary organisations did commendable jobs under severe constraints. No new independent state could have asked for a task of such gigantic proportions.

Rehabilitation and resettlement was a Herculean task. The government tried its best to provide relief to the teeming millions but compensation against lost property and assets could not be provided as the declarations were, supposedly, exaggerated and Pakistan was reluctant to provide the details of the property left behind. At last, the Rehabilitation Commissioner of the West Punjab, through an ordinance, allowed taking possession and control of abandoned properties and agricultural holdings for a one year term. The government of India’s liberal policy encouraged a hundred thousand Muslims to come back and re-settle in India. The move was gaining momentum but no non-Muslim went back. This showed how unwilling the people had been to leave behind everything and start life from a scratch in an alien environment. The government of India had made concerted efforts at getting bank accounts
and Insurance money transferred, but only partially succeeded. Occupied agricultural land was allotted to the migrants to help them though it entailed a lot of complications. The government extended loans, and accommodation to the urban refugees. Housing was taken on a war footing and industries were set up. The exiting industries were given incentives and concessions on the condition that they would employ refugees.

Women, as usual, suffered a lot of mental and physical torture. They were done to death by burning, drowning or strangulation by their own males to save them from dishonour. There were numerous accounts of innocent girls changing many hands as they were raped and sold away. Some settled down with men who seemed to adore them initially, but, gradually, when the attraction were off, they were cast aside and made to fend for themselves through prostitution. If they bore children, there was no guarantee of legitimacy. Some of them who had recovered were mostly not accepted back in the family fold. Some had no choice but to reconcile to the situation. If women were forced by rejection to spend the rest of the life in Ashrams, the Children also were doomed to life in orphanages. Why the ‘fairer sex’ is dealt such emotional jerks unfairly, defies all sense of righteousness. The sole consolation is that women were provided vocational training, which helped them to become self-sufficient. They were trained in nursing, handicrafts and teaching also and were accommodated likewise. This brought some respite to their beleaguered souls and painful hearts. Economic security brought about a sense of some emotional well being. Purdah system of migrant women lost all validity in the open era and free environment.

The migrants were shown a lot of sympathy by the locals, initially, but soon the hard-working migrants started giving cut throat competition to the local businessmen who were not as enterprising as the refugees. The refugees did better bargaining also. This financial competition made the locals sore. The refugees could always strike better deals for small margins of profit and could sell their wares by sitting on pavements outside the big shops and business
establishments. If it was a case of the survival of the fittest, the refugees had to be the winners.

The refugees from West Punjab exuding a sense of self-pride refused to live on charity. No work was too burdensome, no occupation too low for a displaced person to undertake so long as it enabled him to preserve his self-respect and support his family. All that counted was the effort to fashion for himself and his kith and kin a place in the new surroundings. Bitterness born of hatred had given place to tolerance. Frustration had been overcome by a desire to live. Disappointments in life had been compensated by hope and faith in the future. This was all in keeping with the traditions of the virile and enterprising people of the old ‘land of the five rivers’. They were anxious to stand on their own feet. Soon they began calling themselves pursharthi (one who believes in self-help) and they positively disliked to be called sharanarthi (refugee).

My survey reveals that the grownups are, sometimes, victims of nostalgia and remember their ancestral villages in West Punjab but the younger generation is no longer haunted by such memories. While the older people are nursing memories of the horrors through which they had passed, and which might appear like fairytales, the younger people are no longer obsessed with such horrors. They regard their new villages and towns as their homes. They are accustomed to hard work and are not afraid of anything. Though they are happy in their new environment and have totally rehabilitated and have assimilated socially, culturally, political and economically in the Indian milieu but they still are somewhere joined to their roots which is evident from the fact that even after more than 50 years of Independence they yearn for their homes in West Punjab.

M.S. Randhawa has given an apt description of the successful rehabilitation of the Punjabis when he writes, “Oak is the national tree of Germany, Maple of Canada and Tahli of the Punjab. Tahli is also symbolic of the Punjab peasant. It is one of the hardest woods, and also the most useful. It
can stand lopping and mutilation as no other tree can. Even if cut to its very roots, it will sprout again in spring. The avenues of Tahli trees on the Grand Trunk Road between Ludhiana and Jullundur were so badly lopped by the Muslim evacuees, who were leaving for Pakistan in September, 1947, and who were naturally in need of fuel, that only stumps were left in two columns along the road. It seemed as if the road had to be replanted. After a few years, these stumps got covered with luxuriant leafy branches again. How symbolic of the people of Punjab the Tahli tree is!” Like Phoenix, the mythical bird of Chinese folklore, who after burning itself on a funeral pyre, rose again from its ashes, young and vigorous, Punjab was born again after undergoing a terrible ordeal, which could have destroyed a weaker race.

The state had an important role to play in the rehabilitation process and, consequently, there were greater expectations from governmental agencies. If there had been disappointments among some of the refugees for the rehabilitation process, it can easily be understood. They could not help being bitter about the intentions of the political masters who were party to the decision of the partition. Not many had the time or inclination to delve deeper into the reasons for such an arrangement. The best of efforts on the part of the government to provide food, shelter, clothing, compensation, medical services, health care and job opportunities, could not provide succour to their jilted psyche in the aftermath of such horrifying and nightmarish experiences.

They didn’t believe that a new dominion had very limited funds and resources. That Lord Mountbatten showed undue haste in declaring independence cuts no ice with such seeping wounds of the heart. My survey in Delhi reveals that out of all the people interviewed, not many feel that the partition should be revoked as the passage of five and a half decades has made it abundantly clear that there seems to be no meeting point over the differences. Nostalgia about the roots still haunts many. But time is the best healer and almost all have got over the initial shocks. The painful experience undergone
by these brave refugees is a story of atrocities, loss of life, property, security
and above all, honour – honour of the self and of the womenfolk, in particular.
All said and done, one can conclude that the experiment of the settlement of the
migrating mass of humanity from West Pakistan has been fairly successful as
they are no more referred to as refugees.