Summary and Conclusions

Migration, by geographers, has been referred to as a dynamic phenomenon. It is primarily because when people move from one place to another, they not only affect the demographic characteristics of their places of origin and destination but also bring a considerable change in the socio-cultural characteristics of both the places. The study of migration, nevertheless, becomes extremely crucial for a country like India as it is characterized by not only outward migration but also a large scale internal migration. With economic development racing its limits, people are changing their place of living from one place to another for various reasons, such as- to attain better standard of living, for social and political security, for economic gains, for improved educational opportunities etc.

The present study is attempted to broadly analyse and examine various trends of in-migration in the NCT of Delhi; the population characteristics of in-migrants from West Bengal to NCT of Delhi; the evolution and distribution of Bengali migrants’ colonies in Delhi; attributes of their social identity and lastly, the level of integration attained by Bengali migrants within the host society. While studying the above mentioned attributes; it was specifically attempted to investigate as to (i) what happens to people when they migrate (ii) how well do they adjust to the new geographical settings. The answers to these questions were deliberated in accordance with the framework set out in the introduction of this research work. The present study has been confined specifically to the Bengali migrants who came to settle in the NCT of Delhi over specific points of time and on permanent basis. The study is focused to trace back the historical basis of the advent of Bengali migrants in Delhi from Calcutta; to examine the efforts of these migrants to adjust in a different cultural setting by simulating the culture of their place of origin within the new setup and finally to quantitatively analyse the degree of satisfaction brought by such a geographical-cultural-social shift. The study concludes with the following findings.

NCT of Delhi holds second position after Maharashtra accounting about 13 per cent of the total migrant population of the country. Moreover, it accommodates more than one-third of its total population as migrant population. The high inflow of migrants in the national capital is attributed not only to the fact that it has the highest per capita income and income growth among Indian metros; efficient and abundant infrastructure; high
quality of urban services but also to the level of urbanization which is increasing at a tremendous rate. Over the decades the proportion of urban population to total population of Delhi has risen from 52.76 per cent in 1901 to 93.18 per cent in 2001. Moreover, the number of villages in NCT of Delhi has declined significantly from 300 in 1961 to 165 in 2001. All these factors together induce large scale in-migration in Delhi. Although, Delhi has been designated with the titles like ‘City of Dreams’; ‘Urban Magnet’; ‘Melting Pot’, yet the trends of population growth and in-migration in Delhi have been quite fluctuating.

The trends of population growth during 1961-2011 and in-migration during 1961-2001 revealed that in absolute terms Delhi has not only witnessed a six fold increase in its total population i.e. from 26.56 lakhs in 1961 to 167.87 lakhs in 2011 but the in migrant population has also witnessed significant increase from 8.76 lakhs migrants in 1971 to 22.22 lakhs migrants in 2001. This rapid increase in population has resulted in raising the density of population in Delhi from 6352 persons/sq km in 1991 to 9340 persons/sq. km in 2001. It was interesting to note that though, in absolute terms there has been an incredible increase in the total as well as the migrant population of Delhi yet a significant decline in the growth rate of both the components has been experienced. The growth rate of population of NCT has witnessed a falling trend ever since 1981 i.e. from 51.45 per cent in 1971-81 to 21.20 per cent in 2001-11. On the similar note, a constant decline has been witnessed in the decadal growth rate of the migrant population i.e. from 50.15 per cent in 1971-81 to 34.86 per cent in 1991-2001. Besides, the declining decadal growth rate of total population as well as migrant population, the share of migrants to the total growth of population in Delhi has also declined. These demographic trends of NCT of Delhi unmistakably demonstrate that there has not only been a great impact of implementation of various schemes and regional plans on the net migration to NCT of Delhi but also the development of counter magnet regions around Delhi such as Gurugram, Ghaziabad, Noida etc. has led to reduction in migration to NCT of Delhi; which is primarily because people prefer to move towards areas with less congestion and affordable housing facilities.

The district wise distribution of migrants in Delhi, however, revealed that more than 70 per cent of the migrant population was concentrated in four districts of Delhi namely: North West, South, South West and West. One of the reasons behind such a pattern of
distribution of migrant population was the construction of numerous unauthorized colonies in the above mentioned districts. Besides, when the district wise share of migrant population was studied in relation to its total population it was interesting to note that New Delhi district which shared only 2.37 per cent of total area and 1.29 per cent of the total population of Delhi. It however, accommodated nearly 53.09 per cent of migrants to its total population. Since New Delhi serves as the centre for all administrative services of the entire country, it attracts myriad of skilled and professional class workers and therefore supports a large proportion of migrants to its total population. The Central district of Delhi holds the least area and also accommodates least migrant population to its total population. Central district of Delhi had a small share of migrants to its total population as it has been the centre of wholesale trading commerce and problems like traffic, congestion and old structures with narrow lanes repelled people to settle there.

The characteristics of migrants with respect to their socio-economic attributes revealed that majority of migration tends to occur from rural areas and was male selective in 2001. More than 50 per cent of the migrants coming to NCT of Delhi were ‘currently married’ among which females outnumbered males, since, marriage is considered as one of the predominant reason for female migration. Also, due to reasons like higher life expectancy among females than males; as well as difference in age gap during marriage more widow- female-migrants are witnessed in Delhi than widower-male-migrants. Delhi accommodates majority of the migrants as literates. However, the literacy rate for male migrants was way higher than female migrants. Also, migrants with high level of educational attainment were migrating more from urban areas than rural areas.

Delhi being the national capital creates enormous job opportunities not only for skilled workers but also for labourers and unskilled workers. The working composition of migrants in NCT of Delhi stated that about 42.83 per cent were migrating as workers while the remaining as non-workers. Majority of the migrant workers were migrating from rural areas and were engaged in production related works such as labourers and as transport equipment operators followed by other occupations such as fruit and vegetable vendors, midwives, domestic workers, newspaper vendors etc. Thus, Delhi has aptly been considered as an ‘Urban Magnet’ pulling migrants from different parts of the country not only due to the availability of basic amenities such as education, employment,
health facilities but also being considered as the prosperous Indian metro with high per capita income and income growth.

Nevertheless, the continuous flow of in-migrants to NCT of Delhi has been occurring largely due to the constant interstate migration occurring from various parts of the country. The seven states namely Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Punjab and West Bengal emerged as the top contributors of inter-state migration to Delhi. These states together contributed to as much as 86 per cent of the total migration among which Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for more than two-fifths of the total migrant population. The majority of in-migrants, thus, are provided to NCT of Delhi not only by its neighbouring states but also by far off state like West Bengal. Moreover, the pattern of in-migration from these top seven states to individual districts in NCT of Delhi showcased that except North district of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh shared the largest number of migrants in every district. Two districts in Delhi i.e. North East district and East district exhibited highest percentage of migrants from Uttar Pradesh. Since these districts were in close proximity to the state (i.e. Uttar Pradesh) thereby, people preferred moving over short distances. Since Haryana bordered Delhi from the other three sides thereby majority of the migrants coming from Haryana were settled in its adjacent districts of South West, North West and West districts in Delhi.

Furthermore, among the inter-state migrants, ‘work/employment’ was the predominant reason for migration mainly from the two states of Bihar and West Bengal. Whereas, the reason ‘moved with household’ was prominent among migrants from Rajasthan followed by Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Uttaranchal. Moreover, there had been a noticeable decline in the percentage of female migrants with the reason of ‘marriage’ while an increase with the reason of ‘work/employment’ was registered. Among those migrating within the state ‘moved with household’ was the major reason while ‘employment’ formed the major reason among the migrants migrating for all duration of residence beyond the state of enumeration.

Moreover, while studying the patterns of in-migration in NCT of Delhi, it becomes interesting to note that while the majority of inter-state migration was occurring from the neighbouring states, it was only from the state of West Bengal that far off migration was noticeable. Though, in terms of share of migrants West Bengal lagged behind the states
of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttarakhal yet in terms of distance over which such a migration is occurring strengthens its position vitally. Furthermore, the data highlighted that among all the top seven migrant sending-states as mentioned above, it was only from West Bengal that as much as 60 per cent of migrants were arriving from the urban areas. The root to such factors emerged to be the metropolitan city of Kolkata from where the largest migration had taken place. Kolkata, with 87.14 per cent literacy rate (higher than the national average) generated the probability of supporting an ably skilled and professional class of migrants. Moreover, Kolkata in comparison to the top twenty districts which were proposing migrants in Delhi is the farthest district from where migrants are constantly coming to the NCT of Delhi. The importance of West Bengal migrants in Delhi was also heightened by the fact that ‘Bengali’ was found to be the fourth most widely spoken language in NCT of Delhi. These factors thus, explain that despite offering a small percentage of migrants to the NCT of Delhi, why and how West Bengal holds a distinct position with regard to migrant-sending states.

During the survey it was found that majority of migrants from West Bengal preferred to live in South district of Delhi. This district alone accommodated nearly one-third of the total migrants from West Bengal. District wise rural urban composition of migrants from West Bengal suggested that a large scale migration had occurred solely from urban areas, which also indicated towards Bengali-migrants’ progressive outlook in Delhi. It also suggested that the migrant population from West Bengal was either skilled or professional. The inter district analysis with regard to duration of residence, further displayed that one third of the Bengali migrants, living in Delhi for more than 20 years, were residing only in South district of Delhi. Similar preference of district was noticed among the migrants residing for the duration of 1-4 years. Thus, among all the nine districts in NCT of Delhi, South district of Delhi acquired the distinct locality position of attracting and absorbing the highest number of migrants arriving from the state of West Bengal. The influx of Bengali migrants in this particular district was due to an ambience that feels innate to them. Chittaranjan Park, which is popularly known as “Mini Kolkata of Delhi” is thus selected for the extensive field work. As many as 1200 Bengali adult residents of Chittaranjan Park were interviewed for this purpose. It is a place which has emerged to have fixed a whole set of emotions for Bengalis to create a home in Delhi.
In order to further explore the prominence of Bengali migrants residing in NCT of Delhi it became essential to delve into their history of migration to Delhi. Delhi had lived through centuries. Evolving from Indraprastha in 900 B.C. to the present day capital of modern India, the city had been built, destroyed and rebuilt several times by many empires and powerful kingdoms. However, the major turning point that had put Delhi back on India’s political map and had changed the course of its history was the decision to move the capital of the British Raj from Calcutta to Delhi. Before the shift of the capital, Calcutta was serving as the capital of British Raj. But the prevailing political distress and humid environmental conditions in Calcutta during that time, compelled the British government to shift the capital. This shift particularly had brought a good chunk of Bengalis designated as ‘Bhadraloks’ (term used to indicate members of middle class and upper middle class of Bengal) to work in various government offices that were established in the new capital of India i.e NCT of Delhi.

Though it was only in 1911 that large number of Bengali migrants had arrived from Calcutta yet their history in Delhi could be traced back to the year 1842. During this period, Bengalis had established their residential colonies in the streets of Chandni Chowk, Daryaganj and Ajmeri Gate (near the ‘King’s Palace’) which today are the parts of the Central district of Delhi. Bengalis’ influence on people’s domain was so significant that a road (H.C Sen Marg ) was named after an eminent Bengali figure i.e. H.C Sen who had established the first Indian Medical Hall (medical store) as well as Indian Medical Hall Press (IMH Press) in Chandni Chowk in the early 20th century.

During the 1910s, after the shift of capital, a major wave of Bengalis was brought from Kolkata to Delhi as employees of the central government and were settled in the areas of Civil Lines, Timarpur and Kashmere Gate which today are important parts of North district of Delhi. Since Bengalis initially migrated as government officials they were famous for their brilliance and their tendency to flock together in groups. Subsequently, Durga Puja which formed the heart of all religious festivals of Bengalis, was organized for the first time in Delhi by consecrating the earthenware pot as a symbol of ‘Devi’. Therein, the idol worship started in 1912 when for the first time the idol of Kali was brought from Varanasi.
During the 1920s, residential areas that were allotted to the government officers were given accommodation at the D.I.Z area i.e. Delhi Imperial Zone. Since Bengalis belonged to the white collar jobs and worked with the British government thereby, they were settled in the areas of New Delhi; while some were transferred to the areas of Chandni Chowk and Paharganj. These Bengali colonies were located in the Central and New Delhi districts of the present Delhi. During the 1930s, however, the Bengali migrant colonies were further expanded to the areas of Irwin Road, Albert Road, Havelock Square which are the parts of present New Delhi district. The influence of Bengalis during this time was strong and deep. Not only was their language added into the school curriculum by the British Raj but also there were separate shops opened to sell exclusively Bengali books and magazines. Durga Puja which once started with a single earthenware pot slowly developed into a mega event celebrated in several parts of Delhi. Such a beginning was followed by the commencement of several Kali Baris (Temples of Divine Mother) which later became centres for Bengali cultural and religious activities.

However after independence with an influx of refugees in Delhi, new localities sprang up whereby Bengalis started to explore and move to the areas of their own choices. This further initiated the process of their redistribution in the NCT of Delhi. With the passage of time there was not only a significant increase in Bengali population, but a substantial increase in the total number of Durga Puja venues was also noticed. By the 1980s the Bengali colonies were mainly concentrated in four districts of Delhi i.e. North district, Central district, New Delhi district and South district. These districts later emerged as the major hubs of Bengali migrants. Thus, over all these years ever since 1911 Bengalis have expanded themselves in various parts of Delhi not only in terms of their population but also with respect to their religious and cultural affiliations. Though with the process of redistribution we can today find Bengalis almost in every part of Delhi yet one of the areas which remarkably distinguishes their identity from other Bengali colonies of Delhi is Chittaranjan Park popularly known as “Mini Kolkata of Delhi” which is located in the South district of Delhi. The shift of capital from Calcutta to Delhi therefore had not only played an valuable role in deciding the fate of Bengali migrants in Delhi, who after migrating to Delhi evolved and distributed and redistributed themselves in the city that was provided to them by their political superiors. It also, made it crucial to study as to how Bengali migrants who have been residing in the distinctive locality of Chittaranjan
Park over the years have retained their distinct identity on the one hand and integrated themselves with the society on the other.

Migrant communities are always sensitive of preserving their cultural and social identity. The attributes like traditions, rituals, language etc not only help them in reinforcing their lifestyle in an alien land but also guarantee their survival. Similarly, to preserve their social identity amidst a culture which is entirely different from their own, the Bengali community in Delhi has been constantly working at preserving and highlighting their distinguished sense of language, food, clothing and festivals.

Language is considered as one of the easiest mediums through which a person’s identity can be communicated. It can designate a particular group of people as a community when it is not only spoken by an individual but also by families and ethnic communities from generations to generations. Language not only plays a crucial role in retaining the identity of any migrant group but it also helps in connecting them to their native land providing a sense of belongingness. The Bengali migrants in Delhi have been using various measures to withhold their cultural identity through the means of language. To preserve their language especially among the younger generation, older generation chooses to talk with them in Bangla; since during social and professional interaction Hindi and English have been their only choice of language. Besides, satellite sources and literary sources, active participation in various activities and festivals organized by Bengali associations have also helped them in preserving their individual identity. Along with the individual efforts of Bengali migrants, institutions like the Bengali associations and their local libraries have also played a significant role in preserving the Bengali fervor in Delhi. The programmes organized by these associations constantly try to reinforce their culture through various ways but especially through the medium of language. However, despite rigorous engagement at preserving their ethnicity; Bengalis, over the course have undergone a change in the expression of their language. Since, the younger generations’ interactions with the non-Bengalis are much extended and permanent, their language has become a mix of Hindi-English-Bengali. This mix of different languages with the native language has been termed as ‘The Cocktail Bengali’. Nevertheless, the zest within this community for their culture and its polishing is somehow remarkable.
Food, like language is another social attribute that helps in maintaining the social identity of any migrant community. Food too not only defines ‘who’ we are but in addition also exhibits ‘where’ we come from. India is a diverse country where every state has its unique dietary pattern that distinguishes it from others. Therefore, food certainly becomes an important part of the cultural remains that lives through their lives and never dies. The Bengalis, through history have been considered to be as great foodies. Fish formed a part of their staple food and is also an inseparable part of their culture. With an easy availability of fresh fish in Chittaranjan Park as much as 64 per cent of the Bengali migrants are able to maintain it as a part of their daily diet. Since, Chittaranjan Park is the hub of Bengali migrants in Delhi thereby; one can easily find everything and anything as that available in Kolkata. This mainly is the reason why C.R. Park is usually called as a ‘go-to’ place for the taste of Bengal. Though, the older population is still used to the traditional Bengali food habits yet a subtle amount of change has been noticed among the younger Bengali generation. Nevertheless, regardless of the degree to which the younger generation has adopted the local food, they are always much more excited for the flavours and taste of the food cooked in the traditional Bengali style. As said ‘you can leave Bengal but Bengal always stays with you’.

During the study it was also observed that Bengali migrants have not only experienced changes with respect to their language and food habits but also in the way they dress. More than 50 per cent of the respondents agreed upon a complete change in their wardrobe while 81 per cent consented that these changes were more vital among the younger generations. Thus, ‘dhoti-kurta’ which was earlier a part of their daily wear was now purely confined to particular occasions, ceremonies and pujas. Besides, language, food, clothing-religious activities and festivals had also played an integral part in maintaining the social identity of the Bengali migrant group in an area absolutely foreign to their belief. Their deep religious beliefs highly demonstrate their community values and culture. In regard to the religious activities and festivals of the Bengali migrants, the study found that the Bengali migrants in Delhi are highly synchronized with their traditions and customs. They have embodied their culture so deeply in the host society that Durga Puja which was initially celebrated by a handful of Bengalis at a small number of venues is now being celebrated at over 350 places in Delhi. It was rather
interesting to notice that all the customs and traditions that were part of the Durga Puja are conducted exactly the way as these were in West Bengal. Even the artisans are especially called from Bengal to bring alive the idol of Goddess Durga in Delhi.

Festivals combined with religion have gone hand in hand to establish a deeper and stronger identity of the Bengali migrants in NCT of Delhi. The survey revealed that Bengalis in Delhi have never ceased to follow their traditions and customs with best of their zeal. They also follow their traditional rituals related to the birth and death ceremonies. However, when data for cross community marriages were evaluated among the Bengali migrants it was discovered that though these traditionally confined groups of people prefer to sustain to their wholesome, yet they like to evolve their pattern of living. The Bengalis in Delhi have showed a progressive attitude towards inter marriages over the course of time and in fact have started following mixed customs and rituals due to more and more prevalence of inter marriages. Thus, when seen in terms of social attributes i.e language, food, dress, religion and festivals the study revealed that over a considerable period of time, the Bengalis in Delhi have learnt to express and maintain their culture, traditions and rituals so strongly and effectively that even the people of the host society have not only welcomed their co-existence whole heartedly but have also been encouraged to adopt some dimensions of their socio-cultural setup partially or completely.

While migrating to an alien land, migrants often carry attributes of their social identity in order to maintain their cultural existence. But over the course of their stay and with each successive generation, the Bengali migrants have started merging with the host society. This process is known as integration. The process of integration not only helped in bridging the gap between the Bengali migrants and the natives of Delhi but also helped in achieving the labels of integration such as residential integration, political integration, language integration etc. The survey revealed that even though Bengali migrants residing in NCT of Delhi have successfully retained their social identity through various measures yet the younger generations (in particular) have underwent changes in the patterns of their language, food habits, clothing etc. This change has, overall, indicated towards the process of integration of Bengali migrants within the host society and vice versa. Thereby, it was important to study how Bengali migrants over the years have interacted and integrated themselves socially, politically and culturally with the host
society. To further calculate the level of integration achieved by the Bengali migrants in Delhi Chi square was calculated and was further cross tabulated with different social attributes. These attributes were: migrants’ flexibility for choice of spoken language; their willingness towards inter marriages; their level of satisfaction based on residential segregation; the opportunities for political participation; their sense of belongingness in the new space and most importantly their adoption of the changes that have occurred over the generations.

The study indicated that the integration of the Bengalis with the host society with respect to the social attribute of language (especially) among the younger generations was progressive. The amalgamation of efforts from both the sides of the society immensely added up to the process of integration. The survey showed that Bengalis, who were highly integrated with the society, with as much as 59.9 per cent of the respondents spoke a mix of Hindi and Bengali which indicated that Bengali migrants are highly interactive with the culture of the host society. Another important attribute which acted as a key indicator of Bengalis’ integration with the host society is ‘inter marriages’. Inter-marriage is a well-known vital component which helps in reducing the gap between two different ethnic groups. The survey of Bengali migrants in NCT of Delhi has established a significant relationship between integration and inter-marriages. About 50 per cent of the Bengali migrants who are integrated with the host society were showing their acceptance towards marriages outside their own community. In fact, they did not display any particular signs of objection and reluctance in following mixed customs during cross community marriages highlighting the degree of acceptance they have attained.

Still, another important attribute that defines integration of any migrant group is its residential integration. Several studies have examined that it is when a migrant group starts sharing the same residential area as that of its host society, the migrants of such a group should be considered fully integrated. In the present study however, it was found that residential segregation has led to integration of migrants. The data revealed that those Bengali migrants who were highly integrated within the host society still preferred to live in their separate ethnic locality known as ‘Chittaranjan Park’. They believed that their residential segregation in Delhi was one of the driving factors that contributed to the simulation of their culture deeper into the host society. Besides this, residential
segregation tends to occur due to migrants’ efforts to maintain their ethnic identity in the society they live in. Thus, residential segregation among Bengali migrants in Delhi cannot be seen as a process retarding integration. In fact, it helped Bengalis not to feel secluded in the initial phase of their migration rather it facilitated them to gradually integrate with the host society at large and then ultimately to become a part of it.

The political participation of migrants in the host society also showcases their level of integration. Political participation not only grants the migrants the right to vote but also provides them the right to express their opinion and beliefs and to associate themselves with the political parties. However, political participation of the Bengali migrants in the present study was only confined to the practice of their voting rights. The political participation and integration level between the Bengalis and the host society came out to be highly significant. Majority of the Bengali migrants who were integrated with the society cast their vote during the last election which indicated that as the migrants get adjusted to the host society, their participation in the political life also increases.

However, among all the above mentioned attributed of integration ‘sense of belongingness’ is considered to be the most fundamental attribute through which migrants’ adjustment can be best judged. It shows whether or not migrants are leading a satisfactory life in their place of destination. In the present study Bengali migrants’ level of satisfaction while residing in NCT of Delhi was found to be highly positive. It concluded that more than 80 per cent of the Bengali migrants who were discovered to have a good integration score were leading a satisfactory life in the NCT of Delhi. Moreover, when the level of integration among generations was studied it was found that the second generation shared a much stronger bond with the host society as compared to the first generation. Not only did their language become a mix of Hindi and Bengali and their food changed from fish to Chinese and tandoori; their heart and minds also evolved from puchkas to golgappas and from the streets of Chittaranjan Park to that of New Delhi.

With continuous daily interactions Bengalis have been experiencing a mix of English and Hindi with their native language of Bangla. There has also been a counter impact of Bengalis’ language on the people of host society as well. This impact is so intense that during their festivals, Bengalis are often greeted by their non Bengali friends in their own language (Bengali). It is not only in terms of language rather the Bengali culture has also
intermingled with the host society so much so that Durga Puja, the most important religious festival among Bengalis, is not just limited to Bengali community rather the members of the host society equally participate in its celebrations.

Thus, this study provided particular and detailed insights of all the aspects of the lives of the Bengali migrants in the NCT of Delhi. After thoroughly discussing the social, cultural and political aspects involved in the process of integration of the Bengali migrants in NCT of Delhi, it was subsequently concluded that nearly 50 per cent of the Bengalis were highly integrated with the host society and that there was no sudden rupture from the past that was experienced in order to forge new beginnings. Rather, what really happened was that these Bengali migrants tried to push the past to the present so as to meet the present. By adhering to their own language i.e Bangla with a mixture of English or Hindi; by allowing marriages of their children with children of other caste and cultural groups of the host society; by adopting segregated residences with a feeling of belongingness and by participating in local political commitments these Bengali migrants have integrated themselves effectively and efficiently with the host society. Hence, even with a small percentage of the total population in NCT of Delhi; Bengalis have saved their identity extremely well by adopting some rituals and norms of the host society and by sharing their own culture and traditions with it. This give and take relationship between the host society and Bengali migrants by all means indicates a two way process of integration taking place among the Bengali migrants and the people of NCT of Delhi.