IAN TALBOT

The 1947 Partition of India and Migration: A Comparative Study of Punjab and Bengal

in


ISBN: 978 0 199 56195 7

The following PDF is published under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND licence. Anyone may freely read, download, distribute, and make the work available to the public in printed or electronic form provided that appropriate credit is given. However, no commercial use is allowed and the work may not be altered or transformed, or serve as the basis for a derivative work. The publication rights for this volume have formally reverted from Oxford University Press to the German Historical Institute London. All reasonable effort has been made to contact any further copyright holders in this volume. Any objections to this material being published online under open access should be addressed to the German Historical Institute London.

DOI:
The 1947 Partition of India and Migration: A Comparative Study of Punjab and Bengal

IAN TALBOT

The 1947 massacres and migrations were for many years little more than footnotes in the study of the achievement of India’s and Pakistan’s Independence. Since the 1980s, however, historians have increasingly focused on them. The work of such scholars as Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin, and Ritu Menon enabled a gendered dimension to be brought to the Partition experience. They have addressed the sensitive issues of the large-scale abduction of women and their recovery and, in some instances, forced repatriation. Accounts of the violence which sparked off the greatest refugee migration of the twentieth century have begun to see it as more than a ‘temporary madness’. Anders Hansen, Paul Brass, and Ian Talbot have shown that it was organized, possessed a genocidal element, and was the result not merely of the collapse, but occasionally the involvement of local systems of civil and police administration.

Work on the Punjab region of India has been at the forefront of the ‘new history’ of Partition. This reflects the fact that it was at the epicentre of violence. In less than three months, over 8 million Punjabis in chaotic and often brutalizing circumstances undertook a reverse migration across the new international boundary which divided the region. Accounts of this vast human

1 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi, 1998); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Delhi, 1998).

tragedy have drawn on a variety of documentary accounts produced in the aftermath of Partition, on oral testimonies, and fictional representations. These together with the dramatic intensity of the migration experience have resulted in a Punjab-centred model of Partition emerging. The iconic images of the vast refugee columns, trains packed to the rooftop, and of bloody communal massacres have all been drawn from the Punjab. Such a standardized account ignores not only the variety of Partition experiences elsewhere in north India, but also homogenizes what was a highly differentiated pattern of violence, migration, and resettlement within the Punjab itself.

The paucity of comparative studies of Partition is a striking element in the evolving literature. The vastness of such a subject matter, and language and visa difficulties for Indian and Pakistani scholars have all been cited by way of explanation. Community and nation-building considerations have also obstructed such an enterprise. These tend to privilege the suffering, victimhood, and the ability to ‘bounce back’ of particular groups. Official histories trumpet the role of the state in dealing with the ‘unprecedented refugee problem’. These types of historical discourse would not be served by a comparative approach.

This essay aims to examine migration in the two regions of the subcontinent, namely the Punjab and Bengal, that were most affected by Partition. The new international boundaries bisected both these Muslim-majority provinces of British India. The reasons why they were divided and the demarcation of their boundaries lie beyond the scope of this work, although they are addressed in an earlier comparative volume, *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, which I edited in 1999 with Gurharpal Singh. This essay possesses three main aims: first, to delineate the migratory processes in the Punjab and Bengal regions; secondly, to seek to explain them and to reveal how they affected the contrasting histories of resettlement and rehabilitation in the regions; and thirdly, to examine the different histories of migration constructed by Punjabi and Bengali migrants. Before turning to these themes, however, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the wider picture of Partition-related migration flows and to consider the variety of migration experience.

3 Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (eds.), *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Karachi, 1999).
The 1947 Partition of India and Migration

British officials and Indian politicians were alike unprepared for the mass migrations that accompanied the division of the subcontinent. There had been warning signs from the Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946 that a new phase of communal violence had emerged which involved elements of ethnic cleansing. The outbreak of violence in the Punjab itself in March 1947, which started in Lahore and Amritsar but became known as the Rawalpindi Massacres after the region worst affected, rendered around 40,000 people homeless. Nevertheless, a transfer of population was unexpected in August 1947.

Politicians reassured minority populations that they would be safe and encouraged them to stay in their ancestral towns and villages. Within days of Independence, however, it became clear that a chaotic two-way flight was under way across the plains of the Punjab. This stemmed from outbreaks of violence that the impotent Punjab Boundary Force was unable to stem in the twelve districts in which it was deployed. The level of casualties remains controversial. Figures vary from the low estimate of 200,000 by the British civil servant Penderel Moon, to that of 2 million. The Indian judge G. D. Khosla put the figure at 500,000 with an equal number of Muslim and non-Muslim casualties. The MQM in its publications for reasons of community assertion maintains that as many as 2 million mohajirs (Muslim refugees from India) died. Such writers as Patrick French have adopted a median figure of a million casualties. In the absence of verifiable figures, Gyanendra Pandey has correctly pointed out that the historical discourse on the killings 'continues to bear the stamp of rumour'.

The tragedy unfolding in the Punjab dominated national and international headlines, but other regions were also affected. Muslims fled from UP, Delhi, Bihar, and Bombay to Pakistan. In Delhi, according to some unofficial estimates, violence in

4 Penderel Moon, Divide and Quilt (new edn., New Delhi, 1998), 293.
5 Gopal Das Khosla, Stern Reckoning: A Survey of Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India (2nd edn., New Delhi, 1999), 299.
6 Patrick French, Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division (London, 1998), 349.
7 Gyanendra Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India (Cambridge, 2001), 91.
September claimed about 10,000 Muslim lives. Muslims were driven to take sanctuary in refugee camps at Jama Masjid, Purana Qila, and Humayan’s Tomb. The latter camp was still bulging with over 30,000 refugees in December 1947. Shahid Ahmad, the publisher and progressive writer, has provided a harrowing account of its desperate conditions in his autobiographical work *Dilhi ki Bipta*. Some 300,000 Muslims, two-thirds of the community’s total population, eventually abandoned India’s capital. A comparison of the 1941 and 1951 census reveals the dramatic demographic transformation. Muslims comprised 40.5 per cent of the population in 1941 with Hindus in a majority of 53.2 per cent. A decade later, Hindus made up 82.1 per cent of the population and Muslims a mere 6.6 per cent. Delhi’s population increased by 1.1 million in the period 1941–51. This unprecedented growth of 106 per cent largely resulted from the influx of Partition migrants. These were members of the Hindu Khatri and Arora commercial castes of the West Punjab. Most were drawn by the economic opportunities afforded by India’s new capital. Some refugees already possessed professional, commercial, and kinship ties in the city which had a growing Punjabi community from the late nineteenth century.

Muslims also migrated from UP, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam to the eastern wing of their new homeland. East Bengal/East Pakistan received around a million and a half refugees. Hindus and Sikhs left not only West Punjab for India, but also the West Pakistan province of Sindh and the North West Frontier Province. There was also, as we shall see later, an ongoing Hindu migration from East Bengal that continued for decades after the movement of population in Punjab had ceased.

The figures for migration are only slightly less haphazard and controversial than those for Partition-related deaths. They vary from 14 to 18 million. In either case, this eclipses violence-related migrations as a result of two world wars and the end of empire elsewhere in the twentieth century. There was no accurate accounting

8 Ibid. 199.
9 Report of A. S. Bhatnagar, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner Delhi, 4 Dec. 1947. MB1/D276, Mountbatten Papers, University of Southampton.
in the early period of flight in the Punjab. In West Bengal there was no enumeration of refugees between March 1958, when the government officially wound up its rehabilitation work, and 1 January 1964. After the latter date, refugees were termed 'new migrants' to differentiate them from Partition-related migrants. The most accurate figures are those provided by the Pakistan and Indian military organizations. They were established in response to the spiralling violence in the Punjab and oversaw what was a virtual exchange of population in the region.\textsuperscript{12} According to the figures of the Pakistan Military Evacuation Organization, 4,715,919 Muslims were transported to West Punjab from East Punjab between 23 August 1947 and May 1948. Its Indian counterpart produced figures of 3,672,851 making the reverse journey. In both instances most refugees had moved by December 1947. This concentrated period of an organized exchange of population contrasted with the situation elsewhere in India.

Sarah Ansari's work on Sindh, for example, reveals a much longer timescale.\textsuperscript{13} The province possessed a large Hindu and Sikh minority (a quarter of the population). Nevertheless, it remained calm in the immediate aftermath of Partition. The first serious outbreak of communal violence did not occur in Karachi until January 1948. This claimed around 200 lives and was accompanied by widespread looting in the city centre.\textsuperscript{14} Following the disturbances, 10,000 Hindus crowded into refugee camps in the city, before their evacuation to India. The violence was linked with the flood of Muslim refugees into the city. The Sindh Prime Minister, Muhammad Ayub Khuhrro, had been reluctant to accept refugees who could not be absorbed in West Punjab. This 'unco-operative stance angered the Centre and was to be a factor in his eventual downfall in April 1948'.\textsuperscript{15} In August of that year, the Centre declared a state of emergency and resettled an additional 200,000 refugees in Sindh. The figure was eventually to increase following the closure of the Punjab camps in October 1948.\textsuperscript{16} There was a further influx of refugees from India


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 56.


\textsuperscript{16} Ansari, \textit{Life after Partition}, 66 and ff.
following communal disturbances in Uttar Pradesh in 1950. By April, refugees were arriving at the rate of 3,000 to 4,000 a day.\(^{17}\) Migration from India was to continue well into the 1950s. The inflow of 6,683 refugees was so high in July 1952 that the Pakistani authorities considered sealing the main border crossing into Sindh at Khokropar.\(^{18}\) Eventually around 60 per cent of the refugees known as *mohajirs* from Uttar Pradesh resettled in Karachi, Hyderabad, and some of the smaller towns in the interior. By the time of the 1951 census, *mohajirs* numbered 616,906 and accounted for 58 per cent of Karachi’s population.\(^{19}\) The transplantation of an Urdu-speaking enclave into the sands of Sindh has possessed profound consequences for Pakistan’s politics.\(^{20}\)

The timing of refugee movements thus varied considerably between regions. There were also differences in experiences of migration. This has been obscured by the standardized portrayal drawn from an overly homogenized Punjab model. Recent scholarship has revealed a gendered dimension to Partition migration. Women were not only vulnerable to assault as symbolic upholders of community honour (*izzat*); they had to cope in unaccustomed roles as household heads following the slaughter of their menfolk and to adapt to close proximity to strangers on trains, in refugee camps, in queuing for rations, and in making claims for compensation. Work on Hindu female refugees from East Bengal has shown them not only as victims, but as undergoing processes of radicalization in the struggle for survival in Calcutta’s post-Independence squatter communities.\(^{21}\)

The outlines of a class-based differentiation in refugee experiences are also emerging from current research. The higher rank of government servants who had opted for service in the neighbouring country were guaranteed transportation, often by air, and had accommodation provided for them in their new postings. The British Overseas Airways Corporation transported 28,000 people from Pakistan and 18,000 from India in the period

\(^{17}\) Ibid. 128.  \(^{18}\) Ibid. 131.  \(^{19}\) Ibid. 110.  
\(^{20}\) It should be noted that Karachi received not only Urdu-speaking refugees, but also Gujarati migrants from Bombay. They came largely from the Khoja and Memon trading communities. 
15 September to 7 December 1947. This was in addition to the twice daily service from Lahore to Amritsar and the daily service from Delhi to Rawalpindi run by Indian National Airways.²² Such passengers could look down on the burning villages and antlike refugee columns traversing the Punjab’s killing fields. On the rare occasions that the elite travellers were inconvenienced it could reach even Cabinet-level discussion. Nehru noted with displeasure, for example, an incident early in October when a flight direct from Peshawar to Delhi had to set down at Lahore because of slight engine trouble and its ‘occupants had been stripped of all their belongings’.²³

The business and political elites were also privileged migrants. Many had shifted female family members to hill stations and businesses to ‘safe’ areas well in advance of Partition. Huge sums of money flowed out of the future Pakistan areas of West Punjab and Sindh in the months leading up to Independence. The leading Muslim newspaper Dawn claimed that in the last days of June 1947 alone Rs. 6 crores (60 million) had been withdrawn from West Punjab.²⁴ New property-dealing businesses sprang up to exchange Muslim and Hindu properties. English-language newspapers advertised residences for sale or exchange in ‘safe areas’. Similarly in East Bengal, it was the wealthiest individuals who migrated first. The bhadralok class was not only politically aware, but its members frequently had properties and social connections in Calcutta. Artisans such as drummers and idol-makers followed their wealthy religious patrons. Landless labourers were the last to leave and did so because of insecurity. They had no experience of migration, or connections to ease their plight on arrival in West Bengal. Wealthy anticipatory migrants did not share in the dangers of the crossing to a new homeland that faced ‘acute’ migrants who were literally fleeing for their lives. Refugees also faced very different experiences on their arrival. On the whole, the ability to recover from the trauma of displacement was markedly improved if an individual possessed previous social and economic capital.

²³ Extract from Emergency Committee 20th Meeting, 3 Oct. 1947 MB1/D275, University of Southampton.
From relief camps through to the construction of housing colonies, the Indian and Pakistan states differentiated between different classes of refugees. The ability to afford their own food rations, for example, determined whether refugees in Delhi would be directed to a life under canvas in the Edward and Outram Lines of the Kingsway camp, or be accommodated in concrete barracks at the Hudson and Reeds Lines. Both Indian and Pakistani satellite towns and refugee housing colonies had varieties of house-plot sizes, streets, and availability of services to suit the different classes of refugee. 'The class differences visible during the population movement', Ravinder Kaur has appositely declared, 'became further entrenched when permanent housing projects were undertaken on such a basis. This ensured that refugees were reinvented in their old class of social stratification.' Perhaps the clearest example of this was the Indian state's provision of separate colonies and camp accommodation for Untouchables.

The post-colonial state also upheld traditional gender roles in its treatment of refugees. Young female orphans were housed and trained in Lahore, for example, so that they would not become an economic burden. The state's guardianship role extended to their arranged early marriage. Like a family patriarch, it saw its role as to establish control over female sexuality. The social stigma attached to widowhood was reflected in the establishment in Delhi, for example, of a separate refugee colony for young widows. In Calcutta there was a similar Women's Camp. But given the gender imbalance amongst East Bengal refugees, the conditions prevailing in the squatter colonies in Calcutta, and the dramatic changes in both caste-based and gender-based economic roles, traditional social mores and family roles were not as rigidly re-established.

The Punjab and Bengal Experiences of Migration

There are significant differences in both the intensity and the timescale of Partition-related migration between the Bengal and
Punjab regions. Migration in Punjab was highly concentrated in the period immediately after the British departure. While more than 8 million Punjabis were uprooted between August and December 1947, the total number of refugees in Bengal at this time numbered only around half a million. The greatest migration in the Bengal region was in 1950, rather than at the time of Partition. According to official Pakistani sources, by the end of that March there were 400,000 refugees from West Bengal and Assam.\textsuperscript{28} Within six weeks, the figure had leapt to 1.1 million.\textsuperscript{29} The Hindu influx into West Bengal in 1950 peaked at 1.5 million. Migration in the Bengal region was to continue thereafter whenever there were periods of tension in Indo-Pakistan relations, or communal riots in the region or elsewhere in the subcontinent. The displacement of population continued after the West Bengal government officially wound up its rehabilitation work in March 1958. By 1981 the West Bengal Refugee Rehabilitation Committee put the number of refugees at around eight million, or one-sixth of the total population.\textsuperscript{30} This was still not the level of concentration of refugees in Pakistan Punjab, which received 5.3 million refugees accounting for over 25 per cent of the population.\textsuperscript{31} Nevertheless, because of its existing population density and weak regional economy West Bengal was much less able to cope with this burden. Partition had left it as the smallest (34,000 square miles) and most densely populated state in India. Most of the refugees from East Bengal/Pakistan settled in the Calcutta, Nadia, and twenty-four Parganas districts of West Bengal. Calcutta was favoured because of its hoped-for job opportunities. Migrants also clustered around the border areas of the Nadia district where there had been some exchange of population. These three areas were eventually to contain two-thirds of all the refugees from East Pakistan.

By July 1952 there were over 400,000 refugees in the Nadia district, where they constituted about 40 per cent of the

\textsuperscript{28} Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), 27 Mar. 1950.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. 26 May 1950.


The 1951 census highlighted Calcutta’s demographic transformation as a result of refugee migration. The city’s population was nearly 20 per cent higher than it had been just five years earlier. By 1973, the number of refugees was just under 2 million and represented around two-thirds of West Bengal’s urban refugee population and one-third of the state’s total refugee numbers. One in four of Calcutta’s inhabitants was a refugee. Seven out of every ten migrants from East Pakistan had found their way there. The absence of arrangements over property exchange and of a population balance between Muslim evacuees and incomers meant that for all but the wealthy, accommodation was difficult to obtain in an already overcrowded city. The household deities in the possession of almost all East Bengal Hindu families had also become ‘refugees’, as there was no space for them. Some were anonymously abandoned in temples, others found their way to a ‘camp’ in Upper Chitpur Road Calcutta, where Swami Satyanand Tirth was deputed to perform puja (worship).

In both the Punjab and Bengal, migration occurred in the context of outbreaks of violence. This differed from ‘traditional’ Hindu–Muslim conflict in that it contained dimensions of ‘ethnic cleansing’. Communal riots previously had been about the ‘renegotiation of local hierarchies of power’. This is, in essence, what the common disputes over the routes of religious processions were about. The resulting clashes have been termed by some scholars ‘consensual’ in character. The signs of ‘ethnic cleansing’ are first evident in the Great Calcutta Killings of 16–20 August 1946. Over 100,000 people were made homeless. They were also present in the wave of violence which rippled out from Calcutta to Bihar, where there were high Muslim casualty figures, and to

32 Statesman Weekly (Calcutta), 12 July 1952.
34 Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), 4 June 1950.
37 See Report on Disturbances in Bihar and UP (Muslim Information Centre, 1946). P/T 3363, IOL.
Noakhali, deep in the Ganges–Brahmaputra delta of East Bengal. With respect to the Noakhali riots, one British observer spoke of a ‘determined and organised’ Muslim effort to drive out all the Hindus, who accounted for around a fifth of the total population.\(^{38}\) The Punjab counterpart to this transition in violence was the Rawalpindi Massacres of March 1947. The massacres paved the way for the later August violence in that they both created a Sikh desire for revenge and revealed the ease with which minority communities could be expelled in the absence of effective law enforcement. About 40,000 Sikhs had been left homeless. The August 1947 Punjab violence repeated this uprooting on a huge scale. The high levels of violence can be variously attributed to the militarization of the region’s population which formed the sword-arm of India; the cycles of retributive genocide which began with the March 1947 Rawalpindi Massacres; the collapse or unreliability of the police and local administration; the existence of a Sikh Plan to ‘ethnically cleanse’ Muslims from East Punjab in order to carve out a Sikh state; and the involvement of the armed forces of such Sikh states as Patiala in attacks on minority populations. The princes themselves denied that they had contacts with the Sikh war bands (jathas), but high-ranking court, state, and military officers such as Bir Davinder Singh and Colonel Bhagwan Singh of Patiala along with the Chief Minister of Jind were widely believed to have connived at their activities.\(^{39}\) The fact cannot be denied that troops from the princely states not only attacked their Muslim inhabitants and passing refugee trains, but joined in assaults on neighbouring districts of the former British-administered Punjab.

Bengal had witnessed horrific communal violence in 1946 in Calcutta and Noakhali. The figure of 4,000 deaths was officially quoted at the time of the Great Calcutta Killings. An English official maintained that this was ‘a new order in communal rioting’. He described Calcutta as a ‘cross between the worst of London air raids and the Great Plague’.\(^{40}\) Around 10,000 people shifted out of the city. Seven weeks after the Great Calcutta Killings, violence spread to this south-eastern district of Bengal.

\(^{38}\) Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal 1905–1947 (Delhi, 1991), 199.
\(^{40}\) Das, Communal Riots, 171.
From Noakhali it fanned out to the Tippera district. In all, 350 villages were affected in the two districts. The disorders were only finally quelled by the deployment of around 2,500 troops and police. The minority Hindu populations living in inaccessible villages were the victims. Fifty thousand people took refuge in relief camps.

The cycle of violence had largely spent itself in Bengal by the time of Partition. Crucially, the region did not have the level of preparation for communal attacks that existed in the Punjab. Here weapons had been stockpiled and training given to para-military groups by ex-soldiers. Calcutta’s relative quiescence has been attributed to Gandhi’s moral influence. He stayed in a poor Muslim neighbourhood where he prayed and fasted for peace. Mountbatten dubbed him a ‘one man boundary force’.

Official responses to the 1947 violence impacted on the patterns of migration in the two regions. As we have already noted, the violence in Punjab resulted in the two governments determining on a virtual exchange of population under the control of the Pakistan and Indian Military Evacuation Organizations. Despite misgivings about this in both countries, fears for the security of minorities along with the need to utilize properties and land evacuated by them to accommodate refugees determined this policy. There were some hopes that Muslims who numbered 13.17 lakhs (100,000) could stay in the south-eastern Ambala division of the Indian Punjab. Eventually all the Muslims departed for Pakistan.

The Military Evacuation Organizations set up headquarters on both sides of the new international boundary which now bisected the Punjab. A joint civilian machinery was also established consisting of Liaison Officers. The two Chief Liaison Officers held the status of Deputy High Commissioners. There were also district officials who were provided with funds, escorts, and scarce supplies of petrol to facilitate their work on behalf of refugees. The Joint Evacuation Plan agreed on 20 October between the two Military Evacuation Organizations set a December target for the evacuation of 10 million refugees from both sides of the Punjab. This elaborate machinery brought some order to the migration process, although not to the extent

maintained in official histories. Minority populations had no choice but to leave their ancestral homes, even when they were not in imminent threat of attack. The result was the denuding of Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan Punjab who had numbered 33.99 lakhs before Partition and 53.85 lakhs Muslims from the Indian Punjab and surrounding Indian states. Further government control over the migration process was exerted by settling rural refugee populations together in assigned districts. Both populations and land were, in effect, being exchanged.

The lower levels of violence in Bengal in 1947 encouraged a reverse policy. When migration did occur, it was seen as a temporary process. This meant that evacuee property was not freed up to house refugees. It led the right-wing Hindu leader, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, to call for an exchange of populations or, alternatively, to demand that a third of the territory of East Pakistan should go to India to be utilized for refugee resettlement.

Inter-dominion conferences were held to assure the minorities in East and West Bengal of their security. The rehabilitation ministers of India and Pakistan jointly declared in Calcutta in April 1948 that they were determined 'to take every possible step to discourage such exodus and to create such conditions as would check mass exodus in either direction'. Partition left around 4 million Muslims in West Bengal (approximately 17 per cent of the population) and around 11.5 million (approximately 42 per cent) Hindus in East Pakistan. In contrast with the Punjab's dramatic demographic transformation, migration in the Bengal region occurred in a series of waves, rather than one tidal force.

The governments of both East and West Bengal sought to reassure minority populations. Upper-caste Hindus living in the eastern wing of Pakistan were, however, disturbed by status reversal, and were also sensitive to any threats to the honour (maan) of their female family members. In 1948 twice as many refugees left East Bengal (around 800,000) as at the time of Partition. The Muslim populations of West Bengal and Assam

43 Ibid. 101–3.
44 For details of this process with respect to Indian Punjab, see Kirpal Singh, The Partition of the Punjab (Patiala, 1989), 181–3.
45 Sanyal, Making of a New Space, 133.
felt less insecure. The serious disturbances early in 1950, however, resulted in a peak of migration in both Bengals far greater than had occurred in 1947.

I visited Muladi . . . where I found skeletons of dead bodies at some places. I found dogs and vultures eating corpses on the riverside. I got the information there that after the wholesale killing of all adult males, all the young girls were distributed among the ringleaders of the miscreants.47

This was not Punjab in August 1947, but East Bengal in February 1950. The violence had started in Dacca, but spread within a few days to the Tippera, Noakhali, Syhlet, and Barisal districts. The coastal district of Barisal witnessed severe disturbances. Four villages were completely burned down. Muladi was one of its important riverine ports. Most of its Hindu victims died in the compound of the police station where they had taken shelter. The officer in charge was later found in possession of large amounts of looted property.48 In the Syhlet district, over 200 villages were devastated and 800 Hindu temples desecrated.49 In large areas, the repertoire familiar since 1946 was repeated: forced conversions, dishonouring of women, and attacks on trains.50 The latter lasted from 11 to 14 February and claimed many victims on the Chittagong Mail. The bodies of at least a hundred Hindus were buried by the side of the railway line.51

Similar scenes of violence occurred in West Bengal. There were widespread disturbances in such Muslim localities of Calcutta as Bagmari, Beliaghatu, and Goolpara. Houses were looted and burned along with mosques. According to the *Civil and Military Gazette* newspaper, nearly 10,000 Muslims from Chinsurah, Paikpara, Goolpara, and Telnipara had to leave their homes and take shelter in open fields opposite the Victoria Jute Mills. Muslims were also attacked in Jalpaiguri town. Two

---


48 Ibid. 63.

49 Ibid. 76.

50 The trains packed with up to 4,000 refugees had been easy targets in August 1947, despite the presence of armed escorts. Blood-splattered trains arrived in both India and Pakistan with whole compartments of butchered corpses.

51 Kamra, *The Prolonged Partition*, 89.
hundred shops were looted in the Muslim-controlled bazaar of Karimgunj in Assam. Muslim refugees from Karimgunj and Hailakandi claimed that the police led the looters. Certainly more resolute law enforcement would have cut short the disturbances. Their continuation sparked the largest wave of migration in the eastern Indian region since 1947.

The Indian and Pakistan Prime Ministers tried to restore some stability in the celebrated Nehru–Liaquat Pact in April 1950. It promised equality of citizenship for minority communities and stated that refugees who returned home by 31 December 1950 would be entitled to the restoration of their houses and land. This stemmed migration for a time and even led to around 12 lakhs of refugees returning to East Bengal. Most were able to recover the houses they had abandoned, but the provincial government set aside a further Rs. 7 lakhs to cover the cost of their rehabilitation. The returning Hindus together with Muslim refugees from West Bengal meant that the population of East Bengal increased by nearly 950,000 by the middle of 1951. Thereafter, migration continued to fluctuate and depended on prevailing communal and Indo-Pakistan relations. It was West Bengal, however, that received the majority of migrants. The announcement at the beginning of October 1952 that a passport system would be introduced for cross-border travel encouraged another influx of Hindus amid fears that future migration would be more difficult. Within a week, upwards of 2,000 people were daily arriving by train at the Indian border outposts of Bongaon and Ranaghat. The trains were ‘dangerously overcrowded with passengers riding on footboards and hanging on to iron beams and rods beneath the carriages’. The authorities opened an interception camp at Ambagaon less than half a mile from Bongaon railway station. Many of the 12,000 or so refugees preferred to sleep on the platform or under railway wagons. Eventually special trains had to be called in to dispatch them to Sealdah Station Calcutta which itself soon presented ‘a scene of

----

52 Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), 22 Mar. 1950.
53 Ibid.
54 Chaudhuri, ‘Refugees in West Bengal’, 38.
55 Dawn (Karachi), 18 June 1951.
56 Ibid.
57 India introduced passports on 15 Oct. 1952; Pakistan followed suit two days later.
indescribable confusion’. ‘A fog of blue smoke’ from countless cooking fires, a correspondent for the Statesman newspaper recorded, ‘hangs over the listless grey brown mass of humanity’.59 Many of the refugees were from poorer, lower-caste Namasudra, Mahisya, and Sadgop communities in the East Bengal hinterland. They were eventually dispersed to transit camps on the outskirts of the city or fended for themselves in the crowded and squalid squatter colonies which had sprung up in Calcutta. Their existence attested to refugee self-settlement in the absence of an adequate government response.

The squatter colonies literally sprang up overnight, when thatched huts were constructed under the cover of darkness on vacant land. Their hogla leaves became a refugee symbol. One of the earliest refugee self-settlements was at Bijoygarh, the site of American barracks during the Second World War. The pre-1950 developments were eventually to be regularized through the government’s payment of compensation to landowners and the gifting of deeds to the occupiers. Even before their regularization, many colonies in such south-eastern areas as Tollygunj, Behala, and Javedpur were well managed by committees which raised subscriptions and labour for the construction of drains, roads, and water supplies. This was not the case, however, in the ‘illegal’ colonies that sprang up after 1950 on the west bank of the Hooghly river between Magra and Uluberia. Even worse off were the large numbers of agriculturalist refugees consigned to prolonged residence in refugee camps in Calcutta and elsewhere in West Bengal. In 1958 the camp population stood at 800,000. One-third of their inhabitants had spent anything from six to ten years living in these squalid conditions.60

Refugee camps in Punjab had been closed as early as 1948. In both Indian and Pakistan Punjab evacuee property had been supplemented by building refugee colonies in existing towns and creating new satellite towns such as Faridabad and Rajpura. The latter development on the GT Road, fifteen miles west of Ambala, was built at the cost of Rs. 20 million. It was termed ‘one of the biggest experiments of the Government of India in building a well planned and simple yet dignified home for refugees’.61

59 Ibid. 18 Oct. 1952.
60 Chatterjee, ‘The East Bengal Refugees’, 74.
61 Statesman (Calcutta), 28 May 1949.
The sense that refugees from East Bengal were the main victims of Partition because of their neglect in contrast to their Punjabi counterparts is a central element in the Bengali historical discourse. It was an important factor in the support refugees gave to the Communist Party of India (CPI), especially in the wake of the threatened legislation in 1951 to evict ‘Persons in Unauthorized Possession of Land’. The CPI portrayed the Congress administration of Bidhan Chandra Roy as being more concerned with the rights of landlords and property speculators than with the distress of the refugees. Before examining the problems surrounding the West Bengal government’s rehabilitation programmes, we shall first consider the ways in which the characteristics of migration impacted on rehabilitation measures.

Refugee Rehabilitation in Punjab and Bengal

The circumstances of the Partition-related migration in East and West Punjab made it clear from the outset that violence had initiated a permanent demographic transformation. This was not the case in Bengal. Moreover, the scale of the Punjab crisis facing both the Indian and Pakistani governments inevitably prioritized rehabilitation efforts in the region. A number of Bengali writers have gone further and argued that the Punjab’s greater proximity to the seats of power in India and Pakistan and the lobbying of powerful Punjabi bureaucratic and political elites resulted in a concentration of scarce resources in the region. This discourse will be examined in the final section of the essay. Suffice it to say here that oral testimonies from Punjabi refugees on both sides of the border, along with written complaints to newspapers and politicians, reveal a far less positive assessment of government rehabilitation efforts than some allegations of pro-Punjab bias would allow. Indeed, Raghuvendra Tanwar has declared that ‘Attractive statements supported by huge statistics indicating the dimensions of the resettlement effort were routinely issued, sadly these statements concealed a whole body of corrupt decisions of injustice and unfairness. This trend increased as days and months passed for as long as the resettlement measures continued.’

Tanwar, Reporting the Partition of the Punjab 1947, 473.
Those without wealth or connections were at the mercy of corrupt and incompetent officials.

It is important to recognize here that there is no echo of Indian Bengali allegations of a pro-Punjabi bias in rehabilitation efforts amongst Muslim refugees who migrated to East Bengal. This in part reflects the fact that the refugee situation in East Bengal has been under-researched, for it cannot be deemed insignificant. Contemporary press reports in March 1950, for example, record that Dacca was ‘overflowing with refugees’. It may also be the result of a more efficient government response which was aided by the relatively greater availability of evacuee property.

The East Bengal government early in 1950 established refugee camps on the outskirts of Dacca and Chittagong to relieve congestion. Around 1,000 people were accommodated, for example, in specially constructed barracks at Samair in the Kurmitola area of Dacca. About 8,000 refugees were rehabilitated in the Bogra district of East Bengal, where they were allotted between 3 and 6 acres of land. Such short-term measures were accompanied by longer-term rehabilitation efforts. These were coordinated by a new East Bengal Relief Commissioner, N. M. Khan. He reported early in June 1950 that Rs. 50 lakhs had already been spent on such measures as the provision of stalls for shopkeepers, and the distribution of sewing machines and looms. His Employment Bureau had placed 45,000 persons in various jobs by September 1950. A month earlier, the Pakistan government had announced that it was advancing 12 million rupees to the East Bengal authorities for rehabilitation purposes. This enabled ambitious urban and rural rehabilitation schemes to be planned. The former involved the construction of five satellite townships near Dacca, Chittagong, Syhlet, Jessore, and Rangpur at the cost of Rs. 1 million. They were designed to house over 100,000 refugees. Three million rupees were set aside for a rural rehabilitation scheme. Families were to receive 5 acres of land along with a maintenance allowance of Rs. 50 per family until their first harvest. In June 1951 the government finalized a scheme for a 10,000-acre refugee colony at Aflong in Sylhet.

63 Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), 18 Mar. 1950. 64 Ibid. 5 Apr. 1950. 65 Ibid. 20 Apr. 1950. 66 Ibid. 7 June 1950. 67 Ibid. 22 Sept. 1950. 68 Ibid. 6 Aug. 1950. 69 Ibid. 6 June 1951.
simultaneously gave 250 houses free of charge to refugee families in the Mirpur colony, Dacca.\textsuperscript{70}

The early rehabilitation effort of the Pakistan authorities in East Bengal appears both more planned and urgent than that of the West Bengal government. This was borne out by the latter’s own Statistical Department figures published in February 1952. They revealed that 12 per cent of the 2.14 million refugees were living on land on which they had trespassed and 72 per cent were unemployed.\textsuperscript{71} In addition to relying on grants from the Centre for rehabilitation purposes, the East Bengal provincial government from July 1952 levied a ‘refugee tax’ on the licences required for the export of raw jute. In contrast, the West Bengal state government only moved from ad hoc responses to the formulation of a comprehensive rehabilitation policy after the June 1953 report of a fact-finding committee.\textsuperscript{72} Impressive as the East Bengal effort appears, it did not match that in West Punjab during the same period. In 1951, for example, the West Punjab government earmarked Rs. 17 million for different rehabilitation schemes in the latter province. They included the establishment of ten satellite towns, three of which were to girdle Lyllapur.\textsuperscript{73} Why, then, is there no anti-Punjab discourse amongst Muslim Bengali refugees, unlike their Hindu counterparts?

Until there is further research, a definitive response cannot be given. It appears, however, that the funding was adequate, given the fact that the overall situation was more favourable for the Muslim refugees in East Bengal than their Hindu counterparts in West Bengal. This meant their lot was less intolerable than that of the highly articulate Hindu refugees who settled in Calcutta. There was a relative abundance of evacuee houses in the East Pakistan towns.\textsuperscript{74} The Hindu population of Dacca, for example, declined from 58 per cent of the population on the eve of Independence to just 4.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{75} According to a survey of

\textsuperscript{70} Dawn (Karachi), 18 June 1951.
\textsuperscript{71} Statesman (Calcutta), 16 Feb. 1952.
\textsuperscript{73} Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore), 23 Sept. 1951.
\textsuperscript{74} Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia (London, 2000), 169.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
Hindu neighbourhoods in December 1950, Muslims now controlled 6,255 out of 7,175 properties owned by Hindus in 1947. Unlike in Calcutta the terms of trade in properties very much favoured the refugees. Although Dacca’s population mushroomed by 53 per cent in the decade 1941–51, the housing demands of its migrants could be met. The East Pakistan countryside was also much better able to accommodate refugees than West Bengal’s. The latter region was more overcrowded and its agriculture was both qualitatively and quantitatively inferior.

Muslim refugees in West Punjab were also in more favoured circumstances than their counterparts in the Indian Punjab. Hindu and Sikh refugees vacated 9.6 million acres of land in Pakistan, while Muslims left behind 5.5 million acres of land in India. While refugee Sikh farmers had to make do with unirrigated tracts of land and smaller holdings under the system of ‘graded cuts’, Muslim cultivators from the East Punjab took over the fertile tracts of land in the Canal Colony areas abandoned by Sikh farmers. Rural resettlement was nevertheless not all plain sailing in West Punjab. This was in part because Muslim owners of tenanted land abandoned by non-Muslim farmers still sought their share of the crop (batai) from refugees. There were also delays in making permanent allotments of land to refugees because of the time it took to exchange land settlement records. Some refugees were even ejected from land they had been semi-permanently allotted, in May 1952. Such organizations as the Muhajir League and the Jinnah Awami League lent their political support to the hunger strikes and public protests of the affected refugees.

The East Punjab government attempted to ease the resettlement of West Punjab cultivators by establishing rural housing schemes. Model villages were constructed on the sites of evacuee villages which had been demolished during the violence. According to M. S. Randhawa’s figures, there were some 1,800 East Punjab villages where 90 per cent of the houses were demolished. Before refugees were permanently allotted land they

76 Ibid. 168. 77 Ibid. 144.
79 Statesmen Weekly (Calcutta), 31 May 1952.
were disbursed loans for food and for fodder. Large sums of money were set aside for the purchase of bullocks, seed, and the reconstruction of houses and wells. When land was permanently allotted in 1950, loans were provided for agricultural modernization such as water pumps, tractors, and tube-wells. Tractor loans, for example, amounted to Rs. 32 lakhs.81 This laid the preconditions for the Green Revolution success story of the East Punjab. During the period September 1947 to March 1951, Rs. 4 and a half crores were disbursed to displaced cultivators.82

The state government in West Bengal, in contrast, did little more than provide basic immediate relief. It lacked sufficient funding to build large numbers of townships and houses. Its eventual solution to the refugee accommodation crisis was to try to disperse refugees to neighbouring states. This became politically controversial not only within the state, but in such places as Assam, which was reluctant to receive refugees. A large dispersal centre was established at Bettiah in the Champaran district of Bihar. The most ambitious and controversial settlement scheme involved the moving of over 25,000 families to the 270,000 cleared acres of forest at Dandakaranya in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.83 Many refugees saw this as deportation rather than rehabilitation. They were exiles in the ‘dark forest’ like Lord Rama in the Ramayana. By 1978 over 11,000 families had deserted the settlement.

Untouchable refugees from East Bengal were also resettled in the remote Sunderbans region of West Bengal at the beginning of the 1960s. The scheme was better thought through than that at Dandakaranya, in that the cultivators who were sent there originated from the Khulna and Barisal districts, so had some experience of roughly similar agricultural conditions. They were provided with 3 acres of land each and loans to build houses and purchase agricultural equipment. Nevertheless, a survey of the settlement a decade later found the bulk of the inhabitants mired in poverty. At least 25 per cent of the cultivators were living in distress and barely 58 per cent at subsistence level.84 The government cash doles had ceased, while agricultural productivity

remained low. The poor communications hindered economic activity. The nearest market was 18 miles away, while a journey by country boat of 35 miles was required to reach the nearest railway station. As the investigators concluded in their findings, much poverty was the result of the ‘lack of far-sightedness of the Government department responsible for planning the project’.  

The West Bengal government’s limited response to the refugee ‘problem’ was in part the result of disputes with the Centre over funding, and in part reflected the sense of the state’s being overburdened because of its weak economy and high population density. The refugee plight was further worsened by the decision of the government of India not to extend evacuee legislation to either West Bengal or Assam. This reflected the view that migration was not permanent and that further transfers of population should be discouraged. Indeed, the latter waves of refugees were seen as economic migrants rather than as victims of Partition. In the Punjab region, the governments of East and West Punjab agreed on a response to the problem of abandoned property as early as September 1947. Arrangements were made for the exchange of property and compensation for abandoned property. This, together with the official refusal to recognize the illegal seizure of property, eased the rehabilitation of refugees. At the same time, the East and West Punjab governments through refugee taxes and disbursements from the Centre set aside large sums for resettlement.

**Punjabi and Bengali Refugee Discourses**

The Indian government’s account of refugee resettlement focused around the Punjab ‘success story’. This was reproduced in official works such as *Millions on the Move* and in semi-official studies such as M. S. Randhawa’s carefully named study *Out of the Ashes*. Such accounts reproduced the statistics of government assistance interspersed with photographs of smiling refugees in their new homes in East Punjab. There were even lapses into Orientalist stereotypes of the ‘sturdy’ Punjabi Jat peasants with their capacity for hard work and enterprise. These stereotypes were later internalized. V. N. Datta’s pioneering study of Punjabi

85 Ibid. 50.
refugees in Delhi extols their willingness to turn their hand to anything in order to make their way. 86

First-hand accounts go even further and attribute the successful rebuilding of lives after the upheaval of Partition to self-help. Interviews in such cities as Lahore and Amritsar leave little room for government support for resettlement. We have seen above, however, that the governments of both East and West Punjab diverted large sums of money to ‘the refugee problem’. Some refugees, for psychological reasons, may choose to forget the role government assistance played in their resettlement. They refer if at all to outside assistance coming from community and religious organizations. This may reflect the persisting influence of such organizations in their lives. It also is rooted in the fact that, as Raghuvendra Tanwar has noted, much government aid was mired in delays and corruption.

Official accounts often contrast Bengali dependency with Punjabi flexibility and entrepreneurial spirit. Aside from dealing in colonialist stereotypes, such understanding displaces blame from the government, for the more problematic resettlement process, to the refugees themselves. As we have seen, however, the emergence of the squatter communities in Calcutta displays just as much enterprise as that attributed to the Punjabi migrants.

Hindu Purbo Bongiyo (East Bengal) refugees argued that they were the principal victims of Partition because of the Indian government’s half-hearted approach to their rehabilitation. 87 Salil Sen’s 1950s play summed up this sense of victimhood in its title, Natun Yehudi (The New Jews). Such writers as Prafulla Chakrabarti have been at pains to highlight the greater government assistance to Punjabi than Bengali refugees. 88

There was undoubtedly some truth in the claim made by the Rehabilitation Minister, A. P. Jain, in New Delhi on 18 June 1952 that ‘it was unfair to compare official efforts to rehabilitate refugees (from East Pakistan with West Pakistan) for attention to


87 For a discussion of these claims, see Joya Chatterji, ‘Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947–50’, in Suviir Kaul (ed.), The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India (Delhi, 2001), 74–110.

88 Prafulla Chakrabarti, The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal (Calcutta, 1999), 250 and ff.
evacuees from West Pakistan had been paid over a period of 5 years whereas the problem of refugees from East Pakistan had become a serious one over the past two years'.

Moreover, government assistance in West Bengal, although belated, was considerable. In response to the 1952 refugee influx, New Delhi allotted the West Bengal government Rs. 55 lakhs for relief and a further Rs. 25 lakhs for rehabilitation. The following year, the West Bengal government received a sum of Rs. 2.7 crores for the task of refugee rehabilitation in the Burwan, Nadia, and 24 Parganas districts. By the end of 1957, there were 83 government-sponsored refugee colonies with 21,500 families. Up to the previous June, Rs. 24.28 lakhs had been sanctioned to fifty-nine cooperative societies. Loans were also advanced through the Refugee Businessmen’s Rehabilitation Board and separately to lawyers and medical practitioners. Grants were also sanctioned for the opening of schools in refugee colonies. Nevertheless, there was a clear difference in the amount and type of assistance that was on offer by the Indian authorities in the Punjab and Bengal regions. Moreover, delays in the flow of funds from the Centre to the West Bengal government hampered its rehabilitation programmes. As much as a crore of rupees earmarked for relief in 1953-4 remained unspent.

One similarity between the refugee experiences is that of nostalgia for the land left behind. Punjabi Hindus in Delhi look back to Lahore. This is reflected in the titles of such accounts as Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City; Lahore: A Sentimental Journey; Lahore: Loved, Lost and Thereafter. East Bengal refugees look not to a city, but the villages they abandoned in ‘Golden Bengal’. Accounts focus on memories of public holidays at the time of the major religious festivals, boat races, the abundance and beauty of the countryside, harmonious social relations, and the ‘respect’ for elders and women.

96 See Som Anand, Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City (Lahore, 1988); Pran Nevile, Lahore: A Sentimental Journey (New Delhi, 1993); Sahdev Vohra, Lahore: Loved, Lost and Thereafter (Delhi, 2004).
udvastu (outside of home), attested to this painful separation from ancestral roots. There is an elegiac quality about their memory of the idyllic villages of ‘Golden Bengal’, contained in such collections as Chhere asha gram (The Abandoned Village), just as mohajirs remember the small towns of eastern UP they have left for Sindh.\(^98\) Punjabi and Bengali Hindu identification of Partition with loss, of course, sits more easily with the national historical discourse than does the similar sentiment of the migrant Uttar Pradesh elite within Pakistan.

**Conclusion**

The ‘new history’ of Partition reveals the extent to which it was a highly differentiated experience. This essay represents a modest contribution to this understanding. The waves of migration in Bengal contrast with the single flood of refugees in the immediate post-Partition period in Punjab. These differences reflected the varieties in the patterns of violence. The year 1950 was a far more significant date for East and West Bengal than 1947. Even when accounting for the propagandist element, it is clear that government responses were less focused and effective in the Bengal than the Punjab regions. A litany of reasons why rehabilitation was a more difficult task in West Bengal than East Punjab was provided by both state and Union-level ministers.\(^99\) There was, however, differentiation in government responses within regions, as well as between them. The East Bengal government, for example, appears to have diverted greater energy to the rehabilitation task than its Indian counterpart. It allocated large sums of money from the Centre for both rural rehabilitation and the construction of satellite refugee towns and colonies. The East Pakistan authorities also raised their own funding by means of a ‘refugee tax’.

\(^98\) The latter is the setting for the famous Urdu writer Intizar Husain’s short story Akhri Mom Batti, which explores the theme of Partition loss. See Ian Talbot, *Freedom’s Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India* (Karachi, 1996), 142–4. Nostalgia for East Bengal is seen in such poems as Taslima Nasreen’s ‘Broken Bengal’, which has been translated into English by Subhoranjan Dasgupta, from the selection *Behula eka bhasiyechilo bhele*.

As for the refugee experience, this was highly diverse. Even within the city of Calcutta, which underwent profound changes, differentiation in refugee experiences is visible. Despite their human suffering, the first wave of upper-caste refugees, whose memories and complaints fill the historical narrative, were better able to rebuild their lives than the later migrants from poorer agricultural backgrounds. Within Punjab, it was the poorer and less politically acute communities that were caught unawares and had to cross the killing fields in August 1947. Sections especially of the West Punjab Hindu elite had moved their money and families to places of safety well in advance of Independence. Wealth and connection impinged equally on refugee success in resettlement on both sides of the border.

At the same time, as a more detailed understanding of the Partition process is emerging it is clear that major gaps remain. Little, for example, has been written about the Untouchable community’s experience of violence, migration, and resettlement. Just as the Punjab experience has been privileged in the general historical discourse of Partition, so the experience of the *bhadralok* refugees who settled in Calcutta has dominated writings on the population movement in eastern India. This excludes the movement to West Bengal of non-elite groups such as Santhals. There are also the untold stories of the migration of Bengalis to Tripura and of Muslim migrants from West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh to what is now Bangladesh. Finally, work is required on the experiences of Muslims in West Bengal who did not migrate to what is now Bangladesh. Anecdotal evidence points to the fact that they faced displacement as Hindu refugees illegally occupied properties. There appears to have been a process in which former mixed localities in Calcutta were increasingly replaced by what were, in fact, Muslim ghettos. Rural Muslim populations also appear to have shown a tendency to migrate from south-west Bengal to concentrated Muslim areas in north Bengal, as well as clustering near the border in Nadia district, for example, over which they could flee in times of communal strife. Much more research is required on Muslim Partition-related migration within West Bengal.

Actual violence or its threat was a crucial factor in the migration processes in both Punjab and Bengal. Individuals were reluctant to leave their ancestral homes, not only because of the
material loss this involved, but because their identity was vested in these localities. Uprootedness was to be avoided at all costs. The violence which demographically transformed vast swathes of north India was not spontaneous. While it possessed elements of retribution and opportunism, it was in many instances carefully planned and executed. Communal organizations sought forcibly to remove minority communities. The state afforded scant protection to all its citizens in situations of extreme polarization along community lines. In both Bengal and Punjab, local officials and policemen not only acquiesced, but participated, in communal violence. The dislocation was so severe in the Punjab that spontaneous mass migration gave way within a fortnight of Independence to a virtual exchange of population. Despite the continued violence and suffering which accompanied this process, it eased the Pakistan and Indian states’ task of refugee resettlement in the region. In Bengal, the pattern of waves of migration occasioned by violence from non-state and sometimes state actors continued for years after Independence. The demographic transition was never as complete as in Punjab. The absence of evacuee property intensified the housing shortage, especially in Calcutta. The result was that refugees from East Pakistan termed themselves the ‘New Jews’ and principal victims of Partition. This discourse was created by the most privileged section of the refugee community. Their lower-caste counterparts were reduced to a miserable existence of pavement dwelling which etched Calcutta in both the national and international consciousness as the ‘city of dreadful night’.