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Original Research Paper

Partition of Bengal: Impact on Displaced Women and their Contribution to Refugee Movement in West Bengal



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Abstract

Indian independence in 1947 and its consequences created a major change in the Indian administrative structure in which British India split into Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan, respectively. This division also fragmented the undivided Bengal and West Bengal and East Pakistan appeared on the world political map. These partitions played a crucial role among the inhabitants of both regions and they started to leave their country of origin. Hindus from East Pakistan especially women were one of those migrants who were displaced from their motherland and settled in West Bengal. This study deals with the situation, women faced during and after their displacement in West Bengal. It highlights their movement to achieve rehabilitation benefits from the government and their struggle to be financially independent individuals. Several archival reports, books, newspaper articles, etc. helped provide information regarding refugee women's conditions from East Pakistan to West Bengal.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The partition of British India in 1947 was one of the most tragic incidents in Indian history. It fragmented the British-dominated Indian Territory into two nations based on their religion that is Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan, respectively (Chakrabarti, 1999). This partition also divided Bengal into two distinct units, in which the western part remained in India and the eastern part was merged with the newly formed Pakistan. They were known as West Bengal and East Pakistan separately. After the declaration of partition in 1946, people from West Bengal and the newly formed East Pakistan started to cross the border to maintain their religious homogeneity. In the process of migration, they faced lots of misery and suffering. Abduction, kidnapping, looting, and arson of property by the major community were very common (Bandhopadhyay, 1970; Chakrabarti, 1999). Most of the partition studies related to the East Pakistan refugees mainly emphasized their overall journey towards India, especially into the newly created West Bengal. Some

scholarly articles highlighted district-wise refugees' relocation and their struggle to adjust to new places. Some books narrated the Central and State Governments' policies and programs allotted for the East Pakistan refugees. In this study, the main emphasis is given to the Hindu refugee women from East Pakistan. How did Indian Independence and the consequences of the Bengal Partition adversely impact them? Their survival strategies by their efforts and their post-migration journey in different parts of West Bengal are also highlighted in this study. The government and non-government initiatives to look after these hapless Hindu women and their struggle for survival in West Bengal are also highlighted in this article.

2 DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary sources. Several archival documents, published books and articles, newspaper reports, etc. are used to extract information about Hindu refugee women from East Pakistan and their struggle to survive in a new place.

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3 OPPRESSION ON HINDU WOMEN AND THEIR DISPLACEMENT

The lives of the Hindu community in East Pakistan became unbearable especially when Hindu women suffered extreme violence and oppression in 1946. Many instances of women's persecution and torture were documented by many researchers. An incident was stated in 'The Trauma and the Triumph' by Jasodhara Bagchi in which a Bengali Hindu girl named Sutara lost her consciousness after being assaulted and molested by the Muslim community.

Before the announcement of the partition, both Hindus and Muslims had lived happily in both regions. After the Noakhali and Tippera riots in 1946, the situation suddenly changed and two ways of the exodus started. Sutara and her family also started to run before registering what was happening. Her mother jumped into the water to save her honor, and her father and elder sister disappeared which led Sutara to take shelter in her neighbor's home. Her neighbor Tmijuddin, who belongs to the Muslim community, nurtured her despite facing threats from his community. After hearing about the tragic incident, the reaction of Sutara's elder brother was lukewarm. Finally, Sutara was transferred to his brother's home in Kolkata with the help of Tamijuddin and his son. Sutara was living in his brother's in-law's house as a guest with strict restrictions to enter the kitchen. She was treated as an untouchable from the beginning due to her six months of staying in a Muslim house and being molested by the Muslim community. Finally, she was sent to a Christian missionary hostel where she met similar riot victim girls. Such kinds of victim girls were molested twice: first by a distinct religious community that tried to establish an identity by oppressing women of other communities; and second by her own family to whom women's purity was confined to her body which was more important than her soul (Bagchi and Dasgupta, 2007). Another incident occurred on 5th April 1950, in which a report was lodged at Basirhat Police Station about the snatching of gold ornaments from Hindu women by 500 military men at Satkhira and Khulna in East Pakistan. They also tortured the women and forced them to discard their clothes (Chatterjee, 2021; IBWB, 1950). News had been circulated in Khulna district in which it was stated that some Pakistani militia forcefully converted the Hindu girls by marrying them to Muslims. These incidents created a major tension among the minority and they started to cross the border (IBWB, 1950; IBWB, 1947).

It was also stated that post-partition migration was initially based on mental torture rather than physical violence. An incident was based on this point. A group of refugees came to West Bengal during the first phase of migration that is between 1946 and 1948 and they mentioned how Muslim men mentally tortured the women by chanting doggerels when they went for a bath in ponds (Bandyopadhyay, 1970). Women irrespective of their castes were verbally oppressed by Muslim men. Incidents also occurred with Namasudra and Dalit communities which led them to leave their motherland for a secure future. It was also observed that a group of

hundred Muslims arranged a meeting in Rudrapur regarding the wedding and decided that the marriage should be done between Muslim Men and Hindu Brahmin women (Chatterjee, 2021). Gandhiji also took the refugee matter seriously and started his journey towards Noakhali. As per the interview taken by Dr. Amiya Chakraborty (1946), Gandhiji stated that the prime objective of his journey was to save the Hindu refugee women from the hoodlums as most of them were going to convert to Islam (Sinha and Dasgupta, 2011). These types of events created major turmoil among the Hindus and they started to leave their country in search of new hopes.

4 ARRIVAL OF REFUGEE WOMEN IN SEALDAH AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

After crossing the border, the East Bengal refugees started to live in various camps and colonies in West Bengal. Their emigration occurred in several stages and in each case, Hindu migrants settled all over Bengal either with the help of the government or by their efforts. Initially, when the migrants crossed the border, they took shelter at the transit points; from there they had to be sent to transit camps (Dasgupta, 2016). One of the important transit camps was opened at Sealdah station which was also a meeting ground for the refugees. After reaching the Sealdah station the refugees were vaccinated for Cholera. It was reported that after arriving at the Sealdah station refugees started to spread their bedding on the southern platforms and started to live there (The Ananda Bazar Patrika, 1948). The situation of the women migrants became miserable as there was no sufficient arrangement for them. They used to cook at the corner of the platform as there was no specific kitchen (Nandy, 2019). Using rubbish as fuel and three bricks as an oven, they also cooked food on the street where the movements of vehicles were common. Two latrines were allotted for them which also led them to take baths openly (Chakrabarti, 1999). The life of the women refugees was not secured on the platform. Sometimes they became soft targets to the traffickers (Nandy, 2019; The Jugantar, 1950; The Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1950). Police at the station premises were also aware of this kind of activity (Nandy, 2019; The Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1950). It was also stated that apart from the Sealdah station, Eden Garden in Kolkata was also crowded with refugees (Nandy, 2019).

Some non-governmental organizations were involved in various kinds of activities for the development of the refugees such as the Kasi Viswanath Seva Samity, the Bharat Ashram, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Hindu Mahasabha were one of them (Nandy, 2019; Chakravarty, 2005). Kasi Viswanath Seva Samity started to distribute cooked food among the Sealdah refugees in 1949 and after that Ramakrishna Mission took over the responsibility. The government provided some doles and shifted them to the relief camps for temporary rehabilitation which were located all over West Bengal (Chakrabarty, 1991).

5 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR REHABILITATION OF WOMEN REFUGEES

The government classified the refugees according to their abilities and categorized the camps into three segments. The first group of refugees was able to receive rehabilitation facilities and they were shifted to the relief camps before sending them to permanent rehabilitation camps; the second group of people was unable to look after their own families having old or paralyzed members. The government took responsibility permanently. This camp was known as a permanent rehabilitation camp. The third group of refugees belongs to the old women or widows having a child who were powerless to take care of their families. The government also considered the matter and shifted them to the women's camp. Such camps were opened at Titagarh and Kartikpur in 24 Parganas, Ranaghat in Nadia, Bansheria, and Bhadrakali in Hooghly. A part of the Dhubulia camp in Nadia, the largest among the refugee camps in West Bengal was allotted only for women. At that time scarcity of land was also observed which led the women refugees to take shelter in the passenger waiting room under the Babughat Port Commission (Bandyopadhyay, 1970).

Apart from the rehabilitation assistance, the government also provided some benefits to the refugee children by sanctioning educational loans. A special type of camp was allotted for them and named 'home' for both boys and girls. The Government had thought to educate these children properly so that they would be financially independent and look after their families. In Titagarh and Andul near Shalimar two 'homes' were constructed for boys and they started to take lessons in moral education and physical activities. Two homes were opened for the girls; one of which was located in Regent Park in 24 Parganas and another was in Uttarpara in Hooghly. The former was also allotted for middle-aged refugee women who were involved in various handicraft activities like weaving, tailoring, soap-making, etc. (Bandyopadhyay, 1970). In this way, many women's homes and camps were constructed in and around Kolkata. This initiative was not taken suddenly by the government; many tussles and movements by the refugee women were responsible for this kind of improvement.

6 PROBLEMS FACING BY WOMEN REFUGEES IN VARIOUS GOVERNMENT CAMPS

Hindu Women refugees started to fight over their rights before the partition. They suffered mental and physical oppression in their land and left the country in fear. After arriving in West Bengal most of them were facing similar kinds of harassment and suffering. One incident was documented in which a group of 18 women refugees from Titagarh Women Camp No. 1 were shifted to Medinipur camp without being given any doles. Initially, they managed the situation by themselves but later they started a hunger strike for their demands (Chatterjee, 2021; IBWB, 1950). A similar incident also occurred at the Dhubulia camp of Nadia

where a woman went on hunger strike as the government stopped 'doles' to abled-bodied refugees. Around 300 women refugees blocked the railway tracks to fulfil their demands. Government officials finally came to the site to control the situation (Chatterjee, 2021). Most of the women's camp was also facing accommodation problems which led to the temporary shelter in floating barges. Some reports documented that, in Titagarh Camp No. 1 there were 2100 women along with 1603 minors; in Camp No. 2 there were 1032 women with 444 children; 216 women were staying at Belur camp, etc. The documented reports were only collected from the government camps leaving behind the undocumented ones (Nandy, 2019; The Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1950). The condition of the women's camp created major turmoil among the camp refugees. In the Medinipur Salva camp, due to the negligence of the government, around 300 children and 1000 women were starving for days which led to the death of some children. Camp refugees also lived in ordinary tents and suffered from malaria, dysentery, and snake bites. It also led to the demise of many camp refugees (The Anandabazar Patrika, 1950).

In 1955 an initiative was taken by the Central Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation to look after the rehabilitation matter by comparing both eastern and western regions of India. A group of social workers was involved for this purpose. They visited a hilly region known as 'Pepsu' in East Punjab (which was incorporated into Himachal Pradesh later) and started to make a detailed inquiry. They visited different camps and homes in the concerned region of which the majority were women and children (Gupta et al., 2003; Ganguli, 2016). After inquiring about the situation, they concluded that East Punjab refugees received more amounts of doles than the East Pakistan refugees. Women refugees in the western section were more privileged than in the eastern one. Finally, in West Bengal, there was a lacuna from the government side regarding the rehabilitation benefits which opposed the women refugees from being economically and socially self-reliant (Ganguli, 2016).

Most of the members of the Permanent Liability (PL) camps were women who were living in gloomy conditions. There was a lack of sufficient measures to improve their conditions. Even women were not allowed to move outside of the camps for job purposes. Violation of these rules excluded them from accessing the basic camp facilities. Finally, they decided to abide by the rules and leave their life on the meagre number of inadequate doles provided by the government (Ghosh and Dutta, 2009; Ganguli, 2016).

There were insufficient numbers of schools in the government camps and colonies which resulted in fewer children being enrolled. As there was no middle school at the PL camps, children were allowed to access the nearest school. In some cases, due to the absence of any school, the refugee children were forced to go without education (Gupta et al., 2003).

Some training centers were sanctioned for the women refugees for a shorter period and they were not given any wages for the product shaped by them after completion of the training. It was stated by the camp authority that the government took responsibility for their clothes and food. This led the women to come and join the training center reluctantly. As there was no crèche for the baby, the women trainees had to leave their child at the 'Homes' and after returning from the vocational training center, the child was handed over to the women. Women trainees were not allowed to engage in any activity in the adjoining towns or villages. Any violation of the camp rule led to the cutting of daily doles for which women either maintained the secrecy of their work or accepted the reality (Gupta *et al.*, 2003).

7 ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE REHABILITATION OF REFUGEE WOMEN

Apart from the government initiative regarding the rehabilitation schemes, several non-governmental organisations were also involved in the refugee matter such as Uday Villa Industrial Home, Mahila Seva Samity, Nari Seva Sangha, Ananda Ashram, All Bengal Women's Home, etc. (Gangopadhyay, 2000; Ganguli, 2016). Their emphasis was given to the well-being of the women refugees and their children which became a major change among the refugee women and they started to become self-reliant. These organizations started to look after the refugee women by arranging proper shelter and involved them in various industrial training and handicraft works (Ganguli, 2016). Some of the organizations were established before the partition; Ananda Ashram was one of them. Shri Charushila Debi was the founder of this organization where residential schools and vocational training centres were opened for women. Efficient women from different camps came here for training. Nari Seva Sangha was another pre-independence organization, established in 1943 during the famine (Datta Ray, 2003). The Sangha was located at Syed Amir Ali Avenue in Kolkata and was founded under the supervision of Mrs. Seeta Chaudhuri, an eminent social worker. The Sangha started its journey to distribute milk and khichri and later extended its support by providing industrial training among the refugees. Women were trained in batik work, embroidery, block-printing, weaving, bookbinding, etc. Apart from that, a working women's hostel, nursery school, printing press, training canteen, and air-conditioned auditorium were constructed for the women refugees. The Sangha had a great example of secularism as Muslim women were also involved in the training centers without facing any hassles (Datta Ray, 2003).

Social activist Ashoka Gupta founded Mahila Seva Samity during the time of partition to assist the women refugees. It was stated that the Samity was founded by the recommendation of then chief minister P.C. Ghosh. He insisted the people of West Bengal take some responsibility for the rehabilitation of the refugees which resulted in the formation of the West Bengal Emergency Relief Committee. Many Women's Organizations joined together and formed this

committee which was later renamed Mahila Seva Samity. These samities and their sub-organizations played a vital role in controlling the crisis of refugee women and helped them to reach the mainstream of society (The Ananda Bazar Patrika, 1951; Ganguli, 2016).

Uday Villa Industrial Home was located at Kamarhati near Kolkata and treated as a cooperative society. This organization worked mainly for those refugee women who left or lost their families in East Pakistan and crossed the border alone (Gangopadhyay, 2000; Ganguli, 2016). This organization was founded under the supervision of Bina Das. It was mainly a vocational institute. After completion of the training, they engaged in various economic activities. As a cooperative organization, the members of the women refugees also received remuneration and a percentage of the profits (Bandyopadhyay, 1970). It was also observed that women refugees were also getting married from this organization and again back to the villa after suffering mental and physical torture from their families (Gangopadhyay, 2000; Ganguli, 2016). Sometimes government also supported the organization financially but it was not fully controlled by the government (Ganguli, 2016).

Bengal Women's Home was located at Eliot Road in Kolkata. This home was mainly constructed for women suffering from the trauma of rape or abduction. They required special care and treatments, which would be helpful for them to back to the mainstream (Bandyopadhyay, 1970).

One of the distinct organizations which were also established before the partition of India was Mahila Atma Raksha Samity (MARS). It was the most important organization, involved for the sake of the refugee women, and also dealt with various issues such as the famine of 1943, the Second World War, the fight of the peasant community, various mental and physical tortures of the village women, women refugees, etc. (Sen, 2001). The MARS was formed with people of different classes and financial backgrounds; some of them were peasants, some belonged to the urban middle class, some were inhabitants of slums, and some of them were workers. Urban elite class people were also members of this organization. The strong point of the organization was to believe in secularism and dedicate their lives to the women refugees. Ganguli (2016) stated that initially women refugees were unaware of their present situation and did not believe the words of the politicians. MARS with its strong and powerful organizational structure joined with the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) which was the core organization of the refugees and expanded its influences into various Mahila Samitys (WBGSB, 1957; Ganguli, 2016). Initially, these Mahila samitys along with the MARS tackled various situations of the colonies (The Swadhinata, 1954) later; all these samitys were merged with various units of MARS and formed a Central Women's Organization (Sen, 2001; Ganguli, 2016). The Women's Organization was one of the major milestones for the women refugees. It changed the lives of refugee

women. It was also stated that some of the women organizations such as Mahila Atma Raksha Samity and Nari Seva Samity were used to work under the banner of CPI (WBGWB, 1953a). Women refugees and their involvement in the political organization was an important aspect in Bengal. Their processions and agitations regarding the different issues were regular incidents in West Bengal (Ganguli, 2016).

8 WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE REFUGEE MOVEMENT

The partition of India created a tragic incident in Indian history in which a region was separated into two segments according to its religious structure. The eastern section of India was segmented into two parts such as East Bengal and West Bengal. The former adjoining state of India was incorporated with Pakistan which created major turmoil in Indian history. It also crumbled the lives of the people who left their homes and started to settle in West Bengal. These migrants were known as refugees who travelled a lot and started to live in an alien land (Nandy, 2019). The journey towards the new land for the refugees was not easy, especially for the women. Their struggle and fight for survival started before leaving their country which also continued in West Bengal. Their dispersal changed their identity from domestic women to working women who started to take financial responsibility for their families (Nandy, 2019). These 'refugee women' after suffering lots of humiliation and oppression in the camps and colonies, decided to claim their rights by raising their voices. The left-oriented women from East Pakistan started their movements in various camps and colonies regarding their demands.

MARS was one of the leading organizations of refugee women who started their movements with the help of other women's organizations. It was stated that MARS was working under the influence of the communist party (Chakrabarti, 1999) which led them to become illegal. Members of the MARS claimed that they had no political connections. MARS with the help of the All-India Students Federation (AISF) started to look after the refugees of Sealdah station (Nandy, 2019). Gradually they started to expand their role by organising vocational training in the camps and made the camp women financially independent. Apart from that, they started to claim electricity and water supply for the camp refugees. Conferences and meetings were conducted by the MARS against the police atrocity which ordinary housewives also joined (Roy, 1992; Nandy, 2019). They also demanded to release of all the women refugees immediately without any trial (Chakravarty, 2005; Nandy, 2019).

MARS was also popularised by its struggle for the peace movement, Special Marriage Bill, and Hindu Code Bill which also influenced other women's organisations. The women refugees were against any kind of violation and conflict and wanted to continue their movement peacefully (SBGWB, 1955; Nandy, 2019). The members of the MARS connected to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)

and started their journey by the end of 1952. Some liberal congress women also joined this group (Sen, 2001; Nandy, 2019). Finally, MARS collected 22160 and 45000 signatures for implementing the Hindu Code Bill and Special Marriage Bill (Sen, 2001; Nandy, 2019) which was opposed by the Hindu Mahasabha (Kumar, 2014; Nandy, 2019). The bill allows inter-caste marriages and increases the marriageable ages of girls (Sen, 2001; Nandy, 2019). Hindu Mahasabha assumed that it might destroy the Hindu cultural systems (Kumar, 2014). These bills also had a provision for women's rights on her ancestral property equally or divorced her husband if required (Sen, 2001; Nandy, 2019).

Women refugees also had a demand for financial stability and they rallied toward the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. They assumed that the employment of women was essential, especially for housewives and peasant women (SBGWB, 1955; Nandy, 2019). There was a signature campaign in favor of their demand and they collected 14012 signatures by the end of February 1955 (SBGWB, 1955; SBGWB, 1953; Nandy 2019). The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) passed a resolution regarding women's employment. They stated that women also could get administrative jobs (SBGWB, 1955; Nandy, 2019). This also influenced the Bengal women and they appealed to the National body for their employment. They also had a demand for the right to education, right to work, right to choose a profession and ultimately demand the employment of the women refugees for which 30000 women signed a memorandum (SBGWB, 1955; Nandy, 2019).

The refugee movement was started with the help of other women organizations but it was also observed that there was a strong communist connection in this movement. Initially, communist was banned due to their armed struggle. Later, the restriction was withdrawn and the communist activists started to help the refugees (Chakrabarti, 1999; Nandy, 2019).

United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) was established in 1950 and started to join with other refugee organizations. It was the UCRC that motivated the women most and they agreed to join in rallies in large numbers (Chakrabarti, 1999). UCRC succeeded in extending its influence into various camps and colonies which resulted in the success of many movements. A group of refugees was living in lands forcefully occupied by them. When the government observed that both private and government property was forcefully grabbed by the refugees, they introduced an 'eviction bill' in favor of landlords. Refugees especially women opposed the matter and decided to join a rally under the banner of UCRC. It was documented that there were 10000 refugees in the procession among them 1200 were women. They attained the procession with their children and made the protest more powerful (Nandy, 2019; Chatterjee, 2021; Chakrabarti, 1999). As per the eviction bill, the occupiers of the land had to leave the place and choose alternative arrangements for them. In the Jadabgarh area, Section 144 was applied on 24 December 1950. Squatters of this camp were unable to

arrange substitutes for them which resulted in the direct collision between the police and the camp refugees. Due to the action of being 'lathi-charged' by the police, Binapani Mitra, a pregnant woman died. It was documented that she was the first woman martyr of the refugee movement in West Bengal (Nandy, 2019; SBGWB, 1951; The Saytajug, 1950).

The second phase of migration started in 1950 when most of the refugees belonged to the 'namasudra' community. Apart from that, lower-class peasants and artisans also crossed the border and started to live in various camps and colonies (Bandhopadhyay, 1970, Chakrabarti, 1999, Singh, 2003). The government also faced an accommodation crisis and decided to shift the refugees outside of Bengal. A conference was organized at Darjeeling in 1956 in which Bettiah in Bihar was selected as an alternative rehabilitation for West Bengal refugees. Most of the Bettiah camp refugees were Namasudras (Chatterjee, 2021) who were not staying in the camp permanently but rather returned to West Bengal and started to live at Howrah Maidan, Dumdum Cantonment, and Sealdah Station (Chatterjee, 2021; IBWB, 1950). Pashchim Banga Samaj Sevi Sangha was one of the relief organizations, working for the refugees at Howrah Maidan. Refugees who returned from the Bettiah camp were not satisfied with the amount of rice provided by the organization. The refugee women demanded more amount of food which was ignored by the sangha. Finally, a group of women snatched 3 bags of rice from the Pashchim Banga Samaj Sevi Sangha. They were so adamant that they were not ready to return those bags which also created a heated argument between police and the women refugees (Chatterjee, 2021). The situation was getting worse when a government official came to the spot and was physically assaulted by the refugee women. Returnees from the Bettiah camp also organized Satyagraha to achieve their demands in which many women and children participated (Chatterjee, 2021; IBWB, 1950). This incident had evidence that women refugees dared to do their best to fulfil their rights (Chatterjee, 2021).

Due to insufficient space in West Bengal, refugees from various government camps and colonies were shifted outside of Bengal. The dispersal policy of the government created a major problem among the refugees of the Bankura District, especially the Basudebpur and Shiromani camps. In December 1957, refugees from the Basudebpur camp received a notice regarding their dispersal to the Rajasthan site (Chatterjee, 2021). They opposed the decision to rehabilitate outside of Bengal and decided to launch Satyagraha with the help of the UCRC. The Satyagraha was started on 12 March 1958 in Bishnupur with the help of UCRC and Usharani Bhattacharya, a leading organizer of the Basudebpur and Peardoba camps. Women from various camps of the Bishnupur subdivision participated in this Satyagraha movement (Chatterjee, 2021). Another Satyagraha movement was started in March 1958, when the government developed the Dandakaranya scheme in early 1958. It was decided by the rehabilitation department and the government to

sanction 1 lakh acres of land for the rehabilitation of refugees. After hearing the government's strategy regarding dispersal, refugees also prepared to start agitation. Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sanmela was one of the leading refugee organizations that took the first initiative of counter-action. Police protested the refugees' agitation by firing tear gas. Despite being suffered from 'lathi' charges the women refugees of the Burdwan district moved ahead and joined in the Satyagraha movement (Chatterjee, 2021). The Anti-Dandakaranya movement was not confined to the Burdwan refugees; it was spreading all over Bengal. Police oppression resulted in the suffering of the refugees which was documented in many leading newspapers.

9 WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN FINANCIAL SECTORS

After lots of agitation and the Satyagraha movement, women refugees finally broke the stereotype of 'andarmahal' culture. They started to share the economic burden by joining different financial sectors. Many East Pakistan women were working as clerks in various offices (Chakravarty, 2005; Nandy, 2019). Despite resistance from the family, these hapless women were joined in the banking jobs to live. They started to get degrees and joined as teachers, stenographers, or typists. Their involvement in the food department, telephone exchange office, and even in the police sector created major changes in the economy which also influenced West Bengal women to do the same (Ghosh, 1981; Nandy, 2019). With the help of Uday Villa Women's Cooperative or Nari Seva Sangha, the women were getting training in tailoring, book-binding, batik printing, or even starting fast food centers to make them self-reliant (Chakravarty, 2005). Less educated women were involved in selling fruits, flowers, and vegetables, supplying food to the offices, or working as maids. Their living condition was not up to the mark which they were used to in East Pakistan but these kinds of financial independence improved their state of mind. It was documented that out of 2320 registered women, 221 were getting jobs by 1952. Under the urban scheme, there were 784 trained women were involved in non-official sectors. Their involvement in the education and financial sectors prevented them from getting married (Chakravarty, 2005; Nandy, 2019). Many refugee women were getting admission to Sarojini Naidu College of Dumdum (Ghosh, 1981; Nandy, 2019) and the number of schools in various camps and colonies increased from 340 in 1949-50 to 1385 in 1960-61 (Bhaskar Rao, 1967; Nandy, 2019). After completing their education or becoming financially independent refugee women started to take their family responsibility like male members of their households.

10 THE STRUGGLE OF REFUGEE WOMEN AFTER RECEIVING AND REHABILITATION AND FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Partition made women independent and self-reliant. Despite achieving an honorary position in the

employment sector, the displaced working women were facing negative consequences from society. The general perception of society did not appreciate the involvement of women outside of their homes. This resulted in more and more engagement of the East Pakistani displaced women in the public sphere with educational and vocational training than the non-refugee women ([Educational Facilities for Displaced Persons, GOI, March 1960](#); [Ganguli, 2016](#)). The non-refugee women were mainly concentrated in the teaching profession if their families permitted them to do the same. In some cases, refugee women after being a part of different organizations and involved in employment sectors did not receive the proper honor and respect from their families. Orthodox family members accepted women to be a part of committees or involved in working sectors to earn money but they always being neglected during the time of decision-making ([Nandy, 2019](#)).

The struggle of the refugee women after being uprooted from their motherland and their journey toward an alien land was documented by either the government or many non-governmental organizations. Many scholarly articles also did the same. The trauma of the women refugees and their fight to survive was also portrayed in many novels and films. Jyotirmoyee Devi in her monumental work in 'Epar Ganga Opar Ganga' explained the pain and trauma of a Hindu refugee girl who was molested and oppressed by other religious communities before leaving the country. This novel also portrays her journey towards a new land and how she survived there despite receiving similar mental harassment from her family members. Her story reflected the situation of all women during that time. Another epic novel, *Swaralipi*, written by Sabitri Roy, mainly reflected the women's struggle for survival. It depicted the women's struggle toward the anti-eviction bill, the Hindu code bill peace movement, etc. This novel describes the women's struggle to protect their squatter colonies and fight within the political party. Apart from the novels many films also portrayed refugee issues such as *Chinnomool* or Ritwik Ghatak's trilogy (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Subarnarekha*) in which the struggle of the uprooted women was represented by some fictional characters. Their fight for financial stability to run their family or dream of starting a new peaceful journey with their dear ones was explained in these movies ([Ganguli, 2016](#)).

11 CONCLUSION

The independence of India and the resultant partition adversely affected a particular group of people in East Pakistan and they were forcefully uprooted from their lands. After announcing the partition these unfortunates suffered a lot, especially women and it invigorated them to leave their country. Their dispersal to a new land and their struggle to survive was fairly difficult which compelled them to be involved in various active movements. These prolonged fights and agitations changed their miserable lives and the government was forced to think about their up-gradation through the construction of new homes, the opening of new industrial sectors which provided employment and

economic opportunities, and the formation of new schools and colleges for educational purposes, etc. After arriving in West Bengal, these women refugees created major changes in societal reform. Their involvement and courageous movements influenced the other Bengali women to stand on their own feet. In other words, these displaced women became followers of the existing Bengali females who were unable to achieve something due to a lack of spirit.

ABBREVIATIONS

AISF: All India Student's Federation; **CPI**: Communist Party of India; **IBWB**: Intelligence Branch, West Bengal; **MARS**: Mahila Atma Raksha Samity; **NFIW**: The National Federation of Indian Women; **PEPSU**: The Patiala and East Punjab States Union; **PI**: Permanent Rehabilitation; **UCRC**: United Central Refugee Council; **SBGWB**: Special Branch, Government of West Bengal; **WBSA**: West Bengal State Archive; **WIDF**: Women's International Democratic Federation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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