



E-ISSN: 2706-9117

P-ISSN: 2706-9109

www.historyjournal.net

IJH 2022; 4(1): 01-02

Received: 01-11-2021

Accepted: 03-12-2021

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Partition of India and the refugee resettlement in West Dinajpur district (1947-2011): A historical study

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Abstract

The objective of this study were to determine the existing conditions of the refugees in the West Dinajpur district in West Bengal, India, and their grievances towards the central and state government of India and the demographic change which had a severe impact on the society and economy of West Dinajpur District from 1947-2011. The other objectives of this study are as follows. To study the history of refugee resettlement programme in West Dinajpur. To assess the origin of the Refugee problem, its nature, characteristics and development. To identify the developmental projects initiated by the Central Government, State Government and the Local Self government. To study the Rehabilitation programme in West Dinajpur and its impact on society. Quantitative approach was chosen for the research study. The research design used for the study was exploratory survey design. The study consist with personal interview of 120 sample refugees. The data was collected by administering structured questionnaire to 120 sample refugees. The questionnaires consist of two parts. Section-A and Section-B, Section-A consist with demographic data and Section-B consist with personal experience, their emotions, feelings and their grievances. The other sources from where the data was collected was the district census handbook, letters and paintings by locals, Gazetteer, official records etc.

Keywords: refugees, resettlement, quantitative, questionnaire, gazetteer

Introduction

The Nationalism in India and the end of Colonialism came through the acquisition of independence in the year 1947 which came through the effort of millions of people irrespective of caste, class and religion from both the countries India and Pakistan

After the acquisition independence both the government of India and Pakistan solemnly agree that each shall ensure, to the minorities, through out its Territory complete equality of citizenship, irrespective of religion, a full sense of security in respect of life, culture property and personal honour, freedom of movement within each country and freedom of occupation, speech and worship, subject to law and morality. Members of the Minorities shall have equal opportunity with members of the majority community to participate in the public life of their country, to hold political or other office, and to serve in their countries armed forces.

Through the partition one term has been evolved i.e. 'Refugee' though the people of either India or Pakistan was not familiar with this term before the partition. After the partition the people from both the countries were familiar with another term 'Refugee Camp'.

Many of the Indian nationalist didn't accepted the partition with the name of independence.

In the study nationalist history though the partition was referred as painful But with the joyous moment of independence the people have for got the pain to loose their own family and own land. Like Punjab Bengal also sufferance the partition of India and Pakistan.

The influx of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan is a big phenomenon in Indian history in consequence of partition of India in 1947, a large number of people were compelled to leave their homeland and come to India. From the very beginning of the exodus the primary task of the government was to provide relief to the vast number of refugees. The government has been trying to solve the socio- economic problems arising from influx of refugee by undertaking various relief and rehabilitation measures. In order to tackle the massive task of providing relief and rehabilitation to millions of people, the Refugee relief and Rehabilitation Department was created with offices at the district and sub-divisional level. The persons who migrated only from erstwhile East Pakistan before 25.03.1971 are treated as REFUGEE by the RR&R Department.

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In the first phase of the first wave out of 41.17 lakh people who left East Pakistan 31.32 lakh remained in West Bengal in the Second Phase the Government refused to provide any help thought that the unofficial figures were approximately 25 lakh. During the second wave 11.14 lakh people were displaced of which 6 lakh people remained in West Bengal though the government had informed that they would provide the relief and rehabilitation only if the refugees would resettle outside West Bengal. The Bangladesh War in 1971 left 2 lakh people as human flotsam. In order to link the habitation with livelihood, the colonies were set up near the towns or industrial area.

But, the squatters colonies were not limited to the cities and suburbs. In rural areas, the refugee peasants took over the uncultivated wasteland. Such land was seized not only for habitation, but also for cultivation. This type of colonies were established in Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore, Burdwan, Nadia, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas, West Dinajpur, Malda, Coachbihar and Jalpaiguri districts. At the peak of the inflow of refugees from across the border with East Pakistan, the government mainly set up three types of camps, namely, Women's camps, Worksite camps and Permanent liability Camps. After staying long in those camps many of the women started to rehabilitated along with their family members in and around the camp. A list of total 998 squatter's (Jabardakhal) camps were identified which was sent the central government for approval but it was turned down.

Though there are immense literature on Partition of India and the Refugee Rehabilitation Programme in West Dinajpur district, which had given the vivid description of this event with the data and information. But while listening the real stories from those groups of people who were migrated to India as refugee from East Pakistan which is presently known as Bangladesh by leaving behind their property, memoirs and the land who nourished them as her child and resettled in India, I have found the lacuna of the history of Refugee Rehabilitation Programme in West Dinajpur district. Though the information and data from different sources such as, Gazetteers, Census Reports as well the primary and secondary sources almost gave us the correct data but with the addition of more information such as the reaction of the subaltern groups of people their emotions, thoughts and suffering will make this topic more accurate and universally more acceptable.

After the 'Muktijuddho of Bangladesh' or the 'Bangladesh Liberation War' in 1971 to till the last census in 2011 the influx of refugees either trespassed or Govt. of India had given the shelter to them. There are no such type of official records for those trespassers in West Dinajpur i.e. presently known as North and South Dinajpur.`

Research Methodology

The present study is a micro-historical type. The historical method of research i.e. both descriptive and analytical types has broadly been used to reconstruct the history and phenomenal changes of Partition of India and the Refugee Resettlement in West Dinajpur District (1947-2011): A Historical Study.

This works is not merely a compilation of information it has tried to analysis the origin, development, initiatives and consequences on the human lives etc.

The Primary and Secondary sources have been used for the collection of requisite information. The Primary Data have

been obtained by using Gazetteer, letter, administrative report, news paper.

The secondary data on the study have collected from different books, journals, unpublished works, magazine, interview etc. All these data are used after checking and comparing with the primary source materials.

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