



In Search of 'Home': Dandakaranya and the East Bengali Migrants, 1957-1977

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Introduction

In the annals of Partition historiography on Bengal, scholarly attention has essentially been riveted on memories of migrants from East Bengal centring on West Bengal as the geographical location. What such scholarly studies gloss over is that a sizeable segment of the migrants from across the border, who partook of government assistance in the hope of rebuilding their lives on this side, were pushed outside West Bengal primarily to the Andamans and Dandakaranya (p. 5) for rehabilitation. Unfortunately, while scholarly literature abounds on rehabilitation within West Bengal, analysis of rehabilitation of Bengali migrants outside the state are far and few. While refugees and Dandakaranya have stirred the imagination of the literati, the most celebrated being Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (chronicling the plight of migrants who abandoned Dandakaranya to come back to West Bengal), scholarly attention has been far and few. K. Maudood Elahi's *Refugees in Dandakaranya* (1981) is one of the first articles to bring the Dandakaranya issue to the fore.



After a long hiatus, Alok Ghosh's "Bengali refugees at Dandakaranya: a tragedy of rehabilitation" (2000) brought to focus the lackadaisical attitude of the government that added to the misery of the displaced population. Of late, a few scholars working on South Asian Partition have tried to address this lacuna. Udit Sen's "Dissident memories: exploring Bengali refugee narratives in the Andaman Islands", in *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration during the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave McMillan 2011) and her forthcoming work *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* have forayed into the virgin area of Andaman resettlement. But Dandakaranya has sadly remained a neglected area outside the purview of serious scholarship. Debjani Sengupta's *From Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi: Rehabilitation, Representation and the Partition of Bengal (1947)* has tried to weave in the literary texts to analyse the Dandakaranya experience.

Apart from these few articles, Dandakaranya has essentially been analysed as an adjunct of the Marichjhapi massacre. Frustrated at the lack of infrastructure, many of the migrants deserted Dandakaranya to travel back to West Bengal and founded their own enclave at Marichjhapi in the Sundarbans area in 1977. The newly-installed Left Front government, which catapulted to power riding high on the support of the East Bengali migrants, it is alleged, opened fire on the hapless Dandakaranya returnees, leading to large-scale massacre, which has been equated with the Jallianwala Bagh killing in the existing discourse (Ghosh 1999: 8). Collections of memories of that massacre, namely, Sibnath Chaudhuri's *Marichjhapi Kanna* (2004), Jagadish Chandra Mondal's *Marichjhapi: Udbastu Kara ebong Keno?* (2005) and *Marichjhapi Naishabder Antahraley* (2002), Tushar Bhattacharya's *Aprakashito Marichjhapi* (2010), Sandip Bandyopadhyay's *Dandakban thekey Sundarban* (2010), Madhumoy Pal's *Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihaash* (2009) and *Nijer Katha-y Marichjhapi* (2011) pivot around the deep sense of betrayal first by the Congress-led central and state governments, which did not heed to their pleas of rehabilitation within West Bengal and cart-loaded them to Dandakaranya and second by the Communist Party of India (M) (CPI (M)) led Left Front government in 1977 which opened fire on the unarmed returnees at Marichjhapi in the deltaic Sundarbans area of West Bengal, where the migrants had resettled after abandoning Dandakaranya.

These articles and collection of memories essentially depend on government documents, newspaper reports and migrant voices—an



eclectic mixture of memory-history (to borrow Pierre Nora's term, Nora 1989) and personal documents (to borrow Louis Gottschalk's term, Gottschalk, Kluckhohn & Agnell 1945). More or less using the same set of sources, this paper questions whether Dandakaranya was an unqualified failure, a story of unmitigated disaster as portrayed by existing literature. The very title of Alok Ghosh's article, "Bengali refugees at Dandakaranya: a tragedy of rehabilitation" speaks of the sham the entire process of rehabilitation was all about. Spread across the modern-day states of Chattisgarh and Orissa, Dandakaranya, topographically and climatologically, presented a completely different picture to the migrants. Culling information from a wide array of narratives, both written and oral, this article presents the quotidian struggle of the migrants amidst the inhospitable terrains of Dandakaranya and analyse whether it became a laboratory for all sorts of social experiments. Still nursing the wounds of uprootment from their home and hearth back in East Bengal, they had hoped to start their lives afresh in West Bengal. But the government's stern refusal to their pleas left them with no choice but to journey towards the unknown for the second time. This article investigates narratives of what awaited them when they reached Dandakaranya, whether they still struggle to find a foothold and feelings of belonging and alienation vis-à-vis East Bengal and Dandakaranya.

The backdrop

As the clock struck midnight on 14 August 1947, India began its tryst with destiny after shedding almost two hundred years of colonial yoke. The country awoke to a new dawn—a dawn of freedom. Frenzied enthusiasm was witnessed throughout the country. But at the same time 'it was the best of times, it was the worst of times [...] it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness' (Dickens 2000: 5). It was also a time of mourning for thousands, who could not partake in the joys of independence and freedom. The other side of Independence was Partition—the creation of the two nation-states of India and Pakistan. For many, freedom, thus, came with a price—a heavy price of losing one's homeland, being torn asunder from the natal set-up for good and to losing near and dear ones.

The migrants, pouring into West Bengal from East Bengal/East Pakistan in fits and spurts, between 1946 and 1971 (Noakhali riots to Bangladesh war) have been classified into two categories:



- a) Old Migrants – I) Those who migrated between October 1946 and March 1958; II) Those who migrated between April 1958 and December 1963.
- b) New Migrants – Those who came between January 1964 and March 1971 (Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation 1976: 1).¹

It was essentially for the old migrants (II) and the new migrants that the Dandakaranya scheme was envisaged.

Baffled by the burgeoning stream of migrants after Partition, the West Bengal government was literally at its wit's end to tackle the crisis. The problem of the refugees was classified into two heads—initial relief and subsequent rehabilitation. At important points along the border, interception centres were opened where refugees, as they arrived, were questioned and on satisfactorily establishing their claim of fresh arrival, were issued with interception slips, which qualified them as refugees. Some refugees did not have to depend on the government for food and shelter. To them these slips were useful as a proof of their refugee status for certain other facilities like procuring house building loans and trade loans.

To those who were entirely dependent on the government for food and shelter, a special type of interception slip was issued which entitled them to admission in camps. They were then asked to report to the nearest reception centre, where they were further checked and moved to the nearest available transit camp. Here they were again questioned, classified according to their profession or occupation and given cards entitling them to live in relief camps and draw their maintenance grants. Accordingly, after enumeration the refugees were dispersed to the Relief Camps, Permanent Liability Camps and Colony Camps. The Permanent Liability Camps were earmarked for the aged, the infirm and the invalids, widows or families with no able-bodied male members. As the very name suggests, their welfare became the long-term responsibility of the government. The Colony Camps were essentially set up by the government to develop sites for housing the displaced, and also townships (Government of West Bengal 1953: 6f.).

With the announcement for the introduction of passports and visas for Indo-Pakistan travel from 15 October 1952, there was a huge onrush of migrants from mid-1952. They were now required to equip themselves with migration certificates to be obtained from the Deputy High Commissioner for India at Dacca. The previous system of the issue of interception slips at border stations was discontinued and the interception centres closed. Only the one at Sealdah remained in



operation. Migrants, seeking admission to camps, reported to the reception centre at Sealdah from where they were dispersed to any one of the four transit camps functioning near Calcutta. The unattached women were sent to the Babughat transit camp while the rest to Ghusuri, Cossipore or Reliance camps.

But camp-life did not entail permanent jobs. Here came the question of rehabilitation. Camp people were classified into rural and urban and separate sets of programmes were formulated for them. For the rural people, further subdivided into agriculturists and non-agriculturists two separate sets of schemes were in operation. While the agriculturists were provided with lands for homestead as also cultivable lands, the non-agriculturists were provided with lands for homestead along with loans of various types in order to help them settle themselves by starting small trades. Loans up to 75 Rupees per family were provided for purchase of homestead plots, while in rural areas a family was entitled to house-building loans up to a maximum of 500 Rupees (Government of West Bengal 1953: 78). Each agriculturist family was forwarded a loan of 600 Rupees for purchase of cattle, seed and manure and a further loan of 50 Rupees per acre for the development of land, where admissible, and a maintenance loan for six months at the maximum rate of 50 Rupees per month (*ibid.*).

The non-agriculturist rural families were advanced business or small-trade loans to the tune of 500 Rupees per family, with a maintenance grant for a month up to a maximum of 50 Rupees per family per month (*ibid.*). The weavers could claim a loan of 600 Rupees for a handloom, with guaranteed supply of yarn from the stock maintained by the Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate (*ibid.*). Middle class rural refugee families² were entitled to horticultural loans—one bigha³ and a half of horticultural land, a loan of 630 Rupees and a maintenance loan of 200 Rupees (Government of West Bengal 1953: 79).

The urban displaced families were forwarded a variety of loans: house-building loans, professional loans or business loans. Each family was entitled to a house-building loan of 1,250 Rupees (Government of West Bengal 1953: 76). Professional loans were essentially meant for medical practitioners and lawyers. The former could claim a maximum loan of 2,600 Rupees for equipment and subsequent maintenance, while for the latter a loan of 2,100 Rupees was earmarked (*ibid.*). Those intending to start small businesses in the Calcutta area could submit an application for loan to the State Refugee Businessmen's Rehabilitation Board (set up on 26 July 1948), which if, satisfied after



verifying the necessary details, would have sanctioned a loan up to 5,000 Rupees for the same (*ibid.*). Within the district, the District Magistrate was empowered to grant such loans within their jurisdiction.

Another important plank of the government sponsored rehabilitation programme was the dispersal of the refugees outside the state. Paucity of agricultural land as also the mounting pressure of unending exodus, forced the government to think in terms of rehabilitating them in a few faraway locations like the Andamans as also distributing them in the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa. At the Conference of Rehabilitation Ministers of States at Calcutta in January 1956, it was already declared that cross-border exodus was a national calamity and the solution ought to be sought by incorporating state level relief and rehabilitation measures within the "national level" and in urging other states to share the responsibility (Ministry of Rehabilitation 1957: 2). Nine states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, Rajasthan, Mysore and Tripura had already offered a total area of 5 lakh acres of land and approximately 45 schemes were sanctioned by then (*ibid.*: 8).

At the Rehabilitation Ministers' Conference in Calcutta convened on 4 July 1958, it was decided that all the camps would be closed by July 1959 and the system of doles be discontinued (The decision was later reversed and it was decided to close the camps in West Bengal, by October or November 1959, at the latest). Those whom the government had labelled as old migrants category number (II) were not eligible for any further rehabilitation benefits from the government within West Bengal.⁴ Camp inmates, i.e., old migrants category number (I) numbered around 35,000 families on 1 August 1958 (30,000 agriculturists, and 5,000 non-agriculturists) (*ibid.*). The total number of persons was roughly 158,000 (*ibid.*). As per the decision of the Conference, the onus of rehabilitating 10,000 would rest on the Government of West Bengal, while the rest, i.e. 25,000 would be dispersed outside the state mainly under the Dandakaranya scheme (Jugantar 24 April 1960). Each family would be given a time frame of two months to decide whether to accept or reject the government's scheme of rehabilitation. Those, who would renounce the proposal of the government, would be given a one-time dole of six months, after which they would cease to be the responsibility of the government (*ibid.*).

Manoranjan Byapari, a resident of Siromanipur camp in Bankura, recalls that sometimes in 1958, a notice was put up in the camp office



informing inmates that the names for Dandakaranya, would be registered on a first-come-first-serve basis. This continued for around a year, when notices were put up at regular intervals urging the inmates to opt for Dandakaranya. Finally, with the time-line for the closure of the camps approaching fast, the camp administrators started winding up and residents like Byapari's family, who did not opt for Dandakaranya, became homeless for a second time (Byapari 2012). The reason for them not to opt for Dandakaranya was that it was located far away from West Bengal. Besides, the Hindu epic *Ramayana* depicts it as a dense forest inhabited by *rakshasas* (demons). As a result, in popular psyche, the name Dandakaranya conjures a negative image.

As migration continued unabated, so did the government's resolution to despatch the migrants outside the state. Post 1964, a different strategy was devised for their dispersal. It was decided that they would directly be picked from the border, kept waiting at makeshift camps for a few days and then brought to Sealdah station and packed off in trains to Mana, about 150 miles from Dandakaranya, where a transit camp was opened and where their final destination in terms of rehabilitation would be ascertained. With Assam and Tripura backing out of the rehabilitation scheme, Dandakaranya was the only option left for rehabilitation (Gupta 1999: 4).

Dandakaranya project

Dandakaranya approximately covered an area of 77.63 square kilometres spread across the districts of Koraput and Kalahandi in Orissa and the district of Bastar in then Madhya Pradesh and present-day Chattisgarh. A proposal for the development of the area was mooted for the first time when on 11 January 1957, the central government green-signalled a project and constituted a committee with the representatives of the governments of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, in short, an AMPO committee, for developmental purposes. The National Development Council of the Government of India gave a nod to the Committee's proposal already in 1957. A.L. Fletcher was appointed as the Chief Administrator of the committee in 1957. Andhra Pradesh eventually backed out and the project was confined to Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

For the purpose of fructifying the scheme of rehabilitation, the Dandakaranya Development Authority was set up in September 1958 with the two-fold agenda of resettling the East Bengali migrants and to



ensure the overall development of the belt, encompassing the resident tribal population in the process. With the Second Five Year Plan of the government being implemented in full swing between 1956-61 with the Mahalanobis model⁵ as the guiding principle, Dandakaranya became a part of the development discourse where the marginalised, namely, the migrants and the tribals would be equal stakeholders in the path towards development. The infrastructure, especially land, would be provided by the state governments but the funding would be done entirely by the central government. So coordination between the two was an essential pre-requisite for the successful execution of the scheme (Gupta 1999: 10).

The Dandakaranya area was divided into four zones: Paralkote (Chattisgarh), Pharasgaon (Chattisgarh), Umerkote (Orissa), Malkangiri (Orissa). The area was inhabited by the tribal Gonds, who practiced shifting cultivation. An aerial survey was undertaken in 1957 to assess the feasibility of resettlement of the migrants, essentially agriculturists. On the face of it, the undulating hilly tracts with intermittent rainfall were not conducive for the rehabilitation of agricultural families but the sparse population of the area, around 100 per square mile, was the clinching factor.

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The first phase of rehabilitation ended in 1961. But the scheme of dispersal outside the state left much to be desired. The number of displaced persons dispersed from camps in West Bengal to other states for rehabilitation during 1960 amounted to (Ministry of Rehabilitation 1962: 7):

I	Dandakaranya	4,369
II	Uttar Pradesh	4,852
III	Madhya Pradesh	210
IV	Andamans	819
Total		10,250

The pace picked up from 1962, with riots in East Pakistan pushing the Hindus to seek succour across the border. A majority of the families belonged to the agricultural castes. By June 1964 with the new government strategy, around 7,500 families moved into Dandakaranya, out of which 7,261 were agriculturists (Gupta 1999: 17). Each such family was allotted around 6.5 acres of agricultural land and half an acre for homestead and kitchen garden, a total of seven acres. When in 1971, hordes of migrants cascaded down on West Bengal, the rehabilitation measures were revised to accommodate the unending



stream. In non-irrigated areas, the amount would be 5 acres, and in irrigated areas 3 acres were to be handed over (Government of India 1978: 55).

Voices

The officials

The most prominent official voice is that of Saibal Kumar Gupta, the Chairman of the Dandakaranya Development Authority (DDA) or the project-in-charge for ten months from December 1963-September 1964 when he resigned from his post. He narrated his experience in a series of articles published in *Economic Weekly*, later compiled into a volume titled *Dandakaranya: A Survey of Rehabilitation* (Calcutta 1999). His autobiography, *Kichhu Smriti, Kichhu Katha* (Calcutta 1994), also catalogues his experience as the administrator of DDA. Dr Sankar Ghosh Dastidar, medical officer connected with the project and based at Kondagaon, serialised his experience in *Anushilan Barta* in 1986 and 1987. The first-hand depictions of these two officials help unravel the reality from behind the maze of statistics and data of the official records.

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Gupta's accounts reveal the lack of all-round planning that could have spelt success of the project. Demoralised at the turn of events, he resigned from his post, not before pointing out the ills plaguing the project. The underdeveloped area remained cut-off from the rest of the state during the monsoons as the roads remained out of bounds turning into muddy slush as evident in the writings of Dastidar. He recalls when under official directive, he was instructed to visit Paralkote, post-monsoon, the area was infested with grass that towered over his head. Suddenly, he noticed some movement at a distance, only to come face to face with a tiger. Fearing for his life, he climbed the nearest tree (Ghosh Dastidar 31 May 1986: 13). There was no public transport connectivity. Dastidar could reach Paralkote only after a three-day jeep-ride from the nearest town of Kanker.

Moreover, at the outset, although the project was meant to rehabilitate essentially agricultural families, the site selection was faulty since the Dandakaranya belt was primarily a less fertile zone with inferior quality soil, not suitable for agriculture. Whatever fertile soil was available had already been put to use by the Gond tribes. The peculiar nature of cultivation practised by them (slash and burn) ensured that the soil was deprived of the enrichment it might have received from the decaying forest litter in the course of the year.



Embarking on a zone-wise analysis, Gupta shows how the very nature of the soil was usually 'shallow, sandy loam and loam in texture, acidic in reaction, poor to medium in nitrogen and organic content, and poor in phosphate as well as moisture-laden capacity' (Gupta 1999: 19). Thus, the very planning of rehabilitation of families, whose primary skill lay as agriculturists, would spell doom for their future.

Liberal use of organic and green manure, adequate amount of fertilisers and a sustained scheme of irrigational projects that would ensure perennial supply of water to make these lands arable were necessary requirements to make these areas fit for cultivation. In his resignation letter, Gupta lamented,

Very little was done to supply fertilisers or to augment the resources of the settler to buy them. [...] irrigation was conspicuous by its absence [...] dam on Bhaskal likely to be completed in 1965 was estimated to irrigate only about 1,100 acres out of an area of 11,000 acres [...]. (Gupta 1999: 79).

In the Burja village of Umarkot, where nearly a hundred agricultural families were settled, a housewife narrated her tale of woe to Gupta, when he went there to have a first-hand feel of the situation,

I had tried to grow vegetables and fruits in the land adjacent to my homestead [...] but there is no facility of water-supply in the vicinity [...] no well [...] no canal [...] we have no other option but to starve on days end [...] even clean drinking water is lacking [...]. (Gupta 1994: 135)

Ghosh Dastidar recalls how when he objected to the settlement of the East Bengali migrants at Ishabeda village due to the absence of proper drinking water facilities, the then administrative officer, very patiently, opened a file and showed him a note from the central government whereby it was mentioned that provisions of drinking water had been arranged and that if Ghosh Dastidar dared to say otherwise, he would lose his job (Ghosh Dastidar 31 May 1986: 15). Gupta's survey shows that in the entire village of Burja, there were only two wells and a pond of which the latter had almost dried up, while one of the wells was waterless. The East Bengali migrants, coming from a riverine set-up, understandably, could not adjust to this water scarcity.

A better planning could have ensured supplementary income opportunities for the migrants, which could have offset the woes faced by them due to non-arability of lands. But unfortunately, such avenues were not adequately explored and implemented.



Employment of displaced persons in project offices was systematically ignored [...] most non-agricultural displaced persons have received no homestead plot and the land secured from the state governments for this purpose were occupied by the Project Departments or staff. The few shops erected in different places lie vacant because the large majority of non-agricultural displaced persons work in small-scale industrial units run by DDA at a heavy loss [...] wages paid are far below the subsistence level and there is no guarantee of permanence. (Gupta 1999: 79)

Economic rehabilitation of the migrants thus, remained a distant dream. With nothing to fall back on, the settlers started to sell off their cattle and the asbestos rooftop for their subsistence.

Basic facilities like health-care and education were severely lacking. The dismal state of medical care comes alive in the writings of Ghosh Dastidar. There was no proper dispensary let alone hospital. The nearest hospital was located at Jagdalpur, which was out of bounds for the locals because of poor connectivity. Their only hope was the mobile medical units operated under the aegis of DDA. Ghosh Dastidar and a team of doctors stationed themselves in various locations in Dandakaranya and traversed often at the dead of night amidst perilous conditions to provide basic health-care to the inhabitants. In his letter to the Director of Health Services, Dandakaranya Project, Ghosh Dastidar complained that nurses posted did not have midwifery training nor did the compounders possess syringe or thermometres. The doctors had hardly any equipment, stationery or light (Ghosh Dastidar 21 December 1986: 15). Dr Sukhen Dutta, while responding to a call from a village on the bank of the river Kotri, in June 1967, got stuck when his mobile ambulance could not move forward in the muddy roads. He had to spend the entire night thus. Only after daybreak could the local villagers send news to the nearest government office from where a tractor was sent to clear the roads and make way for the ambulance (Ghosh Dastidar 21 February 1987: 23).

During monsoons, the river turned devastating. Ghosh Dastidar recalls in 1961, his first year in Dandakaranya, Paralkote was completely severed from the rest of the state. Even the bridge over the river became inundated. What was agonising was that the migrants, because of the government's unflinching attitude, had to journey to Dandakaranya amidst the pouring monsoons when the river had flooded its banks. The second batch of migrants to Paralkote was literally dumped amidst such inhospitable climate in June 1961 (Ghosh Dastidar 19 September 1987: 13). Such was their quotidian struggle,



which according to Ghosh Dastidar was an 'epic struggle' waged against nature and man alike. Given this gloomy picture in the early years, that the very purpose of the project would be a failure is a foregone conclusion.

Large-scale desertions by the migrants marred the success of the project so much so that Manmohan Kishan, who was associated with the project as the deputy to the first Chief Administrator A.L. Fletcher, wondered in 1978, whether there was any logic in pumping money into the project. Identifying the problem, Kishan opined, '[...] the refugees have not been able to adjust themselves to an environment quite alien to their culture and language. It is highly problematic if they would ever take root in the area. Why then spend any more money?' (Readers' Views The Times of India 20 June 1978: 8).

The Newspapers

Prominent Bengali dailies, such as *Jugantar* and the *Anand Bazar Patrika* carried extensive reports about the Dandakaranya project, especially highlighting the plight of the settlers and the step-motherly attitude of the central government in pushing the migrants out of West Bengal. In its editorial of 5 April 1960, titled "Dandakaranya Mrityu na Mukti?" (Dandakaranya—the Escape Route or Death-Trap?), the Bengali daily *Jugantar* questioned the efficacy of the project,

The officials connected with the project, on paper, fudge the statistics to prove that the project is on track having met the targeted deadline of rehabilitating 9000 families, whereby crores of rupees have been spent. But in reality, development work lags far behind—out of the promised reclamation of 90000 acres of land, 10,000 have been partially reclaimed. The migrants remain cooped up in the make-shift camps, still awaiting rehabilitation. (Editorial, *Jugantar* 5 April 1960: 4)

It further came to light that those who 'opted' for rehabilitation outside West Bengal, were often forced to do so. Nearly 29 families of the Reliance Camp who boarded the train on 20 January 1960, confided to *Jugantar*, that their name was included in the list without their expressed approval (*Jugantar* 29 January 1960: 1).

The same daily also carried out its independent investigation to lift the lid of the development works in the areas that were advertised by the central government. Prior to the visit of the West Bengal Chief Minister, Dr B.C. Roy in April 1960, *Jugantar's* reporter exposed the sham that went in the name of development,



Before the tour of the government representatives from West Bengal, hurried measures were adopted to show that Dandakaranya was well on the path of development. A temporary handloom with a lone spinning-wheel was constructed in Boregaon, on the eve of the Chief Minister's visit, in Umarkote a few houses along with a few wells, were hurriedly erected for the settlers. (Jugantar 28 April 1960: 8)

But according to the newspaper, the real statistics was that only 40 families had been rehabilitated in the true sense of the term and only one house constructed for the settlers (ibid.). Whereas nearly 30 transit camps had been set up, most of these lacked basic facilities like drinking water. In the Lamjora camp, the solitary well had dried up, while the pond water was contaminated. In the Boregaon camp, the water-tap had remained out of service for nearly three months. A thin trickle of water from a single tap was all that the inhabitants of Bedama camp got in the name of drinking water. Out of the five water-taps in Keshkal camp, only one was functional (Jugantar 29 April 1960: 1).⁶

Lack of proper rehabilitation facilities forced many of these settlers to look for alternatives. Even the aged had to look for other avenues. With employment opportunities being absent due to non-existence of industries, physical labour was the only option. Thus 64-year old Umesh Chandra Haldar had to toil as a stone-cutter to earn his meal. Even then, at the end of the month, Haldar along with his two sons could earn a meagre 38 rupees, which was not sufficient to sustain their families (ibid.). The newspaper lamented, 'The dream of owning that precious piece of land which egged them to undertake the arduous journey to Dandakaranya, will it ever be fulfilled' (ibid.). Thus 'the displaced families who went to Dandakaranya were put to much hardship and what was to be a land of promise appeared to them to be the burial ground of their rehabilitation as useful and self-reliant citizens' (The Times of India 26 December 1960: 6). In fact, the real causes of the ills, too, have been unveiled by the newspapers.

Newspaper reports were replete with such grim accounts of the hardships of the Bengali migrants. Amidst such trying circumstances, that the migrants would once again crave for West Bengal is understandable. Thus, desertion became a common occurrence. In the second half of 1964, nearly 40,000 East Bengal migrants to Dandakaranya returned to West Bengal, taking the total number of returning migrants from the area, to 500,000 (The Times of India 19 December 1964: 5). Many of the inhabitants left Dandakaranya after selling off



their agricultural implements and lands and migrated to the borders of East Pakistan to enrol themselves as fresh migrants and avail of the facilities after admitting themselves in camps (The Times of India 9 April 1965, p. 9). The largest mass desertion however, was triggered off in the 1970s culminating in the move towards Marichjhapi in the Sudarbans area in West Bengal. The Left Front government was steadfast in its commitment towards non-rehabilitation of the migrants in West Bengal. It feared that offering refuge to the Dandakaranya returnees would open the floodgates, making West Bengal prone to a reverse in flow of returnees. It is alleged that the government thus cut off communication, means of food and drinking water supply, and opened fire on the deserters who had settled down in Marichjhapi in January 1979.

Newspaper reports abound on the Marichjhapi fiasco. The Bengali dailies carried sustained reports of the unending stream of Dandakaranya deserters choosing Marichjhapi as their final destination. Nearly 9,000 migrants from Dandakaranya crossed the Ichhamati river to take refuge in Hasnabad, violating Section 144, which prohibits the assembly of more than four people in public spaces at any given time, imposed by the administration (Anandabazar Patrika 9 April 1978: 2). Their never-say-die attitude was hailed in the contemporary reportage. Jyotirmoy Datta in his two-part article titled 'Das Hajaar Robinson Crusoe Abikal Khulna Banachhen (Ten Thousand Robinson Crusoes Building a Replica of Khulna) saluted the steely determination of the Marichjhapi settlers/Dandakaranya returnees who toiled day and night to convert the swampy island into a habitable terrain (Jugantar 27 and 30 July 1978: p. 3 and p. 4). Simultaneously, the terror unleashed on the settlers by the Left Front administration found wide coverage in the newspapers. *Jugantar* reported the bestial torture that the returnees were subjected to, how the police forcibly evicted and dragged them from their makeshift settlements and huddled them into trucks for transporting back to Dandakaranya (Jugantar 16 May 1978: 2). Finally, the whole island was put under siege. The Marichjhapi blockade grabbed first-page headline, "Marichjhapi Saaf" (Marichjhapi Cleansed) (Jugantar 17 May 1979: 1).

That the newspapers, especially the vernacular ones, did not side with the government and adopted a pro-migrant stand thus, becomes clear when one analyses the reportage on Dandakaranya over the years. One of the possible reasons for this stand lies in the fact that the founders of these Bengali newspapers had ancestral homes in East Bengal and therein feelings of affinity and a tentative soft corner for



East Bengali migrants in general. For example, *Jugantar* was started by Tushar Kanti Ghose in 1935, who hailed from Jessore in present-day Bangladesh. Also, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* was founded in 1922 by Prafulla Chandra Sarkar born in Kumarkhali village in Kusthia subdivision, now a district in Bangladesh. In the pre-independence days these newspapers were imbued with patriotic fervour and took a strong nationalist stand and championed the cause of nationalism. Following independence, the next generation of editors of these newspapers became the torchbearers of making the nation. With West Bengal battered by Partition and migration, they became critical observers of the unfolding events.⁷

The migrants

Institutional stand

UCRC (United Central Refugee Council)

The United Central Refugee Council, with leftist leanings, was formed in 1950 as an umbrella organisation encompassing 43 smaller units, with the expressed purpose of protecting the interests of the migrants coming to West Bengal. The UCRC vehemently opposed the Dandakaranya proposal and urged the camp inmates to rise in protest against the high-handedness of the government. In 1958, a congregation was summoned in Asrafabad between 5 and 6 July, where representatives of nearly 60 camps throughout West Bengal attended (UCRC 2000: 20). Strong protests were registered against the government decision to close down the camps and deport the inmates to Dandakaranya. As an alternative, UCRC submitted a memorandum to the government outlining the salient features that might help the migrants find a foothold in West Bengal itself.

Titled the "Alternative Proposal for Rehabilitation of Camp Refugees in West Bengal" it carried a detailed survey of the migrant families in West Bengal, numbering around 55,535 (UCRC 1958: 193). Of these, 10,400 were essentially, what was known in the government parlance as, 'unattached', i.e., children, widows and the aged and hence not deemed fit for rehabilitation. The rest were classified into two: agriculturists and non-agriculturists. Of these, the former numbered around 35,000. Around 7,682 families, out of these, could be absorbed in the Bynanama Scheme,⁸ as per the UCRC contention (ibid.). The government would have to figure out how to rehabilitate the remaining 27,818 families. UCRC laid down the blueprint for the same. Each agricultural family would have to be given around 9 bighas of arable



land and 10 cottahs as homestead plot (UCRC 1958: 11).⁹ The required quantum of land within the state to fructify the proposal would amount to 2.7 lakh bighas. Reclamation of swampy marshy lowlands at the outskirts of Calcutta at Bagjola, Sonarpur-Arpanch and Herobhanga and highlands at Salanpur and Midnapur would solve the problem of land shortage that was the greatest hurdle in the path of rehabilitation within West Bengal,

If schemes of land development and reclamation are undertaken and extended with sincerity and earnestness and if adequate funds are made available it will not be difficult to develop adequate lands in West Bengal for rehabilitation of agriculturalist families now in camps. (UCRC 1958: 32)

In total, the UCRC claimed nearly 88,000 acres of fallow land could be brought under cultivation (ibid.).

The memorandum was accepted in spirit by the state government and the migrants were engaged full-swing in the reclamation process. In case of the Sonarpur-Arpanch scheme, nearly 48 camp families each were allotted six acres of land. They were, however, not destined to enjoy the fruits of their labour for long. The local landless peasants could not reconcile to the fact that these "outsiders" would be allotted land in their home turf, while they will be left in the lurch. Thus, trouble ensued and the "outsiders" were summarily evicted from their possessions (Jugantar 5 February 1960: 3). The story of the Bagjola scheme is a photocopy of the Sonarpur-Arpanch scheme. By the lure of rehabilitation, nearly 1,500 families were made to toil, under the aegis of the reclamation process and it was hoped that 38,000 acres of new land would be available to the disposal of the government (West Bengal Legislative Assembly 27 February 1954: 342).

But local hostility prevented them from putting an end to their misery, while the government remained indifferent to their plight. About 1,200 acres of land had been reclaimed for rehabilitation purpose (ibid.). Even title deeds or 'arpanpatras' were presented to nearly 100 families each of whom were given 6 bighas (Jugantar 28 June 1960: 1). But strong objections by the locals shattered their long-cherished dream of settling down. The locals went to the extent of filing a petition in the High Court who issued a decree in their favour. The government now abandoned the proposal but assured the inmates that they will be rehabilitated. Simultaneously, in Herobhanga and Salanpur although the state government was eager to develop the areas, and submitted a proposal for the same to the central



government for approval, the latter refused to finance such schemes, citing non-feasibility of such a proposal (Ministry of Rehabilitation 1958: 19).

Simultaneously for the non-agricultural families, the alternative proposal suggested the setting up of industrial enterprises like handloom in Santipur, Nadia; engineering works in Rabindranagar, Hooghly; sugar industry in Dhubulia, Nadia. However, as per UCRC, the state government refused to tap the industrial potential of these areas. UCRC lamented, 'If the mineral resources of Dandakaranya can be exploited by the labour of the local people and the refugees, why that can not be done in this state' (UCRC 1958: 35). Thus, UCRC proposals for rehabilitation within the state were dismissed and the state government increasingly pressurised the migrants to shift to Dandakaranya. As evident, the state and the UCRC were at loggerheads from 1958 onwards. The UCRC made it clear at a press conference that they were not against any development project in Dandakaranya but they were apprehensive that 'the people of those regions would not feel happy if these people (East Bengali migrants) were forced to go to Dandakaranya' (The Times of India 26 December 1958: 4).

SBBS (Sara Bangla Bastuhara Samiti)

The SBBS or Sara Bangla Bastuhara Samiti (All Bengal Refugee Association), another motley organisation of the migrants although staunchly anti-Dandakaranya, differed with UCRC in the manner of protest. Though both were politically left-inclined, whereas the UCRC was led essentially by the CPI, with representatives of all major left parties in its fold, the SBBS was led by a splinter group of the left—the Proja Socialist Party—and was essentially active amongst the dalits or the lower-caste refugees in the camp areas. The base of the SBBS was narrow, as compared to UCRC, since they essentially concentrated in organising and agitating for the demands of the marginalised class of refugees. Whereas the UCRC was not in favour of unconstitutional means of agitation, the SBBS adopted a more hardened stand. They spurred the offer of UCRC leader Ambika Chakraborty for a joint protest against the Dandakaranya move. Several leading SBSS men threatened that they would quit the organisation, if a combined protest with UCRC was launched.

Thus, while the SBSS banked more on hunger strikes, public burning of effigies, the UCRC resorted to public meetings where anti-dispersal resolutions were adopted. In 1959, nearly 50,000 courted arrest after



a protest demonstration by SBSS, where the effigies of the political leaders were burnt. Manoranjan Byapari recollects how the SBSS mobilised the Namasudra inmates of various government-run camps in Bankura, against the Dandakaranya drive. SBSS gathered nearly 15,000 inmates of the Siromanipur, Basudevpur 1, 2 and 3 camps, the majority belonging to the Namasudra caste, to stage a sit-in-demonstration against the move in 1959. This was followed with a hunger strike. SBSS chalked out a plan for a more intense demonstration. It was decided that the inmates would march on to the district headquarter at Bishnupur and would lay siege so as to paralyse the district administration unless the Dandakaranya directive was withdrawn. Apprehending trouble, the local administration imposed Section 144. Notwithstanding, the inmates marched on to be met by tear gas shells and merciless lathi charging by the police. Byapari's father was injured in the process (Byapari 2012: 43-6). However, SBSS soon lost steam and after the early 1960s the refugee movement was effectively led by the UCRC.

Once the migrants deserted Dandakaranya to return to West Bengal, the UCRC extended their whole-hearted support and petitioned the government to pay heed to their demand, which the latter refused, unleashing the reign of terror on the Marichjhapi residents, the details of which could be gleaned from the newspaper reports.

Settlers

How did the migrants or the Dandakaranya settlers visualise their situation? Are they happy? Are they content? Large-scale desertion which was extensively reported in the newspapers and which finds scholarly attention especially in the context of Marichjhapi, prompts one to question, why did these migrants stay back in Dandakaranya and do they regret their decision? Till date, historiography essentially pits the Dandakaranya tale, extracted from official memoirs and newspaper reports, as a sordid story of hardship and misery. But is there another side of the same story? When one talks with the present-day inhabitants of Dandakaranya, one gets to know of the other perspectives. The picture of quotidian struggle and betrayal of trust does come up in the narratives. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, who migrated in 1960-61 to Malkangiri, recounts that the land they were given for rehabilitation and cultivation was overgrown with grass. They were promised that they would be provided with irrigation facilities that would aid in crop production twice a year so that a steady flow of



income could be ensured (Majumdar 2009). But unfortunately, such promises were belied,

60% irrigational works in our area is yet to be completed after so many years, though money was earmarked for the same. In 1988, work was officially stopped. Thus our only source of water for agricultural purposes remains rainfall, which is inadequate for production. In order to supplement our income, many work as agricultural labourers. No other alternative employment is available. (ibid.)

Tara Kishkor, who along with his family was sent over in 1962, still lives in a mud hut. When the drive towards Sundarbans peaked up in the 1970s, Kishkor, too, joined the group. But midway, the government offered them sops to lure them back to Malkangiri. He now rues, '*Ekhaney kono shanti pelam na* (We never found any peace here)' (Kishkor 2009). Malkangiri presents a dismal picture where the settlers are still finding it hard to gather two square meals a day. They engage in odd jobs like beedi-binding and day labour. Development has eluded them even after more than fifty years of independence.

But can this negative picture be generalised? When one listens to some other voices one gets a different feel. Sunderlal Seal of Umar-kote, who came over in 1960, i.e., in the early years of the project, expresses his happiness at the state of things,

Agricultural production is good, especially paddy cultivation. More or less in every household the employable population are in jobs. There are several meritorious students who later on went on to become doctors, engineers or civil servants. There are around 4 doctors, one engineer and an IAS officer from the Punjab cadre. (Seal 2009)

Pijushkanti Manjhi, another interviewee, narrates his family history to show how they did not cling to land only, but gradually moved towards white-collar jobs, 'My elder brother works in the fields, I am employed as a senior clerk in the agricultural department, my younger brother is associated with a private sector company' (Manjhi 2009).

On the Chattisgarh side also, the picture was not that dark and gloomy. Kartik Sarkar, who came to Dandakaranya and settled near Pakhanjore recalls that the surroundings were all barren. He now owns two ploughs and two pairs of cattle. While his fields yield paddy during the summers, winter crop is mainly pulses. Vegetables also grow aplenty (Sarkar 2009). Sibananda Roy, the local postmaster, who came over in 1962, recalls the early days when the area was covered



with thick forests and bulldozers were used to clear the jungles to make way for resettlement. Although those were difficult years with cholera epidemic, scanty medical facilities, maladministration, they were determined to carve out their own identity and never to give up. He also recalls with gratitude the help they received from the local Gond tribals which helped them tide over many crises. Gradually, their life gained pace and rhythm (Roy 2009). Sailen Biswas, teacher at the Baragaon High School, encapsulates the feeling in two words, '*Bhaloi achhi* (We are doing well)' (Biswas 2009). Pakhanjore is now in fact a prosperous town, thanks to the toil and labour of the Bengali settlers. It boasts of two high schools, one college and a hospital. Sweet delicacies, the integral component of a Bengali palate, are found in abundance in the sweetmeat shops dotting Pakhanjore. One owned by Hemanta Sarkar does brisk business as his *bonde* and *rasogolla* are in high demand amongst the locals.

Manoranjan Biswas of Malkangiri, a migrant and an erstwhile DDA worker, although led the exodus to Marichjhapi in 1978, realised that Marichjhapi would not be a paradise compared to Dandakaranya. He returned to Malkangiri and is now one of the most affluent farmers of that area. His source of wealth is his roaring business of pisciculture. N.C. Banik, who started his life in Malkangiri as a petty trader, is now in his own words, 'a business magnate, whose textile business runs into crores of rupees' (Banik 2009). Nirmal Chandra Majumdar, another resident, who, too had migrated to Sundarbans and returned, opines that had they not gone to Sundarbans, they would not have felt the tug of Dandakaranya which prompted their reverse migration. He, too, is now a wealthy agriculturist of that area (Majumdar 2009).

Has the search for home ended for these residents or do they still look back to their East Bengali home? Especially for those who have found material stability and are comparatively well-off? Sunderlal Seal still feels the pull of his erstwhile home in East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh), 'this is nothing in comparison to what we lost. That was *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal)' (Seal 2009). Manoranjan Biswas echoes the same sentiment, 'There is no place like East Bengal [...] we had everything back there [...] there was so much peace and happiness all around' (Biswas 2009). East Bengal, to them, is 'not merely a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space' (Rubenstein 2001: 1). They spend a lot of time regretting what they had lost, envying those around them 'who had always been at home near their loved ones, living in the place where they were born and grew up without even having to experience not only the loss of what



was once theirs but above all the torturing memory of life to which they cannot return' (Said 1996: 62). They remain prisoners of the memories of their homeland—the rivers of East Bengal like the Padma, Meghna and Arialkha, the beauty of nature, the relaxed village life, the atmosphere of peace, tranquility and camaraderie, i.e., an idyllic life torn to pieces by the tornado called Partition. Material stability has failed to erase or dim the memories of their home on the other side of the river Ganga. They do share cordial relationships with their tribal neighbours, 'We always shared a very warm relation with our tribal friends' recalls Murari Mohan Mondal (Mondal 2009). There is intermingling and admixture, 'We visited their homes during festivals [...] they too reciprocated by participating in Durga Puja. In times of crisis, we used to borrow from each other' (ibid.). But even then, as Edward Said has pointed out, 'once you leave your home, wherever you end up, you simply cannot take up life and become just another citizen of the new place' (Said 1996: 61f.). Thus, they carry 'their "homes" on their back' (Roy 2000: 182).

If one listens to this cross-section of voices, one can get a nuanced view of the Dandakaranya scenario, which was not altogether bleak for those who settled there. If one traverses through Paralkote, one would chance upon green fields yielding various crops, owned and managed by the settlers, who are now an integral part of the local society. There were initial frictions with the local tribals who were understandably sceptic of these outsiders. The government report notes there were around 98 incidents of crop looting by the tribals (Government of India 1978: 86). However, over the years, such differences have largely been ironed out as testified by many of the interviewees. Banana plantations, maize fields, cashew nut orchards testify to the affluence of the Bengali settlers, who have scripted their own success stories. Many of the residents, who weathered the adversities in the initial days, have found stability and do not regret their decision to stay back.

This also helps to break the stereotype perpetrated in government discourse of the un-enterprising, indolent Bengali refugee community, 'completely shattered in body and spirit, all initiatives all capacity for self-adjustment drained out of him' (U Bhaskar Rao 1967: 148). While Prafulla K. Chakrabarti demolishes such coinage in his analysis of the squatters' colonies in West Bengal, a similar story can be sketched if one sifts through the voices of the Dandakaranya settlers. Unfortunately, Dandakaranya has been portrayed essentially as a mammoth failure, a project gone awry. But if one takes stock of the situation in



its present context, one can see that it was not a complete failure for some.

It is true that development in many places still eludes this belt covering the two states. In Malkangiri, the residents complain that many deserving applicants have not received their due under the Indira Awas Yojana and Million Wells Scheme.¹⁰ Maoists, who are very active in these areas, are known for blockading roads and traffic and planting land mines, thus cutting off the zone from the rest of the country. Often the security forces are ambushed, making the area inaccessible and dangerous even for the state forces. An independent investigation by the leading English daily *The Telegraph* in Malkangiri in 2011, reveals how development has bypassed some of the core areas. Now a full-fledged district of Orissa, the 100km long Malkangiri-Jeypore Road, the district's only link to the rest of the state, 'is a never-ending stretch of craters, some of them deep enough to swallow a small car' (*The Telegraph* 27 February 2011:1). But even then, the picture of prosperity at places does not elude one.

From the viewpoint of social integration, there is considerable admixture with the local tribal population. On the face of it, there does not seem to be much animosity between the two. But psychological assimilation with the existing set-up perhaps eludes a few, as is evident from some of the voices, steeped in nostalgia for their lost homeland. Though materially well off, their financial stability could not erase the deep sense of loss. From that angle, one can dub the project a failure since it failed to obliterate the sepia-toned images from the memories of the elderly residents of Dandakaranya. However, if one takes conditions of material livelihood of some of the settlers in account, then to dismiss the scheme as resulting in untold misery and emphasising the same without acknowledging that it did some good at least for some, would be presenting an incomplete picture.

Conclusion

This article has aimed at introducing readers to the myriad layers of discourses on the experiences of refugees from East Bengal who went to Dandakaranya after their arrival in West Bengal. It has presented two important voices within the 'official' discourse, which reveal how a lack of planning led to unfavourable consequences for an efficient execution of the project. These insider perspectives, coming from officials who worked within the ambit of the project, add an important dimension to understanding how and what went wrong with Danda-



karanya. Similarly, the article has highlighted the predominant discourse in West Bengali newspapers, which held an anti-government stance in opposing the project and pointed to the fallacies of the same, the hardships faced by the settlers of Dandakaranya and the atrocities faced by the settlers at Marichjhapi, who had returned from Dandakaranya. Within the larger field of the migrants' experiences, it first traces the positions of the UCRC (United Central Refugee Council) and the SBBS (Sara Bangla Bastuhara Samiti), two organisations that were opposed to the project and aimed at voicing the interests of the migrants. From a less institutionalised perspective, the article has resorted to oral history as a means to present some of the voices of the settlers in Dandakaranya.

This viewpoint is also highly valuable as it shows how numerous settlers, who still are residents of Dandakaranya and did not return to West Bengal, did manage to start new lives. Though interspersed with a sense of loss for the place where they were born, they nonetheless narrate accounts of contentment. Though miniscule, one needs to pay cognisance to these "other" voices that go against the dominant discourse as well. As Gyanendra Pandey opines, 'There are many different stories to be told about 1947, many different perspectives to be recovered, stories and perspectives that tell of other histories. [...]' (Pandey 2001: 44). Such "other" voices hardly find space in the existing literature. Though the negative aspect of the project can be concluded from the variety of sources, oral and written, government as also personal, a few success stories which came up during the interviews have never come up in any of the writings based on interviews/written sources/novels. This article has attempted to also cull out such "other" voices to portray that for some Dandakaranya was not an unmitigated disaster and helped them to find a sense of meaning in their existence after the crossover.

However, the larger story of Dandakaranya is further diversified by simultaneous narratives of the majority of migrants for whom the project failed to provide the much-needed relief and stability that they were in search of after their migration to West Bengal. The article draws home the multi-layered and complex discourses and experiences about the project, therein moving beyond its simplistic depiction as entirely positive or negative. While paying heed to stories of hope, the "other" voices, it has nonetheless given cognisance to narratives of failure, loss and disillusionment in official accounts, media landscapes as well as personal narrations.



Endnote

The interviews were taken as part of the project "The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India" hosted by the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata. I am grateful to Professor Subho-ranjan Dasgupta for allowing the use of these interviews. They were taken in the course of a fieldwork undertaken in September 2009 in Malkangiri zone of Koraput district in Odisha and Paralkote in the Bastar district of then Madhya Pradesh and present-day Chattisgarh. 56 interviews were taken over a course of 15 days.

Endnotes

¹ In contrast to the abovementioned Old Migrants I and II as well as the new migrants who came up to 1971, those who came after 1971 were termed as evacuees i.e. they were temporary migrants who were given essential relief and housed in relief camps adjacent to the West Bengal-Bangladesh border so that once situation returns to normal the evacuees, under government supervision, would be transported back to Bangladesh.

² This status was determined by the government on the basis of the families' level of education, past profession etc. It specifically referred to families which were based in the rural areas but not dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

³ See endnote 10.

⁴ The reason for the same was that the state was already saturated after providing rehabilitation to a majority of the Old Migrants category I. Hence those migrating from April 1958 were clubbed into a separate category as Old Migrants category II and separate schemes were formulated for them. The residue population of Old Migrants category I who could not be rehabilitated within March 1958 and still languished within the camps were offered rehabilitation in Dandakaranya along with Old Migrant category II.

⁵ This model is named after Professor P.C. Mahalanobis, the architect of India's Second Five year Plan, was who designed a four-sector model for economic growth. He prioritised investment goods as crucial for economic growth but at the same time did not minimise the importance of industry, agriculture and cottage industry and service, education and health (Karmakar 2012: 121-32).

⁶ The newspaper carried out an independent investigation and published a daily report on the basis of that investigation.

⁷ Other newspapers like *The Statesman* (English daily), *Dainik Basumati* (Bengali daily), too, aired similar views in their reporting.

⁸ Under this scheme, the displaced families would themselves find land for their resettlement and loans would be advanced to them for the purchase of land on the basis of a Byananama i.e., an agreement of sale entered into between the displaced persons and private owners. Once the loan was sanctioned the migrant should furnish proofs of land transfer and apply for home building loans. Once the house was constructed he was supposed to leave the camp and shift to the new site.

⁹ Bigha and cottah are traditional units of measurement. There are no standard conversion rates. For a bigha the range might vary between 1,500 to 6,771 square metres, where for a cottah the range might be between 720 ft to 2880 ft. Usually 20 cottahs consist of 1 bigha.



¹⁰ Indira Awas Yojana was a welfare scheme launched in 1985, by the Government of India to provide housing for the poor by giving them financial assistance. Million Wells Scheme was launched in 1988-89 with the objective of providing free of cost open irrigation wells to poor, small and marginal farmers. It has now been renamed as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin. Source: <http://iay.nic.in/netiay/home.aspx> [retrieved 16.11.2017].

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