

## **Disease and Death: Issues of Public Health Among East Bengali Refugees in 1971**

*“Because of 'Operation Searchlight', 10 million refugees came to India, most of them living in appalling conditions in the refugee camps. I cannot forget seeing 10 children fight for one chapatti. I cannot forget the child queuing for milk, vomiting, collapsing and dying of cholera. I cannot forget the woman lying in the mud, groaning and giving birth.”*

The situation of East Bengali refugees in 1971 was grim. The Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 witnessed 10 million people from erstwhile East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), fleeing the persecution by Pakistani soldiers and coming to India seeking refuge. The sudden influx of refugees created a mammoth humanitarian crisis. At one hand, the refugees were struggling to access food, water, proper sanitation, shelter. On the other hand, their lives were tormented by various health issues. The cholera epidemic of 1971 alone killed over 5,000 refugees. Other health concerns were malnutrition, exhaustion, gastronomical diseases. “A randomized survey on refugee health highlights the chief medical challenges in the refugee population as being malnutrition, diarrhoea, vitamin-A deficiency, pyoderma, and tuberculosis.” This research paper studies the public health crisis among the refugees of West Bengal in 1971 and the government, international and local measures to alleviate the crisis.