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## Displacement, rehabilitation and social change: Problems and concerns of the Partion of India

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### Abstract

It has become a matter of great concern that what we have achieved with the partition of the Indian sub-continent. Almost all the scholars and historians from both the nations have started asking question about this horrible, unplanned and homicide partition. After the partition the Islamic nation of Pakistan emerged as a sovereign nation while India was declared 'a nation for all'. During the process of the settlement of the migrated people from and in both the sides, at least 10 million people were displaced and as many as one million were killed in the violence. The Indian government had to stretch itself to the maximum to give relief to and resettle and rehabilitate the nearly six million refugees from Pakistan who had lost their all there and whose world had been turned upside down. The task took some time but it was accomplished. It is now well established that the "state" (in either its colonial or post-colonial forms) was not a rational bystander to social violence, but complicit in producing and organizing it. The recent studies have placed the refugees as a central subject of analysis in relation to partition. The scholars have started examine Partition's refugees as a new kind of political subject or as a new social form which shapes the process of post-colonial state formation, rather than victims of the violence that created mass displacement. In the present paper I propose the reminiscences and evocations related to the grounds of their displacement and rehabilitation and the cultural aftermath.

**Keywords:** Partition, violence, displacement, disfiguration, refugees, communal, subcontinent, migration etc.

### Introduction

The term Partition is not alien to us and we know that it stands for a kind of separation. Separation which always brings a kind of anxiety, agony and a feeling of loneliness. Obviously, when we talk about India's partition, it does not only have the geographical implications but also have its psychological, spiritual and contemporary consequences. The division of Indian Empire into two new nation-states was announced by the British Prime Minister Atlee on 3 June, 1947. The bulletin about the division of approx. 1.8 million square miles of the Indian Empire, at least twenty times bigger than the size of Britain itself, was broadcasted around 7 pm of Indian Standard Time. That was the end of the colonial rule of almost about two centuries (200 years) and the beginning of two new separate sovereign countries: India and Pakistan. The borders of these two newly build states were mainly divided along the religious lines because till then the enmity between Hindus and Muslims started dominating the politics of the Indian sub-continent. Therefore, these religions appeared to be the decisive factors for creating the identity of both the nations- India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims. That summer in 1947, unbelievable ferocity shoot up, particularly in the disputed territories. The partition of India became one of the biggest examples of displacements in the history of mankind after Second World War where around one million humans died; and about 20 million people were dislocated.

There were many shortcomings and questions in the process of division. The most important of these questions was how the maps of the new nations were to be drawn and when they were to be published. The last viceroy of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, was given a June 1948 deadline to disentangle the British Empire from India. Yet, after arriving in India, he decided to move the decolonization process ten months forward to August 15, 1947, presumably because he decided that "rapprochement between the various parties was impossible".

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What more ironical was the fact that in accordance, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who had never been to India, was appointed to lead the Boundary Commission consisting of four South Asian judges. Although these political appointments aimed to ensure equal representation, the commission lacked any advisers familiar with even the basics of boundary-making. Radcliff and his South Asian colleagues, all legal experts, did not have any previous experience of boundary-settlement. Along with the lack of expert knowledge, an extremely tight timeline made it impossible to gather surveys and other vital information to support a well-informed decision on where to draw the boundary lines. Radcliffe arrived in India on July 8, more than a month after the announcement of the partition. He learned that he had to finish drawing the map by August 15.

When Mountbatten released the final boundary decision, known as the "Radcliffe line", the people from both the nations were not ready to accept it. As a result, violence started in all these areas. The question was that the announcement also did not specify that what about the people from both the countries who did not want to leave their original nation irrespective of their religion. There wasn't any guidelines for the people who did not belong to those two religions. As such, South Asians today still feel the effects of an event which occurred 73 years ago, and it continues to attract scholarly research and cultural currency.

### **Refugees and Nation-Making**

In this context, the events of 1947–48 profoundly undermined communal identities previously held in each respective population for generations. On the subcontinent, millions who identified themselves primarily through religious, caste-bound, regional, and linguistic associations, suddenly became "Indian" or "Pakistani". This is a story of memory's generation, and its regeneration and transformation over time, following cataclysmic historical events experienced as rupture, dislocation, and triumph. Each generation has struggled to tell this formative national story in its own way. Thus in Palestinian, Israeli, Pakistani, and Indian societies we find critical reinterpretations of fundamental narratives that had been originally promulgated by first-generation leaders and intellectuals in accordance with nationalist imperatives of their immediate postcolonial era.

The Indian National Congress in March passed the resolution that if there was to be a Partition, it would ask for a partition of Bengal and Punjab. All parties agreed to the partition of Punjab and Bengal. On 3 June Mountbatten, along with M. A. Jinnah and J. Nehru, made the declaration on radio that Partition would take place on 14/15 August. So the plan was to be made effective within weeks. There was of course great joy that Pakistan would become a reality, yet disappointment that the states of Punjab and Bengal would be partitioned. That brings us to the question of a 'national' population. Which population belonged to what land? In the 20 years from the 1930s and the first articulation of a separate territorial homeland, the idea of nationality evolved dramatically. Pakistan was enunciated as a homeland for Muslims. Having said that, in Jinnah's speeches at least this homeland was not a homogeneous place. In Nehru's and Gandhi's speeches India was to be a homeland of multiple religious, linguistic and cultural groups.

There remains another important context of partition – that of governance/government. The decision regarding

partitioning into two states was being taken in a particular imperial context, as well as at the start of the Cold War context of international relations. The governments of the time – the British government of Churchill and then Atlee, the Indian government of Lord Wavell and then Lord Mountbatten, the provincial governments of India that were supposed to maintain law and order – dramatically failed in their task. The British Government of Clement Atlee clearly rejected any responsibility for safe-keeping of the refugees around 1947. Their responsibility did not extend beyond appointing a boundary commission, advised by local politicians in India, to draw the line between the states. Their concern was the repatriation of troops and personnel from India.

The paradigmatic experience of Partition was not simply an inter-communal experience of war and conquest; it grew out of the actions of a state that had lost the will to govern. It was really shocking to find that the people who used to live happily with each other were now ready to kill and destroy and particularly in the areas of Punjab and Bengal, the situation was very tensed and critical. By 1948, as the great migration drew to a close, it was recorded that many people became homeless and so many of them lost their own people. Not only had this innumerable number of women faced humiliations and molestations.

It was really surprising that the followers of both the religions who used to live happily and in close relationship with each other suddenly became the enemy and started killing each other. However, everyone wants to discuss the reason behind the growing enmity between the Hindu and Muslims. Many people witnessed that a day before of the day assigned for freedom, the Viceroy was enjoying the evening with his wife by watching a movie, while the common public from both the nations were facing bloodshed and deadly violence. Even at that time when our first Prime Minister was delivering his famous speech and informing the world about the freedom of India, at the very same time millions of people were becoming displaced and the women were losing their respect. When the British army was going back to their homeland, that time also severe looting, slaughter and butchery were taking place there. The railway platform were also filled with pool of bloods and no one was there to take care of the railway system. Nobody can forget the coming of the train from Lahore which brought only the dead bodies with a severely injured driver.

The incidents that took place in Bengal and Punjab could be sentenced as one of the most horrible experiences of the history. What followed, especially in Punjab, the principal center of the violence, was one of the great human tragedies of the twentieth century. Some of the great literary figures of the continent projected this division as one of the cruelest incidents of the human history. They have written a lot about the madness and inhuman activities of the humans from both the sides.

Now since the time of partition the relationship between both these nations has become bad to worse. Now they have to be ready to fight with each other all the time. Other than open wars both the countries are also facing the terror of pseudo war. The war, that took place between these two nations, had originated a third nation, Bangladesh. How can we forget the war of Kargil in which we have lost so many of our soldiers? The brutality, the butchery, the bloodshed, the violence, the killings, the molestations, the slaughter and the massacre that we have witnessed in all these wars really

define the implications of this partition. At one time, it was felt that these countries might use the nuclear weapon against each other. This also controls the growth and development of both the countries because they are spending a lot for their defenses. So the areas like education and other welfare schemes are highly affected and it's a kind of obstacle in the path of progress. The fear of terrorist attack is also one of the gifts we have achieved from this drastic event.

Legacy of the Partition provides a backdrop against which to place unresolved conflicts and a feeling of enmity and hatred for each other. Some of the notorious terrorists have presented their viewpoints in front of us with their writings in which they have mentioned their bitter experiences of the time of partition. The impact and implication of this partition cannot be cleared with any kind of detergent and this should also be accepted that we all have to face and suffer a lot due to this. Accounts of the Partition vary not only between neighboring nations, but also within India, where they depend to a great extent on the perspective stemming from one's social position. The British historian Ian Talbot pointed out that official Indian accounts of the rehabilitation of refugees elevate the heroic efforts of the Indian state. Quite another picture emerges when the same events are depicted by refugees, yet narrative dissonance occurs even among these accounts, with the texture of the narrative in most cases highly correlated with the social status of the narrator at the time of the events.

The writers, artists, film-makers and other creative people have worked a lot on this topic. They have reflected their intelligence, credibility and creativity by means of their products. Its because of these literary figures and constructive minds that we are compelled to rethink about the consequences of separation and also to put the question about the inevitability of this incident. There are numerous story tellers, novelists, dramatists, poets and journalists who have presented each and every aspect of the torture of people through their art. Many of them also raise the question that who was interested to get the division of Indian sub-continent? According to them if the Britishers believed in the theory of divide and rule, then why we had given them a chance to fulfil their motto. After studying the literature of both sides it can be said that this incident took place not as a result of English imperialism but also to satisfy the political motifs of the political leaders of both the sides. We should be highly thankful to all these writers particularly to present the real glimpse of the historical event. Special mention here of the great Pakistani writer, Intizar Hussain's short story *Woh Jo Kho Gaye* which has a very nostalgic representation of the feelings for the lost people during partition.

Memories with regard to the Partition have taken many forms depending on whether they have been politically proclaimed or whether they have been personally experienced, and were perhaps suppressed or hidden. Like the currents and eddies of a river, they are fluid and changeable, in that they are continually constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. There is an urgent need to understand the effects of forced displacement, so that policies can develop in ways that take account of both immediate and long term needs of refugees, and contribute to their resilience building. This could help mitigate the impact of the psychological and social stresses experienced by refugees during and after migration. Whilst recognizing

that geopolitical, economic and cultural influences affect the health of refugees, it is important to explore new possibilities for emotional health promotion research, practice and education in refugee-receiving societies. The psychological and social stresses experienced by refugees during migration can double the prevalence of severe disorders (psychosis, severe depression and disabling anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)), and increase the prevalence of mild to moderate mental disorders from 10% to 15%–20%, according to the World Health

### **Millions on the Move**

*Millions on the Move* (a step taken by Ministry of culture) initiated the vision of a uniform refugee migration experience. This became associated with iconic images drawn from the Punjab of men, women and children with their heavily laden bullock carts travelling across tracks of ground inundated by the monsoon rains; trains with not only their carriages, but running boards and roofs, packed with refugees. In Bengal, however, people moved much more by steamer. Even in Punjab, the reality was different from the standard portrayal. There was considerable anticipatory migration by the wealthy moneylenders and businessmen from Lahore. It was the poorer Hindus and those who were less politically sensitive who were left as acute migrants to scramble for safety in August 1947. Even the wealthy who had left it late to depart could buy their way to safety. It is a little remarked fact of partition migration history that the British Overseas Airways Corporation transported 28,000 people from Pakistan in the period 15 September to 7 December, 1947. This was in addition to the twice daily service from Lahore to Amritsar run by the Indian National Airways. Such passengers could look down on the burning villages and ant-like refugee columns traversing the Punjab's killing fields. On the rare occasions when the elite travelers were inconvenienced it reached the highest levels of Government. Nehru noted with displeasure early in October 1947, an incident when a flight direct from Peshawar to Delhi had to set down at Lahore because of slight engine trouble and its 'occupants had been stripped of all their belongings'.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to status, the uniform understanding of the migration experience in *Millions on the Move* does not reflect fully on the gendered dimension which has been the focus of much recent work, especially with respect to the recovery of abducted women. By October 1952, just over 8,000 women and children had been rehabilitated from Pakistan. Recovery was in some instances forced and involved separation from children and new family ties for an uncertain reception in the land of the abducted women's origin. The task of recovery was nevertheless actively pursued by the state agencies as it was seen as important for Indian honour and building the nation in the wake of partition. Just as women were not in charge of their own fate with respect to recovery, so in the words of Ravinder Kaur, 'they do not author' their partition history. Official accounts constitute them as 'victims' who can be statistically accounted for, but whose range of experiences is condensed in the generalized partition narrative.

Despite the failures to address the intricacies and inadequacies of the rehabilitation process, the official account nonetheless points to the fact that the solution of the refugee problem impacted heavily on nation-building and political development throughout the subcontinent. The

need to coordinate resources to deal with the refugee influx, meant that the most important embodiments of the early post-colonial Indian State were the Emergency Cabinet Committee, chaired by Lord Mountbatten, and the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. The latter had an 'ambiguous' relationship with the non-state agency Central Relief Committee founded by the All-India Congress Committee in late July 1947. This new body bypassed traditional agencies such as the Public Works Department and, according to Ravinder Kaur, displayed 'a reformist zeal and urgency' which was different from the institutions inherited from the colonial state. The fear of food shortage and population explosion that were fuelled by concerns around refugee influx. The figure of the refugee soon came to take centre stage in Nehruvian discourses on nation-making. In postcolonial India's developmental narrative, the ideal refugee came to be imagined as a hardworking, disciplined, and obedient individual who, despite experiencing the trauma of partition, was always eager to provide labour for building the nation (Sen 2010; Sengupta 2017). Producing the ideal refugee, therefore, required the state to don the pedagogue's robe. Kaustubh Mani Sengupta's (p 58) article on refugee education and training in West Bengal throws light not only on the educational initiatives that specifically targeted refugees, but it shows how the government's refugee education policies can help understand the classificatory strategies of the postcolonial state and the biases that informed such bureaucratic decisions. There was no educational policy for all refugees. "Bhadralok refugees" took their own initiatives to establish schools in the squatter colonies they set up on the fringes of Calcutta. But the task of educating "subaltern refugees"-poor migrants from low- or middle-caste backgrounds who left Pakistan mostly in the 1950s and 1960s, often riding on the tides of communal violence-was taken up by the state. The vast majority of these refugees, who were dependent on government relief and rehabilitation, were sent to camps throughout West Bengal and outside (Basu Ray Chaudhury 2000; Ghosh 2000; Chatterji 2007; Sen 2010). In determining the education policy for these subaltern refugees, the government made distinctions on the grounds of whether they hailed from rural or non-rural areas. Determined to remould them in the image of a productive labourer, government schemes emphasised vocational training. However, presumptions about the kinds of work that suited the different categories of refugees, which often had firm roots in official misconceptions, precipitated the failure of such state- driven initiatives. The Nehruvian projection of the ideal refugee as a productive labourer for nation-building influenced refugee self-fashioning, as Garima Dhabhai's (p 66) article on Sindhi refugees in Jaipur shows. Turning the commonly used descriptive category of sharanarthi (refugee-seeker) on its head, these refugees inscribed themselves into the urban space of Jaipur as purusharthi (hard- worker/entrepreneur). She charts how they were accommodated within the landscape of the walled city-the markets that sprang up, the residential colonies that were established-as Jaipur underwent transformation from a princely state to the capital of Rajasthan.

### Conclusion

The refugee problem threatened social order and the dislocation of caste, class and gender hierarchies. For this reason the early post- independence Indian state devoted considerable resources to deal with the situation in its most acute form involving Punjabi migrants. It also sought to legitimize itself in dealing with the humanitarian issues arising from mass migration. The securing of moral

authority through the rehabilitation process was significant, given the earlier failure to protect minority rights and the complicity of officials in the massacres which sparked the migrations. The production of official accounts such as *The Story of Rehabilitation* was crucial to this legitimization process. While such writings produced a standardized account of refugee experience which diverges from a far more complex reality, they were not merely rhetorical productions, given the large amount of resources devoted at national and state level with respect to the Punjab refugee crisis. The recent emergence of oral based accounts has provided a diametrically opposing narrative of the rehabilitation process in which the state is conspicuously absent. Both psychological needs and the restoration of community pride called for understandings which played down state agency and emphasized personal autonomy. The colonially constructed stereotype of Punjabi pride, courage and self-reliance provided a 'myth' with which to inform first hand accounts. At the same time, the culture of corruption encouraged the silences surrounding the state in personal narratives. It reduced the effectiveness of state provision for many refugees. Simultaneously its existence created embarrassment for those who flourished in this environment through their utilization of wealth and political connections. The temptation to hide these personal details by passing down a community influenced memory of self-reliance cannot be overlooked by oral historians.

Finally it is important to acknowledge that the overwhelming upper class character of oral testimonies may have exaggerated the downsizing of the state's role in the 'history from beneath' of rehabilitation. Wealthier refugees were not only more likely to buy into the Punjabi myths of self-reliance, but to have the most to hide in terms of their dealings with the state. Poor migrants on the contrary had little power or ability to access the state on their own terms. They were, to put it bluntly, in no position to bribe officials to ease the rehabilitation process. Yet, however 'paltry' and discriminatory was the state's response to their needs, it represented, especially for Untouchables, a radical break with the past. They had nothing to lose by acknowledging their gratitude for this assistance. It is thus likely that if further recovery of the Untouchable experience of the aftermath of partition is undertaken, the yawning chasm between the official and first-hand accounts of the rehabilitation process may be somewhat narrowed.

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