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DISPERSAL AND REHABILITATION OF THE REFUGEES FROM WEST PAKISTAN

Prof. Hema Ravi Pinjani

Department of History, R. K. Talreja College, Ulhasnagar, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

The paper focuses on the exodus of the Sindhi Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan at the time of independence of India. As the news of communal violence was heard, some prominent personalities in Sind were convinced that the migration would take place. Ultimately it was the Karachi riots, 6th January 1948 and the accelerated threat to life that led to exodus of Sindhi Hindus to India. The choice of most of the displaced persons was to migrate to the port and commercial city of Bombay, a modern metropolis and comparable with Karachi in Sind.

Due to this it led to establishment of camps at various places in Bombay. The paper continues and mentions about these various camps, the reception and aid that came to be given to displaced persons by the Chief Refugee officer on their arrival. Apart from this initial help, the paper focuses on the efforts of both the government and social organizations that helped in the rehabilitation of the displaced persons, also then termed as refugees.

The paper is then concluded. It is a kind of attitude study of the migrants towards the government. As in a direct talk to some of the respondents who had experienced partition and migration, they showed resentment and even sometimes, pointed out maladministration of the government. But this resentment, one can say is proportionate to the various hardships suffered by the displaced persons. But, as is clearly seen today, rehabilitation and resettlement of large number of people has been fairly successful. This, one can believe has been possible only due to the concerted efforts of government and mental adjustment of the displaced in the new place of residence.

Keywords: *Dispersion, Rehabilitation, Displaced Persons, Refugees.*

Sind had been the land of immigration and exoduses. In Sind came the Arghuns and Tarkhans from Central Asia, Baluchis from West, Rajputs and Kutchis from South East and Punjabis, Siraikis and Pathans from North. And during these periods of history, the Sindhi Hindus though a minority in Sind were financially prosperous. In 1947, the year of Independence and partition of India, the Sindhi Hindus were faced with a difficult decision to make i. e. whether to leave or to stay. There were reports coming continuously on the radio of mass migration due to violence spreading rapidly. In spite of glaring episodes of communal ill will being heard each day, many saw partition as temporary. But the exodus of Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab and Muslims from East Punjab had already begun.

Hiranand Kirpalani, was the first to join the Indian Civil Service in 1947 as the financial commissioner of the canal colonies in West Punjab. He was then followed by his brother Santdas Kirpalani. While in West Punjab, Hiranand was convinced that Sindhi Hindus needed to migrate to India. But his warnings were shrugged by the Sindhi Hindus. The reason stated by some was that, they had received personal assurances of protection from the Premier Hidayatullah. Also in the Sindhi Congress, Professor Narayandas Malkani and Choithram Gidwani, president of Sind Provincial Congress Committee had presaged mass migration of Hindus much before partition. And their attention was drawn to Rajasthan, adjacent to

Sind and also under populated. On his part Dr. Chiothram Gidwani had already petitioned Bombay government for accommodation and succor in case of large scale migration. His brother Shamdas Gidwani too had made separate petitions to government of Bombay and United Province. By the middle of July 1947, some of the prominent Sindhi Hindu business men of Bombay formed an association Sind Hindu Seva Samiti that aimed to help Sindhi Hindus.

Role of Congress and Issue of Migration

Congress over the issue of separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency had lost its popularity among Sindhi Hindus. Then in the elections of 1946, Congress came to power. But once again Congress over the issue of the partition of the country had become unpopular with the masses. Congress, maintaining its official line that Sindhi Hindus, though a minority in Sind should not migrate, as though nothing had changed.

Finally on 3rd June 1947, partition of India was announced. A meeting of the All India Congress Committee was then convened on 14th June in Delhi resisted the idea of partition and demanded provisions for the security of the minorities. However, this demand was ignored. To this Dr. Choithram Gidwani said, "There is neither justice nor any matter of principle that those who

have to suffer the most from partition are not given voice, and no plans are being drawn up for their safety"¹

Finally on 15th August 1947, India got independence and was partitioned. Partition was a long drawn process. As it was not merely the division of the country, redistribution of provinces and establishments of separate governments. But partition dealt with human beings and the mass migration of population across the new boundaries. Seventeen lakhs crossed borders each way i. e. India and Pakistan, as reported in Bombay Chronicle, dated September 1947. All modes of transport were pressed into service to speed up the evacuation.

Karachi Riots - 6th January 1948 and the Migration of Sindhi Hindus

The city of Karachi was looted and the strong roots of Hindus were ripped in a day. They faced a strong sense of discrimination and an accelerated threat to their life since January 1948. This led to the Sindhi Hindus exodus to India. Karachi riots ended by 9th January 1948 and the city was quietened. Ships then begun to leave Karachi for Bombay and the ports of Gujarat. Between 9th January to 15th January, about 18, 000 Hindus and Sikhs left Sind as estimated by Nandita Bhavnani in her book titled, 'The Making of Exile –Sindhi Hindus and the partition of India'. By mid June 1948, 10, 00, 000 Hindus had migrated to India. Thus beginning from 1947, the major evacuation continued for a period of three years and was finally tapered off in 1951. The once flourishing town of Karachi was left with a scant population of 150,000 to 200,000.

By the first anniversary of Indian independence 12,00,000 to 14,00,000 Sindhi Hindus came over to India. They had left their homeland permanently and started their trek towards a new abode and for the most of them the choice was Bombay.

Reasons to Come to Bombay

In a direct talk with some of the senior citizens who have experienced partition and migration many stated the reasons as to why their choice was choice was Bombay. It was stated by most of them that the safest way to travel was by ship from Karachi to Bombay, as trains in most cases were prone to attack. And in a steamer it enabled them (migrants) to carry as much luggage as possible with them.

Bombay also had a deep psychological significance for them, as is seen from the work of Dr. Subhadra Anand. Sind being a part of Bombay Presidency up to 1936, the colleges of Sind were affiliated to Bombay University. So at the time of partition and migration, this made the educational transfer of Sindhi students comparatively easier. Also many of the Sindhi Hindu traders had their branch offices in Bombay and some could rely on their relatives in Bombay for accommodation. And even for those who had neither family nor friends in Bombay were attracted towards the dream city. As Bombay was a port and commercial city and a modern metropolis comparable with Karachi.

Refugee Camps in Bombay

The displaced persons, also termed as refugees that came from West Pakistan were mostly Sindhis and a few Punjabis. As thousands of refugees were pouring in to the city of Bombay from Sind, Punjab and Delhi, the first and the most urgent need was the provision of food, shelter, clothing and medical aid. Rao Saheb R. N. Nayampalli was appointed as a Special Officer for Evacuees. Also there was an Advisory Committee to assist him and to make suggestions and recommendations relating to the refugee problems. The Mayor of Bombay, praised the Sindhi refugees for facing the plight with restraint and patience. Sir Behram N Karanjia, called upon the people of Bombay province to donate liberally towards the relief of the evacuees. The film actor, Mr Prithviraj Kapoor urged the Government of Bombay to provide assistance to the refugees. Many private organizations too made gestures of help to the refugees arriving in Bombay.

Reception and Aid

On receiving the information of the arrival of ships, the Chief Refugee Officer and other officers of the Government Transport service received the refugees at the quayside. The volunteers of service institutions served the refugees with light refreshments and cold drinks. The refugees were then taken to the camps in government motor vehicles. Government spared no efforts in improving all possible arrangements. Refugee camps came to be established at Chembur, Powai, Virar, Mulund, Borivili and other places. In the camp at Koliwada, run by Punjab Frontier Association 2, 100 refugees came to be accommodated.

There were camps, where the refugees stayed for day or two before leaving for their destination. The biggest of such camp was the Dariyastan camp at Mandvi, run by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. The Maratha

¹ Nandita Bhavnani, *The Making of Exile-Sindhi Hindus and Partition of India*, Tranquebar Press, Westland Ltd, 2014

Mandir ran a camp at Worli and two small camps were run by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Sind Hindu Samiti.

Employment and Other Help

As, for the displaced, there was no chance to go back to native land Sind, a special branch attached to the Labour Exchange came to be opened in the office of the Special Officer for Evacuees and Refugees. The refugees could register their names there and efforts were made to find employment for them. Students were given all possible facilities to pursue their studies. The Chief Refugee Officer attended to the needs and difficulties of all refugees in every way. Meanwhile the Bombay Government passed a welcome order that the domicile rule would be relaxed for the refugees applying for service under the provincial government.

Non-official charitable and social organizations too came forward to reinforce government's efforts. The prominent among them were the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, the All India Save the Children Committee and the Trust for Sindhi Women and Children. The compensation scheme came to be launched in November 1963. Also the Ministry of Rehabilitation in every way kept the women and children busy.

Vocational Training

Especially for women and children under the care of Rehabilitation Ministry were kept busy by way of some rewarding occupation. I. e. a system of vocational training was introduced as a basic feature of the homes run by the government. Thereby the trainees were afforded a chance to release from the bondage of helpless dependence. And those who decided to fend for themselves were given handsome grants and loans to set themselves up. Women under training for nursing were given stipends ranging from Rs. 25 to 35. In this way nearly 20, 000 came to be absorbed into the fold of community as nurses, teachers and dais. As a measure of interim relief, major item of expenditure of the government consisted in giving maintenance allowances. This was given to about 17, 000 persons and by the end of March 1957 the expenditure incurred by the Government was Rs. 1.40 crores.

By August 1949, government intimated the displaced persons that they should no longer depend upon government doles and should make earnest efforts to stand on their own. As gradually the camps were to be closed down. Arrangements for inmates of the camps were done in various townships built by the government. Associations such as the Sind Refugee Association were also deeply interested in promoting model township schemes for their members on co-operative basis. Even K.

C. Neogy, the Relief and Rehabilitation Minister called upon prominent persons from among the refugees of different provinces to form co-operative societies for the purpose of housing. The displaced Sindhi Hindus could also benefit due to the efforts of an enterprising Sindhi Women, Jethi Sipahimalani. She established the first co-operative housing society, the Navjivan Society at Grant Road, Bombay.

Conclusion

To summarize when the displaced persons came to India they needed substantial and judicious help, as they had suffered considerable amount of deprivation, insecurity and uncertainty. This was no doubt a very stupendous task and needed concerted effort. And the government tried its best. The uprooting was complete and the displaced lost all contact with their homes and this required mental adjustment to the new environment.

So, on the part of the displaced persons, expectations from government for helping them were of a great magnitude. Also there were sometimes delay in administration and even charges of maladministration in the functioning of the government. But this resentment one can say was proportionate to the hardships that the displaced had to suffer. Gradually there was acceptance and a shift in the attitude of the migrants developing a more national outlook. From this one can say that rehabilitation made good progress. Thus one can conclude that the resettlement of the migrants from West Pakistan was fairly successful.

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