

## **Overcoming the Partition Trauma**

*By Sonali Narang*

The political partition of Punjab in August 1947 caused one of the largest migrations in human history. Within a short span of four years, an estimated number of 14.5 million people migrated from Pakistan to India. Many Sikhs and Hindu families settled in the Indian parts of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi. In Haryana, they were settled in various parts like Panipat, Yamunanagar, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Jhajjar, Sonipat, Rohtak etc. I have tried to capture voices and day-to-day narratives of elderly people who lived during the period of partition, including my own grandparents who were among those millions of people who were forced to migrate from Pakistan. They have left everything behind and initially stayed in camps. Later, in compensation for their land in Pakistan, they received a plot of land in the Indian state of Haryana by the then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

### **SHELTER IN YAMUNANAGAR**

Before independence, Yamunanagar was a small village with the population concentrated around the railway station. After the partition of India, many refugees from Punjab in Pakistan were given Yamunanagar as their new home. Faridabad was yet another city of Haryana where a Pakistani Refugee Resettlement Project was started after the Partition, especially for displaced persons who came from the North-West Frontier District (now in Pakistan). It remained a small town until 1947 when it was developed as a planned city primarily to rehabilitate the refugees from the N.W.F.P. Pakistan.

The main factor that encouraged the refugees to put down their roots in Faridabad was affordability. The high real estate values in the National Capital restrained the refugees from settling in Delhi. Faridabad developed as a resettlement project through self-help groups and labour cooperatives for generating employment.

Second reason was the desire for their own community. There was a lot of insecurity among the people as a result of the violent and disturbing division of India into two separate countries of India and Pakistan. It generated, among the refugees, a desire for having their own closely-tied community with the least amount of intermingling with the native population. Faridabad was a small town where the refugees could live in such a community all by themselves. Thirdly, the idea was to develop an industrial town to provide employment to the people.

The Faridabad city comprises three towns namely: Old Faridabad, Ballabgarh and New Industrial Township (NIT) Faridabad. The NIT was set up in 1950. The city gained much of its present status during the industry-oriented Second Five-Year Plan (from 1956 to 1961). The Faridabad Development Board was set up in 1966 to provide employment to all the new settlers. Till 1971, all the three towns had their own municipalities. Faridabad Complex was constituted on January 15, 1972 under the Faridabad Complex Act 1971, which included these three towns along with 36 surrounding villages. Thus, the government formed new cities for settlement of the displaced people in Haryana.

Panipat was one such city where the government allotted land to many displaced people. Many new colonies and towns were established for refugees, like Model Town, Tehsil Camp, Kacha Camp, Nehar Vala Camp, Ath Vath etc. New schools and colleges were also constructed by the government for the settlement of these refugees in the cities.

Social reformers like Swami Omanand did a lot for the refugees who came from Pakistan on the division of India. He started the cancer hospital at Jhajjar and gave away free medicines to all the refugees.

## **SCARY MEMORIES**

The Partition of 1947 resulted in massive forced migration and caused a lot of trauma to people who had to leave their homes and resettle in new places. They were brutally uprooted from their soil and had to struggle a lot to carve a niche for themselves in an unknown land.

Here is an account of harrowing experiences from those people who were displaced from their homeland as a result of the 1947 Partition and came to settle in Panipat.

--

Septuagenarian Asha Saluja, living in Rohtak, came from the district of Mujjafar Nagar, Pakistan. She said that when they got the news of Pakistan being created, their whole family moved to Laiya in Pakistan. She told of women jumping into wells to drown themselves so as to avoid rape and save their honour. After a wait of three months in Laiya, they boarded a bus which was leaving for India. Despite problems, they somehow managed to reach Panipat where they stayed for about six months.

“Those scary memories are still vivid in my mind,” recalls Asha. Then her family got involved in small activities in order to survive. After they moved to Rohtak where they set up their own hotel, they tasted success. She said that most of the people took the houses which were left by the Muslim people who migrated to Pakistan. She told Haryana Review that when her family was staying in a camp in Karnal, the government provided food and water to all the people who were staying there. In Rohtak, refugees were settled in Gandhi Camp, India Colony, Durga Colony.

--

Krishnavati, my maternal grandmother aged 67, who belongs to Multan district of Pakistan, was among those who moved twice within the Punjab and has experienced the whole process of displacement and resettlement twice in her lifetime. The reason for the first migration was the construction of canals and rails by the colonial power, and later she was forced to migrate again as a result of the Partition in 1947. She said that the difference between the two types of migration was that the former was neither forced nor preceded by violence, while the latter saw a lot of violence, bloodshed, pain and misery. She said, “We were seven sisters. We sold corns, fruits and peanuts for our survival. Then somehow our father managed to start a business of fruits and dry fruits in Sonipat. After that, we moved to Delhi and started our own handloom business which was very successful.” The journey from selling corn on the streets to establishing a handloom business was a hard one and cannot be ever forgotten by Krishnavati and her family.

--

Om Prakash Taneja is a refugee who came from an area called Krishna Nagar in Pakistan. After coming to Panipat, he picked up various petty work in order to earn money. He sold peanuts, became a rickshaw puller, and ran power looms. He also taught khadiya (looms) to other labourers at free of cost. Today, he is successfully running his own handloom business, but he cannot forget the hard times he had to face at the time of Partition. Recalling the past, he said that he struggled a lot in order to survive then. Giving a piece of advice, Om Prakash

said, “we must not forget the path from where we have passed and from where we are passing, all the path carries our story of hardship, struggle and hope.”

--

Octogenarian Lakhmi Chand Gulati came from Mujaffargarh district of Pakistan. During the Partition of 1947, he and his family first stayed at Kurushetra in a refugee camp. He told Haryana Review that in the camp he got all kinds of basic help from the government. From there, he moved to Karnal and then to Panipat where he got a job in the railways for two months on a monthly salary of Rs 45. After leaving this job, he moved to Madhya Pradesh where he worked as a cloth merchant. Due to some problems, he came back to Panipat and worked as labourer in a Khadhi factory. He said that he got land from the government at a very low price for building his house. Presently he is running a shop in Tehsil camp. He has five children and all are well-settled. He said, “Though I have earned a lot in life after moving from my motherland to this place, yet I have left behind my peace of mind in Mujaffargarh.” He still hopes to go back to his motherland one day where he finds his identity.

--

Master Hans Raj ji, a resident of Panipat, aged 70 years, is the retired principal of S.D Higher Secondary School. He recalled that there were 10,000 Hindus and 30,000 Muslims in Panipat and the whole town was divided into 12 wats. After this, the entire Muslim population was gone and only one person was left behind. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad also visited this place and asked people who came from Pakistan to settle down in this place. Later, government also helped these refugees in setting up handloom businesses and in building schools. He said that those people who came from Pakistan were really very hardworking, civilised and grateful and added “Great are those who are grateful”.

--

## **THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

India is neither party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees nor to the 1967 Protocol, and the lack of specific refugee legislation in India has led the government to adopt an unplanned approach to different refugee influxes. Historically the status of refugees in India has been governed mainly by political and administrative decisions rather than any codified model of conduct. But still the government had to stretch itself to the maximum in order to give relief to and resettle and rehabilitate nearly six million refugees from Pakistan who had lost their homes.

The government granted a full range of benefits to partition refugees, including monetary compensation, residence, loans at lower interests, basic facilities, food and access to basic social resources. The problem of the rehabilitation of the refugees from West Pakistan was fully tackled in Punjab and Haryana. The mission took some time but it was accomplished. The 1954 Displaced Persons Compensation and Rehabilitation Act provide for the payment of compensation and rehabilitation grant to displaced persons. Although many plans and schemes were implemented to ensure the proper rehabilitation for displaced people, the pain of leaving their birthplace is still within the hearts of those who came from Pakistan to India. The trauma of leaving one’s home and native place still haunts the elderly people who left during the partition of India.

*Sonali Narang is a research scholar at the Center for the Study of Geopolitics, Department of Political Science Panjab University Chandigarh, India. You can reach Sonali by email at [snarang68@gmail.com](mailto:snarang68@gmail.com)*