

REVISITING PARTITION OF INDIA 1947 – THE VOICE OF DALIT REFUGEES

Dr. Akanksha Kumar

Assistant Prof. ,Janki Devi Memorial College , University of Delhi

Even after decades partition of India, 1947 continues to incite curiosity among historians. While the marxists, nationalists and subalterns believe that partition was a result of the policies of colonial rule, others have looked at it as an inevitable event or as a consequence of Hindu Muslim antagonism. Ayesha Jalal has argued that the Congress high Command was anxious to storm the center, and the British, anxious to ward them off, therefore, they needed someone to speak for Muslims at the all India level. Thus, the demand for Pakistan did not actually come from the Muslims but was a result of Indian National Congress and its politics. However, recent writings while putting the partition issue in perspective beyond high politics has moved towards examining the effect of partition on the common people who were forced to migrate. Lately, gender perspective, has also been commendably researched by the scholars like Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to focus on the experiences of ignored and underplayed history of the Dalit refugees from West Pakistan through sources such as Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation records supplemented with personal interviews of surviving Dalit migrants. Oral narratives are included here to incorporate the question of Dalit refugees during partition by not just limiting them to recipients of relief and rehabilitation but also to take into consideration their role as historical actors.

Dalit refugees from Pakistan have been mentioned in the archival records as ‘displaced harijans’, they were rehabilitated by Harijan Sewak Sangh which acted as a central government agency. Ravinder Kaur gives a useful account for the history of Dalit refugees in particular. She refers to them as untouchable migrants of partition. The absence of Dalit refugees from the present historiography according to her does not mean that they were ‘physically absent from the partition drama’.¹ The numbers of the Dalit refugees were sometimes included in the government

¹ R.Kaur, *Since 1947*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 158.

statistics to show the size of non-Muslim population that needed to be evacuated from Pakistan but the statistical category of 'non-Muslim' did not make them full Hindus according to Kaur.

The history of partition is 'popularly imagined as the history of upwardly mobile upper caste Hindus and Sikhs who were forced to move in the middle of all the chaos and violence. Kaur mentions that there is an absence of untouchable migration accounts from the studies of resettlement colonies figuratively as well as physically. Therefore, the partition migration stories that we know of till now are mostly of the upper caste, middle class refugees stories that have contributed to post colonial historiography. In her study therefore, Kaur proposes two questions i.e Did untouchable non-Muslim migrate at all from West Punjab or West Pakistan? And if they did then where did they resettle? According to a report on Dalit refugees from West Pakistan, 10 lakh Dalits migrated from East and West Pakistan it also states that it is a well known fact that 'harijans are economically poor, educationally backward and socially handicapped. They had been subjected to humiliating treatment and neglected for centuries. As they migrated to India they did not know where to go for the government's help and how to get it². The report also contained a few statements by Rameshwari Nehru who was the secretary of the Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board, formed in 1948 to rehabilitate the Dalits from Pakistan.

Before developing the scope of this paper from oral narratives, it would be appropriate here to discuss some of the existing literature on the use of this source itself. As this whole paper is based on oral history narratives of the Dalit refugees from West Pakistan it is important here to discuss how oral history narratives can narrate the past, and can these narratives be 'pure' for the reader is another question that arises. Shaping of an interview is required to make them more readable and presentable to the reader, many aspects such as body language emotions, thoughts, phrases, expressions can tell a story of their own. These of course cannot be covered here entirely. However an effort has been made to bring out the authenticity of each interview in terms of what the person being interviewed is revealing and what he or she is hiding from the interviewer and why.

Moving away from official histories Paul Thompson states that in 'in some fields, oral history can result not merely in a shift in focus, but also in the opening up of important new areas of inquiry'³. He also points out that by opening up of this new field i.e oral history brings

² Rameshwari Nehru Papers , NMML , '*Reports on Harijan Work Done by smt. Rameshwari Nehru*'

³ For example oral history allowed labour historians to undertake effective studies of the poorly organized unions of male workers, woman workers, and of the 'normal experience of work and its impact on the family and community'. P. Thompson, 'Voice of the Past' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson's, ed., *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998.

recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored and here a cumulative process of transformation is set into motion. This makes history more democratic according to him and lastly this enlarges the scope of historical writing and 'it provides a means for radical transformation of the social meaning of history'⁴. Therefore giving a voice to these specific Dalit communities I have utilized this field of history writing here.

Focus on refugee experiences and actions during and after the partition reveal a significant historiographical shift in conceptualizing the nature of migrations induced by the partition – posing questions on the nature of its homogeneity or heterogeneity. The recent emphasis on oral history narratives as a means of recovering the experiences of partition narratives has also revealed the presence of master narratives that may exclude or marginalize narratives of other groups.

Although oral history might be a challenging source and it might be difficult to arrive at generalized conclusions, the basic aim, however, would be to reveal a few historical facts about the Dalit refugees, who are perhaps underrepresented in the present historiography. What makes oral history different. Is a question that could be discussed here. When we talk of oral history terms such as imagination, symbolism, desire and memory emerge. However the reliability of oral sources lies in the fact 'that even 'wrong' statements can be psychologically 'true' and this is equally as important as factually reliable accounts, where factual verification may be required but that would be required for all types of sources anyway'⁵.

By 1979 , scholars such Alessandro Portelli and P. Thompson , challenged the critiques of oral history and argued on what makes oral history different , he points out that 'orality, narrative form, subjectivity, the 'different credibility' of memory and relationship between interviewer and interviewee should be considered as strengths rather than the weaknesses, a resource rather than a problem'.⁶ Portelli in his article 'what makes oral history different' has managed to produce a range of peculiarities to the field of oral history⁷.

The actual document in the oral history is basically the recorded tape; this would no doubt invite changes and interpretations. The author Alessandro Portelli argues that 'the most literal translations are hardly ever the best and a truly faithful translation always implies a certain

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. Portelli 'What Makes Oral History Different', *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998, p.68.

⁶ R. Perks and A.Thompson ,ed, *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998. p.4

⁷ A. Portelli 'What Makes Oral History Different', R. Perks and A.Thompson ,ed, *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge,1998,p.68.

amount of invention'⁸. Therefore even for a transcription there is always a certain amount of invention. The author here goes on to explain that even here the written texts include graphemes, syllables, words and sentences. The tones and volume of speeches have meaning and social connotations which are not necessarily reproducible in writing. Therefore the use of transcriptions may leave or exclude certain connotations and these can only be approximately described in the transcribers' own words.

Memory for Portelli is 'not a passive depository of texts but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility for the historian does not lie in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes brought by memory. These changes reveal the narrator's effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context'⁹.

In order to increase the validity of the transcripts it is important to use punctuation marks, at right places where the pauses exist, 'the exact length and position of the pause has an important function in the understanding of the meaning of the speech'¹⁰, but some things can only be perceived by listening and not reading for example change in rhythm of the speaker in the same interview. As a result rhythm analysis in terms of velocity and other changes should be viewed with caution.

This history therefore is different in the sense that it tells us less about events and more about their meaning. Portelli talks about a speakers subjectivity in the use of oral history in which he points out that the only problem posed by oral history could be of verification, but it contains subjectivity and according to him 'a cross section of the subjectivity of a group or class may emerge.' Similarly in the present research work I will try to locate this subjectivity or at least attempt to make use of it in terms of revealing a particular caste a separate social group i.e Dalits.

Urvashi Butalia's book is entirely based on personal interviews with the families of Partition refugees in Punjab. She mentions that there are some major differences in the speeches of men and women. There is a difference in the way the two types of refugees i.e Dalit refugees and upper caste refugees choose to remember the past and the behaviour of the two towards me also differed. The Dalit refugees who were not living in the posh colonies responded to me enthusiastically, they were more responsive and contented about being interviewed, which gave them a sense of importance.

⁸ Ibid.P.64

⁹ Ibid.P.69

¹⁰ Ibid.P.65

The interviews I have conducted are not based on a sample or a structured questionnaire. I gave interviewee the liberty to speak in whichever direction they wanted to take the conversation to tell a story.

The question of caste and the discourses around it need to be included here, as I will be studying the narratives of Dalit refugees. Modern caste developed out of its interactions with the colonial rule. Nicholas Dirks argues that caste was fundamental to colonial knowledge. After the direct Crown rule of 1857, he argues that as the colonial governmentality unfolded caste emerged as a fundamental importance for 'colonial struggle to know and to rule India'. According to him post 1857, when there was a direct challenge to the state sovereignty, 'came the anthropological idea that caste could be seen as the colonized form of civil society that would both substitute for and explain away the problem of political sovereignty'.¹¹ Dirks points out that post mutiny the British organized the army, police, and military for which they used the "criminal" castes as the "martial" castes 'where there was an intimate relation between martiality and criminality'.¹² All these reforms post mutiny represented 'anthropologization of colonial knowledge' according to Dirks.

The Sansi and Bhil refugees studied in the present paper were categorized as criminal tribes under the colonial rule. An attempt has been made here to trace their history. The concept of 'dangerous' classes or 'criminal' tribes was a 'product of bourgeoisie fears of the west.'¹³ And this according to Mukul Kumar this found suitable refuge in the institution of caste.

Meena Radhakrishna in her study of the criminal tribes and the British colonial policy points out that the criminal tribes act had its roots in the local systems and structures for political control rather than the social concern for escalating crime. She also points out that in the late nineteenth century there was a 'renewed interest in, and admiration for the Indian caste system in the British administration and intellectual circles'¹⁴(in similarity with Dirks). The narratives of the Dalit refugees constantly throw light on the British and how they were of help to them in the pre partition or colonial period. Therefore it is significant here to link the question of British colonial rule and caste, as it will be linked to the Dalit refugee narratives studied in here.

¹¹ N.Dirks , *Castes Of Mind*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press,2001,p.123

¹² Ibid.p.177

¹³ M.Kumar 'Relationship of Caste and Crime in Colonial India: A discourse analysis' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 10 (Mar. 6, 2004), pp. 1078-1087

¹⁴ M.Radhakrishna, *Dishonored By History 'Criminal Tribes' and British Colonial Policy*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Limited, 2001,p.4.

The 'Untouchable migrant were separated physically from upper caste Hindus through a maze of governmental policies of resettlement 1947- 1965'¹⁵, this physical separation according to Kaur was manifested in the housing arrangements. Although this physical separation was never in the government's plan however, due to a complex social structure, the Dalit refugees were resettled in separate colonies many at times located in remote areas of the city. The government initiated schemes for resettling Dalit refugees which led to the construction of 'Harijan' colonies in Punjab and other states. The task of resettling Dalit refugees was handed over to the Harijan Sewak Sangh for one year in April 1949, after which this period was extended and the Sangh under the leadership of Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru completed nine years. East Punjab like many other states, presents a case of this physical separation of resettlement under the governmental schemes.

The evacuation records of the East Punjab, state that quite a large number of Meghs were left behind in district Sialkot, who were desirous of coming over to the Indian dominion. Around 60,000 Dalits were reported to be stranded in Sialkot, Lyallpur and Lahore districts. After their migration to the East this community was settled at Bhargave camp, Jalandhar.

A Dalit Refugee Colony of Jalandhar, Punjab

This section will study a particular colony which was built by the government of East Punjab to resettle these Dalit refugees belonging to Megh community. In the evacuation records, a report by R.L Jadhav, officer on special duty Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, refers to the stranded Meghs in the district of Sialkot. He says that the Meghs formed the majority of the Schedule Castes in the district of Sialkot and their number is over 50,000. Jadhav persuades the government for bringing all the Meghs over to East Punjab as they are skilled, good weavers and cultivators. He mentions that Meghs living in the cities are skilled in sports goods and manufacturer of surgical appliances. He states 'in short the Meghs are the best stock of Schedule Castes members in West Punjab. It would be a pity if they are left behind in Pakistan for no fault of theirs '¹⁶ According to the reporting of the liaison officers the Meghs were forcibly converted to Islam and were being held back by local Muslims and Police. Indian military was sent to the villages and camps of Sialkot to evacuate these refugees from Megh community.

¹⁵ Ravinder Kaur, 'Narrative Absence: An Untouchable Account of Partition Migration' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, August 2008.

¹⁶ ¹⁶ Evacuation of Schedule Castes, LV/23/46 A, Punjab National Archives, Chandigarh.P.113

After migrating to East Punjab these Meghs were resettled in Bhargave Camp, a Dalit colony, situated in the heart of the city with a population of about 30,000.¹⁷ Set up in 1948, the colony resettled Megh refugees who arrived at Gandhi Camp situated next to the colony. The colony was named after Gopi Chand Bhargava, the then chief minister of Punjab. The Megh community is presently a scheduled caste in Punjab, the caste certainly has a pre independence history. Their occupation, status in society and position in the traditional varna system is something that needs to be taken into account here. Therefore, before looking at the condition of this community after partition, it would be necessary to have a look at their brief history.

According to Ibbetson the Meghs of Punjab are similar to the Chamar of the tract below Jammu hills, but the Megh is slightly better standing than the Chamar, 'their superiority is doubtless owing to the fact that the Meg is a weaver as well as a worker in leather,'¹⁸ In the social scale a weaving stands a degree higher than the shoe-making. The members of this caste were therefore menial workers who were well trained in domestic crafts, weaving, goods making and so on. In Bhargave Camp this caste earned a living with these skills after migrating from Sialkot. Ibbetson writes, 'like the chamars of the plains the Megs work as coolies'¹⁹ In other words an 'inferior' caste of cultivators who were concentrated in the banks of upper Sutlej. Although they belong to this region their largest stronghold was district Sialkot.

The socio political history of the Meghs has been covered by scholars such as Kenneth Jones, who writes that this community was largely affected by the *Shuddhi* movement of the 19th century. The Megh community living in Sialkot prior to partition went through many significant changes under the *Shuddhi* movement. After 1901 and 1902, the Multan Samaj 'purified' the Odes and Rahtias under the public *Shuddhis* which was mainly done on the demand of leaders from Ode community, the Samaj purified thousands of Odes in South Western Punjab. Subsequently, this led to a massive campaign amongst the Meghs of Sialkot and surrounding districts. For six years the Samaj mounted a campaign for 'purifying' more than 36,000 Meghs from the districts of Sialkot, Gujarat and Gurdaspur'.²⁰

These newly 'purified' Meghs were called "Arya Bhagats", after which a 'Megh Uddhar Saba' was formed in 1912 at Sialkot. The Samajists also started special training and elementary schools for the Meghs, on June 25th a special industrial school was opened for Megh boys who would receive technical, literary and religious education. Jones writes that these schools were different

¹⁷ Veena Dua, 'Elections in a Scheduled Caste Neighbourhood: A Punjab Town', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 46 (Nov. 13, 1971), pp. 2323-2327.

¹⁸ Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, P. 333

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Kenneth Jones, p. 212

from general Anglo- Vedic schools, since they focused only on weaving and tailoring, these technical skills were mainly in line with their caste profession. According to Jones these changes led to a better life for the Meghs but in no way did it lead to social equality. Since the Meghs were a backward community, it did appear to be a practical solution but in the 'long run they remained stuck in their inferior positions with no perceptible change in status.'²¹

Veena Dua in her article, 'Elections in a Scheduled Caste Neighbourhood: A Punjab Town' written in 1971, refers to Bhargave Camp as BG camp. She states, 'Almost 90 per cent of its estimated 30,000 population belongs to two Harijan castes, viz, Megh and Barwala.'²² She also writes that the BG Camp was set up in 1948 to rehabilitate the refugees from West Pakistan. And that it was named after Gopi Chand Bhargava, the then chief minister of Punjab. Veena Dua points out that most of the Meghs in this colony refer to themselves as Arya Samajists and practice it as a religion. Some of them also visit Hindu temples, but 90 percent of them are Arya Samajists. Dua also points out, no upper caste in the adjacent colonies identifies themselves as Arya Samajist as this has been associated with the schedule castes of that area.

It is clear from this history of the Megh community that they practised Hinduism strongly after being 'purified' under the *Shuddhi* movement and this could have been one of the reasons for their strong desire to come over to the Indian domain. In the post Partition period the Meghs attained a Schedule Caste status, according to Veena Dua this became the biggest reason why they voted for the congress. 'They were acutely aware of the distinctions which separated them from the caste Hindus.'²³ This feeling was largely because they felt too far away from the upper caste to have any common economic or political interests. This is an important socio- political shift amongst the Megh community, who had migrated from West Punjab to East.

As pointed out above, prior to partition this community was under the influence of the Arya Samaj and *shuddhi* movement whereas as after partition they went on to support the congress, despite the fact that Arya Samaj had boycotted the congress in 1967 elections. This reflected a difference in the political choice of the Meghs after partition. On the one hand these refugees identified themselves with a Hindu identity migrated to East Punjab in such large numbers. But the irony is that even after partition they remained economically and socially backward to have had any similarity with the upper castes. In other words there is an ambiguous similarity between the Meghs and the upper caste as far as religious identity is concerned. However, economically

²¹ Sanjay Paswan and Pramanshi Jaideva edited, *Encyclopaedia of Dalits in India: Movements*, Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2002. P. 171

²² Veena Dua, 'Elections in a Scheduled Caste Neighbourhood: A Punjab Town', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 46 (Nov. 13, 1971), pp. 2323-2327.

²³ Ibid.

and socially vastly different, which resulted in a distinct political choice in 1967, as pointed out by Veena Guha.

Reference to Bhargave Camp was found in the report of the DHRB, which mentions that 'harijan' refugees were allotted mud huts in Bahrgave camp, Jalandhar. The number of refugees at this time were obviously lesser in 1947, however the number increased as more and more refugees from West Pakistan settled down in the adjacent Gandhi Camp. The Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board's report stated :-

59 families consisting of 414 persons got mud huts in the Bhargave camp, Jullunder. So far 5620 persons have been secured roofed houses. Four shops have been rented to Harijan refugees. Housing scheme is still under consideration of the various department of the Government.²⁴

Today Bhargave camp is referred to as Bhargo Camp in Jalandhar by general public, field trips to Bhargave camp revealed that almost all the persons living there are from Sialkot and from the Megh community. The refugees from this community perform menial jobs to earn a living. Most of them are labourers, tailors, weavers and a lot of them make industrial products such as sports goods. The women of the Megh community are also equal participants in these professions. These Dalit refugees from West Pakistan were given the benefit of allotment of quarters and common toilet facilities per refugee family. The Tribune reporting of 29th January, 2014, says that there was a paucity of space which did not make it possible for the construction of bathrooms and toilets. This news reporting on the Meghs of Bhargave Camp goes on to state that, 'the refugees were stated to be largely labourers and earning their livelihood by plying bullock carts, small dairies, sheep/goat keeping, pottery etc.'²⁵ My personal visit to the colony proved that many of these refugees worked from home, as they were well trained in crafts, tailoring and other menial jobs. Veera Devi migrated from village Bhakarpur, Sialkot, she was the first Megh refugee women I met at Bhargave Camp. Veera Devi was a widow, her husband was a tailor, who had passed away long back. Veera narrated whatever she could recall of the violence and displacement that took place during the time of partition.

I remember everything, the British divided us in pieces. Every memory of violence and partition makes me sad. I was around 15 years old when violence broke off. As I was young I did not know why so much of violence is taking place. We came with the military in a bus with my mother. She was a widow. I had one elder brother also, but we lost him, he was taken by the military and never came back. I cannot forget those days it was very painful to lose my brother. My husband was also from Sialkot and lived in the same colony as us when we came from

²⁴ Ibid.P.42

²⁵ The Tribune of 29th January, 2014 reported, that the Punjab and Haryana High Court have given orders to regularise 525 encroachments in Bhargo (Bhargave Camp).

Pakistan. He was a tailor by profession. I do remember those bad times, there was a cousin sister of mine who was picked up by a Pathan. She was very beautiful...but there was never any news of her after this incident. I would say we were very lucky by the grace of god, that we lived normal lives. We struggled and lived our normal lives. I have two daughters who are married and well settled.

Veera Devi was ready to go down memory lane and share her experience of partition. She recalls it as a very hard time, the violence seems to have affected her and her family in many ways. As her younger brother was picked up the army and her cousin sister by a Pathan. Veera Devi also realises that she was lucky as compared to the others because she lived a normal life. In one sense Veera Devi's account narrates that the experience of partition and violence for the Meghs of Sialkot who settled down in Bhargave Camp, their experiences were no different from other refugees during partition. The evacuation records state that lot of the Meghs had been stranded in the villages of West Punjab and had been forcibly converted to Islam, in other words they were in the midst of partition violence and needed to be escorted to East Punjab. According to a letter dated 19th July 1948, from Lala Ram Dass, President of the Dayanand Dalit Udhaar Mandal Punjab, Hoshiarpur to Premier, East Punjab Government Simla, a lot of the Meghs residing in the villages and camps of Sialkot had all been converted by force to Islam and were afraid to be escorted by Pakistani military and police. The letter states the following:-

In district Sialkot quite a large number of Meghs are residing either in camps or in villages. They have all been converted by force to Islam and they are afraid to come over to India in the company of Pakistani Military or Police, for there is a danger of their being murdered during the course of their evacuation.²⁶

The letter also goes on to demand that Indian Military and police be sent to Sialkot to evacuate Meghs as they were scared in the company of Pakistani military or Police. A reference to this fear of the Megh community is reflected in the interview of Hansraj age 78. Hans Raj lived next door to Veera Devi. He had a workshop of making iron tools, when I met Hansraj he was working in his workshop even at this age, his workshop was right next to his house. I went to meet him twice but he was not ready to answer any of my questions as he was deeply engaged in his work. However, in the second visit, I requested to him share whatever he could recall. Hansraj could not hear properly and due to the noises in the workshop it was very difficult to gather what he shared. Hansraj said his village's name was dhul, district Sialkot.

²⁶ Evacuation of Schedule Castes, LV/23/46 A, Punjab National Archives, Chandigarh.P.11

The riots broke off, Hindus were killing Muslims and Muslims were killing Hindus. This was the main reason we wanted to leave our village. We came through Jammu, it was only 4 kms away from our village. It was nearer to move to Jammu.

Hansraj interestingly told that his family had only moved to Jammu for a short period of time to save their lives. When peace was restored in the village they returned, after which the Hindustani military brought him and his family to East Punjab. Hansraj's family was therefore not willing to vacate their village and this displacement was very painful for this family, he said:-

First we went to Jammu for a short period because it was very near to our village. After that we decided to come back to our village when peace was restored. I was very young at that time so did not know why we came back. Then the Hindustani military came and set up camps. We were escorted in three trains by the military, we came via Lahore this time. At Lahore the Pakistani military gave Rs. 2000 to our captain and asked our train to proceed as soon as possible or else we would have been killed.

Hansraj's short story was about two experiences, one was the fact that military took many of these refugees to camps (as also reflected in the evacuation records), although Hansraj's family was not willing to migrate they took the decision of going to a refugee camp because of the military's presence, and the second was the experience of the trains, how Pakistani military was in conflict with the Hindustani one comes out in his story. Due to his hearing problem, he could not communicate very clearly. It is not clear who was the captain he was referring to but his story reflects that there was some conflict with the Pakistani military.

In Bhargave Camp most of the men had passed away and thus only women survived from the time of partition. These women were mostly young at that time and most of them got married at Bhargave Camp. Their in laws and parents both lived in Bhargave Camp as all of them were from the same community, married in the neighborhoods. About ten women were alive from the time of partition but most of them refused to give any testimony of what had transpired during that time. Either they were too young, or they simply did not want to recall unpleasant memories, whatever may have been the reason the women at Bhargave Camp did not share their experiences openly. After a two days search I met Laal Chand age 80, from village Khoje Chak, Sialkot who was eager to share his story. Laal Chand said the following:-

At the time of partition we came to Jammu first, because the border was nearer to Jammu. We lived in Jammu for about six months. From there we went to Ludhiana, we stayed there in a camp, in one camp there were four people. We were so tightly packed that it was difficult to even breathe. We lived in the camp for six months, we got ration also. But the life in camp was not good, so we came to Jalandhar on our own expense. We had to do all sorts of work before

arriving in this camp, we changed many professions. We came to Bhargave camp because we were allotted a quarter here. Bhargave camp was built after 1947, so till then we had to manage in the camp nearby, Gandhi Camp. Everyone from this colony lived in that camp before getting this quarter allotted. We owned land in Pakistan the government told us that we will be given compensation for our land owned in Pakistan. My father used to trade, we did not do any agriculture in Pakistan but had some land. We were finally given cash in lieu of land we owned in Pakistan.

Lal Chand's story is also similar to Hansraj's as they also arrived in Jammu first. But the difference in both their stories is that Hansraj's family had returned to their village after peace was restored however, Lal Chand's family chose to stay on and moved to Jalandhar. Lal Chand was not escorted by the military, instead they chose to migrate themselves. Lal Chand's main reason of coming to Bhargave Camp was that they were being allotted a quarter. From Lal Chand's testimony it appears, his family came separately on their own expense. He also indulged in various professions before coming to Gandhi Camp. The interesting point in Lal Chand's story is that they belonged to the same community as others in the colony but came separately, same caste could have been the only reason why Lal Chand chose to settle down in Gandhi Camp, this again emphasizes the point made above, Dalit refugees were physically separated in the refugee camps and housing accommodation. On the third day of the visit at Bhargave Camp I met Lajwanti, Age 82 from Sialkot, Village Ganjiwali, Lajwanti was elder at the time of partition she claimed to have a clear memory of everything she said:-

Muslims burnt down the factory where my father used to work. That was main reason why we had to flee from our village. Things were too terrifying to stay back. Our village was of Jats, all the fights were between them and the Muslims, but when our house got burnt down we came here.

When I asked Lajwanti why they decided to flee immediately from the village, in a lighter mood she said, 'they took all the utensils pots, pans, everything, they even took even took the *maa chole ki daal* (lentils) that we had cooked' (jokingly.) Lastly, she said 'the Muslims did a very bad thing to us, they left us in a very bad state of affairs at that time, she repeated herself, 'the Muslims did a very bad thing' and then silence prevailed. This silence of Lajwanti somewhere indicated that there was some pain she was trying to hide and only talked about it in passing references, unlike Veera Devi who cried and narrated how her brother was killed in the riots Lajwanti had a different way of sharing her story.

Although we loved our village, we had no choice. We came via Lahore in trucks, it was a very horrifying trip. I had my parents, elder brother and sister with me. Drinking water was not available to us on the way, we were told not to drink water from anybody because it might have

been poisoned by the Muslims. We came to Amritsir first, then from there we were brought to Gandhi camp. My father passed away soon after we reached Jalandhar. I was married to a soldier. After coming to Bhargave camp we were allotted *kaccha* houses and a monthly installation was paid to retain it. The house had a wooden roof and it was made of mud, it is only later did we built our houses.

Lajwanti's story is different, as she did not come with the military, her family decided to flee from the village because of the fire in the factory. This one incident petrified her family and they decided to come over to East Punjab in trucks on their own without any help from the military, as seen in the case of Lal Chand. It seems that Lajwanti's family made this choice on their own as they belonged to a better family economically, unlike other Megh refugee families, they were not escorted by the military and they travelled in a private bus hired by their father. Lajwanti said, 'My father hired truck especially for us, he did not want that any of us fall sick or unwell.' Lajwanti lived in the lane a little far off from Veera Devi's, her house was also better constructed, she belonged to a better off family as her husband was a soldier in the army unlike Veera Devi's who was a wife of a tailor.

Veera Devi, Hansraj, Lal Chand and Lajwanti's stories reveal that this community from Megh caste all migrated in large numbers, mostly escorted by the military. This point is cross checked in the evacuation records. According to evacuation records many of these refugees were under communal threat and were forcibly being converted, also conflict with the Pakistani military and local Muslims is apparent in the liaison records. There is no doubt that the Meghs who migrated to East Punjab were victims of communal violence as pointed out in the interviews above. However, no refugee spoke about the forcible conversions to Islam. This is something that does not easily come up in the testimonies of the refugees, as most of them feel a strong association with being Hindu or at least having a Hindu identity. The refugees avoid any talk or association of being converted during partition. This is different from the Sansis of Gunna village, Phillaur who admitted that they still have relatives in Pakistan who have been converted to Islam. Perhaps the historical association of the Meghs with the Arya Samaj and *Shuddhi* movement prohibits them from talking about forcible conversions of Islam.

A lot of the Megh refugees had moved to Jammu initially but probably unavailability of work brought them to Jalandhar city where they stayed at Gandhi Camp. The other important factor that is reflected in this migration is that almost all of these refugees belonged to the rural areas of Sialkot. The settlement of these refugees at Bhargave Camp in one sense becomes a migration from rural to urban as they all have their routes back in the villages of West Pakistan but they cannot claim any association with that area and thus their younger generation would all be associated with urbanised life of Jalandhar city. Nevertheless, this is also the case with many refugee families who settled down at Delhi.

As pointed out by Ravinder Kaur in her article 'The Second Migration: Displacement of Refugees from Rawalpindi During Partition', migration from one region to another or rural to urban was not something that was completely new. As a lot of partition refugees had moved from East to West during colonial period for employment in the canal colonies and these very same people had to move to the East in 1947 as a result of partition. However, during partition these refugees did not have a choice, they had to move either because of fear of riots or because the military had started escorting them as we see in the case of Meghs here and so they crossed the border by train via Lahore and Amritsir.

Conclusion

The building of a separate colony for the Meghs of West Punjab was beneficial to these refugees in one sense, as all of them were allotted a quarter. A separate colony was built especially for the Dalits which promoted division of the city on caste lines, as Kaur mentions they were in fact 'physically separated'. However, this was not an isolated case as separate 'harijan' colonies were built in Delhi as well. As mentioned above, the refugees who were settled in Bhargave Camp did menial jobs, tailoring, goods making and so on. The families at Bhargave Camp till today remain in the same professions. As evident in the interviews of Hansraj and Veera Devi's husband, one was a tool maker and the other a tailor. Others in the colony were also seen making sports goods, such as sewing footballs etc.

Lastly, we see Bhargave Camp was built by the East Punjab government, in Punjab the setting up of separate Dalit colonies for refugees from West Pakistan was in the hands of the state government, in contrast to Delhi where the 'Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board' was also involved in the rehabilitation work. The study of Bhargave camp here only shows the rehabilitation story and inclusion of voices of Dalit refugees from one perspective. There were most certainly other colonies built, and other experiences too. By bringing out the voices of these Dalit refugees an attempt was made in this paper to include the voices of Dalits in partition narratives and show that they were in fact very much part of the 'partition drama'.

Following are the pictures of Veera Devi, Hansraj, Lal Chand and Lajwanti from Bhargave Camp, Jalandhar.



Veera Devi



Hansraj at his workshop



Hansraj trying to communicate despite the difficulty



Lal Chand in front of his house



Photo of Lajwanti

Bibliography

Primary Sources

1. Fortnightly Reports, DSA.
2. Records from ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.

3. Private Papers

Rameshwari Nehru Papers

File no. 1. (a), Subject Files.

File no.1. (b), Subject Files.

File no. 1. (c), Subject Files.

Reports on Harijans Work done by smt. Rameshwari Nehru.

4. Published Primary Documents

Schedule Caste Survey of Delhi. 1961. GOI. Central Secretariat.

Ambedkar Writtings, Volume 17, Government of Maharashtra.

5. Interviews

Interview with Sona Devi, in October 2009, at Vinobha Puri, Lajpat Nagar , New Delhi.

Interview with Mangat Ram, November, 2009, at Timarpur near Majnu ka Tila, Delhi.

Interview with Veera Devi on 22nd September, 2014, Bhargave Camp, Jalandhar.

Interview with Lal Chand on 22nd September 2014, Bhargave Camp, Jalandhar.

Interview with Hansraj on 25th September, 2014, Bhargave Camp, Jalandhar.

Interview with Lajwanti on 25th September, 2014, Bhargave Camp, Jalandhar.

Secondary Sources

Bhalla, Alok , *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*, Oxford, 2006

Bharadwaj Dutta,Anjali, 'Gendering Oral History of Partition:Interrogating patriarchy', *Economic and political weekly*, June 3, 2006

Chakravarti ,Gargi, *Coming out of Partition; Refugee Women of West Bengal*, Bluejay , New Delhi ,2005.

Dirks, Nicholas, '*Castes Of Mind*' Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2001.

Karuna,chanana, '*Partition and Family Strategies Gender-education and, Linkages among Punjabi Woman in Delhi*'. *Economic and political weekly*(1993, april 24).

Kaur, Ravinder, 'Exploring Social Class in 1947 Migration', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 3, 2006

_____ *Since 1947*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kumar, Mukul, 'Relationship of Caste and Crime in Colonial India: A discourse analysis' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 10 (Mar. 6, 2004), pp. 1078-1087

L. Malkki, 'REFUGEES AND THE EXILE: from Refugee Studies to the National Order of things.' *Annual Review of Anthropology*.

Menon, Ritu and Kamla Bhasin, ed., *Borders and Boundaries*, New Delhi,1998

Pandey, Gayendra ,'Community and Violence Recalling Partition' *Economic and Political Weekly*,(August 1997).

Portelli, Alessandro, 'What Makes Oral History Different', R. Perks and A.Thompson ,ed, *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge,1998,p.68.

Radhakrishna,Meena, *Dishonored By History 'Criminal Tribes' and British Colonial Policy*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Limited, 2001.

Roy, Anjali Gera and Bhatia, Nandi, ed., *Partitioned Lives*, Dorsely Kinderseley,2008

Talbot, Ian, and D.Singh, ed., *Epicenter of violence: Partition Voices and Memories from Amritsar*, New Delhi,2006.

Thompson,Paul, 'Voice of the Past' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson's, ed., *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998.

V.N Dutta, 'Punjabi Refugees and the Urban Development of Greater Delhi', in R.E Frykenberg, ed., *Delhi through the Ages in Urban History, Society and Culture*, Delhi, 1986.

Yong,T and G.Kudaisiya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, Routledge, London and New York,2000.