



# Administrative Persecution of refugees: A Study of Select Partition Stories

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The people of India had been visualising the dream of freedom from the shackles of the British slavery for more than three hundred years. The long cherished dream became a reality in 1947 when India won freedom that brought with it joyous experience. Unfortunately, the euphoric moment wreaked the worst kind of violence let loose by the communal frenzy that made deep scars on the psyche of those who suffered for no fault of their own. Innocent people were punished for no fault of their own. The freedom of the country ironically meant, for large sections of masses, the loss of freedom. People were denied the right to live peacefully. The freedom of India brought with it the birth of a new country called Pakistan. For millions of people on both sides of the boundary 'free' India meant loss of homes, life and property. It resulted in rapes, abductions and violence on a large scale causing looting, bloodshed and arson. The most agonizing thing that took place was that millions of people were rendered 'refugees' overnight owing to the single wrong political decision. The Partition led to one of the largest ever processes of forced migration (Aiyer 15).

The Partition was the dark side of independence (Butalia 272) that brought with it dislocation of people from their home and country where they had spent centuries together. Tragically, the mass migration was not peaceful at all. Communal foolishness and religious intolerance turned people mad with hatred so much so that they became so callous that that they did not spare even children, women and the old. The dislocation was so ghastly that uprooted ones were crawling like columns of ants across the border. The large caravans of refugees were seen moving helplessly. This was really mind numbing in dimension. It was, in fact, a grotesque exodus in which human being and cattle were facing the same pain and trauma.

There is no denying the fact that the Partition of India was one of the biggest political blunders. It caused the worst catastrophe in the history of humankind. People who suffered the onslaught of the Partition violence had never expected that their lives would be devastated and their faith in those who supposedly fought for the freedom of the country would be offended. The jubilation resulted from long-awaited independence was overshadowed by the impudent and irrational decision of politicians who were bent upon dividing a country into two. Aftermaths of the Partition of India were more appalling and shuddering as it rendered millions of people homeless. They became strangers in their own country. The Muslims of India were forced to leave India for newly created country Pakistan. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs from the other side were forced to flee to India leaving behind the land where they had spent centuries. The Partition caused exceptionally 'savage massacre'. The politicians turned apathetic to the plight of the people as they did not want to help the sufferers in distress. They had their own axes to grind. These power hungry politicians played with the sentiments of innocent people.

People had rested their faith in their political leaders and had never anticipated even in passing that their faith in them would be betrayed. People who had lived with love and harmony for centuries felt deceived at the hands of their political mentors. The partition was not peaceful. The violence it unleashed was unprecedented, unexpected and of course barbaric. Those who were rendered homeless—refugees—had nowhere to go. They had been running from pillar to post in search of solace, that was, otherwise, nowhere to be seen. In refugee camps the homeless sufferers led life worse than those of beggars. When they went to government offices for claiming their loss, they were humiliated. They were, in fact, victims of political apathy as politicians did not want to help them.

The stories that are analysed based on the theme of political apathy are "Toba Tek Singh", "The Claim", "Parrot in the Cage" and "God's Dog". These stories deal with the life of those who suffered for no fault of their own. The writers of these stories very successfully depict the trauma of uprooted people.

Mohan Rakesh's "Gods Dog" is a poignant account of a refugee who along with other members of his family suffers a lot after he is uprooted. The story depicts the mental pain of this old Sikh refugee. The religious bigots in "communal inferno" killed his brother. He migrated to India with his brother's widow and his son and daughter. All of them are in a impoverished state as they are virtually starving. The brother's son is suffering from tuberculosis and the daughter is of marriageable age. It gives pain to the old man to see all these persons in a miserable condition. After reaching India he applies for the land. It takes seven years before he is allotted a useless piece of land that he cannot cultivate to grow food for the family. The old man feels it is making a mockery of his misfortune. For two years he has suffered the indifference of the administration. He had given an application for the change of this land for a better piece of land so that he may earn his livelihood. But no one seems bothered about him and millions other like him who are rendered homeless. Even basic needs of food and shelter are not available to them. Such is the deprivation of these humans that

they are reduced to mere numbers, not individuals. When anyone asks him his identity he doesn't give his name but only his number 1226/6. And it seems to the administration that the refugees are not human beings but just numbers. The corrupt clerks and officers are blind with selfishness and greed. One refugee Surjeet Singh is helped in the story only when he bribes the clerk. The attitude of the officers makes the old man rage with anger. He stretches his legs fully. He attracts the attention of others and cries out loudly:

The government takes time! In five to ten years the government will decide whether my petition should be accepted or no—Bastards! Even Yam Raj keeps count of our days. When the days allowed by him are over, I'll find out that government has accepted my petition. (121)

He feels so broken and full of agony that he spreads his turban on the ground and makes his family sit on it.

He says in desperation:

Look today I have arrived here with my entire family. Now you can take as much time as you want. After starving me for seven years, the bastards allotted me a pit three acres wide, so that I could bury the bones of my ancestors in it!...I am starving, but the application is still being considered.(121 )

Depressed by the delay in getting something from the government that can help him make livelihood for the family he grows angry. In a rage he shouts, “ all of you are dogs, and I am also a dog! The only difference is that you are the dogs of the government—you tear people to bits and bark at the orders of the government! I am God's dog. I live by grace and bark at his command”( 122). Unable to take the apathy of the administration anymore he decides to shake the administration out of its stupor by a shocking act. He gives up all sense of shame and takes off his clothes so that the administration wakes up from its stupor. The collector takes up his case immediately after two years and he is allotted a piece of land, which may sustain his family.

“Gods Dog” is a bitter satire on the apathy, indifference of Indian administration. The story of personal agony is equally about society at large as it portrays how common man suffers at the hands of government servants. The apathy of system becomes more painful because now it was supposed to be people's own government, not of any foreign rulers.

Similar feelings are expressed in Narain Bharti's story “The Claim”. The protagonist of the story, Joharmal, is so broken and sad to leave behind his land and relations that he does not make any claim for material losses. The things he lost cannot be compensated. He is ‘stupefied’ by the formalities required by the claim office since they ask tiresome questions. When the typist asks Joharmal, “How much property have you left in Pakistan? How many houses? How much other property? Joharmal is surprised to hear such questions.

He says, I have left the whole Sindh in Pakistan. I am now putting in the claim for whole of Sindh; it should be given back to me. The proof of the claim is that Joharmal is a Sindhi, his language is Sindhi and his culture is Sindhi. Joharmal is right. Nobody can perceive his loss, the pain of separation from one's land, soil, and fellow human beings with whom one has spent his life. He would like to claim the emotions which can never be redeemed. He is right as he is speaking in the context of the culture he shared with those left behind; the language he used to share with the natives of Sindh. How can one return to him his ethnic group? Undoubtedly he has lost much and he would like to fill up a claim for Sindh! Joharmal eyes are full of tears for those Muslim friends he had left behind. He says, "I shall never meet my brothers Rajab, Ramzan and Mehboob, the barber. Can I get back their friendship?"(222 ) Joharmal doesn't claim any house or land. He says, "My friends, their friendship was dearer to me than my fields." (222 )

The story, thus records the emotional losses suffered by the refugees, not only seen in the light of an emotional response to loss of personal friends but also equally important of the collective identity.

Partition brought with it not only physical and material loss but also unbearable emotional losses. The most touching account of the emotional shock to individuals appears in Saadat Hasan Manto's classical story, "Toba Tek Singh" which is also a subtle satire on the madness of the whole idea of the partition of India. The story moves around the character of Bishan Singh who is known as Toba Tek Singh as he has large land holdings there. He is a lunatic and is entrusted to the care of an asylum in Pakistan. Once the Partition is declared he along with other non-Muslim lunatics, is forced to migrate to India as both the governments have decided to transfer the lunatics along with other people. Though Bishan Singh is mad he loves his land very dearly. The thought of leaving his land gives him immense pain. Before he is forced to migrate to India He wants to know whether Toba Tek Singh is in India or Pakistan. When he comes to know that it is in Pakistan he becomes very sad. He is not ready to go to India.

Here Bishan Singh represents millions of people on both sides of the borders who never wanted to leave their homeland but were forced to forsake their land due to whims of their political leaders. The masses have to pay for the fancy and wickedness of these leaders who fail to feel the trauma of the people. Bishan Singh loves his land so much that he will die but not leave the country that belongs to him .When the evacuation process is going on he refuses to enter the other country. He is left standing and is not forced to go. He remains in the place where he stands while transfer of other lunatics continues. Before the Sun rose, a piercing cry arose from Bishan Singh who had been quiet and unmoving all the time. Several officers and the guards ran toward him; they saw that the man, who, for fifteen years, had stood on his legs day and night, lay on the ground prostrate. Beyond a wired fence on the other side was Pakistan. In the middle, on a stretch of land which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. He dies there stretched on the no man's land. Not only Bishan Singh but other lunatics like him are also sad at heart when they are told about the transfer. One of them, a Muslim First climb onto a tree and when the guards order him to come down he goes still higher up. He is

then threatened by the guards but he says, “I want to live neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan. I will live on this tree”. (2) When he comes down, he embraces his Hindu and Sikh friends, cries bitterly and is saddened by the thought of their impending departure to India. The story really gives a moving account of the emotional loss caused by the partition. Even lunatics intensely feel the sense of loss. They have nothing to do with the materialistic pursuits since they are mad. They don't love money and power but they love human relations. They too have feelings and love for land and the bond they have enjoyed with their fellow human beings. The lunatics of the asylum “cursed all the leaders both Muslim and Hindu, who were responsible for splitting Hindustan into two.”(p.3) So the real lunatics were those leaders who divided the country for their vested interests and created a vacuum in the life of the masses. They had no fellow feeling as they had been devoid of love for those who suffered for no fault of their own. The loss of these lunatics is, no doubt, irretrievable. While the material losses could be compensated to some extent by providing partial compensations by the government, however delayed, but the emotional losses suffered by the masses are irretrievable as they can neither be claimed nor can be paid back by way of compensation.

All the uprooted were fated to suffer. There was no bar of age, class, caste or religion. Even the old and the poor were not spared from the onslaughts of violence, callousness and apathy.

Mulk Raj Anand has vividly recorded the pain of uprootedness of an old refugee woman, Rukmani, in “The Parrot in the Cage”, who has only a parrot to keep company with. She used to earn her living by working as a domestic help. She is representative of millions of those who are uprooted and wander like a lost soul from pillar to post expecting some help from the government. But they are not fortunate enough to get even both ends meet. They were thrown out of their native places for the only reason that they belonged to a particular religious community. They had no right to stay in Pakistan which was created out for the Muslims. Rukmani escaped the rioters as a Muslim helped her. She says, “I only know if Fato had not given me a burqah to escape with, I should not be there....” But surviving the bloodshed has only added to her misery. She has nothing to eat, nowhere to live. The community which had given her an identity, and the identity that was responsible for her being driven out of her home, however, has nothing to offer her here. She is left to fend for herself. All she can look up to is help from the government that is finding it hard to handle the large number of refugees and which is equally incompetent because of corruption and apathy.

Rukmani is a helpless victim of the partition violence. She hopes that the Deputy Collector will compensate her for the loss as she has come to know that the government will give what they have lost. She waits for the sahib in the scorching sun. Every passing moment is full of agony and sorrow for her. She has nothing to eat. She tells the roadside gram-seller, “I am waiting for the sahib, so that he can give me some money to buy bread with....” (87) She is hurt. Her mind drifts between hope and despair. She is full of agony, “Oh, why did I leave home to wander like this from door to door!...Oh why did you have to turn me out of my room in my old age, God...oh, why....why did not I tie rupees I had earned in a knot on my dupatta!...Hai

rabba!....”(87 ) She keeps moaning while waiting For the help and her eyes are filled with tears and when the Deputy collector arrives, the refugees rush towards him and like beggars they cry, “Hujoor, Mai Bap, hear us! Sarkar! Deputy Sahab!.....We have come on foot all the way from Lahore....you....”( 87) The old woman Rukmani too rushes grimly on. But they get nothing. They were left as destitute as they were.

A furious whirlwind rises from the opposite direction and “a posse of policeman charged the refugees with lathis and angry shouts which drowned the chorus of voices of which Rukmani’s sighs and her parrot’s cries had been a part”( 88). Poor Rukmani is brushed aside by some desperate arm. She reels and falls down where she has been sitting and waiting for the sahib. But she does not lose hold of cage in which her parrot is sitting .The parrot keeps on repeating as before, “*Rukmanai! Ni Rukmaniai! Ni tun kithe hain! Ni tun ki karni hain!* ( Rukmani,where are you? What are you doing?). )Ironically, Rukmani cannot reply since she herself does not know where she is. There is darkness all around her .That is why she replies to the parrot, “Han han, son, han my son.... I don’t know where I am! I don’t know....” ( 89) He has nowhere to go. She is fated to bear the brunt of sufferings and irretrievable losses, like the loss of her dignity. She used to earn her living as a domestic help and now she has to beg for food, which she does not even get.

Rukmani, like other refugees, is a victim of the callousness of the government Officers and the apathy towards refugees. No doubt, the officers may be unable to compensate for the losses because of the problem of large Numbers of refugees. But the officers also seem to be insensitive of their sufferings probably since they themselves are not uprooted. This apathy of the administration only adds to their agony.

All these stories based on the theme of Partition analysed in this paper leave the readers shocked as the politicians never anticipated that what they did would devastate the lives of millions of common people. This innocent people had been waiting for the independence but the long awaited independence brought with it uncountable miseries in the life of those who had to leave their home and hearth for good. The politicians responsible for their traumatic circumstances were apathetic for the sufferings those innocent people were subjected to.

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