

Locating Dalits in the Midst of Partition and Violence

by

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The partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 and its socio-economic impact has engaged the attention of historians and scholars ever since the sub-continent was divided. When speaking of partition violence, women and gendered aspect of partition cannot be ignored. Women were central to partition and violence, questions of 'honour', rivalry and abduction all resulted in violence against women. Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Karuna Chanana have exactly done that on the gendered narratives of partition refugees, through personal interviews and so have traced the histories of woman refugees from Punjab. However, the present paper tends to probe into an area largely unexplored. In similarity with the exploration of gender and partition through personal interviews, the present paper attempts to explore the question of dalits and their position during partition.

Where Menon and Bhasin explore the gendered experiences of Partition, Butalia included the experiences of untouchables, children and orphans during partition. Ravinder Kaur makes a similar attempt by studying the partition experience of untouchable migrants of Delhi.

Based on oral history and government reports, the paper will look at the position of dalits during partition. Were they victims of communal violence? What led to the migration of dalits from West Punjab and Pakistan to Delhi and Punjab? The first part of the paper would look at incidents of violence and fear among dalits through the study of East Punjab government reports and evacuation records. The second part would consist of three narratives of Bhilsat Kala Pahar in Baljit Nagar, New Delhi and Sansis at Timarpur, North Delhi, as mentioned in the Schedule Caste Survey of Delhi this area is where they mainly settled after partition. Lastly, the story of a Valmiki woman from Karachi who came to Delhi during partition, what made her migrate in the midst of partition violence will be explored.

Dalit refugees from Pakistan have been mentioned in the archival records as 'displaced harijans'. 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 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.

Also 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. She also 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, Did untouchable non-Muslim migrate at all from West Punjab or West Pakistan? And if they did then where did they resettle?

The East Punjab evacuation records mention, that the government had started paying special attention to the problem of evacuation of dalit refugees for many reasons. One was the forcible conversion among dalit refugees, the other was that the dalits were being held back by the government of Pakistan as they were required for essential services. Apart from all these reasons the government was compelled to pay special attention to the evacuation of dalit refugees due to the pressures built by Ambedkar and other dalit organisations. The evacuation work of the dalit refugees had begun in November, 1947.

In November 1947, a letter addressed to the Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore from B.G Rao of Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, stated that 'reports have been pouring in of the disabilities of which members of Schedule Castes are experiencing in the matters of evacuation.'² According to the government there were two reasons why the dalit refugees were experiencing difficulty in migration to the East. One was that the Pakistani local officials and Muslim National Guards were hindering their evacuation process; the other was that they maybe '*easy prey to conversion tactics*'.³ These two

were the main reasons why dalit refugees stranded in the villages and cities of Pakistan, one reason was, as mentioned by Ambedkar, that they were required for essential services and the other was forcible or easy conversion of the remaining dalits in Pakistan. However, as mentioned by Ravinder Kaur there was also a campaign launched by the liaison officers for the evacuation of these refugees, therefore it was also the role played by liaison officers and not just desire alone that led to these migrations.

A letter related to the intentions or the role played by liaison officers is reflected in a complaint against DLO, Montgomery who had been charged of inducing dalits to leave Pakistan due to a possibility of a war. In response to this complaint made by the Pakistan Refugees and Evacuees Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner of India Lahore, Sampuran Singh states that, *'I have been informed that the depressed classes are leaving Pakistan for India not due to any pressure of the District Liaison Officer but of their own accord'*.⁴ As this source reflects, some instances of forcible evacuation of dalit refugees comes up in these records. However, in other cases the stranded dalits needed assistance for evacuation as they were victims of communal violence. The violence and forcible conversion faced by these stranded dalit refugees was also due to the fact that their evacuation took place at a later stage of the whole evacuation process.

The government had appointed RL Jadhav as a special representative to look into the evacuation of Schedule Caste refugees. Jadhav was sent by the government of India to help in the evacuation of members of the Schedule Castes who were willing to move out of the West Punjab. He visited the refugee camps in all the districts and worked closely with the local DLOs to get in touch with the Schedule Caste refugees. Jadhav reported the condition of dalit refugees from district tours, from these reports it was apparent that quite a large number of dalit refugees were stranded in the villages of West Punjab and they required government's help for evacuation. Secondly the dalit refugees were forcibly being converted and faced communal violence.

A report of Sialkot district tour mentions that 68,700 dalit refugees were stranded in about 17 districts. R.L Jadhav, officer on special duty for the Schedule Caste evacuation travelled to the different districts of Sialkot. He reported that many dalit refugees were stranded in these districts of Sialkot. A section of the report states that

R.L Jadhav personally checked the figures of the non- Muslims and Schedule Castes, he mentions that the total number of Schedule Castes in the camp was 28943. Jadhav alleges that lesser number of Schedule Castes have left the camp, and there is a large number of dalit refugees stranded in these districts. The report states the following:-

I personally checked the figures of the evacuated non-Muslims for this camps from 6th of September 1947 from the register kept up-to-date by the D.L.O (copy attached). From this it will be seen that total Non-Muslims evacuate from this camp comes to 38590 up to the 3rd January 1948. Taking for granted that 25 % of this total of 38590 were caste Hindoos, the total No. Of schedule castes evacuated from that comes to 28943. Actually less no. of schedule castes have left Sialkot than 28943, as the scheduled castes started coming in the camp very late.⁵

It is established from the liaison records that special attention was paid by the Ministry of R&R on the evacuation of dalit refugees, thus special officers recruited for the purpose and operations were launched. Sialkot district had, any dalits stranded who awaited evacuation, they were mostly from the Megh caste, who migrated to East Punjab in large numbers.⁶ The report mentions that these refugees started coming in the camp during the later phase of the evacuation process R.L Jadhav mentions that date of evacuation was over and he could no longer evacuate them. Later he appeals for the date of extension of evacuation, the date of evacuation was therefore extended to 31st January after his request. After this Jadhav continued to stay at Sialkot in order to evacuate these refugees. The report mentions that:-

They started coming in large numbers from the last week of October 1947, or from the first week of November 1947. The total population of the schedule castes from Sialkot, Pasroor and Daska is 38,000, 12,000, and 1000 are respectively. The total of this comes to 51,000. These figures are from census report. The actual population of schedule castes is much more than the census figures which is estimated about on lac by the schedule caste local leaders. Even if we stick to the census figures it will be seen that there are still to evacuate from the pockets of these tehsils. According to the figures available from local people and

schedule caste leaders there were about 18, 751 schedule castes persons still to be evacuated till the 3rd January 1948.⁷

R.L Jadhav Officer on special duty visited many of the refugee camps and reported the condition of dalit refugees who were to be evacuated. He visited Jaranwalla Refugee camp, Lyallpur refugee camp, along with the Sialkot district tour. Jadhav reports that most of the dalit refugees are still stranded in the villages. Those who have been able to reach the refugee camps need to be evacuated as soon as possible. Another significant point that emerges in the reporting of Jadhav is that many of these dalit refugees faced violence, threats and were forcibly being converted to Islam. These refugees according to him needed to be evacuated immediately, the report states the following:-

Many of the Schedule Caste people are still in the villages. Those who are in the villages are very anxious to leave their villages. They are forcibly converted by the local Muslims and their daughters and women are being abducted. When they try to leave their homes for Hindustan they are beaten and some are killed and they are deprived of all their belongings.

The Ex Criminal Tribes refugees (presently part of the schedule caste community of Punjab today) were also victims of communal violence during this period. Some communities who practiced Hinduism strongly and identified themselves as Hindus, such as Laubana or Mazhabi Sikhs also faced communal violence during partition riots.

Report on the Administration of Criminal Tribes in The East Punjab mentions that in Talumba district of Multan Criminal Tribes were victim of communal violence, an agricultural settlement chak 16-9/R inhabited by 'Bauria (Sikh) tribe was killed by furious Muslim mobs by adjoining *chaks*, which surrounded the settlement on 22nd September 1947. This *chak* was the wealthiest amongst all the Criminal Tribe institutions in the West Punjab.⁸ According to the report, incidents such as these led to an extensive migration of non- Muslim Criminal Tribes from West Punjab to East Punjab. "The refugee members of Criminal Tribes were resource less and suffered untold hardships till steps were taken to rehabilitate them. A carefully planned

scheme for the rehabilitation of the refugee Criminal Tribes was chalked out and put into action.’⁹

The brutal incident of violence mentioned in the report on the administration of Criminal Tribes states that 3,500 people of the Bauria tribe from Multan district in an agricultural settlement were killed and the remaining have been waiting to get land allotted to their name. Apart from this about 25 women from their community are missing, and need to be recovered.

The dalit refugees, faced communal violence and forcible conversions also they were from weaker economic and social backgrounds, thus did not have the resources to flee immediately therefore required government’s help in evacuation. These two points are very significant when we deal with the question of dalits during partition violence, since these refugees were the ones who were being held back by the Pakistan government for various reasons, mentioned earlier. On the other hand, as the reports reflect they were forcibly being converted and many dalit women were also abducted. Dalits migrated to the East Punjab mainly for two reasons one was the general fear associated with partition riots and the other was to escape forcible conversions.

I

Personal Experiences Dalit Refugees

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 choose to remember the past and the behaviour of the two towards the interviewer also differed. The dalit refugees who were not living in the posh colonies of Delhi, were more responsive and contented about being interviewed, which gave them a sense of pride and importance. Some wondered how this interview would benefit them, while others responded with great enthusiasm.

Similar to Butalia and others, interviews I have conducted are not based on a sample or a structured questionnaire. I gave them the liberty to speak in whichever direction they wanted to take the conversation to tell a story. The portions of transcriptions quoted here are not translated in a manner which would change the meaning. To

maintain the originality the interviews, translations and transcriptions were kept as close as possible to the oral narratives.

The interview of 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.’¹⁰ And this according to Mukul Kumar found suitable refuge in the institution of caste.

It is necessary to have a glimpse at how modern caste developed out of its interactions with the colonial rule, and so argues Nicholas Dirks 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’.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 to ‘where there was an intimate relation between martiality and criminality’.¹² All these reforms post mutiny represented ‘athropologization of colonial knowledge’ according to Dirks.

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’¹³ (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.

II

The Sansi Refugee

The schedule caste survey of Delhi 1961, mentioned a number of castes who migrated from West Pakistan. It mentioned that the ‘The Bhils in Delhi have all migrated from west Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur’.¹⁴ It mentions that ‘Civil Lines Subzimandi has the

maximum number of Bhils, second largest are in rural area and Delhi Cantt. Karol Bagh and Patel Nagar rank third in their number of residents, and their main settlements are in Timarpur and Baljit Nagar on Kala Pahar near West Patel Nagar. These are temporary settlements near the quarry site where they work¹⁵. My field work revealed that caste Sansi from West Pakistan along with Bhils lived in these areas.

I visited Timarpur which is near Majnu Ka Tila in North Delhi. This area contained a small colony of Sansis who had come from West Pakistan, the colony consisted of semi pucca shanties which were originally allotted to these refugees for the purpose of rehabilitation. I met a couple of families, mostly women were alive from the time of partition. These women told me that they came by foot from Pakistan. One man who belonged to the same family gave me a long account of his life journey. He had much information to share and had many grievances as well, his account is very interesting since he made interesting statements about his caste, economic and refugee status.

Mangat Ram was a 78 year old retired technician. He worked in the railway department and was an active member of the workers union. I asked him to firstly tell me about his journey from Pakistan as a refugee. He told me 'I was around 16 when I came from Pakistan, district Montgomery tehsil Okara Mandi and the village was chak. He said "I used to study Urdu. My father did agriculture and we had land in Pakistan. We have grievances can you do something about it?" This is something he kept mentioning throughout his interaction with me. He continued:-

We still have not gotten our claim for the houses and land that we had in Pakistan. We owned land in Pakistan. We were in Okara Mandi, it was a Hindu area, when partition took place a kafilah of 90,000 collected in a common place. That was the first time I had seen Nehru ji, he had come to OkaraMandi to do the examination of the kafilah. Nehru ji is really worth being praised, he picked up small kids and did not discriminate them. At that time people were dying of hunger because of the riots. Military brought whoever they could gather, they brought them walking all the way from Pakistan. There were Sikhs, Hindus and so on. Nehruji had given the order that this kafilah should be kept alive and it should

reach India in a good condition, although people faced many problems on the way.

Mangat Ram narrated his journey and in between he kept telling me to take up the question of his grievances as a refugee, he continued to tell me about his journey.

We walked for four to five days, day and night under the supervision of the military. The kafila was so long that the first person was at Ferozpur, Sulemanki head and the last person was at Okara, many were killed amongst us also. Young girls were picked up, those days were really bad, I hope god does not show anyone such days. But I can say that yes, congress helped us to some extent when we were in camps, tents and so on. We were provided with ration and blankets were also distributed in those days. All this was there but the aid that we required had not been given. After all we left everything behind, we did not bring anything except one pair of clothes, we did not have the strength to carry anything, humare pairon mein chhaale pad gaye the (we got blisters in our feet because of walking). We got some land allotted in district Ferozpur, Hindu malkot and tehsil was Fazilka Bangla but that has also become a district now. Apart from this in Delhi we did not get enough aid form the government even being a refugee did not help us. Although Nehru ji had been very helpful since he helped us reach India safely from Pakistan. The helicopters threw rotis for us while we were walking.

Ravindar Kaur in her article 'Exploring Social Class in the 1947 Migration' talks about a variety of transport modes used by migrants from West Punjab. In which she mentions that 'fastest and safest means were seldom available to under privileged sections'.¹⁶ Kaur states that 'The safest and quickest means of transport was also the least widespread. It was available exclusively to the upper crust of society, mainly high-ranking bureaucrats or rich people who could afford to pay their passage'.¹⁷ Mangat Ram's narration of the foot journey from Okara Mandi to Ferozpur perhaps corresponds to this argument made by Kaur, this was the social class that she refers to while exploring social class and migration of 1947.

Kaur used oral narratives from refugees to explain how people remember the past. She emphasizes how people travelling by air, train and foot bullocks have different

memories. For example, people on train experienced loot fear and violence. She narrates an incident where a women is pushed through the window with the help of a strange man, this highlights how the gendered barriers were challenged in crude ways at this time. The dalits also narrate that they opted to cross the border with foot columns rather than train because of this fear of violence. Mangat Ram told that they walked a long distance and it was a difficult journey. Through the modes used by these refugees it is clear here that they belong to the social class Ravinder Kaur is referring to.

Although he is praising Nehru and the congress, he expressed apathy as a dalit refugee who was unable to get claim for land he owned in Pakistan. He kept mentioning about a claim he was unable to get. He said, "Till now we have not been able to get our claim." We got less than what we should have gotten. I request you to take this question up in your research. The Hindustan government told us at that we cannot give you the claim right now because we are not in a good condition due to partition. We were told that we will get our claim later but till today we have not gotten it'.

Mangat Ram requested me to take up this question of claim he kept mentioning, he said that some land was supposed to be given to them that the government had promised. Most of these refugees had grievances with their present lives more as compared to the past, they were not happy about many circumstances they had to deal with throughout their lives. In most of the studies that I have conducted shows that Partition did not bring about a rupture or a positive change in their lives unlike Kaur's study in which she states that the dalits experienced a change in their lives even though they got a small amount of relief and rehabilitation from the government. Although the government and the Harijan Kalyan Board in Delhi worked for improving the conditions of the dalits, it seldom fulfilled the requirements of the dalit refugees from West Pakistan or dalits from other places. Mangat Ram finally said that everything he has told me is absolutely true and that it can be cross examined by anybody and still kept mentioning his claim for land which was never met.

Our voices cannot reach up. Even you will not make our voice reach up, because you also are doing this for good marks in your project. But let me tell you that everything

I have told is absolutely true. So, I can still say we have grievances and complaints because even till today we have not gotten any help or aid. Till today! And we belong to the Sansi caste, we are schedule castes we were criminal tribes under the British, we were schedule tribes in Pakistan, but here in Delhi we have not been converted into schedule castes, this is another injustice done to us. Our fore fathers were criminals and you know why we were criminals? Because we did not get education, neither were we allowed to go to the temple, neither did we get services! Therefore the British gave us land which had supervisors allotted by the British government in West Pakistan.

Here Mangat Ram talks about how the British assisted them by allotting land to them for improving their status from criminal tribes to the status of a cultivator. The British government had allotted land to criminal tribes for the purpose of 'reform' in the nineteenth century this was done for 'the urge to 'reform' these communities which emerged out of a 'compulsion to raise revenue from land and the administrator's commitment to private enterprise'.¹⁸ And this could be achieved by giving them work on land and or in private enterprises according to Meena Radhakrishna. But on the other hand Mangat Ram's testimony reflects the positive impact of this 'reform' Radhakrishna discusses.

Mangat Ram was a conscious man, politically as well as socially. Since he was a union leader he had good knowledge of his rights and was aware of his caste history, he had much to share about the discrimination his caste had to deal with. According to him being backward and deprived was the biggest reason why his caste was branded as criminal tribes. His second grievance was also that they had been included in the schedule caste although they are schedule tribes in other states. This point can be linked to the study of Sher Singh's in which he mentions that this was often done to include this caste with the Hindu population. Lastly, Mangat Ram said:

Being a schedule caste did not help us here at all, nobody actually takes interest in us why does anybody not come here. Why does anybody not inquire whether our children get education or not? Whether there is a night school here or not? You people don't help us, I am asking for your help but you people don't write about us. Even media persons have taken interview from us before, but even that did not have any effect. I have been in the union, I have been a leader also. Everybody is going ahead

our children will only study till eighth or ninth class and they will never become a lawyer or a doctor like other people's children. Because they will be treated as Sansi, Schedule Caste and Harijan. Even till today people believe in untouchability, and that is why we are not able to go ahead!

This account of Mangat Ram was very useful, as questions related to his identities are reflected here firstly, his experience as a refugee, then as a schedule caste/untouchable. His interview reflects a multi layered experience of partition as a refugee who belonged to particular social class representing a narrative that carries its own social baggage when referring to partition refugees.

His account speaks for itself and many features about his refugee status and dalit status come out here. Mangat Ram spoke about the misuse of government policies and how the aids of Harijan Welfare Board do not reach his colony. He had a social vision and talked about a night school which should be opened for children so that they can get education and improve their conditions. His interview reflected that affirmative action and reservation policies of the government are not effective in these areas.

It is important to go into the caste history of this community here, Punjab is the main province where this caste lives but the largest number of Sansis in Northern India are in Delhi, and 'this has especially increased after the Partition of Punjab in 1947 because hundreds of families have settled in Delhi which were uprooted for West Pakistan'.¹⁹ Sher Singh has done an extensive study on this tribe and chose to work on the colonies in Delhi. Singh collected data from family to family in all the major colonies where this caste is living and majority of these colonies were resettlement colonies. He collected data from Kasturba Nagar, Majnoon Tila, Amrit Kaurpuri, Rameshwari Nagar, Prasad Nagar, Prem Nagar, Motinagar, Tihar, Andha Mughal, Naya Bazaar, and New Rajinder Nagar.

Although Sher Singh was not studying the history of partition refugees, almost all the colonies he studied are resettlement colonies of the dalits and where majority of schedule caste population of Delhi still lives today. He points out that number of displaced families from West Pakistan is 365 out of which 362 belong to West Punjab, 31 from Peshawar and two families are from Sind. He also informs that these

families from West Pakistan who live in Delhi today had gone to Peshawar and Jacobabad (Sind) about thirty years before partition of India.

III

Bhil Refugees

The Bhils are one of the oldest tribes of India which have vast spatial distribution over Rajasthan and parts of Gujrat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The Bhil migrants to Delhi are mostly from Rajasthan which accounts for 33% of the total Bhil population who are scattered all over south of Rajasthan in the districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Chittorgarh and Bhilwara.

I met Bhils at kala pahar in Baljit Nagar (as mentioned in the schedule caste survey of Delhi this area is where they mainly settled after partition). 'The Bhils of Delhi have all migrated from Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur, Only two or three families of the Bhils are Gujrati Bhils'.²⁰ They were mostly labourers on the kala pahar an industrial area in Delhi. These refugees had a different story to tell. They were not allotted houses or even huts from the government but mostly lived in Jhuggies when they came from Pakistan, they worked at the quarry site where they temporarily settled down. Today this colony is called Bhil Basti in Karol Bagh area with pucca constructed houses. I interviewed an 85 year old man who came from Sind Hyderabad during Partition riots. He said:-

We came from Nawashaha Gaon (village) in Hyderabad. I was 25 when I migrated in 1947. We used work on agricultural fields. We came by train, from Hyderabad to Mirpur, then Barmer to Jodhpur by train, and then to Delhi. We did not have money so we had to rely on labour. I used to work here in this pahar and we used to live here in jhuggies, I got married here also. I got this jhuggie allotted but not anything else. After that I made it a pucca house. After sometime the stone work finished here at kala pahar we lost our labourers jobs. My wife also used to do labour with me. My children are doing this job till today!

He told me that they used to work as agricultural labourers in Sind which was a better job than what they did here. He stated reasons of why he was not happy with this change and shift in his life as partition refugee.

I came here because there was no requirement for labour in Rajasthan and I did not get work so I came to Delhi. The contractors brought us here. We stayed at Pusa Gate for 5 years. We did not get much help from the government. We were supposed to get land in Alwar but that land never got allotted on my name.

Pahlash was a simple labourer and had not received any education, unlike Mangat Ram. The story of the two are similar in the sense that, both of them were supposed to get land allotted after being displaced from West Pakistan. Pahlash was not as politically conscious as Mangat Ram and narrated his story with less emotion and grievances although his life journey had been a difficult one, partition did not have a positive effect on his life he narrated:-

My father moved to Pakistan because of drought conditions in Rajasthan. Therefore, I was born in Pakistan we lived a really happy life there, coming here was a real pain for us. I had to do a lot of labour. We had no disputes with the Muslims our women were also not picked up during the partition. But we were told that it would be better if we move to Hindustan because we witnessed violence, 2 miles away from our village a train of the Sikhs had been brought down by the Muslims there were three bogies full of Sikhs and they were all murdered. But we were safe, so all the Hindus in that village left for Hindustan out of fear. We came almost with nothing! I had a little bit of money with me because we sold our cattle, my old mother was also with us. We did not get anything in Jaipur, the Sindhis and Baniyas got a lot we did not get anything as compared to them. We were four brothers who came, 2 of my brothers are in Jodhpur. This quarter that we are living in was not allotted to us by the government this was owned by a Bania, we used to live on rent here in the jhuggies, for which we paid 1 rupee per month for this.

From this account of Pahlash, it is reflected that these refugees were not at the midst of the violence that took place and their women were not vulnerable to the violence that took place between the Hindus and the Muslims. However, they were compelled

to leave their homes because they were in fear of being attacked. For Pahlash migrating to Delhi did not have a positive change in his life as we see in the case of other refugees. It is also reflected that the government's relief and rehabilitation did not reach Pahlash in anyway.

This Bhil basti was a small and congested one, there was no provision for electricity here, it functioned on stolen electricity. The colony had many people who had come from Pakistan at the time of partition. I met Heeralal in the same colony he had a slightly different story to tell. Heeralal was also a labourer he had travelled in a lot of cities with the contractor and finally settled down in Delhi. He told me:-

“I was born in Mirpur Pakistan but our village was called Khan. I came to Hindustan at the age of 17 or 18. We used to do agriculture there, we had 5 bigha land there that was much better than the labourers job that I did here.”

Heeralal said he had to leave his village because he saw a lot of violence and he did not want to stay back, out fear they left their village. He narrated:-

We saw so much violence due to which we did not want to stay back, in front of me, I saw four children being killed in Mirpur, and we just wanted to run away from there to save our lives. We had seven cattle and two carts but we left it all there only, we faced a lot of difficulty.

Firstly we came walking to the city Mirpur from our village. The first place where I saw violence was in Amritsar. Here we saw dead people in the trains around 2 to 3 bogies of the train was full of slaughtered people. We finally arrived to Barmer district near Jodhpur there we stayed for three years. We travelled all around India due to our profession i.e labourer. I was alone my parents passed away earlier, so I was the only one from my family, there were many others with me but we all got separated. I came to Hindustan because I were scared to live there alone. We had to spend a night there in the jungles without any food or water. Then finally we caught a mal gadi(goods train) in that we came till Barmer. In Barmer we did not know what to do, we had no work nothing, so from there I went to my grandfather's village which was near Barmer, there a thakur told us that you can do agriculture and

earn a living by farming. But the weather conditions are not good there for agriculture, it is dry without any rainfall. So there was no option left for us but to do labour.

We travelled around Rajasthan for work, firstly we came to Samdheri there also we did not get much work, we only stayed there for about six months after that we went towards Bhilmal. There I got one paisa for throwing three baskets of stones. We could not even buy ration from this amount, so we used to buy chickpeas which was for one rupee kilo, and that one piece of chickpea had around hundreds of holes. There was no chakki we had to grind it by hand my wife used to do this by hand, poor women had to do this job for two to three days we had to boil and eat that only. After that we went to Jhansi, from there we went to Lalitpur which is 25 kms from Jhansi. We travelled a lot, the contractor used to take us by filling us up in trucks. Then we travelled to Panni a village 125 kms away from Lalitpur. After that Peelibhit near Nainital, eventually we landed up in Kota Rajasthan. We have even eaten grass, those times were so difficult. After all this travelling I finally got married, my wife was also from my village we used to work together and that is how we got married. After marriage we had children, so it became very difficult to work.

Finally we came to Delhi in Baljit Nagar Bhil Basti. This land was of a Gujjar called Baljit he gave us this land. I did not receive any help or aid from the government in this regard we used to live in a jhuggi. At that time it was so difficult for us because the wind used to blow away our jhuggies my wife and I used to hold the top of the Jhuggie so that our children could sleep, I had five children when I came here.

Caste as well as class angle of partition stories arises in this narration of Heeralal as this testimony represented a lot of poverty and hard life. How did partition affect the migrant or contractual labourers is also another aspect that comes to light here. I asked Heeralal if his children received any education he said that he could not afford education he said "I could not afford flour for ten rupees how could I purchase a notebook for my children to study? We used to get only 16 rupees at that time how could I eat or educate my children at all? But I always voted for the congress since

the day I came to Delhi.” Although these poor labourers had nothing to benefit from by voting, they all chose to be loyal to the congress.

I asked Heeralal what was the original work of his caste. He told me that the work of his jati ‘was bow and arrow and to loot money our forefathers used to do this work and take money but they took money and only after they made the person bleed!’

This account of Heeralal was a different one since he was a contractual labourer. He did not arrive in Delhi as a refugee immediately after partition but came after being taken around as a contract labourer. His account narrates that these refugees were surrounded by a lot of violence that took place during partition. All these refugees from Sindh i.e. Heeralal and Pahlash witnessed a lot of the partition violence, which was the main reason they had to leave their village, both of them left their village solely out of fear.

Heeralal and Pahlash were both labourers, it is important to see here how this history of labour and caste were connected. According to Michael Anderson during colonial period labour was conceptualized through the lens of land, caste, and family ingredients of the pre-colonial framework, and it was not until 19th century did labour receive state concern. According to him colonial labour policy if at all was mired in the contradictions of between an ideology of free labour and legal paternalism. On the other hand PrabhuMahapatra disagrees with the formal recognition of labour for the purpose of ‘workers welfare’ that Anderson talks about. Mahapatra points out that ‘An alternative narrative of legal development in colonial India will make it clear that regulation of labour was not just episodic but in many ways much more pervasive than figures of ‘legal enforcement or disputes may indicate’²¹

A large number of the Bhils who came to Delhi post partition were labourers, this position of labourer and contractual labourer continued for these Bhils.

IV

The Valimiki Refugee

The Valmiki or the sweeper caste is traditionally involved in human scavenging or sweeping. They are scattered over the vast area of North Western India and are called chuharas in Punjab, Domra in Rajasthan and Mehtar in Bihar. In some parts of U.P

they claim to be called 'valmiki'. In this section I will study an oral history narrative of a Valimki woman from Karachi who came to Delhi during Partition. Although Sona Devi was originally from Western U.P she was among the dalit families who migrated to different parts of the country during colonial period. As stated earlier that many Dalit groups migrated to different parts of the country for reasons such as employment (arising out of the 'reform' policies of the British for the criminal tribes) or droughts (in case Bhils of Rajasthan).

A file especially dedicated to the evacuation of Christians in the liaison records, corresponds to the question of evacuation of dalit refugees as many of these were recent converts. The government intended to evacuate only those Christians who were converted after March, 1947. The large part of this community was left behind in Pakistan for reasons mentioned by Ambedkar in his letter to Nehru. A good number of this community had therefore converted to Christianity in Pakistan to escape the violence during riots. The correspondence of liaison records, stresses on the point that Pakistan government was preventing or interrupting the evacuation of communities who had converted to Islam or Christianity due to fear of riots.

Following letter dated, 16th July, 1948, from T.K Kaul, East Punjab Civil Secretariat, to Ram Rattan Chief Liaison Officer, East Punjab Government. States that the Mazhabi Sikhs or members of other Scheduled Castes, who embraced Christianity after March, 1947 can be evacuated by the government. However, others who are old standing will not be considered by the government. The following quote from the letter stresses on the planning of evacuating Christians who wished to come over to India.

Government agrees with you that it will not be worthwhile to evacuate Christians of old standing from west Punjab though for whatever reasons they might wish to come over to our province. Government, however, consider that every effort should be made to evacuate the Mazhabi Sikhs or members of other scheduled castes, who embraced Christianity after March, 1947.

Any Christians, who are anxious to come over to this province and who approach you for evacuating them, should be advised to come over to the

D.A.V. college camp, Lahore, from where arrangements might be made to send them over to this province.²²

The large part of this community was therefore left behind in Pakistan for reasons mentioned by Ambedkar in his letter to Nehru regarding the dalit refugees from West Pakistan. A good number of this community had therefore converted to Christianity in Pakistan. Pieter Streefland in his study of Christian Punjabi sweepers in Karachi states that the condition of the Christian Punjabi sweeper in Pakistan is as stigmatized as their ancestors, chuhra. He mentions that their profession after partition was reduced to a sweeper or a human scavenger from an agricultural labourer because their Hindu landowners had abandoned their farms as well as those who worked for them, this community therefore did not have work so they took up their caste professions. This explains that a large number of this community did not succeed in migrating to India, except for those who were originally from places in northern India such as U.P. such as Sona Devi.

Lajpat Nagar is one of the most well-known colonies where the partition refugees had settled down. VinobhaPuri was one colony which was built by the Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board at the time of partition. I visited this colony as I was told that this was built for the dalit refugees from Pakistan. I figured that it was very difficult to find dalit refugees living in this colony presently. I met a Sindhi man in the same colony, who had a namkeen business in the Lajpat Nagar market. He had a double story house which was newly renovated and reconstructed. However his neighbour's house was totally the opposite of this, it was old, single story and had a tin roof. I inquired about this house from the Sindhi business man he told me that it was a schedule caste family.

I visited this house and found that an old woman from Karachi was allotted this house in 1948. Sona Devi was above 85 years of age and belonged to the valmiki community.

She was around 25 when she came from Pakistan during partition. Her story was similar to the other dalit refugees interviewed. Similar to Bhil refugees in the sense that the generation before Sona Devi had also migrated to Karachi from U.P during

colonial period for employment opportunities. She was born in Karachi and told me about her whole journey from West Pakistan.

I was born in Karachi, my father went to Pakistan at the age of 15. Somebody who knew him had taken him there. He was told by a British man why do you live in filthy conditions? Why don't you people get educated and live better lives? My father used to work at a bijlighar. And as I grew older I started working in British man's house, as a cook and nanny for his three children.

What about your experience during partition?

During partition riots it was difficult to come out. But when the riots were at an ease we had to leave. We used to live in the area of the British people, they told us to negotiate with the Muslims and let those people go who wish to go to Hindustan. Everyone was called to the camp, people from every caste Brahmin, Baniya etc. collected in a common place and a decision was taken as to whoever wishes to go to Hindustan may go. Then finally the congress brought us here. I was with my father, uncle and I had a little daughter. I was around 25 at that time. First they took us to Bombay and we stayed there for 3 days in a camp. I don't know why we were taken to Bombay first, maybe it was because we came by ship from Karachi. The journey from Bombay was very difficult, the railway line was broken we stayed in Jhansi for one night it was a very difficult night but we got off our ship and went to the camp. The Muslims had taken everything from us all our belongings and even my earrings were taken. They said that even we left our belongings in Hindustan why can't you leave yours behind? Even a copper ring of mine was taken away, they had snatched these away from us. So we had nothing of ours when we reached Bombay. Not even clothes. We got clothes at the camp, we stayed there for three days and then we were sent in a train to Delhi. Even in Delhi we came to a camp first, at LodhiRaod. We got no work initially, but finally we worked as labours at a construction site near Bhogal (Delhi). We lived in a rented jhuggi (shanty) for around three years working as labourers. Then Mata Rameshwari called us to Lodhi road again and we got this house allotted in this place at vinobhapuri.²³ Baba VinobhaBhave had

given these in charity to us. But after sometime after his death we were told that this house is on lease and you will have to pay the rent. We kept giving 25 rupees per month for this house. After 15 years we got the ownership papers for this house.

Sona Devi was one of the very few dalit refugees who managed to stay in the house allotted to her during partition. She paid the rent with great difficulty as she had no family, her father passed away soon after she came to Delhi, her infant daughter also passed after sometime. Therefore she started living with her sister's son who worked in the sewage department of the Delhi Jal Board like her father. She told me:-

It was actually very difficult we had to deal with a lot, the fact that we had to leave our houses was difficult. My father worked with a factory he used to work as a labourer, and he also worked with the Delhi Jal board sewage department, and presently my grandson (her sister's son) is working with this too.

About the colony Sona Devi said:-

This was a Harijan colony. But all the Punjabis have taken over their houses, they bought them for a very low price from the Harijans, all of them left this colony, but we did not leave our house! Those people who sold off their houses did not think about profit or loss they just sold them off because for the first time in their lives they were getting so much money. Right now I don't know where these people are. A lot of them sold off their houses because they were addicted to alcohol. Now we are stuck in a family dispute my brother in laws son has taken this house on their name although I paid the rent for this house for so long. They have the papers for this house now. My court case is going on and I don't have any proofs to present in the court that this house was originally allotted to me. We have seen more difficulties than others who were at a better position!

From Sona Devi's account many aspects related to her caste status are revealed. Firstly her father and son in law both work with the sewerage department of the Delhi Jal Board this reflects that they are carrying their caste profession forward by working here. Both Sona Devi's father and grandson were employed with this.

Although there was a sense of empowerment within this family that they have a house in Lajpat Nagar and an earning member from their family has a government, it is reflected through this account how the caste identities and caste professions remained intact.

Sona Devi said that Rameshwari Nehru called her personally for allotment of the house, when she was a labourer after coming to Delhi. Allotment of a house really helped Sona Devi to lead a decent life. Retaining the house was a real problem for her but she managed with great difficulty. This interview also reflects that Sona Devi was one of the few who could benefit from relief and rehabilitation policies.

Similarly it would be appropriate to include the story of Laxmi. Who is a second generation dalit refugee from the valmiki community living in Trilokpuri (another dalit refugee colony). I could not take a long interview of Laxmi as she was a second generation refugee, and only gave me basic information of what her parents told her. Laxmi said her parents Ram Fal and Kela Devi came from a village called Raghunathpur near Lahore. Her parents used to work as labourers on agricultural land in Lahore, as the riots broke out both of them left their village out of fear. They came to Meerut in a train since they originally belonged to a village in U.P. This is similar to the story of Sona Devi because the generation before her had also migrated to Karachi from U.P for employment. In the same way Laxmi's parents were second generation migrants to Lahore. Laxmi told me that her parents came to their village near Meerut with two children, they had no work in the village and no source of income. Her elder brothers who were toddlers at this time died of malnutrition. After this Laxmi's parents moved to Delhi as her father got employed with the NDMC as a sweeper. Laxmi said they did not receive any help from the government, this was probably because they did not come to a refugee camp with all the other refugees. Therefore the question of getting a house allotted for her parents became impossible unlike Sona Devi who travelled to Delhi with all the other refugees.

Laxmi is presently employed as a sanitation worker in Jawahar Lal Nehru university. Her husband is also a sweeper employed with the NDMC. Laxmi and Sona Devi's story can be linked with the larger story of dalit refugees, as their caste profession continued to remain in different forms. In the case of Sona Devi her father and grandson worked with the sewerage department and similarly Laxmi's father and husband were employed as sweepers with NDMC.

Conclusion

The Dalits were not absent from the partition drama, infact they were very much part of the communal violence, threats and migrations. Partition for them also meant changing homes, leaving land behind. All the three refugee communities studied here have different stories and histories connected to them. The aim of the present paper was not to draw genralised conclusions but only to cover the experiences of these dalit refugees. Since no two experiences can be the same and that is what makes each of these individual stories from parition important. The Bhils and the Sansis have similar histories, in the sense that their ancestors migrated to Pakistan in the colonial period because they were branded as criminal tribes

These dalit refugees chose the congress while making their political choices , which is visible from the account of Mangat Ram. He seemed to be a strong supporter of the congress although he had many grievances. In Ranabir Samadar's review of Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Remembered villages' he points out that this hindu refugee that Chakrabarty is talking about is the 'pastoral, revivalist, modern, romantic, upooted hindu refugee'²⁴, in the context of the partition in the East where 'the great partition shows the materiality of politics' people rebuilt their lives and made their political chioces, in the East the refugees joined the left whereas in Delhi they became the strength of the Jan sangh. But the question here is where do you locate the dalit refugee in this 'materiality of politics' Samadar talks about. The dalits from West Pakistan (as reflected from the interviews) definitely supported the congress in Delhi rather then becoming the core spport of the Jan sangh as we see in the case of upper caste hindu refugees.

Lastly, an attempt here was to bring out the voice of these refugees so that their experiences are also included in the studies related to partition and vioence. While drawing no conclusions between the gendered and dalit experience of partition. The caste and economic status of these refugees does reflect a different partition story. Since each of them have their own histories, social grouping, caste history and experiences to share. Menon, Bhasin, Butalia and Karuna Chanana have done exactly this with the gendered naratives of partiton refugees through personal interviews and so on, each of these writers have gone back into the histories of woman refugees they interviewed. A similar attempt was made here by studying the caste history of each of

these refugees to bring out the change in their lives after migration to Delhi and Punjab in the midst of partition violence.

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Endnotes

¹ Ravinder Kaur 'Since 1947', OUP: New Delhi (2007), PP. 158

² Evacuation of Schedule Castes, LV/23/46 A, Punjab National Archives, Chandigarh, P. 159

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. P. 161

⁵ East Punjab Liaison Agency Lahore Records, File no. LV/22/198, Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, P. 1

⁶ These refugees are today settled in Bhargo Camp Jalandhar

⁸ Report on the Administration of Criminal Tribes in The East Punjab For the year ending 31st December, 1947, B/8660, Punjab State Archives, (Patiala)

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¹⁰ 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

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

¹² Ibid., P.177

¹³ M. Radhakrishna, *Dishonored By History 'criminal tribes' and British Colonial Policy*, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 2001, P.4.

¹⁴ The Schedule Caste Survey of Delhi 1961, Central Secretariat Library, GOI, New Delhi. P. 52

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ravinder Kaur 'Exploring Social class in 1947 migration', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 3, 2006.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ M. Radhakrishna, *Dishonored By History 'criminal tribes' and British Colonial Policy*, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 2001. P.7

¹⁹ Sher Singh, 'The Sansis Of Punjab', Oriental Publishers & Booksellers: Delhi (1965) P.107

²⁰ Ibid. P.51

²¹ P. Mohapatra 'Regulated Informality: Legal Constructions of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814-1926' in S. Bhattacharya and J. Lucassen ed., *Workers in Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History, 1800-2000*, McMillan, New Delhi, 2005.

²² East Punjab Liaison Agency Lahore Records, Evacuation of Christians, File No. 24- EV, Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh. P.3

²³ In March 1949 it was decided to entrust the work of the rehabilitation of the dalit refugees to the Harijan Sewak Sangh which was recognized as a Central government agency. The board named 'Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board' was set up with Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru as its chairman.

²⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu- Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10th August, 1996.