

Partition's Aftermath: A Case Study of Migrants of Mirpur in Jammu

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Abstract

The Partition of India affected the lives of millions of people who had to face many hardships. Genocide, rapes, murders were witnessed by the people on both sides of border. Jammu & Kashmir state was also affected by this cataclysmic event. The effect of Partition on the state was such that it has its repercussions on the state today also.

Keywords: Partition, Migration, Refugees, Migrants, Problems, Violence, Devastation, Accession

Introduction

The partition made its way in 1947 with the birth of a separate country called Pakistan and Independence of India but the problems regarding the amalgamation of princely states was yet to be solved. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir where Maharaja Hari Singh was in power was not keen on joining either of the side. But it was after the tribal raids from Pakistan which started from Kashmir and reached as far as Kathua that Maharaja had to accede to India to save his territory as the situation was getting out of control and difficult for state machinery to handle the situation. Moreover the communal riots in the state that followed after the accession made it difficult for all the officials to work together. Many people chose their allegiance towards either of the country which created more difficulties for the administration to handle the situation.

The tribal raids shook all parts of the state including areas of Poonch, Rajauri, Kotli, Bhimber, and Mirpur were also attacked. The paper deals with the area of Mirpur. The Mirpur city is situated on the banks of river Jhelum. The city is surrounded by Jhelum River, Rawalpindi districts of west Punjab from the southwest side and on the northeast side Poonch, Jammu and Reasi district border it. It was one of the important commercial centres of Jammu and Kashmir. The dialect spoken in Mirpur is Mirpuri which resembles to the Punjabi language.

Aim of the Study

This paper aims to study the effects of Partition on the migrants from the small region of Mirpur which is currently in Pakistan and the struggles they had to face. Most of these migrants reside in Jammu today and have different tales to tell - the hardships they had to face, the atrocities of the Pakistan army, and the problems they had to encounter while migrating to the Indian side of the border.

The Mirpur city is presently in Pakistan as it couldn't be saved from the army's onslaught and according to the census of 1941 the population of Mirpur was Three Lakhs Eighty Six Thousand Six Hundred Fifty Five but after the Pakistani's raids almost 35000 thousand people became refugees, they had to leave their homes and most of them made their journey to Jammu. Majority of the population moving from Mirpur were Hindus and Sikhs. The major turn of event started from the 5th and 6th November when the army of Pakistan along with tribal raiders reached the outskirts of Mirpur city. Neither the Indian army nor the additional forces of Maharaja could reach to save the people trapped in the Mirpur. Moreover the Wazir-e-Wazarat of Mirpur Rao Rattan Singh also fled the city along with some of his men leaving the residents of the city to the mercy of the Pakistan's army.

With the situation getting out of control the citizens took hold of situation and formed Mohalla committees, which undertook the task of providing security to their fellow citizens. The young population helped the remaining Maharaja's forces in maintaining peace and security, but their only link with the outside world which was a lone wireless set of state police developed a snag which made them vulnerable to the attack and they lost their

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link with the outside world.

On 23rd November Pakistan army attacked the city of Mirpur from the outskirts of the city with the grenades and heavy artillery due to which the defenders of the city suffered as they were not well armed, taking the advantage of huge gunfire many Pakistani Pathans entered the city some of these Pathans were killed in the fight with young volunteers who were defending the city, many of the volunteers lost their lives while defending the city. Meanwhile Pakistan's army stormed the city and started burning the houses of the local residents.

Many of the citizens of Mirpur city were captured by the Pakistan's army and were kept in the Alibeg Gurudwara which was turned into a prison, efforts were made by the government to get the citizens released, and vehicles were arranged from Jammu to get them released. Although one group of prisoners were released but the release of one group another group of people were not released. At that time Gulam Abbas who was the leader of Muslim Conference was kept under arrest by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir tried to assure that if he is released he would get the remaining prisoners of Mirpur also released by the Pakistan government. But as soon as he was released and reached Poonch he turned aggressive and gave aggressive speeches against the king. Moreover he did not keep his promise of getting the prisoners of Mirpur released.

Mehar Chand Mahajan who was then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 in his autobiography says that he along with Maharaja undertook a tour of border area of Kathua to Bhimber, Mirpur and Kotli which had faced the brunt of Pakistan raiders. Before the Maharaja and Mehar Chand Mahajan could reach Mirpur there was an attack of Pakistani raiders on Dak Bunglow of Bhimber due to which they could not proceed further.

An aerial tour of Mirpur, Kotli and Rajauri was done to assess the situation. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir was already in worse condition meanwhile riots also broke out between two communities. Muslim population was attacked in Jammu, Riasi, Udhampur and Kathua areas, whereas in retaliation Hindu and Sikh population was exterminated on the Chenab side of the Riasi, Rajauri areas where Muslims were in majority.

Mehar Chand Mahajan in his autobiography also mentions about the efforts made by the government of Jammu and Kashmir to persuade Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India to send extra military enforcements to free number of towns in which Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber, and Rajauri was among them.

It seems that the freedom of these towns were not much of priority for the Indian government due to close proximity of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, leader of National Conference, all the focus was on Kashmir, however the Gorkha battalion of Indian army was flown to Jammu. The army was however successful in rescuing the inhabitants of Kotli(which is near to Mirpur) in migrating but they could not get the territory of Kotli and it was overtaken by the Pakistan but as far as Mirpur was concerned, before the army could reach there to help, the town was again attacked by the Pathan tribesmen, citizens were killed mercilessly and many of the influential men were killed either by Pathan raiders or by native Muslims. The neighbours who were living together peacefully irrespective of religion few months before Partition were now eyeing each other with the feeling of vengeance. Many of the Mehar Chand Mahajan's relatives were also killed it is mentioned by him in his autobiography. Many of the people had to lose their lives due to the government's apathy.

It was after the signing of Instrument of Accession by the Maharaja the raids by Pakistan army got frequent, riots broke out and many villages were attacked by the residents of Pakistan from across the border with the help of Pakistan's army. Mirpur too faced the brunt of riots as Mehar Chand Mahajan himself recalls that while touring the Mirpur kotli areas he saw human corpses lying around which spoke the story of butchery and cruelty on the resident of the area. Many of the survivors fled to Jammu along with their families along with little bit of saving they had. It was recorded that no less than 60000 families migrated from Poonch-Mirpur area to Jammu

Bal k. Gupta in his book *Forgotten Atrocities: Memoirs of Survivor of the 1947 Partition* was the witness of the events that unfolded in the Mirpur after the

1947. The author relays a day to day account of events and loss of family members who were killed either by the tribal raids or by communal violence. Gupta talks about his grandmother and uncle who lived few house away from his house and were killed in the heavy artillery attack by the Pakistan's army. The migration from Mirpur to nearest army cantonment by Gupta is a gruelling tale of helpless people who were harassed at the hands of the governments. Gupta shares that Pakistan army upon entering the Mirpur city abducted the two daughters of his neighbour *Bodh Raj* who was shot dead along with his son and left their old mother on her own.

Gupta narrated his journey of leaving Mirpur city from where they first went to nearby Gurudwara which was at the end of town but upon finding themselves vulnerable to the Pakistan army's attack, migrants left for the nearest army cantonment which was deserted by the army and here civilians were attacked by the sniper shots of the army and many lost their lives in this surprised attack. Gupta had to leave his mother in this cantonment as she was suffering from some leg infection which made it difficult for her walk further and Bal k. Gupta and his brother had to leave their mother and set on a journey to Jhangar along with thousands of other refugees. The other group of refugees moved towards Kasguma and third group moved towards Thatyal. *Harbans Singh* who was leading a group of migrants to Dadiyal when ran out of the ammunition decided that they would all commit suicide by shooting his wife, his unmarried sister and his little daughter, however his son who was only 5years had survived due to the injury in his leg only and with the last remaining bullet *Harbans Lal* shot himself. Similarly *Bhai Mohan Singh* had to kill his two sisters and his mother and along with them 20 more women who persuaded him to kill them out of fear of being abducted or molested by the enemy army.

The people moving to Jhangar were caught by the Pakistan's army and were sent to *Alibeg Gurudwara* which Pakistan army used as a makeshift jail, everyday about 15-17 innocent people were taken to isolated places and were killed. An incident by *Sardar Ibrahim* happened when he assured the learned group of migrants from the *Alibeg* prison that they will be given chance to put their case in front of government of Pakistan and the people included advocates and teachers who boarded the lorries thinking that they were helping their fellow citizens but somewhere in the midway they were stopped and asked to get down and *Sardar Ibrahim* on whose assurance these people had come ran away silently, refugees met the same fate what other people in Kotli, Rajouri, Poonch were meeting.

Master Harbans Lal who was also a captive at *Alibeg* prison was one day taken to Mangla Dam along with other captives where they were to be thrown in the water with their hands tied so that they drown in water, when the turn of *Master Harbans Lal* came he jumped before his hands could be tied, the Pakistani army fired bullets at him but the strong current of water washed him away, later he was found in a semi-conscious condition by a Muslim Zaildar who took care of him and sent him to Lahore from where he was handed over to International Red Cross Society which sent him to Jammu to be united with his wife and son, he retired as a principle from Higher Secondary School, from Jammu and Kashmir government.

Not only did the prisoners were being murdered but the meals given to refugees were also unhygienic due which diseases were common in the camp, flour was mixed with *chuna*, *neela thotha* and *peices of glass* as a result many people died because of starvation, cold, diseases.

Many people had to convert themselves so as to save themselves from the persecution. *Omprakash* was also one of them, helped by his Muslim friend, on his advice, *Omprakash* had to convert himself into so that he could reach India. After wait of over one month he finally reached India from the border of Gujarat along with his father. The fall of Mirpur resulted into the looting of lot of money which went into Millions of Rupees and each and every house was dug to recover the hoarded amount.

Author Aanchal Malhotra in her book *Remnants of Separation*, interviewed Ajit Kaur who came from Mirpur and Kaur recalled her tale of migration from Mirpur to Jammu, she was pregnant, Mirpur was attacked by mercenaries in which many of her family members died including her father and she witnessed all the bloodshed. Recalling her journey, she had to walk for three days and pass

through a dense forest, she said many of the children were abandoned and many were buried alive many people died on their way due to starvation. She also gave birth to a child on her journey and had to cut her umbilical cord with her husband's sword. After giving birth she recounted that being weak and frail she and her husband decided to leave their newborn behind but couldn't leave her and with great effort three of them got to Jammu safely.

By 1949, when the ceasefire was announced, the territory of Mirpur was amalgamated with the Pakistan. Today many of the Mirpur residents' lives in the Bakshi Nagar area of Jammu city and Subhash Nagar and many have migrated to the other parts of the country and outside the country. Every year 25th November is celebrated as Mirpur day. The Mahesh Pura Chowk which is outside the Government Medical College Jammu is dedicated to the Mirpuri population.

Conclusion

The fall of Mirpur is considered to be bitter chapter in the history of Jammu and Kashmir because of the brutality faced by the people of Mirpur and loss of their homes. The people of Mirpur had to uproot themselves from their hometown and shift to new places sans their belongings and their loved ones. Many lost their loved ones in this cross-border migration especially women who lost their families, taken away forcibly and married off to people of different religions. Many children became orphaned, some were left behind by their parents. The government apathy and untimely help tainted the lives of the people of Mirpur.

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