

## Sociological Perspective of Population Migration

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### Abstract

*From the time Immemorial, human beings have been getting displaced from their native places for one reason or the other. Sometime the dislocation was on account of the demands of development and on other it was because of war, natural calamities, religious and political persecutions. All this and a host of other factors have been continually creating a class of displaced persons who are uprooted from the places of their origins. Normally this class of displaced and uprooted persons are what we call as refugees. The influx of hordes of refugees into any country especially the third world country created several problems in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is the living testimony of the marked increase in the issues related to the refugees.*

**Keywords:** Community, Host, Jats, Punjabies, Refugees.

### 1. Introduction

The phenomenal increase in the influx of the refugees, stretches considerably the resources of the host society to the limit and if it is an underdeveloped country like India which does not have the sufficient resources to feed its own people, the problem gets further compounded. It not only creates economic problems for the host society but also disturbs the host of political balance for the sons of soil. This is partly due to the enormous increase in the refugee streams witnessed during this period. The division of Europe during the Second World War forced thousands of persons to leave their homes in Poland and East Germany and to seek refuge in west Europe. The creation of Israel produced a number of Arab refugees camps and the events in main-land China, Cuba and parts of Africa (Nigeria) have created several mammoth refugees streams. In this regard, India since independence has perhaps witnessed the world's largest refugee influx from East Pakistan. The very act of providing asylum to refugees can lead to tension in the relationship prevailing between the host country and the other country.

Given this scenario the problem has attracted the attention of social scientists. Most of the studies are either in the field of psychology and social psychology, emphasizing on issues such as nostalgia, depression and invulnerability of the refugees. The socio-logical literature in the field however remains scanty. Hence in this dissertation an attempt is made first to review the sociological literature that is available on the refugees and next to develop a framework to study the adaptation of Panjabi refugees in India, who came in the wake of partition from a sociological perspective.

The social scientists have tried to explain the term refugees in their own respective ways. According to Sir Simpson,<sup>1</sup> "a refugee is one who finds himself deprived, of legal action, mutual support, the access of employment and the measure of freedom of movement which happier mortals take as a matter of course. In an ordered world this legal protection and mutual support constituting what might be called social security is enjoyed by the nationals of a sovereign state. Security is extended to them, not only at home, but when they move around the world in other countries. The refugee, unless special means are taken for his protection, has no such security but exists in any country on sufferance. His defenselessness lies in his inability to demand the protection of any state. For all practical purpose he is outlawed by his country of origin, in his country of refuge he has a measure ordinary legal protection in any decently governed state. Above all, he has no claim such as the right to continued residence and is liable to expulsion if his presence for any reason is no longer desired. The essential quality of a refugee therefore may be said to be that he has left his country of regular residence of which he may or may not be a national as a result of political events in that country which rendered his continual residence impossible or intolerable, and has taken refuge in other country, or is already absent from his home, is unwilling to return without dangers to life and liberty."

In the international law two conditions must exist for the proper definitions of who is a refugee<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Persons or categories of persons qualifying for refugee status must have left the territory of the state of which they were nationals.

- 2) The events which are the root cause of man's becoming a refugee derive from the relations between the state and its nations that is victims of natural disasters are excluded.

There are three types of refugees according to Keller,<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Those who have become refugees due to economic causes;
- 2) Those who become refugees due to war, and those
- 3) Who owe their refugee status to political, religious or ethnic reason.

The first category of persons concern those men whose moves are voluntary and the cause of displacement can be described as positive motivation or a desire for economic betterment. The actual travel is felt to be more of an adventure than an escape. Since in most of the cases, death is not the alternative to migration and violence does not attend it, these people suffer little or no psychic damage.

In the second category comes "war refugees" who were made homeless by war and who have not yet been resettled, the displacement sometimes voluntary, sometimes not is negatively motivated. It becomes necessary to flee if one's safety is to be guaranteed. Since these type of refugees in most of the cases returned to their homelands, it becomes difficult to characterize them as refugees, but in some other cases, in which they cannot return to their homeland they are usually known as war evacuees.

The third category of refugees which is relatively new includes those people who as the result of a new government or new policies find themselves threatened in a hostile environment and secondly because of community ethics and religious world-view is out of harmony with a new governing majority or thirdly because of certain political beliefs, which is not in consonance with the new government's policies are forced to flee their native land for the purpose of security. These three types of refugees is a broad classification and in any nation there may be more than one type : e.g. Korea has both the second and third type Australia has the first and third Holland and Israel have all three and in India we also have second and third type of refugees such as Panjabis and Bangalis etc. Further, even among one refugee group, depending on their migration and time of departure different types can be found. Recently there has been a resurgence of the second type, the war evacuee of external variety i.e. traditional people who because of enemy occupation of their territory are forced to flee to more or less to inhospitable or unsympathetic areas. For instance the Chinese occupation of Tibet has sent thousands of Refugees into the hilly regions of India.

The Keller's categorization of three types of refugees does not fit in with other definitions of refugees which regard the refugees as an involuntary migrant who cannot return to his country and enjoy the same citizenship status as those of other nationals. To accept Keller's categorization of an economic migrants as refugees would lead us to categories, Indian migrants to the middle east countries in search of job opportunities also as refugees. Therefore a refugee for our purpose is regarded as a

person who has been forced to abdicate his motherland due to loss of political status or due to hostile environment created by the emergency of new religious or political groups.

Since the advent of independence three divorce refugee streams have been observed. The partition of the country in 1947 led to an exodus of 8,500,000 refugees from East and West Pakistan. Of these, 50,00,000 were from West Pakistan in the period 1947-48 and 35,00,000 refugees from East Pakistan in the period 1941-50.<sup>1</sup> According to the census 1951, the total number of displaced persons in India in 1951 was 74,79,273. These figures, it is believed, understate the refugee flow.

Murphy<sup>2</sup> feels that the refugees in India were unlike those from Europe to American shores or European jews to Israel, people endowed with a great hope for a new life or people fulfilling an ancestral destiny of a religious community. The refugees in India were "more struggling suffers trying to pull together the fragments of a lost life but unable to do so."

There exists very few studies of the refugees communities in India. To be precise there are three major studies, one each for the three refugees communities in India. Of course, two viz. Pakrasi's<sup>2</sup> study of the Bengali refugees and Palakshappa's<sup>2</sup> study of Tibetan refugees have been conducted from the sociological point of view. The third study conducted by Keller<sup>1</sup> on the Panjabi refugees in India has been done from the psychological point of view.

Pakrasi's study was conducted keeping in view the following objectives:

- 1) How the displaced persons behaved to remain together in family level by inner kin bonds and in doing so what structural modifications they had to accept within family units in post-migrational living?
- 2) How a caste influence created differentiations among the refugee migrants in their propensity for building up a new society after migration dis-organised kinship organisations on family level in West Bengal?
- 3) How the displaced families originating from different occupational classes agriculture and non-agriculture behaved in reorganizing disrupted facilities in West Bengal?<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Pakrasi was interested in studying how the traditional caste and kin bonds of refugees were affected by the trauma of partition and forced migration. His study also focuses on the extent to which the refugees' occupational background supported them in reorganizing their post emigrational family life in West Bengal. Pakrasi used the field data collected immediately after the partition in 1948 by the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.

His analysis of West Bengal data led him to the following conclusions:

- 1) The refugees with the occupational background of trade, business and commerce, bureaucratic and non bureaucratic professions reacted "more quickly and vividly in taking for reaching decisions in favour of migration.

- 2) The class of refugees who belonged to the occupational background of the trade and commerce mainly congregated in the cities in search of jobs. Those who belonged to the bureaucratic and other services preferred to migrate to the towns in West Bengal.

Pakrasi's study also reveal that crisis of partition and uproot did not disrupt the institution of joint family. This he attributes to the persistence of the cultural norms related to the Hindu way of life and the strength of the caste system. Thus Pakrasi's study highlights the importance of Hindu culture and Hindu way of life in explaining the minimal disruption of family life among refugees. He further stresses that unlike in the case of other social structure which are disrupted by crisis to individuate the human beings, the crisis of partition in Bengal maintained the existing social-structure based on joint family and caste. This culturological explanation of Pakrasi's however, does not take into account the more important and interesting issues namely success of refugees in adapting themselves to the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of a review of several studies quoted in Pakrasi's book itself,<sup>1</sup> it is apparent that those refugees who migrated to the cities of West Bengal found it extremely difficult to adjust themselves where as those who settled down to agriculture in rural areas found in least difficult to rehabilitate themselves. If we match this fact to Pakrasi's analysis of occupational background of the migrants settled in the rural and urban areas, it becomes evident that the problem of adjustment was most acute in the cases of refugees with the background of trade and commerce and minority of agriculturists to settle in cities of West Bengal, Pakrasi is of the view that since a sizeable portion of displaced families continued to regard themselves even after 14 years of partition (at the time of study) as refugees they have not been able to 'assimilate themselves' into the mainstream of Bengali life. He seeks an explanation for this in social psychological factors but he does not elaborate on this, while Pakrasi recognizes that this lack of assimilation has something to do with governmental financial support to refugees, he regards the refugee problem as not an economic problem but a social psychological problem.

Many social scientists of the refugees scene in India have commented on the lack of adjustment and assimilation of Bengali refugees as compared to that of the Panjabi refugees, although both the refugee communities were mainly settled in states which were contiguous to the states from which they migrated. The Panjabi refugees were quick to adapt themselves and succeeded in agriculture, trade, commerce and industries. The Bengali refugees however, did not show this dynamism. There are several explanations offered. According to U. Bhaskar Rao,<sup>1</sup> "the East Bengali refugees were mainly agriculturists, the pressure on agricultural land in West Bengal had already reached such proportions that the resources one could mobilize for the relief of immigrants were negligible. The displaced persons in the west revealed a praiseworthy mobility; they were ready to spread themselves out over the whole country, as it was not so with the refugees from East Pakistan. They were

reluctant to move beyond West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, where they were largely concentrated. West Bengal naturally, had to offer asylum to the largest number, a burden for which it was ill-equipped."

Thus, while Pakrasi suggests that only those refugees who converged to the cities of West Bengal posed a problem in rehabilitation, Bhaskar Rao goes on to point out that because of the non-availability of land, even those Bengali refugees who were settled in agriculture proved to be a problem. They had to face the problems of adjustment and assimilation apart from their differences in economic, cultural and social values with that of the host society. The process of assimilation and adjustment are very slow and difficult between the refugee people and local people of the province.

In the study of Keller, he is of the view that refugees may tend to become parasitical and may lapse into an infantile dependent-state as in the case of Bengali refugees if sufficient economic support of the host country is not available. The Bengali refugees, he points out, lapsed into the mentality of a frustrated infant to whom all is owing because pre-partition land arrangement and distribution of wealth in Bengal were such that the Bengali Hindu refugees could not be resettled on the land as easily as his western counterpart. In Panjab, however the fact that immigrant Muslim Land was available for resettlement made these Panjabi refugees who had suffered great calamities and threats of life, invulnerable. Invulnerability, according to Keller is a psychological trait which makes a man feel that he belongs to the chosen few for whom no danger would cause any great harms. This feeling of invulnerability, he explains is the result of the harrowing or deals and threats to life refugees experienced inspite of which they manage to survive. Invulnerability according to Keller infuses the need for power (n power) which makes them to take to business, commerce and large scale agriculture because the doors to conventional careers such as the military, the government and politics are blocked off by groups that have already staked out for these vocations. Hence the invulnerable Punjabi refugees, become successful agriculturists, businessmen and industrialist transforming Panjab and Haryana into the granary of India and into a highly industrialised state. Keller is of the view that the invulnerability resulting in the high n power would make the refugees take high risks and search for un-conventional strategies in order to succeed. Such high risk taking ability led them to make significant contributions to the development of Panjab and Haryana. Keller's explanation counterperson McClelland's argument which locates in the need for achievement (n Ach) the psychological raw material for economic development. One of the characteristics associated with n-Ach is a willingness to make moderate calculated risk. Keller believes that McClelland's<sup>1</sup> argument fits well in situations in which the economic development has already begun. In the relatively under-developed society in which rapid growth has just begun or is on the horizon, a high-risk high gain situation prevails. In such a situation a strategy in which there is a high risk component is likely to be socially as well as individually beneficial.

Keller goes on to point out that the refugees' ability to take high-risks and succeed though not especially aggressively made them the target of aggression by envious non-refugees.<sup>1</sup>

This led to a situation of competition between the refugees and non-refugees which legitimized and institutionalized the synergy. Synergy is the socially shared world view that sees competition as legitimate. Each individual in a synergistic situation while maximizing his personal goals, benefits society. Thus synergistic situation created by the invulnerability of refugees contributed to the overall sustained growth of the entire Panjab and Haryana region. The overall result of the synergy which is gradually transmitted from refugees to non-refugees makes for greater participation in economic development and that the values of the society does not become concentrated in the hands of a few magnates and zamindars. Thus Keller sees in refugee-hood the potential for economic development and social change in the host society under certain specific conditions.

Hazelhurst's<sup>1</sup> study of a Panjabi town also points to the fact that refugees entrepreneurial success is related to their greater social mobility which he attributed partly to the influence of religious reform movements such as Arya Samaj and partly because partition has deem-phased already diminished importance attached to such elements of orthodoxy such as sub caste distinctions and obeisance to Brahmins. Hence, Freed from the traditional obligations and values which tied down the local merchant communities, the refugees could use unorthodox strategies for success in entrepreneurial activities. It is to be noted here that the refugees studied by Hazelhurst mainly belong to the trading and business class. Thus Hazelhurst's thesis comes close to the wellknown sociological theories which isolate the marginal man who, freed from conventional resources seeks new directions to become successful in the entrepreneurial field. As regards the assimilation of the refugee communities in any host society, several processes have to overcome before assimilation is reached. Hence the explanation of the processes of assimilation becomes pertinent here.

Assimilation is one of the important processes in which persons of diverse ethnic and social background come to interact in the life of the larger community. Whenever representative of different racial and cultural groups live together some individuals of subordinate status (whether or not they constitute a numerical minority) became assumable. Complete assimilation would mean that no separate social structure based on social or ethnic dimension remained but difficult to achieve.

Assimilation may be distinguished from accommodation, a process of compromise characterized by toleration and from acculturation a cultural change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more cultural systems or the transference of individuals from their original societies and cultural setting to new socio-cultural environments. According to a widely quoted point of view, "assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons of groups acquire the memories, sentiments, attitudes of the host persons and by sharing their experiences and history get incorporated with them in a cultural life."<sup>1</sup>

Assimilation, it may be pointed out is a matter of degree. In large society, the process of assimilation depends upon the racial, structural, psychological and cultural factor. There is, at present, very few systematic comparative analysis of assimilation. Ecological factors have been important in the limited states, where "cultural islands" created by immigrants group often provide security but also isolate new comers from the mainstream of nation life.

Another important dimension to assimilation is that of psychological variables. Attention should be called to attitudinal factors that have started assimilation in specific historical situations, particularly the belief that members of one or another racial or ethnic groups are inassimilable. The refugee groups tend to adjust shedding one's inherent characteristics to that of host society and try to mingle with them so as to shed their status "refugee status." As regards the process of adjustment it presents a particular ambiguous problem when the "core culture", or culture of the host society is unstructured or heterogeneous. It is therefore, some times unclear as to how close to "core culture" a refugee must come before he can be considered assimilated.

In the occupational structure of host society the successful entry of the major bread winner is generally considered to be a major criteria of adjustment. Most countries that have admitted large number of refugees, with the exception of Israel during its early years, have not suffered from a serious unemployment problem. Entry into the economic system is often accompanied by considerable downward mobility. Refugees are pressed to accept jobs at a lower status level than that to which they have been trained. Downward mobility produce frustration and tend to slow up other aspects of adjustment process. Satisfactory entry into the economic structure is not necessarily associated with successful adjustment in other spheres. If refugees are employed they generally interact only with other refugees either from countries of their origin or from other countries but in any case not with members of the host society from whom local norms can be learned. Furthermore even if the refugees work side by side with the members of the host society, the work situation may be limited to formal, instrumental relationship and may provide little overlap in the more informal spheres.

It is our contention that the criterion of adjustment must thus be viewed both from the point of view of the individual refugee or group and from the point of view of the host society; and the image of the process may differ from their points of view. The degree of similarity of the refugees in culture as well as the general similarity in social structure of the former home land to the host society, plays a major role in the adjustment process. The social structure of the country of origin and the refugee's former place in it predetermine his skill and attitudes and thus direct his to specific segment or stratum of the host country.

Thus the review on available literature on the Bengali and the Panjabi refugees, lead us to conclude therefore that the former represent a case of unsuccessful adaptation while the latter represent a case of successful adaptation. Successful adaptation could be regarded as a situation

when the refugees becomes self-reliant either individually or collectivity and also loose their identity as refugees. Adaptation is unsuccessful when the refugees still regard themselves as aliens in the host society and continue to depend upon support from external agencies.

From the above mentioned studies the crucial factors that makes for successful or unsuccessful adaptation of refugees are:

- 1) The amount and nature of governmental assistance to rehabilitate refugees.
- 2) The elements of social structure and culture of the refugees prior to migration.
- 3) Actual experiences of the refugees in the process of uprootment.

This way of identifying the factors responsible for adaptation however may lead us to view adaptation as a once and for all process. But adaptation is a continuous process as we are well aware from Keller's study and that of Hazelhurst's that successful adaptation may itself lead to refugees becoming the environs target of host society. While such hostility may under certain circumstances lead to overall development of the host society and change the social structure and culture of refugees themselves, it is quest conceivable that the hostility from the host society may adversely affect the refugees' integration into the host society. This may be particularly in the case if the social structure and culture of refugees is completely alien to that of host society. In this context, it is relevant to study the process of adaptation of Panjabi refugees in the Indian social and cultural milieu.

Hence in the what follows, we attempt to explore the process of adaptation of Panjabi refugees in the Indian setting.

To analyse the process of adaptation at work in the case of Panjabi refugees it is essential to have an understanding of their economic, political and social life prior to their arrival in India.

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