



**MIGRATION ISSUES DURING  
PARTITION OF INDIA AND THE  
RIGHTS OF MIGRATING WOMEN**

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## THE MAIN FOCUS

- The migration issues during the partition of India.
- Even after the 1951 census many Muslim families from India continued migrating to Pakistan throughout 1950s and 1960s.
- It would be therefore crucial to understand how gender interacted with this migration and responded accordingly.
- This paper would seek to find how rights of the women was affected due to this displacement.



## PHASES OF MIGRATION IN INDIA

- Migration occurring between October 1946 and March 1958 was termed 'old migration'.
- The second category consisted of migrations between April 1958 and December 1963 with the migrants being called 'in-between migrants'.
- The last category was that of 'new migrants' comprising of people migrating from 1963 to the 1970s.



## WOMEN AS BODIES, NOT HUMAN BEING

- During the Partition of India, violence against women was an extensive issue.
- It is estimated that during the partition between 75,000–and 100,000 women were kidnapped and raped.
- In November 1946 Muslim women were subjected to stripping, nude processions and rape by Hindu mobs in the town of Garhmukteshwar.
- Systematic violence against women started in March 1947 in Rawalpindi district where Sikh women were targeted by Muslim mobs.



- Women were reduced to their bodies, carrying the burden of the honour of the community, to be conquered, claimed or marked to attack that honour.
- Violence was also inflicted on women by their own men in the form of suicides they were coerced into, or killed in the name of honour.
- There were also women who committed suicide to keep their *'purity'* and were later glorified as *'martyrs'*.
- The mass suicides in Thoa Khalsa, Rawalpindi, with 90 women jumping in the well, was greatly publicised in the news. *The Statesman* in its report also compared this act to the *Rajput* tradition of Sati, thereby giving it the sanction of traditions.



## ABDUCTED WOMEN'S RECOVERY AND RESTORATION: STATE'S DECISION OF VIOLENCE

- Another kind of violence that women faced was inflicted by the State immediately after the violence during the partition.
- In September 1947, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met at Lahore and decided to start a program for recovering abducted women from both sides.
- On December 6, 1947 an Inter-Dominion Treaty was signed for this purpose and the program was called *Central Recovery Operation*, comprising of women social workers and police.
- In 1949 the *Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act* was also passed for the same. Under this act, a date was decided and conversions and marriages of women after March 1, 1947 were not recognised, while these women were considered abducted persons.



## CHILDREN OF ABDUCTED WOMEN

- ❑ Regarding the children borne by abducted women, the state refused to recognise them as legitimate since they were born of '*wrong*' sexual unions.
- ❑ Women were separated from their children, and forcefully if they resisted.
- ❑ The pregnant women on the other hand, had to either give their children up for adoption or go for abortion or '*cleansing*' as it was called.
- ❑ Even though abortion was illegal in India, the government financed mass abortions specially for this purpose. Even Women's rights to take decision about her own body was also ignored.



## STATUS OF REHABILITATION FACILITIES

- The communal violence in the Bengal region started in October-November 1946 with the Noakhali riots and the women had to bear the brunt, becoming victims of rape, abduction, and forced conversion and marriage.
- Ashoka Gupta, one of the social workers working for rehabilitation of refugees, went to the Punjab camps in 1955, and pointed out the neglect of the Bengal camps.
- In Bengal, there were also no separate women's homes and latrines as well as no training centres to help them stand on their own.
- Later six homes for women, six women's camps, four mixed Permanent Liability (PL, one of the various types of camps) camps and five women training centres were established in West Bengal.





## COMING OUT OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPHERE: STRUGGLE TO BE ECONOMICALLY INDEPENDENT

- Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta have argued, the East Bengali woman was not only a victimized recipient of her circumstances but also triumphed through her trauma. These women changed the social reality of West Bengal and became inspiration for the other women by coming out in the public sphere.
- The *Communist Party of India* (CPI) also played a significant part by spearheading many of the refugee protest movements. The women were especially supportive of CPI as along with their demands as refugees, it fought for their rights as women.
- By 1955 CPI had collected 14,102 signatures demanding employment for women in government sector. It also fought for grants of marriage for girls and remarriage for widows, as well as passing of the bill giving equal rights to inheritance to Hindu women in 1950.
- Partition also altered the lives of women who belonged to the minority community and did not migrate. Syed Tanveer Nasreen, through interviews with the women in two villages of Burdwan district in West Bengal, shows the trauma the Muslim women suffered and continue to suffer.



## CONCLUSION

- Partition and post-partition migration were life changing event for many women who suffered brutalities at the hands of men, were uprooted from their homes and lives, thrown into an unknown world or completely isolated and alienated from social life, and most importantly successfully adapted to their difficult circumstances.
- Partition and migration like wars and other forms of violence do, affected women differently than it affected men—mostly because of the specific roles and responsibilities attached with the specific gender.
- Women were not the ones who were deciding their fate, their killing or living or migrating. Women faced violence at various levels; communal, at family level and at the macro level. They were being abducted, kidnapped, raped, killed. They were forced to commit suicide in order to protect the family honour. Furthermore, in the name of recovery, they were disowned by their families, their children were deprived of basic rights as they were considered illegal and wrong.

