

## **Rehabilitation Of Woman During Partition**

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### **Abstract:**

The Partition Of India Into Two Sovereign States Has Been A Unique Example In The World History Which Led To The Mass Migration Of People In Crucial And Most Adverse Circumstances. The Communal Violence That Shook Northern India In The Month Before And After Partition Was Dramatic; So Were The Refugee Movements, Who Scale Even At That Time Was Described As Unprecedented In Human History. Mass Murder, Arson, Abduction And Rape Of Women And Looting Were The General Phenomenon In Both The Sides. The Number Of Casualties From The Upheaval Was Estimated To Be Between 2, 00,000 To 2, 50,000 Non- Muslims And Equal Number Of Muslims. The Province Of Punjab Was The Worst Affected Area In The Process. Nearly 5 Million Hindus And Sikhs Were Uprooted From Their Homes In West Pakistan In The Wake Of Partition. Out Of These, Nearly 2.7 Million Displaced Persons Resettled In East Punjab Alone.

### **Introduction:**

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The Rehabilitation Of Unattached Woman And Children Was Essentially An Urban Phenomenon, And The Peculiar Nature Of The Groups Required A Different Way Of Handling Their Rehabilitation. A Majority Of Them Were Illiterate And Did Not Possess Any Hereditary Skills With Which They Could Earn Their Living. They Represented The Most Helpless Victims Of The Tragedy Of The Partition Who Needed Urgent And Immediate Relief.

### **Violence Against Women:-**

Women, On Both Sides Of The Borders Suffered Enormously Both During And After The Partition Carnage. Some 100,000 Women Abducted, Mainly In The Punjab. These Were Hindu, Muslim And Sikh Women Who Were Raped By Men Of Religion Different From Their Own. Many Were Pulled, Many More Sold Into Prostitution. Others Were Sold From Hand To Hand. A Number Of Abducted Women Were Taken As Wives And

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Married By Conversion; Still Others Just Went Missing. Many Among Them Witnessed The Pulling Of Their Near And Dear Ones Before Or After Suffering Sexual Assault.

Women Were Also Mutilated, Their Breast Cut Off, Stripped Naked And Paraded Down The Streets And Their Bodies Carved With Religious Symbols Of The Other Community. Incidences Of Such Cruelty Suggest How The Women Were Reduced To Their Bodies, Carrying The Burden Of The Honor Of The Community, To Be Conquered, Claimed Or Marked To Attack That Honors. 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 Honor. There Were Also Women Who Committed Suicide Of Their Own Volition To Keep Their Purity And Were Later Glorified As Martyrs.

### **Abducted Women Recovery And Restoration:-**

Following The Position Of Country The Indian Government Directly Assumed Responsibility For Two Groups Of Women, The First Were Those Who Had Somehow Been Separated From Their Families, Picked Up While Fleeing To Safety, Taken Hostage, Or Kidnapped; These Women Were Called “Abducted”, The Second Group Compared Those Who Had Been Displaced, Disputed Widowed, These Women Were Collectedly Described As” Unattached”<sup>2</sup>.

The Government Of Both The Countries Raised The Issue Concerning Abducted Of Women In Various Meeting Held Between The Two. In The Meeting Of The Two Prime Ministries At Lahore On September 3, 1947 It Was Decided, Both The Central Government And The Govt. Of West And East Punjab Wish To Make It Clear That Forced Conversion And Marriages Will Not Be Recognized<sup>3</sup>. Further, Women And Girls Who Have Been Abducted Must Be Restored To Their Families, And Every Effort Must Be Made By The Government And Their Officers Concerned To Trace And Recover Such Women And Girls.

Refugee’s Organization Of The East Punjab Has Been Created A Separate Section, Under The Change Of A Prominent Lady Social Worker. The Function Of This Section Was Recovery And Restoration Of Muslim Abducted Women From The East Punjab Reception And Restoration Of Hindu And Sikh Girls Recovered From The West Punjab And The General Case Of Women And Children Living In The Camps<sup>4</sup>.

For The Restored Abducted Women And Children Arrangement Continue To Exist On The Same Basis As They Were Organized During The Year 1948 When A Large No. Of Hindu And Sikh Abducted Women Were Restored To Us From The West Punjab. The Recovery During The Year 1949 From The West Punjab Has Been Comparatively Very Small. For The Recovered Abducted Muslim Women, Transit Camps Have Been Set Up At Amritsar, Gurdaspur And Ferozepore With A Base Camp At Jullundur<sup>5</sup>. The Government Had Accepted The Responsibility For The Care And Maintenance Of Those “Unattached” Hindu And Sikh Women And Children Who Had Lost Their Parents Or Guardians In Pakistan.

In Sept.1947, The Government Of India Set Up A Women Section Of The Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation Rameshwari Nehru, Who Had Been Looking After The Evacuation Of Women And Children From West Punjab During The Worst Disturbance, Took Over As Honorary Director Of The Women Section In November 1947, Responsible For The Care, Maintenance And Rehabilitation Of Uprooted Women And Children From Pakistan. Rameshwari Nehru, Recommended That The Victims Of A Struggle That Might Will Be Regarded As A War, They Should Be Classed In The Category Of War Widows And War Orphans And Treated As Such<sup>6</sup>. These Women Could Be Classified Into Two Categories:

These Whose Husbands, Son And Other Bread Winners Were Killed During Riots,

Those Who, Though Unattached Had Still Some Relatives Alive; But Being Out Of Job, They Could Not Take Up The Responsibility. The Responsibility For The First Category, Mrs. R Nehru Emphasized, Should Be Taken Entirely By The Govt. And Of The 2nd Category, Only Up To The Time Till Their Relatives Became Self-Supporting. The Govt. Opened A Number Of Homes And Infirmaries To Accommodate These Women. Between 1947-50 Eight “Homes” And “Infirmaries” Were Established At Different Places<sup>7</sup>.

Name Of Home/Infirmary	Name Of Organization Running The Home	Sanctioned Population
Seva Sadan Jullundur	Punjab Govt.	250
Gandhi Vanita Ashram	-Do-	1500
Mahila Ashram Hoshiarpur	-Do-	1500
Mahila Ashram Karnal	-Do-	1500
Mahila Ashram Rohtak	-Do-	1500
Infirmary Rewari	-Do-	Not Available
Infirmary Khanna	-Do-	-Do-
Jainendra Gurukul Panchkula	-Do-	1000

The Expenditure Was Met From The Grant Made By The Govt. Of India Which Was Calculated On The Basis Of The Number Of Inmates Residing In These Homes At The Rate Of Rs. 25 Per Adult Had Per Month. Private Institutions Provide Care And Shelter To Such Women And Children Were Given Special Grants.

The Functions Of The State Woman Sections Were: To Formulate Scheme For The Rehabilitation Of Woman And Children, Establish Homes For Them, Run Production And Training Centers, Organize The Sale Of Articles Produced In Work Centers, Run Schools Arrange For The Adoption Of Orphaned Children, Give Financial Or Other Aid To Women, Assist In Finding Employment And Finally Arrange Marriages For Them Wherever Possible.

#### **The Widows:**

In 1989 Some Three Hundred Women Sat On Dharna And Relay Hunger Strike Outside The Home Of The Then Home Minister, Buta Singh. The Majority Of Them Were Over Sixty Years Of Age, All Survivors Of Partition. Many Among Them Had Been Forced To Abandon Their Homes In West Pakistan And Move To India; They Had Lost Their Husbands, Sometimes Other Members Of Their Families And Several Were Left With Small Children To Bring Up.

The Number Of Women Who, In The Years Immediately After Partition Were Categorized As 'Partition Widows', Was Not Small. Reports Of The Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation Put The Figure Somewhere In The Region Of 75,000 With Approximately 30,000 Of These Being From Bengal. In A Note Dated December 1949, Rameshwari Nehru Said That The Number Of Women From West Punjab Under The Care Of The Government In October 1948 Was 45,374. A Substantial Percentage Of These Were Widows. On 31 December 1953 The Number Of Unattached Women And Children Receiving Relief From The Government Was 36,737. The Three Hundred Who Sat On Dharna In 1989 Then, Were Only A Small Number Of This Total. None The Less, They Were Somewhat Representative, Coming From Diverse Backgrounds And Histories. Some Belonged To Sindh And Baluchistan, Most Were From Punjab And Their Families Had Been Engaged In A Range Of Occupations-From Selling Furniture To Kirana (Grocery) Shops To Petty Trade Of Different Kinds.

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In The Early Days, The Government Instituted A Number Of Relief Measures For The Vast Numbers Of Refugees That Flowed In. These Included Transit Camps, Relief Centres, Vocational And Technical Training Centres, Housing Boards, Etc. Widows Formed A Category That Required Special Attention-Not Only Were They Alone, Or With Small Children, But They Were Unused To Dealing With The Public World. Once Apprised Of This, On 24 November 1947 India Set Up The Women's Section Of The Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation With Rameshwari Nehru As Its Honorary Director. The Section Was Charged With Very Specific Responsibilities. These Were:

1. To Organize Relief To Women And Children, Especially Unattached Women And Children.
2. To Help In The Rehabilitation Of Unattached Women And Children.

By The End Of March The Following Year, Three Women's Homes Had Been Set Up In Delhi (Province) And Three In East Punjab (Kurukshehra, Jullunder And Amritsar). In An Attempt To Make Them Self-Reliant, Women In These Homes Were Taught A Variety Of 'Trades' Including Calico Printing, Embroidery, Knitting, Soap Making, Vegetable And Fruit Preservation And Spinning. Apart From The Government, A Number Of Voluntary Organizations Also Stepped In To Work With Women. These Included The Arya Samaj, The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, A Number Of Gandhi An And Christian Missionary Organizations, The Kasturba Gandhi Trust, The Central Relief Committee, The United Council For Relief And Welfare And Later, The Tata Institute Of Social Sciences And Others. Initially, The Work Of The Women's Section In The Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation Extended To The Whole Country, But Gradually, States Took On Responsibility And The Women's Section Began To Concentrate Its Energies More On The Centre<sup>8</sup>.

In 1948, A Number Of Silai (Sewing) Centres Were Also Set Up In Delhi. Initially Only Eight-With Some 441 Workers-These Centres Became Very Popular And By 1951 Their Number Had Risen To Thirteen With About 1,880 Workers. Women In These Centres Earned Between 12-20 Rupees A Month<sup>9</sup>.

The Women Were Treated As 'War Widows'. As Rameshwari Nehru Said, Because The Struggle They Had Inadvertently Been Part Of Could Well Be Regarded As A War, They Had To Be Classed In The Category Of War Widows And War Orphans And Treated As Such. The State, However, Also Assumed Responsibility For Their Social And Economic Rehabilitation As Well As Their 'Moral Well-Being'. Attempts Were Made To Provide Training In A Variety Of Trades And Professions So That The Women Could Enter Into Jobs, Or Set Up Their Own Training; Others Were Provided Start-Up Capital As Well As Things Such As Sewing Machines, Employment Exchanges Were Instructed To Place Women In Jobs, Children Were Taken Up For Adoption, Schools And Other Educational Institutions Were Opened Up, As Were Marriage Bureau Where Younger Women's Marriages Were Arranged. A Difference Was Made Between Women Who Were Completely Alone, And Those Who Had Relatives Who Could Help Them. The Latter Were To Be Supported Till Such Time As They Became Self-Sufficient While The Former Were Fully The Responsibility Of The State.

Initially Faltering, The Relief And Rehabilitation Operation For Widows And Other Unattached Women Became One Of The Major Welfare Operations Undertaken By The Indian State. The Purpose Of All The Training That Was Being Offered Was To Give Widowed Women A Chance To Integrate Into The Economic Mainstream Of Indian Society. Additionally, However, It Was Recognized That Mere Economic Rehabilitation Was Not Enough. In Rameshwari Nehru's Words

At The Very Outset The Section [The Women's Section Of The Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation] Realized That Rehabilitation Is An Intricate Process And Can Be Achieved Only If Adequate Attention Is Paid To The Psychological, Educational And Emotional Needs Of The Women. It Is Of Utmost Importance To Make Them Self-Reliant And Self-Supporting And Restore Their Sense Of Dignity And Worth.

It Was This Same Sense Of Dignity And Worth That Led The Three Hundred Widows To Sit On Dhama In 1989. More Than Four Decades After Partition, These Women Remained The Responsibility Of The State And Indeed, Saw Themselves As Such. After All, They Said, 'We Are Its [The State's] Children. And If The Parent Does Not Look After The Child When The Child Needs Looking After, Who Will?' By The Time Their Strike Took Place, Several Had Managed To Build Small Houses From The Pieces Of Land Allocated To Them, Their Children Had Grown Up, Some Had Moved Out And Some Had Done The Opposite-Married And Brought Their Wives Home To Stay.

#### **Children Of Abducted Women:**

Regarding The Children Born By Abducted Women, The State Refused To Recognize Them As Legitimate Since They Were Born Of Wrong Sexual Unions. As A Result, The Women Were Separated From Their Children, And Forcefully If They Resisted, With The Children, Being Recognized As Citizens Of Counties They Were Born In And Staying With Their Father. She Also Gives The Example Of Women Who Did Not Want To Part From Her Child But Had To Fear Of Not Being Accepted By Her Natal Family.

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 Govt. Financed Mass Abortions Especially For This Purpose. Thus Such Complex And Life Altering Decisions Were Taken Without Considering The Feelings Of Or Taking Consent From The People They Were Taken For.

While Muslim Women Were More Easily Accepted In Pakistan, In India, Especially Among Hindus, The Issue Of Their Purity Became Important. The Children That Were Able To Accompany Their Mothers Became A Constant Reminder Of The Violation Of The Women And The Mothers Were Given The Option Of Giving Them Up For Adoption Or Living The Family.

#### **Foot Notes:-**

1. Leonard Mosely, The Last Days Of The British Raj, London-1961, P-244
2. Annual Reports On The Working Of Ministry Of Relief And Rehabilitation, 1947-48, P-28
3. Rao, U. Bhaskar, The Story Of Rehabilitation, Delhi-1967, P-30
4. Govt. Of East Punjab, Millions Live Again, Simla-1949, P-32
5. Govt. Of East Punjab, Relief And Rehabilitation In Punjab, Simla-1950, P-9
6. Rai, Satya M, Punjab Since Partition, Delhi-1968, P-185
7. Rai, Satya M, Punjab Since Partition, Delhi-1968, P-186
8. Government Of India, Report On The Working Of The Ministry Of Rehabilitation 1951-52 And Research Done By Pudr For Their Report Satta Hak.
9. Pudr, Ibid