



PARTITION AND DISPLACEMENT: A STUDY OF RURAL REHABILITATION IN PUNJAB(1947-1958)

Sneh Yadav*

The movement of population between the east and west Punjab led to concentration in a very large number on both sides of the border. The movement of the non-Muslim population into the east Punjab and that of the Muslims into the west Punjab caused a predictable upheaval in the economic life of the province. The vast disparity in the occupational pursuits of the migrants on the two sides gave a severe set back to trade and industry and greatly affected agricultural production. The standing crops had suffered a great deal as many of the departing families on both sides had set them to fire. Natural calamities like rain and flood, during the period further devastated the villages. The endless stream of refugees from one side to the other made the food position extremely difficult for the east Punjab. Therefore, the first task of the east Punjab government was towards rural resettlement. This paper makes an attempt to study how the processes of reconstruction and resettlement was actually implemented in the years following partition.

Majority of the displaced persons were agriculturists, it therefore provides an account of how the problem of rural rehabilitation were addressed and the manner in which the east Punjab countryside was resettled following the upheaval of partition. Approximately 4.7 millions displaced persons from west Punjab reached India.

*Asst. Prof.of History, Govt. College Gharaunda



Table -1

Statewise Distribution of Displaced Population in India (Western zone)
(As on 31st December 1958)

State	Number of displaced persons		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Punjab	16,11,000	11,26,000	27,37,000
Rajasthan	1,54,000	2,09,000	3,73,000
Delhi	30,000	4,71,000	5,01,000
Bombay	54,000	3,61,000	4,15,000
Madhya Pradesh	50,000	1,59,000	2,09,000
U.P.	49,000	4,31,000	4,80,000
Mysore	2,000	5,000	7,000
Madras	1,000	8,000	9,000
H.P.	1900	4,000	4,000
Andhra Pradesh	-	4,000	4,000
Total	19,62,000	27,78,000	47,40,000

Source: *Annual report on the Working of Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation (1957-58)*,

Table-1, p.67

The east Punjab was far weaker economically as compared to west Punjab. As a result of the partition of the Punjab the east Punjab obtained control over the waters of three out of five rivers of the united Punjab and obtained about 45 per cent of the population, 38 per cent of the area, and 31 per cent of the income of the united Punjab. West Punjab on the other hand, included about 55 per cent of population, 62 per cent of the area and controlled about 69 per cent of the income of undivided Punjab.¹ As against an area of 67.22 lakh acres of land abandoned by the Hindu-Sikh land owners in west Pakistan, only 47.35 lakh acres were available in Indian Punjab, including the princely states.²

Table -2

Abandoned land by Refugees in West Punjab and East Punjab

Type of land	Land vacated in West Punjab	Land available in East Punjab
Total	67.22 acres	47.35 acres
(i) Perennial irrigated land	25.56 acres	4.34 acres
ii) Other canal irrigated	10.10 acres	2.6 acres
iii) Well irrigated land	7.4 acres	6.31 acres

Source: *The Tribune*, 26 Jan. 1950

¹ Government of Punjab, *Punjab on March* (Chandigarh, 1951) p.6.

² *The Tribune*, 26 January 1950. See Pepsu Government, *Thousands Live Again* (Patiala 1951), p.4.



The difference in area was bad enough but the position was actually much worse when we consider factors like fertility of soil and means of irrigation. The Hindu and Sikh refugees had left behind 43 lakhs acres of irrigated land against only 13 lakh acres of irrigated land vacated by the Muslims in east Punjab. Of the irrigated land left behind in west Pakistan by the Hindu-Sikh refugees, 25 lakh acres were perennially irrigated as against only 4 lakh acres of such land left by the Muslims in East Punjab. The best cotton and wheat producing areas of the canal colonies went to the share of Pakistan. Numerous important forests and mineral resources and a large number of important industries, like rubber-goods, surgical instruments, sports goods, resign, etc. also went to west Punjab, just as the only university as well as a large number of educational, medical, technical, veterinary and agricultural institutions of the province. West Punjab had therefore, emerged comparatively far richer in terms of economic and food resources.³ Therefore the problem of rural rehabilitation emerged far more daunting in east Punjab.

ALLOTMENT OF ABANDONED LAND – EAST PUNJAB

Group Allotment

Immediately after partition, the government of East Punjab decided to allot the land left behind by Muslims to the refugees coming in from Pakistan, so as to provide a source of living to rural refugees and to prevent the productive capacity of these abandoned lands from being wasted.⁴ About the middle of September 1947, the machinery of administration in east Punjab was far from adequately organized. In such a situation when even elementary information regarding land in east Punjab was not available and there was scarcely any detailed knowledge of the holdings of refugees in west Punjab, the east Punjab government decided to allot temporary lands for the current Kharif and for Rabi 1947-48 to groups of peasant families: "Within the framework of the principles outlined below revenue staff and lands officers should be asked to reach decisions as far as possible on their own judgement and responsibility.... As it is not practicable to make allotment separately to each individual refugee, as a rule allotment are to be on a group basis. As far as possible, agricultural refugees from west Punjab should be encouraged to come to tehsils in group in which they

³C.N. Vakil, *Economic Consequences of Divided India: A Study of the Economy of India and Pakistan* (Bombay 1950) p.146.

⁴ Tarlok Singh, 'Rural Resettlement in Punjab: The Background: A Transfer of Population' *Statesman* (New Delhi) 25 July 1950.



have lived in west Punjab and/or in groups in which they wish to live in villages in east Punjab. Frequently, it may be possible to allot a whole village to a group, sometimes two or three groups may have to be given possession in the first instance in one village. Possession should not be delayed, because two or three groups intended for the same village come separately or are settled separately. As soon as people have gone to the land, there will be opportunities for rationalising groups.....”

The idea of group allotment on equal distribution however, was not free of shortcomings and problems. Some thought it to be a ‘collectivist experiment.’⁵ Peasants and landlords who owned large units in the west felt that they were being deprived of their legitimate rights. While most admitted that exigencies of the time demanded quick distribution but soon the urge for permanent settlement based on right held by individuals in Pakistan started gaining ground. Therefore, on 7th February 1948, the government of east Punjab proposed to replace the system of group allotment by a new scheme which was to take into account the holdings of refugees in west Punjab. Thus land was to be allotted only to those “who in west Punjab were owners, occupancy tenants under the Punjab Tenancy Act, and tenants under the colonization of Government Land Act, and to certain other classes of grantees and holders of land in West Punjab to be specified by the Government.”⁶

Quasi-Permanent Allotment of Evacuee Land

In the temporary settlement of refugees, no consideration had been given to previous land-holdings, and it soon became clear that a revised scheme had to be formulated. It was only natural for families to want that they would be given land according to size of their former possessions in Pakistan. Most landholders wanted convinced that the extent of their earlier holdings must determine the future allotment of land.⁷

The new land allotment scheme based on this review was announced on February 7, 1948. The press communique issued by the Punjab government in his connection underlined the fact that it would take into account the holdings of persons displaced from west Punjab. It was, announced too, that allotments were to be made only to such refugees as were

⁵ *Pepsu Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol.IV, No.9, 20 July 1954, pp. 623-24.

⁶ Govt.of East Punjab, *Rural Rehabilitation in East Punjab*,(Simla 1948) p.10.

⁷ Gyanesh Kudaisya, ‘From Displacement to Development: East Punjab Countryside After Partition, 1947-67’ in D.A. Law & Howard Brasted (ed.) *Freedom, Trauma, Continuity: Northern India & Independence* (New Delhi, 1988), p.15, (hereafter ‘Displacement to Development’)



owners, occupancy tenants under the Punjab Tenancy Act, or tenants under the colonisation of Government Lands Act.⁸

Exchange of Revenue Records with Pakistan

At this stage Government had no record in its possession to show how much land area had actually been vacated by displaced persons. Complete data was not available even about the credit side. Without authentic records, no sound scheme of resettlement could obviously be worked out. Therefore, an agreement was organised between the east Punjab and west Punjab Government on the subject of exchange of revenue records. It was decided that each government would prepare copies for the use of the other. The government of east Punjab and Pepsu, on the one side, and the Government of west Punjab on the other, agreed to exchange copies of jamabandis (revenue records) of all evacuee villages on either side.⁹

Scheme of Allocation

By the middle of 1949 relief administrators in east Punjab had done the necessary groundwork to formulate the blueprint of a scheme of permanent rehabilitation. The final scheme of allotment of land was based on the following principles:¹⁰

- (i) Only owners of land in west Pakistan were given land in east Punjab.
- (ii) A system of graded cuts was applied while making allotments.
- (iii) Land left by Hindus and Sikhs in west Pakistan and evacuee land in east Punjab and Pepsu was converted into 'Standard area.'
- (iv) Special provision for urban lands, gardens and Suburban lands was made.
- (v) Allotment was made in the form of lease without rent for three years.

⁸ U.B.Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, (Delhi 1967) p.50.

⁹ S.M. Rai, *Punjab Since Partition*, (Delhi 1963) p.164. See Report, *Ministry of Rehabilitation* (1947-48), p.52.

¹⁰ M.R.Bhida, Text of the Statement Issued at a Press Conference held at Patiala (Patiala 1951). Also see Tarlok Singh, *Land Resettlement Manual Facts at a Glance – Relief and Rehabilitation in east Punjab* (n.d.) p.3. (hereafter given as Fact at Glance). Tarlok Singh was born in 1913 and educated at the London school of Economics. He joined the ICS in 1937. In 1940 he conducted a field survey of nine villages of Hisar district and in 1943 was posted as the Colonization Officer of Nilli Bar colony in West Punjab. Between 1944-46 he worked for the Finance Department of the Government of India and thereafter served briefly as Private Secretary to the Interim Prime Minister during 1946-47. In 1945 he published *Poverty and Social Change: A Study in the Economic Reorganization of Indian Rural Society* (London 1945). He became the first Director General of Rural Rehabilitation in the Government of East Punjab. He continued in this position till December 1949. He compiled the *Land Resettlement: Fact at a Glance. Relief and Rehabilitation in East Punjab* (n.d)



The broad principle of the scheme was as far as possible, to resettle persons from particular areas in Pakistan to specific districts in east Punjab and Pepsu (Patiala and east Punjab state Union).

Table -3

Places of Allocation in Quazi Permanent Allotment

From	To
1. Lahore, Montgomery	Ferozepur
2. Rawalpindi, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala	Karnal and Pepsu
3. Shahpur, Gujarat	Ambala
4. Multan	Hissar
5. Jhang, Muzaffargarh	Rohtak
6. Dera Gazi Khan, Mianwali	Gurgaon
7. Sialkot	Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Amritsar

Source:M.S. Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*,(Bombay1965) p.99

The Standard Acre

There was a marked difference in soil, irrigation, rainfall and productivity of land in various districts of west Pakistan and of districts in east Punjab and PEPSU.¹¹ It was therefore decided to evaluate the different classes of land on the basis of a comparable unit of value. The unit devised for land resettlement operations in east Punjab and Pepsu was given the name of 'standard acre.' The 'standard acre' represented a unit of value based on the productivity of land. An acre which could yield ten to eleven maunds of wheat was given the value of sixteen annas and termed one 'standard acre.'¹² The physical area of a standard acre thus varied and all classes of land in all assessment circles were given a valuation in annas so that they could be measured easily in terms of 'standard acres.'¹³ In the *barani* areas of Hissar district where the valuation of one acre was four annas, four ordinary acres went to make a 'standard acre'. In ordinary canal-irrigated tracts where the value of an acre was sixteen annas an ordinary acre was equivalent of a 'standard acre.'¹⁴

¹¹ Tarlok Singh, *Manual of Resettlement*, p.14.

¹² M.S.Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes* (Bombay1965)pp.80-81

¹³ See Tarlok Singh, 'Valuation of Fields: Methods of Allocation' *Statesman*, 27 July 1950

¹⁴ Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, p.84.



Scheme of Graded Cuts

Area of land available for allotment was 47.35 lakh, equivalent to 24,48,830 standard acres, as against 67.30 lakh acres equivalent to 39,35,131 standard acres abandoned in west Pakistan by the claimants.¹⁵

The gap in area to the extent of 20 lakh acres or 14,86,301 standard acres i.e. 38 per cent of the total area abandoned, prevented in possibility of full compensation being given to the displaced landholders. To satisfy the individual claims of about 5 lakh persons, a scheme of graded cuts was adopted, in which the cut increased proportionately with the area of land originally held by a claimant.¹⁶ According to this scheme, refugees were classified according to the size of their holdings in Pakistan stated in 'standard acre' terms. Each category was then subjected to a scale of 'graded cuts' based on which the net entitlement of the claimant was arrived at. The scale of 'grade cuts' was worked out as follows:

Table -4

The Scale of Graded Cuts Scheme

Grade (standard acre)	Rate of cut	Net allotment (standard area)
upto 10	25%	7.5
10 to 30	30%	21.5
30 to 40	40%	27.5
40 to 60	55%	36.5
60 to 100	70%	48.5
100 to 150	75%	61.0
150 to 200	80%	71.0
200 to 250	85%	78.5
250 to 500	90%	103.5
500 to 1,000	95%	128.5

Source: Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, p.97

Effect of Graded Cuts

Scheme of graded cuts affected all the displaced landholders. In the Quazi permanent system 4,83,611 land owners got allotments out of these, 3,88,387 were land owners, owning less than 10 standard acres each. This class of farmer got 75% of the area which they abandoned.¹⁷ The new laws proved very harsh on small peasant proprietors like the Labana Sikhs of Gujrat and the Jat Sikhs of Sialkot, whose average holding did not exceed a couple

¹⁵ Rai, *Punjab Since Partition*, p.165

¹⁶ Ministry of Rehabilitation, *Annual Report of the Working(1949-50)*, New Delhi, p.6.

¹⁷ Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, pp.97-99



of acres, as well as the Sikh Jats of Gujrat and Lahore whose average holding was about 2 to 5 acres. For these small self-cultivators cut in their small holdings was a very great loss. The land allotted in east Punjab was also inferior than the land abandoned by West Pakistan. Therefore, new holdings were uneconomical for them.¹⁸ For example Narain Singh, a Rai Sikh had 7 kanals of land in a village 5 miles from river Sutlej in Montgomery district. In addition to his small holding, he cultivated the land of the Mahajan of that village, and had 4 bullocks and 2 buffaloes. In east Punjab he had been allotted only 4 kanals of land in Chak Maujain in Muktsar tehsil, Ferozepur district. He began working as a tenant of Aroras, who was a non-cultivator, while some of his family began earning their living by manual labour.¹⁹ The middle size farmers also suffered. There were 79,181 land owners who owned 10 to 40 standard acres, these landholders abandoned 14,57,657 standard acres, and were allotted an area of 10,90,230 standard acres, i.e. 72.3% of their total area. This class of self cultivators lost an area of 4,16,727 acres. There were 12,610 land owners who owned 40 to 100 standard acres and who abandoned an area of 7,35,929 standard acres and were allotted an area of 4,51,889 standard acres. These relatively prosperous farmers, lost an area of 2,84,040 standard acres. Hari Singh, a Sikh Jat from village Mauzoke Makam in tehsil Chunia in Lahore district, owned 125 acres of land in west Pakistan, but in east Punjab he had been allotted only 85 acres equivalent to 49 standard acres in a village, Hastiwala in Ferozepore Tehsil. The quality of land was extremely poor. About 10 to 12 acres of this land had been ruined by a canal breach, and the remaining area was covered with reeds. In Pakistan, he had about 20 buffaloes and 3 pairs of bullocks, and was very prosperous. But in east Punjab he did not initially possess any bullock or a buffalo.²⁰

The graded cuts system almost eliminated the very large land-holdings in east Punjab. They led to a levelling of large holdings and the eradication of absentee landlordism.²¹ There were 714 land owners who owned between 250 to more than a thousand standard acres who abandoned an area of 5,36,474 standard acres and were allotted only 90,569 standard acres, i.e. 16.8% of their total land. Out of these, 87 owned more than 1000 standard acres and abandoned an area of 1,67,098 standard acres, and were allotted only 19,360 standard

¹⁸ Govt. of East Punjab, *Millions Live Again*, Simla 1948, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹ Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 105.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'Displacement to Development' p. 80.



acres. These were the biggest land owners, who were rarely self-cultivators, and owned large estates scattered over scores of villages. But in graded cuts system they suffered a great loss. A few examples of this may be considered.²²

The largest landowner among the displaced persons was Mrs. Vidyawanti, widow of Dewan Badri Nath of Emenabad in Gujranwala district. She lost a total area of 11,582 acres in thirty-five villages of Gujranwala and Sialkot districts. In this side she got an allotment of 835 acres in Karnal district.²³

In overall terms, the new scheme acted as a sort of 'shock therapy' to the agriculturists. It forced the big farmers to take to cultivation themselves rather than live as absentee landlords, and made the middle and small farmers more industrious. At the same time, it provided an opportunity for mobility at the lower end of the spectrum, as efforts were made to give small plots to even the poorest rural households. This scheme also encouraged the big landlords to take part in farming operations, and a number of them took to mechanical cultivation, and many made tube-wells in chahi areas.²⁴

Allotment of Houses in Rural Area

The rural displaced persons also needed help in the area of housing. The provision of housing in rural areas was a difficult task. The disturbances at the time of partition had resulted in substantial damage to houses. Rain and floods had damaged a large number of houses abandoned by the Muslims and many of them got damaged beyond repairs.²⁵ Like land, residential houses were also allotted on a temporary basis in the first instance. All the houses abandoned by evacuee landholders in a village were available for allotment to land allottees of the particular village. Each allottee was given a chance to choose a home for himself according to their place in the merit list.²⁶ This merit list depended on two factors:

1. The land allotted to him.
2. The value of the houses abandoned in Pakistan.

Marks were given to each allottee for both these factors. He got one mark for each standard acre of land allotted to him. Similarly he got one mark for each one thousand rupees of the

²² Randhawa, , *Out of the Ashes*, p.100.

²³ Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'Displacement to Development' p.80.

²⁴ Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'Displacement at Development,' p.38.

²⁵ Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'The Demographic Upheaval of Partition: Refugees and Agricultural Settlement in India 1947-67' *South Asia*, 18 Special Issue (1995), pp. 73-94.

²⁶ *The Times of India*, 25 Oct. 1954.



value of his house abandoned in Pakistan. The value of the Pakistan house was determined by means of an affidavit filed to that effect by each allottee when marks had been counted up, the list of precedence was prepared.²⁷

House allotment work was done by the *halqa* revenue officer, usually a Naib-Tahsildar.²⁸ He had publicised through the Patwari that the house allotment work in that village was to be done on a particular given date. All the allottees were assembled at the venue of the meeting before the arrival of the Naib Tahsildar. The Patwari had a list of the evacuee houses in the village, the number of rooms and other accommodation in each house, with their exact dimensions, the general condition and the approximate value of the house. He had a another list of the allottees along with the marks allotted to them under each count. He had also a map of the village showing the location of each house. The revenue officer read out the merit list, so that every body knew where they stood. The villagers were next asked if they wanted to reserve any houses for common purposes. These common purposes could be a school, place for worship, house for marriage, residence for school master or a place for a doctor. If there was any house of a value of Rs. 20,000 or more in the village, it was singled out and declared outside the scope of allotment.

Financial Assistance

Most displaced persons, when they started settling on evacuee land, did not have any financial support to restore the land – money was needed for food, seeds, bullocks and agricultural implements.²⁹ Their traditional financier the village *bania*, who had migrated with the villagers was unable to support. The government did make some efforts to meet the needs of displaced families. These loans were for various purposes, food, seed and bullocks and even for repair of houses, purchase of fodder, agricultural implements, water pumps, tractors, tubewells and repair and boring of wells. These *taccavi* loans were given in two phases (1) before the quasi-permanent allotment of land. (2) after the completion of quasi-permanent allotment.³⁰

Before the quasi-permanent allotment of land, the largest single loan item was for purchase of food. This loan was given to displaced persons when they left the relief camps and settled

²⁷ Randhawa, , *Out of the Ashes*, pp. 121-122.

²⁸ *Karnal District Gazetteer*, p.105.

²⁹ M.R.Bhida, *Progress of Rehabilitation in Pepsu* (Patiala 1951), p.31.

³⁰ Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, p.163.



in villages. The crops sown by them had to mature after six months, and the refugee farmers were to be fed during that period. They were, therefore, given monthly food allowances for every member of the family. Revenue officers visited the villages and distributed these loans on the spot. The rate was Rs. 3.8 per adult and Rs. 2 per child per month.³¹

Table -5

Statement Showing Distribution of Taccavi Loans (Before quasi-permanent allotment)

Sr. No.	Kind of Loans or Grants	During 1947-48	During 1948-49	During 1949-50	Total
1.	Food	19,79,204	59,74,762	30,12,218	82,55,184
2.	Fodder	7,97,177	55,082	-	8,52,259
3.	Seed	17,92,267	37,53,744	8,37,671	63,83,682
4.	Bullocks	30,66,262	23,90,362	-	54,56,264
5.	Rural Artisans	26,375	5,33,690	31,350	5,91,415
6.	Implements	-	9,61,731	-	9,61,731
7.	Repair of Wells	5,800	-	-	5,800
8.	Repair of Houses	33,020	-	-	33,020
	Total Loans	77,00,105	1,36,69,371	11,70,239	225,39,715
	Grants				
1.	Grants for repair of wells	-	1,77,721	-	1,77,721
2.	Grants for repair of houses	-	3,23,675	-	3,23,675
		-	5,01,396	-	5,01,396

Source: Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, p.171

There was a radical change in the attitude of allottees towards their allotted land after the quasi-permanent allotment and, therefore a change in the purpose for which loans were taken. Under the temporary allotment scheme, the allottees had only temporary interest in their allotments, and were not therefore, prepared to avail themselves of the loans which were meant for making permanent improvements in land or houses. The popular loans like food and fodder were discontinued after the quasi-permanent allotment of land. Loans for heavy agricultural machinery like tractors, waterpumps and tube-wells began only after conferment of quasi-permanent rights. No landholder could be expected to set up a tube-well or a water pump on a temporarily allotted holding. Tractors were out of question for small allotment of 8 to 10 acres given during the temporary allotment phase.

Table -6

³¹ Ibid., p.164



Loans Advanced for Rural Rehabilitation (Western Zone) (1947-48 to 1957-58)

Years	In lakhs of Rupees
1947-48	77.00
1948-49	129.63
1949-50	252.58
1950-51	218.31
1951-52	89.54
1952-53	47.25
1953-54	5.48
1954-55	-
1955-56	66.69
1956-57	31.01
1957-58	1.15
Total	918.64

Source: *Report Ministry of Rehabilitation*, p.69

Till the end of 1958, the government advanced total loans to all the rural refugees (in western zone) to the tune of about Rs. 918.64 lakhs. This is a quite impressive figure but when we remember that the number of families settled on land was about Rs. 4.77 lakhs, and each family on an average got only Rs. 192 the scheme falls apart. This amount was hardly adequate for a family. Apart from this taccavi loans were not given to many of the needy refugees, as in the disbursement of loans also, money and influence were the main considerations the most needy were usually denied the relief.

The process of rural rehabilitation was linked with land reforms after independence. The reconstruction of the agricultural economy, consolidation of holdings and the creation of an irrigation infrastructure did help the refugees in the rehabilitation progress. The Bhakhra Dam provided a glimpse of hope in the rehabilitation progress.

But the real glimpse was the fruit of their own efforts. Displaced farmers worked hard and produced more than they were producing in west Punjab. They were energetic and restless. They made a significant changes in the methods of irrigation and farming. It can be seen that upto 1958 most of the rural displaced persons had been settled on land with considerable success.