

# DISTINCTIVE CITIZENSHIP

## REFUGEES, SUBJECTS AND POST-COLONIAL STATE IN INDIA'S PARTITION

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**ABSTRACT** The refugee, in India's Partition history, appears as an enigmatic construct – part pitiful, part heroic, though mostly shorn of agency – representing the surface of the human tragedy of Partition. Yet this archetype masks the undercurrent of social distinctions that produced hierarchies of post-colonial citizenship within the mass of refugees. The core principle of the official resettlement policy was *self-rehabilitation*, that is, the ability to become a productive citizen of the new nation state without state intervention. Thus, the onus of performing a successful transition – from refugee to citizen – lay on the resourcefulness of the refugees rather than the state. This article traces the differing historical trajectories followed by 'state-dependent' and 'self-reliant' refugees in the making of modern citizenry in post-colonial India.

**Keywords:** refugees, citizens, post-colonial state, social class, Partition, India

### INTRODUCTION

In the history of India's Partition, the 'refugee' is a central – almost mythical – figure without which the national histories of India and Pakistan can hardly be told. The processes of Partition become particularly palpable when narrated through the lives of ordinary people who experienced violence and homelessness in the course of the boundary making between the two states. Thus, the official narrative of Partition is built around an abstract notion of 'refugee experience' wherein the multitude of refugees is often articulated as a singular body with a common origin, trajectory and destiny. This archetypal refugee appears as an enigmatic construct – part pitiful, part heroic, though mostly shorn of agency – representing the surface of the human tragedy of Partition, even as it masks the tense undercurrents and distinctive state practices of resettlement.

Partition scholarship has very recently begun un-forming this construct to excavate the underlying differences. A study of Bengal refugees has shown how an authentic refugee type within the state discourse was fashioned after the Punjab experience of internecine violence and movement.<sup>1</sup> This frame seldom fitted the Bengal refugees, whose journeys were not always entwined with dramatic episodes of violence and who were, thus, discursively located outside the orbit of authentic 'refugee-ness'. Elsewhere

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I have shown the *affects* of social differences on state policies of resettlement and the ways in which refugees were segregated and isolated – untouchables from upper castes, single women from families, poor from rich – in accord with prevalent social norms.<sup>2</sup> The transit camps and permanent refugee housing colonies were hardly levelling spaces where differences of class, geography, caste and gender would disappear against the larger-than-life canvas of Partition. The obvious question then is: how did this landscape of social differences among the refugees translate into a modern citizenry of post-colonial India? And what forms of hierarchies or grades within the citizenry were affected through this production of difference? The intricate linkages between the categories of refugees and citizens, and the ways in which one un/easily morphs into the other, are yet to be fully explored vis-à-vis Partition history.

The central analytical premise is that the *making of* and *becoming* post-colonial citizen-subjects were linked to the refugees' ability to *self-rehabilitate* rather than depend on the state for survival and recognition. Self-rehabilitation, here, suggests a governmental technology, pursued by the Indian state, aimed at producing self-supporting citizens out of the mass of refugees. In a way, it symbolized state-ordained *rites de passage* of growing up – from child to adult – and taking responsibility for oneself rather than depending on the state. Clearly, refugees were seen as minors who were being pushed by the paternalistic state to become adult citizens. In policy terms, this meant becoming proper subjects befitting the nation without being a burden on the state. In practice, becoming proper subjects depended on one's successful deployment of social capital, that is, one's possession not only of financial resources but also of useful social networks and cultural distinctions.<sup>3</sup> An individual's success in setting up homes, businesses and gaining employment, then, became the success of state policies, whereas failure to be self-reliant was an individual failure that the state was not responsible for. One's ability to survive outside of refugee camps and state institutions was linked to one's prospects of becoming relevant and full-fledged citizens of the new nation. Thus, the emerging citizenry itself was shaped by the differing trajectories of movement and resettlement traced by the refugees.

The following is an account of Partition resettlement history from two perspectives – state-dependent and self-reliant refugees – and their different journeys from being refugees to citizens in the new nation state. The account is based on extensive fieldwork conducted over a six-year period in refugee resettlement colonies in Delhi.<sup>4</sup> It also relies upon a vast newspaper archive as well as a variety of official documents.

## DISTINCTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The notion of citizenship within Partition historiography is largely considered as given, and an uncomplicated one at that. This is because in most cases the legal status of citizenship was automatically conferred upon 'displaced persons' in post-colonial India.<sup>5</sup> Thus, enquiries into the transformative processes – of refugees into citizens – have hardly been pushed beyond the legal-technical boundaries of citizenship where the rights and responsibilities of individuals are considered universal in relation to the nation state.<sup>6</sup> Such a narrow conceptualization of citizenship limits our understanding

of the architecture of social differences upon which the modern Indian citizenry was based. In this article, citizenship is conceptualized as 'a set of self constituting practices in different settings of powers', where power itself is understood as a social technology that induces being made and self-making.<sup>7</sup> In other words, citizenship is seen as a constant work-in-progress, shaped and realized in everyday life through strategies that newcomers adopt to negotiate different governmental authorities, and the state practices that seek to classify and define displaced people; pressure on the newcomers to integrate and self-define underpins this overlapping space between refugees and citizens. Far from being a universal and unified category in post-Partition India, I argue, citizenship appears as a polymorphous field upon which the distinctions and hierarchies of new subjects were negotiated with the post-colonial state. This distinctive citizenship becomes particularly visible within the spectacular imaginary of 'refugee' – a discursive lens through which to view the simultaneous processes of *being made* and *becoming* citizens of post-colonial India. While the first process suggests a set of transformative state practices to resettle the displaced populations, the second suggests an active effort by the displaced people themselves to gain resources and status by appropriating and redirecting those state practices. In both instances, the state's interventions to resolve the 'refugee problem' were influential in shaping the new citizenry, even though it sometimes reified the old social distinctions and prejudices of, for example, class and caste.

Two related arguments that underpin the central idea concern the identity and imaginary of 'refugee' that both state and migrants sought to define and appropriate. First, the label 'refugee' accrued moral capital and opened fresh political terrain upon which citizenship was to be negotiated with the post-colonial state. The condition of being 'refugee' was a significant tool to gain political influence and to bargain concessions from the new state – and therefore subject to negotiations that could enhance one's position in the new society. This is evident in the way a number of pressure groups and organizations were formed with the prefix refugee, such as 'Refugee Protection Society', 'All India Refugee Welfare Association' and 'Refugees Old Motor Parts Dealers Association' to name a few. It signified a moral community of victims and survivors of genocidal violence who were rendered homeless in the making of the post-colonial nation state. Second, while being 'refugee' formed the broad basis for negotiations with the state, it was the *social distinctions* – based on class, caste, gender, age and geography – within the displaced populations that shaped differing modes and outcomes of interaction with the governmental agencies in the different locations of the refugee camps and beyond. The word 'distinction' is used in a double sense to convey both *differences* and *privileges* accrued from differing levels of social capital accumulation that displaced individuals, families and communities possessed. At the bottom of this register of social distinctions were the state-dependent refugees who barely possessed any social capital or bargaining power to gain prime resources from the state agencies upon displacement. They were often the low caste groups, the rural and urban poor, and single women, who constituted the marginalized and who, consequently, had little influence on the ongoing political processes. At the top, on the other hand, were the *exceptions*, prominent men, and their families, often honoured

and rewarded by the authorities for the services they rendered to the colonial state and whose experiences of movement did not always follow the standard narrative of loss and chaotic escape.<sup>8</sup> They depended on the state not for survival, but rather for recognition of their social eminence. They were resourceful, politically astute and well entrenched in useful social networks that came in handy while interacting with the state authorities. They were seen as natural leaders of the refugees and authentic representatives of 'refugee experiences' by the state authorities, even though sometimes their own experiences were far removed from those of the ordinary refugees they were representing. These individuals were drawn from *Rais* (pronounced *ra-ees*), or wealthy families, who traditionally took up specific social causes and performed community service and were often at the helm of political leadership; *sarkari afsar*, literally government officers, who were endowed with social prestige that came with their rank in the colonial administration; and middle-level prosperous traders, businessmen, teachers, local community leaders, who derived and magnified their authority from the community resettlement efforts they were engaged in.

In the following pages, I describe the everyday life of the refugees to show how: (a) the governmental imaginary of 'the refugee' became a powerful framing device for state policies that positioned the post-colonial state as an empathetic guardian of displaced people, as well as an all-too-visible screen behind which the state functionaries practised policy distinctively; (b) even as the displaced populations were defined through the state's imaginary of 'refugee', the label was actively appropriated, employed and given new meanings by the migrants themselves; and finally (c) the new citizenry was shaped distinctively in relation to refugees' degree of dependence on the state for survival and recognition.

## IMAGINARY OF 'REFUGEE'

'Refugee' was the most popular term used in Indian newspapers, eyewitness accounts and statements by the political leadership to describe nearly ten million people who were forced to move into India by the internecine violence from mid-1947 onwards. It also formed a popular imaginary through which displaced people were now viewed as helpless, homeless and in need of rehabilitation. This view is fully reflected in Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's description of these people as 'unfortunate refugees from Punjab and listening to their stories it is difficult not to be moved'.<sup>9</sup> An eyewitness account entitled 'Helpless Thousands in West Punjab' described 'thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees ... depressed and half-starved, [all] but resigned'.<sup>10</sup> The newspapers were replete with heart-rending photos of men, women and children huddled in camps, cooking food at the roadside or just sleeping on pavements. A photo feature depicting the situation of refugees, entitled 'Influx of Refugees into Delhi', appeared with captions such as 'refugees arriving at the Delhi railway station', 'refugee receiving first aid treatment', 'two refugee families' and 'refugees receiving their rations'.<sup>11</sup> The very ordinary human activities of cooking, sleeping, sitting with one's family or just waiting in a queue had become special 'refugee' activities in this imaginary – each meant to underscore the plight and misfortune of the dislocated people.<sup>12</sup> The act of

dislocation – matter out of place – had become the defining characteristic of the newcomers, and ‘refugee’ was the prism through which their everyday life was now described.<sup>13</sup> In other words, all previous identities and social distinctions were collapsed to constitute the ‘refugee’, an archetype of dislocated people in need of relocation within the post-colonial citizenry.

In the official Indian account entitled *The Story of Rehabilitation*, the ‘refugee’ is a generic product not of the state’s failure to protect its citizens, but of ‘a new and pernicious doctrine [that] had come to poison men’s minds ... arson, rapine and murder were let loose [and] people were uprooted from their homes’.<sup>14</sup> The ‘refugee’ is a multitudinous body of ‘five million people crazed with fear, shattered in body and mind, most of them pitifully destitute [who] had to be fed, clothed, protected from the ravages of disease, found shelter and homes, where they could be slowly nursed back to some semblance of lost dignity’.<sup>15</sup> Despite the occasional plural form used to describe the mass migration, the official narrative casts millions of individuals, a colossal demography, as a single multitude of being – anonymous, helpless, fearful and dispossessed subjects at the mercy of the state authorities for their bodily and moral healing.

The ‘refugee’ is also the raw material out of which modern citizens were produced, once the bodies had been healed and spirits restored in the refugee camps. We are told that ‘when the refugee was sent back into the normal work-a-day world, *he* was restored and refreshed; discarding the crutches of the camp, *he* was able to respond to measures to make him indistinguishable from his fellow men, just another happy, useful citizen’.<sup>16</sup> The refugee body, for the purposes of policy-making, is a dispirited male body that can be repaired successfully, while the female bodies remain mostly absent, appearing only to signify the atrocities of sexual violence and abductions by the enemy. The refugee camps are the transformative spaces where governmental policies and practices of ‘rehabilitation’ bear fruit in recharging the broken spirits and incarnating a new citizenry.

The new label ‘refugee’ was also favoured by the displaced populations and often used interchangeably with Punjabi/Hindi terms like *panahgeer* and *sharnarathi*, literally meaning those in need of shelter and security. Despite the interchangeable usage in everyday parlance, ‘refugee’ was more than a literal expression of homelessness and insecurity and less than a full legal categorization in the administration of displaced people. The identity of refugee was affixed through official registration of displaced persons as refugees. This brief, though important, ritual was performed upon arrival, when a refugee card with name, registration number and date of arrival was issued. This card was essential proof in gaining a ration card, temporary and permanent housing, admission to educational institutions and employment earmarked for the Partition migrants. The state practice of formalizing identities through the issuing of a ‘refugee card’, as it was popularly known, became an important first step on the road to becoming a proper citizen-subject of the new state.

In legal terms, though, the word ‘refugee’ had little meaning since the actual laws pertaining to migrant property and compensation made use of terms like ‘displaced person’ or ‘evacuee’.<sup>17</sup> The very usage of the term to describe displacement in official as

well as academic discourse is instructive – especially when it was never employed in the legal sense. During India's Partition in 1947, the international legal mechanisms concerning refugees – or 'stateless' people – were still not in place, but the ideas and debates around refugees and nation states were commonplace.<sup>18</sup> The forced migrants to India (and Pakistan) were not stateless in the sense of in need of rights, since they were assured of citizenship rights upon arrival. The frequent usage seems to have had an emotive function, besides being a governmental technology of population classification, to draw attention to the helplessness and misery the migrants faced in everyday negotiations over resources such as food, housing, medical aid and employment opportunities. And, more importantly, it helped emphasize the state's generosity in helping the displaced populations to overcome their miserable situation.

### TECHNOLOGY OF SELF-REHABILITATION

The core principle of the official resettlement policy was *self-rehabilitation*, that is, the ability to become a productive citizen of the new nation state without state intervention.<sup>19</sup> This governmental technology of making citizens out of refugees was based on two prerequisites: (a) being dislocated and (b) being able to survive without the state's help. While the act of dislocation was mired in violence, loss and defeat, the act of survival independent of the state indicated success in overcoming those defeats. This individual feat – of turning defeat into success – facilitated one's entry into the new citizenry and formed subjects worthy of the new nation. The emerging process was, however, fraught with contradictions and tensions: while those who owned sufficient social capital were in little need of prodding from the state to be self-reliant, those who had no capital had little choice but to depend on the state. In practice, this meant that those who did not need the state for basic subsistence on an everyday basis were better placed to make the transition to citizenship than those who depended on the state. Thus, the effectiveness of the policy of self-rehabilitation supported a constituency that was already resourceful in one way or another.

To begin with, the policy was based on the useful employment of able-bodied refugees, while women, the infirm and disabled people were left on the margins. The official stance was that 'every grown up and able bodied refugee had to be found gainful employment. No one willing to work could be denied an opportunity to earn a living.'<sup>20</sup> The minister for rehabilitation, Mohanlal Saksena (1948–50), expressed this vision while reflecting upon the problems of rehabilitation: 'the energy and courage, enterprise and self reliance of the displaced persons themselves led me to hope that it may be given to me to assist these stricken people, and uprooted millions, in their settlement; and if possible, in making them the pioneers of a new social order.'<sup>21</sup> The emphasis was on self-reliance and self-rehabilitation, though under the watchful eyes of the state authorities. Those who did not show the promise of self-reliance, that is, who needed financial support from the state, were chided for being 'lazy and feckless, losing all initiative, self-respect and self confidence.'<sup>22</sup> The 'free doles' were seen as a disincentive that had a demoralizing effect and were stopped soon after Mr Saksena took over the minister's office. He later wrote: 'paradoxical as it may seem, the

discontinuance of gratuitous relief has been one of the biggest strokes of rehabilitation, for it gave the “drone” a shake up, and set him thinking as to how best to rehabilitate himself’ (inverted commas in original).<sup>23</sup> The allusion to ‘drone’, a male honey bee, is significant with its double meanings of parasitic loafer living off others’ labour as well as remote-controlled object that is not its own agent. The refugees who survived on cash handouts were necessarily seen as lazy and unmotivated, irrespective of other factors such as ill health or the inability to find employment, especially in a new location. The withdrawal of state support was seen as a necessary action that turned passive recipients of aid into active architects of their own destiny.

The ability to self-rehabilitate, it seems, was crucial in becoming an active citizen of the new nation. The success criterion of transcending refugee-ness was measured as: ‘only when the displaced person has shed his dependence on government or private doles has he been fully rehabilitated’.<sup>24</sup> Often those able to look after themselves were the resourceful ones who had, for example, transferable government jobs that reinstated them upon movement, assets that could be liquidated or exchanged and capital to invest in new businesses. Those who could afford to support themselves seldom lived in refugee camps for long periods. In fact, the government had created two types of refugee housing facilities – self-supported and state supported. The newcomers arriving at the refugee registration office in Delhi, for example, were asked if they could afford their own food and clothing rations.<sup>25</sup> If they could, then they were assigned the concrete-built old military barracks, while others were sent to camps where cloth tents from the Second World War were used. From the very moment of arrival, an administrative filter was created that weeded out resource-rich people from the mass of refugees. Thus, those left within the camps were the socially weakest groups in comparison to those who could earn their livelihood independently of state aid. Mr Saksena, in fact, gave credit to the ‘displaced persons, especially outside camps, that ... have made a supreme effort to earn their livelihood and to stand on their own feet. Many of them have done remarkably well in rehabilitating themselves without the aid of the Government.’<sup>26</sup> The physical distance from the state-run refugee camps was clearly seen as a sign of forward movement towards being a full citizen.

This approach, however, left out women and disabled and infirm people without family support networks from the possibility of fully forsaking state support and, consequently, becoming self-rehabilitated full citizens of India. At the end of his report on refugee rehabilitation, Mr Saksena wrote a chapter called ‘miscellaneous problems – unattached women etc.’ where the fate of single women is discussed sympathetically. While he earlier insisted that refugees be put to work to achieve rehabilitation, here he pre-empted any discussion by circumscribing the women as a ‘permanent liability’ to the state.<sup>27</sup> He explained that ‘from the very beginning the Government of India have [sic] undertaken responsibility for the maintenance and care of women and children’ and that this should continue to be ‘a responsibility of the state’.<sup>28</sup> Unattached women were wards of the state, to be protected and cared for in the absence of family or a male guardian. The state took its role as a patriarch seriously enough to construct exclusive camps for unattached women that kept the inmates in seclusion. For example, Kasturba Niketan camp in the Lajpat Nagar area of Delhi was secured with high barbed

wire and guarded round the clock so that no male intruders could enter the premises.<sup>29</sup> The camp protocol did not even allow male visitors inside the private lodgings. This seclusion of unattached women, often young widows, was in keeping with the contemporary norms of controlling female sexuality and avoiding socially unsanctioned reproduction.<sup>30</sup> The young unattached women were considered unsafe outside the protective control of family or state. There were not many avenues for these women to self-rehabilitate and shed their dependence upon the state. The resettlement policies were largely tailored to meet the needs of an ideal type, i.e. the able-bodied, masculine refugee. The frequent use of the masculine pronoun in official writings suggests that the object of the state's gaze was primarily the male refugee – the female refugees were deemed to be included within that archetype. The 'unattached' women, kept in seclusion and guarded by a patriarchal state, had few options to become independent of the state.

### STATE OF DEPENDENCE

The paradoxes within the self-rehabilitation policy are best viewed on the premises of the now defunct Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation.<sup>31</sup> The ministry ceased to exist in 1965, when officially the rehabilitation work was considered finished even though the settlement of claims was far from over. The unfinished work was entrusted to a new department of rehabilitation, formed with the objective of completing the 'residual work of rehabilitation'. This administrative move suggested that resettlement, at least in the eyes of the state, had been concluded and that whatever was left unfinished was a mere residue unworthy of full attention. Yet, during my fieldwork, the queues at the premises of the rehabilitation department suggested that not only had the resettlement programmes never been fully concluded, but also the old men and women waiting in the queues had never been able to fulfil the official goal of self-rehabilitation. More than five decades later, they were still making regular trips to the resettlement office to get their 'cases' settled. This ageing generation now constituted the *residue* of the Partition upheaval – made to wait for long hours and dealt with impatiently by young officers who had little comprehension of events which, from their point of view, belonged to history.

I met Kewal Ram and his wife, Kanta Devi, at the resettlement office during my routine visits to consult the department's record room. Both were in their late sixties and had moved, together with their respective families, from Lahore to Delhi in 1947 at the height of the violence. They started their lives anew in a refugee camp located at the historic site of Kingsway that had been built in connection with the 1911 Delhi Durbar in honour of King George V. The camp was a basic facility where the inhabitants were given bare minimum rations and financial aid for a limited period. This particular camp housed those who had no private means of support and necessarily had to depend on the state. Both their families, Kewal Ram's and his wife's, had lost whatever they had owned, since they were forced to leave Lahore in haste. Kewal Ram's father used to run a store selling everyday household items in the locality where they lived. The shop was a rented property and that meant they had no claim to

commercial property in lieu of property lost in Lahore. Their only hope was to have a rentable shop allotted to them by the government since it was impossible to buy property in Delhi because of the sky-high property prices. The situation was made worse because better-off migrants had already begun purchasing commercial and residential property in Delhi, reportedly at exorbitant prices. A news report suggested that premises in Delhi were being 'acquired by Lahore businessmen by paying *pagris* ("premium") ranging between Rupees 50,000–100,000'.<sup>32</sup> These were enormous sums for ordinary people, who could not compete in an open market to acquire assets in order to earn their livelihood. Kewal Ram's father was told that he could rent a shop if any were left after the disbursement of property claims had been dealt with. In the meantime, the father and son began hawking homemade *pakorās* (lentil snacks) in the neighbourhood colonies to make ends meet. They would regularly return, without fail, to the resettlement office to enquire about the possibility of renting a shop. The years passed, and Kewal Ram's father died without ever re-creating his Lahore shop in Delhi; the responsibility for running the family fell upon his son. After persistent pleas, in the early 1960s the family, now consisting of the young couple's four daughters and mother, was allotted a two-room flat in the newly constructed Old Double storey area of Lajpat Nagar. They had started their hawking business again, even though it was tougher now since they lived far away from the city in a sparsely inhabited area.

When I met the couple in 2002, they were waiting outside the office for their turn to argue their case for the shop that had been promised to Kewal Ram's father in the late 1940s. Since I was working on the 'history' of Partition, I was not expecting to meet people who were still arguing their decades-old cases before the settlement officer. Yet each person in the queue had a different story to tell – about withheld pensions, promised accommodation or jobs, unsettled compensation claims, among other things – that indicated that their lives were not settled even though decades had lapsed. Partition was not history for them; they were living its consequences in their everyday lives. In fact, the archive at the resettlement office is called a 'record room' and not an archive, I was told, because 'cases were still live' and so cannot be officially designated an archive.<sup>33</sup> Kewal Ram showed me his refugee registration card that he had carefully kept all these years, along with a bundle of official letters concerning his plea. The refugee card was the sole evidence he had to testify to his claims of dislocation and all the hardships that followed it.

I asked them why they continued to pursue their case after all these years, especially when there was little indication that the plea would be entertained. The answer was simple – it was a matter of earning a livelihood, as they had no pension or family support that would take care of them. Their daughters had been married off and were unable to look after them because of pressure from their husbands' families. Their only income was what they earned from the makeshift stall they had set up some years before. On compassionate grounds, and with due intervention from the local municipal councillor, the couple had been allowed to put up a stall near the newly established Central Market in Lajpat Nagar by the municipal authorities. This arrangement was ended in the early 2000s when the municipality decided to demolish all 'unauthorized' structures in the area in an effort to curb illegal constructions.<sup>34</sup>

Their stall was found to be an unauthorized structure by the municipality and was removed. This fresh setback was the reason why they went back to the settlement office to find out if they could pursue their livelihood legally in a rented shop. The answer was a clear 'no', as they soon found out, because the settlement office did not have any jurisdiction over the municipality. It no longer had the mandate or resources to make such decisions, especially after the department had been amalgamated within a larger full-fledged ministry.

The clerk at the settlement office, whom I interacted with everyday, told me that these people wasted everyone's time by pressing on with useless cases.<sup>35</sup> He would helpfully draw my attention to the well-known 'success stories' of refugees who, through sheer hard work, had built their fortunes.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the people who queued up at his office had somehow failed to show the same initiative that made success out of failure. They were still looking to the state for support after many decades, long after most other refugees had taken control of their lives. The lack of enthusiasm among the officials was compounded by the fact that the department was to be downsized further. Most were waiting to be transferred to other departments that were considered active and relevant. The resettlement department had ceased to be relevant in the larger scheme of things, even though it remained relevant to people like Kewal Ram whose most important possession was a refugee card. The only capital he owned was the moral capital of being a refugee, which he strategically employed in an effort to gain a foothold in his old age.

While Kewal Ram and his family had moved out of the refugee camp, they hardly possessed any tools to be self-reliant outside the camp. Though at a policy level refugees were to be given loans to start businesses, in practice it was difficult to obtain them since one needed guarantees and references from community leaders to safeguard the loan. It was especially difficult for people like Kewal Ram who clearly did not have important social connections or any property in lieu of which they could make a claim to assets like better off refugees. The most they had been able to manage was a makeshift stall near the market through the interventions of their local councillor. This too was taken away from them since the stall had never been legally endorsed. They had not shown qualities of self-reliance that would make them citizens befitting the new nation. At the same time, their own efforts at becoming meaningful citizens – by attempting to start small business – were frequently thwarted by various governmental authorities. Their stories did not fit in the popular 'failure-to-success' narrative, and neither did they make the crucial 'refugee-to-citizen' transition by distancing themselves from state dependence.

## THE RELIABLE SELF

Though the contemporary discourse on refugees, at the time of Partition, was mostly sympathetic in drawing popular attention to the 'plight' of the generic refugee, very few discursive fragmentations were made to highlight social differences within the migrant population. This is why the following news report, entitled 'The Ways of Rich Refugees', stands out as exceptional in its description of upper-class refugees:

they buy the best of everything without regard for the prices. From 2 p.m., provided the weather is not too bad, they begin to go up and down the Mall, the men talking about their losses in Lahore and the women about the dresses and fancy goods they had to leave behind. There are a number of restaurants on the Mall which every evening are filled with bored, well-dressed men and women. You cannot mistake the look on these refugee faces. While some are thus killing time, others roam the Mall looking for officials of the East Punjab Government, members of the Legislative Assembly, retired judges and others. From them they get the latest information from Lahore. This information is then embellished and passed on from one group to another. Highly coloured accounts of disturbances causing dismay and demoralization are thus passed on as factual news. In this mood of self-pity the refugees look for people to blame and find their own leaders the handiest.<sup>37</sup>

The above is one of the very few newspaper reports that focused on the wealthier sections of the migrant population. These refugees, compared to the camp refugees, were able not only to meet their everyday needs of food and shelter on their own, but could even afford to maintain their normal lifestyle in exile. They regret their losses and speculate about the 'disturbances' taking place in the plains – of which they have little direct knowledge. They appear more as spectators than actors in the Partition drama. This theme of loss had become a meme through which one could recount, embellish and impress others of the riches one owned. Even this moment of suffering could be turned into a technique of reification of one's social status. The theme of loss and the detailed recounting of all the wealth that had been left behind were frequent themes I encountered among the upper-class refugees in Delhi during my fieldwork. In contrast, the lower middle-class refugees were often less detailed about their losses and would rather gloss over the subject completely. This contrast made sense, after my initial surprise, since one had to own something in the first place in order to lose it. The lower middle class and the poorer sections of, for example, untouchables had few assets and consequently a more limited discourse of loss. Clearly, the upper classes were not the target section of the state's policy of self-rehabilitation since the wealthy migrants had sufficient means to live without state intervention. Many of them had escaped violence in cities like Lahore and Delhi by moving to hill resorts long before the riots broke out at the onset of summer.<sup>38</sup> This also happened to be the season when the elite – high-ranking government officials, merchants and big landowners among others – traditionally migrated to the cooler climate of the hills along with the annual migration of the colonial government.<sup>39</sup> The migrant population in this news report, unlike the inhabitants of the refugee camps, was well versed in the ways the state machinery functioned, which put them in an advantageous position to begin with. Similarly, their personal acquaintance with the state officials and policy-makers was an asset that could be employed when resettling businesses and families in the new place.

A good example of social networking to gain resources is underscored in the following letter to Minister of Rehabilitation M.L. Saxena from one Mrs Kamla Kaushal asking for an allotment of a bungalow plot in the posh environs of the newly developed Nizamuddin colony in lieu of lost property in Pakistan. These plots were much in demand and were, in fact, a source of conflict between the Old Fort camp

refugees and the authorities since the former were initially promised allotments in the colony.<sup>40</sup> The letter begins in rather deferential, though direct, terms:

I beg to apply for one of the larger plots in Nizamuddin area. I am [a] refugee from NWFP and a widow having lost my husband during the communal riots in 1947 at Bannu. I beg to state that I was allotted one of the Pusa Road hutments, which I surrendered requesting at the same time that I should be given a plot of land. Last of all I beg to state that I have been labouring and tilling in the Nizamuddin area and I hope that work shall not be ignored. In this connection it may be added that I was photographed with Mrs Saksena [the Minister's wife] and other ladies while working in that area and the photo appeared in the Illustrated Weekly [a magazine] of that month.<sup>41</sup>

Mrs Kaushal signed off this letter from an address located in the upmarket locality of Connaught Place rather than a refugee camp. The most important identity, however, to gain the plot was that of a refugee, since the locality was being developed for the resourceful refugees. An official note invited 'displaced persons from Western Pakistan who are gainfully employed in Delhi' to submit bids for the 60 x 116 ft plots.<sup>42</sup> The bid could be placed against compensation certificates issued by the Ministry in lieu of property lost in Pakistan. Those refugees who were neither gainfully employed nor in possession of compensation certificates were not eligible for the plot allotments. The fact that Mrs Kaushal became a widow during the Partition violence formed the emotive context of her plea. She states in her letter that she gave up the Pusa Road 'hutments', which were quarter of the size of the bungalows, in the hope of a larger bungalow plot. She mentions that she had been 'labouring and tilling' [sic] the land,<sup>43</sup> and, most importantly, that she had been photographed with the Minister's wife, who had visited the area. This last bit of information makes the plea more interesting since the photograph with Mrs Saksena constitutes the most emphatic argument forwarded in order to secure the plot. This last argument took up at least as much space as her being a refugee and a widow in her case for the plot. Clearly, Mrs Kaushal believed that this important bit of additional information would strengthen her chances of securing a plot. Whether the strategy worked or not is unclear since further correspondence on her plea is missing from the files. But what is clear is that social connections were seen as an important tool in gaining a foothold in the new place.

The needs and strategies of the elite refugees were, clearly, different from those of the ordinary refugees. The common thread was the emotive frame of being 'refugee', despite differing experiences, which prefaced all demands for houses, promotions and easy loans. An exchange of correspondence between Devi Dayal, a high-ranking bureaucrat from the Ministry of External Affairs, and the Ministry of Rehabilitation highlights this contrast. Devi Dayal was allotted one of the much-coveted plots in the Nizamuddin area in 1949. Far from being happy, he wrote a long letter to the Ministry of Rehabilitation complaining about his situation and asking for an easy loan to construct his house on the plot. In the letter he begins by emphasizing his status as a registered refugee, even though a little later he explains his migration as a 'regular transfer' that brought him to India. It was a common practice of the state to arrange

job transfers from Pakistan to India (and vice versa) for its employees. A special Transfer Bureau was set up for this purpose as early as 1947.<sup>44</sup> This way, the employees did not lose their monthly income, accommodation, provident funds or any pensions upon migration. His complaints included the following:

By transfer to India, I have lost 22 years [of] permanent service; I have till now not been paid the balance in my Provident Fund; I lost all my movable and immovable property in Pakistan and have not received any compensation or rehabilitation facilities; I have four children receiving expensive education in schools and colleges but have not obtained any loan, advance, scholarship or other concession from public funds in aid of their education.<sup>45</sup>

The list of grievances was a bit exaggerated and contradictory since, under the transfer rules, employees did not lose seniority and were looked upon rather sympathetically by the state. The provident funds were paid to all employees upon transfer, as agreed under the terms of transfer. Paradoxically, Devi Dayal claims not to have received any compensation against lost property, even though his letter was occasioned by the allotment of a bungalow plot for the same. His letter also states that his children continued to receive an expensive education, though he complains about not having received any aid to subsidize it. This last bit is specially striking since for the vast majority basic survival – food and shelter – was at stake, rather than seeking subsidies to finance expensive private education. For most ordinary refugees, a regular income, accommodation and the undisrupted education of their children were more of a luxury than a requirement. In Devi Dayal's account, one does not witness the events of violence and chaos that constitute many Partition accounts. Partition was the occasion of his movement to India, not a constant determinant in his life as a post-colonial citizen. This letter basically showed how very different spheres of reality existed in the otherwise generalized universe of refugees.

Although refugees like Devi Dayal had little experience of the hardships implied by the label 'refugee', the 'plight of refugees' was a frequent meme used by the elite to mobilize refugees into a political force. In 1949 the Refugee Protection Society (RPS) decided to field 'refugee' candidates in the state Assembly elections since the government was not seen as doing enough to rehabilitate refugees. Charges of negligence had long been levelled against the government by refugees dependent upon the state for loans and the allotment of housing etc. In a letter addressed to RPS President Diwan Chaman Lall, a wealthy barrister from the Punjab and a refugee, a society member noted the problem as follows:

dissatisfaction has very much increased amongst the refugees and they openly charge that the Government has failed to solve the problem even to a negligible degree. Some of the more enthusiastic among them even doubt the intentions of the Government. This, however, seems to be more due to a sense of desperation rather than a true picture of the facts.<sup>46</sup>

While describing the sense of neglect and desperation felt by refugees in need of state support, the writer refers to the refugees as 'them', thereby clearly separating himself

(and the RPS) from the ordinary refugees. The lamentations of the refugees are seen as exaggerations not based on true facts. Even while representing the refugees' state, the writer seems to be an arbiter between the refugees and the government rather than a partisan voice of the refugees.

The list of twenty-three election candidates suggested by the society underscores this distance between the refugees and their representatives. To begin with, a number of them are variously described as 'refugee business magnate', 'important refugee industrialist', 'refugee merchant', 'refugee businessman' and 'refugee leader', among others.<sup>47</sup> Such descriptions carry inbuilt paradoxes that, at once, convey social prestige, economic power and influence conjoined with the emotive and helpless state of being 'refugee'. Interestingly, none of the candidates actually lived in the refugee camps; instead, a number of their addresses were located in the fashionable district of Connaught Place. Their financial losses were minimal since there were private agencies that sold or exchanged evacuee property in both India and Pakistan.<sup>48</sup> In any case, the state policy of compensation made it possible to make good one's losses provided one had the proper documentation and a bit of patience. Most of the candidates were high profile individuals, well-established businessmen, political leaders, wealthy philanthropists, influential community leaders and professional doctors and lawyers. The only common bond they had with the refugees whose experiences they were representing was formed by the act of dislocation and the official refugee identity cards they had been issued with. This mobilization did not lead to a political formation but became a fertile ground from where 'distinguished' members of the refugee community emerged to provide leadership and direction.<sup>49</sup> They were successful examples of the state's policy of becoming good citizens – as they had been self-reliant and productive from an early stage. But they also represented the hollowness of the state's vision since their supposed transformative journeys – of turning failure into success and thus gaining a meaningful place in the new citizenry – had not always been travelled. Their abridged journeys, if anything, created unfavourable contrasts with those who had to struggle for basic survival in their everyday lives.

## PERFORMING CITIZENSHIP

The refugee registration card, in the historical trajectory of self-rehabilitation, carries a particular significance. While it generally symbolized the official recognition of one's dislocation and earned concessions and resources from the state, it also conveyed a state of helplessness and dependence for some whose journeys had been turbulent and difficult. To others still, such as Devi Dayal and Diwan Chaman Lall, the acquisition of refugee cards was a legible entry into borrowed 'refugee experiences' and concessions even when their own journeys did not bear much resemblance to the popular narratives of forced movement. These differing meanings invested in refugee cards were made apparent when a former resident of Rawalpindi narrated his personal story of movement, homelessness and long struggles to me. At the end of his narration, which took place in front of his two sons, he offered to show me his refugee card, which he had kept but never shown to anyone. The card was meaningless in his current life,

except for its historical value. As I waited for him to return, I overheard his younger son arguing fervently against his offer to show me the card. A little later, the son returned to say that his father could not find his refugee card. When the father returned, he shrugged off his futile search by suggesting it did not matter since they were not refugees anymore.

The card, clearly, was an uncomfortable reminder of a difficult and often inglorious past, and a matter of disagreement within the family. Whether the card went missing or was hidden wilfully, its absence signified its irrelevance for the family more than five decades later. The family over the years had gained success in business and could choose to keep or dispense with this relic from the past. They had been able to self-rehabilitate themselves, and therefore their refugee identity was no longer central to them. However, this option was not available to Kewal Ram, for whom the card was a necessary proof of identity when he interacted with the state authorities. In the eyes of the state, he had failed to be a success since he continued knocking on the doors of different authorities even after five decades.

The core principle of the state's refugee rehabilitation policies was self-rehabilitation – aided and initiated by the state but to be self-executed by the refugees in order to become well-integrated citizens of India. The idea of self-rehabilitation, in fact, carried within it two seemingly complementary processes – of *being made* independent of the state, though upon the state's insistence, and *becoming* self-reliant through one's active efforts. Both processes worked simultaneously towards a common goal of relocating the newcomers on the citizenship map, yet they carried tensions and different outcomes from the very beginning. While some refugees – owners of social and economic capitals – were able to *become* self-reliant from the start, others who did not have resources had to *be made* independent by the state. Kewal Ram belonged to the latter category of refugees who did not grow out of the shadows of the state. While the officials at the resettlement office found his pleas a waste of time and categorized him a failure, it was hardly a matter of debate that the state had failed him not only by not focusing on his needs, but also by thwarting his attempts to begin small-scale independent ventures.

The state's attention, from the very beginning, had been on resourceful refugees. These individuals and groups were not beholden to the state for their everyday existence since they owned private means and social networks of support. Even though their journeys had little in common with the stories of violence, mayhem and shortages of food and water along the way, they were not only seen as representatives of the refugee experience but also considered leaders of refugee communities. Thus, being labelled 'refugee', and a self-reliant one at that, was to be given a desirable identity that helped integrate the newcomers in the upper echelons of the host society. This way one could draw upon the moral capital invested in the imaginary of refugee – without having experienced the hardships and struggles popularly associated with it – and yet be seen as an ideal example of a self-reliant refugee based on one's own social capital.

Three conclusions may be drawn to sum up the discussions above. First, while there was universal sympathy for an archetype of refugee – hardworking but fallen on bad times – this did not always translate into concrete support since individuals seldom match the ideal. The mythical persona of refugee was actually constitutive of a wide

range of distinctions, whereas the state policies were made following the one-size-fits-all principle. Second, one's position as a post-colonial citizen was shaped by the relationship one had with the state: the greater one's ability to be self-reliant, the better one's chances of gaining a firm foothold in the new citizenry. Finally, it was not only the state-dependents who were enchanted with state power; it was also the self-reliant refugees who appealed to the state for recognition of their social eminence and advancement. Self-rehabilitation was not always a display of initiative and hard work, but often an expression of resourcefulness in manoeuvring the authorities in everyday life. The policy of self-rehabilitation, in fact, inadvertently rewarded those who owned social capital and could manage on their own, rather than supporting those who really needed state help. Those left on the margins of the new citizenry symbolized the state's failure to design policies that focused on the most needy and subaltern of the refugees.

## NOTES

1. Joya Chatterji, 'Rights or Charity? Government and Refugees: The Debate of Relief and Rehabilitation 1947–50', in Suvir Kaul (ed.), *Partition of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (Delhi, 2001).
2. See Ravinder Kaur, 'Narrative Absence: The Untouchable Account of Partition Migration', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 42(2) (2008), pp. 281–306, and also *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (Delhi, 2007).
3. I draw upon Bourdieu's work on social capital here. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA, 1984).
4. The fieldwork in Delhi was conducted over different periods in 2001–2, 2005 and 2007.
5. The citizenship rights of the displaced people from Pakistan were guaranteed in retrospect under Part II (clauses 5 and 6) of the Constitution of India adopted on 26 January 1950. According to the rules, all those who had 'migrated to the territory of India from the territory now included in Pakistan shall be deemed citizens of India at the commencement of this constitution'. The cut-off date for this provision was 19 July 1948, after which special registration had to be undertaken. This did not mean that migration took place in one clean sweep since people often travelled back and forth, unable to decide where to settle down. This is borne out by numerous records of litigation over property with the office of the Custodian General of Evacuee Property. See Syed Mohammad Husain, *The Law and Practice Relating to Evacuee Property in India* (Delhi, 1954).
6. Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1950).
7. Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), p. 276.
8. On state patronage and the making of the new elite during the colonial period, see Francis Robinson, 'Consultation and Control: The United Provinces' Government and Its Allies, 1860–1906', *Modern Asian Studies*, 5(4) (1971), pp. 313–36.
9. *Hindustan Times*, 29 August 1947.
10. *Hindustan Times*, 2 September 1947.
11. *Ibid.*
12. See Liisa Malkki on representations of refugees in *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and Exile in National Cosmology of Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, 1992).
13. See Mary Douglas Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Danger* (London, 2002).

14. U.A. Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (Delhi, 1967), p. 3.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. See, for example, *East Punjab Evacuee (Administration Property) Ordinance of 1947* (Delhi, 14 September 1947), where the legal terminology of 'displaced persons' and 'evacuees' is first proposed and explained. In contrast, the official accounts of Partition migration and resettlement are constructed around 'refugees'. See, for example, reports such as *Millions on the Move: The Aftermath of Partition* (Delhi, undated) and U.B. Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, both issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
18. The sixteenth-century expression 'refugee', used for French Huguenot groups in exile, denotes individuals and groups seeking refuge to escape threats and persecution in their homeland. The term was imbued with specific legal meanings and status when the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950, followed by the ratification of the Refugee Convention a year later. See *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (Geneva, 1951 and 1976), <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2009).
19. The idea of self-rehabilitation is expressed in official documents in terms of self-reliance, or the ability or intent to rehabilitate oneself. See, for example, Mohan Lal Saksena, *Some Reflections on the Problems of Rehabilitation* (Delhi, undated). Also Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*.
20. Rao, p. 63.
21. Saksena, p.2.
22. Saksena, p. 3.
23. Saksena, pp. 3–4.
24. Rao, p. 62.
25. Interview with V.K. Kataria, Delhi, 16 December 2000.
26. Saksena, p. 33.
27. Saksena, p. 125
28. Saksena, pp. 125–7.
29. Interview with Rajrani, Delhi, 10 February 2002.
30. Kaur, *Since 1947*, p. 147.
31. The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation was set up in September 1947, and in 1965 it was integrated within the Ministry of Home Affairs as the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation. See Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*.
32. *Hindustan Times*, 21 August 1947.
33. 'Archive', here, seems to bear a sense of something that is no longer relevant in everyday life and can, therefore, be consigned to professional history writers. Interview with Sham Singh, Record Room attendant at the Department of Rehabilitation, Delhi, February 2002.
34. The demolition drive in Delhi was the result of a Supreme Court directive to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to remove illegal constructions and extensions.
35. My repeated visits meant that at least the functionaries in the lower echelons of the departments had become friendly enough to explain and provide a context, as they saw it, to the predictable drama everyday.
36. This was a popular theme at the department, where a few individual success stories were repeatedly narrated to underscore the different destinies shaped by hard work or the lack of it. The favourite rags-to-riches story was that of the hotelier H.S. Oberoi, the late owner of Oberoi hotel chain, who had come to Delhi penniless and then become an international

- success. In fact, the flagship hotel of this chain was a stone's throw from the settlement office, and that perhaps explained the excessive emphasis on Oberoi's story. However, success stories like that of Oberoi were far and few between and not a general trend.
37. *Hindustan Times*, 31 August 1947.
  38. The Partition violence took place in different time periods and different locations. The first major series of violent acts was reported from Rawalpindi in March 1947, followed by widespread violence in Lahore in May and then Delhi in August and September. The Rawalpindi violence had, in fact, initiated pre-emptive migration by minority groups, namely Hindus and Sikhs, seeking security in areas considered safe. For the chronology and nature of Partition violence, see Anders Bjørn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide: Manifestations of Violence in Punjab 1937–47* (Delhi, 2002).
  39. The colonial government in Delhi moved to Shimla every summer since the heat was found too oppressive to conduct administrative business.
  40. I explore in detail the conflict over plot allotments in Nizamuddin in Kaur, *Since 1947*, ch. 4.
  41. Letter from Mrs Kamla Kaushal to the Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation, file no. RHB/120(3)/49, dated 2 November 1949, National Archives, Delhi.
  42. 'Bungalow Plots for Sale to Displaced Persons in Nizamuddin Colony', press note from the Ministry of Rehabilitation, file no. RHB/120(3)/49, undated.
  43. The Old Fort camp refugees had been initially asked to provide manual labour to prepare the land for construction. Many believed that they would be given the land they were working on. This explains Mrs Kaushal's emphasis on tilling the land.
  44. Annual Report 1947–8, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of India.
  45. Letter from Devi Dayal to Mehr Chand Khanna, adviser to the Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation, file no. RHB/120(3)/49, dated 28 November 1949.
  46. Diwan Chaman Lall Papers, file no. 73/1949, dated 28 July 1948.
  47. Diwan Chaman Lall Papers, file no. 73/1949, undated.
  48. Letter from Durga Das & Co. detailing commission rates and terms of business, Diwan Chaman Lall Papers, file no. 73/1949.
  49. For example, Mehar Chanda Khanna, a refugee and political leader from North-West Frontier Province, was appointed as Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation in 1950 as a result of pressure from refugee interest groups.