

Book Reviews

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The Journey to Pakistan: A Documentation on Refugees of 1947. Compiled by Saleemullah Khan. Islamabad: National Documentation Centre, Cabinet Division, 1993, p.viii+357. Price: Rs. 70/-.

Communal violence and mass migration across the international borders between Pakistan and India at the time of independence have no parallel in human history. The leaders of the Pakistan movement did suspect foul play in the process of partition of the South Asian Subcontinent but had not foreseen the enormity of the problems attending it. With hardly any administrative structure, military personnel and financial resources, the government of Pakistan was ill-equipped to face these problems at the advent of independence. The scene of riots and refugees was initially the partitioned province of the Punjab. Later, it spread to adjoining and other areas. Realising the inadequacies of the young and inexperienced political leadership of the (West) Punjab — the province which was denuded of its limited resources as a result of the division of assets and the riotous conditions —, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah instructed Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan to shift temporarily the cabinet secretariat from Karachi, then the federal capital, to Lahore, the capital of (West) Punjab in order to control the situation. Quaid himself stayed in Lahore for over a month. The magnitude of human misery he saw in the refugee camps deeply affected his already deteriorating health. Amidst chaos and riots, the (West) Punjab government began to publish

literature to expose the non-Muslim plans to exterminate muslim population from eastern Punjab. After it had published just three pamphlets in this series, Quaid intervened; he stopped the circulation of these pamphlets and printing of any new ones lest these aggravate an already tragic situation.

Any official publication or circulation of material on the subject discontinued after Quaid's instructions. But there was no 'ban' on publication of such material. Accounts of riots and refugees did appear in contemporary newspapers, magazines and literary works, mostly in Urdu. A few general studies on the establishment of Pakistan like Chaudhri Muhammad Ali's *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York, 1967) have touched upon some aspects of the problems of the refugees, but systematic and independent studies of this multi-dimensional subject have yet to be made. The origin of the issue of refugees was rooted in communal conflict and its magnitude required enormous resources for rehabilitation. It influenced not only the lives of those millions who were uprooted from their homes but also changed the demographic, social, economic and political milieu of the regions where they settled. All the regions of Pakistan were affected by these changes; the difference was only of the degree of influence. One cannot understand the post-independence history and politics of Pakistan without familiarity with this subject. This is possible only when literature of an academic nature is available to scholars.

The National Documentation Centre, which was established in the 1970s, has brought out a number of important documentary and bibliographic surveys. Among these works, the first was four-volume documentation on *The Partition of the Punjab, 1947* (Lahore, 1983), which had been initially prepared by the Record Office, Civil Secretariat, Lahore in the 1960s. *The Journey to Pakistan* is another important addition to these documentary surveys. This work is divided into three parts. The first part includes a selection from the official records about the refugees, their evacuation from eastern Punjab, the relief work in the refugee camps, administrative arrangements for their rehabilitation, the formation of the Pakistan-Punjab Refugee Council and a few reports by the Refugees Commissioner and the Punjab Governor. The second part comprises eye witness accounts of communal riots and the state of the refugees by

important individuals including Hafeez Jullundhri and Begum Noon and one report on the Punjab riots by the Communist Party of India. These accounts have been taken from a compilation, the *Disturbances in West Punjab and Contiguous Areas during and after 1947*, issued by the Government of Pakistan in 1948. The third part contains press coverage of various aspects of the refugees and their problems, drawn essentially from the Lahore daily *Pakistan Times* and the *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*. At the end of the book are given four paintings by a Pakistani artist, Jimmy Engineer, who has tried to recapture and depict the condition of the people at the time of partition.

This documentary survey, as stated in its Introduction, includes documents that were (easily) available to the Centre. The work is, therefore, selective in content and limited in scope. A more comprehensive documentation, or at least a more exhaustive introduction to different aspects of the refugees' problems and their impact on Pakistan's society and politics, would have enhanced the usefulness of this work. This, I hope, the Centre would do when it brings out its next edition. Even in its present form, the work would serve as an important source for the scholars of the partition of the South Asian Subcontinent and history and politics of Pakistan's early years.

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