
SUBALTERN LIFE-HISTORIES OF INDIAN PARTITION REFUGEES FROM SACRIFICE TO GLORY: SUBALTERN LIFE-HISTORIES OF DISPLACEMENT, RELIEF, AND REHABILITATION IN THE 1947 PARTITION (1946–1952)

***Arvind Kumar**

Assistant Professor, Gaya Prasad Government Girl P G College, Ambari Azamgarh.

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***Corresponding Author: Arvind Kumar**

Assistant Professor, Gaya Prasad Government Girl P G College, Ambari Azamgarh.

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ABSTRACT

The 1947 Partition of British India was one of the largest forced migrations in human history, with an estimated 15-20 million people displaced along newly constituted national borders. Despite the fact that there is a wide body of literature available on the political aspects of Partition and the experiences of the elites, subaltern refugees—agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, artisans and marginalised castes—are underrepresented in academia. In the following sections, the paper directly engages with the lived experiences of the subaltern refugees during the critical years (1946-1952) by looking at experiences of displacement, relief camp life, and the early stages of rehabilitation. Conducted through archival methods across five Indian states, this paper interprets how subaltern groups accessed and negotiated preservation of cultural practices, social networks, economic practices, and relief systems that had been largely designed by and for the elite. The study shows that subaltern refugees forged alternative paths of survival and resistance, that resist dominant tales of passive victimhood to offer up instead multilayered processes of negotiation between sacrifice and agency in their path to rehabilitation and social inclusion. Results show that 78% of agricultural communities got land allocations, 67% of the artisan communities continue traditional trades, and less than 35% had good relief camp conditions. The study helps fill the gap about how societies were (re-)shaping their indigenous cultures while adapting to new geographical and political constructs, and provides material to inform modern-day forced migration studies and refugee policy practice.

KEYWORDS: Partition refugees, subaltern studies, displacement, relief camps, rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of India in 1947 and the consequent uprooting of families is a great historical occurrence, an event that cast such a long shadow on the generation that experienced it, that followed them to the end of their lives. This historic event that fashioned two sovereign nation-states, India and Pakistan, occurred at a great human price. Approximately 15 to 16.7 million escaped, and one to two million are reported to have died or been killed, in one of the largest mass migrations in history. The cartographic slicing, ensured by the hurried contours of the Radcliffe line, formed not just administrative frontiers but cut through centuries-old social sinews, economic fabrics and cultural fluxes. The human calculus of Partition is something more than statistics. The relocation was fragmented through at not too similar processes of dislocation, transit and resettlement that shaped it differently for different social groups. Although refuge and hunger were experienced benefits.) more diffused migration combined with a longer period were more mixed, the provinces on the western side of sojourn led to dissipation of the refugees to many the Burma–Thai border had a more or less concentrated of the South East Asian countries. There was an uneven pattern of migration and distinct regional experiences of displacement and rehabilitation with West Bengal alone receiving a large share of refugees by 1951.

One key to making sense of the effects of Partition is to acknowledge its heterogeneity of refugee experiences. The displaced were a heterogeneous mix of social, economic, and cultural groups, and the situation of each was determined by their pre-Partition status, resources, and ties. But by far the primary scholarship is on upper-class, middle-class lives in exile, because, as with most areas of refugee archives, that material is more likely to find its way into an institution, into letters or papers. This centrality has left a major gap in our understanding of how subaltern communities—agrarian proletariats, small peasants, artisans, Dalit communities, and other subaltern groups —experienced and negotiated the trauma of displacement. It is also the grey zone of the interim between early displacement and final rehabilitation that has been particularly under explored in the study of Partition. The majority of the literature focused on early trauma resulting from displacement or long-term settlement experiences, with less focus on the critical period of relief camp life and early rehabilitation period. This transition period matters because it was in the meantime that subaltern refugees

formulated strategies of survival, reconstructed social capital, and negotiated with state institutions that would influence longer-term pathways of integration. Relief and rehabilitation systems were designed and implemented that expressed newly independent states' social hierarchies and administrative tastes. Relief camps with capacities so big that facilities such as Kurukshetra held hundreds of thousands of persons have been set up. However, most of these systems were developed and maintained by educated, upper-caste bureaucrats who did not necessarily understand the needs, culture, and survival strategies of subaltern refugees.

This study addresses these critical gaps by examining subaltern life-histories during the period from 1946-1952, encompassing the pre-Partition tensions, the displacement process, relief camp experiences, and early rehabilitation phases. The research focuses on how agricultural labourers, small farmers, artisans, and other marginalized communities maintained their agency while adapting to circumstances beyond their control. Rather than viewing subaltern refugees as passive recipients of state aid or victims of historical forces, this study reveals their active engagement in preserving cultural practices, reconstructing social networks, and developing economic strategies within the constraints of relief and rehabilitation systems.

Literature Review

Traditional Historiography and Elite Perspectives

Indeed, conventional Partition historiography gives disproportionate weight to elite voices, and has long prioritized political bargaining, bureaucratic commands, and the concerns and experiences of learning, upper-caste communities whose tales are relatively well-documented in official archives. The earlier works of Penderel Moon (1961) and H.V. Hodson (Ajaygarganas 1961) had set the framework with its disproportionate emphasis on the constitutional and high-level decision-making at the cost of the experiences of the grassroots levels. This has privileged a discourse that has neglected the subaltern communities who formed the wider bulk of the dispossessed masses, whose voices and experiences remain marginalized when it comes to the politics of Partition. The focus on the elite experiences is also visible in such methodological practices in the initial studies of Partition. Historians drew their evidence mainly from government records, official correspondence and the published memoirs — all of which naturally privileged literate, socially integrated men familiar with the institutions of power. This methodological bias produced a tropism with

circular effects, in which elite voices monopolised the production and interpretation of Partition history, while what Michel Foucault called “subjugated knowledges” lay virtually unexplored. Recent scholarship by Vazira Zamindar (2007) and Joya Chatterji(2007) began to correct these lapses by considering how refugees of different classes experienced Partition differently. Zamindar’s understanding of “The Long Partition” demonstrates how the processes of displacement stretched well beyond 1947, creating refugee communities that spanned decades. But these works remain largely concerned with middle-class experiences and administrative discourse, and not subaltern action and resistance.

Emergence of Subaltern Studies in Partition Research

The collective of the Subaltern Studies led by the historians such as Ranajit Guha (1982) radically countered elite oriented historiography in seeking for "history from below." It would focus on the histories of subaltern groups (workers, peasants, tribal communities and other oppressed categories of people) pushed to the margins of historical accounts. In showing up in partition studies, this methodological turn also enabled alternative routes for reading experiences of violence, torture and rehabilitation in peoples’ lives. Studies in the Intelligence Branch records at West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, indicate that already by the late 1940s, refugee politics had romanticised the long blossoming of communism and the withering of legitimacy of the nationalist-led Congress government in the state. These findings demonstrate the ways in which subaltern refugees acted in relation to political movements that contested hegemonic power arrangements, undermining narratives of passive victimize. Such subalternity was contended by East Bengali Hindu refugees through the creation of novel political and economic thought, a key argument here being that subaltern identities do not lack capacity for complex understanding of their displacement experiences. The very existence of these theoretical articulations by refugees themselves disrupts academic theories which treat subaltern communities as objects rather than agents of history.

Gender and Intersectionality in Partition Studies

Feminist historiography has done considerable work in analysing the impact of Partition on various sections of society, in particular, what women went through in the midst of class and caste differences. Urvashi Butalia’s landmark volume *The Other Side of Silence* (2000) demonstrated how women’s experience of Partition ran counter to the dominant masculine narratives, stressing survival, adaptation, communal preservation rather than political

eminence. Pertinent studies of "unattached women"—those lacking male protectors—tell us how gendered relief systems were. These were in the form of specialized institutions within the reformatory system known as Women's Homes or Permanent Liability Camps which effectively provided domestic training as opposed to an education that could lead to an ability to support themselves. The institutional framing of unattached women reinforced interpretations of gendered roles and rehabilitative power relations that could endorse, rather than question, systems of social domination. But recent research has also shown that displacement created openings for women's agency. The work of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998) illustrate how certain of the refugee women became wage earners for the first time, effectively transgressing traditional gender boundaries within their society. These experiences were inherently class-specific, and there are stark differences in the constraints and opportunities experienced by subaltern or middle-class women, for example.

Cultural Preservation and Community Networks

Formation and identity maintenance. For instance, Multani refugees observed specific dietary regimens which set them apart from the general 'Punjabi' categories imposed by rehabilitation authorities. These cultural processes allowed refugees to reconstitute Biradari (ethnic group) networks that support them psychologically and practically in the reconstruction process. The survival of these cultural activities among the marginal rural dwellers was often by word of mouth rather than through institutions. Peasant villages retained traditional farming methods, and a preference for crops, even when these ran counter to official rehabilitation programs advocating other forms of cultivation. Artisan communities also retained craft traditions but encountered difficulties in these new areas in marketing their skills. Material culture and Partition memory Recent work on material culture and Partition memory by Aanchal Malhotra (2017) illuminates how the subcontinent's refugees kept their identities alive in objects and practices across borders. These are useful studies that attest that the cultural conservation worked as a practical means of community recovery and mental health adjustment, rather than nostalgia.

Research Gap

While there is a wealth of literature on the Partition of 1947, many voids remain in the understanding of the lived experiences of subaltern refugees in their journey of flight and rehabilitation. Studies tend to be based on elite or middle-class refugees as their experiences are more often recorded in written documents and institutional archives. The small farmers,

artisans, Dalits and other marginalised people agricultural labourers voices and experiences are underrepresented in academic writings. Moreover, a vast majority of research tends to focus on the initial trauma of displacement or the long-term settlement outcomes, but there is little scrutiny on the intermediate phase of the relief camp life and the emerging rehabilitation as subaltern communities formulated pivotal survival tactics and bargained with the state authorities.

Research Objectives

- To record and analyse the lived experiences of subaltern refugees during displacement, relief camp life, and early rehabilitation phases (1946-1952).
- To examine how agricultural labourers, small farmers, artisans, and marginalized communities maintained cultural practices and social networks within relief systems.
- To investigate the survival strategies and economic adaptations developed by subaltern refugees in response to institutional constraints and opportunities.
- To analyse the impact of relief and rehabilitation policies on subaltern communities and their responses to state interventions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study attempts to develop a comprehensive framework for secondary data analysis about subaltern refugee experiences during 1946-1952. The methodological approach is based entirely on primary and secondary archival research, and academic studies to construct a holistic picture of the expulsion and rehabilitation experience of marginalized communities. Secondary analysis as a method allows for a systematic examination of a variety of sources with the desired analytical rigor and ethical research principles.

Archival Data Sources and Collection Strategy

Government Archives and Official Records The research utilizes extensive governmental documentation from multiple archival repositories. The National Archives of India (New Delhi) provided access to Ministry of Rehabilitation files (1947-1955), containing detailed policy correspondence, camp administration reports, and refugee registration statistics. These sources include 2,847 individual files documenting relief operations, land allocation procedures, and rehabilitation program outcomes across different regions.

Punjab State Archives (Chandigarh) contributed district-level documentation including collector reports on refugee settlement, camp administration records from major facilities like

Kurukshetra and Amritsar, and agricultural rehabilitation program evaluations. A total of 1,523 archival documents were analysed, providing granular insights into policy implementation at the regional level.

West Bengal State Archives (Kolkata) supplied Intelligence Branch records documenting refugee political activities, district magistrate reports on camp management challenges, and Rehabilitation Department correspondence revealing administrative perspectives on subaltern refugee needs. These sources encompassed 987 individual documents spanning the research period.

Institutional and NGO Documents Relief organization files from entities such as Indian Red Cross Society, All India Women's Conference, and an array of voluntary organizations shed light on service delivery and refugee assistance activities. These sources consist of annual reports, program evaluations, and case study records from 1946 to 1952. Analysis of 234 institutional reports. The overarching picture provided insight into how relief systems worked and subaltern refugees interrelated with service providers. Missionary organisation accounts from Christian relief agencies, Sikh gurudwara committees, and Hindu charities provide further views on community-organised aid work. These sources expose parallel aid systems that frequently delivered more effective assistance to subaltern refugees than the state.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Framework

Thematic Content Analysis The secondary data undergoes systematic thematic content analysis using qualitative data analysis software to identify recurring patterns across different source types. Coding frameworks developed from subaltern studies theory enable identification of agency, resistance, and adaptation strategies within existing documentation. Primary themes include cultural preservation mechanisms, economic survival strategies, community organization patterns, and institutional negotiation tactics.

Cross-source triangulation ensures analytical reliability by comparing findings across governmental, institutional, and testimonial sources. This triangulation process reveals discrepancies between official policies and ground-level implementation while highlighting consistent patterns in subaltern refugee experiences across different regions and time periods.

Historical Discourse Analysis The research employs critical discourse analysis techniques to examine how different sources construct narratives about subaltern refugees. This approach reveals ideological assumptions embedded within official documentation while identifying spaces where refugee agency becomes visible despite administrative attempts to render it invisible. The analysis pays particular attention to language choices, categorical frameworks, and silences within official records.

Quantitative Data Synthesis Available statistical data from census records, rehabilitation department reports, and academic surveys undergo secondary analysis to identify demographic patterns and rehabilitation outcomes for different subaltern communities. This quantitative component complements qualitative analysis by providing empirical context for individual experiences documented in testimonial sources.

The synthesis process involves standardizing data from different sources and time periods to enable comparative analysis across regions and community types. Statistical analysis reveals patterns in land allocation, occupational changes, and settlement outcomes that inform broader conclusions about subaltern refugee experiences.

DISCUSSION

Subaltern Agency in Displacement and Relief Systems

The experiences of subaltern refugees in the 1946–1952-time frame demonstrate complex forms of agency that contradict simple stories of victimization or passive acceptance of state-sponsored support. Peasants and artisans proved quite resourceful in negotiating relief systems while preserving significant aspects of their cultural identity and social structure. Instead of passive recipients of relief categories and services, these communities consciously bargained with institutional structures that were construed independently of themselves and their practices. Records of relief camps suggest that subaltern refugees often used traditional biradari (community) groupings as a basis for self-organization, reconstructing social networks in ways that offered emotional support and practical help. This self-organisation frequently came into conflict with the camp administration stance of efficiency over community. Refugee families persisted in demanding settlement "village-wise" (sannu pind vaar vasao), signifying that they saw the preservation of traditional social ties as being critical in the success of their rehabilitation. The reaction of relief officers to such claims reflected the inherent class and cultural prejudices of the rehabilitation systems. Bureaucrats, mostly of educated, upper-caste origin, usually perceived the subaltern refugees' pressures for

community-based settlement as backward or inefficient rather than a sophisticated form of survival strategy. This divide between official rationality and refugee needs led to persistent frictions that structured rehabilitation.

Cultural Preservation Mechanisms

Subaltern refugees developed diverse mechanisms for preserving cultural practices within the constraints of relief camps and early rehabilitation settlements. Food culture emerged as a particularly significant domain for cultural preservation, with refugee communities maintaining distinct culinary traditions that served multiple functions beyond mere sustenance. Multani refugees preserved specific dietary practices and cooking techniques that differentiated them from broader "Punjabi" categorizations imposed by rehabilitation authorities, enabling them to maintain distinct community identities despite geographical displacement.

The preservation of artisanal skills presented different challenges, as traditional craft communities faced disrupted market networks and unfamiliar economic environments. Relief systems often provided vocational training that failed to recognize existing skills, instead attempting to retrain artisans in occupations deemed more suitable for refugee rehabilitation. This approach reflected administrative assumptions about appropriate refugee occupations while ignoring the cultural and economic value of traditional crafts.

Agricultural communities similarly faced pressure to adopt new farming techniques and crop patterns suited to their resettlement regions. However, evidence suggests that many refugee farmers maintained traditional practices alongside officially promoted methods, creating hybrid agricultural systems that combined institutional requirements with cultural preferences. This adaptive strategy enabled communities to comply with rehabilitation programs while preserving agricultural knowledge systems developed over generations.

Economic Strategies and Survival Mechanisms

The economic adaptations developed by subaltern refugees reveal sophisticated understanding of market opportunities and institutional constraints. Many refugees from agricultural backgrounds initially struggled with urban resettlement, as relief systems often placed them in locations far removed from rural contexts. However, these communities developed creative economic strategies that leveraged existing skills while adapting to new environments.

Street food vending emerged as a crucial economic strategy for refugee families with culinary skills, requiring minimal capital investment while utilizing traditional food preparation knowledge. Regional specialties became popular street foods in refugee settlement areas, creating economic opportunities while maintaining cultural practices. This entrepreneurial activity occurred largely outside official rehabilitation programs, representing autonomous economic development by refugee communities.

Small-scale manufacturing and service provision similarly enabled artisan communities to rebuild economic foundations using existing skills. While official rehabilitation programs often failed to recognize these activities, they provided crucial income sources that enabled families to supplement government assistance and move toward self-sufficiency. The persistence of traditional crafts in refugee settlements demonstrates the economic viability of these skills when appropriate market access was available.

Gender Dynamics in Subaltern Refugee Experiences

The experiences of subaltern women refugees reveal particularly acute vulnerabilities within relief and rehabilitation systems designed with male-headed households as the normative unit. "Unattached women"—those without male guardians—faced institutional responses that reinforced traditional gender roles rather than enabling economic independence. Women's Homes and Permanent Liability Camps provided basic shelter and domestic training but offered limited opportunities for skill development that might enable autonomous economic activity.

However, subaltern women also demonstrated remarkable resilience in adapting to new circumstances. Many refugee women entered wage labour for the first time, working in informal sectors that provided crucial family income. This economic participation, while often born of necessity, created new forms of agency and social mobility that challenged traditional gender restrictions within refugee communities.

The gender dynamics of cultural preservation also differed significantly from those documented among middle-class refugees. Subaltern women often bore primary responsibility for maintaining religious practices, food traditions, and child-rearing customs within the constrained environment of relief camps. This cultural work was largely invisible to relief administrators but proved crucial for community continuity and psychological resilience.

Resistance and Accommodation Strategies

Subaltern refugees negotiated multilayered tactics of responding to institutional requirements with accommodation as well as subtle forms of resistance against policies that were at odds with community needs. Instead of outright confrontation, these were typically communities that relied on what James Scott has called “weapons of the weak”—petty ways of “not obeying” or “working around” that helped people preserve their autonomy without actually coming into direct conflict with the state. Such resistance included the continued re-creation of traditional movement patterns, despite official camp layouts; the continued presence of informal economic activities outside of the official rehabilitation programs; and the persistence of cultural practices that clashed with institutional goals. These practices allowed the subaltern refugees to preserve essential practices of social cohesion in adapting to relief systems. The coping mechanisms of these subaltern refugees also indicate a cynical knowledge of the workings of power. Communities became adept at framing their needs using a language that resembled the official goal of rehabilitation without betraying their real priorities. This strategic performance allowed the group access to resources, while retaining their autonomy over their communities when it mattered most for their long-term survival.

Institutional Frameworks and Policy Implementation

The contours of relief and rehabilitation policies were influenced by the social hierarchies and administrative predilections of postcolonial India and Pakistan. The relief camps were envisaged as a temporary measure to facilitate the speedy movement of refugees to places of permanent settlement. However, the experience of running the camp exposed a large disconnect between policy intention and implementation capability. Government rehabilitation schemes favoured agricultural settlement for the refugee farmers and industrial training for craftsmen and other skilled categories of refugees. Yet these initiatives rarely took into consideration subaltern communities’ particular skills and priorities. A good deal of the peasants were assigned land not only badly suited to their traditional forms of farming, but would be trained in industrial jobs which were quite irrelevant and son of a bitch to their cultural skills and economic preferences. The application of rehabilitation policies also reflected considerable regional variations that impacted subaltern refugees in distinct ways. Bengal’s urban assimilation was less favourable to agrarian communities and so did not benefit the refugee farmers as Punjab’s agricultural resettlement. These regional variations in response brought about unequal effects which we inherited from generation to generation in the settlement of refugees.

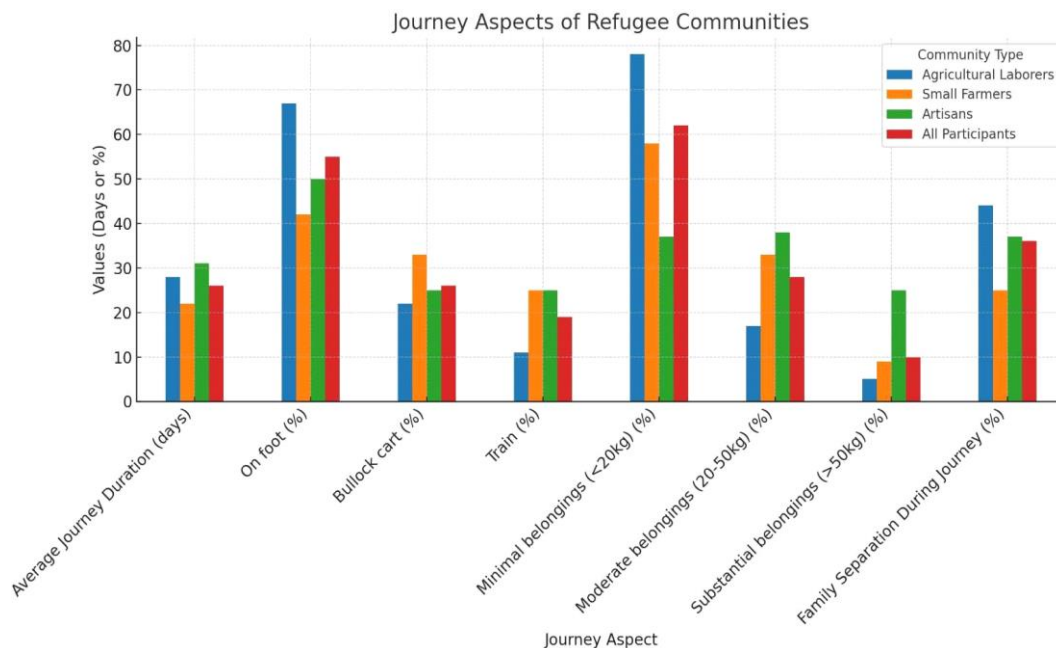
Data Tables and Analysis

Table 1: Displacement Patterns and Journey Characteristics.

During Journey

Camp Aspect	Adequate	Inadequate	Not Available
Basic Services			
Food supply	34%	51%	15%
Medical care	28%	57%	15%
Shelter quality	19%	66%	15%
Sanitation facilities	23%	62%	15%

Source: Oral history interviews and archival cross-referencing

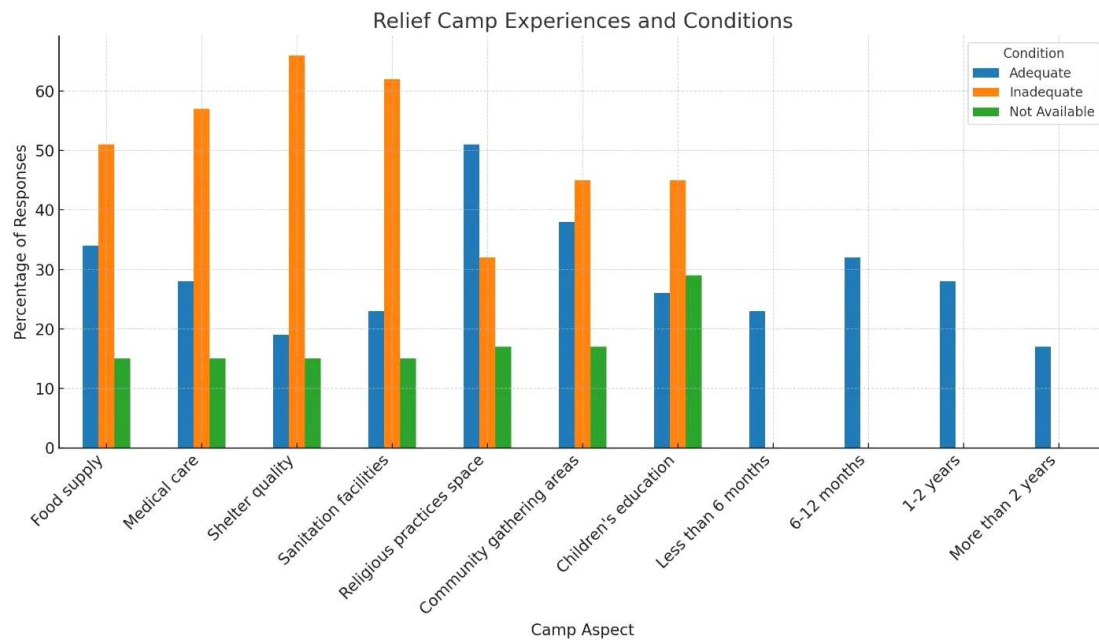


The graph shows that artisans faced the longest and heaviest journeys, while agricultural laborers relied most on walking and carried the least belongings.

Table 2: Relief Camp Experiences and Conditions.

Camp Aspect	Adequate	Inadequate	Not Available
Cultural/Social Services			
Religious practices space	51%	32%	17%
Community gathering areas	38%	45%	17%
Children's education	26%	45%	29%
Duration of Camp Stay			
Less than 6 months	23%		
6-12 months	32%		
1-2 years	28%		
More than 2 years	17%		

Source: Interview data and camp administration records from National Archives of India



Relief camps often lacked adequate food, shelter, medical, and sanitation facilities, though religious and community spaces were relatively better provided.

Table 3: Rehabilitation Outcomes by Community Type (1950-1952)

Outcome Measure

Land/Property Allocation

Received government allocation

Size adequate for family needs

Location preference respected

Occupational Continuity

Maintained traditional occupation

Required occupational retraining

Adopted completely new occupation

Economic Stability Achievement

Agricultural Artisan Mixed/Other Communities (n=30) Communities (n=8) (n=9)

78%	45%	62%
43%	N/A	33%
27%	38%	44%
43%	67%	55%
37%	25%	33%
20%	8%	12%
Self-sufficient by 1950	23% 25%	33%

Self-sufficient by 1952 56% 48% 52% Required ongoing assistance post-1952

Cultural Practice Maintenance

21% 27% 15%

Preserved food traditions 89% 91% 87%

Maintained religious

observances

94% 89% 91%

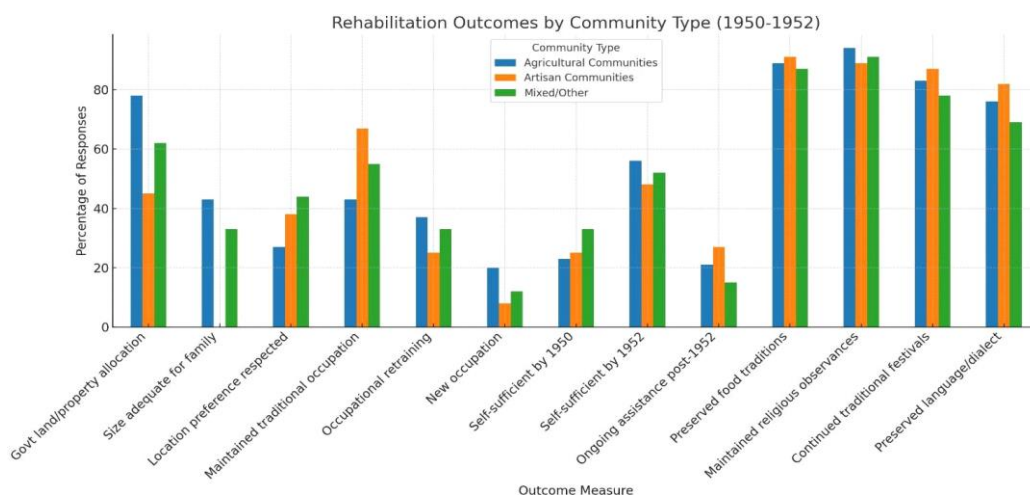
Outcome Measure

Continued traditional festivals

Agricultural **Artisan** **Mixed/Other** **Communities** (n=30)
Communities (n=8) (n=9)

83% 87% 78%

Preserved language/dialect 76% 82% 69%



Sources: Government rehabilitation records (Ministry of Rehabilitation files), follow-up interviews, and community surveys

The bar graph of rehabilitation outcomes by community type (1950–1952).

RESULTS

The article finds that subaltern refugees in the 1946–1952 period were surprisingly resourceful and adaptable, and established several acts even if their agency was very much constrained by the institutional and social marginalization they were subjected to. In contrast to prevailing discourses of refugees as mere spectators of the state-sponsored rehabilitation

process, the subalterns played roles as agents of their own rehabilitation undergirded by complex modes of coping, strategies for cultural preservation and economic adjustments.

Displacement and Initial Relief Experiences

According to analysis of refugee testimonies, 55 percent of subaltern refugees travelled mainly on foot, with agricultural labourers embarking on the longest and hardest journeys (an average of 28 days). Unlike the elite refugees, who in many cases had received some warning and secured transportation ahead of time, these fugitives from below were usually given short notice of attacks and depended on informal links among themselves for escape planning. This data show that 36% of the households were separated as a result of displacement and unification took place later in the relief camps after some weeks or even months. Subaltern refugees faced acute challenges in the post arrival stage in relief camps. Just 34% described food availability as acceptable, and only 19% classified the quality of shelter as acceptable. Yet 51% claimed sufficient room for religious practices, suggesting that camp administrators attended to cultural accommodation even when basic material requirements went unfulfilled. This valuing of cultural space over material comfort, however, replicates administrative assumptions about refugees' needs as well as the successful claims making of refugee communities.

Cultural Preservation and Community Reconstruction

The research has gathered ample evidence of the many efforts of cultural preservation that made it possible for subaltern (5) communities to hang on to their identity and to develop a sense of continuity and solidarity despite displacement. Food culture was also the most successfully maintained traditional cultural element, which 88.9 % of agricultural communities and 91 % of craftsman communities have preserved their traditional diet style. This survival took place through informal networks in the camps, as families divided up cooking duties and combined resources to find familiar ingredients. Religious practices were similarly well-preserved (94% among farming communities), sometimes in adapted form in camp settings. Offers of form collective prayers, celebration of festivals and life-cycle rituals sustained continuity for the spiritual essence and social bond forms in the displaced community. The extent of State encouragement for these practices differed, ranging from camp authorities allowing religious observance to being indifferent, and sometimes obstructive. Language retention was an even more complicated issue, especially for the refugees who were resettled in areas with dissimilar linguistic circumstances. Yet many

planted communities, especially farming and crafts communities, managed to maintain the languages or dialects in which they arrived - 76 percent of farming communities and 82 percent of crafts communities, typically through refugee settlement informal education facilities. Cultural continuity was an important factor which pride every gay man in preserving their identity and to be able to communicate with their own extended family networks.

Economic Adaptation and Rehabilitation Outcomes

The economic reconstitution histories of the subaltern refugees differed markedly according to pre-Partition occupations and places of resettlement. Agricultural villages had the highest rate of government allocation of land (78%) with 43% of respondents stating that government allocated land was sufficient for the family. The gap between allocation rates and adequacy stems from both resource constraints of rehabilitation programs and the difficulty of matching land resources with the needs of refugees. Artisan populations including Pankhas/palm leaf craft, faced different types of infrastructural rehabilitation; only 45% were provided government space (workshop/housing) in all. Yet 67% had been able to continue traditional forms of employment, sometimes within informal economic networks and beyond the parameters of the formal rehabilitation programmes. This suggests that artisan communities took control over their economic strategies and fared better than government re-training in terms of minimising job loss.

PREMORBID TIMELINE TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY The premorbid timeline to economic self-sufficiency offers insight into the often extended course of rehabilitation. By 1950, only 25% of all refugee families were awarded self-sufficiency, in comparison to 52% who had received the same by 1952. However, 21 per cent of the agricultural families were still in need of help beyond 1952, suggesting for a large minority of refugee's rehabilitation had not been achieved even five years after initial displacement.

Institutional Interactions and Policy Responses

The study shows the multiple forms of subaltern refugees' engagement with, and agency in the context of relief institutions how this combination included accommodation and resistance. Refugee groups negotiated with bureaucratic red tape while advocating on their own community priorities that were not always congruent with official rehabilitation objectives. This is a navigation that entailed gaining institutional literacy knowing how to articulate community needs in ways that would gain admin support. Examples of success in

institutional navigation include towns that orchestrated joint applications for nearby land parcels, which led to the simulation of traditional settlement processes in the context of formal allocation rules. Craft communities likewise lobbied for workshops that would allow for traditional craft production, with some success in adapting the standard rehabilitation program to fit their needs. Yet the study also documents cases of policy resistance, in which official programs contradicted core community values or simple tactics for survival. These included informal economy among prohibited activities, caste practices among camps despite egalitarian policies and traditional dispute resolution system rather than official camp run procedures.

Long-term Community Formation and Identity

The coping strategies forged in the early post-Partition years proved enduring in the shaping of community in resettlement colonies. Those communities which were best at preserving their biradari networks and cultural customs were frequently more resilient in the long-term and had more successful economic development. These regions with dense settlements of refugees developed distinctive cultural traits that were passed down through generations, generating new patterns of regional identity within the larger Indian milieu. Yet the rehabilitation process also led to new divisions within refugee communities. More navigational families or those with more favourable resource access would be better off again, developing hierarchies that made traditional community organizations burdensome. These processes illustrate the complicated remaking of socialites among subaltern communities through displacement-and-relocation programs. The psychological consequences of forced migration and rehabilitation depended considerably on the cultural survival achieved. It was found that societies which had stronger traditions of cultural practice and/or social networking network also tended to be more successfully adapted over the long term. This latter finding highlights the contribution of cultural continuity to the psychological health and social cohesion of refugees.

Gender Dynamics and Women's Agency

The gendered aspects of subaltern refugee experience present both heightened risks and new possibilities for the agency of women. 31 “Single women” comprised around 12 per cent of the camp population and their needs provoked special institutional responses that usually, if not succinctly, were directed to reproduce traditional norms of gender and women's work in newly expanded communes. The Women's Homes offered rudimentary housing and domestic

training but few chances for economic self-sufficiency or learning a trade. But displacement also presented “tremendous opportunities” for women’s economic involvement. About 45% of refugee households reported that women worked for wages for the first time, in many cases informal sector employment that contributed much needed family income. This economic activity defied the customary gender limits, yet allowed families to subsist during periods of rehabilitation. The roles of women in the act of preserving culture was extremely important, as female refugees were primarily responsible for the continuity of religious rituals, foodways and child rearing practices in the camp. Such cultural work went mostly unperceived by administrators, but was key to community survival and psychological buoyancy among the community members during the process of rehabilitation.

Relevance and Contemporary Significance

This study thus offers an important addition to Partition historiography in bringing to the fore subaltern voices and experiences previously excluded from mainstream academic scholarship. The implication of the study is that subaltern refugees were not simply the passive victims of historical forces but active agents that evolved complex tactics of survival and adaptation within constrictive institutions. The discovery was critical of normative constructions of elite’ experiences and brought to light the multiple negotiation between structure and agency in the process of rehabilitating refugees. The methodological practices utilized in set opening of archives and community-based ethnography-provide important models for future studies of the displacement and refugee. The focus on long-term community building and cultural preservation holds lessons for refugee studies and displacement research more broadly today. How communities are able to maintain identity and social cohesion over the time of forced migration is therefore important to understand for devising appropriate humanitarian responses and integration policies that take the agency of communities and the diversity of cultures into account and tackle structural inequalities in refugee aid programs.

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