

# STATISTICS OF REFUGEE CAMPS AND THEIR ADMINISTRATION IN COMBINED PUNJAB

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## ABSTRACT

*More than one million persons were displaced due to partition of 1947 and these persons were called Refugees in their own country. These so called refugees played an important role in the freedom struggle and suffered a lot just after midnight of freedom when others were in celebrative mood. In the present paper it has been tried to provide the statistics of refugees camps and their administration.*

**Keywords:** *Camps, Partition, Refugees, Religion*

## I. REFUGEE CAMPS

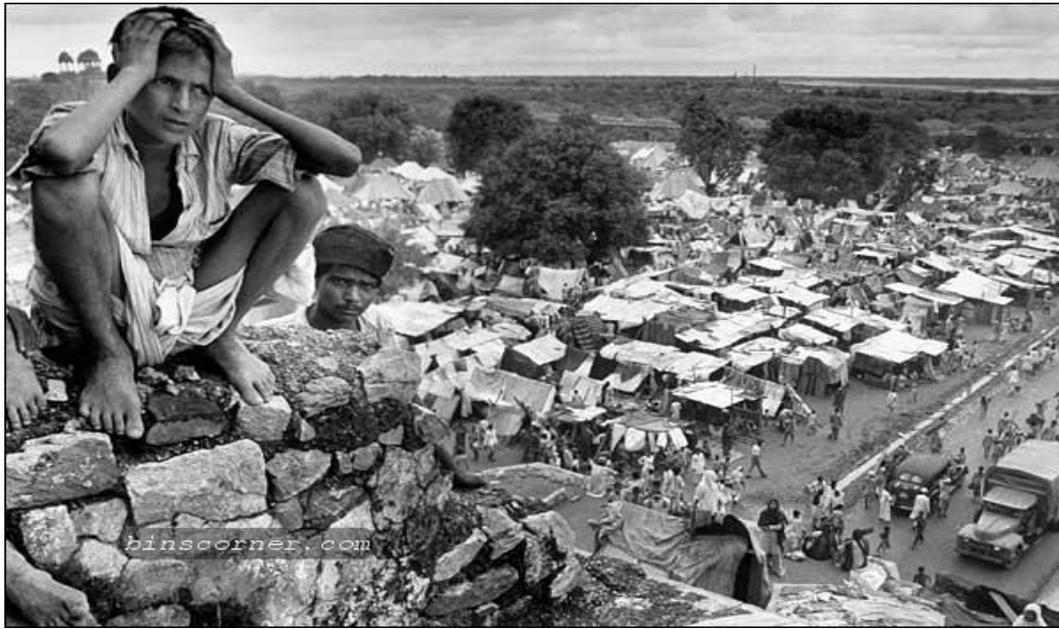
Government of India created a new ministry on 6 September 1947 to look after the evacuation, reception, relief and rehabilitation of refugees.<sup>[1]</sup> A large number of refugee camps had been set up by the government in East Punjab, U.P., Delhi, Bombay, the East Punjab State, Jodhpur, Bikaner and other Rajputana States.

In all about 160 refugee camps had come up all over the country, providing temporary shelter to 1250000 refugees. In the East Punjab alone 721396 refugees were accommodated in 85 camps towards the end of December 1947. A total number of 150000 refugees were in camp in Delhi, 113000 in Bombay, 30000 in U.P., 500 in Madras and 1500 in C.P. about 53000 in Rajasthan.<sup>[2]</sup> The governments spend large amounts on the camps – their establishment and distribution of food and clothing. The following were some major non-Muslim refugee camps functioning in East Punjab towards the end of Dec. 1947.

**Table 1**  
**Number of relief camps in East Punjab<sup>[3]</sup>**

Upto December 1948 (District)	No. of Camps	No. of Persons
Amritsar	5	1,29,398
Gurdaspur	4	3,500
Ferozepur	5	53,000
Ludhiana	1	25,000
Jullundur	19	60,000
Hoshiarpur	1	11,701
Hissar	3	3,797
Rohtak	2	50,000
Ambala	1	50,000

Karnal including Kurukshetra	4	3,25,000
Gurgaon3363	40	20,000
Total	85	7,21,396



In the initial stage, lodging was provided to the Hindu and Sikh refugees in public buildings of the nature of Dharamshalas, Sarais and educational institutions. In fact, all the educational institutions were ordered to remain closed for three months till the end of February. Thousands of refugees had to fend for themselves on railway platforms, in temples and mosques even without any religious sentiments.

They were soon, there after moved into the houses and Mohallas of Muslim evacuees also, and where these Mohallas constituted recognizable units they were given recognition as camps. But roofed accommodation was not sufficient, big tented refugee camps were organized.<sup>[4]</sup> It had originally been planned to have one big camp of capacity upto 500000 at Kurukshetra, and a second line of camps at Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jallundur, Ludhiana and Ambala, The transit camp in the border districts were to serve as feeders to the second line camps and the central Kurukshetra camp.<sup>[5]</sup>

The following table shows the various camps which had, at one stage or other, been organized in the East Punjab, indicating the maximum population accommodation in the camps and their nature of accommodation.

Table 2<sup>[6]</sup>

## Population and type of accommodation for relief camp

Camps	Maximum population	Type of Accommodation
AMBALA DISTT.		
Kudlip Nagar	53000	Tented
Gandhi Nagar	14430	Tented (bivouac)
Baldev Nagar	15198	Tented
Mubarikpur	13916	Tented
Auchinleck Barrack	3857	Tented
KARNAL DISTT.		
Kanral camp no. 1	50000	Tented (bivouac)
Karnal camp no. 2	38000	Tented
Karnal Grouped camp	18500	Educational Institution
Panipat	43700	Tented
Kaithal	9100	Tented and Buildings
Shahabad	21000	Tented
HISSAR DISTT.		
Hissar main camp	36729	Tented (bivouac)
Sirsa	6868	Buildings
Hansi	14377	Tented plus Buildings
Bhiwani	12300	Buildings
ROHTAK DISTT.		
Gandhi camp	31325	Tented
Vaish college	22644	Educational Institution
Government college	16081	Tents (bivouac)
Rothak grouped camp	15243	Buildings
Soenpat	28587	Tented (bivouac)
GURGAON DISTT.		
Gurgaon camp	16818	Tented (bivouac)
Palwal	20623	Tented (bivouac)
Rewari	11555	Tented
Faridabad	3863	Tented

Source : Millions Live again, pp. 41, 42.

Sheltered accommodation was a big problem. At least six to seven lakh refugees were to be sheltered during the winter months. Educational institutions provided considerable shelter but alternative accommodation had also to be sought to avoid educational institutions remaining indefinitely closed. Army authorities were approached for

the use of spare barracks, line and rest camps. This was greatly welcome, but was insufficient. The next alternative was tentage. These tents get from the defense ministry. With the help of this tentage than regularly planned camps, with straight, wide roads and crossing and side streets, with water supply and sanitation arrangements, hospitals, kitchen-sheds, bathing places and trench latrines started springing up.<sup>[7]</sup>

All educational institutions were to reopen in the beginning of March 1948 and the refuses were shifted to regular camps. These camps were divided into blocks. For each block, there was a separate administrative section which generally comprises of the tent of the Unit Officer and the tent containing the ration depot. In a number of camps, regular kitchen sheds had been constructed for facilitating individual family cooking. There was one central administrative block in every camp. There was also a distinct hospital block in these camps, where there were separate sections for maternity cases, fever cases, and infection diseases. There were in some of the camps industrial and vocational training blocks, where training was imparted to the refugees in various crafts and industries such as weaving, dyeing, calico-printing, spinning, leather work, soap-making, etc. Schools were a regular feature of all the camps.<sup>[8]</sup> Wherever electric supply was available, electric street lighting among rows of tents had been provided. In other places kerosene oil lamps were being used for this purpose. Microphone, loudspeaker and radio had been provided in all the camps.<sup>[9]</sup>

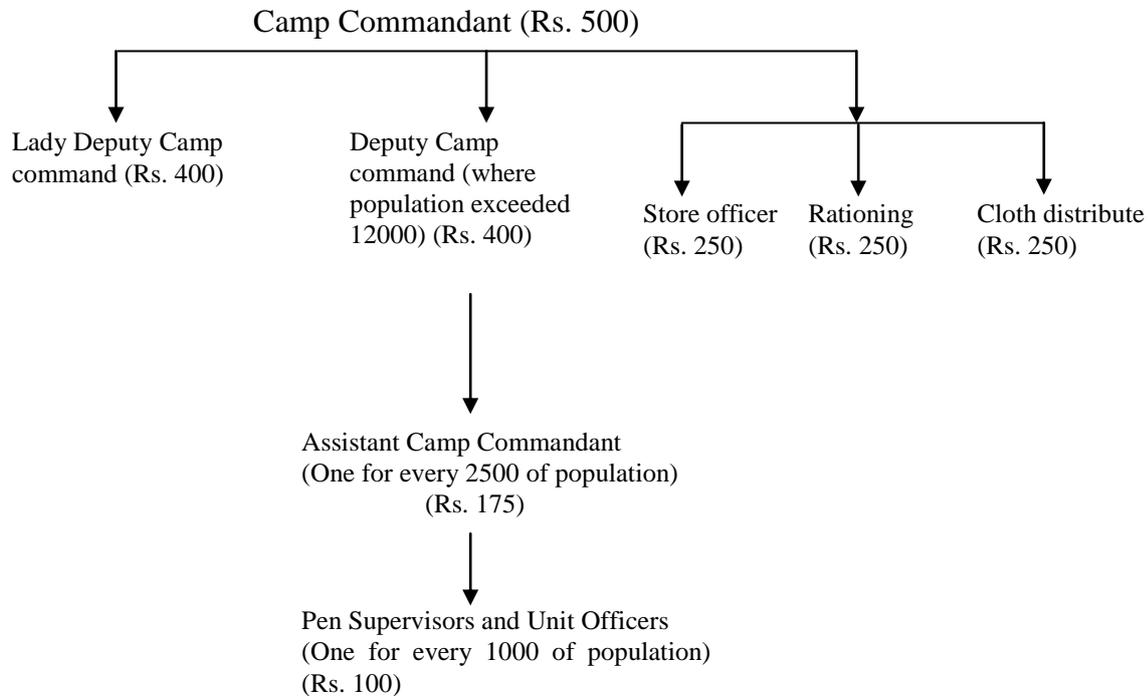
## II. ADMINISTRATION OF THE REFUGEE CAMPS

Administration of the whole provinces had been rudely shaken. Attendance in the offices was far from satisfactory. Muslim members of the office establishments had gone away from their post. It was a matter of the greatest difficulty to organize the staff for administrating the camps.

It was at about this time that upon an appeal from the East Punjab government, the home ministry of Government of India sent by air thirty young probationers of the cadre of IAS and IPS.<sup>[10]</sup> These officers rallied together the official and non-official effort, gave shape to the camp and helped in the regularization of accounts, and distribution of rations and clothing. The displaced government servants gradually started reporting for duty, and a number of them were put to work in the refugee camps or in the district refugee offices.

For each camp, there was a camp commandant who was the head of the camp administration, responsible for this administration to the Deputy Commissioner of the district. Under the camp commandant, where the population exceeds 12,000, there was a Deputy Camp Commandant. For each camp, there was also a lady Deputy Camp Commandant, whose primary function was to look after the needs of women and children residing in the camp, organize vocational training for women, and also help in organizing camp schools. Below the Deputy Commandant there were the Unit Officer or pen supervisor, whose number again was dependent upon the population strength, there being one unit officer for every 1,000 of the population. Besides these officers in each camp there was one store officer, one rationing officer and one cloth distribution officer.<sup>[11]</sup>

These officers were responsible for their work. Following is the Camp administration, indicating salaries of the staff.

**Table 3<sup>[12]</sup>****Camp Administration, Indicating Salaries of the Staff**

Other staff in the camps consists of the staff of the medical department and sanitation department. These will find mention at a later stage when problems connected with these departments were studied in greater details.

**III. FOOD**

Government provided free food, in almost all the refugee camps. Free food, was also supplied to Muslims in India and had to send foodstuffs, sometimes even by air, to non-Muslim camps in West Pakistan. In November 1947, the Government of India laid down a uniform scale of daily rations for refugees.<sup>[13]</sup> Additional items were added time to time. The scale of ration in camps is indicated in the table given below.

**Table 4<sup>[14]</sup>****Enforced Scale of ration in relief camps**

Commodity	Ration scale enforced on 17-1-1948
Wheat atta or rice	5 chh. Daily per adult unit
Maize atta	1 chh
Parched gram	1 chh
Dal	½ chh

Vegetables	½ chh
Veg. ghee	¼ chh
Gur or Sugar	½ chh
Salt	¼ chh
Fuel wood	1 Seer
Washing soap	3-2 per month
Match boxes	1 per week per family
Milk	1 Ib. per child under 12 years

In may 1948 the government stopped free rations to those refugees who were not prepared to accept the employment offered to them. Those who were unemployable were allowed to draw free ration.

#### IV. CLOTHING

Clothing was provided free of cost to the refugees in camps. Supply of winter garments like quilts and blankets were to protect against winter. Besides these, cotton cloth and readymade cotton garments were also distributed in camps. A scale of issue of clothing and it was stressed that the free issue of these was to be confined only to destitute refugees. The maximum scale for any one individual was set down as under.<sup>[15]</sup>

- i) One *razai*, or blanket, or great-coat.
- ii) One pair of *pyjamas*, or in case of woman *salwar*.
- iii) One shirt or *kurta*, or not more than 3 yds of cloth.
- iv) One *dapatta*.
- v) One *turban* (for Sikh only).
- vi) One *bundi* or jersey.
- vii) A *Gandhi cap* for Hindus.

The government had to send thousands of blankets to various camps in India and non-Muslim refugee camps in West Punjab.

#### V. MEDICAL RELIEF

In the very early stage the work of medical relief started with voluntary effort organizations. A number of organizations like the St. Johns Ambulance Brigade, helped in this task. The first concrete mode of relief which was then organized was that of mobile dispensaries and mobile sanitary squads. The mobile dispensaries carried a doctor, one or two compounders and the necessary equipment and drugs. The sanitation squads consisted of a sanitary Inspector and a number of coolies and sweepers. The dispensaries rendered first aid, removed the sick to hospitals and also carried out inoculation and vaccination. The sanitary squads cleaned-up routes of columns and sites of the transit camps.<sup>[16]</sup>

Each camp has its own hospital, the bed strength of which depends upon the camp population, and which lacks nothing in equipment and medical supplies. The medical organization has at the peak of its work, controlled as many as 32 camp hospitals with, aggregate bed strength of 1730, including 800 beds of the Kurukshetra camp hospitals.<sup>[17]</sup> There was one medical store and dispensary in every camp.

## VI. EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING FACILITIES

In order that the education of refugee children in camps might not suffer, primary and secondary level schools were set up in different camps, and teachers were recruited from among the refugee themselves.<sup>[18]</sup> Industrial and vocational training centers were opened in some of the camps by the East Punjab department of industries. At these centre training was imparted in various crafts and vocations such as spinning and weaving, calico printing, tailoring and dressmaking, leather work and dyeing, etc. The department of industries has now in hand a scheme for expansion of this effort, providing for the training of 4,000 men and 2,000 women during the course of next two years.<sup>[19]</sup> More training centres were opened in various camps. The training in crafts played an important role in permanent rehabilitation operation.

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- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Ibid.
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- [12] *Million Live Again*, p. 40.
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- [15] Ibid, p. 25.
- [16] Ibid.
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[18] C.N. Vakil, *Economic Consequences of Divided India* (Vora and Company Publishers Ltd., Bombay, 1950), p. 86.

[19] *Million Live Again*, p. 34.