

THE 1947 PARTITION OF BRITISH INDIA

Forced Migration
and Its Reverberations

Edited By

Jennifer Leaning
Shubhangi Bhadada



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABWU	All Bengal Women's Union
AIWC	All India Women's Conference
CHPD	Centre for Population, Health and Development
DAV	Dayanand Anglo-Vedic
DIT	Delhi Improvement Trust
ECC	Emergency Committee of the Cabinet
FSU	Friends Service Unit
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INA	Indian National Army
IRC	Indian Red Cross
MEO	Military Evacuation Organization
NCC	National Christian Council
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
UCRW	United Council for Relief and Welfare
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IUB	Independent University, Bangladesh
KIT	Karachi Improvement Trust
LAC	Lahore Art Circle
LIT	Lahore Improvement Trust
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PAG	Progressive Artists' Group
PL	Permanent liability
POCs	Points of contact
RR&R	Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation
UCRC	United Central Refugee Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Introduction

**Jennifer Leaning,
Shubhangi Bhadada,
and Meena Hewett**

The Partition of British India was a cataclysmic event of the mid-20th century whose overall political parameters have been extensively explored. As a constitutional process, the Partition resulted in the division of the Indian subcontinent, first into two and then, into three separate entities. As an independence process, the Partition marked the culmination of an anti-colonial struggle against the British and the creation of two, and then three, independent nations in South Asia. Many serious scholars continue to address questions such as how these processes came about, why other paths were not taken, and what their political consequences have been. Recent historians and political scientists, acting within the postmodern attention to complexities, localities, and differences, have delved deeply into the local records. They describe subnational dynamics of power and group relations (communal ties and antagonisms; class and economic linkages; and the roles played by individuals, elites, and militant organizations) in order to arrive at a wide range of revised responses to the ongoing questions of how, why, and with what consequences the Partition took place in the subcontinent.¹

The Partition was also an episode of extraordinary violence and disruption for the communities directly affected and for the nations that emerged. Our understanding of the Partition is fragmentary in its direct demographic and health impacts on populations. Mass violence, outside the relatively choreographed and recorded context of formal military

¹ Mushirul Hasan, "Partition Narratives: Introduction," in *The Partition Omnibus*, eds David Page, Anita Inder Singh, Penderel Moon, G. D. Khosla, and Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), ix–lxix.

hostilities, is difficult to study. Its occurrence signals a rupture in the standard processes of society and almost always a loss of records and data. For perhaps these reasons, as noted by Pandey,² historians tend to vault over episodes of violence, preferring to focus on what led up to these instances and then moving directly to what followed from them. An additional barrier often felt by historians or other analysts close in time and social distance is that these violent episodes deeply disturb their own notions of identity and community cohesion.³

Yet those who study current wars and armed conflicts—many from the humanitarian response community—recognize that these events, characterized by sustained violence against civilian populations and consequent mass forced migration, demand systematic study.⁴ To date, however, despite abundant historical and political scholarship on the Partition and now a growing literature of personal reflection and fiction, very little has been written from the humanitarian perspective about the grave immediate experiences of people as they were forced to leave, during their flight, and then in their struggles to survive in the temporary settlements. Such a study of the 1947 Partition at this moment is important not only for reflecting on a charged historical event over 70 years after the fact but also for providing perspective on the complexities of involuntary population displacements that are taking place in record numbers around the world.

In crisis settings, the quest for information is complex. The usual systems for collecting data are disrupted, and emergency measures are often instituted without the accompanying machinery for keeping records. With the Partition, in particular, these issues apply but also quickly ramify into wider inquiry, demanding different modes of ascertainment. The circumstances and impacts of the Partition are diverse, ranging from the rupture of family ties and social relationships, and severance of connections to places and heritage to the need to reconstitute life and livelihoods in unfamiliar and, in some cases, unwelcoming terrain.

These questions, however, are precisely what preoccupy scholars in the fields of forced migration, humanitarian response, and human rights. To date, the methods and understandings from these fields have not been applied to expanding our understanding of the greatest instance of forced

² Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Issue 7 of Contemporary South Asia) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45–91.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2007).

migration in the 20th century. Nor, conversely, has the lens of Partition informed these fields of study.

During the 2000s, in the midst of discussions that have led to this book, several of us deployed advanced demographic and economic methods to arrive at two very similar estimates of the numbers who had moved and were missing (probably dead) in the two years of Partition-forced migration across the new Punjab demarcation border.^{5,6} Both studies used somewhat different methods while relying on analyses of the decennial census of British India, whose processes remained virtually intact after the division of the subcontinent. It is a matter of historical importance and a sign of professionalism of both the Indian and Pakistani directors of the 1951 Census that they included a new question in the 1951 Census form: Where were you in 1947? The answers to this question permitted the derivation of estimates that suggested that between 1947 and 1951, about 15–18 million people crossed the Punjab border alone, in both directions,⁷ and that approximately 2–3 million people could not be accounted for⁸ despite extensive analyses of in-and-out migration and the possible impact of Indian male deaths during World War II.

Methodologies explain part of the reason for this discrepancy in migration numbers (earlier estimates had been based on official cross-border and police records, whereas these more recent studies relied on census data and modern methods of indirect estimation, capturing the many hundreds of thousands who moved by foot or cart across the porous border and avoided predictable routes or formal checkpoints). Another set of reasons, especially for the marked discrepancy in mortality estimates compared to earlier ones cited in the literature, may derive from the failure to capture the extent of violent deaths in the countryside, outside the scan of the authorities. This latter set of reasons, until now conjectural, is buttressed by the current work of this team investigating Partition's humanitarian consequences.

In addition, the paper by Hill et al. also provides cumulative estimates of the changes in the mixed religious affiliations of people in pre-Partition Punjab. It shows that population movements between 1947 and 1951 resulted in virtual complete communal homogenization in the Pakistan portion of the Punjab (Muslim) and in the Indian portion (Hindu and Sikh).

⁵ Kenneth Hill, William Seltzer, Jennifer Leaning, Saira J. Malik, and Sharon S. Russell, "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab 1947," *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (July 2008).

⁶ Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Khwaja, and Atif Mian, "The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2008): 1–20.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hill et al., "Demographic Impact."

These profound shifts in themselves, without any grand or local account of the events of these years, would alert those who understand the dynamics of forced migration to the fact that an extraordinarily disruptive and wrenching social process had taken place in the subcontinent.

As an instance of forced migration, the Partition is fundamentally a demographic phenomenon. But it is also a humanitarian and societal one, as millions of individuals and groups of people were forced to undergo tremendous fear and uncertainty, abrupt dislocation from home, loss of family and livelihood, hardships en route, and difficulties upon reaching destinations. From these perspectives, an understanding of the Partition as an instance of forced migration must address issues of warning, recruitment, incitement, communal relations, official security, casualties, the route and timing of flight, the processes and outcomes of relief measures, rehabilitation, reconstruction, reparation, resettlement, and recollection. It is these issues that we explore in this book.

An analysis of these multifaceted and consequential questions is best accomplished through an interdisciplinary approach undertaken through a wide exploration of resource materials. With the sustained support of the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute at Harvard University, the authors here have collectively developed a rich and empirically grounded understanding of the Partition using extensive archival records of British India in the UK as well as in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. They have sought out relevant information from collections and documents in national government records and records of the railways and armies; diverse reports and letters from civil society, religious and secular relief and welfare organizations; holdings in private universities and personal estates; collections in national libraries; corporate records and media print archives; papers, memoirs, and diaries of key individuals; and oral narratives of survivors of the Partition.

The analysis has required the application of varied lenses and disciplinary methods, including the demographic and humanitarian consequences of the Partition based on excavation of official census, government reports, and newspaper accounts; targeted inquiry on these humanitarian issues undertaken through crowdsourcing; extensive personal interactions and interviews with the survivors of the Partition; examination of the physical form, layout, and temporality of refugee camps and settlements established for Partition migrants; and interpretations of art and architecture as modes of discerning what has lingered or can be reclaimed in the minds and memories of survivors and descendants from those terrible times. This effort has spanned many years and, since 2017, has lived within

the Mittal Institute's Partition Project. Members of this Partition team, including our Advisory Board, are acknowledged as follows.

These chapters participate in shaping for Partition a framework of evidence and received meaning that could arguably accompany every instance of forced migration—were the documents kept, the remnant society not devastated, and the efforts made to find and interview survivors.

Part I examines the parameters of forced migration and relief measures undertaken in the initial years of the Partition. In terms of demographic and humanitarian accounts of the Partition, with a few exceptions,⁹ little has so far been done to construct a detailed picture of what actually happened to groups and populations during the peak times of violence in the West (March 1946–March 1948)¹⁰ and in the East (beginning in March 1946 but then extending up to and past the 1971 civil war). What were the general features of official and humanitarian response and outcome during this period? What factors were important in shaping the fundamental circumstances of who moved, who lived, who died, who suffered, who provided help, in what ways, for what reasons?

Chapter 1 by Jennifer Leaning takes up two lines of inquiry with a focus on the Punjab: provision of public health and medical care in the context of very little official preparation; and bureaucratic arrangements, which, for reasons of time and shortsightedness, were not fully taken up. As the colonial power, the British focused on their departure and prepared little in advance for the populations. Consequently, in mid-August 1947, it fell to the newly established Indian and Pakistani officials to grasp how immense the numbers were now seeking to cross the new borders and how extensive and fierce was the violence accompanying these population transfers. The strategic effort was forced away from taking care of people to moving people through and across the very dangerous border areas. From a modern humanitarian perspective, Leaning examines how a multitude of individuals, civil society organizations, religious and welfare institutions, and international agencies then began to swing into gear, saving lives and feeding people in the midst of overwhelming need and severe privation.

Chapter 2, by Shubhangi Bhadada, Tiara Bhattacharya, Tarun Khanna, and Karim Lakhani, discusses the role that “social capital” played in determining refugee access to humanitarian assistance and stability in

⁹ Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60–89.

¹⁰ Ilyas Chattha, “The Patterns of Partition Violence in West Punjab: A Study of Police Records,” in *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections*, ed. Ian Talbot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58–89.

post-Partition relief and rehabilitation. This chapter, based on existing literature, official documents, and oral narratives collected, explores the professional, social, and kinship ties that tended to determine refugee outcomes, and in so doing, manages to problematize the images of refugee camps as equalizing spaces.

Based on documents and collections of private papers, Chapter 3 by Rimple Mehta discusses the issues faced by displaced refugee women from East Pakistan in various camps, homes, infirmaries, and squatter colonies in the eastern region of India. Through an analysis of official state and central government documents, memoirs, newspaper articles, and oral narratives, she describes the experiences of refugee women from East Pakistan who moved into the eastern part of the Indian state of Bengal during the period from 1947 to 1965. The refugee women in the eastern region were battered into various forms of confinement by an overwhelmed state bureaucracy and burdened by a lack of funding and attention from the Indian national government. Confronting the triad of the family, state, and society, these refugee women, with the support of East Bengali female social workers, displayed exemplary grit and determination to hold ground in the face of meager resources.

Part II explores the diversity and durability of memories from the Partition period. In Chapter 4, Tarun Khanna, Karim Lakhani, Shubhangi Bhadada, Ruihan Wang, Sanjay Kumar, Mariam Chughtai, and Ornob Alam rely on innovative crowdsourcing techniques to collect the narratives of over 2,000 survivors (or their immediate descendants still living), more than 70 years after the event. Targeted questions were asked to gather information about the journey of the survivors as they crossed the newly formed borders and then moved deeper into the territory they would have to call home. The chapter describes the inventive ways used to gather these narratives from survivors, with a focus on collecting minority voices, and discusses methods that worked or not. The possibilities are ripe for such methods to be used in the current crisis of forced migration.

A different narrative emerges in Chapter 5 by Ornob Alam, Rita Yusuf, and Omar Rahman, who rely on interviews and oral narratives to explore the experiences of Muslim refugees from West Bengal who migrated to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The authors draw a distinction from the refugee experience in the Punjab in that the Muslim migration out of West Bengal into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) took place over a period of years without the presence of extensive violence. The chapter focuses on the experience of professional, middle-class Muslims migrating from eastern India to East Pakistan and the factors that made their migration

a far from traumatic event. It also discusses how the comparatively negative experiences of the Urdu-speaking Bihari migrants into East Pakistan diverged from those of the ethnically Bengali migrants. In a patrilocal society where identity was closely tied to ancestral village homelands, Bihari assimilation differed significantly from that of Bengali migrants returning to ancestral homes and from Bengali migrants in general, who at least shared a common language.

In Chapter 6, Navsharan Singh takes a close look at the literature, documents, and oral narratives that shed light on the sorrow that afflicted the impoverished rural minorities in the Punjab who did not migrate and so endured the slow dissolution of their wider community.

She explores the selective silence of the Partition historiography with respect to rural Muslim (Kammis) minority populations who remained in rural areas of what became primarily Hindu East Punjab. How were they figured in the Partition plan? There is some reference in the Partition literature to the Chuhra, the urban sanitation workers, and how they were “divided” between the two countries. However, there is almost complete silence on the rural low caste, agricultural, and other laboring classes and their division between the two countries.

In Chapter 7, Uma Chakravarti explores the problems and attractions of seeking accounts of the difficult circumstances from people who were children at the time of the events. As an historian, not a psychologist, she has compiled oral interviews through which she examines the manner in which a child or adolescent, witness of the Partition violence, remembers the event and explains the subsequent trajectory of his or her life. The narratives link the strands of time, reflect screen memory, and capture the almost magpie capacity of children to hold on to something of interest to them, regardless of the import of the larger drama. She notes the apparent unpredictability in what they remember, ranging from the details that have stayed imprinted on their minds, such as slogans chanted as they crossed over, to what their mothers wore as they left home, to what they carried with them. Yet, as those she interviewed tell her, these apparent random pieces of memory remain as elements in the experiential history of the survivors today.

In Part III, different visions of how history is instantiated animate the discussion. The chapters revolve around the question of time: What is it to have the past so radically affect the future? What is it to remain in the past but still haunt the present? And how do implacable past realities get metabolized into a symbolic present?

In Chapter 8, Rahul Mehrotra and Diane Athaide examine the persistent and profound geographic and architectural imprint of the Partition refugees on the subsequent development of two major cities in India—Mumbai and Delhi—with a comparative look at Lahore and Karachi. They focus on the catalytic effects of the speed and magnitude of the refugee influx on the urban form of these cities. The authors describe the mechanisms used by the government in these cities to ensure the safety of both citizens and refugees, such as rehabilitation programs, unconventional planning efforts, public–private partnerships, and new notions/appropriations of property rights. Of particular interest, and pertinent to today’s movement of refugee populations, is that some of these mechanisms have evolved into more permanent solutions, while others have proved ephemeral in that they serve as temporary and transitional solutions for perceived short-term problems.

In Chapter 9, Nadhra Shahbaz Khan offers, through the lens of loss, an elaborate elegy for a few buildings of pre-Partition Lahore, which have been left in a remnant form. Speaking to those few who still remember, these buildings evoke the collective pre-Partition independence struggle, which in mournful irony led to a violent parting of the ways. These structures were erected or inhabited by former Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore who were evicted or fled due to the 1947 Partition decisions. Although then appropriated and occupied by incoming Muslim refugees or by influential locals, these sites have never ceased to be mnemonic structures, reminding the survivors of their absent Hindu and Sikh owners and inhabitants. Carrying traces of decay and marks of destruction and division, these buildings tenaciously display signs of their pre-Partition lives. The chapter looks specifically at Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan and Bradlaugh Hall and aims to pay tribute to the significant role these structures played in the anti-colonial movements that resulted in the independence of Pakistan and India.

Finally, in Chapter 10, Zehra Jumabhoy confronts the artistic focus on borders that pervades current art and exhibitions of the Partition. She critiques the post-colonial focus on the generative properties of borders, where the dividing line reappears as a double gesture: both as a sign of creative virtuosity and a symbol of continual conflict. In this discussion, she seeks to discover if the Partition as an artistic and intellectual motif is really a *constructive* space. Do such p/Partition-focused displays and theories lull us into a false security? Artists and thinkers can draw the line under their investigations; they can control their boundaries. But does this persuade us to forget the political demarcations that lie beyond

the borders of art? This chapter pays attention to the implications of using political motifs as creative inspiration for art and theory and asks additionally whether they encompass in any way the enormity of what remains—the persistent losses, the unaccountable ruptures, and the lingering animosities.

The core focus of this book is on the human consequences of the Partition, bringing together different lines of research. Such a study of the 1947 Partition at this moment is important not only for reflecting on a charged historical event 75 years after the fact but also for providing perspective on the complexities of involuntary population displacement which are taking place in record numbers around the world. What emerges here from this historical exploration are crucial insights into questions of deep relevance to the current dilemmas faced by societies struggling to emerge or rebuild after wars, armed conflicts, and forced migration. How does violence erupt? What does mass migration look like on the ground? How do people struggle to support those in need? How to think about success and failure when the losses are overwhelming? How to begin to tell the story of the rupture of family ties and social relationships, the severance of connections to places and heritage, and the need to reconstitute life and livelihoods in unfamiliar and often harsh circumstances? How to account for a fractured history? How to sift through what remains?



Migration and Relief in the 1947 Partition of British India



The 1947 Humanitarian Response to Partition in the Punjab

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1946 and 1948, the greatest instance of mass displacement of peoples took place in the context of the 1947 Partition of British India. Millions were forced to move, millions died, and the consequences of these vast miseries continue to reverberate in the subcontinent and elsewhere. Traced here through the months of 1947, the contours of humanitarian preparation and response in the Punjab are viewed through the lens of current principles of best practice.¹ The record reveals a sustained failure of early warning and an extraordinary late but robust scramble to compensate for lost time. The factors contributing to this characterization are the focus of this chapter.

Early Warning

Response to humanitarian crises is marked by great attention to the pace of conflict evolution and the speed by which an adequate response can be

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Famine Affected, Refugee, and Displaced Populations: Recommendations for Public Health Issues," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 41, no. RR-13 (1992): 1–76; Michael J. Toole and Ronald J. Waldman, "Refugees and Displaced Persons: War, Hunger, and Public Health," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270, no. 5 (August 4, 1993): 600–605; Jennifer Leaning, Susan M. Briggs, and Lincoln C. Chen, eds, *Humanitarian Crises: The Medical and Public Health Response* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

mounted. Early warning provides insight and guidance on these issues. It is currently a complex and often cumbersome process by which communities of observation (United Nations [UN] agencies, national governments, civil society leaders, and heads of major humanitarian and development organizations) attempt to participate in assessments of stable patterns and identify sudden departures from baseline. The parameters of ascertainment usually include measures of increased population flight and/or indicators of increased number of assaults and deaths.² The aim of early warning is to provide time for the mobilization of assets and supplies and an appropriate health and security response.

Background versus Foreground

Partition took place in the wake of World War II. For the subcontinent, the main impacts of the war were to exhaust and impoverish its imperial ruler and to accelerate demands for independence from Britain. In 1942, in the midst of the war, the British Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, ordered that Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress Party be put in jail. His action was in response to the escalating tensions between Jinnah and the Muslim League, on the one hand, and the leaders of the Congress Party, on the other, who, with Gandhi, had formed the Quit India movement. His aim was to reduce the risk that political action by the Quit India movement would distract the British government from its paramount efforts to fight back the advancing Japanese forces in Burma and to confront the security threats posed by the emerging Indian National Army (INA).³

In post-war London, the appetite to manage troublesome colonies had markedly diminished.⁴ The new Labour government (elected July 1945) under Prime Minister Clement Attlee was intent on disentangling Britain's

² Holly E. Reed and Charles B. Keely, eds, *Forced Migration and Mortality* (Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2001); Khalid Koser and Susan Martin, eds, *Conceptualising Displacement and Migration: Processes, Conditions, and Categories* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

³ Formed in Southeast Asia in 1942–1943 and allied with the Japanese. In the short two years between the end of the war and the end of the British rule in India, the pursuit of remnant INA leaders and sympathizers continued as a strong preoccupation. The ties of the INA leaders and their adherents to the Indian communist party made these security concerns appear more urgent. Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 25, 29.

⁴ Mushirul Hasan, "Partition Narratives: Introduction," in *The Partition Omnibus*, eds David Page, Anita Inder Singh, Penderel Moon, G. D. Khosla, and Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxi; Victoria Schofield, "Wavell and the 'High Politics' of His Replacement as Viceroy in March 1947," in *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections*, ed. Ian Talbot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 140–141.

colonial commitments.⁵ The regime in India represented a drain on funds that Attlee needed to pay for the social and economic reforms he had pledged to introduce in Britain; and in the new UN, Britain was more publicly exposed to criticism from the USA and the USSR who, during the war years, had quietly insisted to Churchill that as their ally, Britain needed to dispense with its colonies.⁶ The release of Gandhi in 1944 on health grounds and the resurgence of the Congress campaign fueled national and provincial debates around home rule, independence, and the nature of what the new country might become. The return and demobilization of over one million Indian soldiers in the British Armed Forces from overseas also proved pivotal to the unfolding process of Partition.

In the foreground, however, the dynamics of anti-colonial sentiment were perhaps almost too familiar to the colonial authorities in British India, who had been dealing with mass protest or mobilization movements at least since the end of World War I.⁷ The groundswell of local Indian political organizing from the 1920s onwards, relating to Home Rule and possible independence, had been classified as political agitation. The communal aspect (antagonism between and among ordinary populations of the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs) was regarded as routine background noise, aggravated by extremists, and moderated by the leaders of the political parties. The habitual colonial response to the observed clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims had always been a mix of high and low politics: high, to interpret these through the political lens of their national leaders, and low, to see these as instances of criminality or thuggery and to impose rigorous measures of law and order on the ground. The paramount aim throughout the previous century had been to avoid or suppress a mass uprising against the British authorities, and in 1945–1946, it initially appeared to be business as usual.

In 1945, the colonial enterprise in British India was very thin (approximately 90,000 British nationals) compared to the 318.7 million people they

⁵ Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67–68; Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40.

⁶ Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Partition and Division* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997), 137–140. James M. Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), 459. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1969), 33. Narendra S. Sarila, *The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2005), 97–121.

⁷ Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).

oversaw in a vast area of 862,679 square miles.⁸ Its capacity to maintain order and control dissent rested on a trained Indian civil service, who reported through Indian chief ministers to the British governors of the provinces. In the post-war era, these governors served increasingly as advisors or ultimate decision-makers to their chief ministers. The fortnightly reports from the provinces were prepared by the chief ministers and forwarded under cover of the governors (with their comments as they chose) to the office of the Viceroy in Delhi. These reports covered a range of concerns at the provincial level that related to security considerations and the welfare of the millions of people the governors oversaw. The security apparatus of the Raj included tens of thousands of Indian police under British supervisors and tens of thousands of organized Indian army units with British officers. Each governor could call upon his provincial police and the military units to maintain order within his province. The political reliability and competence of these Indian police and soldiers was a shared source of mild concern and irritability among the provincial governments across India.

From the summer of 1945 to the early spring of 1946, the colonial bureaucracy perceived only slowly and unevenly the shift in the pace and nature of discussions ongoing in India. In various provinces, the fortnightly reports from the governors (accompanied by usually more detailed reports from their chief commissioners) proceeded routinely to the Viceroy and his staff in Delhi. They were filled with categorized details on food, security, criminal activity, political activity, weather, and health (mentioned only about epidemic disease). For each province, the content was virtually the same every month, with post-war attention to terrorists, communists, banditry, criminals, and hooliganism becoming more recurrent themes but variously grouped under crime or politics. These ritualized categories of disturbance served as the Viceroy's early warning system. It is true that he also had other sources (military, intelligence, deputations from political leaders, concerns raised in London), but it was the very predictable aspect of these fortnightly reports for the Viceroy that created a basis for a reassurance or a capacity for warning—but then in this latter instance only if a particular governor chose to interpret something he was seeing in that mode.

⁸ These are the 1941 Census figures for British India, not counting the land mass or population of the Princely states. By 1947, however, people were referring to the entire land mass (1,575,187 square miles) and the total population, counting the Princely states, as about 400 million. Information from Wikipedia for the 1941 Census.

Were one to look for signs, they were first evident in the vernacular expressions of rising communal antagonisms in provinces across northern India, fueled by mass crowd debates at the district level along the lines of various political agendas regarding independence and possible separate states or entities for the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Sikhs. The British provincial governors categorized these activities either under political or communal agitation around a particular party agenda. They did so even as from other sources it was evident that from Bengal to the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), feverish inter-communal vituperation emanated from one or the other radical fringe elements of all the major political parties (the Congress, the Muslims, and the Sikhs). Spread by local papers and posters, these hostile screeds served to inflame and polarize the country along communal lines. Slowly, in the fortnightly reports, the names of these groups began to occur more frequently. These groups included the Muslim League National Guard (associated with the Muslim League); the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist group; and the Sikh-affiliated militias (the Akali Dal and associated paramilitaries such as the Jathas). These so-called “volunteer organizations,” many of which were formed in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, were considered by the British to be “India’s ‘private armies’.”⁹ They were all seen by the British as instigators of violence but in the early months of 1945–1946 not rising as threats to British rule or British citizens, still the ultimate rubric of concern.

In this immediate post-war period, it is argued that the colonial enterprise in British India was alert—but to issues they perceived in the rearview mirror. Their gaze was still fixed on threats to the political order of the British rule (terrorists, communists, traitors—such as demobilized officers in the INA—and other forms of agitators of various kinds).¹⁰ Whatever communal frictions came to the attention of the authorities were usually dismissed as contributing to terrorism or crime or political organizing against the British rule. In November 1945, Viceroy Wavell reported to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India and Burma, on speeches being made by Nehru and others as:

...intended to provoke or pave the way for mass disorder...asserting that the British could be turned out of India within a very short time; denying the possibility of a compromise with the Muslim League; glorifying the I.N.A.; and threatening the officials who took part in

⁹ India Office Records (IOR). L/PJ/12/666, volunteer organizations in India, January 18, 1947.

¹⁰ Talbot and Singh, *Partition*, 65–68.

the suppression of the 1942 disturbances with trial and punishment as “war criminals.”¹¹

THE GATHERING STORM (EARLY 1946 TO FEBRUARY 1947)

The situation began to turn beginning in January 1946 and accelerated in early 1947. In some measure, the UK decision to hold provincial elections across India from December 1945 to March 1946 not only galvanized the Indian demand for self-rule but also stoked the rising communal sentiment (Hindu versus Muslim) with regard to the idea of a separate state for the Muslims.¹² The UK government was focused on post-war issues, including that of who among their citizens might be leaving India to return home, but they were attentive to the preoccupations of the Viceroy and his executive staff regarding the political dynamics within various branches of the Indian leadership.¹³ In January, as the unsettled disturbances in India began to intensify and British options were discussed, General Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of British forces in India, sought approval from his superiors in London to send three additional British brigades to India “as a steadying effect.” This request was refused because British forces overall were deemed too depleted by the war.¹⁴ As it turned out, this question from Auchinleck proved prescient. With the focus remaining on the political machinations of Nehru and Jinnah, laced with skeptical readings of the role of Gandhi, early signs of communal unrest in the Punjab and throughout North India began to trickle through the official exchange of documents between and among British officials in India and London. Common people in considerable numbers were suffering and a chasm had begun to open in the established order of things.

Responding to the debates of Indian political leaders, the authorities in London sent a mission of the British Cabinet to India to gather first-hand assessments of the debates and the views of the Indian leaders. This mission, led by Lord Pethick-Lawrence, arrived in Delhi in March 1946 and, in coordination with Viceroy Lord Wavell, engaged with all parties well into June 1946 to seek their advice and find an acceptable compromise on what form an independent Indian government might take. The debates in public and in private on these matters consumed the newspapers and

¹¹ Wolpert, *Shameful Fight*, 94.

¹² Khan, *Great Partition*, 31–39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 96–99.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

attracted interest across the provinces. The attempt to reach closure on some form of agreement ultimately failed, in part at least because Nehru and Jinnah could not agree on the modes of Muslim representation and because of Jinnah's strong opposition to suggested terms, which did not explicitly endorse the concept of an independent Pakistan.¹⁵

During the four months of Cabinet mission in India, British authorities in India and in London had become increasingly concerned about their capacity to hold on to the country for much longer. They realized that communal tensions were building along political as well as sectarian lines and that the colonial lines of authority might prove insufficient to maintain law and order. Their concerns, however, still focused on how they might exit without inciting attacks against British personnel.

On July 29, in repudiation of the entire process encompassed by the Cabinet mission, Jinnah called for a Direct Action Day across the country to take place on August 16, 1946, in Calcutta. His aim was to demonstrate the resistance of the Muslim League to the sidelining of their dreams. On that day, relatively peaceful demonstrations took place in many cities of British India, but a terrible outbreak of communal violence rapidly engulfed Calcutta. The widespread and deadly riots in that city then extended to Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), many cities in Bihar, and by early 1947, into the volatile Punjab.¹⁶ The communal killings and massive displacement that took place caught the country and the British government by great surprise, and a scramble for reliable data is reflected in official communications between and among the Secretary of State for India in Whitehall¹⁷ and the Viceroy in Delhi and the governors of Bengal, Bihar, and others.¹⁸ The extent of the carnage led Whitehall and Delhi authorities to accelerate their timetable for exit and their efforts to leave India before the killings might extend to British nationals.¹⁹

As can be seen by the sequence of deliberations in Whitehall, dating from the summer of 1946 to early February 1947, the British government and the Viceroy of India began to focus on a possible but slow erosion of British control and the need to disentangle the British community from

¹⁵ Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 180–182.

¹⁶ Khan, *Great Partition*, 63–77.

¹⁷ Whitehall is the large government building in London that housed many cabinet ministries, including the offices of the Secretary of State for India.

¹⁸ IOR L/PJ/8/575. Casualties in communal riots from July 1946, 153–220 *passim*.

¹⁹ IOR. December 10, 1946; British Commonwealth Affairs (India) Secret Section 2. W/11979/560/68 Copy No. 142, December 10, 1946; Confidential Appreciation of the Political Situation in India, No. 11 of 1946, dated 20 November 1946, prepared under the authority of the Governor-General.

India.²⁰ A series of initiatives launched out of London indicates the preoccupation of the imperial authorities with these matters.

On November 27, 1946, in coordination with the executive team of Lord Wavell, the Inspector General of Police in the Punjab sent out a notice to the Superintendents of Police in each district to find out who among the British citizens (males speaking for their spouses where relevant and single females speaking for themselves—a much smaller number) would be thinking of leaving the subcontinent for Britain by June 1948—an exhaustive exchange of memos and forms ensued, ending only in mid-June 1947. By then, the entire inquiry had collapsed under its own weight and did not feed into planning purposes because unfolding events had undermined its relevance.²¹

In another initiative, raised during the December 20, 1946 meeting of the British Cabinet, called “Future Policy in India,” a memorandum from Lord Pethick-Lawrence (n.d., referred to as “I. B. 9460 50”), which dealt with modes of exit, strategies to pursue, and a quest for constitutional clarity, was discussed. The minutes reflect the Cabinet discussion of the Secretary’s memo:

Field Marshal Lord Wavell thought we could do no greater disservice to the minorities than to appear to have responsibilities towards them when we had no power to give effect to those responsibilities. The present situation in which although apparently responsible he had to accept the dictation of Congress under threat of their resignation was fast becoming intolerable and would reduce British rule to ignominy.

Field Marshal Lord Wavell emphasized that the process of withdrawal from the whole of India was bound to take some time. We should give facilities for any Europeans in India who wished to do so to leave the country. There were about 90,000 Europeans in India and perhaps 30–40,000 would want to leave.²²

²⁰ L/PO/102c: 63–66, January 24, 1947, Memo 304, George Abell to Mr Harris. Abell transmitting memo by Smith, director of Intelligence Bureau, states that he foresees very serious disturbances, notes that control is already very far gone at provincial level, and writes that “Grave communal disorder must not disturb us into action which would reintroduce anti-British action. The latter may produce an inordinately dangerous situation and leads us nowhere. The former is a natural, if ghastly, process tending in its own way to the solution of the Indian problem.”

²¹ IOR R/3/2 series, *passim*. Ian Talbot analyzed this correspondence in his essay, “Safety First: The Security of Britons in India, 1946–47,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 203–221.

²² Future Policy in India (previous reference: I.B. [46] 9th Meeting, Minute 1) in Kirpal Singh, ed., *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab, 1947* (Delhi: National Book Shop), 737–739.

Following the Calcutta riots, in the same time period of November 1946–February 1947, senior intelligence officials in Whitehall became aware of transport problems and the timing of arrangements to get all Europeans out of British India in case of major escalation of riots and killings. The entire folder²³ deals with preparatory plans for the evacuation of Europeans from British India, with tension building regarding whether to announce intentions and when and what might happen. As the cycle of inquiries and requests for detailed information unfolds within British India, an especially testy and clear memo from Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, is sent directly to the Secretary of State for India:

We are in fact on the horns of a dilemma. Our object is a peaceful transfer of power with as little disturbance as possible. On the other hand, our power to influence events is rapidly diminishing, and the prospects of agreement between the main parties and of the production of an acceptable constitution seem to be receding with almost equal rapidity. I can see no prospect of a constitution being formed by the end of 1948. Should we then announce a date for our final departure or not?" [He proceeds with a lucid discussion of pros and cons, and within the pros is this statement]: "If we stay, we may become involved in a situation like that of Palestine, when we can neither emerge with credit nor stay with safety."²⁴

On February 23, 1947, W. H. J. Christie (senior secretary to the Secretary of State for India) responds to Lord Wavell:

B. It is proposed to set up the Movements Board at once. It was always contemplated that this would be done very soon after an announcement of withdrawal of British power within a time limit. It will be for the present, a Planning Board, and will not begin to control movements until what QMG [Quarter Master General] describes as the 2nd Stage is reached, i.e. "when the number of passengers wishing to leave India is beginning seriously to exceed the shipping in sight, and requires strict control and priority treatment."²⁵

²³ IOR R/3/1/273.

²⁴ IOR L/P/J 10/77, Wavell to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, February 3, 1947, 282–293. Memo 337.

²⁵ IOR JPSV/2/B/3/1/273, W. H. J. Christie to V. R. Wavell, Most Secret, Para B, File No. February 23, 1947.

THE PACE ACCELERATES (FEBRUARY 20 TO MAY 1947)

On February 20, 1947, His Majesty's government announced its decision to withdraw from India "no later than by June 1948."²⁶ The announcement, delivered by radio to British India, was the most complex document and created confusion among members of its vast audience.²⁷

In his fortnightly letter for the second half of February 1947, Sir Evan Jenkins, Governor of the Punjab, wrote a memo to Lord Wavell, then still the Viceroy of India, to warn him of the coming chaos and death that was brewing in the province. Attributing the spark to the February 20 announcement to the House of Commons, delivered by Prime Minister Clement Attlee, of the British departure from India "no later than June 1948,"²⁸ he noted that already in his jurisdiction, the killings and mob violence had begun. Citing agitation by the Muslim League, he describes recent incidents in Gujrat (city in the undivided Punjab, now in Pakistan) that reveal techniques for stopping trains:

Their method was to board a train and keep on pulling the communication cord or to lie down in front of the locomotive of a train halted at a railway station. Some of the crowds entered the carriages, smashing windows and destroying fittings. [He continued by noting that large crowds and demonstrations in Lahore grew] gradually more offensive... [and] serious disturbances [took place] in Amritsar, Jullundur, Rawalpindi and elsewhere....²⁹

These communal killings and riots further inflamed political tensions and made it impossible for Prime Minister Khizar Tiwana, the leader of the Punjab Unionist Party (comprised of the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Sikhs), to form a coalition Punjabi government and he was forced to resign on March 2. This resignation provoked a severe communal outburst,³⁰ in which organized Muslim groups conducted an extended 10–15-day set of killings and attacks on the Hindus and the Sikhs, primarily in the Rawalpindi division, causing thousands to flee for their lives.³¹

²⁶ Prime Minister Clement Attlee in the House of Commons, 20 February 1947. In *Speeches and Documents on Indian Constitution*, eds Maurice Gwyer and A. Appadorai (Bombay: OUP, 1957), quoted in Singh, *Select Documents*, 14–16.

²⁷ Raghuvendra Tanwar, *Reporting the Partition of Punjab 1947: Press, Public, and Other Opinions* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2006), 199–215.

²⁸ IOR L/PJ/5/250, Report of Governor of the Punjab to Viceroy, 78 (1/2).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Latif A. Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten* (Appendix, "Mountbatten and Violence in the Punjab") (Karachi: Council for Pakistan Studies, 1986), 180–181.

³¹ Talbot and Singh, *Partition*, 44, 84–85. B. R. Nanda, *Witness to Partition: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003), 44–51.

Sir Evan Jenkins invited the Punjab Muslim leader to form a government, but that proposal sparked further Sikh and anti-Muslim rioting in Lahore and Amritsar. On March 5, Jenkins was forced to invoke Governor's Rule (under Article 93 of the 1935 Government of India Act), which in emergency circumstances permitted the governor of a province to take charge and bypass the Legislative Assembly.

By then, murderous communal riots in the Punjab had begun to disrupt equilibria throughout the country. Pamphlets from across northern India, emanating from each of the radical sects of the communal groups (Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim) and in local languages, were urging escalations in attacks and violence against the other groups.³²

Also, in that speech of February 20, Attlee had indicated to the Parliament that he planned to replace Lord Wavell with a more aggressive and new face, Lord Mountbatten, Earl of Burma.³³ This decision became evident to Indian audiences when Mountbatten arrived on March 22 in the country with Lady Mountbatten. On March 31, 1947, Jenkins wrote his first letter to Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy in the form of the governor's bimonthly report. This was also the first of his 1946–1947 bimonthly reports to use the term “refugees.”

As harbingers of what would come, Sir Jenkins reported:

*In the Rawalpindi Division we have something like 40,000 refugees on our hands. All these people have to be sorted out and interrogated. At a later stage we shall have to find out what they want and make such arrangements as we can for rehabilitating them. Outside Rawalpindi Division there is no serious refugee problem, since the numbers were not very large and the refugees have been absorbed into private families or by charitable bodies.*³⁴

When Lord Mountbatten arrived in Delhi to succeed Lord Wavell as the Viceroy of India, he came with specific instructions:

*to work for a Unitary government for India on the basis of the Cabinet Mission plan...[but] within a few days he grasped that these instructions were out of date and that all talk of a Unitary Government and the Cabinet Mission plan was now in vain.*³⁵

Upon his arrival, and with London's permission to pursue a more aggressive timeframe for exit, the high politics of Partition went into high gear.

³² Tanwar, *Reporting the Partition*, 120–153 passim. Talbot and Singh, *Partition*, 86–89.

³³ Schofield, “Wavell and the ‘high politics’,” 139–152.

³⁴ IOR L/PJ/5/250. Jenkins to Mountbatten, Punjab Governor's Reports 1947, 63.

³⁵ Penderel Moon, “Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India,” in *Partition Omnibus*, 65.

Between April 15 and May 6, 1947, Lord and Lady Mountbatten toured the NWFP and the Punjab. Lady Mountbatten, who was known to be deeply committed to social welfare and had served as a Superintendent-in-Chief of the Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance Brigade during World War II,³⁶ remained in the Punjab an additional four days to visit relief centers, refugee camps, and hospitals in areas experiencing disturbances around Rawalpindi, Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Tank. “As a result of her visit, full-scale health clinics were organized in each refugee centre.”³⁷

This visit to the troubled areas of the Punjab also drew Lord Mountbatten quickly into the fray. Jenkins, known for his succinct and often outspoken assessments of difficult situations, began to communicate to the Viceroy with more urgency. In a secret letter to the Viceroy on May 3, 1947, Jenkins said that “[t]his partition business seems to me to be getting out of control...[and] I think we must begin to consider very seriously what ad hoc arrangement can be made for the transfer of power.”³⁸

FULL STEAM AHEAD (JUNE TO AUGUST 15, 1947)

During these months, the level of riots and killings and mass flight intensified. The events had little pattern except on a very local scale of attack and then retribution, escalating into wider areas, subsiding for a bit, and then occurring again not far away, either from a new provocation or a delayed further retribution for an earlier attack. The police were outnumbered and increasingly perceived as unreliable because of their communal affiliations. The military, not yet transitioned into separate Indian and Pakistan armies, attempted to exert control as best they could. Despite suggestions from London and Mountbatten’s staff that provincial and district authorities be given permission to shoot to kill, or that martial law be declared, there was a marked hesitancy to do so for the fear of inflaming tempers further³⁹ and decisions were not made until the last week of May 1947, as is evident in the Viceroy’s Report to the Secretary of State of India:

³⁶ IOR Mss Eur F158/1046 (obituaries of Lady Mountbatten, February 22, 1960).

³⁷ Lionel Carter, ed., *Mountbatten’s Report on the Last Viceroyalty* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2003), 133–134.

³⁸ Jenkins to Mountbatten, Top Secret, May 3, 1947; Nicholas Mansergh, *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, the Transfer of Power 1942–7*, Vol. X, 298, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 62–63.

³⁹ IOR MB 124 19, Jenkins to Mountbatten, 19 No. 660/P, March 26, 1947. Seeking permission to consider raising restrictions on “minimum force.” In Singh, *Select Documents*, 31–32.

I asked if the Cabinet would support me to the hilt in putting down the first signs of communal war with overwhelming force, and if they agreed that we should also bomb and machine gun them from the air, and thus prove conclusively that communal war was not going to pay. This proposed policy was acclaimed with real enthusiasm by the Congress and Muslim League members alike, and when I looked across at the Defence Member, Baldev Singh, and said, "Are you with me in this policy," he replied Most emphatically "Yes."⁴⁰

The net result, however, was relatively uncontained escalation of terrible attacks on ordinary people who tried to flee out of the cities to the countryside, or vice versa. As weeks passed on, increasing numbers of people tried to escape campaigns of pillage and killing by fleeing to the presumed loci of safety in West Punjab (Lahore) or to Amritsar or another town considered likely to be assigned to East Punjab. The ambiguity and uncertainty contributed to the fear and the frenzy.

A most rapid series of events and decisions transpired in May and June, all leading directly to the acceleration of processes toward the partition of British India. During spring 1947, as communal tensions rose and the central government became increasingly divided between the Muslim League and the Congress, Lord Mountbatten moved to propose that the country be partitioned into two dominions, to be known as Pakistan and India. After both the League and the Congress agreed to this plan "behind the scenes," the British government announced its approval and Nehru, Jinnah, and Baldev Singh publicly accepted it on June 3, 1947.⁴¹ In a widely covered press conference the next day,⁴² Mountbatten referred to these two momentous developments: the agreement on the formal political structure for Partition and the accelerated timeframe in which to achieve it. The new date was August 15, 1947.

On Wednesday, June 25, 1947, the Viceroy assembled a meeting of the Indian Cabinet dedicated to the topic of "Refugee Problem." The Minister for External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations opened the meeting by announcing:

...that the problem of refugees had now assumed grave proportions and was particularly acute in Delhi where it was estimated that there were no fewer than 70,000 refugees; the United Provinces

⁴⁰ Viceroy's Report No. 8 (presumably to Secretary of State for India), Public Record Office, London. CAB127/111. XCA 04623/ May 23, 1947, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 87–88, para 26.

⁴¹ Statement by His Majesty's government, dated June 3, 1947, in *Partition Proceedings*, Vol. VI, 1–6, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 93–98.

⁴² 55 Press conference by Lord Mountbatten, *Partition of Punjab* (Lahore, 1983), 1, xxxii, 17–25, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 5.

and neighbouring states had also to cope with large numbers of refugees.⁴³

It was proposed in this meeting that a "Special Officer with appropriate staff" be appointed under the Home Department to set up an organization to manage refugee relief and analyze the problems and needs of "refugees from communal violence, whether from the NWFP, and the Punjab, or from Bengal and Bihar." As far as can be ascertained, the Home Department did not take up this assignment and this immense task was not addressed until September 1947, when the new Pakistani and Indian governments were forced to face the debacle in their own ways.

In mid-June, the focus moved specifically to the highly volatile Punjab, where the boundary division for the creation of two new nations (India and Pakistan) would clearly also be the line of division of Punjab (and Bengal).⁴⁴ Two joint arrangements were set up to manage the creation of transition principles for the machinery of government (Joint Evacuation Plan) and for the military protection of populations (Military Evacuation Organization, MEO) who might be expected to move.⁴⁵ Neither Lord Mountbatten⁴⁶ queried in his press conference on June 4 regarding the possibility of large-scale transfers of populations nor Mr V. P. Menon, the senior Indian civil service officer who served as a constitutional advisor to Mountbatten,⁴⁷ considered the possibility of large-scale transfers of population to be likely.

The Punjab Partition Committee, a joint Indian and Pakistani group of politicians and technicians, was set up by Governor-General Jenkins on June 16, 1947, in close consultation with Mountbatten and others. Continuing its work (renamed Partition Council on June 26, 1947),⁴⁸ its remit was to advise on a number of key issues that would best be settled before mid-August, among them were the division of finances, the division of the police, and the division of the senior administrative services along with their office equipment.⁴⁹ Important progress was made but time ran

⁴³ IOR NEG 15564, IOR Mountbatten papers, case #156/32/47, at 0294 on microfilm: "Minutes of Indian Cabinet Meeting, 25 June 1947."

⁴⁴ Bengal had remained relatively stable since Gandhi's intercession after the August 1946 massacres; its partition story would unfold more slowly and very differently.

⁴⁵ Talbot and Singh, *Partition*, 102.

⁴⁶ Moon, "Divide and Quit," 93.

⁴⁷ Mansergh, *Constitutional Relations*, 417, quoted in *ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁸ Special Committee of the Cabinet, extract of meeting on June 26, 1947. Singh, *Select Documents*, 117–118.

⁴⁹ Note on a meeting on Partition preliminaries, Government House, Lahore, June 16, 1947; Singh, *Select Documents*, 109–113.

out. Yet this committee continued to hold sway as a respected bipartisan deliberative body until early September 1947, when both countries had established their Emergency Committees of the Cabinet (ECCs).⁵⁰

The Punjab Boundary Force, developed in June and in operation on July 1, 1947, had 10–15 battalions each from India and Pakistan. The units were merged to provide communal diversity and set up to provide security for refugees and townspeople along both sides of the Punjab border.⁵¹ By August 31, it was disbanded, overwhelmed by the large numbers of people fleeing in distress, and evidently having difficulty with command, given the communal affiliations of the troops.⁵² Its difficulties could be taken as a late warning sign of how incendiary the months ahead might be.

The third and most portentous of the ad hoc arrangements developed in this transition was the Punjab Boundary Commission. A British lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, arrived on July 8, 1947, and was put to work in an office in the Viceroy's quarters, instructed to define and draw the lines that would divide British India and define the boundaries of an India independent from the British rule and a new nation, Pakistan. He relied on two commissioners (one for the Punjab and one for Bengal) and retained the power to resolve decisions, although he had never been to India and was not permitted to travel to see the country. In relative isolation, he had to determine, in six weeks, the political and human fate of over 300 million people whose ancestors had inhabited the subcontinent for millennia.⁵³

A stipulation in the documentation behind the Partition agreement was that Mountbatten would seek the resignation of all his senior Cabinet and provincial governors by August 15. He did so, although many of them had already decided to leave India or Pakistan in any case. One visible result in the India Office of the British Library is that by mid-July 1947 the number of official communications from India (between and among the provincial governors and their staff, between the Governor-General and the Viceroy, and between Whitehall and Delhi) had diminished dramatically in number from their baseline a year before. Beginning with a decline in the biweekly reports in late June, little information flowed from the provinces to the central authorities in British India or in London. Instead, there were

⁵⁰ Yaqoob Khan Bangash, "Proceedings of the Punjab Partition Committee, July–August, 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 43 (2021, February 8), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X20000505>

⁵¹ Robin Jeffrey, "The Punjab Boundary Force and the Problem of Order, August 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 8, no. 4 (1974), 491–520.

⁵² Minutes of the sixth meeting of the Joint Defence Council held at Government House, Lahore, on 29 August 1947. Secret Item 1. Filed/268 Broadland Archives, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 503–504.

⁵³ Khan, *Great Partition*, 105–106, 124–127.

farewells, thanks to all who had served so well, questions about lodging in post-war Britain, and queries regarding posts that senior officials might take upon return. Effectively, in the months of June–July before August 14 and 15 (dates of Pakistan's and then India's declarations of independence), the attention of the British establishment in India had switched entirely to finding ways out of their most famous and wealthy colony.

The bells marking the midnight of August 14 going into 15 were still echoing in the ears of those celebrating independence when on August 18, the Radcliffe line was publicly announced. From that date until the early spring of 1948, great swathes of the northern land mass of what had been British India became contested and bloody terrain.

SCRAMBLE TO RESPOND

Current evaluations of response to a given humanitarian crisis begin by placing it along a spectrum of parameters: the size and nature of the affected population(s); their status under international legal regimes; the extent of imposed mortality and morbidity; the level of atrocity involved; and the rapidity with which population movement, suffering, and death took place. Within these defining parameters, evaluation of the humanitarian impact includes rate and pattern of declines in mortality and morbidity, issues of settlement and integration, and measures taken to address population protection, human rights, and human security.

In the last 25 years, increasingly sophisticated protocols have been developed to guide the medical and public health response to population needs in these disturbed contexts.⁵⁴ Humanitarian response in the setting of incipient or full-blown communal conflicts has evolved with exposure to the shifting risk to aid workers as well as local populations in such contexts and the ugly and dangerous ways in which violence interferes with taking care of ordinary people.⁵⁵ These conflicts are much more likely to cause populations to flee the areas where they are directly attacked and make it more complex to provide them with life supports and health

⁵⁴ Evelyn Depoortere and Vincent Brown, *Rapid Health Assessment of Refugee or Displaced Populations*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Epicentre, Medecins sans Frontieres, 2006); Sphere Association, *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response* (Geneva: Sphere Association, 2018); Medecins sans Frontieres, *Refugee Health: An Approach to Emergency Situations* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1997); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Guidelines for Assessment in Emergencies* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, March 2008); Pierre Perrin, *War and Public Health: A Handbook* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1996).

⁵⁵ Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness, and Morality in War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008); Medecins sans Frontieres, *World in Crisis: The Politics of Survival at the End of the 20th Century* (London: Routledge, 1997).

care. As a result, the reach of aid workers has become more limited, their presence in the contested areas harder to maintain, and much of the humanitarian effort has devolved to taking care of refugees or internally displaced who have fled from the areas of active kinetic hostilities.⁵⁶ Many of these issues active in current humanitarian response applied as well to the humanitarian context of Partition.

In assessing the pace and substance of the humanitarian response to Partition, the focus here will be on East Punjab and Delhi, noting, as appropriate, parallel or different processes underway in West Punjab.

Overview of Humanitarian Response in East and West Punjab

- **Phase 1. Early Warning (August 1946 through August 15, 1947)**
Similar issues for East and West Punjab as discussed above.
- **Phase 2A. Early Response (August 16 through September 1947)**
Similar issues for East and West Punjab. Recognizing what was the reality; negotiating domains of responsibility, struggling to coordinate; building the lean initial response infrastructure; focus on protection and population movement.
- **Phase 2B. Early Response (September 1947)**

East Punjab and Delhi: Ongoing focus on the protection of those moving across the borders; the crisis in Delhi; setting up intensified plans of operations and initial deployment; mobilization of assets and rapid needs assessments; creating bureaucracies and supply/delivery chains to sustain a long-term engagement.

West Punjab: Ongoing focus on the protection of those moving across borders but an intense focus on transfer out of Lahore area because of the vast crowding crisis in West Punjab transit camps for people waiting to cross into India via Amritsar; setting up transit camps for people just arrived from Amritsar and waiting to move deeper into West Punjab; protecting Lahore from mob violence.
- **Phase 3. October and November 1947**

For both East Punjab and West Punjab: Assessing early impact and modifying the response accordingly; stabilizing and reducing deaths and injuries; setting up temporary education and livelihoods options; increasing attempts to move the Muslims out of Delhi who had fled attacks from other areas in India and find housing for wealthy refugee

⁵⁶ Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, *Ethnic Cleansing* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), 41; Jennifer Leaning, "Enforced Displacement of Civilian Populations: A Potential New Element in Crimes against Humanity," *International Criminal Law Review* 11 (2011): 445–462.

Hindus from West Punjab who wished to stay in urban areas; assessing timeframes for populations to return to homes when violence abated.⁵⁷

- **Phase 4. December 1947 through January 1950**

East Punjab and Delhi: Ongoing attempts to support refugee populations in major camps; improve health and welfare capacities; negotiate refugee relief by introducing employment schemes;⁵⁸ testing and evaluating interim possibilities for what turned out to be decades of displacement.

West Punjab: Refugees to Pakistan were moved out of West Punjab to the environs of Karachi or to the agricultural lands in central Pakistan. In this operation, large Muslim refugee populations from East Punjab (India) were in general moved out of camps but issues of relief and rehabilitation remained ongoing issues for these populations.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Phase 2A. Facing the Scale of Violence (August 15 through September 1947)

At new national levels, extraordinary decisions with crucial implications were made at a lightning speed. The pressure revealed who had executive competence, a sense of strategy, and courage to act; and although the situation on the ground for the populations worsened dramatically, the essential work was underway to build institutions and organize a humanitarian emergency response in a timeframe intensified by complexity without a parallel in the world then or now. It is relevant that many of the top officials and officers in India and Pakistan had developed considerable expertise in making decisions under stress during the military service of World War II. One can discern this experience in the concise diction and precise formulation of problems that these former and current military personnel contributed to the deliberations.

These processes described here were mirrored in West Punjab, although increasingly Jinnah and his executive staff (with representation from the leaders of the province) assumed responsibility directly for managing

⁵⁷ File No. 8-G(R)/48. Release of state/rulers houses in Delhi and Mt Abu for accommodating temporarily government servants, decent refugees, and for Government of India offices (National Archives of India). The file contains over 140 memos from ministries in Delhi and from the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry to the heads of Princely states seeking their cooperation in opening up their Delhi-based homes, sheds, stables as possible temporary housing for the wealthy Hindus. No positive replies.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of India, *Annual Report on Evacuation, Relief and Rehabilitation (September 1947 to August 1948)*. Xerox from Central Secretariat Library, Government of India.

this initial relief effort. Aiding Jinnah was Sir Francis Mudie, formerly provincial governor of Sindh province, whom Jinnah appointed on August 15, 1947, as provincial governor of West Punjab.

High levels of violence and displacement accelerated from February to mid-August 1947, and then, after the announcement of the Boundary Award, exploded in two ways. The numbers of those trying to flee in two directions across the borders suddenly leapt to extraordinary levels and the sweep of atrocity and violence accelerated to an unfathomable extent.

In late August and September, as frightened masses of families on foot or in bullock carts tried to flee to the zones of presumed safety, their convoys blocked the roads and brought them to a standstill. They immediately became ready targets for armed marauders aiming at pillage and killing. The cities were burning, and, in the villages, armed groups could kill with impunity. Rapidly, in a matter of weeks after the Boundary Award, hundreds of thousands of people were moving on foot every few days both ways across the border at Amritsar or across the more southern agricultural border lands in the Canal Colonies of West Punjab and the areas of Sindh irrigated by the Sukkur Barrage. The trains between India and Pakistan, crossing at Amritsar, were each packed with hundreds of terrified families and their bundles of belongings.

Reports to senior authorities still in command (military and intelligence) provided updates, including observations of dwindling resources.

- Supreme commander, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck—police in Lahore and Amritsar completely unreliable and Army thin; air surveillance shows fires and population flight in environs of Lahore all the way to Amritsar. Major-General Rees of Punjab Boundary force asks for and receives promises for an extra airplane for reconnaissance, which should also provide psychological reassurance to people who see plane flying over.⁵⁹
- Supreme Commander Auchinleck reports from military sources on refugee camps that 5 or 6 in existence contain well over 100,000 refugees; conditions of life were bad, no tents, no medical arrangement, and no sanitary arrangements and the danger of outbreak of cholera must be faced. “He had asked for one or two Army Sanitary Sections and the Army would do everything possible but due to demobilization, the army’s resources were now very much restricted and it was quite impossible to expect assistance on the scale given during the Bengal

⁵⁹ Informal minutes of the Joint Defence Council meeting at 11:45, Saturday, August 16, 1947, IOR R/3/1/171, in Singh, *Select Documents*, 489–492, paras 2, 3, 10, 11.

famine.” The Director of Medical Services, Supreme Headquarters, was “in the area and had been asked to make an independent report on conditions in the refugee camps.” The Joint Defence Council agreed to send letter to the prime ministers of both Dominions “drawing attention to the unsatisfactory conditions in the refugee camps recommending that they should give the matter their personal attention.”⁶⁰

The new Governor of West Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie, reports to Prime Minister Jinnah on September 5 regarding his impressions.

Dear Mr. Jinnah,

...The refugee problem is assuming gigantic proportions. The only limit that I can see to it is that set by the Census Reports. According to reports the movement across the border runs into a lakh or so a day. At Chuharkana in the Sheikhpura district I saw between a lakh and a lakh and a half of Sikhs collected in the town and round it, in the houses, on the roofs and everywhere. It was exactly like the Magh mela in Allahabad. It will take 45 trains to move them, even at 4000 people per train; or if they are to stay there, they will have to be given 50 tons of *ata* a day. At Govindgarh in the same district there was a collection of 30,000 or 40,000 Mazhabi Sikhs with arms. They refused even to talk to the Deputy Commissioner, an Anglo-Indian, who advanced with a flag of truce. They shot at him and missed. Finally, arrangements were made to evacuate the lot. I am telling every one that I don't care how the Sikhs get across the border; the great thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible. There is still little sign of the three lakhs of Sikhs in Lyallapur moving, but in the end they too will have to go.⁶¹

Mudie continues to say that “the most serious recent development is the very rapid deterioration in the reliability of the Army” and observes that the Hindus and the Sikhs in the Army pose real liability, raising threats of mutiny among the Muslim and Pathan soldiers. He further notes that incidents “have convinced the Military that their own non-Muslim troops are number one priority for evacuees.” He then offers details about the grave understaffing of his office. Then ends with: “I do not know whether I have addressed you in this letter as you wish to be addressed. If not, will you please let me know?”⁶²

⁶⁰ Joint Defence Council meeting, Wednesday, August 20, 1947, secret IOR R/3/1/171, quoted in Singh, *Select Documents*, 495–496.

⁶¹ Sir Francis Mudie to Mr Jinnah, 103 MSS Eur F164/14, secret, September 5, 1947, from Government House, Lahore, as cited in Singh, *Select Documents*, 511–513.

⁶² *Ibid.*

It was becoming clear that the full capabilities of these two new governments would need to focus on protecting these huge numbers of people, help them move in safety, and at best accelerate their passage through a territory that had suddenly become ferociously hostile. Gaps in resources constrained readiness to move quickly and on a large scale. The railways were built to suit one country, so issues of symmetry in track and carriages did not largely arise, but the rails ran on steam engines which needed to stop frequently to obtain water from watering points—now obvious sites for ambush. The war had depleted the country of vehicles of all kinds and materials for track repairs and road construction. There were very few functioning airplanes, and a large share of the military's vehicles were in a state of disrepair with no access to spare parts. Serious food shortages were prevalent.⁶³ In reflecting on the issues faced in refugee relief, the Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation identified one gaping deficit: the inability to provide shelter of almost any kind. In his report for the two years, 1947–1948, he noted that “[p]rovision of shelter has been one of the toughest problems.” Supply of tents throughout 1947 proved gravely insufficient and the previous stock of building materials had been consumed by the war effort. Had it not been for the population exchanges and the requisition of abandoned homes, the problem would have been much worse.

Phase 2B: Gearing Up to Govern (September 1947)

Only in late August 1947 do we see the creaky apparatus of the new governments begin to fire up. The memos and notes of authorities reveal consternation, the sense of staring into the abyss. As senior civil servants and military officers in the colonial administration, they retained the customary formalities in their modes of address and deliberations. Yet these newly empowered executives, some with significant administrative and political experience under the British rule, struggled to define their tasks and to delegate responsibilities.

They were now required by the office to take responsibility for dealing with the horrifying levels of communal violence, vicious incitement, and enormous numbers of people fleeing for their lives. The targeted mayhem had almost destroyed the fragmented civil, police, and military systems of ascertainment, command, and control at the sub-district, district, and provincial levels. Throughout all levels of the Punjab society, in tiny settlements deep in the country and in the most multi-dimensional cities,

⁶³ Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, *Annual Report on Evacuation*, 3.

among the rich and the poor, what mattered for survival—any time, day or night—was communal affiliation and location. And to flee to further safety, people often had to first cross into the harshly hostile land.

The challenge was immense: to assemble the apparatus of governance and create the machinery to manage a refugee crisis of staggering dimensions. It rapidly became clear that the apparatus of the Raj was unfit for modern governance, let alone sufficiently robust to deal with the intensifying carnage and accelerating mass migrations.

The axis of oversight and control for the divided Punjab that carried over from mid-August 1947 consisted of the leaders of Pakistan (Governor-General Jinnah and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan) and the Provincial Governor of West Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie; and for India, Prime Minister Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In mid-October, appointments came through for the Provincial Governor of East Punjab, C. M. Trivedi, along with Chief Minister Dr Gopi Chand Bhargava.

Initially, Lahore served as the West Punjab base of operations for refugees and military protection but in late 1947, Jinnah moved the capital to Karachi. Immediately after the date of Partition, East Punjab did not have its own capital. The gap in appointments for leadership of East Punjab during the first two months meant that operations for East Punjab would initially be based in the national capital of Delhi. When East Punjab authorities were in place, they chose to be hundreds of miles away in the hill city of Shimla, at the Viceregal Lodge.⁶⁴ Amritsar, perhaps the logical site for the East Punjab capital, was a politically and strategically impossible choice. The difficulties were insurmountable: the insecurity posed by the continual communal unrest within the city; the proximal two-way land transit of vast refugee populations via the Grand Trunk Road; and the intersecting railheads in the city, which had become sites of major carnage as trains crossed between East and West Punjab. Consequently, much security and relief coordination for East Punjab continued for months to be managed out of Delhi, which also had its own significant refugee issues to be dealt with by the Delhi local authorities. Communications (telephone and telegram) to interior regions connected through Delhi as well as to Lahore, and movement of goods and people by air could best be managed out of the capital.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Lord Mountbatten had suggested Shimla as the site for the shadow government of East Punjab in his July 22, 1947, visit to Lahore. G. D. Khosla, "Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India," in *Partition Omnibus*, 120.

⁶⁵ In current humanitarian crises, often off-site management is required because safety and communications cannot be assured closer to zones of refugee flight or military action. For

Coordinating Governmental Response in India

Despite the Cabinet's decision at the end of June 1947 to establish a governmental organization to deal with the refugee problem, this task was not taken up until September 6, 1947, with the establishment of the ECC and the agreement to set up a Ministry for Refugees. Lord Mountbatten (as the honorary Governor-General of India until his departure in 1948) served as chairman of the ECC at the request of Prime Minister Nehru. In addition, the core members of the Emergency Committee included Prime Minister Nehru, Deputy Prime Minister Patel, and the ministers of defense, railways, and refugees. They nominated representatives to attend all meetings to ensure "that executive action decided upon is taken." The resulting number of people required at these meetings was approximately 16 high-ranking officials, plus 3 senior secretaries and additional attendance, as needed, by a range of senior military officers, and representatives from the departments of finance, law, food, works, mines, power, labor, and industries and supplies.⁶⁶

As cumbersome as this gathering proved to be, it forecasts what perplexes the current humanitarian responses—the tension between inclusion of all facets of a major networked operation and the need to have fast and efficient decision-making. The difference with this ECC in these immediate post-Partition months is that this executive function was based on newly authorized governmental hierarchies which had not yet been put into practice. The full minutes of this ECC and of subsequent ECC meetings reflect how poorly worked out were such issues as the chain of command versus collaboration, competence versus politics, personal relationships versus assigned roles, communications versus orders, and courtesy versus insistence on feedback loops.

At the first meeting of the ECC, in addition to establishing the composition, attendance, and timing of future committee meetings (to be held daily at 10:00 AM in the Council Chamber at Government House in New Delhi) and the coordination meetings noted above, the committee noted that it was authorized by the Cabinet to issue all executive orders pertaining to meeting emergency needs. The Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army was instructed to appoint a Major-General to head the Military Emergency Staff in order to provide military information to ministries; it was determined that the new Minister for Refugees would establish an

instance, in the Somalia crisis in the early 1990s, humanitarian operations were based out of Nairobi.

⁶⁶ IOR, Mss EUR F200/52, "Emergency Committee of the Cabinet," Part I (a) 6/9/47–14/9/47 (secret).

Information Bureau to provide information to refugees; another committee would handle publicity; and the Governor-General of India would telegraph the Governor-General of Pakistan reporting the establishment of the ECC and propose to send Lord Ismay (Lord Mountbatten's Chief of Staff) to Karachi within 48 hours to explain what was being done. In addition, at the suggestion of Lord Mountbatten,⁶⁷ a Map Room was arranged to show dispositions of military, air force, and police; refugee camps; relief centers; first aid units and hospitals; rail, road, and air communications; locations of attacks, concentration of armed bands, localities that received threatening letters, etc.; standing crops, harvested crops, food stocks, etc.⁶⁸ Clearly, by context, this list reflects Mountbatten's military background and his assumption of deep staffing capacity, not recognizing how difficult in these early and scattered circumstances it would be to gather these separate lines of information and assemble them on one map in any accountable timeframe.

Coordinating Non-governmental Response in India

The so-called "Formation Meeting" of the United Council for Relief and Welfare (UCRW) was held at Government House, New Delhi, on September 8, 1947.⁶⁹ Participants in the meeting were Lady Mountbatten as chair; Mr K. C. Neogty, Minister for Refugees; Mrs Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Minister for Health; Dr Jivraj Mehta, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Director-General, Health Services; Mr S. K. Kripalani, Secretary, Ministry of Refugees; and Mr C. N. Chandra, Refugee Commissioner. Other members included a range of voluntary health and welfare services who would become the backbone of the relief effort for refugees in East Punjab.

Lady Mountbatten opened the meeting reporting that the Cabinet strongly endorsed the formation of an entity to coordinate the relief activities of voluntary organizations in collaboration with the "Official Authorities." One of the functions of this entity would be to channel government support to the voluntary organizations.⁷⁰ The meeting then

⁶⁷ Janet Morgan, *Edwina Mountbatten: A Life of Her Own* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 408.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Item 5B.

⁶⁹ Lady Mountbatten Archives, University of Southampton, UK: MB1/Q117, United Council for Relief and Welfare, minutes of meetings, 1947–1948; minutes of the formation meeting of the United Council for Relief and Welfare, held at Government House, New Delhi, on Monday, September 8, 1947.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

heard from representatives of the participating organizations regarding their activities to date and plans for moving forward.⁷¹

Minister of Health Rajkumari Amrit Kaur reported that her department had already received some medical supplies from the Indian Red Cross (IRC) to supplement the government stocks in Punjab. They were acquiring vaccines and sending them to West as well as East Punjab.

Dr Mehta (Secretary, Ministry of Health and Director-General, Health Services) added that local voluntary organizations were helping refugees in East Punjab, while in Delhi, the Department of Medical Services had made 50 beds available to civilians in the Military Hospital, and it had been agreed upon that military guards should be provided to other hospitals.

Sir Sen from the IRC confirmed that they had provided four consignments of medical supplies (including medicines [e.g., ointments and tablets] and drugs [e.g., fluids in vials] donated by the British Red Cross) to refugee camps in East Punjab and Delhi. In addition, three tons of evaporated milk had been sent to the Society's Punjab branch for distribution to refugee women and children. Sir Sen also proposed that some of the 50 Red Cross workers currently serving in military hospitals be temporarily reassigned to refugee camps, provided the military medical authorities agreed.

Mrs Sucheta Kripalani (Congress Central Relief Committee and Kasturba Workers) reported that "in the early days of refugees arriving in Delhi she had started a camp and tried to co-ordinate some of the various small Refugee Committees." The camp had tent accommodation for only 500 people but now had 4,500 refugees. She recommended that because of the growth in the number of refugees now in Delhi, they should not be concentrated in the city, the two (Muslim and Hindu) communities should be separated, and the government should manage reception of refugee points of entry at train stations, airfields, and highways and also provide financial assistance. She also reported that their camps kept a register of refugees and had started schools for children.

Sir Patrick Spens (St John Ambulance Brigade) noted that the Brigade was strong in Lahore but was "unfortunately and always had been weak in Delhi." So they would have difficulty providing personnel but would put out an appeal for volunteer auxiliary nursing and first aid workers. He would also see if the Brigade members who had moved from West to East Punjab might "be redrafted for service."

⁷¹ Ibid. All summaries and direct citations are from the minutes of the formation meeting, September 8, 1947.

Mr Horace Alexander (Friends Service Unit, FSU) reported working closely with the National Christian Council (NCC) and the YMCA, and that “one American Doctor had already been sent to East Punjab.”

Mr E. C. Bhatta reported that the NCC “had been in touch with American colleagues who had made big offers of milk, multivitamin tablets and special foods for children...the present difficulty was the Indian Import duty which it was hoped could be waived.” He also reported that the NCC was seeking volunteers to help with relief work.

Regarding the effort to recruit more people to provide assistance for refugees, the UCRW members discussed granting leaves of absence (e.g., one month) to office workers to do relief work.

Mrs Hannah Sen (Delhi Branch of the All-India Women’s Conference) “proposed that in all camps there should be a register made of the refugees and their abilities, so that not only could those abilities be used in the camps but also they could be drawn on for work outside, such as cooks for hospitals, etc., of which there was such great need. There was great need for the refugees to have occupation.”

Miss Watson (Lady Mountbatten’s personal assistant), in referencing experiences in Greece and the Middle East, said that “it had been found most helpful for the refugees to form a responsible committee of their own to help the Camp Commandant with the Administration of the Camp.”

As the meeting drew to a close, the UCRW members agreed to form a Coordinating Council and Executive Committee in order to bring together the major players in the voluntary services community as well as those who had come together for the first time to assist in this emergency setting. Lady Mountbatten said that Miss Watson would attend all the meetings of the ECC to provide “liaison on relief and welfare matters.”

In these meetings of experienced volunteers and directors of civil society, one sees a very rapid assembly of people with a sense of command and/or assigned responsibilities. Yet as of September 1947, they were only beginning to grasp the vast scale of the crisis. They evince an odd but refreshing sense of confidence, with evident managerial experience but no available capacity for ascertainment on the scale which this emergency would demand. Their stance is similar to that of current seasoned humanitarians summoned to respond to a large unfolding crisis. These current workers albeit would be markedly more uneasy in the absence of information, they would also be determined wherever they could to begin set up operations.

Phase 3: Protection and Assessment (October–November 1947)

Many complexities surfaced in the last weeks of September and first weeks of October. The issues centered on the strategy and means for evacuating what appeared to be millions of people on both sides of the border of the Punjab who sought safety on the other side. Consequential meetings of the ECC with overlapping membership convened on September 8, September 25, September 28, September 30, October 5, October 6, October 13, and October 23, 1947, in India. They included political leaders, railway authorities, and senior military officers (and required frequent consultations with parallel Pakistani officials). Because no one could yet imagine how immense the numbers were and how fast people would accumulate, the responses to some of these questions proved prematurely definitive and a few contained unavoidable ambiguity:

1. Whether to characterize the situation as a complete transfer of populations or a strenuous accommodation to those who wished to leave (“transfer”)
2. Whether Pakistan would accept the Muslims from areas outside East Punjab (“no”—but over time, it proved that they had to)
3. Whether Muslim refugees in Delhi should be given priority transport into West Punjab, given the high insecurity in the capital (“yes”—but the Muslims from within India kept arriving anyway)
4. Whether the Delhi Muslim evacuees could be sent to transit camps in Ludhiana (“no”—floods in the region and refugee camps there were already massively overcrowded)
5. Whether the processes to divide the British Indian Army (into Pakistani and Indian Army commands) should take priority over the transfer of populations (“Army to take precedence,” but often the volume of transfers commanded urgent priority)
6. Whether an MEO could be set up to protect the two-way flow of populations (“yes”—but the question left hanging was how well it could do so)
7. Whether there would be adequate troops in both countries to staff this MEO (“uncertain”—and the answer proved to be never enough)
8. Whether a Joint Evacuation Movement Plan could be drawn up with a timeline of completion of population transfers by all modes of transport by end of 1947 (“yes” to the plan—but even with great effort, this process was not complete until the end of 1948)

During these months, it became evident that the main humanitarian response had to focus on moving millions of people. Sustaining them on the way and protecting them in transit, although humanitarian priorities, were severely constrained efforts because of high insecurity and scant supplies of emergency medicine, vaccinations, food, and potable water.

The existential reality was shaped by the extent to which the MEOs, the armed forces, and the railway personnel and systems could function at peak capacity and peak efficiency. A train car malfunction or a breach in the track could prompt a raid from the bush and many might die. Acts of sabotage were routine. The roads were terrible after a few weeks of heavy traffic and the September floods and rains in the border areas of eastern Punjab made travel as well as more sedentary life deeply miserable. More than in most contemporary humanitarian crises, the logistics aspects of this relief effort resembled a conventional war effort, where progress was measured on how much stuff could get delivered to as many people as possible.

Statistics on morbidity and mortality were collected and analyzed in terms of year-to-year comparisons but the context makes it obvious that whatever was collected was clouded by a significant but uncertain scale of under-counting and a confounding vagueness about categorization of disease and symptom. It is not surprising then that the main measure of success was the monthly count of refugees moved across the border to safety. The count of those evacuated, although an important underestimate because of ascertainment issues, provides figures that are at least on defensible scales of parameter. Tables 1.1(a) and 1.1(b) present a summary record provided by the Indian Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation by month and year, which details the number of non-Muslims evacuated by foot and by rail. These data are mostly incomplete and reflect only the Indian side of the Punjab border, but they show a dramatic decrease in numbers seeking to move over these months.

By the fall of 1947, convoys and camps dominated the land on both sides of the border. Long convoy lines, extending for as many as 20–50 miles, crowded the Grand Trunk Road going both ways. The dust they raised could be seen by planes. The two-way traffic of the Muslims going one way and the Hindus and the Sikhs the other was sparsely protected by soldiers with the MEO. Once near the border, as people waited for armed protection to either by walking or by rail cross into the safer zone, they were placed in collection camps (termed concentration camps on the Pakistan side) to await their time to move. In these camps, the situation

Table 1.1 (a) Number of Non-Muslims Evacuated by Foot

Period	No. Evacuated on Foot
Up to October 31, 1947	1,014,000
December 1947	6,000
January 1948	15,000
February 1948	1,598
March 1948	<i>Nil</i>
Total	1,036,598

(b) Number of Non-Muslims Evacuated by Rail

Provinces	No. Evacuated by Rail by March 1948
West Punjab and NWFP	1,144,907
Bahawalpur	21,200
Sind	352,252
Total	1,518,359

Source: Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of India, *Annual Report on Evacuation, Relief and Rehabilitation of Refugees: September 1947 to August 1948* (Central Secretariat Library, IO-026789), 4.

Note: Numbers expressed in lakhs in original filings; Ministry publication converted to Western convention in the tables as shown here (10 lakhs equals 1 million).

was grim: people were exhausted, and many bore serious wounds; all were hungry; there was little potable water, scant shelter, and only minimal sanitation. Protection could not be counted on, given the numbers of camps and people. There were few volunteers to help, and provisions of all kinds were very scarce. Night was dangerous. The crossing was hazardous and murderous attacks were frequent. Once past the border, it was still possible for convoys and trains to be stopped and raided by militant gangs operating in cross-border raids.

Upon reaching the other side, people were again put into what were called temporary or transit camps, needing emergency relief and awaiting guidance about where to go next. These were primarily families trying to find new homes, so they were in groups. They were not particularly mobile and so drained from their experiences that they could not venture far without assurances and assistance. In these camps, on the safe side of the border, the volunteers from India or Pakistan were relatively numerous and proved to be of great service and support.

The Humanitarian Responders

The support provided by international humanitarian agencies was important in providing solidarity, technical advice, and expertise but it was completely insubstantial compared to the scale of the need. The IRC provided material and outreach to its sister organizations world-wide. But its own funds were meagre and its important role was to coordinate efforts of international relief workers and the Indian government officials. The Pakistan Red Cross was just getting started as a separate organization. The St Johns Ambulance Brigade supported transport of medical personnel and supplies in both India and Pakistan. The British Red Cross sent substantial material supplies, especially to Pakistan, but most funding available for humanitarian assistance was still directed to war-affected European refugees and displaced peoples. The US government also sent some large supplies for refugee aid to India. None of this support was remotely sufficient to meet the cumulative needs of the millions of destitute and damaged people who had to subsist through months of acute hardship.

The relief was essentially organized, deployed, and sustained by the two national governments, their militaries, and their own civil societies. These entities evinced an astonishing degree of resilience, ingenuity, and generosity in helping the refugees survive and manage in many urban and rural camp settings in both Pakistan and India. The members and leaders of the many women's associations and societies, including the All-India Women's Conference, the Congress Central Relief Committee, and Kasturba Workers, played prominent roles in moderating the miseries of the camps in Delhi and elsewhere by raising funds, supplying all forms of goods, and engaging with the social and educational life of the refugee families. These groups saw early on how essential it was to get people moving into productive activity and join the life of the wider community. Although the scale of despondency and poverty was vast, these organizations persisted for years in supporting extensive rehabilitation

efforts.⁷² These women's organizations also took the lead in identifying perhaps the signal horror of Partition—the issue of abducted women and abused women and girls. Their activism and scholarship on these enduring harms has not only shaped our understanding of the particular cruelties of Partition but also alerted us to the prevalence of gender-based violence in all societies and to its virulent potential in settings of social disturbance or war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had extensive experience in delivering humanitarian relief and medical care in war zones. Its absence in the subcontinent during this time of great political stress and human suffering is notable. The ICRC headquarters sent Dr Otto Wenger as an ICRC delegate to India in December 1947, but he was immediately detailed to the unfolding conflict in Kashmir to serve as a neutral intermediary on matters relating to prisoners of war and protection of civilians. An excellent historical study of the ICRC in the post-war period acknowledges this failure to respond to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in India and Pakistan and is uncompromising about the explanation. The ICRC emerged from the tribulations of World War II almost bankrupt and short of manpower. Its reputation, damaged by the failures to confront the atrocities in Nazi death camps, weighed on its own sense of moral vision and hampered fund-raising. Its involvement in the Israel–Palestine conflict took much of its attention and resources and it was very engaged as well in family tracing, reunification, and refugee aid in Europe following World War II. A sense of regret infuses this report although its extensive actions in Kashmir in terms of monitoring military action toward civilians and improving treatment of prisoners of war were abundantly worthwhile.⁷³

A British charity, FSU, came to the Partition relief effort with extensive prior work experience in British India, most recently providing relief during the 1943 Bengal famine and providing acute trauma care to people wounded and ravaged in the 1946 massacres in Calcutta and Noakhali. In September 1947, a contingent of FSU humanitarian workers was sent from FSU headquarters “to investigate needs and make plans for Unit participation.” Succinct terms of reference were given to professionals, who upon arrival immediately went to work securing necessary introductions, setting

⁷² Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, *Annual Report on Evacuation*, 7–9; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 65–129.

⁷³ Catherine Rey-Schirr, “The ICRC's Activities on the Indian Subcontinent Following Partition (1947–55),” *International Review of the Red Cross* 203 (1998): 267–291.

up coordination meetings, and conducting rapid needs assessments in the camps in Delhi and then in transit camps along the ways to border areas.

Their reports back to headquarters are fragmentary but cogent: almost impossible working conditions because of no communications, no transport, highly variable competence of informants and intermediaries, and, above all, huge numbers overwhelming any grasp of the whole. They note the hazardous road conditions. Over time, the reports state that the roads were becoming clogged, not by refugees but by traffic jams of all manner of people in vehicles trying to proceed—seeking to count, or deliver services or goods, or communicate with authorities in Delhi or Lahore about the shifting contexts of the disaster as they saw it. The mobility of the transit camp populations impeded assessments of their progress—often the staff could not find someone the next day to follow up. These impressions are very similar to those of international aid workers plunged into very large complex crises today. The FSU field notes contain the details of their protocols. Since these were probably among the most experienced and trained humanitarian workers deployed in relief efforts at this time, the specifics of what they attended to might readily be termed best practice.

Experienced in harrowing conditions, the FSU relief workers in the camp hospitals rapidly instituted cholera inoculations, routine DDT spraying, sanitation measures, and distribution of appropriate food items, including milk powder packets and vitamins. They made sure men were separated from women and that blankets and clothes were supplied to all in need. The medical program included management of serious malnutrition, monitoring for cholera, institution of inoculation campaigns, and treatment of diarrheal disease. These measures would accord with current humanitarian procedures in austere conditions. The focus was facility-based, staffing the hospitals and clinics. The camps were too crowded across vast areas to permit anything but the most minimal population surveillance. No mention is made of skin or eye diseases, perhaps because they must have been so prevalent. Smallpox simmered at a low rate in these camps, often mentioned in medical and public health reports but isolation and quarantine measures are not discussed. No real triage is reported. Everyone who approached the hospital was ill but, given the numbers, it is likely that the doctors and nurses scanned to find those in most immediate need. Other members of the FSU teams, experienced in social service supports, set up family tracing in the camps and devised a range of mail service and messaging supports.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ 4714/13. "Annual Report of the Friends Service Unit and Calcutta Friends Centre," 1947; #14. "Emergency Relief Work throughout East and West Punjab," Xerox copy, 1–3 (London:

Two of the leaders of FSU (Richard Symonds and Horace Alexander), who were familiar with both wings of the country, Punjab and Bengal, arrived in Delhi in mid-September to assess conditions in both Pakistan and India with regard to welfare and medical care for the refugees.⁷⁵ They made the necessary diplomatic rounds in Delhi and Pakistan, and eventually secured agreement to their plan, leaving for Lahore and Amritsar in mid-October. They split up (Symonds to Pakistan and Alexander to India) with the intent to visit all the major camps and sites of care for the populations they termed “minorities.” Their aim was to assess refugee needs and prepare a list of necessary supplies and recommendations to submit to the respective governments and medical units. The travel was arduous and yet in about three weeks, they had accomplished this initial rapid assessment in good order. Upon their return to Delhi, however, they learned of the unrest in Kashmir and the onset of conflict there between India and Pakistan. The FSU leadership, responding to the official requests for their help in this complex region, sent them back to Kashmir, Symonds to work on the Pakistan side and Alexander on the Indian side. Their absence from the extended and highly complex Partition response left an important gap in two regards: Alexander, in particular, was very experienced in medical relief and public health, and they both were the most efficient and resourceful problem solvers in chaotic situations—a set of valuable skills in the Partition context.

Reports from the NCC are modest but it is clear from the records of other missionary groups that the NCC created a mobilizing hub of very active and educated volunteers. The NCC was also engaged in significant funding efforts overseas. The Christian voluntary societies worked particularly in the Muslim camps in Delhi, providing health and medical care along with important social services in some of the worst conditions during the first two months of the crisis in the city. Thereafter, they engaged more widely in East Punjab and provided important continuity for the waves of international volunteers who came for shorter stints of service.⁷⁶

In the NCC report of March 1948, Mr E. C. Bhatti states that: “With the cessation of mass migration and the closing of camps for Muslims,” the work of the NCC was now moving into rehabilitation efforts in the Delhi

Friends Library).

⁷⁵ Richard Symonds, *In the Margins of Independence: A Relief Worker in India and Pakistan, 1942–1949* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33–72.

⁷⁶ National Christian Council, *Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive Committee of the National Christian Council, Held at Nagpur* (Mysore City: Wesley Press and Publishing House, November 1947, March 1948, and November 1948).

camps.⁷⁷ Six months later, in his November 1948 report, he bids farewell to their emergency ties with the UCRW, the organization he joined at the time when Lady Mountbatten set it up in those frantic days of early September 1947. He observes that our relations “were cordial and friendly throughout. Without the guidance and help given to us by the U.C.R.W., we would not have been able to accomplish nearly so much. We hope to keep in touch with this Council.”⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

With appropriate early assessment in emergency refugee settings, the expectation is that within three months, appropriate measures can be taken in camps to bring down the initial high death rate (from war wounds, disease, malnutrition, and exhaustion) to under twice the baseline mortality.⁷⁹ Over the past 30 years, improvements in all aspects of humanitarian organization, training, and deployment have produced interventions that have achieved this goal. It is a minimum goal and suffering in a large population may still be grave, but as a rough indicator, it provides an important overall assessment of humanitarian progress in a particular setting.⁸⁰

This mortality metric seems patently unsuitable to apply to the Partition response but only because conditions made it impossible to compute. Actually, over the months in question, people were dying and being killed at an unknown rate in unknown numbers. In modern practice, one could have established indirect ways to track these deaths rather precisely. Yet, at that time, it was in part the very ignorance of the actual numbers of accumulating deaths which made possible the long delay in recognizing the extraordinary mortality dimension of Partition. What mattered to the authorities in the moment (both British and then Indian and Pakistani) was that great numbers of people were demonstrating in the streets and that the riots were prompting people to flee their homes. The humanitarian response to Partition was focused on the numbers who were moving, not on the numbers who were dying. The geopolitical consequences of mass flight in a communally defined conflict had by the

⁷⁷ National Christian Council, *Minutes of the Meetings*, March 1948, 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

⁷⁹ Arguments abound over what constitutes “baseline” mortality. For a good discussion, see Charles B. Keely, Holly E. Reed, and Ronald J. Waldman, “Understanding Mortality Patterns in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies,” in Reed and Keely, *Forced Migration and Mortality*, 4.

⁸⁰ Sphere Association, “Health Section,” in *Sphere Handbook* (2018), <https://handbook.sphere-standards.org/en/sphere/#choogRef>

mid-20th century proved enormous in any country, and India and Pakistan were no exception.

In those months and early years, what drove action was cataclysmic mass migration. And the only rubric for successful response in this catastrophe became the decrease in the number of people fleeing from threat and the increase in the number of those settled out of immediate harm's way. This rubric was also most relevant to relief workers in that setting because any practically robust humanitarian response could be marshalled only when people are at least temporarily at rest in one place. Attempting to intervene to save substantial numbers of lives as people were hounded and on the run would have been seen then, and perhaps now, as mere heroics.

The Indian and Pakistani authorities arrived at practical ways to estimate how many people moved. This effort was in part rendered more feasible because most population movement across the Punjab boundary was funneled through narrow channels of transit or accomplished via passage on rail or plane. In the demographic studies of Partition conducted in the mid-2000s,⁸¹ based on an analysis of sequential census data, the estimated number who crossed that border one way or the other included at its low bound about 15 million people and at its high about 18 million. These numbers, and the range of deaths (2.3–3.2 million), compel some mix of sorrow and consternation.

But also, so many lived. The humanitarian response time in Partition was fall of 1947 through 1948. Before was an early warning phase that passed unrecognized; after was the rehabilitation period, which consumed the focus of governments and civil society for subsequent decades. Yet during the first four months of the response, the great majority of people had found refuge from attack and privations of flight and had, in fact, ceased to flee from acute jeopardy. Afterwards, the pace at which the death rates returned to the baseline is not known. Yet certainly had there not been a humanitarian effort during those four months, the cumulative numbers of deaths as found in the population census comparisons would likely have been much higher. It was a collective humanitarian effort on both sides of the border that made for this mixed and sobering outcome.

⁸¹ Kenneth Hill, William Seltzer, Jennifer Leaning J, Saira J. Malik, and Sharon S. Russell, "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab 1947," *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (July 10, 2008); Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Khwaja, and Atif Mian, "The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2008), 1–20.

In the long aftermath of Partition, which we all inhabit, it is uplifting to look back at these four months to see how a society came together to try to ease the pain, mitigate the loss, and account for itself through public and private actions of charity, inquiry, and immense generosity of spirit. Here is where the humanitarian moment transpired, in these transit camps, in the organizing committees, in the bundling of cloth, and the binding of wounds.



CHAPTER

2

The Role of Social Networks in the Process of Migration during the 1947 Partition

**Shubhangi Bhadada, Tiara Bhattacharya,
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INTRODUCTION

Refugee relief and rehabilitation were key to the stability of the emergent state apparatuses of India and Pakistan after the 1947 Partition of British India. The nascent governments and militaries of the two newly independent countries attempted to manage the massive movement of people and to provide necessary primary social services to the millions¹ of displaced people, both preceding and succeeding their flight.² Relief efforts often provided refugees with their last shelters in the land of their old homes

¹Estimates range widely, but recent research suggests a lower figure of at least nine million, going up to close to 17 million. See Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Atif R. Mian, "The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 43, No. 35 (August 30, 2008): 40, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2008/35/special-articles/big-march-migratory-flows-after-partition-india.html> (accessed on May 26, 2022).

²While the data and sources we explored for this chapter were not conducive to deriving useful estimates of how many people stayed at some point in refugee camps, they do illustrate that ending up at a camp could be a consequence of the intersection of socio-economic class, geographic location of home and social network, mode of transportation, and luck. While there were certainly many families with previously privileged positions who lost key assets and ended up in camps, some of the most privileged families were able to bypass camps. Some of the least privileged may not have even been able to access camps, at least in some cases.

and the first shelters in their newly adopted polities. Consequently, relief networks were important nodes on the migratory paths taken over the course of 1947 and beyond, at least until the 1960s. These rehabilitation infrastructures and social relations with other refugees cultivated emergent forms of post-colonial community and identity.

Government affiliates periodically published several reports and book volumes in the Partition's subsequent years, documenting the role of the state in providing relief and rehabilitation services. Prominent examples on the Indian side include *Millions on the Move: The Aftermath of Partition* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1948), *Out of the Ashes: An Account of the Rehabilitation of Refugees from West Pakistan in Rural Areas of East Punjab* (East Punjab rehabilitation commissioner Mohinder Singh Randhawa, 1954), and *The Story of Rehabilitation* (U. Bhaskar Rao, Department of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Labor, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India, 1967). In Pakistan, the government only released *Journey to Pakistan: A Documentation on Refugees of 1947* (by Saleem Ullah Khan), a compilation of miscellaneous documents on the topic in 1993.

However, there has recently been an increasing amplification of efforts to uncover *unofficial* memories and documentation of the Partition period, gaining steam in the latter half of the 2000s, to fill in the gaps left by state-official records. Migration and camp experiences are an important component of oral narratives that have been collected by ventures including the Berkeley-based the 1947 Partition Archive (established in 2010)³ and the Harvard Partition Stories Project (established in 2017). The Partition Museum, opened in Amritsar, India, in 2017, has hosted exhibitions that touch on the life in refugee camps.⁴ Ravinder Kaur⁵ and Vazira Zamindar⁶ have written about refugee camps and their residents in the greater Delhi region (Kingsway and Kurukshetra, Purana Qila respectively). Ilyas Chattha⁷ has recently written about the experiences of Muslims at relief encampments at Hanifia High School (Kasur, Pakistan),

³1947 Archive, "The 1947 Partition Archive," <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org> (accessed on May 26, 2022).

⁴"Rising From the Dust: Hidden Tales from India's 1947 Refugee Camps," India, Habitat Center, New Delhi (May 2016).

⁵Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, Cultures of History (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁷Ilyas Chattha, "After the Massacres: Nursing Survivors of Partition Violence in Pakistan, Punjab Camps," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 2 (April 2018): 273–293.

the neighboring town of Ganda Singh Wala, and Hussainiwala (Ferozepur, India), based on personal diaries of missionary workers and healthcare providers serving there. Joya Chatterji,⁸ Dibyadyuti Roy,⁹ and Debjani Sengupta¹⁰ have explored key episodes and tensions in East Indian camps and resettlement schemes.

Partition scholarship has also increasingly turned to shed light on gendered, ethnic, class, and caste-specific experiences of refugees related to the Partition and its aftermath. Ravinder Kaur, for example, powerfully cites the experiences of Punjabi migrants in Delhi to argue that “refugees were reinvented in their own class of social stratification” in her study on how refugees were allocated living quarters or rations.¹¹ Looking toward the East, Debjani Sengupta’s work on relief and rehabilitation in Bengal looks at the impact of caste in an analysis of forced evictions in the latter half of the 1950s.¹² Questioning the popular Bengali novelist Narayan Sanyal (b. 1924–) in his literary depictions of “*brahmins, kayasthas, baishyas, baidyas* as well as the untouchables” all sharing space in refugee camps, Sengupta argues against the notion that camps operated as a caste-equalizing space.¹³

Oral accounts complicate the official government narratives of the refugee-state encounter by capturing differential experiences of migration along the lines of religion, gender, and class. They emphasize the heterogeneity of regional rehabilitative practices, facilities, and services in sites supervised by state military and provincial governments as well as those operated out of private homes. For this study, we have relied on more than 2,000 oral narratives collected through the Partition Stories Project based at the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University,¹⁴ as well as archival material. The contradictions and corroborations between and among oral, state-official, and other archival accounts provide insight into the ways in which social, cultural,

⁸ Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967*. Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 15.

⁹ Dibyadyuti Roy, “From Non-Places to Places: Transforming Partition Rehabilitation Camps through the Gendered Quotidian,” *Millennial Asia* 9, no. 1 (2018): 19–39.

¹⁰ Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹¹ Kaur, *Since 1947*, 9.

¹² Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal*, 133.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ These interviews were transcribed and translated from their original language (Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Pashto, etc.) by a network of ambassadors as described in Chapter 4. As a result, interview translations were subject to the discretion of individual ambassadors and vary in quality.

and political capital largely determined refugees' post-Partition experiences. In the current interview collection, the majority of the interviewees (75.6%) before Partition came from middle class, upper middle class, or wealthy backgrounds, typically classified based on their land holdings, business engagements, and means of transportation while migrating. The narratives provide insight into the processes of land and property allotment (e.g., who was able to *leave* refugee camps), as well as the separate rehabilitative provisions for civil service members.

The data from these interviews was collated to outline which factors of the migration experience tended to determine refugee experiences. We identified three broad metrics by which to categorize individual experiences: (a) the demographics of the refugees, (b) the facilities in refugee camps, and (c) rehabilitation or resettlement. These parameters suggest that, to a certain extent, the experiences of the refugees in 1947 were often contingent on their prior social and demographic characteristics. Social networks ultimately blurred taxonomical understandings of camp stays and resettlement options. The camp experiences of the majority of interviewees were determined by the resources they could leverage during the migration process, challenging standardized nationalist narratives that homogenize the refugee experience.

For example, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, the 1967 account of the Indian Ministry of Rehabilitation, offers a surprisingly standardized image of movement and relief along the Western border. While the author declares that rations at camps universally included wheat flour, rice, lentils, vegetables, ghee or oil, salt and condiments, sugar, and milk, accounts from the Harvard oral narrative collection seldom refer to availability of provisions beyond grains, milk, and sugar. Many interviewees said that their camps did not provide any food or water, with supplies often being supplemented or supplied by local zamindars.¹⁵ Others reported that rations were not distributed uniformly among camp residents.¹⁶ Recognizing these contradictions between state-official accounts, archival materials, and oral narratives helps shed light on the reality of the humanitarian response. It provides a powerful intervention into state conceptions of refugee identity that distinguish between migrants who "submit[ted] to the indignity of living on doles and charity" and "the eternal credit ... their toughness,

¹⁵ One such interviewee migrated from Toba Tek Singh to Delhi. Interviewed by Divya Babbar in New Delhi, India, on November 1, 2017.

¹⁶ (a) Interviewee migrated from Pakistan to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Eshaa Jain in Vijaynagar, Delhi, India, on December 26, 2017; (b) Interviewee migrated from Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Divyanshi Saxena in Rajendranagar, Delhi, India, on June 6, 2018.

their sturdy sense of self-reliance, their pride” of refugees able to avoid relying on government support in the immediate aftermath of Partition.¹⁷

This chapter questions the idea of camps as an “equalizing space” by looking at how social networks tended to determine refugee outcomes, arguing that social upheaval in the Partition’s wake more often reproduced than reconstituted existing social relations. Previous studies have used state rehabilitation policy to make the argument that policy measures reinforced inequality along caste and class lines, and we supplement this argument by looking at the role that professional, social, and kinship ties played in post-Partition relief and rehabilitation efforts. To showcase the highly diverse character of relief experience, we look deeper at migration, camp stay, and resettlement experiences as recounted by interviewees from the Partition Stories Project.

There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the role that “social capital” plays in determining refugee access to humanitarian assistance and well-being.¹⁸ Robert Putnam’s foundational work in the field defines social capital as a “wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks.”¹⁹ The concept’s relevance to the fields of refugee and migration studies can be found in studies on refugees from Afghanistan,²⁰ Syria,²¹ Yemen and Sudan,²² Myanmar,²³ as well as those

¹⁷ U. Bhaskar Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation* (Department of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India, 1967).

¹⁸ Examples of relevant research in the field includes Rochelle Johnston, Anna Kevittingen, Dina Baslan, and Simon Verduijn, “Social Networks in Refugee Response: What We Can Learn from Sudanese and Yemeni in Jordan” (Amman: Mixed Migration Centre, 2019); Ensiyeh Jamshidi, Hassan Eftekhari Ardebili, Reza Yousefi-Nooraie, Ahmad Raeisi, Hossein Malekafzali Ardakani, Roya Sadeghi, Ahmad Ali Hanafi-Bojd, and Reza Majdzadeh, “A Social Network Analysis on Immigrants and Refugees Access to Services in the Malaria Elimination Context,” *Malaria Journal* 18, no. 1 (January 3, 2019): 1; Lucy Williams, “Social Networks of Refugees in the United Kingdom: Tradition, Tactics and New Community Spaces,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 5 (July 1, 2006): 865–879; Miriam Potocky-Tripodi, “The Role of Social Capital in Immigrant and Refugee Economic Adaptation,” *Journal of Social Service Research* 31, no. 1 (October 19, 2004): 59–91.

¹⁹ Robert Putnam, “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Economic Growth,” *Current no.* 356 (1993): 4.

²⁰ Kristian Berg Harpviken, “Social Networks in Wartime Migration,” in *Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan*, edited by Kristian Berg Harpviken (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 13–45.

²¹ Noel Calhoun, “With a Little Help from Our Friends: A Participatory Assessment of Social Capital among Refugees in Jordan,” New Issues in Refugee Research, Research Paper No. 189 (September 1, 2010); Matthew R. Stevens, “The Collapse of Social Networks among Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan,” *Contemporary Levant* 1, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 51–63.

²² Johnston et al., “Social Networks in Refugee Response,” 1–10.

²³ Pei Palmgren, “Survival and Integration: Kachin Social Networks and Refugee Management Regimes in Kuala Lumpur and Los Angeles,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no.

resettled in Canada.²⁴ For example, researchers studying the refugee crisis in Syria have shown that Syrian refugees have drawn from the various forms of capital existing within social networks to “act as traditionally protective shelters in times of crisis,” to facilitate economic and emotional well-being.²⁵

In the current chapter, we focus on the way these forms of connect-*edness increased access to civic bodies*, as well as the ways in which they facilitated the *informal distribution of resources* for relief and rehabilitation with respect to Partition refugees. This chapter thus draws from foundational principles of social network analysis to explore how the flow of resources through social networks interacted with the relief and rehabilitation efforts of the government in order to modulate the nature of the refugee-state encounter. We pay special attention to the intermediate points (often refugee camps) of what often became a grueling, multistage migration process, especially as now over two-thirds of the world’s refugees spend years in such limbo.²⁶ As noted by Palmgren’s social network analysis on Kachin refugees in Kuala Lumpur and Los Angeles, highlighting such intermediary points allows us to examine the under-studied “relationship between migrant social networks and activities of state agents.”²⁷

In a sample of 1,419 interviewees who reported migrating between the two countries, only 374 (25%) reported receiving land from the government, and only 558 interviewees (40%) reported receiving any form of assistance from the government. If not through government assistance, what kinds of resources could the majority of displaced interviewees utilize to resettle in their new countries? How do refugee camp sites and populations evolve 5 or 10 years after the initial waves of migration? What influence does the demographic skew of the interviewee pool—and by extension, the survivor pool—have on the answers to these questions? By tracing three broader stages of the migration process—departure, mediary points, and resettlement—we try to answer these questions based on the experiences of Partition survivors.

13 (November 2017): 2247–2264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1255140> (accessed on May 26, 2022).

²⁴ Navjot K. Lamba and Harvey Krahn, “Social Capital and Refugee Resettlement: The Social Networks of Refugees in Canada,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l’Intégration et de La Migration Internationale* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 335–360.

²⁵ Stevens, “The Collapse of Social Networks among Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan,” 52.

²⁶ Palmgren, “Survival and Integration,” 2252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

DEPARTURE AND MOVEMENT

Social, professional, and kinship ties profoundly shaped refugee outcomes after 1947. They often determined how and when refugees left their original homes, the paths and lengths of their migration, and the ensuing process of resettlement once they arrived in their newly adopted polity. As Ilyas Chattha discusses in his work on the camps of Pakistan's Punjab, the journey across the western border was dangerous, traumatizing, and perhaps the most trying part of the refugee experience. In addition to mass killings along the way, thousands of migrants died due to starvation, lack of sanitation, and sheer exhaustion. The journey itself was a "cruel physical punishment."²⁸ The vast majority of refugees traveled via foot, with those who walked long distances tending to be "much more exhausted and disease afflicted," something that the middle class refugees, who could opt for transit via train or bus, were spared from.²⁹ This pattern of choice is reflected in the narratives collected through the Partition Stories project, wherein most of the interviewees stated that they traveled to and arrived at their camps via bus or train, reflecting the class (and survivor) bias of the interview pool. One interviewee, for example, reported taking a "Muslim League bus" to Lahore's Walton Camp,³⁰ while another's train to Lahore was guarded by the Pakistan army's Baloch regiment.³¹ Trains to India often received army protection as well—for instance, five interviewees' trains from Lahore were guarded by a battalion of the Indian Army's Gurkha infantry.³² While traveling via train or bus may not have completely mitigated the risk of experiencing or witnessing violence, it allowed for a greater chance for larger families and groups to stay together during the journey.

Although it is unsurprising that refugees often migrated with extended family members, a trend that often emerges in contemporary studies on

²⁸ Chattha, Ilyas, "After the Massacres: Nursing Survivors of Partition Violence in Pakistan, Punjab Camps," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28, no. 2 (2018): 277.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interviewee migrated from Patiala, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Sajjad Aziz Khan in Lahore, Pakistan, on October 6, 2018.

³¹ Interviewee migrated from Gurdaspur, India, to Kabirwala, Pakistan. Interviewed by Amin Warsi in Kabirwala, Pakistan, on April 2, 2018.

³² (a) Interviewee migrated from Kot Sultan, Pakistan, to Attari, India. Interviewed by Harshita Girdhar in Adarsh Nagar, Delhi, India, on January 27, 2018; (b) interviewee migrated from Sargodha, Pakistan, to Kalka, India. Interviewed by Lavisha Vig in Faridabad, India, on February 13, 2018; (c) Interviewee migrated from Quetta, Pakistan, to Katni, India. Interviewed by Nidhi Bavishi in Kolkata, India, on December 5, 2017; (d) Interviewee migrated from Vijh, Sargodha, Pakistan, to Abdullahpur, Haryana, India, (presently Yamunanagar). Interviewed by Urvashi Dinkar in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India, on December 26, 2017; (e) Interviewee migrated from Lahore, Pakistan, to a village near Amritsar, India. Interviewed by Aditya Menon in Noida, India, on February 20, 2018.

involuntary migration,³³ they also sometimes completed the journey alongside multiple neighboring families. One interviewee, who migrated via train and ship from Bombay to Karachi, recalled that there were around 40–50 people who traveled with them, including distant relatives and neighbors, and mentioned how many of these people stayed in touch with them after migrating.³⁴ Another interviewee recounted that traveling with her village people allowed them to share knowledge about migration routes: “The decision to migrate was taken collectively by the whole village, comprised of 50–60 houses. We left in groups and followed the same route as each other.”³⁵

Refugee experiences on the methods of transportation beyond foot, bus, and train, such as ships³⁶ and planes, shed light on the extent to which financial means or bureaucratic connections could secure families a safer passage and shelter upon arrival. One interviewee was able to quickly flee an outbreak of violence in Agra in central India when her father-in-law’s position in the Indian Navy granted them access to seats on a ship headed toward Karachi.³⁷ Interviewees from the highest socio-economic tiers (inferred through indicators such as education level, occupation, land ownership, business ownership, means of transportation, possessions traveled with, and family wealth) could leverage their financial or bureaucratic resources for plane tickets—the “safest option and the best way to avoid any sort of looting.”³⁸ One respondent’s family owned a construction business in Dhaka; when faced with the threats of violence, they were able to fly to Calcutta with luggage and jewelry.³⁹ The majority of interviewees who traveled by train or bus were not able to bring along such possessions.⁴⁰

³³ Lamba and Krahn, “Social Capital and Refugee Resettlement,” 337.

³⁴ Interviewee migrated from Bantva, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Safia Hussain in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 20, 2018.

³⁵ Interviewee migrated from Muzaffargarh, Pakistan, to Delhi, India, via Ambala, India. Interviewed by Chiya Ahuja in Malviya Nagar, Delhi, India, on October 31, 2017.

³⁶ It should be noted that traveling via steamer was actually quite common in Bengal due to the natural landscape of its eastern border. Traveling via ship in the East would not necessarily be the same class indicator as it would be in the West.

³⁷ Interviewee migrated from Agra, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Safia Hussain in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 12, 2018.

³⁸ (a) Interviewee migrated from Manikganj, East Pakistan, to Kolkata, India. Interviewed by Nidhi Bavishi in Kolkata, India, on February 5, 2018; (b) Interviewee migrated from Karachi, Pakistan, to New Delhi, India. Interviewed by Pedada Sai Kumar in Mumbai, India, on February 18, 2018.

³⁹ Interviewee migrated from Dhaka, East Pakistan, to Kolkata, India. Interviewed by Sampurna Basu in Kolkata, India, on November 21, 2017.

⁴⁰ Out of 1410 interviewees, 718 reported traveling with no possessions or only with food and money/jewelry (approximately 51%), reflecting the survivor bias of the interview pool. Packed

As population pressures rapidly mounted in cities such as Lahore and Delhi, the scramble for resources such as living spaces further demonstrates how refugees relied on social networks for security and movement. Delhi witnessed a particularly high degree of internal movement, as incoming refugees without a relative's house in which to stay frequently moved between camps or neighborhoods before finding a permanent home. For example, one interviewee reported arriving at Dhaula Khan station, moving to Kingsway Camp, then shifting to Daryaganj, before finally settling in Lajpat Nagar.⁴¹ In the first two years after Partition, Muslim communities originally living in Delhi were also often displaced from their neighborhoods and pushed into rudimentary camps established in the city's Islamic monuments, notably Purana Qila, Humayun's Tomb, and around the Jama Masjid.⁴²

In the case of Delhi's Muslims, the narratives suggest that the rupture of neighborhood communities destabilized some of the social networks that could have been used for safety, leaving some interviewees stranded in camps for years after their homes were appropriated. Nine Muslim interviewees, seven of whom subsequently moved to Pakistan, stayed at Purana Qila after evacuating their Delhi homes. Many reported frustration with the camp's lack of food, water, sanitary arrangements, and security, on average staying at the camp for two years.⁴³ One wealthy refugee, however, was able to leave for Pakistan within the span of a month:

My father was a really influential person and he had a relation with the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi ... my uncle used to be the head-master in Delhi Cantonment School so he had a relationship with

luggage was often looted on trains. According to Ilyas Chattha's 2018 work on refugees in Punjab, most interviewees walked with no possessions.

⁴¹ Interviewee migrated from Lahore, Pakistan, to Lajpat Nagar, Delhi, India. Interviewed by Pratishtha Kohli in New Delhi, India, on December 30, 2017.

⁴² Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 140.

⁴³ (a) Interview subject stayed in Purana Qila camp but did not migrate. Interviewed by Mahika McCarty in Delhi, India, on December 29, 2017; (b) Interviewee stayed at Purana Qila camp but did not migrate. Interviewed by Mahika McCarty in Delhi, India, on December 22, 2017; (c) Interviewee migrated from Mehrauli, Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Hareem Feroz in Birmingham, United Kingdom, on January 24, 2018; (d) Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Javeria Vaqar in Karachi, Pakistan; (e) Interviewee migrated from New Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Zehra Jabeen Shah in Karachi, Pakistan; (f) Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Javeria Vaqar in Karachi, Pakistan; (g) Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Javeria Vaqar in Karachi, Pakistan; (h) Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Abdul Rehman in Bhakkar, Pakistan, on January 14, 2018; (i) Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Maleeha Hameed in Lahore, Pakistan, on June 7, 2017.

one of the army officers. He came with an army truck to [Purana Qila]. We had to drive to the base to get to Pakistan by airplane.⁴⁴

While other refugees with less viable social networks were forced to live in Purana Qila's squalid conditions for multiple years, the above interviewee's resources allowed him in main to avoid the deleterious health-, safety-, and economic effects that often accompanied refugee camp stays.

The variety of departure and transportation experiences from interviewees demonstrates that refugees with more "social capital" before migrating were more likely to be able to (a) access previously existing social networks and (b) preserve their financial and political resources during the process of migrating. Refugees with less social capital were more likely to lose access to the resources embedded within their social networks preceding and during flight. This resonates with a more contemporary study on migration in wartime Afghanistan, where social networks enhanced the "ability to cope with economic hardship [and] the mobilization of resources to migrate."⁴⁵ Accounts also demonstrated that critical information about migration routes was shared through social networks, often through neighborhood communities. Most importantly, it establishes that humanitarian actors—including state responders and military personnel—were an active part of refugee social networks. Bureaucratic connections often facilitated each step of the migration process for middle- and upper middle-class refugees, as described in the following sections.

INTERMEDIATE STOPS

Just as social networks influenced refugees' decisions on how and where to migrate, they also determined how and where refugees sought shelter upon arrival, how long they stayed in refugee camps, and how they left the camps. Identifying camps by facilities provided, administrative capacity, condition of living quarters, and length of stay often proves difficult because of the heterogeneity of refugee accounts. This section first draws on the interviews to sketch out the diverse experiences and concerns of refugees staying in camps before illustrating how various social ties emerged to alleviate suffering among and between refugee communities.

⁴⁴ Interviewee migrated from Mehrauli, Delhi, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Hareem Feroz in Birmingham, United Kingdom, on January 24, 2018.

⁴⁵ Harpviken, "Social Networks in Wartime Migration," 22. This study also notes the importance of social networks in the "protection of resources at the locality which one leaves." Given that there was not a substantive collective awareness of the need to migrate before the summer of 1947, such a need for protection was not visible among the oral accounts collected.

An analysis of the narrative collection broadly identified four types of camps. Transit sites, such as Purana Qila, emerged as intermediary sites for those awaiting transportation to the destination country. Acute relief sites, such as Lahore's Walton camp, where "no one was allowed to stay more than four days because there were so many people coming behind," provided immediate shelter and rations to incoming refugees.⁴⁶ Temporary settlement camps, such as Nagrota Camp in Jammu, typically housed refugees for one to five years with varying degrees of administrative support. Permanent settlement sites included camps that gradually grew into larger colonies (Kingsway), squatter settlements (Jadavpur), and camps that hosted refugees in barracks or tents into the 1960s (Ulhasnagar).

Most facilities provided some degree of rations and medical services, while very few were able to provide livelihood rehabilitation services such as temporary education centers or employment training. At Kingsway, the largest refugee camp on the Indian side of the border with a relatively high degree of structural oversight, refugee experiences ranged significantly along class lines.⁴⁷ An upper middle-class interviewee's "family slept in camp barracks and subsisted on rations provided by the government."⁴⁸ Another interviewee, whose father worked in a government service, reported that "people were quite healthy" and provided with appropriate hygiene accommodations.⁴⁹ Similar accounts reported limited medical facilities in the barracks and temporary education centers for children.⁵⁰ Other interviewees' reflections bore grimmer resonances. Some who arrived in Delhi from lower middle-class backgrounds recalled no food or water provisions being available at Kingsway,⁵¹ and an interviewee from an agricultural background found "there were no facilities for education or medications."⁵²

⁴⁶ Interviewee migrated from Delhi, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Fiza Ahmed in Hyderabad, Pakistan, on December 13, 2017.

⁴⁷ Vijendra Kasturi Ranga Varadaraja Rao, *An Economic Review of Refugee Rehabilitation in India: A Study of the Kingsway Camp* (New Delhi: Delhi University Press, 1955).

⁴⁸ Interviewee migrated from Wazirabad, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Olana Marie Peters in New Delhi, India, on April 28, 2018.

⁴⁹ Interviewee migrated from Tank, Pakistan, to Bikander, India. Interviewed by Nidhi Narayan in West Patel Nagar, Delhi, India, on January 28, 2018.

⁵⁰ Interviewee migrated from Peshawar, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Kritika Singh in Rohini, Delhi, India, on February 15, 2018.

⁵¹ (a) Interviewee migrated from Toba Tek Singh to Delhi. Interviewed by Divya Babbar in New Delhi, India, on November 1, 2017; (b) Interviewee migrated from Rawalpindi, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Divya Babbar in New Delhi, India, on January 6, 2018.

⁵² Interviewee migrated from Rawalpindi, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Yukti Uppal in New Delhi, India, on July 12, 2018.

Difficulties with overcrowding, hygiene, and access to medical care plagued refugees across the subcontinent for years. In camps, multiple families often shared the same tent or barrack. Interviewees recalled how inadequate sanitation infrastructure precipitated the spread of malaria, chicken pox, tuberculosis, and cholera.⁵³ In Karachi's Army Camp, one interviewee remembered that 10–15 people often shared a barrack, using curtains for privacy.⁵⁴ In many camps, the government ceased providing rations after a few months, and medical care was available to “only those who could afford to pay the doctor's fee.”⁵⁵ Faced with poor infrastructure and deteriorating conditions, refugees with the capacity to do so opted to look toward their social networks for relief resources. This section traces the utility of ties to the bureaucracy, ties with the host community, and the recultivation of social networks after migration.

Ties to the bureaucracy often intervened to mitigate the uncertainty and distress associated with the intermediate stages of the migration process. Accounts collected from Pakistan identify certain camps established specifically for those working in the civil service.⁵⁶ One interviewee's family en route from Sindh's Sukkur district to India stayed in a Karachi transit camp designated for government officials, and she observed sufficient arrangements for food and water during her stay.⁵⁷ In contrast to the descriptions of poor camp arrangements cited earlier, one migrant to Karachi cites the comfortable conditions at Jacob Lines, designated for members of the bureaucracy.

Since my father was in the government service, they asked whether [he] wanted to go to Pakistan or stay in India [...] He came to Pakistan via Bombay on a ship and docked in Karachi, so luckily, he didn't really have to face any horrors. [...] Well, technically it was a refugee camp, but it was dedicated for CSP officers and was more lavish than the other refugee camps.⁵⁸

⁵³ Interviewee migrated from Lahore, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Eshaa Jain in Kamla Nagar, Delhi, India, on January 26, 2017.

⁵⁴ Interviewee migrated from Allahabad, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Safia Hussain in Karachi, Pakistan, on February 3, 2018.

⁵⁵ Interviewee migrated from Malkhanagar, East Pakistan, to Kolkata, India. Interviewed by Sampurna Basu in Kolkata, India, on November 4, 2017.

⁵⁶ Interviewee migrated from Allahabad, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Musab Waqar in Karachi, Pakistan, on November 18, 2017.

⁵⁷ Interviewee migrated from Agra, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Safiya Hussain in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 12, 2018.

⁵⁸ Interviewee migrated from Allahabad, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Musab Waqar in Karachi, Pakistan, on November 18, 2017.

Such camps designated for refugee bureaucrats fostered the building of social networks *within* class milieus and helped preserve pre-Partition social positions. Professional ties, especially bureaucratic ties, could offer fewer intermediate stops and healthier camp environments upon arrival.

Upon arrival in their new home country, migrants were forced to contend with varying degrees of receptiveness from the host population and local authorities. *Bridging social capital*, defined as the ties between refugee and host communities, emerged as another powerful network support that could transform relief experiences on the local level. Works on Yemeni and Sudanese refugees in Jordan have found that the ties that a refugee forms with the host community, although typically weak, offers critical access to information and resources.⁵⁹ Relationships with Jordanians provided Sudanese and Yemeni communities with employment opportunities, access to loans and credit, as well as leniency from local authorities.⁶⁰ A number of interviews from the narrative collection identify the economic utility of bridging social networks. One Calcutta refugee from Dhaka relied on his colleagues in the bureaucracy for information about potential sources of income:⁶¹

My grandfather was an officer at the Survey of India. He spoke to some men from the Jailer's Office who said that his daughters could stitch the uniforms for the convicts in the jail. He took some loans from the government to buy two sewing machines.... It was easier because my grandfather had connections.⁶²

Interestingly, after leveraging his bureaucratic connections to secure a loan, the story continues that this grandfather shared the sewing machines with “all the girls living in the camp [so] they earned a living.”⁶³ The pooling of resources within the camp demonstrates an effective reorganization of resources where an individual with more social capital is able to disseminate information and employment opportunities through the camp network. The Mixed Migration Centre's study on social capital within refugee networks also found that income among Yemeni and Sudanese refugees was often redistributed to less well-off members of the community.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Johnston et al., “Social Networks in Refugee Response,” 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interviewee migrated from Malkhanagar, East Pakistan, to Kolkata, India. Interviewed by Sampurna Basu in Kolkata, India, on November 4, 2017.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Johnston et al., “Social Networks in Refugee Response,” 3.

Accounts collected from Walton Camp in Lahore, and from Lahore more broadly, reflect a uniquely synergistic relationship between locals and refugees. One newspaper in Lahore recounted “the outpouring of sympathy and charity from the Lahori public ... every half hour interval vehicles loaded with food would arrive [to the camps].”⁶⁵ Two interviewees, refugees in Lahore themselves, recalled women in their families cooking food to send to Walton after they had settled in the city.⁶⁶ Locals often opened their homes to support relief efforts, providing a substantial source of shelter for incoming refugees. One interviewee’s home hosted several extended family members from Peshawar, such that “the house had become like a camp.”⁶⁷ By August of 1947, private homes in Lahore offered shelter to more than 30,000 refugees, often housing between 10 and 30 migrants each.⁶⁸ Refugees who stayed in private homes, rather than government-administered camps, could to some extent avoid the sanitation, employment, and food troubles rampant within the camps.

For refugees en route to Pakistan, Muslim League camps emerged across Western India, with oral and archival accounts suggesting they were primarily volunteer-run:

I used to live in Kanpur and we traveled by train and came to Mumbai [Bombay] through Jhansi. In Mumbai [Bombay]. We stayed in the Muslim League’s refugee camps for 10 days. They used to provide us with food as well. The volunteers took care of us.⁶⁹

According to a newspaper, rations at such Muslim League camps were “being arranged by unnamed ‘relief societies’ and doctors [were] serving 60 patients/day free of cost,” providing critical acute relief.⁷⁰ In the face of immense resource and social service pressures upon local authorities, civic efforts transformed refugee outcomes as sources of shelter, nutrition, and security.

Relationships between the host and incoming refugee communities were critical to the formation of social and political identities

⁶⁵ M. D. Qureshi, “To the editor,” *Pakistan Times*, August 23, 1947.

⁶⁶ (a) Interviewee migrated from Ludhiana, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Shahrugh Burki in Lahore, Pakistan, on November 28, 2017; (b) Interviewee migrated from Malerkotla, India, to Lahore, Pakistan. Interviewed by Aswath Javed in Lahore, Pakistan, on April 28, 2018.

⁶⁷ Interviewee migrated from Peshawar, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Akanksha Jha in New Delhi, India, on February 25, 2018.

⁶⁸ *Pakistan Times*, August 14, 1947; “Editorial,” August 23, 1947.

⁶⁹ Interviewee moved from Kanpur, India, to Karachi, Pakistan. Interviewed by Nazahat Nadeem in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 14, 2018.

⁷⁰ *Pakistan Times*, August 3, 1947.

post-Independence.⁷¹ One interviewee who migrated from Lahore recollected the sympathy he received from the locals in Amritsar: "Once we migrated to Amritsar, we were treated just fine by the people there. Many of the people living in Amritsar were sympathetic to our plight as they too had relatives affected by the [P]artition."⁷²

As touched upon by the above interviewee, the intensity of the violence across the Punjab kindled widespread sympathy for Punjabi refugees in large northwestern cities on either side of the divide, extending from local officials to provincial authorities to the central administrations of India and Pakistan. This solidarity did not hold true for other regions. In her study on "Unwanted Refugees," Nandita Bhavnani argues that refugees from regions where the intensity of the violence was relatively lower than in the Punjab received less public and bureaucratic sympathy.⁷³ Provincial governments in Sindh, Bombay, Gujarat, Bengal, and the United Provinces (presently Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) expressed frustration at the influx of migrants and implemented various legislative measures to avoid the burden of rehabilitation.⁷⁴ However, social networks emerged as a way for refugees to navigate legislative and civil forms of exclusion. For example, in 1948, the provincial government of Bombay instituted the Bombay Refugees Act in response to an "unauthorized influx of refugees."⁷⁵ In 1949, the government published another notice delineating which refugees were eligible to receive shelter and other rehabilitative services:

Un-sponsored refugees coming to join their families in the Province will be allowed to join them. If such families are staying in camps, the refugees will be allowed to remain in the camps, provided no fresh accommodation is required by them. Those who have sufficient means in this Province to rehabilitate themselves will be admitted into this Province but will not be entitled to camp accommodation. All other refugees who do not fall within these categories, if they enter the Province, will be doing so at their own risk, and the

⁷¹ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, 55; Sarah Ansari, "Pakistan's 1951 Census: State-Building in Post-Partition Sindh," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 820–840; Nandita Bhavnani, "Unwanted Refugees: Sindhi Hindus in India, and Muhajirs in Sindh," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 790–804.

⁷² Interviewee migrated from Lahore, Pakistan, to a village near Amritsar, India. Interviewed by Aditya Menon in Noida, India, on February 20, 2018.

⁷³ Bhavnani, "Unwanted Refugees," 791.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ The Bombay Refugees Act, 1948, Act No. 22 of 1948.

Government will not be responsible for provision of shelter, relief, or rehabilitation benefits to them. [No. P 88 of January 18, 1949]⁷⁶

The notice limited the number of incoming refugees to those with families already staying in the province of Bombay, given that no new accommodations would be provided. This edict had the dual effect of excluding poorer, lower-caste refugees without the resources to “rehabilitate themselves.” Kinship ties emerged here as one of the only ways for incoming refugees to gain access to the city’s relief and rehabilitation facilities. Refugees arriving to Bombay without social capital in the form of financial resources or kinship ties were directed elsewhere—such was the experience of one interviewee whose family was diverted to Deolali Camp in Nashik, 166 kilometers away.⁷⁷

Interviewees from Bombay were inclined to note that the province’s host population tended to be unwelcoming. According to one interviewee, “locals in Mumbai [Bombay] were not very receptive” of incoming Sindhis.⁷⁸ Her account suggests that incoming refugees alternatively looked *within and between* migrant communities to rebuild social and kinship ties.⁷⁹ While her family was staying in Ulhasnagar, for instance, her sister got married at Sion Koliwada camp, located approximately 50 kilometers away in Bombay proper.⁸⁰ Another interviewee who grew up in Rajasthan reflected on the general lack of interaction between locals like her own family and the refugees⁸¹:

I remember my father telling me how the people who came to India were mostly from the Sindhi community. They were kept in camps by the government. But due to the prevailing atmosphere, it wasn’t considered appropriate to interact with them. Therefore, we don’t have much of an interactive experience with them.⁸²

The narrative collection echoes broader scholarship that often finds refugee communities clustered on the outskirts of larger cities.⁸³ For example, the migrant Sindhi community of Bombay generally lived in the eastern,

⁷⁶ Notice P 379 of March 11, 1949. Displaced Persons Not Refugees.

⁷⁷ Interviewee migrated from Hyderabad, Pakistan, to Bombay, India. Interviewed by Shourya Patel in Chembur, India, on February 5, 2018.

⁷⁸ Interviewee migrated from Hyderabad, Pakistan, to Baroda, India. Interviewed by Pedada Sai Kumar in Bombay, India, on February 4, 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interviewee did not migrate from Jaipur, India. Interviewed by Garima Sadh in Jaipur, India, on October 26, 2019.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, 57.

suburban townships of Thane and Ulhasnagar. Researchers studying migration and urban planning generally concur that concentrating in an area fosters “mutual economic and social support” among immigrant and refugee communities.⁸⁴ A study on spatial relations of Syrian refugees in Eastern Amman found that sociocultural drivers, such as the presence of Syrian families in the neighborhood, actually outweighed economic drivers in determining place of residence.⁸⁵ This finding particularly resonates with Sindhi refugees in Ulhasnagar, a number of whom had chosen to migrate to Bombay for the city’s economic prospects. However, in order to stay together as a community, they ended up staying in refugee camps far from the main city, which often precluded them from immediate access to some of the economic opportunities greater proximity to the city could provide.⁸⁶ According to one interviewee, Sindhis “used to cooperate amongst themselves” to distribute loans and construct houses at minimal prices.⁸⁷ This distance did not mitigate the pressure to assimilate—Bhavnani points out that the use of written Sindhi language and its Perso-Arabic script steeply declined, and interviewees mention that Sindhi was not taught in schools.⁸⁸ The lack of bridging social networks between refugees and host communities in Sindh, Bombay, and Bengal has been the subject of much post-Independence literature examining spatial formations of identity.⁸⁹

Thus, social networks within and between refugee communities, as well as with host populations, emerged to provide information and acute relief during the intermediate stops of an often multistage migration process. These networks offered significant economic utility, especially when they expanded to include neighbors in refugee settlements. Social networks bolstered access to government relief programs and could further determine access to adequate sanitation infrastructure, rations, or medical facilities. However, refugees without access to such resources often bore the brunt of poor relief infrastructure and grappled with uncertainty about where to go.

⁸⁴ Raed Salem Al-Tal and Hala Hesham Ahmad Ghanem, “Impact of the Syrian Crisis on the Socio-Spatial Transformation of Eastern Amman, Jordan,” *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 591–603.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Interviewee migrated from Karachi, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Pedada Sai Kumar in Bombay, India, on February 18, 2018.

⁸⁷ Interviewee migrated from Shikarpur, Pakistan, to Ulhasnagar, India. Interviewed by Aishwarya Lonkar in Bombay, India, on February 18, 2018.

⁸⁸ Bhavnani, “Unwanted Refugees,” 795.

⁸⁹ Chapter 8 further discusses the long-term impacts of refugee settlements on the geography and infrastructure of some of the big cities, including Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, and Karachi.

FINAL STAGES OF MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT

There remain gaps in our understanding of how the majority of people began to leave camps, why some stayed in camps, and what happened to sites of resettlement that fell out of, or always existed beyond, government jurisdiction. The previous sections have shown that social networks, both with local and between refugee communities, were critical determinants for the length of stay, health and safety, and economic well-being in camps. The narrative collection also demonstrates that there was a large discrepancy in the extent to which refugees could leverage resources embedded in their networks to facilitate the process of resettlement. Interviewee accounts regarding the final stages of the migration process clearly establish that social networks emerged as a powerful means of accessing humanitarian actors, and a close look at resettlement options provides insight toward how state provisions for rehabilitation interacted with social networks. This section attempts to identify the daunting challenges of resettlement and explore how bureaucratic ties and kinship ties possibly improved refugee outcomes as they left camps.

Refugees with relatively more social capital, especially those with family members in government service or who possessed significant pre-Partition land holdings, were increasingly allotted land or quarters by the government in their relatively immediate milieus:

He stayed there [at Kingsway] for around 1.5 years. The camp was very large and had thousands of people. Registrations happened in the camp and he was issued a certificate. There were schools in that camp, and he too studied there. After that, since his father was in railways, they were allotted a government quarter, and they left the camp.⁹⁰

On the other hand, thousands of displaced families who awaited resettlement for years were often subject to forced evictions, economic exclusion, or dispersal to remote areas, as discussed by Sarah Ansari, Udit Sen, and Debjani Sengupta.⁹¹ Met with such conditions, refugees' understandings of resettlement and rehabilitation quickly expanded beyond the acquisition of residential spaces. A December 1948 editorial published in the *Pakistan*

⁹⁰ Interviewee migrated from Lahore, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Deepita Raut in Delhi, India, on February 15, 2018.

⁹¹ Ansari, "Pakistan's 1951 Census"; Sen, Udit. "The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and History in the Making of Bengali Refugee Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2014): 37–76; Anandita Dasgupta, "Denial and Resistance, Sylheti Partition 'Refugees' in Assam," *Contemporary South Asia* 10, no. 3 (2001): 355. Anandita Dasgupta, "Denial and Resistance: Sylheti Partition 'Refugees' in Assam," *Contemporary South Asia* 10, no. 3 (November 2001): 343–360.

Times emphasized that sustainable resettlement for Sindh's refugees required bureaucratic services beyond property allotment, such as the creation of industrial training facilities.⁹²

The narrative collection similarly emphasizes that the distress and challenges associated with migrating persisted long after families acquired land or quarters, sometimes even with networks of affinity and bureaucracy. For example, as a government servant, one interviewee's husband was offered a plot in New Delhi's Srinivaspuri neighborhood. However, they continued paying off loans and interest on the land until 2014, almost 70 years after Independence.⁹³ Exploring the heterogeneity of resettlement processes represented in the oral stories finds that social networks played key roles in not only accessing government resources, but also in navigating the gaps in humanitarian services.

Kinship ties emerged as one of the most prominent determinants of how long people stayed at refugee camps as well as whether they had the capacity to leave. After facing violence from a Hindu mob in Jammu, one Muslim interviewee was separated from his family and sought shelter at Danyana refugee camp, near the city of Jammu, for five months.⁹⁴ The camp did not receive rations, precipitating a severe food shortage and widespread starvation. After staying at the camp for five months, a state-coordinated population exchange led him to reunite with his family in Sialkot:

We were told that a few Hindus will be sent to Amritsar and the same number of Muslims to Sialkot. "Exchange of Population" (Tabadla-e-Abadi). We were in Jammu and our family was in a village near Sialkot. [...] I was a kid by then, so it was dawn when I went there [Sialkot] and fortunately, found my mother in the first house I searched for. But mothers of the boys left behind [in Jammu] kept weeping and crying asking "Where is my Akram? Where is my son?"⁹⁵

The interviewee's account suggests that while local authorities were often unable to provide substantive relief in many places (often to poorer, lower-caste, religious or ethnic minorities),⁹⁶ the state did invest into reuniting

⁹² "Resettlement of Refugees," *Pakistan Times*, December 17, 1948, 6.

⁹³ Interviewee migrated from Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Shalvi Rastogi in Delhi, India, on February 8, 2018.

⁹⁴ Interviewee migrated from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, to Sialkot, Pakistan. Interviewed by Muhammad Affaq Lone in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, on February 5, 2018.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kaur, *Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement*, 12; Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 140.

families and preserving the kinship networks that would potentially reduce the burden of rehabilitation on the state.⁹⁷ For many refugees, camps offered an intermediate stop en route to relatives' homes. Such was the case for one interviewee whose family migrated from Barisal in East Pakistan to Jadavpur in West Bengal, stopping at Calcutta's Salt Lake camp for a day to acquire the ration card.⁹⁸ Her account demonstrates that while camps were the primary site through which refugees could access the state and its services, many migrants found that the camps offered very little rehabilitative utility. In other words, many interviewees preferred relying on their own social networks, rather than on the state, for help with resettlement.

In considering why and how some refugees left camps while others stayed, the question arises of what tangible benefits the camps did offer to refugees. After arriving in Delhi, one interviewee stayed in the Ghanta Ghar camp, which was predominantly populated by her original neighbors in Gallotiyani in Punjab, Pakistan. After 15–20 years' stay, the government finally allotted them community houses in New Delhi's Sarai Rohilla neighborhood:

We stayed in a refugee camp at Ghanta Ghar and lived there for around 15–20 years. In that refugee camp, most of the families were there from her neighborhood [in Gallotiyani, Pakistan]. Then, the government asked them to vacate the camp and allotted houses to them at Sarai Rohilla. In the camps, there was no arrangement for food or healthcare.⁹⁹

This interviewee's story identifies a neighborhood community that traveled together, stayed in the same camp for more than 15 years, and eventually resettled in the same locality. However, it also notes the extremely limited services available at the camp—authorities did not provide food, water, healthcare, or economic opportunity. In this case, the camp was not a source of rehabilitative services, but rather a space for maintaining the social networks useful for rebuilding community after migration. The social networks both born and preserved through refugee

⁹⁷ Ideas of kinship and belonging heavily influenced border crossings in the West. See Veena Das, "The Figure of the Abducted Woman: The Citizen as Sexed," in *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, 18–37 (Berkeley, MA: University of California Press, 2007). <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520939530-003>

⁹⁸ Interviewee migrated from Barisal, East Pakistan, to Calcutta, India. Interviewed by Aditi Saraogi in Kolkata, India, on December 28, 2017.

⁹⁹ Interviewee migrated from Gujranwala, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Harshita Girdhar in Delhi, India, on October 22, 2017.

camps establish camps as crucial nodes in post-Partition identity formation and social organization.

The narrative collection also describes many sites of unofficial settlement, as well as camps that evolved into larger colonies as years passed. Refugees often stayed at these sites for multiple decades or settled within them permanently. One interviewee reported living in Ulhasnagar's army barracks for approximately 30 years, where "living conditions were quite poor."¹⁰⁰ In the April of 1960, a resident of Ulhasnagar wrote to *The Times*, lamenting the lack of any local authorities to ensure safety:

There are repeated reports and complaints of lawlessness in Ulhasnagar. The police should put a stop to the attacks, burglaries, dacoities, stabbings, and murders which frequently take place here. The lights on the roads in Ulhasnagar are too few and too dim.¹⁰¹

A campsite turned permanent residence, the development of Ulhasnagar suggests that there was substantially less government oversight in refugee settlements moving into the latter half of the 1950s—by which point majority of the interviewees from middle- or upper middle-class backgrounds had been allocated property or leveraged resources in their social networks to facilitate resettlement. The narrative collection clearly establishes that poorer, less enfranchised refugees tended to stay in camps for much longer periods in deteriorating conditions. One Dalit interviewee's family shifted between camps in West Bengal for years after first migrating in the early 1950s:

By that time, the upper-caste and class Hindus who had migrated earlier in 1947, had settled more or less. Numerous new colonies had come up, lands been taken on forcefully by the migrants, vacancies in government jobs filled up, and the government had begun to be stable on its feet. But at the time of these lower-castes who had later migrated, the government shook itself of any responsibility and made no efforts to settle them. They were left in miserable conditions in the refugee camps.¹⁰²

Echoing the above interviewee's account, much of the Partition literature on the East focuses on how migrants could leverage kinship or economic ties to establish squatter settlements in or around Calcutta through the

¹⁰⁰ Interviewee migrated from Karachi, Pakistan, to Delhi, India. Interviewed by Pedada Sai Kumar in Bombay, India, on February 18, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Arjan B. Panjani, "Letter to the Editor," *Times of India*, April 23, 1960.

¹⁰² Interviewee migrated from Barisal, East Pakistan, to Bankura, India. Interviewed by Yashodhara Chowdhury in Kolkata, India, on December 26, 2017.

early 1950s.¹⁰³ This pattern of resettlement had the dual effect of creating a discursive dichotomy between such “self-reliant” refugees and those who required relief services from local authorities.¹⁰⁴ The central Indian government began to describe refugees living in camps as “childishly dependent on the Government support,” positioning rehabilitative services as more a charity effort than a question of rights.¹⁰⁵ Refugees themselves expressed anxiety over being “reduced to beggars who were living off government doles.”¹⁰⁶ In reality, these were likely refugees who lacked the kinds of social capital that tended to determine resettlement outcomes, such as property, bureaucratic connections, or business ties. This depiction of the roles that social networks played in facilitating the resettlement of refugees substantiates the argument that Partition reproduced, rather than transformed, existing social relations, especially along the caste-class lines.

CONCLUSION

This chapter draws on interviews and archival materials to identify the role social networks played in determining migration and resettlement outcomes after the Partition, contributing to a growing body of literature on refugees and social capital. Social networks were a central feature of the humanitarian response to the millions displaced by the subcontinent’s division. The analysis here identifies the key roles such networks played in the departure, intermediary, and resettlement phases of a multistage migration process. From the moment of departure, social networks emerged as the primary channel through which refugees accessed information about migration routes, often making collective decisions on when, how, and where to migrate. Upon arrival to their destination country, some refugees were met with huge civilian efforts to bolster government relief programs, whereas others found themselves alienated from the local communities. In their new polities, refugees continued to share information about economic opportunity, began to provide each

¹⁰³ Joya Chatterji “New Directions in Partition Studies,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 67 (2009): 213–220; Partha Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Rethinking Working-Class History,” in *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* edited by Dipesh Chakrabarty (Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁴ For more on conceptions of self-reliance among refugee populations, see Talbot, “Punjab Refugees’ Rehabilitation and the Indian State.”

¹⁰⁵ Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation*, 42; Sen, “The Myths Refugees Live By,” 39.

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee subject migrated from Malkhanagar, East Pakistan, to Calcutta, India. Interviewed by Sampurna Basu in Kolkata, India, on November 4, 2017.

other with loans or support each other's businesses, and occasionally pooled resources to enhance communal well-being. Critically, as migrants sought to cultivate kinship ties and economic ties within camps or unofficial settlements, we also saw that refugees often rebuilt their networks within pre-Partition class milieus. Consequently, poorer refugees often did not have the resources to participate in these mutual aid activities.

A close look into the resettlement phase highlights the fact that humanitarian actors, including the government, were dynamic participants in refugee social networks. Moreover, access to humanitarian actors was often contingent upon social capital—wealthier migrants, as well as those with bureaucratic ties, could reliably count on state agents to allocate them land or property within the first two to four years following the Partition. Others awaited resettlement directions into the late 1950s.¹⁰⁷ However, particularly in the Punjab region, kinship ties and family reunions played a huge role in facilitating resettlement. To a certain extent, the nascent governments of India and Pakistan demonstrated their understanding that efforts to preserve kinship networks could consequently reduce the burden of rehabilitation on the state.

The majority of these conclusions support the broader scholarship on social networks and refugee well-being, but they also offer unique insight into what the processes of repatriation, integration, and resettlement looked like before the establishment of global mandates on refugee protections, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR (est. 1956).¹⁰⁸ Whereas contemporary scholars on migration networks generally agree that refugees now “are primarily distinguished by their relationship to the state,”¹⁰⁹ interview accounts suggest that refugee identity in the Indian subcontinent after 1947 was driven by social and political relationships. In other words, social networks, especially kinship ties and bureaucratic ties, often governed the nature of the refugee–state encounter.

¹⁰⁷ Debjani Sengupta, “From Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi: Rehabilitation, Representation and the Partition of Bengal (1947),” *Social Semiotics* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 101–123.

¹⁰⁸ The UNHCR was created in 1950 to respond to the crises of World War II refugees and only expanded its scope beyond Europe after 1956. Its predecessor, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, operating from 1943 to 1947, concentrated its efforts on European refugees. The UNHCR mandate today oversees 57,959,702 refugees around the world according to a 2015 mid-year report.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy Hein, “Refugees, Immigrants, and the State,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 43–59.

From the early attempts to codify (and limit) refugee status in 1954¹¹⁰ to contemporary understandings of national belonging, the refugee question in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh continues to pose one of the subcontinent's most pressing challenges.¹¹¹ The narrative collection identifies a number of campsites that have continued to host refugee communities over the past 73 years, their spaces evolving alongside conceptions of refugee identity. One interviewee from Bihar migrated via train from Calcutta to East Pakistan's Bogra, where he stayed in Plastic House Camp for 71 years.¹¹² The site continues to operate as a refugee camp for Bangladesh's Bihari refugees, where provisions for rehabilitation are slim according to a 2006 report by Refugee International.¹¹³ Similarly, Karachi's Quaidabad neighborhood, once an unofficial site of settlement for the Muhajir community, began to host Afghan refugees in the 1980s, eventually becoming a predominantly Pashtun settlement.¹¹⁴

By taking a closer look at social networks and given the class/survivor bias of the narrative collection, this chapter attempts to answer the question of who had access to humanitarian actors and who was left behind during the 1947 Partition. The well-being of refugees often depended on their ability to harness kinship or professional ties for assistance, effectively leaving refugees from backgrounds of less social capital with more limited protections. As a result, poorer, less-enfranchised refugees tended to stay in camps or unofficial settlements in squalid conditions for much longer periods and were forced to grapple with poor, almost non-existent rehabilitative services well into the 1960s. Shedding light on the ways that pre-Partition capital accumulation affected refugee outcomes challenges state narratives that those who relied and/or continue to rely on state support are freeloaders relying on charity.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Act No. 44 of 1954, Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act, 1954. The act limits the definition of "displaced persons" eligible for rehabilitation services to those fleeing "civil disturbances," excluding migrants categorized as migrating due to "economic causes."

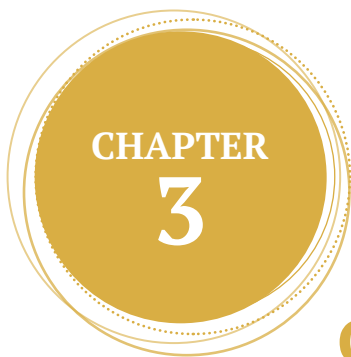
¹¹¹ South Asia is now home to over 2.5 million refugees (75,927 in Afghanistan, 932,209 in Bangladesh, 197,122 in India, 21,467 in Nepal, 1,393,132 in Pakistan, and 820 in Sri Lanka) according to Nafees Ahmad, "Options for Protecting Refugees in South Asia," <https://harvardilj.org/2019/09/options-for-protecting-refugees-in-south-asia/>

¹¹² Interviewee migrated from Sitamarhi, India, to Bogra, East Pakistan. Interviewed by Mohammad Waiz Alam Saad in Bogra, East Pakistan, on January 7, 2018.

¹¹³ Refugees International, Bangladesh: "Stateless Biharis Grasp for a Resolution and Their Rights," March 23, 2006.

¹¹⁴ Laurent Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (New Delhi: Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2014).

¹¹⁵ For more on this subject, see Sen, "The Myths Refugees Live By."



How Women Negotiated Gendered Relief and Rehabilitation in Post-Partition West Bengal

Rimple Mehta*

INTRODUCTION

In 1943–1944, West Bengal experienced a famine¹ and a post-war inflow of refugees from Myanmar.² In 1947, still reeling from a crippled economy and changing social fabric, the state of West Bengal had, with little help from the Indian central government, to draw up a relief and rehabilitation plan for the Partition refugees from East Pakistan. The West Bengal

*I thank Mr Deepak Bhattacharya, former Kanungo with the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, and ex-General Secretary, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Employee's Association, for providing access to his personal archive of documents and reports on post-Partition rehabilitation work. Mr Bhattacharya also provided valuable insights and information on the refugee movement in West Bengal under the leadership of the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC). At present, he is the Organizational Secretary of the UCRC. I also extend my gratitude to Ms Debamitra Talukdar, Librarian, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, for assisting me with access to the Ashoka Gupta files housed in the School library.

¹Paul Robert Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943–44* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

²Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: The Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972).

state, however, received much support from civil society organizations, philanthropic individuals, and social workers.

In this context of refugee migrations to West Bengal after the 1947 Partition of British India, this chapter discusses the position of displaced refugee women from East Pakistan in camps and *jabardakhal* colonies or squatters' colonies³ in West Bengal. The experience of women during the Partition of Northwest India (particularly the Punjab), their abductions and exchanges across religious groups, and their stories of horror linked to the "honor" of the family, state, and society have all been extensively documented.⁴ The refugee women in India's eastern region, that is, West Bengal, had to contend with not just the triad of the patriarchal family, state, and society, but also with the lack of adequate attention from the central government of India toward the problems of the refugees in the east.⁵ The tussle between the central government and Government of West Bengal over resources had a deplorable effect on the lives of the refugees.⁶ In this context, the support and encouragement of social workers such as Ashoka Gupta, Bina Das, and Renuka Ray (social worker turned politician), as well as organizations such as the All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

³ Refugee colonies which had come up in and near Calcutta on the land of private owners, neither through purchase or negotiation, nor acquired by the government and allotted to refugees (the procedure followed for allotment of land under certain schemes). Refugees occupied these plots of land that belonged to others, and built permanent and semi-permanent structures with the intention of staying there permanently (see Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, *Handbook of Refugee Rehabilitation*, Part I [Kolkata: Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, 1954], 36). Between 1959 and 1961, those in refugee camps in West Bengal were served notices to be resettled in Dandakaranya. Some who did not want to leave West Bengal continued to stay in camps there despite the government of West Bengal pulling back basic amenities such as water supply and electricity. They were eventually turned into squatter settlements self-supported by the refugee population known as squats on ex-camp sites (Uditi Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 168–170).

⁴ See Urvashi Butalia, "Abducted and Widowed Women: Questions of Sexuality and Citizenship during Partition," in *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, ed. M. Thapan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998); Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

⁵ There has been some scholarly work on the experiences of dislocation and struggles for livelihood and shelter faced by refugee women in the eastern region, as well as on the cultural imagination of displaced refugee women in West Bengal. See Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Kolkata: Stree, 2003); Paulomi Chakraborty, *The Refugee Woman: Partition of Bengal, Gender, and the Political* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶ Prafulla Kumar Chakrabarti, in his book *The Marginal Men*, refers to the discriminatory attitude of the government of India toward the refugees in the East and attributes it to the geographical proximity between the West and Delhi, as well as the involvement of Punjab in the defense sector, which may have prompted action from the Government of India.

and the All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU), among many others, provided a beacon of hope for refugee women in the eastern region.

The refugee women did not fit into a uniform category and, consequently, did not receive the same treatment from the government of West Bengal. There was a group of women in refugee camps that were designated as the "unattached" refugee women (those without any able-bodied adult male family member), and they were perceived as being in the category of "permanent liability" (PL),⁷ with the state taking on the role of their guardianship. In contrast, the refugee women in the squatter colonies were on their own and either did not opt for any state support or were left out of the category of refugees eligible for resettlement. This chapter examines the histories and experiences of these refugee women in different camps and squatter colonies in West Bengal, relying on the archival papers of Ashoka Gupta and the writings of Renuka Ray as well as on narratives of refugee women whom I have interviewed. The efforts of the female social workers in the rehabilitation of refugees, as now documented, provide valuable insight into the histories of these women refugees, whose stories might otherwise have been lost forever.

This chapter will also examine the roles of Ashoka Gupta and Renuka Ray as social workers and middle-class Bengali women, also known as *bhadramahila*, in the post-Partition rehabilitation process⁸ and how their efforts were based on their own preoccupations and social location. The chapter thus discusses both women beneficiaries and women service providers to explore how the experiences of the members of each category were embedded in gendered tropes of confinement, either within the camp or the broader societal and state context. Based on the official classification of refugee women, societal perceptions of the morality of refugee women, and the role played by women service providers in post-Partition relief and rehabilitation work, these women can be broadly classified as

⁷The "PL" category, as discussed later in the chapter, included "unattached" women, families with old and/or disabled males, children dependent on either of these groups, and orphans.

⁸There are a number of literary works written in Bengali that look at issues of refugees and rehabilitation through the lens of fiction, such as Narayan Sanyal's *Aranya Dandak* (*The Forest Dandak*, 1961) and *Bakultala P. L. Camp* (*The P.L. Camp of Bakultala*, 1960), Amiyabhushan Majumdar's *Nirbaash*, Shaktipada Rajguru's *Dandak theke Marichjapi* (*From Dandak to Marichjapi*, written in 1980–1981), and Dulalendu Chattopadhyay's *Ora Ajo Udvastu* (*They Are Still Refugees*, 1983). A discussion of some of these works can be found in Debjani Sengupta's *The Partition of Bengal*. There are a number of anthologies as well, based on testimonies and interviews, such as Sandip Bandyopadhyay's *Deshbhag: Smriti O Swatta* (*Partition: Memories and Selves*), Semonti Ghosh (ed.) *Deshbhag: Smriti O Stobdota* (*Partition: Memories and Silences*), Madhumoy Paul (ed.) *Deshbhag: Binash O Binirman* (*Partition: Destruction and Reconstruction*), Hiranmay Bandyopadhyay's *Udvastu*.

“unattached,” “wayward,” and “free,” respectively, with varying degrees of overlap.

MIGRATION INTO WEST BENGAL

The exodus of minorities from East Pakistan to West Bengal began in October 1946 after the riots in the districts of Noakhali and Tipperah.⁹ At the dawn of Partition, in August 1947, India and West Pakistan saw rapid movements of populations across their shared border, whereas the exodus from East Pakistan only gradually gained momentum. As a result of fresh disturbances in Hyderabad, India, in September 1948,¹⁰ there was a wave of migration from East Pakistan into West Bengal.¹¹ In 1950, following the riots in Khulna, East Pakistan,¹² a large percentage of the migrants into India came from educated middle and lower middle classes, as well as the prosperous trading class. During 1951, 140,000 people came to India from East Pakistan following the agitation in Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. After the introduction of the passport and visa system for travel between India and Pakistan in 1952, about 30,000 people came to India in a fortnight. As of October 31, 1952, the total population of West Bengal was 24,810,308, of which 2,585,974 were refugees.¹³

In 1955, when the debate over the imposed use of Urdu in East Pakistan ensued, the monthly average of out-migration to India rose to 21,000. In 1956, with Pakistan adopting the Islamic Constitution, as many as

⁹ Statement of the Government of West Bengal in the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department on the exodus of the minorities of East Pakistan into India, File No. 15/Adm 61/65, dated 1965.

¹⁰ After India's independence from the British, the princely state of Hyderabad insisted on remaining independent. It refused to surrender to the sovereignty of the new democratic state of India. While the Indian state was reluctant to allow a Muslim-led state to exist in the heart of India, the Razakars, the armed wing of Hyderabad's most powerful Muslim political party, were terrorizing the Hindus in the area. On this pretext, the Indian Army invaded Hyderabad in September 1948. The violence and exploitation that ensued had a trickle effect on the insecurities of the Hindu minorities in East Pakistan. See Sunil Purushotham, "Internal Violence: The 'Police Action' in Hyderabad," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 2 (April 2015): 435–466.

¹¹ Statement of the Government of West Bengal in the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department on the exodus of the minorities of East Pakistan into India, File No. 15/Adm 61/65, dated 1965.

¹² The persecution of minorities in Khulna in 1949 and other districts in East Pakistan, particularly Bakerganj in February 1950, considerably increased the influx of refugees into West Bengal (ibid.).

¹³ Government of West Bengal, *Millions Came from Eastern Pakistan, Report on How They Live Again* (Director of Publicity: Government of West Bengal, 1954).

88,000 people crossed into West Bengal.¹⁴ It is estimated that by May 1957, there were about 4 million people who had migrated from East Pakistan to India.¹⁵

While the influx from East Pakistan continued through this time, the absence of a proportionate efflux of refugees from West Bengal to other states¹⁶ created great pressure on the economy of West Bengal.¹⁷ The next big population flows into West Bengal were in 1964, after the Khulna riots,¹⁸ and in 1971, at the time of the Bangladesh War of Liberation. The Government of West Bengal reported 6 million refugees in the 1971 census figures presented to the Planning Commission in 1974.¹⁹

Despite the worsening economic condition of West Bengal and the inability of the state to handle the inflow of refugees (long after the refugee relief programs in Punjab and other regions along the western border of the country were closed down), the Government of India did not provide a concerted financial or administrative effort to ease the problems in the East.²⁰ The migration from West Pakistan into India was essentially over by the end of 1948; in 1959, the Central Ministry of Rehabilitation reported to the Parliament's Estimates Committee that the rehabilitation

¹⁴ Statement of the Government of West Bengal in the Refugee Rehabilitation Department on the exodus of the minorities of East Pakistan into India, File No. 15/Adm 61/65, dated 1965, presented by the "Commission to enquire into the exodus of the minorities of East Pakistan into India."

¹⁵ Government of India, Rehabilitation Retrospect (Ministry of Rehabilitation: Government of India, 1957).

¹⁶ Official conservative estimates suggest that between 1946 and 1964, just under 5 million Hindu refugees came from East Pakistan to the states of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, and in the same time period, about a million and a half Muslims left West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura to go to East Pakistan. See Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105–106.

¹⁷ Government of India, Rehabilitation Retrospect.

¹⁸ The 1964 Khulna riots refer to the persecution of Bengali Hindus in East Pakistan in response to the alleged theft of what was believed to be the Prophet's hair from the Hazratbal shrine in Jammu and Kashmir, India.

¹⁹ Government of West Bengal, *Manual of Instructions for the Guidance of Officers of the Refugee and Rehabilitation Department*, Part II (Districts) (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1998).

²⁰ According to Renuka Ray (*My Reminiscences: Social Development during the Gandhian Era and After* [New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1982], 169), the Ministry of Rehabilitation of Government of India spent INR 1,533.89 million on displaced persons from West Pakistan and INR 702.9 million on displaced persons from East Pakistan in 1954–1955. The expenditure categories included grants, loans, housing, establishments, etc. Another estimate suggests that up to December 1971, INR 770 million was spent on the rehabilitation of the refugees from East Pakistan living in West Bengal, while INR 1150 million was spent on the rehabilitation of those who had migrated from West Pakistan (Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, *A Master Plan for Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal* [Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1972]).

of the West Pakistan refugees was nearly complete and only “residuary work” remained.²¹

In contrast, despite the consistent influx of refugees and escalating problems in West Bengal, it was only in 1955 that the Government of India took cognizance of the issue of displaced persons from East Pakistan as a “residuary problem” and offered INR 220 million to the West Bengal government in response to its demand for INR 390 million.²² In this context of what was perceived as insufficient support to the West Bengal government, the refugees themselves who came to West Bengal from East Pakistan did not get any compensation for the property they left behind, as it was assumed that they technically still had a right to the properties under the terms of the 1950 Liaquat–Nehru Pact.²³

REFUGEES IN WEST BENGAL

There were different categories of refugees who arrived in West Bengal over different periods of time. There were some who did not require government support for food and shelter. At the border, they were provided with slips that confirmed their refugee status so that they might seek help from other facilities.²⁴ A second category constituted those who were in dire need of food and shelter but decided to claim their rights by setting up squatter colonies, instead of opting for government support or those who were not eligible for resettlement. Those who were completely dependent on the government and were identified as eligible for resettlement were given white interception slips and sent to one of the following types of camps: relief/transit camps, worksite camps, colony camps,²⁵

²¹ Government of West Bengal, *A Master for Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal* (Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department: Government of West Bengal, 1972).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Under the Liaquat–Nehru Pact of 1950, refugees in India and Pakistan were allowed to return to dispose of their properties, abducted women and looted property were to be returned, forced conversions were unrecognized, and minorities were assured of their rights.

²⁴ Government of West Bengal, *Millions Came from Eastern Pakistan*.

²⁵ The relief/transit camps did not have facilities for work. Worksite camps were established to keep able-bodied men engaged in useful work for the development of the area where they were supposed to be rehabilitated. The nature of work at these worksites included road construction, canal cultivation, embankment work, and development work. Colony camps were rehabilitation sites for the purpose of rehabilitating the refugees through the process of providing advance loans, etc. Typically, a colony camp was to last no more than three months, as that was the amount of time needed for the distribution of loans and building a house. For details see, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, *Handbook of Refugee Rehabilitation Part I*.

PL institutions (also in the nature of camps),²⁶ and women's camps.²⁷ The refugees who were included in the PL category were "unattached" women, families with old and/or disabled males, children dependent on either of these groups, and orphans.²⁸ However, the PL institutions housed only refugee families of the PL category, and "unattached" women were accommodated in women's camps. The division and delineation of the different categories of camps and homes was based on the "ability" of the individual to perform certain kinds of labor and was distinctly gendered. The 1954 report, *Millions Came from Eastern Pakistan, Report on How They Live Again*,²⁹ published by the Director of Publicity, Government of West Bengal, identified 31,517 persons as "PL."

From about July 1954, the flow of refugees into West Bengal came from two sources: one from East Pakistan and the other from the neighboring states of Bihar and Odisha. A number of agriculturist refugees, who had been resettled in the neighboring states, started returning to West Bengal because they claimed that they could not adjust to the climatic conditions in the places where they had been resettled. They were habituated to West Bengal and complained that they could not live and cultivate in a land they did not know.³⁰ They merged with the urban poor and destitute of the city of Kolkata. The more enterprising among them found some odd jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities for survival, or set up *jobardakhals* or

²⁶ At a meeting of the Central Advisory Committee held in Calcutta on June 27, 1956, it was decided that the PL camps would thereafter be referred to as "homes and infirmaries." However, it was felt that unless all the facilities that were admissible to the residents of homes and infirmaries were made available to the residents of the existing PL camps, there was no point in renaming them as homes and infirmaries. It was, therefore, recommended that till the time the PL camps were reorganized they would be referred to as "camps for unattached displaced women or/and old and infirm displaced persons" (Minutes of the Meeting of the Central Advisory Committee held in Calcutta on June 27, 1956; Ashoka Gupta Papers File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University). In this chapter, PL camps and homes have been used interchangeably.

²⁷ Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, Handbook of Refugee Rehabilitation Part I.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Government of West Bengal, *Millions Came from Eastern Pakistan*.

³⁰ This group was largely comprised of Namasudras (who belonged to the lower caste) who owned and survived on small landholdings in East Pakistan. When they migrated to India, they were looking for a similar source of livelihood, as they did not have other skills, education, or family contact through which they could establish themselves in West Bengal. When the pressure of refugees came to bear its burden on Bengal's economy, the refugees were kept in transit camps and sent to different parts of the country. A large number of them were sent to Dandakaranya. They were unable to settle in this area. It was a plateau region that was dry and arid, completely removed from the cultural, physical, and emotional space they were used to. For further details, see A. Jalais, "Dwelling on Morichjhapi: When Tigers Become 'Citizens' and refugees 'Tigerfood'," *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 23, 2005), pp. 1757–1762; J. Sen, "Reconstructing Marichjhapi: From Margins and Memories of Migrant Lives" in Urvashi Butalia, ed., *Partition: The Long Shadow* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015).

squatters' colonies. A statement, "Rehabilitation of Camp Refugees," issued by Dr B. C. Roy, then chief minister of West Bengal, on October 13, 1958, concluded by saying:

The desire of a Bengalee [Bengali] to live in West Bengal is appreciated and is understandable, but economic necessity does and should outweigh most consideration. What is necessary is that displaced persons who have left their hearths and homes should settle down contentedly and happily with an adequate living wherever they are.³¹

Their representation in the media at that time is worth noting. In the October 1954 edition of the *Economic Weekly*,³² it was reported:

These deserters, as they are officially called, from the rehabilitator camps of the neighbouring states pose problems, which are different from those of the incoming refugee from East Bengal [East Pakistan]. They do not crowd around Sealdah [station]. They start squatters' colonies in Calcutta's streets. They naturally cluster around Auckland House, the Alipore headquarters of Government's rehabilitation department. They ask for fresh loans. But Government takes them back again to some rehabilitation centres within the State.

The article further went on to compare the refugees from East Pakistan with those from West Pakistan and portrayed the latter as being more adaptable to the jobs and living conditions they were offered in different parts of India.

There were also comparisons made between the women refugees of the Eastern and Western borders. In an undated (approximately 1954–1955) official document,³³ it is stated that the psychological differences between the refugee women of East Pakistan and those of the West should not be neglected. Further, it assumed that the women from East Pakistan had been living in a joint-family system and had never before had to earn their living. They were considered incapable of earning their living by engaging in small businesses of their own. East Pakistani refugee women were then divided³⁴ into two categories: (a) women who could become employable through some trades such as weaving, tailoring, embroidery, and confectionary and (b) women who could undertake a course of education or

³¹ "Rehabilitation of Camp Refugees," WBGp-58/9-6234R-2M.

³² *Economic & Political Weekly*, "East Bengal Refugees," *Economic & Political Weekly* 6, no. 43–44 (October 1954): 173–176.

³³ Ashoka Gupta Papers File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

³⁴ The undated (approximately 1954–1955) document, while dividing the East Pakistani refugee women into two categories, made a reference to the Meher Khanna Committee Report. This indicates that the division was made for purposes of official classification. Ashoka Gupta Papers File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

training as nurses, midwives, teachers, etc., and become employed after that. The distinction between the refugees in the East and the West in discussions and writings of the time and the derogatory representation of the former negatively impacted the everyday lives of the women refugees in the eastern region of India.

THE “UNATTACHED” PL: THE STATE AS THE “GUARDIAN”

In his budget speech for 2016, the minister-in-charge of the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation (RR&R) Department, Government of West Bengal, stated that there were 436 refugees residing in the eight camps and homes³⁵ maintained by the RR&R Department in that year. He further stated that most of the refugees residing in these camps and homes were infirm and that they received a monthly cash dole of INR 1,000 (approximately \$14) each. He proposed raising the cash dole amount to INR 2,000. Interviews with some of these women still residing in the “PL” camps and women’s homes confirmed their discontent with regard to the dole amount and their living conditions. Most of these women were over 80 years of age and had spent their entire lives in these camps and homes. They complained that they barely received their rations on time, and what they did receive was insufficient to sustain them till the next stock arrived. The same was true for the dole amount, which by no stretch of the imagination is enough for survival. To understand the present context, it is important to trace the history of these camps.

Immediately after the Partition, in the rush to make space for the refugees,³⁶ vacant military structures in West Bengal (left behind after World War II) were utilized in some locales, and in some others, on an emergency basis, tents were put up or sheds of a very temporary nature were constructed as relief camps, such as Cooper’s Camp.³⁷ The sheds were deplorably dilapidated, and thus the living conditions of most of the residents were far from satisfactory. Arrangements for thorough and

³⁵ Out of the eight camps and homes, four were women’s homes, three were PL camps, and one was an amalgamated home.

³⁶ Between 1947 and February 1971, there were 4,013,000 refugees who migrated from East Bengal to India. (Department of Rehabilitation, *Statistical Information on the Influx of Refugees into India and Their Repatriation to Bangladesh till 31st December 1971*, Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, 1972). Another estimate suggests that INR 4.117 million persons migrated up to March 31, 1958, and another 1.114 million migrated between 1964 and March 25, 1971 (Department of Rehabilitation, *Report of the Working Group on the Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal*, Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, 1976).

³⁷ There were several transit relief camps in West Bengal. Dhubulia camp and Cooper’s Camp constitute the largest and oldest camps in West Bengal. The Government of India set up the former in 1950 and the Government of West Bengal set up the latter in 1951.

quick repair of the existing sheds and construction of family-based separate units were immediately necessary to accommodate the “permanent and long-term liability” families and to remedy the overcrowding in the existing homes.

The PL camps marked a shift in the family pattern; they were a marker of the break-up of the traditional joint family system.³⁸ The pattern that occurred was that the “nucleus” of the family—typically, a son and his wife—stayed together with the parents in the “regular” camps, but an unmarried sister or widowed aunt, who would have typically stayed in the same house, would be sent to another camp. Widows and women separated from their long-untraced husbands,³⁹ along with minor children, were referred to as “unattached” and were accommodated in women’s homes started under the Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Government of West Bengal. The number of “unattached” families admitted to women’s homes up through the end of June 1957 was 10,364, consisting of 25,830 people.⁴⁰

In women’s homes with families headed by “unattached” women, when a son attained the age of 18, the family was screened out of rehabilitation, irrespective of his ability to earn and maintain a family, which often consisted of minor brothers and sisters, thus reflecting that the onus of livelihood was on the “male” adult members of the family. In the case of orphan boys in children’s homes, efforts were made to provide them with some vocational and technical education in order to enable them to become independent. Problems arose when these young men were unable to get gainful employment immediately after successful completion of training; as orphans, they could not be removed from children’s homes, but they could not also continue to live there after having reached

³⁸ The joint family system in India usually comprises of many generations living together and bound by a common relationship.

³⁹ There is little evidence to suggest why the husbands of these women went untraced for so long. Extrapolations based on other available evidence suggest that these could be the possible reasons for their long separation from their husbands: (a) the women and children were sent to India before the men decided to migrate; (b) they lost contact during the process of migration; or (c) the women were deserted by their husbands.

⁴⁰ Resettlement of these families was taken up through one or more of the following methods: (a) rehabilitation through land and loan to families declared rehabilitable (*sic*: fit for rehabilitation); (b) rehabilitation by reuniting families to the husbands or relatives who had remained untraced for a long period of time; (c) rehabilitation through training and small trade loans; (d) rehabilitation through employment by imparting vocational, professional, and technical training; and (e) rehabilitation of young girls through marriage. These points have been listed out in a six-page document in File 11 of the Ashoka Gupta Papers, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University. It indicates that these were the classifications made by the Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Government of West Bengal. The patriarchal nature of this classification is reflective of the position of the Government of West Bengal toward refugee women. The methods proposed for rehabilitation such as “restoring” them to their husbands or by way of marriage, assumed the women’s dependence on a man and infantilized them.

18 years of age.⁴¹ The orphan girls were conspicuous in their absence in these discussions.

The paucity of resources made the running of the PL camps and homes difficult. The superintendents of the homes and camps had no authority to ensure that they would receive the relief materials they had requested.⁴²

Comparison of PL-Related Camps and Homes in Punjab and West Bengal

In the early 1950s, Ashoka Gupta and other social workers insisted that the government take stock of the obvious inequalities in the rehabilitation efforts and schemes between the two border regions. In response, the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, set up a committee for rehabilitation for West Bengal, just as it had done for Punjab.⁴³ The committee was named the “Committee for the Resettlement of the East Bengal Refugees” and was set up under the leadership of Minister Mehr Chand Khanna.⁴⁴

The committee surveyed the camps and homes to see what further steps were required to be taken. A subset of this committee concerned itself with the issues of PL.⁴⁵ Under this committee, in 1955, a subcommittee was set up for a tour of homes and camps in Indian Punjab to understand the inequalities in the process of rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees between West Bengal and Punjab.⁴⁶ The Union Minister for Rehabilitation invited the subcommittee to visit homes and training centers for displaced persons located in Dehradun, Jullundur, Hoshiarpur, Rajpura, and Delhi.⁴⁷ The membership of the subcommittee was composed of non-official, well-known women social workers such as Ashoka Gupta, Bina Das, Sheila Davar, Sudha Sen, and Amar Kumari Varma, along with Suniti Pakrashi (Deputy Director of the Women’s Cell, Government of

⁴¹ Ashoka Gupta Papers File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁴² Ashoka Gupta, *In the Path of Service* (Kolkata: Stree, 2008).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The reference to this committee was made in Ashoka Gupta’s autobiography. The exact date of the establishment of this committee has not been stated there. It may, however, be assumed that it was set up in the early 1950s.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The proposal for the social workers of West Bengal to pay a visit to the institutions of rehabilitation in West India was placed at the Social Workers’ Conference held under the auspices of the Ministry of Rehabilitation in January 1955 (Letter to Ashoka Gupta dated March 2, 1955, D.O. No. 216 (4) S.D., sent by West Bengal Secretariat, RR&R Department, Calcutta, available in the Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 7, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University).

⁴⁷ Letter to Ashoka Gupta dated March 10, 1955, D.O. No. 14 (3)/55 RSM, Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 12, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

West Bengal) and Bikul Sen (Rehabilitation Officer, Training of Women, Government of West Bengal).

They visited various homes and work centers in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Patiala and East Punjab States Union, and Delhi. The subcommittee's report, titled *East Is East, West Is West*,⁴⁸ pointed out the gross inequalities between financial assistance provided by the central ministry of rehabilitation for refugees in Punjab and West Bengal. For example, it was noted that in Gandhi Vanita Ashram, Jullundur, a home for "unattached" women and their dependents, there was a middle school where education was free and reading and writing materials were provided. There were adult literacy classes for the grown-ups and for the children who had outgrown the education provided in the home and were given a stipend and opportunities to study in institutes of higher education outside. There was a training-cum-production center for the grown-ups within the home itself, and a number of women were also sent to outside institutes for training as nurses, *dais* (nannies), and midwives. Nurseries and crèches were set up to enable the mothers to go out to work.

In the PL homes and women's camps in West Bengal, very few such support systems existed. The spaces were not conducive for the refugees to stay. Refugees in the state were allotted two mats per three families or a blanket that would be shared by three persons. No regular work center was set up to enable the refugees to learn and earn some form of income. Even when some work centers or training centers were established, it was for a short period only and no wages were paid for the goods produced by the participants after the training was completed. There were no creches for the children of the women who were undergoing training. In the report,⁴⁹ the committee stated:

No woman is allowed to go and work in the adjoining city or village even if she is willing. We have seen a number of women in the PL camps engaged in *bidi* or paper-bag making but they do it secretly because they are afraid of their doles getting cut.

It is evident from the above quote that "unattached" women were considered to be "complete PLs"; they were not allowed to work as it was assumed that the state did take care of all their needs.

While in Punjab there were schools for children of all ages within the camps, there was no nursery, pre-basic education, or middle school in the

⁴⁸ Ashoka Gupta, Amar Kumari Varma, Sudha Sen, Bina Das, and Sheila Davar, *East Is East, West Is West*, 1955, <https://www.india-seminar.com/2002/510/510%20ashoka%20gupta.htm> (accessed on May 17, 2022).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

PL camps and homes in West Bengal. Children were given the opportunity to study outside only if the school was in the home or camp's neighborhood.⁵⁰ Boys and girls were kept in separate camps. Since there were no facilities for children in the camps, the boys were sent to the boys' home set up by the Ramakrishna Mission, and girls were to be sent to Ananda Ashram or the Nari Seva Sangha.⁵¹ In reality, most of the girls remained behind with their mothers. This resulted in the fragmentation of the refugee family, and often there were cases where the mother did not recognize her son as he had grown up away from her. In light of this situation, the social workers began organizing classes for the education of the children in the camps. Organizations such as AIWC and ABWU formed groups and conducted educational classes in various camps. There were separate classes for older people and children. The state government provided transportation for the social workers, but all the other expenses, such as those for the books and materials, were borne by the organizations.⁵²

At a Central Advisory Committee⁵³ meeting on January 10, 1957, a scheme on "domestic service and attendance" for both men and women residing in homes and infirmaries across India was proposed. This scheme was supported by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India. Widows between 25 and 45 years of age were especially asked to take up this training. Upon completion of the training, trainees were placed in top tier hotels and restaurants and were later given certificates specifying the special fields covered during their apprenticeship. Young "able-bodied" women with some education were advised to take up training as nurses and *bal sevikas* (young women engaged in community welfare).⁵⁴ These

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The state governments often entered into an agreement with private organizations to run the homes and infirmaries. This was further encouraged in the "Recommendations of the Central Advisory Board: Reorganization of the Homes/Infirmaries for Displaced Persons Classes as the Aged, Infirm, Unattached Women, Their Dependents and Orphans" dated August 18–20, 1952, No. RHAW-97(1)/52 (available in Ashoka Gupta File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University). The Board further encouraged the state governments to seek the assistance of public-spirited non-officials to run homes/infirmaries run by the government. These homes were set up by faith-based organizations or social workers.

⁵² Gupta et al., *East Is East*.

⁵³ In response to the Social Workers' Conference held on the January 11, 12, and 15, 1955, the Government of India decided to convene a Central Advisory Committee to look into and make recommendations on matters of homes and infirmaries for displaced persons from East Pakistan. In particular, the committee was charged with investigating the following: scale of rations, clothing and cash doles to be given to the residents of homes and infirmaries, strength and location of homes and infirmaries, policy relating to new admissions into homes and infirmaries, amenities to be provided in the homes and infirmaries, etc.

⁵⁴ Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 9, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

training programs were often designed based on the traditional gender division of labor, which mandated certain types of training for women.

While the lack of funding from the central government was one side of the coin, the paternalistic approach of the state of West Bengal was also evident in some of these practices and programs, reflecting a complex disregard of refugee women's needs. Although there were tensions between the center and the state over the allocation of funds, even well-intentioned efforts made from both ends had adverse implications on the lives of refugee women.

While this section has focused on the relative deprivations of the "unattached" refugee women in West Bengal, it is important to note that the conditions of refugee women in the divided Punjab were also difficult. The *East Is East, West Is West* and other such reports of the time have focused on the differences in the conditions of refugees in Punjab and West Bengal. Renuka Ray and Ashoka Gupta have made specific references to the disparity between the East and West in their memoirs and official documents. The tussle between the central and the state government in West Bengal toward rehabilitation programs in the East has limited the discussions to these issues rather than paving the way for a more nuanced discussion on gender and the practices of rehabilitation throughout India after the Partition.

The gendered notions of women's role in society as caregivers and dependents on their male counterparts were replicated in the policies and programs designed for the refugee women. The policies failed to see them in their own right and programs for their rehabilitation were geared toward making them further dependent on the state or a male counterpart by getting them married.

Rehabilitation through Marriage

Marriage played a very important role in the state's plan for the rehabilitation of refugee women. In a letter from the Deputy Director, Women's Resettlement, Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Government of India, Calcutta, to Ashoka Gupta dated May 23, 1955,⁵⁵ with reference to a particular case of 10 women, it was stated:

It is realised that whatever might be done by Govt. for rehabilitation of ten unattached displaced women, the final and ultimate

⁵⁵ Letter from the Deputy Director, Women's Resettlement, Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Government of India, Calcutta to Ashoka Gupta dated May 23, 1955 (Memo No. 2848 (4) W/R. Misc./G-64/55).

rehabilitation of the young refugee girls cannot be achieved unless they have settled peacefully in some family. So it is decided by Hon'ble Minister in the conference on 9.5.55 that every effort should be made to rehabilitate these young girls through marriage.

Sociologists of the time, such as Lalit Sen, had similar views:

The problem of unattached women and children should also be solved by executing efficient schemes, as soon as possible. To deal with the unbalanced sex-ratio, the government of the receiving country will be wise to lift any social bar in the way of intermarriage between the refugees and the original inhabitants.⁵⁶

The state instituted a mechanism through which “marriage grants” were to be paid to women refugees on the occasion of their marriage. Permission for marriage was, however, given by the superintendent of the home only after enquiries had been conducted by responsible social workers as to the character and financial capacity of the bridegroom to support his wife. The marriage grant was initially fixed at INR 200 for all to encourage “rehabilitation” of young women to a large extent by marriage.⁵⁷ Later, in a meeting of the Central Advisory Committee on September 16, 1955, it was decided,

A marriage grant of INR 300⁵⁸ should be given to those girls who have received a full course of training and INR 500 to those who have received no training or partial training. This marriage grant would also be extended to those living [and working outside], provided her earning is less than INR 60 per month.⁵⁹

This statement makes it amply clear that the state valued the marriage “marketability” of women based on their “training.” This could also be

⁵⁶ L. Sen, “Refugee Problems: A Sociological Problem,” *The Calcutta Review* CXXI, no. 1 (October–November, 1951): 7–28.

⁵⁷ “Recommendations of the Central Advisory Board: Re-organisation of Homes/Infirmarys for Displaced Persons Classed as the Aged, Infirm, Unattached Women, Their Dependents and Orphans” dated August 18–20, 1952 in Ashoka Gupta papers, File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁵⁸ An increase in the marriage grant to Rs 300 was also mentioned in a document titled “Some preliminary discussion was held by some members of the subcommittee with Minister on 26.4.54” in Ashoka Gupta papers File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University. Although this subcommittee had been appointed to give their recommendation on the future of PL camp refugees, the minister stated that it would also welcome suggestions from the committee regarding facilities for training that may be given to women in government sponsored colonies or in areas where there is a middle-class concentration of refugees. The minister also stated that the “wishful thinking” with regard to marrying young girls through grants needed to be tackled more seriously and apart from a raise in the grant he suggested setting up a marriage bureau in conjunction with the Women’s Section to expedite such marriages.

⁵⁹ Ashoka Gupta papers, File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

interpreted as women with more training could find job opportunities and fund their own marriages and hence were given less by way of marriage grants; in either case, the value given to marriage as the main pathway to refugee women's rehabilitation is noteworthy.

The marriages were closely monitored by the state and a record was kept of all such marriages. One can read into the paternalistic and patriarchal idea of protection in the increased restrictions on women and their mobility at a time of crisis and that marriage was seen as the panacea for women's emancipation. A few women I interviewed⁶⁰ in the women's wing of Cooper's Camp corroborated this when they said that their mobility was closely watched, and they could not marry until the superintendent approved the groom. It indicates the puritanical and rigid view of women refugees held by the West Bengal government.

An untitled document dated June 26, 1954, signed off by Ashoka Gupta⁶¹ as a member of the Central Advisory Committee, stated:

Giving out girls to suitable grooms is not easy. Any such proposal coming through the guardian must be thoroughly investigated by a Committee set up for the purpose with the help of the local *thana*, as lots of trafficking in women and cheating are going on, on the pretext of marriage.

Further, a letter to Ashoka Gupta, dated November 27, 1963, by Binodini Sarangi, the Chairman of the Odisha State Social Welfare Advisory Board,⁶² offers another perspective on this issue. In her letter, she stated:

I am giving an orphan girl in marriage on 7 December, 1963. This girl has neither parents nor any other relation. You will be interested to know that she was rescued from a gang who steal children and disfigure them for the purpose of begging etc. She was in one of our women's homes all these years. So I have taken the responsibility of her marriage and the members of Nari Seva Sangh⁶³ are helping me a lot.

⁶⁰ Interview with women in the PL camps in Nadia District (names withheld to maintain anonymity) in 2017.

⁶¹ Ashoka Gupta papers File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁶² The Central Social Welfare Board was established in 1953 as an autonomous body functioning under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Education. It was responsible for looking into the welfare of women, children, and the disabled. The board was also meant to assist voluntary organizations and government agencies that were engaged in social welfare. The scope of the Board was so wide that in 1954, the respective state governments set up State Social Welfare Boards. The Central Social Welfare Board is now under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

⁶³ Nari Seva Sangha is an organization that was founded in 1944 in Kolkata to help women survivors of the Bengal famine (1941–1942) to become self-reliant. In the post-Partition period,

Therefore, while it is important to be critical of the West Bengal state and its paternalistic attitude toward women, one cannot deny the reality of trafficking and the ways in which gangs often exploited refugee children. Although trafficking of young girls and cheating or adultery on the pretext of marriage was prevalent, documentary evidence also suggests that even middle-class women like Ashoka Gupta, who had taken up the baton to help the refugees coming from East Bengal, especially women refugees, subscribed to the idea of marriage as a means of rehabilitation for “unattached” women and young girls.

THE “WAYWARD”: SEXUALIZING THE FEMALE REFUGEE BODY

Both the socio-economic status and the spatial location of the refugee woman determined the nature of her participation in the labor force. While the middle-class *bhadramahila* joined the service sector as teachers, office secretaries, tutors, tailors, and small shop managers, the women living in squatter colonies engaged in paid domestic work and other forms of unskilled labor.⁶⁴ Bina,⁶⁵ a women’s rights activist from Kolkata, was born in a locality that experienced the emergence of a squatters’ colony. Her mother and grandmother had come to India from Bangladesh with great difficulty after changing several modes of transport. She described how the women in the squatter colonies began defying old stereotypes and started going out to work. Most people in the colony were aware that a number of these women were engaged in sex work, but no one seemed to be making moralistic statements about it at that time. She thought that the area was particularly safe for women because of the common struggle that men and women lived through. She further added that issues of caste, class, and gender intersected in different ways in the squatter colonies and often worked in a way different from that of Indian society at large or those in the camps.

the organization also helped women refugees from East Pakistan by providing them with shelter, non-formal education and vocational skills.

⁶⁴ This information is derived from interviews with various individuals who came to India as refugees in the post-Partition period.

⁶⁵ Interview with a women’s rights activist in West Bengal in 2017 (name changed to maintain anonymity).

Jhuma Das Sharma,⁶⁶ who migrated to West Bengal when she was very young and grew up in Netaji Nagar Colony⁶⁷ in South Kolkata, corroborated this sense of a common struggle and the ways in which they supported each other, often setting aside their caste, class, and gender biases. She spoke at length about the solidarity that women in the colony forged with each other as well as with the ensuing refugee movement spearheaded by the Communist Party of India-led UCRC⁶⁸ in West Bengal. She said that she, along with a few other refugee women in the area, started a women's association and bought two looms to make clothes for sale. They hired a teacher who would teach them embroidery, cutting, and stitching. She further added that there were no concerns about women's safety. It was a very safe space, and there were no instances of rape or molestation. The women in squatter colonies fought against all odds to assert their right to life and fight the stigma attached to their sexuality by society at large.

However, the stigmatization of the sexuality of refugee women can be found in the writings of the period. In their writings, sociologists Sen and Sen⁶⁹ depicted their privileged Bengali middle-class bias against the "uncontrollable" sexuality of refugee women. According to them,

Lack of social control, the economic condition and the inactivity of the menfolk have given impetus to feminism. Women who used to live behind closed doors only yesterday, are today freely moving about and mixing with all sorts of people in the bazaar, in front of the tube-well and at other places of common contact.⁷⁰

In their article, they describe several instances (two examples quoted here) to emphasize the need for state intervention in controlling the sexuality of refugee women:

1. In the majority of these cases [of "illegitimate" pregnancies] the expectant mothers desert the camp for fear of police action. According to reports, dead bodies of just-born children are discovered almost every fortnight, in the latrines, fields, drains and even

⁶⁶ Interview with Jhuma Das Sharma in 2016 (name changed to maintain anonymity).

⁶⁷ Netaji Nagar is a locality in South Kolkata. It started as a large squatter colony where Bengali Hindu refugees from East Pakistan began to settle down over the years after the Partition in 1947. The locality saw a vibrant refugee movement in the 1960s under the leadership of the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC). A number of refugee activists later went on to become active members and leaders in West Bengal's left-wing political parties. Government of West Bengal provided the people who occupied land with land deeds in 1989, thereby legalizing the ownership of the erstwhile squatter colonies.

⁶⁸ The UCRC was set up in 1950 to give voice to the grievances of the East Bengal refugees and put forth their demands for economic rehabilitation.

⁶⁹ K. N. Sen and L. Sen, "Sex Life of the Refugees in a Transit Camp: Some Case Studies," *Man in India* 33, no. 1 (1953): 55–66.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57–58

on the roads of the camp. In almost every case, the child is found dead and it is difficult to say whether it was killed or was still-born. The junior author saw one such case where a pair of just-born twins was lying in a lane in the camp. They were admitted into the hospital and later died.

In some cases, it is possible to trace out the mother. In most of such cases, the mothers were widows and above 35 years. In the women's camp, a camp exclusively for women and children adjacent to the Cooper's Camp, 6 women had illegitimate conceptions during the first 6 months of 1952. All were widows and three of them were above 40 years.⁷¹

2. One U. used to carry on her [sex] trade inside the camp. Her ration card was cancelled and she was compelled to leave the camp. But the economic reasons which generally drive a woman to prostitution are always present and there are numerous reports which show how women sell themselves for a handful of coal or coins or a piece of cloth etc.⁷²

The middle-class *bhadralok* (middle-class Bengali men), through their narratives, found it easy to relegate such sexual "pollution" to women in camps and squatter colonies, while making scant references to the *bhadramahila*. However, literary works such as *The River Churning*⁷³ by Jyotirmoyee Devi (Ashoka Gupta's mother) bring forth the narratives of the stigmatized *bhadramahila*. In Devi's Partition novel, Sutara, an upper caste Hindu woman, is raped in a pre-Partition riot in Noakhali in 1946. All her family members, except her brothers, who lived in the city, are killed. Her father's Muslim friend and his family provide her shelter and help her recuperate, but Sutara's attempt to return to her brothers is not devoid of challenges. She is stigmatized by the men and women of her family. Unable to deal with the "pollution" she harbored in her body (by staying with Muslims for six months who helped her recover after a brutal rape), her brothers send her away to a hostel to study. The "shame" she was now perceived to be inhabiting in her body was seen as threatening to the "honor" of the rest of the family members.

Jyotirmoyee not only touches upon the violence of Partition but also on the resulting trauma and the multiple alternative possibilities of rehabilitation. At the end of the story, Sutara finds economic independence and develops or achieves an autonomous selfhood, though in reality, that was

⁷¹ Ibid., 64–65.

⁷² Ibid., 65.

⁷³ J. Devi, *The River Churning* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995).

never imagined as possible for the “unattached women,” who were mostly from poor backgrounds and lower caste groups. Moreover, it is important to note that the novel ends with a marriage proposal for Sutara from her sister-in-law’s brother, Promode. This is in keeping with the belief of social workers and administrators of the time that rehabilitation would occur through marriage.

Sutara’s story is a reflection of the lives of those women who were not necessarily in camps or squatter colonies. The kind of stigma, trauma, and violence that women like Sutara and other refugee women faced has been understated in the literature on Bengal’s Partition. Jyotirmoyee Devi’s novel brings forth the often-hidden realities of women caught in the vagrancies of Bengal’s Partition. But it also highlights the ways in which the central character in her book ultimately moves toward achieving *bhadralok*-centric goals by way of showing the possibility of Sutara getting married. It suggests that the author is caught in the realities of the times and the limited options available for women and saw marriage as a panacea for “defiled” refugee women.

The reality was that refugee women, whether in camps, squatter colonies, or *bhadramahilas* residing within the family, saw the issues of “honor” and sexuality intersecting in their life experiences of marginalization and exploitation.

THE “FREE”: THE FEMALE SOCIAL WORKER

With the negligence of the central and state governments on issues of rehabilitation in the East, the social workers (mostly women) in West Bengal stepped up to take responsibility for caring for the refugees. The social workers not only procured materials and resources but also devised and implemented training and livelihood programs. Social welfare organizations such as Bharat Sevashram Sangha; Indian Red Cross Society; Ramakrishna Mission; Missionaries of Charity from Calcutta; AIWC, Calcutta Branch; Trained Nurses Association of India; and many individuals, including private donors and social workers, initiated relief programs and discussed how best to plan for and serve the cause of distressed refugee families without duplicating efforts.⁷⁴ The contributions of non-official agencies toward the welfare of the migrants merit recognition, reflection, and analysis.

⁷⁴ The list is collated from several documents found across the different Ashoka Gupta Papers, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

Many income-oriented programs were launched to help refugee women become more self-sufficient. Training centers in tailoring, knitting, and weaving were started. A “Charkha”⁷⁵ subcommittee was formed for teaching spinning with the “Charkha” (spinning wheel).⁷⁶ In 1947, the AIWC, along with other organizations, opened a relief society based on the premises of the Raj Bhawan (official residences of the state governors in India) to help refugee women in West Bengal to become self-sufficient, including by sourcing raw materials from abroad. For instance, wool was secured from the Government of Australia for distribution amongst women who knitted sweaters for the refugees of Punjab. In this way, these women were able to earn their own livelihood.⁷⁷ In 1948, Phulrenu Guha,⁷⁸ a renowned social worker working under the banner of United Council for Relief and Welfare,⁷⁹ provided materials and arrangements for the marketing of these products made by the refugee women, allowing them to earn at least a meagre income.⁸⁰ The Marwari Relief Society also helped during this time by supplying spices and all the necessary ingredients for making *papads* and paying the women labor charges.⁸¹ Both Renuka Ray and Ashoka Gupta had been associated with AIWC, and throughout their work with refugees, they tried to focus on the issues and needs of refugee women.

In 1954, a co-operative canteen was opened in Calcutta to be run by 15 trained refugee women under AIWC and ABWU jointly. The net profit was divided equally in three portions to the women, AIWC, and Reserve Fund. All the work was shared equally between the shareholders. It was decided that until the business was financially sound, the women along with their children were to be paid doles as per a prescribed scale for a period of six months and later at a sliding scale. The shareholders further proposed that initially either the canteen rooms at the Hawkers Corner at Esplanade or

⁷⁵ A charkha is a spinning wheel for spinning thread or yarn from natural or synthetic fibers. It was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi during the *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) movement at the time of the colonial rule in India.

⁷⁶ Report (AIWC Central Calcutta Constituency Report), Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 11, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Phulrenu Guha was a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament, from 1964 to 1970, from West Bengal. She was also the Union Minister of State for Social Welfare in the central government ministry in 1967. She served in various state and central government organizations in different capacities. She was also a member of the Committee on the Status of Women in India from 1972 to 1975. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian award in the Republic of India, in 1977.

⁷⁹ It was an initiative set up by Lady Edwina Mountbatten.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

rooms on the ground floor of Radha Cinema at Cornwallis Street were to be utilized for the purpose of setting up the canteen.⁸²

In 1960, Mr Mehr Chand Khanna, the then Central Minister for Refugee Rehabilitation, expressed appreciation for the dedicated work conducted by AIWC by awarding them INR 25,000 toward a plot of land in Beliaghata, Kolkata. A building was constructed, and the first project in the building was a vocational training center under a directive of the education department of West Bengal. Training in crafts such as bamboo baskets, paper flowers, tailoring garments, batik, embroidery, and confectionary were all a part of the vocational training program, and it ultimately enabled the women to get reasonably well-paying jobs. For instance, those trained in confectionary got jobs in canteens. With the help of some of these trainees, a canteen was set up in the school of tropical medicine on the campus of Calcutta Medical College and Hospital. Later, a number of canteens were set up in other colleges and hospitals as well.⁸³

Girl Guides

A Volunteer Corps, consisting of girls (ages 12–16), was organized in 1964. The Corp members helped in the distribution of clothes and gifts contributed by various donors, took patients to hospitals, and mended, sorted, and cleaned gifts of clothes, bottles, and tins that were very often dirty.⁸⁴ Some of these girls were trained as Girl Guides, a program introduced by Ashoka Gupta in the rehabilitation camps with the purpose of giving girls of this age some “recreation, a taste of enjoyment, and freedom.”⁸⁵ The girls were often stagnating in their studies, getting no vocational training, and were not able to go out and see the outside world. The girls were suffering from “lack of goals and disorientation,” so Ms Gupta approached the international headquarters of the Girl Guides for some help in training one person who could train the others.⁸⁶ Ms Pakrashi, Deputy Director, Department of Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of West Bengal,

⁸² “Revised scheme for a co-operative canteen to be run by trained refugee women under AIWC and ABWU jointly” (dated August 4, 1954) in Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁸³ “AIWC Central Calcutta Constituency Report” in Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 11, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁸⁴ “Welfare Services for Refugees from East Pakistan” in Ashoka Gupta File 9, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁸⁵ Gupta, *In the Path of Service*, 160.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

helped them tremendously in the process of setting up training sessions for girls in the different camps.⁸⁷

The Girl Guide units helped by distributing milk and helping sick and ailing persons secure medicines from the dispensaries for the displaced persons.⁸⁸ They were responsible for informing the camp authorities of any sickness in the women's camps and also for taking care of the sick at night in the dormitory. They worked under the guidance of a *sevika* (a female helper) and a trainer.⁸⁹ Many girls joined craft classes where sewing machines were in use for providing uniforms to Balwadi children, Girl Guides, and Volunteer Corps. They also made ragdolls and balls for the hospital children. As a relief measure, they distributed used clothing to the new migrant families and to the distressed Adivasi patients and their children coming for medical assistance at the hospitals.

Young women and girls amongst the displaced persons drew scores of buckets of water, washed clothes, cooked sick diet and kept the dormitory of the hospital clean. They were given a complete course of Home nursing under the able guidance of Miss Paul of Indian Red Cross and were awarded the certificates by St. John's Ambulance.⁹⁰

Social Stereotypes and Their Interaction with Female Social Workers

Women social workers enabled the refugee women by providing them with training in employable skills and, in doing so, supported the process of rehabilitation, which was in official discourse, the role of the state. The nature of women's labor, however, remained voluntary and limited to the confines of the stereotyped duties of a woman or a mother. Also, these trainings and programs often did not empower women for an economic life outside the confines of the camp. It is important to note that the work of a number of middle-class *bhadramahila* in post-Partition rehabilitation in West Bengal reflected the prevalent stereotypes associated with women and was reproduced in the rehabilitation plans for labor for "unattached" women and the conceptualization of their rehabilitation through

⁸⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁸ Note titled "How Refugee Girls Are Working as Volunteers" in Ashoka Gupta's File 9, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University. The papers in File 9 are dated around 1964 and focus on the Mana camp set up in Dandakaranya.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Note titled "Welfare Services for Refugees from East Pakistan," undated, Ashoka Gupta Papers, File 9, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

marriage. The narratives presented as follows suggest how their own lives were also caught in the patriarchal practice of the family and the state.

Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, took over the portfolio of rehabilitation in West Bengal in 1950. In 1952, after the elections, he was preoccupied with forming his ministry in West Bengal, and at that time, Ms Renuka Ray, Refugee Adviser for the Eastern Zone, approached him to discuss some problems of the refugees. In her autobiography, Ms Renuka Ray reflects at length on this meeting:

Dr. Roy listened to me and said, “I think the best thing for you would be to join my cabinet as Rehabilitation Minister.” I asked him not to make jokes at my expense. I pointed out, “I am not even a member of the Assembly, nor am I willing to be in the Legislative Council because in the Constituent Assembly I took a stand against the establishment of a second chamber in a small State like West Bengal.” Dr Roy then asked for a copy of the Constitution ... I protested and asked, “Have you consulted any other person about this?” His reply was that he had asked the only person it was necessary to consult and that was my husband. I still refused and left the place. When I rang him up the next day and asked him what he had decided about the refugee issue that I had placed before him, he told me, “It appears that women like to be advisers but not to take on any responsibility and so I have nothing else to say to you. I made an offer to you to help me in resolving this difficult problem.” When I told this to my husband, he felt that I should not disoblige the old man. When I asked him whether he had been consulted by Dr Roy, he told me that the Chief Minister had merely asked him “Have you any objection to stand up when your wife comes into the room?” My husband’s rejoinder was that he would always stand up when women enter a room and the same thing was observed with his wife in public. Dr Roy said that then there was no problem. As my husband was Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal, this was Dr B. C. Roy’s way of informing him. Thus, I was propelled into this position of responsibility which I held for the next five years.⁹¹

This situation, as discussed by Ray⁹² in her autobiography, reflects the kind of position in which women of the stature of Renuka Ray and Ashoka Gupta found themselves in during the post-Partition scenario in West Bengal. While they strived to ensure state accountability and responsibility toward refugee women from East Pakistan, they had to prove their own abilities and willingness to help these women. They continued to

⁹¹ Ray, *My Reminiscences*, 158–159.

⁹² *Ibid.*

negotiate public and political spaces within the given patriarchal context while striving to negotiate their own personal lives and locations within various hierarchies. For instance, in a letter dated March 14, 1955,⁹³ in response to the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, invite to visit the homes and camps in West Punjab, Ashoka Gupta indicated her discomfort with travelling alone:

I, however would like to get my railway ticket through you to be sent to me to my address mentioned above and reservation made either in a Ladies Compartment where there are other passengers or in a coupe reserved for ladies. In case, I am alone, I will take permission from the guard to keep my female attendant with me at night.

Renuka Ray, Ashoka Gupta, and other women, in various capacities, continued their work with refugees up to the 1960s. Renuka Ray sought election to the Lok Sabha in 1957 with the hope that she “would be more effective in securing the Centre’s interest in the cause of the refugees from East Bengal in Parliament than I was able to do as minister in [B. C. Roy’s] cabinet.”⁹⁴ She also claims in her autobiography that she engaged in “constructive social work.”⁹⁵ Ashoka Gupta served as a member of the West Bengal State Social Welfare Advisory Board from 1955 to 1959, and in 1959, at the behest of B. C. Roy, she became a member of the Central Social Welfare Board. With her husband, Saibal Kumar Gupta, she spent a considerable amount of time in the 1960s working with Bengali Hindu refugees, most of whom were Namasudras, in Mana camp and other camps in Dandakaranya.⁹⁶

Women like Ashoka Gupta and Renuka Ray, along with many others, were instrumental in conceptualizing rehabilitation for refugee women in West Bengal, and they collaborated and formed organizations to have a voice and some maneuverability to deal with those in positions of power. They raised an important voice and critiqued the newly born nation state’s ways of incorporation and assimilation of the refugee woman as a subject. Their efforts were also mired in the political ideologies of the time. Both were deeply influenced by Gandhian ideals,⁹⁷ and their work

⁹³ Letter from Ashoka Gupta to L. B. Mathur, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, dated March 14, 1955, in Ashoka Gupta’s File 12, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University.

⁹⁴ Ray, *My Reminiscences*, 206.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁹⁶ Gupta, *In the Path of Service*.

⁹⁷ Renuka Ray was a part of the freedom movement and met Gandhi at the young age of 16. Ashoka Gupta met Gandhi during the relief work at Noakhali after the Partition-related violence in 1946.

reflected the idea of *sewa* or service. In her reflections on social work, Ashoka Gupta writes, “We were drawn to social work out of a need to find a sphere of activity outside the confines of the home, to ‘do something for the country’ and for people less fortunate than ourselves.”⁹⁸ In effect, their work was driven by a combination of individualism and the politics of the time, which demanded a nationalist duty and mission. Yet they also had to confront or manage the patriarchal constraints that governed their own lives. As a result, although in comparison to the women in the refugee camps and squatter colonies they were “free” and in privileged positions, narratives of their own experiences suggested otherwise. Their proposals for policies affecting refugee women, in turn, often had zones of opacity or prejudice marked by their own caste and class positions.

CONCLUSION

The paternalistic and patriarchal framework of the rehabilitation process is apparent in the narratives of the refugee women (whether they were deemed “unattached” or “wayward”) and in the accounts given by the social workers (the free) who helped them. In West Bengal, the rehabilitation of refugee women, whether in camps or squatter colonies, became the responsibility of women, by women, and for women, where the beneficiaries and service providers constantly moved between the categories of the “unattached,” “wayward,” and “free.”

While the women in the camps had the attention, although gendered, of the West Bengal state government as well as the social workers, the women in squatter colonies only had their resilience and solidarity to rely on. Along with negotiating and resisting the perverse perceptions of society about their sexuality, they battled with the challenges of setting up a habitable space amid adverse land conditions. They forged solidarities across caste and class hierarchies and developed mechanisms for their safety and survival.

Although it may seem that the women in squatter colonies were relatively “free” in comparison to the “unattached” refugee women, the label of “wayward” defined their public identity due to their perceived “deviant” sexuality. The social workers, who were relatively the most “free,” were limited by their class and caste positions. The “unattached” women in camps were confined by the plans of the state as well as by the moral standards of the women social workers who appeared to be “free.” The

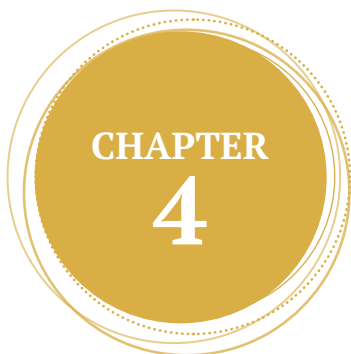
⁹⁸ Ibid., 213.

“unattached” women were also often stigmatized for stepping over the limits of their “expected” sexual behavior.

The continuing confinement of “unattached” women in camps in West Bengal up until now and their testimonies in 2017 raise questions about the efficacy of the “rehabilitation” apparatus instituted by the state. Did the state’s plan ultimately result in the “unattached” women never being truly free from the burden of the Partition? Was the state prepared to bear the “burden” of their “PL”? The lives and experiences of these women were forgotten in the mirage of bureaucratic processes and lack of resources, and although this chapter gives voice to the women who in some way encountered the formal or informal rehabilitation efforts of the state and volunteers, it has perforce left out the refugee women whose narratives and experiences of sexual, physical, and emotional violence did not make it into any documents or archival records.



Memories of Partition



Crowdsourcing Memories

Process of Narrative Collection of the Survivors of Partition

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INTRODUCTION

The Partition of British India resulted in the largest forced mass migration in recorded human history.¹ It led to the displacement of more than 15 million refugees and approximately 3 million people missing and presumed dead.² Although precipitated in 1947, the Partition was not a singular event but a continuous process.³ It continues to shape

¹ Syria, which is often considered "the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time" (Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), has 6.6 million internally displaced and 5.7 registered refugees, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, "Syria Emergency," <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html> (accessed on April 18, 2018)).

² Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Atif R. Mian, "The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India," *Economic & Political Weekly* 43, no. 35 (August 2008): 40, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2008/35/special-articles/big-march-migratory-flows-after-partition-india.html> (accessed on May 18, 2022); K. Hill, W. Seltzer, J. Leaning, S. J. Malik, and S. S. Russell, "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab in 1947," *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (2008): 168, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27643460> (accessed on May 18, 2022). The estimated numbers stated here, focusing mainly on the Punjab border, are much higher than previously estimated on the Partition migration; the two cited research papers have better analyses in our judgement and came to their similar conclusions independently. The demographics of the Partition along the Bengal border remain less clear since the migration patterns extended for decades.

³ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4–12.

the politics and society of South Asia today. The implications of the Partition in the region are abundantly evident in the contemporary political climate, including the Kashmir crisis in 2020, the tense political relationship between India and Pakistan, border disputes between India and Bangladesh, and the communal tensions between Indian Hindus and Muslims. Political and personal issues are intertwined in South Asia. From the expanse of geopolitics to the intimacy of family life, the Partition has played and continues to play a pivotal role in shaping identities and many inherited histories.

Over the last seven decades, a rich literature has emerged on the Partition. Scholars have studied the role of the high-level politics of the British Empire, the pre- and post-Independence elites,⁴ and the grassroots politics of communal conflict⁵. Historians and journalists have sought to gather documentation of the negotiations and planning that yielded the two daughter states from British India,⁶ as well as to document the practices, responses, and statements of members of the public and those whose voices have not been captured in the historical record.⁷ The latter strain of work has brought forth the exploration of the experiences of minorities and marginalized populations,⁸ such as women,⁹ non-Punjabis,¹⁰ and Dalits.¹¹ Refugees—their narratives, sociology, and politics—have been a

⁴ U. Bhaskar Rao, *The Story of Rehabilitation* (Delhi: Delhi Department of Rehabilitation, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India, 1967); Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵ Richard D. Lambert, *Hindu-Muslim Riots* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶ Lucy Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁷ Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom: A Report on the New India in the Words and Photographs of Margaret Bourke-White* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1949).

⁸ Ian Talbot, ed., *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

¹⁰ Nandita Bhavnani, *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2014); Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹¹ Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

focus of many more recent works,¹² as has been the connection between the Partition and nationalism in the region.¹³

In facilitating, revisiting, and analyzing Partition memories, oral narrative scholars emphasize both the immediacy of the experience and the impact the Partition has had on contemporary life. Till recently in human history, oral histories (of the colonized, particularly) were deemed unreliable and culturally tainted, and their ancient pedigree as a means for transmitting knowledge stood in contrast to modern scientific epistemologies. For many academics, oral histories/narratives were too vulnerable to critique due to their subjectivity and served as a basis for sound historiography. They were not considered legitimate data sources as they did not fit the traditional definition of a research “object” that could yield objective data.

From the 1980s onward, however, there has been a paradigm shift whereby scholars have demonstrated the value of oral testimonies in providing grounding, specificity, context, and depth to our comprehension of history. Chakrabarty has argued that the narrative structure of traumatic memories often emphasizes the inexplicability of experiences and gives them more nuance in opposition to histories that are based on just explaining events.¹⁴ Today, the enduring power—and empowering effects—of narrative research is evident in oral history memorialization projects around the world. The Memory Project about the Holocaust,¹⁵ the Berkeley 1947 Partition Archive,¹⁶ the Citizens Archive of Pakistan,¹⁷

¹² Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947–1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Vishwajyoti Ghosh, ed., *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition (an Anthology of Graphic Narratives)* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2013); Elisabetta Iob, *Refugees and the Politics of the Everyday State in Pakistan: Resettlement in Punjab, 1947–1962* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007); Haimanti Roy, *Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–65* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Aanchal Malhotra, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2017); Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari, eds., *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹³ Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu–Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 31, no. 32 (August 1996): 2143–2151. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4404497> (accessed on May 18, 2022).

¹⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Writing Workshop for Holocaust Survivors,” <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/office-of-survivor-affairs/memory-project> (accessed on July 7, 2021).

¹⁶ 1947 Archive, “The 1947 Partition Archive,” <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/> (accessed on April 15, 2019).

¹⁷ The Citizens Archive of Pakistan, <http://www.citizensarchive.org> (accessed on July 7, 2021).

narrative memorials of the Armenian genocide,¹⁸ and the Palestinian Oral History Archive¹⁹ are just a few examples of efforts to document and archive the testimonies of important historical events.

Seventy-three years after the Partition, there is a rapidly decreasing pool of survivors who have memories of the displacement. The importance of collecting these narratives cannot be overemphasized. As Kabir observes, “in the absence of public rituals and spaces of mourning sanctioned by the nation-state, Partition narratives present alternative, albeit contested sites for such mourning.”²⁰ In addition to being family histories of adversity, trauma, survival, and hope that have often never been shared or talked about, these narratives are treasure troves of minute details of the Partition and resulting displacement that do not exist in any library or archive. These memories can also help us better understand collective identities that have been informed by the Partition, such as the Punjabi refugees in Delhi, East Bengali refugees in Kolkata squatter settlements, and Sindhis in Mumbai. These narratives also provide valuable insights into the Partition process itself and its resulting impacts throughout South Asia. Analysis from the perspective of current refugees in crises around the world, whether it be Syrian refugees or the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, might also yield important information on how people cope, what breaks their spirit, and what sustains it.

The Partition Stories Project was initiated in early 2017 with the support of the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute at Harvard University to collect and analyze as many narratives as possible from all populations of South Asia that had been affected by the Partition, with a particular focus on minority voices. This project has been undertaken by a small research team led by two professors²¹ and the generous time and assistance of more than 300 volunteers (referred to as “ambassadors”) in

¹⁸ USC Shoah Foundation, “Armenian Genocide,” <https://sfi.usc.edu/content/armenian-genocide> (accessed on July 7, 2021).

¹⁹ American University of Beirut, “Palestinian Oral History Archive,” <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Pages/poha.aspx> (accessed on July 7, 2021).

²⁰ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Subjectivities, Memories, Loss of Pigskin Bags, Silver Spittoons and the Partition of India,” *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 245–264.

²¹ The personal connection of the lead researchers (Professors Tarun Khanna and Karim Lakhani) to the Partition and the role it has played in the formulation of the research methodology and data collection is discussed in Tarun Khanna, Karim Lakhani, Shubhangi Bhadada, Nabil Khan, Saba Kohli Dave, Rasim Alam, and Meena S. Hewett, “Crowdsourcing Memories: Mixed Methods Research by Cultural Insider-Epistemological Outsiders,” *Academy of Management Perspectives* 35, no. 3 (October 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2018.0090> (accessed on May 18, 2022).

Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, coordinated through the institute's in-region leaders in the three countries and the core Harvard team.

This chapter describes the idea behind the project and the innovative methods used to collect the narratives of an ever-reducing pool of survivors of the Partition through crowdsourcing interviews and the application of painstaking organization of boots on the ground, who went out and found people who could not be “found” in any other manner, nor who could have been persuaded to talk in any other way. Anticipated but still surprising in its prevalence was the reluctance of respondents to talk about traumatic events. This difficulty in asking people to talk increases even more when focusing on minority voices, especially those of women whose narratives were often paraphrased or taken over by the men in the room. Finding ways to surmount these challenges and give these aging survivors a voice and a listener has been in itself a major achievement of this project.

The recording of the narratives of these survivors contributes to the documentation of an historical event that now has its last group of living survivors and allows for the reclamation of a time and set of beliefs that have virtually disappeared but had incontestable power in their historical setting. In addition, it helps suggest new methods and approaches for what we must do to find out and understand what people in forced migration and refugee settings are really thinking about now. It helps emphasize the need for adapting well-established processes and methods to the specific situations and obstacles present and encourages other such experiments in data collection.

THE PARTITION STORIES PROJECT

The Partition Stories Project aims to collect oral narratives from survivors of the Partition from across all three affected countries: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. The goal is to build an extensive database of oral stories that represents all sides of the border, with a focus on stories from vulnerable, underrepresented populations. These include Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians in Pakistan; those in the North-West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan; Muslims, Christians, and Dalits in India; Biharis in Bangladesh; and narratives from poor, rural, and lower caste populations. The aim of the project is to preserve and enrich historical knowledge, discover different perspectives on mass migration, and sift and evaluate the prevalent understanding of the Partition using mixed methods of analysis.

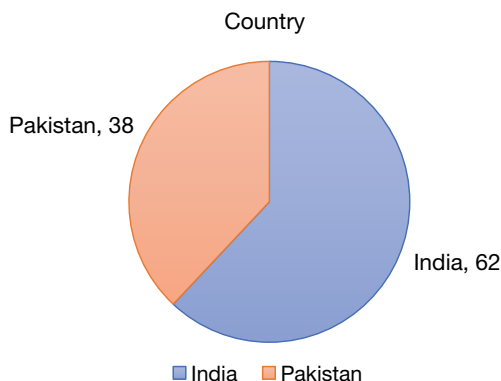


Figure 4.1 Breakdown by Country of the Stories Collected¹

¹ Pakistan in Figure 4.1 includes the stories collected from Bangladesh as well, given that after the 1947 Partition, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan until 1971.

PROCESS OF SELECTION AND COLLECTION

The project used two methods to collect narratives: a modified form of respondent-driven sampling²² transformed by the ambassador model and an online survey method. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire that was prepared with the assistance of, and vetted by, experts in the Partition literature.²³ The questionnaire was divided into three broad sections: addressing the experiences of the interviewees before, during, and after the Partition (see Annexure A). The purpose of the questionnaire was to prompt and guide the interviewees and to gather discrete pieces of information. At the same time, the semi-structured format gave agency to the interviewees, allowing them to share memories and details to the extent and in the manner with which they felt most comfortable.

²² Douglas D. Heckathorn, "Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations," *Social Problems* 44, no. 2 (May 1997): 174–199, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3096941> (accessed on May 18, 2022); Krista J. Gile and Mark S. Handcock, "Respondent-Driven Sampling: An Assessment of Current Methodology," *Sociological Methodology* 40, no. 1 (2010): 285–327, 10.1111/j.1467-9531.2010.01223.x (accessed on May 18, 2022).

²³ The questionnaire was prepared with particular help from Professor Jennifer Leaning, Harvard School of Public Health, and members of the advisory board of Partition experts, comprising Ian Talbot, Professor of Modern British History, University of Southampton; Yasmin Khan, Associate Professor of History, Faculty of History, University of Oxford; Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, Associate Professor of History, Brown University; Sunil Amrith, Renu and Anand Dhawan Professor of History, Yale University; and Urvashi Butalia, Writer and Publisher.

The online survey model, which is the more common form of crowdsourcing data,²⁴ was initially piloted in early 2017. It allows people to upload their own or their families' stories by accessing the questionnaire in a survey format through the project website. The survey can be accessed with ease on a computer or smartphone, and answers can be uploaded in both written and/or audio format. This method of collection resulted in stories predominantly from the South Asian diaspora in the UK, the USA, and other parts of the world, relying on people who were familiar with using technology as well as people who used this technology in order to interview their own family members. Many of the people who participated in this online survey noted that it gave them the opportunity to hear their families' Partition stories for the first time or to at least have the opportunity to capture these memories in an organized manner. It provided families with a platform on which to share their experiences and memories and to discuss how they had shaped all of them, as individuals and as members of family units.

Soon into the pilot phase, however, it was realized that the online survey model did not have the reach that was hoped for, particularly in the South Asian region. People from the generation that had experienced and survived the Partition were, in general, not comfortable using technology. This discomfort was augmented by the difficult effort of sharing their memories of an event that, for most, had changed and shaped their lives irrevocably. Moreover, a large number of people in the region, particularly the marginalized or disenfranchised, did not have access to the internet. These factors—the age of the survivors; difficulties in accessing and operating the survey; the multiple languages spoken; and hesitancy by survivors in sharing their memories of traumatic events—prevented the survey model from fully realizing the goals of the project. It was clear that there needed to be a more direct approach for the collection process to be successful.

Based on these lessons, the ambassador model was thus implemented. The premise of the model was to have trained volunteers interact one-on-one with survivors, listen to them, and record their narratives in a setting that was most accessible to them. As in classic respondent-driven sampling or snowball sampling, the interviewees in this model were most

²⁴ Kevin J. Boudreau and Karim R. Lakhani, "Using the Crowd as an Innovation Partner," *Harvard Business Review* 91, no. 4 (April 2013): 61–69, <https://hbr.org/2013/04/using-the-crowd-as-an-innovation-partner> (accessed on May 19, 2022); Karim R. Lakhani, "Managing Communities and Contests to Innovate with Crowds," in *Revolutionizing Innovation: Users, Communities, and Open Innovation*, eds Dietmar Harhoff and Karim R. Lakhani (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 109–134.

often collected through the “friendship network of existing members of the sample”²⁵; the volunteers, referred to as ambassadors, often started with their immediate family and friends to find interviewees and were then given recommendations of other survivors whom they could talk to. In addition, the ambassadors went to the homes of the survivors as well as various public gathering places, such as places of worship or old age homes, to interview them in the language most comfortable to them. The ambassadors, in most cases, recorded the interviews with the express permission of the interviewee and subsequently transcribed (and often translated) the interviews. In a few cases where the interviewees were uncomfortable being recorded, the ambassadors, with permission, took notes of the interview. In all cases, express consent was taken from the interviewees regarding the following: permission to record their narratives; the manner in which the material could be used going forward (including whether each interviewee was comfortable with his or her name being used or instead preferred anonymity); and with whom their stories could be shared.

Under this model, volunteer ambassadors were supervised directly by the in-region coordinators, called points of contact (POCs), in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, who were supported and coordinated by the Cambridge team. The POCs recruited the ambassadors and conducted training that was specifically developed for the project (including completing an online National Institutes of Health certification on protecting human subject participants, in accordance with Harvard’s Institutional Review Board requirements). Particular attention was given to instruction on how to be careful and sensitive while conducting these interviews, which could often bring back difficult memories for the interviewees, and how to recognize their own internal biases as outsiders. The POCs helped the ambassadors find interviewees to interview through their personal networks (which would then snowball into other potential interviewees through the ones interviewed), brainstormed ways to connect with survivors, and acted as their direct helplines for the ambassadors, in case questions or issues arose. In addition, the POCs liaised with the Cambridge team and ensured the quality of the interviews and transcripts. The liaising included tasks such as ensuring that the ambassadors were trained and their completed Institutional Review Board training certifications

²⁵ Matthew J. Salganik and Douglas D. Heckathorn, “Sampling and Estimation in Hidden Populations Using Respondent-Driven Sampling,” *Sociological Methodology* 34, (2004): 193–239. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0081-1750%282004%2934%3C193%3ASAEIHP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A> (accessed on May 19, 2022).

were shared with the Cambridge team, to tracing missing audio, written transcripts, or permissions by interviewees, based on feedback from the Cambridge team as they processed the incoming interviews.

The ambassadors themselves were from varied locations (ranging from Delhi and Lahore to Jammu and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of the ambassadors were young students from universities who were keen to explore a part of their history that they had just read about in populist terms in school history books or heard alluded to around their dining tables but had had no opportunity to fully understand or imbibe. It was an enriching experience for these ambassadors to have the opportunity to hear from their grandparents or their peers, experience the pain and trauma through the words of these interviewees, and arrive at nuanced understandings of their historical and current situations. Hearing stories about the kindness of strangers and also of “enemies,” often pivotal moments in the path that brought these narrators to where they are today, gave the ambassadors an intimate glimpse into their own complex familial, societal, and national histories through the eyes of those who lived through them.

All 300 ambassadors have conducted at least one in-person interview, and a majority of them have conducted more than two (Figure 4.2). The majority of all interviews were collected using this ambassador model.

Specific attention was paid to the collection of minority voices, including women, whose voices are often overlooked or suppressed in such exercises, and those of religious or regional minorities, such as Muslims,

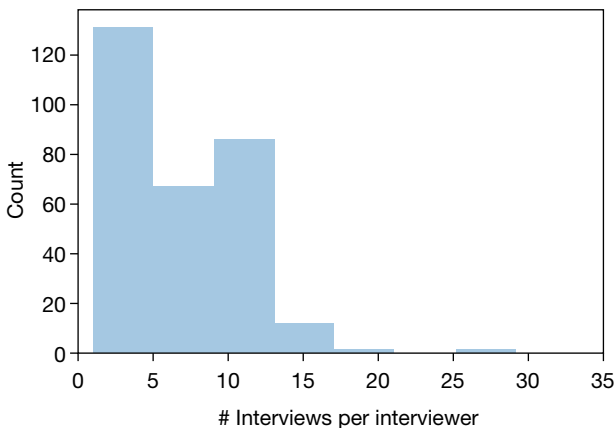


Figure 4.2 Number of Interviews per Ambassador

Sikhs, Christians, and Parsis in India; Bihari Muslims in Bangladesh; and Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians in Pakistan (Figures 4.3 and 4.4).

Since the narratives were collected from all three countries in the immediate aftermath of the 1947 Partition, that is, Bangladesh (at that time East Pakistan), India, and Pakistan, the collection process and methods were adapted to be specifically suitable for the particular countries and regions.

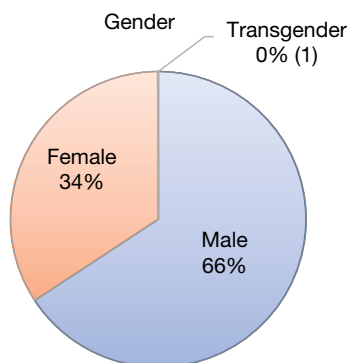


Figure 4.3 Interviewees by Gender

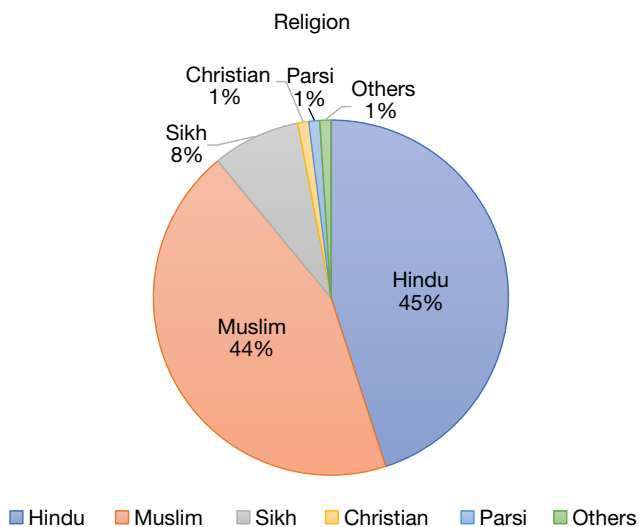


Figure 4.4 Interviewees by Religion

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the narratives were collected in partnership with the Centre for Population, Health and Development (CHPD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) in 2017–2018. CHPD has, over the years, led the Bangladeshi arm of several international epidemiological studies, gaining experience and expertise in the logistics of administering quantitative and questionnaire-based, as well as qualitative research. A study such as the Partition Stories Project, especially one that involved engaging student volunteers, was an innovative endeavor for CHPD.

The POC in Bangladesh was Mr Ornob Alam, a lecturer in life sciences at IUB and one of the co-authors of this chapter and author of Chapter 5 in this book. He worked on the project with the support of Professor Rita Yusuf from the School of Environmental and Life Sciences, and relied on Professor M. Omar Rahman, the previous Dean of the School of Public Health, for his demographic expertise and knowledge of migration dynamics.

Given the collaboration with IUB, it was an obvious choice for Alam to focus on recruiting students from the university itself to serve as ambassadors. He initially focused on simply recruiting from the department with which he is affiliated, the School of Life Sciences. He explained the project to the ambassadors, guided them through the online ethics course, and trained them to conduct probing qualitative interviews using the sample questionnaire provided by the Cambridge team. The initial interview pool was comprised of grandparents, extended relatives, and neighbors of the students themselves. However, Alam soon realized that, apart from a single student who traveled outside Dhaka to his hometown to collect interviews of Urdu-speaking migrants, this approach did not yield any minority voices. He therefore looked to the wider student population of IUB.

Recruiting committed students as ambassadors was a big challenge. Alam used social media with the incentive of receiving a volunteer certificate from the Mittal Institute, Harvard University, to promote the project across the student body. After the first round of such promotions, he received more than 50 emails from students who expressed interest in working on the project. Alam replied individually to each of the emails, explaining in detail the scope and objectives of the study as well as the extent of participation expected from the volunteers. To his slight dismay, only about one-fifth of the students subsequently followed up, many of whom were then excluded due to their lack of motivation and their

struggle with completing the basic ethical training requirements. One of the students he successfully recruited through this process traveled to the border district of Lalmonirhat and collected 10 interviews with the Partition Muslim migrants and a Hindu shop owner who had not moved to India during the Partition.

Alam next attempted to recruit students through flyers posted around the campus. This effort brought in several volunteers who were later instrumental in collecting interviews from a diverse set of people. With the help of some of these students, the Bangladesh team targeted Bihari settlements in Dhaka. In the context of the Partition, Biharis are an important minority in Bangladesh because they are non-Bengali, Urdu-speaking Muslims who had moved from the Indian state of Bihar to Bangladesh in 1947–1948. They are deeply entwined with the history of the 1947 Partition as well as the 1971 independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan, and their experiences and perceptions of the Partition have not been widely heard. The interviews collected by these students give deep insight into the impact of the Partition on Bihari communities and the subsequent changes they went through after 1971. These stories were extremely difficult to collect as most Biharis, many of whom are still in refugee camps since the 1971 civil war, were hesitant to talk about their experiences and worried about the potential repercussions of sharing their stories. (The majority Bengali population continues to hold animosity against the Biharis for their support of the West Pakistan government during the 1971 civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh.²⁶)

The process of story collection in Bangladesh was in no way smooth. There were several technical and procedural challenges arose during the course of collection. Owing to their lack of familiarity with qualitative research of any kind, students initially came up with very short interviews in which the responses of interviewees lacked detail or explanation. Consequently, a guideline was prepared to help students extract more information from the interviewee, which included pointers on when and how to probe for more details. Further, given that the 1971 civil war is often considered as the defining moment in contemporary Bangladeshi history, interviewers were told to ensure that the interview focused specifically on the interviewee's memories of the 1947 Partition and not let their experience of the 1971 civil war supersede the memories of the 1947 Partition.

²⁶ Zaglul Haider, "Biharis in Bangladesh and Their Restricted Access to Citizenship Rights," *South Asia Research* 38, no. 3_suppl (September 2018): 25S–42S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728018791695> (accessed on May 19, 2022).

In many cases, individuals were nervous about going on record with their statements, fearing political backlash. In some cases, this was addressed by assuring them they could remain anonymous. However, despite assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, several individuals still backed out completely. A large proportion of the individuals who declined to be interviewed were from Bihari communities, who are a discriminated minority in Bangladesh. They refused to be interviewed, possibly due to a combination of historical trauma of their conditions since 1971 and contemporary insecurity.

In the end, the Bangladesh cohort of ambassadors was collectively able to collect a hundred interviews, with a diversity of voices among the interviewees. Those interviewed included descendants of early post-Partition Bihari migrants; Hindus who had not left East Pakistan following Partition; economic migrants; migrants who exchanged government job positions when they migrated; migrants whose families were part of the long-term migration to East Pakistan in the decades following the Partition; and Muslims who have been residing in East Pakistan since before the Partition and witnessed it. These diverse voices coalesced to strengthen the historical and scholarly position that the narrative of the Partition must now become more nuanced, with regard to its effect in Bengal, than the commonly held associations with cataclysmic violence and mass migration. Interestingly, a number of these narratives from Bangladesh often reference their experiences from 1971 alongside 1947 and reveal how the memories of the Partition are constantly being reshaped based on the subsequent experiences of the interviewee.

India

In India, the collection of oral narratives was undertaken by the Mittal Institute's nascent New Delhi office, spearheaded by the Mittal Institute Country Director, Dr Sanjay Kumar, who became the POC for this project in India. The Indian team worked very hard to promote the project and used word of mouth, physical flyers, and social media posts to reach both potential ambassadors and interviewees.

For recruiting student ambassadors, the team reached out to departments and student bodies in various universities around the country, such as various colleges of Delhi University, the department of Mass Communications and New Media, Central University of Jammu, St. Xavier's College, Sophia College, and Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University in Mumbai, and Presidency College, St.

Xavier's College, and Jadavpur University in Kolkata. Based on the training modules prepared by the Cambridge team (including certification requirements by the Institutional Review Board), Kumar traveled to these cities, held information sessions in the universities to explain the project, and conducted training sessions for the prospective ambassadors, which included details on the mechanics of the collection process and the need for sensitivity and confidentiality.

The enthusiasm and effort of the student ambassadors were what made the entire process a success in India. They were very responsive in attending the training sessions and collecting the stories. Many students expressed their excitement at the chance of working on a project where they were collecting live data, which was not only informative but also allowed them to develop a nuanced understanding of the impact of the Partition. The ambassadors initially often started the collection process with their own family members and friends. In addition, ambassadors visited old-age homes, parks, gurudwaras, and neighborhoods where refugee families had settled post-Partition²⁷ to interview survivors.

The success also gave rise to coordination challenges—the sheer size of the volunteer team made it often difficult to keep track of each ambassador's collection process and ensure that each person submitted quality work in accordance with the established timeline. The staff assistant of the India office provided invaluable logistical support, including staying in constant communication with the ambassadors in their outreach efforts. To ensure coordination and sharing of information about potential interviewees, WhatsApp groups were created for batches of ambassadors in the same area. This almost-real-time outreach turned out to be a very effective mode of communication, allowing for constant interaction between the ambassadors in different cities and the India office based in Delhi, and resolving any immediate issues or questions that arose as the ambassadors conducted interviews and transcribed them. In addition, to further streamline communication, a student group leader was appointed for each college who acted as the conduit between the India office and the ambassadors in that college and could follow-up with the student ambassadors as needed.

In the first few months of story collection, the majority of ambassadors were from Delhi and collected mostly the narratives of middle-class Hindu

²⁷ For example, in Delhi, ambassadors went to a neighborhood with a huge Bengali population, Chittaranjan Park, to collect stories from Bengali Partition survivors, who migrated from East Bengal to India during Partition and made their way to Delhi. Narratives of survivors who migrated from East Bengal were also collected in Kolkata, West Bengal. Similarly, ambassadors visited Sindhi colonies in Mumbai to interview refugees from Karachi.

males. Realizing this lack of diversity of voices, in the second round of recruitment, the India team made a special effort to ensure the collection of narratives from different regions of the country and interview people from minority groups and women. Ambassadors were trained to be conscious and sensitive of the potential societal dynamics while conducting such interviews. For example, with respect to interviewing women, it was brought to the team's attention by the ambassadors that while interviewing women survivors, oftentimes their husbands or some other male family member would talk over them or paraphrase for the women. Upon realizing these patriarchal dynamics were in play, the ambassadors were trained to be conscious of it and either try and interview the women alone, or at least try to get the answers from the women themselves as much as possible. This allowed for a range of diverse voices to be heard and recorded. To make the questionnaire more accessible to interviewees, it was also translated into Hindi.

Certificate distribution functions were organized as groups of ambassadors completed their story collections. This gave the ambassadors a chance to share their experiences and challenges with their colleagues, along with recognition for the work they had done. The ambassadors have largely had very positive experiences. One ambassador mentioned how, through this project, she had a chance to interact for the first time with people of her grandparents' generation since she lost them when she was very young. This project gave her a chance to learn about the challenges faced by people who witnessed India's independence and to connect with them; she now often visits public parks to spend time with, and learn from, the elderly.

The India team had the biggest cohort of ambassadors—a total of more than 150 ambassadors who collected more than 1,400 narratives by December 2019. These narratives include stories of survivors from not just the Punjab border but also those who were in the east in West Bengal, in the north in Jammu, and in the west in Mumbai. It includes narratives of those who stayed in refugee camps for varying amounts of time, those who had family support, and those who were civil servants and worked in the state machinery.

Pakistan

The collection of narratives in Pakistan was possibly the most challenging—resulting in some of the most innovative methods being developed to promote the project and engage people. One of the biggest

challenges was in finding people who were willing to share their experience of the Partition—they were hesitant to talk about it. They often agreed only after being assured that their narratives would be used only for research purposes and only to the extent that they gave their express consent. Further, even in terms of obtaining their consent for interviews, people frequently said they were not comfortable with giving written consent and for the recordings would provide only verbal consent. Finally, it was challenging to recruit ambassadors who were motivated and willing to collect and transcribe the stories. Despite these challenges, the Pakistan team persevered and successfully managed to collect a wide variety of stories from across the country.

The efforts in Pakistan were led by Dr Mariam Chughtai, the Pakistan Programs Director for Mittal Institute and Associate Dean and Assistant Professor at the Lahore University of Management Sciences School of Education, Lahore, along with Mr Sajjad Aziz Khan. She became the POC in Pakistan while Khan managed the outreach efforts. The Pakistan story collection effort initially employed the same techniques as the India team and tried to recruit ambassadors from various universities and high schools across the country, including Lahore University of Management Sciences, Punjab University, and Lahore Grammar School in Lahore; the Institute of Business Management, Karachi; the Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar; and Roots School, Islamabad, to name a few. The Pakistan team went to schools and colleges and sent emails or held orientations to talk about the project and recruit ambassadors.

The Pakistan team used various forms of media to publicize the project. This included creating a Facebook page for Pakistan, where they advertised the project, shared snippets of stories collected by the ambassadors, and photographs of the certificate distribution functions to attract both potential interviewees and ambassadors. In addition, to reach a broader audience, particularly the survivors who are now in their late 70s or older, the Pakistan team published an advertisement about the project in the *Daily Jang*, a popular newspaper that has a broad audience. As a result of these advertisements, a number of people reached out to the Pakistan team and agreed to be interviewed. The Pakistan team then sent the ambassadors to interview the people who indicated interest.

For about a month in 2018, interviews with Chughtai and Khan were broadcast on a radio channel in Pakistan, where they talked about the program and explained the mechanics. The radio campaign was successful in reaching survivors who agreed to share their experiences in different parts of the country that would have been inaccessible otherwise,

such as Sheikhupura, Ali Pur Chattha, Chichawatni, Bahawalpur, and Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir. The Pakistan team also collaborated with Faiz Ghar, an arts foundation in Lahore with a large reach. Faiz Ghar shared their list of 6,000 members with the Pakistan team, who subsequently sent out brochures describing the story collection process to all of them in order to garner more interviews. Some people responded to the brochures, and their interviews were collected by the Pakistan team.

Most importantly, the Pakistan team, particularly Khan himself, went to small towns and villages across Pakistan to collect stories from across the country and various demographics. This exercise resulted in around a hundred stories being collected from Gujranwala, Nankana Sahib, Wazirabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Muzaffarabad. As a result of these varied efforts, more than 550 stories as of December 2019 have been collected in Pakistan from all over the country. In addition, an additional 246 stories were generously shared by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, based on a partnership with them from October 2017 to June 2018, wherein they had agreed to share secondary data on interviews with the Partition survivors which they had collected since 2007.²⁸

Thus, a total of about 800 stories from Pakistan have been collected from a diverse population who shared their experiences and thoughts about the Partition from the perspective of residents in West Pakistan. The Pakistan team paid particular attention to making sure they recorded the voices of minorities, whether they be religious, such as Hindus and Christians, or regional, such as from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Kashmir. They traversed across the country to ensure that interviews were collected from not only the big cities such as Lahore and Karachi but also from people in small towns and villages, whose experiences of the Partition were often very different from those who settled in the cities.

ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED

The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewee, resulting in interviews in a multitude of languages, including English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali. Figure 4.5 shows the percentages of different languages used during interviews.

²⁸ These 246 narratives were part of larger interviews conducted by Citizens Archive of Pakistan during their own collection process. Citizens Archive of Pakistan sifted through the larger interviews and shared the information related to the questionnaire from these 246 narratives in the form of written answers to our questionnaire and subsequent coding of these answers to add to our dataset.

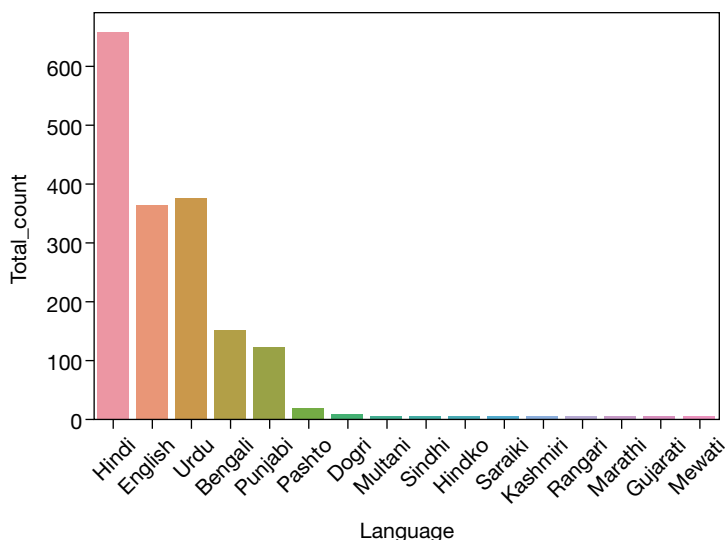


Figure 4.5 Interviews by Language Distribution

The interviews were, on average, about 20–40 minutes long and, in most cases, recorded on hand-held devices such as cellphones by the ambassador. These audio recordings were then transcribed (and translated into English, if needed) by the same ambassador, with a quality check being done by the in-country POC. The English transcripts were subsequently manually coded into a range of pre-determined quantitative and qualitative parameters by a group of researchers in Cambridge,²⁹ who were trained on the basis of a codebook that was developed to ensure

²⁹ The manually coded dataset is being analyzed using mixed methods to investigate which factors significantly affected or impacted an individual's experiences and responses to the Partition. In addition, a sentiment analysis is being done on the transcript texts of the interviews in order to chart whether the interview transcripts reflect any specific topics and sentiments with respect to the memories of the interviewees of their experiences before, during, and after the Partition. For the sentiment analysis, we calculated a sentiment score for each story based on a dictionary specifically created for this dataset as existing dictionaries could not adequately capture the terms used in this dataset, including the usage of words in a South Asian and event-specific context. Each word in the dictionary has been given either a positive or negative tag. The score of a particular interview would be the equivalent of the number of positive words subtracted by the number of negative words. There is currently a working paper that discusses some of the main results from the analysis of the data (Tarun Khanna, Karim Lakhani, Shubhangi Bhadada, Ruihan Wang, Michael Menietti, and Tiara Bhattacharya, "Long-Run Memories of Involuntary Migratory Displacement: A Correlational Analysis of the 1947 Partition of British India" [working paper 2020] https://mgmt.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Partition_dataset_paper_Tarun_MM-Seminar-speaker.pdf [accessed on May 19, 2022]).

consistency in the coding process. In addition, one of the researchers would do a final systematic spot check on the coded entries to ensure their uniformity and to maintain standardization of the process. Despite this effort, thousands of interviews conducted by approximately 300 ambassadors using a number of different languages and translated and transcribed by the ambassadors themselves resulted in variation in the quality of the interview transcripts. This variability affected the quality and quantity of information that could be extracted in the coding process. An example of the variability could be seen in evaluating the socio-economic status of the survivors prior to the Partition. In some cases, the interviews and transcripts included specific information that made it easy to evaluate the socio-economic status of the survivor's family before the Partition, such as a clear statement with them on being well-to-do, having land holdings, and mode of transportation used to make the journey. However, in other cases, there was very little information given and their socio-economic status had to be inferred from what little was described of their lives before the Partition, if anything.

Given that the Partition happened more than 70 years ago and that the pool of survivors is continually diminishing, this sample collected here could not claim to be random or representative. It necessarily reflects survivor bias and location bias, which overlap to mean that the sample favors findings from the middle and upper middle classes (who have had the means and capability to survive till their late 70s to early 90s). The graphs (Figures 4.6 and 4.7) reflect the socio-economic breakup of our dataset immediately before and after the Partition. The socio-economic status of the interviewees was inferred and manually coded based on varied factors such as occupation, land ownership, family wealth, class, belongings traveled with, mode of transportation, and location of the interview (urban or rural)—all indicators mined from the responses of the interviewees.³⁰ The majority of interviewees belong to one of the middle-class categories, although it is important to note that according to those

³⁰ For example, interviewers who reported that their families were one of the wealthiest in their hometown/city were categorized as wealthy. They often travelled by plane. The "upper middle class" were those who often came from families that had doctors, lawyers, and other privileged professions. These families were not extremely wealthy, but affluent. They often traveled by ship or in special vehicles provided by the government. "Middle class" is the default category; these families held middle-income posts. Most government employees, police, soldiers, or schoolteachers will be coded as "middle class." "Lower middle class" and "poor" are differentiated based on occupation and landholding. "Lower middle class" and "poor" respondents were clerks, farmers, blue-collar workers, small shop owners, rural residents, etc. They often bore the brunt of violence and travelled on foot or with public trains.

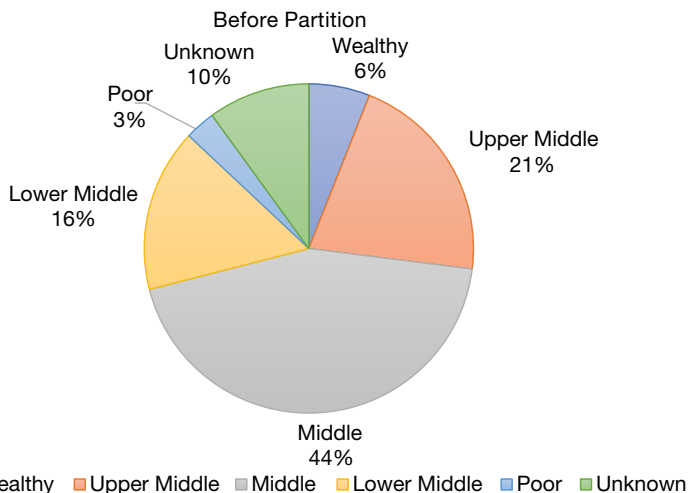


Figure 4.6 Breakdown of Socio-economic Status before Partition

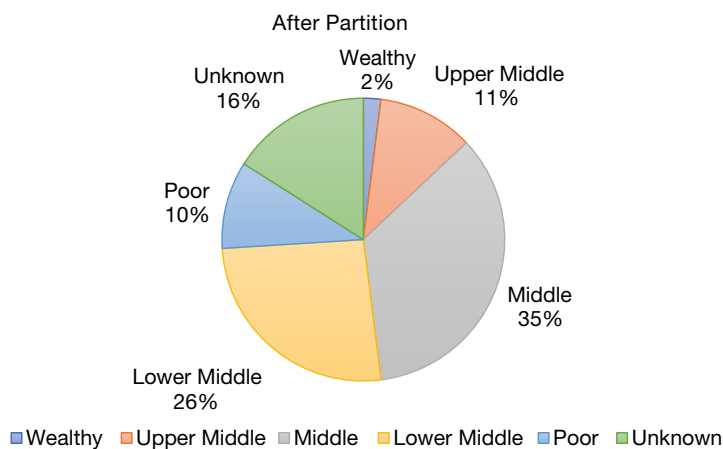


Figure 4.7 Breakdown of Socio-economic Status after Partition

interviewed now, decades later, the socio-economic status of most has changed for the worse.

In addition, the location of the ambassadors, who lived in predominantly urban areas, also skewed the sampling toward those interviewees who lived in big cities. Finally, unavoidable in any such project, the bias

of circumstance will have shaped the experiences of these interviewees over the past 70 years and the bias of memory will have colored their recollections of the events surrounding the Partition.

CONCLUSION

The Partition Stories Project is an ongoing effort to build a database of narratives from this steadily decreasing population who experienced this epochal event that has shaped South Asia as a whole, and its communities and families, for the last 70 plus years. The collection of these interviews has been a difficult and time-consuming process. There were many challenges to finding and convincing the survivors across the three countries to share their stories with us, and each region had its own unique issues. However, the collection of more than 2,000 stories in less than three years is a testament to the relentless efforts of everyone on the team. The various approaches and methods employed to gather these narratives, described in this chapter, highlight the need for innovation to obtain further knowledge about events such as the Partition and illuminate how an interdisciplinary approach can be used to enrich existing material.

Adapting the snowball or respondent-driven model, which is considered to be one of the most fruitful ways by humanitarian workers and human rights organizations to find people who are willing to talk about a difficult incident or situation, into the ambassador model was one of the key reasons for the success of the project. The model had to be innovatively adapted to the wild diversity of settings (languages, locales, countries, and politics). It had to effectively address the context-specific obstacles and barriers for the different groups of people (old, poor, minorities, afraid). Focusing on the exercise of story collection at the grassroots level, including getting the buy-in of local universities and enlisting leaders from these settings and relying on young people in the local communities, whose hesitancy and inexperience may well have diminished the anxiety of their older informants, were some of the reasons why the exercise has been such a resounding success.

This interview dataset is unique for not only having interviews of survivors from all three countries that were a result of the Partition, but also for having specifically collected interviews of underrepresented voices in these regions, particularly those of women and religious minorities. The narratives of these underrepresented voices will help to fill the large gaps in the official texts and literature of the experience of ordinary people in the Partition. The inventive methods needed to collect the narratives of a

diverse group of survivors bring to the forefront the psychological, logistical, societal, and/or political issues that inhibit the underrepresented from sharing their experiences.

These interviews are rich sources of information and details about the Partition event and also give a window into the thoughts and feelings of the survivors about the Partition and its impact today. The use of semi-structured questionnaires has ensured that most of these interviews contain more specificity and detail than would have been obtained from open-ended ones. It is in asking for specifics and respectfully following up with more questions relating to details, that older or fearful informants are more likely to share facets of what they recall but might otherwise censure as too minor, too personal, or too emotionally hazardous. Information collected from these narratives includes details of the movements of the refugees, conditions of refugee camps, and personal thoughts and assessments about the Partition as an event and as an experience.

A major output of this project will be the archived interviews that will be available to other researchers and scholars, who may use these narratives as a means to understand and discover further nuances of the Partition experience but also to discern lessons that may be applied to contemporary crises. The collection, selection, and analytic process described in this chapter is just the first step in this project.

We hope that this description of the innovative processes and methods employed in the Partition Stories Project will encourage others to embark on similar efforts of data collection and analysis by thinking outside the box, contextualizing their approaches to the specific barriers faced by the target population, and above all, not be afraid to adapt and challenge established methods and processes.

ANNEXURE A. 1947 PARTITION OF BRITISH INDIA: PARTITION STORIES—INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Basic Information (to be Filled out by Interviewer)

Name of interviewee _____ Date of interview

Interview location _____ Language of interview

Interviewee experiences or recounting for someone else? Interviewee (self) Someone else: _____

(Name/Relationship)

Migrated from/to _____/_____

Hometown/current residence _____/_____

Religion of interviewee _____ Education _____ Age during the Partition _____

Consent

Before you begin to answer the questions, please acknowledge that you have given permission to be interviewed.

Method of consent: • Audio • Signature on paper

QUESTIONS: 1947 PARTITION OF BRITISH INDIA— PARTITION STORIES

Before Partition

1. Describe life before the Partition. Where were you before the Partition happened? What were you doing? What were things like? What was the feeling then (your feelings, general atmosphere)?

During Partition

2. When and how did you learn about the Partition? Please tell us about your experience. What happened during the Partition? Where were you when the Partition happened? Did you stay where you were or did you have to leave?

Migration

If you *migrated*,

- 3a. Where did you leave from/to? Which towns did you cross or stay in? How was the decision to leave reached?

- 3b. Who did you travel with? What method(s) of transportation did you take? Did people in your area leave? Who left, who stayed back?
- 3c. What did you take with you and why? What did you end up with? What happened on the journey?

If you *did not migrate*,

- 3a. Please describe how it was decided to stay. Where did you stay? Who did you stay with?
- 3b. Did you interact with migrants? How?

Refugee Camps

- 4. Were you at a refugee camp at any point on the journey?
If so, then:
 - 4a. Where was the camp located?
 - 4b. When were you there? (If you don't remember exact dates, try to remember the season, recent events, or year.)
 - 4c. How long were you there? How did you decide to leave the camp?
 - 4d. How many people were there?
 - 4e. Describe life at the camp (food, water, medicine/medical care, sanitation, activities at the camp, work/money, registration, deaths).
 - 4f. Was there any temporary education center? Did you study there? Do you have any certificates?

Health

- 5. Could you tell us what kinds of diseases or illnesses were common at the time of the Partition?
- 6. Did you, or anyone you know of, experience any health-related issues during the Partition (e.g., diseases, injuries, or mental illnesses)? If so, did you get any help to deal with those issues during that time? Who provided help?

Education

- 7. What was the impact of the Partition on your education? Did you change your stream? Could you tell us if you missed school/college, and if so, for how long?

Livelihood/Profession

8. How did the Partition impact your livelihood/professional life?

Response of the Government and Civil Society

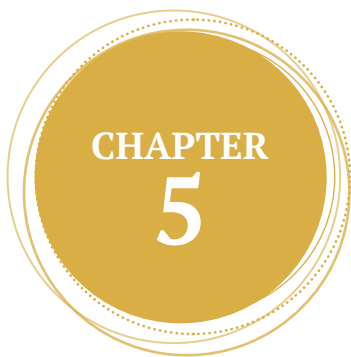
9. How did the government and/or civil society in the new countries respond to the Partition? What do you think they did well and where did they falter? Do you remember any other individuals that were active during that time?
10. What do you remember about the role of the police and military during the Partition?

After Partition

11. What was it like after the Partition? Was life any different than it was before the Partition happened? Did you undergo any lifestyle changes as a result of the Partition (e.g., change schools, eat different foods, aspects of daily life and care, etc.)?
12. How do you feel about the decision on Partition? Is that any different than how you felt in 1947–1948?
13. Have you been, or are you, in touch (present or in the past) with anyone from your birthplace/location before the Partition? Would you like to share anything about that communication?
14. Can you share any photographs or memorabilia with us from the time of the Partition?
15. Have you been interviewed before? If so, by whom?

After Completing the Interview, Please Circle All That Apply

- ☐ Permission to use your name and first name (or initials) in our study.
Name First name Initials
- ☐ Permission to use quotes/excerpts from this interview. Name Short name Anonymous
- ☐ Permission to use age, location during the Partition, and audio (name as above). Age Location Audio
- ☐ Permission for the information above to be included on the Harvard South Asia Institute website devoted to research. Yes (grant permission) No (research only)



The Impact of Partition on East Pakistan

Toward a More Nuanced Central Narrative

Ornob Alam, Rita Yusuf, and Omar Rahman

INTRODUCTION

The 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan is conventionally described as a time of massive upheaval.¹ Much has been written about the migration-induced trauma of large numbers of people who were forced to move in either direction in Punjab or Bengal. The dominant narrative has been that people had to leave behind their homes and livelihoods against the backdrop of violence and discrimination and move to a foreign land not of their choosing, while those who remained behind had to contend with a landscape of unpredictable terror and change.² This near-monolithic view of the Partition, which has gone largely unchallenged until relatively recently, needs to be put into greater context, particularly with regard to Muslim migration—including Bengali and the often

¹ Jennifer Yusin, "The Silence of Partition: Borders, Trauma, and Partition History," *Social Semiotics* 19, no. 4 (December 17, 2009): 453–468, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330903361141> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

² Navdip Kaur, "Violence and Migration: A Study of Killing in the Trains during the Partition of Punjab in 1947," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72 (2011): 947–954; Gyanendra Pandey, "Community and Violence: Recalling Partition," *Economic & Political Weekly* 32, no. 32 (1997): 2037–2045; Yusin, "The Silence of Partition."

overlooked Bihari Muslims—from the eastern part of India to East Pakistan and the experience of Muslims living in East Pakistan at the time.³

With regard to migration on the eastern front, there is a considerable disparity in the extent to which the effects of Partition have been studied in India versus East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The trauma of the displacement of Hindu migrants from East Pakistan to India, mainly West Bengal, has been relatively well-documented.⁴ In her book, *Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India 1947–1967*, Joya Chatterji describes the plight of the often-destitute refugees, who struggled to settle into a place with increasingly fewer opportunities, as West Bengal progressively lost political and economic influence following the Partition.⁵ Such experiences have also been culturally immortalized by Ritwik Ghatak, among others. His Partition trilogy focused on the emotional longing of migrants from East Pakistan for a lost ancestral home, in parallel with the economic hardships brought about by the migration into West Bengal.⁶

On the other hand, the experiences of Muslim migrants from eastern India to East Pakistan have until recently remained largely unexplored. *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*, written as a collaboration between Joya Chatterji, Annu Jalais, and Claire Alexander—a historian, an anthropologist, and a sociologist, respectively—and published in 2015, made significant headway in addressing this gap.⁷ The book paints a complex picture of migrations to East Pakistan, highlighting the factors that influenced the decision to migrate across the newly formed borders, and providing important historical context for the movement of Biharis.⁸ Most strikingly, the book blurs any clear distinction between economic

³ Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315660066> (accessed on May 27, 2022); Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim I. Khwaja, and Atif Mian, "Population Exchange and Its Impact on Literacy, Occupation and Gender: Evidence from the Partition of India," 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12039> (accessed on May 27, 2022); Prashant Bharadwaj and James Fenske, "Partition, Migration, and Jute Cultivation in India," *Journal of Development Studies* 48, no. 8 (August 2012): 1084–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2011.579114> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁴ Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and Their Rehabilitation in India, 1947–79," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17, no. 1 (1996): 24–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.1996.tb00082.x> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁵ Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶ Anindya Raychaudhuri, "Resisting the Resistible: Re-writing Myths of Partition in the Works of Ritwik Ghatak," *Social Semiotics* 19, no. 4 (December 17, 2009): 469–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330903361158> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁷ William Gould, "Rethinking 'Diaspora': Bengal's Muslims and Hidden Migrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 3 (February 19, 2017): 413–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1249502> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁸ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

and forced migrations—a theme that we elaborate on here—by noting that long before the Partition, urban centers such as Dacca, Rajshahi, and Bogra had been destinations for white-collar migrants as well as railway workers from North India. Papiya Ghosh's 2016 book, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora: Extending the Subcontinent*, delves further into the impact of Partition on Bihari Muslims, focusing on the plight of approximately 300,000 Bihari Muslims living in refugee camps across Bangladesh today. Their historical trajectory is broached in some of our interviews.⁹

In this chapter, we examine the factors that for a large proportion of Muslims made the transition on the eastern border—both in terms of physical movement, in the case of Muslims migrating from eastern India to East Pakistan, and in terms of national identity—an aspirational event rather than a traumatic one. This perspective holds especially with reference to the motivations and experiences of migrants from the Bengali professional middle-class and Bihari communities. Based on close examination of historical and demographic evidence as well as on oral histories, we corroborate and expand on recent scholarship that paints the motivations of migrants to East Pakistan with a finer brush. And in an effort to gauge the long-term social impact of Partition, we also explore how the decades following the Partition have tempered the lives and sentiments of the affected individuals now living in Bangladesh. Here we place at the core of our analysis the views of individuals who were living in East Pakistan during the Partition, not only to frame the above narratives but also to gain a better understanding of why it does not figure heavily in the conversations of cultural identity or regional history taking place in Bangladesh, especially when compared to India and Pakistan. To provide an important context, it will be useful to first examine the salient events in the history of Bengal that formed the backdrop to the 1947 Partition on the eastern front.

BENGAL LEADING UP TO PARTITION

The first partition of Bengal took place in 1905. It proved to be the historical fulcrum around which pivoted the 1947 division of British India along communal lines.¹⁰ The response of Bengali Muslims to the prospect of partitioning Bengal into distinct administrative sectors in 1905 presaged

⁹Papiya Ghosh, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora: Extending the Subcontinent*, 1st edition (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2016).

¹⁰David Ludden, "Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (May 20, 2012): 483–525. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X11000357> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

their attitudes toward Partition in 1947—even in 1905, they perceived the partition of Bengal and the resulting changes in administration and power dynamics as offering favorable prospects.¹¹

The considerable size and population of Bengal had prompted the British to toy with the idea of shifting administrative boundaries several times in the decades leading up to the first partition of Bengal in 1905.¹² While a few proposed changes, such as the 1874 separation of Assam, were successfully executed, the first radical proposal for Bengal's division was brought forward in 1903. The major proposed changes included the separation of Dacca, Mymensingh, and Chittagong from Bengal and attaching them to Assam.¹³ The argument was that this would relieve Bengal of some of its administrative burden and allow the development of Assam by providing access to the Chittagong port. This initial proposal was met with almost unanimous opposition.¹⁴ Middle-class, educated Hindus foresaw a number of unpleasant economic and political consequences, such as the establishment of a new court in Dacca (possibly reducing the influence of the Calcutta High Court), and businesses such as newspapers losing much of their market.¹⁵ The majority of Muslims objected to being included with Assam under a Chief Commissioner, as opposed to the Lieutenant-Governor for Calcutta, which they felt would hinder economic development.¹⁶ Further, some Hindus and Muslims also saw this move as an attempt to undermine Bengali solidarity.¹⁷

However, the revised 1905 proposal proved more acceptable. In response to some of the opposition, and after inspecting the state of the administration in eastern Bengal, the British Indian government pushed through an even more radical proposal, which went into effect in 1905. The new province resulting from the split was designed to be large enough to have its own independent administration and, combined with Assam, served under its own Lieutenant-Governorship.¹⁸ The new provinces of Eastern Bengal and Assam had their own Legislative Council and Board of Revenue. This new proposal, while still largely opposed by Bengali

¹¹ Gordon Johnson, "Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908," *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1973): 533–588.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Barbara Daly Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lion M. G. Agrawal, *Freedom Fighters of India* (New Delhi: Isha Books, 2008).

¹⁷ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*.

¹⁸ Johnson, "Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908."

Hindus, was embraced by a majority of Muslims, especially those from the educated middle class.¹⁹ They realized that the new province provided for a Muslim majority, which would lead to more appointments for Muslims and greater representation in government.

The 1905 partition of Bengal led to the Swadeshi Bengali nationalist movement, with its two major activities being agitation against the British, and the boycott of British goods.²⁰ Only a handful of Muslims supported the movement. The Hindu nationalist movement was a response to the partition, and the boycott was meant to force the withdrawal of the partition resolution. Muslims, however, banded together in favor of the partition of Bengal, and the 1905 partition lasted for six years.²¹ In 1911, the continuing opposition from Bengali Hindus, among other administrative reasons, prompted the British government to annul the partition.²² They appeased the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam by mandating special representation of Muslims in the Legislative Council and other bodies.²³

Leading up to 1947, when the Partition of India was imminent, the general opinion among Bengali Hindus swung in favor of the partition of Bengal as they felt threatened by the prospect of living under a Muslim-dominated administration in Pakistan.²⁴ This feeling was intensified following the 1946 riots in Bengal. Petitions were made in favor of including Hindu-majority regions in Bengal as part of the Indian Union in an effort to save the Bengali Hindus from cultural extinction as well as to preserve their economic interests.²⁵ Lower caste communities were mobilized by proliferating the idea of a Hindu nation. Muslims, who also largely favored partition, were motivated by the prospect of freedom from Hindu domination in administration and the potential for nation-building with Muslim socio-democratic ideals.²⁶ These views were shared by the Muslim peasantry as well as urban, educated Muslims living in Dacca and Calcutta. In many ways, it can be argued that Muslims favored the

¹⁹ Ibid.; Anil Baran Ray, "Communal Attitudes to British Policy: The Case of the Partition of Bengal 1905," *Social Scientist* 6, no. 5 (1977): 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3520087> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

²⁰ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² F. A. Eustis and Z. H. Zaidi, "King, Viceroy and Cabinet: The Modification of the Partition of Bengal, 1911," *History* 49, no. 166 (1964): 171–184. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24405055>

²³ Agrawal, *Freedom Fighters of India*.

²⁴ Haimanti Roy, "A Partition of Contingency? Public Discourse in Bengal, 1946–1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 6 (November 18, 2009): 1355–1384. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X08003788> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

partition for economic benefit, while Hindus were mainly looking to avoid harm to their way of life.

CONTRASTING DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN BENGAL AND THE PUNJAB

Partition in the Punjab has received so much focus in the literature that it has come to serve as a model for Partition in general.²⁷ There are, however, important differences in the demographic trends and transitions between the regions.²⁸ The violence-centric narrative of the Partition fits much more closely with the experiences of migrants in Punjab than in Bengal.

The scale of migration was much lower in Bengal compared to the Punjab, both in numbers and in proportions of the total population. Based on current estimates, the total population in both Bengal and the Punjab was close to 30 million people. The 1951 census enumerated 9.2 million migrants to or from East or West Punjab, and 3.2 million migrants to or from East Pakistan or West Bengal.²⁹ The migration of nearly a third of the population in Punjab naturally resulted in greater disruption, and while the number of migrants to East Pakistan is almost certainly underestimated due to underreporting and back-migration of East Bengalis who had settled in West Bengal,³⁰ this is unlikely to change the larger picture. The scope of migration was lower in Bengal to begin with, as the majority of Muslims in Bengal already lived in what became East Pakistan.³¹

Moreover, while migration across the Punjab in either direction was comparable in numbers, the difference was much starker in Bengal.³² There was significantly less movement from the eastern part of India—West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Tripura—to East Pakistan compared to movement from East Pakistan to eastern India. In the 1951 census, only 671,000 migrants from eastern India were enumerated in East Pakistan,

²⁷ Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem Van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee: Rethinking Partition Migration," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 2003): S0026749X03003020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

²⁸ K. Hill, W. Seltzer, J. Leaning, S. J. Malik, S. S. Russell, "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab in 1947," *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (July 2008): 155–170, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324720801955206> (accessed on May 27, 2022); K. Hill, W. Seltzer, J. Leaning, S. J. Malik, S. S. Russell, "The Demographic Impact of Partition: Bengal in 1947," *XXV International Population Conference of the IUSSP, 2005, 2005*, <https://iusp2005.princeton.edu/papers/52236> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rahman and Van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee."

³¹ Hill et al., "The Demographic Impact of Partition."

³² Hill et al., "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab in 1947."

compared to 2.5 million migrants in the opposite direction, of which 1.4 million are thought to have been post-1947 migrants from East Pakistan to West Bengal.³³ Migration in Bengal also took place over a longer period compared to Punjab, where it was practically completed by the end of 1947. Over the course of the two decades following Partition, at least an estimated three to four million people migrated from eastern India to East Pakistan.³⁴ And in the other direction, an estimate of five million migrants from East Pakistan to India between 1946 and 1964 is described by Chatterji as “improbably conservative.”³⁵ Migration in Bengal, in contrast with the Punjab, was not a massive two-way reshuffling brought about by cataclysmic events.

In our examination of migration from eastern India to East Pakistan, we bring together threads from historical literature and documents to assert that the movement in this direction was defined by a combination of factors, including economic incentives for migrants,³⁶ religious and territorial sentiment,³⁷ and existing networks of migration in the region before Partition.³⁸ As we explore these factors, we rely on oral interviews we conducted with individuals currently living in Bangladesh who witnessed or have been affected by the Partition to provide anecdotal and empirical support for our arguments. In the process, we also gain some insight into why the 1947 Partition appears to have had a much smaller impact on the prevailing sense of cultural and historical identity in Bangladesh compared to India and Pakistan.

THE COLLECTION OF ORAL INTERVIEWS

To collect oral interviews of individuals or their direct descendants who experienced the 1947 Partition, we recruited students interested in conducting interviews from the Independent University of Bangladesh (where we are based), using flyers and social media to locate and interview them. The students completed an online ethics course and were subsequently trained on conducting qualitative interviews using a sample questionnaire

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

³⁵ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*.

³⁶ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*; Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000).

³⁷ David Gilmartin, “The Historiography of India’s Partition: Between Civilization and Modernity,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 23–41.

³⁸ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

provided by the team based at the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University.

Our initial interviewees were grandparents, extended relatives, and neighbors of the students themselves. Given that all student participants belonged to the major ethnicity and religion in Bangladesh (i.e., Bengali Muslims), this beginning was useful for gaining a general sense of how people felt about the Partition at this moment in time. However, apart from a single student who traveled outside Dhaka to his hometown to collect interviews of Urdu-speaking migrants, this strategy did not turn out to be the best way to find minority voices. So we expanded our radius.

One student traveled to the border district of Lalmonirhat and collected ten interviews, which included Bihari individuals who had migrated from India during the Partition and a Hindu individual who did not move to West Bengal during the Partition. A group of students then targeted Bihari settlements in Dhaka. Biharis are an important minority in Bangladesh in the context of Partition. They are deeply entwined with the history of the 1947 Partition as well as the 1971 independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan, and their perception of Partition has not been widely heard. The interviews collected by these students gave us an insight into the impact of Partition on the Bihari community that settled in East Pakistan and the subsequent changes they went through after 1971. While we were ultimately able to get some interviews from Bihari individuals, a large proportion of the individuals belonging to the group declined to be interviewed, even with a guarantee of anonymity. We discuss some of the potential reasons for their refusal later in the chapter.

In the end, the students were collectively able to collect around 100 interviews, with a diversity of voices among the interviewees, including (among others) the descendants of early post-Partition Bihari migrants, Hindus who stayed in East Pakistan following the Partition, economic migrants, migrants who exchanged government job positions when they migrated, and migrants whose families were part of the long-term migration to East Pakistan in the decades following the Partition. Around 30 percent of our interviewees were women, while 10 individuals constituted minorities. These diverse voices coalesce into anecdotal support for the argument that the narrative of Partition needs to be more nuanced than the commonly held associations with cataclysmic violence and mass migration allow, at least with regard to its history in Bengal.

THE VIEW FROM THE EAST: ORAL NARRATIVES FROM EAST PAKISTAN (BANGLADESH)³⁹

Mohammed Aatur Rahman, who was only 12 years old and living in eastern Bengal at the time of Partition, does not appear to harbor strong sentiments about the event that split a nation into two along tense, communal lines. He recalls continuing to go to school with his brothers and generally going on with life as he had done before Partition. He does casually note one key difference: a large proportion of Hindus in his village in what had just become East Pakistan left for India in the immediate aftermath of the Partition. Members of his Muslim community, he recalls, responded with an increased focus on educating their children as employment sectors previously dominated by the more educated Hindus suddenly opened up for Muslims. But appreciation, if any, of the economic benefits for Muslims following the Partition is tempered by the hardships endured in the time preceding the second partition, which he has lived through. He tells us now that a feeling of discontent slowly grew among East Pakistanis as a result of discrimination by the West Pakistan government, which led to the 1971 war for the independence of Bangladesh, and that life has been much better since gaining independence from Pakistan. He notes with pride how far he has come from his village days to now being a retired government official in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh.

This is not an uncommon narrative among our interviewees. Another interviewee, Abdul Alim, similarly told us that before the Partition, teachers at his school, as well as most of the students, were all Hindu, as were two of the three doctors in his village in eastern Bengal. During the Partition, many of the Hindus in his village departed for India in steamers, and he recalls once seeing a steamer in 1947 that was so “overloaded with people as if it would sink.” His life, however, progressed similarly as before. The following account from another interviewee, who requested to remain anonymous and had been in Sylhet at the time of Partition, implies that the migration of Hindus made enrollment in schools easier for Muslim students. When asked about the impact of the Partition on his education, he stated:

It had a good impact for me. Because of the partition, many schools got relatively vacant, and I could get admitted and start my education. Before the partition, I was home-schooled, but after the partition, the restrictions in the form of rules and requirements from the schools became looser. Therefore, I could start my education.

³⁹ Please note that all interviewees' names have been changed to protect identity.

Such narratives are consistent with key aspects of the impact of Partition on Muslims in East Pakistan that come through in literature and historical documents. First, despite being a relative minority in eastern Bengal, Hindus in the region before Partition had enjoyed a near monopoly on positions that required education, and their departure to West Bengal left behind a welcome economic vacuum.⁴⁰ This point is reflected in the literacy figures from the 1941 census of Bengal. Dacca Division, the most populated division in eastern Bengal, had a Hindu population of around 4.5 million and a Muslim population of nearly 12 million.⁴¹ The number of literate individuals, however, was around 1.1 million for both Hindus and Muslims, demonstrating a much higher literacy rate for Hindus.⁴²

While Hindus had a similarly higher literacy in the Punjab as well, there had been massive mobilization in the Punjab in the preceding decades to try to ensure that Muslims were proportionally represented in provincial services.⁴³ A 1933 survey revealed that Muslims held 48 percent and Hindus held 40 percent of a total of around 37,000 government positions in Punjab.⁴⁴ In addition, while the partition of Punjab was ultimately to be of economic benefit to Muslims, the migrations there were sudden, rapid, and mostly completed by early 1948.

A second key aspect of the Partition in Bengal reflected in these narratives is that a relatively large number of people who were living in East Pakistan regarded Partition as a favorable outcome prior to 1947.⁴⁵ Our interviewees were understandably quite young in 1947, and most of them recall events that transpired locally, often without the context of their social or political significance, but their recollections provide a sense of widespread celebration in the nascent East Pakistan.

Saleha Khatun, an octogenarian living in Dhaka today, does not remember much about the Partition and how it occurred, but she can clearly recount the multiple feasts for feeding the poor as well as *milads* (Muslim religious feasts) that were held in her neighborhood in what was then Dacca in the days following the announcement of Partition. Mohammed Abul Bashar, who was in the Barisal district during the Partition and now

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*.

⁴¹ R. A. Dutch, "Census of India, 1941, Volume IV, Bengal," vol. IV, 1942.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ K. B. S. Fazl-i-Ilahi, "Census of India, 1941, Volume VI, Punjab Tables", 1942.

⁴⁴ Peter Scragg, *The Muslims of the Punjab and Their Politics, 1936–1947* (London: University of London, 1984).

⁴⁵ Neilesh Bose, "Purba Pakistan Zindabad: Bengali Visions of Pakistan, 1940–1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 48 (January 1, 2013): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X12000315>; Gilmartin, "The Historiography of India's Partition."

resides in Dhaka, similarly recalls going to programs arranged to celebrate independence with his father and uncles. Mohammed Alamgir, who had also remained in his home village in eastern Bengal during Partition, recounts: "After the [P]artition we got Pakistan. We felt ecstatic. With overwhelming joy, we sang songs written by the Bengali poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam. We got relief."

All of our interviewees who were living in eastern Bengal at that time recall being happy with becoming part of the Muslim state of Pakistan, at least initially, before it became clear that they were being discriminated against by the West Pakistani government, as Ataur Rahman mentioned. A few of them described anti-British sentiment during the period. Abdul Jabbar, a seven-year-old in Rangpur during the Partition recalls that people in his village were happy that the British would be leaving. Husne Ara Mustafa brought up World War II and presumably the Bengal famine of 1943: "Partition happened after the war. During the war, Bengali people didn't take part. Due to this reason, they stopped the supply of staple foods like rice. Many people died of hunger during the time of Partition. This is what I remember."

This account is in line with Madhusree Mukerjee's recent analysis of Winston Churchill's policies during World War II. Churchill implemented policies to export food from India to Britain and its war theaters,⁴⁶ while allocating resources in India only to those who were involved in the war effort (through fighting or making weapons), or those involved in making the railways.⁴⁷ Recent analyses of geological data provide strong evidence that the 1943 Bengal famine was not caused by drought, suggesting that Churchill's policies were to blame.⁴⁸ Churchill, though, blamed Indians for causing the famine by "breeding like rabbits."⁴⁹ Given that Muslims largely constituted the poorer strata of Bengal and were often exploited by wealthy Hindus,⁵⁰ the famine strengthened the resolve among Bengali

⁴⁶ Soumen Dhar Choudhury, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, September 12, 2019), <https://cognizancejournal.com/vol1issue5/V1I504.pdf> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁴⁷ Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010).

⁴⁸ Vimal Mishra, Amar Deep Tiwari, Saran Aadhar, Reepal Shah, Mu Xiao, D. S. Pai, Dennis Lettenmaier, "Drought and Famine in India, 1870–2016," *Geophysical Research Letters* 46, no. 4 (February 28, 2019): 2075–2083, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2018GL081477> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁴⁹ Madhusree Mukerjee, "Winston Churchill's Plan for Post-War India," *Economic & Political Weekly* 45, no. 32 (2010): 27–30.

⁵⁰ Denis Wright, "Islam and Bangladeshi Polity," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 1987): 15–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856408708723099> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

Muslims to be part of a state governed by Muslims, while also intensifying the antagonistic feelings toward the British.⁵¹

Resentment against Hindu landlords had been growing in the decades leading up to Partition,⁵² and a sense of emancipation from Hindus in the aftermath of Partition was reflected in some of our interviews. Mohammed Nizamuddin has no personal memories of the Partition and was a one-year-old living in Bogra when the Partition was announced. Yet, while sitting for his interview with us, he painted a brutal picture of life before the Partition, in which his parents and grandparents used to be “tortured” by Hindu landlords, based on what he had heard from them. Interestingly, he also went on to mention that people lived difficult lives in poverty before and after the Partition, and that, in his experience, life was only better when Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971.

While it has been established that there was not as much violence in the aftermath of the Partition in Bengal in comparison to the Punjab, especially as people continued to move across borders for decades,⁵³ there was significant carnage leading up to the Partition.⁵⁴ The Noakhali and Calcutta riots in 1946, in particular, led to greater support for the Partition.⁵⁵ The violent backdrop to the Partition is reflected in the accounts of riots and skirmishes, at least in urban centers, from some of our interviewees. Saleha Khatun describes being relieved when the Partition announcement was finally made, as there had been skirmishes between Hindus and Muslims in her neighborhood in Dacca, and there was hope that these incidents could now end. An interviewee, who wished to remain anonymous and who had lived in a village on the East Bengal side through the time of Partition, indirectly corroborates this:

No violence occurred in the village areas. Some did take place, but in the city. We were living in the village and didn't see any riots or conflicts. In the city, conflicts and riots took place between some

⁵¹ Maya Tudor, *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139519076> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁵² Roy, “A Partition of Contingency?”

⁵³ Prashant Bharadwaj, Asim Khwaja, and Atif Mian, “The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 43, no. 35 (2008): 39–49; Manjeet S. Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly, “Violent Punjab, Quiescent Bengal, and the Partition of India,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 57, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2019.1554232> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁵⁴ Biswaroop Ghosh, “Religion and Politics in Bengal: The Noakhali Carnage 1946–47,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72 (2011): 936–946; Asok Mitra, “The Great Calcutta Killings of 1946: What Went before and after,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 25, no. 5 (1990): 273–285.

⁵⁵ Ghosh, “Religion and Politics in Bengal.”

Muslims and Hindus. There was violence in Dhaka, Calcutta, and other cities. It didn't happen in the village areas. In these riots, many Hindus killed Muslims, and vice versa.

An underappreciated aspect of migration to East Pakistan—the existence of pre-Partition patterns of movement—also came through during Saleha Khatun's interview. Her niece, who referred Saleha to us for the interview and took us to her home, greeted her aunt in Urdu but could not tell us why Urdu was the language of choice for communication among the paternal side of her family. Fortunately, her aunt could: Saleha's father had migrated to Bengal from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh long before the Partition to teach Arabic to a Nawab family in Dacca. This story ties in well with indications that existing networks of movement existed in the region before Partition.⁵⁶ It also foreshadows the complexity of defining Urdu-speaking migrants to East Pakistan following Partition that we will come across later in the chapter.

Finally, in the references to 1971 in the accounts of interviewees such as Mohammed Ataur Rahman and Mohammed Nizamuddin, we hear echoes of why the 1947 Partition does not dominate the national consciousness or political identity in any meaningful way in modern day Bangladesh. Extensive exploitation of East Pakistan following the Partition in 1947⁵⁷ ensured that the 1971 independence from Pakistan instead came to dominate the Bangladeshi national consciousness. As an *Aljazeera* feature written to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Partition noted, “in Bangladesh, 1947 is a distant memory, erased by the bloody 1971 liberation war against Pakistan.”⁵⁸

LONG-TERM MUSLIM MIGRATIONS TO BENGAL

Organized riots, killings, and abductions, motivated by economic and political interests, are thought to have been responsible for the very rapid migration observed in the Punjab.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

⁵⁷ Stanley Maron, “The Problem of East Pakistan,” *Pacific Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1955): 132–144, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3035377> (accessed on May 27, 2022); Donald Beachler, “The Politics of Genocide Scholarship: The Case of Bangladesh,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 5 (December 2007): 467–492, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220701657286> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁵⁸ Afsan Chowdhury, “Haunted by Unification: A Bangladeshi View of Partition,” *Aljazeera*, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/08/haunted-unification-bangladeshi-view-partition-170813093154943.html> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁵⁹ Ian Talbot, *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections* (Karachi: Oxford University Press Pakistan, 2013); Yusin, “The Silence of Partition.”

While there was less organized violence in Bengal both during migrations in the immediate aftermath of the Partition and the slower migrations in the following decades,⁶⁰ there is ample evidence that violence and threats to safety did occur. Several riots punctuated the gradual movement of migrants in Bengal.⁶¹ To many Bengali Hindus, the 1946 riots in Noakhali and Bihar were signs that living in a Muslim-dominated state would not favor them and that the Muslim League would not be able to protect them.⁶² In the years following the Partition, persecution of Hindus in East Pakistan, for example, by boycotting many of their festivals, rose in intensity until it evolved into full-blown riots and killings across the country.⁶³

These communal conflicts that had been ignited around the time of Partition from already volatile relationships between Hindus and Muslims continued intermittently over more than two decades.⁶⁴ A 1962 report of the Government of East Pakistan in the National Archives on the refugees in East Pakistan who were forcefully expelled from Assam and Tripura to East Pakistan listed hundreds of affected individuals.⁶⁵ These refugees were Muslims who had been living in Assam and Tripura since long before the Partition (in many cases for many generations) but were forcefully expelled across the eastern border at various points following the Partition leading up to 1962. In 1964, a theft at a Muslim store in Jammu and Kashmir resulted in riots against Hindus across East Pakistan.⁶⁶ Interestingly, the violence during these riots often selectively targeted wealthy Bengali Hindus who owned businesses and industries,⁶⁷ suggesting the persistence of economic resentment against Hindus among the Muslim peasantry in East Pakistan. Communalism had risen rapidly

⁶⁰ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

⁶¹ Richard. Bessel and Claudia B. Haake, *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶² Sucheta Mahajan, "Social Pressures towards Partition: Noakhali Riots of 1946," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 48 (1987): 571–578.

⁶³ Rabindranath Trivedi, "The Legacy of the Plight of Hindus in Bangladesh Part IV," *Asian Tribune*, 2007; Kālīprasāda. Mukhopādhyāya, *Partition, Bengal and after: The Great Tragedy of India* (Ontario: Reference Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*; Rahman and Van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee."

⁶⁵ Government of East Pakistan, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the Refugee Problem Arising out of Expulsion of a Large Number of Muslims from Tripura State and Assam. Part 1*, 1962.

⁶⁶ S. K. Bhattacharyya, *Genocide in East Pakistan/Bangladesh: A Horror Story* (A. Ghosh, 1987).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

since the 1943 Bengal famine,⁶⁸ when there had been similar targeting of the Hindu upper class.⁶⁹

To examine the differences in patterns of migration to West Bengal and East Pakistan, it is instructive to think in terms of the classic push–pull dynamics of migration.⁷⁰ Bengali Hindus living in East Pakistan undoubtedly felt the push of persecution and sporadic violence against them, as did Muslims living in eastern India, especially in the border regions, and in Assam and Tripura.⁷¹ But for educated Bengali Muslims living in Calcutta, there were possibly some pull factors in East Pakistan, in addition to any push they may have felt as a result of persecution of their communities.

To begin with, for Muslims in general, becoming part of a Muslim majority and being ruled by a Muslim government served as a pull factor, especially for individuals who had faced exploitation from Hindus,⁷² and had the economic means to migrate. Several of our interviewees recall that their families migrated just to be with other Muslims. One interviewee quotes her West Bengali native father who migrated to East Pakistan during the Partition: “This is my country as a Muslim. No matter how hard it gets for me, whether I work sitting on a mat or not, I live and work here, and I am proud of it.”

Furthermore, the prospect of Pakistan represented a transition in identity from being a minority in British India to being part of a majority,⁷³ as is borne out in our interviews with Muslims described above who had stayed on in East Pakistan after the Partition. Muslims choosing to migrate to Pakistan often believed that they would have a better life with more opportunities in Pakistan simply because they would be living in a land established for them and ruled by one of their own. Robiul Islam recounted the story of his parents who had migrated from Calcutta after the Partition; his father sold three shops that he had owned to migrate to East Pakistan for a better future. Anjum Ibrahim similarly told us of her father, a Bihari who had been living in Delhi at the time, and who moved to East Pakistan to find a job. There was a key differentiating factor between migrants to and from the newly formed nation of Pakistan: the departure

⁶⁸ Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine To Noakhali, 1943–47*, 1st edition (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005).

⁶⁹ Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943–44* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁷⁰ Z. Zhang, T. Zhang, and Q. Zhang, “The Push–Pull Theory of Migration and Its Application,” *Chinese Journal of Population Science* 9, no. 3 (1997): 255–263.

⁷¹ Mukhopādhyāya, *Partition, Bengal and after*; Mahajan, “Social Pressures towards Partition.”

⁷² Wright, “Islam and Bangladeshi Polity.”

⁷³ Scragg, “The Muslims of the Punjab and Their Politics, 1936–1947”; Roy, “A Partition of Contingency?”

of the Hindu professional class from Pakistan opened up opportunities for economic progression for Muslims living or migrating there. The same was not true for Hindus migrating to India, who had to contend with educated Hindus occupying the same positions in India that the migrants had had to leave behind in eastern Bengal.⁷⁴ Thus, the pull factor of Pakistan was arguably stronger for Muslims. Conversely, the Hindus who had ended up in a nation built on a singular religious identity that was not their own faced a significant push away from Pakistan. These differences in motivation were more or less lost in the midst of the widespread terror and mass murder in the Punjab following the Partition, as people were forced to run for their lives. But in Bengal, where migration played out over a much longer period and amidst less organized violence, we can see some of these forces play out more clearly.

We argue that the economic opportunities in the newly formed Pakistan, as suggested by others in recent years,⁷⁵ as well as the kinship ties between Muslims living in West Bengal and Muslims living in East Pakistan contributed to the flow of Muslim migrants to East Pakistan in the decades following the Partition. In addition, migration to East Pakistan was largely undertaken by people with certain skills and assets.

Educated, middle-class Muslims migrating to East Pakistan were able to avail themselves of numerous government employment positions that had been left vacant by the evacuating Hindus.⁷⁶ In fact, in many cases, the government helped to mediate exchanges of individuals serving in equivalent government positions in West Bengal and East Pakistan.⁷⁷ Asma Rashid recalls migrating from government quarters in Birbhum, West Bengal, to government quarters in Gopalganj, East Pakistan, as an eight-year old during the Partition, as a result of such an exchange taken up by her father. Bashirul Khan, who was born in Bogra, East Pakistan, after the Partition, remembers his father speaking of migrating from Calcutta to Bogra in 1947 after he was offered a government position in Bogra. There was also overt exchange of property between the wealthy elite on both sides. Nazrul Islam's father, who migrated from western Dinajpur in West Bengal, India to eastern Dinajpur in East Pakistan following the Partition, was able to exchange land with Hindus migrating in the opposite direction. Habibul Alam, who was living in eastern Bengal at the time of Partition spoke of a Hindu landlord he knew at the time who

⁷⁴ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*.

⁷⁵ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

exchanged homes with a Muslim man in India in a process that he called *rod bodol*, which literally translates to an exchange.

Educated Muslim migrants generally prospered in East Pakistan following the Partition,⁷⁸ and many of their descendants have gone on to form the modern-day Bangladeshi middle and upper classes. This is borne out in numerous interviews conducted with both surviving migrants and descendants. Markedly absent from these collected narratives are the stories of abject poverty and helplessness following the migration that are so commonly associated with Hindu migrants from East Pakistan in West Bengal.⁷⁹ However, in west Punjab, the cataclysmic nature of the migration ensured that migrants largely reacted to the push factors from the threats to their safety.⁸⁰

Partition and the formation of Pakistan in general represented an opportunity for social and economic upward mobility for many Muslims.⁸¹ This incentive contributed to the waves of migration to East Pakistan.⁸² Robiul Islam's father migrated from Calcutta two years after the Partition, even though his uncle (his father's brother) had migrated in 1947. Given that he had to sell three shops before migrating, it is possible that he only moved after receiving some assurance, from his brother or from other circulating hearsay, that he would be able to build his life from scratch again in East Pakistan. Mokammel Hossain migrated from Assam in India to Mymensingh in East Pakistan because it had been made compulsory to learn Assamese where he lived. However, he immediately found employment as a teacher in Mymensingh and bought some land to settle down. His brother and nephew followed him to East Pakistan after a few years because he was able to economically prosper there. Mokammel Hossain's story also appears to corroborate the reports of less educated or less qualified Muslims availing themselves of employment opportunities in East Pakistan. He was required to stop his studies in Assam after completing higher secondary education due to financial constraints, but still managed to get a job as a teacher in East Pakistan.

Khadija Begum took a more circuitous route. Having been born and raised in Agartala, West Bengal, India, she moved to West Pakistan at the age of 14 in 1960 after her parents arranged her marriage to someone

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*.

⁸⁰ Yusin, "The Silence of Partition"; Kaur, "Violence and Migration."

⁸¹ Haimanti Roy, *Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–65* (Oxford University Press, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198081777.001.0001>

⁸² Rahman and Van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee."

from there. Her parents and brothers then moved to Chittagong in 1964, and she and her husband joined them in 1974, after East Pakistan had become Bangladesh. It is worth noting that she still has fond memories of her Hindu friends and community in Agartala and does not recall directly being impacted by any violence. While religion played a major role in the arrangement of Khadija's marriage, there was probably an economic aspect to it as well. Muslims in West Bengal were and still are not doing as well as Hindus there in terms of education and financial success.⁸³ Such stories serve as an indication of East Pakistan's sustained economic pull, at least for middle-class, educated Muslims in West Bengal, for years after the Partition.

Another noteworthy aspect of post-Partition migration to East Bengal that is often not discussed in most mainstream narratives of the Partition despite ample evidence is that in addition to religious identity and the prospect of economic advancement, kinship ties or networks in East Pakistan constituted a major pull factor for potential migrants from the eastern part of India during and after the Partition.⁸⁴ We see reflections of this influence in the stories of Robiul Islam's father and Mokammel Hossain's brother and nephew.

While some of these kinship or social networks were built as migrants filtered into East Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of Partition, a good proportion already existed before the Partition. Calcutta in West Bengal was the capital of British India until 1911, and by the time Partition took place, it had become a cosmopolitan hub that attracted migrants from all over Bengal,⁸⁵ much as any modern city would. In fact, it has been argued that Calcutta, and West Bengal in general, had come to rely upon the import of talent from East Bengal.⁸⁶ Large numbers of youth from middle-class and affluent families in East Bengal were sent to Calcutta in West Bengal to study in universities and find employment.⁸⁷ In addition, Calcutta also drew large numbers of blue-collar workers from rural

⁸³ Md Zinarul Hoque Biswas, "Socio Economic Conditions of Muslims of West Bengal: An Enquiry to Their Social Exclusion," *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*, 2, no. 2 (2015), <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/1115-1443862461.pdf> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁸⁴ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*; Rahman and Van Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee."

⁸⁵ Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Internal Migration in India: A Case Study of Bengal* (Calcutta: South Asia Books, 1987).

⁸⁶ Asok Mitra, "Parting of Ways: Partition and after in Bengal," *Economic & Political Weekly* 25, no. 44 (1990): 2441–2444.

⁸⁷ Emran Hossain, "Calcutta University and the Bengal Muslims," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 61, no. 4 (October 1, 2013): 55.

eastern Bengal as it did from rural West Bengal.⁸⁸ Dacca had not developed to nearly the same extent. Many among those who migrated from East Bengal to Calcutta before 1947 had done so relatively recently,⁸⁹ and likely retained ties to their kin. Following the Partition, they would have faced little disruption as they trickled back into the newly formed East Pakistan. This was certainly the case for one author's own parents.

It has already been established that a large group of migrants to East Pakistan belonged to the middle class.⁹⁰ Several of our interviewees' stories are consistent with the idea that members of this socio-economic class of migrants were returning to their ancestral villages, often where they still had family members. These ties would possibly have eased their transition to East Pakistan.

Shabbir Ahmed, who lives in Dhaka, was not born at the time of Partition but was able to recount the story of his parents. Before the Partition, his father had migrated from eastern Bengal to West Bengal and was working at the Ishapore Ordnance (Rifle) factory at the time of Partition. While they were living comfortably in West Bengal, the Partition prompted them to move back to their birthplace in East Pakistan. Asma Rashid's father, whom we mentioned earlier, had originally migrated to West Bengal from eastern Bengal several years before the Partition, and chose to take the opportunity provided by the government to move back to what was now East Pakistan. Hamida Ali's father had moved to Calcutta when she was a six-year-old in 1943, where he worked as a school inspector under the British government. Hamida notes that he was not from a well-off family and worked hard to get his education and the job. They moved back to Dacca after the 1946 riots in Calcutta and were already living there when the Partition was announced. These reverse migrants appear to have done well. Shabbir Ahmed, Mariam Begum, and Hamida Ali, all live in affluent settings in Dhaka today. Mariam Begum's account, in particular, of the time following the Partition and how she feels about the Partition today is strikingly positive:

We were much more affluent here, in the new country. The new living quarters were bigger and better than the previous one. I felt like what was missing in India was present here. For example, the food here was fresher, and available in large amounts and varieties;

⁸⁸ Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*; Nahid Kamal, "The Population Trajectories of Bangladesh and West Bengal during the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study" (PhD Dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2009).

⁸⁹ Hossain, "Calcutta University and the Bengal Muslims"; Kamal, "The Population Trajectories of Bangladesh."

⁹⁰ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

these included fish, poultry, vegetables, etc. I remember my mother and older sister discussing the quality and price of grocery items, as well as the ample quantity. Not only that, the food was more affordable. So, I would say that our financial condition improved in the new country. Personally, I feel that the occurrence of Partition back in 47 was, in the long run, a good thing. Because if British India did not split into India and Pakistan, we would never have our beloved Bangladesh. Even though at present our country is plagued with problems of different shapes and sizes, the achievement of a distinct national identity is priceless.

Such kinship networks, existing through the pre-Partition economic migration of educated Muslims from eastern Bengal to West Bengal, probably helped mediate a substantial amount of migration to East Pakistan after the Partition, and merits further study and exploration. Many such migrants to East Pakistan, depending on how long before the Partition they had migrated to Calcutta, probably were not even counted as migrants as they often had ancestral homes to which they could return. These networks, along with opportunities for employment and economic progress as discussed above, possibly enabled a smooth transition for educated Bengali Muslims after migration to East Pakistan, which is in stark contrast to the experiences of literate Bengali Hindus migrating from East Pakistan to West Bengal.⁹¹ Networks, however, were not unique to the migration of educated, middle-class Muslims, and also existed for the working class migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Bengal, as we will see in the next section.

BIHARIS THROUGH THE AGES

Biharis, including both Hindus and Muslims,⁹² had been part of a stream of economic migrants coming out of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to east Bengal since the 19th century.⁹³ The Partition, along with the riots preceding and accompanying it, helped amplify the flow of Muslim migrants toward eastern Bengal.⁹⁴ Post-Partition migrants from these states to East Pakistan largely followed the pre-Partition patterns of blue-collar migration into

⁹¹ Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*.

⁹² Papiya Ghosh, "Partition's Biharis," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 17, no. 2 (August 1, 1997): 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-17-2-21> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁹³ Anand A. Yang, "Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in India," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, no. 1 (1979): 37–58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/203300> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁹⁴ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

urban centers such as Dacca, Bogra, and Rajshahi.⁹⁵ This migration indicates the existence of networks of Bihari Muslims in these cities, a point supported by our interviews with Bihari individuals.

One might assume that a Bihari is a migrant with origins in Bihar but that is not completely accurate. Blue-collar migrants from the north Indian regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had long been labeled “Biharis” by Calcutta’s educated Hindus, and the term had picked up pejorative connotations by the time of Partition.⁹⁶ Today, in Bangladesh, the term is synonymous with Urdu-speaking migrants—essentially migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—living in the country.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, a large proportion of modern “Biharis” are in fact of Bihari origin.⁹⁸ Biharis arguably suffered most in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at the hands of the forces galvanized by the Partition. The changes in fortune they have experienced in the decades following the Partition directly illuminate several aspects of the Partition and its aftermath, which we will explore in this section.

A look at the history of Bihari migrants in modern day Bangladesh gives one the sense of how closely they are tied to both of the wars for liberation in the region’s history. Riots in Bihar in 1946 provided strong grounds for the Partition a year later, to the extent that Jinnah is known to have stated, “I never dreamt that in my lifetime I shall see Pakistan in being, but the tragedy of Bihar has brought it about.”⁹⁹ In a similar vein, anti-Bihari violence in Chittagong of then East Pakistan in the early March of 1971, instigated as a result of their support of the West Pakistani Muslim League, was used as justification by the Pakistani Army to launch an operation against the incipient Bengali nationalist movement, leading to the Bangladeshi liberation war.¹⁰⁰ However, despite their being such important historical players, the experiences of Biharis and their descendants in Bangladesh are relatively understudied.

Biharis identified with the Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis, and to this day, refer to themselves as “stranded Pakistanis,” despite the Pakistani government showing no interest in accepting them after initially allowing

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Eric Paulsen, “The Citizenship Status of the Urdu-Speakers/Biharis in Bangladesh,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdi0146> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

⁹⁸ Dina M. Siddiqi, “Left behind by the Nation: ‘Stranded Pakistanis’ in Bangladesh,” *SITES* 10, no. 1 (2013).

⁹⁹ Papiya Ghosh, “The Changing Discourse of the Muhajirs,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2001): 57–68.

¹⁰⁰ Bina D’Costa, *Nationbuilding, Gender, and War Crimes in South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

a small number of Biharis to migrate to West Pakistan following the liberation war.¹⁰¹ They opposed the independence of a nation built around Bengali language and ethnicity, but they were not Punjabi themselves. Before 1971, West Pakistanis had their own reasons to favor Biharis over Bengalis, which they did: Biharis were preferred for public sector positions in post, railway, and telegraph,¹⁰² and early on after 1947, were often hired to replace Hindus who had vacated such positions.¹⁰³ West Pakistanis regarded the ethnically Bengali East Pakistanis as lesser Muslims who were “Hindu at heart.”¹⁰⁴ The Pakistani mistrust of Bengalis and the shared Urdu common language contributed to Biharis attaining much success and prosperity in the period between 1947 and 1971. This status was, however, followed by a drastic reversal of fortune during and after the events of 1971.

Most of the few academic studies on the subject interchangeably use the terms Biharis and Urdu-speakers to refer to this group of refugees.¹⁰⁵ This conflation is not completely correct in the historical context as Urdu was not spoken as a first language by majority of the residents of Bihar. Even accounting for native Urdu speakers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and elsewhere, a large proportion of Bihari migrants who actually originated in Bihar would have identified Bhojpuri or Maithili as their mother tongue, although they would have understood Urdu as it was a court language in Bihar.¹⁰⁶ In fact, even in West Pakistan, Urdu was largely the language of the political elite, and each ethnic group, such as Punjabis and Sindhis, had their own native languages.¹⁰⁷ The 1961 census therefore points us to a small contradiction: There were approximately 30,000 individuals in East Pakistan who were born in West Pakistan but more than three million individuals who listed Urdu as their mother tongue.¹⁰⁸ While this number

¹⁰¹ Kazi Fahmida Farzana, “An Artificial Minority: The Stateless Biharis in Bangladesh,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 2 (June 2009): 223–235, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000902943682> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

¹⁰² Victoria Redclift, “Subjectivity and Citizenship: Intersections of Space, Ethnicity and Identity among the Urdu-Speaking Minority in Bangladesh,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de La Migration Internationale* 12, no. 1 (February 9, 2011): 25–242, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-010-0163-3> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

¹⁰³ F. Knight, *Law, Power and Culture: Supporting Change from Within*, 2014 edition (Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Beachler, “The Politics of Genocide Scholarship.”

¹⁰⁵ Paulsen, “The Citizenship Status of the Urdu-Speakers/Biharis”; Siddiqi, “Left behind by the Nation”; Farzana, “An Artificial Minority.”

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

¹⁰⁷ Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ Government of Pakistan, *Population Census of Pakistan, 1961. Final Tables of Population, Sex, Urban-Rural, Religion*. Census Bulletin No. 2, 1961.

included pre-Partition migrants, it is still very high when considering the demographic distribution of East Pakistan in 1961. Even more strikingly, the likes of Bhojpuri and Maithili, commonly used native languages in Bihar, do not appear in the list of languages in the census statistics even among a long list of non-Bengali languages that do appear, such as Assamese, Marathi, Baluchi, Persian, and Kashmiri.¹⁰⁹

We argue that this apparent adoption of Urdu by Biharis was part of a trend among Muslims that began long before the Partition, as Urdu became increasingly associated with Muslim identity.¹¹⁰ In addition, it is plausible that Biharis adopted Urdu in an effort to assimilate with their newly adopted homeland. The division between West Pakistanis and ethnically Bengali East Pakistanis was clear from very early on after the Partition; in 1952, East Pakistan strongly and successfully protested the West Pakistan government's decision to instate Urdu as the state language of Pakistan.¹¹¹

The experiences of the Urdu-speaking Bihari migrants in East Pakistan diverged from those of the ethnically Bengali migrants. As noted by several others, the Bihari alliance with the government of West Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war all but sealed their modern-day fates.¹¹² Prior to this war, however, Biharis had enjoyed a comfortable, if not privileged existence in East Pakistan.¹¹³

Based on scant available accounts, it is hard to say how the ethnic Bengalis themselves regarded Bihari migrants after the Partition. In a patrilocal society where identity has always been closely tied to ancestral village homelands, the Bihari assimilation experience probably differed significantly from that of the migrants returning to ancestral homes in East Pakistan, and from Bengali migrants in general, who at least shared a language with the majority in East Pakistan. Consistent with this expectation, Papiya Ghosh has noted from source material published in the *Jinnah Papers* that Bihari migrants had to contend with Bengali provincialism in the workplace.¹¹⁴ It is probably safe to say that it was at best a peaceful coexistence and not seamless assimilation in the initial years after the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Tariq Rahman, "Urdu and the Muslim Identity: Standardization of Urdu in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 25 (September 10, 2010): 83–107.

¹¹¹ Tariq Rahman, "Language and Ethnicity in Pakistan," *Asian Survey* 37, no. 9 (1997): 833–839. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645700> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

¹¹² Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

¹¹³ Redclift, "Subjectivity and Citizenship."

¹¹⁴ Z. H. Zaidi, *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers* (Islamabad: National Archives of Pakistan, 2020); Ghosh, "Partition's Biharis."

Partition, although many of our Bihari interviewees do mention a friendly reception from neighbors upon first migrating to East Pakistan.

Several interviewees from Dhaka's Geneva refugee camp for Urdu-speaking refugees fondly recall the time between 1947 and the 1971 liberation war. Amanat Ali told us the story of his father who migrated from Bihar to Dacca in 1947 and received a plot of land from the Pakistani government. Julekha Begum's father, who had migrated from Calcutta, similarly received a plot of land in Dacca. Note that Calcutta had been a major hub for blue-collar migrants from Bihar and many Biharis who eventually moved to East Pakistan were actually living in Calcutta at the time of Partition.¹¹⁵ These interviewees, and many other individuals currently situated in the Geneva camp were living in their own houses before the 1971 liberation war. They were displaced after the war owing to their community's support for the West Pakistani government and army and were subsequently placed into refugee camps by the Red Cross. As mentioned above, Biharis had identified linguistically and ethnically with West Pakistan despite their geographical association with East Pakistan.¹¹⁶

Similar narratives prevail among Biharis who migrated to Bogra, north of Dacca, following the Partition and still live there. Mohammad Shouqat Ali was a year-old during the Partition but has learnt from his father that they had migrated from Bihar to Bogra as part of a group of around 40 people in 1947. For the first two years, they lived in a camp called Dotto Bari that had been set up by the government to support migrants. Aftab Ali was nine years old at the time of Partition and was born in Bogra where his family had their own house. His parents had migrated before his birth from Bihar. During the Partition, Aftab found himself in his ancestral village in Bihar, visiting his grandfather. He simply traveled back with his family, and lived on as before the Partition, until 1971, when they were placed into the Jamil refugee camp in Bogra. Mohammad Siddique moved with his family at the age of 14 from Patna, Bihar, to Goshala camp in Bogra, where they lived until 1971. During the liberation war, when Biharis were being rounded up by the East Pakistani army, they left the camp. It appears that the camps set up prior to 1971 by the West Pakistan government were for supporting Bihari, and perhaps other West Bengali migrants and enabling their integration; while after 1971, the refugee camps were used by the

¹¹⁵ Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora*.

¹¹⁶ S. Sen, "Stateless Refugees and the Right to Return: The Bihari Refugees of South Asia Part 1," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 11, no. 4 (October 20, 1999): 625–645. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/11.4.625> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

Bangladeshi government to house Biharis, now considered undesirable refugees because of their support for Pakistan.¹¹⁷

The post-1971 experience of Biharis is colored by their shock at being abandoned by Pakistan, and the resulting realization that they would not have the same privileged position in Bangladesh that they enjoyed as loyal Pakistanis in East Pakistan.¹¹⁸ It has been advanced that while there have been opportunities for Biharis to earn Bangladeshi citizenship since 1971, some Biharis remain opposed to the idea.¹¹⁹ Many Biharis in Bangladesh continue to live in abject economic misery.¹²⁰ Beyond the offers to integrate as citizens, the Bangladeshi government still does little to support the community and has been slow, at best, to respond to demands from Biharis for better living conditions and help with education, employment, and entrepreneurship.¹²¹

Note that the conflict described above during the 1971 war played out between Muslims. The Bihari experience, along with the occurrence of the liberation war itself, brings to the fore a key aspect of the Partition that is sometimes overlooked. Religion was merely the proximate marker of difference that defined divisions and conflict during the Partition. In Bengal, what was truly at stake was identity and the struggle to be associated with power.¹²² When religion was no longer a differentiating element once Pakistan was formed, the defining divide was taken up by language and ethnicity. But the same undercurrents of economic exploitation and discrimination were still at play in the 1971 conflict. In 1971, East Pakistan sought to be a separate state governed by its own people and to escape mistreatment from the West Pakistani government.

Finally, it is important to note that although Bengalis were discriminated against by West Pakistan after the Partition,¹²³ eventually leading to

¹¹⁷ Siddiqi, "Left Behind by the Nation."

¹¹⁸ Farzana, "An Artificial Minority."

¹¹⁹ Azad Majumder, "Bangladesh Citizenship Right Divides Biharis," *Reuters*, May 20, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-33670320080520> (accessed on May 27, 2022); Paula Newberg, "Biharis: Almost Forgotten for 20 Years," *baltimoresun.com*, 1991, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-12-29-1991363009-story.html> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

¹²⁰ Rahat Rafe, "The Neglected 'Bihari' Community in Bangladesh," *DW.com*, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-neglected-bihari-community-in-bangladesh/a-50824994> (accessed on May 27, 2022).

¹²¹ Newberg, "Biharis"; Bijoyeta Das, "Bihari Migrants Wish for Better Life in Bangladesh," *DW.com*, 2011, <https://www.dw.com/en/bihari-migrants-wish-for-better-life-in-bangladesh/a-6554559> (accessed on May 27, 2022); *ibid.*

¹²² Roy, "A Partition of Contingency"; David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920-1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹²³ Redclift, "Subjectivity and Citizenship."

the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, this fact does not diminish the reality that for Muslim migrants from India, including Bengal-speaking migrants, life in East Pakistan was still likely to prove to be much better than if they had stayed behind in India. This generalization is supported by the positive anecdotes on the aftermath of the Partition from many of migrants (or their children) that we interviewed and more objectively by the current economic and social marginalization of Muslims in West Bengal and Assam.¹²⁴

CONCLUSION

The discourse around the 1947 Partition has historically tended to be centered on the rapid migrations and cataclysmic violence in the Punjab. On the eastern borders, while migration from East Bengal to West Bengal has been the subject of considerable focus, migration in the reverse direction has received much less attention. In this chapter, we sought to consolidate several threads across historical literature and documents to present a more nuanced narrative of the social impact of the Partition in East Bengal. In addition, we have supported this narrative with anecdotal accounts from individuals we interviewed who were directly or indirectly affected by the Partition.

While migration in the Punjab was substantially completed within a year after the Partition, migration in Bengal continued over the following decades in both directions. This cross-border movement was motivated by both push and pull factors. Many fled in fear of violence and persecution of Muslims in West Bengal. There was also considerable pull in the concept of a nation created for Muslims. This sentiment was driven by decades-old discontent with perceived exploitation by the upper-class Hindus in pre-Partition Bengal as well as by communalism that arose after the 1943 Bengal famine.

It is also increasingly recognized that there were economic reasons for Muslims to move to East Bengal. A large proportion of the educated middle class in East Bengal was composed of Hindus before the Partition and the economic vacuum left behind by the Bengali Hindus migrating to West Bengal from East Bengal contributed to waves of migration of Muslims to East Pakistan, extending long after 1947. Several of our oral narratives directly mention widespread migration of Hindus out of East Pakistan after

¹²⁴ Shabbir Hussain, Ahmed Usman, Ume Habiba, and Aaisha Amjad, "Hate Crimes against Muslims and Increasing Islamophobia in India," *Journal of Indian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 7–15; Rowena Robinson, "Religion, Socio-economic Backwardness & Discrimination: The Case of Indian Muslims," *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* 44, no. 2 (2008): 194–200.

the Partition and the sudden availability of opportunities in education and employment for Muslims that arose as a result.

A noteworthy aspect of migration to East Bengal that has been insufficiently explored in the Partition literature is that old networks of migration had existed long before the Partition and these facilitated movement across the borders afterwards. It is unclear what proportion of migrants to East Bengal after the Partition was in fact returning East Bengali migrants from West Bengal or their descendants, but the existing literature on these networks and several of our oral narratives suggest that they may have constituted a significant percentage. In addition, streams of Bihari migrations into urban centers in East Bengal continued at an increased rate after the Partition.

The modern-day struggle of Bihari Muslims for identity and citizenship in Bangladesh, an outcome of shifting boundaries of economic, religious, and ethnic divisions, serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing impact of the Partition on the people of the region. While Biharis briefly benefitted from having a shared language with West Pakistanis, as well as by the ethnic discrimination of the West Pakistani government against East Pakistani Bengali Muslims, the 1971 liberation reversed the power dynamic. Subsequent failures to repatriate the majority of Biharis to Pakistan—an interesting objective in this context as Biharis were not from West Pakistan—left them stranded as refugees in their former home. Our interviews with members of this community supplement the work of Papiya Ghosh and others in bringing their voices to the fore in considering the impact of the Partition in East Pakistan.

The picture of the Partition that emerges from historical literature and our oral narratives from Bangladesh is quite different from the traumatic collective memories of the events in India and Pakistan. The lack of antipathy toward the fact of Partition among Bangladeshis is not only due to the more recent memory of the 1971 liberation war but also possibly by the reality that for Muslim migrants from Eastern India to the then East Pakistan, the Partition was by and large a positive experience for both Bengali speakers, and in the shorter term, Urdu-speaking Biharis. The eastern Partition of Bengal led to significant economic mobility and increased security and comfort among Muslims as constituting the new majority culture, often sustained by existing community networks. It is hoped that future studies focusing on migration to East Bengal following the Partition will expand on these threads and reveal a clearer picture of the demographic changes that took place and the diverse push–pull factors involved.



CHAPTER

6

Rural Kammi of Punjab in the Partition Plan

Navsharan Singh

INTRODUCTION

The year 1947 stands distinct in the troubled history of Punjab. The independence from British India and the birth of Pakistan brought with them a massive displacement of people, a sectarian frenzy resulting in the killings of hundreds of thousands, and mass violence against women. The wounds of the Partition remain open in public memory, as seen in scholarly work, the arts, films, and museums. Partition stories continue to surface as testimony to the memories that refuse to fade and wounds that refuse to heal. As a Punjabi woman growing up in Amritsar whose family personally experienced the Partition, the salience of narrative in framing my views of the events of 1947 has positioned me to understand the role of memory in shaping views of the present.

There are still wounds and memories that have not been revealed in any medium. One such persistent gap in the Partition historiography is the story of Muslim Kammi, the low-caste rural landless of Punjab. How were the so-called low-caste, rural, landless poor acknowledged in the Partition plans and accounted for in the Partition experience? The literature is scant on this aspect, though some scholars have raised the question of caste and tried to alert us to these lacunae in Partition literature.¹

¹Urvashi Butalia has done some pioneering work on this question, as well as how the Partition experience was caste differentiated. See, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998).

In Part 1 of this chapter, I review what little can be found on this topic in the historical discussions of Partition, interspersing with a personal encounter with a Kammi and one piece of fiction—a long poem about a Kammi. In Part 2, I provide testimonies from six interviews. These testimonies build a narrative of what happened and bring out the caste and class experiences of these very poor rural Punjabi Muslims. Part 3 reflects on the importance of shifting the primary mode of understanding Partition from the lens of high politics to the experiences of the working classes. Such a shift stands not only to enrich our understanding of Partition historiography but also to allow for a more nuanced understanding of contemporary Indian politics, where the invisible Kammi is resurfacing but with a different kind of visibility—that of a Muslim, the *other*.

PART I. THE MUSLIM KAMMIS

There is some reference in scholarly literature to the Chuhra, the urban low-caste sanitation workers, especially in how they were “divided” between the two countries.² However, there has been no systematic work on the Muslim Kammi, the rural low-caste agricultural and laboring classes in Punjab, and how they were divided or chose to be divided between the two countries. This chapter is an attempt to recover their history.

The use of the term “caste” in this context bears some explanation. It is true that Muslims do not have caste in the same rigid sense as Hindus do and that “low caste” or “Dalit” are terms applied only to Hindus. In the Hindu hierarchical caste classification of people, the four *varnas*—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—were initially organized by occupation and are now maintained through endogamy. This form of *varna*-based caste structure does not exist among Muslims. However, “caste consciousness” is very conspicuous among Indian Muslims, and it is quite well documented.³ More specifically, in traditional rural Punjab, caste very much existed among Muslims. Pervaiz Nazir’s work on social structures in rural Punjab in the late 19th and 20th century describes how Muslim castes were divided into roughly three main categories: the Ashraf (nobility descended from Arabs, Persians, Turks, Afghans, and converts from upper-caste Hindus); the Ajlaf or lower-status castes such as village

² Ravinder Kaur, “Narrative Absence: An ‘Untouchable’ Account of Partition Migration,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2008): 283; Alice Albinia, *Empires of the Indus: The Story of a River* (London: John Murray, 2008): 3–5.

³ Parvez Nazir, “Social Structure, Ideology and Language: Caste among Muslims,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 28, no. 52 (1993): 2898.

artisans; and the Arzal, which consisted of the lowest castes, comprising of village menials such as leather workers, potters, and landless laborers.⁴

Further, in colonial rural Punjab, within any particular village, the population was divided into three broad socio-economic categories—the landowning cultivators (zamindars), artisans/service castes, and landless agricultural laborers/tenants; the latter two categories are often collectively referred to as the Kammi. All three categories also fit into the categories of Ashraf, Ajlaf, or Arzal. The last category, the Kammi, invariably constituted the majority of the village population and was lowest in the power hierarchy. The Kammis owned no productive resources; they were landless, and dependent on the landowners for protection and livelihood. There is also reference in the literature of untouchability to how it was practiced against Kammi Muslims. Sikh landlords did not allow Muslims to touch their pots because, to them, this touch would make them religiously impure (*bhitt jana*). Landlords had complete control over Kammis.⁵

Where is the Kammi in Partition history? How is low-caste Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh migration documented? More generally, how has caste informed Partition historiography? There is not much in literature by way of answers, though the silence is being recognized by some scholars. Urvashi Butalia, in her seminal work, *The Other Side of Silence*⁶, says that despite the recent opening up of Partition histories, “there are voices that still remain unrecovered” and she goes on to say that a history that has remained invisible is that of the scheduled castes, which remains “untouchable even in the writing of this history.” In her works, Butalia looked at various texts to uncover the processes through which Dalits/Harijans were abandoned, not only in Partition historiography but also as political entities in both post-Partition countries.

Ravinder Kaur, who has written extensively on the experiences of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh refugees during the Partition, highlighted one of the gaping holes in Partition historiography—how the whole mainstream history was built on the erroneous notion of a “common refugee experience” of Punjabi Hindu and Sikh migrants from Pakistan. Her work provides a counter narrative as she follows the journey of the urban

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The unchallenged power of landlords over other groups has been traced to the nature of collaboration between the British and the local big landlords. For instance, in the second half of the 19th century, canal colonization unleashed tremendous resources which the British utilized to patronize the influential rural elite, who received large land grants and maintained their power in the countryside. See Tahir Mahmood, “Socio-economic Engineering and the British Profit Motives in Colonial Punjab, 1885–1922,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 54, no. 1 (January–June, 2017): 201.

⁶ Ibid.

untouchables, mostly Chuhras (untouchables involved in manual scavenging) refugees from West Punjab and North-West Frontier Province, who were offered resettlement in Delhi's Regar Pura, an old colony of Dalit residents, but whose experience of caste-based discrimination in the refugee camps and in the resettlement colonies remained absent in most partition narratives. These poor people escaped the Partition violence because they were untouchables and were not considered in the communal scheme of things or in the making of the modern nation states of India and Pakistan:

They were neither Hindus nor Muslims and therefore were not even fit for communally motivated killings. The government created separate refugee camps, separate mass housing schemes and separate job arrangements for them, mostly as sweepers in the city municipality. This spatial and occupational separation was in accordance with the upper-caste Hindu ideal of keeping the polluted castes at a distance so that their shadow or touch would not pollute others and also the wish to keep Partition narratives sacred and protected from contact by the Untouchables.⁷

Kaur suggests a conscious attempt on the part of upper-caste scholars to keep the lower castes out of Partition history.

There are other fragments of information on the lower castes in some other texts. Alice Albinia⁸ discusses the circumstances in which low-caste Hindu Chuhra sanitation workers left Karachi. After the communal riots started in Sindh in January 1948, a large number of Hindu Dalits in Sindh wanted to leave Pakistan for India, and the Indian government launched an evacuation operation. The people waited in transit camps for their turn for a place on the ships, which were in short supply. Within a month of this waiting, however, the government in Pakistan realized that among the fleeing Hindus were the city's sweepers and sewer cleaners. Since this work was done only by low-caste people, this flight had serious implications for sanitation services in the city. The Pakistan government was prompted to publish a review of its administrative policies in the daily *Dawn* newspaper on February 23, 1948, stating:

Lately, in view of the apprehended blow to the social and economic structure of the province as a result of the wholesale migration of depressed classes, the government of Sindh have [sic] been compelled to take legal powers to slow down the migration of such

⁷ Kaur, "Narrative Absence," 285.

⁸ Albinia, *Empires of the Indus*, 13–15.

persons who in their opinion constitute the essential services of the province.⁹

Aqueel and Faruqi¹⁰ refer to this situation in Karachi in 1948 to make a link with the patterns of expulsions in West Punjab. Fleeing low-caste Hindus left the cities for East Punjab, and to meet the demand for sanitation and sewage workers, the authors note that other low-caste people—Punjabi Christians living in rural areas and working as agricultural labor—were mobilized to take up the sanitation jobs in the cities.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians from villages in the central Punjab where they worked as agricultural labor were uprooted through state actions such as through their eviction from the lands where they lived by allotting it to the Muslim peasants who migrated to West Pakistan from India.¹¹

Clearly, the transfer of population of the low-caste people from Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities was organized in such a manner that each country got its share of scavengers. The low-caste people were responsible for the implementation of entire sanitation works system, including public sanitation (the so-called night soil removal) and manual scavenging (the manual removal of fresh and untreated human excreta from containers used as toilets or from the pits of simple pit latrines). Some of these people identified themselves as Sikhs, others as Christians or Muslims, but as mentioned in another interview in Delhi for this project (Paramjit Singh), “It didn’t matter what they called themselves—Sikh, Hindu, or Christian—they were all Chuhars and they lived in separate colonies called *thathian*.”¹²

The poor treatment meted out to Dalits arriving in East Punjab from Pakistan has also been documented. Such were the conditions of severe caste-based discrimination that Bhimrao Ambedkar, appointed as the Chairman of the Indian Constitution Drafting Committee on August 29, 1947, and selected by the Assembly to write the new Indian Constitution, wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru to complain against caste Hindu officials not allowing Dalits to take shelter in refugee camps.¹³ Because they were not in the camps, they were denied food rations and clothes. Furthermore, they were not given land as they were deemed to have been landless working

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Asif Aqueel, and Sama Fauqui, “Caste Away: The Ongoing Struggle of Punjabi Christians,” *Herald*, February 26, 2018. Available at <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153539> (accessed on October 6, 2020).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Chapter 7 for a full discussion of the interview.

¹³ Kaur, “Narrative Absence,” 287.

classes without property in Pakistan and, therefore, not entitled to the land that the Muslims in India had left behind (see Chapter 8).

My review suggests that even in the most sympathetic Partition literature, the low castes/Dalits/untouchables are represented as people who have only one or the same identity, a category with the same problems and issues. Differences among rural and urban, issues of gender, and matters of low-caste people pursuing different occupations have not been explored separately. They appear as a single category requiring a single development strategy. How do we understand the question of compensation and the claims of those who owned no property listed in their names—such as women, the landless, and the urban poor? Dispossession is the common experience, but what about the issues surrounding other ruptures, such as displacement from familiar employment, where people had previously held specific jobs as laborers or artisans?

For the Kammis, there is limited knowledge of the circumstances in which they negotiated their citizenship in the two countries. They had limited choice in matters of choosing the country of their preference when the Partition plan unfolded. As working bodies, they were retained or pushed across either side of the border based on the need for their labor.

During a visit to Lahore in 2012, I visited a family. Hearing that I was from Amritsar, the host took me to the outhouse, where an old woman, Mejo, lay on a cot. Mejo told me she was Sikh, as her name suggested. Mejo said that at the time of the Partition, she was a young *majhbi* Sikh (a low-caste Sikh) girl whose Kammi family worked on the farms and also as sanitation workers for the landlord's family. There were many such families in the village. For many months during and post-Partition, they did not know that their village was in Pakistan. They were in a relatively quiet village, and they were protected by the landlords. But when the movement of people started to happen on a big scale, Mejo's family also thought about moving. But the landlords insisted that they stay; otherwise, who would do the labor in the farms and in the house? So the family stayed back. The Partition happened, but nothing much changed. Mejo was married in the same community. She recalled how some Sikh Kammis converted to Islam; others just changed their names. Mejo remained Mejo; perhaps no one noticed her name or religion so long as she continued to work on the farm and clean the toilets. The Partition, a social and political upheaval of epochal nature, had passed her by. Was this the story of all rural low-caste Kammis? Who decided which *mulk* (nation) they belonged to? How do we understand the choices the rural Kammis made? Scholarly literature is unfortunately lacking.

While the Kammis are conspicuous by their absence in most scholarly work, they are present in the imaginations of several Punjabi writers, especially those who had a rural background and grew up in the villages. In the early 1980s, Punjabi poet Joga Singh wrote a long poem called *Munshi Khan*. The poem was about a Muslim man, Munshi Khan, a low-caste Kammi attached laborer who lived in East Punjab and who never left for Pakistan in 1947.¹⁴ As the story goes, Munshi Khan was the son of Dulla, a *mochi*, the shoemaker, a low-caste leather worker. When Dulla died, he was buried in the village. Munshi Khan, the only son of Dulla, a Kammi, worked as an attached laborer with a Sikh landlord in the village. Around 1947, when the news of violence began to trickle in and some Muslims started to leave the village, Munshi Khan, then in his 20s, got very confused. “How can I leave abba (father) behind?” He asked. “Father’s grave is in the village.” His landlord also asked him to stay: “What will you do in an alien land? Here you are part of the community and the family.” Munshi readily agreed. Moving to an alien land was not an appealing idea. He was familiar with this land. Never mind that the land did not belong to him, but he belonged to the land. He decided to stay in India and was spared the violence that other Muslims endured as they migrated to West Pakistan.

But some other militant Sikhs in the village placed a condition on his decision to remain: Munshi could stay only if he gave up Islam and converted to Sikhism. Munshi did not have much choice, so he was baptized in the village gurdwara and Munshi Khan became Sajjan Singh. He was a man of faith, and he took his baptism very seriously. He grew a beard, started tying a turban, observed all Sikh codes of conduct and lived with the landlord family as their attached laborer. He never married. The landlord and his wife were kind to him. Fifty years passed; the landlord and his wife were no more; Sajjan Singh was now an old man who could no longer toil on the land. The command of the landlord family had passed on to the hands of the young daughter-in-law, who had little respect for the old good-for-nothing, attached laborer, Sajjan. As the story goes, her lack of respect broke Sajjan’s heart. He lost interest in life and would sit in the outhouse doorway all day and talk to himself so that all passersby could hear. “Why did I not go to Pakistan?” He asked and then answered himself, “We never owned any land; how could we decide which land is

¹⁴ The poem was converted into a full-length play of the same name—*Munshi Khan*—by Gursharan Singh, a famous Punjabi playwright and artistic director, and became a very popular play on the Punjabi stage in the 1990s. It struck a deep chord with its audience; it was a story familiar to many ordinary rural Punjabi families.

our homeland? Home is where father is buried. I want to be buried next to my father. I don't want to be cremated. I want to be buried." "We never owned any land; how do we decide which land is our homeland?" Munshi Khan's question remained unanswered.

To explore these questions and fill some of the gaps in the history of 1947, in 2017 and 2018, I conducted interviews in East Punjab with low-caste rural Muslims who had continued to live in the villages where they were born and did not migrate to West Punjab in 1947. The question I was trying to explore was what the circumstances were in which they had made these decisions. These interviews were based on only a convenience sample. Participants were identified through contacts in the community. After introductions and explaining the purpose of the meeting, which was to develop an understanding of their situation at the time of the Partition, wherein they or their elders made decisions to leave or stay, I let them talk about whatever they wanted to. Some started with the present, prefacing their narrative with, "We are Muslims, but we face no problem here." Some others felt that there was no point in talking about those events, and they chose not to say anything. Silence is often a survival mechanism, especially within the context of ongoing violence against Muslims and a repressive social order. Yet others began to talk after initial reluctance.

The testimonies are important on many counts. They not only help to understand the Partition from an unexplored perspective but also invite introspection about the dilemmas of our own times, such as the complexities of negotiating the Partition's long-term aftermath. They provide context for the questions of freedom of movement, identity, and transitions. They expose the process and politics of survival of the poor low caste. The stories of these Kammis have long been overlooked. My hope is that with this chapter, their experiences of the Partition will be acknowledged and considered in further historical accounts of the Partition.

As the new Partition literature is claiming, there is a "second narrative" emerging in Partition studies, not only through reopening and reinterpretation of archival material but also through testimonies of the second generation who grew up hearing the stories and now carry the memory across generations. As the testimonies of those who were born after Partition reflect, there is a generation that is dead but not gone. There are stories to be told from the past and how the past has slinked into the present as they are reproduced by the children of the survivors in post-Partition India.

PART II. INTERVIEWS WITH THE MUSLIM KAMMIS¹⁵

"Which Earth Are We a Part of? We Live on This Earth"

Saliha Khan and Ayesha Bibi: Salarian Village, Mansa District, Punjab

Saliha Khan was 7 or 8 years old during the summer of 1947, and the monsoon had not arrived yet. He lived in the village of Bada Khayala (now in the district of Mansa, Punjab, India). He and his family were *kumhar* (potter) by caste and belonged to a very big clan of about 50 families, all of whom lived in Bada Khayala. The families in the village were all related; his great grandfather had 11 sons, his grandfather had 9 sons, and they all lived in the same village with their families.

It was the summer of 1947. He was returning from the village *dera* (a socio-religious place of worship and congregation) with his *chacha* (uncle), who was only a few years older than he was, and his *bhua* (aunt, father's sister), who was around 13 or 14 years old. Going to this place of congregation was a regular routine for the kids. At the *place*, they would get *batashas* (sweet meat) in return for doing small jobs of cleaning and sweeping the premises. During those days, Saliha reminisces, when they had nothing to do at home, they would just go there, a mile's walk from the *kumharpatti* (potters' colony). The *place of congregation* and the *potter's colony* were separated by a *jhiri*, a thick cluster of trees.

On that day, as they crossed the cluster of trees in the afternoon, they heard a Jaat farmer shouting after them that their family had been massacred, including the grandfather and his brother, and they should not go toward the potters' colony. He shouted, "Go hide in the fields and save your lives!" On hearing this, he and his uncle started running in the opposite direction toward the fields, but his aunt ran toward their house in the potter's colony, screaming to find the family. They had barely run a few yards away when they heard a village landlord saying, "A *musli* (a pejorative term for a Muslim girl) is coming," and next they heard a bullet shot and knew she was killed. They both hid in the fields the entire afternoon. He recalled how when he started crying out of fear, hunger, and thirst, his uncle asked him to stop. When he could not, his uncle told him that he would strangle him, and Saliha knew that he meant it. "In such times, everyone thinks about themselves and would like to save their own lives first." Saliha stopped crying.

¹⁵ All names in the interviews have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewees. The names of the villages are also changed, but the districts remain unchanged.

In the evening, when everything was quiet, they slowly raised their heads and saw a Sikh man. They tried to duck again, but the man told them not to be scared. He asked them to follow him, and they did. He took them to the orchard of Gurnarain Singh and Mandar Singh, landlords of the adjoining village, Malakpur, where they saw scores of other Muslim families, some from their village and others who were rescued by these people from the nearby villages. Saliha's mother, father, and grandmother also arrived at the same *haveli* (mansion) later.

Saliha recalls staying in the mansion inside the big orchard for more than a month with some 40–50 other families. They were well looked after and fed, and though seven–eight people died of illness and disease (he could not recall the details of the disease), there was no threat to their lives. When the killings stopped, they were told they were free to go back to their villages. But how could they go back when their loved ones were killed in the same villages?

Many decided to go to Pakistan, so they were escorted out and joined the *kaflas* (convoys) going to Pakistan. However, others, including Saliha's father, a couple of other uncles, and a few laboring families, did not want to leave. They thought, "Who knew what calamity awaited us in Pakistan, and who knew which earth we are a part of?" Gurnarain Singh and his family assured them of rehabilitation and even promised them small plots of land outside of village *shamlat* land (village common) for homestead if they did not want to return to their villages. So, they stayed back and rebuilt their lives in the new village. "Life was tough, but in any case, when had they ever had it easier?" Saliha said.

When Saliha was growing up, he learnt that their rescuers were communists who were also active in other parts of the district, saving the lives of Muslims. As he grew older and became a village butcher who took pride in the fact that, with his own hands, he had prepared 10,000 goats, Saliha Khan became a "communist." "I think these guys say the right things and I tell people in my community to listen to them," said Saliha Khan of the communists.

Now in his late 70s, Saliha Khan looked frail and wearied. "Life is hard; there are hardly any Muslim families left here, and the boys have no jobs." Saliha abruptly stopped the conversation, got up, and left.

"We Have No Love for That Land"

Ayesha Bibi, Saliha Khan's wife, picked up the thread when Saliha stopped abruptly. Perhaps she realized that the burden of finishing the

conversation fell on her and she had to speak and record her love for this land. Silence could convey a wrong conclusion.

She said she must have been 5 or 6 years old when it happened. Her father was a cousin of Saliha's father, and one of the few families who were rescued and had decided to stay on. Ayesha has a vague memory of the mansion where they stayed for months following the massacre in the village. She remembers the food that was served there. They called it *langar* (community food) and it was *khichdi* (rice porridge). She was married off to Saliha when she was 12 or 13, and she bore three sons and two daughters, who are all married now in the community. The sons never got much education, and they ended up doing odd jobs on the farms, at the butchers, and in the nearby brick kilns. However, all her 11 grandsons went to school and some of them also to college. They did "courses," got degrees and diplomas, but no one gave them jobs.

"Life was okay in the initial years after Partition," she continued. They made pots and pans and brought them to the village landlords, who gave them wheat, vegetables, and fodder for their cows. But things began to change fairly soon. People started buying metal utensils, and no one wanted earthen pots. So to acquire wheat for family consumption, she also started working in the fields. But then came the machines and women were no longer required on the farms, and she barely got any work. As the boys grew up, the potter's sons started working in the nearby brick kilns and started bringing home some wages, but then the brick kilns closed. So they became construction workers, and the family continued to survive, somehow.

In the late 1950s, she mentioned, some of their relatives who had gone to Pakistan came to visit with them. When they entered the new potters' colony, they came running with their arms open. They hugged their brothers, rubbed the soil from the potters' wheel on their foreheads, and wept oceans of tears. They stayed for a couple of days, saying things were hard *there* as well, and they left. Till the war (Indo-Pak war, 1965), there used to be visitors from the other side once in a while. But after the war, no one came. "We did not want anyone to come either. We had nothing to do with Pakistan. We have no love for that land; we only love this land." Ayesha was categorical.

"But things have completely changed now," she said, with a sudden change in tone. She gets no work in the fields, only a few days of cotton picking, and that too only if the crop doesn't fail. "The wretched white fly ruined the entire cotton crop last year (2015–2016), so there was no work."

Farmers asked for compensation, but what could the poor and landless ask for? There was no crop, so no work and no wages.

Also, Muslims are considered “outsiders.” “We are from here. Aren’t we?” she asked. There was a very small mosque in the village, and after Saliha sided with the communists, the village “big-shots” started saying that the land under the mosque was theirs and taunted us. The maulvi (Muslim priest) who used to come from the other village stopped coming, and the mosque was deserted. “There is no deputy commissioner from our community in the whole district, in the whole state,” she said bitterly. “There is no professor from our community either. My grandsons are all educated, and they have no jobs. No one employs them. There are so few houses for Muslims left now. Muslim people are migrating to Malerkotla” (the only Muslim majority town in Punjab, about 90 km from Mansa). “My grandson also wants to go there. But that’s a faraway land, more than 100 *koh* (miles). It won’t be easy to settle there, I tell him,” said Ayesha.

“If You Leave, Who Will Do the Work on the Field?”

Bashir Khan: Saheta Village, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab

Bashir Khan, in his early 80s, was sitting outside his son’s small hardware shop in the main market of village Saheta when we approached him. He lived in Saheta with his large extended family when the Partition took place. Saheta was a small village, with a Muslim majority and mostly low caste. Most of the members of his clan, who were landless, worked for the local landlord, Choudhry Radhu Ram, who owned almost the whole village. There was enough employment for all the landless on his farms, barns, and orchards.

When *raule* (the Partition-related violence) began and the news of massacres of Muslims began to spread, the Saheta Muslims also decided to leave. They packed their belongings, and one early morning, when it was still dark, some 50 of them left the village. They had barely walked two miles when they saw someone on horseback blocking the *kafla* (convoy). As they came closer, they recognized the man; it was Choudhry Radhu Ram. In a tone full of authority, he asked them where they were headed. The elders came forward, with hands folded and voices barely audible, and said, “We are Muslims, and there is danger to our lives if we stay here anymore. We have decided to go to Pakistan.” “With whose

permission?” roared Radhu Ram. The entire convoy stood still, with eyes lowered and hands folded. “If you leave, who will do the work on the fields,” Radhu Ram continued, and he ordered them to turn and go back to the village.

He assured them of their safety, telling them that it was their village and that they should not leave. Bashir Khan remembered that the community had looked at each other and decided to obey the landlord; at least he was guaranteeing safety and they had work. They all turned back and decided to stay.

For a few years after the Partition, life went on in routine. But then Radhu Ram grew very old, his sons did not stay together and fought amongst themselves, and then others came from outside and grabbed the land. Radhu Ram died, and in the next 30–40 years, there was no land left; everything was divided. The landless lost jobs as there was not sufficient work for everyone. Bashir Khan’s father continued to work in the fields. He and his brothers worked in the fields, dairies, and did other odd jobs. The barbers, butchers, potters, weavers, *mirasis* (folk entertainers) who used to do different things in the village now worked in different places.

Bashir Khan’s son went to the village primary school and then to the middle school when it opened in the village. Bashir Khan worked in a shop for a few years and when his son grew up and passed 10th class, he rented a small shop and started selling ropes, nails, screws, fasteners, and other stuff. Bashir Khan now sits outside the shop all day, talking to people and watching the market bustle.

“Who Will Make Our Pots and Pans?”

Saddiq: Saheta Village, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab

Saddiq, also from Saheta, joined the conversation as we were talking to Bashir Khan. He is a little younger than Bashir Khan and was around 5 or 6 at the time of the Partition. He also sits outside the small sweetmeat shop his family runs in Saheta. He said his father was a potter, who made pots and pans, and that they were stopped by Radhu Ram from leaving. “Who will make our pots and pans?” he had asked. Saddiq made pots for a few years, and then there was no demand. One of his sons, who worked in a shop in Kharar, later opened a shop in his village. He stated that life is not bad for *Musalmans* (Muslims) in Punjab. “We do not feel discriminated against, perhaps because we never demanded anything of anybody.”

My *Bhua* (Aunt) Was Raped and Killed Near the Well, and the Family Went Back in Fear

Akram: Mohali, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar

Akram, in his mid-40s, is also from Saheta but does not live there anymore. He lives in the adjoining town, Mohali, and works at a radio station. He is a singer and comes from a landless, low-caste community of folk entertainers. He was born long after the Partition, but he says he grew up on the stories of the Partition every day at home and on Fridays when he went for prayers to the mosque in the village with his father and grandfather. He said his grandfather was employed in the small British army office near the village, perhaps to run errands. Since no pension ever came to the family, Akram knows that his grandfather from the *Mirasi* family was no *subedar* (officer), as some of his cousins boast about.

He had heard the story that his family also tried to escape when Muslims started getting butchered by Sikhs in the neighboring villages. Some 15–20 of them left the village, and after walking for a few miles, they entered the thick forest, which they had to cross to meet the road. However, they were intercepted by a group of Sikh men with swords. The Sikh men had laid siege to the passage joining the main road. They challenged the group, who tried to flee unsuccessfully, attacked them with swords, and before they knew it, a young woman from the family, Akram's *bhua*, was pulled aside and raped in front of the family. Her ordeal lasted a long time, according to the elders, and when the Sikh marauders were done, they left with the loot, leaving the family with several men bleeding from sword injuries and a half-dead woman.

After the Sikhs left, the men looked around and found a well. They hauled some water, drank it, and washed themselves. They then picked up the semi-conscious, tortured young woman and flung her into the well. They returned to the village that same night. They were so scared that they decided never to step out, to stay where they were, and wait for destiny to unfold. They had made a feeble attempt to leave, but when it could not be sustained, they settled for destiny to decide which country to call home.

Akram said that when he was growing up, young men from the community used to get together often to visit the site of the attack, and the well was still there. It was only later that the forest land was acquired, auctioned and a private developer built a sprawling private housing colony on that land. There is no trace of the well now. As Akram spoke, the image of the aunt who he had never met filled him with visible sadness and anger

at once. He asked me to not explore this incident with anyone else. "People in the community do not take it well. Even if they are poor, nobody wants to talk to strangers about the loss of honor," he said.

If We Had Money, We Would Not Have Been Dependent on Maharaja's Train

Abdullahah Wahid: Patiala

Abdullahah Wahid was born six years after 1947. His father, Muhammad Toufique, was a young gardener who lived with his father in Sirhind's famous garden, Aam Khas Bagh. Sirhind is a town in Punjab's Fateh Garh Sahab district. There were a large number of Muslims in the area that came under the Maharaja of Patiala's princely state. When riots began in 1947, the Maharaja of Patiala, a Sikh man, gave protection to all Muslims. But soon after, thousands of Sikh traders from Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur arrived in Patiala, and they were put up in the Fort Bahadurgarh refugee camp outside Patiala. Once they came, pressure began to mount on the Maharaja of Patiala to send Muslims to Pakistan and accommodate the Sikh refugees in Patiala.

In September 1947, a train was booked and filled with Muslims from Patiala and Sirhind to be sent to Pakistan. However, a rumor was spread that Muslims were fleeing after attacking the army in Patiala. So the train was stopped and attacked soon after it left Patiala, and a large number of passengers were massacred. The entire extended family of Abdullahah Wahid's father, Muhammad Toufique, was killed. Toufique somehow escaped by hiding under the seats and then made his way back to the Aam Khas Bagh, where he was given protection by a Hindu employee of the garden and sent to Bassi Pathana, another small town in Punjab, where a distant relative of his lived. He lived with the family for a few years and was married off to the daughter of the family. After the marriage, he made his way back to the garden where his father had worked. Since his father had been an excellent gardener, Toufique found employment there. But since he was not educated, he could never get a formal position, despite being very skilled.

Abdullahah Wahid also learnt the trade from his father, and now he runs a nursery in Patiala. He had heard these stories from his father, who often mourned the deaths of his father, mother, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, all of whom he lost in one attack. Toufique used to say, "If we had money, we would not have been dependent on the maharaja's

train,” recalls Abdullaha Wahid. A sense of betrayal by the benevolent Maharaja, who first offered shelter and then withdrew under pressure, is still somewhat fresh in Abdullah’s quiet and resigned tone.

There Is No Caste Now; We Are Bound by *Kalma*, Confession of Faith

Bashirullah: Saheta Village, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab

I interviewed Bashirullah, a native of Saheta village in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, in the winter of 2017. He was born in 1967, 20 years after the Partition, but he grew up hearing the story of his family during the Partition. His grandfather, Ghafoor Alam, was a cattle trader and lived in a village called Harpat in Dehradun, now in Uttar Pradesh. He would buy cattle in Dehradun and sell them in the animal markets of Ambala and Ropar in Punjab.

It was in the early 1940s, during one of his trips, when Ghafoor had stopped in the village of Nagari, near Ropar. Ajmer Singh, a landlord in Nagari, had a very big animal shed, where Ghafoor usually stopped for the night. Ghafoor was a religious man and offered prayers at night. That night, as he was preparing himself for prayers, Ajmer Singh’s daughter had a seizure. Everyone panicked, but Ghafoor remained calm, and he offered prayers for the girl. By the time he finished *kalma*, the rendition of the Muslim confession of faith, the girl had settled. The news spread in the village that Ghafoor’s *kalma* cured the girl. From then onwards, every time he came to the village, people asked him to say *kalma* or pray for them.

A few years later, in 1947, when *hale* (communal attacks) started, Ghafoor, along with 25–30 families from Harpat in Dehradun, set off to leave for Pakistan. They were travelling on bullock carts. When they reached the outskirts of Nagari, it began to rain heavily. In that downpour, their carts got badly stuck in the mud. As they were trying to pull their carts out, a group of Sikh men attacked, killing many and looting the convoy. A few people ran in different directions.

Ghafoor and a few members of his family somehow managed to reach Nagari and knocked at the door of Ajmer Singh. He took them in and hid them for two weeks in his barn. When others in the village found out, they demanded that the Muslim men and women be handed over to them for butchering and raping to avenge the lost honor of the Sikhs in west Punjab. But Ajmer Singh prevailed upon the villagers and made them agree to his

plan of settling Ghafoor and his family in Nagari. After all, Ghafoor was a man of faith, *kalma da banda*, who possessed special healing powers that would help bring good health to the entire village, Ajmer Singh convinced the villagers. He gave Ghafoor Alam half a *bigha* (a small piece of land) for building a house, some extra land for a cattle shed, and also allotted some land from the village commons for a *kabaristan* (burial land).

Ghafoor had no possessions, so he worked very hard with Ajmer Singh and built a small animal trade. But it did not last beyond Ghafoor. The only surviving son of Ghafoor, Rashid Ahmed, became a barber. His son, Bashirullah, is a small-time singer and a performer who ekes a modest living out of the entertainment business. As for marriages, he says, the community decided a long time ago that before the Sikhs and Hindus take away your daughters, marry them off at the first opportunity to a Muslim, any Muslim, regardless of caste. So now in the poor communities, there is no caste; *we are all bound by kalma (asi sab kalme de shareek)*. The cataclysmic disaster proved to be an opportunity to break the hold of caste within an embedded religious identity for this community.

PART III. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF HOMELAND FOR KAMMIS?

What sense do we make of these oral narratives? What do they add to the Partition narrative?

The interviews were dense and difficult. In most places, the interviewees were apprehensive about being recorded during the interview and did not want to be photographed. One of the first interviews with Saliha Khan made me aware of the risks of my project. I learnt from him that those who fired at his aunt and killed her still lived in the village. Saliha and his family are a religious minority in the village and are therefore suspect in the eyes of villagers. It was early 2017, and the weight of time on the Muslim community was palpable. But once I decided to switch off the phone and the recorder, the interviews became free-flowing. I took copious notes, but beyond them, there is no evidence of the interviews.

The testimonial approach was fraught with other methodological dilemmas. In my effort to locate landless Kammis from a specific historical context who had remained in East Punjab, I found little in the historical record to help reconstruct their identities and circumstances, and so literature and testimonies turned out to be key. Through their personal narratives, the participants conveyed a sense of themselves as actors, agents, and victims, by focusing not only on the experience of dispossession but

also on their present lives within their families, communities, and the country they call home.

These narratives take us beyond the restrictive understanding of the Partition experience to reveal the underbelly of the society—caste ridden, deeply divided, prejudicial, and gendered. The poor rural Muslims' survival during the Partition and 70 years later is a history of dispossession, silencing, and betrayal—their script written and rewritten for them. *What will you do in an alien land?* They were told by the Sikh landlords in 1947 that they needed laboring bodies on their lands, and the Kammis stayed back. In 2017, their children and grandchildren are unemployed because there are no jobs, and in addition, they are Muslim. What is the meaning of homeland for them?

For the Kammis, a life of peace and security came not with the rights of citizenship but from their negative guarantee that they would seek no entitlements. Saddiq's words that "we don't ask for anything (from the state)" reflect the place of second-class citizenship. The Muslims in that small village ran their own school, built a mosque on their own land, and remained self-employed.

The experience of these poor, low-caste people trying to cross the border is in sharp contrast with the experience of some of the wealthy who moved to the countries of choice with safety and ease in private transport. Ravinder Kaur highlighted the anticipatory migration by wealthy Punjabi Hindus through the analysis of private letters written to the All India Congress Committee.¹⁶ She mentioned that political connections, along with wealth, could not only secure a safe migration passage, sometimes even by air, but, as in the case of the Lahore High Court Judge G. D. Khosla, could also result in return visits to secure personal belongings. "Those who flew to safety had a different view of the Partition. They could witness the murderous events from safe distances, and if concerned, could more often than not, fly away without ever having to face the mob."¹⁷ On the other hand, Toufique's painful memory of watching his family killed, as reported by his son, is disrupting the narrative of the Partition of the "common experience of all Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims."¹⁸ There were those poor Muslims in Patiala who did not want to leave and continue to stay in a country that promised equality of citizenship to all from different religions, but they had to be dispersed in favor of those who had higher

¹⁶ Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007): 67–68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

claims by virtue of their religious or class identity. These are experiences of the Partition, which are as much differentiated by social class as by religious identity.

Post-Partition, the landless did not receive compensatory land because land was reserved only for those refugees who had owned land prior to the Partition. Kammis were not owners of lands; they labored on them. And there was no policy to compensate labor. Interestingly, the post-Partition postcolonial Indian state had to grant land ownership rights to small and marginal farmers and tenants. They were also dispossessed but were not low caste. They were mobilized, and they were a politically significant group exerting pressure on the state through the process of electoral democracy. The landless Kammis had no political power, and they remained entirely unrepresented by any political interest. It is therefore no surprise that there was no framework to address the dispossession of this social class. There was no need to shake up the scheme of things, despite some suggestions that the landless should be given some land, because they were farmers, and what other vocation could they follow in the new countries? It was only later that the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act was passed in 1961, which reserved a third of village common land for the use of the landless. However, as subsequent studies have shown, this promise too remained on paper only. Dalits' access to common land was blocked by upper-caste Jat farmers¹⁹. If the landless had been part of the traditional Partition narrative, the post-colonial state would have perhaps had to acknowledge their presence in the national development project. The testimonies here speak to the consequence of this silence in the dominant narrative.

The interviews reflect the difficult circumstances and the difficult "choices" the Kammis made during the Partition and are having to make in India today. Is moving to Malerkotla, a Muslim-majority district, the only option left for Ayesha Bibi's grandsons? The distinctive anxieties endured by these most vulnerable women and men need to be heard, as they acutely bear the weight of social prejudices and attempt to negotiate their agency in light of dispossession. Their voices reveal a unique political relevance and begin to provide data to fill a gap in the narrative of the Partition.

When Ayesha Bibi took the opportunity to talk, it was a dialogue between the past and present: Of choosing to stay on this side of the border for the love of this land and of life not being easy on the other

¹⁹ Navsharan Singh, "Writing Dalit Women in Political Economy of Agrarian Crisis and Resistance in Punjab," *Sikh Formations* 13, no. 1–2 (2017): 30.

side of the border; of the unmaking of the idea of the country that she had known. She recalled the lost farm employment for women after the Green Revolution of the 1960s, the roots of the current agrarian crisis, and the location of the landless in the midst of this crisis. While all her love is reserved for this village, there are no jobs for her grandsons because they are Muslims. When the Partition happened, their religious identity did not matter; it was the Kammiss' capacity for work that made them wanted, even as Muslims, on this side of the border. "Stay; otherwise, who will do the work?" they were told. Today, that skill and even their work have no value, but the Muslim marker makes them feel apart from the other landless Dalits in Punjab, who also have no jobs and whose prospects of a good labor season are also eaten away by the same white fly.²⁰

There is a rampant job crisis in rural Punjab today, reducing agricultural labor to perennial casual labor, forcing the men to go out to the towns and cities to seek casual employment, and leaving women to fend for the families somehow. There is an acute lack of earning options for women and they must resort to extremely low-paying, back-breaking odd jobs in the village. Ayesha Bibi is today stuck in this crisis. In addition, she carries the burden of her Muslim identity—an identity that Ayesha, her family, and others like her did not construct but had been written for them. As they were just laboring bodies, Kammi, in 1947, they are now Muslim laboring bodies, a distinct step further into jeopardy.

Bashir Khan has spent his life in Saheta, and he has experienced it all. From the land ceiling laws and the disintegration of zamindari or the aging of his protector Radhu Ram; the fragmentation of holdings and the mechanization of farming which left not enough work for him and his family; to the dispossession of the barbers, butchers, weavers and potters who had to move out to do other things. They are now free to move, there indeed is freedom to go grab the opportunities, which was resisted in 1947 by the landlords. But what opportunity is now offered to artisans and their next generation, and especially when they are Muslim?

Those who did not leave the traditional occupation and did not acquire a new skill through education could only become self-employed, scratching their day-to-day wage out of an informal economy where the struggles for subsistence rely on self-exploiting skills. For those who did acquire

²⁰ According to the Census of India 2011, Punjab has the highest percentage of Dalits among the states of Indian states, accounting for more than comprising over 30 percent of the total population according to the Census of India 2011. Agricultural labor is the largest category of rural worker category, accounting for 30.5 percent of total workers, a majority of whom are Dalit. They continue to be at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, and their position is deteriorating.

education, like Ayesha's grandsons, there were no jobs, and if there were any, Muslims did not get them. Ayesha's lament that there were no senior officials and no professors from the Muslim community speaks to the differentiated, arbitrary and discriminatory labor market that Ayesha knows from her experience.

Saddiq's words—"and who will do the work?"—is a shared refrain across many Kammis landless whose testimonies have contributed to this chapter. They were wanted for their labor, so they were asked to stay, some only if they converted, others as is, provided they continued to work. But as the need for labor changed overtime with the growing incompatibility between the development paradigm and the existing relations of production, they became redundant—surplus in the labor market and second-class citizens in the country.



CHAPTER

7

“This Time Will Surely Pass”

Stories of Border Crossings in 1947

Uma Chakravarti

BY WAY OF A BEGINNING

In writing this chapter about the 1947 Partition of British India and related events, I am a bearer of memory—my own and of my siblings, and of friends and colleagues, whose Partition stories I have heard over the years. I am also a re-teller of the memories of others whom I have interviewed. Both sets of memories are now part of a project seeking to bring together an archive of official papers with an archive of memories.

I began to collect oral narratives in 1984 when the anti-Sikh carnage swept across many towns in North India. Delhi witnessed burning, killing, and looting for 72 hours as did other towns, leaving at least 4,000 dead. On the second morning of the violence in Delhi, the newspapers carried accounts of killings in trains. Killings in trains, evoked in powerful writing on the 1947 Partition in novels such as *Train to Pakistan*,¹ are part of the collective memory that we, especially my generation, have carried within us. Reading in 1984 about these trains and the carnage triggered my own personal memories of the Partition that I had long suppressed.

When some semblance of order returned to the streets of Delhi, I began to feel the need to document the “three days that shook the nation” in November 1984.² As a historian, I was driven to collect oral narratives of

¹ Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1988).

² Most of these interviews were published in a book: Uma Chakravarti and Nandita Haksar, *The Delhi Riots: Three Days in the Life of a Nation* (Delhi: Lancer, 1987).

the violence over the next two years. What is significant is that among these interviews of 1984, there were six interviewees who began their stories with memories of the Partition. It became, for some of my narrators, a takeoff point for how they recounted their stories of 1984. That more current trauma rekindled old traumatic memories.

When I became more closely involved with the Mittal Institute's Partition Project, which has led to the work that has culminated in this book, it was no accident that oral narratives were what I personally wanted to collect and contribute. To date, I have collected 25 oral accounts of the survivors of the Partition,³ who can be broadly classified as young children between the ages of 4 and 13 at the time of the Partition, adolescents in the age range of 11–14 years, and young adults between the ages of 15 and 21, just on the threshold of a working career. Nearly half of the accounts are from women, who were young girls at the time. In addition, I draw from a range of secondary works, including memoirs, which constitute a growing field in the Partition canon.⁴

³ These interviews were conducted with the participation of Srikanth Singh. Six of these interviews date back to 1984–1985 when Nandita Haksar and I spoke to a number of Sikhs who were affected in one way or the other by the anti-Sikh carnage in Delhi (Chakravarti and Haksar, *Delhi Riots*).

⁴ There exists a substantial corpus of literature on the Partition since the 1990s. See, for example, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries* (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (Delhi: Viking, 1998); Kamalaben Patel, *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2006); Vazira Fazila-Yaqoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York, NY: Columbia, 2007); Nandita Bhavnani, *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition* (Delhi: Tranquebar, 2014), among many others. One of the earliest memoirs, based on notes that were written during the years 1947–1949, is that of Anis Kidwai (Anis Kidwai, *In Freedom's Shade*, trans. Ayesha Kidwai [New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011]). Anis gives us an excellent and detailed account of her work in the refugee camps in Delhi during the years 1947–1949, which includes a chapter that recounts children's experiences of the Partition, but also has many references to children throughout the memoir. Her work in hospitals and refugee camps in Delhi led her to gain knowledge of what was happening to children. She kept a notebook during the months of her work after the Partition, where she recorded her feelings and concerns for children. This gave her a deep insight into the special trauma faced by children, and her book, written later, was based on her notes; it describes the tragedy that children faced, often orphaned as a consequence of the killings. Sometimes, they strayed into the camps; occasionally, they found a father or a brother and could be restored to them. At other times, they ended up in orphanages. This book, now available in translation from the original in Urdu, provides a comprehensive eyewitness account of the consequences of the Partition violence. Kidwai went to work in refugee camps in Delhi after her husband was killed in Partition-related riots in Mussoorie where he was posted. Devastated, Anis went to see Bapu, Mahatma Gandhi to the world, and asked him: "What do I do now, Bapuji?" and he said, "Go and work among others who too have suffered." And that is what she did. Also see Sanjiv Jain and Alok Sarin, *The Psychological Impact of the Partition of India* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2018). This recent book on the Partition edited by two psychiatrists is a significant contribution to Partition writing. It specifically focuses on the psychological impact of the Partition, on mental health, and institutional arrangements dealing with trauma, anger, and healing. However, in this book there is almost nothing on children, and the word does not feature in the index of the book.

The chapter is organized in three parts.

Part I focuses on my memories of the Partition as a child witnessing the events of 1946–1947—experiences that shaped me as an individual and later as a scholar of history.

Part II extends this focus to others, by describing the manner in which a child’s memories, expressed as an adult, are structured by the kind of work and interests that the child later developed. For example, those children who have gone on to become professionals or disciplinary scholars, like historians or sociologists, recall the details of the Partition, and of lives that were lived before and after, in ways that appear particular to their academic interests and training.

Part III delineates the class and gender dimensions of the survivors and the way these identities, along with their personal histories, influenced their experiences and their perceptions of the Partition events. It brings up the richness of recall, the way the child remembers things that the adults may or may not have noticed—caught up, as they were, by the imperatives of survival and the sheer effort to protect the children as they raced to reach their destinations without risking or incurring physical harm. It is possible that the connections worked in both ways in that the child sought, on the basis of these memories, to become a certain kind of person with a certain capacity to organize a difficult experience.

This part describes how the child absorbed and later used, or perhaps incorporated into their own explanatory systems, the experiences of fear and dislocation—the journeys to cross the border, the confrontations with dangerous others, the apprehensions of the adults.

In the concluding paragraphs, I note the limited but still valuable contribution an historian can bring to the evoked childhood memories of those who are now old surviving adults. There is little known about the deep anguish these children had to endure. What I present are their guarded recollections, ones that could be plumbed more thoroughly by trained psychiatrists. To the best of my knowledge, that process has not been undertaken with these survivors, constituting as they do a population still with the living memory of the 1947 Partition events. So we are left with the accounts that historians and political scientists (including the stories referenced in Chapter 4 of this book) have managed to gather. In these accounts, we obtain a sense of the psychological resilience of these children and their adult selves. We are allowed to see the ways in which they encapsulated some memories and do not make others (which may not be easily accessible even to themselves) evident to us. Yet as one of the bearers of their collective legacy, I offer a glimpse into how this very

small sample of people have managed to understand and live with their memories of the Partition.

PART I. PERSONAL MEMORIES

In late August of 1946, my younger sister was born in a hospital in Old Delhi. As my father and I (then five years old) were going to the hospital one evening to see the baby and my mother, we were accosted by a group of men who told us curtly to return home forthwith as there was going to be a “trouble” in the area. We hurried back home, and I remember experiencing fear and confusion about what was happening. It has remained in my memory as an inexplicable incident because I grew up with the memory of violence in Delhi, including our neighborhood, as dating from only August–September 1947. So then, why did I have this memory of an incident in 1946, when I was only five?

The Partition took place in August 1947 and so began much of the violence in Delhi, which I remember all too well. I remember passing the refugee camps in 1948–1949 in Purana Quila and Humayun’s Tomb along with other memories of the upheaval in the city. I wondered if I was confused about the dates and years of my memories, but it could not be since my sister was definitely born in 1946. It was only when I discovered as an adult that there was considerable violence that *preceded* the actual Partition that my memory of 1946 fell into place. There was violence in Delhi even in 1946 as the idea of Partition had already surfaced, as had the political mobilization that led to the 1946 killings in Calcutta and Noakhali, as well as in Delhi.

In many ways, the memories of the experiences of the five-year-old me have shaped my own sense of what independence brought along with it—terrible, inexplicable violence. It was inexplicable then, when I was a child, and remains somewhat inexplicable even now. Perhaps it was that sense of the child’s confusion and inability to understand the violence that has drawn me to write about the Partition through memories of the child/young survivor of the Partition (although I was never in any personal danger and suffered no dislocation or trauma in any direct sense). Today, 75 years after the Partition, children from that period are the only bearers of the memory of the Partition. Soon, they will be gone too, and will no longer be able to tell their stories as witnesses of the Partition violence and the massive dislocation in the subcontinent.

My own family’s memories of the Partition do not end with the stray incident I remember from 1946 that caused so much confusion in me. I

had two elder siblings and one younger sibling—apart from the baby who was born in August 1946. Each of us had some stray memories until we began in 2017 a thread of emails among us to collect and collate what each of us remembered. Some of these memories of our siblings we were aware of, others we discovered for the first time as we wrote back and forth on the email thread. Now, these accounts constitute as a collective Partition recall of our family, although they also remain as individuated memories for each of us.

The incident that everyone remembers and has now become a family story is one in which three Muslim men were being pursued by a group of Sikhs. Two of them managed to reach the safety of a police station in our Delhi neighborhood. The third was killed. The killing was witnessed by my elder brother and sister, who did everything together, and were outside playing games at the time of the incident.

My family lived in a government housing colony that was quite peaceful and far from the trouble spots in Delhi. It was located across from the Bangla Sahib gurdwara (a Sikh place of worship) that we all frequented as children—taking time off from games in the summer heat to enjoy the cool high interiors within which we sat listening to the soft chanting of the *Gurbani*.⁵ It was our sanctuary and, in the years to come, I could not reconcile that feeling with the group of angry killers. Where they came from, no one remembers. But what my elder siblings do remember is that a person was killed before their eyes and forever afterwards this is what defined what Partition meant to them: Their own time of madness, incomprehensible then, incomprehensible now. I did not see the incident but came to hear of the killing as they recounted what they saw, and it clearly stayed in my consciousness. Sometime during that summer, I moaned in my feverish delirium caused by an illness whose details I cannot recall: "Why are the Hindus and Muslims killing each other?" I do not have a memory of these delirious nightmares—they were recounted to me years later by my mother and have stayed with me as one of the memories she passed on.

As the chain of recall began to go back and forth amongst us, other memories also came up—of how my father later discovered that the Muslim man killed was his peon (a functionary in the government administration, who occupied the bottom end of the hierarchy and was specifically allotted to an officer for his office needs) who had decided not to take a transfer to Pakistan. Another Muslim member of my father's staff had

⁵ *Gurbani* refers to the recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib, the most important text of the Sikhs attributed to Guru Nanak Singh's own voice, that is, sayings.

elected to go over, and my father had managed to arrange for him to leave safely. My father lived with some sense of guilt that his peon was killed.

Incomprehension is the dominant motif of our childhood memories of this time. The youngest of the four of us, then only four years and eight months old, has the most isolated and idiosyncratic memory of all of us: He remembers that the gravel roads along the street on which we lived had reddish stains till they got a new layer of gravel laid over them. Years later, suddenly remembering this strange memory and after my elder siblings began to talk about our childhood traumas, he finally understood. They were bloodstains that had to be erased from the path, erased from the memory of the time of madness, the fragments of which we have carried with us most of our lives.

Another family memory of the trauma that the Partition wrought in the lives of people was the image of a Sikh man, of indeterminate age in my head, who used to stray into our school grounds—the school was in tents and had no walls or gates. It was quite close to the Rakabganj Gurdwara, a little distance away from our home but close to our school where everyone even today is welcome to eat from the common kitchen and can stay overnight, if needed. Over the weeks and months after 1948, when the school had moved into these open grounds, this somewhat unhinged person used to wander around within the school grounds, and we somehow picked up his story—he had been a math teacher previously and possibly was drawn to the school grounds because it reminded him of his life in Pindi. Sometimes, we saw him solving math sums—making addition and subtraction signs with his fingers—in the air. Other times, he would mutter incomprehensible words and sentences. One that I remember was *Maa main kadi na Pindi jaawan—othey meri maa marisi, othey mera pyo marasi* (O mother, I will never go to Pindi again—that's where my mother died, that's where my father died). At other times, he seemed to be cursing Master Tara Singh.

He was our own Toba Tek Singh.⁶ What I now remember with some sense of wonderment is that no one made fun of him—as children sometimes do with those who are not quite there. Even as children we felt some inexplicable connection to him—so he went in and out of the school grounds till the school itself shifted to a new site many miles away

⁶ Saadat Hasan Manto, *Bitter Fruit: The Very Vest of Saadat Hasan Manto*, trans. and ed. Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008), 9–15. Toba Tek Singh's story, written by one of the finest writers of the Partition violence, is a sharp critique of the "lunacy" of the Partition, and told through the story of the division of the "lunatics" in an asylum who must be assigned to either India or Pakistan. The Sikh lunatic who is being sent to India refuses to cross the border and dies in the no-man's land between the two newly carved countries.

sometime in 1950 or so. All my siblings remember him, although each of us has distinctive memories, overlapping sometimes but not always in very particular ways. What happened to this anguished soul, we never found out, and we never will know now. However, he has stayed in each of our minds—one in the jungle of memories, a reminder of that time of madness,⁷ a time of bewildering things that we never could understand.

The new location of our school was also in an open field at the edge of a heavily wooded space. It continued to be a tented school and was not far from the Purana Quila on one side and Humayun's Tomb on the other. Both these monuments and their grounds were occupied from 1947 to late 1949 with hordes of refugees, housed in camps till they could be safely evacuated to Pakistan or, for the ones who had come in from West Punjab, till they were assigned more settled homes to move into.

In late 1949 or early 1950, we received in our school our own "authentic" child survivor of the dislocation caused by the Partition violence—Satinder Khurana, whose family of six siblings had come across the border in a military truck. She became my best friend, and I spent a considerable part of my childhood years with her. I was aware of the Partition then through her and her family's attempt to build a new life in a new location, sheltered by wealthier kin who tried to help Satinder's father rebuild their lives in Delhi. We spent a marvelous childhood and adolescence together, but what I remember strikingly is that the whites of Satinder's eyes were yellow in color. Satinder told me later she had contracted trachoma during the days of dislocation. And this yellowness was its residue. This explanation of trachoma was part of Satinder's detailed recall when I tracked her down after many years of not being in touch. When I began collecting accounts for this chapter, we met up again and she provided me with a rich account, graphically recalled in terms of detail, which will feature more fully in Part III of this chapter.

I have spent some time talking about my childhood memories because, in a sense, that set of memories has provided the emotional charge that has driven me in recent years to engage with the Partition, as well as to be drawn to the theme of the child witness to the Partition trauma. What do children experience in days of turmoil? What gets imprinted in their mind and why? How does individual memory, the disjointed flashes that stay in the mind, become part of a larger narrative as individual memories get absorbed into the memory bank and as others (parents, siblings, friends, and communities of people) fit the snatches of a personal memory into

⁷ A phrase often used for the Partition violence. Also, a book title: Salman Rashid, *A Time of Madness: A Memoir of Partition* (Delhi: Aleph, 2017).

a larger storehouse of memories?⁸ That larger storehouse also becomes part of one's collective story, whether these are "passed on" to others or not.⁹ Today, what I will tell others, if I am the teller of the story, will be the collective story that has now become part of my own conscious as well as unconscious being.

PART II. MAKING SENSE OF MEMORIES: LOOKING BACK AT DISLOCATION AND VIOLENCE

The manner in which people begin their recall of the Partition seems to follow a pattern, especially if the narrators are educated and have gone on to lead professional careers such as university teachers, administrators, and businessmen. All the interviewees were aware of why I had reached out to talk to them about the events they had experienced decades before, directly or second hand. To now recall these experiences, dredging them up from their buried memories in most cases, they had tried to prepare for the session by "thinking" about what they were going to say. This process probably structured the manner in which they located themselves against the backdrop of a larger story of families, communities, and regions. As they told their stories, they also sought to make sense of what had happened to them—something they must have done at least subconsciously in the past. They now tried to "arrange" their memories so that their accounts could have some coherence, to which the experiences themselves may have refused to conform.

I begin with Omi Manchanda, who was 19 at the time of the Partition. She had been a colleague of mine in a women's college in Delhi, where she had spent her entire teaching career but during which time we never discussed the Partition. Omi had taught ancient Indian history and had refused to teach anything else, including Modern India, the course that concluded with a section on the Partition of India. She was 89 at the time of my interview with her.

Immediately, she took over the conversation, raising her own concerns or issues that she had perhaps begun to think about in advance of the

⁸ The child is an important witness in Bapsi Sidwa's novel, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1991). An essay on this novel by Nandi Bhatia is a significant contribution to thinking about children and their experiences of the Partition. Nandi Bhatia, "I know the difference between what I see, and what I only want to see": Remembering India's Partition through children in *Cracking India*" in *The Public Intellectual and the Culture of Hope*, eds Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2013), 89–106. I am indebted to Shubhangi Bhadada and Nabil Khan for alerting me to this essay.

⁹ As, for example, in the memory of Pushpinder Singh Chopra in the work cited in Footnote 15. Pushpinder moves from personal memory to the memories of his sister to the memory of his father.

interview. She began to recount the Partition through the prism of "how and why Partition happened," what forces shaped the events, why two nations were formed, how events were shaped through violence so that populations and demography could be re-aligned before the boundary lines were drawn or referendums held. She began by saying, even before I could ask the first question: "Partition happened because that's what the British did to us: It was their 'revenge' for 'our' demand for Independence from colonial rule." In her view, it was a kind of parting kick.¹⁰ This was a new angle. I had heard people say, "Partition was a conspiracy: the British wanted to control this part as a counter to Russian influence in the region, and as an undivided India would not allow that, a divided subcontinent would make for a pliable partner in the region which the British and Americans could control." But Omi's analysis was based on her thinking over seven decades; it was the only one that made sense to her and her family, who had never expressed anti-Muslim or anti-Jinnah statements. Instead, she proceeded to castigate Nehru for not accepting a federal structure for the subcontinent, which would have allowed for greater autonomy to the regions, including the Muslim-dominated Punjab and Bengal. It was almost a necessary explanation for her because Omi, as did many of the people from whom I collected Partition stories, described relations before the Partition among the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs as harmonious. Only an external villain provided the essential explanation for the terrible cost that we all in the subcontinent suffered in equal measure, whether it was on this side of the border or the other.

Omi's attempt to prepare herself for the interview was also the way by which she now tried to make sense of the months before the Partition, the intense uncertainty, and once it was clear that the division of territories was going to take place, the chain of events that were set in motion. As preparations for the division of the subcontinent unfolded, she and her family could see the burning of select areas across the city of Lahore. Non-Muslim communities that constituted majorities in certain areas and minorities in others became targets—identified groups to be frightened into leaving the city of Lahore and other cities across West Punjab. There had been great uncertainty about what might transpire in the city

¹⁰ Salima Hashmi expressed a similar view in an interview for the Stanford Library 1947 Partition Archive, dated January 18, 2016. The piece is included under the title, "Survivors and Their Memories." She said, "The fact remains that the British set this up to drive the point home: This was their last goodbye to the sub-continent. It [the violence] could have been nipped in the bud very easily but they chose to look away when they had the means not to." Salima is the daughter of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the famous poet of the subcontinent. Interestingly, Salima's mother was English. Salima is an artist who has taught art in Lahore and is a feminist activist.

of Lahore in particular. It had a numerical majority of Muslims but a substantial proportion of Hindus, who dominated the businesses, as well as a substantial number of Sikhs.

There was intense anxiety over where the border would be drawn. According to Omi, it was one of the two most contested cities at the time of the Partition, the other being Calcutta. There were also other regions, like the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now in Pakistan, where Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, known as the Frontier Gandhi, had led the anti-colonial struggle and who was opposed to the Partition. As Omi recounted, there had been intense political counter-mobilization from the Muslim League that preceded the referendum held in NWFP. As part of her storehouse of knowledge, she as a historian was acutely conscious of these referendums *prior* to the Partition and how it may have shaped the final lines of the boundaries.

Omi's excellent memory allowed her to describe her college years, her school and college friends, and the limits of the interaction with other communities. Then she focused on a sudden recollection about class relations. With a sharp sense of regret, she recounted the sanitation arrangements in urban Lahore, for which her family was entirely dependent on manual scavenging performed by Dalit women who were also Muslim. In her account of the pre-Partition days in Lahore, that memory for her was almost as painful as the loss of home, family business, and a disrupted educational career in the account she gave to us.

Ravi Vira, who was ten years old at the time of the Partition and went on to join the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), prearranged his account with no clutter and little baggage of emotion. His family was in Khairpur, Sindh (which became part of Pakistan), where his family lived, and his father had a specialized factory that produced soda ash. Ravi was at boarding school in Dehradun in India. There was no violence in either place but because of the uncertainty and beginnings of violence in the Punjab, his family decided that he must return to Karachi, escorted by a tutor from his boarding school. However, Ravi's extended kin were in India and were quite alarmed at this foolhardiness and placed enormous pressure on his father to leave Sindh and come to India.

As they had relatives high up in the Indian administration (his uncle Dharam Vira was private secretary to Nehru), arrangements were meticulously made to travel to Karachi with an escort, and after spending unhurried few days at Karachi, including going to the beach to see the sea, plane tickets were arranged for a return to India. The highlight of his boyhood memories of the departure from Pakistan was that everyone was shocked

to discover that there were no seats in the plane (it may have been a cargo plane), and that's how they crossed over.

More in keeping with the adult Ravi, the IAS officer, is that he "arranged" his account of the Partition from his executive perspective. He castigated the British for their failure to be evenhanded in their administrative decisions about what assets to divide between the two countries. That is how he summed up his view of the Partition—as an administrative task that should have been done properly because otherwise anarchy would prevail.

This administrative failure he placed squarely on Mountbatten who "pre-poned" the date of independence from June 1948 to August 1947 because he was "desperate" to return to England. The complete and meticulous planning that was required for an exchange of population never happened. The drama in this failure was that "everyone" knew even before the subcontinent was divided that such careful preparation would be necessary in the Punjab and Bengal, which were to be partitioned. The rest of the subcontinent was going to be assigned to one side or the other as full units—except the princely states, which could technically choose which side they would go with. In Khairpur, one of the native states, the Partition was a quiet one. No violence happened anywhere in Sindh, and it was clear that all of Sindh was becoming a part of Pakistan.

His keen administrative eye in general had been honed by his referring to Wikipedia, prior to our interview, to look up facts to refresh his memory. He offered in the interview a very interesting classification of his family status at the time they finally came to India: They were evacuees, not refugees, so they were not entitled to any compensation or rehabilitation.¹¹ So they just collected all their easily movable assets like bank deposits and jewelry, locked the house, gave the keys to one of the members of their staff, and then came over. Ravi's father had thought the borders were going to be soft—after all, Jinnah had said that he would spend his winters in Bombay, that businessmen had businesses in other countries across the world, that there would be some dislocation no doubt but finally the "business of living" would go on. As it turned out, all borders—whether in Sindh or the Punjab—became hard and the family never went back to Pakistan.

Another account, which also had some of the features of his later persona in how he recalled issues around the Hindu–Muslim–Sikh relations,

¹¹ I have not been able to verify this distinction as no one else mentioned it in any interview. But since Ravi Virra was in the administrative service, I consider that he knew the distinction to be a valid one.

was that of Jit Singh Uberoi, who was a 13-year-old Sikh boy living in Lahore at the time of the Partition. Jit went on to become a sociologist, first studying communities and then religious traditions. He chose to work in the area of religion, pluralism, and Islam, and simultaneously on science and rationality. His richly textured narrative recounting the events of the Partition, as he recalled them, yielded many interesting and unexpected details. For example, even the radium in pre-Partition India was divided between the hospitals in Lahore and Amritsar according to the “overall division principle of 60/40” between India and Pakistan and was carried from Lahore to Amritsar in a lead (Pb) box.

What evoked this memory was Jit’s story of how he finished his disrupted schooling and the preparations for matriculating in the years immediately after the Partition. Since he was studying math and science, he had gleaned this bit of information from one of his friends, who also was a science student and would go on to become a surgeon. This friend’s father was a doctor in the Amritsar medical college and hospital, having come from Lahore. The hospital at Amritsar did not have any radium as prior to the Partition, all of it had been held in Lahore. So, according to Jit, the father went to Nehru and said, “We don’t have any radium!” Nehru then wrote out a letter in his own hand and gave it to the doctor, who took it to Lahore medical college and hospital, and returned with 60 percent of the radium then held there, almost as a matter of routine, and of course in the lead box without which it could not be transported safely. This anecdote provides an interesting twist to the stories of even the cutlery being divided in the official “60/40 ratio of transfers” of everything to India and Pakistan after the Partition.¹²

Jit was a meticulous storyteller who always applied his own philosophical and sociological lens to the subject he was dwelling upon. To the question, “Why did Partition and the violence happen?” Jit’s answer was a full-scale thesis. To the first part of the question, he had the most extraordinary answer that I have ever come across.

¹² This ratio is difficult to confirm as a principle in the division of assets as it appears that there was a wide range of ways by which the assets were divided. See Anwesha Sengupta, “Breaking Up: Dividing Assets between India and Pakistan in Times of Partition,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, no. 4 (2014): 529–548, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464614550767> (accessed on May 27, 2022). But in general discussions what stands out is the arbitrariness of the principle applied, changing from item to item but also part of the madness of the Partition where even books such as dictionaries were divided on some principle by tearing them apart! Perhaps the radium was divided on the basis of a 60/40 principle because of its importance to medical treatment. This is how J. P. S. Uberoi remembers the story of the radium. He was a reliable testifier otherwise.

That's what patriarchs do; his job is to make divisions and ensure that the shares are justly divided, and that is what they thought. Once the divisions were done, the different "new families" with their respective assets could go back to the business of living. Even Patel, between August 1947 and the time of Gandhiji's death in January 1948, said that Pakistan would come back. But that was not to happen. Once people are out and have tasted blood, they see that they can make a life out of it; they will not go back. Even the abducted women did not want to go back.

The metaphor of property and its divisions in a patriarchal society was carried by Jit into his account of how the new countries tried to cope with rehabilitation and livelihoods. Again, his keen sociologist perspective shaped his recall of the rationale for how the two nations organized the compensation—movable property, all the jewelry, household goods, and the books (an important detail for him because his father went back to collect his books and applied for leave from Lahore College—after they had crossed over) were not compensated. The underlying logic in Jit's understanding was that the leaders—Jinnah, Liaquat Ali, Nehru, and Patel, never accepted politically and administratively that the migration was a *forced* dislocation, an involuntary one made under duress. If you chose to leave, you got no compensation. If you left voluntarily and were welcomed voluntarily, you got nothing for the jewelry and other movable assets that you left behind.

What remained to be accounted for were only immovable properties, such as houses, agricultural lands, and factories. These were compensated. Agricultural lands were sought to be compensated by treating the community of the village as a unit: New locations on the other side of the border were given to the village unit and were not allotted to individuals so as to require that you rebuild a community on that side. Jit relied on this rationale when he wanted to dispose of his share. (In Hindu law, which also applies to the Sikhs, every adult male through his agnatic kin gets his share of the agricultural unit as soon as he is an adult.) In the Punjab, you cannot cultivate land "without six lathis"—the capacity to defend the land through force. By claiming compensation, Jit made a bid for the house left behind in Lahore, which his father and he ultimately received by way of a house in Patiala.

The question of violence and its extraordinarily bloody trail was again interpreted by Jit the sociologist as something of a family story.

Divorces are like suicides; they leave a bloody legacy; all kinds of skeletons come out. People lost their taboos, their restraint. They

had strangled their daughters with their own hands, and you could not keep that truth away even from the mothers. Patriarchy is terrible. Manto was not a great writer, but he had his finger on the pulse. It was a shameful story. The flames were so hot, people disowned Gandhi on this issue: “You are too soft on Pakistan,” they said.

Yet the account of the Partition based on patriarchy and its bloody mess was also a deeply personal story for Jit. He was an adolescent during that period and however reflective he was in later life, the Partition crisis was tied up with his relationship to the patriarch at home, the father who tried to abandon the mother during the turmoil and violence.

Jit had a huge fight with his father at the time as Partition was happening, and they never made up. After the family had reached the Indian side, quite unexpectedly, the father wanted to go back to Lahore, although they had all heard from the porters that the trains back might be attacked. The father said that he wanted to get his books back. The mother, who probably suspected that the father was trying to dump the family, insisted on accompanying him. As the deserted train to Pakistan was steaming out of the station, Jit’s little sister, hardly 10 at that time, burst into tears: “We will never see them again and I will have to wash dishes in other people’s houses to survive.” The slightly older Jit consoled her saying, “As long as this brother of yours is alive, you will never have to do that!” And that’s what he did, ensured that money from compensation of the house in Lahore in the form of a house in Patiala, which was sold, and used to educate her in England, training her to become a librarian who worked till the end of her life. While consoling her, Jit had said, “Don’t cry, we have an English education which will see us through whatever happens to us!”

Although the mother and father returned from Lahore after a few days, the family quarrel led to a split household, a split between mother and father, and the family never lived together after that. The narrative that Jit wove brought together personal history and political history, sliding easily from one to the other. The story of the Partition is after all a macro-level family story that is at war with itself. The patriarch then partitions the family, fairly or unfairly, leaving its anguished legacy.

PART III. LANDS, HOMES, FAMILIES: MAKING CHOICES, SHAPING MEMORIES

The interviewees, who were children at the time of the Partition, recounted their accounts of 1947 in two ways. First was their own memories of the days and nights around the time of Partition, as they themselves

remembered it. This part was most often episodic, in bits and pieces that may not appear coherent and may also be removed from violence, focused on trivia. But it can be seen that these flashes of memory do link up to fill in pieces of the larger account. The second part of their narratives was what they had heard over the years from other family members or had read or thought about, so that their memories had become more complex accounts of what was happening in the months before the Partition and after it.

The mode of recall also differed between and among those who were young children, adolescents, and young adults—what each age group recalled was somewhat different. The very young ones remembered little episodes often unrelated to the big events around them. For those who were in their early teens, the accounts were more detailed; these adolescents were more aware of the routes taken, fear of the imminent violence, and the hardships faced.

The narratives of those who were young adults at the time of the Partition were more analytical and less experiential. They are significant in many ways as these young people were the first in the Partition generation to be forced to bear the burden of helping to carve out new lives. To be the bearers of memory as well as the makers of the new present placed these now old survivors in a most pivotal position of remembering as well as explaining. They constitute the oldest of the Partition recounters today and are well into their late 80s and early 90s. Ahead of them, and closely observed by them, are those who would have been full adults and with the passage of time are now unavailable for interview. These older adults were faced with making the decisions of moving or staying, how to move, where to go, and how to make lives that could put the Partition behind them—and to interpret their choices we have their now elderly sons and daughters.

For all of the interviewees, both class and geographical location shaped their very survival, as well as their experiences during and after the Partition took place. In the months leading up to and immediately after the events of 1947, the major survival factors at work were class and geography. Over 70 years since these events, many intervening factors have contributed to the group that now persists in reasonable mental and physical health. But certainly, as can be seen in these stories, people were sustained by their assets, education, and standing to be able to avoid extended travel by foot (the most high-risk mode of transport) to reach and cross the dividing border; and to be able to find shelter and support upon their arrival at the selected destination. Some people, even those

who were cushioned by class, experienced a sense of dislocation for years, maybe even for their entire lifetime; indeed, my sense is that 1947 never went away from their subconsciousness, especially where families or individuals had lost their sense of selves and may never have fully found them again. A perpetual sense of restlessness and a permanent sense of loss is sometimes offset by clinging to family ties in the new homeland.

The Young Adults (Ages 15–21)

Lieutenant Colonel Gill, a Sikh who was just over 20 years of age at the time of the Partition, belonged to an army family. He was already in military service and before the Partition, was posted to what would become the Indian side of Bengal. When the Partition was announced, the officers in military service were required to state their preference for serving in either Pakistan or India. The soldiers were not given this choice—their regiments were simply divided by the higher-ups to go to Pakistan or India. Gill wrote to his father, the head of the household, asking about which country he should state in the option form. His father wrote back asking him to state Pakistan. The family lands were in West Punjab in the Rawalpindi region, so that was a fairly rational option.

What is interesting is the rationale for choosing Pakistan. The father wrote, “We have lived under Muslim rule before, and we will do so again.” The implication was clearly that the Partition of the subcontinent into two parts should not lead to an exodus from ancestral homes and lands. There was nothing in the announcement of the Partition that implied, let alone mandated, a transfer of population from one side of the divided land to the other. That only became a “choice” when the violence erupted. After a month or so, the father wrote back to Gill, asking that he change his option to India as staying on where the ancestral lands were located was no longer a tenable proposition because of security issues. And so, the family moved and a few months later, Gill met them where the family had relocated on the Indian side of the border.

A similar account was provided by Major General Bhog, who was 15 at the time of the Partition. He came from a family that had both Hindu and Sikh ancestors, which was common in the Punjab in pre-Partition days. His father was in the army and was posted in Pune, where the boy studied in an Urdu madrasa school, perhaps continuing from his earlier schooling in Rawalpindi in West Punjab, where the family held lands. Again, based on the idea of home, ancestral lands, and “homeland,” Bhog saheb’s father chose Pakistan as his option. The family packed up their things and went

to the railway station to travel to that side of the border. But just before they boarded the train, news spread of "terrible" violence on that side. The family returned to their Pune home without even opening their bedding packed in the holdall, an essential preparation for train journeys in those days. Seventy years later, the memories of that aborted return to the homeland still plague Bhog saheb: "Why did Partition happen? Why did the violence happen, and what is the lesson to be learnt from what happened?" One thing is clear to him now: There is no other way but to have secularism. That is the only way people can live together no matter what their religious beliefs may be.

Prabha Bhog, who was four at the time of the Partition, added to her husband Major General Bhog's account cited above. Prabha remembered the days and nights before they left their village in disjointed segments. For a few nights before the family actually tried to cross the border from her grandfather's village in Mianwali near Jammu which fell in Pakistan to the Indian side, all the children would be put to bed wearing their best clothes. One day Prabha asked her mother, "why do we wear these new clothes every night? No one comes to see us!" Finally, one night, they left their home to cross over to the Indian side and came to a small segment of land on a gorge over the river Munnawar Tawi, which was in full flood as it had been raining incessantly through the weeks following the Partition. Prabha remembers being terrified of the river and refusing to cross. She could not be persuaded even though she was told that she would be carried across by an adult. She still refused, wailing till she was assured that a strong man would carry her across. Finally, she herself "chose" her ferry, the tallest Pathan among them all. He hoisted her onto his shoulders, she clung to him and finally reached the other bank of the swollen river. Later, they got into a goods train to reach Delhi from the Jammu border. She also remembers that they had to keep their heads down lest they be discovered when the train passed the fields and stations along the track. Prabha remembers that her wails that she wanted pickle with her parathas were met with tears from her mother and reassurances that she would soon get parathas with pickle as always when they got to their new home in Delhi.

The story for those who were in Sindh was very different. There was very little violence as Sindh was not partitioned. Life went on as before for many months after the Partition was announced and independence was celebrated. Many months later, the new year came and even after Gandhiji was assassinated, all remained quiet. The 18- or 19-year-old Phanda Singh described how the idea of moving

to India began to arise. Phanda Singh's family were Labaniya Sikhs, who had lands in a village near Shikarpur, Sindh. Phanda Singh recalled his story to me in 1984, when I was collecting accounts of attacks on the Sikhs in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination. Phanda Singh identified for me the first moment of dislocation from the multiple histories of dislocation to which he and his community were ultimately subjected.

According to him, sometime in early 1948, Nehru was said to have invited "those Sikhs in Sindh" to come over to India and make new homes there. In the meanwhile, Muslims from India had gone over and into Sindh too and they brought stories of violence and mayhem with them. Accordingly, he and his entire village went to Karachi and boarded a ship which took them to Bombay in a couple of days—or so he recounts. They lived there for a few months and then went to the Alwar district where they were given lands in compensation for the lands left behind in Shikarpur. They farmed these lands and also learnt how to weave charpoys. Sometime in the 1970s, the pressure of expanding families led them to seek new livelihoods in Delhi, where the Labaniya Sikhs lived in urban slums with no fixed abodes.

Finally, Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Nehru who had originally "invited" the community to come to India, gave them plots of land for small tenements in new colonies set up on the other side of the river in Delhi. And here they lived till cruel "fate" took over: The community was savagely attacked in the anti-Sikh killings of 1984, dislocating everyone once more. Phanda Singh lost three sons and was left with three daughters-in-law and their children to look after. His account has tragic elements of a fable, of permanent loss of home and homeland, of a life requiring him to be always an outsider wherever he went. The high irony is that Phanda Singh and his family had not personally experienced either hatred or violence during the Partition, but because of the Partition, he became a dislocated person in the new homeland, who then lost everything in a later instance of violence.

The Adolescents (Ages 11–14)

The adolescents' accounts differ from those of the under-10 child on the one hand, and on the other hand from that of the young man or woman at the threshold of full adulthood and the entailing responsibilities. In the three narratives here, it is evident the extent to which their parents' choices influenced their own perceptions of events and their own futures.

Yet their own agency also shines through in shaping a course of their own choosing.

Hirdepal (12 at the time of the Partition) is from Preetnagar, a unique residence and nonsectarian Hindu–Sikh ashram that is 12 miles from Amritsar on the one side and 12 miles from Lahore on the other. It was set up as an experimental institution by Hirdepal's father in the 1930s. Preetnagar was named after the philosophy of the institution—the abode of love. Hirdepal began his account of the Partition with the point that on the day of independence, before the Partition actually happened, no one knew where the border was going to be drawn. Although Cyril Radcliffe had handed over the document containing the boundary line to Mountbatten on August 13, 1947, Mountbatten filed it away in his drawer as he did not want the celebrations to be dampened by the hard facts of where the boundary was going to fall. So August 14 and 15 came and went for everyone—with no knowledge of where the boundary would be drawn until it was announced on August 17. The residents of Preetnagar got up on the morning of August 18 to discover that it was in India and that the boundary line was the river Ravi, or close to it.

And so, in one fell swoop, as Hirdepal put it, suddenly "the dominant community in the village became the dominated community." Since trouble broke out immediately, all the Muslim men in the village were escorted to the Pakistan border by the Preetnagar people as quickly as possible. The women and children were left behind until better arrangements could be made. Thirty-five women and children were sheltered in a house across from the main house in which Hirdepal's family lived. They remained there for almost two months until proper arrangements became possible for the women and children to be escorted across the border to join their menfolk.

This instance of saving the lives of men, women, and children became well known only years later when Hirdepal and his sister Uma were invited to a conference in Lahore. When Hirdepal was asked to speak, a man in the audience suddenly demanded to speak first even as the organizers told him to wait his turn. He insisted on speaking before Hirdepal, saying: "I wouldn't be alive today to stand here before you all if it wasn't for this man's father!" He was then a Police Commissioner in Pakistan. For the inhabitants of Preetnagar, their role in "saving" the Muslim inhabitants of Preetnagar was merely an extension of their unique philosophy, which was based on love for the earth and for fellow humans.

It was perhaps in part due to this philosophy of love for humanity that Uma, the 17-year-old sister of Hirdepal, played the role of a nurse to an

injured Muslim man who hid in the fields during the day and came to the Preetnagar house to have his wounds dressed by Uma at night. Some villagers warned the family not to help the Muslims but Uma, Hirdepal, and the rest of family continued to act according to their conscience regardless of the opposition they faced. Today, the village where Preetnagar is located is dominated by people who came from the other side and took over the lands and houses of those who have fled to Pakistan. The alignment of the communities to the respective new nations has been completed. Although the history of Preetnagar's unique philosophy has survived in social memory, its fundamental principle of the relationship between the earth and her friends, which did *not* distinguish between communities, was disrupted by the lines the Partition drew across the Punjab.

Kirti Kaul, who has spoken at many meetings where an event relating to the Partition is discussed, was 11 in 1947. Her father was a prosperous and well-respected criminal lawyer with both Hindu and Muslim clients, so he was never personally in danger in Lyallpur (now in Pakistan) where they lived. The family was holidaying for the summer in Dehradun while Mr Kaul was still in Lyallpur when the Partition was announced. At some point after the announcement of the Partition, her father was persuaded to join them "just for safety's sake" by his eldest son, who was a pilot and who collected him from their home and brought him to Dehradun.

Everyone expected to go back. Her father did not sleep in a bed for months after the Partition as he regarded himself as being "in transit," but by December, when it became evident that they could not go back, the family managed to arrange for all their dogs to be flown in individual seats by name and get to Dehradun safely. A key part of the narrative was how all their belongings, including horses and cows, carpets, and other goods, came across the border with their servants who were mostly Hindu. Among the servants was a Muslim syce (a man who looked after the horses) who was extremely devoted to his *malik* (master). He crossed the border to the Indian side with no difficulty but was persuaded to return as there could be trouble for him later. Tragically, as he crossed back, he got killed at the border, and Kirti's father, the lawyer, was devastated by this news. A further blow was that all the goods that had come safely across the border and were stored in a house of a known friend in Amritsar disappeared from the friend's house before the family reached there to collect them.

It was following this detailed recounting of the Partition that I asked my question about the most striking memory of the Partition that Kirti could recall. In the early months of the post-Partition violence, she said,

[O]ne day, we had to leave the safety of our home in Dehra Dun to go to the airport in order to fly to Bangalore where a family tragedy had occurred; my brother who flew planes and had flown my father into Dehra Dun when he was left behind had died unexpectedly. On the way to the bank to withdraw money before we went to the airport, we could not avoid the scenes of killings in the town. There were bodies strewn across the road, which our jeep had to physically drive over in order to reach the bank.

Kishan Lal was 12 at the time of the Partition and grew up in the Multan district in West Punjab. An old man at the time of the interview, he had become a prosperous owner of a dairy in Karnal, about 100 miles from Delhi and a large center for camps that housed refugees from West Punjab. His mother had died when he was two, so he was brought up by his *chachi* (aunt). The father had a small grocery shop in a village called Arian in Multan. Kishan Lal was in the third grade while his brother was older, about 14, who worked in a shop in another village.

Kishan Lal remembers that when the violence erupted and the word spread, the village *maulvi* (teacher cum preacher among Muslims) told the nine Hindu families in the village that they must leave immediately and that he would escort them to safety, which he did. There was no time to take the brother along with them because of the distance between the villages, so this brother got left behind. As the Hindu families of Arian proceeded, they met their relatives from other villages at the station and along the route, making up the large caravans of people escaping the dangers along the way.

Kishan Lal's sister was married into another village and as the family travelled further in the convoy, the daughter and her in-laws also joined the mass of people going along the paths. Then another group of people joined them. What was strange is that this third group of people had no women in it as the group had decided to save the "honor" of their women by setting them on fire before they left the village. In this passing information given somewhat routinely by Kishan Lal, the possible abduction of women loomed large. What struck me as a listener is that they did not even seem to know or want to know whether some of these women were saved, rescued, or had fallen into the hands of marauding men; they merely accepted that there were no women in the group that had joined the fleeing men, women, and children. (It is part of the way men tell stories of the death of women during the Partition so that their honor can be saved. The narrator here was only 10 or 11 at that time, yet he also had adopted

that reserve.) All groups then proceeded together and crossed over to the Indian side.

However, a few weeks later, they got news that the brother, who could not manage to cross over and was left behind in the neighboring village, was now ill and in a bad way. The desperate father went back in search of his son, found him, and brought him to Karnal. But the boy could not be saved and died in front of his father. The heartbroken, and perhaps guilt-ridden, father could not survive the tragedy and he also died within a year. So Kishan Lal became an orphan with no direct kin, living with his aunt and uncle for many years before he struck out on his own, much later in life. Though he and his relatives made it across the border and came to Karnal to the refugee camp, there were terrible losses they had suffered.

Kishan Lal's narrative is punctuated by the poverty that he endured—he mentioned the word *gurbat* many times in his account, a word that means abject poverty—the work he did as a young boy, the sense of desperation as he strove to survive in the face of marked adversity. Finally, he had built his life, the dairy business was doing well; he had children and grandchildren and was now an important member of the community in Karnal. His memory is sharp, the details of people and places absolutely clear, almost as if they were still part of his life today.

The experience of a much wealthier Hindu family living in Multan at the time of the Partition is told by Kanta Arora, a Hindu girl of about 15 in 1947. She lived with her widowed mother and siblings in Multan; the family had lands there and in Bahawalpur state. In the summer of 1947, Kanta was in the preparatory course of study just before entering college at Lahore, living in a hostel. She recalls that before the early tensions began, there were no differences between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, but about six months before the event of the Partition, signs of cliques began to appear among the girls and verbal confrontations started between them. Refugees from the villages around Multan started to pour into the city and could be seen at the railway station. In March 1947, serious rioting began in Lahore, and it was not safe to stay in the hostel anymore. Kanta, that month, went to Delhi by plane but she returned after about 20 days when it looked as if things were settling down so that she could take her exams. The plan was to pack and shift to Delhi after the exams in April 1947 and wait there to find out which parts of the Punjab would fall on which side of the anticipated boundary line.

As Kanta and her family waited for the Partition, she practiced rifle shooting and sword fencing in preparation for possible attacks against her by unknown men. She also studied hard in preparation for her exams. One day, Kanta's mother came to her and asked her what she was studying.

When told she was studying English literature, the mother responded with an acute political sense: *Jab raj badalta hai to kya hota hai—History padho, English nahi kaam karegi is time* (There is no point in studying English at times like this—study history instead to understand what happens when power changes hands). On her part, the mother began to plan for bad times. She recovered all the monies that she had lent out, took out all her jewelry and certificates from the bank, and transferred everything to the Punjab National Bank in Dalhousie in the hills on the eastern border of Punjab where they were going for the summer. Amid saying, “who can take away the earth bound in chains”—implying perhaps that the lands they could do nothing about—they left for Dalhousie in the early summer of 1947. When the Partition was announced, her mother wanted to go back to retrieve her other things from Multan but was dissuaded from doing so. Finally, after a few months in Dalhousie, which was their holiday home for the summer, they travelled by train to Amritsar and from there to Delhi. The train took four days to get to Delhi with frequent halts as Kanta recalls that there were many dead bodies on the track.

Kanta's other relatives left behind in Multan were rescued by Muslim neighbors who were aware of plans to abduct the girls. They were given burqas to wear to disguise their real identities and helped to escape from the looming danger with the help of neighbors. They went by train from Multan to Lyallpur and then to Lahore and ultimately by plane to get to Kanta's family, who had gone to Delhi. But since there were killings in Delhi too, the family went to Bombay, which was relatively safer. Finally, when things settled down, Kanta's mother came to Delhi to file claims against the property left behind in Multan. She may have done this because Delhi was the capital and the headquarters of the Indian administration. It was likely to have been the headquarters of the claims office.¹³ The mother had safeguarded all documents through her journey from Multan, to Lahore, to Dalhousie, to Delhi, and finally to Bombay. Thanks to this “single” woman, who headed her household and had meticulously planned her moves, she managed to help them all weather the economic storms of the Partition.

The Young Child of 1947

Keeping their heads down as the train steamed past stations is the only distinctive memory that Pushpinder Singh Chopra, aged five at the time, has of the times of trouble because the family never had to move from one

¹³I am unable to verify the reason for coming to Delhi to settle her claims as both Kanta and her mother have now passed on. Oral history has its inherent difficulties, especially when there is a long gap in writing up the interviews.

side of India to the other. Pushpinder was the son of an important army officer, Mohinder Singh Chopra, who was posted in Shillong, Assam, and was first deputed to organize the referendum in Sylhet in early July, which voted to go to east Pakistan in 1947.¹⁴ Later, the family travelled from the eastern side of India all the way to Amritsar, where the father took charge of the Amritsar division in October 1947. Pushpinder became the official documenter of his father's work as he went on to write his father's story based on papers, documents, photographs, and family accounts, including diary jottings of the father and a memoir written by his sister, who was a young adolescent in 1947.¹⁵

One striking aspect of these records is the description of how the border between India and Pakistan was drawn on the road from Amritsar to Lahore. The two commanders of the respective contingents, Mohinder Singh Chopra from Amritsar and Nazir Ahmed from Lahore, both of whom had been part of the same army battalion in 1933, met up on the border and drew a line across the road with a piece of chalk. They also placed a few painted drums on either side of the line along with a rubble of stones and that line on the road became what is now called the Wagah border. A simple brass plaque was also set up, which can be seen even today. It is here that the ceremonies of lowering the flag and closing the border for the night are enacted on a daily basis with crowds cheering on both sides in a carefully orchestrated display of nationalist frenzy.¹⁶

What is significant in terms of what the child actually remembers as opposed to what he or she proceeds to add to the memory bank through what is heard, read, or worked upon more formally, is that these threads all end up constituting the personal account of the interviewee. Pushpinder's interview was a summary of the book he had written 50 years after the

¹⁴ It is often forgotten that Assam was included among the states to be partitioned along with the Punjab and Bengal (see Footnotes 15 and 16 for details of the description of the referendum in Sylhet, pp. 25–50).

¹⁵ Pushpinder Singh Chopra, *1947: A Soldier's Story* (Delhi: The Military Studies Convention, 1997).

¹⁶ In his book, *A Soldier's Story*, 25–50, Chopra provides an account of the Sylhet referendum, closely watched by Jinnah, which validates Omi Manchanda's reference to the referendums in other parts of the West Punjab that had substantial proportions of the "two" communities that counted in terms of the Partition of the subcontinent. He also gave me an interview which wove his own memories and what he heard as well as validated the fragments of papers left behind by his father, which he strung together and published in the abovementioned volume. Pushpinder gave me a copy of this book at the end of the interview. There are a number of photographs in the book that Pushpinder Singh Chopra gave to me. One of them shows the painted drums and the flags of the two countries flying just behind the painted drums, a brass plaque that commemorates the drawing of the boundary which the author saw still standing there in 1997. The photograph also shows a painted line across the road at Wagah. The photographs include one showing the two army officers who created the boundary first while they were in the same battalion in 1933, and then as they looked later in 1947.

Partition and the train journey that he does remember. So whose story is told by the narrator in an interview? One's own or the collective story of the family which is recounted to others many years after the events of the Partition took place?

One interview involved two brothers, one 13 at the time of the Partition, and the other under four years of age. When the Partition became a reality, the elder brother, O. P. Sharma, was studying in a school at Narowal, a small town about 50 miles northeast from Lahore, in Pakistan. The family decided to join the exodus of people seeking to cross the border into India, a zone of perceived relative safety although there was no violence in their own village of Narowal even after the Partition. The progress was hampered by the grandmother's refusal to leave home saying, “[T]his time will surely pass,” causing the father to have a terrible sense of guilt and so they turned back after the first day's journey. The next day, they were persuaded to make another attempt to leave, hampered now by torrential rain. They tried to cross over into Jammu, but the Maharaja's guards would not let them through—the Maharaja was still biding his time in deciding on his future course of action. The group then returned and spent another night in the village. The following morning, they set course again and finally managed to cross the river north of Lahore, which was still at flood levels, but now they were in the safety of their new country, and they never did go back.

In the meantime, the grandmother (the father's mother) was still on the Pakistani side and remained in the village along with a few other old women. She had refused to believe that they were going to have to leave their home in what was now Pakistan. About four months later, the army came and rescued all the old women left behind (who had been perfectly safe there) and took them to a camp in Amritsar. In these months, the rest of the family had moved to Delhi and were trying simply to survive. Some of their relatives found the grandmother in the Amritsar camp and sent a letter to her son in Delhi. In the end, the family was finally reunited.

O. P. Sharma recounted his crossing of the border in detail, describing the various stages of the days and nights of the great migration and also included the moral choices families and communities made in leaving the elderly and the sick along the route as they had no other options. Then, in similar detail, he recounted the rebuilding of their lives, using family networks and friends to settle in Delhi, using also the government's relief support, in order to jump classes and finish school, and finally find a job in the Government of India, which enabled their fortunes to stabilize. As the eldest son of a traumatized father who had left his own mother behind,

even though she was finally reunited with them, it was O. P. Sharma who had become the anchor of the family.

A tailpiece of the story of O. P. Sharma is the sudden intervention of his younger brother, only four at the time of the Partition. The telling seemed to be complete when suddenly, as the younger brother, he added a quirky but poignant anecdote. He at the time had understood and registered little but he remembers insisting on wearing his new shirt as they left home. He also insisted on carrying his prized walnuts even though the family scolded him for his plaintive cries, and he finally had his way. After days of carrying his walnuts, he dropped one of them in a river as they tried to crossover. He cried even more piteously, insisting on getting it back and so the father went toward the rushes in search of the walnut. As he got to the rushes, he found a man with a knife crouched among the rushes. For a minute, they thought that he was going to stab them, but he stayed quiet. The floating walnut was retrieved and given to the boy and the family proceeded to complete the crossover to safety. For this brother, the walnut that floated away is the only story he remembers—the rest was only hearsay.

The six-year-old Vinod Mubayi, a Kashmiri Pandit, was born in Lahore in his *nanaji's* (mother's father) house and he also lived there in his early years. His *nanaji* had a big house near one of the most beautiful mosques (the Wazir Khan mosque) in the walled city of Lahore. That is where Vinod's mother had grown up. Vinod's father worked in the railways. When the Partition was announced, the question of moving to safety arose, but his *nanaji* refused to budge saying *Raj badalti hai, awam nahi badalti* (rulers change, they come and go; the people stay where they are!). But it soon got too dangerous to stay as Lahore burnt every night. Finally, Vinod's maternal grand uncle, who was in the police, took everyone away to the other side of the border into the Jullunder district.

One day, Vinod was seated in his granduncle's jeep as he was out on some work on the Indian side of the border. They reached a point where a convoy was going from the Indian side to Lahore with people walking along a path slightly below the main road, which was on an elevated plane. Vinod witnessed something unexpectedly that was scary but also intriguing. As the convoy went along, a group of Sikhs on horseback swooped down onto the convoy walking below and one of the men grabbed a young girl to carry off with him. Vinod's granduncle saw it and shouted *chadd de* (leave her), which the man trying to grab the girl did not respond to. His granduncle then took out his service pistol and shot him; the man fell off the horse and the other marauders quickly rode off. The convoy then

pressed ahead as if nothing had occurred. Vinod did not know then what was happening and why; only that what he had witnessed was chilling. It made sense to him only some three years later when the entire family was gathered in their new home in Delhi and abductions were talked about by others recounting the Partition violence in his own family. Still later, he read all the writing that came out on abductions during the Partition and met writers and poets, including Kaifi Azmi and Rajinder Singh Bedi, who were grown men when they became aware of the violence of the Partition and had written about it. Only then did he fully comprehend the whole episode he had witnessed as a child. Interestingly, he did not recall, until his uncle later reminded him of it, the really dangerous moment that happened to him when he was out on the verandah and a bullet grazed his clothes, but the attempted abduction he remembered on his own without anyone having to remind him of it.

Satinder Khurana, whom I met first as a child and mention in my own recollections in Part I, provides her own childhood memories of these times in particular detail (in part because I knew her well over the years). She began her account by telling me about her childhood in Mandi Bhawal, about 50 miles to the northwest of Lahore, where her father ran a factory of cotton spinning. Labor came in from as far away as Uttar Pradesh and Afghanistan. The factory was in a gated area and the children played on the mounds of cotton that lied on the premises. Satinder and her sister were preparing to go to a boarding school because the school in the factory town was not very good. Everything seemed to be normal and happy—the father made a ritual of his evening tea, and the children bathed in the afternoon at the pump to cool themselves after the heat all day. In the months leading up to the Partition, however, trouble had started. There were fires and killings, but her father had remained adamant that things would be all right. Through these times, Satinder and her siblings were in the thick of politics as it was demonstrated on the streets. The children—Satinder and her siblings—used to hear and repeat the slogans being shouted on the streets by the Muslim League. They would treat the whole thing as a game in which they went around repeating the Muslim League slogans.

When the Partition was announced, she remembers her father saying, “What nonsense—we have been here for generations and this is our land.” He carried on as before. Since the factory was gated, the family had felt quite safe but then fires began in the town near the factory. The family in their house and the laborer’s who resided in the factory began to prepare bombs for self-defense, which they hid under the quilts in the large trunk

that everyone in the Punjab had in those days. The police had gone around making searches but did not find anything because the bombs were hidden under the quilts at the bottom of the huge trunk. Her father had a licensed gun, which he was allowed to keep.

At some point, the decision was made to move to a camp in the main town some distance away. Preparations were made. Her father killed a chicken while saying, *chal main teri Pakistan banana va* (Come, I'll make Pakistan out of you!). They made a lot of parathas and took a jar of pickle and got ready to go to the camp. All animals were given away to the neighbors and they finally left for the camp. But by nightfall, when the food was eaten, Satinder remembers her father saying that the camp was not as secure as their own gated factory. So they decided to return to the factory. There they set up the camp and everyone from the original campsite in the main town also moved to the new campsite. (Perhaps the father felt he was safer where he was in control rather than going into a camp over which he would have no control. He was clearly reluctant to leave his home and factory, which was walled and gated, whereas the camp near the main town was unlikely to have been).

In this way, they all stayed on till the end of September 1947 when Satinder's uncle left for India. Their mother now began to exhort the father to also leave but he would have none of it, saying, all these people in the camp inside the factory were dependent on him so how could he abandon them? Their mother then began to work through the children, asking them to cry and beg the father to leave, saying "we will not go without you," but to no avail. Finally, the family moved into a camp at Mandi Bhawal in October and stayed there for a few weeks. They ran short of food, remembers Satinder, so guess what fetched a good price? The gun! They got ₹800 for it, but it caused a dilemma for her father since it was clear against whom the gun would be used. But he told himself that he had no choice as his children's needs settled the issue for him. (When I asked about jewelry that they might have had, Satinder said it had no value; a ring only fetched ₹10.)

When Satinder's mother had originally left for the first camp, she was in her high heeled shoes as these were her prized possessions and the children wore their best clothes. But everything wore out in the weeks they were at the various camps. Finally, in the month of October, the family left the Mandi Bhawal camp for India in the last truck leaving the town. It was an army truck and they travelled in it for 24 hours, passing many convoys coming in the opposite direction. As they passed each other,

people, including the children, shouted out, "We are leaving palaces for you, but you are only leaving earthen pots for us."

In the course of this one 24-hour journey in a military truck, unexpected things happened. Satinder's little sister strayed away from the family as everyone got down to perform their ablutions and panic ensued before she was found. Much rumormongering occurred among the travelers as the truck proceeded on its way to the border. People believed that the water along the way was poisoned (this fear also came up in 1984 as there were rumors that the Sikhs had poisoned the main water tanks in Delhi) with some substance that gave everyone diarrhea. Given the health and sanitary conditions en route and at camps, gastrointestinal issues were very likely to occur without any calculated intent. When the truck reached Amritsar the next night, Satinder remembers it as the day Princess Elizabeth was married to Prince Phillip in her mind as perhaps November 1, 1947.

For about three months after reaching India, the family was housed in a camp in Ambala. The father (perhaps restless in the face of uncertainty?) could not stand this arrangement and so they finally left for Delhi, where there were some relatives who would help them tide over the difficult times. They arrived in Delhi on the day Mahatma Gandhi's funeral was taking place. In Delhi, Satinder had to go back to pre-school because now the English medium was required for entering a good school like the one she joined in Delhi. She had lost two years in the process. All children then pursued their education with the seriousness they would give to their best resource, which one carried within oneself. Satinder's closing remark to my question about recalling any fears they had experienced during those troubled times was "as children we felt no fear; if there was anxiety, it was the concern of the parents."

BY WAY OF SUMMING UP: TRAUMA, MORAL CHOICES, AND SURVIVAL

While there is a burgeoning field of writing today around the Partition, including those that are interview-based, there is little written on how children experienced the Partition *as children*. The notion of the child as a survivor of often terrible early experiences is not at all prominent in current discussions of the Partition on the subcontinent.

Anyone writing on the Partition will be faced with half-told stories, each vignette incomplete because all that is available is a fragment of a larger story that is now lost to us. These "memories" are of incidents that

make up snatches of memories, stray bits¹⁷ carried in a memory bank as it were to be recalled years later when someone asked them formally about what they remembered of the Partition. Sometimes these were recounted as an add-on to another recounting of a slightly older person and carry the quaintness of a childish mind remembering a detail that had little to do with violence or trauma, impending or actual, that the child had actually experienced. These accounts of the now old people, but then very young children, have a particular kind of recall—idiosyncratic, whimsical, and fleeting—even as some accounts were structured and could build a sequence of events leading to the great departure from “home” to an unknown destination.

The loss of the familiar and the tensions that adults were experiencing were translated in the only way a child could explain her own reaction to the fear and the dislocation from the life she was leaving behind. The children sought to comfort themselves by hanging on to the familiar, the shirt that was a valuable object or the walnut you could hold and feel against the wider confusion.

Further, an explicit acknowledgment of the trauma of the Partition is difficult to access seven decades after the great exodus. In all accounts that I heard in my interviews, deep fear, or the trauma of witnessing bloodshed, was not volunteered or sequestered outside the flow of the narrative of recall. Only in one interview, and only after I expressly sought a response to the question: “What is your most striking memory of the Partition?” did the adult person (82 at the time of the interview) mention the feeling of driving over dead bodies in a jeep.

Much has been written about the trauma of abducted women, but these accounts focus on these traumas, to the relative exclusion, in my view, of the depth and extent of violence inflicted on other sections of society including men, the elderly, and children. These latter issues have still not registered in public consciousness as part of the continuum of Partition-related consequences.

In my view, certainly, in these interviews or others, if a trained child mental health person were to pursue the deep feelings or memories of the child that the adult could now summon up in response to a sequence of skilled questions, there might very well be a release of strong feelings and intense stories of trauma.

¹⁷ These might be termed “screen memories” according to some interpretations of Freudian psychology. See Lucy Lafarge, “The Screen Memory and the Act of Remembering,” in *On Freud’s ‘Screen Memories’*, eds Gail S. Reed and Howard B. Levine (London: Karnac Books, 2015): 41–44.

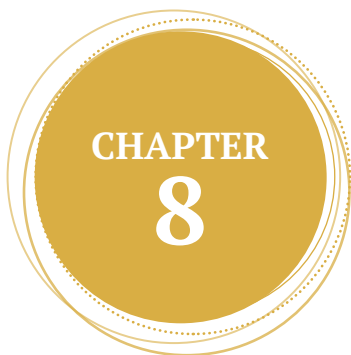
Yet in friendly and informed interaction with people now in their 80s or 90s, my asking them, as a peer, of what they recalled as a child during the time of the Partition, they reply in the modes I have categorized: as adult professionals reconstructing backwards; as adolescents forced to take on responsibility heavier than their age might have allowed had times been different; as children whose memories have storylines fixed on what they could control or on what objects they loved and carried with them. And all participants acknowledge what I have come to learn for myself—that these accounts they share with me have become collective ones. These accounts have become the talismanic remnants of what they in their families experienced, of what has become distilled as bearable—in physical and emotional meanings—from memories of the harsh and chaotic welter of their lives back then.

Yet these collective family memories, protective as they may be, are potentially volatile. These accounts are honed by the telling, an odd source of comfort because they encapsulate a past the teller need not, must not, does not wish to return to. But these memories, despite being the familiar account that families and individuals can access, arise from events that are not understandable—not when the narrator was young, and still not in old age. In my interviews, everyone at some phase of the conversation voiced a sense of disbelief, incredulity, or, if then a young child, bewilderment. How could this all have happened?

And in that emotional and cognitive irresolution, a sense emerges to the interviewer and the interviewee that the past is not stable. The roots of ethnic or communal antagonisms in the subcontinent, as in other parts of the world, are neither plumbed nor resolved. Hence, the sudden return to a distant terror among those forced to witness the outbreak of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984. The Partition will leave the bearers of its memory only when they themselves have passed on. But their collective memory persists to perturb the generations that follow.



Cities, Art, and Architecture



Camp to *Nagar*

Impacts of the Partition on Urbanization in India and Pakistan

Rahul Mehrotra and Diane Athaide

The Partition of India had catalytic effects on the patterns of urbanization in cities in India and Pakistan due to the extreme influx of refugees and the rapid densification that ensued. The outcome of the Partition, however, including demographic displacement, played itself out differently in each city depending on its location, governance capacity, and availability of serviced land. These aspects determined the resilience of each city in absorbing large numbers in a very short time. This chapter focuses on the four large metropolitan areas of Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, and Karachi, where the governments of the newly created countries of India and Pakistan tried to ensure the safety of their citizens as well as refugees through rehabilitation programs and unconventional planning efforts. These rehabilitation schemes exemplify the efforts of both governments, from the central to the local level, to shape the cities in question into the urban formations we know today.

In addition to physical planning, the governments on both sides of the border also introduced new measures to assist people displaced by the Partition. These included property laws to deal with the rapid population influx and the immediate shortage of capacity to deploy planned rehabilitation measures. This response may prove instructive in the context of contemporary instances of forced migrations, wherein accelerated refugee movements in many parts of the world (for example, the Rohingya crisis, Syrian refugees in Europe and the Middle East, and the vast distressed migrations of people from Africa and elsewhere in the

Middle East) reflect the inability of governments to respond swiftly and, more importantly, with appropriate solutions. It is in this context that it is valuable to examine the responses of the newly formed Governments of India and Pakistan in their struggles to deal with the post-Partition influx of refugees in both countries. It is particularly pertinent to study the cases of Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, and Karachi, where existing urban systems were challenged and modified to accommodate an unusually large number of people. The lessons that could be gained from studying the Partition could inform current anticipatory strategies for planning and provide lessons on how to deal with the increasing global migrations of refugees or displaced populations due to political strife and climate change.

INDIA

The influx of refugees into both India and Pakistan and the extreme demand for shelter were the immediate outcomes of the Partition. The influx demanded immediate emergency response measures be undertaken by the newly formed governments on both sides of the border. The first actions by the East Punjab state government, the municipal government, and the respective city improvement trusts (like the Amritsar Improvement Trust) were necessary but entirely insufficient. It not only made the extent of the problem clear to the Government of India but also demonstrated the government's initial lack of capacity (in terms of resources and personnel) to deal with the influx adequately. In order to respond to the immediate problems of housing, the various federal government agencies were propelled to think about this complex situation more strategically and systematically.

On September 6, 1947, the Central Government of India, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, established the Ministry of Rehabilitation ("Ministry") to efficiently manage the rehabilitation of the newly arrived refugees.¹ The Ministry initially focused on the setting up of refugee camps and the provision of basic necessities. However, the Ministry also recognized the importance of a long-term strategy to create entirely new urban areas like satellite towns,² as the government realized that there would be an eventual limit to the expansion of existing cities as well as

¹ Prerana Chatterjee, "Managing Urban Transformations of Refugee Settlements in West Delhi from Camps to Nagars: The Story of Moti Nagar and Kirti Nagar," *Creative Space* 2, no. 2 (2015): 183. <https://doi.org/10.15415/cs.2015.22005>

² Satellite towns such as Faridabad, Gurgaon, Bahadurgarh, and Sonapat were planned. Rakesh Kumar, *Partition of India: A Study of Rehabilitation* (1st ed., New Delhi: Research India Press, 2016), 147.

their ability to absorb the masses of new people.³ Although the Ministry drafted detailed plans to absorb the incoming refugees, there was a huge gap between what was planned and what was executed due to the sheer enormity of the task at hand. Local urban cooperative societies, non-profits, and relief associations often aided the Ministry's efforts. Through these processes, the refugees were incorporated into the planning process, and their rehabilitation became a means of legitimizing the new India.

The process of resettlement of refugees in India can be broadly categorized into two phases: temporary and permanent. Temporary measures included short-term measures to provide food, shelter, and medical aid.⁴ Temporary measures were in equal part state initiatives such as those from the Ministry of Rehabilitation and the combined efforts of relief agencies such as non-profits and civil society. Relief agencies engaged more with the on-ground activities of distributing food, setting up medical facilities, managing donations, and setting up tents and other shelters in the refugee camps for the newly arrived migrants. Permanent resettlement involved efforts led primarily by the Government of India to build or assist in the establishment of housing colonies⁵ either on the sites of refugee camps or on the urban fringes. The more specific decisions were then usually taken by various governmental departments like the development authority, sometimes in conjunction with the housing authority. Permanent efforts also included setting up broader amenities such as institutions such as schools, colleges, and hospitals⁶; extension of roads and railway lines; and sanitation infrastructure.

In this context, the case of Punjab provides a robust insight into the state government's role in providing housing assistance to refugees. This role was executed in stages, from temporary responses to long-term solutions such as the provision of construction loans and the building of new industrial townships to decongest urban centers and provide employment opportunities.

³ The Ministry of Rehabilitation had to also include plans to expand physical infrastructure to service the cities, including sewers, drinking water facilities, and public toilets, to maintain public health and sanitation standards in the newly densified urban areas.

⁴ Ravinder Kaur, "Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement," in *Since 1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

Initial Efforts in East Punjab, India from Amritsar to Delhi

The efforts by the East Punjab government to house the newly arrived refugees began first with the provision of temporary housing assistance through the planning of refugee camps. The Sikh and Hindu refugees that moved to East Punjab from West Pakistan were first temporarily rehabilitated in institutional buildings such as dharmshalas and public educational institutions.⁷ In the initial resettlement efforts, refugees were also moved to Muslim evacuee homes.⁸ However, existing vacant housing stock was exhausted rapidly and there was a necessity to designate open land on which refugee camps could be built.

Hence, the second form of temporary housing assistance provided by the East Punjab government was to create refugee camps by setting up tents and populating barracks in military camps that were usually located in vast empty tracts of land, either around existing urban settlements or within the compounds of old historical monuments.⁹ Depending on the number of inhabitants residing there, refugee camps were categorized into camps with more than 25,000 people, camps with 10,000–25,000 people, and camps with fewer than 10,000 people.¹⁰

It was initially planned to establish one large camp at Kurukshetra in East Punjab, with a capacity of up to 500,000 persons, and a second line of camps at Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Ferozepur, with smaller capacities. However, due to the high volume of Hindus and Sikhs being evacuated from West Pakistan, refugees began to also move to other towns further west and south, such as Ambala, Panipat, Sonapat, Hisar, Hansi, Bhiwani, Rohtak, and Gurgaon (on the border of Delhi).¹¹

Permanent resettlement measures were provided by the state to refugees in two forms: one was through assistance with housing construction loans provided by the East Punjab government, and the second was through the building of townships.¹² Building loans for those who wished to construct new homes were offered through the housing loan assistance

⁷ Kumar, *Partition of India: A Study of Rehabilitation*, 71.

⁸ When a street consisted of many vacant housing units, as was expected in a former neighborhood primarily with Muslim residents, it was recognized as a refugee camp.

⁹ Kaur, "Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement," 24.

¹⁰ Kumar, *Partition of India*, 75–76.

¹¹ Ibid., 72–73.

¹² Ibid., 116–122.

program by the Government of Punjab.¹³ This initiative to promote self-construction of housing by individuals and cooperatives helped alleviate the pressure on the government to build housing for the unprecedented number of refugees.

Besides the housing assistance provided by the East Punjab government, the government helped refugees with the creation of townships. These townships were of two types: “model townships” for middle-to-higher income groups¹⁴ and “cheap housing schemes” for low-income groups.¹⁵ The cheap housing schemes were primarily located in industrial areas being established on the peripheries of some of the important urban areas. These were built to provide accommodation for the workers who would be employed in the industries. However, according to most accounts, the intended trajectory for these new growth centers did not pan out in the expected time frame and it most often took decades for the notional industries to provide adequate employment.

Delhi

The Growth of Delhi up to the Partition of 1947

Until 1911, the city of Delhi was no more than 27 sq. km with a population of 238,000 when Delhi was announced to be the new capital. In the newly constituted province of Delhi, three new urban administrative districts were created in addition to the existing urban expanse, and by the 1920s, urban Delhi was spread over an area of 168.09 sq. km with a population of 304,420.¹⁶ The last two districts of South and West Delhi were primarily agricultural land in the 1940s until the government bought land here to permanently resettle the refugees of the Partition.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 116–122. This program was supported by legislation called the East Punjab Refugee Rehabilitation (House-Building Loans) Act, 1948. Significant funds amounting to nearly INR 4,000,000 were placed at the disposal of the deputy commissioner and registrar to disburse to individuals and cooperative housing societies to construct houses on the sites in the new townships.

¹⁴ The model townships were established by the Government of East Punjab in 17 towns with the goal of accommodating 66,000 houses.

¹⁵ Kumar, *Partition of India: A Study of Rehabilitation*, 118–122. The cheap housing schemes were of two kinds: the first aimed at providing 6150 building sites at various places in the province, and the second aimed at providing 10,000 plots.

¹⁶ Véronique Dupont, Emma Tarlo, and Denis Vidal, eds., *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2000), 229–235.

¹⁷ Aparna Alluri, and Gurman Bhatia, “The Decade That Changed Delhi,” *Hindustan Times-Partition: 1947 Archive*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/static/partition/delhi/> (accessed on July 5, 2021).

Formation of the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT)

The intense construction activity that was required for the building of New Delhi's elaborate, geometric plan as well as the industrial production for World War II in 1939 led to a rapid increase in the population of the old city as military men, laborers, workers, and traders migrated to Delhi.¹⁸ New Delhi's inability to house its own population had increased the demand for accommodation in Old Delhi. The mismatch between the gross shortage of housing in New Delhi and the increasing demand meant that rents would soon rise drastically. As the congestion due to the extreme shortage of housing grew, there was the possibility of a public health crisis. The central government established the DIT in 1937, whereby the state increased its control over land, urban development, and the built environment.¹⁹

The DIT formulated plans that aimed to first make improvements in the Delhi Municipal Committee, such as slum clearance and infrastructure works, which would pave the way for further urban expansion. The DIT also planned to build new planned townships to accommodate up to 100,000 people to rehabilitate those cleared from the slums and decongest the Old City. However, after 1941, the DIT began to sell plots to the highest bidder by auction or by tender instead of leasing them and benefitting from the increase in property values. The DIT also primarily developed housing for the new middle and lower-middle classes. This model, therefore, did not alleviate the shortage of housing or congestion, and squatter settlements continued in the city. Since DIT and the Delhi Municipal Committee, the two local bodies at that time, were not adequate enough to cope with the situation, the central government appointed a committee which recommended a single planning and controlling authority for all the urban areas of Delhi, the Delhi Development Authority.

The Partition: Short-Term and Long-Term Measures

After independence and the Partition of India in 1947, Delhi, the capital of the newly formed Indian Union, immediately faced a massive influx of population. Delhi received about 470,000 refugees from western Punjab and Sindh, while 320,000 Muslims left the capital and migrated to Pakistan.²⁰ As per the census of 1951, the population of Delhi jumped

¹⁸ Diya Mehra, "Planning Delhi ca. 1936–1959," *South Asia* 36, no. 3 (2013): 361, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2013.829793> (accessed on May 20, 2022).

¹⁹ Mehra, "Planning Delhi ca. 1936–1959," 358.

²⁰ Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal, *Delhi*, 229.

from 917,939 in 1941 to 1,744,072, of which 495,391 were displaced persons.²¹ Rural-to-urban migration and a natural population growth rate of 4 percent could also account for a small portion of the significant population growth, but a majority of the increase can largely be attributed to the Partition. The incoming refugees integrated into the city, initially as inhabitants in temporary settings like the tents or military barracks in refugee camps and pavement dwellings. The displaced population was later permanently resettled in mass housing in refugee colonies and townships on the periphery of the old city.

Delhi's already existing housing shortage was greatly exacerbated by the Partition, as hundreds of thousands of refugees fled into the city to escape fear and violence. These refugees were Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab, but there were also thousands of Muslims fleeing other parts of India on their way to cross the border into West Punjab. The state implemented rehabilitation schemes and established control over the refugees in Delhi through a series of legislative acts and by establishing new ministries and bureaucracies. The most significant law was the Delhi Refugees Registration Ordinance, 1947. This ordinance mandated the registration of refugees in the Province of Delhi, and only then would they be granted a certificate of registration and be eligible for rehabilitation benefits.²² When it came to housing refugees, the Delhi government used a variety of short- and long-term strategies to deal with the increase in population. The short-term measures included the creation of "safe zones" within the city and the formulation of new notions of property rights. This strategy was primarily to prevent Hindu-Muslim riots and violent outbreaks. The immediate creation of refugee camps to accommodate the displaced populations, as the demand for shelter outstripped the supply of evacuee property, became a priority. The long-term measures include the construction of new housing colonies, the expansion of the city's urban area, and the development of satellite towns to facilitate urban deconcentration. As part of the long-term measures, a planning strategy that emerged to organize the housing colonies, the *nagars*, was more specific to Delhi.

²¹ Ibid.

²² S. K. D. Gupta, K. V. Rajagopalan, J. R. Dhurandhar, K. K. Hajara, R. P. Verma, T. C. Shrivastava, S. M. Lahiri, C. C. Coari, U. Chan Tun Aung, S. Namasivayam, R. Espitalier-Noel, and C. E. Purchase, "Eastern Countries," *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 31, no. 1/2 (1949): 121. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/754791> (accessed on May 22, 2022).

Short-Term Measures: The Creation of “Safe Zones” within the City and New Notions of Property Rights

During the Partition of 1947, displacement of populations took place not only across borders but within India and Pakistan as well. A prime example is East Punjab and Delhi, where the newly arrived refugees from West Punjab often forcibly occupied Muslim homes. It is estimated that 44,000 Muslim houses were occupied in Delhi alone.²³ Muslim majority neighborhoods such as Karol Bagh, Paharganj, and Sabzi Mandi were subjected to acts of violence and arson, causing the survivors to flee to “Muslim camps,” which began to emerge at this time.²⁴ Sometimes Muslims residing in neighborhoods that had not experienced any violence moved to the camps in apprehension. The forcible occupations, in addition to departures by Muslims to Pakistan, left many properties abandoned by the Muslims, which were occupied by Hindu and Sikh migrants. This left a large population of Muslims homeless.

The Indian government adopted the policy that no non-Muslim refugee would be evicted for illegal occupation without being provided with alternative accommodation. At the same time, it is believed that the Emergency Committee encouraged many Muslims in mixed areas to be rehabilitated into “Muslim zones” in the city, which were predominantly Muslim areas. It was said that only then could the government guarantee protection on an individual basis.²⁵ It would appear that the lack of strict action to protect Muslim homes was in part due to a concern of the newly formed government to provide for the incoming population from West Punjab and thus prove its legitimacy. The Emergency Committee set up by the Indian government responded to the forcible occupation of Muslim homes in two ways. The first was through the institution of the Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950, and the second was through the creation of “safe zones” or “Muslim camps.”²⁶

For the efficient management and administration of evacuee property, the Government of East Punjab first promulgated an ordinance which was converted into legislation called the East Punjab Evacuees (Administration of Property) Act, 1947 (the “Act”).²⁷ This Act provided for the evacuees’

²³ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

²⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “India: Act No. 31 of 1950, Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950,” Refworld, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5420.html> (accessed on July 5, 2021)

property to be preserved and protected by specially appointed custodians. According to the Act, an “evacuee” was defined as “any person who left India on or after 1st day of March 1947, for any place outside the newly formed territory of India post partition, due to the formation of two separate nations of India and Pakistan and the civil disturbances that ensued.”²⁸ The definition of evacuee also included

A resident in any place now forming part of Pakistan, and who for that reason was unable to occupy, supervise, or manage in person his property in any part of the Indian territory, or whose property in any part of India has ceased to be occupied, supervised, or managed by any person or is being occupied, supervised or managed by an unauthorized person.²⁹

The migrants were described as evacuees if they were leaving India, and as displaced persons if they were coming from Pakistan, which was an approach that equated ownership of assets—such as homes and property and the basic requirements necessary for a decent livelihood—as the mark of settlement. This shaped the idea of resettlement, which was formed around granting or making available such resources to curb homelessness.³⁰

The Indian state acquired and consolidated a variety of these abandoned properties belonging to evacuees as the refugees on both sides left behind substantial immovable assets such as houses, workshops, factories, shops, and farmlands. A main duty of the custodian, who was appointed for the city, was to look after any property declared to be evacuee property until the displaced could return to them. Initially, occupation of an evacuee’s property by an unauthorized person was considered illegal. Eventually, from most accounts, the custodian was permitted to temporarily allot abandoned Muslim houses in his custody to Hindu and Sikh refugees from Punjab as a way to provide immediate housing.³¹ The position of custodian was created with the proclaimed object of providing for the administration of abandoned evacuee property until such time that the displaced could return. However, it was extremely difficult for evacuees on either side to return, and the property effectively came to belong to the state, which could put it to any use that it deemed fit, although the evacuee had the right to sell the property. In cases where the property was being used for rehabilitation, the custodian was to collect

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kaur, “Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement,” 21.

³¹ Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*, 27–28.

the rent, which was ultimately to be transferred to the other dominion. However, properties owned by Muslims who had not left India were also confiscated in many cases, as they were seen as “intending evacuees,” making preparations for migration. This mechanism was created to take control of their property before they became an evacuee, and it was difficult to regain their properties as various documents proving legitimacy were required. The process was litigious and exhausting, taking decades to be resolved, if at all.³²

As a second measure, the city was remapped for Muslims into “mixed areas” and “Muslim areas” or “safe zones” as Muslims no longer felt safe in mixed localities. The abandoned houses in Pahari Imli, Pul Bangash, Phatak Habash Khan, and Sardar Bazaar were cordoned off and kept empty by the police so Muslims could return to them, or others could move in.³³ Muslims from mixed areas were offered safety if they moved to these Muslim zones. The places in the city chosen by Muslims seeking shelter were the Jama Masjid, houses of Cabinet ministers such as Maulana Azad and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the Idgah, Humayun’s tomb, and the Purana Qila.³⁴ Some of these places of refuge emerged spontaneously as large numbers of people congregated, and some were organized as camps. Relief work in Jama Masjid and Idgah was carried out by volunteers, while Purana Qila and Humayun’s tomb were managed by the Indian government.

Camps like Purana Qila, which started out disorganized, were eventually brought to order once taken over by the Indian government. However, personal records of volunteers inside the camp demonstrate that the priority was also to maintain control and discipline within the camp, with the establishment of loudspeakers, policing, a camp commandant, and dividing the camps into those who wished to leave and those who wished to remain in India. While administration of the camp was important, according to one author, the provision of additional access to water initially took a back seat, and relief supplies were often lacking.³⁵ Thus, this creation of “safe zones” is an interesting lens through which to look at the city for two reasons. First, a pattern emerges wherein religious communities not only display an affinity toward the monuments of relevance to them at an individual level, but the community as a whole also considers these monuments to be places of refuge and solidarity. Second, the creation of these gathering spaces can also be looked at as a means for

³² Ibid., 125–127.

³³ Ibid., 28–29.

³⁴ Ibid., 34.

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

the governing body to protect a certain section of its citizens while also maintaining a degree of control.

The Short-Term Measure: The Creation of Refugee Camps

In Delhi, the Indian government allotted large tracts of vacant land and rural land outside the city to the Ministry of Rehabilitation on which to build refugee camps for the Hindu and Sikh refugees coming into India from Pakistan. Kingsway, Rajendra Nagar, Moti Nagar, and Kirti Nagar were the sites of some camps, of which Kingsway Camp was the largest due to its prime location and extensive area of 151.3 acres. It accommodated 30,000 people at the height of migration. Four main military barracks named after British commanding officers were located here: Edwards Line, Outram Line, Reeds Line, and Hudson Line.³⁶ Large World War II tents, as well as barracks for soldiers, were used here to house the refugees. Kingsway Camp is now, in contemporary Delhi, the site of huge residential colonies named Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar and Mukherjee Nagar.

It is useful to examine the manner in which camp allotments were made to the refugees. On arrival at Delhi railway station, refugees were required to visit the refugee registration office. Here, they would be given refugee registration numbers and asked if they needed food and clothing rations from the state. A positive or negative response would then form the basis for the allotment to the barracks or cloth tents in various camps. Those who could afford their own rations would be allotted Hudson and Reeds Lines barracks, while those who could not would be sent to Edward and Outram Lines.³⁷ The latter would be housed in cloth tents from World War II, while the former were settled in concrete barracks.³⁸

In conclusion, there are a number of critical observations to be made in the case of Delhi when it comes to the immediate handling of a crisis like the Partition by a major city. To begin with, Delhi had a pre-existing housing crisis that was triggered by the building of New Delhi and the ensuing migration that occurred. This crisis was clearly exacerbated by the Partition. While Amritsar was also an important commercial hub, due to its proximity to the border, it not only experienced Muslim populations fleeing to Pakistan but also many Hindus and Sikhs moving to towns like Ambala that were further away from the violence. Delhi, however, remained relatively safe for Hindus and Sikh migrants, and being a large

³⁶ Kaur, "Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement," 23–24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

city, offered many job prospects for those choosing to live in an urban area. The Delhi government went through various phases in its handling of the crisis on a short-term basis. As a planning device, the creation of informal “safe zones” followed by the permitted occupation of evacuee housing supported by legislation allowed authorities to maintain security by geographical isolation and then supervise individual assignment to housing or transit out as circumstances stabilized. Here, the state sought to protect its minorities but not through the existing “rule of law,” which would allow a homeowner or tenant to continue living securely in their place of residence. Instead, the government provided aid by encouraging the targeted population to collect at monuments or other designated zones that were protected, and then promised safer transit to Pakistan from these points. A similar strategy was used in Pakistan. While the underlying ethical questions of such a legislative device can be deconstructed, it is an interesting example of temporary policies that are often hastily evolved during a crisis.

Long-Term Imaginations: Expansion of the City's Urban Area

The spatial expansion of Delhi, due to a widely spread pattern of urbanization, led to a dramatic decrease in residential densities from 1911 to 1921, followed by a gradual increase from 1921 to 1941,³⁹ and then a drastic increase from 1947 due to the influx of refugees. The role of the state in the urban expansion of Delhi was pronounced when it embarked on the project of providing permanent resettlement to the refugees. The acquisition of evacuee houses provided accommodation that was far from adequate, since for every two Muslims who left India, at least three Hindus or Sikhs came in from Pakistan.⁴⁰ The proportion was more striking in Delhi, where for every outgoing Muslim refugee, there were three Hindu and Sikh refugees who sought shelter.⁴¹ The strategy of the DIT was to convert refugee camps that were built outside the city into townships or *nagars*, thus expanding the city's urban area and housing stock. The urban area of Delhi more than doubled from 174 to 446 sq. km between the years of 1941 and 1971 due to the dramatic population increase.⁴² The geographical location of Delhi in the Gangetic plain and the absence of

³⁹ Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal, *Delhi*, 229.

⁴⁰ Kaur, “Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement,” 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴² Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal, *Delhi*, 230.

any significant physical barrier to the progress of urbanization facilitated this multidirectional urban expansion.

It is interesting to look at the before and after conditions of Delhi, brought on by the drastic increase in urbanization in various parts of the city. For example, in North Delhi in 1942, vast tracts of vacant land lay north of the Civil Lines. After the Partition, however, the Kingsway Camp, which was Delhi's largest refugee camp, was located there as the Indian government had allotted 2,000 acres of land to the Ministry of Rehabilitation to permanently resettle refugees. This catalyzed urban development in the region as Kingsway Camp was gradually transformed into a permanent town, or *nagar*, and later renamed Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar. In a similar way, the government started buying land in South Delhi, which was primarily agricultural, to be converted for residential use. By 1956, Defense Colony and Lajpat Nagar began to take shape as housing was built incrementally on the plots allotted to refugee families.

Long-Term Imaginations: Formation of *Nagars*

The development of the new colonies or neighborhoods, from former refugee camps to residences for the refugee population, with vast industrial areas for economic development, was one of the major interventions in Delhi. As the new capital of the country, Delhi, which faced the maximum influx of refugees in the country, saw the extensive building of such new neighborhoods called *nagars*, and these were allocated specific urban design guidelines.⁴³ The newly formed Indian government proposed as many as 36 such rehabilitation colonies for refugees as "Emergency Projects."⁴⁴ These were mostly named after famous Indian leaders; for example, Rajendra Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, Moti Nagar, etc. Since the city center was already developed, these new colonies were mostly located in West Delhi and on the other side of the Central and South-central ridges, where vacant lands (old Rajput villages) were available.

Moti Nagar and Kirti Nagar

Moti Nagar, which was one of the new residential towns, was formed in 1948–1950, aided by the DIT, to accommodate refugees as well as the people living in the surrounding villages with vast expanses of farmlands.⁴⁵

⁴³ Chatterjee, "Managing Urban Transformations of Refugee Settlements in West Delhi from Camps to Nagars," 183.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 189.

After the Partition, these lands came under government ownership and were put together into small parcels to be developed for the refugee colonies. The first squatter refugee settlement was in the Basai Darapur area of Moti Nagar. A small market street came into being, leading from the camps to a gurdwara (a Sikh temple), which was established informally by the residents themselves. The market had shops and small-scale industries as well as small enterprises run by the residents.⁴⁶

Kirti Nagar, formed by the Delhi Development Authority, is a plotted housing development adjacent to Moti Nagar, with a very distinct open space network, where the urban fabric follows a hierarchy from private cluster-level open spaces to public parks. The clusters were designed in C-shaped and L-shaped loops, with semi-attached houses surrounding small fenced open spaces with parks. The typology of housing used in the *nagars* was a derivative of the long and narrow shape of the parcels of land allocated to refugees. Housing was rarely built by the state as the demand outstripped supply. Instead, the Delhi government allocated plots to families within a *nagar*, very often community wise, roughly “14 × 70,” with the shorter width on the street front.

There is also an interesting case of built housing, found in Jangpura, which was housing constructed for low-income refugees. The housing block was square, with a courtyard in the center, and the occupants were housed in 64 two-room units. Common toilets were provided at the four corners and entrances and staircase in the center of each side of the block, fronting the street. The courtyard became the central interactive space for all the families living in the cluster and the smallest unit in the hierarchy of community spaces in the neighborhood. Similar to the plotted *nagars*, this typology also had interesting appropriations over time, which transformed the blocks. As families grew, they added extra rooms to the original unit, which projected out toward the street, transforming the section. Additionally, retail units, small-scale manufacturing units, clinics, and nursery schools have also evolved within the blocks over time.⁴⁷ This typology of housing was similar to the “*chawl* type” of housing, commonly found in Bombay, which proved to be a very popular typology for accommodating migrants in Mumbai who moved into the city for employment in the textile mills after the cotton industry boomed in the 1860s.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁷ Solomon J. Benjamin, “Understanding Urban Housing Transformations: A Case Study of Bhogal—India” (Master’s Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1985), 97–101.

Long-Term Imaginations: The Development of Satellite Towns to Facilitate Urban Decongestion

The increase in population density in Delhi provided impetus for the development of satellite towns like Faridabad to absorb some of this refugee population. In August 1947, the Government of India planned to create four new towns, with a capacity of 30,000 people each: Faridabad, Gurgaon, Bahadurgarh, and Sonapat.⁴⁸ To reduce the strain on Delhi's resources, it was decided by the Government of India and the Punjab state government to accelerate the development of Faridabad to accommodate 40,000 people. Faridabad was intended to rehabilitate refugees from the North-West Frontier Province, and hence half of the available quota was allocated to them.⁴⁹ The decision regarding the remaining 20,000 units was for allocation based on the discretion of the Punjab state government. The Faridabad Development Board, which was formed for this purpose, worked on a plan that included the plots for the first families that moved in at that time and also included an area of 500 acres for industrial development. It was proposed that the buildings constructed would include a hospital, a high school for boys and one for girls, and a town hall. The construction was financed by a loan granted by the Government of India to the Punjab government.⁵⁰

It can be concluded that the rehabilitation of refugees by the government in Delhi was broadly done in three ways: first through rehabilitation of evacuated housing stock; second on vacant land within the city and through extension of the city limits (the *nagars*); and third, through creating new towns away from the city. It is useful when examining modes of governance to look at the gap between legislative intention and actual implementation. The authorities sought to provide housing on a needs-based allocation while avoiding responsibility for actual home construction. These aims were derived from the emergency situation and were driven by practicalities. What resulted proved to be an interesting mix of favoritism for the higher income groups, delegation of responsibility to individual families, and settlement along communal lines. The mode of allocating compensation to refugees, while attempting (on paper) to allocate based on actual needs, in reality was more luxurious for higher income groups. The *nagars* of Delhi are also an interesting paradigm, evolving in many cases from refugee camps and, in some cases, on vacant

⁴⁸ Kumar, *Partition of India*, 147.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 147–148.

tracts of land or acquired agricultural land. The *nagars* followed the system of a “masterplan,” with equally sized parcels allocated to migrant families that were laid out around smaller parks. This system of delivery relieved the government from the task of designing and building housing. The housing was built incrementally by each family, first with temporary materials and gradually gaining permanence over time. The housing typology that was constructed on a majority of the plots in the *nagars* was a derivation of the long and narrow parcel shapes and did not differ much except in terms of the materiality and facade. This perhaps also made it easier to hire one contractor to build multiple houses quickly. There was also a tendency for parcels in a *nagar* to be allocated by the government based on community, thus making *nagars* almost like communal enclaves, which was advantageous as it provided a support system to the refugees. Finally, with the building of satellite towns with proposed industrial areas, the intention of the government was to move people away from the main city where land was a scarcity and infrastructure was overburdened. Satellite cities offered larger plot areas and jobs in the newly proposed industries, a contrast to the crowded *nagars*. However, the land in the satellite cities was undeveloped, and the process of development here was slow, which failed to provide the immediate need for housing. While these were imagined as industrial towns, in reality, very few industries were actually set up. With few employment opportunities in the vicinity, the location far from the conveniences of the city, and the lack of amenities and infrastructure, the satellite cities were an unsuitable housing option for refugees at the time.

Bombay

In the immediate aftermath of the Partition, Bombay was the preferred destination for many Sindhi Hindus, as it was easily accessible by sea from Karachi. Compared to travel by rail at this time, sea voyages were relatively safer from attacks. During the colonial period, Sindh had been part of the Bombay Presidency for almost a century, and Sindhis felt a strong connection to the city of Bombay. Additionally, Sindhi colleges were still affiliated to Bombay University, and so the transition from Sindh to Bombay was easier for families on many counts, as Bombay was also a commercial, port city, and metropolis comparable to Karachi.⁵¹ It was attractive for prospective businessmen as several Sindhi Hindu businessmen already

⁵¹ Nandita Bhavnani, “A New Geography,” in *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition of India* (Kindle ed., Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2014), 196.

had office branches in Bombay and had family members residing in the city who helped with accommodation and facilitated the move. Of the 290,000 Sindhi refugees in India, 250,000 settled in Bombay Province and 100,000 in Bombay city.⁵² The strategies used by the Government of Bombay to deal with the increase in population began with temporary measures, such as the creation of short-term refugee camps in many parts of the city and in outlying areas. Some refugees were also absorbed into the existing vacant housing stock, built by the Bombay City Improvement Trust. The relatively low number of refugees entering the city, compared to what the Governments of Punjab and Delhi faced, allowed Bombay to pursue a different strategy that did not require building housing projects specifically for the rehabilitation of refugees but did, in the short run, require substantial emphasis on the building of camps. The longer-term solution in Bombay, however, did not result in government-sponsored housing projects but instead plans for resettlement through adoption and support of the Cooperative Housing Society model.

Short-Term Measures: The Creation of Refugee Camps

By the end of March 1948, there were 18 refugee camps in Bombay Province. In the city of Bombay, refugees were housed for a very short period in temporary refugee camps near the main debarkation point, the Alexandria Port. On arrival at the port, they were either received by family and friends or rapidly moved to transitory refugee camps within the city like Mahajanwadi, where they were given a meal and coupons for free transportation on the railway lines to other refugee camps such as Sion Koliwada, Chembur, and Powai, which were outside the densely occupied areas of the city.⁵³ Once the space for rehabilitation in the city was exhausted, the refugees were sent to camps outside the city limits, which were either newly built or appropriated from army barracks, such as the Kopri and Kalyan camps in the Thane district. However, these were largely undeveloped lands not served by infrastructure. For example, the Kalyan camp, while accessed through the central railway line, was not in close proximity to the station.

Shelter in the refugee camps was of two kinds: barracks and tents. The barracks, built during World War II by the British army, were long, large

⁵² Ibid., 197.

⁵³ Nandita Bhavnani, "Arrival," in *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition of India* (Kindle ed., Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2014), 169.

halls subdivided into 12 spaces, each space earmarked for one family.⁵⁴ It is said that each space was separated from each other by curtains, saris, or gunny bags used as screens due to the absence of actual walls. However, these measures offered very little privacy or even security.⁵⁵ Another shortcoming of the barracks was that by the time the refugees took possession, the barracks were in a dilapidated state as they had not been maintained after the end of the war. Where barracks were insufficient or unavailable, the government was obliged to set up tent camps. These, however, offered little protection against the monsoons and were too hot in the summer. People were often compelled to sleep outside in the open air. Additionally, bathrooms and toilets, while built in the camps, generally proved to be insufficient. The camps also had no kitchens or facilities for cooking, which had to be done outside. Refugee camps generally had no specific form of temporary housing and were usually a combination of barracks and tents. For example, the Pimpri camp had a combination of barracks and cowsheds to provide shelter, and the Kalyan camp had barracks and tents.⁵⁶

The Kalyan camp, which was the largest refugee camp in Bombay and located 36 miles from the city, was initially set up as a transit camp for the British military. The administration of the camp was under the central government until April 1948. Responsibility for the camp was then handed over to the Relief and Rehabilitation Department of Bombay Province in April 1948. There were approximately 1,175 barracks at Kalyan camp, which were divided into six sections using old military names, still in use today: Sections 1–5 and the Officers Transit section. Accommodation was either in the barracks, each of which was 20 × 20 feet, or in the halls, which were 60 × 80 feet, and subdivided into individual spaces for each family. These were required to house 80,000 people, where the average family size was 6 people.⁵⁷

The Kalyan camp was primarily occupied by Sindhi refugees, many of whom gradually tried to improve living conditions in the camp. By 1952, the camp had three cinemas and one public library. The Sindhis, essentially a community of traders, set up an estimated 3000 shops in the Kalyan camp and several small-scale industries. Residents of the Kalyan camp community also established small retail enterprises such as sweet

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 180–182.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 180–181.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183–185.

shops, teashops, restaurants, places of worship, and daily newspapers.⁵⁸ Until mid-1949, the refugees lived rent free and constructed unauthorized shops and other structures on the empty land. However, on August 8, 1949, Kalyan camp was declared a township (Ulhasnagar) and the refugees were asked to pay rent for their tenements. The administration, however, remained the same and Ulhasnagar was still run as a camp by an administrative officer, assisted by three camp commanders.

Besides the Kalyan camp, many other Sindhi camps became permanent colonies, such as Sion, Chembur, Mulund, and Thane in Bombay, Kurnagar in Ahmedabad, Pimpri in Pune, and Bairagarh in Bhopal. The Kalyan camp, which evolved into the Ulhasnagar township, was connected to Mumbai city by first road and then rail, with a station being built for the town in 1956⁵⁹ on the central railway line. The township now has 60 private hospitals and 3 government hospitals, 255 dispensaries/clinics, and a family planning center to cater to the health requirements of the town's population.⁶⁰ Educational facilities are also present with primary schools, secondary schools, higher secondary schools, colleges and several public libraries. There are entertainment facilities, which are provided by one stadium, several theatres, and auditorium halls. Ulhasnagar also has a number of small businesses and small-scale manufacturing units that produce confectionaries, textiles, furniture, printing presses, etc.⁶¹ In short, Ulhasnagar has organically morphed into a somewhat self-contained township with a range of amenities and employment opportunities and is perhaps more robust than the *nagars* in Delhi.

Long-Term Strategies: Adoption of the Cooperative Housing Society Model

In the early 1900s, the Bombay City Improvement Trust looked north toward Dadar and Matunga to expand the city and create more serviced land for housing. Their plans initially consisted of low-density bungalows, but the rapidly escalating demand later led to a change in the development plan, and low- to mid-rise "flats" were eventually built.⁶² Between 1918 and 1947, Bombay was a city in which renting was far more common

⁵⁸ Ibid., 186–187.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁶⁰ Ulhasnagar Municipal Corporation, "Welcome to Ulhasnagar Municipal Corporation," <http://www.umc.gov.in:8080/umc/UMCWEB/English/index.html> (accessed on July 5, 2021).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Nikhil Rao, *House, but No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898–1964* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 35–40.

than actual ownership. The Rent Control Act of 1947 in Bombay, as well as the stringent controls placed over the supply of building materials by the government during and after World War II, severely curtailed the supply and maintenance of new rental housing. In addition, the urban immovable property tax of 1939 discouraged investors from investing in residential apartments, which was the primary mechanism for new housing to be built.⁶³ For these reasons, rental housing started to be disincentivized, and ownership of housing was favored. Simultaneously, the demand for housing had greatly increased in the years following World War II, and the pressure on the existing housing stock was significantly elevated, as Bombay experienced a massive increase in population post 1947. Due to the existing legislation in place as well as the government's own overstretched resources, it was extremely difficult to build more rental housing. While it was true that preferences were gradually moving toward an ownership model, there was also an awareness that the lower middle class did not have the finances to build housing independently. Thus, the Planning Commission of Bombay instead promoted "aided self-help" through cooperative housing as a strategy that could mobilize private capital, provide housing for the middle classes, and create private stakeholders. The cooperative housing society proved to be a favored model in the state as well as in the city, which allowed it to execute its agenda to address the housing problem in urban regions. The extension of support through cooperative housing societies appeared to resolve the tension in the city between providing some support for displaced persons, on the one hand, and weaning them away from dependence on handouts, on the other. As a part of the agenda, the state provided low-interest loans, facilitated land acquisition, and assisted in obtaining building materials for societies interested in building cooperative housing societies. By 1948, 401 rooms in apartments had been added to the city's housing stock by cooperative housing societies. This number increased to 465 in 1949 and 1,040 rooms by 1951.⁶⁴

The Saraswat Brahmins and the Parsis originally pioneered the cooperative housing model in the late 1910s. Cooperative societies in India were initially agrarian, where farmers jointly farmed and harvested crops, with an emphasis on producer co-ops and rural credit co-ops. Cooperative housing societies in India, on the other hand, are generally

⁶³ Nikhil Rao, "Uncertain Ground: The 'Ownership Flat' and Urban Property in Twentieth Century Bombay," *South Asian History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2012): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2012.639523> (accessed on May 23, 2022).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

community-based, with legislation that permits such a structure. In 1916, a group of housing activists in Bombay used this model to create the first cooperative housing society called the Saraswat Cooperative Housing Society, whose membership was restricted to Saraswat Brahmins.⁶⁵ It is believed that this model of housing mobilized capital among middle-class investors while delivering much-needed housing. With the housing co-op model, members of a society had to put up a very small percentage of the total cost upfront, and the society acquired a loan for the remainder on the basis of the security that those deposits provided.⁶⁶ The society became the owner of the building and the members became tenants, paying a monthly “rent” that covered the cost of the interest on the loan, along with perhaps a small portion of the principal, and maintenance costs. That is why the system was called a “tenant co-partnership scheme.”⁶⁷ The legislation emphasizes the collective nature and shared ownership concept of the cooperative housing society, where each individual member does not own anything, and he or she has the lifelong and transferable right to occupy a particular unit as long as he or she complied with the rules of the society. The society, as a collective of individuals, owned the building and either owned or leased land.

The cooperative housing model greatly benefitted the displaced Sindhis and Punjabis in Bombay after 1947. Besides embracing the cooperative housing society model, the Sindhi community also appropriated it. The variations introduced by Sindhi entrepreneurs were the ownership-based forms of occupancy over the course of the 1950s. One of the first Sindhi cooperative housing efforts was the construction of two building complexes in Cumballa Hill. Shyam Niwas and Nanak Niwas were societies with the classic form of cooperative housing described earlier, where a group of individuals from the same community got together and formed a cooperative society. They would then proceed to acquire land and usually played a role in designing the structure, which might be tailored in some ways to the needs of their community.⁶⁸

In conclusion, what is interesting about the long-term measures in the Bombay case is that the mechanism of cooperative societies, which were employed successfully and accelerated to solve the refugee crisis, became absorbed in the “business as usual” protocols of housing provisions in

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

Bombay. The mechanism exists till date, though not used as frequently as it was up to the time India liberalized its economy in the 1990s.

PAKISTAN

Lahore

By the time Pakistan came into being in 1947, Lahore was already well equipped with the physical infrastructure required to become a metropolis. The road network and a public water supply system had been laid out, along with an operating bus service. Additionally, a separate public planning body, called the Lahore Improvement Trust (LIT), had been established in the wake of the Punjab Town Improvement Act, 1922, and guided urban development in the city from that point on.⁶⁹ After the Partition, the city's primary concern was the resettlement of Muslim refugees from India.⁷⁰ Almost half of the city had been vacated by the Hindus and Sikhs, who formed over a third of the population, and their abandoned homes and businesses were available for distribution among refugees.

However, Lahore, like Amritsar, was in close physical proximity to the border and had suffered tremendous destruction of property—6,000 houses were damaged in Lahore as its Hindu and Sikh population departed for India.⁷¹ Unlike Delhi and Bombay, which had scarce availability of evacuee property, Lahore faced the problem of rebuilding the riot-torn areas, a process which was handicapped by the shortage of building materials. While there was an availability of evacuee properties, there were problems surrounding the legal acquisition of land and property, much of which was owned by evacuees. Additionally, in 1948, there was a real problem in commandeering land to hold the refugees in temporary camps, farther from the Wagah border gate. The move to the interior was prompted by perceived security problems at the border and to reduce the pressure on larger camps that had clustered in that area. The slow rebuilding process meant that many refugees lived in dangerously dilapidated dwellings. New construction began only after the stock of evacuee housing was distributed among the refugees and dilapidated buildings were renovated, a process that took at least until 1950. It was perhaps only from 1950 onwards, that the LIT finally initiated schemes for the development of suburban

⁶⁹ Mohammad A. Qadeer, *Lahore, Urban Development in the Third World* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1983).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Ian Talbot, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Aftermath of Partition for Lahore and Amritsar 1947–1957," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 2007): 151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X05002337> (accessed on May 23, 2022).

subdivisions and thus began the process of the city's urban expansion in order to absorb the growing population in Lahore.⁷²

Lahore Improvement Trust (LIT)

The LIT, created in 1936, was responsible for the city's reconstruction and further accelerated its urban development efforts after the Partition.⁷³ The 1947 violence provided an opportunity to transform what had once been a narrow maze of streets into a major thoroughfare. Building sites were offered at fixed rents and were made available through an auction.⁷⁴ A major part of the LIT's redevelopment schemes included the city's suburban development. However, this did not solve the acute housing shortage, which was prevalent even before the destruction caused by the Partition. During the period of 1947–1950, Lahore's population grew from 700,000 to 1,200,000.⁷⁵ Approximately 4,000 houses had been destroyed in the Partition riots, and the LIT demolished a further 2,000. However, until 1950, it had managed to build only a fifth of the total number of houses that had been demolished.⁷⁶ One consequence was that while some of the walled areas were cleared for development, many houses that were dangerous remained standing as there was no alternative accommodation. In this way, the LIT did not thoroughly engage with the repair work required in the city.⁷⁷ Furthermore, while the LIT had redevelopment schemes that contributed significantly to the city's suburban expansion, they never fully addressed the shortage of affordable housing either, as a majority of the housing catered to the middle-upper class population.⁷⁸ It thus became evident that the Trust either lacked the resources, the competence, or the political will to keep pace with demand. In fact, in a manner similar to the DIT, it would appear that the Trust began to cater more to the demands of the middle class and above while responding less to the growing demands of the lower income populations that had been displaced as a result of the Partition.

⁷² Qasim Ali Shah and Haider Abbas, "Livelihoods and Access to Services: An Analysis of Peri-Urban Areas of Lahore, Pakistan," n.d., 2.

⁷³ Talbot, "A Tale of Two Cities," 160.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 161–163.

Long-Term Projects: The Gulberg, Samanabad, and Shad Bagh Housing Schemes

The LIT's land development "schemes" defined the future growth of the city. Infrastructure such as water storage towers, electrical grids, and telephone lines were initially built to serve the new areas. These measures created serviced land, which attracted the private development of housing for the middle and upper classes while also attracting massive unplanned and often unregistered home building by the lower income groups.⁷⁹ Squatter clusters, called *katchi abadis*, also became numerous in these neighborhoods. Two of the LIT's initial schemes in its planned urban expansion for the city were the Samanabad and Gulberg schemes, located to the south and southeast of the city.⁸⁰ The Gulberg scheme, which was started in 1952, created a new area of 2,900 acres around the existing Gulberg Colony in the southeast of the city near the cantonment.⁸¹ As part of this scheme, bungalows and small houses were planned. The next phase of the Gulberg scheme, covering 1,600 acres, was completed at the end of 1956, and the demand for plots was so great by this time that the allotment committee of the LIT required every applicant to provide documentation attesting that they had never been allotted a plot for a residential house under any of its schemes, or were in possession of a house or buildable plot in Lahore.⁸² Gulberg, however, was an upper-class residential area and the scheme reflects the importance that post-Independence Lahore gave to economic and commercial development as the accommodation was well out of the reach of poorer refugees.

The Samanabad scheme, which was started in 1950 and intended for middle-to-lower middle class families, initially covered just over 200 acres.⁸³ The scheme was founded on the south-western side of the city in an area that was comprised of abandoned brick kilns, wells, and ponds. The first phase of houses was slowly developed and was allocated to officials who were still temporarily accommodated. It was only in the 1970s that development in the neighborhood increased, and the majority of the allottees were local residents. The most basic typology used in this scheme was the "N-type" house, which comprised of three rooms with a kitchen and bathroom installed with water supply and electricity.⁸⁴ Although basic,

⁷⁹ Qadeer, *Lahore, Urban Development in the Third World*.

⁸⁰ Talbot, "A Tale of Two Cities," 162.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 162–163.

⁸³ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

the N-type house was still out of the reach of lower middle-class refugees and locals. The cost of housing quarters with more rooms or facilities increased. Hence, even before the considerable rise in land prices in the 1970s, it is clear that accommodation in Samanabad was also well out of the reach of low-income refugee families and locals, on similar lines to Gulberg.

The Shad Bagh scheme was a continuation of the LIT's Misri Shah Development Scheme that had originally been conceived in August 1944. The scheme was comprised of 585 plots ranging from 20 to 10 *marlas*⁸⁵ in size. The plots were organized within blocks, with the plan being to build 7 blocks. At the time of Partition, only two of the seven blocks had homes built on them. These were small single-story houses on five-*marla* parcels as the LIT initially required that only single-story houses be built on the open plots. However, the rules were later relaxed, and it eventually constructed some double-story houses, possibly to allow for more density. As land values eventually rose, it is said that the allotment procedures became less transparent, and the lower-middle-class purchasers were replaced by those with political connections. Of the total stock of housing units, it was only in the first two blocks constructed that refugees were housed. Refugees, however, were not granted ownership rights and were only allowed to rent. Whenever the quarters were sold or had a potential buyer, the tenants were evicted and asked to settle their claims against the evacuees' property.⁸⁶

The development of real estate in Shah Bagh was delayed when compared to Gulberg and Samanabad as it was prone to flooding in the monsoon due to its proximity to the Ravi river. It also lacked basic infrastructure. However, by 1949, roads and services were also improved with the installation of hand pumps, and electricity was provided in the early 1950s. At the same time, an embankment was built to reduce the risk of flooding. These improvements created serviced land, which then began to gain popularity. Private investors and local landowners built housing properties adjoining the scheme, which was finally completed in 1965. Very soon, the area became congested with a population density that was considerably higher than in Gulberg and Samanabad.⁸⁷

Lahore possibly faced more destruction of property than other cities in Pakistan and was closer to the border, which increased the security risks. However, while the housing shortage was acute, it should be noted

⁸⁵ One *marla* is equal to 272.25 square feet or 25.2929 square meters.

⁸⁶ Talbot, "A Tale of Two Cities," 163–164.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 165.

that the extent of accommodation problems faced by the city was far less than that of other cities like Karachi, due to the larger amounts of evacuee property that was available because of the outmigration of Hindus and Sikhs. However, the plans laid out by the LIT for the future growth of the city failed to work as designed. Most of the housing schemes initially planned for the refugees were unaffordable and catered instead to the needs of the emerging middle and upper classes.

Karachi

The History of Karachi and the Refugee Influx

The city of Karachi has always been important as Pakistan's largest city and its only international port. In 1843, the British annexed Sindh to their empire and made Karachi the administrative center. From this period onwards, Karachi expanded rapidly. As the new administrative center for Sindh, new buildings were built in the city, and the population increased from 15,000 in 1843 to 56,000 in 1870.⁸⁸ During World War II, it was used as a landing place for troops and materials for the eastern front and expanded as a result. After the Partition, the newly created state of Pakistan declared Karachi as the capital. The population at this time was 400,000.⁸⁹ Between 1947 and 1951, over 600,000 refugees from India moved to Karachi. The majority were poor and occupied public and private open spaces within the city, such as playgrounds, parks, school buildings, and cantonments.⁹⁰ As with other cities in India facing similar conditions of influx, the city's services and infrastructure were severely stretched. The major repercussions were significant problems with health and sanitation. The strategies employed by the Karachi government to respond to the refugee influx, as with cities such as Delhi and Bombay, deployed short- and long-term actions. The short-term measure was to permit refugees to squat wherever they could find space in the city, a tactic that subsequently led to the creation of short-term refugee camps. The long-term strategy to deal with densification was the formation of the Karachi Improvement Trust (KIT) and the subsequent formulation of a number of versions of the Greater Karachi Plan to direct urbanization to the peripheries and decongest the old city.

⁸⁸ Arif Hasan, *Seven Reports on Housing: Government Policies and Informal Sector and Community Response* (Karachi: Orangi Pilot Project, Research and Training Institute for the Development of Katchi Abadis, 1992), 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

Short-Term Measures: Refugees Permitted to Squat with the Subsequent Creation of Refugee Camps

In contrast to Lahore, which had a large number of evacuee properties that could house the newly arrived migrants, Karachi lacked this feature. Initially, the Karachi government permitted the newly arrived refugees to squat on all available land and public buildings vacated due to the Partition and the departure of the non-Muslim population from the city.⁹¹ Some of these public buildings occupied by refugees were later required, and the refugees were shifted to open areas in cantonments. The government spent large sums on providing water and sanitation infrastructure to the camps because public health was the central concern.⁹²

Long-Term Projects: Formation of KIT to Direct Urbanization and the Greater Karachi Plan Proposal

In 1950, the KIT was established to control and direct the growth of the city. The KIT was later converted to the Karachi Development Authority in 1957.⁹³ In 1952, KIT, along with the consultancy services of a Swedish firm, MRV, prepared a master plan for Karachi, known as the Greater Karachi Plan.⁹⁴ The plan envisaged the creation of a new administrative area to resettle refugees on the outskirts of the old city and linking it via highways. This plan also proposed the construction of 10-story residential buildings on the refugee-occupied land within the old city for the rehabilitation of refugees employed in the city. However, high-density housing in the old city center was not favored, and the authorities planned to move the poor to the administrative area outside the city.⁹⁵ The area outside the city, however, lacked development and amenities. Additionally, the old city offered far more employment opportunities, leading refugees to continue to squat there.

In 1958, the capital of Pakistan was shifted from Karachi to Islamabad.⁹⁶ At this time, there was also a push by the government to industrialize rapidly, with the focus of this effort in Karachi. To achieve this goal, the government forcefully secured rural lands and converted them into areas for industry. This rapid industrialization led to an increase in migration from

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

villages to the city, further aggravating the housing shortage in Karachi and increasing the number of squatters.⁹⁷ In reality, the new lands being opened up for industrialization and new settlements took much longer to complete than anticipated and failed to provide viable living conditions as well as jobs and amenities. Thus, these administrative moves intensified the pressures on Karachi for jobs as well as housing.

The Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan and the Decongestion of the Old City through the Creation of New Townships

In 1958, to address the growing deficit in housing, the Government of Pakistan appointed Doxiadis Associates from Athens as consultants for the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan.⁹⁸ The plan sought to create new townships outside the city with industrial job centers to relocate residents in the city's informal settlements. The residents of the settlements consisted primarily of refugees from the Partition. The government planned to build more than half for low-income groups and the remaining were to be developed as site and services projects, wherein 30 percent of the cost of the land would be subsidized and the remaining could be paid in installments.⁹⁹ As part of Phase 1 of the plan, townships were planned 15–20 miles outside Karachi in Korangi and New Karachi. Initially, 45,000 one-room nuclear houses were planned for these two colonies, along with the supporting services and infrastructure. However, just 10,000 were built by 1964, and it was then that the plan was abandoned by the government, which was unable to recover development costs to finance further construction.¹⁰⁰ The failure of the plan, as with similar schemes in other key cities, was in part due to limited investment by new industries near the new townships as well as their slow pace of development.¹⁰¹ This lack of jobs was one reason that led to residents selling their properties to speculators and moving back to the city to be closer to more employment opportunities. Another important factor is that the government was intent on removing informal settlements in the city, especially those located near important public spaces.¹⁰² The residents were then moved to new

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² It is significant to note that among the first irregular slum colonies to be dismantled was Qaidabad, which existed in close proximity to one of the most important spaces of sovereignty of the new state, the mazar (mausoleum) of the state's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah. See Sarah F. D. Ansari, William Gould, and Taylor C. Sherman, *From Subjects to Citizens: Society*

townships like Korangi, which were completely isolated from the city. Upon arrival, the new housing units were allocated randomly to seemingly show no favoritism. However, this often broke up family units and social networks that had developed in the informal settlements.¹⁰³ With little connectivity to the city, this also created immense mobility problems, with regard to both time and cost, for those who worked in the city center while living in the satellite towns. In the meanwhile, large squatter settlements were cleared from the inner city, which gave rise to illegal subdivisions on the fringes of the city as this internally displaced population moved further afield.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the markets, schools, and dispensaries that were constructed in the townships remained unoccupied.

The Karachi Master Plan

Unable to successfully deliver housing and control the ongoing shortage, the Government of Pakistan approached the United Nations Development Programme in 1968 and the Master Plan Department was created.¹⁰⁵ This organization functioned as consultants to the Karachi Development Authority, and together they developed the Karachi Master Plan. This plan assisted in the development of the Metroville program, which was a series of planned townships in close proximity to an industrial area, but also provided recommendations for housing development programs to be incorporated into the Metrovilles. The objectives of the program were to provide a range of plot types to match the financial capacity of low-income groups specifically. Three housing development programs within Metroville were recommended, specifically targeting low-income groups. The first was the Utility Wall Development, which was directed toward the more affluent poor. The plinth and all services were provided with the core walls within the plot, and the house was to be constructed by the owner himself or herself. The second was the Open Plot Development, which was a program structured to cater to the very poorest among the low-income groups. In this case, the plinth and utility walls would not be provided. The third was the Improvement and Regularization Program, which was an upgradation program for squatter settlements aimed at giving residents security of tenure wherever possible.¹⁰⁶ In all three cases,

and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970 (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 162.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰⁴ Hasan, *Seven Reports on Housing*, 6–7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

secure tenure would be provided to the owners, and public facilities like schools, markets, and hospitals would be built by the government. The plan specifically encouraged incremental building to match family budgets and needs and discouraged built housing being forced on residents. The program also sought to arrange easy access to house-building loans for the lower income groups.

The Orangi Metroville was the first Metroville to be planned and developed as a part of this program. It was a Utility Wall Development scheme and aimed to house 35,000 persons.¹⁰⁷ However, non-occupancy was a major problem in Orangi Metroville. By 1984, a large number of the owners were middle class, having bought the plots from low-income groups that moved back to the city.¹⁰⁸ It was due to this failure of the Orangi Metroville on many levels that the government modified the scale of its program and limited the number of Metrovilles to be developed in the future. The initial plan proposed the development of four Metrovilles per year, while the revision reduced this to four for the entire duration of the program, from 1974 to 1985.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the cities of Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, and Karachi were extremely pivotal sites in the effort to absorb refugees post-Partition. These cities, in the long run, transformed the lives of many dislocated families. In turn, the formation of these cities was deeply influenced by the new settlement patterns that evolved to absorb these large populations. It is important to note, however, that the impacts on the form of the city and new governance paradigms differed significantly between cities. For example, in Delhi, Lahore, and Karachi, the state proved decisive because of the heavy pressure of population migration, in comparison to Bombay, which received a smaller influx of poorer refugees and faced a less intense problem. In Bombay, the existing urban systems had the capacity to absorb refugees as well as easily accept modes of public-private partnership that facilitated the building of additional housing stock in the form of cooperative housing societies, which were generally for the middle and upper classes.

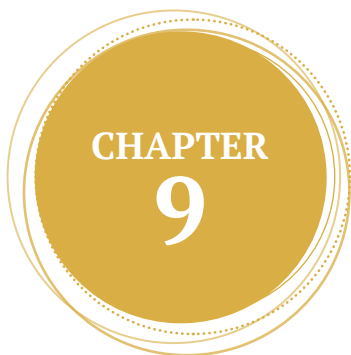
More broadly, in all these cities, one can see short-term as well as long-term measures that were deployed to respond to disruptive conditions

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

created by the phenomenon of the Partition. The more noteworthy cases are when short-term measures evolve into more accepted protocols and practices, such as the Bombay Cooperative Housing Societies. In other situations, such as the evacuee legislation and safe zones, the short-term and long-term strategies stayed clearly differentiated, as the short-term measures were soon disbanded. Besides these more general findings of possible use for future anticipatory strategies, it is evident that crises such as the Partition also bring to surface crucial shortcomings within governance systems. These range from procedures of allocation to capacity building or the lack of it within the existing system. A case in point is the failure to build the many housing schemes planned for low-income groups, especially in cities like Lahore. This expropriation of services and housing stock by the more affluent was exacerbated in the coming decades. Clearly, the seeds for these misappropriations were set in the immediate post-Partition period. These inequities resulted from austere governance practices and the absence of effective checks and balances through consultation and more democratic processes, inevitably the result of the crisis conditions and sparse governance capabilities at the time. In this context, Delhi stands out as an exemplary case where the government managed to balance short-term as well as long-term strategies, such as facilitating the evolution of the camp into the *nagar*. However, both Karachi and Lahore relied on new development as a response to the crisis. This specific strategy did not yield the results intended as the competitive market for land began to determine rising prices, thus marginalizing the poor. In fact, in the case of Karachi, the demolition of slums by the government and the randomized allocation of new housing disrupted social networks and isolated residents, who then preferred to return to settlements developing on the fringes, which had good access to the city. Additionally, new isolated developments (as was also the case in Delhi) failed to provide the anticipated employment opportunities because the planned industries were never brought to fruition. Therefore, the deep learning to be plumbed from the crisis of the Partition is how, in the future, through more preparedness and anticipation, we might aspire to creating an appropriate mix of strategies that are premised both on long-term projections as well as short-term solutions. Furthermore, the Partition could potentially teach us how to combine user-driven solutions and strategic planning visions on a realistic temporal scale. The challenge then and now is to avoid locking ourselves into the short-term and myopic decision-making that often becomes the default condition in crisis situations.



Men, Monuments, and Memoirs

Reclaiming Sites of the Indian Independence Movement in Lahore

Nadhra Shahbaz Khan

This chapter is about Lahore's people, places, and poetry. It is composed as a tribute to all freedom fighters who participated in the struggle against the British rule of India and draws attention to two significant but disregarded edifices in Lahore associated with a few of them. Given little or no space in official historical accounts, some of these revolutionaries and built spaces they occupied only survive in memoirs penned down and published by residents of pre-Partition Lahore, especially by the city's non-Muslim inhabitants (mostly Hindus and Sikhs) who emigrated around 1947. Replete with references to women and men who made history but are overlooked in official chronicles as well as neglected places and spaces that should be cherished as historical monuments, these memoirs are a valuable source to re-imagine Lahore in its pre-Partition days. The following pages propose to recollect the city's memory through these literary fragments about and biographies of revolutionaries who were associated with the Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan and Bradlaugh Hall—two cherished buildings that have been neglected since the Partition.

Largely due to the communal violence that ensued before and during the 1940s in India, especially in the Punjab in 1947, the history of the Partition is bound within borders that gloss over the "other." Another aim of this chapter, therefore, is to invite a shift of focus from the divisive

politics of the Partition to the inclusivity of the Independence movement that preceded it—to times when people of the Indian subcontinent in their individual capacities or as members of political organizations, belonging to all religious groups and from all walks of life, struggled to liberate their country from the fetters of British rule. Since the movement of independence was neither initiated separately nor fought so by different religious communities—Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs—or political parties, according recognition to a select few while disregarding sacrifices of several others due to religious or political biases is construing history erroneously. Much has been lost over the past seven or more decades that is irreparable and irrecoverable. What survives and can be preserved are glimpses of the lives of these silent protagonists recorded in textual sources and the material objects associated with them. The most visible among the latter are the structures these men and women erected or occupied on each side of the border. Lamentably, many of these structures will be lost if not documented and rescued soon. On the heels of this tribute is the plea to reclaim such monuments from the debris of the Partition and accord them and the men and women they signify the honor they deserve not only in the annals of history but also in our social imaginaries.

Lahore, capital of the Punjab at the time of the Partition, was a city with Muslim majority but was also home to a sizeable Hindu and Sikh population along with a small Christian community. Affluent Hindus outnumbered the “underdeveloped”¹ Muslim middle class and owned two-thirds of the houses in the city.² Appropriated and seized by incoming Muslim refugees or by influential Muslim residents of Lahore after the Partition, these buildings have never ceased to be mnemonic structures reminding us of their absent Hindu and Sikh owners and inhabitants. Carrying traces of decay and marks of destruction and division, they tenaciously display signs of their pre-Partition lives, instantly kindling a nostalgia in those who encounter them. Buildings such as these manifest the passage of time and have what the Austrian art historian and philosopher Alois Riegl (1858–1905), who served as the first Conservator General of Monuments in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, calls “age value.”³ Investigation of

¹ Ian Talbot and Tahir Kamran, *Lahore in the Time of the Raj* (Haryana: Penguin, 2016), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development,” in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, eds. Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr., and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 74–77. In a footnote, the authors explain that this is from Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Augsburg: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, GmbH, 1928), 144–193, originally published as *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1903) and translated by Karin Bruckner with Karen Williams.

timestamps on the body of a monument that show signs of decay and elucidation of the context of each stage then leads to Riegl's discussion of "historical value"—a concept that we will pick up again later in this chapter. For now, let us turn to Deborah Cherry who calls the stages in a building's existence their "afterlives" and explains the importance of studying them:

To explore the afterlives of monuments is to investigate how, where, when, and why monuments have been remodelled, reused, remade, re-sited, cast aside, adapted, destroyed, defaced, forgotten, or abandoned. It is to investigate the diverse conditions in which objects and sites survive and the varying demands and claims made upon them.⁴

These claims and demands often reflect the continuous negotiations that buildings undergo between the necessity for an accurate documentation of its historical development and its socially constrained memory, between what Tapati Guha-Thakurta calls "scholarly and administrative authority" and "the combustible domain of public memories and claims."⁵

LONGING FOR LAHORE MAPPED IN MEMOIRS

Memories of pre-Partition Lahore subsist in its architectural landscape. They also live through writings on the city and the life narratives of its inhabitants. Each contribution constitutes a fragment of the historically complex memory of the city this chapter wishes to recollect. This first section offers a literary account of the nostalgia for the city, as mapped in the memoirs of those who had to flee or stayed at the time of the Partition.

Texts written by those who knew the buildings at some earlier stage help narrate their stories. This body of literature has two categories: memoirs penned by Hindus and Sikhs forced to migrate to India shortly after the Partition who reminisce about their former lives in Lahore, and memoirs by Muslims who continued living in the city and remembered the patterns of joint living.⁶ Such writings are dotted with descriptions of actual buildings where the authors recall aural, olfactory, or visual

⁴Deborah Cherry, "The Afterlives of Monuments," in *The Afterlives of Monuments*, ed., Deborah Cherry (London: Routledge, 2014), 3.

⁵Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 303.

⁶Catherine Coomb uses a different lens to visualize nostalgia, loss, and longing for a lost chapter of life due to the Partition. She studies memoirs of the British civil servants in India who had to serve in positions that fast became ineffective after 1946 and all of a sudden became jobless and homeless. See her essay "Partition Narratives: Displaced Trauma and Culpability among British Civil Servants in 1940s Punjab," in *From Subjects to Citizens: Society*

memories. Each recollection is important as it can give us the locations of a street or a colony, or the old names can resurrect for us significant structures that have disappeared from the city. Reinhard Benrbeck, Kerstin P. Hofmann and Ulrike Sommer in their essay “Mapping Memory, Space and Conflict” posit that “Events and their details can be remembered best through a spatial visualization [...] Thus, the function of ‘memory sites’ lies in providing continuity and support for common pasts and a collective identity.”⁷

Before moving on to the two important but neglected monuments in Lahore—Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan and Bradlaugh Hall—and the revolutionaries they commemorate—let us map the streets and lanes of Lahore following the memory paths of people who inhabited them in the pre-Partition days. Life in Lahore before 1947 has been described in nostalgic accounts by the city’s Hindu residents in works like *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* by Pran Neville (1993), *Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City* by Som Anand (1998), Santosh Kumar’s *Lahore Nama* (2002), S. Vohra’s *Lahore: Loved, Lost and Thereafter* (2004) and *Inqilāb Zindabād* by Manorma Diwan (1985). Memoirs by Muslims who stayed on but harken back to the multi-religious milieu are numerous. Among these are *Lahore ka Chelsea* by Hakim Ahmad Shuja’ (1988), Mohammad Saeed’s *Lahore: A Memoir* (1989), Yunas Adeeb’s *Mera Shehr Lahore* (1991), Ahmad Salim’s *Lahore 1947* (2003), and several essays in the Lahore Number, a special issue of *Nuqush*, an Urdu journal published in 1962 and edited by Muhammad Tufail. The common element in these texts is a sense of loss. This element is more conspicuous in the expressions of authors who left the city during or shortly after 1947. Ian Talbot, in his study *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar 1947–1957*, uses Maurice Eisenbruch’s terms, stating that the dominant sentiment featured in such writings is that of “cultural bereavement.”⁸ He explains that “nostalgic memory of the former home is a common migrant experience. It is pronounced when the uprooting has been violent and the opportunity for permanent return is foreclosed.”⁹

Departure from Lahore for Hindu writers was forced and, in some cases, violent. Santosh Kumar, the author of *Lahore Nama*, lost his 26-year-old brother Krishan Kumar Gorto in a communal attack before he and the

and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970, eds. Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 216–240.

⁷ Reinhard Benrbeck, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Ulrike Sommer, “Mapping Memory, Space and Conflict,” in *Between Memory Sites and Memory Networks: New Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Reinhard Benrbeck, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Ulrike Sommer (Berlin: Deutsche National Bibliothek, 2017), 22.

⁸ Ian Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar 1947–1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130.

⁹ Ibid.

rest of his family left the city for Delhi on September 17, 1947. His work is dedicated to Krishan Kumar and became a *roohāni taqāza* (“spiritual calling”) in which he compares his memories of the pre-Partition days with what he found in Lahore 30 years later.¹⁰ His primary reason for the later visit was an inner voice that repeatedly urged him to visit his native land before life took away a chance to do so: *dékh āa, dékh āa, apnā shehr Lahore, aik bār phir dékh āa, koi purāna yār milay na milay, tū naē yār banā āa, koi bannay ko tayyār nah huā to puranay gali kāuchon sé humkalām ho āa ...* (“go see it, go see it, your own city Lahore, go see it one more time, whether you find an old friend or not, go make new ones, and if no one befriends you, go have a *tête-à-tête* with old lanes and hamlets”).¹¹ Santosh Kumar’s excitement of finally being back in what had been “his” very own city is evident in his poetic sentences: *mein divāna-vār baḥtā chalā jā rahā thā, aik aik qadam mein kāē qadam uṭhā rahā thā, dar-o-dīwār se hum-kalām hotā jā rahā thā, māzī mein khotā jā rahā thā* (“I was moving forward as if I had lost all self-control, each step I took had multiple strides in it, engaging in dialogue with each door and wall, losing myself more and more to my memories”).¹² His movements appear to be “below the level of conscious scrutiny” and may be described using David Seamon’s terminology as “automatic,” “habitual,” “involuntary,” and “mechanical” or more appropriately keeping the rhythmic tone of his narrative in view, “a place-ballet.”¹³ Santosh Kumar’s recollections bring the city, frozen in time when he had left it, into the present (i.e., in 1980). Crossing Kūcha Shāmi and Mahalla Mohliyān, the author passed by the spot where once stood a shop called “Kunj di Hatti” and sold kites in winters and *sharbat* or sugary drinks in summers. The surge of emotions brought back memories of children chanting in unison:

Kunj di hatti jāvān gay

*Tay guddi dor liyāvān gay*¹⁴

To Kunj’s shop we shall go

and kites and string we will get.¹⁵

¹⁰ Santosh Kumar, *Lahore Nama* (New Delhi: Vibha Publications, 1983), 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Ibid., 21.

¹³ David Seamon, “Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets,” in *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, eds., Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 155–159. David Seamon discusses the “place-ballet” as a “time-space routine” and explains that it is “a set of habitual bodily behaviors which extends through a considerable portion of time.” Another similar term he uses in this chapter is the “body-ballet” which according to him is “a set of integrated behaviors which sustain a particular task or aim, for instance, washing dishes, plowing, householding, potting or hunting.”

¹⁴ Kumar, 21.

¹⁵ Translation by the author of this chapter.

His silent mourning over unfamiliar faces in the most familiar places is palpable in his memoirs. The titles of his chapters also reflect the nostalgia: “Apné hi Shehr mein Ajnabi” (A Stranger in My Own City) and “Wohī Galiān, Wohī Rāstay, Magar ...” (The Same Old Lanes and Pathways, But ...). A visit to his host Umar’s house near Gumti Bazār brought him to Kūcha Aurangzeb, formerly known as Kūcha Kālī Māta, indicative of the former religious identity of this locale. Within this *kūcha* was a *mandir* or temple dedicated to Kālī Māta, which now served as a residence. Disturbed over this appropriation of a sacred space, Santosh Kumar notes how he longed to know what may have happened to the idols of the deity and her *vahanas* or mounts.¹⁶ Troubled by the changed names of the *mahallas* or quarters of the Walled City where he had lived and studied, he recalls their original names as if trying to erase the recently hoisted boards or nameplates. Allen Pred’s belief that places “are never ‘finished’ but [are] always ‘becoming’,” could explain how these old lanes and colonies where Kumar had been performing the “place-ballet,” had become places where he now needed conscious navigation.¹⁷

Santosh Kumar expresses his love for his lost city with some restraint, but Pran Neville and Som Anand’s memoirs pulsate with a longing for Lahore. Neville unabashedly admits that “[e]ven after a lapse of over four decades, my emotional attachment to this great city is as deep as ever.” In his Introduction, he quotes verses by a Mughal prince Dara Shikoh, who had also held the city very close to his heart:

Khuda Punjab ra mehmur darad

May God keep the Punjab
prospering!

Ba khaq auliya manzur darad

May He protect the land of
the Saints!

Bood abad dayam Shahar Lahore

Oh, may Lahore be always
full of bliss!

Waba Wa Kahat Z bakha dur darad

May suffering and famine
never visit it!¹⁸

Neville’s account from the beginning to end is embellished with poems and songs of his time in Lahore that most probably were generally known to residents of the city, the *Lahorias*. The pun and humor of these verses offer a touching insight into a culture that appears to have been at the crossroads of age-old traditions and modernity and where the latter was

¹⁶ Kumar, 35.

¹⁷ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, [2004] 2008), 34–35.

¹⁸ Pran Neville, *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1993), 19.

threatening to take over the former: women abandoning *purdah* or veil and keeping pace with changing fashions; young men studying in colleges and wearing trousers instead of customary *shalwar qameez*; people eating cakes instead of *roti* (traditional bread). Here is another poetical criticism targeting young women of Lahore in the early decades of the 20th century:

<i>Ena fashionan ne sanu mar dita sajana</i>	My dear friend, these fashions have ruined us.
<i>Pinde nun dakhana da chah pya chadhya</i>	They delight in exposing their bodies,
<i>Chunian nun sir ton hataya sajana</i>	So they have removed veils from their heads and move about bareheaded.... ¹⁹

Annex 1 of Pran Neville's book, titled "Songs of the Bygone Era," gives a small body of old Lahori ballads an eternal life: 12 songs are written in the vernacular with English translations.²⁰ The songs resurrect social and cultural memories of different castes, creeds and religions in the Punjab, see, for example, "Char Sau Wee" ("Four-hundred and twenty"—a cheat), "Ik Daya Daya" (One into ten is ten) and "Husan Da Garur" ("Pride in Beauty").

Som Anand in his *Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City* compares himself to people who had accepted their dislocation as their fate and had allowed time to heal their grief after 50 years. Unlike them, he never came to terms with this tragedy and states, "my love for Lahore remains as intense as it was when I was forced to leave my home and settle in Delhi. The pain and sorrow of being uprooted from the land of my birth lives on inside me to this day."²¹ After narrating the gradual build-up of communal division in Lahore, the resultant attacks by one community on the other, his own life in the Model Town area and his narrow escape with his father, he notes with heavy heart:

Thus Delhi became my home, but even after more than four decades, I have not reconciled myself to the situation. Emotionally drawn to Lahore, I have always returned to see my old haunts whenever an opportunity has arisen. I am not alone in this craving. Lahore's name has been etched in the memory of all those Punjabis who have ever been a part of the pulsating life of that many-splendoured city.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

²⁰ Ibid., 171–178.

²¹ Som Anand, *Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1998), 77.

²² Ibid.

The nostalgia and yearning for Lahore we find in Pran Neville and Som Anand's memoirs remind us of the work of the 12th century Persian poet Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmân of Lahore, written during his separation from his beloved native land:

*Makhmali bayad az
Khudavandam keh azū būē
Lohāuar āyad
Keh hamī z ārzūē Lohāvur
jān o dil dar tanam hami
nayad.*

I want from my Lord some velvet
from which emanates the fra-
grance of Lovāhūr [sic],
For, through longing for Lohāvar,
heart and soul faint within me.²³

Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmân's nostalgia unfolds in his *Habsiyât*,²⁴ the Persian poetic genre of exile and longing for one's homeland written while in bodily or metaphorical imprisonment. The poet addresses the city of Lahore and not its inhabitants several times as "it is Lahore that understands his suffering and pain, not the people of the city."²⁵ He lovingly confronts the city giving her reasons to lament the loss of a talented resident:

*Aē Lavuhore waihak bē man
chegūna ē?
Bē Aftāb-e rushan, rushan
chegūna ē?
Aē ānkeh bāgh-e tabe' man
ārāstah tara
Bē lala o banafshah o susan
chegūna ē?
Nāgeh aziz farzand az tau
judā shud ast
Ba dard-e ō benuhah o
shevan chegūna ē?*²⁶

O Lahore! How do you fare with-
out me?
How are you illuminated without
your bright sun?
The garden of my poetic talent
adorned you
How do you fare without tulips,
violets and lilies?
Suddenly your dear child was
separated from you:
How do you fare in your mourning
and lamentations for him?²⁷

Tangible topographic contexts mentioned in this literature on Lahore bring forth memories of a shared past associated with some places that are still there, but which have lost both their identities and identifiers. Several writers from other countries have written about topographies that are no more and are revived only through these accounts. For the

²³ Muhammad Baqir, "Lahore: Being an Account of Lahore Compiled from Original Sources," in *Journal of Islamic Culture* (January 1944): 24.

²⁴ A word from the Arabic root *hbs*, meaning "confinement" or "imprisonment."

²⁵ Sunil Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier: Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmân of Lahore* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 65.

²⁶ Sayyad Hashmi Fareedabadi, *Ma'āsir-e Lahore* (Lahore: Idara-e-Saqafat-e-Islamiah, 1976 [1956]), 248. Roman transliteration of the Persian text by the author of this chapter.

²⁷ Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier*, 63.

Welsh, nostalgia for a city as the place of memory is *hiraeth* and for the Portuguese *saudade*; both encapsulate the longing for a lost time and place, an ache for people or places that once were and no longer are. Tuan Yi-Fi calls it “topophilia” and developed this concept with reference to the “affective bond between people and places.”²⁸ Tim Cresswell, in *Place: A Short Introduction*, discusses human geography and explains that Tuan’s concept of “place” must be understood in opposition to “space.” He argues that while space “is amenable to the abstraction of spatial science and economic rationality, place is amenable to discussions of things such as ‘value’ and ‘belonging’.”²⁹ An abstract space, according to him, becomes a personal space only when one occupies it, making it one’s own: “One answer is that they are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place—a meaningful location.”³⁰

This meaningful association, whether temporary or permanent, becomes a part of the resident’s identity and references an agency that transforms space into place. Despite the ephemerality of both places and their occupants, the connection between people and places does not perish. In cases of separation between the two, it is the realm of memory that grants longevity or in some cases perpetuity to this association. Every recollection refreshes their bonds and resurrects some, if not all, aspects of their lives. Sometimes it seems as if concrete structures are called in as testifiers of events recounted in flights of thought that move back in time. This deep connection between place and memory made John Ruskin dedicate an entire chapter (VI) to it in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, calling it “The Lamp of Memory.” He explains that “architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her.”³¹

What Ruskin posits is clearly discernable in the memoirs of pre-Partition residents of Lahore where references to places are intertwined with recollections of people and experiences. For example, Pran Neville time and again refers to spaces and places while recounting an event or reminiscing about an experience. Anarkali, a popular shopping area which developed during the British period close to the 17th century Mughal tomb

²⁸ Tuan Yi-Fi, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes and Values* (Bergen County, NJ: Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1974), 4.

²⁹ Cresswell, *Place*, 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: George Allen, 1889), 178.

of Anarkali and so became a hub of social, cultural, and political activities, features prominently in his memoirs as both space and place. Its status as a pre-1947 trendy upmarket place can be ascertained from a satirical phrase laden with language and gender biases that he quotes:

*Mein hun Angrezi padh gae ān
te Anarkali ch war gayi ān.*³²

I (female) have learnt English
hence have entered Anarkali.

As one of his earliest memories of Anarkali, Pran Neville mentions a balcony from where he saw Jawaharlal Nehru, the newly elected Congress President, riding a white horse as he passed through the bazaar in 1929 in an historic Congress procession. Neville points out that the Bhalla Shoe Company was located in the same area and that its owner, Dhani Ram Bhalla, greeted the Congress leader in front of his store with a huge garland of currency notes. In support of Nehru, Neville calls this the “red letter day for Anarkali that found itself a permanent place in the pages of history.”³³

References to the Anarkali Bazaar as a space containing many places of memory also abound in essays reminiscing about the city in its pre-Partition days. These were published in the Lahore Number of *Nuqush*. Sheikh Abdul-Shakoor in his essay “Kuch Rawadāri ki Bāteṅ” (Some Chitchats of Egalitarianism), calls Anarkali Bazaar the “heart of Lahore.”³⁴ In addition to the Bhalla Shoe Company, he mentions the Karnal Shop and Sardar Jagat Singh Kuwanra’s shop as among the most flourishing stores in the area. The former was owned by a Muslim but was patronized by a large number of Hindus and Sikhs, while the latter was patronized by Muslims although the owner was a Sikh.³⁵ He also mentions another building in the vicinity, Raja Brothers (later Shaukat Market) where the upper story was used by Allam Iqbal (Pakistan’s national poet) as his residence. Sheikh Abdul-Shakoor relates the story of how Iqbal moves from Anarkali in 1923 to a temporary residence at McLeod Road and then owns a piece of land on Mayo Road where he finally built his house “Jawed Manzil.” This name, according to the author, was possible due to the intervention of Rae Bahadur Devi Chand Khanna, a wealthy Hindu wood merchant in the city, who was a great supporter of the poet.³⁶ Sheikh Abdul-Shakoor recounts several incidents where the people of Lahore came forward to

³² Neville, 21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Abdul-Shakoor, “Kuch Rawadāri ki Bāteṅ,” *Nuqush* (Lahore Number) 92, no. 1 (February 1962): 1159.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 1157–1158.

support each other in spite of their religious differences. Time and again he exclaims with nostalgia: *ab aisi waza'dārī ki misālāin kahāñ milaingī?* ("Where can one find such examples of magnanimity now?").

After his migration to Delhi shortly after the Partition, Som Anand visited Lahore several times. His memoirs are a compilation of his experiences over 36 years throughout the changing social and religious milieu of the city. He recounts his meetings with people connected to his past as well as new acquaintances. Anand's narrative of the ease with which he roamed around Lahore as a Hindu "insider" after the Partition radiates warmth for the city and its inhabitants. He gradually got used to the changing cultural atmosphere of Lahore where the new settlers had not only replaced the old inhabitants but had also re-configured the social ambience of the city. Among the few things however, that did distress him was the fact "that many of Lahore's old landmarks had disappeared" making him feel "as if the old familiar Lahore was disappearing."³⁷ Specifically, he recalls the now lost and forgotten Bharat Building in Lahore that once imposingly stood in front of the Mayo Hospital. It was built in 1907 by Lala Harkishan Lal Gauba, "the father of insurance and banking in United Punjab," who lost this building and other assets in litigation.³⁸ Another lost building he laments is the Regent Theatre on McLeod Road; it was knocked down and the land divided into smaller plots was put up for sale. Lastly, he drives our attention to another "handsome structure" that was among the "old graces of the city." This was the building of the *Civil and Military Gazette*, popularly known as *C&MG*—a daily for the "Anglicized gentry of Lahore"—that once stood on the Mall Road. Puzzled over the attitude of the people of Lahore concerning the city's built heritage, especially the *C&MG* building, Som Anand asks: "But why did they pull the building down? It was part of Lahore's history. Many famous people, including the celebrated [Rudyard] Kipling had worked there."³⁹

MNEMONICS OF THE "OTHER"

This was neither the first time such a question was asked, nor was *C&MG* the last building to go. Several other important buildings in Lahore of great historical significance, owned or commissioned by prominent Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore, have been lost or are left alone to slowly decay and disappear. Most of them have neither been documented nor have

³⁷ Anand, *Lahore*, 220.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 220–221.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

ever invited the scholarly attention of architectural historians. Shortly after the Partition, some of these buildings were appropriated by incoming migrants. Only later were Trust properties given to the care of the Evacuee Trust Property Board established in 1960. Repeated references in official discourses shortly after the Partition show that properties owned and occupied by migrants on both sides of the border were a source of great concern for the two governments. Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, intended to raise three most significant concerns at the UN General Assembly meeting in 1949: the ownership of Kashmir, the disputes about the rivers Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, and "the control and treatment of the evacuee property in the two Dominions."⁴⁰ Following the escalation of tension between India and Pakistan (especially East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), the Delhi Pact, also called Nehru–Liaquat Pact, was concluded on April 8, 1950. According to it:

Refugees in Pakistan and India could remove, sell or dispose of their movable property left behind without any permits from the custodians under the new Agreement between the Governments of Pakistan and Bharat on Evacuee property, it was officially announced in Karachi recently. Movable property other than household or personal effects cannot be removed. They can only be sold [...] A joint committee of one officer each from Pakistan and Bharat will be appointed to examine claims.⁴¹

By this time, illegal appropriation, and occupation of the evacuee property by local and influential residents had become a major issue and the Pakistani government tried to take serious action to evict non-refugees. The Deputy Commissioner of Lahore noted in 1948 that the population of the city had increased from 500,000 in 1921 to 1,200,000. He expressed concern that since the 1920s very few new houses were built, while one in every eight existing houses was damaged in the recent troubles.⁴² A large number of these burnt houses once stood in the area inside the Shah Alami Gate which was the most densely populated area inhabited by non-Muslims before 1947; it was set to fire and the "glow of that fire could be seen even from Model Town, five miles away."⁴³

⁴⁰ *Pakistan Affairs*, Embassy of Pakistan, Washington DC, 3, no. 3 (September 27, 1949), 2.

⁴¹ *Pakistan Affairs*, Embassy of Pakistan, Washington DC, 3, no. 24 (July 21, 1950), 6. This took place after economic relations between the two countries were severed in December 1949.

⁴² *Pakistan-Punjab Refugee Council: Proceedings of the Conference of West Punjab, Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners on Rehabilitation, held on the 17th, 18th & 19th February 1948* (Lahore: Government Printing, West Punjab, 1948), 6.

⁴³ Anand, *Lahore*, 48.

Wrought with past communal violence and heavy loss of life and assets, the commemoration of the Partition almost always focuses on painful memories where the antagonists are either Hindus and Sikhs against the Muslims or Muslims against Hindus and Sikhs. Urvashi Butalia in her seminal work on unlocking Partition memories, quotes Krishna Sobti, a writer and a Partition refugee who once said, "Partition [is] difficult to forget but dangerous to remember."⁴⁴ Butalia insists on bringing these harrowing memories to the fore "not only so that we can come to terms with it, but also because unlocking memory and remembering is an essential part of beginning the process of resolving, perhaps even of forgetting."⁴⁵ Where "forgetting" may be one of the solutions to resolve these agonizing memories, widening the scope of remembrances could be another way of finding a closure. While memories of the Partition days make us re-live sentiments of hatred and unending days of awful crimes committed by one religious group against the other, moving further back in time could bring us solace and a sense of collective pride.⁴⁶

Prior to 1947, Lahore was one of the main cities to witness and lead the upsurge of the Indian self-rule movement. It should rightly be host to several monuments as landmarks of this struggle. But other than the Minar-e-Pakistan built to commemorate the Pakistan Resolution passed on March 23, 1940, in what is now called the Greater Iqbal Park, and a recently established National History Museum near it, no other historical monuments are preserved or planned. A general apathy is felt toward everything that falls out of the narrow ambit of religiously/politically constituted self-identity and marks the rest as the "Other," a title awarded to different communities of the past and present. Vilho Harle explains in simple words that "the easiest way to define it is to say that the Other is fundamentally different from 'us'"⁴⁷ As long as this concept of the "other" is perceived as a useful tool for maintaining social order, its implications remain peaceful and is used only to demarcate different groups who identify themselves as "us" and "them." This would be the lowest degree of "Othering," one that has prevailed among religious communities in Lahore for centuries. But it seems that in the absence of an enemy's physical

⁴⁴ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998), 357.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 357–358.

⁴⁶ For more on harmonious coexistence of different religious groups in Punjab more than a decade before the Partition, see Ishtiaq Ahmed, "Forced Migration and Ethnic Cleansing in Lahore in 1947: Some First Person Accounts," in *People on the Move: Punjabi Colonial, and Post-Colonial Migration*, eds. Ian Talbot and Shinder Thandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96–141.

⁴⁷ Vilho Harle, *The Enemy with a Thousand Faces: The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 10.

presence, an associated material culture becomes a mnemonic device for it— and therefore merits treatment fit for these “agents of evil.” Buildings, it is said, “are among the largest, most expensive, and most permanent products of human labor” and that “their capacity to influence social and cultural life [as a] central part in the history of the world’s religious and political institutions [...] are widely acknowledged.”⁴⁸ Even as palimpsests, after appropriations and re-appropriations represent the “proxy aspects”⁴⁹ of their original patron/owner, buildings viewed as monuments in their “afterlives” can easily become sites for expression of dissent. In view of this, it is not difficult to imagine how the nomenclature of “evacuee property” changed to “enemy property” after the Enemy Property Act promulgated by the Indian Government in 1968.

MEMORIES AND MONUMENTS

The term “monument” along with the material culture that contributes to this term play an important role in historical sensibilities of people. Alois Riegl states that: “In its oldest and most original sense a monument is a work of man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies (or a complex accumulation thereof) alive and present in the consciousness of future generations.”⁵⁰

Andrew Hui in his essay “Texts, Monuments and the Desire for Immortality” quotes Marcus Terentius Varro (1st century BCE), a Roman scholar and a poet who he thinks offered one of the earliest definitions of *monumentum*. Explaining the Latin quote, he states that *meminisse*, “to remember,” comes from *memoria*, “memory” and he connects to it other similar words such as *manere* “to remain,” *monere* “to remind,” and *monimenta*, “memorials.” In Hui’s opinion, all these words point toward a “movement back to that which has stayed in the mind [...] to things that are written or produced for the sake of memory.”⁵¹ Riegl, in his understanding of the “historical value” of a monument, writes:

We call historical all things that once were and are no longer. In keeping with the most modern conception, we include therein another view as well: that everything that once was can never be again, and that everything that once was forms an irreplaceable

⁴⁸ Cherry, *Afterlives of Monuments*, 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” 70.

⁵¹ Andrew Hui, “Texts, Monuments and the Desire for Immortality,” in *Moment to Monument: The Making and Unmaking of Cultural Significance*, eds., Ladina Bezzola Lambert, Andrea Ochsner (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), 19–20.

and inextricable link in a chain of development. Or, in other words: everything that succeeds was conditioned by what came before and would not have occurred in the manner in which it did if not for those precedents. The crux of every modern historical perception is precisely the idea of development. According to modern understanding, all human activity and all human fate of which we have evidence or knowledge may claim historical value: in principle, we consider every historical event to be irreplaceable. Since it is not possible, however, to take into consideration the vast number of events of which we have direct or indirect evidence, the number of which multiplies infinitely at every moment, one has no choice but to limit attention primarily and exclusively to such evidence that seems to represent especially striking stages in the development of a particular branch of human activity. This evidence may be a monument of writing, which, through reading, stirs images contained in our consciousness, or a monument of art, whose content is perceived directly through our senses.⁵²

Riegl's idea of a "link in a chain of development" and the "striking stages in the development of a particular branch of human activity" clearly points toward the necessity to bridge the gaps among memories and monuments as "everything that succeeds was conditioned by what came before." Using this framework, can we then say that a city's architectural heritage plays a key role in building its character on the one hand and offers a visual record of stages of its development or decay on the other? Also, might we say that erasure of all kinds of monuments, moveable, immovable, tangible, intangible, seriously hampers our capacity to trace and understand the creative abilities of our precursors?

Let us now turn to the two special monuments I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan and the Bradlaugh Hall. Both were hubs of activity for freedom fighters operating under the banner of the Indian National Congress who became known for their subversive character in pre-Partition Lahore. These buildings stand today with their identity and eminence buried under the debris of the Partition, communicating only one thing—we are Evacuee Trust Property, therefore, a mnemonic of the "Other." The Bradlaugh Hall's dilapidated state continued intermittently to attract the attention of scholars over the past few decades, indicating that its faint echoes can be traced in public memory. On the other hand, Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan, a building that was designed, built, and functioned as a mark of resistance to British oppression, had

⁵² Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments," 70.

apparently completely vanished from the public memory. I was drawn to it through Manorma Diwan's publication but tracing it was a struggle as even the most informed architectural historians of Lahore had no clue about the building.⁵³ Diwan's memoirs not only introduced me to this monument but also offered the lived-in experiences of its inhabitants during Lahore's colonial days.

Manorma Diwan was a resident of Lahore who migrated in 1947 as a young girl and used the title *Inqilāb Zindābād* ("Long Live Revolution") for her memoirs, set between 1942–1947. She dedicated this memoir to her parents Chhabil Das and Sita Devi—both political activists and active members of the Indian National Congress. Sita Devi was elected as a Member of the Punjab Assembly from Lahore in 1946, while Chhabil Das served as a Principal at the National College, Lahore; set up during the last few years of the struggle for independence and was deeply involved with the Servants of People's Society. Manorma not only gives us an insight into the cultural and political milieu of her Hindu family living in Lahore during the troubled pre-Partition days but also invites all "Others" into her home to relive her childhood memories with her. Her family memories connect text and two extraordinary buildings in Lahore—Bradlaugh Hall and her home, Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan. Today the former stands forlorn, and the latter forgotten—both paying the "*proxy*" price. The men whose memories are commemorated in them were Charles Bradlaugh, Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Bhagat Singh.

Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891) was an English political activist, an atheist, and a freethinker, who co-founded the National Secular Society in 1866. He was elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament from Northampton in 1880 and became a controversial figure when he pleaded to be allowed to affirm rather than to swear the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown. He was a strong supporter of secularism, birth control, republicanism, women's suffrage, and home rule for both Ireland and India. In Yaqoob Bangash's words, "Bradlaugh was a thorn in the side of a deeply conservative late Victorian England until his death in 1891."⁵⁴ To acknowledge his strong support of the Indian cause, Charles Bradlaugh was invited to attend

⁵³ Among the people I contacted was Rao Javed Iqbal (Loh Kot Culture and Heritage Society), an architectural historian known for his knowledge of the city's nooks and corners. He promised to help but unfortunately passed away a few weeks later. After several futile visits to the Evacuee Trust Property Board office looking for a lead to trace the Bhawan, it was finally Mr. Munir Ahmed, Inspector (Property), Evacuee Trust Property Board, who not only informed me of its location but also arranged for my photography visits. I am grateful for his help and continued support.

⁵⁴ Yaqoob Khan Bangash, "If Bricks Could Speak...", *The News*, June 2, 2013, <https://jang.com.pk/thenews/jun2013-weekly/nos-02-06-2013/pol1.htm#1> (accessed on July 15, 2018).

the fifth annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1889, held in Bombay. He was closely associated with Annie Besant, who later served as President of the Indian National Congress (1917–1918).

Our second revolutionary figure whose memory is also enshrined in Lahore's historical monuments is Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), who was posthumously known by his title “Sher-e Punjab” (“The Lion of Punjab”). He was the founder of a nonprofit social welfare organization, the *Lok Sevak Mandal* or Servants of the People Society; an Urdu and an English weekly called *Bandematram* and *The People*; and the Gulab Devi tuberculosis hospital for women in Lahore (named after his mother), which at present serves both men and women. He also established the Lakshmi Insurance Company, the Punjab National Bank, and the National College, Lahore. An active supporter and worker of Arya Samaj⁵⁵ and a great socialist and nationalist of his times, he worked incessantly for the underprivileged with the ultimate goal of getting rid of British rule. Muhammad Ali Jinnah noted his admiration of Lala Lajpat Rai when, presiding over a welcoming ceremony on February 20, 1920, he referred to him “as one of the greatest sons of India.”⁵⁶ During his eventful life, full of resistance to the imperial rule, Lajpat Rai was prosecuted and punished several times. He lost his life to the cause while protesting against the Simon Commission—a seven-member commission sent from England to India under the joint chairmanship of Sir John Simon to assess administrative and political situations of the country and propose reforms. As all seven members of the Simon Commission were British, both Congress and the Muslim League vehemently showed their resistance. Upon the Commission's arrival at Lahore on October 30, 1928, Lajpat Rai led “the combined procession of all political parties” in a demonstration at the Lahore Railway Station that carried black banners and chanted “Go Simon Go!”⁵⁷ The Superintendent of Police of Lahore, J. A. Scott, ordered his deputy John P. Saunders to disperse the crowd with a *lathi*-charge. Being at the forefront, Lala Lajpat Rai received direct blows on his head, shoulders and chest from both Scott and Saunders—injuries sufficiently severe

⁵⁵ The Arya Samaj was a Hindu reform movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883) on April 10, 1875, at Bombay. As the first measures toward elevating the Hindu society and introducing religious reforms, Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) schools and colleges were set up in the country. For details see, Lajpat Rai, *Arya Samaj: An Account of Its Origin, Doctrines, and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder* (London: Longmans, Greens & Co., 1915).

⁵⁶ Urmila Sharma and S. K. Sharma, *Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1996), 130.

⁵⁷ Bhawan Singh Rana, *Bhagat Singh: An Immortal Revolutionary of India* (New Delhi: Diamond Books, n.d.), 35.

that he could not survive and soon succumbed to death on November 17, 1928. Annie Besant summed up his most admirable leadership quality when she said:

A grand merit he possessed was that when he led people into a position of danger, he shielded them and went himself along to take the brunt of the attack. He certainly carried out Charles Bradlaugh's word, when you advise an attack, do not say "go" but "come."⁵⁸

The entire nation mourned this loss and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (1873–1956), an activist, orator, writer, poet, and editor of one of the most popular dailies, *Zamindar*,⁵⁹ expressed this sorrow in an Urdu poem titled, "*Lala Lajpat Rai kī Yād Mein*" ("In the Memory of Lala Lajpat Rai") published on December 4, 1928.

We shall remember time and again
Each and every favor of yours, Lajpat Rai!
Our mandate is independence of India
And the title of this mandate is no other but, Lajpat Rai!⁶⁰

A meeting of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association was held on December 10, 1928, at Mozang House, Lahore, to make plans to avenge this tragedy. The Indian association's Commander-in-Chief Chandra Shekhar Azad, had specially come to Punjab for this occasion.⁶¹ It was decided to kill J. A. Scott in broad daylight "so that the fear of British police could be thrown out from the hearts of people."⁶² Bhagat Singh (1907–1931), Rajguru (1908–1931) and Sukhdev Thapar (1907–1931), all members of Hindustan Socialist Republic Association, volunteered for the action planned for December 17. Instead of J. A. Scott, it was J. P. Saunders and the Head Constable Channan Singh who got killed in front of the District Police Headquarters at Court Road, while the assailants managed to take shelter at the nearby DAV College before leaving Lahore successfully. The next morning the police found posters pasted on walls at different places in the city saying "Saunders Is Dead—Lalaji Is Avenged" as well as "The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army" in bold letters.⁶³ After

⁵⁸ N. Jayapalan, *Indian Political Thinkers: Modern Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003), 133.

⁵⁹ It was founded by his father Maulvi Sirajuddin Ahmad.

⁶⁰ Zahid Ali Khan, ed., *Kuliyat-e Maulana Zafar Ali Khan* (Lahore: Alfaisal Nashiran, n.d.), 323.

⁶¹ Kulwant Singh Kooner and Gurpreet Singh Sindhra, *Some Hidden Facts: Martyrdom of Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (Ludhiana: Unistar, 2013), 30.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jitendra Nath Sanyal, *Sardar Bhagat Singh: A Short Life Sketch* (Allahabad: J. N. Sanyal, 1931), 36.

active involvement in several protest activities, such as after throwing two smoke bombs in the central hall of the National Assembly, Delhi, on April 8, 1929, Bhagat Singh offered himself for arrest. He was accompanied by B. K. Dutt who threw red leaflets with the title “The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army” around the venue carrying their revolutionary messages. Both vociferously shouted the slogans *Inqilāb Zindābād!* (“Long Live the Revolution!”) and *Sāmrāj Murdāhbād!* (“Down with Imperialism!”) words that “soon became the universal cry of the youths of India.”⁶⁴ The three fearless young nationalist leaders Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were hanged on March 23, 1931, in the middle of the night and secretly transported to Ferozepur for cremation.

Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, and countless other Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim men and women worked relentlessly, suffered immensely, and sacrificed their lives to make the dream of independence come true. Views expressed in their own writings or reported by their comrades provide evidence of struggles of these freedom fighters to mobilize the masses and arouse the nation against the oppressive British rule. Where it is important to continually call on these written texts to keep memories of their struggles clear and fresh, it is also essential to preserve and visit the architectural monuments that are symbols of the defiance and resilience of these men and women—quiet, yet ready to relay their stories at the tiniest encouragement.

BIOGRAPHIES OF BUILDERS AND BUILDINGS

A monument commemorating Charles Bradlaugh’s freethinking and political activism is Bradlaugh Hall, situated at the Rattigan Road, now in a section of Lahore called the Data Ganj Bakhsh Town.⁶⁵ Bradlaugh Hall was designed as a multi-purpose space where both political and cultural events could be held. A marble plaque at the foot of the central buttress of this imposing triple-storied red brick building states that the stone was laid on October 30, 1900, by Surendra Nath Banerji who twice served as president of the Indian National Congress (1895 and 1902). Aside from serving as the site of the National College, Lahore campus (discussed below), this hall and its rooms were used for political meetings and rallies,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Rao Javed Iqbal has published a small booklet titled, *Lahore ka Tāreekhī Bradlaugh Hall* (Lahore: Lohkot Cultural and Heritage Society, n.d.). According to Iqbal, this area was known as Sheesh Mahal owing to a *haveli* decorated with mirror-mosaic or *āyina-kārī* built by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh. Iqbal does not give any source in support of his claim that Charles Bradlaugh bought four acres of land on Rattigan Road and donated it to the freedom fighters.

mushāirās (poetry recitals), dance performances, and plays. The plaque does not make it clear whether the date marks the laying of the foundation or the building's completion, but the hall was certainly functional shortly afterwards because "*Kasauti*, an adaptation of the Gujrati play *Dorangi Duniya*" by playwright Narayan Prasad Betab, was performed there in 1903.⁶⁶ During his time at the college (1921–1924),⁶⁷ Bhagat Singh is known to have been an active member of the dramatic club. Inspirational in nature, most of these performances were historical dramas and all were staged at Bradlaugh Hall. Some of these were *Rana Partap*, *Mahabharata*, *Bharat Durdasha*, and *The Dawn of the Youth of Samrat Chandra Gupta Maurya*—the last one featuring Bhagat Singh as the hero.⁶⁸

In response to Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, India's national schools and colleges were established with the mission to prepare the young men of India for the task of self-governance. Under the auspices of Lala Lajpat Rai, the National College, Lahore, commenced its classes on May 16, 1921, at the Bradlaugh Hall while a separate college building was intended to be built.⁶⁹ For lack of funds, it was never built/completed and this college with an aim "not confined to getting employment, but Swaraj" (self-governance),⁷⁰ collapsed in 1926. Sardar Bhagat Singh Shaheed, Sukhdev Thapar Shaheed and many other revolutionaries such as Bhagvati Charan, Yashpal, Ram Kishan, and Tirath Ram were proud products of this institution. Ram Chandra was also an alumnus of the National College, a political activist and a contemporary and close associate of Bhagat Singh. They were both founding members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Youth Society of India), a left-wing association with members from all three religious communities. Chandra offers the following information about the College:

National Colleges were unique institutions in India. Nearly every developed state (Provinces at that time) had a National University and a National College. The Punjab Congress started a National University also known as Punjab Qaumi Vidyapith. Lajpat Rai was its Chancellor. Bhai Parmanand was the Vice Chancellor. Shri Jugal Kishore later a Minister in U. P. was the Principal, and when he

⁶⁶ Kathryn Hansen, *Stages of Life: Indian Theatre Autobiographies* (London: Anthem, 2013), 80–81.

⁶⁷ M. M. Juneja, *Biography of Bhagat Singh* (Haryana: Modern Publishers, 2008), 33.

⁶⁸ Ishwar Dayal Gaur, *Martyr as Bridegroom: A Folk Representation of Bhagat Singh* (New Delhi: Anthem, 2008), 70.

⁶⁹ Ram Chandra, *History of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, ed. Malwinderjit Singh Waraich (Ludhiana: Unistar, 2007), 10. The author has gleaned this information from File No. 88–Cong. 42–Pii—Quit India File and refers to it as the "Secret Police Note."

⁷⁰ Gaur, *Martyr as Bridegroom*, 70.

retired, Chhabil Das, member of the Servants of the People Society was appointed Principal.⁷¹

Among the professors who taught at the National College Lahore was Bhai Parma Nand, who taught European and modern history. He was refused a passport to travel to England on the pretext that “he was at the head of the movement for the establishment of National Schools and Colleges and for the boycott of Government institutions.” He was further accused of corresponding with another revolutionary figure, Har Dayal “whose opinions in regard to the training of students with a view to the future emancipation of the country coincide with his own.”⁷²

Not too far away from the Bradlaugh Hall stands the venue where Lala Lajpat Rai’s death was avenged. Within half a mile of this site is situated the building carrying his name, the Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan, at 2, Court Road. A grand structure, it once stood in a compound surrounded by grassy plots and mango and *jāman* (the purple berry) trees but now has tastelessly designed residential structures flanking it.⁷³ In its pre-Partition days, across from the gate of the existing building stood the Sanatan Dharam School, while the DAV College Hostel and the Agarwal Hostel were on its sides.⁷⁴ Of these, the first is now the Government Islamia High School (Khazana Gate), while half of the Agarwal site has been sold to the district courts and the other half still stands occupied by tenants of the Evacuee Trust Property Board. The entire DAV hostel façade is intact although in a dilapidated state. Some rooms parallel to the outer wall are extant on both floors—still with their commemorative marble plaques inlaid in black that were placed there by donors.

A 1930–1934 Report of the Servants of People Society, the welfare organization founded by Lala Lajpat Rai, offers valuable information regarding the Lajpat Rai Bhawan and its functions. According to it, Lala Lajpat Rai had initiated a library to be called Dwarkadās Library that had grown over the years and needed to be relocated in a “commodious hall” and reading rooms.⁷⁵ According to Ram Chandra, this was Lajpat Rai’s personal library “which he donated for the benefit of the public. Raja Ram Shastri, a member of the Servants of People Society, was in charge

⁷¹ Chandra, *History of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha*, 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁷³ Manorma Diwan, *Inqilāb Zindabād* (New Delhi: Press Asia International, 1985), 151.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Servants of the People Society, *Report of Servants of the People Society for the Period 1930–34* (Lahore: Lajpat Rai Bhawan, 1934), 72.

of it.”⁷⁶ With the independence movement gaining momentum, another important need of the hour was to have a space for holding meetings. The Lajpat Rai Bhawan was thus conceived as library and lecture halls and the foundation stone was laid by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on March 25, 1928. A marble plaque in the verandah of the Bhawan commemorates this day (Figure 9.1). The total cost incurred on its completion was ₹45,000 of which only ₹19,000 were collected by the patron who died in the initial years of its construction. A second marble plaque states that an opening ceremony for this Bhawan was performed by Mahatma Gandhi on December 24, 1929 (Figure 9.2).

The Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan is a handsome red brick building with highlights in white plaster (Figure 9.3). The façade features a typical British Raj vocabulary of Palladian features (inspired by ancient Roman architecture) in its symmetry, semicircular arches with a visible voussoir highlighted with prominent key stones, impostes, double Tuscan orders,



Figure 9.1 Lajpat Rai Bhawan Foundation Plaque (Photo 2018)

A marble plaque in the verandah of the Bhawan commemorates the day that Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya laid a foundation stone for the building's conception as a library and lecture halls. (Trans: Lajpat Rai Bhawan, this plaque was laid by the honorable Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on Chet 4, Samvat 1985, i.e., March 25, 1928.)

⁷⁶ Ram Chandra, *Ideology and Battle Cries of Indian Revolutionaries* (New Delhi: Ram Chandra, 1989), 88.



Figure 9.2 Lajpat Rai Bhawan Opening Plaque (Photo 2018)

A second marble plaque states that an opening ceremony for the Bhawan was performed by Mahatma Gandhi on December 24, 1929. (Trans: This is the Bhawan inaugurated by the honorable Mahatma Gandhi Ji on Posh Krishna 9, Samvat 1886, i.e., December 24, 1929.)



Figure 9.3 Lajpat Rai Bhawan, Now Lent to the Daily Insāf (Photo 2018)

The Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan is a handsome red brick building with highlights in white plaster. The façade features a typical British Raj vocabulary of Palladian features (inspired by ancient Roman architecture) in its symmetry, semicircular arches with visible voussoir highlighted with prominent key stones, impostos, double Tuscan orders, and balustrade.

and balustrade.⁷⁷ The last four elements are in smooth white plaster finish playing against the red brick texture—the only aspect that might seem to reflect the local architectural tradition of Sultanate and Mughal red sandstone buildings carrying white marble embellishments. Five large round arched openings on the ground floor formed a verandah in front of the hall and the offices next to it, but four of them have now been bricked up. The building stands on a plinth whose height was originally much more compared to its present state, as can be seen in the photograph given in the 1930–1934 report (Figure 9.4). The steps in front of this verandah originally gave access to three arched openings but are now reduced to just one bay width. What seems from the exterior to be a triple-storied building actually has a mezzanine floor in between the ground and the top floors. Balconies added in front of the windows of the mezzanine floor are new additions. The 1930–1934 report offers a clear sense of its interior spaces and their functions:

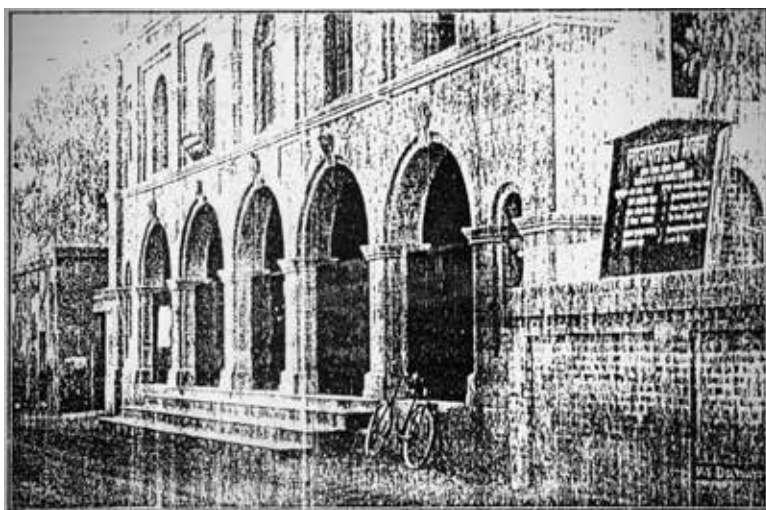


Figure 9.4 Lajpat Rai Bhawan in Early 20th Century

The Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan stands on a plinth whose height was originally much more compared to its present state, as can be seen in this photograph from the Report of the Servants of People Society for the Period 1930–1934.

⁷⁷ The architectural vocabulary adopted for the DAV College and hostel buildings has clear Hindu religious overtones. Lala Lajpat Rai's preference for a secular style speaks volumes about his *weltanschauung*.

It is well furnished and equipped with electric fittings. The hall on the ground floor is used for holding meetings. It measures 60 feet by 36 feet and it can accommodate about a thousand people [...] On a side of the hall are five rooms used for offices of the Society. A side hall in the first floor measuring 60 feet by 20 feet is used for committee meetings. The second big hall on the top floor accommodates the Dwarkadas library. For the reading room there is a smaller hall measuring 36 feet by 20 feet adjacent to the library and there are two rooms for the library office.⁷⁸

The report further states that the halls were available to public institutions for a nominal fee. Also, the report notes, due to the building's central location in the city, it was frequently used for lectures and public meetings. The library was open to the public and while it contained a great repository of books on every topic, its specialties were politics, history, economics, and topics specifically relating to India. The report also mentions that the library was popular with women, who frequently visited it for its Hindi section which, it was understood, was "doing useful service for their popular education."⁷⁹

According to Manorma Diwan, another big section of the Bhawan compound consisted of residential buildings for members of the Society. Close by were some rest houses where outstation members used to stay. The most memorable feature Diwan remembers were the "long verandahs" and the surrounding gardens with fruit trees, especially mango and *jaman* trees.⁸⁰ At some distance from the Bhawan was the Gol Bagh (now called the Nasir Bagh) where once a statue of Lala Lajpat Rai stood.⁸¹

Manorma Diwan's magical utopia, the Bhawan, was home for her family due to their close association with The Servants of People Society and the Congress. At the Bhawan, she spent her early childhood with her parents, two older sisters and a younger brother, her grandmother and other family members. As devout followers of Gandhi, everyone residing in the Bhawan proudly wore handspun coarse *khāḍī* (cotton fabric) and disapproved of anyone serving the British or following their lifestyle,

⁷⁸ Servants of the People Society, *Report*, 72.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁰ Diwan, *Inqilāb Zindabād*, 151.

⁸¹ Gol Bagh, means "the round garden." This oasis is almost circular in shape surrounded by roads. According to Yasmeen Lari, this is "a reminder of the early British cantonment here." See, Yasmeen Lari, *Lahore: Illustrated Guide* (Lahore: Heritage Foundation Pakistan, 2003), 63. Lala Lajpat Rai's bronze statue was commissioned by the Indian National Congress shortly before its 1929 session in Lahore. A young Calcutta artist Bhabesh Chander Sanyal (1902–2003) was selected for the task, a project that brought him to Lahore. He stayed on and served at the Mayo School of Art until 1936.

calling them *toḍīs*. The children of the Bhawan and surrounding areas had formed a Bāl Sabha (Children's Council), and they too deeply cared about the movement for independence. Diwan recounts verses of a Punjabi play she used to perform with her older sister Santosh that involved an exchange between a *toḍi* and a Congressman; she always (unhappily) had to be the former and don a western dress. Some of the dialogues went like this:

- Toḍi:* The ones who fight with the government officers
Are the blind followers of Gandhi and who rot in jails
- Congressman: O *toḍi* do not sneer, your comments hit us like
arrows
Gandhi's followers are like brothers to us
- Toḍi:* We walk with grace when we wear the pants, coat,
and hat
You wear the Gandhi cap and fetch water for us
(serve us)
- Congressman: Leave your smattering of English and propagate
independence
Listen to the slogans resounding the country's
Independence.⁸²

Two other favorites were:

*Inqilāb zindah bād! – goonjay āzādī ka nād – lāthī, golī, sankat, jail
– zālīm ka hai antam khel!*⁸³

“Long Live the Revolution, The Slogan of Independence shall
echo everywhere; the *lāthīs*, the bullets, the danger, the jail – this
game of the cruel will be over soon!”⁸⁴

*Āzād karen ge Hind tujhāy āzād – hum Hindi hain aur kuch bhi
nahin, aur kuch bhi nahin gar Hindi nahin – yeh Hind rahāy ābād!*⁸⁵

“We shall liberate you Hind, we are Hindi and nothing else, and if
not Hindi we are nothing, may this Hind live forever!”⁸⁶

Similar political slogans and discourses could be heard in the large Lajpat Bhawan Hall, which had a permanent stage and galleries on three sides

⁸² Diwan, *Inqilāb Zindabād*, 52. Translation by the author of this chapter.

⁸³ Ibid., 98–99.

⁸⁴ Translation by the author of this chapter.

⁸⁵ Diwan, *Inqilāb Zindabād*, 42.

⁸⁶ Translation by the author of this chapter.

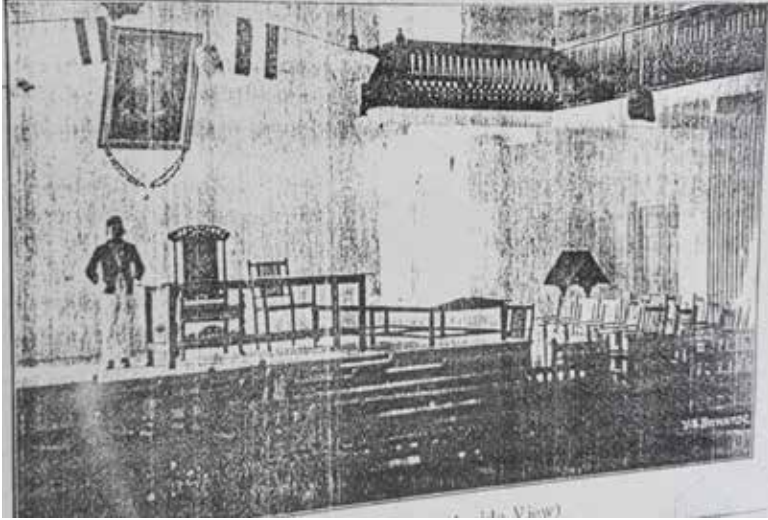


Figure 9.5 Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall in the Early 20th century

The large Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall had a permanent stage and galleries on three sides, as seen in this image from the *Report of the Servants of People Society for the Period 1930–1934*. These walls once reverberated with slogan demanding independence from the British Raj.

(Figure 9.5). Its interior is plastered white and decorated using classical Greek ornamental vocabulary (Figure 9.6). The side walls have fluted pilasters that rise the entire height of the wall to receive the end of a beam framed by dentil and egg-and-dart moldings that continues along the cornice on all four sides. The ceiling had several carved stucco medallions with center metal hooks that held chandeliers or fans.

Manorma Diwan's account of her life at the Bhawan covers a span of slightly more than five years. On August 8, 1942, the day Gandhi started the Quit India Movement in Bombay, both her parents and several other residents of the Bhawan were arrested for planning rallies in Lahore. August 23, 1947, was her last day in Lahore, when she left her home at the Bhawan forever. At the time of the Partition, its premises along with the nearby DAV college and hostel buildings were turned into *sharanarthi* camps, shelters for Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore and surrounding areas before they were shipped out in army trucks and buses. Her mother Sita Devi stayed in Lahore for several more months after the rest of the family left for Shimla, looking after the refugees.



Figure 9.6 Gallery in the Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall (Photo 2018)

The interior of the Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall is plastered white and decorated using classical Greek ornamental vocabulary. The side walls have fluted pilasters that rise the entire height of the wall to receive the end of a beam framed by the dentil and egg-and-dart moldings, which continues along the cornice on all four sides. The ceiling had several carved stucco medallions with center metal hooks that held chandeliers or fans.

HISTORY RELAYED BY MONUMENTS

Diwan's first trip back to Lahore was in November 1957. She found the main building of the Bhawan occupied by the Indian Deputy High Commission. On her second trip in 1984, she found the residential buildings of the Bhawan badly aged, now occupied by *mahājirs* or migrants while the Punjab Police Department's Finger Print Bureau was set up in the main building.⁸⁷ The Dwarkadas Library had left the Bhawan and so had Lala Lajpat Rai's statue that stood at one end of the Gol Bagh, facing the Zamzama, an 18th century canon placed in front of the Lahore

⁸⁷ Diwan, *Inqilāb Zindabād*, 223.



Figure 9.7 Printing Press Machinery in Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall (Photo 2018)

Since 2010, Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan has served as the head office of a daily newspaper, the *Sahāfat*. Their staff is sensitive to the Bhawan's historical significance, and the building is kept in overall good repair, except for the main hall on the ground floor.

Museum.⁸⁸ Shortly after the Partition, both memorials of the great man were relocated to Chandigarh and Shimla respectively.⁸⁹

Since 2010, the Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan has served as the head office of a daily newspaper, the *Sahāfat*. Their staff is sensitive to the Bhawan's historical significance and the building is kept in overall good repair, except for the main hall on the ground floor. The space that once hosted revolutionaries and still echoes with their heart-warming slogans promising to rid the country of its oppressive rulers now persists in a dilapidated state. It houses a printing press, and its walls and floor are stained with ink and grime (Figures 9.7–9.9). Structural changes have also marred its stately size; the stage has been removed and a partition wall has been added.

⁸⁸ "The Zamzama canon outside the Lahore museum was made famous by Rudyard Kipling as Kims' gun. According to David Ross, it was "brought to India in A.D. 1761, used by Ahmad Shah [Abdalil, in the battle of Panipat." Latre, a powerful Sikh *misl* (confederacy) of the Bhangis, got possession of it and it became known as the *Bhangiān wālī Top*. Maharaja Ranjit Singh got hold of it when he took control of Amritsar in 1802. See, David Ross, *The Land of the Five Rivers and Sindh: Sketches Historical and Descriptive* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1883), 128–129.

⁸⁹ The library now stands in Chandigarh housed in the Lajpat Rai Bhawan in sector 15 and is managed by the Servants of the People Society. Lala Lajpat Rai's bronze statue now stands at Scandal Point, The Mall, Shimla. It was unveiled once again on August 15, 1948, by Mr Gopi Chand Bhagrva, a member of the Congress and the first Chief Minister of East Punjab after Partition.



Figure 9.8 Printing Press in the Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall (Photo 2018)

Since 2010, Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan has served as the head office of a daily newspaper, the *Sahāfat*. Now, it houses a printing press; its walls and floor are stained with ink and grime. Structural changes have also marred its stately size; the stage has been removed and partition wall has been added.

There have been several illegal attempts to appropriate Lala Lajpat Rai's property at 2, Court Street as a simple evacuee property. The Evacuee Trust Property Board has successfully warded off such claims to the five *kanals*, seven *marlas* and 154 sq. ft. of both vacant and built space. Court records of this case yield fascinating details of the claimants' pleas as well as rebuttals by the Board. According to the Trust Deed, No. 1606, dated May 18, 1926, Lala Lajpat Rai had given the property in trust to the Servants of the People Society with all rights, to be used for specific purposes:

- The object of the Society will be to enlist and train national missionaries for the service of the mother country.
- It shall be their duty to work for the educational, political, social, and economic uplift of the country.

What the plaintiffs forwarded in their counterpleas is ironic and shocking in its ignorance.⁹⁰ They "contended that the [Servants of the People]

⁹⁰ The petitioners had been in possession of the property since 1958 and had applied to the Settlement Department to get it transferred in their names on the pretext of it being simple



Figure 9.9 Lajpat Rai Bhawan Hall (Photo 2018)

The Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan is kept in overall good repair, except for the main hall on the ground floor. The space that once hosted revolutionaries and still echoes with their heartwarming slogans promising to rid the country of its oppressive rulers, now stands in a dilapidated state.

Society was not created for educational purposes but for agitation, political work, movements of non-cooperation, and political propaganda and that its members were being arrested and sentenced for creating violence and unrest in India.”⁹¹ In support of their arguments they provided news clippings from *The Inqilāb*,⁹² from 1928–1942. The honorable judge dismissed this claim and accepted the Evacuee Trust Property Board’s rights to the custodianship of Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan and its surrounding land and built structures.

Keeping the contentions of the plaintiffs in mind, I would like to flip the language they used against the Bhawan and—in the spirit of its patron, inhabitants, and others associated with it—proudly reassert and reclaim all memories of the Independence buried at the Bradlaugh Hall, Lala Lajpat Rai Bhawan, and other similar sites in and around Lahore. The city of Lahore, we must not forget, is what it is because of both “age value” and “historical value.” People come and go; it is the city’s built heritage that diligently serves to keep memories alive in the present. Architectural monuments are significant for their physical presence in the public realm in large measure because their visible solidity directly sustains a sensory appreciation of key historical narratives. Erasing monuments we imagine not “useful,” or worse still, forcing some like the Bhawan and Bradlaugh Hall to stand mute without reference is a disservice not only to them but to ourselves. Anything fragmented is not whole. History with missing links has neither the potential nor the agency to connect us with our past and lead us to our future. Each monument needs to be treated as a chapter in history and preserved to make this manuscript meaningful—missing monuments are missing chapters! Chaman Lal in his “Introduction” to *Bhagat Singh: The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* regretfully observes that there is no fitting memorial for the martyrs of the Independence in Lahore. I could not agree more. Lal has put it beautifully:

The fact is that Lahore was the city where Bhagat Singh came to prominence, where he did some of his most important work, where he was imprisoned, and eventually hanged and cremated. Lahore is where a memorial to Bhagat Singh and his comrades ought to be created. It is also noteworthy that of all the heroes of the freedom movement, Bhagat Singh evokes awe and admiration on both sides

evacuee property. The Deputy Settlement Commissioner referred the case to Evacuee Trust Property Board in 1976 and the case was dismissed on its final hearing on November 17, 2017.

⁹¹ Annexure P “Q” of the Court Case presented in the Court of Muhammad Siddique-ul-Farooq, Chairman, Evacuee Trust Property Board, Government of Pakistan, 9–Court Street, Lahore. 198.

⁹² Edited by Abdul Majeed Salik.

of the border equally. As the people of India and Pakistan extend hands of friendship and fraternity towards each other, the figure of Bhagat Singh has the potential of uniting people over a divided land.⁹³

Such a memorial for this hero must be more than just renaming Shadman Chowk as Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chowk after “years of candlelit vigils and demands” in October 2012.⁹⁴ The struggle for independence from the British rule was a joint effort of all Indians of the subcontinent, regardless of religion, caste, and creed. People who lost their lives or worked relentlessly for this cause must not be forgotten—on either side of the border. Monuments associated with these revolutionaries carry timestamps of their struggles ready to replay historical moments at the slightest provocation—they must be kept alive as our tribute to these men and women and their memories.

⁹³ Chaman Lal, “Introduction,” in *Bhagat Singh: The Jail Notebook and Other Writings* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2007), 25.

⁹⁴ Talbot and Kamran, *Lahore in the Time of the Raj*, 145.



Tilting at Thresholds

Partition in Modern versus Contemporary South Asian Art and Exhibitions

Zehra Jumabhoy

*The line's got weak spots. It's old and I've got my suspicions about
those who strung it up in the first place.¹*

INTRODUCTION

In 1947, two nations were born: India and Pakistan. They were bifurcated by a partition—the Radcliffe Line. It was named after Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the British lawyer who was charged with dividing the subcontinent in six weeks.² As the chair of the two boundary commissions—one for Bengal and the other for Punjab—he was tasked with splitting the two regions according to a mind-boggling array of factors: religion, cultural traditions, socio-political beliefs, natural boundaries, and irrigation systems.³ He had never been to the subcontinent before. As his decision was announced on August 17, 1947—just days after Indian and Pakistani Independence—Radcliffe

¹Catherine M. Valente, *The Girl Who Soared over Fairyland and Cut the Moon in Two* (London: Cosair, 2012), 36.

²Radcliffe arrived on June 8, 1947, and his commissions began work on July 1, 1947. The final demarcations were completed by August 12 but not made public till August 17. My point is that the release of information about the official demarcations *after Independence* may have been responsible for the panic and chaos the Line caused via the mass migrations it necessitated.

³The Radcliffe Line's impact was equally profound for the provinces of North-West Frontier Province as well as for Sindh, Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, and Gujarat.

left the subcontinent in haste and horror. He burned his documents and waived his fee. He never returned. For the Radcliffe Line was the site of violent upheavals and horrendous bloodshed as millions migrated across new borderlines, across regions Radcliffe had never heard of.

Unsurprisingly, Radcliffe's demarcations—the 553 km line that split Punjab and the 4096 km one that bisected Bengal—continue to be enduring sites of trauma. Its tortuous curves are tangled up with the Line of Control—the barrier between India and Pakistan that separates Kashmir, a site of ongoing conflict between the neighboring countries. For Pakistan, as a Muslim-majority state, Kashmir is a symbol of what the country was “owed” at its inception and what it was cheated of. In India, Kashmir is equally vital to the self-definition of both the Hindu right and “secular” liberals. If *Hindutva* valorizes it as the land of the Vedas, the very blood and bones of Mother India, for liberals, Kashmir's Sufi-Bhakti past is proof that Indian syncretism was and is possible. Both think of Kashmir as the pulsing heart of Indian unity. So the quest for Kashmir reverberates so deeply in the psyches of India and Pakistan that the compulsion to “own” it has led to numerous battles and three bloody wars. The Line of Control is thus a shifting concept. Continually evoking and revoking the boundary lines of the 1947 Partition, it shadows every commemoration of Independence with its specter. In 1971, the Radcliffe Line became the basis of yet another division. This time, East Pakistan split off from West Pakistan to form Bangladesh. Each of these Partitions ensured that South Asia's nations were not just born in blood but that the wounds they created continued to seep. Every time sectarian conflict tears India apart or religious fundamentalism rears its head in India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, the old injuries of the Partition bleed afresh.

This chapter will examine the role the Partition plays in modern and contemporary Indian and Pakistani art and a current spate of exhibitions linking the two nations. It will compare the relationship modern and contemporary artists have with respect to Partition's primal split, explaining the possible difference in their attitudes via Partition studies and Marianne Hirsch's memory theories. In addition, the piece also examines some of the major shows dedicated to the Partition that swept across South Asia and Euro-America from the late 1990s to the 2000s.⁴ It aims

⁴ Since “modern” versus “contemporary” art is often referred to in this chapter, it is worth decoding my usage of the terms. There is no hard and fast definition that art historians agree to and no cut-off year that demarcates the one from the other. For the purposes of this chapter, “modern artists” means those who lived through the 1947 Partition and consciously forged a visual language for the new nations. Meanwhile, by “contemporary” South Asian artists and curators, I mean those who did not experience this primal Partition, but who have

to unravel the claim made by many of the curators of these exhibitions, which is backed by anti-essentialist and postcolonial theory, that art can and will help us heal the wounds of the Partition. Instead, this chapter argues that while extravagant exhibitions have helped forge commendable connections between the curators of South Asia, they are unable to do more than this to make Partition a “productive space.”⁵

If my take is more pessimistic, this could be a product of current political realities in South Asia. The communal crisis that the Partition precipitated in the subcontinent is back with a bang. Hence, little remains of the hope that motivated the curators and theorists who helped shape many of the Partition-themed art shows and the debates around them in the 1990s, the noughties, and teens.

MEMORIES AND THE MODERNS

We have been led to believe, despite Partition’s ideological grip on the national imaginations of the countries it created, that Indian and Pakistani artists who witnessed the Partition have been peculiarly wary of visualizing it. This is a claim generally posited by art historians (think Karin Zitzewitz, Iftikhar Dadi, and Sonal Khullar). For curator Hammad Nasar, the responsibility to fill this gap in visual art and, thereby, assuage the traumas of 1947 falls on the intrepid shoulders of contemporary practitioners, like himself. But is it really true that there is a Partition-shaped lacuna in modern art? I will argue that while it is tempting to see the moderns as having eschewed the topic, a relook at their oeuvres compels us to tweak this truism.

A cursory glance at the output of the South Asian moderns would seem to corroborate the views of naysayers. Even Bombay’s famously “revolutionary” Progressive Artists’ Group (PAG) does not appear to have tackled the Partition. The PAG was formed just after Indian Independence

been influenced by it. However, the distinction between these categories in art history is not always chronological—the definition of what constitutes modernity is still being disputed. As the venerable Delhi-based art historian Geeta Kapur elucidates in her famous 2000 book, *When Was Modernism*, to be “modern” entails a specific set of ideological attitudes and principles. While I will not delve into this debate here—having dealt with it extensively elsewhere—this chapter will underscore how the terms buy into a certain conceptual positioning: This chapter supports the claim that what separates the “modern” artist from their “contemporary” counterpart is their adherence to a universal concept of man; their work tends to handle trauma metaphorically rather than relate to specific socio-political events. Contemporary artists are invariably more explicit about their contexts, even as they are more distrustful of notions of universality and essence. As we will see, my argument suspends artist Zarina Hashmi between “modern” and “contemporary.”

⁵ *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space* (2012) is the title of the pivotal exhibition, curated by Hammad Nasar and Iftikhar Dadi, that much of this essay addresses.

in 1947 by F. N. Souza, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, S. K. Bakre, K. H. Ara, and H. A. Gade. While these so-called “fathers of modern Indian art” have a tight grip on the narrative of Indian modernism, the collective was in fact short-lived, and many of its founding members left for foreign shores quickly after its inaugural shows in Baroda and Bombay in 1949. In 1953, new members joined the PAG—Krishen Khanna, V. S. Gaitonde, Bhanu Rajopadhye, and Mohan Samant, amongst them—but even this second wind did not last long. By 1956, the group had unofficially dissolved. Yet the PAG and its close associates (such as Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta, and Ram Kumar) continue to define Indian modern art. This is partly because of the PAG’s plurality; as a multi-religious cohort from the different castes and creeds of the new India, it embodied Prime Minister Nehru’s vision of “unity and diversity.” It fell to the progressives to give visual form to the myth of the “progressive” nation. So if anyone should have painted the Partition, the task ought to have been shouldered by the PAG. And yet their oeuvres seem to bypass this seminal rupture. This is odd since many of the PAG lost families across the border or were themselves refugees. For instance, Muslim Raza chose to stay in India, while his brother, Syed Ali Imam, left for Pakistan. If Raza joined Bombay’s PAG, his brother was a founder of the Lahore Art Circle (LAC) in 1952. Meanwhile, Khanna was one of those who made the opposite journey; in 1947, his family moved to Shimla from Lahore.

Dadi (developing an insight from film theorist Bhaskar Sarkar) points out that the Partition had a destabilizing effect on its victims: “Partition experience” on the “psyche” created a distorting time lag, so that it was not broached in the cultural productions of those who survived it. Instead, it was marked by “deferral, gaps, and uncertainties, providing no guarantee” of its “eventual assimilation” or “therapeutic closure.”⁶ But if other cultural practitioners (such as novelists and filmmakers) who professed “progressive” agendas tackled the Partition, however irregularly, what accounts for the supposed chasm in modern art? For instance, a member of the Progressive Writers’ Association, Saadat Hasan Manto, is famous for his Partition stories. The best-known of these is *Toba Tek Singh*, in which Hindu and Muslim inmates of a lunatic asylum encounter the “insane” logic of the Partition. It is difficult to ascertain which is crazier—the madman or the enforcers of an arbitrarily drawn line. However, Manto’s insights were left to the 1946-born Nalini Malani to enshrine in her deliberately disorienting video installation, *Remembering*

⁶ Iftekhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, ed., *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 19.

Toba Tek Singh (1998). Malani was only a baby when her mother boarded a person of Indian origin boat bound for Bombay with Malani in her arms. Her memories of the Partition were absorbed vicariously: "I have no direct experience of the Partition. It's the atmosphere that my mother and my grandparents lived with, the sense of loss," Malani said.⁷

If the progressives seemed strangely silent, then their LAC colleagues across the border—Shakir Ali, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Parvez, and Syed Ali Imam—appeared similarly so. They also appeared to be preoccupied with the formal problems of style rather than socio-political contexts. As Pakistani art historian Samina Iqbal explains,

The LAC did not engage with Partition per se in terms of producing any visual images referring to it. The young cohort wanted to establish a new idiom that didn't reclaim "the glorious Muslim past" but rather marked the new and *progressive* nation on the world map.⁸

Members of the LAC, like many progressives, left for Europe to find their artistic feet. According to Iqbal, the Circle used the PAG as a model for channeling its "progressive" spirit. However, Iqbal maintains that the implicit nation-conscious agenda of the PAG (i.e., their mission to fashion a visual idiom for secularism) was not LAC's driving impetus. They were more concerned with establishing an "international style"—one that kept "abreast with the prevailing times."⁹ If the LAC's paintings from this period share stylistic affiliations with the PAG's, this is why. For instance, Raza's black suns are echoed by his brother's black moons, and Shakir Ali's blocky forms bear comparison with the angular figuration of early Ram Kumars. (They were both taught by the Cubist André Lhote in Paris in the 1950s.) Iqbal suggests that for Pakistani moderns, the issue of national identification was a more complicated project: "Perhaps, the artists witnessing Partition were too shocked to process what happened so quickly and brutally? Maybe they were just in denial, just as Jinnah never sold his Bombay residence after Partition."¹⁰

⁷ Nalini Malani, "Indian Artist Nalini Malani Talks Myth, Metaphor and Women," Interview by Brittny, *Art Radar*, March 21, 2014, <https://artadarjournal.com/artist-nalini-malani-talks-myth-metaphor-and-women-interview/> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

⁸ Samina Iqbal, email interview with the author, March 1, 2020. The reference to a "glorious Muslim past" is a pointed attack on the dreamy Mughal-inspired paintings of A. R. Chughtai (an erstwhile member of the Bengal School of Art, alongside Abanindranath Tagore). It is interesting that across the border, the PAG was just as vitriolic about the nostalgia-ridden musings of Tagore. Souza was as vicious about the latter's "pretty paintings" as he was about the academic realism that flourished during the Raj. Zehra Jumabhoy and Boon Hui Tan, ed., *The Progressive Revolution: A New Art for a New India* (New York, NY: Prestel, 2018), 17–26.

⁹ Iqbal, email interview with the author.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Pakistan's grip on the idea of its own national identity—as hereafter separate from India—was a tenuous one at best at this stage. This fact is underscored by Dadi when he speaks about Pakistan's lack of a “primordial” sense of its cartographic contours.¹¹ This could be the reason that the rare modern artists who did tackle the Partition head-on were Indian.¹² The most feted of these is Satish Gujral, whose *Partition* series chronicled the horrific journeys of those crossing the borders of the new nations: “My first beginning as an artist was Partition. I witnessed killing, murder, rape. I painted a man suffering and the people of those days adopted me as their artist.”¹³

Gujral's dark depictions evoke the trauma of the migrants; their emaciated bodies contorted in pain, their eyes blankly staring. These skeletons, with their Munch-like mouths open in silent screams, are shadow people. As symbols of universal anguish, they transcend race, nation, and time. Gujral's universalist renderings provide a clue to another way of reading modern art produced post-Partition. If we examined the symbolism of modern art, would we find more references to the amputation of the subcontinent than conventional art history has taught us to expect? I suggest, by extending Dadi's comments about the “metaphoric” and “indirect” representations of the “Partition experience” in art, that the Indian progressives did refer to the event, but that it was through myth and metaphor, which resurfaced most dramatically in the 1970s.¹⁴ In metaphorically gesturing to the Line in the socio-historical context of the second Partition, they were able to revisit the traumas of the first. For instance, in the conflict-ridden paintings of Krishen Khanna, Tyeb Mehta, and Husain, allusions to the Partitions tended to be allegorical rather than specific, usually drawing on Hindu mythology to gesture to the idea of an India ripped asunder by internal fissures. It is telling that both Husain and Khanna's paintings of the 1970s were engrossed in the *Mahābhārata*. In

¹¹ Iftikhar Dadi quoted in Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Art on the Line: Cartography and Creativity in a Divided World,” in *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 313. Dadi's use of the word “primordial” is laden with symbolism because if the Pakistani moderns had no sense of a primal “motherland,” this marked their difference from the PAG. For the latter, the idea of India as embodied from time immemorial by a Hindu goddess, Bharat Mata, was a pervasive motif in even their most abstract formulations (think of Raza's *Maa*, 1981).

¹² My opinion may change. Research on this period is being conducted by Samina Iqbal. Just as I have discovered hidden elements about the Indian PAG, she is beginning to uncover art historical lacunas in the way LAC's output has been addressed. In fact, this essay feeds into new research Iqbal and I are conducting collaboratively on modern art on both sides of the Indo-Pak border.

¹³ Satish Gujral, “A Brush with Life: A Documentary on Satish Gujral,” February 15, 2012, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yLVbhG7GWs> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

¹⁴ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 19.

Husain's *Battle of Ganga and Jamuna: Mahabharata 1*, 1971–1972, a deep blue line gashes the figure of a dancing goddess in two; the halves of her body are deliberately misaligned and disjointed. It is not coincidental that the work was made at a time when the subcontinent was again ruptured along the lines of Radcliffe's bifurcated Bengal.

It is in the 1970s that the Diagonal enters Mehta's visual language, rending his figures apart so that they appear divided from themselves. Unsurprisingly, 1972 is also the date ascribed to Khanna's celebrated, painterly riff on Rembrandt: *The Anatomy Lesson*. In Khanna's version, it is not a man but a map that is being surgically dissected. Here, black-clad generals hover around a table that is covered with white shroud-like paper. Stepping back from the canvas, we can make out the cartography of Bangladesh, which stands in for the person being probed on the operating table. At the Asia Society's *Progressive Revolution: Modern Art for a New India* (2018), which I guest curated, I deliberately played up this reference to the 1971 Partition by placing one of Mehta's dark Diagonals next to Khanna's sinister *Lesson* (Figure 10.1). The conventional interpretation by art historians is that Mehta's Diagonals were "derivative" of American Barnett Newman's "zip" paintings. My placement argued that Mehta's Diagonal was not just a formal choice. It was a political one.

US-based curator Siddhartha Shah agrees.¹⁵ He also highlights the socio-political context of modern Indian art in his 2020 rehang of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Paintings from the 1970s feature heavily in Shah's display. In Husain's *Ganga Jamuna* (1971), a pulsing yellow line hacks a goddess in two: on the left she is an upright flesh-hued figure; on the right she is a meditating black one. A red sun has been sliced open; a chunk of it missing, it hovers on the amputated wrist of a dark lady. In the *Mahābhārata*, brother battles against brother; the self is split against itself. As Sonal Kullar corroborates, the "splits and cuts" of Husain's *Mahābhārata* series "can be related to India's war with Pakistan in 1971" that, like the epic, marked a "fratricidal conflict."¹⁶ Shah has placed Husain's *Mahābhārata* referencing works—such as *Ganga Jamuna* and *Duryodhana Arjuna Split* (*Mahabharata* 9), 1971, where a cracked black sun dominates the

¹⁵ As curatorial consultant for the rehang of the Herwitz Gallery at Peabody Essex Museum, I worked closely with Siddhartha Shah on the layout of the permanent display. My curatorial lecture at Asia Society explains my argument for reading the Indian modern through the frame of Partition. Zehra Jumabhoy, "Midnight and the Moderns: Mapping Progressive Past; Proposing Secular Futures," filmed September 18, 2018, at Asia Society Museum, New York, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34GlsIP2w6c> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

¹⁶ Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity and Modernism in India, 1930–1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 126.



Figure 10.1 South Asian Gallery as installed at the Peabody Essex Museum, 2020. Photo by Kathy Tarantola. Image courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum. The installation was part of curator Siddhartha V. Shah’s rehang and it includes Tyeb Mehta’s *Untitled (Diagonal)* from 1973, which is part of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

canvas—in close proximity to Mehta’s 1973 *Diagonal*, in which huddled figures on a throbbing green background are slashed by a zig-zagging white partition. For Shah, Mehta’s bifurcated bodies serve a similar function to Husain’s cleft circles and vertical gashes. They all gesture to Partition as a concept.

I would argue that even Raza and Gaitonde’s “abstractions” found a means to portray it. Raza’s acrylic *Bangladesh* (1971) makes no secret of its allusion. A square canvas is divided in two: The top half is painted crimson, like freshly spilled blood; the bottom section is smeared with brushstrokes of fleshy, muddy greens—reminiscent of an aerial view of the deltaic alluvial plains on which Bangladesh is situated. Interestingly, the 1970s are often seen as Raza’s “French phase.” But he obviously felt connected enough to his homeland to speak about its politics in such (for him) overt terms. The Delhi-based Gaitonde’s gestures are more elusive: In his pistachio-brown *Untitled* (1971), we discern the faint outlines of a fragmented map of British India, swimming in a sea of earth-hued paint. The green-brown shades used in both paintings evoke the

floodplains, lakes, and peatlands of Bangladesh. My point is not just that in the 1970s art met politics halfway, but also that the Bangladesh war of independence—in which India played a major part—gave the Indian moderns an opportunity to revisit the subcontinent's primal Partition, that of 1947. As if the pain that had been suppressed during the first had found an outlet—perhaps cathartic—in their depictions of the second. Hence, while the 1947 Partition may not have figured overtly in the art of the Indian moderns, it is incorrect to argue that it was absent.

Recent archival research compels one to adjust this conclusion. The documentation of Krishen Khanna's early work by his granddaughter, Kajoli Khanna, has revealed that though Khanna did not talk about his Partition paintings, he made them. 1947 paintings like *Death in Autumn, Lahore*, where a snarled tree trunk stands surrounded by blood-colored earth, its two branches twisting in opposite directions, and *Fields from Tara Devi*, where a winding blue road cuts across the landscape, make veiled references to the Radcliffe Line. If these two canvases have had brief airings among the cognoscenti, a small one, resembling a Pahari painting, has been overlooked: *Refugee Train 18 Hours Late* (1947). Here, a mother rocks her baby in the folds of her sari; figures hunch together in misery; a lady weeps on the lap of an older woman; a man cries next to a prostrate body; and lovers hold each other close. The refugees recall characters in a children's book and (as with much of Khanna's 1940s output, such as his 1948 *Death of Gandhiji*) have a poignantly naïve air. Khanna has never referred to *Refugee Train* (not even when asked about whether he depicted the Partition). Could there be others he never owned up to (Figure 10.2)? Might other moderns have done the same?¹⁷

Perhaps, the clue lies in looking outside the established canon of South Asian art history to the work of forgotten figures like S. L. Parasher. Born in Gujranwala (now Pakistan) in 1904, post-Partition violence had a profound effect on Parasher. His paintings, drawings, sculptures, and terracotta figures were influenced by his experiences as the commandant of a refugee camp near the railway station in Ambala in 1947. The woe-begone protagonist of *Heavy Despair* (ca. 1947–1949), one of the paintings

¹⁷ Interestingly, Krishen Khanna, a surviving PAG member, is now giving interviews that speak about the Partition directly, after years of glossing over his references to it in his work. Just as this chapter was being prepared for publication, Khanna was quoted by art journalist Reema Gehi in the *Mumbai Mirror* comparing COVID to Partition. Referring to *Refugee Train*, he said: "Nobody knew where they were going after the Partition. This image of refugees waiting at a train station for 18 hours remained with me. And the memory came alive on canvas." Krishen Khanna, "Visions of Partition," interview by Reema Gehi, *Mumbai Mirror*, May 3, 2020. <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/others/sunday-read/visions-of-partition/articleshow/75513518.cms> (accessed on May 25, 2022).



Figure 10.2 Krishen Khanna. *Refugee Train 18 Hours Late*, 1947. Oil on Canvas. Image courtesy of Krishen Khanna Archives.

included at Amritsar's Partition Museum, bears a resemblance to Gujral's victims of *Partition*. According to Mallika Ahluwalia, the curator of the museum, Parasher's early works were themselves casualties of the turmoil: "most of the early work by many of Punjab's artists was either lost or scattered due to the Partition."¹⁸ Cross-border collaborative research into these displaced relics may induce us to adjust our conclusions about the paucity of visual representations of the Partition still further.

As current research stands, however, I would argue that the best known of the Indian and Pakistani moderns stuck to making largely elusive gestures to South Asia's foundational trauma. It is not incidental that Khanna himself is evasive on the subject of the Partition in the face of his granddaughter's quest to unearth evidence of it in his work.¹⁹ In a 2015 panel discussion at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, Khanna said: "The Partition was a monstrous, terrible thing that happened. When one is afflicted with such a situation, you don't sit down and start painting it. You let it metabolise within you ... I'm still in the process of painting those pictures."²⁰

Khanna's comment is consistent with Sarkar's contention—supported by trauma theory—that for the generation who experienced the Partition, direct memorialization is difficult.²¹ It surfaces obliquely, "in displaced allegorical forms, intimating a kind of melancholic obsession."²² In keeping with this insight, Sumathi Ramaswamy records that Tyeb Mehta also

¹⁸ Mallika Ahluwalia, "Journey of a Painting in the Chaos of Partition," interview by Staff Reporter, *The Tribune*, August 22, 2020, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/schools/journey-of-a-painting-in-the-chaos-of-partition-129849> (accessed on May 25, 2022). The article records the discovery of a rescued pre-1947 painting of Guru Nanak Dev by S. L. Parasher and its subsequent inclusion in an online exhibition at the Partition Museum in 2020.

¹⁹ Kajoli Khanna and I have often tried to draw Khanna out on this topic. As discussed later in Ananya Kabir's reformulation of Marianne Hirsch's theories, our obsession with Partition could be evidence of "postmemory" at work. The article quoted above was sent to me by Khanna, for which she had provided an image of the painting.

²⁰ Neha Mitra, "The Progressives and Partition: A Studied Silence," (Graduation Diploma Dissertation, Bhau Daji Lad Museum Diploma Programme, 2018), 18.

²¹ In "Visions of Partition," Khanna spoke about his famous truck paintings from the 1970s, which feature dark vehicles filled with ghostly passengers, in a way that corroborates my interpretation that the formation of Bangladesh jolted repressed memories of the 1947 Partition. Khanna says of a 1972 truck painting: "This is another image I painted from memory, nearly three decades after witnessing it. The Partition didn't happen over a day. The migration happened over several days, weeks and months." It is telling that it is only in his old age that Khanna is willing to acknowledge the relationship between 1947 and his 1970s paintings explicitly.

²² Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 30.

refused to associate his Diagonals with the 1971 Bangladesh War, insisting that they were a formal choice inspired by his 1968 encounter with Newman's canvases at the Museum of Modern Art.²³ So even if Partition figured in the works of the moderns, as Ramaswamy argues, often providing the "structuring" principle in their oeuvres, excavating the relationship generally runs against their professed intentions.²⁴ Moreover, the moderns' approach to art was inherently allegorical. Unlike their contemporary artistic brethren, addressing socio-political issues explicitly was never a preoccupation with this generation. Part and parcel of the myth of the modern is that it speaks to the universal condition of man by transcending the specifics of time and place.

One of those who treaded a different path was Indian artist Zarina Hashmi. (She preferred to go by the name Zarina.) Zarina's oeuvre rubs up against both the moderns and the contemporary: her poetically autobiographical paperwork is ideologically hinged between them.²⁵ Born in 1937 in British India, she was a victim of the Partition, and her art makes references to its impact on her life. Zarina is well-known for her use of the motif of "the mobile home," where belonging is always, literally, in transit. Her prints and tiny house sculptures (Figure 10.3) revolve around recreations of her father's house in Aligarh or the homes she lived in as she travelled the world as the wife of an Indian diplomat. In Zarina's art, political trauma is indelibly linked to personal loss and, finally, flips into the universal. Speaking about her monochrome maps, *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness* (2003), Zarina said: "No one is going to find the way home, but it [the work] is a testimony that they had a country and a home and that the world remembers."²⁶ Her situation as twice-displaced from

²³ Ramaswamy, "Art on the Line," 313.

²⁴ Ibid., 314.

²⁵ Art critic Girish Shahane (in his groundbreaking 2001 lead essay for *ART India* magazine's volume on *Identity*, called "Alter Egos") argues that contemporary Indian art from the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Anju Dodiya's self-portraits; Pushpamala's photographs of herself play-acting filmy stereotypes) is preoccupied by the concept of identity as performative, transitory, and "iterative" (also known as "quotational"). I have argued elsewhere that this idea of identity as unfixed, playful, and, above all, anti-essentialist (a term used in a very specific philosophical context here) can be read in line with Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall's "identity theories." What structures this view of the self is not autobiographical at all: there is no deep, universal self. Zehra Jumabhoy, "Me, Myself, and You," in *India: Art Now*, eds. Christian Gether, Stine Hoholt, and Ranjit Hoskote (Copenhagen: Hatje Cantz Exhibition Catalogue, 2012), 64–81. The reason I suggest that Zarina belongs to a hinge generation is that her work is not playful about the self: it is autobiographical. As the rest of this chapter implies, while Zarina's traumatic revisiting of thresholds makes her *seem* a perfect visual fit for exhibitions on Partition and even for postcolonial theories (inspired by post-structuralist Bhabha's threshold theory), this would be doing an injustice to her art.

²⁶ Zarina Hashmi (@hashmizarina), "These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness," Instagram photo, November 21, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/hashmizarina/?hl=en> (accessed



Figure 10.3 Zarina. *Homes I Made*, 1984–1992. Cast aluminum (28 units) and stained terracotta (20 units). Installation view at Nada Raza’s exhibition *Altered Inheritances: Home Is a Foreign Place* (2019). Photo by Ismail Noor/Seeing Things Dubai. Collection: The Ishara Art Foundation and the Prabhakar Collection, Dubai. Image courtesy of the artist and Ishara Art Foundation, Dubai.

her point of origin—first as a casualty of the Partition and then as a diasporic Indian—has meant that her art has often been compared to the disrupted domesticity of Palestinian Mona Hatoum’s installations. Zarina’s output has been included in major museum shows in the West, which have feted her as an international, New York-based artist. Relatively, she has recently been brought into conversations with other South Asian talent on the subject of the Partition. This insertion is largely thanks to the efforts of contemporary South Asian curators and academics.²⁷

PARTITION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SPACE

And so, the alleged Partition-shaped hole in visual art and aesthetic theory is busily being filled by these contemporary practitioners, thinkers, and curators whose experience of the Partition is seldom firsthand,

on May 25, 2022).

²⁷ As an art critic for *Artforum International*, I count myself among this number. Zarina passed away as this chapter was being prepared for publication. The outpouring of grief for her—both as a person and as a symbol—was evident in the literature surrounding her death, including the shared “map of memories” published alongside my obituary for the Scrollin website. Zehra Jumabhoy, “Zarina Hashmi (1937–2020): An Artist Whose Work Is Woven with Ideas of Displacement and Mobility,” *Scrollin*, April 29, 2020, <https://scrollin/article/960503/zarina-hashmi-1937-2020-an-artist-whose-work-is-woven-with-ideas-of-displacement-and-mobility> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

built instead on imaginative recreations of familial or cultural memories. Over the last 20 years, there has been a flood of exhibitions that revisit Partition, involving collaborations between Indian and Pakistani artists. Zarina's artworks, which revisit the traumatic threshold or lines of Partition (via the visual tropes of maps and architectural floor plans), have been drawn into this frame. Her work was included in the most influential of these Partition-themed exhibitions, *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, curated by Hammad Nasar and academic artist Iftikhar Dadi at Cornell University's Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in 2012.

Following close on the conceptual heels of the 1997 *Mappings: Shared Histories ... A Fragile Self*, curated by Pooja Sood in Delhi, as well as Ranjit Hoskote's 2011 India Pavilion at Venice, *Everyone Agrees: It's About to Explode*, Nasar and Dadi in 2012 gathered a multi-religious group of South Asian artists to debate borderlines. The display, which consist of over 40 artworks (videos, prints, photographs, paintings, sculpture, and installations) by 33 artists, was initiated in 2005. Its press release stated that it aimed to investigate the "historic upheaval of the 1947 Partition of India that spawned the nations of Pakistan and, later, Bangladesh" as well as address "physical and psychological borders, trauma, and the reconfiguration of memory in other partitioned areas" (such as Israel and Palestine; North and South Korea).

In the comprehensive catalogue, Dadi and Nasar argued that since moderns had been silent about the Partition, this show represented an attempt to remedy this omission.²⁸ The premise of the exhibition was best fleshed out by *Bloodlines*—a collaboration between Indian Nalini Malani and Pakistani Dadi himself—which hired craftsmen from both sides of the Indo-Pak border to fashion 16 squares of cloth intricately sewn with red, blue, and gold sequins. Each piece depicted a section of the Radcliffe Line—that twisting "bloodline" which was, through the joint efforts of artists and craftsmen, represented as a shimmering route of crimson *zari*. The message was clear: Blood can be turned into beauty via cross-border teamwork; the successful deployment of craftsmen from both sides of the divide would represent the symbolic triumph over Radcliffe's restrictions.²⁹ Dadi's curatorial essay is suffused with an undercurrent of

²⁸ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 19. I question the validity of this claim: The moderns were oblique, but they addressed Partition more than art historians have usually allowed for. The supposed "groundbreaking" nature of curatorial ventures must be re-evaluated in this context.

²⁹ A 1997 version of *Bloodlines* had figured in Sood's show in New Delhi. In the catalogue for *Lines of Control*, Dadi admits that whilst this art-and-craft collaboration across the border motivated the work, in fact, visa problems necessitated that the 2011 re-fabrication of *Bloodlines* be restricted to professional *embroiderers* in Karachi.



Figure 10.4 Nalini Malani and Iftikhar Dadi, *Bloodlines*, 1997–2007. Sequins and thread on cloth. Refabricated in 2011 by the workshop of Abdul Khaliq, Karachi. Image courtesy of the artists and Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai. Edition 2/3.

hopefulness that exhibitions and artworks which circumvent the “national modern” and its narratives of “transcendence” and “utopia,” are able to productively “map” “the multiple dislocations” of Partition in the “social field” (Figure 10.4).³⁰

Lines of Control spawned many cross-border tributes. There was the renowned Pakistani art historian Salima Hashmi’s offering, *The Night Bitten Dawn*, at Delhi’s Devi Art Foundation in 2016; the city-wide *Memories of Partition* in Manchester, UK, in 2017 (to mark the 70th anniversary of the Partition); and Nada Raza’s show of Zarina’s paperwork, interspersed with younger Bombay-based Shilpa Gupta’s photos and installations, at Dubai’s Ishara Art Foundation in 2018. Raza’s *Altered Inheritances: Home Is a Foreign Place* focuses on the arbitrary anguish generated by national borders. Her contribution was followed by the mega-group display, *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan*, curated by Devika Singh at Cambridge’s Kettle’s Yard gallery in 2019. Zarina’s enigmatic prints of bifurcated maps, snaking lines, and mobile homes, such as those found in the woodcuts *Home Is a Foreign Place* (1999), *Atlas*

³⁰ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 9.

of *My World* (2001), and *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness* (2003), formed the philosophical fulcrum of these Partition-referencing exhibitions. Nasar, Hashmi, Raza, and Singh all included one or another of these series in their enterprises.

These curatorial decisions participate in a larger ideological gesture that feeds into the lineage of Partition studies as a discipline, which often borrows from discussions of the Palestine–Israel conflict. Urvashi Butalia’s edited volume, *Partition: The Long Shadow*, opens with a reference to the “intractable border wall” between Tel Aviv and Ramallah.³¹ Palestinian Edward Said has influenced the ideas of older-generation Subalterns (like Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Ranajit Guha) as well as the relatively younger Bhabha’s formulations of liminality. Thus, Zarina’s resonance with displaced Mona Hatoum, a Lebanese–Palestinian who Said championed, makes her pivotal to South Asian scholarship. It is evident that Said’s essay, “The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum’s Logic of Irreconcilables,” is a reference point for Aamir R. Mufti’s “Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession.” It uses the same tropes (the uncanny, loss, and exile) to discuss the “irreconcilables” of Zarina’s oeuvre, where “the tension between abstraction and representation” highlights the “unfamiliar always lurking in the midst of the familiar.”³² Both essays feature in Sonali Mathur’s edited volume, *The Migrant’s Time*, underlining the importance of the Zarina–Hatoum affiliation to South Asian historiography. By including Zarina in Partition-referencing shows, South Asian curators implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, draw on this theoretical affiliation (for Said-ian rubber-stamping).

“POST-MEMORIES” OF MIDNIGHT

What accounts for the current preoccupation with the Partition in the visual arts? Could it be because this is the way a generation of South Asians cope with the aftermath of a trauma that they never saw firsthand but that still affects them? This is what Ananya Jahanara Kabir argues in her book, *Partition’s Post-amnesias*, drawing on Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” a term coined to describe the experience of the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Kabir claims her own place as a product of “postmemory”: She never witnessed the Partition,

³¹ Urvashi Butalia, “Introduction,” in *Partition: The Long Shadow*, ed. Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Penguin, 2015), vii.

³² Aamir R. Mufti, “Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession,” in *The Migrant’s Time: Rethinking Art History & Diaspora*, ed. Sonali Mathur (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 162.

but it haunts her generation, rupturing their sense of time. Kabir's move is not a novel one. It follows in the footsteps of Partition theorists like Sukeshi Kamra, who argues that Partition scholarship has been limited in its focus on immediate victims by documenting the stories of those who were *there*. Such an approach, says Kamra, dooms scholars to an endless cycle of "nostalgia" and victimhood. Kamra takes a leaf out of Hirsch's formulations to suggest that it is time to acknowledge the "inherited memories" of successive generations, who risk having their "own life-stories displaced, evacuated even, by our ancestors."³³ This is the call that Kabir answers in *Partition's Post-amnesias*.

Hirsch's "postmemory" relates to individuals who have not had the "powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births" but who have had these memories "transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right."³⁴ Hirsch's term deals with a group of people who need to reconstruct this past trauma—often through visual means—as a way of understanding and dealing with how intergenerational memories have colored their lives. Hirsch's own examples of "postmemory" are related to the Holocaust, but she stresses that the concept is productive for other socio-political traumas too. Hirsch's ideas open the door for art to serve a special function. Since Hirsch's postmemory "is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation," the output of artists and cultural practitioners would seem to fit perfectly into this definition.

This concept is what Kabir relies on when she refashions it for a South Asian context, drawing upon "postmemory" to coin the term "post-amnesia," described as "the symptomatic return to the exploration of places lost to the immediate post-1947 and post-1971 generations."³⁵ Kabir sees the recent wave of exhibitions and artworks that eddy around the themes of Partition as evidence of "postmemory" or "post-amnesias" at work in South Asia and its diasporas, where "vernacular histories" braid together "the politics of memory" with the "poetics of place."³⁶

This revisiting of the traumatic thresholds of the Partition via art could also be sparked by the rise of religious nationalism in South Asia.

³³ Sukeshi Kamra, "Engaging Traumatic Histories," in *Partition: The Long Shadow*, ed. Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Penguin, 2015), 159.

³⁴ Marianne Hirsch, "An Interview with Marianne Hirsch," Columbia University Press website, June 2012, <https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/hirsch-generation-postmemory> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

³⁵ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-amnesias; 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited Press, 2013), 26.

³⁶ Kabir, *Partition's Post-amnesias*, 26.

The ascendance of the Hindu right in India, which gained momentum with the destruction of the 16th century Mughal mosque, Babri Masjid, in 1992, as well as the increasingly violent Islamization of Pakistan and Bangladesh, has generated desperation amongst South Asian liberals, fueling a desire to transcend topical traumas by healing one from the past. What better way to mend the breach than to provide opportunities for “creative” collaboration?

Partition-themed exhibitions and contemporary artworks, involving the participation of artists from throughout South Asia, have stepped up to the challenge. In these shows, curators and the art historians who support them suggest that collaboration is possible, that the Partition can indeed become a “productive” space. Following this train of thought, as do many of the curators of these exhibits, one could posit that the nationalist ills that beset India and Pakistan might be conquered through art and literature. It is this perceived leap in logic from aesthetics to activism—when the former is rooted in anti-essentialism, non-linearity, and an eschewal of essences (i.e., when they are based on Bhabha-style “threshold theory”)—that merits further discussion.

Academic departments have also begun to look at the Partition as a creative space via these shows and their seminal artworks. Many of the key figures who have discussed Partition in their talks and writings, such as Ramaswamy, Mufti, and Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, draw heavily from these exhibitions, especially Zarina’s fragile prints and sculptures. Ramaswamy, whose scholarship is generally angled toward cartography, is fascinated by the potential of Zarina’s imaginative mapmaking. Ramaswamy refers to Zarina’s comment on *Atlas of My World IV* (where the map of India and Pakistan is suggestively divided by a thick, tortuous black line that spreads past the frame of the central image). Zarina admitted that perhaps the work “distributed territory incorrectly”; that she did not look at a map because “that line is drawn on my heart.” For Ramaswamy, this deeply affecting attitude to cartography brims with hope that art can make a difference: that it demonstrates how “the affective erupts to leaven the geopolitical imperatives of state and scientific cartography.”³⁷

My contention is that the specter of postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha looms large in the literature surrounding these Partition shows and their theorization—albeit, sometimes *unacknowledged* in the background. This is not an incidental point when considering the contemporary art of

³⁷ Ramaswamy, “Art on the Line,” 321.

Partition. Since many of the claims that these shows and theories make borrow heavily from Bhabha, analyzing the validity of *his* aspirations to “resistance” becomes imperative. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to tracing and unpicking the bond between Bhabha’s inherently Derridean theories and cultural calls to celebrate the healing potential of art in Partition as a productive space. I will show that while Bhabha’s ideas are deeply seductive for some cultural practitioners, they have limited applicability. This conceptual association between art and politics needs to be modified, and my argument is that, as curators and cultural practitioners, we need to be more circumspect about what we expect from Partition-referencing exhibitions.

One can almost see Bhabha’s ghostly hand at work behind Dadi’s benedictory gesture, which asks for a resolute refusal of “all claims to authenticity.”³⁸ Bhabha’s own repudiation of authenticity is famously elaborated in his essay “Interrogating Identity” (1990), which talks about the transitory nature of the self. For Bhabha, like Derrida, identity is not an essence but a construct. It is not authentic or unified. It is never complete; it is fluid, not fixed; it is inherently split, not whole. It is not “homogenous,” not “autonomous” and not “universal.” Bhabha’s essay recommends not addressing the colonial subject in “universalist terms of the liberal-humanist” as, for Bhabha, there is “no such unified notion of history” nor such a “unified concept of man.” He aligns his project with those who question “master narratives” and the “formation of both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of social sovereignty.”³⁹ Instead, Bhabha proposes working in a non-rationalist vein “through image and fantasy on the borders of history and the unconscious.”⁴⁰

In her essay “Art on the Line” (which encompasses many of the artworks in *Lines of Control*), Ramaswamy makes no direct allusion to Bhabha when she speaks about the healing properties of cartography-referencing art. Nevertheless, in her championing of “art on the line” that transgresses rigid institutional boundaries, Bhabha’s logic guides her hand. Ramaswamy suggests that such art contests geopolitical agendas to provide “the potential for human acts of defiance, the ability to resist the colonial lines of division.”⁴¹ As I will demonstrate, Ramaswamy’s attempt

³⁸ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 19.

³⁹ Homi Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 59–61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴¹ Ramaswamy, “Art on the Line,” 314.

to escape the narratives of authority is a move borrowed from Bhabha's distrust of logocentrism, universalism, and "essentialism."⁴² Meanwhile, Kabir's book on the Partition leaves us in no doubt about her Bhabha-ian leanings. Through this, Kabir creates a frame to examine post-Partition, with which she proposes to bypass logocentric narratives of essentialist nationalism. She says that Bhabha has shown that there is "a mutual entanglement of nation and narration." Her frame, therefore, calls for the coexistence of two types of interpretative "impulses": the "narrative" and the "lyric." Whilst narration operates with an idea of "linear causality" (i.e., a "narrative impulse" that moves "forward in time"), the non-narrative "lyric" one "lingers over moments and demands we linger with it."⁴³ It is the latter impulse, which disrupts "nationalist remembering" or "linear temporality," that she draws attention to. Kabir seeks to "map" "cultural trauma" from a "multi-directional perspective" to "break out of the default positions of blame and guilt," which is the direct consequence of an "over-reliance on narrative modes of remembrance."⁴⁴ The move mirrors Bhabha's in *Nation and Narration*, when he recommends using the disjunctive time of "nation-ness" to disrupt linear, essentialist narratives of nationalism. In both cases, there is an inherent promise that this method of reading against the grain escapes narrow nationalism. This section seeks to critique this implicit belief in Bhabha's textual strategies as sites for bypassing South Asian hyper-nationalist traumas (relics of the Partition).

⁴² My contention is that Bhabha's theories, especially well set out in his seminal "Interrogating Identity" and "The Other Question" essays, which posit the fluidity of identity, unraveling the concept of a unified, essentialist self, are motivated by a Derridean (and, to some extent, Lacanian) post-structuralist distrust of essentialism, linearity, and logocentrism. In both these essays, the split nature of selfhood is stressed with direct references to Derrida and/or Lacan; for instance, when Bhabha says that he wants to understand "the *productive* [note Bhabha's italics] ambivalence of the discourse of the colonial Other" as an "articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity." Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, ed. K. M. Newton (London: Palgrave), 96. This splitting of the essentialist, "originary" self via the difference of the other is a move that Bhabha borrows from Derrida, but his cleverness lies in how he applies it to a postcolonial, *racial* otherness. One could say that Bhabha fuses Derridean "différance" (a term coined by Derrida to describe both *difference* and a *deferral* of meaning) with the racialized self of Franz Fanon to generate his notion of postcolonial identity and the "liminal nation." My point is that while Bhabha's theory is extremely clever, there are conceptual pitfalls to using Derridean anti-essentialism for a postcolonial project. It necessitates that Bhabha's notion of selfhood is a *textual* one. (This chapter is not the correct forum to flesh out the complexity of this conceptual link or the great weight of existing philosophical scholarship on the problems with Derridean formulations of "différance" per se, but it was the subject of this author's PhD thesis, Zehra Jumabhoy, "Homi Bhabha's Concept of National Identity and Contemporary Indian Art," (PhD Dissertation, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2017), 276–292.

⁴³ Kabir, *Partition's Post-amnesias*, 17–19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

Just as Hoskote invited Bhabha to speak about Zarina's art at a conference shortly after his inclusion of her prints in Venice's India Pavilion, Devika Singh's *Homelands* catalogue contains yet another interview with the theorist. He also lectured at one of its opening events. Singh's invitation to Bhabha follows a refrain similar to Kabir's, which also treks the same terrain as Dadi, Nasar, and Hoskote. It is tied to Singh's refusal of essentialist nationalism.

In her curatorial essay, Singh speaks about how "many artists from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have, since independence, questioned the notion of authenticity" and connects the latter to "the nation building narratives of their countries or with present day forms of narrowminded, exclusionary nationalisms."⁴⁵ The comment maps almost exactly onto both Kabir and Ramaswamy's disavowals of logocentric trajectories and state-sanctioned, linear narratives in favor of a more poetic stance. Singh's show included Dadi, Shilpa Gupta, and Zarina, artists from the *Lines of Control*, as well as Nikhil Chopra, in whose performances the idea that "home is a foreign place" takes a whimsical turn, disrupting linear history and dismantling "authentic" identity.

Chopra is known for his aloof role-playing; when in character, he never speaks or makes eye contact. The performance *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing II* (2007), which was presented in a warehouse above his Bombay gallery, Chatterjee and Lal, marked a major watershed in his career. It lasted for 72 hours, at the time Chopra's longest performance, and introduced the principal actors in his subsequent adventures. Chopra's multiple personalities prompt us to reassess our assumptions about gender, race, and India's colonial baggage; they include a manly "native," a foppish dandy (with a monocle and cream plus-fours), and a lace-festooned queen (complete with a glittering crown). And, as he plays fast and loose with ideas of a fixed identity, he also befuddles our sense of time and place. The character of the dandy is modelled on his paternal grandfather, Yog Raj Chopra, a "gentleman landscape painter" who "draws" on his family's aristocratic past as Kashmiri landowners. Chopra usually makes an elaborate wall-drawing of a landscape. (The word *chitrakar* in his title translates as "picture-maker.")

For *Homelands*, Chopra donned the persona of a sad-eyed, black-robed figure—his inky matador-style coat edged with crimson. His wall-drawing consisted of a landscape delineated with pink-red lipstick. Something about the red forms recalled Kashmir's mountainous terrain. We know

⁴⁵ Devika Singh, *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, 2019), 12.

that Chopra's family holidays were spent in Kashmir, surrounded by the Himalayas. His *Memory Drawings* are haunted by their presence. As Chopra added the last vermilion touches to the white wall, the audience fell silent. We wondered: was his rouge-hued drawing depicting the current state of Kashmir, a no man's land of violence? Or was it meant as an idyllic, rose-tinted, representation of Chopra's childhood territory? Was this Kashmir at all or just a British landscape of hills and dales? Either way, where did the present end and the past begin? Time hung suspended between the two. This is exactly the kind of non-linearity that Bhabha celebrates. He asks how the movement "back and forth across countries and cultures relates to artworks whose time-lagged materials and techniques place them somewhere between the past and the present?"⁴⁶ The comment was made in reference to "Muslim" diasporic artists included in the Museum of Modern Art's group show, *Without Boundary: 17 Ways of Looking*, in 2006. But it could just as easily apply to Chopra's performances. Presumably, it was the "time-lagged" anti-linear logic—one that escapes nationalist narratives—that guided Singh's inclusion of Chopra.⁴⁷

Partition-themed artworks and exhibitions in line with anti-essentialist and anti-linear theory make much of the generative properties of borders—analyzing how the dividing line reappears in all of them as a double gesture: simultaneously a symbol of continual conflict and creative virtuosity. However, this study seeks to examine whether partition as an artistic and intellectual motif is really a constructive space. How far can it assuage the Partition's pains?

POST-STRUCTURALIST PARTITIONS: ART AND ACTIVISM

Bhabha's ideas about identity and the nation are fleshed out in two books: *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha, "Another Country," in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, Exhibition Catalogue, 2006), 32.

⁴⁷ Chopra's performances would fit neatly into Kabir's definition of the "lyric impulse."

⁴⁸ Bhabha's "DissemiNation" and "Interrogating Identity" are products of the 1990s, usually identified with Bhabha's "British" period as an ally of Stuart Hall. Hall and Bhabha's essays in *The Fact of Blackness: Franz Fanon & Visual Representation* (1996) reinterpreted the Algerian revolutionary through the frame of Derridean deconstruction. This chapter quotes most heavily from the Bhabha of the 1990s, lining up his thoughts with those of the Partition curators and specific theorists because it argues for an *ideological* link between their versions of selfhood and national identity and Bhabha's own non-linear, anti-essentialist take. I am not making claims to a chronological connection, and sometimes not even a conscious affiliation, which is why I say that sometimes Bhabha's ideas have filtered into Partition-referencing curations and theories *despite* themselves. It is their shared belief in a Bhabha-ian model of self, of his examination of the thresholds of national and individual identity as *productive acts*,

In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha describes “the nation” as “a large and liminal image,” saying that a “particular ambivalence” haunts “the idea of the nation” and “the lives of those who live it.”⁴⁹ Vitrally for my investigation, Bhabha promises that his “liminal nation” holds the key to tackling problems like *Hindutva*: “The liminal figure of the *nation-space* would ensure that no political ideologies [my italics] could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves.”⁵⁰

The fact that Bhabha is concerned with “ensuring” that political partisanship is neutralized is suggested by his comment that he focuses on ethnic vulnerability *because* in his “home state” (Bombay), *Hindutva* turned against the Muslim minority as “foreigners” in the 1980s riots.⁵¹ Such remarks might make us think that Bhabha has the solution to India’s Hindu nationalist crisis, as well as the religious fundamentalism that besets Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bhabha’s theories, funneled into art shows, can reconcile the schisms caused by the Partition.

Certainly, Hoskote, curator of India’s pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011, thought so. Hoskote’s exhibition, *Everyone Agrees: It’s About to Explode*, took an unexpected approach to the “idea of India.” Instead of turning India’s “first-ever” Pavilion in Venice into an opportunity for nationalistic gloating, he circumvented “fixed and *a priori*” definitions of “national identity,” including artists from the North East (a border-region with separatist aspirations) and diasporic Zarina. In his concept note, Hoskote said his line-up of artists attempted to “critique the idea of the nation-state as something unitary or territorial.”⁵² A comment that chimes with Bhabha’s view that “national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself” and nor is it “simply as other to what is outside or beyond it.”⁵³ Significantly, Hoskote invited Bhabha in 2013 to Berlin to give a lecture on Zarina’s woodcuts, *Home Is a Foreign Place* (1999). The resulting talk revolved around the idea of the Partition.

Bhabha examined the print *Threshold*, where a thick black line hovers near the bottom of a cream page. Below it floats the Urdu word, *chaukhat*

that I want to unpack. It is also to be noted that my stance assumes that Bhabha’s theories are consistent across his texts.

⁴⁹ Homi Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

⁵⁰ Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *The Location of Culture*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1994), 212.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁵² Ranjit Hoskote as quoted in Margot Cohen, “India Heads to the Venice Biennale,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/scene/2011/01/10/india-heads-to-the-venice-biennale/> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 4.

(threshold). Saying the line represented an “exilic road, the barrier, the frontier ... purely the repeated journey of partition”; Bhabha underscored it served not just a “partition” between what is “inside” and “outside” but also as a symbol of South Asia’s Partition. Bhabha read *Threshold* as a “geo-temporal” configuration that “bridged” the “traumatic” “threshold between one culture and another.”⁵⁴ What does Bhabha mean by a nation that is not “unitary” and can it *successfully* undermine a hyper-nationalist politics of belonging, that is, can it cure the ills of the Partition? If Hoskote’s exhibition seemed to imply that it *might*, Dadi and Nasar’s *Lines of Control* suggested that it could.

For Nasar, the idea of the threshold turns into an unequivocally positive metaphor for Partition as a “productive act” which “generates new lines and maps” and fashions “new identities.”⁵⁵ Instead of quoting Bhabha, though, in Nasar’s catalogue-text, visual theorist Irit Rogoff assumes center stage with an analogous “anti-linear” positioning. Nasar says artists embody an “undisciplined approach” which is able to work on the “memory and trauma” of Partition. It is this “undisciplined energy” that enables artists to “navigate” the “gaps, erasures, and silences” that allow “the triumphalist narrative of a nation to be written.” Since artists can circumnavigate nationalist narratives, it makes them “uniquely placed to navigate new paths for us to live with our partitioned selves.” In fact, Nasar even thinks that Partition exhibitions have more than a “commemorative” or “cathartic effect,” because thanks to the “undisciplined energy of visual artists,” they demonstrate “an innate and indomitable desire for these lines of control to be crossed.”⁵⁶ Nasar’s statements are in sync with Bhabha’s declaration at the Kochi Biennale in 2014 that the work of South Asian artists shows evidence of a productive boundary: “you are on the threshold, on the edge of something which is about to happen.”⁵⁷ This comment, in turn, reverberates with Derrida’s idea that “the enigmatic model of the line” needs to be explored from outside disciplinary boundaries.⁵⁸ For Derrida, it is important to disrupt the repressive strictures of

⁵⁴ Homi Bhabha, “Age of Insecurity,” filmed March 2013, for Former West: Documents, Constellations Prospects conference at House of World Cultures, Berlin, video, <http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/AgeofInsecurity> (accessed on January 1, 2014).

⁵⁵ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁵⁷ Homi Bhabha, “Kochi-Muziris Biennale as an Exploration of Horizons,” filmed January 2015 at Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSjmAn75QNM&app=desktop> (accessed on May 25, 2022).

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 88.

linear, logocentric interpretations and epistemology in order to achieve a more pluralistic, inclusive stance. He says: “this night begins to lighten a little at the moment when linearity” begins to relax “its oppression.”⁵⁹

My point is that Derrida’s disavowal of linearity and its “scientific economy,” as inherently “oppressive” structures that need to be surpassed to unlock the plurality of “the line,” is echoed by Bhabha’s embrace of disrupted, fragmentary national histories.⁶⁰ If Bhabha leans on Derrida, Partition theorists and curators borrow from Bhabha. Hence, these Derrida-derived disavowals of linearity’s repressive agenda find sympathy in Ramaswamy’s discussions on the art of Partition.⁶¹

Ramaswamy argues that it is not the apparatus of official power—formulated through state-sanctioned maps—that really defines the nation. Rather, the unofficial activities of those who imagine it in visual form give it substance. Ramaswamy’s theories have famously revolved around “barefoot cartographers.” These “artful mapmakers” whom she tracks from the 19th century have a “critical and constitutive role to play” in “disseminating” knowledge about the “terrain of the nation” to the citizens. She stresses that it is through their activities “more so arguably than through science” that many Indians become cognizant of “the territory they inhabit as citizen-subjects.”⁶² The power of these mapmakers is analogous to the one she accords visual artists, who also operate outside official, “scientific” nationalism. Ramaswamy does not tend to attribute wholly benign motives to her “barefoot cartographers”; she has explained that their envisioning of Mother India, as a demure but comely matron, is predictably full of the biases to be expected from conservative Hindu males. However, when she discusses the way contemporary artists manipulate the cartographic line, she is much more salutary. Art offers the means to redeem restrictive linear nationalist narratives and to imagine a better realm. This explains the optimistic tone of her appraisal of Anita Dube’s *River/Disease* (1999)—included in *Lines of Control*. Dube’s tiny enamel eyes—like the ones that gaze at us from temple deities—conjure the rivers of the Indus system. It is the self-same system that was split by Radcliffe. Ramaswamy says that Dube managed to achieve what Radcliffe only dreamed of: “resurrecting” his “avowed hope of keeping the Indus

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ We have already seen how they echo Kabir’s “lyric impulse”; Singh’s claims against authenticity and linearity and restrictive nationalism; Hoskote’s strictures against the unified national self; and Nasar’s proposal of the (productive) undisciplined potential of artists.

⁶² Ramaswamy, “Midnight’s Line,” in *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, eds. I. Dadi and H. Nasar (Ithaca, NY: Herbert F. Johnson Museum and Green Cardamom, 2012), 32.

System intact.”⁶³ Just like Bhabha, Ramaswamy is adamant that artists successfully contravene “official” narratives. Ramaswamy contributed to the catalogue of *Lines of Control*, and it is pertinent that Dadi echoes her (and hence Bhabha) when he celebrates the “undisciplined practices” of artists who refuse “to be contained by institutional or disciplinary protocols.”⁶⁴

Since South Asian curators purloin tactics from Bhabha, the *validity* of their arguments is connected to the plausibility of Bhabha’s own. My point is that Bhabha’s suggestion that his ideas have agency outside the world of theory is what guides the choices of many a hopeful South Asian theorist and curator on Partition. Bhabha’s repeated use of the terminology of “agency” and his comments about his “war-like” writing—not to mention his repackaging of the political revolutionary Fanon’s theories—is easy to interpret as providing a means of political healing. They hold out the implied promise that by leaning on his non-linear, anti-essentialist logic, it may be possible to circumvent the strictures of narrow nationalism and productively surpass post-Partition’s sectarian traumas. This is why these thinkers and curators quote him or others, like Rogoff, whose theories are formulated in the wake of Bhabha’s own. Hence, the next section focuses primarily on exploring Bhabha’s ideas, in order to assess how and in what way they are productive in their use of “threshold” tropes.

Bhabha’s theories depend on their disavowal of the official logic of power, that is, of the master narratives of colonial or nationalist discourse, which he “reads” against the grain. Bhabha’s strategy takes from Derrida’s deconstruction of logocentrism. Derrida is a post-structuralist. While structuralism posits binaries—inside/outside, citizen/exile, self/other—Derrida’s device is to destabilize these categories, showing how each depends on its opposite for its definition. So the concept of the self is not possible without that of the other. The threshold separating the two is inherently unstable.

Bhabha, in his turn, takes this insight into postcolonial terrain; he argues that the colonizer always and already implies the colonized, that the self is always haunted by its other. In this way, he reads against the master discourses of power, liberating the hidden tendency behind the official text. By reading at the “edge” of legitimate discourse, Bhabha says he transgresses official narratives.⁶⁵ This is what anticipative South Asian curators pin their masts to. They argue that destabilizing the thresholds of the Radcliffe Line is a means of upending its restrictive logic to establish

⁶³ Ramaswamy, “Art on the Line,” 313–316.

⁶⁴ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 20.

⁶⁵ Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity,” 58.

collaboration between warring factions. The goal is to rupture the p/Partition separating India and Pakistan through art. This sense of expectancy is what makes border-baiting Partition exhibitions exciting. Their curators (e.g., Nasar, Dadi, and Singh) hold out the hope that reading at the “margins” can traverse narrow, monocultural nationalistic affiliations; that we can *disrupt* South Asia’s competing nationalist narratives whilst celebrating its cultural and religious pluralism. This is argued through their choice of artworks: they abound in “borderline” imagery as stand-ins for the geopolitical Line of Partition. Nasar’s *Lines of Control* harbored Pakistani Farida Batool’s lenticular print, *Line of Control* (2004), where a nude man and woman fit snugly together, only a faint, shadowy bifurcation separating their conjoined bodies (Figure 10.5). Up-close, this dark demarcation appears to shift, forming an unstable, moving threshold. The political implications behind this image of two lovers, joined by a



Figure 10.5 Farida Batool, *Line of Control*, 2004. Lenticular print. Edition of 7. Image courtesy of the artist.

vacillating boundary, are underscored by its title, “The Line of Control.” It is the border that separates India from Pakistan in their battle over Kashmir. The lovers’ bodily crevices mimic Kashmir’s hilly terrain, so that the borderline turns into a metaphor for both birth and death; Eros and Thanatos. In Derridean terms, the linear logic of the Line (or essentialist identity) has been breached.

Also included in *Lines of Control* were Zarina’s *Dividing Line* (2001) and Malani’s collaboration with Dadi, *Bloodlines*. In Zarina’s monochromatic print, a spidery black line appears to be gouged out of the cream page, cleaving it. Zarina’s line recalls the delineations on a map, but its blurry contours remind us of a vein seeping black blood. It is tempting to read this as the divisive rupture that tore the subcontinent apart at the same moment that India and Pakistan were born. It is just as tempting to see it as an abstract sign that obfuscates such literal narrative explanations. In other words, it foils scientific logic. Meanwhile, Malani and Dadi’s collaborative offering fabricates a map of South Asia in sequins. This time, the “dividing line” glistens with crimson *zari*, like a trail of wet blood. As Dadi explains, “*Bloodlines* remind us of cartography’s implication in the bloody violence that followed the drawing of the Radcliffe Line.”⁶⁶ But, it is not just bloody; *Bloodlines* is also bewitching. (Ironically, it recalls one of celebrated Indian designer Manish Arora’s fabulous garments.) In true Bhabha-ian mode, the thresholds in Zarina, Batool, and Dadi/Malani’s artworks slide between one thing and its binary opposite; between violence and beauty; desire and revulsion; India and Pakistan. Or put differently, they enact the “ambiguous” borderline which Bhabha extols. In this way, as we read their thresholds vacillating between opposites, between India and Pakistan, we read past the nationalist narratives of either country. These aesthetic thresholds have morphed into symbols of the parting Line itself. This is what Bhabha means when he praises reading as a “spectacular resistance.”⁶⁷ As we read, we enact liberation, and this is what accounts for the curatorial and theoretic belief that reading art and literature at the threshold escapes essentialist nationalism.

But are we right to pin our prospects on the textual productivity of Bhabha’s threshold theory, as running against the linear logic of political power? Properly fleshed out, Bhabha’s threshold theory suggests that the borderline violence of the Partition does not only haunt the nation at its birth—as a necessary component of its formation—it involves a

⁶⁶ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 188.

⁶⁷ Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity,” 61.

continuous Other-ing.⁶⁸ My point is that Bhabha's reading of the nation "at its limits" implies that the very idea of an inclusive nationalism that attempts to heal Hindu-Muslim relations is doomed from the start. Sunil Khilnani's description of Partition's enduring kinship with friction is prescient: "Partition is the moment of the Indian nation's origin through violent rupture with itself. It both defines and constantly suspects India's identity, dividing it."⁶⁹

This double movement, what Khilnani terms "the permanent disturbance of Partition," is its legacy, but it is also inherent in the borderline as a concept. This is why, according to a Bhabha-ian reading, artworks (such as the border-centered constructions of Zarina, Malani, Dadi, and Batool) compel viewers to perform the same oscillation at the threshold that Bhabha enacts when he "writes" the liminal nation. If Partition is a "productive space," it is because its foundational trauma was necessary for the birth of South Asia's nations; for their competing dialogues that justified their formation as separate entities. This is not quite the sense in which hopeful exhibitions that revisit Partition seem to use the term "productive"; on the contrary, being productive in this sense is to acknowledge that re-conciliation is written out of the script from the start.

However, Bhabha appears to promise that his theories equip the post-colonial subject with the "agency" required to resist domination.⁷⁰ After all, Bhabha's rationale for this method was to suggest an alternative to the essentialist nationalism posited by far-right formations like *Hindutva* or state-sanctioned Wahhabism. This is why South Asian curators and theorists use his non-linear strategies as a way of healing Partition's after-effects via art.

Yet Bhabha himself admits that his notion of "agency" is *ultimately* textual. He explains that "the object of linguistic science is always already in an enunciatory process of cultural translation" and that it is in this "hybrid gap, which produces no relief," in which "the colonial subject takes place."⁷¹ In order to combat essentialist nationalist claims of the "purity of cultures," Bhabha proposes that we examine the "subaltern position inscribed in that space of iteration."⁷² This is like "warfare," a sign of "spectacular resistance."⁷³ So it is a war-like reading of subjectivity—as

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 202.

⁷⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

⁷¹ Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity," 83–84.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," in *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 172.

split and against the grain—that, for Bhabha, constitutes “agency.” However, as Benita Parry damningly argues in her now famous critique, Bhabha “promises an instrumental agency, but he only delivers a textual one.”⁷⁴

Bhabha’s lack of application for “revolutionary transformation” beyond the text (whether this is an essay, an artwork, or an exhibition) is exactly what Geeta Kapur and Aijaz Ahmad have also criticized him for; Kapur says Bhabha is about a “play of choice” and not “praxis.”⁷⁵ Importantly for my argument, even the Subaltern theorists who are on the side of Bhabha’s “reading” of the nation (as a form of war-like “writing”) comment on the limits of its applicability. Partha Chatterjee makes an admission about studies of the nation at its limits or borderlines (his own included) when he says that his work “bears the imprint of an unresolved contest” since “to make a claim on behalf of the fragment” is to “produce a discourse that is itself fragmentary.”⁷⁶ Chatterjee’s comment underscores that such “fragmented” postcolonial interpretations are not useful for activism or “agency” outside the space of a text, exhibition, or artwork. My contention is that for postcolonial theorists and curators who borrow insights from post-structuralism, Partition’s threshold-trauma is a “formal” problem.⁷⁷ It does not leave the door open for intervention or even relief from narrow nationalism. As theorists such as Parry and Jonathan Culler remind us, the essentialist self is not a self that acts; it is a mode of examining the disturbance of the threshold as identity forms. It is the curatorial and theoretical reliance on non-linear, anti-essentialist dialogues to implicitly counteract repressive nationalism and to puncture the partition between India and Pakistan through threshold-centered artworks that is misguided.⁷⁸ This method of reading at thresholds should not be mistaken for a solution to “ethnic nationalism.”

⁷⁴ Benita Parry, “Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*,” in *Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture and Theory*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar, Rasheed Araeen, and Sean Cubitt (London: Continuum Publishing, 2002), 248. Parry’s argument is echoed (and often directly quoted) by the other Marxist theorists who condemn Bhabha’s threshold theories for promising more “instrumental” or political “agency” than they deliver: for example, Geeta Kapur, Aijaz Ahmad, Peter Hallward, and (slightly more ham-fistedly) Vivek Chibber in his highly contentious dismissal of all postcolonial theories in *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013). It informs the more measured critiques of Stuart Hall and David Huddart as well.

⁷⁵ Geeta Kapur, “Navigating the Void,” in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2007), 346.

⁷⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments, Colonial State and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 13.

⁷⁷ Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 166.

⁷⁸ The problem is, as Jonathan Culler argues, that these two versions of the self do not map onto each other. One seeks to describe the problematic process of identity *per se* (as

More troubling is that Bhabha's reading of the "threshold" can be applied *ad hoc* to any artwork: all visualizations of dividing lines can be read as alluding to Partition. So Zarina's pain-laden semi-abstract cartographical gestures, oblique and blurry with anguish, can be—via a Bhabha-ian analysis—treated in the same vein as young Pakistani artist Waqas Khan's Sufi-inspired *Wasli* abstractions. This is what happened in the curation of Manchester's *Memories of Partition* project, when Khan's drawing of a bifurcated monochrome circle, *My Small Dancing Particles* (2017), morphed into a cipher for the show's Partition-orientated thematic. In Khan's giant circle, tiny white dots coalesced to form a ghostly halo on a black wall. The circle was disrupted vertically by a thick silver line (Figure 10.6). Khan's background as a miniature-trained artist, interested in the connection between Modernist form and Sufi geometry,

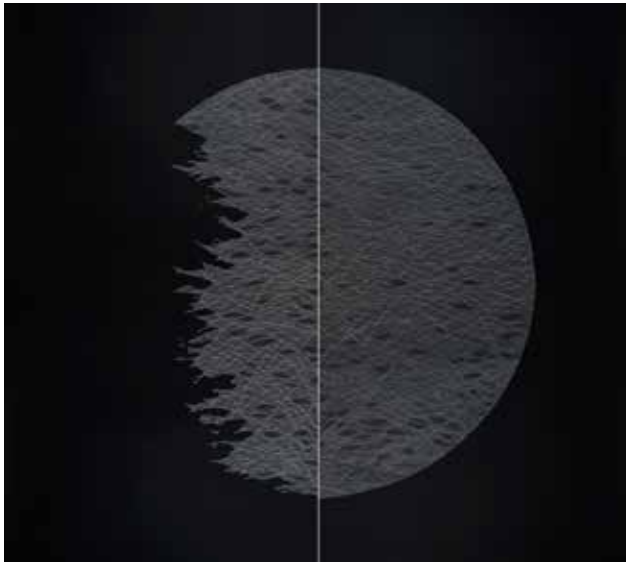


Figure 10.6 Waqas Khan. Detail of *My Small Dancing Particles*, 2017. Archival ink on Wasli paper (diptych). Image courtesy of the artist, Manchester Art Gallery, and Sabrina Amrani Gallery.

a "non-essentialist version of identity"); the other addresses it as a rational agent (as a self who "demands" political equality and action). They are different "levels of theory" which are not in "competition, except that we cannot engage in both at the same time." Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115–118.

inspired the work. Khan's oeuvre veers clear of socio-political commentary. Yet in the context of Manchester's display, his silvery line of division was—through clever juxtapositions with overtly political works (such as Reena Saini Kallat's recreation of the gate at the Wagah Border)—made to evoke Partition. But, surely, such a reading of Kallat and Khan within the same frame does symbolic violence to both? The issue is not that Bhabha conducts such readings himself—just that his threshold formula enables them. His analysis at the borderlines of image, text, and national identity is unable to make a distinction between the two types of artwork and their diametrically opposed inspirations. This is because, true to its post-structuralist underpinnings, Bhabha's threshold theory provides a method for looking. Far from being a palliative cure for trauma, it reads everything through its supposedly productive prism. For Bhabha, "ambivalence" and "tension" at the threshold are productive because they are instructive; that is, they show us how identity is formed precisely within the cracks and fissures of political trauma. It is an inevitable consequence of Bhabha's position that "borderline" moments of national conflict be enshrined as sites of revelation.

Therefore, using "threshold theory" as a means of political healing is strategically flawed from the start. And, the use of artists, like Zarina, whose works operate through trauma, to generate solutions seems peculiarly wrong-headed. Curatorial ventures that make this move could fall in for the same criticism that Stuart Hall dishes out to Bhabha for using the revolutionary Franz Fanon in his formulations. Hall accuses Bhabha of having misunderstood the impulse behind Fanon's writings. The latter "has the political question of how to end alienation inscribed" in his theories because "Fanon cannot, politically, 'live with this ambivalence', since it is the ambivalence that is killing him!"⁷⁹ Proving my point, Bhabha's comment about Fanon's traumatized use of "repetition" sounds like his discussion of Zarina's work.⁸⁰ He romantically insists that Zarina's use of "repetitive" motifs in her delicate art demonstrates that "great works of art like the journeys we make are impossible to forget, because they are difficult to remember."⁸¹ For Bhabha, this "unforgettably" is embodied in the repetitive nature of the works themselves. In *Homes I Made* (1984–1992), tiny aluminum and vermillion-stained terracotta structures have repetitive forms, simultaneously recalling dilapidated houses and

⁷⁹ Stuart Hall, "The After-Life of Frantz Fanon," in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996), 27.

⁸⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, "Day By Day .. with Frantz Fanon," in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996), 192.

⁸¹ Bhabha, "Age of Insecurity."

tombs. Bhabha describes Zarina's serial works as revisiting the moment of Partition; suggesting a trauma that is "repeated, again and again and again" and as "it gets smaller, it lives longer." Hence, what for Zarina is a moment of painful rupture—just as Fanon's "ambivalence" was "pathological"—serves Bhabha as a site for "unforgettable," even cherished, aesthetic contemplation. The language of trauma has a different currency in Bhabha's texts, curatorial ventures and in "Partition experience."⁸² As a product of Partition, Zarina's art highlights the problems of South Asian identity. These problems are not eliminated via art. Zarina's fraught mark-making just gestures to their persistence.

Yet Nasar (in his catalogue for *Lines of Control*) made a self-congratulatory remark about mining the creative and linguistic possibilities of the border: "Partition is how the nation-states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were formed. It was thus, *by definition* [my italics], a productive act."⁸³ For art and theory, the tension of the "limen" is fruitful, fashioning new identities and new artworks for display and sale. The problem is that when partition with a small "p" turns into a cipher for Partition with a big "P," this conversion often ignores their divergent impact on human lives. Cultural historians and curators would be well-advised to pay attention to this distinction. They too often conflate political and linguistic "agency." For instance, Dadi claims that artist Jolene Rickard's contribution to *Lines of Control* "draws attention to the markings of territory and language as profoundly political and social acts."⁸⁴ Thus, if Bhabha mingles textual markings with geopolitical ones and posits both as a means of agency and as signs of "resistance," we see a similar move in such exhibitions and the theorization around them. And this confusion of the textual with the instrumental is where the problem arises. This chapter does not argue that these well-meaning shows are unproductive or that they serve no purpose in the intellectual life of South Asia's liberal intelligentsia. However, it underscores the sad truth that art and theory do not occupy the same frames of reference as nationalist politics. The most "constructive" Partition-referencing shows acknowledge the *limits* of art.

PARTING WAYS

Much has happened since Bhabha first advanced his theories, and they have been embraced by South Asian anticipative curators. Radcliffe's dividing lines may have created a world that is beyond the power of art to redeem.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Dadi and Nasar, *Lines of Control*, 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

The second Lahore Biennale, *Between the Sun and the Moon* (2020)—curated by Sharjah’s Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi with assistance from Lahori Zarmina Rafi—did not try. Including artworks from over 80 artists, Qasimi said she sought to establish “relations between Central Asian, Western Asian and African contexts.” She said nothing about Pakistan’s “relations” with India. Yet India haunted the proceedings. In Bradlaugh Hall, a Raj-era building falling to rack and ruin, Indian Amar Kanwar’s *A Season Outside* (1997) riffed on the results of the Radcliffe Line. Kanwar’s film was shot at the border between India and Pakistan, 50 years after independence. It could be viewed in a suffocating, ramshackle room—recalling a prison cell or refugee detention center? Kanwar’s work featured in Nasar’s *Lines of Control*, but its new abode gave it an altered resonance: The Line cannot be transgressed, South Asians are doomed (as Kanwar reminds us in his voiceover) “to dance to its secret magic.”

Meanwhile, the Nomani brothers’ photographs afforded a deliberately disturbing *déjà vu*. Mohammad Younus Nomani’s monochrome photographs, *An Orange Leaf in a Green Tree* (2018), were shot in Kashmir. His colorless offerings were juxtaposed with his brother’s, Mohammad Yousuf Nomani, color-saturated *Muneeb* (2018) which features a school-boy ensconced in a green haven. The brothers’ images tread each other’s visual footsteps; they mimic each other’s moves (Figure 10.7). The



Figure 10.7 Mohammad Yousuf Nomani. Installation shot of *Muneeb* (2018) at the Lahore Biennale 02, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and the Lahore Biennale Foundation.

Nomanis' say that their photos are meant to dismantle stereotypes about Kashmir and its people: "to project an innocence that knows no guile, no subterfuge." Thanks to India's suspension of Kashmir's "special" status, it is more perilously positioned than ever. As the Nomanis' protagonists unsuspectingly inhabit their verdant vistas, we fear for them. Trapped between India and Pakistan, those two fraternal, *fratricide* doppelgängers, what will their futures hold?

MIDNIGHT'S CONCLUSION

This chapter has tracked how modern and contemporary art and exhibitions have dealt with the subject of Partition. It is usually assumed that the South Asian moderns, that is, those who experienced the Partition, did not visualize it. However, I have argued that the moderns have alluded to Partition, but their visualizations are usually oblique and allegorical. This interpretation takes some of the wind from the sails of contemporary curators who claim that it is up to them to do the job that the moderns eschewed.

While Partition-themed shows—and the theories they have generated—have done much to foster international collaboration between Indians and Pakistanis, it is only by travelling beyond activist aspirations that they can achieve their potential, illuminating how Partition continues to cast its divisive shadow on the subcontinent. This is the most we can expect from Partition as a "productive" space.

Conclusion

Memory as an Organizing Construct for Interdisciplinary Scholarship of the 1947 Partition

Tarun Khanna

In our work on crowdsourcing memories about the Partition, we found that even after seven decades, memories of the event and its aftermath remained strong and evocative of all manner of emotions. Sometimes survivors' views seemed to fly in the face of rationality, at least when construed in purely economic terms. For example, migrants to Pakistan continued to hold less negative views about the Partition and its associated effects than the migrants into India, even when their material circumstances had eroded considerably in recent decades.¹ Their memories, in our analyses, appeared more driven by preexisting ideologies, and reinforced identities, than by measurable changes in their material circumstances.

As I have participated in the scholarly work that led to this volume, the single salient phenomenon that was omnipresent throughout is that of each survivor's struggle with their memory of the Partition. This is true of the individuals we studied, in first-person encounters or through research materials, as well as of the individual scholars who contributed to this project, wrestling with the idea of memory through myriad disciplinary lenses. Accordingly, in this chapter, I return to the idea of memory

¹Tarun Khanna, Karim Lakhani, Shubhangi Bhadada, Ruihan Wang, Michael Menietti, and Tiara Bhattacharya, "Long-Run Memories of Involuntary Migratory Displacement: A Correlational Analysis of the 1947 Partition of British India" (Working Paper 2020).

as a unifying intellectual construct—its formation, recording, and even erasure. Perhaps this brief synthesis will also contribute in a small way to the decades of deep scholarship on memory by historians, psychologists, and other social scientists.

Scholars across a range of disciplines and historical contexts have delved into the topic of memory. Ricoeur and Sacks, for example, have written on the malleability of memory, and Samaddar has explored the relevance of such distortions of memory to politics in the subcontinent.² Halbwachs' foundational text created a framework for understanding collective memory, identity, and behavior.³ Trouillot and Carr have both discussed how power interacts with historical narratives, while Schacter's work contextualizes the remembering of emotionally charged events.⁴ Approaching a similar question from a different disciplinary background, Apfel and Simon have engaged psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers to consider how the distress of communal violence affects the mental health of children.⁵ In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Hirsch grapples with questions of memory formation and psychological trauma to understand how stories of trauma are transmitted through generations.⁶ In coining the term "post-memory," Hirsch argues that memories passed down from survivors can profoundly affect the belief systems of the descendants, even displacing the descendants' own life experiences.⁷ Although her theories are based

² Oliver Sacks, *The River of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017); Paul Ricoeur, "The Historian's Representation," in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2010); Ranabir Samaddar, "The Historiographical Operation: Memory and History," *Economic & Political Weekly* 41, no. 22 (2006): 2236–2240.

³ Hasan Öztürk, Azad Günderci, and Atilla Tekin, "Forced Migration-Related Traumatic Experiences and Collective Memory in Ezidi Asylum-Seekers Coming to Diyarbakir Province from Shingal Region," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 55, no. 1 (2020): 63–70; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also Reinhard Benrbeck, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Ulrike Sommer, "Mapping Memory, Space and Conflict," in *Between Memory Sites and Memory Networks: New Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, eds Reinhard Benrbeck, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Ulrike Sommer (Berlin: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2017).

⁴ Daniel Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996); Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge, January–March 1961* (London: Macmillan, 1962); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁵ Roberta J. Apfel and Simon Bennett, *Minefields in Their Hearts: The Mental Health of Children in War and Communal Violence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁷ Ibid. See also Sukeshi Kamra, "Engaging Traumatic Histories: The 1947 Partition of India in Collective Memory," in *Partition: The Long Shadow*, ed. Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015), 159.

on the experiences of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, Hirsch emphasizes the applicability of this memory theory to other sociopolitical traumas. Indeed, Urvashi Butalia notes that memory is critical to the field of Partition studies, emerging as a motif in the works of Jalal,⁸ Chakrabarty,⁹ and, more recently, Sen,¹⁰ and Kabir.¹¹

As Leaning mentions in her introduction to this volume, the advent of mass violence ruptures standard processes of record and data keeping. In the absence of such sources, memory has played a unique role in shaping our knowledge of the Partition and its legacies. I want to note that, as an aficionado of applied mathematics, I claim no expertise on the permeating effects of memory on our relationships, communities, and institutions. Rather, I am approaching this conversation as an interested academic social scientist, albeit an emotionally “connected” one given my own family experiences with the Partition.

Of course, we all recognize intuitively that memory matters for a variety of what I will refer to as “macro” and “micro” reasons. On the “macro” front, scholars have long grappled with the relationship between memory and history. The way history is recorded shapes memories, and power underlies how and which memories are recorded.¹² In Chapter 1, Leaning reminds us that many archival records themselves—government documents, diaries, and letters—are subject to the predispositions and perceptions of the narrator. The historical “record” itself is an epistemological construct and shaped to buttress or modify the recollections of survivors.

At the “micro” level, memories affect how we go about our daily lives. For example, pleasant memories predispose me to certain activities. Memories affect how we interpret information, and, therefore, how we engage with each other, whether we are able to cooperate in addressing challenges and opportunities. In the context of the Partition, the memories are relevant for not only survivors of the Partition but also their family, friends, and society as a whole; we are all grappling with the

⁸ Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 115–137.

¹⁰ Udit Sen, “The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and History in the Making of Bengali Refugee Identity,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2014): 37–76.

¹¹ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013). See also Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, “Voices of Difference: Partition Memory and Memories of Muslims in Jharkhand, India,” *Critical Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2004): 113–142.

¹² Carr, *What Is History?* Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

ways in which its legacy looms over our social, cultural, and political life in the subcontinent.

Now, let me comment on what the chapters in this volume have to say about the formation, recording, and erasure of memories of the Partition.

FORMATION OF MEMORY

How were memories of the Partition formed and reformed? In Chapter 7, Chakravarti writes about how incomprehension emerged as the dominant motif of the Partition memories. Grappling with terror beyond the realm of belief, there was a degree of “rearranging” required to make sense of what happened. Survivors often did this by locating themselves within the backdrop of family stories, community stories, and regional stories, even though their experiences may not have cohered with the collective narrative.¹³ Sacks suggests that there is often a subconscious pooling of ideas to co-create a group’s “truth.”¹⁴ In the case of the Partition, collective family, community, and regional memories were reproduced and “honed” through the processes of telling and retelling over the years.

There is also the possibility that memories are not so much organically formed as they are imposed. This appears to have been particularly true for minority and disadvantaged groups as they navigated the Partition. The stories of the latter were not recorded by others, perhaps because they were rendered invisible to those with the means to do so, perhaps because they were deemed unworthy of attention, in either case, ensuring that the less visible regressed to the invisible. Of course, the marginalized groups have no access to the production of history to self-redress this neglect. In Chapters 3 and 6, it is incredible to read the stories of “unattached” Bengali women and rural Kammis in Punjab, which have been relatively absent in the historical, political, and academic records so far. Indeed, Bhadada et al. in Chapter 2 discuss how migrants’ social milieus, particularly along the lines of class, often remained the same before and after the subcontinent’s division, reproducing the pre-Partition social structures. Consequently, memories, to a large extent, were rarely influenced by those beyond one’s “circles”, and dominant histories often overrepresented experiences of the elite.

¹³ Halbwachs’ foundational work on collective memory finds that memories are critical to anchoring group identities as they adapt to physical surroundings and form stable relationships with their environment. See Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

¹⁴ Sacks, *The River of Consciousness*.

The malleability of memories poses a challenge in identifying what is “factual” and what is “imaginary.”¹⁵ For example, Sacks has written about the ways that childhood memories particularly incorporate what we were told, what we read, and what we dreamed about.¹⁶ This framework is relevant to the subject of the Partition as most memories collected in the last decade or so have been collected from survivors who were children or young adults at the most during the subcontinent’s division, as is reflected in Chapter 4 by Khanna et al. and Chakravarti’s collections in Chapter 7. Memories are subject to a continuous process of reciprocal remembering and forgetting.¹⁷ In relation to traumatic events such as the Partition, it raises the question: “Does one or can one choose to forget?” Memories can be selective in the face of repeated trauma.¹⁸ Since repeated trauma interrupts reconciliation of one’s circumstances, it often exacerbates communal antagonism.¹⁹ In the case of the Partition, the irresolution of memories discussed by Chakravarti in Chapter 7 continues to obscure the nature of trauma experienced by the survivors. The formation of memory cements certain details, while others drift beyond individual, family, or community recollections of what happened. There is an idea that everyone selectively forgets things; Schacter points out that even as our perception of the past events becomes distorted, it does not impact our belief in those memories.²⁰

RECORDING OF MEMORIES

The recording of memories is a willful act on the part of the society. Think of historians as representing society; Carr argues that contemporary power structures shape how one collects data about the past, and by extension, whose narratives are recorded as fact.²¹ In Chapter 10, Jumabhoy explores the “inherited memories” of the Partition, builds on Hirsch’s work, and demonstrates that the experiences of the Partition were not immediately popular subjects of cultural production for those who survived it. Instead, she draws from Kabir’s work to suggest that the event’s recent resurfacing

¹⁵ Sacks, *The River of Consciousness*. See also Schacter, *Searching for Memory*; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Ricoeur, “The Historian’s Representation.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ricoeur, “The Historian’s Representation.”

¹⁸ Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*.

¹⁹ Ricoeur, “The Historian’s Representation.”

²⁰ Schacter, *Searching for Memory*.

²¹ Carr, *What Is History?*

in exhibitions and artworks indicates “postmemory” of the event, creating a space to process “vernacular histories.”²² On the other hand, popular culture—novels, movies, museums, and art shows—is often simultaneously a product of and reinforcer of dominant memories of an event, in this case, the Partition.²³ Homogenized dominant narratives frequently omit the contradictions contained within individual reminiscences.²⁴

Today, many of the chapters in this volume join a growing body of the Partition scholarship focusing on recording the experiences of disenfranchised communities. Khanna et al. in Chapter 4 of this book describe an innovative method of collecting narratives from across demographics that can access details of migration from those excluded from dominant narratives. But even as their experiences are brought to light, Singh (Chapter 6) and Mehta (Chapter 3) show how such marginalized communities continue to live as second-class citizens, rendered invisible to policy action. Singh argues that the historical scripts of the low-caste, rural landless poor have been “written and rewritten for them.” The silencing of the landless in the dominant Partition narratives amounts to the postcolonial state abdicating its responsibility for rehabilitation.

ERASURE OF MEMORIES

In the aforementioned processes of selective remembering and forgetting, certain narratives are silenced, while others, which offer utility to political actors and social elites, are promoted.²⁵ Khan in Chapter 9 points toward the lack of historical monuments dedicated to the Indian Independence movement in Lahore, despite the city’s centrality in the movement. Lahore’s structures have lost markers of their pre-Partition affiliations with the city’s former Hindu and Sikh occupants. The marginalization of iconic buildings is a way of silencing these communities’ narrations of the Partition, almost wiping them out of Lahore’s history, and seeking to reshape the city’s cultural identity. As places lose their identities and identifiers, the inclusivity and shared goals of the Independence movement are lost through an apathy that is both conscious and unconscious. In the case of Bangladesh, Alam points out in Chapter 5 that the legacy of the Partition is not a large factor in conversations on cultural identity or

²² Kabir, *Partition’s Post-amnesias*, 26.

²³ Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Sen, “The Myths,” 4.

²⁵ Samaddar, “The Historiographical Operation”; Sen, “The Myths.”

regional history since the memories of the 1971 War have largely superseded the Partition memories in popular imagination.

The above discussion re-emphasizes the need and relevance of this book: The Partition continues to cast a long shadow on the Indian subcontinent. Memories of the Partition have shaped not only the society and polity of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, but also how people within and outside the subcontinent think of these countries.²⁶ Personally, my family has intimate knowledge of the Partition; both my parents and their families were involuntary migrants from Lahore to Delhi in 1947. Through participating in this intellectual exercise, I have not only gotten a much deeper understanding of the Partition process, but this edited collection has also sensitized me to the insidious effects of grievance-tinted mental models. Everyone thinks of themselves as a victim, not as an aggressor. How, pray tell, is that conducive to cooperation if one assumes that overarching amounts of forgiveness do not come easily to most?²⁷

I want to end with a final observation about what I have learnt from this project. We tend to flock to those with whom we share something in common, a well-documented tendency often referred to as homophily.²⁸ These commonalities bequeath easily discernible advantages in communication and reinforcement of a validating self-image. But equally, the tendency has many attendant disadvantages, especially resulting in the balkanization of a polity in a way that precludes the creative mixing and matching of ideas for novel insight.²⁹ The under-documentation of the histories of the marginalized so clearly in evidence throughout this volume must have precluded much of the mixing and matching of learnings that could have better informed our collective understanding of an epochal historical event.

Nor are scholars immune to inadvertent intellectual balkanization, reinforced by the academy's advocacy of deep specialization. We operate famously in our own disciplinary silos. It is but a short corollary to

²⁶ It is no surprise that the Partition history has been taken up by a range of fields and approaches, from museologists to journalists to musicians, with the event's legacy spilling into the ways our cities are organized, the movies we watch, and who we consider 'minorities' (Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*).

²⁷ For more on forgiveness, see Ricoeur, "The Historian's Representation," 495.

²⁸ For example, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook's study on homophily demonstrates not only that our social networks tend toward homogeneity but also that our relationships with members of demographically different groups are more likely to dissolve. See Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook, "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 415–444.

²⁹ For an exposition of the combinatorial possibilities of mixing and matching in the context of scientific ideas, see Brian Uzzi, Satyam Mukherjee, Michael Stringer, and Ben Jones, "Atypical Combinations and Scientific Impact," *Science* 342, no. 6157 (2013): 468–472.

state that stepping outside of the disciplinary silos on occasion, if only to stimulate reflection and pause, is likely a worthwhile investment. This book, through a variety of interdisciplinary lenses that are often out of the ordinary, is an attempt in this vein to gain new insights into the cataclysmic event that influenced the Indian subcontinent and perhaps even to derive lessons for contemporary involuntary mass migrations.

The Mittal Institute at Harvard University has made it feasible for us to do that in this particular instance, and for that, we are grateful to the university and its team.

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