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Hearts Divided: A Social Overview of the Partition of Punjab, 1947

Abstract

The subcontinent, as it emerged on the dawn of the twentieth century, was a multifarious community of many nations, social identities and religious proportions. The British had ruled this huge mass for almost a century as the first tenors of division began to raise their head, threatening to uproot their 'idyllic sense of authority'. By now the tussle, later turned into the struggle for independence, had been reduced to two dominant groups, Hindus and the Muslims, aiming at deliverance from imperial clutches with their own motives and maneuvers. With World War II ending on a global horizon, the Indian subcontinent also began to witness turbulent occurrences that would in the coming weeks and months alter the course of history for a very large population of the world. Partition resulted in a massive uprooting of societies on both sides with an approximated 12 to 14.5 million people crossing the newly demarcated boundaries.[1] The majority of these people came from Punjab, Sind, North-Western Frontier Province and Bahawalpur from the Pakistani side, East Punjab, Princely States, Delhi and the United Provinces from the Indian side.[2] Bengal was largely saved from the appalling tragedy mainly because it had a clear division of Muslim and Hindu areas whereas Punjab had a complex mixing of communities that not only took time to be sorted out but also appropriated a horrific toll on the inhabitants.

The War of Independence 1857, landed Punjab's population on a trajectory of rapid polarization; people were becoming passionately and visibly Muslim or Hindu.[3] This was a relatively new phenomenon and its intensity grew as the British rule progressed. 'Divide and Rule' and the 'Two Nation Theory' can be attributed to the increasing schism that began to define the separateness of the communities.[4] In less than a century the split had become an open oozing scar that went through countless political upheavals to ultimately leave behind a blaze of turbulent memories. These memories make up the baggage India and Pakistan carry today in all aspects of unpleasant ties, an animosity and bitterness that has come to be the brand of the South Asian region. The legacy of the flawed implementation of the Partition Plan as 'written in blood' by the departing Raj conspicuously stands out in defining the contours of this acrid relationship. On a political plane very little rational thinking had gone into the making of the plan; the available infrastructure to control violence, ensure peaceful passage of migrants, safe transportation and adequate support of refugees was woefully insufficient and ineffective. In fact the magnitude of the occurrence was clearly

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underestimated and apparently unexpected.[5] This was liable to produce a sense of deprivation, abandonment and trauma causing major psychological issues. Unfortunately, very little of this aspect of the damage has been researched into.

Violence, displacement and migration symbolize the social dimensions of Partition in the context of India. And with it are attached the strains of memory, or a deep and profound sense of nostalgia for the lost homeland, which all displaced people carry.[6] It was an unparalleled incident in the sense that it brought two people of the same land but of different religious identities "to sub-human levels in a terrifying mutual reciprocity."[7] The anguished days of Partition have much to say of this animosity as it continued to grow until the subcontinent erupted and the lava engulfed the surroundings. The present study is an attempt to emphasize the social impacts of Partition on the province of Punjab, not only the largest to be dissected but also the most brutally effected in the course of the division of India, in terms of violence, dislocation, migration and refugee crisis. The social dimensions are irrevocably intertwined with the 'high politics' of Partition and the two overlap any study of the mass of human beings trapped in its deadly clutches.

The most troubling part of Partition, its violence, remains painfully unspeakable by the victims. "Abrupt and sudden dislocation, loss of social rootedness and exposure to social unrest have all been identified as causes of trauma."[8] In the specific case of Partition the widespread violence and the death of half a million people, abduction and sexual assault, arson and looting, trauma of both the mental and physical type became a common phenomenon.[9] The social aspect of Partition or the 'New history' that converges on the stories and experiences of women caught in the throes of the event is a relatively new manifestation and has largely remained in the shadows of nationalist and political discourse in Partition Studies.[10] But the 1947 moment saw more than what happened to women, though they remain the largest and most nasty preys of that Indian summer's vagaries. A whole society and its fabric were collapsing and that collapse did not spare anyone caught in its path. Violence in all its naked forms has become synonymous with Partition including not only the ones killed but also those millions who were uprooted and in a matter of days made refugees.

Partition, though a thing of a considerably distant past, lives on. It cannot be put aside or erased from the memory of South Asia. Maybe if the violence had been less intense, a little more tolerance had been shown on all sides, the authorities had played their part and the leaders had acted sensibly, the mayhem would not have been of the degree that cost the region its peace. But the baggage is there, with its deep sense of rupture, and the differences it entailed. It brought not only the death of countless souls, the migration of millions of hapless people, the abandonment of property and assets, a political divide but in fact a 'division of hearts'.[11] Responsible for arbitrarily drawn boundaries with families separated, it brought untold misery and suffering, pain and trauma to communities, which had so far lived together in some kind of a 'Social Contract'.[12] Perhaps the worst impact was on the living of not only the dead, but also how the experience changed and shaped their lives in the days, years and decades to come.

It is this experience that lives on in family histories and becomes a collective memory of nations born out of such turmoil. In most cases it is painful to the

extent that the victims either pretend inability to remember or simply refuse to talk. Perhaps this is because they had to deal with the most difficult things; loss and sharing, friendship and enmity, grief and joy, painful regret and nostalgia for a lost home, country and friends, and with an equally strong determination and desire to create them afresh.[13]

A mother and a daughter, separated in the violence of Partition, found each other fifty years later through the agency of a news magazine when, in search of stories to mark fifty years of independence for India, a reporter and a photographer went looking for families divided at Partition. A brother and a sister were brought together after fifty years at the border by the same news magazine. A father whose thirteen-years-old daughter was abducted from Pakistan by Hindu men made several trips to India to try to track her down. On one of these, he was arrested on charges of being a spy and jailed. His daughter was never returned.[14]

The intensity of violence left no lesser scars. The earliest beginnings of the turbulence can be traced not very far back, to the start of the Partition process in June 1947 with the setting up of the Partition Council and the formation of the two Boundary Commissions. The appointment of a London based lawyer Sir Cyril Radcliffe[15] as the head of these Commissions and his completion of the task in a mere five weeks (from his arrival on July 8 to the announcement of the Award on August 17) carries the seeds of the turmoil sweeping millions in its wake. His "saving grace is that the majority of those people would remain ignorant of his existence."[16] And it was, probably his good fortune, too. The province of Punjab with more than 35 million people, of thousands of villages, towns and cities, with a unified and integrated system of canals and communication networks[17] was divided arbitrarily in a matter of thirty-eight days. The shock of this sudden change was felt not by the leaders, the authorities, the new administrative units, the law enforcing agencies or the political organizations but by the common people residing in these areas, not knowing where to go and which part of land to call their own. In a frenzy of groping for survival all they could think of was to turn where the multitudes of their community were moving. This brought them in collision with the 'others', also uprooted and dislocated. A province of 16 million Muslims, 15 million Hindus and 5 million Sikhs who despite their religious differences had shared a common cultural past and history,[18] were now up in arms against their former neighbours and life long friends. This in itself was torment enough, for no house or locality was safe anymore. The "widening circle of terror and violence and the calls for counter-attack and revenge that the very flight of the refugees generated" compounded it.[19]

The province faced a double partition. It followed the plan that the departing British had imposed on the country, and then there was the internal division of East and West Punjab. It was the latter that was harder to come to terms with. Houses, fields, orchards, shops, jobs and livelihood were the material aspects of the divide; abduction, rape, arson and killings were the real life-long scars on those who saw and survived the massacres. In a growing atmosphere of mistrust, little attention was given to people's concern for safety and protection. In a naïve understanding of the situation, the leaders urged the people to stay where they were, in the misguided hope that there would be no major exchange of population. But despite all, the journey to the 'Promised Land' was undertaken, not by choice

but sheer compulsion on both sides of the now demarcated borders. Within two or three weeks of the Partition of India, the numbers that the political parties and authorities had to deal with had become "both unthinkable and unmanageable."[20] Until almost the end of August 1947, both Jinnah and Nehru along with many other leaders on both sides, did not foresee, rather opposed the notion that there would be any large scale-transfer of population.[21] Yet by early September several lakh of Punjabi refugees were on the move in both directions and not without 'official co-ordination'.[22] Sir Evan Jenkins, the governor of the Punjab continued to warn the authorities in Dehli throughout July and August but Mountbatten disregarded him, mainly on the advice of Nehru who didn't believe that "the slaughter would occur".[23]

Even today people involved in the Partition violence question what turned the "interconnectedness of entire lifetimes, often generations of shared, interdependent, albeit different lives into feelings of enmity."[24] And many have no answer. The chaos, the lack of control by the authorities and a general fear was all they carried, as they became refugees overnight on their way to an unknown future.[25] In September 1947, Delhi was a particularly horrific month. As 'murder stalked the town', no Muslim householder could go to sleep 'with the confidence that he would wake up alive the next day'.[26] A similar situation awaited the non-Muslims in Lahore. The attacks in all other major cities were forcing people to collect their meager belongings, all that they could carry on foot or trains, and move out of enemy neighbourhoods. The East and West bound caravans were on the rise with each passing day. Even if they managed to reach the prized land, "they were paying the price, with their lives shattered and livelihoods lost."[27] The impact on the survivors was such that they reached their destination with little or no sense of elation at having realized the long cherished dream of independence. As an eyewitness laments, "it was only in the shape of bloodshed that ordinary people saw the shape of independence".[28] This was the melancholy reception that freedom received in India.

Why and how it happened is to be found in the critical miscalculations of the political agencies at work. As mentioned earlier the party leaders did not foresee mass transfer of population, resulting in overlooking any measures to be taken if need arose. Political institutions were largely responsible for the complete rupture of the social fabric. The Radcliffe Award was a hastily and incompetently drawn verdict and also a delayed announcement, days after independence arrived. The weakness of the state to control the rioting, arson, loot and killings pushed millions to mass migration. Some believed that, "there was not so much of a breakdown of law and order, as a suspension of it; brutality was allowed".[29] The British troops that could be effectively utilized in case of trouble were barred from "being employed in communal disturbances, to protect Indian lives, but they could if it was necessary to protect British ones." [30] The unwarranted slackness and ineffectual handling of affairs resulted in the worst communal frenzy ever witnessed in India. There seemed to be a complete breakdown of authority, a certain disinterestedness not uncommon in colonial governments once their interests associated with the land exhaust. It was bound to cause physical and emotional agony to all those who survived the massacre rightly described as a holocaust, mayhem, carnage, genocide and even ethnic cleansing where one

community is bent upon the complete extinction of the other. This was all the more striking, as these communities had co-existed over generations in relative calm and harmony.

Women in all upheavals are the worst targets of the enemy. Molested, abducted, raped and converted, their misery surpasses all others in any catastrophe. The female body in the context of inter-community conflict, as Belen Martin Lucas sees it, "becomes the territory of dispute suffering from the 'softer' indoctrination from diverse social agents on silent obedience, to the extreme violence of abduction, rape, mutilation and/or murder",[31] in case armed conflict erupts. The women of India in 1947 did not escape a similar fate. They suffered sexual assaults by men of the enemy community " in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the 'Other' by dishonouring their women."[32] Stories of women peeled as bananas, paraded naked on streets and marketplaces, made to dance in their religious places, their breasts amputated and genitalia branded and tattooed with triumphal slogans, knifing open their wombs and killing the fetuses, and being raped in the presence of their menfolk recur both in written records and interviews.[33] Such accounts abounded all across Punjab as the new states were taking birth and as previous communities were taking shape as new nations. In all this turmoil women were treated merely as property, territory to be conquered and "objects in male constructions of their own honour".[34] Woman's sexuality was a symbol of their 'manhood'; its desecration a matter of shame to be rightfully avenged.[35]

The killing of women by their own family members to spare them of dishonor was a leading characteristic of the 1947 Partition of Punjab. As the "chief sufferers"[36] of the violence and killings, the women on both sides became victims of brutality and sufferings, not only of the 'other' community but also of the male heads of their own families, sacrificed as "objects of national honor to promote the interests of the newly created nation-states".[37] The Thoa Khalsa episode of March 1947 in Rawalpindi where 90 Sikh women jumped in a well to save their honour,[38] at the behest of their male family members, is one instance that occurred repeatedly in the subsequent months and days in the riot ridden Punjab. It is estimated that 75,000 women were abducted and raped during this time on both sides of the border,[39] and many more also forcibly converted to the religion of the enemy and married to them subsequently. Pippa Virdee terms this behavior seen during Partition as 'power rape', which moved beyond an exchange of violence in the public arenas to engulf private arenas.[40]

Dislocation and up rootedness leading to migration in the summer of 1947 was not the travail of women and children only. Thousands of men too marched on foot or boarded trains every day to reach a carved yet unknown destiny. How many of them did this willingly and of their own accord is a highly debatable question, which the nationalists of both the countries would answer in unison. Yet this independence scarred with so much bloodshed was not all about celebrating. Punjab had become a land marked by scenes of disarray and chaos, corpses and carcasses, as Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* writes, of 'Charred bodies and skeleton valleys, where vultures wait to fill their bellies.' Between March 1947 and May 1947, the official count for deaths in disturbances in the Punjab were 3,410-3,600, and the loss of property, Rs. 15 crores.[41] Trains ran from east to west

and west to east on dangerous journeys of carrying passengers that would be ambushed and attacked on the way, many times by hiding armed mobs, reducing them to 'ghost trains' as they arrived on their destinations, packed with corpses. The dead and dehydrated littered berths and platforms, and those who escaped murder, died of thirst, fatigue and starvation.[42] Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Patiala, Sheikhupura and many other stations were death traps for those passing through them. The saddest part for them all was the fact that the perpetrators of this violence were 'their own people'; people who worked on their fields, were their labour force, friends, neighbours, business partners, schoolmates and associates. All relationships stood blurred in the fury of the new identities, not quite understood yet. It was actually the 'language of feud' as some social scientists prefer to call it, defined as a 'pact of violence', between social groups in such a way that the self and the other "emerges through an exchange of violence," and the victims of this violence are simply "bearers of the status of their group, the means through which the pact of violence continues to be executed."[43]

Migration was inevitable in the circumstances that had been imposed upon India no matter how far and to what extent the politicians and the administrators had taken it into cognizance as a reality. Dislocation was the first milestone in the long and painful journey of the migrants. And it was an analogous story across the borders of Punjab. A numbing grief at the prospect of migrating from the homeland, guilt of leaving behind family and livelihood, and finally aggression at being a helpless spectator at the hands of time marked the three stages of a refugee, as pointed by Stephen Keller.[44] These stages spelled a grievous time for the refugees as they saw the unsettling future looming before them. The longing for the lost homelands would haunt them for their entire lifespans, even if it became, with the passage of time, a distant memory. G.D. Khosla, who was in charge of the Government's Fact Finding Organization formulated to probe into the mass exodus, writes:

Day after day, week after week, non–Muslims from West Pakistan continued to pour across the border in trains, lorries, aeroplanes, bullock carts and on foot, till by the end of December 1947, four million of them had come into India. All of them had left behind their property and valuables, the majority of them had suffered bereavement; their bodies sick and wounded, their souls bruised with the shock of horror, they came to a new home.[45]

In this state of mind and body, all responses are seemingly lost in the crowds and this 'Collective Mind', made "people feel, think and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would."[46] The reaction of the mob is capable of a conduct that individuals are seldom qualified for; hence passions seize masses that can produce acts that are either heroic or barbarous.[47] In the Partition of India the mob was responsible for not only the massacres but for generating a fear and hopelessness that became the hallmark of its violence. And such violence terminated community interaction, so remarkably maintained in centuries beyond.

In the context of India, transfer of population wreaked the biggest havoc on the masses. Even those who were suddenly made to leave everything behind and embark upon an uncertain journey did not foresee it. Many bewailed that

"governments change, even rulers may change but people are never exchanged."[48] It was something they could not understand. Many remained tied to the belief that even if Partition took place, no one would force them to leave their homes. The uncertainty caused by the delay in the announcement of the Boundary Award,[49] further complicated the situation. Throngs of people were on the roads leading in the direction of their new homes, unceremoniously plucked from their settled abodes. In a matter of days they became refugees "herded into camps… The dead lay rotting in the streets because there was no one to collect or bury them. The hospitals were choked with dying and wounded…"[50] even as refugees they found no solace; trains were ambushed and foot caravans were attacked by charged angry mobs. The latter were driven just by hatred of the other community. The irony was that the culprits had also been in one way or the other victims of the same wrath in some other yet similar circumstances. The "cycle of revenge and retribution" blurred the boundaries between the victim and the perpetrator.[51] To be a refugee is a very fluid form of existence. And that form reaches a dangerous level when it is impacted by an intense and in some cases extreme forms of violence. There came a time where these people, to use Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's expression, became "stateless",[52] alien to their own land and foreign to the new. The psychological ramifications of this scenario had a long-term hold on all those who found themselves crossing the border on either side of the Punjab border in the summer of 1947, and of course not without much damage to the family set up that followed their migration. India and Pakistan though on separate trajectories, equally suffered the effect of this fate.

Of all ages, the refugees of the older generation were the worst hit by the on-going trauma. To be made a refugee was certainly hardest "for the old, who can't really imagine creating a new life and whose sense of themselves and whatever their lives might mean had been left behind in the road."[53] They were the ones unable to fathom the situation; for them it was like closing a door to another lifetime without ever hoping to return to it. The people next door were now from another world, not theirs anymore. They had become émigrés at the end of a life's journey forced to embark upon a new, unwanted one, quite "unable to answer the calls of the next generation."[54] And more so, because for many there was "no closure".[55] Rightfully belonging to the "silent twilight",[56] their vilest nightmare had come true; to be buried in a foreign land. Perhaps they would have given anything to avert that fate, but nothing was anymore a matter of choice or control. Of a generation who wanted to tell stories of Partition all the time: it preoccupied their minds, filled their lives, memorialized their past, yet when asked formally to relate their tales, they were strangely reluctant to talk.[57] There existed another segment of the society whose plight was equally distraught; they were the infants and children caught in the throes of Partition. They too were at the mercy of circumstances, unable to comprehend the reality of things, separated from their loved ones and forced to join and live with strangers. With looting and burning all around, what they lost most critically to the perilous times was their childhood. Khalid Hasan, a journalist who migrated from Kashmir to Sialkot in September 1947, writes in his Memoir;

The most disturbing and by far the saddest things that lay scattered everywhere were children's toys. I do not think I have ever seen in the years anything so

desolate, anarchic and disturbing and I have no desire to see anything like it again.[58]

The Refugees posed a double-edged threat. Their plight on arrival and their rehabilitation in the new state were two serious concerns for the governments of India and Pakistan. Everywhere there were scenes of "refugees thronging the province in camps, schools and colleges buildings, military barracks, temples, inns, and every other conceivable place. The whole land was covered with them. They were frenzied, bleeding, and in great destitution."[59] In this context women again came in the limelight. The rescue, return and rehabilitation of women presented the gravest challenge to the new governments. It was a tricky issue, as any male above the age of sixteen was considered free to make a choice of the country he wanted to settle in, whereas a female of whatever age she was, had to be repatriated to her rightful home, irrespective of what she wanted. And in this effort the recovery of women of childbearing age was given top priority.[60] An Inter-Dominion Conference was held on 6 December 1947, to decide the issue of women repatriation and abducted persons. The agreement reached and signed by the two governments led to the 'Recovery of Abducted Persons Ordinance', 1949, which ensured:

1. The establishment of camps for abducted persons;
2. The taking into custody of abducted persons by police officers;
3. The maintenance of discipline in camps;
4. The setting up of tribunals to determine whether a person detained is an abducted person or not;
5. The handing over of abducted person; and
6. The termination of all proceeding for the production of any abducted person pending before a High Court or Magistrate at the commencement of the ordinance and the preventing of courts from questioning the detention of persons abducted.[61]

The process under this treaty continued for another ten years, and during the course of that long period, the reality of the situation had changed for many of the victims and their families. Yet there is hardly any doubt that attempts to restore to the lost families, their loved ones, were made in all earnest on both sides, as highlighted by this report appearing in one of the leading Pakistani newspaper:

An Inter-Dominion Conference was recently held in Lahore to consider the best method for accelerating the recovery of abducted women. The Conference felt that a good deal of selfless work had been done in recovering the abducted but the time had now come to make an all-out effort to achieve the maximum results in the shortest time possible. No civilization can ignore with impunity the sanctity attached to a woman's person. It has already been declared by both the Governments that forcible conversions and marriages will not be recognized. The Governments of the Dominions of India and Pakistan have accordingly expressed their firm resolve to leave no stone unturned in rescuing the abducted persons and restoring them to their homes. Above all, the doubts and suspicions haunting these persons regarding the nature of the reception awaiting them in their homes must be

categorically removed. The public leaders in both the Dominions have declared that these unfortunate victims of communal frenzy must be received with open arms. Every effort should, therefore, be made to erase their unfortunate experiences and give them happy homes. But more than that it will close a tragic chapter in the history of the recent disturbances.[62]

The subject of how these women would be taken back by their families was another question mark on the recovery efforts, not only on the kinfolks but the entire society. The issue of 'honour' was prevalent throughout the Punjabi society, deeply woven in its cultural fabric, and still is, even to the present days.[63] It was and continues to be a conservative society wedded to norms of chastity in the strictest sense of the word. In many cases women refused to go back fearing the treatment that awaited them. The issue of purity was foremost in their minds; the absence of it tormented them to the extent that they preferred to continue living with their new identity. Often families refused to take them back; for them these women had been soiled. These were the victims of 'double dislocation',[64] as Urvashi Butalia renders it. Forced conversion, abortion, re-marriage were all related issues that these abductees faced often with no choice at their disposal. Sometimes these women resisted recovery. Though seemingly strange, it does emphasis the quandary of these women who had not only visibly reconciled to their new situation but also wanted to make others believe in their contentment. The underlying trauma and loss was only theirs to bear and live with. In the entire development one thing was undeniable; women were not free agents with the liberty to decide if they wanted to leave or stay in any environment right from the point of abduction to recovery.[65] The bitter truth was, that they were offspring of history, yet with no history.[66] Through the efforts of both the governments and many social workers a large number of women were repatriated or settled in special homes, yet the staggering figure of those who never saw their families again, continues to haunt the two nations as a dark chapter of Indian independence.

Social implications of any event are intertwined with the belief patterns of a people. The Partition of India was a partition of faiths too; in fact it was based on this principle. The task of the boundary makers in 1947 was accentuated by the overwhelming impact of religious connotations of the subcontinent. In drawing boundaries majority community was given the right to choose the country to accede to. Hence it was religion that became the basis of Partition. But nowhere does religious contiguity follow geographical patterns.[67] In the case of India too it was a complex issue as communities had to be divided on the basis of the land they inhabited. This became the root of the problem. Boundaries are simple lines that need to observe certain principles, religion being just one. Here an entire subcontinent was being split between followers of different beliefs. The demographic layout of Punjab was such that apart from 16 million Muslims and 15 million Hindus, 5 million Sikhs also resided in its expanse and to make matters worse all these nations were inextricably mixed into one another. If the line of Partition "went through Muslim and non-Muslim majority districts, the Sikhs would be split down the middle".[68] It was rumoured that there was a "Sikh Plan to eliminate Muslim population from East Punjab to create a Sikh state in Punjab after Partition."[69] But once it was clear that no such plan was feasible or acceptable to the authorities, they cast their lot with India though at the same time

demanding their religious shrines, most of which were falling inside Pakistan (the most prominent being Nankana Sahib), to be handed over to them. Similar claims also came from the Muslim and Hindu sides. Such entitlements, however, were impossible to address to by the Boundary Commission. Amid all this confusion the Radcliffe line eventually went through villages, towns, and shrines, not actually following rivers, deserts and mountains. This was neither a natural nor a geographical demarcation. Demography and political constraints won the day; religious identities became the basis and India was partitioned.

With this kind of division taking place, radicalism and hatred, mob attacks and killings were inevitable. The forcible conversions displayed the level of "religious fanaticism to which the communities had sunk."[70] If women were converted, men were 'inspected' to see if they were Muslims or not. Whenever religion becomes a matter of convenience and not conviction, such unpleasant incidents are very likely to happen. The 'untamed violence',[71] to borrow Gyanendra Pandey's words, was the madness of the 'other Punjab', as expounded by both sides involved in the massacres. It compounded the chaos. Furthermore, the "spontaneous quality of riot behavior"[72] and the planned attacks on trains and foot caravans added to the grief and despair of the refugees. The fear of 'reprisal killings' by the opposite community, fired by the zeal of routing the 'other', was at its peak as these columns moved across the borders. The violence against minorities in Punjab "involved heavy participation of army troops, veterans, paramilitary organizations and the local police."[73] The agencies responsible for the maintenance of law and order were not always in control and the refugee camps to shelter the destitute migrants did not always turn out to be 'safe havens'. This harsh truth was yet another aspect of the social and moral turpitude of the times. Policemen were found to be raping the girls they were given custody of.[74] It was a time when the subject, object and instrument of violence became interwoven in a single unit of conflicting identity, mainly because of the complete breakdown of authority.[75]

It was believed by many that the migration was a transitory affair, soon to be reverted. Pippa Virdee interviewed a migrant from Sialkot, illustrating the hope that uprooting would be temporary;

People just tied locks to their houses in our village. We told our neighbours that we would be back soon. Some people who were our sympathisers said not to go. People lost a lot, most left everything there. We had one horse and brought along as much as we could. We didn't know that we would not return.[76]

The communal violence was anticipated to quench as swiftly as it had flared up, echoing an optimism that "two weeks or so of unrest and then business as usual".[77] However, very soon the illusion broke and the only two options left with the victims was to "migrate or die."[78] The agencies at work, which had precisely been formed to ensure safety of the migrants, fizzled out, without much sweat and work to their credit. The Punjab Boundary Force, conceived as an after thought, which comprised of Indian and Pakistani troops under a British commander, was seen to take sides and was communally divided.[79] It wound sooner than expected, much before it could be further charged and criticized for its impotency. Similarly the Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) also did not secure the rehabilitation of the refugees as desired and anticipated. The refugees in the early years sustained a

hope of visiting their family and homes and some managed too, but to be faced with permit regularities. The Influx from Pakistan (Control) Ordinance[80] was imposed first by India in July 1948 and then by Pakistan, the Pakistan (Control of Entry) Ordinance in October 1948.[81] For many this was the 'real Partition'.[82] The divided families of the Indo-Pak subcontinent stay divided not because there was a Partition but because of the way the boundaries "were constructed as an outcome of the long, drawn-out process of Partition".[83]

The rehabilitation of the refugees was a real problem that faced almost 15 million people on both sides. Once again it carried a dual characteristic. To re-settle in a new land was a phenomenon they overcame with the passage of time, though it did take years to secure acceptance; the emotional rehabilitation in most cases never came or if it did, with a very heavy price. It was this "abrupt and sudden dislocation, loss of social rootedness and exposure to social unrest" that has "been identified as causes of trauma", making "people more susceptible to developing physical and mental health problems."[84] In the process many lost their lives and many their minds. Depression, paranoia, guilt, acute feelings of sadness, betrayals, persistent flashbacks, recurring nightmares and a dire sense of harm and loss multiplied the agony of the victims. These and many other symptoms of emotional trauma persisted in the lives of the refugees irrespective of religion, origins and the environs that they were forced to migrate to. The sense of a homeland left behind, does stay as a powerful memory of loss, handed down from one generation to the next.[85] In many cases despite the worst of turbulent times it becomes a source of sustenance helping to gently ward off that excruciating and irredeemable sense of loss and pain. In the end it is the resilience of the human soul and no organizational or sanctioned assistance that helps overcome the nostalgia for a lost homeland. The scars, nevertheless, endure and continue to remind many across the barbed wires of the subcontinent, how a shared culture and a single society erupted in a unique surge of historical violence.

Finally, the Partition of India was a "shared experience of violation."[86] The same people, divided into two religious communities were reducing each other to "sub-human levels in a terrifying mutual reciprocity."[87] The genocidal massacres were planned and organized but their special characteristic was not ordered by the state.[88] It was a human calamity invented by people who had lived in accord for centuries but once Partition was announced, violence, brutal killings, migration and forced evacuation replaced the 'paper-thin' harmony. Communalism defied all norms of civility and the brute side of human nature overcame a co-existence that had marked relative calm in the subcontinent. It soon went beyond the control of the governments of India and Pakistan, with the number of refugees crossing the West Punjab border rising between 100,000 and 15,000 daily.[89] Terms like 'retaliatory violence', 'vengeful retaliation', 'summer madness' and 'retributive violence' have been used to describe the explosion of communal violence, that swelled the tide of refugees on both side of the province.[90] Harrowing tales from one side of the province ignited sympathy for their co-religionists leading to further and more gruesome disturbances.[91] Amid all this confusion and chaos the price of human dignity and life fell to an abysmal low. The ghastly events that marked the incidence of Partition have invoked mainly how Partition is socially

remembered and carried on as an obdurate baggage, of which individual and collective memory is a testimony.

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[15] Sir Cyril Radcliffe was a strange choice for this very sensitive job. A person who had never been to India before was given the shortest possible time to demarcate a subcontinent…virtually thirty-eight days from his arrival on July 8 to August 15, 1947, was hardly expected to do justice to the contract. A land of 400 million people of varying religious, social and cultural proportions, with absolutely divergent needs and demands could not even be understood in this small timeframe.

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