

Batwara:
Partition and the City of Amritsar

by

Pitamber P. Sahni

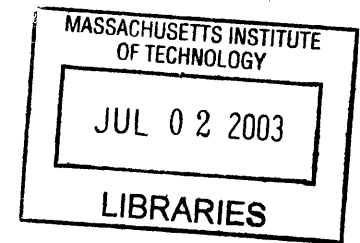
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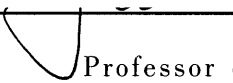
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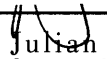
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ABSTRACT

The Partition of British India into the two dominions of India and Pakistan on August 15th 1947 left in its wake the largest human migration of the twentieth century with the transfer of twelve million people across two newly formed borders. The boundary line, demarcating Indian and Pakistani territory, was created 17 miles to the west of Amritsar awarding the city to India. Amritsar, a flourishing commercial and cultural center, thus, became a border city overnight on the Indian side. Mass religious emigration ensued clearing the city's Muslim population of over 184,000 people coupled with the immigration of a huge Hindu-Sikh population from Pakistan over a period of a few months.

This thesis explores how Partition affected the city of Amritsar. Its metamorphosis from a viable commercial and cultural center to a city that shows a decline in population post-partition for the first time since its inception is partially explained by its proximity to the International Border, its vocational and demographic shifts and its official label as a transit city. The thesis documents communal migration, both inter- and intra-city, from March 1947 to the mid 1950s with the arrival of Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Punjab. This thesis then cross-references Amritsar with Lahore, a border city in Pakistan to explore how and why Partition affected that city differently. Amritsar is finally then seen through the lens of rising Sikh nationalism in the 1980s and its effect on the urban fabric. This thesis concludes with general inferences that can be drawn from the experiences in Amritsar as a case study of a city transformed by an unplanned and immediate forced resettlement.

A b s t r a c t

Thesis Supervisor: Julian Beinart
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To my grandparents
Who made the move and survived.

And to the countless others who couldn't.

D e d i c a t i o n

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ONE

Introduction

The Partition of British India, also known as the *Batwara* or “divide” was a turning point in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The “greatest human migration in history”¹ saw the movement of 12 million people across the newly formed border between India and Pakistan and an estimated loss of one to two million lives in the process. This movement was sited on the West by the division of the state of Punjab – west Punjab being apportioned to Pakistan and the East awarded to India. In addition, Partition divided the state of Bengal, with the West granted to India and the East to Pakistan² (Fig. 1).

Politicians on both sides intended the creation of two independent nations to be a glorious moment in time. However, Partition, designed to prevent communal upheaval³, quickly led to the severest of bloody and contested territorial clashes between the Hindu/Sikh and Muslim communities on both sides of the border.

Punjab as a state was particularly problematic in any discussion where Partition and the creation of Pakistan were suggested. The state in its entirety could not be handed over to India or Pakistan due to the significant inter-mixing of the communities – not only within the cities, but in the entire central tract of the state. The added factor of a significant Sikh population, a third major religious group, made the division all the more complex.

The city of Amritsar epitomizes one such communally contested space within this central tract. Prior to Partition in 1947 into the two dominions of India and Pakistan, Amritsar was a thriving metropolis with a fine-grained religious fabric spread throughout



Fig. 1. Map of Post-Partition India showing India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

Introduction

the city; Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs inhabited the city living adjacent to each other, often in the same localities. According to the 1941 Census of India, Amritsar was dominated by three major religious groups – Muslims accounted for close to 48 percent of the total, Hindus made up approximately 35 percent, while the Sikhs consisted of 16 percent of the population of the city.

Prior to 1947, Amritsar was a major commercial and cultural center with a cosmopolitan population. Its location along the Grand Trunk Road, the principal trading route that ran from Kabul in Afghanistan right up to Calcutta in Bengal ensured its commercial viability within the state of Punjab. Amritsar was one of the three major cities in the state based on the size of its population – the other two being Lahore and Delhi.⁴

In August 1947, with the creation of the International Boundary 17 miles to its west (Fig. 2), Amritsar witnessed a massive transformation of its population. The city changed drastically from a community of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs prior to Partition to a seemingly homogenous society of Hindus and Sikhs through the exodus of the entire Muslim community and the arrival of Hindu and Sikh refugees post-Partition. This changed the population into a coarse-grained religious and social demographic that spread itself to inhabit every corner of Amritsar.

THESIS QUESTION

This thesis poses the following question:
How did Partition affect the city of Amritsar?

Prior to Partition, Amritsar lay in the central tract of Punjab. I hypothesize that the transformation of Amritsar into a border city

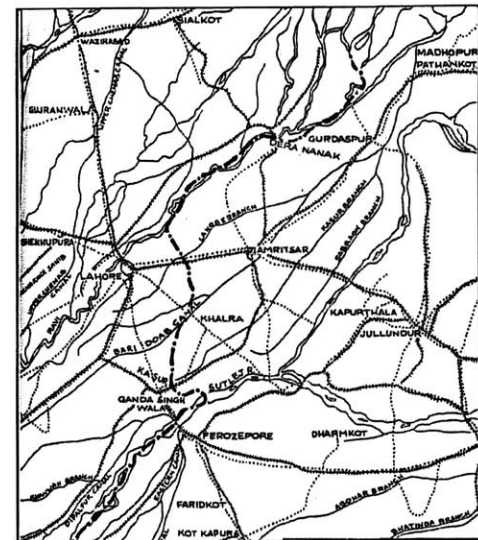


Fig. 2. Map of Punjab showing the new boundary line and the location of Amritsar

as a repercussion of its proximity to the dividing line between the two dominions led to the immediate decline of the city due to a number of reasons. I further infer that this was a common feature throughout the border district in cities in both countries – India and Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Few texts exist which document the growth of the city of Amritsar. Anand Gauba's work is the one of the principal texts which traces the growth of the city and has been referenced for its urban history from 1577 to 1947. A number of texts document the general conditions in East and West Punjab in the run-up to Partition and the years immediately following and have been quoted throughout this thesis – Satya Rai and Dr. Kirpal Singh are the most notable authors who have contributed significantly to documenting post-Partition Punjab. There is, however, little documentation of the growth of Amritsar in particular through the early days of Post-Partition India. Scarce government documents, refugee stories, and newspaper articles from 1947 are some of the main sources of information used to make sense of this city under siege.

To gain insight into the city and study the population shifts the city underwent, three people were personally interviewed in Amritsar in January 2003. Out of these, two were refugees and one was a witness to the shifting communal tides within the city. They are all present residents of Amritsar.

Edna Bhandari: A resident of the city since 1941, Edna Bhandari arrived in India from England in 1936. She first came to Lahore where she lived for five years before moving to Amritsar with her

husband, an Indian lawyer whose family was part of the elite in Amritsar. She witnessed the change in the city through the events of 1947 and beyond. She is currently 90 years of age.

Kasturi Lal Sharma: A refugee at the age of twelve, Kasturi Lal Sharma arrived in Amritsar with his parents and siblings from rural Sialkot in Pakistan a few days after Partition was declared. He and his family were one of the thousands of refugee families who settled in Amritsar in the first wave of arrival. They moved to the walled city and settled down in one of the evacuee properties left behind by the fleeing Muslim families. He still lives at the same property with his extended family.

Basant Lal: Basant Lal moved to Amritsar with his parents in 1956 from Peshawar, Pakistan as a ten year old boy. He and his family represent the second wave of refugees that populated Amritsar in the 1950s rather than immediately after the 1947 Partition. They settled down in a new suburb of the city, outside the walls along the Grand Trunk Road. The creation of these new localities in the outskirts of the city by *biradiris* (kinship groups), who made the move to India collectively, is typified in his story. He is currently a doctor living and practicing in the same locality as where he first moved when he came to Amritsar.

It should be noted here that the refugees interviewed had made the move to Amritsar when they were very young. Yet, these interviews show a remarkable clarity of events – an indication that possibly, their memories are not entirely their own. Perhaps their memories have been shaped partly by what they experienced, but also by stories recounted to them by their elders. Thus, the memories recounted are dual voices speaking – their own generation’s as well as their parents’. Therefore there is a certain lack of objectivity in the process - a feature however, that, I argue is to be expected when

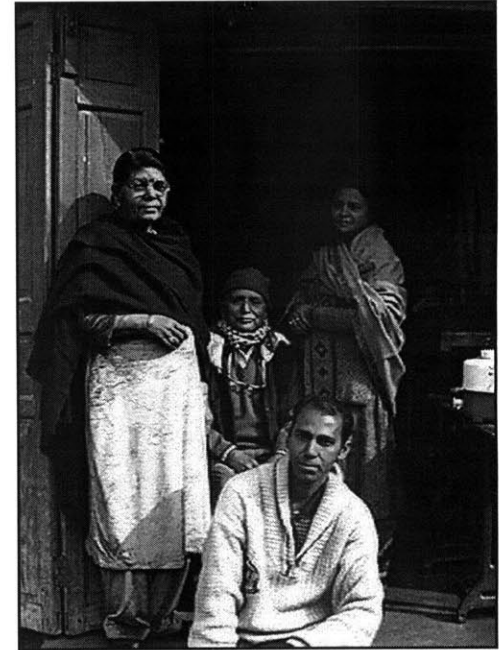


Fig. 3. Kasturi Lal Sharma (seated, center) surrounded by his family at his home in Moti Ram Kutra, Amritsar.

talking of severely traumatic events.

These three stories characterize the myriad faces that represent the city. They have little in common save for the fact that they witnessed the events of 1947 either in India or in Pakistan and that they all made Amritsar their home as a direct or indirect result of Partition.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter two of the thesis, “Beginnings”, describes the urban history of Amritsar from its inception in 1577 to March of 1947 – the beginning of major communal riots in the city. It traces the city’s urban growth through the rule of the Sikh gurus and Misl, the Mughals, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and finally the British. In addition, this chapter documents the political development in the state of Punjab which caused and subsequently affected growing Hindu/Sikh-Muslim tension and the rising demand for a separate Muslim state.

Chapter three, “Exodus”, details the evacuation of the entire Muslim population of Amritsar between March to August of 1947 after the certainty of the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan is realized. Communal shifts of population in the city are documented through a series of maps depicting inhabitation zones and clusters of the Muslim community within the city.

Chapter four, “Arrival”, maps the Hindu and Sikh refugee communities which migrated from West Punjab into India. Through the lens of refugee accounts and newspaper articles, the location of the Hindu and Sikh communities within the city is discussed along with the governmental infrastructure that supported the rebuilding of Amritsar. The East Punjab Government’s policies of Urban Renewal

in the walled city are highlighted through a case study of the neighborhood of Moti Ram Katra to emphasize the role of the state in shaping the rehabilitation of the city. Finally, a shifting religious demographic and its repercussions on decline of industry within the city are analyzed.

The principal reasons for Amritsar's decline as a city are elaborated upon in the penultimate chapter, "Explication". Upon further examination of the issue one finds that the decline of Amritsar was peculiar to Amritsar itself; that Lahore, located just 26 miles away on the Pakistani side, experienced a different fate. While Amritsar suffered a period of decline, Lahore saw an upsurge in population in the immediate years following Partition. The reasons for this disparity are analyzed and conclusions are made to explain this inconsistency. Finally, Amritsar is seen through the lens of rising Sikh nationalism in the 1980s and the identity of the city reverts back to its primary identity as the holiest site of the Sikhs - its germination point in the late 16th century. Through this time, the issues of memory in the city and the lack of a physical memorialization of Partition are raised and its motives questioned.

"Reflection", the final chapter, brings to light general conclusions which can be drawn from the experiences of Amritsar that can be applied to cities that undergo sudden and severe transformation by an unplanned and immediate forced resettlement.

NOTES

¹ Corruccini, Robert S. and Kaul, Samvit S., *Halla: Demographic Consequences of the Partition of the Punjab, 1947*, University Press of America. 1990, pl.

² East Pakistan gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a Civil War. It is presently known as Bangladesh.

³ Corruccini, Robert S. and Kaul, Samvit S., *Halla: Demographic Consequences of the Partition of the Punjab, 1947*, University Press of America. 1990, pl.

⁴ As of the Census of 1941, Delhi had the largest population of close to 918,000 people; Lahore was second with 671,659 inhabitants while Amritsar ranked third in the state of Punjab with 376,824 residents. Out of these three cities, Amritsar was the only one which showed a decline in population in the Census of 1951.

TWO

Beginnings

Amritsar: The Pool of Nectar

“I’m Mrs. Edna Bhandari wife of Mr. Ramesh Chandra Bhandari, Barrister at Law. I’m 90 years old and I’ve been a resident of Amritsar for the last 64 years... not of Amritsar... Lahore... let me say India. I came out to India in 1936. First I was living in Lahore and then I moved to Amritsar probably in 1940-1941 – something like that. So I was here all through the days of the Partition...all through the riots... all through the refugees...”

- Interview respondent Edna Bhandari, Bhandari House, Court Road, Amritsar, January 19, 2003.

The Partition of India and Pakistan and the resultant division of the states of Punjab and Bengal left its mark on the hearts and minds of millions of people forced to abandon their homes for the sake of a new homeland that was officially appropriated to be theirs based solely on their religious beliefs.

What is central to the story in Punjab is the fact that the process of Independence from close to a century under British rule is not remembered as joyous an occasion as one would expect. The word ‘independence’ is seldom used to describe that traumatic period

in history for Punjab. ‘Partition’ and the painful memories of its events are what are ingrained in the hearts and memories of people. The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance¹ explains to some extent the recounting of memories of refugees who made the move across the border at the time. The situation refugees were forced to bear; to have to choose between two incompatible beliefs and/or actions is not uncommon. Over a brief period in time a neighbor from a different religious entity had turned into the enemy. Over a brief period of time what was for centuries your home was no longer officially yours. Over a brief period of time your country was no longer your own.

Edna Bhandari’s confusion concerning Amritsar, Lahore and India with what *is* India and what is *not* is proof of the fact., The two cities of Lahore and Amritsar, both within Punjab and separated by a mere 26 miles, were once part of the same state but came to represent two different countries and two different peoples.

As a result of Partition Amritsar came to be sited just 17 miles from a newly created border between the two dominions of India and Pakistan. The city underwent a dramatic metamorphosis as a direct result of the divide. While these changes primarily took place from March 1947 onward, the history of the city and the politics of the region left certain warnings as to what to expect in the years to come. The setting of the piece, so to speak, created the story.

THE SETTING

The city of Amritsar – literally meaning ‘pool of nectar’ has a rich and varied history. From its inception in the late 16th century to the present day, the city has undergone a great deal of change.

Established by the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das in 1577, the specific site of Amritsar (Fig. 4) was chosen for a number of

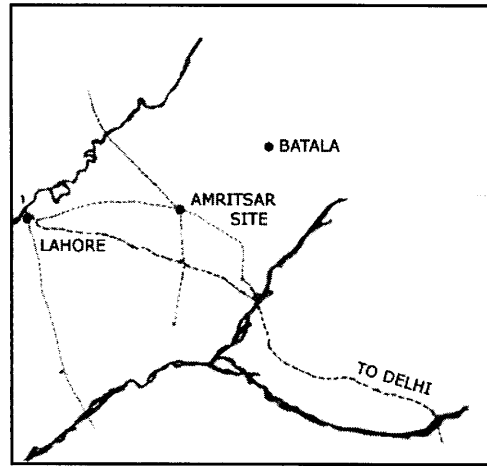


Fig. 4. The site for the city of Amritsar

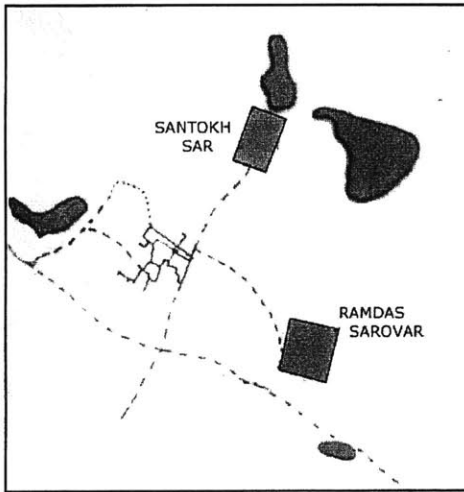


Fig. 5. The Ramdas Sarovar and Santokh Sar water tanks constructed by Guru Ramdas at the site

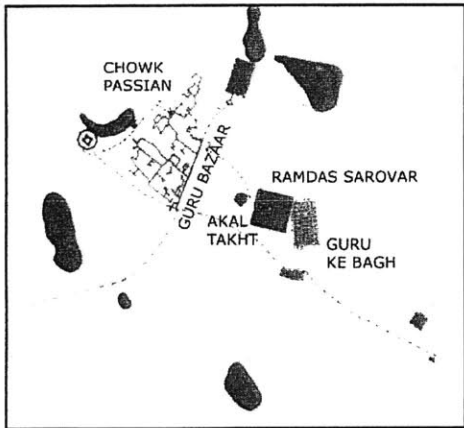


Fig. 6. Ramdaspur Development upto 1628

reasons. Traditionally, cities have located themselves alongside water resources and Amritsar was no exception. Situated between the rivers Ravi and Beas on either side along a principal trade route, the site was approximately 26 miles east of the city of Lahore.

The Sikh gurus laid the foundation of what would come to be known as the Golden Temple as early as 1573 with the construction of two water tanks by Guru Ramdas (Fig. 5). After his death, his son Guru Arjan Dev completed the construction of the tanks and concerned himself with the expansion of the town. He built his residence which came to be known as *Guru Ka Mahal* alongside this tank. At that time, the city was known as Ramdaspur (named after Guru Ramdas) and soon attracted a small settlement to locate itself right next to *Guru Ka Mahal*. The plan for the *Hari Mandir* (later to be known as the Golden Temple) was conceived by Guru Arjan Dev which he decided would be built in the middle of the tank.

Located on the principal trade route and now the home of the Sikh Guru, Ramdaspur (Amritsar) came to attract traders from the areas surrounding Punjab. The traders were organized by Guru Arjan Dev into locating themselves on particular streets according to their caste and trade.²

The settlement of these trade families in the immediate vicinity of the Hari Mandir led to the natural formation of a trade street which came to be known as *Guru Ka Bazaar*³ (Fig. 6). This street is still in existence in Amritsar and is one of the principal markets of the walled city even today.

Amritsar under the Sikh Misls

The Mughals had by now been in India from the early 1500s. The third emperor Akbar – known for his religious tolerance among Hindus and Muslims – had great respect and shared a cordial

relationship with Guru Arjan Dev. Upon Akbar's death and his son Jahangir's ascension to the throne, matters changed. Growing animosity between the Sikhs and the Mughals led Jahangir to sentence Guru Arjan Dev to death.

Growing Sikh-Mughal tension due to Guru Arjan Dev's killing led to the militarization of the Sikhs by Guru Arjan Dev's son, the sixth Guru – Guru Hargobind. He built a small fortress to the west of the city and created a small army. The guru also formed the *Akal Takht*⁴ which was the political seat of the Sikhs formed largely due to the introduction of the Mughals into the city of Ramdaspur. He, however, had to leave Amritsar in 1628 due to the might of the ruling Mughals and was never to return.

The next hundred years saw a period of anarchy in the city. After the death of the last Sikh guru in 1708, the city came under siege of the Mughals and the invading Afghans. The Sikhs organized their military forces into an army known as the *Dal Khalsa*. This army had 12 branches or *misls*. Each *misl* was considered equal to the other. The Sikh *Misls* established their independent sovereignty in Punjab and retained joint control over the city of Amritsar. The Sardars or heads of the *Misls* gained influence and occupied the areas surrounding the temple. They established their estates or *katras* and fortified them with walls. Each *katra* became the territory of that particular *misl*. The *katras* were, however, not interconnected. They all radiated out from the temple as its starting point. The underlying idea of this approach was that in order to go from one *katra* to the other, one would have to go first to the Hari Mandir and then enter the other *katra*, thus physically, spatially and experientially reinforcing the Hari Mandir as the originator and organizing force of the city⁵ (Fig. 7, 8).

The physical growth of the city took off during this period. Land was given for free in the *katras* to attract prospective settlers.

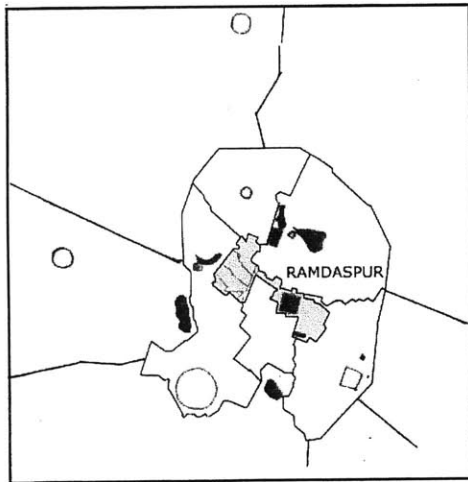


Fig. 7. Misl Estates around Ramdaspur (1764-1802)

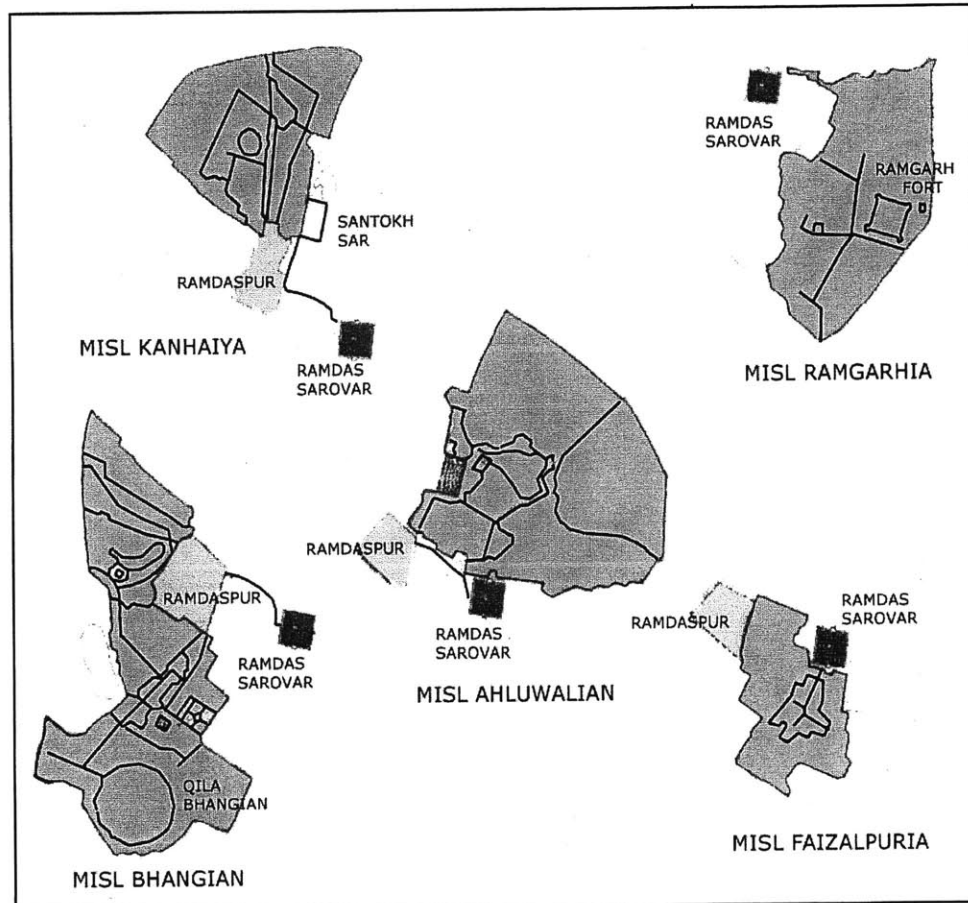


Fig. 8. Detail of the Misl Estates with the katras demarcated in them.

Amritsar as a city became a poly-nuclear system with the *katras* soon expanding. Within each nucleus, growth was however, relegated to a linear pattern along the principal commercial street with offshoots in either direction for the residential enclaves.

From the early 1800s to the middle of the century Amritsar came under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who took over Amritsar in 1803. Up until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the *misl*s had grown considerably in Punjab. However, this growth had been accompanied with jealousy and rivalry between the Sardars of the *misl*s. Serious infighting between them rendered Amritsar weak and left it open for Ranjit Singh's army. Two *Misl*s that were extremely powerful and influential at this time were the Ramgarhia *Misl* and the Ahluwalian *Misl* – both of which had established their *katras* in the city. In 1803, following the death of the leader of the Ramgarhia *Misl* - Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, “a contract of friendship (was) signed between the Ramgarhia family and Ranjit Singh in Amritsar before the Granth (Sikh holy men). Ranjit Singh stamped the papers with his open palm dyed with saffron... went to the Ramgarh fort and succeeded in capturing it with his artillery”⁶.

Amritsar Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign, the city of Amritsar developed considerably. Although Lahore remained his political capital, Ranjit Singh made Amritsar the spiritual and commercial center of his empire. He encouraged a great number of the nobles from his Lahore court and big merchants to settle in Amritsar. As a result, the development of the *katra* continued further. New *katras* were developed by the king's courtiers in and around the existing *katras* of the *misl*s. Some new *katras* that were formed in this period

are Katra Karam Singh, Katra Hakima, Katra Mil Singh and Katra Sher Singh (Fig, 9). In addition to the development of the *katras*, Amritsar also saw the building of the Gobindgarh Fort in the North West and the Rambagh Gardens in the North. Amritsar began to thrive as a center for trade and commerce. Its location on the Grand Trunk Road was fully exploited.

It was only in 1821 that the actual walls of the city came into being. Massive double walls were erected by the Maharaja to defend the city from future attack. The Hari Mandir which from now came to be known as the Golden Temple was renovated and covered with copper plates. Amritsar was further reinforced as the Sikh religious center.

In the early 1850's the population of Amritsar was enumerated as 100,466 with the Muslims accounting for approximately 40,000 of those inhabitants.⁷ This number was partly due to an influx of Kashmiri Muslims since the 1830s. They formed about half of the Muslim population of Amritsar. The balance of the Muslim populace came during the reign of the Maharaja.

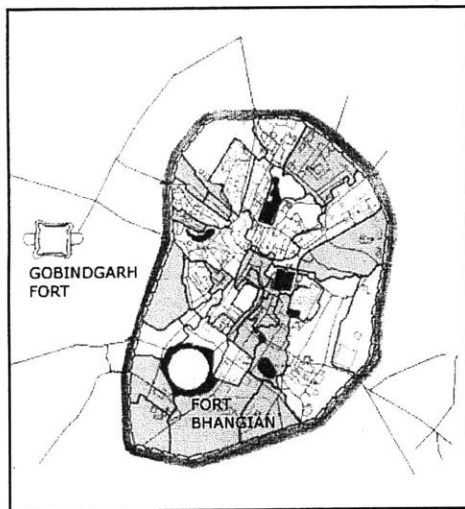


Fig. 9. Development of the Walled City under Maharaja Ranjit Singh showing the new *katras*.

“Thus one could find Muslim traders and shopkeepers in the heart of the old city like Bazaar Sheikhan adjoining Guru Bazaar. But Muslims in general had mostly settled in the outermost quarters of the city, close to the wall like katras Khazana, Hakiman, Karam Singh, Garbha Singh. Relatively speaking, the Hindus and Sikhs who together constituted only a little more than half the population of Amritsar, were mostly the older inhabitants of the place. These localities clustered around the nucleus and in old Amritsar in large numbers”⁸

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Amritsar Under British Rule

The British arrived in Amritsar in 1849 when they annexed Maharaja Ranjit Singh's sphere of influence. The army cantonment was established soon after in the extreme north west of the north zone⁹. It was during this time period that Amritsar saw maximum growth (Fig. 12, 13).

The Kashmir famine of 1883 caused a further influx of Kashmiri Muslims to the city. There was a paralleled growth in terms of trade and commerce as well as the spread of the city. With the arrival of the Kashmiris, the carpet trade began to flourish in Amritsar after the 1880s.¹⁰ Wool played an important role in terms of exports at the time. Amritsar also became the primary center of trade in India of grains and flour in the twentieth century.¹¹ In addition, Amritsar became an important manufacturing center for textiles, leather and iron and steel work right up until 1947.

In terms of city growth, the entire area north of the walled city was developed by the British. Amritsar's location along the trade route of the Grand Trunk Road made it a prime location for colonial administrative units, providing a route to other parts of Punjab and the sub-continent.¹² Industry had located sporadically along the Grand Trunk Road towards the west of the city leading to Lahore. The labor colonies mostly congregated near the industry to the west of the city. Slums sprang up alongside the highway, the railway corridor and the wall.¹³

In terms of demographic locational splits, "the posh localities [north] were dominated by Christians and Hindus while Muslims managed to settle on the outskirts [west] or in the slum-like low lying areas"¹⁴

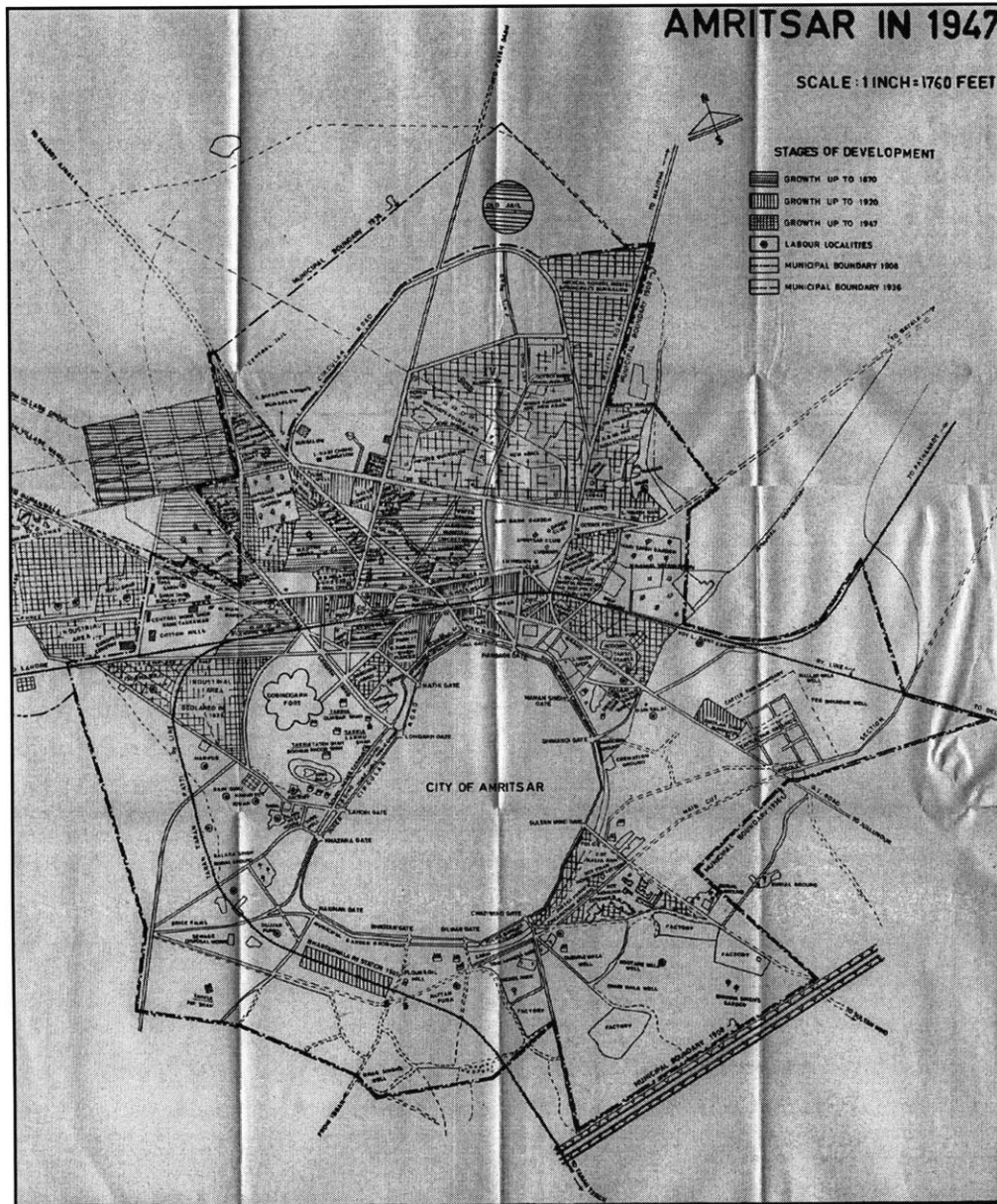


Fig. 12. Amritsar City Limits as of 1947 showing the development outside the Walled City

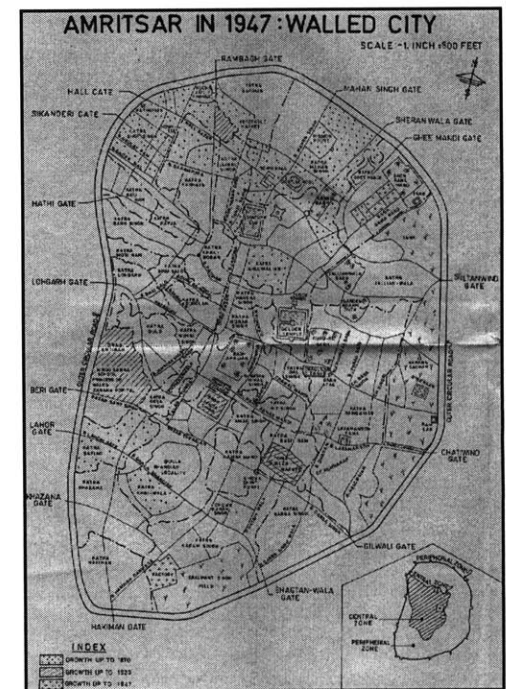


Fig. 13. Map showing the developments within the Walled City as of 1947

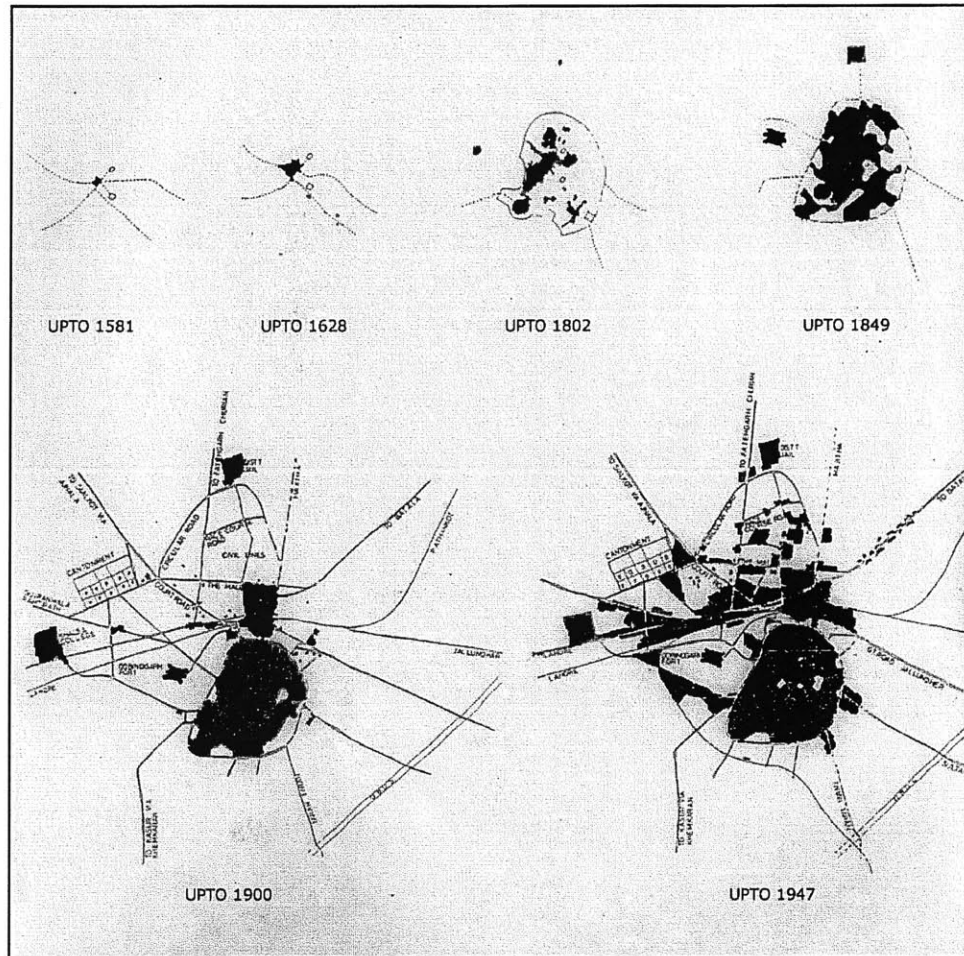


Fig. 14. Map showing the Growth Stages of Amritsar

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUNJAB

In the following years, as can be expected, the politics of the region affected the city of Amritsar considerably. Prior to 1909, there was no guaranteed representation of minorities within the provinces. The right of representation granted to the Muslims in 1909 which spread to other minorities in 1919 led to the rise of communal consciousness¹⁵. Punjab was one of the only regions that had a major Muslim population - 57% according to the 1941 census in the entire state. Sir Malcolm Darling, the Assistant Commissioner of Punjab at the time, wrote in his article "At Freedom's Door" that "nowhere is communal feeling potentially so dangerous and so complicated as in the Punjab...complicated because there is a third and not less obstinate party - the Sikhs".

The Muslims were in actual fact, the majority in the region, however, economically, the non-Muslims dominated. In addition to the non-Muslims owning more than half of the total industrial establishments in Punjab¹⁶, the Sikhs were the biggest land owners in the central districts. Over and above agriculture, money lending was the most important commercial activity in the province which was entirely in the hands of the Hindus and the Sikhs.

The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms(1919) and The Indian Act(1935)

The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 which granted reservations for communities for representation set off a chain of events that would lead to the demand for a separate Muslim state. The reservation of seats for Muslims and Sikhs in the Punjab assembly brought in its wake nation-wide agitation and intensified the struggle for freedom, however, creating along with it a divide between the

communities¹⁷. The establishment of the Akali Party of the Sikhs in 1920 and the Unionist Party – a party of land-holders (primarily Muslim – with a few Hindu and Sikh representatives) in 1923 was a direct result of the Reforms. The Muslim League had already been established in India in 1906.

Apart from the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the Indian Act of 1935 is seen as the “starting point” of proceedings that led to the Partition of India in 1947.¹⁸ The Act sought to maintain the unity of India by federating the total number of princely states (close to 600 of them) together with the eleven British provinces and providing a method of self-governance to the latter. This first part of the Act remained unresolved due to the breaking out of the Second World War in 1939. The second half of the Act though, which spoke of self-governance for the British provinces had a major impact on the changing face that was to become India and Pakistan and was put into force.

The Act proposed to give power, in each of the British Provinces, to an Indian Cabinet and ministry responsible to an elected legislature. Power was still to be retained in the hands of the Governor who was appointed by the British to preserve peace and protect the minority communities. In order to protect the minorities, the Imperial British government provided separate electorates for the minority communities. Introduced in 1892 for the Muslims, by 1935 this had extended itself to Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans. Among the provinces controlled by the British were the provinces of Punjab and Bengal with a majority Muslim population of 57% in the case of Punjab and 54% in Bengal¹⁹.

The immediate repercussion of this was the reinforcement of a communal divide in India. With the establishment of separate electorates based on religious lines, there was a newfound

reexamination of the political debris of India. Authority which had been long fought for on the very site of the subcontinent over centuries between the Hindus and the Sikhs on one side and the Muslims on the other in the avatars of the Hindu Kings and Sikh Gurus and the Mughals was being translated into the present and being fought for all over again. India seemed to have become a land of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who were suddenly seeing the differences between their communities in a new light.

THE RISE OF MUSLIM SEPARATISM

Separate electorates were the germination seed for the idea of a separate state for Muslims. However, this is true for the demand for a Sikh state as well. The Muslim League called for a consolidated North-Western State consisting of Punjab, North West Frontier, Baluchistan and Sind for the Muslim electorate.²⁰ This would have, however, led to the division of the Sikh population. The idea of a territorial rearrangement of the province that would consolidate the Sikh population to counter this move was suggested. Proposals and counter-proposals flew back and forth between the Sikh and the Muslim political parties right up till 1943 when the Pakistan Scheme was being fervently discussed at the All – India level. The demand for a separate Sikh state would become a major issue later in April of 1947 in the run-up to Independence in August.

The idea of an actual separate state for the Muslim community, however, only came about in March 1940 when the Muslim League proposed the establishment of Muslim-majority states in the North West and North East of India. It was further in 1946 that the proposal for that being *one* sovereign state with an eastern and western wing was actually made formally.²¹

THE PUNJAB ELECTIONS OF 1946

Elections were held in 1946 in which the Muslim League under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah²² fared extremely well. They captured 79 out of the 86 seats reserved for Muslims, The Congress captured 51, the Panthic Akali Sikhs 22 and the Unionists and Independents garnered 10 each. Thus, the Muslim League established itself as the largest single party in the Punjab Assembly. However, it wasn't enough to form a government. The diametrically opposite politics of the League when compared to those of the Congress, Akalis and the Unionists made a coalition with any of them impossible. As a result, the Congress, Akalis and the Unionists got together to form a coalition government under the leadership of Malik Khizr Hayat Khan.

The ongoing tension that ensued in Punjab was a direct result of the Muslim League being left out of the ruling government. They were determined to establish "undiluted Muslim rule" over Punjab²³. To maintain peace in ever increasing volatility, on January 24th of 1947 the ruling government imposed a ban on the Muslim National Guard and the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*²⁴ – both extreme right-wing political parties of the Muslim and Hindu community respectively. The League saw this as an affront to their civil liberties and was supported by the Communist Party in its agitation following the ban.

The movement was at its most intense in Lahore and Amritsar. The population of Amritsar at that time was 376,824 out of which 184,055 were Muslim, 134,000 were Hindu and 58,769 were Sikh²⁵. The Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College in the city became the headquarters of the agitation. Large processions went out daily from the college. The Khair-ud-Din Masjid, the largest mosque in the city, was another rallying point. While the Muslim rallies in the city were

predominantly peaceful, the Sikhs saw them as an attack on a friendly government that formed a barrier to the creation of Pakistan²⁶. The flying of the Muslim League flag on public buildings in the city caused further Sikh resentment. Due to the extent and severity of the agitation, the ban had to be lifted four days later on the 28th of January.

By February, a couple of weeks later, the situation was at its worst. The League's agitation particularly against the Unionists was at its peak. The declaration by the British Government on the 20th of February stating the transfer of power to India further intensified the League's struggle to get their demand for a separate state agreed upon. The death of a Sikh constable four days later on the 24th of February by a Muslim mob in Amritsar led the Akali Leader Master Tara Singh to claim that the League was fighting a communal rather than a political campaign.²⁷ He demanded that the state of Punjab be returned to its earlier rulers – the Sikhs – to avoid a civil war.

Further agitation between the Muslims on one side and the Hindus and Sikhs on the other forced the resignation of the Khizr Hayat - led government a week later on the 3rd of March.

Thus, we see the trajectory of the growth of a city from its early origins as the birthplace of Sikhism into a fiercely contested urban space in 1947 between the Muslims on one side and the Hindu and Sikh communities on the other. The contestation was a direct repercussion of the rise in demand for a separate Muslim state. Where traditionally, the different communities had enjoyed close civic and emotional ties, that very site had been transformed into an area of dispute. It was to wreak havoc in the city of Amritsar in the months to come.

NOTES

¹ Festinger L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance Theory developed by Leon Festinger (1957) is concerned with the relationship among cognitions. Two cognitions are considered consonant if one follows from or fits the other. The theory states that when two cognitions are dissonant, and are experienced as an unpleasant drive state, the individual is motivated to reduce it by either changing cognitions to make one consistent with the other, by adding one or more consonant cognitions to reduce the magnitude of dissonance or by altering the importance of the dissonant cognitions.

² The Duggals settled in *Gali Duggalan* (lane of the Duggals), the Uppals in *Gali Uppallan* and so on.

³ Market of the Guru

⁴ Seat of the Akalis

⁵ The *katra* had a definite settlement pattern which was universal throughout the city. Each had a small bazaar for food and other essential commodities. The *katra* was the site for each Sardar to build his own haveli. All *katras* had one principal street off of which there was unplanned and unsystematic growth of the *katra*. This was the principal street with its head at the vicinity of the Hari Mandir (Golden Temple). The unplanned growth of the *katras* gives Amritsar its present configuration of narrow and winding streets on account of them being essentially pedestrian at this time.

⁶ Datta, V.N., *Amritsar- Past and Present*, Amritsar: The Municipal Committee, 1967. p23

⁷ Gauba, Anand. *Amritsar: A study in Urban History*, Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988. p25

⁸ Ibid p25

⁹ Ibid p44

¹⁰ Ibid p320

¹¹ Ibid p320

¹² Purewal, Navtej K., *Living on the Margins: Social Access to Shelter in Urban South Asia*, Ashgate, 2000. p46

¹³ Ibid p57

¹⁴ Ibid p57

¹⁵ Singh, Kirpal. *The Partition of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University Patiala, Second Edition 1989, p5

¹⁶ Ibid p6

¹⁷ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House. 1965. p33

¹⁸ Philips, C.H. and Wainwright, Mary Doreen (ed.), *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947*, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1970.

¹⁹ Philips, C.H., *The Partition of India 1947: The twenty-fourth Montague-Burton lecture on International Relations*, Leeds University Press, 1967. p5

²⁰ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p36

²¹ Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p21

²² Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a lawyer by profession, joined the All India Congress in 1906. He moved to the Muslim League in 1913 while still serving with the Congress. Early in his political career he was chiefly concerned with achieving independence for a united India. He however, became increasingly worried that

British oppression might be replaced by Hindu oppression upon Independence. He resigned from the Congress in 1919 and turned his focus to Muslim interests. By the late 1930s Jinnah had become the leader of the Muslim League and was the architect of the idea of a partition of the country. In 1940 the League adopted the 'Lahore Resolution' which called for separate autonomous states in Muslim-majority areas of India. Upon Partition, Jinnah became the first President of Pakistan.

²³Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p 41

²⁴ The RSS. Literally meaning 'National Volunteer Group'

²⁵ Census of India 1941

²⁶ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

²⁷ Ibid.

THREE

Exodus

March – August 1947

“In March the riots started in Amritsar between the Hindus and the Muslims...we stood on the roof of the Bhandari Bungalow [on Court Road, outside the walled city] and the whole sky was lit up with red. So many [sic], I should say, a quarter of Amritsar city was in flames at that time... there was a lot of trouble. In 3 or 4 days the army came in and the curfew was put on for a number of days. No one could move out – whether you had food, whether you didn't have it - that was no concern of theirs. Gradually things calmed down a bit. Life went on, but not normally at all.”

-Interview respondent Edna Bhandari, Bhandari House, Court Road, Amritsar, January 19, 2003.

The period from March to August of 1947 saw a period of intense unrest and conflict in Amritsar between the Hindu and Sikh communities versus the Muslims. It was during this period that the entire Muslim population of the city was forced to evacuate and leave behind their properties in a city they had once called their own. The following chapter shall further document the political scenario in the state and the country as a whole and shall speak of reasons

for the Muslim emigration. It shall then reference these political movements and events in terms of the Muslim relocation and intra-city migration that followed in the city of Amritsar itself.

It would be erroneous to say that the change in Amritsar's city form as a result of Partition started after Partition itself. The resignation of the Khizr Hayat Government in March of 1947 unleashed a wave of communal tension in Punjab. The Akali leader Master Tara Singh was incensed by the resignation of Khizr Hayat succumbing to pressure from the Muslim League. The idea of "Muslim *Raj* (Rule)" in Punjab went a step further by this show of strength of the League in Punjab politics. The unsheathing of his sword on the steps of the Punjab Assembly building in Lahore¹ in response to the resignation of the government is seen as the catalyst for the violence in Punjab that was to ensue. Khushwant Singh in his article "Lahore, Partition and Independence" equates Master Tara Singh's unsheathing of his sword and his cries of "Pakistan *Murdabaad*" (Death to Pakistan) to 'hurling a lighted matchstick into a room full of explosive gas'.² Violent calls for Sikh rule made by the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal,³ Giani Kartar Singh on the evening of the resignation further instigated a Sikh community concerned about the prospect of being an under-represented minority in a power struggle between the Muslims and the Hindus.

Lahore as the provincial capital of the state of Punjab greatly influenced the fortunes of Amritsar. Due to its proximity to the city, (Fig. 15) repercussions of events taking place there were easily felt in the entire region. Therefore it would be prudent to establish the situation in Lahore due to the ripple effect it would have in the state.

The first riots of this period started in Lahore. A group of Hindu students clashed with police outside Government College followed by an attack on a police station the morning following Khizr Hayat's



Fig. 15. Map of Undivided Punjab superimposed on the current boundaries of India and Pakistan showing the locations of Amritsar and Lahore

resignation.⁴ A group of about two to three hundred Hindus and Sikhs undertook a procession in the Anarkali bazaar of Lahore denouncing the creation of Pakistan and forcibly hauling down Muslim League flags from Muslim shops.⁵ The afternoon saw the burning of Hindu business establishments in the walled city in Lahore. A curfew was enforced but, by the 6th of March, many Hindu properties in the walled city had already been torched in retaliation while most of the casualties were Sikhs. The Muslim attacks in Lahore were primarily on Hindu property and not on the Hindus themselves. Hindus however, responded with bomb-throwing and stray stabbings.⁶ Out of 82,000 houses in the Lahore Corporation Area, 6000 houses were burned down during these disturbances.⁷ It is estimated that three thousand perished in the violence in West Punjab in the spring of 1947.

Through the following months, large masses of Hindus and Sikhs were now fleeing Lahore and much of the Muslim-majority areas in West Punjab. To try and arrest the exodus of Hindus and Sikhs from Lahore, the Tribune, a major newspaper in Punjab ran the following editorial on its front page in May:⁸

To Lahore citizens:

1. Don't run away from Lahore like cowardly deserters. Stay at your posts and defend your sweet homes. Get back immediately to your houses, if you have left them.
2. You may remove your womenfolk and children, clothes and valuables to safe places, but YOU should on no account leave your houses. You should consider them your castles and fight like soldiers from there, determined to save civilization and humanity from the jungle cult.

3. Those who flee betray and weaken those who stick to their guns. Not a single able-bodied man should leave Lahore.

The Partition Council would pass a resolution later on 2nd August to contain the exodus and encourage people to return to their homes on both sides of the border.⁹

CONTRASTING METHODS OF VIOLENCE

Amritsar was directly affected by the unrest in Lahore 26 miles away. Rioting had begun in the city on the 5th of March and soon became more serious than the situation in Lahore. Large swaths of the Hindu commercial areas in Hall Bazaar, Katra Karam Singh and Lohgarh were seriously hit (Fig. 16). Shops were systematically looted and burned by Muslims from neighboring localities. The Muslim National Guard, whose banning by the Khizr Hayat government along with the RSS, had been the precursor to the events of March was seen as a major role player in orchestrating the violence in Amritsar against the Hindu and Sikh community.¹⁰ The Golden Temple was used as a sanctuary to house approximately 50,000 people who had been rendered homeless or were afraid for their lives.

Alongside the attacks on Hindus and Sikhs, four thousand Muslim shops and homes were destroyed within a single week in March 1947 within the walled city of Amritsar.¹¹ The torching of Hindu and Sikh businesses by the Muslim community can be understood to some degree by the prevalent social dynamics of the time. The Hindu and Sikh community were, generally speaking, wealthier than the Muslims. The Muslim community in the city consisted mostly of the artisans, craftsmen and industrial labor force

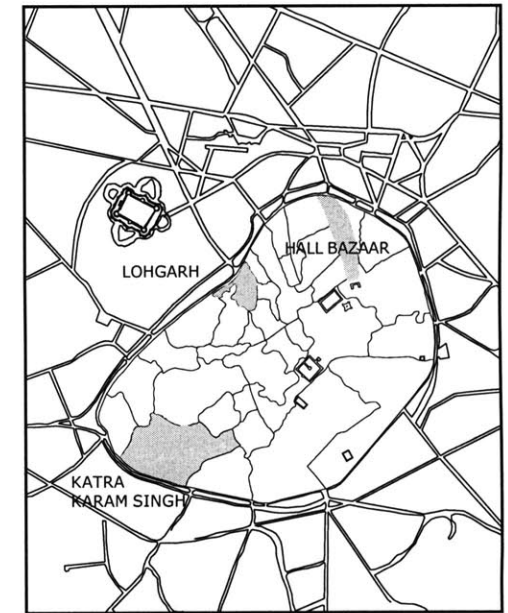


Fig. 16. Hall Bazaar, Katra Karam Singh and Lohgarh within the Walled City

in the iron and steel works and leather and tannery industries. The Hindu and Sikh community, in contrast were the wealthier land owners and traders of the city. It is argued that this torching of commercial establishments was symbolic of the Muslim antagonism towards the non-Muslims – the poor pillaging the shops and warehouses of the rich.¹² The attack seemed more class oriented; religion just added fuel to the fire.

The attacks in Amritsar and Lahore prove this to a large extent. The major areas that were continually burnt in Amritsar were the markets of the Hindu and Sikh community – most notably in Hall Bazaar, at the northern edge of the walled city of Amritsar (Fig. 15). Lahore, likewise saw large-scale burning of Hindu and Sikh shops and homes. The June 22nd attack on Shahalmi, a Hindu and Sikh trading stronghold in the walled city of Lahore, in which a majority of the locality was razed to the ground, is seen as a major turning point in the mass exodus of Hindus and Sikhs from the city.¹³

The attacks on the Muslims by the Hindus and Sikhs were, in sharp contrast, seen to be more personal and physical in nature. The greater incidences of Hindu and Sikhs assaults on Muslims personally could be linked to the concept of ‘pollution’.¹⁴ Talbot, in his book “Freedom’s Cry” writes about the perception of Muslims by Hindus as ‘unclean’ – only to be eradicated by death. The Muslims on the other hand regarded the Hindus as infidels thus, not a motivating factor for attacking on grounds of impurity. These, however, are theories of motivation – and no theory ‘fits’ neatly as a reason for the nature of inter-sectarian violence in Punjab. What does come across is the marked difference in the ways that the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities were targeted in Amritsar.

As of May 16, 1947 a total of 209 people had been killed and 422 injured between March 5 and May 16 in the Amritsar riots.¹⁵ Lahore and Amritsar were, however, not the only cities to experience

communal strife – all of Punjab’s major cities – Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Jhelum and Rawalpindi reported major damage. Hindus and Sikhs were particularly targeted in these attacks. In Rawalpindi and Multan, the attacks were fiercer, more sudden, and more savage than ever. In the rural areas attacks were launched by large mobs of Muslim peasants who banded together from several hamlets and villages to destroy and loot Sikh and Hindu shops and houses in their area.¹⁶ There were heavy casualties prompting a considerable exodus of refugees towards Central and East Punjab and Delhi. By the end of April 1947, the official estimate of refugees in Punjab was 80,000 people.¹⁷

The Rawalpindi massacres as they came to be known brought a flood of refugees into Amritsar and a fleeing Hindu and Sikh population took refuge in the walled city. However their injection into the city fabric had a peculiar effect. Upon arrival, they brought with them stories, some accurate and some exaggerated, of intense atrocities committed against their communities by the Muslims. The city saw the militarization of the Sikhs and their subsequent call to arms to ‘claim the city that was rightfully theirs’. In a letter from Sir Evan Jenkins, the then Governor of Punjab between 1946-47, to Lord Mountbatten on 9 April, 1947, he mentions the establishment of a ‘war fund’ and the large scale manufacturing of *kirpans*¹⁸ (swords) by the Sikh community in Amritsar. Exaggerated reports of the violence in Rawalpindi along with the above contributed to the cease of normal community existence in Amritsar.



Fig. 17. Paragdas Chowk located half-way between the Golden Temple to its left and Gilwali Gate to the right



Fig. 18. (Clockwise from top) Hall Bazaar, Chowk Lachmansar and Qila Bhangian

PARAGDAS CHOWK

The Partition of the Punjab was a territorial issue in every sense of the word. This was played out at all levels - both nationally and at the city level. A classic case where this was played out was in Chowk Paragdas - barely three hundred meters from the Golden Temple in the heart of the walled city of Amritsar (Fig 17).

The incoming Hindu and Sikh refugees from the Rawalpindi massacres had settled down in the areas surrounding Paragdas Chowk after the resident Muslims had evacuated the area following disturbances in the city on the 7th of March. The Paragdas Mosque located at the Chowk had been burnt by the Hindu-Sikh mob during that riot and was situated in the midst of the newly occupied Hindu-Sikh localities, though on its right it still had a vast Muslim dominated stretch ending at the Gilwali Gate (Fig. 17). On Friday, April 11th, a congregation of four to five thousand Muslims authorized by the Deputy Commissioner of Police approached the burnt-down mosque under police protection to offer prayers. After offering prayers, riots broke out between the Muslims and the Sikhs in which nineteen persons were killed and more than sixty injured.¹⁹ The riots also saw the burning of Hindu and Sikh houses in several areas including Qila Bhangian, Chowk Lachmansar, Chowk Chira and Hall Bazaar (Fig 18).

The Paragdas Chowk incident is indicative to understanding the social dynamics of the city at the time and how it translated itself into a physical manifestation in terms of appropriation of civic space in the city. The event came to represent the fracture of a heterogeneous community across an entire city-scape.

Paragdas Chowk, a locality which had, prior to the communal tensions of the era, been one with an intermixed religious community saw itself transformed from that to one which was primarily Hindu

and Sikh due to their arrival en masse from Rawalpindi. Through the last transformation, the religious icon of the space [the mosque] had been destroyed for all practical purposes. The basic aim of the “communal war of succession”²⁰ and the ensuing ethnic cleansing that was going on all through Punjab at the time was to make it impossible for a rival community to continue living in a territory claimed for the majority. Therefore, the re-appropriation of the destroyed mosque as an Islamic icon seemed to be absolutely necessary to the Muslim community – with due reason.

It is important to note that the case of Amritsar was all the more peculiar because of the fact that there was no clear majority or minority in the city. Hindus and Sikhs were seen as one community; all the texts of the time refer to the population of the city as Muslims and non-Muslims – the distinction between the Hindus and the Sikhs appears to be unnecessary and superfluous according to many authors of that era. History seems to ignore the differences between the Hindu and the Sikh community as far as the problem in Punjab at the time was concerned. Amritsar prior to partition in the 1941 census showed a Muslim population that comprised close to 48% of the total city’s people. The issue of majority and minority therefore played itself out not in terms of the city in its entirety but instead in the localities of the city that were predominantly Hindu, Muslim or Sikh or intermixed as the case may be.

Up until this time, the Hindu and Muslim communities had resided side by side. They found themselves sharing the same *katras* in the walled city. Some *katras* ended up being dominated by one community over the other in terms of numbers; however this domination seems to be more a by-product of occupation rather than conflicting religious beliefs themselves. Relationships between the Muslim community and non-Muslims were cordial; social interaction

was commonplace. One refugee interviewed said that “they attended each other’s marriage ceremonies”.²¹

INTRA-CITY MUSLIM RELOCATION

Once the tensions in the city had risen to such a heightened state, the Muslim community evacuated their previously established isolated pockets (Fig. 19) within the walled city to larger enclaves. They moved to the areas around Chowk Farid, Kucha Dabgaran, Rambagh Gate and Bhagtanwala Gate within the walled city. Some Muslims also ventured out to the suburbs of the city – such as Daimganj, Risalpur and Sharifpura (Fig. 20). Sharifpura’s location is telling in that it is bounded by the Grand Trunk Road on the south and the Railway line connecting Amritsar to Lahore on the north. As of March 1947, this was the largest Muslim cluster in the city with a population of close to 25,000 people. This siting of the Muslim cluster would prove beneficial in the months to come when it would be time to evacuate the city. The numbers would also increase.

Risalpur, one of the sites of the Muslim relocation, came under attack by the Sikhs on May 24th. The Sikhs used grenades and trucks against the Muslim community here killing many witnesses in the Paragdas Chowk case.²² One argument is that the attack had another purpose though; one more psychological rather than physical²³. It made it clear to the Muslim community that guaranteed safety was not to be found outside the city; the suburbs were as unwelcoming to the community as were the confines of the walled city.

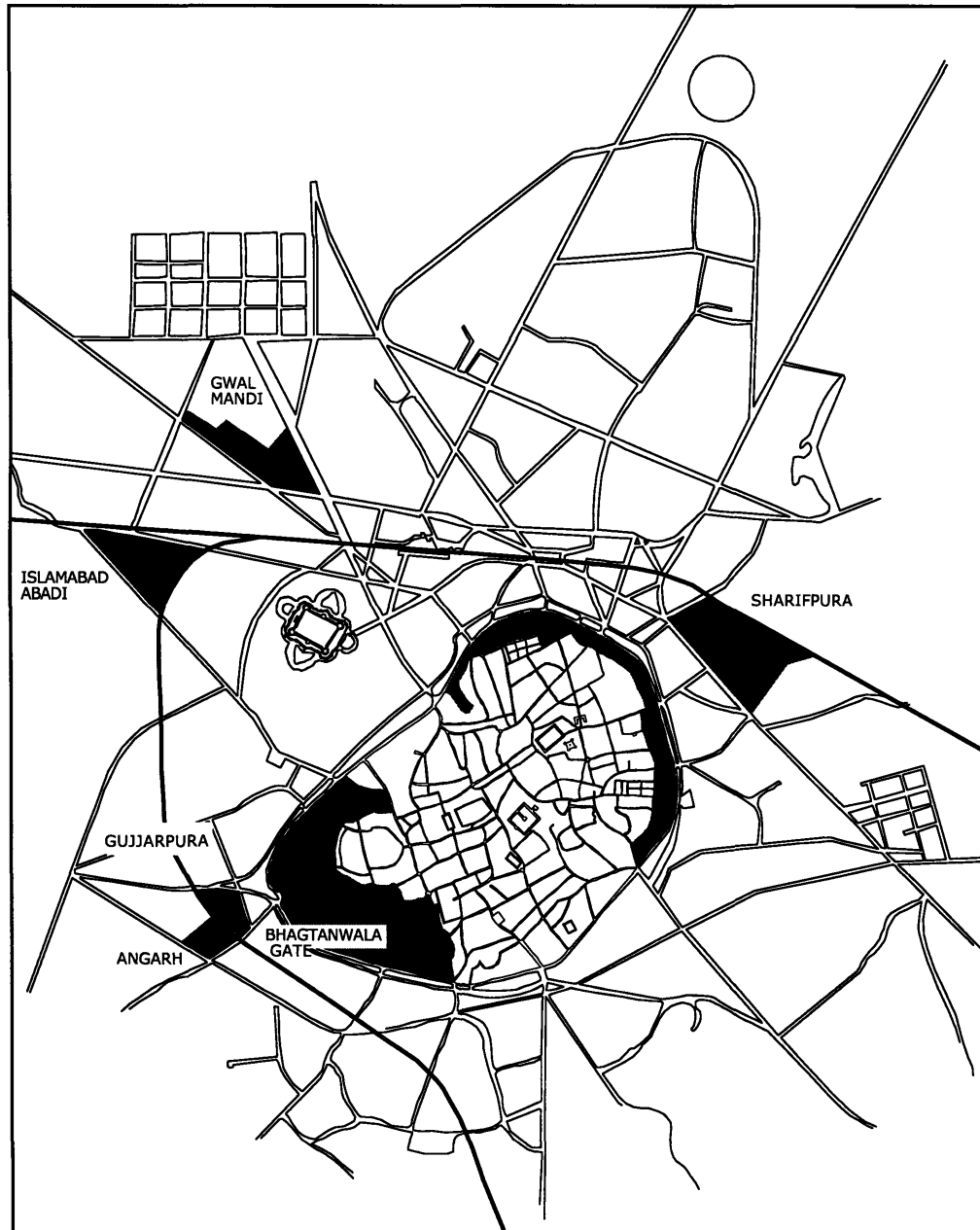


Fig 19. The principal Muslim inhabited clusters within the walled city as of March 1947. The clusters shown represent a majority of Muslim inhabitants in those particular areas. The Hindu and Sikh majority areas were closer to the core of the city in the surroundings of the Golden Temple and towards the North and North-West of the city outside the City Walls.

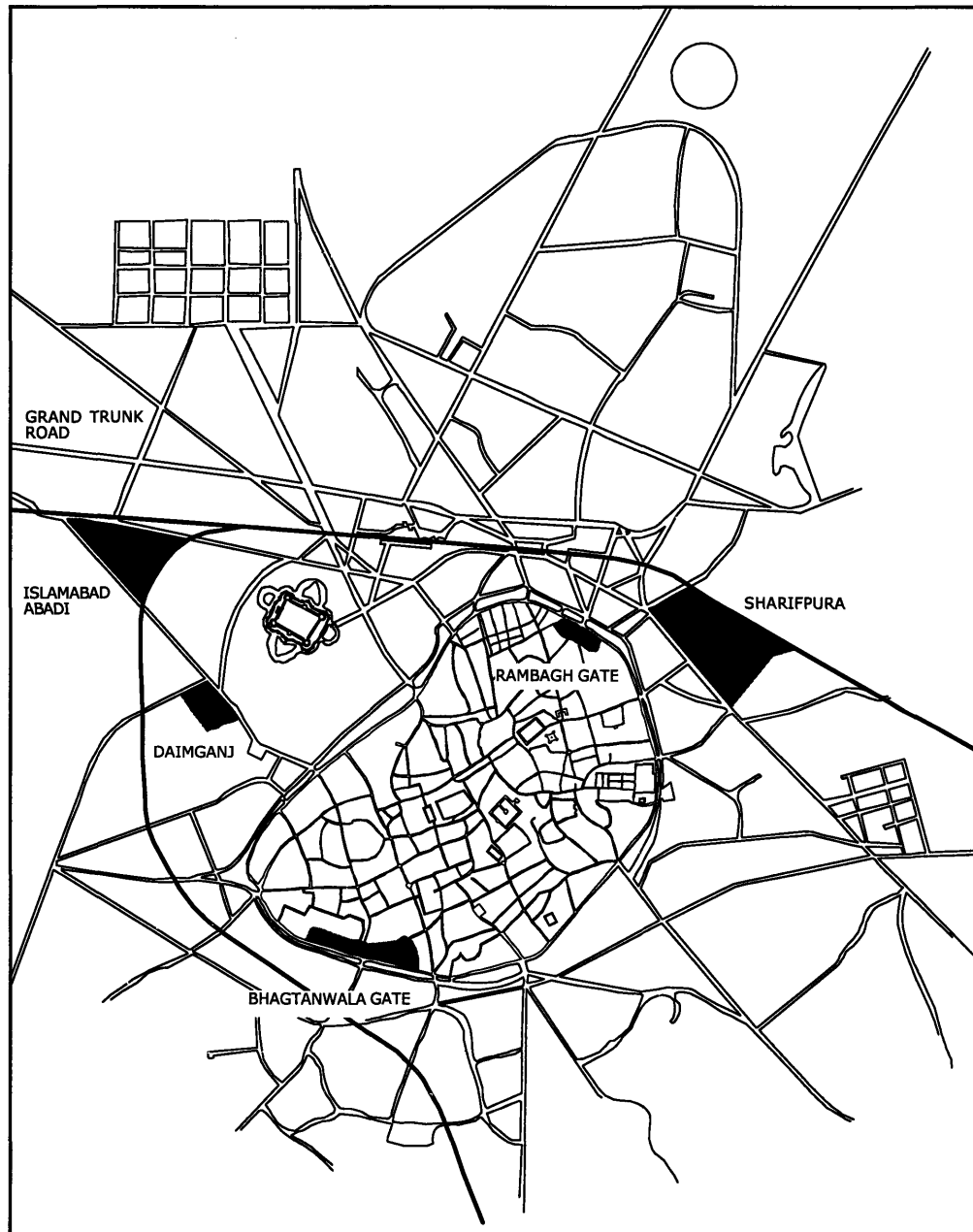


Fig 20. Muslim intra-city clustering into new and existing Muslim majority clusters with the density of these isolated pockets intensified.

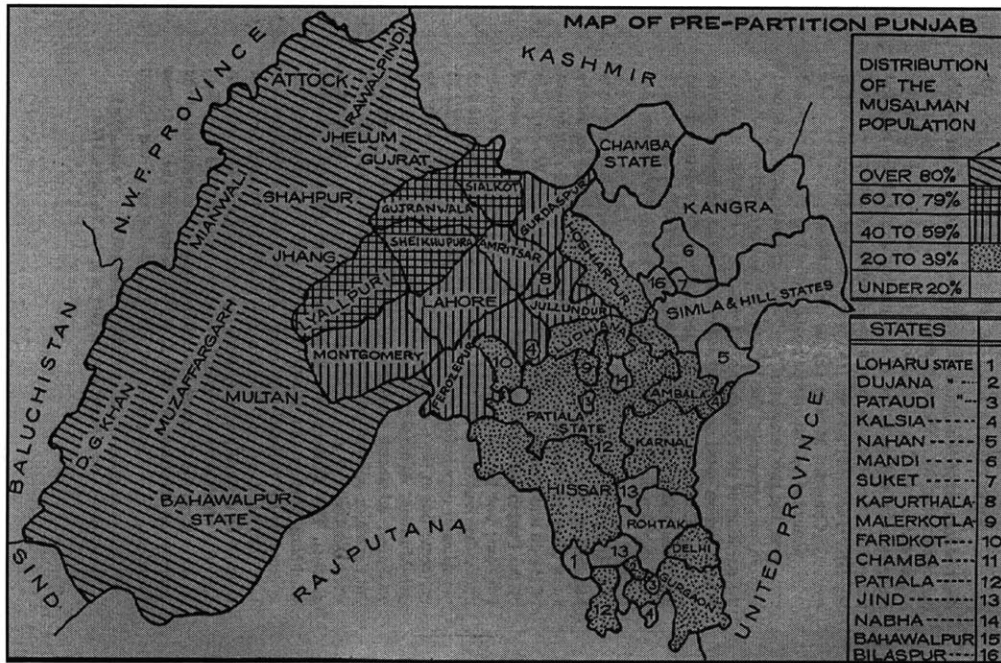


Fig. 21. Map of Pre-Partition Punjab showing Muslim Majority areas in the entire state.

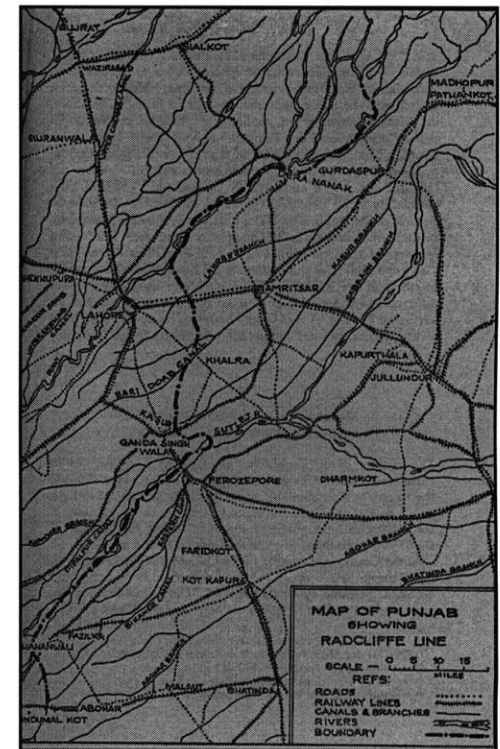


Fig 22. The Radcliffe Award (closeup) in the state of Punjab showing the location of the line with respect to Amritsar and Lahore.

THE PARTITION PLAN AND THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

The riots had shown that Punjab was particularly problematic in any discussion where Partition and the creation of Pakistan were suggested. The entire state could not be handed over to one side over the other due to the significant inter-mixing of the communities – not only within the cities, but in the entire central tract of the state (Fig. 21).

It was the Partition Plan put forward by the Governor-General of India Lord Mountbatten on the 3rd of June that made the actual Partition of India a certainty. Included in the plan was the note that the details of the partition of Punjab and Bengal were to be worked out by separate Boundary Commissions on the basis of contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims, and not on the basis of the existing district, *tehsil* or *thana* administrative units. The plan was agreed upon by all the communities in India and by Mohammad Ali Jinnah on behalf of the Muslim nation in India.²⁴

The Boundary Commission set upon their task and used the 1941 census as a referencing tool in order to ascertain Muslim and non-Muslim majorities. Until the Boundary Commission had been put into effect, the provisional boundaries based on the census were to be used. Therefore, the Muslim majority area was to comprise of the Lahore division (excluding district Amritsar), Rawalpindi and Multan divisions. The non-Muslim area was to consist of Ambala and Jullundur Divisions in addition to Amritsar district of Lahore Division.²⁵

The Punjab Boundary Commission was set up on the 30th of June overseen by Sir Cyril Radcliffe.²⁶ It was expected that the Commissions²⁷ would give their decisions by the 15th of August, 1947 – the date set for Independence.

The Punjab Boundary Commission had an added complication in an already muddled division between Hindus and Muslims; the introduction of the Sikh factor. Unlike Bengal where there was no Sikh community to speak of, Punjab posed a serious problem necessitating careful consideration to the position of the Sikhs. It was inevitable that there would be a split in the Sikh community – the degree of the split was what was left to be ascertained.

Both Muslim and the non-Muslim cases were put forward by the League and the Congress respectively to the Commission for consideration of what part of Punjab should become a part of India and which should become part of Pakistan. These cases were advocated by the representatives of the communities who were part of the Boundary Commission. The district of Amritsar was particularly contested between both communities due to a variety of reasons. Justice Mahajan representing the non-Muslim case suggested that the Commission should demarcate only the predominantly Muslim and non-Muslim areas and that the remaining areas should be considered on economic, strategic and ideological lines. The district of Amritsar, along with Gurdaspur and Lahore, he felt, should come under Indian control due to the fact that the non-Muslims paid more than two-third of the total land revenue and owned close to two-thirds of the total acreage of the districts.

The Muslim case claimed the districts of Gurdaspur, Tehsil Ferozepur, Zira, Nakodar, Jullundur, Ajnala, Nawanshahr, Phillaur, Rupar, Una, Garhshankar, Hoshiarpur, Dasuya, Thana Majitha (Tehsil Amritsar) as part of the territory of West Punjab. He therefore, asked for the district of Amritsar to be added to the territory of West Punjab in the interest of contiguity even though it had a non-Muslim majority population as it was surrounded by Muslim majority areas.

It is argued that a study of Muslim and non-Muslim claims to territories in Punjab are self-contradictory in many ways;²⁸ that there

were no fixed principles in making claims to territory. The Commission had the agonizing task of making sense of these claims – one particular area that came under serious dispute was the geographical situation of Lahore and Amritsar. It became significantly difficult because of the ‘other factors’ that both parties claimed as being reason enough for the territory to come under their respective rule. The Radcliffe Award, as it came to be known, was submitted to the Viceroy on 12 August, 1947.²⁹ As a result of the Award, thirteen districts, comprising the whole of Jullundur and Ambala Divisions and the Amritsar district of the Lahore Division as well as the tehsils of Pathankot, Gurdaspur and Batala in Gurdaspur District and a part of the Kasur tehsil of Lahore District were allocated to East Punjab while the rest went to West Punjab. The city of Amritsar had been officially granted to India while Lahore was to become part of Pakistan (Fig. 22).

TRANSFER OF POPULATIONS

As was to be expected, the award was severely criticized in both Muslim and non-Muslim circles; each community felt shortchanged in the allocation of lands. Geographic features such as the Ravi and Sutlej rivers were not considered in the boundary demarcation thus further complicating matters. In addition, the Radcliffe Award was vague in its identification of territory thus leading to the situation of both countries claiming lands as rightfully theirs.

Surprisingly the actual prospect of a transfer of population was not considered as feasible throughout this process. When the Muslim League leader Mohammad Jinnah suggested exchange of population on 10 December 1945 and a year later in November 1946,

it was not seriously considered by the Congress. The Hindus were already being driven out of areas in West Punjab, notably Noakhali, and Jinnah was of the opinion that since it was already underway, a mechanism should be put in place to ensure a peaceful transfer. The Akali leaders agreed to the prospect of a transfer after the riots at Noakhali; S. Swaran Singh, leader of the Panthic Assembly Party said on July 10, 1947 that the transfer of population was the only solution which would be to the ultimate good of both Pakistan and Hindustan.³⁰ He went a step further to suggest that the line of division of the country should be such as would facilitate the transfer of population across the border.

The Congress though was of another opinion. Mahatma Gandhi in a press report in December 1945 rejected the idea of a transfer. In his words, "It (exchange of population) is unthinkable and impracticable. Every province is of every Indian, be he Hindu, Muslim or of any other faith. It won't be otherwise even if Pakistan came in full...The logical consequence of any such step is too dreadful to contemplate."³¹ Opinions differed but leaders decided against the planned exchange of population. The Partition Council passed a resolution on 2 August, 1947 to arrest further exodus and encourage the return of people to their homes.³²

The Punjab Boundary Force was put into effect to mitigate any disturbances in the event of clashes in the neighborhood of the boundaries between the two Dominions after 15 August. It was to be headed by a British officer with a force which would be of a 'mixed class composition". The Force was to ensure protection to the minorities in the event of any violence. The Partition Council consequently agreed on a Joint Commander who would act on behalf of both the Dominions.

INTRA-KATRA VIOLENCE IN AMRITSAR

Amritsar, all through the decision-making process of the Boundary Commission and the formation of the Punjab Boundary Force continued to deteriorate day by day. Muslim areas were not the only one under fire; Hindu and Sikh properties were continually burnt as well. The two most persistently burnt Hindu and Sikh localities were Chil Mandi adjacent to the Mohan Singh gate on the north-eastern edge of the walled city and Katra Karam Singh on the South western edge. Kucha Beli Ram, Kucha Khotian and Katra Sher Singh were also heavily destroyed in the ensuing months in the run-up to August 15th. The report of the Chief Secretary to the Punjab Government for the months of April and May stated that over four hundred and sixty persons had been killed in Amritsar in those months.

The intermixing of the communities in Amritsar was actually a major contributing cause of the massive damage that the city saw in the run-up to Partition. Prior to the inter-sectarian violence of 1947, the communities had lived adjacent to each other – often within the same locality. The first cases of violence in Amritsar were in fact reported from these intermixed *katras* and not in those that were predominantly Muslim or non-Muslim³³. The segregated Muslim majority colonies were able to hold out much longer than the others due to the installation of barricades of iron gates manned by members of the community. The intermixed *katras*, in sharp contrast, had no such elaborate defense mechanism. A mob of one community would scour the streets of these localities looking for properties or persons of the other leading to the violence that erupted city-wide. The inherent essence of Amritsar which was this interwoven community living side by side with each other was actually the reason for its sudden collapse.

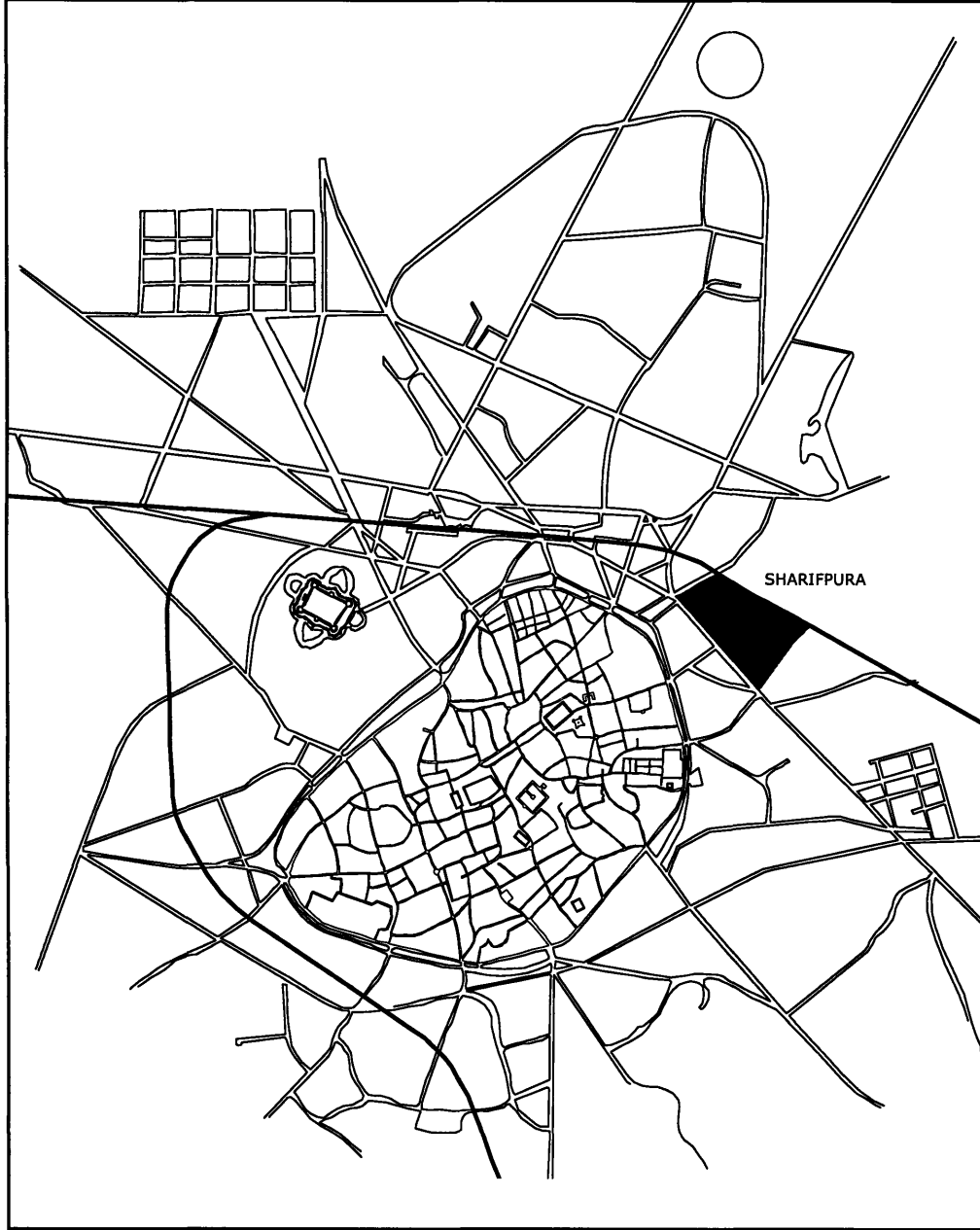


Fig 23. The final stage of the Muslim Intra-City Relocation. Sharifpura as of August 15, 1947, had 100,000 Muslim refugees awaiting safe passage to Pakistan.

In the final week before Independence, the attacks in the city intensified. Even though the Boundary Commission had not delivered its verdict yet, it was becoming clear that Amritsar would become part of India. The administration in East Punjab collapsed ushering in a final genocidal phase of violence. According to Mohammad Said, a former Amritsar tax superintendent now settled in the Kashmiri enclave of Nisbet Road in Lahore, 500 people were killed when rioters overran the Muslim area of Katra Karam Singh.³⁴ Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, noted in a personal report on August 16th that armed Sikh bands were raiding Muslim majority villages in the Amritsar district at the rate of three or four each night. The appointment of a Hindu Additional Superintendent of Police and his subsequent disarming of the Muslim police manifested itself in increased Muslim deaths in the city. The Muslims were now fast retreating from their homes in the pockets in the walled city. By the 13th of August, two days prior to Independence, Bhagtanwala Gate at the southern tip of the walled city was the last Muslim enclave to be abandoned.

Muslim refugees in Amritsar poured into the Sharifpura refugee camp just outside the north-west of the walled city. Due to Sharifpura being cut off from the rest of the city, thus making it as safe a haven as possible in Amritsar, the numbers here swelled to 100,000 people by the 14th of August (Fig. 23). It was evident - the Muslims were on their way out. They were being forced to leave.

As can be seen, this period of the city's history saw the movement of the Muslim community from scattered pockets throughout the walled city into major clusters both within and outside the walls for reasons of security. Safety was in numbers and this played itself out throughout the months of July and August wherein most of the Muslims that had not already fled the city clustered in large numbers

towards the gates of the city and then finally in Sharifpura. In the months to follow, the city would be overrun with a huge incoming populace of Hindus and Sikhs fleeing from persecution across the border on the Pakistani side.

NOTES

¹ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

² Siddiqui, Mohammad Ali, et all, *Common Heritage*, Oxford University Press. 1997, p28

³ The principle Sikh political party of the time

⁴ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

⁵ Baqir, Mohammad, *Lahore, Past and Present*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation. 1985, p238

⁶ Talbot, Ian, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India*, Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1996, p47

⁷ Baqir, Mohammad, *Lahore, Past and Present*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation. 1985, p238

⁸ The Tribune, Lahore, Thursday May 22, 1947. Vol. lxxvii no. 109

⁹Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi. 1986, p 103

¹⁰Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

¹¹ Talbot, Ian, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India*, Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1996. p48

¹² Ibid

¹³ Salim, Ahmad, *Lahore 1947*, India Research Press. 2001. p7

¹⁴ Talbot, Ian, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India*, Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1996, p48

¹⁵ The Tribune, Lahore, Tuesday May 27,1947. Vol. lxxvii no. 114

¹⁶ Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press. 2001, p23

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ The *kirpan* is a sword sanctioned to be carried by members of the Sikh faith at all times. The Sikh faith asks its followers to have five items on their person at all times for ease of identification. The five are *kes*h (hair), *kanga* (comb), *kacchha* (baggy underpants), *kada* (heavy bangle) and the *kirpan* (sword). The large scale production of the *kirpan* at this time was, therefore, seen not just as the manufacturing of swords, but as the manufacturing of violent religious expression.

¹⁹ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid. Interview with Qureshi Sahib Lahore 11 Sept 2000. Ian Talbot conducted interviews with 25 refugees in Lahore and 25 in Amritsar as part of an ongoing project. This excerpt has been taken from one of his interviews.

²² Many of the Muslim witnesses of the Paragdas Chowk massacre had fled to Risalpur for fear of their lives.

²³ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

²⁴ Besides the states of Punjab and Bengal, the division of India into two countries was made on the basis that each of the princely states would have the option to accede to either India or Pakistan. The princely states were semi-autonomous entities with predominantly self-governance. They paid a tax to the British

government yearly and relied on them for security and other national issues. The ambiguity of which lands would form Pakistan and which would form India came about in the British provinces (Punjab and Bengal being two principle provinces of the British Raj) and hence, these were the only two provinces or states that were actually divided. The rest of the princely states went either to India or to Pakistan based on the decision of the ruling King of that state.

²⁵ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House. 1965, p 49

²⁶ The four members of the Commission were Mr. Justice Din Mohammad, Mr. Justice Mohammad Munir, Mr. Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan and Mr. Justice Teja Singh – thus ensuring representation of the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities.

²⁷ For Punjab and Bengal

²⁸ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House. 1965, p55

²⁹ The Radcliffe Award, however, would not become public knowledge till the 17th of August – two days after the granting of Independence to India.

³⁰ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House. 1965, p73

³¹ Gandhi, M.K., *To the Protagonists of Pakistan*, Allahabad, 1947, p 214

³² Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House. 1965, p73

³³ Talbot, Ian, *Locality and Partition: The Muslims of Amritsar and the 1947 Division of the Punjab*

³⁴ Ibid

FOUR

Arrival

August 1947-Mid 1950s

“We came [to Amritsar from Kotlibawa village, Sialkot district, West Punjab] in 1947. On 15 August, there was a shor (an unrest) in my village to “drive out the Hindus”. Our village Muslim mukhia (village leader) gathered us together and sat us down in one place. When it got dark in the evening, he told us to go because if someone or some group from another village were to come along and try to kill or harm us, he would be incapable of stopping them.”

-interview respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma, Moti Ram Katra, Amritsar, January 22nd 2003.

From August of 1947 right up to the late 1950s Amritsar witnessed a massive influx of Hindu and Sikh migrants making their way from the newly formed state of Pakistan. Their arrival was unprecedented; Kasturi Lal Sharma, his parents and siblings were just one of hundreds of thousands of families who made the move from West Punjab into East Punjab. An equal wave of Muslim migrants made their way across the Indian border into Pakistan.

The city of Amritsar tried desperately to cope with the arriving numbers. In addition to being at the receiving end of Hindus and

Sikhs displaced from West Punjab, it had to contend with a number of Muslim refugees from the interior of Indian Punjab looking for safe passage to Pakistan. The following chapter traces the reaction and growth of the city caught in the midst of these shifting populations. Newspaper articles and refugee accounts have been used as a thread throughout the chapter to explain the moment. The articles have been quoted in full, where appropriate, to establish a sense of the situation at the time.

The greatest human migration in history saw the movement of close to 12 million people across the border between India and Pakistan.¹ Between 1st August, 1947 and December 31st of the same year, 2 million non-Muslims had left for East Punjab. The non-Muslim population of the West Punjab according to the 1941 census was 3.8 million while the Muslim population in East Punjab was 5.3 million.² Therefore what was foreseen was that 3.2 million Muslims would move to Pakistan while 1.8 million would cross over to India.³

The transfer of population that took place was through a variety of modes; railway trains, motor vehicles in the form of trucks, civilian aircraft and transport planes were mobilized to help speed up the evacuation. The Military Evacuee Organization was set up in Amritsar on 4th September 1947 – three days after the abolishment of the Punjab Boundary force. The Pakistan government had set up their Military Evacuee Organization on the 28th of August, 1947 – roughly a week earlier. The MEO escorted huge foot convoys of 30,000 to 40,000 people across the border. These were mostly rural migrants from West Punjab.⁴ These columns were frequently attacked by the opposing community and suffered heavy casualties. Motor transport in the form of trucks was used to rescue stranded non-Muslims in the rural hinterland of West Punjab.

Convoys were also held up on both sides of the border. Allegations of the governments on either side stopping convoys of

exiting Hindus and Sikhs or Muslims as the case may be were frequent. The Tribune headline of “500,000 Hindus and Sikhs held up – West Punjab Government stops movement of convoys to India: Muslim Refugee Trains [from East Punjab to West Punjab]” is testimony to that fact.⁵

“I was 12-13 years old at the time. We were walking... for a while – it became nightfall – by then we were about 50-100 people. Further up, we met some Muslims who surrounded us. They told us since it was nightfall, we shouldn’t go ahead – someone would kill us. They told us to stay with them that night and they would escort us the following day. The next morning they sent us to a small town nearby. We stayed there for 3-4 days in government custody. There was a military camp set up - there wasn’t anything to eat though... Then, when we were a few thousand in number, the military escorted us on foot convoys from that katra to a place which was about 30-40 miles away. There they would fill up a truck with however many would fit in – they would then send the truck to Amritsar.”

-interview respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma, Moti Ram Katra, Amritsar, January 22nd 2003.

The East Punjab government set up 21 refugee camps all over Punjab. These Transit camps were set up at entry points from West Punjab and were meant to be temporary housing for the refugees till they could proceed to lands they had been allotted by the Central Plan. As a part of this scheme, the idea was to collectively resettle persons from particular areas in West Punjab to specific districts.⁶

The population of these refugee camps exploded to over 700,000 people in early November 1947 – barely two and a half months after Partition. Locations of these camps were close to the new international border; Fazilka, Ferozpur, Khem Karan, Atari and Dera Baba Nanak. The largest of these camps was at Kurukshetra, approximately 100 miles north-west of Delhi which had close to 200,000 refugees (Fig. 24).

Amritsar, being one of the key transit camps, saw a huge flood of refugees enter the city. However, along with dealing with the incoming numbers of Hindus and Sikhs, the administration had to also deal with the exiting Muslim population. All the Muslim residents of the city were now isolated at Sharifpura, to the north-east of the walled city. As of October 4th, 1947 according to refugee maps in the map room of the government office, there were 42,300 Muslim refugees still in refugee camps [Sharifpura] in Amritsar.⁷ In total there were 1,431,600 refugees scattered across both borders still awaiting evacuation according to the report.

The Tribune, the principal newspaper of Punjab ran the following story on Tuesday October 7, 1947⁸

Lakhs⁹ of refugees still in Amritsar

Amritsar, Oct 6. The local authorities are requisitioning all the local colleges and schools, for the present up to October 25 for accommodating the military personnel arriving here shortly and also the refugees, says a United Press message.

The accommodation for the refugees has become a great problem. Lakhs of refugees



Fig. 24. Map of (current) Indian Punjab showing locations of some of the principal transit camps in the state.

are still in Amritsar. Sharifpura is overcrowded. All the verandahs of the district courts are full of refugees. Thousands are lying in open spaces, waiting for conveyance to go out of Amritsar.

The east Punjab Government is requisitioning all available trucks and lorries, whether used by petrol or gas, for the conveyance of the refugees from one place to another.

Safe passage has been ensured for Muslim refugees. A curfew has been imposed near about the railway line between Sharifpura and Chheharta¹⁰ and on Amritsar railway station platforms for safe passage of Muslim refugee trains since the 4th instant. During the train time all crossings along the Carriage Bridge and Foot Bridge etc. are closed for the public till the trains have passed. Even curfew passes are not honored resulting in great inconvenience to the public.

The entire city had literally been turned into a refugee camp overnight; Hindus and Sikhs arriving by the truckloads, trainloads and foot convoys from across the border and the Muslim refugees isolated in a pocket outside the city desperately awaiting methods of exodus.

The Sharifpura camp underwent a drastic change in its demographic in just a couple of days. The Tribune of October 9th,

1947 – just two days after the above story reported the presence of 507,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees in camps in East Punjab. It went on to list the thirteen principal camps according to the latest government report. Among those listed is “Private camps in Amritsar” totaling 50,000 people. However, Sharifpura is also mentioned as housing 60,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees, not Muslim.¹¹

It would be safe to assume that by the 9th of October close to the entire Muslim population of Amritsar had been evacuated. The Sharifpura locality found itself in the all too familiar situation of being appropriated now as a Hindu and Sikh locality after having traditionally been a Muslim enclave.

REHABILITATION IN THE CITY

“[Upon arrival] We found a broken down truck near the subzi mandi (vegetable market) near Hall Gate, it started raining so we stayed there that night. The next morning we went to the Gobindgarh fort. At that time there were no buildings around it – it was just the fort. There was a huge camp set up in the grounds – there were tents everywhere. They used to give a family a tent along with rations – they gave blankets as well. We stayed there for a while after which slowly, whoever got a place in the city, they moved.”

-interview respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma, Moti Ram Katra, Amritsar, January 22nd 2003.

Refugee camps were seen all over the city. The grounds of Gobindgarh Fort towards the west of the walled city were filled with

refugees who had just made the trip across the border. In addition, Khalsa College, the biggest university in Amritsar along the Grand Trunk Road towards the west as well, was converted to a refugee camp.

Apart from these two main locations, all schools and colleges within the city were made into make-shift refugee holding places by the state¹² (Fig. 25). Moving between camps was common; Kasturi Lal Sharma and his family were one among many who moved from the Gobindgarh Fort camp to the west of the walled city into one that had been established at the Hindu Sabha School and College within the security of the city walls. Schools and colleges remained closed in the state of Punjab till the 29th of February, 1948 to accommodate the immigrant refugees. In addition to that, the government requisitioned all military accommodation as well for the purpose of housing the incoming masses.¹³

Before the actual Partition of the state, the Punjab Government had appointed a special Agency to work exclusively for the evacuation of the refugees in Lahore. Known as the Liaison Agency, it was aided by the Military Evacuation Organization. The M.E.O. had the task of arranging the movement across the border of the refugees and was responsible for their safety en route. In the week ending 30 October, 1947 over 570,000 Muslim refugees were said to have crossed into Pakistan via Amritsar and Ferozepur alone, while 471,000 non-Muslims crossed the other way.¹⁴ The Liaison Agency evacuated a total of 4,220,000 people from West Pakistan through Amritsar, Ferozepur and Fazilka¹⁵ in the first stage of movement and more than 150,000 in the second stage. It was also successful in removing valuables and moveable property estimated at Rs. 57,500,000 deposited in lockers and buried in houses.¹⁶

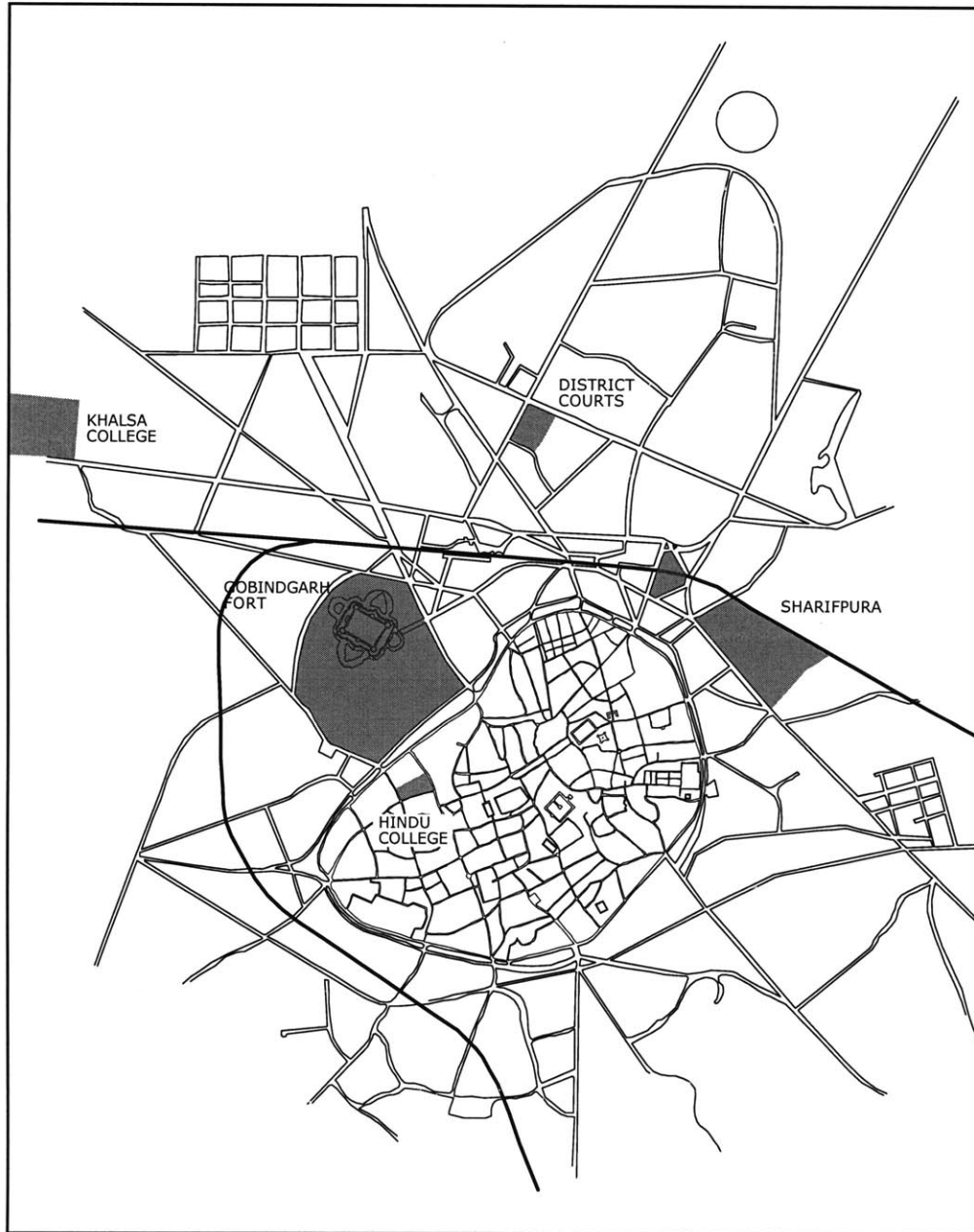


Fig. 25. State-run Refugee Camps in Amritsar

The Tribune on Friday, December 5, 1947 ran the following story:

**Hindus and Sikhs evacuated from West
Punjab
Colossal task completed within allotted
time
Over 8 million people cross border**

Mass evacuation of Hindus and Sikhs from west Punjab has been completed within the allotted time. There remain about 5000 people scattered in small pockets whose evacuation is expected to be completed in about a week's time.

Over 8 million refugees have crossed the Indo-Pakistan border in both directions up to November 21 according to the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. Of this a little over 4 million consisted of Hindus and Sikhs who were brought over to India from west Punjab, the North West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan. The evacuation of the remaining Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab and the NWFP is expected to be completed by the middle of December. Over 4 million Muslims have been evacuated from east Punjab and Delhi.

On an average, over half a lakh of Hindus and Sikhs were brought to safety every day by using all available means of transport;

trains, motor lorries, aircraft, ships and on foot.

Next to foot convoys, refugee trains carried the largest number of refugees. About 673 trains moving over 23 lakhs inside India and across the border were run between August 27 and November 6. Of these refugees 1,362,000 were Hindus and Sikhs and 939,000 were Muslims.¹⁷

Of the total number of non-Muslims arriving from West Punjab, 2,950,000 were of rural and 1,090,000 of urban origin. In contrast, the Muslim evacuees from East Punjab numbered 3,450,000 from rural and 900,000 from urban areas.¹⁸ These numbers belie the fact that the total acreage of urban land evacuated by Muslims in India was far less than that abandoned by rural non-Muslims in Pakistan. Thus, evacuee land to be redistributed in East Punjab fell short by a great deal.¹⁹ This had an immediate and drastic effect on all urban areas in East Punjab; particularly in the cities like Amritsar which served as transit camps.

Amritsar, like many other cities had to also grapple with the issues of abducted women and children. At the time of Partition, Hindus and Sikhs abducted the women-folk of the Muslim community and vice versa. Refugee camps were set up all over East Punjab particularly for these women. A transit camp was set up at Rosemary College in Amritsar. Small batches of women were rescued from West Punjab and brought here before being transferred to the Gandhi Vanita Ashram in Jullundhur – further East in Punjab, also set up by the East Punjab Government.²⁰

The Government-run Refugee Relief Bodies that had been manning the refugee camps were wound up by the 28th of February 1950 statewide in the whole of Punjab. The services of all the camp staff, including camp commandants, and store officers were terminated from the same day. The refugee camps thereafter, came under the charge of medical officers and relief places in the districts under the district urban relief officers' charge.²¹

EVACUEE PROPERTY

“[Upon arrival to the walled city in Amritsar] whatever was left around us was burned or vacant – they were all empty because the Muslims had left. Whichever house were empty, people used to squat. The government set up a Rehabilitation Department – there, after giving an application, places got allotted to refugees. The properties that people left behind in Pakistan – the allotments were made based on those properties...”

-interview respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma, Moti Ram Katra, Amritsar, January 22nd 2003.

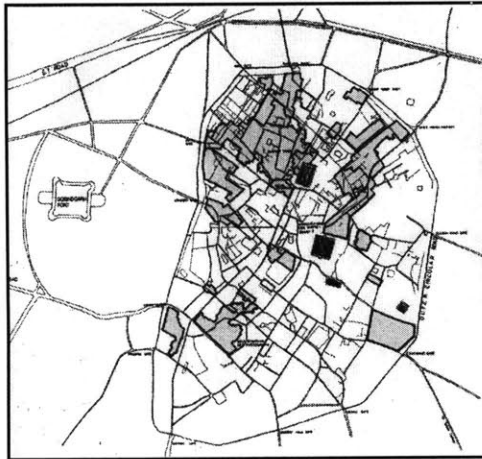


Fig. 26. Map of the Walled City showing the areas damaged by the riots of 1947.

The number of urban refugees that needed to be settled in East Punjab exceeded the number of departing Muslim inhabitants by about 400,000 to 500,000 people.²² In addition, the riots in Amritsar and other cities had rendered a lot of the housing stock as uninhabitable – an estimated 25% of the walled city had been destroyed in the riots in the run up to Partition (Fig. 26). These were both Muslim and non-Muslim properties that had been destroyed. This coupled with the excess numbers of arriving Hindus and Sikhs left Amritsar crippled.

The Government of East Punjab decided in October 1947 to allot a scale of space at the rate of 50 square feet of floor area for an adult and 30 square feet for a child.²³ This however, was not properly enforced for a variety of reasons; the disorganization of the authorities and the sheer magnitude of the supervision of squatter settlers. The Muslim evacuee property also needed to be surveyed – finally completed in June of 1948. This therefore, left all the refugees in a state of flux. Mechanisms that were in place failed to keep up with the pace of work that was required.

The arriving masses, therefore, squatted wherever they could. The large swaths of the walled city which had been burned at the time of the riots were now the first locations that were targeted by the incoming populace. The abandoned Muslim properties were systematically appropriated by the Hindu and Sikh population in complete inconsistency to an earlier notion of the Muslim community as being a source of pollution.²⁴ The need for immediate housing had led to the transformation of ‘unclean abodes’ into ones that were embraced and engaged in the urban realm.

THE CASE OF MOTI RAM KATRA

Moti Ram Katra, located at the northwestern edge of the walled city was one such location that had been heavily damaged in the riots. The *katra*, which had been traditionally a Muslim inhabited locality, had been vacated at the time of the ensuing Muslim exodus. In the course of the riots and evacuation (Fig. 27). Seventy percent of the *katra* had been burned to the ground.²⁵ Only a hundred and twenty eight structures existed in the area out of which three were under religious use – one temple and two mosques. The total population of the area was close to about 950 people.²⁶



Fig. 27. Moti Ram Katra within the context of other *katras* in the Walled City as of 1947.

Kasturi Lal Sharma and his family moved here shortly after their arrival into Amritsar. According to his testimony, they were not the only family;

“Whichever houses were empty, people used to squat. We came to this present location in 1952. It was all burned – there were piles of earth everywhere. One or two rooms here and there were inhabitable – there were 2-3 houses in front. Whoever squatted stayed on...”

Life at Moti Ram Katra and many others throughout the walled city was not easy. Studies carried out in urban East Punjab found that 98% of those families surveyed lived in houses with no independent arrangement of water supply and 93.6 per cent were in non-electrified homes.²⁷

Due to the extensive damage to Amritsar, the Amritsar Improvement Trust was set up by the East Punjab Government in April 1949. The activities of the Trust though, were governed by the Town Improvement Act of 1922 which left them with little power to exact change on a fractured city. To combat that an ordinance called the Punjab Damaged Areas Ordinance was promulgated in 1949. This was followed by the Punjab Development of Damaged Areas Act of 1951.

The salient features of the Act were:

1. The Act could be applied anywhere in Punjab.
2. Accordingly any area could be declared a damaged area under the purview of the Act for purposes of redevelopment/improvement.
3. The new legislature laid down a more convenient procedure for acquiring of land enabling the Trust to take immediate

possession of land and defer payment of compensation for land to each owner to a proportionate share of the income; i.e. sale proceeds minus cost of the scheme.

4. All redevelopment projects were to be planned on a non-profit basis
5. It gave the Trust the power to demolish structures which were “in contravention” to the sanctioned layout plan.

Under this act the entire walled city of Amritsar was declared a Damaged Area and the Amritsar Improvement Trust was given the responsibility of Planning and Implementation of redevelopment projects (Fig. 28).

Moti Ram Katra was one of the localities that were “improved”. Survey photographs of the time show a housing stock that had all but been destroyed. A total of only 55 structures were retained as part of the development scheme initiated by the Amritsar Improvement Trust. 80 families were thus safeguarded against being uprooted. Out of the two mosques and a temple that had existed in the *katra*, only one mosque was retained – at the head of the locality close to *Hathi Gate* – one of the principal gates of the walled city.

The new plan proposed by the Amritsar Improvement Trust (Fig. 29) created an additional 175 plots within the locality. This was done to accommodate the 80 families that had been uprooted as well as create an additional housing stock – something that Amritsar was in dire need of, a feature that was adopted in many of the Redevelopment Schemes implemented across the city. Implementation of the scheme started on January 15, 1959 but due to governmental red tape took over ten years to complete. By the 6th of August, 1970, the scheme had officially been completed.

Land was given to applicants based on a priority basis; i.e. the original residents who had been uprooted were given first priority

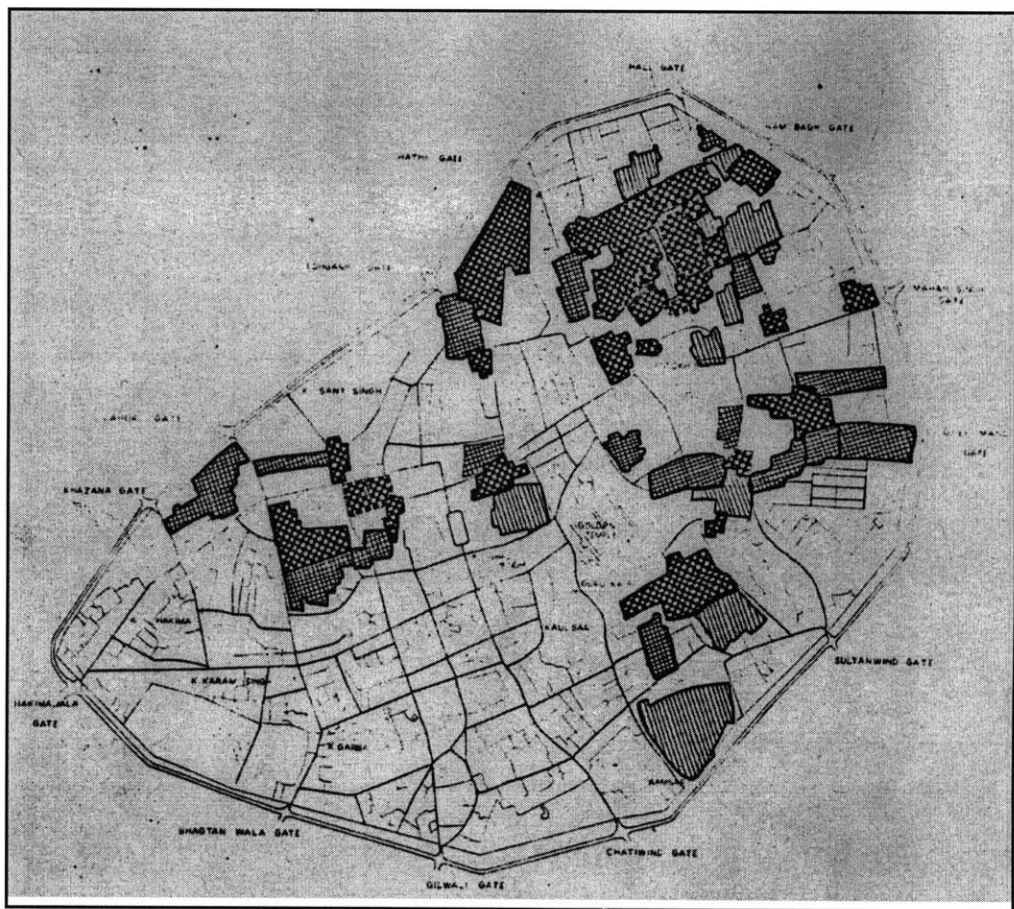


Fig. 28. Map of the Walled City showing the Redevelopment Projects earmarked by the Amritsar Improvement Trust

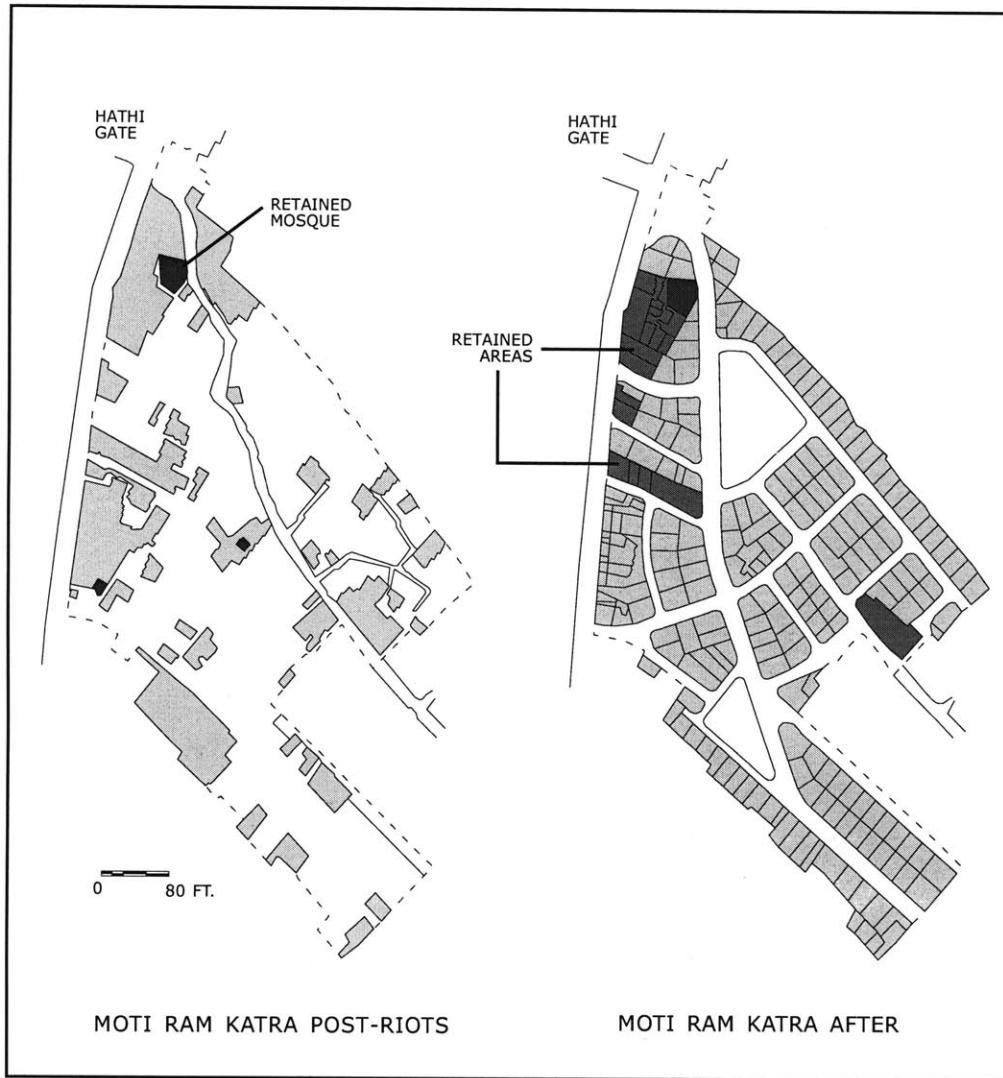


Fig. 29. Maps of Moti Ram Katra before the Redevelopment Scheme and after showing the new plotted development and open spaces.

and then the scheme was opened to other displaced individuals from other *katras* throughout the city.

“When we became a little more financially comfortable – this area came under the Improvement Trust. The Trust developed this area. Whatever area we had, that they acquired and they sold it back to us at 30 rupees. We collected the money somehow. To construct, the government also gave us money in terms of loans. We made the house very late – in 1963 – by then my brothers had grown up. After being educated, my younger brother who was in a cycle shop started his own lathe machine shop.”

-interview respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma, Moti Ram Katra, Amritsar, January 22nd 2003.

Kasturi Lal Sharma’s house was not in one of the areas that had been retained as part of the redevelopment scheme.

If one were to analyze the Redevelopment Scheme proposed by the AIT, it becomes immediately clear that it was a method employed to erase within the locality whatever traces of the riots and hence the destruction that had remained in the *katra*. Lanes were widened, housing built and open parks were introduced into the fabric completely negating and ignoring much of the existing fabric of the city (Fig.29). New circulation systems were put in place overlaying demolished structures. One could argue that this is true with much of Urban Renewal; reasons given for clearing of the area were along the lines of improved health and sanitation, ease of vehicular access and a more regulated circulation system.

However, it could be argued that in Amritsar, urban renewal had another layer to it – that of memory and the state’s implicit erasure of it. Due to the fact that the city now consisted of a large immigrant community, the concept of memory of an existing urban space was not one that the authorities needed to contend with. The Punjab Damaged Areas Act and the declaration of the walled city of Amritsar as a Damaged Area gave the AIT legal authority and sanction to intervene. Kasturi Lal’s family, like countless others who now inhabited the *katra*, had come from afar – both from rural (as was the case with them) and from urban Pakistan. For them Amritsar was a new city, a sanctum of sorts from the carnage they had left behind and a place of new beginnings for their future generations. It was important for the state to recognize that in every possible manner – the urban renewal of these localities within the walled city was just one method by which this was to be achieved.

A further layer of religious identity or the lack thereof and its association with an urban space was superimposed onto Moti Ram *Katra*. What had previously been a communally contested space was now homogenous in its identity.²⁸ This was repeatedly seen throughout the walled city. What was seen was the systematic re-appropriation of a city in all its components that had been of mixed heritage and mixed communities transformed into a communal single-entirety. Sharifpura, a classic case of a vacant Muslim slum overtaken by an incoming mass of refugees, had undergone a similar fate earlier. Its subsequent occupation by the immigrant Hindus and Sikhs was, in all likelihood state-sponsored although no evidence has been found to support the claim that it was implicitly crafted by the authorities.

By 1961, 13 schemes had been officially executed by the Trust or were within the process of being implemented within the old walls of the city. The most important of these were *Katra* Jaimal Singh,



Fig. 30 Panoramic view of the principal open space as part of the Redevelopment Scheme in Moti Ram Katra



Fig. 31. (Right) View of Entry from Hathi Gate into the katra

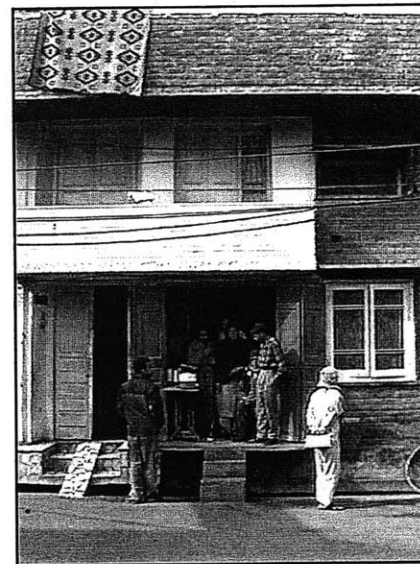


Fig. 32. (Far Right) Kasturi Lal Sharma outside his home in Moti Ram Katra

Bazaar Ram Bagh, *Katra* Sher Singh, *Chowk* Phawara, Islamabad *Abadi* (outside the walled city), Bazaar Tokrian and *Katra* Moti Ram.

SHIFTING VOCATIONS

A large percentage of the departing urban Muslims had consisted of artisans, mechanics, craftsmen, blacksmiths, potters, butchers and the like while the arriving Hindu and Sikh populace belonged to the trading classes.²⁹ Amritsar, prior to 1947 had been a major center for woolen manufacture and carpet weaving. The departure of the craftspeople from the city paralyzed all forms of industry; the incoming Hindus and Sikhs did not have the skill set to take over what the Muslims had left behind. Jobs were hard to find and people took whatever came their way.

Kasturi Lal's family suffered a similar fate.

"[My father] was a street-side food vendor [in Sialkot, Pakistan]. He had his own shop. He used to cater for weddings. [After coming to Amritsar] he got no work. He struggled. He would sit in the bazaar – he used to make papads (dry roasted bread) and sell them. We also got jobs like this in shops – for Rs. 5 to 10 a month; my younger brother started working in a juice shop."

Large factories were now left untended. The owners, most of whom had been Hindu and Sikh, had no employees left. The traders that came in took over vacated shops left behind by the Muslims but there were no goods to sell or worse, no buyers left.

In order to mitigate the problem the East Punjab government set up 36 vocational training centers all across the province to train the incoming labor force. The trainees were encouraged to manufacture saleable goods which were then marketed through depots set up by the government. The Department of Industries, in addition, maintained 23 industrial school and 20 demonstration parties to train people in the crafts that had been abandoned by the Muslims.³⁰

After Partition, the main industrial centers of Punjab had been left behind in Pakistan – Lahore, Wazirabad and Sialkot. The non-Muslim industries lost nearly 400 industrial establishments as a result of Partition.³¹ Traders coming from West Punjab, particularly Lahore sidestepped Amritsar and moved further interior to Delhi. The Muslim exodus from Delhi was coupled with a huge immigrant population of Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab. Even in 1951, the census showed Partition refugees accounting for 28.4 percent of Delhi's total population of 1.74 million people.³²

Due to the increased insecurity of Amritsar as an industrial center, the obvious choice for a large number of businesses already existing would have been to move further to the interior of Punjab. In an effort to prevent the liquidation of any of the area's industrial base, the government passed the East Punjab Factories (Control and Dismantling) Act in 1948 which put heavy restrictions on the rights of any person to move machinery or any other parts from a factory without official permission.³³ Still, many businesses managed to move their locations from Amritsar to Delhi, Bombay as well as Ludhiana further east in Punjab.

The non-viability of the border for trade and the economic stagnation that took over had a crippling effect on the economics of all urban cities, most notably felt in the border city of Amritsar.

THE SECOND WAVE

Despite this economic stagnation, Amritsar still remained a destination for some who found themselves across the border after the initial wave of migration. Refugees continued to enter the city even later as a result of Partition. Reasons could be multiple; the need to be in the presence of other refugees sharing a similar fate seems to be the most prevalent. The city received incoming Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan up to the late 1950s. These refugees though, did not have the benefit of state-sponsored relief and rehabilitation department to assist them in any manner.

Dr. Basant Lal presently residing in the *Peshawari Mohalla* locality on the Western edge of Amritsar outside the city walls along the Grand Trunk Road was one among many who arrived here directly from Peshawar in Pakistan in 1956. He was a child of 12 when he arrived with his father.

“We left because we were Hindu. Some people [Hindus and Sikhs] stayed back in Pakistan even after partition thinking things would settle down. However, we soon realized that we needed to go to Hindustan [India] since we were Hindus. We used to hear Panditji [Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India] on the radio. The flag also beckoned us...”

-Interview respondent Dr. Basant Lal, Main Road, Peshawari Mohalla, Amritsar, January 21st, 2003.

An abandoned warehouse in the industrial district of Amritsar, Peshawari Mohalla literally meaning “neighborhood of people from

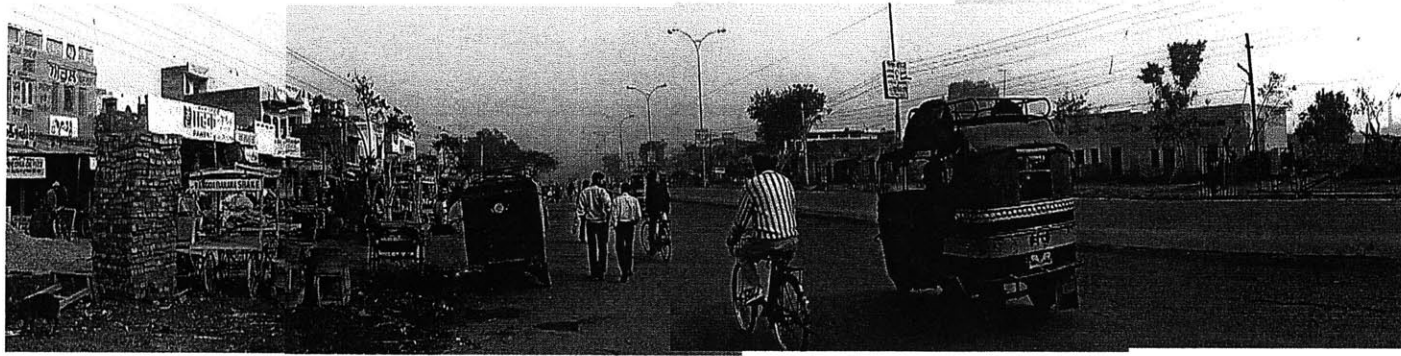


Fig. 33 Panoramic view of the Grand Trunk Road and Peshawari Mohalla on the left.

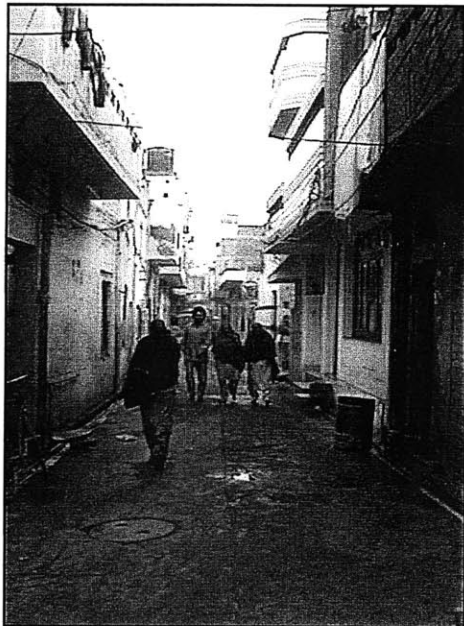


Fig. 34. Interior Street in Peshawari Mohalla

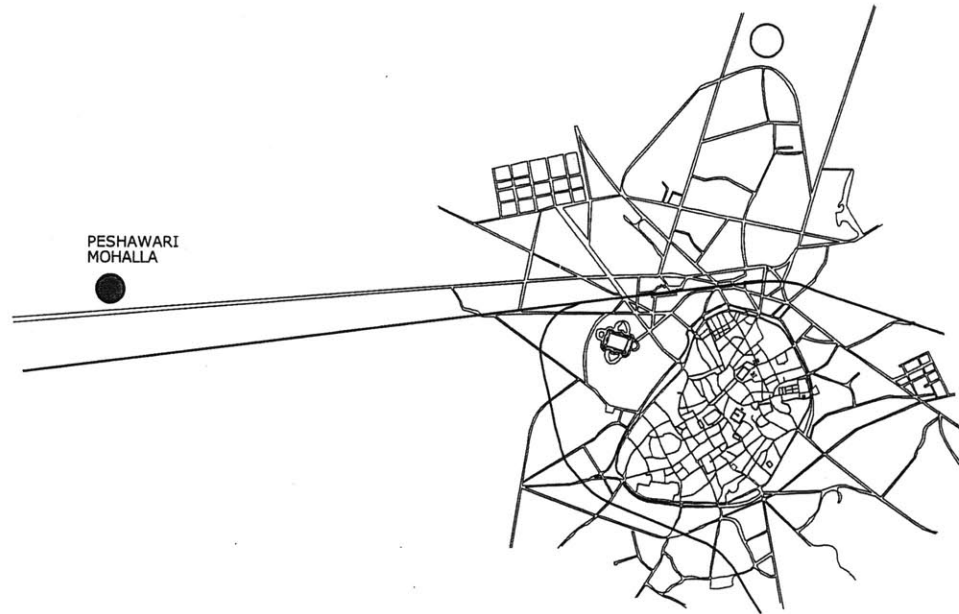


Fig. 35. Location of Peshawari Mohalla along the Grand Trunk Road at a spatial distance from the Walled City

Peshawar" was established by this group of migrants (Fig. 33- 35). The migrants who were of three *biradiris* (kinship groups) in Peshawar, Pakistan had split up into three parties – one each going to Jullundhur, Khanna and Amritsar – all three of them cities in East Punjab. The group that came to Amritsar bought the warehouse from the owners at the time and demolished it to make 80 plots for homes for themselves.

In a similar manner many refugee localities sprung up along the Grand Trunk Road in the suburbs towards the west of the city. The Grand Trunk Road was, for many, the main arrival route into Amritsar. All foot and vehicle convoys had used this path for exiting and entering the city. It was only natural that this corridor would soon find itself an area where refugees would elect to settle down. In addition, this stretch that had previously been the Industrial sector of the city had fallen into disarray due to the closing of manufacture in the city after Partition. The abandoned factories and warehouses seemed ideally suited for the refugee influx.

Therefore one sees the arrival of immigrants within Amritsar as occurring at two points in time; the first immediately following Partition and the other as a trickling in of a population through the 1950s.

The first wave was associated with a sense of immediacy; it was an instantaneous appropriation of a city through occupation of contested space within its walls. It was unplanned for the most part and consisted of a series of self-motivated point insertions within existing abandoned sections of the city fabric.

The second wave of immigrants constructed their own communities in the suburbs of Amritsar conforming to the traditional South Asian city model³⁴. The evacuee properties within the walled

city had already been occupied by the first wave of immigrants who had made the move from Pakistan. The new communities therefore located themselves on the only unclaimed land in the outskirts of the city. Peshawari Mohalla was one such example of a community who considered its origins to be its primary cohesive factor in the new city; hence the name of the locality. One could argue that the naming of the locality was a method employed by the community to differentiate itself from a seemingly homogenous city that had seamlessly integrated the Hindu and Sikh communities within it.

NOTES

¹ Corruccini, Robert S. and Kaul, Samvit S., *Halla: Demographic Consequences of the Partition of the Punjab, 1947*, University Press of America, 1990. p1

² Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p78

³ Based on the assumption that all non-Muslims in Pakistan would wish to evacuate while the Muslims on the Indian side would want to go to Pakistan.

⁴ These foot convoys also consisted of livestock that the farmers brought across with them.

⁵ The Tribune, Simla, Friday September 26, 1947, Vol. lxxvii, no. 226

⁶ Tan, Tai Yong and Kudaisya, Gyanesh, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, Routledge. 2000, p132. People from Sialkot district in Pakistan were allotted lands in Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur and Amritsar Districts. Although this demand for a village-wise allocation of land was incorporated in the new scheme for a permanent settlement, it was assumed that people who had already settled on temporary allotments would not be disturbed as far as possible for obvious reasons.

⁷ The Tribune, Simla, Saturday October 4, 1947, Vol. lxxvii, no. 234.

⁸ The Tribune, Simla, Tuesday, October 7, 1947, Vol. lxxvii, no. 237

⁹ One Hundred thousand

¹⁰ Village-town to the west of Amritsar city along the Grand Trunk Road and on the railway line to Lahore, Pakistan.

¹¹ The Tribune, Simla, Thursday, October 9, 1947, Vol. lxxvii, no. 239. The article lists the numbers in various refugee camps – among those listed is Kurukshetra with only 14,000 people. It is estimated that a large number of these evacuees moved further to the interior of India – towards Delhi. Fazilka and Ferozepur, both adjacent to the border had 20,000 and 40,000 refugees respectively.

¹² The Tribune, Simla, Tuesday, October 7, 1947, Vol. lxxvii, no. 237

¹³ Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi, 1986. p111

¹⁴ Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p36

¹⁵ All three being major transit camps

¹⁶ Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi, 1986. p111. The Agency was withdrawn on 30 November 1948. A small office of the Agency remained functioning in Amritsar to dispose of property of Indian nationals who had come from Lahore, dispose of the shares of Indian nationals from Lahore and to settle matters arising out of audit accounts.

¹⁷ The Tribune, Simla, Friday, December 5, 1947. Vol. lxxvii no. 293.

¹⁸ Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi, 1986. p158

¹⁹ Ibid, p158

²⁰ Sunday Tribune, Simla, Sunday, April 11, 1948. Vol. lxxviii no. 97

²¹ The Tribune, Ambala Cantonment, Saturday February 25th, 1950. Vol. lxx no. 55

²² Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New

York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p 130

²³ Ibid p131

²⁴Talbot, Ian, *Freedom's Cry, The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996. p48

²⁵ Singh, Balwinder, *Planning and Implementation of Redevelopment Projects in Amritsar*, Unpublished thesis, Guru Ramdas School of Planning, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1981-82. p47

²⁶ Ibid p 50

²⁷ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p130. These percentages concern urban refugees in East Punjab and not Amritsar only. These findings were part of a survey carried out by V.P. Malhotra for his book "Economic Conditions of Displaced Persons Settled in East Punjab" published in 1949.

²⁸ The differences between the Hindu and the Sikh community which were to become a focal point in the rise of militancy in Punjab in the 1980s, were not evident or an issue at this point in time. For all intents and purposes, the two communities were seen as one.

²⁹ Rai, Satya M., *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of its effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab (I) 1947-56*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965. p 133

³⁰ Ibid p 135

³¹ Ibid p 137

³² Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p122

³³ Purewal, Navtej K., *Living on the Margins: Social Access to Shelter in Urban South Asia*, Ashgate, 2000. p 47

³⁴ Ansari, Sarah, *Mapping Old Identities on to new Terrain: The Drawing up of 'borders' in Pakistani cities during the late 1940s and 1950s: the case of Karachi*. Traditional south Asian cities were characteristic by the existence of spatial communities, whose cohesion was maintained by kin and caste ties lubricated by reciprocal services together with other kinds of obligations.

FIVE

Explication

Amritsar Analyzed

The previous chapters have shown the complete transformation of Amritsar as a small town of the birthplace of Sikhism right up to the exodus of its Muslim component and the subsequent post-Partition arrival of Hindu and Sikh immigrants interpretation into the city.

Before going any further, it is important to realize that the Partition of India and Pakistan and the mass migration that it caused was not typical of global refugee movements for one fundamental reason - the populations that moved were welcome on the other side of the border by the other dominion. The move was officially sanctioned by both governments; they were state-sponsored mass exoduses happening on both sides of the border at numerous points.

This is a crucial difference; the concept of the refugee escaping his country into an unknown abyss does not apply here. The abyss was very much a known fact and was seen as official refuge and not an imposition by the refugee on a state. The added advantage of being welcome across the border and being guaranteed citizenship and all the legal ramifications of what that implies was a significant factor that cannot be ignored.

Keeping this in mind, the events of 1947 and the subsequent changes that took place in Amritsar as a city beg the question:

Why did Amritsar react to Partition in the manner in which it did?

To try and explain the reaction of the city to the massive upheaval that took place in those years, it would be prudent to, along with Amritsar, describe the aftereffects of 1947 on two other sites within the subcontinent to put it all in perspective. Firstly, a correlation shall be drawn with Lahore – another border city the exact same distance away from the border but on the Pakistani side. How did Lahore react to the upheaval? Was it any different or was it the same? Secondly, interior Punjab and the growth/decline of the cities towards the interior of India shall also be included in this cross-referencing in order to gain greater understanding and perspective on why violence and migration marred the physical space of Amritsar in the manner that it did.

1. Proximity of the International Border and the Decline of Industry

The location of Amritsar is probably one of the major reasons if not the most important one for the decline of the city. From being situated a mere 26 miles from Lahore – the Punjabi capital prior to Partition - and occupying a prime location on the Grand Trunk Road, the city could not have had it better. Lahore and Amritsar were considered twin cities by many prior to partition – many residents had pre-existing ties with the other city.¹ A thriving community with a stable and growing economy, Amritsar seemed to have an ideal location for the city to grow exponentially.

However, the creation of an international border 17 miles towards its west suddenly made Amritsar a border city. The two cities of Amritsar and Lahore suddenly were representative of the two dominions of India and Pakistan themselves; a mantle they had no

choice but to take on.

Partition Riots were at their most severe in Amritsar and Lahore precisely because of their locations so close to the border. Perceived safety therefore, was a prime concern for the citizens of Amritsar as well as those arriving Hindu and Sikh refugees seeking sanctuary across the border in India. As a result of this, the middle and the upper class from Lahore mostly chose to settle further away from the border in cities like Bombay and Delhi – by January of 1948, Delhi had a refugee population of 400,000 from Punjab alone.² Amritsar, which had previously been at the crossroads of central Punjab and a major economic, cultural and religious center found itself becoming the last city on the Grand Trunk Road before the border demarcating India and Pakistan.

Amritsar had been a primary center for textiles, leather work and tanning, chemicals and iron and steel works prior to Partition.³ After 1947, the area to the West of Amritsar (now Pakistan) was closed for trade purposes. The closure of this belt, which had been the major supplier of raw material and a major market for export, forced the city to look for new markets in the Indian interior.

Industry in the city was practically non-viable for another important reason. The exodus of the Muslim community from and the arrival of the Hindus and Sikhs into Amritsar had a crippling effect on the craft-based industry of the city. The departing Muslims were mostly weavers and workers in the tanning, leather and steel industry. The arriving Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab were in contrast, primarily traders and businessmen. Amritsar suddenly found itself with an abundance of traders in the city, an abundance of factories as well but with no artisans to work in them.

The flight of industry to more commercially viable centers in the rest of India was the only option. Not only did Amritsar lose out on industry that might have relocated from Lahore to it, it also lost

out on the survival and the retention of the existing industries set up in the city. The hosiery and woolen industry shifted from Amritsar to Ludhiana in the 1950s⁴, at a distance of approximately 135 kilometers towards the east in the interior of the state causing the economic boom of that city which remains today, the economic capital of the state of Punjab.

2. Unprepared Communities and the Uncertainty of the Line

The transfer of population that occurred in the latter half of 1947 and the years immediately following was one of the largest mass migrations of the twentieth century. The actual transfer of populations that occurred was, however, an unplanned outcome of the violence in Punjab.

As has been explained earlier, the governments of both dominions were of the opinion that population transfer was not required – that Hindus and Sikhs could coexist peacefully with Muslims both in Pakistan and in India. The main order of the time was to work out the division of assets and liabilities of both countries so much so that the actual transfer of population was never given any serious thought; transplantation of populations was thought of as inconceivable and impracticable. The Government of India were of the opinion that no one would be willing to leave their ancestral properties and move to a new land altogether.

The Muslim League had suggested the exchange of populations in 1945 and a year later in 1946 but was not seriously considered by the Congress government. After the riots of March 1947, however, it became clear that minorities left on either side of the border would become prey to “organized lawlessness”.⁵ Akali Leaders asserted that whatever line of division were to be carved out, it should be done to facilitate the transfer of population and property.⁶

The Congress, however, were of the opinion that it was a temporary phase and that the exchange of populations would be too drastic a step to take. They also felt that if the exchange were to occur, the position of Muslims left in other parts of India would be rendered more insecure with the exclusion of a major portion of their community from the country.

Thus, many of the refugees interviewed at the time recall the move from their homes as sudden. A common refrain in refugee interviews is the lack of preparation; no one expected to leave their homes permanently. Homes were frequently left with friends or staff for caretaking until they felt the crisis would blow over⁷; the move was considered temporary at best.

Another factor that compounded the ambiguity of the predicted after-effects of Partition was the fact that the Boundary Commission declared the International Boundary line two full days after Independence had been declared. Even though it was assumed that Amritsar would fall on the Indian side, it was still not a certainty. The fate of Lahore, likewise, hung in the balance. What could have been a systematic evacuation extended over a longer period of time prior to the actual declaration of the two separate dominions was therefore, not carried out.

3. Delay in Reclaiming Evacuee Property

As a result of this massive unplanned exodus and arrival on both sides of the border, evacuee land became a serious issue to contend with. Due to the hope of the Indian government that those people who had migrated to India at the time of Partition would eventually return to Pakistan, they were wary of distributing the evacuee property left behind by the fleeing Muslim masses. The Pakistan government had already taken control of evacuee property

left behind by the departing Hindus and Sikhs right after Partition and had started distributing the land as evacuee property among the incoming Muslims from East Punjab.

The Indian Government, however, was hesitant to do the same in the hope that the departing Muslims would eventually return to India. It was only decided in 1954 – seven full years after the actual migrations “to acquire rights, title and interests of evacuee owners in their properties in India and to utilize these properties for giving part compensation to displaced persons.” Consequently, the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act was passed in October 1954 giving the Government of India the power to redistribute evacuee property left behind in India for purposes of relief, compensation and rehabilitation.⁸

The immediate repercussion of this in Amritsar was that the refugees that had squatted on evacuee properties did not have any rights to the land until 1955 – a full eight years later. The cleaning up of the debris left behind was also delayed as a result of this since burnt down properties of the departed Muslim community could not technically be salvaged or cleared up by the state.

Amritsar as a result was a city which bore the visage of an urban ruin. As mentioned earlier, approximately 25% of the walled city had been destroyed as a part of the Partition riots. The inaction by the authorities to clean up the city or rehabilitate the properties resulted in an urban landscape that was both unsightly and ill prepared for any inhabitation whatsoever.

4. Transit City Status

Prior to 1947, Lahore, Amritsar and Delhi were considered the major cities of Punjab based on population counts. However, upon Partition the Government of India conferred Amritsar with ‘Transit City’ status at the time of all the refugee movements that were taking place in the state of

Punjab.

As has already been stated earlier, twenty-one transit camps were set up all over East Punjab with all of these being located close to the new International border. Amritsar was one of these along with other cities such as Fazilka, Ferozpur, Khem Karan, Atari and Dera Baba Nanak (Fig. 36). These transit camps that were set up were meant for two-fold purposes; firstly, a collection point for arriving Hindus and Sikhs and secondly, a consolidated point for Muslims from India to collect before being escorted across the border by the MEO. In the week ending 30 October 1947, over 570,000 Muslims were said to have crossed over into Pakistan from Amritsar and Ferozpur alone, while 471,000 non-Muslims had come in from Pakistan.⁹ In addition, the Liaison Agency had evacuated a total of 4,370,000 people from West Pakistan through Amritsar, Ferozpur and Fazilka.

Keeping this in mind if we were to look at the population table (Table 5.1) for major cities in Punjab for the years 1941 and 1951, the numbers are telling. The table overleaf gives a listing of all major towns in all the major provinces of Punjab that had a population greater than 5000 people in 1941.



Fig. 36. Transit Camps in Punjab on the new International Border between India and Pakistan.

Table 5.1

<i>District</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>1941Male</i>	<i>1941 Female</i>	<i>1951Male</i>	<i>1951Female</i>
Ludhiana	Ludhiana City	65,061	46,578	83,820	69,975
Gurdaspur	Pathankot	7,084	5,270	20,276	12,139
	Batala	23,820	20,638	30,097	25,753
Amritsar	Amritsar City	229,199	161,811	191,219	144,895
Ferozpur	Ferozpur City	51,171	31,331	22,152	18,551
	Fazilka	17,196	11,066	13,926	12,008
Patiala	Patiala City	40,923	28,927	54,561	43,308
Sangrur	Malerkotla	15,606	13,715	17,073	15,502
Bhatinda	Bhatinda City	13,968	10,865	19,283	15,708
Jullundur	Jullunder City	79,730	55,553	91,127	77,689
Kapurthala	Phagwara	9,226	6,968	13,611	11,980

Upon examination of the table, the numbers show that Amritsar, Ferozpur and Fazilka are the only three cities that show a decline in population in 1951 when compared to the numbers of 1941. The fact that all three of these, and only these among the list, were major transit camps is not a coincidence. Proximity to the border does not seem to be the only contributing factor to explaining these numbers as Gurdaspur is adjacent to the border as well, and still sees an upsurge in population between 1941 and 1951.

Transit camps were seen by the arriving populace as precisely that – transitory accommodation. There was a lack of permanence associated with the term and with the conditions in these cities. For Fazilka and Ferozpur to be appropriated as such is understandable; their populations prior to Partition were 28,000 and 80,000 people respectively. However, the granting of a similar status to Amritsar was one of the key reasons for the decline in population in 1951.

A key factor that should be recognized here is the government's role in the decline of the city immediately after Partition. The categorizing of Amritsar as a transit camp by the government had a deep psychological impact on the refugees coming into the city. The flight of Industry that has been elucidated upon earlier was a direct result of the apparent administrative pigeonholing of Amritsar into a transit-camp status. No refugee if he could afford to, would consider staying on in a city that the government itself saw as one that was transitory. After the massive economic upheaval that the refugees had gone through, the interior of India seemed a safer bet.

From being one of the three prime cities in Punjab, Amritsar overnight became a city of transients. Most of the Hindus and Sikhs arriving from Pakistan moved further interior for reasons that have already been mentioned in this chapter. Those Muslims departing Amritsar were either residents of the city who were on their way out or people who had gathered from all over Punjab and were awaiting safe passage to Pakistan.

5. Lack of a Cultural Distance

The proximity of Lahore and Amritsar had another role to play in the transfer of populations and why it affected Amritsar the way it did. Punjabi migrants into Pakistan (and presumably, the other way round as well) suffered less cultural conflict than *mohajirs* (Muslim migrants from the rest of India who settled down in the other provinces of Pakistan) because they were not settling in a different language area.¹⁰ What is clear is that the community did not suffer a collective cultural displacement. What was seen in other parts of the subcontinent – notably in Karachi in the province of Sind in Pakistan – was that the 'urban landscape was tailored and mapped

by people who actively used territory, residence, distance, space and movement to build up collective representations which have communicative value and use sharp boundaries to differentiate themselves from others'¹¹

This however, did not happen in Amritsar. Cultural and religious similarities underplayed the need for any such establishment of a new identity in a ravaged city. In the first wave of migration that happened immediately after Partition, the immigrants settled in the Walled City in locations that were predetermined by the sites of evacuee properties that had been left behind. The settlements were a series of self-motivated point insertions into abandoned sections of an existing fabric. It was only in the second wave that happened in the 1950s where one sees a proclamation of ancestry which takes the form of the establishment of kinship colonies in the suburbs of the city.¹²

The first wave of immigrants therefore did not 'construct a community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning and a reference of their identity'.¹³ Therefore, I argue that there was no sense of permanence that set in; that the new home and what it entailed was not markedly different from what the refugee was used to.

Another repercussion of the proximity of the cities was the lack of permanence that the move itself projected. The fact that Amritsar was so close to Lahore was an added factor in the transitory appeal that the move had; refugee accounts of the time frequently show that the respondents all had illusions of going back "once things calmed down". The move was seen as temporary at best by so many of them - most did not expect this to be a permanent situation. The new immigrant community had to settle for temporary jobs once they arrived due to the closure of industry in the city and a shifting vocation structure.¹⁴ These temporary jobs though, had a debilitating

psychological effect on the new community in the city. The eventual economic stagnation that Amritsar witnessed can be partially attributed to this mindset of the urban refugee.

LAHORE: A CROSS REFERENCE

Given the factors that have been outlined above, Amritsar's reaction to the events of 1947 should have, by the same account, been felt across the border in the city of Lahore in Pakistan.

Located at approximately the same distance as Amritsar from the border, Lahore, however, was witness to a completely different situation (Fig. 37). As a primary indicator, if one were to compare the populations of Lahore in 1941 and that of 1951 we see an increase from 671,659 to 849,333 – a rise of 177,674 people over the ten-year period.¹⁵ Amritsar in sharp contrast had dropped from 391,010 people in 1941 to 325,747 in the 1951 Census.¹⁶ If one were to continue the comparison through to the next decade we find that Lahore had a further increase to 1,296,477 people in 1961 while Amritsar reached a total of 376,295 – still lower than its initial population count in 1941, a full 20 years before.

What then caused the population of Lahore to nearly double from 1941 to 1961 while Amritsar sees a decline and then rise to reach the approximate same numbers of 1941?

There are perhaps, three principal causes that could explain to some extent the population upsurge that took place in Lahore over the twenty-year period.

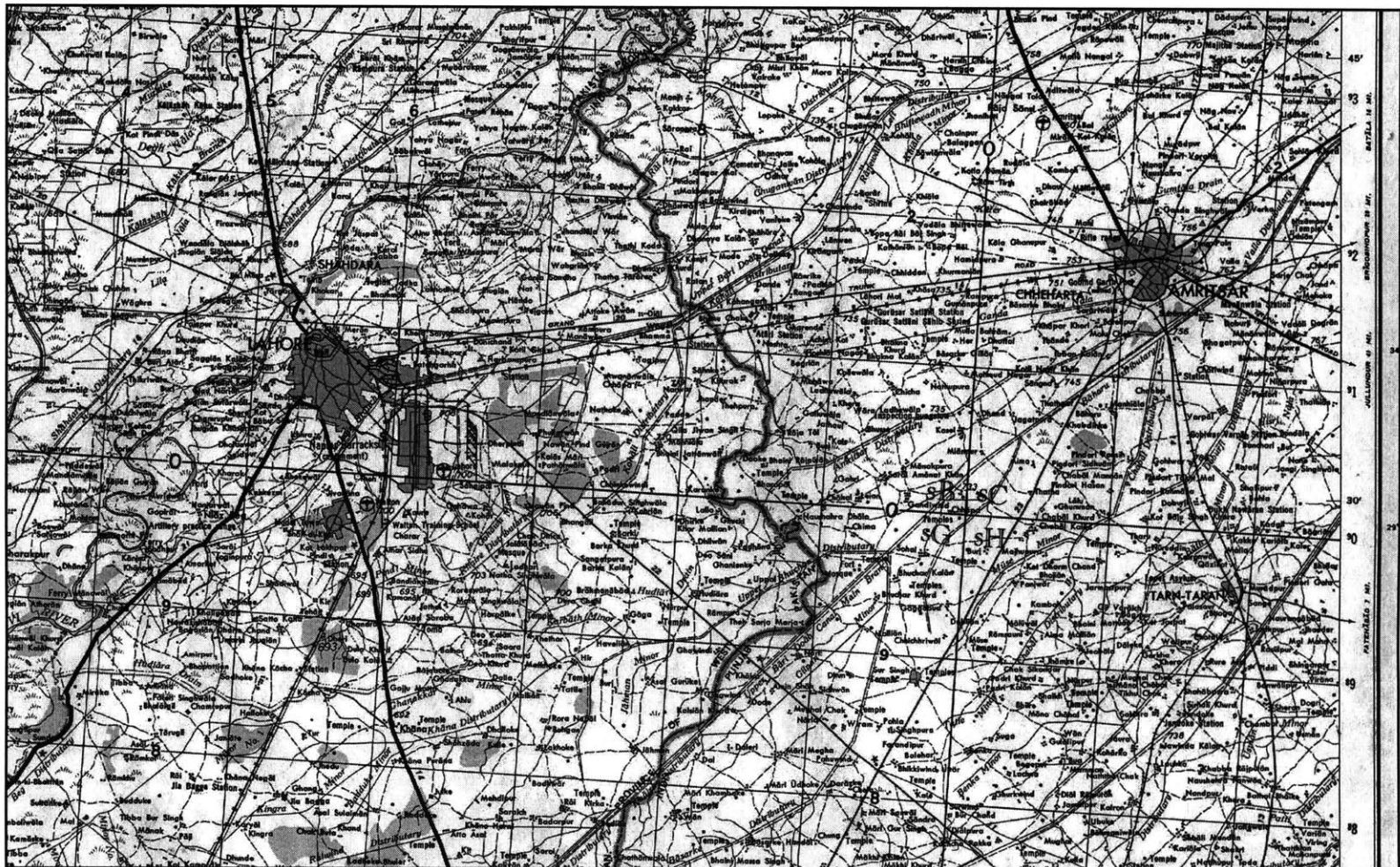


Fig. 37. Map of Lahore and Amritsar across the International Border.

1. Retention of Capital Status

The city of Lahore had been the capital of the province of Punjab under the control of the British prior to independence. Amritsar, being one of three principal cities in the province¹⁷ had a twin-city relationship with Lahore and all that it had to offer. The Partition of 1947 and the subsequent awarding of Lahore to Pakistan occurred because of the fact that Muslims accounted for three fifths of the entire population of the district¹⁸.

Lahore therefore retained its provincial capital status even after the divide of 1947. As of the census of 1941, Lahore was the most populous city in what would become Pakistan. With the presence of the entire state machinery, Lahore was a viable and, more importantly, very visible destination for many of the Muslim migrants fleeing India.

As far as industry is concerned, prior to partition, Hindus and Sikhs owned two-thirds of the city's shops and four-fifths of the city's factories¹⁹. They paid seven-tenths of the city's urban taxes thus alluding to the fact that they were the most prosperous community in the city at the time.

Their exodus left this entire swath of wealth up for grabs by the immigrant Muslim community making its way from East Punjab. Muslims in the city occupied and took over the commercial establishments, while the immigrant Muslim labor, a majority of which consisted of skilled craftsmen, literally picked up the pieces of a city under transition. Lahore was particularly attractive to Amritsari Muslims because of the employment opportunities it afforded as the provincial capital. This added fact of Lahore as the provincial capital of West Punjab further validated the city in the eyes of the immigrant; both the partition migrant as well as the rural-urban migrant from the rest of rural West Punjab.

It should be noted that as of this time, Pakistan did not have an established capital city like India, which had inherited Delhi as the seat of power from the departing British. Karachi had taken over the role of the seat of government, albeit temporarily. The migrations to Delhi post- partition are a reflection of the power that the capital city exuded on the populace. Pakistan still did not have the benefit that India had of national machinery present at any one given location.²⁰ Karachi and Lahore were the two prime cities in Pakistan at the time and it was these two that achieved the maximum growth over the next two decades.

2. Status of Evacuee Property

One of the major issues in Amritsar was the fact that it took up to eight years for the Indian government to officially sanction the acquisition of Muslim evacuee property in the city (and the rest of India) for the purposes of redevelopment and rehabilitation of the incoming Hindu and Sikh community. This delay was a result of a number of issues, the key issue being that of the required perception of secularism that the ruling Congress government wished to portray. This was done to safeguard the sentiments of the remaining Muslim community in India who had not fled across the border at the time of Partition.

The Pakistani government, though, did not have that as an issue to contend with. Pakistan was created as a Muslim state – the politics of the time were very clear about that sentiment. With the arrival of the Muslim community to Pakistan, it was very clear as to where loyalties as far as abandoned property would go. The “Economic Rehabilitation Ordinance” issued by the West Punjab Government authorized the Rehabilitation Commissioner of West Punjab to assume possession and control of abandoned lands and

business undertakings and to grant their temporary lease for the period of one year.²¹ Unlike the Indian government and their hope of the Muslim community returning to India, the Pakistan government had no illusions of the Hindu and Sikh community returning to Pakistan once they had made the move across the border to India. The redistribution of that evacuee property was swift and was a huge stabilizing factor in the politics of the city of Lahore.

It should be noted here that both the ideologies of Pakistan and India - communalism and secularism respectively were nothing but creeds formulated as a response to colonialism in a bid to win over the allegiance of large segments of a fractured Indian society. They were nothing but alternative strategies of political mobilization.²² This political agenda was seen at play in the manner in which Evacuee Properties were dealt with by both states.

3. Contrasting Government Mechanisms and Ideologies

The departure of the British translated into different realities for the new dominions of India and Pakistan. India inherited the pre-existing central state apparatus along with the domestic and international personality of British India.²³ Pakistan, on the other hand had no central authority set up – there was an absence of any basic machinery and a central authority that could link all of the new provinces that were separated by over a thousand miles across the newly formed territory.

This however had a silver lining for the development of cities such as Lahore in post-Partition Pakistan. India, as a result of the inherited bureaucratic system of the British Raj, had to deal with a system wherein the Central Government sovereign authority from New Delhi had to be imposed on a confused amalgam of provinces and states spread across the entire subcontinent. The absence of a pre-

existing established administrative center in Pakistan made the provision of greater autonomy to the administrative bureaucracy in the provinces in Pakistan a necessity.

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN AMRTISAR IN THE 1980S AND THE DEMAND FOR KHALISTAN

The city of Amritsar went from being a fine-grained community of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims spread out across the city to a coarse-grained urban demographic system. Amritsar saw itself transformed in 1947 into a city of only Hindus and Sikhs where traditionally people from all the three communities of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had lived side by side, often in the same localities. Hindus and Sikhs were regarded at the time as one community; they were both Non-Muslim. The ‘other’ had been driven out of the city.

The exodus of the integrated Muslim community from the interior of the walled city in March 1947 to the outskirts of the city by August and the subsequent exodus across the border was coupled with the introduction of a migrant Hindu and Sikh community re-appropriating the urban space into a reconstructed home for themselves.

This injection of the Hindus and Sikhs in Amritsar transformed the city in a number of ways that have been highlighted throughout this thesis. However, in the years beyond the 1950s this coarse-grained urban system transformed itself yet again. From a unified duo-religious entity which saw commonalities between their religions, a wedge was created between Hindus and Sikhs in the 1960s creating a fine-grained community existing cheek by jowl yet again – reminiscent of the early 1900s when the Hindu-Muslim issue first

took on communal overtones during the British Raj.

The dissatisfaction of the Sikh leaders, who argued that the Sikh community had not gained from Partition in terms of any land of their own²⁴, came to a fore with the *Punjabi Suba*²⁵ Movement in the 1960s. Although the movement was started for linguistic recognition of Punjabi as a language, it became a vehicle for communal politics in Punjab in the 60s. The Census of 1961 showed that many Punjabi-Hindus declared Hindi as their spoken language and not Punjabi. This resulted in the state of Punjab being further subdivided in 1966 whereby the state of Haryana was carved out of Punjab based on where the Hindi speaking majority lived.

This was accompanied by the rise of the Arya Samaj Movement which emerged as the voice of urban middle class Hindus who sought to align themselves with a pan-Indian Hindu identity rather than a secular Punjabi one.²⁶ These two movements together resulted in heightened communal tension between the two communities.

The demand for an independent Sikh state of Khalistan gained popularity and made the situation between the communities even more volatile. This played itself out in Amritsar in a curious manner. The Hindus and Sikhs that had located side by side upon their arrival from Pakistan now found themselves in a similar situation to what had been the case between them on the one side and the Muslim community on the other before the Muslim exodus from the city in 1947. A city that had become communally homogenous at the time immediately following Partition now exhibited signs of a perceived difference between the two remaining communities. The rise of Sikh militancy in the 1980s was a direct result of these tensions. Religion and politics intertwined with the demand for Khalistan reaching its peak.

These feelings of discord came to a head in June 1984 with “Operation Bluestar” – the storming of the Golden Temple by the

Army which the Sikh militants had occupied demanding the independent state of Khalistan. The Operation, which had been ordered by the Congress-led government headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, resulted in destruction to the shrine and the death of 493 terrorists and the apprehension by the army of 1592 people.²⁷

The assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, a Hindu, by one of her Sikh bodyguards in October of the same year in retaliation resulted in one of worst riots in the city of Delhi targeted against the Sikh community. Over 5000 Sikhs in Delhi alone were killed in the November carnage – the worst riot Delhi had seen since the time of Partition.

The city of Amritsar itself, though, did not experience the riots that raged in Delhi. However, the city and district had been the core of the militancy and separatist movement all through the 1980s and up to 1992.²⁸ In 1986 the repeated raid of the Golden Temple²⁹ saw a bomb blast in the city a few days later killing 20 people outside a temple.

Hindu-Sikh tension was rife; the rise of the Sikh nationalist movement played itself out on the streets of Amritsar. Curfew was imposed repeatedly throughout the 1980s by the Government in order to prevent the sheer carnage of 1947 from repeating itself. The city structure and the intermixed community clusters present throughout the city harks back to pre-Partition Amritsar where the fiercest fighting and rioting was seen in those parts of the walled city that had Hindus and Muslims living next to each other. The immediacy and proximity of the communal enemy was present even in the 80s, though in an entirely new avatar. A coarse-grained demographic had been transformed into one that was fine-grained yet again; though not by an actual shift in populations, rather a shift in ideology.

History has a habit of repeating itself and Amritsar was no exception. Amritsar as a fiercely contested communal space played itself out in two different forms over a period of close to 50 years – the first was outright violence and the resultant mass religious emigration and immigration of 1947. The second was of a more embryonic nature; one that could have developed into a recreation of Partition and all it ensued.

AMRITSAR TODAY

Amritsar as a city today consists of two major urban foci – the Golden Temple and the Jallianwallah Bagh complex (Fig. 38, 39). The importance of the Golden Temple as the seat of the Sikh faith and the holiest of Sikh cities has already been illuminated earlier in this thesis (Fig. 40). The second of the foci, Jallianwallah Bagh was the site of a massacre of peaceful Indian protesters at the hands of the British Government in 1919³⁰. A memorial today exists at the Jallianwallah Bagh site commemorating those lives lost in the carnage (Fig. 41).

The fact that these two and these two alone are the major features of the city is curious. Partition is not physically memorialized in the city in any manner - the remembrance of Partition and the related exodus of the Muslim community are all but relegated to refugee accounts and texts. I argue that the lack of a physical memorialization of Partition in the city is a conscious decision of the state because of the fact that the memory associated with that time is one that is communally driven.

The inter-sectarian carnage of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims *at the hands of themselves* in the city and the expulsion of the Muslim

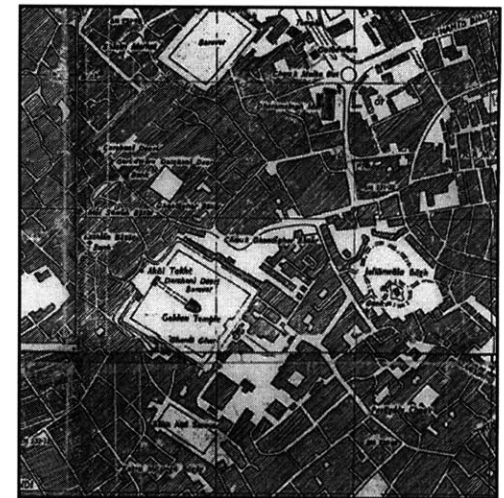
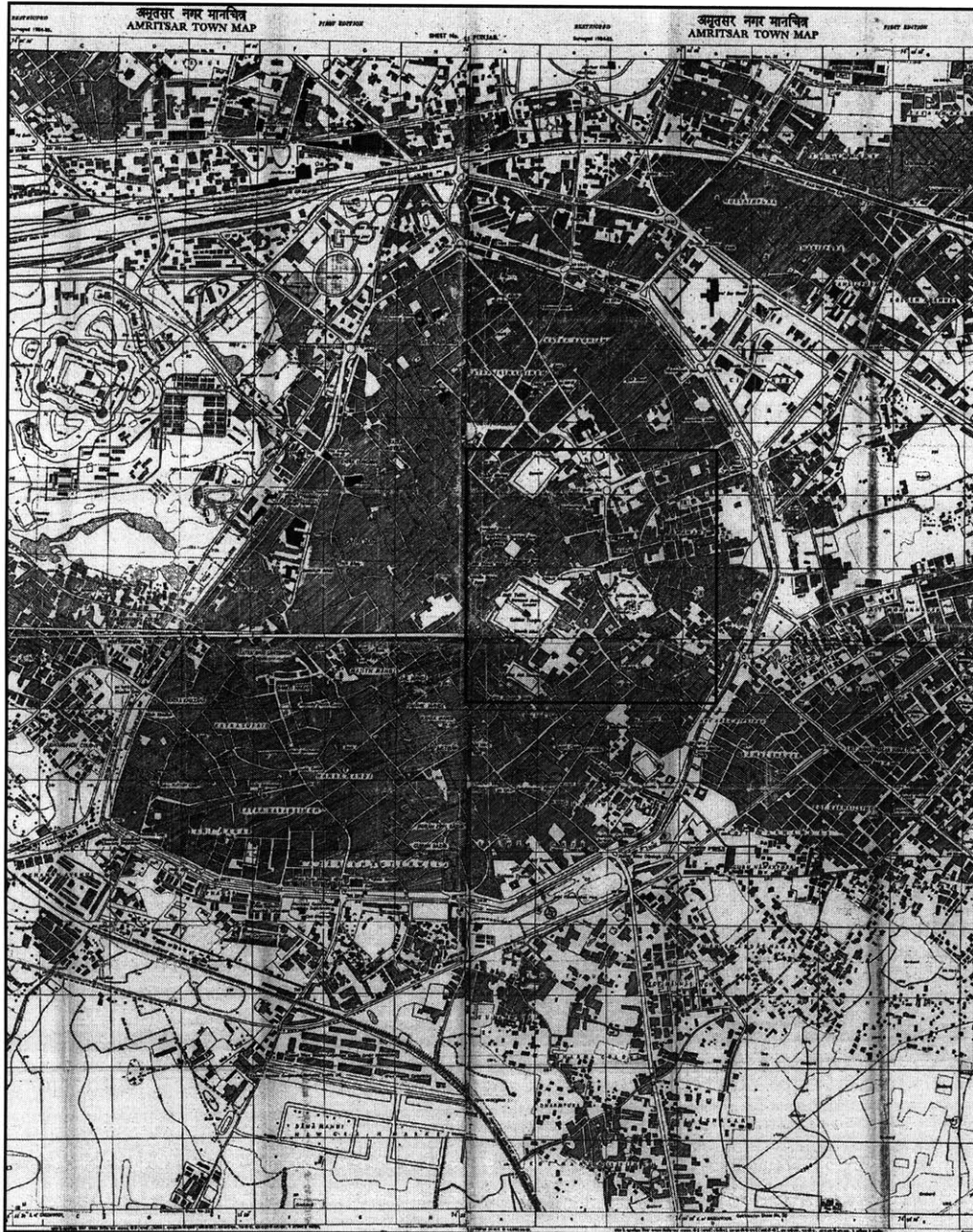


Fig. 38. Close-up map of Jallianwallah Bagh and the Golden Temple within the Walled City

Fig. 39. Map of the Walled City of Amritsar (1984).

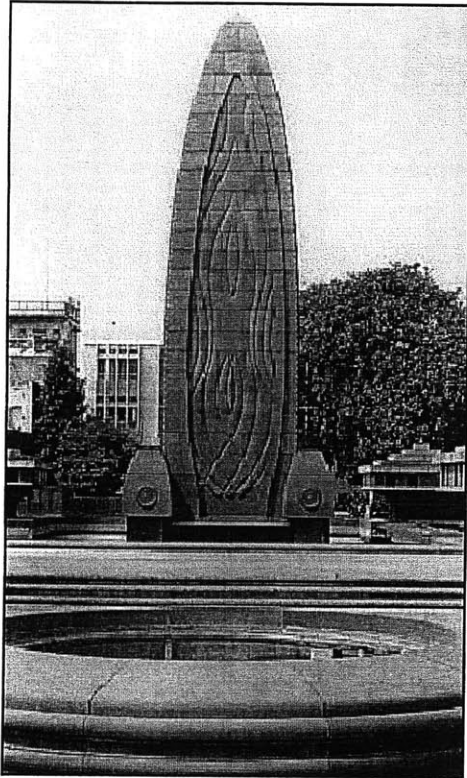


Fig. 41. The Jallianwallah Bagh memorial

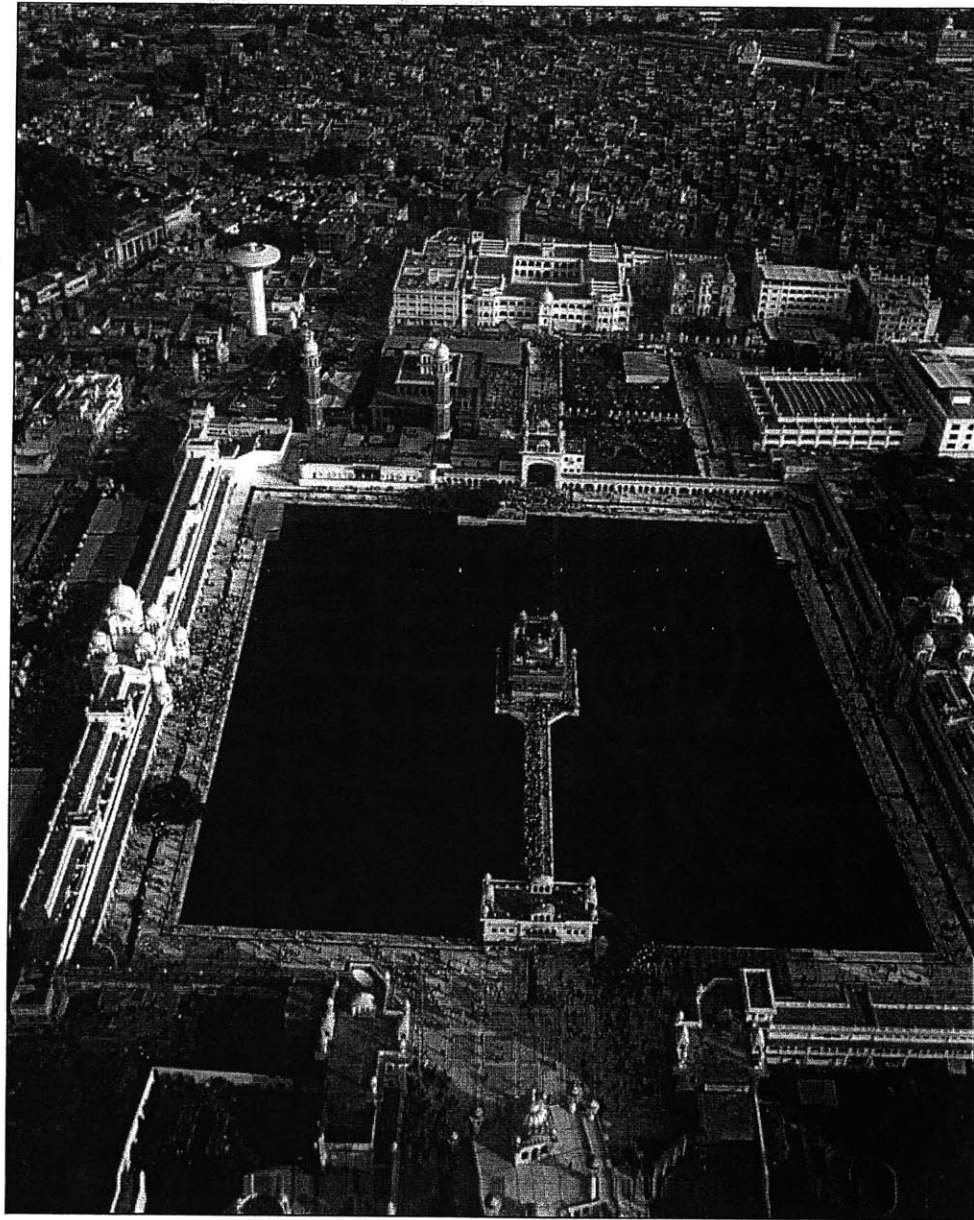


Fig. 40. Aerial View of the Golden Temple and the Walled City beyond

community does not conform to the neatly categorized secularist identity that India currently identifies itself with. The holocaust had been internally motivated, driven and executed. Jallianwallah Bagh, in clear contrast, epitomizes the exact opposite – a united Hindu, Muslim and Sikh community that was collectively massacred at the hands of an external agency – the British. This difference is the key to understanding the politics at play in the city and its role in memorialization or the lack thereof within.

The question then arises, how does the city perceive the events of 1947? As has been previously elucidated, the city consisted of approximately 184,000 Muslims as of the census of 1941. A number of mosques had dotted the urban landscape of the city at the time, a large number of which survived the riots of 1947 (Fig. 42, 43, 44). After the complete Muslim exodus, however, these mosques had been reduced to shells - devoid of followers and a supporting community. The entire Muslim population of the city had fled.

Are these mosques, then, collectively the monument to the city? Are they the only *physical* memorial of Partition and the massacres that ensued? Are they the sole representation of the community expelled that had once inhabited Amritsar?

They just might be.



Fig. 42. Mosque behind Town Hall



Fig. 43. Mosque near Ram Bagh Gate

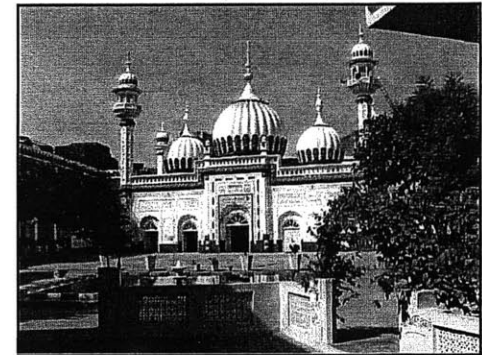


Fig. 44. Khair-ud-Din Mosque in Hall Bazaar

NOTES

¹ Talbot, Ian, *Partition Revisited: Fresh Challenges and Insights from the Grassroots' Experiences of Refugees in Lahore and Amritsar*

² Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p124

³ Gauba, Anand. *Amritsar: A study in Urban History*, Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988. p321

⁴ Purewal, Navtej K., *Living on the Margins: Social Access to Shelter in Urban South Asia*, Ashgate, 2000. p 47

⁵ Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi, 1986. p 102

⁶ In a statement by Sardar Swaran Singh, leader of the Panthic Assembly Party on 10 July 1947.

⁷ Talbot, Ian, *Partition Revisited: Fresh Challenges and Insights from the Grassroots' Experiences of Refugees in Lahore and Amritsar*

⁸ Rai, Satya M., *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publications, Delhi, 1986. p 190

⁹ Pandey, Gyanendra, *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p 36

¹⁰ M. Waseem, 'Partition, Migration and Assimilation: A Comparative Study of Pakistani Punjab' in Talbot, Ian and Singh, Gurharpal, (eds.) *Region and Partition. Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, Karachi, 2000. pp 203-228.

¹¹ Suttles, Gerald, *The Social Construction of Communities*, University of Chicago Press, 1972. p 7,35.

¹² Seen in the case of Peshawari Mohalla along the Grand Trunk Road.

¹³ Ansari, Sarah, *Mapping Old Identities on to new Terrain: The Drawing up of 'borders' in Pakistani cities during the late 1940s and 1950s: the case of Karachi*

¹⁴ Respondent Kasturi Lal Sharma from Moti Ram Katra mentions his father looking for odd jobs in order to support his family. He a boy of 12, was forced to look for work as well. Respondent Dr. Basant Lal from Peshawari Mohalla mentions the fact that, upon arrival, members of his *biradiri* got odd jobs as well – of driving cycle rickshaws to make a living.

¹⁵ 1981 Census Report of Pakistan, Census Report no. 69. December 1984. Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan. Table 2.4.

¹⁶ Mitra, A., Sachdev, R., Pant, G.C., Soam N.S. and Gahlot, V.S., *Population and Area of Cities, Towns and Urban Agglomerations, 1872-1971*, Allied Publishers, 1980, Punjab. p432

¹⁷ The third being Delhi.

¹⁸ Salim, Ahmad, *Lahore 1947*, India Research Press, 2001. Introduction by Ian Talbot, p5

¹⁹ Ibid, p4

²⁰ The present capital of Pakistan, Islamabad was founded as late as 1958 under President Ayub Khan. Karachi in the province of Sind had been playing the role of national capital between 1947 and 1958. Islamabad was chosen as the new capital along the Grand Trunk Road in the center of the country as opposed to Karachi which was located at the south-west tip of Pakistan.

²¹ Singh, Kirpal. *The Partition of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University Patiala. Second Edition 1989. p 146

²² Jalal, Ayesha. *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1995. p25-27

²³ Ibid, p18

²⁴ Purewal, Navtej K., *Living on the Margins: Social Access to Shelter in Urban South Asia*, Ashgate, 2000. p 59

²⁵ Dawn of Punjab

²⁶ Purewal, Navtej K., *Living on the Margins: Social Access to Shelter in Urban South Asia*, Ashgate, 2000. p 59

²⁷ According to the official White Paper released by the Government.

²⁸ The Government of India alleges that the militants were state-sponsored by Pakistan – a charge that Pakistan denies to date.

²⁹ Operation Black Thunder

³⁰ General Dyer of the British Army marched 50 armed soldiers into the Jallianwallah Bagh (Garden) the afternoon of April 13, 1919 and ordered them to open fire on a protest meeting attended by some 10,000 unarmed men, women and children without issuing a warning. Dyer kept his troops firing for about ten minutes, until they had shot 1650 rounds of ammunition into the crowd which had no way of escaping the Garden, since the soldiers spanned the only exit. About 400 civilians were killed and some 1200 wounded in the incident.

SIX

Reflection

Although the events in Amritsar were specifically due to the peculiarity of a sudden drawing of borders, there are broad conclusions that can be made looking at Amritsar as a case study of a city under siege.

1. Heterogeneous communities i.e. communities of different religious/racial or ethnic components living within the same urban space are more susceptible to internal conflict in the absence of a powerful state whose objective is to maintain diversity. *This was highlighted in the intermixed katras of Amritsar which saw the maximum destruction during the riots of 1947.*
2. Major cities adjacent to newly created borders need an established and prepared state machinery in order to withstand the tide of migrants that is sure to follow. *The fact that the government of East Punjab was ill-prepared for the incoming wave of refugees was a major contributing factor to the rapid decline of the city of Amritsar.*
3. If cities are categorized as transition stations by governments, they will be perceived as transitory by the population as well. The official labeling of cities by governments has an undercurrent psychological impact on both the population that currently resides there as well as the arriving masses. *The categorization of Amritsar as a Transit*

Camp by the government of East Punjab contributed to the lack of a perception of security of the city by the incoming refugees.

4. When land is partitioned between two religious communities alone, irrespective of the wishes of a third – even when the third's claim to the land is primary, violence is a natural outcome. It shall manifest itself repeatedly over the years along permutations and combinations of these three communities. *The Sikhs were left out of the equation when Punjab was partitioned between the Hindus and the Muslims albeit in the name of India and Pakistan respectively in 1947. The rise of Sikh nationalism in the 1960s which culminated in the late 80s with inter-sectarian violence between the Hindu and Sikh communities, communities that hadn't been opposed till that point, was a direct result of the Sikhs being overlooked when national boundaries were being drawn up.*

5. When a city loses its status as a major commercial city, it tends to reinvent itself into a previous identity – one that is commensurate with a time when the city was viable in a said manner. *In the case of Amritsar, it goes through transitions of identities from a time of religious primacy to one of a cultural and commercial center back to identifying itself as first and foremost the holiest of Sikh cities.*

6. Communities under threat locate themselves close to major transportation routes – be they railway corridors or highways. This is seen due to two main reasons; usually these spaces are uninhabited and secondly because of the ease of escape/arrival that these corridors imply. *Major clusters of fleeing Muslim communities were located in Islamabad Abadi and Sharifpura just before Partition, both adjacent to the Grand Trunk Road and the railway corridor leading to Lahore respectively.*

7. Changes in the religious demography of a city do not necessarily affect its form directly. They are more often seen in terms of an economic, political, social and cultural impact to the city. It is these factors that determine the direction of city growth and the mutations that occur. *The arrival of the Hindus and Sikhs and the departure of the Muslims didn't affect the form of Amritsar outright. Its impact however, was felt in the decline of industry and the subsequent economic stagnation of the city which affected its growth.*

8. Refugee communities cluster and congregate where possible creating their own new identity of place in the process. "The urban landscape is tailored and mapped by people who actively use territory, residence, distance, space and movement to build up collective representations which have communicative value and use sharp boundaries to differentiate themselves from others".¹ *The first wave of migrations into Amritsar did not see this appropriation in such stark terms for the simple reason that the arriving communities would occupy vacant evacuee land regardless of where it was situated. Therefore, the arriving masses were scattered and assimilated within the entire city. The second wave, however, in the 1950s saw the characteristic marking of territory by the arriving refugees into separate and distinctive colonies in the outskirts of the city. Peshawari Mohalla, the colony formed by the arrival of a biradiri (kinship group) from Peshawar in Pakistan is a testament to this fact.*

9. Memories of individuals and the state are not necessarily the same and neither do they share the same trajectory. The official memory is dictated by the power structure in control and the biases of the power structure are often reflected in what is remembered and what is erased.

“Memory is always suspect in the eyes of history, whose true mission is to demolish it, to repress it.”² *What is seen in Amritsar is the stark difference between memory, an inherently personal account and history, the account of the state. This has been seen clearly in Amritsar with the selective memorialization of events past.*

The above reflections are intended to serve in the interest of understanding cities that undergo severe and abrupt transformation. As can be seen they are not typical of the transformation of every border city; however they are universal in that they address the issues of the social, economic and cultural changes that a city undergoes as a result of severe trauma.

NOTES

¹ Suttles, Gerald, *The Social Construction of Communities*, University of Chicago Press, 1972. p7,35.

² Nora, Pierre, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

EPILOGUE

Despite the fact that over fifty years have transpired since the cataclysmic events of 1947, there is no official physical memorialization of the holocaust in Amritsar. The entire fortunes of the city were determined by the acts of Partition yet that event is not recognized physically in the city. True, Amritsar has undergone a complete demographic sea-change since pre-partition days – there are few Muslims in the city even today. This however, is the only indication of the mass migrations that happened in those years.

Susan Slymovics in *The Object of Memory* states, ‘The way in which we preserve and reinterpret elements of our collective history locates the emotional core of our past.’ Whatever histories exist, they are reconstructions of the past at some level, raising/reducing history to the level of mythology for many. Amritsar today is a city that seems to have buried the ghosts of its past. Though it still is not the commercial or cultural center it once was, it has, over a period of time, reinvented itself back to what it started off as – the holiest of Sikh sites. Partition is only a memory within the walls of most homes in the city. It is these homes, however, that make the city what it is today – a dense urban space still marred by internalized fractured identities.

APPENDIX

Interview Transcripts

The following are the three refugee interviews transcribed in full conducted in Amritsar in January 2003 by the author. Edna Bhandari's interview was conducted in English while Dr. Basant Lal's and Kasturi Lal Sharma's interviews were conducted in Hindi and Punjabi. The latter two have been translated into English by the author.

Interview 1

Mrs. Edna Bhandari.
Bhandari House, Court Road
Amritsar 143001.

I'm Mrs. Edna Bhandari wife of Mr. Ramesh Chandra Bhandari, Barrister at Law. He went to England to do his law – he did it from Middle Temple London and then came back here to settle down. – I'm 90 years old and I've been a resident of Amritsar for the last 64 years – not of Amritsar, Lahore – let me say India. I came out to India in 1936 – so that's a long time ago, very happily – no problem at all and then I moved to Amritsar probably in 1940-1941 – something like that. So I was here all through the days of the Partition. All through the riots – all through the refugees.

Before the partition actually took place, the riots started. In March of the same year of partition – the riots started in Amritsar

between the Hindus and the Muslims. So the first night there was a lot of damage. The whole of the city, half of it I should say, was on fire. We stood on the roof of the Bungalow there [on court road, outside the walled city] and the whole sky was lit up with red. So many, I should say, a quarter of Amritsar city was in flames at that time. So there was a lot of trouble. In 3 or 4 days the army came in and the curfew was put on for a number of days. No one could move out – whether you had food, whether you didn't have it, that was no concern of theirs. Gradually things calmed down a bit. Life went on, but not normally at all. Then eventually, when the partition took place, the real trouble started. The killings, dreadful things happened. The Hindus were running over from Lahore to Amritsar, the Muslims were running from Amritsar side to Lahore so on the way there was a lot of killings there. Our personal experience was that our relations and friends from Lahore used to come and stay with us – we gave them shelter for a few days – then they used to move on. Also we gave shelter to our Muslim friends that were residing in Amritsar. So eventually we went and reported to the cantonment area that we can't protect them. We've no means of protecting the Muslims that are with us. So the next day they sent a truck with Muslim soldiers and they took them away to different refugee camps.

Did you ever have people coming in and asking you if you are protecting any particular community?

They did come - two or three young men came but they never asked us. But, we asked them to sit down and have a cup of tea. It was a big house so in the front of the house we called them to the drawing room and gave them tea and in the back there was a courtyard and we sent all the Muslims there and we said – don't

appear, you see. So we knew they were looking around and trying to find [Muslims], but they didn't ask us. But that was the time when we decided that we better inform the army here because we can't protect them and they are prowling about to see what they can find.

How long after partition was this? Was this within a few weeks of partition?

Well during the partition. I mean, immediately after the partition, and really, as you say, a few weeks even this was going on. But then they all scattered and went to the refugee camps.

Do you have any recollections of the city as to the extents of the city at the time?

Well, as I told you, I didn't go out at all. But I only heard – I told you about the incident of the train with the Muslims all butchered in it but I've also told you – *haan* (yes), there was another incident. Down the lane there at the bottom there was a truckload of Hindus there – dead. And they had no wood to cremate them. So they left them standing there till they could find wood to cremate them. That's another thing.

Had those people come down from Pakistan?

Haan (yes). From Pakistan I presume.

And you were saying earlier that the city of Amritsar round about that time was basically the walled city of which, you say a lot of it was destroyed because of the riots. And then you had Mall road and that's pretty much it...?

Only three or four houses. Actually, there was not much built up area in the civil lines. But it was there long since, and it was I believe, all made by the British. But the roads were there – they were all there. Queen’s Road, Malviya Road, Cooper Road, Mall Road, Lawrence Road. But they were not built up – there were no shops – nothing was there. Even if we had to buy vegetables, or meats or daily goods, servants used to have to go into the city.

The walled city?

Yes. The cantonment was very quiet – very nice.

Was Islamabad Abadi there at the time? I’d heard that refugee camps were set up there.

That I can’t tell you. That I don’t know where the refugee camps were. There must have been some in the cantonment – where the army is. That I’m sure. But otherwise I don’t know. Where the border is, that was all agricultural land. Cheharta village was there.

Interview 2

Dr. Basant Lal.
Peshawari Mohalla,
Amritsar.

My name is Dr. Basant Lal. I came to Amritsar from Peshawar in 1956. We were three *biradiris* (kinship groups) who left Pakistan to come to India. We split up into Amritsar, Khanna and Jallandar.

Is that why this area is known as Peshawari Mohalla?

Yes, we named it and the name has stuck.

What did you do when you came to the city?

We came along the Grand Trunk Road by foot. We reached this area [Peshawari Mohalla]. There were all abandoned buildings here – there were no people. Khandwala the sugar factory was there at the time – but there was no one working there. There were *godowns* (warehouses) everywhere. Our *biradiri* bought this *godown* from this man. We subdivided the land of the *godown* and we built eighty houses here for ourselves.

Did you get any help from the government?

No, the government did nothing to help us out. There was no rehabilitation department – we were not given any help or land. We all got odd jobs when we arrived – some of us rode cycle rickshaws for a living. It was difficult but we managed.

How old were you when you came?

I was about 10 years old I think. I came here with my parents.

Why did you leave Pakistan?

We left because we were Hindu. Some people had stayed back in Pakistan even after *batwara* (Partition) thinking things would calm down. However, we soon realized that we needed to go to Hindustan since we were Hindus. We used to hear *Panditji* (Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru) on the radio. The flag also beckoned us.

What is your occupation right now?

I'm a doctor now. I have my clinic here on the main road [points at this clinic]. I live here now with my family.

Interview 3

Kasturi Lal Sharma.
House #155, Katra Moti Ram,
Inside Hathi Gate,
Amritsar 143001.

Could you tell me your name please?

My name is Kasturi Lal Sharma. I used to live in Kotlibawa village in Sialkot district, Pakistan.

And you came in 1947?

Yes we came in 1947. On 15 August, there was a *shor* (an unrest) in my village to “drive out the Hindus”. Our village Muslim *mukhia* (village leader) gathered us together and sat us down in one place. When it got dark in the evening, he told us to go because if someone or some group from another village were to come along and try to kill or harm us, he would be incapable to stop them.

When it got dark 10-12 of us set off from the village. As we kept walking more and more people joined us. At places, the Muslims stopped us at barricades. Luckily our elders knew some of these people – they would ask “who’s son are you?” I would say I was Sharma sahib’s son – my father was not with us, I was with my mother and brothers. My father had got separated from us – he met us later on the way.

In Amritsar?

No. At the time of leaving my father left us to tie the cattle in the shed. The *mukhiya* then told us to hurry on and get on our way –

at that time we got separated but met up later on. On the way there were many difficulties – the Muslims that we met they were ready to kill us and rob us – but due to the fact that they knew my father or knew of him, they let us go.

In particular they had great enmity with the Sikhs. There was a Sikh brother with us. We passed some *havelis* (traditional courtyard homes which were collectively inhabited by an extended family) with a well – there we came across a cattle shed – since there was a Sikh man with us we felt scared that because of his presence, we might get killed. So we hid in the building near the well. We then trimmed his beard to make him look like the Muslims. The elders were doing this – we were children – we just saw this.

How old were you at the time?

I was 12-13 years old at the time We were walking like this for a while – it became nightfall – by then we were about 50-100 people. Further up we met some Muslims who surrounded us. They told us since it was nightfall, we shouldn't go ahead – someone would kill us. They told us to stay with them that night and that they would escort us the next morning. There was a big open space in that village. Whoever used to come by, they used to sit them down. They had set up 2-3 *tandoors* (ovens) and there was food for us – vegetables and lentils. They used to make the *rotis* (flattened bread) and feed whoever came. I don't remember the name of that village. We ate there and my father met us there.

How many days further did it take you to reach Amritsar?

The next morning they sent us to a small town nearby like Batala. There we stayed for 3-4 days in government custody. There

was a military camp set up there. There wasn't anything to eat though - whoever went out to get something, he or she ended up getting killed. My father would go and get wheat from which *atta* (dough) is made, from nearby and boil it and we would eat that. A lot of people did this. This went on for 3-4 days.

Then when we were in numbers of thousands, the military then escorted us on foot convoys from that *katra* to a place which was about 30-40 miles away. There they would fill up a truck - however many would fit in - they would then send the truck to Amritsar.

Did you come straight to Moti Ram katra when you arrived in Amritsar?

Yes, we came straight here... and we stayed.

What was the condition of this place at the time?

I don't know the condition of this place. Whatever place one got, one stayed at. We found a broken down truck near the *subzi mandi* (vegetable market) near Hall Gate, it started raining so we stayed there that night. The next morning we went to the Gobindgarh fort. At that time there were no buildings around it - it was just the fort. There was a huge camp set up in the grounds - there were tents everywhere. They used to give a family a tent along with rations - they gave blankets as well. We stayed there for a while after which slowly, whoever got a place in the city, they moved.

How did people find place? Did the government allot land?

No, whatever was left around us that was burned or vacant - they were all empty because the Muslims had left. Whichever were

empty, people used to squat. The government set up a rehabilitation department – there, after giving an application, places got allotted to refugees. The properties that people left behind in Pakistan – the allotments were made based on those properties. People took odd jobs – I was young – my father set me up in a restaurant to be a waiter and cleaner there.

What was your father's occupation in Sialkot?

He was a *halwai* (street side food vendor) there – he had his own shop. He used to cater for weddings.

After coming here what work did he find? The same?

No – he got no work. He struggled. He would sit in the bazaar – he used to make *papads* (roasted bread) and sell them. We also got jobs like this in shops – for Rs. 5 to 10 a month, my younger brother started working in a juice shop. We came to this present location in 1952. We left the camp.

Were all these buildings constructed?

No, no. It was all burned – there were piles of earth everywhere. One or two rooms here and there were inhabitable – there were 2-3 houses in front. Whoever squatted stayed on. We also stayed. In 1952 my father passed away. We brothers were still working – we used to each get 5-10 rupees a month. I put one of my younger brothers through school. The youngest brother I put him in a bicycle shop. It went on like this. Then when we became a little more financially comfortable – this area came under the Improvement Trust. The Trust developed this area. Whatever area we had, that

they acquired and they sold us my present area at 30 rupees. We collected the money somehow. To construct, the government also gave us money in terms of loans. We made the house very late – in 1963 – by then my brothers had grown up and after being educated. The brother who was in the cycle shop started his own machine shop.

When you came to Amritsar in 1947, where all were there camps set up?

There was major camp at Gobindgarh. Also in the schools and colleges there were camps. In particular the Hindu Sabha School and College – there was a camp there where we also stayed for a while. The people of Amritsar were very kind to us – they would give food to us. The refugees that came from Pakistan were very well looked after by the people of the city.

When you came here, did you see any Muslims or had they all fled?

I didn't see any. The area had been burned – not the entire city, but this area and a little beyond it was burned. Shastri market, [Katra] Sher Singh – they were all burned. The interior of the city was still around – the old houses. We didn't see any fighting here.

We did see fighting though in my village in Pakistan. When we were leaving the village, there was a Mangal Singh and Kuldip Singh – the Muslims killed both of them – with swords they chopped them up in front of me. Ghanta Singh was their *Mukhia* – he was a really nice man – in those days he was considered wealthy – he built a *gurudwara* (Sikh temple) in the village. The Muslims were jealous of him and killed his son and grandson. The rest who survived, fled. One of his brothers became a Muslim – Gujjar Singh – he stayed on.

The Indian Government helped people a lot. We were young – we didn't understand what was going on – those that were elder took advantage – they took money and jobs – this way people progressed. The elders that came from Pakistan are mostly no more. Now and then you meet someone who came – that too those that were young at the time.

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