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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Writing Partition Violence: Historiographical Trends and Emerging Perspectives****Adnan Tariq**

Assistant Professor, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, GCU Lahore.

dr.adnantariq@gcu.edu.pk**Abstract**

The violence accompanying the Partition of British India in 1947 remains one of the most extensively debated subjects in South Asian historiography. While earlier scholarship primarily interpreted the bloodshed through political explanations that emphasized constitutional failure, communal rivalry, and the decisions of elite leaders, subsequent historians expanded the analytical framework by incorporating social, cultural, gendered, and local perspectives. This article critically examines the evolution of historiography on Partition violence from the immediate post-Partition period to recent interdisciplinary studies. It reviews major interpretative schools, including nationalist, revisionist, subaltern, feminist, anthropological, and memory-based approaches, highlighting their methodologies, contributions, and limitations. The paper argues that no single explanatory model sufficiently accounts for the complexity of Partition violence. Instead, violence emerged through the interaction of colonial state policies, political mobilization, local socio-economic rivalries, administrative collapse, rumors, migration, gendered experiences, and regional dynamics. The study concludes by identifying emerging research directions, particularly the increasing use of archival sources, spatial history, digital humanities, environmental perspectives, and microhistory, which promise a more nuanced understanding of one of the twentieth century's largest episodes of mass violence.

Keywords: Partition of India, Historiography, Violence, Punjab, Bengal, Communalism, Colonialism, Memory Studies

Introduction

The Partition of British India in August 1947 transformed the political geography of South Asia while simultaneously unleashing one of the largest episodes of forced migration and communal violence in modern history. Between twelve and eighteen million people crossed newly created international borders, and an estimated one to two million individuals lost their lives amid widespread massacres, abductions, sexual violence, forced conversions, and displacement. The scale and intensity of this violence have made Partition a central subject of historical inquiry, attracting scholars from history, political science, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, and memory studies.

Despite the abundance of scholarship, historians continue to disagree over a fundamental question: why did Partition produce violence on such an unprecedented scale? Explanations have varied considerably over time. Early nationalist histories largely attributed the violence to communal antagonism or political failures surrounding constitutional negotiations. Revisionist historians subsequently challenged these interpretations by emphasizing the role of the colonial state, administrative collapse, and local political dynamics. Later scholarship shifted attention towards ordinary people, examining how rumors, local rivalries, economic competition, gender relations, and everyday social interactions shaped the unfolding of violence. More recent studies

have further broadened the field by incorporating oral history, memory, trauma, emotions, and material culture, thereby moving beyond purely political explanations.

The historiography of Partition violence has therefore undergone significant transformation over the past seven decades. Earlier works sought broad national explanations rooted in elite politics, whereas contemporary historians increasingly favor localized, interdisciplinary, and comparative analyses that reveal considerable regional variation between Punjab, Bengal, Delhi, Sindh, Kashmir, and other affected areas. These developments demonstrate that violence during Partition cannot be understood through a single explanatory framework but requires attention to multiple interacting factors operating at different spatial and temporal scales.

This article surveys the major historiographical trends that have shaped scholarly understanding of Partition violence. Rather than reconstructing the events of 1947 themselves, it examines how historians have interpreted those events, the methodologies they have employed, the debates that have emerged among competing schools of thought, and the strengths and limitations of existing scholarship. By tracing the evolution of these interpretations, the article seeks to demonstrate how changing historiographical approaches have progressively expanded our understanding of Partition violence from elite political narratives to multidimensional analyses encompassing state structures, local societies, gender, memory, and everyday experiences. Violence during partition has been a complex occupation in the historiography of the Partition of India. To understand the reasons and nature of this bloodshed, many works have been produced from different interpretations.

In his seminal work *Hindu-Muslim Riots*, Richard D. Lambert analyzed in detail all forms, and types of violence keeping in focus the geographical variation, urban-rural difference, and history of the previous record of violence in any specified area/locality. Quite objective in opinions, he described the general characteristics of rioting in Punjab. By declaring riots as only the product of the broader tension, he stated that the belligerence of the Sikh community led to the ascendancy in the course of violence in Punjab.¹ By delineating the differences exhibited by the different riots in Punjab, he described that the violence in west Punjab was less organized. On the other hand, in the territories of the princely states in east Punjab, elements of pogroms and large-scale massacres were far more organized.² He also mentioned that elements in Princely states of east Punjab had lent clandestine assistance in organizing those Shahidi Jathas. Lambert also talks about the official's silent consent to let those Jathas wreak havoc on the migrant caravans. Apart from the many other important sections of his book, the part where he described in detail the pogrom in the Meo villages in east Punjab by the Bharatpur and Alwar states is more important as in that part it tried to construct the actual happenings in that local area.

Ever since the publication of the works by Richard Lambert, two types of urban riots are identified. The first area is mixed residential areas, where one community is a comparatively distinct minority. The Second type comprises those areas, which were situated on the borderlines, which are partisan between two stronghold communities of opposing interest.³ Urban riots were facilitated by the propinquity of groups in a common space and that rural riots are much less frequent because of insufficient village heterogeneity: riots are most likely where groups are in close contact. Once locations, where the balance of force is unfavorable to the

¹ Richard D. Lambert, *Hindu-Muslim Riots*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.

² Ibid., 226.

³ Ibid., 123-130, 155, 156, 174

attacking groups, are ruled out, the most common locations should be characterized by a strong presence of the target group, but still short of a majority.⁴

Madhav Godbole, a retired Indian civil servant, assessed the role of police, administrative machinery, and army.⁵ In his book 'Holocaust of Partition; An Inquest,' using declassified official sources, he argued that in the tumult's year of partition, administrative machinery, including police and army got communalized, and owing to that transformation, growth, and working of private armies reached far more organized level. The main contention of Godbole, however, is to generalize the activities of those private armies. While seeing those forces across the communal board, Godbole did not differentiate the acts of violence in different localities of British India and princely states. It is, however, a major flaw while assessing the role of militant bodies in British Punjab, particularly in princely states of Punjab.⁶ Another noteworthy work, 'Liberty or Death' by Patrick French criticized the high-ups in London for mishandling the political situation in India.⁷ However, when it comes to assessing the violence accompanying political machination, he viewed them as a 'communal war of succession,' a phrase borrowed from one of Evan Jenkin's fortnightly reports. His take on violence is occupied with quite a conservative British bureaucratic position while dealing with the violence. Patrick tried to study the chain of violent incidents in the scenario of threefold communal entanglement of the communities in Punjab particularly and India broadly. In the same line on granting British Authorities a rather conservative role, Lucy Chester in his research on Punjab Boundary Force, stated that its violence was not the outcome of the wrong demarcation of Boundary Commission award. On the contrary, the flawed process of partition unleashed a terrible wave of violence. According to his assertion, the complexity of the nationalistic dealings with the British colonial structures was one paramount reason, which exacerbated the eruption of violence.⁸ Burney White Spinner also charged the British administration with underestimating the mounting evidence of the looming threat of violence between Hindus and Muslims at the end time of British rule in India.

A monograph by Farooq Ahmad Dar on the violence during the partition of Punjab is primarily occupied with chronologically straightening the factuality of incidents. Concentrating directly on the course and nature of violence, the writer established that the role played by three communal groups in negotiating the political situation was a primal cause for the eruption of violence. The writer stressed that violence up to 13 August was different from the following episodes of violence, while the new government in transition had taken control of the affairs. The main hypothesis of his work relied on the orthodox validity of primordiality of the communal trend in Punjab since the turn of the twentieth century. This work provides comprehensive detailing of the communalism turning into large-scale violence in the year of 1947. However, the major lack is to provide a well-connected thematic argument. His only argument is on insisting on the primordial nature of violence, primarily with the broader and historical construction of the study rather than substantiating the violent course during the year 1947.

Gurharpal Singh using adequately I.S. Lustick's theory of punctuated institutional structures looks at the partition of India. According to that theory, a state needs to institutionalize the existing political structures to bring them into the state regulations and mainstream. In this particular application, Gurharpal Singh stated that the British Indian government had not adequately

⁴ Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (California: University of California Press, 2003), 388.

⁵ Madhav Godbole, 'Holocaust of Partition; An Inquest' (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2006)

⁶ Burney White Spinner, *Partition: The story of Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan in 1947* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017)

⁷ Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London: HarperCollins, 1998)

⁸ Lucy Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia. The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009)

institutionalized national political structures long before partition. That poor institutional transformation had left many grey areas, which led to creating such a mess and chaos all across India and particularly in Punjab, Bengal, and princely states. In that transition when the British government, which was erstwhile hegemonic now become quasi, those not-institutionalized political structures (parties and communities) start acquiring their own space. That ratcheting 'war of maneuver' led to the unleashing of the descale disturbances.⁹

Hansen's research provides a detailed analysis of the communal development in Punjab in the last decade before partition. He asserted that granting of provincial authority had ensued a trajectory, which saw the escalation of violence from 'low-intensity communal violence and riots to the all-encompassing exterminatory violence between the three groups in Punjab; Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Hansen studied the fortnightly reports of Governor Punjab from 1937 to 1947 and concluded that the introduction of political autonomy in the year 1937 had ensued the tussle for political autonomy among various communal factions in Punjab.¹⁰ That tussle led to the development of the 'self-defense mechanism' among all communities. Particularly the Sikh community was at the foremost to develop such self-defense mechanisms to prepare themselves for Muslim aggression in the future development.¹¹ Both Hansen and Suranjan Das developed their thesis on communal positioning in post-1937 autonomy at the provincial level. While Suranjan Das described that an 'Institutional-Riot-System'(IRS) was devised as a reactionary result that provincial autonomy in Bengal. In which both rival political elite groups had stakes.¹² Owing to that system, in any such situation where riots were needed to be active, rival elite groups let open the door to riots through those institutional riots system in Bengal. Thus, the great Calcutta killings were its most vivid phenomenal outcome. On the other hand, Hansen, though trekking the same line of argument on post-autonomy communal repositioning, used the phrase 'Self-Defense-Mechanism' (SDM) which is equivalent to the Institutional Riots System (IRS) devised by Suranjan Das. He concluded his argument directly relating to the outbreak of violence and declared it genocidal violence.

Manjeet Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly also associate the eruption of the violence with the complete breakdown of the provincial government. In their co-authored research, "Violent Punjab, Quiescent Bengal, and the Partition of India", they used an analytical eclectic approach to explain the different stages of violence in Bengal and Punjab. According to this study, ethnic mobilization in the wake of partitioning the country was not a sufficient condition for the unleashing of violence.¹³ According to their study, religious mobilization resulted in the eruption of violence only in the absence of a neutral third party which was the breakdown of the provincial government in the provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Bengal had seen that prescribed absence of a provincial state in August 1946 and Punjab had seen that case in 1947.

In a rather new research work, Douwe den Held borrowed the 'Weak State Thesis' by converging with other factors. In this thesis, he stated that at the time of partition, owing to the lack of intelligent borders and inefficient state institutions, India and Pakistan could not able to cope

⁹ Gurharpal Singh, The partition of India in a comparative perspective: A Long-term view, in *Region and partition: Bengal, Punjab and the partition of the subcontinent* eds. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Anders Bjorn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide Manifestation of Violence in Punjab 1937-1947* (India Research Press, 2002)

¹¹ Anders Bjorn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide Manifestation of Violence in Punjab 1937-1947* (India Research Press, 2002)

¹² Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947*, (U.K: Oxford University Press, 1991)

¹³ Manjeet Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly, *Violent Punjab, Quiescent Bengal, and the partition of India* working Papers Series WPRS-2015-2 November 2015. Indiana University Bloomington World Politics Research Seminar.

with the emergent violence.¹⁴ By applying the commitment problem theory, the researcher substantiated the involvement of princely states in Punjab. He also ascribed violent behavior of individuals out of 'fear and greed.' Due to the security dilemma, people are involved in acts of violence against each other without having to justify their deeds to the legal system. That was due to the temporal weakening of the state authority.

In 'Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947,' Suranjan Das traced the role of the elite class to maneuver their stake. According to this research, the great Calcutta killings were a manifestation of the elite-propelled battle to a large degree between Hindus and Muslims to get control of the key city of Calcutta in the end game of the British Empire. In that battle, both sides patronized the criminal element of the city to wage their own political goals.¹⁵ According to Suranjan Das, the outbreak of violence in the city was politically motivated with no parallel example in the forthcoming episode of violence in the preceding year of 1947. His research testified that the criminal element in the violence had a clear and organized relationship with the political sides. Subsequent bloodbaths had thus a particular dimension of organized violence. Finally, in the last decade before partition, communal violence of this kind has become inseparable from party politics, as both Muslim League and Congress leaders exploited reports of atrocities against one community to discredit the leadership of the other. At the same time, political leaders were identified for organizing and arming crowds to loot and desecrate preselected targets. Although Das is careful to try to acknowledge the complexity of factors that contributed to the violence and not force this series of riots to fit any one pattern. 'Both Hindu and Muslim frequently found their traditional authority challenged by others who found the riots an expedient way to appropriate symbols of a newly constructed communal identity to establish their legitimacy.' In the end, Das's study is more descriptive than analytical and provides an important insight into the complex nature of the political violence and diverse motivations that ultimately led to the unleashing of communal frenzy in Bengal. In another supplementary article, Suranjan Das maintains a difference between the great Calcutta killings and the violence in Noakhali and Tripura where the machinations and actors of violence were quite different. In Noakhali and Tripura, it was a Muslim tenant-peasant revolt against their Hindu landlords. In Bengal, the main targets of attack for poor Muslims were the persons and property of their class enemies. In Bihar, the situation was different. Here sectarian conflict coexisted with class conflict and it would be difficult to argue that class was the primary or only contradiction in the locality.¹⁶ Thus, it was class generated series of acts rather than politically motivated organized violence. Riots and Victims: Violence and the Construction of Communal Identity among Bengali Muslims, 1905-1947 by Patricia A. Gossman is seminal work, which tried to establish the possibilities of the link between politics and mass behavior towards violence.¹⁷ Grossman argues that communal violence and communal identity were not merely the consequences of long-term animosities, but rather plays orchestrated by mid-level politicians for their advancement and aggrandizement.

Nandita Bhavnani does not see any major eruption of violence in Sindh before the 14th of August. It was only the pouring of refugees into Sindh in the months of September and October, which has ripened the situation with the pre-requisites of violence. With each news or rumor of

¹⁴ Douwe den Held, *The violence of the Partition of India and Pakistan, 1946 - 1948*. Bachelor of Arts Thesis, (Netherlands: Utrecht University, 2017)

¹⁵ Suranjan Das, *"Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

¹⁶ Vinita Damodaran, *Violence in the Countryside: Agrarian Unrest and Communal Rioting in Bihar, 1946* (Sidney: Sussex College studies in history, 6, 1, s. 1990)

¹⁷ Patricia A. Gossman, *Riots and Victims: Violence and the Construction of Communal Identity among Bengali Muslims, 1905-1947*, (New York: Avalon Publishing, 1999)

the Hindu-Muslims riot in India, the situation got more worsened and the rumor of the desecration of a Darghah at Ajmer proved the ultimate catalyst for that ripe situation. Incoming refugees had played a dominant role as compared to the locals in waging violence in the major cities of Hyderabad and Karachi. Thus, in the months of December and January, we see the eruption of large-scale pogroms against the non-Muslims. Which ultimately led to their purge from Sindh.¹⁸

Ian Talbot has been engaged with partition studies throughout his academic carrier. At least two of his studies are primarily aimed at studying violence. The first one is about the happenings in the twin cities of Lahore and Amritsar. In this book, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar*, Talbot studies the impact of the 1947 partition of the Punjabi cities of Lahore and Amritsar, providing important comparative insights into the processes of violence.¹⁹ Prof. Talbot described the role of the local groups with political connections, in waging violence against the rival community in their respective cities. While describing the gruesome details of the many incidents of prominence, the author tried to present the case with a strong emphasis on the local political elite and security machinery in not stopping the wave of violence. His take on the communalization of police in both cities is another important dimension, which sheds light on the local dynamics of the violence. In his other seminal study on violence, he evaluated the city of Sheikhupura, he tried to trace the actual causes behind the violence in the city of Sheikhupura. He identified a level of organized intent behind the gruesome killings in a factory area by declaring a segment of security personnel responsible for that tragedy. He also traced the intent of the local petty bourgeoisie, which provided social facilitation to take that situation on such intensity. Thus, a statement of local responsibility emerged which testified to the assertion of local involvement due to certain interests with the connivance of some segment of officials. Ilyas Chatha brought his dissertation on Sialkot and Gujranwala while studying the chains of violence.²⁰ He hinted at the organized nature of that violence. In his opinion, violence in both cities emanated owing to the local desires of particular sections. Such as, the role of local blacksmiths is depicted as the proactive culprits due to their interest in copper and steel utensils and other items. In the same way, while explaining the Kamonke Train Massacre, the role of local power players is described in connivance with some political interests.

It seems clear that veterans also played an explicit role in perpetrating violence in some areas. Swarna Aiyar in her article shed light on this important dimension. In her article, "*August Anarchy: The Partition Massacre in Punjab*," she had to make a line of difference between the violence during March-July and August-September. In the first phase, violence remained largely confined to the western part of the British Punjab.²¹ That wave of violence was under the local tradition of communal hostility. However, the months of August-September onward had seen total anarchy. She stated that the planning, and precision accompanying violence would suggest a large-scale involvement of the security personnel in the affairs. However, without

¹⁸ Patricia A. Gossman compares the situation to the riots in Delhi where the Hindus and Sikhs, in no better condition than the Muslims who fled to West Punjab, sought refuge in over-crowded camps. She hastens to add that the violence in Karachi was less intense and less prolonged than the riots in Delhi. Bhavnani also feels that sex crimes against women in Sindh at the time of Partition were much less than in the two Punjab. "Many personal narratives of Sindhi Hindus who lived through Partition do not mention abductions and rapes." See her book, Gossman, *Riots and Victims*.

¹⁹ Ian Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005)

²⁰ Ilyas Chatha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration and Development: 1947-1961*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010)

²¹ Swarna Aiyar (1995) 'August Anarchy': The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947, South Asia: *Journal of South Asian Studies*.

substantiating this assertion, she continued with her argument that nature, plan, and methods of violence clearly showed that it would not be possible without the massive connivance of personnel of police and military. While giving details of the sequences of violence, from train attacks, convoy attacks, and military-style raids, she relied only on a few official accounts to give credence to her thesis. However, she did not mention that the majority of train attacks and military-styled raids were the phenomenon of east Punjab in general and the Sikh Princely States in particular. Saumitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson have come up with their study on determining the participants in waging violence in Punjab. In their study, Veterans and ethnic cleansing in the Partition of India, they established their thesis that districts with higher numbers of war veterans had seen a far larger proportion of violence. Their work interprets the role of war veterans beholden of war-time military experience in providing human capital, enhanced skills at both organizations, and perpetrating violence-led ethnic cleansing.²²

Indivar Kamtekar is also of the opinion that the violence during partition was unprecedented due to the involvement of the demobilized soldiers in the province of Punjab. In his research on the Indian army during Second World War, he studied their post-war role in the form of demobilized soldiers in India. According to his studies, the violence of partition was not a mere result of the 'crowd' or 'collective action' of groups active during those chaotic times on communal lines. It was the work of decommissioned army soldiers who conducted army-styled planning and campaigns, which could not be organized otherwise by a casually gathered mob. In further elaboration. It is suggested that ambush techniques on foot convoys and sabotage of railway tracks require sophisticated means and training.²³

Pippa Virdee's research on the theme of the absence of violence in Malerkotla would reveal the possible role of the state or authorities in controlling and stopping violence. This article referred essentially to the role of state rulers in creating a cordial atmosphere, which had not let the violence unleash in Malerkotla. Thus that particular episode had significance in conceiving the wide range of possibilities where the state and its authorities would be conceived, if not direct culprits of the violence, then at least deterrent agencies in respect of controlling militant segments in their respected premise of control.²⁴ Ajay Verghese in his seminal work substantiates the thesis those areas ruled directly by British Authorities and those by princely states had different experiences of violence. Tracing the different traditions of governance and sovereignty, his book, *'The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India,'* looks to the Indian past by making a difference that British-controlled areas had seems to suffer from cast and class conflict and princely states areas had shown more propensity of communal violence.²⁵

Application of the theory of genocide had always been problematic when applied to the violence of the partition of India. Some writers had generalized the depiction of partition violence as 'Genocidal' (not Genocide) owing to certain commonalities, not as per the legal definition.²⁶

²² Saumitra Jha & Steven Wilkinson, *Veterans, Organizational Skill and Ethnic Cleansing: Evidence from the Partition of South Asia* (January 16, 2012). Stanford Graduate School of Business Working Paper No. 2092. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract1998429> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1998429>

²³ Indivar Kamtekar, "The Military Ingredient of Communal Violence in Punjab, 1947." (ed.) Tan Tai Yong & Gyanesh Kudaisya. *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. (London: Routledge, 2000)

²⁴ Pippa Virdee, *From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

²⁵ Ajay Verghese, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016)

²⁶ Genocide is intentional action to destroy a people (usually defined as an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group) in completely or in part. Raphael Lemkin coined the term genocide in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. The word genocide was used in indictments at the Nuremberg trials, held from 1945, but solely as a descriptive term, not yet as a formal legal term. In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (CPPCG), which defined the crime of genocide for the first time.

Genocide is a policy of violence that happens with the compulsory participation of the state. It has its European tradition but now it is on changing discourse as Paul Brass had borrowed that conception to apply it to violence during the partition of Punjab. His changed allocation of the term is with the applied concept of retributive. The added term 'retributive', suggests a slight shift, which makes it different from its European applications. The usage of 'retributive' would suggest that it was not state-involved genocide rather it was retributive involving either side's communities to unleash violence to take revenge from the rival community on the imagined and immediately drawn boundaries. Moving along these lines of Paul Brass, Hansen also tried to depict the same statement in his book, 'Punjab 1937-1947-A Case of Genocide?' His thesis statement is in line with this understanding of the mutuality or reciprocity of genocidal violence. He did not use the term Genocide per se. but he looks at those acts of violence as 'genocidal.' Hansen offered a critique of the too-state-centered approach to Genocide.²⁷

Despite identifying partition violence with slight pertinence of Genocide, scholars of Genocide have not seen partition violence as an established and classic case of Genocide. However, a few scholars have spared a little focus on partition violence as Genocidal violence not Genocide per se. Leo Kuper has argued in his seminal studies on the genocides against describing partition of Indian violence as genocide as lack of evidence of the state involvement as state involvement is compulsory for the orchestration of genocide.²⁸ Rather he argued that partition violence is genocidal violence and massacre owing to commonalities with genocide. He asserts that it is genocidal because it exhibited the annihilation of a group or segment of people in the hands of another group or segment of people. In the same line of description another genocide expert Leonard B. Glick opines in his seminal work, "*Religion and Genocide*" opines that violence during Partition of India is a near-genocidal ethnic-religious conflict," where the intentions and acts of violence qualify as genocidal (again not Genocide per se).²⁹

According to Claude Markovits, violence during the partition of India does not bore witness to 'organized-state-driven exterminations.' This chain of incidents was more of local initiatives triggered by an 'infernal cycle' of reprisals and counter-reprisals. According to Claude, those local initiatives were facilitated by the passive or active (in some cases) complicity of the members of the administrations. Many such attacks were perpetrated with the help of modern methods of control and organization in military style, which were acquired during the Second World War by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. The majority of such types of methodic attacks were in those areas where ex-military personnel were in a large majority. All such acts would suggest the isolated nature of their command and control not corresponding to the 'precise political objective' or 'state-driven' nature. Claude Markovits stated that only genuine plans that seem to be at work were launched by Some Sikh leaders to arrange some space for a separate Sikh homeland within or without India. Apart from this assertion, Claude categorically denied any premeditated plans to cleanse the land from the rival communities.³⁰

Donald Horowitz opines on the nature[s] of violence in his book, "*The Deadly Ethnic Riots*" by declaring them as spontaneous and organized on ad hoc bases. According to his study, the level and nature of the organization, the identity of the organizers, and the goals of the organized riots are all research questions due to the subterranean quality of many riots. His evidence-based

²⁷ Punjab 1937-1947-A Case of Genocide?

²⁸ Leo Kuper, *Genocide: It's Political Use in twentieth century*. (Yale University Press; 1983), 10.

²⁹ Leonard B. Glick, *Religion and Genocide*, in Israel Charnney (ed.) *The Widening circle of Genocide*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 54.55.

³⁰ Claude Markovits, 'The Partition of India,' in *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*, edited by Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Ivekovic (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57-59.

study of riots of partition would tell further that most riots seem to be unorganized, partially organized, and partially spontaneous to respond to the instantaneous disturbances. Most of the riots, in his opinion, consist of angry violence. He applies this assertion even in those cases, which had manifested strong signs of clandestine organizations. Their main objective was to take advantage of a hostile mood in an already fragile and polarized situation.³¹ On the other hand, with a slight difference in locating the ultimate responsibility, Jason Francisco opines that violence during the partition of India is difficult to put under the tag of nationalist Genocide. From a wider perspective, partition stands as the archetype of nationalist fratricide in which people of common cultural heritage compete with one another to secure their vital interests. Their methods could be political or violent as an extremity. He contends that nationalistic genocide is essentially characterized by explicit or dominant State involvement in conducting violence against one particular segment of its community. That is not the case in studying the partition of India. Francisco's readings are primarily occupied with secondary sources of the partition of India predominantly literary sources.³² Yunas Samad compares the violence in the partition of India with the violent experiences of the Rwandan case of Genocide and the violence unleashed following the disintegration of Yugoslavia.³³ Shail Mayaram also looks at the violence following the partition announcement in Punjab as a case of genocidal violence. She suggests in her article that there was clandestine existence of organization behind those atrocious episodes of mass killings in Mewat.³⁴

Ishtaiq Ahmad perceives violence in Punjab as an apt example of Ethnic Cleansing. In his seminal book and along with a supplementary monograph he presented his study corroborating with a large corpus of accounts to describe it as a finished case of Ethnic Cleansing in Punjab. Dr. Ahmad has described the mutuality of that process on both sides. This book is, however, more of a source material than the comprehensive application of the stated theory. Nonetheless, it provides a vast number of oral accounts, corroborated with the declassified official document. In a monograph on the happenings in Lahore Ishtaiq Ahmad deployed the theory of Ethnic Cleansing - particularly in the last phase which started from the mid of June. His research is a significant break as it studies the happening within a locality. Muhammad Waseem also asserted that the violence during the partition of the Punjab is one of the worst and most violent processes of ethnic cleansing in modern history. Ian Copland also considered the expulsion of the Muslims from the princely states of Bharatpur and Alwar as a case of a systematic process of ethnic cleansing.

Conclusion

The historiography of Partition violence has evolved considerably since 1947, reflecting broader methodological transformations within historical scholarship. Early interpretations emphasized constitutional politics, communal antagonism, and the decisions of political elites, often seeking singular explanations for the outbreak of violence. Over time, however, historians increasingly recognized that such approaches inadequately explained the remarkable regional variation, differing patterns of violence, and diverse experiences of communities across the subcontinent.

³¹ Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, (California: University of California Press, 2003), 226.

³² Jason Francisco, 'In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly,' *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. 228

³³ Yunas Samad, 1997 "Reflections on Partition: Pakistan Perspective," in *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 4.1, 43-61.

³⁴ Shail Mayaram, 1997, Speech, Silence and The Making Of Partition Violence In Mewat" Shahid Amin(ed): *Subaltern Studies. Writings on south Asian History and Society*. New Delhi, 143.

Subsequent scholarship broadened the analytical framework by integrating local histories, administrative records, oral testimonies, gendered experiences, anthropological perspectives, and memory studies. These approaches demonstrated that Partition violence resulted not from a single cause but from the convergence of multiple processes, including colonial institutional legacies, administrative breakdown, political mobilization, migration, rumours, economic competition, local power struggles, and the collapse of social trust. The growing emphasis on microhistory has further illustrated that violence varied significantly across districts, towns, and villages, challenging generalized national narratives. Despite these advances, important gaps remain within the historiography. Comparative regional studies remain uneven, with Punjab receiving substantially greater scholarly attention than Bengal, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province, Kashmir, and the princely states. Likewise, greater use of district-level archives, intelligence reports, police records, refugee documentation, and digital mapping technologies offers significant opportunities for future research. Interdisciplinary approaches combining archival evidence with oral histories and spatial analysis may further illuminate how violence unfolded differently across local contexts. Ultimately, the historiography of Partition violence demonstrates that historical interpretation is continually shaped by new sources, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives. Rather than producing a definitive explanation, successive generations of scholars have revealed the complexity of one of the twentieth century's most traumatic historical events. Future research that integrates political, social, cultural, gendered, and spatial perspectives promises a more comprehensive understanding of the causes, dynamics, and legacies of Partition violence in South Asia.

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