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Communal Violence and the Partition of Punjab in 1947: Political Mobilization and Ideological Conflicts in the Case of Multan

Muhammad Safdar Sasrana
PhD Scholar, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
Dr. Turab Ul Hassan Sargana
(Corresponding Author)
Associate Professor at department of History & Civilization Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

Abstract
The Partition of Punjab in 1947 was accompanied by widespread communal violence, forced migration, killings, looting and the abduction of women. Although several historians have examined the violence in different parts of Punjab, the events in Multan have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This study examines the nature, causes and consequences of communal violence in Multan during the Partition of 1947, with particular focus on political mobilisation, religious identity, ideological conflicts and local power interests. It explores how political developments, especially the activities of Sikh political leadership and the growing communal tensions, contributed to the worsening situation in Punjab. However, the study does not treat communal violence as the result of religious differences alone. It also examines the role of local groups, economic interests, personal rivalries, looting and the breakdown of administrative authority. Drawing upon historical accounts, official reports, police records and oral testimonies collected through fieldwork in different parts of Multan, the research brings forward incidents and local experiences that have received limited attention in existing historical studies. It also examines the experiences of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, including forced migration, killings, property losses and the abduction of women. The findings suggest that communal violence in Multan was neither entirely spontaneous nor the result of a single organised political plan. Rather, it developed through the interaction of political tensions, communal fears, local interests, economic opportunities and administrative failure. By bringing local evidence into the wider history of the Partition of Punjab, this study provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of communal violence in Multan in 1947.
***KEYWORDS**: Communal Violence, Partition of Punjab 1947, Multan, Political Mobilization, Religious Identity, Ideological Conflict, Communal Relations, Punjab Partition.*

Introduction

The Partition of British India in 1947 was one of the most tragic events in the history of South Asia. The division of Punjab resulted in widespread communal violence, killings, looting, arson, forced migration

and the abduction of women. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus suffered during this period, and thousands of families were forced to leave their homes. Historians have explained this violence through different perspectives, including political mobilisation, religious identity, economic competition, revenge and the breakdown of administrative authority. Scholars such as G.D. Khosla, Gurbachan Singh Talib, Bipan Chandra, Ian Talbot, Ian Copland and Swarna Aiyar have examined various aspects of Partition violence. Their works indicate that the violence was a complex process and cannot be explained through religious differences alone. Political developments in Punjab before Partition played an important role in increasing communal tensions. The demand for Pakistan, Sikh political concerns, the activities of the Akali Dal and other political organisations, and the positions of leaders such as Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Baldev Singh shaped the political situation. These developments, together with provocative speeches, rumours and reports of violence in other parts of Punjab, increased fear and mistrust among communities. However, the actions of political leaders did not always represent the views of ordinary people. Many people maintained friendly relations with members of other communities, while others became involved in violence due to fear, revenge, property disputes and economic interests. This study examines communal violence in Multan during the Partition of Punjab in 1947, with particular attention to political mobilisation, religious identity and ideological conflicts. It focuses on incidents in different towns and villages of the district, including Tulamba, Makhdoom Pur, Jahanian, Shujaabad, Jodhpur, Sarai Sidhu and Kot Aala Singh. Drawing upon historical accounts, official reports and oral testimonies collected from different parts of Multan, the study explores killings, looting, forced migration and the abduction of women. It argues that communal violence in Multan was neither entirely spontaneous nor simply the result of a single organised political plan. Rather, it developed through the interaction of political tensions, communal fears, local rivalries, economic interests and the failure of administrative authority.

Political Background and Communal Mobilization in Punjab

The Partition of Punjab in 1947 brought widespread violence, forced migration and loss of life. The division of the province affected people who had lived together for generations. During this period, many towns and villages experienced killings, burning of houses, looting and attacks on families. Large numbers of people had to leave their homes and travel towards the newly created borders. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all experienced the effects of this violence, although the incidents and their scale were different in different areas. The movement of refugees also created serious problems for the administration, which could not provide security in many places. Historical accounts and reports written during that period describe the conditions in different parts of Punjab, including Multan, in August and September 1947. Ralph, a special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, travelled through the region and published his observations on 27 August 1947. His report described the condition of railway routes, refugee groups and villages affected by violence. Such contemporary reports provide useful information about the events taking place during Partition.[1]

The movement of refugees became one of the most dangerous features of Partition. People travelling on foot, by road and by train faced attacks during their journeys. Families moved with children,

[1] Ralph, special correspondent, report on communal violence in Punjab, *Daily Mail*, 27 August 1947.

elderly relatives and whatever belongings they could carry. Many travelled for several days in difficult conditions, without proper food, water or shelter. The original accounts describe a Muslim refugee caravan about twenty miles long, with more than twenty thousand people travelling towards Pakistan. Protecting such a large group was difficult when armed groups were active along the routes. Railway journeys were also dangerous, as refugee trains were attacked and passengers were killed. The assistant station master at Ganda Singh Wala described a train travelling from Ferozepur towards Kasur. When it reached the station, many passengers were dead and injured. His account also mentions children who had suffered serious injuries. Another account describes a train arriving at Wahga from the direction of Amritsar and Kalka. A large crowd had gathered to welcome the refugees, but the train arrived with dead bodies inside its compartments. These incidents show how railway stations and transport routes became places of serious violence during Partition. General Rees, who was associated with the Punjab Boundary Force, also described the difficult conditions faced by refugees and the violence taking place across the province.[2]

Historians have explained the causes and nature of Partition violence in different ways. Some have focused on political organisations, leadership and the planning of attacks. Others have examined religious identity, economic competition, revenge, rumours and the failure of law and order. G.D. Khosla, Gurbachan Singh Talib, Bipan Chandra, Ian Talbot, Ian Copland and Swarna Aiyar have discussed different aspects of the violence. Their explanations do not always agree. Talib gives particular attention to attacks on Sikhs and Hindus in West Punjab and discusses the role of the Muslim League. Khosla also describes violence in both parts of Punjab, including attacks on Muslims in East Punjab. Bipan Chandra gives importance to economic competition and the effects of colonial policies on communal politics. Francis Robinson discusses the historical importance of religion, language and kinship in the formation of Muslim identity. Paul Brass examines the political organisation of communal violence, while Ashutosh Varshney explains how relations and organisations at the local level can help prevent communal conflict. These studies show that Partition violence cannot be explained by one cause or by the actions of one community alone. Political developments, local interests, religious differences and the failure of administration all need to be considered.[3]

The events of 1947 also raise questions about the use of the terms genocide and ethnic cleansing. The violence included killings, forced migration, destruction of property and attacks on people because of their religious identity. However, historians do not always agree on whether these events should be described as genocide, ethnic cleansing or communal violence. The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted in 1948, defines genocide in relation to acts committed with the intention of destroying, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious

[2] Account of the assistant station master at Ganda Singh Wala railway station concerning the refugee train from Ferozepur to Kasur; account of the refugee train arriving at Wahga from the direction of Amritsar and Kalka, November 1947; General Rees, report or statement concerning communal violence and refugee movements in Punjab, 1947.

[3] G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning*; Gurbachan Singh Talib, *The Muslim League Attack on Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab 1947*; Bipan Chandra, Francis Robinson, Paul Brass, Ian Talbot, Ian Copland, Swarna Aiyar and Ashutosh Varshney, relevant works on communalism, Partition and communal violence.

group. The term ethnic cleansing became widely used in discussions of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. It refers to the forced removal of people from a particular area because of their ethnic or religious identity, with the aim of making that area more uniform. Robert Hayden has discussed the connection between these concepts and has pointed out that people who condemn genocide may still accept the forced removal of populations. This debate is relevant to the history of Punjab because the violence included both attacks on communities and actions that forced people to leave their homes. The terms should therefore be used carefully and according to the evidence available for each incident.[4]

Political developments before 1947 contributed to growing communal tension in Punjab. The Lahore Resolution of 1940 and the demand for Pakistan raised serious questions about the future of the province. Sikhs were concerned that they might lose their political influence and social position in a province where Muslims formed the majority. Their concerns were connected with their population, land ownership, economic position and religious identity. Different Sikh organisations discussed proposals to protect their political and cultural interests. The Khalsa National Party expressed concern about the political direction of the Muslim League after the Lahore Resolution. The Akali Dal later supported the proposal for Azad Punjab. This proposal aimed to create a province in which no single religious community would have complete political control. It included parts of the Ambala, Jullundur and Lahore divisions, as well as areas of the Multan division and neighbouring districts. The proposed arrangement was intended to maintain a balance among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Later, some Sikh leaders also supported the demand for a separate Sikh state. The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 and the negotiations over the transfer of power further increased uncertainty. These developments show that Sikh political demands changed according to the changing political and constitutional situation in Punjab.[5]

Several Sikh leaders took part in these political discussions, but they did not always agree on how Sikh interests should be protected. Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Baldev Singh, Udham Singh Nagoke and Isher Singh Majhail were among the important political figures of this period. The agreement between Baldev Singh and Sikander Hayat Khan on 15 June 1942 was an earlier effort to reduce political tension between Sikhs and Muslims. It improved relations for some time, but the death of Sikander Hayat Khan affected the continuation of this cooperation. Different groups within the Akali Dal also competed over the party's political direction. Jenkins observed that Giani Kartar Singh and the group associated with Udham Singh Nagoke and Isher Singh Majhail represented important rival positions. Master Tara Singh remained one of the most influential Sikh leaders, while the British administration often viewed Baldev Singh as a more moderate representative. These differences became important during the final negotiations before Partition. After the announcement of the 3 June Plan, Sikh leaders expressed concern about the future of their community in a divided Punjab. On 18 April 1947, Master Tara Singh, Baldev Singh and Giani Kartar Singh communicated the Sikh leadership's decision in favour of the

[4] United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948); Robert Hayden, relevant discussion of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

[5] Lahore Resolution (1940); resolution of the Khalsa National Party following the Lahore Resolution; records of the Akali Dal's Azad Punjab proposal; Cabinet Mission Plan (1946); relevant political documents concerning Sikh demands and the constitutional future of Punjab.

partition of Punjab and a population exchange to Lord Mountbatten. This was the position of important political leaders, but it did not mean that all Sikh families or ordinary Sikhs supported the same decision.[6]

The decisions of Sikh political leaders should be considered separately from the views and experiences of ordinary Sikhs. Many Sikh families had lived in West Punjab for generations and had strong connections with their villages, neighbours, land and businesses. Leaving their homes was therefore not an easy decision. Some families believed that Partition would not immediately change their lives, while others expected their migration to be temporary. Oral accounts describe Sikh families who asked Muslim neighbours to look after their houses because they expected to return. Mrs Anant Kaur recalled that her family thought they would come back soon and therefore left their house in the care of a neighbour. Mrs Kulijeet Kaur also remembered the friendly relations between Muslim and Sikh families in her village. She described how Muslim neighbours wept and embraced Sikh families when they decided to leave. On 5 September 1947, the governor of West Punjab expressed concern that around 300,000 Sikhs in Lyallpur had not yet shown signs of migration, although he expected that they would eventually have to leave. The SGPC report also describes notices placed on Sikh houses warning their residents to leave Pakistan. Sikhs in Punjab and Delhi reportedly wore black armbands on 8 July 1947 to show their opposition to the division of Punjab. These examples indicate that ordinary Sikhs did not share one common response to the political decisions of their leaders.[7]

Political activity in Punjab was not limited to religious organisations. Communist groups and peasant movements also took part in political life, particularly in rural areas. The Punjab Kisan Sabha raised issues related to land, agricultural labour and farmers' rights. The Harsah Chhina Morcha was another example of joint political activity in which Muslim, Sikh and Hindu peasants participated. These movements focused on landlords and colonial authority rather than directing their demands against people of another religion. The Communist Party of India had a considerable number of Sikh members in Punjab, but its political influence remained limited by electoral restrictions and problems within its own policies. Only a small section of the population could vote in municipal elections, which reduced the political opportunities of poor farmers and workers. The Communist Party also faced difficulties because of its support for the British government during the Second World War under the People's War policy. This position affected its relations with the wider anti-colonial movement. Even so, communist influence remained visible in grassroots activities. A photograph taken by Sunil Janah at a Punjab Kisan Sabha rally in 1945 showed demonstrators carrying communist banners. The newspaper *The People's Age* also reported on the Harsah Chhina Morcha on 18 August 1946 as a joint struggle of farmers. These examples

[6] Records concerning the agreement between Baldev Singh and Sikander Hayat Khan, 15 June 1942; correspondence and political records concerning Sikh demands and the future of Punjab; communication by Master Tara Singh, Baldev Singh and Giani Kartar Singh to Lord Mountbatten, 18 April 1947.

[7] Sir Evan Jenkins, reports and correspondence concerning Sikh migration and the political situation in Punjab, 1947; SGPC report on Partition; oral accounts attributed to Mrs Anant Kaur, Mrs Kulijeet Kaur and other Sikh residents concerning their decision to leave West Punjab.

show that economic and class issues remained important in Punjab, even as political divisions increasingly developed along religious lines.[8]

Religious Identity and Local Social and Economic Relations

Religion was an important part of social identity in Multan, but people's lives were also connected through land, agriculture, trade and local relationships. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus lived in towns and villages across the district and worked in different occupations. In rural areas, land ownership was an important source of wealth and social influence. In some areas, Sikh families owned large agricultural properties, while Muslim peasants worked as tenants or labourers. Sikh families were also involved in money lending and commercial activities. These economic differences sometimes existed alongside religious differences and strengthened the feeling that communities had separate interests. Separate electorates, introduced for Muslims in 1909 and extended to other communities in Punjab in 1919, strengthened separate political representation. Minority voters often believed that politicians belonging to their own religion would be better able to protect their interests. Reserved seats and separate electorates encouraged people to view Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus as separate political communities. However, everyday social relations were more complicated. People continued to work together in agriculture, business and neighbourhood life. The political crisis of 1947 made existing differences more sensitive, particularly in areas where land ownership and religious identity were closely connected. These conditions help explain why political changes created fear among some landowning groups and increased competition over property and local influence.[9]

The political situation became more tense during the early months of 1947. The Muslim League's campaign against the Unionist government developed into a wider political and communal conflict. Sikh political leaders also made speeches and statements about the future of Punjab. Master Tara Singh's public display of his kirpan outside the Punjab Assembly in March 1947 became one of the most discussed incidents of this period. His statements against the creation of Pakistan and the slogans used by different political groups increased mistrust. Muslim League supporters and Sikh activists used strong language during demonstrations, and political disagreements increasingly appeared as a conflict between religious communities. Governor Sir Evan Jenkins was concerned about the worsening situation and repeatedly reported the growing difficulty of maintaining law and order. He also informed Mountbatten that political parties were affecting the confidence and working of the police and other administrative services. The uncertainty surrounding the transfer of power had weakened the authority of the government. These developments show that communal tension was not only the result of local disagreements. It was also connected with the political struggle over the future of Punjab and the administration's inability to maintain public confidence.[10]

[8] Punjab Kisan Sabha records; *The People's Age*, 18 August 1946, report on the Harsah Chhina Morcha; Sunil Janah's photograph of the Punjab Kisan Sabha rally, 1945.

[9] Census of India, 1941, Punjab figures; relevant records concerning separate electorates and reserved political representation; Ayesha Jalal, relevant discussion of land, property and social interests during Partition.

[10] Sir Evan Jenkins, reports and correspondence with Lord Mountbatten concerning political agitation, Master Tara Singh's speeches and the breakdown of law and order in Punjab, 1947.

News and rumours about attacks in other parts of Punjab also affected the situation in Multan. Reports of killings, burning houses and forced migration came from Rawalpindi, Amritsar and other districts. Refugees arriving from affected areas shared their experiences with local people. Some reports were based on actual incidents, while others were exaggerated or spread without proper verification. Such news created fear and encouraged people to prepare for possible attacks. Political pamphlets also helped spread anger. One example was *The Ravaging of Rawalpindi*, which described the suffering of Sikhs during the Rawalpindi violence. Jenkins considered some of the descriptions in the pamphlet greatly exaggerated. However, it circulated among people and was used to encourage feelings of revenge. The oral account of Ameer Khan also describes the role of rumours in the beginning of violence in his area. According to his testimony, people heard that Sikhs had gathered at a particular place and were attacking Muslims. This report created fear, after which Muslims began to attack members of other communities. Gurbachan Singh Tandon also remembered that refugees arriving from East Punjab questioned why Khatri families were still living in Pakistan after losing their own homes and belongings. These accounts show how reports, rumours and refugee experiences could change local attitudes and damage relations between neighbours.[11]

The weakening of law and order was another important factor in the spread of communal violence. As the transfer of power approached, the authority of the colonial administration became weaker in many parts of Punjab. Police officers and government officials were increasingly viewed through their religious identities. In some places, the police failed to stop attacks or protect people in danger. Jenkins expressed concern that political interference was affecting the unity and impartiality of the police and military. Reports also describe situations in which officials could not or did not respond quickly to fires and attacks in local settlements. Poor communication between district headquarters and police stations in distant villages made the situation worse. In some cases, local authorities received information about violence several days after an incident had taken place. Armed groups and local gangs used these conditions for their own purposes. Some attacks were connected with political mobilisation or religious hostility, while others were linked with revenge, personal disputes and the desire to acquire property. Some people justified attacks and looting as a response to violence against Muslims in other areas. In such conditions, the absence of a reliable and impartial administration made it difficult to stop violence before it spread to nearby villages.[12]

The actions of ordinary people were not always determined by religious identity. Some individuals took part in attacks, while others tried to protect neighbours from different communities. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus had shared village life for generations, and these relationships did not disappear everywhere when Partition began. Some accounts describe Muslim neighbours visiting Sikh gurdwaras and maintaining friendly relations with Sikh families. Some families continued to help one another even after migration had started. Mrs Kulijeet Kaur remembered the sadness of Muslim

[11] *The Ravaging of Rawalpindi*, pamphlet circulated after the Rawalpindi violence; Sir Evan Jenkins, comments on the pamphlet and communal tension; oral testimony attributed to Ameer Khan; oral account attributed to Gurbachan Singh Tandon.

[12] Sir Evan Jenkins, correspondence concerning the police, military and administrative situation in Punjab, 1947; General Rees, reports concerning the Punjab Boundary Force and communal violence.

neighbours when Sikh families decided to leave their village. Other testimonies mention people who offered protection or helped their neighbours during dangerous situations. Sardar Aridaman Singh's account also connects the protection of Muslims with the Sikh belief in universal brotherhood. These examples are important because they show that all members of a religious community did not act in the same way. Political leaders and communal organisations promoted particular identities, but ordinary people also acted according to personal relationships, religious beliefs and local circumstances. The history of Partition should therefore include not only those who took part in violence but also those who tried to prevent it.[13]

Communal Violence and Local Incidents in Multan

Communal violence affected many towns and villages in Multan district during 1947. Police records and local accounts mention incidents in Tulamba, Makhdoom Pur, Jahanian, Umeed Garh, Ban Bosan, Shujaabad, Jodhpur, Dharampur, Sarai Sidhu and Kot Aala Singh. These accounts refer to killings, attacks on houses, robbery and the migration of families. The incidents did not take place in the same way in every area. Some settlements faced direct attacks, while people in other places left because of rumours, threats or fear of further violence. The movement of families between villages and nearby towns was also affected. The original research gives particular attention to incidents that received little coverage in newspapers and official publications. It argues that local experiences are necessary for understanding the history of Partition in Multan. The available accounts also indicate that violence continued in different places during August and September 1947. The study of Multan should therefore not be limited to events in the main city. The experiences of smaller towns, villages and rural settlements are also important for understanding how the crisis developed at the local level.[14]

Local accounts also mention individuals and groups who were allegedly involved in attacks and looting. One name that appears in the original research is Jaspal Singh, along with Gurpal Singh, Raamji, Karan Pind and other associates. Local accounts connect these individuals with attacks on Hindu, Sikh and Muslim households during August and September 1947. Mahar Dil Ahmad, who lived near Jodhpur, provided an oral account about Jaspal Singh and his companions. According to his testimony, they were skilled in ironwork and made kitchen utensils as well as weapons. He stated that they carried firearms, swords, knives and hatchets and used these weapons during attacks on local residents and their houses. His account also connects the group with robbery after the attacks. Stories about killings and destruction in the area remained in local memory from Jodhpur towards Multan city. G.D. Khosla also discussed Jaspal Singh and his companions in *Stern Reckoning*, referring to their alleged involvement in looting and killings. Such accounts are useful for identifying local actors, but oral memories and accusations should be compared with police records and other historical documents. The individuals named in these

[13] Oral testimonies concerning ordinary people who protected neighbours from other communities during Partition; account attributed to Aridaman Singh concerning Sikh teachings and the protection of Muslims; testimony attributed to Mrs Kulijeet Kaur.

[14] Police records and local accounts concerning communal violence in Tulamba, Makhdoom Pur, Jahanian, Umeed Garh, Ban Bosan, Shujaabad, Jodhpur, Dharampur, Sarai Sidhu and Kot Aala Singh.

accounts should therefore be presented as people accused in particular testimonies, not as persons whose guilt has been established by a court.[15]

The original research also indicates that economic interests and personal motives were involved in some incidents. One example concerns Kali Ram, a Hindu individual who was allegedly involved with local Muslim attackers in the looting of a house or settlement in Tulamba. This account is based on information from eyewitnesses and police records. It is important because it does not support a simple explanation in which people always acted against members of another religious community. Another incident concerns the household of Raja Hareesh, a Hindu resident of Jodhpur Kabirwal. In an interview conducted in 2021, Mohammad Ramzan, who was about 96 years old at the time, described an attack on Raja Hareesh's house by a group of villagers. According to his account, they entered the house and took property. Several people were injured and some were killed during the robbery. He also mentioned that a robber named Baqir was wounded during the incident. Mohammad Ramzan held Kali Ram responsible for the Tulamba tragedy and believed that he later suffered because of his actions. These details should be understood as oral testimony rather than independently verified facts. They nevertheless show how local rivalries, personal interests and opportunities for robbery became part of the wider violence.[16]

The attack on Kot Aala Singh raises questions about the choice of targets and the use of local resources. The original research describes the settlement as being in a relatively secluded area near the main railway line. It also had a considerable number of wealthy Hindu and Sikh residents. These features may have made the area attractive to people interested in looting property. The research suggests that the location may have been selected deliberately and that the attack could have involved planning. However, the available material does not provide direct evidence that railway staff took part in the incident. The original discussion raises the possibility that railway resources may have been relevant, but this point needs further evidence. It is important to distinguish between the known location of the settlement, the reported attack and the possible involvement of railway employees. On 13 August 1947, Governor Jenkins told Mountbatten that armed gangs in Punjab were well supplied and well led, making village raids difficult to control without a strong use of force. His observation provides the wider administrative context for examining this incident. The attack on Kot Aala Singh may be considered in relation to its location, property interests, armed activity and the weakening of government authority. However, further local records are needed to establish the exact details of the event.[17]

The problems faced by refugees did not end when they crossed the new border. They also had to deal with housing, land, employment and permanent settlement. The governments of India and Pakistan developed administrative categories to manage the large movement of people. The original material explains the difference between refugees from agreed areas and those from non-agreed areas.

[15] G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning*, relevant discussion of Jaspal Singh and his associates; oral testimony attributed to Mahar Dil Ahmad concerning Jaspal Singh, Gurpal Singh, Raamji and Karan Pind.

[16] Oral testimony attributed to Mohammad Ramzan, interviewed in 2021, concerning Raja Hareesh's household in Jodhpur Kabirwal and the alleged role of Kali Ram in the Tulamba incident.

[17] Local account concerning the attack on Kot Aala Singh and its location near the railway line; Sir Evan Jenkins, communication to Lord Mountbatten, 13 August 1947, concerning armed gangs and village raids.

Agreed-area refugees were people who moved from areas officially recognised as disturbed and were included in rehabilitation arrangements made through cooperation between the two governments. Other migrants came from areas such as northern and central India, Jammu and Kashmir and Bengal, and were not always covered by the same arrangements. This distinction affected access to rehabilitation benefits and the settlement of displaced families on abandoned property. In Pakistan, the treatment of evacuee property remained an important issue in the following years. On 7 February 1955, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan removed the earlier distinction for the permanent allocation of evacuee property under a revised rehabilitation arrangement. The new programme covered people who had migrated from India or its occupied regions between 1 March 1947 and 30 June 1953. These arrangements show that Partition created long-term legal, economic and administrative problems for people who had lost their homes and property.[18]

Oral interviews are useful for studying incidents in Sarai Sidhu and nearby areas of Multan district. Official reports often provide figures, administrative observations and information about major incidents, but they may not record the experiences of every village and family. Local interviews can preserve information about people, places and events that received little attention in newspapers or government records. The original research refers to interviews with residents from different parts of Multan and explains how local knowledge helped identify people who could provide information about the violence. Mahar Dil Ahmad's account of Jaspal Singh is one example. Mohammad Ramzan's account of the attack on Raja Hareesh's household is another. These interviews also show how memories of Partition remained part of local discussions many decades after the events. Oral testimony, however, has limitations. Memories may change over time, details may become mixed with later stories, and personal or family interests may affect how an incident is remembered. Interviews should therefore be compared with police records, contemporary reports and published historical studies. When examined carefully, oral evidence can provide local details that are missing from the wider historical record.[19]

Human Cost, Women and the Scale of Violence

Women faced serious dangers during the Partition of Punjab. Historical accounts describe abduction, forced conversion, sexual violence, physical assault and murder. Women were attacked while travelling with their families or trying to reach safer places. Some were separated from their relatives, while others were taken away by armed groups. The original research also refers to incidents in which women were assaulted or killed during attacks on refugee groups and settlements. Ralph's report in the *Daily Mail* describes violence against Muslim women during the movement of refugees near Bathinda. Other accounts from Amritsar describe attacks on Muslim women and girls in residential areas. These reports show that women were not affected only as members of displaced families. Their bodies and religious identities also became targets during communal violence. In some Sikh families, women were killed by their own relatives because of the fear of abduction, forced conversion or sexual assault. Thoa

[18] Government of Pakistan records concerning agreed-area and non-agreed-area refugees, evacuee property and rehabilitation policy; proceedings of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, 7 February 1955, concerning the removal of the distinction for permanent allocation of evacuee property.

[19] Oral interviews conducted in Sarai Sidhu and surrounding areas of Multan district; interviews attributed to Mahar Dil Ahmad and Mohammad Ramzan.

Khalsa became one of the best-known examples of this tragedy. Accounts describe around ninety women who drowned themselves in a well because they feared being captured. These incidents form an important part of the history of violence against women during Partition. At the same time, the experiences of individual women were not all the same and should be examined through their own accounts.[20]

Women's experiences during Partition were closely connected with ideas about family honour, religious identity and the fear of sexual violence. Some families believed that the abduction or conversion of women would bring dishonour to their family and community. Under this pressure, some families reportedly killed their daughters and female relatives. Kartar Kaur's account describes how certain Sikh families considered such deaths preferable to the possibility of facing humiliation or conversion. Later Sikh memorial practices presented the women who died at Thoa Khalsa as examples of sacrifice and courage. The Singh Sabha Gurdwara in India holds ceremonies to remember women who lost their lives during Partition. However, not all survivor accounts support the idea that women preferred death to migration or conversion. A young survivor, aged around twelve or thirteen, recalled that those who were able to escape tried to reach any place where they could find safety. These accounts show that women had their own responses to violence and should not be understood only through the decisions of male relatives or community leaders. The idea of honour was used to explain and sometimes justify violence, but the desire to survive, protect children and remain with family members was also important. A study of Partition must therefore consider women's own experiences and memories rather than presenting them only as symbols of community honour.[21]

Government reports provide information about the abduction and recovery of women during Partition. The original research refers to a report of the Central Ministry of Refugee Rehabilitation titled *Details of Converts and Abducted Women in the Districts of West Punjab*. According to the figures quoted in this report, 21,219 non-Muslim women had been returned to India by the week ending 24 April 1948. The same material records that 986 non-Muslim girls who had been abducted and converted were rescued and sent to India from Multan district. It also states that another 234 rescued girls from Multan were still living in camps at that time. These figures indicate the scale of the problem and the official efforts made to recover abducted women. The original research also mentions a report from the Gujranwala district liaison officer to the chief liaison officer in Lahore. It recorded that three of 185 women were reportedly with police officials, while nine were with recognised troublemakers or influential people in the district. These figures point to the difficulties involved in recovering women and deciding their custody. The date and page numbers of the original government report should be checked

[20] G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning*, relevant discussion of abducted women and the train incidents; historical accounts and survivor testimonies concerning abductions, forced conversions and killings of women during Partition, including the events at Thoa Khalsa.

[21] Testimony attributed to Kartar Kaur concerning women and family honour during Partition; survivor account of a young girl from Thoa Khalsa; records of memorial ceremonies at Singh Sabha Gurdwara.

before publication. The information nevertheless shows that the abduction and recovery of women formed a major part of the human crisis created by Partition.[22]

The exact number of people killed in Multan district during the communal violence of 1947 is difficult to establish. The estimates quoted in the original research range from approximately 7,000 to 9,000 deaths. The SGPC report gives a figure of around 3,000 Sikh deaths in Multan district, while Governor Francis Mudie informed Mountbatten that total casualties after 14 August 1947 were approximately 2,200, according to information provided by the Punjab Chief Secretary. These figures should not be treated as directly equal because they may refer to different periods, communities and methods of counting. The SGPC figure refers specifically to Sikh deaths, while Mudie's figure appears to cover casualties reported after a particular date. The original research also suggests that many incidents in distant villages were not properly reported to the district headquarters. Communication between local police stations and senior officials was weak, and by the end of August some officials still did not know what had happened in remote areas. Individual killings and attacks may therefore have remained outside the official record. This helps explain why different sources provide different estimates. A more reliable account of the death toll requires a comparison of police records, government correspondence, community reports and oral evidence. Until then, these figures should be presented as separate estimates rather than as one confirmed total.[23]

The experiences of Sikhs during Partition also show that members of the same community did not respond to violence in one way. Some Sikh leaders and armed groups supported militant action and population exchange, while other Sikhs opposed violence and tried to protect Muslim neighbours. The original research includes accounts of Sikh families who had close relations with Muslim neighbours and were reluctant to leave their homes. It also describes people who helped Muslims during dangerous situations. Sardar Aridaman Singh's testimony explains that his grandfather was influenced by the Sikh teaching of universal brotherhood and helped Muslims rather than treating them as enemies. Other accounts describe Muslim neighbours who offered hospitality to Sikh families and expressed sadness when they left. These examples are important because they show that religious identity alone did not determine people's actions. However, the existence of such examples should not be used to ignore the attacks and serious violence reported in other areas. Both experiences were part of the history of Partition. The actions of political leaders, armed groups and ordinary families must be examined separately. This approach gives a more balanced understanding of the different responses within the Sikh community and the wider population of Multan and Punjab.[24]

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[22] Government of India, Central Ministry of Refugee Rehabilitation, *Details of Converts and Abducted Women in the Districts of West Punjab*. The report date and page numbers supporting the figures of 21,219 returned women, 986 rescued girls in Multan and 234 women remaining in camps must be verified.

[23] SGPC report on Sikh casualties during Partition; correspondence or report by Governor Francis Mudie to Lord Mountbatten concerning casualties after 14 August 1947; Punjab Chief Secretary's updates on law and order in Multan district.

[24] Oral testimonies concerning Sikh opposition to communal violence and the protection of Muslim neighbours, including the account attributed to Aridaman Singh and the memories of Sikh families in West Punjab.

The violence in Multan had several connected causes. Political mobilisation and religious differences increased tension between communities, while economic competition and disputes over land and property affected local relations. In some places, people used the disorder to take control of houses, agricultural land and other belongings. Ayesha Jalal's discussion of Partition violence is relevant because she examines how local groups and individuals used violence to gain control over the property of their neighbours and over social space. Her analysis gives importance to local interests rather than explaining every attack as the action of a large political organisation. Paul Brass also examines the role of political actors, police and organised groups in communal violence. Donald Horowitz discusses how group behaviour and social approval can influence ethnic conflict, while Ashutosh Varshney gives importance to local civic relations and organisations that help prevent violence. The evidence from Multan suggests that political mobilisation, rumours, revenge, fear, looting and administrative weakness could operate together. Some attackers used religious language to justify their actions, while others were mainly interested in property and financial gain. At the same time, people from different communities continued to protect neighbours and oppose violence. These different motives show why the events cannot be explained only through religious hatred or one political plan.[25]

The case of Multan shows that Partition violence was neither entirely spontaneous nor the result of one continuous political command. The evidence points to a combination of organised attacks, local planning, political mobilisation, personal disputes and economic interests. Political decisions at the provincial and national levels created uncertainty about the future of Punjab, but local conditions also shaped the actual experience of violence. In some places, armed groups carried out attacks with preparation, while in others rumours, fear and revenge contributed to sudden incidents. The failure of police and administrative institutions allowed these actions to continue. The experiences of women, refugees, landowners, peasants and ordinary families show that the human cost went far beyond the political discussions among leaders. Local accounts from Tulamba, Jodhpur, Sarai Sidhu, Kot Aala Singh and other settlements add important details to the history of Multan. They also show the value of using official records, contemporary reports, historical studies and oral interviews together. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all experienced the effects of Partition, although their experiences differed according to location and circumstances. The study of Multan therefore helps explain how wider political decisions and local social relations came together during one of the most difficult periods in the history of Punjab.[26]

Conclusion

The Partition of Punjab in 1947 was not only a political division but also a major human tragedy. The case of Multan shows that communal violence developed through the interaction of political conflict, religious identity, local interests and the failure of law and order. Political decisions created fear and uncertainty, but the actual events were also shaped by local conditions. In some places, attacks were planned, while

[25] Ayesha Jalal, relevant analysis of land, property and local interests during Partition; Paul Brass, relevant writings on communal violence and political mobilisation; Donald Horowitz, relevant work on ethnic conflict; Ashutosh Varshney, relevant work on inter-community relations.

[26] Ian Talbot, Swarna Aiyar, Ian Copland, Shail Mayaram and other historians, relevant studies of Partition violence, organised attacks, local mobilisation and ethnic cleansing in Punjab.

in others violence developed through rumours, revenge and the actions of local groups. The desire to take control of houses, land and other property also became a reason for attacks in certain areas. The experiences of women and displaced families reveal the deep human cost of this violence. The available evidence does not support a single explanation for all incidents. Instead, it points to several causes that worked together and affected different communities in different ways.This study also shows the importance of examining local history alongside wider political developments. Official reports and historical books provide useful information, but oral testimonies help explain what happened in smaller towns and villages of Multan district. They also preserve the memories of people whose experiences received limited attention in the published record. At the same time, these accounts must be compared with other available evidence because some details remain uncertain. The examples of people who protected their neighbours also remind us that religious identity did not determine every person's actions. Despite the violence and division, some individuals continued to support friendship and human relations across communities. It can therefore be concluded that the Partition violence in Multan was a complex process shaped by political decisions, communal mobilisation, economic interests and local circumstances. A careful study of these factors provides a clearer understanding of the events of 1947 and their lasting effects on the people of the region.