From the Ashes of 1947

This book revisits the partition of the Punjab, its attendant violence and, as a consequence, the divided and dislocated Punjabi lives. Navigating nostalgia and trauma, dreams and laments, identity(s) and homeland(s), it explores the partition of the very idea of *Punjabiyat*.

It was Punjab (along with Bengal) that was divided to create the new nations of India and Pakistan and that inherited a communalised and fractured self. In subsequent years, religious and linguistic sub-divisions followed – arguably, no other region of the subcontinent has had its linguistic and ethnic history submerged within respective national and religious identity(s) and none paid the price of partition like the pluralistic, pre-partition Punjab.

This book is about the dissonance, distortion and dilution which details the past of the region. It describes 'people's history' through diverse oral narratives, literary traditions and popular accounts. In terms of space, it documents the experience of partition in the two prosperous localities of Ludhiana and Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), with a focus on migration; and in the Muslim princely state of Malerkotla, with a focus on its escape from the violence of 1947. In terms of groups, it especially attends to women and their experiences, beyond the symbolic prism of 'honour'. Critically examining existing accounts, discussing the differential impact of partition, and partaking in the ever democratising discourse on it, this book attempts to illustrate the lack of closure associated with 1947.

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From the Ashes of 1947

Reimagining Punjab

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List of Abbreviations

AIHM	All India Hindu Mahasabha
CLO	Chief Liaison Officer
DC	District Commissioner
DLO	District Liaison Officer
GoI	Government of India
GoP	Government of Pakistan
INC	Indian National Congress
IOR	India Office Records, UK
MEO	Military Evacuation Organisation
MR&R	Ministry of Refugees and Rehabilitation
NAI	National Archives of India
NDC	National Documentation Centre, Islamabad
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
PBF	Punjab Boundary Force
PEPSU	Patiala and East Punjab States Union
PSA	Punjab State Archives, India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SARRC	South Asian Research and Resource Centre, Islamabad

Glossary

Abadi	Village area.
Arains	Cultivators Vegetable growers.
Arora	Trading/business caste.
Artisans	Classification of people, majority were Muslims. Artisans were usually treated similarly to shudras.
Bania	Merchant class, village shop-keeper or money-lender, originally from Gujarat.
Bazaar	Market place.
Bazigars	Nomadic tribe that live off circus-like performances.
Bigha	A measure of land about 4 kanals or 2,000 yards.
Biradari	Brotherhood or social networks which are often used for marriage and political relations.
Brahmin	Priest/intellectuals; belong to the highest caste, function is to study and teach, to perform sacrifice and other priestly duties.
Caste	System of hereditary social stratification. In Hinduism, there is a four-fold classification of – brahmin (priests), kshatriya (warriors), vaishya (traders) and sudra (labourers). There is also a fifth group at the bottom of the scale and they are considered as 'outcastes'.
Chak	A block of land – a colony village.
Chamar	Menial worker, usually with leather and animal hides. Considered unclean caste/untouchable.
Chowk	Meeting point or main junction like a roundabout.
Crore	Numerical term denoting ten million.
Dargah	Muslim shrines, especially Sufi Shrines.
Dharamshalas	Shelter for devotees at Temples/Gurdwaras.
Doab	Literally 'two rivers'; the strip of fertile land between two rivers. For example, the area between the rivers Sutlej and Beas known as the Bist Doab.

Dogras	The term 'Dogra' refers to an ethnic group that lived in the south-eastern part of Jammu, ruling family of the Princely State were Dogras.
Gali	Narrow lanes.
Ghee	Clarified butter.
Goonda	Thugs.
Gurdwara	Sikh temple.
Guru	Religious leader in Sikhism.
Hakim	Traditional doctor.
Harijan	Term popularised by Mahatma Gandhi for untouchables. Literally means 'children of God'.
Hindutva	Literally means 'Hinduness'; term has been popularised by the Hindu nationalists in India.
Izzat	Honour, prestige or status, often associated with maintaining 'face'.
Jat	Agriculturalist; cultivating caste prominent in Punjab agriculture and within the Sikh community. Also prominent in the military.
Jatha	A group of volunteers for a specific purpose – usually associated with groups of Sikhs.
Kacha/Kachi	Mud houses or those with weak structures.
Kachi abadi	Slum colonies.
Kafla	Foot convoys of refugees.
Katha	Hindu prayer.
Khatris	Trading/business caste.
Khojas	Members of a Muslim trading community who are disciples of the Ismaili Agha Khan.
Lakh	Numerical term denoting a hundred thousand.
Lohar	Artisan Class – ironsmiths/blacksmiths.
Mandi	Market/Market town.
Mandir	Hindu temple.

Maraba	25 acres of land.
Masjid	Mosque.
Memon	Muslim commercial community from usually western part of India. Historically associated with the Kathiawar area.
Mohalla	A residential locality or area of a town.
Nala	Ravine, river bed.
Nawab	High-ranking political/military official, provincial governor or viceroy in Mughal India; later used as courtesy title for member of the Muslim elite.
Rajput	Caste of northern and central India traditionally associated with rulership and warriorhood.
Ramgarhias	Sikh artisan caste, prominent among East African Sikhs.
Sepoys	Indian soldiers originally in the East India Company.
Sheikh	Respectable Muslim.
Tarkhan	Artisan Class – carpenters.
Tehsil	Sub-division of a district in the British and post-independence period.
Vaid	Traditional doctor.
Viswakarmis	Artisan Class – work with tools.

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The journey towards completing this book has been a long one, perhaps too long. It has been filled with immense feelings of gratitude and fulfilment but at the same time, it has been accompanied by the enormous amount of personal loss too. While the loss can never be replaced those loved ones remain in memory. Like many of those people that I interviewed over the years, their personal loss of friends, family and homelands can never be replaced but they retain fading memories of former lives. This work would not have been possible without the generosity of people who shared their memories with me and opened their hearts to a stranger.

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Preface

Memories Create History

It is 5 December 2013 and I have just attended a lecture by Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, at Foreman Christian College, Lahore. He was giving a talk on Khan Ghaffar Badshah Khan, the great leader from the Frontier. At the same time, Gandhi was also launching his book *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten*. All these fragmented pieces are brought together later in the day while I am attending a dinner for Rajmohan Gandhi and I sat there chatting with Najum Latif, talking about Indian nationalism, the two-nation theory and Punjabi nationalism. We were meeting after many years; the first meeting was at Government College Lahore while I was doing my PhD on the partition of India. We are conversing in Punjabi and through his stories he takes me back to the days of his childhood in pre-partitioned Punjab, more specifically in Jullundur, where his ancestral roots are. He laments about the state of Punjab and why it should never have been partitioned; he is one of the few survivors of that generation that witnessed this great calamity himself as a child. Uprooted, unsettled, traumatised and ultimately disappointed in outcomes. No politician asked people like him or that generation whether they wanted a divided land. Instead, they were sold dreams, aspirations and division.

Ten years after completing my PhD thesis, I revisit my own work that was never published in its entirety. After visiting Lahore at the end of 2013, I felt that it is even more relevant today. There is a need for many to understand why this happened, though the answers may never be truly known. Many friends and colleagues were still discussing and debating the events of 1947. I also noticed that there seems to be a great deal of interest in partition and what happened in Punjab among many people.

I had a chance meeting with Jamil Khan, another migrant from Patiala and himself an Urdu writer; we had many discussions about partition and why so many people turned to violence. Jamil sahib is still not at peace with this event, which has shaped much of North India and Pakistan. There are fragments of partitioned lives wherever one goes; casual conversations inevitably lead to questions about one's background and then of course, in the distinctly unpolished tones of the Punjabi dialect, there are questions about which side one belongs to? My own identity, as I assert, is Punjabi and I am usually immediately placed in the *doab* and thus the familiar tones to the migrants in West Punjab and home in East Punjab. But as a child of the diaspora, my Punjabi is largely

untainted with the influences of (Arabic) Urdu and (Sanskrit) Hindi in modern Pakistan and India. Yet there is immediately a connection with each other, a sense of lost kinship, which is awakened and so the conversation continues to reminisce about lost homes, friends and childhoods abruptly dislocated. The past is unadulterated, pure and happy until the great *halla*, *batwara, takseem*, or *wand* (partition) came to shatter the illusion. The new imagined homelands of India and Pakistan are then put under the microscope: Was it worth it? There is a question mark over whether it was worth the loss and why Punjab had to pay such a heavy price. This is why individuals like Latif and Khan still lament the politicians and choices they made. The population exchange and territorial division cannot be undone but the greater tragedy is the loss of homelands that people can no longer visit. The strict visa controls mean that the ordinary people still suffer the most because they are unable to visit the 'other' side. Why are we still separated? This is the question many migrants ask.

Indeed, the strained relation between India and Pakistan for the past seventy years has further embedded this trauma. Although there is still much nostalgia about 'my city, my street', as testified by Abdul Haq,[1] the hard border between the two countries has made it impossible for these forced migrants to re-visit their homelands. Instead, memories of that lost youth and place have 'served to reinforce displacement, loss, and anger',[2] even though some people delayed this process for as long as possible. However, it is Sarwan Singh who captures the essence of the issues that have really torn the people that were dislocated. This was also one of the first interviews I did as a PhD student and the gentle sardar, sitting there cross-legged in his fabric shop in Malerkotla, with tears in his eyes, left an emotional impression on me. Poignantly, he talks about his village in Pakistan and his yearning to visit his 'home' again, which will remain unfulfilled:

> The thing that has affected me the most, which I still yearn for is the need to go back to my village and have a look but I am unable to do this. The law does not allow me to go back there to see my ancestral village and meet my friends and others there. This thing I feel I will be unable to complete in my life…Work is good but what happened at that time, the things we saw and experienced, and now when I see trouble taking place then it upsets me. We are settled now everything is fine but like I said it

1 Interview with Abdul Haq, Montgomery Bazaar, Faisalabad, January 2003.
2 Jeffrey Diamond, 'Narratives of Reform and Displacement in Colonial Lahore: The Intikaal of Muhammad Hussain Azad,' *Journal of Punjab Studies* 16 (2009).

> can never compensate for that time and what is in my heart. The thing that I yearn for, to see my house and my friends.[3]

Many of the people I interviewed vividly remember their homes. They can describe their homes in such detail as if an image has been permanently preserved in their memory. As someone who grew in Nakuru, Kenya, and had to leave as a child, I can relate to those feelings of wanting to see that home once again, just the way I imagine it in my head, but I chose not to, partly because I want to preserve that picture just the way it was, untainted. While the people I interviewed have moved on and they have settled down and created new lives, a part of them still yearns for those childhood memories.

Exploring Partition

In 2001, when I started my PhD, I was a student of history with limited knowledge of partition. Despite being closely connected to that land, I tried to remain an outsider in order to maintain some objectivity. The process of completing the thesis and now revisiting it, I realise now, has left an indelible impression on me and has shaped much of my understanding and growing intellectual interest in the idea of *Punjabiyat*. Punjab was divided to create the new nations of India and Pakistan but the lingering legacy has been one of a communalised and fractured Punjabi identity. The Punjabi Muslim has been absorbed in the Pakistan project and thus hardly speaks his mother tongue, especially the younger generations; the Indian Punjabi has been sub-divided into the Sikh and the Hindu. The Sikh and Punjabi identity has become synonymous to create a Punjabi-speaking state and the Hindu Punjabi is marginalised out and has been absorbed in the Hindutva project. Punjabis as an ethnic group have therefore been divided (and sub-divided) along religious and then linguistic lines. Punjabi as a language is now almost exclusively associated with the Sikh community, yet it is the mother tongue of most Pakistanis who have adopted Urdu as their national language and thereby created a new mother language. The Hindu Punjabis, on the other hand, associate themselves with Hindi; this was of course made easier by linguistic reorganisation of East Punjab 1966. These are simplified stereotypes of the divided people but, more broadly, they are symptomatic of the communalised politics of the sub-continent, and more specifically, they are much more peculiar to the Punjab region. It is difficult to think of another region in the sub-continent that has shunned its own linguistic

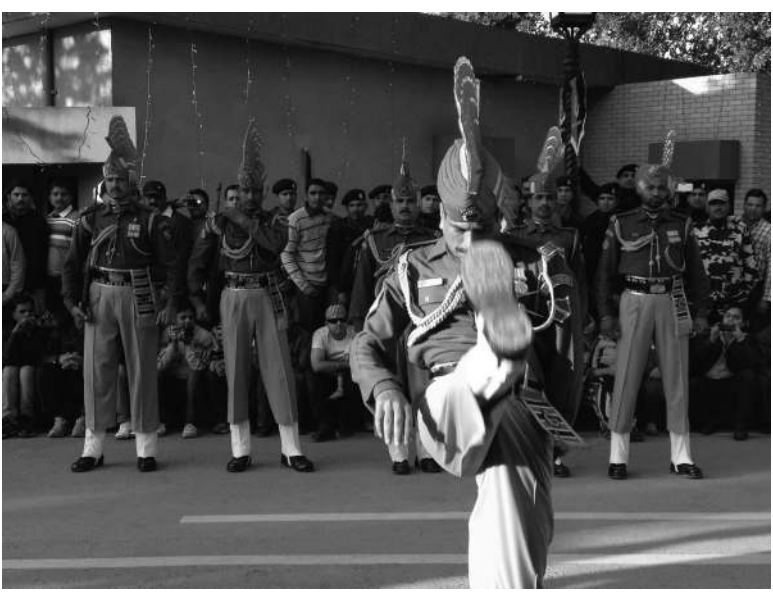
3 Interview with Sarwan Singh, Lal Bazaar, Malerkotla, August 2001.

and ethnic history in favour of a national or religious identity. The pluralistic region of Punjab that epitomised people like my own mother's generation are fewer and fewer. The convergence of different religious practices is evident in the way many people practice faith. Recent scholarship has been particularly interested in unearthing and documenting these shared religious practices and histories to challenge the otherwise distorted communalised histories. This book is about that period which transformed the land, the people and a dilution of its history which now tells us a different myth and past of Punjab. It is a revised post-1947 history, which fulfils the national projects of Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan but fails to adequately acknowledge the shared cultural roots and traditions of the broader Punjabi community. This polarisation of people is an attempt to homogenise people and endanger the essence of the plurality which has existed in Punjab for centuries.

Over the years, I have interviewed many people about their experiences of partition and the hardships they endured; the responses resonated across borders, regardless of their religion or country. People went through similar process of being uprooted and forcibly removed from ancestral homes, and feelings of dislocation were apparent in all communities. The differences were more at the class, caste and gender to some extent. Through the course of the research, it was clear that the migrants experienced intense trauma arising from loss of life, loss of property and being forcibly removed from their ancestral homes. Even today, some families bear the physical and psychological scars of the upheaval that was accompanied by incomprehensible violence against the most vulnerable in society. This of course raises many ethical concerns about the researcher's role in intruding and evoking old memories. What was also clear to me was much of the research, and indeed, history in South Asia is concerned with the political dimension. This work is an attempt to move away from seeking answers to why and how India was divided (which is done to a limited extent to provide the context). Instead, there is a need to focus on the people's history. This is also in line with current trends in history that is seeking to explore experiences 'from below' or provide a history which connects with the public. The oral narratives and poetry used in this book seek to bridge that gap between traditional history and popular history. These narratives also allow us to understand our own history through the prism of personal accounts and experiences. They are just as important as the 'high politics' because they remind us of the human suffering that was endured in the creation of India and Pakistan.

I wanted to speak to people who experienced Partition and migration first-hand, and record their narratives as opposed to the 'high politics'. Spending time

Picture 1: The India–Pakistan border at Attari–Wagah. The picture was taken in 2006 when trade was still exchanged manually at the line of control.



Picture 2: The Indian Border Security Force in full swing during the daily lowering of the flag ceremony, at the Attari-Wagah border. It attracts many people and is packed with the euphoric patriotism and excessive nationalism.

in both India and Pakistan was a privilege which not many people have. Relations between India and Pakistan often follow a roller-coaster ride where there is little certainty of the highs and lows. When I set out to do my research, I was not even sure that I would be able to get a visa for Pakistan since I was born in India. Having overcome that first hurdle, my first visit to Pakistan was filled with trepidation of the unknown land. Mysterious, because of how my own community's history is shaped by the Muslim/Sikh conflict going back to Mughal India. However, I was determined to visit regardless of the fears, but once I got there, all this vanished. The people I met were so generous and warm, that it almost immediately felt familiar and like home. The shared culture and heritage of the two Punjabs was only too apparent; however, there were clearly differences in the way West Punjab and East Punjab have developed over the past seventy years.

While trying to document that transformation of the land and people, I focused on two localities, Ludhiana in India and Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) in Pakistan because both had prospered economically in the post-1947 period. I wanted to examine to what extent partition migration had an impact on the two cities. I also use another case study, Malerkotla, a Muslim princely state surrounded by Sikh states. This was a very interesting area, because there was hardly any violence in this state during those partition days and in fact it became a safe haven for Muslims fleeing the surrounding areas. In addition, I also focus on women and their experiences because they are often forgotten for their contributions in the making of modern India and Pakistan. Although they have become symbolic of the nation's 'honour', their experiences and impact go beyond that and continue to shape our understanding of South Asian society.

The first aim of this book is to critically examine existing accounts of partition and its aftermath, focusing specifically on the Punjab region. Second is to analyse the diverse historical experiences of partition and its aftermath with the use of localised case studies and personal accounts. The final one is to utilise case studies to bring about a new understanding of the differential impact of partition and its aftermath on the Punjab region. An attempt is made to consider, first, the localised patterns of political authority and how culture impacted on the differential experience of partition-related violence and second, how far the experience of partition and dislocation was a process rather than an event confined to August 1947. For many of the victims, it took many years for the physical process of refugee rehabilitation to be completed. Within this story, it is important to understand the extent to which the input of refugee capital and labour were locally significant in the region's post-partition urban economic development.

Throughout this study, part of the objective has been to chart this change and shift taking place in Partition Studies, the move from high politics to politics from below, a move that has been made possible in part because of this shift in wider history which has begun to envelop social causes and move beyond just the archival record. At the same time, this process has at least democratised the discourse, with a greater diversity of voices emerging and being represented in the history books. But in moving towards a people's history, technology has played an important role – the way recording and sharing devices have transformed our understanding of partition history. A history without hard borders is crucial in providing a new kind of history, a kinder history I hope.

In the past ten years, there has been a plethora of material emerging in Partition Studies. Some of this work is concerned with this new approach, others have continued with the focus on the politics. Yet one aspect is clear: There is still an appetite for material and research on partition. This of course begs the following questions: Why should this be so? Why, after seventy years of this bittersweet experience of partition and independence, should the people be talking about their memories? The answer partly lies in the lack of closure and understanding of why ordinary people paid such a high price. The history books talk of an organised process, controlled by the 'great men', yet few expected the great upheaval, mass dislocation and the violent response to the drawing up of the boundaries. While both India and Pakistan have engaged in projecting a 'nationalist', and thereby, providing the *aam log* (ordinary folk) with a rationale for why this was necessary, neither country can truly come to accept its responsibility and liability in bringing about such carnage and forced migration of millions of people who were uprooted from their homes.

Note on permissions

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Any errors or omissions in this book are of course mine.

Quote by Catherine Hall

'For the most part, however, in all sectors of higher education we remain on the margins. But the margins can be a very productive terrain – a space from which both to challenge establishments and develop our own perspectives, build our own organisations, confirm our own collectivities. The hopes for feminist history in the 1990s cannot be the same as they were in the 1970s for we are living in a very different political world, and some of the harsh lessons we have learned about both exclusivity and marginality must inform our practice in the future. The dream remains – a kind of history that excites and engages, that retains its critical edge, is open to new voices, and always in a dynamic relation to the political world in which we live.'[1]

1 Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 34.