

Partition of British India, 1947

Author - Nikki JG*, 11th Grade, High School Student, Palo Alto, CA.

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1 - Research Problem

This paper is an exploration for me, an American-born and raised teenager to find out what it means to be a Punjabi, from the lens of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

2 - Introduction

Who am I? This is an essential question that, I think, everyone asks of themselves. I do too. I am an 11th-grade student in a high school in the Bay Area, CA. I was born in America. I am being raised by a single mother, who is a victim of domestic violence and stalking. I too have been impacted. Consequently, I am keeping my identity hidden. My mother is ethnically Punjabi and is from India.

However, when I study history in school, there is no mention of my ethnicity history in the school curriculum. So, I have learned to look at history from two lenses, one is the history of the majority of the people in the United States, then the much more, somewhat, tangentially relatable personal identity history that is discussed at home. In my mind, the threads of the latter do get entangled and knotted quickly, but, they contain codified details of my Punjabi ethnicity that I must unravel.

Being a Punjabi can mean many things. It can be our food, language, culture, history, and more. Primarily, it refers to the people who belong to the state of Punjab, which is now spread across India and Pakistan. The people of Punjab speak the language Punjabi and its various dialects. The Punjabi language is written in Gurmukhi script in India and Shahmukhi script in Pakistan.

During my conversation with my mother, I realized, that the word “Lahore” has a special meaning. I often hear the fragment, “Usee lutte putte aye see” (When we came to India, we had been looted and uprooted”). Together, we have watched Hindi films whose core story is woven around the bloody 1947 partition of British India, into India and Pakistan.

I learned that every single Punjabi was impacted. The trauma has been passed on to the next generations. So, I decided to explore the impact of partition on Punajbis.

This essay focuses on the 14th and 15th August 1947 partition of British India. The British broke up British India into two parts, India and Pakistan. On the west side of British India, chunks of current-day states of Punjab, Jammu, Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Gujarat were partitioned between India and Pakistan. On the east side of British India, a chunk of the current-day state of West Bengal was given to Pakistan. Millions of people were uprooted from their homes overnight.

This essay focuses on what happened in the state of Punjab.

This essay is written from a woman’s perspective. All narrators are women.

I am grateful to Dr Malhotra, University of California, Santa Barbara for allowing me to submit my essay.

3 - Method

My goal was to expose and educate myself about the experiences Punjabis faced during and after the partition. Consequently, I asked my Punjabi friends in the Bay Area whether they or their families would be comfortable with sharing their partition experiences. Some were not comfortable, fortunately, some families agreed to be interviewed. With my request being accepted, it allowed me to start interviewing their family members.

I chose to interview Dr. Rajdev Grewal because she was 9-10 years old at the time of partition, and whose family did not have to relocate. I chose to interview Hameeda Begum because her family relocated from India to Pakistan. Additionally, she is the only Muslim narrator, the rest are Sikhs. I chose to interview Arshu* because her family moved from Pakistan to India. I also interviewed my grandmother, Malka*, because, her family moved from Pakistan to India. She and my great-grandmother walked from Lahore to her village in India during the partition.

Dr. Rajdev Grewal and Arshu* are part of the Indian diaspora and live in the US. Malka* lives in India and Hameeda Begum lives in Pakistan.

I held my interviews on Zoom, Facetime, and phone calls. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour. During that hour, the interview commenced with the interviewee sharing their partition experience. Lastly, I asked all the interviewees a series of identical questions, which are listed below. Not all questions were answered by the interviewees.

- What kind of hardships did the families have to endure in terms of loss (family members, emotional and financial)?
- What was the mental impact of the trauma caused by the partition?
- How did the family stabilize themselves (emotionally and financially) post-partition?
- Who were the people who helped them and how did they help?
- In their opinion, why and how was a decision taken to relocate during the partition?
- Who did think was responsible for the partition at the time it occurred? At the current moment (now), 75 years after the event, who do they think was responsible for the partition?
- Should the partition have happened?
- Were they compensated by the governments of the countries they relocated to? Was the compensation enough?
- When the partition was happening, did they think that the partition was temporary and they would allowed to go back to their pre-partition native place eventually?
- Did a family member voluntarily kill themselves in order not to fall into the hands of people not belonging to their religion? Or were family members killed by other family members?
- Did the family change their religion and identity in order to save their lives?
- Did some of the family members get lost during the partition? If yes, was an attempt made to find them? Were those family members found? What happened to family member(s). Where were they found? Was their religion changed?
- What do they yearn for most in their pre-partition native place?
- Did they keep a link with the people they knew in pre-partition native place?
- After the partition, did they ever go back to pre partitions native place for a visit? If given an opportunity would they want to visit the place now? If so, what would they feel?
- What events caused them to immigrate to the Bay Area?

After the interviews, I had to translate all the narrations. This led me to the realization that each narrator had a unique colloquial style of speaking. In order to fully capture the essence and emotion of each interviewee's distinctive powerful voice, I translated their narration almost verbatim. However, I decided to not translate parts of the narrations because I did not want to strip away the authenticity of certain narrations. Therefore, a portion of the narrations in their original language(s) (Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu) remain in this paper, along with their translation.

4 - Narrations

For the purpose of the narrations below, I have masked the real names upon request.

4.1) Narration by Malka*

Narrator - Nikki JG's* grandmother, 78 years old, Sikh, retired school teacher, Delhi, India
Narration language - Punjabi, Hindi, English

I was born in Singh Pura, Lahore, British India. My father had two brothers and two sisters. My father and his youngest brother had studied till 10th grade. The second brother was less educated as compared to his brothers. My father's two sisters were not allowed to study. They were taught to do all housework efficiently.

Before partition, my father, mother, and I lived in Singh Pura, Lahore. The boundary between the 2 countries has not been finalized. My father was an employee of Indian Railways. During those tension-filled days, his coworkers were fearful and agitated. They would lament about the places where fires were burning in the city. Some coworkers were of the opinion that they should leave Lahore and go towards areas that could possibly end up in India. Some others thought that nothing adverse was likely to happen, therefore everyone should remain in the city. Some days, people would get agitated more than the other days. My father used to acknowledge the fact that fires were burning, but, gave assurance to others that the situation would calm down soon. Consequently, he thought that the fires should be ignored because such an atmosphere would not sustain for long.

He used to say "Eh kuch din da shor hai. Logan nu bharka ditta hai. Jad shanti ho jaye ge, Asse dobara naal wapas aa Javan ge. So Jane da Matlab hi nahi hai." (This cacophony will last a few days. People are instigated to hurt the other. Once there is peace, we will come back. So, there is no question of leaving.)

"Per es show mai bare awaz thee, bahut Jaan thee". (But, this cacophony had a clear sound and it was powerful enough to be heard by everyone).

So, my father's family, which included his parents and siblings met. They decided that if any kind of calamity would occur, they would all go to the nearby Amritsar city.

As the situation worsened, my father did not receive any transfer order issued by the government. He could not leave his job posting, because leaving would mean that he would not be on duty and his service could possibly be terminated. He was the only earning member and had family responsibilities. So he continued to work at his assigned office in Lahore.

One day, my father went to the office, and the atmosphere was tense. People were screaming and wailing. All non-Muslim coworkers were asked to stand in line. They were told that either they convert to Islam and become Muslim, or they should get ready to be shot to death. All the non-Muslim coworkers refused to convert to Islam. They were asked to be ready to be shot immediately. They were made to stand in a line. One by one, they were shot. My father was the last in line. They would shoot people from behind. He too was shot in the back. The ones that were shot, started dying. He noticed that there was a dirty pond nearby. He jumped into that pond. Later, he thought that because the water of the pond was cold, the effect of the gunshot was reduced. That day he did not return home. We don't know how he survived, but, somehow he did. He had no memory of what happened to him.

I don't know how and when my mother realized that my father would not return home. Daily, "Kafila" (caravans) of people left for India. They would walk together. She must have decided to walk with strangers going in a direction towards Amritsar. She must have decided to walk to her parent's home in village Othian, district Ajnala near Amritsar. At that time, I was less than 2 years of age. My mother carried me in her arms. All her household belongings were left behind.

She would say "Kisi cheez de hosh nahi" (I was numb).

I used to ask my mom, how she walked. She said that she just walked by following other people. On the way, there was no poster saying the city name and how far it is from Amritsar, nor the direction in which to walk to reach the city. My mother was completely illiterate, she did not know where she was. On the way, there were carts filled with wheat grains that traveled along in the group. Sometimes, the travelers would sit in the carts. Everyone was scared, thinking, that God only knew which Muslim man will come and kill them.

When my mother and I walked from Lahore, we did not bring anything with us. We came in the same clothes that we were wearing. Everyone was scared. There was no desire to eat or drink. One small child was screaming for water. There was a small collection of road water on the side of the road. A family member cupped his hands and filled it with water so that the child would drink. But a Pakistani policeman nearby forced the person to spill the water. He said that they could not drink the water because it was Pakistani water and they were Indians.

After walking for a long time, we arrived at her parent's village, Othian. People in the family were surprised to see her. Her parents were shocked to hear what had happened. At their house, in the evening, they would ignite the tandoor (clay oven) to make roti (Indian bread). Seven-eight families would come together to use the tandoor and make rotis collectively. Everyone would bring their own firewood. When one family finished making rotis the tandoor would cool down. The next family would add their firewood, heat up the tandoor, and start making rotis. This continued till all families had made their rotis. There were no street lights in

the village. Everyone would light divas (either lamps) or kerosene oil lamps at home. The Muslims in the neighborhood would notice the smoke and fire coming from the tandoor. This allowed them to precisely locate people making the rotis. They would come immediately and kill someone.

The non-Muslim villagers would complain to the Muslim leaders of the village and tell them someone or the other was killed by the Muslims again. Daily, the Muslim elders would say “We made a mistake, the young blood gets angry a lot, very quickly, so we will try, we promise that tomorrow when you are cooking on the tandoor, they will not come”. The villagers would say that it is good that the elders have at least said that they would try to prevent the killings. They had no choice, but, to accept the assurance given. But, they knew that there was no guarantee that the killings would stop. The next evening, the Muslims would come again and kill. The killers had no sympathy for the people they killed. They felt no pain or guilt when killing someone heartlessly, stabbing them with knives, or slitting the victim’s throat. This was a daily occurrence. The non-Muslims were at their wit’s end and did not know what to do. Finally, they started making rotis on the Chula (small stove) inside their home so that no one could figure out when rotis were being cooked. Compared to a tandoor, a chula generates relatively less smoke. My mom kept asking her mother for her favorite “meato” meat curry dish. But, food was scarce, so there was no question of serving meat dishes.

My maasar (mother’s sister’s husband), who has been missing, arrived at the Othian 3-4 months after partition. He did not share what had happened to him. He kept crying. The family understood that he was tortured.

Eventually, my father found his way to Othian too. Then went to the Indian Railways office in Delhi. He was asked to join work immediately in Delhi. We first stayed in a house abandoned by a Muslim family in Pahar Ganj, Delhi. At no cost, my father would allow refugees to stay with them until they stabilized. In the meanwhile, he was allotted government accommodation. So, he left the home and moved to his government quarters on Chitra Gupta Road, Delhi. In a few years, I had three brothers.

As children, we noticed that our father had a palm oval-sized scar on his back. Whenever we saw him change clothes, we would always see that scar, which was a gunshot scar. When he realized that we were looking at him, he would speed up putting on his clothes so that we would not notice the scar. After such events, there is an immense mental trauma. He never shared with us what had happened to him after he was shot.

“Ghar ke barre, sab log titer biter ho gaye”. (All the family elders were scattered).

My paternal grandfather and my father's brothers also suffered. They never shared their experiences with the children of the family. During partition, we lost contact with our paternal grandfather and uncles. Everyone was alone. Somehow, everyone reached Amritsar separately. They say that Amritsar is just half an hour's driving distance from Lahore, but, when you are scared, then half an hour seems like a mountain of time.

In those days, people used to scream and shout, they were not in their senses. They could not think what they should do or not do.

In exchange for the house my father's family had in Lahore, the government officially allotted them a house in Sharif Pura, Amritsar. The Muslims who lived in that house had migrated to Pakistan. In that neighborhood, a Muslim lady used to live alone with her child. She was unhappy and scared. The local "thanedar" (police officer) would harass her. The "thanedar" would not allow her to go to Pakistan because he liked her. So, the neighbors complained about the officer. Finally, all the neighbors came together and enabled that woman to go to Pakistan.

In Delhi, where we lived, on the opposite side of the street, there was a Muslim man who sold "chat pakori, tikki, gol gappas" (street food) shop. My brother used to love to eat from his shop. He'd buy an extra plate for my mother and tell her to eat it too. She would ask, where did you get this food from? He would say that I got it from uncle's shop, the shop on the other side of the street. My mother would immediately, without opening the packet, throw it in the trash. She would say that you know that I will not eat food from a Muslim home. Angrily, she would ask him not to bring such food home and ask him not to eat it too. My brother stopped bringing the food home. But, he continued eating at the shop. Once he had eaten then he would wipe his lips so that our mother would not know that she had eaten from that shop. When asked, he would lie and say that I have not eaten from that shop. Till the day she died, she did not eat from the hands of a Muslim. We children did not hate. However, my mother had witnessed atrocities committed against her husband, her community and so she would not trust Muslims. We children were not directly mentally impacted, however, our parents were. However, indirectly, we can feel the pain of partition in our psyche.

My father enjoyed exercising. In Lahore, he was in good health. However, his health deteriorated in Delhi and he developed high blood pressure and diabetes.

My mother was always busy with housework. She would offer food to anyone who came to visit. She would stitch my clothes. She helped a lot of people in whichever way she could. She would buy rotten fruit from an old and very poor fruit seller. The fruit was not fit for human consumption. She would give the bananas to the street dogs. During those days, right after partition, in Delhi, at around 11 am, daily, an old man, a woman, and his children would walk by and slowly lament:

“aye mai kutch bacha kutcha hai te de, de.
koi kapra de de,
kutch katre hai, te de de,
roti da tukra de de,
adhi roti de de,
kutch vi de de,
asee bookhe han,
sadda parivar booka hai”.
(O mother if you have any leftovers,
then give them to us.
If you have any clothes,
any rags then give us,
if you have a piece of roti give it,
give us half a roti, give us something,
we are hungry,
our whole family is hungry.)

My mother would daily cook something for that family, for example, extra rotis. Our family was not rich, my father was the only breadwinner, but, my mother shared what she could. There was no fridge where food could be stored. She would take a share of the food she cooked for her family and give it to them. One day she asked the old man if he had come from Lahore. He said yes. Then she asked, “Are you from Singh Pura too?” He said yes, we have come from there only. He told her his name. My mother recognized him and said that they used to be neighbors in Lahore. He was a rich businessman in those days. Did he remember us? What has happened to him? He said yes, he was, that rich businessman, he lost his business and came to Delhi after the partition. He said, “Now we don’t have any food and so we beg for food.”

There was a woman by the name of Dharm Kaur in my mother’s village. During partition, her husband was killed in front of her eyes. After that, she became mentally unstable. She did not know what to do. She was from a well-to-do zamindar (land-owning) family. She used to beg for food after the incident. My little brother used to say to her “Dharmo tha!” (Dharmo <sound of a gunshot>). When she saw him do that, she would fall and lose consciousness. Then people would pick her up and console her and would say to her that it is ok, and ask her to keep busy with some work. She would get up and leave. The kids in the neighborhood would scare her on a daily basis. When my brother behaved in this manner, my grandparents were very angry with him. They told him to not behave that way. They would say “She is already a troubled woman, why do you torture her? Don’t say anything to her. If you can help her, please help, but don’t scare her.” Then my brother understood and stopped making fun of her.

I feel very sad. The politicians are directly responsible for the partition. It's fine that they wanted to partition the country, but, why did they allow the killings? Trains from Amritsar to Pakistan were filled with dead bodies. The trains that came from Amritsar to Lahore, were filled with dead bodies too. Why did this happen? Somebody instigated the killings, someone said something, and that is why people killed each other. There was no need to kill. Women were raped. That should not have happened. The politicians should have stepped forward and stopped the killings. But, nobody did. Mahatma Gandhi, Jinnah, and Winston Churchill were directly responsible for this "shaitani"(mischief). Where did all this violence come from? Why were the women raped? If you are angry, just slap a person and end the issue. Where did the thoughts to kill and chop up people start?

We were told not to criticize the government and not to make any statements that would show the political leaders in a bad light. Say only positive things, people said. We used to see Nehru go in a buggy in front of our house. People would stand on the roadside and wave. They would talk about his white clothes and the rose he had on his dress. But, people would also complain about him as they believed that he was responsible for their pain, and the loss of their home, belongings, and family members. In many families, there was only 1 person who earned and he died. Such people were against Nehru and other politicians that were held responsible for their misfortunes. They used to say, what did he get, his position and we got nothing. It is really bad that people were killed, and chopped up. If the only breadwinner was killed, the families did not know how to get food for themselves. So many people became homeless. Many children became orphans. Who was going to take care of the orphans?

"Sa ra ta sa ra ast wyast kere diya, sa ra bera garrak ker diya." (There was instability everywhere, people lost their livelihood)

Most Punjabis overcame their trauma by trying to forget about the past. They would say to the children "We are already troubled people. You go, be happy and play, live your childhood."

It took 20-30 years for people to stand back on their feet after partition.

After partition, the Indian government verified that the property in Lahore/other parts of Pakistan was indeed in the refugee's name. The size of the property was cross-checked.

They would contact the claimant's neighbors across the border for verification. Only after the verification were people compensated.

We had relatives who were left behind in Lahore. But, we broke up the relationship because they had become Muslim. We never got any updates about them.

My chacha (uncle) and Chachi (aunt) had gone to Pakistan for a visit and they were very happy. They recognized the house that they used to live in. They were treated really very well. When they were going back home, they were given gifts.

On the other hand, some people were not allowed inside their old homes. They were told that now that you have left this house, it is not yours and you cannot come in. Don't come here.

My brothers and I, as we got older, we used to say, forget what had happened. But, my mother and father could not forget. On India's Republic Day and Independence Day, there would be celebrations in the country, but till the day my mother was alive, she would not step out of the house on these days. She would be sad. She used to say, people want to celebrate August 15th, think of those people whose lives were destroyed. Now you are celebrating August 15th, where were you when people were dying? Why did you not stop the tragedy? Now you are celebrating, eating sweets, this is not right.

Teach people to live peacefully. Some people have nothing, they are helpless, so try to help them. We cannot control disease, we cannot stop death, but, man-made problems can be stopped.

My daughter lives in USA and my granddaughter is a high school student in the Bay Area.

4.2) Narration by Hameeda Begum

Narrator - Hameeda Begum, Muslim, Lahore, Pakistan, housewife, age 78 years

Narration language - Punjabi

I was 2-2 1/2 years old when the partition happened.

My father was a doctor in Batala, India. He had retired from government service. After retirement, he set up his own clinic. At that time of partition, I had 2 older brothers. The eldest brother was a doctor. The second brother was in 3rd or 5th grade. My maternal uncle, Mukhtar, also lived with them. He was in 8/9th grade. My eldest brother was a passionate reader and had traveled to faraway places like Delhi and Calcutta to buy books. He kept them in his trunk.

My father thought that the partition was temporary and continued to stay in Batala after the partition. He continued to operate his medical clinic. For the family, the situation turned bad, so, after 1 year the eldest brother decided to leave for Pakistan. In those days groups of people (Kafila) used to walk at night to reach their destination in Pakistan. During the day, the Muslims would hide in the farms and fields in order to avoid Sikhs who would be hunting (to kill) for them. My eldest brother joined one such Kafila. It took him many days to walk to Dhariwal and then to Sialkot, Pakistan. After that, somehow he reached his maternal uncle's village, Jaranwala

Sher in Pakistan. From there he went to Lalaypur/Faisalabad area and worked in a medical store. His family did not know about his whereabouts for a long time.

Eventually, my father sent my mother, brothers, Mukhtar, and myself by train to Pakistan. We took along my eldest son's precious book trunk with us in the hope that we would give it to him once we were united. Mukhtar was a clever and active young man. He managed to take care of the family during the journey. We had very little money with us. He would go to the camps set up by the government and get food for all family members who were traveling with him. We eventually reached the Sangla camp in Pakistan.

Later on, my father came over to Pakistan too. My whole family was united at Hari Singh Wala village. The village sarpanch (chief) offered my father a vast tract of land. However, my father only accepted land that was of the same size as his land in Batala. He refused the offer of extra land. He stated that he would only take the amount that he had in India, nothing more. When it came to compensation people exaggerated their assets and wealth that they had left behind in India. My father claimed a house in Thandla Mandi. It was of similar size to the house he had in Batala. At that, time, it was valued at Rs 9,000.

A long time after the partition, the men in my family would visit Batala and meet our neighbors.

I think that partition happened because leaders wanted it, specifically Qaid-e-Azam (Jinnah), Nehru and Churchill. Just like the situation in Kashmir, India today, in those times, there was no religious freedom in India for Muslims. So, Qaid-e-Azam wanted a nation where Muslims could practice their religion freely. That nation would be Pakistan.

All my life, I have only seen "barbadi hi barbadi" (destruction and only destruction). At the time of partition, it was -

"Bure haal te Bonke dihare

Barbadi hi barbadi

Lokan kol paisa nahi

Khan nu nahi milda

Tan te kapre nahi

Sab da ehi haal

O bura waqt se

Sab de halat kharab

Tad vi halat kharab

Aaj vi halat kharab

Tad vi Bookhe

Aaa vi bookhe

Hun dekho Corona aa gaya

Hun baar aa gayee
Lokan kol atta khareedan de paise nahi”

(terrible state of being, terrible days
destruction everywhere
everyone was in the same state
it was bad times
everyone was in a bad state
in those days, the situation was bad
even today, the situation is
we were hungry then
we are hungry now
now see, Corona has come and gone
now we have floods
people have no money to buy “atta” (wheat flour)

My daughter immigrated to the USA, she is a school teacher. Currently, she lives in the Bay Area. Her daughter attends a high school locally.

4.3) Narration by Rajdeep Grewal

Narrator - Jatt sikh, Psychiatrist, 85 years, Florida, USA

Husband - Engineer, Florida USA

Narration languages - English, Punjabi

I was 9 years old at that time of partition. We were living in a city called Sunam, district Sangrur, India. My father was posted there as a judge. Rumors were there that Punjab was going to be divided. But, we did not know where the exact line of division would be. So, nobody knew which side would be Pakistan and which side would be India. People did not think that there would be communal riots because only the governments were changing, Muslim government in Pakistan and Hindu government in India. The people thought that they would live the way they have always been living, that is, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians living together in each country.

The day they announced that the partition was going to happen, rumors started that Muslims were killing Sikhs and Hindus in the area that is now Pakistan. And there were some similar rumors spread in Pakistan that they were killing Muslims in India. But, when the rumors started that they were hurting Hindus, they were hurting Muslims, so a lot of fears came up among the people. And then a train full of dead bodies came from Pakistan. It reached Amritsar, and they

saw that all the Hindus and Sikhs had been killed on the train they started a lot of commotion and they started killing Muslims.

We lived in a 3-story house. As my father was a judge, we had 2 police security guards. All around the house, the neighborhood was Muslim. They did not have rich big homes, their homes were kind of like middle-class Muslim homes. We were constantly fearful that we could be attacked by the Muslims around us. But, those poor people had no means, they had no guns. But, one night we saw that Hindus and Sikhs came from outside the locality and they started attacking our Muslim neighbors. I saw a lot of Muslims being killed in the neighborhood myself. They set fires to their homes, killed them heartlessly, and just ran away afterwards. We were looking through the “jharokhas” (lattice grills) on the terrace. We were scared. After the riot, the whole neighborhood became quiet. They had killed a lot of people. Some Muslims went into hiding. Second or third day, after the incident, we found two kids (my age), who lives across the street from us, one boy and one girl, eating out of the dumpsters on the streets, foraging for food. We, the kids, told our mom that, “there are 2 kids who need help”. So my mom sent the servant to bring the children to our house. We hid them in the downstairs rooms. We were afraid, and we did not want anyone to know. My mom didn’t even tell my dad that we had hidden them in our house. Once the situation calmed down a bit, the government set up camps for the refugees. There were Muslims who were to be transferred to Pakistan in the camps. So, then my mom told my father and then we had those kids, they did not want to go, they were scared, they thought you know, they did not want to leave the house but, we sent them to the camp. This was a very scary time. We had other relatives living with us. During this time, the adults were taking turns to guard the house to make sure that nobody would set fire to our house.

The incident scared us, we thought if they could set fire to the houses in the neighborhood, they could set fire to our house too, mob mentality came into mind. Our family is very open type, we talk. The night of the riot, I was not the only one looking, there were other members of the family, who just like me, saw the other people being killed right in front of my eyes. For me it was like other people were there, watching too. If you talk in a group then it is not as traumatic as it is if you are somewhere alone experiencing something like that. As a child, it looked like there were 100s of them in the mob. They did not have guns, however, they had axes, “lathes” (wooden sticks), and “barchas” (spears). They were stabbing the fallen person and then throwing the body into the well. I saw that. It was very cruel.

The crowd looked very angry, they were saying “You are going to kill our Sikhs in Pakistan, we are going to kill you.” Not that these people have done anything bad, but this is just the mob mentality, you know.

When they opened the camps, they found out that many people had been hiding in their homes for days, until police started searching from door to door, looking for people and announcing on

the loudspeaker “You are safe now, you can come out, we can take you to the camps’. It was an extremely scary time.

We often talk about it, how terrible it was. This incident only happened only 1 night. It seemed like they emptied the whole neighborhood.

People thought that they would return to their homes after they settled down, but that did not happen.

Even though we did not have to move, we were still impacted.

We were in the area which is currently in Punjab, India. It was never a part of the area that is now in Pakistan. I did not go through any hardships caused by partition at all.

My sister was living in the area, which is now in Pakistan, in Lyallpur district. But, before the partition happened, my father and other people in the government jobs knew that the partition was going to happen, so my father asked her to come back to our house. So, she was with us. They left their whole property, everything there. But, she and her husband came with their little baby. It was a very tragic time, lot of shortages, rationing of sugar, “atta” (wheat flour), and everything you know. Honestly, because my father was an officer, we did not have to go through any hardship like others, who left everything back and suffered.

My teacher in school was a Muslim lady, I don’t have any idea as to what happened to her because I was only 9 years old. There was mistrust, one of the policemen guarding our house was Muslim. I remember my mom begging my dad to tell the police officers not to send that guy. The thought was, that he is Muslim and he may attack us, and kill us.

Right after the partition, my father was transferred to Patiala in 1947. For me, there were a lot of changes, like schools. All Muslim teachers were gone. They were living in camps and then they were sent to Pakistan.

My husband is a year older than me. His family lived in the area of Punjab which is now in Pakistan. They lived in district Montgomery. They had land there. So, there again, the people who had the means, knew that the partition was going to happen, so his father took the whole family to the hill station called Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh for the summer. For the people who have the means, in the hot summer, they will go to the hill station. They probably took their cash and jewelry with them, but the whole property was left behind. So, they went through a lot of hardship for a few years. They had no cash, no income. Then they were allotted land in lieu of the land that they had previously. They had to build a new house. They initially lived in a small

house for 2-3 years and it was really hard to adjust to for several years. Once they got the land, they started working on the land, then they were fine.

The family did not keep in touch with the villagers back in Lyallpur because the whole village was Sikh, maybe workers were Muslim. They were Muslim helpers. 100% of the Sikh families moved. What happened was that in India, they were not allotted land in the same village. They moved to different villages and towns. For example. My husband's family were on one side of Ludhiana City, but, his cousins and relatives were allotted land on the other side of the town. So, the extended family got scattered a little bit.

Mahatma Gandhi did not want the partition of India. Jawahar Lal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, both wanted to be the prime minister. So they made up this scheme, that if we partitioned Punjab, Jinnah could be the prime minister of Pakistan and Nehru would be the prime minister of India. And that's exactly what happened. British did not care what they did with the country. They just wanted to get out because they were tired of all the riots, people rebelling, wanting freedom. So, they sent a guy who just drew a straight line through Punjab, just like that, arbitrarily, and in one day he decided, this is going to be Pakistan and this is going to be India. That's how the partition happened. The people didn't think that the partition would be temporary, but, people thought that nobody would have to move. Nobody realized nobody knew that there would be a mass movement of people, Hindus, and Sikhs to India and Muslims to Pakistan. What happened was totally unexpected.

I don't think that the partition should have happened. That was the worst thing that happened. Punjab used to be a huge state up to Afghanistan, Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled all the way up there. After partition, they divided the Indian side of Punjab into Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir. Now Punjab is very small.

I do not know what I would do if the partition happened again.

My father was for women's education. He wanted me to become a doctor from day one. There was a lot of discrimination in those days. They used to say that girls don't need to be educated. My father treated all his children equally. I never did a job until I became a doctor. My first job was that of a doctor in Patiala district. I did not have to do any work to support myself. After marriage, I moved to Ludhiana, I got a job over there. I studied and came to the USA and have spent most of my life here. I was 29 years old when I came here. I raised my family here. We did go back to visit our family in India. From Ludhiana I came to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1968, then we moved to Akron, Ohio in 1972 where I practiced. I have raised 2 boys. I moved to Florida after I retired in 1999. My husband is an engineer. My older son is a cardiologist and the younger one is an attorney in the Bay Area. My granddaughter is a high school student in the Bay Area.

4.4) Narration by Arshu*

Narrator - Sikh, approximately 35 - 40 years.

Narration language - English, Punjabi

Before partition, my maternal grandparents used to live in Lahore. The family was originally from Kana Katcha Village, which is 10 kilometers from Lahore city. They had 2 children at the time of the partition, a boy and a girl. My maternal grandfather was a "sipahi"(policeman) in the British Empire. One month before the partition happened, he heard murmurs that partition might happen. My grandfather told my grandmother that the situation might get ugly so it would be prudent to move to a place where there would be a lot more people like them. When the neighbors in Lahore heard their decision, they cried and pleaded with them not to go. They said that they loved them and that nothing untoward would happen to the family. Additionally, if anything happened, they would protect and support them. As they feared that the partition could happen at any time, my grandparents decided to leave quickly for Amritsar.

When they arrived at Amritsar, they were allowed to grab any house left behind by the Muslims. So, my grandfather occupied one such house.

At the time of the partition, my grandmother was 20 years or less of age. In 1953, she was pregnant with my mother. Tragically, my maternal grandfather was shot dead on duty. It seems that there was news that riots were going to happen, so, on duty, inside the police station, he started filling cartridges in his gun. A fellow policeman shot him. Perhaps it was jealousy or it could have been an accident. So, at 25 years of age, my pregnant grandmother became a single mom. She gave birth to my mother when she was a widow. The family was not compensated for their move from Pakistan. After her husband died due to the gunshot, the Indian government did not compensate her. After the death of her husband, she raised her 5 children all by herself. Her father offered her (and her children) to come and stay with him. The children were raised on his meager pension. My grandmother generated revenue by stitching clothes all night for other people. The money paid for her children's school tuition fees. At that time, as the border was open, she and her family would often go to Pakistan and visit Nankana Sahib Gurudwara. She often yearned to go back, but, eventually stopped going after 1970. She would often talk about the things that she left behind in Lahore, for example, her silver water glasses, and her copper glasses (with silver inside) used to drink lassi. She missed her embroidered bedsheets, blankets, cushion covers, and doilies that she had made with her own hands. She would tell me that if they were in Lahore, she would have given her milk in those glasses. She would talk about good quality solid wood beds, including day beds that they had in Lahore. She came to know that her silver household items and the furniture were taken by people in the neighborhood. From time to time, she would thank God for bringing the news of the partition ahead of time, thereby allowing

the family to reach Amritsar safe and sound. She would say “Wahe guru tera lakh lakh sukar hai!”. (“Praise be on the Guru, thank you a million times”)

For my grandmother, Amritsar was a very different city as compared to Lahore. Amritsar was mostly inhabited by Hindus and Sikhs. The people of the city were superstitious. There were very few Muslims. In contrast, Lahore was influenced by Islamic culture. The food there, especially the sweets was the best. People of all 3 religions would socialize, eat, and meet in each other's homes. My grandmother's soft and fluffy Panjiri (sweet food delicacy) “Lahori” (from Lahore) recipe was far superior to the Panjiri made in Amritsar.

In Amritsar, one of my grandmother's distant male relatives married a Muslim woman who was left behind in the city. There is no clarity as to why she was left behind. At the time of partition, she was married to someone else and had a daughter. After partition, she might have been raped and captured. The male relative who married her converted her to Sikhism. She might have been grateful that she was not left behind to fend for herself on the streets. After her marriage, she had a family of her own in India, 2 boys and a girl. Her husband in India did not make any attempt to find her family in Pakistan.

The Britishers were responsible for the partition. They always followed the policy of divide and rule. They told both Nehru and Jinnah that each of them would become prime minister first. At partition, neither Nehru nor Jinnah wanted to give up the opportunity to become prime minister. Gandhi favored Nehru. The people, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, did not want partition. Everyone was sad. No one wanted to leave their homes, cattle, and land. It is just the politicians would want to split up the country.

After the partition, Punjabis used to visit Pakistan for trade purposes. They would go there and bring back big blankets, American Almonds, etc, and sell them for a profit in Amritsar. People were suspicious that phone calls between Pakistan and India were tapped from both sides.

I am not sure if the partition should have happened or not. The impact of partition continues till today. If the partition had not happened, India would have been, politically, a much stronger country. It would not have to guard so many borders. Currently, both India and Pakistan are burning billions of dollars to manage the Siachin glacier in Kashmir. That would not have happened. Two wars with Pakistan would not have been fought if partition did not happen. Bangladesh would not have been created.

In the 1980s, Amritsar was the hub of terrorism. Our older home was closer to Harmandir Sahib. As a 4-year-old, I would see huge firecrackers in the temple. All this fight for Khalistan was ignited by Pakistan. Media was present when India helped the formation of Bangladesh. So, Pakistan wanted to break apart Punjab from India because it is the food producer of the country.

The unrest in Punjab caused goods production in the city of Ludhiana to stop. India would be a poorer country if food production would stop.

If there was no partition then weaponization of Indian Punjab would not have happened. The weaponization of India was done to benefit the politicians. In 1984, when Operation Blue Star happened and then followed by the Sikh genocide in Delhi, Punjabis in Punjab would discuss and question, “Where was the money to do such activities coming from?” The people of Punjab did not definitely have that much money to spend on terror activities.

At that time, I was in 6th grade. Punjab was captured by terrorism. I was studying in a Catholic school and used to wear a skirt as a part of my school uniform. My school received a threatening letter warning that something bad would happen if the girls continued to wear skirts. So, in 7th grade, my uniform was changed and all girl students started wearing salwar kameez. The school had houses (clubs), that were named after Catholic saints like St Thomas and St George. They were renamed to Sikh names. Sikh girls were no longer allowed to have 2 braids. They now had to style their hair in a single braid.

The terrorist activities in Punjab continued between 1984 and 1996 roughly. These activities could not have been sustained if the money had not come from external sources.

Even till today, city people in Punjab, never leave their houses unattended. They will ask someone they trust to sleep in the house for the time they are gone. This paranoia does exist in the villages of Punjab.

I live in the Bay Area and my daughter is a high school student locally.

5 - Analysis

This analysis is based on the narration of the experiences of partition from 4 families.

	Malka	Hameeda Begum	Rajdeep Grewal	Arshu
Forced Physical Relocation	Yes	Yes	No, but other family members had to relocate	Yes
Directly Witnessed Violence	Yes	Not mentioned	Yes	No
Loss of Property	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Faced with Financial Wealth Loss	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Compromised Physical Health	Yes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Was Partition a Traumatic Event?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nostalgia for lost home	Yes	Yes	Not applicable. The family did not have to move.	Yes
Visited previous home location after partition	Yes	Yes	Not applicable. The family did not have to move.	Yes
Have thoughts on who was responsible for partition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family member converted to a different religion after partition	Yes	No	No	Yes
At the time of partition, were adult woman victims educated?	No	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Next generation (post partition) of women education at college level	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Did adult woman partition victim earn a living?	No	No	No	Yes

Next generation (post partition) of women earn a living	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
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6 - Conclusion

A common theme that emerged from these four narrations is the sense of helplessness due to the inability of the victims to control their destiny. No one could control the partition, they had to deal with it.

Many victims of partition often reminisce about the material goods that they had to leave behind with a sense of loss and acrimony. Arshu* gives vivid details of the differences in material and social life in Lahore and Amritsar cities.

Two interviews, (Malka* and Arshu*) mention that when families from Pakistan reached India, some of them chose to occupy empty homes previously owned by Muslims. They did not ponder on whether their occupation of abandoned properties was right or wrong. The government had no choice, but, to allot those properties to them. However, in many cases, the government did cross-verify before allotting properties to the partition victims.

After the partition, some Muslims, like Hameeda Begum's family, felt compelled to move to Pakistan. It is possible they might have felt alienated, and found life untenable in India, propelling their decision to move to Pakistan.

All narrators blame the political leaders of India, Pakistan, and Britain for the partition.

The partition directly impacted the political and social narrative of post-partition Punjab in India. Arshu* linked her grandmother's experience of partition to the tragic events of 1984, holding Pakistan responsible for the militancy in Indian Punjab during that time. When a purer form of identity is forced upon society, women are the first victims.

Some victims of partition found it challenging to be happy while celebrating Independence Day in India (Malka*), due to reminders of the deaths, trauma, cruelty, and pain of those dark days of partition.

It is heartbreaking, that children, (Dr. Rajdev Grewal, 9-10 years of age), witnessed the brutal killings, that happened during the partition.

Punjabis are resilient, brave, hard-working people who have rebuilt their lives in spite of the trauma of partition. The partition of British India was preventable and should not have happened. Post-partition, many families invested in women's education, resulting in some women working in professional jobs, enabling them to emigrate to America.

In Conclusion, I know a lot more about who I am now. However, I have explored one only aspect of being a Punjabi, there is a lot more that I am eager to explore in the future.