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Reimagining historiography of partition 1947: freedom or despoliation? A lens of subaltern strata of society

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Abstract

The end of British Colonial rule in 1947 led to the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent into two new states: India and Pakistan. As a consequence of this Partition, a large-scale displacement occurred. Existing scholarship on Partition 1947, slightly insights into its bitter implications. In the political historiography of partition, the chapter of 1947 is painted as a rosy picture in the name of 'freedom'. While first-person accounts and contemporary newspapers speak volumes about the seamy side of the image and raise poignant questions: was the Partition of 1947 equally beneficial for the masses, or did it perpetuate despoliation? How did the actions of political elites displace and disempower the underprivileged classes, eroding their social foundation? This research highlights that the partition's human costs outweigh its purported benefits. Besides the whole earning of laymen, the Partition of 1947 snatched their kith and kin as well. This effort provides a new lens to view the Partition of 1947 with its social stratification during migration that raised queries on authority figures. Additionally, this article highlights the high and mighty attitude of political elites during migration by showing the financial woes and malnutrition in challenging hours of the people. Besides the secondary sources, key strengths of this research are the primary sources. Drawing on a rich trove of untapped sources, unpublished memoirs, vernacular old newspapers, declassified records and personal archives-this article argues that partition 1947 left irremediable loss on human ground on the name of 'Two-Nation Theory'. Historical evidence proved that this concept was neither resonant nor echoing with the masses before 1947. Common People were living in social synchronization. This research asks questions on behalf of the destitute; to draw an arbitrary border is the only sensible solution of issues based on politics?

Keywords: Partition, Masses, Migration, Oral History, Marginalized, Despoliation.

Introduction

This article seeks to explore the lived experiences of marginalized communities during the Partition of 1947. While Partition brought liberation from prolonged

colonial rule, [1]simultaneously, it opened the door to unending miseries for ordinary people. For many, the episode of 1947 marked a reset of their personal histories, encapsulated in the phrase جدوں اسیں اجڑے/("When we were despoiled"). For the lower strata of society, the much-celebrated independence of 1947 was, in reality, a story of اجاڑا/("despoliation").[2]

Political elites made decisions under the pretext of securing a better future for the masses, yet these choices had devastating consequences, stripping countless individuals of their homes, savings, and livelihoods in an instant[3].The Partition of 1947 remains a multidimensional chapter in South Asian history, with far-reaching political, religious, socio-cultural, and economic repercussions. Understanding its complexity requires careful attention to the ways in which political decisions affected the subaltern segments of society.

Suffering of the masses in the name of freedom remains a largely unexplored aspect in the historiography of 1947 Partition. Much scholarly work examines Partition through a political lens, with primary focus on the violence of 1947 and the state's role in refugees' rehabilitation and settlement[4]. Only marginal and incidental references in the literature illuminate the hardships endured by the lower strata of society, including their self-driven efforts toward rehabilitation and resettlement[5].

Major human-centred narratives of the Partition primarily originate from the other side of the border, presenting only one side of the picture. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the human impact of Partition, research in West Punjab (Pakistani Punjab) is essential. By exploring the untold stories of migrants from East Punjab, along with archival records, agency reports, and official data, crucial insights into the actual consequences of Partition can be revealed.

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[1] Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[2] Shareefan Bibi, interview by author, Chunian, Kasur, November 2022.
[3] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
[4] Adnan Tariq, *Lahore @ Partition: Violence, Cross-Migration, and Regeneration 1947–1961* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2024.
[5] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Existing historiography of the Partition of 1947 faces significant challenges, both in general and within the Pakistani context. Scholars have predominantly employed a political lens, often to substantiate the 'Two-Nation Theory' as the foundation of Partition[6]. From 1947 to early twenty-first century, the nationalist narrative, framed through a teleological perspective, has persisted. Those who bore the brunt of Partition have gradually abandoned the illusory sanctity of politically and religiously driven ideologies as socio-cultural and political transformations have unfolded[7].

By critically engaging with existing scholarship, this paper argues that agents of change remain fundamentally rooted in human agency. Shifts in Pakistan's political map, such as the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971[8] and the rise of social media, enabling direct interpersonal connections, have catalysed a notable paradigm shift in Partition historiography[9].

Now the Partition of 1947 is increasingly being examined through a humanitarian lens that prioritises social and human consequences over political and religious ideologies[10]. Furthermore, contemporary scholarship supplements text-based studies with oral histories and visual narratives, drawing on personal accounts and interpersonal interactions.[11]

Phenomenologically, a diary compiled by Ganda Singh, based on several first-hand secret sources from 1946 to 1947, records the political activities of

[6] Sikandar Hayat, *The Charismatic Leader: Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Creation of Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[7] Ian Talbot, "Literature and Human Drama of the 1947 Partition," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 18, suppl. 1 (1995): 37–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856409508723243
[8] Anam Zakaria, *The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2015).
[9] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
[10] Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).
[11] Zakaria, 201 Anam Zakaria, *The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2015)

Muslim League in Amritsar and Lahore[12]. Women, who constitute half population of any society, were subjected to large-scale persecution. The gendered dimensions of Partition are examined in Urvashi Butalia's landmark work[13], which is based on Indian sources and presents one-sided account.

Research about the Partition under the aim of humanitarian ground highlights that, the year 1947 signified a year of suffering rather than independence: it rendered many women widows, maidens turned into mothers without marriage, and tore families apart, leaving children orphaned. These aspects are being documented in Indian perspective and leaving significant gaps regarding experiences in Pakistan. Bhasin and Menon insights about the lives of ordinary people, yet it too relies exclusively on Indian-centric sources which depicts Partition largely from across the border.[14]

However, a micro-level economic analysis by Virdee[15] sheds light on the implications of Partition for Pakistan, navigating themes of nostalgia, trauma, dreams, and the fragmentation of Punjabi identity. In the context of socio-cultural and political transformations, the historiographical lens on 1947 has shifted from causes to consequences, from political narratives to human-centred perspectives.[16]

Currently, Partition as memory and its legacies are receiving increasing scholarly attention.[17] Recent approaches also emphasize material memory, marking a turn from literary to visual histories of Partition[18]. Collectively, these works foreground the human dimensions of Partition. However, most contemporary

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[12]Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[13]Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998)
[14]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
[15] Pippa, Virdee, F*rom the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab* (Cambridge, 2018).
[16] Gyanendra Pandey *Remembering Partition: Violation, Nationalism and History in India (Cambridge University Press: 2001).*
[17] Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay *The 'Long Partition' and its Memories; Revisiting Partition: Contestation, Narrative and Memories*, Ed Aninda Ghosal(Primus Book: 2022) pp, 494.
[18] Anchel Malhotra, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition Through Material Memory* (Harper Collins:2018) ISBN10: 9352770137

scholarship relies on Indian sources, illuminating only one side of rehabilitation and settlement, primarily the sorrows, suffering, and resettlement of those displaced from West Punjab who found refuge in East Punjab.

However, Virdees's[19] Talbot's [20] and Ahmed's efforts [21] primarily examine violence, the challenges of 1947, and the difficulties faced by refugees during migration and rehabilitation. They recount the sorrows and suffering of uprooted people but provide little insight about those who played pivotal roles in supporting them. These works are silent about fellow senior women's services in challenging maternity hours on the way, in camps and other voluntary services that enabled refugee survival. These works primarily focus on the roles of the state and society. Zakaria [22] also examining societal dynamics. Yet, narratives of ordinary people's suffering, women's persecution, and their crucial self-struggles during this transitional phase remain largely absent.

In short, the human suffering that accompanied the Partition, including maltreatment arising from social stratification during migration, warrants greater scholarly attention in historiography. The **s**udden displacement triggered by Partition led to the loss of lifelong earnings for the marginalised group. Their homes were left behind, which they could never revisit. Savings accumulated through years of labour, intended to provide comfort in old age, were lost entirely[23]. Arriving in financially unstable Pakistan, these individuals faced the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. Such realities demand closer scholarly engagement to inform policymakers, ensuring that future large-scale decisions prioritise long-term human consequences and minimise human cost.

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[19] Virdee Pippa, *From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab* (Cambridge, 2018).
[20] Ian Talbot, "Literature and Human Drama of the 1947 Partition," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 18, suppl. 1 (1995): 37–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856409508723243 Talbot's *Lahore and Amritsar*,
[21] *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Ahmed, 2016),
[22] Anam Zakaria, *The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2015).
[23] Pakistan, Constituent Assembly (Legislature), proceedings, March 2, 1948.

This study is situated within the framework of the Subaltern School of Thought, which emphasises "history from below"[24]. This approach prioritises the lived experiences of the masses at the grassroots level rather elite narratives. It examines, effects of 1947 Partition on the suffering of ordinary individuals who migrated from East Punjab and resettled in West Punjab in the name of "independence." Moving beyond a political lens, this school of thought underscores the pain and struggles of marginalized groups whose contributions have often been neglected.[25]Thereby, researchers from this side of the border have a critical role to play in bridging this knowledge gap in order to show a complete picture of the partition of 1947 from both sides of the border.

Besides declassified archival records, English and Vernacular newspapers, unpublished memoirs of Partition survivors, and records from the Pakistan Movement Workers Trust, reveal critical dimensions of public suffering in the name of independence. Accounts detail the hardships of refugees: uprooting, arduous journeys, and brutalities that turned brides into widows, children into orphans, pregnancies into losses, and both parents and children were killed in front of each other's eyes, along with the loss of movable property, gold, and fully furnished homes [26]. Many had minimal awareness of the concept of the "Two-Nations Theory." In a plural society, they had once thrived on reciprocal relationships[27]. Decisions by the political elite uprooted masses from their ancestral homes. This research uncovers their grief, struggles, and tireless labour during this critical period. Hanifa Bibi, a migrant from *Riyasat Alwer* now residing in *Rehman Pura* near *Raiwind*, recalled: "کیسی آزادی؟ اسی اتھے وی اودی کرکے کھا دی اوتھے وی اودی کرکے کھادی۔" ("Which kind of independence? We earned bread there by our labour, and here too we earn bread by our labour.") For her, religion and the so-called "Two-Nation

[24] (Ranajit Guha, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Subaltern Studies I*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).
[25] (Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
[26]Ismail, interview by Noreen Fatima, Chunian, Kasur, January 2023.
[27]Jummy Khan, interview by Noreen Fatima, Kot Muhammad Aslam, Kasur, November 2022.

Theory" held a little significance; economic survival outweighed ideological concerns. She began her narrative with economics rather than religion[28].

Under the subaltern lens, decisions made by the elite raise critical questions about policymakers' priorities. The state's economic growth depends heavily on lower-class labourers, yet they continue to endure inadequate living conditions and limited security[29]. A similar reality unfolded in 1947: grief began with the call to abandon ancestral homes, continued through starvation and disease during arduous journeys, and culminated in deaths from thirst and the desperate search for shelter. In stark contrast, the political elite travelled comfortably by air, completing their relocation without experiencing a single psychological or physical hardship[30].

Similarly, Subaltern lens seeks to foreground overlooked issues of social stratification and the suffering endured during migration. The unending hardships of Pakistan's displaced populations were further exacerbated when the nascent state, constrained by limited resources, struggled to meet urgent needs[31].

Above all, the Subaltern lens helps to acknowledge people's struggle for their own survival. Numerous individuals avoided seeking state assistance, instead initiating their own efforts to survive. Their self-reliance not only ensured financial stability but also safeguarded their dignity. On one hand, these endeavours were driven by personal struggle; on the other, they became a pillar of support for the state, alleviating its financial burden during a critical period.

By utilizing previously unexplored archival records, oral testimonies and contemporary newspapers; *Naway Waqt*, *Dawn*, *Pakistan Times*, and *Zamindar*, Census Reports, Fortnightly summaries of Prime Minister Meetings, Refugees and Rehabilitation Ministries Reports, Official Correspondences, Special Police Record; Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Lahore Branch, it offers a vivid portrayal of the plight of refugees. It reveals how Partition 1947 left profound and enduring impacts on displaced populations, who rebuilt their lives through sustained self-

[28]Hanifa, interview by Noreen Fatima, Kot Radha Kishan, Kasur, 2022.
[29] Hanifa, interview.
[30] Nawaywkat, August 6, 1947.
[31] Shaista Suharwardy Ikramullah, *Purdah to Parliament* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

effort without resorting to complaint[32]. By examining the roles of the state and society in refugee rehabilitation this research highlights the parallel hardships and self-reliance of women, who faced the crises of migration alongside men with equal courage and perseverance, worked as partners in every circumstance.

Freedom or Despoliation? A Lens of Subaltern Strata of Society

'New country' or 'independence' were alien 'terms' for the masses. **Illiteracy and limited socio-political awareness confined the lives of the lower strata of society.** In peripheral areas, villagers, peasants, and tenants lacked knowledge of the Muslim League and the Congress parties. To them, 'independence or freedom' did not have any importance. The motherland and the place where they earn a living are the final places of residence. In their view, 'country' is the 'motherland' where someone is born and grows up. That is the motherland, where ancestors live, and the economy is based, rather than any 'ideology'. Ideology did not concern itself with a piece of land. Any type of ideology can be at any place. Their ideology had a link with 'bread' 'daily necessities' and above all 'familial traditions'. These were all total treasures of their generations based on legacy.

ساڈا وطن اوھو اے جیتھے ساڈے باپ دادا دیاں قبراں نیں ۔ جیتھے اوہ مرے اوتھے اسیں مرنا ایے۔

("Our true homeland is where our forefathers once lived. Where they are buried now. Where they died, we too wish to die over there").[33]

For them, other places were merely for visiting, not for permanent residence. Any place other than their ancestral home was perceived as **پردیس پرایا دیس**(an unfamiliar land, a country of others). The motherland was their only true homeland, the place where they were born and where they wished to die. As one respondent explained: *"کاکی کی آئیڈیالوجی؟ کی دو قومی نظریہ؟"* ("Daughter! What is ideology? What is the Two-Nation Theory?"). He added, *"We did not have this kind of understanding; in our neighbourhood, we maintained good give-and-take relationships. That's all we knew."*[34] Such reflections provided a new perspective

[32] Nawaywkat, September 4, 1947.
[33]Jummy Khan, interview.
[34] Jummy Khan, interview.

when conducting interviews with individuals who had experienced forced migration.

The depth of their reflections is evident in their statements. The unprecedented mass movement caused a multifaceted disruption, affecting not only their physical and emotional well-being but also their economic stability. This abrupt transition from stability to upheaval left them vulnerable and bereft, with their lives overturned in an instant[35]. Many lost small or, in some cases, substantial tracts of ancestral land due to a lack of awareness about claim submissions and land permit procedures[36]. Families bore the brunt of these hardships, with women from lower socio-economic backgrounds particularly victimized.

Fig. 1 A Foot Caravan of Common People with Few Utensils and Cattle. (Courtesy of , The Great Migration, 1947, by Margaret Bourke-White.[37]

[35]Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).
[36]Asifa, Secretary of Rehabilitation and Settlement Department, interview by Noreen Fatima, Lahore, 2023.
[37]From The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock (https://static.life.com/wp-content/uploads/migrated/2016

Foot caravans and trains—often referred to as "ghost trains"—were especially harrowing for this group, who suffered greatly due to their marginalized social standing.[38]

Chief concerning point here is that eyewitness accounts reveal numerous instances which highlight the stark disparities between privileged and underprivileged groups during the 1947 migration. Those from marginalized socio-cultural backgrounds were particularly disadvantaged. Historiography on Partition has remained largely silent on the issue of class stratification in migration. In this context, micro-level content analysis, critical assessments of pictorial and archival records, and examinations of migration routes, along with previously unexplored evidence, offer a valuable framework for observing social stratification during the 1947 displacement. Reports from vernacular newspapers and accompanying graphic accounts further illustrate how forced migration underscored deep societal divides.

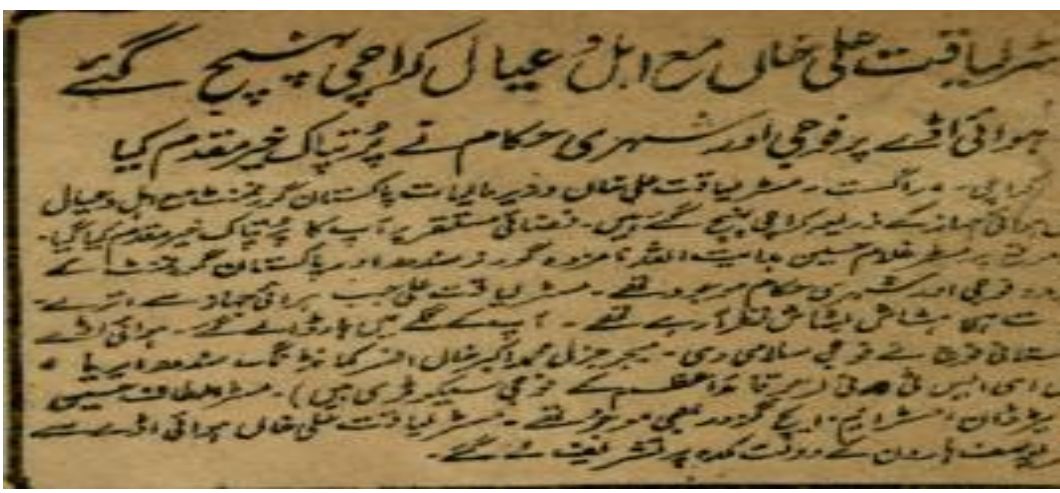

Fig. 2. Mr Liaquat Ali Khan[39], along with his Family, reached Karachi. At the Airport Army and Civilian Warmly Welcomed Him with flowers. (Vernacular Newspaper Archive, Punjab Public Library Lahore)[40]

[38]Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

[39] Finance Minister who later on become First Prime Minister of Pakistan 1947-1951.

[40]Nawaywkat, 4th August, 1947.

Analytical assessments and archival records speak volumes about the deteriorating conditions of barefoot migrants traveling in foot caravans, contrasted with images of air travellers at a time when widespread hunger was prevailing. During this critical period, the so-called leaders were notably absent from the struggles of the masses.

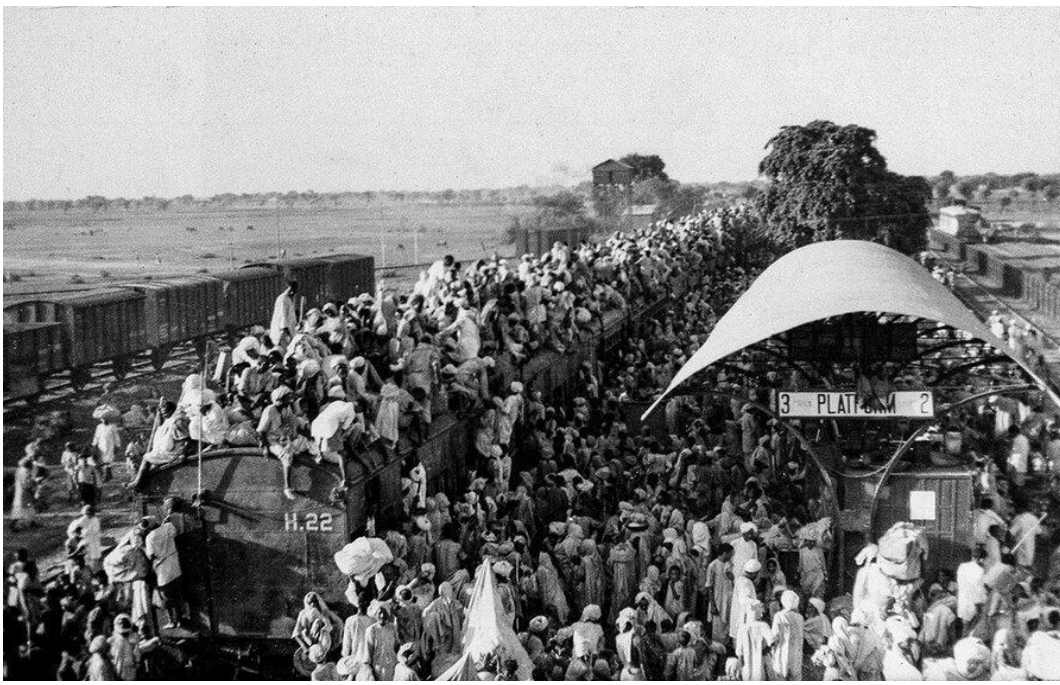

Fig. 3 From CNN Opinion Associated Press. Muslim refugees' crowd onto a train bound for Pakistan, as it leaves the New Dehli, India Area, September 1947 (retrieved from, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/13/)

Notably, people did not choose their routes for migration haphazardly, but their socio-economic circumstances directed them to adopt 'the mode to cover distance'[41]. Declassified records and personal accounts reveal that following the declaration of the Radcliffe line, the second phase of migration witnessed an unprecedented mass movement of people. To facilitate the massive relocation, complementary train services were initiated from both sides. The scale of train services was phenomenal.[42] Around twelve million people crossed the border in

[41] *Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[42] Ibid.

both directions.[43] Between August and November 1947 — barely within three months — as many as 673 refugee trains moved approximately 2,800,000 refugees within India and across the border; in just one month.[44] The Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO) were made up. This military personnel were set up to evacuate people. They used some 10, 00,000 gallons of petrol to evacuate people in East Punjab[45]. Police and Military were appointed in train to keep law and order in control. People were moving via Passenger trains, Cargo Trains named "Special Train". 'Relief train' were working for alternate when a train was burnt into ash or was damaged by attacks.[46] In the early phase, the train was secure, later on, the most insecure journey was by train. At Bhatinda Station, three trains were completely annihilated. Similar tragedy occurred near Rao-Khan Wala, contagious to Kasur[47].

Some privileged families managed their migration by road, paying high fares for transport. However, the availability of transport services posed a significant challenge, as most companies were under Hindu and Sikh control prior to Partition. At that time, Punjab was governed by the Unionist Party, and many key administrative positions were held by Hindus and Sikhs [48]. The majority of truck drivers also belonged to Hindu or Sikh communities. After their migration to East Punjab, road transport became severely limited. Truck and "omnibus" services arranged by authorities were inadequate[49]. Free truck services were occasionally provided by volunteers responding to appeals from the Government of Punjab[50]. Some government employees took advantage of military vehicles. One refugee from Chunian Tehsil recalled:

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[43] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998)
[44] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998)
[45] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998)
[46] *Jinnah Papers*, vol. 4 (Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam Papers Project, 2003)
[47] Rasheeda, interview by Noreen Fatima, Sindhu Kalan District, Kasur, September 2023.
[48] Pakistan, Constituent Assembly (Legislature), proceedings, March 2, 1948.Vol. II
[49] Nawaywkat, August. 1947.
[50] Nawaywkat, 1947.

"When we came to know about the movement of the people, my *taya* (uncle) came to my father and said, 'I will send a military vehicle; pack your necessary luggage!' My *taya* came with a military vehicle. We and the surrounding people got into that vehicle under full security. We reached Lahore safely"[51] .

Residents of Bhamba Klaan village, composed entirely of refugees from various parts of East Punjab, shared similar experiences. One woman recounted:

"My father was in the military, so we reached safely. We did not know what happened to others"[52].

Overall, a small minority of migrants travelled by road—using private vehicles, buses, and military transport—and took precautionary measures before the riots intensified, ensuring their safe arrival in West Punjab[53]. During the second phase of migration, the Directorate of Government Transport in Lahore arranged Omnibuses, Trucks, and Military vehicles, along with drivers and mechanics, to facilitate the relocation[54].

Migration also occurred via waterways. In Punjab, with the announcement of the Radcliffe Award, the Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas rivers became international borders. Crossing by river was often considered safer than facing gangs and violence on land. Many people from areas such as Head Sulemanki, Ravi, and Sutlej chose this route, but these rivers claimed countless lives. Boatmen, like owners of private vehicles, exploited the desperation of migrants by charging exorbitant fares—sometimes as high as 500 rupees per person. Archival records and personal testimonies from survivors reveal that in some cases, boatmen demanded up to 2,500 rupees per person. Those who lacked cash but had gold or silver were forced to barter their gold or silver for passage. If anyone resisted, boatmen would halt the vessel midstream, endangering everyone on board. In one tragic incident, 192 people drowned; of those who could swim, only 14 managed to reach the

[51] Ismail, interview.
[52]Jamaal Din, interview by Noreen Fatima, Chunian, Kasur, October 2022.
[53] *Jinnah Papers*, vol. 4 (Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam Papers Project, 2003)
[54]Nawaywkat, 1947.

riverbank[55]. Their only "crime" was poverty, with nothing to offer but their own lives.[56]

Notably, these waterways were not free from gang attacks. Beyond the exploitative behaviour of boatmen, fear of such assaults was equally pervasive. On the night of 18 August 1947, nine women were killed by gangs on the banks of the Sutlej River[57]. Women were also abducted from families while attempting to cross the river[58]. At *Trimoo* Head, approximately eight thousand Muslims were killed during the last week of August 1947. [59]The massive gathering resulted from the severe shortage of boats available along the Sutlej River, forcing migrants to cross in limited batches. Meanwhile, seven consecutive days of rainfall caused flooding, which claimed additional lives; many who had escaped gang attacks drowned in the deluge.[60] All this transpired under the ministry of Nawab *Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot*, Chief Minister of West Punjab. During this period, members of Mamdot's cabinet travelled by air, while official records indicate that around sixty boats remained unused at the Lahore Boating Club, and military steamers were also available but not deployed[61].

Ultimately, those who had nothing to pay were left with no choice but to travel on foot. The economically disadvantaged, socially marginalized, and those living far from railway networks experienced independence—the so-called "land of freedom"—as a distant goal, accessible only through long journeys in foot caravans, popularly known as *pedal kafilas*. These caravans undertook the arduous journey independently, without assistance from higher authorities. Stretching for miles, foot caravans of 40,000 to 50,000 people reached their destinations after weeks or even months of travel, often using bullock carts[62]. They entered Pakistan through major gateways such as Wagah Border (Lahore), Ganda Singh Border (Kasur), and Khem Karan (near Kasur). The Government of Pakistan established the Military

[55] *Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[56] Ismail, interview.
[57] Nawaywakat, 19, August 1947.
[58] *Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[59]*Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[60]*Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[61]*Nusrat Risala*, "Muhajirin Number," July 5, 1959 (Lahore: Jaded).
[62]*Jinnah Papers*, vol. 4 (Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam Papers Project, 2003).

Evacuation Organisation (MEO) on 22 August 1947, following the announcement of the Cyril Radcliffe Award[63]. At the district level, military and police personnel were designated to lead these convoys (*kafilas*) and facilitate the evacuation of minorities. The MEO represented the only formal support provided by the authorities to the foot caravans.

Archival records and refugee testimonies indicate that, in certain cases, rulers of princely states personally supervised the evacuation of their subjects during Partition. Notably, some Nawabs accompanied their people on foot to the border, demonstrating extraordinary leadership and solidarity. One refugee family from Farid Kot recounted that their Raja himself walked in a foot caravan to escort them to safety. According to their account, the Raja declared, "You are my *Ra'iyya* (the masses, public) رعایا. We have shared a long history together. Although circumstances are now beyond my control, I will remain with you until the end of our journey"[64] . Hajraan and Saddique narrated many stories of the kindness and loyalty of their Raja. Hajraan further explained, "Our Raja, along with the military, kept us safe throughout the journey. They prohibited us from walking on *kachi* (muddy) roads or along the sides of roads because of the threat of underground bombs"[65] . Fateh Muhammad added that their Raja had tears in his eyes when he left them at the Ganda Singh border[66]. This remarkable display of benevolence and accountability highlights the complex dynamics of princely state governance during the turbulent period of Partition. The Nawab's actions went beyond formal obligations, reflecting a profound sense of responsibility toward his subjects.

These noteworthy precedents illustrate how public could have been shielded from chaos. They also underscore district-level negligence in managing the mass movement of people. Planning by the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO) was delayed, as approximately sixty percent of the migration had already taken place on both sides of the border before its implementation. Archival records indicate that by 19 August 1947, approximately 60,000 Muslims had already

[63]Nawaywkat, 1947.
[64]Hajraa Bibi and M. Siddique, interview by Noreen Fatima, Raiwind, Lahore, 2018.
[65]Hajraa Bibi and M. Siddique, interview.
[66]Interview, Fateh Muhamamd (22 Chak, Vehari 2016).

reached Lahore[67]. Furthermore, the number of troops assigned to the MEO was minimal. A newspaper dated 27 August 1947 reported the arrival of military forces in East Punjab to restore law and order, but by then, countless families of ordinary people had already been torn apart.

Hundreds of thousands of people—elderly, children, women, young maidens, pregnant women, and infants—burdened by grief and poverty, sought their homeland on foot. Their movement began in the first week of April, shortly after the July Bill, and gradually grew in scale. By the first week of April, 60,000 refugees had reached Amritsar[68]. By August 19, 1947, 70,000 refugees had arrived in Lahore alone, while hundreds of thousands more had entered Pakistan throughout West Punjab. Of these, 40,000 were housed in Walton Camp, with others in Baowli and near Lahore Railway Station[69]. Within a week of Partition, 125,000 refugees had arrived in Lahore by 22 August 1947.[70] Initially, caravans (*kafilas*) were composed of 30,000–40,000 people, but the largest reached 400,000—an immense, slow-moving foot column that took weeks or even months to cross a single area. By 29 August 1947, when more than 200,000 refugees had reached Lahore, the Government of Pakistan finally established the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO)[71]. On 29 August 1947, *Nawaywkat* reported: مشرقی پنجاب سے مسلم پناہ گزین لانے کا کام فوج کے حوالے کر دیا گیا۔ ("The task of bringing Muslim refugees from Eastern Punjab was handed over to the army"). At the request of the West Punjab Government, the provincial cabinet decided that General Seedi and the Punjab Boundary Force Commander, General Raees, would oversee the evacuation. From that point, Muslim evacuees were placed under the authority of the Boundary Force, with approximately 75,000 refugees arriving in West Punjab daily under this plan[72].

[67]Nawaywkat, 22 August 1947.
[68]Ranjeet, April, 1947.
[69]Nawaywkat, 19 August 1947.
[70]Nawaywkat, 22 August 1947.
[71]Nawaywkat, 28 August 1947)
[72] Ibid.

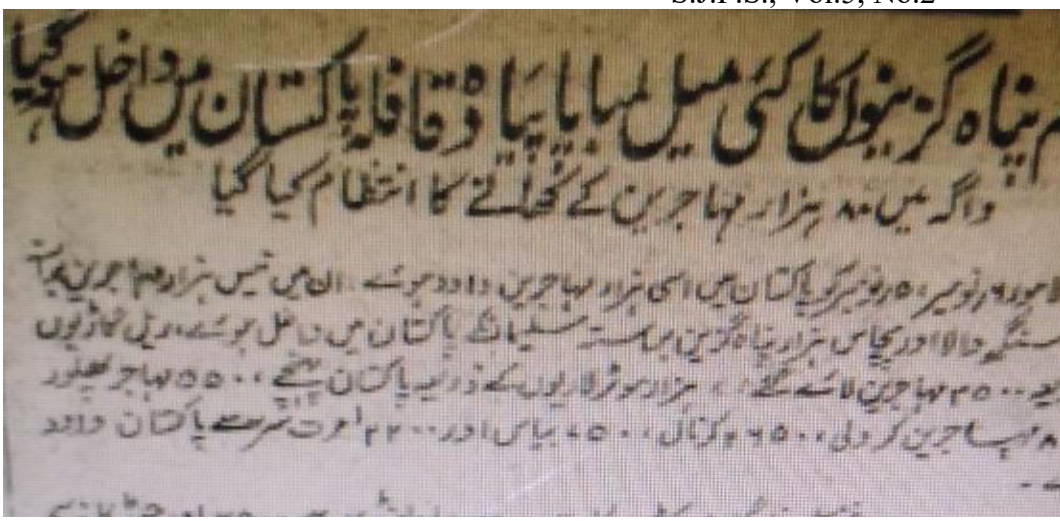


Fig. 4 Muslims Refugees Foot Caravan Entered in Pakistan. At the Wahgah Border, food was arranged for eighty thousand refugees. (Vernacular Newspaper Archive, Punjab Public Library Lahore.)[73]

The plan implementation was too late, as millions had already reached West Punjab and vice versa, enduring immense hardships. Such planning should have been in place immediately after July. At the reported pace of 75,000 evacuees per day, the evacuation from both sides could have been completed by 14 August 1947. However, Butalia's research expands the figures of migration, noting that between 18 September and 22 October 1947, twenty-four *kafilas* of Hindus and Sikhs moved from Lyallpur and Montgomery to India, carrying with them approximately 849,000 people[74] .

After the train attack, people on foot became the primary sufferers of migration. Many women were abducted from the edges of the caravans at night, with their family members either killed or taken away. Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon[75] also emphasize that most abducted women were typically from middle-class families, with rare cases involving women from elite backgrounds. Beyond mob or gang attacks, countless individuals perished from hunger and thirst. Women

[73]Nawaywkat, 6th November 1947.
[74] (Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998).
[75] (Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998)

in the mature stages of pregnancy, forced to walk hundreds of miles, often went into labor on the road, assisted only by elderly women in the caravan. Entire deliveries took place on the roadside, shielded by a simple *shaal* (shawl). Many new-borns died due to unhygienic conditions; their mothers even killed some in desperation. In these circumstances, women endured labor pains without even a sip of water or a cushion (*kushan*). The strain of the journey often led to miscarriages, with premature infants lost along the way. Such life-threatening and heart-wrenching experiences were an inseparable part of foot caravan migration, endured in the name of "freedom."

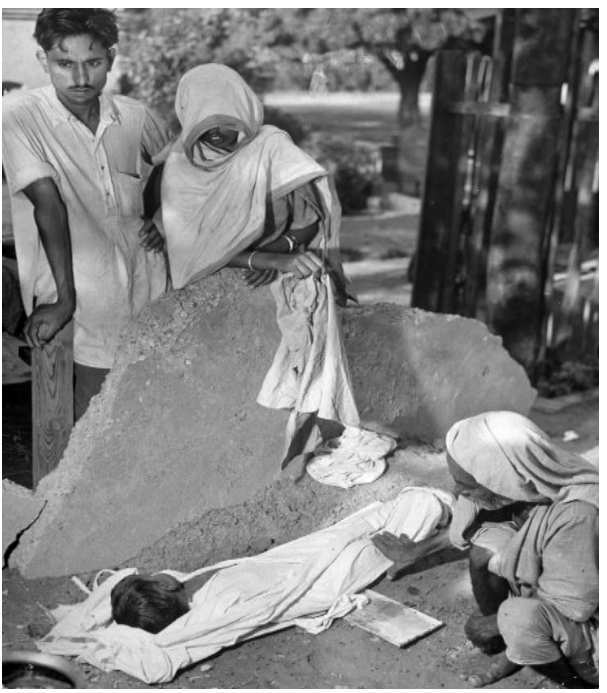
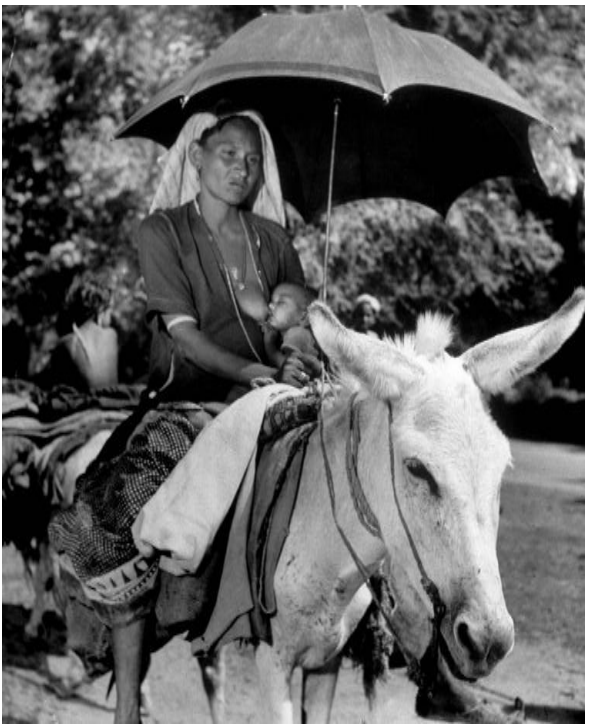


Fig.5. A Muslim Family Paused to Bury a Child, Died due to Starvation. (Coutesy of The Great Migration, 1947, Margret Bourke-White)



.Fig.6. A Mother During Migration Feeding her Child. (Coutesy of The Great Migration, 1947, Margret Bourke-White)

These pictorial references speak volumes, illustrating the social stratification and discrimination in the means of covering the same journey. While the political elite travelled by air and those with connections secured places in vehicles, the masses were left to cover the distance on foot. Many women, carrying unborn children, endured long treks on foot.[76]

The anguish did not cease after crossing borders; another chapter of grief awaited the uprooted. Central cabinet records and old newspapers reveal that the lower strata of society were the most affected during the 1947 migration. The majority were cultivators of agricultural land—some owning small plots, others working as tenants on annual payments—and labourers who bore the brunt of

[76]Nawaywkat, 30 August 1947.

displacement[77]. Census data from 1941 further confirms that most who arrived in West Punjab were cultivators, small business holders, peasants, and tenants.

Rehabilitation and settlement were not an overnight task. Hungry and thirsty foot caravan of thousands of refugees brought physical ailments along with them too. In the camping phase, basic medical treatment is provided to sufferers of epidemic or stomach diseases due to drinking dirty water during critical migration journeys. Injections arranged by state were injected to all refugees.[78]

Predominant medical rehabilitation was required for pregnant females. Volunteer mobile medical teams were also working for those whose babies were delivered prematurely due to covering long distances on foot.[79] Although several premature babies and their mothers died on the way but survived needed cure.[80]. Public announcements in daily newspapers and appeals by political leaders mobilized volunteers to provide services in refugee camps[81]. Elderly and experienced women played a critical role; according to Sharifan Bibi of Kot Muhammad Aslam, Kasur, *"many women whose babies were lost along the way due to long journeys on foot, and others who reached full term during migration, had their deliveries handled by us"* [82]. State medical camps; Mayo Hospital and Ganga Ram Hospital in Lahore, were set up to treat maternity and epidemic-related illnesses. [83]This initial phase of medical relief enabled refugees to begin contemplating the next stage of their lives.

Thus, people handled many things on their own rather than waiting or burdening the state. Walton Camp Lahore, Mouri Gate Primary School Kasur, Hanifiaa Islamia High School Kasur, Kasur Civil Hospital, American Christian Missionary Institute in Kasur, and Ganga Raam Home in Lahore were converted

[77]Jennifer Leaning and Veer Bhushan Bhadada, "The 1947 Partition of British India: Forced Migration and Its Reverberation," *SAGE Spectrum* (2022).
[78] Ibid.
[79]Pakistan times, 14 March, 1948.
[80] Jennifer Leaning and Veer Bhushan Bhadada, "The 1947 Partition of British India: Forced Migration and Its Reverberation," *SAGE Spectrum* (2022).
[81]Nawaywkat, 1947)
[82]Shareefan Bibi, interview.
[83]Nawaywkat, 6 November, 1947.

into temporary accommodations (camp) for refugee patients'.[84]Similarly, at Kasur Civil Hospital, a refugee lady nurse from Amritsar took responsibility for pregnant women. She made their delivery process easier through her skilled practice—women whose pregnancies reached term delivered babies under aseptic and proper medical care. [85]

Regarding the economic conditions in West Punjab, partition survivors reported that, in addition to temporary accommodations in camps, many refugees directly settled in evacuee houses stocked with essential commodities and necessities. In surrounding areas, fully ripened wheat and chickpea crops were ready for harvest. According to Rasheeda Bibi, a partition survivor from Sindhu Kalaan in Kasur District, "After crossing the border, we did not go to camps. We occupied a large evacuee house left by a Sikh family, filled with all household commodities"[86]. Kareeman, another survivor, recalled, "We used to bring wheat and chickpeas daily from nearby fields. In this way, we collected many mounds[87] of wheat"[88]. Survival, however, remained a formidable challenge. A significant number of refugees neither entered camps nor requested state assistance. Although the state provided rations, these were sometimes insufficient.[89] To meet other needs, refugees in Punjab assumed responsibility for their own sustenance, aided by the cooperative spirit of the local community. In addition to this compassion, numerous employment opportunities emerged across various sectors. While these opportunities were not prestigious, they were adequate to sustain livelihoods. This immediate support bolstered refugees' resilience and strengthened their will to rebuild their lives.

The refugees' natural inclination toward hard work paved the way for a better future. Both males and females daily went outside in search of work. Some females started jobs as housemaids, sweepers, dishwashers, washerwomen, nannies,

[84]Umair Saddiue, *Hum Nay Pakistan Kesy Bnyaa* [*How We Achieved Pakistan*] (Lahore: Zawyaa, 2014), 192–197.
[85] Ibid.
[86]Rasheeda, interview.
[87] Mound used in measurement scale which is equal to forty kilogram.
[88]Kareeman Bibi, interview by Noreen Fatima, Chunian, Kasur, November 2022.
[89]Pakistan, Constituent Assembly (Legislature), proceedings, March 2, 1948.

and masseuses, sometimes they did midwives' work too.[90]Jannat said, "We went to a house, a lady asked to oil her hair, and massage her body. After that do clean grain for grand to make flour. Wash kitchen dishes. We did all these and she paid us some rupees and gave us cooked food as well. Further, she said you can come daily. In this way, we earned money. Similarly, two ladies from the Teerath Village district in Kasur told, "We daily cut wood from Chhanga Mangaa Jungle, put it on our heads to sell in Pattoki Bazaar to earn money"[91].

In the early post-partition period, people adapted their lives to meet immediate needs, often living on half-filled stomachs while working tirelessly to survive. Approximately sixty percent of refugees were engaged in work to maintain a basic standard of living, and every one out of five became self-employed within a short time. Many performed labour-intensive jobs across various sectors, including homes, shops, fields, small industries, and cottage industries[92]found employment in factories, small production units, or as hawkers. Jamal Din, a partition survivor from Kasur Tehsil Chunian, recounted, "Before receiving government-allotted land, I worked in a cotton ginning factory. Having left our land in U.P., we earned as daily wager in local industries until the paperwork for land permits was completed"[93].

Kareeman Bibi recounted, "Sometimes our men would go to scout for land, and we females used to do the work outside of cutting and selling wood. There was a time when we struggled to fill our stomachs and we had to beg. We would venture outside the camps, entering any household and asking for just one loaf of bread. [94]

[90]Umair Saddiue, *Hum Nay Pakistan Kesy Bnyaa* [*How We Achieved Pakistan*] (Lahore: Zawyaa, 2014), 192–197.
[91]Shareefan Bibi, interview.
[92]Tahir Mehmood, interview by Noreen Fatima, Model Town, Lahore, 2022.
[93]Jamal Din, interview.
[94]Kareeman Bibi, interview.

Fig. 8 To Attract Public Attention for Helpless Refugees. (Vernacular Newspaper Archive, Punjab Public Library Lahore).[95]

All the above evidence makes it clear that those who lived life with a strict routine and hard work just for the good old days saw their dreams fade away. They left behind a lifetime of earnings that they could never see again.

As far the concern of property The Government of Pakistan opened the Refugees Rehabilitation Department under the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation to properly address property claims.[96] Deputy Commissioner initiated district-wise allotments, but the process was marred by complications, primarily due to the dishonesty of the Patwaries, Deputy Commissioner, [97] and the administrative

[95]Nawaywkat, 8th Nov, 1948.
[96]Nawaywkat, 8th Nov, 1948.
[97] NDC, 1947 evacuee property.

machinery. This led to fraudulent rehabilitation and resettlement practices.[98] Personal interests dominated over national interests.[99] Litigations and Nepotism erode the property claims of ordinary men and keep them landless.[100] Farid Kot House Lahore records of Evacuee Property still speak volume about the balim game which is stil going on in 2026. After 78 years of partition Pakistan is still dealing with the case of evacuee property of 1947.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the implications of the partition of 1947 are question marks. An unplanned and sudden migration turned the trajectory of millions, with many losing lifelong earnings and facing unimaginable hardships. Amidst this chaos, women bore the brunt of patriarchy's brutalities, their dignity and privacy brutally stripped. 'Women nudity' was on the road. It was not all about her sexual violence, but when she had to deliver her baby on the road, feed her baby at a railway station among a mess of males, and also made her nude in critical circumstances. Her 'private' issues became 'public' when she had to travel with a foot caravan for months. Her secret did not remain secret, where the masculine gender in normal condition raises a point of self-respect. When she faced the revelation of her secrecy, despite this, she did not want to be revealed, and questions about male self-respect began to shiver. This detailed eye opening aspect raised questions for power holders. However, this research also underscores the agency and resilience of refugees, who rebuilt their lives despite overwhelming challenges. Local support networks, socio-cultural harmony, and religious familiarity facilitated their adjustment, underscoring the importance of community solidarity. It was just because of societal agencies that refugees did not realize alien by trends and trajectories of the society while asking for any kind of help at any door. Norms and traditions, language familiarity made smooth adjustment. This research highlighted the long-lasting implications of the 1947 partition on human life. However, room for further research by giving prioritize the lived experiences of partition survivors, exploring the

[98] Umair Saddiue, *Hum Nay Pakistan Kesy Bnyaa* [*How We Achieved Pakistan*] (Lahore: Zawyaa, 2014), 192–197.
[99]Pakistan, Constituent Assembly (Legislature), proceedings, March 2, 1948.
[100]*Lahore board of Revenue, Farid Kot House, Evacuee Property Record File*, Lahore.

intergenerational transmission of trauma, memory, and identity. By centring the human dimension of this pivotal event, scholars may foster a deeper understanding of its enduring impacts on individuals, communities and nations.

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