PART I

Foundation
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After nearly seventy years of independence, the partition of India, the creation of Pakistan, and their wider ramifications continue to resonate and reverberate today. This is particularly palpable in the region of Punjab, which bore the brunt of the associated partition violence, resulting in millions of people being forced to migrate and forever severed from their homelands. The generation that witnessed this grand project in history, which informs and defines the region, is fading away in numbers, but the small numbers that survive still talk about the events as if they were a recent memory. During a trip to Lahore at the end of 2013, I was constantly reminded of the events of 1947 and taken back in time by a generation that had known Punjab before it was partitioned. During a conversation with Najum Latif, who had migrated from Jullundar as a child in 1947, he emotionally recited this poem by Ustad Daman:

We may not speak, but deep in our hearts we know
That you have lost, as we too have lost in this divide
With this false freedom, towards destruction
You ride, and so too do we ride
There was some hope, there is life to be found
But you died, and so we too died.

Ali 2011

The painful loss and the lack of closure continue to haunt. The remnants of this bygone era are everywhere, from the often-crumbling buildings to the often-melancholic memories. The food, the language, the dress, the vibrant and hearty Punjabi and the plains of the Punjab that connected people and are now divided by hostile boundaries. There is a constant reminder of these divided histories while travelling between the two Punjabs; one only needs to casually observe the place names of shops which are frequently located in the ‘other’ Punjab. These are the small ways in which those who fled in 1947 have preserved their own ancestral histories, passing them through the generations that will be unfamiliar with the other half. The strict visa controls by both governments ensure they remain divided and foreign.
The transfer of power in India was essentially planned, however, in the closing days there was a collapse of law and order, especially in the province of Punjab. This highly militarised area responded with some of the worst violence seen in the history of the subcontinent. And so the smooth transfer of power and the creation of two states was forever tainted with the blood of civilians. By tracing this extraordinary period through personal experiences of violence, forced migration and finally rebuilding torn lives highlights the fact that this was not just a moment in history but instead it was a decision which impacted millions of lives and lasted for years; and for some they are still wandering in the streets of their childhoods. Although lives were rebuilt, the memory of ancestral homelands and lost childhoods remained with the people. The fractures caused by imperial collapse and the partition became permanent and so for many refugees their former homes remained with them only in memory. It is perhaps for this reason why some people, especially in Punjab, have not reconciled to the idea of partition; the lack of closure is equally evident in the response of the two new states and their inability to have any form of an open post-conflict reconciliation.

This chapter deliberately stays away from the wider political legacies associated with independence and the partition of British India because these are better documented elsewhere (Hasan 1997, Kamra 2002, Talbot and Singh 1999, Pandey 2001). The volatile and emotive issue of Kashmir and its bloody shadow continue to dominate the discourse of Indo-Pak relations. The security concerns have consequently fuelled the race for both India and Pakistan to become nuclear nations, which prominent writers such as Ashis Nandy, trace back to partition (Tan and Kudaisya 2000: 211). The broader questions surrounding the accession of Princely States (other than from a conflict and security perspective) have also not generated that much scholarly discussion given that they formed two-thirds of India at independence. The Princely States remained excluded from the Radcliffe Boundary Commission discussions; yet they were to form an integral part of the new nation-states and had to accede their autonomy. Politically then, partition has been fundamental in shaping the political and security landscape of post-colonial India and Pakistan. However, this chapter will focus on the region of Punjab, which was partitioned in 1947 and has been transformed by the decisions taken in Delhi and London. It was the last region to be annexed following the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1849, and following the mutiny in 1857 Punjab played a pivotal role in the British imperial machinery. It was a region that was transformed under colonial rule and then divided. Today Pakistani Punjab is the most populous province and dominates the tripartite power base (military, bureaucracy and feudal) in Pakistan. Indian Punjab has also been at the forefront of India’s green revolution but politically the separatist movement of the 1980s has overshadowed much of its recent history. But underlying this is the scar and trauma of partition; the dreams of independence and creation of Pakistan that very quickly transformed into bitter legacies. It is here that Daman’s poem acts as a powerful reminder of the loss and evokes nostalgia of a lost age.

**Handing over the reins of power**

As independence drew closer and the idea of a separate homeland for India’s Muslims became a reality, the Punjab, which Jinnah termed the ‘cornerstone’ of Pakistan, effectively became the battleground. The Unionist Party, which had dominated Punjabi politics for the past twenty years, was able to block the Muslim League’s attempts to form a Ministry, due to the fragile balance of votes. But tensions were mounting outside the legislature
as communal organisations in the region all laid claim to the historic land. Neeti Nair (2011) argues that contrary to popular perception, some high profile Hindus also preferred the partition option in the decades preceding independence. There is, she argues, a convergence taking place of politics of communalism with anti-colonialism in Punjab during this period (257). Evidently the Indian National Congress which refused to share power with the Muslim League in the United Provinces following the 1937 provincial elections is seen as a major turning point in changing the fortunes of the Muslim League that ultimately laid claim to speak for all of India’s Muslims. By 1946 the Muslim League had been transformed and so the journey towards a separate and new entity of Pakistan became a real possibility.

When the British decided to hand over the reins of power in India, the result was not a smooth transfer of power from colonial rule to two independent countries of India and Pakistan. The reality was much more chaotic, with widespread lawlessness creating the space for unprecedented levels of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims and in the case of Punjab, the Sikhs too. The toxic mix of large numbers of demilitarised personnel and weaponry, the militarised Punjab (Sikh) States, and law and disorder as the British exit, and at stake for the average masses was their livelihoods, their homelands and their lives. In the case of the Sikhs this was also their spiritual homeland. Most were taken by surprise at the levels of violence, chaos and mass forced migration that followed.

The result, an estimated death toll of approximately 1 million people, though the true human cost can never be measured. The Punjab and Bengal were the two regions most affected by the division, which drew the new boundaries between India and Pakistan. The all-consuming violence which engulfed these regions resulted in one of the largest forced migrations in the twentieth century, with an estimated 15 million people crossing the newly created borders by Sir Cyril Radcliffe. The dislocation was at its peak in the Punjab between August and December 1947. It was estimated by the Indian government that, by June 1948, 5.5 million non-Muslims and 5.8 million Muslims crossed the border in Punjab (After Partition 1948:50).

It was in the wake of the Unionist government’s resignation on 2 March 1947 that the Punjab slid into communal violence (see further Talbot 1996). Until this time, the province had escaped the communal violence that had earlier engulfed Calcutta, Noakhali in East Bengal and then spread to Bihar (Nanda 1948: 16). The disturbances of March 1947, in Rawalpindi division, in the wake of Khizr’s resignation marked an alarming trend towards increased use of violent means to achieve political goals and thus legitimatising violence as a political tool. The demarcation of territory in response to the impending British departure, combined with the highly militarised nature of Punjabi society, made the situation qualitatively different from previous ‘communal riots’ (Aiyar 1995). Crucially the March violence set the benchmark for further and more gruesome reprisal hostility, or as Paul Brass has termed ‘retributive genocide’ (2003), in August 1947.

The Punjab violence was a factor in the last Viceroy Mountbatten’s decision to bring forward the date of departure from India. Initially planned for June 1948, the date changed to August 1947, which effectively left no time to prepare a smooth transfer of power and even less time to consider how the country would be divided. Partition was now seen as the only way forward. The Mountbatten Plan was announced on 3 June 1947 and accepted by the main leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Sikh leader Sardar Baldev Singh. And so on 14 August 1947 Pakistan came into being (though the two wings were divided by 1,000 miles of landmass) and the following day at the stroke of midnight on 15 August, India finally got its independence after a long struggle.
Porous borders to permanent fractures

Sir Cyril Radcliffe was given the unenviable task of chairing the Boundary Commission. One of Radcliffe’s virtues was apparently his lack of any familiarity with Indian politics and more importantly, any previous knowledge of the region that he was going to divide (Yong 1997: 7). This was supposed to ensure that he appeared as a neutral figure and dealt even-handedly with the conflicting territorial claims. Based on previous census material, the partition line, known as the Radcliffe Line, was eventually drawn in six weeks establishing the fate of millions of people. What is more astonishing is that the actual boundary between the countries was announced on 17 August, three days later (see further Chester 2002, Yong 1997). The majority of people remained oblivious to the political wrangling over the boundaries and most, until the violence and chaos spread, remained in their homes regardless of the new international boundaries reluctant to leave (and abandon) their homes.

Curiously, Radcliffe’s relationship with Mountbatten continues to raise questions over the extent to which Mountbatten influenced the boundary award. Lucy Chester suggests that Radcliffe was not as ignorant as he is often portrayed, however, it is difficult to quantify the level of ‘influence’ Mountbatten had on the outcomes of the Boundary Commission, who allegedly influenced the line in Gurdaspur and Ferozepur, despite some tehsils having Muslim majority populations (Kamran 2007: 203). Arguably this is one of the most bitter legacies of the boundary, which is intertwined with the Kashmir issue as it provides a corridor to India (Abid and Abid 2011). While the controversies surrounding Mountbatten’s role will continue, Chester does offer an interesting insight into how Radcliffe felt when leaving India:

I station myself firmly on the Delhi airport until an aeroplane from England comes along. Nobody in India will love me for my award about the Punjab and Bengal and there will be roughly 80 million with a grievance who will begin looking for me. I do not want them to find me. I have worked and travelled and sweated – oh I have sweated the whole time.

Chester 2009:100

This is a rare insight because the enigmatic Radcliffe was obsessive about destroying his personal papers and so his role is left mostly to speculation and conjecture; however, it does show his own awareness of the repercussions in drawing the lines and perhaps he also sensed that he would be blamed for this unpopular award.

It is interesting to note that all three key leaders, Mountbatten, Jinnah and Nehru, failed to anticipate the mass migration of peoples. During the months of August to December 1947, almost all the Sikhs and Hindus of West Punjab left Pakistan and similarly nearly all the Muslims of East Punjab and many from adjoining areas left to create new homes in the Dominion of Pakistan. Prior to independence there was hardly any mention of a planned exchange of population, the Government of India felt it was inconceivable that people would just leave their ancestral lands and property and migrate (Rai 1965: 72). This was despite the warning signs of violence-related migration in Noakhali (October 1946) and Bihar (November 1947) that contained elements of ethnic cleansing, and the fact that some non-Muslims started to migrate in the wake of riots and violence in Rawalpindi in March 1947. Jinnah on the other hand had also envisaged a Pakistan that included other religious minorities as is evident in his Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August 1947. Indeed the Muslim League leadership vowed to protect the
minorities in Pakistan and thus prevent a mass exodus (Singh 1962: 9). Yet the idea was not completely inconceivable because Jinnah had also suggested an exchange of population as early as 10 December 1945 and Ghazanfar Ali Khan, who was one of Jinnah’s close aides, considered an ‘exchange of population a necessary corollary’ to the establishment of a Muslim state (Rai 1965: 72). While the secular orientated Indian National Congress could accept a territorial division, a division of peoples would totally negate its ideology and force it to accept that India was indeed made up of ‘two nations’ with irreconcilable differences (Address by Jinnah 1983). The colonial government alternatively was completely focused on leaving India at this point and had neither anticipated nor planned for a mass transfer of population as a result of its policies. Yet the idea of planned exchanges of populations and the so called ‘unmixing’ of ethnic communities was something used extensively following World War II in Europe so it is surprising that it does not feature in the discussions in the exit plan for India (Frank 2011).

Once the violence reached uncontrollable levels and chaos engulfed the Punjab region, the two new dominions had to accept that the exchange of populations was an inevitable outcome of partition. It was therefore recommended by the High Commissioner to Nehru, that a ‘transfer of population should take place’, although the nature of that exchange was less clear (Singh 2006: 502). Many people still resisted migration, for example in Lyallpur the sizable Sikh population were forced to leave in September after appeals made by the Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh, and the West Punjab Governor, Sir Francis Mudie; others saw the migration as a temporary measure due to the uncertainty and had planned to come back to their ancestral lands. Even the leadership of the two countries had anticipated that the refugees would return to their homes once the situation had improved. Mahatma Gandhi’s view on this was that ‘the migrant must eventually return to their homes and lands that the two Dominion Governments must extend the fullest protection of their minorities’ (After Partition 1948: 59). The newly created international border should have functioned as a porous border (which it did in the early period) but in reality it gradually began to limit and restrict people’s movement and thus entrench the division. Zamindar’s (2007) research has also shown how during the early years the border was quite fluid and there was much more flexibility in movement of people, indeed people were coming back and forth to make arrangements for their possessions and properties until the permit system was introduced.

For many fleeing refugees though, the traumatic and often violent journey across the new border marked a sense of relief, Keller makes the analogy with the feeling of having reached the ‘promised land’ (Keller 1975: 59). Yet, the longer-term legacy of this migration has not always represented that analogy of the ‘promised land’. Saadat Hason Manto, a short story writer, most poignantly touches upon this space that became ‘no mans-land’ in this Urdu fictional account of Toba Tek Singh (see Bhalla’s translation, 1999: 565–573). The short story is set in a lunatic asylum, overcast by the looming partition but with little knowledge of how this will impact them. The madness of partition is offset by the madness in the lunatic asylum and the story of Bishan Singh, more popularly known as Toba Tek Singh, which is an old town in what would become Pakistan. Manto, a migrant from India, was never completely at ease in Lahore and died shortly afterwards in 1955. The confusion of identity and citizenship are themes which resonate in his work and as the ending of Toba Tek Singh unfolds we find the remnants of the many migrants that were torn between two spaces in no man’s land. It is perhaps the legacies of these amorphous lines in the minds and memories of the victims of partition that have left a most bitter legacy, which has eventually translated into a bitter relationship between the two nations.
For the love of cities

The mass migration of people following partition also fundamentally altered the physical landscape. Delhi, the colonial capital, was transformed from an Urdu speaking Muslim city in character to a city that housed the incoming Punjabi refugees that now lend much of their character to the city. Delhi retains its Mughal links through the extensive architecture that dominates the city but the people are heavily influenced by the Punjabi migrants (Kaur 2007). Shaista Ikramullah, a prominent female Pakistani politician, after leaving the city wrote, ‘For millions of people like me, to whom Delhi was synonymous with Muslim culture, a Pakistan without Delhi was a body without a heart’ (Rumi 2013: 49). The economic and demographic reconfiguration of the cities in Punjab was also to have a significant impact on the divided Punjab; it transformed small towns to cities and cities into regional and international economic centres.

Demographically, the communally mixed Punjab was after independence unceremoniously ‘unmixed’ of ‘other’ communities. Historically Punjab had a strong pluralist and composite cultural tradition that statistical data and simple religious categorisation does not reveal. Furthermore there is much debate about the role of colonialism and the formation of these fixed religious categories (Bhasin-Malik 2007). According to the 1941 Census of India, Punjab consisted of 29 per cent Hindus, 53 per cent Muslims, 15 per cent Sikhs and 3 per cent others. By 1951, Pakistan Punjab was overwhelmingly Muslim with 98 per cent and only 2 per cent other. Indian Punjab on the other hand became dominated by the 66 per cent Hindus and 30 per cent Sikhs, with a small 2 per cent of Muslims and 1 per cent other. The reality prior to August 1947 was that some localities, especially in Central Punjab, were much more diverse, while others were dominated by one community. After the partition, the impact of the total out-migration of ‘other’ communities had a huge impact on the local and regional economy because of the skills and contribution of these people. For example in Ludhiana, skilled Muslim workers dominated employment in the flour and rice mills with 83 per cent of workers; in the hosiery sector, Muslims accounted for 61 per cent; and in the textiles industry they accounted for 78 per cent of the workforce.3 For many cottage industries the result was closure. Furthermore, the new migrants coming from West Punjab, who had a different set of skills, did not compensate the skills that were lost with the migration of these workers.

Prior to independence Lahore was the leading commercial and cultural heartland of the Punjab (and indeed in north India) with an influential and affluent non-Muslim population, while Amritsar, only a short distance from Lahore, depended much on the Muslim artisans that contributed to the vibrancy of the city. During their deliberations of the Boundary Commission, Chester asserts that they were ‘driven by the need to preserve Amritsar’s economic and strategic position’ (2009: 75), hinting that perhaps no one had anticipated the demographic and economic consequences of partition on Amritsar city (see further Talbot 2006). The reality was that Amritsar suffered more than Lahore due to its geographic positioning as a border city; the large Muslim artisan class had left a big void in the labour market thus leading to its decline (Luthra 1949). Furthermore, the sensitive international border between India and Pakistan ensured that the border areas, such as Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozpur now experienced economic decline. Conversely Lahore, partly due to the lack of alternatives in Pakistan and its political importance, retained much of its former imperial glory; though it also suffered in the short term from the complete out-migration of the economic dominance of Hindus and Sikhs.

Equally provincial towns like Ludhiana and Lyallpur became industrial heartlands of divided Punjab (Virdee 2007). Both these towns previously had majority ‘other’ populations
and consequently attracted fleeing refugees from the other side. Interestingly there is a history of migration between Ludhiana and Lyallpur prior to independence. The development of the new Lyallpur Canal Colony in the late nineteenth century and the social engineering that went along with the project has received relatively little attention, given its dramatic impact on the region (see further Ali 1988, Gilmartin 2004). Farmers, artisans and even some professionals from Central and East Punjab, including Ludhiana, were drawn by the economic opportunities in these newly irrigated colonies that came to represent the most fertile lands in India (Darling 1925 [1977]). Fifty years later at the time of partition, the non-Muslims re-migrated eastwards once again to their ‘original’ ancestral homes from which their grandparents and parents had earlier departed (see further Tatla 1995). Adding to the attraction of Ludhiana was, however, the fact that it was on the main artery of north India, the Grand Trunk Road. It was therefore connected to all the major cities (Delhi, Amritsar and Lahore) and thus was an important stop for refugees who were on the move and consequently attracted many refugees.

Internal migration has historically therefore played an important role in the development of Punjab. Following partition, refugees and migrants have played a significant role in providing the basis of creating new industrial heartlands that have shaped new emerging cities like Lyallpur and Ludhiana and in regenerating the economy post-1947. However, it was the dominance of small-scale industry in Ludhiana, which in 1952 stood at 452 small-scale units compared to Amritsar’s 239, that enabled the city to achieve a competitive advantage over its rivals. Through this, Ludhiana emerged as East Punjab’s leading industrial centre, surpassing Amritsar and Jullundar. Indeed, the development and the necessity of small-scale units was praised by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru:

One of my colleagues had recently made a quick survey of the small-scale industries started in the Punjab since independence and was much impressed with what had been done both by the permanent residents there and those who had come from Pakistan as refugees. I believe he listed 20,000 small enterprises that had grown up in the last few years in the Punjab with a relatively small capital but with a great deal of energy and enterprise. That is the kind of thing which heartens one and increases self confidence … It is the Government’s business to create conditions for the rapid spread of medium and small-scale industries all over India. The example of Ludhiana, where such industries have thrived shows that this kind of thing could be done everywhere. It would be better for such industries to be started away from big cities.

_Dhiman 1962:28_

While small towns like Ludhiana eventually benefited from the mass human displacement of 1947, there was also another side effect, which continues to resonate in contemporary India. Refugees from all communities faced similar problems of rehabilitation and those who had access to influence and money used their connections to ease that process. Satya Rai notes that nepotism, corruption and bribery were rampant in the administration. Money, power and influence were important factors in the speedy evacuation of friends and family, ‘refugees could not get equal justice or attention’ (Rai 1965: 87). Some individuals took advantage of the chaos and lack of administrative control and used the misery of others to make money, ‘one trip with the refugees or with their kin was equal to an ordinary months earnings’ (Rai 1965: 87–88) for the _riksha wallas_. Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, the East Punjab Minister for Refugees and Rehabilitation, was well aware of some of the corruption that
was going on. He is reported to have declared in December 1947 that he would take every effort to prevent shops and factories from falling into the hands of rich people (Tribune 13 December 1947). This was in response to reports of members of the Legislative Assembly attempting to acquire factories and workshops in their names or in collusion with other notables (Tribune 13 December 1947). The process of granting loans and allocating evacuee-abandoned property was almost inevitably open to abuse. Bribery, land grabbing and extortion were especially prevalent due to fierce competition for resources coupled with abandoned properties but Talbot notes that the ‘border cities provided additional opportunities for crime’ (Talbot 2006: 68). The legacy of this is also evident in present-day India and Pakistan, where institutionalised corruption is endemic. Ilyas Chattha (2012) has recently been unearthing this connection between corruption during the rehabilitation of refugees and its impact on the post-colonial states.

While the urban landscape changed dramatically, lives were rebuilt and new homes were made, the emotional attachment that people had with cities such as Lahore and Delhi was a source of much literature. The following poem by Prem Kirpal who was a Lahori migrant to Delhi is about how his beloved city became a foreign land:

**Spirit’s Musings**
My beloved City of Lahore
Still Standing not far from Delhi
Within quicker reach by air or train,
Suddenly became a forbidden land
Guarded by a sovereign state
Of new ideologies, loves and hates.
Homes were lost and hearts were bruised
In both unhappy parts of Punjab.

Nevile 2006: xxix

Pran Nevile, a retired diplomat and writer in his later life, never forgot Lahore, the city of his youth. He reminisces, ‘Even after a lapse of over five decades, my emotional attachment to this great city is as deep as ever. My memories of boyhood and youth are still fresh in my mind and are often a subject matter of conversation whenever I sit together with ex-Lahorias of my generation’ (2006: xxix). However, Rumi in his eulogy to Delhi, notes how many prominent writers from Lahore never came back to visit the city after migrating. These included figures such as, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Balwant Singh and Balwant Gargi; the trauma of seeing their beloved city transformed in the new world was perhaps too much for them (2013: 51).

Similarly Afzal Tauseef, a writer and journalist based in Lahore, moved to Quetta, after her family were killed, unable to come back to Punjab and Lahore until much later in life. The carnage left many members of her family dead during August 1947 and Tauseef is still puzzled about the root cause that led to such a painful division. She was forced to migrate following this massacre; displaced from her ancestral land, she has not to this day come to terms with being uprooted from her home.

my father was so bitter about it. He opted for Baluchistan and left Punjab forever. So for me, my Punjab was my village, which then became a part of India … Living in Baluchistan made me forget Punjab and Punjabi language. But then I started rediscovering the Punjab … I was only nine years old and was too young to develop
any personal opinion about such circumstances. I was just like a scared child simply following the instructions. My father was so disheartened and disappointed. He left it straightaway saying that: ‘I don’t want to live in here’.

*Interview in Lahore, 22 April 2007*

Though a child at the time, the irrationality of partition shaped Tauseef’s views and it was only later on in life that she was able to come back and live in the Punjab. There was much bitterness in her experiences, understandably shaped by the massacre of her family, but then subsequently shaped by the new state of Pakistan. The expectations of the new state were high and millions had paid the price for the creation of Pakistan and so the gradual deterioration of state institutions has created a class critical of the regime; a class that is trying to understand and reconcile itself to a bitter legacy of partition that has persisted for nearly seventy years.

**Reimagining the land, language and religion**

While the partition of Punjab addressed the needs of the Muslims of India, the territorial division itself has created a much more unintended outcome that of a more communalised and fractured post-colonial Punjabi identity. As noted earlier, Punjab was made up of three main communities, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and a smaller number of other minorities. Rammah powerfully argues that the Muslim–Hindu–Sikh mix in Punjabi society ceased to exist once Punjab was divided (2006: 215). The 1947 Partition and subsequently the linguistic reorganisation and further division of East Punjab in 1966, has created territories which are now associated with three ‘unmixed’ religious communities. Thus Pakistan Punjab is predominately Muslim; Indian Punjab is dominated by Sikhs; and Haryana and Himachal Pradesh (previously part of eastern Punjab) are now dominated by the Hindus. Post-1947 Punjab(s) today reflect the fault lines created in colonial India and remain divided religiously and linguistically. However, recent scholarly work has started to challenge this dominant discourse of Punjabi society that is still quite complex given the huge population transfers that have taken place.

One of the most important features of any ethnic group is language which binds and brings the cultural history of those people together to form a cohesive group of people with a shared sense of its past. Punjabi interestingly was never given state patronage; this is true for the Mughal period, Ranjit Singh’s reign and also under the British. The preferred state or official languages were Persian and Urdu (Malhotra and Mir 2012: xxix). Mir argues that part of the problem under the British was the plurality of the scripts used to write Punjabi; all three scripts (Indo-Persian, Gurmukhi and Devanagari) were used but none of them dominated (2010). Yet despite this anomaly, Punjabi continued to be the language of the masses and reached into wider Punjab (from Peshawar to Delhi), albeit in different dialects but broadly comprehensible. But it is the plurality in written Punjabi that causes friction and provides the space for further divisions in the post-colonial context. It is within this context that the language, the people and the land become further sub-divided to reflect both national and in the case of Sikhs, sub-national, identities. This produces three distinct outlooks: Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan; Urdu, Muslim, Pakistan; and Punjabi, Sikh, Khalistan (Kalra 2014: 3). The Hindu Punjabi has therefore been absorbed into the wider Hindutva project; the Muslim Punjabi (in West Punjab) has abandoned the Punjabi language in favour of the more ‘Islamic’ Urduised identity; and interestingly it is the Punjabi owning and speaking Sikhs that have become synonymous with the Punjab and Punjabi identity. Yet in reality it is also the mother tongue of the majority of Pakistanis and many Hindu Punjabis.
The connection of language and religion has therefore come to define the post-colonial landscape in Punjab. While these are simplified stereotypes of the divided people, more broadly they are symptomatic of the communalised politics of the sub-continent and more specifically, they are much more peculiar to the Punjab region. For example Tariq Rehman has shown how ‘Soon after the creation of Pakistan, Punjabi vanished as a University subject. Because of its association with Sikhs and due to the state’s promotion of Urdu, Punjabi was relegated to the periphery’ (Rammah 2006: 216). It is difficult to think of another region in the sub-continent that has shunned its own linguistic and ethnic history in favour of a national or religious identity. People like my own parent’s generation who epitomised the pluralistic land of Punjab are fewer and fewer. There are hardly any people of my father’s generation left in Indian Punjab; as child I never found it strange that my father made most of his notes in the Indo-Persian script despite being a Sikh. As Bhardwaj (2012) notes, ‘in East Punjab, Urdu became a casualty of Punjabi.’ The prescriptive orthodoxy symbolising Sikhism today is also unfamiliar to many, including myself. My mother, who was a practising Sikh, had embraced ‘other’ practices to epitomise the pluralistic tendencies associated with the Punjab that I am familiar with. Similarly Bhardwaj has tried to unearth some of the hidden histories of a composite Punjab, which belies the dominant narrative. He recalls this story:

Behind my grandparents’ house in our village Akalgarh, in district Ludhiana, is a narrow street. To this day it is called Rajputan de Gali (the street of the Rajputs). This is where the influential community of ‘Rajput Muslims,’ as they were addressed, lived before Partition. The villagers’ reference to the Maseet Wala Gurdwara (literally the mosque turned gurdwara) is yet another symbol of the once powerful presence of Muslims in Akalgarh. Similarly, there is a pond called Taru Shah da Tobia, named after a wandering fakir Taru Shah, who preferred to stay on in our village. Over the years his shrine in the old graveyard has grown in size and stature. Yet there are no Muslims in the village.

Partition has enabled this rewriting of history that is now constructed through a lens that is linear and mono-religious in its outlook. Both India and Pakistan have been trying to erase and rewrite their shared past; the forced migration resulted in the separation of people and lasted a few months but the project to rewrite these histories has been more complex and subtle. Churnjeet Mahn, in a recent project, has been exploring this cultural amnesia towards contested sites and how Sikh and Muslim sites co-exist in post-1947 along the Grand Trunk Road (see the project website: www.th egtroad.com). Retelling this story in the post-1947 Punjab also means erasing ‘other’ histories. But as Bhardwaj highlights, these new imagined localities still retain a connection with their previous history despite renaming of places. For example in Lyallpur, old Sikh localities are still known as Gurunanak Pura and Gurugobind Pura, despite the out-migration of all the Sikh community. Malhotra and Mir’s work interestingly tries to delve into some of these complexities which have shaped contemporary Punjab(s). Memory and nostalgia for a glorious past continue to resonate beyond the divided boundaries, as they note, ‘For many of the Partition’s refugees, while the physical relationship with land/people was irrevocably lost, their “Punjab” would live on in their imaginaries, and in the new world they constructed for themselves.’ For example names given to refugee colonies of Delhi: Gujranwala, Bhera or Punjabi Bagh….or the other is conversation opener, ‘tussi pichhon Kithon de ho?’ (where are you from?), which is a clear
reference to where were you from before partition (Malhotra and Mir 2012: xxv–xxvi). Naming places after former villages, towns or cities helps embed and memorialise the past in the present and Bhardwaj’s work alludes to the presence of the past in the present. Yet both these highlight the complex history of migrations in Punjab and moreover the mixing and unmixing of people before and after 1947.

Making new histories

This regional history, highlights the transformation and legacies of that moment in time, when as Mushirul Hasan says; ‘never before, in South Asian history did so few decide the fate of so many and rarely did so few ignore the sentiments of so many in the subcontinent … never before in South Asian history did so few divide so many, so needlessly’ (1993: 42–43). The longer-term repercussions of this violent beginning for India and Pakistan have overshadowed the trauma and dislocation felt by millions of innocent people who were forced to flee their homes. While the process of carving up India was pre-planned, the exchange of population was not; though disruption and violence were expected, the ability to deal with them was inadequate and while New Delhi and Karachi celebrated their new existence, neither thought this would be the source of such hostility between the two countries. The legacy of decolonisation in India has therefore had ramifications far beyond merely transferring power. This was not just a physical separation but a division of people, emotions, ancestral lands and properties; it was a partitioning of people whose primary identifier now was their religious identity, while their caste, class, linguistic or ethnic identity had been receded, albeit temporarily. In reality the process had started in colonial Punjab, with increasing communalisation of identities. Revivalist groups were important in awakening and constructing essentialised religious identities among people who had previously adopted a more pragmatic attitude. And it is within this context that more broadly it is about the transformation of a region which has not just been demographically altered but that it also now tells us a different history. It is now a revised post-1947 history that fails to adequately acknowledge the shared cultural roots and traditions of the broader ethnic identity.

It is of course impossible to talk about independence and partition without mentioning the accompanying violence, at its height in August 1947. The bitter legacies of this have developed into bitter memories and relationships. Interestingly though, this is much more prevalent at the national and ‘official’ level rather than at a human level. The people, however, are most bitter about the lack of contact and travel restrictions, which keep them separated. Furthermore, given the levels of violence in 1947, it is interesting that in post-colonial India, the communal violence that has overshadowed much of the secularist history has largely been absent in Punjab. Though in Punjab, the militancy period of 1980s and the movement for Khalistan has been particularly violent and bitter; some would trace the history of this back to the unresolved aspirations of a Sikh State and 1947.

Finally in the making of these new histories, one aspect that stands out in the new globalised world is the widespread impact of migration. Earlier in the chapter there was a brief discussion of how refugees often find small ways of preserving their histories and memories in their ‘new’ homes. This has allowed them to remain connected with a past, which is forever fractured. Others, however, decided to completely break with history and chose to migrate abroad. There is evidence that this great migration led to further migrations, both internally to other states and abroad like post-war Britain, which at the time was short of labour and was an attractive option for those looking to escape the trauma of partition (Tan and Kudaisya 2000: 231–232). According to estimates by Tan and Kudaisya,
between 8 and 10 per cent of all Sikhs had migrated overseas by the end of the 1950s and another 30 per cent were living within India but outside Punjab in towns and cities of adjacent provinces and in the capital of Delhi.

And it is within the diaspora that much of the recent scholarship on memory, trauma and partition has been emerging. Though they escaped the immediateness of the sites that were associated with the violence and dislocation, the memory associated with the land has not escaped. The generation that has grown up listening to stories of partition has prompted some people to at least explore this history. Bhalla, a US-based physicist, ‘grew up listening to these stories from her grandmother who remained traumatized till her death. She regretted not having recorded them and this prompted her to start the 1947 Partition Archive’ (Arshad 2013). The oral history project has been busy collecting first-hand accounts from a fading generation.

The loss associated with partition is also made worse by any lack of closure or any form of official recognition for what happened. People were forced to flee and many thought they would return to their home but most never did and this sudden fracture was never allowed to heal properly. The suffering therefore has largely been a private matter, until more recently with the digital revolution allowing people to share their stories across the borders and religious boundaries. But it is the dreams, memories and legacies of partition that Balraj Sahni, a prominent Indian actor and a migrant from Rawalpindi, captures so evocatively in his poem and continues to haunt many. It was written during his visit to Amritsar in 1951 and it draws on much of the pain and loss associated with partition:

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You are those with a country; you are those with homes
We are homeless; we are estranged
You smiled and took us to your breast
We cried and took consolation
The faded stars, twinkled once again
What we did not hope for, was made possible by your warmth
May my city live, and its people thrive
We came and pray for this as we now depart
All our pockets are empty!
We carry nothing with us as we leave.
Half a heart repines here
Half a heart lies neglected there.
The paths, for which our hearts once beat
For those paths we became strangers.
What of our becoming human beings,
We have turned into Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims.
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Sahni 1963 [2006]:89

Notes

1 The Punjab region was the major recruitment area for the Indian Army during colonial rule. By the time of World War I, over 50 per cent of the army recruitment was from Punjab (Yong 2005).

2 In the lead up to the violence in March 1947, the Muslim League had been pursuing a campaign, ‘Direct Action Day’, against the incumbent Khizr Ministry in the Punjab. When the Ministry resigned on 2 March it was amid growing unrest in the district. Aiyar (1995) suggests that the
March violence showed signs of a move towards organised violence and the emergence of 'private armies' in carrying out formulated plans.

These figures are for the district, but most of the industry was located in the city. In Amritsar, Muslim workers accounted for 90 per cent of workers in scientific engineering, 83 per cent of wood workers and 79 per cent in the glassware sector. In Jullundhar, 90 per cent of the workers in the hosiery industry were Muslim and in Ferozepur 80 per cent of the workers in the textiles industry were Muslims (Luthra 1949: 32).

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