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FORCED MIGRATION, COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND REFUGEE CHALLENGES IN WEST PUNJAB AFTER THE PARTITION OF 1947

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Forced displacement, Radcliff Award, Communal Violence, Canal Colonies, Transit Camps, Ethnic Cleansing, Demographic Change, Punjab Partition.	This study examines mass migration, communal violence, and forced population displacement during the Partition of Punjab in 1947 in British India, with particular emphasis on the demographic, administrative, social, and psychological consequences in West Punjab. It focuses especially on Montgomery (Sahiwal), one of the important canal colony districts that played a significant role in the settlement and rehabilitation of Muslim refugees arriving from East Punjab and other parts of India. The study traces the processes of forced displacement, communal violence, political uncertainty, and administrative decisions that contributed to the rapid movement of populations across the newly created international boundary. Particular attention is given to the delayed public announcement of the Radcliffe Award, which intensified uncertainty and insecurity among communities living in the affected districts. The research also explores the humanitarian consequences of Partition, particularly for vulnerable groups including women, children, and elderly people who experienced family separation, loss of property, displacement, violence, disease, and psychological trauma. The Walton Refugee Camp in Lahore is examined as a major transit and rehabilitation centre that reflected the administrative and humanitarian challenges faced by the newly established government of Pakistan. Furthermore, the study investigates the demographic transformation of West Punjab resulting from the large-scale influx of refugees and the departure of Hindu and Sikh populations. It also examines the processes of land allotment, property redistribution, agricultural settlement, and rehabilitation in the post-independence period. Overall, the study demonstrates how Partition transformed the demographic, socio-economic, agricultural, and social structure of West Punjab and left lasting effects on collective memory and regional identity.
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Introduction

The partition of Punjab took place as part of an overall agreement to divide India, negotiated by the British government between the main national political parties the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League and the Sikhs of Punjab. The Partition Plan was announced by the British government on 3 June 1947 and was supported by representatives of the main political parties and the Sikh representative of Punjab, Baldev Singh. In mid-August, the British Indian Empire came to an end. The international boundary between the two states, through Punjab in the northwest and Bengal in the northeast, was drawn a few days later. At that time, Muslims constituted the majority of the Punjabi population. According to the 1941 census, the total population of Punjab including British Punjab and the princely states was 33,922,373. Muslims were in an absolute majority of 53.2 percent, while Hindus were 29.1 percent (including 6.4 percent Scheduled Castes and Tribes), Sikhs, 14.9 percent, and Christians, 1.9 percent. British Punjab had thirty-nine districts with a total population of 28,418,819, of whom Muslims were 57.1 percent; Hindus 27.8 percent (5.6 belonged to Scheduled Castes or 'untouchables'); Sikhs 13.2 percent and Christian's 1.7 percent. It cannot be denied that if India had not been partitioned, Punjab would also not have been partitioned. The demand for the partition of Punjab was made by Sikh leaders in response to the demand by the Muslim League leaders for a separate Muslim-majority Pakistan, which included Punjab. However, it was not inevitable that the Punjab would have been partitioned if the leaders of the three main communities, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, had agreed to live together (Ahmed, 2012, p. 375).

The decision to partition Punjab applied to British Punjab: it was an administrative unit under British administration. However, the great upheaval and turmoil involved in the partition process inevitably engulfed the princely states of Punjab as well. As a result of the partition process, all traces of Muslim presence in Indian Punjab were erased; the only exception was the small princely state of Malerkotla (population 88,109) ruled by a Muslim Nawab. Similarly, Hindus and Sikhs were conspicuous by their absence from Pakistani West Punjab and the princely state of Bahawalpur. Beginning in mid-May 1947, there was a revival of attacks, becoming more frequent and more organised as the weeks passed (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 376–377). The riots continued until the end of that year, reaching their peak in early August, while a British governor was still in power. After the handover of power to India and Pakistan in mid-August, violence escalated dramatically, continuing at very high levels for about three months. It is widely believed that what happened in Punjab dwarfed the violence of the communal riots that had taken place in Calcutta, Bihar and a few other places in 1946. Ultimately, this would prove to be the first large-scale experiment in population cleansing since World War II. It must be emphasized that the decision to partition Punjab was not taken by the Punjabi masses or even their elites, but at the central level, by the colonial government in Delhi, the high command of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League; the Viceroy consulted only the Sikhs of Punjab, who put forward their case for special treatment. They claimed that their religion and cultural identity had more roots in Punjab than those of Hindus or Muslims (Butalia, 1998, pp. 3–4). The fact was that they were a minority in Punjab, and in the context of India, a small minority. Nevertheless, the

fact that they were employed in large numbers in the colonial army made them a significant community. In general, the Punjabi people were not consulted on the issue and most of them had no idea that they would have to leave their homes and ancestral homes. (This point comes up forcefully and clearly again and again in my interviews with various sections of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs) The worst aspect of the partition process was that the much-discussed Radcliffe Award, which marked the international border between India and Pakistan, was made public on 17 August when Pakistan and India, on 14 August and 15 August respectively, had become independent. Its timing was most inopportune, because suddenly, millions of people were on the wrong side of the line. The colonial government that could have maintained order was removed from the scene, and the displaced people became sitting ducks who could be easily targeted by men who, in the previous months, were ready to commit violence against the other side (Butalia, 1998, pp. 5–6).

More than one crore Punjabis were displaced at the time of partition. According to an estimate by the Pakistan government, about 6,500,000 refugees came to Pakistan. Of these, 5,200,000 came from East Punjab and neighboring states, while 130,000 came from Delhi Province. About 5,500,000 Hindus and Sikhs left West Pakistan. It is also claimed that a total of 7.25 million Muslim refugees came from India between 1947 and 1951. About 5.5 million displaced persons settled in West Punjab, while about 1.5 million moved towards Sindh. Many families from Gujranwala, Gujarat, Sialkot, Jhelum and other parts of the country had already settled here after its creation in 1903. The process of resettlement began in 1947 and ended in 1974. It was a smooth process in which no incidents of rioting were ever recorded (Talbot, 2010, pp. 63–76).

The region of Punjab was badly affected since the Radcliffe Line cut it almost in half between India and Pakistan. The Muslim-dominated areas in the West Punjab, such as Montgomery, received many migrants or refugees from the areas of Indian Punjab, such as Amritsar, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Ambala, and Hoshiarpur. For many of the immigrants, there were difficult times characterized by famine, sickness, attacks, family separation and all the other problems that came from migration (Khan, 2017, p. 5). The Montgomery district played a key role in the strategy of settlement of refugees due to its canal colonies and vast agricultural lands. Before the partition of India, the Montgomery district had a population consisting of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. In accordance with the data provided by the 1941 Census, Muslims constituted 69 percent of the total population, while Hindus and Sikhs made up around 31 percent. With the departure of Hindus and Sikhs from Montgomery to India, there emerged a vacuum which the authorities decided to fill with Muslim immigrants (Ahmed, 2012, p. 11).

The movement was neither organized nor smooth. The refugees going to Montgomery encountered serious difficulties on the way. They arrived at Montgomery without any possessions other than the one they were wearing. Their homes, farms, enterprises, and other assets had been destroyed in India. They also experienced separation of family members, especially women and children, who became victims of exploitation due to the circumstances. The psychological impact of seeing the killings and losing family members kept haunting them for the rest of their lives (Ahmed, 2012, p.

13). The large number of migrants changed the demographic and socio-economic composition of Montgomery. They had introduced some new practices in agriculture, business, and social life which played an important role in developing the economy of the district. Migration in the canal colonies resulted in agricultural prosperity through more cultivation. At the same time, the problems in land allotment and distribution also emerged (Ahmed, 2012, p. 15).

Concept of Migration

Migration is broadly defined as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, with no distinction made between the distance of movement, voluntary or involuntary, the nature of the act, and external or internal migration. There are four factors in the phenomenon of migration. The first is the origin factor. The second is the destination factor. The third is the intervening obstacle and the fourth is the personal factor. Several terms were used in administrative and popular discourses for refugees related to partition. These included displaced persons, migrants and refugees. The Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi words for refugees are muhajir and panahgir (Lee, 1966, pp. 47–49).

Migration of individuals, groups, communities and even entire societies has occurred throughout the ages and across all regions and continents of the world. In world history, migratory movements of people have occurred for a variety of reasons, including the food search, the desire for conquest, the escape from poverty and persecution, and many others. It is useful to distinguish between forced and voluntary migration, although in some cases it is difficult to do so. In general, the decision to uproot oneself from one's homeland is emotionally very difficult, even if the decision is made freely. Nowadays, this is perhaps less true of the industrial urban cities of the West, where people often move around. However, the fact of community 'roots' is still alive. Historically, nomadic peoples also moved within familiar surroundings and followed seasonal cycles (Lee, 1966, p. 50). They resisted being forced out of the natural habitats where they roamed. This sentiment has persisted, and perhaps even strengthened, as territorial states and other modern innovations have begun to restrict the free movement of people. Naturally wandering in agricultural societies, such as Punjab at the time of partition in 1947, mobility was quite limited. Most people lived in rural communities where a close identification with the village and local kinship (kinship lineage) ties formed the universe of their activity and thought. The connection with local institutions was organic, and for the landowning castes in particular, an integral part of their identity. The situation in the towns and cities of the Punjab of 1947 was not much different. Although Punjabis from many districts had joined the British Indian Army and served in various parts of the subcontinent, many remained attached to their ancestral homes even on foreign soil (Lee, 1966, p. 52).

Forced displacement entails the coerced movement of people away from their homes in consequence of violence, armed conflict, persecution, human rights violations, or natural disasters. According to the current international law, refugees are people who cannot be forced to return to their country because of well-founded fears of persecution. Nonetheless, the concept of forced

displacement implies the notion of internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are inside the national borders of the state where they have faced violence. Forced displacement has become widespread in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries because of wars, civil conflicts, and political instability. It is now one of the major humanitarian problems of our time (Purewal, 2003, pp. 539–556).

The theoretical approaches to forced displacement stress that it is not merely a humanitarian issue, but a political and socio-economic process as well. Landlessness, unemployment, social disintegration, hunger, and loss of cultural identity are the issues that displaced people face, according to the studies by such scholars as Michael Cernea. In other words, forced migration leads to the breakdown of social links and community organization, which makes resettling complicated. As a result, durable solutions for IDPs and refugees are gaining more attention; they include resettlement, integration, and safe repatriation (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 97).

Throughout history, there have been various instances of forced migration like slavery, colonization, ethnic cleansing, and exchanges. In the twentieth century, some of the largest cases of forced migration included displacement due to the two World Wars, the division of Germany, the exodus of Palestinians, and the partition of India. This clearly shows that forced displacement is linked to political decisions and transformations of states and societies. Effects of such displacements include more than just changes in demographics, but also effects on the economy and social issues⁵. The partition of India is one of the biggest cases of forced displacement in recent times. Partition of the territory of the former British India created two nations: India and Pakistan. Twelve to fifteen million people were displaced during this process. Muslims from various parts of India left for Pakistan, whereas Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan to go to India. Violence, killings, abduction, rape, and property damage took place during this movement. Historians consider this migration to be a perfect example of forced migration since most migrants had to migrate under fear and insecurity (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 99).

The partition migration process had great repercussions in terms of social and economic aspects for both countries. Migrants were forced to reconstruct their lives in completely new locations, whereas governments had to tackle great issues related to housing, job opportunities, and resettlement. Pakistani districts like Montgomery (now called Sahiwal) saw a dramatic change in population because Muslim refugees who moved into East Punjab from Punjab became owners of the land left by Hindus and Sikhs. The migrant movement changed economic structure, social relations, and land ownership in Pakistan forever (Ali, 2019, p. 1). It is important to note that migration can be perceived through its psychological aspects too. Migrants went through great suffering caused by violence, separation, and the destruction of their ancestral homeland. Migration research proves that migration is not only the physical movement of people but also a rupture in terms of culture and emotions. The memories of migration become part of the identity of descendants of Partition migrants. Hence, the phenomenon should be studied taking into consideration all possible aspects of life, including history, sociology, psychology, and politics. Migration and forced displacement are interrelated yet separate terms. As voluntary migration is driven by social and economic aspirations, forced displacement happens due to coercion caused

by wars, persecution, and violence. The Partition of India in 1947 demonstrates the influence of political changes on the occurrence of mass migration. Knowledge of the terms is important when studying the movement of refugees and population dynamics, especially when considering regions such as Punjab that have been significantly influenced by migration throughout history (Khan, 2017, p. 6).

Causes of Mass Migration:

Migration between the two parts of Punjab (East and West) began in February–March 1947 amidst uncontrolled bloodshed in West Punjab. In total, about 6 million Muslim refugees migrated to West Punjab, out of which about 4 million settled in West Punjab alone. The rest of the refugees migrated to other provinces of Pakistan, as it was somehow impossible to settle all of them in West Punjab. It was a common belief that the partition was a temporary phenomenon and the refugees would go back to their native areas. Therefore, most of them tried to settle near the border districts like Lahore, Sheikhupura, Kasur, Sialkot, etc. As it was easy for them to return to their native lands. This resulted in the refugees coming from East Punjab putting a heavy burden on the border districts, especially Lahore and its urban areas. The urban areas of Lahore were comparatively more developed than the rural areas, where the migrants had ample facilities, vocational prospects, and various means of support. In addition, industrial cities like Sialkot, Gujranwala, Gujarat, and Lyallpur were also heavily burdened. The main reason for the migration of minorities was violence, while both the new states were not in favour of migration as they were not ready to accommodate a large number of refugees in their respective areas. To prevent violence and bloodshed, the Punjab Border Force (PBF) was formed on 19 July 1947 under the command of Major General Pete Rees (12 January 1898–15 October 1959)²³ to keep the law-and-order situation in the 12 border districts of Punjab under control. According to the PBF report of 11 August 1947, the situation was becoming increasingly critical. Due to heavy violence, the partition of Punjab was happening rapidly and the plight of the refugees was increasing and the death toll was increasing from two hundred to five hundred per day (Talbot, 2009, pp. 321–347).

Communal violence was the direct reason for mass migrations in the context of Partition in 1947. Although there used to be communal disturbances before the announcement of the Partition Plan by the British on 3 June 1947, violence increased drastically in Punjab when various communities – Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims became suspicious of each other. The rumors of attacks led to panic, and people started migrating from their ancestral villages before actual violence occurred in their own locality. Fear acted as a strong force of migration (Khan, 2017, p. 132). The communal riots in Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Multan, Jalandhar and Ludhiana made the people feel insecure about their lives and properties. Villages were attacked, houses were burnt and places of worship were destroyed. The March 1947 massacres in Rawalpindi caused the deaths of thousands of Sikhs and Hindus, which was followed by retaliatory violence against Muslims in East Punjab. Such events brought terror into Punjab and hastened the process of migration (Ahmed, 2012, p. 199).

Violence did not remain confined to the cities alone. Rural Punjab too saw instances of planned attacks on villages as well as refugee caravans. Refugee trains were the target of massacres and reached their destination stations with corpses lying everywhere. This was widely publicized in the press and increased the sense of fear among ordinary citizens. This made migration a means of survival rather than an option. Women and children faced the worst form of violence in the face of communal riots. Many women were kidnapped, raped, or forced into conversion, while children were separated from their families when migrating from their homes. Such incidents prompted families to move to safe zones in unison without even taking along any of their belongings (Butalia, 1998, p. 44). Most historians agree that the communal violence was the prime reason for the mass migrations in 1947. It is estimated that the Partition violence killed anywhere between 200,000 and one million people, making it one of the bloodiest moments in South Asian history. The other important factor responsible for triggering migration was political uncertainty. The announcement of Partition by the British government gave rise to doubts regarding the political future of the provinces and districts. People had doubts about whether their area belonged to India or to Pakistan, and they felt insecure and worried about their future (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 82). The situation was made worse by the fact that the dividing line between the two nations was announced only on 17 August 1947, two days after the attainment of independence. At this point in time, millions of people were still unsure as to whether they would become citizens of India or Pakistan. Areas such as Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, and Lahore remained a matter of guesswork, leading to insecurity among the people there. Social considerations also contributed to the process of migration in Punjab. Since in Punjab, religion was closely associated with social life and identity, people found comfort among those belonging to their own religious community (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 84). The factor that had a significant impact on the decision to migrate was the familial network. When some members of a particular family migrated to Pakistan or India, they persuaded other members of the family to join them. The presence of familial networks in the new destination made sure that the migrants were provided with shelter and security. Also, social pressure was another important element in this process. Some families who wanted to stay back changed their decision when they saw their neighbors and relatives migrating. Migration soon turned out to be a collective experience (Ahmed, 2012, p. 245).

Punjab also faced a major demographic shift as a result of the partition. The influx of refugees and the migration of minorities from West Punjab to East Punjab and East West Punjab created a huge number of problems for the administration of West Punjab. Most of the Hindu and Sikh traders, industrialists and landlords moved from West Punjab to East along with their capital and investments. This sudden shift directly disrupted the economy of the state. Since the Muslim refugees from East Punjab were not the established commercial or capital class. The number of Hindus and Sikhs was high in most districts of West Punjab, as the remaining percentage of Hindus and Sikhs reached 0% as per the 1951 Pakistan census, while Muslims reached 100% in D. G. Khan and Muzaffargarh districts. On the other hand, the proportion of Muslims never reached 0% during 1941-1951, not in any district of East Punjab. Even in 1951, in the Gurgaon and Hoshiarpur districts of East Punjab, Muslims were 16.9% and 0.1%, respectively but not 0% (Choudhary, 2003, p. 100). About 13 million Punjabis were made homeless due to partition and

about 10 million were displaced. In the context of partition, Lahore suffered greatly as a border area. The temporary and permanent settlement of refugees was a major task for the West Punjab administration. They expected that by November 9, 1947, about two million refugees would arrive in West Punjab (Choudhary, 2003, p. 101). It was not an easy task for the Deputy Commissioners to properly entertain this large number in the districts. Due to the shortage of buildings, building materials were required to construct new shelters or buildings for the refugees. The available materials had already been used up in the Wagah, Dhali, Kasur and Sulemanki camps. It was later decided that "the alternative is to open camps in all tehsil headquarters and small towns across the province" (Iftikhar-ud-Din, 1947, p. 25). Regarding food, the total wheat stock in the provincial depot on August 15, 1947, was 110,000 tons. However, by November 1947, this had reduced to 20,000 tons. Lack of staff to run the administration of segregating refugees in the camps was also a major problem (Iftikhar-ud-Din, 1947, pp. 25–26).

By the autumn of 1949, about four million Muslim refugees had been settled in rural areas of Pakistan. On the Kasi-Stha scheme, land was allotted to the refugees. In West Punjab, out of 2,473 urban factories vacated by Sikhs and Hindus, 1,798 were allotted to Muslim refugees coming from India. All these allotments were on a temporary basis. However, "since the property rights still rest with the absentee owners who are entitled to sell them in the free market" (Joseph, n.d., p. 411), that was also a major issue at that time and could affect the process of resettlement. On refugee issues, Quaid-e-Azam said this (Khan, n.d., p. 313):

On 13 August, the Pakistan Times reported that at least 5,000 refugees from Gurdaspur district had arrived in Lahore in the last three days. On 24 August the newspaper reported that the number had increased to 150,000. On 8 September it was reported that 50,000 were arriving in the city every day. On 14 September the total number of refugees was put at 1,200,000: Lahore received 500,000 via Wagah; Kasur in Lahore district, another 400,000; and Narowal in Sialkot district, 200,000; while about 100,000 crossed over the Sulaimanki bridge into Pakistan. As to their settlement, it was reported that Montgomery and Multan districts had absorbed 350,000 and Lahore district 100,000 (Pakistan, Ministry of Refugees, 1947). The rest settled in Jhang, Sargodha, Gujrat, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura districts. On 15 October, the Pakistan Times gave figures of 5.4 million Muslim refugees from East Punjab who would be relocated to West Punjab. It also mentioned figures of 495,000 Hindus and Sikhs who had entered India. According to the Pakistan Times of 7 November, in the Walton relief camps, 117,712 Muslim refugees were reported (Pakistan Times, 1947, November 7). On 6 November, Jinnah visited the Walton camps and found that the morale of the people was high. The Pakistan Times of 9 November reported that the Minister for Refugees and Rehabilitation in the Punjab government, Mian Iftikharuddin, had given a figure of 1,881,939 Muslims resettled in West Punjab. The Commander of the Pakistan Military Evacuation Organization, Brigadier F.H. Stevens said that 350,000 Muslims were still stranded in the East Punjab awaiting evacuation. The Pakistan Times reported on 25 December that 4,680,000 refugees had been evacuated by 10 December (Pakistan Times, 1947, December 22).

About 6,500,000 refugees migrated to Pakistan. Of these, 5,200,000 belonged to East Punjab and surrounding states while 130,000 came from Delhi Province. On the other hand, about 5,500,000 non-Muslims left West Pakistan (Dar, 2003, p. 173). It is also said that "a total of 7.25 million Muslim refugees migrated from India between 1947 and 1951 (Thandi, 2004, p. 64)" and about half a million people were killed within a few months of Partition (Saleem, 2003, p. 85). However, Sargodha was the only district city in West Punjab where Hindus and Sikhs could move freely. These non-Muslims constituted 14.88% of the total population. Lahore district absorbed about 100,000 refugees. Multan and Montgomery (Ahmed, 2012, p. 315) (now Sahiwal) absorbed 350,000 refugees and the rest were absorbed by the districts of Sargodha, Sheikhupura, Gujrat, Jhang. Of these, Sargodha was the only one with a large Muslim refugee population from India. Muslim refugees belonging to the capitalist class preferred to settle in smaller towns like Sargodha, Lyallpur, Jhang and Gujranwala, all of which were quite far from the border area (Ahmed, 2012, p. 315). About 73% of the migrants from India landed in West Punjab, which numbered over five million people and constituted a quarter of the population by the end of the migration process. For example, 43% of the population of Lahore was made up of migrants; The proportion was 65% for Jhang, 50% for Gujranwala, 49% for Multan and 69% for both Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) and Sargodha. They soon settled in western Punjab (Chattha, 2011, p. 97).

By the end of October 1947, about 720,000 Muslim refugees expected a smooth migration to West Punjab. Sargodha, Faisalabad and Gujranwala absorbed most of the refugees by 1951. About 40% of the refugees settled in Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi and Sahiwal (Waseem, 2007, p. 108). On the other hand, 32,500 in Sargodha, 366,500 in Rawalpindi, 105,000 in Muzaffargarh, 50,000 in Dera Ghazi Khan, 90,000 in Sialkot, 148,000 in Multan, 32,000 in Gujranwala, 8,500 in Montgomery, 259,600 in Sheikhupura, 167,500 in Lyallpur, 59,000 in Jhang and 8,000 in Lahore. Similarly, non-Muslims also hoped for a smooth migration to East Punjab (Hindustan Times, 1947, p. 3). Aircraft were provided to evacuate non-Muslim refugees from Sargodha, Lyallpur (Faisalabad), Sialkot and Dera Ismail Khan charter. A special organization was also started and a special officer was appointed to control the "air movement of refugees". In total, West Punjab received 5.5 million refugees and East Punjab received 3.5 million refugees. From the above statements, it can be assumed that 1/6th of the population of West Punjab is 'Muhajirs'. The following table shows the total figures of those awaiting migration (non-Muslims) and settlement (Muslims) in Sargodha district (Rashid & Haniffa, 2018).

Walton Road Refugees Camp

The formation of Walton Camp was directly related to the large-scale migration due to the partition of India. Estimates suggest that the number of migrants who crossed into India and Pakistan between 1947 and 1951 ranged between 14 million and 18 million while almost 7 million and 8 million Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Lahore was the primary point of entry for the refugees in West Punjab. As per official sources, up till the end of September 1947, hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees came through Walton Camp. In the beginning, Walton Camp was

only a transit camp which soon grew into a large settlement of tents, barracks, and huts covering several hundred acres of land. It was very difficult for the government to deal with this situation owing to the limited economic and administrative resources at the time of independence of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 1953, pp. 18–25; Khan, 2017, pp. 136–145).

The conditions prevailing at Walton Camp demonstrated the magnitude of the refugee problem. Refugees resided in tents made of cloth and bamboo shelters erected in open ground. There were different zones in the camp depending on the size of the family, gender, and country of origin. Separate zones were set up for women, children, and orphans. However, the facilities provided fell short of the mark owing to the sheer volume of the refugees coming in. According to the contemporary press accounts, refugees initially had to sleep in the open as there were not enough shelters for them. The lack of blankets, clothes, and bedding was especially acute in the winter of 1947–48 (Pakistan Times, 1947, September 3; Civil and Military Gazette, 1947, September 8).

In 1947, the official population of British India was about 390 million. The official estimate is that 60 million migrated to their new homes. Thus, about 17.5 percent of the entire subcontinent was forced to migrate. No wonder it is considered the 'largest exodus in human history'. The hatred that arose resulted in inhuman experiences, especially for women, and their stories are not of interest to our rulers and bureaucrats. Records show that at its peak, 80,000 people were marching towards this camp in a single day. Of these, an average of more than 6,000 died every day from cholera and starvation. The food donated by the people of Lahore was all they could get. Most of the grain markets were emptied, and people from nearby villages donated cartloads of wheat and rice, vegetables, cooking oil and spices. In the end, these were the ones who helped the poor. This is still the case no matter what the crisis. New cemeteries sprang up at Walton and thousands of bodies were loaded into carts and carried upside down on poles by refugees, loaded onto stretchers. The Red Cross in Lahore estimated that in the two months starting on 15 August 1947, around 150,000 people were buried across Lahore and in abandoned fields. This is in Lahore alone. Inside the walled city, corporation carts were collecting 'unknown bodies' at a rate of over 750 per day and dumping them in fields on the banks of the Ravi River, mostly in Mahmud Boti (Talbot, 2006, pp. 3–16). This is the place where hundreds were dumped every day during the famine in the days of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, earning it the name 'the market of corpses'. The stories of what happened at the Walton refugee camp have never come to light, although it remains a most important part of our 74-year history. Why has Pakistan forgotten those who sacrificed their lives, their homes and their means of earning to fulfill the aspirations of the founders of this beautiful country? It is amazing how millions of people have been cheated so that the 'merchants of claims' can prosper, as they are still in Pakistan and abroad (Chattha, 2018, pp. 273–293).

Women were affected more than any other group because of the violence of Partition. Many of the women found at Walton camp were separated from their husbands, fathers and brothers. Reports of rape, abduction, and forced marriage have been quite common amid the religious violence that occurred in Punjab. According to Urvashi Butalia, women served as symbolic victims of communal honor and revenge during Partition. At Walton camp, many women had

reported themselves as widows or were registered as heads of families who raised children on their own. The government set up special sections and relief centers to take care of their physical requirements such as food, clothes and medicine but psychological problems prevailed among women refugees (Butalia, 1998, p. 100).

Children belonged to yet another vulnerable group at Walton Camp. Many children were either orphaned or deprived of one or both parents during migration. Many children came to the camp in a state of shock and malnutrition. Contemporary accounts refer to many instances of orphaned children wandering about in the camp in search of their families. Temporary schools and orphanages were set up by the government and voluntary organizations. Attempts were made by social workers to trace missing children through registration records and newspapers. Even after all these measures, many children stayed permanently estranged from their families and led their lives in Pakistan without any family support (Butalia, 1998, pp. 123–124). The issue of health and sanitation was one of the major concerns for Walton Camp. The overcrowded and unhygienic situation posed a threat of disease breakout. Diseases such as cholera, dysentery, malaria, and smallpox endangered the refugees, particularly the vulnerable groups like the children and old people. At the onset, the medical facilities were not sufficient due to the lack of expertise and hospitals in Pakistan. With the help of the military and non-governmental organizations, emergency hospitals were opened. The doctors and nurses operated under harsh situations with thousands of patients every day (Government of Pakistan, 1948, pp. 8–10).

Walton Refugee Camp, which was set up outside of Lahore in August 1947, is said to be one of the biggest refugee camps built at the time of partition of British India. This camp was initially intended to provide temporary shelter to the thousands of refugees who were fleeing Lahore and the rest of West Punjab. At a later stage, the camp also provided refuge to the Muslims fleeing from East Punjab and other areas of India. According to the historical accounts, there was a huge number of people coming into the camp; in one day, around 80,000 refugees entered the camp. By the month of April 1948, there were about one million refugees in Lahore and two fifths of them were living in camps, with Walton being the biggest among them. Most of the Hindus and Sikhs who sought refuge in Walton had lost their homes, families, and business interests during the riots of 1947 (Government of Pakistan, 1948). They had arrived in the camp either as survivors of train and caravan attacks or as people having escaped with a small number of possessions. The conditions of the women and children were particularly harsh. The families lived in crowded tents with little food, drinking water, and healthcare facilities available to them. The epidemics of cholera, dysentery, and malnutrition were common, resulting in many deaths among the refugees due to diseases and starvation. There have been accounts of sorrow where people were searching for their missing children or grieving over their dead relatives (Punjab Government, 1948). It is challenging to come up with the exact number of Hindus and Sikhs that passed through Walton, but from what is known from historical research, the figures indicate that millions of people were displaced due to Partition, where about 12-15 million people migrated into and out of India and Pakistan. Lahore, which had a good number of Hindus and Sikhs, accounting for over one-third of its total population, became devoid of such communities by the end of 1947. Therefore, Walton

Camp provided the necessary shelter and served as a transit point in what can be called one of the most tragic events in the history of mankind (Dawn, 2026, June 20).

Table No 1: Violence in Major Districts of Punjab during the 1947 Partition

District	Estimated Deaths	Estimated Displaced Persons
Lahore	20000-30000	500,000+
Rawalpindi	5000-10000	300,000+
Multan	2000-5000	150,000+
Montgomery	1000-3000	250,000-350,000
Amritsar	30000-50000	700,000+

Sources: The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed Book by Ishtiaq Ahmed.

Table 1 shows that the communal violence that took place in the major districts of Punjab region in the year 1947 was uneven but highly devastating. According to the data in Table 1, Amritsar district and Lahore district were the areas with the greatest number of deaths that ranged between 30,000 and 50,000 and 20,000 and 30,000, respectively, and in which the numbers of the displaced people exceeded 500,000. Rawalpindi was one of the first areas where the major outbreaks of the communal violence occurred in March 1947 and where an estimated death rate reached 5,000-10,000, and the number of the displaced people surpassed 300,000. As for Multan and Montgomery (which is now known as Sahiwal), the death rate is estimated to be much lower and ranged from 2,000-5,000 and 1,000-3,000, respectively, but the numbers of displaced people were significantly higher than in other districts. Overall, the table demonstrates that while the intensity of violence varied from district to district, the humanitarian consequences were profound throughout Punjab. The widespread displacement of millions transformed the demographic composition of the province, making migration and rehabilitation one of the most significant challenges faced by the newly established governments of India and Pakistan in the aftermath of Partition.

Conclusion

The partition of Punjab in 1947 is one of the largest and most traumatic events of forced population displacement in 20th-century world history. The division of the Punjab province resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. It was characterized by communal bloodshed and violence, along with widespread destruction of property on both sides of the newly drawn border. Newly established government was under a severe burden. Entry points with transit centers such as the refugee camp at Walton placed demanding logistical strains on resources, resulting in epidemic diseases and a large number of casualties among incoming refugees. Heavy rains further worsened these conditions. Despite of severe conditions, districts like Montgomery, played a pivotal role in absorbing thousands of refugees from East Punjab. Canal colonies and fertile land attracted the refugees for their settlement in Montgomery (Sahiwal). The resettlement

and land allotment process in West Punjab faced economic disruption, loss of commercial assets, and administrative complexities that posed real barriers to the integration of migrants. All these factors transformed the socio-economic, demographic, and agricultural composition of West Punjab. The partition of 1947 is not merely a temporary state reorganization, but a deep socio-cultural and psychological rupture that continues to shape identity and collective memory in the region.

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