



19

Crossing Borders

47

Typset in Adobe Garamond Pro
A Publication Design project guided by Abhijith KR

*To represent the nation that was split in three, the book
has its text area divided into three columns.*

For all the lives that were irrevocably changed
at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947

01

The Years Leading up to
Partition: A Political Timeline

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The Years Leading up to Par

1885

Indian National Congress founded initially as a moderate body to press for greater opportunities for all Indians irrespective of religion. Demands include end of discriminatory practices in employment, greater public spending on education and lower taxes on the mass of poverty-stricken peasantry.

1905

Partition of Bengal. First attempted break up of a province of India by the British colonial government. Partition along religious lines leads to the initial development of Muslim political separatism in the following years. However, nationalist campaigns, lead to the annulment of partition and the reunification of Bengal in 1911.

1906

All-India Muslim League founded in Bengal by 'men of property and influence' from north India, with the primary aim of securing adequate Muslim political representation based on separate electorates for Muslims and Hindus.

**1914–
1918**

As the contribution of Indian soldiers to the defence of the British Empire is recognised by the British Cabinet in London, campaigns for Indian 'home rule' or swaraj intensify and many Muslim leaders, including Jinnah, become members of both political parties.

**1919–
1922**

Attempt at forging a permanent Hindu-Muslim nationalist political alliance, led by Gandhi who is now the dominant force within Congress. Gandhi launches his first campaign of 'non-cooperation' with British rule with the objective of attaining swaraj within a year. Jinnah views this approach as too radical, breaks with Gandhi and resigns from Congress. In 1922, Gandhi calls off the campaign, following outbreaks of violence in defiance of his insistence on peaceful, non-violent agitation. He is promptly arrested and sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

tion: A Political Timeline

1930–
1933

Gandhi launches further campaigns of strong Civil Disobedience, now based on the demand for Purna Swaraj. This time Muslim participation is very low compared to 1919-22, with the exception of the North West Frontier Province where the radical Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) movement of the local Pashtuns, historically known as Afghans, enthusiastically endorses civil disobedience. A day of peaceful protest in Peshawar is met with considerable violence from the British military resulting in over 200 predominantly Muslim civilian deaths.

1940–
1945

Congress protests against the British unilateral declaration of war on Germany on behalf of India. It launches a mass 'Quit India' campaign which is met with severe repression. In contrast, Jinnah and the Muslim League agree to cooperate with the British.

1947

At its Lahore session in 1940, the Muslim League puts forward the view that Muslims and Hindus make up two distinct 'nations of India'. On the strength of the League's enhanced status in British eyes, Jinnah conducts a skilful campaign to persuade Indian Muslims to accept his leadership so as to compel both the British and Congress to concede the idea of 'Pakistan' – which still remains at this stage quite vague.

Partition is now seen as the only solution by both parties. At the same time, the British decide to bring forward their departure from India by a full ten months. In June 1947, Viceroy Mountbatten broadcasts a rushed and incoherent partition plan to Indians, announcing that British withdrawal and the division of the country was to take place in just two months.



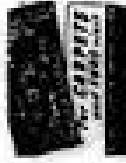
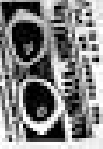
Train Routes—1947



INDIA, PAKISTAN, AND BURMA

INDIA INDEPENDENT : BRITISH RULE ENDS

THE NEW STAR REELS IN THE EAST


The Times of India


BIRTH OF INDIA'S FREEDOM

DELHI EDITION
 SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 1947
 NEW DELHI: MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 1947

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES WEEKLY
 LARGEST CIRCULATION IN NORTHERN, NORTH-WESTERN AND CENTRAL INDIA

Tricolour In Every Home; Cheering Croods Cry 'Jai Hind'

INDIA'S MILLIONS REJOICE



SCENES OF SPLENDOUR IN
 THE CAPITAL
 SALVO OF GUNS HERALDS DAWN OF
 NEW AGE
 NATIONAL STANDARD UNFURLED
 OVER RED FORT

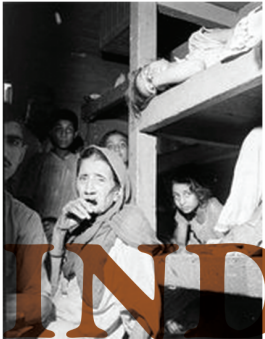
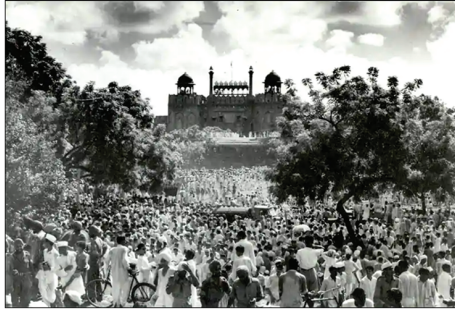
By Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, Saturday.—A night-altering events, crowded into 24 hours, marked the celebration of Indian Independence Day. Beginning with the waving



and marching and the National Standard





INDIANS
MILLIONS
REJOICED





1

Prologue



CHAPTER 30.

An Act to make provision for the setting up in India of two independent Dominions, to substitute other provisions for certain provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, which apply outside those Dominions, and to provide for other matters consequential on or connected with the setting up of those Dominions.

[18th July 1947.]

BE it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :—

1.—(1) As from the fifteenth day of August, nineteen hundred and forty-seven, two independent Dominions shall be set up in India, to be known respectively as India and Pakistan. The new Dominions.

(2) The said Dominions are hereafter in this Act referred to as "the new Dominions", and the said fifteenth day of August is hereafter in this Act referred to as "the appointed day".

2.—(1) Subject to the provisions of subsections (3) and (4) of this section, the territories of India shall be the territories under the sovereignty of His Majesty which, immediately before the appointed day, were included in British India except the territories which, under subsection (2) of this section, are to be the territories of Pakistan. Territories of the new Dominions.

In the
summer
and fall of
1947

In the summer and fall of 1947 the south Asian subcontinent witnessed an unimaginably bloody and disruptive upheaval that created one of the largest mass refugee crises of the last century.

As the clock struck midnight on August 15, 1947, celebratory shouts of freedom from the colonial rule were drowned out by the cries of millions frantically making their way through the corpse-littered landscape of nascent India and Pakistan. After more than one hundred years of British East India Company rule and an additional 90 years of the British Raj, the Indian subcontinent had finally achieved Independence.

What should have been a moment of crowning triumph after years of anti-colonial struggle was indelibly marred by unimaginable violence and bloodshed.

Up to two million people lost their lives. The darkened landscape bore silent witness to trains laden with the dead, decapitated bodies, limbs strewn along the sides of roads, and wanton rape and pillaging. There was nothing that could have prepared the approximately fourteen million refugees for this nightmare. The 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent into the independent nations of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan was accompanied by one of the largest mass migrations in human history and violence on a scale that had seldom been seen before. As the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal were effectively split in half, approximately seven million Hindus and Sikhs and seven million Muslims found themselves in the wrong country. Believing they would return “home,” many families left their valuables behind before they packed up their essential belongings and began the trek to India or West or East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Many never made it.

The event saw bloodshed and savagery of barbaric proportions. Propaganda had built up during the preceding war years and ultimately, 1947 became a catastrophic imbroglio as many contingencies collided. Who was to be held accountable for the blood spilt, the families torn apart, the millions uprooted?

One could blame the damage on the July 15, 1947 decision by the British to hand over power only a month later on August 15, 1947, a full ten months earlier than anticipated. The British prime minister, Clement Attlee's new Labour government in 1945 was keen to grant independence, perhaps this related to the fact the British could not afford to support and finance an empire after the war.

One could blame the hastily drawn borders, which were created by a British lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliffe who lacked basic knowledge of India and was given only five weeks to redraw all the borders of South Asia. According to historian Ayesha Jalal, 'it was rather an arbitrary line, which in some instances cut villages into two.' Radcliffe flew only once in a Dakota over the parts of northern India before actually demarcating borders.

One could even fault the increasingly hostile rhetoric that accompanied the rise of Hindu and Muslim nationalism or the divide and rule policies of the British.

Many solely blame Jinnah, the British, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha.

A brilliant legal mind, Jinnah fought his corner doggedly and could convince most of India's Muslims that it was impossible to trust their future to an overwhelmingly Hindu India without built-in safeguards to ensure their voices would be heard.

This is the kind of demand insecure minorities have always made through history, be they Kurds in West Asia, Chechens in Russia, Uighurs in China, and, lest we forget, or dare to admit, the Mizos, the Nagas and the Kashmiris in India today.

Ever since 1947, India and Pakistan have nourished a deep-rooted mutual antipathy. They have fought two inconclusive wars over the disputed region of Kashmir—the only Muslim-majority area to remain within India. Both countries find themselves more vulnerable than ever to religious extremism. In some sense, seven decades on, well over a billion people still live in the shadow of Partition.





“Do you foresee any mass transfer of population?” one journalist asked Mountbatten at a press conference in Delhi, after the plan was announced.

“Personally, I don’t see it,” he replied.

Smilesh Sharma	"Baffa, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	34.4407	73.2205	28.6443	77.242			
Shen Singh Kukkal	"Baffa, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan"	"Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India"	34.4407	73.2205	26.7658	83.3649			
Dinabandhu Majumdar	"Bagan, Barisal Division, Bangladesh"	"Kashipur, West Bengal, India"	22.7051	90.3731	23.4341	86.6678			
Paritosh Sengupta	"Bagbazar, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.6026	88.3659	22.6026	88.3659			
Kulada Prasad Ray	"Bagbazar, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.6026	88.3659	22.6026	88.3659			
Parimal Chakraborty	"Bagbazar, West Bengal, India"	"Lower Circular Road, Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6026	88.3659	22.5474	88.3638			
Bina Pani Thakur	"Bagbazar, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.6026	88.3659	22.6026	88.3659			
Devi Kaur	"Bagdana, Gujarat, India"	"Sri Muktsar Sahib, Punjab, India"	21.1932	71.4959	30.4618	74.5064			
Isar Singh	"Bagdana, Gujarat, India"	"Sri Muktsar Sahib, Punjab, India"	21.1932	71.4959	30.4618	74.5064			
Ira Majumdar	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	Did Not Migrate	22.6555	89.7662	22.6555	89.7662			
Jayantee Rani Ghosh	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	Did Not Migrate	22.6555	89.7662	22.6555	89.7662			
Kalyani Dutta	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.5726	88.3639			
Ranjan Kumar Bhattacharjee	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Haihati, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.8929	88.422			
Amoti Sen	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.5726	88.3639			
Aravinda Bose	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.5726	88.3639			
Gour Chatterjee	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.5726	88.3639			
Gouranga Sundra Mitra	"Bagerhat, Khulba Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	22.6555	89.7662	22.5726	88.3639			
Sajal Roy Chowdhury	"Bagerhat Town, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.8456	89.5403	22.8456	89.5403			
Surta Singh Bhinder	"Bagga Khurd, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	30.9507	75.7655	30.9507	75.7655			
Muhammad Sharif Janjua	"Bagga, Punjab, India"	"Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan"	31.0392	75.3594	31.5203	74.3587			
Rama Modak	"Baghair, Dhaka Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	23.669	90.3854	22.5726	88.3639			
Bal Krishan Gupta	"Bagha Purana, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	30.6879	75.0961	30.6879	75.0961			
Lakshmi Mandal	"Bagnan, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.4683	87.9707	22.4683	87.9707			
Bhagvan Swarup Sharma	"Bagrai Khurd, Uttar Pradesh, India"	Did Not Migrate	28.2392	77.8953	28.2392	77.8953			
"Ashok Singh Bagrian	"Bagrian, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	30.4306	76.0348	30.4306	76.0348			
Harbans Kaur Rai	"Bagrian, Punjab, India"	"Sunam, Punjab, India"	30.4306	76.0348	30.1251	75.8137			
Muhammad Mehfooz Khan	"Bahadurpur, Haryana, India"	"Midh Ranjha, Punjab, Pakistan"	28.3339	77.4279	32.057	73.1718			
Ilurun Nahar	"Baharampur, West Bengal, India"	"Dhaka, Bangladesh"	24.0988	88.2679	23.8103	90.4125			
Mohammad Badiuzzaman	"Baharampur, West Bengal, India"	"Rajshahi, Bangladesh"	24.0988	88.2679	24.3635	88.6241			
Shantiprabha Chakraborty	"Baharia, Chittagong Division, Bangladesh"	Did Not Migrate	23.1899	90.6498	23.1899	90.6498			
Chayaranji Manna	"Baharu, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	22.2204	88.4283	22.2204	88.4283			
Muhammad Anwar Amin	"Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan"	Did Not Migrate	30.0024	73.2411	30.0024	73.2411			
Jasmeel Kaur Dhalliwal	"Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Jassiana, Punjab, India"	30.0024	73.2411	30.566	74.5185			
Muhammad Rafiq	"Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan"	Did Not Migrate	29.9991	73.2588	29.9991	73.2588			
Ram Swaroop Rewari	"Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	30.0024	73.2411	28.6443	77.242			
Sultan Ahmad Akhtar	"Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan"	Did Not Migrate	29.9991	73.2588	29.9991	73.2588			
Chandra Prakash Ghai	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Bikaner, Rajasthan, India"	29.3543	71.6911	28.0134	73.3502			
Surjit Kaur Brar	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Ratta Khera, Punjab, India"	29.3544	71.6911	30.2904	74.4162			
Ram Devi	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Wahag Ke, Punjab, India"	29.3543	71.6911	30.9094	74.5063			
Bachitar Singh	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Pindi Balochan, Punjab, India"	29.3543	71.6911	30.6872	74.5009			
Naheed Fayyaz Shaikh	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	Did Not Migrate	29.3957	71.6833	29.3957	71.6833			
Rajkumari Malik	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	29.3544	71.6911	28.6443	77.242			
Ranjit Singh Brar	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Ferozepur, Punjab, India"	29.3544	71.6911	30.9331	74.6224			
Gurdev Singh	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Pindi Balochan, Punjab, India"	29.3543	71.6911	30.6872	74.5009			
Pritam Singh Sidhu	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Pindi Balochan, Punjab, India"	29.3544	71.6911	30.6872	74.5009			
Hazara Singh Dhalliwal	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Ferozepur, Punjab, India"	29.3543	71.6911	30.9331	74.6224			
Satvaenal Choudhry	"Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Kurukshetra, Haryana, India"	29.3957	71.6833	29.9695	76.8782			
Gurbachan Kaur	"Assandh, Haryana, India"	"Panipat, Haryana, India"	29.5201	76.6142	29.3909	76.9635			
Tulsi Bhattacharjee	"Astagam, Dhaka Division, Bangladesh"	"Agartala, Tripura, India"	24.2795	91.1185	23.8315	91.2868			
On Prakash Srivastava	"Aswamau, Uttar Pradesh, India"	Did Not Migrate	27.2826	80.6854	27.2826	80.6854			
Tapan Roy	"Atharabari, Mymensingh Division, Bangladesh"	"Chinsurah, West Bengal, India"	24.6339	90.7141	22.8859	88.3919			
Lia Kanjilaal	"Atapara, Dhaka Division, Bangladesh"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	23.5422	90.317	22.5726	88.3639			
Banta Singh	"Attari, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	31.5978	74.6019	31.5978	74.6019			
Abdul Majeed	"Attari, Punjab, India"	"Kasur, Punjab, Pakistan"	31.5978	74.602	31.1176	74.4499			
Kuldip Singh Bhandari	"Attari, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	31.5978	74.6019	31.5978	74.6019			
Chandermohini Sharma	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Haridwar, Uttarkhand, India"	33.766	72.3609	29.9457	78.1642			
Mohan Lal Jain	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Rohtak, Haryana, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.8955	76.6066			
Shiv Prakash Mehdiratta	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Jalandhar, Punjab, India"	33.766	72.3609	31.326	75.5762			
Ramkumari Kakar	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.6443	77.242			
Virendra Kumar Sharma	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Nabha, Punjab, India"	33.766	72.3609	30.373	76.147			
Vishwanand Tandon	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Faridabad, Haryana, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.4089	77.3178			
Ran Nath Chadha	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Chandausi, Uttar Pradesh, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.4481	78.7796			
Pran Kumar Basin	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.6443	77.242			
Durga Dutt Sharma	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Rohtak, Haryana, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.8955	76.6066			
Ascharaj Singh	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Patiala, Punjab, India"	33.766	72.3609	30.3398	76.3869			
Pritam Bhatia	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Jalandhar, Punjab, India"	33.766	72.3609	31.326	75.5762			
Krishna Bhole	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India"	33.766	72.3609	26.2182	78.1828			
Niranjan Singh	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Wagah, Punjab, Pakistan"	33.766	72.3609	31.6047	74.5741			
Shri Chand	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India"	33.766	72.3609	28.9845	77.7064			
Sukhdev Sharma	"Attock, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Ludhiana, Punjab, India"	33.766	72.3609	30.901	75.8573			
Khushi Muhammad	"Attoke Awan, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Attoke Awan, Punjab, Pakistan"	31.5996	74.4921	31.6037	74.4939			
Gangadhar Bhavnano Pant	"Aundh, Maharashtra, India"	Did Not Migrate	17.5397	74.3349	17.5397	74.3349			
Wajid Ali Khan	"Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India"	"Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan"	19.8762	75.433	24.8607	67.0011			
Harbahjan Kaur Kohli	"Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India"	Did Not Migrate	19.8762	75.433	19.8762	75.433			
Santosh Kohli	"Aurangabad, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India"	32.4126	73.7592	32.7266	73.857			
Jeejo	"Awan, Ferozepur District, Punjab, India"	Did Not Migrate	30.7786	74.3543	30.7786	74.3543			
Noor-ud-din Shah	"Awantabhawana, Jammu and Kashmir, India"	"Kolkata, West Bengal, India"	34.1373	74.8112	22.5726	88.3639			
Gurumukh Singh Banga	"Azakhal, Peshawar, Pakistan"	"Mumbai, Maharashtra, India"	33.7997	71.6214	19.076	72.8777			
Tahira Khatoon	"Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India"	Did Not Migrate	26.0737	83.1859	26.0737	83.1859			
Nisar Ahmad	"Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India"	Did Not Migrate	26.0737	83.1859	26.0737	83.1859			
Shakoori Begum	"Azampur, Haryana, India"	"Nandpur, Gurjanwala District, Punjab, Pakistan"	30.4354	77.1049	31.9862	74.27			
Pyana Singh	"Azimabad, Punjab, Pakistan"	"Delhi, India"	29.9681	72.5697	28.6443	77.242			
Biman Srinial	"Azimganj, West Bengal, India"	Did Not Migrate	24.2351	88.2607	24.2351	88.2607			
Prahlad Ranjan Ray	"Azimpur, Dhaka Division, Bangladesh"	"Nabadwip, West Bengal, India"	23.7286	90.3854	23.4036	88.3676			

Migration data Partition, 1947

Data source: 1947 Archive

2

A Survivor's Witness Account

the stories of people
who lived through
it provide a different
perspective

Where the popularly accepted narrative of the partition stresses upon geo political and religious factors, and characterizes the violence as neighbour turning against neighbour and bands of weapon-laden young men in the throes of a communal frenzy seeking out their next victims, the stories of people who lived through it provide a different perspective. They not only help illuminate a period that has been difficult to make sense of with its hazy documentation, but also provide a challenge to the popular politically driven narratives of the partition, countering them with real, lived human experiences.

My grandmother doesn't know when she was born; in those times, people rarely did. There was no documentation, only the vague memory of what month of the Punjabi calendar it might have been, or perhaps what season of harvest it was. Any set of parents then had an awful lot of births to remember, so they often did not.

She does, however, remember that she had just gone into the fourth grade when Hindustan was torn apart. She had lost her father six months earlier.

She can still almost recall his face, he owned and ran a cloth shop, she tells me. He had a fever for a few days before he passed away. It was Sankranti the day he fell ill, a religious and cultural festival, he had set up a stall to distribute drinks to people as an act of charity. She thinks it was probably the heat that caused him to fall unwell. She doesn't remember much more than what her mother would later tell her, only that she and her siblings were called home from school early, at 12 'o' clock.

They lived in the Sillanwali tehsil of zila Sargodha in Pakistan. My grandmother, her parents, four sisters, and two brothers. They lived with their entire extended family— two *chaachas*, three *buas*, and all their children, all in one big haveli, the map of which she still remembers.

They had a large iron gate, she tells me, the kind with circular handles, like those of a palace. Each family had two bedrooms and a large verandah to themselves within the sizeable house. It must have had 15 rooms. She remembers a large tandoor to the left of the house if one entered from the main door, all their rotis were made there.

I ask her about the religious divide of the time, if any. There was none she tells me, everyone lived together in harmony, they didn't care who prayed to which god. They were neighbours, they treated each other the same. There were hindus, sikhs and muslims all on the same street.

“ਸਾਰੇ ਇੱਕ ਦੂਜੇ ਡਾ ਨਮਕ ਖਾਂਡੇ ਸੀ”¹

¹ *sare ik duje da namak khande si*
(lit.) *We shared salt*
We lived in harmony.

The first event of the partition she remembers was the death of her neighbours. *Dadi's naana* was good friends with them, they had set out to meet him one day in early August. Six of them in a tonga, three in the front and three at the back. They were slaughtered on the way. The news spread like wildfire in their small *pind*, that was when they first began to feel the pangs of fear that would soon become a constant companion.

Punjab was split down the middle and they were soon told to leave, and fast. She remembers the chaos of those days. She was the first to make the journey eastwards. Her older *mamaji* brought her and his four children. When asked why only her, she tells me it was because he loved her best.

They were set to leave around the middle of August, just after the official announcement of the partition. She remembers the morning of that day; they had packed all of their things and were just getting ready to leave when they heard that their train had been cancelled. That same day, her *mamaji* had an accident with a piece of glass and injured himself, severely.

Their plans were delayed by two weeks.

It was in the first week of September that they began the four-day journey to Amritsar. Even at that age the children knew that when the trains slowed down, it meant bad things were happening. They kept their heads lowered when the train would stop, keeping well out of view of the windows.

My dadi tells me of the horrors she saw, things she's never told me before. She tells me of the trains they passed, full of severed bodies. She describes the shade of red that the Sutlej river had turned. She still remembers the corpses floating in the canals they passed over. She was nine years old.

They spent the next twenty days in Amritsar, they found shelter in one of the camps there. Those days are hazy in her memory nearly seventy-three years later. She remembers them moving to Jalandhar in early October.

The rest of her family joined her there. There weren't enough trains operating by the time they started the same journey so they had to travel in trucks across the border, shared by many strangers. My dadi's mother told her of how they left their things in Pakistan, in the house of a muslim family that was their friend.

“ਬਹੁਤ ਪਿਆਰ ਸੀ ਸਾਡੇ ਵਿਚ”²

² *boht pyaar si saade vich*
There was a lot of love between us

They painstakingly packed their belongings. There was a charpoi that my great grandmother had embroidered and weaved herself. She placed trunks of their belongings on top of that to protect it from damage as they stuffed a single room full of their goods and chattels. They left with the firm belief that they would return home soon.

Her younger *mamaji* had made the journey even earlier. At fifteen years of age, he had brought over the entire family's gold and documents. It was on account of his efforts that everyone was able to have land issued. They lived together for two months until the allotment process was finalised after which they were all assigned homes in different places— Salimgarh, Jalandhar, and Ambala.

She says all combined, it was still less than the land they had had in Sargodha but even so, they were some of the luckier ones.

The house they got was a semi-constructed, one-story home in Jalandhar. They later built two more floors as well as a verandah. It was as though the family who had it before intended to do the same. The building material was all there, ready to be used.

Dadi says it was easier because they were all together through it; they lost everything together, and they bore the grief of it all the same way.

Her mother suffered the most, *dadi* tells me, first she lost her husband, becoming dependent on her brothers to help raise her children and then, she lost her home. Her weak lungs, coupled with anxiety caused by trauma had her frequently ill. She spoke often of the life left behind, of her things, of her home.

“ਸਭ ਕੁਝ ਛੱਡ ਕੇ ਆ ਗਏ”³

³ *sab kujh chhad ke aa gaye*
We left everything and came

They didn't let go of the hope of going back dadi tells me, not until six months later when they had all settled into their new routines.

She had begun school, admitted into the fourth grade. Her brothers got jobs at the bank and in the military. Life goes on, they learnt, somehow wounds heal. Slowly and surely memories become less painful to recall. They were lucky. The entire family made it here. There was a distant *chaacha* and his family who were tortured and robbed but the military managed to get them across the border in the dead of the night. They were shaken and bruised but they recovered too.

The friends whose home they had left their things in wrote letters to them for a few months—asking after their health, if they had settled. There was genuine love there, dadi said. Eventually, however, the possibility of going back had diminished and the stream of contact trickled out.

She tells me again that they were amongst the luckier ones that made it across the border safely. They didn't see as much as they later heard others did.

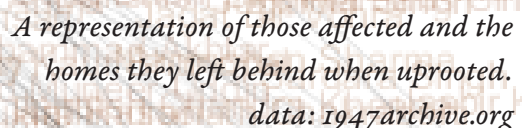
Dadi was young enough to be able to settle into her new life easily enough. The language she spoke remained the same, the culture she was surrounded by was almost indistinguishable from the one she left behind and most of all her family was all there.

She told me this countless times.
Above all, they had each other.

"ਅਸੀਂ ਸਭ ਕੱਠੇ ਸਨ"⁴

⁴ *asi sab kathe saan*
We were all together

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3

Epilogue

The stories of Partition are horrific. Communal hatred killed humanity, and in turn, it made killers out of the men.

“We must kill them before they kill us” became the justification.

The pain of all the lives that were irreparably damaged lives on. The India of 1947 rang out with gun shots, the agony that lay deep in the screams of people praying for mercy, the cries of anguish that faded into the wails of broken families that listened sleeplessly for announcements of missing people that played on the radios.

Most witness stories, recalled even eighty years after they took place are enough to push one to tears. The torment of that epoch transcends the years passed.

The decisions were taken by those who had close to nothing to lose.

Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy, was told by the British prime minister, Clement Attlee, in March 1947 to negotiate an exit deal with Indian leaders by October; if he could not, Britain would leave India with no deal by June 1948. The decision to speed this up and leave on August 15 was Lord Mountbatten's. The decision to grant this power to Lord Mountbatten, a naval officer nicknamed the “Master of Disaster” in the admiralty for his propensity to damage warships by precipitate action, was Mr. Attlee's.

Cyril Radcliffe, who had never been to Asia, arrived in India thirty-six days before the date of the partition to draw the lines to split one of the world's largest and most ethnically diverse countries. On August 9, he finished drawing the map, but the British viceroy, his superior, kept it a secret. He didn't want the British to be blamed for any ensuing violence. But it prolonged the uncertainty for millions and very likely increased the loss of life to come.

Neither Jawaharlal Nehru nor Muhammad Ali Jinnah, foresaw the scale of the coming violence. Mr. Nehru had told a journalist in 1946 that "when the British go, there will be no more communal trouble in India." Mr. Jinnah had pushed for the partition to create Pakistan, a homeland for Muslims, who would otherwise be a minority in a Hindu-dominated superstate. He was backed by British imperialists, notably Winston Churchill, who believed Pakistan would prove a faithful friend to the West and a bulwark between the Soviet Union and a socialist India.

It was however, the common citizen that bore the brunt of the decision. It was them that turned into men they themselves couldn't recognise. It was them that brutally killed the neighbours who saw a different God. A generation that lived two lives, one that they had always known, and one that was forced on them. They are more than just stories, more than just the demographic they were regarded as at the time. They were human beings. Ones that had to learn to accept fate as it came.

In all the accounts I have heard and read, there seems to be a constant theme of gratefulness, there is scant trace of bitterness, just loss, longing and gratitude for having survived.

Hate seemed to have been forced upon them, especially on the spirited youth of the day, each seeking revenge for a thousand others but against enemies that had the same face as them. A mirror was broken in half on 15th august, 1947, and the pieces have been parallelly placed, reflecting each other endlessly ever since.



“There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be.”

— Jawaharlal Nehru

Midnight on August 15, 1947

‘I am asking myself this question now,’ Mountbatten was quoted as saying. ‘Would I have said, let’s hold India together and not divide it? Would I have put back the clock, and held the position? Most probably.’

We are separated from the ones that saw Partition by two generations now. There is a scarily sparse amount of documentation of the time that shaped the South Asian subcontinent. This is my attempt at contributing whatever I can—documenting the story closest to me.

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To my sister, thank you for answering my endless “Does this look better or this?”

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