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Partition, Border-Making and Identity Construction: An Oral History of Migrants and Locals in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research article critically examines the profound impact of the Partition and subsequent border-making on the conceptualization of community identity in Punjab in comparison to the conception of the community during British rule, with a particular focus on the city of Okara. By drawing on oral histories from Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in the Okara, the study seeks to explore the dynamics of community identity before and after the Partition. The article is structured around three primary themes: first, it analyzes the prevailing processes of community identity construction in Okara during the British colonial period. Secondly, the impact of the partition and border making on community identity construction in the Punjab region, particularly in Okara. The third aspect examines the transformation of community identities among both residents and migrants in the aftermath of Partition, highlighting how forced border-making and displacement reshaped the region's socio-cultural fabric. The study argues that in Pre-Partition Punjab, the identity of the community was derived from locality or residence in Okara. However, at the time of the Partition of Punjab, when communalism was prevalent throughout Punjab, the community's identity was constructed based on religion in Okara. Nevertheless, when border making was completed and no longer were migrants pouring into Okara after three years of partition in Punjab, the identity constructed again became localized, and the identity of the community constructed based on locality assumed primacy. Thus, increasing tensions between the locals and the refugees.

INTRODUCTION

This research article critically explores the significant impact of the Partition and the subsequent border-making on the formation of community identity in Punjab comparatively to the conception of community during British period, specifically focusing on the city of Okara. By drawing on oral histories from Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in the Okara, the study

seeks to explore the dynamics of community identity before and after the Partition. The article is structured around three primary themes: first, it analyzes the prevailing processes of community identity construction in Okara during the British colonial period. Secondly, the impact of the partition and border making on community identity construction in the Punjab region, particularly in Okara. The third aspect examines the transformation of community identities among both residents and migrants in the aftermath of Partition, highlighting how forced border-making and displacement reshaped the region's socio-cultural fabric.

The study posits that prior to Partition, community identity in Okara was largely defined by locality and residence. However, with the onset of Partition and the intensification of communalism across Punjab, religious identity began to take precedence in the construction of community identity within Okara. As the border-making process concluded and the influx of migrants ceased by 1950, the identity that had emerged was once again localized, with a resurgence of community identity based on territorial ties. This shift led to heightened tensions between the local population and the refugees.

In August 1947, the British rule over the Indian sub-continent ended, and two separate states came into being: Pakistan and India. Pakistan was created as a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. The Muslim leaders belonging to the All India Muslim League contemplated that the religion of Islam would be a source of Nationalism, due to which they encouraged the exchange of population from India to Pakistan (Haider, 2013; Qasmi, 2019). Consequently, the Partition of the Indian sub-continent compelled people to leave their homelands. As a result, almost 12 to 14.5 million people migrated across the nascent demarcated border between India and Pakistan (Virdee, 2018; Das, 2022).

When Pakistan came into being, there were two wings of Pakistan. Migrants came to West Pakistan from the region of United Province, Princely States, Delhi, and East Punjab. On the other hand, Migrants also came to the Eastern Wing of Pakistan from East Bengal. On the other hand, the migrants left West Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, and Bahawalpur for India. (Ali, 2020). It was decided under the 3rd June plan 1947, that the partition of Punjab and Bengal would take place, and the Muslim population would migrate to Pakistan; while the Hindu and Sikh population would migrate from Pakistan to India.

Before the Partition, there was a The predominant population of Sikhs in Okara city and Muslims were in the minority, but there were no communal tensions between them before the 1940s (Ahmed, 2012; Saif, personal communication, 2021). Most of the agricultural lands were allotted to those Sikhs who were serving in the military of British India (Singh, 2021). At the time of the Partition of Punjab, the increase in communal tensions compelled the Sikh population of Okara to migrate to the Eastern Punjab, India.

On the other hand, the Muslim population from East Punjab migrated to West Punjab. Communalism took the lives of many Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs who were migrating through the newly established porous border of Punjab in 1947. In July 1950, border making was completed as a result of the Liaqat-Nehru Pact, which closed borders to migration. However, identity constructed based on religion did not provide cohesion between the migrants and the local Muslim community in Okara; rather, the tensions began to emerge between them as soon as migrants arrived in West Punjab from East Punjab.

Literature Review

The existing literature on the partition of Punjab could be divided into two categories. The first category of literature examines the degree of violence that erupted following the partition of Punjab and the steps taken by the Pakistani government to mitigate the impact of partition, including the refugee crisis (Ali, 2019; Jamil, 2018; Ahmed, 2012). The second category of literature examines the impact of partition on the socioeconomic dynamics and memory of the people by comparing the cities of East Punjab and West Punjab in India and Pakistan, respectively (Chatta, 2009; Virdee, 2019; Talbot, 2007).

Ishtiaq Ahmed (2012), in his study of the violence in Punjab, argues that before 1947, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims lived in harmony with each other. As soon as the partition of Punjab was announced on 3rd June 1947, communalism emerged in Punjab. The author has selected the regions of Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi from West Punjab, as well as Amritsar and Jullundur from East Punjab. The author has collected data from oral history, archival sources, including the secret fortnightly reports of the British, Partition papers, and newspapers, to document the degree of violence that prevailed from January 1947 to December 1947. However, Ahmed (2012) only focuses on the theme of ethnic cleansing in documenting the partition violence in Punjab. He does not delve into the steps taken by the government to contain the violence in Punjab.

Rabia Umar Ali (2019) and Busharat Elahi Jamil (2018) discuss the role played by the Pakistani government in containing the violence. Both authors agree on the fact that despite different steps taken by the government of Pakistan, they were unable to control the violence in Punjab. The authors rely on the archival data to narrate the steps taken by the government of Pakistan to control violence. Jamil (2018) discusses how the Pakistani government faced difficulties in accommodating, facilitating, settling, and rehabilitating refugees. The Punjab Boundary Commission (PBC) and the Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) were established to maintain law and order on the border between Punjab and Pakistan. Moreover, the economic pressures originating from the settlement and rehabilitation of refugees have given rise to many social, fiscal, and political challenges in the West Punjab, making it more difficult to carry out the refugee rehabilitation process in Punjab.

Ali (2019) argues, on the other hand, that the Liaqat-Nehru Pact of 1950 brought relief to the prevailing violence and refugee crisis in Pakistani Punjab. According to this pact, both India and Pakistan brought a halt to the violence by closing the border for further migration and providing citizenship rights to those people who had migrated. The governments of India and Pakistan also protected the minorities under this pact. In this manner, Ali (2019) argues that the Pakistani government brought an end to the prevailing communal violence at that time.

The second category of literature focuses on the impact of partition on the socioeconomic dimensions and the memory of partition. This literature has adopted a regional focus, as opposed to discussing the entire Punjab region. Ian Talbot (2007) discusses the impact of Partition on the cities of Lahore and Amritsar in his seminal study on the regional comparative analysis of these two cities. Talbot discusses the scale of damage that occurred in Lahore and Amritsar during partition, as well as the steps taken to rebuild the two cities. The governments of India and Pakistan established the Amritsar Improvement Trust and the Lahore Improvement Trust, respectively, for rebuilding the two cities. Moreover, both governments also took some steps to restore the commercial activity in Lahore and Amritsar. The author argues that although both Amritsar and Lahore lost their workforce, the migration of this workforce compensated for it, and government support improved the economic conditions.

Similarly, to Talbot, Ilyas Ahmed Chatha (2009) also discusses the role of refugees in socioeconomic development, although in a different context. In contrast to Talbot (2007), who conducted a study of Indian and Pakistani Punjab cities, Chatha (2009) examines the two Pakistani Punjab cities of Gujranwala and Sialkot to discuss the impact of partition on socioeconomic development in these regions. Chatha (2009) argues that the commercial classes were mainly composed of Hindus and Sikhs who migrated to East Punjab from West Punjab, resulting in a scarcity of resources in West Punjab. The development that these two cities experienced in the post-partition period was not due to the arrival of the refugees, but rather to the legacy of the British. The two cities have inherited a developed market from the colonial period.

In this manner, the abovementioned literature discusses how people experienced violence during partition, what steps the government took to control the violence, and the impact of partition on the socioeconomic development of Punjab's cities. Most of the literature, except Ishtiaq Ahmed (2012), relies primarily on archival data to substantiate its claims and has not employed the oral history method to incorporate people's experiences. Ishtiaq Ahmed (2012) has conducted an oral history to document the experiences of violence by the people during partition. He has not focused on the experiences of the locals and migrants in Punjab. Pipa Virdee (2018) has conducted oral histories with people from Faisalabad, Pakistan, as well as Ludhiana and Malerkotla in the Indian state of Punjab. Virdee (2018) examines the themes of displacement, violence, and the formation of new identities that result from the partition of Punjab. Moreover, she explores the emergence of shared narratives surrounding the Partition on both sides of the newly established border, highlighting the complexities, distortions, and divergences within the collective memory of the region. Hence, most of the literature written on the partition of Punjab does not focus on identity construction during the post-partition period in Punjab, and Pippa Virdee is filling this gap in her study. However, she has not focused on Okara of Pakistan. This research article fills this gap by conducting a study of identity construction among migrants and locals in the post-partition period in Okara.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the conceptualization of the changing meaning of identity during the partition of South Asia is derived from Sarah Ansari's (2005) study on the impact of partition and border-making in the context of Sindh. Sarah Ansari (2005), in her book, "Life after Partition: Migration, Community and Strife in Sindh 1947-1962," has discussed the tensions between the communities in Sindh generally and in Karachi specifically after the Partition of British India. Her work also provides significant analytical tools for Punjab. She suggested two types of community: community based on territory and community based on interests. First, the community based on territory shares sentiments of community because its members reside in the same geographical area. However, in the case of a community of interest, it is different. The community of interest is geographically dispersed and does not share a residence.

Ansari argues that the community is constructed symbolically, with meaning embedded within it. The meaning signified in the symbols is used to construct identity. In the context of South Asia, Ansari emphasized that the community's identity construction relied on the definition of borders at the time of partition. The border distinguishes one group of the community from another. For instance, Ansari argues that the community of interest created at the time of partition derived its meaning from the border between India and Pakistan. The set of people who were migrating from the Indian regions to Pakistan perceived themselves as Pakistani in the same way as the people who were already living in the region that became Pakistan perceived themselves as Pakistanis.

However, the community of interests was short-lived as soon as the migration was completed and the migrants settled in Pakistan. For Ansari, the nationalist sentiments that were rampant during the independence movement changed when the borders were drawn between India and Pakistan. The tribal, ethnic, and regional-based identity re-emerged after the Partition. Pakistan failed to maintain national unity, which is evident from the separation of East Pakistan. In her study of Karachi city, she argues that when Sindh became part of Bombay, Hindus began to migrate to Karachi in search of commercial opportunities. The growth in the business of Hindus has given rise to communalism in Sindh. The Muslims have started to gather animosity against the Hindus.

However, the creation of Pakistan has compelled the Hindus to leave Sindh. The Urdu-speaking community, which migrated from Delhi, the United Provinces, and Gujarat, began to form in Karachi and Hyderabad. Then the focus shifted to politics, with an emphasis

on migrants and locals. In this way, Sindhi nationalism emerged (Ansari, 2005). Similarly, in the context of Sindh, Punjab also experienced the same changing meaning of community during the partition of Punjab. In Okara, most of the businesses were dominated by Hindus. In adjoining rural regions, most of the landowners were Sikhs, and Muslims were marginalized, which is similar to the context of Sindh. Similarly, in the post-Partition period, the changing meaning of community emerged in Okara between locals and migrants due to their contestation over the distribution of resources.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research method has been used in this study. The research began with a review of the existing literature on the partition of South Asia. After reviewing the literature and identifying the gap, primary data were collected from archives and oral history. The focus of the oral history is on the respondents' memories of past events. The respondents provided the interpretation of the past in the present by remembering past events. The collective experience of the respondent is analyzed through an interview with an individual.

The oral history can be said to have an element of life review in it because the interviewees delve into recalling their past experiences and interpret them in light of their present conditions (Bornat, 2003). Ishtiaq Ahmed (2012) argues that oral history is subjective because the respondents are not considered just objects of collecting information. The person narrating the story is considered central to the story they tell. The interviewer and the interviewee are both involved in reproducing the past event (Ahmed, 2012). Moreover, the oral history method focuses on a particular period or specific events in the past. Hence, oral history enables the researcher to gain insight into the socio-cultural context in which the interviewee recounts a particular phase of history (Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003).

In this manner, the present study focuses on the memory of the Partition and border-making in Okara. The oral history method has been selected because the research aims to gain knowledge of the experiences of migrants and locals regarding the Partition and border-making in Okara, and to understand the socio-cultural context of the partition of Punjab. The oral history for this study was conducted from June 2022 to August 2022 in the city of Okara. In the present research, the snowball sampling method is employed because most individuals who have experienced partition have passed away, and those who are still alive are aware of some people who could provide information. Therefore, first, a person who had experienced partition was contacted, and he provided the contacts of other respondents. In this manner, six respondents were selected from Okara, of whom two were local, two were migrants, and two had migrated to East Punjab in 1947. The interviews with respondents who migrated to East Punjab in 1947 were conducted via WhatsApp video calls.

Okara city during British rule: Economic development and social dynamics

The Okara was a tehsil of the Montgomery district. The economy of Okara was predominantly agricultural at the time of the Partition due to the project of canal colonization in Punjab. The British have constructed canals in different regions of Punjab. The British constructed nine canal colonies in Punjab from the 1880s to the 1920s. The canal colonies consisted of Sidhnai, Sohag para, Chunian, Jehlum Chenab, Lower Bari doab, Upper Chenab, Upper Jehlum, and Nili Bar. The Montgomery district was part of three canal colonies: Lower Bari Doab, Nili Bar, and Sidhnai. It is due to this reason that the economy of the Montgomery district was predominantly dependent on agricultural production (Ali, 1989). However, the British have also established a town, Okara, in the Montgomery district for administrative purposes.

The Okara was established in 1865 by Blyth, the Deputy Commissioner of the Gugera District. The name of the Gugera District was changed to Montgomery at the same time. The district was named after Robert Montgomery, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab. The reason for establishing the Town in Montgomery was to link the regions to other regions of Punjab,

Sindh, and with Delhi, “Montgomery....lies on the Sindh, Punjab and Delhi Railways between Lahore and Multan” (Montgomery District Gazetteer, 1883-1884, 178). The British established police lines, police office, post office, munsif court, session court, jail, dispensary, church, bungalows (for the British population), travelers' inn, dispensary, and two markets that were Blyth Ganj and Ford Ganj in the newly established Okara (Montgomery District Gazetteer, 1883-1884). The market resembled the pattern of the Union Jack when viewed from an aerial perspective (Saif, personal communication, 2021).

When the Hindus and Sikhs started to settle in Okara, a mandir and a Gurdwara were also constructed. In 1892, a mosque was also established at the railway station, allowing Muslim travellers to pray during their stay in Okara (Saif, personal communication, 2021). Nevertheless, at the time of the establishment of Okara, the trade had not flourished, and it only served for administrative functions: “The town has little or no trade, and is nothing but the headquarters of the district staff” (Montgomery District Gazetteer, 1883-1884, 178). However, when Hindus and Sikhs began to settle in Montgomery, trade and commercial activities started to flourish. The Hindus also established factories and mills in Montgomery (Ahmed, 2012). Hence, markets for fruits, vegetables, and other edible crops, such as wheat, were established in Okara. The vendors, who were mostly Hindus, used to purchase items from agriculturalists and farmers, and then bring them to the market in Montgomery town. Birla, who was a famous Hindu industrialist of British India, established their factory in Okara. The factory used to manufacture the clothes and towels. It was considered the largest cotton mill of South Asia at that time. Many people came to Okara to work in that mill (Saif, personal communication, 2021).

Many Sikhs were given agricultural lands in the Montgomery Canal Colony. The personnel from the British army were allotted land in the Montgomery Canal Colony. However, Muslims and Sikhs who served in the British army were given land there. However, the villages were communally divided, and the Muslims lived in a separate village vis-à-vis the Sikhs in Okara. At the time of the Partition, the Sikhs left the area and migrated to East Punjab in India. For example, Harinder Singh belonged to the Montgomery Canal colony and migrated to Hoshiarpur in East Punjab. His father was a Havildar in the British army. In 1921, the British army allotted land to his father in village 4 *Chak*¹ 1R/A, Okara. Harinder Singh was born in 1936 in Okara. He was in 4th grade when the Partition of Punjab was announced in 1947. Most of the villages in the Montgomery Canal Colony were predominantly populated by Sikhs. There were five villages in which the land was allotted to the British army personnel. There was just one village of the Muslim army personnel, 2 *Chak*, out of 4 villages, 1 *Chak*, 3 *Chak*, and 5 *Chak* of the Sikhs. The two non-military villages, 7 *Chak* and 9 *Chak*, belonged to the indigenous Muslim population, known as *Janglee* (Singh, personal communication, 2021).

Imran Ali mentions in his book, *Punjab under Imperialism: 1885-1947*, that the indigenous nomadic tribes of Punjab, who practiced shifting agriculture alongside cattle rearing, were known as *Janglee* in Punjab (Ali, 1989). Michael R. Dove (1992) has argued that the word *Jangal*, which is used to describe "forest" in Pakistan, is erroneous because the word *Jangal* has its origin in the Sanskrit word *Jangala*, which means a savanna. The earlier nomadic pastoralists practiced shifting agriculture and converted the forest into grasslands in Punjab; however, the onset of British rule altered this practice, leading to increased agricultural land use and the clearing of forests. The British also altered the meaning of *Jangala* to *Jangal*, introducing a negative connotation that implied something bad or undesirable. In this way, the British promoted settled agriculture by altering the meaning of the word *Jangala* (Dove, 1992).

¹ A *chak* refers to a traditional unit of agricultural land or a village in the Punjab region, particularly in Pakistan and India

Initially, when the British were colonizing the lands and extending their control in Punjab, the *Janglee* resisted the expansion of British authority in their region. There used to be a thick forest in the Montgomery region where these nomadic tribes used to wander and exercise control. They also rebelled against the British authority in the 1857 mutiny. It is evident from the mutiny records of 1857 that the *Janglee* people resisted the expansion of the British authority in Googira (old name of Montgomery), “Matters proceeded thus smoothly until the 17th of Septmeber, when the Googira Bar tribes, many of whom graze their flocks in this district, rose and according to a preconcerted plan attacked and plundered almost all the small police posts situated in the Jungle Bar,... I may here mention that these police chowkees are, with one exception, mere open sheds guarded by three to four Burkundazes, and consequently incapable of defence” (Mutiny Report Record, 1911, 2:37)

The British established their control by clearing the forest in Montgomery and Googira and extending agriculture through the construction of canals. Initially, there was resistance from the indigenous *Janglee* Muslims. They also resisted the immigrants from being settled in the newly constructed canal colonies. Later, the *Janglee* were also settled by the British when the canal was constructed. They were also allotted lands in the canal colonies under the name of *Janglee* and settled them (Ali, 1979).

Inter-communal relations during British period in Okara

Generally, the inter-communal relationship in Okara during the British period was not characterized by violence (Ahmed, 2012). Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims coexisted in peace and harmony. If there was a dispute or conflict between any group of people, it was not severe enough to escalate into violence (Talbot, 2007). This is evident from the presence of two mandirs and one gurdwara, along with a masjid in Okara (Saif, 2021, personal communication, 2021). The identity at that time was not constructed based on religion. The identity at that time was constructed based on shared residence or territory in Okara. To put it in another way, the common interest of the people was dependent on their living together in a specific territory. In this section, the minor tensions and harmonies between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in Okara are discussed.

Janglee Muslims were known for the profession of cattle lifting in the Montgomery district. Until 1856, the British were unable to establish control in the forest region, where the *Janglee* were more powerful. (General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, 1854-55 and 1855-56). The *Janglee* Muslim lived mostly in the Nili Bar regions of the Montgomery district. Although the police station was established in the Bar regions of the Montgomery district, the cattle theft was not controlled in those regions. The thanadars (police station officers) were not able to exercise their control in the Nili Bar regions. “The thanadars seldom went outside their stations...as they were quite helpless without the assistance of the local zaildar and could not even get speech with the nomad graziers”. (General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, 1854-55 and 1855-56, 11)

In this way, the British were compelled to accept the authority of the tribal chief of the *Janglee* Muslims. After the 1860s, the British devolved power to local influential individuals and introduced the position of *zaildar*. The *zaildars* were local influential people who assisted the British in revenue collection, settlement work, and law enforcement within their territorial limits (Roseberry, 1988). Hence, the British incorporated the *Janglee* Muslims by appointing their tribal chief to an official position in the region's administration. The local chief of the *Janglee* was locally known as *Rat* at that time. The British could not control the region under the *Rat* without making a compromise with the *Rat*. In this way, the British appointed a Raja for their respective locality. The *Rat* was given power to assist the police in their respective locality.

The British also endeavored to settle the nomadic *Janglee* Muslims when they constructed canals and brought land under agriculture. Although the British were successful

in settling the Janglee Muslims, they defied the British authority and continued to assert their control in their locality. They also continued to steal the cattle from their adjoining villages. The villages were divided based on the communal affiliation of the people. There were separate villages of the Muslims and the Sikhs. Despite the separate villages, there existed harmony between the Muslims and Sikhs. It could be seen from the example of a Sikh whose bull was stolen by the Muslims, but when the Sikh approached the Muslims and requested them to return the bull, the Muslims agreed to his request.

The Janglee Muslims stole Harinder Singh's Bull from another village. He went to recover his stolen animal from the *Janglee* Muslims. First, the Janglee Muslims refused, then they agreed to give him back the animal, "The people stole my bull from the *Janglee* Muslim village. The village was situated on the banks of the River Ravi. When I went to their dera with my brother, the Janglee said to me, 'The bull is tied there; take it with you if you are courageous enough.' However, we requested that the man show some mercy and return our bull to us; then, when he was satisfied that I was not challenging his authority, he agreed (Harinder Singh, personal communication, 2021). In this example Harinder Singh has referred to their village as the village "on the bank of the river Ravi", which means that there existed the community of residence at that time in Punjab he is not referring the *Janglee* as the Muslim, rather he is using just the word of *Janglee*, which means that the community based on residence was prevalent at that time. The British introduced this to criminalize the non-agricultural-based economy in Punjab.

The second example of peace and harmony in inter-communal relationships before Partition is the story of one Hindu, Rakesh Kumar, who lived in Okara prior to the Partition. He was born in Okara. His maternal grandfather belonged to Lahore. His grandfather was a doctor who served in the Punjab Civil Medical Service. His grandfather settled in Okara in 1932. During his stay in Okara, his grandfather opened a clinic and treated patients without charging them. His father treated everyone equally without any discrimination based on religion or caste, "He opened a clinic in Okara where he asked his dispenser Hari das to keep a box on his reception table and never ask anyone about money, just leave this to the patients and their attendants it is up to them how much they could contribute in promotion of this cause" (Kumar, personal communication, 2021).

There is another example of a Hindu petty shopkeeper, Arjun Arora, who used to have three Muslim employees with him. He was born in 1899 in Okara. Interestingly, he was a Hindu, but he lived in the village where the Muslims were in the majority. He mentioned that there was one more Hindu family in that village and one Sikh family; all the other were Muslims. In the nearby villages, Muslims lived with their relatives. In this way, Arjun and other Hindus were living among the Muslims in some villages of Okara in harmony. "I never charged more money from my Muslim customers; I also sold them the best available items. They were nice to me, and the elders usually treated me like their own son. (Arora, personal communication, 2021).

Partition of Punjab: from community of residence to community of interest

The meaning of identity was changed as soon as the partition of Punjab was announced in 1947. The British Prime Minister Attlee announced in February 1947 that India would be given independence by June 1948. On 3rd June 1947, Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India, announced the Partition of the Indian subcontinent after consultation with local political leaders. It was decided under the 3rd June plan that the Punjab and the Bengal provinces were to be partitioned (Ali, 2019). The departing British government established a boundary commission to determine the borders between India and Pakistan in the provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Sir Cyril Radcliff was appointed as the chairman of both the boundary commissions of Bengal and Punjab. In the Punjab Boundary Commission, the representatives

were present from the Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim communities. Justice Meher Chand Mahajan was the Hindu member, Justice Teja Singh, and Justice Munir.

The Partition of the Punjab was based on the distribution of the population of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in the districts of Punjab. The 1941 census was used to determine the Muslim-majority districts and Hindu- and Sikh-majority regions in West and East Punjab. According to the 1941 census report, Muslims comprised approximately 56.95% of the total population in Punjab. On the other hand, Hindus comprised 26.52%. Moreover, Sikhs comprised 13.48% of the population (Jamil, 2018). The British, as well as the political leaders of India, particularly Muhammad Ali Jinnah from the All-India Muslim League (AIML) and Jawaharlal Nehru from the All-India National Congress (INC), had not anticipated that the announcement of the Partition Plan for Punjab would lead to such widespread bloodshed. Until August 1947, both Jinnah and Nehru were unaware that a massive-scale migration would occur in Punjab (Pandey, 2001). At that time, the governor of Punjab was Sir Evan Jenkins. He warned the Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, that the conditions would lead to a loss of control in Punjab. However, the Viceroy did not heed his warnings because Nehru had assured him that such a massive migration would not occur in Punjab (Spinner, 2017).

In this manner, by September 1947, almost 200,000 refugees were crossing the border from both directions of India and Pakistan in Punjab. Neither the newly established India nor Pakistan was prepared to handle the situation, as the leaders of both countries had confidence that such a large-scale migration would not occur (Pandey, 2001). Interestingly, all the political forces in Punjab were sponsoring the violence at the time of the Partition of Punjab. Whether they were from AIML, INC., or the Akali Party of the Sikhs. The Governor of Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, has written a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, stating that political parties are sponsoring violent activities (Ali, 2019). In this way, India and Pakistan became independent states from British rule in August 1947; however, the border, which Sir Cyril Radcliffe demarcated in July 1947, remained unsettled. It remained in the process of making because the population was moving from India to Pakistan or from Pakistan to India based on their religion. The state was also unable to control the violence at that time (Jamil, 2018)

The same people who had previously lived in harmony with one another and shared common interests became enemies. The identity constructed based on the shared territory was changed as soon as the Partition plan was announced. The identity constructed based on religion became primary for everyone in Punjab, whether they were Hindus, Sikhs, or Muslims, in 1947. Okara faced a similar shift in the meaning of community at the time of partition. The community of interest became dominant at the time of the Partition of Punjab in Okara. A community of interest refers to individuals who are not living together but share common interests and values. For example, Muslims in British India were not concentrated in a single region. They were in the majority in some regions, and they were in the minority in some regions, but they shared the common interests of creating an Islamic state in India (Ansari, 2005). In this manner, the definition of community reached the national level, and the local definition of community was undermined and disrupted.

The Muslims who were living in India became Pakistani, and the Sikhs and the Hindus who were living in Pakistani Punjab became Indians. Now, the Muslims who are living in Pakistani Punjab at the time of the Partition of Punjab are Pakistani in the same manner as the Muslims living in the Eastern Punjab in India. The same applied to the identity of the Hindus and the Sikhs living on both sides of the border. The British were unable to control the violence because by September of 1947, the communal violence had spread to most places, and neither Mountbatten, nor Jinnah, nor Nehru was prepared to control the

situation. The British army was not allowed to intervene in the communal violence. Their jurisdiction was limited to the protection of the British citizens (Ali, 2020).

Communalism plagued the relationship between Muslims and Sikhs, and now the same Muslims who had spared the Sikh bull in the past became enemies of the Sikhs in Okara. The Muslims started to kill the Sikhs in Okara. Harinder Singh mentioned this experience as, “In July 1947, we left our area to migrate to Hoshiarpur. Army personnel came, and he said that your area now belongs to Pakistan, you should leave the area, as the Sikh army personnel populated our village, and we were all asked to leave the village. When we were leaving, the Janglee people from 7 *Chak* and 9 *Chak*, located on the bank of the river Ravi, started looting and plundering our belongings. However, since our village was home to all the army personnel, the army convoy arrived and escorted us to the border region. In this way, the *Janglee* Muslims were unable to finish their mission. All the Sikhs from the various Sikh villages gathered in a camp established in another Sikh village, 5 *Chak*. Then, we all migrated from there, and we went to the border, which was established at the head of Sulemanki. We reached our village in Hoshiarpur in 24 days on bullock carts” (Singh, personal communication, 2021).

The communal violence was not just restricted to the general population; the military personnel also became part of it. The Baluch regiment has also started to attack the Sikh and the Hindu population. Harinder Singh experienced this attack by the Baluch regiment when he was migrating to Hoshiarpur from Okara, “As we started our journey and reached Kissan Adda (farmer’s station), the train which was loaded with the Baluch regiment crossed us. The Baluch regiment opened fire against us as they came closer to us. Fortunately, we did not lose the lives of the people, because we ran away. Most of our animals died due to that firing by the Baluch regiment” (Singh, personal communication, 2021). Ishtiaq Ahmed (2012), in his book “Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned, and Cleansed”, also mentioned that the Baluch regiment was deployed in the Montgomery district as soon as communal violence broke out. At the time of communal violence, the curfew was imposed in the Montgomery district, and the Baluch regiment was given the order to shoot on sight after giving a warning. Ishtiaq Ahmed narrated the oral history of Sardar Jarnail Singh Pasricha in the following words: “A Baluch unit of the army was trying to control the atrocities; I recall one Muslim who did not obey the curfew rules and came out shouting on the street. The soldiers told him to go back, but when he refused, they shot him dead, since they had orders to shoot-on-sight” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 396).

In a similar vein, the Muslims who were migrating from Eastern Punjab to Western Punjab also suffered the same fate as the Sikhs suffered in Western Punjab. The Muslims also faced the massacre on their way to Okara. In this way, the religious emotions were high on both sides of the Punjab when the Partition plan was announced. When the news of the Muslim massacre reached the Western side of Punjab, which was to become part of Pakistan, the Muslims in that part reacted by massacring the Sikhs and the Hindus (Ahmed, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite the heightened communal tensions, still the example of Muslims helping the Hindus in safely reaching their destination was also evident at the time of the Partition of Punjab. (Jamil, 2018). The Hindus were also given safe passage in the village of adjoining Okara by the Muslims, despite the ongoing communal violence everywhere. The story of Rakesh Kumar is also like the case of violence that emerged due to the news of the violence on Muslims on the Eastern side of Punjab where Muslims were a minority. As soon as the Partition plan was announced, the *Tehsildar*² and the *Lumbardar*³ of the village came

² A *Tehsildar* is a government official in South Asia who is responsible for revenue collection, land administration, and law enforcement within a specific administrative division known as a *tehsil* (or *tahsil*). The *tehsil* is a sub-district or subdivision within a district, and the *Tehsildar* plays a central role in the administration of these areas.

to Rakesh Kumar's grandfather and asked him to stay with them and not leave the place. The *Lumberdar* and *Tehsildar* protected his grandfather and even escorted them to the border. “The *Lumberdar* and *Tehsildar* came to our house and said to my grandfather that he should not leave Okara. Even when the disturbances started in the adjoining areas, the *Lumberdar* and *Tehsildar* offered their houses to my grandfather to live in. Conditions changed when the Muslim refugees from the Eastern Punjab started to pour into Okara. They were injured, their clothes were soaked in blood, and they were mentally suffering from the trauma of the bloodshed. The arrival of the Muslim refugees from the Eastern Punjab also heightened the communal violence in Okara. The same *Lumberdar* and *Tehsildar* came to my grandfather and requested him to leave because the conditions had gone beyond their control. They could not guarantee the protection of my grandfather. However, they assured my grandfather that they would take our family up to the border region. Moreover, they safely took us to the border area” (Kumar, personal communication, 2021).

Border making and identity construction

Soon after, the exchange of population began in Punjab. It became difficult for both India and Pakistan to bear the burden of the refugees and to provide safety to the migrants who are crossing the borders from both sides. Pakistan coordinated with India and the British and established the Punjab Boundary Force (PBF) in July 1947. However, PBF was unable to control the violence in the border regions. The trains carrying the refugees across the border came with not a single person alive. Whether the train was entering Pakistan from India or vice versa, the communal violence took the lives of all the migrants. To provide security to the refugees, the MEO was established in September 1947. MEO was tasked with safely escorting the refugees (Jamil, 2018; Ali, 2019). By the year 1948, both India and Pakistan decided to close their respective border in Punjab to stop the flow of refugees because neither PBF nor MEO was successful in protecting the people. Finally, Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, signed the Liaquat-Nehru Pact in 1950. Under this arrangement, the migration was halted and borders were closed. According to this pact, India and Pakistan would protect the minorities, and they would be granted equal citizenship rights (Ahmed, 2012; Ali, 2020).

Initially, the people who crossed the border settled near the border, as they considered the communalism to be temporary and believed they could return to their homes once the conditions returned to normal (Virdee, 2018). Nevertheless, the completion of border making by the Liaquat-Nehru Pact of 1950 made it clear that they would not return to their respective regions; rather, they were citizens of either India or Pakistan (Ahmed, 2012; Ali, 2019). The partition and border-making altered the definition of community for both migrants and locals. During the pre-partition period, when there was no communalism, community identity was constructed based on residence. When the partition was announced and people began to migrate, the community's identity was constructed around religion due to the intensification of communalism. However, after the border making was completed in 1950, following partition, the community's identity was again defined based on residence (Ansari, 2015).

Most of the migrants preferred to stay in the city centers of Pakistani Punjab, which offered them employment opportunities. For example, most of the migrants settled in the cities of Lahore, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Kasur, Sheikhupura, Gujrat, and Lyallpur (present-day Faisalabad) (Talbot, 2007; Chatta, 2009; Jamil, 2018). However, the overcrowding in those cities compelled many migrants to look for other potential regions for their migration. Therefore, many migrants came to Okara due to the employment opportunities that it offered at that time. There was a cotton mill belonging to the Birla group of industries in Okara. They

³ A *Lumbardar* is a traditional village headman or a community leader in rural areas of South Asia. The *Lumbardar* serves as an intermediary between the local community and the government, playing a crucial role in the administration and governance of a village or locality.

used to manufacture clothes and towels (Azhar, personal communication, 2021). When the number of migrants increased in Okara, refugees were confronted with a shortage of food, shelter, water, and clothing. The Government of Pakistan was unable to pay more attention to the refugee rehabilitation in Okara (Akhtar, personal communication, 2021)

As a result of the lack of resources, the tensions between locals and refugees started to develop. The locals started to construct the identity of the migrants as uncivilized (Saif, personal communication, 2021), and the migrants started to construct the identity of the locals as uncivilized (Azhar, personal communication, 2021). For the locals, the migrants have taken away their resources, and vice versa. The migrants have broken the locks of the evacuee property and assumed possession by force, on which the locals laid their claims (Saif, personal communication, 2021). On the other hand, the migrants also accused the locals of taking over the evacuee property. They accused the locals of bribing the *Patwari*⁴ and forcibly taking possession of the houses (Azhar, 2021). In this manner, a unified community of locals and migrants did not form after the migrants arrived in Okara.

In this manner, neither the Punjabi culture nor Islam proved to be a combining force between the migrants and the local Muslims in Okara. The migrants established their neighborhoods in the name of their ancestral villages in the Eastern Punjab region. Migrants typically marry within their community, while locals tend to marry within their local community (Saif, personal communication, 2021; Azhar, personal communication, 2021). In this manner, the community based on residence reemerged in Okara after the Punjab border was Settled between India and Pakistan.

Post-Partition Punjab: From Community of Interest to Community of Residence

Although the border was settled in the region of Punjab between India and Pakistan, the massive influx of refugees has multiplied the issues for the Government of Pakistan. Although the government of Pakistan established refugee camps, the huge number of refugees made it difficult to address the needs of every refugee. The Government of Pakistan was unable to provide relief to the refugees who were coming from the Indian side to Pakistan. Although the Government of Pakistan established the Ministry of Refugees and Rehabilitation in September 1947, its activities initially focused on Lahore, excluding other regions of Punjab. West Punjab received almost 5.5 million refugees (Jamil, 2018). In 1948, Refugee Rehabilitation Cooperation was established to provide relief to refugees (Chatta, 2013), but it also failed to reach the migrants of Okara (Azhar, personal communication, 2021; Akhtar, personal communication, 2021).

As the government of Pakistan focused primarily on the development of Lahore in Punjab, other bordering regions were subsequently marginalized. There is another reason why most of the wealth was in the hands of Hindu businessmen, traders, Sikh Landlords, and commercial classes. When they left Punjab, they also took their wealth away. When the refugees arrived in West Punjab, they were not wealthy; rather, they had abandoned their meager belongings and migrated to West Punjab. In this manner, the economic conditions of the other bordering regions of Punjab had deteriorated (Chatta, 2009). Therefore, in the absence of the government support the refugees started to compete for resources with each other as well as with the local population as a result of which the meaning of community which was constructed during the partition of the Punjab, that is community of interest based on the religious bonding was again transformed into the earlier definition of the community. The people again constructed their community's identity based on their residence and locality. The new identity was not based on the binary of Muslims and non-Muslims, but rather on the binary of Local vs Migrant.

⁴ A *Patwari* is a government-appointed official in South Asia responsible for maintaining land records and performing other administrative duties related to land and revenue management at the village or rural level.

The absence of the involvement of the government of Pakistan in the rehabilitation of the refugees in Okara was not just a problem for the refugees. However, it also allowed the refugees, as well as the locals, to occupy the evacuee property left by Hindus and Sikhs in Okara. The Muslim refugees have migrated in the form of the *Biradari*⁵. In this manner, those who have more men in their *Biradari* exercised more power and occupied the evacuee property. This has been narrated by Waleed Akhtar as, “At that time, many people were also unlocking the homes which the Hindus and the Sikhs had left in Okara. They were taking possession of the houses by their manpower, because the government was unable to keep a check and control on this activity of illegal house occupation. We came from the *Biradari* community in India. Those migrants who had more men in their family were more likely to occupy the house forcefully. We also decided to occupy a house. All the men of our *Biradari* sat together, and we discussed possible solutions to the problem of our shelter. Then we also unlocked a home and occupied it forcefully” (Akhtar, personal communication, 2021).

However, Rana Azhar, who migrated from Haryana to Okara, said that it was not just the migrants who were occupying the houses using force, but also the locals who started to occupy the houses. Rana Azhar blamed the patwari for illegal transfer of property to the local population, “The local population also got allotment of the houses in Okara; they bribed the patwari due to which the patwari allotted the land to them. In some cases, the local population of Muslims also occupied some houses forcefully” (Azhar, personal communication, 2021). The migrants started to blame the locals for taking over their resources, and the locals started to blame the migrants for taking over their resources. Muhammad Saif, who was born in Okara in 1949, has heard from his father about what happened at the time when the refugees arrived in Okara, “When the migrants came to Okara, Pakistan, from East Punjab, India, in 1947, they started making claims on the evacuee property with forged documents. They wanted to claim the things that they did not own in East Punjab. The migrants also started to occupy the houses illegally, using force” (Saif, personal communication, 2021).

The community based on residence was resurfaced as soon as the number of refugees increased in Okara. The local community started to construct the identity of the refugees as uncivilized, who have taken over their resources. As Ian Talbot (2007) has mentioned, there was a sense of superiority among middle-class refugees from East Punjab. Similarly, the refugees in Okara, whether they were from Jullunder, Amritsar, or Hoshiarpur they considered the local *Janglee* Muslims as uncivilized. Umer Farooq was born in 1934 in Okara. When the influx of refugees started, he was in the 7th grade. Umer Farooq is from the *Janglee* Muslim community of Okara. His experience of interacting with refugees is as follows: “The refugees are uncivilized, they have taken over our resources when they came here, and they label us as *Janglee* who do not have a sense of civilization. The refugees consider us as dacoits and those who do loot and plunder” (Farooq, personal communication, 2021).

The refugees established their settlement based on their caste or community, known as their *Biradari*. Hence, the people from Amritsar established the *Mohalla*⁶ of Amritsariya, and the people from Jullunder formed the *Mohallah* of Jullunderiya. In this manner, it can be seen that the refugees do not claim the identity of West Punjab; they are still considered migrants in West Punjab, so they adopted the identity of Eastern Punjab based on their homeland rather than their religion. “The migrants do not claim the Punjabi identity that the local population affiliates with. Rather, they derive their identity from the area from which

⁵ *Biradari* is a term used in South Asia to describe a social or kinship group or community that shares common ancestry, culture, and often, a common occupation or geographical origin.

⁶ A *mohalla* is a term used in South Asia, to describe a neighborhood or locality within a town or city. It is a community-based term that refers to a specific residential area or a cluster of houses that forms part of a larger urban or rural settlement

they have migrated; that is, they are either Amritsari or Jullunderi, but they are not considered natives of Okara to this present day. The migrants have their *Mohalla*, and their residential area recognizes them. The neighborhoods of the migrants are scattered throughout Okara and the city area. For example, there is the *Mohalla* of Jullunders, *Mohallah* of Hosiharpur, *Mohallah* of Amritsar” (Saif, personal communication, 2021).

The locals do not intermarry with the migrant community because they cannot conduct an inquiry into the reputation of the potential son-in-law or daughter-in-law, as few people know them who could provide information about them. Ian Talbot (2007) has discussed this in the case of Lahore, in which he argues that, “The limits of assimilation between migrants and locals were seen clearly in the most intimate social arrangements – marriage” (Talbot, 2007, p. 168). Muhammad Saif has mentioned that they do not marry within the migrant community because it is easier to obtain information about a potential son-in-law or daughter-in-law who belongs to the local community than to the migrant community. He rejected that there is some solidarity with the migrant community in terms of being a Punjabi or being a Muslim; rather, the identity is based on local and migrant, “There is no solidarity based on Islam or the Punjabi language or culture. We do not consider migrants as civilized, due to which we do not inter-marry with them. The locals marry with the locals and the migrants marry within their migrant community because it is easier to get the biographical information of the potential son-in-law or daughter-in-law” (Saif, personal communication, 2021).

Similarly, Rana Azhar, who is a migrant, was reluctant to marry his children in the local community. He preferred the migrant family because in that way, he was able to keep track of the whereabouts of the families from his network of *Biradari*. For him, it was not enough that the family of the local belonged to the same caste or that they spoke a similar language. The Punjabi culture and Islam do not play a role when it comes to marriage. “The Muslim identity on which Pakistan was established did not play any significant role in bringing solidarity and cohesion between the local and migrant communities in Okara. The Punjabi culture also did not become the source of unity among the migrants and the local population of Okara. The differences have not withered away; rather, the differences between local and migrants still exist in Okara. They do not inter-marry each other despite belonging to the same caste and the same *Biradari*” (Azhar, personal communication, 2021).

However, the migrants were not just thinking that the locals had taken over their resources. However, the Migrants from East Punjab also considered the migrants from the Urdu-speaking regions of United Provinces (UP) as having more privileges. Waleed Akhtar mentioned that in the Birla cotton mill, Urdu-speaking people dominated the bureaucracy, which led to the recruitment of Urdu-speaking individuals from UP and the provision of residential and educational facilities for their children. “There was a person named Dalmiya from UP, who was in charge of the Birla cotton mill in Okara. He brought the Urdu-speaking people from UP. The bureaucracy of the Birla cotton mill was primarily composed of the Urdu-speaking community from UP. However, the labor class consisted of Pathans, local *Janglees*, and Punjabi migrants. The Urdu-speaking population was provided with accommodation within the residential area of the Birla Cotton Mill. The Urdu-speaking migrants did not suffer like we were suffering at that time. There were also two schools inside the Birla cotton mills for the children of the workers” (Akhtar, personal communication, 2021).

Conclusion

In the present research, the change in the meaning of the community in Okara is discussed in the context of Partition and the creation of the Punjab border. In Pre-Partitioned Okara, the identity was constructed based on locality or residence. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims lived in harmony. Even if some criminal activity, such as cattle theft, was committed, it was resolved

at the village level. The combined force in the community at that time was the shared residence; their interests were common because they lived together.

However, the British government's announcement of the Partition Plan in India in June 1947 altered the definition of community in Okara. The community of residence was replaced with the community of interests. The community of interests means that the Muslims of India were not living together when the Partition of the Indian sub-continent was decided; they were in the majority in some regions and the minority in other regions. They shared an interest in creating a Muslim state in India. The definition of identity also shifted in scale before the community was defined by locality in Okara. However, with the announcement of the Partition of Punjab, the definition of community expanded to the national level. Hence, the interests of the Muslims were to join Pakistan, an Islamic state.

In August 1947, the international borders between India and Pakistan were demarcated, but due to the mass migration of people in Punjab, the border in Punjab remained unsettled. The newly established state of Pakistan was confronted with twofold problems: firstly, Pakistan must settle its border through the deployment of forces, and secondly, Pakistan must provide rehabilitation to the refugees. To solve the first problem, Pakistan coordinated with India and the British. It established PBF, but it was unable to control the violence in the border regions, and the trains still came full of corpses.

To provide security to the refugees, the MEO was initially established, working collectively between Pakistan and India. Later, it was divided between two countries. In 1948, the governments of Pakistan and India decided to close the border to avoid the influx of refugees from both sides of the border. In 1950, Liaqat and Nehru signed a pact in which it was decided that minorities in India and Pakistan would be given equal citizenship rights. In this manner, it can be seen that the change in the definition of the community emerged when the border-making process was completed. The community that was established at the time of the Partition of Punjab was based on shared religion. However, closing the border and declaring equal rights for minorities meant that no longer are those Muslims who are in Eastern Punjab considered Pakistanis.

Moreover, neither the Punjabi culture nor Islam proved to be a binding force between the migrants and the local Muslims in Okara. The migrants established their neighborhoods in the name of their ancestral villages in the Eastern Punjab region. Migrants typically marry within their community, while locals often marry within their local community. In this manner, it can be concluded that the definition of the community became localized again with the process of border-making. The border-making process kept the migrants in the illusion that they would return to their homeland, but when the border was settled, they realized that they must stay in Pakistan forever. In this manner, the community based on residence reemerged in Okara after the Punjab border had been settled between India and Pakistan.

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