INDIA DIVIDED

The announcement of the Boundary Award on 16th August fuelled the communal frenzy as each community felt that it was being denied the right to its homeland. While Pakistan was granted an area of 63,000 square miles of the Punjab province, only 37,000 square miles remained on the Indian side. Though the main guideline of the commission was to draw a borderline along religious affiliations, the diversity of the Punjabi population rendered the task almost impossible. Instead of creating religious majority states, all it managed to do was to create isolated islands of religious minorities.

The partition created two sovereign states to serve as the ‘homeland’ of two principal communities. The minorities in the proposed ‘homelands’ – many millions on both sides of the border, however, wished to believe and were made to believe that they would be able to live in security, after the political changes. The atmosphere was, of course, surcharged with tension but this appeared to be a passing phase. At any rate, there was no incentive - not even a compulsion yet – for sacrificing ancestral homes, habitations and occupations. There had been an exodus of non-Muslim minorities from West Punjab districts to Hardwar and Patiala after the riots in March 1947, and then from Lahore and Amritsar in the summer months; there was reverse flight of Muslims from Amritsar.

The leaders of the political parties and the officials were preoccupied with working out details of the division of assets and liabilities of the country, but little attention was paid to the planned exchange of population. The orgy of violence that occurred in different parts of the country, made Hindus and Muslims suspicious of each other. Transportation of the mass of population from one country to the other, had not been envisaged seriously at any stage by

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
either government. The Government of India thought it inconceivable that the people would be prepared to leave their lands, property and their ancestral homes.

When the Muslim League leader, Mr. Jinnah had suggested exchange of population\(^5\) on 10 December, 1945, and again\(^6\) on 15 November 1946, it had not been seriously considered by the Congress leaders. Referring to the driving out of the Hindus from Noakhali, he said that transfer of population was already in motion and some machinery should be devised for effecting it peacefully.

The Congress leaders, however, thought that this “organized lawlessness” was only a very temporary phase. To them, transfer of population appeared a complete negation of their ideology, which they have advocated throughout their political life.\(^7\) Opinion differed on the subject, but the leaders decided against planned exchange of population, for they feared that it would bring in its wake a number of other problems complicating the existing issues. Even if an exchange of population had been arranged between the North-West Pakistan and the East Punjab or between East and West Bengal, the position of the Muslims in the areas left in India, would have been rendered more insecure as a result of the exclusion of a major section of their community. Any plan for complete exchange of Hindu and Muslim population could, nevertheless, prove disastrous to both the states. Consequently, the Partition Council passed a resolution on 2 August, 1947 to arrest further exodus and encourage the return of people to their homes.\(^8\)

It nevertheless, appears surprising that the Congress leadership agreed to the communal division of Government personnel, but could not reconcile itself to the idea of giving the same right of “option” to the people. Undoubtedly, it

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\(^5\) M.A. Jinnah, Dawn, Delhi, dated 12 December, 1945.
\(^6\) Ibid., Dawn, Delhi, Dated 26 November 1946.
would have meant partial acceptance of the two-nation theory, but the congress had already accepted by acceding to the demand for Pakistan.9

The Punjab was caught in the grip of communal riots in March 1947. These riots took the worst turn in some of the districts where there were British Deputy Commissioners such as Rawalpindi, Multan, Lahore and Amritsar. The Punjab Disturbed Area Act and the Punjab Safety Ordinance were promulgated to meet the evil.10 The military had been called out several times to quell the disturbances.11

According to Frank Moreas, “a few British officials had their heart fully in the primary job of maintaining law and order. In the minds of some of them the prospects of civil chaos in India on the eve of Independence was not without its allurement. What better testimony to the inability of Indian rulers and administrators to control the communal situation once the strong arms of British authority was withdrawn.”12 Ever since the outbreak of the communal disturbances in the districts of Rawalpindi and Multan during the month of March 1947, the communal situation had not improved. Sir George Abell, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, visited Lahore in the last week of April and reported that the situation was serious. According to Sir Evan Jenkins, there was “a grave danger of civil war”13 Sir Malcolm Darling who had served in the Punjab for a number of years also visited Lahore in April and noticed that there was extreme tension and “the province was a smouldering volcano.”14 When the Partition Plan was announced, the situation in the Punjab had not improved. Simultaneously, with the announcement of the Partition Plan, “Firm action to be taken” orders were issued.

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The Governor of the Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, formed a Security Council in order to maintain law and order in the province. It comprised three party leaders in the Legislative Assembly, viz. Khan Iftikhaar Hussain of Mamdot, the leader of the Muslim League Assembly Party, Bhim Sen Sacchar, leader of the Congress Party, and Sardar Swaran Singh, leader of the Akali Party. It met daily to review the law-and-order in the Punjab and more particularly in Lahore. But this Security Council could not work as Muslim League withdrew its representative from this body.

The authorities in New Delhi were not unaware of the mounting tension in the Punjab. Lord Ismay writes, "Nevertheless, I was worried at the prevalence of the idea that it was all going to be plain sailing. I thought that there were still many fearful obstacles to be overcome and I was particularly worried about the Sikhs. This warrior sect, which provided many thousands of splendid recruits for the Indian Army, had every cause to feel aggrieved. Out of their total population in India of some five and a half million, no less than four were domiciled in the Punjab. It was therefore, certain that wherever the boundary line was drawn roughly two million Sikhs would soon find themselves citizens of Pakistan, and that many of their holy places would be under the domination of men of an alien and to them a repugnant faith."

The political pressure exerted by the Sikh leaders by means of resolutions, on the 8th of July, which they celebrated as Nankana Sahib Day had an adverse effect on Mr. Jinnah, who, at the outset, spoke in the meeting of the Partition Council held on the 10th of July, "Although he was doing everything in his power to retain a hold over the Muslim sections of the population concerned to honour the undertaking given that the findings of the Boundary Commission, whatever they were, would be accepted, he had noticed that the Sikh leaders were still reported to be inciting their followers to offer active resistance to the decision which they might regard as unfavourable. It was

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16 Ibid., p. 431.
reported that active preparations were being made and oaths were being taken.'\(^{18}\) The Viceroy said in reply to Mr. Jinnah's remarks, "he had made it abundantly clear to His Highness the Maharaja of Patiala, S. Baldev Singh, Master Tara Singh and all other Sikh leaders, with whom he had interviews, the consequences of any attempt to offer active resistance. No responsible government would tolerate for a moment such action, which would be met by the immediate employment of the regular armed forces of India. In view of superiority in aeroplanes, tanks, artillery, that the armed forces enjoy, such action would inevitably result in severe lesson being inflicted on those who would only be armed with rifles and out-of-date weapons."\(^{19}\) The Viceroy had also assured Maulana Azad, "At least on this one question I shall give you complete assurance. I shall see to it that there is no bloodshed and riot. I am a soldier not a civilian. Once partition is accepted in principle, I shall issue orders to see that there are no communal disturbances, anywhere in the country. If there should be the slightest agitation, I shall adopt the sternest measures to nip the trouble in the bud. I shall not use even the armed police. I will order the Army and Air Force to act and I will use tanks and aeroplanes to suppress anybody who wants to create trouble.\(^{20}\)

**PUNJAB BOUNDARY FORCE**

When the communal situation became worse the leaders who had always been against planned transfer of population gradually realized the position. Even Mr. Jinnah did not expect that there would be such a large migration of population.\(^{21}\) The leadership was obliged to take measures to protect the minorities in the affected areas. The proposals of the Commander-in-Chief were discussed on the 17\(^{th}\) of July in the meeting of the Partition Council to which the Commander-in-Chief had been specially invited. During the course of the discussion, it was made clear that there was no need of


\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 146.


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establishing any special military force in Bengal. The following decisions were however made regarding Punjab:

a) "that action to deal with disturbances in the neighbourhood of the boundaries between the two Dominions on or after the 15\textsuperscript{th} August should be on the lines suggested by the Commander-in-Chief.

b) "that Major-General Rees, Commander of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Division should be appointed Joint Commander on behalf of both Dominions to control all troops operating in the defined areas in the Punjab and that the chain of control from the two Dominion Governments to Major-General Rees should be through the Joint Defence Council and Supreme Commander.

c) "that the troops should be in position by the 7\textsuperscript{th} or 8\textsuperscript{th} of August at the latest.

d) "that there should be no change in the law governing the use of troops in aid of civil power after the 15\textsuperscript{th} August for such periods as these forces were employed on this work."\textsuperscript{22} The Viceroy suggested that a Boundary Force, consisting of Indian troops of a "mixed class composition" under British officer's Command should be appointed and placed in charge of this area. The Force, he said, should ensure protection to the minorities and warn all concerned that in the event of trouble, the mischief-makers would have to face dire consequences.\textsuperscript{23}

The Partition Council, consequently, agreed that Major General Rees, Commander of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Division should be appointed as Joint Commander on behalf of both the Dominions. The Council, in this way intended to restore confidence among the minorities so that they could decide to stay back in their respective areas. Punjab Boundary Force was responsible for maintaining law and order, working in collaboration with the civil authorities. On the 24\textsuperscript{th} July,

\textsuperscript{21} The Tribune, Ambala, April 5, 1954
\textsuperscript{22} Partition Proceedings. Govt. of India, Vol. IV., Parliamentary Library, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
the Viceroy nominated Colonel Ayub Khan, who later on became the President of Pakistan, as an advisor to General Rees, Commander of the Punjab Boundary Force. Brigadier Digambar Singh was nominated from the Indian side.\(^\text{24}\)

The Boundary force however, utterly failed to protect the minorities and the exodus of the people from one country to the other increased when Pakistan became a settled fact. But the Congress leaders kept on appealing to the people to stay on where they were. Mr. Nehru expressed his definite opinion against mass migration on 19 August, 1947, "While we shall give every help to those who wish to come to East Punjab, we would not like to encourage mass migration of people across the new borders, for this will involve tremendous misery for all concerned..." \(^\text{25}\) He hoped that very soon peace and order would be restored.

In view of the above facts and the public announcements of the leaders in favour of retaining their minorities, the idea of a planned exchange of population, was never entertained by the Governments of the two sides, although the Muslim League had advocated it as the basis of their politics in early 1947. The Governments and the leaders could not arrest the spread of communalism and with the establishment of the two Dominions communal frenzy recurrent in the most brutal form. "It was not an ordinary citizen who attacked... The attackers were the tools of fanatical communal groups who organized these heinous crimes for political reasons... They even coerced those neighbours who tried to stand by the refugees.\(^\text{26}\) Besides both the Muslim and non-Muslim provincial leadership though, apparently, against mass migration, was either tacitly or openly encouraging the communal elements to drive out the minorities. It may appear paradoxical, but is a fact that the Governments

\(^{24}\) Ibid.


and leadership concerned raised their voice of protest against the treatment
given to their community on the other side, but they followed the same policy
towards the minority groups in their own region. 27 The murderers of the
minority community were considered heroes and were openly defended even in
the law-making bodies. Justifying the massacre of Muslims in the East Punjab,
S. Udham Singh said in the East Punjab Assembly, "If our Hindu and Sikh
brethren had not risen to defend themselves, the province of East Punjab would
not have existed at all..."28 He appreciated the steps taken by the people of
Amritsar to turn out the Muslims. As a consequence, physical annihilation of
the minority had become more or less a matter of determined policy with the
majority communities inspite of the declarations to the contrary. The exodus of
minorities gathered volume and momentum rapidly and within a few weeks life
became impossible and death became the only alternative to migration.

In the beginning of August 1947, rioting broke out all over the Punjab
and the situation worsened as the date of the transfer of power drew nearer .The
Pakistan Government subsequently brought out a number of brochures to prove
that the Sikh were mainly responsible for the riots. The East Punjab
Government and the Indian Government issued a number of pamphlets stating
that the August riots in the East Punjab were a repercussion of riots in the West
Punjab since March 1947.

If it is to be taken as true that the Sikhs received ammunition from the
Sikh states, it was equally true and, infact, it had been proved in the Mamdot
enquiry in Lahore Court in 1949 that the Punjab Muslims League purchased in
1946 hand grenades, jeep and other war material.29

The “Punjab’s virile hot-headed people”30 began now to work in a spirit
of vengeance. The retired Sikh army men along with the Sikh soldiers of the

27 East Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, 1 to 8 November, 1947, Vol. I, Punjab State
Archives, Chandigarh, pp. 114-15)
28 Ibid.
disbanded Indian National Army organized small squads to kill the Muslims. The Muslims retaliated. Attacks by the Muslims in the West Punjab were followed by counter-attacks by the Sikhs and the Hindus in the East Punjab. Reprisal followed retaliation till the whole province was a seething cauldron of hate and bestial passions. The poison affected the unlettered and the ignorant masses as well as the educated middle classes. It spread to the officials, the police and the army. The Muslims and the non-Muslims vied with each other in degrading themselves to the lowest level of barbarity. The grim sport of murder and rape flourished on both sides of the Punjab with equal ferocity.

A popular estimate of casualties is about half a million. According to G.D. Khosla, "The loss of non-Muslims life has been estimated at a figure between 200,000 and 250,000. It is believed that an equal number of Muslims perished." Jan Stephen gives the casualty figures to be 500,000. But the estimate of those Britishers who were actually amidst that holocaust was more reliable.

Lord Mountbatten's estimate coincides with the figure of casualties calculated by Sir Penderal Moon who writes, "In December 1947, I made some calculations regarding the number of persons killed in the West Punjab and Bhawalpur. I had pretty accurate knowledge of the casualties both in Bhawalpur state itself and in the immediate adjacent West Punjab districts. Regarding several other districts, I had good information from old subordinates, especially among the magistracy and police with whom I was in touch. I was thus able to reach fairly precise figures for about half the districts of West Punjab and on the basis of these to make intelligent guesses regarding the remainder. Those calculations led me to certain figures for the total casualties from August onwards in the West Punjab and Bhawalpur. The figure

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was 60,000." According to Moon, the casualties in East Punjab and the East Punjab States had been heavier than in the West Punjab. But these were not twice as high. According to Moon, the total casualties were near about 200,000.36

The Punjab Boundary Force did its best to quell the ever increasing lawlessness but with little success. Some of the most gruesome tragedies were enacted in the areas entrusted to it by its own units. The Balauch Regiment, a Muslim force, worked havoc in the town of Sheikhupura in the West Punjab where hundreds of Hindus and the Sikhs were massacred. Consequently, the officer Incharge of this regiment was arrested, pending court martial and the troops were confined to barracks and the C.O. was suspended.37 In the Gurdaspur District, troops were reported to have shot dead over 600 Sikhs, while quelling the disturbances.38 Durga Das wrote a report in the Hindustan Times stating, "that while the communal orgy of March 1947 was the result of the Muslim League's preaching of violence and hatred the holocaust of the past three weeks is the work of the civil officials and the police and the military. There was little to choose between West Punjab and East Punjab. By dividing the Army, the police and the civil services on communal lines, they let loose a Frankenstein... Mountbatten had hurried through with partition without making sure that the Boundary Force would be able to maintain peace."39

The Hindu and Sikh officials who had migrated from West Punjab after witnessing the orgy of murder and destruction in that region had permitted it to be avenged in the eastern part. The state of affairs can well be imagined from the fact that because of the communal break-up of the provincial services the police force in East Punjab had dwindled from 17,000 to 3,000.40

36 Ibid., p. 283.
40 Ibid.
Sir Francis Mudie, the Governor of the West Punjab, was not at all satisfied with the working of the Punjab Boundary Force. He wrote a strong letter to the Viceroy, urging him to abolish this force and entrust the responsibility of law and order to the governments concerned.\textsuperscript{41} The abolition of the Punjab Boundary Force was a bold and wise step. It ended the joint control and placed the responsibility of maintaining law and order in their respective areas on the Indian and Pakistan Governments. Since communal rioting was not confined to the districts under the control of the Punjab Boundary Force, it enabled both the East Punjab and West Punjab Governments to deal with the situation as a whole. Moreover, after the 15\textsuperscript{th} August, the Punjab Boundary Force was the only force left which had Muslim, non-Muslim and mixed units. In that vitiating atmosphere of communal frenzy, it acted according to the traditions of impartiality. Alan Campbell Johnson has said, "Steady and experienced troops began to feel the tug of communal loyalties deeper even than their military discipline."\textsuperscript{42}

**MIGRATION AND EVACUATION**

When the rest of India was celebrating the coming of independence on August 15, 1947, the unhappy land of the five rivers was undergoing the sufferings of migration.\textsuperscript{43} Although the Muslim League had been, assiduously, arousing communal frenzy in the country especially since the launching of Direct Action on August 16, 1946, still few had imagined that disaster of such intensity occasioned by a wholesale transfer of population would be the result of the partition. Never before in the history of the world has such a large-scale transfer of population taken place, under such adverse conditions and within such a short time. More than 15 million persons were involved in the post-


\textsuperscript{43} *After Partition*. 1948, Delhi, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, p. 6.
partition Indo-Pakistan migration.\textsuperscript{44} Mahatma Gandhi was totally against this exchange of population and during his visit to Lahore said on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of August, 1947, "I am grieved to learn that people are running away from the West Punjab and I am told that Lahore is being evacuated by non-Muslims. I must say that this is what it should not be."\textsuperscript{45} Even the terrible communal riots in the Punjab, leading to mass-migration on both sides, did not shake his faith and it was at his insistence that the All-India Congress Committee passed the following resolution in November 1947: "While it is impossible to undo all that has been done, every effort should be made to enable evacuees and refugees from either Dominion ultimately to return to their homes and to their original occupation under the conditions of safety and security."\textsuperscript{46}

There were many causes, which led to the mass migration on both the sides. Allan Campbell Johnson is right when he declared that only the compulsion of mass-killing and the fear of reprisal could have brought about mass migration.\textsuperscript{47} Another significant factor leading to the forced migration of the non-Muslims from the West Punjab was the "Economic Rehabilitation Ordinance" contrary to the very spirit of agreement and the statements of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of September wherein both the Governments of the East Punjab and West Punjab had agreed "not to recognize illegal seizure of property belonging to the refugees".\textsuperscript{48} Under this ordinance, the Rehabilitation Commissioner, West Punjab was authorized to assume possession and control of the abandoned lands and business undertakings and to grant their temporary lease for the period of one year. He was also empowered to permit the occupation of any abandoned building by the refugees or other persons. Consequently not only the houses and shops of the Hindus and the Sikhs of Lahore who had left their homes in panic were allotted to the Muslim refugees but the forcible

\textsuperscript{44} Vakil, C.N., 1950, \textit{Economic Consequences of a Divided India}, Bombay, Vora & Co. Publishers Ltd., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{45} The Tribune, Ambala, 8\textsuperscript{th} August, 1947.
occupation by the Muslim refugees of the properties left by the Hindus and the Sikhs was also legalized. Even before the issue of this ordinance, the authorities in Lahore were responsible for the forcible occupation of shops and houses belonging to the non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{49} The disposal of the Hindu and the Sikh properties in this way without knowledge or consent of their owners was "another form of confiscation," which compelled the Hindus and the Sikhs to leave Pakistan for good.\textsuperscript{50}

The Muslim refugees, in order to avail themselves of the houses and business of the non-Muslims, created panic and disorder to turn out the Hindus and the Sikhs. Sir Geoffrey Prior, Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan analysed the causes of migration. He wrote, "the reason appears simply to drive out the minority community and enjoy the fruits of business which they have built through many years. The attitude of these persons to my mind is like that of a loathsome vulture sits by a dying animal waiting to pick up its bones."\textsuperscript{51}

The exodus of refugees from the West Punjab was mostly responsible for the trouble in the East Punjab.\textsuperscript{52} The non-Muslim refugees had been migrating ever since the disturbances in the districts of Rawalpindi, Multan and other areas. A camp for non-Muslim refugees had already been started at Wah, District Attock, because "the population" in these areas often with the connivance and even with the encouragement of the Government officials committed atrocities on the non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{53} Wherever these refugees went, they carried with them their tales of woe and sufferings creating tension and panic. The Muslim leader seldom, if even, expressed any regret or condemned these attacks on the non-Muslims. According to Master Tara Singh, it was in this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Singh, Kirpal, 1972. \textit{The Partition of the Punjab}. Patiala, Punjabi University Press, p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{51} The Indian News Chronicle, New Delhi. 11 October, 1947.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Singh, Kirpal, 1972. \textit{The Partition of the Punjab}. Patiala, Punjabi University Press, p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{53} After Partition. Publication Division, Govt. of India, p. 40.
\end{itemize}
atmosphere of frustration that the Sikhs and the Hindus in the East Punjab resorted to retaliation.\textsuperscript{54}

Following the disturbances at Amritsar and the Hoshiarpur rioting, arson and murder broke out in other districts. As the refugees progressed eastwards, communal trouble also spread, causing the migration of the Muslims from the East Punjab. What had happened in the West Punjab was re-enacted in the East Punjab in August and September on a large scale, even with more ferocity.\textsuperscript{55}

Over large areas in the East Punjab, the Sikh mobs attacked almost every Muslim village, killed a large number of Muslims and harassed the columns of Muslim refugees. At places, like Dasua, District Hoshiarpur, where the Muslims were in a majority, they accommodated a large number of the Muslim refugees and armed themselves with firearms, swords, spears etc. There were open fights between the hostile mobs. One Jamadar (a junior official in army) who was on leave in his village in the district of Jullundur, wrote to a Major in the Eastern Command on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of August, "This country has become a battlefield since the 16\textsuperscript{th} August. One village attacks another village and one community another community. Nobody could sleep for a week. Villages are being destroyed and thousands are being killed or wounded. Smoke-fires are seen everywhere all around my village. Everyday too many casualties take place in this country."\textsuperscript{56}

This was further followed by counter retaliation with attacks on minorities in the West Punjab. "A reliable British Lieutenant Colonel in the Pakistan Army stated on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of September, 1947 that some 250 armed Pathans from the frontier have drifted into Lahore and the surrounding villages".\textsuperscript{57} The same brutalities of death and fire were again perpetuated on the Hindus and the Sikhs who were still in Lahore and its surrounding areas.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] Ibid., 121.
\item[57] Ibid., p. 479.
\end{footnotes}
Exactly, the same thing happened in East Punjab where the Sikhs and the Hindus attacked the Muslims to drive them out in order to acquire their lands.

One of the most important factors, which paved the way for law nemesis to work in the East Punjab and West Punjab was the exchange of Deputy Commissioners, the Magistracy and other high officials belonging to the minority community in the opting out process provided by the Punjab Partition Committee. Their departure from amidst the minorities to whom they belonged undermined their sense of security in that tense atmosphere of communal rioting. The officers, who had been recently transferred as a result of the partition, were themselves affected by communal rioting. After taking charge of their new posts, they incited retaliations, as in the case at Bhakkav, District Mianwali, West Punjab.

The police officers can hardly escape the responsibility for the expulsion of the minorities both in the West Punjab and the East Punjab. In the United Punjab 74.1% of the regular police force was Muslim and 78.2% of the additional police was Muslim. The East Punjab Government could hardly be expected to depend on the Muslim police helping them in keeping law and order. Almost all the Muslim constables fled to Pakistan with equipment, in the border districts of East Punjab, the East Punjab Government decided to relieve the Muslim constables at once. Consequently, they were relieved at Amritsar on 10th August. This greatly unnerved the Muslims and undermined their sense of security.

In the East Punjab, new policemen had to be recruited because out of about 20,572 strong police force of the United Punjab, East Punjab had been left with only 7,185. In the new recruitment, most of the policemen were refugees from the West Punjab. In this way the newly organised police force in

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59 Ibid., p. 122
the East Punjab was infected with the communal virus. When trouble started in
the East Punjab, instead of controlling it, these policemen abetted the wrong
doers. "We must also confess that there was a regrettable lack of honesty of
purpose on the part of the police and certain other agencies in charge of the
maintenance of law and order. This was found especially marked in the railway
police in Ambala and a number of their men had to be arrested on the charges
of looting and murder in other districts also."\(^{63}\) At places police officials in
West Punjab did everything to turn out the Sikhs and the Hindus. It had been
rightly stated by one of the staff officers of the G.O.C Eastern Command:
"There is no doubt whatsoever that the police of both the East Punjab and West
Punjab joined in the slaughter and looting of the minority communities."\(^{64}\)

The riots, arson, murders, loot and abduction of women was spreading
like wild fire, setting a chain of retaliation and counter retaliation, uprooting the
minorities on both sides of the border. The people belonging to the minority
community were fleeing. Under these conditions of grave nature, the
representatives of India and Pakistan agreed on the 17th of August, 1947: "The
governments of East Punjab and West Punjab will give maximum assistance
towards evacuation of refugees from one province to another and will make
necessary arrangements for refugees prior to evacuation. The central
governments will give whatever assistance may be needed for maintaining
services and communication."\(^{65}\) The Deputy Prime Minister of India was of the
view that if the Hindus and Sikhs could not live in peace and honour in the
West Punjab and the Government of India have no means of ensuring this
primary condition, it is better to allow migration, which is going on to find its
natural termination by a complete exchange of population between the two
Punjabs.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{66}\) Hindustan Times, New Delhi. 6 September, 1947.
More than four million Muslims were left in the East Punjab and about four Million Hindus and Sikhs in the West Punjab.\textsuperscript{67} On account of continual communal riots since March 1947, the Sikhs and the Hindus had been migrating to the districts subsequently included in the East Punjab, and the Muslims, after the August riots, to the Muslim-majority districts included in the West Punjab. The stream of displaced Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims got swollen into a big torrent just after the transfer of power and the announcement of Punjab Boundary Award. The minorities of the central districts of the erstwhile United Punjab had lost every hope of being included in the newly created province of their choice. Both the East Punjab and the West Punjab Governments, therefore decided “to give maximum assistance for the evacuation of refugees from one province to the other.”\textsuperscript{68}

In view of the deteriorating situation and failure of the leadership and the Government to check the exodus both the Dominions, finally, considered it necessary to set up machinery to evacuate the displaced persons. A number of Inter-Dominion Conferences were held between the two countries to solve some of the vexed problems concerning partition. The two Dominion Governments empowered their high level organizations to decide the policy with regard to evacuation. The Partition Council decided matters of broad policy and the Joint Defence Council supplied military services and defined their functions and jurisdiction in the evacuation work.\textsuperscript{69} The Joint Rehabilitation Board laid down policies with regard to the reception and rehabilitation of the refugees. The Government of India, also appointed a special officer to act as liaison officer on its behalf with the East Punjab Liaison Agency.

The entire provincial machinery was, in fact, directed to the task of evacuation, relief and rehabilitation of the refugees. It is difficult to name any

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{itemize}
\item[68] Ibid.
\item[69] Partition Proceedings, Govt. of India, Vol. VII. Parliamentary Library, pp. 3-5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotes}
particular department, which was exclusively in-charge of evacuation. The Governor, Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary were overall in-charge of the evacuation and settlement of the refugees, the Civil supplies Department had to provide food, clothes and other necessities of life. The P.W.D. was to arrange for the accommodation. Similarly, Police, health and Education Departments were required to maintain law and order, sanitary conditions and make arrangements for the education of the children respectively. The Government of Punjab appointed a special Agency to work exclusively for evacuation. The Liaison Agency representing the East Punjab Government was set up at Lahore under a Chief Liaison Officers (C.L.O) and a number of District Liaison Officers. The District Liaison Officer (D.L.O) was to act as liaison between the evacuees in the camps and the district in which they wished to go on the one hand and the district authorities on the other and dealt with all other matters regarding the welfare of the evacuees. The East Punjab Liaison Agency was to be helped by the Military Evacuation Organization (M.E.O.), which was to arrange the movement of the evacuees across the border and was responsible for their protection en route. It also helped the civil authorities in the maintenance of law and order and in protecting the camps of the evacuees waiting to move across the border. The C.L.O was to determine the priorities for the movement on the reports of the district Liaison officers and in consultation with a priority Board.

The migrants differed in their composition and importance, and the Board had to decide priority of movement, according to the relative importance of various categories of refugees. For instance, the Government servants were given the first priority because they had to report for duty in the East Punjab. Any delay in their movement could seriously affect administrative efficiency. Similarly, it was felt that the peasants from the West Punjab should be given priority so that they could look after the crops left over by the Muslim. In

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71 Ibid., p. 78.
72 Ibid.
actual practice, however, it could not be done because these people who had to carry their bullocks and carts were to be moved from remote villages where transport facilities were not available and had to proceed in caravans, on foot. There were cases of women and children who needed immediate transportation.

On account of the communal riots spreading in a chain reaction, there were a large number of displaced non-Muslims and the Muslims to be evacuated in the East Punjab and the West Punjab. To begin with, a hundred trucks were placed at the disposal of the Deputy High Commissioner of India in Lahore. The East Punjab Government supplemented this arrangement with the appointment of a Liaison officer at Lahore, and a transport controller at Amritsar who was provided with one hundred trucks. It was found there was no machinery to prevent attacks from hostile mobs on the convoys in the West Punjab. It was, therefore, decided to entrust this work of evaluation of refugees to the military. The East Punjab Area Head Quarters at Lahore was converted into the Advance Military Evacuee Organization and a separate command known as Military Evacuee Organization was established at Amritsar on the 4th of September, 1947.

In Order to facilitate the speedy clearance of refugees on both sides, the East Punjab Government and the West Punjab Government entered into an agreement by which no train or motor vehicle was to cross the border with refugees. The agreement that no train should be allowed to go without taking refugees did not work as when the crew of the train and the passengers belonged to different communities. The Muslim and non-Muslim crew sometimes frightened or sometimes in a spirit of retaliation stopped the trains on the appearance of the mobs belonging to their community and thereby, caused the deaths and destruction of the refugees travelling by their trains. This

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73 Ibid.
arrangement wrought havoc among the refugees. The D.L.O, Sialkot writes, “On the 25th August a convey of 25 trucks, the drivers of which were all Muslims, was sent from the refugee camp, Sialkot cantonment to Amritsar. When the convoy reached the bridge of the Ravi Nedv Shahra, it halted on the plea that the drivers wanted to take led and they went into the town, wherefrom a mob of Muslims attacked the convey.” Similarly, the commanding officer of the 2/1 Gurkhas wrote, “The Battalion arrived at Ambala Cantonment Station at 12:30 p.m. On the 1st September, 1947. the adjutant reported the commanding containing dead bodies was lying on the line next to ours. Holes caused by Bren-gun bursts were visible on all coaches. The driver of the engine evidently intended to let massacre continue by driving his train into the open country and only disconnected his engine at the pistol point.” In a spate of religious fury, trains were held up and their passengers killed, houses burned down over their owner’s heads, women raped and abducted, forcible conversions made from one religion to another and every kind of physical atrocity practiced.

The railway trains carried the largest number of refugees. It is estimated that more than two million people crossed the border by trains within two months or so. About five or six trains crossed the border everyday and every train was full to capacity. The roofs, footboards, buffer spaces and even the undersides of the carriages were fully utilized. The evacuation operation by trains would have proved more successful, had there been co-operation between the East Punjab and the West Punjab governments and had the railway staff on both sides not been infected with the communal venom.

Of all the modes of evacuation, the organization of the refugee foot convoys proved to be the most effective for the peasants of the Punjab who

were tough and hardy by nature. A foot convoy enabled ten thousand of refugees to be collectively moved out in either direction along with their bullocks, carts, household goods and cattle. A strong foot convoy could defend itself with the help of military against and hostile mob. Plans for the movement of foot convoys had to be laid down with scrupulous attention to detail. No effort could be spared in their execution. Halting points for the night, food, water, medical aid and protection had to be provided for in advance. Schedules had to be provided for in advance to avoid clashes between caravans moving in opposite directions.  

All along the route of the convoys, jeeps and armoured cars kept constant vigil. Night curfew had to be clamped down on areas through which the convoys marched. Mobile dispensaries were always in attendance to care for the sick. Besides all this, when heavy rains towards the end of September washed roads away in many regions and brought movement almost to a halt; the M.E.O had to undertake repair and construction of lines of communication.82

Non-Muslims from Pakistan were moved out in 24 such convoys. The normal strength of a convoy ranged between 40 and 60 thousand.83 By far the largest was organized for the uprooted population of the canal colonies of Lyallpur. As this monstrous caravan snaked its way along the 150 mile road to East Punjab, it was swollen by tributary refugee streams from Gojra, Sumanduri and Jaranwala. Soon it was 4 lakhs strong, a slow moving flood of utter human misery. The colonists had set out with their cattle and every bit of their belongings they could carry or cast away. Some had brought vehicles – tangles, pushcarts, wheelbarrows, whatever one could lay hands on. With the agriculturists came petty shopkeepers, businessmen, doctors and lawyers.84 The caravan, it is reported took eight days to pass any given point as it struggled

82 Ibid.
forward. The story of its unparalleled sufferings is replete with incidents of compassion and heroism, fortitude and endurance. The able-bodied carried the weak across the border. But, often, the sick and the feeble-bodied were abandoned by the roadside and were the dead, with none to mourn them or perform the obsequies. The living had no time for the dying and the dead.

It is estimated that about one million human beings crossed into Indian territory on foot, within a month up till the 3rd week of September 1947. By the end of October 1947, the main foot movement of non-Muslims from west Punjab had been completed. The number of people thus evacuated on foot has been placed at around 10,36,000.

It was as early as the end of August 1947 that the Government of India decided to provide for air-transport of refugees from certain inaccessible points in Pakistan. Ten aircrafts belonging to various transport companies were mobilized for the purpose and six or seven flights were carried out daily to convey refugees from Sargodha, Luallpur, Multan and Rawalpindi. In addition, the scheduled services between Delhi, Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar were intensified. This effort gained further reinforcement from the B.O.A.C. offer of aircraft towards the middle of September. The British airline had just then completed an assignment of the Pakistan Government. The aircraft fleet at the disposal of the Indian authorities, strengthened by the B.O.A.C.'s 18 Dakotas and two Yorks, was able to carry out no fewer than 1,962 flights during the height of the evacuee operations from 15 September to 7 December, and to transfer about 28000 people from Pakistan and 18,000 in the reverse direction. Nearly 600000 gallons of aviation spirit were used monthly for evacuation purposes.

85 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
Air transport was both safe and speedy but then it could not be employed for mass evacuation. In the scale of air priorities, Government employees naturally came first. At a late stage, these flights were thrown open to paying passengers too.\textsuperscript{91}

There were severe riots in Karachi and among the targets of attack, were a school where Hindu refugees were sheltered and the office of the Indian National Congress. On January 14, a Directorate General of Evacuation was set up. The first major job it was entrusted with was the transfer of 54000 destitute from Karachi.\textsuperscript{92} Every available ship was pressed into service. The vessels took on their human carol at Karachi, dis-embarked passengers at Kathiawar ports and steamed back at full throttle from Karachi for another bursting load.\textsuperscript{93} The Rehabilitation Ministry, meanwhile, organized reception and dispersal arrangement in Kathiawar. In addition to the regular Persian Guy Line Steamers of the British India Steam Navigation Co., which picked up evacuees from Karachi on their way to Bombay, nine steamers were specially chartered by the Government of India for the purpose.\textsuperscript{94}

In retrospect, the operations connected with the planned evacuation of non-Muslim from West Pakistan constitute a miracle of precision, efficiency and speed. In fact, they have no parallel at all elsewhere in the pages of history. Immediately, after attaining independence, the leaders of India solemnly affirmed faith in the dignity of the people of the country that was left to them. The policy of the Government was spelled out by the Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru “So far as India is concerned, we have clearly stated, both as Government and otherwise, that we cannot think of any state which might be called a communal or religious state in which every individual, to what ever...
religions he may belong, has equal rights and opportunities.... That has been the ideal of the India National Congress ever since it was started 65 years ago, and we have consistently adhered to it."

The Prime Minister’s pledge to make India a secular state has been translated into a meaningful reality for the Muslims, particularly. They were entrusted with key jobs, no discrimination was done and thereby, the affections and loyalty of the Muslims who had elected to stay on in India were won. Not only the exodus to Pakistan which had started in 1947 cease entirely, but over a period those who had fled in the wake of the riots came back, never to leave Indian soil again.

RECEPTION AND INTERIM RELIEF

The Story of mass migration from west Pakistan was a grim tale of appalling human misery, with hardly a parallel anywhere else in history. One could see the flashes of superhuman courage, endurance and faith that triumphed over every obstacle. Some five million people crazed with fear, shattered in body and mind, most of them pitifully destitute, had come over. They had to be fed and clothed, found shelter and homes where they could be slowly nursed back to some semblance of lost human dignity, and the fear was to be driven out from their hearts, In the pre-partition months the majority of the Hindus and the Sikhs who came fleeing from the terror unleashed by communal rioting, found shelter with friends and relatives. They were received with open arms moreover, there was a throbbing sympathy for the victims of communal frenzy, but then the intermittent trickle changed into an over whelming torrent after Partition.

The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, with its hands already burdened with operations connected with the transfer of population, had to gear

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itself to additional back-breaking responsibilities. In less than five months more than five million refugees had poured into India. They had to be received and provided with temporary accommodation, fed and clothed, given interim relief and then dispersed to sites of permanent rehabilitation.

There was something remarkable about the displaced persons from West Pakistan. They were tough, hard, sturdy, with a sense of self-reliance and were full of pride that would not submit to the indignity of living on doles and charity and this perseverance helped them to rehabilitate themselves. Tens of thousands of them disdained government help. They found accommodation of some sort or the other with relatives or friends; where that was not available, they made do with whatever they could improvise by way of shelter. It might be a sorry put up affair on the pavements of towns and cities in India, just a couple of poles erected to support a piece of rough canvas for a roof; a make shift wooden sack against the crumbling walls of Delhi’s ancient battlements: or just a bit of earth converted into a home without either roof or enclosing walls. They carried on regardless of the inclemencies of the weather with stoicism, which was unparalleled. Hundreds of them had seen affluent days in the homes they had abandoned. But they would not stoop to accept charity and never would their hand be stretched out to receive alms. They were willing to undertake any kind of work however low it seemed. Some became mechanics, some turned hawkers, yet others potters at railway stations and bus stops. There is the poignant story of a young Punjabi lad hawking newspapers in New Delhi’s fashionable shopping centre. On a generous impulse, a kindly soul offered him a rupee note in exchange for a paper and waived the preferred change. There were tears of chargin in the youngsters eyes as he angrily

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protested that he was not a beggar. There was a gallantry that mocked at adversity and would never admit defeat.98

It was same in the rural areas. The refugees mostly sought to rehabilitate themselves. No helpless dependence on governmental relief was sought after by them. Those who had rescued cattle from among their belongings were soon at work, tilling a patch of land. Others found employment on farms. They represented the fine core of the Punjabi peasantry for whom honest labour was the only way of life. Rehabilitation in their case, was easy, for they met government’s efforts more than half way.99

The provision of refugee’s first necessity was shelter, which was the toughest problem of all. Everywhere government requisitioned all available habitable space. In East Punjab educational institutions were closed down for several months and their buildings placed at the disposal of the incoming refugees. The army readily allowed military camps, barracks and tents to be pressed into service. The displaced people were also accommodated in houses vacated by Muslims as well as in government quarters wherever that was feasible. But there was an ever-growing demand for the habitable space and so the ministry was constrained to resort to strict rationing of living space. Each refugee was allotted just enough room to spread a bed in a very little corner enough for an odd box or two. Thousands had to fend for themselves on railway platforms, in temples and mosques. Many more had to shift for themselves, with a crude apology for a tent here and in a tin shack there along the main thoroughfares in the cities of East Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. There were people camping out under the sky. There were number of camps in different provinces of East Punjab (including Kurukshetra), United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh), Delhi Ajmer-Merwara, Bombay, Central Provinces, Bihar Madras and West Bengal and in States of Rajputana, Kathiawar States and Central Indian States. Towards the end of March 1948, refugees in camp

numbered about 9,08,000 – nearly 8,30,000 in the provinces and about 78,000 in the states.100

Kurukshetra lies between Karnal and Ambala and it was selected for the site of a reserve camp by the East Punjab Government. The army was entrusted with the administration of the camp and Major General Nathu Singh appointed the first commander. By 2 December, 1947, the inmates of this camp were reported to be 3 lakhs. Kurukshetra was converted into an orderly tented city spread over an area of about nine square miles. It was divided into four towns, each with its own considerable staff of rationing officers, storekeepers, inspectors, assistants, clerks, typists and record keepers to handle the distribution of supplies. The camp was provided with three full-fledged hospitals and fourteen dispensaries. Every effort was made for sanitation and conservancy. Special attention was paid to the education of children. By March 1948, there were 35 schools in the camp area and the number of students was about 18,200.101 The vocational training centre opened at Kurukshetra was the first of the kind in any camp, and rendered yeoman’s service. The centre imparted instruction in various trades like, spinning weaving, dyeing and calico printing, tailoring, blanket making, soap manufacturing etc. This training in crafts which played a notable role in permanent rehabilitation evoked a ready response from the refugees. Care was taken to see that as much as possible, the work connected with the camp was entrusted to the refugees themselves. This inculcated the spirit of self-help among the inmates and gave an impetus to rehabilitation. By March 1950, the Kurukshetra camp was finally closed down.

Food, clothing, medical aid and education was provided free in camps, run by the government or the philanthropic bodies. The free daily ration included “atta”, (wheat flour) or rice, “dal”, vegetable ghee or oil, salt and condiments, “gur” or sugar and milk for children. Besides, there was a supplementary weekly or monthly ration of fuel, matches and washing soap.

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., p. 38
Every one received Vitamin tablets as these were considered to maintain minimum standards of health and well-being. All children above five years were supplied with 10 grams of calcium lactate daily and children below that age milk. Every effort was made to ensure a nutritious and balanced diet for every refugee.

The problem of clothing this vast population was even more staggering, especially, as winter was approaching. There could never be a sufficiency of quilts, blankets, jerseys, pullovers and other warm apparel. Appeals were broadcast throughout the country for clothes and blankets that could be spared and the response was truly heartening. Gifts came pouring in from abroad too in abundance. The ministry placed orders as early as in 1947 for the supply of 14,00,000 quilts and 3,25,000 blankets for free distribution in East Punjab camps. Among other articles on order were 2,56,000 cotton-lined jackets and 1,67,000 jerseys. Provincial governments were supplied garments with about 1,75,000 lbs. Of wool to be knitted into warm garments. Nearly 4 millions yards of various kinds of cloth were purchased on government account. Ready-made garments were procured from every possible source, nearly 20 lakhs from the directorate-General of Disposal alone.¹⁰²

The distribution of clothing among inhabitants of camps were carried out twice a year in accordance with a prescribed scale. This covered the minimum needs of men, women and children, and included a blanket or quilt or a great coat, and in Delhi and East Punjab in view of the severity of the winter, warm socks as well. By the end of March 1948, inmates of camps had received 12,50,000 quilts, 1,70,000 blankets, 1,05,000 jerseys, 2,00,000 bundies, 4,62,184 shirts, 3,20,637 shorts and 12,59,101 yards of various kinds of cloths.¹⁰³ Among the articles most in demand were blankets or quilts and the officials were unsparing in their efforts to meet every request.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 40.
¹⁰² Rehabilitation: The Years After the Freedom. The Publication Division (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), Govt. of India, p. 33.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
Government received invaluable assistance from a large number of voluntary organizations. Prominent among these were St. John’s Ambulance Brigade, Calcutta University’s Relief and Welfare Ambulances, The Indian National Ambulance Corps of Calcutta, the National Christian Council, the Marwara Relief Society and the Rama Krishna Mission. Army’s contribution could not be praised into words. It lived up fully to its traditions of humanitarian service by placing at the disposal of the authorities 500 hospital beds, mobile hospital units and motor ambulances.

Refugees poured into the camps in tens of thousands destitute, shattered in the mind and spirit, bearing the scars of physical and mental hurt, ill nourished, often on the verge of starvation. They had to be nursed back to health and sanity, protected from the ravages of epidemics that find a happy breeding ground in camps bursting with human misery and suffering. To cope adequately with all this vast burden a medical unit was attached to each camp. Physicians, surgeons, nurses mobilized in their thousands, worked round the clock to bring relief and succour to the ailing. Medicines and equipment came in constant stream both from the Central Ministry of Health and from countless medical stores of the country. Inoculation against cholera and small pox vaccination were carried out by teams of doctors. Twenty-two medical officers were assigned to East Punjab camps exclusively for mass inoculation operation. The death rate among the camp population in 1948 was 1.33 per thousand, a month later it dropped to 0.93. Though subject to fluctuation the morality rate seldom exceeded the February figure.

The camp authorities also made elaborate arrangements for education of children as well. Free primary and middle schools were set up for boys and girls, the teachers being recruited from among the displaced persons themselves. This educational effort was supplemented by the provision of facilities for technical and vocational training. By March 1948, several of the

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camps could boast of modest institutions for imparting training in spinning, weaving, tailoring, dyeing, soap-making and the like. These were vocations in which an acute shortage of trained personnel was being experienced because of the large-scale migration of Muslim artisans to West Pakistan.

In the First Inter-Dominion Conference held at Lahore on 6th December, it was decided that all women abducted or, forcibly married after March 1, 1947, should be restored and that joint organization of the two Dominions should be set up to carry out the rescue work. Transit camps were to be set up in the districts and central camps at Lahore in the West Punjab and Jullundur in the East Punjab. The camps in Pakistan were under the control of India and were guarded by Indian troops. The army also provided transport and escort from West Punjab to East Punjab. Women social workers were responsible for the supervision of the recovered women and children in the transit and central camps but the provision of accommodation, food and other facilities was the responsibility of the government.

The Government of India appointed four Regional Organisers and nearly 40 social workers. Kumari Mridula Sarabhai was appointed representative of the women's section of the Rehabilitation Ministry for all work in West Punjab. To ensure perfect co-ordination she was also entrusted with overall supervision of the work in East Punjab.

Homes for rescued women were established at Jullundur and Amritsar. The one at Jullundur was called the Gandhi Vanita Ashram and it provided shelter to about 2,000 women. The Amritsar home was a transit camp to which women from Lahore were conveyed en route to Jullundur.

In the early stages refugee camps were mostly run by private organizations. Later, when population transfer became an official responsibility, the burden of receiving and providing for refugees was entrusted to the East Punjab Government. When refugees began to be dispersed over a
wider area covering other states as well, the administration of camps was handed over to the respective State Governments. Only the mammoth one at Kurukshetra, which was treated as a sort of reserve camp to look after the needs of refugees who could not be accommodated elsewhere, was retained under Central control.

\[105\] Ibid.