The City as a Space of Suspicion: 
Partition, Belonging and Citizenship in Delhi, 
1940-1955

by 
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Decolonization in India was combined with territorial partition that resulted in mass killings, forced displacement, and the creation of millions of refugees. India’s capital city, Delhi underwent demographic transformation as hundreds of thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees from what had become West Pakistan poured into the city while a considerable portion of its Muslim population fled in the opposite direction. This dissertation explores the meanings and ramifications of partition in Delhi.

I treat partition as a process that unfolded during the years 1940-1955, as the idea of Pakistan was dramatically and violently transformed from a nebulous concept to concrete reality, carrying practical implications for citizenship and belonging in the nation and the city. This process began in 1940, when the Pakistan movement gained momentum, infusing the city with an extremely aggressive political culture. Partition in August 1947 was not the end point of this process, but rather the beginning of a protracted operation through which borders were fixed, citizenship determined, and a shared linguistic and cultural world divided.

The dissertation emphasizes a host of uncertainties that imbued this period of transition with intense emotions—great anxieties and great hopes surrounding the different imaginings of “Pakistan,” “Independence,” and “Partition” that circulated on the eve of partition. This emotional climate induced the violence against, and the minoritziation of, Delhi’s Muslims in partition’s aftermath—their transformation from a dominant public to a weak minority on the city’s spatial, political, and cultural margins.

The dissertation includes four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an in-depth study of the September riots in Delhi. Chapter 2 examines the law-and-order situation in the first years after partition, underscoring the persistent nature of the violence. I highlight the competing visions of
the Indian nation and the extremely fractured nature of the state that sustained the violence. Chapter 3 focuses upon struggles over Muslim “evacuee property” and their spatial consequences. Chapter 4 looks at the “wars of words” taking place in the Urdu press between refugee and Muslim editors, which provide insight into how these publics understood this period of great upheaval, and their place in the city.
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## LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AICC</td>
<td>All India Congress Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>Constituent Assembly Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Chief Commissioner (of Delhi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>Criminal Investigation Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWMG</td>
<td>Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner (of Delhi)</td>
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<td>DPCC</td>
<td>Delhi Provincial Congress Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSA</td>
<td>Delhi State Archives, New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>Indian Civil Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHA</td>
<td>Ministry of Home Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAI</td>
<td>National Archives of India, New Delhi</td>
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<td>NMML</td>
<td>Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWFP</td>
<td>North West Frontier Provinces</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Police Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>R&amp;R</td>
<td>Relief and Rehabilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSS</td>
<td>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps): Hindu-right organization founded in 1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWJN</td>
<td>Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, ed. S. Gopal, series 2 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru memorial Fund; distributed by Oxford University Press, 1984-)</td>
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INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 1948, nearly a year after India’s independence and partition, Delhi’s Criminal Investigation Department (henceforth CID—the intelligence division of the Delhi Police) sent the following confidential report:

It is understood that some Muslims who had come from Rawalpindi and who had been noticed moving about in the Subzimandi area clad in Hindu fashion, had told the refugees from Rawalpindi and Wazirabad, etc., that they had come to Delhi to create disturbances and avenge the wrongs done to the Muslims of Delhi. According to the Muslim goondas, the Subzimandi area was formerly predominated over by Muslims but now all their houses had been occupied by Hindus and Sikhs and they would see that all the Muslim houses were got evicted of the non-Muslims. They gave out that the Muslims would get thousands of their brethren killed at the hands of the non-Muslims in India in order to show to the U.N.O. commission which was shortly coming to India that the Muslims were the oppressed and that it were the non-Muslims who were responsible for the great killing carried on in Delhi and the Punjab after the partition of India. […] Thus there appears to be a regular conspiracy of the Muslims with the tacit support of the Pakistan Government to create communal flare up in India to prejudice the world opinion against India. It is believed that the non-Muslim residents of Subzimandi who have come to Delhi from Rawalpindi and Wazirabad, etc., have identified these Muslim goondas and some of them are aware of their abode in Delhi.¹

The report caused alarm, and propelled the Ministry of Home Affairs to ask the Delhi administration and the CID to start sending weekly reports on Muslims arriving in Delhi from Pakistan with potentially malicious intentions. This report, quite characteristic of the intelligence documents produced during this period, captures in a nutshell some of the prominent features that make up the story of India’s capital city after decolonization. At the center of the story lies tremendous violence, accompanied by forced possession of property and the demographic transformation of whole neighborhoods. The categories of “refugees” and “Muslims” are central, and the latter is characterized by a particularly ambiguous identity. Who were the Muslim goondas mentioned above? Were they Pakistanis or Indians? Were they the original residents of

¹ The report is located in: File 56/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. Official correspondence was conducted in English, and I quote it without any [sic] notations.
the neighborhood? If so, did they come back “for good,” or just for a short visit of insidious nature, as the report suggests? How did they cross the border, anyway? Wasn’t the border between the two states supervised?

These questions make up the story of post-partition Delhi, the narrative I wish to recount in the context of this dissertation. This is the story of partition as the process by which two nation-states and two national identities were created out of an undivided India. I suggest that the formative period during which this process took place occurred roughly between 1940 and 1955, and I seek to underscore its violent, fissured, and incomplete nature.

This report is reflective of the anxieties surrounding Muslim identity in post-partition Delhi, and it addresses the persistent, doomed-to-fail endeavor to distinguish between “nationalist Muslims” and the “Muslim League”—Indians and Pakistanis. Paranoia with regard to an enemy infiltrating from within was constitutive of the minoritization that Delhi’s Muslims underwent after partition. By minoritization, I mean the crisis of Muslim belonging within India’s nationalism: the enduring tension between “being an Indian” and “being a Muslim,” and the processes of marginalization and ghettoization that accompanied this irreconcilability. This dissertation tells the story of partition and the crisis of Muslim identity and belonging in Delhi.

Delhi is an especially apt location in which to examine the processes of nation- and state-building in the aftermath of decolonization in South Asia, for three main reasons. First, it had been a hub of Muslim political and cultural life for centuries, and had a strong Muslim minority—both numerically and politically—prior to partition. Second, it experienced the partition violence and dislocations in a dramatic way; and third, as the national capital and seat of central government, the national leaders took a special interest in its governance. Delhi was a

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central charge run by the Home Ministry through an appointed chief commissioner—a bureaucrat. The two strongest cabinet members of India in this critical period, Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Patel, constantly intervened in its affairs. As a consequence, its history reflected and was directly shaped by conflicting political visions and ideological uncertainties marking the transition from colonial to postcolonial order in South Asia. Before we delve deeper into this analysis, let us take a step back and familiarize ourselves with the relevant historical context and secondary literature.

On August 15, 1947, after nearly two hundred years of British rule, India gained independence, accompanied by the partition of British India into two dominions: India and Pakistan. This territorial division, conceived as a solution to the growing rift between Hindus and Muslims, was determined by religious principle. Areas with contiguous Muslim-majority populations were carved out and transferred to the new state of Pakistan, whereas the rest remained within India. Specifically, provinces in the northwestern part of the subcontinent, where Muslims formed a decisive majority—the North West Frontier Province (henceforth NWFP), Sind, and Baluchistan—were wholly transferred to Pakistan, while the two important provinces of Punjab (in the northwest) and Bengal (in the east), where Muslim majorities were slight, were divided between India and Pakistan.3

3 The place of the princely states in this scheme should also be clarified. During the colonial period, the Indian subcontinent was comprised of two distinct political spaces: British India, with 11 provinces under direct British rule, and Princely India, which consisted of nearly 600 princely states—some huge, others tiny, governed by semi-autonomous rulers who acknowledged British supremacy. As independence neared, the princely states were formally left to decide their own fates: to join India or Pakistan, or remain independent. In practice, these negotiations were led by Congress leader and Minister of States Sardar Patel and his secretary, V.P. Menon. This involved various carrots and sticks which collectively ensured that by August 15, most of the princely states had acceded to India. About 10 states joined Pakistan; a few remained intractable, but eventually succumbed to existing pressures. The most enduring (and yet unresolved) case is, of course, Kashmir. The standard account of the integration of the princely states was written by V.P. Menon: V. P. Menon, The Story of the Integration of the Indian States (New York: Macmillan, 1956). For a recent study, see: Ian Copland, The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
There was nothing self-evident about the creation of Pakistan, which came to possess a very strange territorial shape, with its western and eastern wings (West Pakistan and East Pakistan) disjoined and separated by 1700 kilometers of an Indian territory. In addition, partition blatantly divided the Muslim community of the subcontinent, leaving about 40 million Muslims in India. Moreover, partition involved the division of Punjab and Bengal—provinces with distinct, cohesive regional identities based upon geography, language, and social mores. This tearing-asunder of age-old social and cultural fabric represented a traumatic event of epic proportions, and was accompanied by massive killings, brutal rapes, abduction of women, and the uprooting of some 18 million people who then migrated across the new borders.

On September 4, 1947, three weeks after the Declaration of Independence, violence broke out in Delhi, the capital city of colonial (and now independent) India, a stronghold of Indian Muslim political and cultural life for centuries. Thousands of Muslims were killed, and Delhi, whose total population on the eve of partition was about one million people, underwent an enormous demographic transformation. Five hundred thousand Hindu and Sikh refugees from

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4 Estimates of the mass migrations and killings diverge. Estimates of the dead range between 200,000 to a million and a half, with those in the uprooted range falling between 12 to 20 million. This divergence reflects the high stakes of a painful and controversial historical event, and also the biases and uncertainties inherent in the primary sources themselves. For a critical presentation of the existing divergent estimates, see: Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89-91. I will discuss this problem at greater length in Chapter 1. The divergence of estimates also reflects the Punjabi-centric character of many partition studies, which simply ignore the migrations and killings that took place on the eastern border dividing Bengal. While the violence and exchange of population in Punjab was abrupt and rapid, both were much slower and more gradual in Bengal, and continued for two decades after partition. This fact, along with the porous nature of the eastern border, made attempts to assess migrations there particularly challenging. For this point, see: Joya Chatterji, "New Directions in Partition Studies," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 67 (Spring 2009).

According to Chatterji, between August and December, 1947, 15 million people crossed the western borders between India and Pakistan, in both directions and in roughly equal numbers: about 7.5 million Hindus and Sikhs left western Pakistan for India, and over 7 million crossed over in the other direction. With regard to the eastern border, she estimates that between 1947 and 1967, at least six million Hindu refugees from East Bengal crossed the border to West Bengal, and about a million and a half Muslims crossed in the opposite direction. *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2, 105-06.
what had become West Pakistan poured into the city, while more than 200,000 Muslims (roughly two-thirds of Delhi’s Muslim population) fled in the opposite direction.⁵

**Transfer of Power, Prelude to Partition, and Partition Violence**

Before discussing the secondary literature on partition and positioning my own study vis-a-vis the existing literature, I will set forth the main contours of this eventful period of transition in India and create a chronological framework to which the reader can refer in the following chapters.

Partition was the result of growing tensions between Hindus and Muslims under colonial rule, which came to be known as the “Muslim question” or “communal problem.” The term communalism, as historian Gyanendra Pandey explains, acquired a meaning peculiar to India during the colonial period, and has dominated Indian politics ever since: “In its common Indian usage, the word ‘communalism’ refers to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities.”⁶ Communalism is defined as a disruptive force representing collective forms of belonging, narrower than national identity, which threaten cohesiveness. Partition was the archetypal communal rupture, which determined that the long-awaited departure of the British resulted in two independent states rather than one.

An extensive amount of literature has been produced addressing the nature, sources, and history of communalism in India. To simplify matters, current analyses range between two extreme poles. On the one side, essentialist depictions of Hindus and Muslims portray two distinct entities that have always lived in conflict. This approach views Islam as a foreign force in the subcontinent, which was not able to assimilate. On the other side lies the theory of

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⁵ The Muslim population was 304, 501 at the time of the 1941 census, and 99,501 at the time of the 1951 census. The Muslim percentage of the total population dwindled from 33.2% to 5.71%. See: Prabha Chopra, "Delhi Gazetteer," (New Delhi: Gazetteer Unit, Delhi Administration, 1976), 130, 42-4.
‘composite culture,’ which emphasizes the hundreds of years of coexistence of Hindus and Muslims—and the emergence of distinct Indo-Islamic religious and cultural forms that made Muslims and Islam part and parcel of the Indian subcontinent.⁷

Indian nationalist history, which incorporates the second approach, has placed special emphasis upon the divide-and-rule strategy of the British, and views colonialism as the main culprit in the production of communalism. Later generations of historians and anthropologists, influenced by postcolonial theory and the Subaltern Studies, have also focused upon colonial impact, but provided a more in-depth, Foucauldian analysis of the construction of caste and religious identities through colonial forms of knowledge. This systematic mapping and categorization of Indian society took on a life of its own, rigidifying and politicizing identities:⁸ “Community, rather than the bourgeois individual, emerge[d] as an object of colonial knowledge and power.”⁹ In the broadest sense, many scholars have viewed the exposure of 19th-century Indians to Orientalist knowledge, western science, colonial policies, and missionaries as an epistemological crisis rife with self-introspection. In response to the challenge it posed, religious

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“revivalist” and reform movements emerged—both Hindu and Muslim—whose reflection on, renovation, and re-articulation of religious traditions put religious identities at center stage, thereby sharpening the boundaries between communities. Moreover, endeavors to “purify” both religions and facilitate a return to a golden age, advocated by Hindus and Muslims alike, brought about attacks on popular syncretic religious practices and widened the rift between religious communities. Undoubtedly, since the 1880s, communal tensions had been on the rise in north India with the spread of the Hindu cow-protection movement and outbreaks of communal riots over the sacrifice of cows by Muslims during the Id festival.

Such processes were intensified by the British ‘high politics’ policy—specifically, the slow and gradual process of the ‘devolution of power’ whereby the colonial government granted administrative and political powers to Indians from the second half of the 19th century on. Increasing Indian representation in the administration brought about twin processes. On the one hand, it catalyzed the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885, which would eventually lead India to independence; but political aims inherent to its establishment were far more modest. It functioned as an All-India pressure group representing the interests of the educated elite, who sought greater representation in the administration. On the other hand, the devolution of power brought about competition over employment, education, and representation in the local representative bodies. This competition, which coincided with the enumeration and


classification of the population according to religion and caste, further politicized and entrenched religious identities.

In this respect, the establishment of the Muslim League (in 1906) as an exclusively Muslim organization parallel to the Congress and devoted exclusively to the advancement of the interests of Muslim elites, represented a landmark in the politicization of religious identities. This was further congealed by the League’s successful demand for separate Muslim electorates, which was granted in 1909. This created a unified All-India political and administrative category of Indian Muslims out of a diverse Muslim social landscape consisting of myriad regional, sectarian, class, and caste identities.

Henceforth, standard accounts of high politics during the 20th-century focus upon interaction between three main historical actors: leaders of the Congress, leaders of the Muslim League, and the British colonial government. There were several important historical junctures, starting with the Lucknow Pact between the Muslim League and the Congress (1916) over future representation in the legislatures. The Pact was orchestrated by the Muslim lawyer and politician Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), who would become the father of Pakistan. Interestingly, back in 1916, Jinnah was committed to a vision of Muslim-Hindu collaboration in advancing the interests of Indians through gradual constitutional changes. Significantly, he came from within the Congress, and in 1913 joined the Muslim League; at the time of the Lucknow Pact, he belonged to both organizations. Accounts of (and debates over) the high politics of partition concentrate in large part upon the conundrum of Jinnah’s own transformation—of how and why this secular, constitutional lawyer, long committed to liberal, moderate politics and Hindu-Muslim collaboration, turned into the champion of a separate Muslim homeland, utilizing Islamic religious symbols and populist politics.
We will return to this point later, but for now, two points about the Lucknow Pact are noteworthy: first, that the Congress accepted the principle of separate electorates for Muslims; and second, that the agreement benefitted Muslims in the provinces where they formed a minority, especially the United Provinces (henceforth UP), while working at a disadvantage to Muslims from the Muslim-majority provinces. This point played a crucial role in shaping political relations between Muslim politicians of the two categories, which in turn proved pivotal to the political dynamics leading up to partition.

The Lucknow Pact was followed by WWI and the meteoric rise of Gandhi in national politics, especially upon his return from South Africa in the aftermath of the war, which was a period of fervent political and anti-colonial unrest. Significantly, the period from 1919-1922 was marked by nationalist collaboration between the Congress under Gandhi and the new Muslim leadership, who led the “Khilafat Movement,” which advocated the cause of the Ottoman Caliphate. The Khilafat movement was led by the Ali brothers and others, most notably Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who represented the younger generation in the Aligarh movement.

The Congress-Khilafat collaboration was born of widespread frustrations over British policies at the end of the war, which went back on Britain’s declared commitment to the Ottoman Empire as well as the promise of introducing self-government in India via the Montagu Declaration of 1917. What followed was the first Gandhian mass political agitation, joined by Hindus and Muslims alike. However, a violent incident in Chauri Chaura of the UP, which caused Gandhi to call off the movement (1922) and preceded the dissolution of the Caliphate in

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12 The Pact promised 50% of legislature seats to Muslims in the UP, though they formed only 14% of the population. In Bengal, where Muslims formed a majority of 52%, they were granted only 40% of seats, and in Punjab, Muslims who formed 54% of the population were granted 50% of the seats: Ian Talbot, Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-47 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xii.
1924, led to the collapse of this collaboration as well as to outbreaks of communal riots in cities across north India.\textsuperscript{14}

At the start of the 1920s, prospects seemed bright in terms of Muslim-Hindu collaboration, but the end of the decade was far gloomier. In the second Civil Disobedience Movement inaugurated by Gandhi in 1930, Muslim participation was much more limited. In 1930, the idea of a territorial Muslim state in the northwestern region of India was conceived by the Muslim intellectual and poet Muhammad Iqbal, though the name “Pakistan” was not yet in use.\textsuperscript{15} The word itself was coined in 1933 by a group of Muslim students in Cambridge, influenced by Iqbal. They created the term “Pakistan” from a play on words that invested it with a double meaning—literally, “the land of the pure,” and, at the time, an acronym of the Muslim-majority areas in the northwestern region: ‘P’ for Punjab, ‘A’ for Afghan (NWFP), ‘K’ for Kashmir, and ‘an’ for Baluchistan.\textsuperscript{16} It is noteworthy that the province of Bengal, whose eastern districts would eventually form part of Pakistan, was omitted from the name, while Kashmir, which would not be transferred to Pakistan, was included.

These are just anecdotal expressions of the ambiguity surrounding the concept of Pakistan and its territorial boundaries—an important topic I will elaborate upon in later discussion. In any event, it is significant that the idea of Pakistan was not taken seriously at the time, and was famously rejected by Muslim leaders—including Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who allegedly reproached the Cambridge students who presented him with the idea in London.

By 1940, just seven years later, the idea was taken much more seriously, and was advocated by Jinnah himself in the famous ‘Lahore Resolution’ of 1940, which was declared at the All-India Muslim League (henceforth AIML) annual session. The resolution is considered

\textsuperscript{14} I will refer at greater length to the Khilafat noncooperation movement and its collapse in Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 12 footnote 14.
the decisive moment at which the League embarked on the political mission of forming a separate Muslim state. The Lahore Resolution rested upon the “two-nation theory,” which conceived of Hindus and Muslims as two separate nations and can be traced back to the 19th-century Muslim intellectual and leader, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898). Jinnah’s articulation of the two-nation theory exerted a powerful impact upon the Pakistan movement and, as we will see throughout this study, upon the history of the Muslim minority in India in the aftermath of partition. Here are is a representative articulation of the idea:

… But one thing is quite clear. It has always been taken for granted mistakenly that the Musalmans are a Minority and of course we have got used to it for such long time that these settled notions are very difficult to remove. The Musalmans are not a minority. The Musalmans are a nation by any definition. […] We find that even according to the British map of India we occupy large parts of this country, where we Musalmans are in a majority—such as Bengal, the Punjab, Northwest Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan. […]

The problem in India is not of an intercommunal but manifestly of an international character, and it must be treated as such. […] If the British Government are really in earnest and sincere to secure the peace and happiness of the people of this Subcontinent, the only course open to us all is to allow the major nations separate homelands, by dividing India into ‘autonomous national States.’ […]

It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders. It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits, and is the cause of most of our troubles, and will lead India to destruction, if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither intermarry, nor interdine together, and indeed they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. […] To yoke together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must leads to growing discontent and the final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a State. […]

With the Lahore Resolution, Jinnah, no doubt, had come a long way from the Lucknow Pact he had masterminded in 1916. His transformation remains the topic of fervent debate.

Historians trace this shift in part to the growing estrangement between Jinnah and Congress leadership. Gandhi assumed leadership after WWI, and Jinnah held an aversion to Gandhi’s political strategy, which rested upon mass mobilization and the suffusion of politics with religious language. Jinnah was further disenchanted by his Congress colleagues during the debates following the Nehru Report of 1928—a document that described the Congress’ plan for the future of India. It demanded dominion status along with a strong central government and repudiation of the principle of separate Muslim electorates, which had been accepted by the Congress in Lucknow Pact. The Nehru Report estranged most Muslim political leaders, who saw it as foreshadowing an oppressive Hindu majoritarian rule—except for a small group of Muslim leaders aligned with the Congress, henceforth called “nationalist Muslims,” whose most important representatives were Maulana Azad, M.A. Ansari, Asaf Ali, and the religious leaders of the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind.  

Jinnah himself temporarily quit political life and moved to London. He made a political comeback in 1934, when asked by Muslim leaders of the UP to return and build the Muslim League anew. In 1935, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, which extended the franchise to nearly 35 million and granted the provinces a large degree of autonomy while keeping tight control over the center.

The provincial elections held under the new act in 1937 represented another key juncture leading up to partition. The election results were a stunning success for the Congress, which won the majority of open (non-Muslim) seats and formed governments in seven provinces. For the Muslim League, it proved a humiliating defeat, as it won less than 5% of total Muslim votes. The

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20 The diarchy system introduced in 1919 was abolished, and Indians became responsible for all spheres of governance in the provinces. For a good analysis of the Government of India Act and the logic guiding it, see: Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*, 15-17.
21 758 out of 1,500 seats
Muslim League’s dismal performance clearly showed that it was relatively strong in the Muslim-minority provinces, notably the UP, but that it was almost nonexistent in the Muslim-majority provinces that would form the cornerstone of Pakistan. In the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal, regional parties devoted to regional non-communal agendas came to power, whereas in the Muslim-minority province of UP, where the Muslim League had performed well, the Congress shut the door on the League’s offer to form a coalition. This, along with allegations concerning the oppressive Hindu majoritarian policies of Congress provincial governments during 1937-9, further strained relations between the Muslim League and the Congress.

The outbreak of the Second World War is considered a formative period and prelude to partition. The British government’s declaration of India’s entry into the war without consulting Indian leadership brought about the resignation of all Congress provincial governments in September, 1939. The Cripps Mission of 1942, headed by Labor Party member Sir Stafford Cripps, negotiated with Indian leaders over the future of India in the aftermath of the war, offering the prospect of independence. Significantly, the Cripps offer included a provision that allowed provinces to opt out of any future independent India, thereby accommodating the Lahore Resolution and its demand for Pakistan.

The Cripps proposal, dismissed by Gandhi as a “post-dated cheque on a failing bank,” and thwarted by Churchill, eventually failed. Its collapse was followed by the Congress’ declaration in August 1942 of the ‘Quit India’ movement—the last anti-colonial mass mobilization to take place before independence, which prompted the imprisonment of top Congress leadership until the end of the war. For its part, the Muslim League, headed by

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22 For the 1937 elections, see: Metcalf and Metcalf, A Concise History of India, 196-7. Talbot, Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-47, xiii.  
Mohammad Ali Jinnah, took advantage of the war to collaborate and strengthen its relationship with the British government and, simultaneously, to increase its influence in the Muslim-majority provinces.\(^\text{24}\)

With the end of WWII, decolonization was in sight, and discussions about the transfer of power began in earnest. Negotiations were held at the Simla Conference during June and July, 1945, but failed over Jinnah’s insistence that the Muslim League should have the exclusive right to nominate all Muslim members of a future interim government. Jinnah sought to be recognized as the sole spokesman for India’s Muslims, dismissing as irrelevant the “nationalist Muslims” aligned with the Congress and the Muslim regional parties of Bengal and Punjab. His claim received a boost in the subsequent elections of winter 1945/46, which were fought by the Muslim League as a referendum on Pakistan, and characterized by acerbic campaigns and aggravated communal tensions. The Congress won 90 percent of the votes in open (non-Muslim) constituencies for the central legislature, and formed governments in eight provinces. This was a replay—even an enhancement—of Congress success in the elections of 1937. In what amounted to a dramatic transformation compared to the elections of the previous decade, the Muslim League’s equally-dazzling results proved its influence in both Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority provinces.\(^\text{25}\)

An important juncture and last opportunity to avoid a territorial partition came about with the Cabinet Mission Plan, devised by a three-member Cabinet mission (including Cripps) and sent to India by the British government in March 1946. The Cabinet Mission Proposal of May

\(^{24}\) On the Muslim League’s strategic maneuvering during the war, see: Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-47*.

\(^{25}\) The Muslim League won all 30 reserved Muslim seats in the central legislature, and 442 of the 500 Muslim seats in the provincial assemblies. Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of India*, 213. It is important to keep in mind that these elections were still based upon a very limited franchise (about 10% of the population in the provinces and less than 1% for the Central Assembly). Hence the Muslim League’s demand of Pakistan was won without really proving its claim to represent the Muslim vote. While the Congress would win All-India elections over the next 30 years, the League lost in East Pakistan in the very first vote held on universal franchise in 1954: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 427-8.
16, 1946 offered to keep India united as a loose federation of three groups of provinces: Muslim-majority provinces in the west, Muslim-majority provinces in the east, and the bulk of Indian territory comprised of Hindu-majority regions. The three groups would have a great deal of autonomy vis-à-vis an established center, which would be in sole charge of the key functions of defense, external relations, and communications. In other words, this scheme provided for a “Pakistan” while interpreting it not as a separate independent nation-state, but rather as two semi-autonomous groups of Muslim-majority provinces inside India, sharing power at the center with a third group of Hindu-majority provinces. Initially, the Muslim League accepted the plan and the Congress followed suit, but a controversial speech made by Nehru caused a stir, and both parties withdrew their acceptance.26

The collapse of the Cabinet Mission Plan, which drew the curtain on the prospect of a united India, was also the first act in partition violence, a year prior to partition itself. The League responded to the failure of the plan with the mass campaign of Direct Action Day, triggering the outbreak of violent riots in Calcutta. This came to be known as the Great Calcutta Killing, in which about 4,000 Hindus and Muslims lost their lives. In the following months, the violence spread to Bombay, eastern Bengal, Bihar, and the UP. Against the background of a deteriorating situation, an interim government was established at the Centre on September 2, 1946—which, following failed negotiations between the two parties, did not initially include the Muslim League members. Even after the Muslim League joined in October, relations between the two parties were so strained that the Interim Government had trouble functioning properly. A

26 The Cabinet Mission plan was published on May 16, 1946. The Muslim League was the first to accept the plan in a resolution published on June 6, 1946. The All-India Congress Committee (henceforth AICC) announced its qualified acceptance on July 6, a month after the Muslim League. On July 10, Nehru held a press conference in Bombay, making controversial comments that rejected the principle of the compulsory grouping of provinces and arguing that the provinces should be left with the choice of whether and which group to join. For differing assessments of Nehru’s speech and his motivations, see: Jalal, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan, 209-10. Judith M. Brown, Nehru: A Political Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 163.
constituent assembly, whose purpose was to lay out a constitution, was formed in December, 1946 according to provisions of the Cabinet Mission Plan, but it was boycotted by the Muslim League and most of the princely states.\(^\text{27}\)

On February 20, 1947, Britain’s Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that British withdrawal would take place by June 1948, and that Lord Mountbatten had been appointed as the last Viceroy of India and would oversee the transfer of power. This announcement made the transfer of power palpable, and rendered the competition for it even more urgent and aggressive—especially with regard to Punjab, where the Muslim League was out of power, despite its victory in the elections.\(^\text{28}\) Fearing that British withdrawal would catch the Muslim League out of office in the most important Muslim-majority province, the League intensified its pressures on the existing government under Khizr Hayat Tiwana, embarking upon a mass campaign of civil disobedience that led to his resignation on March 2. The campaign and the fall of the coalition government led to the outbreak of riots across Punjab. From this point onward, five months prior to partition, Punjab was already engulfed by violence that would only intensify as partition drew near.

Since his arrival in India on March 22, the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, had commenced intensive negotiations with the Congress and the Muslim League over the transfer of power, resulting in his announcement of the partition plan on June 3, 1947. This announcement

\(^{27}\) The Constituent Assembly was elected according to provisions directed in the Cabinet Mission, and its original purpose was to lay out a constitution in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan. Members of the assembly were elected by the provincial legislators—each province having one member for every 1 million of its residents. Different communities elected their representatives in proportion to their relative size. Accordingly, the CA had 292 members from British India, out of which 78 were Muslim and 214 were non-Muslims (208 of whom were Congress). In addition, 93 seats were given to the princely states. The Muslim League members boycotted the assembly, and so did princely states. This meant that the 208 Congress members dominated the assembly. See: Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, 66.

\(^{28}\) Although the Muslim League succeeded in the elections at the expense of the regional Unionist Party that had dominated Punjabi politics since 1923, it did not succeed in forming a coalition. Hence, the much-weakened Unionist Party managed to cling to power by forming a coalition government with the Congress Party and the Akali Sikhs.
revealed that British withdrawal would take place on August 15, 1947, and would effectuate the partition of India. Once Nehru, Jinnah, and the Sikh leader Baldev Singh had publicly endorsed the plan, the way was paved for the rushed process of withdrawal. The legislatures of the most sensitive provinces of Bengal and Punjab voted on whether their provinces should be partitioned or transferred wholly to Pakistan. While Muslim members predictably voted against partition, Hindu members voted for it, thereby sealing the fate of the provinces to be divided. The next, most complicated task was to draw the boundaries that would divide the two provinces, along with their populations, rivers, roads, communication networks, and governance structures. The person chosen for this complicated task was Sir Cyril Radcliffe, Vice-Chairman of the General Council of the English Bar, who was appointed chairman of two separate boundary commissions for Bengal and Punjab. He was totally unfamiliar with India and, upon his arrival, “was evidently shocked when told that he had only five weeks to complete his work.” Numerous representations were made before the commissions by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—the latter fearful of the prospective division of their community, property, and holy places between the two Punjabs.

29 According to the Mountbatten Plan, the Punjabi and Bengali legislatures divided themselves into two sections—members elected by the Hindu-majority districts of each province, and members elected by the Muslim-majority districts. The two sections voted separately on the partition of their province. See: Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, 20-1; Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, (Routledge, 2005 [2000]). 77-9.

30 Each boundary commission consisted, apart from Radcliffe, of four members representing equally the Congress and the Muslim League. On the Radcliffe Boundary Commissions, see: *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. Chapter 3. Tan and Kudaisya follow a longstanding historiographical criticism of the boundary commission, arguing that a delicate and complicated work was entrusted to the hands of a man inexperienced with boundary-making and ignorant about the territories he was to divide (he had never been to India). Moreover, he was ordered to complete this complicated task within an outrageously tight schedule of five weeks. For a revisionist analysis of the Boundary Commission for Bengal, which shifts the emphasis from the sole responsibility of influencing the final boundary award from Radcliffe to the agency of local Bengali politicians, see: Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Chapter 1. For a recent restudy of the boundary commission in Punjab, see: Lucy P. Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

The Boundary Commission Award was held in secret until after independence, and was only published on August 17. It is alleged that the uncertainty hovering around the disputed areas made the violence and ethnic cleansing even fiercer. It is estimated that between August and December, 1947, 15 million people crossed the western borders between India and Pakistan, in both directions and in roughly equal numbers. Violence on the eastern side was apparently less intense, and the migrations less abrupt. These migrations continued for two decades after partition, spurred on by periodic outbreaks of violence that turned the partition of Bengal into a protracted, unfinished business.\textsuperscript{32} The upper classes had the luxury of air travel, but the vast majority of the refugees fled on foot or in bullock carts, forming columns thousands of kilometers long, and vulnerable to attack by gangs of rioters. These columns, along with the refugee trains, remain the strongest visual resonance of the partition violence and exodus. Trains were packed beyond belief, and refugees clung to the rooftops. They were easy prey for attackers, and reached their destinations with dead bodies. This propelled avenging attacks on refugees waiting to board the trains and flee in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{33}

Standard accounts of partition often conclude with these images. The current study will take the violence as a starting point, explore the partition riots in Delhi, and move beyond the high drama of this critical event to explore its lingering repercussions over the course of the first decade after partition. Before I present my study, I would like to survey the development of the field of partition historiography—the main trends, debates, questions, and lacunas—against the background from which this project developed.

\textsuperscript{32} Joya Chatterji estimates that during 1947-1967, at least six million Hindu refugees from East Bengal crossed the border to West Bengal, and about a million and a half Muslims crossed in the opposite direction. For Punjab, she estimates that between August and December 1947, about 7.5 million Hindus and Sikhs left western Pakistan for India, and over 7 million Muslims crossed over in the other direction. See: Chatterji, \textit{The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967}, 2, 105-06.

The Field of Partition Studies

The tragic consequences of partition turned it into one of the most controversial topics in the historiography of the Indian subcontinent. The history of the field can be divided into four main consecutive trends (though they have sometimes overlapped): 1) studies of the causes and events leading up to partition, focusing upon the high politics at the All-India Centre; 2) studies that continued exploring the causes of partition, while shifting the gaze from the All-India Centre to politics in the provinces; 3) studies that turned the gaze from political history of the causes of partition to the social Subaltern Studies, along with feminist histories of the experiences of ordinary people who got caught in the upheavals and violence; and 4) the most recent scholarship on the topic, which has moved forward in time and focuses upon the consequences of partition after 1947. The following paragraphs will provide the primary features and developments in these trends, and serve to position my dissertation in relation to them.34

Partition from Above: The High Politics of Partition

The first generation of partition studies explored the high politics leading up to partition, i.e., the machinations and negotiations between the three major historical players (the colonial government, the Congress party, and the Muslim League under Mohammad Ali Jinnah). In the first two decades after partition, the field was dominated by biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs of the political actors themselves, who were keen on leaving their mark upon

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subsequent understanding of this momentous event. 35 These writings can be divided into three nationalist standard historiographies: the British, the Indian, and the Pakistani.

One of the seminal questions differentiating the standard Pakistani narrative from the Indian one has been the question of inevitability, whereas Indian historiography tends to view it as a tragic historical accident, the result of an unfortunate set of contingencies for which colonial rule was greatly to blame. The Pakistani narrative is undergirded by determinism, inevitability, viewing Pakistan as the fulfillment of the Muslim nationalist movement in establishing a homeland for the subcontinent’s Muslims. 36 The question of contingency vs. inevitability is thus intimately linked to the “Muslim question” in India. While the Indian narrative reflects the Congress’ Nehruvian ideology, which views Muslims as part and parcel of Indian history, culture, and nation, the Pakistani narrative is an expression of the two-nation theory of the Muslim League, according to which Hindus and Muslims have always been two distinct nations.

Those who see partition as contingent differ on the question of which historical crossroad in the chronology outlined above marked the “point of no return” from which partition became inevitable—and who was responsible. Indeed, writings have often taken the form of an emotionally-charged blame game. This was true with regard to the controversy spurred by the publication of India Wins Freedom by Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), an erudite Islamic scholar and the most important “nationalist Muslim” at the time of independence. He was also president of the Indian National Congress during the period 1940-46. Azad is often contrasted with Ali Jinnah. While the latter came to represent Muslim separatism and the Pakistan demand, Azad

35 Yong and Kudaisya note that Lord Mountbatten had a developed sense of history and “was particularly anxious that official records subsequently spoke eloquently about his actions. His views, filtered through official papers and the interviews which he generously gave to writers later, have left a strong impression on the early reconstructions of that period.” Tan and Kudaisya, The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia, 8. See also: Ramachandra Guha, India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 51-2.
36 For the standard Pakistani narrative about partition, written by public figures involved in the Pakistan movement and later Prime Ministers, see: Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, Pathway to Pakistan (Lahore: Longmans, 1961); Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, The Emergence of Pakistan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).
forcefully argued that Muslims belonged in India. Azad’s controversial political autobiography accused his colleagues Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel of alienating the Muslim League in the aftermath of the 1937 elections, and pushing Jinnah toward the solution of Pakistan. He was also highly critical of Lord Mountbatten, who allegedly manipulated Nehru and Patel into accepting his partition plan. Others, however, have argued that by the time Mountbatten arrived on the scene, partition was already a done deal.

Indeed, there has been heated controversy surrounding Mountbatten, especially with regard to his level of responsibility for partition and the massive violence that took place. Indian historians have argued that the haste with which the transfer of power was executed actually exacerbated the violence. The early withdrawal of British officers, leaving in their wake a depleted force to deal with the mayhem, brought about the breakdown of the system of law and order. Also, the hurried drawing of the boundaries, resulting in problematic, even irrational divisions, precipitated the violence and refugee crisis. The Pakistani standard narrative, for its part, argues that Lord Mountbatten and Congress leadership should have taken the blame for the massive violence, for their irresponsible insistence upon dividing the provinces of Punjab and Bengal rather than transferring them intact to Pakistan. Pakistani writers have also claimed that there was a joint conspiracy between Lord Mountbatten and the Congress that influenced the Boundary Commission in favor of India. British writers, on the other hand, have defended Mountbatten, arguing that by the time he arrived in India, partition was inevitable and so was the

37 The Lahore Resolution is often juxtaposed with Azad’s presidential address in Ramgarh, which was delivered several months later and emphatically claimed that there was no contradiction between being a Muslim and being an Indian. Extracts of the two speeches are juxtaposed in Hasan, *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization*.
38 Maulana Azad had hoped that the Cabinet Mission Plan that could have kept India united would succeed. The failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan appears in his book as a missed historical opportunity, whose failure was the defining and most regrettable moment in the prelude to partition, leading to tragic consequences. See: Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan 2009 [1988]).
horrible violence. If anything, Mountbatten’s administrative skills and decisions only helped to contain it somewhat.40

The opening of archives in the 1970s and the tremendous number of official records that were released have allowed historians to scrutinize and intervene in a field hitherto dominated by the historical actors themselves, and provide more nuanced accounts of the transfer of power along with closer examination of the interests and strategies of the key players.41 Personality-driven analyses, however, continue to mark even some of the more recent efforts.

Perhaps the most important intervention in the study of the high politics of partition was made by Ayesha Jalal with the publication The Sole Spokesman in 1984. In her introduction, Jalal asks, “How did a Pakistan come about which fitted the interests of most Muslims so poorly?”42 Her revisionist analysis overturns the Indian and Pakistani narratives at once, and places the idea of historical irony at the center. She argues that contrary to accepted notions, Jinnah did not strive for the partition of the subcontinent, but rather used “Pakistan” as a bargaining chip in his negotiations with the Congress over the power share in a united India. The Congress leadership, on the other hand, realized the poker game Jinnah was playing, and decided to push him off the cliff. It gave him a Pakistan shorn of the Hindu-majority districts of Punjab and Bengal—the truncated Pakistan he did not, in fact, want.

Jalal claims that the narrative delineating the transformation of a moderate liberal (who had long invested all of his political energies into achieving power-sharing at the All-India

40 The earliest accounts in this vein were written by the colonial officials themselves: Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission with Mountbatten (London: R. Hale, 1951); Penderel Moon, Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1962]).


42 Jalal, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan, 4. For an excellent discussion of Jalal’s pertinent intervention in the field, see Roy, "The High Politics of India's Partition: The Revisionist Perspective."
Centre) into a separatist focused upon the Muslim-majority provinces was simply unattainable, and could only be explained by a gap between his long-term strategy and temporary tactics. Refuting the idea of a break in Jinnah’s political biography, Jalal asserts continuity through reexamination of the main junctures leading up to partition, and by showing that the concept of Pakistan had been kept intentionally vague by Jinnah over the course of an elaborate game he had been playing since 1940. In fact, the famous Lahore Resolution of 1940, long considered the “Pakistan Resolution,” did not even mention the name “Pakistan,” let alone “partition,” and it defined future relations between the Muslim-majority areas (both internally and with the rest of India) in highly ambiguous terms. “In other words, Jinnah was keeping his options open for a constitutional arrangement which would cover the whole of India.”43

The other main junctures Jalal revisits are the Cripps Mission (1942), which Jinnah turned down despite the fact that it provided for partition, and the Cabinet Mission Plan, which Jinnah accepted a month before the Congress even though it kept India united. She argues that the Cabinet Mission Plan was the option closest to what Jinnah really wanted—a united India with a Centre controlled equally by the Congress and the Muslim League, who would, in turn, serve as representatives of the provinces grouped into “Hindustan” and “Pakistan.” The main shortcoming of the Cabinet Mission Plan, for him, was the separation of the Muslim-majority provinces in the east and west into two distinct groups. Jinnah would rather have had one group of Muslim provinces forming a united “Pakistan” within India, but he was willing to compromise. The Congress torpedoed the Cabinet Mission plan because, Jalal argues, Nehru and Patel preferred a partitioned India with a strong federal center over a united India with a weak

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Jalal’s theory, which presents Pakistan as an unplanned and undesired outcome for its founding father, has, unsurprisingly, been criticized by Pakistani historians; but since many others have accepted it, her theory has turned from a revisionist history into a shared working assumption in the field. Among those who accept her thesis, many criticize her overall analytical approach as pursuing too narrow an understanding of agency and subjectivity, as it was limited to a few, highly calculating, rational “great men.” Even if Jinnah himself did not really want a separate Pakistan, one has to account for the fever pitch that the Pakistan demand created. Echoing Pakistani intellectuals who had taken part in the Pakistan movement, Pandey claims, “Progressive historians should not run away with the idea that Pakistan came to be established ‘in a fit of absentmindedness.’ The younger generation of Muslim students, teachers and professionals of the 1940s supported the idea of Pakistan without exception.”

I discuss Jalal’s thesis at some length not only because it represents a key intervention that changed the way in which the “endgame of empire” is understood; but also because she draws two important observations that shape my analysis of partition and its aftermath in Delhi:

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45 For a representative formulation of this criticism, see: Gyanendra Pandey, “The Prose of Otherness,” in *Subaltern Studies Vol. 8*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994). A recent commentator on Jalal’s argument that there existed a gap between Jinnah’s intentions and the outcomes of his game notes that “the focus… on hidden motives and intentions resolves Pakistan’s history into nothing more than a failed conspiracy—which is only appropriate given the conspiratorial nature of political thought in that country.” Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*, 7. Others criticize her instrumentalist understanding of the role of Islam and ideology in the Pakistan movement: Farzana Shaikh, ”Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986).

46 Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*, 27. Mushirul Hasan also notes that “It is no longer useful to argue, as is commonly done in popular scholarly interchanges, over the question of whether Jinnah bargained for a separate nation or not. What is relevant … is his forceful articulation of the two-nation theory and his success in mobilising people in such large numbers and to such great effect.” Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence* (London: Hurst & Co., 1997), 54.
1) the *ambiguity* of the idea of Pakistan and, 2) her interpretation of Jinnah’s two-nation theory as, first and foremost, a rejection of the status of minority. Jinnah’s insistence that Muslims formed a separate nation did not necessarily carry the demand for self-determination in a separate state. Rather, it was a rejection of political representation based upon numerical configuration and a demand for equal representation of Muslims alongside Hindus at a shared center, based upon their equal status as nations.\(^{47}\) To foreshadow a later discussion in this introduction, my dissertation draws heavily upon these two observations—namely, the ambiguity of Pakistan and Jinnah’s aversion to the status of minority. In the end, as partition took place, Indian Muslims became a severely depleted and vulnerable minority. My dissertation follows closely the unfolding of the process of their minoritization in Delhi, through the partition violence itself and its aftermath.

**Partition from the Province**

The 1970s and 1980s also saw a shift in partition studies from the center to the provinces. Simultaneously with Jalal’s revisionist interpretation of the politics at the Centre, other historians explored the causes and development of Muslim separatism in the regions themselves. These scholars, by and large, accept Jalal’s claim that Jinnah did not want a separate state of Pakistan; yet they claim that one has to go beyond the intentions and actions of one person, and effectively probe the meaning of Pakistan for a wider Muslim public in order to comprehend the success of the Pakistan movement. Consequently, these studies are complex and involve multiple historical actors, especially with regard to the interaction between the All-India and regional levels of politics. The earliest works in this vein focused attention upon Muslim separatism in the Muslim-

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minority provinces, especially the UP, which represented the stronghold of the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement. The following conundrum drove these studies: why the Muslims of the UP “…supported the demand for Pakistan when it was obvious that if they were successful they would have either to remain in a Hindu-dominated India, or suffer the upheaval of migration.”

The 1980s saw the publication of Ian Talbot and David Gilmartin’s books, both of whom studied Muslim politics in the Muslim-majority provinces in the northwestern regions, probing the way in which the dismal performance of the Muslim League in the 1937 elections was dramatically transformed in the elections a decade later. Taken together, their works show how the Muslim League tapped into traditional networks of patronage that included rural landlords and Sufi pirs to mobilize the masses during these critical years. While most studies of the provinces focus upon Muslim politics, Joya Chatterji’s research of Bengal illuminates the responsibility of Bengali Hindu elites and the Bengali Congress Party for the communalization

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of Bengali politics and the partition of the province.\textsuperscript{50} This and subsequent works by Chatterji have come to correct what she sees as the Punjabi-centric character of partition studies.

Partition from Below

The 1990s saw another shift in partition studies: away from causal analysis of the politics leading up to partition (whether at the central or the provincial level) toward study of the partition violence itself as experienced by ordinary people. This move from \textit{causes} to \textit{experience} and from “a few great men” to the masses bears the influence of the Subaltern Studies’ call to investigate seriously the lives and experiences of the subaltern classes. Focusing upon the personal and highly differentiated experiences of men and women during partition, these works have disrupted nationalist histories that depict “the Indian people” as a unified historical subject marching forward toward the shared goal of independence.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, the shift follows the Subaltern Studies by treating violence seriously as an object of analysis, thereby bringing to center stage a topic that had been sidelined by the nationalist focus on independence.\textsuperscript{52} As Gyanendra Pandey, a key figure in this turn, has argued, histories in general have been part of the process of nation-building, and have “tended to wipe out many of the signs of struggle and violence that marked the way to their own success: the violence involved in making national


\textsuperscript{51} On this point, see Gyan Pandey’s criticism of the nationalist historiography of partition in his later book, which recaps and further expands upon the earlier articles: Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India}, Chapter 3.

histories, like nations, appear natural." Paradoxically, argues Pandey, the historiography of partition has scarcely addressed the history of the violence itself:

The history of violence is written up in the historiography of modern India as aberration and as absence. Aberration in the sense that violence is treated as something removed from the general run of Indian history, its distorted form, its exceptional moment: not the ‘real’ history of India at all. Absence—and here the point applies more emphatically to a field wider than Indian history—because historical discourse has experienced very great difficulty in capturing and re-presenting the moment of violence. The ‘history’ of violence is, therefore, almost always about context—about everything that happens around violence. The violence itself is taken as ‘known.’ Its contours and character are simply assumed: its forms need no investigation.

Pandey wrote this article in the aftermath of the Bhagalpur riots in 1989 (in the Indian state of Bihar). Likewise, the leading feminist scholars who studied sexual violence against women during partition—Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin and Urvashi Butalia—attested that the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 acted as a major catalyst that pushed them to look back at partition as the archetype of communal riots in independent India. By studying communal violence systematically and linking post-partition riots to partition violence, these scholars have challenged the national representation of such communal violence as aberrational moments in the history of a nation that is fundamentally secular and nonviolent.

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56 According to Pandey, the nationalist discourse that includes academic works, journalism, and fiction represents partition as "a history gone wrong—a puzzling and, in effect, inexplicable failure." Pandey, "In Defence of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," 560.
Some of most important works in this vein are by feminist scholars who focused upon sexual violence against women of all communities by men of all communities.\textsuperscript{57} In this way, they opened up a topic that had long been a social taboo, turning it into a legitimate subject of analytical scrutiny. This scholarship has been influenced by studies on memory work and trauma, and has drawn upon systematic utilization of oral history and fictional representations of partition.\textsuperscript{58} The use of unconventional materials has yielded interesting theoretical reflections on the nature of memory work and historical analysis, the challenges of oral history, and the limitations of the official archives that stand as products of the homogenizing and normalizing drive of the nation-state.

These studies also had their limitations. As Joya Chatterji argues, they often mirrored “the tendency of the subjects of their research to look back on the horrifying events of 1947 as inexplicable catastrophes.”\textsuperscript{59} Ordinary people in these narratives often emerge as passive victims of events beyond their control. As David Gilmartin forcefully argues, there has been “disjunction between the narrative of high politics and the personal experience of violence [...] the place of the violence in the larger historical narrative has continued to prove elusive,” and “The violence of partition itself has resisted effective integration with the political narrative of partition’s causes.”\textsuperscript{60} The violence has remained, to a large extent, unexplainable and therefore outside history. To simplify his argument, studies of the violence have tended to concentrate upon the experience of the victims rather than that of the perpetrators. For this reason, ordinary people

\textsuperscript{57} In addition to the works cited above, see also: Veena Das, \textit{Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 3. Andrew Major, “‘The Chief Sufferers’: Abduction of Women During the Partition of the Punjab,” \textit{South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies} 18, no. 1 (1995).


\textsuperscript{59} Chatterji, "New Directions in Partition Studies," 215.

\textsuperscript{60} Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative," 1070, 69. my emphasis. See also Hasan, "Introduction: Partition Narratives," xxxix-xl.
almost always appear as passive victims bearing the consequences of someone else’s decisions and deeds. How are we to account for the motivations of those who killed, kidnapped, and raped? Since the violence of partition was a civil war in which all three communities were equally perpetrators and victims, this question is decisive.

Some studies have made definite progress in this respect, especially in their examination of the structure of the violence. The work of Swarna Aiyar, Paul Brass, and Ian Talbot on the massacres in Punjab qualify the notions of communal frenzy and undifferentiated crowd violence that are central to standard nationalist narratives of the partition violence. Aiyar has emphasized the central role played by demobilized soldiers in Punjab, a province that had long served as the recruiting ground of the British army in India. At the end of WWII, demobilized soldiers, armed with pistols, revolvers, and even rifles, were roaming around Punjab, and large quantities of arms and ammunition were circulated on the black market. Much of the violence was orchestrated and executed in military style by groups of ex-soldiers. Brass and Talbot move away from notions of spontaneous violence and temporary madness in favor of tracing preplanning and organization by Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim paramilitary groups working in complicity with the police.

Searching for motives, Jalal and Talbot underscore the localized and personal nature of the violence as a battle for social space: “Old scores could be paid off, wealth and property

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61 For the classic Indian standard narrative, see: G. D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
looted, and as some retrospective interviews reveal, attractive women were singled out for future appropriation. Such localized and personalized actions were, however, both condoned by the wider struggle and impacted upon it. Yet as other scholars note with regard to riots in contemporary India, while economic interests, political aspirations of local leaders, the role of neighborhood *goondas*, and police complicity are no doubt constitutive of the violence, the violence cannot be reduced to these alone. Religious tensions cannot be explained away as the smokescreen of other, underlying causes, but must instead be taken seriously. With regard to partition, the question remains how such localized and personal dimensions of violence became linked to the growing polarization between Hindus and Muslims during the endgame of the empire.

This dilemma and attempts to address it have inspired the argument of this dissertation. Specifically, I find David Gilmartin’s endeavor to bridge the gulf between the high politics of partition and the mass violence especially productive. It has yielded important observations about the processes of identity formation in the prelude to partition that inform my analysis of the partition riots in Delhi and the reconfiguration of the city in its aftermath.

The Ambiguity of the Idea of Pakistan

Interestingly, Gilmartin pushes forward Jalal’s argument about the delicate strategizing Jinnah was doing in the last decade of British rule. He is less interested in the high politics debate about blame placement—that is, whether it was the Congress instead of the Muslim

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66 Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative."
League which pushed, and should be held accountable for, partition. Rather, Gilmartin takes interest in the implication of Jalal’s argument for Muslim identity formation and politics on the eve of partition. According to Jalal, Jinnah aspired for parity with the Congress at the political center of a united India, claiming that Muslims formed a separate nation and that he, Jinnah, as the sole spokesman of this Muslim nation, should have equal footing with the Congress. “At the root of Jinnah’s obsession, of course, was the fact that he was not, in reality, the sole political voice of Muslims in the 1940s—far from it. The idea of Pakistan, a Muslim state, provided Jinnah symbolic capital as he sought to identify himself with an image of Muslim unity.”67 The real struggle was not so much the creation of a territorial homeland for India’s Muslims, but the establishment of a united Muslim political community as it emerged from a diverse landscape of rival regional, class, and sectarian identities. The idea of Pakistan produced a vision of a moral community against the backdrop of a highly fragmented arena of particular identities that structured everyday life.

Significantly, as Jalal notes, Jinnah was a player “who kept his cards close to the chest; and a good player with a poor hand has to pretend to have different cards than those he is actually holding.”68 The meaning of Pakistan was kept intentionally vague, and in fact contained critical contradictions between, on the one hand, a symbol of Islamic moral unity and, on the other, a more “practical” demand for territory—implicitly, a territorial partition of the subcontinent. While Jinnah’s negotiating strategy rested more on the former, it was the latter meaning that materialized—with bloody consequences.

The way in which the notion of Pakistan developed into a separate territorial claim, argues Gilmartin, has been frequently discussed but rarely explained. He argues that the roots of

67 Ibid., 1071. Emphasis in original.
68 Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*, 60.
the demand for territory are found in the increasing engagement of Indian leaders, in the 1930s, with the “modern internationalist discourse of territorial nationalism.” Nehru’s adoption of the notion of a territorial citizenship pushed Jinnah in the same direction, to prove that Muslim demands were not communal, but national.69 Yet “Jinnah was extraordinarily vague in his calls for Pakistan as a clearly-demarcated territorial state,” and, in fact, “the ‘two-nation’ theory embodied a fundamentally non-territorial vision of nationality.”70 This vagueness was reflected in the diverse notions and plans for Pakistan in the years prior to partition.71 Most Muslims did not think of Pakistan in territorial terms, and this is a point that helps to explain the apparent paradox of the Pakistan movement—that its stronghold was in the Muslim-minority provinces that would be left outside Pakistan, while the Muslim-majority provinces (that would become its heartland) were the last to adopt it.

Importantly, Gilmartin sees the unclear relationship between the utopian and territorial aspects of Pakistan as lying at the heart of the violence, constituting its unprecedented scale and ferociousness. During negotiations between the Muslim League, the Congress, and the British, the meaning of Pakistan as a bounded territory came more and more to the surface. The Cabinet Mission Plan represented the last attempt to reconcile the meaning of “Pakistan” as an ideal moral order with “Pakistan” as a territory; and when it failed, “Pakistan’s realization as a territorial state became inescapable.”72 As the practical, territorial implications of Pakistan came to the fore, the violence that erupted was exceptional compared with that of previous communal riots, which had been more confined and tied to local struggles for control. Violence was no

69 Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative," 1081. A territorially-defined citizenship was supposed to surpass, for Nehru, the rise of “primordial” communal identities and violence.
70 Ibid.
71 For the different schemes proposed for Pakistan in the late 1930s, see: Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850, Chapter 8. For a discussion of the non-territorial vision of Pakistan, see also: Hasan, Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence, 128-9. See also the recent analysis by Faisal Devji, who draws thought-provoking parallels between Pakistan and Israel: Devji, Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea.
72 Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative," 1084.
longer merely about power and status “within the symbolic framework of a local order;” it took the form of highly organized ethnic cleansing, and the “moral appropriation and purification of territory.”

Pakistan thus came to occupy an uneasy, indeterminate place in people’s imaginations—somewhere between utopian moral order and territory. As for the subcontinent’s inhabitants—Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs—it was not quite clear until a later stage whether Pakistan would be a separate state or more like the semi-autonomous provinces discussed in the Cabinet Mission Plan. Its territorial meaning came to the fore all of a sudden, when Mountbatten was appointed last Viceroy and advanced the transfer of power by almost a year. Competition over territory became all the more urgent and brutal, especially in the border areas in provinces that were to be divided. In Punjab, as Brass shows, the Sikhs’ anxieties about the prospective division of their community, lands, and holy places between the two states propelled them to embark upon an organized campaign of ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the eastern districts. That it was not obvious where certain cities and villages would find themselves after partition was evident in the Muslim belief that Amritsar would become part of Pakistan; and, on the part of Hindus and Sikhs, that Lahore would remain in India. The secrecy that surrounded the borders, and the decision to postpone the announcement until two days after partition, worked to fuel anxieties and violent struggles over territory.

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72 Ibid., 1087.
74 Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946-7: Means, Methods, and Purposes." After partition, the Sikhs managed to concentrate the whole community in East Punjab, and formed 35% of the province.
The “Long Partition” and this Dissertation

I take from the above discussion the insight that the practical implications of the territorial division that eventually took place were far from self-evident to the residents of the subcontinent in the late colonial period. *Independence, Pakistan,* and *partition* all had different meanings in people’s imaginations. When the reality of independence and partition unfolded at an urgent and rushed pace, it took many, including the political leaders themselves, by surprise. Significantly, evidence suggests that neither the Congress leaders nor the Muslim League expected that a major exchange of population would take place. Their private correspondence and speeches, including Jinnah’s famous first address to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, indicate that they expected that each state would include large populations of religious minorities.\(^{76}\) In fact, Punjab was the only province where a mutually agreed-upon transfer of population was organized by the two states; and this was only “after the fact,” so to speak, in response to the reality of the mass migrations taking place on the ground.\(^{77}\)

This dissertation is about the unfolding of the two-nation theory in Delhi—its rapid, dramatic, and violent transformation from nebulous concept to concrete reality, with practical implications for citizenship and belonging in the nation and city. In this way, and by underscoring the contingency and uncertainty marking this process, I build upon and pursue a recent development within partition studies that shifts the gaze from causal analysis of the prelude to partition—or the experience of violence—to partition’s impact upon the social,

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\(^{76}\) Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*, 41. Joya Chatterji’s study of the Bengali Congress leaders’ demands from the boundary commission shows that they also did not take into consideration the large exodus that eventually took place: Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Chapter 1.

political, and cultural histories of the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{78} By examining the “day after,” these studies have shown that the crisis of partition both states had to address at the very moment of their birth—which included the collapse of law and order, the recovery of abducted women, and the pressing need to accommodate millions of refugees—was productive of the process of state formation and the creation of national subjects. Refugees also shaped the political trajectories of their new home provinces.\textsuperscript{79}

Especially relevant is Zamindar, Khan, and Chatterji’s argument that partition was a long and protracted process rather than an event neatly bounded within a short time span. The many contingencies and uncertainties underpinning partition had been resolved in a long process that took about a decade to congeal. This was more evident in the case of Bengal, where the migrations continued for two decades and where the border has been extremely porous; but as Zamindar’s recent study shows, the partition on the western side was not as swift or dramatic as it is usually perceived to be.

Zamindar’s fascinating book on Muslim divided families is one of the few studies that deal directly with Delhi during partition (though Delhi itself is not the focus). She traces the impact of partition on Muslim families originating from Delhi, who were divided on both sides of the border. When one part of the family left for Karachi, the other remained in Delhi. Her


\textsuperscript{79} Joya Chatterji ascribes the failure of the Bengali Congress government to deal with refugees’ rehabilitation as a key factor in the rise of the Communist party in West Bengal in 1967. Sarah Ansari shows how the tension between the \textit{muhajirs} and locals dominated the politics of Karachi for decades.
interesting argument is that not only did partition impact the lives of these people, it actually took effect through the states’ pressing efforts to divide them into Indians and Pakistanis. Zamindar’s study of partition thus focuses upon state governmentality, and the various bureaucratic discourses and practices that were set in place in order to make national citizens out of the residents of late-colonial India. Delhi’s Muslims posed a challenge to such classification because, as she shows, their migration was contingent, and far from straightforward or complete. Muslims continued to move back and forth between India and Pakistan throughout the first year after partition, since the border was completely porous and their national belonging was not yet fixed. Numerous considerations—familial, economic, and ideological—impacted people’s individual decisions about where they belonged, and in times of great upheaval, movement across the border was frequent. Zamindar shows how the fixing of the western border was a gradual process—occurring through the introduction of the permit system in 1948 and then the passport system in 1952—in response to persistent movement of this undefined category of people across the border. Translation of religious categories (i.e., Hindus and Muslims) into citizenship categories (i.e., Indians and Pakistanis) was not clear-cut or easy.

This dissertation draws upon some of the observations made by Zamindar while diverging from her approach in other respects. First, I take Delhi itself as an object of analysis, and am interested in the impact of partition upon the city’s spatial reconfiguration, social landscape, and political orientation. My study therefore examines Hindu and Sikh refugees as much as it does Muslims. Second, I share the “processual” approach of Zamindar to partition; but while she takes 1947 as her point of entry, I see the years 1940-1955 as the formative period ultimately defining this process. The year 1947 remains, in her book (as in many others) the
defining point in time—the watershed moment separating colonial from postcolonial India.\textsuperscript{80} I suggest that the process should include both sides of the watershed—and begin earlier, in the late 1930s or 1940, when the division between the Muslim League and Congress assumed a new dimension, and the Lahore Resolution introduced the idea of Pakistan (even if the term itself was not explicitly mentioned) into the agenda. It is only by taking into consideration the utopian imaginations of Pakistan—and the increasingly abusive and polarized political culture and public sphere during the prelude to partition—that we can begin to comprehend the enormity of the violence that took place in Delhi and the transformation of the city into a space of suspicion.

At the center of this suspicion lies (and here I return to the point with which I opened this chapter) the indeterminate identity of Delhi’s Muslims. Were these Muslims Indians or Pakistanis? Nationalist Muslims or Muslim Leagu? There were no easy answers to these questions, and growing competition over resources in a city sinking under the burden of refugees produced suspicions ever more forcefully. In this respect, I try to bring together lessons learned from the long generation of studies on high politics and the endgame of power with the recent turn toward the implications of partition in the post-1947 period. I underscore the fissures and ideological and power conflicts between different state bodies at this critical moment, along with the role of class in the dynamics that cut across religious communities.

I conclude my account in the middle of the 1950s, since by that time, many of the crises accompanying partition had been more or less overcome. First, with Sardar Patel’s death in December 1950, a period marked by intense controversies in the Congress and an extremely polarized political scene, gave way to a long period during which Nehru’s hegemony was unquestionable. Then, with the concerted rehabilitation efforts in Delhi concluded, refugee

\textsuperscript{80} As argued by several scholars, until very recently, 1947 was also considered to be the threshold separating history from political science in studies of the subcontinent: Anthony Low, "Forward," in \textit{From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition}, ed. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
camps were wound up, and many of the new refugee colonies were established. The passport system that was introduced in 1952 fixed the Indo-Pakistani border on the western side—and, along with it, separation between Indian and Pakistani citizens. The evacuee property legislation that defined Muslim property in the city as “evacuee” was abolished in 1954. It was also in 1954 that Shankar Prasad, Delhi’s chief commissioner since 1948, ended his term, and the Shanti Dal—an important volunteer organization that will figure prominently in the next chapters, was wound up.

**Dissertation Outline**

**Chapter One** provides an in-depth study of the partition riots in Delhi, drawing upon intelligence records, newspaper clippings, oral histories, and memoirs as well as secondary literature on colonial Delhi that helped trace the development of communal tensions and riots under colonialism from the mid-19th century on. I attempt to walk a tightrope between uncovering the emotional underpinning of the violence—the climate of fear and suspicion that was grounded in the deep uncertainties of this period—and scrutinizing the organization and structure of the riots, and identifying the main agents. I show that in addition to the responsibility of the crowds of homeless refugees, which represents a recurrent theme in standard government narratives about the riots, there was also a great deal of orchestration on the part of the local Delhi RSS, along with the Hindu *bania* (trading castes) community. This is traced to the entrenchment in Delhi of the Hindu right since the late 19th century, and specifically of the RSS, since the mid-1930s.

**Chapter Two** pursues the discussion of the law-and-order crisis, concentrating upon the role of the police and a host of nongovernmental organizations, first, in the September riots, and secondly, in the less dramatic yet persistent violence that lasted for three years. By examining the
law-and-order situation in the first years after partition, I expand the time frame of the “partition riots,” and show that they were not contained within the well-confined time span of a couple of months, as stated in standard accounts, but continued at least until the end of 1950. I highlight the competing visions of the Indian nation that battled during this period of great uncertainty, and the extremely fractured nature of the state. I show that divisions permeated all levels of governance—the central cabinet, the Delhi secretariat, and the policemen and officers on the ground. By underscoring this divided administrative and policing landscape I move away from more simplistic analyses of the state during riots as either “weak” or “strong.” I focus upon the role played by a host of volunteer organizations that straddled the line between state and society, and the controversies surrounding them, which show how, at this moment of crisis, the ideal type of a modern state as neutral and separate from society totally collapsed.

Chapter Three continues to pursue the study of the lingering violence, focusing solely upon struggles over Muslim “evacuee property.” This continued until the abrogation of the evacuee property legislation in 1954. The chapter explores the spatial consequences of partition—the ghettoization of the Muslim community through the gradual encroachment upon Muslim-majority neighborhoods that were designated “Muslim zones.” I study a host of factors shaping this dynamic, and how it became inundated with an atmosphere of suspicion that infiltrated the Muslim neighborhoods themselves. In doing so, I highlight that just as the state itself was not a unified body, neither were the Muslims and refugees. These two rival publics in the city were each divided along socioeconomic lines that played a role in determining whose house was occupied, by whom, and in what manner.

Finally, Chapter Four that looks at the “wars of words” taking place in the Urdu press also underscores the processual nature of partition. The first decade after independence is revealed as a twilight zone in which Urdu still served as a language shared by Hindus, Muslims,
and Sikhs, before it came to be identified exclusively as a “Muslim language.” Urdu was the main journalistic language of the two rival publics in the city—the Muslims and the Punjabi refugees—and the editorial exchanges between their newspapers created a robust and extremely aggressive, yet *shared* vernacular public sphere. The Arya Samaji editors still articulated their propagation of Hindi and Hindu culture, and their most vehement attacks on Muslims and Islam, in refined Urdu. The Urdu press was also more rooted in local affairs, compared to the English press, and it thus provides a window into the emotional climate that sustained the daily tensions and violence in the city. Through the discourse of the refugees and Muslim press we can get insight into how these publics understood this period of great upheaval, and their place in the dramatically-transformed circumstances.
CHAPTER ONE

THERE WAS ONCE A CITY WHOSE NAME WAS DELHI: 1947 DELHI AND A HISTORY OF AN EVENT

The Event

"...And yet, how many were not fortunate enough to return to their city. How many, who spent the rest of their life missing and crying for Delhi. Delhi has always, recurrently, made her children cry. Having been wrenched from her protective lap, they spend the rest of their life wandering around and wailing. And here, [Delhi], drenched in dust and blood, comes to life again. She changes her dress, embraces the newcomers and is filled with renewed happiness and life [...] Delhi's old concrete turned into dust. Now Delhi is a new bride with a new concrete."81

Towards midnight on the brink between August 14 and August 15, 1947—the eve of India’s independence—India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, delivered his famously riveting speech “Tryst with Destiny.” It opens with these unforgettable words:

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.82

Nehru delivered this speech at the Constituent Assembly in New Delhi, where the atmosphere was celebratory and festive. Yet, as he was delivering it, the city was already on the verge of crisis, packed with Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Punjab. The movement of refugees from Punjab into the city had begun several months earlier, initiating with the Muslim League campaign bringing down the coalition government in this province, and the communal riots that followed. As partition drew near, the number of Punjabi refugees in Delhi had

increased significantly. By August 5, there were already 80,000 refugees in the capital;83 By August 21—a mere six days after independence was declared—it was reported that there had been an arrival of between 4,000 to 5,000 refugees in Delhi on a daily basis.84 Delhi was confronted with unprecedented demands on its resources and was facing a food and housing crisis. This was accompanied by horrifying news of the violence Hindus and Sikhs suffered in West Pakistan. There were also tales of Muslim occupation of Hindu and Sikh houses—tales that further fuelled people’s anger and served to justify the forceful occupation of Muslim houses in Delhi.85 Serious outbreak of violence was in the air.

The trouble began on Sunday, August 24, in Subzimandi, when a number of refugees occupied four vacant houses by force, following the landlords' refusal to rent them out.86 Subzimandi was one of the first localities to spring to the west of the walls of the old city of Shahjahanabad, and was where the vegetable wholesale market had been located since at least 1851.87 By the late 19th century, it became a hub of mechanized industry and a residential quarter for the laborers working in the new factories—most notably, the Delhi Cloth Mills. In the early 20th century, as more people began settling outside the walled city, Subzimandi ceased to be an area exclusively populated by laborers, yet it retained a working class character.88 Importantly, by 1947, it was considered a “mixed locality,” populated by both Hindus and Muslims, and it was one of the first localities where refugee had settled prior to partition.89 The clash in

83 “80,000 Refugees in Delhi Now,” Hindustan Times, 5 August 1947.
85 For news on the occupation of non-Muslim houses in Lahore and other cities, see: “Refugees Welcome Nehru’s Assurance,” Hindustan Times, 28 August 1947.
86 “12-Hour Curfew in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 26 August 1947.
89 As will be shown below, Subzimandi was one of the three main localities (besides Paharganj and Karol Bagh) where total ethnic cleansing took place during the September riots. All three localities were repeatedly characterized
Subzimandi developed into arson and looting, and a stabbing incident that impelled a 12-hour curfew. The Deputy Commissioner issued a reassuring press note, promising that the government was taking strict precautionary measures, and that it was determined to maintain peace in Delhi at any cost. The curfew was then extended for an additional week. The English daily Hindustan Times expressed its hope that Delhi would not be drawn into the maelstrom, and that refugees would reciprocate the hospitality extended to them by Delhi’s people and avoid “rec-enact[ing] here anything of the frightful drama of the Punjab.”

Less than a week later, however, the situation span out of control. Cases of stabbings were increasingly reported every day and bodies were found in different localities in and around Delhi. On September 2 there was a significant shift from sporadic assaults of stabbings and shootings to an outbreak of mass violence, initiating in the rural areas surrounding the city. The Hindustan Times reported that 55 bodies were found in Holambi Kalan village, in the jurisdiction of Narela Police Station (henceforth PS), northwest of the city. More than 300 Muslims were killed in an attack on village Barwala, south of Holambi Kalan. Riots continued in the following days in various villages in the west to the city, in the jurisdictions of Najafgarh, Narela, Nangloi and Mehrauli. Villages were attacked; people were killed, exiled or forced to convert; places of worship were burnt down; and property was looted. Many of the remaining

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in official correspondence as “mixed localities.” According to Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi, a Muslim of Delhi whose reportage will be given below, Punjabi refugees started settling in Subzimandi from March-April 1947: Dihlavī, Dilli Ki Bipta, 34.


91 “10 Killed in Delhi Suburbs,” Hindustan Times, 2 September, 1947.

92 “Disturbances were not confined to the city alone but also spread to rural areas. In fact the trouble started from the latter and then swept over the city.” Sahibzada Khurshid to R.N. Banerjea, “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of September 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

93 Four more people were killed in various locations in and around the city: “Two Stabbed in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 3 September, 1947.

94 According to Hindustan Times, in the first week of September there were widespread disturbances in Narela, Sarai Rohilla, Bakar Khan, and Najafgarh: “Troops Open Fire on Rioting Mobs in City,” Hindustan Times, 6 September, 1947. On September 9 there was an attack on Mehrauli village, near the historic minaret of Qutab Minar. Its bazar was burnt, about 35 people were killed and 2,000 Muslims huddled in one house: “Situation in
Muslims in the rural areas were assembled in the villages of Chhatarpur, Tihar and Punjab Khor—the latter was then “attacked by a mob of 2500 but with the timely arrival of the military the situation was saved.”

In the urban area, Friday, September 5, marked a shift from the erratic incidents that had taken place over the previous couple of days, to organized attacks on Muslim life and property. The violence, albeit unevenly, had reached all four areas of the city: the old city of Shahjahanabad, the localities west of it, Civil Lines north of it, and the posh areas of New Delhi to its south. Abdul Rahman Siddiqui, a 23-year old supporter of the Muslim League, working then for the main Muslim League English daily Dawn, recalls September 5 as a fateful day. In a memoir published recently he recalls that he was at the Dawn’s news desk when:

Around 3pm, the teleprinter came alive with ‘Flash, Flash, Flash.’ Presently headlines started to appear: ‘Bomb explosion inside the Fatehpuri Mosque during the Juma prayers. Several wounded. City under curfew.’ ‘Good Lord, it has started. The war is on!’ we exclaimed, almost in the same breath.

The Fatehpuri Mosque mentioned by Siddiqui is an important mosque, second only to Jama Masjid, located at the end of Chandni Chowk—one of the two main boulevards in

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96 Shahjahanabad, popularly known as “old Delhi,” was the capital of the Mughal Empire, named after Shah Jahan, the Emperor who built it in the 17th century. During the 18th century, known as the period of “Mughal Twilight, Delhi was sacked time and again by a series of plunderers—from Nadir Shah and the Persians who carried off the famous peacock throne (1739), through Ahmad Shah Abdali and his Afghans (1757), to Ghulam Qadir and his Rohillas (1788). The weak Mughal Emperor Shah Alam accepted the Marathas' protection and they formed the real power behind his throne from 1785 to 1803. The British took over Delhi in 1803. After the Great Revolt of 1857 the British built Civil Lines, a residential and administrative quarter for the colonial rulers to the north of old Delhi. In 1931, 20 years after the colonial capital was transferred to Delhi, the construction of the spacious New Delhi to the south of the old city was completed, and has since housed India’s main governing bodies.
Shahjahanabad radiating from the Red Fort (the Mughal palace). The bomb explosion in the mosque is similarity underlined in Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi’s account of the riots. Dehlvi (1906-67) embodied the Muslim intellectual milieu of pre-partition Delhi. He was an accomplished writer, literary editor, and grandson of Deputy Nazir Ahmad—a prominent figure in the 19th century Delhi Renaissance. Dehlvi's reportage of the riots in Urdu, titled *Dilli Ki Bipta* (the calamity of Delhi) was written soon after the riots, and published in 1949. His family’s residence was located in Khari Baoli, a Hindu locality and wholesale grain market near the Fatehpuri Mosque. Approximately ten years prior to the riots, Dehlvi re-located to the Muslim locality of Jama Masjid (the most important mosque in the city), but his mother insisted on staying in the old family house in Khari Baoli, where the office of his Urdu literary magazine *Saqi* was also located. On the aforementioned Friday, September 5, he left his office in Khari Baoli and proceeded to the nearby mosque for *namaz* (prayer). Upon returning to his office, he heard a bomb explosion. He saw hundreds of pigeons flying up in the air from Fatehpuri Mosque, accompanied by a startling sound—exclamations of "Allah O Akbar". Then, there was dead silence. Hindus were seen running across the roof of Gadodia Market (the market adjacent to the mosque). At the time of the explosion, although the prayer had already ended, the *namazis* (praying people) apparently stayed inside the mosque in order to listen to a sermon. One person died on the spot and between eight to ten people were wounded. The *namazis* shouted Allah O Akbar and ran outside the mosque, where the police dispersed them by shooting.

As fear spread out, the bazaar of Khari Baoli closed down and all the people rushed back to their homes. Dehlvi's house was in great danger—as it was located right at the heart of the

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98 The mosque was sold to a Hindu banker, Lala Chunna Mal in the aftermath of the Great Revolt of 1857. It was returned to the Muslims only in 1877 and became an important arena of religious debates. It formed a link between the city and the localities outside the western wall, since it was patronized by the Punjabi Muslim community, within the city and in Sadar Bazar: Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, 54. For the Punjabi Muslim community of traders and the Fatehpuri Mosque see also Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*, 281 and passim.
Hindu locality. The Muslims residing in the area all gathered in his house with their families. The men prepared for an attack, holding knives, wood logs, stones and a gun. Some men began collecting large bricks, empty bottles and chilies. The Hindu houses around them, however, were all quiet. Dehlvi returned to his office, and left the locality at 3pm along with three of the office munshis. They set off towards his home in Jama Masjid. Dehlvi’s depiction of their escape route provides a detailed description of their trajectory—and thereby, of the space of the city as one totally underwritten by communal logic and fear: every alley was clearly demarcated as either Hindu or Muslim. Furthermore, Dehlvi sets a clear contrast between their place of departure, Khari Baoli—a Hindu, and hence dangerous locality, and their destination, Jama Masjid—a Muslim neighborhood, i.e. a safe haven. The walking distance between these two points—which is a relatively short one, as can be attested by anyone who had been there—became for Dehlvi and his companions a long and complicated route, full of pitfalls and dangers. The streets were desolate, apart from groups of young men—Hindu in Hindu alleys and Muslims in Muslims ones—who were either standing idle, or on the lookout for victims. Dehlvi bore witness to the stabbing of a Hindu man, which happened right in front of his very eyes. Every turn, shortcut and lane they took was a fateful decision. Finally, they reached Jama Masjid and took a sigh of relief. Dehlvi thought he would return the following day to the office in order to collect essential documents, yet due to the newly enforced curfew he could not henceforth leave his home for days.99

The explosion of the bomb inside the city marked the commencement of the violence in Siddiqui’s and Dehlvi’s accounts. The important position of this mosque invested the attack with symbolic resonance for Muslims—as had been indicated in an urgent telegram sent by Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, to Nehru concerning the matter. But the localities that

suffered the worst hits were those located outside the walled city, to its west. These localities had partly existed before the 1857 Revolt, but received a boost of development and expansion in its aftermath, when large-scale demolitions took place within the walled city—forcing many people to relocate outside of the western walls. The construction of the railway line in this area in the 1860s further encouraged their development, and by the late 1930s this area was larger than the walled city itself. The localities struck by the bloodiest forms of violence in early September 1947 were the aforementioned three “mixed localities” of Karol Bagh, Subzimandi, and Paharganj. The mixed nature of their habitation rendered their Muslim population especially vulnerable, since they could not set up gates and other forms of protection as did Muslims in the Muslim-majority neighborhoods.

In Karol Bagh, reported the Chief Commissioner, “Hindus and Sikhs were definitely the aggressors,” and according to Dehlvi, Muslim houses had been marked out in advance of the riots. Whereas some people recognized these signs and left for the Muslim-majority areas prior to the attack, others would not listen. Karol Bagh was apparently a stronghold of Congress-supporting nationalist Muslims, who, according to Dehlvi, were adamant on staying put, preventing others from leaving. Hence, once the locality was attacked it proved disastrous. Among the many atrocities that took place in Karol Bagh, it was alleged that a group of Muslim

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100 Gupta, Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth, 60.
101 Dihlavī, Dilli Ki Bipta, 32. I.H. Qureshi, whose account will be given below, also claims that Muslim houses were marked in advance with the Hindu symbol of inverted swastika. The attackers were aided by the Hindu ration dealers who provided them with full lists of Muslim residents in “unprotected”—that is, mixed localities: I.H. Qureshi, "A Case Study of the Social Relations between the Muslims and the Hindus, 1935-47," in The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947, ed. C. H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 367. For the marking of Muslim houses before riots in present-day India, see: Subramaniam, "Culture of Suspicion: Riots and Rumors in Bombay, 1992-1993," 99.
102 Dipankar Gupta, whose brief account of the riots is based on interviews he conducted with old-time Congress members of Delhi also claims that Karol Bagh was a stronghold of nationalist Muslims who were butchered mercilessly—an instance of historic irony, or tragedy: Dipankar Gupta, "The Indian Diaspora of 1947: The Political and Ethnic Consequences of Partition with Special Reference to Delhi," in Communalism in India: History, Politics, and Culture, ed. K. N. Panikkar (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), 88.
high school boys were separated from the rest of the class and butchered by Sikhs with *talwars* (big swords).\(^{103}\)

In Paharganj and Subzimandi, two localities with long history of street fights and communal disturbances commencing in the 19\(^{th}\) century,\(^{104}\) the struggle was fiercer and Muslims appear to have participated in the fight, at least initially. Dehlvi had relatives in Paharganj, and when the curfew was lifted for two hours, a few courageous young men from his neighborhood took a *tonga* (horse carriage) to Paharganj to find out what was going on. Upon arriving, however, they found the place to be occupied by the army, and the road closed. They returned disappointed. Not a word was heard from Paharganj for two whole days. On the third day, Muslim survivors from the locality trickled into the walled city—broken people with only shreds of clothes on their body. According to Dehlvi, the Muslims of Paharganj fought for two days and two nights. The attackers were equipped with guns and were wearing khaki uniform (that is, they were RSS men). The Muslims hit their attackers so forcefully, that embankments were installed and the attackers came equipped with the newest kinds of military-issued weapons. Shortly thereafter, rivers of blood began flowing in Paharganj. The army men, like hunting dogs, chased the Muslims and shot them down. Paharganj became a death trap. Along with the army were armed looters who moved from house to house, looting wealth and honor. Women were gathered up and stripped naked on the street.\(^{105}\) “Hundreds of women are still missing today,” exclaimed Dehlvi in 1949, “and only God knows if they were swallowed by the earth, or the sky.” Then it became quiet and refugees settled in the Muslim houses and mosques of the

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\(^{103}\) Gyanendra Pandey also recounts this affair, relying, apart from Dehlvi, on an article in *News Chronicle*, cited by a report on the riots that was published by the Delhi Muslim League on December 30, 1947: Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*, 129.

\(^{104}\) I will elaborate on the history of these disturbances in the section *Communal Relations in Delhi, from the 19th Century to the Late 1920s*.

\(^{105}\) Jugal Kishore Khanna, a Delhi Congress member, also claims that Muslim women in Paharganj were paraded naked on the streets: Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, p. 133.
locality. In the evening, Dehlvi concludes the paragraph with a sarcastic comment, the radio announced: “the insurgency in Paharganj was suppressed and peace has been restored; there was one person who was shooting all night, it was found out that he was crazy.”

Noteworthy, that it was highly important for Dehlvi to establish the heroism and strength of the Muslim community in Paharganj. He also emphasizes the agency of the Muslims of Subzimandi in the fighting; he extols their determination and courage—their attackers were wearing khaki uniforms and were armed with guns, and yet, the Muslims fought so hard that the attackers had to withdraw and return with reinforcements. The Muslims of Subzimandi had enough weapons, as well as a group of well-trained Muslim blacksmiths who built Bren guns and Stein guns. However, when the army appeared on the third day, the Muslims mistook the soldiers for the uniform-clothed RSS people, and fought them. It was not long after that they understood their mistake, yet it was too late. What followed was a “Day of Judgment.” People were caught and “roasted like peas in an oven.” Hundreds were wiped out. In the evening, Dehlvi comments sarcastically, it was told on the news that Subzimandi was brought under control and peace was restored.

That the Muslims in Subzimandi fought hard is also suggested in the fortnightly report submitted by the Chief Commissioner:

In Subzimandi, Muslims, who were better armed, and had a lot of illicit arms in their possession, caused a good deal of damage by firing with machine guns and sten guns from their houses. A pitched battle was fought between the Military and the Arains and it was after great difficulty that these pockets of resistance were cleared.

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107 Arain were Muslims gardeners. According to Margrit Pernau, social tensions between the Muslims gardeners and the Hindu bania (trader castes) in the area of Subzimandi, where the fruit and vegetable wholesale market was located, had become imbued with religious feelings since the mid-19th century: Pernau, Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi, 194.

Reports published in the *Hindustan Times* also claim that in Subzimandi Muslims used machine guns and mortar fire against the army troops, who eventually managed to capture it.\(^{109}\) Interestingly, while the three accounts emphasize the agency of the Muslims, they frame it differently. The Chief Commissioner’s and *Hindustan Times*’ reports speak the state’s “prose of counterinsurgency,” to cite Ranajit Guha’s famous article, describing Muslim struggle as “pockets of resistance” that were “cleared.”\(^{110}\) Dehlvi, on the other hand, presents their fight as an act of self-defense rather than aggression.

Among the first victims in Subzimandi, claims Dehlvi, were the Muslim mill laborers, and not a single Muslim laborer remained in the mills.\(^{111}\) Anis Kidwai—sister-in-law of Cabinet member, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, who had participated in the rehabilitation efforts in Delhi from October 1947—claims it was specifically in the Birla Mills (belonging to the wealthy business family of the Birlas) where the carnage took place, turning into a “slaughter house.”\(^{112}\) The area of Delhi University and the surrounding neighborhoods located just to the north of Subzimandi, were also badly hit. Phool Chand Jain, (1907-?), an important Delhi Congress member who played a central role in the non-cooperation and Quit India movements, was a resident of the Jawahar Nagar locality of Subzimandi. He actively took part in the relief work—both during and after the partition riots. He recalled in a later interview from 1971:

>The first riot happened in Subzimandi and Paharganj. In Subzimandi I, together with my son Lakshmi Chand and my brother Kastur Chand lifted the dead bodies with our own hands. No one else went there. No one entered this area for three days. It was raining

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\(^{111}\) Dihlavī, *Dilli Ki Bipta*, 34.

\(^{112}\) In contrast, she argued, the management of the Delhi Cloth Mills in the adjacent Kishanganj area arranged for the timely evacuation of its Muslim laborers to the refugee camp and from there, to Pakistan: Anis Kidwai, *In Freedom's Shade*, trans. Ayesha Kidwai (Penguin, 2011), 119. Nehru addressed the mill workers in the aftermath of the riots on September 30, and reproached them: “workers in other countries have progressed because they have strong unions. The workers in India must remain united and form powerful trade unions. Riots like the ones that have taken place here do not help the workers in any way…” See, “India Will not be a Hindu State,” Nehru’s address to mill workers and labourers, 30 September 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 107-109.
heavily. It was on the occasion of Janmashtami (birthday of the god Krishna). So we went house by house and took away the dead bodies. We saw what kind of destruction befell each house. In these houses we also saw gulel [slingshots] which were prepared as weapons, lying there, like the catapults used in gardens to scare away birds. In preparation for the fighting, people also sharpened iron blades. Sticks were found in all houses, whether they had already been in the house or brought especially for the event. In Arya Pura, Subzimandi and in Lal Masjid we found bodies of three or four women who were totally naked. I cannot say for certain what happened to them before they were killed. There was one school, a big building in which many women were hiding. There, as well, perhaps one woman had a shred of cloth on her body, the rest were totally naked. They were killed in that very place. We lifted about 700-750 dead bodies only from Subzimandi. Other people cleared away a similar number in Paharganj. mukaabla to khub datkar tha [So the fight was fierce] […]

There was such maar kaat (carnage) in Subzimandi that the police moved all of them out. Whoever survived, we collected them and took them to Purana Qila, lest they be killed in another attack. We told them that when peace was restored we would bring them back.113

Lakshmi Chand Jain (1925-2000), Phool Chand Jain's son, also recalls these events in his autobiography.114 Jain describes the area surrounding the university, Jawahar Nagar, where the family lived since 1939—the year when Delhi University campus was built. It was “a frontier territory, overgrown with trees and shrubbery, with the possibility of sighting the odd jackal, and almost totally uninhibited.”115 He recollects:

By September, the killings had not stopped, and dead bodies were littered all over the place around the University area especially Subzi Mandi and Roshanara Road. P.N. Dhar (the economist, later member of Indira Gandhi's PMO) whom I knew from Hindu College and I got together a group to clear the bodies from the streets. The group included some 40 students from the University, mainly those from UOTC, the University Officers Training Group, who were like Home Guards; they had dummy rifles given to them for training. We needed some sort of protection because the people who had killed the residents of that area would not allow anybody to remove those bodies. They said, let them rot there. So we decided to go in a force of 40 to persuade the residents who were watching from their balconies. We told them that if the bodies rotted there, disease would spread into their homes and they would risk infection. After one or two hours of argument, we started clearing away the corpses. The September rains, which were fierce in Delhi in 1947, had soaked the bodies…the stench was unbearable. My father arranged for two trucks from the Municipality to be made available to us. Over 15 days, we removed 3000 dead bodies which were carted away by the Municipal trucks to a place designated by the Municipal Committee. There were more dead bodies to be removed,

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113 Interview with Phool Chand Jain, Oral History Transcript No. 479, NMML. (my translation from Hindi).
114 L. C. Jain, Civil Disobedience: Two Freedom Struggles, One Life (New Delhi: Book Review Literary Trust, 2010), Chapter 4.
115 The family moved to Jawahar Nagar. The plot of land was offered to his father by his colleague, local Congress leader, and owner and editor of Tej, Deshbandhu Gupta.
but we could not do it. We used to get nightmares. We had to wash our hands 3-4 times before we ate.\textsuperscript{116}

The two accounts also depict a horrifying scene of a survivor who was buried beneath the piles of bodies, pretending to be dead lest he would be killed. Their accounts are similar, and yet, one should note the subtle differences: namely, for example, while the father remembered that he worked alone with his son, the son mentions his friends from college as the main partners in the relief work; and while the father recalls that there were 750 dead bodies, the son’s estimate of the dead is as much as 3,000. This is just but one example of the malleability and fallibility of memory and, thus, of the evidence used to reconstruct violent riots—a point I shall further elaborate upon further in the forthcoming section.

To be sure, the Delhi University campus was also not spared. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, a Muslim League member—who later moved to Pakistan and became Pakistan’s Rehabilitation Minister, and later, Vice Chancellor of Karachi University—was at the time of the riots a history professor and Dean of the Arts Faculty in Delhi University. In his account of the riots he explains that Jawahar Nagar, where the carnage described by the Jains took place, was an RSS stronghold. In addition, camps for the Punjabi refugees also opened up in the vicinity, which aroused the residents’ sympathy towards the refugees and, along with it, anti-Muslim sentiments. Soon enough, groups of armed Sikhs and others were seen roaming around campus. Qureshi himself, as a Muslim League member and supporter of Pakistan was in a precarious position. He noticed that Hindu students associated with the RSS watched his house and every movement closely and that one of them “came a little too often” to see him. Then Muslim residents were attacked and murdered in the neighboring orchards. Fruit trade was a Muslim monopoly Qureshi explains, and Muslim refugees from the orchards—probably the \textit{arains} mentioned in the Chief

\textsuperscript{116} Jain, \textit{Civil Disobedience: Two Freedom Struggles, One Life}, 58.
Commissioner’s report—began to pour towards the university. “That night was full of terror for us. We could hear screams of men, women and children…killed in their homes.”\textsuperscript{117}

Next morning the campus was attacked. There was no loss of life but all Muslim houses were looted, one by one. Muslim students and teachers barely escaped. The women put “Hindu caste marks” on their foreheads and Hindu clothes, and they fled by car to the Pakistan’s High Commission. The roads were scattered with dead bodies. His house was looted soon afterwards and he lost all he had except the clothes they wore and the money in the bank. To him, it was the loss of his personal library—containing rare manuscripts and miniatures—which was difficult to bear. Two of his books—one in manuscript and the other in typed script—were irretrievably lost.\textsuperscript{118} On the next day, he put his family into the Purana Qila refugee camp.

To be sure, the loss of culture is indeed prevalent in such turbulent times. In Karol Bagh the Jamia Millia University—a stronghold of nationalist Muslims—was attacked and its library burned down, along with \textit{lakhs} [hundreds of thousands] of books. “Some good souls managed to save a few books and manuscripts” and Gandhi asked Zakir Husain to inspect them. But Zakir Husain (1897-1969), Vice-chancellor of the University, who had mourned the loss of so many precious books and priceless years of work, could not bring himself to visit the place.\textsuperscript{119}

To recap, the three localities saw large-scale arson, killings, looting and raping – all leaving very few Muslim survivors, who fled to Muslim-majority neighborhoods in the old city. In addition, Turkman Gate at the outskirts of the old city was one of the worst-hit localities. As in Subzimandi, the fortnightly report and especially the \textit{Hindustan Times} depict the events in Turkman Gate through the language of counterinsurgency, emphasizing the machine guns and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Qureshi, "A Case Study of the Social Relations between the Muslims and the Hindus, 1935-47," 268.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Alok Bhalla mentioned that St. Stephens' students did all they could to save Qureshi's library: Interview with Alok Bhalla, 27 February, 2010, New Delhi.
\end{itemize}
other ammunition Muslims had, as well as the “pitched battle” they had with the police and army.\(^{120}\) Here too, the final outcome was that Muslims survivors from this neighborhood were evacuated to the Purana Qila refugee camp.\(^{121}\)

Within Sadar Bazar, the fourth main locality to the west of the old city,\(^{122}\) some neighborhoods were badly attacked, while others remained strongholds of Muslim presence.\(^{123}\) The other locality of mixed habitation that had suffered greatly during this week was the government employees’ neighborhood of Lodi Colony, in New Delhi. According to Dehlvi, arms were taken from the Muslim policemen beforehand while Hindus were abundantly supplied with licenses and allowed to amass a great deal of weapons. The Sikhs’ *kirpans* (ceremonial daggers) got bigger by the day and turned into *talwars* (swords). On the day of the attack the Muslims were unarmed and vulnerable.

Unlike Lahore—where the posh areas remained untouched by the violence—\(^{124}\) New Delhi was not spared. Even the high-scale shopping area of Connaught Place became chaotic, as rioters looted Muslim shops in broad daylight, and Prime Minister Nehru himself, who toured the city, stepped out of his car, outraged, snatched a gun from one of the passive soldiers standing

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\(^{120}\) “City Now Near Normal,” Hindustan Times, 12 September 1947.
\(^{121}\) “Big Haul of Arms in Paharganj,” Hindustan Times, 13 September 1947
\(^{122}\) The Sadar Bazar area developed in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857-8, when, following the massive demolitions around the Red Fort, the government granted land in this area to some of the traders and shopkeepers dislocated in the clearances. Others, whose properties were destroyed or confiscated also concentrated there. When the railway line was built along the Grand Trunk route and the octroi boundary was made contiguous with the city wall, Sadar Bazar became the best location for wholesale shops and depots. During the 1880s and 1890s many of the Punjabi Muslim wholesale merchants bought up property in this area. Since the 1890s, it became, along with Subzimandi, the main hub of mechanized factories. See: Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, 39, 62; Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism*, 119. Since the mid-1920s, when tensions between religious communities in the city increased, Sadar Bazar was considered a “weak spot” for outbreak of riots.
\(^{123}\) According to Hindustan Times, on September 8 there was a riot in Bara Hindu Rao in Sadar Bazar, and on the night of September 10, Sadar Bazar was the main focal point of trouble: “Situation in Capital Under Control,” Hindustan Times, 10 September, 1947; “Improvement Maintained in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 11 September, 1947. An officer who visited Bahadurgarh Road (Sadar Bazar), Kishenganj and Serajganj areas, reported that many people—most probably Muslims—were running away from their homes following looting and arson.
\(^{124}\) Ian Talbot, who studied the riots in Lahore and Amritsar, emphasizes the socio-economic factors that played a role in the violence and in the rehabilitation of refugees later. According to Talbot, violence in Lahore was intense and confined within specific areas—it was highly differentiated and did not touch the posh neighborhood of Model Town: Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar, 1947-1957*, 49.
by, and threatened to disperse the looters.\textsuperscript{125} Groups of attackers were roaming around New Delhi’s residential areas, entering bungalows, looting and killing Muslim domestic servants.\textsuperscript{126} An attack on the residence of a diplomat, which clarified the need for special protection of the embassies and consulates located in New Delhi, made this violence especially embarrassing, and Nehru’s letters from September express his concern over the total breakdown of law and order in the heart of India’s capital.

Just as had occurred with those of other cities across West and East Punjab, Delhi’s railway stations—namely, the old Delhi Railway Station in Chandni Chowk, and the New Delhi Railway Station near Paharganj—turned into scenes of death, as gangs of rioters killed and looted Muslim refugees awaiting the trains to flee the city.\textsuperscript{127} Around New Delhi Railway Station the \textit{bandhani} (coolies) community was targeted.\textsuperscript{128} The Old Delhi train Station turned into a death trap. Jugal Kishore Khanna, a member of the Delhi Congress and Deputy Secretary of the Constituent Assembly of India, was appointed a Special Magistrate during the crisis, and was posted at the Station. He later recalled that the only train which ran at that time was the \textit{Frontier Mail} from Amritsar, as other lines stopped altogether:

…almost daily I used to obtain an order taking out the bodies, of course, mostly of Muslims on average 30 to 35 bodies a day from this Frontier Mail and there was no question of going into formalities. We could not get any names or any post mortem, not even counting was there. They were put on the Municipal refuse trucks and dumped into the Jamuna. In fact I used to send daily reports to Mr. M.S. Randhawa the then Deputy Commissioner of Delhi. Even now I have got copies of those reports which I used to send

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\textsuperscript{126} “Situation in Capital under Control,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 10 September, 1947. In a letter to Rajendra Prasad, discussing the coverage of the riots in the foreign press, Nehru wrote that the negative coverage was direct result of what foreign correspondents saw for themselves, and that “Every ambassador’s house has been visited by gangs in search of Muslim servants.” Jawaharlal Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 17 September 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 82.


\textsuperscript{128} Gupta, "The Indian Diaspora of 1947: The Political and Ethnic Consequences of Partition with Special Reference to Delhi," 89. Gupta relies on interviews with Congress members who lived in Delhi during the riots and took part in the rehabilitation efforts.
daily from the railway station. Those were horrible things which Delhi witnessed. But fortunately, Mahatmaji came here and the trouble stopped.\[129\] […]

Once when I was on duty I saw a Muslim running about to catch the special train. He had with him a girl of about 10 or 11 years of age. The train had not reached the platform but before that the girl and the man came by crossing the railway line. Instantly I heard a shot, I ran towards the line and I saw the girl lying in a pool of blood; I noticed a stab wound on the side of her ear. About the same time I noticed that the old man…ran towards the platform and when I came back I saw that the old man was lying dead. Similar incidents were witnessed by me on several occasions.\[130\]

Once or twice, notes Khanna, Nehru himself came to the railway station and was horrified to find dead bodies that were collected there:

At the Railway Station, there was an office of the Government Railway Police. Behind that office there was a waiting room and a bathroom and some sort of an enclosure. And one day news was brought to me that when Muslims came to the G.R.P. office they sought police protection, but their luggage used to be kept in the office and they were asked to go at the back of that enclosure and there they were butchered, of course, with the assistance of the Police, it may be connivance, it should be really the assistance of the Police. I detected some bodies there. I came to Panditji [Jawaharlal Nehru] and said, “This is the state of affairs. I am helpless.” In a worried mood he listened to me and then rushed to the spot to see things with his own eyes and then gave a bit of his mind to Randhawa [Delhi’s Deputy Commissioner] who had come by that time. And Mr. Randhawa on that day, of course, ordered firing and so on. But the administration, of course, on account of circumstances also was very loose and demoralised.\[131\]

Throughout that month of September, the violence extended to other localities within the old city, such as Faiz Bazar, Darya Ganj, Ajmeri Gate, and Phatak Habash Khan. With Delhi being the seat of the government and of foreign embassies, the political and symbolic stakes could not be higher and the central government sought to restore law and order with full force. An Emergency Committee of the Cabinet was established on September 6, headed by Lord
Mountbatten, who drew on his military expertise to suppress the violence as quickly as possible.\(^{132}\) In his broadcast to the nation on September 9, Nehru defined the situation as analogous to a war, asserting that the government intended to deal with it “on a war basis in every sense of the word.”\(^{133}\) On the same day, the Cabinet Emergency Committee decided to set up a parallel Delhi Committee in order to address the emergency situation in the capital. The Delhi Committee was chaired by C.H. Bhabha and consisted of the army, police, civil administration and representatives of volunteer bodies.\(^{134}\) The Delhi District Magistrate, a position held by Deputy Commissioner Randhawa, passed an order under section 13 of the Punjab Public Safety Act 1947 (as extended to Delhi Province) prohibiting all people from carrying any firearms or weapons, even crude ones, in public places.\(^{135}\) Sikhs were prohibited from carrying kirpans.\(^{136}\)

Moreover, it was also on September 9 that Gandhi arrived in Delhi. Gandhi was on his way to the riots-stricken Punjab— and although he had planned to stop in Delhi for a mere few days,\(^{137}\) by the time he arrived the city was already in flames, and thus he became adamant on restoring peace in Delhi, just as he did in Bengal. Up till his assassination on January 30, 1948, Gandhi addressed the people of Delhi in his daily prayer meetings, in which he preached for

\(^{132}\) Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 139; Zamindar, The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 21. According to Maulana Azad, the emergency committee, which consisted of cabinet members and several high civil and military officials, met daily until peace was restored. Despite his great bitterness towards Lord Mountbatten, whom he saw as the chief architect of the partition plan, Azad commanded him for his military training and his persistence in restoring order to Delhi. See, Azad, India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version, 230-1.

\(^{133}\) Nehru's broadcast to the nation on Tuesday, September 9 was covered at length in the newspapers the following day. See: “Ruthless War against Evil-Doers,” Hindustan Times, 10 September, 1947.

\(^{134}\) “Maintenance of Law and Order,” Hindustan Times, 10 September, 1947.

\(^{135}\) “Improvement Maintained in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 11 September, 1947.

\(^{136}\) On Sikhs’ resentment over the over restrictions imposed by the District Magistrate on the length of their kirpans see Sahibzada Khurshid to R.N. Banerjee, “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of October 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

\(^{137}\) Jawaharlal Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, 5 September 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 50.
communal harmony and reproached those engaged in violence and hatred.\textsuperscript{138} His messages were broadcasted on the radio and covered extensively in the daily newspapers. The prayer meetings had electrifying effect on the crowds, as described so powerfully in Nirmala Jain’s memoir about the period, as well as in Anis Kidwai’s reportage.\textsuperscript{139} Many others, however—most of whom refugees—were extremely angry about his “Muslim-appeasing” policy and his constant reproaching of them. It was even reported that a group of refugees had burst into one of his meetings, and killed a Muslim in his presence.\textsuperscript{140}

The riots drove the Muslims who survived out of their neighborhoods, forcing them to seek places that were considered safer. In the initial outbreak, many sought refuge in the houses of Muslim notables—such as cabinet ministers Maulana Azad and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, as well as Pakistan’s Chief Commissioner, Zahid Hussain.\textsuperscript{141} Siddiqui recalls how the survivors from Phatak Habash Khan came trickling into his Muslim-majority locality of Ballimaran. Based in the other major Muslims area of Jama Masjid, Dehlvi witnessed his neighborhood turning into an improvised refugee camp. Jama Masjid and Idgah in Sadar Bazar\textsuperscript{142} turned into temporary refugee camps, where thousands of Muslims gathered. Another big refugee center for Muslims opened in a by-late on Qutab Road (the main road running north-to-south through both Sadar Bazar and Paharganj).\textsuperscript{143} As these were on the verge of becoming over-populated, Muslim

\textsuperscript{138} Gandhi’s prayer meetings are all collected in Gandhi, \textit{Delhi Diary, Prayer Speeches from 10-9-47 to 30-1-48}, 1st ed. (Ahmedabad,: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948).

\textsuperscript{139} Nirmalā Jaina, \textit{Dillī, ŚAhara Dara ŚAhara} (Nayī Dillī: Rājakamala Prakāsana, 2009), 77. Kidwai, \textit{In Freedom’s Shade}, Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{140} I will discuss the anti-Gandhian sentiments among the refugees in the days leading to the assassination in chapters 2 and 4.

\textsuperscript{141} Azad describes this in his autobiography. See also: Qureshi, "A Case Study of the Social Relations between the Muslims and the Hindus, 1935-47," 368. According to Gyan Pandey’s account of the Delhi riots, the ‘Pak Transfer Office’ at ‘L’ Block in Connaught Place turned into a place of refuge for thousands of Muslims who fled Lodi Road Colony and other locations in New Delhi: Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India}, 123.

\textsuperscript{142} An \textit{idgah} is a Muslim site where the Id prayers and animal sacrifice take place, and situated outside a town.

refugees were transferred to the two large refugee camps opened for them in the ruins of Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb, south of New Delhi.\textsuperscript{144} Delhi’s Muslims turned into refugees in their own city, echoing the Muslims who had fled the city in the aftermath of the 1857 Revolt and hid in the ruins and villages surrounding it. It is not surprising that in Muslim memoirs, the riots of 1947 are perceived as a repetition, and in some regards even as an extension, of the events of 1857—in the sense that both were tragic events of epic proportions bringing about massacres, destruction, and large-scale exodus. If 1857 posed a brutal attack on “Muslim Delhi,” 1947 was its death blow.\textsuperscript{145}

To Ghalib, the quintessential Urdu poet of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Delhi, Delhi itself had died in the aftermath of 1857: “Delhi was ‘a city of the dead.’ Did someone ask about Delhi? ‘Yes, there was once a city of that name in the realm of India,’” he wrote.\textsuperscript{146} And Dehlvi, almost 100 years later, concluded his reportage thus:

\begin{quote}
The scar of the separation from Delhi will remain forever. Delhi is still there and Muslims still reside there but where is that Delhi? Delhi died...Delhi \textit{Zindabad} [long live Delhi]\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

By mid-September, there were as many as 120,000 Muslim refugees in the camps. Conditions in Purana Qila and Humayun’s Tomb were horrible, with Purana Qila having only a single water tap. These were places, to quote Zakir Husain, “in which humanity was dumped.”\textsuperscript{148} By late October most of them were evacuated by trains to Pakistan, while others—thousands, according to some; hundreds, according to others—returned to the city.

\textsuperscript{145} Dehlvi’s reportage exemplifies this understanding of 1947 as a repetition and extension of 1857. Both he and Kidwai open their accounts with an explicit comparison of the two events.
\textsuperscript{147} Dihlavī, \textit{Dilli Kī Biptā}, 61.
\textsuperscript{148} “Record of the Twelfth Meeting of the Cabinet Emergency Committee,” New Delhi, 16 September 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 79.
Historians’ History of an Event

The above is a skeletal account of the September riots, synthesized from government fortnightly reports, newspapers clippings, and personal accounts written soon after the events, as well as memoirs written, and interviews given, many years later. It is a typical historiographical exercise. Having sorted out and went through numerous reports and oral histories, I pinpointed those features that seemed common to all, or at least to most sources and tried to place them in structure of time and space.

Notwithstanding, this account is far from being determinate. In fact, it is underlain by uncertainties: What was the exact chronological unfolding of the riots? Was the violence differentiated in any way, skipping certain classes of people? To what extent did Muslims participate? Were there indeed “fierce battles” in which Muslims used large amounts of arms and even machine guns? To use Paul Brass’ distinction between riots and pogroms, could the September violence be termed “riots,” in the sense of disturbances in which more or less equal rivals take part, or is “riots” a misname that should be substituted for “a pogrom”—an orchestrated attack on a vulnerable minority in which the police and other state bodies are complicit?149 Was the violence a spontaneous outbreak or preplanned? And, naturally, the question of responsibility looms large—that is to say, who is to blame for the mass killings of Muslims? Is it chiefly the bitter and traumatized Hindu and Sikh refugees, as so many accounts seem to suggest, or did locals participate? What motivated the main agents? Finally, how many people were killed in Delhi in total, and until what point in time do we count? In other words, what is the timeframe defining the riots—do we consider the first two weeks of September when law and order collapsed, or do we look beyond the initial crisis, to the less dramatic yet persistent

violence that lingered on in the capital for at least a year? The answers to these questions are inflected differently by the nature of each source, according to their subject positions and political stance. Some issues just do not add up into one coherent narrative and leave open questions.

The Question Agency

Answers to the question of responsibility differ. While the standard nationalist narratives of partition and specifically the Delhi riots present agency in extremely amorphous terms, other sources tend to blame it all on the refugees; whereas a third group, mostly of Muslim League members like Qureshi, emphasize the responsibility of the local RSS. For example, the opening paragraph in the Chief Commissioner’s report on the riots is representative of the standard narratives:

The communal tension with which the city was surcharged owing to influx of refugees from West Punjab burst into an orgy of murder, loot and arson in the first week of this month.150

The statement is vague, and refrains from pointing fingers at specific agents. It is a typically general statement that takes non-human nouns as grammatical subjects, such as tensions, atmosphere, and anger. The historical subjects are to a great extent the emotions that took over the masses. Verbs such as “burst,” “exploded,” “swept”—which often recur in such explanations—give the impression of a natural disaster that came all of a sudden and was beyond anyone’s responsibility or control. L.C. Jain’s explanation of the riots is also typically vague:

The [refugees] brought with them tales of horror and violence, and in turn, triggered butchery of a kind we had never witnessed before. 151

151 Jain, Civil Disobedience: Two Freedom Struggles, One Life, 57.
Note that both statements are ambiguous, yet at the same time, hint at the responsibility of the Punjabi refugees, albeit only indirectly. The refugees “triggered butchery,” but it is unclear what it meant practically.

The contemporary daily news reports of Hindustan Times which covered the violence daily depict a similar portrait. 152 On the whole, its coverage tended to downplay the gravity of the riots, in contrast to its emphasis on the cruelties committed in West Punjab (Pakistan), which characterized the newspaper's headlines in those days. There is almost always disjuncture between the headings of a given news article—“Two stabbed in Delhi”, for example—which undermines the seriousness of the violence, and the actual content of the article that reports on dozens of dead bodies. 153 Also, while there seems to be great attention to details, in terms of the number and exact locations of the disturbances, the reader could very easily lose the big picture in the sea of information. The overall impression one is left with when reading Hindustan Times is that of violent chaos comprised of discrete, haphazard incidents. The systematic and massive character of some of these incidents is totally lost in this newspaper. The broader picture and trend of the events—namely, the cleansing of mixed localities from the Muslim residents is missing here. The identity of the assailants is never mentioned, except for cases when assailants were reported to be Muslims. 154 When Hindu and Sikh responsibility is acknowledged it is indirectly ascribed to the refugees. 155

152 This analysis is based on a close reading of the daily reports published in Hindustan Times, between August 1947 and February 1948.
153 “Two Stabbed in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 3 September, 1947. This is but one of numerous examples.
154 According to the press code, newspapers were asked to refrain from disclosing the communal belonging of victims and aggressors, to avoid inflaming passions. Reading through Hindustan Times reports clearly reveals that this policy was very selectively followed, and that identities were disclosed only in cases in which Muslims were aggressors, or thought to be aggressors. Representative examples are: “Arson and Stabbing in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 5 September, 1947; “City Now Near Normal,” Hindustan Times, 12 September 1947; “Ministers Tour Delhi Riot Areas,” Hindustan Times, 12 September 1947.
The second category of explanations unequivocally blames the refugees. Representative is the account given by R.N. Banerjee, who, during the time of the riots was Home Secretary to Sardar Patel:

What happened was that law and order practically ceased to exist on the 5th, 6th, and 7th of September 1947. A large number of Sikhs and Hindus drained out of Pakistan in conditions well known, came on to Delhi and practically began to kill every Muslim at sight.156

Anis Kidwai, on her part, claims that Delhi’s people were all too eager to throw all the blame on the refugees, while many locals in fact participated in the violence.157 The recurrent blaming of refugees does echo the motif of the lawless, migratory outsider element so prominent in nationalist historiography of communal riots, and official and media reports on contemporary ones.158

The third category of explanations identifies the local RSS and Sikhs as main organizers. Qureshi’s account belongs in this category. It should be noted that at times, the second and third categories sit uneasily within the same account. Dehlvi, for example, throughout his depictions, draws too neat an opposition between locals (both Hindus and Muslims) and refugees, blaming the latter for the violence. This simplistic dichotomy has no doubt provided him with a more digestible explanation for the circumstances under which he was banished from the city of his forefathers. In his depiction of the riots, however, local khaki-clothed RSS members dominate the most crucial scenes of attacks. Jugal Kishore Khanna similarly pinpoints the refugees—and especially Sikhs—as the main culprits, but then proceeds to describe how “the R.S.S. people

156 Interview with R.N. Banerjee, Oral History Transcript No. 366, NMML, pp. 116-7
157 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade.
158 For a criticism of this motif, see: Pandey, "In Defence of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," 563-4; "The Prose of Otherness," 199.
organised themselves and took prominent part in organising arson, looting, murders in mixed localities.”

The Mark of Rumors in the Primary Sources

To be sure, the aforementioned uncertainty exists even at a more fundamental level. That is to say, even were we to expose and “neutralize” the biases of the different writers, weigh their relative reliability and distill the features common to all accounts, the very “raw material” making up the history of violence nevertheless remains “marked,” to use Gyanendra Pandey’s expression, “by the signature of the rumor.” The fact, for example, that a piece of information, such as the usage of Sten guns by Muslims, appears in different reports does not necessarily corroborate its historical truth, even if the accounts represent oppositional political stances. In his book Remembering Partition, Pandey reflects on the problems inherent in history writing—every history—but especially the history of violent events. Following Ranajit Guha, Pandey looks closely at the three levels of historical discourse that make up the work of history: primary discourse—comprising of the “raw materials” of reports “from the front”; secondary discourse—“commentaries and memoirs that aspire to the status of memory”; and tertiary discourse—“proper” history, “with the full paraphernalia of referencing and footnotes, objective distance and ‘scientific language’.” Pandey effectively demonstrates that the primary discourse, from the First Information Report (FIR)—namely, reports filed in police by the victims closest to the event, to official and newspapers reports—is not only comprised of mere fragments, but also permeated by the effect of the rumor, and framed by narratives that were constructed and set in place very fast, even as the riots unfolded. Hence, it is impossible to recover “the truth of the

159 Khanna refers specifically to the two mixed localities of Karol Bagh and Bazar Sita Ram: Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, p. 137.
160 Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 69. Pandey draws on Ranajit Guha’s analysis of the representation of peasants’ insurgencies in colonial and nationalist histories, as well as on studies of historical representation of the French Revolution.
riot”—one that is not already determined by exiting narratives and marked by rumors. Furthermore, the FIRs that are the accounts by witnesses rarely exist in the case of the partition riots and communal riots in contemporary India. The law-and-order machinery does not function, police does not file reports, and if it does, the authorities themselves often destroy them.161 What historians rely on, instead, are newspapers or official reports and private correspondences comprised after the narrative of the event was set in place. Although these are often taken by historians as eyewitness accounts, they never really are.

This point becomes evident when closely examining the primary sources on the September riots in Delhi used above. One of the first official reports we have on the riots, closest in time to the event, is the Chief Commissioner’s confidential fortnightly report. The fortnightly reports, which form part of the archive for this dissertation, were sent by the Chief Commissioner to the Home Ministry on a regular basis, summarizing the individual reports received from the different departments in the Delhi Secretariat and Police. The report for the fortnight during which the riots took place was sent on September 25—that is, 20 days after the riots broke out, and roughly 10 days after the initial law-and-order crisis was overcome. Moreover, the 10-day delay also entailed that it was still missing the most important report from the Senior Superintendent of Police. The previous report, apologizes the Chief Commissioner, could not be sent at all, since all the officers responsible for sending the information were tied up with the emergency situation.162

Likewise, newspaper reports – even though published closer to the events, as they followed the riots daily – were often based on hearsays, such as that this number of people died

161 Pandey, who went on 10-member team to investigate the 1989 riots in Bhagalpur (Bihar) notes that evidence suggests that the District Magistrate destroyed crucial records, notably the log book of the central control room. Pandey claims that this case is not exceptional: “In Defence of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today,” 561.
in a certain locality; that another locality was burned down, that a machine gun was used from a third quarter, and so on. In fact, the word “rumor” itself resurfaces again and again in the Hindustan Times reports from September. Lefebvre’s observation about the rumors spreading across revolutionary France is applicable to the press coverage of the riots in Delhi: “…in due course the rumour would reach the ear of a journalist who would imbue it with new strength by putting it into print…”  

When closely examining Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi’s systematic account of the riots, we notice that apart from the explosion at Fatehpuri Mosque which took place near his office, he was far removed from all the other massacres he describes so vividly: Karol Bagh, Lodi Road Colony, Subzimandi and Paharganj. He did not venture outside his own mohalla of Jama Masjid all these days. In fact, he even tells us that Paharganj was cordoned off and that no one was allowed to get inside for three days—neither the young Muslims who drove there, nor, we can assume, any reporter in the city. What Dehlvi tells about Paharganj is what he heard from the survivors who fled to the old city in the aftermath of the riot. Some of the recurrent motifs in his account, such as the great amounts of weapons in Muslims’ disposal, also recur in Siddiqui’s account. Emphasis on Muslim arms is also prominent in the Hindustan Times report about machine guns and Sten guns in different Muslim quarters, and it is briefly mentioned in the CC’s report. Stories about the canons and guns Muslims used in Subzimandi and Paharganj circulated across north India and reached Lucknow, where Anis Kidwai lived. However, when she reached Delhi a month later to work with Muslim refugees she could not verify the truth of these tales.  

These were rumors circulated around the city that found their way into the primary sources, structured differently in each narrative. For Siddiqui and Dehlvi they help establish the heroism

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163 Quoted in Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 70.
164 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 44.
and boldness of the Muslim community in the face of an orchestrated attack. For the *Hindustan Times* and some circles of policemen and bureaucrats they served to prove that the massacre that took place in these areas by police and army were in the service of counterinsurgency. The Muslim machine and Stein guns of Subzimandi probably have a grain of truth, but it is difficult to establish to what extent. They remain located somewhere on the fuzzy line between fact and fiction.

**Rumors and Numbers**

Pandey shows how the signature of rumors is clearly evident in the tertiary discourse of partition historiographies with regard to the very basic question of the number of causalities. He quotes Urvashi Butalia: “‘Estimates of the dead vary from 200,000 (the contemporary British figure) to two million (a later Indian estimate) but that somewhere around a million people died is now widely accepted.’” 165 200,000 to two million is “a considerable margin of error,” comments Pandey. He pushes this further:

> What is the basis for this acceptance [of one million]? That it appears like something of a median? Menon and Bhasin choose ‘500,000-1,000,000.’ Mohammad Waseem accepts a figure of ‘about half a million.’ Wolpert settles for ‘approximately one million.’ 166

Like others, I have in an earlier essay accepted something like the latter figures as the most ‘likely’. Nothing in the surviving records, in the calculations made at the time, or in the contentious debates that have gone on since then, gives us anything like a persuasive basis for such an inference. Is it, rather, a question of what one can live with? Yet it is not entirely clear why it is easier to live with 500,000 dead than with a larger or smaller figure. Is this the ‘median’ that allows one to emphasise the enormity of Partition and point to our surviving humanity at the same time? Or is it a figure that has gained credibility in academic circles simply by repetition? 167

Pandey’s observation about numbers is relevant to the reconstruction of the partition riots in Delhi. Interestingly, as we shall soon see, it is his very reconstruction of the Delhi riots a few

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165 Urvashi Butalia, quoted in Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*, 89.
166 ibid.
167 ibid., 91-91.
chapters later in the same book—which propels a process whereby circulated rumors that found their way into the primary sources are reproduced in the powerful “tertiary discourse” of historiography, to bear the stamp of truth.

Indeed, how many people were killed in the Delhi riots? This question has high political stakes. The editor of the Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN), who annotates Nehru’s correspondences, articulates an Indian nationalist narrative which echoes the Hindustan Times’ coverage of the events. He restricts the enormity of the event in terms of time and casualties, assigns responsibility to the outsider refugees while, at the same time, minimizing their agency, and presents the whole event as an unfortunate, yet brief, almost fleeting episode, which was rapidly and efficiently overcome by a strong state committed to law and order:

Riots had broken out in Delhi on 4 September 1947 with the arrival of over 20,00,00 refugees from the Punjab. The reports of their sufferings stirred up feelings against those Muslims who still remained in the city and caused disturbances for four days until 7 September during which nearly two thousand people died. A military force of 5000 men patrolled the streets day and night and restored order with the assistance of Mahatma Gandhi, who arrived from Calcutta on 9 September. ¹⁶⁸

To be sure, scholars in recent years tend to put the number of the dead as much higher—10,000. Dipankar Gupta, who first published this estimate of 10,000 in an article from 1991, bases it on an interview he conducted with “an old time Congress worker and trade unionist.”¹⁶⁹ This number was then picked up by Yong and Kudaisya in 2000.¹⁷⁰ A similar estimate is proposed by Jugal Kishore Khanna, who claims in his interview that before the arrival of Gandhi in Delhi, at least 8,000 to 10,000 Muslims were killed.¹⁷¹ In a recent book from 2007 Vazira Zamindar put the number higher and claims that “some 20,000 Muslims were killed.” In the

¹⁶⁸ SWJN Vol. 4, p. 54, editor’s footnote No. 2, my emphasis.
¹⁷⁰ Tan and Kudaisya, The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia, 199.
¹⁷¹ Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, 133.
footnote she elaborates: “Dipankar Gupta suggests that 10,000 Muslims were killed in this violence. [...] Gyanendra Pandey’s more recent account of the Delhi violence puts the figure of Muslim casualties as between 20,000 and 25,000.” Pandey indeed writes that “Between 20,000 and 25,000 were said to have been killed.” Yet his footnote reveals that his higher estimate is based on a “statement on Delhi disturbances” made by a Muslim officer on September 21, as well as upon a source which figures frequently in his chapter on the Delhi riots. It is a short booklet entitled The Tragedy of Delhi (through Neutral Eyes), published by the Delhi Provincial Muslim League Committee, three months after the riots, which interweaves news reports published by the foreign press with the writer’s own commentary. The estimate of 25,000 deaths is given in this booklet without any explanation or reference. It is a political statement of a political party, or to use Pandey’s own term for the secondary discourse on partition riots—it is “rumor politicized.” If the evaluation of the SWJN’s editor represents one political pole, that of the Congress Party, attempting to minimize the event as much as possible, the Muslim League’s account is at the other extreme. One can see how quickly the Muslim League’s estimate that was picked up by Pandey was later reproduced in Zamindar’s account and, if repeated often enough, it will gain the stamp of historical truth.

This is not to say that the estimate of 25,000 is exaggerated and that of 10,000 is more accurate, or vice versa—rather, the fact is that we simply don’t know. We may recall the different assessments with regard to the number of dead in Subzimandi—while Phool Chand Jain estimates that they lifted 750 dead bodies, his son places a much higher figure of 3,000. As Jugal Kishore Khanna notes with regard to the dead in the railway station—there was no registration, no counting, not to mention post mortem or a proper burial—the bodies were simply

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172 Tan and Kudaisya, The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia. 21, 247 footnote No.5.
173 Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 124.
174 D.M. Malik, "The Tragedy of Delhi (through Neutral Eyes)," (1948).
175 Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 79.
collected on municipal trucks and thrown in dumping grounds and, when these were filled up, they were dumped in the Yamuna River.

Notwithstanding, that the primary sources about the partition riots are incomplete and imbued with rumors does not mean we should give up the task of reconstruction altogether. In what follows it is my intent to extend our understanding of the event by, first and foremost, going back in time and examining the history of communal relations in the city from the late-19th century up to the breakup of the riots. This is in order to provide the riots with historical perspective that shall trace threads of continuity that qualify the narrative of a sudden eruption coming from the outside—that is to say, from the hordes of refugees; This will show the exacerbation of Hindu-Muslim relations in the city, especially from the 1920s onwards, and—more importantly—the steady buildup of the Hindu nationalist movement and the RSS organization, and its connections with the Hindu business community in preparations for the riots.

At the same time, looking back at previous communal disturbances in the city will also confirm that the partition riots were unprecedented in their brutal nature and scale. How can we comprehend this novelty? What propelled this extraordinary violence? To address this question and explore the different layers underpinning the 1947 riots, I will attempt to uncover the daily experience of living in the city, its emotional properties, in the prelude to partition. It should subsequently be made clear how, since the late 1930s, both utopian expectations of “Pakistan,” and growing uncertainties about its meaning its territorial implications, took over the city. Then, the inflow of refugees and the pressures they exerted on the city’s resources and real estate market and indeed, their own experiences of atrocities committed in Pakistan, turned tensions in the city unbearable. Finally, we shall also see how the rumors that had left their mark on the primary sources, fed on the expectations and uncertainties of this period and, in turn, further
fuelled the anxieties that took over the city. In this sense, rumors were not just a “false evidence” and thus hindrance to the work of historical reconstruction, but also constitutive elements of the violence.

**Communal Relations in Delhi, from the 19th Century to the Late 1920s**

In her recent book on Muslims in 19th century Delhi, Margrit Pernau claims that the boundaries between religious communities in 18th century Delhi were in many respects fluctuating. During the 1820s-1830s, Delhi, like other parts of India, experienced an increasing significance of religion as a marker of Indian and British identities. This was accompanied by “fierce battles to demarcate the religious communities from each other and to homogenize them internally,” leading to an escalation of conflicts between communities. Pernau traces this process to the opening up of India to the entry of missionaries in 1813. Colonial discourse became invested with religious meaning, and notions of political superiority, race and Christianity became entangled. The first British colonialists in Delhi were called “white Mughals” because they were known for their great immersion in the vibrant Urdu culture and etiquette of Delhi. They paid their due respect to the symbolism of Mughal authority, and took part in the social and cultural life of the elite, adopted Indian dress, and married Indian women. They even lived in the neighborhoods of Kashmiri Gate and Daryaganj within the city, rather than in segregated localities outside it. While there is no evidence on whether the

176 The following account draws on secondary literature on colonial Delhi, especially on Margrit Pernau’s recent book which traces changes in the place of religion and tensions between religious communities over time. See chapters 7, 10, 14 in: Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi.*

177 ibid., 180.


179 The building of the separate quarter of Civil Lines for the British north of the city took place only after the Revolt of 1857: Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth,* 58.
“white Mughals” ever actually converted to Hinduism, argues Pernau, the very doubts surrounding this topic indicate the permeability of boundaries between religious identities in the early period of British presence in Delhi.\textsuperscript{180}

With the increasing presence of missionaries in Delhi, attitudes began to change and religion assumed new importance as a marker of identity, drawing boundaries between communities. Notions regarding Christianity and racial superiority have embedded by the British since around the 1830s. Theological debates that had hitherto taken place within the Mughal court and were confined to the elite shifted to the open bazaar and targeted an undifferentiated mass audience. Religious debates, which became more and more virulent, now also took place in the rapidly emerging public sphere of newspapers, journals, tracts and pamphlets. The period of 1830-1857, also known as the “Delhi Renaissance”, was a time of cultural and intellectual ferment. The old Delhi College (founded in 1792) was taken over by the government and transformed into a British institution disseminating western learning and criticism of existing traditions. Several students were converted to Christianity, leading to heightened controversy.

Then, the trends that had commenced in the early 1830s—the growing presence of missionaries, public theological debates, increased segregation between the rulers and the ruled, the imbrication of notions of race with religion, as well as the flourishing of public sphere disseminating religious ideas and controversies—became further entrenched after the 1857 Revolt. While this is not the place to elaborate on the 1857 Revolt, suffice is to state that it was a traumatic event for both the British, as well as for local residents of the city—once it had been recaptured by the British. To be sure, the British wrought havoc on the city; killed, looted, and expelled residents outside the city. Large-scale demolitions ensued as well as the setup of a separate quarter for the colonial officials, outside the city walls. In addition, Delhi was merged

\textsuperscript{180} Pernau, \textit{Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi}, 189.
with the province of Punjab, neglected, and became provincial and subsidiary to Punjab’s cities Amritsar and Lahore. That Delhi became part of Punjab during 1857-1911 is also significant to explain the rising influence of Punjabi social and communal life on Delhi, to be discussed below.

As in other parts of India, the challenge posed by Christianity and the modern sciences catalyzed the rise of religious reform movements in Hinduism and Islam. The reform movements shared the urge to purify religions from later traditions and move away from syncretic practices. As Pernau argues, the initial drive of reformers was not to exclude others but rather to “link one’s own identity more firmly to the centre.”\(^\text{181}\) The long-term consequences, however, were to sharpen divisions between religious communities. Delhi had been the hub of the reformist Islam of Shah Wali Ullah since the 18\(^{th}\) century. This had laid the groundwork for the boost of Muslim reformists in 19\(^{th}\) century Delhi, who called for a return to the sources of Islam, and centered on the Prophet. It also preached for abolishing everything “un-Islamic,” especially the emotionally-laden devotional practices surrounding the Sufi shrines. The rising Muslim middle classes in Delhi, especially the Muslim Punjabi traders, became associated with the reformist Islamic groups and served as important financers and patrons.

Interestingly, it was also Punjabis who played a significant role in the increasing influence of Hindu reform movements on the social and religious life in the city. This point is noteworthy, since it indicates the growing “Punjabization” of Delhi, with an attendant straining of communal relations, long before the partition migrations of 1947. According to Kenneth Jones, the late-19\(^{th}\) century saw the transformation of Delhi from a city with little or no role at all in the world of Hindus, to a centre of a new type of Hinduism—organized and structured.\(^\text{182}\) A

\(^{181}\) ibid., 190.

\(^{182}\) This paragraph is based on: Kenneth W. Jones, "Organized Hinduism in Delhi and New Delhi," in Delhi through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture, and Society, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (Delhi Oxford University Press, 1992 [1986]). According to Jones, Delhi became a centre of “organized Hinduism,”—that is, one that uses organizational forms adapted from the voluntary associations of the west including presidents, vice-presidents,
branch of the Arya Samaj (founded in 1875 in Bombay) was opened in Delhi in 1878 by the movement’s founder, Swami Dayanand Saraswati.\textsuperscript{183} True to the purifying tendencies of religious reform movements, Swami Dayanand, a wandering recluse from Gujarat, advocated a return to the ancient Vedas, emphasizing their rational scientific essence. “Aggressive and uncompromising, Dayanand’s faith fitted the mid-Victorian atmosphere of dogmatic Christianity and imperial arrogance.”\textsuperscript{184} Famously, he gained his most widespread influence not in his native Gujarat but rather in Punjab. Dayanand’s reformed Hinduism entailed an attack on polytheism and idolatry, as well as on “socially backward” practices of what he perceived as degenerate Hinduism—caste hierarchy, child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, and more. The movement got implicated in the heightened religious controversies of the Punjab: the Arya reformers versus Orthodox Hindus, and Hindus versus Muslims. As the Arya Samaj had taken root in late-19th century Delhi, it “imported” this combative atmosphere, and the Arya Samajis became involved in two main explosive controversies—cow slaughter and conversion.

If Muslim reform centered on the prophet, for Hindus the sacredness of the cow and its protection became of seminal importance. Cow slaughter became a focal point of tensions between Hindus and Muslims under colonial rule in the early 1870s—with the first major incident taking place in 1822, when Thomas Metcalfe, in his capacity as magistrate, sought to re-impose the ban on cow slaughter within the city, leading to public debates and eventually to the


\textsuperscript{184} Jones, Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab, 30.
attack of a Muslim procession to the Idgah by Hindus of “lower classes.” Henceforth, the Id festival became a focal point of tensions between Hindus and Muslims, who mobilized their publics through the press, treaties, petitions to the British government, and demonstrations. Yet, the first half of the 19th century had been free of violent riots, and public clashes were still rare in the 20 years following the 1857 Revolt.

Provocations by Muslim butchers from Nizamuddin (a Muslim locality outside the city walls, to the south) triggered the first clashes in years between Hindus and Muslims in 1873 and 1874. Moreover, tensions increased from the late 1870s onwards during religious festivals. In 1877, following amounting pressures by the Jain community to be permitted to hold public processions in the city’s main boulevards, the British succumbed, thereby reforming their long-standing policy of banning such public processions. This was a major decision with momentous consequences since it re-opened the public space of the city for competing demands, and henceforth every single public manifestation of faith was open for negotiation. The timing of the policy reform was highly explosive, since it preceded the overlap, for three consecutive years (1884-1887), of the Hindu Festival Ramlila with the Muslim Muharram. The procession routes and access to the city’s main squares and streets became sites of competing claims. Tensions were on the rise during the Id of 1883 and the Muharram and Ram Lila festivals which coincided in 1885, but violence was prevented. 1886, however, saw a fierce outbreak of violence, in Delhi

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185 Pernau mentions that when the Marathas conquered Delhi in the 18th century they imposed a ban on cow slaughter to signal the Hindu nature of their rule. When the British conquered Delhi in 1803 they lifted the ban, thereby associating British rule with the Mughal Emperor, in whose name they ruled. Metcalfe then tried to reinstate the ban on slaughter inside the city premises in 1822, leading to controversy. By 1857 animal slaughter within the city walls was prohibited and restricted to the idgahs outside the city walls. After 1857, the government took a step forward and regulated the sale of beef inside the city. Most of the meat markets were closed by 1870 and sale to private individuals was restricted to Muslim localities. Also, it was conditioned that meat would not be displayed openly, to avoid offending Hindu and Jain religious feelings: Pernau, Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi, 192, 386.

186 ibid., 195, 382.

187 ibid., 383-4.
and across northern India. In Delhi there was a serious clash between a Muslim and a Hindu procession in Chandni Chowk when Ramlila and Muharram coincided. The late 1880s also saw an upsurge of polemical religious literature from Hindu, Christian, and Muslims groups. Aside from the aforementioned issue of cow slaughter, topics of controversy included conversions, competition over jobs, and education—most notably the closing down of the Delhi College and opening up of St. Stephen’s College, dominated by Christian missionaries.

The late 1870s and 1880s thus witnessed a rapid increase in religious tensions and the founding of more and more Hindu organizations, from conservatives to radical reformers. During the 1890s Delhi was again disturbed by a series of riots and controversies, between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between reformers and Orthodox, and different sects within Islam. 1896-7 formed the peak of communal violence in this decade, with the a bitter exchange between Muslim and Arya Samaji publications, which culminated in the assassination of the Arya Samaji leader Pandit Lekh Ram. With the outbreak of the plague in Delhi in 1898 and growing resentment towards colonial forced health policies, religious tensions were subsumed for a few years.

The first decade of the 20th century was marked by growing organized presence of the Arya Samaj in Delhi, and tensions surrounding the Arya Samaji shuddhi, which means, literally, “purification.” The concept of ritual purification had been part of Hindu practices long before the Arya Samaj, and it included various purifying practices for those who broke caste taboos, such as bathing in a sacred river or pilgrimage. The Arya Samaj drew on and innovated shuddhi,
transforming it into a vehicle of conversion. It was initially perceived as a defense mechanism against Christian missionaries, meant to win back those recently converted to Christianity, but it soon became more “offensive mechanism,” targeting Muslims and Sikhs as well.\textsuperscript{193} The struggle took the form of street preaching, polemical pamphlets, aggressive public speeches and acrimonious newspaper articles. The most controversial case was the conversion in 1903 of one Abdul Ghafur, who became an ardent Arya Samaji named Dharm Pal.\textsuperscript{194} In 1909 Delhi became the headquarter of the new All-India Arya Samaji organization Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi. Thus, emphasizes Jones, it was already before the 1911 announcement of Delhi as the new imperial Capital of India that Hindu religious organizations—both reformist and Orthodox—gravitated to Delhi, making it the center of their national activities. It was also in 1909 that the recently-established All India Muslim League opened a branch in Delhi.\textsuperscript{195}

The transfer of the capital to Delhi in 1911 furthered this trend and Delhi’s politics came to be entwined, ever more strongly, with national politics. The entanglement of Delhi with other regions assumed a new dimension and “one might almost speak of the nationalization of Delhi,” as all organizations and politicians seeking national recognition made a presence in Delhi.\textsuperscript{196} Importantly, just before the outbreak of the war, Muhammad Ali—Muslim leader of the young generation and future leader of the Khilafat movement shifted his influential newspapers, the


\textsuperscript{195} Jones, "Organized Hinduism in Delhi and New Delhi," 211-2.

\textsuperscript{196} Supra-local Muslim institutions were established in Delhi in 1912-4: All India \textit{Ah\textasciitilde{}l-e hadith} Conference, the Shi\textasciiuml;ite Association, and the \textit{Aanjuman-e Khuddam-e Kabba}. Pernau, \textit{Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi}, 396, 8.
English Comrade and Urdu Hamdard to Delhi.\textsuperscript{197} It foreshadowed the prominent place of Delhi in the upcoming period of nationalist politics.

WWI and its aftermasts famously brought about a surge of anti-colonial nationalism and a period of Hindu-Muslim collaboration, when the Congress under Gandhi joined hands with the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement leaders, the Ali brothers—Muhammad and Shaukat Ali. Importantly, the Ali brothers insisted there was no contradiction between one’s Muslim and Indian identities.\textsuperscript{198} The strength of the Ali Brothers was their ability to reach out to various Islamic, often rival groups in Delhi, connect them in the name of pan-Islam, and politicize them, thereby bringing into the anti-colonial movement wider circles, hitherto detached from politics.\textsuperscript{199} The other prominent nationalist Muslim leaders to emerge in this period were medical doctor M.A. Ansari, who was close to Gandhi; Hakim Ajmal Khan (1863-1927), the famous doctor of \textit{unani tibb} (Islamic medicine) from Ballimaran in Delhi; barrister Asaf Ali, whose house in Daryaganj became the venue for Congress meetings; and of course, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), renowned Islamic scholar and Urdu poet, soon to become the President of the Congress. These people formed the core group of nationalist Muslim leaders who advocated Hindu-Muslim collaboration under the umbrella of Indian patriotism, and who

\textsuperscript{197} Gupta, \textit{Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth}, 197; Pernau, \textit{Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi}, 398.

\textsuperscript{198} Minault, \textit{The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India}.

\textsuperscript{199} Pernau provides an excellent discussion of the Khilafat movement in Delhi, analyzing the interaction between national events and figures and local networks of influence. The Ali brothers had contacts with the Muslim butchers, as well as with the Muslim Punjabi traders, especially the shoe and leather merchants who had been important financiers of reformist Islam in Delhi. In addition, they managed to bring together Maulana Abdul Bari from the Firangi Mahal in Lucknow, Khwaja Hasan Nizami of the Nizamuddin \textit{dargah} (belonging to the Sufi Chishti order), and new madrasas associated with \textit{Ahl-e Hadith}: Pernau, \textit{Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi}, 399-417.
founded the Jamia Millia Islamia.\textsuperscript{200} It was in this period that Delhi experienced nationalist mass agitations, public meetings and demonstrations at a whole new level.

The Khilafat-non-cooperation collaboration is often seen as a missed opportunity, an alternative history of a united India that is buried beneath the rumble of partition. This is indeed the case with recollections of this period by Delhi Congress members. Both Jugal Kishore Khanna and Dr. Yudhvir (1897-1983), another important Congress member of Delhi, present the years between 1919 and 1921 as a period of communal harmony and great collaboration between Muslims and Hindus. They look back at this period nostalgically, as a time of vital nationalist politics that transcended communal boundaries, and which was shattered in 1922, with the suspension of the noncooperation movement by Gandhi following the Chauri Chaura incident.\textsuperscript{201}

In many respects, this period had witnessed unprecedented cooperation between different groups within the Hindu and Muslim communities, with rival religious and political orientations. The Khilafat movement brought together the westernized Muslim elite of Aligarh and the conservative religious ulama (Islamic scholars) of Deoband, which formed the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind (The Association of Indian ‘Ulama) in 1919.\textsuperscript{202} Among the Hindus, the more “secular-oriented” Congress drew Arya Samaji leaders, whose focus on cow protection and Hindu symbols had played a leading role in communal tensions since the late 19th century.

This new collaboration is best represented by the Arya Samaji leader Swami Shraddhanand during the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919. Born in 1856, in the Jullundur District of the Punjab, Shraddhanand (originally Munshi Ram), had settled in Delhi around the year 1902

\textsuperscript{201} Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML; Interview with Yudhvir Singh, Oral History Transcript No. 499, NMML.
\textsuperscript{202} The Jamiat Ulama-e Hind was established in 1919 by a group of \textit{ulama} (legal Islamic scholars), mostly from Deoband, who were actively involved in the pan-Islamic, anti-British Khilafat Movement. For the history of Deoband, see Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, \textit{The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan} (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963). Metcalf, \textit{Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900}. 80
and henceforth played a central and controversial role in its political life. He was a highly charismatic leader, who gained such influence in Delhi that he was called “King of Delhi” during the Satyagraha of 1919. He famously led a mass demonstration in spite of the bayonets of the Gurkha soldiers pointed at him near the Clock Tower in Chandni Chowk. Even more significantly, Shraddhanand was invited to speak from the pulpit of the Jama Masjid to a mass audience—an extraordinary occasion which he concluded with a recitation of the Gayatri Mantra. While many, Jugal Kishore Khanna included, assert that there was no objection whatsoever among the Muslims to Shraddhanand’s chanting of the Gayatri Mantra from within the Jama Masjid, other sources suggest that not everyone was happy about it. There exists an equivocal resonance to the memory of this event, as to Shraddhanand’s historical role more generally. Certainly, he contributed his share to the straining of Hindu-Muslim relationships in the aftermath of the noncooperation movement, as we shall soon see.

The equivocal reception of Shraddhanand’s sermon and the ambivalent nature of his politics, speaks to a more general complexity in the politics of the Khilafat-noncooperation. Recollections of this period by Congress members often tend to look back at the movement nostalgically, presenting its collapse as an unfortunate sudden turn of events that followed the abrupt ending of the movement by Gandhi. But recent scholarship has put emphasis on the

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203 According to Jugal Kishore Khanna: “Yes, I was present. Swamiji opened his chest. He took off his long kurta and said: ‘Yes, I am here facing you, fire, fire.’ They were all silent.” Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, 15.

204 The event is emphasized in most recollections of Delhi Congress members active in this period, such as: Interview with Yudhvir Singh, Oral History Transcript No. 499, NMML, 4; Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, 15; Interview with Imdad Sabri, Oral History Transcript No. 722, NMML. For a recent discussion of Shraddhanand’s role in the noncooperation movement and his sermon in the Jama Masjid, see: Nair, Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India, Chapter 3.

205 Gupta, Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth, 207. Gupta argues that Hakim Ajmal Khan objected to the sermon and to the subsequent sermon which Shraddhanand gave a few days later in Fatehpuri Mosque. Her account of the Khilafat movement, the 1919 Satyagraha, and the noncooperation movement in Delhi is on pages 197-212. Later in his interview, Khanna mentions that when the Khilafat-noncooperation collapsed many Muslims accused the “nationalist Muslims” of letting Shraddhanand desecrate the Jama Masjid.
ambivalent nature of the Khilafat-noncooperation movements, notably the dominant place of religious symbols in the politics of both Gandhi and the Ali brothers. After all, it was the charismatic force of religious symbols which rendered the movement so powerful, and which famously alienated Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The national alliance was not based on secularization, in the sense of obliterating religious identities, but on the contrary, it emphasized these religious identities, and their mutual respect for each other. Gandhi expected Muslims to respect the sacredness of the cow, as he was willing to join Muslims in their struggle to protect the Caliph. The nature of the alliance, claims Pernau, consolidated and even naturalized the boundaries between religious communities. This was certainly articulated in the nationalist Jamiat Ulama-e Hind’s vision for India as made up of two interconnected yet distinct communities having their own personal laws and educational systems. Moreover, the movement had millenarian qualities, grounded in Gandhi’s promise that Swaraj would be attained within a year, investing the atmosphere with intense expectation of political independence that meant spiritual redemption as well.\(^{206}\) With the suspension of noncooperation by Gandhi following Chauri Chaura, “the energies which had been generated sought other outlets.”\(^{207}\)

During 1923-8 north India was repeatedly beset by communal riots. In Delhi, according to Narayani Gupta, the dashing of the expectations pinned on the noncooperation movement coalesced with local struggles. Communal clashes broke out periodically, twice or thrice a year, mostly in Sadar Bazaar and Pahari Dhiraj—localities to the west of the old city, which were populated by Muslim butchers and Jats respectively. The most significant riot took place in 1924 during the Id festival.\(^{208}\) Clashes between the Muslim butchers and the Jats revolved around the


\(^{208}\) Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML. On the 1924 riots see Gupta, *Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, 218-9. Gupta mentions the riots
new slaughter house that was established near the Idgah in Sadar Bazar in 1916, in proximity to
the Jhandewalan temple. In 1924 the route of the cows taken for sacrifice was altered to exclude
Pahari Dhiraj road, but Muslims of Sadar Bazar challenged the municipal order, leading to a
tussle that spilled over to Chandni Chowk, involving lathis (sticks) and brickbats. Significantly,
attempts by Congress and Khilafat leaders—Muhammad Ali, Ajmal Khan, Ansari and Shankar
Lal to restore peace failed, indicating that this group was losing its hold on the masses. Troubled
by the outbreak of communal violence, Gandhi resorted to a twenty-one-day fast in Delhi in
September 1924, a gesture that would be repeated some 23 years later in the same city.209

Examining the local root causes of this clash, Gupta argues that the butchers were
growingly frustrated by the restrictions imposed by the municipality on the sale of meat, and that
the Jats, who historically had little contact with the walled city, came into closer relations with
the city as it expanded westward. Significantly, they had increasingly come under the influence
of the Arya Samaj in the decade preceding the 1924 riot. This point is important for our concern,
as it indicates that the communalization of social life in Delhi since the mid-1920s corresponded
to the growing presence of the Arya Samaj and the aggressive Hinduism it represented. Delhi
was to a great extent part of the larger climate of Punjab, where the Arya Samaj became a
dominant voice, long before the partition migrations and the so-called “Punjabization” of Delhi.

With the disintegration of the Khilafat-noncooperation Shraddhanand opened a campaign
of Shuddhi, aimed at (re)converting Muslims and uplifting “untouchables”—a group considered
vulnerable to the missionary efforts of Christians and Muslims.210 To counter the Shuddhi
movement, Khwaja Hasan Nizami from the Nizamuddin dargah initiated the Tabligh

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209 For Gandhi's 1924 fast in Delhi see: "Organized Hinduism in Delhi and New Delhi," 214; Chopra, "Delhi
Gazetteer," 102.
(propagation) movement. The two rival movements operated with a vengeance, exacerbating tensions in Delhi.\textsuperscript{211} Shraddhanand himself was shot dead by a young Muslim, Abdul Rashid, in his house in the Hindu \textit{mohalla} of Naya Bazar in the old city. Like the assassination of Arya Samaji Pundit Lekh Ram in 1897, this assassination was preceded and followed by abusive exchanges in the Urdu public sphere. The assassination followed a controversy surrounding the conversion to Hinduism of a Muslim woman by Shraddhanand and other Arya Samajis. The murder led to a riot and so did the execution and funeral procession of Abdul Rashid 11 months later. The event drew the Hindu and Muslim leaders who joined hands in the noncooperation movement further apart, and there were even rumors and suspicions revolving around the alleged complicity of Khwaja Hasan Nizami and Muhammad Ali, leader of the Khilafat movement, in a conspiracy to kill Shraddhanand. Henceforth, the assassination was commemorated annually by Hindu organizations in the city, turning into a demonstration of Hindu strength and anti-Muslim sentiments.\textsuperscript{212}

It was also during 1926 that Asaf Ali, who represented the Swaraj Party, was defeated by Rang Behari Lal, the Hindu Mahasabha candidate in the elections to the Legislative Assembly. The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, established in 1915, and which claimed to be the voice of the Hindu community as a whole, shifted its headquarters to Delhi in 1925, thereby

\textsuperscript{211} Interview with Imdad Sabri, Oral History Transcript No. 722, NMML, p. 92-3; Shail Mayaram, \textit{Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory, and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 235.

\textsuperscript{212} On Shraddhanand’s assassination and Abdul Rashid’s execution, see: Jones, "Organized Hinduism in Delhi and New Delhi," 215; Stephen Legg, \textit{Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities} (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 125-6. For the controversy surrounding the conversion of a Muslim woman and her renaming as Shanti Devi as the main catalyst for the assassination, see: Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML. See also Phool Chand Jain’s interesting recollection of Shraddhanand’s funeral procession and the tensions accompanying it, and Abdul Rashid’s execution: Interview with Phool Chand Jain (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 479, NMML, 82-84. For the rumors about Khwaja Nizami’s and Muhammad Ali’s complicity, see: Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML; Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML; Interview with Rana Jang Bahadur Singh, No. 208, Oral History Collection, Centre of South Asia Studies Archive, Cambridge, 13. The latter provides an interesting account of Muhammad Ali and the process by which he became distant from the Congress.
completing the transition of most Hindu groups and associations to Delhi. Rang Behari Lal was an advocate who used to defend Hindus in cases of communal riots. His victory was thus interpreted by Muslims as a vote of non-confidence in the Muslim community, and further alienated them. Among the Muslim nationalist leaders who commenced huge influence in the early 1920s, the Ali brothers drifted further apart from the Congress, and those who remained with the Congress, such as Ajmal Khan, Maulana Araf Hasvi, Asaf Ali, Dr. M.A. Ansari and F.H. Ansari, began to lose their hold on the Muslim public.

Communal tensions thus reached new peaks by the end of the 1920s, as noted by the British police in Delhi. Yet, it should be emphasized that the violence described here is of different dimensions and nature than the partition riots of 1947. For example, in the riot of 1924, considered the worst since the 1880s, 16 Hindus and one Muslim were killed, and 100 and 50 people were injured of each religion, respectively. During the communal clashes of 1926 and 1927, four people were dead and 116 injured. These seem like disturbances or street fights, nothing near the violence of 1947 which was aimed at expulsions and ethnic cleansing, and which took the form of extreme brutality, sexual violence, and mass killings. To be sure, this strengthens Pandey’s claim that the term “riots” is misleading and does not always stand for the same violence. Communal riots had taken different forms and dimensions throughout history. We will return to this point later.

The 1930s: Growing Polarization

The alienation of Muslims from the Congress, and the declining influence of the nationalist Muslim leaders found expression in the marginal participation of Muslims in the

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214 Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML
215 Legg, Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities, 125, 26. For the number of dead in 1926-7 Legg relies on: Hasan, M.A. Ansari: Gandhi's Infallible Guide, 114.
Gandhian Civil Disobedience movement of the early 1930s, in comparison with their contribution to the nationalist movement of the early 1920s. Those who did join the movement did so mainly through Jamiat Ulama-e Hind, rather than joining the Congress directly.\(^{216}\)

In order to grasp the communal relations experienced in Delhi during this period, we turn to the memoirs of *Dilliwallahs* who grew up in Delhi in the 1930s. They depict the communal relations in the city in terms of a relatively peaceful coexistence, interrupted by periodic cycles of riots. Both Lakshmi Chand (L.C.) Jain (1925-2010) and Hindi literature professor, Nirmala Jain (1931- ), grew up in the area of Chandni Chowk. They emphasize the multi-religious character of this famous boulevard, the co-existence, on the same street, of Fatehpuri Mosque, Gauri Shankar Temple, Gurdwara Sisganj and the Jain temple.\(^{217}\) Notwithstanding, and more importantly, both accounts describe communal relations in the city as “life in great proximity, but segregated. The Jains in one area, the Muslims in another, the Kayasthas in another gully [small alley].”\(^{218}\) Mutual economic dependence tied together the Hindu and Muslim populations: most businesses owners were Hindus whereas most artisans were Muslims, who made jewelry, embroidery and decorations for dishes and tusks. Despite this economic interconnectedness, there was a clear separation between Hindu and Muslim residential neighborhoods. The densely populated areas of the Muslims began from Chawri Bazaar towards Urdu Bazaar, including the localities of Matiya Mahal, Chitli Qabar, Farashkhana and Chandni Mahal. The Hindu *mohalle* were not very far; the dividing line being Chawri Bazaar.\(^{219}\) The other major Muslim-majority locality was Ballimaran. Both Nirmala Jain and L.C. Jain emphasize that Hindus and Jains maintained a strict taboo on sharing food with Muslims. On occasions in which Muslim friends

\(^{216}\) For the role played by the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind in the Civil disobedience movement in Delhi, see the recollections by Abdullah Farooqi: Interview with Maulana Abdullah Farooqi (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 634, NMML.


\(^{218}\) Jain, *Civil Disobedience: Two Freedom Struggles, One Life*, 63.

\(^{219}\) Jaina, *Dilli, Šáhara Dara Šáhara*, 30-1.
and businessmen came to visit their fathers, chai was served in separate cups which were later purified with coals. These are important descriptions of spatial and social segregation in the city. While later chapters in this dissertation will discuss the ghettoization of Muslims in the aftermath of partition, it should be kept in mind that communal division of space had existed in the city long before the riots, albeit in a different, more moderate form.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s communal riots in the city erupted every once in a while. 220 Stephen Legg’s account of the riots clarifies that in addition to the polarization between Hindus and Muslims described above the Sikhs in Delhi underwent a process of radicalization. The focal point of tensions became the traditional Sikh annual procession commemorating the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675. The procession departed from Gurdwara Sisganj in Chandni Chowk, which is believed to be the place where the Guru was beheaded by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. During the 1930s the procession underwent transformation from Sikh celebration to anti-Muslim demonstration, involving playing music and other provocations outside mosques during prayer times, notably in Paharganj west to the city. 221 Aside from the Sikh procession, and similarly to previous decades, disturbances in the late 1930s were prompted by religious festivals and marriage processions playing music outside mosques—and this generally amounted to struggles over symbolically-important public spaces and procession routes in the city. L.C. Jain remembers communal riots as frequent, yet relatively negligible outbreaks of disturbances: “From time to time as children we were rushed indoors because of some communal skirmish or the other, but it was always of a minor nature. When peace returned we

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220 For an account of the communal riots in the 1930s, and colonial security measures to counter them, see: Legg, Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities, 138-45.
221 ibid., 138.
were allowed to walk out and it was reassuring to find the piaos or drinking water (separate for Muslims and Hindus) cooling throats, thankfully not slitting them […]”

Abdul Rahman Siddiqi, who was at the time a young Muslim boy living in the Muslim area of Ballimaran, clearly remembers the communalization of the space of city during period of tension, as Hindu and Muslim mohallas became forbidden territories for each other. He recalls one particular riot, aroused by the “Shiv Mandir episode,” when a Hindu sadhu accompanied by his chelas forcibly occupied an open plot of land close to the Company Gardens, which was used by Muslims for their post-sunset Maghreb prayers. The sadhu set up a samadhi there, claiming it was the site of an ancient Hindu temple, the Shiv Mandir. This became a major topic of controversy in the Delhi Urdu press, divided between the Arya Samaji papers and the Muslim ones. The Muslims staged a protest rally through Chandni Chowk, and as they approached the Clock Tower, they were pelted with stones from behind the corner of Nai Sarak—a predominantly Hindu area. This turned into a lathi (stick) and stone throwing incident. Later, a Muslim student of the Ajmeri Gate branch of the Anglo-Arabic School named Munawwar Ali stabbed the sadhu, who recovered and left the city after a while. Yet, despite the departure of the sadhu and clearance of the place:

Communal tensions, bitterness and mistrust, however, persisted, going well beyond the ‘Hindu pani, Muslim pani’ syndrome, the battle lines were drawn: quite a few neighboring Hindu-Muslim mohallas turned into virtual fortresses at war. To reach one's own home, one had to make long detours, avoiding the normal shorter routes through the Hindu mohallas. Mutual mistrust and anger persisted; and hardly a week would pass without a binot—lathi fight. Lathis—dipped in linseed oil, and seasoned—quite often, metal-tipped, would serve as the main weapons. […] Binot fights became an almost

223 Siddiqi does not mention the exact year in which the riots broke out, and I could not find any mention of them in other accounts, including the Delhi Gazetteer. The only other source who mentions the “Shiv Mandir” episode is Imdad Sabri but he does not elaborate: Interview with Imdad Sabri (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 722, NMML, p. 94
224 As will be seen later, the Urdu press continued to play a pivotal role in expressing and provoking communal tensions during the 1947 riots and afterwards.
regular feature of the city life. They were at once a live *tamasha* (spectacle), hugely enjoyed by the spectators as well as sort of a catharsis—a release of so much pent-up communal anger.225

If we put together Legg’s account of the 1930s riots, based on confidential reports of the colonial administration with Siddiqui’s personal recollections, an interesting picture arises—one of subtle changes taking place within a familiar pattern of communal disturbances. As in the 1920s, they took the form of street fights between rival groups, in which Muslims often had the upper hand, and which resulted in limited number of victims compared with the partition riots. At the same time, Siddiqui describes the communalization of space, with Hindu and Muslim mohallas turning into “fortresses” that one was careful to avoid—a description that foreshadows Dehlvi’s account of his escape route to Jama Masjid on September 4, 1947.

What was certainly novel in the 1930s was the entrenchment of both Hindu nationalist organizations and the Muslim League in the city, which invested the familiar religious skirmishes from previous decades with new politicized meanings—competing visions of nationalism, including, towards the end of the decade, the nascent concept of “Pakistan”. The Hindu nationalist movement consolidated its presence in Delhi during the 1930s. The dominance of the Arya Samaj in Delhi, traced to the late 19th century, had prepared the ground, as it did in Punjab. In 1931 there were more than 50,000 Arya Samajis among the 400,000 Hindus in Delhi.226 The Hindu Mahasabha expanded its offices and activities, under the leadership of the new President Bhai Parmanand (elected 1933), who built the Hindu Mahasabha Bhavan on Mandir Marg in New Delhi, and founded the English weekly *Hindu Outlook* that would serve as

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225 Siddiqi, *Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi*, 138. my emphasis. Siddiqi was then about ten-twelve years old and a student in the Daryaganj branch of the Anglo-Arabic school. He describes the Shiv Mandir episode on pp. 134-8.

the main organ of the organization into the 1950s.\textsuperscript{227} In 1939 the Lakshmi Narayan Temple was built on Mandir Marg in New Delhi (near the Hindi Mahasabha Bhavan). Financed by Baldeo Das Birla, the wealthy industrialist and businessmen, and popularly named the “Birla Mandir,” the impressive building became the first important pilgrimage site for Hindus in Delhi. According to Jones, the opening of the Birla Mandir marked the peak of the process that had begun in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, where a city hitherto considered “non-Hindu” became the hub of organized Hinduism.\textsuperscript{228}

What is of high importance for this study, as far as the partition violence is concerned, is that it was during this time that the most aggressive Hindu-right organization—the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, or National Volunteer Corps), which was founded in 1925 in Maharashtra—took root in Delhi.\textsuperscript{229} The first branch in Delhi was established in 1936 by Vasant Rao Oak, an RSS \textit{pracharak} (propagator) from Nagpur, who significantly drew on the existing networks of Hindu organizations in the city, especially the Hindu Mahasabha. The RSS’s headquarters and first \textit{shakha} (branch) in Delhi was set up within the Hindu Mahasabha Bhavan, close to the Birla Mandir. Jugal Kishore Birla, Baldeo Das’s elder son, who patronized the temple, extended his help to the RSS, and it was in and around the temple, where young Hindu men used to hang out, that the RSS found its first recruits.

The RSS’s influence spread in the Delhi Province (including the rural areas) and in 1937, a year after the opening of the first \textit{shakha}, there were six \textit{shakhas}. By 1947, when independence was declared, there were 100. It was a large unit and the RSS was especially successful among government servants, students from the three big colleges of Delhi University—St. Stephens’, Hindu College, and Ramjas College—and the Banias (Hindu merchant castes). In fact, what

\textsuperscript{227} Jones, "Organized Hinduism in Delhi and New Delhi," 216-7.
\textsuperscript{228} ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{229} My discussion of the RSS in Delhi draws mainly on: {Jaffrelot, 2011 #1009} Jaffrelot relies on interesting interviews he conducted with Delhi’s RSS members—both locals and refugees.
seems to be very evident in Jaffrelot’s survey of the Delhi RSS in the 1930s-1940s, is the important role played by the Hindu \textit{rais} (wealthy notable) of the business community in Delhi. Hindu businessmen and industrialists who were often part of the Arya Samaj ideological and social world, served as financers and patrons. Traces in the archives suggest that they would also take part in the partition riots.

To recap, and push further, what is most relevant for our concern with the partition riots is that Delhi, by the early 1940s had become a stronghold of the Hindu nationalist movement; it centered on the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, as well as the institutions of the Birla Mandir and the Hindu Mahasabha Bhavan. Key figures in these organizations were Hindu Banias whose ideological world had been shaped by the reform movement of the Arya Samaj. In this respect, not only that the RSS and the Hindu right had presence in Delhi before the arrival of Punjabi refugees, but the social and mental landscape of the Hindu nationalist movement in Delhi prior to partition shared a great deal with that of Punjab. This point is oftentimes glossed over in popular discourse about “the Punjabization of Delhi” in the aftermath of partition. True, the migration of Punjabis to the city in 1947 had been unprecedented in its scale, but the movement of ideas and personalities related to the Hindu nationalist movement from Punjab had been long in the making.

The Punjabi Arya Samaji Swami Shraddhanand himself, we may recall, arrived in Delhi in 1902, when Delhi was administratively part of Punjab. This brings us to another feature of pre-partition political life in Delhi, in addition to the prominence of the RSS. Shraddhanand’s politics had equivocal nature—the entanglement of nationalist ideas with the Hindu agenda of cow protection, promotion of Hindi and \textit{Shuddhi}. This entanglement had been a central feature of
the Congress in Punjab, which had a particularly Hindu slant. It was shared by some circles of the Delhi Congress—and especially those with Arya Samaji connections, such as Shraddhanand’s two main followers: his own son, Pandit Indra Vidyavachaspati – owner of Hindi daily Arjun, and Shraddhanand’s spiritual disciple, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta—who was member of the Delhi Congress and the Constituent Assembly, and who had owned and edited the nationalist Urdu daily Tej. In other words, the vernacular (Hindu and Urdu) nationalist press in Delhi, aligned with the Congress, had been influenced and financed by Arya Samajis from Punjab, who, alongside their support of the Gandhian movement, took active and provocative part in fuelling tensions during times of riots through controversies with the Urdu Muslim papers.

**The 1940s and the Dreamscape of Pakistan**

It was also in the 1930s, that the Muslim League started to gain influence in Delhi, with its activity being centered in the Anglo-Arabic College (previously the “Delhi College”) outside Ajmeri Gate. While evaluations differ on the exact time in the 1930s in which the Muslim League gained momentum, all accounts—by Muslim Leagui, nationalist Muslims and Congress members—suggest that by the end of the decade, the nationalist Muslim leaders associated with the Congress lost much of their grip on the Muslim public, which steadily drifted towards the Muslim League. The rift between the Congress and the Muslim League became acute after 1937, when the League showed poor results, the Congress established governments in seven provinces in India, and refused to build a coalition government with the League in UP—the only


231 Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, p. 39.

232 While Khanna suggests that Muslim League influence increased in the early 1930s, Abdullah Faruqi argues that until 1937-8 the Muslim League had very negligible presence in the city.
province where the League did well. Phool Chand Jain recalls that after 1937, the Muslim League's presence in Delhi became strong. Liaquat Ali Khan and Muhammad Ali Jinnah organized public meetings in the Parade Ground in front of Jama Masjid, where they presented very provocative speeches:

They used to ridicule Gandhiji and call him by names—dhoti wala, langoti wala, choti wala, a Hindu…

Hari Dev Sharma (interviewer): Jinnah, himself…?


[...]

They used to harshly criticize Gandhiji. [...]

Sharma: what else did they say in their speeches?

Phool Chand Jain: The main thing was that these people will finish off your Muslim culture, they will oppress the Muslims. They will destroy the Muslims, they won't give the Muslims any rights; we cannot trust them. The Muslims should rise up, they should remember their old tradition, these kind of things.²³³

Abdullah Farooqi, who was born in Delhi in 1908 and was central to Delhi's Urdu journalism and politics—both in the Congress and the Majlis Ahrar-e Islam, supports the claim that by 1937-38 the Muslim League gained momentum, and their speeches, which evoked fear of the “Hindu Raj,” attracted and aroused the Muslim masses. What Farooqi adds to the picture is the great support the Muslim League in Delhi received from the administration. Their policy, he argues, was totally shaped by the directives of the Delhi Chief Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. Muslim League’s support of the British in WWII—contrary to the Congress’ policy—granted it an unprecedented recognition from the colonial government. In Delhi, Jugal Kishore Khanna claims, although there was no popular administration in Delhi, practically up to

²³³ Interview with Phool Chand Jain (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 479, NMML, 87-8 (my translation).
1943-44 the administration was run by members of the Muslims League in collaboration with the
Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Commissioner.234

Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi similarly sees 1937 as a turning point marking the worsening of
communal relations. He himself was away during 1937-1939, and upon his return he was
overwhelmed by the radical change in the social atmosphere of the city. Although the Lahore
Resolution was not adopted before 1940, “the idea of Pakistan had caught the imagination of the
Muslims like wild fire.”235 During the 1940s, inter-communal mingling, which was restricted in
the first place to the small circle of the urban Westernized elite, had also changed. Political
conversations in his social circle at Delhi University became a taboo, and debates were relegated
to the public spheres of the press and political leadership, which became extremely aggressive.236

Hence, we can see that the more familiar communal tensions revolving around religious
festivals and cow protection were imbricated with a particularly virulent political culture –
especially since WWII when the Muslim League gained momentum. I quoted above the Muslim
League’s condemnation of Gandhi. However, their harshest attacks were reserved for the
“nationalist Muslims”, who were part of the Congress or supported it. With the collapse of the
Cabinet Mission plan in the summer of 1946, and following the riots that spread out across India,
the Muslim League’s political culture became extremely intolerant, attacking nationalist
Muslims as traitors within the community. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who untiringly warned
the Muslims of the horrific consequences of partition, was denounced by Jinnah as the “show
boy” of the Congress. As the Congress President and epitome of the “nationalist Muslims,” Azad

234 Interview with Maulana Abdullah Farooqi (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 634, NMM, 13; Interview
with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, 130. L.C. Jain buttresses this argument,
recalling that following the Muslim League's support of the British during WWII The League was easily given
permits from the administration to hold its processions: Jain, Civil Disobedience: Two Freedom Struggles, One Life,
64.
236 ibid., 364.
was ridiculed and reviled, prevented from entering mosques and even spat upon by students of Aligarh Muslim University.\textsuperscript{237} The Jamiat Ulama-e Hind’s leaders, long-standing allies of the Congress since the Khilafat movement, were called “Hindu stooges, ridiculed and physically attacked in a brutal vilifying campaign in the name of Islam.\textsuperscript{238}

The public sphere became extremely polarized, divided between Congress papers and Muslim League papers.\textsuperscript{239} In order to grasp the personal and emotional dimension of the Muslim League's success, we return to Abdul Rahman Siddiqui: Born and raised in Ballimaran, to a Punjabi Muslim family, Siddiqui belonged to the Muslim educated public; He was an undergraduate student at the Anglo-Arabic College (a stronghold of the Muslim League) during the WWII, and a Masters student at St. Stephens since 1945; He describes how he and his friends read \textit{Dawn}, the English Muslim League organ, religiously every day, memorizing the provocative editorials of Altaf Hussain, who engaged in a war of words with the “Hindu papers” of the city. The Muslim League certainly attracted the young Muslim educated elite such as Siddiqui, but it is still difficult to judge to what extent its popularity went beyond this circle, despite some recollections of mass rallies and demonstrations. What is certain is that many of those who unequivocally supported the Muslim League did not envision that the establishment of Pakistan would mean a departure from Delhi. It never occurred to Siddiqi or his friends, until the very last months that they would ever need to leave Delhi. People would say: “Well, where else could Delhi go [but Pakistan]? Delhi is where the Dilliwallas are,” they are like to two hearts within a single body.

Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, (1915-2000), one of the few women to take part in the Pakistan movement, and later a member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, recalled in her

\textsuperscript{237} Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India}, 29.
\textsuperscript{238} Hasan, \textit{Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence}, 94.
\textsuperscript{239} “Confidential Annual Report on Newspapers Published in the Delhi Province During 1946-7,” F. 8(72)/48-Home, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
memoir from 1963 exactly the same thing. She was enamored by Delhi, where she lived during WWII:

That I would ever have to leave this city which I loved in its every mood, as one does a person, I never even dreamt. The frontiers of Pakistan had not been defined and it never entered out heads that Delhi would not be included within it. How sure we were that Delhi was ours and would come to us…

When a conversation took place over the place of Delhi in a future Pakistan, her husband pointed to the domed and turreted skyline of Delhi, to its essentially Muslim character, asserting Delhi belonged with the Muslims, and hence with Pakistan.240 But one quick glance at the subcontinent’s map is sufficient to see that Delhi could never have been included in Pakistan. How then can we explain this illusion? These recollections are symptomatic of the vagueness of the idea of Pakistan in territorial terms, discussed in the Introduction. As Jalal claims, since the Lahore Resolution of 1940, Jinnah had kept the definition and exact contours of Pakistan intentionally indefinite, in order to keep all options open. The picture of the idea of Pakistan that Siddiqui and Ikramullah depict corroborates Jalal's claim that Pakistan was not thought of as a clearly-bounded and separate territory, until the very end. Their illusion that Delhi would belong with Pakistan can only make sense in the framework of the Cabinet Mission plan that envisioned Pakistan as part of a united India, which many Muslims must have had in mind, in one form or another.

During WWII Pakistan became a household word, but its full meaning was not really clear:

There was such force, such attraction in the name itself that none of us ever bothered to find out its real meaning: whether it was the name of a country outside India, like Afghanistan or something out of a fairy-tale book. The name had gained wide currency just the same and we all talked non-stop about it.241

241 Siddiqi, Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi, 152.
Siddiqi had made some enquiries regarding the true meaning of “Pakistan,” yet never received a straightforward answer. People would say: “Must we know what Allah Almighty is all about? Nobody has ever seen Allah. And yet everyone believes in him.”

He describes the spirited encounters the College students had with the Muslim League General Secretary and future Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, who portrayed a utopian picture of Pakistan, as a land that would offer them dignity, pride and independence, and abundant jobs and business opportunities. To their question about whether they would need to leave Delhi, he responded vaguely: “who know? Remember one thing…that is no matter where you might be after Pakistan—whether here in Delhi as most of us would indeed be or in Lahore or Karachi—we could still serve Pakistan. For Pakistan is and shall be the only goal and ultimate destiny of Muslim India regardless of where one might be.”

The movement thus had a distinct utopian quality—Pakistan was a dreamland and an ideal, rather than a concrete program. Siddiqi provides this utopia with historical depth, tracing it back to the ghadar of 1857 and the Khilafat movement. He suggests that Delhi’s Muslims had lived in a state of daydreaming and detachment from reality since 1857. “For practically half a century after the Ghadar of 1857, Delhi had gone into a deep slumber, close to a coma.”

It woke up during the second decade of the 20th century, with the rise of the Khilafat movement, when the city became a vital hub of political activities. “The city and its people would be wide awake only when dreaming of distant lands of grand sultanates and empires, of which the Ottoman Caliphate was the last living symbol.” With the collapse of the Khilafat movement “Muslim Delhi was stunned and paralyzed and, once again, lapsed into the deep post-Mutiny

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242 ibid., 153.
243 ibid., 224.
244 ibid., 157.
245 ibid., 157-8.
coma.” Delhi's residents slept and slept until the rise of Jinnah in the late 1930s, who came “to galvanize the city and stir the Dilliwallahs with the love of yet another distant land: a land that was not even there, which existed only in their dreams, hence was more real.”

The idea totally permeated everyday life in the city—the Jinnah cap came into prominence and mosques, especially Fatehpuri Masjid and Jama Masjid, were filled up even on week days. Even the Delhi eunuchs joined the movement, and composed songs in praise of Jinnah and in condemnation of Gandhiji. The bazar of Ballimaran resounded with slogans about Pakistan. The Anglo-Arabic College (near Ajmeri Gate) was in the vanguard of the Pakistan movement, second only to Aligarh Muslim University in UP.

There were various disturbances in 1946. The Senior SP of Police Delhi claimed that throughout the year many police stations in the city were virtually in the state of ongoing emergency, which seriously affected their ability to deal with crime. The most serious outbreak was in November, resulting in 28 dead and 54 seriously injured. Similarly to the riots of the 1930s, this one also featured the more “traditional” characteristics of religious riots. It erupted over the Id procession of sacrificial animals from the mosques in Paharganj to Idgah in Sadar Bazar. A crowd of 200 Hindus gathered and attacked the procession in Paharganj. “Riotous mobs” spread over to other parts—Daryaganj, Faiz Bazar and Kashmiri Gate within the walled city, and Sadar Bazar to its west, where there was “a wave of stabbings.”

In some respects, this was another, albeit especially grave, instance of struggles over public spaces in the city. Notwithstanding, we should not lose sight of the broader national context within which it was situated—the mass and brutal violence that swept over north India,

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246 ibid., 159.
247 ibid.
248 Senior SP of Police Delhi Robinson's “Note on the Inspection Report on Faiz Bazar SP for the Quarter Ending 31.3.46,” 1 march 1947, F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
249 Legg, Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities, 146.
starting with the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946, which was in a sense the beginning of the partition violence. While the Delhi disturbance was far from the horrific scenes of Calcutta, it was in its aftermath that the RSS in Delhi started organizing systematically for a civil war. An intelligence report disclosed that on November 23, 1946 a meeting of the RSS took place in a house of an RSS member in Karol Bagh. It was presided over by Basant Rao Oak and attended by 250 prominent RSS workers. They passed the following resolutions: 1) to make enquires about the number of the Muslims residing in the Hindu areas, and how many of them could take part in riots; 2) That all the Hindus of Delhi and its surrounding areas should be armed; 3) that strong anti-Muslim propaganda should be carried out; 3) knives and daggers should be supplied methodically. 4) that all the Sikhs in Delhi should be supplied with *kirpans*; 5) “that sweet relations with the Sikhs” should be cultivated in order to spread anti-Muslim propaganda among them; 6) that firearms from Gwalior state should be imported; 7) to provide the Hindus in the adjacent UP areas of Meerut and Bareilly with firearms from the factory of one, Sudarshan Shukla; 8) that all firearms should be stored in temples; 9) that financial assistance should be given to Shukla to prepare more arms and weapons in his factory.250

**1947: Uncertainties, Fears, and Preparations for a Civil War**

This report shows that the riots that broke out in September 1947 had been long brewing under the surface. At least nine months prior to the riots, and before the refugees started arriving in Delhi, the local RSS and related personalities in the Hindu business community were engaged in systematic preparations for a civil war. The Chief Commissioner’s fortnightly reports buttress it. In December 1946 he reported that while the Muslim National Guards in Delhi numbered 700

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250 This information was compiled along with other intelligence reports in a report on the activities of the RSS between 1946 and 1949: Inspector-General of Police S.R. Chaudhri to CC Shankar Prasad, 3 March 1949, D.O. No. 1595 E.M., F. 48/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
men and were not well organized, the RSS had strength of 3,000 volunteers, who performed physical exercise regularly. “Their policy is claimed to be purely defensive, but they are obviously a potential menace to law and order.”

March 1947 was critical juncture. Partition began to unfold, emotionally so to speak. Attlee’s announcement of the transfer of power by June 1948 and the arrival of Lord Mountbatten as the last Viceroy rendered the transfer of power tangible and the competition for power ever more urgent. The Muslim League declared a campaign of civil disobedience in Punjab, which brought down the Unionist government and sparked mass killings. Tensions in Punjab affected Delhi. March 11 was declared an anti-Pakistan day by Hindus and Sikhs who observed hartal in Delhi—shopkeepers did not open their shops, students did not attend classes and most mills remained closed. The RSS held its annual procession across the city, drawing 100,000 participants, half of them from Delhi. During the second half of March the first wave of non-Muslim Punjabi refugees arrived in Delhi, anticipating the influx in the coming months. Chief Commissioner Christie noted that the refugees’ desperate condition and tales of horror, were covered extensively by the press, and further exacerbated the Hindu and Sikh public opinion.

It was also in March of that year, following Mountbatten’s arrival in Delhi, that the Delhi press had been fixated on Pakistan, and came to terms with the fact that Pakistan—including some sort of partition—would indeed be established. Therefore, various speculations about Pakistan’s and India’s territoriality began to circulate a couple of months before Mountbatten announced partition. Sikhs and Hindus became anxious that Punjab would be partitioned and their pressures received a fillip from the Punjabi refugees in the city. To counter the Hindu and

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Sikh propaganda for the partition of Punjab, the Delhi Muslim League demanded the inclusion of Delhi within Pakistan (!)\(^\text{252}\). This impractical demand may have been a tactical move, it remains unclear, but for a supporter of the Muslim League like Siddiqui, this was a real enough demand, adding to his confusion.

On March 23 “Pakistan Day” was celebrated by the Muslim League, provoking disturbances. Sikhs began parading about in the city in lorries and jeeps, carrying their *kirpans*. The trouble started in front of Jama Masjid when a Sikh jeep and lorry collided with a Muslim cyclist, followed by clashes and stabbings that continued for a couple of weeks resulting in 15 deaths. Curfew was imposed during the nights.\(^\text{253}\)

The other overt trends that had emerged, following the events in March, were the communalization of the police. For example, while accusations were raised against Muslim policemen for being biased in favor of the Muslim community, Hindu and Sikhs policemen were accused of the same kind of partisanship—but in support of their own communities. Furthermore, the tone of the newspapers became growingly aggressive and polarized and their reports disclosed the religious identity of people involved in disturbances, in contravention of long-standing instructions. In addition, the exclusive permission given to Sikhs to continue carrying their *kirpans*, while all others were prohibited from carrying any weapons (under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code) had become one of the most acute and persistent controversies. Sikhs, on their part, demanded the abolition of the *burqa*, following the arrest of a Muslim woman at the railway station, hiding a knife beneath it.\(^\text{254}\)


Most significantly, there were worrying signs that the three communities, especially, the main youth organizations, were preparing themselves for “a savage civil war.”\textsuperscript{255} the use of arms in several incidents, accidental bomb explosions in improvised “arm factories”, recovery of explosive substances, and indications that members of the three communities were applying for licenses and collecting arms, wherever and however they could get them. In addition to firearms, people were collecting knives and daggers and crude weapons such as catapults and arrows.\textsuperscript{256} The rivalry over arms, suggested Christie, was getting out of control and people were willing to pay “fabulous sums for a weapon.” An intelligence report from May, for instance, disclosed that the RSS ordered samples of catapults and arrows from Lahore with the intention of making large purchases. The sample “consisted of a metal catapult fitted with a powerful rubber and [the] arrow had a sharp iron spear-head attached to its point. The point was to be dipped in a poisonous chemical before use.”\textsuperscript{257}

These reports confirm Nehru’s complaint to Patel a month after the breakout of violence that the writing was certainly on the wall, and that even the persons and groups were named in intelligence reports but nothing was done in the matter.\textsuperscript{258} Reports from April-May 1947 named specific people in the Hindu community who were involved, including Mr. Birla (it was not mentioned who of this wealthy business family), who purchased a large amount of helmets for the RSS. What unfolds in Christie’s fortnightly reports is the growing assertion of volunteer youth groups, the deterioration of law and order, and a weak police force, unable to cope with it and growingly divided on communal lines. RSS volunteers especially were reported to prepare systematically, including military training in the camp in Gurgaon, making large purchases of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{W. Christie to Banerjee, “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of May 1947.”}
\footnote{W. Christie to Banerjee, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of April 1947.”}
\footnote{Inspector-General of Police S.R. Chaudhri to CC Shankar Prasad, 3 March 1949, D.O. No. 1595 E.M., F. 48/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA}
\footnote{Jawahar Lal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 6 October 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 126.}
\end{footnotes}
arms and first aid, and making lists of all volunteers who could participate in case of riots. New Sikh volunteer organizations were set up (Akal Regiment and the Sikh National Volunteer Corps), with thousands of volunteers enlisting and preparing to defend the community. Yet, the last British Chief Commissioner in Delhi provides his observations with distant matter-of-factness, as if describing events that were taking place elsewhere, not under his jurisdiction.

In the last week of May, “communal tension had been acute and panic had risen to a very dangerous extent” in anticipation of Mountbatten’s June 3 announcement. Conjectures regarding the content of the plan took over the press, and the broad outlines of the plan began to leak beforehand. The press was also filled with contradictory hearsays on the recent disturbances in Gurgaon, a nearby rural district of Punjab, from which Meo refugees started arriving in Delhi. There was a clash at the railway station between Muslim National Guards helping Muslim pilgrims on their way to Ajmer and RSS volunteers who received refugees from Punjab and NWFP.

To Siddiqui, the months preceding independence were like a fast-speeding train, and anticipation for partition became like a “dizzy whirl”:

Lamp posts after lamp posts, fields after fields, stations after stations flashed past as one neared the final station with a sense of fulfillment and awe. Fulfillment for the destination was getting closer and closer and awe because we just didn't know what it was going to be like at the journey's end.

It was also during this time that utopia gradually confronted reality. Once partition was announced on June 3 and confirmed by the main leaders, the contours of Pakistan began to take a clearer shape and doubts began to sneak in. It became clear that the Muslim-majority provinces would be divided between India and Pakistan, rather than being transferred to Pakistan intact. With the acceptance of the Mountbatten plan the League turned its back on Jinnah's promise delivered only three years earlier, that he would never agree to a “maimed, mutilated and moth-
eaten Pakistan.”  

Perhaps Jinnah was not such a superior political strategist after all, suggested Siddiqi’s Hindu pals sarcastically, as they were sitting at the India Coffee House. Wasn't the Muslim League caught in its own trap?

Moreover, it now became clear that the Muslim community would be divided between two nation-states. Delhi’s Muslims, reported the Chief Commissioner, were not happy about living in Hindustan but were “apparently reconciling themselves to the decision taken by the leaders of the Muslim League.”

This laconic statement merely hints at the emotional turmoil in which Siddiqui and others found themselves. Jinnah famously demanded at this time a corridor between East and West Pakistan. The Delhi Hindu press described it as “fantastic and grotesque” but it was endorsed by the Muslim League press, which “did not bother to securitize its practicality.” Siddiqui was at a loss. He went to see Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi on Delhi University campus, who assured him that Jinnah’s demand was totally legitimate under international law and the “Right of the Sealed Wagons.” Siddiqui rushed to the coffee house. His Hindu pals were there as he had anticipated, waiting to taunt him about the absurdity of Jinnah’s new demand, but he felt he overwhelmed them with the mysterious and innovative “Right of the Sealed Wagons.” Notwithstanding, doubts began to creep in. The Hindu pals asked him where he would live after partition:

‘Why right here in Delhi. Where else? This has been our home for the past two or three centuries at least.’

‘Do you really think it’d be the same after Partition?’

‘Well, I don’t really know. But I see no reason why it should be any different.’

And that is where the argument would stop, to leave me full of growing doubts.

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259 Siddiqi, Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi, 255. This is how Jinnah famously responded to congress leader C. Rajagopalachari’s offer in 1944: Jalal, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan, 121.


262 Siddiqi, Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi, 255.
Furthermore, Mountbatten's decision to advance the transfer of power from June 1948 to August 1947 caught Muslim League supporters in Delhi unprepared. As utopia confronted reality, the troubling practical questions that had been avoided thus far, have now come center stage. A growing sense of disillusionment and fear took over, and the frightening possibility of leaving Delhi arose. Pakistan was in sight and “it had nothing of the gloss and glitter of the dream we had dreamt of, the vision we had projected on our mental screens of a wonderland with flowers blossoming and birds singing.\textsuperscript{263}

Siddiqi, like many of Delhi’s Muslims, would soon feel abandoned by the Muslim League leadership, who, upon departing for Pakistan, left behind a fearful public to face the real consequences of the establishment of Pakistan. Admiration for the Muslim leaders was soon replaced by bitterness and a sense of betrayal. Siddiqi describes a scene which severely shook their confidence, soon after the June 3 announcement was made. A delegation of Muslim women went to Jinnah's house on Aurangzeb Road shouting slogans in support of Pakistan. They were received very reluctantly and coldly by his sister. When Jinnah finally came out, he told them:

Those who could make it to Pakistan at all would be welcomed. Others would have to stay in India. Pakistan cannot accommodate all of you. As for your sacrifices, they had to be made for Pakistan in any case, whether it could accommodate all of you or not.\textsuperscript{264}

Jinnah departed for Karachi on August 7, asking his followers to leave the old grudges behind and become loyal citizens of India. Muslims in Delhi and other places felt like children suddenly orphaned.\textsuperscript{265}

\textsuperscript{263} ibid., 262-3.
\textsuperscript{264} ibid., 263.
On the Brink of the Riots: The City as a Space of Fear

Independence was declared on August 15. The streets were festive and the atmosphere celebratory, but the city was on the verge of crisis: hordes of homeless refugees, acute shortage of food, cloth, fuel, and electricity, a flourishing black market, and real estate market spiraling out of control. Disturbances in Gurgaon and Alwar princely state pushed Muslim Meo refugees into Delhi and the Delhi Provincial Muslim League settled about 10,000 Meos in two camps. They gathered in the Urdu maidan (open space) in front of Jama Masjid. For the Muslims living in the Jama Masjid locality, as Dehlvi recalls, the Meo camp served as a buffer zone, protecting them from the adjacent Hindu localities and giving them a sense of security. Nirmala Jain describes the arrival of the Meos as experienced from the other side of this “buffer zone.” The Jains’ haveli was situated in a sensitive location, facing the Jama Masjid, and at the border between the Muslim mohalla and the Hindu one. As the Meos settled in the Urdu maidan, rumors of their excessive violent character intensified the anxieties of the Hindu and Jain residents.

A Hindustan Times item indicates how the coverage in the press, even the so-called mainline English press, contributed to the mills of rumors surrounding the Meos. The report alludes to a much higher number of Meos—50,000—as opposed to the Chief Commissioner’s estimate of 10,000. It also unequivocally blames them for the riots in the Mewat—riots, in which they were the main victims. The people of Delhi, claims the newspaper report, “are naturally apprehensive of the presence of Meos,” and the latter should be sent away. Jain remembers her mother staying awake night after night, constantly inspecting the various sounds and sights coming from the direction of the Meo camp. The Meos, Jain realizes retrospectively, were no

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267 Dihlavī, Dilli Ki Bipta, 42.
268 Mayaram, Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory, and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity.
269 “Meos in Delhi to be Sent Away,” Hindustan Times, 5 September 1947.
less terrified – and thus would light up their lamps and patrol around their camp throughout the
night, which further ignited the fears of her mother.270

When examined side by side, Dehlvi's and Jain's accounts draw a troubling picture of the
communalization of space, turning the city into geography of fear, with clearly drawn boundaries
between Hindu and Muslim territories. To be sure, accounts of this period convey a city ridden
by unbearable tension. Iron gates were placed on the narrow alleys, turning neighborhoods into
small fortifications. Male residents organized into groups who patrolled the locality and guarded
from the rooftops during long curfews and sleepless nights. In his interview, Phool Chand Jain
recalled:

…people were very passionate. Now it’s difficult to recall names but the general
perception was that these were RSS men. They told people in the different mohalle that
we should all get organized, lest we’ll all get killed. They said: you should get weapons,
do this, do that, collect lathis, enclose the mohalla, build fortifications; this kind of thing
began on a regular basis two months before.

Sharma: two months before August 15?

Jain: Yes, but it wouldn’t be a mistake to say even three [months]. This activity began
with great vengeance. There were meetings in the mohalle. On the other side people
started coming […] We in our homes also planned that first we’d kill our women, we’d
set a fire and then leave the house so that they wouldn't be dishonored. So, on one side
were meetings of the Muslim League people, on the other side were meetings of people
in the mohalle. All this infused people’s hearts with great josh (fervor).271

I find this interview astonishing. Phool Chand Jain embodies the ideals and politics of the
Gandhian Congress. He had taken an active part in the noncooperation movement and the Civil
disobedience movements and was imprisoned six times for his nationalist activity. He views of
women’s role were considered progressive and his wife took an active part in the nationalist
movement, and even courted arrest. In the aftermath of the riots, we may recall, he volunteered
in the relief work and lifted dead bodies of Muslims along with his son. Yet, as he recalls the

270 Jaina, Dillī, Śāhara Dara Śāhara, 70.
271 Interview with Phool Chand Jain (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 479, NMML, pp. 91-2 (my translation).
preparations for a civil war, his language slips from “they” (RSS members) to “we in our homes,” and moves to a chilling account of how “we” got prepared to kill “our” women, lest they be dishonored. It shows how, within the context of aggressive polarization and the brutalities that swept other India, distinctions between the Hindu right and Congress became more blurred, and everything was congealed into Hindu or Muslim.

These tensions were further exacerbated by the inflow of Punjabi refugees. The refugees exerted unprecedented pressure on the city's resources, and the Delhi Rationing Department was running out of food. The real estate market spiraled out of control, and what clearly arises from the sources is that property became a determining factor in the upheavals of the period. The refugees, argues Shahid Ahmed Dehlvi bitterly, were far from being hungry and poor people. They frantically bought up property in the city, driving the prices up. Although Dehlvi’s account is biased against the refugees throughout his account, other sources confirm that the first waves of refugees, who came prior to partition, were mostly of middle and upper class backgrounds. Talbot’s study of the impact of partition on Lahore, discusses the important trend of anticipatory migration of wealthy Hindu and Sikh businessmen to Delhi, from June onwards. Bank accounts were transferred, Punjabi companies were registered, and offices were opened in Connaught Place. By independence, the upscale locality of Lahore, Model Town, emptied out of its non-Muslim residents.272 As Joya Chatterji finds with regard to the partition exodus in Bengal, the wealthiest were the first to leave, usually in a more organized manner, transferring some assets in advance and carrying some property. It was the poorest who stayed behind and left only when there was no other choice—when the flames of violence engulfed them, forcing them to flee with nothing but the shreds of their clothes, and embark on dangerous journey that not all survived.273

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In Delhi, the anticipatory in-migration of the well-to-do had driven the prices of property up. A Hindustan Times article of August 21 suggests that the upper-class refugees were a disturbing factor, buying up firms and residential premises for fancy prices with money they amassed in the black market during the war. The RSS members held a secret meeting on August 28, when violence in Delhi had begun, condemning the Hindu refugees who despite repeated warnings purchases Muslim houses for enormous sums of money. The RSS decided to set on fire all such buildings, commencing with the new branch of the Punjab National Bank on Under Hill Road in Civil Lines.

Dehlvi also underscores the spiraling up of real estate prices, the frustrations it caused, and its imbrication in the massacres. He describes the case of a Muslim friend from Karol Bagh, who decided to sell his house, which he had bought before the war for Rs.8,000. When the refugees started to come to the city he decided to sell the house and leave for Pakistan. He initially asked Rs.25,000 but, as prices kept rising, he could not resist the temptation and increased his demand to Rs.40,000; and then to Rs.50,000. When the potential buyer agreed to pay Rs.50,000 he would subsequently request that they pay Rs.60,000. The price of Rs.60,000 would soon be raised to Rs.75,000 and then to Rs.80,000. At this point the riots in Karol Bagh broke out and he lost everything apart from the clothes on his body. Fortunately, a relative from Ajmeri Gate came at the last minute with a car to rescue the friend and his family. Just before their escape they trusted the house key with a Hindu neighbor, asking him to protect the house until peace is restored. Notwithstanding, even as they were escaping from the house, a group of refugees already burst their way in, disregarding the neighbor's claims that he bought the house and was its legal owner. All protests were to no avail and the house was occupied.

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275 Inspector-General of Police S.R. Chaudhri to CC Shankar Prasad, 3 March 1949, D.O. No. 1595 E.M., F. 48/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. I do not know whether the bank was eventually set on fire.
276 Dehlvi, Dilli Ki Bipta, 32.
Who was it that broke into the house of Dehlvi's friend in Karol Bagh? It is difficult to know for certain but it is likely that they were refugees of lower means—those roaming around the city hungry and homeless, frustrated by the spiraling up of property prices, which applied to all transactions, including rent. In its editorial of August 30, for instance, Hindustan Times admitted that there were “a few grabbing landlords and shopkeepers who attempted to profit out of the misery of their co-religionists…” On September 4 the paper reported on a flourishing black market in housing, which propelled refugees to pay fantastic rents for small rooms.

There was a class distinction among the refugees; a division between people of means, who bought up property and pushed the prices up, and those who were excluded from the real estate market, and who resorted to violence, bursting their way into and occupying Muslim houses by force, during the September riots and afterwards. Property had become a key factor, even a driving force in the social turmoil that took over the city in 1947 and 1948, as people bought, sold, rented out and illegally occupied what came to be known as “evacuee property.”

The September Riots – Coming a Full Circle (Conclusion)

We have come full circle to the outbreak of the riots on September 5. Our historical journey, tracing the communal relations in the city from the late-19th century hopefully thickens our understanding of the riots, their structure and the meanings underpinning them.

Let us begin with the event marking out the outbreak of the violence on September 5—the bomb thrown inside Fatehpuri Mosque. Later intelligence reports ascribed direct responsibility to RSS men, who managed to throw the bomb from the flat of one Gobind Singh in the adjacent Gadodia Market in Khari Baoli. This is just another piece of information that shows that rather than being a spontaneous outbreak of passions on the part of disgruntled and

278 “Problems of Refugees in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 4 September 1947.
traumatized refugees (though this element no doubt existed), the local RSS had a great responsibility for planning and orchestrating the violence long in advance. The riots had historical roots in the entrenchment of the Hindu right in the city since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and, since the 1930s, of the RSS, which drew on the support and resources of the business Hindu community.\textsuperscript{279}

There is also evidence that the RSS reached out to the Sikh community since at least the end of 1946, to cultivate an anti-Muslim conspiracy. More generally, since March 1947, new Sikh organizations were set up in Delhi, with thousands of volunteers, and Sikhs became more assertive in this period. Nehru and Maulana Azad later argued that in addition to the RSS, Sikh bands clearly planned the violence in advance. Other suggested that the Sikh who were largely responsible came from outside Delhi, and were parts of the Sikh gangs who roamed around East Punjab and the princely states. Jugal Kishore Khanna argues:

[...] Sikhs came in the Frontier Mail and they travelled without tickets. There was no question of buying tickets in those days. They came to Delhi and committed violence and put locks on the properties of the Muslims, went back, then came back and then they allotted those properties to Hindus and so on. That was a regular thing which went on for about two months.\textsuperscript{280}

This account draws attention to the fact that Delhi became connected to a larger nexus of violence in Punjab and the princely states, whose rulers, for example, undoubtedly extended their help to the Delhi RSS in military training and supply of arms. Also, in such upheavals and mass migrations, the lines between locals and outsiders become somewhat blurred. Among the refugees there were many who had already established connections with the Delhi RSS through the relief camps the RSS and other Hindu-right organizations set up for the refugees, long before

\textsuperscript{279} Joya Chatterji reached a very similar conclusion in her analysis of the Great Calcutta Killing, in: Chatterji, \textit{Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947}.

\textsuperscript{280} Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML.
the government stepped in. Other refugees had been RSS members already back in Punjab, and the two were after all part of the same network.

On the whole, the partition riots in Delhi impacted an ethnic cleansing of the Muslim community and mass killings, launched by different actors with varying degrees of connections between them—the local RSS, Sikh organizations, parts of the police and the army, and refugees from Punjab, who forcibly occupied Muslim houses, and avenged whatever they suffered in Punjab. Yet, I suggest that the riots were not quite the same as the clear-cut pogroms launched by Hindu right organizations and state bodies on vulnerable populations in present-day India. There are subtle differences. In 1947, both sides prepared for a civil war in a city that had a long history of violent clashes in which the Muslims often had the upper hand. Muslims participated in the first phase of the violence, when stray stabbings took place in various parts of the city. This was acknowledged by the Muslim Leagui Qureshi and is glimpsed in Dehlvi’s account of the outbreak of the riots and the stabbing of a Hindu man in front of his eyes. Various accounts also suggest that in Paharganj and Subzimandi the Muslims fought hard and had arms that they amassed in advance. The extent of their resistance and armament may be exaggerated, as I noted above. For Dehlvi and Siddiqui it proved the heroism of the Muslims, who rather than succumbing to death like sheep to the slaughter, prepared in advance and fought to the very end. For the Hindustan Times and state representatives it justified the violence inflicted by the army and police in these areas. Then again, given the long history of communal disturbances and street fights in these areas, which Muslims often won, that there was some degree of Muslim preparation and fight is highly plausible. But the Muslims were no doubt less organized than the RSS and the Sikhs, and as partition drew near and Muslim leaders, civil servants and policemen started departing to Pakistan, the Muslims became increasingly vulnerable.
What I aim at is that unlike contemporary pogroms in India where Hindu right organizations and local politicians target minorities that are defenseless to begin with, it was through the partition riots that Delhi’s Muslim were transformed from a strong minority numerically and politically, who occupied more than half of the police force, into a depleted and frightened one. Jugal Kishore Khanna recalls how a Muslim Leagui colleague who stayed in Delhi after partition told him: “how foolish the Muslim League had been in Delhi? We had a Pakistan in Delhi. It was we who were running the Delhi Administration and they had spoiled the whole thing.”

One can sense the hint of humiliation in Dehlvi’s and Siddiqui’s accounts of the massacres that took place in the mixed localities. Both emphasize the well-known physical strength of the Bandhani (coolie) community and how they used to win over Hindus in the local disturbances and street fights. Muslims possessed self-assurance about their position in the city, which can also be gleaned from their confidence, until the very last stage, that Delhi belonged to the Muslims and would form part of Pakistan. In other words, despite the clear-cut outcome of the riots and the obvious superiority of the Hindus and Sikh—in terms of organization, support of the army and police, the mass of refugees who transformed the demographic balance in the city, and the fundamental fact that the territory now belonged to them—the anticipation for and first phases of the riots had been experienced as a symmetrical battle between forces who were more or less equally dangerous to each other.

This also explains the levels of anxiety that had permeated both Muslim and Hindu localities. Rumors had important part in shaping this geography of fear. The primary discourse on partition riots, to recall an earlier observation, is marked by the signature of rumors. And rumors, alongside military organization and armament, constituted the violence. During the last

281 Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, 136.
months in the run-up to partition, the city was filled with speculations about the possible boundaries of Pakistan, rumors about Muslim civil servants and policemen who opted to serve in Pakistan, stories about the dishonoring of Hindu and Sikh women in Punjab, rumors that the Hindus, or Muslims, in so and so locality amassed large amounts of weapons, and, as partition drew near, that one’s locality would be attacked on night. These rumors fed on the great uncertainties of the period, and the fears were lit by the torches of residents patrolling localities at nights.

I mentioned earlier the rumors circulating about the dangerous and violent character of the Meos—a group of refugees in Delhi who were themselves survivors of riots in the nearby rural areas. These Meos caused Nirmala Jain’s mother long sleepless nights. Interestingly, on the eve of the attack on the Muslims of Karol Bagh, on September 4, the Hindustan Times published the following:

**Panic in Karol Bagh:** False alarm that Meos were about to attack the locality made residents of Karol Bagh and Western Extension area pass a sleepless night. Women were hastily evacuated to "safe" houses and men kept a whole night vigil. The police had to be sent for from New Delhi and to patrol the locality.282

As Radhika Subramaniam found with regard to the Bombay riots of 1992, reports of rampaging mobs from the other community heading to one’s locality were frequent and “not surprisingly, no one said they had been the first to launch an attack. It was always in defense or in retaliation for violence…that was carried on the rumor waves from elsewhere.”283

This observation also sheds light on the rumors of Muslim insurgency, located as it were between fact and fiction. While recalling and the growing tensions in the city, R.N. Banerjee noted:

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This assumed a serious form in certain congested areas of Old Delhi and apparently from one area—speaking from memory—from some Muslim quarter a sten gun began to fire on a Hindu crowd. This became a signal for a wholesale murder of Muslims and from the next day Muslims began to rush out of Delhi as best as they could284

Dehlvi described how, with the opening of the Purana Qila refugee camp, the Meos were moved out of Urdu maidan. The “buffer zone” which hitherto gave the Jama Masjid residents some degree of confidence, was eliminated, leaving the residents increasingly vulnerable to attacks that came closer and closer to the Muslim locality, as the houses surrounding them were taken over by refugees. Siddiqi's recollection of these days, as experienced in the other Muslim locality of Ballimaran is similar, dominated by the sense that the noose was getting tighter around their neck.285 This ushered in a period of great confusion and tensions within the Muslim localities, as residents debated whether they should stay or migrate. Attempts to impose collective discipline on the residents failed, as more and more families started to sneak outside the localities. Dehlvi finally left for the Purana Qila camp and from there for Lahore on the train of September 19.286 Siddiqi left Delhi on October 9. It is to the expansion of the circle of violence and its persistent, lingering nature that I now turn.

284 Interview with R.N. Banerjee, Oral History Transcript No. 366, NMML.
285 This experience is expressed very powerfully by both Dehlvi and Siddiqi: Siddiqi, Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi, 293.
286 He describes his departures as a shameful event, since he had been one of the more vocal supporters of staying in Delhi.
CHAPTER TWO

DELHI AS A STATE OF INDETERMINACY:
LEAW AND ORDER IN THE AFTERMATH OF PARTITION

Introduction

In early December 1947, four months after partition, an Urdu poster provocatively titled “What Does the Delhi Muslim Want from Mahatma Gandhi and the Ministry of the Indian Union?” was posted on walls all over the old city. The poster, which carried the signatures of 300 Muslims and claimed to represent the voice of the Delhi Muslim community as a whole, comprised thirteen clauses articulating their demands in strong and unequivocal language. Their demands revolved around two main concerns—law and order (or, more accurately, the lack of it) and struggles over Muslim property. The gist of the thirteen clauses could be summarized as follows: First, it was claimed that three months after the riots, Muslim life and property in the city was still in great danger. Incidents of stabbing happened on a daily basis in the Old City and its neighboring localities, specifically in Chawri Bazar, Bazar Sita Ram, Khari Baoli, and Faiz Bazar (Daryaganj) in the old city, and in Pul Bangash and Pahari Dhiraj to its west. The poster included a demand for a better protection of these localities by the police and the imposition of collective fines on adjacent non-Muslim localities involved in the attacks. Second, it was claimed that non-Muslims should not be allowed to settle in vacant houses in Muslims localities, since they spread terror throughout the area. Third, the petition included a demand that Islamic places of worship that were forcibly occupied should be vacated and restored to the Muslims, and those destroyed should be rebuilt. Fourth, it stated that Sikhs should not be allowed to carry

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287 They named specific alleys and areas that were located between Muslim neighborhoods and Hindu ones: “…Gali Murgan which is open towards both sides of Chawri Bazar and Bazar Sita Ram, Gali Lohe-wali (Chawri Bazar), mohalla Charkhe Dalan, Bazaar Sita Ram, Naya Bans, Khari Baoli, Gandhi Gali near Fatehpuri, Cloth Market, Urdu Baghdiwar, Faiz Bazar (Daryaganj), Pul Bangash, and Pahari Dhiraj.”
their kirpans, and Sikh refugees should be transferred to East Punjab as soon as possible, since they created havoc on the streets of Delhi. **Lastly**, but most poignantly, the poster contained various charges against the Delhi administration, the police, and the Special Police Force, accusing them of anti-Muslim bias and demanding the immediate transfer of key officials, especially Deputy Commissioner Mohinder Singh Randhawa, Commander of the Special Police Force Captain Ranjit Singh, and the inspector of the Hauz Qazi police station, Chaudhuri Amar Singh. Randhawa was accused of affecting a change of personnel within the Special Police, transferring honest Congress workers and replacing them with RSS and Akali supporters. The poster concluded with a direct appeal to Mahatma Gandhi, Prime Minister Nehru, Home Minister Patel, Education Minister Maulana Azad, Minister of Communications Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, and socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, requesting that they remove dangerous elements from the Delhi Administration and police. Furthermore, since the local Administration was deemed untrustworthy, the petition instructed the Muslim community to report directly to Nehru and Gandhi on every hurdle and injustice they encountered.

The poster was brought to the attention of the Indian Government's Home Ministry by an Intelligence Bureau report, which defined it as a highly objectionable material, given the precarious situation in Delhi. The report initiated a dense correspondence between the Home Ministry and the Delhi Administration. R.N. Banerjee, Sardar Patel’s secretary in the Home Ministry, criticized the lack of coordination between Delhi's Chief Commissioner and the Delhi CID, arguing that it was a grave failure if the Chief Commissioner proved ignorant of such an inflammatory publication and had to be informed about it by the intelligence arm of the Home Ministry, rather than Delhi's own CID. Following the Home Ministry's orders, the poster was
forfeited by the Chief Commissioner, and an investigation into the identity of the 300 signatories was commenced.288

Both the poster and the official correspondence concerning it capture the main features of the social and administrative turmoil that engulfed Delhi throughout 1947 and 1948. It therefore serves as my point of entry into a discussion of law and order in Delhi during the transition from colonial rule to postcolonial democracy. First, and most prominently, the poster indicates that the violence lingered on in Delhi long after the major disturbances of September officially ended. While the main riots may have ended by mid-September, the situation in the city and its rural surroundings remained precarious throughout 1948 and up to 1950, as cycles of violence erupted every few months.

Second, the poster also summarizes the pattern and driving cause of the violence. In continuity with the pre-partition days, the ongoing violence in the aftermath of the riots was fed by the constant influx of non-Muslim refugees from West Pakistan and the ensuing struggles over Muslim property. While covering the housing crisis in Delhi, the Hindustan Times estimated that by January, over 400,000 refugees from West Pakistan were already registered in Delhi,289 and that more people were living on the streets than in built houses.290 Muslim mosques, dargahs, and graveyards were all occupied by refugees, and so were municipal schools. The

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288 A copy of the Urdu poster and the correspondence concerning it between the Home Ministry, Delhi's Chief Commissioner, Delhi Police, Delhi CID, and the Press Branch of the Delhi Chief Commissioner's Secretariat, are included in F. 8(1)/48-Home, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.

289 See: “Registration of Refugees in Delhi to Stop,” Hindustan Times, 8 January, 1948. The Government announced that registration of new refugees would stop on January 10. On January 23, Nehru emphasized that Delhi could not possibly absorb fresh batches of refugees, who would have to be sent to Kurukshetra and other places: “Delhi Can't Take Any More Refugees,” Hindustan Times, 24 January, 1948. The stream of the refugees, however, did not halt, given that Nehru delivered a very similar message three months later, in early April: “Delhi's Hospitality Reaches Saturation Point,” Hindustan Times, 5 April, 1948.

290 “Delhi's Hospitality Reaches Saturation Point,” Hindustan Times, 5 April 1948. I could not find an official support to the claim that more people were living on the streets than inside houses, but it is important, even as an impressionistic claim, to convey the overwhelming effect of refugees' immigration to the city. See also: “Fresh Influx of Refugees in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 6 November 1947; “Increase in Delhi Population,” Hindustan Times, 17 November 1947. See also Deputy Commissioner Randhawa's description of homelessness as chronic to city life in: Randhawa to Khurshid, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of December 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
education system in the city shut down for a few months, leaving refugee and other children loitering aimlessly in the streets.\textsuperscript{291} The long queues of desperate refugees standing in line for hours every day in front of the rationing offices became a trait of the urban landscape, featuring prominently in fiction and memoir representations of the period. They conjure up an image of a city packed with homeless people wandering around and running their lives in the open, on railway platforms and at every available street corner.\textsuperscript{292} Such blurring of the boundaries between private and public space represented a cause of recurring complaints by the \textit{Dilliwallahs}, who found the growing presence of Punjabi women on the streets indecent\textsuperscript{293} and the ruination of the city's landscape offensive. Letters to the editor of the \textit{Hindustan Times}, sent by the city's English-educated milieu, repeatedly complained about squalor, filth, and congestion—the narrowing-down of the streets and pathways by numerous vending stalls improvised by the refugees. Delhi's older inhabitants complained that even Connaught Place, Delhi's elegant, upscale colonial shopping center, was now packed with refugee stalls and resembled the bazaars of the old city.\textsuperscript{294}

Overcrowding and homelessness were accompanied by a precarious law-and-order situation in general, and anti-Muslim violence in particular. Police reports and newspapers noted an alarming increase in all sorts of crime—murders, burglaries, and thefts—especially cycle

\textsuperscript{291} The forcible occupation of mosques and graveyards is depicted in Delhi Chief Commissioner's files: File 26/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA; File 55/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. See also Anis Kidwai's detailed discussion of this matter: Kidwai, \textit{In Freedom's Shade}, Chapter 15.


\textsuperscript{293} On the criticism of the presence of Punjabi refugee women on the streets, see: Kriṣṇā Sobtī, ibid.; Shāhid Aḥmad Dihlavī, "Maan: Dilli Aath Mahine Baad," in \textit{Dilli Ki Biptā} (Karachi: Shahrzād, 2010).

\textsuperscript{294} There was extensive discussion of the congestion and nuisance caused by the refugees’ stalls. For representative articles, see: “Pavement Shops to be Abolished,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 5 November 1947; “Rs. 10 Lakhs Loss to Delhi Municipality,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 11 December 1947; Indrani Chandra, Letter to the Editor, \textit{Hindustan Times}, 22 December 1947. See also Dehlvi description of the narrowing-down of Delhi's streets: "Maan: Dilli Aath Mahine Baad.".
thefts, which became an “epidemic” of city life. CID and police records reflected a growing concern about the avalanche of unfamiliar faces from the Punjab and other provinces of Pakistan, among them gangs of criminals unknown to the local police thanas.

The general increase in crime was entwined with the specifically communal violence targeting the Muslim minority, which was the main concern of the Urdu poster. If the first phase of the violence—up to and including September—concentrated in the mixed localities of Paharganj, Subzimandi and Karol Bagh, once these localities were captured and largely cleansed of Muslims, the next waves expanded beyond these areas to target Muslim-majority localities within the old city and to its west, in the area of Sadar Bazar.

The violence of the winter of 1947 represented the background against which Mahatma Gandhi decided to undertake his fast unto death to restore peace in Delhi, from January 12 to January 18, 1948, just a month after the poster was printed. Indeed, temporally speaking, the period under discussion can be divided into two main phases: (I) FROM SEPTEMBER 1947 TO FEBRUARY 1948—that is, the months preceding Gandhi's last fast in mid-January and his assassination on January 30, 1948. This period saw the growing assertion of Hindu far-right organizations—the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS—who deepened their influence and expanded their branches. By November, an increased enrollment to the RSS was reported in the exact

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296 Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML.
297 These expanding attacks targeted Muslim houses. I will analyze the struggles over Muslim property in the next chapter.
298 In December, the RSS asserted its presence through a well-attended procession throughout the city, “demonstrating the vast and disciplined force of Hindu youth.” See: “CID Report for the First Half of December 1947,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA. Interestingly, this CID report, produced a few weeks before Gandhi's assassination, warned against the hazardous potential of the RSS, predicting that they would fight the government with guerilla warfare if it tried to suppress them. In its report for the first half of January, the CID described the training in firearms given to Sangh members in a camp in Indraprastha, District Gurgaon: “CID Report for the First Half of January 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
localities where the September riots had taken place, and where approximately 100,000 refugees settled: Subzimandi, Karol Bagh and Paharganj.\textsuperscript{299} (II) In the months following Gandhi's assassination, during which the RSS and other communal organizations were banned and de-legitimized, the Congress and socialist activists embarked upon peace initiatives, and Delhi's officials and police officers signed pledges to maintain communal harmony.\textsuperscript{300}

While all sources indicate that the situation in Delhi then improved considerably, claims of miraculous transformation were exaggerated, given existing reports on violence against Muslims and Congress peace processions in the midst of the fast.\textsuperscript{301} The atmosphere in the city was still highly polarized,\textsuperscript{302} and a failed attempt on Gandhi's life took place just a few days after the conclusion of the fast, famously followed by his assassination on January 30. Significantly, the shockwaves created by the assassination gave the Congress Government and the Delhi Administration momentum to take severe action against the RSS and other communal

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{300} On Gandhi's declaration of his fast and its impact, see: "Gandhiji Decides to Fast from Today," \textit{Hindustan Times}, 13 January 1948. For Maulana Azad’s account of the fast and its impact, see: Azad, \textit{India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version}, 237-41. See also “Peace Processions in Capital,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 17 January 1948; “Gandhiji's Seven-Point Test for Delhi,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 18 January 1948. For the full quote of the peace pledge and the list of signatories, see: “Gandhiji Ends Fast,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 19 January 1948. A similar pledge was signed by Delhi's magistrates and senior police officers. See the list in F. 68/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. The fast's conclusion was followed by peace initiatives, a campaign to vacate mosques, and a peaceful celebration of the Urs at Mehrauli, in which Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs participated.
\item \textsuperscript{301} For a report on the violence in Qasabpura, Sadar Bazaar, see: F. 68/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. See also a \textit{Hindustan Times} report that described a group of Hindu and Sikh refugees that assaulted a lorry of congressmen shouting peace slogans at Ajmeri Gate. They abused the Congress and Gandhi, and later attacked a lorry at Ajmeri Gate carrying Muslims returning to their homes from Humayun's Tomb camp. The same item reported on abuses against Congress peace volunteers in Sadar Bazaar, the stoning of Muslims near New Delhi Railway Station (Paharganj), the looting of a godown in Hauz Qazi and a shop on Bahadurgarh Road, and the murder of a Muslim couple in their home in Hauz Qazi: “Refugees Assault Congress Volunteers,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 15 January 1948.
\item \textsuperscript{302} Hindu far-right circles in the city were resentful towards the Indian Government's decision to pay back the cash balance in full to Pakistan (Rs. 55 Crore), and they saw Gandhi’s fast as a political blackmail device meant to pressure the Government to make further concessions to Pakistan and the Muslims. See: “CID Report for the First Half of January 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA; “Fortnightly Press Report for the First Half of December 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
organizations. \(^{303}\) Yet even after the assassination, and especially a few months later, when the initial impact of his martyrdom waned somewhat, violence erupted every few months, concentrating in the Muslim zones and responding to two main factors: the waves of non-Muslim immigration from Pakistan, and the annual climatic cycle, specifically the worsening weather conditions in Delhi during winter and summer.

The last and most important point for this chapter—one explicitly raised by the poster—centers upon the administrative and ideological uncertainties accompanying the transition to postcolonial democracy, and how they fed ongoing daily violence on the ground. This chapter will focus upon an analysis of Delhi's governance and administration—an analysis for which the poster offers a few important leads. It first points to the tight control the central government held over the administration of Delhi. Note that it was the Home Ministry that had initiated the investigation into the poster in the first place, reproaching Delhi's chief commissioner and the CID for their lack of cooperation and prompting them to take action immediately. Such dynamics are evident in many other files of Delhi's chief commissioner's secretariat, disclosing the broad scope of the Central Government's intervention in Delhi's administration. No doubt, the tight control of the central government was not a new trend, but rather the legacy of colonial rule. As the national capital and seat of the central government, Delhi was governed by the Home Department (later Ministry) through the chief commissioner—an unelected bureaucrat of the civil service. \(^{304}\)

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\(^{304}\) When Delhi became the capital of British India in 1912, the city and its rural surroundings were separated from the Punjab and became a separate province under a chief commissioner acting under the control of the Home Department of the Government of India. Henceforth, its whole administration and finance became a central charge. This situation continued after independence and until September 1951, when Delhi was redefined as a Part C state. While the new status provided Delhi with its own elected council of ministers and legislature, Delhi still had far less autonomy vis-à-vis the central government and Parliament compared with other (Part A and B) states. In practice, vital spheres of administration were still vested in the central government through the chief commissioner. In 1956,
One might have assumed that such a centralized control would create an effective, highly disciplined chain of command. In practice, however, the central government was divided along ideological lines and personal power struggles, sending conflicting messages to the Delhi Administration: while the Home Ministry under Patel pulled in one direction, Prime Minister Nehru pulled in another. Accordingly, the local administration and levels of police operating beneath the central government were divided between these two camps.

It is also important to note that the Muslim signatories had communicated a deep sense of distrust toward Delhi's administration and police. Their distrust went beyond the charge of inadequacy, deeming it partial and biased, as well. Specifically, the poster singled out Deputy Commissioner Randhawa and Special Police Force Commander Captain Ranjit Singh as anti-Muslim figures who had affected a change of personnel within the Special Police Force. As we shall see, Randhawa was indeed a key player and highly controversial official who stood at the center of ongoing disputes.

Likewise, the bitter struggle over the change of personnel within the Special Police Force, to which the poster referred, was one of a series of conflicts concerning voluntary bodies that straddled the line between governmental and non-governmental organizations—or, to put it differently, between state and society. The conflicts surrounding these bodies involved all of the main agents in the governance of Delhi—the central government, including the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, the Delhi Secretariat, including the Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, and, interestingly, the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee—a non-governmental yet politically-connected organization whose relation to the new national Government was negotiated at this critical time of transition.

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even this curtailed autonomy was abolished, and Delhi again functioned as a centrally-administered state, defined as a union territory. See: Chopra, "Delhi Gazetteer," Chapter 10.
It is noteworthy that the Muslim signatories attempted, through the poster, to bypass the Delhi administration and speak directly to Gandhi and the ministers of the Central Cabinet. This was a recurrent strategy which, as we shall see in this and the following chapter, was employed time and again by social activists, political organizations, and citizens. I suggest that this strategy reflected a contemporary public perception of the state's bureaucracy as one that was not a unified body following impersonal rules through a clear, hierarchical chain of command—the classic Weberian model of bureaucracy—but rather a highly fragmented and politicized body comprised of competing forces in a state of constant struggle over authority.

The two main arguments put forward in this chapter are, first, that rather than functioning as a unified body arbitrating social relations "from outside," the postcolonial state, during this volatile period of transition, was deeply enmeshed in social conflicts. It comprised a set of competing political, bureaucratic, and policing forces that often operated in contradiction to and contravention of each other. Ideological divisions and power struggles permeated all levels of political command, bureaucracy, and the police—from tensions between Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Patel, through the conflict between Delhi's Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, to struggles between competing factions of police and special police on the ground. Such a divided, administrative, and policed landscape fed (and at the same time was fed by) enduring violence on the streets. Second, I show how these divisions reflected competing visions of the Indian nation-state, and the place of Muslims within it. The question “Can a Muslim be an Indian?” was far from self-evident at this important juncture in Indian history.
A State of Indeterminacy in the Administration: The Top Leadership

Focusing upon the divided landscape of Delhi's Administration, I take my cue from a brief observation made by historian Gyan Pandey on the crisis of law and order that engulfed Delhi in September:

The longer-term residents of Delhi were persuaded...that these troubles would pass. Delhi was, after all, the seat of the national government. The government would maintain peace here at any cost. They were not entirely mistaken: the government did try (though governments are made up of many parts that do not always pull together).305

I find the last sentence in parentheses compelling, and central to the mayhem of 1947-50.

Before we investigate the world of Delhi's controversial non-official organizations, let us become acquainted with the "big players" on the Delhi scene, beginning with Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Sardar Patel. The relationship between the two does not lend itself to an easy, clear-cut characterization. It was an emotionally-charged relationship, underscored by ideological differences, jealousy, and rivalry, but also by mutual respect and affection. Similarly complex is the figure of Sardar Patel himself, the “iron man of India,” whose pragmatism and strong hand produced varying evaluations of his politics, ideology, and attitude toward the Muslim minority.306 In early January, as the tensions between the two leaders could no longer be contained, they wrote notes about each other to Gandhi, laying out their major disagreements and asking him, as the higher moral authority, to arbitrate. Their notes are striking for the intensity of emotion they express. Nehru opened his note thus:

305 Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 139. (my italics)
306 For emphasis on Patel’s communalist mentality and his connections with the RSS, see: Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947, 438; Puri, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Organisation and Ideology: Delhi, a Case Study, 9. See also Patel’s demand that Muslims would provide “practical proof” of their loyalty to the Indian dominion: “You cannot ride on two horses. You select one horse, whichever you like best.” Quoted in Hasan, Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence, 148. On the other hand, the ICS officers who worked under Patel, like V. Shankar, R.N. Banerjee, H.V.R. Iengar, and Shankar Prasad expressed high respect for Patel's integrity and sound thinking, and a more positive assessment of an ideological worldview and communal attitude, leaving it open-ended: V. Shankar, My Reminiscences of Sardar Patel, 2 vols. (Delhi: Macmillan Co. of India, 1974); Interview with R.N. Banerjee, Oral History Transcript No. 366, NMML; Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML; Interview with H.V.R. Iengar, Oral History Transcript No. 303, NMML.
306 This claim and the following discussion draw upon the correspondence between Nehru and Patel from September 27 to November 22, located in: Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (henceforth SWJN), Vol. 4
It is true that there are not only temperamental differences between Sardar and me but also a difference in approach in regard to economic and communal matters. These differences have persisted for a long number of years, ever since we worked together in the Congress. Nevertheless, in spite of differences, there was obviously a very great deal in common in addition to mutual respect and affection and, broadly speaking, the same national political aim of freedom [...] 307

In his own note, Patel wrote:

There is no disagreement on the existence of temperamental differences and different outlook on economic matters and those affecting Hindu-Muslim relations. Both of us, however, place the interests of the country above these personal differences, and, aided by mutual respect and love for each other, have cooperated in a common endeavour. Through our joint efforts we have weathered many a storm that best us and despite such differences we have got over one of the most critical phases in the history of any country or any government. It is painful and rather tragic to reflect that we cannot carry this any further, but I fully realise the strength of feeling and conviction behind the Prime Minister's stand as regards his own position. 308

In a subsequent note written to Gandhi in the midst of the latter's fast, Patel added:

It is agonizing beyond endurance to have to go away when you are fasting. [...] The sight of your anguish yesterday has made me disconsolate [sic]. It has set me furiously thinking. The burden of work has become so heavy that I feel crushed under it. I now see that it would do no good to the country or to myself to carry on like this any more. I might even do harm. Jawahar is even more burdened than I. His heart is heavy with grief. Maybe I have deteriorated with age and am no more any good as a comrade to stand by him, and lighten his burden. The Maulana (Azad) too is displeased with what I am doing and you have again and again to take up cudgels on my behalf. This is also intolerable to me. 309

Tensions concerning the Delhi situation already emerged in the first days of the riots. Mountbatten's intervention in the emergency measures, introduced to confront the law and order crisis, was embraced by Nehru and Azad (despite the latter’s aversion to Mountbatten) but received a much colder response in the Home Ministry. As R.N. Banerjee (Patel's Home Secretary at the time) recalled, both Patel and Banerjee felt that the Emergency Committee under Mountbatten took charge of issues that fell within the purview of the Home Ministry—“For reasons not very clear to us at the time, the Prime Minister rather toed the line with Lord

308 Sardar Patel to Mahatma Gandhi, 12 January 1948 in ibid., 279-80.
309 Sardar Patel to Gandhi, 13 January 1948, in ibid., 283.
Mountbatten, who only carried out the suggestions and programmes of the Army people.” The latter, Banerjee bitterly added, were all too happy to insinuate the failure of the new independent state to deal with law and order.310

The fissures between Nehru and Patel widened during the following months. Maulana Azad later testified that there were two rival camps: Azad and Nehru on one side, and Patel on the other. Azad described Patel's attitude toward the Muslims of Delhi in an unflattering light, arguing that Patel was indifferent toward the massacre and tried to undermine it, causing great grief to Gandhi. Gandhi’s famous last fast in mid-January was, according to Azad, directed, in a sense, against the attitude of Sardar Patel, who knew this was the case:

Sardar Patel was the Home Minister and as such the Delhi administration was directly under him. As the list of murders and arson grew longer, Gandhiji sent for Patel and asked him what he was doing to stop the carnage. Sardar Patel tried to assure him that the reports which Gandhiji received were grossly exaggerated. In fact he went to the extent of saying that Muslims had no cause for complaint or fear. I remember distinctly one occasion when the three of us were sitting with Gandhiji. Jawaharlal said with deep sorrow that he could not tolerate the situation in Delhi where Muslim citizens were being killed like cats and dogs. He felt humiliated that he was helpless and could not save them. His conscience would not let him rest [...]. We were completely taken aback by Sardar Patel's reaction. At a time when Muslims were being murdered in Delhi in open daylight, he calmly told Gandhiji that Jawaharlal's complains were completely incomprehensible. There may have been some isolated incidents but the Government was doing everything possible to protect the life and property of Muslims and nothing more could be done. In fact, he expressed his dissatisfaction that Jawaharlal as the Prime Minister should express disapproval of what his Government was doing. Jawaharlal remained speechless for some moments and then turned to Gandhiji in despair. He said that if these were Sardar Patel's views, he had no comments to make.311

Azad goes so far as to say that Patel initiated extensive searches of arms in Muslim localities in order to present the Muslims as aggressors, thereby justifying the ongoing attacks on

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them. 312 Patel then ordered the police to amass recovered arms and keep them for the inspection of the Emergency Committee:

On our arrival we found on the table dozens of kitchen knives that were rusted, pocket knives and pen knives with or without handles and iron spikes which had been recovered from fences of old houses, and some cast iron water pipes. According to Sardar Patel, these were the weapons which the Muslims of Delhi had collected to exterminate the Hindus and Sikhs. Lord Mountbatten took up one or two knives and said with a smile that those who had collected these materials seemed to have a wonderful idea of military tactics if they thought that the city of Delhi could be captured with them. 313

The contemporary correspondence between Nehru and Patel leaves no doubt that the two differed greatly in their interpretation of (and attitude toward) the events in Delhi. They had profound disagreements on the very basic facts making up the situation in Delhi, and on how to handle it. The true proportions of the anti-Muslim violence, the policy that should be adopted towards Muslims residing in the refugee camps, the creation of Muslim zones, and assessment of the function of the local police and administration—all were matters of great disagreement.

As mentioned above, Patel was apparently frustrated by Lord Mountbatten's Emergency Committee's encroachment upon his territory. Similarly, his above-quoted argument with Nehru in Gandhi’s presence was as much about Nehru's implied criticism of the functioning of the Home Ministry as it was about the extent of violence against the Muslims of Delhi. As Shankar Prasad, Chief Commissioner of Delhi (1948-1954) put it in a later interview, Sardar “was very sensitive about any encroachment on his domain by any other Ministry.” 314 Patel was especially resentful toward what he saw as Nehru’s uncalled-for meddling in the business of Delhi’s

312 The alleged Muslim possession of arms during the riots was, as we saw in the previous chapter, a matter of debate. The Hindustan Times certainly covered the searches done in Muslim houses at great length, highlighting the alleged large quantities of arms and ammunition found there.
314 Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML, p. 165
administration, giving direct orders that contradicted Patel’s instructions or simply bypassed them.\textsuperscript{315}

In fact, the extent of the Prime Minister's interference was at the center of the above-mentioned notes to Gandhi. Following a series of disputes concerning events in Delhi, Ajmer, and Kashmir, Nehru wrote to Gandhi that the most immediate issue to be solved centered upon the function of the Prime Minister:

As I conceive it, the Prime Minister's role is, and should be, an important role. He is not only (not) a figurehead but a person who should be more responsible than anyone else for the general trend of policy and for the co-ordination of the work of various Government Departments. The final authority necessarily is the Cabinet itself. But in the type of democratic set-up we have adopted, the Prime Minister is supposed to play an outstanding role. [...] As Prime Minister … I have a special function to perform which covers all the Ministries and departments and indeed every aspect of governmental authority. [...] Inevitably, in discharging this function of Prime Minister I have to deal with every Ministry not as head of one particular Ministry but as a coordinator and a kind of supervisor. [...] the Prime Minister should have full freedom to act when and how he chooses, though of course such action must not be undue interference with local authorities who are immediately responsible. [...] In the event of the PM not functioning in this way, then he can hardly carry on as a mere figurehead and much harm may be done to the Services as well as to the public at large by the enunciation of contradictory policies by Ministers. [...] Normally speaking, the best way out of these difficulties would be for some rearrangement in the Cabinet to be made which would cast the responsibility on one person more than anyone else. In the present set-up this means that either I should go out or that Sardar Patel should go out. For my part, I would greatly prefer my going out. [...] \textsuperscript{316}

Patel responded to Nehru's note, writing to Gandhi that:

I have tried my best to appreciate what he says on that subject, but howsoever much I have tried to understand it on the twin basis of democracy and Cabinet responsibility, I have found myself unable to agree with his conceptions of the Prime Minister's duties and functions. That conception, if accepted, would raise the Prime Minister to the position of a virtual dictator, for he claims 'full freedom to act when and how he chooses.' This in my opinion is wholly opposed to democratic and Cabinet system of Government.\textsuperscript{317}

\textsuperscript{315} See Nehru’s and Patel’s letters to each other from September 28; see also Iengar's account of the day-to-day friction between Nehru and Patel concerning Nehru’s intervention in Delhi's administration and the riots in Ajmer: Interview with H.V.R. Iengar, Oral History Transcript No. 303, NMML. Shankar Prasad, who was Commissioner of Ajmer during the riots, described the affair in: Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML.


\textsuperscript{317} Sardar Patel to Mahatma Gandhi, enclosed in Patel’s letter to Nehru, 12 January 1948, in ibid., 280. Nehru, for his part, replied on January 13 that “I still find a considerable difference in your appreciation of the PM’s position
This debate was played out on the Delhi scene when Patel accused Nehru of issuing direct orders to the local administration. On September 28, he wrote to Nehru:

I should like to suggest that it is somewhat embarrassing both to me and to the local officials if orders are issued to them direct by you in respect of the matters which fall within my departmental responsibility. The officials are bound to be in difficulties as to whose instructions they should take in respect of particular matters. Unless there is one channel of communication of instructions and orders, confusion is inevitable and conflicting instructions might result. Even if some instructions were issued by you, I feel that I should at least have been informed…  

Indeed, the ongoing dispute about the proper “division of labor” between the Home Minister and Prime Minister resulted in confused procedures whereby the Home Minister pushed in one direction and the Prime Minister pushed in another. Azad’s observation of the impact of this dynamic upon local administration is noteworthy:

The truth is that there was a difference of attitude between Sardar Patel on the one hand and Jawaharlal and me on the other. This was affecting local administration and it was becoming clear that the officers were divided into two groups. The large group looked up to Sardar Patel and acted in a way which they thought would please him. A smaller group looked to Jawaharlal and me and tried to carry out Jawaharlal’s orders.

This effect was clearly shown at the top level of the Delhi Administration—in the disturbed relationship between Khurshid, the Chief Commissioner, and the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate, M.S. Randhawa. Khurshid Ahmad Khan (1897-1952) comes up in the sources as a weak officer, at least during this particular period, when his Muslim identity rendered him especially vulnerable. Assessing the Delhi situation in early October, Nehru wrote to Patel that “the position of the Chief Commissioner of Delhi has been very and mine. There is no question, of course, of the PM or anyone else being a dictator. So far as I know, the position in practice in the United Kingdom is in consonance with what I have suggested.”

318 Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 28 September 1947.
peculiar. He has hardly functioned with any authority during the past few weeks. This seems to be bad from the point of view of work and discipline. It must demoralize the services somewhat.”

In his reply, Patel acknowledged that:

The Chief Commissioner's position was more difficult and delicate. […] There is no doubt that the local administration had virtually to be supplanted by the Emergency Organisation we had to set up in the Town Hall. I do not think we can disguise the fact that a large section of the population of Delhi suspects the Chief Commissioner, rightly or wrongly, of leanings towards the League. His contacts and relationships with some League personalities, some of whom were suspected of illicit possession of arms and ammunition, added to the intensity of public belief. One or two recent acts of his have filled me with some misgivings.

Khurshid’s Muslim identity came to occlude all other aspects of his identity, and totally undermined his ability to operate with authority. Khurshid thus emblematizes the predicament of Muslims in post-partition Delhi and the growing suspicion of this national belonging. Khurshid himself was a “nationalist Muslim” through and through, and a longstanding supporter of the Congress; yet like many other Muslims, he had relatives and friends who had left for Pakistan.

Zamindar interviewed his niece, who was given refuge at Khurshid’s house during the September violence, in Karachi before departing for Pakistan. His niece recalled Khurshid’s bitterness at being sidelined and marginalized during this period. Zamindar also mentions that the niece was married to the president of Delhi’s Muslim League, a piece of information that I find important. The Chief Commissioner embodied the indeterminate figure of the Indian Muslim, which was at the root of the paranoia and prevailing anxiety that nationalist Muslims could not be clearly distinguished from the Muslim League, since the two “categories” of people were intertwined in familial and friendly relations.

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321 Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 6 October 1947.
322 Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 October 1947. See also Anis Kidwai’s account of Khurshid. Contrary to Patel’s intimation that Khurshid had Muslim League leanings, she thought he was “a weak, callous person” who failed to be of any help to the Muslims of Delhi: Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 170-1. For more assessments of Khurshid, see: Azad, India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version, 231; V. Shankar, My Reminiscences of Sardar Patel, 2 vols. (Delhi: Macmillan Co. of India, 1974), 99.
Khurshid was constantly sidestepped by Deputy Commissioner M.S. Randhawa, who functioned as the “real sheriff” in town and represented a highly controversial figure. It is also noteworthy that Randhawa was (at least nominally) a Punjabi refugee. When he arrived in Delhi several months prior to the riots, upon his appointment as Deputy Commissioner, he came from Lyallpur in West Punjab. The relationship between the two represents, in a nutshell, the broader trend of the “Punjabization” of Delhi at the expense of its Muslim population.

The writers of the Urdu poster, who demanded Randhawa’s replacement, reflected the feeling of many nationalist Muslims—like Anis Kidwai, who saw him as their archenemy, an RSS man through and through. Others, like Jugal Kishore Khana or Maulana Azad, expressed a more cautious view, suggesting that he was an honest officer who operated in tough times and was apparently influenced by the events in West Pakistan.

Randhawa lay at the heart of Nehru and Patel’s disagreement. Nehru claimed that during the first week of the riots, he asked Randhawa to trace and arrest the instigators of the disturbances, but Randhawa “[…] seemed to think that the whole affair had been a spontaneous one and he could not think of any person who could be called an organiser or instigator.” Nehru

323 Mohinder Singh Randhawa (1909-88) joined ICS in 1934, and served in various capacities in the UP until 1945. He was Deputy Commissioner, Delhi, 1946-48; Commissioner, Ambala Division, 1951-53; Secretary to Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1955-60; Adviser, Planning Commission, 1961-64; Special Secretary, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1964-66; Chief Commissioner, Chandigarh, 1966-68; Vice-Chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University, 1968-76; and the author of several books on art, literature, and horticulture. See: Singh, Nehru-Patel, Agreement within Differences: Select Documents and Correspondences 1933-1950, 83, footnote 3.

324 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, Chapters 5-6.

325 In his later interview to NMML, Jugal Kishore Khanna noted: “Unfortunately, there was a feeling in Delhi at that time that M.S. Randhawa, then the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi, secretly encouraged R.S.S. people and Hindu Sabhites. I do not believe it was true but I must admit that he was influenced somehow on account of the happenings which had occurred in Pakistan to Hindus.” See Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML, p. 137. Azad wrote that prior to August 15, there had been a suggestion to transfer Randhawa, but many leading citizens of Delhi, including a large proportion of Muslims, had objected to the transfer, saying he was fair-minded and a strong officer. “Randhawa was accordingly retained but it seemed that under the stress of the communal tension which was sweeping through the Punjab he also changed. I received many reports that he was not taking sufficiently strong or effective action against the miscreants. The very Muslims who had a year ago pleaded for his retention now came and pleaded that he was not giving the necessary protection to the Muslim citizens of Delhi. This was reported to Sardar Patel but he paid hardly any attention to such complaints.” See, Azad, India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version, 231-2.
was surprised at this, “[…] because it seemed pretty evident that there was plenty of organisation behind the thing.”

Later in his letter, Nehru stated that he had known Randhawa for a number of years and had a good impression of him, and that Randhawa had functioned well in Delhi in the months prior to the disturbances. This made Nehru all the more surprised when, despite previous intimation about the imminent riots, no action was taken to arrest suspicious people. There was great slackness and delay in arresting RSS and Sikh bands who had clearly organized the riots, and it was a mystery to Nehru “[…] why Randhawa, who had functioned so effectively previously, should have slackened at such moment of crisis. From his talk, it would appear that his sympathies lay in a certain direction and this perhaps prevented strong action.”

In his subsequent letters to Patel, Nehru kept bringing up the name of Randhawa, expressing his view of the man less equivocally and more directly. The situation in Delhi, he argued, could not improve as long as local officials remained communal. The district authorities operated in contravention of the Government of India Policy, and Randhawa made speeches expressing views that contradicted the policy of the Government. Nehru reached the conclusion that it was these official elements, rather than Delhi’s citizens, that represented the root cause of the problem.

In response, Patel defended Randhawa, claiming that he was a good and reliable officer doing his best under stressful conditions. Nehru, in turn, pushed for the reorganization of both Delhi’s Administration and police, and for the transfer of Randhawa. If Randhawa could not be

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326 Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 30 September 1947. On the organized nature of the riots, Nehru wrote: “The information that has reached me from many sources indicates that the trouble in Delhi was caused by certain well-organised bands, some Sikh and some Hindu. Probably most of the murders were committed by one or more organized and well-armed Sikh bands which had come here especially for the purpose and which subsequently visited Simla and Kalka and other places. The Hindu bands seemed to owe allegiance to the R.S.S. It seems to me clear that the R.S.S. have had a great deal to do with the present disturbances, not only in Delhi but elsewhere. In Amritsar their activities have been very obvious.”
327 Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 11 October 1947.
328 Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 October 1947.
transferred, his powers should at least be reduced by dividing the District Magistrate’s responsibility among three or even four officials. With regard to the Chief Commissioner, Nehru observed that the weakness of Khurshid had a demoralizing effect on the services, and if he was not wholly suited for the job, he should also be replaced by someone assertive enough.\(^\text{329}\)

Patel was all for the immediate reorganization of the Delhi Police, which clearly did not function during the riots; but he objected to Randhawa’s transfer, and to the devolution of his powers. Dividing up the authority of the District Magistrate would only lead to more confusion, and what was required, he argued, was not a breakup, but unity. Delhi was not as complex, in terms of population and expanse, as cities like Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta; and even these cities had only one authority vested in the District Magistrate.\(^\text{330}\) Patel agreed that Chief Commissioner Khurshid should be replaced at some point, but not immediately, since this was bound to cause alarm among the Muslims of Delhi.\(^\text{331}\)

Eventually, by August 1948, both Chief Commissioner Khurshid and Deputy Commissioner Randhawa had been removed. Khurshid was transferred to a lesser position and passed away a few years later in 1952, a heartbroken and bitter man.\(^\text{332}\) Randhawa’s subsequent career was long and successful, including positions in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Planning Commission, and the Chief Commissionership of Chandigarh. Randhawa even proceeded to write several books, and his account of the refugee rehabilitation in East Punjab is considered the standard narrative of the era, cited time and again in partition studies.\(^\text{333}\)

In the place of Khurshid was appointed Shankar Prasad, then Commissioner of Ajmer, who shifted to Delhi in late July 1948 and remained in office until 1954. Prasad, who selected

\(^{329}\) Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 6 October 1947.
\(^{330}\) Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 11 October 1947.
\(^{331}\) Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 October 1947.
Rameshwar Dayal as his deputy and District Magistrate, testified in his later recollections that Dayal was known for his integrity and independent views, and that the two had an excellent working relationship. Together, it seems, they put things in order, establishing appropriate administrative procedures and restoring the proper hierarchy between the Chief Commissioner and his deputy. Yet despite Prasad’s strong personality, he acknowledged that administrative confusion did not come to an end in 1948. One of his greater challenges as Delhi’s Chief Commissioner was to maneuver between the contradictory orders he received from Nehru and Patel.334

In the following sections, we will look closely at the interplay between the divisions at the top level of government and administration discussed thus far, along with those at the lower levels of police and administration, operating on the level of the street.

**Special Police Force and Home Guards**

At this juncture, we return to the lead provided by the Urdu poster which opened the chapter. Singling out M.S. Randhawa and Captain Ranjit Singh, the Officer Commander of the Special Police Force, the poster demanded their transfer. It is noteworthy that the poster chose to focus upon one particular affair: the change of personnel within the Special Police Force. It was claimed that honest Congress workers did a good service as Special Police magistrates in protecting the Muslim community during the September riots, and the names of Lala Dipti Mal Jain, Dr. Yudhvir Singh, Chaudhury Sher Jang, Lala Jugal Kishore Khanna, and Lala Phool Chand Jain were gratefully mentioned—most of whom we already encountered in the previous chapter, as prominent members of the Delhi Congress Party who took part in the nationalist struggle.

334 Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML, p. 165.
Randhawa, it was claimed, disarmed many Congress special policemen four days before Id, appointing in their place members of communal organizations. The poster pointed out the recent appointment by Randhawa of 18 special magistrates, among whom were Akali and RSS members. Enlisting such elements to an official body, it was argued, was clearly in contravention of the recent resolution by the All-India Congress Committee against communal organizations—the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, the Muslim League, and the Sikh Akali Party. While the public clearly understood what Randhawa was aiming at, it was the Central Government and top leadership—Nehru, Gandhi, Patel, Azad, Jayaprakash Narayan and Qidwai Saheb [Rafi Ahmad Kidwai]—that should have opened their eyes to his plotting, and intervened forcefully by removing these dangerous people from the Special Police.

As we have learned from other sources, the poster touched upon a highly contentious matter: the manning of the Special Police Force. Who were the special policemen, and what was their role in this period? It was a body of volunteer citizens, the product of the colonial legal and policing system. The Police Act of 1861 authorized the enrollment of citizen-volunteers into an additional police force to work alongside the regular police in times of need. The need arose urgently with the outbreak of the riots in early September. One of the gravest problems faced by the cabinet Emergency Committee was the dysfunction (and, in some cases, malfunction) of the security forces—both police and army.

The Dysfunction of the Delhi Police during the September Riots

The police force in Delhi had already been in bad shape prior to partition, allegedly due to ongoing neglect on the part of the British officers. R.N. Banerjee claimed that the Delhi police

335 According to section 18 of the Police Act (1861), Special Police Officers held “the same powers, privileges, and protection and shall be liable to perform the same duties and shall be amenable to the same penalties and be subordinate to the same authorities as the ordinary officer of the police.” See letter by G.V. Bedekar, Deputy Secretary to Home Ministry, 14 October 1947, F. 26-37-47-Police, MHA Political, NAI.
was not very strong to begin with, and was not fortified (as it should have been) due to the
demoralization of British officers on the eve of independence:

Delhi never had a regular Inspector-General of Police. It is strange that nobody
discovered this anomaly, namely that the only Inspector-General of Police Delhi had was
the Chief Commissioner who was ex-officio Inspector-General since 1912 when the
province of Delhi had been created, and he never, of course, functioned as Inspector-
General. The local head of the Delhi Police was what was called a Senior Superintendent
of Police who unfortunately did not function too well during the disturbances in
September.

[…] It was found on a casual inspection of the Station Houses that the arms of the Delhi
Police had not been checked and verified for years and there was shortage of nearly 400
rifles. Immediate liaison between the Delhi Police authorities and the Magistracy, that is
to say the Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Commissioner, did not exist.336

Furthermore, during the months preceding partition, the Delhi police force underwent a
process of communalization, and hence, when the September riots broke out, many police
personnel were complicit in the violence. It was alleged that Muslim policemen supported
Muslims, while Sikh and Hindu policemen fought alongside Hindus.337 As in the case of the
rumors about the large quantities of weapons and the fearless struggle of the Muslims of
Subzimandi, I find it impossible to recover what the role of Muslim policemen really was during
the riots. What is evident, however, is that the Delhi police had been dominated by Muslims in
the late-colonial period—to the extent that about 75% of its manpower was Muslim, and most of
them had deserted the force at some stage and left for the Purana Qila refugee camp, along with
their weapons. The desertion of the Muslim policemen became one of the controversial and
unresolved issues in the accounts and interpretations of the crisis of September. Patel wrote to
Nehru in mid-October:

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336 Interview with R.N. Banerjee, Oral History Transcript No. 366, NMML.
337 In his report of September 25 on the riots, Chief Commissioner Khurshid argued that the policemen—Hindus and
Sikhs, as well as Muslims—were partisan in the violence. See Sahibzada Khurshid to R.N. Banerjee, “Fortnightly
Report for the First Half of September 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
SSP [Senior Superintendent of Police] was completely ineffective [...] Half the police force was completely ineffective. Most of them either deserted or resigned in the midst of crises. Most of the other half had tainted sympathies. All of a sudden I had to ask for a loan of 300 police from the CP Government as there was a complete breakdown. These people were quite new to Delhi. The calls on the District Magistrate Time were too many. […] I myself was receiving calls almost every fifteen minutes. […]

Banerjee explains that contrary to other provinces, Muslim policemen in Delhi had not been given the option to choose Pakistan, and hence, when riots broke out, the police force remained predominantly Muslim. Many of them deserted and fled to Purana Qila along with their guns. This information reached Sardar Patel and he passed orders to intercept all such Muslims leaving for Pakistan by railway trains. Banerjee said that he had the opportunity to question a few constables:

[...] and some of them were really very sensible. They said that they did not find anybody responsible to whom they could hand over their rifles and so they did not want to leave them. They threw away their rifles on me asking me to take charge of them, adding that they were not interested in any rifles; they simply wanted to go away; they simply wanted to go away.339

This was a formative moment that dramatically changed the demographic composition of Delhi police, turning it from a Muslim-dominated force into one in which Muslims were almost absent. In the initial phase, most of them were replaced by Hindu and Sikh refugees.340

According to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the army stationed in Delhi was also partisan, comprised mostly of Hindus and Sikhs who did not prove reliable during the riots.341 One of the

338 Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 October 1947.
339 Interview with R.N. Banerjee, Oral History Transcript No. 366, NMML. See also Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML.
340 V.P. Menon argued that 75% of the police force in Delhi prior to partition had been Muslim, and when they left, the gaps in the officers' cadres were hastily filled by Hindus from West Pakistan: quoted in Shankar, My Reminiscences of Sardar Patel, 99. Almost 30 years later, in 1974, the Delhi police had a total strength of 20,322, of which there were only 237 Muslims: R. Prasad, "Report of the One-Man Commission of Inquiry into the Sadar Bazar Disturbances (1974)," (1975), 122.
341 Azad, India Wins Freedom: The Complete Version, 229. Dipankar Gupta argues that many of the troops in Delhi were from Rajasthan, and that they were complicit in the violence. Gupta bases his information on an interview with a Delhi Socialist Congress leader who was present in Delhi during the violence, but he does not disclose his name. See: Gupta, "The Indian Diaspora of 1947: The Political and Ethnic Consequences of Partition with Special Reference to Delhi," 89. Other sources also indicate that Rajputana troops indeed played a violent role during the
first steps taken by the Emergency Committee was to bring in troops from the South. According to various sources, the Madras troops, who were physically and emotionally distanced from the experience of partition, played a key role in restoring law and order.342

**Special Police Force**

In addition to the military troops brought in from the South, it was the Special Police Force that became a key institution to restoring and maintaining law and order. In the first days of September, both Nehru and Patel appealed to the Delhi public to volunteer for this force. According to *Hindustan Times* news reports, many of the men who subsequently enrolled were appointed by the Home Ministry under Sardar Patel, in collaboration with the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee (henceforth DPCC). The DPCC sent Patel a list of Congress members recommended for the posts. On the whole, about 2,000 men were enlisted to this force during the disturbances, and they were divided, in hierarchical order, into magistrates, officers, and constables.343

On the pages of the contemporary news coverage, this seemed like a smooth process of enrollment—the product of a natural collaboration between the Delhi Congress Committee and the Home Ministry of a Congress government. The government records disclose, however, that

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343 On November 20th, the *Hindustan Times* reported on a comprehensive account of the riots given by Patel in Parliament. Patel stated that 2,000 Special Police officers of all ranks had been recruited to meet the riot situation, and that there was no proposal to make the arrangement a permanent one. See: “Large Arms Haul in Delhi,” *Hindustan Times*, 20 November 1947. The first five Special Magistrates to be appointed were all Delhi Congress members: Lala Omkarnath, Rughunandan Saran, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta (a member of the Constituent Assembly and owner of the nationalist Urdu daily *Tej*) and two other prominent leaders of the Delhi Congress Party familiar to us by now—Jugal Kishore Khanna and Dr. Yudhvir Singh. See: “Nehru Rescues Two Girls,” *Hindustan Times*, 10 September 1947. In the same news item, it was mentioned that Nehru appealed to responsible men in the city to offer their services to the Government as Special Police officers and constables.
the appointment process was fraught with tension involving recurring debates about who should be enlisted into this force and who had the authority to decide on that. The force was not homogenous in its ideological and political outlook, but was instead extremely heterogeneous, reflecting the divided political and social scene in Delhi. It included various competing elements, from rival factions within the local Congress Party itself to rival organizations, most notably the RSS.

A Home Ministry file spanning the years 1947 to 1950 sheds light on the stage upon which the change of Special Police manpower took place in October. It clarifies that while the Muslim writers of the Urdu poster were right in pointing out Randhawa as a key player, the latter was not solely responsible for this shift, but operated in full collaboration with and under the orders of Sardar Patel’s Home Ministry. The Home Ministry file concerns a group of Special Police officers aligned with the Delhi Congress Party, often mentioned in abbreviated form as the “Congress SPOs” and whose leader was Chaudhury Sher Jung. Sher Jung, who was a member of the DPCC, was apparently aligned with the Socialist wing.

The file includes various reports sent by Congress SPOs to the Government, as well as Government correspondence about them, revealing that the former had constant friction with other forces policing the streets. A major conflict between Chaudhury Sher Jung and Captain Ranjit Singh—the Officer Commander of the Special Police force—lay at the heart of this affair. The Congress Special Police magistrates and officers wrote daily reports on the Delhi situation in the first week of October 1947, which they sent to the DPCC and also to several Government bodies. Their reports documented the daily reality of anti-Muslim violence, including stabbing, looting of shops and houses, abductions of women (interestingly, of both Muslim and Hindu

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344 F. 26-37-47-Police, MHA Political, NAI. This file is the main source for the following discussion.  
345 Sher Jung was specifically mentioned in the Urdu poster as an honest Congress member to whom the Muslims were grateful, but who was dismissed by Randhawa.
women), snatching of rickshaws from Muslim drivers, and forcible occupation of Muslim houses and businesses.\textsuperscript{346} Their reports contained repeated complaints against other forces—policemen, special policemen and army \textit{haveldars}, who, they argued, not only did not cooperate with them, but were often complicit in the violence. For example:

\[\ldots\] about 20 persons while going on foot along the Delhi-Shahdara Rly. line were killed on 4th Oct. Mr. Lincoln A.S.P., who doubted the authenticity of the report [sent by us] was taken by Messrs. Thara Kan and A.V. Rao and Jagat Prakash headed by Ch. Sher Jung to the place of occurrence where they found, after some enigmatical obstruction on the part of the C.I.D. official, a Havaldar and a constable, the ground besmeared with blood and blood-stained cloth at the edge of the bridge from where, as the Havaldar confessed later on, the dead bodies had been thrown into the water.

In his own report on the incident, C. Sher Jung added that the Head Constable, who was fully intoxicated, first rudely questioned their authority to investigate, and later confessed that he had received orders from the Magistrate and other officials of the Shahdara \textit{thana} (police station) to dispose of the dead bodies in the river.\textsuperscript{347} Their reports also mentioned a refugee who broke open a lock in Dariba with the assistance of Constable No. 908, as well as a policeman who did not cooperate with the Congress SPOs when asked to intervene and stop the looting of Muslim shops near Fatehpuri. Another Special Police magistrate and prominent socialist of Delhi, Mir Mushtaq Ahmed, complained that “the police has neither searched not arrested any of the suspects” on whom the Special Police reported.

Their detailed accounts of such encounters are especially important because they demonstrate the chaos and confusion on the streets. They show how, in numerous cases of violent incidents, police forces did not respond to the situation in an orchestrated manner

\textsuperscript{346} The city was divided into several areas patrolled and reported on by these SPOs: Sadar Bazar, the Town Hall in Chandni Chowk, P.S. Kotwali, Sabzi Mandi and Hauz Qazi. The reports were sent by Congress Special Magistrates Chaudhury Sher Jung, B.D. Joshi, Ram Dhan Sharma, Phool Chand Jain and Radha Raman (the President of the DPCC.).

\textsuperscript{347} See “Delhi Situation Report from 1\textsuperscript{st} to 5\textsuperscript{th} October 1947” and “Report of Ch. Sher Jang S.M. and Chief of Congress SPOs. Town Hall Area,” F. 26-37-47-Police, MHA Political, NAI. Anis Kidwai also referred to this incident: Kidwai, \textit{In Freedom's Shade}, 195.
according to a proper chain of command, but rather reacted in opposing ways while questioning each other’s authority. Such discordant co-existence of rival policing factions was exactly what concerned the Home Ministry, except it saw the Congress SPOs as the root cause of the problem. The Home Ministry was not interested in the grave content of Congress SPOs’ reports, nor did it accept their charge against other policing forces. Instead, Home Minister Patel and his secretaries—V. Shankar, R.N. Banerjee, and G.V. Bedekar—saw these reports as evidence of the rebellious nature of Congress SPOs. The Home Ministry adopted the version of Captain Ranjit Singh, Officer Commander of the Special Police Force, according to whom Chaudhury Sher Jung had led an insubordinate faction within the Special Police Force, acting independently and in subversion of Ranjit Singh’s orders.

There were recurring conflicts between the two factions, but tensions exploded following three particular incidents, the most significant of which took place near Fatehpuri Mosque in Old Delhi. In this case, the parties involved presented two contradictory accounts.\(^{348}\) According to Captain Ranjit Singh’s version, two Congress SPOs fired indiscriminately at a Hindu crowd, while disobeying the orders of Special Police Magistrate and Area Commander Bishan Sarup. They insisted that they would not accept orders from anyone but their leader, Chaudhury Sher Jung, who was not even there. When Captain Ranjit Singh asked Sher Jung to accompany him to the scene, the latter refused.\(^{349}\) For his part, Sher Jung presented a different account, arguing that the Congress SPOs had caught three Hindu boys red-handed while looting. When the SPOs tried to arrest the boys, they were attacked by a “mob” that gathered around them in order to release

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\(^{348}\) There were three main incidents that drew the government's attention: 1) The Yamuna bridge incident mentioned above; 2) firing upon the residents of Kucha Ghasi Ram; and 3) firing near the Fatehpuri Mosque. For a summary of the police investigation into the three incidents, which, for the most part, supported Ranjit Singh's account, see Randhawa's summary in his letter to the Home Secretary, Government of India, 24 November 1947.

\(^{349}\) Ranjit Singh’s version appeared in a letter sent by G.V. Bedekar of the Home Ministry. Bedekar did not mention specifically that it was Ranjit Singh’s account, but it is quite clear from the context. See G.V. Bedekar to I.G. of Police D.W. Mehra, 27 October, 1947.
the boys, leaving them with no other option than to fire in the air. Chaudhury Sher Jung, who arrived on the scene and saw the crowd trying to snatch the weapons from his men, also had no choice but to fire in the air in order to disperse it. As for the Special Police area commander on the spot, Congress SPOs had failed to obey him, since he was the one who had instigated the crowd against them in the first place.\footnote{For Ch. Sher Jung’s version, see: “Report of Ch. Sher Jang S.M. and Chief of Congress SPOs, Town Hall Area.”}

This controversy soon spilled beyond the confines of the Special Police, involving all levels of the Government. It becomes clear that Deputy Commissioner Randhawa and the Home Ministry sided with Captain Ranjit Singh. On the other side stood the DPCC, which vehemently championed the cause of the Congress SPOs. In fact, it seems that the internal split within the Special Police Force soon became the ground on which existing tensions between the Home Ministry and the DPCC were played out. Chief Commissioner Khurshid and Prime Minister Nehru also got involved, and tried to intervene on behalf of the Congress SPOs.\footnote{Unsurprisingly, a comment made by Nehru in a different context reveals that he held Chaudhry Sher Jung in great esteem. Nehru claimed that Sher Jung brought about a very amicable agreement among the people of Narela (a rural district of Delhi), thereby verifying Nehru's suspicion that the lingering violence in Delhi was grounded not in the public, but rather in communal officials like Randhawa: Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 11 October 1947.} The file’s correspondence reveals a long and convoluted affair spanning three years, full of twists and turns in which all of these central figures took part.

The Home Ministry took a special interest in the case, and was adamant about removing Sher Jung and his associates from the force.\footnote{The internal notes clarify that the Home Ministry secretaries followed Patel’s orders. Patel expressed special interest in the case and summoned to his residence the key men in the administration and policing of Delhi to discuss the matter—the IG of Police, DIG of Police, Superintendent of Police New Delhi, Superintendent of Police Old Delhi, and Deputy Commissioner Randhawa. It is noteworthy that Khurshid, the Chief Commissioner, was not invited, an indication of his marginal position in Delhi at the time.} What appears to have especially infuriated Patel was an interview given by Chaudhury Sher Jung to the Daily Worker (London) on the riots in Delhi, saying that “the regular Police were so active in looting and killing that the Hindu murderers were probably quite amazed they had been arrested.”
Following a meeting with Sardar Patel, his Private Secretary V. Shankar wrote:

The statement is a very wild exaggeration and [...] Choudhury Sher Jang as a Special Magistrate had no business to make any such allegations in public. H.M. [Home Minister] would like to know what action had been taken against Choudhury Sher Jang in respect of his previous misdemeanors and whether he is still a Special Magistrate.353

Apart from the interview, the Home Ministry’s main accusations against Sher Jung and his men were the “indiscriminate and excessive firing at the crowd” near Fatehpuri Mosque (discussed above), another “indiscriminate firing” in the locality of Kucha Ghasi Ram, and unauthorized alterations of 48 appointment certificates of SPOs originally issued by Randhawa.354

The general, principal allegation underlying these accusations—voiced time and again—involved their indiscipline and the fact that "Government cannot countenance what appears to be a sort of parallel police organisation run independently by the local Congress Organisation on their own lines [...]"355 That Chaudhury Sher Jung took the liberty to send his reports directly to various Government bodies was illegitimate, but that he sent them to the non-governmental body of the DPCC was inexcusable.

Chaudhury Sher Jung and his men were removed from the force, and the IG of Police promised that he would embark upon a reorganization of the Special Police Force, ensuring that such irregularities in its function did not reoccur. Having removed them from the force, the Home Ministry and Deputy Commissioner Randhawa decided to go even further and prosecute the Congress SPOs in court.356 In response, the DPCC, which patronized the Congress SPOs,

353 V. Shankar, Private Secretary to the Home Minister to Home Secretary R.N. Banerjee, 27 October 1947. D.I.G of Police, D.W. Mehra, replied that he discussed the matter with Deputy Commissioner Randhawa, and the latter would call upon C. Sher Jung to submit his explanation for making a false report to the Special Correspondent of the Daily Worker. See, Mehra to Deputy Secretary, Home Ministry, 29 October, 1947
354 G.V. Bedekar to DIG of Police Mehra, 23 October, 1947.
356 It is not exactly clear how many Congress SPOs were removed. The Home Ministry filed charges against 16 men, under section 29 of the Police Act, and under section 249 of the Criminal Procedure Code.
pleaded with the Home Ministry, the Chief Commissioner, and the Deputy Commissioner to withdraw the criminal charges. The Chief Commissioner attempted to intervene on behalf of the Congress, but to no avail.

The President of the DPCC then tried to bypass Patel and the Home Ministry by addressing Nehru directly. Such a direct appeal to Nehru is noteworthy, as it was an important strategy employed time and again by various actors. The Prime Minister’s secretariat tried to intervene, but the Home Ministry remained adamant in the face of what they saw as an illegitimate encroachment on Government’s authority by the Delhi Congress’ machinery. This turned into a war of attrition between the Home Ministry and the DPCC, whose main tactic was stalling. Many of the accused simply did not show up in court, and the cases against them dragged on, fizzled out, or concluded with light penalties.357

If we follow the archives a step higher to the Nehru-Patel correspondence, we gain further background on the Special Police controversy, which puts both the Urdu poster and the Home Ministry file into a wider perspective. As mentioned above, the Home Ministry’s correspondence about Ch. Sher Jung and the Congress SPOs began in October, 1947 in response to the interview given by Sher Jung and complaints by the officer commander of the Special Force against them. More broadly, however, this affair unfolded against a background of growing tensions between Nehru and Patel, as discussed above. In fact, the dispute over Nehru’s interference in Delhi’s matters was directly related to the recruitment of special policemen, and the exchange of letters concerning it took place exactly at the same time as the Home Ministry’s correspondence about Chaudhury Sher Jung’s indiscipline.

357 The Home Ministry was particularly upset that Sher Jung’s case was deemed time-barred on December 7, 1948. Upon questioning, the SSP of Police sent a report to the Delhi chief commissioner explaining that Ch. Sher Jung could not attend court, since he was away in Kashmir “under orders of the Government.” The Home Ministry filed a revision petition against Sher Jung, which was dismissed on February 13, 1950.
When Patel reproached Nehru for issuing direct orders to the local administration, he specifically referred to Nehru’s intervention in the process of SPO recruitment. This allegation was inseparable from their disagreement over the legitimate scope of the DPCC’s intervention in Delhi’s governance. Nehru, according to Patel, bypassed Patel and ordered Randhawa to follow the recommendations of the DPCC when recruiting special policemen. While Patel encouraged cooperation between the local authorities and the local Congress body, he maintained that cooperation did not mean running day-to-day administration on party lines.

Nehru explained that during the first days of the crisis in early September when he had visited the Town Hall, he advised Randhawa, among other measures, to appoint Special Police officers. A few days later, he heard that among the people appointed were those included in the suspects’ list of principal organizers of the riots. Furthermore, Chief Commissioner Khurshid complained to Nehru that he had been totally bypassed by Randhawa throughout the recruitment process, though this should have been his responsibility. Nehru clarified to Randhawa that the whole process seemed flawed and that the list should be revised, this time consulting with the chief commissioner:

I did not say that Special Police officers should be recruited through the DPCC, but that some noted Congressmen, who knew the people in Delhi, should be consulted. After the incident, I did not visit the Town Hall for many days. I heard a number of complaints from Congress people that their services were not being utilized. But I did not intervene in any way. […] I understand that there have been many instances of grave dereliction of duty among the special magistrates and Special Police officers. Many of the R.S.S. men, who have been appointed, have functioned improperly and an attempt is being made now to purge these people.

In his response, Patel gave a detailed breakdown of the Special Police officers and magistrates appointed, showing that Randhawa accepted all the names recommended by the

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359 Patel to Nehru, 28 September 1947, in Ibid., 238.
360 Jawaharlal Nehru to Patel, 30 September 1947.
DPCC, with the result that out of 1,304 special officers, 574 were Congress members, and out of 49 special magistrates, 19 were Congress members. Randhawa, Patel claimed, accommodated the DPCC’s demands, tried to be as inclusive as possible, and was himself responsible for barely a third of the selection.361

To recapitulate, the Special Police officers recruited as an emergency measure were irregulars as well as political activists, and hence further politicized the security forces operating on the street. The struggle between them further fuelled (and became linked to) the contest for power between Patel and Nehru—and between Patel and the DPCC. The controversy surrounding this special force continued. Throughout 1948, Delhi saw periodic waves of violence every few months. Each episode led to the enlistment of Special Police officers, and also to related conflicts over who should be included in the force—and who would be authorized to decide on that. Thus, the new wave of violence in November and December, 1947 prompted a new enrollment drive recruiting 18 special magistrates. Among them were nationalist Muslims such as M.N. Masood, Aziz Hasan Baqi, and the socialist Mir Mushtaq Ahmad, as well as prominent Delhi Congress leaders such as Brahma Prakash and B.D. Joshi.362 Along with them, at least according to the Muslim poster, were also Akali and RSS members, which aroused further indignation.

In mid-January, in the midst of Gandhi’s fast, there was a meeting between Home Secretary R.N. Banerjee, Chief Commissioner Khurshid, and Deputy Commissioner Randhawa regarding the need to expand the force. The negotiations and intrigues involved in this new recruitment drive offer insight into the impact of Gandhi’s fast and assassination, and how it

361 In detail, Patel stated that out of 1,304 special police officers, 574 were Congress nominees, all recommended by the DPCC. 203 were recommended by various departments of the Government of India, and 340 were selected by the District Magistrate (Randhawa). 187 were a miscellaneous board, out of whom 95 were selected from the Delhi volunteer board. 19 out of the 49 Magistrates were selected by the DPCC, and the rest were people who, according to Randhawa, commanded some influence in their localities. See Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 October 1947.
362 See: NC HT 471125, Stabbing Cases in the City.
changed, to some extent, the balance within the administration in favor of non-communal voices.

A day after the meeting, Chief Commissioner Khurshid followed up, instructing Randhawa to pay special attention to proper selection of the new SPOs while excluding communal elements. For this purpose, Khurshid asked that the selecting committee include non-officials—responsible and non-partisan citizens, both Muslims and Hindus.

Khurshid followed up on the matter in early February, just a few days after Gandhi’s assassination—this time addressing Mehra, the DIG of Police. He enquired whether his instructions were followed while forming the selection committee. In another note to Mehra on the same day, he ordered the immediate removal of undesirable elements from the Special Police Force—specifically RSS men who were “recruited in a hurried manner during the emergency situation of the last disturbances.” Khurshid’s tone in these notes is more assertive and resolved—reflecting, so it seems, the changing climate after Gandhi’s assassination, which involved de-legitimization of RSS in official circles and among the public. It is also noteworthy that Khurshid asked the DIG of Police to report to him directly, thereby expressing his distrust of Randhawa during his attempt at re-asserting his authority and position in the decision-making process.

Two days later, Khurshid sent yet another note to Mehra, this time addressing the problem of communal elements within the regular police force. He wrote about a senior police officer who, when arresting a member of the RSS, disclosed the name of Jugal Kishore Khanna as his informant. An action had to be taken, he stressed, against such officers who were indiscreet or disloyal. On the same day, he also wrote to Mehra:

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363 “Elimination of Undesirable Personnel from the Services, Including the Special Police Force,” F. 43/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
364 Specifically, Khurshid asked Randhawa to include Dr. Yudhvir Singh and Dr. Raghunandan Saran from the DPCC, and Mr. Shafiqul Rehman Qidwai and Col. Habibur Rehman of the Jamiat Ulema-e Hind. Saran, we learn from Nehru-Patel correspondence, had a personal grudge against Randhawa.
Now that the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh has been declared to be an unlawful organization and Government have announced to root out communalism where-ever it may be – in political organizations, services, etc. – it is of the greatest importance and urgency that you should very carefully go into the question of purging the police force of all undesirable elements. My information is that there are amongst subordinate police officers many members of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh. In fact I am informed that not only are these officers members of this unlawful organization but some of them were also office bearers of Sanchalaks, as they are called. If my information is true, I take a very serious view of it. No time should be lost to go into the matter very carefully and take firm action to get rid of people who are members of an organization which has been declared to be unlawful and which was responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. [...] In the meantime please send me a complete list of all police officers including Superintendents of police. I should like to have this list by tomorrow evening.\(^{365}\)

There was further correspondence about the manning of the Special Police Force throughout January and February. When Khurshid asked Randhawa for an update on the selection process in mid-January, Randhawa delayed his reply for a month, during which time he set the appointment process in motion, including some controversial personalities in the list. It is no wonder that the chief commissioner felt compelled to write again to the DIG of Police and verify that the people he recommended were indeed included in the advisory board, as promised by Randhawa.\(^{366}\)

**Home Guards**

Captain Ranjit Singh removed, by the end of March, 127 RSS members from the Special Police.\(^{367}\) From other files, we learn that the Special Police Force was dissolved soon after this reorganization. Instead, a new body of Home Guards, whose projected manpower was 1,000 men, was established in June, 1948.\(^{368}\) Who initiated this reorganization, and why? The archive does not offer any answers, but this shift indicates the general atmosphere of disquiet,

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\(^{365}\) Mehra, in response, sent Khurshid the requested list of police officers. It is noteworthy that the list included just three Muslim names, all within the lower ranks of the police—an indication of the demographic transformation the Delhi police force underwent following partition.

\(^{366}\) CC Khurshid to IG of Police Mehra, 3 March 1948.


\(^{368}\) Many of the new enlisted Home Guards were former Special Policemen. See, F.311/48, DC Files, DSA.
zigzagging, and power struggles in the administration. Khurshid again pointed out that the recruitment process should be commenced with no delay and with great effort to include people “of the right type […] thoroughly loyal to the Indian Dominion Government, and free from communal bias.” He clearly wanted to exclude Punjabi refugees, writing that “no person of whom there is the least suspicion of having any connection with any communal organisation, or who was not permanently settled in Delhi before the 15th August 1947 should be enrolled as a Home Guard.” He once more recommended specific members to the selection committee to ensure a fair and non-partisan selection process.

This was one of the last decisions Khurshid affected as Chief Commissioner, since his transfer took place soon after in August, 1948. His instructions were apparently implemented, as we learn from a Hindustan Times item. While the English newspaper covered the topic in a dry and neutral tone, the vernacular newspapers’ coverage was polemic, using sensational and provocative language to convey how politically-charged this move was. The Urdu daily Aj published an article entitled “Recruitment to the Home Guards commenced: Sons of Prostitutes, Members of the National Guards and No. 10 Badmashees [hoodlums] got into the Home Guards Organisation.” The article reads as follows:

Delhi – In accordance with the scheme formulated by the local administration, recruitment to Home Guards has begun and many young men have been enlisted. Shri Sulhan is the Chief of this organisation. There is grouse in the public that some persons who do not belong to respectable families and are of bad character have got into this useful and important institution. In this new recruitment, one or two are reported to be

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369 “Complaint re: recruitment of undesirable persons in the Home Guards,” F. 77/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
370 Khurshid again requested that the committee should include non-official members, recommending, in addition to a representative of the Inspector General of Police and a representative of the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Sulhani, Dr. Yudhvir Singh, Col. Hasbibul Rehman, Mr. Brahma Parkash and Bawa Bachiter Singh.
371 “Home Guards for Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 15 June 1948. The article also stated that the decision to organize a recruitment drive was taken by the Delhi Administration in an emergency meeting on June 14. They chalked out a 3-month training course to impart training in rifle drill, firefighting, anti-gas precautions, and first aid. 230 policemen have been selected for setting up the organization.
372 The article was published on June 16 and was deemed objectionable by the Press Branch: “Fortnightly Press Report for the Second Half of June 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
sons of prostitutes. Some persons from Bara (Hindu Rao) who were formerly members of
the Muslim League National Guards have also been recruited. There are some others who
are No. 10 Badmashes. Col. Habib Rahman of Azad Hind is also on the Selection
committee. The public demand that there ought to have been some better man in his
place. During the days of the last disturbances his behavior was very objectionable. He
was notorious in making money out of Muslim exodus from Delhi. Many oppressed
Muslims who had been ruined and looted cursed him on reaching Pakistan [...] [373]

The article aroused the interest of the Home Ministry, especially with regard to
allegations against Habibur Rahman, an important leader of Jamiat Ulama-e Hind. The IG of
Police explained that the committee, which was appointed by the previous Chief Commissioner
(Khurshid by this time was transferred), weeded out a number of “undesirable men” who had
previously enlisted as Special Police officers and it was believed that these rejected men were
responsible for the news item. [374]

What did eventually become of the Home Guard organization? What was the proportion
of men chosen by Randhawa vs. those selected by the DPCC? And what was the scope of its
action and influence? Here, as well, the archival material is fragmentary, offering no further
information on how the story developed. What becomes clear, however, is that both the Special
Police Force and the Home Guards represented important examples of a host of organizations
that stood at the center of ongoing controversies, straddling the line between state and society. [375]

**Shanti Dal and its Controversial Head, Mridula Sarabhai**

A significant case in point, and the last to be discussed in this chapter, is the Shanti Dal
organization and its controversial head, Mridula Sarabhai. As in the case of the Congress SPOs,
the administration was divided between those who supported Mridula Sarabhai’s activities—

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373 Included in: “Complaint re: recruitment of undesirable persons in the Home Guards,” F. 77/48-C, CC Files
Confidential Branch, DSA.

374 Note by IG Police Mehra, 20 August 1948, No. 13638-Est/4-1, F. 77/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.

375 Home Guards continued to be enlisted in subsequent disturbances, as reported with regard to disturbances that
took place in Sadar Bazaar in 1974. The judge investigating the riot claimed that they were rather ineffective, and
recommended Special Police officers: Prasad, "Report of the One-Man Commission of Inquiry into the Sadar Bazar
Disturbances (1974)."
Prime Minister Nehru and Chief Commissioner Khurshid—and those who saw her as a great nuisance—Deputy Commissioner Randhawa, the Home Ministry under Sardar Patel and, to a lesser extent, Shankar Prasad, the Chief Commissioner who replaced Khurshid. In this sense, controversies surrounding Shanti Dal were in direct continuity with the earlier debates about the Special Police.

The first record on the topic is from June 1948, just prior to Chief Commissioner Khurshid’s transfer, when he was preoccupied with the organization of the Home Guards and the eradication of RSS elements. As part of this endeavor, he issued 28 orders of arrest, under Section Three of the Punjab Public Safety Act. This invoked a charged correspondence between Khurshid and the Home Ministry—an exchange that reveals the intensity of his bitterness and friction with Randhawa and the Home Ministry. In addition to the passions of personal rivalry and power struggles, it also sheds light on the conflicted ways in which decisions were taken and executed, and the rather substantial debate that underlay this and other controversies of the period—namely, what role, if any, non-official bodies should play in Delhi’s governance. Thus, on June 18, Home Secretary R.N. Banerjee wrote to Chief Commissioner Khurshid:

I enclose, in original (to be returned to me), a representation by a large number of citizens of Delhi complaining of the indiscriminate arrest of a large number of respectable and influential Hindus under your orders issued directly to the Inspector General of Police on the report of some Jamiat people and Socialists. […]. Ordinarily, any reports received against these persons should have been referred to the Police and the latter should have been asked to take action to the extent to which their own sources of information or their enquiries might have confirmed these reports, unless of course the information, on which action was taken, was a matter of your personal knowledge. It is also understood that three or four persons have had to be released on subsequent enquiry. It is obviously risky to arrest people on reports which are not verified by regular or independent official enquiries and such action is likely to cause public criticism and resentment. I am desired to ask you to let Government have your comments on the representation, as soon as possible, in the light of these observations.

Khurshid's harsh reply put the cards on the table:

376 35/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
2. It does not require any high order of intelligence to be convinced that the representation is an inspired one and the concluding paragraph of the representation furnishes a clue to the source of the inspiration. It is indeed most deplorable.

3. Now to the allegations made in the representation. It is true that the arrests were made under my orders. It is also true that I issued orders on receiving information from a non-official source, the Shanti Dal. But I specifically mentioned in my order that if the police had definite and positive information to show that any of the persons whose arrest was ordered was wrongly implicated he was not to be arrested. In other words the police officer concerned could use his discretion in the matter of affecting the arrests. Out of 52 whose names were reported to me only 28 were arrested. Of these 7 were released as there were grounds to believe that the information laid against them was incorrect.

4. Under the orders of the Local Administration every Superintendent of Police is empowered to arrest a person under Section 3 of the Punjab Public Safety Act without the Deputy Commissioner's concurrence. It was, therefore, quite unnecessary to pass on the information conveyed to me to the Deputy Commissioner.

5. My order to the Inspector General of Police was a secret order. Both the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police who affected the arrests committed grave official impropriety in divulging the information and making it known to subordinate officers that the arrests were made under the direct orders of the Chief Commissioner. I have pointed this out to both of them. The Deputy Commissioner committed a worse impropriety which borders on subordination in passing orders of release in respect of certain persons at a meeting of magistrates and police officers whence my order was subjected to criticism. The Superintendent of Police was perfectly right in taking no notice of the order of release.

6. It is sheer mischievous nonsense to say that the arrest of 28 persons created panic in the city. In February and March hundreds of people were arrested, scores of whom were probably as innocent as the seven persons released under my orders and yet there was no panic. The fact is that certain interested persons patronized by certain disloyal and indisciplined officials resented for reasons of party politics the action taken on the information supplied by the Shanti Dal. I may mention that at a meeting held under the auspices of the Shanti Dal in the Committee Room of the External Affairs Ministry, the Prime Minister, who was also present, approved the plan of action chalked out by the Shanti Dal and it was agreed that the Shanti Dal would receive unofficial recognition by the Local Administration in the matter of preserving peace and communal harmony and the main point of contact between this non-official agency and the official machinery will be the furnishing of information by the former to the latter. The members of the Shanti Dal incurred the displeasure of certain magistrates and police officers who very wrongly interested themselves in securing vacant Muslim houses for refugees. In many cases members of the Shanti Dal actively opposed illegal occupation by refugees which was resented by these officials.

7. The representation is a contemptible attempt to bring the Local Administration into disrepute. To make the representation appear impressive the sponsors of it secured signatures of 1000 persons but who does not know how easy it is to get hold of fools many times that number.
This charged correspondence condenses within itself all of the elements forming our discussion thus far—that there was a dispute between the Home Ministry and the Prime Minister with regard to the legitimacy of non-official bodies putting a check on the official police and administration; that this dispute spilled over to Delhi's administration and was intimately connected with the discordant relationship between the Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner; that the heart of the debate concerned the fate of Muslim houses in the Muslim zones; and that the end result was the coexistence of competing forces, which derived their authority from either Nehru or Patel. Toward the summer months of 1948, as we can see, this debate concentrated upon the roles played by Mridula Sarabhai and Shanti Dal.

Who was Mridula Sarabhai? Well, it depends who we ask. For some, like Patel, she was a nuisance; for others, like Nehru, she was an important activist and social worker. For Anis Kidwai, who worked alongside her, she was a role model—a sharp, defiant, and opinionated woman fearlessly dedicated to idealistic causes. Everyone—both enemies and fans—agreed that Sarabhai had a formidable and rather eccentric personality. Shankar Prasad's portrayal of her seems to capture the essence of Sarabhai's public image:

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378 Chief Commissioner Khurshid to Home Secretary Banerjee, 24 June, 1948, D.O. No. 1802 ST/CC, 35/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA (my italics). The affair was also mentioned by Shankar Prasad in his later interview to NMML. Prasad argued that after Prasad took office, he heard that Mridula Sarabhai furnished Khurshid with a list of 200 people who, according to her information, would make mischief upon the anniversary of the Direct Action Day proclaimed by Jinnah in 1946. Khurshid did not check the list and issued orders for their arrest, while bypassing Randhawa and Ram Lal, the Senior Superintendent of Police. Most of them, according to Prasad, were innocent. See: AS TM OH Shankar Prasad, pp. 154-5.

379 Sarabhai had Nehru's support at least in this earlier period. Interestingly, her interference caused similar resentment in West Bengal later, in 1950, as indicated in a correspondence between Nehru and B.C. Roy: SWJN Vol. 14II, p. 167. She was later arrested for her activities in Kashmir and detained in Tihar Jail from 8 August 1958 until 6 August 1959. See: Aparna Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[...]. Mridula Sarabhai was the daughter of Ambalal Sarabhai, a wealthy mill owner and a leading Congressman of Ahmedabad. She took to a life of simplicity early in life and became a devoted Congress worker. She rose in the Congress hierarchy and was at one time the General Secretary of the AICC. She was fanatically devoted to Nehru and never missed the early morning ritual of presenting a bouquet of roses at the P.M.’s residence, for his buttonhole. She had ample private means of her own and ran an independent intelligence organisation manned by many workers, issued cyclostyled bulletins of which the principal recipients, among others, were the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Chief Commissioner. [...]. She was altogether a very fine person, but I regret to say that her judgment of men and things was not equal to her enthusiasm. For this reason, she was very much disliked by Sardar Patel, who asked me to avoid her as much as I could. But this was easier said than done. Dr. K.N. Katju—when Home Minister—once told me that in Delhi he was afraid of only two persons – the speaker of Parliament and Mridula Sarabhai.380

A Gandhian and Congress leader, Mridula Sarabhai (1911-1974) took part in the national freedom movement and India’s political life after 1947. She was particularly active during the partition days, and was known for her leading role in the recovery of abducted women.381 According to Anis Kidwai, during the winter months of 1947, when the degree of violence in Delhi again intensified, everyone working in Old Delhi’s localities united and formed Shanti Dal (Peace Corps) on the initiative of the Congress’ labor section. It was dominated by socialists and comprised of both Hindus and Muslims, who worked relentlessly to restore peace in the various mohallas.382 With time, Shanti Dal expanded its realm of activity beyond the urban area and penetrated into the villages, where it gathered information on, and worked to counteract, mass conversions of Muslims, restoring Muslim villagers to their land by forming peace committees and initiating negotiations between the various religious and caste groups in the villages.383

A few months after the assassination of Gandhi, when the impact of this traumatic event was on the wane and the summer heat had reached its peak but the construction of housing for the refugees had not yet begun, tensions in the city and its rural surrounding areas were again on

381 See: Basu, Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause; Menon and Bhasin, Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition.
382 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 107-8.
383 Ibid., Chapter 10, 11.
the rise. One alleged cause for the tensions was the return of Muslims from Pakistan to the city and its villages. In the villages, this return, facilitated by the work of Shanti Dal, was accompanied by disputes over land and the requisite share of the crops. Simultaneously, Hindu far-right organizations began to resurface, as many RSS workers of Delhi were released from jail and the Hindu Mahasabha resumed physical training classes, according to CID reports. Shooting and stabbing incidents resumed with full force, and rumors circulated about looming communal riots to commence on June 15.

In order to combat the imminent danger, the Shanti Dal was reorganized to strengthen its foundations; it was incorporated into the Central Peace Committee, and led by Rajendra Prasad. In her own report on the reorganization of the Shanti Dal, sent to Delhi's Chief Commissioner and other official bodies in June, Mridula Sarabhai defined it as a cross-party organization that included Congress members, socialists, and Jamiat Ulama-e Hind volunteers. As she put it, “Anyone who is non-communal, non-sectarian and non-provincial and who believes in strengthening the Janata Raj will be considered eligible for being enrolled as a Shanti Dal worker or volunteer. […] Efforts will be made to select good citizens irrespective of party considerations.”

Sarabhai’s letters communicate her great efforts to receive the Delhi

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384 On the refugees’ frustration with the slow pace of rehabilitation work, see ibid., Chapter 16. M.S. Randhawa to Sahibzada Khurshid, “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of May 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
385 On the return of Muslims to Delhi, see the following chapter.
387 Ibid., 211-3.
388 F. 54/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. In the same letter, which defined the rules and regulations of the Shanti Dal, Mridula Sarabhai named the following people as members of the organization’s Central Board: “Jauji, Mridula Sarabhai (Convenor), Brahma Prakash (Secretary of DPCC), Ram Saran Chouhan (Rep. Socialist Party), Maulana Ahmad Saood (Rep. Jamiat-ul-Ulema), Subhadra Joshi (Peace worker), Pandit Jai Dev Sharma (i/c rural area), Begum Shafi Ahmad Kidwai (i/c rural area), Master Shanti Sarup (Office i/c), Dharam Vira (Secretary to Pandit Nehru, invitee member).”
Administration's recognition and cooperation. Her goal, as she defined it, was to advance the link-up of official and non-official efforts.389

The reformed Shanti Dal advanced a resolution to establish sub-offices in each and every police thana, acting as information bureaus and as centers of activity to implement the programs of the Peace Committee. Sarabhai requested that “all officials of the Thanases may be informed to give cooperation to them, and vice versa.” Furthermore, Shanti Dal’s central committee resolved to form “vigilance committees” in each police thana, which would keep a check on “anti-social and anti-national elements, assist in the maintenance of law and order, and create goodwill and mutual confidence among the population of that area.” Sarabhai enclosed the names of appointed vigilance committee members, requesting “that these names may be accepted as official and a press note issued side by side.”390

It comes as no surprise that this endeavor represented a source of bitter discord between Shanti Dal and the Home Ministry, replaying the controversy surrounding the Congress SPOs. Like Chaudhury Sher Jung and his men, Sarabhai and her workers were highly critical of the Delhi administration and police, sending reports that documented violence, oppression, and “growing lawlessness” in the various localities and villages of Delhi.391

Shankar Prasad, who by this time had replaced Khurshid as Delhi’s Chief Commissioner, later recalled his interactions with Sarabhai and the controversies surrounding Shanti Dal:

One day, I received a very bulky file from the Ministry of Home Affairs. I discovered that at nearly all Police Stations, a tented camp had been put up by Mridula Sarabhai. Her excuse was that the old administration was partial to refugees and hostile to the Muslims and that in general, the Police could not be trusted. The Sardar was very much opposed to this arrangement as he thought that the tented camps acting as rival Police Stations would

389 Mridula Sarabhai's letter of 14 June 1948, F. 54/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA
390 The list of 65 vigilance committees' members was attached to her letter, dividing them into the 10 police thanas in Delhi. The list, she reported, was created after “mutual informal consultations with officials and non-officials.”
391 Whereas the “reports on the Delhi situation” sent by the Congress SPOs to the DPCC in October 1947 concentrated on the urban area, Shanti Dal’s reports covered the rural areas as well: “Report Submitted by the Officer In-Charge, Rural Area, Re: the Immediate Problem in the Villages of the Delhi Province,” and “Situation and Reports on Incidents in Delhi City,” F. 54/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
undermine all constituted authority and that they should be dismantled. Nehru, on the other hand, thought that the activity was relatively harmless and that the social workers under Mridula Sarabhai could exercise a wholesome and salutary check on the activities of the Police. The controversy had gone on for a long time and it had not been settled when I arrived.\footnote{Interview with Shankar Prasad, Oral History Transcript No. 494, NMML, pp. 153-4}

Indeed, by mid-October 1948, Patel had urged Rajendra Prasad to wind up Shanti Dal, since the [new] Chief Commissioner, the Inspector-General of Police, and the Deputy Commissioner agreed that “the activities of the Shanti Dal are leading to constant frictions, that the Shanti Dal has some undesirable elements, […] and] that this organization, which virtually aims at a parallel local administration, and functions as such, should be wound up as soon as possible.”\footnote{Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 14 October 1948. Included in Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 266. my italics} The organization was eventually wound up in 1954, a few years after Patel’s death. When Sarabhai started criticizing the Kashmir policy of the Indian government and Sheikh Abdullah’s arrest, she was forced to resign from all government-related agencies, including the Shanti Dal, which concluded soon afterward.\footnote{Basu, Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause, 120.}

**Conclusion: A State of Indeterminacy**

We can appreciate, by now, the extent to which the idea of parallel forces was troubling to the Home Ministry. The term was used time and again by other contemporary social actors, thereby indicating its existence as formative of the experience of this period. The term “parallel forces” is prevalent in Anis Kidwai’s account of the activities of Shanti Dal and its ongoing struggles with small-time policemen, high-ranking officers, thanedars, tehsildars, nambardars, and many other officials. Kidwai’s narrative covers a wide range of aspects of social life—from irregularities and corruption in the Muslim and Punjabi refugee camps through the systematic orchestration of mass conversions of whole Muslim villages, the digging up of Muslim sacred
places by the Public Works Department, the “keeping” of abducted women by high officers and the silence surrounding it, to the complicity of local police officers in the forcible occupation of houses in the Muslim zones by refugees. For Kidwai, the source of the problem could be found in the ideological uncertainties marking the period of transition—that is, the deep differences in the Cabinet on the question of a secular Indian state. Official statements never came out clean on the matter, enabling the officers on the ground to interpret official policy as it suited them.395

In her recent book on citizenship in India, Niraja Gopal Jayal identifies an underlying tension between two principles of citizenship: *Jus Soli* (birth) and *Jus Sanguinis* (blood-based descent). While the former is based upon one’s residence in a territory and is thus more inclusive, the latter excludes all those who do not belong to the nation as an ethno-cultural entity. In India, religious affiliation—that is, communal identity—stands for the *Jus Sanguinis* principle. Jayal works against the accepted scholarly perception that India started with an inclusive territorial definition of citizenship, and shifted toward exclusionary definition in the 1980s. She claims that the history of legal citizenship in India is more complicated than suggested by this neat chronology, and that tensions had been apparent since the very beginning, as reflected in the constitutional settlement of the question.396

Her study of the Constituent Assembly debates provides the broader background against which the conflicts and controversies depicted in this chapter took place. The constitution laid out an inclusive territorial definition of citizenship, but it involved acrimonious debates precisely on the question of Muslim belonging in this scheme. Articles 6 and 7 established qualifying provisions that addressed the belonging of Hindu and Sikh refugees (Article 6) and Muslim refugees (Article 7). The latter was the most contentious article, and it concerned the Muslims

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395 Kidwai, *In Freedom’s Shade*, 119.
who left for Pakistan but later returned. Was their departure a spontaneous and forced decision in the mayhem of violence, or a voluntary act which meant they belonged there?

While the Indian Constitution did make provision for citizenship for…the Muslim “migrants,” the accommodation of the claims of returning Muslims was a hard-won battle in the constitution-making process. It was intensely contested, and these disagreements within the Assembly were echoed outside it not just in civil society but also in the practices of official agencies, especially in the exercise of their discretionary powers and grant of permits…

This basic tension lay at the heart of the controversies depicted in the chapter.

I also suggest that conflicts at the top level of the Congress leadership and Central Government, which were both ideological and personal, trickled down, or at least reinforced, conflicts at various levels of the Delhi administration—including rival factions of policemen and special policemen, custodian officials, and others. Alternatively, we could look at it the other way around and argue that struggles in society permeated the state’s machinery. Either way, the state, far from acting as a neutral bystander and arbitrating social conflicts from the outside, was instead deeply implicated in them. Our discussion has shown how time and again, people—whether the Muslim poster writers with whom we opened the chapter, or Shanti Dal activists—were aware of the factionalized nature of the state, and turned directly to one faction in the government while bypassing another in order to pursue their interests, or simply to survive.

This portrayal of a “factionalized state” fits within scholarship on the state which dispenses with the conception of “a monolithic state arbitrating social conflicts.”

Anthropologists, especially, have emphasized the need to move away from abstract conceptualizations and toward concrete study of the ways in which the state functions and is

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experienced in everyday life. In doing so, they question two main assumptions: first, with regard to the externality and neutrality of the state and, second, with regard to its supposed unity and internal consistency—because “in practice, state functionaries often, or even normally, pursue competing agendas at cross-purposes with each other.”

Within the context of South Asian studies, scholars questioning the state’s externality respond to theoretical formulations of Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and others, who have emphasized the disjuncture between the realm of the elites and that of the subaltern, or Indian, masses. This is also part of a broader trend that goes against the assumption of clear boundaries between state and society. In his seminal article, Timothy Mitchell surveyed and criticized an entire scholarly tradition within the political sciences, which grappled with the definition of the boundaries of the state. According to Mitchell, the boundaries between state and society are, in fact, always porous and negotiable. Yet the appearance of such a boundary represents an important claim of the modern state, and Mitchell sets forth a whole set of practices and institutions which produce this “illusion” of a boundary and, hence, the effect of the modern state as external to society.

As anthropologist Carol Greenhouse notes with regard to the study of social life during periods of political instability, historical crises allow ethnographers to “reflect on what

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400 Fuller and Harris, "For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State," 3.
constructions of ‘normal times’ conceal.\textsuperscript{403} The partition of India and the transfer of power formed such a moment of political change, in which the boundary between state and society became visibly blurred. In this respect, the host of non-official and semi-official organizations that stood at the heart of the great controversies described in the chapter—the DPCC, the Special Police Force, the Home Guards, and Shanti Dal—are especially important, because they occupied a peculiar space that straddled the line between state and society. Internal conflicts within the Congress Committee both influenced the decision-making process in the government and shaped struggles on the streets between various sections of the Special Police. This opens up a host of questions with regard to the ways in which the boundaries between state and society were negotiated and produced with regard to the transfer of power. Specifically, it suggests that the boundary between the Congress Government on the one hand, and the Congress Party on the other, had to be negotiated with the assumption of power.

The next chapter will examine how the fundamental debate about Muslim belonging in the nation and the city affected—and was influenced by—struggles surrounding the question of Muslim evacuee property. Some of the main players in this chapter, like the Shanti Dal, will figure prominently in the next one, as well.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SCRAMBLE FOR HOUSES:
VIOLENCE, INFORMAL ECONOMY, AND EVACUEE PROPERTY

Introduction

When Madhusudan, an aspiring Hindi writer and journalist, first arrived in Delhi in the early 1950s, he lived with a friend in Qasabpura, a Muslim-majority neighborhood in Sadar Bazar. Madhusudan’s endless excursions in search of employment in the big city exhausted him physically and emotionally. His only refuge from his feelings of depression and suffocation was the sitar music played by Ibadat Ali during the long, sleepless nights.

Ibadat Ali was nominally the owner of the house but, in reality, its most marginal inhabitant. The house in Qasabpura had been given to his forefathers many generations before by the Mughal court for their services as professional sitar musicians. Before partition, Ibadat Ali had lived in the main portion of the house and rented out the other rooms to Muslim tenants. Then, during the September riots, all his Muslim tenants fled. Ibadat Ali hesitated for a while but finally took his young daughter one night and quietly slipped out of the house. They left for Pakistan and stayed in Lahore. When they returned three months later, also in the middle of the night, they found that the house had been occupied by Hindu refugees in their absence. Ibadat Ali applied to the Custodian of Evacuee Property and, after numerous petitions, somehow managed to clear the upper room on the rooftop. The other refugees remained in the house as his tenants, but they persistently harassed him and denied him access to the main water pump in the courtyard. While his attractive and assertive daughter would quarrel with them, the old Ibadat Ali became submissive and slowly faded away, withdrawing into himself and his sitar playing.
Ibadat Ali is a touching minor character in Mohan Rakeh’s *Andhere Band Kamre* (*Dark Closed Rooms*), a Hindi novel that takes place in Delhi of the 1950s. By depicting Ali as a scion of sitar players long patronized by the Mughal court, Rakesh comments on the disappearance of the social and cultural world of Mughal Delhi. More narrowly, this is a literary representation of the gradual encroachment of refugees on Muslim-majority areas such as Qasabpura—a process that will form the focus of this chapter.

The shrinking presence of Ibadat Ali in the house is symbolized by the half-faded letters of his name on the signboard at the house’s entrance—his first name Ibadat is totally erased, while the word Ali, a generic sign of Muslim identity, is vaguely visible. Ten years later, when the protagonist returns to Delhi, he notices that the letters have gone forever. The signboard as a symbol of Muslim marginalization in the city functions similarly in another post-partition Hindi novel about Delhi, perhaps the most famous one—*Jhutha Sach* (*The False Truth*) by Yashpal. Here, the Punjabi businessman Pandit Girdharilal Dutta, who moves to the house in September 1947, erases the Urdu sign carrying the name of the original Muslim owner and writes in its place his own name in Devanagari. As in *Andhere Band Kamre*, this act stands for the demographic transformation accompanying partition and its broader ramifications.

Yet, there are telling differences in the circumstances of the two scenes. While Ibadat Ali’s house in Qasabpura is *illegally occupied* during the riots, Samad’s house in Daryaganj is *willingly exchanged*, just before the riots break out, for Panditji’s house in Lahore. This is a fictional representation of the other channel through which property ownership in Delhi was dramatically transformed in the context of partition and its aftermath—the many *private transactions* taking place between Hindus and Muslims of the middle and upper class. It is also noteworthy that the reason that Panditji erases the old Urdu signboard is to protect the house.

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from the crowds of poor Punjabi refugees who threaten to break in at any moment, oblivious to Panditji’s cries that this is no longer a Muslim residence but his very own house, legally transferred to his name. At one point, the hungry and tired crowd argues that it is unfair that such a large place houses only two old people, and that Panditji and his wife should make room for others.

Taken together, these two novels provide clues to the central place of evacuee property in the history of post-partition Delhi, and the dynamics through which ownership of houses was transferred from Muslims to Hindu newcomers. In this chapter, I will analyze the process of Muslim dispossession depicted in the story of Ibadat Ali and translate it into spatial terms, tracing the gradual contraction of the spaces defined as “Muslim zones” in the city. While doing so, I will discuss the two main factors contributing to this gradual encroachment on Muslim zones—the “spontaneous” outbreaks of violence, and the bureaucracy of the Custodian of Evacuee Property that regularized and routinized the results of the violence.

Then again, the representation of evacuee property in Jhutha Sach complicates this picture by pointing to the role played by socioeconomic factors that caused friction within religious communities while creating alliances across them. After all, it is their similar economic class that allows Panditji and the house’s former Muslim owner to reach an agreement on property exchange, and class that creates a fissure between him and the crowds of refugees of lesser means, who could not embark on such business transactions before leaving their homes. Socioeconomic divisions existed among both Muslims and refugees, and this chapter will therefore illuminate the role played by such factors in determining how property shifted hands, by whom, and to whom.

I will also highlight the central place occupied by Muslim houses and zones as sites of struggle between competing forces on the ground—the Custodian, the police, the Special Police...
Force and the Shanti Dal. In this respect, this chapter directly continues the previous one, by showing how the political and ideological divisions within the Administration, the police, and society were played out with regard to evacuee property. At the crux of the debates and struggles was the uncertainty of Muslim belonging in post-partition India. This uncertainty directly affected the question of Muslim property in the city: did the owners flee to Pakistan and turn into “evacuees,” or were they rightful citizens of the Indian state who could have a claim on their property?

The differing answers to this question no doubt reflected the conflicting visions of Indian democracy and the place of Muslims in it, but also the real instability of Muslim presence—the movement of many of them back and forth across the border in the first years after partition. Interestingly, both novels pay attention to the return of thousands of Muslims to Delhi during 1948. Like Ibadat Ali, who returns to Delhi from Lahore, Abdul Samad, the original owner of the house depicted in *Jhutha Sach*, returns to Delhi and stakes a claim to his old house, initiating a property dispute between him and Panditji. Thus, Muslim movement across the border was affected by, and at the same time deepened, the uncertain status of their citizenship and property. In this respect, the issue of evacuee property was more complicated in India than in West Pakistan, where the departure of non-Muslims was clear-cut and irreversible. I will return to this point at the conclusion of the chapter.

**Dispossession through Violence and the Creation of Muslim Zones**

To recap the previous chapters, the first phase of partition violence—up to and including September 1947—was concentrated in the mixed localities of Paharganj, Subzimandi, and Karol Bagh (as well as in parts of Daryaganj and Sadar Bazar). It is estimated that about 100,000 refugees occupied Muslim houses in these three areas. The Muslim inhabitants of these localities
escaped either to the predominantly Muslim areas or to the camps set up for Muslim refugees in Purana Qila and Humayun’s Tomb. These served as temporary places of refuge and as transit camps for Muslims waiting to board the trains to Pakistan. A massive exodus took place within less than two months, as indicated by the demographic data for the two Muslim camps: at their peak in mid-September, Purana Qila and Humayun’s Tomb hosted 80,000 and 60,000 Muslim refugees respectively.405 A month and a half later, on October 22, Purana Qila closed down, and the remaining 2,000 refugees were shifted to Humayun's Tomb, whose population had also drastically declined to 4,000.406

It appears that most of the occupants of these camps left for Pakistan. But thousands returned to the city. Their return was the fruit of intense efforts by nationalist Muslim and Gandhian leaders and volunteers to convince the Muslims that they belonged to, and would be safe in, Delhi. Congress Muslim leader and Education Minister Maulana Azad’s speech at the Jama Masjid on October 24 after the Friday prayer was reported to be a key moment that convinced many Muslims to return from the camps.407 In his correspondence with Patel, Nehru initially entertained the idea that some portion of the Muslims returning from the camps would be rehabilitated in the previously mixed localities from which they had been driven out. In early October, he anticipated that half of the 120,000 Muslim refugees in the camps would go to Pakistan, while the other half would return to the city. He asked Patel:

Where are the other half to go? …To what parts of Delhi? Some parts of Delhi which the Muslims did not evacuate, like Ballimaran, Faiz Bazar, etc., are already full and there is not much room for additional people. Where else then are they to go to except to certain

405 Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India, 123.
areas from which they were evacuated? These areas thus cannot be considered as reserved completely for non-Muslims. […]  

Yet, it soon became evident that Muslims could not return to their houses or any other part of these localities. The houses were already occupied by refugees, and the localities became strongholds of the city’s refugees and dangerous for Muslims. Muslims who tried to return to, or merely visit, their old neighborhoods risked their lives. That the consequences of the riots could not be undone, and that Muslims could not return to their homes, soon became a shared premise of the central government and the Delhi administration. This is a point worth emphasizing, because it was an important juncture at which the initial dispossession of Delhi’s Muslims through the outbreak of violence was routinized by the state.

The Custodian of Evacuee Property

The key state institution responsible for regularizing Muslims’ dispossession was the Custodian of Evacuee Property. This position was established simultaneously in West Punjab (Pakistan) and East Punjab (India) following a Joint Defence Council meeting in Lahore on August 29, 1947, attended by the prime ministers of both dominions and by Lord Mountbatten. The official communiqué issued after the meeting stated that illegal seizure of property would not be recognized. Accordingly, the West Punjab Evacuee Property Ordinance and the East Punjab Evacuee Property Ordinance, issued in Pakistan and India on September 9 and 14, respectively, entrusted the abandoned property of the displaced to newly appointed Custodians,

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408 Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 6 October 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 128.
409 For example, the Situation Reports prepared for the Congress SPOs for the first week of October describe a gang that threatened Muslims who tried to reoccupy their houses in Gali Banduqwali (Ajmeri Gate): ‘Situation Reports’ in F. 26-37-47-Police, MHA Political, NAI. See also the report of Zahid Hussain, Pakistan’s High Commissioner in Delhi, who argued that there was no such thing as mixed localities any longer, and that Hindu localities were practically out of bounds for Muslims. “If a Muslim ventures into these areas, in 9 out of 10 cases he'll be attacked”: “25,000 Refugees in Humayun’s Tomb Camp,” Hindustan Times, 26 November 1947. See also CID Source Report dated May 15, 1948, included in F.55/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
whose role was to protect and preserve the property until peace was restored and the original owners could return.\footnote{ibid., 191. Joseph B. Schechtman, "Evacuee Property in India and Pakistan," \textit{Pacific Affairs} 24, no. 4 (1951): 407. Zamindar, \textit{The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories}, 123.}

These ordinances reflected the great bewilderment in government circles in the face of the massive exodus that took place. Before partition, the working assumption of the Partition Council had been that significant populations of religious minorities would remain in each dominion. The massive violence and migrations that ensued took the leaders by surprise. Their hope that the unforeseeable demographic transformation was still reversible was reflected in the refugee property ordinances of September 1947, which entrusted the Custodians with protecting and eventually restoring the properties to their rightful owners.

At the same time, both governments faced an acute refugee crisis and forcible occupations of houses on a large scale. Beyond these initial seizures, refugees kept pouring into cities and villages in desperate search of accommodation. As a result, the function of the Custodians transformed rather quickly from preserving houses for their original owners to dispossessing them. This shift was so rapid that it happened almost simultaneously with the appointment of the Custodians, beginning with a new ordinance issued in Pakistan on the very same day of the first ordinance (September 9, 1947). The second ordinance authorized the Rehabilitation Commissioners (counterparts to India’s Custodians) to utilize abandoned properties for rehabilitating refugees for a limited period of one year.\footnote{Pakistan was the first to introduce changes into the role of the Custodian: “Somewhat surprisingly, the West Punjab Government issued an altogether different ordinance on the same date, i.e. 9.9.’47, ‘to provide for economic rehabilitation of West Punjab’. Under this ordinance, the Rehabilitation Commissioner of the province could, inter alia, assume possession and control of abandoned lands, business undertakings, grant temporary leases of abandoned agricultural holdings to refugees for a term not exceeding one year, permit the occupation of any abandoned building by refugees or other persons (Section 4 (2) of the ordinance). The Rehabilitation Commissioner could also assume possession or control of any property under the control of the Custodian of Evacuee Property (Section 8).” Das Gupta, \textit{Indo-Pakistan Relations, 1947-1955}, 191. Schechtman, "Evacuee Property in India and Pakistan," 407; Zamindar, \textit{The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories}, 70.}

This, in fact, violated the declared principle of protecting and restoring the properties to the original owners. India soon
issued a similar ordinance and, over time, the two governments continued drafting retaliatory legislation that further restricted the owners’ rights to their property.\footnote{170}

In the meantime, as the partition riots spread to Delhi, the East Punjab Evacuee Property Ordinance was extended to Delhi, and a Custodian was appointed there on September 20. As Lobo Prabhu, the first Custodian of Delhi, explained in a press note, Delhi was divided into 13 sectors, each under the charge of an Assistant Custodian. The Assistant Custodian was assisted by an advisory committee, whose role was, first, to examine the eligibility of those already in possession of houses and, second, to find eligible tenants among the refugees for vacant (Muslim) houses.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}} Prabhu estimated immovable evacuee property in urban and rural Delhi at the end of October at \textbf{8,000 residential houses, 2,000 businesses and industrial premises,} 8,000 acres of agricultural land, and 2,000 village houses. He considered that about two-thirds of this immovable property was under occupation and one-tenth uninhabitable.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}

On October 25, the Custodian decided to launch a drive to evict unauthorized occupants of houses abandoned by evacuees. Eviction targeted three groups, estimated by the Custodian to amount to about 2,000 people\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}: (1) those who occupied Muslim houses after October 1; (2) those who may have occupied houses prior to October 1 but failed to report to the Custodian; and (3) those who were not refugees but rather local residents of Delhi who had taken advantage of the mayhem to seize Muslims’ property.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}} This, of course, meant that the state recognized illegal occupations effected during the September riots, so long as the occupiers were refugees

\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}

\footnote{2,000 Tenants Liable to Eviction,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 28 October 1947.}

\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}

\footnote{\textit{ibid.}}

\footnote{“Houses of Evacuees: Unauthorized Occupants to be Evicted,” \textit{Hindustan Times}, 27 October 1947.}
and reported to the Custodian. In addition to legitimizing such occupations, the Custodian allotted more vacant houses from November 1947 onwards.418

I should clarify that such allotment did not amount to transference of ownership. Rather, allotment meant granting the right to occupy a house on a temporary basis. Ownership of the properties was still nominally vested in the Muslim evacuees, and the Custodian’s possession of the houses was considered temporary, extending only until the original owners would return or until an overall compensation settlement would be reached between the two dominions. In the meantime, refugees occupied these houses as tenants who would pay rent to the Custodian. Indeed, from early December 1947, the Custodian collected rent from the roughly 32,000 tenants who occupied the houses and business premises in its possession.419 According to the declared policy, this rent was not used but rather “was lying to the credit of the Custodians in the name of evacuee owners.”420

It should be emphasized, and will be discussed at length below, that some of the Muslims whose houses were declared evacuee property—which were allotted, or whose occupation was confirmed, by the Custodian—had never left Delhi, or had left and returned. In other words, their houses were declared evacuee property although they themselves lived in the city. Where did they go?

Muslim Zones

Most of these Muslims flocked to the Muslim-majority localities, now considered the only safe place for Muslims in the city. The movement of the remaining Muslim population to Muslim-majority areas happened spontaneously during the riots. We may recall the accounts of Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi and Abdul Rahman Siddiqui, who described Muslim survivors fleeing

419 “Payment of Rent by Evacuee Tenants,” Hindustan Times, 22 November 1947.
420 Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammad Ali, 6 March 1954, SWJN Vol. 25, 346-352
from the mixed localities to Jama Majid and Ballimaran, respectively where Dehlvi and Siddiqui lived. On his visit to Delhi in April 1948, eight months after he had left, Dehlvi found his Muslim-majority mohalla of Jama Masjid packed with new faces he did not know.421

This spontaneous internal displacement was later encouraged and systematized by the state. On October 11, 1947, Chief Commissioner Khurshid noted that, “In view of the tragic happenings during the first week of September, Muslims no longer feel safe in mixed localities of Qarol Bagh, Subzimandi and Paharganj, and it is suggested that they should be rehabilitated in predominantly Muslim areas.”422 By late November, Nehru, who initially contemplated the idea of rehabilitating the Muslims in the mixed localities from which they had escaped, reluctantly admitted, “Very few Muslims can find houses or any security in predominantly non-Muslim areas.”423 Hence, it was in the Muslim-majority areas that the more secular and leftist forces in the central cabinet, the local administration, and society concentrated their efforts to rehabilitate Muslims. Nehru was a chief advocate of turning these areas into “Muslim zones” that could provide safe haven for the city’s Muslims. Accordingly, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolution in November was that, in order to prevent further Muslim exodus and leave the door open for Muslims’ return, the entry of non-Muslims into vacant houses in the Muslim areas should be prohibited.424 Jamiat Ulema-e Hind embraced this decision and pressed for the maintenance of Muslim zones that would be excluded from the project of rehabilitating Hindu and Sikh refugees.425 So did other players, such as Mridula Sarabhai, Anis Kidwai, and

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424  ibid.
Subhadra Joshi of the Shanti Dal, as well as the socialist and secularist wing of the DPCC and the Special Police Force. Kidwai explained the reasoning thus:

We requested this [that no refugee be settled in Muslim neighborhoods] because whenever a refugee settled among them, ten Muslim households would pack up and head to the camp. Some part of the fear of the refugees was a result of the Muslims’ imagination, some created by the refugees’ antics themselves. From the minute the refugees set foot in a locality, they devoted their energies to capturing the neighborhoods for friends, and family, by hook and by crook. Whether driven by need or vengeance or both, the result always was that the atmosphere got so charged that locals had to run for their lives.426

On December 24, 1947, Hindustan Times noted that “it is generally understood that Muslims who fled their homes and are currently in Humayun’s Tomb and cannot reoccupy their houses will be allotted with houses by the Custodian at the predominantly Muslim areas.”427 Rehabilitation policy for Muslims thus concentrated in the Muslim zones, and Muslims who accordingly settled in the empty houses left behind by other Muslims became, just like the refugees, tenants of the Custodian.

Debates about the Muslim Zones

As mentioned above, once it became clear to him that Muslims could not return to the mixed areas, Nehru strongly pushed for the creation of Muslim zones. Likewise, the AICC published a resolution in favor of Muslim zones, which was endorsed by nationalist Muslim bodies, most importantly the Jamiat Ulema. But many objected to the creation of Muslim zones, chief among whom was Sardar Patel, who claimed they would only maintain communal enmity and pose security risks.428 Indeed, the correspondence between Nehru and Patel discloses that, in addition to their many other debates discussed in the previous chapter, they sharply disagreed

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426 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 200.
428 Patel’s position is summarized by the editor of Nehru’s Correspondence, thus: “Patel feared that the creation of compact Hindu or Muslim blocks in Delhi would perpetuate communal tension and that such a policy would have wider repercussions on problems of internal security. He suggested consideration of the matter in all its aspects”: Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 21 November 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 185, editor’s footnote 2.
over the Muslim zones of Delhi. This disagreement spilled over beyond the ruling government, and fierce debates took place in the Constituent Assembly on several occasions.429

This controversy also informed the Delhi administration and police, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, were divided over whether Muslims were equal citizens of the state or, alternatively, aligned with Pakistan. This key debate on citizenship directly affected the question of evacuee property and the Muslim zones. The Hindu and Sikh refugees, as we shall soon see, demanded to be rehabilitated in vacant houses in the Muslim zones, contrary to the official endeavor to reserve these zones exclusively for Muslim rehabilitation. The refugees were supported by local RSS and Hindu Mahasabha leaders, as well as by some members of the Special Police Force, the police, and the administration. The key person in the administration advocating this position was Deputy Commissioner M.S. Randhawa. Given the strong disagreement and personal enmity between him and Chief Commissioner Khurshid it is no surprise that the two strongly clashed over the issue of Muslim zones.430 While Khurshid saw the Muslim zones as the only option for Muslim existence in Delhi, Randhawa described the Muslim zones as “miniature Pakistan” in the midst of the city. Similarly, the superintendent of the Delhi CID, Rikhi Kesh, warned time and again—in 1948, 1950, and 1952—against the retention of Muslim pockets that functioned like “small fortresses.”431 Alongside the imperative of security and the fear of Muslim disloyalty, critics of the Muslim zones emphasized economic imperatives—namely, the need to use every available space for the rehabilitation of homeless Hindu and Sikh refugees. Throughout 1948 Randhawa warned that, if Muslim zones were not

430 See Zamindar’s discussion of correspondence on this topic between the two in: ibid., 98-91.
431 For Rikhi Kesh’s reports on the Muslim zones during 1948-1952, see: “Muslim Pockets in Delhi Volumes I&II,” Files 117, 118, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
opened up, refugees’ frustration would again explode.\(^{432}\) He called for the allotment of at least some houses in the Muslim zones for government employees and other “responsible elements” among the refugees. In December, Jamiat Ulema members complained against the administration’s policy of settling government employees in Muslim zones, indicating that Randhawa was not merely making suggestions but creating facts on the ground.

In short, the Muslim zones—the disputes surrounding them and the twists and turns in the government’s policy concerning them—encapsulated all the uncertainties and divisions characterizing this period of transition. It is worth pausing here for a moment and reflecting on the implications of these new spaces. This was a state policy that systematized Muslim ghettoization within the city, which had begun during the riots, yet it was advocated by those most committed to an inclusionary and pluralist vision of the Indian state. While describing Muslim zones as “miniature Pakistans,” Randhawa also noted, “…if we are building a secular state then why this compartmentalization and zoning of citizens.”\(^ {433}\) While Randhawa was apparently motivated by an anti-Muslim bias, or at least a pro-refugee one, his argument cannot be easily dismissed. The policy of Muslim zones was probably the only viable option if any Muslims were to remain in the city, but it indicated the immense predicament facing the Muslim minority in India after realization of the two-nation theory.

In any event, the Muslim zones were not easily implemented, and this policy turned out to be highly divisive. As Anis Kidwai, who expressed the more socialist and leftist stance of the Shanti Dal, put it in her account of post-partition Delhi, “…Muslim zones had no legal status and remained an operational principle expected to be implemented by local governments. As a result,

\(^{432}\) Randhawa reported that with the growing summer heat, refugees’ frustration over the Muslim houses “which have been kept vacant for more than seven months” was about to explode and he advised the Muslims to part with a few houses rather than antagonize the refugee population further: M.S. Randhawa to Sahibzada Khurshid, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of April 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

it was entirely up to local government officials to communicate the reality and necessity of the Muslim zone to its functionaries."\textsuperscript{434} This is a key statement to keep in mind as we look at the various forces that intruded on the Muslim zones.

**Encroachment on Muslim Zones: Expanding the Circle of Violence**

Exactly which localities formed the Muslim zones? There is no simple answer to this question, since different sources at different times listed different localities. This uncertainty and instability is not coincidental but rather intrinsic to the status of Muslim zones, as we shall soon see. Because of gradual encroachment, what was considered a Muslim zone in 1948 was not necessarily so a few years later. Yet, before we look into this history, it is safe enough to generalize and state that Muslim zones were various localities where the majority of the population was Muslim, ranging from a couple of hundred to several thousand people, and which were located in three main areas within the walled city—Faiz Bazar, Kotwali, and Hauz Qazi—and in the adjacent area of Sadar Bazar, just outside the walled city.

The violence that lingered on in Delhi long after the partition riots formally ended concentrated in the Muslim zones. The refugee crisis was such that, even after the mixed localities were “cleansed” of Muslims and occupied by 100,000 refugees, the pressure for housing did not ease.\textsuperscript{435} By early November, the population in these localities had increased by 50 percent, and refugees kept pouring into the city.\textsuperscript{436} By April there were over 500,000

\textsuperscript{434} Kidwai, *In Freedom's Shade*, 201.

\textsuperscript{435} For the estimate that 100,000 refugees occupied the houses in Subzimandi, Paharganj, and Karol Bagh, see: Delhi’s Chief Commissioner Office to R.N. Banerjee, “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of November 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch.

\textsuperscript{436} This was the estimate of the rationing authorities, with regard to Paharganj, Karol Bagh, and New Delhi, as quoted in “Fresh Influx of Refugees in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 6 November, 1947. Chief Commissioner Khurshid estimated that 500 refugees or more were entering Delhi every day. He pleaded with the Home Ministry to ban the further inflow of refugees into Delhi. As he clarified in his next report, at the end of November, since the U.P Government had forbidden any further entry of refugees into its province, the entire brunt of the Punjab’s population movement was being borne by Delhi: Sahibzada Khurshid to R.N. Banerjee, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of November 1947,” F. 1-47-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
refugees in the city. Under these conditions, the next waves of violence—in late 1947 and throughout 1948—expanded to target the Muslim zones. Attacks were launched on vacant houses in these neighborhoods, whose residents had left in September, as well as on inhabited houses, with the intention of driving more residents out. Pressures on the Muslim zones increased by the day, producing a domino effect: growing attacks drove more Muslims out of these localities into the refugee camps and to Pakistan. The empty houses they left behind drew more attacks, causing more residents to flee. As Nehru put it to Patel on November 21, 1947:

Cases have been reported to me where houses vacated by Muslims in a predominantly Muslim mohalla were occupied by non-Muslims, usually Sikhs. Immediately, petty trouble arose there between the newcomers and the old residents and this tended to grow. The Muslims in that mohalla were threatened by the newcomers and in view of the prevailing atmosphere these Muslims were frightened and many of them left their houses and went to Humayun’s Tomb [camp].

Refugees expanded the circle of violence and encroached on more and more parts of the city. During the winter of 1947, the violence was concentrated in various localities in Sadar Bazar. In October, houses and businesses in Bahadurgarh Road (Sadar Bazar) were attacked. In November, tensions centered on vacant Muslim houses in Pul Bangash (Sadar Bazar). As the stream of refugees continued throughout December, congestion in the city became unbearable, and another wave of violence erupted in the second half of the month. This time, the

437 Thus for example, the CID’s fortnightly report for the first half of December 1947 notes that “a mob of 800 non-Muslims went to a Muslim mohalla demanding the Muslim to vacate their houses.” “CID Report for the Second Half of December 1947,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
439 Special Magistrate B.D. Joshi’s Report on Sadar Bazar Area, F. 26-37-47-Police, MHA Political, NAI.
focal points of the trouble were empty houses in Sita Ram Bazar, Lal Kuan, and Bara Hindu Rao (Sadar Bazar)\textsuperscript{441} and in Qutab Road—the main road stretching north-to-south along Sadar Bazar and Paharganj. The violence spread to other parts of the city and to adjacent villages. Then, early January saw another outbreak of violence, this time targeting the Muslim locality of Qasabpura (Sadar Bazar)\textsuperscript{442} and vacant Muslim houses in Phatak Habash Khan (Kotwali).

It is no surprise that the population of Muslim refugees in the Humayun’s Tomb camp, which had dwindled to merely 4,000 by the end of October, swelled up again to 25,000 by mid-November.\textsuperscript{443} The CID fortnightly reports indicate that about 30,500 Muslims left Delhi for Pakistan via the camp during January and February.\textsuperscript{444} While this is not stated explicitly in the reports, it is quite clear that most of them left the Muslim zones, whether they were originally inhabitants of these areas or had settled there after having been uprooted from the mixed localities in earlier waves of violence.

We may recall that on October 28, the Delhi Custodian estimated that the evacuee property pool in urban Delhi included 8,000 houses and 2,000 business premises. Less than a month afterward, the estimate had increased to 32,000 premises. To date, there is no definite number for Muslim houses occupied in Delhi by non-Muslims after partition. The often-repeated figure in current scholarship is 44,000 houses in the old city alone. This number does not derive from official sources but is based on the later estimation of Subhadra Joshi, an important local Congress politician and member of the Shanti Dal to whom we shall return later in this

\textsuperscript{441} Copy of Intelligence Bureau Report on the Events of 9 December, in R.N. Banerjee to Sahibzada Khurshid, 12 December 1947, F. 8(1)/48-Home, Chief Commissioner Files, Home-Press, DSA.
\textsuperscript{442} Habibur Rehman to D.I.G. of Delhi Police, 14 January 1948, F.36-48-C, Chief Commissioner Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
\textsuperscript{443} “More Muslims Leave Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 14 November 1947; “25,000 Refugees in Humayun’s Tomb Camp,” Hindustan Times, 26 November 1947. See also Kidwai, In Freedom’s Shade, Chapter 4.
In any event, although there is no official estimate, it is quite evident that the number of premises occupied in Delhi eventually was much larger than the Custodian’s estimate of 10,000 in October 1947. A major shift in property ownership took place, and it extended far beyond the initial forcible occupations of the September violence.

These later occupations extended to, and encroached upon, the Muslim zones, as evident upon comparing two lists of Muslim pockets in the city produced by the Delhi CID. The first list, from October 1948, names five main areas in which the Muslim urban population was concentrated, as well as the smaller units, or “pockets,” of Muslim habitations in each of them: **Faiz Bazar** (with a population of 42,600 in 32 localities), **Sadar Bazar** (39,500 in 17 localities), **Hauz Qazi** (57,310 in 31 localities), **Kotwali** (5,250 in 6 localities), and **Kashmere Gate** (120 in two localities). Taken together, the Muslim urban population in October 1948 was estimated to be 92,480 (as against 304,971 in 1941). The second list, from 1952, does not include a population estimate, but does provide a breakdown of Muslim localities, showing a significant reduction in their number: **Faiz Bazar** (19 localities, as against 32 in the previous list), **Sadar Bazar** (six localities, as against 17), **Hauz Qazi** (seven localities, as against 31), and **Kotwali** (three as against six).

This spatial shrinking was the product of physical violence. But the dynamics involved in this process were multifaceted. The first and foremost factor was the state itself, and specifically the Evacuee Property legislation and its implementation by the Custodian Department. The next
section will concentrate on the Custodian and, while doing so, present new evidence to support Zamindar’s argument about the role played by bureaucratic violence in institutionalizing civic violence in Delhi in this period. Subsequent sections will add more nuance and layers to this broad picture by underscoring the political debates and local struggles accompanying the Custodian Department’s work, as well as the socioeconomic factors that played a role in this process.

The Custodian’s Encroachment on the Muslim Zones

A year after partition, “the Group for the Reform of the Custodian” (Jamaat-e Islah-e Custodian) was established by veteran local Congress leaders of Delhi—the Muslim Imdad Sabri and the Hindu Lal Shankar Lal. A year after partition, they claimed, it had become sadly evident that, rather than a source of relief and rehabilitation for the displaced, the Custodian was the enemy of the poor and weak, both Muslim and refugee. They called on the public to register their complaints at their office in the Jama Masjid locality, and published the complaints accumulated during a period of 15 days—from September 3 to 18—in a printed Urdu report. The report includes 35 complaints, mostly by Muslims. All of them depict the interaction with the Custodian Department as an ongoing harassment, the result of bureaucratic obtuseness, delay, and corruption.

What becomes clear is that the Custodian was busy confiscating properties and declaring them “evacuee property” even when the Muslim owners were still in Delhi. The Muslim complainants in this report can be divided into two main categories. First, those who used to own houses in localities that were attacked and occupied during the initial phases of the violence, in early September or a bit later—Paharganj, Karol Bagh, Kucha Chelan in Daryaganj, and Ajmeri

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449 A copy of the Urdu report prepared by the Jammat-e Islah-e Custodian is located in a CID file concerning refugees in Delhi: F. 26, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML.
Gate. During the riots, these people fled to Muslim-majority areas.\textsuperscript{450} Their houses were either occupied by refugees or taken possession of by the Custodian, and they could neither re-occupy them nor realize rent from them. Many of the complainants, in fact, once owned several houses or rooms, which they rented out for a steady income. In cases in which the house was seized forcibly by refugees, the latter did not acknowledge the Muslim landlord’s right to rent. And, even in cases where forcible occupation had not taken place, the Custodian notified the tenants—whether Hindus or Muslims—that the landlord had “left for Pakistan” and that rent should henceforth be paid to the Custodian. The Muslim owners of places like these depict a series of tireless petitions and applications through which they presented elaborate documentation, including ration cards, pension receipts, and income tax receipts, as well as Hindu witnesses to prove that they had never left Delhi and thus had the right at least to realize rent from their property. Their cases were postponed endlessly and remained undecided a year after the outbreak of riots. This first group of petitioners is the human face of the government decision to succumb to the fact that Muslims who escaped from the “mixed localities” could not return in any foreseeable future. In effect, the decision transferred their properties to the Custodian even though they were still in Delhi, albeit in a different neighborhood.\textsuperscript{451}

The second category of Muslim petitioners in this report is of residents of the Muslim zones that came within the circle of violence throughout 1948. A group of Muslims from Nawab Ganj (Sadar Bazar) complain, not about the Custodian seizing houses that had already been abandoned, but about the Custodian actually evicting Muslim inhabitants, both owners and tenants. Indeed, in early December 1947, the Custodian informed the public that the East Punjab

\textsuperscript{450} Such as Farash Khana, Lal Kuan Bazaar, and Matia Mahal (south of Jama Masjid)

\textsuperscript{451} A 1952 letter to Nehru by Subhadra Joshi, the local Congress leader, indicates that, by that time, it was self-evident that evacuated Muslim owners did not and could not realize rent from their properties. Joshi explains that “most of the Muslims in Delhi were tenants though some owned houses in the areas where they did not reside. Their houses were declared evacuee property or forcibly taken possession of by the refugees for which no rent was paid”: Jawaharlal Nehru to A.P. Jain, 23 September 1952, SWJN Vol. 19, 162.
Evacuee Property Ordinance (extended to Delhi) empowered the Custodian to take possession of immovable property. The parties concerned had only two days from the publication of an eviction notice to file their objections, together with the necessary documentation. Thus, the group of petitioners from Nawab Ganj includes nine people whose houses were declared evacuee property, sealed by the Custodian, and in some cases allotted to refugees. Some of these houses were sealed while the owners were away on a trip, while others were forcibly vacated.

Nawab Ganj, a Muslim-majority locality in Sadar Bazar, was included in the first CID list of Muslim pockets, produced in 1948. By 1952, however, it was omitted from the list, like many other localities. The complaints of the Muslims from Nawab Ganj provide a clue as to how this change came about—that is, how the physical pressure put on Muslim houses by refugees combined with the Custodian’s intervention in opening up this locality for refugees’ entry. One of the complainants, for example, claims that the house where he and his family once resided was forcibly taken from him in order to clear space for the local Custodian’s office. If a Custodian office was opened in the *mohalla*, we can infer that the Custodian was systematically confiscating houses in this “Muslim zone,” contrary to the prevalent perception that Muslim zones were “outside the jurisdiction of the Custodian.”

A similar picture emerges with regard to the locality of Pul Bangash, which was, like Nawab Ganj, a Muslim-majority neighborhood in Sadar Bazar. Pul Bangash was a contested area and a focal point of violence during the winter months of 1947. By synthesizing different

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453 The CID list estimates that Nawab Ganj was a Muslim pocket of 2,400 people.
454 On refugees trying to break into sealed houses in Nawab Ganj, see: SP of Police City Report on the Political Situation of Delhi, 14 August 1948, in F. 371, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.
455 For Zamindar’s understanding that the Muslim zones were outside the jurisdiction of the Custodian, see: Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, 132, 36.
456 See the Urdu poster that described the violence against Muslims with which I opened the previous chapter. It is located in R.N. Banerjee to Sahibzada Khurshid, 12 December 1947, F. 8(1)/48-Home, Chief Commissioner Files, Home-Press, DSA. See also, M.S. Randhawa to Sahibzada Khurshid, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of
sources, we can reconstruct how the impact of such physical violence was deepened and regularized by the Custodian. 457 Interestingly, the report has two complementary complaints concerning this mohalla. The first is by a refugee who describes his futile applications to the Custodian for getting a house allotted in Pul Bangash, where, he argues, the Custodian had started allotting vacant Muslims houses in mid-1948. 458 The other complaint is by a Muslim who once lived in a house in Pul Bangash while renting out several others. The Custodian officers wanted to settle in his house, and while he succumbed, he now begs that at least the upper floor be left for his family. His daughters, who live with their husbands and children in two of his other houses, have been asked to start paying rent to the Custodian, and so was a Muslim family uprooted from Karol Bagh, who is so poor that the owner lets them stay in one of his houses for free. His other two tenants have received notices of eviction, and one has already been evicted.

The report also includes a statement by Mr. Sultan Yarkhan, a lawyer appointed by the Muslim Relief Committee of Jamiat Ulema to provide legal representation to Delhi’s Muslim residents. His statement puts the complaints in context, as part of a wide trend: from December 2, 1947 until September 1948, more than 3,000 cases came before the courts of the Custodian. Of these cases, only six were decided in support of Muslim applicants, 566 were decided against Muslim applicants, and about 2500 cases remained pending—the result of endless delays by the Custodian.

To sum up, this report makes it clear that the Custodian was taking possession of houses owned by people still living in Delhi, and that this policy was not confined to houses in riot-affected areas that were out of bounds for Muslims after September, but rather included houses

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457 February 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA. For the ongoing pressures in Pul Bangash in June 1948, see: “More Arrests,” Hindustan Times, 15 June 1948

458 Indeed, in January 1948, two months after the disturbances in Pul Bangash, the Custodian released a press note that there were many vacant houses in Pul Bangash which the Ministry for Rehabilitation intended to arrange for occupancy: “15 Arrested in Khari Baoli,” Hindustan Times, 10 January 1948.
in Muslim-majority neighborhoods that were supposed to function as Muslim zones. Furthermore, the Custodian was not only allotting vacant houses in the Muslim zones to refugees, but also actively adding more houses to the pool by taking possession of houses where Muslims still lived.

Before we continue to examine the Custodian’s intervention in the Muslim zones, it is time to take a step back and look at the big picture—that is, the evacuee property legislation that guided the Custodian’s work, and the dispute between India and Pakistan over evacuee property with which this work was situated.

Evacuee Property Legislation

As stated earlier, the Custodians of Evacuee Property in both India and Pakistan turned, almost simultaneously with their establishment, into machineries that dispossessed members of the minority community who abandoned or were forced to abandon their houses. Moreover, as we have just seen, the Custodian—at least in Delhi—soon took possession of property of minority community members who never left at all. The eviction of people still living in their houses was made possible both by draconian legislation and by the way it was implemented by the Custodian’s officials, who had a wide scope of discretionary powers.

The evacuee property legislation, first introduced in Pakistan and India in September 1947, underwent changes throughout the years that put more and more restrictions on the original owners’ ability to reoccupy, rent out, sell, or exchange their properties. The legislation had a retaliatory character—every restriction enacted by Pakistan was introduced into the Indian legislation, and vice versa. Such retaliatory legislation reflected the unresolved negotiations

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459 The first to violate the agreed-upon principle of protection and restoration of evacuee property was Pakistan, which, as mentioned above, issued on the same day (September 9) a second ordinance authorizing the Custodian to use evacuee property to rehabilitate refugees. This was followed by the ordinance of December 1, which made the transfer of property by an evacuee owner depend on so many complicated legal provisions that it “in effect virtually
between India and Pakistan over the question of abandoned evacuee property. India claimed that the aggregate property left behind by non-Muslims in Pakistan was much larger than the property left by Muslims in India, estimating the value as 38.1 billion rupees and 3.8 billion rupees, respectively. Accordingly, India argued that compensation should be settled at the inter-governmental level and should involve Pakistan paying the difference to India.\textsuperscript{460} Pakistan, on its part, never acknowledged this gap, but did not provide an alternative estimate. It insisted that, since the property on both sides was more or less equal in value, compensation should be arranged privately by individuals selling or exchanging their properties.\textsuperscript{461} It also argued that the question of value of evacuee property could not be finalized without also sorting out the dispute over water.

Prolonged negotiations led to a dead end. Even when the two dominions reached agreements, as in the case of the Karachi agreement of January 1949, they soon violated them by enacting contradictory legislation, leading to further allegations and counter-allegations. Against the background of these protracted, failed negotiations, complicated evacuee property legislation developed, which, in the broadest sense, was geared to maximize the pool of evacuee property nullified his right to dispose of it." Even if the evacuee owner could satisfy all the restrictive conditions, the Custodian was authorized to refuse the transaction. Another ordinance made the restoration of property to Hindu or Sikh evacuees contingent upon their return, which was in fact impossible in the context of mass killings. In effect, evacuee owners were prevented from recovering, selling, or exchanging their property. The East Punjab (India) government issued an ordinance on January 12, 1948, amending the Act of September 14, to bring it in line with the Pakistani legislation. See: Schechtman, "Evacuee Property in India and Pakistan," 408. Das Gupta, \textit{Indo-Pakistan Relations, 1947-1955}, 191-3.\textsuperscript{460} Schechtman, "Evacuee Property in India and Pakistan," 407. For a detailed comparison (calculated by the Indian government), see Das Gupta, \textit{Indo-Pakistan Relations, 1947-1955}, 6-7. The difference in value as mentioned in Nehru’s letters to Mohammad Ali, Pakistan’s Prime Minister, was actually smaller than the estimate cited by Schechtman and Das Gupta. Nehru claimed that the property left by Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan was 5 times more valuable than what was left in India.\textsuperscript{461} The debate over government-level compensation vs. private transactions continued to be at the centre of the dispute, as seen in correspondences between PM Nehru and Pakistan’s Prime Minister Mohammad Ali in 1954. See: Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammad Ali, 8 October 1953, SWJN Vol. 24, 455; Jawaharlal Nehru to Ministry of States, 18 October 1953, SWJN Vol. 24, 457-9; Jawaharlal Nehru to A.P. Jain, 27 November 1953, SWJN Vol. 24, 459-61; Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammad Ali, 27 November 1953, SWJN Vol. 24, 461-3; Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammed Ali, 6 March 1954, SWJN Vol. 25, 346-352; Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammad Ali, 7 May 1954, SWJN Vol. 25, 353-5.
that the Custodian could claim and that the nation-state could utilize to rehabilitate its refugees. My aim in the following discussion is not to trace the various amendments in the legislation, but rather its main effect—great confusion and internal contradiction, which were further exacerbated by the vast and discretionary powers in the hands of the Custodian Department. As a result, ordinary people’s interface with the Custodian was truly Kafkaesque.

In the evacuee property laws, the definition of an evacuee was broad and open-ended, both spatially and temporally. When India amended its ordinance in mid-January 1948, it not only added various restrictions on the sale and exchange of evacuee property, it also extended the definition of evacuee “to include not only those who on account of civil disturbances or the fear of such disturbances or the partition of the country, have left India since March 1, 1947, but also those who cannot personally occupy or supervise their property or business.” This, in effect, enabled the Custodian to take possession of Muslims’ property as “evacuee property” even when they had moved only to another neighborhood in Delhi.

This spatially expansive definition of an evacuee was made even broader by the temporally encompassing idea that every Muslim was an evacuee in potentia. For example, in correspondence between Delhi’s Chief Commissioner and the Registrar of Property Transactions during March and April 1948, the Chief Commissioner informed the latter of restrictions that applied to transactions in which “one of the parties was an evacuee, or is likely to become an

462 Having read carefully the existing accounts of the legislation by Schechtman and Das Gupta and compared them with the evidence I found in the Delhi Archives, I have reached the conclusion that the many amendments make a coherent account of the legislation’s history almost impossible, and that such an account, in any case, would not accurately reflect policy on the ground. There were discrepancies between official policy and its implementation, which was sometimes conducted via confidential and non-transparent instructions.


464 See also Zamindar’s discussion of this point. She claims that in 1950 the definition of an “evacuee” was clarified to mean only persons who migrated to Pakistan: Zamindar, The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 127.
The Registrar replied with the million-dollar question: “who is to decide whether a person is a prospective evacuee or not? In a case yesterday Mr. Halim Jung wanted to file an affidavit to the effect that he intended to stay in India. Is such a declaration enough to dispense with the prior sanction of the Custodian?” This correspondence shows that the concept of a potential evacuee was in operation from the very beginning, at least in the way in which the law was interpreted by bureaucrats. The concept was later formalized through the introduction of the category of “intending evacuee” into the new Evacuee Property Ordinance of October 1949. The concept of “intending evacuee” brought into the pool of evacuees not only those who had actually left but also those who might leave in the future, turning, as Zamindar notes, all of Delhi’s Muslims into evacuees in potentia. Moreover, if the Custodian declared a Muslim an “intending evacuee,” the burden to prove otherwise lay on the person himself. The Custodian’s decision could not be challenged in civil courts, but only in the Custodian’s courts.

Against the background of the unresolved dispute between India and Pakistan over compensation for evacuee property, the evacuee property legislation worked to prevent individuals from disposing of their property and thus narrowing the pool of evacuee property available for compensation of refugees. In mid-January 1948, India introduced restrictions on sales and exchanges in order to bring the legislation in line with restrictions placed in Pakistan.

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465 J.P. Ray (Home Secretary to the CC, Delhi) to the Sub-Registrar Delhi, 20 March 1948, F.41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
466 Sham Narain Pandit (Sub-Registrar) to J.P. Rai (Home Secretary to the CC, Delhi), 1 April 1948, F.41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
467 A new central ordinance number 27 of 1949 (Administration of Evacuee Property Ordinance 1949) was promulgated on October 18, 1949. A secret note was sent by the Ministry of Rehabilitation to explain the logic underlying the new ordinance: “Notes on the New Evacuee Property Ordinance,” No. 14(57)Cus/49, 18 October, 1949, in F. 126-49-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
468 An incidental yet important piece of information is that the Indian and Pakistani legislation was copied by the Israeli Government, as recently shown by legal scholar Sandy Kedar. In the Israeli case there is a similar category to the “intending evacuee” named “present absentee” targeting Arab citizens of Israel. See: Alexandre Kedar, "Expanding Legal Geographies: A Call for a Critical Comparative Approach," in The Expanding Spaces of Law: A Timely Legal Geography ed. Irus Braverman, et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
This meant that the evacuees, including Delhi’s citizens who were considered “intending evacuees,” had no control over their properties and could neither collect rent nor sell them. The Indo-Pakistani Karachi Agreement of January 1949 temporarily relaxed such restrictions on private transactions, but the agreement was soon violated, and the two dominions formally banned sales and exchanges again by July 1949.470

The many shifts and amendments in the legislation and its attendant policies created great confusion. As stated, restrictions on sales and exchanges of property were placed, lifted, and placed again, leaving the people involved bewildered and unsettled. In March 1948, the Ministry of Rehabilitation wrote to Delhi’s Chief Commissioner that, under the existing law, all transactions in which one of the parties was an evacuee or likely to become an evacuee must be approved by the Custodian, yet many transactions of this kind were taking place in Delhi without the Custodian’s prior consent. Was the Registrar in Delhi aware of this? The ministry urged the Chief Commissioner to instruct the Registrar to obtain the Custodian’s prior consent before registering such transactions and, in fact, to have past transactions reviewed and approved retrospectively by the Custodian.471 The Chief Commissioner ordered the Registrar accordingly, but a few weeks later the Registrar complained that, while he had stopped registering transactions without the Custodian’s prior consent, the Custodian was unwilling to give his consent to “premature” transactions and insisted that transactions first be registered and only then submitted for his approval.472 What, then, should he do? The Registrar attached pending applications showing that both Muslims and the refugees who paid them were caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22.

472 Sham Narain Pandit (Sub-Registrar) to J.P. Rai (Home Secretary to the CC, Delhi), 1 April 1948, F.41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
In July the Registrar wrote again asking for clarification. He had a case pending before him where a Muslim evacuee and a Hindu refugee from Rawalpindi wished to exchange their kothis (houses). Was the Custodian’s prior consent required in this case? His question led to a protracted correspondence between the Chief Commissioner and the Rehabilitation Ministry. Four months later, the Rehabilitation Ministry confirmed that such exchanges of property were now allowed without the Custodian’s approval, and that in fact the Registrar should proceed without delay to register several urgent cases that were pending and about to expire. But another month later the policy was again reversed, and the Ministry of Rehabilitation instructed that transactions should not be registered without the Custodian’s confirmation and that buyers should be advised not to pay until the transactions were approved. Soon afterward, in January 1949, the Karachi agreement between India and Pakistan led to temporary relaxation of restrictions on private transactions, but the agreement was violated rather quickly, and the procedure again changed in May 1949, re-introducing the Custodian’s prior consent as a pre-condition for registering transactions. By this time, there was so much confusion that the Custodian complained in December 1949 that the Registrar continued to register transactions without prior consent from the Custodian, contrary to instructions. And then, sometime in

473 S.L. Ahuja (Registrar, Delhi) to Home Secretary to the CC, 20 July 1948, F. 41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
474 Joint Secretary (Ministry of R&R) to CC of Delhi, No. 8(2)Cus/48, 26 November 1948, in F. 41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
475 H.L. Soni, (U.S., Ministry of R&R) to CC of Delhi, No. 8(2)Cus/48, 28 December 1948, in F. 41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
477 The Ministry of R&R instructed the governments to prevent any registration of transaction without prior consent from the Custodian, and in the following paragraph, the Custodians were instructed not to approve any sales of property, just exchanges. “This step is necessary as the Pakistan Government, in spite of the agreement, have not permitted any sales or exchanges to take place in Karachi for the last four months.” V.D. Dantyagi (Joint Secretary, Ministry of R&R) to Chief Secretaries of All Provincial Governments, No. 14(33)Cus/49, 17 May 1949, in F. 126-49-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
478 D.R. Kohli (Ministry of R&R) to Govind H. Seth (Rehabilitation Secretary to CC of Delhi), D.O. No. 8(2)Cus/49, in F. 126-49-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
1950, confidential instructions were sent by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, banning the sale or exchange of evacuee properties altogether.\textsuperscript{479}

One can only imagine the utter distress that the constant shifts in policy, as well as the discrepancies between declared and undeclared policy, caused ordinary people. This affected Muslims who wanted to dispose of their property—whether they wanted to leave Delhi or not—and refugees who had the means to buy property, but whose purchases were often disapproved retrospectively by the Custodian, long after their money had been transferred. The latter turned to the courts to challenge the confiscation of property they had bought, claiming it was no longer evacuee property. But what complicated matters further was that the judicial authority in these cases was itself unclear, or at least disputed by outside authorities. The Custodian and civil courts disagreed over their respective fields of operation and over when, exactly, the civil courts were authorized to intervene in the Custodian’s decisions.\textsuperscript{480} This chaotic field of legislation and directives left a wide scope for interpretation and discretion to the Custodians, whose powers were vast to begin with—a point whose implications will be discussed at length further below.

**Citizenship in the Making: the Connection between Evacuee Property and the Permit System**

Taken together, the main pillars of the evacuee property legislation and its implementation—the expansive and vague definition of an “evacuee,” the severe restrictions on

\textsuperscript{479} Secretary (R&R) to CC of Delhi to Custodian-General of Evacuee Property, 15 July 1950, in F. 126-49-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

\textsuperscript{480} In April 1948, the Custodian complained to the Chief Commissioner that there was constant interference from the Delhi courts in the work of the Custodians, and that injunctions were frequently issued even in cases where the courts had no jurisdiction. He asked that the courts be informed that, according to the East Punjab Evacuee Property Act, no order made by the Custodian could be called into question by the courts “except as provided by the Act.” See, V.D. Dantyagi (Ministry of R&R) to Sahibzada Khurshid Ahmed D.O. No. 484-JS/48, 14 April 1948, in F. 41-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA. My emphasis. The Custodian did not elaborate what field of action was legally open to the courts’ intervention, and it was precisely this question that was under dispute. Indeed, there were cases in which refugees who had bought property or tenancy rights from Muslims took the Custodian to court for declaring the properties to be evacuee properties, and won the case.
sales, exchanges, or mortgages of this property, and the discretionary power of the Custodian—
meant that every member of the minority community was considered an evacuee in potentia and
that the Custodian took effective control of many properties of Muslims in Delhi. As Zamindar
aptly shows in her book, the question of citizenship was bound up with that of property, and the
uncertainty of the former was tied to the confiscation of the latter. It is to this underlying
principle that I now turn, relying on Zamindar’s book and on further evidence that strengthens
her argument.

The religious categories of Hindus and Muslims did not correlate neatly with the new
national definitions of Indians and Pakistanis, and there was a large group of Muslims who were
still undecided on the question of where they belonged. Some who never meant to leave were
forced to flee the violence and waited for the first opportunity to return. Others sent their wives
and children to Pakistan while they stayed behind to look after their property, and still others left
for Pakistan to explore the options there, leaving their families in India. Partition thus left many
Muslim families split between the two dominions, whose citizens kept moving across the border,
pressured by the violence in Delhi on the one hand and by the difficulties of absorption in
Pakistan on the other. When Muslims migrated to Pakistan, they realized that, contrary to the
utopian perception of Pakistan as the promised land of the subcontinent’s Muslims, it was in fact
a bounded territory with very limited resources and an extreme shortage of housing.481

Indeed, as discussed in the introduction, during the prelude to partition, the Pakistan idea
was twofold, both utopian and territorial, and the utopian meaning of Pakistan as an ideal Islamic
social order took over the more mundane meaning of a nation-state with a bounded territory. The

481 Sarah F. D. Ansari, "Partition, Migration and Refugees: Responses to the Arrival of Muhajirs in Sind Suring
Community and Strife in Sindh, 1947-1962, "Everyday Expectations of the State During Pakistan's Early Years:
"Competition for Resources: Partition's Evacuee Property and the Sustenance of Corruption in Pakistan," ibid.46,
territorial conception of Pakistan remained intentionally vague until the very last minute, and it was only with the violent expulsions and ethnic cleansing of 1947 that the practical implications of Pakistan began to unfold. Zamindar persuasively shows that this territorial ambiguity continued in the first years after partition, as Muslims crossed the borders back and forth. It took both ordinary people and the bureaucratic and political systems to adjust to the transition from a large colony allowing free movement to two nation-states with international borders between them. Not only did the Partition Council fail to anticipate the large exodus that took place, but it also expected that the borders between the two states would allow free movement, just like in the colonial period. In fact, the eastern border in Bengal remained open for a long time, and the western border remained porous for almost a year.

Zamindar, who traces the gradual fixing of borders and citizenship through the permit and passport systems, shows their intimate connection with the contemporaneous evacuee property legislation. The permit system was initiated by India, following growing concerns over the return of Muslims from Pakistan starting in March 1948. Gandhi’s assassination on January 30, 1948 significantly, if temporarily, weakened the RSS and the Hindu right, and thus made the atmosphere in Delhi more peaceful. Muslims who had left for Pakistan received letters from relatives and friends that they could now return, and they did, in their thousands. Many had found neither housing nor employment in Karachi and seized on the first opportunity to return home. The return of thousands to a city already foundering under the burden of homeless refugees was not well received. The returning Muslims either reoccupied their old houses in the Muslim zones or occupied other vacant houses in these areas, causing great frustration and anger among the refugees. The refugee papers published panicky reports on the arrival of Pakistani

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482 The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 5.
483 Zamindar found CID statistics on the number of Muslims who returned to Delhi between March-August 1948: 16,350. Since about 4,450 left, the increase in the Muslim population in the city amounted to only 11,900, which was much lower than popular estimates in the newspapers: ibid., 86-8.
spies, violent incidents were again on the rise, and rumors spread in June 1948 that another serious wave of communal riots was imminent. The administration and police were also alarmed and reported on the infiltration of Pakistani spies and other “undesirable elements,” sent from Pakistan to create trouble in Delhi. From April 1948 onwards, the CID began to send regular reports on arrests of Muslims in Delhi under the Punjab Public Safety Act for reasons as vague as loitering suspiciously, “cutting pranks with Hindu girls,” impersonating Hindus, or engaging in subversive activities.

Then came the major step to halt the return of Muslims—the introduction of the permit system in July 1948. Muslims now had to apply to the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan for a permit to enter India. There were two main types of permits—one for a temporary visit and the other for permanent return. Since the second type was hardly attainable, Muslims who wanted to return to India tried to circumvent the new system by applying for a temporary permit, which they destroyed upon arriving in Delhi. The police and CID searched for such people, and many were arrested or detained for overstaying their permits or circumventing the system in other ways. Many such cases reached the civil courts, which had to decide whether the defendant had left permanently for Pakistan, had gone for just a short family visit, as some claimed, or had never left at all. Since the borders had been somewhat porous for a time, this was difficult to determine.

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484 For a collection of vernacular newspaper cuttings from July 1948, all reporting on the infiltration and arrests of Pakistani spies: F. 8 (59A) 1948, Chief Commissioner Files, Home-Press, DSA. See also fortnightly report on the Delhi Press and its coverage of the return of Muslims: “Fortnightly Report on the Tone of the Press for the Second Half of April 1948,” in F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

485 See correspondences in: F. 56/48-C, Chief Commissioner Files, Confidential Branch, DSA. For arrests of Muslims suspected of arriving “with the intention of creating communal trouble,” see also CID reports in: F. 371, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML. These regular reports were discontinued in mid-November 1948.

486 See the CID and SP of Police City reports on the developing trend among Muslims of arriving on a temporary permit and overstaying its term: SP of Police City Report on the Political Situation of Delhi, 14 August 1948; Ram Lal, S.P. of Police CID, “Result of Secret Enquiries,” 20 September 1948, No. DS-8556/57. Both reports are located in F. 371, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.
More difficult still, the question of belonging and allegiance stood at the heart of such court cases. One of the most important points made by Zamindar is that, at a time before the enactment of the citizenship laws, the Permit bureaucracy made *de facto* determinations of who was and who was not a citizen. And, to draw on Niraja Gopal Jayal’s analysis of the two competing principles of citizenship in India’s history, the permit system advanced the idea of Jus Sanguinis (blood-based descent) at the expense of the concept of Jus Soli (birth). The Muslim component of people’s identities came to override their birth and long-term residence in Delhi.

Significantly, the permit system and, following it, the passport system were intimately coordinated and bound up with the evacuee property legislation that also began to fix citizenship through its categories of “evacuee” and “intending evacuee” (implicitly Pakistanis). Now every trip to Pakistan, even for a short family visit or under the pressure of violence, could render a person an “evacuee” and result in the confiscation of his property. Zamindar argues that the permit system became so enmeshed with evacuee property that applications for permits included long questionnaires about one’s property in India and Pakistan. Interestingly, I find that the connection between the two was explicitly acknowledged in official correspondence. Upon the promulgation of the new 1949 Evacuee Property Ordinance, the Ministry of Rehabilitation sent a confidential note explaining the new ordinance to the various states. It includes the following:

The permit system is intimately connected with the working of the evacuee property ordinance, because the real intention of permit system was to stop the one-way traffic of Muslims, who after seizing all the property in Pakistan, were wanting to come back to India to regain their hold on their property here. There should, therefore, be close liaison between the authority granting permits, or ‘no objection’ certificates, and the Custodian. Copies of all permits issued are invariably endorsed by the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner to the District superintendent of Police. [...] Persons going to Pakistan temporarily, who wish to return to India are granted ‘no objection to return’ certificate by the district Magistrate in India. The usual period allowed for the currency of a ‘no objection certificate’ is about two months. Careful watch has, therefore, to be kept in to see that persons who go on no objection to return certificate return during the period

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487 Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History.*
of the currency of the certificate. If they do, their cases have to be investigated to see whether they fall under the category of evacuees.\footnote{488}

Thus, the permit system was a seminal part of a whole network of surveillance over Muslims, geared to trace intending evacuees and seize their properties. The evacuee property legislation granted the Custodian special powers to obtain information from the income-tax authorities and from the banks on Muslims’ financial activities, to review all transactions registered by the Registrar, and to cancel those that appeared to have involved evacuee property.\footnote{489}

A hub of surveillance over Muslims was the Delhi CID, which received inquiries about Muslim organizations and individuals from various bodies, including the Custodian Department. In one case from January 1952, the Custodian Department asked the CID to make confidential investigations about a Muslim woman who had appeared in the Custodian’s court and testified that she had never left Delhi. The Assistant Custodian wrote that he had “strong reasons to believe that the lady who gave the statement was not in reality… [the woman whose property was at stake].” The CID’s reply is telling. It admitted frankly that it had no way to verify who had given the statement in court and whether the property owner had left for Pakistan or not, since there were many people who crossed through the eastern border, where there was no permit system or any control. This is an important reminder that the CID was not an all-knowing body, and that the aspiration for complete knowledge of society was more often than not a fantasy. But it was exactly this aspiration for total surveillance—and its constant failure—that perpetuated the CID’s and Custodian’s suspicions. The semi-porous condition of the borders, together with the vague definition of an evacuee, fed the uncertainty about Muslim belonging, which in turn

\footnote{489}{ibid, 9.}
propelled the CID’s anxiety and efforts to draw clear lines between Indians and Pakistanis, non-evacuees and evacuees—in accordance with the emerging taxonomy of the new nation-state.

Surveillance over Muslims combined the imperatives of security and property. The two imperatives underlay the permit system, which was geared to prevent the infiltration of Pakistani spies, as well as of Muslims who wished to come and dispose of their property or reoccupy it. They were also prominent in the evidence of the informants utilized by the Custodian and the CID to trace intending evacuees and Muslims engaged in subversive activities. It is remarkable that almost every complaint concerning evacuee property frames the accusation in a political-ideological context, describing the Muslim involved as either a “Muslim Leagui”—that is, a bad Muslims whose real allegiance is with Pakistan—or “a nationalist Muslim”—that is, a good Muslim who is loyal to India. While the former are “intending evacuees” in disguise, the latter belong in Delhi and have a right to their property.

The following is an interesting case, illustrative of how evacuee property got mixed up with business disputes and motivated the network of surveillance over Muslims. It is a letter of inquiry that the Custodian-General of India, Achhru Ram, sent to the Custodian of Delhi, Uma Shankar Dixit, and to Delhi’s Chief Commissioner. Achhru Ram was paid a visit by a Punjabi businessman who alleged that one Naiz Ahmed of Ajmeri Gate and his associates were conducting extensive business in Lahore with family members who had moved to Pakistan. The informant claimed that most of the family was in Pakistan, and yet Naiz Ahmed was drawing rations on behalf of the whole family, thus implying not only that he was an intending evacuee, but also that he was unduly taking advantage of India’s limited resources. The complaint was

490 On the utilization of informants, even if self-interested ones, see Zamindar, The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 146. See also cases cited in the following discussion.
491 On the charge of Muslim Leagui leanings in cases of evacuee property, see also ibid., 146-7.
492 Note from Achhru Ram (Custodian-General of Evacuee Property), 5 October 1949, in F. 37/49-C Vol. II, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
detailed and included ration card numbers and various documents to show that the Muslims involved had property in Lahore. Achhru Ram, a retired Punjab High Court judge, examined the complaint critically and noticed some weaknesses in the evidence, but he considered it a serious enough matter to be sent to the CID and the Custodian of Delhi for further inquiry. The CID’s investigation found that the allegation was fabricated and resulted from a business dispute between the Punjabi and the Muslim traders, who had collaborated in an export-import business between Delhi and Lahore until they fell out with each other.

This case shows, first, the elaborate network of surveillance over Muslims, which developed around the evacuee property, and which included the Custodian, the permit system, the Ration Department, and the CID. Second, it demonstrates how ordinary people took advantage of this network and atmosphere of suspicion to retaliate at former business partners and to settle rather mundane disputes. Finally, the CID strengthened its findings with the assertion that “Visit of Naiz Ahmed’s family to Pakistan could not be verified. Naiz Ahmed himself is said to be a nationalist Muslim and member of Jamiat-ul-Ulema. He does not own any property in Delhi and has never been to Pakistan.” This comment about his nationalist Muslim identity illustrates how questions of evacuee property got entangled with questions of political leanings and loyalty.

Furthermore, I find that this sweeping suspicion was internalized by Muslims themselves and permeated life in Muslim zones. In some cases, it was Muslims who informed on other Muslims in order to settle scores. One Mohd Yusuf from Churiwalan—a Muslim zone in Faiz Bazar—wrote to Delhi’s Deputy Commissioner in 1952 against one Haji Imamuddin, arguing

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493 He noticed, for example, that a letter allegedly written by Naiz Ahmed and supposedly proving his business connections in Lahore was written in a rudimentary Urdu that did not suit a maulana.
494 I assume that the writer meant to write Pakistan or Lahore, rather than Delhi, because Naiz Ahmed seems to have been a well-to-do businessman who probably owned a residence.
495 My emphasis
that the latter had a printing press in Chawri Bazar, but—because he printed insidious propaganda that he wished to hide from the authorities—had shifted his press from the open bazaar to a back alley, into an evacuee house that he had illegally broken into.\footnote{Letter from Mohd. Yusuf, Gali Akhrewali Churiwalan, Delhi to Deputy Commissioner, Delhi, 16 March 1952, in F. 277, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.} The Deputy Commissioner forwarded the complaint to the CID, which found that Haji Imamuddin occupied the place legally, and that he had duly paid rent to the landlord and, since the latter’s departure for Pakistan in 1949, to the Custodian. Another piece of information indicates that there was a business dispute between the informant and the accused regarding the purchase of a printing machine. As in the previous case, here, as well, the CID found that the allegation concerning evacuee property was false, yet, in this case we can see that the complaint clearly harmed the accused, drawing attention to his printing press and to the fact that he had not reported the relocation of his business and the purchase of a second machine, as required. Moreover, loose surveillance over him continued, as indicated by further CID correspondence from 1959 and 1965.

Shahid Ahmed Dehlvi, who visited Delhi in April 1948, eight months after his departure for Pakistan, provides a fascinating and disturbing portrait of his old mohalla in the post-partition days. The area south of Jama Masjid became a Muslim zone, packed with all those who were uprooted from other neighborhoods. The Muslim traders and shopkeepers from Chandni Chowk all moved to this area. It became so congested that one could not cross the street. Moreover, the old social fabric of the neighborhood was torn asunder with this demographic transformation. Dehlvi writes:

\begin{quote}
I saw a few familiar faces. Haji Halwai asked me: “Maulana, did you go somewhere? I haven't seen you for many days!” I replied: “Yes, I went on Haj.” He looked at me with astonishment—who goes on Haj in such times? I said: “I am a Haji of Karachi.” I've heard that half a Haj is gained by going to Karachi. I went twice, and so completed a full Haj.” There were very few familiar faces in my mohalla. Those I saw seemed scared,
\end{quote}
speaking in hushed tones while constantly looking to both sides. They did not trust each other. Every person could be a *jasoos* [spy, agent]. There were several people who were trained by the police, who would make false or true complaints against their brothers and have them arrested. This is how they earned their money, by making threats [against other people that they would have them arrested]. Some people warned me of such people, that I should be careful. I replied: “What would caution do in this case? I came from Pakistan [and everyone knows that]. If a *jasoos* wants to get me arrested, what can I do about it? Who would listen to me?” Thank God, I was not arrested, but there was one *maulana* who came back to Delhi a few days before me. His house was searched and he faced many troubles.\(^{497}\)

The prevailing suspicion, which arose from the indeterminacy of Muslims’ allegiance and property, was reflected in the Custodian’s *modus operandi*, which was based on the assumption that all Muslims were evacuees until proven otherwise (and the burden of proof lay on them), as well as in the layers of surveillance and the widespread arrests of Muslims. These, as Dehlvi’s account shows, reinforced suspicion among Muslims.

**Muslim Tenants in Muslim Zones**

While I have hitherto focused on propertied Muslims and how they were *de facto* dispossessed of their property rights, there was a second category of Muslims who found themselves deeply implicated in the evacuee property legislation and bureaucracy. These were Muslim *tenants* in the houses that came under the jurisdiction of the Custodian as “evacuee property.” They were either longstanding tenants from the days before partition living in houses whose Muslim owners were now declared evacuees, or Muslims who fled other parts of the city and were rehabilitated in vacant houses in Muslim zones. This, as Subhadra Joshi noted in a letter to Nehru, was in fact a significant group and comprised the bulk of Muslims now living in Delhi.\(^{498}\) They were apparently affected less by the legislation itself than by the capricious way in which the Custodian officials operated. We have already seen a couple of cases in the

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\(^{497}\) Dihlavi, "Maan: Dilli Aath Mahine Baad,” 69.

\(^{498}\) See footnote No. 48.
previously cited Urdu report, of Muslim tenants evicted by the Custodian. The most important allegation, mentioned time and again by such tenants, at least up to 1956, was the arbitrary and corrupt way in which the Custodians collected rents, and how it resulted in the eviction of Muslims tenants. Since evictions were another means by which houses in Muslim zones got cleared, this point brings us back to the spatial process we are tracing in this chapter—the encroachment on, and shrinking of, the Muslim zones.

A letter to the editor published in Urdu daily *Al Jamiat* (the organ of Jamiat Ulema-e Hindi) in July 1949 reveals how the Custodian Department’s dealings with Muslim tenants affected Pul Bangash.499 Pul Bangash, as we have seen, was a Muslim locality whose many residents left during the turmoil of September-October, leaving behind vacant houses that drew refugee attacks from November 1947 onward. The Custodian allotted houses to refugees from 1948 onward, and indeed a refugee camp was established in this area.500 At the same time, some parts of Pul Bangash functioned as a Muslim zone, and many Muslims who fled Delhi or other localities in Delhi settled in vacant houses there. The letter throws light on the tensions between Muslims and refugees in an area where both groups competed for houses and depended on the same source for getting them—the Custodian. The refugee widows in the locality were much better equipped to deal with the bureaucracy of the Custodian than the Muslim widows who had escaped from the riot-affected areas in September and who observed, it was implied, purdah restrictions.

More to the point, the letter details the rigid and somewhat autocratic way in which the Custodian officials dealt with Muslim tenants. The Custodian Department announced that it would conduct a survey in the locality, based on which existing tenants would be confirmed and

rent would be collected. Many of the Muslims, who feared they would not be confirmed, declared that they had been tenants in the houses for a long time, and the Custodian, contrary to its initial announcement, demanded rent covering all those prior months. Other tenants sublet from a tenant who in the meantime had left, and were not registered by the Custodian – what should they do, the letter asks? Still others were threatened by the Custodian to stop paying the landlord and start paying the Custodian, lest they face eviction. Many other tenants were not confirmed and were not asked for rent, and had no clue as to how much money would be demanded, when, and in how many installments. In one announcement, the Custodian declared that all back rent would be collected in one installment – how could poor tenants pay such lump sums? Moreover, the revenue records in this area had apparently been burned, and the Custodian was making fresh and exaggerated valuations of rent.

Complaints were heard time and again about the Custodian collecting disproportionately high rents, demanding rent in lump sums, collecting rent twice from the same tenant, and demanding rent for months during which the tenant had already paid rent to the original owner. Failure to pay could cause eviction—and, again, such evictions cleared space in Muslim zones and paved the way for more refugees to enter.

Clearly, the evacuee property legislation and the Custodian’s discretionary power to enforce it subjected many ordinary people to a quotidian experience of oppression. What I now demonstrate is that these also had structural implications that went beyond the bureaucratic harassment and dispossession of individuals. Namely, the specific ways in which encroachment on Muslim zones took place—which locality was saved, which locality was not, whose house got

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501 This complaint was also voiced by refugee tenants of the Custodian.
502 On the Custodian’s habit of avoiding collection for a long time and then showing up and demanding lump sums of money, see also Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, 142. Zamindar who relies on an article from *Al Jamiat* from August 1952 warning readers to pay duly in order to avoid evictions.
allotted, who was evicted, and who among the refugees was rehabilitated—was determined by an array of local factors, including connections, bribery, the police, pressures by local people, and the intervention of the DPCC, Special Police Officers, and the Shanti Dal. It is to this array of local factors that I now turn.

The Story of Phatak Habash Khan

As my point of entry into this complex dynamic, I will start with a case study of one mohalla in Delhi, Phatak Habash Khan. Specifically, I will utilize various sources to trace the process whereby this locality, which had been included in the CID list of Muslim pockets in October 1948, disappeared from the list by 1952. Phatak Habash Khan was a predominantly Muslim locality in old Delhi, within the jurisdiction of Police Station Kotwali. It is located at the far end of Chandni Chowk, off Khari Baoli and adjacent to the famous Fatehpuri Mosque. It was an affluent neighborhood of the Muslim Punjabi community, whose members owned shops and business firms in Chandni Chowk and Sadar Bazar. According to Abdul Rahman Siddiqui’s recollection of the partition riots, Phatak Habash Khan was attacked in the third week of September 1947, during curfew hours. The residents fled to Ballimaran, “the only relative oasis of peace in the disturbed city. […] It had been shocking to see them pouring into the haveli, old men with beards unattended, young men with faces unshaven, women even without their dupatta not to speak of the burqa. They were young girls, married and unmarried wailing and weeping, trying to cover their shame, with hardly anything to cover with.”

The next time Phatak Habash Khan resurfaces in the records is three and a half months later, in early January 1948, when the locality was at the heart of violent struggles over empty houses. Phatak Habash Khan and the adjoining locality of Khari Baoli were now barricaded,

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503 Siddiqi, Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi, 294.
504 ibid., 294-5.
turning into sites of ongoing struggles between the police, which guarded vacant houses, and groups of refugees, who tried to break in. The refugees’ tactic was to send their women first to try to occupy the houses and, when the women were stopped by the police, to gather a large crowd of about 1,000 people, pushing and shouting slogans against Gandhi, the Muslims, and Pakistan. On some occasions, the situation got out of hand and, “when the mob became violent,” the police used tear gas, shot in the air, and arrested people. This scene repeated itself several days in a row. The daily reports of Superintendent of Police (City) Jagan Nath help to place these incidents within the broader context of a flare-up of violence in the city. The dramatic population growth, the hordes of homeless refugees who roamed the streets in the harsh winter conditions, as well as the disturbing news of the recent massacre of Sikhs in Karachi, sent a wave of indignation through Delhi. January 1948 saw the outbreak of another wave of violence that culminated in Gandhi’s assassination at the end of the month.

Interestingly, Jagan Nath’s reports refer to the role played by some Muslims of the locality in the occupation of vacant houses:

One Mohd. Hussain who is running a hotel [probably a restaurant] in Phatak Habash Khan is said to have given his hotel to a certain Hindu after getting a good sum as ‘Pugree’. This has caused sensation amongst the refugees and now they are openly saying that these houses are not for poor people but those who can pay a handsom [sic] amount as a good will. This behaviour of the Muslims of the locality will aggravate the already high communal tension even further. […] unless this nuisance is stopped there is no hope of the return of peaceful atmosphere in this locality…

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506 The institution of pugree will be discussed at length further below. For now, suffice it to mention that this was an illegal lump sum of money transferred in addition to, or instead of, monthly rent.
The following day he reported that, among the 18 people arrested in the city, two were Muslims of Phatak Habash Khan. The first was the same Mohammed Hussain, who handed over his hotel to a Hindu for a pugree of Rs.2300, out of which he gave Rs.360 to another Muslim of the locality, Sadiq Karachiwala. The other Muslim who got arrested was Mohammed Hassan—“a property broker who is making bargains in the locality thus inviting refugees to settle in Phatak Habash Khan.”\footnote{Daily Report sent by Jagan Nath, SP Police City, 8 January, 1948, in F. 21/48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA. For Hindustan Times reports on this matter, see: “No Incidents in Delhi,” Hindustan Times, 9 January 1948. “15 Arrested in Khari Baoli,” Hindustan Times, 10 January 1948. “Delhi Situation Normal,” Hindustan Times, 11 January 1948.} The Hindustan Times also noted that pressures in Phatak Habash Khan made some Muslims nervous, and that about eight shops were disposed of. A few, however, were demanding pugrees, resulting in two arrests.\footnote{Jawaharlal Nehru to Mridula Sarabhai, 12 September 1948, SWJN Vol. 7, 49.}

Eight months later, Phatak Habash Khan emerges again as a site of conflict in which various actors got involved—poor Muslims evicted from the adjacent locality of Katra Shafi, influential Muslims from Phatak Habash Khan, Subhadra Joshi and Sikandar Bakht, who belonged to the socialist wing of the DPCC and who were members of the controversial Shanti Dal, and the Assistant Custodian in charge of this area. The controversy reached Nehru, who complained to Mridula Sarabhai, head of the Shanti Dal:

I have seen some papers which deal with houses in Phatak Habash Khan. Apparently some agreement was arrived at amongst certain people and some houses were sealed by the Custodian accordingly. Later Subhadra [Joshi] went and removed the seals of these houses and according to her own report resettled the Muslims who had been evicted from their houses.\footnote{Jawaharlal Nehru to Mridula Sarabhai, 12 September 1948, SWJN Vol. 7, 49.} Nehru was under the impression that the decision to seal these houses was made by the Custodian in collaboration with responsible people, including M.N. Masud, Maulana Azad’s private secretary. But, regardless of the merits of the decision, what concerned Nehru most was that Subhadra Joshi and the Shanti Dal in general acted in contravention of the Custodian:
…for any person to break the seals put on by the Custodian is a very serious matter. This kind of thing can hardly be tolerated in any organized community. It will lead to individuals or groups doing just what they like and challenging any authority…

The Shanti Dal may have been doing good work, as I think it is, but if the Shanti Dal deliberately sets itself against the responsible authorities to the extent of removing seals put on houses, they are offending against the law and normally certain consequences follow from this. […] I am troubled by this matter because I think it will react very unfavorably so far as the Shanti Dal is concerned.\textsuperscript{510}

Nehru wrote this note at a time when, we may recall from the previous chapter, he was required to defend Mridula Sarabhai and the Shanti Dal from the growing criticism of Home Minister Sardar Patel and many members of the Delhi Administration and police. Patel claimed that the Shanti Dal’s members operated as a parallel force in conflict with the police and the Administration. Nehru’s letter to Sarabhai came at a time when the mounting resentment towards the Shanti Dal threatened its existence, as Patel sought to dissolve the organization. Unsurprisingly, many of the Shanti Dal’s “uncalled for” interventions dealt specifically with evacuee property and the scramble for houses—a point I will return to later.

One might ask why the Custodian was busy evicting Muslim residents and sealing their houses in a Muslim zone to begin with—a Muslim zone, moreover, that just a few months earlier was defended vehemently from refugees’ attempts to intrude. Was it a declared policy reversal or an \textit{ad hoc} decision? If we put together scattered pieces of information, it seems that, sometime around August 1948, the Rehabilitation Ministry decided to allot a large number of empty houses in some Muslim zones in Delhi. What led to this decision, and which neighborhoods exactly were included, is not clear, but apparently Phatak Habash Khan was one of them.

The source of the conflict in Phatak Habash Khan becomes clearer when we examine the records of this incident in the Chief Commissioner’s and CID’s files, which include four versions of the event—statements signed by Subhadra Joshi and Sikandar Bakht, a CID report, and the

\textsuperscript{510} ibid, 49-50.
The versions do not add up to one coherent narrative, yet they share the following facts: The economically poor Muslims of Katra Shafi, a locality adjacent to Phatak Habash Khan, were evicted from their houses, and the houses were sealed by the Custodian in order to settle refugees there. This was the fruit of a settlement between the Assistant Custodian in charge of this area (Mr. Seth) and the more affluent Muslim residents of Phatak Habash Khan, led by Sadiq Karachiwala—the same person mentioned a few months earlier as the one who received a share of the pugree given to Mohd Hussain. The accounts also agree that the eviction of the poor Muslims from Katra Shafi was meant to save a few houses owned by rich Muslims inside Phatak Habash Khan that had been sealed by the Custodian.

Subhadra Joshi’s and Sikandar Bakht’s reports present this as a shady deal between Assistant Custodian Seth and the rich Muslims of the locality, led by Sadiq Karachiwala, who was “formerly a notorious Muslim Leaguer.” The rich Muslims allegedly bribed the Assistant Custodian to restore to them some big houses that he had seized in order to allot them to non-Muslim refugees. Joshi states that these houses had been sealed sometime before, and that “it was clear that these houses were evacuee property.” She further argues that, according to law, the Custodian was obligated to give a notice of 24 or 48 hours before eviction, “laying down the reason or reasons as to why he wishes to take possession of the premises” and enable the occupants to present their objections. None of these formalities had taken place in the case of the poor Muslims of Katra Shafi. Instead, they were evicted highhandedly, without any prior notice. Their evictions were arranged illegally by some “interested and irresponsible people of the

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511 Copies of the signed statements of Subhadra Joshi and Sikandar Bakht are located in File 55/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA. SP Police City Jagan Nath’s report is in F. 371, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML. The CID report is located in F. 26, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML.

512 It is interesting to see how Subhadra Joshi herself chooses to refer to Sadiq Karachiwala political leanings prior to partition in this case.
locality.” Joshi thus decided to unseal the houses on her own responsibility and allow the poor Muslims to reoccupy them.

The CID and Superintendent of Police versions are implicitly critical of the Shanti Dal’s “uncalled for intervention,” but they do not contradict the main line of the story, merely adding some further details. The Superintendent of Police explains that the Custodian took possession of and sealed “some empty houses” in the locality, that the rich Muslims of the mohalla objected to the prospect of having Hindu refugees “in the interior of a Muslim pocket and as an alternative to this they offered the whole of Katra Mohd Shafi for use as residential quarters for the refugees.” The Custodian agreed and evicted the Muslim residents of Katra Shafi, shifting them to some of the sealed houses in Phatak Habash Khan. “But the Muslims of Katra Mohd Shafi who belong to the poor class suspected…this was a mere maneuverer on the part of the richer class amongst the Muslims living there to get their houses unsealed while allotting only a few to the poor Muslims shifted from Katra Mohd Shafi.” They addressed Subhadra Joshi, who settled them back in their houses, except for three houses already allotted to refugees. The Custodian returned to the place in order to evict the Muslims once again, but Shanti Dal volunteers started a demonstration, and a conflict emerged between the two sides. The matter was now pending.

It remains unclear whether the Muslims who got evicted from Katra Shafi were owners or tenants. Also, who exactly owned the big houses? Were the owners still in Delhi, or had they left for Pakistan? What was Karachiwala’s interest in these houses? While these remain open questions, what is evident is that, eight months after the clashes between the police and the refugees in Phatak Habash Khan, the Custodian was taking possession of houses in this Muslim zone and allotting them to refugees.

Pressures on Phatak Habash Khan persisted. In June 1949, an urgent telegram from Hifzurahman, the General Secretary of Jamiat Ulema, reported that “mischief mongers” had
surveyed the locality and tried to drive Muslims out.\textsuperscript{513} Three months later, the CID reported that 25-30 refugees had forcibly occupied a vacant Muslim house in a certain alley, earmarked by the Jamiat Ulema for a school. The police arrived, evicted the intruders, and sealed the house again.\textsuperscript{514} Nevertheless, by 1952, as mentioned earlier, the CID no longer listed Phatak Habash Khan as a Muslim zone.\textsuperscript{515}

In this case study, we see the different forces involved in opening up a Muslim locality for refugees—the physical pressure by crowds of refugees, the transfer of houses through the illegal practice of \textit{pugree}, the allotment of houses by the Custodian in contravention of the policy declared a few months previously, and the high degree of discretion involved in the Custodian’s work, dictated by corruption and alliances with upper-class Muslims of the locality. Finally, we see Shanti Dal members challenge the Custodian’s action, and as a result houses were sealed and unsealed, turning into small battlefields. The following sections will develop all these elements while drawing on more examples.

\textbf{The Informal Economy of \textit{Pugree}: Cutting across Religious Communities}

Philip Oldenburg, a political scientist who did his doctoral field research in old Delhi during 1969-70, defines \textit{pugree} thus:

\begin{quote}
Pugree (literally: turban), is an extremely important institution in Delhi. It is the initial payment a prospective tenant must make to be allowed to rent a building or apartment. I was told that the Pugree for shops in prime locations in the old city ran into the hundreds of thousands of rupees. The landlord of a one-room apartment, which I knew about, with rent of 20 or 30 rupees a month, was asking a pugree of 4,000 rupees.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{513} Telegram from Hifzur Rahman, General Secretary, Jamiat-ul Ulema, to Delhi’s CC, DC and CID, in F. 96, Delhi Police Records, Fifth Installment, NMML.
\textsuperscript{514} “Extract from CID Daily Diary, 20-21.8.49,” in F. 27, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML.
\textsuperscript{515} Moreover, the name of the locality was changed at some point from Phatak Habash Khan to Tilak Bazaar, illustrating how “the national is crushing the city” and its past. See: Gupta, \textit{Delhi between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth}, ix.
\textsuperscript{516} Oldenburg, \textit{Big City Government in India: Councilor, Administrator, and Citizen in Delhi}, 76.
Thomas Krafft also argues that the property and housing market in old Delhi is “characterized by fairly low rents, but immense sums to be paid as transfer fees. They have to be paid ‘illicitly’ on an informal level and amount to as much as several lakh rupees.”

According to Zamindar, pugree “was a practice of circumventing urban rent restrictions under colonial rule, and here [after partition] became an important means for circumventing restrictions on transfers imposed by evacuee property laws.” An upsurge in the practice of pugree had been reported before the evacuee property legislation, and even before the partition riots. By the time the September riots broke out, 150,000 Punjabi refugees were already present in Delhi, many of them belonging to Lahore’s middle- and upper-middle classes. It was prior to partition that private transactions had begun and property prices spiraled up. A Hindustan Times article of August 21 stated:

The upper class refugees—those who have the wherewithal to fend for themselves—…are a disturbing factor in the life of the big cities. Bringing in their trains heavy resources amassed in the black-market during the war years they buy up established firms and acquire business quarters and residential premises at fancy prices. In Delhi and New Delhi, it is understood, some premises have been acquired by Lahore businessmen by paying pagris ranging between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000.

The scramble for Muslim houses set in motion a black economy based on transfers of pugrees. A month after the outbreak of riots, Nehru wrote to Patel that empty houses were occupied not only by refugees but also by residents of Delhi who were making a profit at the expense of both the original owners and the Punjabi refugees by charging “outrageous sums of money from the refugees as rent and premia [sic].” Other sources also indicate that some of

518 Zamindar, The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 64, 142.
520 Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar Patel, 6 October 1947, SWJN Vol. 4, 126.
Delhi’s residents were occupying other people’s houses. But most pugrees were demanded by the Muslims themselves, and, as evident in the case study of Phatak Habash Khan, this added yet another obstacle to the protection of Muslim zones.

Kidwai mentions that pugrees were often taken by the servant, relative, or neighbor entrusted with the property by the Muslim owner who had left for Pakistan. While some of these agents were honest, others were tempted by the opportunity to earn money by bringing in refugees in exchange for high pugrees of Rs. 5,000-10,000. Others who took pugrees were rich Muslims who could not hope to sell their houses and so took thousands of rupees as pugree and left for Pakistan, hoping to come back and sell the property when things calmed down. No doubt, the numerous restrictions on sales and exchanges of property opened a space for the illegal economy of pugree to flourish. Zamindar also notes that, in many cases, asking for pugrees was the only possible means Muslims had to dispose of their property and realize some money from it.

Kidwai, who took part in the Shanti Dal’s Sisyphean endeavors to keep Muslim zones protected, discussed the unfortunate results of this practice. Overnight, each affluent family would take thousands of rupees as pugree and vanish, leaving the poorer Muslims at the mercy of the refugee newcomers. This was clearly the situation in Phatak Habash Khan, where refugees’ pressures on the locality worked in tandem with the transfers of premises for pugrees. This illegal economy reflected and brought to the fore the opposing interests of diverse socioeconomic classes in predominantly Muslim localities.

521 If we recall the Custodian’s announcement in October, he assessed that there were 2000 people to be evicted from evacuee property, some of whom were Delhi’s residents.
522 Kidwai p. 202
A glimpse into the tensions surrounding *pugree* in Muslim neighborhoods is provided in an Urdu letter that was submitted to Delhi’s Chief Commissioner by Muslim residents of Kalan Masjid (Faiz Bazar), via M.N. Masud (Maulana Azad’s secretary), in December 1948. The letter includes various accusations against one Muslim of the locality, Ghulam Mohd, and his associates. Vouching for the petitioners, M.N. Masud writes that Kalan Masjid had been one of the few strongholds of nationalist Muslims before partition, and it was from here that Muslim Congressman Asaf Ali was re-elected in 1946, “in the teeth of very strong opposition from the Muslim population in general.” Here again we see how, before getting into the details of the case, Masud chooses to cite the political credentials of the petitioners that prove them to be good nationalist Muslims. Unfortunately, he adds, this *mohalla* suffered greatly during the riots and even afterwards, when a large number of its residents were arrested and detained under the Punjab Public Safety Act.525

The petitioners claim in their letter that Ghulam Muhammad was a Muslim Leagui with links to the National Guards and that he and his associates are involved in illegal matters. He had been arrested a few months previously under the Punjab Public Safety Act and detained for three months. Upon his return, he took revenge on the locality’s people (who apparently had brought about his arrest) by making false allegations that led to the arrest of several innocent people. In their absence he demanded Rs100 from their wives and threatened those who failed to pay. He has been putting a lot of pressure on his Muslim tenants to vacate their homes so that he could settle refugees, who were paying fourfold rents and high *pugrees*. One of his tenants went for a trip out of town and, in his absence, Ghulam Muhammad broke the lock of his house and settled in refugees for *pugree*. When the person returned, he found that strange people now occupied his house. During this time, Ghulam Muhammad quietly left his house and stayed in a different

525 The letter is included in F. 37/49-C Vol. II, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
neighborhood for a few days. This incident followed a similar one in which Ghulam Muhammad broke the lock of a tenant in his absence and threw out all his stuff in the alley. The poor tenant’s protests were to no avail, and he quietly picked up his meager belongings and left. Three more tenants were harassed by Ghulam Muhammad until they vacated their houses.

The letter offers insight into how the economy of pugree got embroiled in internal disputes within the Muslim locality that resulted from, or were at least exacerbated by, the pressures faced by Muslims and Muslim localities in this period. After all, it is against the background of numerous arrests of Muslims from the neighborhood in mid-1948 that this internal dispute developed. The petitioners conclude their letter by emphasizing that Ghulam Muhammad and his associates are involved in illegal activities, adding that Ghulam Muhammad has recently changed his looks, started to dress like a Hindu, and that he keeps a choti (braid) on his head (like a Hindu). He hangs out with Hindus and presents himself as such. This last piece of information seems at first glance curious, especially given the writers’ assertion that he was a Muslim Leagui. It is apparently meant to arouse the authorities’ suspicion toward Ghulam Muhammad at a period when Muslims got arrested for roaming Hindu localities dressed like Hindus. In fact, the petitioners assert, not only is Ghulam Mohd a Muslim Leagui, but his whole family has already left for Pakistan and only he has stayed in Delhi to take care of the family’s property. They thus tie together allegations about his Muslim Leagui leanings prior to partition with insinuations that he is an “intending evacuee.” This move mirrors the ways in which the two issues—of Muslim property and (dis)loyalty—were interconnected in the evacuee property bureaucracy, the permit system, and the discourse of the police and the CID. Subhadra Joshi of the Shanti Dal also used this terminology, and so did M.N. Masud.526

526 We saw earlier how, in a similar vein, Subhadra Joshi of the DPCC and Shanti Dal opened her statement about the sealing and unsealing of houses in Katra Shafi by presenting Sadiq Karachiwala as “a formerly notorious Muslim Leaguer.”
Interestingly, the letter of the Kalan Masjid’s residents was transferred to the CID for investigation, which determined that Ghulam Muhammad had indeed been a Muslim Leagui and a member of the National Guards, yet had actually changed his allegiance and joined the nationalist Muslims in 1946, helping Asaf Ali in the elections! We can thus see that the boundary between the categories of “nationalist Muslim” and “Muslim Leagui” was a slippery one, as people could easily move from one to the other. The uncertainty of these categories, indicative of the politics of suspicion surrounding Muslims, resurfaces time and again in the archives—a point I will further discuss in the next chapter.

Just as the practice of *pugree* brought to the fore class divisions within the Muslim public, it also greatly affected the ability of refugees to compete in the scramble for houses. Socioeconomic differences among refugees had been apparent from March 1947 onward, as well-off refugees started to buy up property in Delhi. The scene in *Jhutha Sach*, where a resentful and frustrated crowd of poor refugees tries to break into the house bought by an upper-class refugee, depicts exactly this distinction. And it became all the more overt through the practice of *pugree*. As Kidwai noted, “those who could give pagdi always found a house in the Muslim zones, as did those who could vault walls and capture buildings.”\(^{527}\) Caught in the middle were refugees of lesser means and gentler character.

The refugee petitioners who presented their case in the Urdu report on the Custodian describe exactly this predicament. One applicant, the head of a family from Peshawar in NWFP, describes the family’s life in Delhi since their arrival in November 1947 as endless misery. At first they were cramped into the tiny room of a friend from Subzimandi, who after four months was fed up and threw them out to the street. They left the place in great shame and set up a hutment on the rooftop of a Muslim on Qutab Road. Later, when the hutment collapsed under the

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\(^{527}\) Kidwai 202
heavy monsoons, the Muslim landlord did not allow them to set it up again. They found a place in a *dharamshala* but are under threat of eviction every day. In the meantime, one child died of heat and two others were injured. They have been sending numerous requests to the Custodian department to get allotted vacant houses in Pul Bangash, but to no avail. They cannot even get a place in the refugee camps. During these long months of hardship, they have seen more and more refugees who arrived in Delhi after them getting houses. Some got a house from the Custodian through bribes, while others paid *pugrees* or occupied a house forcibly. “What should people like us do?” asks the applicant. “Those who don’t have enough money to bribe the Custodian, or pay *pugree*, and who are law-abiding people who would not use force?” All routes seem closed off and the only option, concludes the applicant, is “to take my five-member family and drown ourselves in the Yamuna.” He adds bitterly, “What can we do if the Pakistanis who attacked us did not have the courtesy to leave us some money so we could, like our brothers, get houses through bribes or *pugree*?”

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**Corruption and Discretionary Power in the Work of the Custodian**

As the complaint demonstrates, socioeconomic differences played a role not only in the informal economy of *pugree* but also in the work of the Custodian. Those who had means would get a house allotted to them. Indeed, allegations of malpractice and corruption surrounded the Custodians from early days. The first Custodian of Delhi, Lobo Prabhu, was dismissed in 1948 and charged with connivance with bribery and lack of control over his subordinates. 529 It is noteworthy that, in their later reminiscences of the case, both G.D. Khosla, the Punjab High

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528 This discussion strengthens Ravinder Kaur’s study of refugees’ rehabilitation in Delhi, showing how it was inflected by considerations of class, caste and gender, preserving distinctions and hierarchies of colonial Punjab. Ian Talbot made a similar point with regard to rehabilitation strategies in Lahore and Amritsar: Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi*. Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar, 1947-1957*.

Court Justice who was appointed to inquire into the allegations, and Delhi’s Chief Commissioner Shankar Prasad argued that Lobo Prabhu himself was honest. “The complaints were made mostly by disgruntled refugees, and were based on a few cases of undeserving persons having been awarded evacuee houses, because Mr. Lobo, unfamiliar with Punjabi character and ignorant of the social and professional standing of the claimants, had allowed himself to be imposed upon.” But allegations of corruption continued. Some Muslims complained, as well, claiming they had to bribe the Custodian to unseal houses that had been seized and sealed unjustly. In the case of Phatak Habash Khan, the Custodian was apparently bribed to save rich Muslims’ houses at the expense of a poorer locality. Thus socioeconomic divisions among the Muslims could influence the specific ways in which the process of Muslims’ dispossession unfolded.

More broadly, such corruption was part and parcel of the wide scope of operation given to the Custodian, and it functioned alongside local factors—such as the relative strength or vulnerability of the people involved—in determining who was allotted a house, whose house was seized, and where. In practice, the Custodian Department was far from an impersonal and impartial bureaucracy, but rather very personal and influenced by specific persons and pressures in each locality. Beyond the hardships experienced by individuals who got caught in this Kafkaesque bureaucracy, there was a great deal of structural uncertainty and contingency underlying the Custodian’s intervention in the Muslim zones.

After all, the protection of the Muslim zones remained a stated policy that had no real legal sanction and that was highly controversial. Protecting these zones depended upon the good will of police officers and other officials, notably the Custodian Department, and, as we have seen in the case of Phatak Habash Khan, on the intervention of non-governmental bodies such as

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531 Included in the Urdu report discussed above.
the Shanti Dal, the DPCC, and the Special Police. These non-governmental bodies, whose general role was discussed in the previous chapter, operated in the contingent space of fights over houses in Muslim zones.

For example, some reports indicate that Special Police officers with Hindu-right leanings were implicated in the violence against Muslim zones. This was apparently the case in January 1948 in the Muslim zone of Qasabpura, where, according to an urgent telegram from Habibur Rahman of Jamiat Ulema, Special Police officers launched an offensive against the Muslim residents in order to drive them out of their homes. They were allegedly aided by the local police.532

On the other hand, we have seen how Subhadra Joshi and Sikandar Bakht of the DPCC and Shanti Dal unsealed houses sealed by the Custodian. Joshi intervened in other cases, as well, such as one in which she “picked up a row with a Muslim owner of a house in a vain attempt to seal his premises which his tenant wanted to sublet.”533 Similarly, according to a report by Superintendent of Police Jagan Nath, Khalil-ur-Rahman—another Shanti Dal member and Vice President of the DPCC—repeatedly interfered with the work of the police and authorities. In several of these cases, Khalil-ur-Rahman objected to Hindus renting houses and businesses in the Muslim localities of Aziz Ganj (Sadar Bazar) and Nai Basti. He reportedly replaced the lock of the premises in the police’s absence.534 In one case, Khalil-ur-Rahman was aided by B.D. Joshi—Subhadra Joshi’s husband, who was part of the socialist-leaning group of Special Police officers discussed in the previous chapter (“the Congress SPOs”). We can see, then, how socialist or secular-leaning local Congress party members intervened in various conflicts over property as members of the DPCC, the SPO, or the Shanti Dal.

532 F.36-48-C, Chief Commissioner Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
533 “CID Report for the First Half of October 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
Anis Kidwai referred to the Shanti Dal’s interventions thus:

…we found ourselves increasingly in conflict with the Custodian department, even as a section of the Shanti Dal worked with it in sealing and allotting houses. We kept the assisting party and the fighting party separate; the fighting party consisted of Mridula [Sarabhai] and Subhadra [Joshi].

Interestingly, however, the Shanti Dal’s intervention in the Muslim zones was not all heroic and ideologically motivated. While Subhadra Joshi, Mridula Sarabhai, and other members worked tirelessly for the protection of Muslim zones, others were more self-motivated. The CID reported that some members of the Shanti Dal joined hands with the Custodian Department’s employees in opening up houses for refugees in exchange for pugrees. This caused friction between these members and the Shanti Dal leaders and resulted in the resignation of the former. According to the CID informant, “the matter has taken the form of a public scandal and subsequent to that the ordinary members of the Dal have fallen out from their leaders in order to be free from the blame of following corrupt practices and they accuse their leaders and prominent workers to be responsible for charging heavy ‘pagrees.’ the matter is said to…be taking a serious turn.” Kidwai’s account further clarifies the matter. She explains that many of the Shanti Dal volunteers were themselves refugees and, “although they admired and respected Subhadra above all, some wavered.” Some used physical force to drive away other refugees who tried to force their way into the Muslim zones. Others got tired of standing guard at the gates of a Muslim enclave whose residents did not seem to care for them at all, and they would open the gates and let a refugee family sneak in. And others were simply too tempted by the pugree offered to them if they would open the gates.

It was around this time, in August 1948, that Rehabilitation Minister Saxena sent a letter to Mridula Sarabhai of the Shanti Dal, stating that, while the Rehabilitation Ministry (and

535 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 265.
536 CID Report on Shanti Dal, 23 August 1948, F. 26, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML.
537 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 267.
Custodian Department) had thought the Shanti Dal would be instrumental in “peacefully get[ing] possession of a large number of Muslim evacuee houses within a couple of weeks…” it was now clear that the Shanti Dal could not keep out undesirable elements.\textsuperscript{538} This letter concerning the collaboration between the Custodian and the Shanti Dal in sealing and allotting evacuee houses fits with Kidwai’s claim that some of the Muslim zones were disbanded in August 1948. Taken together, Saxena’s letter and Kidwai’s account help explain why this period was characterized by a fierce scramble for empty houses—including the case of Phatak Habash Khan.

Kidwai claimed that, when houses in the now-reclassified localities were opened up for allotment, many of the Shanti Dal’s volunteers thought they deserved priority in allotment, given their service, and assumed that the Shanti Dal leaders would support them. “When things didn’t go as they wished, many of these volunteers lapsed completely, took pagdi, and arranged for houses to be allotted to persons whose names were not on the original lists.”\textsuperscript{539} Kidwai admits that they were too trusting and did not realize that many of the people who joined them were self-interested. When these Muslim zones opened up, “we made huge mistakes, mountainous ones. We scrambled to ensure that our own people were given the houses first—socialists for socialists, Congressis for Congressis, Shanti Dal for its volunteers—and the truly needy were left homeless.”\textsuperscript{540} This picture is corroborated in a CID report on the Delhi Socialist Party, claiming that it sought the Jamiat Ulema’s support in getting houses allotted to socialist leaders among the Punjabi refugees of Kingsway Camp.\textsuperscript{541} Similarly, refugees frequently alleged that the Jamiat Ulema had a hold over vacant houses, which it sealed and allotted to whomever it wanted.

\textsuperscript{538} Excerpt of Saxena’s letter to Sarabhai, included in ibid., 266.\textsuperscript{539} ibid., 267-8.\textsuperscript{540} ibid., 268.\textsuperscript{541} The houses were allotted in Bara Hindu Rao and Sita Ram Bazar. See: File 55/48-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
At this time, when Muslim houses were perhaps the most important resource, and many competed for them, parties sought to advance their political influence through houses, and refugees took advantage of their political connections or economic means to get access to them. Thus, alongside the ideological clash between the secular-leaning Shanti Dal leaders and the more Hindu right-wing volunteer forces, more mundane imperatives were at work—and these two levels often worked in tandem.

Back to Chronology: 1950-1956

In 1950 there was a new outbreak of violence in East and West Bengal that spilled over into U.P. and Delhi, setting off another massive migration from north India to West Pakistan. In Delhi two Muslims were killed and 19 injured in March, when people dispersed from a Hindu Mahasabha meeting in Ramlila Ground and attacked passersby in Turkman Gate and Chawri Bazar. This again set the now all-too-familiar dynamic of pressure on Muslim zones in Delhi, as thousands of Muslims left the city, leaving behind empty houses. Refugees occupied houses, either through pugree or by force, in Bara Hindu Rao (Sadar Bazar), a Muslim locality that had been a site of conflict since the winter of 1947. Anis Kidwai described her efforts, along with Muslim students from Jamia Millia University, to protect the area in the winter of 1947. During the violence of 1947-8, many Muslims fled and refugees took their places, putting more and more pressure on Muslim residents and houses. Kidwai, the Jamia students, and other members who joined the Shanti Dal tried to spread the “message of peace and harmony in the neighborhood,” prevent further attacks on Muslim houses, and halt the ongoing departure of

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Muslims from the locality. They set up their base in the Rehmaniya School building, a large building with dozens of rooms, which was emptied during the disturbances; an emptiness that drew crowds of refugees, who circled the place: “bands of refugees tried to break in, even a bomb was hurled, but nothing dented their [Jamia students’] steely resolve. Disciples of a mentor such as Dr. [Zakir] Hussain, they would never give in, never retreat. They…stay put.”

Kidwai celebrated their triumph in Bara Hindu Rao, but less than three years later, against the background of renewed massive violence in 1950, the Intelligence Bureau reported that disturbances pushed many Muslims out of the locality, and that 35 houses were occupied by refugees, including the very same Rehmaniya School building. At the same time, vacant houses in Kucha Pandit (Hauz Qazi), Gali Shahtara (Ajmeri Gate), and Kalan Mahal were occupied by local Muslims (probably some of those who fled localities such as Bara Hindu Rao). The Deputy Commissioner issued an order declaring illegal all such occupations which took place after March 19—the day on which the disturbances in Delhi broke out. The police started evicting both refugees and Muslims, and 2,000 vacant houses were sealed. The decision to seal these houses increased tension in the city. The Muslims were upset because “so far they used to hand over the houses through pugree,” and refugees became so furious and aggressive that they started assaulting Muslim passersby.

Thus, the violence that swept across north India (and East Pakistan) in 1950 set in motion another cycle of dispossession that brought thousands more Muslim houses into the pool of evacuee property. Here again, physical force and the illegal economy of pugree were joined by the Custodian Department, which operated with a vengeance in this period. During these months, Muslims’ complaints against the Custodian were on the rise. On April 30, 1950, reported the

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544 Kidwai, In Freedom's Shade, 106.
545 IB Report on Vacant Muslim Houses, 4 May 1950, F. 98, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
546 IB Report on Vacant Muslim Houses, 4 May 1950, F. 98, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
CID, Muslims of different localities assembled in the office of Jamiat Ulema to vent their grievances, declaring that the Custodian had taken possession of their houses and assets. The advocate Sultan Yar Khan disclosed that not a single case was decided in favor of a Muslim appellant.547

A week later, Al Jamiat published an editorial entitled “Custodian Ka taza Insaf” (Fresh Justice of the Custodian), arguing that one of the main causes for the departure of Delhi’s Muslims was the Custodian’s excesses. It claimed that the Custodian was moving extremely fast in taking possession of houses, and that “this department plays a dangerous role in uprooting the Muslim population.” People had long been “eating the dust of P Block” (where the Custodian department is located), but even after 30 hearings, their situation remained as before. The writer reported a disturbing fact—that people whose status had already been cleared as “non-evacuee” numerous times were again called upon to appear and explain why they should not be declared evacuees. The writer mentioned several names, among them Mohammed Din Chhatriwala, an affluent businessman of Delhi whose evacuee property case became famous when the Custodian-General Achhru Ram declared him a non-evacuee but reversed his decision a year later. This case led to friction between the Rehabilitation Minister A.P. Jain and the Custodian-General, and to the latter’s resignation.548 Recently, continued the editorialist, several Muslims who had gotten desperate and fed up had just thrown their properties’ keys and papers on the table at the Custodian court, saying, “Since you have decided to seize all the Muslim houses, just take our keys. At least we’ll be freed from the daily humiliation and insult at your court.” Many such people, argues the editorialist, simply left for Pakistan.549

547 ibid.
548 See below on this case
549 “Custodian Ka Taza Insaf,” Al Jamiat, 8 May, 1950.
Al Jamiat argued that the Custodian was not operating in line with the recently achieved Indo-Pakistani agreement. The grave conditions across north India and East Pakistan led to negotiations between the prime ministers of the two countries, resulting in the Nehru-Liaquat Ali (Delhi) Pact of April 8, 1950. The agreement was meant to bring a halt to the exodus of people and ensure the security of minorities in both countries. It was indeed in this context that Nehru sent several letters to the Minister of Rehabilitation, insisting that the evacuee property legislation and its implementation by the Custodians should be reformed. “There can be no doubt that the Agreement calls upon us to create conditions which will give perfect security to minorities. This security must obviously include security of property.”

Nehru was critical of the new Evacuee Bill, which was prepared by Saxena and was under discussions in Parliament. He argued that the evacuee property legislation and its implementation by the Custodian involved a great deal of injustice toward the Muslim minority, and that “it has produced a widespread feeling of insecurity.” He continued:

This was the state of affairs previously. Now we have to deal with a new situation created by the Agreement, when we have undertaken to remove all causes of insecurity and to prevent people from living in India under a sense of fear and insecurity. We know that during the past few weeks large numbers of people in India have, under stress of circumstances, decided to leave for Pakistan and many have actually left. There is no doubt that these people did not want to go originally and it was only the new circumstances and new pressures and fears that have induced them to go. We have tried to stop this by this Agreement and by the propaganda we intend carrying on. Just at this moment comes your evacuee Property Bill with certain clauses which are so vague that they bring in their scope any person who may have some business dealings or private dealings with people in Pakistan…It is true that we are dealing with a very special state of affairs. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to set aside normal rules completely and to produce this sense of insecurity which this Bill is bound to produce. This will undoubtedly encourage the exodus and thus defeat the objects of the Agreement.

Nehru doubted the validity of some of the provisions of the Evacuee Property Act in view of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. His other main concern was the way in which

550 Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena, 14 April 1950, SWJN Vol. 14II, 163
551 Since the Ordinance for administration of evacuee property, promulgated on 18 October 1949, was to expire in April 1950, a draft Bill on the administration of evacuee property was introduced in the Indian parliament.
552 Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena, 14 April 1950, SWJN Vol. 14II, 163.
the law was interpreted and implemented. “In effect, so much vagueness has crept in that the Custodian or his representative can exercise his discretion in a large number of matters.”

Nehru further developed this point in his next letter to Saxena, which used stronger language. Nehru’s harsh evaluation of the Custodian Department was now based on a thorough reading of numerous complaints by Muslims that had accumulated on his desk. He and his private secretary, Dharam Vira, had carefully gone over these files and reached the conclusion that the complaints were overwhelmingly justified, and that the evacuee property laws had become “an engine of oppression” in the hands of the Custodian, leading to “continuous victimization.” Nehru gave details, buttressing the complaints we see in Al Jamiat’s editorials. The Assistant Custodians, he claimed, functioned more like prosecutors than judges and were at pains to prove the person guilty of some offence. There were tremendous delays, and cases went on intermittently without a final decision. The burden of proof lay on the persons accused of violating the evacuee laws, in violation of all canons of justice. People who were proven to be non-evacuees numerous times were again asked to show cause why they should not be declared evacuees. There were cases where people were declared non-evacuee and yet their property was seized, or where the district judge had ordered the Custodian to restore the property to its rightful owner yet the Custodian had failed to do so. Nehru reached the conclusion that “there is seldom any finality in the proceedings and they are sometimes inquisitorial. … Although the evacuee property laws deal with property as such, the effect of their application may well be the deprivation of citizenship or nationality and this is a serious matter.”

The tension spreading across north India was seen through a different lens—the lens of security—by officials of the police and the Intelligence Bureau, which asked the Delhi CID to provide a list of Muslims who should be detained in case of communal trouble, as well as of

553 My emphasis.
Muslim pockets in city. Referring to the arms race between Hindu and Muslim neighborhoods in the months preceding partition, the Intelligence Bureau noted:

The Bureau has heard that the remnants of the 'Post-Quit Plan', in Muslim pockets, have to some extent been revived and strengthened. It has been suggested that the original agencies that built-up the 'Post-Quit Plan', are again in some measure building it up. It will be remembered that the investigation into the 'Post-Quit Plan' disclosed the existence of organised and armed pockets in many parts of India. Some of these were disrupted and disorganised during the communal disturbances of September-October 1947. In the areas which were immune from those large-scale disturbances, the 'Post-Quit Plan' pockets evidently continued to exist and are alive today.554

In his reply, CID Superintendent Rikhi Kesh sent a list of Muslim pockets, noting:

Inquiries show that the following pockets are still made inaccessible for Non-Muslims by all possible means by the Muslim residents of the areas concerned. Every effort is made to keep them intact only for Muslims and strict secrecy is maintained over the happenings in these areas. Entrances and exits are watched by Muslim Chaukidars who prohibit non-Muslims from entering the mohallas and question the object of their visit. Most of these entrances and exits are provided with iron-gates and can be locked, thus turning the pocket into a small fortress. It is undeniable that even the Muslims who profess to be staunch nationalists lend all possible help to keep the Muslim pockets intact and hate the idea of re-habilitation of the Non-Muslims in Muslim areas. So long this mentality prevails and is tolerated, the claim of the Muslims of their being nationalists and true subjects of the Indian Dominion is but farce and cannot obviate the danger of turning their faces on the Indian Dominion at any time of 'Emergency'.

The Intelligence Bureau was alarmed by the CID Superintendent’s disclosure, and asked for more information, upon which Rikhi Kesh replied that some of the gates had been set up a few decades earlier, while others had been set up just before the partition disturbances. He added:

…Another worth mentioning feature in these pockets is the existence of some factories, e.g. metal-casting, steel trunk making, lathis, nickel polishing, etc. These factories could be easily converted into weapon manufacturing factories if and when needed and pockets into small fortresses.

The above-mentioned facts in themselves testify that no 'secrets' of the pockets or conspiracies if hatched therein could be disclosed to any outsider including the local authorities.

It would be in the interest of security to discourage by all means the creation or strengthening the pockets by Muslims in India and also the abolition of the existing

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554 “Muslim Pockets in Delhi Vol. II,” F. 118, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
pockets by providing vacant houses and shops to non-Muslims, making available free and unfettered entry to the…pockets and by removing the gates in case of any emergency.

Protection of Muslim zones, we can see, remained a debated policy, reflecting the equivocal attitude toward the Muslims of India. As Nehru put it, as eloquently as ever, in his letter to Saxena:

In conflict between two countries, it sometimes happens that one country retaliates against the citizens of the other country because of something done to its own citizens in that other country. Here we have a curious state of affairs. We try to punish people who in law and effect are our citizens, but who we suspect might perhaps transfer their allegiance.\(^{555}\)

It seems, however, that this was hardly avoidable—that is, the prevailing suspicion was built into the situation. It emerged out of the increasingly poisonous atmosphere prior to partition, the painful violence, and the need, all of a sudden, to distinguish between Indians and Pakistanis in the midst of mass exodus. Even Nehru’s letters, which confirm time and again his commitment to protecting Muslim life and property, show suspicions creeping in. In the letter quoted above, for instance, he submits that, under the unusual circumstances, the government needed to prevent “large-scale transfer of property”—that is, to prevent Muslims leaving for Pakistan from disposing of their properties. In another letter he asks for a comprehensive report on the number of Muslims returning from Pakistan under the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of April 1950, saying that he had been informed that Pakistan was sending some troublemakers among these people. There was no need, he asserted, to open up this issue with Pakistan, but the people returning on Permits should be “better scrutinized.” In another letter from 1954, he referred to information given to him by the Muslim socialist leader of Delhi, Mir Mushtaq Ahmed, that Pakistan was sending \textit{goondas} to create disturbances in Delhi.\(^{556}\) The point is that, up to 1954,

\(^{555}\) Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohanlal Saxena, 14 April 1950, SWJN Vol. 14II, 163.
\(^{556}\) Jawaharlal Nehru to Home Minister, 19 June 1954, SWJN Vol. 26, 197.
the question of who was a Muslim citizen and who was a Pakistani remained unclear. And it was exactly this indeterminacy that the evacuee property laws reflected. The question of whether a Muslim could be an Indian was far from self-evident in this period of transition. And the migrations of 1950 were a result of, and a cause for, further instability.

After the passport system was introduced in 1952 and the borders gradually stabilized, Nehru himself was set to close this chapter of the evacuee property legislation. The appointment of a new Rehabilitation Minister—A.P. Jain—who appears to have been more sympathetic to Muslims’ hardships, marked the beginning of a shift in the Government’s policy. As mentioned above, he brought about the resignation of Custodian-General Achhru Ram in October 1951, following the latter’s contradictory judgment with regard to Chhatriwala—declaring him a non-evacuee and a year later reversing his decision. In August 1952, Jain also pushed for the omission of the “intending evacuee” category from the legislation and supported this stance against strong opposition in Parliament.

In November 1953, Nehru wrote to Jain that it was time to take a big step and rethink their position on evacuee property. These laws were the result of very unusual circumstances and reflected an emergency situation that could not be prolonged forever. It was high time that India lift the sword hanging over its Muslim citizens, which prevented them from conducting normal business and life. The worst that could happen, submitted Nehru, was that some money would be shifted to Pakistan. In his next letter, Nehru reiterated that there was no longer any

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557 Zamindar, The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, 129. See also “M.P.s Protest,” Times of India, 7 October, 1951; “Clever Bid to Circumvent Criticism,” Times of India, 7 October, 1951. Chhatriwala eventually won the case and was declared by Delhi Custodian a non-evacuee
558 ibid., 143. According to Zamindar, India finally removed the clause about intending evacuees from the legislation in 1953: ibid., 131. See, also: “Quarterly Report on the Muslim Press,” 30 September 1952, F. 1-52-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
justification for denying Muslim citizens what was granted to foreign nationals. Every citizen should be free to deal with his property as he wished.560

Throughout 1952-4, India made several attempts to resolve the evacuee property deadlock with Pakistan. It sent a detailed offer in October 1952, according to which both countries would take over evacuee properties and compensate the evacuee owners accordingly.561 Pakistan turned the offer down, insisting on solving the problem through private transactions. In May 1954, Nehru informed Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Ali that, since six years had passed and no progress had been made, India could not let matters slide any longer, and that it had decided to take two unilateral steps. First, it abrogated the legislation with regard to future cases that may arise—that is, no more properties could be declared evacuee. Second, India would permanently acquire the rights and titles of evacuee owners in properties that the Custodian had already taken possession of, and would utilize them to compensate displaced persons. Evacuee owners would get credit for the value of these properties.562 Indeed, the Administration of Evacuee Property (Amendment) Act, 1954, enacted in October of that year, stated that “the Government of India could acquire the right, titles, and interest of evacuee property in India and utilize such property for payment of part compensation to displaced persons and, from then on, any person could dispose of or purchase any property freely, without going through the Custodian of Evacuee property.”563 A day later, India passed the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act.564 It provided “for compensation to the Muslim

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561 See Nehru’s letter to Mohammad Ali that provides Nehru’s perspective on the history of the dispute and why Pakistan was at fault: Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammed Ali, 6 March 1954, SWJN Vol. 25, 346-352.
564 Ibid.
evacuees from India, in case Pakistan expressed her readiness to come to a settlement on mutually agreed lines.”565

Indeed, in a subsequent letter to Mohammad Ali in November 1954, Nehru again expressed India’s willingness to arrive at an agreement on how to compensate the evacuees.566 But since no mutual agreement was reached, the new laws, in effect, meant that Muslim evacuee property was seized permanently without paying compensation to its owners, whether they had left for Pakistan or remained citizens of India. And so, seven months later, in May 1955, Nehru was astonished at the “staggering figures” of over 130,000 judicial cases of evacuee property that were still pending or under adjudication.567 As Zamindar notes, many cases remain unresolved, even today, in Delhi and other places. In addition, and to no one’s surprise, there was a discrepancy between the legislation and declared policy on the one hand, and the Custodians’ bureaucracy on the other. People were still required to prove their continuous presence in India over several years and to bring documentary evidence in order to keep their properties.568 Nehru noted in December 1954 that “the law has been amended this year, but it seems that our Custodian Department have not quite caught up with this. We must pull them up and put an end to this continuous harassment.”

Moreover, the tenants who lived in the houses declared evacuee in the Muslim zones, continued to experience the pressures of refugees. As late as 1954, a local Hindu Mahasabha leader, Prof. Ram Singh, appealed to refugees to drive out Muslim tenants in evacuee properties,

565 Das Gupta elaborates: “Clause 13 of the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act, 1954, runs as follows: ‘There shall be paid to “an evacuee compensation in respect of his property acquired under section 12 in accordance with such principles and in such manners as may be agreed upon between the Government of India and Pakistan.’” ibid.
566 Jawaharlal Nehru to Mohammad Ali, 9 November 1954, SWJN Vol. 27, p. 177.
567 “These are staggering figures and whatever the legal merits might be, these very figures indicate the terrible pressure on the Muslims of India. I had absolutely no idea that so many months after the ending of the Evacuee Property Law, we shall be pursued by this nightmare.” Jawaharlal Nehru to Mehr Chand Khanna, 25 May 1955, SWJN Vol. 28, p. 561.
568 Jawaharlal Nehru to J.K. Bhonsle, 22 December 1954, SWJN Vol. 27, p. 178.
claiming that this could make room for 40,000 refugees. The tenants were also continuously subjected to the draconian rent-collecting methods of the Custodian—especially the habit of collecting all installment at once, leading to evictions. Complaints in this respect were still voiced in 1956.

These tenants were also badly affected by the October 1954 unilateral decision to transfer the property rights of evacuees permanently to the Indian government. In a note to the Home Minister in September 1955, Nehru mentioned large-scale evictions of unauthorized occupants taking place in Delhi at the time. Among those evicted were tenants of evacuee properties that were about to be auctioned by the Rehabilitation Ministry. What would happen to them? asked Nehru. The fortnightly reports of the following year (July-August 1956) make clear that the auctioning off of evacuee houses resulted in eviction of Muslim tenants, leading to protests by the Jammat Islah-e Custodian and the Jamiat Ulema.

**Conclusion**

In December 1947 the Government and AICC decided to turn Muslim-majority localities into Muslim zones that would be closed to Hindu and Sikh refugees. This seemed to be the only viable option for the continuing existence of Muslims in the city. The objections of Sardar Patel, M.S. Randhawa, and other people in the Administration and Police to this policy expressed the doubts many had about the legitimacy of Muslims in independent India—whether they could live as equal citizens to be trusted. At a time when Delhi absorbed hundreds of thousands of refugees who had survived the violence inflicted by other Muslims, it seemed to many unfair that refugees would be denied access to empty houses only to protect Muslim zones.

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569 Jawaharlal Nehru to Home Minister, 19 June 1954, SWJN Vol. 26, 197.
570 CID Fortnightly Reports, January-August 1956, F.34/56, CC Files, Confidential&Cabinet, DSA.
But Patel and Randhawa raised another point: “if we are building a secular state then why this compartmentalization and zoning of citizens?” asked Randhawa. This was of course mere lip service, because Randhawa was not so interested in intermingling as to suggest the rehabilitation of Muslims in their homes in the previously mixed neighborhoods of Paharganj, Karol Bagh, and Subzimandi. Patel himself, we may recall, decisively rejected this option when it was raised by Nehru in October. For Patel and Randhawa, having mixed neighborhoods meant settlement in only one direction—that more and more refugees would settle in Muslim neighborhoods. Yet, this argument cannot be dismissed easily. The Nehruvian policy of the Muslim zones, although possibly the only option, put an official stamp on, and perpetuated, the process of ghettoization that had begun with the September violence.

Spatially, the result of this process was that the majority of Delhi’s Muslims have resided since independence within the walled city of Shahjahanabad, where they tend to live contiguously in several mohallas. According to Philip Oldenburg, there are two main concentrations of Muslims within Shahjahanabad, “one extending southward from the Jama Masjid into Suiwalan and up to the Turkaman Gate, the other extending from Chandni Chowk and Ballimaran westwards through the area south of the Fatehpuri Mosque to Farashkhana and Kucha Pandit.” These two areas correlate with three of the four main Muslim areas listed by the CID in 1948 and 1952: Faiz Bazar, Hauz Qazi, and Kotwali. The fourth area of Sadar Bazar, which is outside Shahjahanabad, is also mentioned by Oldenburg (specifically Qasabpura and other neighborhoods near Idgah).

Certainty, the number of Muslim neighborhoods in these four areas declined as refugees advanced into the Muslim zones. One of Oldenburg’s informants, for example, estimated that inside Shahjahanabad, Farash Khana, which before Partition had been 85 percent Muslim, was

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572 Oldenburg, Big City Government in India: Councilor, Administrator, and Citizen in Delhi, 159-60
now 50 percent Muslim and 25 percent refugee. Kucha Pandit saw a similar shift.\textsuperscript{573} This process was even more prominent in Sadar Bazar, whose contested \textit{mohallas} occupied center stage in this chapter. The ghettoization of Muslims on the one hand, and ongoing encroachment on these ghettos by refugees on the other, produced, especially in Sadar Bazar, a “communally-segregated pattern of habitation” in close proximity. Gopal Krishna, who studied communal disturbances in Sadar Bazar in 1974-5, describes the area as a heavily populated one, “cut up into small concentrations of Hindu [mostly refugee] and Muslim populations, at once segregated and living in close proximity with each other.”\textsuperscript{574}

At that time, Muslims rarely ventured outside these areas.\textsuperscript{575} In his interview, Shahid Siddiqui claimed that his family was the first to leave Ballimaran and move to New Delhi in 1965, and he acutely remembered the feeling of being out of place.\textsuperscript{576} This zoning of the city, or compartmentalization, to use Randhawa’s term, was the result of the expulsions and fear accompanying partition, systematized by the government’s policy of Muslim zones. It was deepened by the suspicion that prevailed after partition, and the frequent arrests of Muslims roaming around “Hindu neighborhoods” and “impersonating” Hindus. Such zoning undoubtedly undermined the secular vision of the Indian state—a dilemma whose implications will be further analyzed in the next chapter, where I consider the Hindu-right demand that Muslims “assimilate.”

While discussing the process of Muslim ghettoization and the shrinking of Muslim zones, this chapter also attempted to highlight the ideological and political conflicts accompanying this process, between secularist and socialist forces on the one side, and Hindu-right elements on the

\textsuperscript{573} ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{575} To Shahjahanabad and Sardar Bazar we should add the small enclave of Nizamuddin basti in New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{576} Interview with Shahid Siddiqui, 13 June 2011, New Delhi.
other; and the role played by *pugree*, bribery, and socioeconomic distinctions, among both Muslims and refugees, in the scramble for houses. This is a corrective to the somewhat sweeping analysis provided by Zamindar, who treats the state as a unified entity, and who describes the Custodian almost purely as a partisan state’s arm of surveillance over, and dispossession of, the minority community. Accordingly, the communal distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims is overriding in her account. But when Zamindar discusses evacuee property in Karachi and the work of the Rent Collector and Rehabilitation Commissioner (counterpart to the Custodian), the picture she paints is much messier. The importance of bribes and connections in the process of allotment is repeated time and again by her informants. In the discourse of Karachi’s *muhajirs* that she cites from the historical sources and her informants, socioeconomic divisions among the Muslims (now *muhajirs*) become prominent, competition is fierce, and even the practice of *pugree* is seen in a different, more cynical light—as a means for the rich [Hindu] evacuees to make a profit at the expense of the poor [Muslim] newcomers.  

Ilyas Chattha’s study of the Custodian of Evacuee Property in West Punjab (Pakistan) similarly underscores corruption, seeing the Custodian as institutionalizing corruption and the discourse of corruption in Pakistan.

But, of course, these messier facets also existed in the work of the Custodian of Delhi. Since Zamindar’s object of analysis is the Muslim families divided across the border, she traces their movement from Delhi to Karachi (and sometimes back). In their bureaucratic odyssey, the Custodian of Delhi functioned as a body responsible for their *dispossession*, while the Rent Controller and Rehabilitation Commissioner in Karachi were responsible for *allocation* of resources—executed corruptly and unjustly. But if we keep our gaze fixed on Delhi, the

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577 This is exactly how Hindu and Sikh refugees often described *pugree* in Delhi.  
578 Ilyas Chattha interestingly argues that the evacuee property was formative of the practice and discourse on corruption in early-independent Pakistan, serving as justification of the military takeover in 1958. See: Chattha, "Competition for Resources: Partition's Evacuee Property and the Sustenance of Corruption in Pakistan."
Custodian is revealed in its complexity, or duality—as a body responsible for both dispossession and allocation—with their attendant allegations of corruption. In fact, it is quite fascinating to see how similar the discourse of the Hindu and Sikh refugees in Delhi was to that of muhajirs in Karachi—the two almost perfectly echoed each other.

Furthermore, I suggest that the work of the Custodian in Delhi was more complex than in Pakistan. Chattha’s analysis of the Custodian in West Punjab focuses solely on the “monkey business” surrounding the allocation of evacuee property, in which muhajirs and local Punjabis, high officials, politicians, and ordinary people took part. While Chattha divides this crowd into “winners” and “losers,” it is interesting that the Hindu and Sikh evacuees themselves are conspicuously absent from this account, even from the group of “losers.” Most of them had left and were simply irrelevant by this point. In Delhi, on the other hand, the exodus was dramatic yet less complete. It is noteworthy that the two novels with which we opened the chapter incorporate the return of the Muslim evacuees to Delhi, thereby attending to the great challenge of the post-partition period—the indeterminacy of Muslim national belonging, citizenship, and property. It was exactly this ambiguous identity of Muslims that underlay the work of the Custodian in Delhi, who, for its part, further fuelled the uneasiness. While West Pakistan became overwhelmingly Muslim, India was in the midst of a struggle over the question of the place of the religious minority, and it was because this question was still unresolved that Muslim zones became such contested spaces.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRINTING CONFLICT:
THE URDU PRESS IN POST-PARTITION DELHI

Introduction

We return to Pandit Girdharilal Dutta, one of the main protagonists in the monumental Hindi novel *Jhutha Sach (The False Truth)*. In the previous chapter I discussed his property exchange with a Muslim of Daryaganj, which set him apart from refugees of lesser means. Panditji was no doubt well off. What did he do for a living back in Lahore? He started as a young proofreader working for 20 rupees a month. He later opened a small bookshop and started publishing a weekly Urdu magazine. By 1947, at the age of 58, he had become an established and well-respected figure in the press world of Lahore—the owner of a successful Urdu printing press and of a spacious house in Gawalmandi. But then partition was around the corner, communal riots broke out, and Panditji had to leave everything behind and flee the burning streets of Lahore with his family. Luckily, he had had the foresight to transfer some of his life savings to his bank’s branch in Delhi, where he arrived on August 13, just two days before the fateful day of Independence and Partition.

Panditji found Delhi packed with hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly urban Punjabis like him. The refugees settled anywhere they could—on sidewalks and street corners and under every available tree. Panditji embarked on long house-hunting excursions, roaming the streets of Delhi under the burning sun. He searched the lanes south of Delhi Gate, which still housed a Muslim population, albeit confused and dwindling fast. The outbreak of riots in Delhi on September 4 accelerated the pace of the Muslim exodus from the city, and it was then that Panditji found the house in Daryaganj, owned by a Muslim who was searching desperately for a way out of the city. Panditji’s daughter Kanak joined him in Delhi and found a job in one of
several Punjabi Urdu dailies that had recently shifted from Lahore to Delhi. However, she became increasingly frustrated with the shameless advances made at her by the editor, as well as with his constant re-writing of her articles to suit the anti-Muslim agenda of the newspaper. When she finally managed to trace her sweetheart, Jaidev Puri, with whom she had lost touch during the disturbances, she followed him to Jalandhar in East Punjab.

In Lahore, Jaidev Puri had been a promising young Urdu writer, earning a meager income as a journalist for an Urdu daily. After August 15, following a terrifying train journey during which the train was attacked and many of the travelers killed, Puri had found himself in a refugee camp in Jalandhar, destitute and exhausted. A chance meeting with Sood, an old acquaintance, helped him to rebuild his life. Sood was a well-connected local Congress politician, who handed over to Puri an Urdu printing press left behind by a Muslim, Isaac Mohammed. The latter had been a nationalist Muslim who objected to the Pakistan movement, but eventually had no recourse but to flee to Pakistan. He entrusted the keys of his house and printing press with Sood, asking him to keep them safe until he could return from Pakistan in a few months. When Puri reached Jalandhar, Sood not only let him run the press, but also used his political connections to provide Puri with an abundance of printing orders from government offices and private businesses. The press soon turned into a profitable business, and Puri used his new earnings to fulfill an old dream—starting his own Urdu weekly, *Nazir (The Spectator)*, which supported Sood’s political faction and received his patronage. When Kanak arrived, she married Puri and the two invested their energy in the exciting new enterprise of their Urdu magazine.

That the quintessential *Hindi* novel of independence and Partition centers on *Urdu* writers, journalists, and publishers merits consideration. This choice appears peculiar, even

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580 *Jhutha Sach (The False Truth)* was written by the acclaimed writer Yashpal (1903-1976). The novel, published in two volumes (1958, 1960), narrates the fateful years leading up to Partition from the mid 1940s, the transfer of power, the Partition riots, and the first decade after independence up to 1957. It is a realistic historical novel that...
subversive, if we consider the intimate connection between Hindi and the nationalist movement, and between the genre of the novel and the nation. Independence marked the final triumph of Hindi over Urdu—the outcome of the long Hindi-Urdu controversy that had begun in the second half of the 19th century, and was intertwined with the worsening communal relations between Hindus and Muslims. While Urdu gained the British rulers’ patronage during the 19th century and was declared the official language of lower courts and administration in the North-Western Provinces, its status had been increasingly threatened by the advance of Hindi, which was promoted by an increasingly assertive and vocal Hindu middle class. The recognition of Hindi and the Nagari script for use at the lower level of legal and civil administration in Bihar (1881) and later in the North-Western Provinces (1900) was the first stage in the “inexorable advance of

brings to life the period of transition from the colonial to the postcolonial order, through an elaborate plotline that branches out to include multiple subplots and characters.

It led to a “reversal in the balance of power between Urdu and Hindi, resulting in a virtual rout of Urdu in the public domain of authorship and publishing.”

During the Constituent Assembly Debates, in which the language question became one of the most acrimonious issues, the Hindi camp led a campaign against Urdu and Hindustani, which was perceived as Urdu in disguise. Thus, the Constitution named Hindi, rather than Hindustani, the official language of the Union. Although Hindi eventually lost the battle to English, which remained the language of law and administration, it has received strong state patronage since independence. Extensive public resources have been allocated to the promotion of Hindi literature and the production of Hindi books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other publications. In U.P., Urdu’s heartland, Hindi was introduced as the sole language of administration. Simultaneously, the U.P. and Bihar governments suspended aid to Urdu schools, and Urdu was increasingly marginalized and became exclusively associated with the Muslim minority. This trend was clearly evident in Delhi, the historical heart of Urdu’s...
sophisticated court culture and literature. In the 1961 census, only 5.8% of the population identified Urdu as their mother tongue, almost perfectly correlated with the Muslim population that remained in Delhi.\footnote{"…[T]here is close approximation between the total population of Muslims and those who have returned Urdu as their mother-tongue, the respective figure being 1,55,453 and 1,53,247": Chopra, "Delhi Gazetteer," 142.}

To recapitulate, Hindi became a defining component of Indian nationalism in the 20th century. “Consonant with this role,” argues Trivedi, “the growth of the novel of Hindi reflected if not a conscious project to narrate the nation then at least a marked proclivity to represent not merely local or regional but equally thematic concerns.”\footnote{Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation," 961-2.} Given this observation, one would expect an important Hindi novel such as \textit{Jhutha Sach}, narrating the story of the Indian nation coming to its own, to focus on Hindi publishing and writing. After all, Yashpal himself, as a Hindi writer, was part of this shift from Urdu to Hindi in the literary sphere of north India—a switch that was emblematized by the career trajectory of the writer Premchand, and which reached its peak after independence.\footnote{As stated above, after the recognition of Hindi for administrative and legal purposes in 1900, a reversal in the power relations between Hindi and Urdu had taken place, as represented in the growing number of Hindi publications. The shift from Urdu to Hindi was emblematized by the career of the celebrated writer Premchand (1880-1936), who started as an Urdu writer but, from 1915 onwards, gradually shifted to writing in Hindi, producing his important novels in this language. Ibid., 974-5. Premchand was also the one who suggested to writer Upendranath Ashk to switch to Hindi, which Ashk, among many other writers in the 1930s did: Daisy Rockwell, \textit{Upendranath Ashk: A Critical Biography} (New Delhi: Katha, 2004), Chapter 1. After 1947, most of the important north-Indian writers wrote in Hindi rather than Urdu.}

Yet, Yashpal chose to foreground the world of the Urdu rather than the Hindi press. Why? I suggest that, at one level, his decision carries subversive connotations that fit the anti-triumphalist message of this novel—its focus on the darker aspects of independence in the form of the Partition violence, the abuse and exploitation of women, and government corruption after 1947. It was thus appropriate that Yashpal would illuminate the vanishing socio-cultural second official language in 1989, triggering widespread riots. For a recent assessment of, and reflection on, the decline of Urdu after 1947, see: Ather Farouqui, ed. \textit{Redefining Urdu Politics in India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).}
landscape of Urdu rather than the victorious, forward-looking sphere of Hindi. At a more prosaic, but for our purposes, more relevant level, Yashpal’s choice is simply grounded in historical reality, reflecting accurately the social and intellectual world of late-colonial Punjab, in which Urdu was the main language of the intelligentsia and administration.

In this Punjabi world, with which Yashpal was intimately familiar, he himself was rather exceptional. Educated in an Arya Samaj Gurukul (school) in Hardwar, which put emphasis on Hindu culture and on Hindi and Sanskrit education, Yashpal learned Urdu only later in life, when he moved to Lahore and realized that managing day-to-day tasks was almost impossible without a working knowledge of Urdu.592 For historians, Jhutha Sach offers an important reconstruction of this Punjabi world as it was uprooted to and resettled in Delhi, drawing attention to the fact that the ascendancy of Hindi did not take place overnight. In the first two decades after independence, remnants persisted of the linguistic and cultural landscape of late-colonial north India, where Urdu was the dominant literary and administrative language, shared by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.

Indeed, this is exactly how post-partition Delhi was remembered by Aslam Parvez, an eminent Urdu scholar, who wrote a biography of the last Mughal Emperor and who is a true Dilliwallah, born and raised in old Delhi near Turkman Gate. In an interview about his childhood and youth in Delhi, Parvez recalled how Urdu print dominated everyday life in Delhi of the 1950s. There is no doubt, he conceded, that partition and independence eventually brought about

592 He later described how there were no Hindi signboards or newspapers in Lahore: Yashpal and Corinne Friend, Yashpal Looks Back: Selections from an Autobiography (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981), 14-5. Bhisham Sahni, another important post-Independence Hindi writer who came from Punjab tells in his autobiography that his father, an Arya Samaji, sent him and his brother, famous actor Balraj Sahni, to a gurukul where they learnt Sanskrit and Hindi, but was eventually convinced to enroll them in a regular school, realizing that Urdu and English were the key to economic success: Bhisham Sahni, Āj ke Atī (Rājakamala Prakāșana, 2003), 27-8. Similarly, leading Punjabi businessman Prakash Tandon, while telling about his family, mentions that his mother’s father, who belonged to the orthodox Gurukul wing of the Arya Samaj, sent her brother to the gurukul seminary in the Kangra Hill. “The education they gave was amazingly out of tune with the changing times, and he always remained very unworldly.” Prakash Tandon, Punjabi Century, 1857-1947 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 36.
the decline of Urdu, but interestingly, the immediate impact of partition was to make Urdu even more prominent in Delhi’s streets. Thanks to the newcomers from the Punjab, Urdu was everywhere—on the signboards of shops and trollies, in newspapers and magazines, and in the private schools and colleges set up by the refugees, where Persian and Urdu were taught. The impact was felt immediately after partition and lasted for the first two decades after independence.593

Literary critic Aijaz Ahmad makes a similar argument: “Independence and partition were no doubt key watersheds in the chequered history of the Urdu language and its literature […] But…the divisive forces unleashed in 1947 matured fully only by the early 1960s and…the next decisive event occurred in 1965, when the Indo-Pakistan War stabilized a different kind of literary map.”594 Whereas Urdu eventually underwent a process of communalization and became exclusively associated with Muslims and with Pakistan, the division of language did not correspond neatly to the division of territory, but was a long and protracted process that took two decades to mature.595 It is worth quoting Ahmad at length in this regard:

Adjustment to what India became after Partition has required enormous and entirely willed losses of memory. Few historians, literary historians included, care to remember that since Urdu had become the language of cultural literacy for large numbers of Punjabi intellectuals, for whom Lahore was the main centre, the Partition of the country meant that large numbers of Urdu writers moved not only from India to Pakistan but also from Pakistan to India. […] There were…thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, who were Hindus and Sikhs, for whom Punjabi was the spoken language, but Urdu the language of reading and writing, and who then reconciled themselves to the new realities in all sorts of painful and impoverishing ways.596

593 Urdu’s presence in the city, he emphasized, was unprecedented and phenomenal: Interview with Aslam Parvez, 29 June 2011, New Delhi.
596 Ahmad, Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia, 120-1. Emphasis in original.
Certainly, my own research proves that, more than any other language, Urdu holds the key to social realities in the streets of post-partition Delhi. Hence, in one sense, this chapter provides historical research that validates and expands upon Aijaz Ahmad’s observation. It shows that the absolute identification between religious community and language did not take place immediately after partition, and that Urdu was an important language in Delhi shared by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs for two decades after independence.

At the same time, there is an important difference between Ahmad’s analysis and the one offered here. Ahmad identifies Urdu with the ideological and emotional world inhabited by the Urdu progressive writers. He uses Raymond Williams’ terminology to discuss this world as a particular “structure of feeling,” which dominated the intellectual scene during the 1940s and 1950s. This structure of feeling expressed a composite Indian culture shared by Hindus and Muslims alike, and was articulated through Urdu—a language that transcended regional and religious boundaries. According to Ahmad, by 1965, the partition of territory had brought about the erosion of the progressive writers’ structure of feeling and, along with it, a partition of their linguistic and literary world.

But the ideological and emotive world that I found in the archives was very different from the pluralistic spirit of the progressive writers. While Ahmad is no doubt right in associating Urdu with cosmopolitanism and the legacy of a composite Indian culture, there is a very different legacy of Urdu, which is often neglected in his and other studies focused on Urdu poetry or the progressive writers’ circle. It is the legacy of late-colonial Urdu journalism in the Punjab and other parts of north India, in which Urdu served as a tool for expressing an

increasingly toxic communal atmosphere, culminating eventually in Partition. It is this legacy and its workings in post-partition Delhi that will be the focus of this chapter. Urdu, we shall see, served as a *shared language of conflict*, mirroring and nourishing the tensions on the streets.

I first turn my attention to the refugee Hindu dailies, which relocated from Lahore to Delhi. I trace continuities between the combative public sphere of late-colonial Lahore and post-independence Delhi, suggesting that the Arya Samaji ideology of colonial Punjab combined with the catastrophic experience of partition to create a militant discourse of refugees’ right to the city, at the expense of the Muslims. Next, I discuss the Muslim press and its response to the predicament of Muslims after partition, analyzing the development of a discourse of Muslim grievances which, while no doubt being grounded in reality, perpetuated Muslims’ separate identity and exacerbated the process of ghettoization. Finally, I analyze in depth one example of the recurring editorial controversies between the refugee and the Muslim dailies, showing how the problem of Muslim assimilation stood at its center. I analyze the expressive and hyper-emotional qualities of Urdu journalistic writing, suggesting that it sheds light on the emotional and political landscape of Delhi after independence and specifically on the dominance of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the prevalence of small-scale disturbances in the old city and its surrounding “mixed” neighborhoods.

**“This is Delhi” – Recasting Punjabi Identity in Post-Partition Delhi**

This is Delhi and I am a refugee. From the very first day I arrived in Delhi, the accountant of Milap started to cut taxes from my salary on behalf of the government. The government gave me neither a house nor any other facility. In spite of this, I am [considered] a refugee and every *Dilliwallah* seems to believe that I am here because of his mercy and that he is my master. “If this person wants to live in Delhi then he has to go by our rules.”

This is Delhi and this is Delhi’s Coffee House. Here, the refugees drink coffee and the *Dilliwalla* drink only water. And even water they drink only because, without it, they
could not curse the refugees. One Dilliwallah is drinking water and is cursing the refugees. The refugees are listening and are keeping quiet. They know very well why the Dilliwallah is angry. He doesn’t have money for a cup of coffee, so what can he do but curse those who drink coffee.

As soon as he arrived he ordered a glass of water. Then he ordered water every ten minutes. Finally, the annoyed waiter told him, “Babuji, even the Yamuna does not have so much water. Where will I get it from?” The Dilliwallah became angry. But he could not do anything to the waiter. So he started cursing the refugees.

One cannot get eggs at the Delhi Coffee House. But you can get the meat of the egg’s mother, the chicken, with double roti [bread]. People say that when the owners of the Coffee House took the place, the landlord rented it to him on condition that eggs would not be sold here, and indeed eggs are not served here, but there was no prohibition on meat. Because the owners of the Coffee House are not refugees, the landlord never accused them of violating the lease contract.

This is Delhi, this is Paharganj and the tange [horse cart] stand. A ride from here to Qutab Road costs 2 annas. I sat down in a tanga and then came to know that my host the tangewala was a Dilliwallah. When I reached Qutab Road, I gave him 2 annas. He became angry and demanded 4 annas—unlike the refugees, who always sell for lower rates. I was wearing dhoti and kamiz and therefore the tangewala became so furious that he could have beaten me. When I started speaking Punjabi, he cooled down and left, saying, "Who will fight with the refugee ghunde [goons]."

This is the stand at Qutab Road. The same tangewala stands there. He is not ready to go for less than 4 annas. Therefore he does not get any passengers. And he is sitting in his tanga as if it were the Peacock Throne. Within a few minutes, at least ten tange have left the stand with passengers. Still, he looked at the other tangewale as if saying, “These kamine [bastards] refugees have killed my livelihood.”

If any passenger gets seated in the tanga he irritably mutters, “Babuji, this will cost you 4 annas.” As if he were saying, “This tanga is not for people like you, it is for princes.”

This is Delhi and this is Connaught Place. I am a newcomer. I am looking for the post office. I ask one Dilliwallah for the address. He replies angrily, “It’s in front of you, are you blind?” He scolds me for no apparent reason. My first wish is to hit him on the head, but immediately the thought comes to my mind that I am a refugee, so people will accuse me of ghundaism.

This satirical column was written by Urdu poet and journalist Gopal Mittal, a Punjabi Hindu refugee who arrived in Delhi in the aftermath of the partition riots in Lahore. It was

599 “…aur paani bhi voh sirf is liye pite hain ki iske baghair sharanarthiyon ko gaaliyan nikalna mushkil hai.” The writer’s joke on the stinginess of Delhi’s residents plays on a common proverb: “paani pipi kar ke gaali dena,” meaning that one curses so much that his throat gets dry and he constantly needs to drink water in between the abuses he utters.

600 “Yeh Dilli Hai,” Milap, 26 July, 1948. (All translations from Urdu are mine, unless otherwise stated. Official correspondence, however, was conducted in English, and I quote it without any [sic] notations).
published on July 26, 1948 in the Urdu daily Milap, for which Mittal had worked as a journalist in Lahore and, afterwards, in Delhi.\textsuperscript{601} Milap was one of the two most important Arya Samaji Urdu newspapers of Lahore, which shifted to Delhi in 1947 and turned into the main mouthpieces voicing the concerns and grievances of the refugee community in the city. Delhi’s press experienced a Punjabi upsurge, as indicated in the CID files containing applications for declarations of printing presses, newspapers, and magazines. These are fat files that include hundreds of applications each month. Taken together, they give the impression that the entire Punjabi press was transplanted to Delhi, and that most of it was in Urdu.\textsuperscript{602}

The sheer volume of Urdu materials circulated in the capital after 1947 made the Urdu press a key player in Delhi’s public sphere. The large quantity of Urdu publications in Delhi after 1947 stands in contrast to the population data mentioned above. While fewer than 6\% of the residents in 1961 claimed Urdu as their primary language, almost perfectly correlating with the Muslim population, the majority of newspapers and periodicals published in Delhi were in Urdu. Almost 15 years after independence, Delhi still featured 16 Urdu dailies, as compared with 13 in English and three in Hindi. Similarly, there were 54 Urdu weeklies, as compared with 38 English weeklies and 20 Hindi ones.\textsuperscript{603} It is no wonder that the first Press Officer appointed in Delhi to monitor the newspapers after Independence was an Urdu journalist.\textsuperscript{604}

\textsuperscript{601} Back in Lahore, Mittal worked in Milap for only three months. My account of Gopal Mittal’s life is based on an interview I conducted with his son, who owns and manages the Urdu press established by Mittal, and on Gopal Mittal’s memoir: Interview with Prem Gopal Mittal, 30 June 2011, New Delhi; Gopāl Mittal, Lahore Kā Jo Zikr Kīyā (New Delhi: Modern Publishing House, 2000).

\textsuperscript{602} According to colonial law, printers and publishers had to apply for government approval before they could start a newspaper or a printing press. In Delhi, these applications were transferred from the Deputy Commissioner to the CID press division for verification of the applicant’s identity, political inclinations, financial situation, and criminal or political record. For the monthly applications received by the Delhi CID in the first years after independence, see Files 9, 11, 274, 277, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.

\textsuperscript{603} Chopra, "Delhi Gazetteer," 125.

\textsuperscript{604} Gopi Nath Aman, who had worked as an editor for the Urdu daily Tej before partition was appointed as the press officer of Delhi’s Chief Commissioner in 1948. For his bio, see: F. 40/S/1942, CC Files, Special Press Adviser, DSA.
On the other hand, information on circulation, fragmentary and problematic as it may be, suggests a more complicated picture. While the number of English and Hindi publications was much smaller than that of Urdu periodicals, their readership was quite extensive. In other words, the English and the Hindi press showed a greater tendency towards concentration of ownership, which meant that fewer publications reached a greater readership. The fact that the major capitalist families invested in English and Hindi media, rather than in Urdu media, is indicative of the marginalization of Urdu in independent India. At the same time, while there were numerous Urdu periodicals with limited readership of only a few hundred, the more important Urdu dailies, most of them medium-scale refugee family-run businesses, had each a circulation ranging between 8,000 and 14,000. Taken together, the Urdu dailies had a large readership, as well.

What do we learn from these newspapers about the ways in which the refugees coped with their recent displacement from their homeland, and about their experience of the city to which they had migrated? What social, political, and emotional landscapes are conjured up in the

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605 According to a CID report from 1951, the English daily Hindustan Times, owned by the leading capitalist Birla and edited by Mahatma Gandhi’s son Devdas Gandhi (1900-1957), had a circulation of 26,000. The Hindi daily Hindustan, also owned by Birla, had a circulation of 15,000. The Hindi daily Nav Bharat Times, which was part of the Bennett Coleman Group that published the English daily Times of India, had a circulation of 28,335. See CID report in F. 89, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML. For the problematic nature of circulation statistics, see Robin Jeffrey, "Punjabi: 'The Sub-Liminal Charge,'" Economic & Political Weekly 32, no. 9-10 (1997): 445. Ather Farouqui, "The Emerging Dilemma of the Urdu Press in India: A Viewpoint," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 18, no. 2 (1995).


607 For rough information on the circulation of Urdu newspapers in the early 1950s, see two CID press files: F. 89, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML; F. 468, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML. Discrepancies between the two files are indicative of the unreliable nature of information on newspaper circulation. Nonetheless, they reflect the substantial presence of Urdu publications in Delhi. According to file 468: Vishwa Miter (5,000), Vir Bharat (8000), Tej (10,000), Ranjit Nagar (2,000). According to file 089: Bande Mataram (11,550), Milap (8,000), Pratap (14,000), Vir Bharat (2,000), Al Jamiat (5,000).
refugee press? To begin answering these questions, let us start with Gopal Mittal’s satire. The narrator, who is explicitly identified with Mittal himself, takes us along on a daily tour of the city, delineating the spatial boundaries of this urban setting as he experiences it. At the center lies the Qutab Road, the main road stretching along the railway line, from Sadar Bazar in North Delhi, southward through Paharganj, to Connaught Place in New Delhi—the central shopping and entertainment area built by the British, where the Coffee House was located. Like many of the lower-middle- and middle-class writers of his generation, Mittal arranged his life between these two areas. This stretch is also where the main characters in *Jhutha Sach* roam about.

The fundamental experience of the city is one of tension and ongoing confrontation, as the narrator’s daily routine is made up of a sequence of hostile encounters. Another, related aspect, is his preoccupation with money. The narrator seems to think about rupees throughout the day, an indication of the state of mind of a refugee and, more generally, of a society living in austerity and everyday struggle. The narrator is bitter and sarcastic, highly aware of his identity as an unwelcome refugee in a hostile city, whose social landscape is divided in two—the *Dilliwallahs* and the *sharanarthi* (refugees).

Significantly, there is a sense of pride in the Punjabi character, depicted as a hard-working and honest man and, no less important, one who knows how to enjoy and is willing to pay for the small joys of life, such as a cup of coffee. Delhi’s people are, by contrast, lazy and arrogant, rude and stingy. An especially important characteristic of the refugees is their entrepreneurial spirit—they offer competitive prices for low-margin profits and adapt to changing circumstances, while the *Dilliwallah* is inflexible and stuck in the past. Although these have become by now familiar stereotypes, we can see how they were at work already a few

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608 My analysis in this section is based on daily issues of newspaper *Milap* located at NMML microfilm section, the Chief Commissioner Press files, DSA, and the CID press files, NMML, which include both newspaper cuttings and official correspondences about the refugee press, especially *Milap* and *Pratap*. Taken together, my systematic research covers the years 1947-1955, with a few files preceding and following this time span.
months after partition, in response to foci of tension between the old residents and the newcomers. One of these foci was Delhi natives’ disgust at the Punjabi street vendors selling meat kebabs. The scene describing the selling of chicken where eggs are prohibited must be a comment on the craftiness of Delhi’s businessmen, but also on their dietary hypocrisy.

Most important, perhaps, is the theme that opens the column—bitterness towards an incompetent and unhelpful government—rather than receiving shelter and support from his government, the writer was made to pay taxes. These themes dominated the pages of the Urdu Punjabi press, as we shall soon see, with one marked difference—if the tension saturating this satire is softened by its humor, it becomes much more sinister in most articles of the refugee press, marked by ferocious criticism of the government and vicious propaganda against Muslims.

Gopal Mittal was but one of the numerous Urdu writer-journalists who fled Punjab and settled in Delhi, as did many of the proprietors of Lahore’s printing presses, newspapers, and magazines. Together, this crowd belonged to a broader political and ideological world in late-colonial Punjab—from communists and socialists to Akali Sikhs and Hindu Mahasabha proponents. By the late 19th century, Lahore had become a vibrant intellectual and political center, bursting with books and newspapers, colleges and libraries, clubs and associations.609 As historian Farina Mir notes, the British language policy in Punjab centered on Urdu, making it the official language of administration and law in the province. It soon became “the principal language of Punjab’s incipient public sphere.”610 This public sphere grew more and more active, and “[b]y the 1870s newspapers were increasing in number and circulation, and book publishing was thriving, with thousands of volumes produced each year…”611 The majority of these

611 Ibid., 31.
newspapers and other printed materials were in Urdu. Lahore had also become the center of Arya Samaji publications and of ferocious exchanges between Arya Samajis and Muslims through pamphlets, newspapers, and posters, which expressed and at the same time inflamed the growing communal tensions in Punjab.

By the late 1920s, the three most important Hindu dailies of Lahore, which later shifted to Delhi, were the Arya Samaji Pratap and Milap and the Sanatan Dharmi Vir Bharat. Mahashay Krishna launched Pratap on March 30, 1919. The newspaper was named after the 16th-century Rajput Hindu ruler, Maharana Pratap Singh, who, having fought the Mughal Akbar, symbolizes Hindu heroism in the face of Muslim invaders. It was also the semantic range of the word pratap that must have inspired Mahashay Krishna—glowing heat, splendor, glory, ardor, zeal. Mahashay Krishna himself was described as “a kind of firebrand who simply would not bow to anybody” and “a prolific writer who commented on each of the burning issues of his time. He always wrote his editorials in the first person singular, and detested the notorious editorial We.”

He and Lala Kushal Chand, who established the daily Milap four years later in 1923,

612 Ibid., 31 and Chapter 1, and passim. On the development of Punjab’s public sphere in Urdu, see also: Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850, Chapter 2. The leading Punjabi businessman Prakash Tandon gave a very interesting account of the socio-linguistic world of the colonial Punjab in his autobiography: “Official business was transacted in both languages, at the higher levels in English and at the lower levels in Urdu. The district level was the dividing line. My father, when he was in the districts, had a stenographer for English, and a munshi for Urdu.” Likewise, the medium of instruction was Urdu in the primary and middle schools, and English in the high schools. Interestingly, “Hindi, in the Devanagari script, arrived later and was confined at the beginning to the Brahmans and to our women, the latter through the influence of Arya Samaj. Literacy among our Hindu women thus began with Hindi, and this created some amusing situations, because in my mother’s generation there were many women who could not communicate with their husbands when they were away from each other, as they could only write in Hindi and their husbands only in Urdu or English.” Tandon, Punjabi Century, 1857-1947, 67.

613 For the communalization of the Urdu press in late-colonial Punjab, see: Mir, The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab, passim. See, for example, the embittered exchanges between Arya Samaji and Muslim publications preceding and following the assassination of Arya Samaji leader Pandit Lekh Ram in 1897: Jones, Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab, 193-202. For editorial and tract wars in Lahore during the 1910s and 1920s, see: Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850, Chapters 4, 6; David Gilmartin, "Democracy, Nationalism and the Public: A Speculation on Colonial Muslim Politics," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 14, no. 1 (1991); Neeti Nair, "Beyond the 'Communal' 1920s: The Problem of Intention, Legislative Pragmatism and the Making of Section 295a of the Indian Penal Code," Indian Economic and Social History Review 50, no. 3 (2013).

“were professional rivals and criticised each other in pungent editorials. But every evening they would go out together on a long walk.”

Pratap and Milap were family-run businesses, and hence the histories of these newspapers were interwoven with the histories of their owner families. Both Mahashay Krishna’s and Lala Kushal Chand’s families took an active part in the nationalist struggle—family members were imprisoned, and their newspapers often published nationalist materials, followed by government punishment. Their nationalist politics exemplified the politics of Hindus in late-colonial Punjab, where there was an overlap between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha in terms of membership and political sentiments. The complex and somewhat ambiguous political attitudes of Hindus in Punjab marked the policy of the Arya Samaji newspapers. This, at least, is the portrait drawn by Urdu writer and communist party member Hansraj Rehbar in his reminiscences. Rahbar was an Urdu journalist back in Lahore and, from 1947 onwards, in Delhi. He worked for, and had an intimate knowledge of, Pratap, Milap, and Vir Bharat. When asked whether Pratap’s policy promoted a Congress or a Hindu viewpoint, Rahbar refused to provide a clear-cut characterization and insisted that it kept changing and there was no single ideology. Likewise, when asked whether it was problematic for a communist

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615 ibid., 31.
616 On the arrest of Mahashay Krishna’s son, K. Narendra, see “Habeas Corpus Plea Rejected,” Times of India, 24 October, 1942. Lala Kushal Chand’s eldest son Ranbir Singh was convicted in the second Lahore Conspiracy Case: Interview with Navin Suri, 3 May 2011, New Delhi.
619 ibid., 69. Hansraj Rahbar, of course, was not alone. Just like Jaidev Puri, the lower-middle-class character in the novel Jhutha Sach, many of the aspiring writers in the late-colonial Punjab worked in the field of Urdu journalism as sub-editors and translators for meager salaries. Manto did, and so did Upendranath Ashk, and Gopal Mittal, whose satire “This is Delhi” opened this section. Many of these writers were upfront Marxists or, at least, had progressive and leftist leanings. Lahore as recalled in Gopal Mittal’s memoir was a cosmopolitan city of intense intellectual exchanges in its coffee houses, where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs took part. Mittal claimed that when he left Lahore
like him to get employment in Arya Samaji newspapers, he said that such distinctions were irrelevant back then, as long as everyone shared the common cause of ousting the British.

At the same time, Rahbar acknowledged that these papers had a great share in poisoning the atmosphere in Punjab. They were part of a robust, fiery, and highly politicized arena of Urdu publications, which turned increasingly communal as partition drew near. Rahbar recalled a contemporary joke that played on the names of Lahore’s dailies: The newspaper that causes the most discord and rift is Milap (the Hindi word means union or agreement), the most cowardly one is Pratap (vigor and courage), and the most conservative is Inqalab (revolution, the name of a contemporary Punjabi Muslim paper).  

Navin Suri, the current editor of Milap and grandson of the paper’s founder, narrated the history of the newspaper in an interview. A dramatic moment in this history was the outbreak of partition riots in Lahore, during which Milap’s office was burned down and its workers barely escaped under army protection. The paper has been the pride of the family ever since; it ceased publication for only two weeks and then reopened in its new location in Delhi.  

Like Lala Kushal Chand, Mahashay Krishna and his family left Lahore and relocated in Delhi, reestablishing Pratap in Panchkuian Road in Paharganj, now a hub of Punjabi presence in the city. Once these papers arrived in Delhi, they brought with them the combative and abusive nature of Lahore’s public sphere and a discourse underwritten by communal categories and animosities.

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620 Interview with Hansraj Rahbar (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 629, NMML, 71-2. For the role played by Pratap and Milap in the growingly abusive exchanges of the Urdu press of Lahore, see also Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 9.

621 Interview with Navin Suri, 3 May 2011, New Delhi.
Suri’s portrayal of Milap’s history emphasizes a long-standing affiliation with the Congress and the secular outlook of the newspaper. The archives, however, tell a different story. The first piece of information on the family’s whereabouts in Delhi mentions the arrest of Lala Kushal Chand on August 24, 1947, following an “alleged objectionable” speech he delivered in a Hindu Sahayata Samiti public meeting. In subsequent years, the newspaper’s relations with Delhi’s administration remained tense, and its editorials vocal and combative. Indeed, while Suri emphasized the difference between Milap’s “secular” policy and Pratap’s ”communal” one, their publications in Delhi in the aftermath of partition were hardly distinguishable in tone and outlook. Both focused on refugees’ grievances and their right to the city, both provided extensive coverage of the riots in West Pakistan, and both articulated acerbic criticism of the Congress leadership—particularly of Gandhi—and of the Muslims. Accordingly, I treat them as interchangeable in my analysis.

These newspapers’ coverage of riots in West Pakistan was marked by highly sensational headings and extremely detailed accounts of the violence, putting stress on the violation of Hindu and Sikh honor—the desecration of their temples and gurdwaras, of their cows and womenfolk. While doing so, Pratap recurrently utilized emotionally charged images from Indian history, referring to Muslim attackers as “Mahmud of Ghazni,” the 11th-century conqueror of land from eastern Iran to northwestern India, known to have raided and destroyed Hindu temples, notably Somnath. Importantly, both dailies’ news coverage and editorials throughout 1948

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623 The front page of December 22, 1947 is typical: The headings declare that all temples and gurdwaras in Kasur and Chunian were being turned into slaughterhouses for cows, that Hindus were forced to eat cows, and that non-Muslim women were being sold off: “Qasur aur Chunian,” Pratap, 27 December, 1948. See also: “Riyasat Bahawalpur Mei,” Pratap, 22 December, 1948. Many of Pratap’s riot-related news stories are included in file: F. 8(11)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA. Milap’s clippings covering the riots in Pakistan are included in file: F. 8(178)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
spoke of refugee Hindus and Sikhs en bloc, as non-Muslim victims of Muslim aggression. This categorization would change starting in 1949 with the rise Hindu-Sikh tensions in Punjab.

The most important section of the Urdu newspapers was the editorials, where the editor demonstrated the power of his pen and unique writing skills. The editorials formed the main source of attraction for readers and the reason for buying the paper. As opposed to the mainstream English and Hindi dailies, such as Hindustan Times and Hindustan, where editorials were unsigned and written in a neutral and dry tone, Urdu editorials were signed by the owner-editor and clearly identified with his personal views and style of writing. In Milap, the editorials were written by the proprietor, Lala Kushal Chand, and his eldest son, Ranbir Singh, who served as chief editor until his death in 1982. In the months following their arrival in Delhi and before Gandhi’s assassination, Ranbir wrote particularly fierce editorials. The following is representative in its thematic and stylistic choices:

**Listen Carefully!**

Once, while throwing the bomb in the central assembly, Sardar Bhagat Singh said that one should speak loudly to those whose ears are deaf. While he said it in relation to the British imperialists, it is known that the ears of the Indian leaders and officers are even deafer. They think that the problems of the Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh will be solved by talking and giving speeches. Whenever they see a Punjabi, a person from the Frontier, or a Sindhi, they think of them as a problem. They usually say: “We have no place, we have no food, what can we do?” In the best case they say: “We have sympathy for you, you have truly been oppressed, but we are helpless.” In their hearts they think: “These *kambakht*, (wretched) why didn’t they just die in Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh? Why has this trouble befallen on us?” I agree that these *lakhs* (hundreds of thousands) of Hindus and Sikhs, who come to them after being destroyed, are no doubt a problem. These people [the leaders] were sitting in their nice, big bungalows, in their big houses [*kothi*]. They have become *maliks* (owners) of big factories. And they have become masters of such a huge country. They thought: “The British have gone, so we’ll enjoy our life now. We’ll draw fat salaries. We’ll do a lot of business. And we’ll rule with splendor.” But then the destroyed Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh came to their doorstep like an unexpected disaster. I understand their perplexity. I understand their confusion. But one thing these people forget is that if we have been destroyed, it was not any of our fault but, rather, because

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624 Editorial: Kaan Khol Kar Suniye, *Milap*, 19 October 1947. It was considered objectionable material and included in two different files concerning the objectionable nature of Milap’s tone: F. 8(29)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; F. 8(178)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
the leaders of India proved incapable of understanding the tricks of the British and the mentality of the Pakistanis. These people were deceived and now they are deceiving us. They accepted [the establishment of] Pakistan without asking us and against our own will. They should have known that we would bear the greatest burden of Pakistan. And they should not have made this decision without our opinion. After this [betrayal], they betrayed us once more. They told us: “You should stay in Pakistan, we will protect you.” However, they had no mechanism for our protection and no method. We were victims of their lack of sense and of their deception. And now it is these people who perceive us as a problem. These people, who live in huge bungalows, tell us that they don’t have any room for us. We are forced to crowd together, twenty people in one room. And they say: “You should evacuate these few rooms. We are trying to convince the Muslims of Delhi [to return]. If they are persuaded, we will give them back their houses.” Their policy is that Delhi’s and U.P.’s Muslims should stay here, because their businesses cannot run without them, and because following their departure, Hindustan will become only a Hindu state. We are amazed at the extent to which selfishness and power turn human beings blind. These are the same people who came to our doorstep a few months ago like beggars, begging for our votes and support. These are the people who deceived us, saying that Pakistan would be built on their own dead bodies. These are the people who accepted Pakistan without asking us. And after accepting [Pakistan], they deceived us by promising to protect us. These are the people whose incompetence and fraud killed not thousands but lakhs of our brothers. And they were killed only because we supported the Congress instead of the Muslim League, and supported Hindustan and not Pakistan. It is because of these people that thousands of our sisters and daughters experienced dishonor unlike anything ever seen before. It is because of these people that thousands of our women are caught in the claws of Pakistani beasts. And each of these women is forced to become the wife of ten to twenty husbands. It is because of them that our well-settled homes were ruined. Our brothers who were lakhpati (millionaires) became beggars for food. And today these are the people who are frowning at us. They are treating us like beggars. These people who sit in grand bungalows and who have become the guests of big businessmen are preaching to us the message of shanti and ahimsa (peace and nonviolence) and are telling us: “India is the country of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. All should live here.” I want to ask them whether they have such a short memory that they forget an event just few minutes after it happened […] Can’t they think even for a moment that if the Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh have been destroyed they did not come here to be treated like beggars and driven away from every place like dogs. Rather, they came here to demand their rights. It is because of you that these people were ruined, and they were ruined so you would get independence, wealth, and comfort. They have as much right to this independence, wealth, and comfort as you do. Actually, they have more right, because they sacrificed so much, more than any Congress leader. They have no need of your sympathy and empty speeches. No need of the messages of shanti and ahimsa. What they need is their houses, money, businesses, jobs, and factories. These houses, money, businesses, and factories are available in India. Today they are in the hands of your beloved and loyal Muslims. We demand that you expel them from here and send them to Pakistan. Give us these houses, etc. And tell them to go to Pakistan and capture our property. There is no cure but this. There is no other way but this. If our leaders are honest, if they do not wish to be deceived again and again to deceive us, they should take this road. And they should abandon the foolish messages of shanti and ahimsa, which have destroyed us. You should remember that either the

625 This is a reference to a famous quotation by Gandhi.
destroyed people of Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh receive concrete, practical help, or you will never be able to sit in peace and quiet. —Ranbir

Stylistically, this editorial is very typical of the Urdu refugee press—long, repetitive, and emotional, resembling an oral speech more than a written article. Ranbir does not purport to represent an objective point of view, but instead presents himself as an involved actor explicitly identified with his readership—“we the Punjabis”—as opposed to the government and the Muslims. His writing is direct, addressing the government and the readers in the second person, and it interlaces colloquial expressions, such as kambakht. Rather than offering a succinct and cohesive argument, like the ones presented in Hindustan Times editorials, Ranbir hammers his point over and over again, using repetition as a rhetorical device to convince the reader. As we shall see, repetition was not confined to single editorials—the same arguments and metaphors were voiced in one editorial after another, in both Pratap and Milap.

Taken together, all these repetitive statements cohered into a “refugee discourse,” whose central themes were, first and foremost, a preoccupation with the tragedy of partition and the issue of blame, ascribed to the Congress leadership and/or the Muslims. In this discourse, the fact that the Congress leadership was responsible for the refugees’ victimization established their right to the state’s and city’s resources. One Pratap editorial, for example, stated that, “we are not refugees but creditors. As long as the government does not clear our debt, it has no right to be generous to any other community.”626 There was also the cultivation of a sense of Punjabi self-respect and sense of entitlement in the face of existential crisis. We may recall these feelings in

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626 Editorial: Ek Dukhi Dil, Pratap, 6 May 1948. In early May 1948, Pratap published an alleged letter to the editor with the title “a Painful Cry of a Sad Heart.” While the letter was extremely long and suspiciously resembled the mordant style of Mahashay Krishan, Pratap argued it was a genuine letter, sent by a refugee from Kingsway Camp. That Urdu papers—both Hindu and Muslim—published fictitious readers’ letters that were in fact written by the editors themselves was a recurrent charge by the Press Office, the CID, and the newspapers themselves against each other. Whatever the identity of the writer may be, it certainly caused a stir and stood at the center of a court case between Pratap and the Delhi administration. The letter cleverly addressed Mahashay Krishan himself, accusing him that his famously combative style has softened due to government pressures.
Gopal Mittal’s satire, which opened with the income tax he paid to the government. But the bitterness underlying Mittal’s text becomes hostile and communal in Ranbir’s editorials, linking the problem of refugee rehabilitation directly to Muslim presence and property in the city.627

Milap’s editorials throughout October 1947–January 1948 continued to demonstrate anti-Muslim sentiments and a harsh critique of the Congress policy and of Gandhi. In an editorial titled tamasha dekhte jaiye (“Just Keep on Watching the Drama”), Ranbir focused on the burning question of the day—Muslim belonging and loyalty—claiming that, prior to partition, 90% of the Muslims were members of the Muslim League, and hence 90% should now leave for Pakistan. The Muslims were responsible for the partition of India and the disaster of the Punjabis and yet, “because our leaders try to maintain their Mahatmaism, Sadhuism, and Santism, they said that if the Muslims announce their loyalty to the Indian Union they could stay in India and retain their lavish life as before.”628 Such sarcastic attacks on Gandhi were prominent in the refugee press of this period. During Gandhi’s fast for the sake of communal harmony in Delhi, Ranbir bitterly criticized him for defaming India in the eyes of the world by blaming Hindus and Sikhs for the Partition violence.629 When the first attempt on Gandhi’s life was made by Madan Lal on January 20, Singh denounced the act but, at the same time, argued that Gandhi was partly to blame, since his Muslim-appeasing policies drove someone like Madan Lal to mad actions.630

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627 The difference is not coincidental—Gopal Mittal, like many of the Urdu writers working for the Arya Samaji papers, was a leftist and part of the progressive writers’ circle. As his and Hansraj Rehbar’s autobiographical accounts suggest, there was often a wide gap between the ideological worldview and political sentiments of the newspaper proprietors and those of the journalists working for them.


630 Editorial: “Gandhi Ji Par Bam,” Milap, 23 January 1948. Pratap’s editorials’ references to Gandhi were equally caustic. See, for example: Editorial: “Bapu Ab To Hamari Halat,” Pratap, 21 December 1947.
On January 30, the very day of Gandhi’s assassination, Milap published an especially long and poignant editorial aimed at Gandhi and the Congress leadership. Here, the plight of the refugees was directly linked to the struggle over Muslim property in Delhi, giving the refugee perspective on this issue. Here are a few selections:

**Just Shoot Them with Cannons**

Gandhiji, Pandit Jawaharlalji, and other leaders are sad because of those Punjabis who arrived from Pakistan and who are disturbing their life of comfort with stories of destruction. By Punjabis I mean all those Hindus and Sikhs who arrived in India from West Punjab, the Frontier, Sindh, or Baluchistan. In terms of race and culture, they are all Punjabis. Their culture is one, their food is one, their customs are one. Today the presence of these Punjabis in Delhi and other places has created a major problem for leaders and groups of this country. Even after a lot of thinking and trying, they have not managed to solve this problem. Therefore, I suggest a very easy solution for the problem: collect all these people and shoot them with cannons. If one cannon is not enough, there is no shortage of cannons in India. There is no dearth of people who would be willing to do such good work in the name of patriotism. And there is no shortage of such gentlemen and businessmen who, upon seeing the cannons work, would heave a sigh of relief and thank God that they had gotten rid of these *kambakht* Punjabis.

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What is the Fault of the Punjabis?
The destroyed people would say—nothing at all. They would say that the Muslim League was born in U.P., C.P., Bombay, and Delhi, not in Punjab, the frontier, or Sindh. In Punjab, until the very last moment, there was a coalition government. The majority in the Punjab was against the two-nation theory, and also against the partition [bantwara] of the country. [...] The League was not born in these provinces. The Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims of Punjab, the Frontier, and Sindh are not responsible for the birth of the Muslim League. If there is someone responsible then it’s U.P.’s Hindus and U.P.’s Muslims, C.P.’s Hindus and C.P.’s Muslims, Bombay’s Hindus and Bombay’s Muslims, or Delhi’s Hindus and Delhi’s Muslims.

While recalling the past, [the Punjabis] would say that the Muslim League did not get power because of the Hindus of Punjab, the Frontier, Sindh, or Kashmir, but because of the pro-Muslim policy which Gandhi adopted, and which the Congress adopted under the leadership of Gandhi ji. The Muslim League Muslims kept beating them, but instead of strengthening the nationalist Muslims, the Congress surrendered to Mr. Jinnah and his friends. And for this reason, the Muslim League became powerful and demanded Pakistan from a position equal to the Congress.

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631 Milap’s January 30 issue was of course printed before Gandhi’s assassination, which took place during the evening prayer. The editorial by Ranbir was as critical of Gandhi as always, indicating the newspaper had not managed to catch up with the news. The February 2 issue was wholly dedicated to Gandhi and the assassination.

Reminiscing about all this, they would say: We have come here following our destruction, so you should pay for our loss fully. You should pay compensation for our dead. You should give us the value of our lost property. You should avenge the dishonor of our women. You are the cause of our destruction. You have to pay for our loss. And if you say that everybody has to pay the price for freedom, then why did only we pay the price? Why wasn’t the payment collected from everybody? […]

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This word “refugees” [sharanarthi] irritates me. India’s leaders and officers insult us by using this word. We haven’t come under the shelter of anyone. We do not beg from anyone. Whatever we ask is our right. But who would listen to the destroyed Punjabi? All of India’s leaders call us refugees, Jawaharlalji himself did so. But one week has already passed and still, not hundreds but hundreds of thousands are homeless. Schemes are made, townships will be built, cities will be built. But townships and cities are not built in one day—where will these people go until then? What will they do?

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So what are they doing? Punjabi people do not know how to beg. There was a drought in Bihar, trouble in Bengal, and a dearth of grain in Madras. So thousands of people started coming to north India begging. But when Punjab was destroyed, you could not find a single Punjabi begging. Punjabis know how to work hard. Their habit is to give, not to take.633 Therefore those who have been uprooted and came to Delhi and other places started small businesses. The “hospitable” and “big-hearted” people of these places did not [lease] shops to the Punjabis. When [the old-time residents] started looting the looted migrants by demanding a pugree, the Punjabis set up their shops on the roads and footpaths. In these shops they sold merchandise for lower prices. They adopted the principle of small profit and many customers and managed to compete with the big businessmen and traders. So the latter started protesting and raising their voice that Delhi’s beauty is being destroyed. So we found out that the Delhi Municipal Committee decided in its meeting that all these shopkeepers on the sidewalks would be removed by the police. The excuse is the city’s beauty, but the real reason cannot be hidden from anyone. The arrival of the Punjabis in the city made every commodity available. People get it cheaply. Therefore these people who used to sell a one-rupee commodity for ten rupees are yelling.

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Listen to another example. There is one mohalla in Sadar Bazar, where many Muslims left. There are about 500 houses in this mohalla which Hindus have rented from Muslims. There are only five or ten houses where Muslims live. The Muslims who live in these houses met with Gandhiji through a few nationalist Muslims. They told him, “Punjabis have come to our mohalla. Either you take them out or you arrange for our departure to Pakistan.” How could Gandhiji tolerate such words? He immediately gave the relevant authorities an order that Hindus should be taken out from this mohalla. The police arrived and started taking out the Hindus. The Hindus called out, “What is the matter? We pay rent, we did not occupy [the houses] by force. We have the receipts. Who

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633 This argument about the history of Punjabi generosity towards other regions was prominent in the refugee press, for example, in: Editorial: “Ek Dukhi Dil,” Pratap, 6 May 1948.
will pay us back the rent? Where should we go?” The policemen said with regret, “What can we do, this is Gandhiji’s order.”

This is how these people are treated. The presence of these people has become a headache for Gandhiji and other leaders. After much thinking and trying they haven’t been able to solve the problem of these unfortunate people. Therefore I humbly offer the solution that all of them—all the Hindus and Sikhs who have come from West Punjab, the Frontier, Kashmir, Sindh and Baluchistan—should be collected and shot with cannons. If the bamboo is gone, the flute will not play.634 […] The poor businessmen and traders who lose lakhs of rupees every day will be saved. And a lot of space will be cleared for those Muslim League Muslims, whose separation [firaq] renders Gandhiji’s and other leaders’ nights sleepless.

Ranbir

The editorial is suffused with violence, demonstrating the intense atmosphere among the Hindu right-wing and refugee circles in the days preceding the assassination. The allusion to Gandhi’s statement that Pakistan would be established on his dead body and the claim that no dead bodies but the Punjabis’ are seen in the street are disturbing given that these lines were published just a few hours before Gandhi was assassinated. As we shall see, Gandhi’s statement as a metaphor for Congress’s responsibility for partition was a recurrent theme in the Urdu press, both refugee and Muslim.

What is also very conspicuous here is the forging of a common Punjabi refugee identity, connecting Hindus and Sikhs, as well as the different regional identities of Punjab, the Frontier, Sindh, and Baluchistan, subsuming the last three regions under the umbrella name “Punjabis.” As Ravinder Kaur notes in her ethnography of the refugees in Delhi, this group was divided along caste, region and class, divisions that determined the differential rehabilitation measures provided by the state.635 But it was the upper-caste mercantile and urban class of Lahore which came to dominate historical memory, subsuming all other groups as “Punjabis.” Interestingly, in the process, the experience of the poor masses “trudging with bullock carts or clinging

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634 “na bans rahega na bansuri bajegi.” A common proverb about removing the source of the problem—if someone’s flute’s music annoys you, just cut down the bamboo.
precariously to train roofs, before huddling together in tented camps,” was appropriated and became the dominant image of partition refugees, occluding the more comfortable journeys of the upper classes.\textsuperscript{636} We can see this process of flattening at work in Milap’s and Pratap’s editorials.

Interestingly, the emphasis on a unified Punjabi identity also includes here the Punjabi Muslims (now Pakistanis) and absolves them of any responsibility for partition, putting the blame instead on U.P.’s and Delhi’s Muslims, who are all defined as Muslim League. This claim seems puzzling, considering that it was in the hands of the Punjabi Muslims that the refugees had suffered, but in the context of struggles over Muslim property in Delhi, the identification of U.P.’s and Delhi’s Muslims with the Muslim League served a purpose. The bitterness at being considered beggars and the emphasis on Punjabis’ right to the state’s resources culminate here in an attack on the very word refugee (\textit{sharanarthi}). Milap in fact often refrained from using the term \textit{sharanarthi}, preferred the word \textit{pirit} (pained, oppressed), and by 1954 refugee papers featured the carefully chosen word \textit{purusharthi} (virile).

Gandhi’s assassination led to a change in Milap’s tone. In the aftermath of the assassination, Ranbir wrote a short statement, titled “Atone for the Great Sin,” declaring the assassination a grave sin and expressing his hope that God would forgive the nation for it. A subsequent editorial carrying the same title expressed stunned grief at the loss of the holiest of men.\textsuperscript{637} The softening of Milap’s tone in the following months may have been an expression of genuine regret but also, no doubt, the result of public outrage and government actions against Hindu-right organizations and the press. On February 1, Milap’s office was attacked by, to use

\textsuperscript{636} Talbot, \textit{Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar, 1947-1957}, XXV. Both Mahashay Krishan of Pratap and Ranbir Singh of Milap clearly left Lahore with enough means that enabled them to restart their newspapers soon after their arrival in Delhi.

\textsuperscript{637} Editorial: “Mahapap Ka Prayashchit Karo,” \textit{Milap}, 2 February 1948. Milap’s editorials in the aftermath of the assassination featured more tolerant views of the Muslim minority: editorials included in F. 8(29)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
Milap’s language, a “mob” of socialists and communists armed with lathis, who destroyed machinery and furniture and wounded Ranbir Singh’s brother Yudhvir.638 Delhi’s administration also took stern action against the press and banned the publication of Milap and a few other papers for three months.639

These actions had an impact on the press, but not for long. From May 1948 onwards, the Press Officer complained that the tone of the Delhi press seriously deteriorated, mentioning Milap and Pratap among the chief troublemakers.640 Certainly, Milap’s editorials during the summer of 1948 renewed its aggressive tone. This was the time when Muslims returning from Pakistan caused alarm among the public, and growing communal tension in Delhi precipitated rumors about forthcoming riots.

Against this background, on July 31, Mahashay Kushal Chand published in Milap an editorial titled “Barhta hua Asantosh” (“Growing Discontent”), in which he argued that nationalist Muslims in India were all Muslim Leagu in disguise who should be expelled to Pakistan.641 He likened the government’s appeasing attitude towards the Muslims to feeding snakes with milk—as soon as the treacherous Muslim-Leagu Muslims declared their loyalty to India, the government took them at their word and considered them nationalist Muslims. Kushal Chand did not hide his sympathy for the RSS and accused the government of excessive detentions without a trial of alleged RSS members starting in February 1948. The tide against

638 “Milap Ke Daftar Par Hamla,” Milap, 4 February 1948; “Do Sau Communinston aur Socialiston,” Milap, 4 February 1948. According to the CID report on the first half of February, the Socialists, specifically Jayaparaksh Narayan, “exploited” the situation created by Gandhi’s assassination by “inciting the masses against the communalist members of the cabinet.” They organized a number of processions that attacked the houses of Hindu Mahasabha and R.S.S. members and newspapers: “CID Report for the First Half of February 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

639 The ban was eventually lifted after a month, on condition of improvement in the newspaper’s tone: “Fortnightly Press Reports for the First Half of February 1948”; “Fortnightly Press Report for the First Half of March 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

640 “Fortnightly Press Report for the First Half of May 1948,” F. 1-48-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.

the RSS had subsided by this point, and both Milap’s and Pratap’s editorials reflected its gradual comeback.

Stylistically, Kushal Chand’s vocabulary is Sanskritized, as can be gauged in the title, bearing the word *asantosh* (unhappiness). Likewise, he uses the word *vibhajan* rather than the Arabic-derived *taqsim* for “partition,” and “Bharat” rather than “Hindustan” when speaking of India. While Kushal Chand’s language is especially Sanskritized, the inclusion of Sanskrit-derived words was quite common in the refugee Urdu press, especially when discussing issues with Hindu or communal connotations. Thus, for instance, newspapers sometimes used the term *sanskriti* for culture and the term *deviyan* (goddesses) when reporting on the abduction of Hindu and Sikh women in Punjab, thereby invoking the honor of the Hindu community.

Such careful vocabulary choices were just part of the arsenal of the Urdu press. An expressive language with a rich poetic tradition, Urdu served as a powerful tool for a highly argumentative journalism. Its polemics was served by emotionalism and melodrama, overwhelming the readers with an excess of images, metaphors, and motifs, repeated over and over until they were internalized. “There are cases in which it appears there is more poetry than journalism,” complained Delhi’s Chief Commissioner in a meeting with Delhi’s newspaper representatives in 1948. The refugee Urdu press, with its allegedly distorted news reportage and inflammatory writing, stood at the heart of the discussion.

It is no wonder that both Pratap and Milap openly supported the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in the first general elections of 1951. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh indeed became a major political

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642 Further examples are *praja* (people), *sukh* (happiness); *sevak* (servant), *manishi* (intellectual).
643 “Proceedings of a meeting of editors with Chief Commissioner Shankar Prasad on 11 December 1948, F. 8(081)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
644 Mahashay Krishna was in fact part of the small group that met on January 6, 1951 “to draw up an outline of a new party in the Punjab-Delhi area [the Jana Sangh]”: Puri, *Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Organisation and Ideology: Delhi, a Case Study*, 27. The two dailies expressed their support of the Jana Sangh from its very first public
party and a serious competitor to the Congress in Delhi, thanks in large part to the support of the refugee community in the city. Pratap’s and Milap’s editorials conjure up the emotional and ideological world within which such political-electoral choices were embedded. Hindu right-wing ideology, so prominent in late-colonial Lahore, was intensified by the harsh experiences of partition, producing an assertive, even aggressive discourse about refugees’ right to the city’s space and resources, at the expense of its Muslim residents. We should keep in mind that, beyond the sphere of elections, this aggressive discourse coincided with repeated attacks by refugees on Muslims in the ongoing struggles over Muslim property.

“What Should the Muslims Do?” – The Muslim Press in Post-Partition Delhi

What Should the Muslims Do? Conditions have changed fast. After August 15, every morning and every evening have brought a new upheaval.

Probably no community in this century has faced such hefty troubles as the Muslim minority in India, in terms of abruptness and rapidity. The greatest wound was inflicted on the Muslims by their own leaders. Having crippled the community, they fled and left it alone in the midst of the cyclone.

If our leaders were brave like the leaders of other communities, upon the failure of their policy they would have stayed amongst us and struggled, or at least borne with the community the very troubles they created. They did not have the courage to do either. The unsuccessful leaders of other communities commit suicide. This path probably would have been better than fleeing, both for them and for the community.

The disasters that befell the Indian Muslims have broken mountains, and just the thought of them causes one to quiver. But the courage and firmness with which [the Muslims] have tolerated these problems teach us that they have the ability to survive. Now the question remains of what the Muslims should do in order to cross this river of blood.

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646 “Musalmaan Kya Karein?” Al Jamiat, 12 December, 1948.
You are on the bank of the river and I am standing in its depths. I can say with full responsibility that conditions in the country are improving.\footnote{“Tum Darya Ke Kinare Ho,” \textit{Al Jamiat}, 3 February, 1949.}

The first quote is an editorial published in the Muslim-owned Urdu daily \textit{Al Jamiat} in February 1948. The second, published in the same paper exactly a year later, is from a speech delivered by Maulana Azad to a Muslim public.\footnote{The speech was given at Mohammed Ali Park in Calcutta on January 28, 1949, in a mass meeting organized by the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind.} The image of the Muslim community standing on the bank of a river is dominant in both, capturing the sense of loss, uncertainty, and fear gripping Muslims in post-partition India. What would the position of Muslims in India be after the formation of Pakistan? What would their status be in an independent state supposedly committed to democracy and equal rights, but which had just emerged from enormous sectarian violence?

Following Partition, as Aamir Mufti notes, Indian Muslims underwent a process of minoritization. If, before August 1947, nationalist Muslims like Azad could claim that Muslims were not a minority in the sense of being a weak group, after partition the significant decline in their numbers, the loss of the Muslim-majority provinces, and the exodus of the Muslim elites left the remaining Muslims a truly vulnerable minority.\footnote{See Mufti’s analysis of Maulana Azad’s understanding, prior to partition, that Muslims were not a minority in the qualitative sense, and his assessment of their minoritization in the aftermath of partition: Mufti, \textit{Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture}, Chapter 3.} Thus, Indian Muslims in 1947 were at a crossroads, troubled by the question: what next? In the following pages I will discuss the Muslim newspapers based in Delhi and their response to this question. I suggest that their vision of Muslim identity and of participation in Indian social and political life was shaped by a basic tension between \textit{Indianness} and \textit{Muslimness}, and contributed to a process of Muslim ghettoization, both spatial and psychological.
The demographic transformation of Delhi was mirrored in its press world, where the surge of Punjabi presses, publications, editors, and writers coincided with the dwindling of Muslim ones. The Muslim League newspapers, so dominant in Delhi’s public sphere prior to partition and involved in recurring verbal wars with the Hindu press, had largely disappeared from the city by October 1947. Most of them relocated to Karachi, where they became representatives of the *muhajir* voice in that city—a mirror of the Punjabi refugee papers in Delhi. Abdul Rahman Siddiqi, who we may recall, worked for the English daily *Dawn*, recollects that the newspaper management’s dream of publishing the newspaper simultaneously from the capitals of Pakistan and India was shattered less than a month after partition when *Dawn*’s office was torched and vandalized during the September riots in Delhi—again, a reflection of the fate faced by *Pratap* and *Milap* in Lahore. Likewise, the important Urdu Muslim papers *Anjam*, *Jang*, and *Alaman* disappeared from the press files of the Delhi administration and CID by October, occasionally to reappear in subsequent years as “newspapers of Karachi.” Along with them left many smaller papers and magazines, printing press owners, editors, and reporters. Who, then, remained in Delhi?

The Muslim press of post-partition Delhi was a broken world. The few papers that stayed behind had a limited circulation and were in a very precarious financial position, always on the verge of closure. Their vulnerability was aggravated by ongoing pressures from the Delhi

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650 See discussion of the press controversies in pre-partition Delhi in Chapter 1 above.

651 I find striking similarities between the post-partition issues of *Jang* in Karachi, as presented and analyzed by Vazira Zamindar, and those of *Milap* and *Pratap* in Delhi. Zamindar notes, “As Muslim refugees in Karachi confronted substantial ambivalence from the Sind government, which wanted to restrict their numbers, an important narrative of ‘*muhajir qurbani*’ or sacrifice began to take shape as a trope to claim inclusion in the emerging nation-state. This trope made claims to extraordinary entitlement to Pakistan by arguing that *muhajirs*, or north Indian Muslims, had been at the forefront of the Pakistan movement and had made the greatest *qurbani* for it by leaving their homes in India.” Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, 70.

652 Siddiqi, *Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi*, 286.

653 During September and October, these newspapers still appeared in the files as “Delhi papers” and were subjected to pre-censorship and other orders: F. 8(45)/47, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; F. 8(29)/47, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; F. 8(47)/47, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; AS DA Press 8 (028) 1947.
administration, which used the colonial measures of demanding and forfeiting securities from newspapers and presses to exert its control.

Shahid Siddiqui, a politician and the editor of the Urdu weekly Nai Duniya, recalled in an interview that his father Maulana Abdul Waheed Siddiqui, who established Nai Duniya as a daily paper in 1951, was under close watch by the CID. CID files on Nai Duniya through 1960 confirm that it was under close watch, and intermittently characterized as either pro-Pakistani and/or pro-communist. Like Milap, Pratap, and many other Urdu newspapers, Nai Duniya was a family-run business, and the office was located in the first floor of the family house in Ballimaran in the old city—the same Muslim locality where Abdul Rahman’s family had resided, which was considered a Muslim zone after partition. Their haveli was an “open house,” Siddiqui remembered, a social hub where people constantly came in and out and stayed overnight. The CID paid some of the poorer visitors, as well as office employees, to report regularly on happenings in the place. Simultaneously, government pressures through recurring demands of securities destabilized the already-precarious financial position of the family, and Siddiqui had to close down the paper temporarily in 1963. Such pressures were also exerted on other Delhi-based Muslim newspapers and magazines, even those that had hitherto been considered “nationalist” and pro-Congress. Their loyalty was now considered doubtful.

654 Interview with Shahid Siddiqui, 13 June 2011, New Delhi.
655 For CID information on Nai Duniya’s circulation, political leanings, and financial position, and on the government raid on their office, see: F. 19(47)/54, CC Files, Home Department, DSA; F. 9(50)/54, CC Files, Home Department, DSA; F. 8(137)/52, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; F. 274, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML; F. 106, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.
656 Aziz Hasan Baqai, for example, had been a veteran Delhi journalist, associated with the Khilafat movement and Congress nationalist struggle, whose paper Hurriyat had been defined in the colonial CID file as “nationalist.” After partition, however, the paper was suspected of Pakistani ties, subjected to close surveillance, and closed down in 1949. It was restarted ten years later by Aziz Hasan Baqai’s son, Anis Baqai. On Baqai’s role in the in the nationalist movement of Delhi, see: Interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna, Oral History Transcript No. 177, NMML. For CID files on Baqai and Hurriyat, see: Files 468, 508 and 2, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML. Another example is that of Abdullah Farooqi, proprietor of the Farooqi Press, who was a “nationalist Muslim” involved in the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement and who was arrested after partition for publishing the “Muslim poster” discussed in chapter 2: F. 8(1)/48-Home, Chief Commissioner Files, Home-Press,
The ambiguous position occupied by the Muslim papers after partition is most glaring in the case of the Urdu daily Al Jamiat, the most financially stable Muslim newspaper in Delhi, for which Abdul Waheed Siddiqui worked as an editor until 1951, when he left and launched Nai Duniya as a bitter rival of Al Jamiat. Unlike Nai Duniya and the refugee papers, Al Jamiat was not a family-run business but the official organ of the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind, which became the dominant voice of the shattered Muslim public after 1947. Because of its pro-Congress policy, Al Jamiat was the only Delhi-based Muslim newspaper preserved in the archives and accessible for systematic analysis. Other papers, like Nai Duniya, were not preserved and remain only as fragments scattered in the press files of the Delhi Secretariat and CID. Yet, despite the newspaper’s relatively established status, my analysis will highlight the ambiguities and tensions inherent in the government’s attitude toward it, as well as in the positions it articulated. That these contradictions characterize the organ of the Muslim organization closest to the Congress government illuminates just how the Muslim press more generally was.

As discussed in the previous chapters, The Jamiat Ulama-e Hind was established in 1919 by a group of ulama (legal Islamic scholars), mostly from Deoband, who were actively involved in the pan-Islamic, anti-British Khilafat Movement. The organization subsequently supported the Congress’s nationalist struggle for independence and situated itself in opposition to the Muslim League’s two-nation theory, astutely predicting that the position of the Muslim minority in a divided India devoid of the Muslim-majority areas would be considerably weakened, and formulating instead a model of “composite nationalism,” inclusive of both Hindus and

DSA; Files. 2, 468 and 504, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMM L. See also: Interview with Maulana Abdullah Farooqi (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 634, NMML.
657 On the rivalry between the two papers, see: F. 9(47)/54, CC Files, Home Department, DSA.
658 Al Jamiat issues are located in the microfilm room of the NMML. Regarding Nai Duniya, neither the state nor the Siddiqis themselves preserved the old copies: when the family moved out of the old city to Jangpura, it moved the paper’s old issues and files to the attic, where they were eventually ruined: Interview with Shahid Siddiqui, 13 June 2011, New Delhi.
Muslims. However, while the Muslim League gained momentum among the Muslim masses during the 1940s, the Jamiat’s position was marginalized.

After independence, when most Muslim League leaders and newspapers left for Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulama filled the vacuum and sought to become the new spokesman for Indian Muslims. It was supported by Maulana Azad, who, in his famous speech delivered in Jama Masjid in October 1947, told the Muslim audience that the Jamiat was now the only body to safeguard their interests. At its Lucknow conference of 1948, the organization maintained its alliance with the Congress, expressed its support of a secular constitution, and objected to separate electorates and reservations for Muslims. Following Azad’s advice, in April 1949 the Jamiat explicitly renounced its political functions and declared itself a purely socio-religious organization, thus signaling a move away from the separatist politics associated with the Muslim League. Since 1949, the Jamiat has been engaged in social and educational work among Muslims, and has provided important relief and rehabilitation measures to Muslims in riot-prone areas. As a major broker of Muslim votes, it has had a strong alliance with the Congress, which has provided it with government resources for the maintenance and development of its social and educational network.

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660 See Chapter 1 above.


662 For Azad’s advice to the Jamiat and for the resolution approved in its annual session in April 1949 in Lucknow, see the documents included in: Noorani, *The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record*, 73, 76, 78-80.

The Jamiat’s main organ, Al Jamiat, like Nai Duniya, was published from the Muslim locality of Ballimaran, at Gali Qasim Jaan. Its circulation of about 5000 was lower than Milap’s and Pratap’s but higher than most other Muslim publications. As letters to the editor indicate, its readership consisted mainly of north Indian Muslims from U.P. and Delhi. As the organ of a Muslim religious organization, the newspaper conveyed Jamiat Ulama’s concern with the spread of Islam and with the moral, spiritual, and educational uplift of the Muslim community. It extensively covered the social work of the organization among the Muslim public and the activities and speeches of its leadership. The editorial page included, alongside the leading article, a regular column on moral cultivation in daily life in light of the Quran. The paper also used a relatively Arabicized Urdu that distinguished it not only from the Hindu papers but also from Nai Duniya, whose language was simpler and more accessible.

What is the Muslim experience in post-partition India, and specifically in Delhi, that is conjured up in Al Jamiat? By addressing this question, I will undoubtedly walk a thin line between, on the one hand, treating Al Jamiat’s items as a primary source on the daily experiences of Muslims, and on the other, treating them as a discourse that shaped Muslim identity in a particular way. It is noteworthy that post-partition editorials possess a unifying theme, indicated in the articles’ titles, which often end with a question mark—“What Should the Muslims Do?” “Why Are the Muslims Leaving?” “What Is Happening?” Both the editorials and readers’ letters communicate the crisis in which the Muslim community found itself and a preoccupation with the nature of Muslim identity, belonging, and citizenship in a divided and democratic India. The overall picture that emerges from Al Jamiat’s issues of 1947-55 is of the instability of Muslim existence, ranging from actual violence to social and economic discrimination.

664 Al Jamiat was first published as a bi-weekly in 1924. For information on its publication before independence, see F. 266/1943, CC Files, Special Press Adviser, DSA.
665 For CID information on Al Jamiat’s circulation in the early 1950s, see: F. 89, Delhi Police Records, Second Installment, NMML; F. 106, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.
Readers’ letters used for my analysis include both those that were published and others that were intercepted by the CID during its routine censorship of Al Jamiat’s mail and archived in the CID records. The letters sent from U.P. describe recurrent outbreaks of riots, oftentimes during the annual Holi festival, and the continuing outflow of Muslims to Pakistan. Letters sent from Delhi occasionally refer to small-scale incidents and, more often, to a daily experience of harassment and economic boycotting, as well as to the unjust and corrupt policy of the Custodian of Evacuee Property.

Here, for example, is a May 1948 letter from a group of Delhi residents:

**Appeal**

We are residents of Paharganj, Sabzi Mandi, and Karol Bagh. We are victims of communal riots. We do not want to go to Pakistan on any condition. Therefore, we work for our livelihood as *kabarîs* [garbage collectors] in the area of Chah Rahat, behind Jama Masjid, to feed our families. For the last several days, the municipality has been troubling us. Yesterday, on April 27, a *daroga* [sub-inspector] of the municipality came and took the goods of those standing on the footpath. He later entered our area and started taking more stuff. He then took with him two representatives of our community as a guaranty.

We are all very concerned. We do not have any source of livelihood and no business. We ask the government to arrange some method of livelihood for us.

Syed Azizurrahman, Sufi Azizuddinn, Syed Mirza

In the same vein, here is a short editorial published on August 19, 1948:

**Our Delhi**

Delhi has been crying for the last month, and even more incidents followed the blaze of the riots. But during the past week, the atmosphere of Delhi has become especially bad. Let us leave aside the recent incidents in Chandni Chowk. Yesterday and the day before, a few Muslim travelers were wounded. Such incidents happen every day. It causes great anxiety among the Muslims. People make comments on Muslims in the trams, repeating the question, “Why didn't you just go to Pakistan? Why is your face still seen here?” Muslims are so terrorized that they would rather let their wounds bleed than go to the police *thana* (police station), because they know they will be pushed away by the

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666 The main Delhi Secretariat and CID files on which my analysis of Al Jamiat is based include official correspondence, objectionable clippings, and letters to the editor intercepted during the routine censorship of Al Jamiat’s mail: F. 8(196)/48, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA; F. 4-A(5)/50, CC Files, Passport&Political Department, DSA; Files 96, 97, 98, 100, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.


policemen. We know that this situation cannot last for long, but the Delhi administration should also know what its duty is, and that it is essential to put an end to such incidents.

These texts were published during the summer of 1948, when Delhi was suffused with communal tensions and rumors about imminent riots, after waves of Muslims returned from Pakistan. We may recall the editorials by Pratap and Milap published at roughly the same time, which questioned the loyalty of the returning Muslims and suggested they were Muslim League in disguise. Rumors about Pakistani spies lingering in the city and their arrests were circulated in the press and received differential accounts in the papers.\footnote{While most newspapers reported on arrests of Pakistani spies, Al Jamiat argued these were harmless Muslims detained without a trial: “Jasooson Ki Giraftari,” \textit{Al Jamiat}, 19 July 1948, in F. 8 (59A) 1948, Chief Commissioner Files, Home-Press, DSA.}

The following summers also proved to be prone to communal tensions. In May 1949, letters to the editor of \textit{Al Jamiat} (both published and intercepted) reported anti-Muslim riots in cities and villages in U.P. and Hyderabad.\footnote{F. 100, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.} In Delhi, while the scale of incidents was smaller, tensions escalated, revolving around three foci: the ongoing fights over the houses of Muslim evacuees, the alleged molestation of Hindu women by Muslim men, and business competition in Subzimandi, where, according to the Chief Commissioner’s report, Muslims from Pakistan arrived on temporary permits to sell mangos during the summer season.\footnote{For the incidents that took place between May and October 1949 over mango sales and the alleged sexual molestation of Hindu women by Muslim men: see Shankar Prasad’s report in F.127/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.} This comment shows how uncertain citizenship in this period still was and how porous was border, despite the permit system.

While these incidents were described as discrete, “minor” clashes by the administration and mainstream dailies such as the \textit{Times of India}, \textit{Al Jamiat} described them in much graver terms.\footnote{For \textit{Times of India} reports, see: “Minor Clash in Old Delhi,” \textit{Times of India}, 4 July, 1949; “The Rest of the News,” \textit{Times of India}, 5 July, 1949.} The daily’s editorials in this period claimed that the disturbances in Delhi were not...
spontaneous or coincidental but the result of a deep and serious RSS conspiracy, overlooked by
officers on the ground. A letter intercepted by the CID, sent by one Abul-Kalam Ahmed, who worked at Al Jamiat, to a
Muslim friend in Bangalore described the situation thus:

I have been in Delhi for about a month. I could not write to you earlier due to my worries here. Conditions in Delhi are extremely critical. I am not apprising my family members of the situation in Delhi lest they worry about it. Peace in Delhi is always in danger. Nowadays I am working in the editorial staff of the "Daily Aljamiat" and I write comments on the present situation.

In other words, whereas the administration had a tendency to disaggregate information on communal tensions into separate small incidents, thereby playing it down, Muslims in Delhi experienced them as parts of an overall escalation of violence.

Al Jamiat’s representation of Muslim life in India as one of persecution and discrimination was ever more overt in 1950, when violence targeting minorities on both sides of the border escalated to worrisome proportions. Riots in East Pakistan were reciprocated in West Bengal and, subsequently, also in U.P., leading to the Nehru-Liaquat (Delhi) Pact in April, which was meant to ensure the safety of minorities in both countries by improving official and press attitudes towards them. In Delhi disturbances set in motion another wave of Muslim migration to West Pakistan, as discussed in Chapter 3. Al Jamiat’s editorials from this period are preoccupied with the violence and with the Delhi Pact. On May 5, the leading editorial was titled “Why Are the Muslims Leaving?” It included a sample of allegedly representative letters

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674 The letter was intercepted and translated to English in July 1949: CID report No. 8045-48 Press-44, F. 100, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
675 For efforts at improving press tone, see: “War Propaganda to be Eschewed,” Times of India, 6 May, 1950.
that the paper received from its readers. Those from U.P. described a daily reality of violence, fear, and flow to Pakistan. The ones from Delhi typically described a “milder” condition of discrimination. A gentleman from Delhi wrote:

The refugees are troubling me: They order goods from me, but after I send it and ask for my money, they behave badly. ... A couple of them even threatened to kill me. In Karol Bagh … [someone] has been troubling me for the past few months. When I came with a group of 4-5 Hindus, he admitted that he owes me money, but he hasn’t given it back and instead threatened me. There is another person who lives in Karol Bagh but, when I ask for my money, he threatens me. A person from Civil Lines Kothi No. [?] ordered goods worth 32 rupees but then said it was not good. When I asked him to return it, he said: “I won't give you the goods or the money.”

Similarly, a letter to the editor that responded to the editorial with the title: “Why Shouldn’t the Muslims Leave?” claimed:

I read your editorials on a regular basis and I understand that you fulfill your duty and report the situation of Muslims and give advice to the government as much as possible. But all these efforts are in vain. Even lice cannot creep into the ears of the government. [...] If you wish to understand properly the mentality of the majority, then go to buy something in Delhi's markets, Khari Baoli and Batashe wali gali. Go to a Hindu shopkeeper and ask for something. The minute he sees your beard, he will turn his face away. If you request two or three more times, he will reply in a manner that will clarify he does not want to sell anything to us. If you do not believe me, then go and check for yourself. And this is the situation in the capital. In other places, people taunt Muslims in the markets. Muslims are ostracized. And no one has any idea how to stop this. If such things reach the ears of the officers, they do not listen. Muslims are helpless. What shall they do but migrate [to Pakistan]?

Fazul Rahman Azhar, Delhi

A short editorial published a few months later again referred to a general atmosphere of harassment, describing a new phenomenon, which the writer called “communal begging.” Beggars, mostly refugees, roamed Delhi’s train stations and bazaars, specifically targeting Muslims. Shoving a small Congress flag in their hands, they asked for money in return, creating

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676 I write “allegedly” because the CID doubted their authenticity: CID Report on Al Jamiat’s Objectionable Tone, 11 May 1950, F. 98, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML. The question of authenticity will be discussed below.
678 “hukumat ke kaan par joon bhi nahin rengti”: an idiom indicating the deafness and obtuseness of the government.
a *tamasha* [scene, spectacle] and putting psychological pressure on these Muslims, who feared that if they did not comply and pay they would be considered unpatriotic. Other letters from this period described an ongoing reality of harassment on the trains.⁶⁸⁰

When assessing the grave condition of Indian Muslims in those years, some of the articles in *Al Jamiat* chose the path of introspection in light of Muslim ideals, blaming Muslim tragedy on loss of faith within the community and calling on it to reinforce an Islamic way of life. But the increasingly dominant view expressed in the paper was to project the blame outward—on the Hindu majority and the Congress government that failed to protect the Muslim minority in a democratic India. My analysis of *Al Jamiat* diverges from Zamindar’s assessment that the paper was “remarkably cautious” in its criticism of the government lest its loyalty be questioned.⁶⁸¹ On the contrary, I find that *Al Jamiat*’s editorials published in these months attack the government fiercely for its inability or unwillingness to protect Muslims’ lives and property. The image of the Muslim community conjured up in these pages is one of a persecuted minority living in a sham democracy.⁶⁸² Such criticisms were often deemed objectionable by the CID and the Chief Commissioner Press office, which closely monitored *Al Jamiat*.

This debate between *Al Jamiat* and the state censorship poses interpretive challenges to the historian. It is linked to another, striking feature of *Al Jamiat* in the period 1947-55, namely, the inconsistency in the CID’s own definition of *Al Jamiat*, which shifted between the categories “nationalist” and “communal.” One official correspondence, for example, defines *Al Jamiat* as “the organ of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema Hind, a cultural organization of the Muslim with a nationalist outlook. It generally has a sober tone in reviewing different problems. The paper enjoys good

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status and is regular in publication.” 683 Another indication of its legitimacy within official circles is its recognition for the purpose of publishing government advertising—a significant economic benefit that was not shared by any other Muslim-owned paper in Delhi. 684 But another internal correspondence presents a contrary view, stating, “For some time past, the daily ‘Aljamiat’, Delhi, has indulged in insidious propaganda of a dangerous type against the Indian Union…” 685 Another claims that

…the Printer and Publisher of this paper [Al Jamiat] is certainly not working in the interests of peace and public safety. The paper is full of critics which poison the atmosphere. Besides this, the paper has achieved quite a good popularity in Pakistan and has in the past helped the Government of Pakistan to raise propaganda against India. […] The paper, therefore, stands as a living and open danger to the internal as well as external, security of Bharat and no time should be spared to make it ‘peace minded.’” 686

This is a point worth highlighting: the image of Al Jamiat in state correspondence oscillated between “nationalist”—the central mouthpiece of the “nationalist Muslims”—and “communal”—a paper whose loyalty was no less dubious than that of Nai Duniya or any other Muslim publication. Al Jamiat, for its part, often responded to such accusations by claiming it had every right and, in fact, obligation to report on the miserable conditions of the Muslim minority in India.

How are we to interpret this debate about Al Jamiat’s policy? On the face of it, it could easily be explained as an expression of anti-Muslim sentiment within the CID and administration, which extended even to the organ of the “nationalist Muslim” organization and a close ally of the Congress. Another possibility is that there was something “communal” about Al

683 Press Officer Rajendra Nath Shaida to Ram Lal Varma, 24 August 1954, F. 3(8)/1954, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
684 F. 4 (30)/1951, CC Files, Passport&Political Department, DSA.
685 CID Report on Al Jamiat’s Objectionable Tone, 11 May 1950, F. 98, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
686 Note on the Tone of Al Jamiat, 3 January 1951, F. 4-A(5)/50, CC Files, Passport&Political Department, DSA.
Jamiat’s articles. The answer, I suggest, lies somewhere between these two poles, and reflects the predicament of Muslims as a minority in India after partition. Let us examine the main charge in state circles against Al Jamiat and, for that matter, other Muslim newspapers, that, by focusing on Muslim suffering in India, they incited the feelings of the Muslim public against the government, blackened India’s name in the world, and served the purposes of Pakistani propaganda. Al Jamiat’s claim that what was problematic was the very reality the paper depicted, not the depiction itself, seems rather convincing, given that in many cases the veracity of the newspaper’s reports about discrimination was unquestionable. The argument did not convince officers and bureaucrats, who thought that the focus on Muslims’ conditions was deliberate and the articles’ tone inflammatory and exaggerated.

The CID even claimed that many of Al Jamiat’s letters to the editor were fictitious—a strategy used by the paper to avoid responsibility for its objectionable materials. In some cases, the officers in charge argued, secret inquires proved that the alleged sender of the letter was in fact a “non-entity.” Then again, even if we agree that some of the letters were fictitious—apparently a common practice in the Urdu press—does it take away from the truth value of the reality they describe? Does it really matter in the face of the overwhelming number of very similar and genuine readers’ letters that the CID intercepted during its regular censorship of the newspaper’s mail? Was it not a petty charge that ignored the fact that discrimination and even violence against Muslims was a very tangible experience of everyday life? Many in the Delhi administration and CID undoubtedly held anti-Muslim feelings. The use of the word Bharat by the above-quoted officer suggests, for example, that his worldview was aligned with Hindu-right ideology. More generally, the preoccupation with the alleged collaboration between Al Jamiat’s

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687 In one correspondence about Al Jamiat, for example, it was established that while the tone of the article was problematic, the truth of the event described was verified: correspondence between U.P. government and Delhi secretariat, December 1950 - January 1951, F. 4-A(5)/50, CC Files, Passport&Political Department, DSA.
688 CID Report on Al Jamiat, 16 September 1950, F. 97, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML.
and the Muslim papers in Pakistan was part of a climate of suspicion in which the place of Indian Muslims in the Indian nation was questionable.

On the other hand, whether or not the letters were fictitious, they were part of a discourse of Muslim grievances constructed by Al Jamiat and other Muslim papers after partition. Reading Al Jamiat and other Muslim papers, one gets the impression that Muslim victimhood is all they wrote about, forming a negative discourse that describes Muslims’ place in India as passive victims. Even more crucially, from one editorial to another, the identity of Muslims as a separate entity is reaffirmed and perpetuated. As for the charge that Al Jamiat served Pakistani propaganda, it is true that Al Jamiat was so keen on emphasizing that the condition of Muslims in India was dire that it often depicted Pakistan in idealized terms, as the opposite of India. Al Jamiat consistently argued in 1950 that Hindu minorities in Pakistan were better off than their Muslim counterparts in India, and that, while Pakistan honored the Nehru Liaquat (Delhi) Pact, India constantly violated it. It is noteworthy that such expressions were published at a time when India and Pakistan were engaged in mutual accusations of violating the pact, and Al Jamiat clearly sided with the Pakistani stance.

For example, Al Jamiat praised the English daily Dawn of Karachi (previously of Delhi) for dedicating a whole column to the minorities, enabling them to express their grievances. No such gesture was offered by the English and Urdu dailies of India, the writer complained. Instead, it remained the duty of the Indian Muslim newspapers to express and give a platform for the concerns of the religious minority. The editorial also claimed that Pakistan had the power to implement the pact because it possessed unity and leadership, whereas India was torn by opposition, “groupism,” and lack of leadership. A couple of weeks later, the paper’s leading

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editorial pursued this unflattering comparison of India and Pakistan in what amounted to a sting at the constitution, published a mere few months earlier (italics signify the sentences underlined by the CID officer who read the article):

[...] it is pointless to say that here is a “secular state” [using the English words], over there a religious state, here a democracy, over there a dictatorship. This discussion is useless for the minorities. What they need is peace and protection. It is your business whether you want to establish a secular state or a dictatorship or a democracy! The problem of the minorities is solved where they do not feel hopeless about their future and do not consider the country’s majority and government a threat! Beyond that, what does it matter to the minority what kind of political system the majority established! [...] if the intentions are not good, then no form of government will bear good consequences. Take this democracy, which covers up many wrongs [...] It is not necessary that minorities will receive justice in democracies. This is true of religious or Islamic states. If the minorities in Pakistan are guaranteed their lives, property, and honor and are not discriminated against in any way, then they achieve their goal. It is none of their concern why Pakistan is an Islamic state, and it will not matter to them if Pakistan becomes a secular state! People who eat mangoes need mangoes—do they need to count the trees and also keep a regular record? [...] Minorities need practical peace, not just words … The magic of words cannot guarantee their fate. [...] the world is very cunning, it wants to hide its brutality and barbarity behind a veil…

The editorial concludes with a typical comparison of the Pakistani newspapers, which it argues reformed their tone quickly after the Delhi Pact, with the Indian newspapers in Bengal and Delhi, which have not changed a bit. Hence, “if no decision is made in India about such newspapers, then the government of India will not be able to make the Delhi Pact successful, and its reputation in the international world will remain bad forever.”692 Subsequent editorials of May and June 1950 pursued this line of praise for Pakistan and Pakistani newspapers’ attitude towards the minorities.693

Such praise for Pakistan, as well as the argument that the theocratic basis of its governance is irrelevant, is perplexing given the pre-partition enmity between Jamiat Ulama and

691 This is a play on a common proverb that one should eat mangoes and not count the trees—that is, concentrate on the fruits of an action rather than its source.
the Muslim League, which was based on utterly different visions of the Indian state and the place of Muslims in it. In the public sphere, this enmity had been expressed through acrimonious exchanges between Al Jamiat and the Muslim League papers of Delhi. Their rivalry reached such a degree that Al Aman’s editor, Majrul Haq, was killed by two young Deoband-schooled Muslims as revenge for his aggressive editorials against Jamiat Ulama’s support of the Congress. There seems to have been a shift in Al Jamiat’s attitude towards its rival newspapers after they moved to Karachi. Such pro-Pakistani rhetoric voiced by the most “nationalist” Muslim paper fuelled existing suspicions that Indian Muslims looked up to Pakistan as a potential savior.

While such praise for Pakistan was the most overt expression of Al Jamiat’s discourse of grievances, I would like to point out the structural tension undergirding it—a tension that bears on the position of Muslims in India in the subsequent decades. Looking again at the editorial above, what is most noteworthy is the claim that the minority has no interest in the form of governance established by the majority as long as it remains safe. This statement expresses disengagement from the political life of the country and its most important decision-making processes, a withdrawal inwards into a ghetto.

I suggest that this isolationist vision can be traced to the fundamentals of Jamiat Ulama’s variant of secularism, developed by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) in the pre-partition period, and which was based on the idea of cultural difference and the equal rights of communities rather than of individuals. I discussed this tension in the first chapter, in relation to the collapse of the noncooperation-Khilafat movements in 1922. I suggest that this tension resurfaced after independence, when the question of Pakistan, which had long dominated the

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694 Alaman’s editor called the Jamiat people “infidels,” those who sold themselves to the Hindus and who are not worthy the title of ulama. Two young men schooled in Deoband went to his office and requested him to stop the attacks and were refused. They returned to his office later that day and stabbed him to death. This account is based on: Interview with Phool Chand Jain (in Hindi), Oral History Transcript No. 479, NMML, 88-9.
political agenda, was determined. Once the champions of Muslim separatism departed, it was left for the nationalist Muslims to define the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in a united India. The problems undergirding this vision came to the surface, perhaps even more forcefully given the now depleted and vulnerable position of Muslims.

Madani’s political vision was comprised of two main elements: composite nationalism and cultural encapsulation. Composite nationalism imagined a nation-state that would include believers and non-believers alike, justifying such collaboration of Muslims with infields by turning to precedents in Islam’s history. It was a secular, political vision in the sense that it cultivated inter-religious cooperation and a state that would be religiously neutral rather than theocratic. At the same time, society was imagined as composed of “communities relatively encapsulated in their individual languages, cultures, education, and moral/legal systems.” Such encapsulation meant an “unwavering commitment to preserving separate personal law codes for Muslims and … opposition to any government involvement in what is deemed a religious matter.” Historian Peter Hardy refers to this vision as a kind of “judicial apartheid.”

What were the implications of Madani’s ideology as they unfolded in Indian politics after independence? Madani’s ideology fits perfectly within one of two competing approaches to secularism that have underpinned Indian politics. As Shefali Jha has shown, the Constituent Assembly Debates saw recurring battles between two approaches. The first was the “no concern” theory of secularism, which advocated a total separation between state and religion, relegating religion to the private sphere and envisioning the state as strictly removed from religion. The advocates of this theory wished to cultivate the identity of Indians as individual citizens holding

696 ibid., 97. While Metcalf analyzes the two components of Madani’s thought—composite nationalism and cultural encapsulation—she appears to follow Madani’s own view that the two were not contradictory in any way but complementary.
697 Quoted in ibid., 109.
equal rights, rather than as members of distinct communities. The second was the “equal respect”
theory of secularism, which envisioned the state as an involved actor in the field of religion,
respecting and cultivating all religions equally. It was this second approach, with its emphasis
on the cultural and educational rights of religious minorities that eventually reigned supreme.698

And it was this second approach that Jamiat Ulama embraced. This is why it was not only
the CID and administration, but also contemporary Muslims, who charged Al Jamiat of
"communalist attitudes.” Socialist Muslim leader in Delhi, Mir Mushtaq Ahmad, considered Al
Jamiat part of the “communal press,” on par with the refugee dailies Milap, Pratap, and Vir
Bharat.699 Jamiat Ulama advocated an expanded notion of religious freedom, insisting on the
rights of Muslims to maintain their personal law and to have state funding for religious
institutions. Jamiat’s resistance to any reform of the personal law has also drawn the criticism of
scholars, who argue that the Jamiat nurtured a “ghetto mentality.” Mushirul Hasan has argued
that, since the 1970s, following the breakdown of the secular consensus and the spurt of Hindu-
Muslim violence, the Congress-Jamiat alliance began to crack, and the Jamiat rewrote its agenda
by invoking specifically Muslim themes of identity and solidarity. It shifted to communitarian
politics to such an extent that its outlook became indistinguishable from the fundamentalism of
the Jamaat-e-Islami.700

698 Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950," Economic & Political Weekly 37,
no. 30 (2002); "Rights Versus Representation: Defending Minority Interests in the Constituent Assembly " Economic
& Political Weekly 38, no. 16 (2003). See also Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," Economic and
Political Weekly 29, no. 28 (1994).
699 To Ahmad, Jamiat Ulama-e Hind was a reactionary force that tried to keep its hold on the Muslims and then to
bargain with the Congress on their behalf, just as it did, he argued, during the pre-partition period. As a socialist,
Ahmad strove for solidarity on the basis of class, seeing alignment on religious-communal lines as regressive.
Accordingly, there is a huge gap between Ahmad’s and Jamiat Ulama’s conceptualizations of secularism. See his
correspondence with Ashoka Mehta and M. Harris: Mir Mushtaq Ahmed to Ashoka Mehta, 19 June, 1952, Mir
Mushtaq Ahmed Papers, NMML.
700 Hasan, Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence, 213-4. Shail Mayaram has questioned
the dominant understandings of the Muslim League and Jamiat al-Ulama as simplistic binary categories of
communalism versus nationalism. She also argues that the Jamiat has played a conservative role after 1947:
Mayaram, Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory, and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity, Chapter 7.
My analysis of *Al Jamiat*’s issues in the late 1940s and early 1950s shows that this communitarian emphasis on Muslim identity and unity was evident much earlier. Although *Al Jamiat* affirmed again and again its advocacy of secularism (using the English term), it was the second kind of secularism, the “equal respect” notion, that it advocated, undergirded by the “cultural encapsulation” model. The newspaper was apparently criticized for its narrow outlook, as is evident in its own occasional apologies to its critics. It argued that Jamiat was a fighter for justice and protector of the oppressed, regardless of which community the oppressed belonged to, but that it so happened that nowadays the Muslims were the most oppressed community in India.\(^{701}\) The fact remains, however, that *Al Jamiat* expressed the idea of cultural encapsulation—it was a Muslim-owned paper, written by and for Muslims, highlighting Islamic ideals and preoccupied with the concerns of the Muslims, which it presented as a unified and oppressed minority.

The following item serves as an interesting illustration of the ways in which Jamiat’s cultural encapsulation model may have played out in everyday life on Delhi’s streets. It was published on July 14, 1949, against the background of the escalating tensions in the city. *Al Jamiat* chose to advise its readership:

**Do Not Change Your Dress**\(^{702}\)

Rumors are circulating that there are people who, having changed their clothes, roam about in some *kuches* and *mohallas*. Some Hindu youth keep a beard and, for some purpose, go to the area of Jama Masjid and stroll amidst the Muslim population. It is also known that there are Muslims who take on Hindu dress and walk around Kotla Feroz Shah. It was also heard that some Muslims dress like Hindus and go to Paharganj for business. Perhaps affected by recent events, these Muslims thought it appropriate to change their look in order to protect themselves while getting on with their work, so that in case there is a sudden commotion [*hangama*] they will not be recognized as Muslims. However, whatever the reason may be, changing their dress and changing their appearance will unnecessarily cause suspicion in others, who will expose their secret. This will cause doubt and provocation and give the police the right to arrest and punish these people. […] The true wisdom is that Muslims should not create suspicion by their

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actions. Putting their trust in God, they should act transparently. Business collaboration and the creation of a healthy atmosphere require that the interior and exterior be one. We especially request the Muslims not to adopt behavior that would cause problems for them and for the government, and that would render them suspicious and thus hurt their dignity. If they do not follow this advice, then the police will not make any concessions for them, and they will no doubt be punished for their actions.

This is a revealing piece that speaks eloquently about the delicate situation and dilemmas of Muslims in post-partition Delhi. First and foremost, it conveys a prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and growing segregation in the city. On the one hand, as a result of the persistent encroachment of Muslim zones, in the old city and some parts of Sadar Bazar, Muslims and refugees lived cheek by jowl, continuously in conflict, as evident in the numerous daily quarrels taking place in 1949. At the same time, we see that Muslims began to be confined within certain localities and rarely ventured outside to places that had become wholly dominated by refugees, such as Paharganj. Moving around in these neighborhoods with clear markers of Muslim identity, most notably with a beard, was dangerous. But shedding such identifying markers was also considered a crime, or at least a legitimate cause for public outrage and arrest by the police. This means that the basic features that made up people’s daily routine—how they dressed and where they walked—became serious and charged choices. Muslims could not just be Indians, as historian Gyan Pandey suggests. They could not be erased. Moreover, even if people chose to hide their identity and managed to pass as non-Muslims, this was not a neutral decision made lightly, but one with serious psychological implications.

This is exactly the predicament described some 40 years later by historian Faisal Devji, reflecting on his own personal experiences. Devji criticizes an all-pervasive fear that caused many Muslims to “dissimulate” their identity—Muslim housewives in Bombay who took off their burqas before they went shopping, Muslim businessmen who took Hindu names for

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703 Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?."
conducting business and dealing with the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{704} Others chose to stress their identity by way of beards, caps, and veils. While they were no doubt courageous, Devji argues that “they have at the same time cut themselves off from wider society and resigned themselves, I think, to lives within their own ghettos. And this parochialism is not merely spatial or experimental, but psychological as well.”\textsuperscript{705}

As we have seen, it was the second path that \textit{Al Jamiat} advocated in 1949, calling on Muslims to adhere to and emphasize their Muslim identity. It was one of two irreconcilable paths open to Muslims, a dilemma that, according to Aamir Mufti, has deep structural roots in the Enlightenment—the demands of the nation-state cannot be reconciled with protection of cultural difference.\textsuperscript{706} The internal contradictions in \textit{Al Jamiat}'s position and its inconsistent characterization in the CID as either a “nationalist” or a “communal” paper reflect this unresolved tension in the position of Indian Muslims between their nationality and their religion. Mufti discusses the homogenization drive inherent in the secular ideology of the Congress, as articulated by both Nehru and Gandhi. It was all the more overt in the ideology of the Hindu right. In the next section, we shall see that the problem of assimilation lay at the center of the confrontation between the Muslim press and the refugee press.

\textsuperscript{704} Similarly, Shahid Siddiqui recalls how his mother and other female members of the family would take off their \textit{burgas} before venturing outside Delhi Gate: Interview with Shahid Siddiqui, 13 June 2011, New Delhi.


\textsuperscript{706} Mufti compares the Muslim question in India to the Jewish question in Europe, arguing that both are necessary outcomes of the rise of the nation-state. His discussion of the Jewish dilemma as represented in Lessing’s play \textit{Nathan the Wise} (1778) is indeed striking in its similarity to the Muslim dilemma after partition: “To be a Jew outright won’t do at all, but not to be a Jew will do still less.” Quoted in: Aamir Mufti, "Secularism and Minority: Elements of a Critique," \textit{Social text} 45, no. 4 (1995): 76. On the implications of the minoritization of Indian Muslims, see also: \textit{Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture}; Gyan Prakash, "Secular Nationalism, Hindutva, and the Minority," in \textit{The Crisis of Secularism in India}, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
Wars of Words: The Sikandar-Raj Marriage Affair and the Editorial Controversy of May-June 1952

As in previous years, communal tensions in Delhi escalated during the summer months of 1952. This time, the disturbances at the end of May were serious enough to require India’s Home Minister, Kailash Nath Katju, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to give public statements.\(^7^0^7\)

The event that spurred the violence was the intended “inter-communal marriage” between Muslim politician Sikandar Bakht and a refugee Hindu named Raj Sharma. Bakht was closely associated with Subhadra Joshi and the two, we may recall, took part in contemporary controversies surrounding houses in the Muslim zones. Like Joshi, he was part of the Shanti Dal, the socialist wing of the Delhi Congress and, at the time of the controversy, was personal assistant to Delhi’s Chief Minister, Chaudhary Brahm Prakash.\(^7^0^8\) Bakht’s and Sharma’s decision to get married enraged not only her parents but also the multitude of Hindu-right groups in the city, of which the Punjabi refugees now formed an important component. Just before the marriage was to take place on May 24, Raj Sharma’s father obtained a temporary injunction from the court and applied for a permanent one.

Large protest assemblies in support of the father’s suit were organized by the Hindu organizations in the city—the Delhi State Hindu Mahasabha, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the Arya Samaj, and the Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Mandal. On May 26, a partial *hartal* was observed in some Hindu localities. Small processions of Hindus converged in front of the district courts, where the father’s application for a permanent injunction was heard. They “swelled to a crowd of about 2,500 demonstrators who indulged in hooliganism, smashing window-panes in different

\(^7^0^8\) Sikandar Bakht later joined the Janata Party and, when it fell apart, the BJP: “Sikander Bakht: BJP's Best Known Muslim Face,” India Outlook, 23 February, 2004.
courts and removing Gandhi caps from the heads of members of the public and burning these caps on the spot.”

After the crowd dispersed, stray assaults took places in different parts of the city. Seventeen Muslims were injured, and one young man, Islamuddin, subsequently died of his injuries. Other rioters converged on the house of M.P. Subhadra Joshi and threw stones at the car of the Chief Minister who arrived there, lightly injuring the Chief Minister and another Delhi Congressman, Onkar Nath. The arrests of Hindu demonstrators and leaders, especially of Member of Parliament V.G. Deshpande, induced more demonstrations and a partial hartal the following day.

The storm did not subside easily. On June 1, Prof. Ram Singh, an important leader of the Hindu Mahasabha in Delhi, gave a speech to a public assembly in Gandhi Grounds:

[…] In addition I have to say that a friend visited my office yesterday. I was under the impression that he would go but he remained sitting quiet. I was thinking what the matter could be. A number of other friends had also come, and when they left leaving him alone, he, whom I know fully well but will not disclose his name for the present, got up all of a sudden and, touching my feet, started weeping. I asked what the matter. He replied in a very faltering and weeping tone: ‘you have saved my house. The same incident was about to happen to my daughter as well.’ (shame shame). I said, ‘it is my information that we may or may not be in the position to do something in connection with Raj Sharma, but it is a known fact that girls belonging to fifteen families have been saved and our friends have no courage to arrange their naked dance. The present agitation may prove useful or not, but at least such a thing will not happen, how long I cannot say, but for some time they will not be able to do such a humiliating act.[“] I have said nothing exciting but have only been able to disclose that 15 girls have been saved. I will not reveal their names to you or the reporters. At some future time I will tell you if need be how many girls were saved from being married in Delhi, Meerut and Saharanpur (shame shame).

It remains unclear whether the stabbing, in the same week, of a sweeper in Farash Khana was connected with the disturbances, but it soon precipitated the looting of Muslim shops in the same locality. According to the Times of India, Raj Sharma, recognizing the danger to

709 Johnson to Iengar, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of May 1952,” F. 1-52-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
710 CID report on the Ram Singh’s speech in Gandhi Ground, F. 8(145)/1952, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA
711 Johnson to Iengar, “Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of May 1952,” F. 1-52-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
her life, asked the Deputy Commissioner for protection.\textsuperscript{712} On June 5 she declared she had changed her mind and asked the Registrar of Marriage to consider her application withdrawn.\textsuperscript{713}

A Muslim protest meeting was held at the Jama Masjid, where leaders of the Jamiat Ulama condemned the communalist speeches made by Hindu leaders, the violence that had followed, and the alleged failure of the police to intervene.\textsuperscript{714} Al Jamiat clarified that the marriage of Muslims to other communities was forbidden by Islam and, hence, the Jamiat did not appreciate Sikandar Bakht’s actions, either, but that the Muslim community should not have been penalized for the actions of one individual.\textsuperscript{715}

The Sikandar-Raj marriage affair is representative of communal tensions in Delhi in this decade. It is no coincidence that an inter-religious marriage stood at the heart of this controversy, and that both the Hindu and the Muslim leadership objected to the marriage. This affair was very much in line with outrage over the alleged sexual molestation of Hindu women by Muslim men—an allegation that repeatedly served as a pretext for disturbances in the city. Also, that Al Jamiat did not approve of the marriage conforms to its logic of cultural encapsulation discussed above.

What also made this affair representative is the press controversy that it stirred between the Hindu refugee papers and the Muslim ones. Press controversies, or editorial “wars of words,” were a typical feature of the public sphere of Delhi. They served as a platform for editors, who used their sharp pens against each other. The specific chain of editorials and counter-editorials published in response to the intended marriage was quite long, and I could not

\textsuperscript{712} “Delhi Disorder Details,” \textit{Times of India}, 3 June, 1952.
\textsuperscript{714} “Fortnightly Report for the First Half of June 1952.
\textsuperscript{715} “Bi-Monthly Report on the Muslim Press for May-June 1952, F. 1-52-C.
obtain all the related editorials. But what becomes clear is that the controversy soon went beyond the local event and turned into a debate about the nature of Indian democracy, secularism, and the place of the Muslim minority in it. The bitter and solidified stances of the refugee and the Muslim press, hitherto presented separately, clashed in a great crescendo.

“A Few Words to the Muslims of India”

On June 2, 1952, K. Narendra, son of Pratap founder Mahashay Krishan, published an editorial titled “A Few Words to the Muslims of India.” It was provocative and, like most editorials in the Urdu newspapers, long and repetitive. It shows how little Pratap’s rhetoric had changed in the five years that had passed since independence. The editorial opens with the argument that Indian and Kashmiri Muslims receive special rights and concessions [khaas huquq] from Nehru’s government at the expense of other communities. It then proceeds:

[...] My previous article upset many Muslims,716 and the Pakistani newspapers published the words of the Indian Muslim papers in bold headings. This confirmed my suspicion that there is a secret conspiracy between the Muslim newspapers in India and those of Pakistan to defame the Indian public. These Muslim newspapers publish baseless stories about the Indian government and Indian majority, and the Pakistani newspapers publish their words in bold titles to prove to the world that the life of Indian Muslims is miserable. It is for the Indian government to decide what should be done against these criminal attempts by the Muslim newspapers. As for me, what I intend to do here is to clarify my position with respect to the Indian Muslims [...] 

I do not wish to make any insinuations, but this is a truth that no one can deny—who are the Muslims of Pakistan, after all? Weren’t they India’s residents until yesterday? Didn’t they tear India into pieces? Didn’t they join India’s Muslims in partitioning India? Aren’t they friends and relatives of India’s Muslims? Don’t they maintain strong relations with the Indian Muslims—ties of marriage and love? Therefore, it is only natural for the Indian Muslims to feel close to the Pakistanis. [...] 

... The truth is that these people [Indian Muslims] are not willing to merge with the feelings of the great majority of India. I will ask them to look at the world’s history. In no country can the minority stay protected by the police, army, or law. Eventually it has to please the majority If the minority does not maintain good relations with the majority, if

716 Narendra refers here to an earlier editorial he published, which I could not locate, titled “Agar Jawaharlal ko kuchh ho gaya (If something happened to Jawaharlal).”
it provokes the majority on a regular basis and thinks that because such-and-such ruler is on its side it can do whatever it pleases, then its fate will be exactly what the Muslims are so afraid of. […]

I notify the Muslims: *change your behavior, change your viewpoint, change your mentality, and most important, pacify the Hindus* […] No Hindu wants you to change your religion by force, your culture is welcome, we don’t want to suppress it, but *if you want to become happy citizens of India, then you must accept the culture* [*tahzib o sanskriti*] *of India*. There is no country that would tolerate such a minority whose relation with the country is temporary, whose *birth was over there*. The English were different, they would tolerate such things for their own benefit. Now the English have gone, so you will also have to change. […] If you wish, you can think of my words as threats, but I in no way mean them to be so…

I do not quote Narendra’s editorial in full, yet one can appreciate the great number of repetitions in the portions quoted. Hammering his point over and over again, Narendra is preoccupied with Muslim blame for partition and with Indian Muslims’ familial and social ties to Muslims in Pakistan, which make their loyalty doubtful. The discussion is representative of Hindutva ideology, in which Muslims are outsiders for whom it is not India but faraway lands that are sacred, and who cannot belong to the Indian nation in any way other than through assimilation—the minority must “merge [*mudghim*] with the feelings of the great majority.” What are these feelings with which the Muslims should merge? What is the culture [*tahzib o sanskriti*] that they must “accept”? The phrasing is deliberately vague, but with the recurrent reference to cow slaughter, the implication is quite clear—there is no place for difference in the Indian nation.

The editorial stirred a controversy and elicited strong responses from the Delhi Muslim newspapers. *Al Jamiat* published at least three long editorials in response, and so did *Nai Duniya*. Their angry editorials prompted *Pratap* to publish another article, to which *Nai Duniya* published a new response, its fourth editorial on the topic.718 The Muslim press focused on the recent

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717 Editorial: *Bharatiy Musalmaanon Se Do Baatein*, “*Pratap*,” 2 June 1952. This and other editorials relating to this controversy were included in file F. 8(145)/1952, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.

718 *Pratap*’s new editorial (which I could not locate) was not, according to *Nai Duniya*, a formal editorial but an allegedly fake letter to the editor, composed by the editor.
disturbances in Delhi that turned a young Muslim, Islamuddin a *shahid*. The more principled debate revolved around Narendra’s demand that Muslim would assimilate and adopt the culture of the majority. They used a particularly emotive and sarcastic language, involving direct and personal attacks on each other, intended to attract and entertain the readership of each paper. Siddiqui of *Nai Duniya*, for example, addressed Narendra:

> What do you mean by saying that Muslims should descend from sky, that they cannot survive without the help of Jawaharlal and Maulana Azad, that they need to change, they need to adopt Hindu culture, they need to do this, they need to do that? If these are not threats, what are they, words of love? Can any honorable [*sharif*] person speak to another honorable person in this way? […] Who are you and what is your standing that you make threats?

> You have the habit of saying two contradictory things in one breath. You make two turns within one line, and for this reason, it is difficult for you to keep in mind what you wrote two lines before or what you said two days ago. Today you argue that the religion and culture of the Muslims is protected, but the main argument of the editorial “A Few Words to the Muslims of India” was that Muslims had to accept the culture of the majority in order to remain happy citizens of this country. About this, it is said, ”The liar has a very short memory.”

The article’s concluding paragraphs express the tensions underlying the position of Muslims as a minority in India. We can see how *Nai Duniya* oscillates between the two notions of Indian secularism—one based on *communities*, the other founded on the notion of *individual citizens* abstracted from any particular religious identification:

> You say that the Muslims should accept those principles that minorities in all countries of the world should accept—recognizing the fundamental rights of the country. But we refuse to accept that we are a minority in this country. We are not a minority according to the constitution and law. We are citizens of this country with the same rights as all citizens. You call us a minority and, by doing so, you separate us for no reason from the rest of the citizens and wish to strike a blow against our rights. But let us say we accept your words [that we are a minority]. Even in such a case, do you put all responsibility on the minority? Should only the minority be aware of its duties? Does the majority have no duty? No responsibility? […]

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Siddiqui makes a gesture of refusing the position of minority, but immediately withdraws. By this point, the categories majority (aksariyat) and minority (aqliyat) had become so entrenched in Indian politics that it was impossible to transcend them.

As so frequently happened, this controversy soon spilled over across the border, and was covered extensively by the previously Delhi Urdu papers now based in Karachi—Anjam and Jang. The article in Jang was published on June 4, a mere two days after the publication of Pratap’s editorial, indicating that the Pakistani newspapers followed publications in India very closely. This attention was mutual, and Delhi’s editors themselves read the Pakistani press on a regular basis. The previously Delhi-based Urdu newspapers thus continued to play a role, albeit a passive and distant one, in Delhi’s public sphere. The Urdu press continued to be a shared world that now operated across the partition divide, and local controversies in Delhi gained a larger meaning in the context of Indo-Pakistan relations. In this case, the unflattering publication of the controversy in the Karachi press caused alarm in India’s Ministry of External Affairs, which requested the Delhi Administration to make an inquiry into the truthfulness of the report.

Conclusion – A Shared World of Conflict across the Divide

While reflecting on this controversy, it should be emphasized that it was by no means unique but rather very typical of the Delhi public sphere in the first decade after independence. These controversies were ignited by various catalysts—religious debates, national politics, Indo-Pakistani relations, or local incidents. Just two months after this controversy, in August 1952, the press stormed over the derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammad published in the

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719 Delhi’s newspapers ordered newspapers from Karachi through the post office. See: F. 100, Delhi Police Records, Sixth Installment, NMML; F. 469, Delhi Police Records, Eight Installment, NMML.
720 Similarly, in the summer of 1949, reports in the daily Jang of Karachi of alleged atrocities against the Muslims of Delhi prompted Delhi’s Chief Commissioner to report on communal incidents in Delhi: F.127/49-C, CC Files Confidential Branch, DSA.
Hindi daily Amrit Patrika of Allahabad. Similarly, Pratap and the Muslim-owned papers Al Jamiat and Nai Duniya scuffled over Mahashay Krishna’s argument that Islam was inherently violent. The acrimonious tract and pamphlet controversies of the colonial Punjab reverberated in these post-1947 exchanges, sometimes explicitly, as in Mahashay Krishna’s reference to the assassinations of the two important Arya Samaji leaders Pandit Lekh Ram (1897) and Swami Shraddhanand (1926) as proof of the violent nature of Islam.

It was local disturbances, such as the 1952 Sikandar-Raj marriage affair, that often provoked intemperate editorial exchanges. In the summer of 1949, a debate between the refugee press and Al Jamiat broke out in connection with violent incidents in Subzimandi and the alleged molestation of refugee girls by Muslims. In August 1952, a disturbance in mohalla Sheesh Mahal, resulting in the injury of a Hindu, incited polemical editorials and allegations about the harassment of Hindu women by Muslim goondas. It is noteworthy that Narendra, the editor of Pratap, expressed these views both on the pages of Pratap and in a public meeting. Two months later, following disturbances in Bara Hindu Rao and Jama Masjid during Muharram, the press controversy was renewed. In April 1954, a clash between refugees and Muslims over disputed land near Idgah in Sadar Bazar, resulting in serious injuries to six people, produced contradictory accounts in the press. In June of the same year, Pratap and Al Jamiat argued about a small-scale riot in Aligarh and the violence that followed it in Delhi’s Daryaganj district. Around the same time, a Muslim boy from a butcher’s shop in Kucha Rehman Chandni Chowk was caught by a crowd of Hindus and Sikhs in Kashmiri Gate and handed over to the police on

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721 Several Muslims were arrested on charges of molestation: “Fortnightly Press Report for the Second Half of August 1948,” F. 1-52-C, CC Files, Confidential Branch, DSA.
723 For the disturbances near Idgah and the diverse accounts of them, see correspondences and newspaper clippings in F. 14(9)/1954, CC Files, Home-Press, DSA.
the charge that he had sold beef to a *dhobi*. The incident, needless to mention, was depicted in very different colors in *Pratap* and in *Nai Duniya*.\(^7\)

Whatever the direct catalyst, the exchanges reiterated the same logic and themes. The refugee press kept blaming the Muslims for the partition of the country and charging them of disloyalty. “Muslims are in India only in their bodies, their hearts reside in Pakistan,” reiterated Mahashay Krishna throughout 1954, arguing that Muslims stayed in India only because Pakistan would not accept them or because they were waiting for an exchange of property between India and Pakistan to take place before they migrated. The other main accusation, voiced again and again, was that Muslim refused to adopt the culture of the majority of the country. For its part, the Muslim press reciprocated with a vengeance and published *Pratap*’s editorials in great detail, as proof of the plight of Muslims and of the incompetence or complicity of a state that allowed such unbridled editors to spread their poison. The Pakistani press would delightedly pick up on these controversies, thereby giving rise to further accusations in the refugee press about Muslim conspiracy across the border. The cycle of allegations and counter-allegations was thus perpetuated.

Urdu, throughout the 1950s, still served as a *shared language of conflict*. In this respect, Delhi’s public sphere was a vestige of late-colonial north India, where, despite the Hindi-Urdu controversy, an absolute identification of religious community with language—Hindi for Hindus and Urdu for Muslims—had not yet taken root. Delhi of the 1950s was an interesting transition period, a twilight zone before full separation set in. This shared vernacular world would break apart in subsequent decades, as the younger generation of refugees and other Hindus did not learn Urdu. While *Milap* and *Pratap* still publish from Delhi today, their readership is extremely

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\(^7\) For *Pratap*’s account of the incident: “Ilaqa Kashmeri Gate Mei,” *Pratap*, 11 June 1954. *Nai Duniya*’s article was found objectionable and discussed by the Sessions Judge: F. 19(47)/54, CC Files, Home Department, DSA.
limited, confined to the older generation of Punjabi refugees who are dying out. But throughout the 1950s, officials complained that “triangular controversies” between the three sections of the press—Hindu, Muslim and Sikh—poisoned the atmosphere in the city.

Commenting on the Hindu-Muslim controversies, some officers in the administration noted that they were underwritten by an economic logic—they hiked up sales, so both parties had an interest in inflaming every petty issue out of proportion and keeping the fire burning. By repeating the leitmotifs of these exchanges—in a nutshell, Muslim disloyalty versus Muslim victimhood—the Urdu press created an entrenched communal discourse. Sensational headlines, abundance of metaphor, direct address to the readers, and frequent use of melodrama and sarcasm made that communal discourse hyper-emotional. In contrast to the impersonal and cosmopolitan tone of the English press, the Urdu editors situated themselves as involved actors in the local scene, taking a clear and unequivocal stand in relation to happenings in the city.

The Urdu press was thus more rooted in local affairs and, at the same time, invested such local events with broader political-communal meaning. In this sense, it better reflects, and offers a window into, the emotion and ideology that sustained the success of the Hindu nationalist Jana Sangh in Delhi—“one of the first few states to witness a challenge to the Congress from a really

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725 Interview with Navin Suri, 3 May 2011, New Delhi. On the extremely limited circulation of the Hindu Arya Samaji papers in contemporary Delhi, see also: Farouqui, "The Emerging Dilemma of the Urdu Press in India: A Viewpoint." Another indication of the decline of Urdu by the mid-1960s, is that Lala Jagat Narain (1899-1981), a refugee from Lahore and founder of the Hind Samachar Group, started an Urdu daily Hind Samachar in 1948, published from Jalandhar, Punjab. In 1965 he founded a Hindi daily, Punjab Kesari, realizing there was now a market for a Hindi newspaper in Punjab. Although he was more comfortable in the Urdu script, “sound business sense, reacting to the pressures of capitalism, led Jagat Narain to found a Hindi newspaper in 1965, after more than 15 years of expanding state-sponsored Hindi-language education had created a generation of potential readers.” Robin Jeffrey, "Hindi: 'Taking to the Punjab Kesari Line'," *Economic & Political Weekly* 32, no. 3 (1997): 79. See also: "Punjabi: 'The Sub-Liminal Charge'," 444.

726 Interestingly, the Urdu press was also more localized than the Hindi press. Discussing the debility of the Hindi press in the first three decades after independence, Robin Jeffrey notes that it relied heavily on translations of English newspapers news and stories instead of producing its own. “This resulted in the strange fact that *Hindi dailies tended to focus on international and national news* – what came off the wire in English or appeared in English-language newspapers whose stories could be appropriated for translation.” "Hindi: 'Taking to the Punjab Kesari Line'," 77. (my emphasis).
potent political rival”\textsuperscript{727}—and that fed recurring disturbances in the \textit{mohallas} of the old city and Sadar Bazar. If these \textit{mohallas} constituted the heart of the city, then the Urdu press in the 1950s provided the heartbeats.

CONCLUSION

In the three decades that followed the end of WWII, European empires were wound up throughout Asia and Africa, resulting in more than a hundred newly independent states. Decolonization was often accompanied by violent struggles and mass displacement of populations, which, along with events in Europe, turned the 20th century into the “the century of the refugee.” In India, decolonization was combined with territorial partition that resulted in mass killings, forced displacement, and the creation of about 18 million refugees. As a result, all major cities in the northern parts of South Asia, from Karachi in the west to Dacca in the east, turned into partition cities, or refugees’ cities. This study is the first systematic exploration of the meanings and ramifications of partition in India’s capital city, Delhi.

I have treated partition throughout this study as a process and shown that August 1947 was not the end point of partition, but rather the beginning of a protracted operation through which the implications of partition were worked out—borders fixed, citizenship determined, and a shared linguistic and cultural world divided. At the same time, I chose to begin my story earlier, treating the years 1940-1955 as the critical time span during which partition unfolded. Taking 1940 as a starting point prevents the dramatic and transformative events of partition from concealing continuities with late-colonial history. An overemphasis on the repercussions of partition runs the risk of producing an ahistorical understanding of partition as an abnormal event, lying outside history, so to speak.

In the case of Delhi, standard official narratives and popular imagination have emphasized the “Punjabization of Delhi”—the transformation of Delhi from a genteel, erudite, Muslim city into a heartless one, driven by the Punjabis’ “money culture,” which only worsened

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in response to the trauma of partition and the struggles to rebuild their lives. Chapter 1 in this study serves as a reminder of the well-known yet often ignored fact—that Delhi had long been part of Punjab and, in practical terms, was an administrative part of this province from 1858 to 1911. As a result, Punjabi trading communities—both Muslim and Hindu—had long been present in Delhi and exerted an influence on its economic, social, and political life. Both Hindu and Muslim Punjabi communities had taken part in turning Delhi from a cultural center to a commercial one in the aftermath of the 1857, and both gave a fillip to the religious reform movements that flourished in Delhi from the second half of the 19th century. Particularly important for our purposes is the role played by the Arya Semaj’s reformist zeal and anti-Muslim sentiment in pre-partition Delhi, which made the city part of the ideological and political world of late-colonial Punjab, with its increasingly combative politics and abusive public sphere.

Arya Samaji leader Swami Shraddhanand is an important figure, demonstrating Punjabi influence in Delhi and bridging the pre-partition and post-partition years. He moved from Punjab to Delhi in the early 20th century and, starting in the mid-1920s, played a key role in the growing tensions in the city revolving around the Shuddhi/Tabligh controversy. He exerted a huge influence over the vernacular public sphere in the 1920s, through the vernacular dailies—the Urdu Tej, run and edited by Shraddhanand’s follower and Congress member Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, and the Hindi Vir Arjun, edited by Shraddhanand’s own son, Pandit Indra Vidyavachaspati. Notably, the Arya Samaji publications discussed in Chapter 4 were in continuity with the vernacular public sphere of late-colonial Delhi, not merely in their communal tone and editorial wars with the Muslim papers, but even more concretely in personal connections. It is telling that Mahashay Krishna, owner and editor of the daily Pratap of Lahore,

729 For a recent rendition of this theme, see Rana Dasgupta, Capital: The Eruption of Delhi (NY: The Penguin Press, 2014).
was close to Lala Deshbandhu Gupta before partition, and that the latter was instrumental in getting Krishna and his family a house in New Delhi after partition.\textsuperscript{730} Similarly, \textit{Vir Arjun}, which had been owned by Shraddhanand’s son and had ceased publication, was revived by Mahashay Krishan in 1954 to serve as a Hindi counterpart to the Urdu \textit{Pratap}.\textsuperscript{731}

The overemphasis on the Punjabization of the city has also produced an all-too-convenient narrative that identifies the refugee outsiders as the sole agents for the massacres that took place in the capital. As I have shown in Chapter 1, while Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Pakistan no doubt played a pivotal part in the violence and the forcible occupation of houses, there was a great deal of involvement and preplanning on the part of Delhi’s very own Hindu right organizations, especially the local RSS, in collaboration with the Hindu business community. Early signs of this orchestration were already evident in late 1946, in the aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing, long before the first Punjabi refugees arrived in the city.

Indeed, starting the story of partition in Delhi in 1940 allows us to situate the later massacres and displacements within the violent political climate that took over the city starting in the early 1940s, and to note the leading role played by the Muslim League in this process. To put it differently, my study, like Zamindar’s, has focused on Muslim dispossession in post-partition Delhi—a process that was undergirded by a discourse of suspicion of Muslim disloyalty. I suggest that the emotional underpinnings of this discourse, and the frantic attempts to sort out “Muslim Leagui” from “nationalist Muslims,” can be grasped only if we expand our time frame backward and consider this extremely aggressive political culture in the prelude to partition. Zamindar sensitively exposes the impact of bureaucratic violence on the city’s Muslims after August 1947. However, the latter overwhelmingly appear in her account as de-politicized.

\textsuperscript{730} The connection between the two is described by K. Narendra in a recent booklet commemorating Deshbandhu Gupta, printed by Gupta’s family, a copy of which I received from Gupta’s son and current editor of \textit{Tej}, Vishwa Bandhu Gupta.

\textsuperscript{731} CID report on Vir Arjun, 27 March 1954, F. 501, Delhi Police Records, Eighth Installment, NMML.
ordinary people whose main form of attachment—the immediate family—was severed by the governmentalities of the new nation-states. Yet, the Muslim memoirs and government records cited in Chapter 1 suggest that the Muslim League and the idea of Pakistan had enchanted a large part of the Muslim public in Delhi and had become an important component of its political imagination. Admittedly, this political imagination requires further research—what were the Muslim League’s mobilization strategies? Whom exactly did this mobilization reach? Was it confined to the educated masses, or did it appeal to the poorer classes, as well? What did “Pakistan” mean to these different groups? While these remain open questions, my findings suggest that the image of apolitical, ordinary folks does not sit easily with the evidence of an increasingly tense urban setting with a politically conscious population.

In the same vein, while analyzing the September riots and the ways in which they were experienced and have been remembered, I have taken into account the power that Muslims traditionally possessed in the city. I suggest that the 1947 riots occupied a peculiar space between a civil war and a well-orchestrated pogrom targeting a vulnerable Muslim minority. While the latter was no doubt the end result, the first phase of the violence was experienced psychologically as a symmetrical battle between more or less equal rivals. This experience was grounded in the numerical and political strength that Muslims had in Delhi and in their sense of entitlement to the city, which had been strengthened by the collaboration between the Muslim League and the colonial administration during WWII.

This sense of entitlement, together with the fact that Muslims often had the upper hand in the recurring disturbances and street fights in pre-partition Delhi, explains the utter shock and humiliation that is gleaned in Muslim memoirs. This is why Muslim writers repeatedly emphasize the heroism of the bandhani (cooler) community and the fact that it used to defeat Hindus, as well as the fierce fighting on the part of the Muslims of Subzimandi and Paharganj.
Such emphasis on Muslim fighting did not make it into the few existing historiographical accounts of partition violence in Delhi, since, I assume, the utter victimization of Muslims during these riots and afterward closes off the possibility of seeing anything but victimhood. But it was precisely the partition riots that were the defining event transforming the Muslim community from a dominant public in the city to a weak minority on the city’s spatial, political, and cultural margins. If we read the sources carefully enough, we can glimpse the sense of entitlement, power, and privilege Muslims in Delhi had until the eve of partition. A classic example of the signature of rumors in the primary sources, the armament and fierce fighting of the Muslims in Subzimandi and Paharganj exist on the border zone between fact and fiction. The story was widely circulated and constructed differently in the competing narratives of this event—while official reports and the Patel-supporting daily Hindustan Times decried it as an insurgency, for the Muslims of Delhi it was proof of their community’s inherent virility, despite the humiliation of 1947.

Muslim entitlement was also reflected in the illusion, sustained until a couple of months before partition, that Delhi would form part of Pakistan. Indeed, the territorial ambiguity of Pakistan was one of a host of uncertainties that infused this period of transition with intense emotions—great anxieties and great hopes surrounding the different imaginings of “Pakistan,” “Independence,” and “Partition” that circulated on the eve of partition. This emotional climate induced the violence against, and the minoritization of, Delhi’s Muslims in partition’s aftermath.

Chapter 2 looks closely at the clash between a conception of citizenship based on birth in a territory (Jus Soli) and the one based on descent (Jus Sanguinis)—or religious affiliation, in the Indian context. My analysis unpacks the concept of “the state” acting as a unified agent upon

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society, and shows how fractured it really was, from the very top echelons down to the policemen and bureaucrats on the ground, as well the as non-governmental bodies related to the DPCC. My emphasis on the reciprocation between these different levels shows the interpenetration of state and society, especially at such moments of crisis. In addition, it serves as a corrective to an overemphasis on the role of bureaucratic discourse as propelling the process of Muslim dispossession. In fact, the political discourse was not dictated by the bureaucratic one but developed in tandem with it. Unlike Pakistan, where the military and bureaucracy had the upper hand vis-à-vis the Muslim League politicians, in India, the Congress’s supremacy over the other branches of government was unchallenged.\footnote{Philip Oldenburg, \textit{India, Pakistan, and Democracy: Solving the Puzzle of Divergent Paths} (New York: Routledge, 2010).} I suggest that the bureaucratic practices and discourses in the first years after partition in Delhi were influenced by the deep divisions between Nehru and Patel.

These divisions were clearly evident in the struggles over evacuee property in the Muslim zones. The various actors who participated in these struggles, including the deputy commissioner, chief commissioner, the custodians and members of the Special Police Force, the Shanti Dal and the DPCC, were cognizant of the divergent stands Nehru and Patel took with regard to the Muslim zones, divisions that were also apparent in the Constituent Assembly Debates. These divisions created a confused, inconsistent, and nontransparent policy that left room for a host of ad hoc factors, such as corruption and socio-economic differences among the Muslims and refugees, to play a role in determining which zones were opened up and which were protected.

Chapters 2 and 3 trace the process of Muslim minoritization and spatial ghettoization in Delhi. A culture of suspicion sustained the numerous arrests of Muslims for activities as simple
as strolling in Hindu localities with “Hindu clothes” or “cutting pranks with Hindu girls.” Together with the progressive encroachment on Muslim zones, this suspicion effected a process of ghettoization and the huddling together of Muslims within specific localities in the old city, Sadar Bazar, and Nizamuddin.

Chapter 4 further explores this process by analyzing the Urdu press. I underscore the aggressive discourse of assimilation advocated by the Arya Samaji refugee papers and vehemently resisted by the Muslim papers. I argue that Muslim discourse was built upon the model of “cultural encapsulation” advocated by the Jamiat Ulema since 1919, entailing a different, communitarian basis for Indian secularism than the Nehruvian model. These tensions erupted with the collapse of the Khilafat movement in the early 1920s and were subsumed afterward by the Pakistan question. When the latter was resolved and the Muslim League leadership departed, these tensions resurfaced, rendering even the most “nationalist Muslim,” Congress-supporting newspaper into an ambiguous and suspicious category.

Moreover, Al-Jamiat, like other Muslim papers, developed a Muslim discourse of grievances. Its long-lasting implications might be gauged from a recent article by Urdu scholar Ather Farouqui, who presents a poignant criticism of the role played by the Urdu press of Delhi throughout the 1980s and 1990s. His driving question is whether Urdu journalism has played a constructive role in shaping Muslim sensibilities in post-independence India, in the sense of enabling the community to face the challenge of adjusting as a large minority group in a secular India. He argues that the press has failed, because it has “more often than not been prone to reinforce a sectarian and emotional outlook among readers”\(^{734}\) and “explain[ed] the social and economic backwardness which characterizes this community entirely and exclusively in terms of the failure

of the Government to protect Muslim interests.” 735 Most Urdu newspapers, Farouqui asserts, “deliberately search and compile such material which would push Muslims into pessimism and hopelessness.” 736 Farouqui’s blunt criticism was spurred by the two main controversies marking the crisis of secularism in India in the 1980s and 1990s—the Shah Bano case and the Babri Masjid controversy, which led to widespread riots across north India. 737 Farouqui concentrates on the coverage of these affairs in the Urdu weeklies of Delhi, especially the weekly Nai Duniya, which is the inheritor of the daily Nai Duniya and is run by Maulana Abdul Waheed Siddiqui’s son.

A.G. Noorani, writing against the same background, makes similar observations. Discussing the great wound inflicted on the “Hindu psyche” by partition, he notes:

Any mention or expression of Muslims’ grievances or of Muslims’ identity reminded them of [Muslim League separatist demands] and caused disquiet. Muslims’ grievances increased, but channels of protest were constrained. Muslims’ positive contribution to the secular deal, as distinct from protest against injustices, was weak. There were few to counsel them that the politics of protest alone—especially if organized on a communal basis—would aggravate the problem. 738

Al Jamiat’s issues in the years immediately following partition echo these tendencies and show that they emerged in the Muslim public sphere much earlier than scholars have considered. The newspaper’s stance stood for the predicament of Delhi’s Muslims more generally, as the question “Can a Muslim be an Indian?” continued to hover above them for many years.

735 ibid., 95.
736 Farouqui quotes here Masoom Moradabadi, with whom he agrees: ibid., 97.
737 There has been a plethora of writings on both cases, of course. For a succinct and valuable summary of both, see Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, Power and Contestation: India since 1989 (New York, New York: Zed Books, 2007), Chapter 2. On the Shah Bano controversy, see the articles by Upendra Baxi and Flavia Agnes in: Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, eds., The Crisis of Secularism in India (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
738 Noorani, The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record, 9. (emphasis in original)
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