

ILYAS CHATTHA*

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs) and the Forms of Partition Violence at District level

Abstract:

Partition of the Indian subcontinent in August 1947 to create two sovereign states of India and Pakistan was marked by the greatest migration in the twentieth century. Around twenty million people were displaced by Partition, with Hindus and Sikhs migrating to India and Muslims migrating to Pakistan. This article hopes to understand the importance of the Partition violence through previously unused Police First Information Reports (FIRs), that lodged at thana (local police stations) at the time. Police FIRs provide some novel evidence in which the private desire for economic motives presented a major contributory factor in the attacks on unwanted minorities. Crime often reports identity the local constituencies and categories for violence, as well as typologies and occupational basis of perpetrators. Alongside the struggle over territory and the cry for revenge, the article not only highlights different forms of violence but also draws attention to some of the local perpetrators of violence at the neighbourhood level. A focus is on the complicity of the members of law enforcers in coordinating the violence, rather than protecting the communities under attack.

Keywords: Police FIRs, massacres, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, Partition

Introduction

In the recent years, the findings of several scholars have pointed out that there were a host of culpable individuals and group actors involved, ranging from religious extremists on both sides to unscrupulous politicians, officials, policemen, and soldiers. Swarna Aiyar has argued that in many cases the aggressors operated in organised groups under ‘military style’ leadership. She considers the role played by the demobilised soldiers in determining the nature and brutality of the violence.¹ Ian Talbot has pointed out that British authority in Punjab was declining from March onward and violence in the major cities of Lahore and Amritsar began as early as March 1947. He sees this episode of violence as being completely different from that of the ‘traditional’ communal riot in Punjab and links it with that of Partition period: ‘August violence was not a sudden eruption but the final throes of a sustained period of conflict’.² The works of Ian Copland and Shail Mayaram make clear the involvement of some Punjabi princely states in the violence. Copland maintains that ‘Muslims were not only butchered in East Punjab but systematically expelled. We would now term this process ‘ethnic cleansing’.³ Mayaram’s account of violence in Mewat on the contrary challenges the notions of political parties and their association with violence. Some Muslim Meos in the princely states of Bharatpur and Alwar had not even heard of the Muslim League and its leader M.A. Jinnah, but they had been caught up in ‘the state-sponsored campaign of *safaya*, epitomizing the ideology of cleansing’.⁴ For some writers such as Ian Talbot similarities are being revealed between Partition and

* Dr Ilyas Chattha is a faculty member at LUMS, School of Mustaq Ahmad Gurmani Humanities and Social Science. He can be reached at: (ilyas.chattha@lums.edu.pk)

¹ S. Aiyar, ‘August Anarchy: The Partition Massacres in Punjab 1947’, *South Asia*, Vol. XVIII, Special Issue, (1995), pp. 13-36. For other important recent work on the Partition violence see, I. Talbot, ‘The August 1947 Violence in Sheikhupura City’, in I. Talbot (ed.), *The Independence of India and Pakistan: New Approaches and Reflections* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 90-120; S. Jha and S. Wilkinson, ‘Does Combat Experience Foster Organizational Skill? Evidence from Ethnic Cleansing During the Partition of South Asia’, *American Political Science Review*, 106, 4 (November 2012) pp. 883-907; I. Kamtekar, ‘The Military Ingredient of Communal Violence in Punjab 1947’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 56 (1995), pp. 568-72; U. Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998); R. Menon and K. Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Delhi: Kali Press for Women, 1998); P. Virdee, *From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

² Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and Its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 58; also see Das, D.K. Das and A. Verma, ‘The armed police in the British colonial tradition: The Indian perspective’, *Policing* (1998).

³ I. Copland, ‘The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 36, 3 (2002), p. 660 and p. 698.

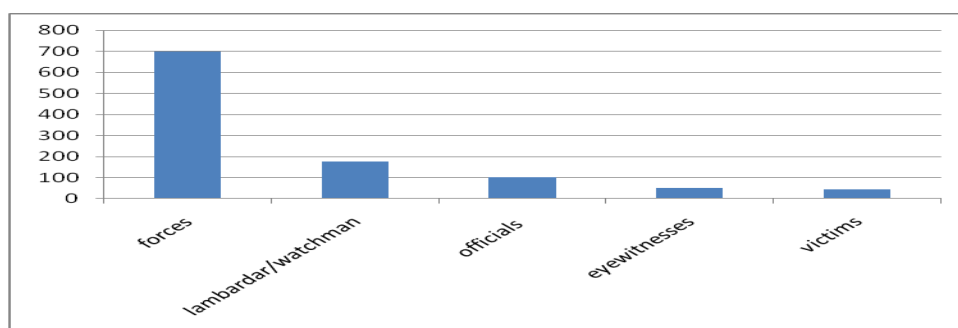
⁴ S. Mayaram, ‘Speech, Silence and the Making of Partition Violence in Mewat’, in S. Amin and D. Chakrabarty (eds.), *Subaltern Studies IX* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 132-162.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

post-independence communal violence in India.⁵ Paul Brass's notion of an 'institutionalized riot system' in post-independence Indian cities such as Aligarh and Meerut parallels characteristics of the 1947 violence in which, for example, the involvement of politicians, police, and gangs was widely reported.⁶ This exploration sees Partition violence as variegated and complex and illustrates the existence of a high degree of organisation and 'ethnic cleansing' element in it, alongside spontaneity.

It seems sensible that we attempt to understand the nature of thana police records, before we make an assessment of the localised motivations, dynamics and manifestations of Partition violence. There were obvious difficulties and limitations to both retrieve and use the police records. The records were spread all over several individual *thanas* and district police record rooms. There was sometimes limited information in the available police reports. Many reports did not explain the incidents but just simply assigned the required sections of the Indian Criminal Penal Code [IPC]. For example, one report read: 'Two unknown men found dead in Krishan Nagar, near Saadi Park... A case has been registered under section 303 of criminal code'. Another report describes: 'some houses in Mughal Pura's Guru Gobindgarh have set alight and a case has been registered under section 436 of criminal code against unknown people'. Different individuals were responsible for making the police record over the period. Some reports were made immediately when the event happened, while others were made in a later situation. Time to time, different statements from the members of officials, policemen, army-men, *chukedars* [watchmen], *lambardars*, and eye-witnesses were reported, despatched, telephoned, or telegraphed to the near police stations, and that statements were, subsequently, incorporated in the related FIRs. At the highest of Partition violence, the incidents, in a number of cases, if not all, were reported by the members of law enforcement forces, and thus reflected their descriptions of the incidents, rather than the victims themselves. Sometimes they overtly exaggerated the amount of suffering of their co-religionists and the extent of criminal activities of the offenders. At the same time, they downplayed the scale of killings of the 'rival' communities and the intensity of destructions of their properties. Besides the differences in defining the incidents, the *thana* police were responsible for assigning the sections of criminal code to committed crimes. For this same reason, however, the true rate of Hindu and Sikh minorities' victimisation and offending was almost certainly higher than that which is revealed in the police reports. Police records, therefore, are likely to provide a fairly conservative picture of the extent of victimisation of non-Muslims. The ratio of reported cases, by different individuals and the law enforcement forces, in the selected *thanas* is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: the ratio of reported cases



The umbrella term '*hamlahawar*' [raiders/attackers] was used in the police FIRs to denote a broad spectrum of alleged groups, ranging from the various members of 'local' populations to habitual criminals, emerged as perpetrators, organisers, or accomplices of the violence and looting. Sometimes, the term '*badmash*' was used to describe the Sikh raiders during the police encounters. The FIRs were full of descriptive swings such as 'Muslim Leaguer', 'Congress Mind', and 'Alaki Mind'. Source material reveals careful organisation behind the attacks on Hindu and Sikh minorities. To describe some incidents, such phrases as '*woho Jan bojkar agg lagaray thay*', [they set alight purposely], '*kuch lootmar kar ray thay, dosharay agg lagaray thay*' [some were looting, while others were involved in burning] were frequently

⁵ I. Talbot, 'The 1947 Violence in the Punjab' in Talbot, *The Deadly Embrace*, pp. 1–15.

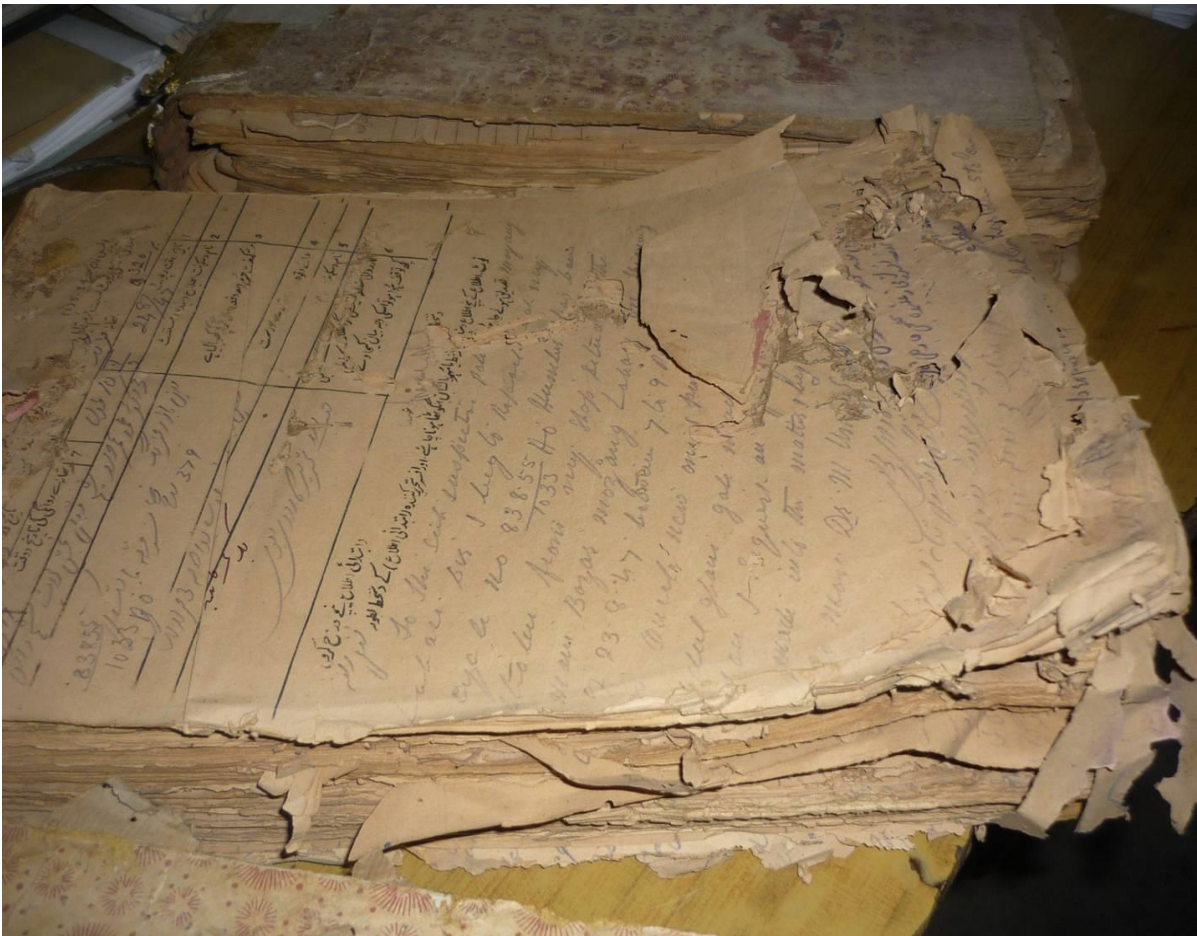
⁶ P. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2003), pp. 377-9; G. P. Singh, 'Police-public Relations in Colonial India', *History Compass*, (2019).

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

used in the FIRs. Despite the planning and careful organisation behind the attacks, the police reports merely termed them conveniently as ‘communal riot’. A number of registered cases in the FIRs were simply written: ‘*ya wakaya farkawarana fasad malom huta hay*’ (this incident appears to be communal riot), *hamlahawars* (raiders), in many cases, were described *na malom afraad* (unknown/nameless people), and big gatherings were called *mushtal hajum* (furious and uncontrollable crowd).

Despite these potential stereotypes, these materials are a unique source for understanding local-level variations in Partition violence, and their condition is perilous. They were chiefly written in Urdu and all hand-written, sealed in coloured ink (usually blue). Most of them are on the verge of total disintegration due to the extremely bad conditions in which they are deposited. Many of the documents are simply in piles on the floor. Dust, insects and damp conditions have infected a considerable segment already. There are wormholes in many of the manuscripts. A team of the India Office Library and Records travelled the ‘old district records in Pakistan’ between 1986-1987 and described the conditions of record room: ‘If you try to grasp hold of one of the coloured bundles to see what it contains you will be assailed by clouds of gritty dust that catch at your eyes and throat and may even force you to retire quickly from that dark and inhospitable place’.⁷ This truly reflects the condition of the ‘thana record room’ and in it the stored material, as is amply illustrated from the below image.

Illustration 1: a view of the archived FIRs from Lahore’s Thana Civil Lines



The reported cases ranged from petty trouble making to large scale murders. They included spontaneous desires for looting to well-organised destruction of the properties of Hindu and Sikh minorities. They also provided some pieces of evidence in which old score paid off in pretext of communal conflict as well as the

⁷ Z. Moir and M. Moir, ‘Old District Records in Pakistan’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 24, 1 (February 1990), pp. 195-204.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

extraordinary examples of cross-community assistance and ethnic solidarity. The FIRs that were recorded by the victims themselves stressed on an anticipatory migration trend, a return desire to their original 'homes' and a non-migrate intension. Source material not only reveals the different patterns of violence, but also identifies some of the grass-root perpetrators of the violence. Further, it uncovers the partisan attitude of law enforcement forces towards the unwanted minorities and shows how members of the forces were involved in the perpetrating of the violence. The reported cases varied considerably- from month-to-month, week- to- week, and day-to-day- in terms of the extent and intensity of violence, magnitude of arson, and scale of looting. Many registered cases, for example, - from February to March 1947- were filed against a great number of the Muslim League activists and Muslim League National Guards (MLNG), who were involved in the street protests and agitating in order to topple the Khizr Tiwana led-Unionist Coalition Ministry in Punjab, in defiance of the provisions of the Punjab Public Safety Ordinance. An early March FIR reads:

A crowd of the Muslim League demonstrators marched into the city's Magistrate building, chanting the slogan: *Khizro Toddy Bacha Haay Haay*, (Khizr, a stooge of the British) *Ban Ka Ray Ga Pakistan; Lar Kay Lengey Pakistan* (Pakistan would be achieved at any cost)... the police arrested the crowd for violating the Public Safety Ordinance, a case has been registered against under twenty-two people, including two local members of the Muslim League, Mohammad Nawaz and Anwar, under Sections 143/144 and 148/149 of the Indian Penal Code, [sections- which prohibited the assembly of five or more persons anywhere within the town].⁸

The tone and tenor of reported cases changed considerably with the fall of the Khizr government, and soon after the incident of Rawalpindi Division, in which many hundred Hindus and Sikhs were killed in early March 1947. Rather than a tussle for power between the activists of the Muslim League and the Unionist government authorities, police records show a growing position of the polarisation of attitudes among the members of 'rival' communities. They organised rallies and then marched to on the streets of the cities and towns, with party flag and political slogans, to express solidarity with their communities and leaders. The disturbed areas were filled with ecstatic cries of '*Alla ho Akbar*' (*God is great*), *Jai Hind*, (Victory to India) *Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal* ((He who cries God is Truth, is ever Happy). Police interception of such processions resulted in clashed with the excited crowd. On some occasions, police averted the clashes. On 15 March 1947, for example, such a clash in the locality of Krishan Nagar in the city of Lahore was averted by the police. A Muslim Sub-Inspector, who witnessed the incident, reported:

Today, a Hindu of Krishan Nagar was stabbed to death by a Muslim of Rajgarh, near the Lal Butcher Khana. Afterwards, a big crowd of Muslims armed with spears attacked Krishan Nagar. Hindus and Sikhs of Krishan Nagar also came out from their shops and houses for the encounter. We shouted at them and some went back; some resisted. We opened some fires in the air. They dispersed. The big procession of Muslims continued to march towards Krishan Nagar, chanting slogans with the cries of their leaders: *Challo Krishan Nagar Nun, Bhun Thea, Pichhan na Hatto*' [Let's march together towards Krishan Nagar, annihilate them, never give up].⁹

This statement shows the level of growing communal situation in Lahore soon after the Rawalpindi killings. In the aftermath of the latter, Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab demanded the division of the province if India was divided. Communal sentiment continued to simmer throughout the autumn of 1947. As time passed, the preparation for imminent communal battle accelerated. A number of episodes were reported involving incendiarism, stabbings, and the manufacture of home-made bombs. Sporadic ambushes and assaults on the minorities became one of the prime crimes of the day. In some occasions, police saved the life of the members of minority populations. Harbajan Singh, when was riding a bicycle back to home from work, was stabbed to neck near his house in Lahore's Ponch Road. 'Alongside my neighbour, two police constables were coming towards us when two Muslims attacked me on the afternoon of 3 April [1947]... they saved my life', Singh filed a FIR in the Thana Mozang against 'two nameless Muslims'.¹⁰

Although cases were registered, they were not followed up and the reality was that no one was ready to stand witness. Moreover, the minorities viewed the predominantly Muslim police as unreliable and partisan. This resulted not just from the generally deteriorating communal situation, but from isolated attacks, especially on night patrols, by non-Muslims. The way attacks on police pickets were coordinated reveals a degree of organisation. In May 1947, a Police van which toured the city of Gujranwala to proclaim curfew was attempted to blow up with soda bottle-manufactured bomb as it reached a narrow

⁸ FIR no. 11, Note Book no. 34, 27 February 1947, DPRO, Gujranwala.

⁹ FIR no. 20, Note Book no. 7, 15 March 1947, Mozang Thana, Lahore.

¹⁰ FIR no. 34, 3 April 1947, Mozang Thana, Lahore.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

corner of the street of a Sikh locality, Guru Gobindgarh. While Muslims held the upperhand, Sikhs were also preparing for an attack, as is evidenced by the following report of the employer of Mushtaq Illahi to the Thana Mozang, Lahore:

Mushtaq Illahi, son of Fazal Illahi, used to work in my shop in the Mochi Gate [in the inner Lahore]. Today, when he was coming back to his home on motor-bike and as he reached near Puli Nala near [Mozang], between 5- 6 Sikhs tried to stop him... and when they failed they threw a bomb upon him... as a result later he died'.¹¹

The reports of members of Sikh community's attacks on Muslims and the recovery of arms from their and Hindu localities, houses and factories appeared repeatedly in the files of police reports. For example, police reports list the following string of 'communal riot' crimes; a numbers of arms, including *kirpans*, spears, and *barchaes* were found in a factory in Mughal Pura; a Muslim was stabbed to death near Janazgha, Mozang, by a Sikh and so on. Such isolated attacks continued up until their forced exodus in the later weeks of 1947. Sometimes, some Sikhs came out from their 'relief' camps to inflict their rivals. One such assault, on 27 August 1947, was reported by Abdul Majeed, the Division Inspector General of Central Investigation Department, in which some Sikhs from a Lahore's relief camp were seen throwing a bomb in the city's session court building that caught fire.¹²

The police records also indicate the trend of anticipatory shifting away from communal 'zone' within the privileged Muslim community weeks before the highest of Partition violence. Such writers as Ian Talbot and Ravinder Kaur have pointed to the anticipatory flight of wealthy Hindus out of Lahore in the months leading up to independence.¹³ The trend of temporary anticipatory internal shifting of members of wealthy Muslim families from the communal to safe 'zone' is, nevertheless, little mentioned in the Partition discourse. An example of this is evidenced from the following report of Engineer Mohammad Wazir, a resident of Lahore's *mohalla* of Ahmed Pur:

I am an employee of Lahore's electricity supply department. I was transferred to Lyallpur. My family left alone here. Owing to the fear of communal strife, I locked my house and shifted my wife and children to the parental home, alongside valuable belongings... When we came back all doors were opened and house was looted... the following items are missing... [including] two *sandook*, and three trucks.¹⁴

Forms of Violence

The 1990s 'violence in Yugoslavia and Rwanda was carried out chiefly by... nonideological, criminals and criminal-like elements', as John Mueller argues, 'to gain material benefits through illicit and lucrative activities. These individuals thus had a strong stake in perpetuating the war to maximize these gains'.¹⁵ Criminality was an important element during the 1947 Partition's crisis, yet it has received little serious academic attention. One of the most growing types of crimes was looting, and was exploded as a major criminal activity as the communal disturbances took momentum in the breakdown of the authority. The ratio of reported cases in the selected FIRs, in which the incidents of looting were far more than other forms of crimes.

As Ayesha Jalal points out that the struggle over territory in Punjab as a whole was mirrored at the local level in 'strategies to appropriate the property of neighbours'.¹⁶ Similar evidence emerged from the work of Ian Talbot's on Lahore. Frequently associated with trade and commerce, the Hindus and Sikhs had earned an enviable reputation for their business acumen and commercial dexterity in West Punjab. For example, in the district of Lahore, the Muslim majority of 60 per cent owned about 33 per cent of land and the non-Muslim minority of 39 per cent owned remaining 67 per cent of the land. In the city of Lahore, the urban immovable property tax paid by the Muslims was Rs 406,747 as compared with Rs 940,248 by the non-Muslims- a difference to the sum more than double. A similar ownership situation existed in the industrial and commercial enterprises: out of 186 registered factories of Lahore 78 owned by the Muslims and the remainder belonged to the Hindus and Sikhs, and out of 97 banks only 7 owned by the Muslims.

¹¹ FIR no. 33, Note Book no. 16, 12 August 1947, Thana Mozang, Lahore.

¹² FIR no. 13, Note Book no. 56, 27 August 1947, Thana Anarkali, Lahore.

¹³ Talbot, *Divided Cities*; R. Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives Among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ FIR no. 85, Note Book no. 40, 17 August 1947, Thana Mozang, Lahore.

¹⁵ J. Mueller, 'The Banality of 'Ethnic War'', *International Security*, 25, 1 (2000), pp. 43 and 58.

¹⁶ A. Jalal, 'Nation, Reason and Religion: The Punjab's Role in the Partition of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33, 32, (August 8-14, 1998), pp. 2183-90.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

The economic superiority and higher percentage of ownership were much the same in other many districts and cities of West Punjab. For example, Hindu and Sikh trading and commercial class controlled the Sports-Goods industry of Sialkot, the Iron-Works of Gujranwala and the Grain-Markets of Sheikhpura.¹⁷

The collapse of the colonial state, in fact, created conditions ripe for lawlessness and opened up an environment conducive to opportunistic criminality- looting.¹⁸ Different groups and gangs were at work without regard to ethnicity; they exploited the breakdown of the administration for their personal gains and turned the communal conflict into the profitable endeavours. For them, Partition's crisis was the best thing that could ever happen to them. They looted without restraint; they killed members of Hindu and Sikh populations with justification, and they ruined their properties with rationalisation. They involved a diverse range of massed and individual groups, ranging from members of law enforcement forces to neighbourhood groups, outsiders, and mobs that spontaneously joined the actions. The number of participants ranged from thousands in episodes occurring in a village called Tata Chanwa, in Gujranwala, to dozens or less in many smaller episodes such as in Lahore's Royal Park. Violence and looting targeting members of Hindus and Sikhs and their properties were often justified as a way to attacks on Muslims in East Punjab. The looted booty ranged from valuable ornaments and net cashes to merely a couple of pots and pans. Those who resisted were either killed or murdered before looting. In one instance, a 'nameless' Muslim murdered an eighty-year-old Sikh couple while sleeping on their rooftop, merely in order to loot their belongings in the house.¹⁹ In another case, six lower-caste Mazbi Sikhs were looted in the locality of Ramgarh in the city of Lahore, in which one Sikh's wife died when she resisted to hand over her wearing jewellery.²⁰

In a civil war, as Azam and Hoeffler assume, the most extreme forms of violence may be seen as by-products of looting and predation.²¹ This is, in some extent, clear from the Partition's crisis. Great numbers of Pathans, for example, 'were out for loot, more on criminal than communal lines'. They were reported not only looting the houses of both Muslims and non-Muslims but also opened fires on civilians and soldiers, wounding Lt. Col. Sher Afzal.²² In one venture, some 'local' Muslims in a village, in Sialkot, burnt to death the *Lambardar* Khusi Mohammad Jat and his wife when the family tried to provide cross-community assistance for the safe evacuation of the Sikh Jats of the locality and resisted the looting of their belongings. As one FIR describes: 'They attacked Bukha Wala [village] and demanded Kushi Mohammad hand over the Sikhs and their belongings... otherwise, they would kill him as well... Kushi resisted... they locked Kushi and his wife up in a room and set alight them...'²³

Charles Tilly adequately points out the role of 'opportunism'- looting- for no other reason than that 'an unprecedented opportunity' that presents itself to obtain free goods in 'collective violence'.²⁴ The charges of exploiting the breakdown of authority for personal gain were reported against banded individuals regardless of their communal or ethnic background. On 31 August, in Sialkot, a police Sub-Inspector reported: '...a group of Muslims was found looting the properties of all communities, including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims'. In another case, two Muslim villagers told the Sialkot police that some Muslims of the area had looted them: 'In spite of that we told them we are Muslims, not Sikhs, they looted us and snatched away from our cattle'. A group of Hindus was reported looting the abandoned houses of Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore's Baghban Pura *mohalla* on 13 August 1947.²⁵ In a few instances, there were mass war-bands drawn from more local populations who were motivated by the desire for loot. They sometimes outnumbered by the victims. In a Gujranwala village, Tata Chanwa, the lure of loot attracted a mob of over 2,500 Muslim villagers to attack a relatively small population of Hindus and Sikhs.²⁶ Despite the fact, such massive gatherings could not occur spontaneously, nor did they acquire their weaponry without planning, the episodes of such looting lacked clear targeting and the looters, in the main, sought economic benefits rather than to fulfil political or ideological ideas.

¹⁷ I. Chattha, *Partition and Locality* (Oxford, 2011)

¹⁸ A recent study argues rather than 'collapse of the colonial state' it was its 'troubled transition' that led to collective violence and mass migration. See for example, T.C. Sherman, *State Violence & Punishment India* (Routledge; 1st edition, 2012).

¹⁹ FIR no. 12/14, Note Book no. 64, (n.d) 1947, DPRO, Gujranwala.

²⁰ FIR no. 386, 13 August 1947, Thana Mughal Pura, Lahore.

²¹ J. Azam and A. Hoeffler, 'Violence against Civilian in Civil Wars: Looting or Terror'? *Journal of Peace Research*, 39, 4 (2002), 261-85.

²² The Punjab Police Abstract of Intelligence, Weeks Ending 20 September, 1947, pp. 461, NIHCR.

²³ FIR no. 130, Thana Daska, 5 September 1947, DPRO, Sialkot.

²⁴ Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 131-48.

²⁵ FIR no. 282, Note Book no. 4/140, 13 August 1947, Thana Mughal Pura, Lahore.

²⁶ FIR no 71/69, Note Book no. 63, 26 August 1947, DPRO, Gujranwala.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

Various organised armed groups and gangs arranged the attacks and drove out non-Muslims and looted their properties. The police records reveal higher visibility of such groups or individuals that mainly belonged to the poor or low-caste groups as emerged from their given-caste names. Their chains of command were not always clear and tended to be driven less by the political agendas of power struggle and more by material benefits. While they operated in limited bands of groups, their social support base was extended to the vast majority of the population. Taking advantage of the disturbed conditions, the local population mopped up after the raids, in expectation of loot and amassing property. They carried off what they thought was their share, and there was nothing to prevent them from taking advantage of the spoils of raids. 'Looting is not endemic or automatic in conflict situations', as Mac Ginty argues. 'Instead it requires the presence of enabling conditions'.²⁷ The absence of restraining authority, impunity from the law, and permissible social expectance created enabling conditions for wholesale looting at Partition. For the latter point, as Satish Kalyvas argues that civil war 'destroys social hierarchies that effectively act as social controls',²⁸ and that was much the situation in 1947 in the Punjab, where for many Partition conflict was not a religious one but a moment of significant opportunity for pecuniary gain. In the context of the state decay and the loss of social norms, looting and violence were carried out with social approval, or social connivance, in the same way, that Paul Brass has pointed out that 'the communal situation made such looting inevitable and acceptable to nearly everyone except the victims'.²⁹ In a number of instances, if not all, leaders or *lambardars* of the local communities were not only aware that preparations for raids were being made, but they also knew the raiders and authorised the acts of raids. They willingly acquiesced and, mainly, reported the incidents after the ransacking.

Some attacks were carried out by 'outsiders', while others were by the 'locals'. Victims did sometimes know their victimizers. A Hindu shopkeeper's wholesale shop in the city of Lahore's locality Bibi Paak Daaman was looted by some 'familiar faces'. Nathu Ram reported the incident to the Thana Civil Lines by providing the following statement:

I am Nathu Ram, son of Lakha, living in Bibi Paak Daaman area. One part of my house consists of a shop. Today, between 10- 12 Muslims attacked my shop. I ran away to the rooftop and thus narrowly escaped... They looted my shop... The looted items were included: Rs 550 net cash, 18 *pashmina* shawls, 10 leather bags... Total lost was over Rs 1,000... I have been living in this *mohalla* [neighbourhood] for the last twenty-five years. I know them and can identify their faces...³⁰

The prospect for enrichment by looting was vastly escalated as the violence took momentum, which was at epidemic proportions in some places. In August 1947, over 50 cases of looting were reported in the radius of Lahore's Thana Mozang alone- an increase accounted more than a hundredfold, in comparison, a normal time rate. Despite spectacular in their intensity and extent, the incidents of looting were hardly isolated moments of Partition's crisis. They were part of what social movement scholarship would call a 'cycle of collective action'.³¹ As the violence exploded, looting became organised and contained obliteration. Economic jealousies and antipathies against the non-Muslims could be another contributory factor for the violence. Some Lahore's traders, for example, were reported vandalising and looting the shops of their Hindu counterparts in Lahore's Royal Park shopping centre area. As a police report reveals that Muslim traders, Ayub Kkan, Dr Noor Mohammad, Khar Baksh, M. A. Shamin and Mohammad Sadiq, went on a rampage on 15 August and deliberately singled out Hindu outlets that were pillaged and plundered.³² Again, these forms of attacks were mainly driven by economic motives and quests. However, attacks far from being a spontaneous eruption were marked by their planning and execution in a general breakdown of the administration. The properties and businesses of wealthy Hindus and Sikhs were looted with systematic planning and transport. The transport of bulky looted goods required logistics, as transport was organised. Included in such episodes was an example of the systematic looting of the properties of wealthy Hindus of Lahore's Bahawalpur Road. An Assistant Sub-Inspector of the Thana Mozang, who witnessed the incident, described the event:

²⁷ R.M. Ginty, 'Looting in the context of violent conflict: a conceptualisation and typology', *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 5 (July 2004), p. 861.

²⁸ S.N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 57.

²⁹ Brass, 'The Partition of India', p. 83.

³⁰ FIR no. 417, Note Book no. 249, 13 August 1947, Thana Civil Lines, Lahore.

³¹ S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³² FIR no. 418 Note Book no. 18/141, 15 August 1947, Thana Civil Lines, Lahore.

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

Today afternoon, some Muslims purposely burned the houses and shops of Hindus and Sikhs at Bahawalpur Road ... they did this for the looting design. When a party of police reached there some people [Muslims] were loading the looted things on their *tongas* (horse-carts) ...³³

There were opportunities in the other direction as well. In one venture, a well-armed timber gang was active in Lahore, whose members were reported axing and transporting big trees in different places that were abandoned by the migration of Hindus and Sikhs to India.³⁴ Habitual criminals made their contribution to the city's violence. Alongside their raids on Hindus and Sikhs for amassing resources, one criminal group was active in Lahore who assaulted on a Police van at Jail Road, that was transporting seven criminals under the supervision of a police picket, in which three criminal ran away, one died, and a constable injured. In the later week of 1947, these fugitives became freedom fighters and actively participated in looting and destruction. A future study of these complexities could produce further categories of violence dynamics.

Coordinated Violence

The attacks on the Hindus and Sikhs were not the work of a few manic belligerents, but were frequently marked by cold-blooded organisation and planning, although some scholars still try to maintain that it was a spontaneous 'vengeful retaliation' and 'summer madness'.³⁵ A key factor in the attacks on the minority populations was the involvement of 'organised groups', whether uniformed or volunteers. They used oil, rod, guns, and transport to attack, loot, and burn down the properties of the minority communities. Attacks on Hindu and Sikh properties provided examples of economic and destructive looting combined. Looting sometimes contained a destructive element that had an expressive quality in conveying an explicit message of unwillingness to share physical space and was aimed at eviction of the unwanted communities. In that sense, it contained a component of what we might now be called it 'ethnic cleansing'. The emphasis now was on mass arson. Destruction of the minorities' properties was situational and time-bound and was made to pre-empt the boundary award. The reported cases of arson in the some of the Hindu and Sikh localities and trade centres in the city of Lahore increased at an alarming proportion a week before the publication of the Punjab boundary award. Over the course of seven days- between 10- 16 August- over fifteen cases of arson were reported in the radius of Thana Mughal Pura alone- an amount accounted no less than a 400-fold more than the previous weeks reported cases. These included a shopping complex in Guru Gobindgarh, owned by Sikh trader Daya Singh, and several grocery shops in Bhagban Pura owned by a Hindu businessman, Lala Dani Ram. At the same time, the number of killings recorded in the locality of Mughal Pura also went up significantly.

The above examples reveal that as the violence intensified over swathes of the neighbourhoods, local-level economic grievances against the Hindus and Sikhs were most likely to spill over into violence against the groups in neighbourhoods where signs of non-Muslims wealth and economic dominance were highly visible. As the police records show selective violence against privileged Hindus and Sikhs was a central form of Partition-related violence. Non-Muslim houses and shops were selectively burned down, while the adjacent Muslim properties were left untouched. A Police Constable on duty in the Bhagban Pura locality of the city of Lahore informed the Mughal Pura Police Station: 'A [Hindu] shop in Bhagban Pura Street...has set ablaze while neighbouring [Muslim-owned] shops have left unscathed'.³⁶ Undoubtedly, there are parallels between Partition's violence and other epochal moments of violence in the subcontinent. As Suranjan Das shows that during communal rioting and looting in Calcutta in 1946 shopkeepers would play display signs so that their co-religionists away from their establishments.³⁷ The way the properties or whole areas associated with Hindus or Sikhs were looted and burned down revealed a high degree of premeditation and the organisational structure of looters. Groups were divided and assigned different performances: some were throwing flammable liquid on the establishments while others were torching them. The following important report of a Muslim Sub-Inspector not only highlights the careful planning behind the burning of a Sikh locality in the city of Lahore and further dispels the easy interpretation that the

³³ FIR no. 340, Note Book no. 512, 23 August 1947, Thana Mozang, Lahore.

³⁴ FIR no 49, Note Book no. 66, 29 August 1947, Thana Mughal Pura, Lahore

³⁵ 'Remembering Partition: A Dialogue between Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma,' *Seminar*, 461 (January 1998), pp. 98-104.

³⁶ FIR no. 377 Note Book no. 2/147, 12 August 1947, Thana Mughal Pura, Lahore.

³⁷ S. Das, 'The 1992 Calcutta Riot in Historical Continuum: A Relapse into 'Communal Fury'?' *Modern Asian Studies* 34, 2 (2000), p. 285; and also see *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

1947 violence was an inexplicable aberration, which cannot sit easily in wider studies of ‘ethnic cleansing’, but it also clearly displays the commonalities with today’s sectarian and communal violence in South Asia.

... When I reached there the *mohalla* of [Guru] Gobindgarh [a Sikh neighbourhood in Lahore’s Mughal Pura area] was burring from all four sides. Already between 100- 150 houses were completely burned down. Three men [who] seemed Muslims were still throwing kerosene on the buildings. Other two were engaged in torching... I tried to stop them but they continued to engage in their criminal activities. I fired on them and they ran away... At the time flames had wrapped all over the *mohalla* and residents of the area had already quit their houses... It appears to be a communal riot.³⁸

Destruction was aimed to permanently drive out the unwanted minorities, and those who intended to stay on were either pulled out or were killed in the pretext of communal frenzy and in a general feeling of impunity from the law. One of the most horrifying murders was that of M.G. Singh, the Registrar of the University of Punjab, Lahore. Despite the remarkable precision behind the attack, a Thana Anarkali’s Sub-Inspector reported the incident a ‘communal conflict’. The assassin’s intention had been widely knowing in the campus for weeks before the murder was committed, but the police had received no information about this and had been no reason to provide protection. On 28 August 1947 afternoon, when M.G. Singh was coming out of the campus hall was stabbed to death in the pretext of a communal conflict. A Thana Anarkai Police Sun-Inspector reached on the spot and reported the incident:

... M.G. Singh was badly bleeding when I reached there. It appeared he was stabbed many times... He died before reaching to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital... He was a cruel victim of communal riot... ten eyewitnesses..., including a Sikh peon, Johar Singh, of the [Punjab] University and the Secretary of the Vice-Chancellor, Mohammad Rahim, told me that an assassin is a man called Ismail, who stabbed the Register several times as he came out from the Hall... Johar Sikh told me that there was a rumour for weeks that [M. G.] Singh would be killed... Ismail was arrested yesterday and a case under Section 303 of Criminal Code has been registered against him.³⁹

Understandably, both the expulsion and killings of the minorities in Punjab were made possible not only in a general breakdown of the local administration but also in a common feeling of impunity to the punishment. Evan Jenkins, the Governor of Punjab, stressed the importance of a sense of impunity to punishment in the outbreaks of communal violence in August 1947. He believed that, in many ways, the gangs carried out operations with impunity in the state transitional environment in ‘the general feeling that all cases will be dropped on 15th August...’⁴⁰

Such attacks could occur because of the quiescence of local police and officials. They were either genuinely helpless because of the scale of the disorder, or sympathised and connived with the attacks, and even in some instances, individual policemen participated in them. While little efforts were made to protect the lives and properties of the minority populations, at the individual level, however, members of the law enforcement forces were protecting their own co-religionists. The charges against a member of individuals were reported throughout Punjab. Question arises here, what actions were taken against those who were apprehended during the 1947 disturbances? While many were named, shamed, and warned away, a small proportion of offenders were apprehended. There were few prosecutions or attempts to investigate these episodes. A close examination of police records reveals the different tone and tenor of the reported cases from time to time. Until the resignation of Khizr government in early March 1947, as pointed out earlier, registered cases in the FIRs revealed the identification of some of the activists of Muslim League and Muslim National Guards, who were involved in the street demonstrations. In the later weeks of the year, the law enforcement forces shared the sentiments of and facilitated the mob. Party activists and the local leaders, who spearheaded the processions were generally described ‘Muslim crowd’, and the attacks on the Hindus and Sikhs were described by ‘*namaloom afraad*’ [unknown people]. Looting, arson, and destruction of the non-Muslim properties were described by some ‘*sharpassand anasaar*’ [trouble-maker elements].

Cases were apparently registered for the sake of the record, rather than in the serious expectation that they would be followed up. Few were chased and seldom were prosecuted. Unfortunately, this kind of action, and the failure of the police to maintain law and order for minorities has been frequently repeated in today’s subcontinent.⁴¹ As Asgher Ali Engineer has pointed out that during the 2002 Gujarat pogrom some officers, who handled the situation quite professionally, ‘were not given free hand by the political bosses’,

³⁸ FIR no. 313, Note Book no 13/50, 12 August 1947, Thana Mughal Pura, Lahore.

³⁹ FIR no. 398, Note Book no. 12, 1 September 1947, Thana Anarkali, Lahore.

⁴⁰ Cited by Talbot, *Divided Cities*, p. 56.

⁴¹ For different themes on communal violence, see Ajay Verghese, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India* (Stanford University Press, 2016).

Thana First Information Reports (FIRs): JRSP, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan-March 2021)

and were instantly transferred by describing such transfers as ‘routine’ or ‘promotions’.⁴² In relation to contemporary India, Ashutosh Varshney reflects that ‘Without the involvement of organised gangs, large-scale rioting and tens of hundreds of killings are most unlikely, and without the protection afforded by politicians, such... [gangs]... cannot escape the clutches of the law’.⁴³ That was much the situation in West Punjab in the later weeks of 1947. On some occasions, the leading Muslims of the district reached a consensus ‘to non-cooperate with the police in the investigation of cases arising out of disturbances and threatened to boycott any Muslim who betrayed them’.⁴⁴ Police were forced to release culprits.

After independence, acquittals were widespread. The police FIRs contained the records of judicial part of the investigation process. They consisted of the preliminary investigations, the court proceedings, and the subsequent verdict by the courts, if any. As source material reveals, the majority of the *hamlahawars* who had apprehended on the charge of killing, arson, or looting were acquitted on the ground of ‘lack of evidence’. Most of the cases of looting and destruction of Hindu and Sikh properties and establishments were simply written with such remarks ‘record of this case has been shifted to India’. Apparently, such cases were transferred to India either on the requests of the victims or on the Indian government to file in the ‘claims’ for compensation of the destruction of properties in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This study adds considerable evidential weight to the argument that Partition violence cannot simply be easily dismissed as ‘temporary madness’ or aberration, the view held by some writers.⁴⁵ This is something that Gyanendra Pandey is very concerned with the nationalist history of popular violence in contemporary India, which sees violence as an aberration, as ‘mere glitches, the result of an unusual conjuncture of circumstances’.⁴⁶ This analysis on Partition sits with this bleak position. Far from a spontaneous eruption, violence was organised with military precision, sophisticated weapons, and transport. The analysis has sought to point out not only the grass-root acts of violence and identified some local-level perpetrators of violence, but it also has shown that the killings in the region bear the hallmarks of what Paul Brass would term a ‘retributive genocide’.⁴⁷

Often overlooked in discussions about Partition, this exploration has highlighted Partition’s crisis opened a window of opportunity for profiteering and looting. Further evidence is produced by the fact that when cases and complaints were filed, they were not followed up. The failure to prosecute the guilty encouraged those involved and intensified the violence. The ‘raiders’ were not only free from the possibility of arrest and prosecution because of the transitional environment, but they acted with social approval and most importantly with the connivance and the complicity of law and enforcement agencies. Thana FIRs had been registered against raiders; however, subsequent records show few were pursued and hardly anyone was indicted. They were merely noted and now provide sources for the historian. Difficulties of access mean that few scholars have yet utilised them in their research.

⁴² A.A. Engineer, ‘Gujarat Carnage: Role of Police in Gujrat [sic] Carnage’, *Secular Perspective*, (June 16-30, 2002).

⁴³ A. Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 10-12.

⁴⁴ The Punjab Police Abstract of Intelligence, Week Ending 27 September 1947, p. 468, NIHCR.

⁴⁵ ‘Remembering Partition: A Dialogue between Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma,’ *Seminar*, 461 (January 1998), pp. 98–104.

⁴⁶ G. Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 33.

⁴⁷ P. Brass, ‘The Partition of India and Redistributive Genocide in the Punjab 1946-47’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5, 1(2003), pp. 71–101