
Muslim Accounts of ‘Happiness’ during the Migration to West Punjab: Revisiting the Experiences/Stories amidst Partition of Punjab 1947

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Abstract

The partition of India in 1947 caused grave bloodshed, ethnic cleansing, brutality and mass migration from both sides of the border. The Punjab became a severe battle field among the communities, namely Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, who had been peacefully living together for centuries. The partition historiography tends to blame for such bloody incidents to other communities. But in fact, there were individuals on both sides of the borders who not only did not take part in killing or looting, but also put their life in danger to save the life and property of their friends and neighbors from other communities. This paper is an attempt to explore and investigate the oral accounts of those people who showed humanity and remained good friends and responsible neighbor despite a religious frenzy in 1947. This paper also exclusively encapsulates with the stories of happiness (assistance and friendship during partition) across the borders, is overlooked by historians of the both India and Pakistan, which in fact will reflect the true face and culture of Punjab.

Introduction

Stories of partition are filled with violence, gore, apathy, and mass killing between Sikhs and Muslims at large scale. Hindus were also a stakeholder in it but major portion of the violence took place between Sikhs and Muslims and Punjab was epicenter of all violent activities. Muhammad Aslam has given reference of first hand interviews of migrants quotes them, saying, “Ask these religious clerks, don’t warn us of hell. We have seen it in partition.” Another historian Muhammad Younas writes that he could not help his tears while interviewing people about events of partition. Moreover, all the historians who have covered the instances of partition

declare it most brutal happening of the history where more than 2 million people were killed on both sides without distinction of children, women, old, and young. The aggregate injury discovers its demeanor in the general articulation of society or country, for it appears to recollect or overlook an agonizing period in its history. Then again, the singular injury is regularly peacefully, and each time the dialect transmits it to others or even to breath after breath, the torment by one means or another remaining parts ingested in the tainted self. Dialect has neglected to pick up understanding from the profundities of the intuitive personality, where despite everything it resounds, harming the day by day presence of survivors, giving it the presence of abusing learning and troubling an unspeakable injury. A twofold relationship from a crash occasion store is shown. The individual by whom it is felt may, disregarding its inconsiderate nature, mistreat the survivors, seem just if the dialect is purposely surrendered. Then again, in the event that we endeavor to make it clear, there is a prompt separation, on the grounds that the dialect conveys with the outside world, as well as with the inward presence. Subsequently, excruciating memory plays a double round of comprehension and non-intelligibility regarding agonizing recollections¹.

Killings in war and at different stages of history are not a strange phenomenon. It might be logical valid to say that inception of conflict emerged with the inception of human life. However, the massacre of Punjab is strange in the sense that it took place between the communities who had coexisted for centuries. There were conflicts among the communities, yet these were low-intensity conflicts. But such a mass killing insensitive to women, children, and old people is a strange phenomenon in history. Another term that portrays the occasions in the area is ethnic cleansing. It is a procedure in which an ethnic gathering ousts people from other ethnic gatherings from towns and villages that they "attack" to make ethnically unadulterated pockets for their individuals. The expression "ethnic cleansing" normally incorporates the efficient and constrained expulsion of individuals from an ethnic gathering from their groups to change or "cleanse" the ethnic synthesis of the locale. On the off chance that it is divided in 1947, the above definition can be connected with a basic edge - rather than ethnic division, the "purging" of religious identity was based.

However, it is important to mention the other side of the picture. But unfortunately, the extent of violence has reduced the visibility of cooperation among people. Endeavors of people who helped people in the time of helplessness also deserve to be highlighted. However, the literature has not highlighted much the stories of happiness, help, and mutual harmony which were seen between Muslims and Sikhs at the time of partition.² Muhammad Aslam has quoted people who said that at one side where the instances of barbarianism are hard to forget, there are also events of the help of people which are as unforgettable as the misery of that time.³

The study is based on interviews of Muslim migrants migrated from East Punjab to West Punjab in general especially to one of the industrially developed city Lyallpur.

Information about Attacks

Though there has been tremendous violence and gore in the process of partition of Punjab. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus who had been living together since a long time like a community turned into worst foes, yet there are some events that remind some stories of cooperation among different communities in the process of migration. No doubt, Hindus, and Sikhs were attacking Muslims in the areas of East Punjab, whereas, Muslims were attacking Sikhs and Hindus in Muslim dominated areas, yet there were good Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims who helped helpless people in that crucial time. Moreover, first hand historical accounts lead to suggest that the persons willing to help people had their limitations as well. It owed to deteriorating peace situation at that time. It can be regarded as the irony of the time that people raised oppression as much as they could and some people helped their out-groups as much as their limitations allowed. Abdul Ghani and Mansoor Nasir told that in 1947 when partition was announced, there was eruption of conflicts in the city. A Sikh friend of my father advised him to abandon the district with family as the situations there was getting unlivable. At one side where Sikhs were killing people, there were good people also who had empathy for their Muslim neighbourhoods.⁴ Moreover, there are some events when Sikhs not only informed Muslims about the threats but also to army so that they could save the innocent people. People had the opportunity to help people until they maintained their anonymity and secrecy. Any hint about their helping hand could lead them suffer. Such a story was told by Abdul Bari who migrated from Amritsar. He calls him an angel. He narrated,

An old Sikh who was almost in his seventies stopped a military vehicle carrying almost 50 soldiers. He said them that a long convoy of Muslims was staying there and the army should save them. Otherwise 26 Sikh villages were gathering to attack them in the night. Army called the reinforcements through wireless and secured our convoy.⁵

There is a perspective that believes in that the violence committed by Sikh community was planned and organized. The militant wing of Akali Dal was mainly assigned and responsible to carry out the massacre. Though some people made hay of money in the sunshine of chaos, yet overall the evidences suggest that the violence

was planned and organized. However, on the other side, it is important to mention that some Sikhs who knew about such planning warned their Muslim friends and their in time advice helped them leave the area and save their lives. Such a story is told by Shujaud Din. He told, as the month of August came near, the peace situations were aggravating. In such situation, honorary magistrate Sardar Suran Singh advised my father to leave the area owing to turbulent peace situation in the area.⁶

Another respondent Abdul Majeed still reminds virtue of his Sikh friend who saved his life by telling him about attack on them. He narrated, that my Sikh friend had saved me and was providing me food. One day he told me to leave in the dark of night because Sikhs had decided in Gurdwara to kill all the Muslims who were hiding there.⁷ Moreover, similar account explained by Muhammad Khalil that Sikhs of our village came to us and warned us a Sikh attack. They protected us whole night and managed our escape in the morning as well.⁸

Dost Muhammad Bala also told the event of virtue of a Sikh. He articulated that we were waiting at railway station for a train to Pakistan. A Sikh friend of my father came to my father and asked him to leave the station immediately. He told us that the train was on hit list and Sikhs were planning to attack it. We left the station immediately and came back to camp. After sometime, the station was attacked and all people were killed there.⁹

Furthermore, on other side of newly created border the account of Desh Raj Kalra elucidate the same version. According to him he was 18 when his family left behind their sprawling house and grain trading store in Pakistan. He remembers a childhood where Hindus and Muslims lived together amicably. But one day the village chief, who was Muslim, told us that he'd heard reports of violence and that they should leave. We thought we would be back in 10 to 15 days so we left everything behind. My grandfather told us: governments may change but people will never change. But it's been 68 years now. None of us ever went back. And now I am too old to make the journey.¹⁰

Saving Women

Since there are numerous instances of sexual brutality against ladies in all social orders amid the detachment, the reasons for this particular wonder are additionally clear. Patriotism and partisan correspondence are the principle philosophies of the time and place ladies at the focal point of their talks and activities. Ladies who endured amid this time were later seen by their groups and now and again by their families as social untouchables. On account of the treatment of these female casualties, it has been viewed as satisfactory for ladies to submit suicide or be murdered by their friends and family so as to escape rape by men of different

groups¹¹. The women were helpless. The untold brutalities were committed on women. ‘Hindustan’ and Pakistan was inscribed on their thighs and breasts. Hindu-Sikh women on that side and Muslim women on this side of the border were hapless. Though the stories of partition are full of instances of brutality with women and children and there are many evidences from literature which unveil that women were burned, killed, mutilated, abducted, and raped; yet, some people protected honor of women and saved them from the attackers. Muhammad Khalil told, a Sikh stopped our convoy. He had a girl. He told she was a Muslim girl and people of his village had abducted her. He rescued the girl and saved her from the harm of Sikh attackers.¹²

Food and Shelter

Food and shelter was the thing desperately needed by the migrants. They had to abandon their homes at very short notice and they had to face enemies at every turn on their road. Hindus living for generations in what was to become Pakistan had to flee their homes overnight. At the same time, millions of Muslims abandoned their homes to cross the border into Pakistan. Khawaja Muhammad Zakariya thinks back to a tumultuous time decades ago when his country was violently split in two, His father hurried home one day, telling his young son they had to gather up their money and jewelry and leave their Muslim neighborhood immediately for an uncle's house across town.

As the call of partition was unexpected and sudden, people could not carry their luggage. Moreover, owing to presence of enemies throughout the way, it was difficult to carry the luggage. So the people had to march light. Moreover, many people thought it a temporary migration and expected to return back within few weeks. Desh Raj Kalra said, “We thought we would be back in 10 to 15 days so we left everything behind”.¹³

However, there were people who helped the migrants with food and shelter. Though the accounts of violence are much greater than the instances of cooperation, yet, the worth of such events is very high and commendable. SardarShaukatHayat narrates,

I acknowledge bravery of some Hindus who guarded many Muslim families with their lives at stake, and similar examples are available on the behalf of the Muslims for their Hindu and Sikh friends. There were many Sikhs and Hindus in my village. Many others from surrounding areas also sought shelter in our village and the Muslim community enhanced their hands of cooperation

and support to them with a pristine heart. We guarded them until they had proper exit arrangements.¹⁴

Adding to this there is one more description of such humanity and help of a Hindu BagguKumhar who saved the people who were in danger of being killed. Mukhtar Muhammad who migrated from Garh Shankar authenticates that my Hindu neighbor Baggu knew that I was hiding in the room. He called me out because Sikhs could have killed me in my house. He took me to his house and served me with food. I spent the night in his house.¹⁵

Muhammad SadiqueChacha who migrated from Patiala narrates his story of migration. His condition was miserable and feeling hungry; A Sikh saved my life and gave me a bread and onion which I ate.¹⁶There are instances when women saved people and hide them in their houses secretly. It was very dangerous and daring work on the behalf of women. Muhammad Bashir Khan recounts that Sikhs had attacked our house. I was young and succeeded to escape to my Sikh neighbor's house. A lady pitied on me and hides me behind clay pots. She hides me there for three days. But she was worried because she couldn't protect me long. At last she told her family on condition that they would not kill me. Her family escorted me safely to migrant camp.¹⁷

The stories of violence in the process of migration largely tell about friends turning into foes. It might be true to great extent as well, yet there are instances when the attackers spared a person owing to good relationship with them in the past. Malik Mehnga narrates; I was hiding in a sugar cane field. I was starving. I came out and there were Sikh attackers. There was my village fellow among them". He further narrates, "He hide me in another field and managed to provide me food and water for 8 days almost."¹⁸

Escort

Throughout the process of migration, uncertainty prevailed among the migrants. All the things were so sudden that proper planning was impossible. At this time, safe escort to migrant camps or across the border was most needed and most difficult task. However, there were people who utilized their potential to send their out group friends safely to their destinations. Among the stories of large killings, there are stories of saving some lives by people.

Sheikh Abdul Salam highlighted this fact that when Muslims left for Halwara, Kartar Singh got the news of our movement. He came with his armed men to us and assured us a safe escort to us voluntarily. He pledged to take our death on himself.¹⁹ While Mian Abdullah Advocate whispered the same remembrance A Sikh friend of

my father arranged a bus for us. He took us to cantonment railway station of Ludhiana safely. He also negotiated there with railway officials to get a compartment in train booked for us and advised us to lock it from inside.²⁰

Some other instances lead to infer that there was a difference between the collective response of Sikhs and their individual response. Individually, there were people who honored their personal relations with Muslims. The literature suggests some events when army either directly attacked Muslim community or facilitated attacks on them. Yet there is a story where a captain stood with his neighbor against the brutality of the other Sikhs. MirajMohamadnarrates that son of our neighbor ‘SardarJeevan Singh’ was captain in the army and he was on leave in those days. We had very good relations with our neighbors. In order to forestall any mishap, my father asked him to come to our house in uniform. He did not make any excuse and agreed to protect us.²¹

The circumstances of that time were crueler than the people. It was the circumstances who turned humans into beasts; otherwise, the same people had been living together for centuries. Yet there were people whose humanity was stronger than the brutality of the situation. They stood for the right cause and did not hesitate to go to any extent in securing their friends of other communities. Master ShabbirAhmad a resident of Jullundur describes the same. After eruption of killing events in East Punjab, Muslim families approached local chiefs. We asked them we had been living together for centuries and regarded honor of each other. If you want to kill us then kill yourself instead of getting us killed by other people. They not only provided us shelter for 10 days, but some retired army men wore their old uniforms and escorted us safely. It was very dangerous for them, but they did not care and protected us.²²

Compassion

Among all the themes of violence as well as cooperation among people, the theme of compassion is unique. It deals with the mercy of people who had come to kill. Among the gangs (Jathas), the instances suggest, were some compassionate people who prevented their gang of killing the people. A migrant Mehar Ali, Chak 478 GB, Faisalabad told such a story of sympathy. Our train stopped under a bridge. There were Sikhs everywhere with naked swords in their hands. We had an army escort with us too. The Sikhs said that they were waiting for a train from West Punjab carrying Sikhs. They would let them go safe if train from West Punjab reached safely. The train reached and they let us go unscathed.²³ Malik Yaseen has mentioned in his work that Malik Mehnga narrates, “Sikhs came to kill us. One of the Sikhs said

that I was young. He did not kill me and spared me".²⁴ Mukhtar Ahmed narrates story of a compassionate Hindu couple who saved the life of an injured girl. The Hindu had also migrated from Jehlum. He narrates,

KasturiLal and his wife picked an injured Muslim girl and hospitalized her showing her their daughter. They took care of her and then she was sent to Pakistan after one month under the protection of the military.²⁵

Rescue

Rescuing people were the toughest task which some people did without considering possible life threats to them. It was potentially capable to turn one's sin group against him owing to his effort to save one from our group. The historians use the term of 'blood thirsty mob' for the jathas. Hence an attempt to save people in from them in front of them was not less than a Hercules task. This side of the picture gives an ironic view of partition. There were people who made out communities their foes to avenge their community across the border, and there were people who turned their own community against themselves while saving their out groups within their neighborhoods.

Lal din while describing his hardships of migration and unthinkable brutalities of the Sikh community gives an irony that there were some humans too among Sikhs. He said that the people of the village handed us over to Mota Singh and his companions to get us killed. They were taking us to some other place. Some Sikhs in the way demanded us to kill us, but Mota Singh refused by saying that only he had right to kill us. Contrary to our expectation, that seer Hindu not only gave us protection, but the food and other basic things also. He was a real Sikh.²⁶

Moreover, the story of rescue is communicated Muhammad Amanat Ali during the journey to unknown destination. According to him we were moving in the shadow of death. And suddenly, in our way, 5 Akali Sikhs attempted to attack us. They had swords in their hands and they seemed not satisfying less than killing us. In the meantime, two Sikh riders intervened and said the attackers not to kill the children. They rescued us and Akali Sikhs spared us. These Sikh riders were angels sent from God to save us.²⁷ Malik Yaseen mentioned interview of Muhammad Anwar in his book. According to Anwar Sikhs had attacked our house and abducted my sisters. I

was saved by our Sikh neighbors. They protected me in their house. Then they sent to safe under their protection.²⁸

No doubt rescuing Muslims from Sikhs' aggression was like inviting death for the people who wanted to help people. Still, some people broke the chains of fear and saved lives with their lives at stake. Ch. Atta Muhammad voiced that Sikhs were after me and I was running to save my life. I ran to *haveli* of one of my Sikh friend. I said him I had come there to seek protection. Don't hand me over to my foe. Kill me yourself if you want. When gang of Sikhs arrived there and asked my friends to hand me over them, my friend came forward and said, kill me first before you kill my friend". They left me.²⁹

Grief of Muslim's Migration

There are many events and stories where people are forced to abandon their homes and migrate across the newly demarcated borders. Yet at the same time, there are events when people of one community were weeping and gloomy on the occasion of migration of their neighborhoods of other communities. Such a relevant story was explained by Baba Soday Khan. According to him it was not only Muslims but the Hindus and Sikhs also loved our family very much. When non-Muslim families of our Mohalla came to know that we were migrating, they felt great grief. Though there was scene of mass killing at one side, I remember Hindus and Sikhs weeping for their Muslim friends.³⁰

There were elements in the community and no doubt they were in majority who were sadist and enjoyed the problems of Muslims at the time of partition. But there were people who shared grief of the people at that time. Mian Habib Ullah Rajpoot narrates; our village had attack of violent Sikhs in the night resulting into our 8 casualties. The local Sikh community came to us for condolence and assured us their full support regarding apprehension of the culprits as well security of the Muslims. They insisted us to stay there but we didn't agree.³¹

Trust

The level and durability of the relations between Sikhs and Muslim which is uniqueness of Punjabi culture can be noticed in many instances during the bloody episode of partition and migration. The trust and level of relation that Muslim migrants handed over their belongings to their Sikh friends as *Amanat* thinking this migration is temporary they will return after some months. The trust was ensured by providing security to their Muslim friends who decide to live in India. Jan

Muhammad narrates, when people of the village left the village, my father stayed their alone and did not feel insecure because he had happy and friendly relations with Sikhs. He said he would stay there and look after the property. He did not feel insecure.³²

People entrusted their friends with their wealth and property that they were abandoning. Moreover, there are instances where trustees fulfilled their responsibility and responded the trust with responsibility. Muhammad Yassen told during his conversation while having tears in eyes that my father handed over keys of our house to his friend Kirtar Singh. The documents of other properties were also handed over to Kirtar Singh. Kirtar Singh hired a police constable for the protection of our property and other things that we had left.³³

The hype of tension between Muslims and the Sikhs was at its peak. During the time of friends turning into foes, there were people whose friendship was immune to the tyranny of the time. Another instance of such trust is told by Mian Abdullah. He said that A Sikh friend of my father took a bus for us. Our Muslim friends advised were right. That Sikh not only took us to the railway station but also helped us to get a berth in the train.

Conclusion

Though partition has been known in intellectual circles as bloody event in the history of Pakistan and India followed by the blame game among the partition writers; each side trying to prove their community as innocent while other side as aggressors. The partition historiography is replete with such stories of ethnic cleansing, blood-shed, brutality and religious frenzy but none dared to delve to highlight other side of this bloody episode. The study has shown the others side of partition cognate 'ethnic cleansing' that there were individuals on both sides of the borders who not only did not take part in butchery or plundering, but withal put their life in hazard to preserve the life and property of their friends and neighbors from hostile communities. During the time of friends turning into foes, there were people whose relations and friendship was immune to the tyranny of the time. It is also observed that migrants still love to recall the memories their friends and harmony of relationships between the Muslims, Hindus and especially the Sikhs; their hearts and minds still reverberate for their friends and places where they were born and brought up. Moreover, their emotional attachment is more than imagination towards their friend and family relations with Sikhs especially and with Hindu community in general.

While this uncontrolled wild brutality of Sikhs against Muslims was creating havoc in East Punjab, there were many incidents where Sikhs safe guarded the Muslim families and Muslim migrants from fellow Sikh bullies. Many Sikhs stopped Muslim families from migrating because they had been living together for decades and

promised to guard their lives on the expense of their own. Muslims and Sikhs swore on both the Holy Quran and the Guru Garanth (the holy book of Sikhism) to protect each other against assaults from furious militant bands. Some Muslim households did continue to stay in Indian Punjab months after the partition under protection of Sikh families but eventually had to migrate when pressure to kill mounted from Sikhs of adjoining villages. The friendly Sikh families themselves escorted the Muslims to Pakistani borders.

¹FurrukhKhan, "Embodied Voice and Violence: Women, Subjective Experience and Agency in the Narratives of Partition." (2015), 4-7.

²Malik Yaseen, *Pakistan Koi SoakhaNahin Banya* (N.P. 2005), 106, 127.

³ Muhammad Aslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K Musalmano Per Kia Guzri* (Lahore: Darul Kitab Publishers, 2014).

⁴ Interview of Abdul Ghani, Naranwala, Faisalabad, March 23, 2014; Interview of Mansoor Nasir, November 2009 quoted in MuhammadAslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K Musalmano Per Kia Guzri*, 292.

⁵ Abdul Bari S/o Abdul Rahim Chak 481GB, Sammundri, Faisalabad, July 25, 2106.

⁶ Interview of Shuja ud Din, Faisalabad, 2013.

⁷ Abdul Majeed, Chak 484 GB, Sammundri, Faisalabad, March 12, 2013; Interview of Malik Mehnga, Faisalabad; Quoted in Malik Yaseen, *Pakistan Koi SoakhaNahin Banya*, 27.

⁸ Interview of Muhammad Khalil, Khushab, March, 12, 2013.

⁹ Dost Muhammad Bala, Ghulam Muhammadabad, Lyallpur, September 12, 2016.

¹⁰ Dawn News, 13 March 2015 (Taken from archives of Pakistan).

¹¹ FurrukhKhan, "Embodied Voice and Violence: Women, Subjective Experience and Agency in the Narratives of Partition."(2015), 4.

¹² Interview of Muhammad Khalil, Khushab, March, 12, 2013. See also Muhammad Israel, Malik Yaseen (2004), 39.

¹³ *Daily Dawn News* 13 March 2015 (Archives of Pakistan).

¹⁴ Muhammad Aslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K Musalmano Per Kia Guzri*, 155.

¹⁵ This family migrated to Lyallpur but after some years Mukhtar moved to Sargodha. Mukhtar Muhammad, Shahiwal, Sargodha, March 9, 2014. For the same details Muhammad Aslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K MusalmanoPer KiaGuzri*, 326.

¹⁶ Interview of Muhammad SadiqueChacha, Kamalpur, Lyallpur, June 30, 2014.

¹⁷ Muhammad Bashir Khan, migrated from Kamalpur, District Ambala, East Punjab.

¹⁸ Interview of Malik Mehnga; Malik Yaseen, *Pakistan Koi SoakhaNahinBanya*, 27.

¹⁹ Sheikh Abdul Salam S/O Abdul Karim, Gojra, September 10, 2016. The same accounts mentioned in Muhammad Aslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K MusalmanoPer KiaGuzri*, 191.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1389.

²¹ Interview of MirajMohamad, Khanewal, September 10, 2013.

²² Interview of Master ShabbirAhmad ,Chak No. 484 GB, Sammundri, District Faisalabad. For the same details MalikYaseen, 13.

²³ Interview of Mehar Ali, Chak 478 GB, Faisalabad.

²⁴ Interview of MalikMehnga; Malik Yaseen, *Pakistan Koi SoakhaNahinBanya*, 27.

²⁵ Interview of Suleman, Beiranwala, Toba Tek Singh.

²⁶ Interview of Lal Din, Maghian, Jhang, March 13, 2013.

²⁷ Interview of Muhammad Amanat Ali, Thatha, KhangahDodran, District Sheikhupura, June 10, 2015.

²⁸ Interview of Muhammad Sadik; Malik Yaseen (2004), 20.

²⁹ Interview of Ch. Atta Muhammad S/O Ahmad Khan Loona, Chak 238 RB. Lyallpur, September 12, 2016.

³⁰ Interview of Baba Sondag khan, Lahore, June 10, 2016.

³¹ MianHabibUllahRajpoot, Lyallpur, April 23, 2016. The same accounts by Muhammad Aslam, *1947 Mein Ludhiana K MusalmanoPer KiaGuzri*, 1462.

³² Interview of Jaan Muhammad, December 2007;

³³ Interview of Muhammad Yaseen, Sheikhupura, September 30, 2009.