

SOME PARTITION EXPERIENCES

(i) An Indian researcher collected information from a Pakistani in 1993. The objectives of this researcher was to understand how those who had lived more or less harmoniously for generations committed so much violence on each other in 1947.

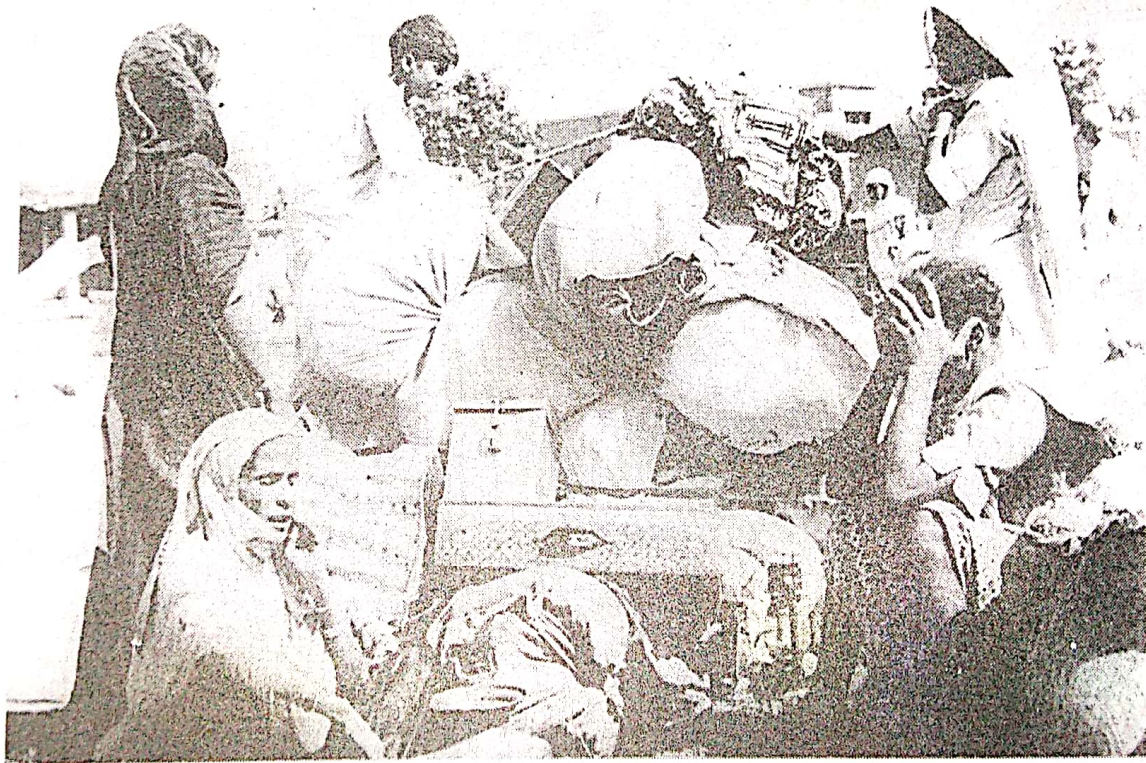
2. A MOMENTOUS MARKER

2.1 Partition or holocaust?

- The partition of the India was full of tragedy. Hundreds and thousands of people were killed, innumerable women were raped and abducted. Millions of people were uprooted and became refugees in alien lands.
- Many scholars have used the term 'holocaust' for the mass level killings, rape, arson and loot. These took place during the partition of the country. Nearly 2 lac to 5 lac people were killed. 15 million moved across. They were rendered homeless, lost their immovable property, movable assets and separated from many of their relatives and friends.
- Local and regional cultures were stripped. Such people were compelled to start picking up their life from scratch. Contemporary observers and scholars have used the expression 'holocaust' which means a destruction or slaughter on mass scale.
- In 1947-48 the subcontinent did not witness any extermination started by the state as was the case with Nazi Germany. Different modern techniques of control and organisation were used for killing the people. The ethnic cleansing took place during the partition of India.

2.2 The power of stereotypes

- India-haters in Pakistan and Pakistan-haters in India both are the products of partition of country. Some people mistakenly believe that the loyalties of Indian Muslims lie with Pakistan. Some people believe that the Muslims are cruel, bigoted, and unclean.



People took with them only what they could physically carry. Uprooting meant an immense sense of loss, a rupture with the place they had lived in for generations.

- Muslims are the descendants of invaders whereas Hindus are kind, liberal, pure and children of invaded. R.M. Murphy, a journalist has described in his study that same stereotypes proliferate in Pakistan. Pakistanis feel that the Muslims are fair, brave, monotheists and non-vegetarian and Hindus are cowards, dark, vegetarian and polytheists.

- Large number of memories, hatreds, stereotypes and identities were generated by the partition and they are still in progressive way to shape the history of people of both the countries. All these hatreds might be seen during inter-community conflicts.
- Stories of partition, violence are recounted by the communal groups. They were to deepen the divide between communities that created people's minds and emotions of doubt and distrust, consolidating the power of communal stereotypes. The relationship between Pakistan and India has been shaped by the legacy of Partition.

3. WHY AND HOW DID PARTITION HAPPEN?

3.1 Culminating point of a long history

- Indian and Pakistani historians mentioned that the Mohammad Ali Jinnah's theory that the Hindus and Muslims constitute two separate nations can be projected back into history of medieval era. These historians focussed that the events of 1947 were referred to the long history of Hindu-Muslim conflicts during the medieval and modern age. They had forgotten that the history of conflict between these two communities has co-existed along with history of sharing and exchange.
- Few scholars assume that partition of India was the climax of the communal politics. It was begun in the opening decades of 20th century. They further assume that the separate electorate, for the Muslims, was created by the colonial government in 1909 and expanded in 1919. It had a great influence on the communal relations.
- Separate electorates provided an opportunity to Muslims to elect their own representatives in the proposed constituencies. It created an enticement for politicians working within the system to use religious slogans and gathered a following by distributing favours.
- Muslims were enraged by the events like music before mosque, cow protection movement and shuddhi movement that brought back Hindus by the Arya Samaj to the Hindu fold those who had recently converted to Islam. In the same way Hindus were troubled by the fast spread of Tabligh and Tanzim after 1923. As middle classes started to build greater solidarity within their communities.
- Riots were spread in various parts of the country. Every communal riot deepened differences between communities creating disturbing memories of violence. Partition was related to quality different occurrence from earlier communal politics.

3.2 The provincial elections of 1937 and the Congress ministries

- First time, in 1937, elections were held to the provincial legislatures. About 10-12 percent of the population exercised with the right to vote. Congress got a clear majority in 5 out of 11 provinces and made its government in seven provinces. Congress could not show a positive performance in reserved seats for Muslims. Muslim League also fared poorly. They got only 4.4% of the total Muslim votes cast in the election. The Muslims failed to win a single seat in the North West Frontier Province and got only two out of 84 reserved constituencies.
- The Muslim League wanted to make a government with Congress in United Province. As the Congress had won an absolute majority, so it rejected League's demand. It convinced the Muslim League that if India would stay united then League would not come in political power.
- The League supposed, of course, that Muslims might be represented by it as Congress was the party of Hindus. Jinnah wanted that League to be recognised as the 'sole spokesman'. Social support for the League was not strong in three of the provinces from which Pakistan was to be carved out, just 10 years later.
- Congress refused the demand of Muslim League for a coalition government partly because League was interested to support landlordism whereas Congress wanted to finish it.

- Congress leaders started to stress on the need of secularism in the late 1930s. Idea was shared by the partymen – ministers like Maulana Azad who was an important leader of the Congress expressed sharply in 1937 that members were not allowed to join the Muslim League while they remain active in Hindu Mahasabha.
- In December 1938, Congress working committee declared that members of Congress could not become the members of Hindu Mahasabha. In this period Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were gaining strength. RSS spread from Nagpur to United Province, Punjab and other parts of the nation. They pledged to an ideology as India was a land of Hindus.

3.3 The 'Pakistan' resolution

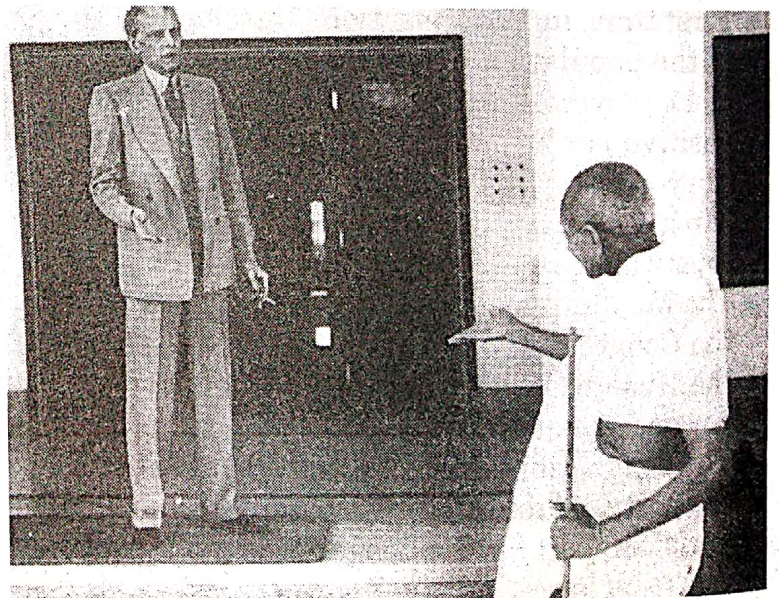
- On 23 March 1940, Muslim League passed a resolution demanding a certain autonomy for the Muslims majority areas of the sub-continent. But this doubtful resolution never mentioned partition or Pakistan.
- Sikandar Hayat Khan, Prime Minister of Punjab and a leader of the Unionist Party, who had drafted the resolution declared in Punjab Assembly speech on 1 March 1941 – Muslim Raj here and Hindu Raj elsewhere.
- The demand for creation of Pakistan might be traced back to the Urdu poet Mohammad Iqbal. He addressed the Muslim League in 1930 as President. He emphasized on the need for a North–West Indian Muslim State.
- He did not stress on creation of a new country but his focus was on an autonomous unit of Muslim-dominated areas in North–Western India.

3.4 The suddenness of partition

- After making the demand of new country, it took only seven years for partition. The meaning of creation of Pakistan and how it might shape lives of people in the future. Many people who were shifted from their homeland in 1947. Thought they would return back as peace prevailed again.
- The demand for Pakistan was not seriously raised by Muslim leaders. Initially, the idea of Pakistan of Jinnah was used as bargaining counter, that was very useful for preventing the possible British's favour to the Congress. The pressure of IInd World War on British made delay in the negotiations for independence. Quit India movement was started in 1942.

3.5 Post-War developments

- Negotiations were started again in 1945. British were consented to establish an Indian Central Executive Council, all the members would be Indian except the viceroy and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Discussions about the transfer of power fail.
- As per Jinnah's will and demand that the Muslim members of the Executive Council will have to be elected by the Muslim League. Further he wished to have a veto in the council on the communal basis. It was opposed by the Muslims as it needed a two-third majority. League's first demand was beyond the thoughts. Muslims backed the Congress.



Mahatma Gandhi with Mohammad Ali Jinnah before a meeting with the Viceroy in November 1939

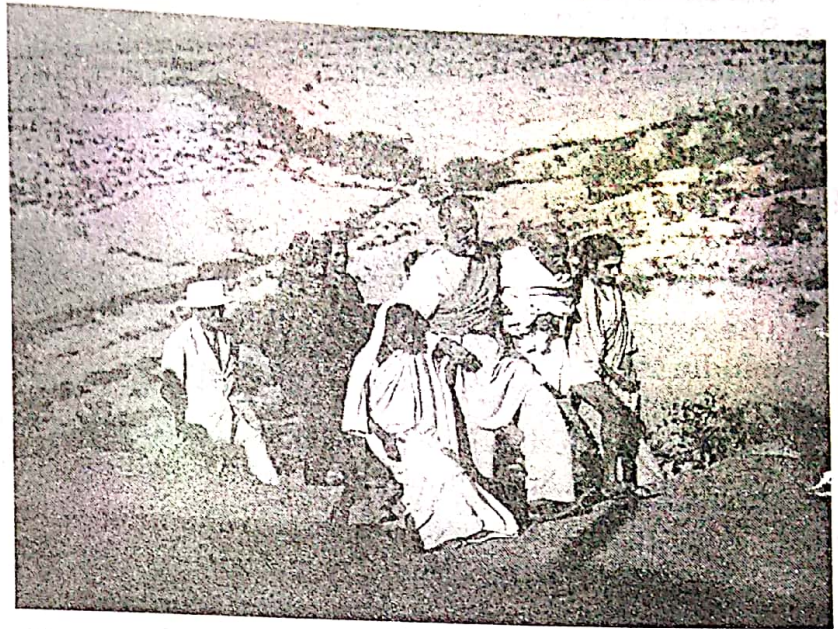
- Provincial elections were again held in 1946. The Congress secured an absolute majority on the general constituencies and got 91.3% of the non-muslim votes. The Muslim League had spectacular success on the seats reserved for Muslims.
- League set itself as a main party of Muslim voters and claimed to be the 'Sole spokesman' of India's Muslims. The right to vote was limited. 10-12% of the population practised the right to vote in the provincial elections, only one percent in Central Assemblies.

3.6 A possible alternative to partition

- A three member cabinet mission visited India in March 1946 to examine the League's demand and suggest a suitable political framework for free India. This mission toured India for three months and recommended a loose three-tier confederation. India was to remain united and central government would have control over only defence, foreign affairs and communication.

- Provincial assemblies were grouped into three sections. Section A for the Hindu-majority provinces; section B and C were kept for Muslim-majority provinces of the north-west, north-east (including Assam). This plan was accepted by all the major parties. The agreement did not stay for long as proposals of the cabinet mission were rejected by Congress and Muslim League, both.

- It was a most crucial juncture as after the partition became more or less unavoidable and most of the Congress leaders were agreed whether it was more tragic but were unable to avoid. Gandhiji and Khan A. Ghaffur Khan firmly opposed the idea of partition.



Mahatma Gandhi in the NWFP, October 1938 with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (who came to be known as Frontier Gandhi), Sushila Nayar and Amtus Salem

3.7 Towards partition

- Muslim League withdrew its support to the Cabinet Mission plan and decided on 'Direct Action Day' on 16 Aug. 1946 for winning its Pakistan demand. Riots broke out in Calcutta that lasted for many days. Several thousand people died.
- In March 1947, the Congress high command passed the motions for dividing the Punjab into two parts – Muslim majority and Hindu/Sikh majority areas. It also proposed to follow the same principle in Bengal.
- Several Sikh leaders and Congressmen in the Punjab were convinced that Partition was a necessary evil. They supposed that they might be marshed by Muslim majority and leaders. A section of bhadralok Bengali Hindus wanted to retain political power. They were under fear of permanent guardianship of Muslims.

4. THE WITHDRAWAL OF LAW AND ORDER

- March 1947 onwards bloodshed continued for one year. The main reasons were the collapse of all the government institutions. In the end of the year, no sign of administrative system. The Amritsar district became the scene of bloodshed. The British officials were unable to handle the situation.
- Problems were compounded as Indian soldiers and policemen came to act as Hindus, Muslims or Sikh. That increased more communal tension in the nation. No professional devotion of such people could not be relied upon. They attacked the members of the other communities.



Through those blood-soaked months of 1946, violence and arson spread, killing thousands

4.1 The one-man army

- As an old man of the age of 77 years, Gandhiji decided to stake his life-long principle of non-violence. He visited the villages of Noakhali in East Bengal (present day Bangladesh) to the villages of Bihar. Further, he moved to the riot-torn slums of Calcutta and Delhi. Everywhere he reassured the minority whether Hindus or Muslims.

- In October 1946, Muslims in East-Bengal targeted Hindus. Instantly, Gandhiji visited the villages on foot and convinced the local Muslims to assure the safety of Hindus. He tried to build a real meaning of mutual confidence between the two communities.



Villagers of a riot-torn village awaiting the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi

- Gandhiji arrived in Delhi on 9 September 1947, Muslims supposed to be safe, according to Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi, a Delhi Muslim. Gandhiji went to Gurudwara Sisganj to address a meeting of Sikhs. He observed that Chandni-Chowk road was without Muslims. He considered this act as a shame for the country. He emphasized on the fight against the ill mentality of those who wished to drive out Muslims from the city.
- Gandhiji started a fast to set a change of heart. Several Hindus and Sikh migrants joined him on fast. Maulana Azad considered a 'electric' change. With the effortless attempts, the macabre drama of violence ended.

5. GENDERING PARTITION

5.1 'Recovering' women

- Scholars described the harrowing experiences of women during the violent times. They were raped, abducted, sold many times. They were forced to settle to a new life in new circumstances. They were deeply traumatised by such incidents. Some of them started to develop new family bonds in their changed circumstances.
- Indian and Pakistani Governments hardly managed the situations towards the complexities of human relationship. Large number of women were taken away from their new relatives and sent back to their earlier families.
- According to one estimate, 30000 women were recovered. 22 thousand muslim women were sent to Pakistan and 8000 Hindu and Sikh women were sent back to India in an operation what was recalled as late as 1954.

5.2 Preserving 'honour'

- According to scholars, ideas of preserving the community's honour came into play in this period. It was believed that lay in the ability to protect zan and zamin from the outsiders.
- Men were in fear as 'their' women—wives, daughters, sisters would be violated by the enemy, they killed the women themselves. Many women ended their lives – as martyrdom.

6. REGIONAL VARIATIONS

- The most bloody and destructive form of the partition came in Punjab. All the Hindus and Sikhs were displaced into India from the Western Punjab. Punjabi-speaking Muslims were displaced westwards to Pakistan. It happened within a short span of time of two years – 1946-1948.



Women console each other as they hear of the death of their family members. Males died in larger numbers in the violence of rioting.

- Several Muslim families from Bihar, M.P., U.P. and Hyderabad continued to migrate to Pakistan through 1950s and early 1960s. They were settled in Karachi, Hyderabad region in Sind. They are known as Muhajirs.
- Many Bengali Hindus stayed put in East Pakistan whereas many Bengali Muslims continued to live in West Bengal. Ultimately Bengali Muslims rejected Jinnah's two-nation theory by political action. As a result, Bangladesh was created in 1971-72.
- There was a huge similarity between the Punjab and Bengal experiences. Women and girls were the main targets of persecution. Attackers treated themselves to women's bodies as they triumphed a territory. Their acts for dishonouring the women of a community was considered as a set back to the community concerned.

7. Help, Humanity, Harmony

- Historians discovered large number of stories of how the people helped each other during the partition. They got a triumph over the trauma. Khushdeva Singh was a sikh doctor. He was posted at Dharampur in Himachal Pradesh. He worked for day and night and provided rare healing touch—shelter, food, love and security to several migrants, Muslims, Sikh, Hindu alike.



The refugee camps everywhere overflowed with people who needed not just food and shelter, but also love and compassion.

8. ORAL TESTIMONIES AND HISTORY

- Memories, oral narratives, family histories, diaries, first-hand written accounts help us to understand the problems, difficulties faced by general masses during the partition of the country. Memories and experiences shape the reality of an event.
- It enables historians to write richly textured, various accounts about the events which happened during partition but it was impossible to extract such kind of information.
- Many historians have doubt about the oral history. As oral data seem to lack concreteness, and the chronology their yield is not correct. They argue that the specificness of personal experience makes generalisation difficult.