

TRANQUILLITY AND BRUTALITY: THE PARADOX OF PARTITION VIOLENCE IN THE PUNJAB

PIPPA VIRDEE

DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY,
LEICESTER
UK

ABSTRACT

Following the decision to partition the Punjab, the region was swept by the most horrific communal carnage that India had ever seen. For many it was the sheer scope and magnitude of the events that has left such a haunting memory. The crimes were gruesome and, while they had elements of spontaneity, there were clear signs of organisation too. In addition to 'outsider' violence, some male family members killed their wives and daughters to save them from the 'dishonour' of rape. Others committed suicide to save themselves from either being slaughtered or being converted to the other's faith. This was violence against humanity of unspeakable magnitude; it was barbaric and sadistic and it was being perpetrated against former friends and neighbours.

Such account of anarchy and brutality, however, has a different historical perspective; thereby the individuals have risked their own lives to save members from the 'other' community. There were also pockets of relative tranquillity, and nowhere was this more palpable than in the small Muslim Princely State of Malerkotla. Studies of the sources of quiescence in conflict-ridden situations have lagged behind those of the sources of violence. Recently though, there have been a number of studies that have sought to explain an absence of violence. Donald Horowitz, for example, devotes chapter 12 of his book on *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* to the examination of violence and quiescence.ⁱ Joseph Montville, in an edited volume on conflict and peacemaking, compares cases of conflict and the avoidance of violence.ⁱⁱ Explanations for this apparent tranquillity range from those based on the absence of economic competitionⁱⁱⁱ, and of extremist organisations,^{iv} to those such as Ashutosh Varshney's that focus on civic engagement.^v

Accounts that highlight the capability of the police and other law enforcement agencies in preventing violence are more compelling. In addition to this, some consideration needs to be taken of social disapproval, in terms of political leadership and community values, in limiting violence. This study by providing an analysis of Malerkotla's lack of disorder during 1947 sheds light on how the political leadership can play a positive as well as a negative force in the prevalence of violence. The study focuses on exploring the popular myth of the Guru's blessing in explaining the peace and tranquillity that has prevailed in Malerkotla. This popular explanation however, is challenged by the role of Malerkotla State in pro-actively preventing the spread of

violence within its border. The latter issue is tied with the wider analysis of examining this issue vis-à-vis Princely India and British India. The importance of a functioning state in averting incitement will be illustrated with a case study of Ahmedgarh, a town split between Princely-order and British-disorder.

Explaining the Paradox

The walled town of Malerkotla was the heart of a small Muslim kingdom, which was one of the oldest states in the Punjab region.^{vi} Today the former Princely State is a *Tehsil* of Sangrur District in the Indian Punjab. Sangrur District is south of Ludhiana and is bordered by Patiala to the east and Moga, Bathinda and Mansa encircle it on the west side. What is unique about Malerkotla town is that it stands as the only place in the Indian Punjab that possesses a majority Muslim population, with an estimated Muslim population of 70 per cent. In 1941 the population of Malerkotla State, according to the official census, was 88,109. This was distributed evenly across the three religious communities. Muslims however, like today, dominated Malerkotla town. The population of the town in 1941 was 29,321; with the Muslim community comprising 76 per cent of the population (Hindus formed 21 per cent and Sikhs 1.5 per cent).^{vii} After partition, the population of the Muslim community was much lower, but there was still a concentration in Malerkotla *Tehsil* and the town itself.

So how does a small Muslim Princely State like Malerkotla avoid being enmeshed into the spiralling violence surrounding its border at the time of partition? A number of factors mark out Malerkotla from its neighbours and consequently avoiding the general violence enveloping the Punjab region. It is possible that further research would uncover other localities that were similarly able to withstand the pressure of being embraced into a cycle of reprisal violence.^{viii} In the case of Malerkotla, however, a number of explanations have been put forward in an attempt to understand and explain the reasons behind this apparent tranquillity at a time when violence was widespread. Anne Bigelow has recently attempted to analyse and contextualise Malerkotla's apparent tranquillity. Her explanations centre on religious and the pluralistic forces which have been influential in Malerkotla.^{ix}

One of the main and most popular explanations put forward is the folk history surrounding the blessing of Malerkotla town by Guru Gobind Singh during the reign of Aurangzeb. This blessing is seen as an important deterrent in preventing carnage in the town. Secondly, the rulers of Malerkotla and the history of tolerance in the State are both considered to be vital in understanding the long tradition of communal harmony. An indication of this is when the fortified city of Kotla was founded in 1656; Nawab Bayzid Khan (ruled 1600-1659) summoned a Chishti Sufi saint, Shah Fazal, and a Bairagi Hindu Saint, Mahatma Sham Damodar, who both blessed the site in a public enactment of pluralism.^x Finally, there is the belief that the many shrines scattered around Malerkotla contribute to the town's "holy spirit". While some look to the power of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing, others look to power of the Sufi saints in the town.^{xi} The most famous of the Sufi shrines is the *dargah* of the founder of Malerkotla, known as Haider Sheikh. His tomb attracts people from neighbouring areas.^{xii}

However, Sufi shrines generally in India attract cross-communal devotees and it is not unusual to find Sikhs and Hindus alongside Muslims offering prayers. Denzil Ibbetson notes how shrines such those of Sakhi Sarwar attracted people from all communities.^{xiii} Geaves and Geaves also note the eclectic nature of religious life in the region and how the folk traditions within these communities are particularly blurred, especially with respect to tombs and shrines to holy men.^{xiv} Therefore, this explanation of shared sacred space cannot be over-played. Furthermore, the influence of *dargahs* and their *pirs* elsewhere in North India did not mitigate communal violence in 1947. A clear case in point of religious sanctity not mitigating partition-related violence concerns Pakpattan. This prosperous town in Montgomery district was the principal crossing point of the Sutlej River. The *dargah* of the famous of Chishti Sufi saint Baba Farid (1173-1265) was located at this site. Baba Farid's cross-community religious appeal is evidenced most clearly in the inclusion of his verses in Sikh scripture. Yet Pakpattan was attacked on 23-24 August, the shops and businesses of its Hindu and Sikh population were looted and the non-Muslims were forced to leave the town.^{xv}

Bigelow has put forward a persuasive argument in her assertions that the positive forces of spirituality and pluralism can prevent or at least inhibit the kind of communal violence seen in 1947 and since. However, while spirituality can act as form of social disapproval, it cannot explain the decisions made at the state level. The role and behaviour of the state is of vital importance; it sets the tone and expectations for the people. Within the context of Malerkotla, the differences between Princely India and British India are worthy of further consideration. In addition to this how the benevolent, or indeed the pragmatic, leadership of Ahmed Ali Khan was crucial in averting violence at the time of partition.

Princely India and British India

Malerkotla was one of a handful of small Princely States ruled by Muslims in the East Punjab region. Unlike the much larger neighbouring Sikh Princely States and the British-administered districts, it largely escaped the violence of 1947. It is this that explains its unique demographic feature. While the population of Muslims in the Indian Punjab declined from 53 per cent in 1941 to 2 per cent in 1951, Malerkotla itself has remained an important Muslim centre.^{xvi} Indeed its Muslim population increased as a result of the partition disturbances and the influx of fleeing Muslim refugees.

Ian Copland has worked extensively in this area and argues that communal violence was significantly less in the Princely States than in the British-administered Punjab by the early twentieth century.^{xvii} Though it is acknowledged that reporting of communal incidences was less common in Princely India than British India, it is argued that in the 1920s and 1930s the Princely States experienced, per head of population, far fewer communal Hindu-Muslim riots than the provinces of British India.^{xviii} Copland's analysis recognises, however, that there was considerable violence in the Princely States of the Punjab in 1947,^{xix} some of which was instigated by the rulers themselves.^{xx}

One explanation for this apparent divergence between Princely India British India can be explained by the tradition of cross-communal support in Princely India. Something which had developed over a number centuries and promoted the accommodation and incorporation of local minority communities. Through this system of 'managed pluralism' potentially contentious issues such as prayer times and routes of religious processions were handled amicably. For example one of the most contentious issues was cow slaughter, which in most Hindu/Sikh ruled states was banned. Muslims would therefore use an alternative animal to sacrifice on the occasion of *Bak'r 'id*. Under the British administration there were no restrictions on cow slaughter and with the growth of Hindu revivalism and cow protection societies in the late nineteenth century this issue became a major factor in destabilising communal relations.

Princely India and Malerkotla did not remain immune from these external influences. It is evident from the British records that there were increased tensions between the communities and signs of the politicisation of communal disputes. This is seen, for example, in clashes over prayer times during May 1935. These arose due to the recitation of the *katha* in Moti Bazaar which overlooked the Masjid Loharan. The *katha* continued for days and when it began to interfere with the *Isha* (night) prayers of the Muslims, there were protests.^{xxi} Both Hindus and Muslims protested; there were public processions, *hartals* and deliberate noise being made during evening prayer times. After four nights of continuous tension, the state authorities suspended both the *katha* and Muslim prayers. This resulted in the attack of Lala Puran Mal, a Hindu leader by four Muslims.^{xxii} The hasty decision by the state to arrest and execute the perpetrators created further tension. The issue was finally resolved when the authorities intervened and imposed different prayer times for each community.^{xxiii}

What is significant, however, is that these incidences remained largely confined and did not escalate. The level of communal violence in Malerkotla stands in sharp contrast with neighbouring Sikh Princely States. In Patiala in a short space of time something like 6,000 Muslims were killed in the capital. An indication of the ferocity of this violence is the fact that the authorities needed four days to clear all the corpses in the city.^{xxiv} In Jat-dominated rural areas of Patiala, Nabha and Faridkot State, Muslim villages were burned and looted.^{xxv} The authorities in these Sikh States were clearly in collusion with the perpetrators and in some instances sanctioned the violence. There was similar blood letting in the West Punjab Muslim-ruled state of Bahawalpur where Sikhs and Hindus were driven out.^{xxvi}

Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan – The Benevolent Leader

This apparent disparity in communal violence between neighbouring Princely States brings into the equation the role of the leadership. While the Maharaja of Patiala, Yadavinder Singh, according to some sources^{xxvii} was involved in the conspiracy to purge all the Muslims out of East Punjab in order to create a Sikh state, the Nawab of Malerkotla was being prudent and safeguarding the future wellbeing of the state in a post-independent India.

It is here that the conduct of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan, which stands in marked contrast to that of other rulers of the Punjab Princely States in August 1947, is crucial. The Maharaja of Patiala enforced a curfew on the Muslims of the state on 31 August. He personally reassured Muslim League workers that the minority community would be safe. Shortly afterwards a Sikh *jatha* supported by the State military and police attacked the Muslims of Barnala leaving over 3,000 dead. Evidence for the Maharaja's acquiescence in the attacks on Muslims is provided not just by this episode, but by the arming of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) members and the role of State troops in attacking refugee trains en route from Delhi to Lahore. At Bathinda nearly 450 Muslim railway employees and their families were murdered by State troops.^{xxviii} The Chief Minister and heir of the Kapurthala state were seen in a military truck witnessing an attack on a refugee train on 5 September 1947.^{xxix}

Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan^{xxx} (ruler 1908-47) in comparison sought to maintain order and to limit the disruption arising from the influx of Muslim refugees. The state of Malerkotla has historically attempted to stress and highlight communal harmony in its territory. Indeed the ruling family's historian and descendent, Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan, declared that 'due to communal harmony and personal interest taken by the Ruler no disorder took place within Malerkotla State territory and all continued to live in perfect peace and harmony during this period of unrest.'^{xxxi} This may appear credulous of the Nawab's role, but he is viewed as a major factor in averting communal carnage in Malerkotla. His personal role, leadership and amiable relations with all communities certainly contributed to the restrained response of the people of Malerkotla. This view was essentially shaped by the political context that was equally important for the maintenance of communal harmony in the state.

The Nawab of a tiny state in an area distant from the Pakistan border, surrounded by Sikh states, had little to gain from stirring communal animosities. This situation did not hold true for the Sikh rulers. The violent attacks on Muslims were not just prompted by revenge, but formed part of ethnic cleansing.^{xxxii} This was designed to consolidate a Sikh majority area. The Sikh States gave refuge to *jathas* operating in the British Punjab and they provided weapons and ammunition for Akali *jathas* in such districts as Jullundur. Attacks on Muslims in the British districts, as in the States, was politically motivated. It was termed by the British CID as the Sikh Plan.^{xxxiii} This sought to carve out a majority Sikh homeland in central and eastern Punjab by driving out the Muslims. The political motivation of the violence comes out clearly in the demand made to the Muslims of Barra in Patiala to 'leave for Jinnah's Pakistan as Patiala was in India and no Muslim could live there; Khalistan was to be created throughout the East Punjab.'^{xxxiv} There is also evidence that members from the Nawab's family did not share his enthusiasm for maintaining communal harmony; Ihsan Ali Khan, who was a staunch supporter of the Muslim League, was engaged in illicit activities.^{xxxv} It was reported that he 'has engaged scores of Muslim ironsmiths to prepare knives, spears and other dangerous weapons openly.'^{xxxvi} But such behaviour was insufficient to disrupt the peace.

Malerkotla was a wealthy state, it had a significant Muslim population and it was surrounded by Sikh majority areas of the Phulkian States and Ludhiana district, thus it

was a prime target for any attacks by Sikhs and Hindus.^{xxxvii} The state authorities were apprehensive about trouble along its eastern and northern borders. There had been no case of Sikh *jathas* entering the state territory yet but, nonetheless, it was imperative for the swift movement of refugees to Pakistan to avoid the state being a target.^{xxxviii} It is thus clear that the Nawab of Malerkotla was extremely anxious about the communal situation, especially with reference to the large numbers of Muslims coming into the State, seeking temporary refuge. This would not only burden the State financially, but also threaten the peace by inflaming communal tensions. Brigadier Commander Stuart noted that if trouble was to spread from outside the state, it would ‘...upset completely the present tranquillity within the state and make its relations with adjoining States difficult.’^{xxxix} It is well documented that the arrival of refugees was a major trigger for violence across Northern India, even in localities that had previously been unaffected. On 6 September, Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan sent a telegram to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India, to request assistance, as the States’ resources were inadequately equipped. The State was willing to absorb the cost as long as the Indian government could render the army.

There is grave danger of trouble spreading from outside, and though the State Forces are here they are inadequate to meet such a large scale emergency... Thousands of refugees have flocked into the State from the Ludhiana District and Patiala and Nabha States the presence of whom has presented the State with a major problem...Great panic prevails every where in the State.^{xl}

The role of the State was therefore crucial and this would have been impossible without the use of the army in maintaining control and deterring external attacks.

The Nawab used his power to keep the peace in the State especially when it might have been overwhelmed by the refugee influx. The rulers of many of the Punjab Princely States turned their armies and influence to the destructive ends of ethnic cleansing. It could also be hypothesised that the absence of a functioning authority was a factor in allowing violence to overwhelm the populace. It is clear from the works of such writers as Ian Talbot that British authority in the Punjab was declining from March 1947 onwards.^{xli} The almost total collapse of authority in East Punjab in August 1947, in part the result of the withdrawal of the predominantly Muslim police force, created the conditions for the communal holocaust in the region. In such circumstances, a Princely State such as Malerkotla in which there was both a functioning government and a ruler committed to maintaining order could become a haven of peace.

The Guru’s Blessing

One of the most unique features of Malerkotla is the story of the Guru’s blessing of Malerkotla following Sher Mohammad Khan’s protest at the execution of his two sons. It still appears to play some part in the minds of people whether they are Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. It is a fascinating story which seems to have assumed mythical proportions during the passage of time. This myth has travelled beyond the borders of Malerkotla and

is now well known in Punjabi folklore. It is worthwhile reciting some of the details of this blessing.

During the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707), many battles were fought between the Mughal armies and the Sikhs. Prior to the onslaught on Chamkaur in 1705, Guru Gobind Singh, sent his mother, and his two younger sons accompanied by the Guru's cook, Gangu, to seek refuge from the ensuing battle. However, Gangu betrayed them and handed the children over to the Mughal authorities. The two young *Sahibzadas* were asked to accept Islam in exchange for freedom in the court of Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind but they refused. The *Qazi* had told Wazir Khan that under Islamic law the two boys were not guilty of any crime and could not be held responsible for their father's crimes. The *Qazi*, though aware that this was against Islamic law, sentenced the two young boys to be bricked up alive.

The Nawab of Malerkotla, Sher Mohammad Khan, upon hearing this decision, sent a letter of protest to Emperor Aurangzeb.^{xliii} The protest was heard but came to no avail as the boys were bricked up alive and consequently died of suffocation.^{xliiii} However, when Guru Gobind Singh came to hear of the Nawab of Malerkotla's appeal, he apparently blessed the house of the Nawab and Malerkotla, declaring that 'his roots shall remain forever green'.^{xliiv} The succeeding century witnessed invasions and disturbances in the Punjab and a shifting balance of power from the declining Mughal authorities to the Sikh *misls*. Significantly, Malerkotla remained unmolested by the Sikh forces.^{xlv}

This *haa da naara*, or protest by Sher Mohammad Khan, has continued to be recited over the past 300 years. It is still cited as one of the most important reasons for Malerkotla's peaceful communal relations. This was reiterated by the people of Malerkotla on several occasions during fieldwork conducted there, citing this as the most plausible explanation for its communal harmony.^{xlvi} The people who were interviewed during the research felt that the Guru's blessing still had relevance today and proudly uphold its symbolic significance for Malerkotla.^{xlvii}

The contemporary relevance and impact of this myth is symbolic. It represents the wanted desire by the people of Malerkotla to believe in its supernatural powers. The myth is assigned a stature which is beyond rational understanding, yet subliminally it has instigated a form of restraint during periods of communal tensions. Although this study is primarily concerned with the absence of communal violence in Malerkotla during 1947, it is worth pointing that since independence the state has continued to observe restraint. Residents were proudly stating that the state remained peaceful following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. Perhaps due to the small number of Muslims living in Punjab compared to other important centres such as UP and Gujarat, there is less of a threat and thus Malerkotla remain relatively peaceful. Competition for scarce resources generally contribute to increased levels of animosity between communities and as this is absent in the Punjab, there has been less tension since 1947.

The continued power of the story of the Guru's blessing over half a century after partition was clearly expressed to me during the fieldwork conducted in Malerkotla. There is clear evidence here of what writers have termed as social disapproval inhibiting violence.^{xlviii} While historians such as Pandey^{xlix} may dismiss the belief in the Guru's blessing as "sentimentality", its power lies in the attachment to the notion of *izzat* in Sikh society and in the high status accorded to Guru Gobind Singh, the founder of the Sikh *Khalsa*. Lying behind the popular history of the Guru's blessing, there may well be evidence that traditional obligations and notions of community honour were able to overcome the so-called "frenzy" and essentialisation of identity that accompanied partition.

Ahmedgarh – Caught Between Tranquillity and Violence

The town of Ahmedgarh offers an interesting example of how a small locality, bordering between Princely India and British India, is split between the brutality of partition violence and the tranquillity which prevailed in pockets of Punjab. The case study of Ahmedgarh sheds further light on the importance of a functioning authority for the control of partition-related violence by comparing the situation in Malerkotla with the former British-administered territory adjacent to it. This type of analysis is new to partition studies. It is based on fieldwork conducted at Ahmedgarh, which in 1947 stood between the border of Malerkotla and Ludhiana district which was under British control. Nothing has been previously written about developments here. Yet an account of its history pieced together from interviews provides some useful insights into the wider understanding of partition and its accompanying violence in East Punjab.

Ahmedgarh is a sub-*tehsil* of Malerkotla *Tehsil* in District Sangrur. The population in 1941 was 4,368, of which 71 per cent were Hindu, 16 per cent were Muslim and 10 per cent were Sikh.¹ Ahmedgarh is better known as Mandi Ahmedgarh due to its famous grain market established under Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan. The town itself is also named after Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan. Ahmedgarh town is located 26 km from Ludhiana and 19 km from Malerkotla.

The stories that were recounted to me in Ahmedgarh during my fieldwork illustrated the differential impact of violence in the locality. On appearance, Ahmedgarh looks like any small town in the Punjab, but what emerged upon visiting the place and interviewing the residents was something quite unexpected. Most of the interviews were conducted around Dehliz in Ahmedgarh. The place turned out to be quite unique in many respects. Firstly, Dehliz is on the border of Ludhiana district and Malerkotla. Thus, prior to August 1947, half of the area came under British jurisdiction and half under that of the Nawab of Malerkotla. Residents of Dehliz suggested that the area under British control experienced considerably more communal tension and violence than the area under Princely rule.

The individuals who were interviewed for this research came from a variety of different backgrounds in Dehliz; all were born in the local area and witnessed the partition violence that engulfed the region. The picture that emerged from Dehliz is a

village that was split into two, one half resisting the pull of joining in the communal carnage and the other half succumbing to the violence and contributing to tensions. The vision presented of the Punjab during partition is that of a province split into communal factions and neighbours becoming enemies, often overnight. This is an oversimplification of the events and underplays some of the complexities that existed. The case study of Dehliz demonstrates how one small village, itself on the borders of the British administration and Princely rule, can be used as a focal point for discussions on the partition violence in the wider Punjab. A respondent, Yaggar Singh, expressed this kind of sentiment, highlighting the differences between British-ruled territory and that of Princely India.

Well the violence you see, this riyasat [locality] of Kotla, in Meherna riyasat, just here which was the “English” side, there was plenty of violence. But on this side, the violence could not come or follow. No, they could not come into this riyasat. In all the “English” areas, the conditions were very bad. Now this girl is sitting here and I cannot tell you about the treatment such girls were subjected to.^{li}

The village Mazara falls under the Ludhiana district and is close to Dehliz. Local residents recounted stories of how Muslim people were killed during an attack on the village. The village was wiped out during the attack; the violence here took place after 15 August and was intense during the month following independence. Mazara was set alight during this violence and many of its Muslim inhabitants were burned to death. Today the land is classed as “useless”; it is under government control and the fields lie empty, devoid of anything alive. A recollection of the period is provided by Ismail Mohammed, talking about the village Mazara when it was set alight.

Yes, it was right next to us...it was part of the “English side”. We told them [villagers in Mazara] to come here, they said we are Rajput why should we leave our homes and come there? That’s when the trouble began there. It was very bad there, a lot of damage. Those who got injured got out and those that died well they died. It was full of bodies, I saw it with my own eyes, and I went there in the morning after it all happened.^{lii}

However, 1 km away from Mazara, there was the village Rasoolpur, whose population was predominantly Muslim in 1947. This area came under Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan’s control and again local residents say that this village was spared and saved from the carnage that engulfed the surrounding villages. They have suggested that the area under Princely rule was unaffected, but nearby Mazara, which until independence was under British control, was completely wiped out. Was this differential experience of violence the result of the Guru’s blessing, the presence and history of communal harmony in the area, or the Nawab’s commitment to maintaining order in contrast both to the neighbouring Sikh states and the former British districts?

While some of the people of this small town explain the lack of violence through the popular belief of the “blessing” others highlight the differences between Princely-

order and British-disorder. There were warnings of administrative collapse in British India^{liii} and this may in part explain the differences between British India and Princely India. The adequate functioning of Malerkotla State during this upheaval was pivotal in maintaining law and order.

Conclusion

The experiences of Malerkotla in 1947 are worthwhile exploring further because they fill an important gap in our knowledge about partition and its wider differential impact in the Punjab region. Moreover, it sheds light on a number of wider issues. The popular myth that its peace rested on the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh on the town raises the question of the extent to which traditional notions of the sacred and of *izzat* (honour) may have prevented violence rather than have promoted it. The differential experience of violence in the state and in the neighbouring village of Ahmedgarh raises the question of the extent to which communalism and communal violence differed in Princely India to British India.

Malerkotla was peaceful because it was not in the interest of its ruling family for violence to break out in the state. The Nawab must have been aware that the future safety of the state lay in maintaining stability and building its relationship with neighbouring Sikh States in the post-independent Indian Union. Any violence against Sikhs and Hindus would have been detrimental to the State's viability in an independent India. The police and the army were thus deployed to prevent rather than abet violence in contrast to what happened in the neighbouring Sikh Princely States. In the surrounding former British districts, the instruments of law and order had collapsed because of communal polarisation. During the partition disturbances, Malerkotla became a "safe haven" for many Muslims fleeing other surrounding areas. This demonstrates that East Punjab did not overnight become a hostile area, forcing all Muslims to leave. Indeed, what is more astounding is that the influx of Muslim refugees into the town did not result in retaliatory violence. Appeals by the Chief Minister were made to observe the peace and tranquillity of the town. Combined with the use of the army as deterrence, Malerkotla was able to prevent external aggression in its territory. This would have been ineffectual had the state mechanisms not been in place during the transitional period of the transfer of power.

Thus the Malerkotla case study brings home forcefully the importance of a functioning administration that is committed to law and order as a crucial factor in inhibiting partition-related violence. Much of the turmoil in East Punjab arose from the decline of the British administration from the beginning of 1947 onwards, the partisan approach of local officials and the impact on law and order of the disarming and disbanding of the Muslim-dominated police force. The consequences of these processes could not be more graphically illustrated than in the differing experiences of the "English" and Princely areas of Ahmedgarh. More widely, Malerkotla supports the view of Brass and others who regard contemporary communal violence as a calculated action, in which authority is compliant, rather than as a spontaneous occurrence. What is unique in the case of Malerkotla is that the effectiveness of the army maintaining peace was

reinforced by the social disapproval of violence arising from the “myth” of the Guru’s blessing.

Endnotes

ⁱDonald Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 467-522.

ⁱⁱJ.V. Montville (ed.), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990).

ⁱⁱⁱSee for example, V.V. Singh, *Communal Violence* (Jaipur: Rewat Publications, 1993), pp. 102-3.

^{iv}Ibid.

^vAshutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

^{vi}See the following for further reading on the history of Malerkotla, Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-I-Jahan of Malerkotla* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2000); Pippa Virdee, “Partition and the Absence of Communal Violence in Malerkotla”, in I. Talbot (ed.), *The Deadly Embrace: Religion and Violence in the Indian Subcontinent 1947-2002* (Karachi: OUP, 2007); and Anne Bigelow, “Punjab's Muslims: The History and Significance of Malerkotla”, *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 12 (Summer, 2005).

^{vii}*Census of India, Punjab, 1941*.

^{viii}Ian Copland mentions another place in Malerkotla that remained peaceful in 1947. According to some Sikhs, Raikot gained immunity from attacks because the local Muslim landlord family had a pitcher, referred to as the ‘Guru Sagar’. It was apparently presented as a gift to the *jagirdar’s* ancestor by Guru Gobind Singh in 1704. The pitcher is well-known throughout Punjab because it has the ability to retain water even though it is pierced by 244 holes. Ian Copland, “The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 36:3 (2002); 694.

^{ix}Anne Bigelow, “Walking Through the Streets of Malerkotla”, *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 2 December 2000; Anne Bigelow, “Practicing Pluralism in Malerkotla, Punjab”, *Items and Issues*, 03: 1-2 (Spring 2002).

^xIbid., also see Khan, p. 23.

^{xi}Bigelow, 2005.

^{xii}A fair is held every Thursday at the shrine of Haider Sheikh with offerings being made by devotees. On the first Thursday of the month, this fair is much larger attracting thousands of people from outside Malerkotla. It is attended by large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs, who make offerings for wishes of a son, wealth, prosperity etc. *Malerkotla State Gazetteer* (Lahore: The Civil and Military Press, 1904), p. 44.

^{xiii}Denzil Ibbetson, Edward Maclagan and Horace Arthur Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province* (Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990), pp. 435-7.

^{xiv}The idea of religious pluralism is further illustrated in the study of worshippers of Baba Balaknath, “The link with Sakhi Sarvar is maintained by the custom of including a visit to the shrine of the Muslim pir at Una on route to the gufa. Many of the pilgrims to Baba

Balaknath carry green flags in addition to orange which they offer to the saint's tomb... Whatever the reasons for the connection between the two pilgrimage sites, it has also influenced the Muslim shrine which contains Hindu murtis and religious iconography mostly connected with Shiva". Ron Geaves and Catherine Geaves, "The Legitimization of a Regional Folk Cult: the Transmigration of Baba Balaknath from Rural Punjab to Urban Europe", Centre for Applied South Asian Studies, see website <http://www.art.man.ac.uk/CASAS/pages/papers.htm>

^{xv}G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning. A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 163.

^{xvi}*Census of India, Punjab, 1951.*

^{xvii}This became apparent when figures for casualties were plotted and seemed to show considerable discrepancies. Ian Copland, "The Political Geography of Religious Conflict: Towards and Explanation of the Relative Infrequency of Communal Riots in the Indian Princely States", *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 07:01 (January-June 2000); 1-27.

^{xviii}*Ibid.*, p. 16.

^{xix}*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

^{xx}Ian Copland, "The Integration of the Princely States: A 'Bloodless Revolution'?", *South Asia*, XVIII (1995); 42; and Copland (2002). Ian Copland builds on the argument which suggests that the Sikh Princes colluded with the Akali Dal in hope of establishing a Sikh State after the British departure.

^{xxi}Letter to His Highness from the Home Minister, Zaman Khan, 19 October 1935. *Malerkotla State Records*, No. 3, File 74, PSA.

^{xxii}Malerkotla Affairs, L/PS/13/1345, IOR.

^{xxiii}Malerkotla Affairs, L/PS/13/1345, IOR.

^{xxiv}Copland, (2002), p. 686 *ff.*

^{xxv}*Ibid.*, p. 686.

^{xxvi}Khosla, (1989), pp. 212-16 and pp. 288-89.

^{xxvii}Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore; Research Society of Pakistan, 1973), pp. 254-61 and *Note on the Sikh Plan* (Lahore: Government of Pakistan, 1948).

^{xxviii}Mudie Papers Mss. Eur. F 164 cited in Government of Pakistan, *Disturbances in the Punjab 1947* (National Documentation Centre: Islamabad, 1995), pp. 408-9.

^{xxix}*Ibid.*, p. 404.

^{xxx}The full title of the late Nawab was Lt. Col. His Highness Nawab Mohammad Ahmad Ali Khan Bahadur, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E. (1881-1947). He was educated at the prestigious Aitchison College, Lahore and for his distinguished services during World War One, he was awarded the distinction of K.C.S.I. and K.C.I.E. and Honorary Rank of Lt. Col in the Indian army. Khan, p. 137.

^{xxxi}*Ibid.*, p. 138.

^{xxxii}Community demarcation and the emptying of territory of rival religious communities in North India from 1946 onwards display the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing. Ian Copland, for example, refers to the Muslim expulsion in 1947 from Alwar and Bharatpur as not just a communal episode, but a case of systematic 'ethnic cleansing'. "The Further

Shores of Partition. Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan in 1947”, *Past and Present*, 160 (August 1998); 216.

^{xxxiii}In *Note on the Sikh Plan* (1948), there are accounts of how the Sikhs were preparing militarily to oust the Muslims from East Punjab and establish Sikh rule in the region after partition. Ian Copland also talks about the “Sikh Plan” and the plans by the Sikh Princes to establish a Sikh State after partition. *op. cit.*, Copland (2002).

^{xxxiv}*Mudie Papers*, p. 409.

^{xxxv}Ihsan Ali Khan belonged to the Nawab’s family that eventually left Malerkotla and settled in Lahore after partition, where the family had property prior to August 1947. As Ihsan Ali Khan was a supporter of the Muslim League, there may be more opportunities in Pakistan than in India.

^{xxxvi}Letter to The Hon. Home, States and Information Minister, 30 August 1947. Malerkotla State, 1947, File no. 2(19) PR/47 NAI.

^{xxxvii}Malerkotla Affairs, IOR.

^{xxxviii}*Ibid.*, Visit to Malerkotla State by Major Gurbax Singh Gill HQ5 Inf. Bde.

^{xxxix}*Ibid.*, Correspondence by Brig. Comd. N. J. B. Stuart re visit to Malerkotla, 25 September 1947.

^{xl}Letter of assistance to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel from Ahmad Ali Khan, 06 September 1947, Malerkotla State, 1947, File no. 2(19) PR/47 NAI.

^{xli}Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), pp. 224-37.

^{xlii}For a full translation of the letter sent by Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan see, *The Sikh Review* (January 1967).

^{xliii}Fetah Singh was less than six years old and Zorawar Singh was just over eight when they were executed. Their shrines at Gurdwara Fetehtarh Sahib near Sirhind, Fetehtarh District, Punjab, still attract a large number of Sikh pilgrims. Their Grandmother, Mata Gujri also died upon hearing the news of her grandsons’ death and there is shrine to honour her at the same Gurdwara.

^{xliv}Khan, p. 35.

^{xlv}*Ibid.*, p. 39.

^{xlvi}This is based on research for PhD thesis, see further unpublished thesis, Pippa Virdee, “Partition and Locality: Case Studies of the Impact of Partition and its Aftermath in the Punjab Region 1947-61” (Coventry University, 2005).

^{xlvii}For a more detailed analysis see Virdee, 2007.

^{xlviii}Horowitz, p. 490 *ff.*

^{xlix}See further Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition. Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

^l*Census of India, Punjab, 1941.*

^{li}Interview with Yaggar Singh, Ahmedgarh, 22 August 2001.

^{lii}Interview with Ismail Mohammed, Ahmedgarh, 22 August 2001.

^{liii}Jenkins to Mountbatten, 8 August 1947, R/3/1/91 IOR.