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One Land, Many Nations

by

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One Land, Many Nations

Anjali Gera Roy¹

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ABSTRACT:

The Panjab Rivers. — "Panjab" is a Persian compound word, meaning "five waters," and strictly speaking the word denotes the country between the valley of the Jhelam and that of the Sutlej. The intermediate rivers from west to east are the Chenab, the Ravi, and the Bias. Their combined waters at last flow into the Panjnad or "five rivers" at the south-west corner of the Multan district, and the volume of water which 44 miles lower down the Panjnad carries into the Indus is equal to the discharge of the latter. The first Aryan settlers knew this part of India as the land of the seven rivers (sapta sindhavas), adding to the five mentioned above the Indus and the Sarasvati. The old Vedic name is more appropriate than Panjab if we substitute the Jamna for the Sarasvati or Sarusti, which is now a petty stream. (Douie 1916)

INTRODUCTION

In the Chapter "The Eye of Power" in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault argued that "a whole history remains to be written of *spaces* __ which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both of these terms in the plural)" (ed Gordon 1980 149). This project has been taken forward by postmodern geographers and postcolonial theorists (Lefebvre 1984; Soja 1989; Crush 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Ashcroft 2001). In 1994, Jonathan Crush announced the aims of colonial geography as "the unveiling of colonial complicity in colonial domination over space; the character of geographical representation in colonial discourse, the de-linking of local geographical enterprise from metropolitan theory and its totalizing systems of representation; and the recovery of those hidden spaces occupied and invested with

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their own meaning, by the colonial underclass”(1994 336-37). Through focusing on colonial interventions in Punjab’s mythical histories and sacred geographies through new disciplinary formations and imperial policies through which Punjab was ‘displaced’ in both colonial and post-colonial histories, this paper aims to re-narrate the history of ‘partition-in-the-west’ as the erasure of the sacred geography of the rivers of Punjab through a succession of imperial conquests, colonial mappings and post-colonial reinscriptions with the objective of distinguishing borders from boundaries. It argues that while old boundaries had ‘unsettled’ its older Indo-Aryan ‘settlers’ through religiously sanctioned violence, they had never displaced them from their homelands. In sharp contrast, colonial geographies, predicated on borders, triggered movements - both voluntary and forced - within and outside Punjab that culminated in one of ‘the bloodiest’ movements in the history of the world killing almost five million and dispossessing twelve million people from their homeland.² It begins by tracing the production of Punjab in colonialism through geographical surveys, cartographic exercises, revenue policies and geographical reengineering and its fragmentation after the Partition of 1947. In the second section, it closely analyzes the postmemories of the children of Partition survivors to demonstrate that different historical and geographical imaginings of Punjab, including colonial ones, collide in their reconstruction of home that problematize the understanding of Punjab as a region.

IMAGINING PUNJAB: A SHIFTING SPACE

The unique cultural history and geographical identity of Punjab makes it the preferred site for the making of territorial claims, national boundaries and transnational identities. Although its etymological origins (Persian *panj* or five and *aab* waters) literally map Punjab’s geography on the topography of its five rivers, the mapping of Punjab on the five rivers began only with its British conquest (Grewal 2004 2). Mythologically, Punjab was known as *sapta sindhu*, the land of the seven rivers, namely *sindhu* (Indus), *vitasta* (Jhelum), *asuhi* (Chenab), *purshin* (Ravi), *vipasa* (Beas), *satadru* (Sutlej) and *saruri* (Saraswati).³ Grewal points out that the name Punjab was given to the province of Lahore when it was enlarged by the Moghul Emperor Akbar to cover the five *doabs* (interfluves). He demonstrates that it still included six rivers during this period and that its boundaries remained more or less the same in Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s empire (2004 2). He contends that it was the British who extended the province to the bank of the river Yamuna and that the metaphor came to refer to a well defined territorial unit for them.

Graham Chapman’s emphasis on the conceptualization of the passes of the North West as a frontier to be defended against all incursions in the formation of the first Empire, that is the Aryan, locates Punjab strategically as a frontier region through which the boundaries of subsequent empires continued to be demarcated (2003 17). However, Punjab’s geographical limits appear to be shifting continually with its multiple invasions and conquests. In opposition to the concept of the frontier with its imperial origins and the borderland with its postmodern associations, I have used Khyber, which means divide in Persian, to contrast an

² The exact number of people who died during the Partition of 1947 remains a matter of debate with estimates ranging from 200,000 to one and a half a million people dead. While Butalia places the figure around 1,000,000, others such as Khosla put it at 500,000. The consensus today, according to Brass, would be around 500,000 though sources closer to the truth give figures that range between 200,000 and 360,000 (Brass, 2006: 18).

³ The narrative of the land of five rivers Saraswati now flows in traces with seasonal streams that flow near Pehowa in Haryana.

understanding of the continually shifting and porous boundaries of old empires with imperial frontiers and political borders (Gera Roy 2010). Once dry desert land between the Khyber Pass and the Ganga basin beyond the constricted passage between the Delhi ridge and Himalayan foothills inhabited by semi-nomadic warriors who defended the region from invaders from the non-west, Punjab's historical and cultural geography was continually interrupted and permanently altered after the annexation of Punjab in 1849. From becoming the 20th satrapy of the Persian empire after Darius's conquest of North Punjab in 516 BC and its falling to Alexander the Great's imperial ambitions from 334 BC in 326 BC, Punjab's rivers – particularly the Indus that Alexander crossed 16 miles North of Attock and the Jhelum at which he met resistance from the Aryan king Pauravas or Porus – have played a significant role, along with passes and deserts, in its contentious history of territorial expansion and imperial conquest. Punjab's boundaries continued to change with the Arab conquest of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim in the 712 AD, subsequent Muslim invasions by Mohammed bin Ghazni in 1000 AD, Babar in 1526 AD, Sher Shah Suri in 1539 AD, Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1761 AD, and the formation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire whose boundaries formed the basis of North India after the Anglo-Sikh war of 1849.

PUNJAB AS TERRA INCOGNITA AND CARTOGRAPHIC REINSCRIPTIONS: THE CASE OF BANNU

Postcolonial theorists have engaged with the dislocation of the colonized through the colonial conceptualization of space, maps, and geography that overwrote the places of the colonized. For example, Bill Ashcroft, in *Postcolonial Transformation*, has implicated the new discipline of geography and colonial mapping in dispossessing colonized of their place (2001). The imagining of the colonies as blank spaces on earth to be named, measured, and owned, according to Ashcroft, constitutes a superscription, if not erasure, of colonized places (2001). The relationship between colonial knowledge and power noted by them is evident in the way the objective mapping of territory, measurement of space, marking of boundaries, and recording genealogies destroyed the colonized relationship to spaces and places. The recollections of Sir Herbert Edwardes, a young lieutenant who conquered Bannu, a district in Punjab in 1848, provide a classic example of colonialism's elision of its pre-colonial history through his representation of Bannu as *terra incognita*.

Now, though most of us possess an atlas and geography, yet not ten educated men in a hundred could state off-hand where New Granada, Trinidad, Manilla, and Yemen are, and to whom they belong. I shall therefore take it for granted that not one in five hundred, whether resident in India or England, knows anything about such an insignificant little place as Bannu, its environs, and its inhabitants; and I shall proceed to describe both, beginning of course "from earliest times," which will not take long, as neither country nor people has any ascertained ancient history to speak of.⁴ [*italics mine*](Thorburn 1876 3)

⁴ As an 'after-partition-born' Punjabi schooled in imperial and national geography, I became aware of "an insignificant little place as Bannu" through my cousin's hilarious mimicry of the rendition of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* in the thick *bannuwalli* Punjabi of Bannu partition survivors in Faridabad. But I figured out its 'environs' very recently guided by the memory of some of the descendants of the inhabitants of some of the two thousand five hundred villages while conducting interviews with children of partition survivors in Ambala, Kalka, Lucknow, Delhi and Bangalore between March 2006 and May 2007.

More than twenty five years later, the boundaries of Punjab still extended to Bannu in the anthropological account of another British official, S. S. Thorburn, titled *Bannu: or Our Afghan Frontier*(1876), which includes excerpts from Edwardes' memoir,

The Punjab is divided into thirty-two districts, amongst which, with reference to size, Bannu stands tenth on the list. Its superficial area is 3786 square miles, which is greater than that of any English county except Yorkshire, and a little more than half the size of Wales(Thorburn 1876 3).

Thorburn, who began his duties as Settlement Officer of Bannu district in 1872, provides a rare record of the conscious overwriting of colonized places by the colonial project of mapping and measuring space, which were then used as instruments of colonial control. The book begins with a monocular view of the colonial administrator borrowing concepts of the new discipline of geography to establish the topography of the region by employing the tools of newly invented cartography. The colonial administrator's meticulous measurement of the area under his control and understanding of its specific features, he maintains, supremely qualified him for the job assigned to him as compared to his blissfully ignorant countrymen in Britain. The rationale behind the colonial project – to rescue the two thousand five hundred villages from the 'vagaries' of the 'capricious tyrant this mighty river' repositions colonial settlement from a strategy of colonial control to a civilizing burden.

Thorburn notes the overlapping linguistic boundaries of Isakhel with its Pathans speaking 'the broken Punjabi dialect of the hardy Jat cultivators' foregrounding the porous boundaries of pre-colonial Punjab.⁵

When entering it from the Marwat side, you feel that you are descending into a new country, for the general level of Isakhel is considerably below that of Marwat. Although, too, the dominant class of its inhabitants are Pathans, and nearly related to the Marwats, they have long since discarded their mother Pashto, which they speak like foreigners, for the broken Punjabi dialect of the hardy Jat cultivators of the soil. An amphitheatre of hills known as the Salt Range to the east, and its Khatak- Niazi branch on the west, of an average elevation of two thousand feet above the plain, in closes this valley on all sides but the south, to which it is open(1876 8).

Locating Bannu and its boundaries through what Ashcroft has defined as the monocular view of space in the West(2001), Thorburn proceeds to describe the river that has witnessed the rise and fall of one of the oldest world civilizations, the Indus.

The reader can easily conceive what a capricious tyrant this mighty stream is, and how anxiously tens, nay hundreds of thousands, who acknowledge it as the dispenser to them of life and death, watch its annual rise and fall. From the point of its final debouchure from the hills to Karachi, near which it discharges its waters from many mouths into the Indian Ocean, the Indus travels about six hundred miles, and has an average width during the flood season of from six to twelve miles. The number of villages on its banks, or in its bed, which are subject to its influence, cannot be under two thousand five hundred, and the average population in each is certainly over two hundred. We have thus, at the lowest computation, no fewer than half a million of human beings whose subsistence depends on this river's vagaries(Thorburn 1876 9).

⁵ This was confirmed by the Punjabi partition scholar Ishtiaq Ahmed when he went to interview the thespian of Hindi cinema Dilip Kumar alias Yusuf Khan of Pathan origin. Ahmed was pleasantly surprised when Kumar, celebrated for his flawless Urdu delivery, insisted on sharing his memories of his native Peshawar with him in Hindko, the Punjabi dialect that Thorburn mentions(Ahmed in Gera Roy & Chua 2012 forthcoming)

But Thorburn is a collector of strange customs as well as an assiduous student of history who provides a comprehensive overview of Bannu under native rule and the old revenue system before outlining the new settlement system. He notes the revenue collection system followed by successive Hindu and Muslim dynasties for centuries with the state as “the supreme landlord of the country” taking a share of every crop according to ‘its enlightenment and capacity for enforcement’ and generally abstaining from “interfering with any agricultural community” so long as its demands were punctually satisfied(1876 107). With the proprietary rights in land vested in the state, the pre-colonial practice of the informal development of tenures or soil-relationships according to local traditions and custom by various cultivating communities and a customary convention of revenue collection was seen to be in sharp contrast to the capitalist economy introduced by the British. Turning to Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s system specifically, Thorburn concedes that the simple Sikh revenue system of collecting one fourth of the harvest based on standing crops was good in principle but villainous in its administration as corrupt collectors appointed by the Sikhs extorted unreasonable sums from cultivators. This was the system that was replaced by the British after the annexation of Punjab in 1848 the first four years of which, by Thorburn’s own admission, were the era of misrule until the ‘incorruptible’ Nicholson was summoned to introduce Summary Settlement in 1852-53(1876 55). With Summary Settlement, the imposition of a lump sum based on a rough measurement of the cultivatable settlement leaving the village to split it between themselves, an intermediary system of joint proprietorship entered Punjab that Thorburn regards as a ‘great advance on the Sikh practice’ despite the old system being superior to the new in theory(1876).

The dispassionate British officer grants that the Sikh could take one fourth of the produce without ‘impoverishing the landlords’ as ‘the demand fluctuated with the yield’(1876 112). In a rare admission of the failure of the colonial system by a colonial official, Thorburn accepts that the fixed annual demand of the British, calculated on the basis of the previous four years average, simply “meant ruin to the cultivators, who sooner or later fell into the toils of the money-lender” but is more concerned about the loss of revenue for the British state than about hardships to cultivators(1876 119). Viewing the difference between the second Summary Settlement of 1858-59 and Regular Settlement as one of increasing taxes, Thornburn gives himself a larger role in the colonial drama by stressing the importance of “the preparation of a record of rights, a judicial and statistical process of a very laborious nature”(1876 118). It is in this laborious process of measuring, knowing, and assessing the land that Ashcroft discerns the ‘imperial cunning’ of Western reason at work that legitimizes the dispossession of the colonized of their place(2001). Thorburn displays a true sense of British fair play by engaging sincerely with survey, mapping and measuring of land as a prelude to determining the revenue to be paid that implicates him in the colonial superscription of colonized places through the disciplinary tools of geography.

By following the Pashto proverb in its spirit, "Take up a clod for a Hindkai, but quietly coax a Pathan," village boundaries were demarcated, and boundary and field maps with indices were prepared. The ordinary scale to which the maps were drawn was one hundred and ten yards to the inch; but in tracts where the sub-division of land was very minute, fifty-five yards to the inch; and in the indices every conceivable detail about every rood of land, marsh, and water in the District was recorded(1876 115).

Colonialism’s assumption of scientific objectivity that conceals its hegemonizing intentions is displayed in the verification of facts by the comparison

of data collected and the collision of divergent state apparatuses in imposing the colonial agenda.

Whilst this was going on, a scientific survey with the theodolite and chain, on a fixed scale of four inches to the mile, was being separately carried on by Officers of the Survey Department, by which my measurements were put to a final test(Thorburn 1876 116).

It is quite clear that Thorburn views himself as one attempting to bring order into a state of confusion that had prevailed over centuries due to the absence of records and unfamiliarity with the notion of private property among a feudal people bound in relations of obligation. He displays an acute awareness of the fact that a concept of “right or obligation, the distinction between which and a privilege enjoyed, or service rendered of grace and terminable at any moment, was, and is, to many incomprehensible”(1876 118). Even as the colonial official congratulates himself for accomplishing the task in record time with amazing efficiency, the collector of native customs displays painful recognition of “with out, by any direct action of my own, *extinguishing a custom endeared to the people by many generations of observance*, and which, notwithstanding the general objections to *any tenure which does not secure permanency of occupancy to each landholder*, has, nevertheless, *many special recommendations not to be found under any other system*”[italics mine 1876 125]. He illustrates this by conceding that customary law such as *khula vesh* could be scientifically verified. Finally, in his ascription of the rise in mortgage to “the inflexibility of our revenue system, long series of bad years, and in some cases over- assessment” is a telling admission of colonial responsibility for the events that followed(1876 126). The Chapter ends with a statement that comes as a surprise from one in charge of the demise of the old system. “Indian agriculturists at large is that, considering the disadvantages under which they labour, poverty, climate, heavy taxation, and ignorance, their systems of tillage *deserve our admiration rather than condemnation...*”(1876 138).

Punjab’s Geographical and Social Reengineering: Establishment of Canal Colonies

Historians such as Ian Talbot and others have systematically unpacked the colonial production of Punjab as the agricultural province of India through the establishment of canal colonies by the colonial state harnessing the waters of the five rivers(2007). The justification of British rule in terms of its transformative effects on outmoded social and cultural practices, patterns of landholding and so on examined by Talbot foregrounds the honest intentions of colonial administration in bringing benefits to the region, albeit through acts of ‘epistemic violence’(2007), as Thorburn would himself grant a little later:

Within the last twenty years it [Indus]has ruined many of the once thriving villages of Isakhel and Mianwali, by converting their lands into sand wastes or engulfing them altogether; whilst others it has enriched with a fertilizing deposit, and raised their inhabitants from the position of wretched cattle graziers, struggling for existence, to that of prosperous peasant proprietors. Its last freak in this district was to shift its chief channel eight miles eastwards, a feat it accomplished between 1856 and 1864. In doing so it submerged between seventy and eighty square miles of cultivated land and seventeen villages. From this we may judge how it may have fared within the same period with the hundreds of villages within its influence farther south(1876 9).⁶

⁶Memories of prosperous peasant proprietors of Mianwali dispossessed from their lands by human acts of violence in 1947 are too hazy to stretch to the time when they were cattle-

Talbot considers the transformation of six million acres of desert into one of the richest agricultural regions in Asia as a ‘stupendous engineering feat’ that was seen as the colonial state’s greatest achievement but was also an attempt to remake both the national environment and its people(2007). However, by calling attention to the commercialization of agriculture and the replacement of arid subsistence production with commercial production of huge amounts of wheat, cotton and sugar, Talbot also links the establishment of canal colonies to the introduction of capitalist production in Punjab through British imperial policies(2007). Pervaiz Vandal corroborates Talbot’s thesis by citing an item in ‘The Illustrated London News’ of 28th March, 1846, which exposes the economic gains of the annexation of Punjab with a specific reference to the irrigation potential:

...if the Punjaub (sic) were placed under the immediate dominion of the British Crown... it might become a most valuable acquisition. It possess(sic) great mineral wealth; its agricultural produce might be almost indefinitely multiplied [emphasis added] by a judicious system of irrigation...’(Vandal in Ashraf 1995 16)⁷

Vandal argues that the twin objectives of the settlement process were ‘to change as little as possible the existing social relations, structures and hierarchies’ and ‘to make clear to all that the British rulers were the true Mai-Baap[Parent] who could make or break jagirdars and sardars’. The act sealed the establishment of colonial control over the independent feudal lords under the Sikh kingdom of Ranjit Singh while guaranteeing the loyalty of Punjabis to the British through the complex system of rewards and punishments.

Ian Talbot has summed up “the contradictions between order and transformation that lay at the heart of the imperialist enterprise in Punjab with respect firstly to ownership and transfer of land, secondly to agricultural development and social engineering, and thirdly to customary law” in “The Punjab Under Colonialism: Order and Transformation in British India”(2007 3). He unpacks the role of the ‘hidden hand’ of market forces that imperiled order brought by British administrators such as Thorburn. He also calls attention to the socio-economic transformation arising from the commercialization of the region’s agriculture that ironically threatened rural order though its being accompanied by indebtedness. The threat to the revolution in holdings through urban moneylenders’ use of the British legal system to foreclose debts of mortgaged lands had earlier led Thorburn, then posted to Dera Ghazi Khan, to sound a note of warning on the possibilities of unrest as land passed into the hands of absentee moneylenders in *Musalman and Moneylenders of Punjab*(1886). The twin faces of British as nightwatchmen and interventionists in Punjab examined by Talbot are unmasked in the series of reforms concluding in the paternalist support they gave to the ancestral landlord and substantial yeoman against the rapacious moneylender(2007 4). The grand rhetoric of the colonial reports notwithstanding, duty, securing the contentment of the masses, is directly connected to safety of the rulers, the keywords in Ibbetson’s 1895 enquiry being “the safe foundation” upon which British rule can rest through “the loyalty and contentment of the sturdy yeomanry from whose ranks we draw our native soldiers”. According to Talbot, the Land Alienation Act of 1900 projected as the grand revolutionary step that prevented the urban commercial castes from permanently acquiring land held by ‘the statutory

graziers or to the last freak in this district that converted their lands into sand wastes or submerging them altogether.

⁷Quoted in Officers of the Punjab Commission compiled and edited by Ch. Mohammad Ashraf, NEDA Publishers, Lahore, 1995, p16.

agriculturist tribes' "structured political developments in the province for the remainder of the colonial era"(2007 6). But one must turn to Talbot's section on Punjab's social engineering to understand how the strong attachment to land in Punjab, or 'landedness' as I would like to call it, stems from its "agrarian development at the expense of industrial growth"(2007 7) whose 'legacy' continued to impact the region as in the Akali Dal's grievances against the Indian state that fed into the anger preceding the call for Khalistan. The harnessing of the waters of the rivers in an ambitious irrigation project that fructified in the canal colonies of West Punjab with their neatly laid out squares not only epitomized the ideals of the modern rational state but also created a new kind of model 'cultivator', a 'manly peasantry capable of self support and of loyal and law abiding disposition'(2007 7). The introduction of The Colonies Act of 1912 by Dwyer that reinstated the landed gentry to provide natural leadership to marginalize the influence of urban agitators like Laja Lajpat Rai seen in the 1907 disturbances in the Canal colonies leads Talbot to conclude that the "British policies of encouraging capitalist farming thus uneasily coexisted with the desire to retain a feudal presence in the colonies"(2007 8). He reveals the Janus face of the legal system whose public face endorsed modern transactions and private reinforced primordial 'traditional' status by pointing out that from the 1872 Punjab Laws Act onwards, personal law was not rooted in Hindu or Muslim religious framework but traditional customary law, which was an important element in 'the paternalist system of imperial rule in Punjab'(2007 8). As progress and paternalism marched hand in hand', Talbot concludes, 'both tradition and transformation served the purpose of the colonial state by justifying the exercise of colonial power'(2007 9).

BORDERS AND THE VIVISECTION OF PUNJAB

Partition historians such as Ishtiaq Ahmed, Lucy Chester and others have called attention to the haste with which the Radcliffe Commission went about determining the boundaries of the nation leaving people guessing until the eve of the partition on which part of the border their land would fall into(Ahmed 2004; Chester 2009). The trauma of Punjab fractured through the creation of national borders is best documented in fictional representations of Partition. If the configuration of the land as the deified maternal body in Indian nationalism had facilitated the mapping of the body politic on images of Mother India, images of vivisection or fracture dominate memories of the partitioned body of the subcontinent. Deepa Mehta's film *Earth 1947*(1998), based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Ice Candy Man*(1989), opens with a montage shot of Lahore with a clip showing a little girl asking her mother, "Mummy, can they break a country?". The mother's reassuring response to the child's question is betrayed by her troubled countenance. In a powerful visual metaphor for the breaking of the nation, Mehta has her eight- year-old protagonist Lenny, a persona for the author Sidhwa, tear her ragdoll into pieces after witnessing the Lahore riots. As the Partition of India is announced on All India Radio with the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru making his Independence address, a Sikh character breaks down exclaiming *mere desh ke tukde tukde kar diye* [They have broken my country into many pieces].

The father of the nation, Mahatama Gandhi, himself reportedly retreated into silence at the vivisection of the land that produced the two monster nations. The plaintive appeal of Punjab's *rajkavi* or poet laureate Hans Raj Hans *ai Punjab vi mera ai o Punjab vi mera ai, sarhadan tod deo, dilan nu jod deo*[This Punjab is also mine/That Punjab is also mine\Break Borders/Unite Hearts] is silenced by the *siapa* or wailing of mothers and children reverberating from Kargil to Godhara. But it was the Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam, who, aboard a train that wailed the one million

deaths of partition, composed a dirge for Punjab. In this *siapa* or lament for Punjab, Pritam calls upon its 17th century Sufi founding father Waris Shah (1722–1798) to rise from his grave to watch his beloved Punjab being poisoned to death. The Punjab with its poisoned rivers, red skies and toxic forest that Pritam invites its founding poet to survey alludes to the historical geography and mythical memory of the region. While her use of the typology of the rivers locates the boundaries of the Punjab she invokes within the geographical map of pre-colonial Punjab, the ironic allusion to its poisoned rivers irrigating the fertile land catapults it into the colonial moment.

*aj lakhaan dhian rondian, tainun Waris Shah nun kaehn
uth dardmandaan dia dardia, uth takk apna Punjab
aj bele lashaan bichhiaan te lahu di bhari Chenab
kise panjan panian vichch ditti zehr rala
te unhaan paniian dharat nun ditta paani laa
is zarkhez zamin de lun lun phuttia zehr
gitth gitth charhiaan laalian fut fut charhial qehr*

Rise! O' narrator of the grieving; rise! look at your Punjab
Today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab
Someone has mixed poison in the five rivers' flow
Their deadly water is, now, irrigating our lands galore
This fertile land is sprouting, venom from every pore
The sky is turning red from endless cries of gore
The toxic forest wind, screams from inside its wake

Pritam's comparison of the mythical Punjab of Waris Shah's *Heer* that has served as the foundational myth of the region with the poisoned body of Punjab conflates the cultural history of Punjab with the spatial thus facilitating the imaginings on the region, natural or remade.

The street-songs have been silenced; cotton threads are snapped
Girls have left their playgroups; the spinning wheels are cracked
Our wedding beds are boats their logs have cast away
Our hanging swing, the Pipal tree has broken in disarray
Lost is the flute, which once, blew sounds of the heart
Ranjha's brothers, today, no longer know this art
Blood rained on our shrines; drenching them to the core
Damsels of amour, today, sit crying at their door
Today everyone is, 'Kaido;' thieves of beauty and ardour
Where can we find, today, another Warish Shah, once more
Today, I call Waris Shah, "Speak from your grave"
And turn, today, the book of love's next affectionate page

Pritam's invocation of the mythical and literary history of Punjab converging on the myth of Heer-Ranjha and its literary representation by Waris Shah to mark its vivisection in 1947 connects the historical geography of the ancient *bars* and their tribes with the newly formed canal colonies. However, unlike Pritam's memories that turn to a legendary past, the memories of Partition survivors and their children locate their lost homes in these colonial geographies that were superimposed on its sacred and legendary histories.

Post-memories of Canal Colonies

Below Kalabagh the Indus is a typical lowland river of great size, with many sandy islands in the bed and a wide valley subject to its inundations. Opposite Dera Ismail Khan the valley is seventeen miles across. As a plains river the Indus runs at first through the Mianwali district of the Panjab, then divides Mianwali from Dera Ismail Khan, and lastly parts Muzaffargarh and the Bahawalpur State from the Panjab frontier district of Dera Ghazi Khan(Douie 1916).

In November 1901, the North West Frontier Province was carved out of Punjab and present day towns of Mianwali, Isa Khel, Kalabagh, and Kundian were separated from Bannu District (NWFP) and hence a new district was created with its headquarters in Mianwali city and placed in Punjab. In 1880, Captain Poham Young, supported by Sir James Lyall, proposed a new town, with a design based on the Union Jack, with eight roads radiating from a large clock tower in the centre. The eight roads developed into eight separate bazaars.

The history of this canal town epitomizes the notion of the palimpsest, with its colonial history erected on the geography of the *bars* or forests, specifically on that of Sandalbar a 50-square kilometre area mainly consisting of thick forests and wild tribes. Sandalbar's historical geography is woven into both the legendary and literary histories of Punjab. Not only does Sandalbar form the setting of the legend of Heer-Ranjha as Heer hailed from Jhang Sial, Toba Tek Singh, the village of Sadat Hasan Manto's eponymous story about the violence of political borders was also included in the same region. While Manto used the village as a metaphor for the partitioning of memories, it is the new town rather than the old *bar* that is deeply etched in survivor memories. I shall largely draw on the postmemory of children of partition survivors from some of the villages in the newly constructed districts and canal colonies to problematize the imagining of Punjab and its boundaries. Marianne Hirsch has proposed the concept of postmemory to describe the trauma experienced by 'the hinge generation' or "descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events"(106). By postmemory, she means "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up"(106).

After the passing of the adult generation of partition survivors since Urvashi Butalia put together her astounding collection of partition stories in *The Other Side of Silence*(1998), the lost homeland must be constructed by the postmemory of those who were children at the time of partition. Postmemory, as Marianne Hirsch pointed out, is more complex than memory because it means "to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension"(107). However, while examining post-memories of the second generation, it is important to distinguish between the intensity of various forms of violence to which they were subjected since the memories of the lost land are invariably coloured by the difference.

Among my respondents, the youngest, a seven year old girl permanently scarred by partition, is haunted by the nocturnal knock at the door that sends shudders down her spine sixty years after. In another seven year old female's account, the midnight thudding when the train stopped at a station and the trembling backs of parents blocking both through a pile up of steel trunks until the visible sigh when it pulled out, the danger that passed tinges the nightmare with the thrill of a horror film. Another seven year old boy, who assisted his merchant father by calling

out to potential customers from Delhi's pavements, displays with great pride the strong fingers that didn't need a pair of scissors to tear the length of the fabric and the will that took him a long way. Yet another, a teenager who was entrusted with smuggling his family gold in the thick belt around his khaki shorts, thinks that the risk was worth taking in exchange of the conversion aborted by the perfect timing of the army. Finally, a Sikh teenager shares the pain of selling the last piece of family silver for setting up a small business and remembers the menu of the first proper meal bought with his own income.

The postmemories of these survivors, who were children or teenagers at the time of the Partition of Punjab in 1947, folded in the villages flanking the Indus in a domestic geography of sailing in a boat from the natal *peke* in Mianwali to the marital *sore* across the river in Bannu or elsewhere.⁸ Hazy about the exact number of villages or the precise area, their fading post-memories followed the course of 'the mighty tyrant' Indus from the plains of the village in Mianwali to the hilly terrain across the river to reconstruct an ancient map of the region eternally plagued by the threat of *kabli*[border tribes] marauders that they identified as Yaghistan (Noelle 1997).⁹ Once again, I was forced to rely on memory histories of prosperous peasant proprietors of Mianwali. Traumatized by the violence of eviction, they reconstructed thriving villages in Mianwali but failed to testify whether they were raised to their position of affluence from that of 'wretched cattle-graziers' by colonial acts of benevolence to support Thorburn's claim about the benefits of colonial reengineering of the Indus Valley(1876 9). I wonder if 'the remembered villages' of the Mianwali survivors were part of the canal colonies established by the colonial irrigation networks or older agrarian structures. Memories invented bumper harvests supervised by its philandering Chaudhry in the village of Bhakkar in 1946, located by the traveler Mahmud bin Amir Wali Balki in Sindh(In Subramaniam 155). As these often mismatched with incongruous details of the region's semi-arid topography in pre-colonial accounts, they appeared to confirm Talbot's thesis about the social engineering of the region.

The stories I have strung together by putting together those I grew up listening to with those I gathering through interviews more recently begin at the time of the making of the Mianwali district and move between several villages and to the newly formed canal town Lyallpur and are interwoven with the history of the Indian Railways and Medicine. The lead actors of these stories are two teenage men and a teenage woman from Piplan and Bhakkar, the chosen few whose accidental 'discovery' by a '*gora sahib*' and a '*memsahib*' led them to the newly constructed canal town called Lyallpur(now Faisalabad) named after a British General. After the completion of the railway link between Mianwali and Lyallpur, the sixteen year old Dhani Ram learnt the basics of medicine in the process of assisting the British Doctor on the medical train, who, impressed by the young man's quick grasp of new information and ideas, recruited him in the new Civil Hospital. Similarly, Manik Ram was on his way to join university in Lyallpur armed with his first class results in his pocket when a *gora* offered him a job in the Railways, which the fifteen year old found hard to resist. Four years later, he brought his seventeen year old bride to Lyallpur where, as a progressive Arya Samaji spouse, he encouraged to acquire a professional training to assist the then only, and the first, lady doctor in India based

⁸ Interviews were conducted in Ambala, Kalka, Lucknow and Bangalore with adult and teenage children of Partition survivors for this paper between March 2006 and May 2007.

⁹ Noelle shows that the term Yaghistan('land of insolence') was used by the 19th century author MacGregor as formal term for all the Pashtun groups living beyond the reach of British administration.(Noelle 1997 162)

in the Lyallpur Civil Hospital¹⁰. Their paths might have crossed a few times in the Civil Hospital but Dhani Ram was already on his way to becoming one of the few millionaires in town on the eve of Partition 1947 leaving all his Mianwali relatives as well as his wife's rich landowning family in Kundiaan way behind.

I shall cross reference these unreliable memories with recorded accounts of the events leading to the Partition of 1947. In an account of a teenage survivor, the relations between the two communities are filtered through interactions on the neighbourhood playground in Lyallpur:

Before Partition, Muslim boys - even several years before partition - often attacked Hindu and Sikh boys, when they were in majority and finding[them] lonely[alone]. Where I was living, there were two mohallas/blocks where Muslims were in majority. Twice I was attacked and once left unconscious. Muslims were mostly poor and were tonga drivers, bullock cart drivers, loaders, butchers, blacksmiths, barbers etc. Whenever they wanted gifts of hockey, ball, volleyball and playing facilities from Hindus, they were very friendly and good, but otherwise they were cruel and opportunistic [not hesitating] to attack[us] with the help of their elders, civil guards, temporary policemen, blacksmiths etc.

The adolescent survivor's witness accounts of the first partition matches with its location by historians in March 1947. It is rumoured that when Pakistan was accepted as an independent unit, the Muslims of Lyallpur held special prayers and distributed sweets and food among the poor on March 3, 1947.

Before partition in April 1947, a big procession was there [moving]towards Dasherra ground near my house. Master Tara Singh – Akali leader - was leading the procession - who tore off the Union flag- and was shouting against Muslim league and Congress to form Pakistan. He was uttering Pakistan will be created on his dead body. I saw the procession, which was lightly lathi charged by police.

The second partition, in June 1947, is inserted as a disruption in the routine – of the school bus leaving early - and his witnessing of violence – the killing of the Muslim vegetable vendor – is coloured by reportage of events such as the stabbing of the Sikh near the Randi bazaar and information about the deployment of the Gorkha Regiment that the narrator must have gathered subsequently.

On 3rd June 1947, a Sikh was stabbed near the Randi bazaar near Jamma Masjid. The news spread all over city and Hindus and Sikhs started killing Muslims. I was studying in 9th class in DAV School (Arya School) which was about 3 miles from my house. The school buses were normally taking children from school after 13 hours, but on the said day, all the children were taken by different buses at 11 a.m. When I alighted 200 yards away from my house, I saw crowd shouting and Muslim (vegetable vendor) being hit by many and a Sikh pushed him in a nullah and people stoned him to death. The people started attacking another Muslim and I ran to my house. After two hours, police took the control and curfew was imposed in the entire city. From 2nd day, Gorkha Regiment took control of the city. From the mosque near 400 yards of our house, Muslims often shout naare[slogans] tabir, allah u akbar and threaten to kill Hindus. In response, some Hindus shout back, Baba har har mahadev and from top of some houses Sikhs often shout bole so nihai sat siri akal. On the first and second day, curfew was bit lenient, the Muslim mobs across Dashhera ground and from mosque used to come out with lathis and stick and knives and challenge Hindus

¹⁰ I was informed by Sister Kiran who has worked on the Missionary History in India that the first female physician who agreed to serve in India was based in Lyallpur and discovered that the 'worseley' that Manik Ram's wife assisted was probably Dr Wellesley(Sister Kiran personal communication February 2006).

and Sikhs. The Sikhs with swords and RSS workers came out with big weapons lathis. Thereafter police and Gorkha Regiment were giving warning to both the communities to go back to their house otherwise they would be shot.

After about six/seven days curfew was removed, the Muslims from the two three mohallas got frightened from the posting of Gorkha regiment and started leaving Lyallpur toward Western Muslim dominated villages and cities only limited young Muslims remained in the end of the fourth week of June. In Lyallpur city Muslim population was in limited areas, most of the shops and houses were of Hindus and Sikhs.

The exodus from Lyallpur is framed within memories of a family vacation within the subplot of a sibling's successful career.

In July/August I went to Delhi, Mathura and Agra, to see Lal Kila Taj etc with other relatives. No Hindu or Sikh was daring to go to Jamma Masjid, Karolbagh and even to Subzi Mandi, Bara Hindu Rao areas of Delhi.

The family owned Ghee Company, in which even a future Prime Minister makes a cameo appearance, looms large in memories of dispersal and historic July riots.

My father came to Delhi to attend meeting of the Agmark Ghee manufactures and government on 10th. The meeting was chaired by late Firoz Khan Noor who was later Prime Minister of Pakistan. My father represented as President of the Punjab Agmark Ghee Graders Association and opposed the government move to harass government chemists in their factories. Before going back to Lyallpur, he came to Meerut and I and my brother requested him to stay in Meerut, till 15th August but he went back. On 12th August my mother and three aunts and youngest brother reached Meerut with the father-in-law of my eldest sister. When they passed through Lahore [they] saw number of houses burning in Lahore and the mob, shouting and coming towards station.

On the 14th and 15th of August when Partition was declared, I and my brother etc, went to the heart of Meerut city and observed Muslim shops and mosques well decorated with flowers. The Muslims were distributing sweets and offering sherbet.

It is in the mother's journey through Lahore and father's return to Lyallpur that postmemory begins to play a significant role for the thirteen year old could be presumed to have no knowledge of events other than that relayed by family members.

My father had reached Lyallpur and he sold a property for Rs 46000 and purchased a bigger in the name my brother and his friend for 75000. At night of 13th, my father had arguments with neighbor that Lyallpur will not go to Pakistan as the population of Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore and Lyallpur districts were more than Muslims. According to him Chanab River will be boundary of partition - as such Lyallpur will be part of India.

Not only the old Sikh in Manto's Toba Tek Singh, this elderly Hindu also lived on in Lyallpur in the obdurate belief that his home could not be part of another nation. The understanding of Chanab as the dividing line was not as far fetched as it seems in retrospect given the consideration given to this proposition in one of the earlier deliberations.

In Lyallpur now Faisalabad, there was no trouble till middle of September 1947. Many Hindus and Sikhs came to Lyallpur for from Western districts of Sargoda, Jhelum and Mianwali, Rawalpindi etc. They were camped in Khalsa college and DAV school. Even they were in grounds with tents. My father once had been to a Muslim

area to see a patient in the second week of September. He was going to be stabbed by a Muslim; a Muslim patient of my father saw and timely saved him.

On 20th September my father went to Ghee grading station and one Unani Hakeem asked him not to go up the stairs. He said miscreants are looting the factory and do not disturb them. He threatened him with his gun and asked him not to go even to public meeting in front of clock tower. My father was to attend the meeting as Vice President of Peace Committee and Deputy Commissioner - a Muslim - had to chair. My father moved half a km when dahshat mardhar started. As the Gorkha Regiment was replaced by Blauch Regiment, the new force brutally killed Hindus camped in tents of Khalsa College and DAV school. In the city also - in Ghantaghar area too - trouble started. The District Commissioner was told by telephonic message from Lyakat Ali - whose family was to come by trains from Firozpur Station of India- to stop the rails as the news will excite Indians of Firozepur who will attack the train and kill his family members. DC had to shout to Muslims even with his two pistols to get the dahshat stopped. He ordered curfew.

My father was earlier mentioning to friends about change of different governments but public- after few days - had no problem in normal life. But after 20th September he too feared and wanted to leave Lyallpur.

Once again, this is corroborated by historian's accounts of peace in several cities upto this period and the gradual exchange of populations extending up to September. Father's escape from Lyallpur is reconstructed through stories heard from him and others,

My brother was trying to get him to India but not getting right his whereabouts. Some news was coming that he was going to airport for taking special flight to India; others told he was moving with convoy. My brother had been to Amritsar for arranging an air seat for him. In the mean time my uncle got transfer order to Madras. My father purchased two bullock carts and got loaded the same. Many of the houses he asked relations to take and a lot was distributed to Muslim friends who had saved him twice. He was to move in a big convoy but he got railways passes through an office on the basis of his service in railway of over ten years before 1928. My father and his brother and family friend, his wife, sister in law etc took rail, my two cousin brothers and servant and ten other relatives joined the convoy. The convoy was attacked after 40 kms and my cousin brothers jumped into truck and reached Amritsar.

My father reached Lahore and his friend and his family members were taken by military jeep by his nephew who was working with Tribune. My father accompanied with my friend's sister in-law reached Firozpure . He failed to get rail or road connection to Meerut and reached Meerut on the 17th of October 1947 in a salwar kameez. He had to walk for five days to reach Meerut.

While the account of the escape from Lyallpur must have been enacted by the father to the family, a little detail – “reached Meerut on the 17th of October 1947 in a *salwar kameez*” that is intended to highlight the father's travails reveals the confusion of personal recall with enacted memory. This mode of narration continues in the account of the family's move from Meerut to Delhi. The juxtaposition of the horror of “two bodies” “found in the debris even in the month of December” with “I was not getting admission in school of Delhi” reveals the complex process through which loss is narrativized by survivors.

My father moved to Delhi and occupied a demolished house in Subzi Mandi Basti Punjabi. I, my sisters and mother also moved to Delhi and started living in two rooms which were repaired just to live somehow. Two bodies were found in the debris even in the month of December. I was not getting admission in school of Delhi.

The grand narrative of violence occurs as an afterthought in the personal narrative of pain and loss,

When we moved to Delhi in January 1948 to Basti Punjabiyan, Subzi Mandi Delhi and occupied the demolished house of Dr Yaqub we found lot of debris in the burnt house and two charred bodies in the debris. The house was connected underground with a big mosque in the basti. There was a big weapon manufacturing factory in the basement halls of the mosque. The underground tunnel was going to Roshanara Road. Dr Yaqoob shot Hoshi the famous Socialist leader during riots. If MS Randhawa had not given a liberal hand to RSS who played on their lives and burnt the mosque and houses in the areas and reached Dr YaQoob's house when the firing was coming from the house [Dr Randhawa was favorite of Mr. Patel and Nehru transferred him just within few months of independence]... Subzi Mandi mosque which I visited in January 1948, had underground connection through Roshanara Road with Jamma Masjid and Karol Bagh etc. If RSS and people like Randhawa had not burnt Subzi Mandi Karol Bagh areas fanatical Muslims would have killed Nehru and Gandhi.

As Hirsch, points out “postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation”(107).

Conclusion

The confusion of the memories of the natural and the remade region – of origins in the wild *bars* or forest regions between the rivers of folklorists as well as in the neatly laid squares of land in the canal colony villages of the historians transmutes Punjab from a place into an imagined space in which the five rivers – before or after their social engineering - play the leading role confirming the disengagement of spatiality from territoriality by postmodern geographers. For the younger survivors, memories of home in the lost land - faded or repressed - are invariably superscripted by life in the camps and refugee colonies; for the older the return of the repressed home occurs despite denials of desire to return. Where is home for partition survivors whose memories of the homeland are ruptured by forced migration and eviction? How does the spatiality of Punjab relate to the construction of imagined communities? Like Rushdie’s Bombay, the remembered home is ‘a lost home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time’ (Rushdie 1991 9), buried or erased in the transformation of the colonial canal town Lyallpur into postcolonial Faisalabad.

Our residence was in Douglas¹¹, in street of Manaktala Building opposite Dasher ground. Our chemist shop was in Rail bazaar, near Gopinath Mandir, opposite Bhagat Ram Lohewala. Just year before partition, our shop moved to outside Bhowana bazaar.¹² Our Agmark grading Company, Chanab Pure ghee Ltd (UTTAM Ghee) was opposite Jamma Masjid.

Notwithstanding its precise description, my inquiries about the remembered home elicited a complete blank from the present residents of Faisalabad.

¹¹ The first railway started in 1910. The first residential area was Douglas Pura established in 1920.

¹² Bhawana bazaar was full of shops selling baans (bamboo,) and other such material. If I remember correctly, it also led to the festival grounds where the annual Dussera festival used to take place; and had annual Mandi Fair—farmers bringing cattle--cows, buffaloes, calves, grain wheat etc for sale. It used to be a very popular affair.-in fact it was a mela (where the twins get separated in the Hindi movies.) The Primary Arya School was also located around there. Was it Douglaspura? I think so. Because that's where we used to go after having finished “Kutchi Class nursery? School, and before going to the High School at “Mai-Di-Jhuggi”.All the Arya Samaj annual functions also used to take place in this school building(Sethi ndt npg).

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