

Sindh: The Partition that Never Happened

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Abstract

While Partition can indeed be viewed as a tragedy of epic proportions for anyone that has a belief in common humanity, it is undoubtedly the case that certain groups were more impacted by it than others, both materially and psychologically. Arguably, none more so than those who had their homes and material possessions fall on the ‘wrong side’ of the newly drawn international border. This article will focus on one such group, the Hindu Sindhis, who, unlike most other non-Muslims that fled the territories of would-be/realised Pakistan, did not have a linguistically similar destination within rump India to migrate to. Indeed many Hindu Sindhis lament the fact that they lost their entire province to Pakistan. Taking this into view, this article will attempt to tackle the question of whether the partition of Sindh, along the lines implemented in certain other provinces of British India, was a legitimate option at the time to lobby for.

Keywords: Partition; 1947; Hindu; Sindh; Sindhi; Refugees.

Introduction

August 15 stands as an important date in India’s history. It marks the date that India, following a near century-long struggle, was officially conferred dominion status by their hitherto British colonial overlords. Each year ‘Independence Day’ is commemorated with much pomp and pageantry across the length and breadth of India, albeit such displays are received with varying levels of enthusiasm. At the same time, for many nationals, mid-August signifies a moment in history when the country was bitterly torn apart on communal lines. Hostilities between Muslims on the one hand and, on the other, Hindus and Sikhs, were essentially rooted in the selfish desire on part of certain Muslim Leaguers to create a state of their own, Pakistan, in complete defiance to the rights and sentiments of the country’s overwhelming non-Muslim population. In the process of doing so, they served, to quote Maulana Azad’s prophetic words, as a convenient ‘play thing’ in the hands of the those British imperialists wishing to preserve a strategic base in the subcontinent to check Soviet expansionism (Azad, 1912; Sarila, 2005: 29), and thereby in the process removing the only conceivable gift that the British, who looted India to the point of destitution, could have left behind—namely a politically unified India. The creation of Pakistan not only resulted in the loss of approximately one-third of hitherto Indian territory, but it resulted in anywhere between fifteen and twenty million people being displaced (Keller, 1975: 19; Hassan, 2006: 12), and unknown numbers forcibly converted, raped, mutilated, and killed during the associated brutalities (Hill et al. 2008: 155). Indeed few would dispute that, in terms of scale and severity, it was the most horrendous humanitarian debacle to have struck the subcontinent since the reign of Aurangzeb.

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While Partition can indeed be viewed as a tragedy of epic proportions for anyone that has a belief in common humanity, with victims and culprits cutting across communal lines, it is undoubtedly the case that certain groups were more impacted by it than others, both materially and psychologically. Arguably, none more so than those who had not only attached significant political and spiritual value to India's unity but also had their families, homes, and material possessions fall on the 'wrong side' of the newly drawn international border. This article will focus on one such group, the Hindu Sindhis, who, unlike most other non-Muslims that fled the territories of would-be/realised Pakistan, did not have a linguistically similar destination within rump India to migrate. Indeed many Hindu Sindhis lament the fact that they lost their entire province to Pakistan. Taking this into view, this article will attempt to tackle the question of whether the partition of Sindh, along the lines implemented in certain other provinces of British India, was a legitimate option at the time to lobby for.

Partition of India and its effect on Hindu Sindhis

By the time that the last batch of British troops made their symbolic exit through the Gateway of India in Bombay (now Mumbai) on 28 February 1948, the Raj had transferred administrative control over its erstwhile territories in the subcontinent to not one but two dominions: truncated, and principal continuator state, India, with its Hindu majority; and the newly formed Muslim-majority state of Pakistan.

Although the roots of Muslim separatism in the subcontinent are long and disputed, the notion of actually carving out a separate Muslim state or states as such had been a relatively late conception—introduced in Choudhry Rahmat Ali's pamphlet of 1933 (Copland, 1991: 50). However, it was not until March 1940, when the All-India Muslim League passed its infamous Lahore Resolution calling for areas in which the Muslims constituted a majority (namely the north-western and eastern zones of India) to be grouped together to form separate independent Muslim states, that the prospect became a live political issue in India. Though their reasons were varied, the Muslim electorate seemed to rally behind the Muslim League in impressive fashion in the 1946 Constituent Assembly elections. With this, and owing to an aggregate of other factors, the plan to partition India along communal lines was officially agreed upon in early June 1947 by the three major stakeholders in the country: the Indian National Congress, the All-India Muslim League, and the representative of the British Crown, Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten.

As a result of the division, the new state of Pakistan was carved out of the north-western and north-eastern wings of the subcontinent, and sandwiched between: approximately one thousand miles of Indian land (Stephenson, 1968). The Muslim-majority provinces of Baluchistan, Sindh, NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and the western portion of Punjab constituted West Pakistan, with the eastern portion of Bengal and the Sylhet district of Assam constituting East Pakistan. Punjab and Bengal were the only two Muslim-majority provinces of British India to be divided along religious lines. This occurred largely due to pressure from the substantial non-Muslim populations residing in those provinces, and their political leaders who fiercely opposed the prospect of their 'homelands' being subject to long-term Muslim domination whether in the form of 'compulsory grouping' as set out in the 1946 Cabinet Mission Plan or the complete partition of India. Despite Mohammed Ali Jinnah's objection to the partitioning of Punjab and Bengal, the non-Muslim stance seemed more coherent. For if Muslims could ask to secede from India despite constituting a mere 23.8 per cent of the national population as per the 1941 census (Census of India 1941: 99), then why could not the non-Muslims of Punjab and Bengal (who allegedly constituted a separate nation), when they not only constituted well over 40 per cent of those provinces and predominated in certain portions of them, not be entitled to demand the partitioning of those provinces along communal lines.

Besides the obvious administrative turmoil associated with division of the subcontinent was the mass exchange of population that took place between the two dominions, resulting in, by the time of the 1951 censuses, 8,229,699 people in India that were 'Born in Pakistan' and 7,226,584 Muslims in Pakistan that were 'Born in India' (Census of India, 1951: 248; Census of Pakistan, 1951: 31). However the true number of refugees would probably have been higher than these figures suggest on account of many such people dying in the period between their arrival and the 1951 census. Many of these refugees often came on foot or bullock cart, while others arrived via overloaded trains (Keller, 1975: 37). These forms of transport, even when escorted by police and military personnel, were highly dangerous and were regularly besieged by looters and marauders belonging to the 'other community' residing in nearby villages or kalifas heading in the opposite direction. In the innumerable 'little incidents' of violence that occurred during Partition, hundreds if not thousands of localised minorities were killed within a matter of a few hours, several of their womenfolk raped and abducted in the presence of their children, siblings, husbands and parents (Talib, [1950] 1991; Brass, 2003; Menon, 2006). In all, it is reasonable to say that this mass exchange of population was arguably both the result of, and a contributor towards, the communal genocide of localised and provincial minority populations.

As mentioned previously, chief among those that, as a group, suffered the most from the debacle of Partition were the Hindu Sindhis. Prior to Partition, Hindu Sindhis were arguably one of the most economically advanced groups in the country. Even after Sindh was detached from the Bombay Presidency in 1936, the minority non-Muslim population in Sindh, admittedly not all of whom were Sindhi, continued to play dominant role in the economy of the province (Khan 2002: 215; Azad, 1996: 1061), with burgeoning urban centres such as Karachi and Hyderabad owing their success primarily to the contribution of the Hindu community, both Sindhi and, to a lesser extent Gujarati and Rajput (Wright, 1991: 302; Rahman 1995: 1008). Furthermore, even though the Hindu Sindhi community was primarily urban rather than rural, forming the majority population in ten of the eleven largest cities in Sindh province and the largest singular communal group in all, they still owned 40 per cent of the cultivatable land in Sindh, which was way in excess of their both their rural and province-wide population (Kothari, 2004: 3888). After Partition, the Hindu Sindhis, unlike most other non-Muslims that were forced flee the territories of would-be/realised Pakistan, did not have a linguistically similar destination within rump India to migrate to. This is because Sindh province, unlike Bengal or Punjab, was awarded to Pakistan in its entirety rather than itself being bifurcated along communal lines. Largely as a consequence, the Hindu Sindhi identity has gradually withered as a result (Aggarwal, 2012: 172). This is not to say that Hindu Sindhis are a destitute group in India or in other parts of the world (Ramey, 2008: 25), quite the contrary, but this economic success stands as quite separate to what has happened to their cultural and linguistic identity. Even for those that remained in Sindh after Partition, their existence is hardly a pleasant one, they subject to palpable discrimination, with their womenfolk often targeted by members of Pakistan's majority community for rape, abduction, and forcible marriage (The Hindu, 2022).

Sporadic Hindu Sindhi calls for the partition of their province

While not as well-known as the calls made by the minority communities of Bengal and Punjab, in the twilight months of Britain's rule in the subcontinent, there were calls by Hindu Sindhis, and others sympathetic to them, to divide their home province with a view to salvaging a portion for rump India. These appeals were made known both directly to the public and also through private letters sent to senior Congressman, who, they probably hoped, would lobby the cause on their behalf.

One view, published on 7 April 1947 in the Lahore-based Sunday Tribune, under the article named 'Partition of Sind: Separate State for Hindus', seemed to capture the gravity of the situation awaiting the Hindu Sindhis in an independent Pakistan, and as such made

an unequivocal demand for the separation of a 'Hindu Sindh', from the rest of the province, without, however, going into any specifics regarding the formula or method for doing so.

The British Government has now made it clear that they wish to quit India latest by June 1948...We are seeing before our own eyes the implementation of policy of down-right crushing of Hindu minority in Sind. The various acts on the anvil in the Sind Legislature make it clear that Hindus shall have no voice whatsoever in future decision which would affect their well-being. I think we cannot look to Congress as it stands today to share our misfortunes. We can remain Congressmen but should make our view-point felt very strongly and firmly. The only course which may be now left open to us is that we should now make it clear that either Mr. Jinnah should clearly and unequivocally give up his idea of a separate Muslim State or we Hindus should demand a separate area to be partitioned in which Hindus in Sind should be able to establish their own government. That area and concomitant Government should be able to join the union of India and should be able to send its member to the Constituent Assembly. Mr. Jinnah cannot deny us this. His argument is that Muslims are 25 per cent of the population of India and that they form their own Muslim State. Applying this logic to the facts in our province, we are more than 30 per cent of the population and on his own saying we belong to a different nation. The action of the Muslim League government in Sind and the acts that are being hurriedly passed and its future policy makes it clear that minorities in Sind cannot expect any safeguard from the League Government in its present mood. We shall be very very happy indeed to see that our Muslim brethren advance materially, mentally and morally and raise the name of India in the Parliament of Nations but they must realise that these cannot be advanced by crushing and exterminating their Hindu brethren.

I therefore think that Mr. Jinnah and his followers should have no objection to granting us a separate Hindu state in our province. The area that should be allotted to us in Sind can be the subject matter of reference to a boundary limitation committee which may consist of some leading international lawyers who may be appointed at the joint request of Hindus and the Muslim League in Sind to some international body (Sunday Tribune, 1947).

The tone in last paragraph in this passage is quite telling, namely 'I therefore think that Mr. Jinnah and his followers should have no objection to granting us a separate Hindu state in our province'. This clearly gives the impression that Sindh was Mr. Jinnah's to divide, that the Hindus of Sindh needed his 'good grace to grant them a portion of their ancestral homeland. Such a submissive tone is in stark contrast to the language used by Master Tara Singh and other politically active Sikhs when referring to the Punjab, where they constituted only 13 per cent of the population of the province and a majority in none of its 30 districts, as the homeland of the Sikhs (Census of India, 1941a: 41-45).

Let the Khalsa Panth now realise the gravity of the situation. I expect every Sikh to do his duty. We shall live or die but not submit to Muslim domination (Master Tara Singh quoted in The Tribune, 1947).

Perhaps calls made with such conviction by high profile Sikhs contributed toward their ultimate demand to partition their home province being taken up by the Indian National Congress and forming the basis of the Partition Plan that all stakeholders agreed to.

In a separate example, a letter to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constitutional Assembly, New Delhi, received on 18 May 1947 from the President of the Sindh Provincial Hindu Sabha, read as follows:

The Hindu Sabha stands for a united India and is opposed to partition. But if Pakistan is inevitable, then the Hindus of Sind demand the partition of Sind by the separation of the Thar Parkar and Hyderabad Districts, with the River Indus as the natural boundary line...[The Muslim League argue] that they are a separate nation...The Sind Hindus are

therefore entitled to a separate homeland to be linked with Indian union. They cannot be coerced to live in Pakistan against their will and in disregard of the democratic principle of self-determination. They have got a bitter foretaste of the Pakistan of the future in Sindh where the Muslim League government, in order to hit the Hindus, has unjustly fixed the proportion of Hindu representation in Government serves on population basis...and filled all the Key-posts with Muslims and passed the Sind University Act and Large Mortgage and Land Alienation Bills on communal considerations in the teeth of unanimous opposition of the members of the Legislature of the minority communities and laid down communal proportion in rationing business and motor bus licenses. The Hindus do not, therefore, expect a fair deal at the hands of the Muslims and insist upon a separate existence to safeguard their religion, culture and economic interests.

The Sabha further demands that the Army should not be divided under any circumstances and that Karachi be declared a free city.

While reference is made to specific territorial units to be severed off from the rest of Sindh, there is no scientific formula cited or rationale for doing so. While reference is made to the river Indus being the 'natural boundary', the fact is that rivers, especially based on certain geology, have a tendency to change course considerably over time, thereby making it a hopeless administrative boundary. Furthermore, while this letter from the President of the Sindh Provincial Hindu Sabha, points to the discrimination faced by Hindus under the Muslim League provincial government, it does not allude to discrimination of a violent nature, nor does it appear to anticipate anything approaching an all-out ethnic cleansing of Hindus the scale of which was to take place only a few months later. The absence of large scale communal violence in Sindh, by mid-May 1947, distinguishes it from Punjab and Bengal, and possibly may account for yet another reason as to why such calls to partition Sindh appeared to fall on deaf ears.

In a response to a question posed by journalists regarding the possibility of partitioning Sindh, with a view to salvaging a portion for India, the high-ranking Congressman, Jairamdas Daulatram, himself a Hindu Sindhi remarked that such a demand ought to be made on district-wise basis and for such units where the Hindus were in a majority (The Tribune, 1947a). Such a response was ill-sighted at best, for, had he bothered to consult the Census of India 1941 statistics, his proposed solution would mean that not one of the eight districts in Sindh province could go to India. The same criticism can be levelled at the following plea by K.D. Karra:

The country is passing through an ordeal. Mr. Jinnah is pressing for Pakistan. Now the case of dividing the Punjab and Bengal provinces into two parts has also been taken up by the Congress, the Hindus and the Sikhs. But nobody is doing anything to secure partition of Sind. The Sind province was separated from the Bombay Presidency by the consent of the Congress. The case for partition of Sind rests, inter alia on the following grounds: First, the minorities can have serious apprehensions in view of the bitter experiences of the Punjab, NWFP and Bengal. Secondly, the non-Muslims in Sind are suffering from a serious handicap. They have never been connected with army, whereas the non-Muslims in the Punjab are martial people. Thirdly, the attitude of the purely Muslim League Ministry is openly hostile and vindictive towards the minorities. The Hindus of Sind claim that the districts of Karachi, Tharpurkar and Sanghar be excluded from Sind Pakistan. They should be allowed to join the Bombay Presidency or to federate with the All-India Union. The Hindus declare that they are in majority in these districts and their case for separation is based on the same grounds as are adduced by the leaguers in defence of Pakistan (The Tribune, 1947b).

Declaring one's group as a majority in districts, and actually constituting a majority there as per an authoritative statistical survey, were, sadly for K.D. Karra, and others like him, not the same thing.

Overall such voices to partition Sindh were fairly sporadic, lacking in forcefulness and, more importantly, any manner meticulous consideration or co-ordination, so unsurprisingly failed to achieve the critical mass of support from the wider Hindu Sindhi population or for that matter the Indian National Congress at the national level. Beyond what has been inferred thus far, one can only speculate as to the underlying reasons for why this was the case, but they probably would include one or a combination of the following factors. First, was a distinctive lack of leadership among the Hindu Sindhi population, in that they did not have anyone of the stature of a Master Tara Singh or Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to represent their interests. The prominent Hindu Sindhis at the time, such as the aforementioned Jairamdas Daulatram and Acharya Kriplani, were almost entirely Congressman with little to no ideological autonomy from the core leadership of the party so as to represent the acute concerns of the Hindu community in Sindh. Second, relate to the very genuine economic interests the community held in urban Sindh, which, both they and certain representatives from the Indian National Congress, perhaps felt could be jeopardized if a partition of the province was touted. Third, has to do with the over-estimated belief in the strength of inter-communal relations in Sindh (Khan, 2002: 218; Aggrawal, 2002: 84), which, of course, was a huge, and frankly unforgivable, miscalculation. While it is clear that it was chiefly the arrival of Muhajirs into Sindh, especially in Karachi, that triggered the ethnic cleansing of Hindus, it is clear that Muslim Sindhis were more than complicit in performing that expulsion. The fourth, held by certain disgruntled persons, was the ‘Nehru factor’, such as his complete lack of political dexterity, such as, only two months prior to agreeing to Partition, expecting Sindh to declare itself independent despite the fact that the Muslim League had already ousted the Sindh United Party from its provincial elections in 1946 (*The Tribune*, 1947c); and far the more scathing view that Nehru actually held a personal distain for Hindu Sindhis and therefore was less than concerned about the plight that awaited them. In a letter to Padmaja Naidu only weeks before Partition, Nehru wrote: ‘I do not feel attracted to Sindh. I have nothing to say about it’ (quoted in Anand 1996: 55). Irrespective of the reasons for why the call to the partition Sindh did not develop up any kind of momentum, this should not detract from being able to objectively assess, albeit academically, whether or not a firm legal case existed for the partition of Sindh. And that is what will be done in the remainder of this article.

Terms and Parameters

Before tackling the question about whether the partition of Sindh was a legitimate option, it is important to clarify that this author does not believe that the creation of separate Muslim nation was a legitimate demand, nor did its ‘settlement’ conform to anything resembling universal norms of justice. However, for the sake of argument, this article will take the view that since all the major political stakeholders of India consented to the Partition Plan in June 1947, the case of whether the partition of Sindh itself was a legitimate option will be judged against the explicit and implicit terms and parameters established by this Plan. These were, broadly as follows:

- A) The territory of British India would be divided along communal lines between Muslim-majority provinces and non-Muslim majority provinces—resulting in the creation of the dominions of Pakistan and Hindustan (rump India).
- B) The terms of the Partition Plan applied only to the territory of British India. Princely states were legally afforded the option to declare independence, join Pakistan or join India.
- C) Provinces of British India situated at the proposed intersection of Pakistan and Hindustan could, where suitable, themselves be partitioned between the two dominions.
- D) There was no stated minimum numerical threshold or percentage that a provincial minority needed to meet before such a province could be divided on communal lines.

E) Any boundary lines drawn across provinces to be divided were not required to adhere to existing administrative boundaries as a unit of division.

Given that Sindh was indeed a province of British India, and would likely be situated at the intersection between the two dominions, it appeared to meet the preliminary qualification for being partitioned. But in order to answer this question with any kind serious rigour, it is necessary to draw attention to the terms of reference that were set by the Boundary Commission to implement the division of the provinces of Bengal and Punjab. The terms of reference read as follows:

The Boundary Commission is instructed to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of [Bengal and Punjab] on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. In doing so, it will also take into account other factors.

There are three crucial points to consider with regards to these terms of reference. Firstly, the division would have to be implemented in two parts. Secondly, the division needed to be able to separate contiguous majority areas of Muslims from non-Muslims. And third, 'other factors' would be considered in the award.

Applying the Boundary Commission's terms of reference to Hindu Sindhi case

For those unfamiliar with the communal demographics in Sindh in 1947, the non-Muslim population of Sindh constituted only about 29.5 per cent of the entire province and they tended to be concentrated in the urban centres, as opposed to Muslim Sindhis, who were overwhelmingly rural in their spread (Census of India, 1941: 98; Census of India, 1941b: 28). However, to salvage a 'Hindu Sindh' by detaching Hindu-majority urban cities such as Hyderabad, Sukkur or Larkana from the rest of the province would be a violation of the terms of reference laid out by the Boundary Commission, since that would result in Sindh being divided into more than two parts. The possibility of detaching Karachi on its own would have preserved this two-part principle, and, being a port city, it could have been accessible through sea-link with the rest of rump India in the same manner that the western and eastern wings of Pakistan were deemed accessible to one another via the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately for the Hindu Sindhi case, the plausibility of this was essentially non-existent. And that was because Karachi was touted to be the capital of Pakistan and arguably the entire viability of this new state hinged largely on this burgeoning urban centre being awarded to them.

Outside of city-level geography, the only substantial expanse of Sindh territory that had anything close to a dense concentration of non-Muslims was the Thar Parkar district that bordered the Rajputana Agency. Being a district bordering the Rajputana Agency, its detachment would not have violated the territorial contiguity of Pakistan's western wing. Moreover, the area of Thar Parkar district was 13,649 square miles, which was 28.4 per cent of the entire area of Sindh (Census of India, 1941b: 44-45), virtually identical to the broader non-Muslim population of the province, thereby a seemingly just arrangement using the criteria of demographics alone. Yet, in spite of this, there remained two main obstructions. The first was that, despite the relative concentration of Hindus in Thar Parkar, this was only so in comparison to the spread of the Hindu population across Sindh overall which relative thin in all other districts as per the 1941 census. Indeed, even in Thar Parkar, the non-Muslim population was still marginally shy of the majority threshold at 49.7 per cent (Census of India, 1941b: 28). Second, relates to the absence of assured administrative contiguity with Hindu-majority provinces that were confirmed to stay as part of rump India. But did these two obstacles, by themselves, delegitimise the case for the partition of Sindh? In the view of this author, it did not.

With respect to the absence of an outright majority of Hindus in the Thar Parkar, it must be noted that besides the Boundary Commission being instructed, by their own terms of reference, to divide the provinces of Bengal and Punjab according to 'contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims' it was also obliged to take into consideration 'other

factors'. However, these 'other factors' were not given any legal precision, and indeed, even Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan, who was one of the non-Muslim justices on the Boundary Commission board, lamented:

His Excellency the Viceroy [Mountbatten has never provided] any exhaustive definition of the phrase 'other factors' in any of his statements or speeches...If the population factor was really the sole basis of division, I do not see what necessity there was of employing the phrase 'in doing so the Commission will take into account other factors'...The Muslim League did not [in] any shape say that other factors should be defined...Similarly the Congress and the Sikhs did not give any definition of the words 'other factors' by clearly including in them the case of the integrity of the Sikh community or other economic factors now mentioned by them.

Nonetheless, in spite of Justice Mahajan's very notable frustration, it would be slightly hyperbolic to suggest that there was not a general grasp of what it would cover, namely, among other things, economical, historical and cultural factors, such as that which had been referred to in parliamentary deliberations in Westminster at the time. In this regard, given that the Hindu population in Sindh made a disproportionately high economic contribution to the province, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this could serve as sufficient basis to award Thar District to the Hindu community. Furthermore, though Islam did indeed enter the subcontinent through Sindh, which left in its tracks a rich Sufi culture that fused together many of the traditional elements of orthodox Islam with local Hindu traditions, it is also clear that Sindh, and the wider Indus Valley basin, was in fact the cradle of Vedic civilization (Ramey 2008: 16). Moreover, the Hindu Sindhis had their own shrines and deities that were unique to their province (Thapan, 2005: 209-211). In other words, Sindh was more than just mere territory. For the Hindu Sindhis, and arguably the Hindu community more widely, it was their ancestral land, it was their holy land, which at the very least deserved partial salvaging.

An unsympathetic legalistic retort may be to suggest that 'other factors' were a secondary consideration, and that the primary focus was on performing any prospective division according to contiguous areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. Given that a definitive description of 'other factors' were never agreed upon, nor was there an official agreement about their relative importance or weightage, such a retort may well seem valid. However, by moving away from the text of the Boundary Commission's terms of reference towards how it was actually applied in the partition of Bengal and Punjab, there is clear evidence that, in certain areas, 'other factors' had a tangibly greater impact on the award than even Muslim and non-Muslim demographics. For instance, the awarding of most of Gurdaspur district to India despite its bare Muslim majority, allegedly, so that India could maintain the link road to the Kashmir valley serves as a fitting example. And a far more decisive example was the awarding of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to East Pakistan despite its 97 per cent non-Muslim majority population (After Partition, 1948: 31), simply because the awarding of Calcutta to India meant the eastern wing of Pakistan needed another functioning port. Given such precedence, it is difficult to make the case that the absence of an overwhelming Hindu majority in Thar Parkar was somehow an insurmountable obstacle in the way of its detachment from the rest of Pakistan-bound Sindh province.

The second main obstacle in the way of Thar Parkar being partitioned off from the rest of Sindh was the absence of assured contiguity with truncated India. During the Partition plan deliberations, and very much in line with the basic principle of the Lahore Resolution, it was made clear that the partitioning of provinces would be done with a view to creating a neat international border between the two dominions, thereby ruling out the prospect of creating enclaves of Hindustan in Pakistan or enclaves of Pakistan in Hindustan. While the detaching of Thar Parkar, as mentioned, would not disturb the contiguity of Sindh with other Muslim majority provinces of the country, be it west Punjab or the North West Frontier Province, being a landlocked district it needed to have territorial contiguity with the rest of rump India. The problem was that both the Rajputana

Agency to its east, and Cutch to its south, corresponding to present day Rajasthan and Gujarat respectively, were princely states and thus outside the Partition Plan. In other words, despite being ruled by Hindu princes, presiding over solid Hindu majority populations, these states were not assured of acceding to rump India, as they had the option to declare independence or accede to Pakistan. Any of the last two options would have left the Thar Parkar without administrative contiguity.

However even such unfavourable circumstances did not invalidate the case for Thar Parkar's detachment from the rest of Sindh. Indeed, three avenues could have been explored, though, admittedly, only one was practical. Of the two unrealistic avenues, a land corridor could have been proposed which connected Thar Parkar to the Arabian Sea through the southern portions of Hyderabad and Karachi districts. This would have allowed the potential for a sea-link to operate between this entity and Bombay. The glaring problem here was that Karachi was the only functioning port in Sindh, and this city would form Pakistan's capital city. While another port could have been established east of Karachi, as it was in the case of Port Qasim in 1980, this was not an immediate resolution. The second unrealistic avenue was to get the princely state of Cutch to sign a preliminary instrument of accession with India, thereby guaranteeing that Thar Parkar retained administrative frontier with confirmed Indian territory that itself had direct access to the Arabian Sea and thereby connection with the rest of rump India irrespective of what neighbouring princely states opted to do after Britain's departure. The difficulty here was that Thar Parkar and Cutch did not have firm landed connectivity. The Rann of Kutch, a huge expanse of saltmarsh in the northern half of Cutch formed a natural impassable frontier between Thar Parkar and the landed portion of Cutch state. While the development of a road infrastructure could have been explored, these were not immediate or pragmatic fixes. The third, and quite frankly, only realistic avenue by which the partition of Thar Parkar could have been a legitimate option to pursue was if the princely states of the Rajputana Agency had decisively announced their unwavering intention to accede to rump India. Unlike in the case of Cutch, the Thar Parkar had firm land, road, rail, economic and cultural links with the princely states of the Rajputana Agency.

On the face of it therefore, the detachment of Thar Parkar from the rest of Sindh was the most viable means for Hindu Sindhis to salvage a portion of their home province, providing, of course, the princely states of the Rajputana Agency had demonstrated an unwavering commitment to union with India. However, as certain discerning historians would already be aware, despite being ruled by a Hindu prince, presiding over a solidly large Hindu majority population, one of the Rajputana states, Jodhpur, and its Maharajah, Hanwant Singh, that shared a substantial landed border with Thar Parkar flirted with the idea, and 'came within an ace', of joining Pakistan owing to the seemingly more favourable terms that Jinnah was willing to concede (Ahluwalia, 1974: 176-178; Copland, 1991: 43). The reasons for this probably include one or a combination of wanting to preserve as much of his royal power as possible in a post-British Raj era, pre-existing economic ties with Pakistan-bound territories to their west, as well as a sense that he and the Marwari people had more in common culturally with an entity that was being carved out of the north-western portion of the subcontinent than a truncated India that would likely include people that were quite dissimilar from their own subjects.

In a nutshell therefore, had a clear agenda for the detachment of Thar Parkar been lobbied for by the Hindu Sindhis, with support of the Indian National Congress leadership, it needed to be done in conjunction with securing an early and definitive accession of Jodhpur and other Rajputana Agency states into rump India. This, palpably, was absent.

Conclusion

In the weeks and months leading up to the formal Partition of the subcontinent, most objective readers would concede that the Hindu Sindhis, had, at the very least, a strong

moral case to call for Sindh to be divided on the basis of religion in the same manner that the non-Muslims of Bengal and Punjab had successfully done in their home provinces. Going beyond that relatively uncontroversial starting point, this article has demonstrated that, through the terms of reference laid out by the Boundary Commission of Bengal and Punjab, and the manner in which those terms were implemented in practice, a case for separating Sindh on religious lines could have been lobbied for, and, with the right political manoeuvring and support, likely achieved. To this end, the most plausible form of division would have been to demand that Thar Parkar, which made up approximately 28.4 per cent of the territory of Sindh, roughly in line with the proportion of non-Muslims across Sindh overall, be detached from the rest of this Pakistan-bound province and retained by rump India. Admittedly, even for certain members of the Hindu Sindhi population at the time this would have been a difficult sell. This is because for certain Hindu urban elites, the awarding of what was essentially barren desert land to their community, given their economic contribution and cultural connection to Sindh, could have been construed as an insult. For other Hindu Sindhis, such a proposal could have been seen as an unnecessary provocation to the majority Muslims of the province, the latter of whom could have been instigated to perform a population transfer, and that too, for such a meagre prize. In the end of course, the Hindu Sindhis got neither a portion of the province for themselves nor were they spared ethnic cleansing.

While lobbying for the Thar Parkar to be detached from the rest of Sindh was the most viable means of salvaging a portion of their home province, it would only be possible through the maintenance of territorial contiguity with rump India. However the princely states of Rajputana Agency, chief among those Jodhpur, needed to be assured of union with rump India, which clearly was not the case. So incredibly tragic that Sindh, foundational to India's civilization, a land etched into lyrics of Rabrinath Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana*, was lost in its entirety to Pakistan.

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