Sikh Refugee Contribution towards Khalistani Nationalism

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Abstract

It has been said that ethno-national identity, despite being 'psychological' in constitution, is territorialized in place. Indeed it is virtually impossible to conceive of any identity, particularly one that is ethno-national in variety, which does not contain a strong territorial underpinning. Yet refugees that are driven out from their homeland on account of their ethno-national identity are typically considered to constitute a de-territorialized group. However, refugees do not necessarily lose a sense of ethno-national identity after being de-territorialized. This paper contends that de-territorialized refugees, upon arrival into their host societies, endeavour to re-territorialize their persecuted identity and that such a process will likely prompt the rise of ethno-national conflict. This claim will be demonstrated with reference to the Sikh refugees that arrived from the territories of to-be/newly established West Pakistan into the eastern portion of Punjab that had remained part of India following the partition of the country in 1947.

Keywords: *Sikh; Refugee; Partition; Punjab; Khalistan; Conflict.*

Introduction

Re-Territorialization of Persecuted Identity

It has been said that ethno-national identity, despite being 'psychological' in constitution, is territorialized in place (Malkki, 1992; Oommen, 1994: 457). Indeed it is virtually impossible to conceive of any identity, particularly one that is ethno-national in variety, which does not contain a strong territorial underpinning. This is true of ethno-national groups that have lived in relatively stable conditions for centuries as well as groups that have been forcibly displaced from their ancestral homelands. Indeed, it can be observed as a general rule that refugee populations grow more conscious of that aspect of their identity which had been persecuted in their departed homeland. After arriving into their host societies, the de-territorialized refugees endeavour to re-territorialize their persecuted identity (Kataria, 2021). Indeed such a process is integral to the very survival of this identity among the group, similar to how an uprooted plant must be replanted immediately or else will inevitably wither away and die. The way in which the refugee persecuted identity is re-territorialized, however, is not uniform but can span across two main forms of expression. The first of these expressions is lower-level re-territorialization wherein the group projects and defends its persecuted identity in a purely localised realm, through an array of potential outlets, be it displaying a general intolerance towards outsider groups, living in ghettoized communities or wearing traditional clothing. In terms of wider-level re-territorialization, this is where are an association to an explicit ethno-national territorial unit is being underscored. The number of wider-level outlets is five in total, these include the following:

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- WL-1: Passive reference to departed homeland. This is when a group does not entertain any realistic hope or will of returning to their departed homeland yet maintain a cultural association with it, mainly for reasons of wishing to maintain group distinctiveness from their hosts.

- WL-2: Assertive demand to return to their departed homeland. This is when a group attempts to return to, or reclaim, their homeland.

- WL-3: Tying persecuted identity with that of host nation. This is when the group attempts to link the ethnic identity that had faced persecution in their homeland to that of the host nation.

- WL-4: Pursuit of an autonomy movement. This is when the group attempts to carve out some measure of political autonomy for themselves. This can be done through conventional institutional means, such as demanding fixed representation at the centre, or through demanding an administrative unit or province of their own, whilst, officially, not challenging the sanctity of the national borders.

- WL-5: Pursuit of a secessionist or irredentist movement. This is when the group attempts to carve out a state of their own, which could consist of a portion, all, or none, of their host state's territory.

The particular forms of expression and outlets subscribed to depend largely upon the group's memory of exile as well as the surrounding contextual conditions at any given time. Furthermore, the forms and outlets subscribed to by the refugee group, or rather by individuals within the group, can, and most probably will, modify throughout time. Curiously engagement in the re-territorialization process is not restricted to the actual refugee population only, but rather very often percolates down to their post-event offspring who have eternalised their family's turbulent re-location and thereby suffer from the knowledge that they too are divorced from their true homeland. The very act of re-territorialization, however, whether done by the refugees or their post-event offspring is not without material consequence. For, re-territorialization is not merely a harmless exercise that helps re-establish, albeit cognitively, some sense of collective self for the displaced group, rather the very process itself is laden with substantial conflict potential as it can help fuel, or justify support for, tangible political goals that are likely to be met with resistance by out-groups, and, in certain cases, by fellow in-group members. The aim of this paper is to assess how the re-territorialization process manifested itself with respect to one particular case study, namely the Sikh refugees[i] that arrived from the territories of to-be/newly established West Pakistan into the eastern portion of Punjab that had remained part of India as a result of the partition of the country take took place in 1947. In doing so, it will establish whether this influx of Sikh refugees, through their engagement in the re-territorialization process, contributed towards the rise of ethno-national conflict in post-1947 Indian Punjab.

Partition of India and the Sikh refugees

As indeed was the case for many of the British-ruled holdings that managed to finally rid themselves of their imperial overlords during the twentieth century, India suffered the ordeal of territorial vivisection as a precursor to securing her independence. Experts in divide et impera, the British imperialists played an instrumental role in both instigating and then placating certain politically prominent Muslims with the fiction that they were a separate nation from that of their Hindu compatriots who, as such, warranted a political state of their own. As a result of the partition of India, which was implemented in August 1947, a new Muslim majority state of Pakistan was carved out of the north-western and

north-eastern wings of the subcontinent, and sandwiched between: approximately one thousand miles territory belonging to the now truncated India. The Muslim-majority provinces of Baluchistan, Sind, 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. Partition not only irrevocably changed the political geography of the subcontinent but it was preceded, accompanied and followed by a mass communal genocide of provincial and district minority populations. One of the principal theatres for this barbarism was the Punjab, one of only three provinces[ii] in 'British India' to be split along communal lines and allotted to the Pakistani and Indian dominions respectively. As a result of the violence, minorities were, in many cases, forced to flee from their homelands and cross over into the relative safe-haven of the dominion that 'represented' their community i.e. Pakistan for Muslims and truncated India for Hindus and Sikhs.

Although the vast majority of Sikh refugees came from west Punjab, there were substantial Sikh populations based in the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir (a princely state that was de facto divided between Pakistan and India after the first Kashmir War of 1947-1948), in Pashto-speaking NWFP, a small presence in Sind, and an extremely sparse one in Baluchistan.[iii] It is generally acknowledged that the Sikhs, together with Hindus, were by-and-large a well-to-do population in the territories that would become West Pakistan. Indeed a disproportionately high number of urban businesses, banks and money-lenders, were in the hands of non-Muslims. Furthermore, the Sikhs, in particular those belonging to the Jat caste, had acquired the distinction of being the 'best agriculturalists' in the whole of India (Singh, 1945: 64). Jat Sikhs, many of whom had migrated from the eastern portion of Punjab state towards the west in the 1880s, were largely responsible for transforming the barren wastelands of districts such as Montgomery and Sheikhupura into thriving agricultural success stories. These 'canal colonies', as they were known, were nine in total on the eve of Partition, and all, without exception, were awarded to Pakistan (Krishan, 2004: 80). Given their sheer economic dexterity alone, it is evident that the decision of the numerous Sikh families to move eastwards was taken lightly. While some Sikhs in the territory earmarked by 'Pakistanists' began fleeing their homes in late 1946 and early 1947, owing to Muslim League-led orchestrated attacks on minority populations in Hazara, Rawalpindi and Multan districts, the decision of the vast majority of their group to migrate further eastwards occurred once it became clear that Punjab would be divided along communal lines (and the eastern section awarded to India) and that conditions for non-Muslims in Pakistan would be intolerable if not virtually impossible.

By 1948, save certain pockets in Sind province, virtually the entire non-Muslim population of West Pakistan had been removed, going down from 22.9 per cent to 2.9 per cent in just a matter of months.[iv] An accurate approximation of the number people killed or abducted may never be known, however, together with the Muslim victims of Partition, this figure is assumed to be within the hundreds of thousands at least if not into the low millions (Menon and Bhasin, 1993; Hill et al, 2008: 155). The Sikh expellees that made it to truncated India tended to settle down in ethnically familiar east Punjab, in particular those districts most proximate to the new international border as well as within the territories of Sikh-ruled princely states such as Faridkot and Patiala. Such was the demographic upheaval in Punjab that the Sikhs, who prior to 1947 held a mere 13.22 per cent of the population of British Punjab and were so thinly dispersed that they failed to command a majority in any one of the 29 districts of the province, actually became a majority in four out of remaining thirteen districts (Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepure, and Amritsar) and the largest group in another one (Gurdaspur). Sikhs were also now the largest group (49.29 per cent), though not the majority, in the new administrative body of PEPSU (created in 1948) which consisted of all former Punjab princely states barring Bahawalpur (Census of India, 1951b: 298-299). The Hindu refugees on the other hand, tended to settle at some distance away from the Pakistan border, with many either

heading for the South-eastern parts of Punjab (territory which would later constitute Haryana post-1966), or actually further afield to parts of India that were markedly dissimilar, culturally and geographically, from that of their ancestral homes (Kamath, 1984: 139; Sharma, 1994: 337; Copland, 2002: 701).

Re-territorialization of Sikh persecuted identity in post-Partition Indian Punjab

What this paper will now attempt to do, by using a plethora of qualitative evidence, is assess how the Sikh refugees re-territorialized their persecuted Sikh identity after their arrival in post-Partition Indian Punjab, and establish whether this contributed towards the rise of consequent ethno-national conflict.

Lower-Level Re-Territorialization

From what can be discerned, there were three main lower-level outlets through which the Sikh refugees sought to engage to re-territorialize their persecuted identity.

The first outlet was to resort to, or aid in, localised communal violence against non-Sikhs. While this particular lower-level outlet was often deployed in order to satisfy an associated wider-level goal (i.e. WL-4/WL-5), it is clear that for many refugees the 'reprisal' killings were an end in itself, akin to what Coser (1956: 49) termed 'non-realistic' conflict. For instance, one interviewee, Lakshman Singh Duggal, who admitted to murdering a 'handful' of innocent Muslims and briefly harbouring a woman abductee, seemed to indicate that his chief motive was more therapeutic than material:

> "Their ghosts [of the Muslim victims he killed] still surround me…I have to say there is rarely a day that goes by that I don't think about what I'd done…I do regret my actions now, absolutely…but in truth, at that time…for a good while at least…finishing these Muslims made me feel at ease…I suppose I wanted them [the Muslims] to feel the pain I had felt, and will always feel, at losing my sister and father to the bastards that plundered my village…[getting increasingly emotional]…I felt this [killing of Muslims] was the only way the fire inside of me could be put out."[v]

This perhaps serves to explain why the tactics of violence used against the Muslims in the east, such as to attack refugee convoys that were already on their way to Pakistan, far exceeded that 'necessary' to prompt their departure (Copland, 2002: 697). Admittedly, refugees, simply by their mere presence, also served as an inspiration for their non-refugee co-religionists in the performance of anti-Muslim attacks as documented in the Communist Party pamphlet at the time entitled 'Save Punjab, Save India' (1947: 8, 14).

Of course, this particular outlet of lower-level re-territorialization was not aimed solely against the Muslims but, in decades subsequent, and together with some major changes in the shape of their memory of Partition (Kataria, 2021), extended to the Hindu 'enemy' also. This extension occurred partly because conflict behaviour against the 'original object,' i.e. Muslim Punjabis, was blocked (Coser, 1956: 40). Furthermore, it seems that members of refugee families that did not engage in 'reprisals' against Muslims in the east or forcibly obtain evacuee property (thus holding deeper pent-up feelings of injustice and even 'shame' at not being able to exact revenge), were more likely to engage in violence during the Khalistan movement that spanned the period between 1981 and 1994.

A Sikh refugee who did not participate in the Partition violence but did so during the Khalistan movement stated the following:

"We lost everything we had, we came here penniless…Regretfully I was just a boy at the time, I was my parents' eldest [child] but was still physically weak for my age, had I been older I may have been able to do something to protect the honour of my people…we lost everything but damage to our honour was more upsetting…I used to think maybe I could have done something…[Despite saying he has always considered Khalistan a 'silly idea,' he admitted to 'foolishly' helping to prompt the departure of some local Hindu shopkeepers during the militant movement. When asked if he had any regrets?]…Feel sorry for them [the Hindus]?...Why not ask the Hindus in Delhi if they are sorry for burning our people alive?…I haven't heard even one apology yet...Let's not forget we Sikhs have suffered more dislocation than anyone else, the Partition [of 1947] cut us right down the middle? Who was there to feel sorry for us, what sympathy did we get from India?...In fact, rather than help us, [Vallabhbhai] Patel called us a 'criminal tribe,' can you believe that?...After everything we had done for the freedom of the country, they are calling us such names [emphasis added]."[vi]

A Sikh refugee who had participated in the Partition violence but did not participate during the Khalistan movement, made the following observation:

"It is impossible for you to imagine the transformation that people went through from the periods of calm beforehand, to the hell that was unleashed during those bitter months…A [Muslim] person who I had despised two days beforehand because of an argument we had over some trivial matter actually came to my rescue at the risk of his own life…Yet people who you thought were sincere, who you could depend on to remain calm, went completely berserk…it was like that for me, I could never have imagined that I was capable of killing another being, it was simply not in my character… but it was the conditions that drove me to it…[When asked about whether the Khalistani militancy was justified] No, not at all, Partition thought me a lesson that this kind of violence can only bring misery ultimately, there is no positive which can come out of it, because the people who get killed ultimately are always the ones who are innocent, the instigators on the other hand only spark the flames, disappear during the fighting, and then profit from the misery afterwards [emphasis added]."[vii]

A second lower-level outlet subscribed to involved Sikh refugee attempts to ghettoise (Puri et al, 1999: 40), if not completely monopolise, the space around which they had settled. This was particularly apparent in urban centres. The chief means for doing so, especially true of those Sikhs from castes with a mercantile tradition, namely the Khatris and Aroras, both of whom native to west Punjab (McLeod, 1976: 98-99), was to not only enter into the service industry hitherto dominated by Hindu banias, but to do so through 'aggressive' means (Keller, 1975: 3, 81-82). This aggression, stemming largely (though by no means solely) from their Partition experiences, led them to (among other things) adopt a near risk-averse attitude to business.[viii] Providing evidence in this regard, Dr Mohinder Singh, remarked:

> "You know there was a joke about us…it goes, when the British came back to Delhi in 1948 a few months after they left, they asked someone in the restaurant, 'Where are all those tall handsome waiters that used to serve us last time gone?'…and the owner replies 'The Sikh refugees?...They are all running big businesses across the city'…[Laughter]…You see when we came the local banias considered us a threat to their enterprise…So what we used to do is buy stocks of sugar, and then sell them at cost price…The banias said, 'Oh they'll never make any profit, what do they know about business?'...but then since everyone was buying from us we put them out of work [emphasis added]."[ix]

Clearly such entry and behaviour, while spelling many positive impacts for their host society, came almost exclusively at the expense of the Hindu bania (Singh, 1987: 222). This gave the 'business rivalry' a manifestly communal dimension (Bonacich, 1972: 553; Weiner 1978: 7). In addition, and giving way to occasions of intra-group competition, the fact that there were numerous incidents of wealthy Sikh refugees extending financial support (sometimes even across caste lines) to fellow Sikh refugees, a privilege which seldom stretched to Hindus, would suggest that their entry into business, and 'aggression' in such matters, had at least a partial communal motive in conjunction with more obvious financial ones.

A third lower-level re-territorialization outlet involved refugees voting for, and engaging with, principally 'communal-leaning' political parties. In the Sikh refugee case, this was seen in their support of the Shriomani Akali Dal, which was disproportionately high,[x] as opposed to apparently more 'secular' parties such as the Indian National Congress. Hukum Singh, whose long political career exhibited strong communal sensibilities, admitted that his

> "purpose, objective or functions, whatever you might call them, after joining the Constituent Assembly, were confined mainly to two spheres…One was service to the refugees because [he] was also a refugee, and…had suffered much in Pakistan. And the other was securing safeguards for the minorities [i.e. Sikhs]."[xi]

It is also worth noting that Hindu refugees, sharing similar Partition-related experiences and grievances to that of the Sikh refugees, also exhibited a political 'shift to the right' by forming a key constituency for the Jan Sangh/BJP (Gupta, 1996: 22; Kothari, 2004: 3888).

Wider-Level Re-Territorialization

In addition to lower-level forms of expression, Sikh refugees, upon their arrival into post-Partition Indian Punjab, re-territorialized their persecuted identity through wider-level means as well. However, particular wider-level outlets have had greater prominence at certain times than have others since 1947.

Immediate Aftermath of Partition (1947-1950)

In the period immediately following their arrival into truncated Punjab/India, it appears that the Sikh refugees sought to re-territorialize their persecuted identity by subscribing

to, albeit to varying degrees, all five wider-level outlets available: namely, WL-1, WL-2, WL-3, WL-4, WL-5.

Passive association with their departed homeland (WL-1) was demonstrated by virtually all refugees observed. This involved; (1) frequent reference, at times of memory recall, to their former, ancestral homes, agricultural lands as well as Sikh cultural and historic sites; (2) attaching the name of their ancestral village/town to their own surname, or maintaining/adding territorial reference to their former villages or towns in their business names; and (3) displaying, what might be described as, subtle 're-unificationist sentiment,' such as viewing Partition with deep regret, or by favouring 'softer borders,'[xii] or advocating some form of confederation[xiii] between all former Indian territories.

There were also assertive demands to return to their homeland (WL-2). This outlet was subscribed to for the shortest period of time out of the five outlets available, perhaps, at most, for a few months after their arrival. Evidence that this outlet was subscribed to at all comes from numerous refugee testimonies which suggest that they had assumed that migration would only be a 'temporary measure' and had, in consequence, left many of their movables in West Pakistan or failed to sell their assets prior to setting off eastward.[xiv] In fact, many refugees conceded that 'only after some time' did it dawn on them that the migration was a permanent arrangement. Once this became apparent, they appeared to retreat from this outlet and engaged in other more feasible outcomes. It was only staunch, but increasingly marginalised, nationalists, chiefly those who had served in the Indian National Army under leaders Subhas Chandra Bose and General Mohan Singh, who continued to support this outlet (this was in concurrence with their wider vision to destroy Pakistan and bring about a complete re-unification of India). This 're-unificationist' sentiment was observed during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War wherein many Sikh soldiers, both refugees and non, were hoping that India would be able capture the Lahore, the former capital of Maharjah Ranjit Singh's empire, in their westward advances.

Tying persecuted identity with that of India (WL-3), though this was a moderately popular form of articulation, it must be said that, and contrary to the suggestion made by Kamath (1984: 139), this was problematic for both Sikhs and Hindus. This is largely because of; (1) the bitterness toward the Indian National Congress for having 'sold out' on the refugees by consenting to Partition; and (2) the dilemma arising from the fact 'their' homes, and what they understood as constituting 'their' Punjab, 'their' India, now lay under Pakistani sovereignty. Consequently, tying their persecuted identity with their host-nation, which despite still being India by name, seemed slightly feigned. However, it is probably true that Sikh refugees had more difficulty than the Hindu refugees in this regard (Narang 1986: 28-29), principally because they held fears, whether legitimate or not, that their unique religious identity would be absorbed into the majority one. Therefore WL-3 came with the condition that it could persist only as long as the Indian state and Hindu majority respected the Sikh community and its religious freedoms.

Pursuit of an autonomy movement (WL-4) was undoubtedly the most popular outlet of wider-level re-territorialization expressed by the Sikh refugees. Evidence for this is twofold; (1) their choice of destination, as mentioned previously, unlike most Hindu refugees, tended to be east Punjab; and (2) their role in prompting Muslims to leave east Punjab, thereby 'sanctifying' their new land for their hitherto persecuted Sikh identity to flourish. Although fairly obvious, the main reason for why WL-4 was the most popular at this stage was because it was the most desirable outlet among the feasible ones available.

As far as pursuit of a secessionist or irredentist movement (WL-5) is concerned, while there were reports of armed Akali bands distributing leaflets across east Punjab in the name of the 'Government of Khalistan' and the Maharajah of Patiala allegedly contemplating heading a confederation of Sikh states (Dhanwantri and Joshi, 1947: 24-

25), this was perhaps the least endorsed wider-level outlet. The following reasons give an indication as to why this was the case (in the order of the first being the most important); (1) it was simply not feasible to carve out a separate state of their own; (2) there was an awareness, at least among politically alert Sikhs, that Nehru had promised them a 'glow of freedom' in India and so it was thought that he would do good on that; (3) there was a belief that India would pursue a path of secularism, be it in the French tradition of laïcité or the Hindu manner of sarva dharma sambhava, meaning that the Sikh religion and identity would be able enjoy sufficient freedom; and (4) the Sikh refugees held a sense of compassion for the Hindu Punjabis, particular those that were also made refugees, and so did not want to behave 'selfishly' like the Muslims who had demanded their own state irrespective of the wishes of other communities historically rooted to the Punjab.

Push for Autonomy (1950-1966)

In the period between 1950 and 1966 the choice of wider-level outlets subscribed to by the Sikh refugees witnessed considerable change from what had been the case during the previous epoch. While WL-1 remained quite popular; both WL-2 and WL-5 (for reasons pertaining to a lack of feasibility) virtually ceased to be articulated. At the same time WL-4 not only remained the most prevalent but grew even more so and, seemingly, at the direct expense of WL-3.

The clearest evidence in support of the view that WL-4 was an increasingly popular outlet was the strong Sikh refugee, in particular Khatri, support for the controversial Punjabi suba demand. This point has been noted by Robin Jeffrey (1986: 110). Of course, one could conceivably argue that; first, the suba was a territorial demand based on their linguistic identity rather than religious, and so was not one that the refugees had experienced persecution of in West Pakistan (and so by definition was not in need of re-territorializing); and second, this was something which enjoyed pan-Sikh support (i.e. not just refugees). Although the suba was sought 'officially' along linguistic lines, the underlying basis was in fact communal: the desire to create a Sikh majority state. Evidence for this is both circumstantial and direct. The circumstantial evidence being that; (1) the Shiromani Akali Dal initially put forward a demand for a Sikh state across seven out of the total thirteen districts of east Punjab on 7 August 1947 without any reference to its linguistic character, and did so on the condition that their calls for Sikhs to be given a reservation of seats and separate electorates in post-Partition India were rejected (Sharma, 1992: 75); (2) when the Shiromani Akali Dal eventually submitted their territorial demand for a re-truncated east Punjab along 'linguistic' grounds to the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955 it excluded from its claims the Hindu majority Kangra district despite it being overwhelmingly Punjabi-speaking in composition (Chopra, 1984: 102); and (3) the symbolism attached to the suba demand was inextricably linked to the Sikh religion, including the phraseology used by Shiromani Akali Dal elites (Master Tara Singh quoted in Nayar, 1966: 242), starting pro-suba processions from Sikh shrines and on dates important to the Sikh calendar (Kapur, 1986: 213). The direct evidence being that; (1) based on numerous meetings author Khushwant Singh claims to have had with Master Tara Singh, it was agreed that the 'linguistic argument [would only be the] sugar-coating for what was essentially a demand for a Sikh majority state' (1992: 40); (2) according to Sant Fateh Singh, Master Tara Singh was really only after a Sikh majority suba rather than a Punjab one, with the latter 'allegedly' telling the Sant during a private discussion: 'For the present, we will talk of the language as the basis, later on things will get crystallised by themselves' (quoted in Anand, 1966: 5); (3) Master Tara Singh, who as Shiromani Akali Dal chief led the suba demand until 1962 when he was deposed by Sant Fateh Singh, admitted, to Baldev Raj Nayar, that

"[t]his cover of a Punjabi-speaking-state slogan serves my purpose well since it does not offend against nationalism. The Government should accept our demand under the slogan of a Punjabi-speaking state without a probe— what we want is Azadi. The Sikhs have no Azadi. We will fight for our Azadi with full power even if we have to revolt for our Azadi (quoted in Nayar, 1966: 37)".

While the suba was a demand that both refugee and non-refugee Sikhs supported, there are credible ground for believing the former played a 'lead-role.' The reasons for this include; (1) that the Shiromani Akali Dal leadership (and its associated political demands), up until 1962, had been dominated by Sikh refugees (Jeffrey, 1986: 110) and drew its support largely from such people. Indeed, one Sikh refugee remarked that,

"I was a supporter of the suba after Partition…I sincerely felt that Sikhs should have a seat of political power, bearing in mind that we hadn't got anything from the Partition…but in hindsight I would say it has been harmful to the Sikhs, we lost yet more of our shrines and other resources."[xv]

(2) That the suba demand disguised an underlying insecurity that existed among its supporters regarding their religious identity. Although, both refugees and non-refugees, could be said to have exhibited such anxieties, it was more so in the case of former as they were first-hand witnesses to the communal genocide inflicted against their people in West Pakistan. In other words 'paranoia' over threats to Sikh identity had more of a substantial basis when seen through the lens of a refugee Sikh rather than a non-refugee one.

Post-Suba (1966-onwards)

In spite of the creation of the Punjabi suba, the sense of Sikh isolationism from the national mainstream, which had built-up steadily during the course of the previous two decades, seemed to persist even beyond 1966. In fact, it appears that, apart from a few isolated occasions in which Indian nationalist sentiment witnessed a mini-surge (i.e. most notably during the war with Pakistan in 1971), the trend of growing subscription to WL-4 at the expense of WL-3 continued apace for Sikh refugee families (by this time inclusive of post-event offspring as well as Sikh refugees proper). This was evidenced most clearly by refugee and post-event offspring association with Sikh ethno-nationalist charters such as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution[xvi] and Rajiv-Longowal Accord,[xvii] which together included issues pertaining to revisions of centre-state relations in favour of more autonomy for the latter, raising the punitive land-ceilings for agriculturalists, ensuring Punjab secured a 'just' amount of 'her' river-waters, that Chandigarh be awarded to Punjab state etc.

However, unlike with the Punjabi suba demand in the previous epoch, it cannot be sensibly suggested that Sikh refugees played a 'lead-role' in this instance owing to the fact that by this stage the Shiromani Akali Dal leadership, and crucially nearly all the signatories to the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, were Jats from the Malwa region. Nevertheless, it can be said that refugee association with WL-4 prompted an evoking of their, by now, increasingly anti-Hindu/anti-India memory of Partition (Kataria, 2021a) to support this conviction and, in consequence, heightened level of endorsement by the wider Sikh collective. The net effect of this was to increase the conflict potential of Sikh ethno-national demands far beyond what the numerical strength of the refugees would otherwise warrant. To be exact, contemporary Sikh grievances vis-à-vis the centre

seemed far more acute if one incorporated the perspective of the highly privileged status that Sikhs held in west Punjab prior to the turmoil and dislocation of the 1940s, rather than just comparing them to pan-Sikh livelihoods immediately prior to the 1966 trifurcation.

Rise of the Khalistan Movement (1981-onwards)

From 1981 onwards, though WL-4 remained by-and-large the most popular wider-level outlet among Sikh refugees and their post-event offspring, it is clear that WL-5, which had hitherto lain largely dormant, witnessed a strong revival. This can be seen in large-scale Sikh refugee and post-event offspring participation in, and facilitation of, the Khalistan-based militancy that spanned the period between 1981 and 1993. Such was the refugee contribution in this regard that certain testimony evidence give credible grounds to suggest that they actually played a 'lead-role' in the rise of the Khalistan movement. This should not be entirely surprising given that others, such as Nirmal Singh have noted that

> "Communalism in post-partition Punjab was essentially an urban phenomenon, mostly confined to cities and towns where Hindu and Sikh refugee population was settled, the chief among them being Amritsar, Jullundur, Ludhiana and Patiala in the Punjabi speaking areas and Rohtak, Panipat and Sonepat in the Hindi speaking areas (1984: 153)".

However, as far as evidence behind play a lead-role in the Khalistan movement is concerned, the following interviewee remarks are quite revealing:

> "The militancy broke caste barriers, actually there were occasions when a cell would be headed by a Mazhabi, with Jat boys acting as their understudy…this kind of thing would have been unheard of in previous times…but all in all it was the Jats who dominated the militancy, at least by its peak…although, this wasn't the case from the start…for the first few years at least, at least until Blue Star and maybe for some time more, it was Khatri youth [post-event offspring] that were taking up arms…so it was natural for Jats to follow the Khatris, as all ten of our Gurus were from that caste [emphasis added]."[xviii]

> "Those who had come from Pakistan at the time of Partition…you could say they were more aggrieved at the situation [during the 1980s] than others…from where they been over there [in Pakistan], living like kings and all, to what was going on here, having to compete with the banias just to stay afloat…So I would say the Bhapas were the ones who started much of the rioting against the Hindus…this was early on…places like Patiala…this was two or three years of years before 1984…but I think, it must have occurred to them later that Khalistan might well result in their freedom from the bania, but instead they will have to face domination from the Jats [laughter]…Maybe this is why Khalistan could never have come in, because all Sikhs other than Jats feared the Jats [laughter]."[xix]

"The soldiers themselves make efforts to form links with us. And, when we do any action in towns, we live the houses of the Bhapas [a term rural people use for urbanite Sikhs]. As far as I am concerned, Khalistan is already achieved [because of this solidarity of feeling]. All sorts of people from many different social groups are making sacrifices. All are fighting and dying equally. And we will live together equally. If one has the qualification for a job one will get it in a future Khalistan. And we will help other movements who are struggling like ourselves once we attain independence. As to helping the poor and the needy, there is no question that we shall do that, as whoever lives in Khalistan must subscribe to the principle of equality" (Sukhiwinder Singh Gora quoted in Pettigrew, 1995: 161)."

Speculating as to why did Sikh refugees and their post-event offspring may have been more willing to associate themselves with or directly participate in the Khalistan militancy than their non-refugee ethnic kin, it is worth considering the following factors. First, since refugee families had suffered far more adversely from Partition than their non-refugee ethnic kin they had further reason to feel aggrieved at their current predicament for which, as per the present shape of their Partition memory, they viewed Hindus as culpable. The second factor being the prevailing sense of injustice, especially for those who had not managed to exact 'revenge' from the stranded Muslims immediately upon arrival, and the intensity of this feeling at the time meant that engagement in the Khalistan movement, which involved violence against Hindu Punjabis and the Indian state forces, provided an opportunity to rectify past injustices done to them or elder members of the family at the time of Partition. A third factor is the paranoia associated with the loss of, and attacks to, Sikh identity were more pronounced, since they had either personal or familial experience of being persecuted for their religious identity and being driven out from their ethnic homelands. A fourth reason that Sikh refugees and their post-event offspring seemed more willing to associate themselves with Khalistani militancy is that since 1962, and the Malwa Jat usurping of Shiromani Akali Dal power, the Khatris (who made up the bulk of the Sikh refugee population), moved further to 'the right' in a bid to maintain their political visibility vis-à-vis the Sikh masses.[xx] This view is shared by author Gopal Singh:

"The urban Sikh traders feel doubly bitter – first because political power in Punjab is controlled by rural Jat Sikhs and they were displaced by Jat Sikhs from control of Akali Dal and SGPC in early sixties under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh and secondly because they have been dominated by Hindus in matters of trade and industry in Punjab. They, therefore, adopt extremist postures and encourage revivalist – fundamentalists – extremist communal groups to dislocate not so much rural Jat Sikhs from SGPC and Akali Dal as Hindus from centres of trade and industry in Punjab (1987: 203)."

Conclusion

In line with the main contention of this paper that de-territorialized refugees, upon arrival into their host societies, endeavour to re-territorialize their persecuted identity and that such a process will likely prompt the rise of ethno-national conflict, it has been carefully demonstrated that the Sikh refugees that arrived from the territories to-be/newly established West Pakistan into the eastern Indian-awarded portion of Punjab re-territorialized their persecuted Sikh identity in a variety of forms and outlets, some of which contributed to the notable rise of ethno-national conflict. The qualitative evidence gathered for this research demonstrates that Sikh refugees engaged in a lower-level of re-

territorialization virtually from the moment they arrived into truncated Indian Punjab. This included performing targeted retaliatory violence upon the remaining Muslim minority population, ghettoizing the areas around which they settled, and aligning themselves politically with the communal charter of the Shiromani Akali Dal. In terms of wider-level re-territorialization, the Sikh refugees subscribed to all five wider-level outlets available, albeit some of which have attained heightened level of subscription at different epochs since 1947. Whereas passive association with their departed homeland (WL-1) had been a commonly subscribed to form of re-territorialization for virtually all members of the refugee population, displaying an assertive demand to return to their homeland (WL-2) was subscribed to for only a relatively short period of time and too among the only a relatively small number of nationalist hardliners. Tying their persecuted identity with that of India (WL-3) was a moderately popular form of articulation, albeit many Sikh refugees did this alongside engaging in other forms of re-territorialization. Subscription to the two zero-sum wider-level outlets, pursuit of an autonomy movement (WL-4) and pursuit of a secessionist or irredentist movement (WL-5), has been disproportionately high for members of the Sikh refugee group. Indeed the qualitative evidence gather as part of this paper appears indicate that Sikh refugees played a lead-role in the pursuit of a Punjabi suba, a movement that stretched between 1948 until its final conceding by the Indian state in 1966. Furthermore, the Khalistan militant movement that stretched between the period of 1981 to 1993, and which had at its core, the intention to establish a separate Sikh nation-state, appeared to have a strong refugee, and post-event offspring, component, with the qualitative evidence, especially in the initial years of the movement, suggesting a heightened level of Khatri involvement.

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[i] Though India has never signed the UN Refugee Convention, those who were forcibly displaced during Partition and crossed the newly formed international borders between India and Pakistan certainly meet the universally recognised criteria for 'refugee' and so will be referred to as such in this paper.

[ii] The other two provinces of British India that were partitioned along communal lines in 1947 were Bengal and Assam.

[iii] According to the 1941 census, there were 1,509,499 Sikhs in west Punjab (inclusive of Bahawalpur) alone (*Census of India* 1941: 41-45). There were a total of 62,411 in NWFP (including the surrounding states and agencies), 32,627 in Sind (including Khairpur) and a total of 12,044 in Baluchistan (including the surrounding states and agencies) (*Census of India* 1941a: 100).

[iv] See *Census of India* 1941: 41-45; *Census of India* 1941a: 100; *Census of Pakistan* 1951: 1-26.

[v] Interview with Lakshman Singh Duggal, Amritsar, 12 September 2010.

[vi] Interview with Avtar Singh Kohli, Amritsar, 19 September 2010.

[vii] Interview with Lakshman Singh Duggal, Amritsar, 12 September 2010.

[viii] Many Sikhs share this view (Sikh refugee #35 quoted in Keller 1975: 84; Interview with Jagdish Singh conducted by Prof. Ian Talbot', Amritsar, 21 November 2002, quoted in Talbot and Tatla 2006, 115).

[ix] Interview with Dr Mohinder Singh, Delhi, 21 August 2010.

[x] This was also partly owed to pre-existing caste allegiances between the Sikh refugee voters, who were largely Khatri, and the Khatri-dominated Shiromani Akali Dal leadership (which was the case until 1962).

[xi] 'Interview with Hukum Singh conducted by S. L. Manchanda', New Delhi, 4 April 1976, Acc No. 344 [Oral History Collection, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi], 103.

[xii] All of the following interviewees have expressed their support for 'softer borders' between India and Pakistan (the first two being post-event offspring, and the latter three refugees)—Interview with Massa Singh, Amritsar, 20 September 2010; Interview with Tridivesh Singh Maini, London, 7 March 2011; 'Interview with Dalip Singh conducted by Prof. Ian Talbot', Amritsar, 18 January 2003, quoted in Talbot and Tatla 2006, 71; 'Interview with Gurbachan Singh Bhatti conducted by Prof. Ian Talbot', Amritsar, 18 February 2003, quoted in Talbot and Tatla 2006, 77; 'Interview with Gurdeep Singh Bhatia conducted by Prof. Ian Talbot', Amritsar, 23 January 2003, quoted in Talbot and Tatla 2006, 92.

[xiii] Interview with Tarlochan Singh, Delhi, 19 August 2010.

[xiv] Sikh refugee #13 quoted in Keller 1975: 44; Interview with Paramjit Singh Sarna, Delhi, 21 August 2010; Interview with Kuldip Nayar, Delhi, 29 August 2010.

[xv] Interview with Amar Singh Bains, Amritsar, 16 September 2010.

[xvi] Though this document was first formulated on 1973, it tended to become more of a prominent issue in Punjab politics once the SAD were out of power in the Punjab Legislative Assembly (PLA), namely 1973-1977 and, particular so, from 1980-1985.

[xvii] This was essentially an agreement brokered between the then chief of the main Shiromani Akali Dal faction, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, and the then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. The agreement was based on the terms sought in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

[xviii] Interview with Davinder Singh, Ludhiana, 2 September 2010.

[xix] Interview with Gurbaksh Singh, Ludhiana, 4 September 2010.

[xx] It is a point of note that many of the leaders of pro-Khalistani groups, such as the Dal Khalsa as well as many militant cells, were from refugee families.