

The Transfer of Population as envisaged by the Sikh Political Leaders

Documents

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Notes from *Selected Documents on Partition of Punjab 1947. India and Pakistan...* ed. Kirpal Singh (Delhi: National Bookshop, 1991; revised edn. 2006).

pp. 12–13 Resolution at Lahore by a Representative Gathering of Prominent Sikh Leaders under the Presidency of Master Tara Singh, Feb. 1946.

...In order to ensure the free and unfettered growth of the Sikh Panth, the Panth demands the splitting up of the existing province of the Punjab, with its unnatural boundaries, so as to constitute a separate autonomous Sikh State in whose areas of the Central, Northern, Eastern and South–Eastern Punjab in which the overwhelming part of the Sikh population is concentrated, and which because of the proprietors in it being mostly Sikhs, and its general character being distinctively Sikh is also the *de facto* Sikh Homeland – the area, extent, the status and constitutional framework of such a state being left to be settled by negotiation between the accredited representatives of the Sikh Panth and the other interested parties, such as the British Government, the Hindus and the Muslims...

p. 44. Interview between H.E. the Viceroy and Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, 18 April 1947.

... With regard to (a) [that there should be an early announcement of the creation of two separate ministries for the Eastern and Western parts of the Punjab to carry on with the Interim period] Sardar Baldev Singh stated that Mr. Jinnah had informed him that he accepted the principle of the transfer of populations in the Punjab (I invited him to put this point to me in writing); and he told me that 20,000 Sikhs had already fled from various predominantly Muslim areas in which riots had taken place, and were now taking refuge in [the Sikh princely state of] Patiala.

pp. 53–60 Sikh and Hindu Members of the Constituent Assembly for the Punjab to Lord Ismay, 1 May 1947

The terrible happenings in the Punjab have revealed that an organized and well-planned *jihad* was preached and carried out against the unoffending non-Muslim minorities, particularly in the Rawalpindi and Multan Divisions of the province. The campaign was inspired by the Muslim League organization and resulted in the most brutal atrocities that have ever been committed on innocent men, women and children. It has now become impossible for the non-Muslim minorities in the Punjab to accept any Government in the province dominated by Muslim communalists. Impetus was given to those who indulged in these atrocities by the 'Direct Action Resolution' passed by the Muslim League under the presidency of Mr. M. A. Jinnah, when he made a public declaration that 'the days of constitutionalism are over' and that 'might can only save our rights'. Soon after the 'Direct Action Resolution' was passed, Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan and Mr. Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Members of the Interim Government and Mr. Feroz Khan Noon, an ex-member of the Executive Council and formerly High Commissioner of India openly preached the creed of violence. All this resulted in a regular holocaust of murder, loot, arson, abduction, rape and forcible conversion in which thousands of innocent lives of members of the minority communities were lost and unheard-of atrocities were committed. Such a state of affairs cannot be described as riots or communal fracas. It was an entirely one-sided and systematic attack, in which innocent members of the Hindu and Sikh communities were caught unawares and being defenceless were butchered or burnt alive in a manner unknown even in the darkest days of human history. Property worth crores of rupees was looted or wantonly destroyed. And significantly enough, these happenings did not elicit even one word of condemnation from the leaders of the Muslim League.

The terrible happenings of March 1947 have rendered homeless a large number of Hindu and Sikh inhabitants of the demarcated part of the province, with the result that they have to find their homes in areas where the Hindus and the Sikhs are strong enough to resist the Muslim menace. Thousands of them are migrating to Central and Eastern Punjab and have no desire to go back to their homes.

The non-Muslim minorities under the circumstances are of the view that the only solution of the Punjab problem is an immediate division of the Punjab. They feel that their honour, lives and property cannot be safeguarded unless the province is divided into two parts on the lines suggested ...

pp. 64–6 **Discussion of Sir Evan Jenkins, governor of the Punjab, with Sardar Sawran Singh and Lal Bhim Sen Sachar, 2 May 1947.**

...We then got on to the Lahore Division and the two Sardars made it clear that this was the real casus belli...

After a good deal of argument they said that any attempt to divide the Lahore Division would lead to an immediate explosion. The Sikhs would be deserting 1.5 million of their co-religionists and this would be quite intolerable. Their area must include all districts with a substantial Sikh population. I rejoined that this idea was quite untenable since the Sikhs were not in a majority in a single district. They would do well to remember that the Muslims had precisely similar problems. The two new States would in fact have minority problems almost as acute as those which beset the Punjab today...

This was an interesting talk. It illustrates the unreasonable demands of the Sikhs and also illustrates the extreme danger of an announcement by HMG of a partition of the Punjab unless the parties have agreed in advance to the principles of such a partition. There may be something in the idea of the third Central State, ridiculous though it is. Our problem may be to tide over the few months remaining before June 1948 in any way which will prevent immediate fighting. Unless there is a considerable change in the Muslim view, fighting is inevitable and the only question is when it will break out.

p. 108. **Sikhs Demand Transfer of Population and Property, 14 June 1947.**

The following resolution has been passed by the joint meeting of the Panthic Assembly Party, the Working Committee of the Shromani Akali Dal and the Panthic Pratindhi Board on the partition of the Punjab.

‘Under the new plan of HMG of 3 June the province of the Punjab has to be partitioned into Eastern and Western Punjab. This partition has followed the division of the country into two sovereign states as a solution to the long standing communal tangle created by the Muslim League.

In the opinion of this province, the Boundary Commission should be given express directive to make recommendations for the transfer of Hindus and Sikh population and property from the western part of the Punjab to the eastern part after the partition has been effected on an equitable basis.

The conference apprehends that in the absence of provision of transfer of population and property, the very purpose of partition would be defeated.’

pp. 164–7. **Sir Evan Jenkins to Mountbatten, 10 July 1947.**

[Meeting with Giani Kartar Singh]. The Giani was extremely frank about the intentions of the Sikhs and what he said confirms my view that they mean to make trouble if the decision based on the Boundary Commission's report is not to their liking, or if the new Governments are set up before the decision is given...

My personal view is that the Boundary problem cannot be solved in any rational way, and that the only solution which will give the two new Provinces a peaceful start will be one negotiated by the Parties ... But with the Sikhs demanding the Chanab as the Western boundary and the Muslims hoping to stretch their tentacles as far east as Ambala, and everyone behaving as they had just been at war and were going to have a new war within a few weeks, I see limited hope of any solution of this kind.

Enclosure

... the Giani said there must be an exchange of population on a large scale. Were the British ready to enforce this? He doubted if they were and if no regard was paid to Sikh solidarity, a fight was inevitable...

The Sikhs were entitled to a homeland just as much as the Muslims and the Hindus.

The Giani then elaborated the Sikh claim. He said that they must have at least one canal system; they must also have Nankana Sahib [the birthplace of Guru Nanak]; finally, the arrangements must be such as to bring three-quarters or at least two-thirds of the Sikh population into the Eastern Punjab. Sikhs should be moved to the East and 400,000 Muslims to the West (later in the conversation he said that the number of Sikhs would be 500,000 or 600,000 and the numbers of Muslims about one million; property as well as population should be taken into account in the exchange and the Sikhs are on the whole better off than the Muslims). The Giani asserted that unless it was recognized by HMG, the Viceroy and the Party Leaders that the fate of the Sikhs was a vital issue in the proceedings for the transfer of power, there would be trouble...

I enquired when the fight would begin. The Giani said that protests would continue from now on. The Sikhs felt that it would be useless to wait for two or three years before taking violent action, and the execution of their plan would start with the departure of the British.

I pointed out that violent action would hardly endear the Sikhs to the Congress, with whom the Panthic Party was now allied. The Giani replied that he had never trusted and did not now trust the Congress... He saw the final Sikh State as a kind of Buffer-State between Pakistan and the Union of India.

[The Giani said that] the Muslims were now putting out some conciliatory propaganda but their intention was that of a sportsman who is careful not to disturb the birds he intends to shoot. He believed that the Muslims would try to make the Sikhs in the Western Punjab feel secure and would then set about them in earnest.

Finally, the Giani appealed to me to do all that I could to help the Sikhs during a period of great trial. Having served in the Punjab for so many years, I could not wish to abandon it to misery and bloodshed; but there would be misery and bloodshed if the boundary were not suitably solved.

The Giani was matter of fact and quiet throughout our conversation, but wept when he made his final appeal. This is the nearest thing to an ultimatum yet given on behalf of the Sikhs. They are undoubtedly very puzzled and unhappy, but I see no reason to suppose that they have lost the nuisance value which they have possessed through the centuries.

pp. 300–4 Report on the situation in the Punjab for the second half of July 1947

POLITICAL ...The Group of Giani Kartar Singh is understood to favour some form of immediate action but the adherents of Udham Singh Nakoke prefer to await the announcement of the award. The unpredictable actions of the Giani, however, are sufficient to arouse apprehension of widespread communal trouble in the near future, and he might precipitate trouble at any time ... the attitude of unprincipled unconstitutionalism to which he has acknowledged himself. There is still no indication that the Sikh community is being subjected to any approach other than the appeal to belligerency and their preparations for an eventual war between the Sikh and Muslim communities have not slackened...

COMMUNAL. Notwithstanding the assurances of League leaders the minorities of the West are again on the move. The exodus of Sikhs from the districts of the Western Punjab has recently gained in pace and from Lahore the exodus has again become large of both communities [i.e. Sikhs and Hindus]. This is due mainly to the number of daily incidents, many of which are of grave nature, to which Lahore has again been subjected. The situation in Amritsar and Gujranwala city has show shown some improvement but the rural areas of Amritsar district and Hoshiarpur are in a disturbed state and the impression that organized Sikh gangs are on the move in these areas appears to have some basis in truth. Further east, the situation has improved follow a slight decrease in tension in Gurgaon district where, however, the situation is still gave and both communities have been reported to be preparing for another struggle. The situation throughout the Province can only be described as unsettled and

combustible and all communities are fearful of grave disturbances following the Commission's award.

VOLUNTEERS The RSS organization for the first time for months shows a decrease in membership, confined to the Lahore and Rawalpindi districts. The decrease is in the neighbourhood of 6,000. Activity, however, has not slackened and six new branches have been formed. Immediate steps are now being taken to strengthen the organization to the fullest extent in Jammu and Kashmir, where, it is anticipated, the Muslims will make a bid for power. In Lahore action has been taken against RSS workers for the part they have played in recent communal disturbances, as a result of which some have been arrested while other important workers have gone underground. In other places the organization's activities have also been criminal in character... There is no doubt that the belief of the RSS in the creed of violence is as strong as ever.

The present strength of the Sikh Shahidi Jathas is estimated in the neighbourhood of 19,000, the increase in strength is probably due to the amalgamation of the Akal Regiments. New Shahidi Jathas are reported to have been formed in seven districts. In Ferozepore District, reports that the Jathas have been concerned in the secret smuggling of arms. In other districts the training of the Jathas is going on.

A new proposal appears to have been adopted under which the Muslim League National Guards are to receive intensive military training and will undertake the duties of Home Guards, in an emergency cooperating with the army... Ex members of the INA and the Army are now being employed extensively in the highest ranks, a policy believed to be in accordance with the instructions of the Muslim League...

PRESS ...Sikh papers which have vigorously espoused the case for the incorporation of their religious places, and the wealthy colony areas of their community, in the Eastern Punjab in company with threats of violence and fulminations against the Government, have greatly helped the Sikh policy of whipping feelings to a pitch when seizure by force would appear the logical outcome...

pp. 459-60. **Sir Evan Jenkins to Mountbatten, 9 August 1947.**

...it is clear that the village raiding which is now causing us so much concern in Amritsar and elsewhere is not specifically directed by Tara Singh and his associates, though it is undoubtedly the result of their general propaganda...

The arrests may be far from easy, as the Sikh leaders travel a good deal and usually live in places like the Golden Temple where police action causes much excitement.

... The whole object of our policy has been to get as smooth a changeover as we can, even at considerable risk. The two new Governments may have to fight the Sikhs, but if I start the fight now they will inherit it, and I do not think that would be fair to them unless the arrests before the transfer of power are quite unavoidable.