



Survival and Strength Amidst Turmoil: The Resilient Journey of a Partition Refugee

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experiences of Parhalad Bhagat, a survivor of the 1947 Partition of India, an event which led to one of the largest forced migrations in history. Through oral testimony, this research captures Bhagat's journey from his ancestral home in Balhar, Rawalpindi, to resettling in Haridwar, India. Bhagat's narrative recounts harrowing events, including the traumatic separation from his family, the challenges of life in refugee camps, and the emotional toll of displacement. His story reflects the immense trauma experienced by millions during Partition, a period marked by violence, loss, and forced migration across newly drawn borders. This study underscores the importance of oral histories in preserving personal and collective memories, which are often absent from official records. By documenting individual experiences, this paper contributes to a nuanced understanding of the long-term psychological and social effects of Partition on survivors. Bhagat's resilience in the face of profound adversity offers valuable insights into the human cost of Partition, making this research an essential addition to the study of Partition's legacy. The study contextualizes Bhagat's experiences within existing literature, aligning with works by Aanchal Malhotra and Anam Zakaria, whose research also highlights the personal impact of Partition through survivor narratives.

Keywords: Forced Migration, Oral Testimony, Partition, Psychological and Social Effects, Trauma.

Introduction

For Indian, remembering the Partition means recalling the dark side of Independence, a moment of loss – not only of homelands and families and materiel things but something more – loss of self and identity.

-Haimanti Roy

The Partition of India in 1947 was one of the most significant and traumatic events in the history of South Asia, marking the end of British colonial rule and the division of India into two independent nations—India and Pakistan. The decision to partition the country was primarily driven by political and religious tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities, with the demand for a separate Muslim-majority state, spearheaded by the All-India Muslim League, resulting in the creation of Pakistan. The immediate impact of the Partition was catastrophic. Approximately 14 million people were forced to migrate across newly drawn borders, as Hindus and Sikhs fled from what became Pakistan to India, while Muslims migrated in the opposite direction. As G. D. Khosla remarks about that era in these words, “...by the end of December 1947, four millions of them had come into India. All of them had left behind their property and valuables, the majority of them had suffered bereavement, their bodies sick and wounded, their souls bruised with the shock of horror, they came to a new home.” (Khosla, 1990, p. 234)

The upheaval resulted in widespread communal violence, mass killings, and the abduction and assault of women. Entire villages were abandoned, and families were torn apart. The displacement left deep psychological scars on those who lived through the event, with many losing their homes, livelihoods, and

loved ones. In *Boarders and Boundaries*, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin wrote, “within a week, about one million Hindus and Sikhs had crossed over from West to East to Punjab, and in the week following, another two and a half million had collected in refugee camps in West Punjab.” (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 34) In addition to physical violence, the emotional trauma of leaving one’s ancestral land added to the collective suffering of refugees. The Partition remains a defining moment in the subcontinent’s history, with long-lasting repercussions on politics, society, and relationships between India and Pakistan.

Oral histories play a crucial role in understanding the human impact of historical events like Partition, especially when official records and political documents fail to capture the personal and emotional experiences of individuals. Personal testimonies provide intimate insights into the everyday realities of Partition that are often overlooked in traditional historical narratives. These oral accounts preserve memories of trauma, survival, and resilience that may otherwise be lost with time. Oral histories also offer a counter-narrative to official versions of history, often revealing the experiences of marginalized groups like refugees, women, and children who were most affected by the violence and displacement. Through these stories, we gain a deeper understanding of the social and psychological dimensions of Partition. They also preserve cultural and social knowledge, contributing to a collective memory that helps future generations understand the long-lasting impacts of such traumatic events.

This research explores the trauma, survival strategies, and resilience demonstrated by refugees during and after the Partition, using Parhalad Bhagat’s (partition survivors) story as a focal point. Bhagat’s testimony provides a valuable lens through which we can examine the personal costs of displacement and the emotional toll of losing one’s home and family. The interview delves into the profound psychological and emotional effects of violence, separation, and resettlement, showing how individuals like Bhagat navigated these challenges with remarkable strength and determination. The paper focuses on the trauma Bhagat experienced during the chaotic migration from Pakistan to India, particularly his separation from his family during a violent attack, his experiences in refugee camps, and the resettlement process in India. By analyzing his personal story, the research highlights broader themes of loss, identity, and resilience, showing how refugees adapted to their new realities and rebuilt their lives in the face of overwhelming adversity.

The Partition of India in 1947 has been the subject of extensive research, with scholars exploring its political, social, and human dimensions. Historians like Stanley Wolpert, in *Shameful Flight*, and Ayesha Jalal, in *The Sole Spokesman*, have analyzed the political circumstances that led to the Partition, focusing on the role of key leaders and the policies that shaped the subcontinent’s division. These works highlight how the political negotiations between the Indian National Congress, the All-India Muslim League, and the British government culminated in the creation of India and Pakistan.

In addition to political histories, a growing body of research has focused on the experiences of refugees during Partition. Works like Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* provide in-depth explorations of the human impact of Partition, emphasizing the violence, trauma, and displacement faced by ordinary citizens, as called by Menon and Bhasin “the largest peace-time mass migration in history.” (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 35) Butalia’s work, in particular, foregrounds the voices of survivors, bringing to light the often-overlooked personal and emotional dimensions of Partition. These scholars emphasize that the official histories do not fully capture the traumatic upheavals experienced by the refugees who had to leave their homes, land, and families behind. Research by Ian Talbot and Anita Inder Singh also focuses on the mass migrations, estimating that nearly 14 million people were displaced, making Partition one of the largest forced migrations in history. Talbot’s work on the violence that accompanied Partition sheds light on the intense communal animosity and how this hostility led to large-scale ethnic cleansing, abductions, and massacres. Singh, in contrast, explores the socio-political consequences of Partition on the two nascent states and how it influenced subsequent Indo-Pakistani relations.

Aanchal Malhotra’s *Remnants of a Separation* and Anam Zakaria’s *The Footprints of Partition* are both profound explorations of the Partition’s legacy in South Asia, though their approaches differ in style and focus. Malhotra’s *Remnants of a Separation* delves into Partition through the lens of objects that survivors carried across borders, like heirlooms, letters, and personal belongings. This tangible connection to the past brings out intimate, sensory memories, which Malhotra uses to humanize history. The objects act as portals to lost homes, revealing stories of resilience, loss, and nostalgia across generations. As Aanchal Malhotra notes, “As the migratory experiences began to unravel, I realized it was not just loss that they were concealing; it was a number of unexplainable feelings – sadness, shame, pain, anxiety, horror – that had risen within them as they had fled their homes and, to date, these feelings have never truly been detangled.” (Malhotra, 2017, p. 29)

Zakaria’s *The Footprints of Partition*, on the other hand, focuses on oral histories from people on both sides of the border, offering a broader range of narratives from varied communities. Zakaria explores how Partition memories and trauma have shifted with time and how younger generations engage with this complex past. Her work touches on the lived experiences of communal harmony and conflict, thereby emphasizing the continued psychological impact of the Partition in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Malhotra’s *Remnants of a Separation* and Zakaria’s *The Footprints of Partition* align closely with my research, as these works seek to capture the memories and experiences of Partition survivors. Like these authors, I use interviews to unearth personal narratives, making history vivid through first-hand accounts

rather than purely academic analysis. Malhotra's focus on tangible objects and Zakaria's oral histories show how deeply rooted memories can be in both physical artifacts and spoken words, offering powerful connections to the past. Similarly, my interviews provide an invaluable lens into the Partition's lasting impact, allowing individual stories to reveal broader themes of migration, loss, and resilience. By capturing these personal histories, my work contributes to preserving Partition's legacy, much like Malhotra and Zakaria, enriching the field of Partition studies with lived experiences that might otherwise fade from memory. This existing literature underscores the need to document not only the political ramifications but also the lived experiences of individuals who endured the violence and dislocation of Partition.

Oral history is an invaluable research method, especially for exploring the human experiences surrounding historical events like the 1947 Partition. This approach involves recording the memories and personal narratives of individuals who witnessed or were directly affected by specific events. Interviewing survivors like Parhalad Bhagat is crucial because it offers access to first-hand testimonies that provide a deeper, more personal understanding of the impacts of Partition—experiences often absent from official records and political histories. Moreover, oral history plays a vital role in preserving the memories of those whose voices are often marginalized or overlooked. This is particularly relevant in the case of Partition, where rural communities, women, and children—like Bhagat, who was just a teenager at the time—may not have their experiences recorded in official accounts. In addition to filling gaps in the historical record, oral histories enable researchers to explore the psychological and emotional aspects of historical trauma. The personal nature of Bhagat's testimony, for example, helps illustrate how Partition affected not just the physical environment and geopolitics but also the mental and emotional well-being of those who lived through it.

The interview with Parhalad Bhagat was conducted by me, a research scholar from Department of English, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. The interview took place on October 22, 2024, at Bhagat's residence in Subhashgarh (Pathri), District Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India. The primary goal of the interview was to gather first-hand insights into the 1947 Partition, particularly focusing on the experiences of refugees like Bhagat who were forced to leave their homes and rebuild their lives in India. During the interview, Bhagat recounted his life before and after Partition, describing his childhood in Balhar, Rawalpindi, and the events that led to his family's decision to flee to India. He vividly recalled the trauma of separation from his family during a violent attack on a train, his experiences in a refugee camp, and his eventual resettlement in Uttarakhand. The interview provided invaluable personal insights into the emotional and physical challenges faced by refugees during Partition, as well as Bhagat's reflections on the broader societal impacts of this historic event. This testimony contributes significantly to the research by shedding light on the migration process, the violence encountered during the journey, the conditions in refugee camps, and the long-term effects of displacement on individuals and communities. Through Bhagat's detailed recollections, the interview offers a compelling and emotionally resonant portrayal of resilience and survival during one of the most traumatic events in South Asian history.

Before the upheaval of Partition, Parhalad Bhagat's life in the village of Balhar, Rawalpindi was marked by prosperity and relative peace. Bhagat describes his home with nostalgia, recalling it as a place of abundance. His family owned 10 acres of land where they grew fruit trees, including grapes, symbolizing a life of agricultural stability. This land, cultivated by his grandfather, represented generations of hard work and was central to the family's livelihood. Bhagat's recollections of Balhar also depict a strong community, with his father being a soldier, which imbued a sense of security in the village. He emphasizes that their village was entirely Hindu, without a single Muslim resident, which contrasts sharply with the surrounding areas that were predominantly Muslim.

Socially, Bhagat's life before Partition seemed stable and integrated into the fabric of rural life. The village's isolation from the religious tensions brewing elsewhere in the subcontinent provided a false sense of security. He mentions that the first signs of trouble came from reports of violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims in nearby areas, marking the beginning of their awareness that life in Balhar could no longer continue as it had.

As Partition drew closer, Bhagat's village was increasingly encircled by threats. Though his village was not directly attacked, fear of the surrounding Muslim-majority areas forced his family and others to make the difficult decision to leave their ancestral homes. Bhagat reflects, "*We had already heard about the chaos spreading in nearby areas... It became clear that staying in the village was no longer an option. Everyone agreed that it was time to leave.*" (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024) This statement encapsulates the uncertainty and fear that spread through the communities, driven by rumors and actual events of violence and displacement in nearby regions. The mass migration that followed was unprecedented in its scale. As millions of people crossed newly drawn borders, entire villages like Bhagat's were abandoned. The forced migration was a chaotic and traumatic experience, as families like his had to leave behind their homes, land, and possessions with little hope of returning. Bhagat's description of his village's decision to flee highlights the collective nature of this migration, as neighboring villages coordinated to protect themselves from violence.

Bhagat's journey from Pakistan to India was fraught with danger and uncertainty. After leaving their village on foot, Bhagat and his family were escorted by General Shah Nawaz Khan, an Indian National Army (INA) officer under Subhas Chandra Bose, known for his dedication to India's independence, who arranged a vehicle to transport them to the WAH refugee camp. Life in refugee camps was marked by hardship and

uncertainty. Bhagat describes his time in the WAH refugee camp as a period of great difficulty, where basic needs like food, water, and shelter were scarce. As he recalls, *"It was a very difficult time. Everyone would spend their nights awake like that, struggling to get through. There were also many problems with finding enough food and water"* (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024) He recalls that families spent nights awake, grappling with insecurity and the trauma of displacement. The camps were overcrowded and often lacked adequate facilities, making survival a daily struggle for many refugees.

These conditions exacerbated the trauma of displacement, as the refugees were not only dealing with the loss of their homes but were also faced with the immediate challenges of survival in inhospitable environments. The psychological impact of living in such conditions was profound. Bhagat's testimony reveals the emotional strain placed on families who had been uprooted from their familiar surroundings and thrust into the uncertainty of refugee life. Refugee camps, while offering temporary shelter, could not provide the emotional stability needed for individuals to process their trauma, contributing to long-term emotional scars.

The journey was long and perilous, with Bhagat recalling how they traveled through hostile terrain, constantly fearing attacks. The most traumatic part of Bhagat's journey occurred during a train attack in Lahore, where the train carrying refugees was ambushed by a mob of Muslims. As the attack unfolded, chaos broke out, and Bhagat was separated from his family. He recalls, *"Everyone scattered, running for their lives. I got separated from my parents and brother."* (Began to cry). (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024) This separation was a defining moment in Bhagat's life, one that he recalls with deep emotion. Lost and alone in an unfamiliar land, Bhagat found himself in a nearby village, where a kind Air Force captain took him in, providing him food, shelter, and safety. This captain later facilitated Bhagat's journey to India and helped him enlist in the army, marking the beginning of a new chapter in his life. This rescue highlights the role of individual acts of kindness during the chaos of Partition, where displaced people often relied on strangers for survival. Bhagat's eventual career in the Indian army is a testament to his resilience. After being rescued by the Air Force captain, he enlisted and was posted in Coimbatore, serving in the 17th Parachute, Field Regiment Artillery.

Then Bhagat had served in the army for two years when, one day, he saw in a newspaper that people from his village had relocated to Ambala. Determined to find his family, he applied for two months of leave, though only 20 days of casual leave were granted. Without delay, he set out for Ambala, where he learned that his village community had moved to Yamunanagar. Upon reaching Yamunanagar railway station, he was informed they had settled in Kharwan. The journey was arduous, with unpaved roads; some traveled by horse-drawn carriages, while others by walking. When he finally arrived, villagers directed him to his family's camp near a large tree beside a well. *"There was a house nearby, and that's where my family was. I finally reunited with my entire family"*, said Bhagat. After spending his leave with them, he returned to his post in the army. (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024)

After surviving the journey to India, Bhagat and his family faced a new set of challenges related to resettlement. Upon arriving in India, they were initially allotted land in Kharwan, but this allocation was revoked due to corruption, leaving them without a permanent home. The Tehsildar, who accepted bribes from someone else, canceled their land grant, further compounding their hardship. This experience was common among refugees, who often found themselves struggling with bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency as they sought to rebuild their lives.

Eventually, General Shah Nawaz Khan intervened again, arranging for Bhagat's family to be resettled in the Pathri area of Haridwar, where they were allotted 1.5 bigha of land. However, this land was not immediately habitable. Bhagat describes the area as dense jungle that his family had to clear before they could settle. His service in the army during this time meant that his parents had to bear the brunt of this labor, enduring harsh conditions to build a home from scratch. As he tells, *"When my parents first arrived here, they encountered numerous challenges. The area was nothing but dense jungle, and they had to clear it before they could even settle under a simple shed. I wasn't there to help them because I was serving in the army at the time. They endured many hardships, and I have no idea how they managed to find food and water."* (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024)

Bhagat's reflections on the safety of women during Partition highlight the specific vulnerabilities faced by women during this period. Women were often seen as symbols of family honor, making them targets for violence, abduction, and assault. Bhagat notes that *"During that time women were not safe. They were often viewed as symbols of family and community honor, making them targets of violence, including abductions and assaults,"* which often resulted in extreme measures being taken to protect them. (Bhagat, Parhalad. Personal Interview. 22 Sept. 2024) Families, in many cases, chose to kill their own daughters rather than risk the dishonor of abduction or rape. The violence against women during Partition was a grim reflection of the breakdown of societal norms. Women's bodies became battlegrounds for religious and communal vengeance, with sexual violence being used as a tool to humiliate and subjugate communities. Bhagat's acknowledgment of the widespread fear for women's safety underscores the gendered nature of Partition violence, where women bore the brunt of the community's need to preserve honor amidst chaos. As in *Boarders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin remarks; *"Very large numbers of women were forced into death to avoid sexual violence against them, to preserve chastity and protect individual, family and community 'honour.' The means used to accomplish this end varied; when women*

themselves took their lives, they would either jumped into the nearest well or set themselves ablaze, singly, or in groups that could be made up either of all the women in the family.” (Menon and Bhasin, 1998, p. 42)

The long-term trauma of Partition left deep emotional scars on survivors like Bhagat. His emotional reaction when recounting his separation from his family and the violence he witnessed reflects the profound psychological toll of displacement. Bhagat's tears during the interview, especially when he speaks of his separation from his family during the train attack, are a testament to the enduring pain that such events caused. The trauma of displacement, coupled with the loss of home and identity, created a sense of profound dislocation that many Partition survivors, including Bhagat, struggled with for the rest of their lives. Even after resettling in India, the emotional wounds of Partition remained. Bhagat's reflections on his lost homeland in Balhar, where he expresses that there is *“no point in going back,”* reflect a deep sense of loss that is not just physical but emotional and psychological. The severing of ties with one's birthplace, coupled with the challenges of rebuilding a life in a new land, created a complex emotional landscape for survivors, who had to navigate both personal grief and collective trauma.

Parhalad Bhagat's personal narrative offers profound insights into the human costs of Partition, illustrating how individuals and families navigated the chaos of migration, violence, and displacement. His experiences of loss, separation, and survival encapsulate the trauma faced by millions during this turbulent period. Through his story, we see not only the immense challenges faced by refugees but also their remarkable resilience in rebuilding their lives in a new country.

Parhalad Bhagat's story provides a poignant and detailed account of the collective trauma experienced by millions during the 1947 Partition. His narrative, which encompasses the violence, displacement, and loss of family and home, illustrates the profound emotional and psychological toll that the Partition imposed on survivors. Bhagat's separation from his family during the chaotic train attack in Lahore and his eventual reunion after two years epitomize the turmoil and heartache felt by many who were displaced and separated from loved ones. Despite these immense challenges, Bhagat's story also exemplifies the resilience that many survivors demonstrated in the face of overwhelming hardship. His ability to rebuild his life, first through his service in the Indian army and later through his efforts to resettle with his family in Haridwar, reflects the determination and perseverance of Partition survivors. Bhagat's experiences of finding new purpose, despite the loss of his ancestral land and the emotional trauma of displacement, offer a powerful testimony to the human spirit's ability to survive and thrive, even after profound loss.

Oral histories like that of Parhalad Bhagat are invaluable in documenting the personal experiences of Partition survivors. While political and historical records capture the broader dynamics of the Partition, they often fail to convey the intimate human experiences of suffering, survival, and rebuilding. Personal narratives fill these gaps, offering insights into the day-to-day realities of those who lived through this traumatic event. Bhagat's story, shared through oral testimony, provides a unique and emotional perspective that helps us understand the psychological and emotional impact of the Partition on individuals. These first-hand accounts are critical not only for historians but also for future generations, as they preserve the memories and voices of those who lived through a period of immense upheaval. By documenting and sharing these testimonies, we ensure that the personal and collective memories of the Partition are not lost, allowing future generations to learn from and reflect on this pivotal moment in history.

Conclusion

Parhalad Bhagat's narrative serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of individuals who endured the trauma of the 1947 Partition. His journey illustrates the psychological and emotional hardships faced by millions forced to flee their ancestral homes, leaving behind lives filled with memories, familial connections, and cultural ties. Bhagat's separation from his family during a violent train attack in Lahore and his eventual reunion in Kharwan reveal the profound disruptions caused by this historical event. His story encapsulates the themes of loss, resilience, and survival central to Partition studies, revealing how displaced individuals coped with both immediate and long-term consequences. Through his testimony, we see the complex layers of trauma associated with forced migration, where individuals not only suffered physical displacement but also faced bureaucratic hurdles and emotional scars from the violence. Oral histories, like that of Bhagat's, are invaluable for enriching our understanding of Partition, bridging the gap between historical records and personal experiences. By preserving these voices, we honor the memories of those who suffered, ensuring their stories resonate with future generations. Bhagat's life, marked by his dedication to rebuilding and his enduring bond with his family, exemplifies the indomitable human spirit that thrives even amidst historical upheaval. His experiences are a crucial reminder of the sacrifices endured by millions during Partition, contributing to a legacy that continues to shape South Asian history and identity.

Acknowledgement

I, Shahjadi (Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University Dehradun, Uttarakhand), conducted the interview of Parhalad Bhagat on 22 October 2024 at his residence in Subhashgarh, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India. As my research focuses on the 1947 Partition and aims to explore the hardships and suffering endured by refugees, this interview was taken

to gain insights into the experiences of those who survived this traumatic event. Mr. Bhagat shared vivid recollections of his life before and after Partition, shedding light on the challenges faced during migration and resettlement, as well as the emotional toll of displacement. His invaluable testimony contributes significantly to my research on the resilience and survival of refugees during one of the most turbulent periods in Indian history. I also extend my appreciation to Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, particularly the Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, for providing institutional support and guidance throughout this research. Special thanks go to my academic advisors Dr. Monika Gupta Aggarwal Ma'am for her insightful feedback and encouragement.

Appendix

1. Please tell me your name?

My name is Parhalad Bhagat S/o Pooran Das.

2. Where are you living now?

I am living in this village. Village- Shubhashgarh (Pathri), District Haridwar Uttarakhand, India.

3. What was the name of your village/town in Pakistan before the 1947 Partition?

The Village was called Balhar, under Tehsil- Kahota, District- Rawalpindi Pakistan

4. How old were you at the time of partition?

I was around 13 or 14 years old at that time, studying in the eighth grade.

5. Who were all in your family at the time of partition?

I had my father, mother, and an elder brother.

6. When and how did you first hear about the Partition?

We had already heard about the chaos spreading in nearby areas, with reports of violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims. It became clear that staying in the village was no longer an option. Everyone agreed that it was time to leave. We reached out to the neighboring villages, and together we decided to leave, escaping the growing turmoil around us.

7. How was your life before coming to India?

Life before coming to India was wonderful. Our home had a garden filled with fruit trees—grapes and many other varieties. Everything was abundant, and life was truly good.

8. Did all casts/religion people live in your village? How was your relation with them?

No, our village was entirely Hindu; there wasn't a single Muslim living there.

9. Was your village/town attacked by the rioters?

No, there was no attack. Everyone in our village was a soldier, including my father. We had rifles, which made the Muslims fear our village.

10. What were the consequences when you and your family left the village/town?

Our village was surrounded by other villages with a larger Muslim population, so we felt vulnerable and feared an attack. That's why we decided to leave.

11. How much was your property there? Did you bring anything from there?

We had around 10 acres of land where my grandfather used to farm. How hard he worked to build it all, and yet everything was left behind when we had to leave.

12. How did you travel and what was the source of transport?

First, we traveled on foot from our village to Mator, another village. From there, General Shahnawaz arranged a vehicle for us and sent us to a camp. After that, we continued our journey by train.

13. How was this journey? Did anyone stop you? Were there any attacks?

Like I mentioned earlier, we started walking from our village, and then General Shah Nawaz Khan arranged a vehicle that took us to the WAH camp. We stayed there for less than a month and a half. After that, we boarded a train to continue our journey. When we reached Lahore, the train was stopped because of an attack by Muslims. Everyone scattered, running for their lives. I got separated from my parents and brother. (Started crying) In panic, I ran ahead and entered a nearby village. There, I found myself near a cinema hall, standing and crying, unsure of where to go or what to do. At that moment, an Air Force captain approached me. He asked who I was and where I had come from. After I told him everything, he took me to his house, fed me, and sheltered me there for a while. Later, he brought me to India and helped me enlist in the army. With his help, I joined and was posted in Pollachi, Coimbatore, serving in the 17th Parachute, Field Regiment Artillery.

I had been in the army for two years when one day I saw in a newspaper that people from our village were now in Ambala. I immediately applied for two months of leave to search for my parents, but I was granted only 20 days of casual leave. As soon as I got it, I set out for Ambala. Upon arriving there, I was told that my village people had moved to Yamunanagar. So, I headed to Yamunanagar railway station, where I learned that the villagers had settled in Kharwan.

At the time, the roads were unpaved. Some traveled by horse-drawn carriages, while others walked. When I finally reached the village, I was told that my family lived at the beginning of the village, near a large tree

beside a well. There was a house nearby, and that's where my family was. I finally reunited with my entire family. After spending my leave with them, I returned to the army.

Shortly after, the Kashmir war broke out in 1948, and I fought in that as well.

14. How did you first arrive on the current address?

We were initially allotted land in Kharwan by the government, but the Tehsildar canceled it after accepting bribes from someone else. After several days without any arrangements, General Shah Nawaz Khan intervened and informed us that there was government land available in the Pathri area. He sent us all here, where each family was given some land to live.

15. How was the situation in refugee camp?

It was a very difficult time. Everyone would spend their nights awake like that, struggling to get through. There were also many problems with finding enough food and water.

16. What was the mindset of the people regarding women during that time? Were women safe?

During that time women were not safe. They were often viewed as symbols of family and community honor, making them targets of violence, including abductions and assaults. Many families took extreme measures to protect them, but the widespread chaos made it difficult to ensure their safety.

17. What problems did you face after getting your home in India?

When my parents first arrived here, they encountered numerous challenges. The area was nothing but dense jungle, and they had to clear it before they could even settle under a simple shed. I wasn't there to help them because I was serving in the army at the time. They endured many hardships, and I have no idea how they managed to find food and water.

18. How did your neighbors (native people of India) treat you? Did you also face some religious problems?

There were no religious conflicts because, at that time, we were the ones who established this village. All the refugees lived together in harmony.

19. Do you still feel like you still don't have what you lost in your native place? (as it has been 78 years since partition)

No, it doesn't seem that way. Now, more than ever.

20. Have you ever visited your hometown after partition?

No, what's the point of going there? There's nothing left now.

21. It's been a long-time now but were you able to contact/ write to your friends or anyone in your previous village/town in Pakistan?

No, there was no way to stay in touch with anyone. Mobile phones didn't exist back then, so there was no contact with anyone—and there still isn't now.



(Figure 1,2,3. Self-taken photographs of Parhalad Bhagat at his residence in Subhashgarh, Haridwar, taken on September 22, 2024)

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16. Interview with Parhalad Bhagat conducted by Shahjadi, Research Scholar, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, on October 22, 2024, at his residence in Subhashgarh (Pathri), District Haridwar, Uttarakhand.