Hate and Anger: An Emotional History of the 1947 Partition

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Abstract

This essay investigates the seminal role of negative emotions, specifically hate and anger, in shaping the events of the Partition of India in 1947. Traditional historiography often privileges high-level political decisions, administrative failure, or communal ideologies as primary drivers. However, this study employs the nascent field of the history of emotions to argue that social and political forces actively cultivated, provoked, and leveraged pre-existing communal differences, escalating them into intense hate and reactive anger within the Muslim and Non-Muslim (Hindu and Sikh) communities. This emotional transformation directly culminated in the widespread, brutal communal violence, ethnic cleansing, and mass migration witnessed during the transfer of power. By analyzing political developments, official accounts, oral history testimonies, and literary representations, this essay establishes hate and anger not merely as byproducts of the Partition, but as foundational, dynamic, and essential components in the catastrophe, whose enduring psychological impact continues to fuel nationalism and hostility in the subcontinent.

Keywords: Partition, Hate, Anger, Emotionology, Communalism

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The Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, marking the birth of two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan, through unprecedented bloodshed, displacement, and trauma. While scholars have meticulously documented the high politics of imperial withdrawal and the ideological schisms between the All-India National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, a crucial dimension often remains under-explored: the emotional history of the conflict (Khan 2007). This essay posits that the Partition was not merely an administrative or political division, but fundamentally an emotional catastrophe, driven and intensified by the deliberate provocation of hate and anger within the populace. This emotional framework provides a powerful lens through which to comprehend the spontaneous and organized violence that defies purely rational explanation. By shifting the analytical focus from political strategy to affective experience, this research demonstrates that hate and anger were engineered and instrumentalized by socio-political forces, transforming a political disagreement into a communal holocaust. This exploration seeks to trace the genesis, eruption, and lasting sustenance of these negative emotions, establishing them as dynamic and essential elements in the history of the 1947 division and its enduring legacy of hostility (Gul 2017).

The larger context of this study rests within the emerging global field of the history of emotions, which recognizes that human feelings are not static biological universals, but rather culturally and historically constructed phenomena that profoundly influence social and political outcomes (Rosenwein 2001). Applying concepts such as *emotionology* (the societal attitudes and standards towards emotions) and *emotional communities* (groups that share the same norms of emotional expression) to the South Asian context allows for a deeper understanding of the collective psychological state of colonial society in the run-up to 1947 (Stearns and Stearns 1985; Rosenwein 2006). This investigation specifically focuses on how the imperial policy of 'Divide and Rule' and the subsequent communalization of politics, spanning from the late nineteenth century to the eve of independence, successfully created distinct emotional communities—Muslims and non-Muslims—whose prevailing emotional standards towards the "other" were increasingly defined by mistrust, fear, and, ultimately, deep-seated hate (Dixon 2020). This accumulated affective tension served as the critical precursor to the explosion of reactive anger that characterized the period of violence and migration, providing the necessary emotional energy for genocide and ethnic cleansing (Brass 2003).

The existing literature on the Partition of India provides a robust foundation across political, social, and human dimensions, yet the dedicated historical inquiry into *emotions* remains an area ripe for contribution. Works by prominent historians like Ian Talbot and Yasmin Khan have illuminated the "human dimension" of the Partition, emphasizing the contingent nature of the division and the localized impact of violence (Talbot 2009; Khan 2007). Similarly, Ishtiaq Ahmed's meticulous research, utilizing British reports and first-person accounts, has convincingly demonstrated that the violence, particularly in Punjab, constituted retributive ethnic cleansing involving both Sikh/Hindu and Muslim communities as aggressors and victims alike, suggesting a communalized environment conducive to extreme emotional reactions (Ahmed 2011; Brass 2003). Urvashi Butalia and Pippa Virdee

pioneered the use of oral history to foreground marginalized voices, focusing on women's experiences, abduction, and rehabilitation, thereby offering intimate narratives saturated with grief, fear, and the lasting trauma that underscores the psychological cost of the conflict (Butalia 2000; Virdee 2013). These studies, while not explicitly utilizing the terminology of the history of emotions, provide the essential empirical evidence—the accounts of violence and despair—from which the emotional history of hate and anger can be analytically extracted and theorized.

The theoretical justification for this study is rooted in the frameworks provided by historians of emotions such as Barbara H. Rosenwein and Peter N. Stearns. Rosenwein's work on *emotional communities* and the social uses of anger provides a model for analyzing how the competing nationalistic and religious groups in colonial India evolved their public and private emotional standards towards each other (Rosenwein 1998). Her assertion that feelings are constantly negotiated within groups is critical for understanding the shift from earlier syncretic communal harmony to the rigid, exclusionary *emotionology* of the 1940s (Stearns 2008). Recent research in the South Asian context by Deepra Dandekar, which uses oral archives to discuss the 'memory-emotions' of Partition, directly legitimizes this approach, demonstrating how fear, silence, and anger are embedded within individual narratives and collectively transform the memory of the event (Dandekar 2019). This essay, therefore, positions itself as a critical extension of this historiography, moving beyond acknowledging the trauma to systematically analyzing how hate and anger were constructed, deployed, and ultimately became the dominant affective language of the Partition era (Harding 2010).

To thoroughly trace the history of hate and anger, this research adopts a multi-source, interpretive methodology, combining the analysis of traditional documentary evidence with the rich, emotive data derived from oral history testimonies and literary works. The primary objective is to move beyond a descriptive account of events to an analytical understanding of the underlying psychological drivers. The first layer of evidence comprises official documents, newspapers, and political records, including sources like *The Transfer of Power* and contemporaneous press reports (Moon 1983). These documents are examined not just for facts, but for *emotionology*—the implicit and explicit emotional standards projected by the state and political elite. For instance, the language used in political flyers or the rhetoric of leaders like Jinnah and Nehru is scrutinized for its capacity to invoke or exacerbate emotions of fear, threat, or resentment, thereby shaping the collective emotional community (Gilmartin 1998; Ahmad 2001).

The second, and most crucial, methodological component is the use of oral history, aligning with its acknowledged importance for recovering the popular narrative of the Partition (Perks and Thomson 2015). Seven in-depth interviews with migrants (or their direct descendants) from East Punjab (Ludhiana and Amritsar) to West Punjab (Sheikhupura and Gujranwala) were conducted and analyzed. This oral testimony provides direct, first-hand evidence of emotional experience: not just *what* happened, but *how* it felt, and *how* that feeling (grief, fear, anger) translates into memory (Truong et al. 2014). A critical and careful analysis is applied to these narratives, searching for evidence of hate and anger in both their *description* of the rival community's actions (the invaders) and in

their *current* emotional expression towards the communities they left behind. These emotional accounts are then cross-referenced with literary fiction, the final methodological pillar, to identify recurring emotional themes and symbolic representations of hate and anger (Lyytikäinen 2018). This triangulation of political record, lived experience, and artistic reflection allows for a nuanced, historically grounded assessment of how negative emotions were not only experienced but actively manufactured and sustained throughout the Partition process.

Genesis of Hate: Political and Communal Formation (1885–1947)

The Partition was the culmination of decades of a deeply flawed colonial structure that actively cultivated divisions, providing the fertile ground in which the seeds of hate could be sown and ultimately blossom into destructive communal anger. This process began with the calculated implementation of the 'Divide and Rule' policy, which systematically leveraged and rigidified existing religious differences for imperial advantage (Stewart 1951). The colonial administration, driven by the trauma of the 1857 War of Independence where Hindu and Muslim soldiers briefly united against the British, institutionalized the religious categorization of society (Devji 2009). This tactic was crucial for the British to overcome their fear of a unified indigenous resistance, and it was primarily achieved by framing different communities as separate, self-interested political entities (Farooqui 2015). The introduction of separate electorates in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 formalized this division, creating political constituencies based on religious identity, thereby ensuring that political mobilization and consciousness were inherently communal rather than unified and national (Umar 1966).

The communal ideology was further solidified by influential British historians who, in the nineteenth century, divided Indian history into Ancient (Hindu) and Medieval (Muslim) periods, reinforcing the notion of a historical rivalry marked by conflict and oppression (Bayly 1985). This historical narrative, eagerly adopted and amplified by communalist Hindu and Muslim historians and political figures, became a powerful tool for shaping the emotional outlook of the populace. Hindu nationalist figures began to speak of "thousand years of slavery" under Muslim rulers, effectively provoking a sense of historical grievance, resentment, and a deep-seated hate for the Muslim community (Pandey 2006). In turn, Muslim communalists responded by framing the Mughal era as a 'Golden Age' to counter the foreign occupier narrative, an act that further entrenched the 'othering' of communities. This constant psychological framing and re-framing of history and identity created a pervasive emotional environment where mutual suspicion, distrust, and latent hate became normalized emotional standards for the respective religious groups (Freitag 1989).

The rise of competing nationalisms transformed this latent hate into active political antagonism. The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the All India Muslim League in 1906 created two large-scale 'emotional communities,' each mobilizing its followers around distinct, often contradictory, emotional platforms (Anderson 1983). For the Muslim community, the core emotion was fear—the fear of political and cultural subjugation by the Hindu majority upon British withdrawal (Sayeed 1968). This fear was expertly articulated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose

'Two-Nation Theory' was fundamentally a psychological defense mechanism against the anticipated dominion of a unitary Indian state (Mughal and Ahmad 2012). Conversely, the Hindu community's defining emotion was anger at what they perceived as a divisive, imperial plot to undermine the natural unity of 'Akhand Hindustan,' fueled by the hate for the Muslim League's separatist demand and its challenge to a unitary, Hindu-majority future (Bandyopadhyay 2004). This clash of emotionally charged nationalisms—Muslim fear transforming into a demand for Pakistan, and Hindu anger solidifying into resistance against Partition—created a political gridlock that could only be broken by violence (Pandey 1997).

The period of the Congress Ministries (1937–1939) served as a critical accelerator in transforming ideological hate into experiential anger, particularly within the Muslim minority. The adoption of orthodox religious policies, such as the mandatory singing of 'Bande Mataram' and the Hinduization of educational programs, provoked a sense of profound betrayal and a justified fear of cultural annihilation among Muslims (Chander 1987). This experience cemented the Muslim community's conviction that their fate under a Hindu-dominated government would be one of systemic oppression and cultural erasure. The political parties then weaponized these raw emotions. The Muslim League's call for 'Direct Action Day' on August 16, 1946, was a formal declaration of intent, rooted in the collective anger and desperation of the Muslim community, designed to demonstrate the depth of their commitment to Pakistan (Hayat 2000). The resultant 'Great Calcutta Killings' and subsequent retaliatory riots in Bihar and Bengal were the first major eruptions of mass, communal anger, setting the grim, retributive pattern that would characterize the 1947 Partition itself (Hodson 1969). The cycle of violence had begun, driven by politically stimulated hate and rapidly escalating into reactive, genocidal anger (Chawla 2014).

The Eruption of Anger: Violence, Migration, and Ethnic Cleansing

The announcement of the Partition plan on June 3, 1947, simultaneously ignited hope for independence and an overwhelming escalation of fear, hate, and anger across the subcontinent, particularly in the border provinces of Punjab and Bengal (Talbot and Singh 2009). For the Muslim community, the plan represented the imminent achievement of Pakistan, invoking feelings of happiness and liberation. However, this joy was immediately overshadowed by profound anxiety in both communities regarding the final borders, which remained undefined until the Radcliffe Award's official publication after independence (Chawla 2018). This period of *intentional uncertainty* provided the critical emotional vacuum in which rumors, paranoia, and preparation for preemptive attacks flourished. The fear of being left on the wrong side of the border became a potent emotional catalyst, compelling communities to stockpile weapons, organize militias, and prepare for migration, viewing immediate, aggressive action against the *other* as the only viable defense against potential victimization (Khan 2007).

The subsequent announcement of the Radcliffe Award on August 17, 1947, acted as the ultimate trigger, transforming generalized fear and tension into an explosive, uncontained anger. The decision to award Muslim-majority areas like Gurdaspur, Ferozepur, and Zira to India—decisions widely seen as politically motivated and

influenced by Lord Mountbatten and Congress leaders—was viewed by Muslims as a gross act of betrayal (Ilahi 2003; Moon 1998). This betrayal fueled a fierce, organized anger within the Muslim community of West Punjab, while simultaneously provoking a reactive and intense hate among the Sikh community of East Punjab, who felt they were being forced to leave their ancestral lands and sacred sites, particularly Nankana Sahib (Jamil 2016). The brandishing of the *kirpan* by Sikh leader Master Tara Singh on March 3, 1947, accompanied by the chilling slogan 'Raj kare ga Khalsa' (The Khalsa shall rule), had already signaled the Sikh community's intent to resist the Partition violently, establishing a clear emotional trajectory toward conflict (Harbans 2020).

What followed was not merely random rioting, but a widespread campaign of *retributive genocide* driven by deep-seated hate and expressed through overwhelming anger (Brass 2003). As attested by official reports and personal accounts, both Muslim and Sikh/Hindu communities engaged in horrific, organized attacks across the divided provinces (Ahmed 2011). The trains arriving at Lahore and Amritsar stations, packed with the mutilated bodies of refugees, served as visceral emotional stimuli (Kaur 2011). These 'ghost trains' became symbols of communal vengeance, instantaneously provoking a boundless, reactive anger in the co-religionists who received them. This retributive emotional cycle established a destructive competitive dynamic: for every atrocity committed on one side, a more brutal one was executed on the other, fueled by the immediate desire for revenge and hate for the aggressor (Talbot and Tatla 2006). The official failure to manage the escalating violence, coupled with the inadequate size and mandate of the Punjab Boundary Force, left communities vulnerable, compelling them to channel their fear and desperation into preemptive and organized aggressive anger (Moon 1983; Hawthorn cited in Talbot and Singh 2009).

The most devastating manifestation of this hate and anger was the systematic victimization of women, whose bodies became battlegrounds for communal honor (Dey 2016). Women, perceived as the embodiments of their community's *izzat* (honor) and religious purity, were the primary targets of abduction, rape, forced conversion, and mutilation, actions designed to inflict the deepest possible humiliation and dishonor upon the rival community (Butalia 1993; Virdee 2013). This was an emotional weapon deployed out of hate. Furthermore, the desperation, fear, and shame caused by the threat of abduction led to the tragic phenomenon of mass suicides, such as the Thoa Khalsa incident where Sikh women jumped into a well to preserve their 'sanctity' from Muslim aggressors, and the 'honor killings' perpetrated by fathers and brothers to save their female relatives from falling into the hands of the angered mob (Brass 2006). The trauma inflicted on women—whether as victims of the invader's hate or the protector's fear—represents the cruelest emotional legacy of the Partition, demonstrating the complete breakdown of humanistic sensibility under the siege of communal hate and retributive anger. The large-scale migration, the "blood on the pathways to freedom," was thus not a peaceful transfer of populations but an ethnic cleansing born of engineered, escalating, and mutually destructive hate and anger (Copland 1998).

Sustaining Hate: Oral History and Emotional Memory

The legacy of the Partition's hate and anger is not confined to the historical record; it is dynamically preserved and perpetually re-enacted through the oral history of the generation that witnessed the catastrophe, shaping the nationalistic feelings of their successors (Pandey 2001). Oral history is an invaluable methodology for capturing the emotional intensity and psychological trauma that traditional archives often sanitize or overlook. The interviews conducted with migrants from Ludhiana and Amritsar to Sheikhupura and Gujranwala consistently reveal that the events of 1947 were so emotionally overwhelming that they remain vividly inscribed on memory, even decades later (Awan 2020). The emotions are often relived during narration, with feelings of grief over loss and a palpable hate and anger for the aggressors resurfacing immediately, demonstrating that the trauma remains raw and unresolved (Dandekar 2019). The testimonies highlight the profound shock of the emotional transformation: as stated by one interviewee, "It was a sudden incident that yesterday's friends became enemies" (Ghulam Muhammad 2020). This spontaneous combustion of communal hate extinguished the pre-existing, often genuine, communal harmony and love (Virdee 2018).

The narratives vividly demonstrate how local instigation and specific acts of brutality served as key mechanisms for escalating emotional response. Accounts from Sheikhupura, for example, reveal that the city remained relatively calm until the arrival of a "train from Delhi with Muslims...loaded with dead bodies of the Muslim men, women, children" (Muhammad Tufail Awan 2020). This single, visceral image of communal brutality instantly shattered the local equilibrium, acting as a powerful emotional trigger that provoked retaliatory anger within the West Punjabi Muslim community, leading to mass violence and ethnic cleansing against the local Hindu and Sikh populations (Ahmed 2011). This pattern—receiving trauma from the 'other' and reacting violently in 'revenge'—underscores the retributive nature of the anger. Furthermore, the migrants' experiences upon reaching Pakistan, including being labelled *Muhajir* ('refugees') and facing a lack of acceptance or even contempt from the local Muslim population, introduced a new emotional layer: fear of identity crisis and profound grief over their sacrifices being deemed unworthy (Zamindar 2007).

The hate and anger generated during the Partition have become institutionalized, forming the ideological bedrock of nationalism in both India and Pakistan (Menon 2013). The memories of violence, carefully curated and selectively shared, serve as 'invented traditions' that sustain the narrative of the 'other' as an eternal, existential enemy (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2014). The state actively engages in this process through rituals and ceremonies, such as the flag brandishing ceremony at the Wagah border (Wagah-Attari), which is strategically staged to invoke and intensify nationalistic fervor, expressed primarily through shouted slogans of aggressive patriotism and mutual hostility (Menon 2013). This performance is a formalized, symbolic re-enactment of the Partition's hate-filled antagonism, ensuring that the victim generation's emotional wounds are transferred and maintained in the national psyche. As an interviewee noted, "Whenever, I think about the events of partition of India 1947, it makes me sad and provokes emotions such as grief, hate, and anger" (Awan 2020). This continuing emotional

response demonstrates that the political hate and reactive anger of 1947 are not merely historical facts, but enduring, dynamic psychological forces continually used to legitimize state actions and fuel ongoing geopolitical conflict, particularly over issues like Kashmir (Chopra 1990). The oral narratives thus confirm that hate and anger are not fading but are being actively sustained as cornerstones of post-Partition national identity.

The Literary Reflection of Emotion

Partition literature provides a crucial, imaginative, and deeply emotional reflection of the trauma, serving as a social barometer for the collective emotional state of the communities (Hasan 2004). Writers, many of whom were refugees or direct witnesses to the atrocities, processed their personal grief, fear, hate, and anger through their art, imbuing their characters and narratives with the raw, turbulent emotionology of the time (Didur 2006). Fiction, in this context, moves beyond factual evidence to explore the psychological impact, allowing readers to emotionally engage with the events in a profound and empathetic way (Lyytikäinen 2018). Novels such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Naseem Hijazi's *Khaak aur Khoon*, and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* all converge on the theme of a sudden, brutal emotional metamorphosis from communal harmony to homicidal hate, driven by political incitement and religious difference.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), for example, meticulously charts the transformation of the peaceful village of Mano Majra, showing how external events—the *dacoity*, the 'ghost train' from Pakistan, and the instigation by characters like Malli—systematically dismantle the existing *emotionology* of shared living and replace it with lethal, organized anger (Singh 1956). The novel explicitly details the retributive mindset, quoting the extremist logic: "For each Hindu or Sikh, they kill, kill two Mussulmans... For each trainload of the dead they send over, send two across" (Singh 1956, 179). This passage perfectly encapsulates the mechanical, tit-for-tat nature of the Partition's anger, illustrating how violence became a competitive emotional exchange. Similarly, Naseem Hijazi's Urdu novel *Khaak aur Khoon* (1993) emphasizes the element of betrayal and external manipulation. It describes the Sikh aggression in Gurdaspur being orchestrated and inflamed by Hindu moneylenders like Saith Ramlal, who invoked historical and religious symbols to provoke hate and anger against Muslims, viewing them as obstacles to their political and economic goals (Hijazi 1993). This portrayal highlights the calculated nature of the emotional engineering that underpinned the mass violence.

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) further explores the genesis of hate and the psychological burden of anger. The protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram, initially expresses anger at Nehru for failing to prevent the Partition, but later shifts his emotional focus after witnessing the Muslim community's brutality in Sialkot, particularly the sexual violence against women (Nahal 1975). However, Nahal's conclusion offers a subtle nuance: the protagonist later feels he "ceased to hate... we are all equally guilty... We need their forgiveness," suggesting that the post-traumatic realization of shared suffering can, eventually, temper the destructive urge of communal anger (Nahal 1975, 375). Nevertheless, the novel provides a harrowing account of the Muslim community's hate-filled aggression, including the stripping and parading of naked women, an act of extreme emotional violence

designed solely to humiliate the 'other' community to the core (Dey 2016).

The short story genre, particularly the powerful work of Saadat Hassan Manto, offers the most acute psychological dissection of the Partition's emotional toll. Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* (1997) uses the absurdity of the mental asylum to symbolize the emotional insanity induced by the political division, reflecting the confusion, fear, and grief of those forcibly stripped of their identity and birthplace. His stories directly confront the theme of sexual violence as the ultimate expression of communal hate and retributive anger (Jalal 2013). In *Colder than Ice* and *Khol Do* (The Return), Manto exposes the profound psychological damage inflicted upon both the aggressor and the victim. *Khol Do* highlights the victim Sakina, whose repeated rape in the throes of hate-filled anger reduces her to a conditioned reflex (unfastening her clothing when asked to 'open it'), signifying the total violation and subsequent emotional collapse of her human identity (Manto 1997). Qudrat Ullah Shahab's *Ya Khuda* (1993) further emphasizes this victimization, showing how Dilshad is brutalized by Sikh men in hate-filled revenge for perceived historical grievances, and later faces emotional alienation and re-victimization by her own community in the refugee camps (Shahab 1993). Collectively, this literature confirms that hate and anger were the engines of the violence, and their psychological impact remains the essential, heartbreaking truth of the Partition.

Conclusion

The Partition of India in 1947 was a moment where the accumulated psychological and emotional energies of a divided society finally erupted. By applying the history of emotions framework, this essay has conclusively demonstrated that hate and anger were not incidental side-effects but instrumental, dynamic forces that structured, intensified, and ultimately defined the communal violence and mass migration. The British policy of 'Divide and Rule' expertly cultivated an environment of mutual suspicion and *emotionology* based on communal difference, which the competing nationalisms of the Muslim League and the Congress then accelerated. The fear of subjugation for the Muslim minority and the anger over territorial challenge for the Hindu majority were weaponized through political rhetoric and specific acts, culminating in the retributive violence of Direct Action Day and the ensuing ethnic cleansing across Punjab (Pandey 2006).

The subsequent violence, particularly in Punjab, was a catastrophic cycle of reactive anger and hate-filled vengeance, visually symbolized by the 'ghost trains' and the systemic use of rape and abduction as tools of communal dishonor. The emotional trauma was so severe that it permanently scarred the memories of the victims, whose oral testimonies continue to transmit the hate and anger to successive generations (Awan 2020). This enduring emotional residue has been actively institutionalized through nationalistic rituals and narratives in both India and Pakistan, cementing a historical consciousness built on the trauma of separation and the perpetual antagonism of the 'other' (Menon 2013). Furthermore, the extensive body of Partition literature serves as the emotional archive, translating the historical events into potent, symbolic representations of human cruelty born out of hate and anger (Manto 1997). Moving forward, understanding the Partition necessitates recognizing this emotional history, acknowledging that the roots of contemporary hostility and the continuing

tension between India and Pakistan are deeply nourished by the hate and anger born in 1947. Further research into other emotions like love, grief, and fear will only enrich this new dimension of Partition historiography (Gul 2017).

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