




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Masjids, monuments and refugees in the Partition city of Delhi, 1947–1959

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Abstract

This article explores refugee occupation in Delhi during the aftermath of the Partition in 1947. The temporary occupation of public buildings and open spaces was integral to the difficult and gradual assimilation of hundreds of thousands of refugees into and through the city. Monuments, shrines, mosques and temples provided temporary shelter for refugees and some remained occupied for years after the Partition. The definition and custody of these buildings speaks of the uncertainty and anxiety produced by violence and displacement in 1947 and 1948. The article considers both the modification of these places by the refugees who lived in them, and the gradual and faltering processes of eviction and the restoration of the buildings. The physical imprints of refugee occupation are a significant part of the city's past; a heritage which both marked a rupture in the city's history and reflects broader mores of urban dynamics.

Introduction

Delhi is a city of many, shifting parts in which boundaries and custodies are rarely clear and uncontested and the Partition is arguably the defining event of the city's extraordinary twentieth century. The legacy of Partition has become a well-known, even axiomatic aspect of the city's past. The arrival of refugees transformed the city's civic and commercial culture and precipitated rapid urban expansion. Yet little demarcation of this extraordinary history and its effects exist within Delhi's urban landscape. The Partition history of Delhi offers an exceptional opportunity to think about the Partition as a spatial history marked through the materials of the city; a history that stretched across decades after 1947 and bequeathed a proliferation of tangible and intangible fragments. The rapid, complex and contested alteration of urban fabrics, spaces and identities by displacement offers both a history of the social experience of Partition and the crises of definition faced by the city's custodians. Displaced people adapted and altered structures and places across the city. These temporary occupations also stand starkly at odds with the exercises in modernist urban planning that were catalysed by mass displacement in both India and Pakistan.¹ They do, however, sit

¹R. Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia: An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement* (Chicago, 2016), 117–28.

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comfortably within a longer history of fractious urbanism characterized by vibrant informal economies at odds with the pretensions of urban governance. This article explores the contingent, shifting occupation of urban space in the ‘postcolonial moment’, a moment when ideas and understandings about the past, chaotic present and possible futures of the city collided.²

In a crisis of global proportions, seven to eight million people were displaced in the creation of the boundaries of two new sovereign states of India and Pakistan. Over a million people lost their lives. The migration began before the announcement of the boundary on 17 August 1947 and continued for many months and, in some parts of the subcontinent, years afterwards. Although indelibly associated with August 1947, the Partition was not a chronologically defined, and delimited, event but a complex set of processes, the ramifications and afterlives which continue to define the subcontinent.

This article examines refugee occupation of two types of place in Delhi: spaces of Islamic devotion, shrines and masjids, and state-controlled, landscaped monuments. Each type of structure was transformed by the hiatus of Partition, by permitted and transgressive refugee occupation and by the changing custodial claims over them. The imperial city had been designed around a number of carefully curated and landscaped remains that ran from Shahjahanabad in the north to the Qutab Minar in the south. In 1947, these monuments and their grounds provided immediate spaces of shelter and assembly for people displaced by violence within the city and, subsequently, arriving into the city after leaving their homes in what had become Pakistan. In early 1948, the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation suspended the monumentality of these sites to allow their temporary transformation into refugee camps. As structures cultivated to embody national histories before 1947, these monuments also became what Aditi Chandra describes as ‘un-exchangeable assets’: places and structures that were indelibly altered by Partition but could not be returned, removed or displaced.³ The Purana Qila (Old Fort), an enclosed sixteenth-century stone fort, which had initially been under the jurisdiction of the Government of Pakistan and inhabited by Muslims displaced in the city, was transferred to the Government of India and functioned as a refugee settlement until the end of the 1950s.

In contrast, devotional structures in the city offered dispersed spaces for informal refugee occupation from which the authorities attempted to eject, rather than contain, people displaced into the city. Scores of masjids, some abandoned but many with imams, provided shelter as parts of a dense urban environment, largely in the old city. On 19 September 1947, shortly after the worst violence against Muslims in the city had broken out, an agreement was reached in Delhi between the governments of India and Pakistan: ‘that all those places which are regarded as sacred by one community are protected from occupation by any other community. Particular care is necessary to preserve such places intact even if they remain empty.’⁴ This elevated,

²This term is taken from G. Prakash, M. Laffan and N. Menon (eds.), *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia* (London, 2018).

³A. Chandra, ‘Potential of the “un-exchangeable monument”: Delhi’s Purana Qila, in the time of Partition, c. 1947–63’, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 2 (2013), 101–23.

⁴Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation circular, 8 Jun. 1948, Alleged desecration of mosques and other religious places of Muslims in Delhi and its adjoining areas, chief commissioner, Rehabilitation Department, F 17(11)/50, 1950, Delhi State Archives (DSA).

inter-state agreement transformed these local places into spatial and cultural markers of discrete, and now incompatible, religious identities. Attempts made to keep devotional sites devoid of refugee inhabitation exposed the tenuous grasp the bureaucracy had on information about these structures, their occupation or custody.

This article considers the physical and functional transformation of these sites by refugees. It also considers the idea of occupation as it was sensitized by rumour, bureaucratic and political responses that resonated far beyond the immediate urban locality of structures occupied by refugees. The material history of the refugee occupation, as well as being far more sustained than is often presumed, represents a significant and largely unrecognized aspect of the city's heritage. Many structures emerged – months, years or a decade later – from refugee occupation and regained their former identities. Others were submerged beneath the urban transformation of the post-Partition period. The archaeological, civil and judicial authorities in the city formulated increasingly narrow definitions of these buildings during their appropriation by refugees. These bureaucratic formulations of state custody over mosques or monuments imagined them to be entirely set apart from the dynamics and contingencies of localities within the living city. Political and bureaucratic responses to refugee inhabitation were conditioned by the recent colonial past. However, the refugee crisis precipitated the emergence of a new political culture of heritage custody in the independent city in which secular and devotional pasts were delineated more sharply and with considerably less compromise.

The Partition city of New Delhi

The demographic impact of the Partition was immeasurable and multi-faceted. The city was transformed by the arrival of half a million refugees and the displacement of around 300,000 of the city's Muslim inhabitants. In September 1947, 30,000 people were accommodated in 24 camps scattered across Delhi, each containing between 700 and 2,000 people.⁵ The tens of thousands of others who entered the city stayed as guests in homes, others on the streets, setting up makeshift encampments on available land. Less than a month after the political formalization of Partition, the 'September Massacres' broke out in the city. Homes and hospitals were attacked, shops were looted, vehicles carrying refugees and relief supplies were ambushed.⁶ In the years following the Partition, settlements built to accommodate refugees considerably enlarged the spread of the city, most especially in the south and west. Population density increased as the number of people living in the city almost doubled between 1941 and 1951.⁷

The historiography of the Partition city has transformed over the last 30 years. V.N. Datta's landmark account of the arrival, accommodation and endeavours of refugee Punjabis in Delhi presents a state-centred and data-rich endorsement of the 'humane, enlightened and realistic policy' pursued by the Government of India and the Ministry for Relief and Rehabilitation that had been established in

⁵'Health minister's appeal', *Times of India*, 5 Sep. 1947, 10.

⁶G. Pandey, 'Partition and independence in Delhi 1947–48', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (1997), 2261–72.

⁷T.Y. Tan and G. Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London, 2002), 199; A.K. Jain, 'Delhi – planning and growth', *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 34 (1989), 65–77.

September 1947.⁸ The aura of planning that followed independence was deliberately removed from the chaos precipitated by Partition, and the ideas of each provided meaning for the other. Partition provided the communal chaos from which the ‘epic narrative’ of enlightened, Nehruvian planning could emerge.⁹ Certainly, the state efforts to restore and maintain stability in Delhi after 1947 were phenomenal.¹⁰ However, more recently, finely grained readings of refugee experience have exposed the ways in which communalism animated the politics and bureaucracy of the city. Vazira Zamindar examines how refugees experienced the proliferation of legislation set in place by the nascent governments of India and Pakistan; new rules and regulations that sought to exercise and distinguish their respective sovereignties over land and people at a time of devastating flux.¹¹ Zamindar and Rotem Geva have chronicled the shrinkage and concentration of the city’s Muslim communities and the politics that underlay the appropriation of Muslim property.¹² Delhi’s urban planning and governance had been compromised by shortfalls between ambition and reach before 1947.¹³ The city had been placed under considerable pressure by the war and, in 1947, a strained capital government faced cataclysmic demographic change.¹⁴

Recent urban histories have offered new ways of thinking about the city’s materials and their social meanings. Diya Mehra has underlined the centrality of differentiation and exclusion in colonial formulations of Indian cities.¹⁵ The colonial and post-colonial Indian city was, and remains, characterized by a confluence of brutally empowered state and municipal authority on the one hand and a vibrant and restive culture of informal occupation, construction and economy on the other. This article examines both of these characteristics. The occupation of masjids and monuments was a contingent *fait accompli* to which the bureaucracy rapidly

⁸V.N. Datta, ‘Panjabi refugees and the urban development of Greater Delhi’, in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society* (Delhi, 1986), 445.

⁹N. Menon, ‘“Help the plan – help yourself”: making Indians plan conscious’, in Prakash, Laffan and Menon (eds.), *The Postcolonial Moment*, 223.

¹⁰Pandey emphasizes the urgency with which the defence of Delhi was pursued, Pandey, ‘Partition and independence in Delhi 1947–48’.

¹¹V. Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York, 2007).

¹²R. Geva, ‘The scramble for houses: violence, a factionalized state, and informal economy in post-Partition Delhi’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 51 (2017), 769–824. Chatterji has illuminated the effects of the Partition on those Muslim communities in Bengal who chose not to move and the demographic concentration of Muslims in urban space. J. Chatterji, ‘Of graveyards and ghettos: Muslims in Partition West Bengal 1947–67’, in M. Hasan and A. Roy (eds.), *Living Together Separately. Cultural India in History and Politics* (Delhi, 2005), 222–49.

¹³For information about inter-war urban planning and the stresses created by war, see A.B. Datta, ‘Genealogy of a Partition city: war, migration and urban space in Delhi’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42 (2019), 152–69; S. Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities* (Chichester, 2007).

¹⁴A. Sharan, *In the City, out of Place: Nuisance, Pollution, and Dwelling in Delhi, c. 1850–2000* (Delhi, 2014); D. Mehra, ‘Planning Delhi ca. 1936–1959’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Special Issue: ‘Beyond the colonial city: re-evaluating the urban history of India, 1920–1970’, 36 (2013), 354–74.

¹⁵D. Mehra, ‘Urban spatial exclusion: a historical perspective’, in V. Dupont, M.H. Zerah, S. Lama-Rewal and M. Faetanini (eds.), *Urban Policies and the Right to the City in India: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship* (Delhi, 2011), 58–62.

established to respond to the refugee crisis could only react. The inhabitation of both places forced certain principles of urban governance to be simultaneously articulated and compromised.

Partition and the monuments of Delhi

The city's monuments provided immediate shelter for those forced to migrate into the city. In 1947, the Purana Qila, Humayun's Tomb and other sites in Nizamuddin became camps for Muslims displaced within the city by violence, in particular from the old city, and by high-reaching deals struck between the political and land-owning classes of the capital.¹⁶ In 1948, along with Safdarjung's Tomb, these sites were run by the Ministry for Relief and Rehabilitation as camps for Hindu refugees moving into or through the city.¹⁷

The camps were spaces within the city in which refugees could be concentrated, overseen and where the limited rations available to them were stored and distributed. Few amenities were provided to the first camps inhabited by displaced Muslims. Greater provisions and adaptations were made for their subsequent occupation by non-Muslim refugees in part because of pressure Gandhi exerted on the authorities. In February 1948, 17,000 people were living around Humayun's Tomb.¹⁸ The tomb, having closed briefly, was opened once again as a camp at the end of 1948 after a fire in the Kingsway camp left 10,000 refugees without shelter. By January 1949, there were over 3,000 people camped around the tomb. Latrines, baths and pukka-walled structures were constructed in the grounds of the tomb.¹⁹ At Ferozshah Kotla, occupation extended beyond the precincts of the official camp and an additional, informal settlement was established in the southern enclosure.²⁰ The Purana Qila had been used as a camp just five years earlier in 1942 to house 2,115 Japanese internees arrested in South-East Asia and transferred to India.²¹ Partition refugees were accommodated in tents and dalans (small recessed verandas under the walls of the fort) within the walls of the fort for the first 18 months. Flimsy tenements were then constructed, consisting of single, unventilated rooms (measuring 12 foot by 12 foot) with asbestos roofs, for which

¹⁶A. Ashraf, 'Did Sardar Patel order the eviction of Muslims from Delhi villages?', *Scroll*, 10 Aug. 2016, <http://scroll.in/article/813521/did-sardar-patel-order-the-eviction-of-muslims-from-delhi-villages>, accessed 12 Mar. 2020.

¹⁷Tara Chand, secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Education, draft note to cabinet, file submitted 25 Apr. 1951, Occupation of monuments by refugees, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1951, file 195, National Archives of India (NAI); Making use of historical buildings of India, suggestions by Mr Tyabji, ASI, Delhi Branch, 1953, D296. NAI.

¹⁸Evacuation from West Pakistan: officials speed up plans', *Times of India*, 24 Feb. 1948, 7, col. 4.

¹⁹Alteration and addition in Humayun Tomb Camp, Chief Commissioner's Office, Record and Routine Branch, file no. 3(78)N, 1948, DSA; Tara Chand, secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Education, draft note to cabinet, file submitted 25 Apr. 1951, Occupation of monuments by refugees, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1951, file 195, NAI.

²⁰Making use of historical buildings of India, suggestions by Mr Tyabji, ASI, Delhi Branch, 1953, D296. NAI.

²¹F. Yap, 'Prisoners of war and civilian internees of the Japanese in British Asia: the similarities and contrasts of experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47 (2012), 326–7; C. Bayly and T. Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (London, 2004), 337–8.

the Ministry charged refugees Rs12 a month. Dry latrines constructed from corrugated iron and 20 water pipes provided limited, shared and squalid sanitation to 1,000 refugee families.²² In 1951, amidst protests from the inhabitants at the camp against the poor conditions and the government's apparent reluctance to improve them, a proposal was made to establish 'quarters and shops, drains and filtered water supply'.²³

The conditions of the Purana Qila camp were poor but the relatively better-off and better-educated refugees housed there had the means to communicate their predicament to the authorities and to the city at large. The refugees at Purana Qila used the lost, sacred past of Multan, by then in Pakistan, to represent the abominable heat of the asbestos-roofed tenements in which they were 'roasted like fish in the hands of Shah Shamus Tahrez', the thirteenth-century saint who persuaded the sun to cook a fish he held in his hands.²⁴ *Milap*, a local Urdu newspaper, published a statement, or rather a plea, from the camp in the summer of 1949:

Please read this carefully. The government officials as well as the police harass the poor refugees of Purana Qila. Some of their belongings have been thrown away or confiscated by the authorities for no reason. Some of them have also been thrown out without alternative accommodation being provided. The poor, who have no way to feed themselves, are being treated poorly by the authorities. This is quite shameful. It is the responsibility of the government to make sure that people do not have to vacate the camps without getting adequate alternative accommodation.²⁵

The inhabitants' appeals made use of the enduring status of the fort as a monument and tourist resort, making sarcastic mention of foreigners who came to see 'the historical Qilla and...[who] are astounded to see these par excellence arrangements made for displaced persons in the capital of Free India'.²⁶ Despite the protests of refugees and lethargy of the authorities, the camp was inhabited for many years. A settlement evolved inside the walls of the Qila and, in 1959, 5,000 refugees settled in the Purana Qila were issued with a 'Positively Final Notice to Quit'. The inhabitants preferred to remain in the township that had developed within the walls of the fort than to be dispersed into the slum-condition resettlement colonies.²⁷

²²Representation made by the Sindhi Panchayat Purana Qila, 23 Jul. 1952, works at Purana Qila, CC (chief commissioner), Record and Routine, 1(10), R&R, 1950, DSA. See also Chandra, 'Potential of the "un-exchangeable monument"', 23.

²³Layout plan of Purana Qila, 1/6, works at Purana Qila, CC, Record and Routine, 1(10), R&R, 1950, DSA.

²⁴Representation made by the Sindhi Panchayat Purana Qila, 23 Jul. 1952, works at Purana Qila, CC, Record and Routine, 1(10), R&R, 1950, DSA.

²⁵*Milap* (Urdu newspaper), 13 Jul. 1949; S. Ahmed, 'Daily Akhbar: newspapers and reading publics in Delhi, 1945–1952', Delhi University M.Phil. thesis, 2016, 61.

²⁶Representation made to minister for rehabilitation, 19 Jul. 1951, works at Purana Qila, CC, Record and Routine, 1(10), R&R, 1950, DSA.

²⁷C. Dunn, 'Saddest siege', *Observer*, 15 Nov. 1959.

The archaeological authorities controlled significant amounts of land in Delhi. Particular care had been taken to document and notify structures as monuments for the new imperial capital in the inter-war period.²⁸ The pressure created by displacement led to the abandonment of archaeological protection at Serai Azimganj, a structure west of the zoological park established beside Purana Qila. The serai had been made a protected monument in 1924, but in 1949 was handed over in a 'dilapidated condition' to the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation together with 16 acres of land to create the Sundar Nagar Colony. Only the mosque at the centre of the area would be maintained amid the new housing that would be provided to refugees.²⁹ The serai survives on the eastern edge of Sundar Nagar.³⁰

From the point of view of the refugees, all of whom were suffering a forced and uncertain migration, the monuments were where life was necessarily to be lived. They had food to prepare, clothes to wash and children to educate. However, the rapid deliberate and incidental transformation of monuments and their grounds infuriated the archaeologists who supervised listed monuments in the city. Archaeological officers complained incessantly about the damage inflicted by makeshift occupation. At Safdarjung's Tomb, archaeological officers complained of broken *jalis* (perforated stone screens) and of plinth stones being raised and broken to be used for washing clothes.³¹ Measures were taken to protect parts of the monuments from the occupation growing around them. At Humayun's Tomb, the 22 marble graves on the first floor of the tomb were encased in masonry to protect them.³² Yasmin Khan's comprehensive history of the Partition draws on Richard Symonds' account of the squalid conditions at Humayun's Tomb and the fountains 'fouled with human dirt'.³³ At the Purana Qila, Sher Shah's Tomb was badly damaged and black marble inlay work in the walls was removed.³⁴ The lawns at all three sites, complained the Ministry of Education, had been 'ruined and altered beyond recognition'.³⁵ From the point of view of the state archaeologists, the informal occupation of the refugees was vandalism, wrecking the orderly monuments and their environs that had been established and defended at considerable, yearly expense. This outrage sits within a broader and enduring tension between the formal orders of urban governance and the informal economies of the South Asian city.³⁶ The archaeological authorities had a long-standing

²⁸Archaeological remains in the new imperial capital were subject to exceptional documentation and a number of monuments were listed and carefully conserved. See Z. Hasan, *Monuments of Delhi*, 4 vols. (Delhi, 1916–20). On Delhi's monumental culture, see M. Rajagopalan, *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Five Monuments in Modern Delhi* (Chicago, 2016).

²⁹Protected monuments between Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb, CCR (Chief Commissioner Records), Archaeology, 2(56), 1948, DSA.

³⁰*Delhi: The Built Heritage: A Listing* (Delhi, 1999), 235.

³¹Safdarjung Tomb, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1949, D25, NAI.

³²Alteration and addition in Humayun Tomb Camp, Chief Commissioner's Office, Record and Routine Branch, file no. 3(78)N, 1948, DSA.

³³Y. Khan, *The Great Partition* (Yale, 2008), 143.

³⁴Tara Chand, secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Education, draft note to cabinet, file submitted 25 Apr. 1951, Occupation of monuments by refugees, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1951, file 195, NAI.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶I am grateful for one of my reviewers for pointing out the importance of this larger frame of urban history.

antagonism towards urban publics and more particularly the urban poor. The work of government archaeologists, first as an Imperial department and after 1951 as the Archaeological Survey of India, was divided, rather unhappily, between research and conservation. The quotidian work of the archaeological officers had long been characterized by a sense that their carefully crafted monuments were besieged by an ungrateful and ill-disciplined urban public.³⁷ Now the monuments, requisitioned as camps, were places where families lived as best they could; cut trees and plants, cooked, bathed, urinated, defecated, beat their clothes, drew and wrote on the walls of the tomb and put cow-dung cakes out to dry.³⁸ Archaeological officers despaired of this occupation, permission for which had never been sought from, or given by, their offices.

Partition presented a crisis of definition and custody for monuments and other spaces in the city. Displaced peoples established schools in mosques, ration shops were opened in monuments and businesses in shrines. The catastrophe of Partition was predicated on the assumption of difference, between communities and territories. In the reality of mass migration, the definition of people and places was simultaneously paramount and unfeasible. Communal rumours emerged that made sense of these uncertainties by identifying deliberate subterfuge amidst the confusion. At the start of 1948, thousands of Muslims returned to the city and were met with rumours about the Pakistani 'spies' in their midst.³⁹ In 1948, the *Times of India* reported that the daily newspaper *Ehsan* in Lahore had reported that 'Gandhi is being worshipped in the Moti Masjid in the Red Fort and that in the Humayun's tomb a temple has been set up on one part and a Gurdwara in another.'⁴⁰ When the Delhi Mandir Raksha (defence) Committee advertised in the *Hindustan Times* in August 1948 offering assistance in the repair of 'dilapidated temples', the secretary of the Mosque Restoration Sub-Committee at the Jama Masjid asked the Delhi government to ensure that such 'repair work' was not carried out on mosques that were being converted into mandirs.⁴¹

In addition to the large, landscaped monuments, smaller monuments within the city were used as temporary shelters by people displaced by violence. By 1948, most of the city's monuments, according to the archaeological authorities, had been occupied. Monuments became homes as 'door leaves and chowkhats [window and door frames]' were added to structures to create privacy.⁴² In complaints to government, the Archaeological Department evoked a civic, public space despoiled. Between Mori and Kashmiri Gates, the refugees, complained the archaeologists, 'converted these monuments into vast latrines but everywhere here and there

³⁷D. Sutton, 'Inhabited pasts: monuments, authority, and people in Delhi, 1912–1970s', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 77 (2018), 1013–35.

³⁸Safdarang Tomb, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1949, D25, NAI.

³⁹Geva, 'The scramble for houses', 792; Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, 86–7.

⁴⁰'Pakistan's "hymn of hate" against India', *Times of India*, 5 Oct. 1948, 7, cols. 1–2.

⁴¹Secretary, Mosque Restoration Sub-Committee, Jama Masjid, Delhi, to Shri Mehar Chand Khanna, convenor, Mosque Sub-Committee, Delhi, Aug. 1948, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁴²Assistant superintendent, Department of Archaeology, Delhi Circle, to deputy commissioner, 18 Mar. 1948, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945, DSA.

heaps of refuse and peelings mixed with overripe eatables stink badly in the corners; also smoke coming out of their improvised ovens has defaced the facades spotted here and there with spitting of betels'.⁴³ Temporary accommodation soon consolidated itself into more fixed claims. Alternative rights to the land emerged as a society of the displaced attempted to establish lives and livelihoods in the city. At Ajmeri and Kashmiri Gates, land was leased and exchanged in spite of the proprietary claim held by the Archaeological Department under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904. In 1948, Saudagar Chand began to build a house on land at Ajmeri Gate which he claimed had been sold to him by Sardar Harbans Singh for Rs500.⁴⁴ By December of that year, archaeological officers complained vociferously about the gathering of building materials and the excavations of foundations at the sites. The city's police, to whom the monuments were unremarkable parts of a city in flux, appear to have had a more communicative and pragmatic relationship with the inhabitants of these sites and assured the archaeologists that the huts being erected at Ajmeri and Kashmiri Gates were temporary protection against the Delhi winter. The police refused to move the refugees on; to do so would require the use of force and the refugees would inevitably return. There was nowhere else for them to go.⁴⁵

Monuments, occupation and devotional spaces overlapped. The tomb of Roshan Ara Begum, inside Roshan Ara Garden in Baradari, had been notified as a historic monument in 1915 and was among the mosques allegedly destroyed by refugees in a list compiled in 1949.⁴⁶ Schools were started by refugees in the mosque at Safdarjung's Tomb, at Masjid Kotla Mubarakpur and at Moth-Ki-Masjid.⁴⁷ Before 1947, the imperial Archaeological Department had, albeit grudgingly, permitted mosques to exist as devotional parts of landscaped monuments. In the mid-1930s, eight mosques were accommodated within monumental sites in the city, an accommodation that included the requirement that visitors remove or cover their shoes if they wished to enter them.⁴⁸

⁴³Assistant superintendent, Department of Archaeology, Delhi Circle, to deputy commissioner, 18 Mar. 1948, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945, DSA.

⁴⁴Shankar Das, assistant superintendent, Department of Archaeology, Delhi Circle, to deputy commissioner, 10 Sep. 1948, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945, DSA.

⁴⁵Superintendent of police to deputy commissioner, Delhi, 18 Jan. 1949; S.R. Chaudhuri, inspector general of police, Delhi, and Ajmer Merwara, to deputy commissioner, 22 Sep. 1948, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945, DSA.

⁴⁶The tomb had been notified in 1915. S.A. Abbasi, Nazir-e-Aukaf, Sunni Majlis-e-Auqaf to deputy commissioner, Delhi, 4 Aug. 1949, Unauthorised occupation and demolition of mosques, Deputy Commissioner Records, 4/1949, DSA.

⁴⁷Dr K.N. Puri, superintendent, Archaeological Department, Delhi Circle, to deputy commissioner, Delhi, 15 Nov. 1949; J.H.S. Waddington, superintendent, Archaeological Department, Delhi Circle, to deputy commissioner, Delhi, 16 Jul. 1951, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945. DSA; List of irregularities at Safdarjung's Tomb, Safdarjang Tomb, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1949, D25, NAI.

⁴⁸These were: Khairul Manazil Mosque, Purana Qila Mosque, Safdarjung's Mosque, Shah Alam's Mosque, Qudsia Garden Mosque, Jamali Kamali Mosque, Moth-ki-Masjid and Khirki Masjid. Rules for

'Set apart for Muslims': the occupation of mosques

Hundreds of mosques, shrines and temples – quotidian places of public resort – were inhabited during the influx of half a million refugees into and around the city. The occupation of these spaces gave shape to a set of anxieties in the wake of violence within the city and across the borders. Custody and guardianship of these structures offered the Indian state the means to attempt to fix a particular category of place at a time of catastrophic instability.

With the agreement made in September 1947 between the month-old states of India and Pakistan, mosques ceased to be public spaces and became the temporary subjects of diplomacy in some of the earliest diplomatic negotiations between the two nations. It was subsequently agreed that all 'shrines, temples, mosques and other religious places which were damaged during the disturbances would be repaired'.⁴⁹ In late 1947, a committee chaired by Mehr Chand Khanna was formed in Delhi to oversee the 'restoration of mosques desecrated during the disturbances'.⁵⁰ The term 'restoration' implied either physical or custodial restoration, or both. In 1949, an estimate of Rs134,667 was approved for the repair of 106 mosques damaged in disturbances or by occupation.⁵¹ This agreement was one of several that dealt with things that were left behind or impossible to move; remnant objects and spaces over which the new states exercised surrogate custody. Custody of the mosques suspended them as 'between' things held apart from the cataclysmic Partition; they could neither be physically moved between the two states nor could they be transferred between community identities by re-dedication. Mosques on one side and mandirs and gurudwaras on the other were fixed within an agreement of mutually assured protection under a presumption that their destruction or transformation was otherwise inevitable.

The occupation of mosques was further sensitized by rumours of their re-use either as temples or gurudwaras. The conversion of mosques into temples exercised the authorities far more than the mere fact of occupation by refugees. Gandhi, who spent several weeks in Delhi before his assassination in January 1948, responded to, and in doing so inflated, the rumours circulating in the city. He condemned the damage inflicted on mosques and described any conversion of a mosque into a temple or gurudwara as 'an attempt to bury Hinduism and Sikhism' and as a 'gross *adharmā*'.⁵² One of the conditions set for the discontinuation of the fast

the guidance of visitors to certain protected monuments in the Delhi Province, Chief Commissioner's Office, Education, 1(20)/1935, DSA.

⁴⁹Clearance of mosques in Delhi under occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner Records, 17(11) 1950, DSA.

⁵⁰Deputy commissioner to assistant secretary (R&R), Delhi State Government, 10 Oct. 1953. Mehr Chand Khanna (1897–1970) was minister for rehabilitation from 1954 to 1962. Chief Commissioner Records, Relief & Rehabilitation 17(11), 1950, vol. IV, DSA. The rest of the committee consisted of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Shah Nawaz, deputy commissioner, Malana Hafizur Rehman, Maulana Ahmed Said, Bawa Harbans Singh Bedi, Ch. Abdul Sattar, the city magistrate, Delhi, superintendent of police, Delhi.

⁵¹K.K. Sharma, secretary to CC, to superintending engineer, Delhi Province, 16 Apr. 1949, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁵²Speech at prayer meeting, New Delhi, 18 Sep. 1947, in *Collected Works of Gandhi* (Electronic Book), New Delhi, Publications Division Government of India, 1999, 98 volumes, www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi-volume-1-to-98.php, vol. XCVI, 7 Jul. 1947 – 26

he began in Delhi on 13 January 1948 was the 'voluntary evacuation by non-Muslims of all the mosques in the city which were being used for residential purposes or which had been converted into temples'.⁵³ Five days after his fast began, Gandhi received a delegation representing hundreds of organizations in the city promising that 'The mosques which have been left by Muslims and which now are in the possession of Hindus and Sikhs will be returned. The areas which have been set apart for Muslims will not be forcibly occupied.'⁵⁴ This undertaking is interesting in its finality and in its wording; most striking in its overstatement of the capacity of the gathered signatories to effect such promises. The idea of spaces 'set apart for Muslims' echoed the government's commitment to hold mosques aside, under an ambiguous promise of restoration.

The photographer Margaret Bourke-White recorded a conversation with her taxi driver who was 'enraged' by Gandhi's prohibition against the occupation of shrines and mosques by refugees. He had, she discovered,

a relatives-in-law problem that would have driven even a milder man to desperation. His wife's entire family had fled from Pakistan and taken refuge in Delhi, and he had just succeeded in installing them comfortably in the tomb of a Muslim saint when Gandhiji started his drive to get the refugees out of all sacred Mohammedan places so the Muslim minority could go freely to worship. As a result, the driver's tiny flat was overflowing with uncles- and aunts-in-law, a mother-in-law, and numerous first cousins, while the still more numerous second cousins were out in an open lot.⁵⁵

In 1948, the deputy commissioner personally visited 16 mosques that had reportedly been converted into 'Mandirs and Gurudwaras'.⁵⁶ The truth of the occupation was more prosaic and complex. Of the 16, 4 were being occupied by refugees with 'some portions of them being used as places of worship'. These were not cases of conversion but the presence of murthis or images in the possession of Hindu refugees. The refugees in these 4 mosques were willing to move if alternative occupation was found. At the mosque on Church Road, the walls of the building declared that the structure was a Laxmi Narain temple though there were no deities within. Instead, three men from Uttar Pradesh had established a buffalo dairy and were 'flourishing in their trade'. This combination of business premises and religious site was not apparently uncommon. The steps of the Masjid Haji Ali Jan on

Sep. 1947, 388; Speech at prayer meeting, New Delhi, 21 Nov. 1947, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, vol. XCVII, 27 Sep. 1947 – 5 Dec. 1947, 363. Also see Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, 198.

⁵³He also asked that *urs* ceremonies would continue at the shrine of Khwaja Qutub-ud-Din Bakhtiar in Mehrauli. Speech by Abul Kalam Azad, 17 Jan. 1948, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, vol. XCVIII, 6 Dec. 1947 – 30 Jan. 1948, 249–50 n. 98.

⁵⁴Speech before breaking fast, Birla House, New Delhi, 18 Jan. 1948, in *Collected Works of Gandhi*, vol. XXVIII, 6 Dec. 1947 – 30 Jan. 1948, 253.

⁵⁵M. Bourke-White, *Interview with India* (London, 1950), 49.

⁵⁶S.L. Ahuja, deputy commissioner to Shankar Prasad, chief commissioner, Deputy Commissioner Files, no. 348, 1948; deputy commissioner to assistant secretary (Relief and Rehabilitation), Delhi State Government, 10 Oct. 1953, Chief Commissioner Records, Relief & Rehabilitation, 17(11) 1950, vol. IV, DSA.

Katra Bhangi near Chandni Chowk was occupied by a cloth merchant and the mosque bore a sign saying, 'Mandir Mahatmaji'.⁵⁷ The incidental presence of devotional objects and the opportunistic marking of the site as a mandir to consolidate precarious rights of occupation are the materials of social hiatus. They also represent another theme of continuity between the city before and after Partition. The Imperial and the Indian state, despite the powers of violent displacement they endowed themselves with, could be made squeamish by the evocation of sacred sensibilities. The strategic placement of devotional materials and words offered the means of protecting informal, precarious occupation from the interference of the state. Like the damage inflicted to jalis and doorframes in monumental landscapes, refugees adapted the spaces they occupied in order to live with some little comfort and security, not as a calculated attempt to displace or usurp other rights. Their interpretation as such reveals the diffuse anxieties that beset the political culture of the city, a culture that hinged on the presumption of antagonism between spaces and communities classified as Hindu and Muslim.

Of the 16 mosques investigated by the deputy commissioner in 1948, the Dargah Masoom Ali Shah in Sabzimandi had become the premises of two businesses – the Lyallpur Goods transport business and Jasbir Singh and Company – displaced from the portion of Punjab that now lay in Pakistan. The Panchkuian mosque on Reading Road was being used as a school for the blind, an accommodation allowed by the previous deputy commissioner and approved by the Muslim Relief Commission.⁵⁸ Three of the mosques had been destroyed entirely. One mosque from the list could not be identified and might have been one of three mosques in Hauz Qasi, none of which were occupied. Two of the mosques were already subject to ongoing civil court cases. One mosque, on Takiya Bela Road in Civil Lines, was occupied by Amar Singh who claimed that the building had been a Shivaji temple for three years. The deputy commissioner's assistant reported the presence of an 'old' *havan kund*, a ritual fire pit, in the building and expressed doubts that the building had ever been a mosque.⁵⁹ Only 2 of the 16 mosques visited by the deputy commissioner in 1948 were categorized in his report as 'disputed'. One was a paio, a drinking stall on Rajpur Road, and the other was the 'site' of a mosque in Queen's Gardens.⁶⁰ The latter site had been disputed for years, having emerged during the Shiv Mandir dispute in the 1930s, and no structure existed on the site. The rumoured trespass by another community fleshed out and consolidated the idea of the Queen's Gardens mosque. These disputed sites, physically empty but symbolically replete, echo the idea of the 'abandoned' mosques held back by the government or the spaces 'set apart' for Muslims now presumed absent from the city.

⁵⁷In 1950 at the same site, police were reported to be awaiting 'the opportunity' to remove the murthis from the mosque. S.A. Abbasi, Nazir-e-Aukaf, Sunni Majlis-e-Auqaf to deputy commissioner, Delhi, Nov. 1949, Unauthorised occupation and demolition of mosques, Deputy Commissioner Records, 4/1949; R. Dayal, deputy commissioner, Delhi, 7 Jun. 1950, Reg. mosque Haji Ali Jan, Katra Bhangi, Bazaar Ghanta Ghar, Delhi, CC, Confidential, F134/50.1950, DSA.

⁵⁸The Andh Mahavidhyalaya Blind School now occupies the site together with a mosque.

⁵⁹S.L. Ahuja, deputy commissioner to Shankar Prasad, chief commissioner, Deputy Commissioner Files, no. 348, 1948, DSA.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Rumoured, disputed and empty mosques provide a way of thinking about Islam's immanence and precarity in the post-Partition city of Delhi.⁶¹

What little information emerged from these investigations belies the certainty of the lists set before the committee. The lists were the product of suspicion founded upon the mutual antagonism of Hindu and Muslim; they were part of coherent narratives and enumerations of distinction and absence, of spaces set aside and suspended under promises of restoration. The fragmentary information speaks of the poverty of information retrievable in the city's small localities by those charged with their custody. The Archaeological Survey waited, cantankerously, for their custody to be restored over the city's registered monuments. While they did so, archaeological officers projected the presumed distinction, and mutual hostility, of Hindu and Muslim communities on to, and into, the monuments and, by extension, the city's past. As displacement, theft and violence marred the city, one officer remarked that 'communal riots will not allow one section of the people to visit monuments *belonging to the other community* on account of fear and mistrust' (emphasis added).⁶² Public custody of these monuments, and the pasts that they embodied, were now partitioned to imagine two, distinct communities. After permission was given by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation in 1948 for the establishment of a school at the Masjid Kotla Mubarakpur, the director general of archaeology's objection made no mention of the Ancient Monument Protection Act and instead evoked the 'sanctity' of the mosque and the injuries already done by the occupation to 'the religious sensibilities of Muslims'.⁶³ The director general's argument avoided the pre-eminent claim of the archaeological authorities based on the 1904 Ancient Monuments Protection Act and instead offered a proxy, communal custody; his statement suggesting that monuments, or parts of monuments, were conserved on behalf of particular, religious, publics. The question of spaces, publics and sensitivities was even more pronounced in the occupation of mosques and shrines in the city.⁶⁴

In official discussion, the mosques were consistently described as having been 'abandoned'. The assertion of state custody, therefore, presumed a vacuum of meaning caused by the evacuation of only the publics that defined the mosques as living parts of the city. This presumption that underlay state custody, therefore, placed Muslims outside of the Indian nation.⁶⁵ The term 'abandoned' also suggested a voluntarism that belied the violence unleashed upon the Muslim population in 1947. In Delhi, 10,000 Muslims were killed in the riots in the city in 1947 and 44,000 homes were abandoned.⁶⁶ Gyan Pandey gives a sense of the

⁶¹For more discussion of these issues, see the excellent work of Hilal Ahmed and Anand Vivek Taneja.

⁶²Note by H.L. Srivastva, Stalls erecting at ancient monuments, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1947/8, D5, NAI.

⁶³Director general of archaeology in India to secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Education, 3 Jul. 1950, Damages caused and occupation taken of protected monuments during disturbances and thereafter, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, DC 21/1945, DSA.

⁶⁴The inhabitation of monuments and religious buildings has been left largely unremarked in the literature on Partition in the city. Mehra, 'Planning Delhi ca. 1936–1959', makes no mention, being more concerned with occupation of houses abandoned by Muslims.

⁶⁵My thanks to Radha Kapuria for making this succinct and valuable observation.

⁶⁶Roughly two-thirds of the city's Muslim inhabitants left the city, c. 329,000, as almost half a million refugees entered it to become 28 per cent of the population. The 1951 census recorded only 99,000 Muslims in the city, a proportional reduction since the 1941 census from 33.22 per cent of the city's

violence experienced by Muslims and their property in Delhi, which included mob attacks on a school, hospital, shops and homes and the inadequate and partial security provided that made 'a whole community...feel defenceless, isolated and increasingly suffocated'.⁶⁷ Gandhi's final fast and his subsequent death at the hand of a Hindu assassin at the end of January 1948 were pivotal in restoring peace and allowing Muslims to live in the city.⁶⁸ Violence and displacement, both temporary and permanent, were concentrated in particular localities. Of the 106 mosques that the government undertook to repair in 1949, 70 were located in the old city triangle of Kotwali, Pahaganj and Subzimandi.⁶⁹ Also within this area were located the majority of the 19 mosques that were reported to have been destroyed during the 1947 riots (3 from Sadar Bazaar, 4 from Haus Qasi, 7 from Nabi Qarim).

The lists created to define state custody abstracted the idea of the shrines from their localities. In reality, these sites remained defined by their immediate surroundings. At Qadam Sharif dargah, disputes over space did not end after the evacuation of refugees from the central shrine. The refugees moved to the area around the shrine, Nabi Qarim. In 1949, the Public Works Department reported that following repair work, jalis at the dargah had been damaged once again and door frames stolen. The adjacent graveyard, having been repaired at a cost of Rs3,000 in December 1948, was once again subject to encroachment and occupation. The engineer responsible concluded that unless and until Muslims had control of dargahs and mosques, any repairs carried out would be futile.⁷⁰ Later in the same year, the Sunni Majlis-e-Auqaf complained that a theatre had been established over demolished tombs in Nabi Karim graveyard and, adding communal spice to attract the attention of government, that 'the construction of the temple is in progress with utmost rapidity'.⁷¹ This sense of besiegement is corroborated by other accounts that suggested that refugees were resourceful in enlarging the spaces they occupied. Geva cites Anis Kidwai's description of the appropriative behaviour of refugees in Muslim neighbourhoods: 'From the minute refugees set foot in a locality, they devote their energies to capturing the neighbourhood for friends and family by hook or crook'.⁷²

The Majlis Mueen-i-Awqaf-i-Hind appealed for the removal of the refugees who were living around the Nabi Karim shrine, claiming both that worship was impeded by the presence of these refugees and that hundreds of Muslim families were ready

inhabitants to only 5.71 per cent in 1951. Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, 199; Datta, 'Panjabi refugees and the urban development of Greater Delhi', 442–3.

⁶⁷Pandey, 'Partition and independence in Delhi: 1947–1948'. See also G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2010), 128–30, 131.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁹K.K. Sharma, secretary to CC, to superintending engineer, Delhi Province, 16 Apr. 1949, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁷⁰S. Narain, executive engineer, Special Division, No. 111, to N.G. Dewan, superintending engineer, Delhi Province, 19 Mar. 1949, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁷¹S.A. Abbasi, Nazir-e-Aukaf, Sunni Majlis-e-Auqaf to deputy commissioner, Delhi, 26 Oct. 1949, Unauthorised occupation and demolition of mosques, Deputy Commissioner Records, 4/1949. DSA.

⁷²Geva, 'The scramble for houses', 778.

to return to the area if the refugees were removed.⁷³ The refugees had been assured that their residence in about 300 houses around the shrine was secure and no discussion of their eviction was permissible. The removal of the refugees from the area around the shrine would, claimed the superintendent of police at Pahaganj, represent a 'breach of faith'. India being a 'secular state', Muslims should be able to pass freely to the shrine from the east, passing through the area occupied by refugee families.⁷⁴ The idea of the secular nation, therefore, protected the notional access to a local Muslim shrine but could not enforce the right of displaced Muslims to return to their homes.

Many of the evictions carried out in 1948 were temporary; the heavy rains in the summer of 1949 forced refugees to return to the mosques and tombs, breaking the locks if necessary.⁷⁵ The occupation of mosques continued for years after 1947. The Dargah Sharif on Connaught Place was occupied for five years.⁷⁶ Conditions within the mosques were poor and refugees expressed a consistent willingness to leave them. In 1950, 29 male refugees who had been living with their families for four years in a mosque (identified only as mosque no. 5648) located between the railway lines at New Delhi Station petitioned to be provided with alternative accommodation. The mosque, they complained, was in a dilapidated state and living in it had become dangerous.⁷⁷ The custodians of spaces taken over by refugees also complained. Masjid Shah Abdul Salam, located on the edge of Connaught Place, between Shaheed Bhagat Singh Marg and Panchkuian Road, housed a number of refugees for years after 1947. In 1952, Shah Mohammad Sanauddin Faridi Chishti Sajjada Nashin and Mutawali Dargah Shahab Abdul Salam Faridi Chishti appealed in the name of the Hindu and Muslim devotees of the saint for refugees to be removed from the dargah. During 1947, the petition claimed, the mosque had been occupied and 'all of its valuables valued at thousands were looted and the garden as well as the trees trampled and destroyed'. The mosque had been returned ('after great efforts') by the Mosque Restoration Committee in 1948 but refugees remained in the dargah. The refugees, claimed the petitioners, interfered with Friday prayers 'by playing their Radios, and gramophones and making other noises'. The refugees had damaged the tombs, including that of the petitioner's father, and made the performance of *urs* impossible.⁷⁸

These complaints were not confined to the occupation of mosques and dargahs. Kalkaji Mandir in Okhla was one of four non-Muslim camps established in Delhi.⁷⁹

⁷³Sahibzada H.S.M. Rashiduddin Ahmad, Majlis Mueen-i-Awqaf-i-Hind to governor general of India, 29 Aug. 1948, DSA, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁷⁴Police report, Pahaganj, 27 Oct. 1948, Restoration of mosques occupied during disturbances, Deputy Commissioner Records, 348/1949, DSA.

⁷⁵Alleged desecration of mosques and other religious places of Muslims in Delhi and its adjoining areas, chief commissioner, Rehabilitation Department, F 17(11)/50, 1950, vol. III, DSA.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Petition, Allotment of quarters to the occupants of Masjid, no. 5648, Chief Commissioner's Office, Rehabilitation, 17(11), 1950, DSA.

⁷⁸Mohd. Wali S/o Rafi Ullah 1564, Masjid and Dargah Hazrat shah mohd. Abdul salam faridi oppp Marine Hotel CP, from 2015 list of old age pensioners getting pension from the New Delhi Municipal Corporation. Aged 61 at start of 2016.

⁷⁹The others being Kingsway Camps, Wavell Canteen Transit Camp and Willingdon Aerodrome Transit Camp.

Refugees remained in the Kalkaji Mandir until 1950 and were the cause of some antagonism by 1949. A petition was filed by the pujaris of the mandir against the damage inflicted by the 300 hundred families, many of whom had been allotted land in Rohtak. The refugees, they claimed, had destroyed *chabutras* (platforms), slaughtered animals, taken and damaged *murtis*, killed birds fed by devotees, cut down trees, were keeping cattle at the *dharamsalas* and threatened to kill anyone who questioned them.⁸⁰ Two shrines had been occupied by refugees, one by a family who placed a charpoy over the 'Moorti of Shiviji'.⁸¹

Return to the quotidian city

In April 1949, it was decided that normality had been restored to Delhi and that 'the Muslims were moving freely and carrying on their business in all parts of the city'. It was estimated that 100 mosques were still occupied but, given the quieter state of the city, the work of the Mosque Restoration Committee was handed over to the Sunni Majlis-e-Aukuf, an organization formed under the Delhi Muslim Waqf Act in 1943. The Mosque Restoration Committee would cease to exist and it would be left to the Majlis to select mosques for 'evacuation' and then approach Mehr Chand to form a plan for alternative accommodation for those living inside the mosques. Once that accommodation was found, the matter would be passed on to the chief commissioner who would order the police to arrange evacuation.⁸² This new arrangement, dividing responsibility between a religious organization and the civic authorities, diluted the authority of the Mosque Restoration Committee and side-stepped the state's former commitment to restoration.

The winding up of the committee and transfer of its responsibilities to a non-state body did not end but instead amplified the political question of mosque occupation and restoration. In April 1950, the high commissioner for Pakistan in India provided a list of 268 mosques in Delhi and its surrounding villages that had been occupied, destroyed or converted.⁸³ The chief commissioner for Delhi was given the task of investigating and reporting on the list. Each named mosque on the list was investigated. Of these, 70 were occupied by refugees, 11 had been converted into mandirs or gurudwaras, 19 had been demolished and 3 were sealed. The remaining 165 mosques from the site, the chief commissioner claimed, were 'actually in the occupation of Muslims'.⁸⁴ The Ministry of External Affairs and Home Ministry exerted pressure on Mehr Chand, the minister for rehabilitation, to empty the 70 occupied mosques. Mehr Chand, however, refused to make the evacuation of sacred

⁸⁰Petition, 10 Nov. 1949, Complaint against refugees residing at Kalkaji Camp, Deputy Commissioner's Office, General Branch, file no. 333, 1949, DSA.

⁸¹Hargain Singh, police report, 28 Nov. 1949, *ibid*.

⁸²Clearance of mosques in Delhi under occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner Records, 17(11) 1950, DSA.

⁸³High commissioner of Pakistan to Ministry of External Affairs, 18 Apr. 1950, Alleged desecration of mosques and other religious places of Muslims in Delhi and its adjoining areas, chief commissioner, Rehabilitation Department, F 17(11)/50, 1950, vol. II; Clearance of mosques in Delhi under occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner Records, 17(11) 1950, DSA.

⁸⁴Clearance of mosques in Delhi under occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner Records, 17(11) 1950, DSA.

spaces a priority, and insisted that his Ministry's first responsibility was towards refugees who were forced to sleep on the streets of the city.⁸⁵ No refugee could be moved unless and until alternative accommodation could be found; refugees occupying shrines and mosques were, however inadequately, accommodated. In 1952, the Ministry named the clearance of religious places on its list of priorities but placed it at no. 5, the lowest rank. In May 1953, the issue was revisited again: 66 mosques were still occupied by refugees, 11 remained, as in 1950, mandirs or gurudwaras, and 19 were, unsurprisingly, still destroyed. Of those that had been sealed off, two had been 'restored' and the third was being restored. Efforts would be undertaken to restore converted mosques only if that restoration was deemed to be 'feasible' (though no elaboration was given as to how such feasibility could be measured). A commitment was made to clear the remaining occupied masjids by 1954.⁸⁶

In 1953, Govind Seth, the secretary for rehabilitation in the Delhi government, reasserted the state's right over masjids in the city and proposed that in cases where there was 'no Muslim population now and the mosques in question are not being used as places of worship by Muslims, such mosques may be used as dispensaries or schools. The sacred spots will be barricaded [*sic*] and their sanctity preserved.' Mehr Chand promised only to consider the suggestion and invited Seth to prepare a list of mosques that could be repurposed.⁸⁷ Seth's proposed reservation of the 'sacred spots', whatever they might be, continued, on a reduced scale, the presumption that some empty but significant space would be held back from the permanent transformation of the mosques. The 'spots' would be physical residues, maintained as remnant hostages of the Partition that further asserted the imagined absence of Delhi's Muslim population.

The will of the state to maintain any presumptive custody over these spaces appears to have dwindled away following Seth's proposal. As time passed and the task moved between various state agencies beyond the Ministry for Rehabilitation, the will to 'restore' – to whom or what – gradually seeped away. In June 1953, the city magistrate wrote to the Delhi government expressing his frustration at being asked to inspect converted mosques on which he had already compiled a report and balked at the suggestion that he should compile a list of mosques, 'situated in predominantly Hindu localities'. Instead, he suggested that the lists be compiled by the police and 'if need be' he would inspect the mosques with the Sunni Majlis-e-Aukaf.⁸⁸ The state gradually abandoned any presumption to set apart refugee-occupied mosques as a singular category of space from the city.

⁸⁵ Alleged desecration of mosques and other religious places of Muslims in Delhi and its adjoining areas, chief commissioner, Rehabilitation Department, F 17(11)/50, 1950, vol. III, DSA.

⁸⁶ Minutes of a meeting held in the room of the minister for rehabilitation on 23 May 1953 to discuss the question of clearance of mosques in Delhi which are in the occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner's Office, Rehabilitation, 17(11), 1950, DSA; Alleged desecration of mosques and other religious places of Muslims in Delhi and its adjoining villages, notes, chief commissioner, Rehabilitation Department, 17(11), 1950, DSA.

⁸⁷ Minutes of a meeting held in the room of the minister for rehabilitation on 23 May 1953 to discuss the question of clearance of mosques in Delhi which are in the occupation of unauthorised persons, Chief Commissioner's Office, Rehabilitation, 17(11), 1950, DSA.

⁸⁸ J.N. Shinghal, magistrate, to Vas Dev Taneja, assistant secretary (R&R), Delhi State Government, Chief Commissioner's Office, Rehabilitation, 17(11), 1950, DSA.

Conclusion

Buildings inhabited by Partition refugees were repaired and restored to their previous purpose or custodies, or were surreptitiously acquired in an epidemic of property grabbing. In 1951, the Ministry of Education appealed for the damage inflicted on the city's monuments, the 'pride of the city', to be recognized. The Ministry acknowledged the 'suffering evacuees' but asked that assurances be made that never again would 'any serious violation of the archaeological principles inside the monuments of national importance...be allowed'.⁸⁹ Japanese internees had been incarcerated in the Purana Qila during the war and the Red Fort had long been a barracks as well as a monumental complex. In the face of refugee occupation, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that had emerged, largely unchanged, from the imperial bureaucracy as the central custodian of India's monuments, sought a more robust and exclusive jurisdiction over the monuments. The transformation of monuments into camps, appealed the ASI, was to be marked as an unprecedented and unrepeatable hiatus in the city's history, or rather, in the history of the Archaeological Department's jurisdiction. Archaeologists, serving both imperial and subsequently the independent Indian state had long complained about the infringements of an unruly public around the monuments they curated and guarded. The refugee crisis was an exponential increase in, but continuation of, both the pressures exerted by Delhi's publics on its monuments and the irritation of archaeological officers.

Partition transformed localities in fragmented and contingent ways and its history offers us the means to understand dynamic intersections of the past and present of the living city. The occupation of masjids and mandirs was the reality of the Partition city and is part of a dynamic fluidity that has long characterized the city and continues to do so.

⁸⁹Tara Chand, secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Education, draft note to cabinet, file submitted 25 Apr. 1951, Occupation of monuments by refugees, ASI, Delhi Monuments, 1951, file 195, NAI.