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Sharing an Equal Past-Amritsar and Lahore

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Abstract

Before the tragic partition of 1947 split the two neighbouring countries, India's Amritsar and Pakistan's Lahore were both part of the Indian state of Punjab. These cities are often referred to as sister cities or twin cities due to their similarities in food, culture, and traditions. They are located just 50 km apart, a distance that can easily be covered in about an hour.

Lahore and Amritsar are both enclosed by walls and feature several gates that were constructed to protect against invaders. The cities share similar layouts; Lahore has landmarks like the Badshahi Mosque, Shahi Qilla, and its old city, while Amritsar is home to the Hindu temple Durgiana Tirath and the Gobindgarh Fort, located on the opposite side of the border. Lahore and Amritsar are both walled cities that have several gates that were built to deal with invaders. Additionally, both cities have Lahori and Mori gates in their historical areas.

During the partition, both Lahore's Shah Alam market and Amritsar's Hall Bazaar suffered significantly from the fires that devastated the cities. It is reported that much of the migration during independence occurred between the refugee camps in Lahore and Amritsar. These twin cities served as major commercial centers where members of all three communities lived. According to author Pran Neville, who wrote a book titled "Lahore: A Sentimental Journey," there was no formal border between the two cities until 1965, allowing for easy travel between them. During this time, numerous individuals, including businessmen and writers such as Balwant Singh, Khushwant Singh, and Amrita Pritam, migrated from Lahore to various parts of India. Conversely, some authors from Amritsar moved to Lahore, attracted by its status as Punjab's cultural heart. Poets like Ahmed Rahi, Firozdin Sharaf, and Saifuddin Saif transitioned from Amritsar to Lahore as well. The Kashmiris who emigrated from Amritsar to Lahore in 1947 are also believed to have greatly influenced the cultural and culinary landscape of Lahore.

Keywords: Indian Subcontinent, Twin Cities, Amritsar, Lahore.

Introduction

Walled Cities of Amritsar and Lahore: Rashmi Talwar

The poignant verses of Allama Iqbal from *Saare Jahaan Se Achha* are emblematic of the deep connection that once existed between the people of India and Pakistan, particularly the two cities of Lahore and Amritsar. These cities, historically intertwined, had a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which was irreparably torn apart by the Partition of 1947. This event not only fractured the geographical boundaries but also dismantled the shared history, cultural practices, and emotional ties that had existed for centuries.

Before Partition, Lahore and Amritsar were thriving cultural and economic centers, home to Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, each contributing to a vibrant, multifaceted society. The artists, poets, and writers from both sides of the border, such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Allama Iqbal, Saadat Hassan Manto, and Amrita Pritam, were deeply affected by the division. The choices they had to make between staying in India or migrating to Pakistan were emotionally tormenting, reflecting the deep personal and ideological rifts that the Partition caused within the intellectual and artistic communities.

The physical and artistic heritage of these cities also faced devastation during the communal violence of Partition. Many priceless works of art, including sculptures and monuments from the British colonial era, were destroyed in the frenzy of mob violence. These were seen by some as symbols of British oppression or as relics of the 'Kafir' (non-Muslim) past. In Lahore, for instance, only a solitary statue of Alfred Woolmer and a gun remain as reminders of the colonial era, while Amritsar has very few public statues from the period. The destruction of cultural landmarks was not just an attack on physical objects but a brutal effort to erase the traces of the shared history that once united the two cities.

Yet, despite the violence and division, the cultural essence of Lahore and Amritsar lives on in many ways. The bond between these two cities endures through the intangible heritage that remains in the music, food, arts, and the shared way of life. The cuisine of both cities reflects a common culinary heritage, with flavors that have been passed down through generations. The music, dance, and arts of the two cities, while having evolved independently after Partition, still retain echoes of the vibrant cross-cultural exchanges that once defined their cultural landscape.

Perhaps most endearing is the shared sense of humor that

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transcends the partition, a unique blend of wit and irony that defines the people of both Lahore and Amritsar. The mischievous, light-hearted banter that characterized everyday life in these cities before Partition remains a cherished memory for many who still retain strong cultural ties to both sides of the border.

In the end, despite the geographic and political divide, the cultural and emotional connections between Lahore and Amritsar continue to bind the people across the border. These cities, though now distinct, share a legacy of unmatched cultural wealth and a rich history of mutual influences that will forever resonate in the hearts and minds of their people.

The traditions of selfless hospitality and service, which define the essence of both Lahore and Amritsar, are powerful symbols of their shared cultural and spiritual legacy. The Golden Temple in Amritsar, with its world-renowned Langar (community kitchen), serves as a beacon of compassion and inclusivity, ensuring that "no one goes hungry." This spirit of generosity and care is mirrored in Lahore's revered *Data Darbar*, a shrine dedicated to the Sufi saint Data Ganj Bakhsh. The same sentiment of providing food to all, regardless of faith or background, pervades the *Data Darbar* and remains a testament to the values of community and charity that both cities once embraced.

The cities' identities are also deeply tied to these sacred and symbolic institutions. Amritsar is affectionately known as *Guru Ki Nagri* (City of the Guru), while Lahore is referred to as *Data Ki Nagri* (City of Data), reflecting the spiritual lineage of their respective patron saints. The enduring significance of these places serves as a reminder of the region's inclusive, multi-religious heritage before the political divides of 1947.

However, the violent upheavals of Partition left many physical reminders of this shared history in ruins. In Amritsar, the fate of the statue of Queen Victoria at Fuhare Wala Chowk remains unknown, and many such monuments, symbols of colonial rule, were either destroyed or lost in the chaos of the mass migration and violence. In contrast, Lahore preserved its own Queen Victoria statue at the Lahore Museum, an act that can be seen as a small but significant effort to conserve the city's complex and multi-layered heritage. The Lahore Museum, in fact, houses invaluable artefacts from multiple religious' traditions—Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian—which serve as the silent witnesses of the city's rich, diverse past.

Among the preserved treasures is the *Trimurti* of the Ashoka Pillar, a historical relic that, like the *Starving Buddha*, stands as a symbol of Lahore's deep connection to Buddhist heritage. The city also safeguards many Hindu idols and Christian sculptures, showcasing the interwoven tapestry of cultures that once thrived here. These artifacts, along with many others, offer a semblance of respect to the diverse religious and artistic traditions that shaped Lahore.

Despite the political borders that now separate them, the cultural and historical bonds between Lahore and Amritsar remain profound. Both cities, in their own unique ways, continue to celebrate and preserve the shared heritage that transcends religious and national divides. Whether through their sacred shrines, their public art, or their community kitchens, the spirit of unity and hospitality that once characterized these cities continues to endure, serving as a reminder of the enduring connection between the people of the two Punjabs.

Tangible and Intangible Heritage

Dr. Balvinder Singh's recent presentation on the tangible and intangible heritage of Amritsar and Lahore highlighted the deep, shared history of these two cities, which are linked not only through their cultural and architectural features but also by their spiritual and historical significance. His research, rooted in a meticulous ground study and historical documentation, has brought to the forefront the urgent need to preserve the heritage of both cities, especially in the face of rapid urbanization and increasing consumerism. His call for an "Integrated Conservational Approach" resonated deeply with audiences in Lahore, who, like their counterparts in Amritsar, are acutely aware of the threats posed to their shared heritage by modern development.

The parallels between the architectural landscapes of the two cities are undeniable. Both Amritsar and Lahore, with their ancient walled cities, stand as testaments to the rich cultural legacies of their respective rulers. While Amritsar flourished under the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who made it the spiritual heart of the Sikh empire, Lahore became the cultural capital of the Maharaja's dominion, bearing the influences of multiple empires, including the Mughal, British, and later, the Pakistani state. These cities were both fortified during Ranjit Singh's time, and their historical structures, whether palaces, forts, or sacred sites, are rich in stories of the past.

However, despite their immense historical value, both cities face growing threats to the preservation of their architectural heritage. Dr. Balvinder's warnings reflect a growing concern among heritage experts in Lahore and Amritsar, who fear that these invaluable structures could soon become mere relics of history, only visible in museums, stage plays, or repurposed as decorative elements in modern developments like restaurants and hotels. The looming threat of neglect and destruction is exacerbated by the focus on intangible heritage, which, while equally valuable, is less financially demanding to preserve.

Lahore, with its historical roots dating back to ancient times and its cultural and trade connections with several empires, including the Mughal and British, has long been a vibrant center of cultural and architectural innovation. The city's connection to the mythological past, as the birthplace of Lav (Loh) the son of Lord Rama, adds a layer of spiritual significance to its rich architectural heritage, which includes sites like the Shahi Killa (Royal Fort) and the Loh Shrine. Similarly, Amritsar, founded by the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das, in 1577, and later fortified during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, holds immense spiritual and architectural value. The Golden Temple, located at the heart of the city, is not only a symbol of Sikhism but also an architectural marvel that draws millions of pilgrims and visitors from around the world.

The need for urgent action to preserve these cities' architectural and intangible heritage is more pressing than ever. As both cities face the challenges of modernization and the pressures of growing urbanization, preserving their historic structures and the intangible cultural practices tied to them is crucial. The call for an integrated approach to conservation, which considers both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage, is vital in ensuring that the cultural richness of Lahore and Amritsar is not lost to time.

Amritsar's Golden Temple-nucleus

The architectural and urban planning principles that shaped both Amritsar and Lahore are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical contexts of these cities, with the Golden Temple and the city's organization in Amritsar exemplifying the progressive, inclusive approach of the Sikh Gurus.

The Golden Temple, as the spiritual and architectural

centrepiece of Amritsar, played a key role in organizing the city around it. The city layout reflects the inclusive philosophy of the Gurus, who welcomed people from all walks of life. This inclusivity led to the establishment of 52 Kittae (trades) and 32 Hattian (shops), creating a thriving economic environment cantered on various professions. This area is still known as 'batti-hattan,' and its structure is a testament to the Gurus' vision of a diverse, self-sustained community. Over time, this developed further into the concept of *Katras*—compact neighbourhoods or markets, often named after the professions practiced there. The use of such urban planning concepts allowed for a variety of trades to flourish within close proximity to the sacred heart of the city, fostering both spiritual and economic growth.

Similarly, Lahore's urban planning echoes a comparable organization, with distinct areas like *Katra*, *Mohalla*, and *Kucha*, which were named after the professions or communities that settled in them. These neighbourhoods were often highly specialized, with people of similar trades or backgrounds living and working in close quarters. This resulted in the creation of vibrant, self-contained communities that contributed to Lahore's unique socio-economic fabric.

Both cities also share a common feature in their fortifications, with city gates named after cardinal directions and regions, reflecting their strategic importance and cultural significance. For instance, in Amritsar, the *Lohgarh Gate* faces the road leading to Lahore, symbolizing the historical connection and trade routes between the two cities. Similarly, Lahore's fortified gates like *Lahori Gate*, *Delhi Darwaza*, *Multani Darwaza*, and *Kashmiri Gate* highlight the city's historical and cultural ties to other regions, including Delhi, Multan, and Kashmir, all of which played important roles in Lahore's development as a regional center of power, trade, and culture.

These architectural and urban patterns not only reflect the historical significance of both cities but also embody the shared cultural and economic histories that have shaped their identities over centuries. The ways in which each city developed its neighbourhoods, markets, and fortifications continue to influence their urban character today, preserving a legacy of communal harmony and cultural inclusivity.

Walled Cities

The contrasting urban layouts and interventions in the two cities of Amritsar and Lahore highlight the distinct yet interconnected histories of these urban centers. As Dr. Balwinder Singh points out, the layout of Amritsar, often referred to as the *Shehr* (city), contrasts with Lahore's *Androon Shehr* (inner city).

Amritsar's urban design follows a more structured grid pattern, with roads radiating outward from central points, facilitating better connectivity and movement within the city. This design fosters a sense of organized flow, allowing for easy access to various parts of the city while maintaining a sense of cohesion. The radial pattern of Amritsar's streets represents a deliberate attempt at creating connectivity and accessibility, which has remained a core feature of the city's character even in the modern age.

On the other hand, Lahore's streets and lanes within the *Androon Shehr* have a more complex, zigzag pattern with many dead ends. This irregular layout reflects the historical evolution of the city, which grew organically over time, accommodating various trades and professions in confined spaces. The winding lanes create a sense of intimacy and community, but also make the city more labyrinthine and difficult to navigate. Despite the challenges posed by this design, Lahore's *Androon Shehr* carries a distinctive charm and vibrancy, where each corner reveals a piece of history and culture, contributing to the rich fabric of life in the city.

Both cities also share a rich tradition of *mixed land use*, where residential, commercial, and religious spaces often coexist in close proximity. This mix fostered a high degree of social cohesion and communal interaction. People from various walks of life—artisans, traders, religious figures, and common folk—lived and worked side by side, creating a socio-economically viable and tightly-knit community structure.

British colonial interventions in both cities also left a lasting imprint on their architectural and infrastructural landscapes. The introduction of English education and the expansion of communication systems, particularly railways and post offices, were pivotal in shaping the modern identity of both cities. Post office buildings from the British era still stand as historical landmarks in both Amritsar and Lahore, a testament to the British efforts to integrate these cities into their imperial framework.

In addition to the colonial influence, both cities underwent transformations under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In Amritsar, the Summer Palace of Ram Bagh became a blend of informal and formal architectural styles, symbolizing the fusion of indigenous and foreign influences. Similarly, in Lahore, the Shahi Killa (Lahore Fort) saw various interventions, with incongruous additions such as the *Teh Khana* (a subterranean room) that served diverse purposes over time. It is noteworthy that this very room became significant in Pakistan's modern history, housing Pakistan's former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for a short period before his execution.

Similarly, in Amritsar, the Gobindgarh Fort, once a military stronghold, was repurposed over time. The fort, which housed various colonial and post-colonial figures, including General Dyer, the perpetrator of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, also had a *Phansi Ghar* (Hanging Room), symbolizing the colonial history of repression. These layered histories of both cities reveal the transformation of their historical spaces, marking them as sites where past and present collide.

Both Amritsar and Lahore, with their rich architectural legacies, urban layouts, and multi-layered histories, reflect the complexities of their evolution over time—shaped by colonial rule, royal patronage, and the enduring cultural and social exchanges between these two historic cities.

Globalization & Consumerism

The impact of globalization on the preservation of tangible heritage in cities like Amritsar and Lahore cannot be understated. As Dr. Balwinder Singh and heritage enthusiasts like Tahir Yazdani Malik point out, the pressures of modern development, urbanization, and global consumer culture have taken a significant toll on the architectural and cultural landscapes of these historic cities. While the charm of these cities once lay in their amalgamation of British, Sikh, and Mughal architectural styles, these traditions are now increasingly at risk due to the lack of a robust preservation strategy and the inability of governments to balance development with conservation.

Tahir Yazdani Malik, a passionate advocate for heritage preservation, voices concern over the loss of cultural identity in the face of rapid globalization. His statement, "we are getting global and robotic," reflects the homogenization of cultures and the shift away from local traditions and heritage in the face of global trends. He humorously notes that while people may not completely abandon modern pleasures like

Coke in favor of traditional drinks like Lassi, the importance of preserving monuments and historical landmarks cannot be ignored. Monuments, he emphasizes, are "our treasures" and hold intrinsic value in shaping a city's identity.

Currently, Yazdani is working on the restoration of key structures, including the Ghulam Rasool Building and 'Andaaz Restaurant.' These initiatives aim to preserve the essence of the city's history while demonstrating an innovative approach to heritage conservation, such as the use of photographic and GIS (Geographic Information System) tools for accurate documentation. His work on 'Andaaz Restaurant' is particularly notable as it represents Pakistan's first step toward cultural heritage conservation of a restaurant, a novel concept that blends preservation with modern use.

In contrast, Dr. Balwinder Singh calls for more contemporary solutions to preserve the heritage of Amritsar and Lahore, particularly in the context of modern infrastructure projects. His suggestion of battery-operated, non-smoke vehicles to mitigate road widening plans and underground streets seeks to maintain the character of the historic cityscape. However, such measures are increasingly difficult to implement as urban planning continues to prioritize expansion and modernization, threatening the very fabric of these cities' identities.

For example, the construction of elevated roads and the proposed overhead pod-travel systems for Amritsar threaten to overshadow the city's heritage. These infrastructural developments could diminish the unique character of the city, replacing its historical beauty with sterile, modern designs. Longtime residents and heritage lovers fear that future generations may lose access to the traditional markets, street food vendors (such as those selling seasonal fruits and local snacks), and the other cultural elements that have defined Amritsar for centuries. This fear of cultural erosion is not confined to just the food vendors but extends to the loss of traditional ways of life that have been an integral part of the city's spirit.

As these cities face the forces of modernity, heritage conservation advocates like Yazdani and Balwinder continue to push for a balanced approach. They stress the importance of integrating modern development with the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring that future generations can experience the unique charm and history of Amritsar and Lahore without sacrificing the progress and infrastructure needed to thrive in a globalized world. The challenge is to create a vision that respects the past while embracing the future.

Of Past with Present: Lahore-Amritsar-Idhar Bhi, Udhar Bhi!

The decision by Mian Amer Mahmood, the then Nazim (Mayor) of Lahore, to retain the original Hindu and Sikh names of 58 streets and buildings in the city marked a significant and heartfelt move towards preserving the cultural and historical heritage of Lahore. His decision to not "Islamicize" the city was met with enthusiasm from heritage lovers in both Lahore and Amritsar, highlighting a shared appreciation for the city's diverse past. This announcement allowed iconic names like *Laxmi Chowk*, *Sir Ganga Ram Hospital*, *Raja Dina Nath Garden*, and *Dyal Singh College and Library* to retain their historical significance, which continue to reflect the cultural liberalism present in Lahore, a quality that is less evident in other parts of Pakistan. This decision was seen as a rare moment of cultural acknowledgment, where the multicultural and multi-religious roots of Lahore were celebrated instead of erased.

The preservation of such names was symbolic of the coexistence and shared histories of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, and echoed the spirit of inclusivity that characterized the region before the Partition of 1947. The importance of these names goes beyond just being street titles—they are a tribute to the city's rich history and to the contributions of various communities in its development.

In a similar vein, the rich tradition of humor remains a permanent fixture in both Amritsar and Lahore, with comedy serving as a vital cultural connector. Both cities have nurtured and produced comedy legends who have entertained generations. In Lahore, figures like Umer Sharif, Moin Akhter, Shakeel Siddiqui, and Ali Hassan have entertained audiences with their unparalleled wit and humor. More recently, *Azizi* (Sohail Ahmed) and his *Hasb-e-Haal* program, a political and social satire, have gained immense popularity, making it one of the most watched shows in Lahore and even in the surrounding regions. His inimitable style of political commentary blends humor and critique, giving the show a distinct edge.

Similarly, Amritsar has produced its own brand of comedy talent, including Kapil Sharma, Sudesh Lehri, Bharti Singh, and Chandan Prabhakar, who lead the laughter challenge variety shows, delighting audiences with their antics and comic timing. *Ghulle Shah* (Surinder Faristha), another famous Punjabi comedian from Amritsar, also plays an important role in training new comedians, ensuring that the city continues to be a nurturing ground for the art of comedy.

The exchange of comedy and cultural practices between the two cities is not just confined to television and the stage. Kewal Dhaliwal, Amritsar's renowned theatre director, regularly stages play in both Amritsar and Lahore, further cementing the cultural and artistic ties between the two cities. The shared humor and the ongoing artistic collaboration highlight the enduring cultural bonds that continue to thrive despite political and geographical divides.

This celebration of humor, alongside the preservation of the cities' shared cultural heritage, offers a hopeful vision for a future where both Lahore and Amritsar continue to embrace their historical diversity, shared traditions, and mutual respect, keeping alive the spirit of unity that existed long before the division of 1947.

The cultural similarities and exchanges between Lahore and Amritsar continue to persist despite the political and geographical divide that came with the Partition. Various personal anecdotes, experiences, and observations shed light on how elements of life and culture are shared and cherished across both cities, highlighting the deep-rooted cultural continuity that transcends borders.

i). Cultural Traditions:

- The Hindu custom of wearing bangles and applying *Mehndi* (henna) has spread beyond its origins and gained popularity in Muslim weddings, particularly in Lahore. This reflects a blending of cultural practices across both sides of the border, indicating the continuity of shared traditions. – *Fauzia Yazdani, Lahore*

ii). Traditional Sports and Hobbies:

- **Pigeon-flying** remains a popular pastime in Lahore, reminiscent of its earlier popularity in Amritsar. Indian pigeon breeds like *Jalandhari*, *Ferozpuri*, and *Rampuri* fetch a high price, showcasing the deep historical connection to this tradition. Similarly, sports

like **lattu-bazzi** (spinning top), **cock-fights**, **dancing horses**, and **ram-fights** were once common in both cities, reflecting the cultural lifestyle that intertwined the cities. – *Faisal Satti, Lahore*

iii). Cuisine and Flavors:

- The culinary overlap is evident, as *Kasuri Methi* (dried fenugreek leaves) and *Pakistani rock salt* are widely used in Amritsari cuisine. The *Kasuri Jutti* (traditional footwear) from Pakistan is still highly regarded in Punjab, further illustrating the cross-border exchange in everyday life. – *Anuja Mallik, Amritsar*

iv). Folklore and Symbolism:

- **Pigeons** were once used as messengers in Indian villages like Dauke (Amritsar) and were adorned with Urdu couplets, connecting the folk traditions of both sides. This is a poignant reminder of the deep cultural and historical ties between the regions. – *Dr. Inderbir Nijjar, Amritsar*

v). Kite Flying and Cultural Celebrations:

- **Kite flying**, often associated with the *Basant* festival, continues to be a popular activity in Lahore, despite bans on the practice. Kites featuring prints of Indian film stars are also seen in Lahore's countryside, further exemplifying the continued cultural resonance between the two cities. – *Dr. Joginder Kairon, Amritsar*
- Before the Partition, Lahore and Amritsar witnessed interfaith participation in cultural and religious celebrations, with Hindus in Lahore once showering rose petals on the Muharram procession, and Muslims in Amritsar attending Ram Leela festivities. – *Chaudhary Tabassum, Lahore Heritage Club*

vi). Markets and Trade:

- There are striking similarities in the commercial areas of both cities, with bazaars like **Landa Bazaar** and **Hall Road** in Lahore finding their counterparts in **Landa Bazaar** and **Hall Bazaar** in Amritsar. These markets sell goods from each other's countries, illustrating the cross-cultural trade that continues to thrive. – *Sajjad Anwar, Lahore*
- Lahore's **Paan Mandi** also sells Indian items such as *chavanprash*, *paan masala*, and *Banarsi sarees*, showing the continued exchange of cultural goods.

vii). Textiles and Fashion

- The ongoing trade and appreciation of textile crafts such as Amritsar's *gotta* and *dabka* embroidery is also evident in Lahore, while Pakistan's *lace* and *fine chicken embroidery* have a strong presence in Amritsar. Additionally, Amritsar remains a popular destination for buying jewelry, with Lahore's elite now opting to purchase diamond jewelry from Amritsar. – *Monica Mehra, Amritsar*

viii). Entertainment and Media:

- The shared love for entertainment across both cities is exemplified by TV serials. The popular Indian serial *Kuch Toh Log Kahenge* is based on the storyline of the 70s Pakistani serial *Dhoop Kinare*, which was also watched on PTV, highlighting the mutual appreciation for television content. – *Anupama Arora, Amritsar*

ix). Lifestyle and Social Trends:

- Both cities exhibit parallel social trends, such as the rise of club culture since the British era and the recent adoption of mall culture in both cities. These trends highlight how both cities, despite their respective political settings, continue to evolve in similar social and cultural ways. – *Zareena Saeed, Lahore*

These anecdotes illustrate how, despite the partition and the resulting political division, the cultural ties between Lahore and Amritsar remain strong. The shared customs, traditions, and experiences serve as a bridge between the cities, offering a glimpse into the rich and intertwined cultural history that transcends borders.

Traditional Amritsari and Lahori Food is – "Laajawab" and "Buraaaa"..!! No Amritsar Lahore

The culinary traditions of Amritsar and Lahore showcase a vibrant and rich mix of flavors, influenced by diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. Both cities are renowned for their unique and flavorful dishes, with a blend of vegetarian and non-vegetarian delights, traditional breads, street snacks, refreshing drinks, and delectable sweets. Here's a breakdown of some of the most famous dishes and beverages from both cities:

i). Famous Veg & Non-Veg Dishes

Amritsari:

- **Champ:** A traditional mutton dish, typically marinated and grilled.
- **Tava Tikka:** Grilled pieces of meat or vegetables, served with a smoky flavour.
- **Brain Curry:** A rich, spicy curry made with lamb or goat brain.
- **Tandoori Chicken:** Marinated chicken cooked in a clay oven for a smoky flavour.
- **Seekh Kabab:** Minced meat skewers, spiced and grilled.
- **Fish Haryali Kabab:** Fish marinated with green spices and grilled.
- **Amritsari Fish Fry:** Deep-fried fish, typically served with tangy chutney.
- **Machi Kabab:** Fish kebabs, grilled to perfection.
- **Sarson Ka Saag:** Mustard greens, cooked with spices, traditionally served with Makki Ki Roti.
- **Shammi Kabab:** Minced meat kebabs made with lentils and spices.

Lahori:

- **Nihari Paye:** Slow-cooked stew made with meat and spices, often enjoyed with naan.
- **Sree Paye:** Stewed sheep's trotters, cooked with spices.
- **Shorba Kabab:** A flavourful soup made with grilled meat.
- **Kathi Kabab:** Skewered meat wrapped in a roti, often served as a roll.
- **Gurde-Kapoore:** A unique dish made from kidney and spleen.
- **Amritsari Fish Fry:** Also a favourite in Lahore, showcasing cross-border culinary influences.
- **Rann:** A slow-cooked whole leg of mutton, spiced and served with rice.
- **Mutton Karahi:** Mutton cooked in a wok-like vessel with spices and herbs.

- **Murg Takka Tak:** Chicken cooked with a combination of spices.
- **Reshmi Kabab:** Soft, juicy kebabs made from minced chicken or lamb.

ii). Indian & Pak Rotis:

Amritsari:

- **Allo Ke Kulche:** Flatbread stuffed with spiced mashed potatoes.
- **Bread Kulche:** A type of stuffed flatbread.
- **Butter Naan:** Soft flatbread, rich in butter.
- **Missi Roti:** Spiced flatbread made with chickpea flour.
- **Onion-Garlic Naan:** Naan bread flavored with onions and garlic.
- **Poori:** Deep-fried bread, often served with curries.
- **Makki Ki Roti:** Flatbread made from corn flour, typically served with Sarson Ka Saag.

Pakistani:

- **Tillian Wale Kulche:** Flatbread stuffed with sesame seeds.
- **Rogni Naan:** Naan made with ghee and topped with seeds.
- **Kasuri Methi Kulche:** Flatbread flavored with dried fenugreek leaves.
- **Manji Dee Dewan Waly:** A special type of stuffed kulcha from Lahore.
- **Lahore Special Kulche:** Local variant of stuffed bread.
- **Mhandrra Kulcha:** Another variation of kulcha bread.
- **Makki Di Roti:** Similar to Amritsari, a corn flour-based flatbread.

iii). Amritsari & Lahori Desi Snacks

Amritsari:

- **Samose:** Deep-fried pastry pockets stuffed with spiced potatoes or meat.
- **Sat-Poore:** A type of crispy, spiced snack.
- **Kachori:** Spicy fried dough, often stuffed with peas or lentils.
- **Mutter:** A spicy snack made with peas.
- **Paneer Pakore:** Paneer (cottage cheese) battered and fried.
- **Onion and Veg Pakore:** Fried fritters made from onions and vegetables.
- **Dhokla:** A spongy, savory steamed cake made from fermented rice and chickpea flour.
- **Papri Chaat:** A savory snack made with crispy dough, yogurt, potatoes, and chutney.
- **Golgappe:** Hollow puris filled with spicy water, potatoes, and chickpeas.

Lahori:

- **Golgappe:** Similar to Amritsari, a popular street snack in Lahore.
- **Fruit Chat:** A mixture of fresh fruits and spices, often served as a snack.
- **Dahi Bhaley:** Fried lentil dumplings soaked in yogurt and chutney.
- **Pakore:** Fried fritters, typically made from gram flour and vegetables.
- **Samosa:** Like in Amritsar, a popular stuffed pastry**.**

iv). Drinks:

Amritsari:

- **Masala Chai:** Spiced tea, a common refreshment.
- **Coffee:** Hot coffee, served in local cafes.
- **Juices & Cane Juice:** Freshly squeezed juices from seasonal fruits and sugarcane.
- **Buttermilk & Lassi:** Traditional yogurt-based drinks.
- **Mango Shake:** A thick, creamy mango drink.
- **Shikwanjvi:** A refreshing, spiced drink.
- **Bantey Wali Lemonade:** A tangy, sweet lemonade.

Lahori:

- **Kashmiri Chai:** A traditional pink tea flavoured with cardamom and spices.
- **Kava:** A spiced tea brewed with tea leaves and herbs.
- **Phalsa Juice:** Juice made from the tangy Phalsa berries.
- **Sugar-Cane Juice:** Freshly pressed cane juice.
- **Lassi & Shikwanjvi:** Similar to Amritsari, these drinks are popular in Lahore.

v). Sweets:

Amritsari:

- **Boondi-Besan Ke Laddo:** Sweet laddoos made from gram flour and sugar syrup.
- **Kalkand:** A sweet made from condensed milk.
- **Chena Murgi:** A dessert made from cottage cheese.
- **Kaju, Badam, Pista Burfi:** Burfi made from cashews, almonds, and pistachios.
- **Pinni:** A sweet made from jaggery, ghee, and wheat flour.
- **Jalebi & Gulab Jamun:** Popular fried sweets soaked in syrup.
- **Rasgulla, Kheer, Phirni:** Traditional milk-based desserts.
- **Gur Ka Halwa & Mung Dal Ka Halwa:** Sweet dishes made from lentils and jaggery.
- **Karah Prasad:** A sacred offering in Gurdwaras.

Lahori:

- **Seweiyaan:** A sweet dish made from vermicelli, milk, and sugar.
- **Jalebi & Mutanjaan:** A sweet dish made with seven-colored rice.
- **Kheer, Phirni:** Similar to Amritsari, rice-based milk desserts.
- **Sheer Khurma:** A sweet dish made with milk and vermicelli.
- **Badam Khateein:** Almond-based sweets.
- **Karachi Halwa & Loki Ka Halwa:** Sweets made from various vegetables or fruits.
- **Kasoori Katlmey:** A sweet treat from Lahore.
- **Lal Khoo Barfi & Kulfa-Falooda:** Traditional barfi and a dessert drink made with ice cream.

This cross-border culinary journey showcases the deep-rooted cultural and historical connections that persist between Amritsar and Lahore, demonstrating how both cities share and enjoy a wealth of flavorful dishes, desserts, and beverages that have been passed down through generations.

Royal Treat of Haryanvi ‘Paanwala’ in Lahore:

Rana Bhai Paan Wala's stall is a truly unforgettable experience in Lahore, offering a unique blend of tradition, glamour, and flair. Originally from Ambala, Haryana, India, Rana has become an iconic figure in Lahore’s cultural scene, especially at major exhibitions and festivals. His stall, once the "shaan" (glory) of Anarkali’s Food Street, has evolved into a spectacle, where he combines the ritual of serving paan with a theatrical performance that leaves a lasting impression on visitors.

The Royal Experience at Rana Bhai's Paan Stall

- **Theatrics and Glamour:** Rana's stall stands out for its theatrical grandeur. Perched atop a royal throne-like chair draped in satin, Rana dresses in glamorous attire that gives him a dramatic, larger-than-life presence. His appearance is often compared to a "Mirza Ghalib look-alike" with traditional attire such as a "Turki topi," "khussa" shoes, and strings of "taveez" (amulets) along with rose garlands.
- **Paan Ritual:** The experience of being served by Rana is designed to make the customer feel like royalty. Upon arrival, customers are first sprinkled with rose water, followed by a shower of rose petals. Then, in a leaf bowl, Rana serves "Paan" garnished with "vark" (edible silver foil) and filled with "gullukand," a sweet mixture made from rose petals. The paan leaves used are famously sourced from India's Banarsi variety, known for their quality and freshness.
- **Mirrors and Cameras:** The stall is equipped with strategically placed mirrors and close-circuit cameras, allowing customers to see themselves being pampered while the onlookers watch, adding to the sense of luxury and spectacle.
- **Completion of the Ritual:** After enjoying the "galoori paan," which melts in the mouth with the sweetness of rose petals, Rana completes the ritual by showering the customer once more with rose petals, reinforcing the feeling of being treated like royalty.

A Touch of Tradition and Innovation

Rana's stall is not just about paan; it's about creating an immersive experience that blends traditional practices with modern innovation. His display includes photographs with Pakistan's cricketing legends and prominent political figures, further enhancing his reputation. Additionally, his recreation of the "Lucknavi Bazaar" theme, featuring Barbie dolls dressed in traditional "Lucknavi" salwar suits and others in burqas, adds a touch of playfulness and cultural flair that attracts both locals and tourists alike. This display has become a favorite among both foreign visitors and locals, with many drawn to the quirky and colorful decorations that celebrate the fusion of tradition and modernity.

Global Reach and Special Orders

Rana's influence extends beyond Lahore, as he receives regular orders from Dubai and other Middle Eastern countries for festive occasions. His stall's charm and the paan's exquisite taste have made it a sought-after experience during grand exhibitions and festivals. Though the setting might be a bustling street filled with people, the attention to detail and the personalized experience make it feel like a private royal indulgence.

Despite the opulence, a quirky twist to the ritual is the re-use of rose petals. After the pampering, a hired sweeper collects the petals and sieves them to separate the dust, recycling them for future use — a nod to the sustainable (yet humorous) side of this royal experience.

Rana Bhai's Paan Wala is a vivid testament to how cultural traditions can be transformed into immersive, luxurious experiences that captivate both the locals and international visitors, offering a blend of heritage, creativity, and a touch of humor.

The Separated Twins of the Sub-Continent: Ammara Ahmed

The first time I went to Amritsar, I felt confused, captivated, and profoundly saddened.

It was in 2008, exactly a decade ago, during a college trip with Kinnaird. We arrived in Amritsar from Delhi after touring other major cities in northern India.

My paternal grandfather, who raised me, came from Gurdaspur district in eastern Punjab, specifically Tehsil Batala.

Since childhood, he would point to the wall beside our house and tell me that our "home" was just across the border in India.

When I crossed Wagah on foot ten years ago and later boarded the bus, I was struck by how close Amritsar was. I felt a tinge of disappointment that my grandfather had never made the short journey to reconnect with his roots. He eventually admitted that the trip felt too overwhelming for him.

Crossing Wagah took several hours as border officials meticulously checked every bag and passport.

After crossing the border, everything felt familiar – except for the sight of more turbans in the distance and young women confidently riding scooters. Our group, made up of teenage girls and those in our early twenties, reacted with awe at every small difference or similarity. The Gurmukhi script on signboards intrigued us, and the sight of mustard fields instantly brought to mind scenes from 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge.'

For most people traveling between the two Punjabs, the striking resemblance is hard to miss. This is especially true when taking a train or bus, as the lush green fields stretch endlessly on either side. The food, language, and overall atmosphere are so similar that the idea of the Radcliffe Line dividing the land feels surreal. The inevitable question that lingers is – why did Partition happen at all?

Lahore and Amritsar are perhaps the most well-known twin cities in India and Pakistan, largely due to their heartbreaking division in 1947. Despite being only 50 kilometers apart, the separation feels immense. A high-speed train, like those in Tokyo, could easily connect the two cities in just 10-15 minutes.

The two cities share a similar spirit, shaped by their Punjabi roots and close geographical proximity. Their layouts mirror each other, with old walled cities designed for defense against invaders and protected by a dozen gates.

Lahore boasts landmarks like the Badshahi Mosque, Shahi Qilla, and the old city in one corner, while Amritsar is home to the Durgiana Temple, a grand Hindu site, and the Gobindgarh Fort at its edge.

Both cities even have gates with matching names – Mori Gate and Lahori Gate. Markets like Lahore's Shah Alam Market and Amritsar's Hall Bazaar were tragically reduced to ashes during the 1947 Partition riots.

During Partition, Lahore and Amritsar experienced devastating violence, and much of the migration between the two regions took place through refugee camps set up in these cities. Before Partition, they stood as the largest commercial hubs in Punjab, home to Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, with Muslims holding a slight majority but populations fairly balanced.

Author Pran Neville, known for his book *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey*, once shared how he used to study at Government College Lahore and cycle to Amritsar just to catch a movie.

Twin cities hold a unique charm. In 2015, as an ICFJ fellow, I was sent to Minneapolis – the twin city of St. Paul. I often imagined how life would be if Amritsar were just a short train

ride away. A quick trip could mean visiting the Golden Temple and returning the same day. Friendships and professional ties could flourish. I could even teach at my grandfather's alma mater, Khalsa College Amritsar, and return by evening.

Twin cities evolve side by side, expanding over time. Though definitions may vary, shared administrative frameworks often connect them. In some cases, cities merge, dissolving borders and blending identities. This, however, remains impossible for Lahore and Amritsar due to the physical and symbolic barbed wire that separates them.

From 1947 to 1965, no formal border existed between the two cities, allowing people to travel freely. Businessmen regularly crossed over to Shah Alam Market and Urdu Bazaar for trade.

A wave of authors left Lahore for other parts of India during Partition in 1947. Among them were Amrita Pritam, Balwant Singh, Khushwant Singh, Krishan Chander, and Pran Neville, many of whom relocated to Delhi and East Punjab.

Conversely, writers from Amritsar gravitated towards Lahore, drawn by its status as Punjab's cultural epicenter. The proximity of Lahore also made the transition easier.

Punjabi poets like Saifuddin Saif, Ahmed Rahi, and Firozdin Sharaf left Amritsar for Lahore. Ahmed Rahi's poetry collection *Trinjan* became a landmark piece reflecting the plight of women affected by Partition violence. Saadat Hasan Manto, born in Samrala, had family roots in Amritsar but ultimately chose Lahore as his home after departing from Bombay.

M.D. Taseer also settled in Lahore, contributing to the city's literary vibrancy and strengthening the Progressive Writers' Movement.

Meanwhile, Bhisham Sahni (brother of actor Balraj Sahni) and Dalbir Chetan moved from Lahore to Amritsar. I am gradually uncovering their contributions to Punjabi, a language now as fragmented as the region itself.

Despite the division, the argument for Lahore and Amritsar as twin cities remains strong. The two cities, with Lahore as the larger counterpart, could benefit from a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between their local governments. This could facilitate smoother visa processes for students, artists, and athletes, encouraging cultural exchanges. With such a rich, shared history, there is much to rediscover.

Of course, such cooperation requires considerable effort, especially since the Wagah-Attari bus service is currently suspended and diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan remain strained. But fostering connections, particularly among younger generations, could yield positive results when relations improve.

Rekindling the bond between Amritsar and Lahore is crucial. Both cities, once vibrant with multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities, are now largely dominated by a single faith – a stark contrast to the diversity that thrived before Partition.

Punjabi on either side of the border has diverged in script and influence – with Persian and Shahmukhi shaping the language in Pakistan, while Gurmukhi and Sanskrit lend their touch to the Indian side. There is a pressing need for collaboration in Punjabi literature and artistic exchange.

The Partition Museum in Amritsar could partner with its counterpart in Lahore. Perhaps this idea could first take root online – through virtual communities and social media – before evolving into something tangible on the ground.

One thing that will forever remain constant between Amritsar and Lahore is their physical closeness. Everything else is vulnerable to the passage of time.

On that January day in 2008, I felt a deep sense of heartbreak. It was the closest I had ever been to my ancestral village – the "home" etched into my earliest childhood memories. I only had a few hours to experience it, a brief window made possible by the improved relations with India during the Musharraf era. But even that progress eventually faded, leaving us suspended in uncertainty.

In that moment, I felt a small fraction of the grief my grandfather must have endured when he was uprooted from his hometown. The weight of loss and forced displacement still lingers with me today.

I remain hopeful that renewed cooperation and friendship will someday unlock doors to our shared past and cultural heritage.

A Pakistani Journalist's Diary

The deep connection between Lahore and Amritsar was severed after the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when both nations imposed strict limits on cross-border movement. Since then, the essence of the two cities has transformed significantly, writes Amir Mateen in the second installment of his four-part series offering a Pakistani perspective on India's politics, society, and economy.

Lahore and Amritsar share a unique, almost familial bond – a shared history that intertwines their identities in countless ways.

One of the most significant influences on Lahore's modern culture and cuisine comes from the Kashmiris who migrated from Amritsar during the Partition in 1947.

As the saying goes, a true Lahori loves food more than his wife and pronounces the city as *Lhorh*. More often than not, this description fits Amritsari Kashmiris perfectly.

Muslim migrants from cities like Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ambala, and Patiala have generally thrived in Lahore. They inherited much of the property and businesses left behind by wealthier Hindus and Sikhs, who made up roughly half of Lahore's population before Partition.

However, the success of Amritsari Kashmiris eclipses that of other migrants. Being just 30 miles away, they were better positioned to capitalize on their close familial, cultural, and commercial ties to Lahore.

Today, they hold significant sway over the city.

Their influence isn't confined to Lahore or Punjab – it extends across Pakistan's political landscape. A prime example is the family of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The *Ittefaq Brothers*, as they were once known, migrated from Jati Umra, a suburb of Amritsar, to Lahore shortly before Partition.

Now, the Sharif family has built a luxurious, seven-star version of their ancestral home in the outskirts of Lahore.

Over time, the Sharif brothers have fostered clusters of Amritsari Kashmiri influence in key cities across central Punjab, further cementing their community's prominence in the region.

The Amritsari Brigade of Poets

Amritsar's influence on Lahore's cuisine is unmistakable. In nearly every corner of old Lahore, you'll find shops selling Amritsari sweets, *harissa*, and *chole*.

The cultural connection runs deeper, as much of Lahore's literary elite can trace their roots back to Amritsar.

Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz once lived in Amritsar, teaching English, while the ancestral home of Saadat Hasan Manto still stands in *Wakeelaan Waali Gali*.

An entire generation of poets and writers – including Saif-ud-Din Saif, Arif Abdul Mateen, Zabt Qureshi, Zaheer Kashmiri,

Ahmed Rahi, Hassan Tariq, and Muzaffar Ali Syed – fondly known as the *Amritsari brigade*, were either born or raised there.
Even the celebrated satirist Majeed Lahori, as it turns out, hailed from Amritsar.
Amritsar, too, reflects this shared legacy.
Lahore's Hall Road, famous for electronics, finds its counterpart in Amritsar's Hall Bazaar. Both cities boast a *Landa Bazaar* near their railway stations, selling second-hand goods.
Their old quarters feature *katras* – clusters of specialized artisans such as jewellers, cobblers, and even *koocha sawaraan* (horse riders) – highlighting the mirrored craftsmanship and culture that continues to bind the two cities.

Lahore Remains the Epitome of the Sikhs' Political Glory:
Amritsar's heartbeat is the Golden Temple, a spiritual and cultural anchor for the city. Its foundation stone was laid by Lahore's revered saint, Mian Mir, at the request of Guru Arjun Dev.
While Amritsar stands as the spiritual center of Sikhism, Lahore holds its own significance – the *samadhis* of Guru Arjun Dev and his father, Guru Ram Das, rest there. Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire, symbolizes the peak of Sikh political power and grandeur.
The late writer A. Hameed painted vivid pictures of life in Amritsar, recalling the city's vibrancy and the friendly rivalry it shared with Lahore. His writings often spoke of the wrestling matches that united and divided the two cities in fierce competition.
Amritsar's renowned *Jahangir Band* was a coveted presence at Lahore weddings, charging lavish fees for their performances. Jahangir's son, Alamgir, famously competed with Lahore's legendary clarinet player, Master Sohni, forging a musical rivalry across the border.
Another gem from Amritsar was a Kashmiri band, famous for its *shehnai* performances. Dressed in silk shirts, long coats, and Jinnah caps, the band added a regal flair to festive occasions.
Reflecting on his deep emotional connection to the city, A. Hameed once remarked, *"Amritsar is my lost Jerusalem, and I am its wailing wall."*

The Shalwar-Kameez became the Pathani Kurta
There was once a train known as the *Babu Train* that ran between the twin cities, transporting workers back and forth. People would travel to Amritsar to watch Indian films and return the same day, fostering a sense of shared life between the cities.
However, that cross-border ease came to an end not in 1947, but after the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when both countries imposed restrictions on movement.
Over the past 65 years, much has changed, particularly the size disparity between the two cities. While Lahore was always larger than Amritsar, it has now grown to be 10 times its size, with a population nearing 11 million.
Amritsar has become more of a peripheral city in India, valued mostly for its religious and tourist significance to Sikhs. In contrast, Lahore is Pakistan's second-largest city and holds considerable political influence, capable of shaping or toppling central governments.
Language has also evolved. I recall an encounter in Amritsar, where an elderly woman laughed as I spoke Punjabi. When I asked her why, she said she found my accent amusing. This shift in language and accent is indicative of broader changes.
The script change has contributed to this divergence. The official language of Ranjit Singh's court was Persian, and the Sikhs were well-versed in Arabic script. Today, few people from the two cities can read each other's script.
Even traditional clothing has evolved. In Pakistan, the *shalwar kameez* is often referred to as the *Pathani kurta*, reflecting the cultural shifts between the two cities.

'Amritsar Circulates in My Blood': A. Hameed
Sadly, the soul of these two cities has changed profoundly over time.
Lahore's social fabric has been irreparably damaged, losing its once vibrant multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual character. The natural consequence of this social transformation is the escalating sectarian violence, with various groups now at odds with each other. After the expulsion of Sikhs and Hindus, the Parsis and Jains quietly left as well. Ahmadis live in constant fear, and Shias have begun to feel increasingly insecure. Even Sunni factions now turn on each other, as evidenced by the recent bombing of Lahore's revered Data Sahib shrine.
While Amritsar may not be plagued by violence, it too has become largely dominated by Sikhs and Hindus, with very few Muslims remaining. The long-standing tradition of religious coexistence has been shaken there as well. Only a few in Amritsar still remember the once-thriving community of Amritsari Kashmiri Muslims, a generation that is now fading in both cities.
Yet, the memories linger for those who remain.
A. Hameed, just before his death, poignantly wrote, *"Amritsar circulates in my blood. I go to sleep after looking at Amritsar, and it is the first thing I see when I wake up in the morning."*
When an Amritsar-bound friend asked him what he should bring back, Hameed requested, *"Get me a flower from the Company Bagh."*

Parvez Mahmood's Family was among the Millions to Experience the Displacement of Partition. The Trauma is Still Alive:
During the deeply uncertain days of Partition in August 1947, families and communities on the "wrong" side of the newly drawn border faced an uncertain future. The buildup to independence had fostered a highly charged political atmosphere, and the growing animosity between Sikhs and Hindus on one side, and Muslims on the other, created a climate ripe for violence. It's possible that political leaders didn't fully realize the destructive forces their extreme partisan positions were setting into motion.
The first signs of this horrific violence had already appeared a year earlier, during the Direct Action Day on August 16, 1946, when large-scale massacres, arson, looting, and rapes ravaged Calcutta. Similar atrocities soon unfolded in Noakhali in October. By then, Bengal had descended into chaos, its path marked by bloodshed.
The epicenter of this violence soon shifted to Punjab, where emotionally charged Punjabis engaged in horrifying acts of ethnic cleansing. This led to the displacement of over 14 million people, with an estimated death toll ranging from 200,000 to one million, and nearly 80,000 women being abducted. Very few families managed to cross the hastily drawn border without suffering immense loss. Nearly every survivor, including children, carries a story of this devastation.

Although it was clear that Amritsar would be part of India and Lahore part of Pakistan, no one seemed to have prepared for the possibility of migration while there was still peace. No one anticipated the need to move. According to the stories I've heard from my elders, despite the ongoing political unrest and frequent incidents of violence in Amritsar, there was no organized planning for migration to Muslim-majority areas. Even if there was some inkling of the impending disaster, the infrastructure for a new country, refugee camps, and administrative systems were non-existent. There were no places to go. The largest migration in history, perhaps inevitably, turned into a sudden exodus.

Lahore and Amritsar, just 50 kilometers apart, were twin cities in many ways. The shape and layout of their old cities were strikingly similar, each with a dozen or more gates and circular roads encircling them. Lahore boasted the majestic Badshahi Mosque and the historic Shahi Qilla, while Amritsar had the splendid Durgiana Terath temple and the notable Gobindgarh Fort (locally known as Bhangian da Qilla). Lahore was home to the revered Data Darbar, while Amritsar held the holiest Sikh Gurdwara, the Darbar Sahib. The abundance of mosques in Lahore was mirrored by the Gurdwaras in Amritsar. Both cities had their own significant parks—Minto/Iqbal Park in Lahore and Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar—and vibrant commercial hubs such as Gol Bagh and Hall Bazaar. Amritsar had its own Aitchison Bagh, modeled after Lahore's Aitchison College.

The roads and gates in both cities echoed each other: the Lahori and Mori gates in the walled parts of the cities, and a road from Lahori Gate in Amritsar that led straight to the Delhi Gate in Lahore. Lahore's iconic Zamzama or Bhangian di Towp, immortalized by Rudyard Kipling in *Kim*, was brought from Amritsar's Bhangian da Qilla by Ranjit Singh. Residents of both cities spoke Punjabi and both were known for their literary traditions. Writers, poets, and sportsmen thrived in each city.

The aerial distance between the Data Darbar in Lahore and Darbar Sahib in Amritsar is just 53 kilometers—shorter than the distance between many modern city suburbs like Clifton and DHA City in Karachi or Rohini and Greater Noida in Delhi. In fact, cities like Melbourne, New York, and Shanghai span much wider areas. Prior to independence, half the population of both Lahore and Amritsar was Muslim. Commuting between the two cities by rail was common, and the Sikh community was significant and prosperous in both places. Both communities were convinced that the cities would remain part of the country of their choice.

However, greater forces had already drawn a line that split the two cities. The twin cities were now separated into rival camps. The once thriving commercial areas of Hall Bazaar in Amritsar and Shah Alam Market in Lahore were destroyed by arson during the violence.

The tragedy of Partition left countless innocent men, women, and children caught in the deadly chaos of trying to cross over the newly drawn borders. They sought a better life on the other side, believing that they would find a utopia. But little did they know that they would face immense challenges in settling and integrating into the new country. The hope and patriotic spirit that had marked the early days of independence quickly faded, replaced by the harsh realities of life in an unfamiliar land.

My family, originally from Kashmir, had lived in Amritsar since around 1820, after Ranjit Singh took control of the state from the Abdali Afghans. On my father's maternal side, we were qaligars (utensil polishers), and we lived in the Hathi Gate area. On my paternal side, we were rafoogars (carpet menders), based in Lohgarh and Chitta Katra, areas inside the Lahori Gate. Both of these trades have now become obsolete.

My grandfather, Ameer Bakhsh, tragically passed away from tuberculosis in 1925 when my father, Mahmood Sadiq, was only three years old. By the time Partition came in 1947, my father was 25 years old, a matriculate, and working as a draughtsman in the Railway Workshop in Amritsar, earning a modest Rs. 43 per month. My elder uncle, Ghulam Sadiq, worked as a guard in the North Western Railway, a job he continued even after Partition in Rawalpindi, where he spent his entire life.

After Partition, my father found employment in the Irrigation Department as a draughtsman, and my younger uncle, Irshad Hassan, joined the Railways workshop as a storekeeper. Along with eight other immigrant families, they settled in a large building in Gujjar Gali, Gumti Bazaar, in the Mohalla Pani Wala Talab area of Lahore. It was here that we lived until the early 1970s. This new life in Lahore, however, was far from the dream of a smooth transition—it was a struggle of adaptation and survival, amid the ruins left behind by Partition's upheaval.

The building where we settled in Lahore had a fascinating history, one that mirrored the larger story of migration, survival, and the resilience of the people who found refuge there. Built on a square, irregular plot of land, approximately 50 by 45 feet, the three-story building stood as a testament to the success of its original owner, Gulzari Mal, a jeweler with a thriving shop in the nearby 'Sarafa' Bazaar. Above the double-door gate was a stone plaque with the inscription "Gulzari Mal, Jewellers, 1939."

While not much is known about Gulzari Mal's family, we do know that they were once a prosperous and well-established family in the neighborhood. His family consisted of five sons and several daughters, though their exact number remains unclear. The house they built was grand and reflected their wealth, but after the Partition of India and Pakistan, the house stood vacant, awaiting new tenants.

My father's Majeed Phupha (great-uncle), who was in Delhi during Partition, owned a carpet shop. After the tumult of the Partition, he migrated to Lahore in late September, seeking a place for his family. He was guided, perhaps by fate, to Mohalla Pani Wala Talab, where he found this large, empty building that seemed perfect for settling down. Shortly after, another group of three Urdu-speaking families from Delhi arrived, also seeking shelter, and my great-uncle generously allowed them to occupy the ground floor.

In those early days, there was a strong sense of camaraderie and selflessness among the migrants, all of whom had gone through similar traumatic experiences. The spirit of sacrifice and mutual support was prevalent, and it was this that allowed my Barray Phupha to keep the building open to those in need. Within weeks, two more families arrived, and Barray Phupha allowed them to occupy the first floor. When his nephew Tahir's family came looking for a place to stay, they were given the third floor, which had two attached kitchens.

As time passed, the building continued to house a growing number of families. When my younger uncle, Irshad, found a job in the Lahore Railway Workshop and needed shelter, Barray Phupha once again showed his generosity, offering him one of the remaining rooms, or Barsatis, on the top floor. The fourth Barsati was later occupied by one of the families already on the second floor.

In 1950, my father's maternal uncle, Babu Mama, who had been unable to settle in Rawalpindi, came to Lahore and

found work. Barray Phupha welcomed him into the building and gave him the fifth and final Barsati.

By 1959, when my father was posted to Lahore, we moved into the fifth Barsati and started living there as a family. Later on, Babu Mama, who had been living alone after his divorce, moved to a room in Rang Mahal Chowk, so that my family could live comfortably.

I vividly remember carrying food from our Barsati to Babu Mama's room. He would always give me a few coins in return, which I kept in an earthen moneybox. Those were small but significant gestures that have stayed with me, reminding me of the generosity, warmth, and camaraderie that defined our lives in those early years after Partition.

My mother's family had their roots in the tailoring business, a profession passed down through generations. They lived in Katra Karam Singh, a vibrant neighborhood in Amritsar, where my maternal grandfather (Nana) had built a fairly large house. My great-grandfather, who had migrated from Kashmir, could only speak Kashmiri and knew little Punjabi. He established a thriving tailoring practice, which my Nana continued. Nana, known as Master Razzaq in the area, was highly respected by his apprentices (shagirds) and workers, and after Partition, many of them followed him to Lahore.

My Nana had witnessed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and was a loyal member of the pro-Congress, anti-Pakistan Majlis e Ahrar. Katra Karam Singh, where the family lived, was also home to famous local figures, including Bholu Pehlwan and his family. My mother, during her childhood, had studied the Holy Quran from Bholu's sister, and the pehlwans were regular clients of my Nana for tailoring their clothes. After Partition, they settled on Mohni Road, Lahore, and continued to invite my maternal uncles to their wrestling bouts until the late 1960s.

When Partition occurred, Katra Karam Singh was relatively peaceful compared to other parts of the city. Despite the surrounding turmoil, my Nana initially refused to move. However, as conditions worsened, particularly after the influx of Sikh and Hindu refugees from West Punjab, my Nana decided to send his family to Lahore on a train, accompanied by one of my maternal grandmother's sisters and her family. He hoped to bring them back to Amritsar once peace was restored.

The two families found refuge in a house in Kailash Gali, Gowalmandi, a narrow street off Bhagwan Bazaar that forked from the Railway Road near the Amritdhara building. My Nana, realizing that Amritsar had become too dangerous for Muslims, made the difficult decision to migrate to Lahore in late August 1947. Despite suffering from polio and a limp in his left leg, he walked most of the way to Lahore. He set up a tailoring shop close to the Amritdhara building, at the junction of Bhagwan Bazaar, Ram Bazaar, and the street leading to Dil Muhammad Road.

In this new city, my Nana continued his tailoring business until his death in 1968. His two sons eventually ventured into the jewelry trade, but the two families continued to share the house for the next 25 years. One of my maternal grandmother's sister's sons still resides in that house today.

It was from this house in Gowalmandi that my mother was married in 1950. I was born there in 1952, and I spent much of my childhood in the neighborhood. Gowalmandi was a place where many rough characters lived, and I became well-versed in the Lahori lexicon of four-letter words. I spent my days loitering around the mausoleum of Shah Mali, stealing poultry from nearby streets, and almost becoming a pickpocket — but that's another story. Despite its rough edges, Gowalmandi left an indelible mark on my upbringing. Fortunately, I eventually moved on to more respectable pursuits.

During the tense political climate of the mid-1940s, my father's family was firmly aligned with the Muslim League. Up until the middle of 1947, Amritsar remained relatively secure, but everything changed with the announcement of the June Plan. As it became clear that the British would soon depart and that the Punjab province would be divided along religious lines, the violence escalated. Stabbings and arson became more frequent, and the already volatile environment turned even more perilous, especially for those living in or passing through areas where the rival community held a majority.

My family lived near Hathi Gate, which was situated on the northeastern corner of the walled city of Amritsar. The railway line from Delhi to Lahore ran along the northern side of the city, and various significant landmarks such as the Durga Mandir and the railway station were located across the circular road from Hathi Gate. As one moved south from this gate, Lohgarh Gate, Lahori Gate, and Katra Karam Singh followed in quick succession.

The violence hit close to home in early August 1947. On the 1st of August, my father and uncle Irshad were riding their bicycles home along the circular road when a homemade explosive device was thrown at them between Hathi Gate and Lohgarh Gate. Thankfully, they escaped with their lives, but this attack marked the beginning of a grim pattern. Three days later, on the 4th, two cousins of my grandmother (Dadi) were injured in a firing incident. Just days after that, on the 7th, another bombing occurred in the locality.

In the face of mounting danger, my father and uncle decided not to go to their offices again. The escalating violence and the realization that safety was no longer guaranteed in the city made it impossible to continue life as it had been. The Partition was just around the corner, and it was becoming clear that life in Amritsar, like many other places in the Punjab, was about to change forever.

As the violence grew ever closer to their street, the atmosphere in Amritsar became increasingly perilous. On August 4th, my grandmother, along with some of her relatives, made the decision to leave the city and head to Rawalpindi, where her elder son was already staying. By the 7th, a curfew was enforced across the city, effectively sealing off most movement. The uncertainty and danger reached a boiling point.

By the 13th, the curfew was temporarily lifted between 3 and 5 in the afternoon, offering a brief window of escape. My father and the remaining family members, realizing they had no other option, packed whatever belongings they could carry and hired a tonga for Rs. 3—a service that was still operational despite the chaos. With heavy hearts and a sense of urgency, they navigated their way through the increasingly dangerous streets, managing to cross the lines of conflict to the railway station. There, they found a throng of Muslims already waiting for trains to Pakistan.

The first three trains were already packed, and they were unable to secure a place on them. However, they eventually managed to squeeze onto the fourth train. My father, desperate to find space, climbed to the top of the engine, riding there throughout the journey. The train finally reached Rawalpindi, where the family sought refuge at the Islamia College refugee camp, awaiting the arrival of the rest of their extended family.

Once reunited, they moved to a better-managed refugee camp,

the Mansar Camp on the GT road in the Campbellpur district, on the left bank of the river Indus. It was here that they began the difficult process of rebuilding their lives in the new country, now homeless, jobless, and without any possessions from their former life. Despite the hardships, they were grateful to have arrived in Pakistan unscathed.

Every time I come across an image of a refugee train, with people perched atop the carriages, or pass by the AJK Regimental Centre—which now stands on the grounds of the former Mansar Camp—I am reminded of the immense suffering and the emotional toll my family endured during the Partition. The memory of those difficult days is etched in my heart, a constant reminder of the trial and trauma that defined that chapter in their lives.

After staying in Mansar Camp for about two months, the family moved to Rawalpindi in early October. The once-bustling Mohallas of Nanakpura and Mohanpura, populated mostly by Sikhs and Hindus, had emptied as their residents had fled to India. My father, along with his mother and three brothers, took up residence in an empty house in Mohanpura, while his maternal uncles settled in Nanakpura. Many other relatives also found homes in these localities, with some still living there today.

As the family sought to rebuild their lives, they began to raid the nearby abandoned houses, looting whatever they could find to make their new homes livable. In one house, they discovered a sword with a scabbard, a relic that is still in the possession of my elder uncle's family. Over time, they also came across brass glasses and silver woks, engraved with Hindu names, items that were once part of someone else's life but were now absorbed into their own. Though these items were cherished at the time, we didn't think to preserve them as historical artifacts, and in retrospect, it seems strange how the turmoil of the time blurred the lines between necessity and the act of looting. For many families, this was simply a way to start afresh, despite the moral dilemma it posed. The once-law-abiding citizens, in the face of survival, had to resort to desperate measures, as difficult as it was to come to terms with.

While my elder uncle, who was posted at the Rawalpindi Railway Station, continued to live in his house in Mohanpura until the late 1970s, the search for work led my father and his younger brother to Lahore. It was here, in the Gumti Bazaar and Gowalmandi areas, that my brothers and I were born and raised, where our family finally began to find some semblance of stability and normalcy. The wounds of Partition were still fresh, but life slowly began to move forward.

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Conclusion

Lahore, Amritsar, and Partition

The narrative of Lahore and Amritsar before and after the Partition of 1947 reveals the dramatic shifts in the socio-political and cultural fabric of these two cities, which were once closely linked but became separated by the newly drawn border between India and Pakistan. Ian Talbot's book *Divided Cities* explores the contrasting fates of these two cities, which had shared deep historical and familial connections before 1947, only to undergo traumatic transformations during and after the Partition.

Historically, both cities had prospered under different influences. Lahore, under the Mughal Empire, became an imperial center and later, under British colonial rule, developed into a hub of education, industry, and trade. Amritsar, similarly, flourished under Sikh rule during the reign of Ranjit Singh, and later became a major trade center for the Punjab region, particularly in textiles, wheat, and other essential goods. Both cities had flourishing communities of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, with interwoven familial and business ties.

The division of Punjab in 1947, however, led to an exodus of communities across the border, with Muslims from Amritsar moving to Lahore and Hindus and Sikhs from Lahore migrating to India. Talbot provides a deep exploration of the violence that accompanied this partition, arguing that the violence was not purely a result of religious animosities but rather a breakdown of law and order as the British Empire withdrew, leaving behind a vacuum that was filled by competing communal groups fighting for control.

In the aftermath of Partition, Lahore emerged as a much faster-growing city, benefiting from its role as Pakistan's administrative capital, whereas Amritsar struggled due to its border position, loss of skilled labor, and broken trade links. The two cities, though both Punjabi-speaking and sharing a cultural heritage, became sharply divided in their post-Partition trajectories. Lahore, as Talbot notes, became a center for refugees, some of whom engaged in smuggling and criminal activities to survive. In contrast, Amritsar's economy, social fabric, and population were decimated, and it could not recover as rapidly as Lahore.

Talbot's study takes a nuanced approach to understanding the impact of Partition on these cities. He looks beyond the narratives of mass violence and national identity formation to examine the emotional and material consequences for the displaced populations, and how the violence of Partition was rooted in political power struggles rather than purely religious conflict. His comparative study sheds light on how Lahore and Amritsar's shared history was shattered by the traumatic events of 1947, and how each city, in its own way, adapted to the new political realities while trying to maintain its cultural and economic identity.

By exploring both the urban development and the emotional aftermath of Partition in Lahore and Amritsar, Talbot enriches our understanding of the complexities of post-Partition India and Pakistan, and the lasting scars left by the violence and displacement of millions.

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