



*From the MixCache.com library*

SAMPLE COPY

# New Delhi Through Partition

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

## Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** A City at the Faultline
- **Chapter 2** The Summer of 1947: Rumors, Departures, Returns
- **Chapter 3** Railheads and Refuge: Old Delhi Station and Purana Qila
- **Chapter 4** Camps to Colonies: From Kingsway Camp to Lajpat Nagar
- **Chapter 5** Evacuee Property and the Making of a Housing Market
- **Chapter 6** Drawing New Lines: Cartographies of a Divided Capital
- **Chapter 7** Neighborhoods Remade: Karol Bagh, Patel Nagar, Rajendra Nagar
- **Chapter 8** Markets and Memory: Bazaars from Ballimaran to Sarojini Nagar
- **Chapter 9** Women's Journeys and the Labors of Resettlement
- **Chapter 10** Language, Schooling, and the Politics of Belonging
- **Chapter 11** Temples, Gurdwaras, and the Remapping of Sacred Space
- **Chapter 12** Policing, Militia, and Everyday Security
- **Chapter 13** Water, Power, and the Infrastructures of Survival
- **Chapter 14** Work, Guilds, and the Refugee Entrepreneur
- **Chapter 15** Cinema Halls and the Public Sphere
- **Chapter 16** The State Plans a Capital: From DIT to DDA
- **Chapter 17** Voting New Delhi: Refugee Franchise and Party Machines
- **Chapter 18** Lines of Caste and Community After Partition
- **Chapter 19** Muslim Delhi: Silences, Returns, and Pocketed Survivals
- **Chapter 20** The Making of the Punjabi Capital
- **Chapter 21** Memory, Testimony, and the Ethics of Listening
- **Chapter 22** Maps, Walls, and Boundaries in the Lifeworld
- **Chapter 23** The City in Photographs: Family Albums as Archive
- **Chapter 24** Aftershocks: 1965, 1971, and the Long Tail of Displacement
- **Chapter 25** Lessons for the Twenty-First-Century City

## Introduction

This book begins at the moment when a carefully planned imperial capital collided with an unplanned human emergency. New Delhi, conceived as a symbol of order and dominion, was thrust into the turbulence of Partition in 1947, as caravans of the displaced poured into and through the city. Streets that once staged ceremony became corridors of flight; bungalows and barracks took on new meanings; milestones along the Grand Trunk Road pointed not only to destinations but to ruptures. In this collision, the city did not merely host history—it absorbed it, remade it, and carried it forward in bricks, bylaws, and biographies. What follows is a sustained attempt to trace how that transformation unfolded and how it continues to shape daily life.

The narrative is anchored in oral histories gathered from survivors and their families—women and men who crossed borders, reopened shops, rebuilt prayer halls, and reinvented neighborhoods. Their voices illuminate what official records often obscure: the hesitations before departure, the improvisations that kept households intact, the quiet bargains that secured a room, a ration card, a foothold. Memory is never a perfect instrument, but it is a vital one; when handled with care and corroborated with documents and maps, it reveals textures of decision and emotion that no ledger can capture. Listening to these accounts, one learns how a city is reassembled not only by planners and politicians but by carpenters, tailors, teachers, nurses, and street vendors.

Alongside testimony, the book turns to archives—municipal minutes, property ledgers, planning files, and newspapers—and to cartographic evidence, from colonial surveys to post-Partition neighborhood plans. Maps, especially, allow us to see the city as it was imagined and as it became: camp perimeters penciled over fairgrounds; new thoroughfares cut through farmland; dense clusters of one-room tenements edging established colonies. Reading these documents against remembered routes—where someone waited for a brother at a station, where a family slept under a portico, where a market first took shape—helps convert abstract lines into lived spaces. It is in this braid of sources that the social and spatial legacies of Partition take form.

New Delhi's transformation was at once demographic, territorial, and political. The arrival of refugees altered the city's linguistic and religious profile and seeded new solidarities, associations, and parties. Laws meant to manage abandoned and evacuee property reshuffled ownership and tenure, creating opportunities for some and precarity for others. Camps gave way to colonies, often through tenuous claims and provisional structures that hardened into permanence. Public institutions—schools, police stations, clinics—followed these new settlements, sometimes enabling stability, sometimes entrenching exclusion. Each change left marks on the map and in the

habits of everyday life.

This is also a book about neighborhoods as laboratories of coexistence and conflict. In lanes and markets, residents bargained over water taps and festival routes, debated the placement of shrines, and learned to live with new sounds and smells. Women's labor—paid and unpaid—quietly sustained households and stitched communities together through savings groups, kitchens, and classrooms. Entrepreneurs built supply chains out of kinship and trust, refashioning the city's commercial geography. And amid all this, remnants of an older Delhi—courtyard houses, craft guilds, Urdu presses, cemeteries—persisted in altered form, sometimes as heritage, sometimes as fragile lifelines.

The chapters that follow move from the city's gateways—railheads, camps, and administrative offices—into the intimate interiors of homes, workshops, and places of worship. They examine how policies were translated at street level; how boundaries were drawn in law and chalked on walls; how elections recast belonging; and how images—official surveys, family albums, newspaper photographs—fixed certain stories while others slipped the frame. Throughout, the method is comparative and layered: testimonies checked against files, maps annotated with memory, patterns traced across multiple neighborhoods to distinguish the typical from the exceptional.

Finally, this study treats Partition not as an episode with a closing date but as a structure of experience that reframed urban possibility. Its aftershocks are visible in the city's spatial common sense: who is expected to live where, which rituals belong on which streets, how safety is defined and for whom. They surface in the institutions that govern land and infrastructure, and in the political repertoires that mobilize grievance and hope. To attend to these continuities is not to deny change; it is to recognize how deeply 1947 imprinted itself on New Delhi's present. If the city today is a mosaic of memories, claims, and plans, this book asks how that mosaic came to be—and what it can teach us about cities built in the wake of rupture.

## CHAPTER ONE: A City at the Faultline

The grand design of New Delhi, a city painstakingly sculpted from the dusty plains of the Delhi Sultanate, was meant to embody imperial permanence and orderly governance. Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, its principal architects, envisioned a monumental landscape of broad avenues, verdant vistas, and imposing sandstone buildings, all radiating from the viceregal palace, now Rashtrapati Bhavan. This was to be a capital that spoke of power, stability, and the enduring might of the British Raj. Every tree planted, every stone laid, every vista framed, was a testament to this grand vision. The city was inaugurated in 1931, a mere sixteen years before the cataclysm that would reshape its very soul.

Yet, beneath this veneer of imperial tranquility, Delhi was a city of myriad layers and simmering tensions. Old Delhi, the walled city of Shahjahanabad, pulsed with a different rhythm - a dense, vibrant tapestry of narrow lanes, bustling bazaars, and ancient mosques and temples. Here, life unfolded in close quarters, a rich blend of communities that had coexisted for centuries. The newer imperial capital, for all its sweeping grandeur, felt somewhat sterile in comparison, a city of civil servants and their entourages, a world apart from the organic chaos and communal intimacy of the old city.

The fault lines, though not always visible to the casual observer, ran deep. The political discourse of the 1940s, increasingly dominated by calls for independence and the growing demand for a separate Muslim homeland, cast a long shadow over the city. While New Delhi was the stage for high-stakes political negotiations, Old Delhi was often the first to feel the tremors of communal discord. Rumors, anxieties, and the growing polarization between Hindu and Muslim communities began to fray the delicate fabric of everyday life. The abstract concept of "Partition" began to take on tangible, terrifying forms in the minds of ordinary citizens.

Even as the political machinery geared up for the transfer of power, life in Delhi continued with its daily routines. Markets hummed, schools taught, and the rhythm of the seasons dictated the pace of agriculture in the surrounding villages. But a sense of unease, a premonition of change both profound and violent, permeated the air. People spoke in hushed tones of the escalating violence in Punjab and Bengal, of trains arriving with bloodied passengers, and of the mass migrations already underway in other parts of the subcontinent. These were not distant reports; they were harbingers of what was to come.

The summer of 1947 brought with it not just the oppressive heat of the North Indian plains, but also an unbearable weight of anticipation. The decision to divide India had

been announced, and the date, August 15th, loomed large. For many, especially those with roots stretching back generations in Delhi, the idea of a divided nation was unfathomable. What would it mean for their homes, their businesses, their very identities? The carefully constructed certainties of their lives were beginning to crumble.

New Delhi, designed to be a symbol of unity under imperial rule, found itself at the epicenter of a historic rupture. Its broad avenues, once designed for ceremonial parades, would soon bear witness to a different kind of procession – endless streams of refugees, their lives uprooted, their possessions meager, their faces etched with fear and uncertainty. The grand buildings would house not just bureaucrats and politicians, but also the displaced, the desperate, and the hopeful. The city, conceived as an ordered cosmos, was about to be plunged into a maelstrom of human migration and communal strife.

The architectural contrast between Old and New Delhi, once a visual representation of two distinct eras and ideologies, would soon become a metaphor for the social and demographic transformations underway. Old Delhi, with its Muslim-majority population, would experience a significant exodus, while New Delhi, particularly its sprawling open spaces and nascent infrastructure, would become a magnet for Hindu and Sikh refugees streaming in from West Punjab. This influx would not merely fill empty spaces; it would fundamentally alter the city's character, its language, its cuisine, and its political alignments.

The concept of 'home' itself was undergoing a radical redefinition. For those who had lived in Delhi for decades, home was a given, an immutable fact. But for millions in Punjab and Bengal, home had ceased to exist, violently torn from their grasp. For these uprooted souls, Delhi, with its promises of safety and opportunity, became a new, albeit fragile, hope. They would arrive with stories of loss and resilience, carrying not just physical burdens but also the intangible weight of trauma and the fierce determination to rebuild.

The administrative machinery of the soon-to-be independent Indian government found itself ill-equipped to handle the scale of the impending crisis. While plans for governance and nation-building were being drawn up, the human cost of Partition had been largely underestimated. The sheer volume of people on the move, the speed of their displacement, and the escalating communal violence caught many by surprise. Delhi, as the capital-in-waiting, would bear the brunt of this unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

The weeks leading up to August 15th were a blur of frenzied activity and mounting anxiety. Families debated whether to stay or go, weighing the risks of remaining against the uncertainties of flight. Property was sold in haste, often for a fraction of its value, as people scrambled to liquidate assets and secure some semblance of financial

security for an unknown future. The communal harmony that had largely characterized Delhi, despite occasional skirmishes, began to fracture under the immense pressure.

The city's strategic location, at the crossroads of North India, made it both a destination and a transit point for millions. Railway lines, once arteries of commerce and communication, became lifelines for those fleeing violence, and sometimes, tragically, scenes of unspeakable horror. The Grand Trunk Road, an ancient route connecting cities and empires, transformed into a dusty, dangerous highway for foot convoys stretching for miles, bearing the hopes and despairs of an entire populace.

The partition of British India into India and Pakistan was not merely a political division of territory; it was a profound psychic rupture for millions. For the people of Delhi, it meant grappling with a city that was simultaneously their home and a battleground of competing identities and loyalties. The abstract lines drawn on a map in distant London would translate into very real, very bloody divisions on the streets and in the homes of Delhi.

As August 1947 approached, the air in Delhi crackled with a potent mix of anticipation and dread. The promise of independence, a dream nurtured for decades, was finally within reach. Yet, it came at a terrible price, a price that Delhi, a city at the faultline of this historic divide, was about to pay in full. The carefully planned imperial capital was on the cusp of an unplanned human emergency, a transformation so profound that its echoes would resonate for generations. The foundations laid by Lutyens and Baker would hold, but the city built upon them would be irrevocably altered.

---

*This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.*

Visit [MixCache.com](https://MixCache.com) to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY