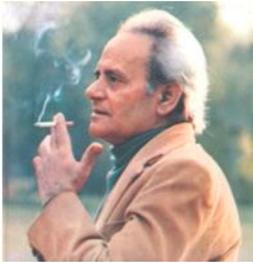


Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in pre-1947 Lahore



Abdul Hameed

Hameed was born in 1928 in Amritsar. He migrated to Pakistan after the partition of India. After working at Radio Pakistan for several years, he joined the Voice of America. He wrote novels, short stories, columns for national newspapers, and programmes for radio and television. He passed away in Lahore in 2011.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared at <http://www.apnaorg.com/columns/ahameed/column-40.html>

There were 300,000 Hindus and Sikhs living in Lahore as Independence approached. By August 19, 1947, that number had sunk to 10,000, and by the end of the month to just 1,000. The majority moved to India. Many were killed, though there is no knowing their number. Some neighbourhoods of the city were entirely Hindu and Sikh, others were mixed, while some were solely Muslim. Gumti Bazaar was a purely Hindu neighbourhood, with the exception of one resident: Maulana Salahuddin Ahmed, editor of Adabi Duniya, the leading Urdu literary journal of its time.

Outside the gated city, other predominantly Hindu neighbourhoods included Krishen Nagar, Sant Nagar, Rajgarh (Kamani Kaushal lived here), Ram Galli, Nisbet Road, Qila Gujjar Singh, Shah Alami and Gowalmandi, while the population of Beadon Road and Nicholson Road was a Hindu-Sikh-Muslim mix. Ichhra and Model Town lay outside the city as it then was. Ichhra, a Muslim-majority area, was said to be the original Lahore, the very site where the foundation of the city had been laid by Lahoo, a son of Raja Ram Chander Ji.

Model Town was founded by rich and upper middle-class Hindus and had few Muslim residents. Every house was fronted by a large lawn with lush fruit trees, especially ones that bore mangoes in summer. There was also a Model Town bus service that took you into the city, right up to Serai Rattan Chand, Gowalmandi and Shah Alami.

The residents of Model Town, who owned their spacious houses, were retired judges, rich businessmen, traders and upmarket store-owners. Many high court judges, doctors and engineers had also moved to Model Town from the city. Included among the residents of this best laid-out residential estate of Lahore were college professors and officers of the civil service. The famous communist leader BPL Bedi, who had studied at British and German universities, lived here. His son Kabir Bedi became a famous actor in post-independence India.

In British times, only a handful of Lahore's Muslims could be called affluent. Even in the old city, most of the grand mansions or havelis belonged to Hindus and Sikhs, for example, Haveli Kabuli Mal, Haveli Dhyani Chand and Haveli Rai Diwan Chand. The only exception was Haveli Mian Khan, which was located between Rang Mahal and Mochi Gate.

Mention, however, might be made of much smaller havelis owned by Muslims in the inner city. One was located in Mohalla Sannian. It was known as Haveli Judge Latif. The other was called Haveli Barood Khana where the family of Mian Amiruddin lived. It was located between Pani Wala Talab and Koocha Langay Mandi.

Most of the Hindus who lived in the city traded in gold and silver, foodgrains and textiles, both wholesale and retail. All the moneylenders of Lahore were Hindu. Every business in Suha Bazaar, Machhi Hatta, Gumti Bazaar, Bazaaz Hatta and Shah Alami was owned by non-Muslims. The only Muslim-owned store in Anarakli was Sheikh Enayatullah & Sons. Dabbi Bazaar had a number of small bookshops, mostly Muslim-owned. In the same Bazaar, you could find Kashmiri Pandits who sold shawls and fine wool fabrics.

Morning in the inner city in those pre-1947 days began with the siren sounded from the North Western Railway loco shop and Makandri Lal's factory. The call to morning prayers was sounded from the city's many mosques, while

bells would be rung in Hindu temples to begin morning worship. Makandari Lal's factory was located in Badami Bagh.

Minto Park was where people took their morning walks and performed exercise.

Cows and buffaloes were a common sight in city streets. Hindus respected the ox because they believed it to be Shivji Maharaj's mount. The cow was, of course, sacred to all Hindus. Sometimes these animals would become a nuisance, blocking traffic, as they would decide to sit in the middle of the street. Some Hindu shopkeepers would place large slabs of rock salt on the street for animals to lick. The more devout Hindus had built water troughs here and there for these animals to drink from. These were all very humane gestures.

In all Hindu neighbourhoods, you found wedding halls called Janj Ghar, which were a boon for families that did not have the means to hold wedding ceremonies at home. While Hindu women did not observe the purdah as many Muslim women did at the time, unmarried Hindu girls were not allowed to apply makeup or go around immodestly dressed.

A great and beloved figure in the old city was that of Dr Sant Singh, whose clinic was located between Haveli Kabuli Mal and Chowk Chuna Mandi. He was an extremely kind-hearted man who would not charge for the medicines he dispensed. He treated everyone equally, without regard to their religion.

Another very kind-hearted doctor inside Modhi Gate was Dr Bahadur Shah who also did not charge for the medicines he gave out. At times, he would even give money to the poorer among his patients so that they could buy themselves some milk to gain strength.

Whenever a Hindu funeral passed through the bazaar, Hindu shopkeepers would drop whatever they were doing, come down from their shops to stand on the street with their hands joined together in respect to the dead. When a Hindu died, his body was removed from the bed and placed on the bare floor, the belief being that if the dead person was left where he had died, his spirit would not leave the house.

If a very old man died, his body was taken to the burning ground called *shamshan ghat*, led by a band playing merry music, including a popular movie hit of the time, *Chal Chal re Naujawan* (March on, march on, young man). Lahore's three or four shamshan ghats were located outside the city, one on the banks of the Ravi where the painter Amrita Sher-Gil, daughter of a Sikh father and Hungarian mother, was consigned to fire. She was only 28.

The most famous shamshan ghat in the city was located beyond Texali Gate. A relative of ours lived not far from there and sometimes I would visit the family. If a body were being readied for immolation, I would watch it stealthily, utterly mesmerised. A close family member would pour ghee on the pyre and then set it alight. In the morning, milk was poured over what had been left of the pyre, the remains, which were called *phool*, picked up, placed in an urn and emptied into the Ravi. The more affluent would travel to Banaras to consign the remains to the waters of the sacred river Ganga. It was believed that this would free the departed soul from the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

On a dare, I once visited the shamshan ghat at night because I had heard that if one did that, one would be imbued with supernatural powers. I was so terrified that I did not have the strength in my legs to run back home. Then suddenly, I heard my mother's voice, "Hamid, what are you doing here?" I turned but there was nobody there. I screamed and began to run, having somehow found the strength to do so. I never stopped till I had arrived home. Needless to say, I never went that way again, even during the day.

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