

## *That makes me happy*



**Harish Malhotra**

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Between 1953 and 1956, I lived in Aligarh, a town in Uttar Pradesh, India. My father was a manager in the Central Bank of India. As he moved to different towns in India, so did his family. It exposed me to different cultures.

As we landed in Aligarh, we heard the locals jokingly say that four things made Aligarh a remarkable place – *miyan, machhar, mitti, makkhi*.

Miyan meant the local Muslim population, which was quite huge. Machhar meant mosquitoes. The place was filled with them due to the surrounding villages' open sewers. Mitti meant dust. Gusts of wind were an ordinary occurrence, and my mother had to dust the house twice daily. If she didn't, we would have ashen grey furniture. Makkhi meant flies. I never saw such huge numbers in my pre-Aligarh days and even today – only in Aligarh. Hundreds of thousands of flies would darken a room in a matter of seconds. We had to install wire mesh on doors and windows to keep them out.

We lived on Railway Road, one of the major roads of the town. There many shops that stretched from the railway station to Upper Kot where the bulk of the Muslim population lived with their mosques and businesses.

Every Sunday, I went to Upper Kot with my father to visit the meat shop. It would be the highlight of our day – buying goat meat. On the other side of the Railway Road was the train station. There was a bridge at that end which we had to cross to visit family friends. They had a big house with a wide playground. At the spot where there was the railway bridge, a road cut it.

What is left in my memory is that turning right from my home, the road would lead to a movie theatre; turning left from my home, it would take me to a government high school. The school was across the *Ghanta Ghar*, the Aligarh Muslim University clock tower. It was a major landmark.

Every day, my brother and I would walk to school. We would usually reach the intersection around 6:30 in the morning. Frequently, we saw a very interesting scenario when we reached the crossing. Both of us would stand still, fascinated with what was transpiring before us. We would forget that we were getting late to school.

There was a short, stocky man with a protruding belly. He was dressed in a white kurta and pajama. He had a thick moustache that was twisted up towards his ears. His head was shaved off, but he had a *choti*, a small strand of hair left at the top of the head. Muslims shaved their heads off completely, but the *choti* meant that the man was a Hindu. He also had a small *tilak*, a dot of sandalwood paste. It meant that he had already visited the temple.

I don't know the gentleman's name, so let's just call him Mishra ji.

He walked towards the centre of the crossing while tapping the ground with a thick walking stick. He would stop and say "Aooo" twice. Another "Aooo," and then something fascinating to us children would happen. Tens of dogs would rush to him from all four directions.

Indian *chapatis* are like Spanish tortillas. They were large pieces of eight-inch diameter thick bread. The man had divided each roti into four pieces. He had these pre-made quarters wrapped in an *angocha*, a general purpose red coloured piece of cloth. He would open this cloth after all the dogs were seated around him.

More amazing to my brother and me was the “disciplined” and “calm” demeanour of the dogs around the man. They never attacked him or jumped at each other for a piece of the roti. It seemed that they were in a cafeteria, lining up for their turn. As soon as a dog got a piece of roti in its mouth, it would walk away at a little distance to savour its share. The man would resume his walk after he had fed the dogs. The pack would disperse when they were done with their breakfast.

I saw this scenario many times. It was only a couple of times that I saw a dog try to misbehave by coming back to him for another serving or by snatching the bread from another dog. During these times, the man’s *danda* (walking stick) came in handy. He would threaten the dog – and the dog would walk away.

During summer vacations, my father, my brother and I went for a morning walk. One morning, we saw that Mishra ji was at it again – feeding the dogs. When he finished, my father approached, said, “Lalaji, *Ram Ram ji ki*, (hail Lord Ram).”

Mishra ji smiled as he folded his *angocha*, and replied. “*Ram Ram ji ki*.”

My father pointed to the dogs and said, “My sons say that you feed the dogs frequently.”

“I have everything in the world, but feeding the dog every morning makes me very happy,” Mishraji said as he caressed his large moustaches.

“It’s amazing to see that they don’t fight with each other. They seem to be satisfied with a piece of roti,” I said.

He looked at my brother and me, giggled and declared, “They know they won’t get a second one.”

My brother asked him, “How long have you been doing it?”

Mishra ji scratched his head, looked up, and replied, “I can’t remember. Always.”

Obviously, he had been doing it for many years because the dogs seemed to expect him every morning.

“I also feed the ants,” he showed my father a small packet of wheat flour. “I know all the anthills in this area. I go to all of them and pour one pinch of flour on each ant hill.”

He explained further and laughed, “Isn’t it wonderful that such a little amount of food can feed thousands of creatures?”

I asked him, “Why do you do that, Mishra ji?”

“It makes me happy.” He smiled.

Mishra ji was quite well-off. His shop was located on Railway Road just across the *Sabzi Mandi*, the wholesale vegetable market. He owned an engineering unit which did grinding, cutting, and threading of large iron pipes. Most of the time, I saw him sitting outside his store on a *charpai* (cot) or an iron chair.

Once, my father and I were walking. As we were nearing his store, we saw that he had a small display of fruits for sale. When we got close, we saw that he had exceptionally large *bers*, *cheekus*, and grapes. Most of the time, *bers* were small, almost a size of a pea, and they were cheap, unlike *cheekus* and grapes which were really expensive. However, the *bers* that he was selling were of high quality, almost two inches long.

“Mishra ji, you’re an owner of such a large engineering unit. How come you’re selling fruits here?” My father asked him.

He smiled and said, “Oh, it makes me happy.”

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**Samples metaphor from Dr. Malhotra's book *Metaphors of Healing*.** Please look at the preview at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). It is available on Amazon & Kindle, Barnes & Nobles & Nook. If you like these metaphors, please share with your family and friends to spread the benefit of the message.

Dr. Malhotra's new book, *Pathways to Hope*, is also available at [Amazon](http://Amazon).

### **Sit in the Lobby of the Hotel**

Jack said that bad things happened in his childhood. His girlfriend died of a heart attack. Then he saw a sick cat in his driveway that was shot by a policeman to get it out of misery. He saw a chicken's head cut by his uncle. These traumatic events played in his mind. He asked, "What should I do?"

Make believe that you're in a beautiful lobby of a hotel with chandeliers and a Persian rug. When you sit down in the sofa, a beautiful woman approached with a smile and said, "Can I get you a cup of tea or a glass of wine. It is free for our guests?" You sat in the cozy atmosphere as long as you wanted.

At the back of the hotel, there were rooms where piles of garbage bags were collected. Cockroaches and rats had a grand time with them.

You stayed often in the hotel lobby, but many times, you ended up being in that garbage room as you got lost while taking a tour of the hotel. Your day was spoiled because it was an unsightly and smelly place.

My question was, "Would you like to spend your time in the garbage room or in the lobby?"

Jack said, "I'd like to spend time in the lobby."

In our lives we have a garbage room and a lobby. The garbage room is exactly what you told me, incidents that happened in life which you had no control on. Your girlfriend, the cat, and the chicken, they're water under the bridge. If you visit those places, they're like the garbage room of the hotel of life.

Be aware of what you think. If you find your thought going to useless and unhappy places, divert them to better places. It is your choice what you think.

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