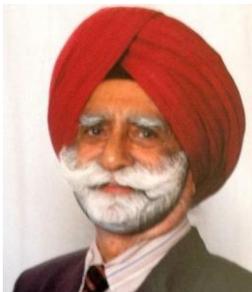


Pindi Memoirs by a Sikh Son of the Soil -4



Kanwarjit Singh Malik

Kanwarjit Singh Malik was born in Rawalpindi in 1930. His family moved to India at the time of Partition in 1947. He joined the Flying Club in Jalandhar, and was later selected by the Indian Air Force. After the retirement from the Air Force, he served as a senior captain in Air India and Air Lanka. He got married in 1961. In 2011, when they were living in Chandigarh, his wife fell ill, and passed away in spite of the best available medical aid. Then, his daughters, who live in Dubai, California and Hong Kong, requested him to move back to his old flat in Mumbai, as it was easier for them to visit him there. He has started writing a book titled *From Khyber to Kanyakumari and Beyond*, which will be about his work experiences and tourist experiences in various countries.

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Some events become Dreams; you remember them again and again like year 1934! Some random old memories follow. I have also added some of my opinions, looking back at how life has evolved over time

Standing in the Big Gate of our house on Nehru Road from which many Victorias and Tongas must have passed earlier as it was the *Ajanti* (the place where the Victorias, etc. used to be kept, along with horses and saddles) of my great grandfather, when he had the contract for conveying *dak* for the Pindi District.

For the first time I saw a few strange persons with almost shrunken heads go past and climb to the roof top of our house. They were all dressed in green, never saw them speak a word; after some time they went away just as they came. I was very scared. Later, my mother told me that they were known as *Shah Doula Chuis*. One Pir used to give shelter to such persons who were born deformed. They were harmless, she said, and that calmed me down.

I had developed a horrible cough due to which my chest sounded like a drum beat. No visits by Doctors could cure it. My mother started visiting Gurdwaras, Mandirs and Mazars of various *Pirs* including Sat Gaza Kabar, but to no avail. Hearing about all the commotion in the house, our Muslim *Dayee* (midwife) turned up one day. She saw me, and assured my mother, and told the maid, Jwandia to bring some wood ash and Pure Honey. I was made to sit on ground. Then she asked me to open my mouth. I resisted since I was scared. The other servants forced open my mouth, and she applied Honey and ash deep into my throat for four days. I was cured and she got Rs 20 *Bakshish* (tip as payment)

I have seen contingents of *Khaskars* dressed in light grey outfits with just *Belchas* (shovels) in their hand, including our Muslim driver of the Convent School Bus. They would march past us shouting “*Hak Ha*” instead of “Left, Right” on Nehru Road. The uniform was Salwar Kameez. Similarly, in Peshawar the contingents were wearing Red Salwar kameezes. They were called Red Shirts.

In 1936/37 when we moved to our Bungalow at Chowk Saidpur Road, we made new friends - Bhushi and his brothers who lived right across our home. I used to boss over them, and he was my age.

As children, along with four or five friends and our Driver Dewan Singh, we used to go to Murree in the winter to play in the snow, and eat *Aloo Chole*, *Gobi Shalgam Achar*, and *Mattar paneer*. Or, to Swan, which was not so developed, for picnics. This was a lot of fun for us, in the severe winters of Pindi and equally hot summers with hardly any outside activity\y except indoor games like table tennis, skating or *Dungal* (a form of wrestling) in the evenings.

With my school friends of my age we twice went to Saidpur in our car with driver Dewan Singh. Apart from looking around the village from where hay-laden carts used to come in winter, there were five ponds where villagers believed they were from the time of Pandu Brothers; we all had a dip there. Similar stone Ponds existed near Murree but we never had a dip there as the water was too cold.

In Murree, our *Munshi* (accountant) used to hire a Bungalow for the Season at Pindi Point. We used to occupy it during Summer School Holidays. An incident with a Britisher left a great scar on my mind. I was not allowed to go alone until after Partition. While on a walk with an older relative, our servant was taunted, “Can you show V for Victory”, which I did. A Britisher in uniform was walking ahead. He stopped and turned around walked towards us. I was so scared. Without saying a word, he gave a slap to our servant Arjun Singh and his turban went flying. I was reported by my older cousin and scolded by my mother. That day, I thought to myself that there will come a time, when I will have a Britisher polish my shoes. I fulfilled that desire in 1967 when I got my shoes polished by a Britisher in a hotel in London, on my first flight as a first Officer in Air India

In the winter months, some Sadhus, Faqirs, Snake Charmers, *Majmawalas* or *Madaris* (entertainers with trained monkeys) used to land up in front of our house on Nehru Road. The Sadhus used to have one Guru or leader, and rest were *chelas* (followers), some big or some small. They used to get busy with their assigned duties. They used to get fire wood from somewhere, Flour, Dal and at least one vegetable. People on Nehru Road used to donate milk and these articles. Their stay used to be at least three weeks. My mother used to give them lassi. My father’s valet cum coachman who used to ply his Tonga used to join them at night. They used to sing songs such as *Babaji Mast Kalandar*, and praise of Hanuman and Lord Krishna. We kids used to fall asleep and then see them missing the next day, until they came back in evenings. They would light the fire in the grounds, drink bhang and would sing the same bhajans again. In those days, Faqirs, Sadhus, or Snake Charmers did not ask for money; but asked for atta (flour), dal or ghee.

Sometimes fake dentists also used to come by showing us tricks of their own trade and would sell bottles of medicine apparently to build strong teeth. Some Ophthalmologists would also turn up with eye treatment even for the blind. They used to sell medicines and *surma* (some powder) for the eye. To us small kids all this Tamasha looked real and very interesting. They drank Bhang to keep themselves warm as they had very little on them except Ash and bundles of hair. They never troubled anyone except with their singing and dholki, and loud ringing of bells.

At the very end of Nehru Road, there was the Cremation Ground of Hindu and Sikhs. When I was very young, and not yet even in school, hearing the sound of *Ram Ram Sat Hai* or *Sat Nam Wahe Guru* used to surprise me. I used to run to watch what it was all about. It used to turn out that a gathering of people were carrying something on their shoulders others crying and chanting slogans. I did not understand till much later when my mother explained about death.

Next to the cremation grounds, on Stream Lai (name of the stream that divided Pindi City from the Cantonment; now called Nallah Lai), there were some enclosures for ladies and men where people bathed after cremation and went home. These were known as *choya* with plenty of water to bathe in. At times people carried someone with fanfare and a Band. This, I was told must be an old man/old lady having lived her full life though I don't know whether happily or not.

Rawalpindi was a cosmopolitan city. All believers lived in peace and harmony; no one interfered in each other's lives. Everyone took part in each other's joy and happiness, and shared their grief; the thinking in the world community has now changed with time. There were some Parsis and Christians. Mainly shopkeepers and some of them were very prominent. Everyone was living with dignity and honour. Life was normal and safe.

Not at all like what it is today when people have descended into towns to find work even as Labour. The villages are very deserted and are totally neglected. I feel sorry for them. The slightly educated class has gone abroad or moved to towns. This trend has dramatically increased the population of cities. Most of these people are illiterate, and they take to crime, live in shanties spreading dirt and they choke the roads and sewage. They become easy target as vote Bank for politicians of all types for corruption. Rest is for you to guess. Villages stand neglected, at the mercy of rain.

In villages around the Pindi District, the population was 90 to 94 per cent Muslim yet for one or two centuries they lived in harmony with people following other religions.

At one time quite a bit of land around Rawalpindi belonged to Chaudhary Waris Khan's ancestors but in a century they were reduced to a Mohalla Chaudhary Waris Khan. My father knew all his brothers. They were regular visitors to us at Nehru Road later at Chowk Saidpur Road. In fact Chaudhary Tariq Azam paid many visits to many families in Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar and some other places, and always visited us. He used to get Birth Certificates from the Municipality and gifts too. Upon his return, we would load him with gifts and requests.

Tariq was a practicing High Court Lawyer, based in Islamabad. His cousin, son of Chaudhary Mauladad, is a Judge of High Court. They shifted from Pindi to Islamabad. Chaudhary Mauladad was a very popular and *rangila* (colourful) person. I still remember him negotiating with father during Municipal Elections. I am in touch with Tariq's son Fakhar Zaman, who lives in Cambridge UK for last 21 years. We often speak on the internet.

Tariq Azam had started writing the history of Rawalpindi and of prominent families and landmarks of Pindi. Unfortunately, he passed away last year (2014), and his task remains unfinished. May be one day one of his cousins will complete it for generations to read of Pindi of Gold.

On one of his visits to Delhi after Independence, Tariq had also brought along his daughter to meet my father. My father had then just crossed 100 years. My father asked her to sit next to him, which she did. He asked her name. Then, he asked her the meaning of her name. She did not know. Then he said "Tariq, Puttar, (son) do you know the meaning of her name?" Even he did not know. It was then that my father recited a couplet in Persian, and told Tariq the meaning of his daughter's name. Everyone was stunned; such was the affection of the Pindiwallas.

Long after Partition, will these stories ever be repeated? No? Pindi was once golden. Had the partition been organized properly, we would not have had so many problems as today. There seems to be no end in sight. We have wasted nearly three-fourths of a century in

trying to blame various communities without admitting our own fault, as an Indian Nation of varying religions under one Hindustan.

Let us even at this late hour of great need give up the one-upmanship and concentrate on building strong bridges forever for our Children and their children. As the saying goes, only fools destroy their motherland, which we have done so far.

Though I was born in Pindi in a very proud Malik family, my roots are from Dera Khalsa where my great grandfather, Malik Khazan Singh, was born in 1813. He spent his youth traveling up to Kabul. He settled his branch of family in Pindi, and died here in 1899 like so many Pindiwallas of his time.

I wanted to give something to Dera Khalsa, the home of my ancestors. I could not do this due to reasons beyond my control. Instead, I have built a *langar ghar* next to my wife's ancestral village gurudwara, where all communities can have a free meal. I have also donated the income of Rs 4 Lakhs a year from nine acres of land, which was lying in my wife's name, to education and marriage of the girl child. I want to make villages *hara bhara* (prosperous). I see no sense in looking at people as vote banks; I think it is much better to think of cooperation - to flourish together,

I was in College in Jalandhar in 1948 after wasting one year in Delhi trying for admission. No college admitted me with Social Service Matric Pass Certificate due to riots. I lost one year. Father had no money, and no help as he lost his property income. People retired at 58 but father took up a job to feed the family; at 63 he became Chairman Army Pension Appeal Tribunal, Jalandhar.

Thus we survived, and his old friends started visiting like old days of Malik Sahib. One of his friends got me admission in Lyallpur Khalsa College at Jalandhar. I used to see Flying Club T Moth aircraft flying, and got enthusiasm for aviation, along with studies. One day I could not resist, and asked father if I could join the Flying Club. He thought for a while, called me close, showed his fist pointing down. Then, he said, "Puttar (son), in life when you open your fist, Always Point it Down (signifying "giving"), Never Up (signifying "begging"). He stuck to that till he passed away at 105. I completed 99% of my Commercial Pilots License but joined IAF in 1950.

Earlier, my uncle H S Malik had served the Royal Flying Corps in World War 1 with distinction, and later in the elite Indian Civil Service. Finally, after Partition, he retired as Indian Ambassador to France. My three other cousins also served in Royal Indian Air Force, including Flying Officer Tarlochan Singh 1939/40, and Flying Officer GJS Malik 1940/41, who was later selected for IFS, and retired as Indian Ambassador to Spain.

Pindiwallas must be a proud lot as the District has produced many Generals and officers in Armed Forces.

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