

Leaving (?)pre-Partition Ludhiana



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I was born in Ludhiana on 19 April, 1943, though my recorded date of birth is 11 July, 1942. After India's Partition, I was raised and educated in Lahore. I studied at Forman Christian College, Lahore and University of the Punjab. In 1964, I was selected to join the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) College of Aeronautical Engineering. I served in the PAF for 27 years, retiring voluntarily in 1991 as a Group Captain. My services were recognized with a National Award. I was told at the time of my retirement that if I did not retire, I was sure to get promoted to Air Commodore, with the strong possibility of another promotion to the rank of Air Vice Marshal. I cannot say what made me give up my career at its prime. The only reason that comes to my mind is that I was looking for "Fresh air". In my post retirement life I got what I was looking for, and have since lived a satisfied life.

I belong to a Muslim family that migrated from Kashmir to Ludhiana perhaps in the beginning of 19th century. I cannot say with any surety the reason for this migration but I presume that economic reasons were the cause of this exodus. A young boy named Kamal was the first of us who came to Ludhiana with a caravan from Kashmir. We do not know where or how he got separated from his family.

Kamal was raised by a family that brought him to Ludhiana. I am told that later on he married in the same family. He had only one son Abdul Karim, and then two grandsons Ghulam Mohammad and Mohammad Khalil (my grandfather). Ghulam Mohammad and Mohammad Khalil lived in two separate properties located in Gulchaman Gali. They had inherited their properties but had rebuilt them on modern lines.

My forefathers came from a business community specializing in the fabrication of Pashmina, and other goods like carpets, etc. My grandfather excelled in his business, and had renowned companies like Liberty & Co., London as his customers. My father used to say that he had offered a carpet to Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah worth Rs. 25,000 who declined to buy it, saying, "too expensive, too expensive".

Our family lived in Ludhiana for over 100 years. Ludhiana became the place of birth of our four generations. My family left Ludhiana for Pakistan in August 1947.

It is amazing that though I left Ludhiana before my fifth birthday, I have fond memories of number of things. I remember the location and layout of part of our house, my grandfather's house, and the house of my grandfather's elder brother (both these houses were across the street and adjacent to each other), my *nana's* (maternal grandfather) house, which was at a distance, and the house of another close relation. These houses were all located in Gulchaman Gali (road). In addition to these houses there were many other houses belonging to our clan in the area. Therefore I tend to believe that the concentration of our relations was high in Gulchaman Gali.

My grandfather must have been a noteworthy person in the town. On one occasion, during one of his visits to Ludhiana, Mr. Motilal Nehru was my grandfather's guest. In fact, my father had gone to the railway station to receive Mr. Nehru.

Since I was very young at the time of the partition of the subcontinent, I naturally remember small things. I remember there was a large water tub in the courtyard of my grandfather's house. There was a water tap above the tub that was running most of the time. The tub was always full of water. I remember that once mangoes had been submerged in this tub to cool them.

I remember my mother once feeding me a banana that perhaps my father brought from Bombay after a business trip. I even remember the color of that banana and my mother gave me half of it, as it may be big for a child of my age.

Now coming to that fateful day in 1947 when I left my home; it must have been in August. I remember walking to the train siding, holding the hand of some male member. It was a raised ground

along the track. We were sitting beside the rail track. Suddenly, I saw my mother trying to shelter me behind some boxes. I was trying hard to free myself from her grip; I was surprised that she was not letting me see the train that steamed in, overloaded with passengers.

Even the top of the train was full of people and they were throwing stones at us. I realized it much later that my mother was holding me tightly to save me from the stones that were being thrown at us by those who were perhaps returning from the areas that became Pakistan.

After that, I have no memories. Perhaps I may have gone to sleep. I do not remember how long it took us to reach Pakistan. I even do not remember how long we had to stay along the rail track to pick up a train for our travel to Lahore. The next thing that I very clearly remember is the words, "*Harbanspura aa gia* (We have reached Harbanspura.)" Harbanspura was the first railway station in Pakistan territory.

Someone was also asking for some milk for the children.

That was my end with Ludhiana and beginning in Lahore.

Epilogue

I consider myself a practicing and true Muslim. However, I respect followers of other religions as much I want them to respect me. I was excited to hear that the border at Wagah-Attari between Pakistan and India shall be open for senior citizens. I was disappointed to know that in India I cannot visit Punjab, and I need a relative to sponsor my visit. If I cannot visit Gulchaman Gali, Ludhiana, my birth place, what else is there to visit in India for me?

Looking back, I see that there are many perspectives about the partition of India. Some say it is vivisection of the motherland, others say that it is partition of Muslims into smaller and perhaps more manageable groups. Yet another school of thought claim the formation of the largest Muslim state and economic independence of the Muslims of India.

I feel that we must not forget those who have paid very heavy price in this process. No one can ever compensate them. It is still a subject of study to carry out honest analysis to sift the good from the bad.

I feel we must learn to face reality for the sake of over a billion souls now living in the subcontinent, and those who will follow us in the times to come. We had tried all options to overwhelm each other, including fighting a few wars. The next war may not leave with us many options.

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