

My Memories of Lahore and the Partition



Indira Kumar

Indira Kumar, born Indira Anand in 1929, was the daughter of C. L. Anand, constitutional lawyer and principal of the Law College of Lahore. She married Rajendra Nath Kumar, Colonel in the Army Corps of Engineers, and professor at the College of Military Engineering in Kirkee, Pune. Indira has two daughters, Nalini and Anjali, and two granddaughters, Manali and Ananiya.

Lahore – 1929

I was born in Lahore, in 1929, in a large joint family. Lahore was the seat of the British Governor of the Punjab, and was considered an advanced and progressive centre of the richest state in Northern India. It was indeed a fashion and culture centre as well and had a number of theatres, libraries, cinema halls, museums and an Open Air Theatre for the Performing Arts. All sorts of persons would converge on Lahore in the winters for its cultural season. The British visitors would stay in hotels, but the Indian visitors stayed with their friends or relatives.

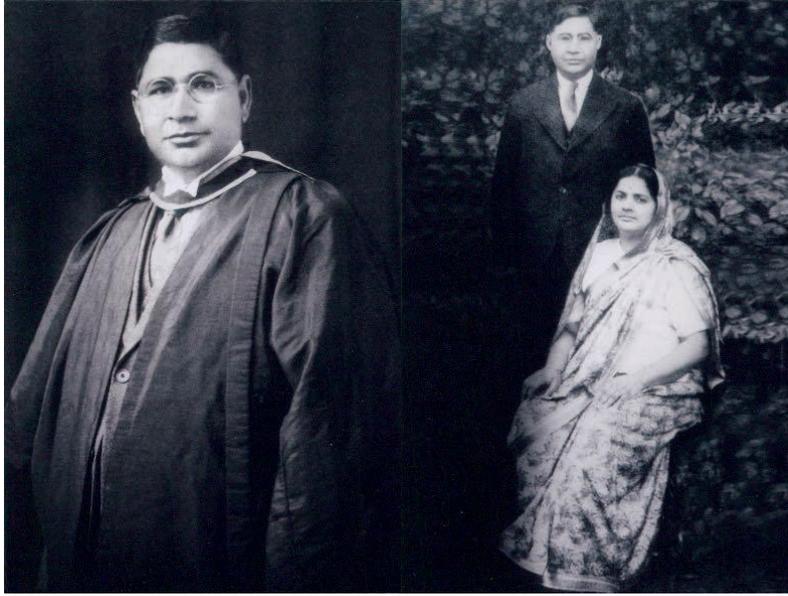
In addition, Lahore had several outstanding educational institutions, which were much in demand for higher as well as professional education. Some of the most outstanding officers of the Indian Civil Service, Indian Foreign Service (after the partition of India), and well-known journalists were the product of Government College, Lahore. Their women counterparts came from Kinnaird College, Lahore. King Edward Medical College and Hospital also gave us the best of doctors (including my father-in-law). The Punjab Engineering College was also among the foremost in India, after Roorkee. And the most accomplished lawyers in North India were from the Law College, University of Punjab, Lahore.

Life at home – my house and family

My father was the principal of the Law College. Professor Emeritus at retirement, he did his MA from Lahore, and his LLB from Gray's Inn in London in 1913. He enjoyed a position of eminence in Lahore. His father was Zamindar Thakurdas Anand of Sargodha, Punjab.

In 1918, my father married my mother, Santosh Anand, daughter of Justice Achhroo Ram Bhandari, while she was still a student of Kinnaird College Lahore. Also educated at the Sacred Heart School of Dalhousie, she had enjoyed an English governess in her childhood, and thus spoke and wrote fluent English, which appealed to my father. However, since her father had already passed away before she was 18 years old, her two elder brothers took his role at the wedding ceremonies – Jai Gopal Bhandari, Accountant General of the Punjab, and General Madan Gopal Bhandari, later the Inspector of Prisons in Bombay State.

My parents had nine children, including three daughters, of whom I was the youngest. Large families were common in those days, though ours was somewhat larger than most. Apart from my parents, my brothers and sisters, my father's parents, his one unmarried sister, and his deceased elder brother's seven children lived in my father's house, a generously proportioned property on 36, Davis Road, Lahore, just behind the sprawling estate of the British Governor of the Punjab.



Professor C.L. Anand Barrister-at-law, with his wife Santosh, nee Bhandari

Our house had several bedrooms with big dressing rooms, a dining table for twelve, and a pantry to keep the food warm for serving on the table. Across from the dining room was a large living room adjoining my father's library, with yet another large set of rooms where my grandparents lived. On the front was a long and wide verandah, with two rooms on either side, overlooking the driveway. These we used as study rooms, to do our homework. The kitchens were detached from the main house, some sixty feet away. We children were not permitted to enter the kitchens, which were strictly the domain of the cooks and house servants.

The house was surrounded by gardens, with space for playing badminton and tennis, and a large vegetable garden. There were more than a dozen large and spacious servant's quarters, some ninety feet away from the house behind the fruit trees. In addition, there were the garages, the stables, the cowsheds and the *Dhobi* (washerman) *Ghats*, where all the family clothes were washed and pressed by our personal *dhobi* and his family. The straight wall running behind the garden gave the impression of being the boundary wall of our house, but behind it lay the servants' own compound and a canal facing the road leading to the back of the governor's house.

Life was very simple in those days; the household was largely self-contained and self-sufficient. We had two cows and a buffalo in the barn, and all the needs for milk, butter ghee and yoghurt were available to all, including the servants and their families. We rarely bought vegetables or fruits; we could have our pick from our garden. However, we had to buy our eggs, bread, fish and meat. Eggs were one anna for a dozen, bread one anna for two large loaves, and fish and meat were both four annas for a seer (uncooked), or six annas a seer, pre-cooked. (There were 16 annas in a rupee. A seer was approximately equal to a kilogram.) These little needs were delivered to the house by young men carrying tin trunks on their heads, who walked from house to house.

My father was the only earning member of the family, supporting such a large and diverse household. To crown it all, there was no dearth of semi-permanent guests moving in for extended stays without batting an eyelid – distant cousins, students at the Law College, or the children of family friends about to embark upon their studies or jobs at Lahore. However, since ours was a large house, it was easy enough to accommodate everyone with love and affection.

Tennis, badminton and cricket were the sports enjoyed by the older children with their friends. The tennis courts, badminton courts and open space for a cricket ground were all within the

compound of my father's house. For the younger ones, there were simple toys - either rag dolls made by my grandmother, or clay toys made by the local *kumbhars* (potters) or wood toys made by the household carpenter.

We also had Snakes and Ladder, Ludo and a very nice carom board, and we treasured these with great relish and honour. And the younger ones were entertained by the Snake Charmers, the Monkey men and the local Muslim magicians, who kept us all enthralled with their tricks.

We also had a music tutor, Mr Ram Lal Masterjee, who taught us all to sing, play the harmonium, the Tabla, and a stringed instrument called the *Dilruba*. The sitar was reserved for my mother, who used to play it like a professional.

We had to share the toys amongst us and we were rarely possessive. Just as we had to share our clothes amongst all the children, we had to share the toys also. I do not remember having quarrels with the other children over toys or clothes. In case of any arguments, the toys would be thrown away without replacement.

We also shared rooms. I was usually in the same room as my elder sisters, or my girl cousins, but sometimes I would be placed with an aunt or elderly visiting relative.

Transport was mainly available in the form of horse driven carriages called tongas, driven by the Muslim tongawallas. These were both cheap and comfortable, and mainly used when we had to go out together or by the elderly. However, my father had a Victorian two-horse carriage, known as a *buggy*, driven by a *saez* – a very stylish carriage for those days.

I and the other children used to bicycle all over Lahore, to school or college, or to our friends' homes. I remember my first bicycle was a Raleigh imported from England for the grand sum of Rs. 35. Lahore was absolutely safe and one could go out anywhere dressed up and bejewelled on the streets during the day or even at night. Thefts and crimes were unheard of, and safety and security was the rule of the day.

Cars were a rare commodity in those days, since they had to be imported from England. My father imported his first car, a black Morris four seater, when I was 8 or 9 years old, for the grand sum of Rupees Five Thousand. There were hardly 25 cars in Lahore in those days, apart from the cars owned by the senior British personnel – the Governor of Punjab, the Commissioner of Police, the Chief Revenue Officer, and a few others.

Home appliances were unheard of when I was young. There were no telephones, no electric fans, no refrigerators, no modern sanitary provisions. Radios were imported into India just before the Second World War. Television, cell phones, and computers were unheard of.

Entertainment was by and large confined to the local music concerts, dance performances, circuses, and black and white movies. These old movies were conservative, family movies – both heart-warming and entertaining. The grace of Kanan Bala, Devika Rani, K.L. Sehgal and Pankaj Malik never failed to keep us singing their songs for ever. Lahore also had open-air theatres, where plays and music concerts were performed.

However, the greatest joy of the family was to sit under the mango trees, eating mangoes in the summer and sugar cane in the winter, sitting on jute charpoys in a circle, or enjoying the performances of snake charmers and the monkey wallas. Life was simple, relaxed and one could indulge in the luxury of cultivating interest in philosophy, poetry, arts and all the cultural pursuits that enrich the soul, and cultivate a balanced mind.

Our neighbourhood and community

Our neighbours included Sir Feroze Khan Noon (*Ed. note: He became Prime Minister of Pakistan in the 1950s.*), whose daughter was my best Muslim friend in Lahore. Opposite his

house lived the Nawab of Mamdot (*Ed. note: He became Chief Minister of Pakistani Punjab after Independence.*)

Next to his house lived Doctor Dharma Vira, a well-known medical doctor and a great nationalist, who always wore spun khadi. He was a very close friend of the famous Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who stayed at Dr. Vira's home whenever he visited Lahore. As a result, I also got a chance to Subhas Bose; as a young girl, I was a little afraid of his overpowering personality.

Dr. Dharma Vira was my father's best and closest friend in life, since they met in England when my father was studying Law. His wife, Mrs Jane Dharma Vira, was a tall, beautiful, cultured and gracious lady of English descent, who always wore South Indian Sarees and had very long hair, done up in a large bun. Many years later, my younger brother was to wed the Dharma Viras' granddaughter.

Other neighbours on the same road were Justice Sir Dalip Singh, brother of Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, and Sir Maharaj Singh. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was a minister in Independent India's first cabinet, and Sir Maharaj Singh became the first Indian governor of Maharashtra. Lady Reva Dalip Singh and my mother were very close friends.

Our other neighbours included Dr. Bashir Ahmed, whose daughter Sarwat and I would cycle to college together. And in the corner of the road lived Rai Bahadur Janki Das Kapur, who started the Atlas cycle company in India. His daughters were also in Kinnaird College. Just around the corner lived Chaudhury Sir Shahbuddin, the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly. His son, Mumtaz Daultana, became the first governor of the Punjab in Pakistan after Independence, and later, the Pakistan High Commissioner in England.

The house immediately next to ours was called Sheesh Mahal. Indeed, it was a huge house like a *Mahal* or palace, and since it had one very large room covered from wall to ceiling with mirrors in geometrical patterns, it was called the Sheesh Mahal, or Palace of Mirrors. This room was for the 'Nautch' girls of the various Nawabs who moved in and out of that palace. All of these Nawabs suffered death and disaster in their families, and moved out.

With bravado, one of the sons of the Nawab of Hyderabad moved in thereafter with his bride, Princess Nilofer of Persia. The marriage ended with the princess returning to her home with her entire retinue of attendants soon after.

Despite its reputation as a haunted house, it was bought by its first Hindu occupant, Mr Parmeshwar Das Khosla, who was a close family friend. I was very close to all the Khosla sisters, and spent a couple of nights sleeping in the top most bedroom of Sheesh Mahal with the Khosla sisters. I was not afraid but intrigued and curious to see the 'ghost' which remained elusive, but we all heard the sound of heavy footsteps above the ceiling, and the wailing sounds of the dog Hector, right through the night. A couple of years before the Partition of India, the Khoslas also sold that house and moved away across the canal in Lahore, and Justice Abdul Rahman moved in.

Ganga Ram School and Kinnaird College

I enrolled in Sir Ganga Ram High School for Hindu Girls when I was four years old. My first school principal was Miss Raksha Sondhi, daughter of Rai Zada Hans Raj Sondhi, a very close associate of Motilal Nehru. Raksha's mother was Lal Devi Sondhi, my mother's sister.

By the time I was seven, Miss Sondhi moved on and our new principal was Mrinali Chattopadhyaya, who had a Master of Humanities degree from Oxford University. She was the sister of Sarojini Naidu, a leading freedom fighter, and also sister to Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya, a poet and theatre personality.

My school was thus a hub of the nationalist movement. When I became the school's Head Girl, I would write down the discussions that several of our Indian leaders had in the house of our

principal, Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya, to put up on the wall newspaper on the Notice Board of our school. I met several of our Indian leaders including Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Azad, Abdul Ghaffar Khan (known as the Frontier Gandhi), and several others. We proudly wore khadi uniforms. While we were encouraged to imbibe a strong feeling of nationalism and loyalty to the freedom movement, we did not even think Independence would lead to the division of India into two separate countries.



Miss Isabelle McNair, left, Principal, Kinnaird College Lahore (1940s) and Miss Mangat Rai, History Professor, on vacation in Dalhousie, at Anand Bhawan.

My college was quite different from my nationalist high school. I went to Kinnaird College for Women, a Church of England college. My mother, my mother-in-law and both my elder sisters were from the same college, considered the most elite college in South Asia. Almost the entire college staff was Scottish and Irish. Some of the exceptions were an American professor of English, and an Indian professor for performing arts, Mrs. Najumuddin, a Muslim convert to Christianity. I had several Muslim and Christian friends in college from the most elite families of India and a few from the Middle East. Indeed, our Principal, Miss Isabelle McNair, a Scottish lady of great eminence, forged a rare sense of unity amongst all the students of various communities.

Quit India and Hindu Muslim divisions

Although we were a very close-knit community of students, yet Mr. Jinnah's call for a separate Pakistan was like a thunderbolt that divided the Hindu girls from their Muslim friends overnight. The bitterness between the two communities was sharp and most unexpected. Friends turned into bitter enemies overnight. I well remember asking my very close friend Sarwat Bashir whether she would kill me to get Pakistan. To my utter horror, she came the reply, "Of course, I would kill you unhesitatingly to get Pakistan." Our friendship with her father, Bashir Ahmad, a well-known lawyer of Lahore, dated back to the days when he befriended my father in London in 1912.

Our tranquil and serene life was abruptly shattered towards the end of Second World War. The rumblings for India's Independence from the British Raj became louder. In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India Movement shattered the tranquillity of all Indians. The enthusiasm to join the movement was quite widespread. Even I joined the march in the streets of Lahore, and in front of the Governor's house singing *Vande Mataram* and *Jana Gana Mana* – the two most prominent symbols of protest against the Raj. Nearly 2,000 people were jailed and almost a thousand killed in the riots that followed all over India. Several students and Independence loyalists were rounded off into prisons. Winston Churchill's remark calling Gandhi "that half-naked Indian fakir" set the whole country into an amazing dislike of the British.

Subhas Chandra Bose was a revolutionary, who became an ally of the Germans and the Japanese in World War II with the aim of having an armed battle against the British with their assistance. On the other hand, Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Ghaffar Khan called for the unity of all Indians in the non-cooperation movement against the Raj to compel the British to move out of India.

When the talks between the Congress, the Muslim League and the British broke down, the call for Independence accompanied by the religious division of India into two separate independent states of India and Pakistan became loud, clear and violent. Jinnah supported a united India only with the proviso that he may be made the first Prime Minister of the country. Gandhi was willing to concede to his demand. But Nehru, like Jinnah, felt it would be a direct blow and insult to his stature as a national leader.

Nehru agreed to divide the country into two separate states. This suddenly shattered the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, who had always lived in an amazing spirit of goodwill and harmony. The greatest tragedy of the situation was that, unknown to the public at that point in time, Jinnah was withering away into oblivion with cancer, and he died just one year after achieving his goal of becoming the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

The Partition of India

The Partition of India occurred in August 1947, leading to the wholesale massacre of Hindus in Lahore. Looting and killings were rampant, and arson and destruction of Hindu property was the order of the day. It was an equally brutal scene in the newly emerged India, devoid of the Muslim held territory of Pakistan. Millions were slaughtered or rendered homeless overnight. To add to the general confusion and upheaval, the like of which has no parallel in human history – more than a million people were left insane, mutilated, orphaned, women raped and their bodies dismembered.

My family lost everything in Lahore, but we were fortunate to be alive as we were at my father's summer resort in Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh. But my elder brother was left in Lahore. When he saw the burning of Hindu homes, and the looting and killing of Hindus, he contacted Mumtaz Daultana to help him catch a flight to Delhi. His request was turned down, but, fortunately, he made his way to the airport and managed to leave.

In Dalhousie, some Muslim homes were looted and burned. The roadside all over Dalhousie and Chamba was strewn with dying and murdered Gujjars – a tribe of Muslim herdsmen, who kept cattle, sheep and goats, and supplied their produce to the summer residents year after year.

Initially, I went into a complete state of shock and disbelief. Soon thereafter, my eldest sister Nirmal Anand decided not to let the Hindus carry on with this carnage. We went and occupied the houses of our Muslim friends (including that of the Daultanas), and told the rioters to burn us with the homes of our friends. None dared. Our greatest supporter was Mridula Sarabhai, a very close friend of our mother and Jawaharlal Nehru, who took us in her jeep all over Dalhousie and Chamba to try to control the rioters.

Our only contact with the world was through a huge radio we had in Dalhousie. Although there was no dearth of electricity in Lahore in my lifetime, the very first electric pole in Dalhousie had only been put up in December 1937. So, fortunately, we had electricity in our home before the outbreak of World War II and the Partition. News about the horrors of Partition spread overnight, worse it seemed to us than the sufferings of the Jews in Germany or the ruthless carnage of British troops by the Japanese.

To cope with the upheaval, the British Indian troops were deployed to bring the situation under control. Most of the trains were diverted to bring refugees from Pakistan and they came in droves, on the roofs of trains, on bullock carts, tongas and buses, shattered after suffering torture en route, their small bundles of possessions taken away by the marauding dacoits on the way

With the mountains turning bitterly cold, we had to move down to the plains, although we had no home in the plains to come back to. I came down to Delhi in an Army convoy with my maternal grandmother. As we hit the plains of Punjab from Pathankot onwards, we could see the dead and dying on both sides of the road. This sight was gruesome, unbelievable, and pierced my heart.

“What price Freedom and to what end?” I thought, clutching on to my grandmother’s sari. Looking back on it today, I cannot but proclaim that Gandhi was the wisest of them all, who had tried his utmost to persuade Nehru to let Jinnah be the first Prime Minister of a united India. Gandhi preferred to quell the Noakhali riots while Nehru delivered his famous speech on the “tryst with destiny” on the dawn of India’s independence.



Nehru, left, with Hans Raj Sondhi, Indira’s mother’s sister’s husband, at the Sondhi home ‘Ashiana’ in Dalhousie

Thereafter, I remember that Gandhi was a shattered man who receded into the background of the political arena, after seeing the aftermaths of a divided India. Today, when I see the so-called Independence Day celebrations, I feel cheated and humiliated, and hang my head in shame and prayer in memory of those millions who suffered so much in the name of Freedom. They lost their homes, families and self-esteem for their motherland, and those that survived had to bear the conditions of the refugee camps.

After the Partition

To get back to my personal journey from the mountains to the plains. From Pathankot, we went to Amritsar to stay with my grandmother’s brother – Srinivas Mamaji as we called him, though he was my mother’s mamaji. A tall and handsome man, he wore a huge big turban and carried

himself with princely dignity. Large hearted, kind and generous, he took care of all our needs. We were in Amritsar for a while, and then moved to Delhi to stay with my mother's brother, Krishan Gopal Bhandari, director of the Agricultural College on Pusa Road in Delhi.

Soon thereafter, I was working as a volunteer relief worker at the refugee camps of Karnal, Panipat and Kurukshetra, along with my eldest sister and a dozen other college friends under Lady Mountbatten. To see the well-to-do of Punjab living in makeshift tents with no food, no clothing, not enough medical assistance, surviving on simple *daal* and *roti* brought home with force the point that life is most unpredictable and one must learn to accept it as it unfolds – with all its joys, sorrows, storms and upheavals.

A number of old students of Kinnaird College joined in to help my sister in managing these camps. The major portion of this set up was to provide shelter and daily food. Old clothes were collected and distributed. There was a separate section for those who were slightly injured but did not require hospitalization.



Lady Edwina Mountbatten (left) at the refugee camps, with Indira Anand (centre) and her cousin, Usha Bhandari (right). Note the Red Cross armbands.

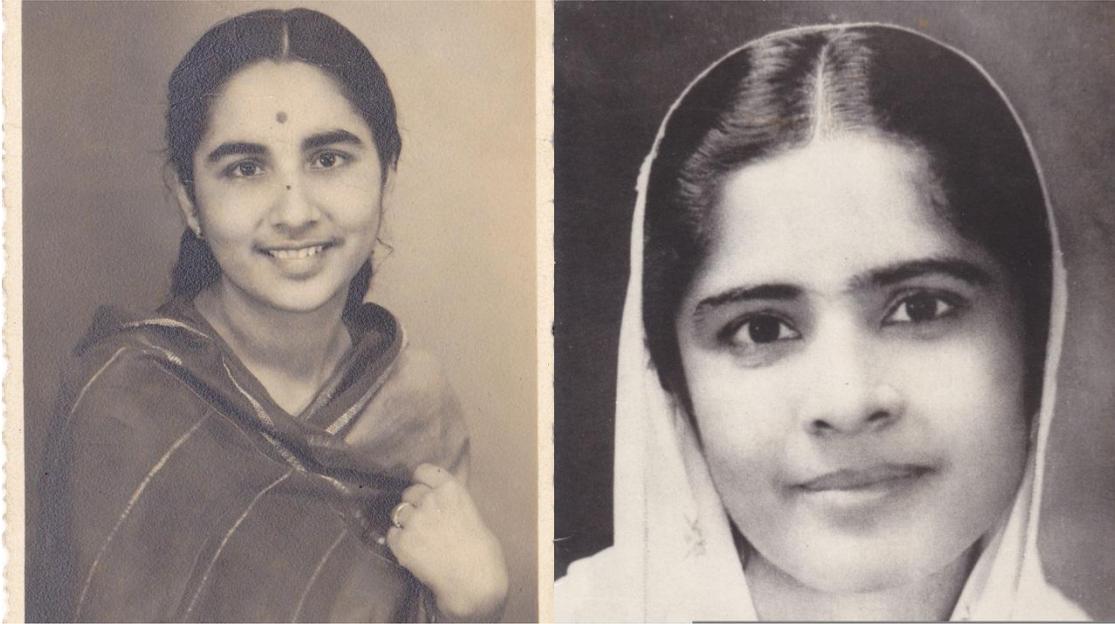
The most difficult place to take care of was the Trauma Centre, somewhat detached from the main camp. Lady Mountbatten was desperately trying to find a psychiatrist to look after them. There were enough doctors around but finding a psychiatrist proved a major hurdle. Since I had been a student of Abnormal Psychology in college under Dr. Salzer, a German Professor, I was temporarily roped in to assist in the Trauma Centre until a suitable replacement was found.

My new assignment proved an insurmountable challenge. The distraught and traumatized women who had been raped or mutilated, who had been witness to the slaughter of their husbands and children, proved to be inconsolable. In fact, some tried to run away and kill themselves.

As a young girl, I became a mental wreck myself and stopped going to the camp altogether. Their stories of agony haunted me whenever I was alone.

I decided to go to Delhi by bus to see Lady Mountbatten. I met her informally at what is now called Rashtrapati Bhawan over a cup of tea. I burst into tears right in front of her, admitting I could no longer carry on in the Trauma centre. She was very gentle, kind and sympathetic, and I left the refugee camps. I moved on to Shimla, where my father had already started a Law College with the help of the university and Bhim Sen Sachhar, father of Justice Rajendra Sachhar of Delhi

High Court. The Sachhars, old family friends, became our immediate neighbours in Shimla. Gradually, I got over the scars of the Partition of India.



Indira Anand 1948; her elder sister Nirmal Anand early 1940s, who also worked in the refugee camps and remained a devout social worker all her life.

Epilogue – Lahore Revisited

Years later, in 1986, I went on a visit to Lahore and Pakistan with a group of old Kinnaird college students who had migrated to India in 1947 – mostly Hindu and some Christian women. As soon as we alighted from the aircraft in Lahore, cameras of leading newspapers flashed to welcome us on the tarmac. The next morning our photographs were on the front pages of the newspapers, with details of our maiden names and our families. We were received with hugs, flowers and garlands by the students and staff of our old college.

The hospitality extended to us was in right royal fashion, and we were provided with official transport to show us around. Some of our old friends came from Islamabad and Karachi to catch up with old times. I stayed with my personal friend Sauriya, who came to the airport to meet me. There was an elaborate program of sightseeing, lunches, dinners and entertainment. I enjoyed the music of the famous singer Reshma in her own house.

But much as I enjoyed the whirlwind visits to old monuments, I longed to meet my own personal friends and find the time to see my father's house – after a lapse of nearly 40 years. Fortunately, from the second day, I was inundated by phone calls by persons several known to me and some members of the legal fraternity who knew my father, the legendary Principal Anand of the Law College. From the Chief Justice of the Punjab to the Chairman of the Chambers of Commerce in Pakistan, I found time to visit them all. I also met my old friend, daughter of Maulana Mohammad Ali – a scholar of Urdu and a very close friend of my father. She gave me a copy of the Quran Sharif written by her father.

Then I went to Davis Road, to see my father's house. To my horror, Davis Road was reduced to an unkempt back lane. All the great houses of that road were in shambles – dilapidated with age and neglect. All the lands and gardens around my father's house had been converted into small

dwellings for refugees from India. The main house had been divided into two or three for the Raza brothers; a medical doctor, a lawyer and a salesman. I was heartbroken to see that grand structure falling apart.

The great Sheesh Mahal adjoining our home had been demolished, and a commercial complex had been established there which was half-empty and was still considered haunted. I quickly left Davis Road and never wanted to see it again. The area had fallen into shabby slums, far removed from the sleek and spacious bungalows of the new Lahore, which had expanded to the former Cantonment area.

Towards the latter half of our visit, we were escorted to the gurudwara. The narrow lane leading to it seemed freshly laid, and on both sides were very tall bushes that blocked our view completely. As I entered the gurudwara, I noticed that the so-called Priest there with his beard and flat turban looked like a Muslim Mullah rather than a Sikh Granthi. While most of the Hindu women bent down in prayer, I stood aside with the Muslim escorts to watch the rituals, which seemed half-baked and somewhat alien to me.

I caught hold of an old Pakistani friend, a journalist, and sneaked out of the building into the overgrown grass fields at the back. My friend pleaded with me to join the group but I moved on towards the distant barracks that I could see well beyond the fields, while my friend found it difficult to keep pace with me in her high heel shoes. In the dead silence around, I could hear footsteps and some conversation so soft as to be almost inaudible.

Soon my friend caught up with me and pulled me away. Obviously, she was agitated. I asked her if there were convicts or soldiers there. Pulling me away, she said, “No, there are no convicts there. You call them terrorists and we call them Freedom Fighters. You have no right to be here. Now come and join the group to go back for lunch.”

We made a quick retreat. I was too disturbed to go for lunch and had lunch at home with Sauriya and her Ammi. Meat Pulao, chicken curry and potatoes with meat balls as the vegetarian dish of the day. I was indeed amazed at the amount of meat the Pakistanis had with every meal, including breakfast and evening tea.

Before long, there was a telephone call for me from a friend telling me urgently to return to India. I could not fathom what had happened till he told me that I was being followed by the ISI (Pakistan’s intelligence service), and I should leave before being taken into custody for questioning as an Indian spy. I left Lahore by the next flight. My friend gave me the ticket and asked me to move on. I returned to Delhi four days earlier than planned. Within hours I got a telephone call from the Pakistan High Commissioner’s wife asking me to have lunch or tea with her as soon as possible. She said, “Before going to Lahore you had lunch with me and told me that you knew no one in Lahore. But we have been informed that you know everyone who is anyone in Lahore. We want to know about your friends and your contacts.” I was taken aback, and mumbled that I would certainly get back to her.

My mind was working overtime to solve this mystery. I had been taken around by my friends. Yet I realized that my visit to the camps had somehow leaked out. I informed someone in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, and decided to stay away from Pakistan in the future.

Reflections

Now I am nearly 83 years old. The memories of Lahore – both happy and sad – still haunt me when I am in a pensive mood, thinking of years gone by. The scars of the Partition have become somewhat dim and distant – especially so with the younger generation whose knowledge of Indian Independence is only superficial as narrated, carefully and cautiously, in the history books. After Partition, the refugees rebuilt their lives over the ruins of an age gone by. Those were the

days of endurance, sharing and caring, far removed from the nuclear families of today. Human resilience is a marvel – provided one has the will to overcome the luxury of indulging in self-pity and self-indulgence!

Do gooder at work



Warmth and charm, coupled with brains that can put any "mastermind" to shame — this is how one would describe Indira Kumar, wife of Late Col R N Kumar. At the age of 72, when most of her contemporaries would be content simply being grandparents, this powerhouse of a woman wants to do something to better the world around her.

"Main kuch na kuch karti rehni hoon (I keep doing something or the other)," says Mrs Kumar, who has recently formed a trust in the memory of her late husband. She has been involved in charity since independence.

"During Partition, the scene which met my eyes was absolutely devastating for my psyche. It was gruesome — people with limbs cut off, ladies raped and breasts chopped off and left to die on the railway platform was all too much for a girl just about 18 years of age." It was all of this and the plight of the

people after Partition, which led Indira to do something for these people. "Being a widow for the last 23 years, I know what are the problems that widows and the aged in India face. Though I have seen the richest in my life, I have also witnessed the hard living of the poorest of the poor. And they are in very bad shape." Indira has formed a public trust, out of which no one can withdraw any amount. Only once a year, some amount will be withdrawn and given directly to the needy.

Forty per cent of the total funds will go to Helpage India and twenty per cent will go to the artificial limb centre of the Sawai Man Singh Hospital of Jaipur. In addition to that, some percentage of the amount in the trust also goes to eye care centres.

Everything about the trust is very transparent. As Indira explains, "I don't even

have too many people working on it. I have a lawyer, who advises me and then there's me. I don't need employees who merely work for money. I need enthusiastic people, who are devoted to the cause and who feel for the needy from the heart, instead of just speaking about it in social circles.

The trust, being a public one, is completely accountable to the government and is totally subject to scrutiny whenever required."

"The idea is that the money should go to a person whose need is far greater than ours. I want that the trust should carry on long after I am dead and gone," says the "iron lady".

Indira has lead a very interesting life. Horse riding, swimming, paragliding—you name it and she has done it. She was in the garment business (which she says she "stumbled upon" accidentally) for more than two decades. But the one thing that gives her utmost satisfaction is the fact that she is able to do something for those who need her.

It is said, "Charity begins at home." But it is for us to recognize what exactly we mean by home. It can be the four walls we live in, or the state or our country. For Indira, home means the country and family is those who live in it and those, whose betterment, she has taken upon herself to work for. "I have to keep the wheel of life going for everybody. And I will," she asserts.

Anjana Ravindranath

2001: Indira Kumar at 72 – Hindustan Times article.

Nevertheless, it is a joy to for me to see how several of my contemporary refugees, who had suffered so much and were at the time reduced from the highest positions to penury, rose up once more in various fields of government of India, in police, in the army, and with huge businesses of their own. ❖

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