

Fareeda Majeed

Fareeda Majeed: I am Fareeda Majeed and I am 75 years old today and I was about 4 years old at the time of partition and I have retired as a professor. I don't have great memories of the time of partition but I remember lots of things post partition and a lot of things from hear say, what I've heard from my family. I remember all those things.

Interviewer: firstly, do I have your consent to give any information you provide me with to the Harvard south Asia archives for the partition project?

Fareeda Majeed: yes of course.

Interviewer: To use your name, any information you provide me with?

Fareeda Majeed: Yes.

Interviewer: How was your life before the partition?

Fareeda Majeed: I had three elder sisters and we lived in an area which is now in India and that was upper Assam and my father worked in an oil field in digboi. He was a geologist. My three elder sisters were there and I was the youngest. As they had the education system which would introduce the vernacular in asam to them at that age, my parents chose to send them across India to Lahore to study in the Punjab with my grandmother and my aunt. These little girls came all the way from upper Assam; it was a train journey of 5 days and 5 nights. Left by aunt and grandmother to educate them in the Punjabi missionary schools because they didn't want to get into learning Assamese over there.

Interviewer: When did your sisters come to Lahore?

Fareeda Majeed: as soon as they came to a school going age, this happened right before the partition.

I was the youngest and not of school going age at that time and it so happened that we migrated before the partition in 1947 but not after the partition in 1947. My father was working for a British company and they already knew what was going into happen .he was working for the Burma oil company. They set up a subsidiary of that organization which was known as Pakistan petroleum limited.

He was appointed there and was posted in Karachi. My three elder sisters were already in Lahore but I had to come to Karachi with my parents

Interviewer: can you tell me how this journey with your parents was?

Fareeda Majeed: i don't remember much but it was summer. My elder sisters had summer vacation so they were all together with us in Assam. From there we took a train and we came all the way 5 days and 5 days nights to Lahore. From Lahore I and my parents took another train to Karachi.

I remember some people who are still alive and who can authenticate this because my parents and the 4 of us had to wait at the Calcutta railway station in the waiting room and there was another family which was also coming from that part of India. They were a couple and a young boy. My parents and theirs were attracted to each other and the same with the boy and us 4 girls. He wanted to play with us. That couple and that kid traveled with us up to Lahore. We boarded of the train at Lahore and stayed with my grand mother for a few days. Then we took a train to Karachi and again that couple and that lid were there with us on the train. There were suspicions, they were thinking that we are a Hindu family and we were thinking that they are a Hindu family. That lady is still there in Karachi and I meet her very often even now because that couple became friends with my family.

When we reached Karachi. A few days later when my father went out to go get groceries, that gentleman was also shopping for groceries, they talked to each other and discovered we were all Muslims who moved to Karachi together and we became friends.

Interviewer: Did you stay in Lahore or Karachi

Fareeda Majeed: we had gone to Karachi. Partition was not one day it was a process which was going on. 14th august, much before that we were in Karachi.

Interviewer: how was the interaction with the other migrants on the train?

Fareeda Majeed: the interactions were fine but there were suspicions because you don't know if it's safe to talk to the other family whether why enemies or friends are. Hearing from my parents, there was so many differences that neither Hindus nor Muslims scared water from the same container. On the railway

stations on the way there were separate water arrangements for both Muslims and Hindus. They were known as “Hindu pani” and “muslim pani”. Both Muslims and Hindus thought it was not pure or clean to drink from each others water.

Interviewer: can you tell me how the atmosphere changed around you due to the partition.

Fareeda Majeed: from what I have heard. My parents had Hindu colleagues and they were all friends. My sisters had Hindu friends and they would go to the mandars and dance and do puja with them and then come home and tell us that they were at the mandar with their friend shadra and we did this .There were no taboos about mixing with other religions or castes for Muslims at least. Maybe it was there for Hindus as Brahmans don't even mix in their own Hindu ranks. It was all nice because my mother and father both had friendly Hindu friends. Then the partition separated us all.

Interviewer: How did the partition change these interactions?

Fareeda Majeed: we've had another partition after that which was partition of Bengal. We had both Bengali and Hindu friends but the friendships remained. Communication was hard tho due to landline disruption.

Interviewer: did you or anybody you know stayed in a refugee camp, did anyone you know work in them.

Fareeda Majeed: oh yes. My aunt was a school teacher and she took care of refugees in the camp. The women were physically, emotionally and psychologically hurt. They were violated. In fact my aunt recounts how they have received trains coming from India in which no one was alive and they reeked with blood. It was really sad. The women were disfigured, their ears, noses had been chopped off in an effort to disgrace them in society. This was done by Sikhs and the trains came from east Punjab.

Interviewer: How did the government and the civil society deal with the situation

Fareeda Majeed: people were emotionally charged as they had gotten a new Muslim homeland where they could live freely. The assets between India and Pakistan had not been divided and the government offices didn't have anything to use but the people brought what they had to share with others. The people had

this great feeling, people wanted to rehabilitate the migrants. My aunt actively worked at the camps. She was a junior Anglo vernacular trained teacher. I still have her books.

Interviewer: How did the partition affect your health?

Fareeda Majeed: I was from the lucky strata of society; we didn't see the worst of the partition due to traveling early. I didn't see anything around me which affected me. We had things like children for adoption but I was too small to understand anything going on.

Interviewer: how did the partition affect your education?

Fareeda Majeed: I had a very happy child hood and was a very lucky child just like my elder sisters. They were going to mission school in Lahore and I was going to a school in Karachi. My sisters were initially in a school near lower mall which was known as Joan McDonald and they were later admitted to sacred heart school on Thornton road. I was admitted to the Karachi grammar school. The partition didn't affect my education or even my livelihood, the problem I suffered was being away from my sisters but due to my mother's paralytic attack I had to move to Lahore later too.

Interviewer: what did you feel about the decision of the partition and did it change.

Fareeda Majeed: I was too small to understand but I remember my parents being excited. Karachi was the capital so a lot of things were happening there. I met Fatima Ali Jinnah. I am still in touch with the lady I met on the train. Her boys are my earliest childhood friends.

Interviewer: have you been interviewed before.

Fareeda Majeed: yes for the citizens archive in Lahore by this lady who makes these movies (forgot name of the lady). I haven't been interviewed for the Harvard south Asia partition project

Interviewer: do I have the permission to use your name any information or quotes you have given during this interview for the Harvard south Asia institute to use.

Fareeda Majeed: yes because it's the truth and I want to share it. I am Fareeda Majeed and I am going to be 75 now.