

Mrs. Akhtar Bashir

INTERVIEWER: I'm doing an internship for Harvard University and they want to collect stories about partition. So, can you tell me what you went through, or what your parents and elders experienced?

Ans: My cousin got married in 1949. Pakistan was made in 1947. Her family used to live in Calcutta, but during the partition moved to Pakistan side with their documents in a house assigned to them. Their house was on the road. My parents' house was on the street. Because it was on the road their house was more prone to fires and abuse. During that time all the Muslims used to stick together, being near each other as much as possible, coming and going. The Indians used to burn our houses and we faced a lot of damages.

There were two parties, Congress and Muslim League, and Lord Mount Baton was there, Nehru and Jinnah just wanted to get independence from him first and then decided they'll split their nations too. But Hindus were untrustworthy and they betrayed us. For now, there was fight against the English. Then they started a movement in Patna. Then in the first week of March 1947, the movement happened in Lahore and Amritsar. Amritsar because Sikh was there, with their golden temple and their leader was Taara Singh, a very cruel and untrustworthy person. Hindus used to make the Sikh do their dirty work like murder and other acts of cruelty.

It was then decided that areas will be decided according to where which majority lives, Muslims or Hindus. Hindus didn't expect Muslims to get anything special, because Hindus had all the main jobs like Lawyers and doctors while Muslims got small meagre jobs. So, Hindus had all the money and control. So, they could easily abuse us by setting our houses on fire. They used to come out in groups chanting, Bolo Ram, while Sikhs chanted, Sat Seeya Kar, and Muslims said Naara e Taqbeer.

At one point the time came that every night; one person from each house would go at the end of the street to guard. One day the Sikhs and Hindus got very close to our street and my dad came to us [all the women of the house], took us off the roof and said, if they come in, close your eyes, jump of the roofs and kill yourself, because that is better than getting into their custody. Unrest kept increasing till partition happened. Mount Baton went against his word and gave Pathans Kashmir, even though Muslims should've gotten it, without any access to it. They had to fly from Delhi to get to it.

One of my relatives was in Jammu. Her husband and his brother were teachers, in Kashmir and Jammu. When the war started, both got to Jammu together. There it was announced that trains for Pakistan were leaving, so people without any baggage, should come. They all boarded the train, with 4 children. However, the train was taken on Katwa road to a jungle and the people massacred. My relative was knocked unconscious. When she woke up, her husband was killed and she couldn't find her children and left that place on foot. Eventually she found the Pakistan army and was rescued. Her children were retrieved from camps too after a few months, injured with broken fingers etc., yet alive. The autocracies were so bad; we never wanted to close our eyes in fear of nightmares.

People who came from Amritsar got houses here. People emptied their houses and left just by themselves. The casualties on our side were higher, particularly death while they mostly lost out properties. I'm telling you what I've seen from my own eyes and heard myself. I saw them bomb our cars and the smoke that rose. We didn't have AC's at that time and slept in the courtyard, so we would cover our eyes with a cloth to prevent the smoke from irritating. I heard the endless chants

from all sides. All the people of a family would gather together in one house, to support each other in case anything happened. I remember how my grandmother had the biggest room and our parents would ask us to stay in there. The Hindus were cowardly and made Sikh fight for them, because the Sikh didn't think before killing. However, our Muslim boys were brave and fought back, killing them with their own spears, since guns were barely used at that time.

I lived in Lahore since the start. One of my uncles was in Delhi, but he came here as soon as the partition started. The partition started in March and continued till August.

INTERVIEWER: so, schools wouldn't be open during this time?

No everything was closed how were schools going to remain open?

INTERVIEWER: And were bazaars closed too?

There was no curfew as there was no government to put on a curfew. Small street shops with essentials kept working. But offices and all businesses, schools and colleges were closed. My grandfather's leather factory also got shut down.

INTERVIEWER: what about hospitals?

Hospitals were working, because they were of the Indian government. One of my aunts was admitted in one at that time, but they created a lot of problems. They sealed the hospitals. People inside had to stay inside. My grandma was with her and had to stay there for 4 days.

INTERVIEWER: But soon things improved?

Not really. One thing or another kept causing problems till the actual partition was officially over. Even then, they gave us old card and very limited things. For a long while we lived in poor conditions because businesses had been flop too. But slowly God helped and we prospered.

So, the movement initially started in Lahore and Amritsar in March, and then spread to other areas in Delhi. During its time period, people kept migrating from city to city e.g. Lahore to Rawalpindi out of fear till things settled down. This was also due to uncertainty of which area was going to which country, such as Kasur. We had to face a lot of problems even after partition such as rapid inflation. In our school we studied history of Hindus and Mughals, because we didn't have our own. I went to school before partition but not after.

But the thing that still gives me goose bumps and standing on the roof while thinking how we are going to jump down. One man at least from every household used to go out on the street for security purposes each night. They would gather weapons and spend the nights on the street. The oppressors came to villages near the city, but not a lot to the main city. At that time Lahore was a very small city, within the boundaries of the gates so at 4 each evening they would lock the gates so no one could enter or leave the city other than in cases of emergencies.

When Pakistan was made Grand Trunk road had gardens. But then it became a place for refugees to live. A lot of people gave place to refugees to live in their homes, thinking they might go back, when things settled down. But no one returned, and instead resettled here. Mostly people came to Karachi by sea, because travelling on land was very dangerous.

Interviewee consented to using her recording and direct quotes.