

## **1947 Partition of British India: Partition Story**

**AYESHA FAISAL ON BEHALF OF HER FATHER**

### **LOST IN THE VALLEY OF FEAR**

#### **LOSING IDENTITY IN THE NEWLY IDENTIFIED HOMELAND**

**BY MARIAN SHARAF JOSEPH**

David Arnold in his journal 'Cholera and Colonialism in British India' called cholera the 'classic epidemic disease of the century.' The epidemic is known to have an adverse effect across the Sub-Continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite attempts to eliminate the epidemic, the disease continued to reoccur taking away precious lives, and leaving many children in particular orphaned.

Cholera had a profound impact on expecting mothers among whom, as it has been noted, many lost their lives. The story of Javed Iqbal, a new born of a couple of months old only is quite the same, who lost his mother to cholera amidst the chaotic brew of partition. Left motherless with only older sisters to take care of him and a father who had to move the entire family to Pakistan, the infant Javed Iqbal had an unseen struggle awaiting him in the newly identified homeland for the Muslims. His unseen struggle was to find his roots and reclaim his lost identity.

Narrated by his daughter, Ayesha Faisal, Javed Iqbal born the same year as the partition was only an infant when Pakistan was made. His elder sisters, between the ages of six to ten or twelve, took care of their little baby brother. "What could they possibly do? Migrating from India wasn't easy at all. They had just lost their mother, and hadn't even settled emotionally when the partition broke out. My eldest paternal aunt, hardly ten herself, carried Abu (father) in her lap. There wasn't anything to eat or drink, or even proper place to sleep. There was panic and the overall ambiance was horrific. It's a miracle that a motherless child like him survived," stated Ayesha.

The partition of the Sub-Continent is said to have instigated one of the worst genocides in the history of the world. The family of Javed witnessed it all, especially his sisters who protected the little child from the murderous hands of newly identified enemies. "Amidst the frightening atmosphere, my grandfather (Dada) along with his children somehow split from his family. They were moving from Amritsar to Lahore. Narrowly escaping bloodshed and brutality of either sides, the family arrived in Anarkali, Lahore. They didn't really need to seek refuge at a refugee camp as they were met with a stranger, who upon spotting the crying baby gave shelter in his house. This man, we

don't know his name, kept my father with his family and advised my grandfather to look for his family while he took care of the baby. He told him to return to take his child after he reunited with his relatives," shared Ayesha further narrating the story, "But that never happened. My Dada took his daughters along and after much quest reunited with his family in Faisalabad. The man who volunteered to take care of Abu passed away after some time. Abu was further adopted by a barren woman, who was very kind to him. Abu must have been around two or three years old. She had remarried, and the foster father wasn't very kind to Abu. He wasn't provided with any education. Rather his foster father kept him busy in home chores and outdoor tasks. Sadly, he didn't have the luxury of enjoying childhood as most other children of his age did."

As families settled down and the overall atmosphere changed, Javed also began to realise the indifference the rest of the family had towards him, especially his foster father had towards him. He must have been in his pre-teens when he started noticing the unpleasant attitude that grew chronic as years flew by. Realizing this, he began to enquire from his mother on this matter, and it took him by surprise when he learnt the truth.

"Abu started enquiring about his actual family background. That's how he learnt about his first foster father, and through that he discovered his family's whereabouts in Faisalabad. His paternal family was allotted lands in Faisalabad which is why they had settled there. His maternal family had also settled there, perhaps for the same reason. Once he was sure of their whereabouts, Abu contacted his sisters and visited them. He met his maternal family too. Abu stayed with his biological family for a while but the two couldn't be. He simply couldn't fit in. So, after living in with his family which included his extended relatives too, he returned to his foster mother," Ayesha informed while talking about family reunion after partition.

The partition could be termed as a real-life horror story. From what Ayesha learnt about the outrage that her father had learnt from his sisters and relatives, there was immense panic. Families lost each other. There was fear of death. "Frankly speaking, it was a blind leap; economically, socially and politically," commented Ayesha saying, "It's beyond human comprehension to conceive the idea of leaving everything behind, and the fact that he could never visit his mother's grave shakes me to my very cores."

As Ayesha shared her father's story she mentioned, "Even if someone didn't want to migrate, they had to. The Hindus were pushing everyone out of their homes. From what I know, most people also ran away from India due to the deadly outbreak of cholera. Fellow immigrants were, however, helpful. I don't

think my grandfather would have been able to find his family if locals and fellow immigrants weren't supportive."

Ayesha speaks with hope about her motherland. Pakistan, after all, was created for the Muslims as a land of peace and freedom, a land where Muslims celebrated their identity, where not only their identity but their values were honoured and safeguarded too. For Javed Iqbal, who tirelessly struggled to identify his true identity, the partition caused him an endless pain. While he struggled on his own to build his future, he has worked hard to establish an identity for his children. Almost 71 years on, Javed Iqbal when in a pensive mood, ponders upon his lost identity in the newly identified homeland.

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