

## **Major (Rtd.) Abdur Rahman**

**Interviewer:** Okay. I want you to recall anything related to partition in your mind and the stories you want to share with me.

**Major:** So, I would start from the name of my brother Inspector Sobat Ali (Shaheed).

**Interviewer:** So, is he your brother?

**Major:** Cousin to be more appropriate. There was a learning city near our residence in Jammu. It had a lot of Gov. colleges and schools. He used to study there and took his brothers and cousins with him too. He was martyred there.

**Interviewer:** Did this happen before partition?

**Major:** No, it happened during the time of partition.

**Interviewer:** The riots in Jammu?

**Major:** Yes! You can read this whenever you have time (Showing the cutting from a newspaper)

**Interviewer:** Yes, I surely will.

**Major:** The writing would not be that good in this article but...

**Interviewer:** It would be great favor if you give me one of them. The writing doesn't matter, it is your experience what makes it worth it.

**Major:** I had 5-6 brothers who were in college at that time. They used to study in college. It was very difficult to reach to college at that time as education was not common. There was Prince of Whales college in Jammu, some of them were there and some were in Islamia High School (Jammu). They were all martyred during the riots in November 1947, and we still don't know what happened to them.

**Interviewer:** So, you were left alone there?

**Major:** I have written my survival story here (presenting a document) and I presented this to the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir. I have also made a memorial (Yaadgar-e-Shohada-e-Jammu) for them. It has two halls. The upper hall is small as compared to the lower one. I have also arranged free water for the common people in the name of those martyrs. There is a big cemented Umbrella with chairs and the water flows through a tunnel from below that place. The story of his (Major Rtd. Sobat Ali) has been carved on a stone outside that memorial.

**Interviewer:** Kindly elaborate a bit about your migration. From where did you migrate? And where did you come afterwards?

**Major:** Actually, we went to Jammu for education. A few of my brothers were already there, but I went in 1947. Riots broke and a lot of Muslims were killed. Miraculously, I survived. I wrote my story and shared it with the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir.

**Interviewer:** I will surely read it. So where did you reach afterwards.

**Major:** We were told that a few Hindus will be sent to Amritsar and same number of Muslims to Sialkot. "Exchange of Population" (Tabadla-e-Abadi). We were in Jammu and our family was in a village near Sialkot. We didn't know where our family was. So we reached a place named Kot-Lak near Sialkot. We came to know that a few Muslims are living behind the ford in front of us. I was a kid by then, so it was dawn when I went there and fortunately, found my mother in the first house I searched for. She got shocked and hugged me instantly and kept weeping and loving. Whole village gathered and congratulated but mothers of the boys left behind kept weeping and crying asking "Where is my Akram? Where is my son?". They kept sitting with me for a while and I have no answer for them and in the end, they all died in the sorrow of their children.

**Interviewer:** What was your age at that time?

**Major:** I was 16 years old.

**Interviewer:** And when did you join the army?

**Major:** Poverty was at its peak before partition. It was very difficult to make both ends meet. I went to Lahore in search of a job and got recruited in Air Force. As I was not a matriculate yet, thus I did not get a good rank. I did my Matriculation, F.A and B.A while serving in Air Force. I applied for army and got recruited in 1959. I was trained in Kohat. In 1965, a Gibraltar Force was launched deep in the Indian territory. The plan was to destroy some of the bridges or to ambush their convoy. I got the chance to be a part of it. I got successful thrice. But that success was because of the bravery and training of the soldiers who were with me. They had absolute faith in me. They used to fight where I want them to. All that success was not because of my skill, a great part was played by the God's help. I got that help because I was fighting for the righteous cause for my country. The way we crossed the snowy glaciers and mountains without maps, and the way we came back safe was not less than a miracle.

**Interviewer:** Indeed.

**Major:** We lost our signals with the wireless communication behind. My major thought that we have been killed in a strike. Our achievements were not conveyed behind, so, we did not get any reward for it. Afterwards, we came to know about the Tank fight at the Sialkot Front. So, our achievements did not get any historical importance. Although it has been mentioned by some Hindu soldiers but it can't get complete without our narration.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me if you stayed at any refugee camp?

**Major:** On 6<sup>th</sup> November, the common people were of the view that the state of Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim majority area so our Raja will either stay neutral or declare merger with Pakistan. He has also declared that Hindu and Muslims are just like my two eyes. But when she was pressurized by India, he declared merger with India and they got a way to reach Kashmir to Pathankot. There was a main bazaar in Jammu which had a big road. Muslims and Hindus lived on the sides of that road. Muslims had streets like "Mohalla Jevan Shah" etc. There was no flush system at that time. There was a place specified for "Nature's Call" and people used to avail that. So, the Muslims used those toilets as their shelters while fighting. They had a few rifles. So, Hindus and Muslims started firing.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me the date of these incidents?

**Major:** It was end of October 1947. Muslims thought that the mission has ended but they found a trunk of ammunition in the house of Samundar Khan. The fight continued. Afterwards, the Hindu leadership decided not to kill the Muslims there as it would be difficult to dispose of their dead bodies. They decided to deceive the Muslims and told them to go to Sialkot safely. They announced that anyone who wants to go to Pakistan should gather in the Police Ground (Which was 1-2 mile long). We were only allowed to carry a small trunk and beddings. All the Muslims gathered there. Some of them had to stay there but almost all the Muslims gathered at that place. When the cars came for our departure, there wasn't enough space. So, the women were adjusted in the cars and we had to climb to the top. Those cars had already taken a huge number of Muslims and they were stopped at "Samba Road" where they were killed and the blood was washed then the cars were taken back for our departure. We were very happy that we are going to Pakistan. The Jammu city is in a valley, and there is a river too. If you cross the river you reach a place which is named as "Satvai" Cantonment. There was a way from Satvai which reaches directly to Pakistan. When we reached Satvai, we stopped the cars. It was dawn, there were dense forests of "Sarood". Many Hindus came out from those woods waving axes, swords, arrows and attacked those busses shouting "Jay-Hind". They started killing the young and robbing others. We were sitting on the roof top. They told us that we won't kill you people but we saw them killing others on the roof tops, thus I jumped in the canal on the side of the road. They started throwing the dead bodies of other Muslims in that canal and the water got all red. I turned back and saw an underground path on the side of the canal and entered it. I crawled almost one mile and then I saw a jeep of Indian Army. They held and checked me, they were interested in getting some money but I had nothing. One of them said "Shoot Him!", the others said "Leave him, why are you wasting a bullet? Give him to Sikhs they will kill him with sword". They called the Sikhs and they started running towards me. Fortunately, there were a few Muslims who have hidden there too. They thought that they are going to kill them too so they started running from there. All the Sikhs left me and started running after those Muslims. There was a small ditch which was big enough for me to hide, so I sat in it. I heard shouting the whole day. After noon, everything got silenced. After Maghrib (Sunset), a Brigadier named Usman (Indian Army) came there. Though he was from Indian army, he had the pain for his fellow Muslims. He told us that The Indian Army has been sent to

protect the tribal people. He berated the local army officials on killing the women and the old people. He asked everyone to come out and assured that he would take them to hospital. I got up too and we all sat in their cars. They took us to hospitals. The hospital officials refused to take us as they were afraid of aggressive Hindus that they would attack them.

There was a place named Dangyana and the people who came from Jammu were living there in a camp. We were also adjusted there. There was nothing to eat in that camp. Everyone was old except me and we had to eat grass and drink stagnant water to survive. Okay so there I met the son of Sobat Ali (Shaheed) whose name was Sarvar and he gave me some support. We were just like bones after a few days because of shortage of food. There was younger brother of Sobat Ali (Shaheed) who was Naik in the Jammu Kashmir Army at that time but was imprisoned. He could find his relatives in the Dangyana Camp.

**Interviewer:** So, did this all happen before you met your mother?

**Major:** Yes, He started staying with us in that camp and because of him we got some food. We stayed there for a couple of months. We stayed there for the whole November, December, January and February. Then in March, it was announced that some people will be sent to Amratsar from Lahore and in exchange of that Muslims will be sent to Sialkot from Jammu.

**Interviewer:** So, it means that you met your mother in Sialkot?

**Major:** No! It did not happen like this. The brother of Sobat Ali was with us when we reached Sialkot. There was a place near Sialkot where we arrived and his Family was somewhere near it so he had to leave. The son of Sobat Ali stayed in Wazirabad as his maternal relatives were there. The Naik came to know that a few of my relatives have been staying in a village named Sajwal. It was the time of "Zohar" (Afternoon). He assured me that I will reach and meet them if I go and cross that ford. So, I crossed it and went there and fortunately found my mother in the first house I looked for. She kept weeping and hugging me. The whole village gathered and the mothers of the boys who weren't there came and started shouting "Where is my Zaid? Where is my Akram" Where is my Mansoor?". They all died in the same state.

**Interviewer:** What was the change in education of the masses after partition? What do you think about it?

**Major:** There a very few school before partition. We had to travel long distances to reach the School. Some had to walk 1 mile, some 2,3,4 and so on. The school, students were physically fit because of this factor. They also had to face extreme weathers to reach schools. Everything was disciplined but the teachers were not interested whether their students pass or fail a class. We had to sit on the floor while studying. There were no benches at all.

**Interviewer:** And what change did you observe after Partition?

**Major:** As I have told you I joined Air Force. The education facilities started getting better. I would like to tell you that the fruit of freedom is priceless. The living standard before partition

was below the poverty line. There were adobe houses before partition and people had to use them for animal and self-shelter. The situation used to get bad during the rainy seasons and we faced difficulty to find dry wood for burning. People had to eat the same crop for 6 months as they had nothing else to eat. Some people could not afford shoes so they had to walk barefooted. They could make shoes only if their animal died and they got the opportunity to use its hide. That shoe was very rough and sometimes it wounded the feet so we had to apply oil to make it soft. Most of the clothes were made up of Khadi. But it all changed after independence and we got the opportunity to wear good and to eat good.

**Interviewer:** How much is your education?

**Major:** B.A. I did it when I was in Air Force.

**Interviewer:** I am taking a lot of your time. I apologize for that. I am left with a few questions.

**Major:** No problem at all. You are just like my Grandsons.

**Interviewer:** What is your opinion on the decision of Partition? Was it right to give independence to Muslim Majority areas? If yes then why?

**Major:** It was right. Because if Muslims had to live in India, they were not going to have their living standards changed. Hindus would have never let them excel. The change has given us a lot of opportunities. If I had not migrated, I would be nothing and would have died somewhere. I became an officer here and two of my sons also became officers. We breathe in the air of freedom. When we were in Jammu, we used to imagine how Pakistan would look like. Would it be a Paradise? Pakistan does not have all those characteristics which Quaid-e-Azam had in his mind, but after all it has a lot to praise for.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember any big personality active at that time? Quaid or anyone else?

**Major:** Quaid-e-Azam was praised a lot. I still remember that when we raised slogan of "Pakistan Zindabad" we also raised "Quaid-e-Azam Zindabad". The whole village believed in the leadership of Quaid e Azam. If one would say that Pakistan has come into being solely because of Quaid then it would be true to some extent but, it also included the divine will and power. Because Quaid-e-Azam was ill, it was either Tuberculosis or Cancer but he was ill. He kept his disease hidden because if Hindus had known that he is ill he would have delayed the process. If they had delayed, we would have left with no leadership for anchoring the whole Muslim community as a unit. So, it would have got difficult. I only see and remember Quaid-e-Azam.

**Interviewer:** Moreover, do you remember anything happened on 14<sup>th</sup> August in Jammu? Any incident? You were in Jammu I guess.

**Major:** No as we were stuck there, it was a normal day for us I don't remember anything.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much. God Bless you.

(Major then holds that newspaper and start narrating chunks from it which he has already narrated to me in the interview)

1947 Partition of British India: Partition Stories --- Interview Questionnaire

**BASIC INFORMATION** (To be filled out by interviewer)

Name of Interviewee Major (Rtd.) Abdur Rahman Date of Interview 10th Jan, 2018  
Interview Location Rawalpindi Language of Interview Urdu  
Interviewee experiences or recounting for someone else?  Interviewee (self)  Someone Else: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name/Relationship)  
Migrated From/To Jammu / Sialkot  
Hometown/Current residence Rawalpindi / Rawalpindi (Race Counce) st. 6  
Religion of Interviewee Islam Education B.A Age during Partition 16

**CONSENT**

Before you begin to answer the questions, please acknowledge:

You give permission to be interviewed.

Method of consent:  Audio  Signature On Paper

Abdur Rahman 10 Jan 18  
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**QUESTIONS: 1947 PARTITION OF BRITISH INDIA: PARTITION STORIES**

**Before Partition**

1. Describe life before Partition. Where were you before Partition happened? What were you doing? What were things like? What was the feeling then? (Your feelings, general atmosphere.)

**During Partition**

2. When and how did you learn about Partition? Please tell us about your experience: What happened during Partition? Where were you when Partition happened? Did you stay where you were or did you have to leave?

**Migration**

If you *migrated*:

- 3a. Where did you leave from/to? Which towns did you cross or stay in? How was the decision to leave reached?
- 3b. Who did you travel with? What method(s) of transportation did you take? Did people in your area leave? Who left, who stayed back?
- 3c. What did you take with you and why? What did you end up with? What happened on the journey?

If you *did not migrate*:

- 3a. Please describe how it was decided to stay. Where did you stay? Who did you stay with?
- 3b. Did you interact with migrants? How?

**Refugee Camps**

4. Were you at a refugee camp (at any point on the journey)?

If yes, then: 4a. Where was the camp? (Location)

4b. When were you there? (If you don't remember exact dates, try to remember season, recent events, or year.)

4c. How long were you there? How did you decide to leave the camp?

4d. How many people were there?

4e. Describe life at the camp. (Food, water, medicine/medical care, sanitation, activities at the camp, work/money, registration, deaths.)

4f. Was there any temporary education center? Did you study there? Do you have any certificate?

**Health**

5. Could you tell us what kind of diseases or illnesses were common at the time of Partition?



6. Did you, or anyone you know of, experience any health-related issues during Partition (for e.g. diseases, injuries, or mental illnesses)? If yes, did you get any help to deal with those issues during that time? Who provided help?

**Education**

7. What was the impact of Partition on your education? Did you change your stream? Could you tell us if you missed school/ college, and if yes, for how long?

**Livelihood/ Profession**

8. How did the Partition impact your livelihood/ professional life?

**Response of the Government and Civil Society**

9. How did the government and/or civil society in the new countries respond to the Partition? What do you think they did well and where did they falter? Do you remember any other individuals that were active during that time?

10. What do you remember about the role of the police and military during the Partition?

**After Partition**

11. What was it like after Partition? Was life any different than it was before Partition happened? (Did you undergo any lifestyle changes as a result of Partition? For example: change schools, eat different foods, aspects of daily life and care, etc.)

12. How do you feel about the decision of Partition? Is that any different than how you felt in 1947-8?

13. Have you been, or are you, in touch (present or in past) with anyone from your birth place/ location before Partition? Would you like to share anything about that communication?

14. Can you share any photographs or memorabilia with us from the time of Partition?

15. Have you been interviewed before? If yes, by whom?

**AFTER COMPLETING THE INTERVIEW, PLEASE CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**

- Permission to use your name, first name (or initials) in our study.  Name First name Initials
- Permission to use quotes/excerpts from this interview.  Name Short name Anonymous
- Permission to use age, location during Partition, audio (name as above).  Age Location  Audio
- Permission for the information above to be included on the Harvard  Yes grant permission) No (research only)  
South Asia Institute website devoted to the research