

## Muhammad Aslam Khan

Life was normal before partition. We had a routine which we followed. Families and relatives got together and met up regularly, life was simple. However, it changed when we came to Pakistan, our relatives scattered across the country and no longer lives near us. It was completely different than the routine we were used to.

I was in Batala when the partition was announced. We heard stories and saw for ourselves how the Sikhs ransacked Muslim villages and how they were killing all the Muslims in their path. I remember when the partition was announced. It was after those instances of violence took place. I remember it very clearly, there was a man who used to live in our neighborhood, he was a Muslim, he ran all around the neighborhood and was proclaiming at the top of his lungs that Batala was going to be a part of Pakistan. Everyone was happy, we were all rejoicing at the news.

I remember I took my sister's green dupatta and, after attaching it to a staff, hung it on our roof like a flag. Everyone was celebrating, however, only 3 days later the same man from before once again ran around the neighborhood announcing at the top of his lungs that Batala was no longer going to be a part of Pakistan. We were no longer rejoicing anymore, everyone was worried. It was only a little while later that the Sikhs started attacking.

My parents were extremely worried, and my older brother was scared. All he knew about Sikhs were that they killed Muslims, took women away, and came into houses and to ransack and steal the belongings and possessions of the people present.

Thus, my brother asked my father to move us away, that it was dangerous for us to stay and that we should leave. My father dismissed his concerns and said that such things happen in life. He said that this was the government's business, and everything will eventually settle down and be fine. My father tried his best to reassure my brother that everything would turn out fine.

It was only when the situation became truly dire that my father realized that our only option was to migrate to Pakistan as we could be killed if we stayed. We used to live near the wilderness in Batala, but after my father decided we needed to move we left for the city. There was a post office in the city where all the Muslims who were ready to migrate to Pakistan were gathered.

My family and I stayed at the post office for twenty days. We had left our house and our belongings, and we lived in that post office, thinking we were safe there. My father tried to arrange some form of transport for us, so that we could leave the post office and migrate to

Pakistan. Unfortunately, he couldn't find any kind of bus or other form of transport for our family.

However, eventually my father was able to talk a truck driver into helping us. The truck was already packed with someone else's belonging and thus, the truck driver said that while we could travel with him, we would need to leave our belongings behind.

My father sat with the driver in the front while the rest of us sat on the roof of the truck. It was August, the monsoon season, I remember it was raining a lot as we travelled, sitting on the roof of the truck. My mother kept praying throughout our journey, asking God to keep us safe from the Sikhs and to help us reach Pakistan whole and unharmed.

On the way to Pakistan, we stopped at Amritsar. We got some food there; I remember we had chickpeas.

All the Muslims in our neighborhood migrated as well. Everyone had made their own arrangements to get to Pakistan, just as my father had done so for our family. We were one of the last ones to leave, everyone else we knew had already left.

We passed over some refugee camps; we never stayed there for long, only long enough to grab something to eat. Besides those stops we travelled nonstop. Our stop at a camp in Amritsar is the most vivid in my memory, I can't recall if we stopped elsewhere. Even in the camp at Amritsar, we only stayed for a few hours.

I remember the other people in the camp were just like us. They too were hungry and thirsty, just hoping and praying that they reach Pakistan safely and unharmed. They too, just like us, were worried about how they were going to bypass the Sikh.

I don't recall hearing anything about any diseases that were rampant at the time, nor did I see anyone with suffering from any disease. We mostly just heard about how the Sikh stopped a whole bus full of Muslims who had wanted to migrate to Pakistan and then slaughtered all the men, took away all the women, and stole all their belongings which were on board.

My education wasn't that affected by the partition. I wasn't that far ahead in my education and the only impact I can think partition might have had on my education at the time is that I didn't go to school for a while as we were travelling and then trying to settle down in Pakistan.

I missed school for months due our lack of a permanent residence and money. We stayed in refugee camps until we got a settlement and it was after getting the settlement, we got a residence. It all took 3 to 4 months, and only after all of this happened did my father get me admitted into a school.

After reaching Pakistan, we stayed in a camp for about 3 months. The camp was set up in the railway department staff accommodations. Each quarter housed about 3 to 4 families. Each family would claim a room and then they would live there, sleep there, and eat there. We stayed in such a room for 3 months, waiting for my father to get a job somewhere.

The civil societies of that time use to give refugees food. The government was giving settlement to the refugees; they had a whole settlement department for this job. My father eventually got a job in that department. The department was tasked with accommodating the refugees, helping them find houses to live in. They also kept track of the refugees and of empty residences throughout the country. Like if there was some empty house in Lahore and a refugee in some other city needed a place to live, they would tell them to go to Lahore and then the refugee would be given that empty house.

When a lot of buses or cars would travel to the border, the military would intervene and protect those vehicles as they travelled.

Prior to getting settled in, our life was very difficult once we reached Pakistan. However, we had already anticipated these difficulties. We were all prepared to eat in clay plates, stay at camps, and face other hardships if that was the price for reaching Pakistan safely. It was only when my father finally got a job that these hardships ceased and we were finally able to relax and live comfortably.

It was only as a young adult that I realized how beneficial the founding of Pakistan was for us Muslims. I was around 20 when I first realized this. I used to compare my childhood in India to my current life in Pakistan and thus, realized that all the Muslims in during that time had very low standing and poor jobs. Muslims would typically be found as laborers. In comparison the Hindus of that time were usually well educated. Here in Pakistan, we were free to pursue education and had so many opportunities that we would not have had if we had stayed back in India.

I had the opportunity to go to India in 1988; I stayed there in Bombay for about a month. After visiting India and seeing the state of the Muslims there I thanked God that my family and I were able to get and migrate to Pakistan. I talked to some of the Muslims in India that I came across and they said that they weren't allowed good jobs still and that the Hindus hated them. Once while in India, I had to pray, there was no mosque nearby so I stopped by a store and asked if I could pray there. The storekeeper refused and told me I couldn't pray there. It was then I once again thanked God for giving me the opportunity to live in Pakistan where Muslims could pray wherever they wanted.

While I think the founding of Pakistan was great for all who could and did migrate, life became harder for those Muslims who stayed behind. I talked to a few Muslims in India and they said

that since such a huge number of Muslims left their numbers were severely diminished and it was easier for the Hindus to discriminate against them.