3. Rückblick - Look-back

3.1 Government College, Lahore

From the age of 15 – 22 years, I was educated at the Government College, Lahore – a premier educational institution that had been founded in 1865 AD (10 years before the formal foundation of Panjab University). I arrived in Lahore in September 1946 (my date of birth: 8th December 1929) from the provincial backwaters of 'Campbellpur' – now called Attock. My father (see later), being a judge, was – under British regulations – always transferred from city to city every 2 ½ years (so that people did not get to know you too intimately and start bringing 'recommendations' to your residing court cases pending before you. So, in 1944-47 he was stationed in Campbellpur – a rather remote area of northern Punjab. The University matriculation examinations were held on a province-wide basis. In 1946, there had been ~55,000 candidates, and I had stood 5th in the whole province, with 745 marks out of a total 850 (i.e. 87.7%). This was a very creditable result. Abdus Salam – later a Nobel Laureate – had, a few years earlier (in ~1941), broken the University's record by scoring 765/850 (90%) marks (from another remote area, Jhang, where the Principal of his intermediate college was a grand-uncle of mine Hakeem Muhammad Hussain, who had formerly himself stood First in the whole of India in the Indian Educational Service exam in ~1912). I had stood First in the province amongst all Muslim candidates, and also was the top student amongst <u>all</u> candidates outside of Lahore: the outstanding and undisputed educational centre of excellence of the Punjab, with the best schools and colleges. (All the four candidates placed above me were Hindus, educated at some of the outstanding Hindu schools of Lahore. The chap standing first in the province had, I think, obtained 753 marks. All these specifications were widely recorded and circulated in the Punjab newspapers.)

At the Government College Lahore, the policy was to interview and admit all candidates in the order of their marks in the matriculation examination; if admitted to the college, they were then given 'roll numbers' in that order. All the top matric 'graduands' would normally apply to the Government College for higher studies. I was admitted and allocated roll no.5. This was deemed a great honour. I was astonished, in the year 2003, to be told by someone called Mr Maqbool Ahmad – the landlord of my friend Professor M. Akhtar, FRS, in the Defence Housing Authority in Lahore – that he had been my class fellow at the Government College, still remembered my roll no.5, and that he like many of his other friends at the college had considered me to be a 'hero' of the Muslims of Punjab!

Actually, originally my father had been opposed to my being sent to the Government College Lahore (GCL). He had done an MA in Economics (also from GCL) in 1919, and was inclined to judging all higher studies in the perspective of what income a graduate earned as a result of his education. He said that his observation was that an average bloke doing his BA joined government service as a clerk earning Rs 35 a month. Someone plying a bullock cart carrying a load of bricks, however, made around Rs 40 pm. So, he argued, what was the point of a college education? Thus when my elder brother had completed his matriculation in the First Class (obtaining 683(713?)/850 marks), he was inclined to put him into some trade (such as brick transport). It was only by a great campaign of lachrymose protest by my mother that father had allowed Sajjad to go to college (when he was only 13 – i.e. 2 years below the normal age for matriculation). And again, about 3 years later, when I, too, had scored a very high I class in the matriculation examination, Father was insisting that I should take up some trade (e.g. becoming an electrician). Once again, it was the staunch stand taken by Mother that ensured that I went on to GCL for further education.

I was thus sent by my parents from Campbellpur to Lahore to stay for the first few weeks with my (youngest) maternal uncle, Siddiq Ahmad – who, indeed, was employed as a junior clerk in the Punjab Secretariat, and was living as a bachelor in Mohini Road (in a rented house together with several other bachelor friends – who were all very impressed by my scholastic prowess, but amused by my naivety). Uncle Siddiq – who was always dressed quite foppishly, and considered himself to be a truly brilliant guy, despite never having been to the University – got a new fawn-coloured suit made for me by his old tailor-master in Anarkali Bazar – Barkat Ali, plus new shoes, socks, etc., and accompanied me (sitting me on the front bar of his bicycle, if I remember rightly) to the Government College for my interview. There, while we waited outside the Principal's office, Uncle Siddiq – in order to build up my morale – said in his patronizing way to someone he knew (who was also accompanying a young interviewee): "My nephew Saeed, here, may, of course, be quite a Butt (rhyming with 'foot' and in broad Punjabi meaning a simpleton, green nincompoop) – but he doesn't look like a Butt today!" This greatly reassured me; at least Uncle Siddiq thought so.

The interview panel was headed by Professor Eric Dickinson, the Principal – and a famous educationist. The interview was conducted entirely in English – a language we had never spoken at school – or at home (though, of course, we had studied it as a subject). The Principal said: You have scored very high marks in your exams. I modestly nodded my head. Your brother also is doing his BA here. I nodded again. Also, according to your application, your Father, four of your uncles, etc., etc., were also the graduates of this college. More nods by me. And you want to read sciences and maths at this college? I nodded yet again. At this, Professor Dickinson remarked: Why does this young man give no answers to our questions,

other than nodding his head all the time? One of the other professors on the panel, who had known my father, replied: Sir, he probably does not understand your English accent. “Well, Professor, then you please speak to this young candidate in your Punjab accent of English!” Needless to say, he did - I was readily admitted, and given the prestigious Roll no.5.

I stayed at GCL for 7 years. They were probably the happiest – and certainly the most formative – years of my life (from the age of 16 to 22 (1946-1952) as a student – and 1 year (1952-3) as a lecturer). I plunged myself headlong and up to the hilt (to mix metaphors) in college life. I was a very studious student – but had a very wide field of interests (except for sports). Thus, I wrote Urdu poetry – and became the joint editor of the Urdu section of the famous college magazine, the Ravi. Did a lot of translation (from English into Urdu) – especially of Chekhov’s short-stories (via Constance Garnett) and Bernard Shaw – and was the secretary to the college’s Sondhi Translation Society for, I think, 4 years. Was the Secretary or joint-secretary of the Majlis-e Iqbal: a society to celebrate the work of Allamah Iqbal – the Poet-Philosopher of the East, who was himself at the college from 1897 to 1905 (and on the staff from ~1908, as a part-time Professor of Philosophy/English for some years). I was also the secretary of the Jones Scientific Society during my MSc years. I was also a debater – and ran for the Presidency of the Students’ Union, GCL (though I lost that election because of some unfair tactics adopted by my opponent). I was also politically active – for the freedom of India from the British raj, and for the creation of Pakistan. Indeed, as a 17 year old I landed in prison for 2 weeks in February 1947, for having participated in anti-government and pro-Pakistan agitation.

I might as well describe this political incident. I had been an enthusiastic political activist since my school days in Campbelpur (in 1944 – when I was 14): especially in favour of the Indian Muslim League and its campaign for the creation of Pakistan. I used to speak at school gatherings and took part in league rallies; wrote narrowly partisan and rather naïve/prejudiced essays. When I arrived in Lahore in 1946 (where I lodged in the New Hostel, just at a stone’s throw from the college), the Pakistan movement was getting heated up to red hot. I took part in several protest marches, etc. (Against the provincial Unionist Government of Khizar Hayat Tiwana.) Once, I was lightly beaten up by mounted policemen wielding *lathis* (staves) in Lower Mall: I took refuge in the Mayo School of Art, pretending to be admiring the paintings on display. On another occasion I was arrested – together with 15 – 20 other GCL students – by the police, taken by black vans in the middle of a cold rainy evening, some 60 miles into the country and released in pitch dark night at 2am on the highway. It took us several hours to make our way back (by hitch-hiking, etc.) to the New Hostel, arriving at 8am, drenched and dirty.

In February 1947, Mr Jinnah (-Quaid-i Azam) for the first time ordered, or permitted, the Muslim leaguers to commit civil disobedience (normally a trait of the Indian National

Congress). As a result all the Muslim students (with the exception of Ahmadis – whose Khalifa Sahib had ordered them to desist) of GCL – in common with those of other colleges – boycotted the classes and took out processions. On 17th February, the GCL students (under the leadership of Mr Nasim Anwar Baig) marched on to the Punjab Government secretariat – a mile away in Lower Mall. Let me explain that, during the Direct Action in the Punjab – in Lahore – on day one, all the fruit sellers would take out a procession; on day two, the copper smiths; on day three, the tailors; and so on. They would all offer themselves for peaceful arrest (a Gandhian ploy – non-violent resistance). The Government would arrest them; but release them a few hours later, as there was no space left in the prisons. So the students arrived in front of the Punjab secretariat. We found ourselves in parallel rows of some 20 persons each, and started saying the Muslim ritual prayers, chanting the Koran, raising our hands to our ear-lobes, them standing with the top arms held horizontally against the chest with hands resting on each other. The time was about 11:30am.

We were surrounded by the police. The English superintendent of Police (SP) then read out the 'riot act' in a loud voice, declaring: I, Superintendent of Police, so order you herewith in the name of King George the VI, King Emperor of India, to disperse peacefully and immediately, or else you shall be arrested, etc. We ignored these orders and continued to pray and to chant the Koran. I, the great simpleton, was standing right in the middle of the very front row of the assembly! In a few minutes' time, the English SP came up to me from behind, put his grip round the small of my neck, and pulled me out. I protested in English that he was interfering in our ritual prayers. He said: I know the Muslim rules; this is no time for congregational prayers. I replied that a Muslim could pray at any time and in any place! He, nevertheless, conducted me to a black Mariah (?) van and shoved me in. On the way to the van, the representative of an American newspaper (as I recall) asked me to give my views. I stated that we were peacefully offering congregational prayers, which was our right, and that this break-up and arrest was a clear violation of our religious rights.

Something like 50 students were crammed inside around 4 vehicles – which remained stationary for 4 hours. It was getting quite hot – as the sun was out and the vans were packed full. There were criss-cross wire networks on the sides of the vans. Some native junior police were on duty, guarding us. We appealed to them to give us some water to drink. A very junior looking policeman thereupon came to the van and pushed some small 'clementines (tangerines: '*sangtaras*') through the wire mesh – for it was impossible to send in a tumbler of water. On seeing this act of support for the Muslim students, a Hindu police officer came up to the junior constable and reprimanded him for his act of violation of rules. The latter's response was a heart-warming act of courage and solidarity with the cause of Pakistan. He stripped off his leather belt of office, flung it on the floor, and shouted that he was leaving the police service: his sympathies were with those fighting for Pakistan!

There was no sign of our student leader, Mr Nasim Baig. He had made himself scarce. The rest of us were all driven to the jail. But since the jails were already overflowing, only 2 persons out of the 50 – 60 arrested were actually selected for detention. I was one of those two students – having been so conspicuous by standing in the middle of the front row and for having had an altercation with the SP. (Some 60 years later, I ran into the Nasim Baig in 2005 in Islamabad, where he was now a leading lawyer-politician. When I reminded him of his disappearance from the scene at the time of arrest, he said that that is what leaders of the protest rallies were supposed to do!)

The 12 days I spent in prison were most enjoyable – at the end of which the Punjab Government fell – and we were all set free. Let me expand:-

As both students arrested (myself and someone called Malik?) were so young (16 – 17 years old), we were detained in the Borstal jail Lahore (for young offenders), pending trial. Actually, because of jail overcrowding, even a number of very senior Muslim league prisoners/detainees were also kept in the same prison as us. These included the Nawab of Mamdot (President of the Punjab Muslim League), and a known maverick, Mr Muharram Ali Chishti. The jail contained a large number of shopkeepers and businessmen – e.g. grain merchants, sweet sellers, etc., as mentioned above. As more detainees arrived each day, we used to climb on to the prison roof and shout political slogans (Pakistan Zindabad, Qaid-i Azan Zindabad, etc.), and chants of welcome for the newcomers. Students recited revolutionary poetry. (It was here that I first heard the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the 'progressive' poet, recited by Ihsan Ahmed(?), later the ADC (Aide de Camp) of a future Governor of Pakistan after independence. *Naqsh-i Faryadi* نقشِ فریادی of Faiz having recently come out.) We were given prison clothes (blue-striped loose garments). The food, we found, was horrible. As we were C-class prisoners, our food was often low-class spinach – which tasted like and probably <u>was</u> grass growing by drain-pipes – served in aluminium bowls which were dented, battered and encrusted; water in metal tumblers, ditto. At first we, the students (there were perhaps a total of 20 – 30 of us), thought of going on hunger strike to demand better food. But the senior detainees (many of them class-A prisoners, served much better food) advised us against such a drastic step. They cautioned us that our strike was likely to be ignored by the prison authorities – and having entered this blind alley, it would be difficult for us to come out with any dignity. They advised us to adopt the other possible alternative – to get our families to send in food from outside, which was permitted.

Now an uncle (mother's brother) of mine – Mr Dost Muhammad Durrani, later the head of Mr Faiz's prison at Montgomery in the mid 1950's, the father of my cousin Lt. General Asad Durrani – knew the Superintendent of the Borstal jail Lahore (Mr Yahya, I think). So Uncle Dost requested Mr Yahya to keep a kindly eye on me. Also my maternal

aunt, Shafqat (married to Captain Zafar Ali Khan) happened to be living in Lahore. So she used to send me rich and luxurious food every day by a servant on a motor-bike, named Salamat. When I was arrested, the authorities weighed me – and I was found to be under-weight by about 2kg. When I was set free 12 days later, I had become overweight by 12 kg (or was it 12 lbs?) as a result of the rich food (floating in ghee, with pilaos and lots of sweets and puddings) sent in by aunty Shafqat! Of course, I did share this surplus food with other students, who had become good friends – as we shared poetry recitals and political discussions late into the night every evening. All in all, we had a great time during that period of imprisonment - as Iqbal says:

ہے اسیری اعتبار افزا جو ہو فطرت بلند

[Confinement raises your worth if you have a sterling character.]

One thing that I remember about that imprisonment is a letter from my father, which he had written to me from Campbellpur – which had been forwarded to me. Remember that he was a judge – and a very law-abiding citizen. He wrote to me "I gather that there is a lot of lawlessness going on in Lahore. I do hope that you are not getting mixed up with their miscreants". Sitting in the prison, I was amused to read this letter. I wrote back that, alas (!), I was already in prison. He wrote back to say "Now that you are in, do NOT apologise to the authorities to get out". I was proud of my father for his courageous advice. I did NOT apologise (as we were given the opportunity) – but were soon set free as the Provincial Government fell. I had spent just 12 days (16th – 28th February, 1947) in prison.

When we came out, we were all taken out in a procession. I was one of the 'heroes' going back to the New Hostel – where there was to be a banquet in our honour at the hostel. I was, however, persuaded to be driven by car to Gujrat (72 miles to the NW of Lahore) where my great uncle, Hakim Chiragh Ali, a leading lawyer of that city and also a Muslim League activist, was giving a dinner to mark the return of the prisoners (perhaps including himself?) and the fall of the Government. But I was sorry to have missed the heroes' banquet being given by the residents of New Hostel (GCL) in Lahore.