

3.2 Partition of India: Creation of Pakistan

The next few months (summer of 1947) were the most terrible time in India: some of the worst in all its history. There were riots and killing and burning throughout the country on a horrendous scale. Lahore was a big city – with large populations of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs (the Muslims being perhaps 50%, and so also the Hindus and Sikhs).

We heard on the All India Radio (there was no TV then), read in the newspapers, and saw in the Pathé News in the cinemas, how the new Viceroy of India – the youthful (42

years?) Lord Mountbatten, a cousin of King George VI – got Mr Gandhi, Mr Jinnah and the Sikh Leader Mr Tara Singh, pushed and clobbered into an agreement (on 3rd June 1947) for the partition of India into three parts: India in the middle (83%), with West and East Pakistan to either side of it (17% population-wise). Punjab and Bengal-Assam were partitioned on the basis of religion: West Punjab and East Bengal going to Muslim-majority wings of Pakistan. Mr Radcliffe, a British lawyer, who had never been to India, made a butcherly (and rather unfair, we thought) cutting up of the two provinces in an astonishing haste caused by the incredibly ill-considered speed (3rd June to 14th August, i.e. 72 hectic days) with which Mountbatten had ordered this ancient continent to be carved up. There was a transmigration of some 10 million souls – men, women and children, of whom some 1 million were murdered en route by shooting, axing, burning wholesale on trains, buses, bullock-carts, foot-travellers heading from India to Pakistan (Muslims) or Pakistan to India (Hindus and Sikhs). Sikhs and Muslims of the Punjab especially hated and murdered each other.

Lahore was burning and its people killed ruthlessly. Even in the GCL and the New Hostel, the Muslims and Hindus-Sikhs were arming themselves against each other. I remember that I had acquired a long-bladed knife, which I had concealed under the jute stairs-carpet under a breach. I never had the occasion to use it, though. As always, I was a very naive ‘Butt’. In the height of riots, I was once searching for a textbook in the nearby Ganpat Road (later Urdu Bazaar) abounding in bookstores – unconcerned with the fact that it was an overwhelmingly Hindu area where I was one of the few Muslim students wandering about. On my way back to the hostel, I ran into my uncle Siddiq, who was bicycling back to his Mohini Road home from his office in the Secretariat. He saw me walking back with some books – he accosted me to ask what I was doing in that neighbourhood. When I told him the reason, he gave me a right sizzling rocket – and told me what a blithering idiot I was. I could have been murdered any moment around those shops. He ordered me to go back to my hostel and never venture out. (I think it was after that that I acquired my long-blade knife.)

Lahore city and all its bazaars and inner-city dwellings were on fire – the flames could be seen from miles away. This was late July - early August 1947. My maternal aunt (*Khala*) Shafqat and her husband Captain Zafar Ali (later Major), were, however, living on the other side of the Lahore canal, close to Lahore cantonment – which was a much safer area. They invited all close relatives (including me and my brother Sajjad, who was at the Engineering College) to come and live with them until things quietened down.

Thank God that most of our family (except uncle Nisar who was in Delhi) were located in what became Pakistan – and thus remained safe during those terrible times. We stayed with uncle Zafar Ali Khan (the father of my cousin, Agha Ghazanfar) and aunty Shafqat for nearly a month (Ghazni was, I think, about 3 years old then; uncle Zafar’s

younger brother, 2nd Lieutenant Nisar Ali also stayed there). It was a moment of great joy, elation and pride when, at the stroke of midnight between 13th and 14th August 1947, we heard in the stately and pure-washed (﴿ ﻰٰلٰم ﻊَلَيْكُم مُّنَّعَّلٌ ﴾) language of the announcer Shakeel Ahmed: This is the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, Assalam-u Alaikum (﴿ ﻰٰلٰم ﻊَلَيْكُم مُّنَّعَّلٌ ﴾) Radio Pakistan, Lahore, Shakeel Ahmed at your service. Pakistan Zindabad. All this in the purest Urdu, after months of unattractive Hindi newscasting and announcements from the All India Radio. I can still vividly remember the thrill that went through my body on hearing that historic announcement.