

Lahore is Always in Our Hearts

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Nostalgia is a sentimental yearning for people, events and places. Most human beings tend to romanticize and idealize their past, because reminiscing bygone days and the associations they evoke, furnish them with a personal history and identity markers with which they construct their distinctive profiles. The relationship between people and places seems to be organic and ruptures between them are often painful. Even nomadic peoples and tribes, who follow seasonal cycles, tend to move within specific regions. Thus even when they do not adopt sedentary life styles, the space in which they roam becomes, so to say, their homeland. In the animal world it is quite common to find many species jealously defending their exclusive domains against intruders. Human beings, it seems, are not very different.

Historical cities

In the relationship between places and people, the importance of historical cities is particularly noteworthy. Historical cities tend to acquire an aura and mystique that makes them coveted places of residence. The reason is that cities make possible a higher level of civilization and culture and therefore life is far more variegated and dynamic in them. Consequently, city dwellers can add many more dimensions to their life stories as they weave the memory of famous monuments and buildings, history and folklore, culture, social practices and festivals, schools, colleges and universities, and cinemas and parks into their personal narratives. Within cities, neighbourhoods and localities hold out their own charm and their residents usually take pride in making a special mention of them. Ultimately, the house, or rather the home, becomes the exclusive identity of individuals. Also, historical cities are venues for important events that become part of historical memory, combining official facts with anecdotes, folklore and legends. As a result cities become larger-than-life entities; they are phantasmagorias that are reified by their lovers who can embed their past in them, filling them with as many colours and hues that their imagination can conjure.

Peter Kageyama has tried to capture such sentiments in his

book, *For the Love of Cities*. The bottom line is that cities become objects of love and devotion just as beloveds and close-knit communities do. He regrets, however, that people do not appreciate enough what their city does to enrich their lives.¹ This is probably true as long as people take for granted their relationship with their city, enjoying its facilities and enriching their lives against the backdrop of its variegated vistas.

However, cities are not autonomous or sovereign units of political organization. We live in the era of the so-called nation-states, which are in fact territorial entities whose most conspicuous characteristic is their right to exercise exclusive power and authority over their populations. Such power and authority is enforced through border controls, passports and other related paraphernalia. In the past too, populations in general and those of cities in particular, were subjected to forced expulsions as wars took place between local rulers and invaders or between competing rajas in the same region. However, once the battle was over it was not uncommon for people to return to their homes and continue as before.

This was especially true of South Asia where the popular fiction that the ruler was the protector of all communities prevailed from the ancient period onwards and continued even under the British. However, the Partition of India was attended by genocidal killing and ethnic² cleansing in the Punjab that profoundly altered the relationship between cities and their populations. On both sides, unwanted religious minorities were terrorized to flee after power was transferred to the Indian and Pakistani governments. However, even after the migration of non-Muslims, Lahore did not become a homogenous city. Sectarian cleavages and contradictions as well as ideological polarization erupted within the Lahore population and that in turn resulted in further exits from Lahore.

It is in the light of such recent developments that the relationship between one of the most famous cities in South Asia, Lahore, and its citizens is presented below. Located only some 20 kilometres from the Indian border, it was, before mid-August 1947, home to three major religious communities: Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. There were also smaller Punjabi-Christian, Anglo-Indian, Parsi (Zoroastrian) communities and some British and other Westerners. The total population at that time was slightly more than 700,000.

1 Peter Kageyama, *For the Love of Cities*, St Petersburg, Florida: Creative Cities Production, 2011.
2 religious cleansing, racially cleansing, sectarian cleansing are all generically part of the same phenomenon

Lahore

In March 1940, the All-India Muslim League demanded the creation of separate states (later that demand was changed to one state) comprising the Muslim-majority north-eastern and north-western zones of the Indian subcontinent. That demand was accepted in the 3 June 1947 Partition Plan announced by the British Government. On 23 June the Punjab Legislative Assembly voted in favor of partitioning the Punjab province on the same basis of Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority contiguous areas though “other factors” was added and that created considerable confusion as to the importance of that condition. The councils of the Muslim League, the Congress Party and the Sikhs pleaded their claims to different districts and towns of the Punjab before the Punjab Boundary Commission.

Expulsion of Hindus and Sikhs from Lahore

On 17 August 1947 the Radcliffe Award given by the Chairman of the Punjab Boundary Commission, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, awarded Lahore to Pakistan. Although there was a clear Muslim majority in Lahore, many Hindus and Sikhs seemed oblivious of the fact. This partly followed from the fact that in the modern parts of Lahore and new middle and upper class colonies the Hindu-Sikh presence was ubiquitous and it could deceive not only casual visitors but also its residents to believe that there was a non-Muslim majority in the city. Consequently many of them believed that Lahore would be placed in India. However, once it became public that Lahore had been placed in Pakistan, attacks on Hindus and Sikhs intensified and within a matter of weeks they were gone. At the same time, Lahore received hundreds of thousands of devastated Muslims from East Punjab. The refugee camp at Walton, outside Lahore, became one of the biggest relief and rehabilitation centres.

Remembering Pre-Partition Lahore

The history of modern Lahore is inextricably linked to the architectural marvels and philanthropic contributions of Sir Ganga Ram. Well-known columnist Salma Mahmud wrote an article, ‘A great son of the Punjab’, in the *Friday Times*, in which we learn about Sir Ganga Ram’s amazing achievements and contributions. Salma Mahmud writes:

‘However, the most impressive charitable act of all performed by Sir Ganga Ram was the construction of the Sir Ganga Ram

Free Hospital, after land was purchased in 1921 by him at the junction of Queen's Road and Lawrence Road. Consequently at a cost of Rs.131,500 a building was constructed there which was open to the needy, irrespective of caste or creed. In 1923 the hospital was taken over by the Ganga Ram Trust Society, and today it ranks second only to Mayo Hospital in its services to the people of Lahore. My mother worked there in an administrative capacity for my (sic) years. And both our children were born there, so it holds a special place in my heart'.

I met Sir Ganga Ram's great grand-daughter, Baroness Shreela Flather, Conservative Member of the upper chamber of the British Parliament, the House of Lords, at her residence at Maidenhead, Berkshire County outside London on 7 July, 2006. She remembered Lahore in the following words:

"I was born in Lahore on 13 February 1934. My early life story is inextricably linked with my family's deep involvement with Lahore and its people. In those days, one never considered religious differences as a reason to make or not make friends. Not only among the educated and well-to-do people but also among ordinary folks there was a great deal of goodwill and solidarity. We lived in a large house next to what is today known as the Sherpao Bridge. My father had set up a number of productive units – an ice factory, a cutlery factory, a bakery and a soda water factory. Following his grandfather's vision of progressive relations between owners and workers, rows of small dwellings were built for the workers and slightly better standard housing for the administrative staff. We had all communities working for us and living in the small housing colony that had been set up. We had close family friends among Muslims and some of the families were like our extended family.

I particularly remember a leading Shia family that was very close to us and I used to visit the Imambara in Lahore. Ordinarily my mother who was a very orthodox Hindu would not eat in a Muslim home but she did so at the Hakim's home. Azhar Ali Hakim who belongs to that family still lives in Lahore. The late Afsar Kizilbash was one of my closest friends. I visited Lahore in 1992 for the first time and then again in 1996 and 1998. All the old buildings were there, only Lahore had become much more overcrowded just like the cities in India. Now that Afsar is dead I have lost the heart to visit Lahore but it is always in my thoughts. Here, in England, I continue to have very good

Pakistani friends and many of them are very pleased to know that I am a direct descendant of Sir Ganga Ram”.³

Ramanand Sagar

The famous Mumbai filmmaker, director and writer the late Dr Ramanand Sagar began his career in Lahore as a journalist and later became the editor of the pro-Congress Urdu/Hindi newspaper, *Milap*. He gave me the following sketch of his feelings for Lahore:

“I was born on 29 December 1917 in *Asal-Guru-Ke*, a small village on the outskirts of Lahore. My father had business interests in Kashmir but I grew up with my grandparents who lived in *Cha Pichwara* off Lytton Road, Mozang, Lahore (some 500 metres from where this author was born on the parallel Temple Road in February 1947). My childhood was spent in Mozang. In those times, children from all communities played together and the elders were respectful of each other’s beliefs and traditions. As a youngster, I would sometimes go to the mosque along with my Muslim friends and join them in their prayers. I can’t recall any tension between the different families in our locality. After the Muslim League gave the call for a separate Muslim state in its Lahore secession of March 1940, some communal tension could be sensed in the otherwise very harmonious atmosphere of Lahore but at that time nobody could imagine that Hindus would have to abandon Lahore.

In early March 1947 communal riots broke out in Lahore when Hindu-Sikh students clashed with their Muslim counterparts. Suddenly nobody felt secure. We Hindus, however, were convinced that Lahore would remain a part of India. There was so much material and cultural contribution of the Hindus and Sikhs to the development of Lahore that it never occurred to us that one day it would be taken away from us. The all-India as well as the Lahore-level Congress leadership told us not to vacate Lahore. It was widely believed that Lahore would be given to India. However, violent attacks against Hindus and Sikhs became a daily occurrence. Many Hindus and Sikhs who had relatives in eastern Punjab or elsewhere in India began to move their families to safety. We had to flee Lahore in July when things went from bad to worse. We did not cross into India from Wagah, but took another route. We

travelled to Sialkot and from there to Jammu and continued to Srinagar. At that time I was writing my novel '*Aur Insan Mar Gaya*' (And Humanity Died), based on the horrors of Partition, as my personal experience of those days. When I left, the novel was half complete. The great Urdu Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz knew about my incomplete novel. Hence later on he came to Gulmarg in Kashmir, where I was staying in a hut in Tangmarg. He came to tell me about the events which followed in Lahore after I left. Lahore is always in my heart, but I don't think I will ever visit it. I am told that it has changed considerably. I want to preserve the memory of the pre-Partition Lahore".

Krishan Chander

The famous Urdu short-story writer and novelist Krishan Chander had an abiding love for Lahore. Till his death in 1977, Lahore continued to figure in his writings. He died in Mumbai on 8 March 1977 as a result of a massive heart attack. I remember the news of his death was received by us in Stockholm with great anguish. Only a few weeks earlier, entirely on impulse, I had written to him after reading one of his latest stories in which he had mentioned Mohni Road Lahore, where he once lived in the late 1930s until he left Lahore for Delhi sometime in the early 1940s, to take up a job with All-India Radio. I urged him to visit Lahore where some of his best friends were still to be found. He was needed to preach his message of peace again in Lahore. He wrote back a very moving reply dated February 21, 1977. In it he wrote, among other things:

'Lahore is a place where I was born, where I was educated, where I started my literary career, where I achieved fame. For people of my generation it is difficult to forget Lahore. It shines in our heart like a jewel -- like the fragrance of our soul'.

I sent the letter to Mazhar Ali Khan, editor of Viewpoint, Lahore along with an obituary. Both were published in the 8 April, 1977 issue on page 26 under the title 'His last letter?' Krishan Chander studied at FC College, Lahore, where many years later I studied as well. There is no doubt that it was in Lahore that he attained recognition and fame. Lahore was the cultural and educational capital of north-western India. It was also a paragon of communal harmony and peace. The publishers of Krishan Chander's novels and short-stories were the Chaudhry brothers of Lahore. Muhammad Khalid Chaudhry published *Krishan Chander key Sou Afsanay* (100 Short-Stories of Krishan Chander)

some years ago as a tribute to the late writer. An English translation is given of what he wrote in the introduction:

‘When my father, Chaudhry Barkat Ali, was alive there was always a large gathering in the office of Maktab-e-Urdu and Adab-e-Lateef. Educationists, writers and political leaders were always there. From morning to evening the atmosphere was gregarious. Now, it feels like a sweet dream. Among writers who without fail visited the office of Adab-e-Lateef everyday was Krishan Chander. I was a young lad at that time, but the company of writers made me curious about literature. I knew almost all of them. Krishan Chander became my friend. When the editor of Adab-e-Lateef, Mirza Adeeb, was not in the office he would start a conversation with me. He spoke very gently and I listened to him with great interest. I still recall what he said and will always do so. I can never forget Krishan Chander. By publishing 100 of his select short-stories I am acknowledging his affection for me’.⁴

Krishan Chander’s friend, the veteran Pakistani journalist and literary critic, Hamid Akhtar, wrote an obituary in which he said:

“Krishan Chander died without coming to Lahore which was his city as it is yours or mine. He didn’t belong to India alone. He belonged, among many others, to us also. Bedi, Majrooh, Kaifi, Sardar, Razia – they are ours as much as they are India’s. Will the new generation give them a chance to sit together and talk together? I am sure that the day is not far off when progressive writers on both sides of the border will get together again and the dark clouds of hatred will break and there will be love and friendship between the peoples of India and Pakistan.”⁵

Pran Nevile

Pran Nevile was born in Lahore in 1922. He began his career as a journalist, then joined the Indian Foreign Service and later worked for UNCTAD. He is the author of, *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey*, in which he has chronicled the places, institutions, traditions and events of those days in very vivid prose. He lives in Delhi:

“I joined service in Delhi in 1946, but my parents were in Lahore when the riots started. I visited Lahore after a very long time

4 Ishtiaq Ahmed, ‘Krishan Chander and Lahore’, Daily Times, Lahore.

5 Ishtiaq Ahmed, ‘Krishan Chander and Lahore’, Daily Times, Lahore.

in 1997. It was a feeling I cannot really describe, though soon afterwards when I realized that all the faces and places that were once part of the old Lahore were no longer there, I felt a bit strange, but then immediately that feeling was superseded by the very warm hospitality that I received in Lahore. My old classmate from Government College Saeed Ahmad Khan was still alive. This caused some embarrassment because in the acknowledgments of the first edition of my book I had mentioned him among those who had left this world, but I was very pleased to know that he was alive and kicking. Through him many other friends were contacted and I became a Lahori again. I went to Nisbet Road looking for our house but I was told it had been demolished only weeks earlier. So, that was a sad realization but a visit to Government College compensated for it. The Principal of Government College Mr. Aftab met me with great courtesy. I felt like attending a class. You know strange feelings are aroused on such occasions. That trip won me many new friends. My book, *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey*, was very well-received in both India and Pakistan. Several of its editions have been published with new experiences added. You should read it to understand how boisterous and fun-loving a city it was. For my generation, Lahore will always remain an object of worship and veneration. Alas, the younger generations of Lahori Hindus do not have the same feelings but Lahori Hindu and Sikh families maintain contact and we try to meet as often as we can. So, the Lahore connection will continue in some form. How long? I can't say."⁶

Som Anand

The author of, *"Lahore: Portrait of a Lost City"* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1998), had the following to say about his feelings for Lahore:

"I grew up in Model Town but used to visit my mama (maternal uncle) in Icchra quite often. Otherwise visits to the main city were not so frequent because Model Town was a self-contained upper-class colony. Although I shifted to Delhi because of the rioting, my father, Lala Faqir Chand, remained behind. He was head of a leading bank and the Government of Pakistan needed his services. Moreover he had married a Muslim lady, though he remained a Hindu. When he died I came from Delhi for the cremation ceremony. A Hindu Brahmin who stayed on in Pakistan performed the ceremony though he was not a priest.

I remained in touch with my close friends, among them is Rauf Malik (veteran leftist, Abdullah Malik's younger brother). I continue to visit Lahore whenever it is possible and also write columns for Urdu-language newspapers. Lahore will always be home though I live in Delhi".

Post-Partition Lahore

The most dramatic change after 1947 is that Lahore became essentially a Muslim city. However, the old connections and relationships did not disappear. On the contrary, whenever old-Lahore Hindus and Sikhs were allowed to visit it the occasions produced very moving and touching scenes as old neighbors and class-fellows met. In January 1955, an India-Pakistan cricket Test match was played at the Lahore Gymkhana ground in the Lawrence Gardens. Pakistan's High Commissioner to Delhi, Raja Ghazanfar Ali had decided to freely allow people from East Punjab and Delhi to visit Lahore. Thousands took that chance. I am not sure how many went to the cricket match but during those four or five days one could see grown men, some with strange turbans and long beards embracing one another and crying. Wherever the visitors went the local people treated them with great warmth and generosity. There were re-unions in the old mohallas and some even went and slept in their old homes – courtesy of the new occupants.⁷ Again in 2004 another historic visit to Pakistan of the Indian team brought thousands of Indian spectators to Lahore. Many of them were children of old Lahoris who went around looking for their ancestral homes and were overwhelmed by the goodwill and warmth they received from ordinary people in Lahore. Somewhere, deep down the old connections really mattered, which despite demonizing and dehumanizing the "Other", had continued on ever since 1947.

Newcomers

At the time of Partition, Lahore received a substantial portion of newcomers, mostly refugees from eastern Punjab. For many of them Lahore became their new home. Here, I present the story of Nasim Hassan whose family arrived in Lahore from Shimla a few days after the Partition had taken place:

"We arrived in Lahore, with nothing but our lives, which were for several long hours at risk during the escape from Shimla

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Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy through Secret British Reports and First-Person Accounts*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 548-9.

as the train moved slowly towards Pakistan. I was then only three, but to this day, remember vividly how scared we were as the train stopped a number of times and one could hear the noises of raiders trying to get onto the train and kill all Muslims. Initially we were in the refugee camp in the Walton area; then we shifted to a hospital on Abbot Road for a few months. Then my parents looked around many places through their contacts and we found this one. It was among many other small houses off Court Street, where Islamia College Civil Lines is now, abandoned by Hindus. There was no one living in these houses but they quickly filled up with people. There cannot be any narrative about Lahore that does not include Anarkali Bazaar. One could spend hours roaming around the main bazaar and side streets. At that time people of all social strata and ages would come to Anarkali. Living in Lahore gives an attitude to people. The person is stamped for life. I can talk to a Pakistani anywhere in the world and recognize a Lahori in a few minutes. After graduation from the Institute of Chemical Technology at Punjab University, I accepted a job in the National Refinery in Karachi and then moved to America. It took me a few years to get settled and then I came back to Lahore many times. Lahore is always home. It is inseparable from my own existence though I may never return to it permanently”.⁸

Sectarian Terrorism

However, while people like Nasim Hassan were quickly assimilated into Lahore and could identify with it, this was not true of all. The first sign of deep-seated tensions and divisions Muslims was the virulent anti-Ahmadiyya agitation that broke out in Lahore in spring 1953.

Munawwar Mir

“I have mixed feelings for Lahore because it has raised my spirits, and also broken my heart. My father was of Kashmiri decent, belonging to the Ahmadiyya community and my mother was an Uygur Muslim. They met in China. Both decided to set up home in Lahore. In 1953, Anti-Ahmadiyya riots in Lahore forced my father to have second thoughts about his adopted home. I myself had a traumatizing experience: my seven year old daughter came home with a choking voice and teary eyes, because her friend was no longer allowed to speak

to her consequent to my daughter's visit to her grandmother in Rabwah. Though physically I never felt threatened in Pakistan, the constant hatred and the 'hate seller's' hold on the innocent masses pushed me to give my children freedom from fear and hatred by moving to Canada".

On May 28th 2010 the horrendous killings of Ahmadi worshippers took place in Lahore. It meant that it had become a place of sorrow and grave worry.

Exile

Farooq Sulehria editor of *Viewpoint*, an online weekly published from Stockholm, made his mark first as a gifted journalist in Lahore, a city he came to love. This is what he wrote about Lahore at my request:

"Wapis na Jao shehar main Munir apnay

Kay jo jis jaga tha, wahan na raha!

(O Munir! do not return to your city. Nothing is as it used to be)

'Ever since leaving Lahore, on 19 February 2001 to be exact, I have become extra sensitive about it. It seems, every time I return I have to mourn a missing piece of that great city even when the town's noisy life goes on. Every successive trip to Lahore, almost an annual ritual, deepens my sense of loss. It feels as if Lahore is dying inch by inch and hardly any Lahorite cares at all. Not just the places I used to frequently visit have gun-toting guards and trench-like entrances, but road-blocks and barbed wire snaking around boundary-walls have also become a routine sight. They mark the visits terror has paid in the last few years. Even more frightening is the look of the famous landmark of Lahore, the Pak Tea House. It has become a tyre-godown! It was on Hassan Nasir Day, at the nearby Pak Tea House that I first came across the Struggle Group back in 1991 and instantly joined. It is that Lahore which is no more, but in my imagination it will always be there'.

Conclusion

From the above interviews, it is clear that imagining Lahore is an ongoing process – each generation is likely to tell its story and each individual will have his/her own slant on it. Needless to say, when exit from a place of birth is the result of a blatant threat to life, it evokes very strong feelings in the victims. If it is irreversible and irrevocable it can

induce a permanent sense of injustice and grief. The situation of the former Hindu and Sikh citizens of Lahore belongs to this extreme case. They were subjected to deliberate ethnic cleansing. To a large extent in post-Partition Lahore, though the Ahmadis and Christians who have left Lahore to escape discrimination and persecution are in a similar situation, en masse expulsion has not been forced upon them. They are victims of the slower form of ethnic cleansing, which I described as ethnic exclusion in another paper— a policy that Israeli governments have been applying to Palestinians who left occupied territories in 1948, 1967, 1973 or later.

In this paper, I have not said much about my own departure from Lahore in 1973, which brought me to Sweden. I have been living in Greater Stockholm for most of my 64-year life. Each time I step on Lahore soil it feels as if I am returning home and have never really left. The meetings with old friends and visits to familiar places always bring back many memories. Simultaneously there is a feeling of great loss because of all those people who are no more; also the new localities that have sprung up are quite alien to me, were it not for some friends who live there. In all honesty, however, home is now with my family and friends in Sweden. I arrived in Stockholm on 26 September 1973, with little money in my pocket. My elder brother, Mushtaq, was there so life was not as tough as for most people on the move. Because of the social-democratic policies of the Swedish Government I could secure a stipend on merit to do my PhD and then later I worked all the way up to become a professor of political science. That city and society have been kind and caring to me. Therefore loyalty and roots in the Greater Stockholm region where we have lived for years have also evolved and coming back to Stockholm is always a strong attraction.

For people like us the best way to remain faithful to Lahore is not to forget it when away from it and to try to come to it as often as is possible. We have a Lahore boys network in Stockholm and I realized that similar networks exist all over the world – not least so in Delhi, which I believe is a mini-Lahore. Lahore networks exist also in cyberspace and many of us keep in touch irrespective of our religious origins or castes. What shape this will take in the immediate and distant future one cannot really say. Who knows one day a South Asian union of independent states modeled on the EU can come into being. Such an arrangement can be achieved without the trappings of the nation-state being abandoned. People can move freely and settle down freely wherever they want. Alternatively, ultra-nationalism and religious and sectarian fanaticism can continue to wreck the romance between cities and their lovers. Lahore will have to be ready for any of such eventualities.