

Memoirs

PARTITION MEMORIES

- By Kaushalya K. Udassi

She was a happy girl till August 14, 1947. The world completely changed for five-year-old Kaushalya Udassi. Her own paternal home in Ladkana, now in Pakistan, looked so unfamiliar. Unable to understand the repercussions of British government that had partitioned the subcontinent into two countries, Kaushalya got confused. Why neighbours had suddenly become Hindus and Muslims? They were never like that, why was it? She asked the elders, but they did not have time to answer such innocent queries as they themselves were as bewildered as young Kaushalya.

“I still can recall that day. Dada (father in Sindhi) came down. Counting the aanas (paisa) and rupee notes, he said ‘Hurry up!’ and our sudden journey started. Life never remained the same”, remembers Kaushalya, 72-year-old, resident of Ulhasnagar, a bustling suburb of Mumbai India.

Asking her mom again and again, she was informed that the phase was called “Partition” that occurred due to some political interest. As the time passed, her mother delivered the pain they suffered due to the overnight migration. ‘We stayed at Ladkana in Sindh. Our eleven family members staying together were all panicked on hearing the news of riots in Karachi. All people started migrating, but we refused to leave for two more months with the hope of everything getting resettled. But leaving all hopes, we were forced to surrender to the situation and move to Hindustan.’ Some people threatened us that the big beard resembled Sikh community. So all the male elders got their beards shaved. “I was crying to leave Sunder mama (maternal uncle) as Dada wanted him to take care of all our belongings till we come back.”

From there, the family came to Hyderabad in Sindh by train. In Hyderabad, there was a city called Khokhrabad with the trains running for India. But due to riots, the trains were cancelled and they were forced to board the ships travelling to Mumbai carrying the migrants. “We stayed

at the shelter house for migrants called court. They gave food to the migrants. The processions were arranged to celebrate the winnings in Karachi riots that threatened all the court dwellers forcing them to switch off their lights and hid themselves.” The life was miserable. Thanks God, the trains started and we were sent back to Karachi. After ten to twelve days, permit to board the ship in the form of Afosi card was given to my family waiting for their turn to board the ship at Karachi Dock having only a temporary roof as the shelter. The heavy downpour added to the problems by fully drenching the migrants. After two days, the family boarded the ship to witness the even worse situations. “The smell of sea water and the dreadful waves touching the ship’s inside floor led us to sleepless nights.” To add to the agony, was the loss of route by the ship due to heavy rains. This made our ship to take five days instead of three days to reach Mumbai.” Finally, with the grace of God, the family reached Mumbai with hardly Rs. 2200 in the pocket. Nobody enjoyed the food served at the Indian dock as the smell of Sindh was lacking. Migrants were advised to go to Ulhasnagar, Devlali, Nasik, Bhavnagar, Ajmer etc. But people said Ulhasnagar is a jungle with wild animals. Scaring, my family went to Ajmer to stay with our followers (as we were religious gurus called Udassi or Bawas in Sindhi). In Ajmer, we gave Rs. 300 for a temporary house ownership called Lungi for a Kothi (house) with sealed rooms and cupboards. However, few seals were broken and the people threatened that we can be imprisoned, when the actual owner who was a Muslim would come back as soon as the situation is controlled. They said, “Khan Sahib would search for his gold and all the cash he has sealed in the temporary constructed concrete walls”. Answering to the threats, the family left the house without even asking for the Lungi amount back. Settling for another house after one month in Ajmer Dargah Bazaar with Lungi of Rs. 600 was another nightmare. “The sight of the tax officer made us run and hide ourselves.”

As an innocent child, I was very happy on finding a small decorated box with silver marbles but mama was afraid of the legal action if any neighbour report it. Threatened family moved on to Nasik. The ticket collector slapped mama for not having the ticket. “The family had small amount of money left out of which six paisa was used to feed me with a some tea and bread,” said Kaushalya wiping her tears. From Nasik, we travelled to a small village in a bullock cart.

The situation was even worst there and we returned within two days. Finally, mama suggested to migrate to Ulhasnagar. The new place welcomed us with heavy rains. Many people died and many barracks were destroyed . Staying in the only tent available at Camp – 4, near Venus theater, adjustments with situations became regular feature of our life . With the foodgrains supplied by authorities , all the migrants, would early in the morning, run to collect cow dung from nearby cow stable for drying and cooking food. A walking journey of three to four hours to and fro Kalyan every alternate day for flour mill became a routine for us, till a family friend called Jasoti informed us about a barrack kept on sale in Camp no. 3. She said that the place was used used to supply ration to military people. Arranging a loan of Rs. 200 for the token money, the family got there own house . The only source of livelihood was the small money made by female members knitting caps wore by Muslims during namaz and the male members selling sweet vadas mixing coconut and sugar.

With five daughters, out of whom only two are alive and settled, I pray to God, “Let the new generation do not suffer from the pains as we have faced.” – sighed Kaushalya, an innocent at the time of partition, but now a senior citizen with the tears still flowing to clear the images of partition memories.

“Civilized twentieth century with the features of fundamentalism, terror, and ethnic strife and partition woes force us to reframe the definition of development” pondered Ms. Savita Punjabi while documenting this memoir.

Bio

A Sindhi Migrant, a housewife and a senior citizen staying at Ulhasnagar – 3 .