APPENDIX 1

I. ORAL ACCOUNTS OF PARTITION SURVIVORS

YOGENDER PRAKASH SURI’S ACCOUNT

Though our family belonged to Rawalpindi District of undivided Punjab, I was born in Peshawar Cantonment in 1924. My entire childhood was spent there. My education also took place there. The first Hindu Muslim riot that is vivid in my memory was when I was a child. May be I was three of four years of age as I had not yet started my schooling. My mother and I were visiting her brother in Rawalpindi. We were staying at Mama’s and Nani’s house when during the night, people in our mohalla started shouting, “JagtayRaho, Hoshiar.” There were some huge fires, somewhere in the city. I was informed that there was a Hindu-Muslim riot. I do not remember the duration of this riot, but after a couple of days we went back to Peshawar to join my father, a business man.

My education started in Khaba Middle School in Peshawar Cantonment. There were two schools for boys. The other one was Frontier High School. In these schools teachers of all religions taught us. Apart from Sikh teachers, there was Maulvi Sahib and other Hindu teachers. Religion of an individual was no bar. Same was the case as far as students were concerned. We were a homogeneous mixture of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Even Pathan students shared this feeling of brotherhood. We used to play and even quarrel together, but always relations were cordial. Once when one of our teachers Master Singh was attacked by a miscreant, Pathan and Muslim students with sticks and batons rushed out and gave them such a beating that they could not walk back on their feet. This shows the respect the Pathans and other students had for their teachers and the closeness between communities.

After my Matriculation I joined Islamia College in Peshawar. Here Hindu and Sikh students were mostly day scholars, and used to cycle a distance of 5 to 6 miles to reach the college. In this institution the majority of students were Pathan and Muslim, but Hindu and Sikh students were looked after very well, both by the administration and our colleagues. In sports due share was given to Hindu students who proved worthy of the standards laid down for selection. Students of both communities respected the religion of the other. We had some very good Muslim friends, who were never failed to provide support and protection when needed.

After passing my F. Sc. examination from Islamia College I joined Edward College, Peshawar Cantonment, the only Arts Degree College. Here also some of our best friends were Muslims. This brotherly feeling amongst the students continued till the end of the Second World War. Though political agitation was at its peak, it never affected the good relationship between us students. Everybody was had his own political ideas, but one aim was common, the “Independence of India.” Hindu students
even used to attend the marriages of brother Muslim students. For Hindus separate kitchens were arranged and every care was taken in preparing non-vegetarian dishes for them separately.

In N.W.F.P. Hindu and Sikhs was only about 3% of the total population. In Peshawar Cantonment and city our population was a bit higher, about 5%. This small percentage controlled the maximum business. A majority of big business houses was in their possession. Muslims were good artisans. Even trade with Afghanistan was dominated by Hindu and Sikh businessmen. Hindu and Sikhs owned their own houses. As there were quite a good number of residents who were in salaried jobs in Government Departments as well as private Business houses, there was lot of rental accommodation available. Most of this rental accommodation belonged to Hindu and Sikh landlords. In Peshawar city too Hindu and Sikhs lived in their own houses. However Hindu and Sikh and Muslim mohallas were segregated.

In 1945 my father purchased a house in Rawalpindi and, as he was dealing in Military contracts, the family shifted to Rawalpindi. I, after my graduation, started a hotel cum restaurant in the Cantonment area. I was doing well. My kitchen and hotel income was ranging somewhere between Rs. 700/- to Rs. 900/- per day. During this time arrangements were made by the Hindu and Sikh community for Holi Milan Samaroh at Company Bagh in the city area. Around midday we noticed that Muslim artisans, like tailors and barbers, were closing their shops and hurrying to their homes, carrying their sewing machines and bundles of finished and unfinished material. A probe disclosed that some Muslim miscreants had hatched a plot to attack Hindu and Sikh areas while the Holi Milan was being celebrated. As most of the men folk would not be at home, they had planned to attack and loot our houses and kidnap the women folk. This intelligence was immediately passed on to the promoters of the programme to alert them. The Samaroh was cancelled and Hindu and Sikhs started gathering in their mohallas.

I was at my hotel, when the first message came from my father telling me to leave the hotel and come to the house. I did not take it seriously. After about an hour a second message came telling me to leave the hotel and come home at once. By this time my chowkidar, Akram, a Pathan, brought me the news of mounting tension among Hindus and Muslims and a riot feared. Akram did not let me go alone. He insisted on accompanying me home, as there was danger while crossing Muslim areas. On our way Akram brought out a fire arm. I do not know from where he got it and pointed it at Muslim hooligans gathered on the path. He openly warned them, that he would shoot if any one tried to attack us. After crossing the nallah, Lai, which was a natural border between the Cantonment and the city area, I asked Akram to return, as I might not be able to protect him in the Hindu localities. I asked Akram to look after the safety of the hotel and his Hindu coworkers there.

I reached home in about twenty minutes. A lot of tension had mounted between the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. From the top of our houses, we saw that fires had broken out in Hindu areas, which were in the vicinity of Muslim areas.
Muslims in groups started pouring in from adjoining villages. Gun firing had started from both sides, followed by arson and looting. This free for all situation continued for two to three days after which the town was handed over to the Army. It took a week or two before things returned to normalcy.

After the riots were over Hindus and Sikhs decided to boycott fireworks, riding mares and playing bands during the marriage ceremonies as these three trades were dominated by Muslims and the decision taken was to put them to financial loss.

In May 1947 I got married and after staying for a month in Rawalpindi, we decided to visit relatives and tour other places. We left for Dehradun and then after staying with my cousin sister and her family for a week, we went to Mussoorie. We stayed there for a month with my maternal uncle. After taking a dip in the Ganga at Haridwar we returned to Phellaur to meet my wife’s parents.

By the time we had reached Phellaur, the atmosphere of the country had completely changed. People had started leaving their houses in the areas which was to be given to the proposed Pakistan. Muslim students from Aligarh Muslim University were actively propagating the ideas of the Muslim League and Mr. Jinnah about the creation of Pakistan. The exchange of population was one of the ideas, doing the rounds. Hindus and Sikhs were to go to India and Muslims to Pakistan. No one took it seriously. People argued that history was witness to the fact that Hakumats changed but Riyasa, the subjects remain.

New reports of arson, killings and kidnappings started coming. Trains packed, beyond capacity, were coming to India from the proposed Pakistan. I was not allowed to go to Rawalpindi by my father-in-law. I was forced to stay with my wife’s parents at Phellaur.

On the declaration of Independence in Pakistan on 14th August 1947 and in India on 15 August the people of both the countries were celebrating in their own ways. There was rejoicing in India, but in Pakistan along with rejoicing people were being killed. Law and order in Pakistan seemed to be at its lowest ebb. Armed gangs of Muslims had started looting Hindu and Sikh dwellings and forcing them to flee from their homes. Many were put to death. Enraged by the treatment of Hindu and Sikhs in Pakistan, people of East Punjab also started retaliating. Cart loads of dead bodies of Muslim men, women and children were being brought to the civil hospital at Phillaur for post mortem. Due to their numbers, the bodies were disposed of without any religious ceremonies.

As my father was still stranded in Pakistan, I came to Delhi to send radio messages to my father through AIR (All India Radio). People on both sides were advised to listen to special bulletins giving information about the welfare of their relatives. Rail and airplanes were specially chartered to evacuate refugees. This was a free service provided by the government and some voluntary organizations.

Delhi was also burning. During the night we could see, from the top of our houses, burning missiles hurled towards the opposite communities. Curfew was
imposed in the walled city. During the day time I saw municipal garbage carriers loaded with dead bodies. During this time I went to Haridwar and, then to Dehradun to meet my cousin sister. On the way I saw swollen, dismembered, dead human bodies lying near the railway tracks. The victims were hacked to death in the trains and then thrown out. I then proceeded to Ludhiana but the train was cancelled at Ambala Cantonment.

At Ambala Cantonment Railway Station I saw a young tall Muslim Army jawan being attacked from behind and his head slashed. I saw him, a dead man walking with bulging eyes and head dangling on one side. Near the tea stall there were some Gurkhajawans taking tea. The Muslim soldier turned towards the Gurkhajawans and, facing them, collapsed. The miscreants who had killed him wanted to throw his body away but the Gurkhas took charge of the dead body and burned him.

Well past midnight an army special arrived heading towards Punjab. On reaching Ludhiana I wanted to disembark but dared not do so. The platform was over crowded with refugee families. People suffering from cholera and diarrhoea were vomiting. The next station was a flag station on the banks of river Sutlej. The train stopped there and the information was passed on that as railway track has been washed off due to very heavy rains, and the train could not go any further. Along with some passengers I also crossed the Sutlej Bridge on foot.

On reaching Phellaur I asked my father-in-law to arrange some conveyance for me to go to Ludhiana. This could only be provided only a week or ten days later, because the road was packed with fleeing multitudes. The only dry land was the road; the rest of the area was covered with knee deep water. People had taken shelter on tree tops and the road.

My father eventually reached Phellaur on Diwali day from Rawalpindi, Pakistan. It was a great relief to see him alive. He could hardly bring anything with him. After staying for a couple of days he left for Lucknow to get his name registered as an Army supply contractor. Before leaving he gave me a cheque for Rs. 5000/- drawn on a rural bank of Hoshiarpur. This cheque was in full and final settlement of the sale of my hotel business. When I presented the cheque to the bank, the Manager regretfully informed me that the bank had collapsed. On his advice I filed a suit in the local court and was successful in getting a decree. The Bank gave me whatever money was available in the account. This was a great financial blow.

I would like to draw your attention to one incident. A few kilometers short of Jullundur, there was a nallah passing through the area which smelt of putrefying flesh. I was told that on the bank of this small nallah a caravan of some hundred Muslim refugees had halted temporarily. One night the nallah was in spate and it damaged the railway bridge on it and washed off practically the whole refugee caravan.

Now law and order returned and on both sides life started to return to normalcy. Efforts to recover abducted women and children, on both sides of the sub-
continent on Governmental basis were on. People coming out from refugee camps gave accounts of atrocities which they had witnessed. Accounts of unparalleled bestiality were also narrated of young children, women and men being brutally tortured to death.

Refugees from Pakistan were required to submit their claims for the loss of their land and property left behind. In lieu, they were to be allotted land in Punjab. I had also submitted my claim of our agricultural land in Pakistan, but unfortunately nothing came out of this claim as our family had shifted to U.P. and we did not intimate the concerned the authorities of our move.

My father completed all his contractual obligations with the Rawalpindi Military Supply Depot and submitted his bills for payment. The bills were passed but to date we have not received any payment. It was delayed on the plea that payment could not be made till both countries came to some agreement. Thus the family was put to heavy financial loss.

During this era of turmoil and unrest all was not lost. There were cases where members of one community had saved the lives of members of other community.

In our house at Peshawar, Mr. Agarwal was occupying the first floor as a sub-tenant. He along with his family, consisting of his wife and six children, were given shelter by a Muslim neighbour. He managed to save the lives of about half a dozen people till the Army jawans had taken charge of Peshawar Cantonment and rescued them and made arrangements for their safe return to India. The light of humanity can never dwindle. This is the whole of the future.