APPENDIX 6

MANJIT KAUR MALHOTRA’S ACCOUNT

My father was from a place called Khanewal. He owned oil mills there. Once a year my mother used to take my sister and me to visit her mother and brother, Sir Bahadur Ujjal Singh, in Kasowal which is near Montgomery. I was about ten years old during those fateful August days and was holidaying in Kasowal with my uncle and granny. As the tension escalated my uncle’s Muslim friends advised him to at least send the family away even if he was determined to stay. Still he did not heed their warnings. When they became insistent in the face of rising violence, he immediately took out his guns and cleaned and oiled them, keeping them ready to use. He got all the household things packed, including all the expensive stuff in huge trunks. I can still picture the dust covers on the sofa and the priceless Persian carpets rolled up. He never imagined that he would not come back. He had just locked up the house thinking that the shift would be temporary.

At first we thought that we would go by train. Before embarking on the journey my granny opened the holy Granth that random and a verse sprang up before her eyes which translated read, “The running fire is put out. God is going to save you”. Taking inspiration from the verse she refused to go by train. It was just as well we didn’t get on that train for we later heard that everyone had been slaughtered.

We left a few days later. I vividly recall the double horse buggy we travelled in during the first lap of our journey. I was sitting in front with my older sister who was then twelve. My uncle was on a horse with his gun. A huge group of people (Hindus) followed us on foot. Slowly, more and more people joined us and a kafila (foot column) was formed. We camped in the open that night near a sugar cane field. People from the kafila lit fires, cooked food and offered it to us. We slept with our shoes on so that we could flee anytime there was danger.

The next morning someone warned us that a train was coming from India which would pose a danger to us. My mamaji was the first to spot it. I remember some men in uniform with red turbans looking out of the windows with guns aimed at us. My uncle, who was ahead, came running towards us screaming at us to lie down. We couldn’t understand what he was shouting when the train stopped and the uniformed men opened fire. A bullet went through my sister’s arm and one grazed my mother’s back. I started screaming at the sight of blood. My mamaji picked up my sister and hid in the sugarcane field. We too followed him there. My sister was screaming in agony, and telling my uncle to leave her there to die. She was also asking for water. A Muslim lady gave us water and a matka. The train finally moved.
and we continued with my injured sister and mother to Miachaun which is near Lahore.

My uncle telephoned his brother, Sir Shoba Singh, who was in Lahore. He came in a car escorted by an army convoy. There was a slight delay as the road was obstructed by a tree undoubtedly put there by arsonists. By now my sister had lost consciousness. My uncle went to a chemist and found out where the doctor lived. The doctor refused to come so my uncle threatened him with his gun and got him to attend to my sister. It was only in Miachaun that we managed to wash ourselves and change our clothes.

When my uncle, Sir Bahadur Singh, arrived we left the kafila and proceeded in a car escorted by the army towards Amritsar. Throughout the journey my grandmother kept my elder sister behind her legs on the floor of the car covered with her dupatta. She did this because my sister had attained puberty and could be abducted. They did not hide me as I was still young. At Amritsar we stayed at my uncle, Dr. Sohan Singh’s house. Both he and his wife were doctors. They treated my sister. Later on she underwent a series of operations. Even today her left arm is shorter than her right. However, our travails did not end. My elder brother was safe in Kasauli but there was no news of my father who was in Khanewal. Eventually, after a month, we found him in a refugee camp. His shoes were stolen and he had borrowed someone’s jutis. We got to know that his Muslim workers had turned hostile and an old Hindu man in the oil shop saved my father. We shifted to London after being reunited with him and then began the saga of rebuilding our lives all over again.

This forced move had a severe impact on me. I was so shocked and traumatized by the shooting that I did not speak for three months after the incident. Whenever I saw a policeman I would hide behind my mother. I would wake up screaming as I would get frequent nightmares. Even now when I narrate the incident after a span of over sixty years, these images come very clearly before my eyes.