APPENDIX 7

VIDYA RATTAN BHATIA’S ACCOUNT

Before I say anything about my experiences during the Partition I want to make one thing amply clear – Rahmat Ali, Jinnah, Gandhi, Nehru and the Hindus were responsible for the division of the country. Yes, I repeat, we Hindus were responsible. I do not have to go far to explain my point. It is made very clear through the example of my own family. My father was a railway official. After he was posted to Ferozepur the family settled there and that is where he died in 1935. I clearly remember that the localities were mixed and we had Hindus and Muslims living side by side. One Shaikh Mohammed-ud-din lived in our gully and he always stood by us in our joys and sorrows. At that time I was in class ten and the Shaikh would treat me as his son and would give me a father’s blessings. When his daughter’s wedding took place he made every effort to see that the Hindu’s sentiments were not hurt. You know Hindus, especially the women, would not touch food made by Muslims or dine at the same table. In order to look after his Hindu guests he went to a Hindu Bania and bought all the foodstuff, engaged Hindu labourers and halwais to cook and serve. He sent the food to all the Hindu houses but my mother, though she accepted the food in all graciousness, made the servants throw it all away. These everyday incidents created divisions among the people and emboldened Jinnah to ask for Partition. This was one reason for the irreconcilable differences between the Congress and the League. The only person whom I consider to be an exception during those troubled times was Maulana Azad.

I was in Lahore serving in Burma Shell when the Radcliffe Award was announced. My mother, brother and his family were in Ferozepur. I remember that the riots started taking place from 19 or 20 March 1947. Master Tara Singh, a former school teacher, was pressing his demands for a Sikhistan. The Muslim League was in the majority and was determined to keep the Punjab in Pakistan. Under the leadership of Master Tara Singh the sardars gathered outside the Assembly and started brandishing their swords and conducted a nara-bazi (shouting slogans) against the formation of Pakistan. Someone started hurling rag balls of fire lighted with kerosene in the air and cries of Allah-o-Akbar and HarHarMahadev(slogans) rent the air. From then on the Muslims started targeting the Sikhs as they were easily recognizable and many were killed. The exodus began after 3 June, 1947 when the news of the division came, followed by a more vicious round of rioting. The Hindus owned more property than the Muslims and were reluctant to leave. At first they only sent the women and children but were forced to follow them when the violence
escalated. They all left thinking they would come back when normalcy returned. However, they were mistaken.

During those tumultuous days my chacha’s (uncle’s) mother-in-law died. It was the beginning of August and I accompanied my chacha and chachito Dinga, a village near Gujrat in Pakistan at night. Riots had erupted there too. With the foolhardiness and bravado of youth I calmly boarded a train for Lahore after the ceremonies were over. My uncle and aunt had to stay back to settle some family matters. In that train a group of people started shouting Allah-o-Akbar and a Muslim attacked me with a knife. I was lucky that a Pathan was there to save me. When we reached Lahore I found that curfew was clamped there. It had become impossible to go home. That Pathan acted as my guardian to ensure that I reached there in safety. To my horror and consternation I found that my house and all the other houses in the gully were occupied by Muslim refugees from U.P., Bihar and Punjab. I saw that the new occupants had written their names in white chalk on my door, and also gave an address from Amritsar.

Since entry to my house was barred I had no choice but to go to my office. The Pathan ensured that I reached there in safely. Another colleague, one Mr. Bharadwaj, and a Hindu peon were also in the same predicament. The three of us were encamped there till 9 October, 1947. A Muslim colleague, Mohammed Rashid whose father owned a flour mill, would send us atta, vegetables and ghee to us and we would cook in the office. We were forced to stay on so that the company work would continue till such time as Muslim trainees from India took over from us.

During those days the premises were guarded by the Baluchi Regiment. In October the Gurkha Regiment from India replaced them and the Baluchis were sent back to their barracks. We saw the arrival of the Gurkhas from the office windows and were pleased. The new trainees also come with them. We realized that it was time for us to leave for India. I could not leave without paying one last visit to my house and get a few of my belongings from there. I persuaded one of the Gurkha soldiers to accompany me. When I reached my house I found that it was sectioned off between several families. A few Muslims, thirsting for blood, got to know that I was there. They raised their war cry, Allah-O-Akbar. I was so overcome by sentiment that I did not knew what to pick up – the furniture, the family photographs or my personal belongings. I had to make a hasty retreat. Eventually, in the heat of the moment, I picked up my grandmothers punkha (fan) and barely made it back to the office. My boss, Mr. Anderson chided me for being so foolhardy.

On 9 October, 1947 Mr. Holland personally drove us to the D.A.V. College as he did not trust the Muslim drivers. From Lahore we went to Amritsar escorted by the Gurkha Regiment. It was a distance of about 40 to 45 miles and we covered it in about two to three hours. In Amritsar there was no news of my chacha and chachi. I would go everyday to the station to search for them. One day curfew was declared around the station area. I was there at that time. With my own eyes I saw a train from Pakistan standing with the words “Amritsar se badla le leya” (we have taken revenge
on Amritsar). There were dead corpses in the compartments; I also witnessed the retaliation from the Indian side. A train load of dead was sent to Pakistan with the words “Pakistan aap kabadla Amritsar ne le leya.” (Amritsar has avenged herself on Pakistan).

I also made a round of all the refugee camps and eventually found my uncle and aunt there. From Amritsar I made my way to Delhi and settled there. Burma Shell retained me but all my property in Lahore was lost.