

A photograph of a man standing in front of a historic building. The man is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, dark trousers, and a red turban. He is standing on a paved surface. The building behind him has a large, arched doorway with a wooden frame. The wall to the left of the doorway is made of rough, reddish-brown brick. Above the doorway, there is a decorative archway. The upper part of the building features ornate carvings and dark wooden shutters. The title 'My Journey Home' is written in large, bold, red letters with a white outline, and 'Going Back to Lehnda Punjab' is written in smaller, white letters with a red outline below it.

My Journey Home

Going Back to Lehnda Punjab

Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia

My Journey Home:

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Baba Farid Book Foundation, Lahore

*Mahraja Ranjit Singh Punjabi Persion
Research Center Lahore*

Book Name: My Journey Hoe: Going to
Lehnda Punjab
Author by: Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia

Published by:

Baba Fareed Book Foundation
Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations
Maharaja Ranjit Singh Punjabi-Persian
Research Center
Indus Heritage Club

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Butalae Pind Da Mor

The Peacock of Butala Village

Butalae pind vich ik moor haa

There was a peacock in village of Butala

ایہہ کالا کلوتا بہوں ڈھیٹھا

Eh kaala kaluta bahu ttheeth haa

he was black, dark, and very stubborn.

بہتر سال اک دیوار تے ٹنگیا رہیا

Bahattar saal ek diwar tae tangiya reha

Stayed hanging on a wall for 72 years

اپنیاں نوں گھر بلاؤندا رہیا

Aapnian noh ghar bulanda reha

Beckoning his people to come home.

ਭਹਤਰ ਸਾਲ ਬਾਦ ਜਦੋਂ ਮੈਂ ਬੁਤਾਲੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਪਹੁੰਚਿਆ

بہتر سال بعد جدوں میں بوتالے پنڈ پہنچیا

Bahattar saal baad jadon mai Butalae pind paunchiya

When I went to Butala village 72 years later,

ਓਇਓ ਠੀਠ ਮੋਰ ਨੇ ਜੱਦੀ ਹਵੇਲੀ ਦਾ ਬੂਹਾ ਖੁਲਵਾਇਆ॥

اوہیوڈھیٹھ مور نے جدی حویلی دا بوہا کھلوايا

Oyeo theeth mor nai jaldi haveli da buha khulvaya

That same stubborn peacock helped open the door to my
ancestral home.

About the Authors and Translators

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INTRODUCTION

I was born in Chandigarh in Chardha (land of rising sun) Punjab when my father and several uncles in the Indian defense forces were at war with Pakistan in 1965.



Much of my childhood and formative years as a youth were spent also in the Chardha Punjab. It wasn't till we moved to Tarn Taran – a small town near the border between Chardha and Lehnda (land of setting sun) Punjab that I became interested in my family's heritage on the other side of the

border.

My paternal grandmother had told me her life story so many times but my favorite part for some reason was how my grandparents left their ancestral village Butala in Lehnda Punjab and came to Chardha Punjab in 1947. My grandmother must have told me this story a hundred times with details – sometimes thinking deeply trying to remember. In one of those



conversations, I just joked with her that if I could go back to our ancestral home in Butala, how would I recognize it. She remarked that it had a black peacock painted on the front of the haveli. She only mentioned it once but I remembered it for some reason.

I also fondly remember our family hunting trips to Dera Baba Nanak in early 1980s from where one could see Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur at a distance – yet forbidden – and hear the dismantling of the steel railway bridge on the Ravi river going from Chardha Punjab to Narowal in Lehnda Punjab. The loud dismantling of the bridge was a vivid and clear reminder of the separation between two parts of the same heart – divided by an arbitrary line drawn by colonial British rulers without regard for the future of the children of Punjab.

On one of our late night hunting trips to Dera Baba Nanak on the border, we were chasing a wildboar on a jeep with a search light. The wild boar had been injured with a gunshot so I along with two others got down from the jeep and started to chase the injured animal on foot. We fired a few more shots and by that time we heard some voices on the other side in the darkness. The voices were 20-30 feet or so from us. They warned us that we had entered the territory of Pakistan (Lehnda Punjab) but as Pakistani Rangers they told us that we were welcome to retrieve our



animal and return – so we did. We finally caught up with the wild board and dragged it back to our jeep from Lehnda Punjab to Chardha Punjab.

While staying in Tarn Taran, we watched Pakistan TV on a regular basis. My favorite show on the TV channel was “Waaris”. I admired the character of Chaudhary Hashmad Khan – in December 2019 when I visited Lehnda Punjab for the first time, I found out from my friend Jahandad Khan that his family had undergone circumstances similar to the real characters of the TV Show. The show's makers had even met his elders several times during its production. I also found out that Jahandad and my families had been enemies and fought battles against each other in early 1800s. Some of my ancestors are mentioned in the family records of the Tanoli family.

My father talked about our family being one of the largest landlords in Gujranwala district before 1947. He also talked about our family name Butalia – which is taken from the root Punjabi numeral Batali meaning 42. He claimed that our ancestors owned 42 jagirs in Lehnda Punjab before the partition but I viewed it simply as a family tale with a pinch of salt. My grandfather had passed away when my father was quite young. He respected one of my grandfather's first cousin Colonel (retired) Maheshinder Singh Butalia whom he referred to lovingly as Maheshi Chachaji. Maheshi Dadaji had actually visited our ancestral home in Butala in the 1970s. Whenever I visited him and his loving wife in Chandigarh or Dharampur, he would



talk fondly about my grandparents and our ancestral village. He told me that our home was in the village of Butala near a pond. More on how Maheshi Dadaji inspired me to dig deeper into my family's heritage is included later in this book.

Fast forward to 1990s – I was now a student at The Ohio State University in USA doing my doctoral studies. I had time to read – so I read nearly every old book published on Sikh history. While reading through these books, I found reference to my family name Butalia and village Butala in Gujranwala. This intrigued me further. One weekend while online perusing the collection of the British Library, I found a file in their archives with the name Butalia. I ordered a scanned copy of the original file. What I received was mind-blowing – it included a family tree till 1860s. It also had a complete list of jagirs held by the family during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – as I counted the number of jagirs listed in it, my heart skipped a beat when it totaled 42. My father and the family tale which I had mistakenly assumed to be gup (made up fiction) was indeed true. I had goosebumps and then went on to read every single edition of Punjab Chiefs by Lepel Griffin.

Finally in December 2019, I was able to visit Lehnda Punjab – a place I had read so much about that I could almost imagine I had visited it but in the 1800s as most



of the accounts that I had read about Lehnda Punjab were from about 200 years ago. During my visit, I kept a brief journal of where I went and what happened. I felt like a kid in a candy store – nearly every place I visited had a personal connection to me. It was not like I was a tourist - I was there to explore my roots and better understand a part of myself that I had been partitioned off from. However, this did not allow me to reflect on the trip as it transpired. On return to US, I made a few facebook posts and then published a 13 part series in the Bhulkeha newspaper – Lehnda Punjab’s only daily Punjabi newspaper in Shahmukhi. I am indebted to Dr. Mazhar Abbas and Professor Khizar Jawad for translating these articles from English to Shahmukhi Punjabi.

I close this introductory chapter with a fascinating account of the Butalia family documented in the 1892 book Ranjit Singh by Lepel Griffin:

“It was not well for a chief to make too ostentatious a display of his wealth. When the young chief of Batalah married his sister to Sirdar Sher Singh, the families spent two lakhs of rupees on the festivities, the like of which had never before been seen in the Gujranwala district. But when the Maharaja (Ranjit Singh) heard of it, and of the boasts of the girl’s mother that she had two parholas (large basket for storing grains) of rupees, he at once sent and said that a family which could spend so much on a marriage must be able to afford him a contribution of Rs. 50,000.”

CHAPTER 1

The Day My Grandparents Left Our Ancestral Home

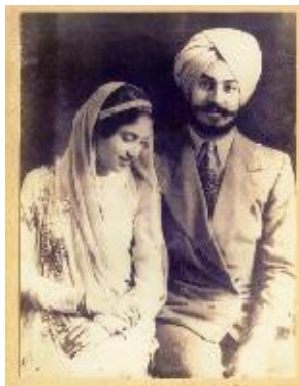


As a kid growing up in North India, I was thrilled whenever both my parents went out – the reason is that I would have the full attention of my frail and aging grandmother. She doted on me – I could do nothing wrong and my sister could do nothing right! I relished the freedom to do anything under my grandma’s watchful eyes. As I have grown up from being a kid to a man, what I fondly remember of her is not only her unconditional love for me but also the stories she told me. I share one such true story here – the day my grandparents left our ancestral village for good.

Some background first. By early 1800s, my ancestors had accumulated 42 jagirs (feudal land grants) – one of the largest landholders in Punjab, South Asia. “Batali” in Punjabi language means 42 and hence the family village was referred to from then on as Butala, now a small village situated about 15 miles west of present day Gujranwala in Pakistan. Our family name of “Botalia” or “Butalia” thus became common.

Then came August 15, 1947 – the partition of India and Pakistan. Despite Gandhi’s non-violence philosophy, it resulted in about 15 million people divided along religious identity lines crossing over to the other side with about half

arrived, the British officer in charge discovered that Ajit Singh had served in the army and took it upon himself to facilitate his family across the border. On the way from the camp to the border, a mob of Muslims stopped the vehicle and demanded that the family be handed over to them. Ajit Singh recognized some of the men in the mob and they decided instead to take the family to Lahore and provided them with shelter. What a change of heart – from mobsters to shelter providers. For several weeks they lived in the home of a Muslim family in Lahore, which provided them with clothing and food (including non-halal meat). They were dropped off at the border around late October 1947.



I still recollect the terse tone in which my grandmother related this incident to me many times in vivid details – sometimes pausing to think hard of what happened when. I once took the courage of asking her if she felt bitter by the betrayal of the young Muslim man who confronted them on the day they left the village. To my surprise, her answer was that many at that time were not even that lucky. She was thankful that the young man let them go even though they had to leave all their possessions. She was particularly grateful to the Muslim family that hid them in their homes despite serious consequences if discovered. As a kid, I remember her telling me that we as human beings are capable of immense good and evil – both at the same time. Now I better understand what she meant.

She never harbored ill-will towards the young man who dispossessed them as they left the ancestral village for good. She felt grateful that he let them go alive. This lesson



of gratitude even among such tragedies has been an inspiration for me.

This story was repeated to me so many times by my aging grandma as I listened to every detail that

sometimes I wonder if was there with them in this journey of hope and gratitude.

CHAPTER 2

From Lehnda Panjab to America



It was September 1947 – the Butala Sardars left their ancestral village Butala Sardar Jhanda Singh near Gujranwala never to return. My grandfather Capt. Aji Singh Butalia (retired) wore a round turban similar to a Muslim man, my grandmother (Sardarni Narinder Kaur Butalia) a burqa, holding their 3 month old son Col. Sarabjit Singh Butalia (retired) in her arms, put 2 year old Squadron Leader Narinderjit Singh Butalia (retired) on a donkey and the Butala Sardars left their ancestral village on foot for good - never to return again. My father Major. Karamjit Singh Butalia (retired), then a student at Aitchison Chief's College, Lahore had already been moved by the school to Chardha Panjab to stay with his maternal grandparents in Shimla.

My grandparents walked several days towards a refugee camp, near Gujranwala. When they arrived, the British officer in charge discovered that my grandfather had

served in the British Army and took it upon himself to facilitate his family across the border. On the way from the camp to the border, a mob of Muslims stopped the vehicle and demanded that the Sikh family be handed over to them. My grandfather recognized some of the men in the mob and they decided instead to take the family to Lahore to



stay with one of my grandfather's friend. What a change of heart – from mobsters to shelter providers.

For about a month they lived in the home of a Muslim friend in Lahore, who provided them with clothing and food (including non-halal meat). The neighbors began to suspect that a Sikh family might be hiding in the home of a Muslim. On Friday when my grandfather's friend went to mosque for prayers, the Imam pulled him aside and inquired about who was staying at his home. He replied that it was his brother and his family. The Imam then asked him to swear upon the Quran that it was his brother's family. This unknown friend of my grandfather swore upon the Quran that this was his brother's family. Reflecting on it today, either he truly looked at my grandfather as his brother or he made a false oath on the Quran to save his friend's family. I will leave it to the reader to make their own opinion but what is unmistakable is that if it had not been for this unknown friend of my grandfather, I might not even exist today. For every partition story of human failings of horror and savagery, there is an even more compelling human story of compassion, love, and friendship at great personal peril.

Meantime, my father who was then a teenager, was already in Shimla with his maternal grandparents along with two of his younger brothers (Advocate Manjit Singh Butalia and Daljit Singh Butalia) had given



up on his parents being alive. It was already late September and there had been no news from the family. So, in grief they organized the last religious rites for my grandparents and their youngest two children to bring closure to the apparent tragedy.

Around

October 1947, when matters had settled a bit, my grandfather's friend drove the family to the newly formed arbitrary partition line drawn by a



white man slicing the heart of Punjab right through the middle in one stroke. On arriving near Amritsar at a refugee camp, my grandmother asked to make a phone call to Shimla. When the phone rang in Shimla, my dad happened to pick up the phone. She

recognized her son's voice, as every mother does, and said that this was his mom calling. My father fainted – how is it possible that his parents who had died were alive again? Thus, my grandparents and their two younger sons were born again – given another chance to live despite as my grandmother put it - “losing our humanity” during those horrific times.

My grandparents were allocated a house in Faridkot, later joining the police force of Maharaja Harinder Singh of Faridkot. My grandfather died in 1955 in Ferozepur, and was succeeded by his five sons, Karamjit Singh Butalia, Daljit Singh Butalia, Manjit Singh Butalia, Narinderjit Singh Butalia, Sarabjit Singh Butalia and a daughter, Jasjit Kaur Butalia who had died earlier due to disease at a young age.

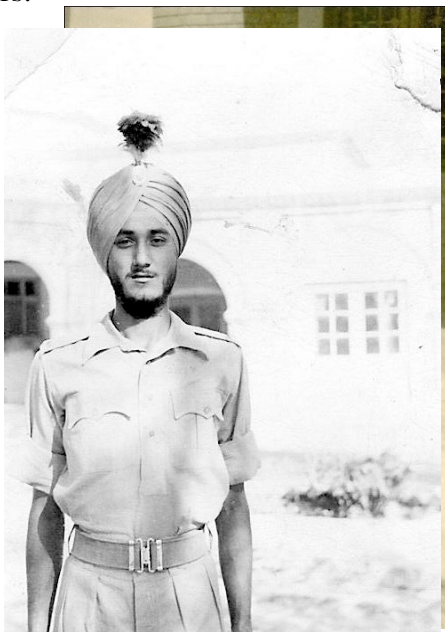
My grandmother took turns staying with each of her five sons. Two joined the army, one joined the air force, one became an attorney, and one stayed in Ferozepur. In the 1960s the family moved to Ferozepur and began living in the former home of Musa Khan at 5 The Mall, Ferozepur Cantt. My grandfather and Musa Khan were to buddies at IMA Dehradun and Musa Khan had attended the wedding of my grandparents. He later became the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army.

My father was a well-known shikari (hunter) from a young age and boasted of driving from Firozpur to Shimla as a 15 year old teenager. In 1963 he married my mom, Sardarni Tripat Kaur Sodhi born at Ram Gali 7 in Lahore and then joined the Territorial Army of India and was stationed in Ferozepur, Chandigarh, and Ambala and served in the army at the border during the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. During his tenure in the army, he was considered to be an avid hunter especially of partridges, wild boar, and deer. His friends fondly remember him as “yaaran da yaar” - best friend of friends.

As an army officer, my father was serving at the border during the 1965 Indo-Pak war while my mother was pregnant awaiting my arrival in this world. I was born October 13, 1965 and my father had to rush to Chandigarh on hearing the good news.

My Papa (as I called him lovingly) - an army officer and a survivor of the partition, held certain views about Muslims that I disagreed with. However, over time I realized that his life experiences had shaped his views and even if I disagreed with them, who was I to impose my views on him. Since then we maintained a healthy balance of tension on these matters.

We moved every 3-4 years because of my Papa's army posting. When he retired from the army, we moved to Tarn Taran – a small town in Chardha Punjab close to the Indo-Pak border. I attended Central School Amritsar. My sister and I went every weekday 30 kilometers by public bus to school and back. One of my best



friends in high school was Sher Ali Khan. I was the studious kid and he was the athletic kind but we were good friends. One day my most favorite teacher at school, pulled me aside into her office. She went on to say that Muslims were unclean and not trustworthy people and asked me not to be friends with “that Muslim boy”. This was my first real

exposure to Islamophobia and faith-based prejudice. That day I lost trust in my most favorite teacher at school.

I attended DAV College Chandigarh from 1981 to 1983 and then joined Punjab Engineering College, Chandigarh (which grew out of now University of Engineering and Technology at Lahore and before 1947 was the MacLagan Engineering College since 1923). I graduated in 1987 with an undergraduate degree in civil engineering and joined the Indian Army for 2 weeks – I quit as soon as I found out that I was being brainwashed by my officers (even though I was attending IMA Dehradun that my grandfather attended in early 1930s). I then joined Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and got a master's degree in Civil Engineering in 1989. After a short stint at National Thermal Power Corporation in Delhi, I went to the United States to pursue doctoral studies in civil engineering.

In 1989, I came to the United States to pursue my PhD degree at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. I was at least an ocean and continent away from my parents and family. As I began my academic career in the United States, the first question I asked myself was, “Do I even want to continue being religious?” After significant introspection, the answer became clear: yes, I wanted to be religious. This was followed by another question: “What religious tradition should I follow?”

I approached a local member of the Catholic clergy near the university campus and asked for his advice on what religious path to consider pursuing. His response surprised me. He asked me to look deeply into the faith I had grown up in and asked me to come back to him after giving my faith one more chance. But I had to promise to him that I would study my faith deeply and sincerely. As you may have guessed by now, I never went back to that priest. But I am indebted to him for his advice. Here was someone from another religious tradition that helped me to grow in my own religious tradition. His advice on

spirituality transcended the boundaries of religion. This person of faith did not see the need to convert me and made me grow from simply “being a Sikh” to “becoming a Sikh.”

My father suddenly died in December 2008. I flew back for his funeral from US to India. After his funeral rites, I visited one of his aging uncle, Colonel Maheshinder Singh Butalia (retired), who lived in Dharampur – a small town on the way from Chandigarh to Shimla. As we were about to leave, he put into my hand an old photo. He explained to me that this was an original 1880s photo of my grandfather's grandfather (Partab Singh Butalia, 1861-1905) and his father (Godham Singh Butalia, 1837-1905). He also gave me family history documents from Lepel Griffin's 1910 book titled “The Punjab Chiefs.” Were it not for Maheshi Chachaji (as my Dad would lovingly call him), I would not have undertaken the journey into my family roots in Lehnda Punjab. The original sepia photo from 1880s of my ancestors sits in my formal family room at our home in Columbus, Ohio.





I now began reading history books – the more I read the more I discovered about my ancestors. I found that in the early days of Islamic rule in India, prior to the arrival of Mughals, my ancestor Rai Bhag Mal of Multan visited Pak Pattan in 1256 to obtain the blessings of Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar by preparing langar (which means free public kitchen in Persian). He was blessed by Baba Farid with the title of ‘Bhandari’ or ‘Keeper of Storehouse’. This title of “Bhandari” has been with the family since then and is documented in early records of the family, especially during the early reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The family resided at Kunjah and is also referred to as “Kunjiah” in early records of the Khalsa Darbar. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the family accumulated 42 jagirs (list of these jagirs is available in British Library). “Batali” in Punjabi language means 42 and hence the family village was referred to in the late reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as Butala, now a small village situated about twenty five kilometers west of present day Gujranwala, Pakistan. The family name of “Botalia” or “Butalia” thus became common.

We as humans long to discover and own our roots. Who were our ancestors, where did they live, what did they

do? As I wrestled with these questions, my longing to visit the land of my ancestors in Lehnda Punjab kept growing deeper and deeper. The break came through facebook – one day as I googled the village name Butala, a couple of folks who listed the village as their hometown popped up. There was no stopping then – in the middle of the night, I would be texting them, looking at photos of havelis in the village that my grandparents left for ever, and photos of the samadh (memorial) of Sardar Ganda Singh Butalia, my ancestor who was martyred on December 22, 1845 at the Battle of Ferozeshah - while defending the Lahore Darbar against the invasion by the British Army with help of Cis-Sutlej Sikh kingdoms.

Finally, my dream of going home to Lehnda Punjab was fulfilled in 2019

CHAPTER 3

Welcome to Lehnda Punjab



Imagine

Imagine the joy of visiting the shrine of Baba Farid in Pakpattan - where your ancestors served Baba Farid more than 750 years ago, imagine the ecstatic feeling of stepping foot on the land of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib – where he was born and passed away, imagine visiting the Gurdwara in Lahore’s Chuna Mandi - where Siri Guru Ram Das Sahib was born, imagine praying at the Gurdwara - where Siri Guru Arjan Sahib was martyred, imagine the goosebumps when visiting Gurdwara Shaheed Singh Singhnian near Lahore railway station – where Sikh mothers were garlanded by Mir Mannu with the decapitated bodies of their own children.

Imagine walking the Lahore Fort – where your ancestors served about 200 years ago in the army of the Lion of Punjab, imagine discovering your maternal ancestral home late at night in galis (streets) of Lahore – to see your maternal grandfather’s name outside the house waiting for

someone to come reclaim its identity, imagine visiting Aitchison College in Lahore – where your father, grandfather, and great-grandfather studied, and imagine the circle of life that leads you back to your ancestral home through which your paternal grandparents walked out in 1947 never to return and you kiss the door walking back inside as a way to honor the promise of goodness of humanity.

The list goes on – but you get the point. It was a roller coaster of sad, poignant, and moments of hope and loving kindness.

Excitement and Fear

It was early December 2019. I had booked my airline tickets to fly from America to Lehnda Punjab – a land I had read so much about in history books that I almost felt I knew it. The excitement of visiting the land of the Sikh Gurus and my ancestors was breathtaking. I have never felt such emotions before. I was excited and scared at the same time. Excited for going back to my roots but scared because while growing up in India I had been brainwashed with the patriotism of hate.

As I took the final stretch of the flight from Turkey to Lahore, I reflected on how I had been brought up. I was born in October 1965 in Chardha Punjab when my father and several of my uncles who were in the Indian armed forces were at war with Pakistan. I grew up being told that Pakistanis were evil – no exceptions, and with prejudiced stereotypes that Muslims were unclean. I now realize that I was being indoctrinated in the patriotism of hate. Patriotism of hate is love of your country based on hate of another

country – in this case Pakistan. The Islamaphobic comments by family and friends were casual – usually said with humor to rub it in. I traced most of these prejudiced feelings to the bloody 1947 partition of Punjab by the British Empire, which drew an arbitrary line through the heart of Punjab dividing people who had lived together for thousands of years. The presence of this physical border for over 7 decades had now been etched as a line of separation in the hearts of the people on both sides of the border.

During my flight, my companions in the aircraft seats next to me were two young Pakistani boys who were excited to go home – I soon realized that I was also feeling like a young boy eagerly waiting to go home – but for the first time. As the aircraft was about to land, I said the Sikh Ardaas (supplication) and at the end I burst into tears. We had finally landed in the city of Uchrae Burj Lahore Dae (high are the citadels of Lahore). Those were tears of joy of reconnecting with my past but also tears of pain that so many of us in Chardha and Lehnda Punjab keep buried deep in our hearts – which can result in prejudice for those on the other side of the border.

As I moved through Allama Iqbal International Airport, it was clear to me that I was more than welcome here. As I went past the immigration desk to get my luggage, a line of luggage carts was being pushed ahead of me. As soon as the person pushing the trolleys saw me, he froze and stopped the carts and said loudly – welcome Sardarji to your land, you are like our brother. Never have I ever received such a warm welcome anywhere in the world even though I have travelled extensively across the world.

My Re-Birth

Avari Hotel had sent a taxi to pick me up and soon I was in the taxi on my way to the hotel. The taxi driver who picked me up asked if this was my first visit to Lahore. As soon as I said yes he quipped, “jinae Lahore ni vaikhya o jamia hi nahi” (he who has not seen Lahore, has not even been born). At that moment I knew I had been re-born!

It was about 5 am in the morning. We drove through the city to avoid the cantonment area. My taxi driver pointed out the former Sikh neighborhoods on the way. Suddenly we crossed a canal and there lay a wide open empty road lit at night – no one had to tell me that this was indeed Mall Road. As we travelled along Mall Road towards my hotel, I glanced to my right and saw the board of Aitchison College. My heart melted – I had just landed in Lahore a few hours ago and here is the school at which my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had studied! The irony was not lost on me that had it not been for the partition, I would also have most probably attended Aitchison College.



Settling In



The hospitality of Avari hotel is par excellence – I was received like a prince and settled into my suite overlooking the manicured front lawn of the hotel. By now it was breakfast time. As I went for the breakfast buffet, I ordered two aloo parnothas (flat bread stuffed with spicy potatoes) – they were fresh, hot, steaming, and delicious. And of course, as a Punjabi, I had to get a maalish (massage). Having booked my hotel massage for the afternoon, I asked the hotel staff to put a bench and table for me outside in the winter sun. And when I got there, there was a traditional charpoy (Punjabi bed) laid out next to the bench and table. Who needed the bench and table now? I laid down in the winter sun and soaked the warmth. I tried to sleep but couldn't. I then realized that I was too excited to sleep. Suddenly I was awoken by the sounds of loudspeakers – it was time for one of the five daily prayers offered by faithful Muslims. The sound was so pleasant and soothing that it put me into a moment of beauty nap. The professional massage was done by a Christian woman who works at the hotel - the perfect activity after a flight halfway across the globe. We talked about our children and what it means to be a religious minority in USA and Pakistan.

Justice and Qawwalis



My friend Jahandad Khan had arranged a special evening surprise for me. In the evening, he swooped me up from the hotel and drove me to the outskirts of Lahore showing me the neighborhood where Babae Nanki (sister of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib) was born. We then arrived in the dark at a haveli called Harsukh (Peace for all) for a surprise gathering at the home of a Mr. Jawwad Khawaja.



The surprise - Mehboob Fareedi, qawwals from Baba Farid's shrine (Pakpattan) were performing at Harsukh! It was breathtaking especially since my ancestors had served Bhandara for 2 years at Pakpattan while Baba Farid was

Khawaja attended Aitchison College (like my ancestors) and was a 1975 law graduate of University of California, Berkley in USA and has been known as a lifelong man of integrity and justice. I also found out that Begum Bina Jawwad (his wife) and him run a school for local children in their haveli aptly called – Harsukh!

Returning to my room and hitting the bed, it didn't take me long to go to sleep. The smell of the fresh rose by the bed and the excitement of soaked white peeled almonds by my bedside for the morning reminded me of my carefree childhood days when my mother used to soak almonds for me every night. I indeed felt at home and welcomed.

CHAPTER 4

High are the Citadels of Lahore



This second day, I was up early due to jetlag. And of course, after eating aloo paronhas (flat bread stuffed with spicy potatoes), I was ready to see the old city in which my ancestors grew up in and I had dreamed of visiting all of my life. My dreams indeed had come true. Little did I know that by the end of the day, I would be roaming Ram Gali #7 to look for my maternal ancestral home.

A Fort Like No Other Fort



Imagine visiting a fort where your ancestors served from early 1800s to 1849 for the Lahore Darbar under Sher-e-Panjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Arriving at Lahore Fort was breathtaking. Parking is usually done outside and far away from the Fort entrance. But as soon as the gate guard saw me sitting in the front seat of the car, he flung open the entry door as if he was opening his heart to welcome me. Once parked inside the fort, I was suddenly now walking in Hazuri Bagh – built in 1815 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to commemorate acquiring of Kohinoor diamond. The Hazuri Bagh Baradari (12 doors) is made of white marble and was a 2 story structure but the top story collapsed a long time ago just like the Lahore Darbar.

Standing majestically on one side of Hazuri Bagh was the grand Alamgiri Gate (built in 1674 by Emperor Aurangzeb) and on the other side was the grander Badshahi mosque built in 1671 by Emperor Aurangzeb. I was literally walking on history. As I entered Badshahi mosque after removing shoes, I felt I had visited this mosque before – then I realized how much Badshahi mosque had common with Jama mosque in Delhi that I had visited last year. Both made of red sandstone and onion domes. I then realized that Badshahi mosque had been modelled after Jama mosque of Delhi built by Emperor Shah Jahan in 1650s.



Two real sisters but so apart in a partitioned subcontinent.

Suddenly, I caught glimpse of a small building to left of the entrance to Badshahi mosque. I was delighted to find out that it was the tomb of Allama Iqbal – the spiritual father of Pakistan. I had been a fan of his poetry so this took me by surprise. I reminisced his poem titled *Said the Coal to a Diamond* and remembered these lines: “Do you know my life's gist? A condensed sliver of smoke, transformed into a single spark, in feature and nature star-like, your every facet a splendor, light of the king's eye, the dagger's jewel. Friend, be wise, the diamond replied, assume a bezel's dignity! Loam strives to harden to fill my bosom with radiance. Burn because you are soft. Banish fear and grief. Be hard as stone, be a diamond.”

Inside of Lahore fort, I visited the various quarters built by various Emperors and Kings but my heart was mesmerized with the Athdhara (8 door building) where Sher-e-Punjab held court. This building has been immortalized in the Sikh imagination by a painting by August Schoeff from 1840s that now lies within the walls of this majestic fort. I imagined the splendor of this court at which my ancestors sat on but I was not brave enough to jump on the Athdhara just yet – it would have to wait till when I come back a few days later to the Lahore Fort for an after dark visit!



Majesty of the Sikh Darbar



It was then that I noticed a haveli with a museum below it – Rani Jindan Haveli. The downstairs museum showcased weapons from the Sikh Darbar, the armor of Maharaja Sher Singh (who my ancestor Ganda Singh Butalia tried to save when he was murdered in Lahore), Sikh musical instruments from early 1800s, and of course everyone's favorite Laila – the favorite horse of Maharaja Ranjit Singh preserved in taxidermy. What was to come next was something I was not ready for. As I walked upstairs, the large room was filled with the Princess Bamba collection. My favorite was the huge painting *The Sikh Court at Lahore* by August Schoefft, circa 1840s – even though the painter reduced the Athdhara (8 door pavilion) to a Panjdharma (5 door pavilion) in his imagination, the splendor of this original painting in the Sikh psyche is etched forever and here I was standing in front of it covering one wall of a large room from top to bottom – wow!

The Sheesh Mahal (palace of mirrors) built by Emperor Shah Jahan in 1630s and the Naulakha (Nine lakh rupees) pavilion were grand buildings but my heart had already been stolen by the simple and elegant Athdhara. To



the right of the Sheesh Mahal was a tall room – which was the personal Gurdwara of Sher-e-Panjab. The view from the Naulakha of the majestic Badshahi mosque and city of Lahore is breathtaking. I picked out a white Sikh-like building to its right. I had no idea then that it was the samadh of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. I dreamed of the fascinating view of Lahore from the Gurdwara room but would have to return later one evening for such a delight.

We then descended through the Haathipaer – the royal path taken by royalty on elephants to their private quarters. This is the way all who conquered the Lahore fort entered, I could almost hear the footsteps of the British soldiers that stormed in through this path to end the Lahore Darbar once and for all.



Shaheedan-dae-Sartaj

As we exited the Lahore fort, I saw a small Sikh building to the left. I recognized it immediately – it was Gurdwara Dera Sahib where Siri Guru Arjan Sahib, 5th Sikh Guru Sahib, was tortured and martyred by throwing him into the river Ravi on May 30, 1606. But there was no Ravi here now. Buddha Ravi – a tributary of Ravi river flowed by the fort walls then but since has dried up. The current Gurdwara building was constructed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A kar sewa Baba is now building an ugly building around the original Gurdwara. A touching visit



- taking vaak here of Siri Guru Granth Sahib parkaash was mesmerizing! After that I sat alone in the small room for 15 minutes. Sitting there I thought of Mian Mir who tried to intervene but was asked by Guru Sahib to accept the will of God. Then it dawned on me that this was the place and event which led Sikhs to bear arms and fight for the weak and the oppressed from then on to now. No feelings can describe what I felt – so I won't describe them here.

Across from the small Shaheedi Gurdwara of the Fifth



Guru was a large Gurdwara like building. I was told that it was not a Gurdwara but samadh of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was quite surprising to me that the descendants of Maharaja Ranjit Singh would build a monument to him that was grander than that of the Shaheedan-dae-Sartaj – Siri Guru Arjan Sahib. After langar as weheaded out, I saw this enormous old gate to the Lahore Fort behind me – this was the infamous Roshnai Gate where Prince Naunihal Singh was murdered in 1840 as he returned from the funeral of his father. The intrigues of the Lahore Darbar were indeed scandalous...

The Gora Kabristan



By now it was late afternoon. My feet were more tired than the excitement so we ended up at the Gora Kabristan. Here in a Christian cemetery lay Princess Bamba – one of the last surviving members of the family that had ruled the Sikh Empire in Punjab. She died without a child on March 10, 1957 in Lahore and was buried here. She was the daughter of Maharaja Dhuleep Singh and the granddaughter of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. I had seen her collection of priceless artifacts from the time of the Lahore Darbar earlier today on display at the Lahore Fort's Princess Bamba Collection Museum.

The Line that Divides Us



After some rest, I set out to visit Wagah border. It was a short ride from Lahore. I remembered last time when I visited the same place but from the other side when I was hounded and jeered for not participating in patriotism of hate being displayed on the other side. Thousands were walking and biking towards the border as if there was a mela (village fair) there. I was welcomed with open arms and not even in China was I ever asked for so many selfies as that at Wagah Border on this day. As we watched the retreat ceremony of lowering of the flags of Pakistan and India, it was clear to me that an arbitrary line of the border had divided the heart of Punjab for too long – 72 years too long! There are decent people on both sides and this line continues to divide the common heritage of Chardha and Lehnda Punjab. I then pledged not to use East or West



Punjab or Indian or Pakistani Punjab but talk about Chardha and Lehnda Punjab – one Punjab whose heartbeat still lives in the hearts of mutual respect on both sides of the border.

The Light Shines through Darkness



By the time I returned to my hotel, it was late evening. After relaxing a bit, I decided to go out for dinner. I checked with my friend Jahandad Khan and he advised me not to go to Gawalmandi. But I decided to go anyway and chose not to tell him because he would get worried for me. I took an Uber to Gawalmandi – the Uber driver refused payment saying – you are our brother. Both

places I ate at - Billa Pehalwan and Yusaf Faluda fed me for free!!! Nowhere else in the world has it happened to me.

By now it was about 9pm. As I was eating dinner, I google mapped the street of my maternal ancestral home - it was only a 10 minute walk! So, I walked alone in the dark with the stroll of a cautious adventurer. When I got to Ram Gali number 7 near Dalgiran Chownk, it was 10 pm already. Folks I talked with there knew nothing of any old Sikh homes on the street. So, I called an Uber to return to hotel. Then 2 high school boys on a motorcycle came speeding to me saying we know of 2 Sikhhomes on the street. So i jumped between the two boys on the motorcycle



and off we went back. Uber could wait - this was too important. They parked in front of an abandoned house on Ram Gali number 7 and asked me to look at a name plaque on the top of the front door. I remember cleaning the red sandstone plaque with my bare hands till I read my maternal grandfather's name etched on it: *Sodhi Dalip Singh son of Sodhi Kashmira Singh, July 1933*. I was ecstatic and tears rolled down my eyes. By then half the neighborhood was on the street shouting: Sardarji found his Nanaji's house (home of maternal grandfather) and everyone hugged me in joy. It reminded them of the homes they left forever in Chardha Punjab in 1947 during the bloody partition. One lady who came out was in tears. When I asked her what happened, she replied: I wish I



could go to Amritsar to see my parent's home. The pain and joy of the partition continues to live within us. The more we suppress it, the more it erupts.

Closing

That night as I lay in bed, I messaged all my relatives about how I found my maternal ancestral home at night walking all by myself with help of two teenagers who were probably too young to drive a motorcycle. They swooped me up and got me to that red sandstone plaque that waited for 72 years for someone to come claim it as its own.

I thought of my visit to Wagah border earlier this evening and how physically close the twin cities of Amritsar and Lahore were, yet so far apart emotionally. The poem below is dedicated to these twin sister cities.



Jurva Bhaina ***Twin Sisters***

Ambarsar sifti da ghar
Amritsar the home of praise

atae uchae burj Lahore di
and the tall towers of Lahore,

do jurva behna noh mai sawal puchia
the twin sister were asked a question by me,

*tusan ek doojae toh kivain vicharian
how did the two of you get separated from
each other?*

*jawab milya bahattar saal di judae vich
asan rulia
Answer came that we are ruined by 72 years
of separation,*

*Gorian nai saade vichkar ik lain kich diti
the white men drew a line between us.*

*sarhad da saano koi fikr nahi
We are not worried about the border,*

*dilan di lain khatm hon dian udeekan nai
we wait for the line in our hearts to be
erased.*

CHAPTER 5

Jewels of Lahore



This third day, I was up early again as I had a long list of places to visit. Today's journey will take me from the streets of Lahore to the former Heera Mandi – now Food Street for a breathtaking view of Lahore by the night.

The Cannon That Changed History

We arrived at the Lahore Museum at opening time but forgot that was the day when the museum was closed. So, we strolled across the museum to the middle of Mall Road to a simple looking cannon. But as soon as I saw it, I knew this was no ordinary cannon – it was the world-famous Zamzama (non-stop) or Bhangi Tope (Cannon)! It was built in 1756 in Lahore by Ahmad Shah Durrani and then used by Bhangi Sardars as well as Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It now stands

proudly outside the Lahore Museum. It is loved by Lahoris as it is said that each home of



Lahore gave one metal utensil in 1750s for its casting. It also came to be known as Kim's Gun after Rudyard Kipling in whose childhood memoirs it is frequently mentioned. History and Punjab would have been very different today if it weren't for this famous cannon. And here lay one of the most important artifacts of our history proudly out in the open in the middle of Mall Road open to rain and sunshine. To me the Bhangi or Zamzama cannon signifies the determination of the sons and daughters of Punjab to secure their own future.

The Garden of Paradise



We then drove across Lahore to a garden with a modest entrance but as soon as we entered it – wow – it was huge and beautiful. We were now at Shalimar Gardens. Built in 1641 by Emperor Shah Jahan (after the famous Shalimar Gardens in Kashmir), this garden was fed by a 100 mile long canal from Madhopur (in Chardha Panjab) to Lahore (in Lehnda Panjab) - built just for this one garden of the Emperor. The 3 terrace garden is built as a Persian paradise garden. The uppermost terrace of the gardens is named Bagh-e-Farah Baksh, literally meaning Bestower of Pleasure. The second and third terraces are jointly known as the Bagh-e-Faiz Baksh, meaning Bestower of Goodness. The first and third terraces are both shaped as squares,

while the second terrace is a narrow rectangle. My only regret was that the fountains were not on that day – I will have to come back one day again to see it in its full glory. I could not imagine what this garden would have looked like during the time of the three-day Mela Chirangan (Festival of Lamps) that was held here till the 1960s.

Supreme Sacrifices

Next we headed past the Lahore Railway Station (where my maternal grandfather served as Station Master till 1946) and Patiala house into a street of foundry metal shops. Suddenly a Gurdwara building popped out of nowhere to my right side. I had no idea of this Gurdwara but when I read the sign on the Gurdwara my heart skipped a beat. This was Gurdwara Shahidganj Singh Singhnian – a painful reminder of the sacrifices made by Sikh mothers in the 18th century. This Gurdwara marks the painful spot opposite to Lahore



Railway station where Mir Mannu with help of Hill Rajas killed about 250,000 Sikhs from 1748 to 1753. Sikh babies were thrown in the air and caught by spear and then the Sikh mothers were garlanded with a necklace of the dead body parts of their children... The well in which he threw the dead bodies of children is preserved as well as the dungeon where he made the Sikh women grind flour. This emotionally was the most difficult part of the trip. I had tears in my eyes as I prayed alone in the dungeon and said Ardaas for all those who suffered and perished here. A

price of 10 rupees was put on the live head of a Sikh and the Hill Rajas brought thousands of Sikhs from the hills to Mir Mannu for rewards. And thus this saying became common among Sikhs



then: Mir Mannu saadi datri, asin mannu dey soye, Jyon sano kap da, asin dunay teenay hove" (Mir Mannu is our sickle and we are his grass, the more he clips us the more we grow double and triple fold)

At a stone's throw is another reminder of the supreme sacrifices by Sikhs. This is Gurdwara Shaheedganj. This Gurdwara in Naulakha bazaar of Lahore marks the place where Bhai Taru Singh was scalped alive at age of 25 in June 1745 by Zakariya Khan, the then Governor of Punjab, at the urging of Mahant Niranjanian. He died several weeks after the torturous act. This is a small one room Gurdwara

but not functional now in the sense that there is no Siri Guru Granth Sahib placed here anymore. As Sikhs, we



remember Bhai Taru Singh's martyrdom daily when doing Ardaas (supplication) as "jina singh singhnia nae... khopria lohaian (the Sikhs who ... were scalped alive). The past is not lost - it is connected to our present right before our eyes... I felt a shiver go down my spine as I sat inside this small one room Gurdwara and recited a prayer of peace and



re-committed myself to stand up for the weak and the oppressed.

Jewels from Delhi Gate to Chuna Mandi

Located just inside Delhi Gate of the Walled City of Lahore is the Shahi Hamam (Royal Bathhouse). It was built in 1635 by Emperor Shah Jahan and has recently been renovated by the Agha Khan Trust. As I walked inside, I could even look at the excavations of the trenches that carried hot water underground. One thing that struck me here were the frescos of angels carrying food items as gifts painted on the walls of the building. This was fascinating to me because I had never before seen human imagery in a historically Islamic monument.

A few minutes' walk along Dabbi bazar is the grand Wazir Khan Mosque. Considered to be the most ornate Mughal era mosque, it was built by Emperor Shah Jahan in 1630s. The mosque combines Mughal and Punjabi art. This Wazir Khan was Shah Jahan's Chief Physician and not the ruthless Wazir Khan, the 1700s Governor of Sirhind. On climbing up the stairs of one of the towers of the mosque, I was out of breath but the view from top of the Walled City of Lahore was breathtaking.





Strolling along to Chuna Mandi, we came upon an important Sikh shrine. Gurdwara Janamasthan Chauthi Patshahi marks the birthplace of 4th Sikh Guru, Siri Guru Ramdas Sahib, born here in 1534. A beautiful, simple, and elegant Gurdwara Sahib. I had the opportunity to read from Siri Guru Granth Sahib here.

The Grand Sikh-Era Haveli



After a brief break, I was now at Haveli (large mansion) that looked like a school. This was Haveli Naunihal Singh located near Mori Gate inside Walled City of Lahore. This magnificent haveli was built in late 1830s by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for his eldest and most favorite grandson then Prince Naunihal Singh as his residence. After the death of Maharaja Naunihal Singh, his mother Maharani Chand Kaur was murdered at this haveli by her servants at direction of Dhian Singh, who killed her on 11 June 1842 by smashing her head here. This haveli is considered to be one of the finest examples of Sikh architecture in Lahore and is the only Sikh-era haveli in



South Asia that preserves its original ornamentation and architecture. The building is now used as a school. However, the top floor houses the Rang Mahal (Palace of Colors) which has multi-faith painting from 1830s still adorning its crumbling walls.

A Priceless View

After a break at the hotel and some rest, we headed to Heera Mandi at sunset. I was a bit apprehensive because I had heard of the infamous Heera Mandi – the red light area of Lahore. It was quite a relief when my friend conveyed to me that it was no more the street of its reputation but was now a Food Street. As we walked towards the street, lights of every color shined brightly on the old buildings from the 1800s. I could almost hear the ghosts of the dancing girls even though there were none. We took an elevator to the top floor of the restaurant and lo and behold the entire Lahore Fort lit by floodlight lay in front of us. The subtly





lighted Badshahi mosque was my favorite along with the brightly lit white memorial to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the background. We dined on the rooftop under the stars with live ghazals taking in the majestic night views of Lahore Fort – where my ancestors lived and served for generations in early 1800s.

Closing

As I reflect on that day, it became clear to me that Lahore was a city of immeasurable jewels of history. The bricks of Lahore have seen immense prosperity and bloodshed. Yet these crumbling bricks continue to stand as if they were giving a lesson to us humans to stand tall during times of joy and adversity.

I went to bed late that night but not before I wrote the below poem honoring this historic city whose bricks still speak to us if we are willing to listen.

Lahore Dian Ittan Bricks of Lahore

lahore shahir diian ittan noh pucho
Ask the bricks of city of Lahore,

tusi keedi udeekan vich baithiyan ho
who are you waiting for?

jawab milya kee akhda hai mundiya
Answer came: what are you asking O young man,

ajnabi dian hokae apnae dian udeekan nai.
belonging to strangers, we wait for our own.

CHAPTER 6

Finding Anarkali



This fourth day in Lahore was a dream come true – visiting Lahore Museum’s priceless collection to the tomb of Anarkali, to where my ancestor served as Chief Justice of Lahore in 1849, to the school attended by my father, grand-father, and great-grandfather, as well the place where my ancestor Sardar Ganda Singh Butalia was injured while unsuccessfully defending Maharaja Sher Singh in 1843, and of course no visit to Lahore is complete without visiting the famous Anarkali Bazar.

A Priceless Collection

I slept in this morning but by the time the Lahore Museum flung open its doors, I was there. The Museum was built in 1894 and is not only one of the major museums of South Asia but also the top museum of Chardha and Lehnda Punjab combined. The majestic sandstone red building was designed by renowned architect Sir Ganga Ram – a son of Lahore. The Museum brings to life the rich Indus Valley, Greek, Buddhist, Islamic, Sikh, and British history of Punjab along with the freedom movement for Pakistan.



In the Sikh gallery there were several items from the time of Sher-E-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh including paintings, furniture, woodwork, dresses, and coins. What caught my attention was an early 1800s painting of Maharaja Ranjit Singh riding his favorite horse Laila. It is said that on special occasions the white horse was dyed in henna. As I wandered the Sikh gallery I wondered how exotic Laila would be in henna glory.

A Sikh cannon from the 1800s lies in the arms and ammunition gallery. Its inscriptions carved in brass claim ownership of the Nakai family of Sikh times. Several other Sikh cannons from 1849 are also on display at the entrance of the museum.

The museum has a very extensive and large Buddhist collection. I had known that its collection of Gandhara period was the best in the world but what now stood before me was the Fasting Buddha – one of the most prized possession of the museum. It is the only Fasting Buddha of Gandhara period anywhere in the world. A large stone carved





Stupa in the middle of the Buddhist gallery added to its grandeur.

What surprised me the most was that as one enters the museum, one sees a temple at the other end of the long hallway. This is a re-assembled Jain Temple from Gujranwala. Before 1947, Gujranwala was a well-known and influential center for Jains. Now here preserved in the halls of this museum was the actual temple.

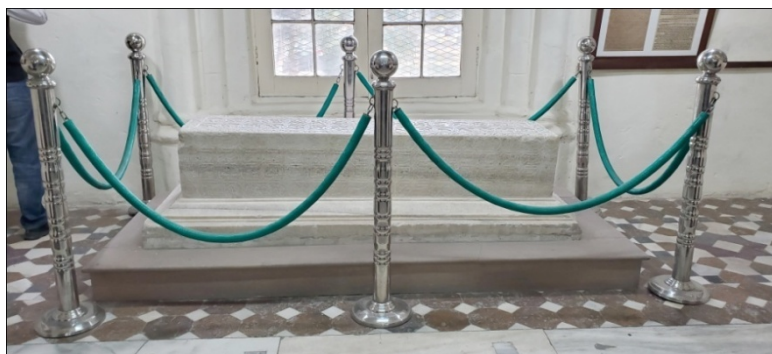


I came to the museum thinking it would focus primarily on Islamic art but came away thrilled that not only did it include Islamic art but also from other faith traditions to make it a multi-faith testament of the Land of the Five Rivers.

The Mystical Anarkali



Heading out from the Museum, I now headed to the famous Anarkali Tomb - one of the earliest Mughal tombs still in existence and considered to be one of the most significant buildings of the early Mughal period. After clearing security, we entered a lavish garden with several white buildings. Right in front was this octagonal tomb built in late 1500s by Emperor Jahangir in memory of his beloved Anarkali. The tomb of the unfortunate Anarkali has been used as a residence by Maharaja Kharak Singh and then by French General Jean-Baptiste Ventura, and then as a Church in 1851. I was surprised to see her grave at one end of the building. The British removed her grave from the center of the tomb when they converted it into an Anglican Church and when the Church use ended, her grave was



moved to the altar of her tomb at one side – poor lady could not find rest even in her grave.



Today Anarkali Tomb serves as the offices of the Punjab Archives with invaluable collection of Punjab and Mughal history. What interested me the most was that I had read somewhere that one of the priceless collection within its white tall walls was the Khalsa Darbar records of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time. Imagine walking up to the first

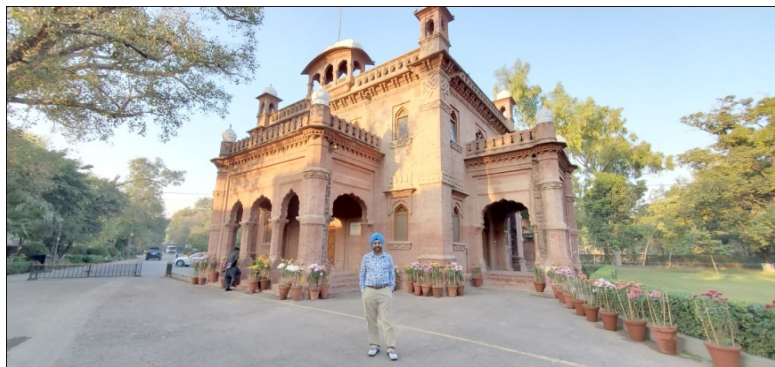
floor of the tomb to a side room and there lay some of the original Khalsa Darbar records for me to hold and touch – I had goosebumps. While these documents were written 200 years ago, the Kashmiri paper and the crisp black ink was clearer than the blue sky – it was as if they were written last year. When I inquired how such old records could be so well preserved, I was advised that keeping old records unbound helps preserve them – binding manuscripts encourages moisture to collect in the binding and rots the manuscripts. I was thrilled to see digitization of the collection in progress as I exited the building.

As we left the Anarkali Tomb building, my guide pointed out to me that in front of us was the place where the Chief Justice of Lahore served. Suddenly I realized this was the building in which my ancestor Sardar Jhanda Singh Butalia served as Chief Justice of Lahore in 1849.

I had looked for Anarkali at her tomb but she was nowhere to be found. So, I decided to visit the market Anarkali – one of the oldest bazars of Punjab to look for

her on my own later in the evening. There a wise old cobbler told me where she lived. Read more about it towards the end of this article.

The Place Where I Would Have Studied



After lunch and some rest, I now headed to the place where my father, grandfather, and great grandfather had studied – Aitchison College, Lahore. It was established in 1886 as Punjab Chief’s College, and it still is Punjab's eminent school for boys. It was designed by the famous Sikh architect Ram Singh – another proud son of Lahore. My great grandfather Bahadur Singh Butalia (1903-1916), grandfather Capt. Ajit Singh Butalia (1924-1931) and father Major Karamjit Singh Butalia (till 1946) attended this school. The huge sprawling campus with manicured lawns was inspiring. The campus has a mosque, Gurdwara, and a Hindu Temple – representing the religious diversity of its students at the time of its inception. I am convinced that had it not been for this line drawn by the British dividing the heart of Punjab, not only would I have studied here but also my son Sukhjot Singh Butalia who lives with me now in USA.



exclaimed "hey see the same logo of this school is on their



In our family records, we have an old original photo of my grandfather with polo trophies along with Nawab of Bahawalpur Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan Abbas. We had no idea where this photo was taken but as soon as we entered the school gate, my friend Jahandad Khan

This family photo was that of two Aitchison buddies who were polo friends. I shared this photo with College Principal and now this photo is proudly displayed by Aitchison College on its website at <https://www.aitchison.edu.pk/a-c-history.php>.

A Murder So Heinous



After getting back to my hotel and some good rest, I took an Uber (again driver refused payment from me) to the outskirts of Lahore to visit a not so well known Lahore landmark – the recently renovated Shah Bilawal Baradari: This is the infamous Baradari (12 door pleasure house) in Kot Khawaja Saeed area, where Maharaja Sher Singh was murdered by Sandhewalia brothers in 1843. The brothers offered him a loaded gun as a gift facing him and when he came forward to receive the gift, they pulled the trigger and then chopped off his head. My great grandfather's great grandfather Sardar Ganda Singh Butalia was standing next to Maharaja Sher Singh during this murderous attack and was grievously injured defending the Maharaja, especially when the Sandhewalia brothers tried to cut off the head of the Maharaja. As I walked around the Baradari, I sensed the betrayal of Sandhewalia brothers who not only murdered the Maharaja of Punjab but also his heir apparent – 12 year old Partab Singh. What savagery and deceit we humans can fall to for claiming power?

Finding Anarkali at Last



Having not found the elusive Anarkali at her tomb – poor lady even her tomb had been moved, I headed to the Anarkali Bazar named in her honor. It is one of the oldest surviving market of Punjab dating back to Mughal times. Today the glory of this ancient market has been taken over by cheap Chinese cloth and shoes. I wandered all over the market looking for her but she proved elusive till I stopped by to talk with a street cobbler – I jokingly told him that I had looked for her at her tomb and at this bazar in her honor but she was nowhere to be found and asked with a smile “Where does Anarkali live?”. His answer helped me find Anarkali at last. The below poem I have written is in honor of this old cobbler who helped me finally find the elusive and exotic Anarkali.



Anarkali **Anarkali**

mai Anarkali noh laban Lahore aya
I went to Lahore to find Anarkali

angreza neh teh ohdi kabbar vi putt chaddi
the British even dug out her grave

ohdee kabar tae chuurch bana chaddi.
and made a Church over it.

pher mai laban Anarkali bazar dian galian vich
variya
Then I entered the streets of Anarkali Bazar to find
her

othae cheeni kaprain vich ruli koye na labhi.
but did not find her lost in Chinese clothes.

pher ik mochi babae noh puchiya
Then I asked an old cobbler

daso ji kis than tae Anarkali gujji
tell me where Anarkali lives.

jawab milya oye gabru muniya
He replied O young man

jisnu bahar labdha hain o tarae dil vich gujji
the one you seek outside; she lives deep in your
heart.

Closing

Having finally found the elusive, exotic, and mystical Anarkali of Lahore, I headed back to Avari Hotel to crash on my bed and go to sleep reflecting on a day that took me back centuries and to the stomping grounds of my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. The wisdom of old cobbler touched my heart and yet I even forgot to ask him his name.

CHAPTER 7

Going Back 750 Years



The fifth day in Lehnda Punjab and my first trip outside the city of Lahore to see the country-side and villages of this land.

I could not sleep all night. I was too excited to sleep because in the morning I was going to a place where my ancestors had served Langar to Baba Farid himself more than 750 years ago! This time I got the aloo paronthas (flat bread stuffed with spicy potatoes) packed to go and we were out of Avari Hotel first thing in the morning.

The Villages

As we left the city of Lahore behind, we drove by several villages. In these villages, people were out and about doing regular chores such as taking care of crops and buffalos. I think I also saw some goats being milked. As we drove through these villages, it suddenly dawned on me that I was not in Chardha Punjab. The villages that I was passing by were just like the ones on the other side of the border – same mix of kuccha (homes made of mud and straw) and pucca (homes made of bricks) homes, cow dung on the walls, and a few improvised shops. The only

difference was that here the signs were in Shahmukhi (script used in Lehnda Punjab) and on the other side they are in Gurmukhi (script of Chardha Punjab). We stopped briefly in a village on the way to Pakpattan. The village folks spoke Punjabi but with a much heavier local accent. I understood 95% of what they said. They were thrilled that a Sardar had stopped by their village. When a bunch of children and dogs had surrounded us, we knew now it was time to leave.

As we travelled towards Pakpattan, I was reminded of the famous Punjabi song I had first heard many years ago on a local radio station while driving in Toronto with my daughter and niece: “kinnae jaana billo dae ghar” (who all wants to go to the home of Billo?). And lo and behold my friend Jahandad Khan put on this song using Bluetooth in our car and we were from then on singing and relishing this song and other Lehnda Panjabi songs - all the way to Pakpattan.

The Sufi King of Pakpattan



After a couple of hours drive south of Lahore, we arrived in the city of Pakpattan. We drove straight to the shrine of Baba Farid Ganjeshakkar – this shrine contains the grave of Baba Farid (1175 - 1266) one of the most

famous Sufi saints in the world. Some of his writings are included in Siri Guru Granth Sahib - the Sikh scripture. More than 130 of his hymns are placed in Siri Guru Granth Sahib – each of which Sikhs consider to be the word of God.

My journey to this shrine was made more meaningful by the special ancestral connection to this historical place. In 1256 AD (yes more than 750 years ago) my ancestor Rai Bhag Mal of Multan, visited Baba Farid here at Pakpattan and organized a bhandara / langar (community kitchen)for more than a year. Baba Farid blessed the family with the honorific title of Bhandari - a humble title our family holds till today! Walking on the sacred ground treaded by my ancestors more than 750 years ago was a memorable experience.

Having paid respects at the shrine, we listened to the qawwals there in an open courtyard sing on top of their voices a Shalok from his Bani enshrined in Siri Guru Granth Sahib: apnarae giraewan mai sir niva kar dekh (look humbly into your own self first). Then was time for langar – we were graciously invited to eat. We sat on the floor in lines on mats (as in Sikh Gurdwaras) and were served a simple meal by volunteers – just as my ancestors did more than seven centuries ago. We ran short of plates to eat in and I ate with our driver Nawaz – some of my fellow Indian family and friends would have been mortified to see me eat out of the same plate with a Muslim.



But this was important – there is no better socio-economic equalizer than to share a meal with someone from the same plate.

Imagine the joy of eating in the same langar that your ancestors had served at over 750 years ago! I had goosebumps during most of the visit to the resting place of the Sufi King.

As we were about to leave the shrine, one little kid put on my arm a colored bracelet made of yarn. I tugged on it as a reminder of my ancestors seva here. On the way out, the market was full of sacks of shakkar (jaggery powder) and then it dawned on me – his name was Baba Farid Ganjeshakkar.



[A Long Lost Dera](#)

As we made our way out of the narrow streets of Pakpattan, we headed back North till we came to an unmarked road taking us towards Dipalpur. After about half an hour of bumpy ride (who needs a massage after this), we arrived at Udasi Dera Bhuman Shah. It is located off the grid in this small village. This old building was the center of the famous syncretic Udasi Bhuman Shah (1700s). The current building is from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time. The central shrine was profusely painted with Sikh era paintings.

One painting caught my attention. It was that of a Sikh woman as a hunter. Being an avid hunter myself, I was intrigued. I had never ever seen a woman hunting in a painting. But here in all its glory under the verandah of this shrine was this glorious woman on horseback hunting a deer.

As we looked at the beautiful murals on the sides of the Verandah, I looked up to see the wood roof on top of this priceless heritage was rotting. I came away saddened that the paintings on the walls under the verandah that had survived for hundreds of years may not last much longer.

It was late afternoon already. In the courtyard of the Dera, we ate a late lunch of sandwiches and tea. It reminded me of my hunting times with my Dad. Being out here was liberating and sad at the same time.



The Sunset at Kasur



Soon we were back on a good road and on our way to Kasur. As we entered the old city, the streets narrowed and the traffic became worse. So, we decided to walk. We got out of our car and began walking along the bazar towards the Shrine of Baba Bulleh Shah (1680-1757) - the father of Punjabi enlightenment. We entered an outside courtyard first and then an inner courtyard all decked with marble. And there to the left of the courtyard off-center was the shrine of the world-famous Punjabi poet Bulle Shah.

This small shrine in Kasur is dedicated to one of the most famous Sufi poet of the land of the five rivers. The shrine is placed in a large courtyard lined with marble - an oasis in the middle of a bazaar selling Kasuri methi.

By now the sun was setting over the courtyard. The orange glow of the sunset bathed the entire marble complex in the shade of henna. And just then, a group of Qawwals sitting in the marble courtyard began singing. It was magical. We sat down to listen. One of the lead singers had a voice like I had never heard before. He sang on top of his voice as if he was in a recording studio – his blood red

throat singing this verse of Baba Bulle Shah from his 300 year old poetry: “mai jana jogi dae naal” (I want to go with the Jogi Ranhja).



Who says history does not come alive? Here sitting in the courtyard of Baba Bulle Shah, listening to his Kaafis being sung by one of the best voices I had ever heard, with the setting sun bathing us all in henna, I closed my eyes and let the time go by as the smell of Kasuri methi filled the air.

But it was not to last. The shadows were growing longer and as we exited the inside courtyard, I ran into a Sufi Baba wearing all black with henna colored hair sitting on the floor. As I sat next to him, he looked at me and said, we are both the same. When I asked him what he meant by that, he replied “we are both colored in the love of God.”

The Ghosts of Ram Gali



Having returned to Lahore after sunset, I rested a bit at my hotel and then headed out to Ram Gali #7 to look at the inside of my maternal ancestral home – which I had discovered on my second day in Lahore but never got a chance to visit the inside.

The name of the building is Sodhi Niwas. My mom was born here and finally I was inside the abandoned home courtesy of a Gujjar family whose patriarch remembers his grandfather telling him that a Sikh railway master used to live here - that was my maternal grandfather Sardar Dalip Singh Sodhi, who had been Station Master Lahore till 1946.

Visiting the abandoned home on the inside at night was emotionally difficult. I was amazed at the 5 floor structure but was sad to see it crumbling. The home seemed as if someone had suddenly abandoned it and walked away. And then I remembered my mom telling me that during the partition of 1947, my maternal grandfather was Station Master Amritsar – they could not travel 32 miles to get to their ancestral home in Lahore. As I wandered the home, I could almost hear the cries of the looters that must have descended on this magnificent 5 floor home since its owners could never ever return.

But the red sandstone plaque outside the front entrance etched with the name of my maternal grandfather and his father and the yellow fading etching of Sodhi Niwas on the front wall was all that was left as a reminder of my maternal roots.

Closing

By the time I got back to the hotel, I was covered in mud. After a hot bath, I reflected on my day, especially the visit to Pakpattan where my ancestors served Baba Farid Ganjeshakkar. I wrote the below poem as an exchange between myself and my ancestor Rai Bhag Mal of more than 750 years ago.

Ganjeshakkar da Langar The Langar of Ganjeshakkar

*Multani Rai Bhag Mal di rooh no puchsan
Ask the soul of Rai Bhag Mal of Multan,*

*Ganjeshakkar dae langar da tuh ki kamayaan
what did you earn from the langar of Ganjeshakkar?*

*jawab milya Bhandari da khitaab divaya
Answer came I earned the title of Bhandari,*

*jo Pakpattan dae Peer nae nivaya
which was bestowed by the Peer of Pakpattan.*

*Satsotraethsaalbaadpher jawab milyasan
After 763 years the answer came again,*

*jad main Ganjeshakkar dae langar vich ayasan
When I visited the langar of Ganjeshakkar.*

*Oye angaelae muniya dil khol kae Niwaz naal khasan
O irresponsible boy eat your heart out with Niwaz,*

*eh rab da attut bhandara hosan
this is the never ending kitchen of God.*

*eh Bhandara dal roti da na hosan
This is not the kitchen of lentils and bread,*

*dil vich pyar vandaun da hosan
but that of sharing love from the heart.*

CHAPTER 8

When Dreams Come True



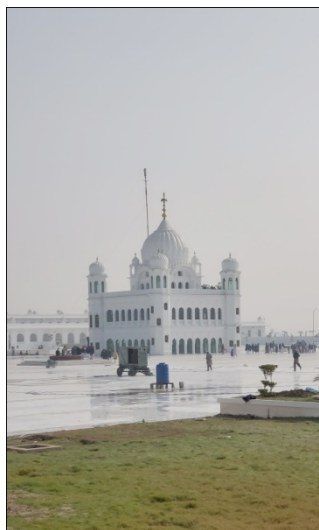
This is the sixth day in Lehnda Punjab and now I am heading directly to the line between Chardha and Lehnda Punjab.

I remember as a kid going hunting with my dad in Dera Babak Nanak in Chardha Punjab. As we hunted, we saw a large white Gurdwara on the other side that was taboo – it was across the line that the British drew in 1947. Every Sikh visiting this line, saw Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur and longed to visit it. No one could ever imagine this coming true. But dreams do come true and miracles do happen!

A Dream Come True & Reconciliation

As we drove from Lahore towards Narowal, I fondly remember my hunting trips on the other side of the border. I was ready to see the same tall white Gurdwara that I had seen so many times as a kid from Dera Baba Nanak. But I could not imagine such a beautiful place of worship –

where Siri Guru Nanak Sahib settled after his travels, farmed here, and passed away here.



The complex is huge with the old central shrine intact. I entered the Gurdwara and went upstairs to the worship hall. Halfway through the service upstairs I realized there were no Muslims inside the central shrine. On the way out, I approached the Sikh guard and inquired. His response floored me – no Muslims allowed inside the central shrine. I could not believe it – I responded this is not what Guru Nanak Sahib would have wanted. He

responded that Muslims take too many photos upstairs. To which I responded that some of the Sikhs who were upstairs with me were no better – they were intrusive in taking photos and videos walking around in between people and pushing and shoving.

I felt that photo taking was being used as an excuse to exclude Muslims from entering the central shrine. Now I realized that my Muslim colleagues accompanying me



from Lahore had politely volunteered to stay outside – they probably knew the bigoted rule and hence complied nevertheless, but I was unaware. The solution is simple – don't allow photography inside the central shrine as is the rule at Darbar Sahib in Amritsar and many other historical Gurdwaras in Chardha Punjab. I walked out of the central shrine making a pledge to myself that I would not return here till people of all faiths, including Muslims, were allowed equal access as Sikhs – a line in the sand of my own conscience.

After visiting the central shrine at Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara, I ate and served langar and then headed to an exhibition hall. I was thrilled to see the writing of Afzal



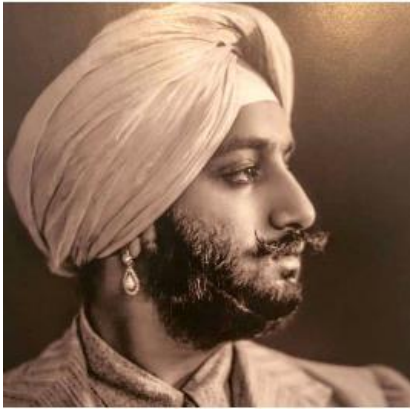
Saahir in Gurmukhi in artistic style— one of the best Panjabi poet of Lehnda Punjab. I had met him just a few days ago at Lahore's famous Pak Tea House. Walking through the exhibit a huge shiny Kara (a bracelet which is one of the five articles of the Sikh faith) on sale caught my eye. I could not take my eyes off it. I bought the new Kara. I removed the one I had worn for over 30 years and put on the new one. I offered my old Kara of 30 years to my friend Jahandad Khan who accompanied me on the trip. I offered it to him as a symbol of our friendship and brotherhood knowing well that our ancestors – the Tanoli and Butalia clans – had

fought many battles in the 1800s – on the opposite sides. This was my way of making peace with the past that can still haunt us emotionally. Jahandad graciously accepted it and put it on. We all believe in stories – some good and some bad. We become the stories we believe in. If we believe in stories of hatred and revenge, that is who we will become. If we choose to believe in stories of love, forgiveness, compassion, and humility – that is who we will become.

The Timeless Photographer



On the way back from Kartarpur Sahib, we decided to stop by Zaidi Studio on Mall Road in Lahore. As we went up a few steps to an office, we met a middle aged British cultured gentlemen - Shahid Zaidi. He first served us some coffee – what strong coffee it was – I had never had such strong coffee in America! As our conversation flowed freely, he suddenly got up and went to a corner of his office and started showing black and white portraits that his dad had taken in the 1930s and 1940s. Looking at the large portraits, it seemed they were just take yesterday. And then he explained that his studio was now digitizing all order records and the accompanying negatives.



One large photo caught my attention – it showed a Sikh gentleman wearing an earring on the right ear. Shahid asked who this might be. My immediate response was that it was probably a royal and resembled Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala. I then pulled out my smartphone and googled Sikh earring photo and lo and behold

the same photo that was taken in this Zaidi studio in 1935 was on my phone. At that moment, Shahid, Jahandad, and I were thrilled like a child getting candy after a month.

Shahid, who has now taken on the family photography business, is an avid photographer. He directed us towards the studio on the ground floor and now we were in the

studio where Rajas and Maharajas and Queens came to get themselves photographed. Taking turns, he photographed Jahandad and me separately – probably a million times till he got the perfect shot. And then I made him a request – Jahandad and my ancestors were adversaries in the early 1800s and clashed with each other's armies but now we were brothers in arms so please take a photo of us together. So



he lined up back to back with our arms crossed across our chests to represent our ancestral past but that each of us watched each other's back – as brothers do.

The Fakir of Lahore



After taking a small break at my hotel, and eating at Butt restaurant near Lakshmi Chowk with Jahandad, Samir Shafi and his fiancée Azal Zahir, we headed to the shrine of Madho Lal Hussain. As we drove there, I asked my friends about the name of this fakir – it seemed to be a combination of a Hindu and Muslim name. This indeed was the famous Shah Hussain of Lahore whose short Kaafis are world famous – he had been the conscious of City of Lahore in 16th century as a Sufi poet. Shah Hussain, a Muslim, was in love with Madho Lal, a Hindu. His love for his partner was so deep that he changed his name to Madho Lal Hussain. As we entered his shrine, this verse of Shah Hussain rang into my head: Sajjan bin raatan hoiyan whadiyaan (Without my Beloved God, the nights have grown longer).

Today was Thursday night and it was dhammal day. On arriving we found out that the dholis were not coming that evening so we seated ourselves at the edge of one of the many groups of 50-60 persons of all ages huddled around makeshift fireplaces around the park next to the shrine. The fireplace on the ground was surrounded by red rose petals and burning incense. We were served hot kheer (sweet rice pudding) in a bowl and accepted for who we



were. Just then a jogi Baba signaled to me to come sit next to him in the middle of the group of strangers. I immediately got up and went over. He began singing. I closed my eyes and as he sang, the crowd would erupt in cheers and religious slogs – all impromptu. As we were about to leave, the jogi Baba asked me for a promise – that I would come back again to be a part of Dhammal. I would indeed visit again in March 2020 and not just see the Dhammal but also be a part of it!

Closing

Getting back to hotel and going to bed tired, I reflected on the gift of Pakistan to the worldwide Sikh community especially for Sikhs in Chardha Punjab – a corridor of friendship. A place where people of Chardha and Lehnda Punjab could come together and simply hug and talk freely – even if it was for just a day.

As I went to sleep, I was thought of my morning visit to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur. While my friend Jahandad Khan met up with a Nihang Sikh from Chardha Punjab and exchanged notes about Gatka, I sat down on the marble steps in the vast white courtyard of the Gurdwara complex. Soon a group of 10-15 boys all wearing the same school uniform surrounded me. I assumed they were on a school field trip. I was surprised to learn that all of them

had skipped school that day to come here. I was puzzled – why would young kids skip school to come to a Gurdwara - a movie theater sounded more fun. And then one of the young man said: “This place is peaceful and fun – much better than any movie. We also get to meet kids of our age from the other side and now we keep in touch on WhatsApp and facebook.” This young man gave me hope for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all of Punjab.

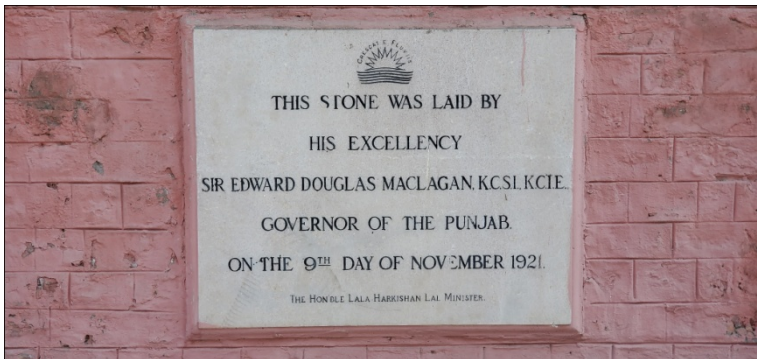
CHAPTER 9

Interfaith Harmony



now my seventh day in Lehnda Punjab. Today I will be visiting my pre-partition alma mater and the shrine of the man who laid the foundation stone of Harmandar Sahib (commonly known as The Golden Temple) of Amritsar.

Engineering meets Interfaith Respect



I graduated from Punjab Engineering College (PEC), Chandigarh in 1987 with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering – one of the oldest engineering profession practiced by our ancient ancestors in the Indus valley civilization. Before 1947, there was only one engineering

college in all of Punjab - Maclagan Engineering College established in 1921 near the Shalimar Gardens on the Grand Trunk Road in Lahore. At the time of partition, the college was split into two parts. The one that came to Chardha Punjab was established at Chandigarh as Punjab Engineering College (PEC) while the one that stayed back in Lahore was renamed University of Engineering and Technology (UET).

I had been invited by UET Lahore for a plenary lecture at an international civil engineering conference. I was a little hesitant as I drove in an Uber taxi to the campus of UET. As soon as I arrived at the college gate, the doors were flung open and I was offered a welcome by the guard. As I alighted from my car and moved towards the conference venue, the civil engineering faculty welcomed me in typical Panjabi hospitality – japhis (hugs)!

When I shared with faculty that I had graduated from PEC Chandigarh, they were ecstatic – they remarked that I was one of their alumni also as PEC used to be a part of Maclagan Engineering College before partition. Their



hospitality and gracious attitude was boundless. At the opening session of the engineering conference, I was invited at short notice to share my personal connections with Lehnda Punjab. As I begun speaking in English, a young civil engineering student at the back heckled me:



Punjabi please. And so I gave the rest of my remarks in Panjabi. I shared my ancestral history going back over 750 years ago, my ancestors having lived in a village near Gujranwala till 1947, my three direct ancestors having studied at Aitchison College in Lahore – there was pin drop silence as I spoke. Many an eye seemed to get wet as I shared my emotional remarks. I noticed an older gentleman who I could see from the stage was visibly crying.

During coffer break, I sought out the gentleman I spotted crying during my opening remarks in Punjabi – he was a Professor at UET. After a few sips of tea, I asked him why he had tears in his eyes. His response was that he was crying out of happiness. When I asked what happiness – he politely responded that as a Muslim he had never been able to visit his ancestral home in Chardha Punjab but on hearing my story as a Sikh returning home to Lehnda Punjab, he felt the joy that he would have felt if he had visited his ancestral land in Chardha Punjab. I then asked if

these were tears of joy, but he couldn't respond as he was now again choking with tears. By then we both were in tears and we held hands and kept silent for a few minutes before someone interrupted our touching silence with a rude engineering inquiry. We both wiped our tears and moved on.

After my technical plenary presentation was completed, I decided to walk the campus to explore it. I ran into several groups of civil engineering students and we chatted sitting on the sidewalk in the warm winter sun. I visited the original college building – which still has the college foundation stone placed at the front entrance. As I googled the college map, a surprising name showed up on the map – Sikh National College. I had no idea that Sikh National College was next door.

As I walked in front of the bit hidden building of Sikh National College, my eyes opened wide – here was this majestic building - one of the oldest and historical Sikh educational institutions of undivided Punjab established in June 1938. While the huge plaque at the top of the entrance commemorating it was gone by now, I walked into the main auditorium. It was an abandoned huge room with the winter sun coming through the many windows. I reminisced about the Sikh youth, like me, who would have graduated in this room. Soon the eerie abandoned feeling of the large empty room with no furniture and abandoned convocation hall became a vivid reminder that we cannot undo history but we sure can learn lessons from it so we don't repeat the mistakes of our ancestors.

Interfaith Harmony



By the time I got back to my hotel, it was late in the afternoon. I set up another massage appointment and went for a short beauty nap. After my massage and sumptuous Chinese dinner at Avari Hotel, I headed out to the shrine of Mian Mir around sunset. My Uber driver took me towards an urban area which suddenly turned into small streets and dropped me off at a little distance from the shrine.

Mian Mir's real name was Baba Sain Mir Mohammed Sahib. He was contemporary of the Fifth Sikh Guru – Siri Guru Arjan Sahib in the 1600s. Mian Mir was a famous Sufi mystic of Dharampura in Lahore. According to Bute Shah's *Tawarikh-i-Punjab* (1848), Mian Mir had laid the foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple) at the invitation of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib.

As I entered the courtyard of the shrine lit at night by lights, it was nearly empty with just one other family there. This oasis in the middle of the hustle and bustle of Lahore city was very calming. The only noises I could hear were those of birds chirping in the trees in the courtyard. As I entered the main shrine, there were 2 or 3 men sitting inside praying. I decided to sit down inside and observe them. Very soon, I found myself dozing off with the serenity of

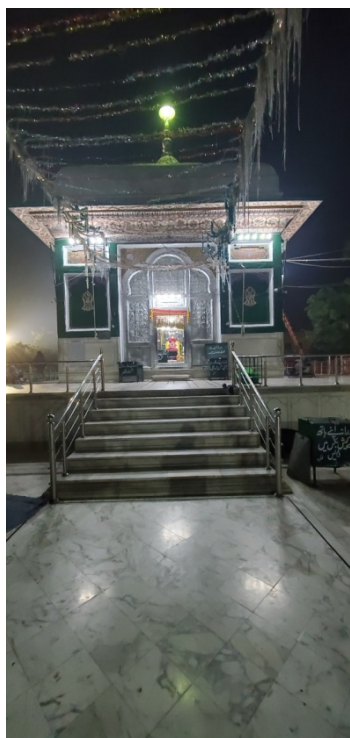
this sacred place. As I shook myself up from sleep, I wondered why the Fifth Guru Sahib had declined the



intervention of his friend Mian Mir to talk with the Mughal Emperor to save him. I then saw a booklet in English and Shahmukhi laying inside the shrine. I began flipping through the English section. The answer to my question was in it. The booklet explained that Mian Mir had offered to the Fifth Guru Sahib to intercede with the Mughal Emperor on his behalf. However, Guru Sahib had turned down his friend's request saying that the will of God needs to be carried out. And thus Mian Mir allowed his dear friend to be tortured and thrown into the Ravi river near the Lahore Fort to respect God's will. Thus Siri Guru Arjan Sahib became Shaheedan da Sartaaaj (King of Martyrs) – an event that changed Sikh and South Asian history forever.

As I was leaving the main shrine, the family there was distributing a pudding. They thrust forward to me some of the rice pudding in a paper bowl. There was no way for me to refuse it since it was given to me with such affection and kindness. I was not sure if I should eat or not but then I remembered God's will. So I ate all the rice pudding and a second serving the family thrust upon me – and God's will prevailed. I did not fall sick!

Closing



Getting an Uber back to the hotel took quite some time as it was 11pm already. I had lost time since I had been there for 3 hours now but it seemed like minutes. As I went to sleep, I thought of my high school Muslim friend Sher Ali Khan. The interfaith friendship and solidarity between Fifth Guru Sahib and Mian Mir from 400 years ago reminded me of our friendship from about 40 years ago.

CHAPTER 10

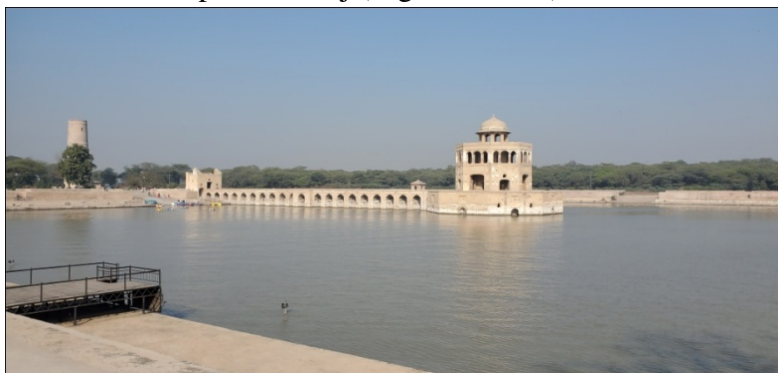
Where the Seed of Sikhi was Planted



This is now my eight day here in the land of my ancestors. Today I will be visiting the place where Siri Guru Nanak Sahib was born and where he did his Sacha Sauda (True Bargain) followed by return to Lahore to visit its magnificent fort in all its night glory.

Memorial to a Deer

On the way to Nanakana Sahib, we first stopped by Hiran Minar (Deer Tower) near Sheikhpura. It was built in 1606 by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir in honor of his most beloved antelope Mansiraj (Light of Mind) who was trained



to lure wild animals to the water tank for hunting by the royals. Next to the minaret and water tank is a large pavilion built by Shah Jahan. The sides of the tower are inscribed with a eulogy for Mansiraj. I looked carefully but saw no deer so I asked my friend Jahandad Khan where all the deer were. He replied that they had been hunted down and now tourists have taken their place. I saw some local tourists in paddle boats in the water tank that was once known as an oasis of nature.

The True Bargain



Our next stop on the way to the land of Guru Nanak Sahib was in Farooqabad. A majestic white Gurdwara embellished with Kesari and dark blue colors stood before me. I knew in an instant that this was Gurdwara Sacha Sauda – the place where the First Sikh Guru Sahib began the tradition of langar (Sikh community meal). The Gurdwara is clearly made in the form of a fortress and the current building dates from the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As we climbed many steps to get up to the central worship space, I was surprised that the actual Darbar Hall was a very small room with old trees growing to its right.

This Gurdwara had remained closed since 1947 and was re-opened for worship after 46 years in April of 1993. I was pleasantly surprised at the excellent condition of the



Gurdwara building – which seemed well maintained with a beautiful manicured lawn in the front yard.

It was particularly nostalgic for me to be here as the tradition of Langar began by Siri Guru Nanak Sahib about 500 years ago continues to this day at every Gurdwara is the world signifying the equality of all irrespective of class, creed, religion, caste, and gender.

On the way from Farooqabad to Nanakana Sahib, we passed many fields of mustard – deep

green with bright yellow flowers. They reminded me of my childhood black partridge hunting trips in Chardha Punjab and so I stopped our car at one the mustard fields and walked in it to take in the fresh air and refresh my childhood memories – I was hoping a black partridge would fly out of it but my hunter's wish remained unfulfilled.

Nanakana Sahib

Before the birth of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, this town was known as Rai Bhoi di Talwandi. After the birth of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, the name was changed to Nankana Sahib. Gurdwara Janamasthan (Birthplace) is the first historic Gurdwara named in honor of the birth of the founder of Sikh faith. The original building from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time still stands – again the inside main



shrine is very small. I read from Siri Guru Granth Sahib inside the small Darbar Hall and was ecstatic till I reminded myself after completing the Vaak (reading) that it was at this very place where I was sitting behind the Sikh scripture that Bhai Lachman Singh was shot by Mahants on February 20, 1921 while reading from Siri Guru Granth Sahib – just as I did.

The side courtyard of the Gurdwara complex had a beautiful and touching memorial to the 86 Sikhs killed on February 20, 1921 by Mahant Narayan Das and his mercenaries who burned the Sikhs at this spot after killing them. I stood by the tree in the courtyard where the injured Bhai Lachman Singh was hanged alive and burnt to death by the mercenaries.



And by now it was late afternoon and time for Langar. The langar hall is a beautiful white and dark blue new building. The langar was simple daal and roti but served by the local Pathan and Sindhi Sikhs with kind hospitality – men and women sat in the same line as we ate langar served to us on floor mats laid out in rows.

I also visited several other Gurdwaras in and around Nanakana Sahib but because of my mistrust of historically inaccurate Janamsakhis and condemnation of miracles in Siri Guru Granth Sahib, I did not attach much importance to these sites.

Before leaving Nanakana Sahib, we decided to visit the grave site of Rai Bular – the landlord of Rai Bhoi di Talwandi – who donated half of his land (over 15,000 acres) in honor of Siri GuruNanak Sahib. His grave sits on top of an old tibba (small hill) with many crumbling civilizations under the old hill.

Soon we were on our way back to Lahore via the highway – which rivaled any highway in the US. Within an hour we were back in Lahore. I rested with some tea and snacks at Avari and then headed out at sunset to tour the Lahore Fort by night.



Lahore Fort by Night

I had visited Lahore Fort during the day on my first day in Lahore and now after a week it was time to soak in its glory at night. The true beauty of the fort comes out at night with the long shadows and fewer crowds. Our tour group of about 25 persons gathered outside the Roshnai Darwaza (Gate of Lights). Soon we were let in with actors dressed as Mughal guards watching our every move. As we



moved through the brightly lit Hazuri Bagh, a flute began playing from the Baradari. Following the live flute performance from the Baradari, we got onto colorful three-wheeler autos and we were sped up to the Lahore Fort to front of the Athdhara (8 entrance pavilion) built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in early 1800s. I climbed up on the Athdhara to marvel the place where Maharaja Ranjit Singh and my ancestors would have sat. I spent about 30 minutes alone on the Athdhara marveling at its beauty and fading paintings.

Next we were led into the Sheesh Mahal (Palace of Mirrors) built by Emperor Shah Jahan in 1630s. The courtyard in front of the Sheesh Mahal was lit with small oil lamps while two musicians squatted on the floor played live instrumental music. After a tour of the Sheesh Mahal, I climbed up the side stairs to the modest Gurdwara built by





Maharaja Ranjit Singh to the right of the Sheesh Mahal's roof. As I looked out from the Gurdwara building, it dawned on me why the Gurdwara was built here. The best view of Lahore can be seen from this spot – the view of old city of Lahore from this place is breathtaking. As I descended the Gurdwara building, I wandered around examining the priceless wall frescoes with my eyes. Suddenly I was on the roof of the Sheesh Mahal. An opening on top of the Sheesh Mahal towards the back of the building revealed water drainage paths that were created with bricks on top of the roof of the Sheesh Mahal. As a civil engineer, I was impressed with the construction crews of Emperor Shah Jahan.

On returning to the courtyard of the Sheesh Mahal, we were seated on carpet with pillows and served Kawa



(Kashmiri tea). This was followed by a traditional Kathak dance in the island in front of the Sheesh Mahal only lit by small oil lamps. Now I had travelled hundreds of years ago to the time of Maharaj Ranjit Singh and Emperor Shah Jahan – who says you cannot travel back in time?

Exiting Roshnai gate, I was now back at Food street. This street was till a few years ago the infamous Hira Mandi (Market of Diamonds) - no mujras (traditional dances by women and eunuchs) here now but it is now a street full of rooftop restaurants. I ate for the second time on one of the penthouse restaurants taking in the night glory of the Lahore Fort and the majestic Badshahi mosque.

Closing

Today had been an eventful day. Visiting the birthplace of my religion had been bittersweet. Joyful because of being able to visit the place where the seed of my faith was planted but sad at the reminder of the massacre inside the Gurdwara – whose 100th anniversary is coming up next year in 2021.

CHAPTER 11

The Journey North



This is now my ninth day here in the land of my ancestors and it is now time to head north to go to Islamabad but visit many memorable sites on the way.

Ranjha's Ghost

Our first stop is the village of Midh Ranjha. It is a small village near Takhat Hazara. We arrived at a grove of very old trees where legend has it that Ranjha played under these trees. While I was not sure about the legend, yet the place had an eerie feeling about it. I could almost feel Ranjha's presence here even though I wasn't sure if the legend of Ranjha playing here was true or not. A local villager who seemed to be a religious leader stopped by and I was surprised at his heavy village accent of Punjabi – I could only understand half of what he said. As we said goodbye to the grove of trees, I

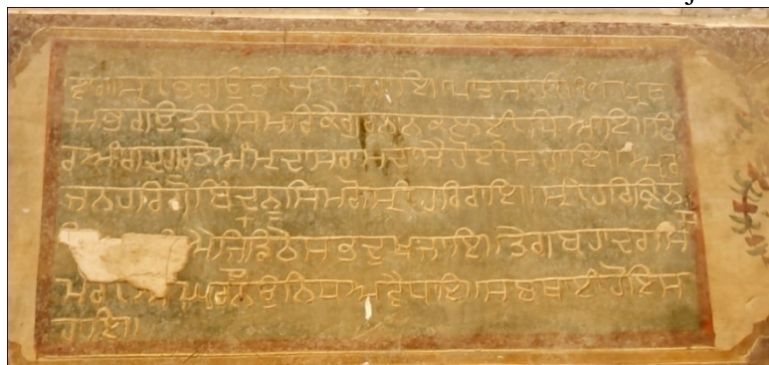


ran into a fighting cock tied to a four-legged traditional village bed. I inquired if cock fighting was still prevalent in the village and I got a hearty affirmation in a slow hush tone.

Bhai Bannu's Gift



located in town of Mangat, this majestic Gurdwara Bhai Bannu reminds us of the place where Bhai Bannu made a copy of the first Granth Sahib (that had been compiled by Siri Guru Arjan Sahib). The copy made here from the original is called Bannu Vali Beer. As we entered the Gurdwara courtyard, it became clear to me that I had been here – that is when I realized that this old Gurdwara building from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's times is very similar to the Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran in Chardha Punjab – I



had lived in Tarn Taran for many years and no wonder the Gurdwara looked so familiar. Udasis had taken over the



Gurdwara in early 1800s but were removed from here with Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925.

The inside of the Gurdwara lower level was covered in soot – it seems a family lived here and cooked inside the building. All the frescos in the main worship space had verses from Siri Guru Granth Sahib inscribed on them. The hallway around the lower level had fading Udasi painting. As I walked close to the staircase, I saw those same Persian angels on the roof that I had seen on the walls of Shahi Hamam in Lahore. As we climbed the stairs, we came up to a small landing with a window – and there by the window was some pre-partition graffiti. Folks who had visited this Gurdwara Sahib in 1930s and 1940s had scribbled their names and villages. While the building is crumbling, the historic graffiti has survived. The top floor has the large dome of the Gurdwara – which is intact with much of original bricks and plaster in good shape.

The beauty of this Gurdwara building could not be hidden behind its crumbling exterior. After tea and snacks by our local hosts in the courtyard, we departed to continue our journey north. I left with a heavy heart knowing well that this crumbling reminder of Sikh history would not last much longer.

War Memorial



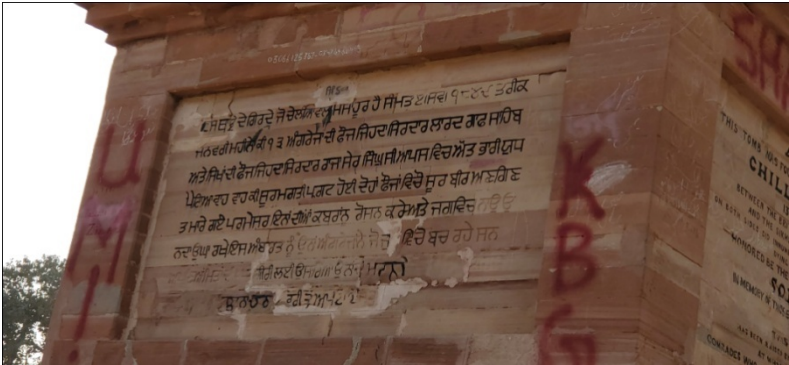
After driving for more than hour, we reached a small open area to our right with an Irish Cross at its entrance. It was odd to see an Irish Cross (common in Ireland) in the middle of nowhere here. This was the entrance to the Chillianwala Memorial.

The Sikh army led by Sher Singh Attariwala and British Army led by Hugh Gough clashed here on January 13, 1849. This battle was one of the bloodiest fought by the British. Both armies held their positions till the end of the battle and both sides claimed victory. The battle was a strategic check to immediate British ambitions in India and a shock to British military prestige. Gough was humbled by the British losses.



The Irish Cross memorial at the entrance is not very tall and has British casualties listed at its base. The main memorial tower inside the compound is very tall and made of sandstone. At its base were inscriptions on all sides in Punjabi, English, and Shahmukhi listing the significance of this spot where the British Empire almost lost.

As we were finishing evening tea in the compound, a group of local young men stopped by to see us. Some of them had never met a Sikh before. As we posed around the memorial for a photo, one of them asked me to send the photo to him by WhatsApp. Even today the



two of us have remained in contact through the miracle of technology.

The Planned City



We took a backroad to Jhelum and soon we were on the Grand Trunk Road on our way to Islamabad. The drive reminded me of my travels on the same road in Chardha Punjab. We stopped at a gas station and I went to the restroom – I was fortunate to have chosen the men’s restroom even though I cannot read Shahmukhi.

We arrived in Islamabad after sunset. As we drove into the city, I realized I had been here to this city in the foothills. Then I realized that this was not Chandigarh – the city of my youth – which like Islamabad is also a planned city in the foothills. Islamabad and Chandigarh also seemed to be twin sister cities but so far apart.

We ate dinner at an open air Afghani restaurant. Sitting with friends in the slightly cool December night, two men sitting on the table next to us kept overhearing our conversation. I finally leaned over and introduced myself to them. When I asked who they were, they seemed hesitant to answer. So I asked if they were in the security forces. One of them winked and the other laughed – they were from the hill station of Murree where my paternal grandmother and her family used to spend summer in the 1930s and 40s. They shared with me how Murree of my grandmother's days had changed now into a bustling hill station.

Closing

This had been a long tiring day today. Going to sleep at the guest house was easy. I have a long day ahead tomorrow.

