

The face in the mirror

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The cremation ceremony was held in a nearby funeral home and was simple, attended only by his closest friends. Since he was born a Sikh, *the Antam-Sanskar*, the last rites were performed by singing the verses from the *Granth Saheb* the Holy Book of the Sikhs by three people. It was a celebration of his life; not a lamentation of his death. Before he died he had discussed the details of his own funeral with Lisa. Singh was like that. His full name was Narender Nasukh Singh, NN for short. I had known him since we were about thirteen years old; I always called him by his surname, Singh. Later in his life, he had shaved his beard and cut his long hair and stopped wearing a turban so he did not look a Sikh.

His close friend Lisa lived only a few houses down the road from him in a small town west of Chicago. At the end of his life she was his main care giver. He had refused to go to a hospital or see a doctor. In the end, he relied on Lisa and me for all his needs. He constantly argued with us about the futility of modern medicine. In his case I agreed with him as he had an incurable cancer.

One Sunday morning Lisa called me to come and see him as he could not breathe and had been up whole night. She was worried about his condition. It was a sunny April morning and since it was a Sunday, I stayed in bed late reading the Sunday edition of the Tribune. I was planning to take a walk and relax afterwards for a quiet day. I looked out of my living room window. The sky was bright blue and the sunshine inside felt warm. The tree tops were full of young, light green spring leaves. The grass still had patches of winter brown but the green

Underneath could be easily seen. The treetops swayed with breeze from north which meant that it was still cool in Chicago and summer was a few weeks away.

"Can you come now? I am worried about him. He does not look good." Lisa told me on the phone.

I already knew that Singh was dying. I meant, he would die soon, in days, may be a week at the most. He was only fifty nine years old; too young to die. He worked at the Argon National Laboratory in the area of high energy photons. He had a name in the scientific community in this country and abroad. He had written papers, books and was in demand for lectures here and around the world. He was always travelling.

I quickly washed my face and brushed my hair; changed into a warm jogging suit and put on running shoes. I thought that if it was warm outside, I might go for a jog; only if I did not have to stay with Singh for long.

When I arrived at Singh's home, Lisa was waiting for me and opened the door. She looked tired. I gave her a quick hug and a short pat on her back and ran upstairs to Singh's bedroom. He was sitting at the edge of his bed. The room smelled of rotting fruits. He looked worn-out and starved. I opened the window a little to let fresh air in. His cheeks were hallowed and eyes lifeless. The sparkle had gone. He looked up at me and gave me a tired smile. He tried to raise his arms to greet me but quickly dropped them on his lap. His face was unshaven. His salt and pepper hair was shabby. He looked a mess.

"My stomach feels full; I am sick and cannot breathe; I can't even lie down. Please help me." He begged me in a low voice. Just talking to me made him winded

I motioned him to lie down. He tried but soon gave up. I asked Lisa to bring me another pillow to put behind his back for him to lean against. She quickly brought two large pillows and we both helped him to rest against them.

I felt his belly. It was bloated, obviously filled with fluid. No wonder, I thought, he could not breathe or lie down. The pressure of the fluid against his lungs made it difficult for him to breathe. The water had to be removed, I said to him. I wanted him to come to the hospital with me and get this water removed. He refused.

"Do it here; you are a doctor. So, do it here." He insisted and closed his eyes. I looked at Lisa and scratched my head. She shook her head in disgust and left the room.

OK, I said to myself: I would take out the water, if it made him feel better. So I drove to a nearby Walgreens and got a large needle and rubber tubing. After I took out enough water from his abdomen, he felt better. He looked up at me and Lisa with a grin and told Lisa to go home and rest. Lisa was reluctant first, and then she looked at me. When I agreed to stay with Singh, she left. Lisa was a slim, a sad looking woman of about fifty with good features and smooth skin. Her sad eyes were more a result of constant stress caused by Singh's illness than anything else. She had a simple oval face with thin lips, slightly sharp straight pointed nose. When she smiled, which she did occasionally, corners of her eyes would go up and out and her cheeks would become more prominent. That gave her an intellectual look. She

moved efficiently with simple steps which also seemed athletic and efficient. Her faded reddish brown hair with enough grey came down to her broad shoulders and made her look middle aged.

Once, Singh told me that Lisa was just a good friend. I took it to mean that she was there mostly to fulfill his needs but I also noticed a deep devotion, she displayed for him. I doubt if Singh ever shared the emotion.

A few days after that Sunday, Lisa called me at work and told me that Singh had died peacefully in his bed while talking to her. He closed his eyes in middle of a sentence and just stopped breathing: that was it, she said. I could sense her pain in her soft sobs at the other end of the telephone line.

A couple of months after his death, Lisa organized a gathering for Singh's friends and his office workers. Before he died he had helped her plan the details of this party. He had left all his possessions and his entire estate to her. Since I had known him the longest, she asked me to be present not as a guest but as a brother to him. I agreed; he was a brother to me!

It was July of 1949, and I was then in tenth grade in a small government school, in a small town forty miles southeast of New Delhi. My father then, worked for the British Government in that town district of colonial India. For me, it was a comfortable and happy home life. On our first day at school there was a new boy, in our class. He was a little taller than I; had long black hair which he made in a bun over his head. A white handkerchief usually covered the bun. He wore a neatly wrapped turban on his head and a steel bangle on his right wrist; carried a four inch long curved knife and a small comb on his person. He

had big brown eyes and a smooth face. The class teacher introduced him to us as a Sikh boy who had come from Lahore, a large city in Punjab in the new country of Pakistan. He was a refugee who had to migrate from Pakistan as a result of partition of India in 1947. We all called him Singh.

He fascinated us by his appearance, which was very different than ours. He was quiet, polite and friendly. We welcomed him among us. There was only one problem, a big boy in our class who constantly bullied us. We avoided any open confrontation with him because we feared the consequences. Right from the beginning, he disliked Singh and often mocked and harassed him. Singh tolerated this boy in the beginning. We were of no help to him and actually, we kept away from Singh out of our fear of the big bully.

One afternoon, as I was leaving the school, I heard a commotion coming from the direction of the hockey field. It was a typical July day; hot and muggy. The sky was dark with heavy black wet clouds of monsoon season. A fierce fight had broken out between the bully and Singh. My class mates and I quickly gathered around the brawl. Singh was on the ground; his long hair open and in bully's strong grip. He was dragging Singh on the ground by it. Singh was crying with pain but he was putting up a brave fight. He tried to catch his opponent but being on the ground, was at an obvious disadvantage. I could not bear his helplessness and without thinking, jumped in the fight. I was small but I felt sorry for Singh. I was also angry! I went after the bully's hair and caught hold of it and pulled hard on it. He immediately let go of Singh and came after me. He grabbed my hair and began to pull on it. I still had his hair in my hand and would not let go. We both were now on the ground; he holding my hair tightly and I his; as I pulled hard, he

pulled harder. The difference was that he was in pain and I was not, a surprising discovery for me! The big boy now was pleading for mercy. The crowd began to clap and chant, asking him to promise that he would never again harass any one and would make up for all the pain he had caused his classmates. He quickly promised and only then, I let go of him.

After the incident, Singh and I became close friends. He lived in an orphanage and I would often bring him home. My mother welcomed him into our family. My dad was not sure about bringing a young orphan in our home. He felt that it would be unfair for Singh to see a normal family life when he had none. Mother thought otherwise. She believed that giving a boy a happy home would make him a better man. So, Mom, as always, won the argument and Singh, to my joy, hung around with us and became a part of our family. His orphanage was nearby so, he could quickly sneak into our home to play with me and my siblings. Together, we played, studied and prepared for school examinations. He was good in physics and mathematics. I dreaded the subjects. Singh helped me in both. I learned from him that hard work and persistence were the secrets of learning.

Singh would often tell me about his past life in Lahore before the Partition but, I did not pay much attention to his tale. He would often start to talk about an incident and then would suddenly stop in the middle and clam up. My mother told me not to bring up the past with him because she said that horrible things had happened during the Partition and it would be better to not talk about them. She asked me to be nice to him so that he would grow up normally and be a good human being. Singh said to me once that memories of his childhood

played tricks on him. Certain experiences were vivid and clear; others were foggy, dim and lost.

The Partition of 1947 had changed everything for him.

His family had lived in Lahore for generations and it was where, he and his sister, Kamaljit Kaur or Kamal, for short, were born at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. His sister was several years older than Singh and acted more like his mother because she was very protective of him. In return, Singh respected and loved her. If he had any problem, he would rather go to his sister first than to his mother. She made sure that he was happy. His parents' house was a bungalow with a thatched roof and a nice green lawn in front. There were a *jamun* and a mango tree in the back yard. Kamla would often sit him up on a low flat branch of *jamun* tree where he could easily reach and pick the purple *jamun* berries and eat them. She would ask him to throw down some berries to her too. Instead, he would tease her by throwing seeds of eaten berries at her. In anger, she would walk away leaving him sitting by himself on the high tree branch until he apologized and begged her to bring him down.

Singh's memory of the layout of his neighborhood and names of streets was good because his father drove him around often in his black Ford Prefect and made him remember the names of various streets in his neighborhood, in case he was ever lost and had to find his way home. He had good memories of many main streets of Lahore of Regent Street, Mall Road and the hospital of his birth and many more. He remembered his school, the *DAV Primary School*. His sister went to nearby *Mahila School*. His *Ayah* often took him shopping in a crowded street nearby in *Heera Mandi*, a neighborhood with crowded streets, stores and a cinema house. There was also a red light area for

prostitutes and not too far from here was a shelter for abused women and runaway girls. Singh's mother volunteered at the shelter and helped resettle poor, mistreated and often homeless young and old women. She went there often. Occasionally, Singh and his *Ayah* would go with her too; the women in the house would often amuse themselves by playing with the young boy, to Singh's great liking.

His *Ayah* was a Hindu woman in her twenties and wore a cotton sari unlike the Punjabi women of Lahore who mostly wore cotton *salwar and long kameez*. She usually spoke *Hindi*, her native tongue from *Bihar* although she could speak reasonable *Punjabi*. She preferred her own native language. She was originally hired to care for Singh and had become part of the family. She lived in the Singh household. He stayed with her most of the day; she would take him for long walks during late afternoons when the sun would cool down and it would not be too hot. The Victoria Park was their favorite place to go and where they would sit in a shade under a large banyan tree. There, she had formed an informal group of friends mostly men of various ages and faith. They would talk of politics, government, neighbors' or jest around with each other. A few of the younger ones subtly and secretly strived for the *Ayah's* attention. She too did not discourage it but rather enjoyed the banter. Singh would play and they would keep him entertained also. Both *Ayah* and Singh enjoyed the outings. Among them was a tall young man from Afghanistan. *Ayah* told Singh that he looked handsome in his turban and dark beard. She often pulled his leg and it seemed that he liked it too. Everyone called him *Kabuliwalla*, from Kabul. He sold knickknacks, nuts and resins, long cloth of various colors for making homemade clothes. He carried all his wares on a bicycle.

Lahore of Singh's childhood was a friendly cosmopolitan city where everyone lived in peace. Singh's neighborhood was made up of mostly of middle class families of all religions of India. It included Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Parsees. The people considered themselves as *Punjabis* first and spoke common languages of Urdu and Punjabi. Their children played outside their homes or in a nearby park. On any day, one could see and hear boys playing cricket, hide and seek and other fun games. Often, the young girls in colorful *salwar and kameez* would join in too. On summer evenings, a *bhisti*, the water man could be seen carrying water in a large *mashak*, a leather sac made of buffalo skin. He would sprinkle water over the dry and dusty ground in front of homes for it to cool down so that the parents and their friends could sit down for evening chat. Singh enjoyed watching *bhishti* sprinkle water on the dry ground. He kept his one hand over the opening of the *mashak*, and then he would rock from side to side throwing water like a sprinkler. There was also a high bucket stand grounded on one side of his house, ordered by the Home Security during the World War II. Several red painted buckets filled with sand hung on it. They were meant to be used to put out fire from Japanese air bombing. Singh and his young friends would use the buckets as target by throwing small stones at them.

Almost daily, the *Kabuliwala* would show up at his door riding his bicycle. Singh's mother often bought small item from him, whether she needed it or not.

"Poor man, he comes all the way from Afghanistan and needs our help to feed his family back home."

That was his mother's rationale to cultivate him. Singh and his sister liked him because he bribed them with free gifts; but his main interest was in the *Ayah*. Often, he would ride his bicycle to the back of the house, stand there and wait for her. Soon, she would open the kitchen door and appear, wearing a newly washed sari. The *Kabuliwala* would stand against his bicycle. There, the two would talk for long time while Singh played nearby.

Another frequent visitor to the Singh home was a young Muslim boy Azim. He was a few years older than Kamal and lived in the neighborhood. He was tall, thin, with dark dense hair on his head. He was clean shaven and wore gold thin rimmed glasses for nearsightedness. His father, Mr. Khan was a prominent businessman who owned a busy grocery store in *Heera Mandi*. The *Ayah* often took Singh to his shop for groceries. Mr. Khan was a kind man who usually wore a fez cap to cover his balding head. He also had a henna colored red beard and with a pair of half-moon glasses resting almost at the tip of his parrot nose, he looked a pious *fakir*. He would often play with Singh and tickle him to make him laugh and would always give him a handful of candies as a parting gift. Azim often helped Kamal in her school homework as he was good in his studies and always came on top of his class at the *Islamia College* in the city, where he studied. He was always teasing her. She did not mind him and rather liked his kidding around. Singh's family welcomed him because he was also respectful and courteous. He could impress his parents' friends by quoting *Koran* and *Geeta* and singing *Gurubani*.

One day, there was quiet an excitement at Singh's house. A woman came early to clean the house and rearrange furniture in the living room. The grass in the yard was cut and trimmed; *bhishti* sprayed

water on the open clay covered verandah to keep the dust down. The flower beds were raked and edged and bushes pruned. *Ayah* told Singh that a couple was expected from Amritsar bringing a marriage proposal for their son with Kamal. The Singh's parents had asked Kamal to stay home and away from the sun, as she might get suntanned which would affect her looks. She was to serve tea in the afternoon, thus giving them an opportunity to judge her looks and manners. Singh was told to stay with *Ayah* and be on his best behavior; to greet the guests with a "*Namaste*"; to say "thank you" with a smile when given a compliment. He was not to refuse a gift, even if it was not to his liking. And, remember to say "thank you." He was also not to jump the food line at the dining table. The guests were to be served first and only then he could have his meal. All this was too much for Singh to bear; he became tense and nervous. Kamal sensed his anxiety and took him by his hand to her room and sat him down on her bed, held him close to her. She waited until Singh calmed down; then gently kissed him on his forehead and gave him a soft pat on his back.

"Why do you worry so much? I will take care of you tonight. I will feed you before the guests. Father has a hired *bawarchee* to cook a fancy meal tonight. I will ask him to serve you in a plate before the guests". She told him gently; tenderly brushing his long hair with her fingers.

Soon, Singh calmed down and fell asleep in his sister's bed. He woke up to the sounds of people talking in the living room. He stayed in the bed and closed his eyes to go back to sleep. Soon, he felt *Ayah's* hand on him who got him out of the bed; took him to the bathroom to wash his face and got him dressed in a nice white and blue striped shirt and a navy blue half pant and black shoes. He now looked like a little

gentleman. *Ayah* then led him to the living room where the guests were sitting and chatting. Kamal sat separately on a sofa chair all dressed up in a white *kameez* with deep blue polka dots and a white *salwar*. Around her neck was a matching blue thin cotton scarf. She looked beautiful! When Singh saw his sister he quickly left his *Ayah* and ran towards Kamal and stood by her side. Kamal put her arms around Singh and pulled him closer to her. He felt shy and kept his eyes to the ground without looking at the guests.

The parents of the boy liked Kamal and the marriage proposal was accepted by both families. It was a happy occasion and everyone seemed pleased and was in a jovial mood. Dinner was served and Singh and the guests had a great time. Next morning, they departed after gifting Kamal with a pair of beautiful sari, gold bangles and a necklace by her future mother in law.

Singh saw all this but understood little. Kamal later explained to him about the ceremony and things to expect.

He worried that his sister would soon go away leaving him all alone. He would miss her. Kamal consoled him by telling him that she would not get married yet. She wanted to finish her school and then teach at the Saint Mary's High School for a while. She also told him that he could visit her in her new home and could stay with her as long as he wished; he could play with the toys and play cricket with her. She planned to have a big house on a large ground full of fruit-trees. He could climb as many tall trees as he wished.

Singh listened to her but disliked his sister leaving him behind. His eyes started to tear up. Kamal quickly wiped his tears with her scarf and told him again that she would not go away so soon. It would a

few more years before she left her home. By that time, Singh would be older and would understand her absence.

"What about you, silly? One day you will also grow up and find a girl to marry. You will be a good looking boy and many girls will want to marry you." Singh did not say anything but remained sad.

The next day was Sunday, July 13, 1947, Singh's eleventh birthday. Mr. Singh was home sitting in a lounge chair reading *The Sunday Edition of Times of India*. Mrs. Singh and the *Ayah* were cleaning the furniture of the heavy summer dust in the house. Kamal and Singh were outside in the yard running around and playing 'hide and seek' around their father. Singh told me that his father in those days was greatly worried about the consequences of the *Radcliff line*. He would often discuss the issue with his mother.

The line was the name of a boundary line between India and future Pakistan and was named after Sir Cyril Radcliff, a British Judge who was charged by the British government to divide India into two nations. It was all done in secret sitting alone in a small room. He was not to speak to anyone including the then Viceroy of India about his task; certainly, not to any politician! The line was to be announced by him on August 17, 1947 two days after the independence of India and its division into two nations. The interesting thing about Sir Radcliff was that he had never visited India and had hardly any knowledge of the country.

Later, when I asked Singh about his memory of his childhood, he told me that past memories played tricks on him. For example, he had lost memory of faces of his parents, sister or his *Ayah*. Yet, he dreamed of them often and could recognize each but he could not

describe or recall their features. He was sure that his parents worried a great deal about the forthcoming division of India. They dreaded the families' fate after the Partition. They never wanted to leave Lahore, a vibrant and a cosmopolitan city, they loved.

That afternoon on Singh's birthday, Azim came to the house on a bicycle and stood in front. He had brought a little toy for Singh as a gift. Singh remembered his visit vividly. He was all dressed up in a cap and long coat with tight cotton pants. He was discussing Pakistan with his father who still had the day's *Times* in his hands. They seemed to be in an animated discussion and at one point his father just got up still holding the newspaper in his hand and left, saying,

"Do not be so sure, Azim. Lahore will always be Lahore; we all live here peacefully and will continue to do."

Azim looked at Kamal who was standing behind a pillar nearby. Azim said anything Singh told him of Kamal's recent engagement.

"She had her *Kurmai*." Singh shouted. Kamal quickly put her hand over his mouth,

"Shut up! You talk too much".

Azim looked at Kamal and asked if it was true.

When Kamal said yes he made a face at her,

"Who would marry an ugly girl like you?"

"Shut up Azim. Have you looked at yourself? With that ugly face, no girl would want to marry you." Kamal teased him.

Azim replied, "You will, Kamal".

Kamal made a face at him in return but remained quiet. Azim kept quiet and joined them in their play.

Singh's mother appeared on the verandah and greeted Azim with a smile and invited him to stay for lunch.

"I can't, Aunty. My father wants me to go with him to a Muslim League meeting in two hours. Thank you, anyway."

"What does the League think of the Partition? They must be happy."

"Most members of the League are very happy, Aunty. Today's meeting is about the duties of every member of the League after our independence next month; we will rule our own country then". Azim replied.

"I hope there is no trouble, Azim. Sometimes I do not know how much to trust the League. A few people in it like to make trouble for all of us. You take care of yourself, and do not get mixed up with that crowd. May God keep you safe" She said as she went back in the house.

The newspapers and radio were full of news about the riots which had broken out in a few big cities in India. New Delhi and Amritsar was no different. It was rumored that the boundary of the new nation, Pakistan, would run between Lahore on the west and Amritsar on the east. Both cities had significant populations of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Over the centuries, they had lived in peace.

Rumors of a Sikhs mob attacking the Muslims in Amritsar were tickling in Lahore. The Sikhs had been agitating for their own nation, the *Khalistan*. Sikhs feared Muslim retaliation in the new nation of

Pakistan. A long history of discrimination against the Sikhs was behind the fear between the two groups.

The rumor of Sikh violence in Amritsar acted as an excuse for some members of the League to take law in their own hands. They went on rampage of looting and burning homes and raping women in the process. The authorities in Lahore were helpless and tried to intervene and to stop the looting but were mostly ineffective. A twenty four hour curfew was imposed on parts of the city including Singh's neighborhood. The next few days were a hell for Singh's family. His mother had gone out in the curfew to *Heera Mandi* with one of her friends to help the women in the shelter. His father, sister and the *Ayah* had locked themselves up in the house during the curfew. A whole day had passed waiting for Mrs. Singh who had not yet returned. The family got very worried. On the radio the news was bad. Many people had broken the curfew and in spite of strong police action they were able to continue the rampage of looting, stabbing, and beheading Hindu and Sikh men, women and children. They were burning houses and shops belonging to the non-Muslims. It was now dark outside and Singh's father decided to go look for his wife. He told his family to lock all doors and turn all the lights off inside of house. He already had put up a Pakistani flag in front of the house to show his loyalty to the new nation. Then, he took his black Ford and went looking for his wife. He too never came back.

Singh never found out the circumstances of his parents loss during the riots. What happened to his mother after she went to *Heera Mandi* remained a mystery to him. Anyone who disappeared in those days was assumed dead. Even the family car, the black Prefect was never found. Singh was sure that his father met his death.

Kamal, Singh and the *Ayah* stayed in the dark house until two in the morning. They were all very tired. Kamal then took Singh in her bedroom to lie down in her bed together and rest still hoping for their parents to return. The *Ayah* slept in an adjoining room. Before leaving, she gave Kamal the keys of the house and embraced both her and Singh. She had tears in her eyes. Kamal was quietly crying also. Singh could feel the teardrops but he was too tired and restless to say anything. They hoped that somehow, it would all turn out fine and they would be safe from the rioting mob. Next morning, Kamal and Singh woke up to a bright sunshine. When they got up they found *Ayah* missing. They looked all over and did not find her. The kitchen door was unlocked. Outside, things were quiet. She could hear the traffic of the street in front and could smell the smoke of burning houses outside. She looked out of the window. The Times of India was lying there near the front door. She slowly opened the door and carefully picked the newspaper which was full of stories of the riots in Lahore, Amritsar and even in New Delhi and many other parts of the country. She could not bear to read further and put the paper down. She missed her parents and wondered what might have happened to them. She believed that they were both safe some place and soon she would hear from them or see them on their return. She made breakfast for Singh and herself but could not eat. She had lost her appetite worrying about her parents and about the *Ayah*. The whole day passed listening to the radio news and waiting for her parents and the *Ayha*. Finally Kamal and Singh went to bed early at around eight in the evening. Soon, they fell asleep.

Around midnight, they woke up to a loud noise of a mob going by their home. Many in the group carried burning torches and others,

shiny swords and long knives. They were shouting "*Allah O Akbar*", "*Pakistan Zindabad*", "Allah is great and long live Pakistan" battle cries by the Muslims heard commonly in those days. As the sounds of shouting came nearer Kamal brought Singh close to her and hugged him.

"Stay with me always. If you see trouble, hide inside the red storage box in the living room. Do not come out until it is safe to do so. Do not worry about me. If something happens to me I will take care of myself. I just want you safe. Always remember that I love you and keep reciting the *Gurubani* our mother taught us".

Singh nodded but was fearful as he listened to his sister. He put his arms around and clung to her. She took him to his bed and sat there until he closed his eyes. Kamal, thinking he had gone to sleep, left him there and quietly went to her own room to sleep. Singh was awake and remained restless. He was depressed. He kept turning and tossing and finally went to sleep. He was full of miserable thoughts about his parents and the *Ayah*. A ten year old boy became a man in a hurry. He reminded himself of what his sister just told him. He started reciting the *Gurbani*, his mother had taught him to recite. In that half consciousness, he saw an image of *Guru Nanak* standing in front of him putting his hand over Singh. He began to sob and begged the *Guru* for mercy and return of his parents and his *Ayah*. When he opened his eyes it was daylight and the first rays of sunshine had already brightened his room.

He felt cold in hot July and very lonely. He slowly got out of his bed and tip toed to his sister's room. She was fast asleep. He quietly returned to his bedroom and lay down in his bed thinking and planning to save himself and his sister. He kept thinking about his parents and

his *Ayah*. There was no one else he could trust but himself and made up his mind to be strong. He recited his prayers again but this time there was no *Guru* to bless him except a large image of *Guru Nanak* hanging on his bedroom wall. In the picture, he was sitting on a golden throne wearing a yellow and red robe with his long white beard and seems to look directly at Singh. He continued to stare at the picture then folded his both hands and quietly began to recite his prayers. Singh felt a power radiate from *Guru's* eyes and enter his body. All of a sudden, he was not cold anymore and his fear was gone.

At about eight o'clock in the morning there was a knock on the front door. Kamal had just woken up and she quickly came to Singh's room and signaled him to be very quiet and hid him under the bed. She then, quietly went to the window above the front door to see who was knocking at the door. She saw a cream white Desoto parked in front of the house. She recognized it immediately. The car belonged to Mr. Khan, Azim's father. He had a long off colored *achkan* and tight white pajamas with a black *topi* on his head. Azim was standing beside him. Mr. Khan had his both hands folded together. When she saw them, Kamal signaled to her brother to get out of his hiding place and both ran down together to open the front door.

Azim's father hugged them tightly for several moments.

"*Masha Allah!* You both are safe. We have been worried about you. We have come to take you both to our home where you will be safe." He said hurrying his words as Azim opened the back door of the car. Kamal felt relieved and took her brother's hand and both sat down on the back seat of the car. Azim sat down on the front passenger seat. Azim's father drove the car to his home which was nearby. Kamal

and Singh both felt a sense of relief. Kamal wondered if Mr. Khan knew whereabouts of her parents.

Later, Mr. Khan told her about their father and the *Ayah*. He said that he had reliable information that Mr. Singh had been killed by a mob when he went looking for their mother. He was not sure if Mrs. Singh was still alive. When Kamal told him that she had gone to the shelter in *Heera Mandi*, he said that it was possible that she might still be there as he knew, a large number of women took refuge there in the last few days. The shelter was being guarded by the Punjab Police.

He also told her about the *Ayah*. He said that there was a rumor for several months about a romantic liaison between her and the *Kabuliwala*.

"They had planned to get married and run away to Afghanistan. The *imam* at the *Badshahi Mosque* is a friend of mine and he told me himself that the *Kabuliwala* had brought her one morning to the mosque and that he himself converted her to *Islam* and performed their marriage ceremony. They probably left for Afghanistan the same day".

Singh heard this and was very heartbroken. He began to hate both his *Ayah* and the *Kabuliwala*. It was too much to handle for a young boy. He started crying and tried to run away from there but Kamal caught him quickly and held him close, trying to console him. Kamal was disappointed too but was helpless and so kept quiet. She was too shocked to even cry.

"*Beti*, Pakistan was not created for this. These are bad people who are doing this. They are not *Muslims*; they are traitors, enemy of the country. I am ashamed. You both stay here; you will be safe in our

home. No one can touch you here." Azim's father said consoling Kamal and her young brother.

Azim's mother welcomed them and was kind to them and pampered them. The two sat down with the family for dinner and felt safe. Several days passed and there was no news of Singh's mother. Singh became depressed and missed her. Azim's father came from his shop one day and said that there was more trouble in the city. The League had now marked each house in each neighborhood according to the religion of the individuals living in it. It claims that in this manner it could guarantee their safety. The fourteenth of August was still a few weeks away and so they would be prepared to take protective action after that day, Azim's father knew better! He smelled a fish in the whole affair. He suspected that the list was meant to identify and target individuals for the purposes of cleansing the city of *Hindus and Sikhs*.

He told Kamal that night of his fears, that soon the League members would find out about her and Singh living in his house. He wanted to help them travel to Amritsar but it was very dangerous to do so. He said that there was a solution only if, she agreed to it. He suggested that since Kamal's father was a close friend of his and had helped him in many ways in past, he now wanted to repay his debt to him.

He suggested that Kamal convert to Islam and marry his son Azim. She would be safe then as no Muslim would be able touch her because she would then be a married Muslim woman".

Kamal was shocked to hear this but was completely helpless. With tears rolling down her eyes she just stood there with her head down.

Her little brother heard Mr. Khan and understood everything. He wanted his mother.

Mr. Khan took her silence as a sign of acceptance of his proposal.

"Kamal you are like our daughter. This is your home now. Only *Allah* knows what is in store for any one of us. I know that you both will be safe here." He reassured her.

When Kamal and Singh were alone, she sat down with Singh and tried to explain to him that it was not safe for them to stay in Pakistan as a *Sikh*.

"Why not? Where is *Mata*? I want my *Mata*." He demanded.

"I do not know where she is." She replied.

"Why can't we look for her?" He demanded again.

"Only if I knew where she is, we could go bring her home." She consoled Singh.

Singh had already made up his mind to go look for his mother. If his sister would not or could not, he would. He knew that his mother had gone to the woman-shelter in *Heera Mandi* on the day she disappeared. He knew the way to the place. He had made up his mind to look for his mother and bring her home. He waited for his sister to go to her room to get ready for the day. As soon as he found that he was alone and other members of the household were busy getting ready for their daily routine and the house was quiet, he sneaked out the back door. He looked around; there was no one in the back yard. He walked by the side of the house making sure no one was watching him, stood in the front yard for a moment and then crossed it quickly. He could see

the main road in front about fifty yards from him. He hid behind a bush and slowly crawled to a side street. Once on the street, he could see that the main road was only a few yards away. He ran towards the road in front, crossed it and turned left. He was wearing khaki shorts and a white shirt. He had bare feet because he did not have time to put on his shoes. He did not have his turban on and his long black hair was made up in a head-bun covered with a light blue cloth. The traffic on the street was heavy with people on foot and on bicycle. All types of traffic was on the road that day including horse driven *tongas*, bullock carts, cycle *rickshaws* and motor vehicle and few trucks. Men in various outfits, women covered from head to toe with black and beige *burka*, walked hurriedly; a few motor cars and bullock carts occupied the middle of the road competing for space. They were all Muslims. He did not see a single Hindu or a Sikh on the road that morning. Singh was not afraid. He ran fast dodging the traffic as he weaved through the people and vehicles. When he reached near *Heera Mandi* he easily recognized it by a familiar row of single story shops with windows open towards the street. Young women with heavy makeup stood upstairs. No one seemed to pay any attention to them. The Punjabi music was blaring from a loud speaker sitting on top of a *paan* and cigarette shop next to a large sign board of the Punjab Hotel. Singh passed a row of shops of Indian sweets, groceries, bicycle repair, butcher and others. People mulled around in the street and a few men haggling with a horse driven *Tongawallah*. Several rickshaws were lined up below a large shady *peepal* tree waiting to be hired. Many women covered from head to toe in black *Burka* walked briskly with small shopping bags in hand. Above, telephone and electric wires hung between high aluminum poles. Hundreds of pigeons and ravens sat on the wires waiting for crumb of food down below. One or two of them would take a dive down to pick up

a little piece of food on the ground and fly back quickly to the wire. Singh knew exactly where he was heading. He did not have time to look around and moreover he did not want to be caught. He passed the shops and then turned right on a narrow street. He just had to go about fifty yards before he would come to a large courtyard where deep inside, a red brick house with a large wooden door stood. This was the house which sheltered women and where Singh was sure, he would find his mother.

When he entered the courtyard, he saw in front, a large bus. Its engine was running. A man in a khaki uniform sat on the driver's seat smoking a *Bidi*. Behind the bus were two police jeeps parked with their engines also running. Several uniformed police officers stood in attention behind and by the side of the jeeps. Each policeman was armed with a revolver in leather holsters and a baton hanging by the side of the body. There was also a small contingent of petrol guards in uniform, a few carrying a rifle on their shoulder and others held a long wooden *lathi*. They were loitering around on the premises.

The front door of the shelter was partially hidden by a large crowd of women some in *Burka* with open face flaps in front and others in just a *Salwar-Kameez*. They were busily but quietly moving around. There were a few men in *achkan* who stood on the verandah quietly talking to each other. Among this crowd, Singh wondered if his mother was there. If she was, he did not see her. No one noticed him first and he quickly sneaked from behind the men and ran directly towards the women hoping to find his mother.

One of the women saw Singh and grabbed him by his arm.

"Where are you going, my child? Who are you with?" She demanded,

"I am looking for my mother. She is here."

Without answering him, the woman pulled him by his arm and took him inside. There were several women standing, sitting and speaking softly. Singh tried to free himself from the woman but her grip was strong and he gave up, still his eyes looking for his mother. Only a few minutes had passed when suddenly he heard loud repetitive sounds in quick succession. Someone in the crowd said it was gunfire. The place immediately became quiet and a woman came running inside and announced that a crowd of men had suddenly appeared outside of the building shouting, threatening and pushing to get in. They were armed with homemade fire poles, swords and knives. They demanded that the women in the shelter be handed over to them. The guards held them at bay by firing in the air. Singh could hear the commotion and sounds of gun fire. Soon, a jeep appeared with several Sikh soldiers who stood in attention in front of the hostile crowd.

A man standing in the verandah signaled a woman at the door for them to enter the bus. The women then lined up quietly and were guided to the bus. The mad crowd continued to make threatening gestures at the women but stayed behind the Sikhs guards.

"Where is my mother" Singh shouted at the woman holding him. It seemed that the woman did not hear him. She kept holding his hand. One of the guard said loudly,

"Quick, let's get in before there is more trouble."

No one had a moment to answer Singh's question. Actually, he was already in the bus with the woman who was still holding his hand as firmly as she could. Before he could free himself, the bus was already on the Grand Trunk Road and was moving east towards Amritsar, a distance of about twenty miles. Singh felt helpless and gave himself to the woman who sat him by the window but continued to keep her grip on him. He looked outside; he saw bodies of men, women and children lying listlessly by the side of the road and on the flat green farmland. They were dead and decomposed in the monsoon rain and heat. The farmland was lush green with vegetation. Several times, the bus passed a column of men, women and children of all ages, walking, riding bicycles and sitting in and pushing various types' of vehicles including cars which had run out of gas. There were also bullock carts, rickshaws, tongas, etcetera. People were desperate to leave Lahore and fearful of the violence on the road. A similar movement of people was coming from the opposite direction; the Muslims coming from Amritsar to Lahore. Both populations were at risk of being attacked. Occasionally, a small crowd of armed men would suddenly appear in front of the bus threatening to stop it and get in but the Sikh soldiers in the bus would disperse them by firing in the air. Singh saw houses on fire and smoke belching out of them. The dead on the way were the unlucky people fleeing to safety but were attacked by the violent mob in the name of religion. There was a human cleansing going on all in name of religion.

"I got sick and began to vomit. My head was hurting." Singh told me.

"The woman sitting next to me put my head on her lap and made me stay there. She put a whole cardamom in my mouth to ease my sickness." I stayed there for a long time and fell asleep."

After several hours of slow, painful journey on dusty G.T. Road, the bus finally arrived at the main gate of The Golden Temple of Amritsar. A welcome party of Sikhs and Hindus was waiting for the bus and received the frightened passengers with open arms. From here they were divided into several small groups to be taken to stay with various families in town. Singh stayed with the woman but never found his own mother. The woman was short and plump but very kind. He could not tell her age but she was all alone.

"My headache, which started just after I entered the bus in Lahore, became worse. I felt hot and sweaty. Soon, my whole body was shivering. The woman told me that I had fever and that I should lie down." Singh said to me later. His fever lasted several days. He went in and out of a delirium. When he regained his senses, he was weak and exhausted. He had no memory of the events around him during that period. He said that he did not even remember about his arrival in Delhi with the woman. He did remember living in a refugee camp there in a fort. He remembered vaguely of walking out of the camp one dark night, still looking for his mother and then falling in a ditch and losing his senses. His next memory was in the orphanage. All he would tell me over and over was that he was very lucky to have survived and very thankful to the woman who saved his life. He tried later to find her but was not successful.

My mother as I said earlier was fond of Singh and I knew that he loved her too. Life in the orphanage was tolerable but harsh and my mother knew it. Once, on my return home from some task, I found my mother and Singh sitting on a wooden *Takht*, a low large wooden settee. She had her arm around him; he was crying bitterly with his head down. I knew that something terrible had happened. His back was towards

me. Mother saw me first and motioned me to be quiet and to go away from there. That night, Singh stayed at our home sleeping on an extra bed in a small corner room. My mother told me later not to see or talk to Singh for his sake. I was confused and curious but obeyed her directions. The next day in the evening, she explained that Singh had gotten an admission at the St. Joseph College in New Delhi and one of my father's friends drove him there early in the morning. According to her, Singh had received a merit scholarship to attend the two year college completely free. He also got a free room to live at the college. I was baffled about the incidence but did not question her. I knew that Singh had excellent grades in Mathematics and Physics, so, I was not surprised that he would go to a College on a merit scholarship. Singh was then about thirteen or fourteen years old. He would study at the St. Joseph College for two years and then join the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi where he would also excel. After his graduation from a well known Technology Institute in Delhi, he then moved to Chicago.

I lost all contact with him after he left for St. Joseph College. I would meet him again in Chicago in early seventies. By this time he was a scientist working on high energy photons at the Argon Laboratory and had developed a name for himself, giving lectures and writing books and teaching. He told me often that he was proud of my friendship and glad that he met me during his childhood. He was very fond of my mother and would often remind me about her. He was sad when she died suddenly. He showed me a small faded photo of my mother, which he kept in his wallet. This was taken out of an old family album. In the photo, she looked young and probably in her forties. I remembered the image but had not seen it for years. After her death we never talked

about her until the day I went to see him a few days before his own death.

It was here that he told me about his sudden departure to St. Joseph College one early morning of that fateful day when he came crying to my mother. I had almost forgotten the incident but now remembered it vividly. A day before the incidence, Singh was awarded a scholarship to go to college in New Delhi. That night, one of the masters of the orphanage invited him to his room; gave him something to drink and then sexually assaulted him. He was hurt and was determined to commit suicide by taking a large dose of DDT which was stored in the garage of our house. He knew about it and had come to get it from the garage. My mother happened to be outside when he came. Singh told me that somehow, she knew that something was wrong with him. She motioned him to come near her. When he came to her, she brought him close to her and held him tightly. Singh began to cry bitterly, tears flowing freely. She also suspected what might have happened to the young boy with long hair, smooth face and big brown eyes. She took him to her bedroom and sat him down on the *takht* to console him.

"Your mother that day was like a goddess to me. I was determined to kill myself that day by whatever means I could find. If I did not find the DDT, I was going to lie down in front of an oncoming train. Your mother sat down with me and consoled me. She somehow knew that I wanted to end my life. She led me by my hand to her dressing room and made me stand in front of a large mirror which had a diagonal crack on it. There, still holding me, she said,

"Look you! This beautiful face in the mirror! Here is what God gave us, a gift of life in your person. If you destroy this, the world would never know what it missed; and the world will move on. It is up to you to save it and move on to things that would really matter in life. What you see in the mirror cannot achieve anything without the one standing in front of it. So, you choose, live or die. That is the lesson of the face in the mirror" She told him still holding him close to her.

That Sunday afternoon when I had gone to see him and take out water from his belly, I handed him his small mirror, while I shaved his stubby face with an electric shaver. He kept looking at himself in the mirror, unaware of me or the shaver moving over his face. When I finished shaving, he handed the mirror back to me and looked at me intently, while smoothing his face with his hand.

"Thank you" He said

"You are welcome" I replied.

"Can you slow the fan down a bit? I am cold."

I lowered the speed of the ceiling fan, put his shaver and the mirror back in his bathroom and left him in his bedroom. In the next room Lisa sat on the sofa looking down with a magazine in her hand. I took her leave and walked out to my car. The day was windy and cool but the sun felt warm.

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V. Amod Saxena,

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Meaning of Non-English words

<i>Achkan:</i>	<i>Long closed collar coat</i>
<i>Angrez:</i>	<i>English man or women</i>
<i>Mata:</i>	<i>Mother</i>
<i>Burka:</i>	<i>A large long garment to cover the whole body worn by the Mulsim women</i>
<i>Ammi jaan:</i>	<i>Mother in Urdu</i>
<i>Tonga:</i>	<i>A two wheeled flat or regular seats vehicle drawn by a horse</i>
<i>Ayah:</i>	<i>Nurse or maid</i>
<i>Antam Sanskar :</i>	<i>Last rites</i>
<i>Beti:</i>	<i>Daughter</i>
<i>Guru Granth Saheb:</i>	<i>Holy book of the Sikhs</i>
<i>DAV School:</i>	<i>Name of the school Daya Anglo Vernacular School</i>
<i>Kabuliwala:</i>	<i>Any man from Kabul, Afghanistan</i>
<i>Eid:</i>	<i>A Muslim festival also called Id a festival of sacrifice inIslam</i>
<i>Baisakhi:</i>	<i>Spring festival common in Punjab</i>
<i>Masha Allah:</i>	<i>An expression of thankfulness in Urdu or Arabic</i>
<i>Gaddaars:</i>	<i>Traitors</i>
<i>Jinnah cap:</i>	<i>A cap popularized by Mr. Jinnah</i>
<i>Gurubani:</i>	<i>Voice of Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Saheb the Sikh's holy book</i>
<i>Diwali:</i>	<i>An annual festival of lights celebrated during autumn by Hindus and</i>
<i>Sikhs:</i>	<i>Belonging to the Sikh religion.</i>
<i>Kurmai:</i>	<i>Engagement before marriage</i>
<i>Khuda:</i>	<i>God in Urdu</i>
<i>Biryani:</i>	<i>Fried rice preparation with meat, a dish</i>

<i>Heera Mandi:</i>	<i>Heera means diamond and Mandi means a shopping area, originally a place where diamonds were traded in the 18th Century during the Mughals</i>
<i>Salwar and kameez:</i>	<i>Salwar and a long cotton and kameez a long shirt</i>
<i>Khalistan:</i>	<i>Nation for the Sikhs</i>
<i>Bawarchi:</i>	<i>A cook or a Chef</i>
<i>Bhisti:</i>	<i>Waterman with a water buffalo skin leather bag</i>
<i>Mashak:</i>	<i>Leather bag made of the buffalo skin</i>
<i>Takht:</i>	<i>A wooden flat settee or a low table to sit on or work on</i>
<i>Paan:</i>	<i>Beetle nut wrapped in special leaf</i>
<i>Bidi:</i>	<i>a small smoking tobacco leaf folded in a cone and tied with a string, used for smoking like a cigarette.</i>
<i>Peepal:</i>	<i>A variety of tall tree grows in India</i>
<i>Fakir:</i>	<i>A Sufi holy man or a wandering mendicant</i>
<i>Gurubani:</i>	<i>Words of Guru Nanak in the Holy Book of the Sikh religion.</i>
<i>Lathi:</i>	<i>A long wooden stick or pole usually made of wood or bamboo used mostly in India for support or crowd control by the police as a club.</i>
<i>Geeta:</i>	<i>Holy book of Hindus</i>