

Easha Ashraf

David Roney

Humanities, Fall 2021

19 November 2021

Finding Home

The sound of explosions, white noise on radios, and forceful cries of youth travel across cities. The division of two religions caused an intense uproar from millions of citizens and the hostilities of over 1.4 million British-Indian soldiers. The sky above the once beautiful capital of Sindh is now filled with smoke, gunpowder, and the distressed spirits of millions of people across the country. Although they don't know it yet, the Partition between the Hindus and Muslims that will occur in 10 months will cause the citizens to be disparaged, forced out of their homes, and separated into two nations in a matter of months.

In January of 1947, Syed Mehmood Shaukat, about 25 years old, was in the midst of chaos as a Muslim soldier fighting for independence. He was tall and strong, his stance conveying the courage and power necessary to be a soldier, fighting against those who wanted to strip him of his freedom. The rift between Hindus and Muslims began after World War II. In 1942, violence began to escalate and polarization occurred between the two groups of people. The war caused people to begin to see each other as different rather than equal, and British Indian citizens could not co-exist peacefully because of the difference of religions. As the British departure from different Indian territories influenced the rising isolation between each religion, religious massacres first began in 1946 in Calcutta against Muslims, which sparked the hatred between Hindus and Muslims (Dalrymple, William, et al.). Because of this, shame and fear was instilled throughout Syed's life with his religion and identity, but he knew that his freedom, the

freedom of his family, and the freedom of Muslims across the country was something worth fighting for.

Razia sat on her dining table, across from her husband's empty chair at the table. She reminisced to the time they were together, just the two of them. The night before he left, six months ago, she sat as she did now, him across from her, sharing words and stolen moments together. His dark, piercing eyes locked with hers, as she shed a tear. *I won't be gone for long*, he said in their native language of Urdu. She smiled, trying to think of something to say. Something meaningful, something worthwhile. Something to display the amount of love they shared over the short time they had been married. But she couldn't find the words.

Razia was especially in danger. Massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and sexual violence towards both Hindus and Muslims caused the fight for independence of the two country so that both religions could live peacefully. And for women, it was infinitely worse. As a pregnant Muslim woman, living alone, and whose husband was fighting for independence, Razia was always in danger of horrifying violence: losing their unborn children, many of their limbs, and oftentimes, their lives (Dalrymple, William). She never knew what would come next, and when she would have to hide. Every part of her desperately wanted to flee this country, where terrorism was more out of control than ever.

Her mind once again wandered to her husband. As she got up from the table, she placed her hand on her stomach, on baby Zafar. She walked over to the photo album she often returned to whenever she missed her husband, and flipped through the grainy, black and white pictures of

the two of them and their families. She longed for the day he would return home. If he would return home.

FOUR MONTHS LATER

Syed laid at night, in the barracks between other soldiers. The Indian Partition was near, He could feel it. After countless lives lost, multiple regions terrorized, and his own life threatened multiple times in the military, he couldn't help but wonder when he would return home to his wife. Throughout it all, all he wanted to do was to fight for his family, to create a better life for them. And he would.

As a member of the British Indian Air Force, he was particularly involved in the shaping of a nation that would occur shortly after the Partition. He witnessed violence towards both Hindus and Muslims, and the immense amount of instability the country had suffered because of the colossal division of the people. Yet, he supported and fought for the Partition of the country because of the religious freedom and peace that would result from it, albeit many were in opposition. Much of the Indian population, including Gandhi, thought that creating a barrier between the two religions was unnecessary and would prevent the idea of unity within the country (Brocklehurst, Steven). Regardless, he fought and would continue to fight in the war until he knew that he and his family were safe to be themselves without fear.

“Syed Sahab! Ye dekho!” A fellow soldier exclaimed to Syed, urging him to follow him through the barracks, outside. He ran to the opening of the tent, where commotion was brewing. He pushed through the other soldiers to see what was causing the sheer excitement, when he finally realized. The fields were clear, and the Chief Marshal was standing outside of the tents. When he heard the Chief Marshal's announcement that the war was finally over and they had won their independence, he fell to the ground, as did many Muslim soldiers. They would finally

have peace. Freedom. Unity. And most important to him, family. “Main Aa Raha Hu, Razia.”
I’m coming.

Razia felt completely alone, lying uneasy in her bed. As she held tiny, new-born Zafar in her arms, she leaned over to increase the volume on the radio. She closed her eyes and listened as the grainy, disembodied voice reported in Urdu: “The Muslims have finally gained their independence. Soon, we will see the separation of British India into two countries: India and Pakistan.” Razia knew this meant Syed would be home soon. As soon as he arrived, they would have to flee to Pakistan. She was already hearing stories about how Muslims remaining in India after the Partition were tortured, dismembered, and slaughtered (Dalrymple, William). She barely had a chance if she remained in India, and she would have to escape to the West so that she and her family would be under the Pakistani government, where Muslims were the majority and ultimately, safe. The first glimmer of hope flashed between her eyes, as she knew she would be safe again.

SIX YEARS LATER

“I’m off to work,” Syed announced to his family, who were having breakfast around the table. As he stepped out the front door, Razia followed him with his briefcase, which was stamped with the words *Pakistan Space Agency*. After he left, Razia was encompassed with a feeling of gratitude, as she was nearly every day. After the Partition in 1947, her husband retired from the British Indian Air Force, from all the suffering and violence he was once forced to endure. He

now worked at *Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission*, where he was able to put both his passion for loyalty to his culture and intelligence to use.

Even though it had been six years after the partition, both Razia and Syed knew that India and Pakistan weren't completely at peace and would likely never be. Thousands of people were still dying, and even after the transfer of power, there was a fine line between being Indian or Pakistani (Zakaria, Anam). Hundreds of children born during this era were brought up in the midst of an international crisis, and would be confused about which nation they belonged to. She worried for her own children. Would they be in touch with their culture? How would they grow up in a country that was created around violence? Despite all of the uncertainties, she knew that the Partition was means for a better life for her children. And although she may not have known it then, her children would grow up safe, in a country where they could express their religious beliefs freely. Her grandchildren, despite being located all around the world, would all be in touch with their Pakistani identities. Her son would build a life for himself in America, where he would raise his daughters in a Pakistani-American household, creating a culture that was a convergence of cultures, ultimately for the better. They didn't know it then, but Razia and Syed sacrificed everything to create a better life for their children, grandchildren, and every generation to follow. And they succeeded.

Works Cited

Brocklehurst, Steven. "Partition of India: 'They Would Have Slaughtered Us'." *BBC News*, BBC,

11 Aug. 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-40874496>.

Dalrymple, William, et al. "The Mutual Genocide of Indian Partition." *The New Yorker*, 22 June

2015,

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>.

Zakaria, Anam. "Partition: An Event to Celebrate, Mourn, or Forget." *India-Pakistan Partition* |

Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 15 Aug. 2019,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/8/15/partition-an-event-to-celebrate-mourn-or-forget>.