

HOME (Zarina)

Interview transcript

“**Khirki jisme jhaankh kar humne zindagi guzarna seekha**” ... she looked out of this window.

And then this is also ... this is fallen apart ...

and she wrote: “Hum rehna waalain hain usse ujedre dayaar ke” ... that this...

This is the front. And half of the house was for ... eh ... men, where my father had all the very Western drawing room, his study, and there was one room for my grandfather. And the back of the house, which you see in my floor-plan, was the women's quarter, the **Parda** quarter where ... you know ... we lived like regular Muslim ladies, you know, sat on the floor with white sheets and ... eh ... and there was a huge courtyard. and this is where we slept under the stars and eh ... and I always say I dreamt my life under those stars.

And this is the end of the courtyard. And this is the wall which I have drawn often.

And it doesn't look that... but when I was little it looked very high. But it has been changed, it was not like this. After that I sort of closed the book and I s...

you know houses are made of people, families, they are not made of bricks. Yes, like the Palestinian poet Mahmoud, he recently died, Darwish said "I make houses in words", and I always say I make houses in lines. I mean memory is selective as we all know ... this will...

but winter I don't know ... we will just hide in the bedrooms with little ... eh... fire ... braziers. The servant will bring and put it in the room. I think this should do.

otherwise it will be too too too big. So this is ... this is the **sehen**, this is the courtyard. There were what you call **kiaries**, and this is the servant quarters which opened inside and outside, and then this is the veranda. This ... what did I do...

and this was the **bawarchi khana**, this was the **dewry, darwaza**, and this was the door. I don't have to look at it this I know. And ... I think you can finish the drawing for me. And then...

I think this was the **baramda**, and these were the rooms, **chandni-ka-kamra** because there was always a white sheet on the floor. This was much light with the white flooring, white everything. It was a very simple house, I think most of the houses ... and this house was bought by Sir Syed for his staff. It didn't belong to us, but for us this was ...

this was another **godown** a little one. I think this was not here...this was hand pump, **nal**, and these were the three rooms. This was my father's study, the drawing room and this was my grandfather's. And this was the ... which no one ever used, the

Western drawing room, it was so ugly... so ugly I don't know where my father bought those furniture. Does it make sense? Some of the furniture was not so bad, but.. eh...we found it very alien. The lawn, the Western lawn. And this was ...

You know I was born in this house, like my other two siblings, we all were born here. And I grew up in this house. And because my mother never ventured out, seldom ventured out on the other side, the **baher-ki-kamra**, so called...we sort of stayed with her. So all my memories of growing up in India are associated with this house. So this is the house I keep on going back to.

And this is the window here, where my sister said she looked at the world, and this is the road from Delhi to **Aligarh**. And this is the **neem-ka-pair**, and this corner is here, and this is another big tree and this is ... we had a tank here with goldfish. And one of the fish... I don't know... a cake of soap fell in the tank, it was a huge tank. And all the fishes died. So we made a little **machli-ki-kaber**, a graveyard. And then, this is where, you know I couldn't remember the name of the tree... which grew here, which was **Kooler**. I don't know what it is called in English, I think it is family of ... ehh.. what is....

Pakistan changed, you know, the Muslim society a lot. Especially the people who came from India. They left their values and lots of things behind, because... I remember when my father moved to Lahore and I went to visit him, I was so shocked that he went shopping, he went to a store to pick a few things, because I had never seen my father to go to a shop, but he just went and picked up the things. And I was ... I was very sad also, because that side of my father I had never seen. And I think this is the decision I know he regretted for rest of his life, moving to Pakistan. It did hurt him a lot. But I still don't know what, because I was not there, and, you know, we don't talk about those things. You can always explain things, and I didn't ask him because I didn't want to hurt him.

There were rumours that Aligarh will be raised to the ground, it will be burned. So I do remember one night that there ... we heard some noise and we went out and we could see some far away, some villages working, so everybody collected in our house. And we didn't know what to expect, you know. We had never experienced violence, but we were scared, you know. But then nothing happened and they went home. So we didn't see any violence, you know. The only time I think it was... after the **Partition** it was my mother's bright idea that maybe we should go to Pakistan for for safety. At least until the things settle down. And we went through **Darya Ganj** and we could see dead bodies and the stench of rotting bodies. And my sister says

that she saw somebody, you know, on a bicycle with a with a sword. But, you know, at that age you don't remember. So for years I had a love hate relationship with Aligarh, because I wouldn't go, because I thought it has hurt me a lot, like Partition, like Pakistan. You know all these relationships are very complicated in my life. But I don't know how to explain it.

I mean I do see my sister who grew up in India, and sometime, you know in certain **Divali** or **Raksha Bandhan** or **Holi**...you know, she was telling me that her other nephews come by and they always make fun of her because she is glued to the TV. Because for her it's home, because for me she's home and I'm, you know, a home which she, a home and a country which she, which she lost.

But you know that's why I ... I am very fortunate. You know, nobody in my family ... died, nobody lost too much property, but these are, but these are hidden hurts which stay with you. Because when you go back and if someone says... at one time it was very common ... and if you are wearing a **Shalwar Kameez**, which is a Punjabi dress, it is not a Muslim dress, it's not a Pakistani dress, 'oh you look like a Pakistani' or 'are you a Pakistani?' And it really doesn't matter, but I think I am very sensitive to it, because I feel every, almost every, Muslim in India is identified as a Pakistan sympathiser. And I find it very hurtful that my loyalty ... that someone can question my loyalty. But, but then I didn't know what was to come.

I mean if you ask me to draw... of course now my hand is not steady but I can chisel a very thin line, as you can ... so I am much more comfortable with the chisel than with the pen.

and I like the residue, so you know ... you can't mistake it for an intaglio or a silk screen.

And this is the tree.

Urdu word list:

Khirki jisme jhaankh kar humne zindagi guzarna seekha = We learnt to live life by looking through this window

hum rehna waalain hain usse ujedre dayaar ke = We are the dwellers of this wretched space

Parda = segregation

sehen = courtyard

kiaries = fence

bawarchi khana = kitchen

dewry = doorpost

darwaza = door

baramda = veranda

chandni-ka-kamra = room with white floor-sheets

godown = storage room

nal = hand pump

baher-ki-kamra = room to receive guests

Aligarh = university city in the north of India

neem-ka-pair = Indian Lilac tree

machli-ki-kaber = fish graveyard

Kooler = a tree

Partition = 1947 separation of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan

Darya Ganj = Central neighbourhood in Delhi

Diwali = Hindu festival of lights

Raksha Bandhan = Hindu festival which celebrates the relationship between brothers and sisters

Holi = Hindu festival of colours

Shalwar Kameez = traditional dress common in Punjab also considered

Pakistan's national dress