

He replied Abbottabad and I told him that my mother was also from there. I again requested him to give me a 30 day visa that would allow me to roam about freely in Pakistan. He looked at me, smiled, went back and without any verification or validation gave me a 30-day visa.

Q. What was it like looking for your past?

When I landed in Lahore, my aim was to roam Pakistan for the first 15 days and then reach Muzaffarabad where my family had been witness to a Hindu-Sikh massacre just before Partition. My aunt had lost two of her children there. They were found years later in a missionary in Rawalpindi. My aunt who was not yet five years old then, lost both her parents in that massacre. She was brought up by a Muslim family and now lives in Rawalpindi and is a Muslim. So my entire aim was to go back to my family's history in Muzaffarabad, pick up the soil from under the bridge where the massacre happened and pass it on to my two daughters. But in those 15 days prior to reaching Muzaffarabad, I kept meeting such people who took me to places where the history of my community kept coming alive in front of me. I kept taking photographs and building a repository of images and stories. When I finally reached

Muzaffarabad and picked up the soil there, I no longer wanted to take it back. I realized that I didn't want to pass on something to future generations that could serve as a source or reminder of hatred. It was just closure that I was looking for, so I left the soil there.

The remaining days in Pakistan, I explored the rest of the country and when I returned to Singapore after a month, I realized that I had touched 36 cities and towns. Even at that time I felt that I had achieved what I wanted to and now I could return to the corporate world. The book began to take shape in my mind towards the end of December 2014. During my younger years, I had been inspired by the travelogues of British spies and travellers like William Moorcroft and Alexander Burnes and when I looked at the 2500 odd photographs that I had taken and remembered the numerous stories, I decided to preserve all of these in the form of a travelogue myself. In a time of much animosity on the political front I wanted to narrate the story of the love and affection I received when I toured Pakistan. In a time when people read less, I wanted to create a visual documentation of my journey reflecting not just history but emotion.

Q. How did the second book come about?

It took me a year to bring my first book together and it got published in January 2016. After that, momentum picked up on its own and by August 2016, I had been to 72 cities around the globe to talk about my book. I then went back to the corporate world and worked till December 2016 when I was invited by the Pakistani Embassy in Singapore to represent them at the Pakistan Academy of Letter conference. At that point I thought that the Pakistani government is welcoming me right now and I have only covered the tip of the iceberg, so why not take it further with their help. And that is how the journey of the second book started. The Interior Ministry gave me the freedom to research. I was able to cover places like the old forts now turned into army bases. In places in Sindh and Balochistan, I was able to study the living communities of Nanak Panthis who are non-turban wearing Sikhs, but believers of Guru Nanak.



Manshera Sikh Temple is now a Municipal Library