

The Pakistan Reel

And then on a winter morning, the fourteen set out...

The How and Why

07659

In the course of our work with students, we often encounter feelings of hostility and distrust towards Pakistan, Pakistani people. Some even extended these feelings towards Muslims in India. In fact, for some students, their 'patriotism' was measured in terms of their hatred towards Pakistan, especially after the post-Kargil media hype. For others, though there was no overt anger, their minds



were filled with questions about Pakistani society, the roots of the dispute with India and myths about Partition, which have not been addressed by either our education, our media or our families. In fact, these have even strengthened negative stereotypes of Pakistan. Against such a backdrop, we at Samvada felt the need to give young people an opportunity to experience Pakistan, interact with people on the street, appreciate its natural beauty, gain insights into the Pakistani cultures and look at the Indo-Pak conflict from their point of view. The exposure was planned to also help students understand

problems that were common to both countries like poverty, gender injustice, environmental destruction and growing fundamentalism.

Once we started breaking our heads about what the trip should include we realised that we wanted to do and see everything! But common sense and visa restrictions helped us finalise our schedule for a ten day trip covering Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar. Then began the marathon letter writing session; to the High Commission, to NGOs, friends and godfathers in Pakistan and students who would be interested in the trip. A thousand letters and some hundreds of emails later, we were able to select twelve students and also had a itinerary that covered visits to historic places, meetings with students, artistes, journalists, NGOs, human rights activists, women's groups and farmers' organisations. We were beginning to wonder if we would get time to chumma wander around in Pakistan.

Armed with this formidable schedule we went to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to get the visas. Much to our disappointment, we were told that we had not been officially cleared by the Interior Ministry of Pakistan (which actually did not exist as the coup had just taken place!). The staff at the Embassy said that the two of us from Samvada, could go to Pakistan and try to get the clearance from there. This seemed like a wild goose chase because we had no idea where to go and whom to talk to. Anyway, we decided that we would go and do our best. So we

rushed to get tickets, money and other paraphernalia. We flew to Lahore, and ran from pillar to post in Lahore and Islamabad only to be told that familiar song "Your file is missing". We did not give up. We frantically faxed anyone and everyone who could help. When we left Islamabad we had a feeling that we just might get the visas, only to land in Lahore and discover our hopes were misplaced. We returned to Delhi all the time wondering what to tell the students who had already reached Delhi. But in Delhi... shoo mantar.. alak pulak... a call from the Pakistan High Commission informs us that the clearance has arrived with some help from mysterious forces ... and from that moment everything fell into place.

This trip had a lot of impact on all of us and changed us in many ways. Yes, ten days is hardly enough to understand another society, but it was definitely more than enough to question our assumptions and enhance our ability to appreciate Pakistan and its people. We got to meet a whole range of people and also were lucky enough to attend the annual international theatre festival in Lahore, taste a variety of kebabs, rotis and green teas, visited Punjasahib and Takshila, had chicken sandwiches with Supreme Court Judges and ate puris and Pakistani "kesaribhat" in the roadside dhabas!

In the pages that follow, all of us in the group try and share some of our experiences, capture our various thoughts and moods. We hope that our excitement will spill over and inspire you to also visit Pakistan someday... but before that, make sure you have a friendly fax machine, a love for high voltage suspense and a wild streak of insanity to never feel discouraged till you get the visas.... Once you are there- it is all worth it!



Anita Ratnam

(Anita Ratnam)

Usha B N

(Usha B N)

There must be more to Pakistan than Cricket, quawaalis and military coups!

6 Nov '99

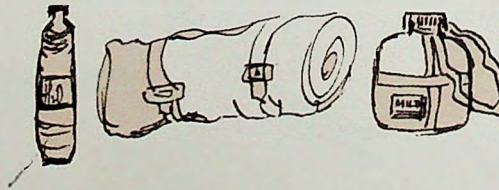


When I heard of the exposure to Pakistan many questions arose in my mind. The first question was, is Pakistan like India? How do the people live there? Why do we hate the people there?

Anthony



My parents were amused as well as a little worried when I told them about my going on the trip. My mother even said, "Tere sath ke sab log America aur London ja rahe hain, tu Pakistan ke liye ja raha hain!"
Kamaan



When I told my mother that I am going to Pakistan, she asked me "Where is this place, how far is it?" I told her that it is beyond Delhi. In my enthusiasm to make her understand I told her that it is the country where most people are Muslims and reminded her of the war that took place recently. Her fears then began to soar, "You just said that we fought a war against them and you want to go there! What if you get injured?" I explained to her that the war is over and that there are many nice people in Pakistan. All my friends were happy because I was the first person in our sanghatan to go abroad.

Shivaninga



The road to Pakistan: so near... yet so far!

7 Nov '99

Over cold egg biriyani we discussed the ten grace marks given to rural students.
We spent the day teasing Padma about Anil Kumble.

We sat in the spooky waiting room of Chennai Central waiting for the Grand Trunk to whisk us off to Delhi. The nine of us sat looking at each other. There is me, I study electronics. Kamaan is doing MA (English). Shivanna and Shivaninga are Dalit activists. Anuj and Shahrukh are studying at the National Law School. Padma is from Vivekananda Law College in Bangalore. Dayanand is from Doddehejjaji and studying law in Bangalore. Anthony is a student from Kerala. What do we have in common except that we are all going to Pakistan?

Chaitra



Many ages
Ancient times
Climb the lizard of memory
Up the wall
The steep cliffs
Climb the squirrel of thought
Up the wall
The steep cliffs
Off the branches
The crazy ones
Race the great languor of feelings
So are we
Are we?
Going to drown?
To live
See the light?
The love?
Who are they?
Those that stumble in the dark?
Are we in the crowd?
Are we?
So obsessed with our future
That we lose the moment
This good second
That we own
So will we...
Ever see the light
Manu



Dilli Darshan

8 Nov '99

Arrived at New Delhi at the absurd hour of 4.30 a.m. Everybody went sightseeing. Dipti who is the tenth member of the group has joined us. She is part of an NGO called Abhivyakti in Nasik. We just got the horrible news that Anita and Usha of Samvada are flying back from Pakistan. The Pakistan Interior Ministry has refused us clearance. The trip is off!



9 Nov '99

We are drowning our sorrows in Delhi-darshan. Visited Red Fort and India Gate. Had lunch at Connaught Place and shopped at Palika Bazaar. When we returned, Usha and Anita were waiting for us. They told us our trip is in the doldrums because of bureaucratic games. The last member of our group has arrived. Manu is an architect currently working with street children.

10 Nov '99

Good news. We seem to have got our clearance. Anita and Usha were both apprehensive and ecstatic. More sightseeing and shopping. Half the group has gone to Agra to see the Taj. What will happen tomorrow?



11 NOV '99

We are going!

We had a meeting in the morning about our programme. After lunch we went to the Pakistan High Commission. The embassy is imposing and luxurious, full of paintings and plush furniture. The High Commissioner Mr. Ashraf Quazi was warm and hospitable and tried to put us at ease by talking about cricket and Sachin Tendulkar. We were fed chicken sandwiches, which we tried to devour without looking like barbarians.

When we left the Pakistan Embassy in Delhi we noticed groups of people sitting near the side gate of High Commission. We discovered that they too had applied for visas to visit their relatives in Pakistan. They were waiting for their visas with a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. Some of them looked very poor and had come from different parts of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and were camping there on the road side and waiting for that magic bit of paper! We wished them luck.

We are still full of confusion about Pakistan. We are going into a country which just saw a military coup. Pervez Musharraf took over just ten days ago. Are we going to be scuttled around Pakistan by soldiers?

*Is it true that all women wear burkhas in Pakistan?
Will there be food-riots and rampant poverty
because of the extremely pathetic state of the Pakistani economy?*

12 Nov '99

Flight of Daedalus



As every other mode of transport is booked (so many people are taking the bus) we had to fly to Pakistan. After lunch we took the long auto ride to Indira Gandhi International airport.

Padma

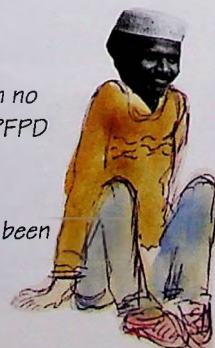


At Delhi Airport, we had to go through a lot of checks and face a lot of pointed questions but that was to be expected, wasn't it?

Dayanand

There was hardly any formality at the Lahore airport. Within no time we were whisked off to the hotel as there were four PIPFPD (Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy) members waiting for us. They welcomed us warmly and were genuinely delighted about our trip. One of them said he has been visiting India every year since 1982.

Shivanna



I never thought I'd get to fly. I can never forget that I lost touch with land. For half an hour no one on the land can find me. It seemed like we were sneering at the sun. I was thrilled when the sun sank because we were above him. My fear flapped its wings as we reached Pakistan. Most of the people around us were men dressed in Pathan suits.

Shivaninga



Lahore looks like Delhi with fewer people, less pollution and more gardens.

Anuj



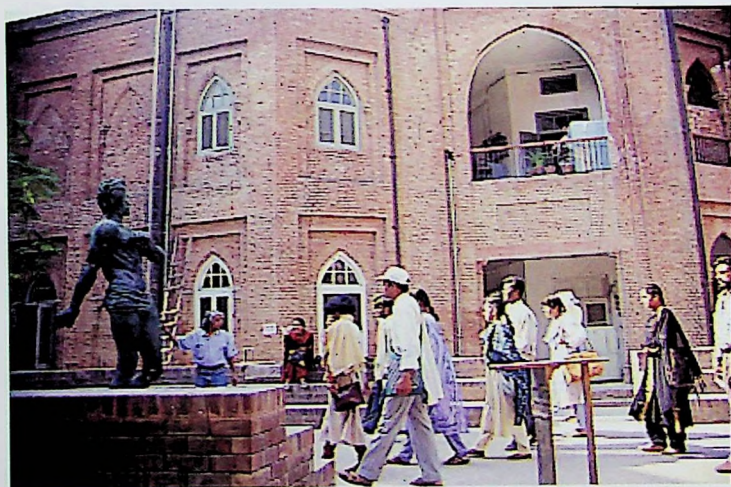
A chicken-eating spree has begun with touch down at Lahore. Much to the shock of many Pakistanis who think that all Indians are vegetarians.

Deepti



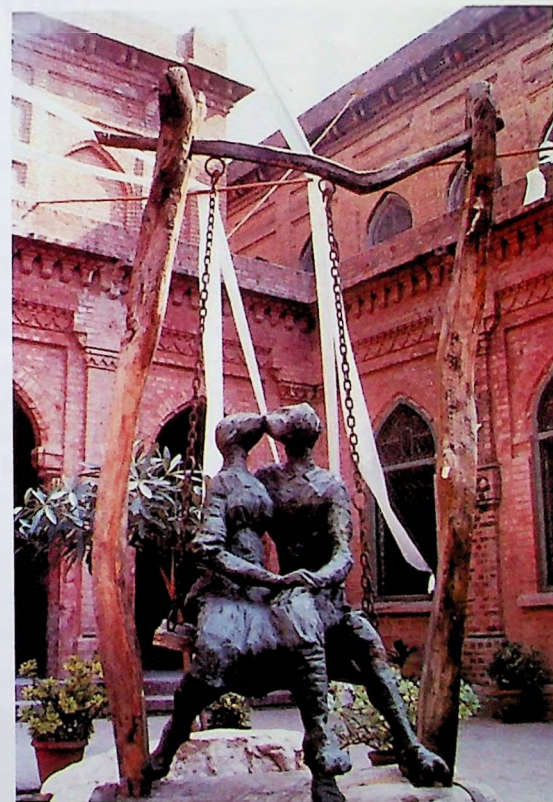
Lahore

13 Nov '99



First day in Lahore and we went everywhere. We visited the National College of Arts. It offers courses in Fine Arts, Design and Architecture. It is housed in a gorgeous building that is 126 years old. It is admission time so the corridors are full of nervous students and huge sketch books, presumably their portfolios. It is a comfortably familiar sight. Some of the girls are very hep. Plenty of tight jeans. Hardly what we expected to see.

Mr. Ajaz Ahmed, director of the college was our escort. He said that the new syllabus does not accommodate traditional crafts like jewellery design and lace making.

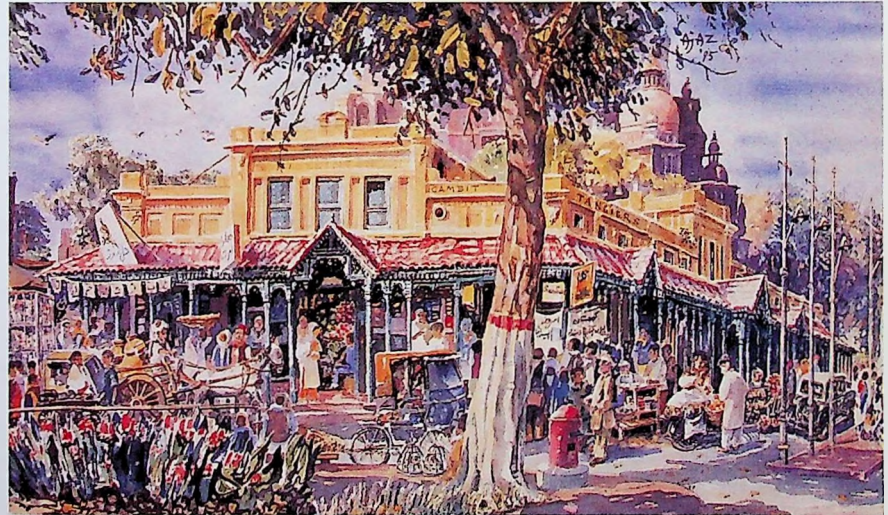


As we walked into the main courtyard in the National College of Arts we were hit by a life-size sculpture of two people on a swing caught in a passionate kiss. But just across the road in Punjab University, we found women in burqas and separate canteens for men and women! The liberal and the conservative faces of Pakistani society are literally side by side. In pre-Independence days Punjab University was the only university from Delhi to Lahore and was a breeding ground for radical intellectuals. Today, a fundamentalist student union has taken over this campus.

Postcards from the past

Ajaz Ahmed has been awarded the Pride of Pakistan award for his art. He gave us booklets of his famous paintings of Old Lahore. He was one of the many people who crossed the border by foot at the time of Partition. He walked from UP to Lahore when he was eleven years old!

Shah Rukh



When he exhibited these paintings in Delhi an old couple came to him and said, "Lahore ko fir dhekne ki ek hasrat si hogayi hai."

"Partition should have been more peaceful," he kept saying. The memories are alive, the words have lots of emotional punctuation. For a person like me who is from South India, who has encountered Partition only in the text books, history suddenly took on a different meaning.

Usha

Against all odds

In the evening we visited AGHS-the legal aid cell run by Asma Jehangir, Hina Jalani and other women lawyers who work on women's issues. They also spoke to us about the kinds of cases they take up - of sexual assault, divorce, separation and sometimes honour killings. Honour killings are crimes committed by families who feel that daughters who make their own choices about who they want to marry damage the mariyathe of the family. Occasionally, women who leave and seek divorce from abusive husbands also die at the hands of their parents and siblings. Of course, honour killings are hardly restricted to Pakistan! Made us think again about dowry killings in India...

Shah Rukh

The radical work undertaken by the group is unpopular in certain circles which would prefer to keep women without rights as patriarchal societies all over the world do. This does not make for a safe life for any of these activists. We had to go through an elaborate security check before we entered the premises. They also run legal cum social awareness workshops for women.

The women we met were vibrant and confident. They were excited about the space AGHS has created for them to discuss things (like families, their rights) which they had never talked about before. They were very anxious to know about the status of women in India.

Muslim personal law, especially for women, is much better in Pakistan. The traditional way of divorce by saying "talaaq, talaaq, talaaq" is no longer the accepted norm in Pakistan. Marriage now entails a proper legal contract. They thought women in India were given more freedom. Are we?

Dipti



3Rd International Theatre Festival Pakistan

12th to 22nd
November 1999



First Day, First Show

At night, we attended a formal dinner organised by the PIPFPD at the Lahore Gymkhana Club. The stunning and spirited Madeeha Gowhar from Ajokha Theatre group was there and personally invited us to watch her play that night. So after dinner, we went to watch 'Bala King' at the international theatre festival at the Al Shamara Art Complex. This festival is an annual event with groups coming from all over the world.

Ajokha's play that evening was a political satire called Bala King. Adapted from Bertolt Brecht's depiction of Hitler's rise to power. It was a courageous play because one could see that the adaptation was actually talking about Nawaz Sharif. Apparently, it had been banned in Pakistan and then allowed to participate in the international festival. Another Pakistani group did a play about a sex worker. It was a brilliant and courageously revealing portrayal of her life, her sexuality, her body.

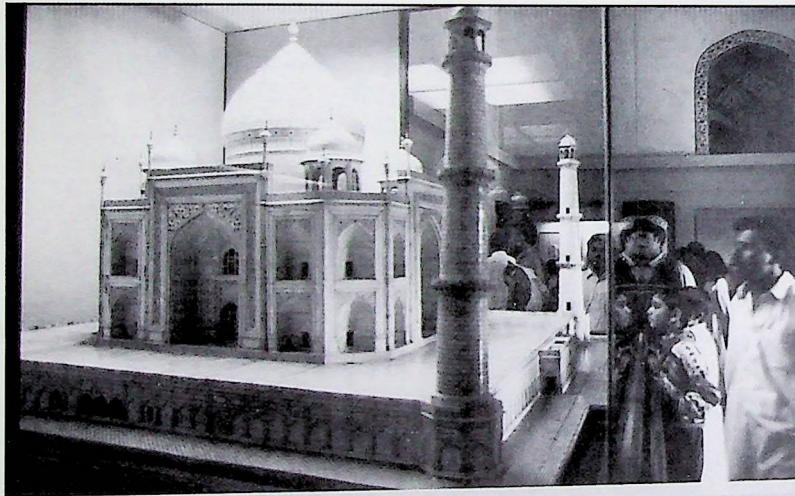
Usha

I was fascinated by the theatre culture in Pakistan. There is a tradition of popular theatre in Pakistan. We were told that Lahore alone has eight theatre houses, which constantly run house-full! However, plays on religion, women's rights and other issues of social concern do not easily get opportunities to get staged.

Shivaninga

14 Nov '99

Museum Musings



Next we visited the museums. There was a large replica of the Taj Mahal in the Lahore fort. Little children were staring at it in awe. It made me sad to think that probably none of them would ever get to see the real thing. Pakistanis who finally manage to get an Indian visa are not allowed to visit Agra as it is a cantonment town.

Usha

A schoolboy at the Lahore Museum asked me if Dubai was in India. Two schoolboys (bunking obviously) offered to buy our tickets and show us around the place.

Kamaan

There are relics from Mohen-jo-daro and Harrappa, which made us want to actually go to those places and look around. Upstairs there is a separate section on the freedom struggle and it was interesting to look at the whole process from a Pakistani viewpoint. It seemed like there is an emphasis on Muslim leaders in the freedom struggle. Tippu Sultan is regarded as the most significant Indian freedom fighter.

Several other pieces in the museum seemed so familiar and reminded us of the common history that India and Pakistan have shared for thousands of years. It sometimes comes as a shock to remember that the nations 'Pakistan' and 'India' are just 52 years old! There are a lot of stamps commemorating the freedom struggle and other important milestones in Pakistani history. There is also a magnificent art gallery which includes a vast collection of Gandhara Art. The sculpture of the Starving Buddha is the most celebrated piece.



Loafing in Lahore



Travelling around Lahore was fun. We used rickshaws, mini-buses and sometimes the Daewoo City buses owned and run by the Korean MNC. Every time we used one of them we were fascinated. They are air-conditioned, have automatic doors and cost Rs 6 for unlimited travel.



The amazingly clean streets and good civic sense (no spitting and peeing on the roads) left me awestruck. There were no signs of abject poverty. Here we are with the neemkaddi seller who gave us neem twigs



Military rule does not seem to have affected day-to-day life. In fact, many people look up to it with hope, while some others seemed confused and skeptical.



Meanwhile, business as usual.

15 Nov '99

Soldiers of a different kind

This morning we visited Mr. I. A. Rehman at the Human Rights Commission, Pakistan (HRCP) who spoke to us about the human rights situation. This was an illuminating session and we could ask all our questions freely- from prestige constructions to feudalism to social practices and the Pakistani State machinery. This gave us some valuable insights into the values that govern Pakistani society.

Mr Rehman spoke about the people's struggle against Kalabagh dam which forced the Pakistan government to re-examine its impact on tribals and farmers. He told us about the campaign against bonded labour and work with women in prisons, about honor killings and about the efforts that human rights groups in different parts of Pakistan are making to tackle very difficult issues.

We later went to the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, an NGO that works to promote democratic rights and rural development where we spoke about inequality in India and Pakistan- the similarities and differences. There are no starvation deaths in Pakistan and we were asked to ponder this. Lovely lunch and lots of food for thought as well.

Shah Rukh



Next stop: the Scholar's College for a discussion with the students. This turned out to be extremely formal almost like a high school where the students had pre-prepared their questions and little speeches. We tried to make it more spontaneous but the spontaneity really came after the meeting. Like in the other colleges, here too we were asked about democracy in India and our stance on Kashmir. A sumptuous high tea followed this. People who craved to visit India were exchanging addresses with us.



In the evening we went to the Aurat Foundation, an NGO that works entirely on women's issues. We were given some posters and treated to yet another round of high tea- samosas and chicken sandwiches.

Groups like Aurat Foundation, Sahil, SAP and HRCP are trying to work against the inequalities of in Pakistani society. They fight bonded labour, gender discrimination, human rights violation and child sexual abuse. Talking to them helped us understand Pakistani society and the different systems that keep the inequalities alive. But seeing the lifestyles of some of the NGOs I wonder whether they can bring about social change. Visiting Pakistan has strengthened my beliefs in the importance of people's struggle and kriyasheel chintana.

Shivanna

The streets of Lahore

Went around the old city in a tonga.



On the way to Anarkali Bazaar we noticed Imran Khan's Cancer Foundation. Lahore still looks like Delhi. The wider roads, signboards in Arabic, fewer women on the streets, the fact there were none on two wheelers, separate women's sections in buses...these were details we began to notice gradually.



Sat talking on the pavements in the evening and met a charming young girl selling knick-knacks. We then walked to Gadaffi Stadium- back to the theatre festival. Since Chaitra, Deepti and I were wearing bindis, people would often give us second looks. Many people come up to us in buses, in shops on the streets. They are full of warmth, hospitality and questions. Some talked of their friends from Pre-Partition days. Many said that they wanted to see the Taj, Mysore and The Lalbagh in Bangalore. If only there were no problems with visas!
Padma

16 Nov '99

Hurtling down!

Left Lahore early in the morning by the new Daewoo bus service. The motorway to Islamabad has also been constructed and maintained by Daewoo and is something most middle-class Pakistanis speak proudly of. While on the bus, we realised that the motorway was totally fenced off from pedestrians, blindly cut across villages and people's houses and fields, ignored water systems and flows. All this has resulted in rampant water logging and farmers getting cut off from their fields while Daewoo reaps millions in tolls and profits. To think that with the express ways being planned - Bangalore-Mysore and Mumbai-Pune and the Kashmir to Kanyakumari highway- India seems to be headed in the same appalling direction. It is fun talking to people on the bus. "Aap hamaare mehmaan hain." was something we heard everywhere. We even made friends with the Punjab CM's bodyguard on a bus. One of the women asked me, "Weren't you scared to come here? How did your parents agree to send you here?"

Padma



Of course, there are Pakistanis who are angry with India. We did not meet too many of them but I cannot forget one incident. Two young men in a Lahore bus were criticizing the war between India and Pakistan. I stood next to them listening to their conversation. An old man sitting next to them stared back saying, "What are you blabbering about? They are destroying our mosques, ill-treating our Muslim brothers there and have occupied Kashmir. You are saying we should not fight with such people?" Then one of the young men said, "It is true that they have destroyed our mosque and ill-treated our Muslim brothers, but are we treating the Hindus here well? We have been fighting for 52 years. Tell me what we have gained from this, except killing some people on both side?" The old man just pounced on them. "I don't know what we have gained... all I know is that we should not give up Kashmir to them." I was slightly perturbed and hoped that no one would realise I was Indian.

Shivaniaga

Islamabad

By noon we reached Islamabad. So here we are in the capital of Pakistan. A popular joke we heard was "Islamabad is a nice city, it is only ten kilometres from Pakistan." To many Pakistanis, the real Pakistan is the crowded old city of Rawalpindi. Islamabad is impersonal with imported cars zooming past and very few people on the streets. There are no city buses or autos. The streets have no names just numbers. Somehow one is reminded of Chandigarh and its inhuman planning. (Very much like Chankyapuri and some parts of Luytens' New Delhi)

Manu



We met Anusheh, director of an NGO called Sahil that works against child sexual abuse. Anusheh was everything that we did not expect to see in a Pakistani woman (Pardon us for the stereotypes !) Black jeans and a sweatshirt, sharp and critical in dialogue, smoking like a chimney. She took our breath away. Anusheh spent an hour with us telling us about child sexual abuse in Pakistan and her work. Her analysis of what is happening in terms of child rape- gang rape of children, male child prostitution and her understanding of the sexual mores in different parts/ strata of Pakistani society made us sit there hanging on to her every word. Of course, there were horror stories, but her focus was more on the causes and on possible ways of addressing the underlying issue.

More chicken sandwiches for lunch and the vegetarians were treated to some hot rice and dal. We then made a beeline for the Sahil computers to send emails to parents and friends.

Shah Rukh

In the evening we went to the Faisal Mosque which was built as a gift from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan. It is a very modern structure and looks almost like a space station. The boys in our group offered namaz while the girls watched from the women's gallery. The boys were carefully copying the movements of the rest of the congregation. For a minute I was unsure of what I was to do. The man next to me gently gave me a cue.

Anuj

17 Nov '99

Of Borders and babus

We visited the Indian High Commission. The officials were very cordial and hospitable though at times they seemed rather critical and prejudiced about Pakistanis.

We could see a huge crowd at the end of Diplomatic Enclave behind the Indian High Commission. Hundreds of people have come from all over Pakistan with all kinds of live-in gear, camping for days in queue to get their rightful visas to visit their relatives in India. The Indian High Commission staff proudly told us about their lottery scheme for the visas- they actually pick lots to decide which applicants will be interviewed! Felt ashamed that Pakistanis who want to visit their kith and kin in India have to go through such a tortuous process.

Earlier, people had told us that getting the visa is only the first part of the unpleasantness in store. The experiences on Samjoutha express have been horrible for people of both sides....people have been pulled off the train in the middle of the journey, awful checks at the beginning and end of journey at the border points. The train itself has hardly any working lights and fans and is a killer in the summer. And then there is this strange rule. If you go by train one way - because you cannot get bus tickets or because you cannot afford to fly both ways or because you want to go to Lahore first and then to Karachi- you have to compulsorily return by the horrible train. What is the logic of these rules? Do our governments want to somehow discourage people from crossing the border?

Usha

Nowhere in Pakistan have we seen slums or rampant poverty at the scale, which it is in India. When I enquired about this of an Indian diplomat, I was told that many of the poorer areas were walled up to make them unnoticeable. If there were many slums, then technically speaking, the Pakistani government had managed a neat cosmetic job. Though, personally I would much prefer that people be brought out of poverty, not hidden.

Kamaan



Pakistan has over a dozen varieties of interesting rotis. Today we had Afghan rotis for breakfast in a dhaba behind the hotel. Met a Kannadiga so I got to eat upma, sambhar and bajis.

Chaitra

Queries and quarrels

We went to the Thames School of Business Management and Quaid-e-Azam University. As usual, there were questions about Kashmir, the rise of fundamentalism in India and Pakistan, Pokhran, the educational system.

Interestingly, many Pakistanis do not know about the ISI, but they knew a lot about the activities of the Indian foreign intelligence agency RAW. One hardly hears of the RAW in India where ISI is almost synonymous with Pakistan according to our media and politicians

Dayanand



The city is full of what someone called 'prestige constructions' built by the government including the Supreme Court, Parliament House and others like the Nawaz Mansion above. Grandiose buildings stand abandoned as they were built for no clear purpose.

Dipti



The Supreme Court

We visited the Supreme Court and even observed the proceedings in two court halls. We observed with relief that the atmosphere inside the courtroom was so informal that the complainant could intervene and explain his position at any point. The judges seemed friendly and talked the common man's dialect!

The law of the land in Pakistan seems so similar to the one in India. We observed that a whole hall in the Pakistani Supreme Court Library was dedicated to the case precedents in the Indian Courts. We seem to have done very little to amend the common inheritance our still adored Raj-babus left us.

We had tea with Justice Zahid and the Attorney general. The judges were discussing the military coup and we could sense the differences of opinion among them. We narrated our experiences so far in Pakistan and then were given more chicken sandwiches!

95N-100

07658

Takshashila

18 Nov'99

We left Islamabad at noon. Takshashila is heart-breakingly beautiful. Our first stop was Takshashila Museum. The collections of everyday use were exquisite and exhaustive. The exhibits date back to the 6th century BC. Wished that we could have spent more time there. From there we went to the excavation sites at Sirkalp and the Dharmajika Stupa. Sirkalp was established in 180 B.C. The stupa was built by Ashoka. Today Takshashila is (according to Lonely Planet) one of Asia's richest archaeological sites.

Most of the relics however are now in British museums.



Onward to Peshawar. Stunning scenery. We now have a police van escorting us. One of the policemen wanted to know if Indian film stars are as good-looking in real life as they seem in movies. Indian movies are a great favourite here. Satellite channels geared mainly for the Indian middle class audiences have a strong presence in Pakistani homes. Unfortunately, it does little to portray the real India. We had to constantly fight the upper middle class images TV portrays. What can be a great tool to bring people together is keeping people apart by sensationalizing the 'sub-continent on fire' image.

19 Nov'99

Peshawar

We are now officially in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) famous for their frontier Gandhi. The difference in culture in Peshawar is obvious. The Pushtos or the Pukhtoos (The British called them Pathans) feel upset by what they call the dominance of Punjabi and Urdu over Pashtu. We are welcomed by Tariq and Tehseem who work with the Human Rights Commission in Peshawar and after some lovely green tea they took us out for a Pashtu dinner- kebabs of all types. We are finally free of chicken sandwiches! It is a different world after all.

In Peshawar we met two amazing women from the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). They told us about of the Taliban and the pitiful state of the common people in Afghanisatan. In many households there are no adult men left alive, because of the war. The Taliban does not allow women to work so people die of starvation. They also spoke about the situation of the Afghan refugees in Peshawar. Most of us donated money to RAWA and wished them well in their struggle for life and dignity.

Anita



School Trip

Went to Model School, Peshawar. Model School was just like any other Indian school. The kids mobbed us and almost the entire crowd from the playground came running towards us. Many of them are Shahrukh Khan and Sachin Tendulkar fans. In one class the children sang for us, while others just stared at us in amazement and a few ventured to ask us questions.

On talking to the teachers, we discovered that they did not teach Pashto. Although the rules permit it, most of the private schools in Pakistan teach only Urdu and English. The syllabus includes six subjects-English, Urdu, Maths, Science, Islamiyat and Pakistani studies. Pakistani studies is taught at all levels (even in medical colleges). In NWFP, co-education is not allowed after the age of 10. Even in lower classes, girls are clustered in small groups, not really mixing with the boys. Boys' schools usually offer only Science and for girls, Home Science is compulsory.



Went to Peshawar University where we had a very enjoyable afternoon with the students and staff of the Department of International Relations. The head of the department is a dignified and friendly woman who went out of her way to make us feel at home.

After the usual questions about each other's countries and the need for peace we had a sing song session. One of the lecturers from the department sang some old Hindi film songs for us. We sang for them too and then some students too joined in. Lunch was grand and we were happy to see some lovely rice on the table. Stomachs and hearts full, we went to the Sahibzada Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology which is on the University Campus

Later in the evening we had tea with the Peshawar chapter of the PIPFPD, followed by dinner with some local leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). They spoke to us about the PPP's stand on peace with India and the need to continue the Bhutto legacy.

By the end of the day we were exhausted. We had been entertained by so many different groups, and had talked a lot about Indo-Pak relationship. Now, we just want to relax.

20 Nov '99

Village Visit



We went to Tehseem's village, (about 30 kms from Peshawar) to spend the day. We are tired of cities and want to see what life is like in the hinterlands. The boys in our group stayed back at a school's premises (because purdah was strictly practised) and the girls went to meet Tehseem's aunt and her family. We found that most men were either employed in the cities or in the Gulf countries and women stayed in the villages and managed the households looking after children, fields and cattle. Here children mostly go to madrasas instead of the government schools.

Tehseem's aunt spoke to us about Partition and what it was like in the village in those months. She feels that when the 'Hindus' were there in the village, there was no open hostility, and a lot of cooperation, but the Hindus practiced subtle forms of untouchability against the Muslims, which used to hurt them. The boys in our group wandered around the village talking to farmers and children. Like Indian villages, there are wide gaps in wealth. The richest man in the village had about 1000 acres of land. There are plenty of landless labourers.

Manu



We stopped at Chaarsadha famous for its khadis and many of us bought fabric - a mixture of cotton and wool - all beautifully hand-woven. Chappli kababs are a local specialty and we all had some.

On the way back, we saw Peshawar Fort from the outside, shopped at Kissa Khawni Bazaar and Saddar Bazaar. Late at night, we took the bus back to Lahore.

Have been gulping down gallons of green tea and Pepsi. My metabolism will never be the same again.

Chaitra

21 Nov '99

Rave on!

All our prejudices seemed unreal as we danced. What people really want is a feeling of well being, happiness and togetherness and not the unnecessary conflicts of war or Mandir-Masjid. I felt guilty for the notions I carried earlier.
Shivanna



We noticed a stark difference between the village meetings and the city meetings we had. The village people welcomed us into their homes and did not ask us to clarify our stand on Kashmir. At Sehgal farms they nearly hijacked us into staying the night. I was overwhelmed.

Manu

I was getting a bit tired of meeting people from big NGOs and colleges only the privileged can afford. I had almost concluded that there are no poor farmers in Pakistan. This visit has deconstructed my image of Pakistan. This is a place where farmers have been struggling for their rights for almost 20 years. I almost felt like I was back in my own village and with my people when we all danced together.

Shivaninga

Arrived in Lahore early in the morning. We then went to a village 40 kilometres from Lahore. It was a phenomenal experience. There was a huge gathering at Sehgal Farms when men and women came together sharing their feelings, songs and ideas. We sat around on charpoys. People sang ghazals and made speeches. And then, there was an energetic session of dancing.

Usha

'A whole village, men and women, young and old, all don't break into a dance in the fields everyday. They faltered, we faltered too, dancing didn't happen there that often. It had to do with us, Indians, being there!

Kamaan

22 Nov'99

Back to base camp

When we came back to Lahore, Zain of Cranes for Peace was waiting for us. He told us about his theatre group and the theatre scene in Pakistan and some of us trooped off to the theatre festival again to see a brilliant German play called "Chairs".

People keep saying "Welcome to Pakistan!" when they find out that we are Indians. I was touched when complete strangers want to talk and spend time with us.

Shivanna



Young performers outside Gaddafi Stadium

Late at night some of us went to a private party general merriment and dancing and some 'illegal' booze like many parties back home. Relaxed day. More shopping. Met a few people from Aurat Foundation and a journalist.

Chaitra

23 Nov '99

Ta Ta Bye Bye

Last day in Pakistan. Our plane back to Delhi is in the afternoon.

In Pakistan when I asked about the hostility between the two countries, often I heard people say that "ye to hukumaton aur hukumat chalane walon ki karni hai". A person in the village put it as "Jinhon ne mulkon ke beech main lakeerain kheechin hain, unhon ne logon ke dil main bhi lakeeron kheenchna shuru kar diya hai." It is difficult to accept that I have been living through a great lie for so many years. It looks like a well-planned scheme. Week after week, one sees lengthy articles on Kenya and Iceland but nothing beyond news reports reinforcing false stereotypes of people who live next door.

Kamaan



Who has decided that the living, breathing, feeling people of both our countries are enemies who ought to fight a war every 15 years? Who decides? Do we have a say at all? Or is it in the hands of our compassionate generals and even more loving politicians?

Manu



I have been struggling to understand the Pakistani situation by constantly comparing it with the Indian context (for example, taking caste as an indicator). I was feeling restless because I could not find the answers. Later, someone at SAP said something that made great sense. We cannot possibly understand the poverty in Pakistan as we understand the Indian situation. One needs to look into each country in its own context.

Sometimes, we felt that half the reason for the hostility between India and Pakistan is our ignorance of our history. Our educational systems shape the Us and Them thinking. As PIPFPD members kept reiterating, our textbooks should highlight truth and friendship rather than prejudice and hate.

Shivaninga

I still cannot get over the fact that India is a ten-minute auto ride from our hotel in Lahore.. And look at the fuss our governments put us through.

Usha

I never felt that I had been in a foreign country for the last 14 days.

Padma



It is only because we are not allowed to meet each other that there is ill feeling. And visiting each other can solve this.

Anthony

Coming face-to-face with the history of India and Pakistan I had a lot of mixed feelings - of grief and happiness.

Shivanna

VOTE OF THANKS



The reality of Indo- Pak tensions is one of recurring war clouds, a war of words, sabre rattling threats, eye-ball to eye-ball troops while leaders don't meet each other's eyes at much hyped summits. The air is rife with contradictions. There are accusations and handshakes, infiltration of "militants", expulsions of diplomats, nuclear tests and no-first use agreements, Anglo-American peace-makers who also sell arms and bomber aircraft. Ordinary Pakistanis are shocked and grieved by the genocide in Gujarat. We could go on. Three years ago when we undertook this journey, things were not much different... If anything it has got worse since then and so the need to tell our story and to share our journey. And for the 14 of us this journey is not over and perhaps never will. This booklet is with the hope to start a similar journey for you.

The people who made an almost impossible journey possible and meaningful, who opened their homes and hearts to us, who made this trip so challenging are really too many to mention here. We would like to begin with Anusheh Hussain, who responded so warmly to the first intrepid emails and gave us the courage to begin the process. She was our guardian angel throughout. Zain and Hajra who picked Anita and Usha up from the airport when they landed on the reccy trip, Mr. A. R. Rehman who gave them his shoulder to cry on when things seemed to have fallen apart. The staff of Sahil who helped them send innumerable faxes and messages to people who could help. Justice Zahid who helped them be patient, Dr Nayyar and Pervez Hoodbhoy who were so excited by the prospect of our trip.

When we finally arrived in Lahore, people under the umbrella of the PIPFPD hosted us in Lahore and Peshawar. Special thanks need to be said to Kamran Islam and the members of PIPFPD who welcomed us on Day One and took us to eat paya breakfast on the last day. People working with various organizations Sahil, AGHS, Cranes for Peace, Aurat Foundation, SAP, the students at QAU and University of Peshawar, Madeena Gowhar and so many others who gave us such valuable insights into Pakistani society. We can never thank them enough. Many were not part of the organizational process, but their very existence gives meaning to the journey... the Afghan refugees at Peshawar, the shopkeepers of Lahore, and the security men guarding us on the journey from Islamabad to Peshawar, the priests at the Pujna Sahib Gurudwara who gave us a fabulous lunch, the special treatment in our hotels...How do we even begin to acknowledge the smiles on the streets, the warmth our handshakes and the risk people took in being seen with us? We thank you all.

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Pssst! Spot Shivanna in the photo on the back cover. For answer stand on your head

cap
Answer: The man with the white

