**The Karachi of the past**

[Dr A Q Khan](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/dr-a-q-khan)

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Last **week**, I received a message from a dear friend about Karachi as it was in the olden days. After reading it a number of times, I sat back, closed my eyes and reminisced about that time.

Still ever the refugee, I come from lovely state of Bhopal, where I completed my high school from in 1952. I joined Hamidia College and then migrated to Pakistan with a group of other Bhopalis. We crossed the border at Khokhrapar after having travelled via Ajmer, Chittorgarh, Loni, Barmair, Munabao, etc. The memory of the journey will remain with me forever. The railway officials were extremely rude and highly insulting, and extorted money all the way.

We finally reached Pakistan on August 14, 1952. There were Pakistani flags flying everywhere with music playing loudly. In contrast to Munabao’s small, cosy railway station with shops filled with edibles, fruits and drinks everywhere, Khokhrapar seemed a haunted place, just like any small village in Pakistan – thatched roof open huts for restaurants, no bathrooms, nothing to eat or drink. Nonetheless, we were happy to be in Pakistan. We took a freight train, sat on the floor for many hours, finally reaching Karachi hungry and thirsty. Of the whole unforgettable journey, it was the treatment by the Indians that stands out most in my mind.

These memories were vividly brought back when I saw on TV how our soldiers were being brutally treated in 1971. I had never imagined such scenes. When the Indians exploded their nuclear device on May 18, 1974 it came as a shock and made me realise that, if we did not give them a befitting response, Pakistan was bound to be further humiliated and divided. My suggestion to Z A Bhutto that we should start a nuclear programme of our own met with approval and in 1976 he requested me to return to Pakistan. A few months later, I was put in charge of our nuclear programme.

My colleagues and I worked with the same zeal as did our forefathers for the founding of Pakistan. It went at the cost of long hours, hard work, total commitment and loss of family life, but in the end we succeeded in turning this backward country into a nuclear power in the short span of seven years – having started from scratch. Little did we know at the time how ungratefully we would later be treated. Our sovereignty sold by a dictator upon a single phone call from America and a national institution and its scientists and engineers (and the country) branded as traitors. And for what? What a shameful and disgraceful end.

Here is the message that set off this train of thought: “In memory of a forsaken city. What a beautiful period it was! People used to get up to the sound of the Quran being recited by Qari Zahid Qasmi and go to sleep to the classical flute music of Bundu Khan. Rashid Turabi, Ehtashamul Thanvi and Shafi Okarvi used to mesmerise audiences with their magical ‘qirat’ and sermons and Mufti Muhammad Shafi and Baba Zaheen Shah Taji held their audiences spellbound with their oratory.

“Shahid Ahmad Barelvi taught us the intricacies of music and told stories of Ustad Jhando Khan. Baba-e-Urdu Maulvi Abdul Haq taught Mushfiq Khwaja the secrets of research and explained the works of Dr Jamil Jalibi and Prof Abul Khair Kashfi to us. The great Seemab Akbarabadi poetised and Prof Karrar Hussain, Syed Sibte Hassan and Hassan Askari showered us all with their knowledge. Arzu Lakhnavi mesmerised us with his flute and Josh Malihabadi and Qamar Jalalvi mesmerised their own audiences. Ibne Safi (the [Agatha Christie] of his time) told sensational detective stories about Imran and Faridi while Mulla Wahidi narrated old Delhi stories.

“Ibrahim Jalees, Ibne Insha, Mushtaq Ahmed Yousufi and Behzad Lakhnavi kept their audiences spellbound with their works while Zareef Jabalpuri, Syed Muhammad Jafri and Dilawar Figar made people laugh. Khwaja Moinuddin and Ahmed Ali Shaikh performed on stage and Hasina Moin and Kamal Rizvi pleased viewers on TV. There was the descendant of Moghul rulers, Mehboob Nirale and Alhaj Fazal Ahmad Kashmirwala (the father of my friend Shakil Ahmed of Shakil Express) wrote letters to Soviet PM Kosygin to console Nehru’s daughter while the son of Allama Mashriqui used to paint walls black so he could write political slogans on them.

“Mahirul Qadri and Adeeb Raipuri recited natia kalam and Ali Raza and Nasim Amnohvi recited natia kalam in praise of Imam Hussain. Ghulam Sabri used to sing at the tomb of Abdullah Shah Ghazi and Shaukat Siddiqui, Siajuddin Zafar and Aziz Hamid Madni recited natia kalam. Rasa Chughtai and Jaun Elia recited ghazals in new, attractive tones and Mohsin Bhopali and Himayat Ali Shair entertained their audiences. Tabish Dehlvi and Mehshar Badayuni enthralled their audiences, while Jamiluddin Ali and Rais Amrohvi had an effect on the gentler side of people.

“Shaukat Thanvi and Majeed Lahori made everyone laugh and Wahid Murad and Nadeem ruled the cinema houses. Mehdi Hasan and Ahmad Rushdi mesmerised with beautiful songs while Zeba, Diba and Shamim Ara ruled the screen. Allan Faqir and Abida Perveen had people in thrall and Sohail Rana composed Koko Korina. Shehki and Jehangir kept us spellbound while Zahir Abbas, Hanif Muhammad, Imtiaz Ahmad, Fazal Mahmood, Khan Mohd, Mahmood Hussain and Miandad raised the morale of youngsters.

Jamsheed Marker and Omar Kureshi gave ball-to-ball cricket commentaries and Anwar Ahmed Khan, Islahuddin, Hamidi, Hasan Sardar and Waheed used to come back with bags full of gold medals. All this while Edhi and Ruth Pfau were taking care of the sick and the needy.”

These people and events are alive in my memory too as are my D J College days and the friendships formed and places visited. Those were the days.

Email: dr.a.quadeer.khan@gmail.com