



Muhammad Haji Gani

THE DAY QUAID LED A PROCESSION TO OUR HOUSE

MAJYD AZIZ BALAGAMWALA

Bantva is a small town in Kathiawar, India, the birthplace of many a prominent Memon personality. This town has produced the largest number of millionaires and eminent persons. Sattar Edhi, the social worker par excellence, Abdul Razzak Dawood, the present Federal Commerce & Industries Minister, Kassim Parekh, past Governor of State Bank of Pakistan, Haji Hanif Tayyab, a former Federal Labor Minister, Ahmed Dawood, the epitome of Pakistani entrepreneurs, Ilyas Shakir, a noted journalist and Editor of Quomi Akhbar, Kassam Dada, the most well-known Pakistani Rotarian, Arif Habib, along with five other ex-Chairmen of Karachi Stock Exchange, and so many others were all born in Bantva.

January 24, 1940 was a red-letter day in the history of this town. It was on that day, that Bantva's Muslim denizens festooned the place with buntings and flags to welcome Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who was making his first ever trip to this village. 25 gateways were set up all over the place, and on his arrival, he was greeted with a 21-gun salute. The grand old man of Bantva and the paterfamilias of the Dada family, Seth Hussein Kassam Dada, very graciously offered his bungalow at his farm for the comfort and convenience of the undisputed leader of the Indian Muslims.

The Memon community organized a sumptuous lunch where the high and mighty of the Bantva Memons plus representatives of various princely states were invited. A public meeting was arranged in the evening at the Madrasa-e-Islamia where the Quaid addressed the gathering in Urdu. He made a clarion call for donations to the "Press Fund" so that an independent newspaper for the Muslims could be published. The next day witnessed an interesting situation that was very much appreciated by the Quaid. The Memon community was in full swing with each person coming up on the dais and announcing his own contribution to the fund. Jinnah was overwhelmed at this show of altruism and frequently commended the Bantva Memons for their generosity.

After sometime, the Quaid inquired in somewhat a lighter mood whether all the Memons had made their pledges. He was informed that one stalwart of the community had not attended any of the programs and the reason being that he not feeling well and seldom left his house. In spite of being a blind person, he did business worth millions. In fact, he

managed more than forty branches all over India and regularly communicated with the resident managers by telegram and mail from his house-cum-office and ruled over his business empire from that place. His name was Muhammad Haji Gani, and he was my paternal great-grand father.

Seth Haji Adam Haji Peer Muhammad, the business tycoon and father-in-law of Mr. Abdul Razzak Dawood, suggested to Mr. Jinnah that he should visit Muhammad Seth at his abode. The Quaid remained quiet for a few moments and then in a serious tone remarked that "In my life, I have never gone to anyone uninvited, not even the Viceroy." He then stood up, walked over to his car, and announced that he would like to visit the Balagamwala (our family name) residence. There was a big roar of approval from the crowd present there. Lo and behold, a procession commenced. The Quaid was in the lead car and one by one people followed in their cars, in their horse-drawn buggies, or by racing alongside. After arriving at the house, the Quaid and others waited in the verandah while Haji Adam went inside. Muhammad Seth was soundly sleeping and no one had given him advance information that the Quaid was on his way to the house.

The Quaid witnessed a scene that could only happen in a Memon house. He saw Adam waking his friend by shouting, "Look Muhammad, a great man like Jinnah is waiting for you in your verandah." The other friend woke up in a startled manner and tried to sit on his bed. Adam sat on the floor holding Muhammad's feet and said, "Muhammad, announce your donation for the Press Fund." Muhammad replied, "Adam, don't sit on the floor holding my legs. Get up on the bed." Adam remarked, "Muhammad, you are a noble man and this is my privilege to sit on the floor." The Quaid watched with amusement the animated conversation and the simple style of two of India's business tycoons and started laughing in a loud voice. He was soon joined by a rapturous laughter from all those present there.

Muhammad invited the Quaid to his office and while announcing his generous donation stated that one of his dreams that of meeting the Great Leader has been fulfilled. The Quaid talked in English while Muhammad replied in Memoni. The interpretation was done by Seth Suleman Diwan, a Memon businessman. The Quaid also stated that the contribution of the Memon community for the cause of the Mussalmans of India would be enshrined for generations to come. Muhammad could not see the Quaid thru his eyes, but his heart proclaimed vociferously that with Jinnah as the leader, a separate land for the Muslims would soon be a reality. After Independence, like millions of Indian Muslims, Muhammad Haji Gani, and along with his extended family, left everything in India and migrated to Karachi to live and to establish business as patriotic and proud citizens of Pakistan