

## **Kuldeep Nayar and Pir Sahib**

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It was Friday, a day of congregational prayer. That was an evening of 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1998 and I with Kuldeep Nayar was heading towards Wagah border via car.

Nayar has been following this for quite some years. Every year on 14<sup>th</sup> August he visits the Wagah among other writers, artists and intellectuals. While the militaries change their duties, and the lowering of the flag ceremony is performed, he along with his friends raised slogans of India-Pakistan friendship. Also, at the midnight when the date changes, they light candles and welcome the Indian Independence.

It was a straight and long road, the evening was moving towards night and Nayar sahib was saying: "If we drive down on this straight road, and there is no gate, no one to stop, no one to ask visas or to check passports then and I could have visited Pakistan, do you think any harm would it do to this country? If we talk about robbers they are everywhere, in this country as well as in Pakistan. They do not need to travel in a foreign land in order to rob". After a pause he again spoke, "That too is my land. So much of me is still in that country".

Seeing curiosity in my eyes, he further explained, "My school, my madrasa, my master Dinanath and Maulvi Mohd Ismael, my primer, school bag, everything belongs to that place. My roots are too deep there, only I am carrying the branches with me"

Nayar sahib's voice was choked. That day, he was repeatedly mentioning Sialkot, his hometown.

All my relatives, uncles and cousins lived nearby. There was a big square in front of our house which was open and not divided by any wall. As we move forward, some people inhabited there other than my relatives. The land was quite sufficient for both the parties that there was no question of grabbing it from one another. There was a shady peepal tree near our house. A grave was there under this tree. No one knows whose it was. But my Ma made us believe that it was 'Pir Sahib's.

Ma would put sindoor on the peepal tree and light a lamp at the grave. After applying the tilak on the peepal, she would wipe off her finger on a brick of the grave. She would perform puja, then present the light of the lamp to the grave and place that lamp on the broken corner of the grave. After doing all this, Ma would believe that the Peepal would get the prasad and so would Pir sahib. If she gets upset, she would go and lean against the tree and talk to Pir sahib. Sometimes,

she would also weep. After feeling a bit relaxed she returns back home. She would also bring Pir sahib with her. She never left Pir sahib behind.

“I remember during exams she would ask to visit the grave of Pir Sahib. Whether it was exams, or festivals, or any happy or sad event, she would always have her Pir Sahib to be there”.

Sometimes Nayar sahib would use pure words of Punjabi. He was saying: “Every time we would go to Pir sahib to find an answer. But we never got any reply. Ma would always get some hunts from Pir sahib. She would sometime say that Pir sahib came in my dreams to give me the answer”.

We had reached Wagah.

The sun was setting. Both the countries performed the grand ceremony of lowering the flags. Few people from their side and few from our side have attended the ceremony.. Film Star Raj Babbar was also among us. They were expecting “Asma Jahageer”. But she could not turn up as the government did not permit her to attend the ceremony.

At midnight, we all lit candles. Pictures were clicked. India-Pakistan friendship slogans were raised. We returned back, some with dry and some with choking voices.

Next day, we were to leave for Delhi. But I wanted to go to Sialkot so I again started talking.

“Nayar sahib, Did you ask Ma about Pir Sahib’s looks, as she has been frequently visited by Pir sahib. What does he look like?”

Nayar Sahib was in a good mood. He smiled and said,

“I started my career with Investigative Journalism. It was obvious to ask this question to her. And to my surprise I found Pir sahib exactly as Ma had described.”

“Did you? I mean? You met him? Really? I could not frame my question properly. He was smiling. And spoke:

It was 1975 when Mrs. Indira Gandhi declared emergency in India. Among other political leaders, intellectuals, writers and scholars, I was also behind the bars.

It too was Friday. The date was July 1975. I was jailed in Tihar Jail. I was informed that this confinement is temporary. You will be released within few days. I asked who ordered you for this. He just replied: “Madam”. A few days passed and there was no sign of me being released. I asked the jailor to bring some of my books and notebooks. He was a kind man, and even arranged table and light lamp for me.

As the expected duration of the imprisonment was increasing, so one day I asked the jailor:  
“When shall I be released?”

I and Nayar sahib both were at the Amritsar airport and were silent. Suddenly the talk sank in me and I asked him:

“To whom? I mean ... Whom did you ask?”

I felt as if he was waiting for this question to be put before him.

“Pir sahib”

“He...

“And he came in my dreams. White long beards. He was dressed in green colour. He was looking as Ma has described him to me. I don't remember if he was wearing something on the head or not”.

“What did he say?”

“He said, you would be released coming Thursday”.

“What more did he say?”

“He told that I feel very cold. Give me your chaadar”.

Nayar sahib started laughing.

“So.. I mean... Were you released on Thursday?”

“No. On Thursday I was very confused. I don't know why but I just wanted it to be true. I was not in trouble in jail. I was worried about Pir Sahib's prophecy. As usual, I worked till late night and woke up late in the morning.

It was 11 September, 1975 and the day was again Friday. The jailor came to me and informed that the orders of my release had arrived. I was surprised and immediately asked him “When did they arrive?” He told that the orders were received yesterday night. But I came late on duty. You were on your table and as instructed by you, I was not supposed to disturb you.

I almost shouted and said, yesterday... Did the papers arrive yesterday? On Thursday..

The jailor was confused and asked me if I was informed about it before. I was so happy and in this happy mood I said, ‘Yes’ I was already informed about it.”

Nayar sahib wanted to narrate one more story. His mother had asked him:

“Beta, visit Sialkot and offer chaadar on the grave. He must be feeling cold and while saying this Ma got emotional. But I could not visit then. In those days, to get visa for Sialkot was not easy. In 1980 Ma passed away and with this it became more important to visit Pir sahib. So, when I reached Sialkot, the area was totally changed. I could see some new faces now living in our houses. Small shops were located in the square there that was now converted into market. I could not find the grave. I started looking for the peepal tree so that I can easily locate the grave. But to my surprise, neither the tree nor the grave was at that place.

At the same spot, I kept meeting the shopkeeper every day. But again and again he insisted that he had never seen a grave there. At last I decided to go back and that day the shopkeeper met me outside the market. He was asking:

“Whose grave it had been?” I replied that it was Pir sahib’s. My mother had believed in him. After feeling a little guilty, he told that “there was a grave here, next to our shop. We are refugees. The area was so congested that in order to survive we removed the grave”.

I came back. One day I decided to visit Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia’s Dargah and offered that chaadar on his grave.

“Did he come in your dreams?” I asked:

“No.. Sometimes, I really wanted if he would come in my dreams and give an answer to my question, but he never came again. Probably, Pir sahib found his salvation with Ma.