

Title:

THE DANGERS OF MEMORY AND ENDANGERED MEMORY

Subtitle:

PARTITION MEMORY AND MEMORY OF MUSLIMS IN JHARKHAND, INDIA.

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Introduction

The disunion of British India in 1947 and the division of the latter into India and (East and West) Pakistan is commonly known as "the Partition". This Partition is normally associated with massive transfer of population estimated at 14.5 million between 1947 and 1951 and followed by subsequent flows of in particular but not solely Hindus and Muslims (Kosinski 1985: 3-5). Scholarly work on Partition is rich and now also includes histories 'of the lives and experiences of the people who lived through that time'(Singh 2000: 341). As far as India is concerned, a fair start has been made by scholars re-writing history through excavating the memory of "Partition victims", through making them relive their pain, trauma, and anger. These memories are being used, it is alleged, to revise, complete or even altogether transform Partition historiography.¹ The purpose of the present article is similar though not identical.

Essays in a recent special issue of *Interventions* (1999) edited by Ritu Menon, which features a 'Special Topic: The Partition of the Indian Sub-Continent', show however present the Partition of British India is. Authors display how people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have retained memories of the event. Similarly, others including myself² have shown how Partition 'continues to play important roles in the

constitution of collective identity and thinking in India'(Kaul 2001: 3). The conceptual method in this article is same, namely that Partition is a process rather than an event with a clear beginning and end. Partition has not ended as its memory "haunts" people, and creates, reproduces and helps to obliterate identities. Besides, and importantly, Partition memory is re-enacted again and again.³

Researchers acknowledge however that the experience of Partition was not the same for all people in India and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya rightly wrote: 'Bengal and Punjab underwent Partition while the rest of India experienced it vicariously' (Singh 2000: 199). Selecting a rather unusual group, this article shows the trauma of "Partition victims", 'who did not leave their homes at all'. Pandey describes these as, 'refugees in their own homes' (Pandey 1997: 2261) who's 'point of arrival' was 'in a physical sense, no different from the point of departure: but in a physical sense alone' (Ibid: 2271). In this way it is shown that mobility is not the sole marker of the effect and meaning of Partition, though an important one.

Though many have welcomed this "Partition paroxysm", disputes such as the Babri masjid-Ramjanambhumi issue spawned off intense debates in newspapers as well as academic journals during the second half of the 1990s with people wondering whether it still was productive to pay attention to

"Partition" more than fifty years after.⁴ Whereas some felt that silence could cure wounds, Ashish Nandy warned for instance for the 'dangerous amnesia' in reference to Partition memories.⁵

In this article I argue that while for many there is a need to 'bear critical witness' (Kaul 2001: 27n10), others are "haunted" by Partition memory in a different sense. After introducing "Muslims in Jharkhand"⁶, it is firstly shown that many of the latter do either have no memories of Partition or no 'need to tell tales'(Ibid.). Subsequently it is shown however, that they do have memories of the 1930s and 1940s and an extreme urge to ventilate those in narratives. After exposing those narratives it is argued that these Muslims are "haunted" by Partition memories of "others" ever after the event of Partition in 1947. It is shown that and how Partition memory is reenacted. The content of this Partition memory is also analyzed and it is illustrated how this affects the lives of Muslims in Jharkhand. Clearly in their case, Partition is not an event but a process with no end. It is illustrated how Muslims in Jharkhand increasingly feel threatened by Partition memories of others displayed in literature, public culture but in particular during so-called communal riots. They both feel endangered by this memory as well as that they feel that their own memory, along with the ensuing identities, are in danger.

Lastly, I conclude that "silence" does not mean the absence of memory. It is believed of extreme importance to

include, 'those on the margins, those who inhabit a world that is somehow - falsely - seen as peripheral literally and figuratively' (Butalia 1998: 223). It is thought that this group of "Partition victims" in Jharkhand provides 'other stories or other silences', which do shed new light on Partition historiography and even perhaps on historiography itself.⁷

Muslims in Jharkhand

Until November 2000, Jharkhand was part of the State of Bihar and commonly known as the Chotanagpur region.⁸ It nevertheless merits a separate analysis as historical developments in this Southern region were in many respects quite different as compared to the rest of Bihar. To start with, the scant research that is undertaken, describes that Jharkhand appears to have remained 'practically independent throughout the Turko-Afghan rule (1206-1526)' (Roy Choudhury 1957: 66)⁹. Consequently, conversions seem to have started later than in Bihar and had a different character (Cf. Ghosh 1998: 229). Though a few religious souls, army personnel and merchants must have travelled through its jungles and hills much before, it is only with the accession of Akbar to the throne of Delhi in 1556 that Muslim influence penetrated Jharkhand, also known to the Mughals as Kokrah. Nevertheless, even 'the enormous power of the Moughals was strictly limited in the hilly tracts

of Chotanagpur where their orders could not always be easily enforced' (Kumar 1969: 42-44). Yet, in 1585, Akbar sent a force to Chotanagpur and reduced the Raja of Chotanagpur to the position of a tributary. Kokrah was included in the *Subah* of Bihar and in 1632 Chotanagpur was given as a Jagir to the Governor of Patna (Ibid.).

Some claim that ninety percent of the Muslims in present-day Jharkhand State, 'are in fact tribals and are descendants of the ancestors who were aborigines and converted to Islam' (Milli Gazette 1-15 August 2001: 6). Yet, I have not come across any research describing how and when these conversions have taken place.¹⁰ Nevertheless, during our interviews¹¹, quite a number of people indeed agreed with the above statement that their ancestors had been *adivasis*¹², but a not insignificant number vehemently denied this.¹³ A good number of informants could recount their family history and mentioned that their ancestors had come from Bihar from places such as Gaya, Aurangabad and Arrah and had arrived as traders, mostly in cloth. Later on, people narrated, many had bought land and became cultivators (too). Some also knew that their ancestors had been working for the (Hindu) *Rajas* in the area or had worked as zamindars with a good number of (tribal) laborers working for them. Some had been employed in local armies. A few even argued their ancestors had come from outside Bihar mostly from Uttar Pradesh and present day West Bengal or Bangladesh.

It is hence not clear how many converts there were till the appearance of the British in the area in 1772. In rural areas of Gumla, Bero (Itki), Lohardagga, Simdega, Palamu, Ranchi, and Singhbhum where we talked with people, we were told that they gradually had become Muslims. At first there had been no mosques and people's knowledge of Arabic had been nil. Besides, for long they had retained other customs too.¹⁴ Muslims in towns and cities such as Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Chaibasa, Irba and Jamshedpur, Daltonganj generally recounted that their ancestors had come to those places in search of employment and had, as Muslims, settled in the area not more than hundred years ago.

Many agreed that it was quite likely that intermarriages had taken place between "locals" and "migrants" and most inhabitants seem really to have been an intermingled lot of "Hindu", "adivasi", and "Muslim" descent.¹⁵ Unlike Christian converts however, most of these Muslims have changed their names, and it is therefore difficult to determine their adivasi or Hindu background.¹⁶ Whereas some trace their ancestry in "foreign Muslim countries", most people interviewed did retort they, "of course", were converts. During the 1960s when the area underwent industrialization, a fresh influx of Muslim migrants came from in particular Bihar but also from South India. Most of the latter migrants in the area seem to have made Jharkhand their permanent residence however and have severed ties with their birthplaces.

Some have stated that the number of Muslims in Jharkhand at present is 27% (Hindustan Times, November 24, 2000). Some spokesmen of the Muslim community in Jharkhand claim even that the number is 32% out of 28.4 million population in Jharkhand (Jamshedpur 2000: 6). Before the division of Bihar it was thought to be between 12-17% however (Roy 2000).¹⁷ Those same Muslim spokesmen now claim that in fact the percentage of Muslims is in many areas higher than that of adivasis.

It is further believed that more than half of them are *Ansaris*, "low caste" Muslims who were labelled as *Julahas* and who called themselves *Momins* after the turn of the century (See Ansari 1971). They are often associated with the weaving profession as well as with cultivation. Other *biradaris* among the Muslims we interviewed are *Pathans*, *Shaikh*, *Saiyid*, *Kalal*, *Kunjra*, *Dhuniya*, *Darzi*, *Idrisi*, *Halalkhore* and *Dafali*. Most of them belong to the "lower-castes" among the Muslims (Alam 1991 and Ali 1974) and also the lower strata. Only a few of the interviewed people were doing better, mostly (university) teachers, those involved in animal trade, farmers, lawyers, doctors, Government officers, and a few professional politicians.

Memories of the 1947 Partition: Memories of "Outsiders"

Not only were historical developments during Mughal rule different from those in Bihar, Partition experience in

Jharkhand was also unique. When politicians in Bihar were "merely" involved in discussions on the so-called Two-Nation Theory, referring to the splitting of British India in two separate nations, in Jharkhand another partition was simultaneously at stake. Though the demand for a separate status of Jharkhand was much older¹⁸, between 1938 to 1947 a rise of the movement under the *Adivasi Mahasabha* could be witnessed. While the latter possessed a pan-tribal composition, for quite some time Bengalis in the area also supported a separate Jharkhand.¹⁹ What is more, the Muslim League in the mid 1940s played with the idea of forming a corridor passing through the tribal areas to link the proposed areas which would constitute East and West Pakistan. They even provided financial support to the *Adivasi Mahasabha* (Prabhat Khabar May 7 2001: 8). The President of the *Adivasi Mahasabha* Jaipal Singh, played multiple roles by at times giving support to the Britishers in their war effort to which the Congress was opposed but also by accepting support from the Muslim League. Besides, though the movement had remained outside the "mainstream" of nationalist politics, during the elections of 1946, the *Adivasi Mahasabha* was routed by the Congress and the link with the Muslim League was broken (Singh 1982: 4-5). Witnessed by written accounts, it seems that although there was sympathy for the Jharkhand Movement among many Muslims all over Chotanagpur, their support was not always well articulated and their participation in the movement varied in

range. Yet, interviewed people often referred to the movement for a separate Jharkhand State. This movement seemed to have left more prints in the minds of some than the Partition of 1947. Our oral accounts clearly confirm that the "bonds of region" had apparently been stronger than the "bonds of religion" (Cf. Ghosh 1998: 232).

Clearly therefore, August 15 1947 seemed not the right cut off date for Muslims in Jharkhand. The date after which everything became black. For them, as will be shown below, the "trauma" came later, for some soon after 1947 for others only recently. Thus, whereas many Muslims in Bihar perceived the curtain had fallen the day after, Muslims in Jharkhand thought that on Independence day the curtain had been risen.

During interviews with so-called East Bengali refugees²⁰ in Purnea District in present day Bihar, a small group of people approached us.²¹ They identified as Muslims and significantly, they insisted they were "locals" too and that actually, "they", referring to the "East Bengali refugees", had come to the area "much later". One of them told us:

We have been living here for many generations but you know what happened during 1946? We were made refugees. You better interview us. As long as there is a Pakistan, we all suffer.

These Muslims of Bihar remembered their displacement after the big riots in 1946 known as the "Bihar Killings" (Amrita Bazar Patrika 30 October 1946 to November 8 1946).²² They had also felt the "legacies of a divided nation" (Cf. Hasan 1997) and thought that after Partition it had become very difficult for Muslims who had inhabited a so-called minority province (*aqliat suba*) (Cf. Ghosh 1998: 232). They (again) feared communal violence, or dominance by a "Hindu majority". In short, they felt "victims of Partition" and wondered how to overcome the trauma (Cf. Dawat 28 September 2000: 31; 39-41; 47-50 and 53-93).

Instead, Muslims in Jharkhand around August 1947 seemed to have had hopes, no fear, and great expectations. They mostly had supported Congress or the Momin Conference, which was mostly working along Congress lines but had vehemently decried the Two-Nation Theory (Ansari 1989). Though extremely disappointed with Partition and being prepared to redeem it, they did not expect any problems for themselves. Identifying as "loyalists" and determined 'to keep alive the vision of a secular India'(Hasan 2000: 350), they expected a preferential treatment in Independent India. Even those who had supported Bihar's partition and the creation of Jharkhand, believed they would reap "the fruits of freedom".

Some had heard about the killings in Bihar, the flow of people leaving for Pakistan but these were not their memories. These

were the memories of "outsiders", of rich Muslims in Bihar, of those who had voted for the Muslim League. These were not the memories of "razil (laborers) Jharkhandis" but those of the "Bihari *Sharif*" (Cf. Ghosh 1998: 242). Md. Rafique Ansari (4-5-2001) narrated:

When I was 18 years old in 1946, there were many riots in Bihar. It was a ghastly scene at the time. Many Muslims were killed and a great number fled to Bengal. In this area it was very peaceful however. Nothing happened here in Hazaribagh. Actually, the lower classes of Muslims never supported Jinnah. Till date, these poor Muslims do not like even to talk about Pakistan. The richer sections were Muslim Leaguers. They mostly lived in Bihar. They shouted: '*le ke rahenge Pakistan. Qaide Azam Zindabad*' (Take Pakistan and keep it. Long live Jinnah!) Those who left really suffered. At present, Pakistan does not even accept the Bihari Muslims. They differentiate between Sindhis, Punjabis and in Bangladesh it is the same.

Others interviewed echoed Rafique Ansari's opinion. Mr. Gulam Mohinuddin Ahmad (4-5-2001) mentioned for instance: 'Only poor people remained in India'. But though these Muslims in Bihar were often pitied, others also expressed their anger. Samrul Haque (7-5-2001) from Ranchi remembered that the, 'upper-

classes and Patna people went to Pakistan. We could not even bury our dead bodies in their graveyard. They did also not allow us to pray in their mosques and visit their hotels'. When asked to express their opinion about Partition, they all condemned it. Though they were also enraged by the Congress leaders who had "finally also agreed to Partition", their anger was in particular directed towards Muslims who had supported the Muslim League and in particular towards Jinnah himself. Again, Md. Rafique Ansari (4-5-2001):

Mr. Jinnah did not understand politics. He wanted to bring people together in the name of Islam but that was quite impossible. See East Pakistan is only for Bengalis and West Pakistan only for Punjabis. Exchange was also never possible. Jinnah himself was not even a Muslim. He was completely Anglicized and never offered namaz at all. How could he know about the position of Muslims in India? If he had not created Pakistan than here in India there would have been 19 Chief Ministers ruling India. We got here the toilet and the house is in Pakistan. This is the division of India.

Nevertheless, Partition was not really part of their collective memory. It concerned the rich, the Sharif and the Muslim Leaguers who mostly had lived in Bihar. Partition memories were related to communal violence, flows, other

nations, to "foreignness", which were all alien to them. Undoubtedly, "bonds of class" and "bonds of region" had united these Muslims more than religion could divide.

Most interestingly, their narratives express other identities that competed with or complemented those of "Muslim" (Cf. Gottschalk 2000: 5). Though most of them strongly identified as a religious group too²³, they had other than religious interests. For one, they shared "a past of staying", which set them apart from other Muslims who had "a past of movement".

Our Memories: Memories of Freedom, Harmony and Stay

Though many remained silent when asked to narrate their Partition experiences, silence was broken when I invited people to talk about life events during the 1940s and 1950s. Significantly, these were memories without the trauma of Partition, without flows of people, without religious communities even. They rather were memories of freedom, of stay and more than anything else of union rather than division of collaboration rather than dissension. Was Partition memory associated with religious identities only, their memories disclosed regional and braderi identities also, which connected them to all others who stayed and had fought for "freedom" on the basis of class, caste, region, or the nation.

The day of Partition was Independence Day and reminded

many of their involvement in "India's National Movement" and the "Struggle for Independence". For them, there simply was "no other face of freedom". (Cf. Hasan 1995). Though others deny her claim Shamima Khatoon Ansari (2-4-2001), who writes "Jharkhand Ratna" in front of her name, says she is the great grand daughter of Shaheed Sheikh Bhikhari 'Martyr of the revolt of 1857'.²⁴ Proud to be the "first Muslim lady from Chotanagpur who passed matriculation" she also writes in her bio-data:

In 1947, I made an effort to bring about national integrity. I opposed the Partition of India and launched a campaign against the Muslim League in Ranchi District. I convinced the Momin Community (mainly women) whose population was 40%. As a result the entire community of Momins cast their vote in favor of Congress and Congress defeated the Muslim League with a good margin. In this way I maintained the integrity of our country.

Imtiaz (20-12-2000) remembered his father Zahoor Ali:

We asked them to include his name in the *Rajya Sabha* or *Vidhan Parishad* on basis that he fought the battle of freedom of our country. He remained a loyal and staunch supporter to the Congress Party, which formed a single majority community. He was President of the *Jamiyatul*

Momineen, which was a nationalist organization and had started in Chotanagpur in 1928.

Mustaqim Hazi (25-12-2000) also participated in the 'freedom movement': 'We used bamboo sticks and fought but our sticks were seized by the Muslim League people'. Sarul Haque who used to be a journalist provided his handwritten memory in Urdu. Among others he wrote: 'Many Muslims here in Jharkhand were involved in the nationalist movement but they never got any recognition'. Amanat Ali (30-11-2000) recollected:

The Muslim League supporters contended that Momins were dogs of the Congress. They also told we are kafirs (non-believers). Jinnah had told the Adivasis that they should ask for Adivasistan and he would demand Pakistan. He told Jaipal Singh he desired Assam and he would give Bengal to the adivasis. But we were proud of ourselves. The All India Momin Conference condemned even the Congress' decision to support the Two Nation Theory. When Nehru paid a visit here I competed with my school friends over who would touch his feet. We were punished for this in school. The teachers did not like us to welcome Nehru. The history of our involvement in the freedom struggle is very old. In 1857 more than 70% of the sepoys who were killed in the movement were Ansaris. We were called the "bloody *Julahas*".

H.H. Rahman (4-5-2001) a Sikh Iraqi said Jinnah had never impressed him: 'my whole family always mixed with Hindus. The Two Nation Theory never excited me. I felt a slave under British rule and was overwhelmed by Gandhi. There was no communal tension here.

Besides these memories, there were others too. These were stories of collaboration, of harmony and similarity rather than difference. Haji Habibullah Sd. (30-3-2001) ex-Assistant Commissioner emphasized:

We received land from the Maharaja Chotanagpur Nagbansi and he appointed many Muslims. We knew Mundari. We even looked like *adivasis*. Yet, they do not have beards. Actually, we are converted *adivasis*. We also drank *handiya* (local alcoholic drink) like the *adivasis*. We did not marry them but they also did observe marriage restrictions. It was the North Biharis who used to deceive the *adivasis*. We formed a small group and worked for Jharkhand already in 1942 and not a single *Momin* was pro-Pakistan. I also collaborated with Zahoor Ali of the *Jamiyatul Momin*.

Md. Yanus Ansari (8-4-2001) did not remember differences between *adivasis* and Muslims: 'We did not even do *namaz* that time'. Similarly, Mirdaha (27-11-2000) recounted:

We were Khans and the Ratu Maharaja gave our title. Mir means pioneer and daha comes from dehat that is village. We originated from the Magadh area and were pioneers in this village. The Khan Bahadur Raj family from the Hatma State in Hazaribagh was very close to us. We were also very close to the *adivasis* here. Some Mundas here were even on fast during *Ramzan* just like us. We all spoke Nagpuri.

Yunus Ansari (8-4-2001) also had always felt 'very close to the *adivasis*':

That time Muslims only knew *Moharram* they did no celebrate Id or Bakrid. We are converted *adivasis*. We have become *Ansaris* and help the people by supplying them cloth. We are like the people who helped the Prophet in Mecca.

Shamima Khatoon Ansari (2-4-2001) remembered that her father taught Sanskrit in 'King Lal Babu's family'. She also recollected that Jaipal Singh had been surprised when once one Muslim had been introduced to him as Oraon and an *adivasi* as *Shaikh*. He then had exclaimed '*Kolha-Jolha bhai bhai*'.²⁵ Md. Mohinuddin from Chaibasa (28-6-2001) did not hide his sympathies for Birsa Munda, the *adivasi* leader who struggled

for an autonomous region some hundred years ago: 'I think Birsa was very good. He was a *Munda* but he told that Jharkhand will be for all Chotanagpur people'. Mohiuddin Ansari (1-11-2000) confessed: 'our leader Qaium Ansari said we are Indians so you should support Congress so we did. But I also support Jharkhand because here are all things and we were always in the grip of North Biharis'.

Many more remembered support for the "Jharkhand Movement" and also collaboration with adivasis. Mustaqim Hazi (25-12-2000) reported that 'even some Ulama under Maulana Ahmad Ali had participated in the Jharkhand movement'. Amanat Ali (30-11-2000) again:

We always had a very good relation with adivasis. Long ago we even used to visit their *dhumkuria* (bachelor hostels). Yet, in the beginning I did not support Jaipal because he supported the Muslim League but after independence I supported him fully as well as the slogan: '*Kolha-Jolha bhai bhai*'.

Haji Md. Hanif Ansari's (30-3-2001) elder brother was Shaikh Mohiuddin. He along with Md. K. Rahman advocate and son of Shaikh Mohiuddin told us some life aspects of the latter:

He started a movement for Jharkhand in 1937 already. The President of this movement was David Munzni. Yunus

Ansari, Mr. Qadir, Bena Puri and Habibullah Ansari were also involved in this movement which was parallel to Jaipal Singh who was leader of the adivasis. Leading *Momins* were involved in the movement and also some *adivasis*. It was separate from the Congress and the Muslim League but we were in close contact with Jaipal.

These family members showed me a leaflet of 29-9-1947 in Hindi which urged the 'Momin Brethren of Chotanagpur' to join the Chotanagpur Momin Union and 'strengthen the cry of Jharkhand'. In this leaflet Sk. Mohiuddin its General Secretary, brought to memory of his 'fellow Momins':

You know that people of our community have been living in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas for a very long time. This is our home. Our people have been living here in close intimacy with Adibasis and other Hindus. Adibasis have a very large population in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas and in these places our Momins also live in great number. Today it is the demand of the Adibasis and also of other people living in Chotanagpur, that a separate Province of Jharkhand be constituted. When this Jharkhand Province is made, it will be for the benefit of all sects living here, the revenue derived from the Province would be spent for the people in the Province and the administration of the Province will be at the

hands of the *Adivasis*, Hindus and *Momins* jointly who live here. Under the circumstances we Momin brethren should join *Adivasis* in their Jharkhand demand, because we always have to live here with them and have with them all our dealings. These *Adivasi* brethren wear our handloom cloth and therefore I appeal (...) to prove their centuries old friendship to the *Adivasis* and others of Chotanagpur (...) and improve the low status of the *Momins*.²⁶

Though only a few hundred Muslims (mostly *Momins*) seem to have joined the Union and the latter was disintegrated within a year, histories of people interviewed expressed the same spirit. Yet, the most dominant aspect of their narratives is that they stayed. Besides, they disliked those who went. Salim Babu (6-1-2001) has two brothers who firstly went to East and thereafter to West Pakistan. He condemned:

Partition should never have taken place and I never supported the Muslim League. Those who went to Pakistan are very bad. I think the only remedy against killings is religion. We do not need Jharkhand or Bihar but peace. That is why I support *Jamate Islam*. Abdul Hamid Asar (18-10-2000) a *Shaikh Iraqi* remembered: 'my boss told me once he would take care of me in Pakistan but I refused going. I am born here so I will not go anywhere. Abdul Qadir recounted:

I liked Congress because it was for simple people like us. I never liked the Muslim League. But Jinnah was not a bad man he was working for both Hindus and Muslims. I think Pakistanis are not good people. I had land here so why should I have gone? Besides, we did not go to Pakistan because our ancestors are buried here. Jaipal Singh was also a good man he made Jharkhand for all.

M.D. Musa (17-4-2001) a member of the Communist Party said he had stayed as he had not wanted to leave his family. He also alleged that actually, 'Muslims did never follow Islam. If they had, there would not have been Partition'. Besides he added he had 'liked none of the so-called leaders, neither Jinnah nor Gandhi'.

Though some Muslims in Jharkhand had indeed opted for the Muslim League, from the interviews it became clear that they rarely had done this with the idea it would involve movement. They actually had guessed (or hoped) Jharkhand would become part of Pakistan. Abdul Khalid from (28-6-2001), a dafali recalled:

In fact my father was known as Pundit Maulvi Abdul Shakoor. He was very gentle, like a cow. That is why one Marwari gave him this name. He also wore *dhoti* and *kurta* and was very close to Hindus. Many Hindus actually knew

Urdu that time. We were poor *Moolwasis*. I never thought I should go anywhere. But there was this election in 1946 where people had to cast their votes and decide which part would become part of Pakistan and which part would become India. It was clear to me that time that the Pakistan area would be up to Purulia. So we thought that this area would also go to Pakistan so we voted for Pakistan, i.e. for the Muslim League.

The Burden of Memory: Re-enactment of Partition, Enforcement of Memory.

Yet, though Partition had not taken place in 1947, many Jharkhandi Muslims perceived it started not long afterwards. A few had had a premonition of what was to come. M. D. Musa (17-4-2001), a Mullick, remembered the 15th August celebrations of 1947 on Ranchi Hill: 'I saw a snake had come out and I knew no good was to come'. A few months after Partition the National Indian Congress thought it necessary to set up a State level Minority Committee, 'to advertise national sentiments among Bihari Muslims and other minorities' (*Hunkar* (Hindi) 1947, November 9: 16). Besides, on January 4, 1948 the *Hunkar* published a speech by Md. Qaium Ansari President of the all India Momin Conference and Minister of Bihar's Rehabilitation and Welfare who urged Muslims to give up their 'communal

sentiments' and 'accept their Indian nationality and join the Congress without any hesitation'. Again, in 1952 Abdul Qaiyum Ansari asked in an article entitled "Our Own Country" published in the yearly Sathi (Patna September 1952): 'Are Muslims Anti-nationalists?' He reminded Muslims that they should forget their pasts during which they had supported the Two-Nation Theory, demanded Pakistan and voted for the Muslim League.

These "lessons in history" taught by both "Hindus" as well as "Muslims" appeared from time to time during the fifties but visibly increased during the sixties in particular after India's war with Pakistan. Though these "messages to Muslims", are multiplied during so-called communal riots when "Muslims" are "reminded of their past", they are not absent in day to day life as witnessed by literature²⁷, public life and popular culture.²⁸ In fact, in particular during riots a re-enactment and reiteration of the original divide takes place (Cf. Kaul 2001: 19). And clearly, in Partition memory people are divided on religious basis and religion and national identity (nationalism) are conflated. During the Jamshedpur riots of 1979 for instance, Bihar Military Police constables and havildars smashed open the closed doors of houses inhabited by Muslims with the abuse on their lips: '*Saala, yahan Pakistan bana raha hai!* (Saala, you are making Pakistan here!) (Akbar 1988: 28).

It seems indeed that this trend has come to stay. Ever

after 1947, Muslims in Jharkhand are continuously haunted by this (Partition) memory that, as we have demonstrated above, is not their own. Besides, it imposes a religious identity on them - the main signifier in Partition Memory - which threatens to supersede all others. Are they historically a part of the local society in their own memories, Partition memory presents them as outsiders - and conquering outsiders at that (Cf. Neera Chandhoke 1997: 272-304). Besides, Partition memory presents them as religious minorities only and multiple identities so visible in their own accounts vanish. Though their own memories unite them with all others who did not share in power neither during the Mughal nor the British Raj, nor during post-independence days, Partition memory depicts them as rulers, forces them to identify with (the deeds of) Muslims in other areas and even in other countries, i.e. Pakistan and Bangladesh. Besides, Partition memory makes them minorities by separating "Muslims" from "Adivasis and (other) Hindus" in the region. Significantly, Partition memory denies them their common pasts and in this way also their common futures.

Reporting on the "communal riots" of 1964 in Ranchi's rural areas during which "adivasis attacked Muslims", the Ranchi Express (March 22 1964) mentioned that, 'Hindus have not forgotten that Muslims were responsible for the Partition of the Nation'. Similarly, in the Report of the Indian Commission

of Inquiry on Communal Disturbances Ranchi-Hatia (1967: 70-71) most persons in their written statements mentioned 'the main cause of the communal tension' was 'the Partition in 1947'. They were reminded of the:

- (a) Distrust of the Muslims by Hindus on account of the feeling that in the struggle for independence the Muslims betrayed them and got the country partitioned;
- (b) subsequent treatment of Hindus in Pakistan; and
- (c) suspicion of persons of the community having sympathies with or acting as spies for Pakistan showing leanings towards Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War.

The organ of the Hindu conservative party Jan Sangh²⁹ reported after "communal riots in Ranchi" had taken place:

That every citizen of India should have equal opportunities and full Justice, regardless of his caste, creed, party or domicile, is a basic principle of the Indian polity. More than that it is the utmost conviction of every Indian nationalist. But nobody should forget that India and Pakistan are two states of what is basically one people. If Hindus are treated as second or third class citizens in Pakistan, there are bound to be unpleasant reactions in India. The Government of India,

and specially Indian Muslims must take all steps including a reference to the UN to assure Hindus in Pakistan equal political and human rights. Indian Muslims must be quick to condemn all excesses and injustices against Hindus in Pakistan without any mental reservations. Secondly, the Indian Muslims must not stand apart and away. He must join the main stream of national life to be equal in rights and responsibilities.

In a pamphlet (Narayan 1992: 209-211) entitled: 'Challenge to the manhood of the New Generation: The wicked and fraudulent plot to create yet another Pakistan within India' its author Vijay Ranjan asks:

Then what should we do? Should we allow 30 lac votes of "Pro-Pakistanis" of Bihar to hurt the feelings of 5 crore 20 lac people of the State? Will our land, our nation be again divided in pieces? No more "Jinnas" will be allowed to be born in this land again, and the venomous serpents' poisonous tooth will be pulled out and its head will be crushed.

Agreeable, this "enforcement of Partition memory" is more often than not a Hindu conservative reaction to the Partition of 1947, which is treated 'as a vivisection of the limbs of mother India, which caused a spiritual and emotional shock to

the Hindu consciousness and hence an unforgivable crime on the part of those who demanded it' (Puri 1994). Yet others too, including those who identify as Muslims, reproduce this History. A history in which "Muslims" are homogenized, united on the basis of religion and linked to outside nations rather than to the local. What is more, they are opposed to "Hindus" who are linked to the soil. Moreover, Partition memory makes these "Muslims" "move rather than stay".³⁰

In report after report, newspaper after newspaper, textbook after textbook it is this Partition memory which is introduced in Jharkhand and which is so contradictory to the histories of Muslims in Jharkhand. Even some researchers reproduce these "historical truths". Jitendra Narayan (1992: 189-190) who made a study "on five communal riots in Bihar" concludes:

The study shows that the roots of the problem lie in the past history of the country. From the very beginning when the Muslim invaders set their feet on Indian soil they created a general atmosphere of hatred and hostility against themselves by mercilessly looting properties, destroying important religious places of Hindus and killing numerous innocent lives (...) Even the Partition of the country could not remove it. In a society where a particular section of the people is looked upon as the descendants of the foreign invaders and is generally

considered hostile to the foreign invaders and is generally considered hostile to themselves by the other sections of people and such persons look upon an enemy country as their savior, riots are inevitable.

The "lesson" is Narayan preaches (Ibid: 193): 'Muslims should show they are nationalists and good citizens and should show no sympathy or preference to Pakistan in matters of differences between Pakistan and India'.

When asked to comment on riots and communal tension, Muslims in Jharkhand often replied that "the cause" of the riots was 'Partition' (For instance M.Y. Mirza, 15-7-2001). Explication showed however that what they meant was that just before, during and after these riots they were haunted by a memory which was not their own. Gullam Rasool (4-11-2000), ex-Pramukh explicated:

We have always been pro-Congress and Momins were anti-Muslim League. In 1967 the Kashmir Vastrala owner's sister threw herself on the street and shouted against us, Muslims. They are Punjabis and refugees. We had nothing to do with it.

Rasool also complained about the 'Hinduisation of the adivasis here'. He feared: 'Very soon a situation will arise here like

that which Muslims faced just after Partition. They will decide who is an outsider and who not'.

Md. Mohinuddin (28-6-2001) who's ancestors had been tailors and had come to Chaibasa 'at least 80 years ago' also complained about a process which he identified as "safronization":

In British time there was peace, things were cheap and there was justice. Yet, we were too dependent so they had to go. After independence things became adverse however. In particular after 1964 when riots had taken place in many villages here in the neighborhood. Peaceful communal life was destroyed. They said we better go to Pakistan. What will I do in Pakistan? But yes, after 1964 people became scared and started living in pockets. They said riots were due to the arrival of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan. That was nonsense. They set up the adivasis against us. We had nothing to do with those people (i.e. Hindu refugees). If those people want to live here okay but they should adjust and live here peacefully. After the Babri Masjid issue secularism is completely destroyed.

Sultan Ahmed Khan from Daltonganj (12-5-2001) recounted:

Most of us came from outside, that is from Bihar. But my

family settled here long time ago. I always got jobs as a teacher, also in Hindu schools. As a Muslim, I was never discriminated against but if people behaved uncultured be they Rajput or Muslims or Brahmins I got angry. My father prevented many people from going to Pakistan. I also remember that in the Military Cantonment they were eating beef openly but my father sent a letter to stop all that. These Jan Sangh were active during the 1960s and telling that Muslims should go to Pakistan. But we are safe here in Jharkhand as this area is not communal. I do not think much about being a Muslim or not. I do not differentiate much but yes I am firstly a Muslim and than an Indian. That does not mean I support Partition!

Hazi Noor Mohammed from Jamshedpur (29-6-2001) remembered the time when 'Sardarjis and Muslims were both reading Urdu'. He recalled however that after 1964 Muslims had started living in pockets: 'Now we are separate from them. They do not know about us, or we about them. It is just like Partition'. Abbas Khan (17-4-2001) sighted: 'They tell these adivasis they are the sons of Hanuman and that we are outsiders'.

Partition memory clearly imposes and changes identities and obliterates others. Samrul Haque (7-5-2001) felt,

The Congress deceived the Muslims. They never wanted our upliftment. They never made Dr. Syed Mahmood Chief

Minister and rather made Muslim League people Ministers. But I admired Maulana Azad. He was very close to the washermen and *Halal Khore*. He ate even together with them.

He also recollected the happenings around 1964 in villages near Simdega:

They (politicians) were telling Hindus that if you kill one Muslim you will get money. They tried to convince Santhalis and Oraons that they were Hindus. They built temples. But the BJP unites us (Muslims). Besides, the relation between Muslims and Christians is now very close. We are both minorities. During riots they protect us.

But, he concluded, '*To, Pakistan Banna yahan ke Musalmano ke leye zaher hai*' (The establishment of Pakistan was a big curse for Muslims here) .

Concluding Remarks: Battling the threat

Safirunn Nisha (17-4-2001), a vegetable seller, lost all her brothers and her father in the Raiboga riots that spread over the rural areas. She stated:

I have no idea why they are killed. I know that Nehru was still alive. That time my brothers died. He went to the spot. After that he died. I became mad when I heard about the news. I did not go there. Bows and arrows killed them. They say it is because we are Muslims. That is not true.

Though Safirunn knows the "truth", "Partition memory" now seems to overshadow her history. Importantly, in the process it also has started outclassing regional, class and *braderi* identities that united and introduced a religious identity that separates. Muslims in Jharkhand are now demanding their rights as a "Muslim minority" and want "the same rights as Muslims in Bihar". Among others this means that they demand the official recognition of Urdu as a second language in Jharkhand.³¹

Yet, there are also many who "battle the threat". Since the last few years and in particular after the establishment of the new State of Jharkhand, fresh efforts are made by "Muslims" to show that there are other (Partition) stories. In the meetings of the Momin Conference held in Jharkhand, efforts are made for instance to remind people of their past, which was not communal, not violent and in which local Muslims had an established position within society.³² Through the creation of histories (Cf. Singer 1997), these people want to show they always had been "adjusted and accommodated" in

Jharkhand (Cf. Hasan 1990). That is, till "Partition" got re-enacted in their lives. This memory will allow them to claim a political community and agenda. It even enables them to claim legislative and administrative power. Rather than choosing between two poles of identity - Hindu or Muslim - that Partition memory seems to enforce, the identities of the past can help them to formulate a common political agenda with adivasis and other "Jharkhandis".

Yet, it is not easy to obliterate more than 50 years of official Partition memory (which often has become "national history"). These 'marginal' voices must be recovered however to rewrite the histories of Partition (Cf. Hasan in Singh 2000: 350 and 359n35). It should be recognized that these popular memories of people who live at the margin is also history and should not be silenced. Why, it can be questioned, is there a tendency to ignore those voices of those "who stayed"? They should speak out, I think, as it seems a useful weapon to combat the logic of Partition itself. Already, Partition has made their present traumatic, if we keep on suppressing these voices, it even threatens to make a traumatic past for those who's past was not traumatic at all. Otherwise, the Partition story will go on.

Notes

1. See for instance Butalia (1993), Hasan (2000), and Menon and Bhasin (1998).

2. See my forthcoming 'Partition and the Making and Unmaking of the Refugee Identity. A Case Study of Two Districts in the State of Bihar, India'. In: Dasgupta, A. and Van Schendel, W. See also: Sinha-Kerkhoff (2001).

3. I would here like to thank Mushirul Hasan who introduced the notion of "re-enactment of Partition" to me. He was discussant of my paper entitled 'Partition Memories, "Minoritization" and Discourses of Rootedness in Jharkhand: A comparison of cross border displaced and "invisible refugees" in Ranchi District', prepared for the workshop on "Displaced People in South Asia" at Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India (2-4 March 2001).

4. See for instance Hindu (September 21, 1997); Hindustan Times (August 31, 1997); Hindu (June 20, 1998) and the Times of India (August 10, 1997). See also Seminar (Special Issue) (1998).

5. Times of India (July 20, 1997).

6. Inverted commas are used here as this article shows that it is difficult to refer to Muslims as a homogeneous category. Narratives of Muslims in Jharkhand show that the Muslim community was divided socially, politically and economically.

7. Hasan in Singh (2000: 350) also feels that, 'Indeed, the part played by those Muslims, who are patronisingly described as "Nationalist Muslims" (...), who were eventually let down by the dispirited Congress leadership (...), the Muslims in Bihar, should not be submerged beneath the rationalisation of the "victors"'.
'

8. Kumar (1969: 42).

9. See also Lal (1981: 1-2).

10. Yet, see O'Malley (1926: 52-53): 'Most of the present day Muhamadans are descendants of the converts then made (i.e. during Mughal emperors), but descendants of the Nawab's family are still to be found at Hussainabad'.

11. Between September 2000 and August 2001, my assistant Mr. Noor Alam and I interviewed around 90 Muslims living in various areas of the State of Jharkhand.

12. "Tribals" are labelled as well as that they identify as "*adivasis*" in Jharkhand.

13. Generally, lower-classes did trace their ancestry in adivasi families and upper-classes denied genetic connection between adivasis and Muslims.

14. See also Ansari (1971: 133-148) and Madani (1993).

15. See also O' Malley (1910: 67): 'The majority of the Muhammadans are believed to be descendants of low caste converts made during the period of Mughal rule, and many of them can with difficulty be distinguished from the Hinduized aboriginals with whom they live side by side'.

16. Yet, at times I came across appellations such as "Yasin

Santhali" (in this case a Momin who defeated a Muslim League candidate during the 1946 elections). The first name denoting Muslim and the second *adivasi* origin.

17. In some districts, like in Palamau, it was thought to be only seven percent (Roy Chaudhury 1961: 160-161).

18. See for instance Narayan (1992).

19. See for instance Sharma (1993).

20. This refers to research I have carried out between 1997 and 2000 during which I interviewed Bengali Hindus who had arrived from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) and had been rehabilitated in so-called refugee colonies in Bihar. This research was part of a bigger project on "Displaced Populations & Development in the Context of the South Asian Economic and Institutional Order. A Study of the displaced populations originating from Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, now living in India and Bangladesh" and was sponsored by the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD) which is part of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.

21. That is, my assistant Dipankar Mukherjee and myself.

22. See also Azis (1947).

23. See for instance Hafizur Rahman (28-6-2001): 'This is my

motherland and I want to live and die here. If I go elsewhere I will be treated in a worse way. No Indian wants to go abroad. But oh yes, it is more important for me to be a Muslim than to be an Indian. Actually, we are more Muslim than Muslims in Bangladesh. They are Hinduized Muslims'.

24. Other Muslims stating that she is "only an *adivasi* convert" disclaim this. Others told me that she belongs to the "advanced *Ansaris*" and could never have descended from the Bikhari family.

25. Referring to the friendship between *adivasis* and *Ansaris*.

26. This is our translation but it equals with another English translation of the same leaflet (See File No. 270 (3) 1947 Political Special, Patna State Archives).

27. Think for instance of history textbooks used in Government schools.

28. Think for instance of exhibitions in an Indian museum, statues of "freedom fighters", street names and names of parks, and Bollywood movies on Partition.

29. See the *Organiser* (Vol.22, No.11, 26 October, 1968: 3).

30. Lack of space prevents me to quote more examples or refer to all literature. But see for instance: 'A word to Muslims' in the *Indian Nation* September 13, 1967. See also *Amrita Bazar*

Patrika 30 March and 2 and 4 April 1964 on riots in rural Jharkhandi areas. See also a report on the Ranchi riot of 1967 in the Organiser (Vol. XXI, No.5, 10 Sept. 1967: 1-2). Newspapers such as Searchlight report in similar vein. They refer to a well-defined Muslim community in Jharkhand with interests different from Hindus and/or adivasis and often refer to the 1947 Partition as an explanation for "communal attitudes" among various religious communities.

31. All people interviewed subscribed to this demand. Though many people (also women) state they know how to read the Koran (in Arabic script), many of them do not use Urdu in day to day life however.

32. See also (Ranchi Express (Hindi) August 3 2000) in which Imtiaz Ali reminds people that his father Late Jahoor Ali tried to involve Momin people in the Jharkhand Movement. See also an archive photo of some well-known Muslims in Jharkhand who had been actively involved in the Jharkhand movement. This photo was reproduced in the Hindustan (Hindi) (August 4, 2000) with the heading: 'People forget these great people of Jharkhand'. See also Md. Rafique Ansari's editorial in Urdu in Farooqui Tanjeem (3 November 1999). Also Anwar Eraz article on 'The Jharkhand Movement of Bihar' in Ifkar Milli (Urdu) (July 2000: 136-140) and Aslam Jamshedpuri's article 'Jharkhand Movement and Musalman also in Ifkar Milli (Urdu) (July 2000: 140-143). See further the Presidential address by

Amanat Ali during the Chotanagpur Santhal Parganas Local Momin Conference. A big Rally (Dated 9 July 1994) Venue Zeyaul Rahman Ansari Nagur Labour Maidan, Sector 4 Bokaro. See also another article in *Ifkar Milli* (July 2000: 243) on 'Sikh Bhikhari' and Afsar Ali in the *Milli Gazette* (16-31 December 2000: 6) on the 'Muslim contribution to the formation of Jharkhand State'. See lastly the article 'Jharkhand Muslims should be declared tribals' in *Milli Gazette* (1-15 August 2001: 6).

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