

2 The three partitions of 1947

Elections, commissions, protest and strife

The years 1945 to 1947 were marked by intense struggle in the sub-continent. What the Second World War established, and the end of the war only underlined, was the changed military, political and economic position of Britain in the world and the radical transformation of the political temper in India. All this lent unprecedented urgency to the question of the transfer of power and the establishment of national government(s) in the subcontinent. It was in this situation that the Indian National Congress leadership was released from jail, efforts at mobilisation of different sections of the society were actively renewed, large-scale urban demonstrations and rural uprisings occurred, new elections were held and sustained high-level constitutional negotiations took place after 1945.

Much of the politics of the previous three or four decades had been about national liberation. It was a serious complication that the call for Indian self-government was now joined by the call for Muslim self-government in a new country to be named Pakistan. Talk of independence was rife. However, while the Congress and those in sympathy with it expected the independence of a united India, the Muslim League slogan became 'Pakistan for Independence'. There were two nations in India, it was argued, and the acceptance of the Pakistan demand was the only road to the genuine independence of all Indians, the Muslims in a free Pakistan and the Hindus in a free Hindustan.

Yet the idea of Pakistan itself, the proposal for a partition of British India between its Muslim-majority and its Hindu-majority provinces, had not had a long history. It was in March 1940 that the Muslim League formally proposed the establishment of separate states for the Muslim-majority regions of north-western and north-eastern India; and as late as September 1944, in his correspondence with Gandhi, and April 1946, in a meeting of all Muslim League legislators of the centre and the provinces, Jinnah and the Muslim League were still having to clarify that the proposal

was for *one* sovereign, independent state called Pakistan (with its separate, eastern and western, wings).

Elections in early 1946 were widely represented as being a plebiscite on the question of Pakistan. The Muslim League performed very well in the majority of Muslim constituencies across the subcontinent and quickly laid claim to being the sole representative of the Muslims of India (although, as Indian nationalist commentators and other scholars too have pointed out, no more than 10-12 per cent of the adult population was enfranchised at this time; and the League was unable to form a ministry in the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and managed to do so only by the skin of its teeth in Sind).

The summer of 1946 brought momentary agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League on the Cabinet Mission Plan to establish a loose federation in India, with the Muslim-majority provinces and states of north-western and north-eastern India being grouped initially into two of the federating units, and the rest of India into a third: there was provision for a constitutional review after ten years. The agreement was welcomed widely and with the most visible relief in nationalist (i.e. pro-Congress) Muslim circles. It collapsed, however, owing to continued suspicions and reservations in both Congress and League camps. Congress leaders, in particular, were agitated over the compulsory grouping of provinces and states into regional units (with the Muslims holding a majority in two regions), and extremely concerned to preserve the sovereign authority of the proposed Constituent Assembly.

Following the breakdown of this Congress-League agreement, the Congress leadership - heading by far the most powerful and well-organised strand of the anti-colonial movement in the country - was still able to press on the British the need to move quickly towards an Interim Government (controlled by representative Indians) and a Constituent Assembly (elected by the legislators returned in the 1946 elections), in line with the 16 May Cabinet Mission proposals. Congress leaders believed that this was the most urgent need of the day, with or without the participation of the Muslim League: once power was transferred to Indian hands, the people of India would themselves resolve all remaining issues.

In August 1946, the Muslim League decided on 'Direct Action' - the first extra-constitutional action in a wholly constitutionalist movement, as Jinnah said - against the direction that constitutional negotiations seemed to be taking. This followed the Congress president Jawaharlal Nehru's apparent retraction of commitments made by his party in accepting the 16 May Cabinet Mission Plan, and the threat of the installation of a

Congress-controlled Interim Government at the centre. On 'Direct Action Day', 16 August 1946, violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. Several thousand people were killed in four days. From here, the violence spread, one way and then the other, to engulf many parts of northern India by March 1947.

After Calcutta, the violence and killings were reported to have been at their worst in Bombay in early September (with over 300 reported killed), East Bengal in early October (several hundreds killed), Bihar in late October (several thousands killed), Garhmukteshwar in UP in November (several hundreds killed). The fire spread to the North West Frontier Province in January 1947 and to Punjab in March (where the casualties were again very high). In the last two instances, the violence coincided with civil disobedience campaigns launched by the Muslim League to dislodge the provincial ministries (a move that occurred in Assam as well).

At the beginning of March 1947, the League agitation succeeded in bringing down the Khizr Hayat Khan-led coalition ministry in Punjab comprising Muslim, Sikh and Hindu ministers from the Unionist, Congress and Panthic parties. The League renewed its claim to form the government in the province that was now seen as the cornerstone of the Pakistan proposal. The fall of the coalition government was seen as a turning point. The demand for Pakistan had reached fever pitch and reports spoke of how 'communal frenzy' had gripped the population at large. The imminence - as it seemed - of a new and far more militant Muslim League government was widely apprehended and reported as the achievement of Pakistan.¹ It led at once to demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, threats of a fight to the finish, and the outbreak of violence on a large scale. It was not only cities like Lahore and Amritsar that were affected this time. The violence was likened to a tidal wave that engulfed Sikh and Hindu 'minorities' scattered in the rural areas of Rawalpindi and Multan divisions.

A British general wrote of the fierceness of the attacks and the rapidity with which they spread from the cities to the countryside. In the cities of Rawalpindi and Multan, 'attacks were fiercer, more sudden, and more savage than ever. In the rural areas attacks were launched by large mobs of Muslim peasants who banded together from several hamlets and villages to destroy and loot Sikh and Hindu shops and houses in their area. In some areas... savagery was carried to an extreme degree and men, women and children were hacked or beaten to death, if not burned in

¹ In the event, a Muslim League ministry was not installed. The governor imposed governor's rule because of the outbreak of serious disturbances and this, of course, served to provoke Muslim League supporters even further.

their houses. There were also quite a number of cases of forcible conversion of males and abduction of females...' Casualties were heavy, especially in Rawalpindi division, and there was a considerable exodus towards central and East Punjab, and indeed Delhi and UP: by the end of April 1947, official estimates of refugees in Punjab put the figure at 80,000.²

Some of the most haunting images of Partition violence come from this period. Many people took their own lives, or those of their family members, rather than surrendering to bondage and dishonour. The collective suicide of ninety or more women and children in the village of Thoa Khalsa is now the best known of these incidents.³ Accounts of huge numbers of refugees, and refugee camps, had already become common at the time of the massacre of Muslims in Bihar several months before. But, perhaps because of the altered political context at the all-India level, the Punjab events outdid even Calcutta and Bihar in the all-round hatred that they generated and the polarisation that they produced in Punjab and beyond.

Hindus and Sikhs in far-flung districts of Punjab, and elsewhere, united in an intensified hatred of all Muslims - as contemporary accounts now commonly had it - and began, in the words of a colonial official, actively 'organising for strife'.⁴ Sikh leaders called on every living Sikh to emulate 'the spirit of sacrifice, chivalry and bravery as exhibited and demonstrated by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh Ji', and to 'give his [*sic*] best in the cause of the Panth which is covered in courageous glory by the numerous sacrifices of our martyrs'.⁵

The pride of Jat Sikhs, whose militaristic traditions had been pumped up by their favoured recruitment into the British Indian army and the rise of the Singh Sabha movement in the nineteenth century, was especially wounded. In West Punjab, stories spread of how the Sikhs' 'much vaunted

² (IOR) T. W. Rees coll., Punjab Boundary Force (PBF) bundles, General Messervy, 'Some Remarks on the Disturbances in the Northern Punjab' (May 1947?), paras. 2 and 8; also 'Events leading up to the Present Situation in Punjab', precis of address by GII Intelligence, Northern Command (25 May 1947). (The Rees papers were uncatalogued at the time that I consulted them: hence I give no reference to volume numbers. I am deeply grateful to Robin Jeffrey for drawing my attention to the existence of these papers, photocopies of many of which he had obtained earlier for the Sussex University Library, and to the archivist and staff at the India Office Library and Records, London, for permission to consult them so soon after they had been acquired.) The question of estimates (of casualties and refugees), which appear almost always in round figures, is discussed more fully in ch. 4.

³ See Butalia, 'Community, State and Gender', and Menon and Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture, Resistance'.

⁴ Rees coll., PBF bundles, Lt Col W. J. Young, 'Note on the Political Situation in the Punjab' (May 1947), para. 7C.

⁵ (IOR) Mss Eur. F200/1923 Tara Singh and others to the raja of Faridkot (19 March 1947).

militancy' had been 'exploded'. Sections of the Muslim press declared that the community had been 'mauled... and the Muslims need not fear them any more'. The London *Times* correspondent in India, betraying his own public school manners and a more general colonial account of manliness, told an English acquaintance that the Muslims had 'thrashed hell out of the Sikhs and Hindus' in the Punjab.⁶

In early September 1947 Nehru, the beleaguered prime minister of newly independent India, distressed and bewildered by all that had gone so wrong, summed up the Punjab events as follows. After Rawalpindi and Multan, he wrote, 'The Sikhs felt exceedingly bitter and angry. Certain subsequent happenings added to this bitterness, more especially the open taunts thrown out to them that they were cowards... They took all this very much to heart and prepared for revenge ... Every kind of weapon was eagerly seized and preserved.'⁷

Several historians, and contemporary observers, have spoken of the 'Great Calcutta Killing' of August 1946 as marking the point of no return in the history of Partition. Others might wish to shift that moment to Punjab in March 1947. Yet it remains unclear how deeply all of this affected Bombay or Madras, or other parts of southern, western or central India, none of which was hit by Partition violence in quite the same shattering way as the north. In the winter of 1946-7, moreover, many people still had faith in the miraculous power of the Mahatma. Freedom was in the air, and Gandhi's wanderings in Noakhali meant that the temporary setback represented by Calcutta or Noakhali would soon be overcome, recalls a Gujarati academic (a leftist student at the time) as having been the general feeling among secular, nationalist youth in Bombay.⁸ Even after Calcutta and Noakhali, and Bihar and Rawalpindi, there were other partitions still to come before Partition became a settled fact.

The first 'partition'

It is my contention that there were at least three different conceptions of 'partition' that went into the making of the Partition of 1947. The first of these may be discerned in the Muslim League demand for 'Pakistan' from 1940 onwards.⁹ In its clearest expositions, and for most of the period 1940-7, what this envisaged was the autonomy, or independence,

⁶ (IOR) R/3/1/174, Sardar Baldev Singh's statement 'Who is guilty?' (16 typed pp.) put up to the governor general and his staff on 3 October 1947; and Mss. Eur. D621, Wilfrid Russell diaries, vol. 14, entry for 27 March 1947.

⁷ Rees coll., PBF bundles, Nehru-Rees (camp Lahore, 3 September 1947).

⁸ Interview with Rashmi Desai (Melbourne, July 1997).

⁹ 'Pakistan' was not named in the Lahore Resolution, as Sikandar Hayat Khan and others pointed out at several points over the next few years; but, as Jinnah noted, the press reports and the public response made this into the 'Pakistan' resolution.

of Muslim-majority regions in the north-west and north-east of India - a land (or lands?) where Muslims, and therefore the ideals of Islam, would hold sway.

Two aspects of this demand for a 'Muslim' state need to be noted. First, this was to be a Muslim-majority state. The Muslim-majority provinces of north-western and north-eastern India would be constituted into separate blocks, with minor adjustments, if necessary, in existing provincial boundaries. The plan entailed a minimal disturbance in the demographic distribution of Hindus and Muslims, the communities they lived in and local, social and economic arrangements.

'The Pakistan movement, as envisaged by Mr Jinnah, [does not] require any uprooting of associations and ties of homeland which have existed for generations by an interchange of populations from the Hindu majority Provinces to the Muslim majority Provinces', declared Hassan Suhrawardy in November 1942.¹⁰ Or, as a Muslim student of Lucknow University in 1946-7 recalled, 'Nobody thought in terms of migration in those days: [the Muslims] all thought that everything would remain the same, Punjab would remain Punjab, Sindh would remain Sindh, there won't be any demographic changes - no drastic changes anyway - the Hindus and Sikhs would continue to live in Pakistan... and we would continue to live in India.'¹¹

'Pakistan' was to be a Muslim-dominated state to balance a Hindu-dominated 'Hindustan'. This is why Jinnah and the Muslim League were ready to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan. In the words of a leading supporter of Jinnah, 'The Muslim League accepted the cabinet mission's plan, as it met the *substance of the demand for Pakistan* and kept the way open for the emergence of a sovereign Pakistan in case the union centre functioned to the detriment of the Muslim provinces.'¹² A group of Punjabi Muslims put the point even more strongly on the Muslim League's withdrawal of its earlier acceptance of the Mission's scheme. 'The most important part of the Scheme is complete provincial autonomy', they noted; '... this is, for all practical purposes, *real Pakistan*. One wonders what more the Pakistan of our Leaders' conception can give us.'¹³

However, the goal of separation and autonomy (or independence) for the Muslim-majority regions of north-western and north-eastern India

¹⁰ Latif Ahmed Sherwani, ed., *Pakistan Resolution to Pakistan, 1940-1947. A Selection of Documents Presenting the Case for Pakistan* (Karachi, 1969; reprinted Delhi, 1985), p. 36.

¹¹ Interview with Viqar Ahmed (London, 15 October 1995).

¹² M. A. H. Ispahani, 'Factors Leading to the Partition of British India', in Philips and Wainright, eds., *Partition*, p. 350 (emphasis added).

¹³ Cited in Ayesha Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, p. 263 (emphasis added).

might not have galvanised the dreams of Muslims across the country. What appears to have moved large numbers of younger, urban Muslims, and enabled them to draw into the movement an even broader mass of Muslims, was the possibility of a Muslim state, at a time when Muslim power was at a low ebb the world over and when few people had considered the possibility of establishing such a modern, Muslim state in the subcontinent.

The growing belief in this possibility - of a state where Islam, and with it equality and justice, would reign - generated great enthusiasm among the Muslim middle classes, especially the youth. University students from Aligarh and elsewhere provided some of the most dedicated and important workers of the Muslim League. As the Raja of Mahmudabad, himself one of the closer younger lieutenants of Jinnah in the period before Partition, recalled twenty years after the event, 'the idea of a separate Muslim state in India [*sic*] stirred the imagination of the Muslims as nothing else had done before'.¹⁴

Leading intellectuals of the earlier generation in Pakistan have made the same point, saying that progressive historians should not run away with the idea that Pakistan came to be established 'in a fit of absent-mindedness'. The younger generation of Muslim students, teachers and professionals of the 1940s supported the idea of Pakistan without exception. One of them said to me: 'We believed in every word of Mr Jinnah, and we went there [to Pakistan, from territories that remained in India] because we had great hopes for the future.'¹⁵ 'Jinnah and the Muslim League and Pakistan are realities', noted a British ICS official posted in Banaras in 1946. 'All my Muslim officers are Muslim Leaguers'.¹⁶

The goal of Pakistan (the 'Pure Land') was seen as the 'Muslim' answer to 'Hindu oppression' and 'Hindu capitalism'. In the climactic years of 1946 and 1947, the League campaigned energetically against the '*bania*' (trading, money lending, interest-gathering and, in that sense, fundamentally un-Islamic) Congress and its '*bania*' leader (Gandhi); against a Congress which was under the thumb of Hindu capitalists and - for

¹⁴ See Raja of Mahmudabad, 'Some Memories', in Philips and Wainright, eds., *Partition*, p. 388. Cf. Mahmud Husain, 'Dacca University and the Pakistan Movement', in *ibid.*, pp. 371-2; A. B. A. Haleem, 'The Aligarh Muslim University' and M. N. Safa, 'Dacca University - Its Role in the Freedom Movement' in *History of the Freedom Movement in Pakistan* (Pakistan Historical Society, 1970; reprinted, Delhi, 1984); and Ahmed Kamal, 'A Land of Eternal Eid - Independence, People, and Politics in East Bengal', *Dhaka University Studies*, Part A, 46, 1 (June 1989).

¹⁵ Interview with Mubashir Hasan (Delhi, 27 February 1995); and Gitanjali Shree and Sudhir Chandra's conversation with Intizar Husain (Dhulikhel, Kathmandu, March 1994).

¹⁶ (IOR) Mss. Eur. D724/101, papers of Andrew Parke Hume, ms. entitled 'To Anyone Interested' [impressions of the situation in India] (13 January 1946).

all its protestations to the contrary - working hand-in-glove with British imperialism; against 'Hindu capitalism and fascism' which oppressed not only the Muslims, but also 'Untouchables' and other 'minorities'.¹⁷

By contrast, the Muslim League demand for Pakistan was presented as aiming at true freedom - the freedom of both the Hindus and the Muslims, the 'fairest deal' for minorities and justice for all who were oppressed and poor. 'Divide to unite' was the League's paradoxical battle cry.¹⁸ Once the Muslims were free and secure in Pakistan, and the Hindus in Hindustan, the two could come together in many areas: communications, defence, foreign affairs, civil rights.

The votaries of Pakistan promised a great deal. As Islam is by nature egalitarian, it was argued, the Muslim state would provide the best conditions for genuine democracy and socialism. Hence Jinnah said in March 1946: 'I am an old man. God has given me enough to live comfortably at this age. Why would I turn my blood into water, run about and take so much trouble? Not for the capitalists surely, but for you, the poor people... In Pakistan, we will do all in our power to see that everybody can get a decent living.'¹⁹

Headlines in *Dawn* in November 1946 made the same point: 'Qaed-e-Azam and Muslim League Have Always Befriended the Downtrodden.' The accompanying report was run alongside an advertisement in Urdu, printed around Jinnah's photograph, citing the results of Jinnah's talks with a number of leaders of the depressed classes in Lucknow in 1937: '*Muslim League tamam kamzor jama'aton ke huquq chahti hail Government ya kisi taaqat se samjhauta karte vaqt musalman, aadinivasi, acchuton ko insafke saath har qism ke huquq dilane mein har qism ki qurbani karenge!*' ('The Muslim League stands for the rights of all weak [oppressed] communities! In reaching an agreement with the Government or any other power, we will make every sacrifice necessary to obtain... every right for the Muslims, the Adivasis and the Untouchables!').²⁰

The Punjab Muslim League Manifesto of 8 November 1944 was read in several quarters as a charter of rights for the working classes and

¹⁷ See K. K. Aziz, *Muslims Under Congress Rule, 1937-39. A Documentary Record*, vols. I and II (1978; reprinted Delhi, 1986); Mushirul Hasan, 'The Mass Contacts Campaign', in Hasan, ed., *India's Partition*; and *Dawn* for 1946 and 1947.

¹⁸ See Sarat Chandra Bose, / *Warned My Countrymen. Being the Collected Works 1945-50 of Sarat Chandra Bose* (Calcutta, 1968), p. 136. See also Indian Communist Sajjad Zaheer's comment asking the Congress 'to welcome this awakening national consciousness of brother nationalities, to recognize their just democratic demand, and then to end once and for all the present unhappy epoch of disunity, discord and deadlock'; cited in Shafiq AH Khan, *The Demand for Pakistan and the CPI* (Karachi, 1986), pp. 64-5.

¹⁹ *Dawn* (1 March 1946), see the rest of die speech too.

²⁰ The advertisement is repeated in many issues of November and December 1946.

the peasantry. A Communist Party report spoke of the Punjab League's 'proud record of service in the *kisan* [peasant] movement... These workers of Punjab's new Muslim League have taken the message of Pakistan deep among the peasant masses. But the message they teach is not one which separates the Muslim *kisan* from his Sikh and Hindu brothers [*sic*], but on the contrary, unites him with them.²¹

In the age of nationalism, however, the strongest argument in favour of Pakistan was probably the claim that the Muslims of India constituted a nation of their own. Jinnah declared: 'The problem [between the Hindus and Muslims of India] is not of an inter-communal character, but manifestly of an international one... Mussalmans are a nation according to any definition of a nation.'²² The argument was repeated down the line, and elaborated into the kind of requirement that nationalism has unashamedly demanded in the twentieth century. To be a true Muslim in India at this time was to be prepared to lay down one's life for Pakistan. Anyone who was unable to contemplate such sacrifice for religion and nation was no Muslim at all, but a 'renegade', a 'quisling' and a '*kafir*' (non-believer).²³

Indeed, as the struggle for Pakistan reached its high point and the lines came to be drawn more and more sharply between 'us' and 'them', the wrath of God was called down upon all those who stood in the way of the achievement of Pakistan. It was 'traitors' within the community who became the targets of the most virulent and continuous attacks. 'Mahatma' Gandhi was a 'celestial quack', 'Pandit' Nehru a 'hypocrite', 'Sardar' Patel a Hindu Mahasabhaite, but it was Abul Kalam Azad, long-term president of the Congress (until mid-1946), renowned for his Islamic learning, so-called 'Maulana' Azad - in reality, as League propagandists had it, no 'Maulana' at all - 'renegade' Azad who was guiltiest of all. He was taunted when the Bihar massacres occurred, reviled for his preaching of Indian unity, prevented from entering various mosques at prayer-time, and insulted and spat upon by students of Aligarh Muslim University when his train stopped at Aligarh railway station.²⁴ Other nationalist Muslims suffered in a similar way. As we know, the experience has not been uncommon in nationalist - or communist - movements elsewhere.

²¹ See Sho Kuwajima, *Post-war Upsurge of Freedom Movement and 1946 Provincial Elections in India* (Osaka, 1992), p. 157; cf. p. 155. Muslim League activists made the same sort of argument during their election campaign in Sind: *haris* (farm labourers) and *mazdoors* (workers) would get their fair share in Pakistan and their children would be assured of education.

²² Sherwani, *Pakistan Resolution*, pp. 23-4.

²³ Cf. David Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 3 (1979).

²⁴ See Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, *Islamic Seal on India's Independence. Abul Kalam Azad - a Fresh Look* (Karachi, 1998), p. 290; Jalil Abbasi, *Kya din the* (Delhi, 1987), p. 108; and numerous interviews.

In spite of all the militant propaganda, however, the idea of Pakistan remained remarkably vague. It was never clarified how Muslims spread out over the subcontinent, and divided by class, sect, gender, regional interests and language, would become part of *one* separate country; or indeed exactly where this new state called Pakistan would be. In any event, there was little desire to move from long-established homes - the *vatan*, homeland, country, native place. Indeed, for numerous supporters of Pakistan, for much of the period up to 1947, the object was to gain assured Muslim dominance in the Muslim-majority zones of north-western and north-eastern India, without any substantial change in existing provincial boundaries or any significant movement of populations.

Many in Punjab and Bengal, even among those who were supporters of the League and the Pakistan movement in the mid-1940s, had reservations about the theory that the Hindus and Muslims of the entire subcontinent formed two separate and homogenous nations. Abul Hashim, secretary of the Bengal Muslim League, declared: 'Liberated India must necessarily be, as God has made it, a subcontinent having complete independence for every nation inhabiting it...' While this could be seen, at a stretch, as a statement in favour of the two-nation theory, it reads more obviously as the advocacy of not two, but several nations: 'a subcontinent' with 'complete independence for every nation inhabiting it' - Bengal, Punjab, Sindh and so on.²⁵

When Hindu, Sikh and Congress leaders proposed the partition of Bengal and Punjab, neither Jinnah nor the Punjab and Bengal Leaguers were pleased. In April 1947, Jinnah pleaded with Mountbatten not to play with the unity of Bengal and Punjab which have 'national characteristics in common: common history, common ways of life', and where 'the Hindus have stronger feelings as Bengalis or Punjabis than they have as members of the Congress'. Liaqat Ali Khan, the first prime minister of Pakistan, echoed the sentiment. The Bengal Muslim League leader, Husain Suhrawardy, asked the Viceroy to postpone a decision on Partition until November 1947 to give his 'united Bengal' scheme a little more time to succeed. Fazlul Haq, mover of the original 'Pakistan' resolution in Lahore in 1940, expressed the opinion even more strongly, declaring that the British should stay on, rather than partition the country.²⁶

'The most striking fact about Pakistan is how it failed to satisfy the interests of the very Muslims who are supposed to have demanded its creation', Ayesha Jalal has written.²⁷ It was in the clash between different

²³ See Leonard A. Gordon, 'Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition', in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition*, pp. 297-8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 307; and Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, pp. 252 and 265.

²⁷ Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, p. 2.

notions of Pakistan - as the 'land of the Indian Muslims', and as a state which would protect all the subcontinent's Muslims, who could stay on wherever they were - that a second conception of 'partition' crept in.

The second 'partition'

This second 'partition' entailed the splitting up of the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. By March 1947, an increasing number of Sikh and Congress leaders were persuaded that Partition was necessary - as the lesser evil. In that month, the Congress high command voted for a partition of Punjab into Muslim-majority and Hindu/Sikh-majority halves and asked that the same principle be applied to Bengal. It was as if a frustrated and angry Congress leadership had decided to thwart the League by offering it an overdose of its own medicine. If you must have your Partition, you'll have it with a vengeance.²⁸

The Hindu Mahasabha had made the proposal for a division of Bengal even earlier. The Sikh leadership supported the Congress call for a division of Punjab even though it was clear that their community would face the severest difficulties from such a development. It was the short-sightedness and selfishness of Congress leaders that led to the Partition of 1947, argues Jalal. Jinnah himself never wanted Partition: the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha insisted on it.²⁹ Joya Chatterji demonstrates this proposition for Bengal, suggesting that *bhadralok* Bengali Hindus, who thought of Bengal as *their* province, were unprepared to live under the 'permanent tutelage of Muslims' (as one of their leaders put it) and were persuaded by events that occurred in the period of the first Muslim League ministry in the province that Partition was necessary. 'In 1947,' she writes, '*bhadralok* Bengalis, once the pioneers of nationalism, used every available stratagem and device to demand that their province be divided.'³⁰

History has often worked in just such curious ways. In spite of the Muslim League's espousal of the two-nation theory and the Congress-Sikh-Mahasabha rejection of it, it was the latter's initiatives that seemed

Cf. Sarat Bose who speaks of a notion of 'self-determination all the way', *I Warned My Countrymen*, p. 133.

Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, pp. 262, 216 and *passim*.

Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 230-1 and 253. 'The Sikhs were the main authors of the partition demand', wrote an Intelligence official in August 1947; Rees coll., PBF bundles, 'Secret Note' (a pencilled note at the top identifies the writer as 'Mr. Jenkins, C. I. D.', and gives the date, Lahore, 4 August 1947). Diwan Chaman Lai had earlier described the March 1947 violence in Punjab as 'Pakistan in action', adding: '... We are determined now to see that the Punjab is divided'; (Southampton University Library) Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana papers, MS 210/4, 'Newspaper reports' (15 April 1947).

to call for a complete separation of the religious communities, and not the former's. The consequences were far reaching.

They led, first, to the demand for the establishment of separate states in many other parts of the subcontinent through a further extension of the same principle of the self-determination of religious communities. There were widespread calls for the establishment of Muslim states in the Muslim-majority districts or sub-districts of Malabar ('Mappillasthan'), west UP, Rampur, Bihar, Delhi, apart from the major princely states of Hyderabad, Bhopal and so on.

Secondly, they reinforced the opinion that the 'minority' (or 'other' community) did not belong in lands that had now been designated Muslim or non-Muslim. This was to lead, in the months following the establishment of India and Pakistan, to the eviction of virtually all Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab and other north-western parts of erstwhile British India, as it did of Muslims from East Punjab. By a final irony, the deputy prime minister of India and, presumably on the government of India's instructions, the deputy High Commissioner for India in Pakistan were found calling for the withdrawal of all Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistani Punjab and the NWFP, while the government of Pakistan was urging Muslims of the territories lying beyond East Punjab *not* to migrate to Pakistan.³¹

No one knew in August 1947 what the long-term consequences of Partition would be; none could have predicted the devastation and bitterness it left behind. However, the signs were already ominous in the months when the proposals for the partition of Punjab and Bengal were still being discussed, and long before the mass movement of peoples from one side to the other had taken on its ultimate gigantic proportions. The bewildering variety of the Sikh leaders' responses on the issue of the division of Punjab - which they themselves had advanced as the 'best' solution under the circumstances - illustrates the point well.

In early April 1947, not long after Master Tara Singh and other Akali leaders had come out in support of the Congress plan to divide Punjab, a meeting called by non-Akali Sikh leaders declared it 'sheer tyranny and [a] moral betrayal' to leave the Sikhs of the western Punjab districts to fend for themselves, as it were. The migration of a few thousand Sikhs to Patiala or other Sikh states offered no solution to this problem, they noted. 'What will you do with the 20 lakhs that will be left behind?' asked Sardul Singh Caveeshar. 'The Punjab, I tell you, will never be divided', said Professor Mota Singh.³²

³¹ Mss. Eur. F200/53, emergency committee meeting (17 October 1947); and *ibid.*, vol. 128, Indian High Commission (camp Lahore) to India Foreign, telegram (27 August 1947). Cf. *ibid.*, vol. 149, R. F. Mudie to Liaquat Ali Khan (24 December 1948).

³² *Dawn* (12 April 1947).

In keeping with the extraordinarily confused nature of this extraordinary time, Sikh leaders across the board seemed to backtrack as soon as the principle of the partition of British India (and, with it, of Punjab and Bengal) was accepted on 3 June 1947. In the second week of July 1947, when the Punjab and Bengal legislatures (each divided into an eastern and a western section) met to vote - and thus express the 'opinion of the people' - on whether their provinces should or should not be partitioned, each and every Sikh member of the eastern section of the Punjab Assembly voted for the division of the Punjab (just as the Hindu members of western Bengal did in the Bengal vote on Bengal's partition).

Yet, a short while afterwards, Giani Kartar Singh, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal, and one of the most prominent of the Sikh leaders at this time, declared that 'The Sikhs have not accepted the [3 June] Plan as such. The Sikh position is that they do not agree to a partition that does not maintain the solidarity of their population in the East Punjab and does not consolidate their shrines in the East Punjab.' What that meant in effect was that East Punjab had to be made so large as to include the vast majority of the Sikh people and the vast majority of Sikh shrines within its borders. The British had short-changed the Sikhs in the Cabinet Mission Plan, Kartar Singh went on, and again on 3 June 1947 when they 'gave' sovereign states to the Hindus and the Muslims, and left the Sikhs in the lurch. 'Now Sikhs ask for this only, that their integrity and solidarity should be maintained and the sacred shrines saved from Pakistan.'³³

Several members of the Sikh intelligentsia declared that the Partition plan was 'grossly unjust' to the Sikhs. Sardar Baldev Singh, who had accepted the decision on behalf of the Sikhs, had been 'goaded by personal interests', they suggested, and had failed to properly represent the community. 'This has resulted in Sikhs being divided into two almost equal halves. A community numbering not more than 40 lacs [lakhs], if divided in this way, would be thoroughly incapacitated.'³⁴ Sikh organisations observed 8 July as a 'Protest Day' against the proposed partition and many Punjab Hindus joined them in the protest. 'After July 8,' commented the *Pakistan Times*, 'the justification for partitioning the Punjab, namely, appeasement of the Sikhs, no longer exists.'³⁵ By that time, Sikh newspapers were calling upon the Sikhs to foil the Partition scheme, this final attempt of the British to destroy the Sikhs and wipe them off the political map of India. 'With clear vision, determination, and vigour that is characteristic

³³ *Pakistan Times* (22 July 1947).

³⁴ *Dawn* (6 June 1947).

³⁵ *Pakistan Times* (11 July 1947). On intelligence reports regarding Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders' frame of mind at this juncture, and secret preparations for revenge against Muslims, see Mss. Eur. F200/141, minutes of meeting held after Provisional Joint Defense Council Meeting on 5 August 1947; and Rees coll., PBF bundles, intelligence summary no. 1 (by Young), 6 August 1947.

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of our virile race, we shall extricate ourselves out of this whirlpool of annihilation that is facing us. Our phoenix like rise shall signal the fall of our enemies.³⁶

Nor were the Sikhs alone in their call for 'manliness' and revenge. Stories of cruel attacks upon innocent Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in different parts of the subcontinent generated calls for vengeance all round. A letter written by a Hindu resident of Peshawar to the general secretary of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha in March 1947 reflects both the effect of these widely relayed stories and the consolidation of warring positions. The 'age of Aurangzeb' had returned to haunt them, the writer says, and the Hindus and Sikhs of north-western India were living in terror - 'like rats in a hole'. The Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Campbellpur districts have been 'completely cleaned out' of Hindus and Sikhs. 'The Hindus and Sikhs in the villages have practically all been converted into Muslims ... Vehicles are arriving laden with corpses.'

The inevitable prescription follows: 'You [your party] alone can put a stop to the unspeakable atrocities being perpetuated here on the Hindu community/nationality. The Hindu Mahasabha must now draw up its *programme of war*. It must go from *village to village, avenging this wrong [apmaan: literally, insult]...* Gandhi cannot be the protector of the Hindu community/nationality at this time: all his schemes have failed...'³⁷

Muslim militants matched the rhetoric. A letter published in the *Al-Wahids* a small-circulation Sindhi daily, on 9 April 1947, urged the writer's fellow Muslims to come out with the holy Quran in one hand and a sword in the other. Muslims in the provinces where they were a minority were 'straining their ears', this correspondent wrote, 'to hear the sound of the hoofs of galloping horses, the rattling of the swords and the sky-rending slogans of "Allah-ho-Akbar" of the Muslim crusaders'.³⁸ 'Unfair Partition Will Breed Civil War in India' declared a headline in the *Pakistan Times* on 17 July 1947. The Muslims would not tolerate any further appeasement of the Sikhs over their demand that Punjab be

³⁶ *The Liberator*. 'Spokesman of the Sikh people' (Delhi, 27 July 1947) in Rees coll., PBF bundles. See also *ibid.*, report of Central Intelligence officer, Lahore to I. B., H. D., government of India (28 July 1947), and intelligence report for Gujranwala city (9 August 1947). Cf. Tan Tai Yong, 'Prelude to Partition: Sikh Responses to the Demand for Pakistan, 1940-47', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 1, 2 (1994).

³⁷ (NMML) Hindu Mahasabha papers, file C-150, Dev Prakash Shastri, Peshawar Cantonment to Deshpande (n.d.; March 1947. The original letter in Hindi is filed along with this translation).

³⁸ (NAI) Home Poll (I), file 57/20/47, translated extracts from letter of Agha Badruddin Ahmad, member of the legislative assembly (MLA), deputy speaker of the Sindh legislative assembly, to Sukkur district Muslim League conference (forwarded to the chief secretary, government of Sindh, by Parasram V. Tahilramani, MLA, secretary, Sindh assembly Congress party).

divided in such a way that the sanctity of property ownership and religious shrines was preserved. Top-ranking Punjab Muslim League leaders warned that every man, woman and child in 'Muslim Punjab' 'will fight to the bitterest end, if a single man or a single acre of land, which rightly falls within Pakistan is taken away from us'.³⁹

'We are determined not to leave any Hindu and Sikh,' a group of Muslim League National Guards of Lahore wrote to their compatriots in Delhi, in early July 1947.

We will treat them in the same manner as Muslims have been dealt with in Bihar... We are about to attack Gurdwara of Amritsar [the Golden Temple?]. If Amritsar is a holy place for Sikhs, Ajmer, Agra and Delhi are so for the Muslims where only yesterday Muslims were ruling... We ask you to hoist Muslim League flag on the Red Fort [in Delhi] on the 14th of August, otherwise all our efforts would go in vain. You should know that we would get either throne or earth [i.e., the grave]. Hindus are determined to wipe us out...⁴⁰

The events of August provided the final, deadly push. The confusion and violence of that long-awaited month and the growing (and, for many, sudden) realisation that Pakistan was not going to be the panacea for all the ills of the Muslims - indeed, that those Muslims who lived far away from the new Muslim state were now in greater danger than before - led to something like a civil war. The third 'partition', in which hundreds of thousands were uprooted and slaughtered, raped and forcibly 'converted' in a display of almost unimaginable malevolence, was well under way.

The third 'partition'

Hundreds of thousands of people were on the road in Punjab within days of the official Partition and the massacres, the nightmares, those other partitions that people would have to live with for decades to come, had begun. Nehru, brought to Punjab by this outbreak of violence on the scale

³⁹ *Pakistan Times* (17 and 22 July 1947), and the following issues. A month later, the Hindu Mahasabha was calling for the observation of 30 August as martyrs' day, referring of course only to the Hindus and Sikhs who had been killed in Pakistan. Among the leaflets distributed by right-wing Sikhs and Hindus was one that reportedly read: 'The day should begin with mass murder of Muslim children and women alike. Forcible occupation of the Muslim buildings should be your objective. Set fire to Muslim mohallas .. .', and so on; see D. M. Malik, *The Tragedy of Delhi* (Through Neutral Eyes) in (IOR) Mss. Eur. Fl 64/18.

⁴⁰ (NMML) Central Intelligence Directorate (CID) papers, 5th instalment, letter no. Mohd-75, from F. H. G. Bridgman, S. P., CID, Delhi, to G. R. Savage. S. P. (A), S. B., CID, Punjab, dated 10 July 1947, forwarding reply to the letter of Manzur-ul-Haq and Sadiq of the Muslim League National Guards, Delhi, from the Salar-i-Suba, Lahore. Cf. (IOR) R/3/1/173, copy of intercepted letter to Khan Faizullah Khan, district Muzafargarh, 25 August 1947, enclosed with Patel to Mountbatten, 23 September 1947.

of a war, had the enormity of it all brought home to him by what he saw after the massacre of Sheikhpura (near Lahore). 'A very large number of persons was being done to death daily', he wrote. 'I do not mention the figure ... as it is incredible.' Officials of the Indian High Commission in Pakistan telegraphed on the same date that '40,000 lives are in danger [in West Punjab] during the next 48 hours'.⁴¹

Towards the end of September 1947 the London *Times* reported: '4 million on the move in Northern India. Minorities in a state of panic.'⁴² A month earlier, reports of the massacre of refugees fleeing by train were already common. Consider the *Daily Mail* correspondent, Ralph Izzard's account of his train journey from Karachi to Lahore on 22-3 August 1947. Luckily the passengers on this journey escaped massacre, but their terror was palpable. At Montgomery in Punjab, Izzard saw what he called the 'first signs of trouble'. The platforms were 'packed with Hindu and Sikh refugees waiting despairingly for transport to India. Those on the platform had been there three days, while on the siding a special train, packed to the doors and on all roofs with non-Moslems, had been waiting for five days.' The Muslim engine-driver of the special train had refused to cross the border to Ferozepur for fear that he would not return alive. At Okara, Izzard continued: 'My train was rushed by 5000 panic-stricken Hindu and Sikh workers from the local Birla textile mills. 40 crammed themselves into my compartment meant to hold 6...' Beyond Raiwind, '... we met the vanguard of the Muslim refugees from India, each platform at Lahore being as crowded as previously they had been with non-Moslems, all as before with an utterly dazed... air'. A day or two earlier, the 15 Up from Delhi, a train with nine coaches and room enough, according to Izzard, for 'a thousand persons at least', had arrived in Lahore seven hours late with eight battered Muslim survivors on board.⁴³

In the week ending 30 October 1947, over 570,000 Muslim refugees were said to have crossed into Pakistan via Amritsar and Ferozepur alone, while some 471,000 non-Muslims crossed the other way. By 1 October, there were 80,000 Muslim refugees in the Purana Qila in Delhi - and many more in other camps in the city. On 26 November, a British embassy official, motoring through Mewat, passed a ten-mile-long column - mostly Meos, he noted, but also other Muslims - being evacuated from a camp 'where they had been held for some time'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ (IOR) R/3/1/172, Nehru to Mountbatten (Delhi, 27 August 1947).

⁴² *The Times* (25 September 1947).

⁴³ Ralph Izzard, 'Indian Massacres Grow. Every Station is Site for New Battle', *Daily Mail* (27 August 1947).

⁴⁴ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/190, weekly summary for week ending 30 October 1947; (IOR) L/P&J/7/12589, UK High Commission staff member, R. M. Hadow's report of his tour of Gurgaon and Alwar state from 17 November 1947 and of Ambala district between 24 and 26 November 1947.

The administrative problems of securing and co-ordinating the movement of great numbers of people in flight, of providing those who had reached some sort of camp minimal support for food, shelter and clothing and of trying to ward off the outbreak of epidemic diseases, especially in the rainy season (July-August), were early recognised. All this was compounded by the political problem of the widening circle of terror and violence and the calls for counter-attack and revenge that the very flight of the refugees generated. Within two or three weeks of the official Partition of India, the numbers that governments, political parties, relief agencies and workers had to deal with had become both unthinkable and unmanageable.

Thus on 7 September 1947, the government of India telegraphically informed the premiers of Bombay, UP, Bihar, Central Provinces (CP, today's Madhya Pradesh) and Madras - that is, all the provinces of the new India barring East Punjab, West Bengal, Assam and the princely states - of the great influx of refugees from Punjab, Sindh and the NWFP into Delhi and asked for an immediate response as to the 'number of refugees you can accommodate in your province and destination where they should be sent by train or air'.⁴⁵ A week later, however, the most urgent problem seemed to be one of preventing the spread of the 'troubles' to UP.

It was noted on 15 September that four trainloads of refugees were arriving in UP daily. The number of refugees in the province had already swelled to 250,000. The small pilgrimage town of Hardwar, which had a normal population of 25,000, now contained an additional 60,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees. There were 20,000 Muslim refugees in the Dehradun-Laksar area. Incidents of violence, it was reported, were moving from the individual to the group stage; and the small police and military force on duty in these areas was hardly adequate to the task of maintaining peace. Nehru now suggested that any further influx of refugees into UP be stopped; that the 20,000 Muslim refugees in Dehradun-Laksar and (all?) Muslim railway employees, including 1,500 Baluchis, be sent to West Punjab; and that the barracks at Chakrata (near Dehradun), where Muslim refugees had been housed, be made available to the Sikhs, if possible.⁴⁶ Ten days later, the UP premier asked urgently for more trains to move Muslims out. Meanwhile, the authorities in Meerut reported great panic in their district owing to the influx of Muslims from Dehradun.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ (IOR) R/3/1/172, telegram from the prime minister to premiers of Bombay, UP, Bihar, CP, Madras (7 September 1947).

⁴⁶ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/168, minutes of meeting of emergency committee of the Cabinet (15 September 1947).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, emergency committee meeting (26 September 1947).

In mid-October, to take an example from elsewhere, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, minister of health in the Indian government, reported that there were 10,000 Muslim refugees at Kalka, many of them Kashmiris from Shimla, living in particularly poor conditions. She asked that the authorities in Shimla be restrained from sending any more refugees to Kalka and urged that those already there be given priority in evacuation, while agreeing that this should not be allowed to affect the movement of Muslim refugees out of Delhi. At this very time, the prime minister of Pakistan was sending telegrams to his counterpart in India, asking that no more Muslim refugees should be sent to Pakistan from Delhi.⁴⁸

In Shimla, the district authorities had been asked in mid-October 1947 not to send any more Muslim refugees to Kalka. It is difficult to establish how many Muslims were, at that stage, still left in the summer capital of the colonial government of India. But there is a report of 29 June 1948 which says that there was only one Muslim in Shimla on this date, a bearer who had been with Penderel Moon since 1929; and he was escorted 'back to Pakistan' by Moon that July.⁴⁹ Exaggerated or not, the report indicates the kind of search for 'enemy' nationals and the urge to drive out every sign of the 'other' from places far and wide in India and Pakistan.

In Delhi, already by September 1947, there were numerous elements that felt that there could no longer be any place in the city or its environs for Muslims: on occasion they suggested (hopefully?) that the vast majority of Muslims themselves preferred to leave.⁵⁰ Such proponents of a wholesale Muslim emigration were to be found at every level of society and government: from the deputy prime minister of India, Vallabhbhai Patel, to the deputy commissioner of Delhi, M. S. Randhawa, to the growing numbers of Sikh and Hindu refugees who had fled from Pakistan with, all too often, nothing but their clothes on their backs.

It is a feature of the records of the time that the terms, 'Hindus' and 'Hindu refugees', 'Muslims' and 'Muslim refugees', 'Sikhs' and 'Sikh refugees', are often used interchangeably. In many parts of northern, north-western and north-eastern India, the distinction was indeed difficult to maintain; and the question of choosing where they wished to stay, or which nation they would adopt as their own, hardly arose for very large numbers of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus caught on the 'wrong side of the border'. In Delhi and Alwar, Ambala and Amritsar, Muslims were urged to leave - 'for their own good'; as were Hindus and Sikhs in

⁴⁸ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/53, emergency committee meeting (17 October 1947). See also *ibid.*, vol. 129, Suhrawardy to Gandhi (21 September 1947): 'In any event... Meo refugees ought not to be sent to Pakistan.'

⁴⁹ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F230/21, Penderel Moon to his sister (29 June 1948).

⁵⁰ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/53, emergency committee meeting (17 October 1947), for example.

Bahawalpur and Sindh, Lahore and Sialkot, and many other parts of the new Pakistan.

In Mewat, to take one final example, what was described as a war between a dominant, land-holding community of Hindu Jats and a cultivating community of Muslim Meos raged from May 1947 onwards and reached a climax in October-November of that year. This drove large numbers of Meo peasants out of their villages. Some of the worst outrages against the Meos occurred in the territories of the states of Alwar and Bharatpur, apparently with the tacit support of the state authorities; and in November, the maharaja of Alwar expressed himself against the return of any of the Meos who had earlier left the state in fear. On 17 November, a column of 80,000 Meo refugees was said to be on its way to Pakistan. Two days later, however, 10,000 Meos were found moving in the reverse direction, having decided that the risks entailed in remaining in Indian Mewat were smaller than those involved in trying to reach and settle down in Pakistan.⁵¹

The condition of the Meos does no more than underscore the extraordinary volatility of the moment. Proud inheritors of local traditions that they shared with Hindu neighbours, 'half Muslims' as they were sometimes described, a community which solemnised its marriages in both Muslim and Hindu ceremonies (the *nikaah* and the *phera*),⁵² the Meos now became plain and simple 'Muslims', free-floating and faceless examples of the 'other', subject to attack like so many other north Indian 'Muslims', or 'Hindus' or 'Sikhs', at a time when the measure of a person's identity was the manner of her/his dress or the extent of his/her fear. They had suddenly become 'Indians' and 'Pakistanis' too. When this happened, and by whose choice, few could say.

The uncertainty of it all

The advent of Partition and Independence was marked by extraordinary uncertainty. A fact that is easily overlooked today, precisely because of the categorical establishment of India and Pakistan as separate, sovereign states on 15 August 1947, is that it was just ten weeks before that date, in early June 1947, that the formal, constitutional partition of British India was finally decided upon. A month before that, in early May, Mountbatten, widely described as the author of the plan to divide India surgically and quickly as the best way out of the existing political and constitutional

⁵¹ (IOR) L/P&J/7/12589, R. M. Hadow's report of his tour of Gurgaon and Alwar state from 17 November 1947. Many Meos from the Bharatpur and Alwar territories shifted to the erstwhile British Indian parts of Mewat, sometimes occupying lands and houses evacuated by other Meos who had been driven out, killed or banished to Pakistan.

⁵² On the Meos, see Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*.

mess, was still discussing the repercussions (in Punjab and elsewhere) of a partition - 'if it comes to that'.⁵³ There was at the same time continued discussion of a possible agreement being reached among the major Indian political parties on some slightly modified version of the May 1946, Cabinet Mission Plan.

In late June, three weeks after the British announcement of their new plan to partition the subcontinent and withdraw from its government by August 1947, Congress workers and leaders in central India (today's Madhya Pradesh) were still talking of June 1948 - the deadline earlier announced by Attlee - as the date when the British would hand over power to Indians. There were many people in the country who were far from being persuaded that the British would actually leave.⁵⁴

From early June 1947, within a few days of the announcement that the principle of Partition had been accepted, until July, Penderel Moon, concerned like many other Punjab civilians for the future well-being of 'his' province, made concerted efforts to get the Sikhs to 'throw in their lot with their Muslim brethren in the Punjab'.⁵⁵ In many parts of Punjab, relations between Muslims and Sikhs had already reached a nadir following the outbreak of mass violence and murder from March onwards. It speaks of the openness of so many questions even at this stage that, in spite of the extreme polarisation, the Sikh maharaja of Nabha and even Baldev Singh, perhaps the most prominent 'constitutional' representative of the Sikhs at this time, still responded to Moon's initiative and considered the possibility of establishing a Sikh-dominated East Punjab unit within the new state of Pakistan, provided this unit had the right to secede if necessary.⁵⁶ At the other end of the subcontinent, Abul Hashim, the secretary of the Bengal provincial Muslim League, joined H. S. Suhrawardy, the Muslim League chief minister of pre-Partition Bengal, and others in propagating the increasingly wishful scheme of a sovereign and united Bengal.⁵⁷

The meaning of Partition was worked out step by step in 1947-8 and afterwards. The point is dramatically illustrated by some of the earliest

⁵³ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/168, Mountbatten to Wylie (4 May 1947).

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, vol. 38, Mountbatten to Fred Bourne (25 June 1947); and vol. 28, Dow to Mountbatten (18 June 1947).

⁵⁵ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F230/31, Penderel Moon to Master Sujjan Singh (Bahawalpur, 8 June 1947).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Sant Singh, maharaja of Nabha, to Moon, letters of 18 June 1947, and 5 and 9 July 1947. See also Giani Kartar Singh's reported feeler to Jinnah regarding the possibility of a 'Sikh state' joining Pakistan after Partition; (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/141, 'Refutation of Charges Regarding Sikhs', draft brief for Indian delegation to UN Security Council (24 February 1948).

⁵⁷ Cf. Ahmed Kamal, 'A Land of Eternal Eid' and Gordon, 'Divided Bengal', in Hasan, *India's Partition*.

reported reactions of Muslim League leaders in UP after the announcement of the Partition plan of 3 June 1947. Muslim League members of the UP legislature had 'suddenly begun to coo like doves', wrote the British governor of the province. 'Seemingly the whole attitude now is that in UP we must forget the past and become all brothers together... The truth is that... Pakistan is of little use to the UP. It has to be got across that the Muslim League everywhere was in favour of Pakistan and that nothing less than a "national home" for the Muslims would meet the case. Now that the said home is *almost* certainly [*sic*] to be provided, our Leaguers quite obviously feel that they can drop out of the fight and look after their own local... interests.'⁵⁸

Consider, again, the matter of the exchange of populations which transformed Partition into one of the greatest mass migrations in history. Although Jinnah had earlier expressed the view that such an exchange may well become necessary on the establishment of Pakistan, the realisation of that goal brought other hopes to the surface. In this respect, Jinnah's position was not unlike that of the League leaders in UP when they learnt that the principle of Partition had been conceded. Hence his address to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly: 'We are all... equal citizens of one state ... Hindus would [soon] cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.'⁵⁹

Until almost the end of August 1947, Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru, along with a host of other leaders and officials on both sides, expressed their opposition to any large-scale transfer of populations.⁶⁰ Yet by the beginning of September, several lakhs of Punjabi refugees were on the move, under official 'coordination', in both directions. On 15 September, Nehru, making a reconnaissance flight over the area, saw two convoys of refugees on foot that stretched for forty miles.⁶¹ Even at this stage, however, Jinnah and the governments of both East and West Punjab continued to express the hope that 'officials of the opposite community would at a later stage come back [or, where they had not left, stay on] and serve in their Provinces'.⁶² And in 1948, while the struggle to keep Punjab as it once was had been abandoned, Suhrawardy was still

⁵⁸ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/168, Wylie to Mountbatten (9 June 1947), emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan. A Nation in the Making* (Boulder, Colo., 1986), p. 42.

⁶⁰ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/128, C. M. Trivedi, governor of East Punjab to Mountbatten (camp Jullunder, 28 August 1947).

⁶¹ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/129, emergency committee meeting (15 September 1947).

⁶² *Ibid.* See also (IOR) Mss. Eur. D621/14, Wilfrid Russell's diaries, entry for 28 September 1947, citing his meeting with the deputy commissioner of Gujranwala, 'Mahmud', who was 'insistent that Pakistan must try and attract [the] Hindus back sooner or later'.

urging the need to encourage the minorities to return to Sindh and East Bengal.⁶³

It was in December 1947 that the government of India declared Pakistan to be 'foreign territory' for the purpose - and for this restricted purpose alone - of levying duties on raw jute and jute manufactures exported from India.⁶⁴ Exit permits, passports and visas for travel between the two countries - a special 'Pakistan passport' first, and only later the standard passport needed for international travel - were still some time in the future. On the Indian side, in 1947-8, there was persistent talk of possible re-unification, and many - even in the highest political circles - thought that Pakistan simply would not last.

An unusually telling example of contemporary uncertainties comes from September 1947. Pakistani army headquarters approached the authorities of Aligarh Muslim University, eighty miles east of Delhi and practically in the heart of the political and sectarian upheaval in India at the time, to provide appropriate candidates from the university for recruitment to regular commissions in the Pakistan army. That request, and the university authorities' innocent response - 'Those interested in the above [call for applications] should see me in the Geography Department with a written application giving full particulars'⁶⁵ - indicates how little the idea had sunk in, even for people in government, that these were now separate countries and that existing lines of communication and supply would therefore have to be reconsidered, if not cut off.⁶⁶

There was not in August 1947, or for some time afterwards (in the case of Bengal, for many years afterwards), any way of knowing who would belong where when things finally settled down. While British India, and with it Punjab and Bengal, were officially partitioned on 15 August 1947, the precise boundary lines between the divided parts were not announced until 17 August. There was, even after that, considerable uncertainty on

⁶³ (IOR) Mss. Eur. F200/84, record of conversation between H. S. Suhrawardy and Alan Campbell-Johnson (30 May 1948, dictated by the latter on 31 May 1948).

⁶⁴ *The Hindustan Times*, 23 December 1947; see Ganda Singh's 'Diary of Partition Days', cited in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India Partitioned*, vol. II, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, vol. rv (Ahmedabad, 1972), pp. 426-7.

⁶⁶ Another interesting illustration of this comes from the highest civil official of Lahore division, a Hindu member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), living in the capital of the province and the headquarters of Muslim League politics at this time, who asked his mother and sister, as they prepared to journey to Delhi on 13 August 1947, to take clothes only for two or three weeks since they would be back in Lahore as soon as things settled down; interview with Romila Thapar about her uncle's experiences, Delhi, November 1996. See Nighat Said Khan, 'Identity, Violence and Women: a Reflection on the Partition of India, 1947', in Khan, et al., eds., *Locating the Self*, p. 159, for a statement of how general this feeling was in provinces like Sindh.

the ground as to the exact arrangement of the dividing lines between India and Pakistan. Had Gurdaspur, or Malda, or particular *tahsils* and even villages in those districts, gone to India or Pakistan? Where would this - or that - village 'go'? The Chakmas are reported to have raised the Indian flag at Rangamati on 15 August 1947, when it was still unclear whether the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now part of Bangladesh, earlier of East Pakistan) had been 'awarded' to India or Pakistan; and the Marmas, the second largest non-Bengali group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, raised the Burmese flag at Bandarban on the same day.⁶⁷

Where would, or could, Toba Tek Singh 'go', in Manto's justly famous query?⁶⁸ And where was home, or nation, to be for that Muslim employee of Aligarh Muslim University who woke up a faculty member early on the morning of 15 August and said, in some consternation, 'I hear Pakistan has been established..., [but] Aligarh is not in Pakistan?'⁶⁹ Consider, again, the protagonist of Intizar Husain's 'An Unwritten Epic', who is 'flabbergasted' that Qadirpur, where he lives, could be outside of Pakistan.⁷⁰ This kind of uncertainty persisted in the case of several princely states, as we all know, for a considerable time. Where would Hyderabad or Kashmir, for instance, 'go'? In the case of the latter, the question is still being asked.

The 'three partitions' - or three different conceptions of Partition - to which I have alluded are not easily separated. They are perhaps better conceived of as three different moments (or aspects) of the same event, or at least an event that has become single - and singular - in our reconstruction of the past. They flow into one another, overlap and depend upon each other. It scarcely needs to be said that what is involved here is more than the drawing of new lines on a map, the unfurling of new national flags and the installation of new national governments. What we are dealing with is the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic and cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities; and the gradual realisation that this tearing apart was permanent - and that it necessitated new borders, communities, identities and histories.

⁶⁷ See Willem van Schendel, 'Who Speaks for the Nation? Nationalist Rhetoric and the Challenge of Cultural Pluralism in Bangladesh', in Eric-Jan Zürcher and Willem van Schendel, eds., *Opting Out of the Nation. Identity Politics in Central, South and West Asia* (London, 1999).

⁶⁸ The protagonist in Manto's famous story, the 'lunatic' Bishan Singh, asks repeatedly whether his native village of Toba Tek Singh has gone to India or Pakistan, without ever getting a satisfactory answer; see *Manto ke numaindah afsane* (comp. Atahar Parvez, Aligarh, 1981); and for an English translation, Khalid Hasan, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (London, 1987).

⁶⁹ Interview (Delhi, 7 February 1995).

⁷⁰ Intizar Husain, 'An Unwritten Epic', in Memon, ed., *An Epic Unwritten*, p. 162.

44 Remembering Partition

There are many different stories to be told about 1947, many different perspectives to be recovered. Stories and perspectives that tell of other histories and other political possibilities. I pursue the task of analysing other stories and thinking other histories and politics in the remaining chapters of this book. It may help, however, to begin with the historians' history of Partition - because it is the chief body of writing whose stated intention is to recount the 'truth' of that event, and because of its obvious influence.