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Jang Āzādī: Perspectives on a Major Theme in Northern Areas' History¹

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1. Introduction

The people of the Northern Areas of Pakistan are by no means a "people without history". History, or aspects of it, form a very important part of their sense of identity. There is a considerable indigenous historiographical production that includes, besides many minor articles and publications, two large works about the history of a local dynasty (Shah Rais Khan 1987) and an important sub-region of the area (Qudratullah Beg 1980), both written by members of the traditional elite.² These works are dedicated to the promotion of an image of the uniqueness and importance of the region and its people. Oral histories aim at a similar direction: they give, for example, accounts of the origin, migration, and settlement of clans, name their ancestors, and thus lay a basis for a clan's identity and separateness. It is especially popular to relate one's own family to those of famous historical heroes or to dynasties, be they of Alexander the Great, of Changez Khan (Genghis Khan) and his successors, or to the old Iranian Kayhani dynasty.

Such histories, whether written or oral, are not always totally satisfactory to a reader or listener who expects "true" or at least consistent accounts about the past. They are as much *stories* as *histories* in that they sometimes blur the limits between myth and a factual kind of history and in that they are now and then prone to the twisting of historical facts. More often than not, different and, at times, contradictory stories about the "same" chain of events are told.

These remarks about the "story-telling" character of local histories do not at all intend to discredit their value. White has argued convincingly that even scholarly historiography never refrains completely from telling stories. It both treats established facts selectively and goes beyond them in conjec-

¹ Although this paper is almost completely based on written sources, the importance of its topic was realized during field research in Gilgit conducted for 15 months in two terms between 1991 and 1993.

² Raja Shah Rais Khan was the paternal uncle of the *raja* ("king") of Gilgit; Qudratullah Beg belonged to the very influential family of *wazirs* ("ministers") in Hunza.

turing about what is not actually known (White 1986: 64). White takes the historiography of the French Revolution to show that different histories written by different authors about the same event are never the same story (ibid.: 78f.). History is, as Ardener remarks with some understatement, not entirely an objective matter (Ardener 1989: 22). This does not mean that to accept the relativity of histories implies the renunciation of the possibility of establishing historical facts.³ It simply means that history is never content with relating chronicles. History always comprises interpretation and tries to structure the sequence of events from a particular point of view. It establishes a *meaning* of the past.

Still, local histories in the Northern Areas (as in other parts of the world) do not always stick to the facts. It seems that for the (hi)story-teller it is often less important that he is telling a "true" and consistent story than that he is telling at all and is thus able to relate himself to a past. History is not told in its own right but in relation to a present. The past becomes a resource of present identity. There is little abstract interest in history. It is interesting mainly as one's *own* history.

This article deals with an especially important period of the Northern Areas' history, with stories that assumed the function of something like a myth of origin of the Northern Areas and that present the modern heroes of the region. Everybody who had played a part in it is eager to tell his story. I will discuss perspectives on the freedom struggle or, as it is called, the *jang āzādī*, which began in autumn 1947 in Gilgit, overthrew the Kashmiri administration, and led to the accession of the region to the newly formed state of Pakistan. The *jang āzādī* is unanimously regarded as one of the most important periods of the Northern Areas' history.⁴ Due to the fact that my material relates mostly to Gilgit, the capital of the Northern Areas, my discussion is limited to perspectives from Gilgit and to the events in Gilgit in 1947.⁵ After briefly examining reports of the events by protagonists, I

³ As some anthropologists seem to fear (cf., e.g., Schlee 1993).

⁴ For example, in a voluminous collection of articles dedicated to the geography, history, and culture of the Northern Areas, all ten papers in the section "modern history" are related to the freedom struggle of 1947/48 (Manzum Ali 1985a).

⁵ It thus excludes mainly the events in Skardu, the capital of the sub-region Baltistan of the Northern Areas and the other important centre of the freedom struggle. For an account of the *jang āzādī* in Baltistan, cf. Mohammad Yusuf 1987; for an Indian perspective on the same events, cf. Skumar Mahajan 1973.

will show that the meaning of these events has changed. In the local political discourse of today, they are no longer seen only as the expression of the desire to join Pakistan. They are also taken as symbols of the ability of the people to revolt against foreign rulers in general and, still more generally, as a token of their potential independence.

2. Gilgit

Gilgit is a small town located amidst high mountain chains. Being a former centre of power in the area, it increasingly had become a target of attack and occupation by neighbouring powers since the beginning of the 19th century. The weakening local dynasty was unable to hold Gilgit and looked for alliance and support in Kashmir. For several decades after the mid-1840s, various rulers of Kashmir struggled to establish their control over Gilgit against local rivals, especially those from the more westward-situated valley of Yasin. The population of Gilgit suffered heavily from this power struggle. War and slavery depleted its ranks.⁶ When Kashmir succeeded in tightening its grip over Gilgit, the government of India became interested in the region due to its fear of a Russian invasion from Central Asia of the subcontinent, and it established its own position in Gilgit in the person of a British political agent. Gilgit became the locus of *dual control*: it housed both the Kashmiri administration of the Gilgit *wazarat* (the Gilgit Province of Jammu and Kashmir State, which included Gilgit itself, Astor, and Bunji) and the British administration of the Gilgit Agency, i.e., the states and governorships of Hunza, Nager, Punial, Ishkoman, Yasin, Kuh Ghizer, and the sub-agency of Chilas. Gilgit gained new importance as an administrative centre, and its population started to grow again. The dual control, which led to many complications and conflicts about authority between the British and Kashmir, was abolished in 1935 when the government of India leased that part of the Gilgit *wazarat* which is located on the western banks of the Indus River from the Kashmir State. The town of Gilgit and its subdistrict came to be included in the Gilgit Agency. This state of affairs ended much earlier than originally planned. When India and Pakistan gained independence in August 1947, the British had to leave Gilgit, too. Two weeks before independence, the administration of the whole Gilgit Agency was transferred to the *maharaja* of Kashmir. In the following months, the *maharaja*, a Hindu

⁶ For the effects of slavery on the population in Gilgit in the last century, cf. Müller-Stellrecht 1981.

himself but the ruler over a majority of Muslims, hesitated as to whether he should join India or Pakistan. When he finally, on October 27th, decided for India, Gilgit took the opposite turn and revolted against Kashmiri rule.

3. A Sketch of Events in 1947

The accounts of that revolt, which include testimonies of many of its protagonists themselves (mainly military officers), are both numerous and bewildering in their number of contradictions. A major force behind the composition of quite a number of these stories seems to be competition for personal honour because many writers/actors strive to enhance their own position and contribution to the revolt. Mainly, three groups of actors can be identified in the first stage of the freedom struggle: first, a group of officers of the Muslim companies of the Kashmiri State troops stationed at Bunji, some thirty kilometres southeast of Gilgit on the other side of the Indus River; second, the Gilgit Scouts, the local paramilitary force already recruited by the British; and third, individuals of the civil population in Gilgit. The role of another figure is highly disputed: the involvement of Major Brown, a British officer who served the *maharaja* as the commandant of the Gilgit Scouts. Later, when the revolt had turned into a war against Indian troops, other military bodies joined the scene, such as the Frontier Constabulary and the Chitral Body Guards.

Before I discuss the present-day reinterpretations of this *jang āzādī*, I will present a rough sketch of its more-or-less undisputed events and examine some of the contradictions of its witnesses and protagonists.

Soon after the Kashmiri Governor Ghansar Singh assumed charge in Gilgit, on July 30, 1947, it was feared that the *maharaja* of Kashmir would declare accession to India. The population, insofar as it was aware of the political changes in the subcontinent, favoured Pakistan instead. Other than some shopkeepers from Punjab and Kashmir, there were no Hindus in Gilgit. Locally, India was conceived of as a state of Hindus, just as envisaged by the Muslim League and the Two-Nations Theory of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and not as a secular state as conceived by Nehru and the Congress leaders.

Shortly before the political *jalsa* at Gilgit in October, the assembly where the local *rajas* and governors had to declare their allegiance and loyalty to the new Kashmiri governor, five military officers revealed their political

sentiments to each other and decided on a revolt in the case of the *maharaja's* accession to India. These officers were Captain⁷ Mirza Hassan Khan of the Sixth Jammu and Kashmir Infantry at Bunji (and a Gilgiti himself) and three Kashmir State officers who had been transferred to the command of the Gilgit Scouts, namely Lieutenant Ghulam Hyder, Captain Syed Durani, and Captain Mohammad Khan Jabral.⁸ These four officers are mostly called the "group of Muslim officers of the State troops" in the literature although three of them served in the Gilgit Scouts. The fifth conspirator was the local junior-commissioned officer of the Gilgit Scouts, Subedar-Major Mohammad Babar Khan, paternal uncle of the *mir* ("king") of Nager. These five officers are sometimes entitled the "*inqilābī kaunsi*" (revolutionary council) (e.g., Syed Durani 1985: 377).

When the declaration of the *maharaja* for India became known in Gilgit at the end of October 1947, the Gilgit Scouts started action. The events immediately before the revolt are not totally clear. It seems that Governor Ghansar Singh got wind of the immediate revolt and ordered Colonel Abdul Majeed, the commander of the troops at Bunji, to send a company of Hindu and Sikh soldiers as support to Gilgit (on October 31st). Captain Hassan, also at Bunji, again came to know about this order and somehow convinced Colonel Abdul Majeed to send him with his Muslim company to Gilgit instead. In the late evening of the same day, Subedar-Major Babar Khan surrounded the residency of the governor in Gilgit. By only the next morning, the troops had succeeded in capturing the governor, who had entrenched himself in his house.

During the night, a platoon of the Scouts under the command of Subedar Safiullah Beg from Hunza had been sent towards Bunji to stop the Hindu troops that were feared to be advancing against Gilgit. But they met with Captain Hassan and his company. Both bodies of troops stayed at the place to guard the way while Captain Hassan proceeded to Gilgit. In the morning, there was a meeting of the revolting officers to plan their further proceedings. During the next few days, a provisional government of the "Islamic

⁷ Although most of the involved officers were promoted afterwards, I am calling them by the ranks which they held during the freedom struggle. I chose this practice in order to prevent confusion, even though it will probably cause resentment by some of these officers and their offspring.

⁸ Captain Jabral was transferred back to Bunji two weeks before the revolt (Mohammad Khari 1985).

Republic of Gilgit" was formed. Raja Shah Rais Khan was appointed president of the republic, Captain Hassan became military commander, and the other officers also got their respective posts. Right at the beginning, the provisional government declared its intention to join Pakistan, sent this same message to Pakistan, and asked for a representative to be sent. A military operation was started in order to get hold of Bunji. It succeeded quickly and nearly without fight because the Hindu and Sikh troops had already deserted the garrison in fear of being attacked.

Only after repeated telegrams to Pakistan did a representative finally arrive at Gilgit on November 16th in the person of Mohammad Alam Khan, who took over the administration for Pakistan as political agent and thus terminated what can be termed the first phase of the *jang āzādī*, when the rebels acted completely on their own account. Two weeks later, when the revolting forces were already proceeding to liberate Skardu and Baltistan, a Pakistani military officer came to Gilgit and assumed charge as commandant both of the Gilgit Scouts and the Muslim companies of the State Forces, which were now combined together as "*āzād* (freedom) *forces*".

The freedom fighters were very successful in the beginning and were able to occupy much territory that is today again under Indian control. However, after a change in the Pakistani military command of the *āzād forces*, some strategic mistakes led to the retreat from many of the positions won, a retreat only ending when a ceasefire was declared on January 1st, 1948.⁹

4. Accounts of the Involved Military Officers

So far, this report will not raise much dissent because it has omitted all the disputed points, to some of which I will now turn. The critical question is this: Who can be given the credit for the revolt?

The Kashmir State officers tend to push their own contribution to the fore and to minimize the role of the Gilgit Scouts. Ghulam Hyder writes that these four officers alone were responsible for the plan and the organization of the revolt. He adds that Subedar-Major Babar Khan was the only pro-Pakistan Gilgit Scout (1985: 347, 355). Babar Khan himself, on the other

⁹ This representation of the events is a very abridged summary of all accounts about the freedom struggle. For much longer and more detailed versions, cf. Dani 1989 and Manzum Ali 1985b.

hand, holds that the Scouts became involved at a very early stage and to a large extent. He writes that the Scouts prevented the occupation of the barracks at Gilgit by a Hindu company of the State troops on the very date Governor Ghansar Singh took charge (1973: 26). This action is contested by Captain Mohammad Khan (1985: 382), but it was confirmed to me in Gilgit by the former Scouts Subedar Safiullah Beg and by many other witnesses. Ghansar Singh himself attests that Subedar-Major Babar Khan had already expressed on August 1st, 1947, the desire to serve Pakistan (1983: 26). Babar Khan relates that eleven out of fourteen junior-commissioned officers of the Gilgit Scouts took an oath on the Quran that they would participate in a revolt for Pakistan (1973: 25). At the occasion of the formation of the "*inqilābī kaunsil*", Babar Khan was able to present these oaths in written form to the other conspiring officers (Syed Durani 1985: 377).

Again, it is disputed who gave the order to start the revolt on the evening of October 31st. Captain Hassan takes the credit for himself and writes that he ordered Subedar-Major Babar Khan and Lt. Ghulam Hyder by telephone to arrest the governor because he felt safe, expecting the arrival of Hindu troops on the next day (Mirza Hassan Khan 1984: 8). But Babar Khan objects that he and the other officers of the Gilgit Scouts took the decision independently as they also expected Hindu troops to come to Gilgit and thought the evening of October 31st to be the last chance for the revolt (1973: 27). Babar Khan writes nothing about prior contact with Captain Hassan. It seems probable that he was not aware of the coming of Captain Hassan and Muslim soldiers instead of Hindus, for he sent a platoon of Scouts towards Bunji to stop the advance of the Hindus.

The next contested issue is the arrest of Governor Ghansar Singh. Babar Khan says that he arrested the governor before sunrise on November 1st after a night-long siege of the residency (1973: 24) and does not mention Captain Hassan in this connection. But Captain Hassan writes that the governor surrendered only after he learned that he, Hassan, instead of Hindus with Colonel Abdul Majid had arrived at Gilgit (Mirza Hassan Khan 1984: 9), a version that is largely confirmed by the governor himself (Ghansar Singh 1983: 33) and also by Subedar Shah Sultan of the Gilgit Scouts (Manzum Ali 1985b: 553). Captain Hassan takes the opportunity to give the Gilgit Scouts a side-swipe in mentioning passingly that they were

unable to capture the governor in spite of the efforts of a whole night of war (Mirza Hassan Khan 1984: 9).

But the question is not only whether Captain Hassan, Subedar-Major Babar Khan, or any of the other involved officers was the real hero of *jang āzādī*. For the British, it seems, this honour rests with Major Brown. Trench describes him as the real figure behind the events who organized the smooth course of the revolt and the transfer of powers to Pakistan (1986: 269ff.). Obviously, Major Brown himself held this view too. In his own reports, he especially accuses the state officers and, above all, Captain Hassan of selfishness and of instigating the whole rebellion only for the purpose of securing profitable positions in the provisional government. These reports contradict the versions of the Scouts' and State Forces' officers in nearly every detail.¹⁰ He even claims that he gave Babar Khan the order to surround the governor's house and to send a platoon towards Bunji.¹¹ But the conspiring officers draw a different picture and hold that Brown and his subordinate, Captain Mathieson, tried to prevent the revolt and changed sides only afterwards in order to save their own lives and positions (Mohammad Khan 1985: 381).¹² Syed Durani, who was transferred from Gilgit to the northernmost post of Qalamdarchi in upper Hunza a few days before the beginning of the revolt, suspects that Major Brown came to know of the impending

¹⁰ The two reports of Major Brown are preserved in the India Office Library & Records, London. The first is called "Precis on the recent events in the Gilgit Agency" and deals with the period from August 1st to November 16th, 1947; the second report, under the title "Precis of the events in Gilgit since the arrival of Sardar Mohd Alam, Political Agent", describes the further course of events until Brown left Gilgit on January 14th, 1948. Both in: IOR L/P&S/13/1860. These reports seem to be the only source for Trench (1986) for describing the revolt in Gilgit.

¹¹ Major Brown: "Precis on the recent events in the Gilgit Agency": 4.

¹² Major Brown himself confirms this view. He writes: "To oppose the wishes of this party [the conspirators] would have been suicidal. Major Brown therefore accepted the situation and helped to maintain law and order and advised all concerned to avoid any resort to violence" (ibid.: 6). Lt. Ghulam Hyder (1985) admits that he first made the mistake of trusting Brown but that the later events proved him wrong. Among the Gilgit Scouts' officers, there is still some dissent about the role of Major Brown: in contrast to the sources cited here, two Scouts' officers from Yasin affirm his positive role in the revolution. I owe this information to Johannes Löhr.

ing plan and intended to weaken the position of the conspirators by the transfer (1985: 379).

The attitude of Major Brown especially towards Captain Hassan seems to amount to personal enmity. Among other things, he charges him of having planned severe atrocities against non-Muslims in Gilgit and Bunji¹³ and also of cowardice because, as he reports, Hassan was not prepared to lead a force for the liberation of Skardu.¹⁴ Several times, Brown accuses Captain Hassan and the other officers of not really working towards accession to Pakistan but towards independence in order to secure power for themselves.¹⁵

Major Brown reports many details that are not to be found in the other texts, but he withholds a piece of information that is presented by nearly all other witnesses: his own arrest by Subedar-Major Babar Khan on the evening of October 31st (Babar Khan 1973: 28) and again by Captain Hassan on the next morning (Ghulam Hyder 1985: 343). From the texts at hand, it is impossible to judge whether the charges of Major Brown against Captain Hassan and others are correct or not, but it seems quite probable that his attitude towards Captain Hassan was moulded by Hassan's several attacks against Brown's position, including the arrest.¹⁶

¹³ Major Brown: "Precis of the events in Gilgit since the arrival ...": 4.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 6.

¹⁵ E.g.: "Major Brown and Captain Mathieson soon realized that an underground movement was at work ... It seemed that certain local people under the guise of pro-Pakistan activities, were aspiring to political power ..." ("Precis of recent events in the Gilgit Agency": 1); and: "The scheme of the underground movement was that the Muslim elements of the 6th Kashmir Infantry in Bunji, the Gilgit Scouts and the people of Gilgit sub-division should declare a Jihad in favour of Pakistan and having murdered all non-Muslims up to the Burzil-Pass should set up an independant [sic] State comprising the former Gilgit Agency and Astor, with all political power in their own hands ..." (ibid.: 6).

¹⁶ Captain Hassan released Brown only after the intercession of Lt. Ghulam Hyder. He wanted to exclude Brown totally from the provisional government, but again, Ghulam Hyder had him appointed as adviser to the cabinet (Ghulam Hyder 1985: 352). Also, after the arrival of the Pakistani political agent, Hassan demanded the dismissal of Brown as commandant of the Gilgit Scouts, but Sardar Mohammad Alam did not agree with this demand ("Precis of the events in Gilgit since the arrival ...": 2).

5. The Role of Civilians

All the witnesses of *jang āzādī* referred to thus far were in one way or another members of the military. They are unanimous in declaring that there was no real role of civilians and the general public in the preparation and implementation of the revolt. Captain Hassan, for example, writes that the organization of the revolt was purely military; no civilian played a part. He adds that there were no influential civilian leaders in Gilgit who could be trusted politically (Mirza Hassan Khan 1984: 8). But this image is strongly contested by civilians themselves. They refer to the foundation of a civilian secret society that served in preparing the revolt, the *tanzīm sarfrōshān*.¹⁷ This organization was founded by Mohammad Ali Changezi, who, as a member of the Indian army during World War II, toured northern India and became acquainted with the issues of freedom struggle and Muslim separatism.¹⁸ Back in Gilgit again, he discussed this matter and tried to promote the idea of Pakistan. When massacres between Hindus and Muslims in connection with partition became known, he organized the *tanzīm sarfrōshān* with the explicit purpose of working for the merger of the Gilgit Agency with Pakistan. Mohammad Ali Changezi was a confidant and, also, a foster-relative of Subedar-Major Babar Khan.¹⁹ The organization seems to have aimed mainly at the formation of pro-Pakistan consciousness and attitudes, but its members also served as messengers between the different military officers involved in the preparation of the revolt. One *sarfrōsh*, Amir Jahan-dar Shah, had already conveyed a letter about the intended accession to Pakistan before the revolt to the Pakistani government (Mohammad Ali Changezi n.d.). Another one, Ghulam Abbas, carried a request for support to the people of the Darel Valley, adjacent to Gilgit in the south.²⁰ Later, when

¹⁷ The name translates to "society of those who sell their heads", i.e., who are ready to give their lives for the goal of Pakistan.

¹⁸ Mohammad Ali Changezi published an article about the society and its activities in the journal *Sadā-e Baltistan*. A copy of it, which is in my possession, is unfortunately not dated.

¹⁹ Babar Khan is the only officer who admits to the existence of the organization, but he takes the credit for its formation. He writes that he had asked Mohammad Ali Changezi to build the society in order to provide support to the Scouts on the occasion of the revolt (1973: 25).

²⁰ This service is attested by certificates in the possession of Ghulam Abbas, signed by Raja Shah Rais Khan and Subedar-Major Babar Khan.

the military offensive was started in order to liberate Baltistan, Astor, and other regions, many of the *sarfrōshān* were recruited to the *āzād forces*.

Oral testimonies, especially, leave no doubt about the existence and the activities of the *tanzīm sarfrōshān*. Still, it is strongly contested. Ghulam Hyder writes that he, during the days of *jang āzādī*, had already feared that its history would be turned into a kind of legend that indiscriminately mixes fact and fiction. As support for the justification of his view, he cites a newspaper article of Professor A.H. Dani that mentions the *tanzīm*, and he judges that this report lacks all and every proof. He had never heard anything about this organization during the freedom struggle, and neither Captain Hassan nor Subedar-Major Babar Khan had ever told him about it. He concludes as follows: "I am asking a simple question: If this organization had existed, why did their leaders and actors not contact the provisional government?" (1985: 353)²¹ A simple answer to this question might be that they did indeed and that Raja Shah Rais Khan, who became president, was himself a member of the *tanzīm* (Dani 1989: 342; Shah Rais Khan 1973).²² Shah Rais Khan, for his part, ascribes the leadership again to himself and to Subedar-Major Babar Khan. According to him, Captain Hassan Khan talked much about the revolution but was in practice quite inactive in the preparations of the revolt (ibid.: 10).

6. The Established Meaning of *Jang Āzādī*

Although the details and personal merits of *jang āzādī* are highly disputed, its general meaning had seemed to be firmly established: the accomplishment of *jang āzādī* and the purpose of the many sacrifices of the freedom fighters during the war was the accession to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. For the "official history", the struggle was fulfilled in that Gilgit and Baltistan, the later Northern Areas, became administered by Pakistan. Thus, Dani concludes his chapter about the freedom struggle with the following words:

"It is this spirit of Jihad that inspired the people of Gilgit and Baltistan and they enrolled themselves as volunteers to fight along with their men of Gilgit Scouts. Finally it is they alone who scored victory against the forces

²¹ All quotations from Urdu or German are my own translations.

²² In his later publication, Dani expresses much more caution and doubt about the "*tanzīm sarfrōshān*" (1989: 342f.), maybe in response to this strict rebuff.

of the Maharaja and liberated the entire area, which is today called Northern Areas of Pakistan. The blood of the martyrs who died in the battlefield, the material and moral support that the entire people of this Zone gave for fight for freedom and their voluntary offer to integrate their land with Pakistan, prove the will of the people to cut themselves away from the Maharaja and throw away his decision to join with India. Under this circumstance Northern Areas of Pakistan came into existence to join freely out of his own accord with Pakistan."

(Dani 1989: 401)²³

This meaning of *jang āzādī* has also been established ritually in the annual commemorations of the freedom struggle, celebrated every year as *yōm āzādī* (freedom day) or *jeśn āzādī* (freedom celebration) on November 1st. On this day, a public meeting is convened at Chinar Bagh, the municipal park of Gilgit, near the river, where the graves of Captain Hassan and Subedar-Major Babar Khan are situated and where a monument commemorates the war and lists the names of all its martyrs. On the occasion, a detachment of the present-day successor to the Gilgit Scouts, the Northern Light Infantry, participates in a small parade, school boys play sports and perform dramas, and garlands are laid at the monument. Speeches of high functionaries of the administration, none of them a local from Gilgit, remember the ideals of the struggle and express its consequence: the rule of Pakistan over Gilgit and the Northern Areas. For public amusement, a polo tournament that lasts for several days starts in the afternoon.

7. The Formation of a New Local Perspective

The official meaning of *jang āzādī* has become strongly challenged by the local perspective, especially during the last few years. Read, for example, the following summary of the history of the freedom struggle, written by the young founder of a local political party, and compare its tone with the passage of Dani quoted above:

"When the British left the subcontinent, the *maharaja* of Kashmir sent his governor to establish his absolute control over Gilgit. Then, Gilgit Scouts and the public started a war to liberate themselves from the Kashmiri,

²³ I think it is justified to call Professor Dani's work an "official history" because it was written at the request of the former Pakistani President General Zia Ul Haq (communication by Prof. Dani in 1992).

from the British, and from all foreign powers to become an independent country. During this war, sacrifices were made that are unparalleled in history ... The population of Gilgit and the Scouts fought, under unknown circumstances and without assistance from outside, a jihad against Kashmir. Not only Gilgit but also Baltistan, Purig, Dras, Gurez, and the larger part of Ladakh were liberated ... After the struggle for the liberation of Gilgit, from November 1st to 16th, a free and independent state in the shape of the Republic of Gilgit existed on the map of the world. Before anything else, this free Gilgit strove to merge with the Islamic state of Pakistan, and the provisional government decided for accession. But this decision of the provisional government was provisional too, for they expected that a government that could decide the fate of the region and declare accession would be elected by the people. But from that time until today, there has been no lawful organization or elected assembly. Freedom and basic rights have been taken from the people. The region has remained without rights, just as it had been before under Dogra-rule. Whoever has demanded freedom has become the target of bullets."

(Nawaz Khan Naji 1988: 19f.)

The different meaning is evident: the freedom struggle was not accomplished by the merger with Pakistan. Here, Pakistan is not at all portrayed as the fulfiller of the freedom struggle but as its usurper. This difference is explained easily by the political development after the provisional government of Gilgit declared its accession to Pakistan. Even today, Pakistan has not yet become what was hoped for by the people of Gilgit. It has not even accepted the accession formally. Pakistan only established its administration in Gilgit and Baltistan, which are regarded as "disputed areas" the legal status of which can only be resolved together with the final settlement of the Kashmir conflict. Practically, this means for the Northern Areas that the region is not part of the constitutional territory of Pakistan. Its people have no right to participate in the formation of the constitutional bodies of Pakistan. They can neither vote for the national assembly nor for a provincial assembly. They have no right of appeal at the Supreme Court of Pakistan or at the High Courts of one of its provinces.

The experience of nearly half a century of Pakistani administration and the denial of the rights mentioned have led to a reinterpretation of the history of the freedom struggle as it is expressed in numerous texts written by authors from the Northern Areas during the last years. The story of *jang āzādī* has

even become a still-more-central topic of identity for the local people because now, it is essentially understood as a story of self-liberation and less as a preparatory step for the merger with another state.

The journal "Bolōristān", which was published in Karachi by students from the Northern Areas along with other migrants from there and which was the voice of a new political movement that opposes the Pakistani administration in its present form, dedicated a whole issue to the commemoration of *jang āzādī* (no. 2/3, 1992).²⁴ Some of its articles have been published before, in Manzum Ali 1985a, but now they have been placed in a different context.

A short introduction to Manzum Ali's article in this issue of "Bolōristān" makes the change in interpretation explicit. It criticizes previous readings of *jang āzādī* as short-sighted in that they treat it as a brief and singular episode the protagonists of which had only been some Kashmiri officers. By contrast, it places the events of 1947 into a long chain of freedom struggle, revolt and opposition against foreign intruders, and it demands a revision in historiography:

"Even today, the history of the freedom movement has not been written satisfactorily. It is portrayed in abstract terms as if the endeavour for freedom was begun by some deserting officers of the State Force as the result of partition, as if the population had not played a role in it and as if the revolution had been carried out in only a year. But the truth is that the freedom movement had already started at the beginning of the 19th century. Our chronicle began when on December 13th, 1841, Raja Ahmad Shah of Skardu together with the rulers of other states succeeded in revolt against Zorawar Singh. After that, the nationalist ruler of Yasin, Suleman Shah, fought against the British and the Dogras. And then, Gohar Aman established a new power in alliance with other tribal leaders and fought against the British ... All of these events prove that, in the population, there existed strong disapproval and resistance against the attackers from outside, especially against the British and the Dogras, which expressed itself from time to time in small revolts. The struggle of 1947 is also a consequence of these historical events. It is an affliction of our history that it

²⁴ After 1993, the publication of "Bolōristān" was discontinued.

was impossible to establish a regular civil administration. Because of this, we could not preserve our freedom and gain our fundamental rights."²⁵

(Anonymous 1992a)

In a similar vein, Manzum Ali complains that thus far, the history of the region has been written to support the position of the intruders, and he demands its rewriting from the local perspective (1992: 9). As a practical example of this revision, he calls Gohar Aman, the *raja* of Yasin who elsewhere is nearly unanimously described as a cruel and merciless, brutal ruler,²⁶ the only "nationalist" (*qōmparast*) leader of his time, who uncompromisingly fought against the foreign attackers (ibid.).

The determination of the people of the Northern Areas to win their freedom against all kinds of foreign occupants lies at the heart of this reading of the history of the freedom struggle (not only of 1947/48). This image is not only displayed as an overall interpretation. Manzum Ali tries to prove it by his evaluation of the merits of the different agents of the struggle. He is at pains to highlight the positive role of locals and the negative performance of

²⁵ Historically, this passage is not completely correct. There was no revolt against Zorawar Singh because this general of the Dogra Raja Gulab Singh (who later became *maharaja* of Kashmir) was already dead at the time of the revolt. Zorawar Singh led campaigns to subdue Baltistan, Ladakh and Tibet. In 1841, Raja Ahmad Shah of Skardu and other local *rajas* had to accompany him as hostages on his campaign against Tibet. The Dogra army was defeated on December 12th, 1841, and Zorawar Singh was killed in the battle. Only after that did Raja Ahmad Shah manage to return to Baltistan and instigate a revolt against the Dogra occupation of the country in 1842. Gulab Singh sent another army to Baltistan and subdued the revolt (Mohammad Yusuf 1987: 58f.; cf. Hashmatullah Khan 1991: 358, 361f.). Huttenback dates the defeat of the Dogras by Tibet to December 10th, 1841 (1961: 485). Also, Suleman Shah and Gohar Aman had no chance to fight against the British because both had died long before the British established their authority in the area.

²⁶ Cf., for example, this passage by Drew: "He [Gohar Aman] was a most blood-thirsty man; as much so perhaps, though he had not the same opportunities of killing on a large scale, as Theodore of Abyssinia. There are many tales told of his ferocity and brutality; the Dards [i.e., the people of what is today the Northern Areas] generally are rather careless to life, but with his deeds they were disgusted" (1980 [1875]: 436f.). The image of Gohar Aman again has to be supplemented by local histories. In his homecountry, Yasin, he was never seen as negatively as elsewhere; instead, he was revered as a great historical personality. I owe this information to Johannes Löhr.

"foreigners" in 1947 and 1948. He stresses that the success of the first phase of the revolt, until the arrival of the Pakistani political agent, was achieved by locals alone without any assistance or guidance from Pakistan (1985b: 570). He attributes the later losses of liberated territory solely to the mistakes of "outsiders" from Pakistan who had joined the struggle in 1948. Thus, he gives the new (Pakistani) command of the *āzād forces* the responsibility for the forced retreat during the second phase of *jang āzādī* (ibid.: 608f.). Concerning the role of the Frontier Constabulary, a paramilitary force of the North-West Frontier Province that joined the war in 1948, he writes: "Only by the cowardice of the Frontier Constabulary Pakistan lost the territory around Gurez that the Gilgit Scouts had conquered. Instead of fighting at the front, the Frontier Constabulary preferred to go home again" (1992: 11f.).

In short, the authors of the Northern Areas are no longer willing to hand over their history to Pakistan; they intend to claim it for themselves. Although not always explicit, in this understanding, Pakistan appears to be only the last in a long sequence of foreign intruders and conquerors. The freedom won in 1947 was lost again afterwards. We have to infer, it seems, that the freedom struggle was not accomplished and concluded with the ceasefire in 1949 but, rather, that it has to be resumed again. It is no surprise, then, that the *tanẓīm sarfrōshān* reappeared again for the first time after autumn 1947 as one of various political organizations and parties that founded a common platform for the struggle for the political rights of the Northern Areas. In an article published in another issue of "Bolōristān", Mohammad Ali Changezi displays his view of *jang āzādī* and the subsequent development under the title "Merger with Pakistan or ...". He concludes with a plea to the people of the Northern Areas: "I appeal to my people and to our heroic nation that we break the long fast of silence and make it clear again to the honourable government of Pakistan that we want to gain our freedom and that we know how to defend it" (Mohammad Ali Changezi 1993: 23).²⁷

Nearly every text or speech about the present political situation of the Northern Areas alludes in one way or another to the freedom struggle and relates it to the present constitutional deprivations. For instance, the intro-

²⁷ The word "nation" in this quotation does not refer to the nation of Pakistan but to a postulated original nation of the Northern Areas.

ductory speech of an All-Parties-Conference of oppositional groups in April 1993 started with these words: "Since the outward liberation of Gilgit Baltistan, 45 years have passed. But in reality, ... this region is more enslaved than before" (Anonymous 1993: 1).

In some (re-)visions, Pakistan is no longer even represented as a former political hope of Gilgit and Baltistan. A political pamphlet from Gilgit reads: "Due to such developments India mobilized its forces on Kashmir borders and started bombing Gilgit and Skardu and other towns of Baltistan. Due to lack of air defence system, the local leaders appealed to the federal government of Pakistan to interns [sic] of defence equipment as well as administrative back up." Here, the decision of the provisional government to hand over administration to Pakistan is portrayed as merely a strategic step undertaken only out of necessity. This version does not even give a hint of a movement that endeavoured for the accession to Pakistan because of political (and religious) ideals. Naturally, it grossly distorts the historical facts, for the Indian Air Force flew air attacks against Gilgit only in the summer of 1948, many months after the provisional government had decided to transfer administration to a representative from Pakistan, and there had already been a substantial movement for the merger with Pakistan before that time. But the aim of this revision of history is certainly not historical correctness. Its purpose is to be found in present-day politics.

This new perspective on the *jang āzādī* also broke with the ceremonial reaffirmation of its official meaning. The political movement that opposes the present form of Pakistani administration in the Northern Areas appeals to the people to participate no longer in the official commemorations of *yōm āzādī*. Since 1992, it has organized instead an alternative public assembly on November 2nd. Its motto is no longer "freedom day" but "*yōm shuhadā*", day of martyrs, and it commemorates as much the freedom struggle of 1947/48 as it does the subsequent political deprivations.

8. Conclusions

One reason that this revision of history is occurring only now and not already a decade or two ago is, of course, that political frustration is growing by the prolongation of its duration. But another reason could be the fact that most of the actors and witnesses of *jang āzādī* are no longer alive. Those who propagate the reinterpretation of its meaning are younger people who know

about its history only indirectly. Through a growing temporal distance, images of the past lose much detail and accuracy. Remembering the past becomes less a matter of memory and more a task of reconstruction. This reconstruction orients itself to the present and its contexts and experiences.

The structure of the revision of the meaning of *jang āzādī* corresponds to what Assmann calls the "reconstructivity of cultural memory":

"No memory is able to preserve a past as such. What remains is only that, 'which a society in any epoch is able to reconstruct with in its present frame of reference' (M. Halbwachs). Cultural memory proceeds reconstructively, i.e., it always refers its knowledge to an actually present situation. Although it sticks to unshakeable figures of memory and bodies of knowledge, every present puts itself in an appropriating, explaining, preserving, and changing relation to it."

(Assmann 1988: 13)

Another aspect of cultural memory is of importance: it is, as Assmann says, "identity-concrete" (German: *identitätskonkret*): "By this, we mean to say that a group bases its consciousness of its unity and peculiarity on this knowledge [of the past] and obtains from this the knowledge of the formative and normative forces for reproducing its identity" (ibid.: 11). This holds true not only for *cultural* identity but also for *political* identity. The political identity of the Northern Areas was essentially related to Pakistan. The very *raison d'être* of the *jang āzādī* was the wish to become identified with Pakistan, to the extent that the rebels wanted their homecountry to become a very part of the state of Pakistan. Because this political identity has never been achieved, the people of the Northern Areas have begun to look in another direction for their own identity. Now, the "same" past is invoked to account for an identity that is much more self-centred, one that aims at autonomy and delimits or even dissociates the Northern Areas from Pakistan. To justify this political turn in the present, the view of the past also has to be changed.

Past and present have one characteristic in common: different and competing images and understandings are constructed about both (Cohen 1987: 133). Differing understandings of the present are turned backwards and result in differing representations of the past. Thus it is impossible to decide the question, as to whether the *jang āzādī* was accomplished by handing over the administration to Pakistan or whether it was betrayed by

the same act without deciding whether Pakistan presently runs a kind of colonial administration in the Northern Areas or whether it is the trustee in the pending Kashmir conflict. There is no absolute or impartial answer to these questions. This is not to say that actual answers are fictitious and unjustified. Thus, the new local perspective on the *jang āzādī* is not fictitious but is firmly grounded in the present experience of the people of the Northern Areas. They also express this experience by changing their view of the past.

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²⁸ To give an overview, this bibliography also contains a few local sources about the *jang āzādī* that are not referred to in the text.

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