

## **Plight of Muslims in our village in 1947**

### **Jagpal Singh Tiwana**

My village, Chinarthal Kalan, is situated between Patiala and Sirhind in East Punjab. In 1947 it was in district Patiala of the Patiala princely state and had a population of about 2,000. It was inhabited mostly by Jat-Sikhs of the Tiwana sub-caste, but about a quarter of the residents were Muslim Tiwanas [Muslim Tiwanas of West Punjab usually claim Rajput origin but in East Punjab they are considered Jats - author]. There was a gurdwara for the Sikhs and a mosque for the Muslims. Relations between the communities were quite cordial. Muslim Tiwanas were originally Sikhs, but were converted to Islam by Aurengzeb, we were told.

I was twelve years old in 1947. I distinctly remember when the riots broke out and the elders of our village, led by my grandfather, Sardar Sampuran Singh Tiwana, came to the rescue of our Muslim population. A meeting was held at Bangla, a central meeting place in the village, to decide a course of action. The majority, especially seniors, were in favor of doing no harm to Muslims as they were our Tiwana brothers, but younger elements provoked by refugees from West Punjab were less sympathetic. They had eyes on their cattle and property. Then the pressure from neighboring villages to attack "the enemy" was mounting day by day as stories of riots began circulating. One day, we saw a jatha of rural Sikhs appeared, fully armed and led by Sardar Lal Singh of village Turkheri. They wanted to demolish the mosque. On the advice of our elders, they agreed to first allow the Muslims take out their religious books and other belongings. The miscreants could demolish only a couple of minarets of the solid cemented masjid. However, no physical harm was done to any Muslim.

Loot and plunder of Muslim property was going on in the neighboring villages. The outsiders had an eye on the Muslims of our village. We were expecting an attack on them any day. Realizing the gravity of the situation, our people again met at the Bangla to decide what to do. The younger group wanted to kick out the Muslims and usurp their property, but the elders came out with a solution. They said they would advise the Muslims to embrace the Sikh religion, or else they would be helpless when the attack came from outside. Mirasi Muslims (singers and entertainers) readily agreed to become Sikhs. They said their ancestor, Mardana, was a companion of Guru Nanak. Seeing a danger to their lives, others too agreed to adopt the Sikh faith. The younger and the irresponsible elements among our people still had reservations. They alleged the Muslims would go back to their faith once the situation became normal. So they must be made to eat pork at the baptizing ceremony, as that would make them leave their religion for good. A Muslim was asked to kill and cut up a pig, and the meat was cooked and served. When offered the pork, some of the

Muslims vomited. I am not sure if any of them ate the pork. It was a most loathsome sight to see.

'As the news spread in the neighborhood that at village Chinarthal the Muslims were safe if they adopted Sikhism, several Muslims came out of their hiding places. One poor fellow had not eaten for three days; he was hiding in a sugarcane field. Our gurdwara became a small relief camp.

"Nobody was killed. Fateh Muhammad became Fateh Singh, and Fakiria was Fakir Singh now. They wore blue turbans and carried a small kirpan slung from their shoulders. One day we heard that Fateh Singh was seen in a barber's shop getting his beard trimmed. Both Fateh Singh and the Hindu barber were summoned to a meeting at the gurdwara. They accepted their fault. The Sikh priest announced the punishment. They were to pay a small fine, clean shoes and dishes, and attend the gurdwara for seven mornings to listen to Gurbani (recitation of Sikh scriptures). We were told that it was a mild punishment as the Sikh priest was a pious man.

Then after a week we heard that some Muslims with loads of their valuable belongings had slipped out of the village at midnight and joined the Muslim camp at Rouza Sharif near the Sirhind shrine. [This was the same camp where Chaudhri Roshan Din sought refuge - Author] This incensed the young ruffians, who shouted at the elderly village folk: "Didn't we warn you not to trust Muslims?" They hatched a plan to teach the Muslims a lesson. They advised the Muslims not to sneak out of the village but if they did not wish to stay on as Sikhs, they would escort them to the camp. A few Muslims accepted the offer which they found to be too tempting. One night they left the village to join the camp at Rouza Sharif under the protection of some young Sikhs. On the way, there was a thick jungle near village Pandrali where their bullock carts were stopped. The Muslims were told to surrender all their jewelry and cash. Then the daughters and daughters-in-law were separated. Daughters (being Tiwana blood) were spared, but daughters-in-law were pulled into the nearby bushes and raped. This shameful story circulated in the village the next morning. A knot of old people sitting around my grandfather were heard lamenting: "Salian ne moon kala kar ditta, ohna noon camp vich mialn joge ni chhadia". (The scoundrels have blackened our faces. How can we now visit them in the refugee camp).

My grandfather had given shelter to a Muslim family. The men in the family were given work at our bhatta (brick kiln). The family had TWO young unmarried girls. Now the young men had eyes on them. Before any harm could come to them, my grandfather one day quietly escorted the family to Rouza Sharif camp.

We had a few unmarried men in our lane. They had little or no land and had bad reputation. They had abducted some Muslim women from somewhere and were living with them. Bachan Singh, known as

Khooni Bachna (he had committed a couple of murders) had two young Muslim girls in his house. It was, however, a short-lived honeymoon. All Muslim women were recovered by the police and sent to Pakistan.

Sometimes we get our Tiwana brothers from Pakistan to visit us. A young man, Tanveer Tiwana from Lahore, discovered me on Internet. His grandfather, Mr Abdul Rashid Tiwana, lived in our village before 1947. He calls me dadaji (paternal grandfather) and stays in touch. According to him, nobody was hurt in his family. With the help of their Sikh neighbors they made it to the relief camp safely. According to Tanveer, the Tiwanas from our village are now settled in the districts of Sheikhpura, Sargodha, Kasur, and Lahore.'

**[This article by Tiwana has appeared in Ishtiaq Ahmed's 'The Punjab Bloodied, Partition and Cleansed' a Rupa publication. The book is receiving rave reviews in the Indian press]**