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Jammu Massacre: The frenzy of Suraiya, and the silence of history



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***Seven hundred years
after Lal Ded would
roam around Kashmir
naked, in frenzy, reciting
words of wisdom,
Suraiya would do the
same across the
mountains, in Jammu,
talking to herself,
speaking gibberish,
“Maar diya, maar diya...
Sabhko maar diya”
(They killed, they killed,
they killed them all).***

Every winter, when the Darbar moved to Jammu, a little something of an autumn long forgotten would greet the Darbaris. As the government shifted to the warmer Jammu plains, escaping the harsh mountain cold of Kashmir, the children would think about that mad woman who would vandalise their school. *Suraiya Pagal* had become a household name in the families of Sarkari and Darbari babus.

“We would be scared to go to our schools,” says Irshada Khan, daughter of a high ranking official whose childhood was spent moving from Srinagar to Jammu with the government. “She (Suraiya) lived close to where the government quarters were, and in her bouts of

madness she would try to
break the doors and come
inside.”



**For Irshada,
Suraiya was a
mad woman.
But it took
her a while to
realise that
the method
behind her
madness was
the chilling
carnage.
Suraiya was a
witness to the
systematic
pogrom of
the Jammu
Muslims.**

That fall of 1947, Jammu was
no longer safe for the
Muslims. Word had it that
some killings had taken place
and violence may break out
soon.

Her family was promised safe
passage to Pakistan by the
Maharaja's government,

where they would be given lands.

Amid rising tensions, Suraiya and her family, like thousands of other families, fled their home, only to be assembled in camps.

Suraiya's family was assembled in Khatikan Talab camp. On a similar modus operandi like that of Auschwitz, those living in the concentration camp, were tricked into boarding busses and trains, with a promise of being taken to safer locations.

What really happened is spoken about by MK Gandhi in the following words, *"The Hindus and Sikhs of Jammu, and those who had gone there from outside, killed Muslims. The Maharaja of Kashmir is responsible for what is happening there... A large number of Muslims have been killed there and Muslim women have been dishonoured."*

Muhammad Amin, a senior Kashmiri official who moved with the Durbar, and was Suraiya's neighbour in the custodian house of Jammu, and in the knowing of rationing to Suraiya's family,



says that she lost her mental balance after she saw her father and two brothers being killed by Hindu Extremists and Maharaja's forces. The women in the family were raped, and left bleeding in the outskirts of Jammu.



Daughter of Master Abdul Aziz, of Primary School Dalpatian, Suraiya was raised in the rural area of Udhampur district, and was moved to Khatikan Talab camp with the promise of being safely taken to Sialkot. But trucks after trucks that were supposed to take Muslims to Sialkot came back with blood dripping from them.

To quote an August 10, 1948 report published in *The Times, London*:
“2,37,000 Muslims were systematically exterminated – unless they escaped to Pakistan along the border – by the forces of the Dogra State headed by the Maharaja in person and aided by Hindus and Sikhs. This happened in October 1947, five days before the Pathan invasion and nine days before the Maharaja's accession to India.”

Apart from the Kashmiri families that moved with the

Darbar, Suraiya and her mother were sent rations by a well known figure amongst Jammu Muslims, Fatima Bibi.



A headmistress in the government school, Fatima Bibi was married to an officer in the Maharaja's government who was in Lahore during the 1947 Jammu massacre. She was on the same caravan of busses that was supposed to reach the 'safety' of Sialkot, as Muslims were being targeted in Jammu, when suddenly her peon from school, who was a Sikh, forced her to de-board.

**The caravan
never
reached
Sialkot, but
was taken to
Samba
instead,
where a
killing field
awaited.**

As told to Muhammad Amin, who later lived as a tenant at her mansion, Fatima Bibi did manage to reach the other side eventually, but decided

to come back to Jammu after a brief period, and reclaim her property when the violence ended.



A General in the Pakistani army whose children Fatima Bibi taught the recitation of the Qur'an helped her, by getting in touch with his friend, another army officer in the Indian Army, who had fought besides him as a brother in arms in the British Army, that was before the lines were drawn.

The Indian officer responded to the call and promised to get Fatima Bibi back safely. He made sure that Fatima reached her home. But on reaching Jammu, Fatima found that her house was taken over by intruders.

Due to his seniority in the government, Amin helped Fatima regarding paperwork. The newly formed Government of Kashmir's department of **Evacuee Property** took custody of her mansion, and handed over the property.

And when Fatima Bibi took possession of her property, Amin decided to live there as a tenant with his family, since the custodian house, where he

earlier lived as Suraiya's
neighbour was not as
spacious.



Amin became the tying factor
of these two women from
different backgrounds, whose
lives were joined by fate.
Fatima Bibi felt for Suraiya
and tried to help her. But
Suraiya saw dead bodies.

Suraiya, and many others,
lost their families by
middle of October when
important Hindu and Muslim
festivals—Dussehra and Eid-
ul-Zuha—coincided leading to
perpetrators and victims
gathering in large numbers.
Hundreds of Muslims in
Jammu, Kathua, Reasi and
Udhamapur were killed on
Eid.

That was the time when
abduction, rape and killing of
women had become an order
of the day in Jammu. There're
several accounts of Muslim
women jumping into Chenab
and Tawi in preference for
death over rape and
molestation.

But not everyone could escape
the marauders. Among them
was the prominent Jammu
Muslim leader Choudhary
Ghulam Abbas's daughter.

After being abducted by Hindu Extremists in November 1947, she couldn't be traced for a long time. Then in 1948, she was found in Punjab. The recovery of Choudhary Abbas's daughter could be made possible with an intervention at the highest level between governments of India and Pakistan.



Choudhary Ghulam Abbas

“A prominent Muslim woman in Jammu who later joined politics in 1970s says she was abducted from Udhampur district in October 1947 and then released in early 1948,” Zafar Choudhary, a Jammu-based journalist writes in his book.

But thousands others consumed by the horrible history were not so lucky.

From the counts of refugees who migrated to Sialkot and

other parts of Pakistan, more than 1,000 women could never be traced down even as Governments of India and Pakistan had set up camps for reporting, identification and repatriation of women abducted by marauders, Zafar writes.



Among that unfortunate lot was the prominent Muslim Conference leader Choudhary Hamidullah Khan's daughter.

In Jammu, camps were established for the abandoned Muslim women and arrangements were made for their travel to Pakistan. However, in many cases whereabouts of their family members could not be established.

Suraiya had seen it all and lost her mental balance beyond recovery.

Irshada, Amin's daughter recalls the time when Suraiya entered her school naked. The terrified children closed the doors and hid behind desks, as she sat outside crying when the rage subsided.

"She would wail remembering her family, and then suddenly start laughing. We were

young and thought it was funny. Children used to throw things at her sometimes,” says Irshada.



**Sometimes
Suraiya
would catch
hold of a Sikh
or a Hindu
man passing
by and would
shout at
them, asking,
*why did you
kill my father,*
recalls Amin.**

“It would be an unbearable sight for everyone,” he remembers, “but no one had any answers.”

Fatima Bibi had mentioned in her will that her property be donated to the Auqaf Board after her death.

Some years back, Suraiya passed away too, reminding many Muslim survivors of the start of the massacre in Poonch, where Maharaja Hari Singh stripped the World War-II Muslim military

veterans **of their**
weapons...

(To be continued)



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