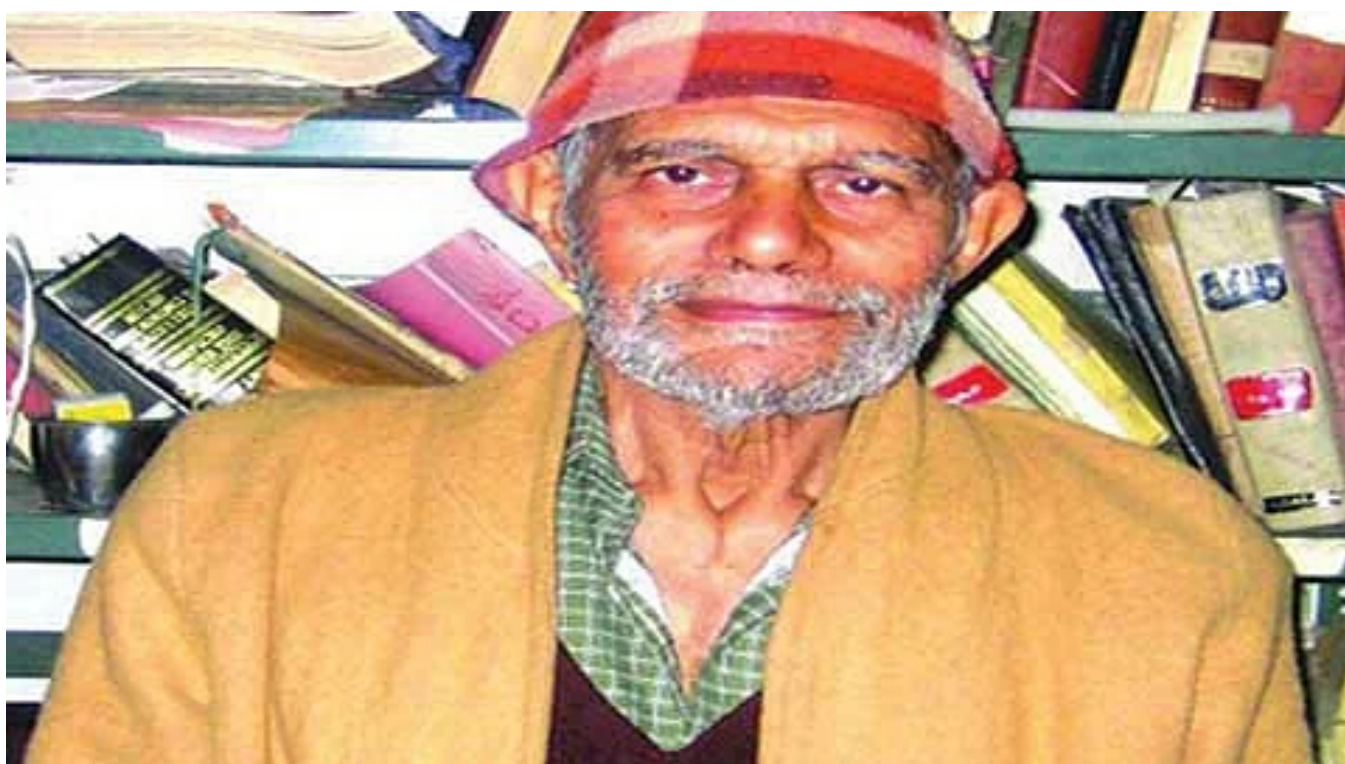




Today's Paper

Survivor of a massacre

My quest for a deeper understanding of the events of 1947 led me to many survivors and witnesses in different parts of Jammu Province including Advocate Shabir Ahamad Salahria.



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horrible days when human blood gushingly flowed through the streets of the eastern districts of Jammu Province, horrifyingly under the watchful eye of the then ruler and an accomplice Administration. They were walking chronicles on the events of that period and, fortunately, shared their excruciating experiences with us before passing into the eternal world. Their narrations have helped documentation of the most chilling period of our recent past.

The Salahrias of Jammu are one of the countless Muslim families that suffered catastrophic consequences of the communal frenzy of 1947. The casualties include father, Chowdhary Ferozuddin Salahria, mother and son, Nasir Ahmad, while three brothers Shabir Ahmad, Nazir Ahmad and Salahuddin miraculously escaped. I had heard about them during my childhood when Nazir Ahmad and Salahuddin used to frequent the Sonawar residence of my cousin, Dr. Muhammad Yusuf, with whom they were friends. We were told how the family had lost everything to the mayhem and how the three brothers had a close shave with death in a brutal ambush attack on the convoy of Muslims who were herded into scores of Lorries on the promise of transporting them to Pakistan but were waylaid and massacred en-route. I had

always been curious to know about the causes and consequences of Jammu violence about which not much has been written. In fact, the massacre, the most horrendous for its magnitude and the complicity of the State, remains the least talked about carnages of the Partition. There are different versions on the number of people killed in planned orgies. Ian Stephens, the then editor of The Statesman, put the figure at a staggering half a million. For Horace Alexander, the casualty figure was

200,000. Sardar Muhammad Ibrahim Khan gives the number of Muslims killed as

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and also served as the Advocate General of the State, besides being a Member of the upper house of the Indian Parliament. He had a flair for writing poetry and also wrote some books. In his death, we have lost one of the significant links to the post-1947 history of Jammu & Kashmir. He is survived by wife, three sons and two daughters.

Months before the Partition of India, the Jammu Province was engulfed by sporadic violence against Muslims and by August things were very bad for them. Towns and villages, especially in the districts of Udhampur, Reasi and Kathua, were turning into chilling scenes of blood spill and arson. Jammu City too was fast becoming unsafe for its minority Muslim population as armed communal elements were freely roaming the streets and attacking unsuspecting people. The Muslim localities were under increased attack and many of the well off scared inhabitants migrated to Pakistan while others were no more than breathing like frightened pigeons. It was under these circumstances that a complicit State Administration embarked upon a devious plan to get rid of them. They were told that since it was increasingly getting difficult for them to stay safe in Jammu, the Administration had arranged to ferry

them to safety. On 5 January, a large number of them were herded into scores of Lorries with a promise to drop them at the border for a crossover to Sialkot.

However, the convoy was diverted towards Samba and waylaid. The passengers were butchered by waiting armed gangs joined by soldiers of the State Army. Next day, the action was replayed. That day, among the ill fated passengers were the Salahrias.

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attack on their locality when soldiers of the Patiala Army deployed to protect the Muslims in Talab Khatika and Urdu Bazar instead fired at them.

As the killers were done with their heinous plan, Salahria and other injured were loaded in vehicles which were washed to remove blood stains on them. They were taken to a hospital where the Medical Superintendent refused them admission citing security reasons. They were then dumped in a camp at Digiana, literally unattended. Far from coming to their rescue, the Administration disallowed the surviving Muslims from returning to their homes in the city. Shabir Salahria with his two young siblings aged 11 and 9 had nowhere to go. Their house had been occupied by a Sikh refugee family from Muzaffarabad and it took them a long legal battle to reclaim their abode in 1966.

At one point in time, a distraught Salahria thought of migrating to Pakistan like many hapless Muslims who now felt threatened to live in the city of their birth. He took his two younger brothers with him and went to the State Guest House where Deputy Prime Minister Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad was staying. However, they

were not allowed by his Pandit private secretary to meet him. As they were returning dejected, Salharia heard someone calling, "Boys what is the matter?" It was Bakhshi wanting to know what had brought the young boys there. Salahria told him about their fate and the desire to migrate to Pakistan. Bakhshi dissuaded the trio from migration and instead gave them a signed chit to be transported to Srinagar where they had a house at Shivpora and their eldest brother, Bashir

Ahmed who was in Srinagar in connection with recruitment in the army. At the

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he saw the Maharaja surrounded by people who were boastfully informing him about the number of Muslims they had killed. The Maharaja patted their backs and encouraged them." Salahria believed that if Hari Singh had not lost balance the situation might not have gone as bad as it did.

Advocate Salahria did his graduation from Kashmir, worked as Naib Tehsildar for a brief period to raise money for pursuing a degree in law at the Aligarh Muslim University, unsuccessfully fought elections against formidable politicians like Dr. Karan Singh and Janak Raj Gupta, joined the Bar and twice served as the Advocate General of Jammu & Kashmir, besides being elected to the Rajya Sabha on a National Conference ticket. His wife Zubaida Salahria is a former legislator and his three sons, including one, Sulaiman Salharia who is an inspector general of police, are well settled.

Khalid Bashir Ahmad's book, Kashmir: Exposing the Myth Behind the Narrative was recently released. His forthcoming work, Kashmir: A Walk

Through History carries an extensive chapter on Jammu Massacre and is scheduled for release later this year.

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