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MEDIA

'Asian Age' Kills Karan Thapar Column After Mention of '1947 Violence Against Jammu Muslims'

Shortly after his article questioning PM Modi's call for a 'partition horrors remembrance day' was published, the journalist said an editor called him to say the "owners have decided to put the column 'on hold'.



Karan Thapar. In the background is a screenshot of The Asian Age e-paper of August 25, 2021. Illustration: The Wire



Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta



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COMMUNALISM MEDIA 14 HOURS AGO

New Delhi: Mentioning **the mass violence which took place against Muslims of Jammu during Partition** has cost senior journalist Karan Thapar his fortnightly column in the *Asian Age*, in what appears to be the latest incident of capitulation on the part of an Indian media house to the majoritarian whims of the Narendra Modi government.

Thapar told *The Wire* that soon after his column “As I See It” was published on August 20, 2021, the national daily’s managing editor Kaushik Mitter informed him that the owners of the newspaper had instructed him to put his column “on hold”. He also said that Mitter explicitly told him that the owners of the daily feared a backlash for the last three paragraphs of the column in which he wrote of the violence against Muslims of Jammu during Partition – a well-documented chapter of history that eventually led to the mass displacement of the community from the region.

Thapar, a television journalist of many decades standing who now does a regular show for *The Wire* called ‘The Interview’, **had been writing ‘As I See It’ in the *Asian Age* for the past 10 months** at the newspaper’s invitation. In this time, he has been writing critically on the policies of the Narendra Modi-led government, including its Hindu-majoritarian social and political agenda.

In what has become his last column, he argued that Modi’s recent announcement to remember August 14 – also Pakistan’s Independence Day – as ‘Partition Horrors Remembrance Day’ was specifically intended to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment in India, while the fact remained that “Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims suffered equally” on both sides of the border.

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While citing examples of Armistice Day in Britain, Holocaust Day in Israel, Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand, and even Thanksgiving Day in America, which are intended to bring people together against past mistakes, Thapar expressed the view that the prime minister’s move served the purpose of polarising people of India on religious lines.

In an effort to establish that all communities bore the brunt of xenophobic violence during the Partition, he reminded his readers of the large number Muslims who were killed or displaced from Jammu in the sectarian violence of 1947.

“At the time, Jammu was a Muslim-majority city. Yet literally in weeks communal riots, mass killings and forced migration turned it into a Hindu-majority one. Both contemporary accounts and those of historians put the numbers killed or expelled in hundreds of thousands,” Thapar wrote in his column headlined ‘Horrors of 1947 Partition: A selective remembrance?’

He went on to cite multiple sources that documented the anti-Muslim violence in Jammu, including reports from *The Spectator* that quoted none other than Mahatma Gandhi, reports in *The Statesman*, and articles by eminent scholars Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack, and former chief information commissioner of India, Wajahat Habibullah.

Quoting from these sources, he estimated that anywhere between two to five lakhs Muslims were killed, and many more displaced in Jammu, in violence allegedly perpetrated by Hindus and Sikhs with tacit support from the state authorities. Thapar goes on to say that columnist Swaminathan Aiyar **in a 2018 column for the *Times of India*** claimed that the massacre of Jammu’s Muslims “far exceeded the ethnic cleansing of Pandits five decades later” in terms of scale.

Thapar then finished his article with a question: “Now that Mr. Modi wants to remember the horrors of partition, is this one of them?”



Refugees atop an overcrowded coach of train leaving New Delhi for Pakistan in September 1947. Photo: Wikipedia

Speaking to *The Wire*, Thapar said, “Yesterday, the op-ed editor Kaushik Mitter called me, rather embarrassed, to say that the owners have decided to put my column ‘on hold’. He said this is because they feel this is a piece that rakes [up] Hindu-Muslim problems and they don’t like those issues to be raised. It worries them.”

“In other words,” said Thapar, “they are scared of the pressure that the government will put on them.”

He added that Mitter told him the owners took particular exception to the last three paragraphs of the article which deal with the massacre of Muslims in Jammu.

“The 1947 violence against Jammu’s Muslims that unfolded over a period of three-four months in 1947 is well-documented and has been historically accounted for. It is something that no one can contest. So I gather that the owners are under enormous pressure, presumably from Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah,” he said.

T. Venkatram Reddy and T. Vinayakram Reddy of Hyderabad control *The Asian Age*, although **a formal handing over** of the

newspaper to the new management, SREI, is under process.

Also read: [The World Must Pay Attention to the Violence Against Muslims in India](#)

Thapar recalled that many BJP leaders like former Union minister Prakash Javadekar, former general secretary of BJP Ram Madhav, and BJP's national spokesperson Sambit Patra had earlier informed him that they have been asked by the party's high command not to appear on his show, indicating that getting the *Asian Age* to stop his column may have been an occasion for the Modi-Shah duo to get back at him.

"I have never had any problem in the *Asian Age* earlier. It has published everything I have written without demur, without question. However, I told Mitter that if writing about a well-known massacre that turned Jammu from a Muslim-majority to a Hindu-majority city is something the owners of the daily objected to, I would rather not write for them," Thapar said.

He added that he had **also written about the Partition violence in Jammu two years ago** in his *Hindustan Times* column 'Sunday Sentiments', and it was surprising for him that a national daily could be so craven as to buckle under pressure.

Repeated calls and texts to *Asian Age*'s managing editor Kaushik Mitter went unanswered. This report will be updated if and when his response comes.

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