

CONFLICT

Jammu Massacre: How a Hindu journalist recorded the Muslim Massacre

By **Sabreena Bhat**

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It was only matter of time before Jammu was forced to go the Punjab way. Fearing that, thousands of Muslims had mobilised from Jammu during the eventful fall of 1947.

Those who stayed put were scared, thinking what the Ice Candy Man in Bapsi Sidhwa's partition novel tells his friends after a train from Gurdaspur arrives in Lahore filled with murdered Muslims: 'Everyone is dead. Butchered. They're all Muslims. There're no young women among the dead. Only two gunny bags full of women's breasts.'

By November 1947, Jammu got its Ice Candy Man moment when the Muslims in Talab Khatikan area were shifted to the police lines at Jogi gate, where now the Delhi Public School is situated.

They were shortly sent to Pakistan rather than being provided security by the Dogra administration.

Several thousands of these Muslims were loaded in about sixty lorries to take them to Sialkot. Many miles into the journey, they were cut short and boarded in buses escorted by Dogra troops.

But no sooner did they reach Chattha on Jammu-Sialkot road, a large number of armed goons pounced on these Muslims and slaughtered them mercilessly. The Dogra army presided over the bloodbath as idle spectators.

Those who managed to escape from the killing fields of Jammu reached Sialkot to narrate the gruesome tales.

69 years later, the details of the massacre was documented by Saeed Naqvi in his book *Being the Other: The Muslim in India*. Among the other things, Naqvi records how a Hindu journalist Ved Bhasin—who later became the decorated editor of *Kashmir Times*—lifted the lid on the massacre that according to a report published in *The Times, London* on 10 August 1948, systematically exterminated 2,37,000 Muslims.



Ved Bhasin.

indifferent to Indian Muslims.”

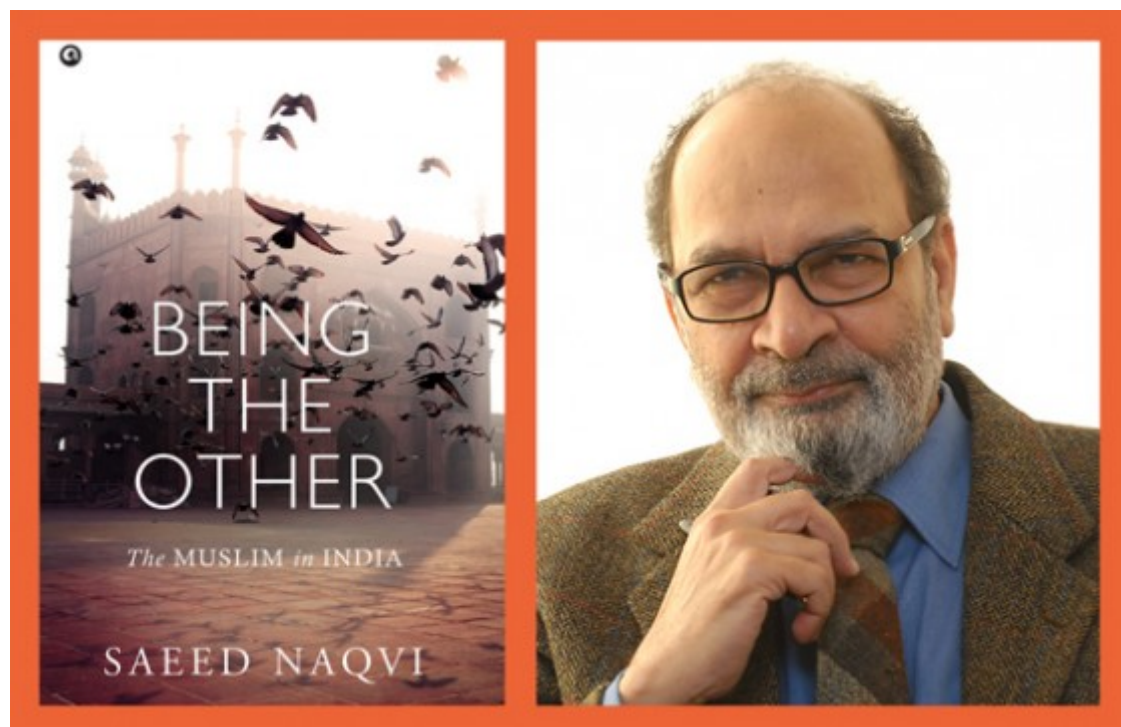
In Jammu, Bhasin was one of the few newsmen present amid the historic carnage. He went on to report the large-scale killing of Muslims in Udhampur district, particularly in Chenani, Ramnagar and Reasi areas.

Even in Bhaderwah (about 150 kilometres from Udhampur), a number of Muslims were victims of communal marauders.

“Some of those who led the riots in Udhampur and Bhaderwah later joined the National Conference and some even served as ministers,” says Bhasin, as quoted by Naqvi in his book.

He went to report how Muslims were massacred in Chhamb, Deva Batala, Manawsar and other parts of Akhnoor, with several of them fleeing to the other side or moving to Jammu.

Similarly from Kathua district, Bhasin reported the large-scale killings, rapes and abduction of Muslim women.



Instead of preventing these communal killings and fostering an atmosphere of peace, Bhasin said, the Maharaja’s administration helped and “even armed the communal marauders”.

Bhasin reported how several Muslims living outside Muslim-dominated areas were brutally killed by the rioters who moved

freely in vehicles with arms and ammunition even when the city was officially under curfew.

But Bhasin differs, recalling his interaction with a state official, *“Though polite, he warned me of dire consequences... he first warned me by saying, ‘I could have put you behind bars for your nefarious activities. But since you also happen to be a Khatri like me and are also related to me, I am simply giving you advice. It is not the time to form peace committees and work for peace but to defend Hindus and Sikhs from the Muslim communalists who are planning to kill them and destabilise the situation. We have already formed a Hindu Sikh Defence Committee. You and your colleagues better support it. We are imparting armed training to Hindu and Sikh boys in Rehari area. You and your colleagues should better join such training.’”*

In Naqvi’s book, Bhasin recalls what then Prime Minister of J&K Mehr Chand Mahajan told a delegation of Hindus who met him in the palace when he arrived in Jammu: ‘Now when the power is being transferred to the people, you should demand parity.’

One of them associated with National Conference asked Mahajan how could they demand parity when there was so much difference in population ratio.

“Pointing to the Ramnagarraikh below,” Bhasin said, “where some bodies of Muslims were still lying, Mahajan replied, ‘the population ratio too can change.’ ”

One thing is true, that post 1947-48, Jammu – that had had a Muslim majority (61 percent Muslims) – housed the community only as a minority, Naqvi quoting Bhasin writes. “After lakhs were killed, many had no option but to flee to what became Pakistan-administrated Kashmir.”

The zonal plebiscite in Jammu that Maharaja Hari Singh was pushing for and revenge for what was happening in East Punjab to Hindus and Sikhs, were cited as possible reasons for the large scale massacre.

But MK Gandhi deflated such claims on Dec 25, 1947 in volume 90 of his Collected Works: “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... Muslim women have been dishonoured.”

Another book, Revisiting India’s Partition, calls the “Mad orgy of Dogra violence against unarmed Muslims” as one that ought to put any self-respecting human to



Mehr Chand Mahajan

shame.

Years later when Atal Bihari Vajpayee unabashedly remarked—“Partition was good for Hindus because we now have fewer Muslims to manage”—Bhasin would recount the horrors of the massacre in his public talks and the role of the Hindutva forces like RSS in it.

But how the RSS played its role in the massacre **is another story...**

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