

On the 73rd anniversary of the organised and officially patronised Jammu massacre, almost nothing has been written by India's mainstream media, keeping alive the tradition of sweeping this enormous human tragedy under the carpet. Gowhar Geelani pieces together a series of events that turned various areas of Jammu into killing fields.

Not only were more than two hundred thousand Jammu Muslims exterminated, but the widespread anti-Muslim riots led to large-scale migration of the community to Pakistan. Courtesy:- LIFE Magazine

At a time when trainloads of Hindus and Sikhs were coming to Hindustan, leaving the newly-formed nation state of Pakistan behind, and tens of thousands of Muslims were boarding the trains to Pakistan from Delhi, something terrible was happening in Jammu province: a well-organised bloodbath of gargantuan proportions was being carried out.

According to a report dated 10 August 1948 published in The Times, London, at least “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.”

There is also an article by Horace Alexander written on 16 January 1948 in The Spectator. Alexander put the number of Muslims killed in Jammu at 200,000.

A humanitarian crisis of such colossal magnitude should never have been forgotten in the manner in which it has been for political reasons. India in cahoots with the so-called mainstream politicians of the State have largely succeeded in suppressing the chilling details of a Muslim massacre in Jammu while selling the idea of ‘unity in diversity’ and ‘secularism’ to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Jammu massacre of October 1947 and subsequent large-scale migration of Muslims from areas of Pir Panjal and the Chenab Valley (Poonch, Udhampur and Bhaderwah) to the other side (Azad Jammu and Kashmir) drastically changed the demographics and reduced a Muslim-majority (then 61 per cent) Jammu province to a Hindu-majority region.

Late Ved Bhasin, the founding editor of the Jammu-based English daily Kashmir Times, was an 18-year old student leader when the massacre took place in Jammu.

In 1947, a sizeable Muslim population inhabited areas like Talab Khati and Kanak Mandi in Jammu city while the areas on the other side were predominantly Hindu.

Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, executive editor of Kashmir Times, would often pose questions regarding the Jammu massacre to her late father, Ved Bhasin who would tell her how “the Maharaja’s army and Patiala army took positions inside the Hindu houses and fired bullets at Muslims living in Talab Khati and Kanak Mandi areas.”

“A section of Muslims after feeling insecure about their survival also collected some old arms for their protection, but the city was pre-dominantly Hindu. Also, the Hindus were supported by the Maharaja’s soldiers. Eventually, the Muslims felt outnumbered and surrendered their arms,” Anuradha recalls her father telling her.

After Muslims were forced to surrender, they were taken to police lines at Jogi Gate from where they were bundled into buses for RS Pora. Instead of taking responsibility of their security, the administration persuaded them to go to Pakistan. Oblivious to what they were in for, they boarded the buses in batches. As the first batch reached Chattha in Satwari Tehsil on Jammu-Sialkot road, a large number of armed RSS volunteers and Sikh refugees were lurking for them.

“Some Hindus had informed armed volunteers of the rightwing RSS about Muslims being ferried in buses. The Hindu volunteers and Sikh refugees were ready. They massacred Muslims,” Anuradha says quoting her father.

Late Bhasin, according to his daughter, personally knew about at least two batches of Muslims being mercilessly slaughtered by the RSS volunteers near Chatha.

Several thousands of Muslims were loaded in about sixty lorries in the first batch to take them to Sialkot. The Dogra troops escorted the buses but the RSS volunteers were already positioned near Chattha in the outskirts of the Jammu city to kill them.

Sheikh Abdullah, who threw his people’s lot with India against their wishes, was known to harbour a visceral dislike against Jammu Muslims.

According to late Ved Bhasin, “They (Muslims) were pulled out of the vehicles and killed mercilessly with the Dogra soldiers either joining [in] or looking [on] as idle spectators. The news about the massacre was kept a closely guarded secret. Next day another batch of Muslim families was similarly bundled into the vehicles and they met the same fate. Those who somehow managed to escape reached Sialkot to narrate their tale of woes.”

Another memory sketch Anuradha shared with Kashmir Newline was about the socio-economically backward and poorer Muslims living near Dak Bungalow, Tourist Reception Centre Jammu, who had no means at all to save themselves from the onslaught.

“The Hindu extremists and RSS volunteers did not even spare children and women. They raped women and killed men and children. In clashes, Muslims obviously felt outnumbered in Hindu dominated areas. They were left to fend for themselves because unlike the influential Muslims, they had no access to the Maharaja,” Anuradha says.

Her father told Anuradha that there was some division among Muslim ranks as a section of Muslims was being patronised by the Maharaja and, therefore, they enjoyed protection while more damage was inflicted on the poorer Muslims.

Most scholarly pursuits focused on the Kashmir valley, partly because those who wrote were either friends of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah or scared to write about the massacre. The Sheikh always ignored Jammu region and considered Jammuites his adversaries because of their pro-Pakistan leaning

Anuradha also recollects one of her earliest memories of seeing one Muslim woman named Suraiyah, a resident of Dalpatian Mohalla near Karbala grounds, Jammu, walking aimlessly on the streets. The pain of losing her father and uncle in the massacre had inflicted deep psychological wounds on her.

“Suraiyah’s father and uncle were killed during the turbulence. She had watched the mayhem as a child and it ruined her psyche. She would hang around the streets and collect twigs,” says Anuradha. “Suraiyah’s disturbing psychological condition remains one of the powerful images of her childhood.”

Dr. Sheikh Showkat Hussain, Head and Dean of the School of Legal Studies, Central University of Kashmir, describes Ved Bhasin as one among the “few far-sighted individuals who identified themselves with the popular resistance” against the Maharaja rule.

In Kashmir Profiles, Dr. Hussain writes: “Ved Bhasin was one among such noble souls. Inclined to socialist ideology, he became the secretary of Jammu Students Union in 1946, a group dedicated to organising masses against despotism. He and his colleagues tried to resist the annihilation and ethnic cleansing of Jammu Muslims in 1947. The group couldn’t do much against the ferocious wave of loot, plunder and killings led by the RSS and its extensions.”

Late Ved Bhasin is credited with lifting the lid off the massacres in Jammu.

“...But like the collective silence over the pogrom in Hyderabad, the holocaust in Jammu has been a story hidden from public view by the machinations of the very people who covertly allowed the massacres to take place. These included many in the national leadership of the Congress party at the time. The events of Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir reveal the emergence in New Delhi of an establishment which was indifferent to Indian Muslims,” writes

author, senior Indian journalist and television commentator Saeed Naqvi in his book *Being The Other*. [Saeed Naqvi, *Being The Other*, chapter eight *The Making of the Kashmir Problem*, p 188]

In his writings and various public speeches, Ved Bhasin did briefly talk about the Jammu massacre as a live witness. But it is said that throughout his journalistic career he did not talk much about it, fearing it may hurt many or stoke communal passions in the region.

In this backdrop, Gandhiji visited Srinagar on August 1 and met the Maharaja. Though Gandhi declared that his mission was not political and he was only fulfilling an old promise to the Maharaja to visit Kashmir, there were clear indications that he had advised him to join the Indian Union.

He did finally open up in public about the pogrom in September 2003 at an event organised by the Jammu University. He also recalled what transpired in Jammu in a paper 'Experiences of Partition: Jammu 1947', which was presented at the Jammu University.

"Communal tension was building up in Jammu soon after the announcement of the Mountbatten plan with the Hindu Sabha, RSS and the Muslim Conference trying to incite communal passions. Tension increased with a large number of Hindus and Sikhs migrating to the state from Punjab and NWFP and even from areas now under Pakistan's control. Trouble was brewing in Poonch, where a popular non-communal agitation was launched after the Maharaja's administration took over the erstwhile jagir under its direct control and imposed some taxes. The mishandling of this agitation and use of brutal force by the Maharaja's administration inflamed the passions, turning this non-communal struggle into a communal strife." [From Ved Bhasin's paper presented at the Jammu University]

"The Maharaja's administration had not only asked all Muslims to surrender their arms but also demobilised a large number of Muslim soldiers in the Dogra army and the Muslim police officers, whose loyalty it suspected. The Maharaja's visit to Bhimber was followed by large-scale killings."

According to Ved Bhasin, the large-scale killings of Muslims took place in Udhampur district, particularly in Udhampur town, Chenani, Chatha Satwari, Ramnagar and Reasi areas. Killings of Muslims were also carried out in Bhaderwah.

Late Bhasin has recorded that the RSS played a key role in carrying out the massacre and that they were aided by armed Sikh refugees "who even paraded the Jammu streets with their naked swords."

In one of his articles titled *Creative Approach to Kashmir Problem*, which is preserved by Anuradha in *Vedji & His Times Vol-I*, the late Bhasin writes: “It was the vacillation and indecision of Maharaja Hari Singh in deciding whether to join India or Pakistan or remain independent after the transfer of power [from the British] that created the problem. After the transfer of power the British paramount lapsed and legally and constitutionally Jammu and Kashmir became a fully sovereign independent state. It remained so till October 27, 1947 when the ruler signed the Instrument of Accession under peculiar circumstances. There is little doubt that the Maharaja nursed the ambition of proclaiming himself the emperor of a sovereign autocratic state and his supporters and loyalists did rejoice on August 14-15 when the two independent dominions came into being for Jammu and Kashmir ‘becoming a sovereign independent under Maharaja Hari Singh.’”

In his book *Being The Other*, Saeed Naqvi writes that “rumours had been reaching Delhi since July 1947 that Maharaja Hari Singh was looking for an opportunity to accede to India, although his subjects were overwhelmingly Muslim.”

Quoting late Ved Bhasin, Naqvi writes: “After the 3 June Plan there was pressure on Maharaja Hari Singh to accede to India or Pakistan from both the Congress and Muslim League Leaders.”

“In this backdrop Gandhiji [M K Gandhi] visited Srinagar on August 1 and met the Maharaja. Though Gandhi declared that his mission was not political and he was only fulfilling an old promise to the Maharaja to visit Kashmir, there were clear indications that he had advised him to join the Indian Union. Gandhiji returned to New Delhi via Jammu where he arrived on June 3,” Naqvi notes. [Saeed Naqvi, *Being The Other*, chapter eight: *The Making of the Kashmir Problem*, p 176]

Christopher Snedden, noted Australian politico-strategic analyst, author and revisionist historian, offers in his book, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, a fresh perspective about who actually “instigated” the Kashmir dispute.

“After Partition in 1947, Jammuites engaged in three significant actions. The first was a Muslim uprising in the Poonch area of western Jammu province against the unpopular Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. The second was serious inter-religious violence throughout the province that killed or displaced larger numbers of people from all religious communities. The third was the creation of Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir in the area of western Jammu Province that the ‘rebels’ had ‘freed’ or ‘liberated’. These significant actions all took place before the Maharaja acceded to India on 26 October 1947. They divided ‘his’ Muslim-majority state and confirmed that it was undeliverable in its entirety to either India or Pakistan. They instigated the ongoing dispute between India and Pakistan over which state should possess J&K—the so-

called ‘Kashmir dispute’,” Snedden writes in the introduction of *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*.

According to Snedden, “these three actions all occurred during the ten-week interregnum between the creation of India and Pakistan on 15 August 1947 and Maharaja Hari Singh’s accession to India on 26 October 1947.”

As a revisionist historian, the Australian scholar describes the now forgotten Poonch uprising as “pro-Pakistan and anti-Maharaja uprising by Muslim Poonchis in western Jammu.”

There is no denying the fact that the overwhelming majority, Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir, were fighting the tyrant Maharaja. Most of them favoured region’s complete merger with Pakistan.

The well-organised massacre took place under Dogra despot Hari Singh’s watch

Instead of taking responsibility of their security, the administration persuaded them to go to Pakistan. Oblivious to what they were in for, they boarded the buses in batches. As the first batch reached Chattha in Satwari Tehsil on Jammu-Sialkot road, a large number of armed RSS volunteers and Sikh refugees were lurking for them.

Saeed Naqwi’s book has a full,detailed chapter on the Jammu massacre.

The Jammu massacre of October 1947 and subsequent large-scale migration of Muslims from areas of Pir Panjal and the Chenab Valley (Poonch, Udhampur and Bhaderwah) to the other side (Azad Jammu and Kashmir) drastically changed the demographics and reduced a Muslim-majority (then 61 per cent) Jammu province to a Hindu-majority region.

Zafar Choudhary, a Jammu-based author and a political analyst, in a telephonic conversation with KashmirNewslne, confirms that those who rebelled in Poonch wanted the state of Jammu and Kashmir to join Pakistan.

“Because of the immense love Jammu Muslims had for Pakistan and their aspiration to join the newly-formed Pakistani dominion, the Sheikh [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah] considered them their enemies. Obviously, the Dogra Maharaja [Hari Singh] too did not like them,” Choudhary tells KashmirNewslne.

Author Mir Khalid corroborates Choudhary’s assertions:“The Jammu Muslims, ethnically and linguistically totally different from Kashmiri Muslims, under the leadership of Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, had a very pro-Pakistan slant to their politics and never ever acknowledged the Valley politicians or their ‘great leader’ Sheikh Abdullah who was seen to be close to

Nehru. They were openly pursuing their own goals to seek accession of the state to Pakistan,” Mir Khalid writes in his book *Jaffna Street*. (Mir Khalid, *Jaffna Street*, p. 270)

Khalid further notes that “though much has been written about the violence during the Partition and its aftermath, the events in Jammu remain a grey area.”

In Poonch district, people had revolted against the Maharaja before 1947 as well, but they had been brutally crushed by the troops of the Dogra despot. In 1947, people revolted again against Maharaja Hari Singh in Mirpur and Poonch. On their part, the Dogra troops and volunteers of the extremist Hindu and Sikh groups started a systematic cleansing of Muslims in Jammu province. There was counter violence against Hindus in Bagh, Kotli, Mirpur and Muzaffarabad.

In his book *Kashmir Conflict and Muslims of Jammu*, published in June 2015, Choudhary has documented the sufferings of communities and the pain of migration besides preserving memories of those who were alive at the time of the Jammu massacre.

Relying on oral history as a research technique for data preservation, Choudhary met at least 65 survivors and heard anecdotes of the massacres from them. At the time of his interactions with the survivors, he had not thought about writing a book, but his insightful conversations with the survivors eventually proved valuable in the making of his book.

One of his many regrets though is that most scholarships on Jammu and Kashmir have ignored the Jammu narrative.

“Unfortunately, there is only a passing reference made with regards to the Jammu tragedy in most accounts,” he says.

“Most scholarly pursuits focused on the Kashmir valley, partly because those who wrote were either friends of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah or scared to write about the massacre. The Sheikh always ignored Jammu region and considered Jammuites his adversaries because of their pro-Pakistan leaning,”

Founding -editor of *Kashmir Times*, Late Ved Bhasin, would narrate to his daughter how the Maharaja’s army and Patiala army took positions inside the Hindu houses and fired bullets at Muslims.

Furthermore, Choudhary opines that the Kashmir valley narrative dominated the discourse then and continues to dominate the discourse now.

“Most things about Jammu and Kashmir are Kashmir-centric when the fact is that Jammuites instigated the Kashmir dispute,” he argues.

Choudhary's numerical calculations based on the Census reports of 1941 and 1961 conclude that at least 2,37,000 Muslims were missing from Jammu, literally taken out of the population.

"It is safe to conclude that most of them were killed," he says.

By the autumn of 1947, Poonch and Mirpur were engulfed in the throes of war. There was anti-Muslim violence in Jammu city, Chattha Satwari and Udhampur district.

Choudhary is of the view that "those who led to the creation of Azad Kashmir were Sheikh Abdullah's enemies. Muslims who got killed in 1947 wanted to go to Pakistan. There was mayhem all around."

He feels that even the Pakistani state did not deem it necessary to worry too much about the Jammu massacre for its bigger design was to wrest control of Kashmir.

"In statecraft, when bigger things are happening, many other significant things happening simultaneously are either ignored or considered insignificant," he opines.

Choudhary laments that records about the Jammu massacre are not available and one has to rely on eyewitness accounts.

"In Mirpur, Kotli, Bagh and Muzaffarabad, there was violence perpetrated against non-Muslims as a reaction to what was being done to Muslims in Jammu Province. It was almost an ethnic cleansing there too," Chaudhary says.

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.

There is a difference how the Jammu massacre is seen, remembered and perceived by the people in two parts of Kashmir. Recalling one of her recent visits to Muzaffarabad and Mirpur, Anuradha says that people there openly talk about the Jammu massacre and also about the violence against non-Muslims in their areas.

"One individual openly told me how his uncle was involved in violence against Hindus. He was regretful. But in Jammu there is criminal silence over the anti-Muslim pogrom. Even those who talk about it do so in order to justify the killings of Muslims," she concludes.