

1947: The Last Letter

By **Kashmir Life** - 1:12 pm November 7, 2016

At the peak of 1947 Jammu Massacre, a 17-year old bride in Bhaderwah was waiting for her professor husband with their midnight summer's child in lap that two letters came. For Tahira Sultana, now widowed and retired, the letters are worth a fortune and the only possession detailing her father. But Bilal Handoo reports the letters are perhaps the first graphic detail of the build-up to the momentous events that changed J&K forever, apparently absolving commoners



Tahira Sultana.

Inside her home overlooking the Chenab, the story started on a sad note. Dusk had long dimmed Doda town when she showed a bundle of nerves before narration. Everything had quietened. In that hush hour, she started with a *sweater* that her father wanted her young seamstress mother to send to his perilous Jammu address. Sweater never reached him—just like that *first class* suit he had bought for his bride amid bloodbath.

Instead, came the heartbreaking news of the man, who was comforting his bride and her family with his warm words amid massacre — that marked the historic transition of J&K in later part of 1947.

Those words were letters — ferried in a war-torn *tonga* from Jammu. Since then, 69 years have passed, but the daughter Tahira Sultan continues to be safe-keeper of these letters. Part of history though, these letters are her only possession that details the man who was her father, a man she never saw.

But reading the scrolls appears like scratching proverbial old wounds to her.

"I was only four-month old when the letters came," began Tahira, as awkward silence gripped the room. "My family raised me like a princess, tried everything to hide these letters from me. But then, how long can truth hide?" When the truth surfaced, uncomfortable questions followed.



A view of Bhaderwah.

Tahira was born in Bhaderwah, 34km down from Doda, on July 4, 1947. She wouldn't tell it, but she is one of those *Midnight Summer's Children*—born during India's partition.

She grew up as supposed daughter of J&K's eminent poet Abdul Qudoos aka Rasa Javidani. It was the family of learned people. Rooted in Islamabad's Kadipora village, this Kashmiri family had migrated to Bhaderwah during early 1900s. Rasa's father Khawaja Munwar was a wealthy trader and scholar who lost his fortune in a massive cloud burst in 1928 — that flooded the entire Bhaderwah town.

The misfortune broke Rasa's heart, Tahira said. And with that broken heart, a poet was born in Bhaderwah who beautifully expressed nature, intense emotions and imagination in his poetry.

Young Tahira was family's darling daughter who like other women members was encouraged to read and study. Everything was hunky dory for her — until one day, in early sixties, she returned home *broken-hearted* with a scholarship form.

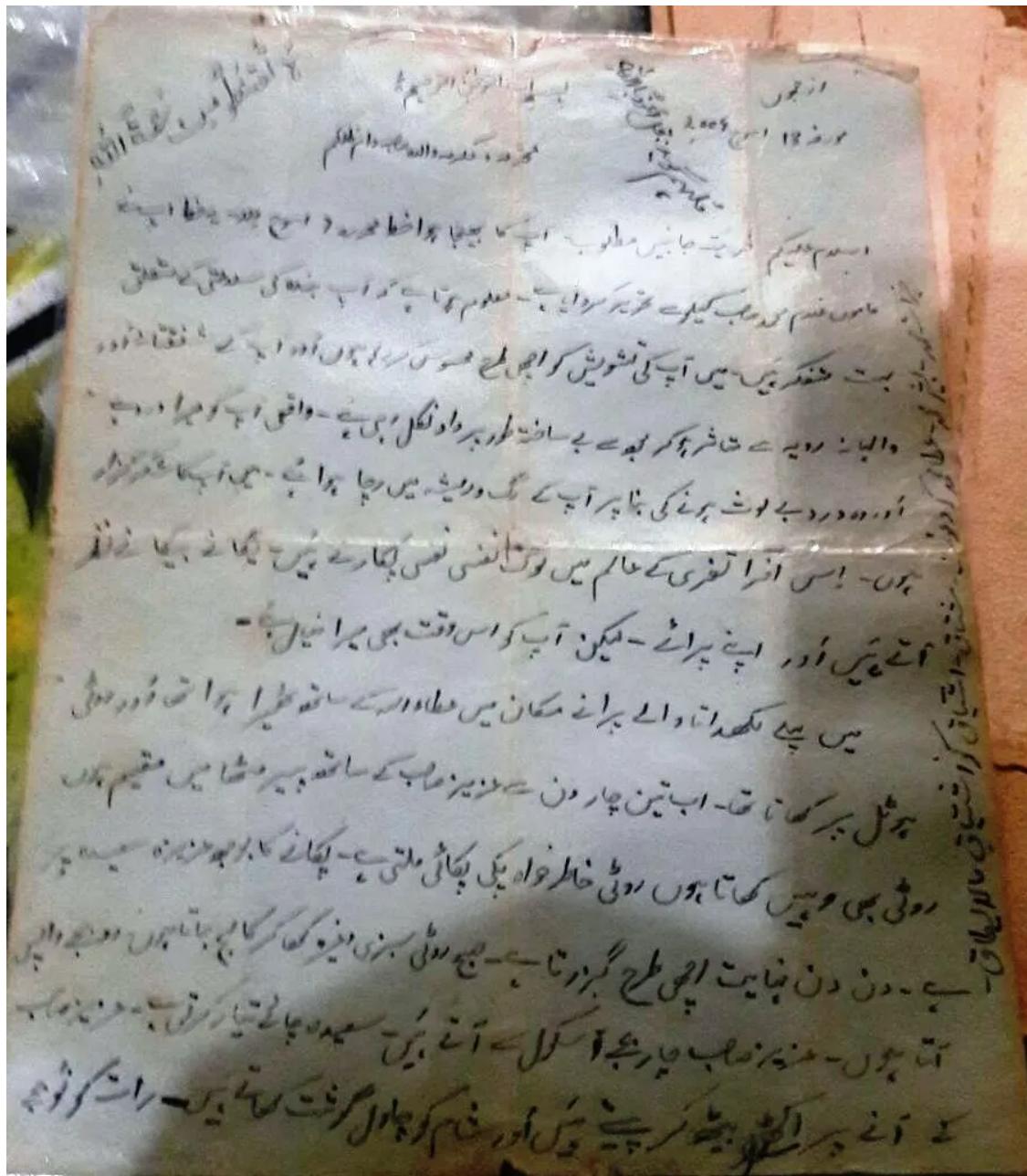
"I was in Class 9," said Tahira, "when I was handed over that scholarship form by my school principal." She became tearful after receiving that form—because it was only given to orphans. "Who is my father? Where is he?" she demanded.

Her supposed father, but actually her *Mammu*, the maternal uncle, Rasa rebuked the principal for the *terrible* mistake. But it never helped. The damage was already

done.

Back home, Tahira was inconsolable. Her relentless wailing finally compelled her family to hand over the concealed letters to her. But the daughter hadn't a hunch that she received a painful legacy.

"Even before reading them," said Tahira, as her dentist son and daughter-in-law hear by attentively, "those letters broke my heart—because they made my orphanhood certain." Besides being an agonizing read, the letters informed her about her scholarly father, who happened to be in wrong place in wrong time.



Snapshot of the letter.

Amid the reminiscence, Tahira began reading the first letter:

Assalamualaikum...

I received your letter through uncle Ghulam Mohammad. It appears, you are too much worried about me. I am overwhelmed by your love. For being my partner in grief, I am grateful of you. In these fatal hours, when everyone seems self-caring, your concern is indeed heartening.

I stay with Attaullah in his rundown house and eat in hotel. But for last five days, I am staying with Aziz Sahib at his Peer Mitha residence. I also eat with his family.

Time passes quite trouble-free these days. I go to College daily after breakfast and return at 2pm. Aziz Sahab returns from school at 4pm. By then, his wife Sayeeda keeps tea ready. We take it together. We eat rice and meat in dinner. Then, I go out with stick to listen radio. I return around 10pm. This is my daily routine.

But undoubtedly, Jammu's mood is murderous. Muslims are abandoning their homes and running to Pakistan. Two-third Muslim population has already deserted the city. The remaining one-third looks anxious, fretful. Hindu military keep patrolling around, thus escalating fears in already terrified Muslims.

Around 30-30 *tongas* daily ferry Muslim refugees to Pakistan. Even today, I saw several *tongas* near Gomut with Pakistan-bound Muslim passengers. Muslims aren't fleeing because of the fear of Jammu Hindus, but because of the *weaponised* Hindu military. Many Muslim delegation met government in Srinagar, but nothing has been done to restore confidence in frightened Muslim community.

Rumour mills have been set on fire. Now, all eyes are on Maharaja *Bahadur*. Everyone is patiently waiting for his decision to either stay independent or accede with one of the two neighbouring nations. It is said that if His Highness snubs Pakistan to accede to Hindustan with Sheikh Abdullah's support, then a big bloodbath is inevitable. In that case, I fear Punjab-like riots.

Let us see what His Highness's decision would be. But from Sheikh Abdullah's speeches, it is quite clear that he is in favour of Hindustan. And naturally, his Highness will be more slanted towards Delhi than Lahore and Karachi. Muslims are also leaving Jammu because of this reason. Anyways, whatever has to happen will happen — but, that doesn't mean, you will remain in this grief throughout day and night.

Despite massacre in Punjab, lakhs of people managed to survive. It teaches us one thing: Whomsoever Allah wishes to keep alive; He saves him even from raging flames. Your sorrowful being won't evade my inevitable destiny. But yes, prayers have a power. They restore the heart's calm. Allah has Himself said in the Holy Quran that He is protector and defender of all. By stating, *alaa kulli shay-in qadeer*, Allah has taken responsibility of every soul. He has already promised us: *Anna haafizun naa'su kaleem* — I am everyone's protector. If Allah's order—*la takhafu wal'la tahzanu*—is absolute, then why to worry, fear.

But for now, my homecoming is impossible — as all roads stand sealed. I may go to Sialkot on foot if situation improves.

My greetings to all, and love to Tahira Sultana.

Khuda Hafiz.



Prof. Malik Umar Ud Din.

Tahira sighed deeply — no sooner the recitation ended. Silence that followed perfectly made sense. Shortly she was busy describing her father. The letter she

just read had come from Jammu in early October 1947. The sender was Prof Malik Umar Ud Din, her father, a native of Baleesa—a remote village in Chenab Valley.

The journey of the man from Baleesa to Aligarh Muslim University had fascinated many during early forties. But Malik was no ordinary *men of letters* around. He had done Masters in Urdu, English, Persian, besides Bachelors in Law, LLB. “I was told that he was also master in Oriental Languages,” Tahira said. “He taught Persian at the Prince of Wales College, Jammu.”

Once Tahira learned about her father, she followed his footsteps. Like him, she became proficient in Persian. And by 1967, she was appointed as Persian teacher in Doda. In '72, she was married to a Doda doctor. And in 2005, she retired as senior lecturer.



Prof Malik Ud Din with Abdul Aziz Bhat (R) and GR Azad (L).

The second letter reading began amid faded street shrill outside. This final letter of her father was written on ending Oct 1947. Like in first, the man's concern for his barely 17-year-old bride also becomes blatant in the second letter:

Assalamualaikum...

It is getting painful over here. Each moment feels like a year. I have never seen such *Zulm* before. Through telegraph I had informed you that my letter is on way. By the time this letter will reach you, I fear for my life.

Jammu is burning, so are its adjoining areas. Muslims are being dragged out of their homes and butchered on roads. This is an organised pogrom against Muslims. Muslim refugees are now taking shelter in Talab Khateekha. We can see big fire balls emanating from Muslim houses.

Around 20,000 Muslim inhabitants of Bahu Qila's backside are living as refugees in Gujjar Pul's Tawi camp. Hindu military aren't allowing them to enter the city. Arson and loot are going on for over a week now. It is said that Sangh partymen are behind this bloodshed. Not a single Muslim has retaliated so far. We remain awake throughout the night in horror.

His Highness Maharaja *Bahadur* has also arrived in Jammu. It is said that he has gone to Akhnoor. He must have seen those Sangh goons on his way. We were hopeful that the situation might improve after his arrival. But the situation is only worsening. We still hope that Maharaja will use his wisdom to restore some confidence in the city.

Jammu was never so dreadful, as it is now. Rumours are flying thick and fast, thereby escalating tensions. It would be great if Hindus and Muslim form peace committees together.

For last two days, I am sitting home. No Muslim professor, student is daring to step inside the college campus. From tomorrow, five days holiday has been declared. I wish, peace prevails during these days.

Even road to Sialkot is hazardous. In Ranbir Singhpora, 16000 Muslim refugees have taken shelter. I and Aziz Sahab's family have abandoned Peer Mitha house for safety. For now, we live with Malik Ghulam. Doda's Attaullah is also with us. Aziz Sahib's both daughters remain unwell. Even today, his son didn't make it to school.

Some of my clothes are with laundryman. Last month I purchased clothes worth Rs 80. I also bought first class suit for my bride. But given the situation, I fear that I may not be able to give it to her.

A few people from Bhaderwah, Doda and Kishtwar are living with us, including a constable, Amkalu Khateeb, Abdullah Khan *Compoder* and three students. One student is Khalil Kachru's son. He took Rs 10 as loan from me yesterday. The other two students are from Kishtwar. The boys tried everything to return home, but had to come back for the fear of their lives.

But it is good that Bhaderwah is peaceful. Peace must prevail. However, I am yet to receive any letter from my home. I wish everything is fine there. I heard that Mirpur and Poonch have also become unsafe. Hiranagar, Samba and Jammu have already turned trouble spots. Even Srinagar is restive and witnessing demonstrations. The protesters there are being repeatedly cane-charged. Muslims from Jammu have abandoned their palatial houses. But in Mohalla Dalpatiya and Ustad, Muslims continue to stay put.

All Muslim shops are shut, while those run by Hindus are open. They do normal business. Panic in Muslims has peaked after authorities told them that rioters have gone out of their control as well. I don't know what is cooking here.

Khaliq Sahab managed to hire a lorry to Bhaderwah. Don't worry, Allah is for all. If our government wishes, all Muslims are ready to go to Sialkot in one caravan. But nothing is being done. We have pinned our hopes on his Highness. Only he can restore the much-needed calm.

By now, I believe, my bride must have made a new sweater for me. She should send it through Khaliq Sahab — if only he has made it to home. In case, she is yet to make it, let her send me an old one.

I and Aziz sahib were thinking of hiring a lorry. Travel permit is being given by Governor Sahab. But who would muster courage to go to Mubarak Mandi to avail that. And yes, if someone is going towards Baleesa, then write a letter to my parents. Please inform them that they shouldn't go toward Kuthua with essentials. They must stay in Bilawar area only, so that they can return quickly.

Blessings to all from my side. Stay cautious and stay in the group of 20 men. My love to Tahira Sultana and my bride.

Yours,

Umar Ud Din.



An unrelated century old picture of Mubarak Mandi Jammu

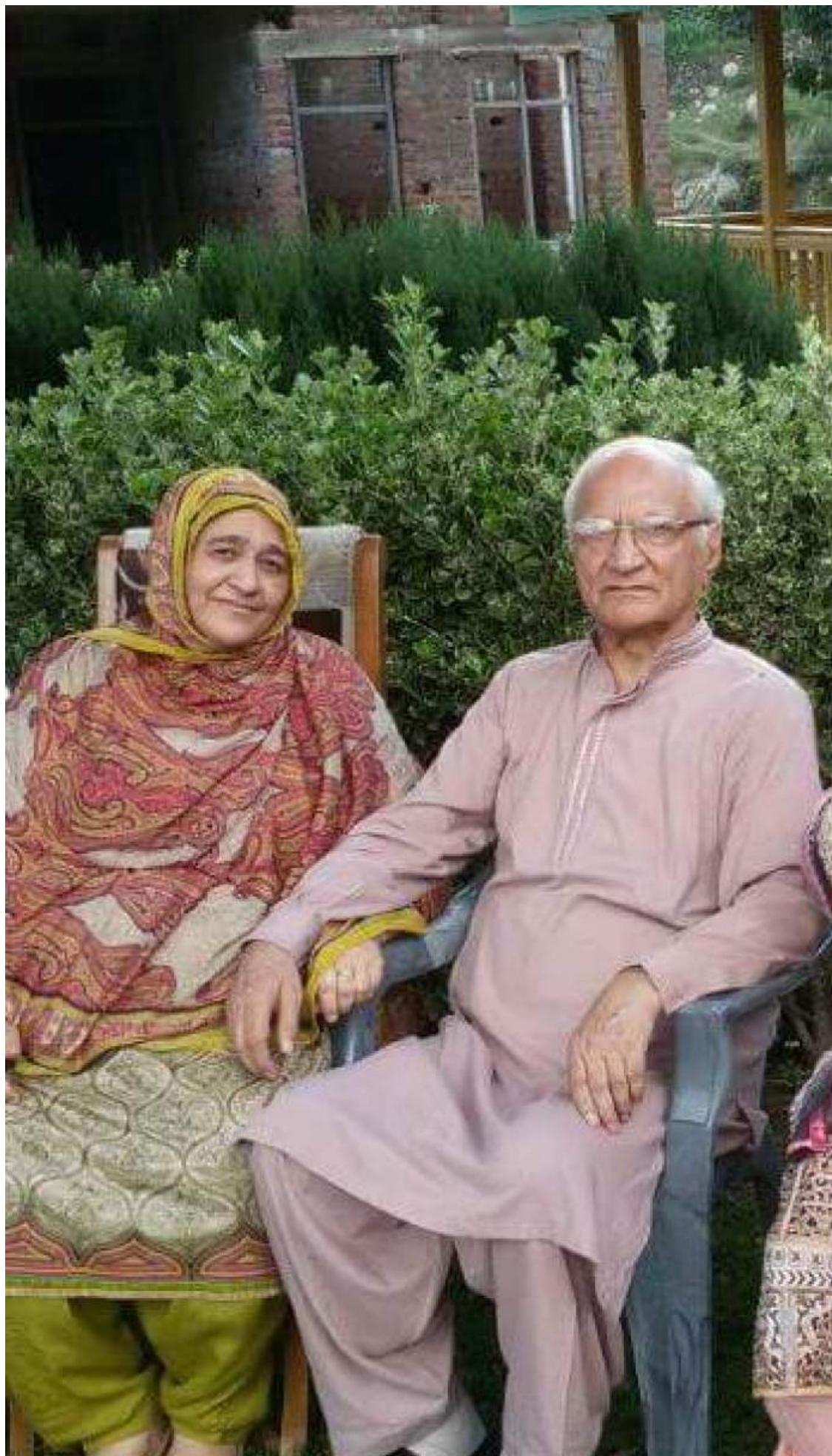
Jammu was shortly drenched in the river of Muslim blood in one of the most shrouded post-colonial genocides. What had reportedly started with targeted killings around mid-July 1947 had become full-blown massacre after Maharaja Hari Singh and his wife reached Jammu on October 26, 1947.

It was Hari Singh, reported British daily *The London Times*, who “supervised the slaughter” that killed 2,37,000 Jammu Muslims. The pogrom was designed to alter Jammu’s demographic ratio, the daily reported. After that gory fall, 123 Muslim villages across Jammu province had turned into ghost towns. Muslim properties and places got new ownerships and names. What used to be Islamia School became Hari Singh High School, while Urdu Bazaar became Rajinder Bazar.

Many survivors recalled how local Sangh gangs and goons from surrounding Gurdaspur were armed when Muslims in Dogra military and police were being stripped of their uniform and weapons. Even Muslim refugees in police stations and government offices were being handed over to Sangh goons for slaughter by officers themselves, the survivors recounted.

Several women reportedly jumped into rivers to save their honour. The eye-witnesses even recounted how some Muslims killed their own daughters to safeguard their honour after prominent Muslim Conference leader Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas’s daughter was abducted.

But perhaps the brutal killing of Khawaja Ali Muhammad, a public prosecutor from Bhaderwah, highlighted the brutality of the mayhem. Before killing him, his killers reportedly chopped off his fingers, saying: ‘we will send your fingers to Pakistan.’





Khairat Mohammad with Tahira Sultana on his visit to Bhaderwah in 2015.

That fall, another letter reached Bhaderwah. Surprisingly that came from Srinagar. The sender was Rasa Javidani's elder son, Khairat Mohammad Ibni Rasa. He was with Umar Ud Din in Jammu related to studies. But somehow, he had managed to reach Srinagar amid slaughter.

"Khairat knew my father's fate," Tahira said without reading the third letter, "yet he never told it to my distressed mother." He migrated to Pakistan, later did his PhD in Chemistry from Brown University and rose to become a scientist and an expert of 22 languages. "Accompanied by General Zia Ul Haq till Amritsar border," Tahira said, "Khairat returned to Bhaderwah in 1979 when his father Rasa Javidani was on his deathbed." After his father's demise, he returned to Pakistan where he eventually rose to become Vice-Chancellor of three universities. He later visited Jammu and Bhaderwah in 2013.



Prof Malik Umar Ud Din.

Amid Khairat silence and the professor's reluctance to return home from the city of carnage during 1947 fall, his young bride was driving herself crazy. She was overtaken by a proverbial woe — the one that never lets a person to live despite being alive. In fact, the professor's prolonged disappearance was disturbing everyone—until a dead presumed man returned to Bhaderwah to everyone's shock at the fag-end of 1947. The man introduced himself as the professor's acquaintance.

"On Nov 5, 1947, the man told my family," Tahira said, "Hari Singh's forces assembled Muslims at police lines at Jogi Gate for shipping them to Pakistan." The

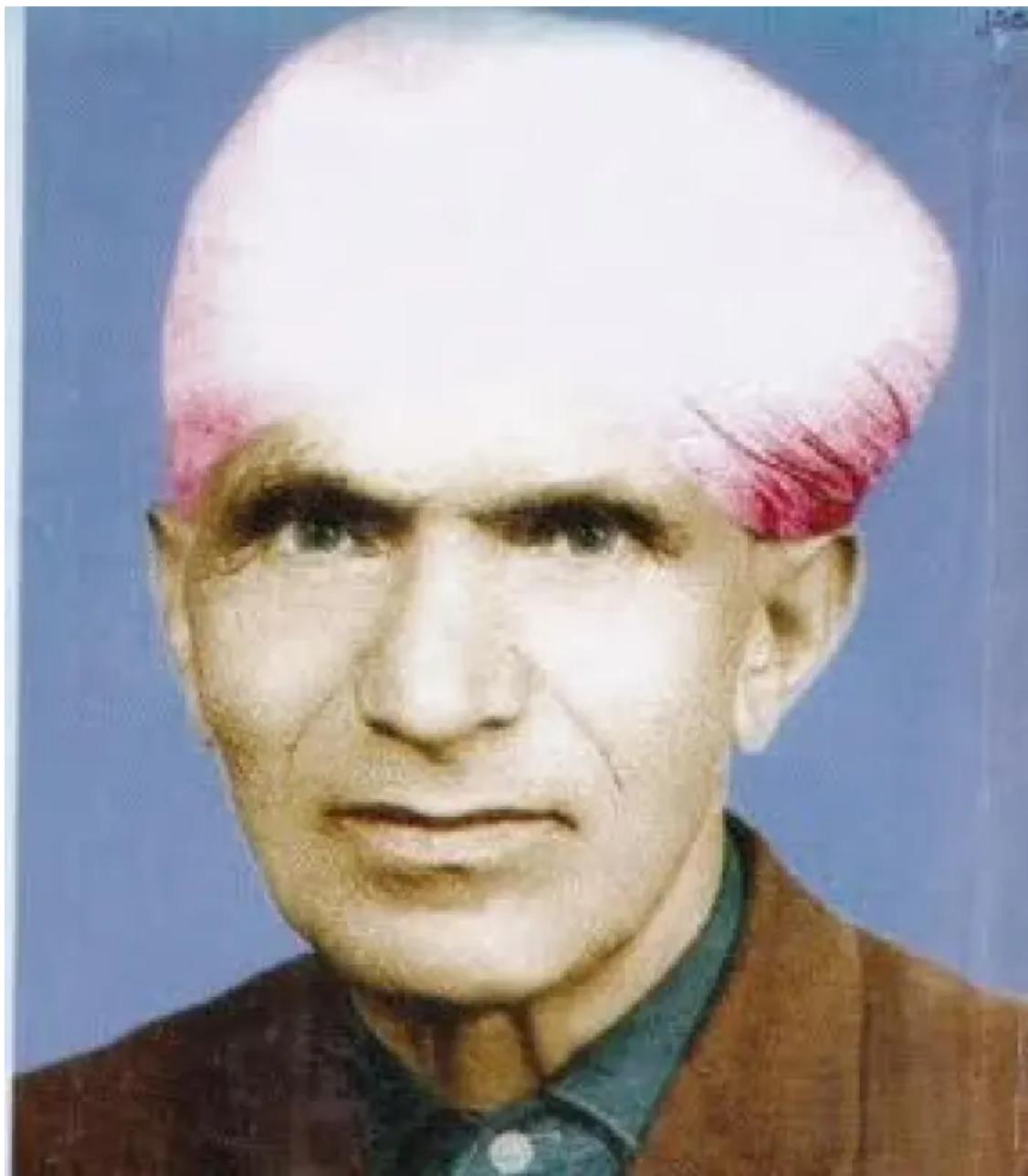
frightened Muslims were huddled in 50 lorries and “culled like chickens” by the Dogra army and armed goons.

A day before that carnage, the man had heard whispers of a Jammu meeting between Hari Singh, Indian Home Minister Vallabhbai Patel, Defence Minister Sardar Baldev Singh and Maharaja of Patiala.

On Nov 6, the man along with Abdul Aziz Bhat, his family and Prof Umar Ud Din left for Sialkot in a big caravan. Escorted by army, they were instead taken to Samba where armed gangs attacked them, the man told the family. “Within minutes,” he said, “700 people were killed in an organised carnage.” Among the slain was Aziz’s toddler daughter, Masooda, shot dead in his lap.

Amid the slaughter, Prof Umar Ud Din was seen addressing a group of wailing Muslim women assembled near a water canal.

“The man who pretended dead among heap of corpses described my father as the fiery man,” Tahira who learned about the visitor from her family said. “My father had told those Muslim women: ‘Protect your honour—even if you have to jump into the river.’ ” But shortly, the Persian professor came under a vicious attack from his own student. He had been stabbed from his back. With that blow, the professor forever vanished in Samba’s heap of corpses.



Rasa Javidani.

Years later, Rasa Javidani wrote a *ghazal*, sounding like an elegy to his departed brother-in-law: *Could he but read the Destiny's command / All this is not in man's grasp.*

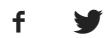
But what happened to his young bride?

“Eventually, she was forced to remarry,” Tahira said. “She was too young to be allowed to get consumed by the grief of my father’s death.”

On that sad note, she ended the story.

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