

JAMMU MASSACRE OF 1947 – AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED STORY OF HORROR

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The Jammu Massacre of 1947 was a harrowing event in the history of the subcontinent, characterized by widespread violence, displacement, and killing of Kashmiri Muslims. The genocide of the Muslims of the State of Jammu and Kashmir had started in 1947 when some 200,000¹ Muslims were killed mercilessly by the forces of Maharaja Hari Singh aided by right-wing Hindu groups and Sikhs (though a report published by *The Times* on 10 August 1948 had put the figure as 237,000). Since then, the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) have witnessed death as closely and as frequently as people anywhere under occupation and tyranny would see.

This gory episode, commonly referred to as “Jammu Massacre”, is one of the darkest parts of the history of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Traditionally, Poonch and Mirpur districts of Jammu region had been recruiting ground for the British army. Following the World War II, thousands of soldiers belonging to Poonch and Mirpur returned to their native land. The Maharaja, who already was losing grip on his rule, not only did not accept them in his army but also heavy taxes imposed by him were a source of great concern for the returning soldiers. By early 1947, the people of Poonch district had launched ‘no tax’ campaign. To counter this revolt and maintain his stranglehold, the Maharaja also strengthened his army by inducting more Hindus and Sikhs. He also ordered all

¹ Horace Alexander, “INDIA-PAKISTAN-I,” *The Spectator*, January 16, 1948, sec. Archive, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/16th-january-1948/6/india-pakistan-i>.

Muslim subjects to surrender their weapons – the very weapons that later appeared in the hands of the Maharaja's army. As the subcontinent was divided into two independent states, communal violence broke out. This was the time when many Hindus and Sikhs had migrated to Jammu from West Punjab that had become part of Pakistan. As a result, the non-communal revolt launched by Muslims in Poonch assumed communal character. Families were torn apart, and countless people became refugees in their own homeland. Many reports documented gruesome incidents, including mass killings, abduction, rape, and forced conversions of Muslims.

Between October and November 1947, a catastrophe had befallen the Muslims of Jammu district as the Dogra army, aided by *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)*, and extremist Hindus and Sikhs went on a killing spree. Ved Bhasin, a journalist and an eyewitness of the events that unfolded in Jammu while recounting the horrors told how Sikhs *“even paraded the Jammu streets with their naked swords.”*² Victoria Schofield in her book quoted Ian Stephens who was the editor of the Statesman (Calcutta) as saying: *“Unlike every part of the State, Hindus and Sikhs slightly outnumbered Muslims, and within a period of about 11 weeks, starting in August, systematic savageriespractically eliminated the entire Muslim element in the population, amounting to 500,000 people. About 200,000 just disappeared, remaining untraceable having presumably been butchered or died from epidemic or exposure. The rest fled to West Punjab”*.³

Christopher Snedden argues that besides communal rivalry, one motive for this savagery against Muslims could be to loot, pillage and accrue booty, which for many was once in a lifetime opportunity at the time of the partition. While another motive, which many Muslims at the time had strongly believed, was that this massacre was pre-planned to eliminate Muslims from the entire Jammu and Kashmir region. Snedden refers to the Government of Azad Kashmir Publication wherein it was stated that the Maharaja had a plan to massacre all Muslims not only because of their pro-Pakistan leanings but also because Sikhs from Western Punjab were invited to make Jammu and Kashmir their new home. Snedden believes that such a plan could have been a possibility in Jammu's four eastern regions where Muslims were in minority (whereas Hindus and Sikhs were in minority in three Western districts). Since the Muslim minority areas were located east of the Chenab River, the

² Sankara Narayana, “The Untold Story of Jammu Massacre,” Clarion India, February 18, 2023, <https://clarionindia.net/the-untold-story-of-jammu-massacre/>.

³ Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir IN CONFLICT- India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003). P. 43

Hindus and Sikhs might have been aiming for partition of Jammu along this line. Hence, the massacre was actually aimed at changing the religious demography of the region.⁴

Whatever happened in Jammu district between October and November 1947 is certainly not a myth or figment of anyone's imagination. Not only eminent scholars and historians like Alastair Lamb and Victoria Schofield have written about this massacre in their works but it can also be authenticated from the statements of Mahatma Gandhi himself. Gandhi was quoted as saying :*"You see Sheikh Abdullah with me [who] although a pukka Muslim, has won the hearts of both [Hindus and Sikhs] by making them forget that there is any difference between the three [communities]. Even though in Jammu recently the Muslims were killed by the Hindus and the Sikhs, he went to Jammu and invited the evil doers to forget the past"* at a prayer meeting in November 1947. ⁵

There are still some survivors of this massacre who have vivid memories of how their family members were lost to this frenzy. In an interview to a TV channel, Mr. Amanullah Khan Naqshbandi who was a small kid at the time narrated the harrowing story of how Muslim community and political leaders were convinced to gather Muslims to the parade ground of Jammu along with their families to be transported to Pakistan. The first convoy that left for Pakistan on November 5, 1947, was looted and its members massacred; so was the second convoy in which Mr. Naqshbandi was also present along with his mother and sisters. The buses after taking wrong turn stopped at a spot and suddenly attackers from nearby bushes came out holding swords and knives in their hands and started killing Muslims. Mr. Naqshbandi who was miraculously saved lost 17 family members on that fateful day. ⁶

Not only Muslims were targeted within the Jammu region but on a number of occasions, these dark forces had actually crossed into Pakistan's territory and killed people. In one village, dead bodies of 1,700 men, women and children could be seen from the other side that was under Indian control. Pakistan by that time was also taking care of around 100,000 refugees who had crossed over to Sialkot to save their lives.⁷ Alastair Lamb lamented that these *"well documented acts of Jammu & Kashmir State 'aggression' on its territory which Pakistan has signally failed to exploit in its arguments concerning the rights and wrongs of the Kashmir situation"*.⁸

⁴ Christopher Snedden, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Pp. 48-49.

⁵ A.G Noorani, "WHY JAMMU ERUPTS," *Frontline*, September 25, 2008, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/article30197742.ece>.

⁶ "Amanullah Khan's Heart Wrenching Account of the Jammu Massacre of 1947 | News Wire | Indus News," November 6, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAp9Q0rk_pk.

⁷ Alastair Lamb, *BIRTH OF A TRAGEDY KASHMIR 1947* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1994). P. 69.

⁸ Alastair Lamb.

It is also believed that the efforts to change the demography of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which the current RSS-BJP dispensation of India is pursuing, had actually started with Jammu massacre as Muslims who constituted 61 percent of the population became a minority following the 1947 massacre and mass migration to Azad Kashmir ⁹.

It is extremely unfortunate that systematic killing of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Jammu was lost in the mists of time. Nonetheless, this is too important and too tragic an event in the history of Jammu and Kashmir to be overlooked.

In this connection, historians, researchers, and area specialists need to step up and remind the world community of this huge human tragedy that has seemingly been forgotten. Accounts of survivors like Mr. Amanullah Khan Naqshbandi must be preserved for posterity. World bodies like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and United Nations as well as international human rights bodies have the obligation to take cognizance of this massacre, including its tragically massive human toll as well as its fateful consequences for the demographic structure of Jammu and the entire state for that matter.

The current crisis in the Middle East has showed the horrendous indifference and double standards of the governments that project themselves as champions of human rights. But on the other hand, growing public support for Palestinian people across countries and regions is encouraging. Pakistan, too, must seek to create increased awareness regarding the gross and systematic human rights abuses and potential genocide of the Kashmiri people among people of Western countries who in turn can exert pressure on their respective governments. Highlighting the Jammu massacre, the continuity in Indian policy and designs of turning the Muslim majority into a minority in their own homeland can be underscored. In line with *yum-e-yakjehti Kashmir* (February 5), *yum-e- istehsal* (August 5), and Kashmir Black Day (October 27), Government of Pakistan should also mark *yum-e-shuada Jammu* (November 6) on national level to not only pay respects to the martyrs of this tragic event but also highlight the plight of the Kashmiri people who have been braving an onslaught not just on their land but also on their religious and distinct cultural identity for the past 76 years.

⁹ Saeed Naqvi, "The Killing Fields of Jammu: How Muslims Become a Minority in the Region," Scroll.in (<https://scroll.in>, July 10, 2016), <http://scroll.in/article/811468/the-killing-fields-of-jammu-when-it-was-muslims-who-were-eliminated>.