

# The Kathua rape case has brought up disturbing memories of Jammu's history



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File photo from Kathua rape protest in New Delhi | Ravi Choudhary/PTI

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**In all the din about the Kathua rape outcry, a warning masquerading as a historical reminder has gone largely unnoticed.**

**B** JP leader and former Jammu and Kashmir minister Lal Singh, a supporter of the Hindu Ekta Manch, had addressed a delegation of the Gujjar Muslims of the Jammu area by saying: “*O Gujjar, 1947 pulligaya hai tase ge* (O Gujjar! Have you forgotten 1947)?”

It's intriguing that the reference to the disturbing events of 1947 **re-emerged** in the middle of the protests against the inhuman rape of an innocent child in Kathua.

Later, Lal Singh changed his statement and said he was referring to how temperature had gone too high in 1947. But what were these events that his veiled dog-whistle was referring to?

It's a forgotten chapter of the Partition era, involving the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in the Jammu area, which has been deliberately erased from the history books and collective memory.

It was the month of October 1947. Five days before the Pakistani raiders attacked and nine days before the Indian Army intervened in Kashmir, there was a mass massacre of Muslims in the Jammu region. Back then, Jammu was a Muslim majority region



— 61 per cent of the population practiced Islam. After the massacre and mass migration, Muslims were reduced to only 34 per cent of the population.

Sheikh Abdullah was the leader of Jammu and Kashmir, widely seen as a rebel against the monarchy of Raja Hari Singh, the Dogra king. Abdullah had even blamed Hari Singh for engineering the massacre.

In his autobiography, '*The Flames of the Chinar*', Abdullah writes: "Upon reaching Jammu, Maharani Tara Devi and he (Singh) distributed arms among communal Hindus and RSS volunteers. The Muslims of Jammu were assured of a safe conduct to Pakistan but were massacred at a place called Saubha. No doubt these killings were organised by the Maharaja, his bigoted wife and (then prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir) Mehr Chand Mahajan."

In the eyes of the Hindutva forces at that time, the Raja was a symbol of Hinduism, and Kashmir was a Hindu state. In fact, Sardar Patel had gone to the extent of saying that Jammu and Kashmir was a Hindu state with Muslim surroundings, which was quite baffling.

According to the 1941 census, 77 per cent of Jammu and Kashmir's populace were Muslims. An editorial in the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* on the 8 November 1947 said Kashmir was a seat of Hindu learning for thousands of years, and at every step, there were signs of sacred Hindu places. This editorial had also **hinted** at the demographic adjustment to retrieve Kashmir from Muslims.

On the eve of the Pakistani attack, the Raja and Hindutva warriors thought it prudent to retrieve at least Jammu from the clutches of the Muslim invaders. It was also thought that if India had to conduct a plebiscite, at least Jammu would decide to stay with India if its population was majorly Hindu.

It is not a coincidence that the RSS chief in those days, M.S. Golwalkar, met Raja Hari Singh twice. It is also true that Sardar Patel, the home minister and deputy Prime Minister, had requested Golwalkar to convince the Raja to merge Jammu and Kashmir with India.

The massacre would have never come to the notice of the world had journalists like Ved Bhasin not reported it. He has presented a paper on this issue in 2003 at Jammu University.

Senior journalist Saeed Naqvi quoted Bhasin his book, '*Being the Other*', as saying: "The tension increased with the large number of Hindus and Sikhs migrating to the state from Punjab and NWFP and even now from the areas under the Pakistan's control... the Maharaja's administration had not only asked all Muslim to surrender their arms but also demobilised the large number of Muslims soldiers in Dogra army and police officials whose loyalty is suspected. Bhasin reports large-scale killing of the Muslims in Udhampur and Bhadravah area... According to Bhasin, the RSS played a key role in these killings, aided by armed Sikh refugees ... Bhasin alleged ... Maharaja's



administration helped and even armed the communal marauders ... terrible carnage took place when Muslims in Talab Khatikan area were asked to surrender. They were shifted to the police lines at Jogi gate ... instead of providing them security, the administration encouraged them to go to Pakistan for safety. The first batch of several thousand of these Muslims were loaded in about sixty lorries to take them to Sialkot ... the vehicle were escorted by troops but when they reached near Chattha on Jammu Sialkot road in the outskirts of the city a large number of armed RSS men and Sikh refugees were positioned there. They were pulled of the vehicles and killed mercilessly with soldiers either joining them or looking idle spectators.”

Bhasin said this carnage was repeated again the next day. The world found out when some fled to Sialkot and narrated the incidents.

The Indian leadership got wind of it. Mahatma Gandhi was furious. He rebuked Sheikh Abdullah for not asking for the Raja's powers to be withdrawn. There was even an argument between Sheikh Abdullah and Sardar Patel on this issue. Nehru wrote about it to Patel.

But somehow, this incident was **never highlighted or discussed later**. It was deliberately forgotten. But people in Jammu and Kashmir are aware of it.

*Ashutosh is a spokesperson for the Aam Aadmi Party.*

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