

*Forgotten Atrocities:
Memoirs of a Survivor of the
1947 Partition of India*

Bal K. Gupta

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Reviews from Readers:

I am also a survivor of the Alibeg Prison described in the book *Forgotten Atrocities* by Bal K. Gupta. The author has put hard labor in recasting his memories and the atrocities suffered by him and his fellow Mirpur Hindus and Sikhs during the 1947 partition of India. It is heartrending to read about events faced by the author and thousands of Mirpuris during the 1947 aggression of Jammu and Kashmir by the Pathans tribesmen supported by the Pakistani forces. It is perhaps the only recorded history of the facts about the fall of Mirpur town and the massacre of thousands of innocent Hindus and Sikhs at Mirpur, and other places on way to Alibeg. It will be appreciable if the book is added to the shelves of the libraries all over the world. It is hoped that the authorities handling the government and private libraries will give due consideration to this suggestion in the public interest.

R. C. Gupta, Jammu (India)

Partition of India is a painful subject with which everyone on both sides of the border is familiar with. The atrocities and tragedies committed by both sides during the mass-migration are remembered today and still bring tears to the eyes of many. Another unfortunate page in the history that is well known is the forced exile of Kashmiri Pandits and their current plight. However, in between these events is one that is seldom mentioned; the story of Kashmiri Hindus and Sikhs who were trapped in the area now known as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

The book is filled with stories the author collected during his time in Alibeg, through relatives and by contacting fellow survivors. The stories these people relate show the ability of mankind to hate for no reason. Certain points in the book make your hair stand on end and you have to take a momentary pause before continuing. However, the fact that these people lived full and happy lives after such ordeal illustrates the strength of human spirit. Books like this should be read to reiterate how easily atrocities can be committed if people do not understand and identify with others in their communities.

Ankit Tiwari, Atlanta (USA)

I have the honor and pleasure of having the author as a neighbor and friend. During several of our many valued conversations he has mentioned some of his childhood experiences but until I read the book I had no idea the degree to which he had suffered and the things he saw and endured as a child. I have always considered myself a student of history yet had no idea that this horrible tragedy had even occurred!! This book should be required reading for anyone dealing with present day Pakistan and their 'political' system.

Charles Martin, Auckland (New Zealand)

I must say that it is a beautifully written book which made me emotional on various occasions knowing how our elder generation suffered when they were so young. This eyewitness account must be read by the young generation especially the kin of those who suffered so as to know how tough their elders were but still they brought up all of us so well keeping us encapsulated from what they had been through.

Abha Mahajan (Sharma), Jammu (India)

As a student of German and the World War II era, I was appalled to hear more stories that, as Bal Gupta states, are forgotten atrocities. Why we are never taught about the turmoil these people have endured, why we are shielded from the horror these families were privy to, I will never know. Though it is an emotionally difficult read as a daughter and mother, though it is my own family by marriage that has experienced such horror, I would recommend it to anyone. You will understand a culture, a religion, and feel for the humans that endured such inhumanity. This is a tale that will teach tolerance, and should be brought to the attention of the world who does not know anything beyond the Holocaust.

Elizabeth K., Virginia (USA)

Lord Krishna in Bhagwad Gita,

Chapter 2, Verse 47:

*"karmanya eva adhikars te
ma phalesu kadachna
ma karma phal hateur bhur
ma te sangostv akarmani"*

“You have to perform your duty without expectation of the fruits.
[Only Lord Krishna decides the results.] Never consider yourself the
cause of the results and never shirk from your duties
[responsibilities].”

Published by:

Bal K. Gupta

Special Thanks

To my wife Kusum, daughter Jyoti, and son Rajesh who patiently listened to my experience many times. They provided me with moral support and encouraged me to write down my experiences both impartially and without malice for the benefit of humanity.

Dedications

To my mother, the late Padma Devi and, my uncle, the late Mukand Lal.

To the 20,000 Hindus and Sikhs, men, women, and children killed or kidnapped in Mirpur, Kas Guma, Thathal and Alibeg.

To the International Committee of the Red Cross for liberating me and the 1,600 survivors from the Alibeg prison.

Introduction

Much has been written about the Partition of India, the end of British rule and influence in the subcontinent, the political events that led up to Partition, the roles of leaders such as Mountbatten, Nehru, Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi, and the tragic events that resulted. Although the basic events of August 15 and 16, 1947-- the division of the subcontinent into a Muslim majority Pakistan and a Hindu majority India and the religious violence and mass relocation of people-- are well known, many of the younger generation of Indian and Pakistani families and most westerners do not realize what really happened during those days, weeks and months of unfathomable chaos, violence and dislocation. Or how unexpected they were. The scars of that chaos are one of the tragic legacies of Partition.

In Forgotten Atrocities: Memoirs of a Survivor of the 1947 Partition of India, Bal Gupta offers us a first-hand recounting of his own experiences as a child during the Partition, the tragic violence that destroyed his beloved home town of Mirpur and of the chaotic flight, massacre of Hindus and Sikhs by Pakistani soldiers and the cruel and wretched conditions of the Alibeg Prison where he and many of his family were held and where many were murdered or died of starvation and disease.

Forgotten Atrocities is a well-researched work of non-fiction and Mr. Gupta does a good job of explaining the national and local political, social and religious context leading up to, during and following the Partition. More importantly, he did extensive research of the events and people impacted in and around the tragedies of Mirpur City and Alibeg Prison. This research was largely done through personal interviews with survivors. Because many of them are now dead or aging, Mr. Gupta has done us all a tremendous service for recording what would have been lost forever.

But the most interesting and compelling parts of *Forgotten Atrocities* are those personal memories that Mr. Gupta records for us. Unlike Khushwant Singh's highly acclaimed novel, *Train to Pakistan*, or Collins and Lapierre's quasi-non-fictional work, *Freedom at Midnight*,

Mr. Gupta's *Forgotten Atrocities* is a non-fictional recounting by someone who lived through the chaos and saw first-hand the events that are described. As a result, the reader comes away with a more profound understanding of the enormity of suffering and feeling of empathy for the millions who suffered.

But to his credit, Mr. Gupta does not leave us feeling bitter. He recounts his life subsequent to his release from Alibeg Prison up until the present time, including his decision to move the family to the U.S. and seeing his daughter graduate from Harvard and his son from Yale and Stanford medical school. He also acknowledges that during Partition atrocities were also committed by Hindus and Sikhs against Muslims. He makes a point of recounting examples of kindness and heroism by Muslims towards Hindus and Sikhs and of Hindus and Sikhs towards Muslims, including the author's own heroism in hiding Muslim colleagues years later during religious riots. In the author's own words, "This only strengthens my belief that man is not always good or bad – he is mostly good and becomes bad during certain occasions."

A reader would be mistaken not to read the Sections II and III of *Forgotten Atrocities*. They contain a fascinating summary of other eyewitness accounts as well as maps, pictures and the author's extended family tree. The family tree and pictures record the devastation of Partition on the author's extended family so graphically, that even having read the book, I was sobered afresh. By extrapolation of the author's family story to the many millions of families directly affected by Partition, the reader comes away with an understanding of the scope and scale of the very real suffering and loss that individuals and families experienced as a result of Partition.

Thomas J. Peters IV, Esq.

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Preface

The world knows about Auschwitz, the ethnic cleansing in Serbia, the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the slaughter of Tutsis in Rwanda, and the genocide in Darfur, but there is no written, eyewitness account of the events that took place between 1947 and 1948 in the small town of Alibeg in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). I witnessed the atrocities committed by Pakistani soldiers and Pathans [Muslim tribesmen of the North West Frontier Province and borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan], which ultimately led to the murder of approximately twenty thousand innocent Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur. As a ten-year-old child, I—along with five thousand Hindus and Sikhs—was held prisoner in the Alibeg prison. On March 16, 1948, only about sixteen hundred prisoners walked out from the Alibeg prison alive. I was one of them. Most of the survivors of the Alibeg prison have died in the past sixty years. As one of its few survivors still alive, I feel compelled to express my accounts and document the events I witnessed.

On August 15, 1947, British rulers partitioned India into two separate countries, India and Pakistan. In 1971, Pakistan was further divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh. These partitions were based on religion, with the intent of India existing as a Hindu majority country and Pakistan as a Muslim majority country. However, one Muslim majority state, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), bordered both India and Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir's Hindu ruler wanted the state to remain independent, rather than join either India or Pakistan. In an attempt to annex Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan because of its Muslim majority, Pathan (also called Pushtoon or Pakhtoon) mercenaries invaded the state with the full support of the Pakistan army.

Mirpur City (commonly known as Mirpur) was one of many small cities in Jammu and Kashmir that lay directly on the border of India and Pakistan. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims had lived peacefully with one another for centuries in Mirpur, but on November 25, 1947, the Pakistani invasion forced the Hindu and Sikh populations to flee towards India. The migration was supposed to be an orderly event overseen by the (Hindu) Jammu and Kashmir army. However, improper planning by military officers and civil administrators resulted

in the abandonment of Mirpur before the evacuation was complete; thus, leaving Mirpur's remaining Hindu and Sikh populations at the mercy of the advancing Pakistani Army and heavily armed Pathans.

By November 25, 1947, there were nearly twenty five thousand Hindus and Sikhs living in Mirpur. During the city's capture, close to twenty five hundred were killed in the infernos that erupted due to Pakistani artillery fire. Another twenty five hundred escaped with the retreating Jammu and Kashmir army. The remaining twenty thousand were arrested by the invading Pakistani army and the Pathans, and marched in a procession towards Alibeg. Along the way, the Pakistanis and Pathans killed about ten thousand of the captured Hindu and Sikh men and kidnapped over five thousand girls and young women. About five thousand Hindus and Sikhs who survived the twenty-mile trek by foot to Alibeg were quickly imprisoned.

The Alibeg prison, which was located about two miles from Pakistan's border, was originally a large Sikh temple (*Gurudwara*) that was converted into a prison by the Pakistani army to retain Hindu and Sikhs. It was outrageous that a Sikh holy shrine was converted into a human slaughterhouse. In the first twenty days, between fifty and one hundred young men were taken out of the prison and killed by guns, swords, or axes every night. By the end of December, the Pakistani soldiers had murdered about two thousand Hindu and Sikh young men. More than one thousand sick prisoners, particularly children and the elderly died of illness, food poisoning, or malnutrition. On average, the death rate was between fifteen to twenty prisoners per day that lasted about fifty days, until January 1948, when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) arrived at the Alibeg prison and helped stop the killing. In March 1948, the ICRC liberated Alibeg's surviving population of sixteen hundred individuals.

Of Mirpur's original Hindu and Sikh population (about twenty-five thousand people), only about five thousand survived the Pakistani invasion. The survivors included the sixteen hundred Hindus and Sikhs from the Alibeg prison, who were liberated by the ICRC in 1948. From 1948 to 1954, the ICRC also liberated about another one thousand kidnapped women. Approximately twenty-five hundred Hindus and Sikhs safely reached Jhangar (India) along with the retreating Jammu and Kashmir army.

What took place in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir was the genocide of Hindus and Sikhs. As a result of the invasion, generations of Hindus and Sikhs disappeared—their family histories ended abruptly. My

grandmother Kartar Devi, my paternal uncle Mohanlal Gupta, and my maternal great-grandfather Lalman Shah were some of those who died in the burning infernos of Mirpur. My mother, who was disabled, could not leave and was interned in a camp near Mirpur. About a dozen of my aunts were kidnapped from the Mirpur courthouse, Alibeg and Thathal. My wife's grandmother Diwan Devi Gupta and aunt were among those killed during the forced march of prisoners towards Alibeg. My wife's cousin, Shesh Gupta, was one of the girls kidnapped by the Pathans. She was likely taken to the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan or Afghanistan and her fate is unknown to this day. My mother's uncles Lal Chand Dhangeryal, Chander Parkash Dhangeryal, Dina Nath Dhangeryal, Khemchand Bhagotra and her cousins Amar Nath Dhangeryal and Malik Shah Bhagotra, were killed. Her cousin, Purshottam Dhangeryal's wife and his mother Raj Rani Dhangeryal were killed in incessant firings by the Pathans. Many of my cousins who were small children died of shock, the lack of medicines, and malnutrition in the Alibeg prison.

With a mixture of hard work, luck, and God's help, I came to the United States in 1971. I was able to start a family here with my wonderful wife Kusum and raise two successful children. Unfortunately, the majority of the Hindus and Sikhs who were forced into the Alibeg prison did not enjoy such a fate. I feel that God had a purpose in saving me from the atrocities I witnessed as a child and, for many years, I thought about writing a book about my experience. After my retirement from the Georgia State government on December 1, 2004, I began writing about my memories of the Alibeg prison. You will find my eyewitness account of the Mirpur holocaust in this book. While writing this book in 2006, 2007 and 2011, I interviewed Dr. Ved Suri, Dr. Karam Veer Gupta, Mr. Ramesh Gupta, Dr. Suresh Chander, Mr. R.K. Bhagotra, Mr. K.L. Bhagotra, Mr. Pradyuman Dhangeryal, Dr. Kranti Loomba in Jammu, New Delhi (India), London (UK), Chicago (USA). They are either survivors of Alibeg Prison or Mirpur.

This book covers only part of the tragic reality that unfolded in the state of J&K preceding and following the partition of British India and is not aimed against any person or religion. It should be seen in the broader context of situation prevailing after the partition of British India.

Prologue

India

Many great world religions (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism) originated in India and these religions (along with Islam and Christianity) are still practiced all over the country. The majority of Indians (85 percent) are Hindu. Only about two percent of Muslims in India are the descendants of foreigners and the remaining majority are descendants of Hindus who converted to Islam from the 8th century A.D. onwards. Buddhism and Jainism are reformist offshoots of Hinduism started in the 5th century B.C. Sikhism¹ came into existence in the 15th century A.D. as a blend of Hinduism and Sufi Islam. In the 1st century A.D., Apostle Thomas brought Christianity to south India via the Roman trade route that ran along the Arabian Sea. His followers are known as *Mar Thoma* Christians and are part of the Catholic Church. After the 16th century A.D., the Portuguese, French, and British spread Christianity into other parts of India. Legend has it that Jesus studied at Hindu and Buddhist universities in some of India's holiest cities. India also has a small population of Jews and Parsis (Zoroastrians).

The British arrived in India during the 16th century A.D., defeated the Muslim and Hindu kings by 1757, and ruled India until its independence in 1947. Initially, the British ruled India with an autocratic style by introducing the English language and the British education system to its new colony. When the British permitted establishment of political parties, Indian patriots resorted to countless strikes and non-cooperation movements that weakened the British regime politically and economically. In retribution, the British hanged revolutionaries, exiled firebrand leaders, and imprisoned nationalists and pacifists. Eventually, financial losses from World War II forced Britain to grant India its independence in 1947.

¹ Sikhism is one of India's newest religions and, although it has its philosophical base in the Hindu scriptures, it does not believe in idol worship nor does it practice the Hindu caste system. Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book for Sikhs.

On August 15, 1947, the British divided India into two separate nations: India and Pakistan. India opted to be a secular democracy and Pakistan became an Islamic state. Mahatma Gandhi (the father of the Indian nation and a liberal Hindu leader) and Mohammed Ali (M.A.) Jinnah (the father of the Pakistan nation and a westernized liberal Muslim) both announced that India and Pakistan should not transfer their minority populations across borders based on religion. Despite their wishes, neither could stop the ethnic cleansing of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims that was to follow. If the Indian leaders had agreed to power sharing, through the formation of a coalition government of the Indian National Congress and the Indian Muslim League, they could have avoided partitioning India and the resulting bloodshed.²

Following the partition of British India, Pakistan's Muslims drove nearly ten million Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan into India. The sudden influx of such a large number of refugees placed tremendous stress on India's leadership. Even the Indian Red Cross was not in a position to handle the massive refugee influx. Pakistan's invasion of Jammu and Kashmir also added about another one million Hindu and Sikh refugees. Ironically, many of India's old guard leaders died soon after India gained independence. On January 30, 1948, a Hindu extremist named Nathuram Godse assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. Soon after, Sardar Patel, India's deputy prime minister, died of heart disease. Only Pandit Nehru, India's prime minister, lived long enough to see the outcome of India's freedom. Nehru ruled India until his death in 1964.

Pakistan

The British Empire followed a policy of “divide and rule” when dealing with their subjects. With India and Pakistan, religion was an easy way to widen the gap between the two powers. Before the British left India, the Indian Muslim League leaders, M.A. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, and Indian National Congress leaders, Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel, could not agree to a power sharing arrangement. Mahatma Gandhi made many attempts to dissuade them from partitioning India but was unsuccessful. The British partitioned India and created the Islamic state, Pakistan, and a secular India.³

² Almost sixty years later in 2005, the same Indian National Congress and Indian Muslim League became coalition partners in India.

³ However, Pakistanis celebrate August 14 as their Independence Day.

At the time of the partition, the total population of undivided India was four hundred million. Around three hundred million (including about 15 percent being Muslims) were supposed to be part of secular India and one hundred million (including about 20 percent being Hindus and Sikhs) were part of Islamic Pakistan. The entire transfer of the Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim populations between Pakistan and India reached about fifteen million—the largest forced migration in the history of humanity.

Pakistan was comprised of five Muslim majority provinces: West Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and East Bengal. NWFP was inhabited by Muslim warriors called Pathans (also known as Pushtoons or Pakhtoons). The Pakistan Army would later recruit Pathans as mercenaries for the invasion of Jammu and Kashmir.

East Bengal (*i.e.* East Pakistan) was separated from West Pakistan by 1,200 miles of Indian territory. Pakistanis of one wing had to travel over 2,000 miles of sea route to get to the other end. In 1971, East Pakistan rebelled against West Pakistan, forming the independent country of the Republic of Bangladesh.

In 1948, soon after the formation of Pakistan, M.A. Jinnah died of tuberculosis. In 1951, a Muslim named Sed Akbar assassinated Liaquat Ali Khan who was Pakistan's prime minister. Democracy could never gain a foothold in Pakistan and, in 1958, a military dictatorship took over. This dictatorship governed Pakistan for about thirty years.

Partition and Holocaust of 1947

As August 15, 1947, approached, the Hindus and Sikhs became bitter enemies with the Muslims and vice versa. Each community burnt the houses of the other and slaughtered their inhabitants without mercy. The only neutral forces available to protect the innocents were the Indian and Pakistani armies who were still under the command of British generals. In many cases, the police and civil authorities looked the other way as Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs looted and slaughtered one another. Entire families were murdered. Women were raped in front of their fathers and brothers—all at the hands of religious fanaticism. In some cases, the fanatics chopped off women's breasts and paraded the naked women in processions.

The Muslim population in undivided India was about one hundred million. Fifty million Muslims chose to stay in India because

of its secular constitution and the remaining fifty million Muslims chose Islamic Pakistan. The most affected provinces of undivided India were Punjab and Bengal because each province had an equal population of Hindus and Sikhs (50 percent) versus Muslims (50 percent).⁴ Punjab was in western India and Bengal was in eastern India. The British divided these provinces between India and Pakistan based on religion: East Punjab went to India with its Hindu and Sikh majority; and West Punjab, with its Muslim majority, went to Pakistan; East Bengal went to Pakistan; and, West Bengal to India.

As per Wikipedia “The partition of the former British India displaced up to 12.5 million people. Estimates of loss of life vary from several hundred thousand to a million. India emerged as a secular nation with a Hindu majority population and a large Muslim minority while Pakistan was established as an Islamic republic with an overwhelming Muslim majority population. Approximately, 7.23 million Muslims from India moved to Pakistan and 7.25 million Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan moved to India”

After the partition, the Muslims in West Punjab (Pakistan) accomplished the complete ethnic cleansing of Hindus and Sikhs. Similarly, the Hindus and Sikhs of East Punjab (India) cleansed its entire Muslim population. The majority of fifty million Muslims in the rest of India chose to stay in secular India. However, many Muslims of Northern and Central India migrated to Karachi, Pakistan, and are called *mohajirs* (refugees).

The large scale killing and mass migration between India and Pakistan are depicted in famous English movies, such as *Gandhi*, *Freedom at Midnight*, *Nine Hours to Rama*, and Hindi movies such as *Khamosh Pani*, *Pinjar*, *Gadar*, *Hey Ram*, *Train to Pakistan*, *Chhaila*, *Lahore*, and *Nastik*. Many writers wrote books and novels in English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali on this subject. Some of the English books include *Freedom at Midnight* by Dominique Lapierre, *India Wins Freedom* by Maulana Azad, *Looking Back* by M.C. Mahajan, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *History of India* by Stanley Wolpert, *Kashmir 1947* by Krishna Mehta, and *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* by Husain Haqqani. These

⁴ Jammu and Kashmir (also known as J&K or Kashmir) was comprised of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Christians, but its majority population was Muslim (60 percent).

films and books can also provide more background on the partition of India and the ensuing Muslim and Hindu conflict.

Pakistani Invasion of Jammu and Kashmir

In 1947, 525 autonomous princely states existed in British India. Each state had its own ruler—a *Raja* (king), a *Maharajah* (great king), or a *Nawab* (Muslim king)—and kept its internal affairs independent. The British governed all of the states' foreign affairs, defense, and railway and postal systems.

On August 15, 1947, the British relinquished their power in India to two political parties—the Indian National Congress in India and the Muslim League in Pakistan. At that time, a wide net of indigenous states spanned the length and breadth of India. According to the terms of the *Instrument of Accession*⁵, the rulers of these states had the prerogative to accede to either India or Pakistan. The British advised the rulers to consider two factors: the will of the people and geographical contiguity.

For the most part, the accession did not pose any problem. Almost all of the princely states lying within the boundary of India joined India and those closer to Pakistan joined Pakistan. However, Jammu and Kashmir was an exception. Jammu and Kashmir was the largest princely state and because it was located in the Himalayas, it was contiguous to both countries. Within the state, opinions differed about which country's policy to adopt. The majority of the Muslim population (60 percent) wanted Jammu and Kashmir to join Pakistan whereas the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist population (40 percent) wanted it to join India. It was a great trial for the Hindu Maharaja Hari Singh to sort out the matter.⁶ The Maharaja wanted Jammu and Kashmir to remain independent so he decided, instead, to sign a *Standstill Agreement*⁷ with both India and Pakistan.

Pakistani Invasion: Dharam Mitter Gupta, a Hindu refugee from Mirpur writes “Pakistan’s rulers were not happy with this decision and

⁵ A legal document signed by an Indian princely state in 1947 to join either India or Pakistan or remain independent.

⁶ Pandit R.C. Kak, the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir was dismissed and arrested by the Maharaja. He appointed General Janak Singh as interim prime minister.

⁷ A legal document signed by a princely state in 1947 not to join India or Pakistan and maintain status quo.

wanted Jammu and Kashmir to be a part of Pakistan because of the state's Muslim majority. In order to annex Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan, the Pakistani Army and Pathans from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) invaded the state. Pakistani army Major General Akbar Khan organized the entire operation. On October 21, the Pakistani Army and Pathans simultaneously attacked the Jammu and Kashmir districts of Muzzafrabad, Baramulla, Poonch, and Mirpur, killing about 100,000 Hindus and Sikhs."

Margaret Burke White writes: "During this massacre, many villages were destroyed and innocent women (Hindus, Sikhs as well as Muslims) were raped or kidnapped by the Pathans. Two nuns of the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Baramulla were not spared and shot dead. The famous Muslim martyr, Maqbool Sherwani, and many moderate Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir and Deputy Commissioner of Muzzafrabad, Duni Chand Mehta were also killed."

General Palit, (an Indian army Colonel in Kashmir in 1947) writes "British law allotted each state about twenty thousand soldiers but because Jammu and Kashmir was so large, it was insufficient for preventing an outside attack. On Muzzafrabad front, on October 22, 1947, Pakistani Army attacked the town of Ramkot (Indian side of J&K), the overwhelming numbers of the Pakistani Army and Pathans defeated the small number of Jammu and Kashmir soldiers controlling the bridge. Thus, Muzzafrabad fell to Pakistan invasion. On October 25, Brigadier Rajinder Singh and Jammu and Kashmir army put heavy resistance to the Pakistani army and laid down their lives at Rampur bridge near Baramulla. Thus, Baramulla fell to Pakistani invasion.

On Mirpur Front, platoons of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (3 JAK Rifles) vacated their posts under heavy Pakistani artillery: Alibeg on October 18; another hill post (on the border with Jhelum) on October 19; and, Dadyal on October 25. Bhimber fell to Pakistani invasion on October 29. Roads to Jhangar (Mirpur Brigade headquarters), Bhimber, Mangla Fort and Jhelum were captured by Pakistani army. 3 JAK Rifles consolidated its entire forces in the beleaguered Mirpur City. Finally, Mirpur fell on November 25 to the Pakistani Army. Jhangar was saved due to the gallant resistance put up by Brigadier Mohammed Usman of Indian army who was ultimately killed by Pakistani artillery."

Accession with India: Prof. Balraj Madhok, a Hindu refugee from Kashmir Valley, writes "On October 23, the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, M.C. Mahajan, advised the Maharaja to visit

India's Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, in New Delhi and announce its accession to India. Pandit Nehru refused to meet the Maharaja until he released the Kashmiri Muslim leader, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, and made the Sheikh chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The Maharaja, though disappointed, had no alternative but to release Sheikh Abdullah. In Srinagar, the Maharaja signed the *Instrument of Accession* on October 25 and handed it over to India's representative, V.P. Menon who flew back to Delhi. He presented it to Pandit Nehru and his cabinet and they signed it on October 26. V.P. Menon flew to Jammu and delivered it to the Maharaja. Thus, on October 26, Jammu and Kashmir legally became a part of India. On October 30, Sheikh Abdullah was appointed as chief emergency administrator of Jammu and Kashmir."

October 26, 1947, might have been the day that marked Jammu and Kashmir as an official Indian state but the reality is that Pakistani forces had already usurped more than half of the state. The Indian government took three days to accept Maharaja Singh's *Instrument of Accession* and this delay enabled the Pakistani Army to advance further into Jammu and Kashmir. Regardless, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and moderate Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir rejoiced at the news of accession to India. The Indian Army began an airlift to Srinagar to counter the Pakistani Army and Pathans who were trying to storm the Srinagar airport. It was a miracle that the Indian Army pushed them back, cleared the airport and occupied Baramulla within a short span of time. On the Jammu front, the Indian Army's gains were not so astounding.

Maharaja's Blunder: During this time, many Hindu and Sikhs were fleeing to Jammu due to the onslaught of Pakistanis in the Kashmir valley. As the Pakistani army neared the outskirts of Srinagar, Maharaja Hari Singh chose to desert Srinagar and leave for Jammu on October 25 - a decision that was later termed an act of cowardice by both Indian and Kashmiri leaders. My wife and her parents were part of a caravan of buses that followed the Maharaja to Jammu. On November 25, one month later, Rao Rattan Singh, deserted Mirpur in a cowardly manner for which Hindus and Sikhs survivors of Mirpur never forgave him.

Non-cooperation from Pakistani Government: Prior to August 15, the Indian princely state governments were responsible for their internal intelligence while the British government provided all outside intelligence information. A covert understanding existed between the

Pakistan government and the Pakistani Army about the invasion of Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, neither the Indian government nor the Jammu and Kashmir government ever received any information about the recruiting of Pathans, collection and marshaling of vehicles, or collection of arms and ammunition from Pakistani arsenals. The Jammu and Kashmir government was under the illusion that occasional border raids by the Pathans and Pakistanis were signs of unrest of local Muslims and acts of communal vengeance. Prior to October 26, Jammu and Kashmir's government was even sending reports of these incidents to Rawalpindi (in Pakistan) and asking the Pakistani Army and civil authorities to help quell these unrests. As a conspiracy to annex Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani Army refused to supply arms, ammunition, and gasoline to the Jammu and Kashmir Army as per the terms of the *Standstill Agreement*.⁷

Desertion of Soldiers to Pakistan: General Palit writes "In addition, the Pakistani Army and local pro-Pakistan Muslims had captured and sealed off all the state's entry and exit points. They even succeeded in subverting Muslim elements in the Jammu and Kashmir Army that was comprised of 50 percent Muslim officers and soldiers. Those were troubled times when the stress and strains of communal propaganda reached critical proportions. Many Muslim soldiers and officers of battalions of 2, 4 and 6 JAK Rifles, (which were 50% Muslims) deserted and joined Pakistani army as the Azad Kashmir Force (AKF). They also killed their Hindu commanders and soldiers before desertion. This dealt crippling blow to the defense of Jammu and Kashmir."

Economic Blockade by Pakistan: Pakistan also applied an economic blockade of Jammu and Kashmir to coerce the state into acceding with Pakistan. As of October 26, no direct road or rail link between Jammu and Kashmir and India existed, except for a dirt road from Jammu to Pathankot (in East Punjab). All rail and road links connecting Jammu and Kashmir with the outside world passed through Pakistan, which meant that food and other necessities stopped entering the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The postal system did not work and Pakistani banks tied up bank accounts in Jammu and Kashmir. My Uncle Mukand Lal owned a warehouse in Mirpur. The Pakistani railways held up his entire shipment of goods and the banks froze his accounts.

Holocaust of Jammu and Kashmir: I could not find independent figures of causality and migration in Wikipedia, etc.

Dharam Mitter Gupta writes “Thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees, mostly from the adjacent Jhelum and Gujarat districts of West Punjab and the NWFP of Pakistan had entered Jammu and Kashmir after the Pakistani Muslims looted and burnt their homes. Local Hindus and Sikhs from the border areas provided them protection. With the capture of road links by the Pakistani Army around Mirpur, some local Muslims in the small villages (e.g Alibeg, Dadyal, Mangla, Pindi Sabherwal, Samwal, and Ratta etc.) turned against the refugees and their protectors. They burnt the homes of Hindu and Sikh villagers, abducted women, robbed or murdered men, or forced them to flee. In a few cases, Jammu and Kashmir Army soldiers were able to evacuate some Hindus and Sikhs to the safety of larger towns, like Muzzafrabad, Baramulla, Poonch and Mirpur. The whole countryside soon witnessed the same pattern as Pakistani infiltration and propaganda spread in villages. Prior to the Pakistani infiltration, the Muslim population in the districts of Muzzafrabad, Baramulla, Poonch and Mirpur was about one million and the Hindu and Sikh populations totaled about 150,000. The Pakistanis killed more than 100,000 after they captured these districts and renamed this area Azad Kashmir.”

Late Sorayya Khurshid, a Muslim refugee woman from Jammu writes: “Had there been no Pathan tribal invasion, the history of Jammu and Kashmir might have been different. In 1947, the Muslims of Jammu were practically decimated. As many as 200,000 Jammu Muslims lost their lives in 1947 and most of them died around November 5.” Many Muslim women were also abducted and children made orphans. Out of a Muslim population of around 550,000 in Jammu, Udhampur, Reasi and Kathua districts, about 200,000 were forced to flee to Sialkot, Pakistan. About 150,000 chose to stay in India due to protection provided by Indian army under Brigadier Usman and visits of Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah to the affected areas. Around November 25, in revenge of killing of Jammu Muslims, 20,000 Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur were killed. **This is where my story begins.**

SECTION I

Chapter 1

Mirpur City in 1947

I was about ten years old when Pakistan invaded Mirpur, the place of my birth. According to legend, two saints by the name of Mir Shah Gazi and Gosain Bodhpuri laid the foundation for Mirpur City about six hundred and fifty years ago. The word *Mir*, taken from the name of the former saint, and *Pur*, from the latter, gave the name *Mirpur*, which became the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity and goodwill. Muslims of the *Bains*, *Chibs*, and *Gakhads* clans were constantly at war with each other and ruled the small towns and villages of the area. Eventually, Mirpur City became the *Jagir* (Protectorate) of the *Chib* clan. The legend holds that the message of the two saints helped the area become a peaceful seat of learning. Simplicity, fair dealing, hospitality, intelligence, and tolerance marked the character of its inhabitants. The values of self-respect, hard work, integrity, and God-fearing were part of their culture. They also were brave, courageous, and ready to sacrifice anything in the cause of their motherland. Hospitality and courtesy are inherited qualities of the people of Mirpur. It is no wonder that Mirpur City gradually rose to become a great commercial center, next only to Jammu City and Srinagar City. People of Mirpur have their own sweet Punjabi dialect known as *Mirpuri*.

Mirpur City—the headquarters of both Mirpur county and Mirpur district—was located on the top of a hill about three miles long and two miles wide at a height of 1,080 feet above sea level. The Jhelum, Gujarat, and Rawalpindi districts of west Punjab (Pakistan) surrounded the southwest side of the Mirpur district, and the Poonch, Jammu, and Reasi districts of Jammu and Kashmir surrounded the northeast side (see map). The Jhelum River and the Upper Jhelum Canal formed the boundary between Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir. On the north side were the Himalayan Mountains; on the south side were farmlands,

where cash crops, like wheat, corn, tobacco, lentils, and other vegetables were harvested; and, on the west lay the Khad riverbed about one-mile-wide that was fed by the monsoon rains. The riverbed flooded during the monsoon season causing havoc and virtually cutting off Mirpur City from the rest of countryside. On the east side were government buildings, such as the divisional commissioner's office, courts, hospital, college, an army cantonment, and a bus and taxi stand.

Mirpur was divided into four parts with roads that passed through the city in a grid-like manner. A three-mile long and forty-foot-wide main street, called a *bazaar* (Broadway), passed through the heart of the town where the majority of businesses and shops were located. The *bazaar* was wide enough for buses and trucks to pass through to load and unload merchandise, and for religious processions. Some Hindu and Sikh *Gurudwara* (temples), schools, and social organizations were also located on or near the *bazaar*. Two wide lanes ran parallel to the *bazaar* and six lanes cut at right angles to it, each started from the riverside, passing through the Mirpur City until they ended at the east side. All the roads were paved with shining firestone fixed with lime and required little repair.

Residential houses and some small businesses were located on the feeder streets. The majority of the houses were two or three-stories high (although there also were many four-story mansions with basements) and they were made of bricks with flat, concrete roofs. On the northeast side, there was an old Sikh fort and a huge Sikh *Gurudwara* called *Gurudwara Damdama Sahib*, which was built during the Sikh empire of northwestern India that included Jammu and Kashmir. The majority of Sikhs lived on the north side near the old fort and there was a huge mansion on the south side called the *Sardaron Ki Haveli* (Mansion of the Sikhs). Most of the Muslim population lived on the southwestern side and their main mosque *Jama Masjid* was located there. Eighty percent of the population of Mirpur City was Hindu and Sikh, and the rest was Muslim. However, the villages surrounding Mirpur City had a majority Muslim population.

Mirpur City was connected to the riverside by over a dozen hiking trails called *Dhakkis*. One of these was called Phoa Dhakki, named after the Phoa clan of my father-in-law Yash Paul Gupta. My grandmother Kartardevi and uncles Mukand Lal and Mohanlal lived off a trail called Loharan Dhakki (Smith's Trail) or Parthian Dhakki. I spent most of my childhood with my grandmother and uncles. My

maternal great grandfather Lalman Shah lived near Pandhi Dhakki. My mother and my younger brother Ramesh lived there after my father Madan Lal passed away in 1940. In 1947, the year that India was granted independence, I was in my maternal great grandfather's house because I had changed schools to attend Pandhi Middle School.

There were many fruit and vegetable orchards and plantations located on the riverside. One of them was Pandit Ram Sharan's orchard that was covered with all types of tropical fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Many people went there for morning or evening walks. I went there many times myself, with my maternal uncle Vishwa Nath, or with my classmates from Pandhi Middle School.

Mirpur City was connected to other cities in Jammu and Kashmir (such as Bhimber, Kotli, Poonch, Chaumukh, and Jhangar) via fair weather roads that also led to Serai Alamgir (about twenty-five miles away in Pakistan) and Jhelum City (about forty miles away in Pakistan). The nearest railheads were in Jhelum City and Serai Alamgir. Mirpur City had about a dozen Ford T-model cars and taxis and about two dozen buses and trucks run by Bhasin Bus Services of Mirpur. Because Mirpur City was the main connection of Jammu and Kashmir to Punjab, these trucks and buses were the lifeline for the population of the Mirpur, Poonch, and Reasi districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Mirpur City did not have a central water supply system. The source of drinking water was through deep-water wells that were located near the Hindu temples and mosques on the riverside or huge rain harvesting tanks (*talab* or *bawlis*) built by kings. The philanthropists of Mirpur City constructed separate public baths for men and women, and the entire population bathed there and washed their clothes in the morning. On their return, most people would carry a bucket or pitcher of water back home for cooking. Some affluent persons, like Diwan Chand Shah, had a hand-pump water well (an underground tube well) and a western style plumbing system installed in their houses. Wealthy persons hired watermen or domestic servants to deliver drums of water to their houses for showers and cooking. Rich people would even give their clothes to professional washer men (*dhobis*) for washing on the river side. Throughout Mirpur City, small drains on both sides of the roads emptied into a huge drain that ultimately ended in the riverbed, so rainwater never collected anywhere in the city.

Mirpur City did not have electricity. People owned battery-powered radios to hear the news and had hand-cranked gramophones. Kerosene

lamp posts lit the streets, and people used kerosene hurricane lamps in their homes. However, nighttime businesses, like soda fountains, teahouses, and restaurants, used gaslights for the after-dark hours. Weddings, religious processions, and public and political gatherings also used gaslights. All machinery and mechanical equipment (flour mills, printing presses, oil mills, etc.) used either gasoline or kerosene engines.

The general population of Mirpur City was highly educated. The majority of Mirpuri men were high school graduates and women were middle school graduates (which was the highest female literacy attainable in Jammu and Kashmir at that time). Many men held college degrees from Punjab University, and doctors, engineers and attorneys completed their graduate education in England. To serve the educated population, three daily Urdu newspapers, *The Sach* (Truth), *The Sadaqat* (Righteousness) and *The Sharaf* (Politeness) were published from Mirpur City. The *Sach* was edited by Raja Akbar Khan and Master Roshan Lal (an uncle of my mother), *The Sadaqat* by Gian Chand Chaudhri (an uncle of my father-in-law), and *The Sharaf* was edited by Bipin Gupta.

The average population of Mirpur City was about fifteen thousand. However, this population had increased to twenty-five thousand, due to the influx of Hindu and Sikh refugees from west Punjab and the adjoining small towns and villages of the Mirpur district. The citizens of Mirpur had sheltered these refugees in religious centers, schools, and their houses. These refugees were confident that nothing would happen to Mirpur City and that the Jammu and Kashmir army of the Hindu Maharaja would protect them. At this time, my father's cousin, Pushpa Devi, and her husband, Raja Tarlok Singh, an attorney in the city of Gujarat (Pakistan), moved back to Mirpur City. My mother's uncle, Lalchand Dhangeryal, a rich businessperson from Serai Alamgir, and their five sons and two daughters also came back to their ancestral mansion in Mirpur. Some of my parents' relatives moved back to Mirpur City from the far off city of Lahore (in Pakistan) because they thought they would be safer under a Hindu Maharaja. Many Hindu refugees from Pakistan took shelter in the huge *Arya Samaj* temple adjoining my great grandfather Lalman Shah's house. Sikh refugees were sheltered in the huge Sikh temple, *Damdama Sahib Gurudwara*, about half a mile away from my great-grandfather's house. My uncles, Vishwa Nath and Suraj Parkash, would help these refugees as volunteers, and sometimes, I would

accompany them on their volunteer missions. My uncle Amar Nath and aunt Swaran Devi also provided shelter to a Hindu refugee Sharma family from Pakistan in their mansion. Dr. Sansar Chandra, a professor at S.D. College, Lahore moved back to Mirpur with his wife and children. Amar Devi Gupta gave shelter to twenty Hindu refugees from West Punjab. Many Hindu refugees were accommodated in S.D. building and other Hindu temples.

When the Maharaja signed the *Instrument of Accession* to India on October 26, 1947, the Deputy Commissioner of Mirpur City was Rao Rattan Singh, a cousin of the Maharaja and the chief of the Jammu and Kashmir army in Mirpur was Lieutenant Colonel Puran Singh Thapa (both deserted and fled to India). The superintendent of police in Mirpur was Mohammed Yahaya Khan Qureshi and public prosecutor was Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim (both defected to Pakistan). Chief Magistrate was Munna Lal, Judge was Indu Bhushan, Chief of Prisons was Devi Chand Gupta (all killed by Pakistanis in Mirpur) and Chief Medical Officer was Dr. Nanak Chand Gupta (prisoner in Alibeg). From October 26 thru November 18 Pakistani noose was tightening around Mirpur and there was no good news on the radio. On November 18, there was a radio broadcast from Sardar Vallbhbhai Patel, India's home minister. Mr. Patel announced that India was sending four battalions of the Indian army to save Mirpur City. The citizens of Mirpur were expecting help from the Indian army but the army reached Jhangar on November 19 but were diverted to relieve Hindus and Sikhs of Kotli because Col. Baldev Singh Pathania, a prominent leader of Jammu and a supporter of Sheikh Abdullah was trapped there. Indian army could not proceed further towards Mirpur since the Pakistani army occupied the motor road from Jhangar to Mirpur City. Mirpuris could hear the artillery fire in the distance from Jhangar and still hoped that the Indian army would arrive soon. They had no inkling of the upcoming holocaust that would destroy their city.

Chapter 2

Mirpur under the Siege of Pakistan

On August 14, 1947, Pakistan's Independence Day, I saw the Muslims of Mirpur City (who mostly lived on the west side of Mirpur) hoisting Pakistan's flag, with its signature green flag and the crescent, on their shops, homes, and mosques. The next day, August 15, was India's Independence Day. Hindus and Sikhs hoisted India's tri-color flag on their businesses, homes, temples, *Gurudwaras*, and government offices. Tension was building between the Muslims (who supported Pakistan) and Hindus and Sikhs (who supported India). With the arrival of the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and the countryside of the Mirpur district, things were getting worse. In those days, I was in the fifth grade and lived on the eastside of Mirpur City at my great-grandfather Lalman Shah's house. My brother Ramesh and my mother were already living there. I would occasionally visit my grandmother Kartar Devi and uncles Mukand Lal and Mohan Lal with whom I had lived up to the fourth grade. Their house was close to the Muslim majority localities in the west side of Mirpur City and even the most subtle signs of unrest scared them.

Suddenly, in late September or early October 1947 (I cannot recall the exact date), the entire Muslim population of Mirpur City deserted their homes and shops. The Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur City thought this was part of a Pakistani plan to attack Mirpur City and that the Pakistanis had secretly informed their Muslim brethren to leave before a massive attack. During one of my visits to see my grandmother and uncles, I saw that along the *bazaar* all the Muslim shops were shut down and all the Muslim homes were empty in their neighborhood. My grandmother and uncles were very pessimistic about the coming events and did not know where else to go.

One day, on the way to my grandmother's house, I saw a mob of Hindus and Sikhs looting a Muslim shop named *Khwaja Bookstore*

from where I used to buy my school supplies. Out of boyish curiosity, I joined the looters and pocketed some pencils and erasers. When I met my grandmother and uncles and showed them those items, they gave me a serious thrashing. They told me that it was a sin to steal and I should return them on my way back to my great grandfather's house. On my way back, I returned the items but they were immediately grabbed by some other persons. Sporadic looting of deserted Muslim shops and homes might have also been taking place in some other parts of Mirpur City.

On another occasion, I witnessed the lynching of an old Muslim man, Wahabdin, a government employee and street lamp lighter in our streets, who probably did not get any information from his fellow Muslims to leave Mirpur City. We used to see him every evening carrying a canister of kerosene, lighting the street lamps. But on this day, a mob of Hindu and Sikh refugees pulled Wahabdin out of his small house and dragged him by his collar up the Pandhi Dhakki (trail). Some in the mob started hitting the poor old man with stones and bricks and he begged for mercy from all of them with folded hands. He pleaded that he was a poor man, an employee of the Maharaja, and was serving the Hindu and Sikh population of Mirpur City for decades. However, the frenzied mob did not listen to his pleas and went on hitting him until he started bleeding. Some elderly Hindus and Sikhs pleaded with the mob to let him go but all in vain. Then, one young man nicknamed Panju told the mob to move over. He was carrying a nineteenth century muzzle loaded musket. He aimed his musket and fired directly at Wahabdin, who fell down with a loud shriek, his hands still folded. This was the first violent death I witnessed and at a mere ten years old, this horrifying scene affected me deeply. I could not eat my meals for the next two days.

We heard that another three or four Muslims who did not leave Mirpur City were also killed by the frenzied mobs of Hindu and Sikh refugees. One of them was the tailor Allah Ditta, who used to make dresses for me and my family. However, there was some positive aspect in those days of mayhem. There was one old Muslim teacher, named Maulvi Abdul Hakim who had a school in his apartment on the second floor of my Uncle Mohanlal's store. Along with many Hindu and Muslim boys, I used to take Urdu (a language of Pakistan and India) lessons from him. *Maulviji* had some ailment in his leg and used a cane for walking. Even though he was informed by his fellow Muslims to leave Mirpur City, he could not do so because of the

problem in his leg. His family left but he stayed behind. I saw a mob of Hindus and Sikhs gathered around his apartment, intent on killing him. Uncle Mohanlal tried to pacify them and asked them to spare *maulviji's* life. The mob did not listen to my uncle and was determined to kill him. Suddenly, Sardar Jagat Singh, a member of a highly respectable and rich family of Sikhs of Mirpur City, appeared on the scene with his rifle. He was one of the owners of the famous *Sardaron Ki Haveli* (Mansion of the Sikhs). He ordered the mob to back down and told them he would shoot any Hindu or Sikh to protect *maulviji* (who at one time was his Urdu teacher). He assured *maulviji* that he would escort him safely out of Mirpur City's limits so that he could join his family. The *sardarji* brought him downstairs and escorted him all the way through the *bazaar* of Mirpur City to the end of the city limits. I, along with my uncle Mohan Lal and many other good-hearted Hindus and Sikhs, accompanied the *sardarji* and the *maulviji*. Then with tears in his eyes, *maulviji* thanked everybody, bade good-bye, and walked outside the city limits until his figure disappeared on the horizon. It is ironic that on November 25 and 26, Pakistanis and Pathans killed my Uncle Mohan Lal, Sardar Jagat Singh and his brothers Vahe Guru Singh, Khazan Singh and, Nihal Singh.

Before deserting Mirpur City, some Muslims with good intention warned their Hindu friends of the upcoming attacks by Pakistanis. They advised their friends to leave Mirpur for safer places like Jammu. One such well-wisher was Karamat Ali, a friend of my mother's uncles Chaudhries and Dhangeryals. The other was Abdul Majid, a friend and colleague of my uncle Vishwa Nath. However, the Hindus were overconfident about their safety due to the presence of the Jammu and Kashmir army and did not heed the friendly warning.

After the Muslims deserted Mirpur City, the Jammu and Kashmir government authorities clamped a day and night curfew on the entire city in order to control the looting of abandoned homes and property. During the curfew break, which lasted four hours a day, from noon to 4 p.m., people would buy their groceries and other necessities from the Mirpur shops. They would also visit their relatives to find out about each other's welfare and to console each other. Before the turbulence began, the Muslim farmers of the nearby villages would bring fresh vegetables and milk for the consumption of Mirpuris, but they stopped coming out of fear due to the influx of the large number Hindu and Sikh refugees. Food supplies from Pakistan were already cut off

through a Pakistani plan to starve the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur City. Thus, essential commodities in Mirpur City became scarce and the population started starving.

Occasionally, a group of Hindus and Sikhs accompanied by the Jammu and Kashmir army would go to nearby Muslim farms and pick up fresh vegetables and fruit. This was a feeble attempt as they returned with hardly enough vegetables to feed the children. My uncles, Vishwa Nath and Suraj Parkash, were some of the few who went along on these foraging parties. Uncles Mukund Lal and Mohanlal were very religious people and refused to join these vegetable raiding groups. They chose to buy vegetables from other people. During the curfew breaks, I would visit my grandmother and uncles to find out about their welfare. These visits became rare as the Pakistani army tightened their siege of Mirpur City. By the time it was September, I was only able to visit them once or twice.

In late September, some wealthy Hindus tried to leave Mirpur City for Jammu via Jhangar (in India) by bus. In those days, buses used to have armed escorts to protect Hindu and Sikh passengers from Pakistanis, but the armed guards proved insufficient on this occasion. The Pakistanis waylaid the bus on the way to Jhangar, robbed, and killed all the passengers. They ordered the Hindu driver to return the bloody bus to Mirpur City - filled with dead bodies. Upon his arrival, the driver told the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur that the only escape road to Jammu was under Pakistani army control. The Pakistani army had already captured the road from Jhelum (in Pakistan) to Mirpur City. The Pakistani army ambushed the Jammu and Kashmir army couriers while they were returning from the Mangla Fort near Jhelum. The fate of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur City was sealed. They could no longer escape by road.

On October 17, the Pakistani army and the Pathans launched a massive attack on the entire portion of Jammu and Kashmir that bordered Pakistan. I saw buses full of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Dadyal entering Mirpur City. With the full support of army vehicles, machine guns, artillery canons, and mortars, they encircled Mirpur City on all sides and tightened their grip. After the siege, nobody could get out of the city to get vegetables or milk from the nearby Muslim farmlands. The only time Hindus and Sikhs went to the riverside was to bring drinking water from the deep water wells. The groups who went to fetch water would always be accompanied by escorts of armed soldiers or armed civilians.

To foil the Pakistani penetration, the Jammu and Kashmir government authorities reduced the curfew break to only two hours. Jammu and Kashmir troops were stationed on 9 tall buildings around the city to keep an eye on the movement of the Pakistani Army. One of the army posts was in the house of my mom's uncle Khemchand Bhagotra on Pandhi Dhakki, which was located near my great grandfather's house. Occasionally, when I stood on the rooftop of Khemchand Bhagotra's building, I could see Pakistani soldiers in the distance. I could also see the movements of the Pakistani soldiers when the Jammu and Kashmir soldiers would loan me their binoculars. The Pakistanis were out of range of the army rifles so the Jammu and Kashmir soldiers could not shoot the Pakistani soldiers.

During the month of October, I visited my grandmother and uncles only once during the curfew break. Many Muslim houses in their locality were empty, which left the Hindu population disconnected and communication between Hindu neighbors very weak. I saw that this loss of communication had caused a loss of morale amongst my grandmother and uncles. An army post was located nearby on Hans Raj Gupta's house on Parthian Dhakki for their protection. My October visit was the last time I saw my grandmother and uncle Mohan Lal alive. On November 25, Pakistani-led heavy artillery fire engulfed their house and they were killed.

The rest of November 1947 was a nightmare. All the members of my family were hardly able to sleep due to the constant machine gun and artillery fire from the Pakistanis and Pathans. After November 14, the Pathans who were retreating from the Kashmir valley also reinforced their ranks. I heard from the soldiers at the Army post on Khemchand Bhagotra's house about the deaths of many Jammu and Kashmir soldiers. They also told the civilians gathered at the post that casualties among the Pakistanis were high. One day, the Jammu and Kashmir soldiers dragged two dead bodies of Pakistani soldiers through the *bazaar*. These Pakistanis had penetrated the city, but the Jammu and Kashmir soldiers killed them during the encounter. Sometimes, soldiers at the post would assure the civilians that, soon, the Indian Army would reach Mirpur City to fight the Pakistanis and that all would be safe. However, this was a wishful dream that never materialized. Mirpur City ultimately fell to the onslaught of Pakistanis and Pathans. It is unfortunate that Mirpur was part of India only for one month (October 26 - November 25).

Chapter 3

Efforts to Save Mirpur

Many Mirpuris working in Jammu City were worried about their relatives who were left behind in the besieged city of Mirpur. The Mirpuris of Jammu contacted their political leaders and the Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA), of whom the Jammu MLA, Premnath Dogra, and the Mirpur Hindu MLA (of Hindu Mahasabha), Ramlal Chaudhri (also an uncle of my father-in-law) were prominent figures. Some of those Mirpuris in Jammu were my maternal grandfather Hans Raj Gupta, a court clerk with a judge, and my father-in-law Yash Paul Gupta, a junior commissioned officer in the Jammu and Kashmir army. They also met Professor Balraj Madhok, a very influential Hindu leader of Jammu and Kashmir, who was connected with the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swaymsevak Sangh (RSS)⁸, and the political party of Jammu, Praja Parishad. Professor Madhok later became president of the All India Jana Sangh (now known as the Bharatiya Janta Party or BJP). The Mirpuris of Jammu requested that these prominent officials use their influence to send Indian army reinforcements to Mirpur. The MLA's met Sheikh Abdullah many times but he refused to send reinforcements to Mirpur since he was more concerned about liberating the Kashmir valley from the Pakistani forces.

“On November 13, Mr. Ramlal Chaudhri, along with a delegation of Jammu MLAs, and M.C. Mahajan (the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir), went to New Delhi to meet Pandit Nehru. Pandit Nehru refused to meet the entire delegation of Mirpuris except for M.C. Mahajan who had already met Pandit Nehru several times without any results. M.C. Mahajan pleaded with Pandit Nehru and asked that the

⁸ In 1947, the RSS volunteers tried to save thousands of besieged Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur and were killed by Pakistanis.

approximate one hundred thousand Hindus and Sikhs trapped in the areas of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) be rescued with the help of the Indian army. Pandit Nehru curtly told M.C. Mahajan that he had already talked about this matter with Sheikh Abdullah and he advised M.C. Mahajan to speak directly with the Sheikh. M.C. Mahajan informed Pandit Nehru of Sheikh Abdullah's decision not to send in Indian army troops to evacuate the beleaguered Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur and warned Nehru that the Pakistanis would slaughter more than one hundred thousand Hindus and Sikhs if the Indian army did not intervene. Pandit Nehru declined to sacrifice any more Indian soldiers for the evacuation of Mirpur and, instead, stated that millions of Hindus and Sikhs had migrated from Pakistan and the Mirpuris could do the same in Jammu and Kashmir. Upon hearing this reply, M.C. Mahajan asked, 'Should the delegation go to Pakistan and meet Mr. Liaqat Ali Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, since the prime minister of India (Pandit Nehru) and the chief emergency administrator of Jammu and Kashmir were not interested in saving the Hindus of POK?' Upon hearing this question, Pandit Nehru flared up and told M.C. Mahajan and his delegation 'to get lost.'

Later that day, the delegation met Sardar Patel, the deputy prime minister of India, who was also India's home minister. Sardar Patel sympathized with them but told them that he was helpless because the prime minister was directly handling the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr. Patel advised the delegation to meet Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru again, who was flying to Jammu on November 15. The delegation met Mahatma Gandhi but did not get any help from him either. The Mahatma told them the Indian army could not proceed to Mirpur because snow had covered the route. When the delegation informed the Mahatma that it never snows in Mirpur, the Mahatma's response was that the roads leading to Mirpur were covered with snow. The delegation returned to Jammu empty-handed and heavy-hearted. On November 15, thousands of people gathered at the Jammu airport to meet Pandit Nehru. Nevertheless, Pandit Nehru refused to meet anybody and flew further into the Kashmir valley to view the situation in forward areas.⁹

⁹ Adapted from *My Jammu & Kashmir – 1947 – A forgotten History* by D.M. Gupta. and, *Looking Back* by M.C. Mahajan. M.C. Mahajan was Prime Minister of J&K from 10/15/47 to 3/15/48. His wife was from Mirpur and many of his relatives were killed in Mirpur .

To save Mirpur, Meher Chand Mahajan met Pandit Nehru again in November 1947 and writes in Looking Back:

"We requested the prime minister of India (Pandit Nehru) to give us arms and ammunition, four battalions of infantry, an armored unit and a few tanks. The PM sent for the C-in-C and the Chief of General Staff. One of them came to Pandit Nehru's house after dinner and we sat in conference for three hours. The chief said that the arms needed by us could not be spared, and the battalions we needed were busy elsewhere in the work of evacuation of Hindus and Sikhs.

I continued *dharna (sit-in)* at the PM's house and eventually succeeded in getting a Gurkha battalion flown to Jammu and another battalion sent there by road. Before this battalion could march on to the relief of Mirpur, the Pakistanis captured that town, murdered a number of persons, and looted all the property there. The citizens fled to save their lives. A number of them somehow managed to reach Jammu. Most of the young people and influential men were killed either by the raiders or by the Pakistanis. Some of my very near relations were among the killed as they were not able to get away in time."

"On November 23, Prem Nath Dogra and Professor Balraj Madhok (prominent Hindu leaders of Jammu and Kashmir) met Brigadier Paranjpe, the Brigade Commander of the Indian Army in Jammu and requested him to send reinforcements to Mirpur. Pranjape shared their anxiety but expressed his helplessness because—as per instructions from the army generals—consultation with Sheikh Abdullah was mandatory in order to deploy Indian troops anywhere in Jammu and Kashmir. Pranjape also informed the delegation that Pandit Nehru was flying to Jammu again, en-route to Srinagar, on November 24. He suggested they approach Pandit Nehru and request him to give proper instructions to Sheikh Abdullah on the matter.

On November 24, Pandit Dogra and Professor Madhok met Pandit Nehru at the Jammu airport and, once again, told him about the critical situation in Mirpur. They requested him to order immediate Indian troop reinforcements to the beleaguered Mirpur City. Professor Madhok was amazed at Pandit Nehru's response—Pandit Nehru flew into a rage and yelled that they should talk to Sheikh Abdullah.

Professor Madhok again told Pandit Nehru that Sheikh Abdullah was indifferent to the plight of the Jammu province and only Pandit Nehru could save the people of Mirpur. However, Pandit Nehru ignored all their entreaties and did not send any reinforcements to Mirpur.

Mirpur fell on November 25, when the Pakistani army used heavy artillery to break open the back gate of the walled town. The Jammu and Kashmir army and local officers lost heart and retreated before evacuating the civilians, leaving the people to defend themselves. People began to run in terror. Occasional fights broke out with advancing Pakistanis and Pathans, which soon turned into routs, and the routs turned into a massacre. Only twenty-five hundred people—including my uncles, Vishwa Nath, Mukund Lal and Suraj Parkash—out of approximately twenty-five thousand Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur reached Jhangar (in India) safely with the retreating Jammu and Kashmir army. The Pakistanis ruthlessly kidnapped or butchered the remaining over twenty-two thousands residents. The number of women abducted from Mirpur ran into the thousands (approximately five thousand). The Pakistanis shamelessly paraded them and then sold them in the bazaars of Jhelum, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar (in Pakistan). The barbarities that the Pakistani troops and the Muslim Pathans committed upon civilians put to shame the worst orgies of rape and violence committed by the hordes of Genghis Khan, Tamerlane. The loot obtained by the Pakistanis from these towns, and especially from Mirpur, went into the tens of millions of *rupees* (equivalent to millions of US dollars). The Pakistanis and the Pathans dug the floor of every house in Mirpur in search of hoarded treasures.

The tragedy surrounding the events in the Jammu province of Jammu and Kashmir was, in a sense, worsened by the fact that most of this area fell into Pakistani army hands after Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India. Indian troops had also taken charge of defending Jammu and Kashmir after the accession and had cleared the Kashmir Valley of Pakistani troops by November 8. They could have conveniently turned their attention to this strategic area and, at least, relieved the beleaguered towns of Rajouri and Mirpur; thus, preventing the worst massacre of modern Indian history from taking place (the massacre in Mirpur was second only to Tamerlane's—a Tartar Muslim invader of India and a descendant of Genghis Khan—massacre of Delhi in 1398).

An even more painful aspect of this unmitigated tragedy of Jammu is that the majority of Indians and people outside of India

know very little about it. Nobody in India or at the United Nations uttered a word of sympathy about these men and women of Mirpur, even though this ruthless killing of people in the Jammu province was, ultimately, genocide of Hindus and Sikhs. The number of Hindu and Sikh men and women who were killed and abducted in the Jammu province (including Mirpur, Poonch, and Rajouri) was over fifty thousand. Only a few thousand - out of over one hundred thousand Hindus and Sikhs (including refugees from the adjoining district of Pakistan) - were able to escape to India from the cities of Mirpur, Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla, and Muzzafrabad in POK. Most of the Muslims in the Hindu and Sikh majority parts of the Jammu province migrated to Pakistan.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Adapted from *Kashmir, the Storm Center of the World* by Prof. Balraj Madhok, www.kashmir-information.com/storm. Prem Nath Dogra and Prof. Balraj Madhok later on were elected presidents of Bhartiya Jan Sangh that later on became Bhartiya Janta Party.

Chapter 4

Fall of Mirpur

November 25, 1947: Throughout the night, I could hear the incessant firing of machine guns and heavy artillery as the Pakistani army and the Pathans began their final assault on Mirpur. The Pakistani army and the Pathans had started the invasion from the west side, and my family and some of my relatives lived on the east side of Mirpur City. For the entire night, twelve members of my great-grandfather Lalman Shah's family could not sleep due to the sounds of gunfire that grew louder as they came closer. They were the omens of terrible times and imminent catastrophic events.

On November 25, at about 10:00 A.M., my relatives—mostly women and children from the west side—poured into Lalman Shah's house, tears flowing down their faces. Wives had lost husbands and children had lost their parents. Others watched generations of memories vanish as the Pakistani army and Pathans ransacked and burned Hindu and Sikh homes. Everyone was in a state of shock or panic.

Death of my uncle Mohan Lal and grandmother Kartar Devi: At about 11:00 A.M., my Uncle Mukund Lal arrived and relayed that my grandmother Kartar Devi and Uncle Mohan Lal had died. Their home, set afire by the Pakistani artillery, collapsed while they remained trapped inside. He was not sure whether the Pakistanis had shot them dead before the house caught fire. Uncle Mukund Lal could not even reach his shop on the west side to retrieve cash and other valuables from his iron safe box. Most of the people in Mirpur City kept iron safe boxes in their shops for safekeeping of their cash and valuables. When he was halfway to his shop, he saw Pakistani soldiers in the main *bazaar* and immediately rushed to the eastside towards Lalman Shah's house to join us.

I had lived with my grandmother and uncles until the fourth grade. Their house was located on the perimeter of the western part of Mirpur City and was prone to the first attack of the Pakistanis. On November 25, most of the western part of Mirpur City caught fire due to nonstop Pakistani artillery and torching of houses by the Pathans. Many of the elderly and children did not get a chance to leave and were burned alive inside their homes. My grandmother's neighbors, Bodhraj Shah and his family, were hiding in their basement when the Pathans broke open their house. The Pathans shot dead Bodhraj Shah and his only son, who was epileptic, and abducted his two daughters. They left his old wife alone. When she came out, she saw my grandmother's house in flames and did not see my uncle and grandmother. My grandmother was over 60 years old and in fragile health. My Uncle Mohan Lal would not leave my grandmother. They were very simple people who would not think of leaving their place of birth under any circumstances. Besides Mrs. Bodhraj, many other eyewitnesses passed by (Mukund Lal Sootwala, Master Devi Mitter, Loknath Shah, and Diwan Chand Shah), but nobody saw my uncle or my grandmother alive. I assume that both of them were engulfed by the fire and died inside their house, or were shot dead by Pathans.

Soon afterward, my mother's aunt, Basant Devi, and her four children also arrived from the west side. She too was crying because her husband Chander Parkash could not come with them when the Pakistani soldiers and Pathans entered their locality. Basant Devi told us that my mother's uncles, Chander Parkash and Lal Chand Dhangeryal, had decided to take up defensive positions on the roof of their three-story mansion. As my mother's uncles fired at the Pakistani soldiers, they ordered all the women and children to leave through the back door. Both uncles shouted to their families from the rooftop that they would soon join them in Lalman Shah's house. It was the last time they would see their families.

Sometime later, my aunt Swaran Devi and her husband Amar Nath, also arrived with their children, Nirmal, Bhushan, and Rajinder. Uncle Amar Nath was one of the richest people in Mirpur and owned a big three-storied mansion across a bridge in the center of Mirpur City. The Pakistani soldiers had set up artillery guns on the west side of the bridge, forcing uncle Amar Nath and his family to leave their mansion without any cash or valuables. He was also unable to reach his shop on the west side of the bridge to get cash and valuables. Later at the Alibeg prison, uncle Amar Nath and aunt Swaran Devi would take care of my brother and me.

As the day progressed, more and more of my mother's uncles, aunts, cousins, and their children arrived with similar stories. Within no time, over one hundred men, women, and children filled our house. As per custom and out of compassion, my mother, her cousins, and aunts cooked a light lunch for all one hundred guests. Meals were often unifying events in our family and I remember our last lunch together. After eating lunch, the elders decided it was best for all of us to flee the house. By this time, all our neighbors had evacuated their houses and left for the army cantonment.

Death of my maternal great-grandfather, Lalman Shah: My great-grandfather Lalman Shah was a retired tax collector of Maharaja Pratap Singh, uncle of Maharaja Hari Singh and the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir before Hari Singh. He was 80 years old, his eyesight was feeble, and he posed a problem. In a steadfast manner, he refused to leave his birthplace and told us that he would rather die at the place of his birth than leave. We bade good-bye to my great-grandfather and he locked the front door from inside. That was the last time I saw my great-grandfather alive.

On November 26, my great-grandfather came to the roof of his house and started calling his neighbor, Mahasha Karam Chand. As mentioned earlier, in Mirpur city, the roofs were flat and connected the neighboring houses and schools. He started walking towards the roof of Pandhi Middle School. The Pakistanis and Pathans had encircled the Pandhi Middle school and the adjoining Arya Samaj temple and put them on fire. Earlier, both these buildings had accommodated Hindu refugees from Pakistan. The Pakistanis thought many Hindus were still hiding in those two buildings. As soon as my great-grandfather walked towards the edge, the burnt ceiling beams gave away. He fell down and he was burnt alive. One of my mother's cousins, Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal, was hiding in the Arya Samaj building and was an eyewitness to this episode. Purshottam Lal would not shout warnings to Lalman Shah, fearing he would be captured by the Pakistanis.

From our house, we went to *Damdama Sahib Gurudwara* (a Sikh temple) located at the northeastern end of town that was less than one mile from the army cantonment. By the time we arrived at this massive *Damdama Sahib Gurudwara*, over one thousand people were already gathered there. That number was increasing by the minute as more and more people fled the west side of town in search of safety. As the sound of gunfire from the Pakistani army approached, people thought

even a Sikh temple like *Damdama Sahib Gurudwara* no longer served as a safe haven. Therefore, our elders, along with many Sikhs from the temple, headed towards the army cantonment.

Upon reaching the army cantonment, we discovered that the Jammu and Kashmir soldiers had already deserted it. The few remaining soldiers were wounded, helpless, and could not flee. The Pakistanis had placed machine guns at higher locations, and the cantonment looked like a one-way battlefield, with the showering of bullets coming only from the Pakistani army. Constant artillery fire on the open cantonment terrorized the vulnerable civilian population, and civilians fell all around us like sitting ducks. Some were crucified in the barbed wires surrounding the cantonment, their dead bodies left dangling on the fence. Others were hit by Pakistani snipers, their bodies tumbling into the trenches of the cantonment. Many others simply collapsed on the ground.

My family had to leave the cantonment, but my mother had an infection in her leg so she could not walk any farther. For her, crossing the trenches that surrounded the cantonment would be impossible. At that point, there was a silent pause and I knew what was about to happen. My mother gazed at my brother Ramesh and me with a quivering smile. She said goodbye to us and secured us under the care of uncles Mukund Lal, Amaranth, Vishwa Nath, and Suraj Parkash, and aunts Swaran Devi, Sheila Devi, and Rajmohini. She hugged me and my brother, and that hug tore our hearts. Then she left for a shelter in the nearby courthouse. Basant Devi also stayed in the courthouse to wait for her husband, Chander Parkash Dhangeryal, and her children stayed as well. With heavy hearts and falling tears, we started walking on a road to Jhangar (in India) as part of a huge caravan of between fifteen and twenty thousand refugees. It was about 3:00 P.M. when we got out of the cantonment.

The sight of our caravan was sorrowful—similar to the scene in the movie *Ten Commandments* where a caravan of Jews is forced to leave Egypt for Israel. Thousands of Hindus and Sikhs, young and old, men and women, all walked in the northeastern direction towards India. Some carried children on their backs or shoulders and others carried bags of valuables. The sight was that of a ten-mile-long caravan of refugees walking to the Promised Land of India. Children were separated from their parents, wives from their husbands, and sisters from their brothers. Some had bullet wounds inflicted by Pakistani snipers and some were sick with disease. Nevertheless, it

was a scene of quiet sorrow, with the Pakistani soldiers in quick pursuit. Suddenly, an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter airplane appeared from the northeast side. IAF airplanes were apparently providing a safety air cover to our caravan to protect us from the pursuing Pakistanis.

By sunset, we had hardly walked three miles from Mirpur City. My brother Ramesh and I were still with our uncles, aunts, and cousins. We all walked slowly because aunt Swaran Devi was pregnant. Many families from farther back overtook us on this stretch. By nightfall, our pace became even slower as we took on the rough, hilly terrain. About one to two miles south of the notorious area known as Kas Guma (Guma Gorge, described in a later chapter), we all, particularly the children, became extremely thirsty and stopped near a well along the route to drink water. There was no bucket or rope near the well with which to draw water. Finally, in desperation, people started using their turbans and *dupattas* (head scarves for women) to soak water from the well to quench their thirst and that of the children. Since our group had eight to ten children, it took more time to quench our thirst and many families overtook us in getting water and moving forward with the caravan. In the darkness, one man tripped and fell into the well, but nobody possessed the means to rescue him.

Around that time, some Pakistani soldiers pursuing us from Mirpur suddenly appeared and began firing at the caravan. Because it was pitch dark, we could only see bullets flying like fireflies. The bullets indiscriminately hit men, women, and children alike and we could only hear each hit accompanied by a loud shriek or the cry of a Hindu or Sikh. In a state of panic, everyone scattered in various directions. Uncles Vishwa Nath, Mukund Lal, and Suraj Parkash ducked and ran towards the north side. Both of them reached Jhangar (in India) safely after a three or four day walk. My brother and I stayed with aunt Swaran Devi and uncle Amar Nath and the wives of the above mentioned uncles on the south side. We were doomed.

Chapter 5

Surrender and Betrayal

In the early hours of November 26, the Pakistani soldiers' firing stopped. None of the elders in our truncated caravan knew the terrain. So we took another route, climbing a nearby hill. When we reached the top of the hill, the Pakistani soldiers, joined by armed local Muslims, addressed the caravan through a bullhorn. They urged us to lay down all our arms and ammunition. They also told us that if we surrendered, they would protect the Hindus and Sikhs (as they had done in a previous rebellion against the Maharaja in 1931)¹¹. Due to the early morning darkness, we could not see their locations or numbers. On a higher hill, some of them were flashing night mirrors (a military code) to reveal our location to the rest of the Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims. It appeared that they surrounded us from all sides. The Hindu and Sikh elders extensively discussed amongst themselves whether to surrender or wait for the morning and fight.

Meanwhile, some people, along with a prominent Hindu named Moti Ram Ratta, Sat Paul Chaudhri and others decided to leave in the direction of Kas Guma that was just a few miles to the north. Moti Ram Ratta and his family and friends thought that Raja Afzal Khan, the Muslim chief of Kas Guma, was their friend and would protect them. It was a detrimental error in judgment by Moti Ram Ratta and his family. During the troubled times of 1947, the majority of Muslims and Hindus were not each other's friends, but rather, bitter enemies. Raja Afzal Khan eventually captured Moti Ram Ratta and his family and slaughtered all of them except the children.

Among the rest of the people in the caravan was Lachman Das Bhasin, a very rich Hindu of Mirpur City. Knowing that the Muslims

¹¹ In 1931, many Muslims rebelled against the Maharaja Pratap Singh of Jammu and Kashmir but some Muslim chiefs sided with him and protected the Hindus and the Sikh population. The Maharaja rewarded the loyal Muslims with Jagirs (land).

would abduct and rape Hindu women, he made a heart rendering decision: he took his young daughter and wife to a lonely spot and killed them with his own sword.¹² I saw the noble Bhasin women saying good-bye to Mr. Bhasin and his son, who was ten years old and studied in my school in Mirpur. My wife Kusum's uncle, Madanlal, also choked his pregnant wife to death with her own dupatta. Uncle Amar Nath also tried to choke aunt Swaran Devi to death, but she did not die and lived to take care of us in the Alibeg prison. Many other Hindus killed their wives, sisters, and young daughters to prevent them from being abducted and raped by the Muslims.

The majority of the elders gave into the ruse of the Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims. Hindus and Sikhs laid down their pistols, guns, swords, and knives. In spite of their overwhelming numbers and the possession of so many weapons, the Hindus and Sikhs did not put up a fight. In order to fight back against the Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims, the civilians needed military skills and leadership, which were missing among the demoralized mass of Hindus and Sikhs. They were still so numb from the events of the past twenty-four hours that they could not see through the Pakistanis' treachery or their own numerical advantage. Instead, a few hundred Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims in military uniforms cheated about ten thousand Hindus and Sikhs, making us prisoners. Segment by segment, the Pakistanis convinced the Hindus and Sikhs to surrender even though the people of the caravan numerically had the upper hand.

¹² This conformed to the Hindu tradition of *Jauhar* where women commit suicide to avoid rape and kidnapping when surrounded by Muslim armies. In a similar episode of the thirteenth century in the kingdom of Chittod (India), 16,000 Hindu women along with their queen, Padmini, also committed mass suicide, rather than fall into the hands of the invading Muslim army of Allah ud Din Khilji. This is similar to ancient traditions, particularly an incident in Masada (Israel), where Jewish civilians committed mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans.

Chapter 6

Prisoners in Akalgarh Village

By sunrise of November 26, the Pakistani soldiers had captured our entire caravan that extended all the way back to Mirpur City and numbered over ten thousand Hindus and Sikhs. The soldiers ordered us to move back towards the southwest direction and we obeyed, walking the entire day without food or water until we reached the village of Akalgarh (now renamed as Islamgarh in POK). In the evening, we plucked corn and millet from the field around Akalgarh, roasted them on a campfire, and ate them with water from a nearby well. The weather was freezing cold as is usual in the Himalayan Mountains during the months of November and December, so the campfire also served the purpose of providing us warmth.

After some time, the Pakistani soldiers and local armed Muslims herded all the Hindu and Sikh prisoners into an open field. Under the threat of death, they ordered us to hand over ornaments, cash, and other valuables. Within a short period, they collected three large heaps of gold and silver (more than a ton), and hard currency of about twenty million Rupees (equivalent to 5 million US Dollars in 1947). My brother Ramesh and I also handed over a few thousand Rupees (equivalent to 500 US Dollars), which my mother had sewn in a secret pocket inside our undershirts. The entire collection went beyond the Pakistani soldiers' expectations so they did not strip search anyone.

Sati of Hindu women: Meanwhile, word had spread in the neighboring Muslim villages about the capture of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur. Some Muslim villagers came armed, joined the Pakistani captors, and swelled their ranks. In the middle of the night, Pakistanis, Pathans, and local Muslims started abducting Hindu and Sikh women and young girls. I saw three women jump into a burning campfire in the Hindu tradition of *Jauhar* (or *Sati*) to avoid abduction and rape—they were my mother's aunts, Basant Devi, Indravati, and

Shanti Devi, wife of Dr. Nanak Chand Gupta and their son was my class fellow in Mirpur. Indravati died in the fire, but the Muslim soldiers managed to pull out both Basant Devi and Shanti Devi. Basant Devi survived with third degree burn marks on her body.

Torture and killing of Sikhs: During the later part of the night, Muslim soldiers randomly picked up some Sikh men and started torturing them. They would hold them by their long hair, hurl them around in a *chakra* (circle) until they fell unconscious, and eventually kill them. During the 16th century, when the Mughal king Aurangzeb ruled India, this was a notorious technique of torturing and killing the Sikhs. In Sikh Gurudwaras, the priests often recite prayers for the Sikh martyrs of Mughal rule. Thus, the dance of death had come full circle.

All through the night, we shivered in the biting cold out on open ground as the Muslims villagers did not give us shelter in their houses. Occasionally, the Pakistanis would bring more Hindus and Sikhs captured from Mirpur. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. Most of the prisoners had lost one or more of their relatives. In the middle of the night, the husband of my distant aunt, Gomti Devi, slipped out of the village, leaving their one-year-old daughter with his wife. That was the last time anybody saw him alive. All her life, aunt Gomti Devi firmly believed that her husband was alive, but the truth is he completely disappeared from her life and her daughter's. Most likely, his fate mimicked those who died throughout the journey.

Chapter 7

Massacres of Hindus and Sikhs in Thathal Village

On the morning of November 27, the Pakistani soldiers forced the caravan of Hindu and Sikh prisoners to change direction. All along, an IAF airplane was monitoring our movements but could not help us in any way. The Pakistani soldiers mingled with the civilian prisoners in the caravan, hiding themselves from IAF air strikes. In the meantime, the Pakistani soldiers, Pathans, and local Muslims were abducting Hindu and Sikh young women and girls. The Muslim abductors shot dead or injured by sword, spear, or axe, any male or female who tried to protect the unfortunate women.

Sacrifice of Yamuna Devi, my wife's grandmother: I witnessed the abduction of Shesh Gupta, a cousin of my wife Kusum. When Shesh's grandmother, Yamuna Devi, intervened to protect Shesh from a Pathan, she was axed to death. Then, Mahasha Tirath Ram, a prominent Hindu of Mirpur, tried to intervene and another Pakistani lacerated his face with a spear. The scar on Mahasha Tirath Ram's face was a physical reminder of this horrendous period and it remained with him for the rest of his life. Nobody ever saw Shesh again—perhaps, like many abductees, the Pathans took her to the NWFP of Pakistan or Afghanistan.

Murder of journalist Bipin Gupta: Before our caravan reached Thathal, I witnessed a gruesome murder. I saw the Muslim Conference leader of Mirpur, Illahi Baksh Zargar, approach Bipin Gupta and his son. Bipin Gupta was the editor and publisher of an Urdu daily newspaper of Mirpur, the *Sharafat* (Politeness). Illahi Baksh accused Bipin Gupta of anti-Muslim writings in his newspaper and asked Bipin Gupta what punishment he deserved. Bipin Gupta replied that he was a

mere journalist and not anti-Muslim. He also told Illahi Baksh that he deserved protection as a journalist. Illahi Baksh did not listen to Bipin's pleas and called a Pathan mercenary to shoot Bipin to death. From close range, the Pathan mercenary fired three shots at Bipin's chest and killed him. This heartless killing took place in front of Bipin Gupta's son who was a young boy of my age. His son Vidya Rattan Gupta, a chemist lives in Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi.

When we reached Thathal, there was a change of guard and new Pakistani soldiers and local Muslims took over command. Again, the new captors ordered all the Hindus and Sikhs to relinquish any cash or ornaments. Those of us who still had some hidden valuables put them on a sheet of cloth that the captors had spread on the ground. After that, the Pakistani soldiers told the prisoners to separate into three groups based on caste and religion: Sikhs were in the first group; Hindu *Brahmins* (priests) in the second; and, Hindu *Mahajans* (business persons) and *Khatri*s (warrior caste) in the third group. The Pakistani commanders announced that soon, they would kill all the male Sikhs, since the Sikhs had opposed the creation of Pakistan and thus were Pakistan's number one enemy. They would not harm Brahmins because they were a priestly class and were generally poor like the rest of the Muslims. They would handle Mahajans and Khatri—*who were generally rich, moneylenders, and landowners*—on a case-by-case basis: their fate was to be determined by the testimony of local Muslims.

Slaughter of Sikh Family: Upon hearing the mass death sentence ordered for all Sikh males, the Sikh women and children started crying and begged for mercy from the Pakistani soldiers and local Muslims. Nevertheless, the bloodthirsty Pakistanis did not care about their pleas. They started pulling small groups of Sikh men away to the fields and shot them dead. A few Sikhs had earlier gone to a nearby village to buy food and were returning with food for their families when the Pakistani soldiers stopped them, robbed them of their cash, and asked them to move towards an empty field. The Sikh men begged to be released so they could take food to their children. Nevertheless, the Pakistanis hit them with rifle butts and shot them dead at point blank range. All this happened so quickly in front of my own eyes—all of their food lay strewn across their dead bodies. The Pakistani soldiers kept shooting until there was no movement from the fallen bodies of the Sikhs. This was the first gruesome massacre I witnessed from close range and it left a deep impact on me. For the

rest of the day, the Pakistanis, Pathans, and local Muslims continued killing Sikhs and abducting Hindu and Sikh women and girls.

During the chilly winter night, we slept inside some empty huts or barns, using haystacks to cover our bodies for warmth. We were all terrified and huddled together in groups of fifty to one hundred people per room.

Chapter 8

Jauhar - Mass Suicide of Hindu Women

On November 28 at midnight, in the village of Thathal, the Pakistani soldiers woke us up and ordered us to march in the direction of Alibeg, which was about ten miles away. The Pakistanis had decided to march the Hindu and Sikh prisoners during the night to avoid detection by IAF airplanes. The caravan of prisoners walked all night under the surveillance of the Pakistani soldiers. In the darkness, many local armed Muslims sporadically attacked the caravan. They randomly pulled Hindu and Sikh men, killed them with their swords or axes, and abducted Hindu and Sikh women. I saw Muslims kill my mother's uncle, Khem Chand Bhagotra, because he was trying to save his daughter-in-law from being kidnapped. I also saw Muslims shoot dead another of my mother's uncles, Mukund Lal Sootwala, when he tried to protect his daughter from being kidnapped.

To save themselves, some Hindus begged the Pakistani soldiers and accompanying Muslims for conversion to Islam and started singing the Muslim prayer:

La- Allah-al -Allah, Mohammed Al -Rasul -Allah

[There is only one God and Mohammed is the prophet of God].

However, even chanting the name of *Allah* did not save them from slaughter. In the twilight hours, we reached the upper *Jhelum* river, which was the border between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan. We were still walking within the borders of Jammu and Kashmir, but at some point, because of the difficult terrain, we were forced to cross a bridge and enter Pakistani territory.

There is a Hindu tradition called *Jauhar* that originated in the Middle Ages of Muslim rulers. *Jauhar* was the practice adopted by Hindu women of committing suicide by either jumping into fires, wells,

or rivers to avoid falling into the hands of invading Muslim soldiers. As we traversed the bridges into the Jhelum, hundreds of captured Hindu women and young girls jumped and committed suicide to avoid abduction and rape by the Pakistanis. I could see dead bodies floating in the frigid waters of the canal. Some women still stood on the edge of the bridge with forlorn looks on their faces and others were standing near the banks of the canal. They threw their children first into the fast flowing waters and seemed impervious to the shrieks and yelling of their own infants. As the children floated down the stream, their heads came up once or twice before the canal gobbled them up. The mothers looked on helplessly. Fear of abduction and torture by Muslims had wiped out all the color and emotions from their faces. Then they jumped in the canal and it was all over in the blink of an eye. Meanwhile, other children on the bridge saw what was coming. They ran to their mothers' sides and clasped them around the knees with despair. The Pakistani soldiers tried hard not to let these women die. They cajoled, threatened, and even pointed their guns at these women. But the desire for self-immolation in these women was too great and was embedded for centuries amongst the Hindu women. They all went to their death with pride and dignity rather than leading a life of rape and torture by Muslims.

One of them was Shanti Devi, the wife of Dr. Nanak Chand Gupta, whom the Pakistanis had earlier pulled from the fire in Akalgarh. My aunt Swaran Devi and her daughter Nirmal also jumped from a bridge into the canal. Seeing them jump into the canal, my brother Ramesh, cousins Bhushan and Rajinder, and I, all started crying. However, some Muslims managed to pull both of them out of the canal and reunite them with us. Those Muslims let them go, because aunt Swaran Devi was pregnant, and Nirmal was just an eight-year-old girl. On the way to Alibeg, I also saw many mutilated bodies of Hindus and Sikhs, killed by blunt weapons such as axes or swords. I recognized one of the bodies as that of a Sikh of *Sardaron Ki Haveli* (Mansion of the Sikhs). Unbelievably, this caravan of scared Hindu and Sikh prisoners was trampling the dead bodies of their own brethren.

Some of the Muslims attacking the caravan were locals who had worked as servants, laborers, masons, cobblers, and other low paying jobs in Hindu and Sikh households and businesses. They were killing their old masters and abducting their women. It appeared that they were settling old scores and it was compounded by religious frenzy.

One such Muslim, Deen Mohammed, worked part time for my uncles Mukund Lal and Mohanlal. He recognized me and inquired about them. I told him that we were separated from our uncles and did not know their whereabouts. He left us alone and walked further to search for his other Hindu employers. By noontime, we reached the Alibeg Prison, which looked like a small fortress from the banks of the Jhelum.

Chapter 9

Alibeg in 1947

Alibeg is a small town in what is now known as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) that was established during the Mogul rule of India between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Alibeg lies on the old Mogul Road that connects Punjab to Jammu and Kashmir and is located about two miles northeast of the Jhelum—the boundary between West Punjab (Pakistan) and Jammu and Kashmir. On the Indian side, Alibeg was about twenty-five miles from Mirpur City and was part of the Mirpur district, and on the Pakistan side, the nearest town to Alibeg was *Serai Alamgir* of the *Gujarat* district. Outside of Alibeg were huge farmlands irrigated by the waters of the Jhelum. There was one main *bazaar*, and houses were on either side of it. My history teacher, Master Harbans Lal, told the class, “During Alexander’s invasion of India 2500 years ago, areas east of the Jhelum River like Alibeg, Mirpur, etc., were under the rule of King Porus. The areas west of the Jhelum were under King Ambi. King Ambi and Porus were sworn enemies and Ambi joined Alexander to defeat Porus. It was near Alibeg that Alexander’s forces crossed the Jhelum. A battle between Alexander’s forces and Porus took place at a site called *Kari Ka Maidan (Battle field of Kari)*.” During my internment in Alibeg, I used to pick firewood from jungles around Kari Ka Maidan.

Sant (saint) *Sunder Singh* built a huge two-story *Gurudwara* (Sikh temple) in Alibeg in 1901. The *Sant* was a Sikh holy person but Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs of the entire Mirpur district and adjoining districts of the state of Punjab respected him equally. During his lifetime, the *Sant* established a free community kitchen for the poor and visiting holy men. He also built a middle school that provided free education for students of all religions, and free boarding and lodging for the poor. The *Sant* created facilities for the crippled, blind, lepers,

and other handicapped individuals. He gave special attention to the orphans, and the Sikh temple management helped poor students who had completed Alibeg Middle School to attend Mirpur High School. Legend has it that when he died in 1943 in Alibeg, the *Sant* had predicted the catastrophic events of 1947 for the Indian subcontinent.

In 1947, the population of Alibeg included about twenty five hundred Hindus and Sikhs and they were property owners, business persons, or in government service. The majority of Muslims were farmers, black smiths, carpenter, masons, leather workers, or in military service. Some of the residents of Alibeg also worked in the neighboring state of West Punjab (Pakistan), two miles away. Most of the houses in Alibeg were one-story brick structures, but there were a few two-story houses. There was one huge mansion owned by a rich Hindu, Kundan Lal Gupta. As described later, in December, Pakistani soldiers forced Kundan Lal Gupta out of Alibeg and used his property as an alternate prison for Hindus and Sikhs when the *Alibeg Gurudwara* became overcrowded.

After August 15, 1947, when Pakistan came into existence, the two Pakistani districts of Jhelum and Gujarat, adjoining the Mirpur district, were the scenes of Hindu and Sikh massacres. Thousands of people fled to Jammu and Kashmir for safety and some of them came to Alibeg. Soon after, Pakistani provocateurs followed them to incite the local Muslim population and the Muslim troops of Jammu and Kashmir. Posters started appearing on walls and leaflets were distributed in and around Alibeg. There were also gatherings in Muslim mosques inciting communal hatred.

On August 27, a large Muslim mob threatened the *Alibeg Gurudwara*. The Jammu and Kashmir army commanders from Mirpur City deployed a platoon for the protection of the *Sant's* holy temple, but even the priests had left for a safer town. Confidence in the Jammu and Kashmir army and its capacity to safeguard civilian life was falling.

On October 17, the Pakistani army launched simultaneous attacks on three small border towns in the Mirpur district—*Chechian*, *Dadyal*, and Alibeg. Only one platoon of the Jammu and Kashmir army guarded Alibeg. Pakistani soldiers and Pathans maneuvered to the rear of the post and subjected the garrison to continuous small arms fire. The shelling continued throughout the days and nights of October 17 and 18. Because lines of communications and supply were unreliable, the Jammu and Kashmir army officers in Mirpur City were doubtful the posts could hold any longer. They ordered the outpost in Alibeg to withdraw to Mirpur and bring with them the Hindu and Sikh

population. Major *Ramsaran Karki* was sent to relieve the garrison, and he extricated the entire platoon and the Hindu and Sikh civilians of Alibeg to Mirpur City. After this evacuation, the Muslim mobs set fire to the Alibeg *Gurudwara*.¹³

As described in later chapters, starting on November 28, the Pakistanis converted the burnt Alibeg *Gurudwara* into the notorious Alibeg Prison and slaughtered over three thousand Hindus and Sikhs. It is believed that Alibeg Prison was set up on the orders of Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim, President of Azad Kashmir (POK) because it was only about a mile from Pakistan border. Sardar Ibrahim visited Alibeg Prison on December 2, 1947.

¹³ Adapted from *Jammu and Kashmir Arms*, by Major General Palit. He was a colonel of a Gurkha battalion in Poonch 1947-1948.

Chapter 10

Alibeg Prison

When the Pakistani soldiers originally captured us, we were over ten thousand Hindu and Sikh prisoners. The Pakistanis slaughtered a large number of Hindus and Sikhs and abducted many women and girls on the way to the town of Alibeg. By November 28, hardly about five thousand prisoners reached Alibeg. Pakistani soldiers herded these remaining terrified Hindus and Sikhs—mostly old men and women, and children—into the *Gurudwara* (Sikh temple). This Gurudwara would come to serve as the notorious Alibeg prison.

As mentioned earlier, a Muslim mob had burnt the windows and the doors of the Gurudwara so that only a huge steel entrance gate survived. Many armed Pakistani soldiers guarded it around the clock. The former Sikh temple was a two-story building that had high brick walls, a large rectangle dirt compound, and a high front steel gate. It normally could only accommodate about five hundred devotees. To live in the prison in the cold weather of November, without blankets or bed sheets, was beyond human endurance. On our first day there, the Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims strip-searched both men and women. The days in November are short in the Himalayan areas and soon a wintry night fell on the Alibeg Prison. There were no lights in the prison and the biting cold and darkness became more fearful because it was eerily dark.

At night, the Pakistani soldiers gave the prisoners some wheat flour and raw lentils. Some male volunteers made a community kitchen by using scrap tin sheets, stones, and bricks to construct makeshift ovens. Female volunteers cooked food on these ramshackle ovens and fed all of us. Water was scarce but available from a small deep water well inside the prison. At night, we slept in the windowless rooms, the kitchen, the *Parikarma* (corridors), and the *Sanctum Santorum* (the seat of the Sikh holy book, *Guru Granth Sahib*). More than twenty persons were packed in each windowless room that was

designed for four or five people. The corridors were about twenty feet long and six feet wide, and each was packed with about twenty prisoners. People had also packed the covered space behind the front gate and the guardhouse. There was a mad rush to occupy rooms to ward off the freezing cold. All the available spaces were occupied on a first-come-first-serve basis. My brother Ramesh and I got a sleeping space in the corridor, along with our aunt Swaran, uncle Amar Nath, Mahasha Tirath Ram, aunt Gomti Devi, Babu Karamchand, and their families. Some surviving Sikh families occupied the other sides of the corridor. Without any blankets or bed sheets for cover, the cold winds of Jammu and Kashmir made it very hard for people to sleep. Sometimes, when cold wind blew through these corridors, they had the effect of a wind tunnel and became more severe. We were also kept awake by the cries of pain all night from the prisoners who had been wounded by bullets and swords. I slept in one wing of the corridors, with about 20 relatives. So total persons crammed in three sided corridor and main prayer hall exceeded 200 persons.

Chapter 11

Massacre of Sikhs

On the evening of November 29, the person in charge of the Alibeg prison, a mean looking Pakistani soldier of medium build named Sergeant Ismail, entered the prison along with a number of armed Pakistani soldiers. From the top of the steps of the prison, he ordered all the Hindu and Sikh prisoners to gather in the open compound. As soon as all the men, women, and children assembled, Ismail menacingly addressed the Hindu and Sikh prisoners. He announced that soon the Pakistani soldiers would kill all the Hindu and Sikh young men. He reminded them that they could not escape the high walls of the prison as the gates were always locked from the outside.

Then Ismail made the most chilling announcement of the night. He announced that the killing of all surviving Sikh men and young boys would start immediately. According to Ismail, Sikhs were the greatest opponents of the creation of Pakistan. Therefore, the Sikhs had forfeited their rights to live in Pakistan and he was going to kill all Sikh men first.

Sikhism became a marshall religion against the tyranny of Muslim rulers of India. Sikh men have the mandatory five religious “K” symbols: *Kesh* (long hair), *Kada* (steel bangle), *Kaccha* (underpants), *Kirpan* (dagger) and *Kangha* (comb). The majority of Sikh men’s last name is *Singh* (lion) and they wear a turban in a different style compared to Hindus and Muslims. In a big crowd, Sikh men are easily identifiable by their symbols.¹⁴ The Pakistanis had already butchered the majority of Sikh men during the forced march from the village of Thathal to Alibeg. The few surviving Sikhs in the prison tried to remove their “K” symbols on the previous night to avoid detection by Pakistanis. A few Sikh men in our corridor also

¹⁴ After the 9/11 episode in the U.S., many Americans mistakenly identified Sikhs with the Taliban of Afghanistan and thought they were Muslim followers of Osama Bin Laden since they wore turbans and had beards.

tried to trim their hair with their knives, but were not successful in trimming it short enough. Their long hair and typical style of pointed Sikh turbans gave them away.

Ismail ordered all the Sikh males to walk outside the prison. Upon his order, the Pakistani soldiers dragged around one hundred Sikh men and young boys towards the gate. The Sikh women started crying aloud and begged for mercy from Ismail and the other Muslim soldiers. However, Ismail and his gang ignored all their pleas and started whipping some in the crowd. In the pandemonium, a few Sikhs broke loose and tried to escape toward the rear of Alibeg Prison. One of them was Sardar Beant Singh, a friend of my Uncle Mohanlal. Beant Singh was a very pious and religious man and had never harmed any Muslim or Hindu. The Pakistani soldiers had earlier stopped Beant Singh at the gates to prevent him from entering the prison, but Singh retorted that, being a Sikh, he had every right to enter the *Gurudwara*—a Sikh place of worship. Ismail pulled his gun and fired all the gun's shots into the back of Beant Singh. As the bullets hit Beant Singh, he dropped like a fallen bird in front of the crying women and children.

Immediately after that, the firing of guns outside the prison broke the silence of the dark night. We heard one shot at a time, each shot followed by the cry of a dying Sikh. Half an hour later, the firing stopped and inside the prison an eerie silence of death and despair fell upon the remaining prisoners. Ismail reentered through the front gate, his face wearing a mean smile. Historians say that Genghis Khan used to laugh loudly after the slaughter of defenseless, innocent civilian prisoners. To me, Ismail was a reincarnation of Genghis Khan.

Only one Sikh male, named Sardar Sohan Singh survived this massacre. He was a bald old man and did not have much hair on either his head or beard. The previous night, Sohan Singh had trimmed the hair from his beard and thrown away his turban and steel bangle. Therefore, in the crowd, he did not show any outward symbols of Sikhism and mingled with the rest of the Hindu crowd without detection. He was the sole survivor amongst the Sikh males in the prison. After that, Sohan Singh lived under a Hindu name, Sohan Lal, with the rest of the Hindu prisoners. Two six-year-old Sikh boys, Vikram Singh and Atamdev Singh, also survived this massacre. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) liberated them in March 1948, and the two brothers are still living in Jammu.

Chapter 12

Massacre of Hindu Youth

On the entire day of November 30, the Pakistani soldiers pulled out young Hindu males from the Alibeg prison and killed them outside the compound walls. Disposing of the numerous dead bodies posed a problem, and the dead bodies of Sikhs still lay outside. The soldiers stopped shooting the victims outside the prison walls. Instead, the soldiers took the Hindus to the banks of the Jhelum and killed them with swords and axes. First, they picked up all the members of RSS and killed them. Illahi Baksh Zargar, a notorious Muslim Conference leader of Mirpur, identified all the Hindus of Mirpur who were members of the RSS. The Pakistani soldiers grabbed them and bundled them in a few buses for execution.

The Pakistani soldiers took the remaining young men whom they found as they searched the rooms. Throughout the searches, they picked up and killed many of my mother's uncles and cousins, including her uncle Dinanath Dhangeryal and cousin Malik Shah Bhagotra. During this time, I witnessed many incidents of sacrifice to save somebody else's life. One example of that was the younger brother of Chander Parkash Gupta, who was carrying his one-year old son, when the Pakistani soldiers started dragging him to be killed. To save the baby, Chander Parkash's younger brother, Ladli Lal, volunteered to take his place for execution. Today, that one-year old baby is the Inspector General of Police of Jammu and Kashmir, Prem Kumar Gupta.

During this period, the Pakistani soldiers also brought some Hindu stragglers from Mirpur City to Alibeg and kept them in different locations, because the prison was already overcrowded. These prisoners, some of whom were my mother's relatives, uncle Tarlok Chand Dhangeryal, cousin Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal, and Master Harbans Lal Gupta, related their own horror stories (see other chapters for their stories).

Chapter 13

Execution of Prisoners of War

On December 1, the Pakistani soldiers brought in two Hindu soldiers of the Jammu and Kashmir army. They were captured somewhere on their way from Mirpur City to Jhangar (India). The prison guards put these Hindu soldiers inside the front gate of the prison where all of us could see them. The soldiers told them that since they were prisoners of war, they would be killed by a firing squad. One of the Hindu soldiers had a young daughter of my age with him. The Muslims had already abducted her mother and she cried all day and night in fear of losing her second parent. As a brave soldier, her father tried to console her all night.

To ward off December's biting cold, a *Swami* (Hindu religious person) had lit a bonfire in the open area of the prison. The *Swami* had found shelter inside the front gate and gave the Hindu soldiers their last religious sermon from the *Bhagwad Gita*, chapter, 2.23:

Na Ainam Chindati Vastrani, Na Ainam Dahti Pavka

Na Cha Ainam Klaindyantyapi Na Shoshita Maruta

(The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by wind)

The last time I saw the Hindu soldiers they were smoking a tobacco pipe – their proverbial “last cigarette.” Before sunrise, the Pakistani soldiers took both of the Hindu soldiers outside the prison and shot them dead by a firing squad. The sound of firing bullets woke us up in the early hours. God only knows what happened to the little girl, but, like many of us, she became an orphan in just one day.

The Pakistani soldiers certainly did not follow the Geneva Convention rules for the captured soldiers. According to the ICRC reports of 1947 and 1948, the majority of the Pakistani soldiers and

officers did not know much about the Geneva Convention and treatment of prisoners of war. In the absence of world organizations like the United Nations and the ICRC during the war, not many soldiers were captured alive. The Muslim soldiers would kill captured Hindu and Sikh soldiers of the Indian army, and Hindu and Sikh soldiers would kill the captured Muslim soldiers of the Pakistani army.

Chapter 14

Massacre of Hindu Intelligentsia

On December 2, while the indiscriminate killing of young Hindus and Sikhs and the abduction and rape of women were going on, the Pakistani soldiers spared the Hindu intelligentsia from killing or torture. The Alibeg prisoners included highly literate doctors, attorneys, teachers, professors, and government officers. On December 1, a young Muslim attorney of Mirpur named Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim (who later became the president of POK) visited the prison. Some of the prisoners, such as Sita Ram Gupta, Sardar Joginder Singh Kakkar, Amar Nath Bhagotra, Nand Lal Gupta (all prominent attorneys of Mirpur), Dr. Daya Ram Gupta, Ram Nath Gupta (a renowned businessman), and Ram Parkash Gupta (a National Conference leader) complained to Sardar Ibrahim about the atrocities that were being committed. Sardar Ibrahim outwardly showed sympathy and told them that he would do his best to remove their miseries. He gave away his sweater to Nand Lal Gupta, Muslim cap to Amar Nath Bhagotra, and muffler to Sita Ram Gupta as tokens of his friendship, but these gestures were, in fact, subtle signals to the Pakistani soldiers to kill these people first. The same evening the soldiers gathered all the educated people of the prison including high school teachers Harbans Lal Gupta, Bhagat Madan Lal, Isahr Das Gupta, attorneys listed above and other prominent Hindus who were wearing Sardar Ibrahim's gifted items. The soldiers said they would take them to Rawalpindi (in Pakistan) for a meeting with Pakistani authorities and then send them to Jammu (India), as a prisoner-exchange with Muslim prisoners in Jammu City.

The Pakistani soldiers took the entire intelligentsia of Hindus on a bus towards Pakistan. They stopped the bus on a bridge over the Jhelum canal and ordered all the Hindus to get down and remove their

clothes. One by one, the Pakistani soldiers killed all these Hindus by sharp-edged axes and swords and threw their bodies in the canal.

When attorney Sita Ram Gupta asked the Muslim soldiers to kill him with bullets, the soldier replied that a bullet was more valuable than the life of the *Kafir* (infidel) Hindu. At that time, Sita Ram Gupta uttered a verse from the Hindu holy book, *Bhagwad Gita*, chapter 2.23:

Na Ainam Chindati Vastrani, Na Ainam Dahti Pavka

Na Cha Ainam Klaindyantyapi Na Shoshita Maruta

(The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water nor withered by wind)

The Pakistani soldiers then axed Sita Ram to death and threw his body down the canal.

Attorney Sardar Joginder Singh Kakkar was especially tortured to death for being a Sikh and starting RSS branch in Mirpur. The Pakistanis chopped off his arms and legs one by one with an axe and then decapitated his head. In the eighteenth century, a Muslim Mughal king had tortured and killed the Sikh warrior Banda Singh Bahadur and his children in the same fashion.

At this time, Master Harbans Lal showed his presence of mind and courage. He chose to jump into the canal rather than die at the hands of the Muslims. Pakistani soldiers fired at him in the dark until they thought they killed him and gave up. He swam a few miles to the Pakistani side of the canal where a kind-hearted Muslim saved him. This kind-hearted Muslim (whose name I do not remember) adopted Master Harbans Lal as his own son and helped Master Harbans Lal to know the whereabouts of his family in POK. In 1950, thanks to the generosity of this man, Master Harbans Lal was reunited with his family in Jammu.¹⁵

¹⁵ In 1955 when I was attending SRMP High School in Jammu, my history teacher, Master Harbans Lal Gupta, narrated the eyewitness account of the massacre to all the students of the tenth class. Harbans Lal Gupta retired as the inspector of schools and died in Jammu (India) in late 1973.

Chapter 15

Massacre of Hindus and Sikhs at Kas Guma

In November 1947, Pakistani soldiers had captured most of the road from Mirpur to Jhangar. When Mirpur City fell to the Pakistani army, the column of the Jammu and Kashmir army would not take this route (mostly hilly terrain) because they wanted to avoid ambushes from the Pakistani army. Instead, they took the backcountry walking trails, passing through many hills, valleys, and gorges.

Muslim *Rajput*, whose ancestors converted to Islam during the Mughal regime in the 15th century A.D., inhabited villages around Kas Guma (Guma Gorge). Rajputs are a *Kshatriyas* (soldier) caste of the Hindus of northern India, and they joined the army in large numbers. The Muslim Rajputs formed about 40 percent of the Jammu and Kashmir army, but with the creation of Pakistan, they deserted the Jammu and Kashmir army and joined the Pakistani army. Most of these Muslims used to borrow money from Mirpur Hindu businesspersons, and they would mortgage their land as collateral. The Muslim Rajputs living in Kas Guma carried away military guns with them when they deserted the Jammu and Kashmir army. Kas Guma lies about two miles off the fair weather road from Mirpur to Jhangar that lies at the base of the Himalayan mountain range (see map). This area became notorious in the holocaust of Mirpur because it set the stage for the largest one-day massacre of Hindus and Sikhs.

On November 25, while other two Dhangeryal brothers were defending the front of their mansion, Tarlokchand had gone to the side of the building where twenty Jammu and Kashmir soldiers under Major Ramsaran Karki, Captain Ramsaran, Sargent Major Daljeet Singh, and about one hundred volunteer Hindu refugees of Pakistan had formed a formidable defensive post. When the entire southwest side of Mirpur City was burning, this mansion also caught on fire. The Jammu and Kashmir soldiers and civilian defenders abandoned their

positions and proceeded towards the army cantonment, taking the path of the main *bazaar*. Non-stop firing by the Pakistani soldiers killed or injured most of those defenders, but at sunset, a group of fifty persons took a safe route down the Raghunath Temple *Dhakki* (hiking trail) by walking along the riverside. From there, they went up the Ramgali *Dhakki* and followed other people to the army cantonment. The cantonment was completely deserted with dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs lying all around.

They continued walking northward towards Jhangar for three days and nights without any food. On the night of November 28, a stroke of bad luck caused the group to lose their way. They were only two miles away from the Indian army camp in Jhangar but during the night, as the group sat on the top of a ridge, Pakistani soldiers surrounded them from the south side. In the darkness, the Pakistani soldiers shouted that they were Hindu soldiers of the Jammu and Kashmir army deployed to rescue Hindu civilians. Upon closer view, the group found that they were, in reality, Pakistani soldiers who had deserted the Jammu and Kashmir army and joined the Pakistani army. Though the Hindus were armed, they did not get a chance to fight and they were captured.

In the morning, the Pakistani soldiers brought them to a village near Kas Guma. About one thousand Hindus and Sikhs were already there, having been taken prisoners in the past two to three days. That night, the Pakistani soldiers and armed Muslims of Raja Murtab Khan and Raja Lal Khan (local Muslim chiefs) gave them some millet to eat and allowed them to use haystacks to stay warm. In the meantime, the Pakistani soldiers and Muslim Rajas asked the Hindu and Sikh prisoners to hand over all their cash and jewelry. The next morning, the Pakistani soldiers took all the young men, numbering about five hundred, on top of a ridge and ordered them to remove their clothes and lie down in a row. Then the soldiers and Muslim Rajputs killed all the Hindu and Sikh male prisoners with axes and threw their bodies down in the gorge. Some of the prisoners did not die from the blow of the axes but their half-alive bodies were still thrown into the gorge. The Pakistani soldiers needed an educated person to keep inventory of the rations for the rest of the prisoners so they spared the life of Tarlokchand and did not kill him. The Pakistani soldiers also abducted and raped young women and girls in Kas Guma.

On December 4, after a few days in Kas Guma, the Pakistani soldiers transferred less than five hundred prisoners, including

Tarlokchand Dhangeryal, old women, and children, to the prison. On the way to Alibeg, Tarlokchand Dhangeryal saw thousands of dead bodies lying on the dirt road and in the fields. Many dead bodies were naked and it appeared the killers had snatched everything, including clothes, from the victims before killing them. Many dead bodies appeared not to have any blood, looking as if they had been choked to death.

With over thirty five hundred prisoners packed into the Alibeg prison, there was no room to accommodate the arrival of prisoners from Kas Guma so the Pakistani soldiers converted Sunderdass Kundanlal's mansion to a prison. Sunderdass was a rich person of Alibeg and was killed in Mirpur by the Pakistanis. After staying for two days in this building, Tarlokchand Dhangeryal was taken to the town of Govindpur. Devichand Bahri, Lachhmandas Bhasin, Vidyanath Dhrawai, Hansraj Gupta, and Shivanand Sharma—the richest Hindus of Mirpur—and a few of their women were also taken to Govindpur. From Govindpur, the Pakistani soldiers took this group of Hindus to Mirpur and told them to dig out and reveal their hidden treasures from their homes. Some of them showed them hidden boxes or dug out hidden treasures, but Tarlokchand did not have any hidden safe or treasure. He had already given all the cash and jewelry at Kas Guma to the Muslim Raja, Murtab Khan. Consequently, the Pakistani soldiers beat and tortured Tarlokchand mercilessly until he became unconscious. When he regained consciousness, the Pakistani soldiers wanted to kill him, but his little daughters clung to his body to protect him. Seeing these little girls, the Pakistani soldiers showed some mercy, did not kill Tarlokchand, and brought him back to Alibeg.¹⁶

In the Alibeg prison, the Pakistani soldiers again appointed Tarlokchand as a ration clerk. On March 15, 1948, when the ICRC was transferring all the prisoners to India, the Pakistani soldiers did not turn over Tarlokchand. At the last moment, the Pakistani soldiers came to know that he was a member of the RSS, whose members the Pakistanis had already killed. When the ICRC intervened, the Pakistani soldiers released him and he was able to catch the train to India. He settled in Jammu (India), worked as a clerk in the defense department, and died there of natural causes.

¹⁶ While I was in the Alibeg prison, my mother's uncle, Tarlokchand Dhangeryal, narrated the above episode. He settled in Jammu (India) and died there.

Chapter 16

Escape from Alibeg Prison

From December 2-4, the Pakistani soldiers loaded buses with Hindu prisoners and headed them towards the Jhelum to be ruthlessly slaughtered. From a bus, another young Hindu named Jagmohan Gupta (son of Master Devi Mitter Gupta) jumped into the canal. He survived after swimming about a mile on the Jammu and Kashmir side of the canal and hiding himself during the day among the tall grass that lined the bank of the canal. The next night, he came back to the prison by crawling through a sewer pipe. Jagmohan was completely naked except for his underwear. The Hindu prisoners did not have any extra clothes but they somehow managed to give him some. For the next few days, Jagmohan kept hiding in a dark room in the basement of the prison.

Through Jagmohan's escape from execution, we learned that the Pakistani soldiers had killed all the Hindus who had boarded the bus to Rawalpindi. We then became vigilant not to volunteer ourselves for transfers to Jammu (India). Within a few days, Jagmohan escaped from the prison along with another Hindu named Dr. Ved Parkash Gupta¹⁷ (son of Dr. Charan Das Gupta). The two traveled through Pakistani territory for many days, hiding by day and traveling by night, until they reached Lahore (Pakistan). There they met Indian Consul who sent them to Jammu safely by mid-December. They told the Jammu and Kashmir authorities about the existence of the Alibeg Prison. They were the first Hindus to inform the Jammu and Kashmir

¹⁷ In the 1950s, Dr. Ved Prakash Gupta eventually settled in Nowshera (India), set up a pharmacy, became active in politics, and fought elections for state legislature. He died in 2004.

government, the Indian government, the Indian Red Cross, and other relief organizations about the massacres of Hindus and Sikhs in the Alibeg prison, Thathal, Akalgarh, Kas Guma, Mirpur courthouse, Mirpur riverbed, Mirpur City, etc. They also met Amar Devi Gupta, her brother Vidya Sagar Dukhiya, Dr. Sansar Chandra, and Master Roshan Lal in Jammu. Vidya Sagar had come from Nairobi (Kenya) to help his family. From there onwards, Amar Devi, Vidya Sagar, Dr. Sansar Chandra and Master Roshan Lal took a prominent part to liberate us from the prison.

Another young man who escaped from the prison was Subash Jain (name fictitious), who hailed from a rich Jain family of Rawalpindi. The Jains who came to Mirpur as refugees were now prisoners in the prison. Subash was the eldest of four brothers. On December 3, he also escaped through the sewer pipe. Since he was from Punjab, he was more familiar with the terrain and geography. He traveled up to Lahore and, with the help of the Indian embassy, reached India. His father and two brothers were killed in the prison. When the ICRC liberated us in April 1948, and we reached the Kurukshetra refugee camp, Subash Jain came in search of his family. When he found his mother and little brother in the refugee camp, he distributed *ladoos* (sweets) to all the refugees of the prison. I also received a bag of ladoos.

Chapter 17

Fateh Mohammed – a Noble Muslim

On December 9, 1947, a noble Muslim, Fateh Mohammed arrived in Alibeg from Serai Alamgir (Pakistan), while the dance of death continued in Alibeg prison. Every day at the prison, young Hindu men, intelligentsia, and RSS volunteers were selected for execution. One of the persons picked up was my mother's cousin, Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal. Though he was seriously injured, he was picked up for execution because he was an educated person. Purshottam Lal's father, Lalchand Dhangeryal, owned a big business in Serai Alamgir (Pakistan) and employed a noble Muslim named Fateh Mohammed. Lalchand and his family had treated Fateh Mohammed like a member of their family. When Fateh Mohammed came to know that Pakistani soldiers had imprisoned Mirpur Hindus in the Alibeg Prison, he came searching for Lalchand and any survivor of his family. Fateh Mohammed appeared in time to save Purshottam Lal's life. He knew some Pakistani soldiers, used his connections and convinced the soldiers to spare Purshottam Lal's life. He gave Purshottam Lal a blanket, food, some cash, and ensured Parshottam Lal the Pakistanis would not bother him anymore. Fateh Mohammed stayed in Alibeg until the mass killings of Hindus had ceased.

On March 15, I saw Fateh Mohammed again in Serai Alamgir, right before our repatriation to India by train. He arranged a crew of Muslim volunteers to provide drinking water for the 1600 Hindu prisoners on board and provided food to Purshottam Lal's family and some others. As the train left for India, he embraced Purshottam Lal and said good-bye to all the prisoners. That was the last I saw of this noble person. We felt humanity was still alive.

Upon arriving in India, Parshottam Lal stayed in touch with Fateh Mohammed. Fateh Mohammed also helped in tracing and repatriating some of the abducted Hindu women and children of Mirpur. Two of

them were my mother's cousins and sisters of Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal. After he rescued them in 1948, he hid them in haystacks in his hut. Many Muslims of his village scolded him and called him a *Kafir* (non-Muslim). However, he stood firm and did not give away the girls under his protection. Finally, he was able to contact Parshottam Lal in India who came to Pakistan and took his sisters with him. While some Muslim employees were killing and looting their Hindu employers in revenge, Fateh Mohammed was an angel and a man of God.

Another kind Muslim (I do not remember his name) who visited Alibeg was an elderly person of Mirpur. Out of fear, only a few Hindus met him outside the prison. After hearing the stories of rape and killings, he loudly cursed the Pakistani prison guards. He warned them that Allah (God) would put them in the worst hell for their actions against innocent Hindu civilians. He had brought *revaris* (sesame candies) for distribution to the prisoners, many of whom were his friends and neighbors in Mirpur. However, he was disappointed that the Pakistani prison guards would not let him inside, and he could not console his friends. Some children like me ventured out and he gave us sesame candy, which gave us some energy in the chilly December month.

Khalid Qureshi, a prominent Muslim from POK residing in the USA, e-mailed me the following. "Comrade Abdul, Aziz a National Conference activist, whom I knew very well, also saved many Hindu and Sikh families in his village home. Comrade Abdul Aziz died 15 years ago and was a colleague of Sardar Boodh Singh, Master Roshan Lal and Comrade Krishan Dev Sethi. Comrade Sethi himself was rescued from Mirpur Jail, hidden and then helped to escape via Nowshera by Colonel Syed Ali Ahmed Shah. Syed Ali Shah was the first Defense Minister of the Azad Kashmir (POK) Government. He later on also became its President and I knew him very well. Also, apart from Thathal camp, Alibeg camp and '*Thekedar Abdul Aziz's*' house, there was a camp at the Mirpur college ground. I lived not very far from that place."

Chapter 18

Death of Pandit Ganpati Sharma

On December 10, 1948, Pandit Ganpati Sharma (called “Panditji” out of respect) died by taking a fast unto death against the atrocities of Pakistanis. He was among the prisoners of Alibeg Prison a scholar of India’s ancient language, Sanskrit. Panditji was a Hindi and Sanskrit teacher in the government high school in Mirpur. He was a renowned Hindu religious leader who was connected with the *Sanatan Dharam Sabha*, a Hindu religious organization. Because of his liberal views, the Hindus and Muslims of Mirpur equally respected him. Some kind Muslims of Mirpur came to prison and offered to take Panditji safely to the Indian border. Panditji declined the offer and told them he would only go to the Indian border if all of the other prisoners went with him. Otherwise, he would meet the fate of the rest of the prisoners. Per his religious beliefs, he would not eat anything until he had taken a bath. But in prison, there was hardly enough water for drinking or cooking. Therefore, Panditji went on a fast and did not eat or drink anything. Panditji could not sustain his body, and, on December 10, 1947, he died from fasting. This was the first non-violent death in Alibeg Prison.

Hindus believe that, upon death, the body should be cremated or consigned to the running waters of rivers. In prison, there were no arrangements for cremation. Dead bodies were either rotting in the fields outside the prison or were thrown into the Jhelum. Pakistani soldiers had already killed all the young and able-bodied Hindus, and the few young Hindus who were still alive had bullet injuries or sword wounds on their bodies (some of these wounds had become septic). No one was available to take Panditji’s body to the river. However, some of the sick and old persons held courage and—with the permission of the Pakistani guards—carried Panditji’s dead body and consigned it to the river. In prison, the Pakistani soldiers would usually shoot those

who went as pallbearers and then dump their dead bodies into the canal. The pallbearers of Panditji were not sure whether they would come back alive, so they bid good-bye to their relatives before leaving for the river. I think, due to the respect for Panditji, the Pakistani soldiers spared his pallbearers and brought them back alive to the prison.

Chapter 19

Buses of Orphans and Widows to Jammu

Around December 16, 1947, three empty buses arrived at Alibeg prison to carry some prisoners to Jammu. While the killing of Hindus was still going on in Alibeg prison, the Pakistani authorities came to know about a Muslims refugee camp in Jammu (India). There were some very important Muslims of Mirpur interned in the refugee camp in Jammu City. Due to the efforts of prominent Mirpuris who had reached Jammu with the retreating army, e.g. Amar Devi Gupta, Vidya Sagar Dukhiya, Master Roshan Lal and Dr. Sansar Chandra, the authorities of the Jammu and Kashmir government decided to exchange the Muslim refugees in Jammu with the Hindu prisoners of Alibeg. As a trial, the Jammu and Kashmir government sent three buses of Muslim refugees from Jammu to POK. After the buses safely reached the POK side and the Muslim refugees were unloaded, the buses arrived in Alibeg to pick up Hindu prisoners. It was December 16, 1947. The Pakistani soldiers asked for volunteers from the prison to go to Jammu, but the prisoners had seen so much killing as a result of similar pretexts that nobody with families availed this opportunity. The Pakistani soldiers decided to send women and children in these buses and selected several widows and orphans. My brother and I had an opportunity to leave by this bus but our uncle Amar Nath and aunt Swaran were doubtful of the Pakistanis' intentions. They told us that we all would live together or die together since our mother had put us under their care. Therefore, we let this opportunity of early freedom pass.

The three buses reached Jammu from the Sialkot-Suchetgarh (Indo-Pak) border on December 20. They traveled for four days

through many cities of Pakistani Punjab and finally crossed Sialkot (Pakistan) to Suchetgarh (India). The liberated widows and orphans told the stories of slaughter and the inhumane treatment of Hindus and Sikhs in the Alibeg prison to the press, and the rest of India. I do not know whether the rest of the world came to know about the prison at this time.

On December 21 and 22, six more buses of widows and orphans arrived in Jammu. Some boys who went on these buses were very sick and looked like skeletons, including the son of Babu Karamchand, an elder who occupied space with us and died there, and the two sons of Lal Chand Dhangeryal, Kuldip and Pradyuman. Upon reaching Jammu, the Jammu and Kashmir government put them in a refugee camp and they were hardly able to walk. During his visit to Kashmir, Pandit Nehru also visited this camp along with Sheikh Abdullah. When Pandit Nehru saw these skeleton-like boys, he was appalled. Camp inmates told Pandit Nehru this was the price paid by the Hindus of Mirpur for India's freedom. Until that moment, Pandit Nehru did not know what had happened in Alibeg. From the freed people of Alibeg, he learned that another thirty five hundred people were still in the prison. It is very likely that Pandit Nehru's visit to the refugee camp expedited the arrival of the ICRC to the prison.¹⁸

Three Emissaries from Alibeg As mentioned earlier, there were some very important Muslims of Mirpur in the refugee camp in Jammu. Chaudhri Hamidullah, a Muslim refugee of Jammu, wanted to send some Hindu emissaries to arrange for a prisoner-exchange of the Muslim refugees of Jammu with the Hindu prisoners of Alibeg. Towards the end of December, the Pakistanis sent three influential Hindu emissaries—Dr. Nanak Chand Gupta, Chander Parkash Gupta, and Raghunandan Bhasin—from the Alibeg Prison to Jammu to meet the Jammu and Kashmir government authorities. The wives of all three men had committed suicide rather than be kidnapped by the Pathans. However, their children were kept hostage in the prison until the Muslim refugees of Jammu were released. Once in Jammu, the emissaries met relatives of the prisoners of Alibeg, and the authorities of the Jammu and Kashmir government came to know about the plight of the Hindus of Mirpur. Due to the efforts of these emissaries, many Muslim refugees of Jammu were repatriated to Pakistan. It also

¹⁸ Adapted from *A Tragedy of J & K State – 1947 – with a Focus on Mirpur* by Amar Devi Gupta. Amar Devi immigrated to London (UK) and died there.

expedited the arrival of the ICRC in Alibeg. In January 1948, their children, including Kamlesh Gupta, were also sent across Sialkot-Suchetgarh border to Jammu.¹⁹

Author's note: One of the Muslim prisoners to be exchanged was Muslim Conference leader, Chaudhari Ghulam Abbas. While Chaudhri Abbas was in Jammu prison in 1947, his daughter was abducted by a Hindu rioter in Jammu. Many years later she was recovered with the help of another Jammu Hindu, Manilal and Indian Red Cross. Chaudhri Abbas was released from Jammu prison in March 1948 by M.C. Mahajan. He migrated to Pakistan and later on became President of Azad Kashmir (POK). Chaudhri Hamidullah was another Muslim Conference leader of Jammu and his daughter was also kidnapped in Jammu. However she was never recovered.

¹⁹ This fact was narrated to the author by Kamlesh Gupta, chief engineer, Jammu and Kashmir, in 2003. After retiring, he settled down in Delhi (India)

Chapter 20

Life in Alibeg Prison

From the end of November to the end of December 1947, the Pakistanis killed almost all the young Hindu and Sikh men in Alibeg prison. After that, the mass killing of Hindus and Sikhs stopped but sporadic killing continued. Some Mirpur Muslims who held personal grudges would show up and drag out old and middle-aged Hindu prisoners and torture or kill them. Occasionally, the Pakistanis would take some rich Hindu prisoners to Mirpur City to recover the valuables hidden in their mansions. If the Hindu prisoners did not have anything, the Pakistanis would beat and torture them. If the prisoners showed them the hidden treasures, the Pakistanis would not harm them and bring them back to the prison. My uncle Amar Nath, who was one of the richest persons of Mirpur, barely escaped this torture because the Pakistanis took another person with the same name to Mirpur. The other Amar Nath was also wealthy and showed them his hidden treasure. That seemed to satisfy the Pakistanis' greed.

Food was a particularly difficult aspect of life in the prison. Pakistani guards appointed some old Hindu men to distribute the daily ration. Each prisoner got two ounces of wheat flour and a pinch of salt per day. The Hindu prisoners suspected the Pakistani guards had mixed arsenic poison or fine ground glass into the wheat flour so as to cause a slow death because almost all of the prisoners got dysentery and diarrhea after eating bread made from this flour. We did not get anything else in the ration for sustenance. Sometimes we would go out to the nearby fields to pick up weeds or wild vegetables. My aunt Swaran Devi would mix them with the flour to infuse some taste and nourishment. Nobody cared if these weeds or wild vegetables were poisonous. Occasionally, I was able to steal a radish or a carrot from the nearby farms of Muslim farmers. On those days, dinner or lunch would be a treat for the entire family.

Aunt Swaran baked *chapattis* (flat bread) on tin plates made from discarded canisters of kerosene oil or vegetable oil. For fuel, we collected firewood, dried leaves, and branches from nearby forests. In Jammu and Kashmir, December and January are extremely cold due to the winter monsoons and, when it rained, we would not go out to pick up firewood nor did we do any cooking. On those days, we starved and remained cold. We did not have any blankets, sweaters, shawls, or sheets to cover our bodies and warm ourselves. The chilly winds passed through the open corridors and the openings of broken windows. Sleeping during the night under sub-zero temperatures was like sleeping in a freezer.

Due to arsenic poisoning, malnutrition, septic wounds, and frigid weather, the children and elderly fell terribly sick in the prison. Dr. Charandas Gupta was the only Hindu doctor still alive. The Pakistani soldiers in Alibeg did not kill him because he had gout and was unable to walk. However, they killed his younger brother who was also a medical doctor. Patients would line up in front of Dr. Charandas and he would diagnose their diseases. He did not have any medicines for curing their illnesses, and, slowly, the vulnerable patients started dying. The Pakistani soldiers and Muslim guards would not even help remove the dead bodies. They did not care whether a Hindu lived or died, and they certainly did not keep a log of dead bodies.

An elderly couple, Babu Karam Chand and his wife, shared the space with us in the corridor (the *Parikrama* of the *Gurudwara*). Babu Karam Chand was an influential person of Mirpur and a retired forest conservator. He was the father of Dr. Sansar Chandra, an uncle of my wife. Due to malnutrition and lack of medical care, the husband and wife died—one right after the other. This was the first case of death in our portion of the corridor, and I watched the elderly couple dying helplessly just a few feet from where I slept. Their youngest son, an eight-year-old child, became an orphan like many of us.

Mahasha Tirath Ram, along with his wife and five children, also lived in the same corridor. One day, the Pakistani guards took him out to the fields to be killed. They beat him mercilessly with heavy wooden staffs and rifle butts and left him to die in the fields. Due to some miracle, he survived and came back to the prison, bleeding profusely from a spear wound on his nose. Over time, he was cured and survived. After liberation by the ICRC, part of his family settled in Mirzapur (India), and the rest of his family settled in Jammu (India) where Mahasha Tirath Ram later died.

My family suffered as well. Uncles Vishwa Nath and Suraj Parkash crossed into a safe zone and reached India when the Pakistani soldiers abducted their wives. Two children (my cousins) were with their grandparents in the prison. Both of my cousins died from the shock of being separated from their parents and from malnutrition. The youngest son of aunt Basant Devi also died under similar circumstances. Aunt Swaran Devi gave birth to a child but the baby died within a few days due to the lack of proper medical care.

On a freezing, rainy day when someone died in the prison, the prisoners would dump the dead bodies into a huge pit outside the prison or bury them in the nearby fields. In the freezing rains, nobody had the strength, or the energy, to travel to the Jhelum for consigning the bodies into the flowing water, as per Hindu tradition. My younger brother Ramesh, who was seven years old, contracted dysentery and was passing blood in his stools. He started to become thinner and weaker and, soon, was unable to walk. He was always drowsy due to illness and weakness. I was extremely sad to see him in this condition. My father died when I was three years old and, after we were separated from our mother in the Mirpur courthouse, we did not know whether she was dead or alive. I did not want to lose my brother Ramesh, possibly my only living immediate family member, but I could not do anything to save him.

Hygienic conditions in the prison were appalling. We were all overcrowded and stuffed in small rooms, corridors, and other small spaces. For months, we did not have any soap or any other washing detergents. We had no option but to use contaminated mud to clean our hands and private parts after defecation. Months passed by and nobody had washed their clothes that had become filthy and wrought with foul stench. However, it appears we had all lost our sense of smell. All the prisoners in Alibeg had lice in their hair. For the toilet, men used the open fields but women used an old-time abandoned community kitchen of the *Gurudwara*. There was no privacy between men and women. Human excrement and other waste piled up within the compound of the prison. The entire prison and its compound smelled of urine and feces and was littered with blood-filled rags from women's menstruation, prisoner's wounds, and other garbage. The polluted air, from the stench of human waste and septic wounds, was adding to the spread of disease. The Pakistanis did not provide any professional sweepers for cleaning and there was none amongst the Hindu prisoners. Uncle Amar Nath was the only volunteer who, every

day, cleaned the entire second floor with a broom and a sheet of tin as the professional sweepers in India and Pakistan often do.

As prisoners were using unclean utensils to draw water from the well, the water also became contaminated. Therefore, the killing process was three-pronged in the prison, caused by food poisoning, unclean water, and contagious diseases. Children, old persons, and the wounded were the first to fall victim and die without medical help. From November 28, 1947, to the beginning of February 1948, about two thousand to three thousand Hindus and Sikhs in the prison died from a lack of medical care. This was compounded by poor hygienic conditions and freezing cold weather.

In the town of Alibeg, the Muslims occupied all the shops and homes that were once owned by Hindus and Sikhs. Muslim inhabitants of nearby villages would buy their groceries and other necessities from the new Muslim shop owners. Some of the Hindu prisoners still had some hidden cash in their shoes or in under garments, and they would ask children like me to buy groceries for their families and smuggle them inside the Alibeg Prison. The children would get a portion of these groceries, or a little bit of cash, as a commission. Sometimes, I also offered my services for such ventures. I would go out and buy sugar, salt, tea, or lentils for them by hiding small packets under my shirt. This was a risky operation because the Pakistani soldiers or prison guards would notice which children were venturing out more often. If the guards were the same, I would not go out and wait for the change of guard before venturing out again. Sometimes, if the same guards were on duty, I had to wait for a week. Uncle Amar Nath and his family had no such hidden cash, and so we all lived on the two ounces of fixed ration per day, except for when I brought extra goods as a commission. Aunt Swaran Devi would use those extra goods in cooking and she always made sure that the children got the first serving.

One day in the winter, I had gone to collect firewood in a nearby forest with a few other persons. All of a sudden, it started raining hard. We took refuge in a nearby village that had eerily empty streets. It was once a Hindu village but was now totally deserted with all the houses burnt to the ground. Even stray dogs were absent in the streets. We passed by the village drinking well and saw bloated dead bodies floating in it. It appeared that many Hindus had jumped into the well rather than face slaughter by the Muslims. Whenever we went out to pick up firewood, we saw this kind of scene in the villages where

Hindus and Sikhs had once lived. In Mirpur City and the countryside of Mirpur, the dead bodies of Hindu women filled almost all the wells. They had jumped into the wells rather than face abduction and rape by the Muslims.

The garrison of the Pakistani army in Alibeg consisted of one or two platoons. They had occupied an empty mansion that was probably once the home of a rich Hindu or Sikh. The Pakistani army kitchen was located in the courtyard close to the entrance. Often, Muslim cooks were baking *nans* (pita bread) as we passed by in the evening after picking up firewood. Since we were starving after a day's hard labor, we begged the Muslim cooks for a piece of bread. Sometimes, a kind Muslim cook would break a *Nan* and throw pieces towards us. Since *Nan* is similar to a jumbo pita bread or jumbo tortilla, one piece for a child like me was filling. Occasionally, the Muslim cooks would also offer a piece of cooked beef to us. Though we were starving, we would decline their offer because the Hindu religion prohibits the eating of beef.

Chapter 21

Mahatma Gandhi's Death

Back in New Delhi (in India), Mahatma Gandhi was trying to stop the massacre of Muslims by Hindu and Sikh refugees who had arrived in India from Pakistan. These refugees were retaliating at the senseless killing and rapes, which they had suffered at the hands of Pakistani Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi had gone on a fast until death if the Hindus and Sikhs did not stop killing Indian Muslims. Hindu and Sikh leaders and refugees listened to the Mahatma's call and stopped killing Muslims in India. Consequently, Mahatma Gandhi broke his fast on January 30, 1948. However, a hardliner Hindu named Nathuram Godse did not like Gandhi's request for Hindus and Sikhs to appease the Muslims. On that same day, as the Mahatma was heading to his daily prayer meeting, Godse assassinated the Mahatma by shooting him from close range. Mahatma Gandhi—along with the five million other Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs slaughtered in 1947—fell on the altar of the goddess of freedom.

The Pakistani soldiers and Muslim prison guards broke the news of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination to the Hindu prisoners in Alibeg. We felt sorrow on the tragic death of the Mahatma but did not have the liberty for a condolence meeting. We did not know the full details of Mahatma Gandhi's death because we had been cut off from the rest of the outside world. The Pakistani soldiers and Muslim guards placed the entire blame of the assassination on the RSS, a Hindu nationalist organization. Even the government of India banned the RSS for the same reason. The Hindus in the prison were sad to know that the killer of Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu. The only news we ever got was from the discarded Pakistani Urdu newspapers that we picked up from the Muslim grocery stores of Alibeg.

Chapter 22

Informers in Alibeg Prison

During the siege of Mirpur in November 1947, a Hindu named Tarlok Chand snuck out of the city with his family. He converted to Islam, and the Muslims changed his name to Tarlok Sheikh. In early December, he showed up in the prison with his Muslim Fez cap and pointed beard (signature Muslim features) where he acted as an informer against Hindu prisoners. He would spy and identify rich Hindus who still had some hidden cash or ornaments. He would also act as an extortionist that took bribes from Hindu prisoners so as not to identify them to their Muslim captors. Though he did not cause the killing of any Hindu prisoner, he caused agony and suffering for many of the families. The irony is that the Pakistanis had killed his eldest son before they converted him to Islam and his wife was killed in a random firing by Pakistanis.

After the arrival of the ICRC volunteers, Tarlok Sheikh disappeared from Alibeg. In 1950, he appeared again in Jammu city (India). I saw some Hindu survivors of the prison severely beating Tarlok Sheikh in the main shopping square Raghunath Bazaar. Somehow, Tarlok Sheikh had managed to cross the Pakistan border with his children from POK, until they reached Jammu (India). He was bleeding profusely and was very apologetic for his betrayal of the Hindu prisoners in Alibeg. Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect, forgave him for his actions, and reconverted him to Hinduism.

Another young, twelve-year-old boy, Mela Singh, and his sister also acted as informers of widows and old women. They belonged to a criminal family of Mirpur City and became orphans after the Pakistani soldiers killed their parents. They would also report to the Pakistani soldiers or Muslim guards about the cash, gold, and silver ornaments that some women still had. The Pakistanis would then search these women and take away their valuables. If the soldiers or guards did not

find anything, they would beat the women and their children. This brother and sister duo would even threaten and force many widows to sleep with Pakistani soldiers. In return, the Pakistani soldiers rewarded the brother and sister with extra food from their military kitchen. After the arrival of the ICRC volunteers, the ICRC officials reprimanded both the brother and sister. Even the Pakistani soldiers started avoiding them because there was a rumor that the ICRC was preparing a list of those Pakistani soldiers who had committed atrocities against the Hindu and Sikh prisoners.

Chapter 23

Dr. Sansar Chandra's Efforts to Liberate Alibeg's Prisoners

My wife's aunt, Kulwanti, was married to Dr. Sansar Chandra. After escaping from Mirpur along with the Jammu and Kashmir army, he and his family stayed with my father-in-law, Yash Paul Gupta, in Jammu. Unfortunately, Dr. Chandra's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Babu Karamchand, were not lucky enough to escape. The Pakistanis captured them and interned them in the Alibeg prison. The couple shared our sleeping space in the corridors of the Alibeg prison along with their young son. Due to malnutrition, lack of medical assistance, and extreme cold conditions, they all died in the prison. Their young son also became an orphan like many of us.

On reaching Jammu in the first week of December 1947, Dr. Chandra found that the number of Hindu and Sikh survivors from Mirpur who reached Jammu safely was a meager twenty five hundred. By mid-December, he also came to know, via the two escapees from the Alibeg prison named Jagmohan Gupta and Dr. Ved Parkash Gupta that another thirty-five hundred Hindu prisoners in the prison were struggling between life and death. After some time in Jammu, Dr. Chandra and a few colleagues proceeded to the Indian capital of New Delhi. They wanted to seek the Indian government's help in releasing the Hindu and Sikh prisoners in Alibeg.

In New Delhi, they met Pandit Nehru. He consoled them and assured them of his determination to take them back to Mirpur. Pandit Nehru declared that the Indian army would be fighting for every inch of the territory illegally occupied by Pakistan, and Pandit Nehru's eyes were wet upon hearing about the massacre of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur. His posture, firmness, and

strength of mind were simply unbelievable. Pandit Nehru's personal secretary also informed the delegation that they had appointed a full-fledged minister of Kashmir affairs. The minister was aware of the sad plight of the Mirpur Hindus at the Alibeg prison. It was to the delegation's advantage, so they were told, to call upon him as well.

Dr. Chandra and his delegation seized this opportunity and went right away to meet the minister of Kashmir affairs. When they met Pandit Nehru, they spoke very little and heard his lecture, much like mutes. With the minister of Kashmir affairs, the delegation did the opposite. The minister's name, Vishnu Sahay (translated as *Lord's Help*), impressed them a lot and they thought he would be more concerned about the release of the Alibeg prisoners. The delegation chose Dr. Chandra as the spokesperson who would speak to the minister about their feelings. However, upon meeting him, they found that a name seldom reflects one's true image. No doubt, the minister did say that he would do his utmost. He told the delegation that the Indian army would crush the Pakistani infiltrators and release the Mirpur Hindus in the prison. He also reminded the delegation that the Pakistanis had destroyed the roads, blown out the bridges, and the whole area remained snow-clad. A big chunk of the Indian army was clearing the Kashmir Valley and, according to the minister, that was more important.

Dr. Chandra informed the minister that they had never seen snow in Mirpur all their lives and Mirpur was as hot as Delhi. He rebuked the minister and reminded him that he was unaware of the topography of a state he governed. Dr. Chandra also told the minister bluntly that Indian soldiers are tough. The lack of roads and bridges could not block their way. Dr. Chandra also said that, while he was in Mirpur, he heard radio proclamations issued by his ministry conveying the dispatch of Indian army, but not a single Indian soldier showed up in Mirpur. He questioned the minister as to why he had been telling lies all along. He also reminded the minister that if they could not liberate the Mirpur Hindus and Sikhs in Alibeg, it would affect the morale of Hindus and Sikhs in the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. It was not the last strike by Pakistan but just a beginning of Pakistani aggression. The minister did not relish Dr. Chandra's direct

speech, and the delegation left doubtful that he would rescue their kith and kin from the Alibeg prison.²⁰

²⁰ Adapted from the website: www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20011125. Author's note: Dr. Sansar Chandra was an eyewitness to the fall of Mirpur. He has written many articles on Mirpur in *The Daily Tribune*, Chandigarh. Dr. Chandra worked as dean of Sanskrit in Punjab University, J&K University and Rajasthan University.

Chapter 24

Efforts by Others to Liberate Alibeg's Prisoners

Amar Devi's Efforts: The Jammu and Kashmir army escorted about twenty five hundred Mirpur refugees to Jammu on December 4, 1947. The Jammu and Kashmir government authorities and Hindu social organizations decided to lodge them in various refugee camps. They put men up in the buildings of various charitable organizations (*e.g.*, Mahajan Sabha, Brahmin Sabha, Khukhran Sabha, and Arya Samaj), and Hindu and Sikh women and children were lodged in government colleges and schools. One of these refugee camps was the Maharani Girls College, where Mrs. Amar Devi Gupta was an assistant camp coordinator. Amar Devi's mother was a prisoner in the Alibeg prison and her father had been killed in Mirpur City. Many of her cousins and uncles also died in the Mirpur carnage.

In the middle of December, the POK government sent three Hindu emissaries from Alibeg to Jammu to arrange for the exchange of Hindu Alibeg prisoners with Muslim prisoners in Jammu. After many negotiations, both the POK and the Jammu and Kashmir governments decided that, on a trial basis, they should exchange three buses of prisoners. On December 20, when three buses of Hindu orphans and widows arrived in Jammu, Amar Devi and two other social workers, Ms. Tara Puri and Mrs. Krishna Bhasin, took them to the refugee camp at Maharani Girls College. The refugees were so weak and sick that they could barely stand and some of the children looked like mere skeletons.

Among the passengers of one of the buses was Amar Devi's twelve-year-old cousin, Kuldeep Dhangeryal (the son of Lal Chand Dhangeryal). Mrs. Amar Devi took Kuldeep in her room and helped him lie down. His clothes were full of dried blood from his wounds and he smelled awful because he had not bathed or changed clothes in almost

a month. Kuldip's condition was pitiful. He walked like a zombie to the toilet and passed blood in his stools. Once her cousin was settled, Amar Devi went to help the other refugee women and children. The volunteers served them tea and covered them with blankets.

On December 21, another three buses reached Jammu from Alibeg, this time carrying Amar Devi's mother, her two aunts, and a nine-year old cousin, Praduman Dhangeryal. The condition of her aunts was bad but her mother's condition was worse. Mrs. Amar Devi had an older cousin in Jammu who gave shelter to Praduman and the others and put them under the care of Dr. Melaram Chhabra. After that, the buses from Alibeg stopped arriving without any explanation.

Every day at 7:30 A.M., Mrs. Amar Devi would go to these refugee camps along with Ms. Tara Puri. They would serve the refugees tea with some snacks as breakfast. Dr. Chhabra would arrive daily to check on the condition of the refugees and give them medicine or injections as required. Volunteers would clean, bathe, and give the children new clothes. At Maharani Girls College, Amar Devi met two boys who were very dirty and looked like skeletons. First, she cleaned them with hot water and then wrapped them in blankets to keep them warm in the winter.

A few days later, Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah visited the Maharani Girls College refugee camp. Amar Devi received the visitors at the gate and brought them inside. When the two leaders saw the destitute Hindu and Sikh women and children of Mirpur, they were extremely shocked. Sheikh Abdullah saw Amar Devi's twelve-year-old daughter Kranti standing in despair. He told Kranti he was sorry for the winter schools closures, and that the schools would open soon which she would be able to attend again.

After saying these words, Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah were ready to leave the refugee camp but Amar Devi requested them to wait for a few more minutes. Both the leaders waited while Amar Devi brought two skeleton-like boys (whose condition was described earlier). Seeing those boys, Pandit Nehru was shocked. When he asked how this happened, Amar Devi replied that this was the price of freedom. She said that India won its freedom but this freedom destroyed the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur. Pandit Nehru asked who was responsible for the barbarity committed upon those boys, and Amar Devi told him that his so-called brothers and sons of Mahatma Gandhi (referring to Pakistani Muslims) did this carnage. She also told him that the boys had stayed at the Alibeg Prison, where Pakistanis

supplied rations of flour mixed with finely ground glass and arsenic to unfortunate Hindus. She said that the prisoners in Alibeg had no alternative but to eat this contaminated food causing dysentery and death. This was the first encounter Pandit Nehru had with the first batch of released Alibeg prisoners. He asked how many Hindu prisoners were still alive in Alibeg Prison. She told him about thirty five hundred Hindus (as of December 31) were still languishing in the prison under miserable conditions. Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah did not say anything further and left the Hindu refugee camp in a state of shock.²¹

Vidya Sagar's Efforts: While Amar Devi was confronting the Kashmiri and Indian leaders for getting Alibeg prisoners liberated, her brother Vidya Sagar Dukhiya was writing letters to the UN and ICRC in New Delhi. In November, his wife, children and mother were in Mirpur, while he was working in Nairobi, Kenya (Africa). When he learnt about the fall of Mirpur, he came to Jammu from Africa. His wife Manorma, mother, and three daughters were in the Alibeg prison. Two of his daughters died in Alibeg due to malnutrition and lack of medical care. He relentlessly met the Indian Red Cross, and UN officials in Jammu and New Delhi. He was a college graduate and could correspond with the ICRC, UN, Indian government and Pakistani embassy in English. Therefore, his efforts helped expedite the paperwork between the Indian Red Cross, Pakistan Red Cross and the ICRC. Vidya Sagar's surviving daughter Sarojini is living in Canada.

Master Roshan Lal's Efforts: In March 1948, when the Alibeg prisoners were liberated from Pakistan, he learnt that two of his daughters had died in Alibeg. He went back to Africa and took Amar Devi's family and Pardyuman Dhangeryal with him. Vidya Sagar later on moved to England and died there. Master Roshan Lal, one of my mother's uncles, was editor of the Urdu daily newspaper "The *Sach* (Truth)." Many members of his family (including us) were also in the Alibeg Prison. He also met Sheikh Abdullah, Pandit Nehru and many other political leaders. He contacted the Muslim leaders of POK, through a Mirpur Muslim leader Mohammed Shafi of National Conference. Because of his political connection, the Indian and Pakistani leaders took keen interest in liberating us from Alibeg.²²

²¹ Adapted from *A Tragedy of J & K State – 1947 – With a Focus on Mirpur*, Amar Devi Gupta.

M.C. Mahajan's Efforts: M.C. Mahajan writes in *Looking Back*: "Ghulam Abbas, the leader of the Muslim Conference, had been put under arrest by Maharaja Hari Singh. Sheikh Abdullah met him a number of times in the jail and suggested that he should be released. I was against his release as he had indulged in pro-Pakistan activities. Sheikh Sahib thought otherwise. A considerable number of persons from Mirpur had been kept in Alibeg camp by the Pakistanis.....Abbas promised Sheikh Abdullah that he would see that all the Mirpur prisoners in the camp were released and sent to Jammu." M.C. Mahajan released Ghulam Abbas from prison and he migrated to POK. Later on Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas became president of POK.

The blunt exchanges with Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah by people like Dr. Chandra, Amar Devi, Vidya Sagar, and Master Roshan Lal pressured the Jammu and Kashmir government to negotiate with Pakistan for liberating the Alibeg prisoners in POK. The Indian government authorities became aware of the prison and its approximately thirty-five hundred Hindu prisoners. After one month of massacre in Alibeg, Kas Guma, the Mirpur Courthouse, the Mirpur River, and numerous other places, this was the head count of surviving Hindus out of an original number of twenty thousand.

²² This account was narrated by phone to the Author by Dr. Kranti Loomba of Chicago (USA), daughter of Amar Devi Gupta. Master Roshan Lal later on became MLA of Jammu & Kashmir assembly and Mohammed Shafi became a member of Indian parliament. Both died in Jammu (India).

Chapter 25

Arrival of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Once the Jammu and Kashmir government and the Indian government became aware of the Alibeg prison and its horrible conditions, they used all diplomatic channels with the Pakistani government to reach the Hindu prisoners of Alibeg. However, the Pakistani government officials did not cooperate and refused to let the Jammu and Kashmir or Indian government officials visit the prison. In Jammu and Kashmir, there was still a full-fledged war going on between India and Pakistan so diplomacy was not working. A non-government organization, the Indian Red Cross, jumped in to help the Hindu prisoners in Alibeg and contacted the Pakistani Red Cross. Both the Indian and Pakistani Red Crosses had worked together in the turbulent year of 1947 helping millions of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims during the riots and aiding the safe transfer of these populations across the Indian subcontinent.

Due to the tireless efforts of the Indian Red Cross and the Pakistani Red Cross, a team of the ICRC arrived in the prison in late-January 1948. ICRC personnel arrived with an escort from the Pakistani army and armed private Muslim guards. Because Pakistani army and Muslim guards accompanied the ICRC, the Hindu prisoners were suspicious of their intentions. The person in charge of the ICRC was Dr. Otto Wenger, who had worked in India during World War II. Upon arriving in the prison, he recruited a prisoner, Dr. Charan Das Gupta, as his assistant. He set up his office inside the prison and prepared a roster of all the prisoners within a day or two.

The total number of Hindu prisoners was reduced to about sixteen hundred from the original ten thousand who were arrested back in November 26, 1947. Most of them were widows, children, old men, and old women. There were hardly any young men alive, except a few who were injured and very sick. Dr. Wenger sternly warned the

Pakistani soldiers that he would hold them personally responsible if they killed any prisoner from then onwards. Dr. Wenger and his medical team performed medical check-ups on all the prisoners and prescribed medicines for the sick. The medicines the ICRC brought were prioritized for the very sick. The rest were ordered via the Pakistani Red Cross from hospitals in Rawalpindi, Jhelum, and Serai Alamgir. Medical technicians poured powdered disinfectants on our hair that partly killed the lice. On a sunny day, the ICRC team also took us to the Jhelum River for a bath. They gave each of us a bar of soap to clean our bodies and wash our clothes. In addition, they distributed one sweater to each person to protect us from the cold. The ICRC volunteers also provided us with nourishing food, such as crackers, powdered milk, and canned soup. My brother Ramesh, who was drowsy most of the time and unable to walk on his own due to malnutrition, started responding to the medicine. He had become an underweight, skeleton-like eight-year-old child, but he started eating some soup.

With the arrival of the ICRC, we had some hope that we would live, but we still did not know whether we would reach India. We had no idea whether uncle Mukund Lal and uncle Vishwa Nath were alive or dead, or if they had already reached India. The last I had seen or heard from my mother was in the Mirpur courthouse on 11/25/1947. Psychologically, India still seemed like a far off and foreign country where we did not know anybody. The Pakistani soldiers and Muslims had killed the majority of our relatives. We did not know about any other prison around Mirpur. We had no knowledge of what had happened to the passengers of the three buses sent from Alibeg to Jammu on December 16. As is human nature, the old men and women became pessimistic and lost any hope that they would reach India alive.

Dr. Wenger and his ICRC team gave us hope of liberation and repatriation to India. On the roster, he had also listed the education and occupation of all the prisoners. From that list, he rounded up a team of Hindu volunteers to help him in non-medical activities. Dr. Charandass was his chief assistant and some semi-literate persons assisted him in other duties. They cleaned our wounds, administered medicines, and distributed nutritious food and new clothes. Soon, the ICRC volunteers brought us some Pakistani newspapers in Urdu and some information and letters about the Mirpur residents who had reached Jammu safely. Dr. Wenger and his team also started compiling

a list of missing relatives and abducted women. They handed the list over to the Pakistani authorities for their traceability and liberation. Due to the dedication and hard work of the ICRC volunteers, our lives became a bit easier a few months before liberation.

Chapter 26

Train from Pakistan

A similar prison of Muslim widows, children, and old men was set up in Kacchi Chhawani, Jammu (India). The Muslim prisoners in Jammu were treated well because the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, was a Muslim. By March 1948, the ICRC in Alibeg carried out the necessary negotiations and paperwork for the exchange of the Hindu prisoners of Alibeg with the Muslim prisoners of Jammu. The ICRC brought about sixty trucks and buses to the Alibeg prison and each truck or bus could accommodate twenty to thirty persons. It took the ICRC volunteers almost an entire day to count the prisoners and load them onto the trucks and buses. We all started lining up in the morning, and skipping lunch so as not to take any chances of missing the buses or trucks.

On March 18, 1948 late in the afternoon, under the banner of “Pakistan Red Cross,” the convoy of buses and trucks with about 1600 surviving Hindus, left the borders of POK, crossed the Jhelum, and entered Pakistan. By evening, the convoy reached Serai Alamgir, which was the nearest train station. The Pakistani army and police had provided guards on the railway station so that Muslims would not attack the Hindu prisoners. We got down from the buses and trucks and boarded the waiting train, which soon was overloaded with Hindu prisoners. To avoid confusion, ICRC personnel allotted each *bogie* strictly according to the list prepared in Alibeg. Cramped in the *bogies* (carriage or small train-cars), we were hungry and thirsty, and some of us had not eaten anything since morning. Each *bogie* had over one hundred passengers occupying all the seats and floor. There were no lights in the carriages and it was difficult to see the faces of other passengers. Later on, about one hundred and fifty women and children from Datial Camp also arrived and were accommodated in last two

bogies. Amongst them were families of my friend Suresh Chander and Krishna Mehta.

At that time, Fateh Mohamed (the noble Muslim mentioned earlier) appeared on the scene, searching for my mother's cousin, Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal. Uncle Purshottam Lal asked him to arrange water for about sixteen hundred thirsty Hindus, and with the help of some Muslim volunteers, Fateh Mohamed brought drums full of water. The ICRC officers asked the railway authorities to help the Muslim volunteers serve water to the passengers. Fateh Mohamed and his Muslim volunteers also brought some food for Uncle Purshottam Lal and his family.

After midnight, some Muslims attacked the last two *bogies* of women and children of Datial Camp. They had known that these bogies had young women of Datial Camp. In the darkness, they tried to drag out some of these girls at the point of daggers and swords. However, those girls screamed loudly in the night, which woke up entire train. They were crying for help and the railway guards ran to their rescue and foiled their abduction from the Muslim goons. After this incident, everybody in the dark train was scared and nobody could sleep. We all were praying and afraid of what could happen next.

The next morning, at 5:00 A.M., the train left Serai Alamagir station. The ICRC officers and armed Pakistani guards accompanied the train to protect the Hindu prisoners. The same day, at about noontime, the train reached Lahore, the largest city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. In 1947, Lahore was one of the most notorious stations, where Pakistani Muslims had slaughtered trains full of Hindu and Sikhs fleeing to India in retribution for trains full of slaughtered Muslims coming from India. Somehow, on this morning, the word had leaked out that a train of Hindus was passing through Lahore on its way to India. Although the Pakistani army and police fully guarded the Lahore station, we could see hordes of angry looking Muslims outside the fence of the railway station.

Our train waited in Lahore for almost the rest of the day for official procedures and clearances from the authorities. The Pakistani guards would not allow us to get off the train to drink water because it would have caused a riot at the station. The Pakistani authorities had not arranged for any food or drinking water, and since many of us had not eaten since the day or night before, we were starving. It was almost springtime and the overcrowding of the train made the conditions more miserable. The hope to reach India soon was the only thing keeping our spirits, and ourselves, alive.

Chapter 27

India - the Promised Land

Atari Station: On the evening of March 19, 1948, the Pakistani railway authorities allowed the train to move out of Lahore Station. At about 5:00 P.M., it crossed the India-Pakistan border at Wagah and reached the Atari Station (Indian Punjab). Ours was the last train of Hindu refugees from Pakistan. Most of us got down onto the Atari platform and kissed the promised land of India. We were no longer prisoners of Pakistan but rather refugees in free India. Kind Sikh farmers who inhabited (and still inhabit) Atari Station had heard about the fate of the last train of Hindus coming from Pakistan and had prepared *halwa* (porridge) for all the refugees. Halwa is a nourishing, sweet food generally offered in Sikh *Gurudwara*. The Sikhs of Atari had also arranged plenty of water for drinking and washing. I almost took a mini-bath under a water hydrant that was primarily used to fill the steam engine of the train. Some of these Sikh men even distributed some cash to the refugees. I received some cash with which I was able to buy something to eat from the vendors at the Atari station. The train stopped there for two to three hours and then proceeded to Amritsar.

Amritsar Station: Amritsar is the holy city of Sikhs and is the largest city in Indian Punjab. It was established around a lake by a Sikh Guru in the sixteenth century and translates into “lake of nectar.” The Punjab newspapers had given full coverage to the last train of Hindus arriving from Pakistan so the response from the public was overwhelming. At Amritsar Station, hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs had brought a variety of food and sweets to feed the last train of the liberated Hindu refugees from Pakistan. They were passed around each *bogie* and food soon disappeared. Nobody bothered about how much they ate because we had been starving for about two days. The Hindus and Sikhs also distributed cash, clothing, and soap bars. After this train of Hindu refugees arrived, no other train of Hindus refugees ever came

from Pakistan, because the ethnic cleansing of Hindus and Sikhs was complete in West Punjab (Pakistan).

At Amritsar Station, we were surprised to see uncle Mukund Lal and uncle Vishwa Nath, who had made it to Jammu from Mirpur on December 2, with the Jammu and Kashmir army. Uncle Vishwa Nath was very sad to learn that both his children had died in the prison and that Muslims had kidnapped his wife, aunt Sushila Devi. However, he was glad to see his father-in-law, mother-in-law, aunt Swaran Devi, uncle Amar Nath, our cousins, and us. We embraced our uncles and cried a lot for our grandmother Kartar Devi, uncle Mohanlal, great-grandfather Lalman Shah, and our mother, whose fate we still did not know.

The crowd of Hindu and Sikh friends and relatives, social workers, news reporters, and officers in charge of refugees were all approaching each *bogie*. They were all busy receiving and checking the refugees. Some of the refugees got down from the train and touched the land. From each *bogie*, government officials compared the names of each refugee with the roster provided by the Pakistan Red Cross. They advised the refugees of their further settlement in the refugee camps. Some of the refugees had relatives in Amritsar so they got down there. But we, uncle Amar Nath, and aunt Swaran Devi were told the train would take us to Kurukhshetra Camp. Uncle Mukund Lal and uncle Vishwa Nath also came with us to Kurukhshetra.

Kurukhshetra Refugee Camp: Later in the night, the train left for Kurukhshetra, a historical city near Delhi, where the Mahabharata War had taken place about five thousand years ago. It was in the battlefield at Kurukhshetra that Lord Krishna delivered the message of *Bhagwad Gita* (the Hindu holy book) to Prince Arjuna in the Mahabharata. The evil Kaurvas and righteous Pandavas had fought the bloody war in which the Pandavas won with the help of Lord Krishna. Justice was then reestablished on earth under the reign of the Pandvas.

Earlier, the government of India had set up many refugee camps in Kurukhshetra for Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan. Now, the refugee camps were set up for us, the newly released refugees from POK. The total number of Hindu and Sikh refugees in Kurukhshetra was over two hundred thousand, and the camp commander was an Indian army officer, Colonel Puri. Kurukhshetra was essentially a city of tents.

The Kurukhshetra refugee camp was visited by hordes of journalist every day to which we narrated the horrors we had suffered

in Alibeg. We told them of the atrocities committed by Muslim Pathans on the entire population of Mirpur and the many massacres that took place. Even film crews came to document the condition of the refugees from Kashmir. Some of the accounts were reported on the front pages of the Indian newspapers. The government of India and the Indian Red Cross provided us healthy rations, clean clothes, sets of utensils, beds, and one tent per family. Health officials and doctors treated all the refugees for lice and gave medicines for any ailments. Almost everybody had some kind of disease or ailment. We all looked like skeletons and needed a lot of nourishing food and medical care.

One day, Pandit Nehru visited the Alibeg refugees of Kurukhshetra camp. He was standing in an open jeep with folded hands. His jeep stopped at many tents and asked whether the refugees were being taken care of properly. Many men and women started telling the horrible experience they had suffered in Alibeg. Pandit Nehru was visibly moved and tears flowed from his eyes. Some even became hostile towards him for not sending the Indian army to save Mirpur. They made Pandit Nehru responsible for the massacre of the Mirpur Hindus and Sikhs, and Pandit Nehru could not answer this accusation.

Many other prominent Indian leaders (e.g. Sardar Patel, Acharya Kriplani, Rajendra Prasad, Shyama Prasad Mukherji, N.C. Chatterji, Ms. Mridula Sarabhai, Ms. Sucheta Kriplanai, and Ms. Aruna Asaf Ali) also visited Kurukhshetra camp to console the Mirpur refugees. Many leaders of Jammu and Kashmir (e.g. Balraj Madhok, Prem Nath Dogra, Ram Lal Chaudhri, and Master Roshan Lal) also visited the refugee camps. The leaders' consolations could not heal the refugees' psychological wounds and nobody could bring back the dead. It would take decades to forget the nightmares of the Mirpur massacres.

My brother Ramesh and I stayed for about a month in Kurukhshetra camp and got well after receiving proper care from uncle Mukund Lal. For the first time in months, we were healthy again. Then our uncle Mukund Lal took us back to Jammu. We said good-bye to uncle Amar Nath and aunt Swaran Devi, who stayed in Kurukhshetra. In later years, when the Indian government disbanded the Kurukhshetra refugee camp, the Mirpur refugees were settled in various refugee colonies of Jammu (Kashmir), Pathankot, Chandigarh (Punjab), Lajpat Nagar, Patel Nagar (New Delhi) and, Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh).

Chapter 28

Reunion with My Mother

Around April 1948, uncle Mukund Lal took my brother Ramesh and me to Jammu from the Kurukhshetra refugee camp. He put us up with my maternal grandfather, Hansraj Gupta, who was working in Jammu City as a court clerk. My grandfather had a large family of seven daughters and two sons, but he took good care of us along with his children. He placed me in a middle school and Ramesh in an elementary school. In the meantime, uncle Mukund Lal was traveling back and forth to New Delhi to find out about our mother, grandmother, and uncle, who were all still missing, and whose fate nobody knew. Uncle Vishwa Nath would accompany him on these trips, as his wife was still missing. From 1949 to 1950, Uncle Vishwa Nath also visited Lahore (Pakistan) many times, and met the Indian Consul and some Pakistani officials who were trying to locate abducted Hindu women in Pakistan and POK.

There were a few more refugee camps near Mirpur where women and children were interned. My mother was in one of these camps. In 1951, due to the efforts of the Indian and Pakistani Red Cross, the Pakistani authorities located and repatriated my mother and many of my aunts to India. Some of them had been kidnapped along with about one hundred Hindu and Sikh women from the Mirpur Courthouse. I, along with my brother Ramesh and uncle Mukund Lal, met my mother in a camp of repatriated Hindu women in Kachi Chhawani, Jammu. We all cried profusely and related the stories of relatives who were killed or who remained missing. My mother did not know about her grandfather, Lalman Shah's, or her uncles, the Dhangeryals', killings. We also told her about my grandmother, Kartar Devi's and my uncle Mohan Lal's killings. We went on reliving these events and she described her eyewitness account of the massacre at the Mirpur courthouse. Each episode was relived with crying and tears.

Eventually, uncle Mukund Lal told her that she would be taken out of the camp in a few days after filing the necessary paperwork. Unfortunately, some of the women in the camp had no living relatives to rescue them and they were sent to other widows' camps in India.

In 1954, India and Pakistan stopped searching and repatriating kidnapped women completely. Uncle Mukund Lal took the financial responsibility of taking care of our remaining family members, covering all of our living and educational expenses. He moved to the border town of Rajouri, set up a grocery store, and rented a place for us in Purani Mandi, the heart of Jammu City. We lived there until 1957.

The governments of India and Jammu and Kashmir refused to accept the claims of Hindu and Sikh refugees of Mirpur for the millions of dollars' worth of movable and immovable property that was confiscated by Pakistan. They had already accepted similar claims from earlier Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and compensated them appropriately. Between 1956 and 1957, the governments of Jammu and Kashmir and India constructed one and two bedroom quarters for Hindu and Sikh refugees from the Mirpur, Muzzafrabad, and Poonch districts of POK. In 1957, we moved to the refugee colony of Bakshinagar into a one-bedroom house (that was later converted into a four-bedroom house). I completed my science college and engineering college and got married to my wife, Kusum, in this house. Later, our daughter Jyoti was born in this house and we migrated to the USA in 1971.

In 1979, my mother visited us in Charlotte, North Carolina and stayed with us for four months. During her stay, she was amazed at the difference of lifestyle between India and the United States. My children learnt Hindi from her, and she learnt to communicate with them in "Hinglish" (English combined with Hindi). We took her to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in a wheelchair. This was the only time in her life that she saw the ocean and touched the waters of the Atlantic.

My mother was very a humble woman all her life. We visited her in Jammu (in India) on numerous occasions between 1978 and 2000. Throughout those years, my brother Ramesh had taken good care of her while I provided financial support for her charitable work. During my visit in 2000, I saw her in a shattered state of health due to osteoporosis. She had no desire to live and I was extremely shocked to see her this way. I offered to take her for a pilgrimage to Mathura, the

birthplace of Lord Krishna. My mother, Ramesh, and I flew from Jammu to Delhi. She was very excited to fly again, in spite of her frail health. It was both the excitement and determination of visiting the holy city of Mathura before her death that sustained her. She visited the dungeon in which Lord Krishna was born and other places attributed to Lord Krishna's childhood. In Mathura, we also met a few American International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) devotees who had lived in Atlanta and knew me. They offered their respect to my mother and invoked Lord Krishna's blessings on her. Though she could not understand English, she was overwhelmed with the respect shown by the American devotees. The pilgrimage to Mathura gave her the strength to live one more year in the devotion to Lord Krishna.

In December 2000, my mother passed away in Jammu in her house, surrounded by her only surviving brother C.L. Gupta, many sisters, her son Ramesh, and grandchildren. Only a week earlier in America, Jyoti, Rajesh, Kusum, and I had talked to her on the phone. Her last words were that she was too sick and was going to leave this world soon. After hearing the news of her death, I flew to Jammu and attended the *havan* (a Hindu religious fire ceremony) in her memory in the Arya Samaj temple. About one thousand relatives and friends attended this religious ceremony in her honor. After the ceremony, I took her ashes to the Hindu holy city of Hardwar for immersion in the Ganges (as per the Hindu tradition, ashes of dead persons should be immersed in the Ganges). God bless her soul.

Chapter 29

My Mother's Tale of the Mirpur Courthouse Massacre

After reuniting with my mother, she told us about what happened in Mirpur after we had been separated. On November 25, 1947, a large number of Mirpur City families abandoned their houses to reach Mirpur's courthouse by late afternoon. Some were old and sick, like my mother, who could not walk any further and stayed behind. Aunt Basantdevi, after leaving our great-grandfather's house, waited in the courthouse for her husband to join. By evening, there were about one thousand people in the courthouse. To save them from the Pakistani artillery fire coming from the southwest side, they locked themselves inside the judges' chambers, clerks' offices, lawyers' chambers, and police station—any area that seemed safe. By 5:00 P.M., Pakistani soldiers had surrounded the entire courthouse complex. They forced open the rooms, dragged out all the young men, and shot them dead.

My mother saw her friend Swaran Devi's husband, Sitaram Gupta, shot, and Pakistani soldiers abducted Swaran Devi and her daughters. Sitaram did not die at once, cried all night, and prayed to God to end his agony and pain. He was thirsty and begged for water before dying. My mother got some water from a nearby well and quenched his thirst. After some time, Sitaram stopped moaning and breathed his last under an open sky. The next day, the Pakistani soldiers transferred my mother and some other injured and sick women to an unknown place away from Mirpur City. The location of this camp was unknown for a long time and slowed down the ICRC's attempt to locate many missing women. My mother and other inmates were repatriated to Jammu (India) between 1951 and 1952 in exchange for Muslim women and children in a Jammu camp. The ICRC repatriated Swaran Devi to Jammu during the same time, along with

her children. She settled down in Bakshinagar, Jammu, as our neighbor.

Dr. Ved Suri's account: In the courthouse, the Pakistani soldiers also shot dead Dr. Dilbagh Rai Sahni, a brother-in-law of Dr. Ved Suri. The Pakistani soldiers abducted Dr. Ved Suri's eight-year-old niece and took her to Pakistan and nobody ever heard from her again. Dr. Sahni's wife committed suicide by jumping into the well. Ved Suri's parents, Ramdas Suri and Brijrani Suri, rescued their other two daughters, but their youngest daughter died in the Alibeg prison. The ICRC liberated their middle daughter and, later on, she married Tilak Raj Gupta, my wife's cousin, in New Delhi. The Pakistanis also abducted Dr. Ved Suri himself and took him to the cities of Jhelum, Gujarat, and Rawalpindi (Pakistan) to sell him as a slave. Finally, a kind local Muslim liberated Ved Suri and sent him to Jammu (in India) in March 1948. He was married to my wife's elder sister Premlata Suri and both of them died in 2007 in Jullahka Mohalla, Jammu.²³

²³ The above episode was narrated by my mother late Padma Devi and corroborated by late Dr. Ved Suri. Both died in Jammu (India)

Chapter 30

Immigration to the USA

After settling in Jammu, I was a hardworking student and, throughout my education, received scholarships to attend schools and colleges. I attended the Central Basic School, Sri Ranbir High School, and Government Gandhi Memorial Science College (G.G.M. Sc. College) in Jammu. After passing the Intermediate Science (I.Sc.) examination from G.G.M. Sc. College of Jammu and Kashmir University, I was selected to attend the prestigious Birla Institute of Technology of Ranchi University. In 1962, I received the University's coveted B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering. I received a scholarship and, fortunately, was one of a very small group of students with little educational debt after graduation.

After graduating from the Birla Institute of Technology, I joined Tata Engineering and Locomotive Corporation, (TELCO), the largest private Indian corporation, and worked in Jamshedpur (in India). TELCO was manufacturing Mercedes-Benz trucks and buses in a joint venture with Daimler-Benz of Germany, and, until 1971, I worked in the manufacturing and training divisions of Mercedes-Benz as a senior engineer, before migrating to the USA.

Riots in Jamshedpur: In 1965, while I was working in TELCO, a train of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) passed through Jamshedpur. The train was mostly full of Hindu women and children who had lost their brothers and fathers in Pakistani-initiated massacres. After hearing their stories, the Hindu population of Jamshedpur got infuriated and started communal riots against Muslims in retribution for these killings. In frenzy, Hindus started killing innocent Muslims of Jamshedpur. I saved two Muslim engineers and hid them in my room in the Engineers' hostel of TELCO Colony. The government authorities eventually put Jamshedpur City under a curfew and the Indian army took over to restore law and order. After the riots

subsided, I handed the two Muslim engineers over to the protective custody of the army.

In 1967, I married my wife Kusum who was born in Jammu City, though her father Yash Paul Gupta was from Mirpur. In 1968, my daughter Jyoti was born in Jammu City. During these years, my mother and brother remained in Bakshinagar, Jammu. In 1969, my brother also got married in Jammu and my mother stayed with him.

Immigration to USA: In 1971, I decided to migrate to the USA when immigration was easy for Indian engineers and doctors due to the conscription of young Americans in the Vietnam War. My mother, uncle Mukund Lal, and Kusum's parents were totally against our decision to go to such a far-off land. However, it was part of my destiny to travel across many continents and oceans.

In October 1971, I came alone to New York by Air France via Paris and London. I did not know anybody in the USA and only had the addresses of a colleague from TELCO and an address of a friend of my brother's, Dr. Rajinder Sharma. I was very homesick when I landed in London Heathrow airport, I sent a telegram to Dr. Sharma, who was very gracious and came to JFK airport to receive me. Dr. Sharma accommodated me in his apartment for a few days and then made alternative arrangements for me to share an apartment with two other Indian immigrants in New York City.

In the beginning, life in New York City was very tough. In addition to the high cost of living, I had to save money for airline tickets for Kusum and Jyoti. In the winter of 1972, Kusum and Jyoti also arrived in New York by Air Alitalia. When Jyoti saw me at JFK airport, she did not even recognize me.

In 1973, I enrolled myself as a graduate student at the Polytechnic University of New York for an M.S. in Management that I completed in 1975. Because of my good grades, my employer at the time, Mercedes-Benz of North America, paid for part of my tuition fees. Our son Rajesh was also born in New York City in 1975.

In 1976, when nuclear power plant design and construction was at its peak, I entered this field. I worked as a design engineer, senior design engineer, and engineering group leader for multinational corporations in most of the nuclear power plants east of the Mississippi. Due to short-term projects, I worked in the states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, and California. I worked for Bechtel Power Corporation, Westinghouse, Duke Power,

Georgia Power—to name a few—and finally settled down in Georgia in 1983. In 1994, I got a job with the Georgia state government, after competing for a number of professional positions. During these job search efforts within Georgia, I also passed my Professional Engineering examinations, and was licensed as a P.E. in Alabama and Georgia. Jyoti and Rajesh both graduated from high schools in Georgia. Later on, both of them attended Ivy League universities in the USA. Jyoti got a master's degree from Harvard and Rajesh got his master's degrees from Yale and Stanford, and an M.D. from Stanford.

SECTION II

OTHER EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Ordeal Of Uncle Mukand Lal

My late uncle Mukand Lal along with my uncles Vishwa Nath and Suraj Parkash, escaped with the retreating Jammu and Kashmir army from Mirpur. This provides another account of the events that took place during this time as told to the author many times.

“On the night of November 25, 1947, we had walked about six miles from Mirpur when it became dark. The people ahead of the caravan kept on burning the bushes to show the path to people in the rear. At last, we reached a well but it was crowded with many people. There was no rope but the well had a bucket. The men who had turbans used them as rope to draw water. Everybody drank water and quenched their thirst.

All of sudden, Pakistanis soldiers and Pathans started firing at the caravan in the darkness. I, Vishwa Nath, and Suraj Parkash ran towards the north and were separated from rest of the family. Bullets from Pakistani soldiers and Pathans flew past us and killed many people while they were running. Nobody cared to look at the fallen dead bodies. After we had gone about two miles, a bullet hit Sohan Singh, son of Master Mohan Singh, who was running with us. His body was full of blood and, in fifteen minutes, Sohan Singh fainted and died. Soon we were at a trail crossing, one to the north and the other to the east. Some of us took the east trail and some went on the north trail. Those who went on the north trail were massacred in Kas Guma.

The three of us wanted to go back to bring our families. But some men in this group persuaded us not to go back and risk getting killed by Pakistani snipers. My mother and brother were already burnt alive in the burning house in Mirpur. Suraj Parkash's father had refused to leave Mirpur and probably died. My nephews, wives, and children of Vishwanath and Suraj Parkash were trapped near the well by Pakistani snipers and were doomed. Our group of about 100 people consisted of men, women, and children, and a few soldiers of the Jammu and Kashmir army. I recognized some members in this group, (e.g. Chaudhri Moti Ram and his wife Amar Devi Gupta, Mahasha Chuni Lal, and Karam Chand Dhangeryal). We climbed a ridge and soon bullets again started flying past us. One bullet hit Ravi, the son of

Karamchand Dhangeryal who was twelve years old. Ravi could not walk anymore, so his father offered a large amount of money to passersby to carry his son. However, nobody was willing to carry any additional burden in those ravines. At this point, Ravi asked his father and brother to leave him at the mercy of God and go because the Pakistani soldiers and Pathans were nearby. Thus, they left bullet-hit Ravi alone.

On November 26, after running about half a mile, we reached a group of people sitting on the ground. We all had lost our way, were tired, and our feet were bleeding with blisters. Thus, we decided to rest. Everybody had a sad story to tell about himself or his family. Here, I met Sardar Punjab Singh and his wife who had a bullet wound in her body. Again, there were two hiking trails ahead of us and nobody knew which trail was safe. Without any discussions, some people took the trail to the north. Somebody shouted that it will lead to Kas Guma but people did not listen to him. The Muslim Rajputs killed them all. Four young men from the remaining group offered to act as scouts on the other route. Half an hour later, they came back after they found the way. They were standing on the top of another ridge and told us to climb it. The path was narrow but, with great difficulties, we reached the top of it and went in the direction those young men were leading us.

On the way, we saw an eight-month-old crying baby boy on the ground. Amar Devi Gupta, a high school teacher, picked it up but he would not stop crying because he was hungry and in a state of shock. A passing soldier gave a piece of sugar candy and Amar Devi put that small piece in the baby's mouth. After it was finished, the baby started crying again. Then another lady fed him from her breast. She also had a baby girl so she did feed him for a few minutes. However, the child was still hungry and started crying again. At this point, the soldiers in this group told them to leave the child; otherwise, we would all be captured. Some women protested on this barbaric decision. However, the soldiers forcibly took the child away and left him on the trail.

The second day was ending and it was soon dark. Nevertheless, we did not stop our journey and kept on walking. The Pakistani soldiers surrounded us and started firing at us again. As soon as we heard the sound of bullets, we hid ourselves in the nearby ridges. After some hours, we started our journey again in the darkness.

On November 27, we reached a plain at the top of the mountain. We were surprised to see a pile of guns, rifles, coats,

sweaters, shawls, and blankets. We understood that the people from Mirpur threw them because they were tired and unable to carry them any further. It was wintertime, days were shorter and the evening came sooner in those mountains. There was no snow but chilly winds would come from snowy mountains in the north. We stopped on the way for the night without any shelter. Some people who had blankets lied down and tried to sleep.

On November 28, before dark, some Jammu and Kashmir soldiers came and told us to go with them. They had made a fire down the hill that could keep us warm. First, we thought they were Pakistani soldiers and wanted to kidnap us. By this time, we were half-dead because of starvation and exhaustion so without any thinking we went with them. We saw that they had lit up a campfire with firewood and hills surrounded this place. They gave each one of us one corn of roasted maize. We thanked them for the corn and after eating, we drank water from nearby stream. They kept the fire burning at many places and we sat around it and then laid down for rest.

On November 29, we reached the top of a hill. From there we could see Jhangar town (India), which was Jammu and Kashmir's military headquarters and hills surround it on all sides. My feet were bleeding due to cuts and blisters and clothes were torn due to sleeping on the ground. In spite of bleeding feet, I did not lose my strength and started descending the hill. On the way, a lot of local Hindu villagers came with roasted corn and were giving it away to hungry refugees. The richest people of Mirpur were accepting the alms of food with thanks. At last, we reached Jhangar which was full of soldiers from the Jammu and Kashmir army and the Indian army. I was shocked to see so many army soldiers and officers of Indian army. Everybody asked them why they had stopped in Jhangar and not proceeded to Mirpur? Why did they not move from Jhangar to prevent the destruction of Mirpur? They told us they wanted to reach Mirpur in time to save it but they did not have orders from Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah. We asked them what happened to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Indian army that he sent to save Mirpur. They replied that the Indian army was diverted to save the Kashmir valley on the orders of Sheikh Abdullah.

Here I met Manga Shah, Lalchand Dharwai, Sansar Chandra, Dina Nath Gupta, Bodh Raj Saraf, Devi Chand Bahri and many others who had torn clothes and bleeding feet. These were amongst the richest families of Mirpur and they did not have any time to bring

money or gold. Even their families were not with them and they did not know what happened to them. After that, I sat in front of a shop. The shop owner was selling blankets and food and I had some money with me to buy a blanket and some food. Others were not lucky to bring any cash or jewelry and were destitute. Some soldiers told us to go further on the hills where we would get free food and blankets. In the evening, I got hearty meals of chapattis, cooked vegetables, and dal after four days and shared these meals with Vishwa Nath and Suraj Parkash. In the night I, Vishwa Nath, Suraj Parkash took shelter in an overcrowded house of a kind Hindu.

We stayed there for a few days. In the meanwhile, buses and trucks started coming from Jammu to take the refugees to Jammu. We told our ordeal to all the surviving relatives and cried a lot for the missing members of our families. In the meanwhile, we saw Indian army trucks passing by. We thought that they would take refugees from Mirpur to Jammu. After a few minutes, we heard that the Indian army would first take refugees from Kotli (another town of district Mirpur) to Jammu. It had taken two days to bring refugees from Kotli to Jhangar.

On December 3, refugees from Kotli arrived with most of their luggage. They looked happy and their dresses were neat and clean. Nobody was killed in Kotli due to the planned evacuation under the Indian army's protection. On the same day, IAF airplanes dropped packets of cooked food. This food was also picked up by refugees from Kotli because they were physically strong and healthy. That did not leave any food for the Mirpur refugees who did not have enough strength to run and catch the food packets.

On the night of December 3, the refugees from Kotli had already occupied all the buses and trucks with their luggage. On December 4, we left Jhangar in a crammed bus and reached the nearest safe town of Nowshera. We spent the night there in the houses of some kindly residents. On December 5, we boarded the buses again and departed for Jammu and reached there on December 8."

Martyrdom of Dhangeryal Brothers

Late Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal

Chander Parkash, Lalchand, Dinanath, and Tarlokchand Dhangeryals were my mother's uncles. They were among the richest families of Mirpur City and owned rifles and ammunition for protection.

"On November 25, 1947, the Dhangeryals saw some Pakistani soldiers in their locality from the roof of their three-story mansion. The Dhangeryals, like most Mirpuris, were not aware that the Pakistani army had entered Mirpur City and the Jammu and Kashmir army had already abandoned their positions. They thought these were stray Pakistani soldiers who had crept into their locality and so the Dhangeryal brothers started shooting at them from their rooftops. At the sound of gunfire, more and more Pakistani soldiers came, surrounded their mansion, and returned the Dhangeryals' fire with full fury. By noontime, Chander Parkash and Lalchand Dhangeryal told their women and children to leave from the rear gate that led to the riverside and assemble either in the house of my great-grandfather, Lalman Shah, or in the Arya Samaj temple on the northeast side of the city. Aunt Basantdevi and her children left, but the other women and children stayed. In the meantime, the Dhangeryals continued to fire on the Pakistani soldiers from their vantage point.

At nightfall, the Dhangeryals realized that either all the neighbors had fled from their homes or that the Pakistanis had killed them. They decided to leave the mansion through the rear gate that the Pakistani soldiers had not yet surrounded. The entire group walked down three miles of the riverside and climbed the Pandhi Dhakki (hiking trail) on the northeast side of the city. On the way, they did not encounter a single soul and there was an eerie silence on all the streets. After walking in ghostly silence and through burning buildings, the group reached the Arya Samaj temple. They entered the temple and locked the steel gate from inside. The Hindu refugees from west Punjab (Pakistan) had occupied the temple until the day before, but the building was empty now, with disquieting silence. The Dhangeryals found cooked *rajmah* (kidney beans) and wheat flour in the kitchen. It appeared the Hindu refugees had cooked food but had to leave in a

hurry without eating. The brothers made *chapattis* from the flour and ate it with the *rajmah*. They could see that most of Mirpur City was on fire and huge flames were rising from the buildings nearby. Soon, the Pakistani soldiers also reached Arya Samaj and tried to open the gate.

Lalchand and Chander Parkash went to the roof and started shooting at the Pakistani soldiers, killing or injuring some of them. They also saw Lalman Shah (my great-grandfather) walking on the roof of his house to avoid the heat of the burning house below. Lalman Shah was ninety years old, and his eyesight was very weak. He did not notice that the wooden beams he was walking on were burnt out below. He stepped on one of them and fell down. The fire engulfed him and burnt him alive. The Dhangeryal brothers in the Arya Samaj temple could not warn Lalman Shah because the Pakistani soldiers were all around and they did not want to be captured.

While Lalchand and Chander Parkash were shooting at the Pakistani soldiers, one bullet from a Pakistani soldier hit Lalchand. He rolled down the stairs and died, becoming another martyr of Mirpur. By this time, Chander Parkash had only one bullet left. He used that last bullet on himself rather than fall into the hands of Pakistani soldiers. Uncle Parshottam Lal's mother went on the roof and jumped to her death. A stray bullet from the Pakistani soldiers hit Uncle Parshottam Lal himself, but he survived. Some young women of the Dhangeryal family jumped into the well and killed themselves rather than face abduction and rape by the Pakistanis. The rest of the old women and children opened the gates and surrendered to the Pakistani soldiers.

On November 26, the Pakistanis ordered the prisoners from the Arya Samaj temple to head to the west side of Mirpur. As ordered, they descended the Pandhi Dhakki (hiking trail) and started walking westward on the riverbed. On the way, they saw many families sitting in the riverbed—those who were too old or sick to climb the hiking trail. Those families had thought this was the safest escape route and were unaware that the Jammu and Kashmir army and deputy commissioner of Mirpur had already deserted Mirpur. Here, the remnants of the Dhangeryal family met the family of Chaudhri Dwarkanath, including his three sons and mother. The Pakistani soldiers told Dwarkanath and his family to walk with the group of the Dhangeryals. Dwarkanath could not keep up with the speed of the young Pakistani soldiers and soon became thirsty. He asked for permission to drink water from the river. Upon his request, one young

Pakistani soldier got mad and shot him dead. Shocked at this event, Dwarkanath's sons, ages nine, eleven, and thirteen, started crying loudly. The same Pakistani soldier then shot the three boys dead in cold blood.

On November 26, the Dhangeryal families saw large numbers of Hindu dead bodies lying in the riverbed. Later, they met Raja Raghubir Singh, Yash Paul Gupta, Amar Nath Gupta, Anand Gupta, Prakash Gupta, Amar Nath Phoa (all attorneys), and Indu Bhushan (a judge of Mirpur court). These were highly respected and rich families of Mirpur City who were now completely demoralized and sitting in the riverbed. The Pakistani soldiers looked at them scornfully and told them to get up. When they got up, the soldiers told them to convert to Islam or die. Upon their refusal to convert to Islam, the Pakistani soldiers shot them dead. Then they brought the rest of the Dhangeryals and other women and children to the prison, including uncle Purshottam Lal who was injured. A few days later, during the mass slaughter of the Hindus and Sikhs at the prison, the Pakistani soldiers killed Dinanath Dhangeryal.”²⁴

²⁴ While I was in the Alibeg Prison, my uncle, Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal, narrated the above account. He settled in Gurdaspur (India) and died there. His brother Kuldeep Dhangeryal settled in Delhi and died there. His youngest brother, Pradyuman Dhangeryal immigrated to London (UK).

Martyrdom of Raja Harbans Singh and Tara Singh

Late Jagat Ram Gupta

“When the ten to twelve-mile long caravan of Hindu and Sikh refugees was heading from Mirpur to Jhangar (in India), the Pakistani soldiers would fire upon the entire length of the caravan at different locations. Refugees ran in many directions, forming separate small groups, unaware of the others. One such group of Hindus and Sikhs reached near the village of Khari. The only men in the group of Hindus and Sikhs were Jagatram Gupta, Raja Harbans Singh, and Tara Singh Chibber. Both the Singhs were Sikhs and they carried rifles and some ammunition with them. The group had about forty young women, including Kanshi Devi, the wife of Uncle Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal. She had been separated from her family and did not have any news of her husband and the rest of their family.

In the early hours of November 26, 1947, Pakistani soldiers surrounded them. Abiding by the Hindu practice of *Jauhar*, Kanshi Devi and the other women requested the Hindu men to kill them since they did not want to fall in the hands of Muslims. The Singhs told the women to stand in a line and shot most of them dead. After that, the Singhs turned their guns on the Pakistanis and started shooting. This shooting went on for an hour until an enemy bullet killed Tara Singh Chibber. After that, Tara Singh’s son picked up his father’s gun and started firing at the Pakistanis, but bullets from the Pakistani army soon killed him. Then Tara Singh’s daughter, Shakuntla, picked up the gun and started shooting at the Pakistanis, but one enemy bullet struck her leg and she fell down. At this time, Raja Harbans Singh was shooting alone at the Pakistanis. They challenged him to stop firing and drop the gun, but Harbans Singh told them he would first kill them and die like a Singh (a lion). When only one bullet was left, Harbans Singh turned the rifle towards his head and pulled the trigger. The Pakistani soldiers captured Jagatram Gupta and a few injured women who did not die in the encounter. The Pakistani soldiers robbed all of them, and the dead bodies, of cash and jewelry, and sent the few

survivors to the Alibeg prison. They arrived in Alibeg on November 28—the third day of their journey from Mirpur”.²⁵

On December 10,—the same day that Pandit Ganpati Sharma died—Jagatram Gupta died from fever that was left untreated due to the lack of care and medicines. Although a few prisoners were willing to consign Panditji’s body to the Jhelum, nobody wanted to take Jagatram’s body for fear of being killed by the Pakistani soldiers. During the night, uncle Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal and his cousin, Mohan Dhangeryal, put Jagatram’s body on a stretcher. With much courage, they took Jagatram’s body out of the prison, and consigned his body to the waters of the canal. Before taking Jagatram’s body, they said goodbye to all the persons in the room because they were not sure they would come back alive. Fortunately, they returned late in the night and everybody was joyous and thanked God.

²⁵ While I was in the Alibeg prison, Mr. Jagatram Gupta narrated the above episode before his death.

Major Ramsaran Karki - Hero of Mirpur

In 1947, the Jammu and Kashmir Army consisted mainly of three clans: The Hindu *Dogras* of Jammu, the Muslim *Dogras* of Jammu, and the Hindu *Gurkhas* from Nepal. *Dogras* are a martial community of Jammu and *Gurkhas* are a martial community of Nepal—most of them join the army. After August 15, the majority of the Muslim *Dogras* deserted the Jammu and Kashmir army and joined the Pakistan army. This happened all over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the situation in Mirpur was no exception. Thus, the total number of Hindu soldiers defending Mirpur was reduced to 800 due to desertion by the Muslim soldiers.

On October 17, the Pakistani army launched a concerted attack on various towns of the Mirpur district. Jammu and Kashmir army commanders in Mirpur determined that defending the Hindu and Sikh population in small towns was impossible under the constant artillery fire from Pakistanis. Therefore, they ordered the outposts of Chechian and Alibeg to withdraw to Mirpur bringing with them the Hindu and Sikh civilians of the area. On this occasion, Major Ramsaran Karki (a Nepalese *Gurkha*) offered to relieve the besieged towns. With his military skills and bravery, he outwitted the Pakistanis and safely extricated the whole company of Jammu and Kashmir soldiers and the Hindu and Sikh civilian refugees from Chechian and Alibeg to Mirpur City.

On October 17, the Pakistani army attacked with full strength garrisons at Chaumukh Hill and Dadyal. They also blocked all roads and tracks, suspending vehicular traffic to and from Mirpur City. After the fall of Alibeg and Chechian, the Jammu and Kashmir army commanders in Mirpur asked their troops to concentrate on the town of Dadyal.

The Pakistani army, estimated to be three companies, surrounded the lone company of the Jammu and Kashmir army at Dadyal. The Jammu and Kashmir army did not have any communications with headquarters at Mirpur City. They had neither food nor rest, and the Pakistani Army had blocked all withdrawal routes to Mirpur City. We, the people in Mirpur City, could hear heavy firing at Dadyal. The

Jammu and Kashmir army in Dadyal resisted successive Pakistani army attacks until October 21. On October 21 and 23, the Jammu and Kashmir Army commanders in Mirpur dispatched two army columns to relieve the beleaguered town of Dadyal, but neither of these two columns was able to break through the Pakistani army blockade.

Finally, Major Ramsaran Karki volunteered to go out to relieve the besieged garrison. On October 24, Major Karki collected a number of volunteers from different companies of the Jammu and Kashmir army and left Mirpur City for Dadyal at 2:00 A.M. By 7:00 A.M., on October 25, the relief column of Major Karki joined them in Dadyal and the two columns jointly fought their way to Mirpur city, reaching headquarters at 10:00 A.M. At this time, about one thousand Hindus and Sikhs of Alibeg and Dadyal also left for Mirpur City. I witnessed the arrival of buses full of Hindu and Sikh refugees coming from the town of Dadyal and from the Poonch River side (see map).

On November 25, the Mirpur defenses fell to the onslaught of the Pakistani army and Pathans. At that time, the Jammu and Kashmir army commanders of Mirpur left behind a rear guard company to engage the Pakistani army and prevent them from pursuing the caravan (column) of refugees. This company was under the command of Major Ramsaran Karki. They fought the Pakistanis with the full fury of Gurkhas and Dogras, killing many Pakistani soldiers and Pathans in the process. On November 26, the Pakistanis heavily engaged Major Karki and his company. A large number of Pakistani soldiers and Pathans surrounded their positions and the lone company of the Jammu and Kashmir army ran out of ammunition. Hindu Gurkha and Dogra soldiers fought to the "*last man and last round*." The notable soldiers, who laid down their lives on November 26, were Major Ramsaran Karki, Captain Pramod Singh, Captain P.N. Kanwar, Lieutenant Kishan Singh, Sargent Major Saran Dass, and fifteen other rank soldiers.²⁶

²⁶ Adapted from *Jammu and Kashmir Arms* by Major General D.K. Palit.

Datial Camp of a Kind Muslim Abdul Aziz

Suresh Chander, Ph.D.

By December 25, 1947, Alibeg prison was overcrowded and some of the widows and their children were transferred to Datial Camp. Datial is a village a few miles away from Alibeg where a God-fearing Muslim, Abdul Aziz, lived. During those troubled times, he would visit the Alibeg prison and persuade the Pakistani guards to transfer some girls, boys, and young women to his house since the prison had become overcrowded. He visited the prison a number of times taking about one hundred young girls and women and about fifty young boys to his house. Almost all these women were earlier kidnapped by Pathans or local Muslims after they killed their husbands. However, Pakistani police recovered them on the secret information provided by their neighbors or their previous Muslim wives. Many of these women were raped by Pathans and forcibly converted to Islam. They belonged to respectable Hindu families and suffered deep shock, trauma, and humiliation. Abdul Aziz provided them the needed psychological help and moral support. All the women and children he saved used to call him *Thekedar Sahib* (Mr. Contractor). Whenever Abdul Aziz heard about the suffering of abducted Hindu girls or young women in nearby villages, he would go there himself and bring them to his house. He looked after them nicely, like his own children, and gave them good food and clothes with his own money. He supplied medicine to the sick women and kept the barbarians away. Abdul Aziz and some of the villagers also owned their own guns. Whenever Pakistani soldiers or Pathans tried to kidnap a girl or woman from his house, all the fully armed villagers would rally around him. Once, he had a confrontation with a top-ranking Pakistani army officer who wanted to kidnap a beautiful and educated girl. Abdul Aziz did not yield to the officer's demands and filed a complaint against the officer in the Govindpur police station.

Abdul Aziz was a rich man and owned a big house, a farm, and a brick kiln. He paid all the expenses of one hundred and fifty people

and kept them under his protection. When the ICRC evacuated the prisoners from Alibeg, Abdul Aziz used all of his official diplomatic channels to make sure that the children and women under his care also made it to Jammu (India). Thanks to him, many Hindus survived and lived on.

“The house of Abdul Aziz consisted of a drawing room (living room), a small room, a large room (where we used to sleep), a storage room (for other families’ sleeping) and a kitchen. It was a typical village house of a man of means. I would guess that the total persons housed were around 150. We used to sleep in a room where wheat straw was spread on the floor to provide warmth and some sort of cushion in lieu of a mattress.

The small room adjoining the living room was given to Mrs. Krishna Mehta whose family came to Datial after our arrival. Krishna Mehta's husband, Duni Chand Mehta, was Deputy Commissioner of Muzzafrabad (now the capital of POK). The family was captured by Pathan tribesmen after they killed Mr. Mehta. Later on, the Mehtas were rescued by Pakistani Kashmir police and sent to Datial camp. The Deputy Commissioner is a senior government officer in Jammu and Kashmir so the Mehtas got special treatment. They used to get milk for tea and I think they did not have to cook their own food – they were considered privileged persons. She had two sons and two daughters who were elder to me and did not mix with the other kids. The girls were in their early teens or a little younger. It may appear that we were jealous of the Mehtas but, at that point in time, we had no such feelings. Our feelings had just died out.

Our guard was a policeman from the Pakistani Kashmir police. The Pathans tribesmen were very furious to lose the Mehta girls and looked for them in all the possible hiding places. One evening, Abdul Aziz saw a group of Pathans coming towards his house. He sensed the trouble and ordered all the women and children to go to the kitchen, which he then locked from the outside. The Mehtas were hidden in another room. When the Pathans came looking for the Mehta girls, they were told there were no Hindus in the house. A Muslim policeman fired a shot in the air and jumped from the first floor to scare the Pathans. I cannot remember why but one thing that is clear is that Abdul Aziz and the policeman did risk their lives to save the Mehta girls. After that, Abdul Aziz's esteem went up many notches amongst the Hindu inmates. The remarkable thing was that during the presence of the Pathans not even a single child uttered a sound. Even

small kids did not weep in that dark room, otherwise, Hell would have fallen on us.

Incidentally, the Muslim policeman used to tell us the above mentioned policeman was part of the Muslim forces that had surrounded Mirpur and was, in a way, responsible for the fall of Mirpur on November 25. This only strengthens my belief that man is not always good or bad – he is mostly good and becomes bad during certain occasions. On the evening of January 30, 1948, Abdul Aziz came from Jhelum and was very sad. He was almost crying and told us that Mahatma Gandhi was killed in India. He did not call everybody to break this sad news but instead mentioned it to only a few kids who were around the cot on which he was sitting. He normally did not talk to the women. The villagers were not part of his establishment and, in no time, they took arms to protect us.

It was not possible for Abdul Aziz to take the children and women from the prison without the consent of the Alibeg prison authorities. We were shifted to Datial as somebody (unknown) was told that Amar Nath Phoa's, my maternal grandfather's, daughters were in the camp. The gentleman was also a Pathan who perhaps was from the judicial service of POK. We were escorted by a few Pakistani policemen and army persons to Datial. My mother, aunt, niece, two cousins of my mother, and a few more women and children were put in a small truck and taken to the Pathan officer. I can still see him sitting in his office with a kerosene lamp – it had just become dark. My mother, aunt, and the children were ushered into his office. He expressed sorrow at our condition, uttered a few words of sympathy, and assured us that no harm would come to us. Then we were taken to Datial and, by morning, we reached there. At Datial, after over a month in Alibeg, we ate *chapattis* (bread), *dal* (lentils), and *taraka* (stir-fried). This is the first time we tasted *dalda* (hydrogenated vegetable oil) since the fall of Mirpur. *Dalda* was not part of the ration. Perhaps it was from Abdul Aziz's own pocket. We children could move freely and go to neighboring Muslim villages. The villagers did not know how to knit or sew. They used to give us wool to knit sweaters for them. In return, the villagers would give us buttermilk, jaggery, millet, etc. A *chakki* (grinding stone) in Abdul Aziz's house was used for grinding wheat and rice. In February 1948, ICRC personnel came to the Datial camp and gave us pieces of cloth. The ladies made dresses by stitching them together. Of course, we got the leftovers after the Mehtas had their pick.

I remember playing in Abdul Aziz's small orchard that had lemon trees. The elder boy used to go to the other villages. He was told to restrict his movements as young boys' wandering in villages was not liked in that part of Pakistani Kashmir. I was too young to understand the miseries through which we were going – it was just life as usual.

In March 1948, the ICRC liberated all the inmates of Datial Camp along with the prisoners of Alibeg. The Pakistani army trucks transferred us to a train in Serai Alamgir. The Mehtas also came in the same train like all the other Alibeg prisoners (including the author of this book). My family got off at Amritsar (India) and were received by my maternal uncle.”²⁷

Bal K. Gupta's note: The train proceeded to holy city of Kurukshetra). When Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, visited the Kurukshetra Refugee Camp, Krishna Mehta tied a *rakhi* (holy thread) on his wrist and, thus, became his adopted sister. Pandit Nehru took the Mehtas to the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on his return from Kurukshetra. Later on, Krishna Mehta became a member of Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian Parliament) from Jammu and Kashmir for a number of years. She died in 1993.

²⁷ Suresh Chander, Ph.D., e-mailed the eyewitness account to the author from Portland (Oregon) and talked on the phone in September 2007. Dr. Chander is from Mirpur and is now settled in New Delhi (India). His brother, Dr. Subash Gupta, is a retired principal of Jammu Medical College. Their sister settled in London (England).

Hindu Prisoners of War in Alibeg Prison

On December 26, 1947, the Pakistani authorities brought about 30 Hindu soldiers as prisoners of war into Alibeg. They were in military uniform, and the Pakistani soldiers put them in a separate prison where they were provided with their own kitchen and better rations compared to the civilians of the prison. Whenever the Pakistani guards took the prisoners of war to the nearby forests to pick up firewood, the guards on horseback shackled the Hindu soldiers with ropes to keep an eye on them. I used to see this scene quite often because we were also picking up the firewood in the same forests. However, we never had permission to communicate with these Hindu soldiers. Then, suddenly, I stopped seeing these soldiers during our visits to the forests. Upon inquiry, the Pakistani soldiers told us that two of the soldiers had loosened their shackles, overpowered one Pakistani guard, and had run away on the guard's horse. The Pakistani soldiers pursued, captured, and tortured them to death. As punishment, the Pakistani soldiers locked up the rest of the Hindu soldiers.

“The Pakistanis had captured these Hindu soldiers from Mangla fort on December 24, 1947. From November 23, 1947, the Mangla garrison of Jammu and Kashmir Army was under constant fire from the Pakistani soldiers. However, it had orders to hold fort at all costs from battalion headquarters at Mirpur. The garrison was under the command of *Jemadar* (Sargent Major) Khajoor Singh and had around forty soldiers. About fifty Hindu civilians had also taken refuge in the fort. The ammunition supply was low but there was ample supply of gunpowder and a stock of muzzle-loaders of ancient vintage. The commander decided to use these muzzle-loaders by firing a charge of pebbles through them. They certainly created a huge noise and the pebbles flew in all directions up to a hundred yards. However, the short supply of ration was the crucial factor. The ponds in the Fort had dried up. It was during the night that small parties would venture out of the Fort to fetch drinking water from the Jhelum River. The Pakistanis had a medium machine gun trained on water point and killed four civilians while they were drawing water.

On the nights of November 23 and 24, Pakistani soldiers also foiled their attempt to break through to Mirpur. They ambushed a volunteer break out party and killed two soldiers, and one injured

soldier returned to the fort after hiding from the enemy for two days and nights. By November 25, Pakistani soldiers had surrounded the fort and sealed the withdrawal route to Mirpur. They bombarded the fort with mortars. The occasional flight of IAF airplanes, which strafed the Pakistani soldiers' positions, also ceased after November 25 (the fall of Mirpur).

The garrison held out in this hopeless condition for one month . On December 24, Pakistani soldiers intensified their fire and brought in anti-tank guns. They blew open the fort gates, and opened up the front wall. Jemadar Khajoor Singh, the Jammu and Kashmir army commander, instructed his men to destroy all the weapons in the fort and attempt to break out. However, the Pakistani army surrounded and captured them all, and forced them back into the fort. The Pakistani soldiers imprisoned them for twenty days and subjected them to torture. Later, the Pakistani soldiers took them to Alibeg and put them in the *Gurudwara* with about 3,600 Hindu civilian prisoners. *Havaldar* Jamiat Singh and Ramdass escaped, but the Pakistani soldiers recaptured them and tortured them to death. The refugees remained in the Alibeg prison for five months, after which the ICRC intervened and repatriated 1,600 survivors. The rest of the prisoners succumbed to torture or starvation [the ration was two *chapattis* (flat bread) per day]. Pakistani army officers kept young women in a separate building at Govindpur where they fed them better, but shamefully raped them. After a ten-month stay at Alibeg, the Jammu and Kashmir army prisoners of war were transferred to Attock (in Pakistan). They were repatriated to India on May 25, 1949.”²⁸

²⁸ Adapted from *Jammu and Kashmir Arms* by Major General D.K. Palit.

Escape from Death Seven Times

Late Raj Kumar Bhagotra²⁹

“December 16, 1947 evening, there was big commotion in Alibeg prison. Some Pakistani soldiers started grabbing young Hindu boys from their tiny rooms. Two soldiers grabbed me from the prayer hall of *Alibeg Gurudwara* and ordered me to go with them so that they could complete their unfinished task. My mother (my father, Amar Nath Bhagotra, was taken away a few days earlier) begged them with folded hands to spare my life because I was sick. But the cruel Pakistanis soldiers kicked her with their boots and dragged me outside the prison gate. They dragged 19 young boys to the Upper Jhelum canal. One of the soldiers yelled to remove our clothes and lie down on the wet ground. We all were trembling with fear and freezing December cold but took off our clothes and lied on the ground in a line. My number was 18th.

One evil looking Pakistani announced that our days of living were over. They would kill all of us *Kafir* Hindus (infidels) with a butcher’s knife. But he yelled that number 18th and 19th have to do a simple task of lifting the dead bodies and throwing them in the canal. That evil butcher recited *Kalma* (verses from *Koran*) and went on slaughtering helpless Hindu boys with butcher’s knife and we would hear their dying shrieks. Both of us naked boys would lift the half dead body of our colleague and throw it in the canal. Then we would sit down on the ground and wait for the next killing. When number 17th Chaman Lal son of Bodh Raj Bazaz was killed, it was our turn and we lay down. The butcher moved towards us with blood thirsty eyes. All of a sudden, there was great thunders, lightning accompanied by

²⁹ R.K. Bhagotra was an Alibeg survivor and was fifteen years old in 1947. His family lived in the prayer hall of Alibeg prison along with my family and 200 others. On December 2, 1947, his father Amar Nath Bhagotra, a prominent advocate of Mirpur, was killed in Alibeg along with rest of the intelligentsia. In January 1948, his family was transferred to Camp Datial of Abdul Aziz. After liberation, he settled in New Delhi and retired as Director of Handicrafts, Government of India. I talked to him on December 2011 and Mr. Bhagotra passed away on January 21, 2012. This is the English translation of his original Hindi article published in The Tawi Deepika, July, 1987.

incessant freezing rains. (Cloud bursts and heavy rains are common in December-January in Kashmir). The wet butcher looked at the sky and kicked me with his military boots. He told us to get up and put our clothes since thunder, lightning and rain had saved us this day but he would complete the unfinished task next time. This is how I was saved first time.

On December 20, 1947 evening, four days after the above episode, Pakistani soldiers grabbed 13 young men and took them to the canal. We were again made to remove our clothes and lie down. I was in the death row second time and was again given the same task of throwing the half dead bodies in the canal. This time my number was 12th. The Pakistani butcher went reciting *Kalma* and slaughtering Hindu boys and we kept on throwing the dead bodies in the canal. After both of us had thrown the body of 11th person in the canal, we laid down on the ground for our turn. Time was same as four days ago but the sky was clear and I closed my eyes for my turn.

Suddenly, we heard a commanding voice asking why soldiers were killing the boys. Another voice introduced him as Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim, President of Azad Kashmir (POK) Government. Then, I opened my eyes and saw that the butcher got up and saluted the Sardar and bowed his head in front of him. The butcher replied that he was a soldier of Pakistan, follower of its president Mohammed Ali Jinnah and was following the orders of his superiors. The Sardar waved at both of us to get up and put his hands on my shoulders. He asked me where I was from and about my education. I told him that I was from Mirpur and was a second year student in Mirpur College. Then he asked my father's name. I told him that I was the son of Amar Nath Bhagotra, advocate.

He exclaimed to hear the name of my father and said that he was also an advocate in Mirpur and my father was one of his friends. He told us not to worry and put on our clothes. Then he addressed all the Pakistani soldiers that this type of blood-letting is no good. They should not kill the innocents. One of my daughters and some of my relatives are interned in Muslim refugee camps in Jammu (India). We will exchange these young Hindu people boys with young Muslims interned in India. Exchange boys with boys and girls with girls-even exchange. We followed the Sardar to his jeep on the road down the embankment. The butcher told to go back to the prison and this time the Sardar had saved us. He warned us not tell anybody about the

killing otherwise they would burn all of us alive. This how I was saved second time.

Five to six times again, death was moving towards me but I was saved from the slaughter. Three times when I was taken away from the Alibeg prison, it started raining heavily before we reached the canal. So we were sent back to the prison. Two times, when I was being taken to the canal, the ration truck arrived. So we were forced to unload the truck and saved. I and few other lucky persons were saved from the jaws of death and I am able to write these episodes. Was it my destiny or miracle?"

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THOSE WHO REACHED INDIA

The following are eyewitness accounts of people who reached Jhangar (India) along with the retreating Jammu & Kashmir Army and the various websites listed. These accounts were also corroborated by my uncles Mukand Lal, Vishwa Nath and my mother's uncle, Suraj Parkash, who escaped safely to Jhangar.

General D.K. Palit's Version³⁰

On the night of November 24, the Pakistanis bombarded Mirpur with incessant machine gun and cannon fire. During that night, Deputy Commissioner (D.C.) of Mirpur (Rao Rattan Singh) and Lt. Col Thapa of the Jammu and Kashmir Army called a meeting. They decided to abandon Mirpur City on November 25 and planned for the Jammu and Kashmir Army to escort the civilian population. However, when the civilians saw the soldiers leaving their posts, they thought the army was abandoning them. In despair, many men took their own lives and that of their womenfolk rather than falling into the hands of Muslim Pathans. About 3,000 civilians were incapable of making the journey out of Mirpur. On November 25, by about 10:00 AM, the D.C. of Mirpur and a Jammu and Kashmir Army escort began their trek towards Jhangar (India). However, due to the unorganized evacuation, the civilians did not leave the courthouse-army cantonment till 3:00PM. The Jammu and Kashmir Army left behind a rear guard company, under the command of Major Ramsaran Karki, to engage the Pakistani Army and to fight to the last bullet. On November 26, 1947, Major Ramsaran Karki, Captain Pramodh Singh, Captain Kanwar, Lt. Krishna Singh, and Subedar Sarandass died, along with the other ranks while fighting the Pakistani Army.

Two Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter airplanes bombed the Pakistani Army positions and prevented them from pursuing the retreating column. The caravan was more than five miles long and

³⁰ This material is adapted from Major General D.K. Palit's book, *Jammu and Kashmir Arms*.

moved slowly because of the presence of many women, children, elderly, and sick. At about 9:00 PM, near Kas Guma, the caravan encountered heavy firing from the Pakistani Army. In a panic, the majority of the civilians dispersed in many directions and the army lost control. At that point, the Jammu and Kashmir Army decided to move cross-country since the Pakistani Army had occupied the main road. During the day time, the presence of IAF airplanes helped to mitigate any Pakistani Army harassment—one airplane would cover until relieved by another.

On November 26, the first half of the column reached Jhangar at 7:00 PM. Brigadier Chattar Singh dispatched parties carrying cooked food to the women and children. On November 28, 1947, the tail end of the column reached Jhangar. On November 28, the Hindu and Sikh refugees of Kotli also joined them. On November 29, all the refugees formed a single caravan and, guided by the remnants of the Jammu and Kashmir Army, marched towards Nowshera. At Nowshera, more Hindu and Sikh refugees from adjoining towns joined them, bringing the total number of refugees to about 20,000. About 100 civilian vehicles transported the elderly, the sick, women, and children. On December 3, they reached Jammu and the government authorities lodged them in makeshift refugee camps or abandoned Muslim homes.

C.P. Gupta's Version³¹

Mirpur, with a population of 25,000 Hindus and Sikhs (including Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan), became the boundary line between India and Pakistan on the western side of the Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) State. In late October 1947, the Pakistani Army and Muslim Pathans from Pakistan attacked Mirpur in full force, with the intention of grabbing the entire J & K State. On November 8, the Pakistani Army and Pathans took position on the ridge known as Blah-Da-Galla. Under heavy odds, the J & K Army retreated from both posts to Mirpur City. This brought the Pakistan Army right to the gates of Mirpur. On November 12, the morale of the J & K Army received a big boost when IAF aircrafts bombed and strafed the Pakistani Army position. On November 14, IAF fighters appeared again and dropped small arms and ammunition for the J & K army. Unfortunately, a great

³¹ This material is adapted from *Directory of Mirpur Mahajans Families Settled in Jammu*. By C.P. Gupta and the Pakistanis killed his father, Mr. Madan Lal Gupta in Alibeg. C.P. Gupta retired as Dy. Chief Secretary, J&K. Government.

part of the ammunition became unserviceable due to lose packaging. In the meantime, the Pakistani Army came closer and occupied almost all the posts around Mirpur city. The stock of ammunition for the J & K army was dangerously low and, essential commodities in the town, including medicines, also became critical. Hindu and Sikh volunteers of Mirpur distributed the limited stock among its population and served J & K soldiers with packets of cooked food.

After November 16, the intensity and regularity of the Pakistani Army attacks on Mirpur greatly increased. On November 19, the J & K Army received another consignment of 25,000 rounds of bullets dropped by IAF fighter planes. Though the supply was insufficient, it boosted the morale of the J & K army. On November 20, the Pakistani Army made another massive attack and broke through the defense at the southwestern portion of Mirpur city. The young men of Mirpur and the soldiers of the J & K Army engaged the Pakistani soldiers in a hand-to-hand fight, pushing them back. On November 21, the J & K Army wireless set went out of order and all contacts with the rest of J & K and India were lost. On November 22 and 23, the Pakistani Army used its full force and showered bullets and artillery throughout day and night. On November 24, the Pakistani Army, with artillery and mortar fire support, launched an assault on the southwestern part of the city. The J & K Army post put up the most spirited resistance, but the Pakistani soldiers came in, wave after wave. After six hours of ceaseless fighting, the Pakistani Army overran this post and entered the town.

In the early hours November 25, Lt. Col. Puran Singh Thapa, commander of the J & K Army in Mirpur, consulted with the D.C. of Mirpur, Rao Rattan Singh, and clandestinely made the decision to retreat to Jhangar, leaving the civilian population to its fate. Some of the soldiers left their posts and followed suit. This created panic, chaos, and confusion among the civilian population. Thousands of women committed suicide to save themselves from the clutches of the cruel Pakistani Army and Pathan invaders. Others assembled in the deserted army cantonment where old men, women, and innocent children searched for their lost family members. A glimmer of hope appeared at 11:00 A.M., when IAF fighter aircraft appeared in the sky. Another IAF plane appeared at 1:00 P.M. but turned away without helping. However, the Pakistani Army and Pathans kept on shooting at the civilian population of Mirpur from all directions, covering the whole town with dead bodies. About 2,500 were able to reach Jhangar

in a very miserable condition with the retreating J & K army. Another 2,500 wounded and half-dead prisoners survived in the Alibeg prison. Thus, fell Mirpur to the Pakistani invaders on November 25, 1947.

International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) Report on Kashmir³²

In 1947, a Hindu Maharaja governed a population of 4 million in Jammu & Kashmir (J & K), three-quarters of them Muslims. Throughout the summer he procrastinated by neither joining India nor Pakistan. With the news of killings in Punjab, the strife spread to Jammu, a southern region of J & K. A predominantly Hindu population massacred the Muslim population of Jammu. In August, a rebellion amongst peasants and Muslim soldiers in the Maharaja's army broke in the district of Poonch, where they formed Azad Kashmir Government with the support of Pakistan. Tensions continued to rise till the invasion of J & K by Muslim Pathan warriors of NWFP of Pakistan on October 22 1947, who came to the aid of their Muslim brothers. There followed destruction, massacre, pillage, rape and kidnappings on a massive scale.

When the fighting broke in Punjab and Kashmir, ICRC had no representative in India. When ICRC's attention in Geneva was drawn to the plight of the refugees, it decided in December 1947 to send Dr. Otto Wenger to India. On his departure from Geneva, Dr. Wenger's instructions were to contact the governments of India and Pakistan and their respective Red Cross Societies. Nobody foresaw that the J & K conflict would take up the entire ICRC delegate's time. As soon as he reached New Delhi, he was asked to act as a neutral intermediary for several thousand Hindu and Sikh prisoners (including Alibeg) trapped in Azad Kashmir. Dr. Wenger made several trips between N. Delhi, J & K (India), Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. Dr. Wenger took trips in snowfalls, on mules or foot under the threat of attack by IAF and Pathans. By the end of February, 1948, Dr. Wenger's efforts achieved the following:

- The immediate dispatch of aid by Pakistan Red Cross and medical personnel by the Christian Relief Association to Alibeg camp, situated in Azad Kashmir. The ICRC

³² Adapted from ICRC's report website – www.icrc.org.

delegate visited Alibeg, which housed 1600 Hindu and Sikh prisoners living in appalling conditions.

- Pakistan's agreement to arrange to evacuate through its territory of all Hindus and Sikhs trapped in Azad Kashmir
- Pakistan's commitment to supply the camps with the provisions
- Consent of Azad Kashmir to the departure of Hindus and Sikhs

The agreement covered about 5,000 Hindus and Sikh civilians, 2500 in Muzzafrabad, 1600 in Alibeg, 125 in Govindpur (Datial) and 700-800 in Bagh.

As had happened in Punjab, thousands of women and children had been abducted by both sides of J & K. Although India and Pakistan had signed an agreement for locating kidnapped women, it was not making any progress in J & K because of the disputed status of the J & K state. Here too Dr. Wenger's mediation was sought that resulted in the establishment of proper procedures. Both India and Pakistan took to intensify searches and, place women and children who had been traced in camps in India and Pakistan. Pending their repatriation, the opposing governments would exchange the lists in order to locate and contact their families of origin. This would allow adult women to decide whether or not to rejoin their relatives.

With most of the time taken up by his work as a neutral intermediary in J & K conflict, Dr. Wenger was not able to devote to the problem of refugees of Punjab. Nevertheless, he visited several camps in Pakistan, India, J & K and Azad Kashmir, and advised the authorities and Red Cross societies in organizing the camps. Dr. Wenger, who had set out on two month mission, finally went back to Switzerland at the end of June 1948.

Eyewitness Accounts of Kidnapped Girls³³

Reports of Indian Liaison Officers (1947-48), Lahore (Pakistan)

"Hindu and Sikh girls abducted from Mirpur are sold in Jhelum city (Pakistan) at Rupees 10 or 20 (\$1-2) each. The local police refused to interfere on the ground that the girls were not abducted from Pakistan. The police expressed their helplessness because of the

³³ Adapted from the website www.bharatvani.org/books/mla/ap21-30.htm.

attitude of the armed Pathans possessing these girls. I am bringing this to the notice of the Pakistan Government but I am afraid nothing would come out of it. In helplessness all these girls will bear hardships all their lives and suffer misery. According to the information received most of the girls abducted from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and some of the girls abducted from West Punjab (Pakistan) are taken to the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and from there to the tribal territory (bordering Afghanistan). At Manshera (Waziristan) and some other places of NWFP, there are regular camps where Hindu girls are sold.”

Statement of Shrimati Chander Kanta, daughter of Bhagat Gobind Ram, aged 13, of village Choba Bhagatan, District Rawalpindi, to the Chief Liaison Officer (1947-48), Lahore, Pakistan.

“My father was a teacher at Mirpur. We had left our village and had gone to Mirpur to seek shelter from the communal disturbances that started in March, 1947. When the Pakistanis and Pathans attacked Mirpur, we fled with the rest of the population. At Akalgarh, the Pakistani army captured us and picked up young girls. Abdur Rahman captured me and took me to Sakhrana (Pakistan). I was married to him lived with him as his wife for one month. The Pakistani police visited Sakhrana and found me out and took me to Rawalpindi Camp (Pakistan). I was lodged in Rawalpindi Camp for 40 days along with 48 Hindu girls. Some Muslims visited the camp to meet the women they had forcibly married. They threatened them that if they go to India they would be killed by the Sikhs and Hindus. Those Muslims warned the girls that they should not express their willingness to be evacuated. I was brought to Lahore along with Pandit Nihal Chand.”

Statement of Shrimati Viranwati, Daughter of Shri Sewa Singh aged 16/17 years, village Ilbhagwan, District Mirpur, to the Chief Liaison Officer (1947-48), Lahore, Pakistan

“About 2½ months ago, a Muslim mob attacked Mirpur. The attack took place on the refugee camp, where many people from the neighboring villages had gathered. My father and mother were killed in this attack. Nawab, a Muslim Pathan abducted me and took me to Hoti Mardan (Pakistan). My younger sister Gian Kaur, aged about 6 years also accompanied me. The Pathans took away 4500 girls with them. From Hoti Mardan he took me to Maj Garhi (Pakistan), where I

remained with him for over a month. Nawab asked me whether I wanted to go back to India. Under fear, I told him that as my parents had been killed, I would not go to India and agreed to forced marriage with him. He was hiding me by changing residence, as Pakistani police was in search of kidnapped girls. Later on, the police found me and brought me to Rawalpindi Camp, which had 51 Hindu girls. These girls were from the Poonch (J & K) and from Kahuta District (Pakistan). Pakistani police guarded this camp and only those Muslims could visit the camp who had forcibly married these girls. But the police did not permit the girls to go out with these Muslims.”

Statement made by Sarjit Kaur, wife of Jaswant Singh, aged about 19 years, of Lahore, now residing at Mahalpur, District Hoshairpur, to the Chief Liaison Officer (1947-48), Lahore, Pakistan.

“I was married only 10 months ago at Mirpur. My parents resided in village Janjit, which is at a distance of 30 miles from Mirpur. After my marriage, I stayed for two months with my husband at Krishan Nagar, Lahore (Pakistan) and went back to my parents. Since then I was with my parents at Janjit from where we shifted to Mirpur proper 4-5 months ago. It was on or about the November 25, 1947, when Pakistanis made the last attack on Mirpur. J&K forces fled, leaving all the citizens at the mercy of Pakistanis and Pathans. The entire population followed the military on the Bhimbar Road towards Jammu. Our batch consisted of 2,000 persons and, was captured by Pakistanis. Men and women were separately kept in a small village Akalgarh, where we stayed for two days. After two days, the Pakistanis and the Pathans led us back on the Mirpur Road. It took us two days to travel on the path. My whole family consisting of my parents, and sister with four children, her husband, Lal Singh, and one sister-in-law were with me, when I was snatched away by one Pakistani Muslim. I was kept by this man in village Haryawan for two nights. At about midnight, he made me walk from that place for about a mile. When we were near Thathal Camp, I was snatched from him by two Pakistani soldiers and Mohammed Hussain, a Tonga-driver of village Kotian (Pakistan). It is nearly 20 days that I have been living in this village. With the help of a schoolmistress, I conveyed the message to Lala Avtar Narain (a Hindu) this morning, who rescued me from the house of Mohammed Hussain. My family was deprived of the cash, gold and silver on the way and I was left with two gold bangles.”

Statement of Harbhajan Kaur, wife of Sunder Singh, Shopkeeper of Alibeg, District Mirpur, to the Chief Liaison Officer (1947-48), Lahore, Pakistan

“My father Harnam Singh belonged to village Balani, 8 miles from Sarai Alamgir (Pakistan). I was married to Sardar Sunder Singh, shopkeeper of Ali Beg, 13 months back. Four and a half months ago, on account of communal disturbances, I along with my husband, his parents left Alibeg for Mirpur, a two hours journey from Alibeg by lorry. With us came my husband’s uncle, aunt, his two young cousins, and niece. On November 25, 1947, Mirpur was set on fire by the Pakistanis. I along with the relatives mentioned above and others left our houses at midday for the army cantonment. We had hardly stayed there for half an hour when the J& K army deserted the camp. About 27,000 refugees in the camp followed them in a caravan. We had hardly covered two miles when Muslims fired on the caravan from their military posts. Under the shower of bullets, I ran away and was lost from my relatives. My husband’s niece and small nephew were with me. We had just passed a well of village Marel, two miles from Mirpur, when we were surrounded by Muslims armed with spears, swords and axes. At dusk, women and men were separated and kept in separate rooms. I was taken away by Akhtar, to village Sehutha and was detained in the house of his father-in-law. Here I was raped by Akhtar and his brother-in-law Araf who had come from Mandi. From Sehutha, I was taken to Mandi by Akhtar accompanied by his father-in-law and mother-in-law. I was kept at Mandi for four days in the house, which had been taken by Akhtar’s father-in-law. I was not molested at Mandi. Araf came to Mandi when I had stayed there for four days. I was temporarily deprived of my ornaments at Sehutha but was restored my ornaments when I left Mandi.

On December 3, 1947, I was taken to Chapra village from Sarai Alamgir, by Araf and Haider and then to Jhelum, Gujarat and Lahore (all in Pakistan). On December 6, at Lahore I was kept at 14, Cooper Road residence of Mr. G. H. Lodhi, Barrister-at-law. Araf’s sister is married to Mr. Lodhi and did not like the idea of her brother abducting a Sikh girl and marrying her. Mr. G. H. Lodhi arranged to deliver me to the Chief Liaison Officer. I did not know what had happened to my husband and his parents. I was told that they all were killed. However, my parents were presumably in Sitapur (India).”

Inder Singh Bali's Version³⁴

“According to Mr. Inder Singh Bali, a Punjab chief belonging to the well-known family of Mahan Singh Bali, Commander in chief of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (in 19th Century), who arrived here yesterday from Mirpur, nearly 40,000 Hindus and Sikhs have been killed in Mirpur district when the Pathan raiders headed by a son of Gulbad Shah, chief of Dir State near Chitral and colonels of Pakistani army laid siege to the town of Mirpur for nearly 20 days.

Although the citizens of Mirpur had resisted for long, said Mr. Bali, they were obliged to surrender on November 25, when nearly 30,000 raiders including deserters from Jammu & Kashmir army shelled the town with three inch mortars. Troops of the Second Punjab Regiment of Pakistan accompanying the raiders attacked with stenguns forcing them to surrender in less than two hours.

Thereafter, all the men of the town were marched towards Pir Hill 6000 feet high and many of them mercilessly butchered. Girls were molested and raped and survivors taken to Thathal camp. Here all those girls who refused to comply with the wishes of raiders were killed in cold blooded manner along with their children.

While going to the Jhelum refugee camp in the company of two Muslim friends, Mr. Bali saw every raider carrying a girl or two with him. Mr. Bali who wept bitterly in course of interview said he had lost every one of his relatives, who were particularly singled out by tribesmen to revenge the fall of Jamrud Fort where the founder of his dynasty General Mahan Singh Bali had succeeded Gen Hari Singh Nalwa as commander after the latter's death (in 19th century). He said that every house in Mirpur was destroyed and now the raiders were holding in villages which were completely bereft of Hindu population. Raiders had installed battery on Pir Hill and to him the Fall of Punch appeared to be imminent. He described how supplies of ammunition and rations were regularly coming to the raiders from Pakistan army.”

³⁴ Courtesy The Tribune, Shimla (India), dated December 3, 1947 and K.L. Bhagotra e-mailed me in December 2011. Inder Singh Bali was a survivor of Mirpur but most of his relatives were killed. 40,000 Hindus and Sikhs of district Mirpur listed above included counties of Mirpur, Bhimber, Kotli and Nowshera.

Krishan Lal Bhagotra's Version³⁵

“On the morning of November 25, 1947, Diwan Badri Nath, Mahasha Yash Paul and I met Major Karki and told him that Pakistanis had entered Western Gate. He replied that he already knew it and Deputy Commissioner, Rao Rattan Singh, along with 50 soldiers and some civilian employees had already fled from Mirpur. Major Karki told us that he and his soldiers did not have any ammunition to fight the Pakistanis and they also had to leave the city. Thereupon, we ran to all over town and warned all the residents to leave town immediately because DC had cowardly abandoned Mirpur. I learnt later on that Major Karki and his soldiers took an alternate route along with some civilians including Judge Munna Lal and Diwan Badri Nath. On the way they were ambushed by Pakistanis and all got killed except a few women who were brought to Alibeg. My father was a disabled person and I carried him on my shoulders a few miles (up to Rehavan Ki Bani). I was forced by him to the ungrateful job to kill him, so I with a very heavy heart shot him dead. I was lucky enough to reach Jammu safely with retreating Jammu and Kashmir Army. After a few days, I moved to New Delhi. Sometimes in December-January, I came to know about Alibeg Prison through three emissaries and two escaped prisoners about my some of my imprisoned relatives”

K.L. Bhagotra also told me “On January, 27, 1948 a delegation of Mirpur refugees in Delhi met Mahatma Gandhi to liberate Hindu prisoners from Alibeg. This delegation was led by Sardar Lal Singh Kakkar and I was part of it along with many refugees from Mirpur. Pandit Nehru, Indian Prime Minister, was also present in this meeting. We told Mahatma Gandhi about the killing of Hindus and Sikhs in Mirpur and Alibeg and asked them to send army to liberate Alibeg. But Mahatma Gandhi told us that it was difficult for Indian army to go forward in those areas because of snow covered roads. Sardar Kakkar explained him it never snows in Alibeg and areas around Mirpur. However, Pandit Nehru only listened and did not make any comment. In the evening prayer meeting, Mahatma Gandhi made an appeal to Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent in to stop killing of Hindus (in Pakistan) and Muslims (in India). This meeting like many earlier

³⁵ K.L. Bhagotra, a survivor of Mirpur told me above on phone in December 2011. K.L. Bhagotra retired as Senior Accounts Officer, Government of India, New Delhi.

meetings was not successful and did not bring any military action to liberate Alibeg. We did not get a chance for a follow up meetings with the Mahatma to press Alibeg prisoners' case more forcefully. On January 30, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.”

Mirpur in the Views of Journalists

Mirpur - Forgotten City by Dr. Ram Chander Sharma³⁶

After the Timurlane massacre of Delhi in 1358, the massacre of Mirpur - a bustling trade Centre and historic walled city of Jammu and Kashmir now in POK - on November 25, 1947, was the worst massacre of Indian history. As the offer of accession by Maharaja was accepted by Government of India on October 26, 1947, after India and Pakistan gained independence, the ill-fated Hindu and Sikh minorities living in Muslim majority of western areas of Jammu region and in Kashmir valley were waiting their dooms day. The decision of accession of Jammu and Kashmir with India and its completed merger with India as its integral part was celebrated like "Diwali" in Mirpur with lighting of candles and bursting of [fire] crackers. But the recently declassified British Government documents reveal that the United Kingdom had decided that the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (or part of it) must go to Pakistan for strategic reasons of importance: the Jhelum bridge, irrigation/hydroelectric potentials of Mangla dam in Mirpur for the economic needs of Pakistan, and the need of an air base in western Jammu and Kashmir close to Russia and China. The creation of Pakistan was itself for the strategic reasons to counter the growing military influence of Soviet Union after World War II. Due to its proximity with China and Russia, presence of warm water sea port of Karachi and the interests of western oil companies in central Asia made Pakistan important.

Soon after the independence, Pakistan conceived a military plan to attack Jammu and Kashmir. Code named "Gulmarg" it was placed under the close guidance of British military officers. Pashtun tribes *Lashkers* (hordes) from Dir and Waziristan areas were roped in under the direct command of Brig. Akbar Khan of Pakistan army code named "General Tariq" and soon armed attacks and looting started in early September in Poonch and Kotli area, about 400 looters entered Owen on 2nd and 3rd September followed by Pakistan regular army and ex-army men. The town of Bhimber fell at the same time when Indian troops were air lifted to Srinagar on October 27, 1947. The

³⁶ Courtesy of Kashmir Study Group taken from <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com>. Dr. Sharma was a senior editor of Daily Excelsior, Jammu (India).

population of the town swelled from 3000 to 5000 Hindu migrants from the adjoining areas. All assembled in a small tehsil building - women and children were taken hostage while the males were put to the sword. Soon, other areas fell one after another and the focus of attention and sending the Indian reinforcement was valley centric as Pandit Nehru completely gave the command of the troops to Sheikh Abdulla, thus side-lining Sardar Patel.

The population of Mirpur swelled from 10,000 to 25,000 Hindus and Sikhs migrating from nearby areas and Jhelum. A garrison of Maharaja Forces was stationed in the town. People made the fortified defenses on the roof tops and on the ground by digging trenches, and groups of youths were assigned the job of vigilance round the clock with primitive weapons. Many advances of the enemy were repulsed till the town fell on November 25, 1947. Pakistan army started using modern weapons and artillery to break the walls of town. There were no supply as the town was already cut off by the fall of Bhimber in October itself; the only hope was the air dropping of supplies of food and ammunition by air till the reinforcements of Indian army reach to push away the enemy. Frantic messages were sent to Jammu over the wireless by Maharaja Forces to Jammu but in vain. Many of the forceful attacks of the enemy were repulsed. A major attack was carried out by the enemy on November 23, 1947, from the main eastern gate and was repulsed by the death squads of Mirpuri youths in hand to hand fight. In a bad luck the only wireless equipment with the state forces broke down and the fresh stronger attack by the enemy forces on morning of the 24th frightened the state forces that left the battle scene with the information to the civil population to move to safer places. The ensuing fierce fighting throughout the next night put the enemy at bay till morning when they broke the western gate of the city next morning by using heavy artillery. The blood thirsty Pakistani army and tribal marauder entered the city around 8 a.m. in the morning. Under chaos and confusion people ran around terrified and the city was set on fire by the invaders. Soon poison was distributed to the women to end their lives and not to fall into the hands of enemy. Many who didn't get the poison were done to deaths with swords by their fathers and brothers. The dance of death continued till afternoon and, at the end of day, 18000 people were slaughtered in most barbaric way of the human history by Pakistan army and tribesmen. Five thousand people most of them women and children were taken

hostages and taken to Alibeg Gurudwara which was converted to a concentration camp. Only 2000 people could reach Jhangar on foot and then escorted by Indian army to Jammu refugee camp. The hapless women and young girls abducted went thorough worst sex orgies of rape and violence. The whole of Mirpur was latter dugout to loot the wealth worth billions of rupees beside gold and silver

The other towns of Jammu province as Rajouri fell on November 10th, where the population swelled from 6000 to 11000 with the influx of refugees from the adjoining villages. Most of population was done to death and less than 100 could escape the jaws of death.

POK refugees - the heroic *Pothwari* tribe who fought the foreign invaders from the ancient times - are now living in abject poverty in camps and are told to be repatriated as soon as India takes back POK areas which are the integral part of India through a resolution of Indian Parliament of 1994. Unlike the refugees of Indian Punjab and Bengal whose cases of compensation and land allotment were settled amicably by India and Pakistan, the POK refugees still are labeled as displaced persons of Jammu and Kashmir and are not given the benefits of UN Refugee Status of 1951 or other benefits extended to Tibetan Refugees or migrants from Kashmir valley after 1989. The sacrifices of POK Refugees of Muzzafrabad kept the enemy engaged for four days till the Indian army was air dropped in Srinagar. The sacrifices of people of Mirpur delayed the enemy for a month till the besieged Poonch was freed and a vital link of Poonch to Jammu was saved from falling into the hands of Pakistan.

November 25, Mirpur Balidan Divas (Mirpur Sacrifice Day), is observed by the POK Refugees in Delhi, Jammu, Sunderbani, Poonch, Udhampur and other parts of India where the community is settled. It is still not too late for India to tell the world the other side of story of the Accession of Jammu and Kashmir with India and forward the case of genocide to UN to punish the perpetrators, settle all the demands and build a war memorial for the martyrs of Mirpur.

Mirpur 1947 – The Untold Story by Khalid Hasan³⁷

The savagery that gripped the Subcontinent at a moment in history which should have been its most glorious remains inexplicable. While a great deal of academic work has been completed in India on the massacres and the movement of millions from one part of the divided land to the other, little of that has been done on our side, which is yet another pity that can be added to the long list of pities that every Pakistani carries in his heart.

Some years ago, I published a book of reminiscences about Jammu and how its Muslim population had been all but decimated in 1947, ironically with the connivance, if not at the directions, of the Maharaja's government, which was supposed to have protected them. That slim book remains the only first-hand account, as far as I know, of what life was like for the Muslims of Jammu before 1947 and what happened to them as India and Pakistan awoke to freedom. Some copies of the book, *Memory Lane to Jammu*, found their way to Jammu and several people who read it later said that they really had no idea what had happened to the Muslims of Jammu city and outlying areas in 1947. Included in the book was a first-hand account recorded for the late Justice Muhammad Yusuf Saraf by Director Abdul Karim, more than twenty of whose family members were killed and whose daughter was abducted, never to be found. He himself received eleven sword and knife wounds on his body and was left for dead.

A couple of months ago, I received an email from Bal Krishan Gupta, a retired engineer who lives in Georgia. He wrote, "I read your article on Jammu 1947 on the website. It is a heart rending account of the massacre of Muslims in Jammu. I am from Mirpur and was a witness to the slaughter of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur. As a matter of fact, I am one of the few survivors of the Alibeg concentration camp. As

³⁷ Courtesy of www.khalidhasan.net. Late Khalid Hasan was born in Jammu (J&K) and, as Muslim refugee he settled in Pakistan in 1947. He was a senior Pakistani journalist and writer who wrote over 40 books. In 1993, he migrated to USA and died in Washington DC in 2009. Above article was published in Friday Times (Pakistan) and Kashmir Times, Jammu (India). I talked to him several times during research for this book and exchanged e-mails.

Muslim refugees from Jammu mark the anniversary of the November 5 Jammu killings, the Hindu and Sikh survivors of Mirpur remember the November 25 holocaust of Mirpur.” He asked if I would publish his story and I said I would.

The account he sent me is harrowing. He was only ten at the time but he says he has a photographic memory. Many members of his immediate family, including some of his uncles and his great grandfather, a man of ninety, were killed in Mirpur. Some of what Gupta has recorded I have tried to corroborate from sources on our side but without luck. Hardly anything is on record. Even Justice Saraf in his two-volume history of the freedom movement in the State has confined his account to the military encounters that took place between bands of Pathan irregulars, sections of the Pakistan army and freebooters and the remnants of the Maharaja’s forces. It is not a satisfactory account and its gung-ho, super-patriotic tone is troubling because I expected more objectivity from a judge and Kashmiri patriot.

Justice Saraf writes that Mirpur district had Hindu majorities in its three principal towns of Mirpur, Kotli and Bhimber. Many Hindus fleeing from West Punjab had taken refuge in Mirpur town, swelling its non-Muslim population to 20,000. According to him, “local mujahids (volunteers) and Pakistani volunteers” cut off the Mirpur Cantonment and a 500-strong force moved towards Mirpur town which was surrounded by the second week of November 1947. A force of 1,000 of tribesmen from Dir also joined in. Most of the atrocities committed against the non-Muslim residents of Mirpur were by these men, though Saraf does not record that. The outer defenses of Mirpur city crumbled and many houses were set on fire. He writes, “At about 4 pm (on 25 November) a column of humanity was seen emerging from the barbed wire enclosure on the Eastern side,” made up of civilians and flanked by Dogra troops (J&K army), which soon abandoned their helpless charges. The caravan scattered and as Saraf puts it “their condition was pitiable; the effects of the fighting and the conditions of siege were clearly noticeable; they were emaciated, exhausted and frightened.” By the evening, there was no Hindu or Sikh left in Mirpur town. Saraf records that while “some Pathans as well as local Muslims wanted to kill the Hindus and abduct their women,” they were prevented from doing so and the people who had

now become refugees in their own land, were sent to Alibeg Gurudwara which was turned into a refugee camp.

Gupta's memories are different. "As a ten-year-old child I, along with 5,000 Hindus and Sikhs, was held prisoner in the Alibeg prison. On March 16, 1948, only about 1,600 prisoners walked out from Alibeg alive. I was one of them. Most of the survivors of Alibeg have died since the horrific massacres. As one of its few survivors, I feel compelled to document the events I witnessed. Around November 25, 1947, there were nearly 25,000 Hindus and Sikhs living in Mirpur. During the city's capture, close to 2,500 were killed in the infernos that erupted due to Pakistani artillery fire. Another 2,500 escaped with the retreating Jammu and Kashmir army. The remaining 20,000 were marched in a procession towards Alibeg. Along the way, Pakistani troops and Pathans killed about 10,000 of the captured Hindu and Sikh men and kidnapped over 5,000 women. The 5,000 Hindus and Sikhs who survived the 20-mile trek to Alibeg were imprisoned. In March 1948, the Red Cross rescued 1,600 of the survivors from Alibeg. Between 1948 and 1954, around 1,000 abducted Hindu and Sikh women were recovered from Pakistan and Azad Kashmir."

Gupta writes, "My grandmother Kartar Devi, my paternal uncle Mohanlal Gupta, and my maternal great-grandfather Lalman Shah were some of those who died in the infernos of Mirpur. My mother Padma Devi and my aunts, Rajmohini Gupta and Sushila Gupta, were some of the women kidnapped from the Mirpur courthouse. My wife's grandmother Diwan Devi Gupta and aunt were among those killed during the forced march towards Alibeg. My wife's cousin, Shesh Gupta, was one of the girls kidnapped by Pathans. Her fate is not known to this day. My mother's uncles, Lal Chand Dhangeryal, Chander Prakash Dhangeryal, Dina Nath Dhangeryal, Khemchand Bhagotra and her many cousins (whose names I do not remember) were killed. I saw Sardar Ibrahim in Alibeg surrounded by his bodyguards. The only helpful Muslims to visit Alibeg were Chaudhri Abdul Aziz of Datial village, who saved many Hindu children and women in his village, and Fateh Mohammed of Serai Alamgir who saved some Hindus from being slaughtered."

Many Mirpuri Hindus and Sikhs settled in Jammu, where there exists a Mirpur Road and a memorial sacred to the memory of the men,

women and children who were killed for no other reason except that they were Hindus and Sikhs. I close this sad story with a snatch from the poem Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote on his return from Dhaka (Bangladesh):

*When will the eye behold the sight of grass without blemish?
How many rains will it take for the blood spots to wash away?*

SECTION III

EPILOGUE

In 1967, Mirpur City (my birthplace)—along with about two hundred surrounding villages—was submerged in the Mangla Dam constructed by the Pakistan government. The Pakistan government constructed the dam over the Jhelum River and its tributaries to harness water for irrigating Punjab and Sindh in Pakistan. The dam is 380 feet high and holds about six million cubic feet of water. It has the capacity to produce 1000 megawatts of electricity for Pakistan. The Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority manages the Mangla Dam. The Mirpur City described in this book is now submerged under the dam along with all the countryside, but the steeple of a submerged Hindu temple can be seen when the water level is low. Ruins of the entire city, including Hindu temples can be seen during the dry season of December through March every year.

A large number (over 100,00) of Muslim Mirpuris migrated to England during the construction of the Mangla Dam after the Pakistan government appropriated their land. About two hundred thousand displaced Mirpuri residents have settled in New Mirpur and other adjoining places. New Mirpur has been constructed at the ridge of Blah-Da-Gala at a higher elevation. It is the second largest town in POK (also called Azad Kashmir), and its population is 100 percent Muslim.

Most of the sixteen hundred Hindu and Sikh survivors of the Alibeg prison have died since their liberation by the ICRC in 1948. Uncles Tarlok Chand Dhangeryal, Amar Nath, Vishwa Nath, Mukund Lal, Suraj Parkash, Master Roshan Lal, Dr. Nanak Chand, R.K.Bhagotra, Ved Suri and many others settled down in Jammu (in India) and died there. Great aunt Basant Devi and aunts Swaran Devi, Sushila Devi and Iqbal Devi settled down in Jammu and died there. Uncle Purshottam Lal Dhangeryal settled in Gurdaspur (in East Punjab) and died there. Kuldip Dhangeryal and Raj Kumar Bhagotra settled in New Delhi and died there. Pardyuman Dhangeryal migrated to Kenya (in east Africa), then to London (in England) and settled there. Mrs. Amar Devi Gupta and her brother Vidya Sagar Dukhiya also migrated to Kenya, then to London, England and died there. Her daughter, Dr. Kranti Loomba migrated to Kenya, then to England, and finally to Chicago, Illinois, USA. My brother Ramesh is settled in

Bakshinagar, Jammu (India). My cousins Bhushan and Nirmal settled in Jammu and died there. My mother's aunt, Rajmohni, is the oldest eyewitness still alive from the Mirpur carnage. I met her around April or May of 2006. Dr. Sansar Chandra settled in Chandigarh and died there in 2010.

A memorial for the twenty thousand Hindu and Sikh martyrs of Mirpur is constructed in Bakshinagar, Jammu. The main road in Bakshinagar, Jammu is named Mirpur Road. A colony of Mirpur refugees in Pathankot (in East Punjab) is also named Mirpur Colony. Most of the Hindu and Sikh survivors of Alibeg and Mirpur settled down in Bakshinagar, Jammu, Mirpur Colony, Pathankot and Lajpat Nagar (in New Delhi). The majority of Hindus and Sikhs born in Mirpur have died without seeing the land of their birth again. It appears that the government of India does not have any desire to liberate POK due to political considerations. Therefore, the old generation of the Hindus and Sikhs of Mirpur, including myself, will soon disappear without ever seeing our birthplace again.

Since 2003, the prime ministers of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh, and the prime ministers and presidents of Pakistan, Raza Gilani, General Pravez Musharraf, Asif Zardari have started talking about peace. They have taken many peace initiatives and sent high-level delegations to each country. Trains and buses have started running between the two countries and after a period of over fifty years, the Jammu and Kashmir Muslims and Hindus are allowed to travel to POK, and vice versa. Sunil Sethi, Krishan Dev Sethi, Yash Paul Gupta (my mother's cousin), Yuv Raj Gupta, R.K. Kohli, Shiv Das Sahni and Kulbhushan Kumar are some of the few Mirpuri Hindus who have visited Mirpur during 1999-2006.

And many Muslims from Mirpur have made reciprocal visits to Mirpur Colony (Bakshinagar), Jammu and Kashmir. Travelers use a new route between Poonch (J&K) and Rawalakot (POK) by bus that was started recently by India and Pakistan governments. This route is also used by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traders to transport goods between J&K and POK thus saving lots of cost over Atari-Wagah border route.

On March 12, 2005, for the first time after the independence in 1947, a four-member delegation from POK visited the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly to watch the proceedings of the House. The delegation led by Riyaz Inquilabi, president of the Mirpur Bar Association, watched the proceedings of the House for about an hour

from the Speaker's gallery. Other members of the delegation included Munir Hussain Choudhary from Mirpur, Mohammad Asgar from Kotli and Professor Shafiq-ur-Rehman from Muzaffarabad. The delegation was on a seven-day tour of the state. It had earlier visited the Rajouri and Poonch districts. Due to the ongoing dispute over Kashmir, twenty-four seats in the Assembly here have been kept vacant for the POK. Besides that, there are eighty-seven elected members while two are nominated. This delegation was given grand receptions and dinners by the Hindu and Sikh survivors of Mirpur in Bakshinagar, Jammu Chamber of Commerce, and Srinagar Chamber of Commerce. They were also invited for dinner by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Ghulam Nabi Azad.

On July 4, 2006, a delegation comprised of Yash Paul Gupta (my mother's cousin), Yuv Raj Gupta, R.K.Kohli, Shiv Das Sahni and Kulbhushan Kumar visited Mirpur. Yash Paul Gupta writes "We were received at Mirpur bus stand by Raja Akbar Khalid, a social worker, and five other men and taken to a hotel. The following day an overwhelming reception was organized in our honor and we were heavily garlanded. It was an emotional reunion after 58 years and we were moved to tears. A big dinner was organized by Mirpur Muslims to facilitate us and was attended by prominent men of Mirpur about 100 including journalists. It was an indoor meeting in a hall and not an open public meeting organized by Justice Malik, who led a POK team to Jammu in 2005. Among others who attended this reception was Lord Nazir (a British Member of Parliament), Allah Ditta (a Councilor of London, U.K.), and three Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front representatives, Amanullah Khan, Abdul Majeed Bhatt and Mohammed Sharief Tariq. Lord Nazir declared that if Hindus and Sikh refugees of Mirpur would like to settle in Mirpur in their place of birth, they would be given free plots of land in New Mirpur. New Mirpur has been constructed on upland some distance from the reservoir of Mangla Dam (near Blah Da Galla) and has population of 250,000. The prime minister of POK, Sardar Sikander Hyat Khan, invited us for tea in Kotli. His son gave us a hearty dinner in which some prominent men of the town were invited."

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GLOSSARY OF INDIAN (HINDI) WORDS AND ACRONYMS

AK	Azad Kashmir (POK)
AKF	Azad Kashmir Force (Pakistan army)
BJS	Bhartiya Jan Sangh
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party (ruling party of India)
DC	Deputy Commissioner, top district administrator
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INC	Indian National Congress (ruling party of India)
JAK Rifles	Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (Indian army)
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir (also called Kashmir, part of India)
MBBS	medical degree in India and England
MC	Muslim Conference (ruling party of POK)
ML	Muslim League (ruling party of Pakistan)
MMG	medium machine gun
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer of Indian Army
NC	National Conference (ruling party of J&K)
NWFP	North West Frontier Province (now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in Pakistan)
POK	Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, (also called Azad Kashmir)
PPP	Pakistan People's Party (ruling party of Pakistan)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu organization
SDS	Sanatan Dharam Sabha, a Hindu religious organization

Alibeg	a historical town (in POK)
Arya Samaj	a Hindu temple without idols
Bhagwad Gita	Hindu holy book
Brahmins	priestly caste of Hindus, also called Pandits
Chapattis	bread similar to tortillas
Dal	lentils
Dhakki	paved hiking trail from the riverbed to the city
Dogras	persons living in Jammu province
Dupatta	a scarf used by Indian and Pakistani women to cover their heads
East Punjab	a state in India in 1947 (now Punjab)
Granth Sahib	Sikh holy book
Gujarat	a city, a district (in Pakistan); also a state in India
Gurudwara	a Sikh temple with Granth Sahib in it
Halwa	a soft sweet dish made of flour, butter and sugar
Havaldar	sergeant in the Indian army
Hindus	followers of Hinduism, 80% of the population of India
Jammu	a city, a district, winter capital of J&K
Jauhar	suicide in war instead of capture by Muslims invaders, a Hindu tradition
Jemadar	sergeant major in the Indian army
Jhelum	a river, a city, a district (in Pakistan)
Kashmiris	persons from Kashmir and their language
Koran	Muslim holy book
Lashkars	Hordes of Pathans
Mahajans	business caste of Hindus, also called Guptas
Maharaja	king of a large state
Masjid	a Muslim place of worship (a mosque)
Maulviji	a Muslim teacher with respect
Mirpur	a city, a district (in POK)
Mirpuris	persons from Mirpur and their language
Mohajirs	Urdu speaking Muslim refugees in Pakistan
Muslims	followers of Islam, 95% of the population of Pakistan, 15% of India

Muzzafrabad	city, district and capital of POK
Panditji	learned Brahmin with respect
Pathans	Muslims of NWFP of Pakistan and Afghanistan (Pushtoons, Pakhtoons)
Poonch	a river, a city, a district (in J&K, also Punch)
Pothwari	people living in Pothwar (Mirpur, Jhelum etc.)
Pulao	rice pilaf
Raja	king or chieftain of a small state
Rajputs	warrior caste of Hindus, also called Kshatriyas or Khatri
Rajmah	kidney beans
Rawalpindi	a city, a district (in Pakistan)
Sadhu	a Hindu holy man, a Swami
Sardarji	a chief, commonly used for Sikhs with respect
Sari	a six yard piece of cloth that Indian and some Pakistani women use to cover their bodies
Sati	suicide of a Hindu woman upon the death of her husband (banned now)
Sialkot	a city, a district (in Pakistan)
Sikhs	followers of Sikhism, 60% of the population in Indian Punjab
Srinagar	a city, a district, summer capital of J&K
Temple	a Hindu place of worship with idols
Urdu	a language of India, Pakistan and Kashmir
West Punjab	a state in Pakistan in 1947 (now Punjab)

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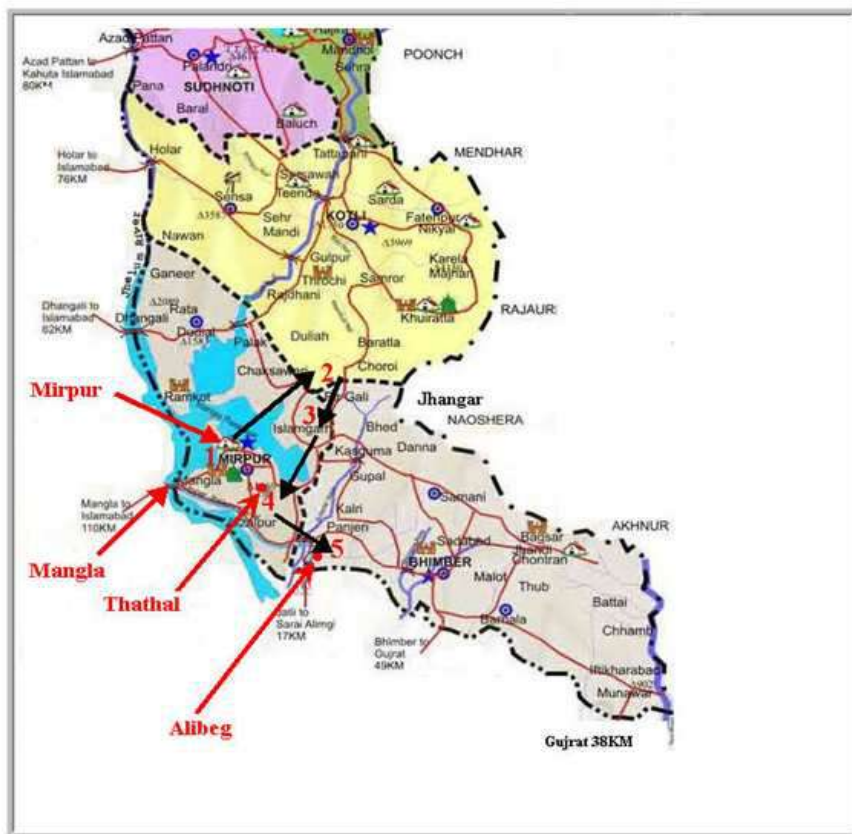
CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS: 1947 - 1948

08-14-1947	Pakistan gains independence from Britain
08-15-1947	India gains independence from Britain
09-20-1947	Muslims of Mirpur desert the city
09-24-1947	Dispatch riders ambushed by Pakistanis near Mirpur
10-15-1947	M.C. Mahajan appointed Prime Minister of J&K by the Maharaja
10-17-1947	Pakistani army and Pathan tribesmen invade J&K
10-18-1947	Fall of Alibeg to Pakistani invaders
10-18-1947	Fall of Chechian to Pakistani invaders
10-21-1947	Pakistani army and Pathan tribesmen besiege Mirpur City
10-25-1947	Fall of Dadyal to Pakistani invaders
10-26-1947	Maharaja of J&K signs accession with India
10-27-1947	Indian army arrives in Kashmir by air
10-29-1947	Fall of Bhimber to Pakistani invaders
10-30-1947	Sheikh Abdullah appointed chief emergency administrator of J&K by Maharaja
11-4-1947	Fall of Blah Da Galla to Pakistani invaders
11-5-1947	Massacres of Muslims in Jammu
11-8-1947	Fall of Mirpur Jail to Pakistani invaders
11-12-1947	IAF planes bombed Pakistanis around Mirpur
11-13-1947	Mirpur and Jammu leaders meet Pandit Nehru in Delhi to save Mirpur
11-15-1947	Mirpur and Jammu leaders meet Pandit Nehru at Jammu airport to save Mirpur
11-19-1947	IAF fighter planes drop ammunition to besieged Mirpur army. Indian army reaches Jhangar
11-21-1947	Army wireless went out of order; Mirpur cut off from the world

- 11-23-1947** Mirpur and Jammu leaders meet Brigadier Pranjpe in Jammu to save Mirpur
- 11-24-1947** Mirpur and Jammu leaders meet Pt. Nehru
Indian army diverted to Kotli
- 11-25-1947** Fall of Mirpur to Pakistani invaders
- 11-26-1947** Massacre of Hindus and Sikhs prisoners in Akalgarh, Kas Guma, Mirpur Courthouse, Mirpur Riverbed, and Mirpur City
- 11-27-1947** Massacre of Hindus and Sikhs prisoners in Thathal
- 11-28-1947** Mass suicide of Hindu women and arrival of Hindu and Sikh Prisoners in Alibeg Prison
- 11-29-1947** Massacre of Sikhs in Alibeg
- 11-30-1947** Massacres of Hindu youth in Alibeg
- 12-1-1947** Shooting of POWs by firing squad in Alibeg
- 12-2-1947** Massacre of Hindu intelligentsia in Alibeg
- 12-3-1947** Massacre of Hindus in Alibeg
- 12-4-1947** Massacre of Hindus in Alibeg; 3500 Hindus and Sikhs reach Jammu (India) with J&K army
- 12-5-1947** Escape of two Hindu youth from Alibeg
- 12-15-1947** Escaped Hindu youth reach Jammu by walking into Pakistani territory
- 12-16-1947** Bus of orphans and widows leaves Alibeg for Jammu
- 12-20-1947** Bus of orphans and widows reaches Jammu
- 12-24-1947** Fall of Fort Mangla, 30 J&K (Hindu) soldiers taken POW
- 12-25-1947** Dr. Sanasr Chandra and Mirpur refugees meet Minister of Kashmir affairs and Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi to liberate Alibeg
- 12-26-1947** POW from Mangla Fort arrive in Alibeg
- 12-31-1947** Amar Devi meets Pandit Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah in Jammu to liberate Alibeg
- 1-27-1948** Sardar Lal Singh Kakkar and Mirpur refugees meet Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi to liberate Alibeg
- 1-30-1948** Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in India
- 1-31-1948** ICRC reaches Alibeg
- 3-18-1948** Train leaves from Pakistan
- 3-19-1948** Train arrives at Attari (India)
- 3-20-1948** Train arrives at Kurukhshetra Refugee Camp



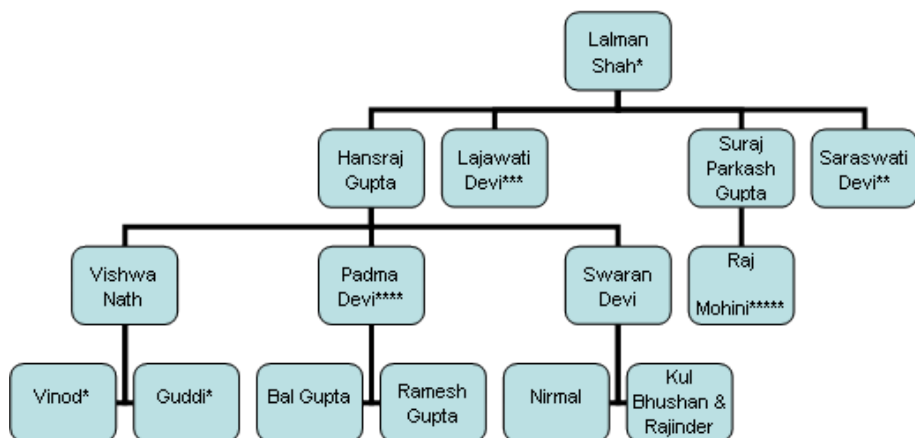
TREK OF REFUGEES FROM MIRPUR TO ALIBEG



1. Mirpur – Looting, burning and massacre of Hindus and Sikhs by Pakistanis
2. Pir Gali (Kasuguma) – Refugees arrested by Pakistanis
3. Akalgarh (Islamgarh) – Refugees looted by Pakistanis
4. Thathal – Massacre of Refugees by Pakistanis
5. Alibeg – Massacre of Refugees by Pakistanis

Mangla Reservoir did not exist in 1947 and was built in 1966.
 Refugees walked cross-country.

MY MATERNAL FAMILY



*They were killed in Mirpur.

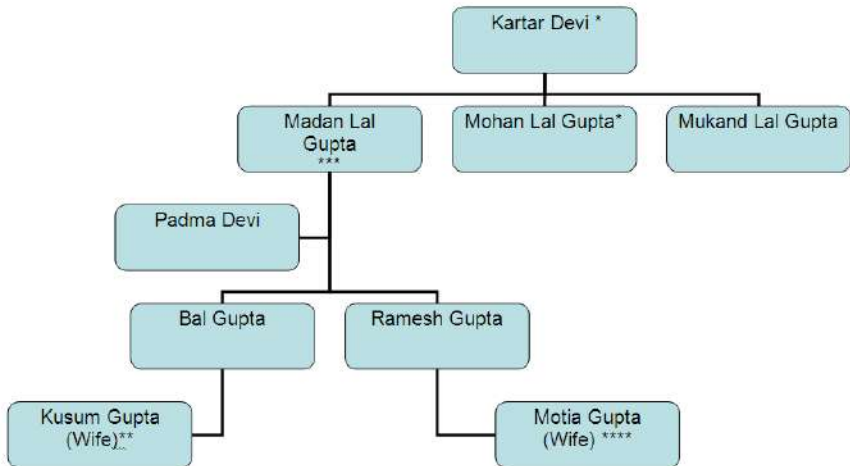
** She, her husband, Mukund Lal, and son-in-law, Baldev Raj were killed in Mirpur.

*** Her husband Khemaraj Bhagotra and son Malik Shah Bhagotra were killed in Mirpur.

**** My mother's uncles (the Dhangeryals) Lal Chand, Chander Prakash, and Dina Nath were killed in Mirpur. So were the wives of Lal Chand and Dina Nath.

*****Her mother and sister's husband were killed in Mirpur.

MY PATERNAL FAMILY



*They were killed in Mirpur.

** Her grandmother Dewan Devi and aunt were killed in Mirpur and her cousin Shesh Gupta was kidnapped.

*** His uncles Pishori Shah and Tarlok Singh were killed in Mirpur.

**** Her two uncles were killed in Mirpur

Mirpur Town from south as in 1947.

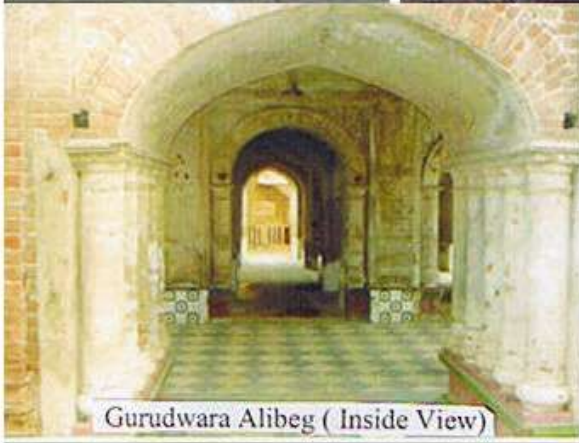
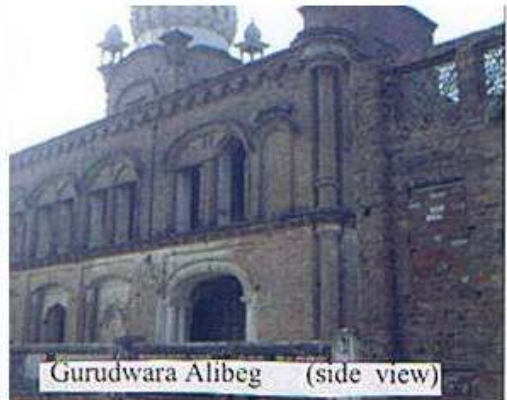


Remains of Mir Gazy tomb in Mirpur Town
(Photograph by Sunil Sethi in 2004)



Remains of Shiv Temple in the heart of Mirpur Town
(Photograph by Sunil Sethi in 2004)





Alibeg in 2011

REFUGES

d-f) demeure souterraine, et groupe de réfugiés à Poonch- à l'ouest-



a 6/29



b 6/30



c 6/32



d 5/17



e 6/27



f 6/37

Nég. orig.

Refugees of Jammu and Kashmir



5005

MOA



b

REFUGES

Refugees of Jammu and Kashmir

Etat de Jammu et Cachemire, mai-juin 1949, région de Srinagar, nord de Srinagar - a) visite du camp de réfugiés, avec le Dr Mahabir-

Conflit indo-pakistanaïse
REFUGIÉS



a Nég. orig.
2/7



b Nég. repr.
3/2



c Nég. repr.
3/1



d Nég. repr.
3/4 (w)

Refugees of Jammu and Kashmir

réfugiés indiennes, à Jammu, et soustraient en conséquence de l'aire soustraites à la hâte par les réfugiés - c) réfugiés à Jhur-d-e) réfugiés à Jasmargah, sud-est-

LOVIT Kodo - Indiennes.
REFUGIÉS



a 5/22 (N)



b 5/18 (N)



d 6/28



e 5/5



c 5/3 (N)

Nég. orig.

Refugees of Jammu and Kashmir

Survivors of Alibeg & Mirpur



Late Uncle Mukund Lal



Late Uncle Vishwa Nath



Late Aunt Swaran Devi



Late Uncle Amar Nath Gupta



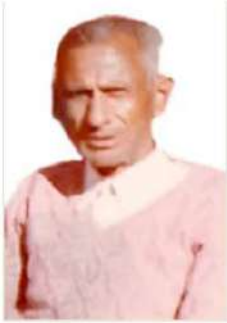
Late Mother Padma Devi



Late Father-in-law Yash Paul Gupta



Mrs. Santosh & Rajkumar Bhagotra



Suraj Parkash Gupta



Master Harbans Lal



Master Roshan Lal



Author with Late Dr. Ved Suri (2006)

Survivors of Alibeg & Mirpur



Amar Devi Gupta



Great Aunt Raj Mohini (2006)



Raj Kumar Bhagotra, author, Dr. Karamveer Gupta, 2006 (L to R)



Ramesh Gupta, author, Iqbal Devi and husband R.K Bhagotra, 2006 (L to R)

Survivors of Alibeg & Mirpur



1947 Alibeg Survivors

Top to Bottom (starting left to right): 1.R.C.Gupta 2.Satyavarat Gupta
3. Prem Parkash 4.Satish Gupta 5. Dev Raj Gupta 6.Atamdev Singh
7.Ved Parkash Gupta 8.Ram Sarup Gupta 9.Rajinder Kumar Gupta 10.
Bikram Singh 11.Vidya Nath Gupta 12.Shashi Kant Gupta 13.Mela
Devi Gupta 14.Niranjan Kaur 15.Subash Rani Gupta 16.Jaswanti Devi
Gupta.



Author with Brother Ramesh Gupta and Mother
in front of Lord Krishna's birth place, Mathura, India 2000



Mother: Late Padma Devi (1920-2000)