

[Fundamentalist Muslims Forcing Hindus Out of Kashmir](#)

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Fundamentalist Muslims Forcing Hindus Out of Kashmir

Hindus, driven from their homes by Muslim mobs, huddled under rough woolen blankets and lit fires to stay warm. They were grateful for the five inches of snow that had fallen that day, for as they told reporters, it kept away the Moslems who had said they would be back the following day to kill them.

These were victims of anti-Hindu violence which wracked the picturesque Kashmir valley this February and early March. The destruction was said to be sparked by the opening of the disputed shrine in U.P., Ram Janma Bhoomi, claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. The shrine, locked for nearly 40 years, was opened to Hindu worship by court order this January. That set off waves of Moslem protest and violence throughout North India. Moulvi Mohammed Farooq, spiritual leader of Kashmir's Muslims, blamed the trouble on the TV coverage of the opening. Defending the mindless barbarity, he said, "Whenever we see our brothers in trouble, even if it is in Saudi Arabia, we respond to their problems. You cannot ignore 600 years of Islam."

Response to pleas for intervention from the Central Government to protect the minority Hindus - local police have proved negligent - was too little and too late. But it was a great relief when the Shah government was dismissed and the state was put under Governor's rule, VHP reports, and the situation is described as gradually improving. Pro-Pakistan fundamentalist Muslim elements are feared intent on driving the Hindus out.

The peril is so great that Hindus, under the aegis of the Hindu Action Committee, are seriously discussing a massive migration from the Kashmir Valley. Isolated incidents of harassment of community members occur almost daily.

In February and March 20 temples were totally burned and 38 partially destroyed,

15 homes burned and 764 looted, and 23 shops looted, mostly in the Anantnag district. The Hindustan Times report of March 17 noted: "There are still people in both communities who hope that in due course the wounds will heal, but this optimism may turn out to be illusory." Hindu population has dwindled from 300,000 in 1947 to 80,000 today.

Several hundred members of the Kashmir Hindu (Pandit) community took their grievances to the streets of Delhi on February 27 in a silent march to Parliament. Men, women and children carried large placards calling for an "end of genocide" in Kashmir Valley. In contrast with the latter sentiment of retreat, here they vowed to live with honor and dignity in their homeland. Later, a delegation presented a memorandum demanding official inquiry into the recent riots.

In mid-April the H.A.C. began polling the community for their opinion on the possibility of leaving the state in exodus. Meanwhile, discussions continue, a major factor being the Central Government's responsiveness in taking comprehensive measures to protect the Hindus.

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