

[Most Kashmir Hindus Flee Valley as Terror Mounts](#)

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45,000 Families Filling Refugee Camps in Jammu And Delhi Hold Little Hope of Returning Home

The exodus of the Hindus from the Kashmir Valley is on. It's likely to continue until the Janata Dal government is able to effectively control increased killings by Muslim militants, something it has been unable to do during the last six months. Now many believe the exodus will stop only when all Hindus have been driven out of the Kashmir Valley.

The valley has a population of 3.2 million. Hindus totalled 150,000 six months ago. Today more than 95 percent of all Hindus, say the reliable sources, have fled in the wake of brutal killings by the militants and extremists operating in a dozen deadly groups.

During a recent visit to Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir State, this correspondent saw about 35,000 Hindu families seeking shelter on arrival from the valley. According to Mr. Kidar Nath Sahani, who is a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and looking after the interest of Hindu migrants, only 10,000 Hindus are left in Kashmir. He fears these too will be soon driven out as the militants attempt to turn the valley into an "Islamic State."

Those who have managed to live in this valley in the last five months say it has come under a siege more severe than the earlier upheavals in 1953 and 1964. It is a siege that is religious, political, cultural, economic and psychological all rolled

into one. The objective behind it is clear: Hindus should convert to Islam or leave Kashmir for good, no matter how deep their roots.

Recalls Anita Kaul, a refugee in Delhi: "I had to cover my head. There was no question of my wearing a sari. The women had to wear salwar kameez dress and make sure their sleeves were long. I stopped wearing bindi on my forehead to avoid being identified as a non-Muslim. The men had to grow beards and wear Kashmiri Muslim dress." She continues: "At night militants would summon thousands of supporters over the loud speakers of the local mosques. Cries of Hindustani Kutton vapas jao, "Indian dogs go back [to other parts of India]" would rent the air as the crowds marched through the streets, stopping sometimes outside a window of a Hindu home to hurl abuse and stones. I would be petrified, afraid they would enter my house."

Recently a well-known journalist, Ms. Nalini Singh, went to Srinagar to make a film on the plight of the Hindus in the valley. She is very fond of putting on bindi and wearing sari. But out of fear she put on the Kashmiri dress used by Muslim women, in spite of the fact that she was adequately protected by the state police.

The Jammu and Delhi Camps

A majority of fleeing Hindus are staying in Jammu. About 40,000 families had registered as refugees with the authorities as of June 15, 1990. But only 6,000 of them have been accommodated in the 25 camps set up for them in the city. The remaining families found shelter with relatives and friends or have rented houses. About 10,000 families have come to Delhi. Only 1,500 of them have been accommodated in the camps set up by the Delhi administration. There are some camps managed by the BJP and Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh. The Kashmiri Brahmin Samiti is trying to coordinate the work of receiving the refugees at transit camps and arranging for their stay either at regular camps or at private homes.

The Government of India (GOI) woke up very late to the mass migration of the Kashmiri brahmins. Only when parties like the BJP raised a hue and cry about the official neglect of the refugees did the central and state governments stir themselves into action. Complains refugee J.S. Kak, "Our Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, has not come to ask us about our plight or our suffering. If we had been Muslims,

he would come running. He promptly went to Bhagalpur [site of Hindu/Muslim riots in November, 1989] because it concerned the Muslims. Not that he should not have gone then. But why must he be so quiet when it affects us Hindus?"

The GOI released US \$625,000 (already exhausted) for the relief measures and distributed \$31.00 a month to each family. There have been reports of serious bungling in the distribution of the monthly funds relief.

The life of the migrants will turn more miserable with the imminent arrival of monsoon in Delhi and Jammu. It will be a nightmare in the overcrowded camps, sanitary conditions worsen and medical facilities remain negligible.

Every day around 10 to 15 persons - both Hindus and Muslims not with the militants - are being gunned down in the Kashmir Valley. As the future of thousands of refugees in Jammu and Delhi is uncertain, so is the future of Kashmir itself. It could become another Punjab, immersed in an endless bloodbath or slip out of India altogether, ending any hope of return for the refugees.

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