

LETTERS

8 MONTHS AFTER THE MASSACRE

Eight months ago unidentified gunmen shot dead almost two dozen Hindus in Kulhand, in Kashmir's Doda district. Months after the carnage, the survivors now struggle to rebuild their lives, with little help forthcoming from the state government.

Damlu Devi is in her forties but she looks at least twenty years older. A widow, she lost her only son, Jagdish, in the massacre. One of her grand-daughters, too, was slain. 'The trauma has driven me almost mad', she says amidst uncontrollable sobs. She now lives in a hovel with her widowed daughter-in-law and her five children. Jagdish, the sole source of income for the family, was, like many others of the Dalit Megh caste, a labourer. But now that he is no more, the family has no way to survive other than a small plot of stony land.

'We received two lakh rupees in compensation from the government', Damlu Devi says 'but of that we have already spent forty thousand on medicines'. Her daughter-in-law was shot in the leg, which has now developed into a serious injury, preventing her from walking properly, and one of her grand-sons has polio and appears to be mentally challenged. 'Every month we have to buy medicines for them, and when the money we have in the bank dries up, we don't know how we will survive', she says. 'We used to have two bullocks, but after Jagdish was killed we had to sell them because we now have no one to graze them'.

Only one of Damlu Devi's grand-children receives a sum of 750 rupees a month from the government, while she herself receives a very modest widow pension. Her daughter-in-law says she was offered a job in the sheep husbandry department in Doda town, a two-hour journey away, but she says it might involve night duty, which would mean it would be impossible for her to work, leaving her children behind in Kulhand.

A Correspondent
Doda, Kashmir

PROFESSOR DIPAK BANERJEE

The Presidency College of Kolkata in the yesteryears could rightfully boast of a galaxy of brilliant teachers who combined their learning with a love for the taught. One of them, Professor Dipak Banerjee, passed away late at night on 22 January, 07 succumbing to the fatal cancer disease after a long struggle with it.

Prof Banerjee had a chequered career. He started his college life as a student of chemistry, but for some reason gave up studies, and then went to England where he worked as ordinary workman, for some time, Then he got himself admitted into the famous London School of Economics and passed the B.Sc examination with a credential that had not been equalled by any in the previous history of the institution. After about two or three years he came back to India to join the Presidency College. Bhabatosh Datta, in his memoirs, listed, among his later colleagues, the name of Dipak Banerjee as 'the record- breaking student of the London School of Economics'. Many

of the famous Indian students of economics who are working in various prestigious institutions all over the globe are his students. What deserves special mention is that even after his retirement, he, in spite of falling health, continued to take classes at his college without any fees. Besides economics, he had many areas of interest including poetry and music, and became intimate with eminent personalities like Radha Prasad Gupta and Samar Sen. As an eminent teacher, he was widely known and his personal acquaintances included J.R.Hicks, Kenneth J.Arrow, Amiya Dasgupta and Amartya Sen.

In classrooms, Dipak Banerjee, or D.B as his pupils called him, presented the picture of a sahib and his English pronunciations, scarcely distinguishable from those of an Englishman, were somewhat difficult for students, especially those from the mofussil, to follow. But outside the classroom, he seemed a typical Bengali who could speak for hours on end without speaking a single English word. He wrote very little, but his power of reflection was enlightening as well as enjoyable. What stands out is his constant curiosity to learn about the difficulties of students. Besides, he went out of his way to help a number of politically victimized students in rehabilitating their lives, even though he did not have any particular inclination for their political views. This betrayed a broadness of mind. He will live in the memories of many, particularly of his students.

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PAKISTAN DIARY

It's 3 am, and Diep drives me down through the deserted streets of Lahore to the Tourist Reception Centre. I have mixed feelings about returning to India. Travelling in Pakistan has been exciting, but tiring and, at times, somewhat unnerving. But then I think of the many wonderful people I have met, many of whom I shall probably never meet again.

The Pakistan government bus taking us to Delhi seems cramped and distinctly uncomfortable compared to the Indian bus that I took to Lahore. It takes us an hour to get to the border, we get our passports stamped and as we pass under the forbidding gate that stands on the border I look back. Diep has come all the way in her car trailing behind the bus. She waves out effusively but I cannot wave back because the windows are shut, we slip into Indian territory and I see Diep's figure fades into the distance.

The Indian check-post seems luxurious compared to the ramshackle structure on the Pakistani side. It feels good to be back home, I say to myself. Rather too soon, perhaps. The customs officer asks me what I am carrying.

'Mainly clothes and books', I reply.

'Any books that might promote communal conflict? Any inflammatory stuff?', he queries.

I hesitate for a while and then reply, 'I picked up some really awful Lashkar-e tayyeba literature'.

The man orders me to remove everything in my bags. Meanwhile, the other passengers have passed through the gate and are sitting in the bus, waiting for me to board.

The man does not know Urdu, and so asks an elderly colleague, who knows Urdu, to inspect the books. I set aside the books that could be considered to be 'inflammatory'.

The elderly man picks up a lashkar publication, titled 'And India Was Sandwiched'. 'Hindus are the mortal enemies of Muslims....The ol prophet predicted that before the end of the world, Muslims would wage a jihad against India....'.

'Are you a Hindu?', the man asks.
'I don't follow any religion', answer.

I explain to him that. I occasionally write, particularly on Muslim-related issues. 'I'm viscerally opposed to religious fundamentalists, and I bought the Lashkar books only to critique them', I plead.

He confiscates almost two dozen books, many of which are harmless tracts on sufism, gives me a receipt and allows me to go.

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