

Tryst with destiny in Bathinda

In the Tribune of 01/11/2025, recalled from a speech at the inauguration of PEPSU, way back on July 24, 1948, was this:

“ ... during my last visit to Amritsar and Patiala in September and October last year ... I asked the Sikhs of the Punjab and the Punjab States to come to the rescue of the unfortunate and stranded refugees by giving an undisturbed passage to the Muslim refugees going to Pakistan.”

On reading these lines, I recalled at once that more details, regarding the nature of this ask to give an undisturbed passage, vis-à-vis Bathinda at least, were included in the *Reminiscences* (2002) of my uncle Ranjit Tayaji, who in August 1947 was posted as Sub-Judge there:

“On 24.8.1947, Bir Devinder Singh, Superintendent of Police who had been sent to Patiala to seek further instructions, returned to Bhatinda ...

Quite contrary to the prior instructions which we had been receiving from time to time, from Maharaja Yadevinder Singh, Bir Devinder Singh said that we are required to lift the curfew and make the Muslims move to Pakistan. He gave a graphic account as to how the Maharaja had received these instructions from Sardar Patel, Home Minister of India. He said when Maharaja Yadevinder Singh received such instructions from the Home Ministry Delhi, he was surprised and wanted to confirm them directly from Sardar Patel. Accordingly, he rang up Sardar Patel and gave an extension receiver to Bir Devinder Singh S.P. to join in hearing the talk and confirmation directly from Sardar Patel. On telephone, while seeking these instructions, Maharaja Yadevinder Singh told Sardar Patel, that “if the curfew is lifted as ordered by you, there will be a large-scale massacre of the Muslims by the huge non-Muslim mob which is being kept out of the town by the security forces.” Sardar Patel then retorted: “A large number of refugees are coming to take shelter, from Pakistan. ਉਨ ਕੋ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਰ ਪਰ ਬਠਾਓਗੇ? ¹ Make these people thus move to Pakistan.”

I have heard that the Maharaja had got these talks with Sardar Patel tape-recorded to safeguard his own position as an impartial ruler ...

... City Magistrate, Shri Diali Ram Puri passed an order lifting the curfew. His order lifting the curfew at 2:00 p.m., was proclaimed on the same day. As a result, by 4:00 p.m., the invading mobs, rushed into the town and massacred about four thousand Muslim: men, women and children. Their number had been estimated because I, as Naib Nazim Devani, was also an office-holder, i.e. official Member of the nominated Municipal Committee of Bhatinda which had to make and bear the cost of collecting and disposing of the number of dead-bodies by the Municipal employees of the lowest strata who were paid annas 8/- for every corpse collected for disposal.”

¹Would you have them sit on my head?