

After Kashmir attack, the partition hardens again

ATTARI, INDIA

India and Pakistan border cleaves families as both countries cancel visas

BY SUHASINI RAJ, MUJIB MASHAL AND PRAGATI K.B.

One family had come to India for a daughter's marriage. Another came so their young children could meet their grandparents for the first time. A woman traveling alone had arrived for the funeral of her mother, whom she had not seen in years.

At the border where Pakistan was cleaved from India decades ago, they pleaded with anyone and everyone for a little more time: to complete the marriage that was just two days away, or to mourn at a grave that was still fresh.

It was not allowed.

India has ordered almost all Pakistani citizens to leave the country, part of the government's response to a terrorist attack in Kashmir that it has linked to Pakistan. The Pakistani government, which denies any involvement in the attack last week, has retaliated with measures of its own, including the cancellation of most Indian citizens' visas.

As people scrambled to comply with those orders, heartbreaking scenes played out at the main land crossing between the two countries.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ATUL LOKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Families like Takhat Singh's, with members on both sides of the border, faced painful separation. Mr. Singh, his younger daughter and his son have Pakistani passports. His wife and his older daughter have Indian ones.

They had all been in the Indian state of Rajasthan for the wedding of Pintu, the older daughter. When India announced the visa cancellations, the family left her behind in her future husband's village and rushed to the border crossing, hoping to make it home before it closed.

But Mr. Singh's wife, Sindhu Kanwar,

was not allowed to proceed because of her Indian passport.

"They are saying your mother cannot go with you to Pakistan," said the couple's younger daughter, Sarita, 15. "How would you feel if you had to live without your mother?"

More than anything else, it is the border that symbolizes the history of these two nations, which, despite a vast shared heritage, are estranged and have frequently come to blows.

British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent ended in 1947 with the partitioning of India along largely arbitrary



Left, checking the passports of people waiting to cross into Pakistan from India after nearly all Pakistani citizens were ordered to leave the country. Takhat Singh, above, was told to return to Pakistan without his wife, whose passport is Indian.

lines, creating Pakistan as a separate country for Muslims. Mass migration into the two new nations set off ghastly religious bloodletting, leaving up to two million people dead.

The decades since have seen repeated wars, and the divisions have become rigid. Kashmir, a beautiful Himalayan region, has borne the brunt of the continued trouble between the two countries.

At the time of India's partition, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority princely state, wanted to maintain its independence. It became part of In-

dia soon afterward, in exchange for a security guarantee, as Pakistan sent militias and took over parts of the region.

Kashmir has been disputed ever since. Each nation now controls a part of the region while claiming it in whole. Those living there have little say.

People on both sides of the India-Pakistan divide are haunted by the ghosts of the bloodletting, by memories of loved ones left behind. Some have tried to hold on to cross-border ties, particularly through marriage.

That has become increasingly difficult. Even before the latest flare-up, diplomatic relations between the countries had been largely severed, and visas were only rarely issued.

For those forced to leave in recent days, the departure stings all the more because of how difficult it was to cross the border in the first place.

Even Hindus who had taken refuge in India from Pakistan's rising intolerance and persecution of religious minorities have been thrown into uncertainty.

In recent years, India has billed itself as a haven for persecuted Hindus in the region. Many living in refugee camps have acquired Indian citizenship. But others are worried that they might now be forced to leave.

Hanuman Prasad, a resident of a camp in Rohini in northwestern Delhi, came to India more than a decade ago from Sindh Province in Pakistan. He said his brother and sister were stuck at the border trying to enter India. He has Indian citizenship, but his wife and six

children are in the country on a variety of different visas.

"What will they do to us? Put us in jail?" he asked. "We will fight and protest if they try to send us back."

He said that governments uprooting families with the stroke of a pen did not understand the pain of migration.

"Even a bird hesitates before leaving its nest behind," Mr. Prasad said. "We sold off our farmland, our house, belongings, everything, to shift to India. What will we go back to and do there?"

As India's deadline for Pakistani citizens, with a couple of narrow exceptions, to leave the country expired on Saturday, chaos ensued on the Indian side of the Attari-Wagah land crossing in the state of Punjab.

Families with suitcases tied to the roofs of their vehicles arrived hoping to cross into Pakistan, but only those holding the country's green passports were allowed to proceed.

Rabika Begum, who said she was in her 40s, had tried for five years to get an Indian visa. She was finally given one to attend her mother's funeral, in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

"My husband is on dialysis in Pakistan, and my mother died on this side," Ms. Begum said as she prepared to return. "I could not even get a fair chance to cry at her grave or be able to hug it long enough before the government asked us to leave."

"What have I done?" she said. "What is my fault in what happened in Kashmir?"