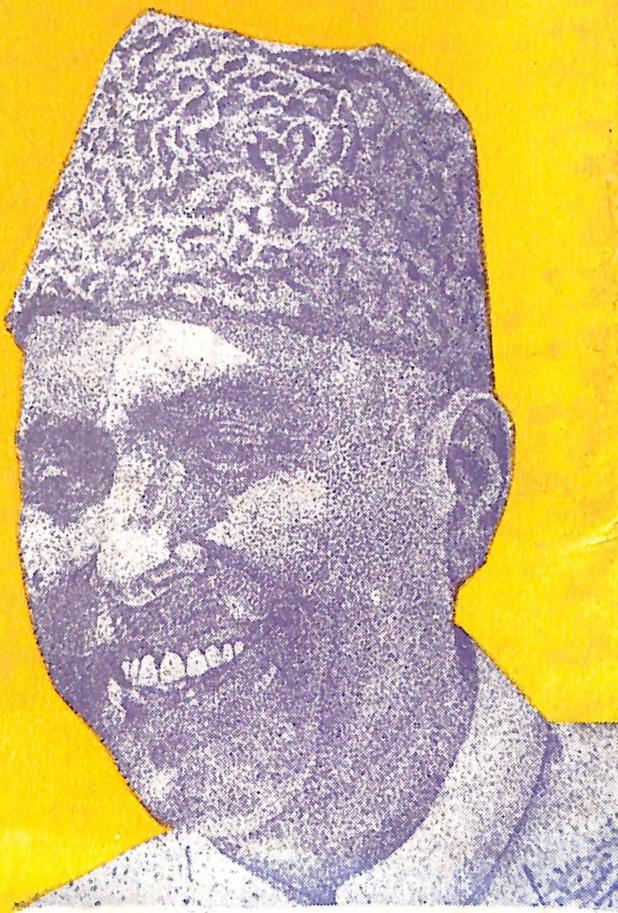


Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah

A Political Phoenix



R N Kaul

SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH
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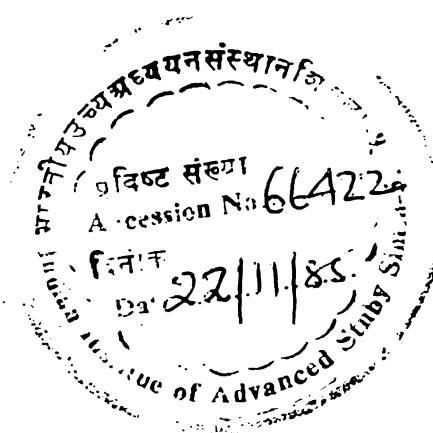
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*To Kashmiri Muslims
for their secular outlook*



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Introduction

THE NUMBER of books written so far on Jammu and Kashmir and its freedom struggle is pretty large. So is the number concerning the life of the main architect of its present status—Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Having been a witness to the changing pattern of the freedom struggle for a long time, I contemplated writing about it, but I always felt a little diffident. What finally decided me in favour of recording my impressions was the passing away of the great leader on September 8, 1982. I joined in my own humble way the tens of thousands of men and women, young and old, belonging to all shades of opinion, religions or regions, in filing past his body, placing a wreath of flowers as a silent token of my respect and admiration for him. It was on this spot that I resolved to translate my silent homage into words and record them in what would form his political biography. My main theme has been the great leader's contribution to the ideology of secularism which is the Kashmiri's greatest heritage. At the same time, I did not what to gloss over his mistakes and the compulsions which made him commit them. I have also tried to analyse how these mistakes could have been avoided. On the whole, I have tried to be as objective as is possible for one who has been his admirer, for there was not a single speech delivered by Sheikh Abdullah which I missed during my student days and youth.

I feel that the present biography is a great need of the hour. India is still experiencing ugly scenes of communal carnage. We have yet to pick up the psychology of secularism as a way of life. We will have to remind ourselves of the great lessons in secularism our leaders like Gandhi, Azad, Nehru, and Sheikh Abdullah have taught us by their precept and example. The present book is a humble contribution towards this goal.

This introduction would be incomplete without my expressing gratitude to persons whose cooperation has made the publication of this book possible. My thanks are due to my friend and colleague Prof. Mohi ud-Din Shah who supplied me with certain otherwise inaccessible material from his library, and to my representative in Delhi, Shri J.L. Dhar.

Srinagar
October, 1984

R.N. Kaul

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1. The Tolerant Kashmiri

Such is Kashmir the country which may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit but not by armed force.

—Kalhana

THREE IS NOTHING mysterious about the evolution of the spirit of tolerance possessed by the people of Kashmir. It is the cumulative effect of the environment which, generation after generation, has turned the minds and hearts of the people towards values of the soul and moulded their aesthetic sensibilities. A temperate climate, rolling meadows, bubbling brooks, fragrant breezes from dense forests, snow-covered mountains—all seem to have conspired in rendering the inhabitants of the Valley incapable of hatred towards one another. Around every Kashmiri is an aura of tolerance and the smiling countenance is a reflection of the divine peace that reposes in the heart. God-fearing and peace-loving, this being is in consonance with the bounteous gifts of nature that have made the Valley a veritable paradise on earth. Mysticism, philosophy, art and tranquillity are the pillars on which the edifice of tolerance has been built.

The tolerant outlook is not of a sudden development. Drawing from the bounty of nature, this plant has received sustenance from different religious faiths and many a benign ruler. Buddhism that prevailed in the Valley before and after the advent of Christianity in the West, has had not a little share in moulding it. After the revival of Hinduism, which Buddhism sought to reform, the Kashmiri thinkers evolved the Trika Shastra philosophy—a synthesis of the older systems of Indian thought, and the doctrines of Buddhism. Thus, at least in Kashmir, the process of synthetization started much earlier than the advent of Islam, which, at later stages, contributed greatly to the process whereby

2 SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH

the Kashmiris refused to be drawn into the fold of the rigid caste system of the orthodox Hindus. In their social and public life, even "women had emerged from the domestic to the political stage. They were free. . . ."¹

With the birth of the Holy Prophet Mohammad, the world got the new religion of Islam which stands for peace—peace in the soul, peace with the Creator and peace with God's creatures. The Muslim sufis and divines like Shah Mir, Syed Abdul Rehman Sharafud-Din, also known as Bulbul Shah, spread in the Valley of Kashmir the message of peace as preached by Islam. Sheikh Noorud-Din Noorani founded the order of rishis which strengthened the roots of tolerance and secularism. Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, saint, scholar and mystic, visited the Valley three times and converted to Islam thousands of Kashmiris through argument, persuasion, and by his impeccable rectitude. It was not obligatory for the people to accept the religion of their Muslim rulers. This fostered the forces of secularism and tolerance, bringing about in the process, a synthetization of cultures and religions. Except for the fanatical and bigotted Sultan Sikandar, known as Sikandar Butshikan, the idol-breaker, there prevailed in the Valley complete religious harmony.

As if to make amends for polluting the atmosphere of peace and harmony, God sent him an angel for son in Sultan Zainul-Abidin (1420-1470). Bud-Shah, or the Great King, as he came to be called for his popularity and nobility, was not only to restore harmony between the communities but to strengthen it by adding new dimensions to it. He rebuilt the temples which had been desecrated by his father and recalled the Brahmins who had left the Valley. Himself a Sanskrit scholar, he had the *Rajtarangini* and the *Mahabharat* translated into Persian. The historians Jonarja and Srivara, adorned his court. Besides being a great builder, he was a patron of art and literature. But his permanent legacy is the spirit of tolerance which he bequeathed to posterity through his pious life and the encouragement of other faiths in the Valley.

Thus the composite culture which emerged in Kashmir became styled as religious humanism. The two faiths did not grow in isolation; each imbibed from the other what was best in it and discarded from its outlook what reason taught it to be wrong. It was a two-way traffic. But while some orthodox Brahmins

offered strong resistance to the spread of Islam, the Shaiva philosophers judged the new faith objectively and adopted many of its teachings in their philosophy. The Muslim divines, sufis and their followers gave up eating of flesh because it went against the principle of kindness to God's creatures. Mutual trust was thus engendered resulting in the process of synthetization. Today, there are shrines and ziarats and holy places venerated by the Hindus and Muslims. A Kashmiri Muslim has many superstitions in common with a Kashmiri Hindu including idolatrous practices as well as social liberties and intellectual freedom unknown to Islam. Much of the delightful tolerance which exists between the two religions is attributed to the fact that the "Kashmiri Mussalmans never really gave up the old religion of the country."²² Although a large number of people embraced Islam, yet they did not entirely give up their old cultural traditions and modes of thought. There occurred a fusion of cultures, of the old and the new. Since both had the strong undercurrent of spiritualism and mysticism, the merger gave rise to tolerance and secularism. The Hindu mystics became disciples of Muslim sufis and the latter had no inhibitions in learning from their Hindu counterparts. Lalla Ded, the Hindu mystic, laid the principles of this spiritual culture in her *vyakhyas* or verse-sayings. Her most illustrious disciple was a pious Muslim, Sheikh Noorud-Din Noorani, or Nund Rishi as he is popularly known. Both Hindus and Muslims made rich contributions to the evolution of a composite culture. Writers and poets nourished it. Worthy of attention among these are Yaqub Sarfi, Mirza Mohammad Mahsin Fani, Munshi Bhawani Das Kachru, Lalla, Habba Khatoon, Abdullah Baihaki and Paramanand.

The legacy of tolerance inherited by the Kashmiris from their saintly ancestors received blow after blow when their beautiful Valley fell victim to foreign aggressors. These peace-loving people suddenly felt their cherished ideals collapsing before their eyes. First the Mughals, then the Pathans, to be followed, in turn, by the Sikhs and the Dogras, invaded their Rishiver, the abode of saints, and in the course of three-and-a-half centuries wrought havoc in their lives. This meant, in the long run, not only political domination but economic exploitation and consequent moral degradation. Stretching over the long period of three hundred and fifty years, it is not difficult to estimate this

damage. Generation after generation, the Kashmiris were reduced to abject poverty. Farmers became serfs when it became a luxury for a peasant to enjoy two square meals a day. Their lands were seized from them on one pretext or another and given as jagirs to sycophants and henchmen who helped the usurpers in their illegal hold on the Valley. Soon the Kashmiris began to lose their identity. Fear gripped their hearts. The autocratic rule perpetuated by semi-barbarians for nearly four centuries made an average Kashmiri fear his own shadow. The moral, economic and political degradation was not confined to the Valley alone, but the poor people suffered in Jammu and Ladakh as well. It was only a shade deeper in Kashmir because of the Valley which provided opportunities for the barbarian rulers to lead lives of luxury. To keep the 'masters' pleased became the motive force of the life of a Kashmiri, when flogging, bonded labour, and intrigues became the order of the day.

By the time the Dogras arrived on the scene, the people of Kashmir had already become serfs. Art, philosophy and literature appeared to be a thing of the past. The Kashmiri seemed to have lost not only his identity, but even his character. "... they had become absolutely sullen and hopeless, and each man played for his own hand."³ The rose had withered from their cheeks and spiritual light had become dim in their souls. The rulers managed to degrade the Kashmiris to an extent that one Kashmiri was afraid of the other. No foreign visitor had a word of appreciation for "a bearded disgrace to the human race."⁴ Without blaming the tyrannical rulers for their moral degeneration, Kashmiris were called "false-tongued, ready with a lie and given to various forms of deceit. This character is more pronounced with them than with most of the races of India."⁵ Prejudice, lure of office or monetary gain seem to have distorted the vision of such writers describing the Kashmiris as "superstitious, intriguing, dishonest, false."⁶

In reality, the political domination and economic exploitation for nearly four centuries had made the Kashmiris fear-stricken and dumb. Fear—of government officials, the patwari, the foresters, the policeman, of influential and rich persons like the zaildar, the tehsildar and above all, the landlord—had become all pervading. And fear generated cowardice breeding lies and depriving the Kashmiri of his moral integrity.

Although the bourgeoisie had lost their character, the villagers, in spite of the fear, managed to retain their identity. "The Mughal Subhas, the Pathan Sirdars, Sikh and Dogra governors dismissed all difficulties of administration and all humane suggestions emanating from their masters with the remark that the Kashmiris were "dishonest, treacherous. . .the old tale of giving a dog a bad name. . . . The Kashmiris' only weapon against the official is deceit. In his fields, in his home, among his friends and neighbours, he is an honest citizen, ranking below none in the Orient for his integrity. Crimes of dishonesty may be said to be absolutely non-existent among the peasants. Property is entirely safe. . . . I have never heard of crimes of theft or burglary being committed by agriculturists. This surely points to the fact that the Kashmiris are not the dishonest people they are represented to be."⁷

When the foreign rulers—whether Mughals or Pathans, Sikhs or Dogras—tried their machiavellian tricks to arouse hatred, to encourage clashes between Muslims and Hindus, to manoeuvre conflicts between them, the Kashmiris never lost their moorings of religious tolerance. Examples of mutual faith and sacrifice by one community for the other are legion and some have become legends. Khwaja Tahir Rafique was persecuted by Ghazi Shah Chak but was sheltered by a Brahmin of Verinag. Two Muslims helped the secret flight of Birbal Dhar across the mountain ranges. Qadus Gojwari, a Muslim, saved the honour of Birbal Dhar's wife and daughter-in-law at the risk of inviting the wrath of Azim Khan, the Pathan Governor. In 1834, the Sikhs wanted to demolish the sacred shrine of Khanqah-i-Maula, but the pandit nobles frustrated their evil designs. The same acts of sacrifice were repeated when, in October 1947, Pakistani raiders descended on the Valley like the hordes of Chengiz Khan, the Muslims protected not only the lives of their Hindu brethren but the honour of their women-folk also. But the spirit of tolerance, hemmed in by fear gripping the heart, longed to free itself of the centuries of repression and waited for a saviour.

Throughout the Dogra rule, fear paralysed the body as well as the mind of the Kashmiri. There were interludes under the benign and pious Maharaja Pratap Singh, but otherwise the period was

marked by the pattern of exploitation that prevailed during the Mughal, Pathan, and Sikh rules. This was the period when western thought made some inroads into the sub-continent. In spite of its being isolated from the rest of the country by the high mountains, the winds of change reached even the Valley. Many schools and some colleges were started in the State where the Christian missionaries became active in opening schools and hospitals. The new thoughts percolating into the Valley were enough to rouse young men, both Hindu and Muslim. They went to Indian universities for studies and returned fired with new ideas, particularly the urge of the Indian people for political liberty and, apart from their academic pursuits, they became interested in the freedom struggle.

Maharaja Hari Singh, fresh from Europe, had, it seems, taken a cue from the country-wide change in the political climate, and started his rule on an optimistic note. He initiated educational and economic reforms and also re-defined the term State-subject which meant giving government jobs to the bonafide permanent citizens of the Jammu and Kashmir State, and not allowing anyone from outside to create or purchase property within its territory. He even attended Id prayers with his Muslim subjects in Srinagar. But this euphoria of the young Maharaja was short-lived. Having ignored the claims of the highly educated Kashmiris belonging to both the communities, he appointed Dogras to high and important posts, alienating, at one stroke, the people of the Valley. The tiny seed of unrest had thus been sown.

Though the stage was set for a 'revolt' against injustice and tyranny, unfortunately in its initial stages, the movement got entangled in bourgeois bickerings between the Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia. Fresh from colleges and universities, they entered into keen competition for government jobs extremely limited in number. The Kashmiri pandits had a slight edge over the Muslims. Since they came from economically better off families, they had greater academic merit. The Muslim youth felt that they deserved preference because they came from the economically backward majority class. The Maharaja and his Dogra 'courtiers' took advantage of this situation and pitted one community against the other. This was the reason why the Muslim educated youth did not feel interested in the country's freedom struggle.

Apprehensive that if at all the British left, the Hindu majority would continue to exploit them, the backward Muslim minority kept aloof. This tendency was encouraged by the British rulers. But there were Muslims with pronounced nationalistic outlook who understood the broader and positive aspects of the freedom struggle. Thus, when Gandhi was arrested following the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, there were hartals in Srinagar and Jammu and bonfires of foreign cloth were made in the main city crossings. The educated Muslims, who kept their distance from the national mainstream, were encouraged by the Britishers, not because they had sympathy for the Muslims, but because they had their own political designs which the Maharaja had frustrated. The Maharaja had liberal political views, though only half-baked. To these he gave expression at the Round-Table Conference at London in 1931. He thwarted the Britishers' attempt of wresting from him the strategic area of Gilgit, though he allowed them to control and not possess it. The Maharaja had even demanded the abolition of the British Political Agency in part of Gilgit. The enmity between the Maharaja and the British turned the latter sympathetic towards the Muslims. The communal tension engendered in the State was to weaken the Maharaja politically. Since the Communist Russians were in Tashkent, Khiva and Bokhara, it became important for the British strategists to tighten the political noose around the Maharaja's neck for securing a complete hold on Gilgit. This could be possible, he thought, by whipping up communal passions among the people. What helped them to these ends was the Maharaja's lack of political imagination. In spite of strict vigilance on the borders, newspapers and 'communal' journals began to pour into the State from Lahore. These added fuel to the smouldering communal fires among the educated middle-class intelligentsia.

The communal virus was only a symptom of competition for government jobs among the educated youth. Hence the masses were touched only at the periphery. The majority of the Muslim intelligentsia had received higher education at the Aligarh Muslim University, then the nerve centre of Muslim communalism in the country. It followed that when these men returned to the Valley and remained jobless, they often met to discuss their problems and started the Muslim Reading Room in Srinagar as a nucleus of political activities in the State. Ostensibly meant to encourage

the reading of newspapers and journals by educated Muslims, the Muslim Reading Room became the rendezvous for strategists aiming to bring about a political revolution in the State. It was from this Reading Room that the concentric waves began to be disseminate political messages in the Valley where they were to become the source of a new consciousness among the Muslims. Gradually, the Muslim Reading Room members rose above their immediate desire for securing jobs to assume the imperative role of awakening the masses from their centuries-old helplessness and the assertion of their fundamental rights. The Reading Room received added strength when Yusuf Shah, fresh from the Deoband Theological College, became Mir Waiz on the death of Mir Waiz Ahmed-Ullah in March 1931. He had had his political initiation at Deoband and threw in his lot with the aspirations of the members of the Muslim Reading Room.

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2. *A Jewel from Soura*

Zainagairi aab pheri

Soweri manz laal neiri

[When water shall flow in the Zainagir canal
In Soura will be born a jewel.]

AS A LEGEND GOES, the Zaingir canal was constructed during the reign of Zainulabidin in the fifteenth century. While people waited a long time for the water to flow, a poet is believed to have said the above lines. But it took five centuries for the jewel to appear when on December 5, 1905 was born Abdullah, a posthumous child of Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim. His ancestors were Muslim converts from a Brahmin family. They had settled at Soura, on the outskirts of the City of Seven Bridges, and were merchants trading in shawls. Abdullah grew up in Soura and received his early guidance from his eldest brother, Sheikh Mohiuddin, and from his pious mother. They were deeply religious and followed the tenets of Islam, offered prayers five times a day, and recited the Holy Quran. Abdullah's mother had great organizational ability and was a strict disciplinarian and survived her husband by thirty years. Abdullah was a sensitive child and what he saw around him was poverty and injustice being perpetrated on the Muslims. If God was merciful, about which he had no doubt, He would surely deliver the down-trodden from the oppressors. But who were the oppressors? The question rankling his mind, Abdullah went to a Maktab to study the Holy Quran. When a little older, he was sent to the Islamia Primary School. When he was about twelve years old, there occurred two incidents which brought Abdullah the answers to his queries and also face to face with the prevailing conditions of exploitation of the poor.

A little beyond his house at Soura is an octroi post. A poor,

naked peasant leading his horse carrying fire-wood to be sold in the city gave, as usual, some of it to the Hindu Brahmin official manning the post. The peasant gave him a few small pieces of wood but the official demanded all the heavy ones. When the peasant hesitated, the official beat him and took the entire load. Abdullah had been watching, and when the peasant began to weep, the young boy, fired with a natural sense of justice, intervened and gave a bit of his mind to the octroi-post official. Muslims everywhere were then dumb with no right even to weep or to complain. The feudal system had not only crushed the bones of the Kashmiris but their minds as well. When the excise inspector came next morning, Abdullah was called for an explanation. The boy reasoned against the tyranny and complained to his mother. The pious woman, believing all this to be divinely ordained replied, "The government belongs to God, dear son." The sensitive Abdullah asked, "Then why does one community behave unjustly towards another?" Unable to explain, his mother simply said, "Children should not get involved in such matters." But Abdullah was far from satisfied.

Soon another incident followed. When an official of the Food Control Department called for the most respected man in the locality for giving ration tickets, it happened to be none other than Abdullah's elder brother. But no sooner did he come forward, the official started boxing his ears. Abdullah saw his brother being humiliated and, though the official apologized, the incident left a deep and indelible impression on his mind.

Abdullah's education at the Government S.P. College, Srinagar after his matriculation from the Government School, Baghi Dilawar Khan, was uneventful. However, his stay at the Islamia College, Lahore, did help in moulding his political future. He came under the influence of Dr Mohammad Iqbal, the great philosopher-poet, and became painfully aware of the sufferings and poverty of the Muslims. Already a sensitive self-respecting young man, Abdullah frequently quoted verses from Iqbal. He tried hard to go abroad for higher studies, but the State Government never encouraged him. He, therefore, went to the Aligarh Muslim University where he met many intellectuals who bemoaned the conditions of the Muslims. Although the nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu delivered speeches at Aligarh, Abdullah was not much impressed. He completed his

M.Sc. (Chemistry) and returned to the Valley where he started trying to secure a government job.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was twenty-five years old when he burst upon the political stage of Kashmir like a tornado. The appointments to government jobs in those days were made by the State Recruitment Board. Since merit was the main criterion, Kashmiri pandits secured these limited positions, leaving the educated Muslims in a state of frustration. Sheikh Abdullah resigned his post as a teacher in the Islamia High School, Srinagar, in protest against this discrimination because the backward majority community was being discriminated against. This was to be a fateful decision in his life. Impelled by Allah and by his own intuition, Sheikh Abdullah's mind began to think not of government jobs for educated Muslims but in terms of ameliorating the economic conditions of the Kashmiri masses. He was touched by the abysmal poverty of his Muslim brethren in the Valley and resolved to put an end to the feudal system responsible for this. Voltaire and Rousseau had used their pens to arouse the consciousness of the French people against tyranny; Sheikh Abdullah used his speech to arouse the Kashmiris from their slumber and organised mammoth gatherings in mosques. Gifted by God with a graceful personality, sonorous voice, powers of rhetoric, intimate knowledge of religion and a sincere heart, he was able to sway the masses. He delivered fiery speeches and identified himself with the plight of the dispossessed Muslims of Kashmir.

There are many reasons why in the formative years of his political career Sheikh Abdullah's political ideas had a communal tinge. The first is that the majority of the farmers were, as they are today, Muslims. The second reason is that at this time of his life, Sheikh Abdullah had a typical bourgeois psychology. The influence of the Kashmir Muslim Reading Room was still dominant. As a government school teacher too, he attended meetings of the recently formed Secret Committee, with G.A. Ashai as its Chairman, held at the house of Khwaja Ali Shah, the elder brother of G.M. Shah who was to become a National Conference leader and son-in-law of Sheikh Abdullah. The service problems of Kashmir Muslims were discussed at these meetings not entirely free of bourgeois thinking. A third reason is also suggested at this stage: Sheikh Abdullah had yet to come

in contact with national leaders with a secular outlook leading the freedom movement outside State. But one thing is certain, whenever the lion roared, a new life was infused into the sunken hearts of Kashmiris. Describing the effect of the coming of Mahatma Gandhi on the minds of the Indian masses, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling conditions. . . The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view. The greatest gift for an individual or a nation, so we have been told in our ancient books, was *abhaya* (fearlessness), not merely bodily courage, but the absence of fear from the mind. . . . But the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear—pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the widespread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the moneylender; fear of unemployment and starvation which were always on the threshold. It was against this all pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised; be not afraid. . . ." This quotation aptly illustrates what Sheikh Abdullah's voice did for the people of Kashmir. We have only to substitute the name of Sheikh Abdullah for Gandhi and the Dogra for British. It was at one such meeting of the Secret Committee that Abdullah Hajam, a Muslim dervish, entered the room and temporarily interrupted the deliberations. He spontaneously uttered, "Master Abdullah, you move forward, Allah will help you."²² The dervish had never seen young Abdullah before.

Every year, July 13 is celebrated as Martyrs Day in the State. It was on this fateful day that the Muslims of Kashmir heard the clarion call of Sheikh Abdullah and turned their backs upon fear which had gripped their hearts for nearly four centuries. Though

the events that day took a communal turn, it was essentially a political eruption directed against the ruler, a spontaneous outburst taking a concrete form in thousands of people attacking the central jail, not unlike the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. These were sparked off by the unwise holding of a trial of one Abdul Qadir in the central jail. Abdul Qadir was a Muslim butler to an Englishman. At a religious gathering at Khanqah-i-Maula in the interior parts of the city, he had spoken against the Dogra rulers and was arrested for sedition. Thousands of Muslims gathered outside the jail. When the mobs turned violent, firing was resorted to and twenty-one Muslims were killed. Infuriated, they turned in huge processions from the jail, looting and burning Hindu shops and also killing some of them. The bodies of the Muslims killed near the jail were taken by the demonstrators to the Jama Masjid, the biggest mosque in the city. Sheikh Abdullah sat beside a dying man whose last words were, "Sheikh Saheb, we have done our duty. Tell the nation [Kashmiris] that they should now do their duty so that the blood that was shed today will bear fruit some day and not go waste. This torch lit today should be kept alive till the nation attains complete freedom."³ Swearing by the blood shed by the martyr, Sheikh Abdullah made a solemn pledge to the dying man that he would not rest till the goal was attained.

Sheikh Abdullah made his debut as an orator on this occasion when he quoted extensively from the Holy Quran and declared a *jehad* against the exploiters and Dogra autocracy. The Secret Committee, at the suggestion of G.A. Ashai, its chairman, had already chosen him leader for his indomitable courage, sincerity of purpose, his zeal, and above all, for his extraordinary gift of eloquence and intimate knowledge of the Quran. He was at once arrested and, along with G.N. Gilkar, escorted to the Badami Bagh cantonment from where, at the dead of night, he was taken to the Hari Parbat Fort.

At this time, leading families came with offers of marriage for Sheikh Abdullah. But such was his preoccupation with the emancipation of the poor Muslims from exploitation that he felt he had been wedded to this cause. The question of marriage, therefore, became redundant. His political activities and search for funds for the movement took Sheikh Abdullah all over the Valley. He soon met Harry Neidu now Sheikh Ghulam Hasan and a

recent European convert, who had a daughter from his wife, a Kashmiri Muslim. He contacted Sheikh Mohiuddin, Abdullah's brother, and when he saw that Abdullah—he was twenty-seven years old then—was also interested, advised him to marry, take up a government job or settle for business and give up politics. But Sheikh Abdullah's mission being the liberation of his countrymen, did not agree with his brother though he was aware that the rejection of the offer would create a bad impression about Kashmiri Muslims in the minds of Harry Neidu and his family. But Sheikh Mohiuddin proved correct in forewarning his younger brother, for soon Sheikh Abdullah was arrested and sent to Udhampur jail. When, on his release, the offer was renewed, Sheikh Abdullah argued that his future wife, having been brought up in the lap of luxury, would find no comfort in the company of a jail bird. But the girl and her parents assured the revolutionary that she would share the roses and the thorns with equal cheer. The marriage was solemnized in 1932 and Begum Abdullah proved as good as her word, supporting and strengthening his secular outlook and the spirit of sacrifice.

The Dorga rulers, meanwhile, had unleashed a reign of terror on the Muslim population. The mounted soldiers galloped through the narrow streets of Srinagar with rifles aimed at the citizens. Indiscriminate arrests were made and political offenders subjected to most inhuman tortures. But the people refused to be intimidated into submission. Their bodies could be bent but not their spirit. Sheikh Abdullah's appeal had not gone in vain. They had responded to his call to shed fear. The Maharaja was quick to see the writing on the wall—in letters of blood shed by those who became martyrs to the freedom struggle on July 13, 1931—and appointed a Commission headed by B.J. Glancy, an Englishman. The Glancy Commission recommendations, to accommodate a larger percentage of educated Muslims in government services, were accepted by the Muslim bourgeoisie. But for Sheikh Abdullah, the recommendations did not even touch the fringe of the demands for ameliorating the economic conditions of the Kashmiris who lived in the villages. By the middle of 1932 he and some of his comrades in the Muslim Reading Room realized that the Dorga ruler and the British worked together to maintain the status quo and applied only mild palliatives.

The educated Muslims who could not be lured by government

jobs began to think of establishing a broad-based political party which would involve the Muslim population. The idea of an organized political party had already been discussed in jail between Sheikh Abdullah and Maulana Mohammad Sayeed who was destined to play an important role in State politics. Thus a political consciousness was growing for launching a mass freedom struggle. A courageous personality with a sense of dedication was the need of the hour and the mantle of leadership seemed destined to fall on the shoulders of Sheikh Abdullah. God had blessed him with sincerity of heart, a sensitive temperament and steadfastness of purpose. Collecting around himself a band of trusted lieutenants, he therefore announced the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932. Although denominational in nomenclature, it possessed, though yet in embryonic form, the seeds of a secular approach. As its first president Sheikh Abdullah declared, "Our country's progress is impossible so long as we do not establish amicable relations between different communities."⁴ The resolutions passed by the Conference from time to time, made the Maharaja announce the formation of a kind of legislative assembly, known as the Praja Sabha. When elections were held, the Muslim Conference bagged nineteen out of twenty-one seats. Far from being a genuine democratic institution, the Praja Sabha became a forum for men of different communities to meet and to get acquainted with one another's point of view.

As a result of the meetings of the Praja Sabha, an awareness was born which was to strengthen the secular outlook of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The beginnings had in fact been made much earlier. With his leanings towards secularising Kashmir politics innate in his heart, Sheikh Abdullah had a free and frank exchange of views with Prem Nath Bazaz, another veteran Kashmiri socialist leader of progressive ideas. The two had met at the Cheshma Shahi Bagh in July 1932 following the publication of the Glancy Commission report in May. Bazaz started publishing *The Daily Vitasta* to popularise the ideal of secular politics. Even the Kashmiri pandits favoured the setting up of a popular government provided, of course, that their job interests were not jeopardized. Bazaz and Sheikh Abdullah started a weekly journal, *The Hamdard*, in 1935 which helped strengthen the secular trends in Kashmir politics and windows were thrown open to receive the breeze of nationalism. May 8, 1936 was

announced to be observed as Responsible Government Day and Sheikh Abdullah as President of the Muslim Conference appealed to the Hindus and Sikhs for support and cooperation for the movement by participating in it. The response to this appeal was even beyond Sheikh Abdullah's expectations. Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders addressed gatherings from the same platform. One wondered whether they too had seen the writing on the wall. If not, they at least began to understand Sheikh Abdullah and his political mission.

The secular dimension appearing in the political thinking of the Kashmiris was nothing but the extension of this outlook from the social to the political plane, and within a few years the Muslim Conference remained Muslim only in name. In 1937 a huge procession of labourers led by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and G.M. Sadiq, young members of the Muslim Conference, was organized. It was joined by labourers from all communities. This demonstration gave a wider base to the movement in that it took a proletarian and socialistic complexion. Prem Nath Bazaz also addressed its gatherings. On March 28, 1938, Sheikh Abdullah making a historic statement said, "We must end communalism by ceasing to think in terms of Muslims and non-Muslims when discussing our political problems . . . We must open our doors to all such Hindus and Sikhs, who like ourselves, believe in the freedom of their country from the shackles of an irresponsible rule."⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru also contributed to the change of character of the Muslim Conference. Sheikh Abdullah met Nehru at Lahore railway station when the latter was on his way to the North-West Frontier Province in 1937. They talked for a few minutes, but not satisfied, Sheikh Abdullah entered the compartment and accompanied Nehru during his tour and discussed the possibilities of giving a secular character to Kashmir politics.

On June 28, 1938, another milestone in Kashmir's journey to secularism, a marathon debate lasting fifty-two hours was held among the members of the Working Committee of the Muslim Conference. It concluded in recommending to the General Council that all people "irrespective of their caste, creed or religion could become its members." In August, the same year, was issued "A National Demand" signed among others by Sheikh

Abdullah, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, Mirza Afzal Beg, G.M. Sadiq, Jialal Kilam, S.L. Saraf and Sardar Budh Singh. The General Council of the Muslim Conference met on June 10, 1939 and was attended by 176 delegates from all over the State, who accepted the recommendations of its Working Committee. Thus came into being Jammu and Kashmir National Conference on June 11, 1939, a political party which has to this day symbolized the secular outlook of the politics of Kashmir. Some doubts were privately raised, especially by a very prominent leader Ghulam Abbas that the new movement would "become a handmaid of the Indian Congress." These fears were discussed at a meeting between Sheikh Abdullah, Abbas and Prem Nath Bazaz. The three declared that it would be harmful to bring the National Conference under the influence of any outside organisation, particularly the Indian National Congress or the Muslim League. Abbas declared, "The garb in the shape of the Muslim Conference has become outworn and threadbare. . . . Now we are in need of a nationalist guise."⁶ Another Muslim leader, Allah Rakha Sagar, said, "Nationalism is the cry of the time and those who do not heed it will repent in the future."⁷

The rise of the National Conference helped the people of the State to join the national mainstream of the Indian people for freedom from the British rule. At the first session of the National Conference presided over by Sheikh Abdullah, the "National Demand" was not only included but given greater emphasis. It was reiterated that the members to the legislature should be elected on the principles of adult franchise and joint electorate. The Maharaja again prevaricated and tried to drive a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. But his efforts were frustrated in the prevailing atmosphere of complete communal accord. He introduced constitutional reforms, but being half-hearted attempts, there was no positive reaction from the National Conference. The fact was that the Maharaja failed to keep pace with the changing political atmosphere in the country and ignored the ominous rumblings. But Sheikh Abdullah, taking the cue from the stalwarts of the freedom struggle like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, was quick to foresee the coming events.

As more and more people throughout the State came forward to join the freedom movement, Sheikh Abdullah became very popular. He was now called Sher-i-Kashmir, the Lion of Kashmir,

and possessed incredible integrity, courage of conviction, and fearlessness to a remarkable degree. He frequently went to India and met leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. He was impressed by their sense of dedication and sacrifice, and discovered complete identity of views between theirs and his own. His intellectual horizon extended beyond the narrow confines of the Valley and correspondingly the political dimensions of his philosophy assumed a national perspective. The atmosphere was infectious. Every British territory and Indian India, as the territories ruled by maharajas, rajas or nawabs were called, was waging relentless wars against tyranny and injustice. The entire sub-continent was undergoing the traumatic experience of an irresistible craving for breathing free air. And the weapon being employed was satyagraha or non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi had given a religious content to the freedom struggle and the whole world was watching this Christ-like figure fighting against the mighty British empire with the weapon of his moral force. The apostle of truth and non-violence at once brought under his irresistible spell the truth-loving Sheikh Abdullah, the sensitive chords of whose heart were touched by Nehru, the Kashmiri Brahmin.

The philosophy of the All-India Muslim League steeped in prejudice, hatred, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness cut no ice with the Muslim leader from the Valley. Islam taught secularism and brotherhood, the principles he saw being preached by the Indian National Congress even though the organisation was dominated by the Hindus. During his political journeys outside the Valley he met luminaries like Khan Abul Ghaffar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Dr Asaf Ali, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, all devout Muslims who had joined the national mainstream and worked shoulder to shoulder with Gandhi and Nehru to achieve independence. Religion, Sheikh Abdullah discovered to his great joy, was not confused with politics, and the freedom movement had a secular tradition of tolerance.

During this second phase of the evolution of Sheikh Abdullah's political philosophy, many Hindus actively joined the National Conference. They were men of a high intellectual calibre and possessed not only a sense of dedication but sincerity of purpose as well and carried the Hindu population with them. They were men like Kashyap Bandhu, Budh Singh, S.L. Saraf, and later, Dr S.N. Peshin, J.L. Kilam, D.P. Dhar, Prem Nath Bazaz from

the Valley and R.P. Saraf, Trilochan Dutt, Girdharilal Dogra, Bal Raj Puri from Jammu. Sheikh Abdullah and his Muslim colleagues welcomed the change and saw the chinar of secularism and tolerance growing strong-limbed and broad-leaved for all the communities in the State.

The growth of the National Conference met with initial difficulties never anticipated. Far from taking recourse to sinister strategies, sincerity rather than negative intellectualism, guided his course. What he desired was to forge a secular united front against the Dogra rule and the reactionary forces. He did understand the sentiments of his people, but he knew that a sentimental or religious approach to politics would lead the Kashmiris astray. While the National Conference was still in its infancy, Sheikh Abdullah knew that the organisation had the shorings of a strong secular tradition built through centuries of communal harmony in the Valley. And the helmsman possessed an indomitable will to steer it safely through the roughest weather. Waver he did in moments of conflict, but in his struggle during those days and in the years that followed, he kept an even keel, always sure of his destination. Although his statements and his deeds often smacked of contradictions and paradoxes, Kashmir as a symbol of secularism was never lost sight of. In the late thirties, the Jammu and Kashmir State was an agglomeration of vested interests not in various units of its territory, but in the same unit as well. These had given rise to divisive forces encouraged by the exploitation of religious sentiments and it was against these almost insurmountable hurdles in his path that Sheikh Abdullah had to struggle.

At this time arose differences among the Muslims. For religious reasons and basically for the fear of losing their vested interests, the Muslim jagirdars and Muslim job-seekers did not agree with Sheikh Abdullah's politics. The Hindu jagirdars, mostly Dogra and some Kashmiri pandits, felt their economic bastions shaking. The Kashmir, pandits who were educationally more qualified, feared that number and not merit would now be the deciding criterion for selection to government jobs. They, therefore, did not join the movement in large numbers. The few who came forward did so because they felt the National Conference would gradually come under the influence of the Indian National Congress. All these tendencies confused Sheikh Abdullah.

The Muslims grew suspicious of the Indian National Congress, influencing the politics of the State and felt that it would ultimately lead to Hindu domination.

The Muslims of the Valley did not like the National Conference adopting a resolution at the Anantnag session during Second World War appreciating "the intention underlying the statement issued by the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress about the policy of the British Government towards the political aspirations of the Indian nation". In such circumstances even Sheikh Abdullah had to play politics. He wanted the people to be led unitedly towards the goal of independence and freedom, from exploitation. Occasionally, he became impulsive and allowed feeling to dominate reason. On the one hand, the Working Committee of the National Conference adopted at Mirpur on December 28, 1939 a resolution to the effect that Hindustani could be adopted either in Persian or Devanagari script for civil service gazetted officers' examination. It was a very reasonable stand. But to win back the support of Kashmiri Muslims, Sheikh Abdullah, while celebrating Id-Milad, spoke contemptuously of the Hindus. The result was that two Kashmiri pandit leaders, Jialal Kilam and Kashyap Bandhu, resigned. But this was a temporary phase and Sheikh Abdullah knew which way to turn for help to realize his dream of secularism, socialism and democracy.

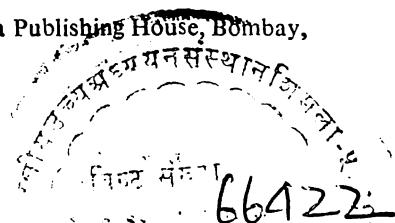
Nehru decided to visit the Valley during this time. As a shrewd statesman, he possessed a precocious understanding about the future course of events in the sub-continent. He had probably felt the pulse of the Kashmiri Muslims. Sheikh Abdullah too grabbed this opportunity and at once extended invitation to Nehru to be a guest of the National Conference. While Prem Nath Bazaz and G.M. Sadiq organised the reception, Nehru toured the Valley for ten days. It proved to be a corner stone for the edifice of secularism and democracy which was later built brick by brick by the indefatigable Sheikh Abdullah who had now been lionised by the people. The ten-day tour eclipsed the communal parties into oblivion, but it had its adverse effects.

During these important days, Sir N. Gopalaswami Ayyengar was Prime Minister of the State. Though a bureaucrat, he had faith in the ideals of Congress and Gandhian principles. He appreciated the secular ideology of Sheikh Abdullah and en-

couraged Hindus to join the National Conference. This, together with Nehru's visit to the Valley as the guest of the National Conference, produced an opposite reaction. The Muslim intelligentsia and diehards became fearful of the domination of Kashmir politics by the Indian National Congress which they identified with the Hindus. When the second session of the National Conference was held at Baramulla on September 28, 1940 there was not a single Muslim delegate from the Jammu unit who attended except from the Mirpur district. It was believed in some quarters that even Mirza Afzal Beg and Maulana Sayeed were not happy at the change. Sheikh Abdullah felt uneasy and to appease and win back the Kashmiri Muslims, he denounced the language policy of the government though the National Conference had approved it earlier at the Mirpur session. The policy concerned the adoption of either the Persian or the Devanagari script by the examinees. Since the government circular made the confirmation of teachers subject to the knowledge of both scripts, the Muslims raised a hue and cry in protest. Attempts were made even to revive the Muslim Conference and all that it stood for, but Sheikh Abdullah again manipulated the State politics in a manner that these attempts were, to a large extent, frustrated. He asked his party men to resign en bloc from the Legislative Assembly as a protest against the government's language policy. Ayyengar also did not want the National Conference to lose support of the Muslims. He agreed to fill the vacancies of the Legislative Assembly by nominees of the National Conference. Though Ghulam Abbas had succeeded in reviving the Muslim Conference with the strong support of Mir Waiz Yussuff Shah, Sheikh Abdullah continued his course steering the National Conference. Prem Nath Bazaz too resigned on November 28, 1940. Sheikh Abdullah resolved to follow the path of truth and justice, secularism and democracy along with his supporters and, if need be, alone. But while he was secular in approach, the interests of the Kashmiri Muslims always remained dear to his heart.

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3. *Quit Kashmir Movement*

I have accepted the burden of ages on my head
The angels of the heavens have shuddered at my doggedness
I have chewed steel, I have braved fire
I have sipped the blood of my heart
But this my head has not till this day
Bent low before any one else but thee.

—Abdul Ahad Azad

THE CONTENT and direction of the freedom struggle launched by the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir underwent a change from 1939-1945 during the World War when Indian soldiers as part of British forces were forced to fight for western democracies while India herself was chained to slavery. The war brought untold sufferings to the Indian people, and the Indian National Congress passed the Quit India resolution for the British to leave India. In Kashmir the National Conference devoted its energies to alleviate the economic sufferings of the people. Its leaders on the political front did not allow their oars to rest and met regularly to discuss the repercussions of the political upheaval in the country on the State. The phenomenon of protracted war in the world, the irrepressible urge of the Indian masses to realize their political aspirations, the intransigence of the British government under the premiership of Winston Churchill, and the equally intransigent attitude of the All-India Muslim League—all were bound to have their impact on the freedom movement in the State.

Kashmir leaders closely watched the direction of the political wind in the country and correspondingly evolved their future strategy and plan of action. Though things were still in a flux, the National Conference leaders were clear in their goals: achievement of a socialistic pattern of society through democratic

processes and strengthening of the forces of secularism. In fact, the Economic Wing of the Organization prepared a tangible, realizable, economic programme called the Naya Kashmir programme. This blue-print envisaged radical land reforms by giving the land to the tiller. It devised means to free the down-trodden people from the clutches of money-lenders by enacting laws by an elected legislature. The programme also suggested the opening of more schools and colleges, academic as well as technical. There was a provision for a socialistic basis so that the elected government of the people would not allow the exploitation of one class of people by the other. The political movement was thus given an economic content. This programme was outlined by a band of young intellects like Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, G.M. Sadiq, and D.P. Dhar under the guidance of Sheikh Abdullah who was not only thinking in terms of making Kashmir a secular, democratic and free state, but a socialistic State as well. His thinking was by now far in advance of the people in the rest of the country.

Sheikh Abdullah was neither an intellectual, nor was he very learned. He had not studied the socio-economic philosophy of Marx and Engels. Yet he had an intuitive grasp of things, and whatever appealed to his sense of justice was accepted by him with open arms. Leaders of communist ideology had visited the State in the thirties. Prominent among them were Abdullah Safdar and Fazl Illahi Qureishi. During the forties, B.P.L. Bedi influenced his thinking. Dr K.M. Ashraf also came. Sadiq became a convert and Sheikh Abdullah "a fellow traveller". It is believed that the New Kashmir manifesto was drafted by B.P.L. Bedi. Whatever the truth, Sheikh Abdullah had this manifesto of the National Conference take an unmistakably socialistic stamp.

The manifesto is divided into two parts—Constitution of the State, and the National Economic plan. The first part is subdivided into (a) Citizenship, (b) National Assembly, (c) Council of Ministers, (d) Ruler, (e) Justice, (f) Local Administration, and (g) National Language. The citizens were guaranteed freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and meetings, freedom of street demonstrations and processions. Universal compulsory military training and service would be established by law. All citizens would have the right to work. Also, all students shall be ensured

equality of opportunity irrespective of accidents of birth and parentage; all citizens shall be secured protection by law and recourse to courts through administration of justice which shall be quick, cheap and impartial; the highest legislature of the State, the National Assembly, will be elected by the citizens of the State by electoral districts on the basis of one deputy for 40,000 population for a period of five years. The Council of Ministers of the State is to be responsible to the National Assembly. Women shall have the right to elect and to be elected upon equal terms with men in all institutions of the State. Justice shall be administered by the High Court of the State and by the District and Tehsil People's courts. The organs of State power in the districts, tehsils, cities and villages, shall be the People's Panchayats. The National Languages of the State shall be Kashmiri, Dogri, Balti, Dadri, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. Urdu shall be the *lingua franca* of the State.

The National Economic Plan was sub-divided into production, transport, distribution, utility services, and currency and finance. The production was to be for use and not for exchange and the objective was to provide a reasonable standard of living for all people in the State. The basic agricultural plan would be abolition of landlordism, land to the tiller, cooperative association, feeding the State people first; and people's control of the forests. A National Agricultural Council would be set up in the State to execute and supervise the national agricultural plan.

The principle of production is that all key industries must be in the hands of the People's Government and therefore the manifesto enumerated the abolition of big private capital; all key industries to be managed and owned by the democratic State; and private monopoly, whether formal or virtual, to be forbidden. For this purpose a National Industrial Council is to be set up. About transport the manifesto said that anything done for the regeneration of the country must plan simultaneous development of the means of communication and transport. Hence it was proposed to set up a National Communications Council consisting of engineering experts and economic advisers. The distribution system being the "vital cornerstone of any planned economy," it was proposed to establish the National Marketing Council consisting of business experts and economic advisers.

The National Public Health Council was suggested to be established for safeguarding the health of the citizens. This would propose that every 1,500 people will have a doctor, every village a medical attendant, starting of a medical college, encouragement of both Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicines. For the promotion of education, the National Educational Council would be set up. This could suggest methods for the creation of a national university laying emphasis on tradition and history, a statistical institute, an institute of nationalities; a network of higher, middle, and primary schools, district colleges for men and women and adult education night schools.

The National Housing Council would prepare plans for town and village housing on modern lines. For cultural progress, the Naya Kashmir manifesto proposed establishment of a radio station, national film industry and national theatre, encouragement of youth activity, protection of ancient monuments, and establishment of the institute of art and culture.

The manifesto envisaged the nationalisation of banking, and regulation of currency on a national basis. The National Economic Council consisting of bankers and financial experts was to draw up the financial plans of the State to provide necessary funds for all productive organisations; regulate the price level and to fix the total wage-bill. The money-lenders and usurers were to be put in the category of social parasites who have no place in planned economy. To the plan were attached three charters, first for peasants, second for workers, and the third for women.

Things began to move extremely fast both in Europe and Asia so far as the War was concerned and hence faster in the sub-continent. The rise of the Indian National Army under the courageous leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose, the Quit India movement initiated by Gandhi made the British feel that in spite of their victory against the Axis forces, they were bound to give freedom to the Indians. Churchill had declared that he was not born to liquidate the British Empire though he was smarting with the agonising feeling of the anomalous situation of Britain fighting a world war to save democracy and denying the democratic right to the Indian people. But the British people did not

share Churchill's view that Indians were not yet fit to govern themselves and therefore the British had to shoulder the "white man's burden" of civilizing our teeming millions. With the end of the World War in 1945, the political thinking in Great Britain underwent a change. Clement Attlee, the new Labour Prime Minister, declared in the British Parliament that Britain was committed to grant independence to India within the shortest possible time. All the political prisoners in India were released and the machinery evolved to devise the modalities of the transfer of power to the representatives of the Indian people.

Thus no political party or individual was left in any doubt that freedom was round the corner. Any delay, if it occurred, would be the result of disagreements among the various communities in India and not to be attributed to the British. This time they would be as good as their word and would pass on paramountcy to one united India. But the Indian Muslim League had been clamouring for a separate Muslim State to be called Pakistan and to be carved out of the sub-continent. The demand was old and the Muslims advocating the two-nation theory had been fighting for it for many years. In spite of the fact that many brilliant Muslim leaders and thousands of others were members of the Indian National Congress and had gone to jail during the freedom movement, Mohammad Ali Jinnah argued that the Indian National Congress, of which ironically he had himself been a foremost leader, represented only the Hindus. And in his dream of Pakistan on the northern side, Jinnah had included the Jammu and Kashmir State because of its predominant Muslim population.

Jinnah's claim, that Kashmir was in his pocket, was ultimately frustrated because he had reckoned without the host, the secular character of the Kashmiri Muslims, and the political training of their leaders. Jinnah visited Kashmir in the spring of 1944. Ostensibly for a holiday, the visit was contrived to feel the political pulse of the people. A reception was organised in his honour by Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference colleagues. Evidently, the National Conference could hear the viewpoint of any Indian leader with an open mind. Replying to the address of welcome Jinnah said, "I am happy to see all classes and groups combined here to receive and honour me." But the shrewd politician was quick to perceive that the political

wind in the State was blowing towards secularism. He, therefore, lost no time to address another gathering, this one called by the then defunct Muslim Conference, where he declared that the “Muslims have one platform, one Kalma, and One God. I would request the Muslims to come under the banner of the Muslim Conference and fight for their rights.” This provoked a sharp reaction from Sheikh Abdullah. He told his people, “The ills of the land can only be remedied by carrying Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs together.” Presiding over the annual session of the Muslim Conference, Jinnah made a frontal attack on Sheikh Abdullah and his co-workers, calling them “a band of gangsters.” When Jinnah reached Baramullah and wanted to address a Muslim gathering, again to incite communal feelings, the people jeered at him and he was immediately whisked away to a place of safety. The people of Kashmir had by then attained sufficient degree of political maturity and in refusing to listen to Jinnah they actually rejected his two-nation ideology and theocratic basis of a State. At this time, Shiv Narain Fotedar, the leader of the Kashmiri pandits, rejected the theocratic ideology of V.D. Savarkar, President of the All-India Mahasabha, because such an ideology was contrary to the traditions of communal amity in the State.

Sheikh Abduliah's political stature was to reach new heights in 1945 when two important conferences were held in October at Sopore, fifty kilometres north of Srinagar. One was the annual session of the National Conference and the other, the All-India States Peoples' Conference presided by Nehru. Eminent political personalities like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad also participated in the deliberations of the conference. There being complete identity of views between the Indian National Congress and the National Conference, the members of the latter, a majority of whom happened to be Muslims, were drawn to the secular, democratic and socialistic ideals of the national mainstream symbolized by the Indian National Congress. The two-nation theory went against their secular outlook and they rejected the appeal by the Muslim League.

The Congress leaders who addressed the session held at Sopore told the people that the National Conference was the sole representative body of the masses of the State, thus countering Jinnah's statement that the Muslim Conference alone voiced the

true political aspirations of the people of the State. This was a personal victory for Sheikh Abdullah and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan said, "Abdullah is the gift of God. If you do not follow him, you will be humiliated." Nehru, while appreciating the secular character of the National Conference and eulogizing the qualities of Sheikh Abdullah, advised the non-Muslims to join the National Conference which had come close to the ideology and secular character of the Indian National Congress, and to follow its leadership.

The credit for the Quit Kashmir slogan should, ironically enough, go to Maharaja Hari Singh rather than to Sheikh Abdullah who raised it or to Mahatma Gandhi who provided the example. The Maharaja's unimaginative and intransigent attitude left Sheikh Abdullah with no choice other than to ask him to abrogate the notorious Amritsar Treaty by which his ancestors had sought the State territory along with its hapless inhabitants. Sheikh Abdullah had agreed to give a trial to the Maharaja's offer of including people's representatives in his cabinet with Mirza Afzal Beg representing the National Conference. Sheikh Abdullah even welcomed the appointment of R.C. Kak, a Kashmiri pandit, as the Prime Minister of the State. While this 'drama' was being enacted, the Maharaja and Kak were hatching a plot to create dissensions in the National Conference. They coaxed Mian Ahmed Yar to desert his party by baiting him with a niche in the Maharaja's cabinet. At this, Mirza Afzal Beg resigned on March 17, 1946 and his place was at once filled by Mian Ahmed Yar. At the same time the Maharaja refused to meet Sheikh Abdullah when the latter sought an interview with him. Thus, the compromising approach of Sheikh Abdullah was responded by the machiavellian attitude of the Maharaja who never believed that the British would quit. Or alternatively, he was made to believe that when the British left, he would be the sole arbiter of the destiny of his subjects.

Great men are especially endowed by God to strike at the most opportune moment which their intuition helps them to perceive. Sheikh Abdullah was almost offered this opportunity by the Maharaja on a platter. Taking his colleagues into confidence, he told the Maharaja to quit Kashmir because he had no moral

or even legal right to hold it. Declaring the Treaty of Amritsar as an anachronism, he said that the document should be scrapped and the people left free to choose their own government. But he also made an unwise statement at the most crucial moment in the history of the freedom struggle waged by the people of the State. He asked the Maharaja to quit Kashmir and rule over the Jammu region if the people there so wished. The faux pas was exploited by his detractors, and the Jammu Muslims and anti-Maharaja Hindus there felt alienated. At the same time it had adverse effect on the State's future political set-up because the statement encouraged regional trends.

When Jinnah came to know about the 'Quit Kashmir' slogan launched by the National Conference, he characterised the agitation as an attempt on the part of the National Conference to coerce the Maharaja into recognising the National Conference as representative of all Muslims. Leaders of the Indian National Congress as well as those of the All-India States People's Conference felt that Sheikh Abdullah was transcending the directions given him by the two organisations. They failed to realise at the moment—and perhaps Sheikh Abdullah himself was not aware—that the slogan had far-reaching psychological reverberations.

As in every other field, a pioneer in spite of himself, Sheikh Abdullah gave a new meaning to the struggle for freedom in the princely States. The 'Quit Kashmir' slogan created a new consciousness in the states—that the maharajas, the rajas, the nawabs, must quit in the manner the British would with the difference that the princes would stay physically in India, whereas the British would leave Indian shores forever. The disturbance thus caused in the political atmosphere in Kashmir travelled to the masses groaning under the burden of exploitation for centuries together. The brand had been lit in the Valley, its light would travel to all the States.

The 'Quit Kashmir' slogan appealed to the imagination of Nehru who looked at every new development in its wider perspective, joining the past to the present and the present shaping the future. Once the British left and British India were free, it would be anomalous to let millions of Indians live as slaves of their rulers even if they happened to be Indians. Nehru must have felt grateful to Sheikh Abdullah because it would make the process of democratisation and integration easier in the future.

The slogan was a veiled warning to the indigenous rulers to quit autocratic rule and march with the changing times. Gandhi and Nehru hailed the slogan because it brought the Kashmiri Muslims closer to the national mainstream, thereby taking the wind out of the sails of the Muslim Conference. The slogan was interpreted by the ruler as sedition and Sheikh Abdullah and his co-workers along with thousands of others were arrested and prosecuted.

Those were the days when the British statesmen were holding negotiations with the Indian leaders to find the *modus operandi* for transferring power to Indians. In spite of the hectic political activities, Nehru left New Delhi for Kashmir. Ignoring his own safety, he rushed to the succour of his brethren in Kashmir and to meet Sheikh Abdullah. If allowed, he would plead his case in the court, and therefore, he reached Domel on June 22, 1946. The authorities banned his entry into State territory and for violation of the ban he was kept under house arrest. The Maharaja had given yet another proof of his lack of political sagacity. But the event—Nehru's impulsive dash to Kashmir at the most crucial stage of political developments in India, and the Maharaja's order to arrest him—had dramatic potentialities for political fall-out.

The world press published the event as something sensational. With the Quit Kashmir movement assuming international dimensions, Sheikh Abdullah was catapulted to the international scene. The people of Kashmir were touched by Nehru's gesture, of the man who, everybody knew, would be Prime Minister of independent India within less than a year. There were protest demonstrations all over the country, and every right thinking Indian condemned the action of the Maharaja. Realising, though too late, that he had added to the list of his political blunders, the Maharaja lifted the ban on Nehru's entry into the State. On July 24, 1946 Nehru came as a lawyer to attend the trial of Sheikh Abdullah for sedition and Asaf Ali, another barrister turned revolutionary, as defence counsel.

The only adverse effect of the Quit Kashmir movement was felt in the Jammu region. It stemmed from the inept definition given to it by Sheikh Abdullah. His statements were torn out of context and given distorted versions. The Muslims of the Jammu region rallied round Choudhary Ghulam Abbas, President of the

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Muslim Conference, and the Hindus fell easy prey to the pro-Maharaja and communal ideology of the Jan Sangh. And since the Jan Sangh ideology appealed to the bourgeois Hindu sentiments, they came specially under its influence. The Hindu interests, the Hindu and Muslim jagirdars and big business favoured the continuance of the Maharaja's rule.

4. *The Vacillating Maharaja*

Hindus will keep the helm
and Muslims ply the oars
Let you together row ashore
the boat of the country.

—Mehjur

NO POWER ON earth could now withhold India from attaining independence from Britain. Negotiations between the British Government representatives and the Indian leaders were going on at an incredible speed. The chief protagonists in the political drama were Lord Mountbatten, Nehru and his team, and Jinnah with his comrades. Prior to Mountbatten taking over the negotiations, Attlee had sent a British Cabinet Mission for evolving a solution and had declared in no uncertain terms that India would be given independence as soon as the Indian leaders came to some amicable settlement among themselves. Ironically enough, while parleys were being conducted in New Delhi or Shimla, Nehru was arrested by the Maharaja of Kashmir. When the Cabinet Mission failed in bringing about an agreement between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League on a political formula for keeping free India united, Attlee sent Lord Wavell as Viceroy of India with instructions that he should try to reach a conclusion and tell the Indian leaders in unequivocal terms that any party which stood in the way of a solution would lose the support of the British Government. But Lord Wavell's efforts failed as did the Cabinet Mission.

A tougher man with wider powers was the need of the hour. And that man was Lord Mountbatten who was to be the last British Viceroy of British India and the first Governor-General of independent India. He worked hard and with utmost circumspection, bringing into the cold negotiations the warm human

element of his interesting and dynamic personality. He established personal rapport with most of the leaders, particularly with Nehru and ultimately made Nehru and Azad agree to the inevitability of partition. To Jinnah he told that he would not be allowed to eat the cake and have it too; if India was to be partitioned on religious grounds, Jinnah was to abide by the logical corollary of dividing the Punjab and Bengal on the same lines. Thus, having been hoisted with his own petard, Jinnah had to accept, what he characterised, a truncated Pakistan with 1,500 miles of corridorless distance between its two wings. On June 17, 1947 British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act, stipulating that transfer of power would take place on August 15 of the same year. The plan for the partition of the sub-continent was also published. This declaration intensified the communal frenzy throughout the country, particularly in the north and the east.

The Indian Independence Act provided that a State could accede to the Dominion of India by an Instrument of Accession executed by the ruler thereof. It also stipulated that the states acceding in this manner would become integral parts of the Union of India. This legal position was upheld by Jinnah. To prevent dislocation of arrangement with regard to customs, transit, communications, posts and telegraphs and other matters, it was provided that a princely state could enter into a standstill agreement with either or both the independent dominions. Again, in the absence of accession, the Union of India was responsible for the defence and protection of the Indian States since it had succeeded to the British Crown. The United Nations recognised the Union of India as the successor State of the pre-independence government of India by allowing it to continue its original membership, while admitting Pakistan, on her application, as a new member State.

It is obvious that Sheikh Abdullah as well as the Maharaja could not be indifferent spectators of revolutionary changes taking place on the political map of the sub-continent. The kaleidoscope was shifting fast and new patterns were in the process of forming themselves. Sheikh Abdullah as well as the Maharaja had to re-adjust their thinking to these patterns. New moves by these two players were inevitable on the political chessboard. Who would checkmate whom would be interesting to watch. But the

first objective of the National Conference was to secure freedom from Dogra rule and then alone would come the intricate problem of accession, intricate because of the geo-political situation of the State and the peculiar nature of its freedom struggle against a Hindu ruler. Though Sheikh Abdullah was clear in his mind, yet he did not want to act in a hurry. At the same time, he was compelled by the situation to consider the whole problem of freedom and accession in a new perspective. The legal and constitutional implications of accession meant that the entire state was now to be taken view of rather than a particular region. His attempt to isolate the Valley from the rest of the State and carve out an independent State or sultanate, as his detractors later alleged, had no legal or constitutional validity.

In the new situation, the Maharaja saw a chance to save his 'empire' for himself and his successors. The Kashmiris displayed restraint and poise during the most trying years of 1946 and 1947. On the eve of partition and for some time after, India witnessed the worst orgy of violence. Man turned into beast, children, women, old men, young people both Hindus and Muslims were killed in large numbers. Most of the villages and towns in the then united Punjab turned into ashes. The same carnage was repeated in Bengal. People were uprooted from their homes resulting in an unprecedented exodus on both sides. In the Jammu region too communal frenzy took a big toll of lives. But Kashmiri Muslims remained cool and not a single incident occurred to tarnish the traditional image of secularism and communal harmony in the Valley. The credit for the same goes to the leadership of the time. Kashmir became a beacon-light of communal harmony for the rest of the country. When Gandhi, a frustrated man, visited the Valley in July 1947, he discovered the ray of light here alone.

The stumbling block towards the goal of accession of Kashmir was not the political leadership in the State but the vacillating Maharaja himself. It is probable that he and his advisers believed that this policy would pay dividends. Our hindsight makes it easier for us today to analyse the Maharaja's psychology at that time. His schizophrenia consisted in his faulty interpretation of reality. His panic had sought refuge in a complacent frame of mind. His statements and actions reveal

him to be self-opinionated, gullible, ever ready to lend his ears to 'courtiers' when they offered him advise gilt in sycophantic language. It may also be true that he was really in a dilemma. His state was contiguous to Pakistan and had a predominantly Muslim population. But there is evidence to prove that this was more of an excuse than a dilemma, for the Maharaja knew that Sheikh Abdullah would be glad if he gave his people complete freedom and acceded to India. Moreover, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, right-hand man of Sheikh Abdullah, had escaped imprisonment at the time the Quit Kashmir slogan was raised. He was then outside the State and it was he who issued the statement that the Quit Kashmir slogan only meant that a responsible government should be set up in the State and never meant doing any harm to the royal family.

Hence, the Maharaja's vacillation had little to do with the fear that if he acceded to India, the Muslims would resent his action or that Pakistan would create mischief. Most of the States, by now, had acceded to India or Pakistan. Only Hari Singh and the Nizam of Hyderabad in the south could not make up their minds. In the complicated issue of accession, Hari Singh probably saw a chance to retrieve his lost ground. By playing possum, he thought he could get away from the clutches of the lion and took the issue of accession as a Godsend to assert his sovereign right on the territory and people of Kashmir. He refused to accept the advise profferred by Lord Mountbatten when he met him on June 19, 1947 in Srinagar. Campbell-Johnson records that Lord Mountbatten advised the ruler to ascertain the will of the people and accede to India or Pakistan and never to declare himself independent. This was the most opportune time for decision and had the advice been accepted by the intractable Maharaja, much of the blood-shed that followed the three Indo-Pak wars could have been avoided. The Viceroy even assured the Maharaja that if he acceded to Pakistan, India would have no objection. And if he chose to accede to India, there would be no interference from Pakistan because Pakistan was yet to be born. "The only trouble that could have been raised was by non-accession, and this was unfortunately the very course followed by the Maharaja."¹

The Maharaja thought it wiser, therefore, to enter into a stand-still agreement with both the dominions in the fond hope

that perhaps this arrangement would be a permanent one. How far Pakistan, or for that matter India, would respect the stand-still agreement, never struck the mind of the ruler. The subsequent events which followed close on the heels of the State's stand-still agreement with Pakistan clearly proved that the Maharaja's approach was either naive or too unrealistic. In any case, the Maharaja contacted both the dominions and Pakistan, which had a sinister clandestine project up the sleeve, at once responded positively to the request and as Sir Mohammad Zaffarullah declared, a stand-still agreement was arrived at between the Jammu and Kashmir State and Pakistan "with regard to the States communications, supplies, post office and telegraphic arrangements."²² A similar agreement with India was in the process of being negotiated when Pakistan violated the agreement even before the ink on the document could dry.

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5. *Indo-Pak War 1947 and Accession*

The real character of a State is revealed in its Constitution. The Indian Constitution has set before the country the goal of secular democracy based on justice, freedom and equality for all without distinction. This is the bedrock of modern democracy. This should meet the argument that the Muslims of Kashmir cannot have security in India where the large majority of population are Hindus. Any unnatural cleavage between religious groups is the legacy of imperialism and no modern State can afford to encourage artificial divisions if it is to achieve progress and prosperity. The Indian Constitution has amply and finally repudiated the concept of a religious State, which is a throwback to medievalism, by guaranteeing equality of rights of all citizens irrespective of their religion, colour, caste or class. The national movement in our State naturally gravitates towards these principles of secular democracy. The people here will never accept a principle which seems to favour the interests of one religion or social group against another. This affinity in political principles, as well as in past associations and our common path of suffering in the cause of freedom, must be weighed properly while deciding the future of the State.¹

—Sheikh Abdullah

BEFORE THE tribal raiders, as Pakistan euphemistically chose to call the invaders, entered into the Jammu and Kashmir territory, the Maharaja had deployed his troops near the borders. The urgent reason for this deployment was that local revolts had started against the Dogra rulers in Poonch and Muzaffarabad. It was reported that a parallel government had been set up on the outskirts of Muzaffarabad. Thus, the State troops were tied down in the difficult mountainous terrain, and could not be moved at short notice. This had actually been done on the advice of a British officer, Major-General Scott. The Maharaja was so complacent that he never thought it could have

been the result of a collusion between his enemies. At least this could render logistics unmanageable. Whatever the truth, it goes to the credit of Scott that he sent to the Maharaja regular reports of infiltration by tribesmen. These were received on September 4, 13, 17, 18, and 20 of 1947. The tribal raiders had been provided ammunition, weapons and transport by the Pakistan government. The Maharaja awoke from his dream and wrote letters of protest to the Pakistan authorities. As the tribesmen succeeded in pushing deep inside the State territory, spreading death and destruction in their wake, they were joined by regular Pakistani soldiers under the command of Pakistani officers. A little before the major thrust by Pakistan, the Maharaja felt that he had burnt his boats and that only Sheikh Abdullah could influence Indian leaders and save the Valley from an impending conflagration. The Maharaja, therefore, released Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues on September 29.

The events that followed the clandestine raid and the consequent release of Sheikh Abdullah were of grave importance. Momentous decisions were to be taken and time was moving fast. The Pakistani raiders had already consolidated their positions, and in spite of the resistance offered by the State's forces, were advancing into the interior of the State. Whether Pakistan should be allowed this vandalism unchecked and to set the hearths and homes of Kashmiris ablaze was a question agitating the mind of Sheikh Abdullah. But at the same time he was aware of the symbolic nature of the secular outlook of the Kashmiri Muslims and its future repercussions in the sub-continent. Six-and-half crore Muslims still lived in India and one-and-half crore Hindus still lived in East Pakistan. Kashmir's accession either side would have far-reaching effects. But Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues did not address themselves to the features of accession. The question of accession was, at the moment, of secondary importance. The people of Kashmir were to decide the dominion they would accede to. But how could they do so unless they were free? In his first speech after his release, Sheikh Abdullah told his people, "with regard to accession I have an open mind and my ears are open." He did oppose the two-nation theory, but he assured his people on October 8, 1947, "Accession is of little importance. Freedom is more important. We do not want to join either dominion as slaves,"² and asked

the Pakistani leaders not to "provoke us."

But Pakistan did provoke the Kashmiri Muslims first, by aggression and, second, by the haughty indifference towards G.M. Sadiq, Sheikh Abdullah's emissary, sent to Pakistan for talks. Sadiq met Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, requesting him to stop direct and indirect help to the raiders and to hold discussions with the Kashmiri leaders regarding accession after withdrawing the raiders from the State territory. Fates must have been laughing over the sincere efforts made by Sheikh Abdullah to win the friendship of Pakistan because the latter made no positive response to reason. On the other hand, Sadiq received evasive replies and returned empty-handed. The Pakistani authorities must have mocked at the simplicity of the Kashmiri Muslims, being sure about the success of their project under the overall command of Major-General Akbar Khan disguised as General Tariq.

The Pakistanis, by now, had taken advantage of the minor local revolts by the border Muslims against the ruler and instigated the frontier tribesmen to rush to the rescue of their brethren in Jammu and Kashmir. While a holy war was declared, plans were made for an invasion. The complete economic blockade of the Jammu and Kashmir State by Pakistan and the multi-pronged military thrust had, it seems, convinced Pakistani leaders that the State was now as good as a part of Pakistan. And also loot to boot. Already, within the State territory, a full-scale military invasion was conducted on October 22, 1947. While Pakistan feigned complete ignorance and non-involvement, the so-called tribesmen fought with sophisticated weapons. It, of course, goes to their credit that they did not say that the tribals had stolen weapons and ammunition from Pakistani arsenals.

The raiders captured Muzaffarabad in just one day. They burnt the buildings and looted the inhabitants. There were many casualties of the State forces. Thousands of young women either burnt themselves alive or jumped into the Krishenganga. The truckloads of blood-thirsty soldiers descended into the Valley like the hordes of Chengiz Khan. Baramulla, fifty kilometres from Srinagar, fell to the raiders on October 24. The town was sacked. Killing, arson, rape and loot were let loose on the population and no distinction was made between Muslims, Hindus, Christians or Sikhs. Three thousand citizens lay dead, women

committed *jowhar* not by burning, but in the waters of the Jhelum. Even nuns were not spared. The Assistant Mother Superior, three nuns, a British officer's pregnant wife were raped and butchered. According to Father Shanks, "The tribesmen—great, wild, black beasts they were—came shooting from the hills on both sides of [Baramulla] . . . so many were killed—nurse Philomena, Mother Superior Aldertrude, Assistant Mother Teresalina, Colonel Dykes, Mrs Dykes. . . ."³ After they had satisfied their lust for gold, women and money, these wolves were told by their Pakistani commanders to fan out east, west and straight on to the Jhelum Valley road leading to Srinagar.

During this carnage, the Kashmiri Muslims saved the honour and lives of their Hindu neighbours in remote villages of the Valley. Nor was an average Kashmiri happy over the occupation of their fertile and beautiful land by these barbarians, no matter if they professed the same religion. Islam never favoured intolerance. At least the Islam they knew so intimately for centuries had taught them tolerance, peace, and universal brotherhood. Thus, during their search for kafirs, the tribal invaders met strong resistance from Kashmiri Muslims many of whom even lost their lives playing knight errants for their Hindu neighbours. The fact that they did not physically fight against the raiders was because they had no arms. The temper of Kashmiri Muslims in Baramullah was, however, exemplified in the martyrdom of Maqbool Shirwani, a young National Conference leader. Sensing danger to Srinagar, Shirwani 'acted' the part of a pro-Pakistan Kashmiri Muslim enthusiast. He 'posed' to act as guide for the tribesmen to show them the shortest route to Srinagar but led them astray thereby delaying their arrival in Srinagar by many hours. When some local Judas betrayed his real identity and intentions to the raiders, the new rulers of Baramulla caught hold of him. When he refused to recant his faith in secularism, he was nailed like Christ to a tree near the central Baramulla crossing. Gandhi observed on Shirwani's martyrdom, "This was a martyrdom of which any one—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or any other would be proud."⁴

Sheikh Abdullah and his comrades who had dedicated the best years of their lives to the freedom movement were stunned by what Pakistan had done. Were all their sacrifices coming to

this? Both the dream and the dreamer would be shattered to pieces if the barbarian hordes captured Srinagar. There were three apparently insurmountable issues—first, the Maharaja's vacillatory attitude; second, the absence of strong opposition to the progress of the Pakistani raiders towards Srinagar; and third, the embarrassing position of the Union of India government. The only weapons in the arsenal of the Kashmiri to fight the aggressors were their unity and faith in secularism and the determination to live as free men and not as slaves. And this determination was personified in Sheikh Abdullah who assured his people that Allah would surely save them, but he made them realise that God would help them only when they did not lose courage. The people rallied round their leader and promised him their cooperation to maintain communal harmony even if the barbarians captured the whole of the Valley. Communal harmony was the *sine qua non* needed to meet the catastrophe which, he told his people, was impending.

Sheikh Abdullah gave instructions for the forming of resistance squads and inter-communal bodies for the maintenance of peace in rural areas as well as the urban regions of the Valley. A National Militia was organised in Srinagar. Young men and women from all communities joined this organisation. It received the active participation of the male members of the National Conference. Among the ladies who worked in close collaboration with their brethren the names of Mahmooda Ahmed Ali Shah, Sajda Begum, Zainab Begum and Lakhwara are worth recounting.

The militia squads marched through the dark streets of Srinagar with a four-fold objective: to resist the invaders; to boost the morale of the people; to maintain communal peace; and to detect saboteurs and fifth columnists. The three slogans for the people were: *Hamlavar khabardar, hum Kashmiri hain tayaar*—Be warned you raiders, we Kashmiris are ready to fight you; *Yeh mulk hamara hai iski hifazat hum kareingei*—This country belongs to us, we know how to defend it; *Sher-i-Kashmir ka kya irshad? Hindu, Muslim, Sikh irihaad*—What is the teaching of Sher-i-Kashmir? Unity among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

Sheikh Abdullah was an embodiment of patience and courage during those tense days. He would move from place to place, address huge gatherings, and advise them not to lose their sense of poise in spite of provocation. He advised them to fight for

every inch of their beautiful land, and above all for their cultural and moral heritage. He told them that the raiders would incite them to communal violence against the Hindu minority in the name of Islam and that Pakistan had sent the raiders not to save Islam in Kashmir but to grab it by force and enslave the people. Those were days when darkness filled the hearts of the people. On October 23, 1947, Sheikh Abdullah spoke to an audience at Pratap Park, in Srinagar. This could have been his last speech to the Kashmiris if Maqbool Shirwani had not delayed the arrival of the raiders in the city. He infused courage into the hearts of the people and said, "Let us place ourselves in the hands of Allah. He shall save our Valley." One felt encouraged, but one could not miss feeling that the Lion too felt visibly upset.

Sheikh Abdullah, by now familiar with the psychology of the Maharaja, lost no time in establishing contact with New Delhi. He met Nehru and asked for military assistance. The Indian Government knew that he was the true representative of the people of the State, but they were limited by legal and constitutional constraints. The Maharaja was in complete quandary. He requested the Indian Government for military assistance to repulse the invader. On this point, at least, the Maharaja and Sheikh Abdullah were moving on parallel rails, not to meet at infinity, but in New Delhi. Political manoeuvres at break-neck speed indicated the gravity of the situation with the enemy at the very gates of Srinagar. The slightest delay in the negotiations would mean utter chaos in the State and the forcible annexation of Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan. Had not Sheikh Abdullah taken an initiative, the Indian Government would have asked the Maharaja to seek the former's approval and endorsement of his request for military aid.

The chief protagonists in this most exciting and breath-taking political drama were the Maharaja, Sheikh Abdullah, and the Union of India. The human agents symbolising great national and international forces kept shuttling between New Delhi and Srinagar. The pivotal role was played by Sheikh Abdullah while the Maharaja, represented by Mehar Chand Mahajan, his Prime Minister, and V.P. Menon, representing the Indian Government, played secondary though important roles. The Indian Government held two basic views on the matter. While the Maharaja

was essential for the legal and constitutional aspect, Sheikh Abdullah was important for the democratic aspect.

When Sheikh Abdullah, representing the people of Kashmir, and Maharaja Hari Singh, representing the legal government of the State, approached the Indian government for assistance the Defence Committee met, and "... considered that the most immediate necessity was to rush in arms and ammunition already requested by the Kashmir Government, which would enable the local population in Srinagar to put up some defence against the raiders. . . . The problem of troop reinforcement was considered, and Mountbatten urged that it would be dangerous to send in any troops unless Kashmir had first offered to accede."⁵

The circumstances which finally led to the signing of the Instrument of Accession reveal the workings of the minds of the parties concerned. The Maharaja sent Mahajan to New Delhi with the documents. When Mahajan told Nehru that he had the instructions that if India did not accept the State's accession, he should contact Pakistan, Nehru is reported to have lost temper. When Sheikh Abdullah, who happened to be in the ante-chamber, heard what had been going on, rushed out and persuaded Nehru to accept the accession. The Maharaja had expressed his intention "at once to set up an interim government and ask Sheikh Abdullah to carry on the responsibilities in the emergency with my Prime Minister."⁶ The Governor-General communicated to the Maharaja the acceptance of accession on behalf of the Government of India, but in his letter, he said, "Consistent with [the Indian Government] policy that in case of any State where the issue of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the State, it is my Government's wish that as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invader, the question of the State's accession should be settled by the reference to the people."⁷

The signing of the Instrument of Accession brings, in retrospect, many attitudes and forces to the surface. First, the Maharaja's reluctance to hand over power at once to the people's representatives. This reservation of his is proved by the fact that

whereas he was prepared to appoint Sheikh Abdullah as head of the interim Government, he kept the institution of Prime Minister of the State alive. Second, the imposition by the Government of India of the condition that accession should finally be settled by reference to people proves beyond doubt the bona fides of Indian leaders. This was remarkable for a new State to do so, because the accession was legally and constitutionally complete. Third, the signing of the Instrument of Accession is also indicative of the personality of Sheikh Abdullah. Though a radical, he proved ready for compromise and adjustment within the framework of the principle of freedom. His complete identity of views with the Government of India, that the question of accession be referred to the people after normal conditions were restored, shows how sincere he was to the people of Kashmir. Respecting the religious sentiments of the masses who reposed complete trust in his leadership, Sheikh Abdullah knew that this clause in the letter of the Governor-General would give the Kashmiri people time to weigh the democratic ideology of India, and the theocratic and aggressive ideology of Pakistan. This in spite of the fact that the Pakistan authorities had stabbed Kashmiri Muslims in the back by sending armed infiltrators, and also by the contempt shown by Pakistan Government to Sheikh Abdullah's emissaries. It is probable that Sheikh Abdullah did not want to give the impression that he was pushing the Kashmiri Muslims into India despite the fact that *Dawn*, the semi-official daily of Pakistan, had commented on August 24, 1947, "the time has come to tell the Maharaja of Kashmir that he must make his choice and choose Pakistan. . . . Should Kashmir fail to join Pakistan the gravest possible trouble will inevitably ensue."¹⁸ Nor is it impossible that in spite of his complete secular outlook and positive vote for Nehru's India, Sheikh Abdullah harboured some doubts about the future set up of secular India, and hence kept a way open for retreat.

The signing of the Instrument of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh and its endorsement by Sheikh Abdullah was a much-needed green signal for Indian forces to be air-lifted to Srinagar and the first contingent of soldiers landed there on October 27, 1947, under the command of Lt-Col D.R. Rai. Meanwhile, the leadership of

the National Conference had kept up the morale of the people. Squads of the National Militia had maintained law and order, and the essential services, while keeping a constant vigil on strategic points.

The appearance of the Indian aircraft lifted the clouds of despondency from the minds of the people. Hindus and Muslims saw in them some hope for survival against imminent threat to Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah proved as good as his word. Confidence returned to the sinking heart. All available transport had been geared into a state of preparedness. Local civilian drivers came forward at the call of Sheikh Abdullah to carry the Indian soldiers to the battle fronts while reinforcements were rushed to the Valley by road. Three decisive battles were fought—one at Shalteng, five kilometres from Srinagar, the second at a village three kilometres from the airport, and the third, in the north of the Aanchal Lake. Beaten from three sides, surprised by armoured cars, and strafing from the air, the raiders took to their heels and the threat to Srinagar was averted. Baramulla was recaptured on November 8, 1947. The greater part of the credit to push the invader out in so short a time goes to the Indian army. But the part played by the Kashmiri Muslims was equally great. It was the Kashmiri Muslims who guided the Indian soldiers on different routes and offered them their cooperation. The rapport between the National Conference leaders and Indian army officers was exemplary. It was the first liberation war that Indian soldiers had been called to fight and in which the common people had fought the enemy shoulder to shoulder with them.

Pakistan escalated the war covering almost the entire territory of the State. Strategic places like the Rajouri-Poonch belt, Jhangar and Nowshera in the Jammu region, Tithwal, Ladakh, Gilgit and Kargil were the targets for the Pakistan army. The Indian army had to move across rugged and inhospitable terrain, sometimes establishing their piquets at heights ranging between 12,000 and 18,000 feet above sea level. During the entire operations, they received maximum cooperation from the emergency administration headed by Sheikh Abdullah. By the end of November 1948, the Indian army had consolidated its positions by wresting strategic places from Pakistani occupation.

India strained every nerve to make Pakistan realize that fight-

ing a war would weaken both the dominions, militarily and economically. But failing in their efforts to get the aggression vacated from the State which was now an integral part of India, the Government of India lodged a strong protest with the Security Council on January 1, 1948. Pakistan at once denied having hand in the invasion. This in spite of the fact that India had captured one Pakistani Lt-Col Sikander Khan and some other ranks together with vast quantities of Pakistani arms and ammunition. Sheikh Abdullah was one of the members of the Indian delegation headed by Indian States Minister Sir N. Gopalaswami Ayyengar. He exposed the hollowness of the Pakistani claims over Kashmir because of its predominant Muslim population. He emphatically rejected the Pakistani contention that the Muslim people of Kashmir had risen in revolt against the tyranny of their Hindu ruler. He told the international community that India represented the secular traditions while Pakistan believed in the concept of medieval theocratic statehood. Again, Sheikh Abdullah pointed out that while India agreed that the issue of accession could not be settled without ascertaining the wishes of the people, Jinnah declared that it was the ruler alone who could make the choice of accession. Now that both the ruler and the people of Kashmir had opted for India, what prevented Pakistan recognizing the reality and vacating its illegal occupation of large portions of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir State? Sir Zaffarullah Khan, leader of the Pakistani delegation "emphatically denied" Pakistan having committed aggression or even having given aid to the tribesmen. The Indian Government agreed, with some reservations, to the United Nations proposal of sending a five-member commission to mediate between India and Pakistan. The commission got the first shock on reaching the sub-continent when the same Zaffarullah Khan "informed the Commission that three Pakistani brigades had been on Kashmir territory since May" for what was euphemistically termed "self-defence." The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) said, "As the presence of troops of Pakistan in the territory of J&K State constitutes a material change in the situation, since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council, the Government of Pakistan agrees to withdraw its troops from the State."⁹ After many a gimmick at the international forum

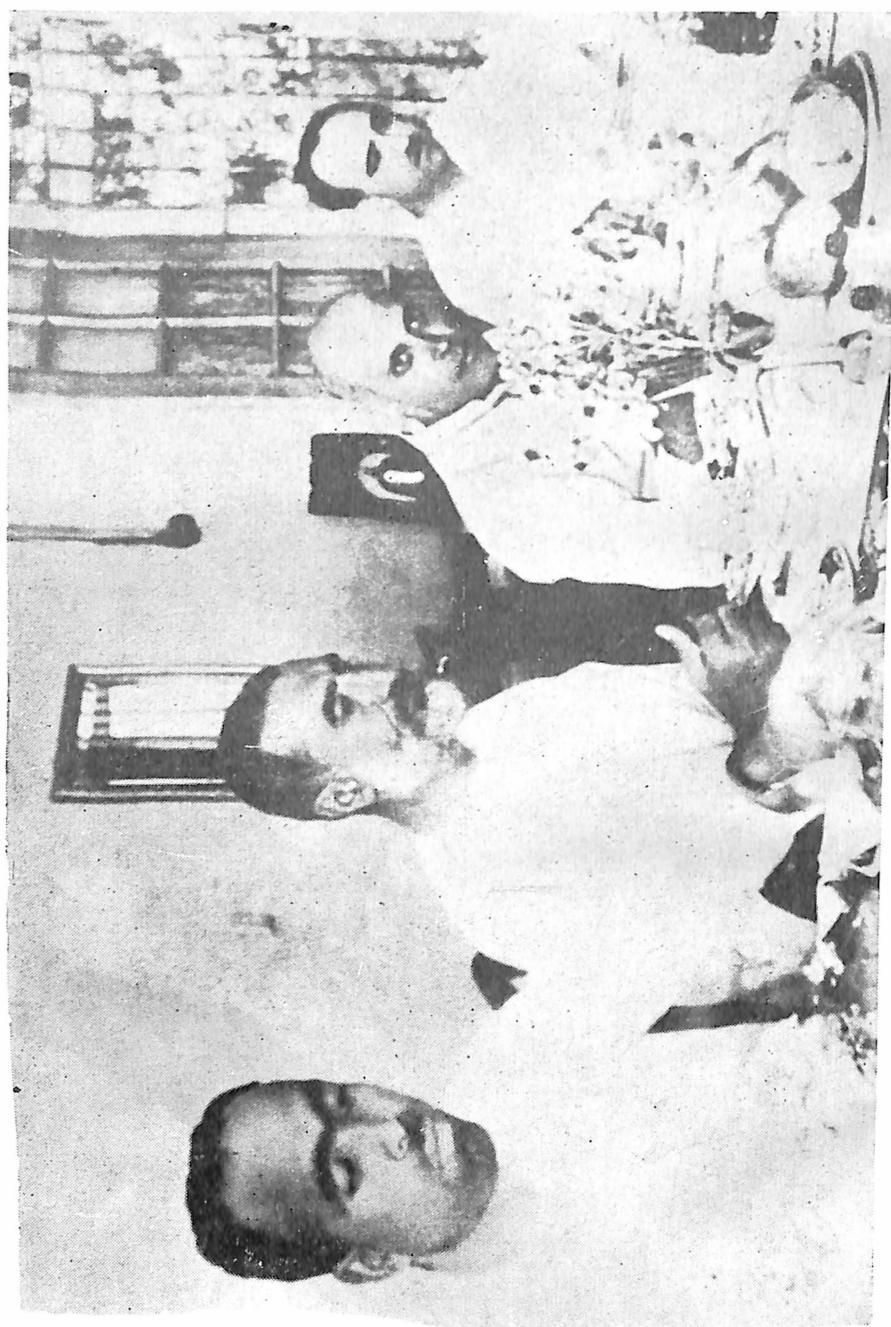
and seeing that playing the hide-and-seek game had failed, Pakistan agreed to a cease-fire to become effective from January 1, 1949.

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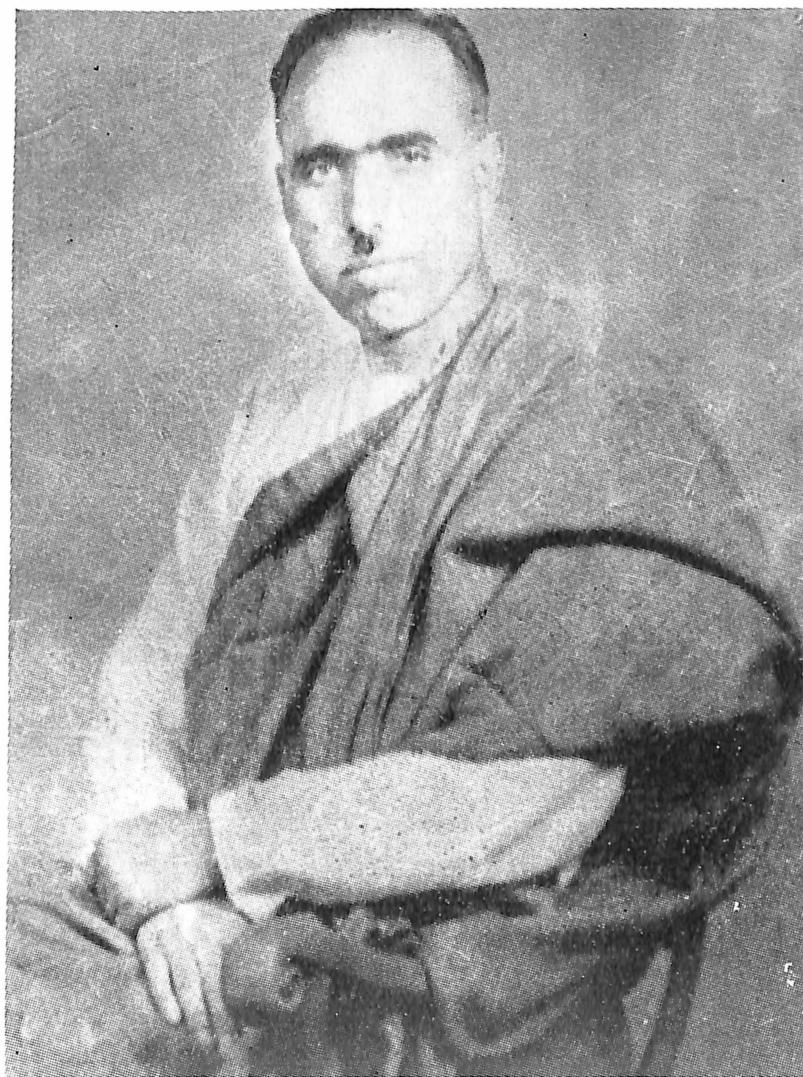
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Sheikh Abdullah (centre) at Batot jail in 1933. Mirza Afzal Beg and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad are also in the picture



*Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah with Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan,
Jawaharlal Nehru and P.N. Chopra, 1940*



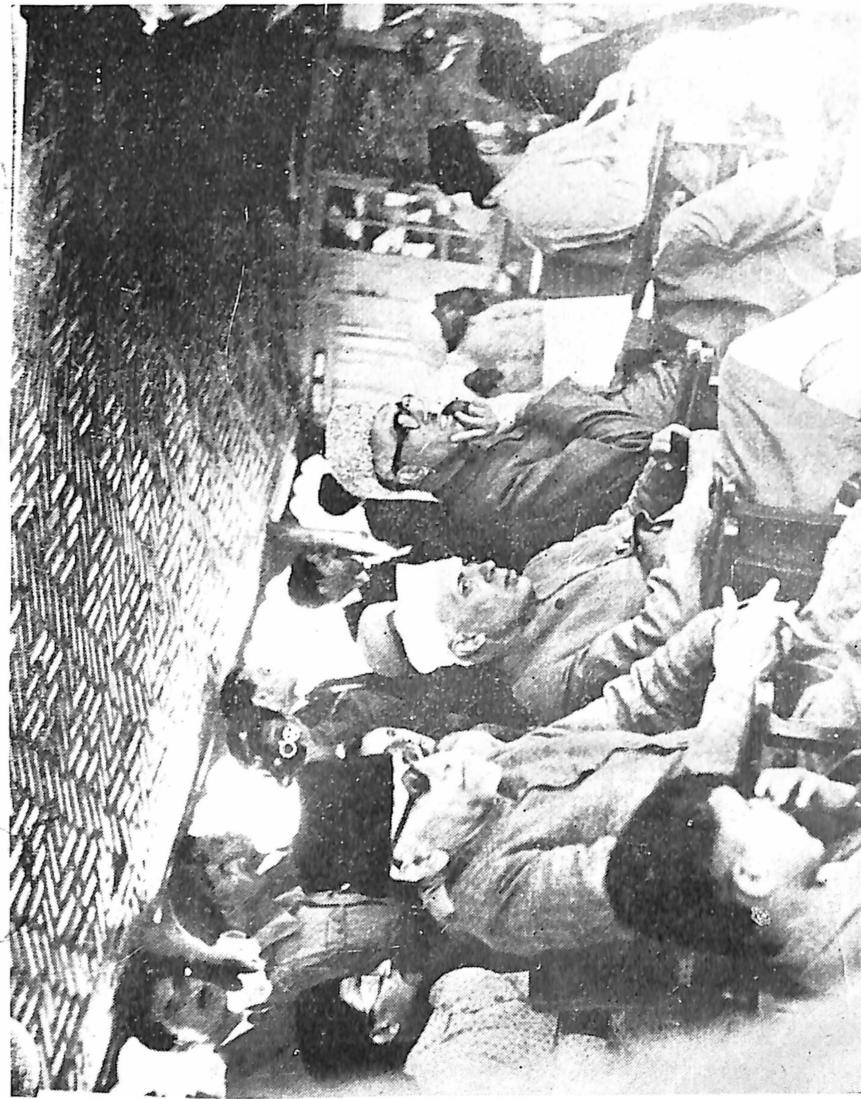
Sheikh Abdullah—From an early photograph



Sheikh Abdullah with Indira Priyadarshini in the early forties



Public ratification of accession—Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru during the historic Lal Chowk speech, 1948



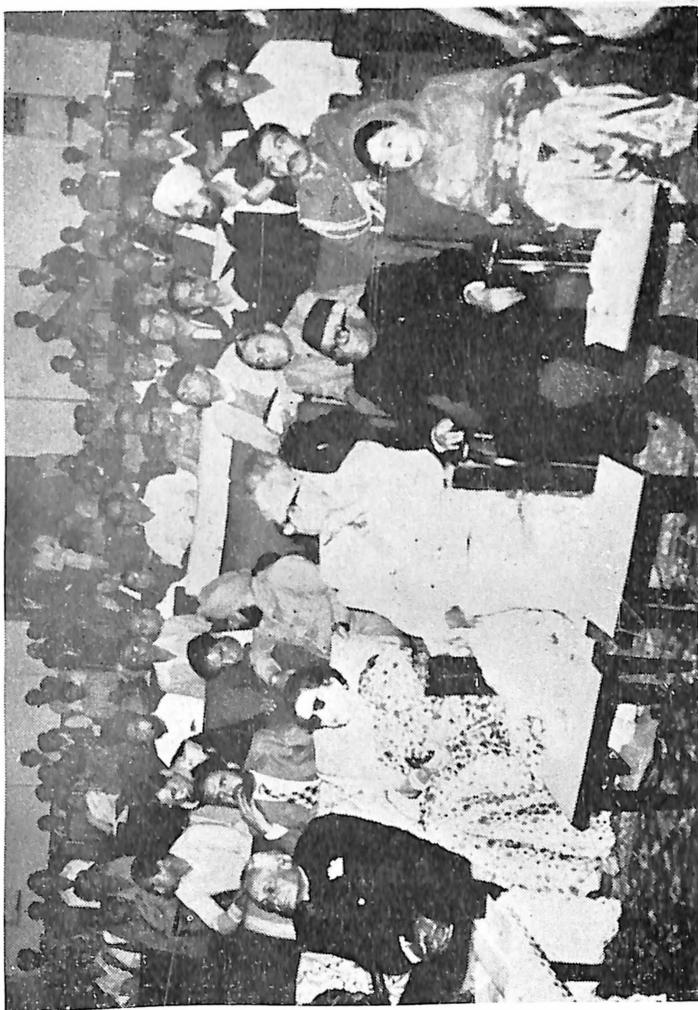
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah watching water sports at Nehru Park in Dal Lake, 1950



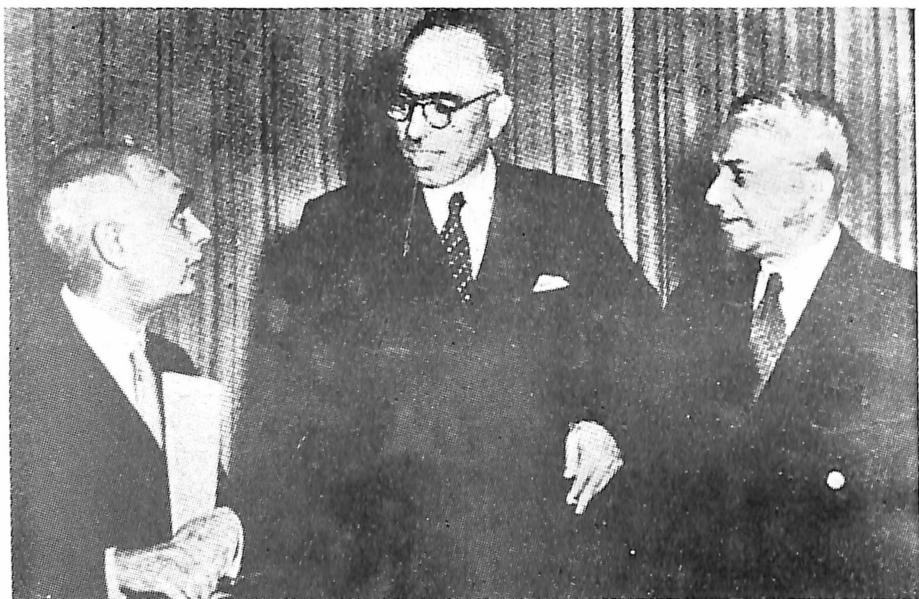
Radical land reforms—Land to the Tiller. Sheikh Abdullah as Prime Minister and Mirza Afzal Beg as Revenue Minister sign the documents



Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi with Chief Minister Sheikh Abdullah at a function in Srinagar, 1975



*Sheikh Abdullah flanked by B.K. Nehru and Mrs Shobha Nehru (right),
President Sanjiva Reddy and Begum Abdullah (left), watching a cultural
show at a local Government College*



*Sheikh Abdullah with Sir B.N. Rao and Girja Shankar
Bajpai at the UNO*



*Sheikh Abdullah's last meeting with
Nehru before he left for Pakistan
in 1964*



*Last Resting Place near the
Hazratbal Shrine on the
picturesque Dal Lake*

6. *The Triangular Conflict*

Sheikh Abdullah is the true master of Kashmir... If the people of Kashmir do not favour Sheikh Abdullah nobody can rule there, neither we, nor the Maharaja, nor Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, nor his comrades—the people alone can decide who will rule over them.

—Mahatma Gandhi

THE JAMMU & KASHMIR State's accession to India was endorsed by Sheikh Abdullah in good faith and a spirit of willing cooperation. He was, in fact, the chief architect of this relationship. At the same time he agreed to be head of the Emergency Administration in spite of the fact that the Maharaja had a *de jure* Prime Minister. He, naturally, took it for granted that he would be the *de facto* Prime Minister and would be allowed to work without interference by the Maharaja or his Prime Minister. He thought that the Maharaja would act only as a titular head like the British Crown in English parliamentary government. He was given to understand that the people's true representatives would take over the reins of government at the end of the Emergency Administration. But to his astonishment and disappointment, he discovered that the Maharaja was not to relinquish his hold on the State administration so easily and early as he had envisaged. Moreover, the Hindu vested interests joined the Maharaja in creating problems for the Emergency Administration. All Hindu communalists of the Jammu region joined hands with him to baulk every effort of Sheikh Abdullah to give the State an efficient administration during the trying times of war on the one hand, and economic recession on the other.

Conflicts surfaced from the beginning, with Sheikh Abdullah unwillingly providing some irritants. For instance, he started Muslimizing the administration by appointing a Muslim as the

Inspector-General of Police. Probably, he was keen to show to the Muslims of Kashmir that now some of their own men would man important posts and that the Maharaja was sincere and honest in making him the head of the Emergency Administration. But he was taken aback when the Maharaja made no bones of his displeasure at such appointments, even going to the extent of stating that it was done, perhaps, to murder him. Mahajan, his Prime Minister, characterized Sheikh Abdullah's methods as "Hitlerian" and did not "wish to be associated with this gangster rule."¹ Tension prevailed, and in the dualism of the administration, urgent problems remained unresolved in a state of deadlock.

Sheikh Abdullah found himself hemmed in on all sides. When Sardar Patel, Central Minister for States, was informed about what was brewing in Kashmir, he told the Maharaja that there was no wisdom in "standing on old ideas of dignity and prestige." Every action of Sheikh Abdullah reported to Central leaders was distorted. For instance, there was nothing wrong in Sheikh Abdullah's attempt to win over Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas of the Muslim Conference because this would have helped him win over the Jammu region Muslims who were avowedly against the State's accession to India. The Maharaja construed this move as anti-Indian and hence communal, and so reported to the Centre. Mahajan's letters, obviously at the behest of the Maharaja, reveal, in retrospect, how the latter had not reconciled himself to the political change and that he had so soon forgotten his part in precipitating the Indo-Pak war. Sheikh Abdullah was once again charged with a communal tilt in his policy because he appointed a Muslim accounts officer as the State's chief secretary.

In fact, Sheikh Abdullah's every move was sought to be checkmated. It was forgotten that he was a revolutionary and had to carry the masses with him, particularly the Muslim masses. He knew that they had been exploited and ignored for centuries and hence had to be given confidence and honour. It was no crime, therefore, to bring the educated Muslims to the forefront to restore the community to its lost prestige. At the same time, he wanted to provide immediate economic relief to the people and could brook no opposition to his objectives. He was aware that the Emergency Administration was just a

stopgap arrangement and very soon Mahajan would have to go and the Maharaja cut to size.

Being a leader of the masses, Sheikh Abdullah had a pronounced ego. In his eagerness to carry the State towards economic rehabilitation, he swept aside all opposition. But the Maharaja-Mahajan combine manoeuvred to frustrate his aims. Thus, the wheels of administration got stuck in the mire of duality. Nehru suggested the Mysore model of government at this stage. Gopalaswami Ayyangar informed the Maharaja that it was "not possible for Sheikh Abdullah and Mehar Chand Mahajan to work together in the same Government hereafter."² The Maharaja insisted on his pound of flesh and wrote to the Government of India: "Sheikh Abdullah should be told that he cannot strike too hard a bargain. I have gone to a limit beyond which I cannot go."³ These lines mirror the recalcitrant attitude of the Maharaja and his still autocratic style of functioning. Gopalaswami Ayyangar accordingly told Sardar Patel that the situation demanded that the hands of Sheikh Abdullah be strengthened. When a final appeal was made to the Maharaja he blurted out, "Sorry, cannot agree." This extremely rigid attitude made even the otherwise sober Ayyangar write to Patel: "I cannot proceed with this foolish man, not having any power for putting pressure on him."⁴

Sheikh Abdullah could not understand the Maharaja whom he considered a titular head. As head of the Emergency Administration and would-be Prime Minister of the State, it was impossible for him to work as long as the Maharaja, Mahajan, or both in collusion, made his task difficult. Yet, he adopted a conciliatory course, though he was not prepared to compromise his principles. That Sheikh Abdullah and his party adopted a correct course of action during the most crucial transitional period is confirmed by what passed between Patel and Nehru who felt that the Maharaja's behaviour would make Sheikh Abdullah suspect the secular nature of democratic India. It was feared that Hindu chauvinism of the Jammu region, influenced by what happened in the Punjab, would surely influence the thinking of Sheikh Abdullah. Patel, therefore, suggested the immediate removal of Mahajan. But there stood, like an impregnable wall, the intractable Maharaja, and so Nehru was obliged to intervene. He told Patel that the Maharaja had created "a complete deadlock."

According to him, Sheikh Abdullah and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed had taken “a very sensible view” of the situation. Nehru characterized Mahajan’s presence as “a constant irritant to various elements as well as to Sheikh Abdullah’s party.”⁵ He envisaged that only a drastic step would resolve the tangle. Nehru observed that the most significant event in the situation was that arms had been sent for Sheikh Abdullah’s Home Guards, but these were “kept back and distributed to RSS people.”⁶ Nehru said that he was “inclined to think that Mahajan sympathises with their [RSS] activities and perhaps helps them.”⁷

Even Mahatma Gandhi specifically held the Maharaja responsible for the communal trouble in Jammu. “Following upon the Punjab upheavals in October 1947 Muslim evacuee convoys going out of Jammu were attacked and massacred by non-Muslims who at that time were directed by the RSS. The State army played a very discreditable part in these massacres. When Gandhi came to know of it, he said that the Maharaja as the absolute ruler could not be absolved from the responsibility for such happenings; he was unfit to continue to hold power. He should, therefore, either abdicate or remain only as the titular head, even as the British King is; full power *de jure* and *de facto* being transferred to the people. . . .”⁸ But “Mahatma Gandhi was even more uncompromising than the Kashmiri leaders themselves seemed to be at the time.”⁹ Speaking to Sheikh Abdullah in the last week of December 1947, he had said, “How dare you weaken on the issue of curtailment of the Maharaja’s power without betraying your trust?”¹⁰ In spite of everybody in favour of being tough with the Maharaja, Sheikh Abdullah was always inclined towards respect for him, only if he did not interfere in the affairs of the day-to-day administration saying that “the ruler of the State can have the same position as that of the British King.”¹¹ He further declared that, “we are repeatedly offering a basis for a compromise. . . . I wish the Prince rules over the minds and not the bodies of the people.”¹²

It is tempting to analyse the working of the Maharaja’s mind during this period. Apparently of a sound mind, his behaviour and letters reveal that he was not master of poise he was supposed to possess as a ruler, and appeared to be a bundle of contradictions and inconsistencies. At least there was a canyon gulf between reality and illusion, which his mind could not

bridge. He it was who had signed the Instrument of Accession, and yet it was he who challenged the legality of the Government of India representing the Jammu and Kashmir case in the Security Council.

One wonders whether the Maharaja had completely forgotten that the accession of the State to India was a *fait accompli*, legally and constitutionally, and that the Jammu and Kashmir State was, therefore, an integral part of India. He also asserted his right to the international aspect of the Kashmir problem towards the end of January 1948 and wrote to Patel that without consulting him and his government "no commitment should be made before the Security Council."¹³ Again, he informed the Government of India that he had acceded to the Indian Union, "with the idea that the Union will not let me down and the State will remain acceded to the Union and my position and that of my dynasty would remain secure."¹⁴ Persecution mania, sense of guilt, fear of nemesis, egotism, struggle for existence—all seemed to have been hanging heavy on his consciousness, and he gave the impression of a person catching at a straw. His one time professions of patriotism and sweet reasonableness now seemed hollow and he threatened to "withdraw the accession" he had made to India. Blowing hot and cold, he finally left the entire matter to Patel "personally." One wonders whether he was writing a political billet-doux to Patel? Then, after another brief interval, he offered to leave the State.

Not that Sheikh Abdullah was behaving ideally. He did not weigh the case of the Maharaja in an all-India context. The Union Government was obliged to treat the Kashmir Maharaja in the same manner as it would treat the maharajas, rajas and nawabs of other six hundred and odd princely states. The policy was to be uniform, but it was yet to be evolved. Hence, the Maharaja's suggestion, that he would leave the State on certain conditions, was termed "feasible" by Nehru, who wanted the Maharaja "to stay on for the present."¹⁵ When Mahajan was relieved, a meeting was arranged through V.P. Menon between the Maharaja and Sheikh Abdullah. This paved the way for the setting up of a popular ministry in March 1948 with Sheikh Abdullah as Prime Minister. Through V. Shankar, Private Secretary to the Minister of States, Nehru advised the Maharaja to act in a responsible manner with his new cabinet. He knew

that if the Maharaja was allowed to be strong enough "to obstruct and oppose the people's representatives, that will weaken our case very greatly and come in the way of our winning the people of Kashmir to our side."¹⁶

The pro-Abdullah stance of the Nehru Government was thus obvious, though it was nothing but a reflection of their democratic approach to the problem. It was, therefore, expected that Sheikh Abdullah would show a little more patience with the apparently eccentric and erratic Maharaja. India was at this time engaged in the herculean task of merging or readjusting the princely states territories with the rest of India freed from British control. The process involved delicate problems of geography, language and race, besides the intricate legal implications, plus the problems of private estates and privy purses. At the same time, the Union Government had given a solemn undertaking to the princes that their personal and private interests would be protected.

Sheikh Abdullah, as a mass leader, wanted to lose no time in joining issue with the Maharaja over the latter's idiosyncracies. He had to keep the promises he and his party had made to the people, the most urgent being land reforms. But he should have appreciated the position of the Union Government vis-à-vis the princely states. Thus, it happened that Sheikh Abdullah ignored even the genuine difficulties of the Maharaja. He could have postponed a total rupture with the Maharaja in view of the stupendous and almost insurmountable problems facing the Union Government.

Though Nehru the leftist, and Patel the rightist did not always agree on many issues, they were of one mind in honouring certain fundamental commitments made to the acceding States. And in these they could not exclude the Maharaja of Kashmir. On June 4, 1948, Patel pointed out to Nehru that "the arrangements regarding reserved and non-reserved subjects to which Sheikh Saheb had agreed in March last are being treated as a nullity. . . . Even the Private Department of the Maharaja is being interfered with . . . but the manner in which the question of his Privy Purse etc., have been dealt with has left on my mind a most painful impresion."¹⁷ The Draft Rules of Business sent by Patel to Sheikh Abdullah in April had, till June 4, not been heeded at all. Sheikh Abdullah perhaps felt that no further delay

could be brooked, and if he did not act immediately, the Maharaja could make a backward somersault. He, therefore, declared on September 20, in Srinagar that "... the Maharaja is still anxious to rule and not prepared to resign. The primary issue before us is that of complete freedom from autocratic rule."¹⁸

A triangular conflict between the regional forces (Ladakh and Jammu), communal elements (Hindu extremists) and the Muslim population of the Valley soon surfaced. These forces included economic and communal vested interests coalescing to form new fraternities. The Maharaja wanted monarchy to be restored; the Hindu and Muslim jagirdars wanted the feudal pattern of society to last for ever; the Hindu extremists, who had acquired wealth in the name of religion, believed that a status quo could be perpetuated by fanning communal flames. The non-Muslim intellectuals and the poorer sections of the Hindus were anti-Maharaja and certainly pro-Abdullah. Many of them, in fact, were active members of the National Conference, and wished the Maharaja to abdicate. But they also wanted Sheikh Abdullah to grant some kind of administrative autonomy to the Jammu region. Thus, the dimension of regionalism was intensified in the politics of the State to be exploited by Maharaja and the Hindu communalists. The Dogra leaders in favour of abolition of monarchy almost outdid Abdullah in his anti-Maharaja posture. A convention of the Jammu District National Conference held at Paramandal in March 1949 demanded that the National Conference should delete from its manifesto the provision for a constitutional ruler of the State. When Sheikh Abdullah adopted a tough stance towards the communal elements, the cry for regional autonomy gathered strength.

When the same regional proclivities surfaced in the Ladakh region, the Ladakhis felt they were being given a step-motherly treatment so far as sharing of political, economic and administrative benefits was concerned. Chhewang Rigzin, President, Buddhist Association of Ladakh, characterized the Ladakhi Buddhists a separate nation. Koshuk Bakula, the Head Lama, protested against what he called the Srinagar dominated administration. He even warned that Ladakhis longing for a political union with Tibet would become strong if Ladakh's entity within

India was not recognized and respected.

The third, and the most vocal and powerful element in this triangular conflict, was Sheikh Abdullah supported by his party and by the entire Muslim population of the State. For when Sheikh Abdullah felt that the Maharaja was raising hurdles in his path towards reform, he declared that the best solution to the resolution of the deadlock would be for the Maharaja to leave the State. That he could not deal with Hari Singh the man is proved by the fact that he agreed to Karan Singh succeeding his father as the Regent. Finally, on June 9, 1949, the Maharaja decided to leave the state "for reasons of health." This came as a rude shock to Hindu vested interests and communalists for whom the presence of the Maharaja was a symbol of safety. Obviously, the quitting of the Maharaja gave a psychological boost to the Muslims of the Valley in this triangular conflict. The Maharaja had literally been made to quit. Sheikh Abdullah felt victorious and started Muslimizing the administration with the view to infusing a sense of confidence among the Muslims and to show that they were now the masters and not slaves. But in the process, the Hindus of the Jammu and the Buddhists of the Ladakh felt discriminated against. In this Sheikh Abdullah could have been generous or, at least, tactful and some key posts should have been allotted to Hindu and Buddhist members of the National Conference. But in haste Sheikh Abdullah alienated the Hindus of the Jammu region and the Buddhists of the Ladakh region from the mainstream of State politics.

These feelings acquired a sharper edge with Sheikh Abdullah's attempt to eradicate communalism from the State. He had given indisputable proof of his faith in secularism and pro-India stance by ruthlessly crushing pro-Pakistan elements in the Valley. His thinking was clear: Muslims who did not want to live in secular Kashmir could go to Pakistan. He almost pushed them out forcibly saying, "I cannot allow any one to support Pakistan . . . I shall uproot them who speak in praise of Pakistan . . . those who are for Pakistan, have no place in Kashmir; they should go to Pakistan."¹⁹ For this, he was to regret almost all his life. Likewise, he was justified, morally and administratively, to mete out the same treatment to the Hindu communalists of the Jammu region who, unfortunately, were still blood-thirsty after having massacred thousands of Muslims in the wake of communal

violence in the Punjab. The upshot was that the Hindu communal elements rallied round Praja Parishad, a newly formed political party, but actually RSS incognito.

While these conflicts inherent in the geo-political and ethnic complexity of the whole State were becoming more and more intense, the leadership of the National Conference addressed itself to more pressing need of initiating the machinery for economic reforms. Sheikh Abdullah had no concern for the Kashmir case in the Security Council which, for him, was an ineffective debating forum where the Big Powers were side-tracking the real issues involved in order to strengthen their own global strategies. But instead of cooperating with the new Government, the Hindu extremists were raising issues which had little relevance to realities. They raised the slogan of merging the whole State with the rest of India and the abrogating of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution guaranteeing a special status to the State. The issue of accession became debatable and a vicious circle, with regional chauvinism and communalism as its arcs, provoking and reinforcing each other, was thus formed.

Each side in this drama of heightening action tried to pull the other down. The Praja Parishad, aware of the Achilles heel, repeated the slogan that the State should be merged constitutionally with India and its special status withdrawn. Sheikh Abdullah made no bones about the fact that the special status flowing from Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was the very basis of the State's accession to India, its very soul. To counter the slogans of the Hindu extremists, Sheikh Abdullah hurled missiles at them from his political and ideological arsenal. He reminded them of their having massacred thousands of innocent and helpless Muslims who had opted to go to Pakistan, and that they had close links with the RSS responsible for Muslim genocide in India and that the bogey of "autonomy" was being raised by them because, being privileged, they knew that their days of exploiting the poor were numbered since he was contemplating the introduction of radical economic reforms.

The people from Jammu, quoting from his statements, accused Sheikh Abdullah of his desire to make the Kashmir region an independent State. They demanded of him why he wanted autonomy for the whole state, but was not prepared to accept a corollary—that Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh must be granted

some kind of autonomy because the three regions had distinct ethnic and linguistic identities. They reminded him that they would not permit him to ignore their rights because some extremist Hindus were alleged to have committed genocide. They argued that by protecting the interests of the Kashmiri Muslims, and at the same time ignoring those of the Hindus and Buddhists, he was being more communal than they were made to be.

All these accusations touched the tender chords in Sheikh Abdullah whose outbursts and actions during the most testing period of his political career reveal that he was on the way to developing a kind of neurosis. His tirades against Jammu and Indian communalists increased in intensity in direct proportion to the propaganda against him. He started losing his poise he had maintained so long, and ignored the fact that India was not communal through and through, or that the Indian Constitution was committed to the principle of secularism. But he should have anticipated such trends from the Jammu region, taken steps to redress their genuine grievances, and desisted from making statements that the Kashmir Valley would maintain an independent entity, or that the Jammu and Ladakh regions could choose their own destinies.

After accession of the State to the Union of India, Sheikh Abdullah became the leader and the Prime Minister not of Kashmir Valley alone, but of the Jammu and Ladakh regions as well. He should have appreciated the problems of all the three regions, the State being a heterogeneous conglomeration of diverse ethnic origins, languages, religions, with each region forming a geographical and cultural entity of its own.

The Praja Parishad leaders exalted in their strategy of provoking Sheikh Abdullah and were watching how the Lion would roar with his back to the wall. At a series of public speeches, Sheikh Abdullah denounced the party that demanded merger of the State with India and the abrogation of Article 370. He expressed his doubts about the genuineness of Indian secularism and dubbed the Hindus of India as communal, unfortunately forgetting the greatest Indian who became a martyr for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. On April 10, 1952, he made a fateful and ominous speech at Ranbir Singhpora near Jammu. While condemning Hindu communalism, he gave veiled hints that some Indian leaders at the Centre were encouraging the agitators in

Jammu. He warned against applying to the State all the Articles of the Indian Constitution. This was his rebuttal to the slogan *Ek Pradhan, Ek Nishan, Ek Vidhan*: One President, One Flag, One Constitution. But the immediate provocation had been the so-called 'interference' of Gopalaswami Ayyangar for release of the Parishad leaders who had been arrested unjustifiably in connection with hoisting the National Conference flag in a local college at Jammu. Said Sheikh Abdullah in the course of this speech, "Many Kashmiris are apprehensive as to what will happen to them and their position if, for instance, something happens to Pt. Nehru . . . if there is a resurgence of communalism in India, how are we to convince the Muslims of Kashmir that India does not intend to swallow up Kashmir . . . such developments might lead to a break in the accession of Kashmir to India. . . ." ¹⁹ Earlier, on April 8, 1952 he had said in Jammu, "Those who are raising the slogan of full application of the Indian Constitution to Kashmir are weakening accession. They are the same people who had massacred Muslims in Jammu. The slogan is natural to cause suspicion in the minds of the Muslims of the State." ²⁰

Was Sheikh Abdullah beginning to have second thoughts about accession to which he was a party? He was not naive but was aware of the legal and constitutional aspects of the accession which applied to all the three regions of the State. The speech could only be interpreted as loud thinking, expressing genuine fears of an average Kashmiri Muslim at witnessing what was happening in Jammu. One wishes, in retrospect, that Sheikh Abdullah had been a little wary of playing into the hands of the vested interests and who raised such extraneous issues.

However, it was amazing that this was the same Sheikh Abdullah who said before the State Constituent Assembly on March 25, 1952, "The people of India have in the general elections held aloft the glorious ideals of secularism and democracy once again under the inspiring and dynamic leadership of Mr Nehru. The victory of the principle of secular democracy in these elections is in no small measure a vindication of the self-same ideals and principles for which Kashmir has been struggling." Was it not the same Sheikh Abdullah who had said about a month earlier, "Pakistan was achieved at the cost of blood and tears of millions of people who suffered before and after partition

at the hands of the Pakistani leaders. Those leaders used to preach to the Muslims that they cannot be free in Hindu dominated India, but in the recent general elections you have proved to the hilt that communal bigotry cannot flourish in our country. This is a great lesson for the people of Pakistan and a great victory for the secular democracy to which India is pledged.”²¹

Sheikh Abdullah, at this time, was facing serious problems in the Valley also. The new Government had not been able to handle the food crisis efficiently, partly as a result of Sheikh Abdullah's bizarre economic concepts. He would not accept Central assistance since, he thought, it would lead to political domination. He, therefore, declared that the people should eat potatoes as substitute for rice and thereby save their honour. The two successive crops failures in 1949-50 and 1950-51 had led to a grave food situation in the State. When, at last, the government reluctantly agreed to accept Central help, its distribution was marred by corruption in the State Food Control Department run by corrupt officers who diverted the grain to the black market. The peasants were forced to part with their limited stocks of paddy at nominal rates, which led to their purchasing grain at exorbitant prices to pay the land tax in kind. The cooperative stores also functioned in the same manner. The distribution of cloth, sugar and salt had suffered due to corruption and malpractices of the directors and employees. Even Mirza Afzal Beg, Minister of Revenue, was heckled by the workers of the National Conference when he rose to address a meeting at Mujahid Manzil in Srinagar.

In such circumstances, Sheikh Abdullah felt confused and began to realise that not only the Jammu and Ladakh regions were slipping out of his hold, but even the Muslims of Kashmir were losing faith in him. But who was to be blamed? Had he not ruthlessly crushed the Muslims in the Valley for harbouring pro-Pakistan sentiments? Had he not driven to the wall the leaders of the Kashmir Mazdoor Conference, the Muslim Conference, and of the Socialist Party? Their fault? They had expressed the wish that Kashmir should have acceded to Pakistan and that before accession, the people of the State should have been allowed to express their will by holding an impartial plebiscite. Had not Abdul Salam Yatu, Prem Nath Bazaz and a score of others been jailed and tortured? Thousands of Kashmiri and non-

Kashmiri Muslims pushed beyond the borders of the State?
Hundreds killed on their way to Pakistan?

To regain his waning popularity among the Kashmiri Muslims, Sheikh Abdullah's tirades against India and the Hindu communalists became more pronounced, and he began to blow hot and cold in the same breath. Well, there might have been some of his close associates, themselves thoroughly corrupt, made India a scapegoat and invented an alibi to escape blame. But the people, by and large, were weary of the new regime. They saw a deep chasm between what their leaders professed and what they practised. The economic conditions had begun to deteriorate and officials at the lower rungs were battenning at the expense of the common man.

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7. *The Delhi Agreement*

From our point of view, that is, India's, it is of the most vital importance that Kashmir should remain within the Indian Union. This cannot be done ultimately except through the goodwill of the mass of population. The only person who can effectively deal with the situation is Sheikh Abdullah.

—Nehru

AT A SESSION of the Constituent Assembly held at Jammu in the spring of 1952, Mirza Afzal Beg announced that the Basic Principles Committee had recommended that the State should form a republic within the Republic of India. The Assembly adopted the principle of abolition of monarchy and to have, instead, an elected Head of the State. Mutual negotiations were set afoot between the Centre and the State to resolve the constitutional deadlock thus created. These culminated in the announcement on July 24, 1952 of the Delhi Agreement.

India agreed and reiterated its solemn pledge to give the State of Jammu and Kashmir a special status in its Constitution. This would guarantee complete internal autonomy to the State. The hereditary ruler was to be replaced by an elected Head of the State, with a five year term of office. The fundamental rights incorporated in the Indian Constitution were to be applied to the State, subject to the provision that they would not disturb the programme of land reforms. The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court was to be limited, as regards the State, to inter-State disputes, fundamental rights and to matters of defence, foreign affairs and communications. The National Flag was to be supreme and the emergency powers of the President of India were to apply to the State "only at the request or with the concurrence of the government of the State." Nehru declared that all the States had acceded in the beginning to only three subjects and it might be that Jammu and Kashmir would link up with India

in other subjects later. When Sheikh Abdullah reached Jammu, he said at a reception, "The Delhi Agreement is not a paper agreement, but a union of hearts which no power on earth can loosen."¹ But this euphoria soon subsided and the Jammu agitation which was launched because the government delayed implementing the clauses relating to Jammu and Ladakh made Sheikh Abdullah speak and think as an entirely different man.

The follow-up action to the Delhi Agreement again exposed what seemed an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, Sheikh Abdullah displayed his transparent sincerity of mind when on November 12, 1952, the Constituent Assembly, by an amendment to the State Constitution, put an end to monarchy, but elected Yuvraj Karan Singh, as Sadr-i-Riyasat (Head of State). On this occasion Sheikh Abdullah proudly said, "Today the National Conference has given proof that it was actuated by the highest principles of democracy and not by rancour or animosity in its struggle against autocracy. I am glad the House has made a splendid and, if I may say so, a befitting gesture to Shri Karan Singh Ji by according him the unique honour of choosing him as the Sadr-i-Riyasat."² But on the other hand, he avoided implementing the articles of the Delhi Agreement of which he seemed to have some reservations. These concerned the transfer of control of the State telegraph and telephone department. The State Government also did not allow the immediate extension of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to the State territory.

Sheikh Abdullah knew that the Delhi Agreement was a befitting reply to the Jammu and Ladakh regional chauvinism, and certainly to the Hindu extremists. But by not implementing the less palatable articles of the Delhi Agreement, he played the game of those who did not like him. Sheikh Abdullah could have acted with caution and circumspection and stalled the possible hurdles that the Hindu extremists would create in his way. From what followed, it appears that some sinister power was at work pushing the chief protagonist into acts which, had reason been allowed to have the better of sentiment, could easily have been avoided.

The Praja Parishad, sharpening its claws and slyly watching for an opportunity, waited for the slightest delay on the part of Sheikh Abdullah in implementing all the articles of the Delhi Agreement and launched an agitation which was almost the

beginning of an end of sanity in the State politics. The election of Yuvraj Karan Singh as the Sadr-i-Riyasat appeared to the Dogras a ruse to lead them astray from their objective of regional autonomy and they refused to be flattered by this election. Thus, when the National Conference arranged a public reception for him, the Praja Parishad, under the leadership of Prem Nath Dogra, gave a call for hartal in the Jammu region. The demonstrators resorted to violence. Festoons, arches, and bunting were pulled down. On November 26, Prem Nath Dogra and fourteen other Praja Parishad leaders were arrested. People were fired at in Ranbirsinghpura, Sunderbani, Akhnoor, Sambha and even in the far flung area of Kishtwar, and the agitation suppressed. Sheikh Abdullah had great contempt for political upstarts and opportunists. He therefore did not condescend to hold talks with the leaders of the movement. But as Prime Minister of the State it was imperative for his ego to come down a peg or two and try to convince even those who refused to be convinced. The Praja Parishad leaders took up rigid postures and failed to appreciate the genuine difficulties of the Prime Minister.

After the Congressmen criticised him at the Allahabad session of the National Congress in January 1953, and after he was hooted at in Delhi while addressing an audience, Sheikh Abdullah began to realize his mistake. Though Nehru strongly supported him, he had to admit that the Jammu people were suffering from certain economic hardships. The Kashmir Government set up a Commission of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Justice J.N. Wazir to report on the working of the land reforms in *kandi*, drought-stricken area, on functioning of government controls, and on measures to rehabilitate ex-service-men and refugees. A constitution was also prepared on the basis of federal principles. It divided the State into five units each with an autonomous administration. The area on the other side of the cease-fire line had also been taken into account for this purpose. The plan envisaged the present territory of the State to be divided into three autonomous provinces—Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. There was to be a federal government supervising the administration of three regions. Sheikh Abdullah declared in a broadcast on April 17, 1953 that it had been decided to give autonomy to different cultural units so that no unit might fear being dominated by the other. But the Dogras and

the Buddhists rejected this plan because the real executive power was to be retained by the Muslims of Kashmir, they being in a majority. The polarisation of politics on communal lines seemed to have reached such limits that the Doda Muslims did not approve of their district being a unit of Jammu province of which it was geographically and even culturally to some extent a part. They did not want to be dominated by the Hindu majority of the Jammu province. What flabbergasted Sheikh Abdullah still more was that the Hindu Dogras and the Buddhists of Ladakh wanted their units to be merged with the rest of India, while the Valley would remain with India under some kind of limited accession. Such was their patriotism and nationalism that even if the Valley were to go to Pakistan, they would not have cared. Sheikh Abdullah was justified in coming to the conclusion that the Dogra agitation would ultimately compel the Valley to accept the suzerainty of India.

The three political parties in India—the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jan Sangh, and the Ram Rajya Parishad gave moral and other support to the Dogra agitation. The Kanpur session of the Jan Sangh resolved that its President correspond with the Government of India for getting the grievances of the Dogras redressed. When his correspondence with Nehru proved of no avail, Dr Shayama Prasad Mukherjee, President of the All-India Jan Sangh, decided to pay the fatal and the fateful visit to Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah announced that nobody could visit the State without a proper permit and that this was applicable even to Sheikh Abdullah himself. Moreover, this visit was construed by the State Government as an endorsement of what Hindu reactionaries were doing in the State. Dr Mukherjee was at once arrested and detained in a private bungalow near the Nishat Gardens in Srinagar. But the malignant fates seemed to have conspired to create mischief and uncertainty in the State. The President of the Jan Sangh died of heart attack on June 23, 1953. His death aroused the indignation of the whole country. Even Jai Prakash Narain observed that the Kashmir authorities were criminally negligent in looking after the Jan Sangh leader's health. The national press, particularly the press dominated by Hindu capitalists, gave wide publicity to the event, alleging and attributing motives, and dubbed Sheikh Abdullah communal. But the facts were that the State Government had made adequate and

elaborate medical arrangements for the ailing leader.

The communal fall out of Mukherjee's death in Srinagar was enough to infuriate the already taxed nerves of Sheikh Abdullah. He lost control of himself and the image of poise that he had built up began to show signs of nervousness. He even started losing self-confidence, of which he had been an embodiment. He began to lose faith in everybody including his closest associates. His attitude grew intolerant, and he openly advocated among his colleagues a review of the State's accession to India. The majority of the members of the National Conference Working Committee led by the Deputy Prime Minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, opposed Sheikh Abdullah's move. There was a marathon session of the National Conference Working Committee and Sheikh Abdullah endeavoured to win over others to his point of view. But the majority argued that Sheikh Abdullah's view was fallacious and unrealistic. A resolution was passed with an overwhelming majority of fifteen voting in favour of the resolution and a minority of four voting against it. It endorsed the State's accession to India, supporting at the same time the Delhi Agreement.

The resolution must have made Sheikh Abdullah feel the earth slipping from under his feet. The lion had been bearded in his den by his own litter, and apparently by the most democratic process. Sensing a coup against himself, Sheikh Abdullah asked one of his cabinet colleague, S.L. Saraf, to resign. Saraf refused to oblige unless the whole cabinet resigned and a new cabinet was formed. Those who had stood like a rock against Sheikh Abdullah's suggestion to review the question of accession, now anxiously waited for his next move on the political chessboard of the State. They had done so on the basis of principles which had guided them when the State acceded to India. They had respect, admiration, and affection for their political mentor, but they could not be compelled to agree to his arbitrary decision to have second thoughts on accession which was *fait accompli*. They were certain that Sheikh Abdullah would use his oratorical powers and make an appeal to the religious sentiments of the people of Kashmir. But these members of the cabinet themselves made a most dramatic move. In a memorandum presented to the Prime Minister of the State, three members of his cabinet, led by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, accused Sheikh Abdullah of taking arbitrary decisions, of being responsible for deterioration

in the administration, for nepotism, inefficiency, and wanton wastage of public resources. Prophetically, the memorandum noted that "... under these circumstances, what seems inevitable is that interested foreign powers may well take advantage of and exploit the situation for their own selfish purposes. We have been constantly urging upon you to put an end to these unhealthy tendencies and to undertake unitedly measures for restoring the morale of the people. In spite of our best intentions, we have failed in our efforts."³ Sheikh Abdullah was informed in the memorandum that the people had lost confidence in the cabinet.

A copy of this memorandum was sent to the Sadr-i-Riyasat who suggested to Sheikh Abdullah to call an emergency meeting of the cabinet to discuss and resolve the differences. But instead of welcoming the suggestion, Sheikh Abdullah treated it with contempt and, on the afternoon of August 8, 1953, left for Gulmarg, with the ostensible purpose of spending the weekend there. This gave a rude jolt to those who thought that the effort to resolve the deadlock was more urgent than holidaying in the picturesque health-resort. The Sadr-i-Riyasat, acting with the speed of lightning, issued orders for the dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah and those who toed his line of thinking. The order was implemented in the small hours of August 9 and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad called upon to form the new ministry and, within hours, he was sworn as the State's new Prime Minister.

It is obvious that the actors in this democratic 'coup' could never be just the local talent. Since the time Sheikh Abdullah manifested symptoms of a substantial change in his attitude regarding accession, the leaders in New Delhi had become alert. At least his public utterances warranted extreme weariness on the part of those who were responsible for the political stability not only of the State but of the sub-continent. Hence, it is logical to assume that the strategy for the climax must have been the result of the collusion between the State and the central authorities. Although Sheikh Abdullah had, on many occasions, ruled out the idea of independence for the Kashmir Valley, he had already given an indication of what was on his mind. In early

1953, it was arranged between India and Pakistan that the Prime-Ministers of the two countries would meet to resolve the Kashmir problem bilaterally. Accordingly, the Government of India asked the State government to form a high power committee and to send to New Delhi the suggestions of the State government. The ruling party constituted a committee consisting of Sheikh Abdullah, Maulana Mohammad Mausodi, Mirza Afzal Beg, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, S.L. Saraf, G.M. Sadiq, G.L. Dogra, and Sardar Budh Singh as its members. The Committee recommended that a plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir be held to decide its future status; the Jammu and Kashmir State to remain free; foreign affairs and defence be given to India and Pakistan; or the Jammu and Kashmir State be divided into three parts—the Hindu majority area of Jammu to be integrated with India, the north-western parts including Gilgit and Hunza to be integrated with Pakistan, and Kashmir Valley to be kept independent. When the document reached New Delhi signed, ironically enough by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the Centre must have started doubting Sheikh Abdullah's intentions.

In fact, Sheikh Abdullah also gave clear indications of the shape of things to come. He had expressed his fears frankly without being afraid of anybody. Rather impulsive by nature, he lacked the true statesman's quality of keeping his own counsel. Being a man of truth, he spoke out his fears without the least thought that these utterances could be distorted. Or, believing that he really wanted to undo the accession and make Kashmir independent, the logical conclusion is that he was living in a world of illusion. India had already fought a war with Pakistan and that too almost at his bidding; India had promised in the Delhi Agreement that the State of Jammu and Kashmir would be guaranteed the special status in its constitution; India had incorporated in its Constitution the secular nature of its socio-economic set up. One wonders whether Sheikh Abdullah was not crying wolf, for he knew well that the central leaders would, at no cost, allow an integral part of India to secede.

Yet, during the period between launching of an agitation by the Praja Parishad of Jammu and his arrest, Sheikh Abdullah left nobody in doubt of what he thought. Political experts on Kashmir said that the plea of "loud thinking" was not at all an alibi. Before the final green signal for his dismissal and arrest,

the Centre had given him an opportunity to meet the central leaders and discuss his fears with them because resurgence of communal trouble was not confined to Jammu alone, but was an all-India phenomenon. While the Centre went doggedly in pursuit of a rapprochement with Sheikh Abdullah, the latter, unfortunately, proved intractable. On May 18, at a meeting with his colleagues he mentioned the possibility of keeping Kashmir independent. It was the same Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who had, just two years ago in May 1951, said that the idea of an independent Kashmir was impossible had impracticable. He had then felt that to think in terms of independence, with five powers surrounding the State and eyeing the Valley with mixed motives, would be committing suicide.

After 1952 and 1953, when a change in Sheikh Abdullah's thinking became perceptible, Nehru visited the Valley in the last week of May and met the members of the National Conference Working Committee impressing on them the dangers of making the Valley independent. But even then Sheikh Abdullah did not change his stand. In the Centre's efforts for a rapprochement Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played important roles. Nehru sent his trusted lieutenants one after the other to Kashmir to discuss the problem with Sheikh Abdullah who treated them with disdain and they returned to New Delhi empty-handed. Nehru wrote a letter to Sheikh Abdullah inviting him to New Delhi to resolve the crisis, for Nehru had now become unnerved. Sheikh Abdullah symbolized Kashmir for him and Nehru believed that once Sheikh Abdullah became estranged, Kashmir would be lost to India. And for the man of vision, Kashmir was the symbol of secularism. Gandhi thought that "it is on the soil of Kashmir that Islam and Hinduism are being weighed. If both pull their weight correctly and in the same direction, the chief actors will cover themselves with glory and nothing can move them from their joint credit. My sole hope and prayer is that Kashmir should become a beacon light to this benighted sub-continent."⁴ But Nehru's colleagues at the Centre, and particularly those who were closely associated with Kashmir politics, viewed the matter differently. They told Nehru that Sheikh Abdullah was one of the greatest of freedom fighters, a symbol of secularism, but Nehru had ignored the fact that Sheikh Abdullah's intransigence would do irreparable

damage to the philosophy of secularism itself. They argued that in political affairs, friendship and idealism had to be sacrificed for broader national interests. In fact, as Rafi Ahmed Kidwai pointed out, Sheikh Abdullah had himself said so in his reply to Nehru's letter providing a solution to the latter's predicament. At this stage of the political crisis in the State, Nehru could either behave as a friend, that is, be sentimental, or act a cold-blooded politician and do what the logic of the situation indicated was unavoidable. If he chose to let emotions dominate his reason, the cost paid would be stupendous.

Even before the Sadr-i-Riyasat ordering Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal and arrest, the Kashmir leader had also been toying with the idea of an independent Kashmir when he was encouraged by foreign powers through some private individuals, for there "... came the highly inflammatory rumours that the United States was backing the idea of Kashmir independence and that Sheikh Abdullah had been encouraged in it when Adlai Stevenson had visited Srinagar in May."⁶ Sheikh Abdullah had discussed the same idea with Louis Henderson. These talks on the part of Sheikh Abdullah, though "private", show how deep the great rebel had gone into the wilderness of illusion. On Martyrs Day, July 13, he said, "If I find that we can progress and prosper by remaining independent, I will not hesitate to raise that voice. If I realize that by acceding to Pakistan we can go forward no power can suppress me to say so."⁷ On July 25, he said that the Kashmiris had full faith in secularism. Why Kashmiris had acceded to India was because they believed their interests were safe within India. But he said the belief was being shaken and he was helpless to do anything about it. He observed that when he said so, he was dubbed a Pakistani with the result that the faith and spirit behind the Instrument of Accession and the Delhi Agreement were being shaken by the hostile attitude of the Jan Sangh and other communal bodies in India. Such utterances were bound to make the Indian Government revise their opinion of Sheikh Abdullah. He certainly was not using pressure tactics as is alleged by his critics. Had India allowed a part of the Jammu and Kashmir State to remain independent, Pakistan would not have honoured such an entity, for Pakistan had not respected even the Standstill Agreement, and an independent Kashmir would have been like throwing all doors of the

Valley open to invaders.

The great tragedy that befell the people of Kashmir and clouded the soul of every Kashmiri for more than two decades was due to many reasons. The Hindu vested interests and extremists precipitated the crisis by launching an agitation which harassed Sheikh Abdullah who wanted to introduce economic reforms. Instead of venting their grievances to the Central leaders, they took the law into their own hands. But there were men like M.R. Saraf, Balraj Puri, G.L. Dogra and Trilochan Dutt, who understood the nuances of the situation and, instead of harassing the administration, favoured cooperation with it to carry the State through economic reforms. It is obvious, therefore, that the Praja Parishad was tutored by anti-national communal forces in the country. Sheikh Abdullah too gave no direct proof of the spirit of understanding and accommodation. He probably thought that by getting Karan Singh elected as the Sadr-i-Riyasat, he had done his duty by the Jammu people. That was a mistake on his part. He should have initiated the process of redressing their genuine grievances. In spite of his sincerity, Sheikh Abdullah showed lack of sufficient tact and patience to tackle effectively the problems of the Jammu and Ladakh regions. He was aware that India would never let the strategic Kashmir Valley become independent. Caught thus in the web of illusion, Sheikh Abdullah ignored the fact that the key to his dilemma was with Nehru. And when the invitation came to meet his friend, he refused to accept it feeling, at the same time, secure in the idea of his invincibility. What if Nehru should have waited and given his friend, who mattered so much to India, and to Kashmir, another chance. The Sheikh then, would have himself staged a coup.

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8. Dismissal and Arrest

By God if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left in order that I may give up my work, I will not do so. I will go on till God helps me or I die in the effort.

—The Holy Prophet

THE TRAGEDY ENACTED in the early hours of August 9, 1953 was witnessed by the majestic deodars standing sentinels in the picturesque Gulmarg mountains. Taken by complete surprise, Sheikh Abdullah thought that his senses had deserted him when he was shown the orders of dismissal and arrest coming like a bolt from the blue. He took an hour to get ready and pray. The Lion was caged and brought to the Valley, from where he was whisked away across the Pirpanjal and safely deposited in jail, nobody knew where. Arrested along with him were Mirza Afzal Beg, G.M. Shah, J.N. Zutshi, Kashypa Bandhu, G.A. Ashai and some of his close associates. The whole operation was executed with the accuracy, swiftness and efficiency of a blitzkrieg.

The secrecy of the operation was infallible and the world came to know of Sheikh Abdullah's arrest when All-India Radio broadcast the news in its morning 8 o'clock bulletin. A hush fell on the people of the Valley. They stood stunned and staggered, speechless with sorrow and indignation. The news was too tragic. Who could think of such an anti-climax to a series of situations from where their leader had always emerged triumphant? There was complete lull, but it was an ominous lull, the lull before the storm. The Central Reserve Police and other paramilitary personnel patrolled the narrow streets of important towns. And when the admirers of Sheikh Abdullah became violent, the demonstrators were fired at in Amirakadal and Zainakadal in Srinagar and at Anantnag, Qazi Gund, Kulgam

and other places in the Valley.

The dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah came as a sequel to the clash of ideologies, convictions and commitments. As chief protagonists in the drama, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and his comrades, in the parting of ways, represented the forces of democracy and of adherence to fundamental commitments; Sheikh Abdullah and his associates symbolized tendencies towards arbitrariness and violation of commitments in a set-up which was positively democratic; the wider national interests being symbolised in Nehru and other Central leaders dealing with Kashmir, the symbol of secularism.

On September 17, 1953, Nehru said in the Parliament, "We have always regarded the Kashmir problem as symbolic for us, as it has far reaching consequences in India. Kashmir is symbolic as it illustrates that we are a secular State, that Kashmir with a large majority of Muslims, has nevertheless, of its own free will wished to be associated with India. Kashmir has consequences both in India and Pakistan because if we disposed of Kashmir on the basis of the old two-nation theory, obviously millions of people in India and millions in East Pakistan would be powerfully affected. Many of the wounds that had healed might open out again."¹

Sheikh Abdullah's arrest came as a blow to the Muslims of Kashmir. It was a blow to their self-respect and honour. It was a blow to the freedom they had secured with blood. Said the sophisticated Mirza Afzal Beg at the time of his arrest, "Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad has sold away the Kashmiri Muslims to India." Whether Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had really done so or whether he had betrayed friendship for the sake of principles, the average Kashmiri could never understand. The simple, illiterate Muslims of the Valley could not be expected to understand political subtleties involved in the event. For them Sheikh Abdullah was Kashmir and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah. With his long career of sacrifices, Sheikh Abdullah embodied for them their aspirations for political and economic emancipation. And now India had taken away their helmsman, when the flag of victory was in his hand.

The Kashmiri Muslim is sober and reasonable, but he can be extremely emotional and get excited when he is unjustifiably humiliated. That is why when they heard that their liberator had

been jailed, the people took it as an affront. When they saw helmeted police patrolling the streets, they were reminded of the terror and repression of the Dogra rulers. There was a complete cessation of activities. Not a single shop was opened and hartal continued for more than a week. The streets were deserted and the city of Srinagar looked like a graveyard. Such horror and gloom prevailed that not a single Kashmiri had a kind word to speak in favour of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad whom they compared with a Yezid.

Considerable patient planning had to be done to put the State administration back on the rails and to bring social life to normal. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, a shrewd practical politician, uninhibited by theoretical considerations, partly out of a sincere desire to improve the economic lot of the poor, and partly to win popular support, made major economic concessions in his first policy broadcast after he was sworn in as Prime Minister. Whereas his predecessor had recommended to his people an almost puritancial austerity which he himself practised, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad announced the subsidized rates of rice and made education free. He also declared that farmers would be provided relief. Among his policy statements was the opening of a university, an engineering college, a medical college, and some polytechniques. His statement, in fact, meant an immediate reversal of the policy and practice of Sheikh Abdullah. Since the State was an integral part of the Union of India, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad wanted to introduce projects with central government assistance as was the case with all the other States of India.

With complete control on the organisational wing of the National Conference, the new Prime Minister arranged processions that broke the ice of week-long sense of shock and frustration among the people. There started from the heart of the city a pro-Bakshi demonstration, shouting *Hindu-Muslim-Sikh itihad, zindabad*, long live Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity. More and more people joined these demonstrations, mostly paid, and some because they had nothing better to do. Shops reopened. Artisans went to work, and the embroiderers resumed their needles. Small children and young boys and girls were back to schools and colleges. Except for some sporadic demonstrations by college students, educational institutions started functioning as if nothing had happened. The secretariate was reopened and the economic

and official work was resumed in right earnest. The peasants went about erecting more and more scarecrows in their ripening crops. The fruiterer tended the ripening apples and grapes. The "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" was only three weeks old. Life looked gay again. Automobiles plied on the roads as usual. The same pattern was duplicated in the Jammu region where the rejoicing Hindus lit bonfires because the person whom they thought as their worst enemy was gone.

Within a few years after the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, there was such economic activity as never witnessed before. The central aid following into the State made all round progress possible. New roads now led to remote villages and forests. This gave a fillip to the exploitation of forest wealth. Hydro-electric projects gave more power to the State and its people. The tourist industry was given a new vigour, and there was a rise in production of handicrafts. The completion of the Jawahar Tunnel in a record time made the Valley accessible all the year round bringing in more tourists. At the same time, there took place a cultural renaissance in the State. Radio Kashmir and the Culture Academy encouraged local talent in music, art and literature. New housing colonies came up. The Constituent Assembly elected during the premiership of Sheikh Abdullah ratified the State's accession to India and the Delhi Agreement implemented. But Article 370 was not to be disturbed. Elections held as scheduled returned the National Conference to power with an overwhelming majority.

The decade or so during which Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was the Prime Minister of the State was like *Ram Rajya*. The tolerant psychology of the Kashmiris made a complete compromise with inevitability under the economic compulsions which had had the better of their conscience. One wondered if they had finally reconciled themselves to the loss of self-respect to retrieve which Sher-i-Kashmir had been lodged in jail. Honour and self-respect seemed mere illusions relative to economic and political exigencies. People had certainly become prosperous. Sycophants had collected rich harvests out of what was really at the roots a hoax, a make believe. The elections had certainly been held, but even a Kashmiri child knew that these were rigged.

India seemed to have now betrayed the Kashmiri people by allowing Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad to defraud his own people. It served India's purpose all right because it helped cheat

international opinion in the belief that the people of Kashmir were receiving their full share of the democratic air that rest of the Indians were breathing. Yet the heart of the Kashmiri was bleeding. The soul was restless, not so much because their liberator was in jail, but because they had not been allowed to choose their own representative. They were corrupted in every sense during the new regime. The worst thing was that the moral fibre was rotting. Appeasement and nepotism had become the order of the day. The moral being of the urban population suffered because the rulers were extremely corrupt. Educational institutions became dens of malpractices to which the youth of the State were baited with bright professional prospects. It had been the cherished dream of Sheikh Abdullah to improve the moral and intellectual calibre of the youth of his State by promoting merit. And here, immediately after his removal, the youth became the first victims to moral and intellectual degeneration, and integrity became a scarce commodity.

The administration was corrupted to such an extent that officers in the State bureaucracy had to pay respects to Bakshi Abdul Rashid, the General Secretary of the National Conference and a first cousin of the Prime Minister, before they would attend their duties. He encouraged favouritism so much that there arose a crippling dualism in the administration. The Centre turned a deaf ear to reports emanating from the State, while the leaders there adopted a callously neutral attitude. Sheikh Abdullah's intransigence had made the Kashmiris pay a very high price in terms of extreme moral degeneration. They looked prosperous and calm, but their sufferings were great. The dormant volcano would erupt. It was only a question of time.

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had been in the saddle of power for nearly half a decade when the all powerful democratic forces in India put pressure on the Indian executive not to keep Sheikh Abdullah in continuous detention without trial. In fact, almost immediately after his arrest, the press started pleading his cause. Both private members and those belonging to the ruling party condemned in Parliament the indefinite incarceration of the Kashmir leader. The members of the Opposition, particularly, exposed the rigging of elections in the State and suppression of

the freedom of press. Amidst all this, Sheikh Abdullah was released on January 8, 1958 after nearly five years of detention.

His whirlwind journey from Jammu to Srinagar left in its wake the swaying hearts of the people and aroused in them spontaneous outburst of love and admiration. At Jammu, which was partly responsible for his fall in 1953, welcome arches of silks, roses, and marigolds demonstrated the respect and affection that the people still had for him. People thronged to Jammu to welcome home their liberator. As the procession wound its way through the narrow streets of the City of Temples, people from the hanging balconies showered basketfuls of flowers on their leader. Sheikh Abdullah responded to the welcome of the people with a smiling face and folded hands in a typical Hindu style. He was extremely happy in the hope that the clouds of misunderstanding would be lifted soon and he would be able to serve his people. He told the milling crowds at Jammu that in 1953 he had been misunderstood. He was against communalism—whether Hindu or Muslim—and reiterated that democracy and secularism were the twin pillars on which the edifice of his political philosophy had been built.

From Jammu, Sheikh Abdullah's entourage moved to Udhampur and then to Kud. People in their thousands came out of their mountain recesses and welcomed him to the beat of drums and shahnais, and danced in the streets to express their joy at Batote, Ramban and Banihal. At every place, he asked them to maintain and enrich the heritage of communal harmony.

In the meantime, in spite of inclement weather, hectic preparations were afoot in Srinagar to give Sheikh Abdullah a hero's welcome. Suspense blended with curiosity, and curiosity with affection. The City of Seven Bridges, down which flowed the quiet Vitasta, was being adorned like a bride. On the actual day of his arrival in the city, lakhs of people collected at vantage points. The whole city belonged to Sheikh Abdullah. Wave after wave, the rising crests of masses gathered at the historic Lal Chowk shouting—Who is our leader? Sher-i-Kashmir; *Sher-i-Kashmir ka kya irshad? Hindu-Muslim-Sikh itihad*, what is Sher-i-Kashmir's direction? Unity among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs; *Yeh mulk hamara hai, iska faisla hum kareingei*, this country

belongs to us, we shall decide its future.

It was people, people every where. When he rose to address the huge gathering, there were deafening shouts, Sher-i-Kashmir, Zindabad. Extremely satisfied with the unlimited affection shown by his people, and their trust in him, he choked with emotion, and clearing his throat, would tell the people that all his life he had fought against oppression, exploitation, inequality and discrimination, and had never lost faith in democracy and secularism. In fact his five years in jail had strengthened his faith in these fundamental principles because he knew that without them the country could not maintain political stability and march on the path to socialism. Waxing eloquent and raising his voice, he bitterly spoke against forces and personalities that had 'betrayed' him. He attacked communalism in whatever guise it reared its ugly head. He declared at the Hazratbal shrine that the Indian Government had no moral justification to hoist on the people of Kashmir a Government that had no legal or constitutional sanctity behind it because the elections were rigged. He declared amidst thunderous applause that the people of the State alone had the right to decide its future. He expressed surprise that Hindu communalists were trying to teach secularism to the Kashmiris when the great saint-politician Gandhi had seen that ray only in the Valley. Wherever he spoke, Sheikh Abdullah advised people to be patient, non-violent, and to maintain communal harmony, a tradition which was the greatest moral and spiritual heritage coming down to them from their ancestors.

Sheikh Abdullah's activities remained limited during the brief period of his freedom from jail. The task of organising the movement for the restoration of full civil and political liberty was entrusted to Mirza Afzal Beg. A new political organisation with a symbolic name, the Plebiscite Front, was formed with Sheikh Abdullah acting as its patron. The slogan of the new party was self-determination for the people of Kashmir. It had a great sentimental appeal and caught the imagination of the masses like the Quit Kashmir slogan. The party gained support throughout the Valley, exploding the illusion created by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad that the Kashmiri Muslims supported him and his National Conference. Attempting belatedly to act up to their professions of democracy in Kashmir, the Central leaders had in good faith

given Sheikh Abdullah a second chance to give up his rigid attitudes, and to join again the national mainstream. But unfortunately he stuck to his guns, giving Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad ample opportunity to snare him again. Such an opportunity soon offered itself when Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's men, who had infiltrated into the Plebiscite Front, created situations which gave rise to violence.

It was obvious that the frustrated supporters of Sheikh Abdullah would initiate political activity soon after his dismissal and arrest on August 9, 1953. Predictably, a hurried War Council was set up with some of its members who were avowedly pro-Pakistan. They started contacting leaders from across the border. When this was detected by the Intelligence Bureau, Gobind Ballabh Pant, the Union Home Minister asked B.N. Mullik, Director of the Bureau to explore the possibility of launching a case against the trouble shooters. In the meantime, Mirza Afzal Beg, a close associate of Sheikh Abdullah, had been released on grounds of health. He managed to change the name of the War Council to Plebiscite Front. Though never pro-Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah gave the new organisation his blessings because his avowed slogan now was that the Kashmiris must be given the right of self-determination to decide the future political status of the State. Since the Plebiscite Front stance was openly anti-Indian, Pakistan seized upon the opportunity and started sending infiltrators into the Valley under the code name 'Gardeners'.

By October 1957 the Bureau had done some spade work, and on October 9, 1957 an F.I.R. (No. 100) was registered at the Kothi Bagh Police Station, Srinagar against people who were alleged to be in clandestine correspondence with Pakistan to overthrow the lawful government of the State and annul the accession. When Sheikh Abdullah was released on January 8, 1958 and was given a tumultuous reception all along the route from Jammu to Srinagar, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's feet began to grow cold. Sheikh Abdullah made inflammatory speeches, calling Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad a traitor to the Kashmiri Muslims, and the Indian Government the worst oppressor of the Kashmiris. Sheikh Abdullah's stance gave Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad a handle to paint his erstwhile mentor in the darkest colours before the Central Government.

While Sheikh Abdullah declared January 17, 1958 as D-day to capture Mujahid Manzil, the headquarters of the ruling National Conference, the army was alerted. As a 40,000 strong mob waited at Pather Masjid in the vicinity of Mujahid Manzil, the Lion did not come as promised. Instead, he went to Hazratbal and delivered a bitter speech against the stooges of the Union government. The Republic Day of 1958 witnessed a huge procession marching through the narrow streets of Srinagar, raising pro-India slogans. But Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was still scared, of the tremendous popularity and hold of Sheikh Abdullah on the Kashmiri masses. He wished Sheikh Abdullah's name to be somehow included in the list of those against whom the Kashmir Conspiracy Case would be conducted. The opportunity came to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad on a platter. On February 21, Sheikh Abdullah made yet another fiery anti-Indian speech and incited people to rise in revolt. Some razakars, a volunteer militant organisation set up by the Plebiscite Front, left the Hazratbal shrine, and attacked the National Conference office at Raj Bagh. One man was killed and thirty injured. A jeep was burnt and some shops were set ablaze. It was said that the razakars were Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's own men who had infiltrated into the Plebiscite Front. The incidents 'confirmed' that a conspiracy for a revolt had been hatched and Sheikh Abdullah was rearrested on April 30, 1958.

The Kashmir Conspiracy Case assumed still greater importance when, on May 21, 1958, a formal case was filed in the court of Special Magistrate against Mirza Afzal Beg, Pir Maqbool Gilani and Pir Maqbool Wiligami, who led the list of twenty-five conspirators. Though Begum Abdullah was excluded at the insistence of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the Lion was taken in as a prize catch when the prosecution filed a supplementary complaint in the court on October 23.

At the trial while G.S. Pathak became the senior counsel for the prosecution, Dingle Foot, a British lawyer of international repute, became the senior counsel for the defence. Mridula Sarabhai, eminent political and social figure of India, fought Sheikh Abdullah's legal battle. She rallied a large number of M.P.'s round herself to support Sheikh Abdullah by declaring the whole case concocted against the Lion of Kashmir. Two-hundred and twenty-nine witnesses were examined and three

hundred documents exhibited and the prosecution took eleven months, the defence seven and the Special Magistrate three, till on January 25, 1962 all accused were committed to the Court of Sessions. During all these years Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad remained in the ascendant and ruled the roost.

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If thou wouldest rouse this habitat of roses
Leave toying with kettledrums
Let there be thunderstorm and tempest
Aye an earthquake.

—Mehjur

THE PEOPLE OF KASHMIR got another rude shock when Sheikh Abdullah was re-arrested after a short breather of just four months. They felt as if the Central Government was determined to play with their sentiments. The Plebiscite Front leaders at the lower rungs of the ladder went underground and the party continued its non-violent struggle for the principles for which their leader had staked his all. The Front became popular while the Central leaders came to be disliked by the people of Kashmir. There was a growing sense of alienation. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad did succeed in winning over some converts, but the number of such people was very small. His close relatives and those who had been purchased to his side, redoubled their efforts to enrich themselves. The people were again baited with money, loans, jobs and admissions to professional colleges.

The most shocking experience for the Kashmiri Muslims was, however, the extension to the State of many Central laws. During the four months that Sheikh Abdullah was free, he had declared repeatedly that he recognised neither the representative character of the Legislative Assembly nor the legality of the application of Central laws to the State. For him, the process was just another encroachment on the autonomy of the State. These laws concerned the provisions of safeguards for the freedom of the people against the arbitrary authority of the executive, and also of some welfare measures. These included the

extension to the State of the jurisdiction of the Comptroller and Auditor General and of the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. But the Presidential Order of 1958 certainly affected the autonomy of the State because it provided for administrative integration of the State with the Union by applying the provision of the Indian Constitution relating to All-India Services including I.A.S. and I.P.S. to the State. These Central laws were introduced for administrative purposes in the context of national integration. This is evident from the fact that, according to its declared policy, the Central Government did not interfere with Article 370 and left its abrogation entirely to the initiative of the people of the State.

Sheikh Abdullah had lost faith in those who had succeeded him and feared that being stooges of the Central Government they might some day voluntarily recommend abrogation of Article 370. Though his fears seemed genuine at the moment, subsequent events confirmed that these were not well-founded and he was not justified in suspecting the sincerity of the Central Government. Speaking about the application of the laws applied to the State for individual liberty vis-a-vis the executive, welfare of the people, and for national integration, the Union Home Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant said, "These measures are symbolic of the determination of the State's people to integrate their hopes and fortunes with those of the rest of India."¹ About Article 370, Nehru declared in the Indian Parliament on November 27, 1963, "We do not want to take the initiative in this matter of completely putting an end to Article 370. The initiative should come from the State Government and the people of Kashmir."² Even Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was very clear about Article 370. Fearing that the Democratic National Conference under the leadership of G.M. Sadiq now in opposition in the Vidhan Sabha, would advocate the abrogation of Article 370, he declared that he would allow no party to "sell Kashmir to India" and that Article 370 would be abrogated "on his dead body." He even resisted moves to merge the National Conference with the Indian National Congress. In spite of this psychology prevailing in the state and at the Centre regarding Article 370, the Kashmiri Muslims had become so allergic to integration moves even on the positive side that the Plebiscite Front warned that if moves for "total integration of the State

with Bharat were implemented, these would set the State ablaze and cause unprecedented bloodshed.”³

Whether Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was sincere about his allowing the abrogation of Article 370 “over his dead body” or whether it was just a political stunt, did not matter so far as the Kashmiri Muslims were concerned. For them, he alone was responsible for their tragedy. At the same time, they wanted an end to his rule and the dictatorial behaviour of Bakshi Abdul Rashid, his cousin in whom he had reposed unlimited trust in spite of the fact that he lacked political acumen and had no educational background. Corruption, nepotism and favouritism became rampant, and the General Secretary took the perpetuity of his party’s rule for granted. The cup of sin was brimful and nemesis was round the corner.

Retribution came in the form of a warning which the ignorant and the haughty let pass unheeded. Events proved the correctness of the saying that man’s wisdom deserts him when bad days come. The days to which these events allude to saw a radical change within the ruling political circles at the Centre where Nehru was keen to rid the Congress Party of reactionary dead-wood. He devised a novel method of removing such right-of-the centre ministers whom he considered an obstruction in the path of reform. He asked chief ministers and union ministers to abandon executive posts for party work. Thinking himself to be indispensable, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad almost quixotically offered to resign from the Prime Ministership. To his utter shock, Nehru embraced the offer with open arms. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad tried hard to ‘force’ Nehru to invite him back to head the State executive by organizing pro-Bakshi hartals and demonstrations, but Nehru remained adamant. When all efforts failed, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad got Shams-ud-Din, one of his own men, elected leader of the House and the third Prime Minister of the State after it attained independence from the Dogra rule. Shams-ud-Din was a puppet in the hands of the General Secretary or at least he was not allowed to function as a *de facto* Prime Minister by the vested interests.

Shams-ud-Din had been Prime Minister for hardly two months, when an event took place in Srinagar which shook to its foundations the facade of popularity which Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and his clique had built for themselves. It came with a volcanic

force and shook the Central leaders out of their complacent Kashmir policy. The event proved that the Kashmiri Muslims, though temperamentally peace-loving, could not be taken for granted, the image which Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had sought to create for the Central leaders. The snows were silently ringing out 1963 when a stupendous tragedy befell on the Kashmiri Muslims. Prophet Mohammad's holy relic enshrined at Hazarbal suddenly disappeared. The miscreants had broken open the sanctuary and removed it to some unknown destination. Who was responsible for this sacrilege has remained a mystery to this day. A sense of shock swept the entire Valley and for every Muslim it was the worst personal tragedy.

The Kashmiri Muslims may sometime accept a compromise in matters political, but the loss of the holy relic was a challenge to their faith. Lakhs of Muslims from the villages poured daily into the city, some coming by buses, some by carriages, and most of them trudging the slushy roads on foot. Wave upon wave of devout Muslims reached Srinagar from every direction. They took out processions and demanded the restoration of the holy relic. Their souls writhed with pain as their eyes longed for a *deedar* of the Prophet's hair. Weeping and wailing, they demanded one thing: the holy relic. Complete confusion prevailed in the beginning and the silent agitation had no direction, no leadership. And yet voluntary organisations emerged to arrange food and shelter, and, above all, fuel for the thousands of people who came from the countryside and waited patiently. Hindus and Sikhs joined in hundreds with their Muslim brethren to share their grief and comfort them during the crisis. Some anti-Indian sections tried to float the canard that it was the mischief done at the behest of the Central Government so that the mass anger could be directed against India. But soon such saboteurs were isolated. The tolerant Muslims were once again charmed by Sheikh Abdullah's slogan: *Sher-i-Kashmir ka kya irshad? Hindu-Muslim-Sikh itihad.* But while Sheikh Abdullah was in jail at Kud, the self-styled leaders of the National Conference were conspicuous by their absence as the law and order machinery of the State Government came to a virtual standstill.

Within days, there emerged the Holy Relic Action Committee. It comprised vocal and popular leaders of all parties, the Plebiscite Front, the Political Conference of the veteran freedom

fighter Mohi-ud-Din Qura, and Awami Action Committee headed by the nineteen-year-old Mir Waiz Maulana Mohammad Farooq. The law and order part of the administration passed into the hands of the Holy Relic Action Committee. The religious movement soon assumed a political complexion. The Muslim masses got an opportunity to give vent to their pent-up feelings when the wrath of the masses was directed towards the ruling National Conference. While primarily demanding the restoration of the holy relic, they also demanded the dismissal of the corrupt and unpopular government of the time to be substituted by the true representatives of the people. The members of the Council of Ministers during this time had burrowed themselves into the earth. Bakshi Abdul Rashid, the General Secretary of the ruling party, was manhandled when he attempted to address the people at Lal Chowk. His jeep was smashed and he had to run for his life. It was clear as daylight that the days of the stooge government were numbered.

The Central Government at once put into operation its entire intelligence machinery. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's hypnosis was at one stroke lifted from the eyes of the Central leaders dealing with Kashmir affairs. Nehru is reported to have said, "If the Bakshi Government is not removed without loss of face, and if the holy relic is not restored, Kashmir is gone from us for ever." The wolf which Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had been crying all these ten years had actually emerged from its lair. There was initiated at New Delhi a re-appraisal of the Kashmir policy and a radical change in it felt. The holy relic was traced more, as Mullik has pointed out, as a result of its own miraculous power, than due to the efforts of the CBI. The jubiliations in the Valley were unprecedented and prayers of thanksgiving were attended by the largest ever congregation. There were illuminations in the whole Valley and each hearth heaved a sigh of relief. Allah and His Messenger had taken pity on the helpless Kashmiri Muslims and brought back in their midst that of which they had been yearning to have *deedar*, again and ever again.

The holy relic agitation was the first stage of a new consciousness at the Centre with regard to Kashmir. The Frankenstein.

created by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had been laid. Accordingly, the Central leaders encouraged liberal and progressive forces in the State to take up the responsibility of running the administration. G.M. Sadiq became the new Prime Minister on February 28, 1964 with the apparent support of the Bakshi group. Bakshi Ghulam Mohamad was, however, preparing for a vote of no-confidence against the newly sworn-in Council of Ministers at an opportune moment. But the new government, with the support of the Central Government, proved more than a match for him. He had already been charge-sheeted for corrupt practices and before he thought he would play his trump card, he was arrested.

As a politician with an ideology, and groomed in Marxist philosophy, Sadiq had pronounced leftist leanings. To Sheikh Abdullah and his people he was as good a stooge as Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, but certainly a lesser evil. Sadiq laid emphasis on emotional integration of the State with the rest of India. Had the elections been conducted fairly, the approach would have been the ideal one, though it could hardly succeed in the absence of Sheikh Abdullah, the main architect of this relationship, from the political stage. In any case, Sadiq addressed himself to the task of restoration of civil liberties and human rights. He ordered the release of all political detenus and disbanded the Peace Brigade. The freedoms—of expression, of association and of the Press—were at once restored. He declared that the best method of defeating the secessionists was to do so politically rather than by branding them with electrically heated irons, as had been done during the Bakshi regime.

The result of this liberalization was that the people of the State felt relaxed after the rule of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and his coterie. Liberalization was akin to the doctrine of social democracy advocated by Islam. The National Conference appeared to have shed the deadwood. Being himself incorruptible to a fault, Sadiq would not allow illiterate tailors to become millionaires, nor fishermen business tycoons. He even allowed pro-Pakistan elements to express themselves freely because he knew their two-nation ideology would cut no ice with the Kashmiri Muslims who were wedded to the philosophy of secularism. Sadiq declared that the *sine qua non* for the administration would be honesty. The saner sections among the Kashmiri

Muslims began to have second thoughts about the independent Kashmir slogan, or the self-determination slogan of the Plebiscite Front. Realizing that the State's accession to India was irrevocable, they hailed the liberalization policy initiated by the new government. And since the Centre had played such an important role in the recovery of the holy relic, it began to retrieve its credibility among the Kashmiri Muslims.

Yet, as in Roman history, Caesar's ghost was more potent than Caesar living, similarly the continued absence of Sheikh Abdullah, their beloved leader, from their midst continued to agonize the souls of the Kashmiri Muslims. There was a void, an emotional vacuum. Their hailing of the new regime was at best a compromise, for without Sher-i-Kashmir the verdant valley seemed like a barren wasteland. Thus, within a few years, the Kashmiris yearned nostalgically for the days gone-by when their leader spoke to them in his sonorous voice from the pulpit of the Hazartbal shrine. As days rolled by, they recalled more poignantly Sheikh Abdullah's political speeches imbued with religious and moral colours.

Very soon Sadiq's edifice of liberalization began to develop cracks. His Marxist ideology underestimated the role of religion in the politics of the sub-continent. It was through religious language alone that the broad principles involved in politics could be brought home to Kashmiri masses steeped in religion. Mahatma Gandhi preached politics to the Indian people through the language of Ram and Rahim. Sheikh Abdullah, a deeply religious man, talked to the people of his State in Gandhi's language. Righteousness that governs the universe is the most important ingredient for the body politic. Sheikh Abdullah knew the Holy Quran by heart and whenever he spoke, he quoted extensively from it to support his political philosophy. God had bestowed on him not only sincerity of feeling and honesty of purpose but the most effective gift of eloquence. He could hold his audience as if under a hypnotic spell for hours. Sadiq had sincerity of heart and honesty of purpose in abundant measure, but he lacked the gift of the gab. The emotional content in his constitution was rather held in restraint. An armchair politician, more a theoretician of the dialectical materialism than a practical statesman, he allowed an exclusive group of persons to run the affairs of the State. He never addressed mass gatherings and

if he ever did, his approach was intellectual rather than emotional. The coterie that began to reap harvests of benefits managed to keep him so isolated that he began to believe in the myth that Sheikh Abdullah was as good as forgotten and was soon to die a political death.

The Sadiq regime also lost popularity because attempts were made to extend more Central laws to the State. Sadiq committed a blunder when he stated that Article 370 of the Indian Constitution would, in the course of time, lose its importance. Taking the cue from this unwary 'loud thinking', some of his Muslim colleagues in the ruling party attempted to show themselves more loyal than the king; they repeated parrot-like the fact of the finality of accession and the advisability of applying more Central laws to the State. Their Hindu counterparts took up the cry, and extremist Hindu elements at the Centre joined the chorus. Doubt and suspicion again gripped the hearts of the Kashmiri Muslims and they felt that attempts were being made to deprive them of their constitutional autonomy and hence of their peculiar identity. They looked back to the days when their Lion roared against any attempt made to encroach upon their autonomy and prevented the Centre from doing so to a great extent. But being away from active politics due to incarceration, he could not prevent the National Conference from causing damage. This party soon ceased to exist as a symbolic expression of the political struggle of the State when it was merged with the Indian National Congress. This wounded the susceptibilities of the Kashmiris and they felt that a greater calamity was in the offing. They therefore got further alienated from the rest of the country and the concept of emotional integration, which Sadiq had sought to build up, soon began to prove illusory.

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Truth has come and falsehood has disappeared.
Surely falsehood is bound to disappear.

—Al-Qur'an

IT WOULD BE naive to suppose that Nehru was not aware of what was happening in the State, especially in the Valley. What must have annoyed him, and even surprised him, was that Sheikh Abdullah had lost the chance for rapprochement when he was released in January 1958. Nevertheless, the Kashmir problem with regard to Centre versus State, in Nehru's eyes, was still to be resolved. He had already suffered a stroke, and he knew that he would not live long. As a Kashmiri himself, he shared the agony of the Kashmiris at the continued absence of Sheikh Abdullah from their midst and his conscience had never been at ease since his first arrest in August 1953. As a true democrat he could not deny the democratic right to the Kashmiris? Patriotic urges were also urgently demanding a solution to the Kashmir problem because, were anything to go wrong in Kashmir, the ideal of secularism would again receive a set back and political and economic stability of the whole country would be imperilled. Nehru knew that unless and until the people of Kashmir felt secure in their alliance with India, no power on earth could force them to feel so by artificial ways. And the key to this voluntary association or emotional integration was with Sheikh Abdullah. Since 1953 the issue had assumed labyrinthine complexities and emotional and political attitudes had become frigid. But it would be wrong to assume that Sheikh Abdullah had no trace of political and emotional flexibility in him. He had given abundant proof of this during the exacting conflict with the Maharaja.

Nehru knew that time was fast running out, and that ice had to be broken. How long could he silence criticism in the Indian Parliament?

Sheikh Abdullah was released on April 8, 1964 and the Kashmir Conspiracy Case was immediately withdrawn. This was done after taking the State Government into confidence and the step was consistent with the policy of liberalization that had already been initiated in the State. It also proved that although Sheikh Abdullah wanted self-determination—meaning thereby greater autonomy—he never wanted Kashmir to accede to Pakistan. Nehru lost no time to invite his former friend and political colleague to New Delhi. Sheikh Abdullah, now sober and more mature due to the healing balm of suffering, responded warmly to this gesture. Fortunately, for the Kashmiris he had developed no inhibitions and he reached New Delhi with an open mind. The meeting between them must not have been confined just to exchange of greetings and pleasantries. Though Nehru was an intellectual, yet there was in his constitution a strong undercurrent of feeling, sometimes reaching the periphery of impulse. And Sheikh Abdullah's impulsive nature was well-marked to go unnoticed. The two leaders must have embraced each other and forgiven each other from the depths of their hearts. The artificial glaciers must have at once thawed in the warm affection and respect the two had for each other. And then, the destinies of fifty crores of Indians were intimately linked with their relationship. Fate had, it appears, arranged that the future Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi should also be present at this historic meeting. The two leaders were conscious of the fact that a slight disturbance in the status quo would unleash forces of destruction in the sub-continent of vaster dimensions than had occurred in the wake of the partition following the transfer of power. They, however, insisted that a solution was imperative so that the Kashmiri Muslims would live honourably within the wider framework of secular India and did not rule out some agreement even with Pakistan so that the problem could be solved within the geo-political realities of the sub-continent. Nehru, therefore, suggested to Sheikh Abdullah that he should undertake a pilgrimage of peace to Pakistan.

Accordingly, Sheikh Abdullah accompanied in his mission by Mirza Afzal Beg, Mubarik Shah Naqshbandi, and son Dr Farooq

Abdullah reached Pakistan in the first week of May 1964. Nehru had asked Sheikh Abdullah to discuss with the Pakistani authorities a proposal for a confederation between India, Kashmir and Pakistan. But the proposal was cold-shouldered by Marshal Ayub Khan, because, as the events were to reveal later, he had another 'solution' for the Kashmir dispute up his sleeve. But fates seemed to prevent a settlement, for Nehru suddenly left millions lamenting on May 27, 1964. Sheikh Abdullah cut short his trip to join the mourning nation and to attend the cremation. The memories that Sheikh Abdullah cherished, as he sat mourning, were many. Nehru under whose guidance and with whose affection he had been able to restore to the Kashmiris the honour they had lost. The Sopore session of the National Conference, the river welcome, accession, shaking of the hands of friendship at Lal Chowk, and then Nehru coming down the steps of his official residence to wish him bon voyage to Pakistan. At the cremation, Sheikh Abdullah held his handkerchief to his eyes and wept like a child as the flames leapt to consume the mortal remains of his friend. The one man who could have resolved the Kashmir problem, so far as the autonomous nature of the State was concerned, was now no more. Sheikh Abdullah returned to Srinagar, a deeply frustrated man. With Nehru's death, the process of reconciliation received a fatal blow.

Not many months after the death of Nehru, Sheikh Abdullah's fears began to be confirmed. Members of the Indian Parliament, the opposition members being most vocal among them, started talking of Kashmir's complete constitutional merger with India. They initiated moves even for the abrogation of Article 370. On November 20, 1964 a private member introduced in the Lok Sabha a Bill seeking complete integration of the State with India by abrogating Article 370. No member except R.K. Khadilkar opposed the move. But legal and constitutional experts pointed out that the recommendation had to come from the Kashmir Constituent Assembly. Since the latter stood dissolved, the right reverted to the people of the State or to the State Vidhan Sabha. Sadiq was inclined to yield to the demand and had he done so, he would have been the first Kashmiri to liquidate the peculiar identity of the Kashmiris. But the tragedy was averted, again this

time, by saner counsel prevailing at the Centre, where the Cabinet studied the matter in depth. They came to the unanimous decision that the move was inadvisable because it would further alienate the Kashmiris from the rest of the country. After protracted and elaborate consultations between the Centre and the State, it was decided that the objective of integration could be realized by extending to the State, in successive stages, the Articles which had not been applied to it so far without disturbing Article 370. Had the Cabinet decided otherwise, the move would have been construed as a second betrayal of the Kashmiri Muslims. A beginning was made by applying Articles 356 and 357 which provided a mechanism for making laws for the State during a possible breakdown of constitutional machinery. Central jurisdiction was extended to the State in regard to four more items: organization of High Courts, regulations of the affairs of trading corporations, and price controls. A provision was also made for direct elections of members to the Lower House of Parliament from the State.

All these measures aroused suspicions in the minds of the Kashmiris about their status as citizens of India. They feared that the constitutional integration would stop with the abrogation of Article 370 and that this would ultimately lead to economic domination of Kashmir by the Indian capitalists. Fuel was added to the fire by statements made by Gulzari Lal Nanda, Central Home Minister, and by Mohammad Carim Chagla, Union Education Minister. The Home Minister said in the Lok Sabha, "Article 370 is not a wall. It is a tunnel. A good deal of traffic has already passed and more will pass now." Chagla recommended "the scrapping of the separate constitution of the State." The reaction of Kashmiri Muslims to such ill-advised statements from men in responsible positions was one of hurt feelings. They were convinced that the Central authorities had been emboldened by the forced absence of Sheikh Abdullah from their midst, and feared that the rich from India would deprive them of their saffron fields, of their vineyards and orchards, of their ever green forests and pastures, and in the process they would also lose their culture. In such moments of despondency the Kashmiri Muslims recalled the sacrifices of Sheikh Abdullah to save the Kashmiris from losing their honour and self-respect. Their identity was now in great danger of being lost.

In 1965 Sheikh Abdullah left India for the Haj pilgrimage. During his sojourn abroad, he visited Egypt, Great Britain, and Algeria, and he also managed a meeting with the then Chinese Premier Zou En-Lai at Algiers when the India-China relations were at the lowest ebb and the wounds received by India during the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962 were still raw. Hence this meeting between Zou and Sheikh Abdullah was interpreted in New Delhi as the worse political transgression committed by an Indian, however tall his stature might be. The contents of the dialogue between the Chinese Premier and Sheikh Abdullah have not become known till date. But the secret dialogue had a tremendous anti-Abdullah fall-out in India. The people and the leaders of India viewed the meeting suspiciously. Anti-Abdullah sentiment reached the highest pitch because he had cast to the winds ordinary norms of protocol. It was also revealed that Sheikh Abdullah had disclaimed from being an Indian national, describing himself as a Kashmiri in the application he made for the Indian passport on which he was travelling. Decisions were taken at the highest level, and within moments of his landing at the Delhi airport, Sheikh Abdullah was arrested, his passport impounded, and he was whisked away to some unknown destination. It was an ironical anti-climax to his pilgrimage of peace to Pakistan.

While Sheikh Abdullah had started serving another term of house arrest in Delhi, Pakistan's Marshal Ayub Khan, goaded by the brainy Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was planning Operation Gibraltor, the code name for Pakistan's attack on India. There was a conspicuous change in the strategy and plan of attack in 1965 in contrast with the one of 1947. While the latter was haphazard and even half-hearted, this time the strategists in Pakistan had done a lot of spade work. Selected army personnel were given guerilla and mountain warfare training under Chinese instructors. About five thousand such trained soldiers were sent as infiltrators into strategic spots both in the Valley and the Jammu region through almost inaccessible passes and moved about in the disguise of *gujjars* or shepherds. Earlier, some local pro-Pakistani groups were contacted and a secret liaison was established with them. The strategists in Pakistan had also kept themselves abreast with anti-India developments in Kashmir. They maintained a close watch on the simmering discontent among the Kashmiri Muslims against the State and the Central

Government and against which they were to stage a demonstration on August 9, 1965 under the auspices of the Action Committee. The Pakistani plan was to send the five thousand or so infiltrators to join the processionists and give the peaceful demonstration the semblance of a violent revolt. August 9 was a symbolic day because it was on this day in 1953 that Sheikh Abdullah had been dismissed and arrested, and compelled to undertake a political hijira.

Evidently, the Pakistanis had never cared to understand the psychology of a Kashmiri Muslim. They had taken it for granted that being Muslims, the Kashmiris would join hands with Pakistani Muslims against Hindu India. They had not reckoned with the fact that every Kashmiri Muslim was fired by the conviction of Sheikh Abdullah the liberator that before Islam came his freedom and honour. They did not realise that the Kashmiris always raised their voice against tyranny and exploitation, whether Hindu or Muslim. The Pakistanis were tragically mistaken that the one man who prevented Kashmir from becoming part of Pakistan was Sheikh Abdullah and perhaps they were happy that he had become a prisoner. But Sheikh Abdullah was an embodiment of the secular outlook which every Kashmiri has inherited as the richest legacy from the *bhikshus* and *rishis* of Buddhism and Hinduism and from the *sufis* of Islam. Sheikh Abdullah certainly wanted to fight against constitutional and economic domination of the Union of India over Kashmir, but this never meant trading the Kashmiris' honour with Islamic Pakistan. The Pakistanis still lived in a semi-medieval and feudal structure of society where democratic forces had little impact on their minds. The revolutionary Sheikh Abdullah would never let progressive Kashmir be linked with a theocratic and feudal Pakistan.

Some events that had taken place in the politics of the Valley were apt to create the illusion in the minds of the Pakistani rulers that the exhibition of discontent would take a pro-Pakistani turn. When Sheikh Abdullah had been out of jail for a year before his departure for Haj, he had given a call of *tarqui mawatl*, or social boycott, against those who had shifted their allegiance from the National Conference to the "Hindu Congress." The Action Committee comprising the Plebiscite Front, the Political Conference and the Awami Action Committee had launched a non-violent satyagraha as early as June 1965. The

agitationists had demanded the granting of the right of self-determination; finding an honourable settlement of the Kashmir problem; and the release of all political prisoners including Sheikh Abdullah. The recently formed Political Conference had raised the slogan "Pakistan Zindabad" and August 9, 1965 had been decided by the Action Committee for taking out processions, protest demonstrations, hartals, public meetings in mosques and courting arrest by volunteers. Hence, the Pakistani strategists were certain that what they had missed in 1947-48 would be achieved in 1965, in the belief that the Muslims in the Valley would welcome them with open arms.

In this again, the Pakistanis had drawn most inept and erroneous conclusions. Resentment against India had been misconstrued by them as a sign of an imminent armed revolt. Even in the worst political crisis, the Kashmiri Muslims are capable of keeping their cool and not allowing themselves to be swayed by sentiment or letting some tragic events to blur their vision of secularism and communal harmony. Under no circumstances were the Kashmiris inclined to bargain their honour and their principles for the so-called freedom, as the Pakistanis ostensibly promised them, from Hindu domination. Addressing a big audience at Zadibal, Mohi-ud-Din Qara, Chairman of the Political Conference said, "While we denounce Hindu communalism in India, we should not overlook the atrocities of Muslim fanatics in East Pakistan."

As it turned out, the most effective resisters of the Pakistani invaders were not so much the Indian army personnel as the Kashmiri Muslims. History was repeated in the 1965 conflict between India and Pakistan when the Kashmiris again rejected the two-nation theory and the theocratic basis of society. The Kashmiri Muslims proved to the hilt that for them, religion is not a decisive factor in political equations. The infiltrators had used unmanned passes in smuggling arms and men into the State. Since the Kashmiri Muslims did not offer them hospitality and protection, and also for strategic reasons, the infiltrators fanned out to converge at the historic Lal Chowk on August 9 when the people of the Valley were to hold a protest. The Pakistani cry of a *jihad*, or crusade, was met with a rebuff. Once again the Kashmiri Muslims gave a lie to the Pakistani propaganda that they had risen in revolt against India. Ideal communal harmony

prevailed in the Valley and elsewhere. Some elements did want to turn the Pakistani attack to an advantage, but they were negligible in number. So much so that Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, President of Plebiscite Front, resigned his post saying, "On account of selfishness and cowardice of the leaders of Kashmir, who were outside the jail, we missed a golden opportunity of the liberation of Kashmir." But his was a lone voice raised out of frustration and not the voice of the majority of the Kashmiri population.

India had repeatedly declared that if Jammu and Kashmir were to be attacked, the Indian forces would cross the international border and she was as good as her word. But Pakistan's most humiliating defeat was on the political front. Chalmer M. Roberts of the *Washington Post* remarked, "The Moslem Pakistanis, led by President Ayub Khan, had expected the infiltrators to be able to produce a general uprising of the predominantly Moslem Kashmiris. But there was no uprising and this is Ayub's first disappointment."¹ The British High Commissioner in India, John Freeman said, "I think the world is deeply impressed by the behaviour of the Kashmiri people with infiltrators."² He further added, "India's case had been strengthened following the Pakistani infiltration and by the behaviour of the Kashmiri people towards the infiltrators."³ The BBC correspondent Ivor Jones reported, "If the guerillas had come expecting any welcome and cooperation from the local population, they did not get it."⁴ The secular tradition strengthened by the inspiring leadership of Sheikh Abdullah, had taken deep roots in the hearts of the Kashmiri Muslims. It is this tradition, joined with the efficiency of the Indian army that gave Pakistan a lesson for life in a defeat that was military, political and moral.

The 1965 Indo-Pak war proved a blessing in disguise so far as the political stability of the State was concerned. The Kashmiri Muslims gained more respect and trust in the eyes of the Central leaders though no further proof of their secular character was needed after Sheikh Abdullah endorsed Kashmiri's accession to India in 1947. The 1967 general elections to the State Legislative Assembly gave Sadiq men of his own choice in the Legislature of which he was elected leader. He had begun to appreciate

the susceptibilities of Kashmiri Muslims with regard to Article 370. He favoured the application of some Central laws to the State but insisted on the autonomy of the State within the broader framework of the Indian Constitution and the least interference with Article 370. The difference between Sheikh Abdullah and his successors in office was about the quantum of autonomy practically possible in the State. Sheikh Abdullah was from the very beginning against the application of Articles 356 and 357. He opposed the application of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, and of the Auditor and Comptroller General of India to the State. His attitude to the whole problem was rather untenable. Article 370 guaranteed the perpetuity of the peculiar identity for the Kashmiri but the position became anomalous when the people of the State would have been denied the security of their fundamental rights and of their participation in the economic growth in the context of the rest of the country. Hence, in the course of a very short duration of time, more and more central laws were applied to the State. This was done to bring the State within the wider perimeter of uniformity and homogeneity in constitutional, administrative and financial fields of the rest of the country. Sheikh Abdullah and the Plebiscite Front should have drawn some lessons from the 1965 war with Pakistan. Now that India had pursued the enemy across international borders, it was clear that the slogan of self-determination had become obsolete. India had been steadily applying Central laws to the State standing by the letter and spirit of the agreement of not disturbing the special status of the State in the Indian Constitution—the special status as embodied in Article 370.

Sheikh Abdullah should have unilaterally announced his joining again the national mainstream from which he had gone astray for some time, partly due to his own rigid stance and partly due to the misunderstanding created against him. He should have allowed some regional autonomy for Jammu and Ladakh. This was an inescapable corollary of autonomy which the State as a whole already enjoyed. India could never hold the so-called plebiscite in the State because Pakistan, as a member of SEATO, had received massive military hardware from the USA and had lost credibility because India had been attacked a second time. Pakistan had not fulfilled the obligation of withdrawing its forces from the illegally occupied territory of the State, and India

could not wait indefinitely and postpone extending the implementation of its development plans to the State in order to bring it economically at par with other States. The Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly had ratified the State's accession to India when Sheikh Abdullah was still in power. The State was, therefore, an integral part of the Union of India, legally and constitutionally. Moreover, Sheikh Abdullah had played an active role in bringing about the State's accession. He should have judged the whole issue realistically and turned his mind to constructive channels.

The 1965 war led Sheikh Abdullah lose, to some extent, even the moral support of such leaders as Jai Prakash Narain and C. Rajagopalachari. They had so far been advocating the solution of the Kashmir problem within a triangular framework: India, Kashmir and Pakistan. Jai Prakash Narain said, "By her deliberate and blatant action, Pakistan has forfeited whatever place it had obtained in the Kashmir issue." Rajagopalachari said, "The crushing defeat suffered by Pakistan should have taught her that she could no longer go on making trouble for India." And Sheikh Abdullah too did not allow the least flexibility in his approach to the problem. It may not be amiss to point out that he was an idealist and a perfectionist to a fault. Abstract ideals fascinated him more than pragmatism. The 1965 war had proved beyond a shadow of doubt that Kashmir was an issue between India and Pakistan, with India's professed claim: Hands off Kashmir. Not that India ever said or wished to wriggle out of its commitment to Sheikh Abdullah that the State would have a special status though this was anomalous so far as other States in India were concerned. Again, the Tashkent Declaration signed on January 10, 1966 on Russian territory by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and President Ayub Khan proved that so far as India and Pakistan were concerned, the cease-fire line was as good as the line of actual control, the expression to be used later in the Shimla Agreement of 1972. The areas captured by both sides were restored to their possessors. The September 5 ante position was restored thus giving the world an impression that the State had been divided tacitly along the cease-fire line of 1948. Thus 1966 would have been the most propitious moment for a rapprochement between Sheikh Abdullah and the Centre.

The Central Government showed no inclination to break ice with Sheikh Abdullah and start negotiations with him. The State elections in 1967 were again a farce perpetrated on the Kashmiri Muslims. Why Kashmiris were not allowed to send their representatives to the Legislative Assembly, has remained a puzzle to this day. Sheikh Abdullah or no Sheikh Abdullah, the elections should have been fair and the Kashmiris would have welcomed such moves because they wanted an end to the political corruption, favouritism and nepotism that was a logical corollary of the people not having their own men in the Assembly. If India had cut Pakistan to its size over Kashmir, she could be ruthlessly firm with elements that might in the Assembly talk of secession after they had declared their allegiance to the Indian Constitution at the time of filing their nomination papers. This eventuality was, of course, too remote to come true. Fair elections in Kashmir would have won for India respect, trust and admiration. Thus, the Central government also contributed largely to the state of uncertainty. Of course, with Sheikh Abdullah made amenable to reason, and with him at the helm of affairs, things would have been ideal. And in the circumstances both Sheikh Abdullah and Central leaders seemed to harbour mental reservations. India's behaviour was still more untenable because the Kashmiri Muslims had in 1965 given yet another proof of their dislike for Pakistan.

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11. Return to Power

We have had enough of politics. Let us now work for things which can be of some benefit for the people.

—Sheikh Abdullah

THERE SEEM TO operate some unknown mystical powers behind important historical events, concludes Toynbee. The story of the relationship between Sheikh Abdullah and the Central leadership to some extent illustrates this. Fates that had prevented a rapprochement for eighteen years appeared in the guise of benevolent gods to make the two parties sit together and hammer out a permanent solution. The opportunity came in the form of war, but for the Kashmiris it proved to be a blessing in disguise. Pakistan had pushed Kashmir into the Indian fold by the unprovoked attack on the State in 1947. The Pakistani attack on India in 1971 compelled Sheikh Abdullah to seek a solution of the Kashmir problem within the secular and democratic framework of the Indian constitution with the guarantee of the special status.

Sheikh Abdullah was released on January 2, 1968, long before the Bangladesh war. His release had been demanded by eminent public men and 163 MPs on grounds of civil liberties. Sheikh Abdullah, happy at the gesture, gave proof of his having abandoned his rigid postures when the same year he organized the Jammu and Kashmir State People's Convention to evolve a possible solution to the Kashmir problem, an indication that the political glaciers had started thawing. The convention was attended by 250 delegates and the inaugural address was delivered by Jai Prakash Narain, the veteran freedom fighter and the legendary figure of the Quit India movement. He suggested that after the 1965 war Pakistan had no *locus standi* in the Kashmir dispute which could

now be settled in the context of the Indian Constitution. Though Sheikh Abdullah did not react favourably to the suggestion at that moment, yet later he gave hint of exploring the scope of the framework.

The concensus of the Convention suggested that the solution of the State's furture should be "peaceful, democratic, just and realistic and keep in view the interests of all the regions, strengthen secular, democratic forces, foster communal harmony and be in confirmity with the values of the freedom movement."¹

What looked like an opening which could lead to negotiations, to the public eye the externment of Sheikh Abdullah and his two staunch supporters, Mirza Afzal Beg and G.M. Shah, on January 8, 1971 came as an anti-climax. The Central leaders were not yet convinced of a change of thinking on the part of Sheikh Abdullah. Some of his utterances after the People's Convention were no evidence of a change in his stand. He made contradictory statements, for he hated aspersions cast on his sincerity. With parliamentary elections round the corner and signs of another imminent attack from Pakistan, it would have been unsafe to let the Lion roar in the Valley. The Plebiscite Front was outlawed and barred from contesting the elections held in March 1971. In view of the situation in East Pakistan, the Kashmir problem was relegated into the background. The Government had to take precautions and most unpleasant decisions to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of the country. There was no brooking of a possible sabotage from any quarter. Not that Sheikh Abdullah would create problems for the Government, but Prime Minister Indira Gandhi did not want to take any avoidable risk in those critical days.

The 1971 India-Pakistan war had profound impact on the Sheikh Abdullah-Centre relationship. For the Kashmiri Muslims and for the Jammu and Kashmir State the war had a healthy positive effect. The Shimla Agreement signed by Indira Gandhi and Z.A. Bhutto, the Prime Ministers of the two countries, was a beginning that led to the Kashmir Accord of 1974. The stage was now set for talks between Sheikh Abdullah and the Centre. The events which took place during the short time span that Sheikh Abdullah was externed convinced him that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was as good as her word and that a solution to uncertainty that prevailed in his State could be resolved only.

by someone with her vision and determination. She, on her part, realized that Sheikh Abdullah alone symbolized the aspirations of the Kashmiri Muslims and was still their most trusted leader.

Accordingly, on June 5, 1972, Sheikh Abdullah was allowed to return home and negotiations were at once initiated. On March 10, 1972, Sheikh Abdullah had told Peter Hezelhurst of the *London Times*, "Our quarrel with the Government of India is not about accession but it is about the quantum of autonomy."² In fact, this statement constituted the basis of the negotiations. In the meantime, after G.M. Sadiq died, Mir Qasim became the Chief Minister. He was convinced that the political uncertainty in the State could be ended and a path paved for true emotional integration if Sheikh Abdullah were to be restored to his original status within, of course, the framework of the Indian Constitution with the guarantee of the special status for the State.

The negotiations extended over a long period and the cobwebs that had collected in the minds of the two parties took time to lift. G. Parthasarthy, the Central Government representative, and Mirza Afzal Beg, Sheikh Abdullah's representative, negotiated long and as a result the Kashmir Accord was signed in New Delhi on November 13, 1974. Jammu and Kashmir was recognised as a constituent unit of the Union of India. Its relations with India were to be governed by Article 370 of the Constitution of India. Residuary powers were to remain with the State, but Parliament continued to have power to make laws relating to the prevention of activities for disturbing the territorial integrity, for secessionist tendencies, or for dishonouring the national flag, the national anthem or the Constitution. The President could modify, alter or repeal by an order, any provision which had been applied to the State after modifications or adaptation but those which had been applied without adaptation or modifications remained unalterable, while the State Government could review the laws made by Parliament or extended to the State after 1953 on any matter related to the concurrent list.

The uncrowned king that ruled the hearts of the Kashmiri Muslims returned to them after twenty-two long years of political exile when Sheikh Abdullah assumed the office of Chief Minister of the State on February 26, 1975. The clouds that had

almost settled permanently on the brows of the Kashmiri's were lifted as if by a miracle. The accord gave a new direction to the State-Centre relationship reviving the spirit of the accession days of 1947 while ensuring not only political integration but, what was more important, emotional integration. It proved that the Kashmiris considered themselves politically, economically, culturally and religiously safe within the democratic, secular and socialistic framework of the Indian Constitution. The phantoms of the Plebiscite Front and self-determination vanished into oblivion when the light of reason and understanding dawned on both sides of the negotiating table. From the ashes of the Plebiscite Front rose, phoenix-like, the National Conference and it took its honoured place of being the symbolic representation of the political struggle and aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Though now three-score and ten, Sheikh Abdullah enjoyed good health and seemed to be surrounded by halo of joy and resplendent glory. His reception was tumultuous because it was spontaneous. It was a personal triumph because his stand had been vindicated after much turmoil and suffering. His return to power was the vindication of the honour of the Kashmiri Muslims. In fact, Kashmir being the symbol of Indian secularism, the accord brought new hope to the ten crores Muslims living in India. The people in the State grew hysterical with joy and excitement. "It was roses, roses all the way."

Though here and there the Kashmir Accord received a mixed reaction, on the whole it was a welcome change. It ended the State of political uncertainty in the State and consequently put a halt to the process of moral degradation that had been eating like a canker into the body politic. It would usher in a positive trend in the process of emotional integration between the Kashmiri Muslims and the rest of India while paving the ground for fulfilling the political and economic aspirations of the people of the State by Sheikh Abdullah introducing and implementing the concept of people's involvement in developmental projects. The accord would satisfy the regional aspirations of the people living in the Jammu and Ladakh regions. Sheikh Abdullah had in fact called a convention of the representatives of Jammu and Ladakh in 1974 to seek their cooperation on the basis of five-tier internal constitutional set-up evolved by the People's Convention in 1970 which envisaged regional autonomy and further devolution of

political power at lower levels.

In 1975, when the National Conference was revived, it emphasised the federal structure of the party with provincial committees for each of the three regions of the State. The accord would restore to the State moral democratic processes which it had been denied for twenty-two years. The accord was a solemn reaffirmation on India's part that the Indian Government accepted Article 370 as good as a permanent feature of the Constitution. It was a triumph of the spirit of good faith, compromise and mutual understanding. "It goes to the credit of Sheikh Abdullah that despite his strong views on these issues (application or non-application of provisions of the Indian Constitution), he . . . accepted the agreed conclusions."³ It was clear that "the clock cannot be put back and we have to take note of the realities of the situation."⁴ The Kashmir Accord also proved the resilient nature of the distinctive character of the personality of the Kashmiri Muslims, they being different from their co-religionists beyond the boundaries of their Valley. The Congress at the Centre failed to get the National Conference merged with it in spite of the fact that Sheikh Abdullah came back to power with the support of the Congress Legislature party in the State. Though the accord was finally reached within the ideological and political framework of the Congress party which ruled at the Centre, yet Sheikh Abdullah insisted that the secular and democratic forces in the State could consolidate themselves only under the flag of the National Conference. This name had become synonymous with struggles, sacrifices, failures and triumphs of the Kashmiri Muslims during their long and chequered freedom movement.

The 1977 elections to the State Legislative Assembly demonstrated the change in the hearts of the Muslims of Kashmir. For the first time after the suffocating atmosphere of the twenty-two years, they really felt part of the democratic traditions and practices of the rest of the country. Again for the first time the Kashmiri Muslims would be represented in the Assembly by people of their choice and not by those thrust upon them by their rulers. All the contesting parties in the State willingly accepted the State's accession to India as an irrevocable fact, and the issue before the people, the electorate, was which political party would put the State back on rails towards an all-round planned

economic development. As the Bharatiya Janata Party also entered the political contest in the Valley, it became certain that Indian democracy and federalization had the vitality and scope to accommodate intense sentiments of Kashmiri regionalism and even Muslim consciousness, which so far had manifested secessionist proclivities.

During the seven years that he lived after assuming power, Sheikh Abdullah worked indefeasibly. As he had no magical wand of Moses to strike water from the desert, he had to be extremely stern. He set an example himself. The principle of single-line administration was translated into practice and he presided over meetings of development councils in far-flung areas like Kishtwar, Rajouri, Leh, Kargil, Poonch, Kupwara and Doda. He reviewed the progress made in connection with the development projects launched from time to time and studied the work done on the spot. Cabinet meetings were held in different district headquarters to expedite the implementation of the projects. This novel way of administration ensured the involvement of local people in economic growth and also gave them training in the process of democratization.

In the short span of seven years Sheikh Abdullah did commit mistakes. He delayed the implementation of his commitment of granting regional autonomy to the Jammu and Ladakh regions. Ostensibly for administrative convenience, Ladakh was bifurcated in 1979 into two districts almost on communal lines —the Muslims majority Kargil district and the Buddhist majority Leh district. There is no doubt that Kargil in Ladakh, Rajouri, Poonch and Doda in the Jammu region have their own peculiar problems in that these areas are very backward. It is an unfortunate coincidence that these areas happen to be inhabited predominantly by Muslims. But a mechanism could have been evolved for their uplift which would give a lie to Sheikh Abdullah's detractors who argued that these districts were created on communal lines. Again, even at this stage in his life, Sheikh Abdullah reacted impulsively to actions and statements made by some Hindus from time to time. In 1978-79, when an agitation was launched in the Jammu region for the so-called political and constitutional safeguards, Sheikh Abdullah lamented,

“I am the most discriminated against person in the whole country.”⁵ When Dr Karan Singh warned that if the Jammu regional problems were not tackled with understanding and imagination, it would lead to “separation of the Jammu region from the Kashmir Valley,”⁶ Sheikh Abdullah retorted, “If the majority of people in the Jammu region believe that they can progress by carving out a separate State of Jammu, then there is nothing to stop them and we must part as friends.”⁷ It was reminiscent of a leader from the Valley rather than a Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, in 1981 the All-Party Action Committee of Ladakh started an agitation for regional autonomy. At that time Sheikh Abdullah said that he would not stand in the way if Ladakh decided not to stay on with the State.

Such statements made by the leader of Sheikh Abdullah’s eminence and stature led to the encouragement of divisive and extremist forces in the State. Though Sheikh Abdullah’s non-communal and secular outlook was beyond a shadow of doubt, some elements took advantage of his utterances. Moves were initiated to cause communal clashes. On April 5, 1981 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Jammu, she made an indirect reference to the minorities feeling insecure in the State. But Sheikh Abdullah’s approach to secularism was always clear. If a Muslim religious gathering on the national, or international level was organized without political overtones, Sheikh Abdullah saw no harm in it. He therefore allowed the Seerat Conference to be held in Kashmir, attended among others by the Imam of Kaaba. He like-wise allowed the holding of the Hindu Vishwa Parishad Conference at Jammu in March, 1981. And the same Sheikh Abdullah disallowed the holding of the World Islamic Youth Conference on August 22, 1980 under the aegis of the Jamiat-e-Tulba, student wing of the Jamat-e-Islami, a militant extremist Muslim organisation. Many prominent leaders of that organisation were even arrested. Though one of the devoutest of Muslims, Sheikh Abdullah being at true democrat at heart was against the revival of Islamic fundamentalism. When his statements were quoted torn out of context, he was more sinned against than sinning.

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12. *The End*

Here was a Muslim leader, who believed as India did, in a non-communal, secular state, but who was aware of the fanatical devotion of his followers to Islam. What then should he do? Pakistan was a reactionary country, he said, and he was convinced that a union of Kashmir with Pakistan would finally work against the interests of his people. They would be better off with India—but what could he do if the sentiments of his people pushed them in a direction against his better judgement.

—Joseph Korbel

MANY A TRAUMATIC experience has been the lot of Kashmiris—1947, 1953, 1965, 1971. But the most excruciatingly painful has been the passing away of Sheikh Abdullah. They had seen him towering their lives for over half a century. There were indelible scenes that came to their minds recalling the chequered political career of this great man; his inspiring and soul-stirring speeches at Mujahid Manzil inciting people to revolt against Dogra tyranny; comforting speeches at the unprovoked aggression of the State by Pakistani marauders; assuming power as Head of the Emergency administration while the raiders had reached the very gates of Srinagar; his appointment as the Prime Minister of the State amidst unprecedeted scenes of jubilation; his bold speeches against Hindu communalism and his subsequent dismissal and arrest in 1953; his release in 1958 and the hero's welcome and calling of the People's Convention; and his coming back to power on February 25, 1975. But the most impressive were those when he addressed huge gatherings at the Hazartbal shrine.

It was in June 1982 that Sheikh Abdullah suffered the first heart attack. Before that too he had not been keeping fit and felt that he had not a long time to live. He had been aware of

some kind of a succession battle in the wings of the political stage on which he was still the chief protagonist. Accordingly, he made up his mind to resolve the succession issue as soon as possible. While addressing a congregation at the Hazartbal shrine, he declared that his son, Dr Farooq Abdullah, would be the next President of National Conference. This was welcomed by all the people in the Valley. The choice was celebrated in Srinagar by organizing a welcome to the new President and taking him out in a procession through the main roads of Srinagar. Dr Farooq Abdullah was inducted as a minister in his father's cabinet. These two steps confirmed the reports that Sheikh Abdullah had chosen his political heir and the mantle would fall on the shoulders of his son. With G.M. Shah reportedly staking his claim as his father-in-law's political heir, the Chief Minister is said to have felt disturbed. On September 5 came the second heart attack, this time a severe one. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited the sick man and was closeted with him for fifteen minutes. She is reported to have come to the rescue of the dying leader by suggesting the appointment of Dr Farooq Abdullah as the new Chief Minister, knowing well the inclination of the great man who had not much more to live and also because she knew that this choice would be to the entire satisfaction of the people of Kashmir.

The end came soon after the resolution of the silent succession battle. On the evening of Wednesday, September 8, 1982, Dr Farooq Abdullah was called urgently from Dastgir shrine where he had gone to offer prayers for his father's recovery. Rumour spread that the Lion had breathed his last. Thousands of people started thronging his residence behind the sprawling lawns of Nedou's Hotel on the Maulana Azad Road. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah died at 7.40 p.m. But the announcement was not made till late at midnight. To avoid a constitutional crisis, Dr Farooq Abdullah was sworn as Chief Minister at a hurried ceremony the same evening following a request by the members of Sheikh Abdullah's Council of Ministers to the Governor, B.K. Nehru.

The mortal remains of Sheikh Abdullah were shifted to the spacious Polo Ground across the road. The body, embalmed and decked with the national Tri-colour, was kept on a dais under a shamiana. As the body lay in state, countless number of people came to pay homage to their departed leader. The

homage was paid more with streaming tears that were the precious symbols of their spontaneous love for the man. Wave after wave of human beings—young and old, men and women, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Christians moved past the body, bent low, looked with tearful eyes at the their leader's serene face and most reluctantly left to give thousands of others the chance to have a glimpse of the man who had been architect of their destiny. President Zail Singh, placed a wreath on the body as mark of respect and affection he had for the man who had been his comrade. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi condoled the bereaved family and shared their grief, giving them comfort in the hour of bereavement. During the entire night between September 9 and 10, the never-ending stream of people poured into the Polo Ground for a last glimpse of Sheikh Abdullah.

As the rays of the sun touched the tops of green-leaved chinars under which the body lay in state on September 10, 1982, the time came to bid farewell. Amidst deafening shouts of "Babai-Quom Zindabad" the cortège moved towards the resting place near the Hazartbal shrine. People sobbed. Young and old, men and women, boys and girls beat their breasts. When the cortège moved towards the Dal Gate, the sea of humanity wailed, "*Shero, Kutuh Gokh,*" "O Lion, where are you gone?" As Sheikh Abdullah had wished, the cortège passed by the main Muslim, Sikh and Hindu shrines, and as the earth turned another ten hours around its axis, the sun shed its parting tints on the placid waters of the Dal. The grief-stricken sea of humanity reached the park on the bank of the lake to consign their saviour to the earth. The spot had been chosen by the man himself, a wish to be buried near the shrine, under the protection of the Prophet's holy relic, and near the lake he loved so much. And then, slowly, very slowly, the coffin was lowered into the grave to the reverberating notes of the last post.

When Mark Antony spoke to the Romans at the funeral of Julius Caesar, he said:

The evil that men do lives after them

The good they do is often interred with their bones.

The sense of shock that filled the nation when Sheikh Abdullah died on September 8, 1982 and the spontaneous outburst of

grief coupled with admiration that the people of all shades of opinion expressed for him belie Antony's generalisation made, of course, in a different context. National leaders belonging to political parties with different ideologies paid rich tributes to the Lion of Kashmir. This notwithstanding the fact that some of them sometimes entertained fundamental differences with him. They acknowledged Sheikh Abdullah's contribution to the freedom movement, to Hindu-Muslim unity, to democracy, and to socialism. When the communal holocaust engulfed the sub-continent in utter darkness, Mahatma Gandhi saw the ray of light in the Valley alone and of that light Sheikh Abdullah was the incarnate symbol. Every leader who expressed his emotional reaction to his passing away recognized this fact.

As the Statue of Liberty watches what Americans do with their sacred trust of democracy, so shall the invisible status of the spirit of Sheikh Abdullah keep an eternal vigil over the sub-continent enjoining upon its teeming millions to nourish the noble ideals of secularism and freedom. Governments will come and go, but India can live only if the deep-rooted faith in secularism is not lost. That was the mission of his life; that was what Sheikh Abdullah stood for. That was the reason why he never allowed Kashmir to accede to the theocratic state of Pakistan.

While, *The Hindustan Times* called Sheikh Abdullah, "last of the Titans of the freedom struggle," President Zail Singh described him as "a great nationalist and patriot with sterling qualities." The President said, "the country has lost a veteran freedom fighter and champion of democracy and socialism, a man of iron-determination and breadth of vision." Vice-President Hidayatullah said, "the country had lost a freedom fighter of the first rank and a man of great stature and determination." The late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said that in Sheikh Abdullah's passing away the Jammu and Kashmir State had lost a father-figure and the country a great stalwart. She said Sheikh Abdullah had always remained lion-hearted and full of concern for the people of Kashmir, "the tall personality of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the Lion of Kashmir, dominated the beautiful State for nearly half a century. Many a time has he defied death. Now it has claimed him. The tall Indian has gone.... Like other popular leaders of the old Princely States, he fought

against the double yoke feudalism and colonialism. . . . He stoutly opposed the politics of the Muslim League and was fine exemplar of the secular ideals of our country. He won the admiration of the people of different regions and religions. . . .”

The Bharatiya Janata Party said that with the passing away of Sheikh Abdullah, “a void had been created that would be difficult to fill.” L.K. Advani, its General Secretary, said that for decades Kashmir’s politics had come to be identified with the personality of Sheikh Abdullah. The CPI Secretary, Rajeshwar Rao, said that the passing away of Sher-i-Kashmir, “one of the outstanding leaders of our freedom struggle is an irreparable loss to the country. . . . His was a life of incessant struggle in the cause of secular democracy and for the well-being of the people.” The Politbureau of CPIM said, “in him we have lost an outstanding leader of the country’s national movement.” Chitta Basu, General Secretary of the Forward Block, decribed Sheikh Abdullah as “a great patriot with unwavering faith in secularism and democracy.” Acharya Vinoba Bhave said that Sheikh Abdullah was a symbol of the culture and civilisation of the people of Kashmir.

The Times of India wrote that, “Sheikh Abdullah was a tall Indian, as Mrs Gandhi has so aptly said, and the tallest of Kashmiris. He was a man of power in every sense of the term, and there was something elemental about his towering personality. He was also a complex individual.” Inder Malhotra wrote, “Until the last Sheikh Abdullah might have deliberately confined his activities to his bailiwick, the beautiful Kashmir Valley. But almost from the start his name was household word in all parts of the country, indeed the sub-continent. To be sure, Sheikh Abdullah did not form part of the glittering galaxy that constituted the high command of the freedom movement in the persons of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Dr Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari and the like. But in the inspiring political pageant of that day (early period of the freedom movement) the Sheikh seemed only a step behind the Titans in the vanguard, sharing a niche with another equally towering and endearing personality, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan”.

The Hindustan Times wrote, “throughout his chequered political career, the Sheikh symbolised the aspirations of the Kashmiri

people as no single individual had done. . . . Although rooted in Kashmir, the Sheikh was a national figure whose name is synonymous in the minds of the Indian people with secularism." In its editorial, September 10, 1982, the same daily wrote, "In the death of Sheikh Abdullah the country loses a colossus who bestowed this sub-continent and helped it to change from a colonial and feudal society to a free, democratic and secular one. It was a long and grim battle that he fought. His task was made more difficult because going by the tradition set by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, he was a secularist who did not invoke the aid of religion to forward his political aims. . . . Sheikh Saheb's innumerable admirers will always have one regret, that he did not take a large part in the nation's affairs."

Brig. Mohammad Hayat of Pakistan occupied Kashmir sent a condolence message to Begum Abdullah praising Sheikh Abdullah for the key role in the struggle of the Kashmiri people against the Maharaja before 1947. A former President of the same territory, Sardar Abdul Qayum Khan, said that they had political differences with Sheikh Abdullah but in spite of that they always held his great personality in respect. He said, "He had become a legendary figure in his own life-time and it cannot be gainsaid that he was the central figure in Kashmir politics for over ten years." The *Dawn* of September 11, 1982, wrote, "Sheikh Abdullah's long and bitter struggle against the oppressive rule of the Maharaja cannot be made light of. For over one and a half decades he played an outstanding role in spreading political awakening among the Muslims of Kashmir."

The London *Times*, on September 10, wrote in a long obituary that Sheikh Abdullah was "one of the last surviving major figures in the struggle for India's independence and one who had made his mark on modern Indian history... but he was above all a Kashmiri nationalist. . . . For the most he remained the lion of Kashmir, admired for his roar as well as for his lifelong commitment to Kashmir and its people."

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