

**KASHMIR  
ON  
THE  
MARCH**

**by**

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*This publication comprises a series of articles which appeared in the INDIAN EXPRESS, Delhi, on October 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20, 1956. The writer, Shri G.N.S. Raghavan, is the Special Correspondent of the Express Newspapers in New Delhi who was on a tour of the Valley in October, 1956.*

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10/11/53

*Issued by.*

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION  
Jammu & Kashmir Government  
November, 1956

Printed at the Caxton Press Private Ltd., New Delhi.

# I

## FESTIVAL IN THE ONCE TROUBLED VALLEY

**M**ANY people tend to think of Kashmir as not only a problem but also a troubled State because it went through an acute political crisis only three years ago, involving the arrest of the then Prime Minister, Sheikh Abdullah, who had been idolized for two decades as the "Lion of Kashmir".

It undoubtedly remains a problem State—with more than a third of its former territory and a quarter of its population under enemy control and its future kept alive as an international issue in the United Nations, despite the patent fact of Pakistan's aggression and the desire expressed by the people repeatedly and overwhelmingly for union with India.

But Kashmir today is assuredly not a troubled State. On the contrary, it is achieving economic and social progress at a rate and under conditions of political stability and mass enthusiasm which the rest of India might envy.

One has to visit Kashmir to realise the unanimity with which the people acclaim the new administration headed by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed as incomparably more beneficent than the former regime. I travelled extensively through the Valley for a fortnight and talked to a large number of people, and the story I heard everywhere and

from everyone was the same: the contrast between conditions of life before and after the change of Government in August, 1953.

### The Contrast

During the six years of Sheikh Abdullah's premiership, food prices rose steadily till rice sold at Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 per maund, employment declined, and a harsh system of controls bred corruption and forced even the poorest peasant to part with a quarter of his paddy crop at the arbitrarily low procurement prices fixed by the State.

The new Government has given the people both abundant food and full employment. The forced grain levy has been abolished, rice is sold by the Government at Rs. 7/8 per maund in Srinagar and a rupee or two more in the countryside, the demand for labour exceeds supply, and education is free at all stages from the primary school to the university.

Tourist traffic, which is not only an important factor in the State's economy but is also an index of the normality of life in the Valley, more than doubled from a total number of 21,381 visitors in 1953 to 51,025 in 1955, while this year the number had reached 60,026 by the end of September. These figures compare with the pre-independence peak of 37,297 visitors in 1945.

It is a veritable economic revolution which has taken place during the last three years in Kashmir, better and more widely liked than the land redistribution of 1950, which on the one hand alienated a section of the people

because of its expropriatory nature and on the other hand, was so poorly implemented that the tiller of the land had in many cases to pay illegal exactions to the landlord and the village "patwari" for the land which, under the law, he was supposed to get free.

The Festival of Kashmir, which was celebrated right through last month, reflected the joy of life which has been restored in this once troubled and unhappy Valley, thanks to three years of good government and enlightened political leadership.

I watched numerous Festival events in Srinagar during the last week of September, and altogether beyond the expectation of any visitor from outside were the enthusiasm and gay abandon with which the people of the city participated in the celebrations.

The most impressive item was the river procession on the Jhelum on September 27, when it appeared as if the capital's entire population of two and a half lakhs had turned out to witness the event. As I was rowed along in one of about a hundred gaily decorated boats which formed the procession, I could not see a single vantage point unoccupied. Cheering spectators packed the balconies and roofs of the houses on either side of the river while some were perched perilously atop trees and houseboats.

A cultural pageant was enacted on some of the boats by groups of singers and dancers from Ladakh, Kargil, Jammu and the Valley itself, dressed in the picturesque costumes peculiar to each of these regions of the State,

while two Dogra swordsmen gave a display of the valour associated with that race.

A great cheer went up as we passed the steps of the Secretariat building (formerly a palace of the Maharaja), from where Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed acknowledged the greetings of the processionists. With him were Mrs. Indira Gandhi and many members of Parliament—about a hundred of whom visited Kashmir during the Festival.

### **Military Tattoo**

Another great draw was the military tattoo on the night of September 29, when tens of thousands gathered at the Polo Ground to witness the torchlight physical training, the operation of a driverless jeep by remote control, display of horsemanship and other items put on by Army personnel. Other popular events included the cricket match and variety entertainment by Raj Kapoor, Nargis and other film stars, and a shadow-cum-live play, based on an old Kashmiri folk tale, staged by local talent.

But the Festival programme was not all fun and games. It included a large and well laid-out exhibition depicting the progress made by the State in agriculture, industry and handicrafts, where the demonstration of improved methods of sericulture was particularly impressive, and an all-India Hill Cattle and Poultry Show which was inaugurated by the Sadr-i-Riyasat, Yuvaraj Karan Singh, and addressed by Mr. A.P. Jain, Union Minister for Food and Agriculture.

Everyone had looked forward to the scheduled visit of the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and his inability to

undertake the journey to Srinagar was a disappointment. But Mr. Govind Ballabh Pant was able to come, and the Home Minister's presence occasioned many heart-warming affirmations of the common objectives and ties of affection which unite Kashmir with the rest of India.

### “Only Light”

The most moving scene was at the party given by the visiting member of Parliament to the legislators of Jammu and Kashmir.

Speaking on behalf of the M.P.s., Mr. Raghunath Singh recalled Mahatma Gandhi's remark during the dark days of communal conflagration in 1947 that light came only from Kashmir, which preserved perfect communal harmony.

He then offered to the Kashmir Premier, through Mr. Pant, the very appropriate present of an electrically lighted ivory statuette of Gandhiji.

Mr. Pant's speech that evening was deeply felt and made a powerful impression on the audience. He contrasted the political instability and economic distress which have been the lot of Pakistan, and more especially of “Azad Kashmir”, with the peaceful progress towards democratic Socialism which Kashmir has been making as part of secular India. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed was at his eloquent best in his reply, pledging Kashmir's continued dedication to secularism and its unshakable union with India.

Asked by me to sum up his own impressions of the Festival, the Kashmir Premier gave me the following message:

“We have just concluded the Festival of Kashmir celebrations, and I am glad to say that these celebrations have evoked wide-spread interest outside the State and mass enthusiasm in Kashmir.

“It is for the first time that we were having a Festival of this kind, and its success has surpassed our expectations. The idea behind it was to revive popular interest in the rich and progressive traditions of our past. Now that we have earnestly launched schemes for the economic and social regeneration of the people of our State, it is necessary that adequate attention should be paid to our cultural heritage so that these traditions are nourished and carried forward.

“In the past Kashmir had many achievements to its credit in the field of arts and crafts as in those of literature and sports. Even today the skill and craftsmanship of our artisans is unmatched. But a long period of stifling servitude and stagnation stultified their imagination and cramped their vision.

### **Freedom, Stability**

“Freedom and stability have brought a breath of fresh air into their lives and consequently their aspirations are stretching towards wider horizons. The agony of dire want and hunger has ceased to torment our land, and our people are now striving for improved standard of life. The thirst for more and better education is a welcome expression of a healthy outlook on life.

“We feel that our progress would be incomplete if, side by side with these material changes, we ignore our cultural



needs. The Festival of Kashmir was started with the purpose of directing public attention towards this aspect of our social life.

“I am glad that the Festival attracted a large number of friends from other parts of India, who had an opportunity of witnessing the celebrations at various places in the Valley.

“It is our intention to make the Festival an annual feature so that interest in our cultural revival is stimulated further. We hope that these celebrations will provide means of greater contact and fraternisation between the people of this place and those living in the rest of India.

“The people of Kashmir realise that in the fulfilment of their age-old aspirations for freedom, peace and dignity, they have the goodwill, co-operation and assistance of their brethren in the rest of the country.”

## II

### STATE POLITICS AND PERSONALITIES

**T**HE Kashmir Premier was the centre of attention and the mainspring of initiative at all the Festival events, very much as Mr. Nehru is at any public appearance of his. Indeed, Bakshi Saheb, as he is affectionately called by every Kashmiri, has many traits in common with Panditji.

As the crowd threatened to get out of hand at the open-air theatre during the film stars' variety entertainment, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed restored order—without any police aid—exactly as Mr. Nehru might have done. He moved quickly all round, appealing for calm and making everybody, including Ministers and high officials, sit down on the ground—there being no chairs even for V.I.P.s.

Later, during a visit to National Extension Service Blocks in the Ganderbal and Srinagar tehsils, I was to find another example of the response evoked by any appeal personally made by the Kashmir Premier. I was surprised to find men at work on the construction of about half a dozen "panchayat ghars" in the localities I visited, since the busy harvest season was not quite over yet. The explanation was that the villagers were anxious to fulfil the pledge they had given when Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed appealed two months ago, at a conference of "sarpanches" from all over the State, for the construction of a community centre in each "panchayat" on the basis of a grant of Rs. 1,000

for each from the Government—everything else, including land and labour, being contributed voluntarily by the people.

The Festival was celebrated not only in Srinagar but throughout the Valley, and the Kashmir Premier made it a point to visit each of the small towns on the dates of the local celebrations—from Baramulla in the west to Pahalgam in the east, and from Bandipur in the north to Kulgam in the south.

### Co-Existence

I had the opportunity of observing the Festival celebration in one of these small towns—Mattan, near Anantnag. The enthusiasm of the people here was as great as in the capital. School children, singing and waving their little paper flags, were out in the morning in a procession, when we passed through the place, while the adult population eagerly awaited the arrival of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed at noon.

It was here, at Mattan, that I saw the first striking example of the peaceful co-existence of religions for which Kashmir has been famous not only in recent years but throughout its history.

A large band of Brahmin priests, or “pandas” as they are called, of the local Martand temple dedicated to the Sun God lived at perfect peace with their Muslim neighbours. I was to find the same thing later at the village of Tulamula, where the temple of Kheer Bhavani (so known after the oblations of milk offered to the deity) is attracting more Hindu pilgrims than ever, thanks to the amenities recently provided by the Government.

I had read in books that people of different faiths in Jammu commonly celebrate each other's festivals such as Basant, Nauroz, Sair and Dusserah. Also, that the Hindus and Muslims of the Valley equally venerate the memory of Lalleshwari and Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, the greatest exponents of tolerant religious thought in Kashmir's history.

Actual observation brought home to me the living reality of communal harmony in Kashmir, where Hindus and Muslims do not merely leave each other alone in peace but mingle socially and co-operate in daily life more than in any other part of the country.

Kashmir is synonymous with natural beauty, and no description can do justice to the variegated delights offered to the eye by Gulmarg and Khilamarg, Pahalgam and the Wular Lake, and the many springs and gardens which I visited.

Its people, too, are renowned for their physical beauty. But no less impressive is the beauty of the way of life in Kashmir, where the two-nation theory has been disproved and differences of religion serve to enrich culture rather than to provoke division and hostility.

### **Threat of Communalism**

The present Government of Kashmir cannot obviously afford to risk a disturbance of the prevailing communal harmony and political stability, which is what is feared might happen if Sheikh Andullah should be released. In the closing phase of his career, beginning early in 1952 when he first hinted at independence as a third alternative

for the State, he slid more and more into the mire of communalism.

Sheikh Abdullah went so far as to suggest, indirectly in public and openly to his colleagues, that Jammu (which is a Hindu-majority area after Pakistan's occupation of the Mirpur and Poonch districts) could break away and join India, and Ladakh, half of whose population is Buddhist, might go wherever it liked—to Tibet or to India—leaving the overwhelmingly Muslim-majority Valley as an independent State.

Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed and his colleagues are aware that though the people of the State have been very favourably impressed by the beneficent economic measures taken during the last three years, and fully support the present Government, some sections might be dangerously swayed if Sheikh Abdullah, on his release, should utilise the power of his name and personality to stir up communal and anti-Indian feelings.

Certainly any impartial observer who has watched the progress that the people of Kashmir are now making after centuries of oppression, will agree that what the State needs is not another political upheaval but to press ahead with the solution of its economic problems—which have by no means been mastered yet, though a good beginning has been made.

It must be noted that, apart from the detention of Sheikh Abdullah and a few of his associates on grounds of security of the State Kashmir is being administered in the normal democratic manner, with a vigorous though small

Opposition in the Constituent Assembly (which also acts as the Legislature), and a Press which enjoys the same measure of freedom as in the rest of India.

I was able to watch the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly on the opening day of the current session on September 29, and it was heartening to see how scrupulously the democratic process was being observed. The Assembly was meeting after six months, and immediately after the opening words of welcome by the President, Mr. G. M. Sadiq, Mr. Ghulam Mohiuddin Hamdani, who is acting as leader of the Plebiscite Front in place of Mirza Afzal Beg (now in detention), rose to move an adjournment motion concerning the continued detention of six members of the House.

### **Democratic Processes**

The propriety of tabling an adjournment motion in a constitution-making body, as distinct from a legislative assembly, was challenged by Mr. Ghulam Rasool Renzoo, who is the Speaker of the House when the Constituent Assembly meets as the legislature.

Mr. Sadiq upheld the principle of the admissibility of adjournment motions even in a Constituent Assembly. The particular motion of Mr. Hamdani was later ruled out on the ground that it did not relate to any recent event affecting the work of the Constituent Assembly, but only after the mover had had the opportunity of making a speech. After the ruling, Mr. Hamdani and three others (including a Hindu member belonging to the P.S.P. from Jammu)

staged a walk-out just as the Opposition frequently does in the Indian Parliament.

The National Conference captured all the 75 seats in the Constituent Assembly during the elections held in 1951. All rival candidates having withdrawn, there were no contests in the Valley and in Ladakh, while the two seats contested in Jammu were both won by the National Conference.

After the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, the first test of popular feeling came during the elections to the Srinagar municipal committee in January this year. Of the 15 elective seats, the National Conference captured 11 unopposed and won all the four contested seats—a striking vindication of the people's support to the new Government. In the constituencies where polling took place nearly half of eligible voters went to the booths despite the severe cold weather.

Municipal elections were also held later in April in Jammu, where the National Conference did not do so well, but where the issue was obviously not the change of Government. The ruling party won two seats uncontested and captured seven out of the 13 contested seats—six going to the Praja Parishad, the Hindu communal party.

### **Parishad Politics**

The limited success of the National Conference in the Jammu municipal elections is ascribed to two factors: imperfect electoral arrangements by the party, and the continuing appeal of the Praja Parishad's slogans to a section of the people of Jammu. The Parishad largely

represents the vested interests adversely affected by the change. over from Maharaja's rule to popular government, and by the land redistribution and other economic reforms. A major task facing the National Conference is to expose and overcome more fully the mentality represented by the Parishad.

There appears to be no basis for the complaint which one hears from some people of Jammu that they are inadequately represented in the State services. When I mentioned this grievance to Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed, he pointed out that 15 out of 23 heads of departments in the State, two out of three Chief Engineers, two out of three High Court Judges, the Inspector-General of Police and the Accountant-General are from Jammu—not to cite many more examples. (Jammu accounts for only 12 lakhs out of the State's total population of three million).

The National Conference is facing the forthcoming State Assembly elections, which will be held next year together with the general elections in the rest of India with confidence. It must be hoped that the leaders will continue to maintain and strengthen their unity of purpose.....



### III

## TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL ECONOMY & LIFE

**T**HOUGH the older generation of people in Kashmir nostalgically recall the days when rice used to sell at a rupee a maund, for many years now the State has been suffering from food shortage, the most elementary manifestation of poverty in an agricultural economy.

Imports of food used to be made in the past from both the Punjabs, but after 1947 all supplies have had to come from the rest of India, which was itself seriously short of food till recently. The problem has been acutest in the Valley, where the majority of the population lives and the staple diet is rice.

The area of Jammu and Kashmir, even excluding the territory under enemy occupation, is quite large: 53,220 sq. miles. But, because of the arid expanses of Ladakh and the mountainous terrain of the whole State, the area under cultivation is only 24 lakh acres.

The ratio of cultivated land to population is the lowest in Ladakh (though the size of the problem is limited by the fact that the population is only 80,000), slightly more but still inadequate in the Valley, and highest in Jammu. One estimate puts the area of cultivated land available per family in the three regions at 2.5, 3.4 and 4.6 acres respectively.

The figure for the Valley might not seem unduly low, but it should be remembered that the weather permits but one crop a year in most of the land. For many decades, till August, 1953, food policy was dictated entirely by the needs of the urban residents of Srinagar, who were kept well provisioned with cheap rice at the cost of the rural population.

### State Levy

Under the system known as "mujwaza", introduced by the then Ruler in 1922, peasants in the Kashmir Valley were required to sell a portion of their produce to the State at the rates fixed by the Government—most often unfairly low. The scale of the levy was enhanced from time to time to meet the needs of the capital's growing population, and there was no exemption from the levy even for small-scale cultivators. These latter had to buy their own requirements of rice in the lean pre-harvest months at much higher rates in the open market.

Strangely enough, Sheikh Abdullah retained this iniquitous system, though he introduced other agrarian reforms. His Revenue Minister, Mirza Afzal Beg, adhered to the policy of rigid controls though they were utilised by the unscrupulous to harass and exploit the peasantry.

Jammu, which is mainly wheat-eating but is deficit in that cereal, was kept under restrictions on food movement despite the advice of the then Union Food Minister, Mr. Kidwai, to link it with the Punjab free wheat zone. The reasoning was that Punjab's higher prices would draw away Jammu's already inadequate production.

The first act of the new Government formed by Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed was to abolish the hated system of "mujwaza" in the Valley. All controls were lifted with the exception of rationing in Srinagar. Wheat started flowing freely into Jammu, and though the price level increased slightly over the previous controlled rate, it was very much less than the former black-market level.

### Voluntary Procurement

For procurement of rice in the Valley, now made entirely voluntary, the price offered by the Government was increased by a rupee per maund while the issue price from ration depots and fair price shops was reduced by a rupee. The scale of the ration in Srinagar was subsequently increased, and arrangements were made for the adequate issue of rice from Government stocks in the countryside, in periods and areas of scarcity, at the same subsidised rate as in the capital plus the cost of transport.

All this entailed much greater expenditure on food subsidy, which has been running at slightly above Rs. 150 lakhs during the last three years in contrast to only about Rs. 19 lakhs in 1948-49.

But this has been a necessary price to pay for ending an unjust system which forced the rural population to bear the entire hardships of the food deficit in the Valley.

The increase in expenditure is not due to greater imports (the total quantity has in fact declined a little but to the changed pattern of imports). In place of the wheat which used to be acquired for Jammu from neighbouring Punjab

more rice (which is much costlier in Punjab than locally and has therefore to be subsidised more) is now bought and transported all the way to Srinagar—and transport and incidental charges add as much as a third to the original purchase price.

The cost of subsidy is met almost wholly by assistance from the Centre, which entered into an agreement late in 1953 to meet the State's subsidy expenditure on imported food up to a limit of Rs. 150 lakhs a year. But the State Government hopes to reduce or even eliminate this expenditure within a few years by increasing production and achieving self-sufficiency in food.

### **Food Production Up**

Mr. Mir Qasim, the young and dynamic lawyer-politician who replaced Mirza Afzal Beg as Revenue Minister, explained to me the steps being taken to increase food production. The most important of these are: (1) lift irrigation which is making the Jhelum irrigate vast tracts of land lying more than 10 ft. above the water level; (2) application of fertilisers; and (3) popularisation of "China paddy" which is said to yield at least 17 maunds more per acre than the best local variety.

Lift irrigation is anywhere more costly than gravity irrigation and is particularly so in Kashmir where electric power is being developed only now and reliance is mainly on diesel engines at the pumping stations. The water rate charged for lift irrigation does not fully cover the cost of maintenance and operation and involves a subsidy of about Rs. 3 per maund of rice so produced. But this is "unecono-

mic" only in the abstract, and is not at all so in the context of the subsidy of more than Rs. 16 incurred on every maund of imported rice.

The Kashmir Government is paying as much attention to the bettering of rural life, in general, as to the improvement of rural production. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed has himself assumed the Community Projects and National Extension Service portfolio, and a Deputy Minister Mr. Pyar Singh, deals exclusively with the subject.

I had the opportunity of visiting some N.E.S. blocks in the company of Mr. Pyar Singh, formerly a Major in the State Army and a remarkably energetic and enthusiastic Block Development Officer. Even allowing for the extra zeal which is everywhere and always induced by the arrival of Ministers and journalists, I found among the villagers a greater degree of awareness and readiness to demand improvements than I have noticed elsewhere in the country during my limited observation.

In the village of Telbal, in the Srinagar block, the people contributed their labour two years ago for the construction of a 21-foot well for drinking water, as well as bund which has freed them from the annual threat to their homes and crops from the flooding of the snow-fed mountain stream in the neighbourhood. But they are not content.

The village elder kept dinning into the ears of the Deputy Minister that there was no dispensary in the locality and that they were "just dying like flies". Unable to promise a full-fledged dispensary directly, Mr. Pyar Singh told him that the village level worker would soon be given

elementary health training and a stock of simple remedies. Polite thanks greeted this announcement, but the disappointment behind the politeness was all too evident. The people of Telbal have truly imbibed the message of progress.

Lack of trained personnel is the chief handicap of the C.P.-N.E.S. movement in Kashmir. Even some of the village level workers are untrained, while there is a serious dearth of technical assistants for agricultural extension, animal husbandry and public health.

Despite this, the State Government decided sometime ago to cover the entire territory with N.E.S. blocks by the end of the current year, instead of by 1960-61 as in other parts of the country. The decision was in response to the demand of the people, who could not understand why, if Rs. 1 lakh had been allotted for an N.E.S. block a few miles away, their own locality should not also receive the benefit of similar development.

### **Land Redistribution**

Land redistribution has undoubtedly contributed to the exceptionally fine response which the community development idea has drawn in Kashmir, by assuring more or less equal advantage to agriculturists. Too often elsewhere, the benefit of a new road, for example, or the popularisation of fertilisers goes mainly to the big land-owners and means little to the small cultivator and the landless worker.

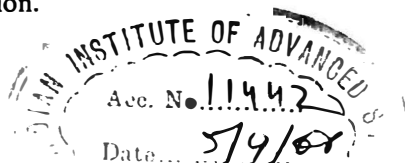
But the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act of 1950 was neither conceived nor implemented very well, and it certainly

did not exhaust the whole range of needed land reforms. Under the Act, a ceiling of 22½ acres was imposed on ownership of all land except orchards and pasture reserves, and the ownership of the surplus land was conferred on the tenants in cultivating occupation of the land as on the appointed date, subject to a maximum of 20 acres.

The reform operated harshly on land-owners in two respects, it was wholly expropriatory, not even nominal compensation being paid for the surplus land amounting to 4.5 lakh acres which was taken over by the State, secondly, it made no distinction between wet and dry lands.

From the point of view of the beneficiaries, too, the implementation of the reform suffered from two defects: since owners were free to resume land up to the limit of the ceiling, the landlord could extort payment from any or each of his tenants on the threat of resuming his particular holding; secondly, since the "patwari" had to certify that a particular tenant was in occupation of a certain piece of land, the unscrupulous among village officials extorted payment even for making correct entries, and also made wrong entries for a consideration.

Land redistribution was accompanied by reduction of the rent payable by tenants, which was fixed at a quarter of the produce in the case of wet lands and a third in the case of dry lands. But the fair rent was applicable only to holdings of 12-1/2 acres and above—which has meant, because of the wide prevalence of small holdings, that only about a third of the tenants in the State have actually benefited from the rent reduction.



### Debt Reduction

A third reform was the reduction of debts under the Distressed Debtors' Relief Act, and claims amounting to Rs. 175 lakhs were scaled down by 51.4 per cent to Rs. 85 lakhs. But since alternative means of credit were not made available, the moneylending class soon began to flourish again.

Revolutionary though the reforms effected by the former Government were, the new administration had therefore to face a number of problems in the building of a better life in the countryside.

So far as agricultural credit is concerned, the problem is now being met by applying the Rural Credit Survey's formula of advancing loans against standing crops instead of the land itself.

During the land redistribution, only 2.3 lakh acres were transferred in ownership right to about 2,00,000 tenants who were able to establish that they had been in cultivating occupation of the surplus land. As much as 2.2 lakh acres became vested in the State, comprising land to which such a claim could not be established by the tillers, as well as uncultivated and unculturable land. Where the land vested in the State is under cultivation the tillers have been paying a cash rent directly to the Government. Now the Government is considering the question of conferring ownership rights on these tillers, and is already allotting waste land to the landless and helping them to cultivate it.

The hardest question, however, is the future of the small tenancies to which the fair rent law does not apply. How



are the interests of the tillers to be reconciled with those of the small owners?

According to Mr. Ram Chandra Raina, the key officer, who has been continuously dealing with land reforms in Kashmir, the solution appears to lie only in the abolition of landlordism altogether. This ultimate reform is now under the Government's consideration as part of the long-term agricultural policy. Significantly, the proposal envisages the payment of compensation at a rate to be determined by the legislature. The old error of expropriation, which will be even more unjust in the case of small landowners, seems unlikely to be repeated.

## IV

### DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LOCAL EFFORT AND CENTRAL AID

THE aspirations of Kashmir's leaders reach beyond the achievement of self-sufficiency in food to the provision of adequate social services and the development of transport and of the State's natural resources so as to lay the basis for modern industry.

In respect of one item of the social services, namely, education, Kashmir is already ahead of the rest of the country. Nowhere else is education free of tuition fees from the primary to the university stages, as it was made in Kashmir soon after the formation of the new Government in 1953.

This portfolio, as well as Health, are held by Mr. G.M. Sadiq, who combines presidentship of the Constituent Assembly with membership of the Cabinet. A National Conference worker of long standing, he went back to his practice at the bar when Sheikh Abdullah dropped him from the Cabinet in 1951, but was soon back in public life.

Mr. Sadiq explained to me how, before 1947 education in Kashmir was practically confined to the two cities of Srinagar and Jammu. There were only about 600 primary schools throughout the State (including the area now under occupation), and even these were poorly attended. By the end of 1953 the number of primary schools rose to

1,000, and stood at about 2,000 at the end of last year.

Similarly, the number of high schools increased from 14 in 1947 to 37 in 1953, and now stands at nearly a hundred. In comparison with four colleges during the Maharaja's time there are now twelve colleges including two for women, and five of these have been established since 1953.

A remarkable and successful enterprise of Mr. Sadiq's is the creation of mobile schools for the nomadic Gujars and Bakarwals, staffed by teachers drawn from these very communities who travel back and forth with their folk seasonally from the hills to the plains.

Mr. Sadiq looks forward to the day when not only instruction but text-books and even exercise notebooks can be offered free. This is being done already in Ladakh, the least developed region of the State where there are now two high schools and 87 primary schools. The Government has offered to bring every Ladakhi matriculate to Srinagar at its own cost, for free college education together with practically free board and lodging.

No wonder, then that the State's education budget has increased steadily from less than Rs. 30 lakhs before 1947 and about Rs. 50 lakhs in 1953 to Rs. 87 lakhs in the current year—or nearly a sixth of the State's revenue.

There has been no financial aid from the Centre for the introduction of free education in Kashmir, and indeed the only special assistance that the State gets is in respect of the food subsidy. It should be remembered that even this is not unique to Kashmir. Aid of a similar nature is given

to other regions ill served by transport such as Assam, on the principle that it is the responsibility of the country as a whole to see that the basic necessities of life are made available to all citizens.

Contrary to some widely prevalent misconceptions, Kashmir is standing more on its own legs now and relies less on the Centre for its normal administrative and welfare expenditure than it did during the period of Sheikh Abdullah's Government.

The State's revenue has been steadily augmented from Rs. 274 lakhs in 1947-48 to Rs. 593 lakhs in 1955-56 and is expected to reach Rs. 674 lakhs during the current year. The main sources of revenue, in the order of importance, are: forest produce; land revenue; sericulture; road tolls; and excise and stamp duties.

Sales tax is not levied in Kashmir, and this is defended on the ground that transport charges make the cost of commodities in common use, most of which including cotton cloth, salt and sugar, have to be imported, almost as high as in the rest of India (with sales tax). But there appears to be no reason why such luxury items as cars and expensive carpets should not bear sales tax, and the State authorities will doubtless examine this among other possibilities of further increasing the State's revenue.

### **Central Assistance**

Between 1947-48 and 1953-54, the State received Central advances of Rs. 403 lakhs in cash and Rs. 253 lakhs by way of the sales proceeds of food grains to cover its budget

deficits—which amounted to more than Rs. 1 crore each in the first two years on account of the dislocation caused by the invasion. Since then the State has been able to balance its budget despite the increased scale of expenditure on social services.

There has of course been a vast increase in recent years in the volume of Central loan assistance to Kashmir, as to other States, for financing developmental expenditure under the Plan. And in determining the size of the Central sector of the State Plan, the Planning Commission has been specially generous to Kashmir because the development of communications, which is essential for initiating the process of economic growth, or any large-scale irrigation project, is altogether beyond the State's own resources.

Communications hold the key to Kashmir's economic development. Till 1947, the road from Srinagar to Rawalpindi was the economic life line of the Valley, while Jammu was linked by railway with Sialkot. Both these lines of communication having been snapped by partition and the cease-fire line, the development of alternative communications has naturally received the highest priority.

The road between Pathankot and Jammu, involving the spanning of the Ravi by a giant bridge at Madhopur, has been completed already. Work is still proceeding, however, on the construction of more bridges across mountain streams which are now negotiated along their beds but which hold up traffic when they are in spate. Extension of the railway track to Jammu is also planned.

There has been a road between Jammu and Srinagar since the 'twenties, but passing over the Banihal range as

it did at an altitude of more than 9,000 ft., it was snow-bound during the winter. Hence the project of a new Banihal tunnel, 8,120 ft. long and at an altitude of about 7,000 ft. which will not only be open throughout the year but will cut the road distance between the two cities by 18 very difficult miles.

The last rock barrier separating the two headings of the tunnel's first tube was ceremonially blasted on September 9 last, and the tunnel will be ready for traffic during this winter. Work on the other tube, which will enable two-way traffic, has been taken up already and the Rs. 3 crore project will be complete in all respects by the end of 1958.

The highly gifted, conscientious and charming Yuvraj, whom Kashmir is privileged to have as the first elected Head of State, looks forward to the day when internal communications can be further developed in the mountainous areas through funicular railways on the Swiss model.

He received visiting correspondents at his modest little place one evening, and spoke among other things about the prosperity which Switzerland, which he visited recently, has achieved, thanks to centuries of peace and the development of modern industry. Implicit in his words was the earnest hope for similar development of Kashmir.

Power is as important for the economic development of Kashmir as transport and communications, and a start has been made in tapping the State's abundant hydel potential with the commissioning of the Rs. 2-crore Sindh project which has been supplying power to Srinagar and servicing some of the lift irrigation pumps since last year.

The large joinery mill at Pampore, a State enterprise which processes the State's timber wealth, and the Government silk weaving factory and woollen mill are the major industrial units established so far in Kashmir, but the real basis for industrial development will be laid only with the expansion of communications and power. The biggest among the industrial projects now under consideration is a cement factory, which will remove the burden imposed on all construction work by the high transport cost of imported cement.

The State flag displays a plough with three bars to denote the three main regions of Ladakh, the Valley and Jammu, and the Government has shown the greatest solicitude for the uniform development of each of them, with the corollary of special assistance to the particularly backward areas.

### **Ladakh's Welfare**

Reference has been made to the special educational concessions for Ladakh. A jeepable road is under construction for linking Leh, the headquarters of the district, with Srinagar "via" Kargil. The Government is also examining the possibility of utilising the waters of the Indus to bring electricity to Leh.

The continued exemption of the Buddhist monasteries or "gomphas" of Ladakh from the ceiling on land holdings is an example of the consideration shown to the religious feelings of minorities. Almost every family in Ladakh has a member in one or other of the Lama orders, and the "gomphas" with their large estates play an important part in the religious, social and even economic life of the villages.

The operation of the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act was stayed in deference to the protest of the Lamas, but the Government is now considering a sensible proposal to extend the benefit of the land reform to the Ladakhi tillers of the soil without destroying the economic basis of the monasteries—by giving each “gompha” a perpetual annual grant equal in value to the rent now received by it from tenants.

A fundamental social reform is taking place in Ladakh as the result of the prohibition of polyandry, which was widely prevalent among the Buddhist population. A law was passed for the purpose as far back as 1941, but it was implemented only three years ago at the instance of Kushak Bakula, the Head Lama of Ladakh, who is also a member of the Government as Deputy Minister for Ladakh Affairs.

As for Jammu, it is enough to cite but one example of the Government's concern for its advancement. The size of Kashmir's Second Five-Year Plan, as approved by the Planning Commission, is Rs. 35 crores (compared with an actual outlay of Rs. 11.6 crores on the first Plan). But the State authorities are proceeding on the assumption of a Rs. 51-crore Plan, encouraged by the Centre's offer to consider additional projects sympathetically if the State's initial performance proves good.

Out of the addition of Rs. 16 crores which the State Government is bent on making to its Plan, Rs. 12 crores are earmarked for the Kandi Canal scheme, so known because it will irrigate the dry Kandi region of Jammu province which has been neglected for decades as being



beyond redemption. It is also referred to as the Border Project, because the Ravi, whose waters are to be tapped, flows along the southern tip of the province into Pakistan.

The provision of Rs. 10 lakhs in the current year's budget of the State for preliminary work is an earnest of the Government's interest in the irrigation project, which will transform the lives of tens of thousands of rural families in Jammu.

## V

# A VISIT TO THE CEASE-FIRE LINE AT URI

**A**NYONE who is aware of the history of the National Conference will know why politically conscious Kashmiris were never attracted by the idea of Pakistan despite the cry of common religion.

When Mr. Jinnah visited the State in 1944 to sound the popular leaders' reaction to the proposed partition of India on a communal basis, the National Conference gave him a rousing reception to begin with as a distinguished Muslim leader. But after he had made some speeches derogatory of the national movement led by the Congress, he was denounced by the National Conference and had to beat an inglorious retreat.

But nothing helps one to understand the intensity of the Kashmiris' dislike of Pakistan so much as to travel along any of the routes which the invaders took in the fateful month of October, 1947. With other members of a Press party, I had the opportunity of making such a journey, going due west of Srinagar through Patan and Baramulla to the cease-fire line beyond Uri.

All along the route we found evidence of the brutality and destructiveness of the raiders, and of the heroic resistance offered by the people of the Valley, the small State force of the time, and by the Indian Army which came to Kashmir's rescue just in time to avert disaster.

Approaching Patan, we saw the ridge on the other side on which the raiders had assembled after entering the Jhelum Valley from the North-West Frontier region, driving through Muzaffarabad district and looting Baramulla on the way. Skirting round this ridge, some of the raiders had reached within a few miles of the Srinagar airfield—then the only communication link with India—when troops flew in and saved the situation.

Three miles before Baramulla, we saw the memorial erected to the memory of Lt.-Col. D. R. Rai of the Sikh Regiment, who fell to an enemy bullet while fighting the raiders in the Indian Army's first major encounter with them. He was the first Indian officer to die in the Kashmir campaign, and was posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for his gallantry.

### **Martyrdom**

A little later, at Baramulla itself, we saw the community hall which is being erected in memory of Mohammed Maqbool Sherwani, a National Conference worker who was brutally done to death in public by the raiders in order to terrorise the rest of the town's population. Chained and flogged in order to make him "repent" his faith in Hindu-Muslim unity, Sherwani was given a final chance to save his life after being strung up on a pole right in the centre of the town. He only reaffirmed his conviction, and bravely met a hail of bullets.

Most of the houses and shops in Baramulla we noticed, were newly built. They have had to be, since the town was practically razed to the ground by the raiders.

We saw here the hospital run by the Franciscan Sisters of St. Mary, which is continuing to serve the people of the area—practically none of whom is a Christian—despite the bestial attack by the raiders on the hospital and the convent.

Entering the convent, we saw a grotto containing the statue of Virgin Marry. It indicated where the dispensary stood before it was burnt down by the raiders. We saw, too the medicine storehouse which formerly housed the hospital's X-ray plant—smashed by the raiders and not replaced since because the institution cannot afford the cost.

We saw the operation theatre, from where the raiders had taken away every removable article including the shadowless lamp. We were shown the pot where the Spanish Assistant Superior of the convent had been shot while attempting to save the Mother Superior.

Also on the way to Uri we saw the memorial to Brig. Rajendra Singh, commander of the State Army of the time who fell in a heroic action which proved invaluable in delaying the advance of the raiders up the Valley towards Srinagar. Brig. Rajendra Singh was a Dogra, and the people of Jammu feel proud of the role which he played in the Kashmir campaign.

### At Uri

Soon we passed Lagama, the last inhabited village before the cease-fire line, and came upon the former township of Uri, now an Army post. Here as at frontline during action, the number and markings of our jeep were mud-

died over and the conducting officer removed his badges of rank—because we would soon be within the range of observation of the Pakistani pickets on the other side of the line.

We passed the small stone-walled building in which Mr. Nehru was briefly interned in 1946 when he entered Kashmir in defiance of the Mahārāja's ban, to defend Sheikh Abdullah and other National Conference leaders who had been arrested during the "Quit Kashmir" movement.

Mr. Nehru was brought to Uri after he had been arrested on crossing into State territory from Rawalpindi over the Kohala bridge—at a place which is now part of occupied Kashmir. Appropriately enough, the building where Mr. Nehru was interned now houses a library for the Army personnel stationed in the area.

Beyond Uri we were shown the hill crests on which Army pickets of both sides are stationed at heights of up to 14,000 ft. Finally we reached the site of the former village of Urosa, where a "nullah", one of the innumerable mountain streams which flow into the Jhelum, marks the boundary between Indian and "Azad" Kashmir. Here, where the bridge over the stream lies broken, ends the national highway which formerly linked Srinagar with Rawalpindi. There is now only a jeepable diversion across the "nullah", used exclusively by members of the U.N. military observation teams.

I heard that the pickets above the snowline on the Pakistan side of the cease-fire line are vacated in the winter, and that the daily routine of the soldiers there is remarkably relaxed—an eloquent testimony to the fact that they have

no reason to fear any aggressive attack from the Indian side.

### Unremitting Vigilance

But our soldiers cannot afford to relax their vigilance, and the Indian pickets maintain a close 24-hour watch all the 365 days of the year, irrespective of the weather. Life in bunkers at these isolated pickets, remote from civilisation and its amenities, is most arduous but it is cheerfully borne.

Uri is just one point on a cease-fire line which extends to about 800 miles, and it was on the question of the strength and nature of the forces to be maintained on either side of the line that the last round of negotiations with Pakistan under U.N. auspices, conducted by the late N. Gopalswami Ayyangar in the winter of 1952-53, broke down.

Since then, of course, the whole context of the problem has been altered radically by Pakistan's acceptance of American arms aid and its adherence to Western-sponsored military alliances.

As Mr. Nehru has said, these developments have changed the whole situation "because it makes little difference now to what extent Pakistan withdraws." There is a vast increase in the "military potential sitting there behind them. It makes a huge difference."

So far as Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed and his colleagues are concerned, they would like to see the enemy-occupied area become in fact, as it is in law, part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. This has been affirmed in the Draft Constitution recently presented to the State's Constituent

Assembly. But they will accept in a disciplined way any decision that may be taken by the Union Government in its jurisdiction of foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, the State Government is pressing forward on the secure basis of union with India with the task of building the "New Kashmir" and improving the health, education and economic well-being of the three million people of different faiths who are under its care.



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