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# LIFE AND WORK OF Dr K. M. ASHRAF

M. Farooqi  
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Dr K. M. ASHRAF

By  
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&  
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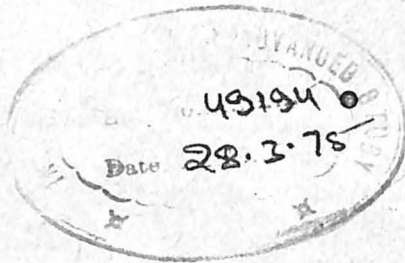


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## AN INSPIRING AND DEDICATED COMMUNIST

M. FAROOQI

The National Council of the Communist Party of India has decided to honour the memory of Dr K. M. Ashraf who was an outstanding leader of our national-liberation struggle, an eminent Marxist historian and erudite scholar, and a dedicated member and leader of our party. On 25 November this year party units will organise functions in various parts of the country to mark the 70th birth anniversary of Dr Ashraf.

This for us is not a ritual. This is part of the ideological-political work of our party. The aim of such a celebration is to educate and inspire the new generation about the revolutionary contribution of the earlier generation of communists; to combat the vicious propaganda of Hindu communalists who deny the notable role played by Muslims in the national-liberation and revolutionary struggles of our country; and simultaneously to fight the Muslim communalists who preach separatism in an attempt to keep the Muslim masses away from the secular and democratic forces, and like the Hindu communalists repudiate the glorious traditions of Hindu-Muslim unity in various phases of our national struggle. Such a celebration is particularly of great significance in the present political context when right reaction is making a determined bid to encourage the revival of Muslim communalism and even to bring about a collusion between Hindu and Muslim communalism directed against the forces of secularism and democracy.

Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf (that is his full name) was born on 25 November 1903 in the village of Daryapur in Hathras tehsil of Aligarh district (Uttar Pradesh). He lived barely 59 years and died in June 1962 in Berlin, capital of the German Demo-

cratic Republic, following a heart-attack and was buried in the well-known cemetery of socialist and communist leaders in Berlin—which no doubt is a matter of great honour.

Dr Ashraf truly symbolised in his person the composite Indian culture. Born in a Muslim Rajput family, descendants of an old Rajput warrior tribe, the family had maintained close relations with Hindu Rajputs. The Hindu and Muslim Rajputs had several customs and traditions in common and sometimes they had similar names despite their different religious beliefs. Ashraf's wife, Kulsum, has brothers with Hindu names. Dr Ashraf always acknowledged with pride this commonness of culture and this deeply influenced his mode of thinking.

Always conscious of his Indianness and Rajput lineage, Ashraf once angrily told Jawaharlal Nehru: "I am more Indian than you. I am a Rajput!" This was in the mid-fifties when Dr Ashraf returned to India from England—a stateless person (how he became stateless will be explained a little later in a different context). He had asked for Indian citizenship and met both Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, with both of whom he had worked closely in earlier years, to canvass support for his request. Nehru offended Ashraf by remarking: "You are not an Indian now." Hence the retort by Ashraf.

Ashraf was drawn into the vortex of anti-imperialist politics in his early teens—although from a religious end. In one of his articles, he records his association with "Hazb Allah"—the party of god—in his school days at Moradabad. This organisation had been influenced by the thinking of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi who during the first world war had set up in Kabul a provisional Indian government along with, among others, Raja Mahendra Pratap. Hazb Allah called for jihad (holy war) against the British. After the end of the first world war, Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement, Ali brothers' khilafat movement and the hijrat movement (a movement in which several batches of Muslims—Muhajirs—left India for Tashkent, where the revolution had broken out under the leadership of Lenin) made a big impact on the mind of young Ashraf. By then he had joined the M.A.O. College at Aligarh (founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan). Those were stormy days in the political life of the country, when millions of Hindu and Muslim masses were moving

together to fight the British imperialists. This was the period of unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity. Both Gandhiji and the Ali brothers (i.e. Maulana Muhammed Ali and Shaukat Ali, foremost leaders of the khilafat movement) gave a call for the boycott of British educational institutions and for the setting up of nationalist and patriotic institutions.

Young Ashraf plunged into this struggle and Aligarh's M.A.O. College became the centre of his anti-British activity. The British teachers in the college frowned on Ashraf's "seditious activities" and seriously warned him. However, when the call came for the boycott of British educational institutions, Ashraf was among the first to respond to it. He left the M.A.O. College and joined the newly-setup nationalist-patriotic institution of Jamia Millia, which had its first beginning at Aligarh (it shifted to Delhi in later years). This was an institution almost without a building and without the necessary requirements of an educational institution. But such was the patriotic fervour of the students in those days that they did not bother about these hardships and difficulties. Ashraf was among the first batch of graduates of the Jamia Millia.

Then comes another turningpoint in the political life of Ashraf. The withdrawal of noncooperation movement by Gandhiji after the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922 (when the oppressed peasants attacked the Chauri-Chaura police station in Gorakhpur district of UP and in which some policemen were killed) completely disillusioned Ashraf (like many other young men) of the Gandhian way of struggle. It led to the search for a new path. He was already in touch with Maulana Hasrat Mohani. The Maulana was the first to move the resolution for complete independence at the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress in 1921; he was later in 1925 chairman of the Reception Committee of the Foundation Conference of the CPI at Kanpur. Ashraf now established contact with Shaukat Usmani, one of the accused in the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924). He also started reading writings by M. N. Roy who was then in the Communist International. But Ashraf was not yet attracted by the ideas of socialism. His main worry was the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim riots, instigated by the British after the demoralisation had set in following the withdrawal of the movement



in 1922. He decided to work, in his own limited way, to restore Hindu-Muslim relations. He chose some rural areas, particularly those he knew, for his work in this connection. In spite of heavy odds he persisted in his effort.

He rejoined Aligarh (which had by now become a fullfledged university under the AMU Act, 1920) from where he took his M.A. and LL.B degrees. It was during this period as a student in Aligarh that the great orator in him was revealed. He was elected vicepresident of the union despite his political views. In those days the vicepresidentship was the highest post that a student could hold in the University Union in Aligarh.

Ashraf obtained a scholarship from the then maharaja of Alwar for higher studies in England in 1927. Ashraf's ancestors were originally from Alwar; the maharaja was impressed by Ashraf's speech and brilliance when the former visited Aligarh University and Ashraf as vicepresident of the union was asked to make a welcome speech. Besides the maharaja was somewhat sympathetic to the freedom movement and had links with several nationalist leaders. However, later the scholarship was withdrawn. Ashraf completed his doctorate from the University of London and his thesis on the social and cultural conditions of people in medieval India is a brilliant piece of historical research and acknowledged as an authoritative treatise on the subject. This is the beginning of Dr Ashraf's eminence as a historian.

But what is of significance is that he chose another path instead of a comfortable academic career in a university. He was in touch with the famous Saklatvala and some Indian students who had been drawn to Marxism-Leninism. It was around 1929 that he became a communist in England. Since then till he breathed his last in June 1962 he remained faithful to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and to the party.

It may be worthwhile to narrate an incident to show his utter loyalty to the party. In the mid-fifties when he was compelled due to personal and financial reasons to take up a job in the Delhi University, one of the bosses in the university who was known for his anticommunism asked him :

“Dr Ashraf, we are told you are a communist.” Pat came the reply : “No, you are wrong. I am a party member and not a

mere communist." That was the end of the interview and the anticommunist boss after that always avoided to cross swords with Dr Ashraf.

Back in India in 1932, Dr Ashraf plunged into active political work. Within a few years he rose to great prominence and acquired national stature as a leader of the freedom movement, particularly of its left wing which he helped to build. He was elected a member of the National Executive of the Congress Socialist Party (formed in 1934 as a left wing in the Congress) along with Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Dr Z. A. Ahmad, Sajjad Zaheer, Asoka Mehta, Ram Manohar Lohia and others. After the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress (1936) Dr Ashraf became one of the secretaries of the Congress and the then Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, put him in charge of Muslim mass-contact programme. By now the communists had once again joined the Congress.

Dr Ashraf was eminently suited for the job which the Congress had assigned him. His deep knowledge of Persian and Arabic languages and of Islamic history and philosophy and of medieval Indian history, his very close association with Muslim leaders in the national-liberation movement as well as the ulema over a period of two decades, and of course his great power of expression as a mass orator were his great assets in carrying out this job of drawing the Muslim masses into the national-liberation movement and away from the separatist politics into which the Muslim League was fast drawing them. As a communist and a great crusader of Hindu-Muslim unity all his life he plunged into this work with the greatest possible zeal and fervour. But the leadership of the Congress had failed to solve the Hindu-Muslim question and by this time the situation had become far more complicated than ever before. The League was fast growing as a mass organisation attracting the Muslim masses. Ashraf and in fact the communists were too weak to prevent the negative development in the sphere of Hindu-Muslim question. By December 1940 the Muslim League had adopted the resolution on Pakistan.

Meanwhile Dr Ashraf had become the spokesman of the communist group in the AICC. He was at the same time taking

close interest in the All-India Students' Federation. He presided over its Calcutta session (January 1939) and inaugurated the historic session at Nagpur (December 1940). Ashraf became a great draw in the mass meetings organised by the Students' Federation in various parts of the country. This is the time when this writer made personal acquaintance with Ashraf which in subsequent years developed into very intimate friendship and comradeship—snapped by Dr Ashraf's untimely death in 1962. About this time (before the outbreak of the second world war) Dr Ashraf accepted Maulana Azad's special request to work as his secretary when he became the Congress president.

The second world war found Ashraf in jail, in the notorious Deoli concentration camp, along with thousands of other communists, socialists and leftwingers. It was in this concentration camp that his health was badly affected following a 30-day hungerstrike in which all the prisoners had participated. Back from prison in 1943, he was drafted by the party leadership to work in the central headquarters of our party which had been set up just then in Bombay. He busied himself in writing for party journals and in mass campaigning in various parts of the country to popularise the new line of the party in connection with the antifascist war, in which the Soviet Union was playing a historic and decisive role. He became an invitee to the Central Committee of the party. The postwar mass upsurge again found him in the thick of the battle—as one of the greatest mass campaigners of the party.

It was some time in 1946 that Ashraf shifted to Delhi and began to live in the Delhi party commune in Daryaganj, like other wholetimers on a paltry allowance of Rs 8 (eight) a month plus food. All of us who were living in the commune were still young and Ashraf was the oldest and the most experienced and mature amongst us. But he was always so modest and so disciplined—and affectionate like an elder brother. This writer was then secretary of the Delhi unit and can testify on the basis of personal experience to Dr Ashraf's great sense of party discipline. Dr Ashraf's was the most lively company. He was a man full of wit and a keen sense of humour, large-hearted and intensely human. He was a man full of life and he could laugh like a child.

It was during this period that he wrote his book in Urdu on the politics of Indian Muslims—a book which throws a great deal of light on the various trends in Muslim politics during the last one hundred years or so.

The partition of the country in 1947 still found him in Delhi. The postpartition Hindu-Muslim riots were a most gruesome and nightmarish experience. Delhi Provincial Party Committee asked Ashraf and this writer to move out from the commune in Daryaganj to the provincial office near Jama Masjid for reasons of personal safety. As we were leaving the commune escorted by comrades, tears rolled down our cheeks that we who had lived in this area for years should be forced to go simply because of our Muslim names. Dr Ashraf was particularly moved because he had fought for Hindu-Muslim unity much longer. When we reached the safety of Jama Masjid area Ashraf broke down and remarked : “Muqim, this is the most tragic moment of my life.” We were to see many more tragic sights in the days to come when Muslim refugees from Subzi Mandi and Paharganj and several other places flocked to Jama Masjid in search of safety—and later still when the Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan came to Delhi, also for safety.

One could feel and see that Ashraf was completely upset during those days—a very sensitive soul that he was. He had been in the freedom movement since almost the age of 15. And he had not fought the many battles in his life to witness this tragedy.

Anyway, we communists are men of a special mould. Ashraf regained his old self very soon. When the party centre decided to start an Urdu daily from Delhi, *Naya Daur*, Dr Ashraf became its editor and Tika Ram Sukhan (now secretary of our party's Haryana State Council) assistant editor. A sympathiser managed the finances and the office was set up in Connaught Place. The paper did not last very long—lack of finances being the main reason. But *Naya Daur* though shortlived played a distinctly useful role in regrouping the forces of our party in Delhi and in the surrounding areas (viz Mewat, where Dr Ashraf was working hard to prevent the Mewatis, a Muslim tribe, from going to Pakistan) and in reforging our links with masses, which had been disrupted in the wake of postpartition riots. The party

cannot but acknowledge the role of Dr Ashraf in this respect. He rendered a great service to the party through his powerful pen.

Soon after the closure of *Naya Daur* Dr Ashraf had to leave India to help organise the party in Pakistan which had suffered tremendously after the partition. He was already in bad health. But like a disciplined soldier of the party he cheerfully accepted this very difficult assignment—the party in Pakistan was under a virtual ban. Dr Ashraf worked underground, and was later arrested as an Indian who had entered Pakistan illegally! In jail his physical condition deteriorated to an alarming extent and as a result of intervention of some of his old friends he was released on condition that he should leave Pakistan immediately. But India was not prepared to take him as he had “ceased” to be an Indian national. What an irony! Ultimately through friendly help he reached England for treatment—but as a stateless person.

As soon as he recovered from his serious illness he started his research work again in the British Museum—to collect material for writing a history of medieval India from a Marxist point of view. Even though he did not have enough money for food he worked hard. He was the first to enter the British Museum when it opened in the morning and the last to leave when it closed.

However, all the time he was thinking of coming back to India—the country he loved most. He returned in the mid-fifties on a special permit as a stateless person. But the Government of India took more than two years to accept his request for citizenship despite his old and close associations with Nehru (Prime Minister) and Maulana Azad (Education Minister). The then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, was the first to help him. He asked Ashraf to work on a project in Srinagar for preparing the history of Kashmiri people. Two years later he joined the Kirori Mal College in Delhi University and became head of the history department. But those who came in contact with him in this period, and this writer frequently met him, realised that he was not happy with his academic life. All his life he had been a very active politician. One felt that he wanted to reenter politics. But he realised his physical and other limitations. However, he frequently discussed

with us his plan of organising party education among workers on an all-India scale.

In 1960 Dr Ashraf left for Berlin to join the world-famous Humboldt University as a guest professor. During his two years in Berlin he made an intensive research and study on his favourite subject: the social and cultural conditions of the people of India in medieval period. In pursuit of this work he also visited Moscow and Tashkent. He collected a lot of material and made immense notes for his project. Unfortunately premature death cut short the immensely valuable work that he was engaged in. Maybe some day someone may help to put all those notes and valuable material into a systematic work to prepare a Marxist history of medieval India and to help a new thinking among historians in approaching Indian history from the point of view of the masses and their actions, a point which he emphasised in his presidential address to the medieval section of the Indian History Congress in 1960.

The life of Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf and his manysided contributions to national life, his selfsacrificing spirit, his devotion to the cause of the party and the people, and his passion for Hindu-Muslim unity should be a source of inspiration to the new generation of political workers and revolutionaries to emulate his example and carry forward the unfinished task of the revolution—which was the main aim of his life and his work.

## A FIGHTER TO THE LAST

N. L. GUPTA

Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf was born into a Muslim Rajput family in Daryapur village in Hathras tehsil of Aligarh in UP on 25 November 1903. Ashraf's ancestors originally belonged to the village of Tasi in former princely state Alwar, where they were employed in the service of the maharaja. However his grandfather, Thakur Kunwar Muin, who had adopted the profession of a hakim, moved out of Tasi because of economic hardships and ultimately settled down in Daryapur. Ashraf's father Thakur Murad Ali Khan learnt some English and got a job in the railways but was called to the colours in the first world war. In those days the Rajputs were designated by the British as a martial race and treated as a reserve force for the army.

Most of the Rajputs of this tribe (who had embraced Islam), besides being known for martial traditions, valour and pride, stood for Hindu-Muslim unity. Although all Rajputs were not unanimous about it, many of them like Tomars, Chauhans, Gehlots and Panwars generally chose this path. The Muslims called them neo-Muslims and Hindus called them Malkanas or Adhbarias. But the Rajputs were keen to preserve their cultural heritage and unity. Among them parents' gotra was avoided in marriage and both nikha (Muslim marriage rite) and saptapadi (seven turns round the sacred fire) were equally prevalent. Ashraf's family was one of this kind. His father on birth was named Murli Singh. After passing the entrance examination, he became a station master at Shahadra in Delhi. He was dismissed because of a collision of two mail trains for which he was held responsible. Two years later he applied for the job of a guard in the Awadh-Rohilkhand Railway under the assumed name of

Murad Ali Khan. Ashraf's mother, Anchchi, was the daughter of Thakur Namlu Singh of the village of Gobanpur in the Mathura district. Anchchi's mother was Sundari. Ashraf was hardly four when Anchchi passed away. But Thakur Murad Ali showered so much love upon his son that Ashraf seldom missed his mother.

Ashraf's life was one of hard struggle. He started his education at the upper primary school in Daryapur. His father engaged a maulvi for teaching him the Quran and Islamic theology. In the school he studied under Pandit Chaterpal and Ram Lal, the headmaster and second-master respectively. Ram Lal in particular exercised great influence on the growth of Ashraf's personality. After a year and a half Ashraf was sent to another school in the Aligarh tehsil and later to the Sanatan Dharam Sabha High School where he read up to class three.

Thakur Murad Ali was transferred to Moradabad and in 1909 Ashraf joined Hewett Muslim School, where he studied Hindi and Sanskrit up to class six and thereafter Urdu and Persian as there was no arrangement to teach Hindi and Sanskrit in class seven. He passed the matriculation examination in 1918. However his career at the school was not free from adolescent adventures or politics. In 1912 he ran away for some time from the school and met an old schoolmate Shankarlal and intending to have a happy life in the Himalayas both of them left home without even enough warm clothings. Ashraf was fond of village life and its simplicity and ruggedness. Whenever he had an opportunity in later life, he always liked to go to Daryapur or other villages in the Mewat or Mathura and Agra districts for relaxation. Ashraf was brilliant but did not pay much attention to his studies in early school days. However, he spent more of his time in the library than in the class and participated in the debates and symposiums in the school. He always spoke on the basis of facts and this endeared him not only to his class but to the entire school. He was considered even then as a budding orator, a promise he fulfilled so eminently in his later life.

At the Hewett School, Ashraf was greatly influenced by several teachers including Khuda Ali Khan, Qamar Sahib, Maulvi Rahmatullah Khan and Maulvi Istafa Karim Khan. After his



father was called to active service in the Dardanelles and East Africa, he lived with one of his masters Khuda Ali Khan at Kasraul. Maulvi Rahmatullah Khan taught him Arabic. The maulvi was a nationalist and an anti-imperialist. His main enemy was the British rule in India which had to be ended. For him to attain freedom was an act of redemption. He wanted the young men to be fearless in the fight against the British rule and not to be corrupted by worldly temptations that the rulers offered to the young educated Indians. Maulvi Istafa Karim Sahib too exercised a great influence in moulding the life of Ashraf and infused anti-British, anti-imperialist and patriotic feelings in him. Istafa Karim was a product of Aligarh and came to the Moradabad school when Ashraf was still there. He organised Hazb Allah (the party of god) and Ashraf became its member and took part as boy in its activities. Besides on every Sunday in Dewan Bazar, where the maulvi lived, discussions, discourses and recitals were held. Poems of Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Iqbal were recited. Ashraf was attracted by these and particularly by the shikwa of Iqbal. The essence of these recitals or discussions was that the British were the main enemy of Islam and that Jihad (holy war) was the duty of every Muslim. Ashraf along with others took the oath of jihad and his political journey began.

About this time Maulana Hasrat Mohani, poet, scholar, writer and leftwing revolutionary, inspired many young men and Ashraf was one of them. Begum Hasrat carried on her husband's work when the maulana was arrested and lived a simple life in a servant's quarter in Dharampur building in Raselganj in Aligarh. She was running a swadeshi cloth shop, whose assets were no more than Rs 200. Ashraf got motherly affection from the begum. Ashraf was more inspired by the poverty, simplicity, sacrifice and love and sympathy of Begum Hasrat than by the socialist ideas of Hasrat Mohani.

During this period great changes were taking place in Indian political life. The younger generation was inspired by a new anti-British wave during the first world war. So was Ashraf at the tender age of 11. The authorities involved his friend Shankarlal in a case of political murder. This made Ashraf more anti-British. When at Moradabad he learnt by-heart many songs of Dhingra

and Sufi Amba Parshad. An order was issued during the war to the schools to salute the Union Jack. Ashraf refused to do so and seeing the resentment of the students, the headmaster of the school did not insist upon it either.

After passing his matriculation examination, Ashraf joined the M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in 1918 founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. It was a famous college in India and abroad for its staff—particularly for the European teachers and good education. But there was a lot of discrimination against the Indians—to impress upon the students the superiority of Europeans and particularly of the British. Indian teachers were paid much less than the Europeans for the same posts. High posts were reserved only for the British.

It was a time when discrimination against Indians was the order of the day. Indians could not enter the British clubs, hospitals, railway compartments, dining halls, hotels or European schools. The British government went to the extent of giving preferential treatment to the children born in Europe as against those born in India. In the schools and colleges, students were asked to write essays on the blessings of the British raj. It was a normal practice that when a white man entered a railway compartment, every Indian—Hindu, Muslim or Christian—had to stand up, salute him and leave the seat for him.

One day one of the European teachers at the M.A.O. College, Ganes, asked his students what they would do if they were travelling in a train and an Englishman entered. All the students got up and gave the “right” answer that they would get up from the seat, salute him and vacate the seat for him. Ashraf was of a different mettle. He had imbibed patriotism and when his turn came, he stood up and said he would do nothing and would keep sitting. “Why”, Ganes shouted, “you are expected to salute him and offer him your seat.” “Not me”, Ashraf shouted back, “I would not do it.” Ashraf was expelled from the class and fined.

After passing the F.A. examination, Ashraf joined B.A. in the same college. The war had come to an end. Ali brothers were released from jail. A qualitatively new mass upsurge swept the

country. The khilafat movement had started. At the peace conference in Versailles (France) the British with other imperialist powers conspired against Turkey and other Muslim and Arab countries to bring them under their rule in one form or other. The mandate system was one of them, under which Britain and France brought within their empire the Arab countries. The imperialists posed as trustees of the destiny of these countries. The British were further conspiring to take away the khilafat from the sultan of Turkey and confer it on a stooge of their own, so that they could control the Muslim world for their imperialist purposes.

Simultaneously, the hijrat movement also started. Muslim young men took the oath not to live any more under the British and go to other countries, where the British did not rule. The leftwing nationalist Muslims were very prominent in this movement. Thousands of persons migrated to Afghanistan. The estimates differ from 36,000 to a lakh. They wanted to go to Turkey via Soviet Russia, since they could not reach Turkey from Afghanistan except by travelling through that country. The amir of Afghanistan at first refused permission to cross over to the Soviet Russia. Most of the muhajirs returned to India at end of 1920. But quite a few crossed over to Russia. On return some of these muhajirs were arrested and tried under the Peshawar conspiracy cases and sentenced by the British government. Ashraf helped one of the muhajirs and kept him in his house for six months and got him a job in a school in Moradabad.

In 1919 the political atmosphere in India was surcharged. A new and revolutionary period of independence struggle began. The anti-Rowlatt-Act agitation, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the emergence of Gandhi, the Hindu-Muslim unity, the preparation for khilafat and noncooperation movement were some of the significant occurrences. "Swaraj in One Year!", "Boycott English Goods!", "Boycott English Courts, English Schools, English Titles, English Service—These Are All Haram!", "Be Prepared for Satyagraha", "Give Donations to Khilafat Swaraj Funds!", "Become a Member of the Congress!"—these slogans resounded in the political atmosphere. A wave of patriotism and anti-imperialism was sweeping the minds of educated young men along with peasants and workers. Ashraf needed no orders from

anyone. He started work for satyagraha. Soon Gandhiji, Maulana Azad, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr Ansari, Hasrat Mohani, Azad Subhani, Satya Dev visited Aligarh. The M.A.O. College Students' Union passed resolution supporting noncooperation. The Aligarh boys demanded of the college not to take aid from the government. Since the college belonged to the nation, the students captured its building. Ashraf was in the front ranks. Soon after the Jamia Millia was founded in the college mosque by Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hassan, one of the founders of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind. Two separate camps were formed within the boundaries of the M.A.O. College—one of the trustees and the loyalist teachers and the other of the supporters of noncooperation with Ashraf active among them. At last the authorities called the police and threw out the latter from the college premises. On the other side of the road at a short distance from the M.A.O. College, Jamia Millia was housed in tents and it became the centre of satyagrahis. A new chapter had opened in the life of Ashraf—in Jamia.

As Ashraf says : "Life at Jamia was typical. In name Jamia was a university. Maulana Mohammad Ali himself used to give us lessons in English and history. But in fact it was a camp of the satyagraha volunteers. After three or four batches of volunteers had left the camp, teaching began and Maulana Mohammad Ali drew up the syllabus : Maulana Mohammad Soorati was appointed to teach Arabic, Khwaja Abdul Haye to interpret the Quran, Maulana Aslam was for history, Maulana Sharfuddin for Urdu, Mr Kelat for English and Mr Singal to teach Gita. They were all teachers in the real sense. A fair number of participants in the noncooperation movement gathered at Jamia. Apart from Aligarh there were young men from many other places such as Peshawar, Delhi, Hyderabad, Assam, etc. At that time I was sharing a room with two friends. We had each a green cloak of the Jamia. We had our food in the dining hall. For breakfast Tonki used to bring two-pice worth of carrots every day. Our common property was a tin box, containing four khadi suits, one or two angochhas, a volume of Diwan-e-Ghalib, Mohammad Ali Lahori's English translation of the Quran, and some national songs published in Urdu at Meerut. My indivi-

dual property consisted of a small, old carpet and twelve-anna shoes made of sheepskin. For games we had an open field at Jamia where we used to play kabaddi and gullidanda at which I was adept. The atmosphere at Jamia had a particular attraction that could be called spiritual. My short story 'Anand' published, I think, in an issue of *Adabi Dunia* (Allahabad) in 1940, recalls it."\*

In 1922, the khilafat movement came to an end and Kemal Ataturk who assumed leadership of the government in Turkey ended the khilafat. Gandhiji withdrew the noncooperation movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident in which peasants burned down a police station in which some policemen were killed. The British government again started its own game of divide and rule in a new garb. Mass communal riots were unleashed. These riots spread with unprecedented speed almost all over the country, in big towns and cities, and this continued for some time. The antinational forces started the shuddhi and tabligh movements leading to further communal clashes. Ashraf's Rajput community, Malkanas, became a particular target of these conversions. There was demoralisation and despondency among the young people.

In 1922 Ashraf met Maulana Hasrat Mohani and became acquainted with his socialist ideas. He read M. N. Roy's writings. But their socialist ideas did not interest him. The works of M. N. Roy rather increased his dislike for socialism. He met Muzaffar Ahmad and Kutubuddin in 1923, just after the Gaya Congress session. But these meetings did not yet draw him to socialism. He used to say later that had these people explained communism in relation to his own nationalist ideas, he might have reached the right path earlier. He lost faith in Gandhism too after the Chauri-Chaura incident. All the hopes to win swaraj in one year had been dashed to the ground. Ashraf now spent most of his time in reading the *Quran* and in prayers.

After the movement for independence had subsided, those

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\* *Personalities and Events that Influenced Me*, edited by Junaid Ahmad, Bombay.

students who had gone over to Jamia started rejoining the Aligarh Muslim University (formerly M.A.O. College). In 1923 Ashraf, even though he had passed B.A. from Jamia, joined the Aligarh Muslim University for a B.A. (Hons) course. He offered Muslim theology, Islamic philosophy and history. He studied under Dr Mohammad Habib, whom he always called his guru. He passed B.A. (Hons) in 1925 and M.A. in 1926. He passed his LL.B. in 1927 and broke all past records.

While studying at Aligarh for B.A. (Hons), he became very popular and was elected vicepresident of the Students' Union—a unique honour for any student. He won laurels for his speeches in the union which always had “abundant and fresh material”. During the election campaign charges of treason were made against Ashraf, cartoons were drawn, pamphlets and handbills were published. A virulent anti-Ashraf campaign was on. But he won with an overwhelming majority. Under Ashraf's leadership, the union became a forum for intellectual development of the student community. His inaugural address after election as vice-president instead of being the usual eulogy of the government and the university authorities, put forward the claims of the new times. He always chose topics for debates which had close relevance to the national problems and helped to widen the thinking and understanding of the students. He instituted Mustafa Kemal Trophy for which Rs 900 were collected from Nawab Ullah Khan Sahib. He also made new rules under which the Aligarh debating team was not to compete for the trophy. Only outsiders could compete for it. The credit for the convention that local speakers should not participate as competitors goes to the Aligarh and Ashraf.

Ashraf invited members of the then Central Legislative Assembly to address the Students' Union. In a debate—“In the opinion of this House present reforms are inadequate and unsatisfactory”. Dewan Chamanlal and Goswami were called from the opposition in the assembly and Mian Mohammad Shafi from the government side. Later when Saklatvala visited India, Ashraf was able to get him to speak to the Aligarh students and teachers under the auspices of the union.

He married Kulsum when he was the vicepresident of the union. The heavy work of the union and responsibilities of married

life did not affect his love and affection for his associates. His brothers stayed with him and he would even wash their clothes and feel proud of it.

Ashraf, Amiruddin Ahmad Qidwai and Saiyed Mohammad Tonki on the suggestion of Prof. Mohammad Habib were associated as students' representatives with the work of preparation for the jubilee celebration of the university. Important personalities like Mian Mohammad Shafi, Maulana Ahmad Ali and M. A. Jinnah participated in the celebrations. The maharaja of Alwar was also invited. According to the prevailing convention the maharaja was given an address by the union. Dr Ziauddin wanted Ashraf to quit the office before the address was presented but he did not succeed in this.

Welcoming the maharaja, Ashraf delivered a balanced and sophisticated speech. He talked of the secular traditions of Aligarh and told the maharaja that the first person to graduate from Aligarh was a Hindu. He also mentioned that Ashraf's ancestors belonged to Alwar state. The maharaja was impressed and flattered that this brilliant student and impressive speaker was, through his ancestors, connected with his state. The secretary of the maharaja contacted Ashraf and extended to him an invitation to come to Alwar after completing his studies at Aligarh and also hinted at a scholarship for further studies in England.

After passing the M.A. examination in 1926, he visited Alwar for a while as a state guest. He stayed with the maharaja in his palaces of Vijay Mandir and Sariska for two or three months. Ashraf describes this visit as follows : "I should admit frankly that Maharaja Jai Singh pleased me very much at our first meeting. I was opposed to the rivalry of Hindus and Muslims, while he supported Hindu-Muslim unity and his practical aim was complete reconciliation." He was impressed by maharaja's proindependence feelings and his support for medical treatment of Mohammad Ali during his illness. Ashraf felt that the maharaja had patriotic feelings and urge for freedom. However one day Ashraf accompanied the maharaja on a hunting expedition. He saw for himself the hardship of the begari labourers and the humiliating treatment they were given by the maharaja and his courtiers, who treated them like animals. This increased his hatred for the present social system. He had already started imbibing socialist ideas

at Aligarh, particularly because of his association with Prof Habib.

Immediately after taking the LL.B. degree, Ashraf went to Muzaffarnagar and established legal practice for a short period of four months. Soon he became popular with peasants of this area. His house became a social, intellectual and semipolitical centre.

At this time the maharaja of Alwar sent for him and offered a scholarship for further studies in London. Through the help of the maharaja he got the passport which otherwise was difficult for a person who had participated in noncooperation movement. On 27 September he sailed for London from Bombay. In London he joined two courses—Lincoln's Inn for Bar-at-law and later the School of Oriental Studies for Ph.D. in Indian medieval history.

His work for Ph. D. was supervised by Sir Wolsley Haig, an eminent historian and a friend of the maharaja of Alwar. The maharaja provided Ashraf with a handsome scholarship so that he could live with ease and pursue his studies well. But this comfortable life did not mar his simplicity or diminish the intensity of his patriotism. In spite of Sir Wolsley's opposition he worked on the thesis concerning the life and conditions of people of Hindustan from 1200 to 1550.

The khilafat leader Maulana Mohammad Ali had once gone to England for treatment. Ashraf and his nationalist friends often visited the maulana. It is at the residence of the maulana that Ashraf first met Saklatvala. The maulana had great affection for the old students of Jamia and he invited all the Indians to dinners, where choicest dishes were served. Ashraf believed in basic human values and whenever he found a glimpse of these values, he communicated the pleasure of his experience to others. During this stay in London he met, apart from Saklatvala, Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar and many other Indians. Sajjad Zaheer wrote his impressions of Ashraf in the following words : "My first impression of him was of intense vitality, of sharp and extraordinary intelligence, of burning patriotism and of a revolutionary, who knows no bounds and considered no sacrifice too great to achieve his goal—the independence of



our dear motherland and the establishment there of a socialist social order." Soon Ashraf turned towards communism.

In 1929 the maharaja of Alwar was celebrating his jubilee. Rao Raja Amar Singh, the personal adviser to the maharaja, visited London to invite guests to the jubilee celebrations. The Viceroy Lord Irwin personally attended the celebrations. Guests included high dignitaries and rajas and nawabs. Ashraf was recalled to Alwar to help in the arrangements for the jubilee. He came with Maulana Mohammad Ali in December 1928. Both of them lived in the palace of the maharaja. Ashraf was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after Indian guests who were mostly rajas and nawabs. The jubilee celebration was a lavish affair. Thirty lakhs of rupees were spent in three days, a sum almost equal to the annual income of the state.

During those three days Ashraf for the first time saw the decadence, inhumanity and brutality of the feudal princes. The political department of the British government encouraged the princes to lead a life of drunkenness and debauchery and oppress the people of their states, thwart democratic movements and disrupt the national freedom struggle. They were allowed and even encouraged to spend major part of the state income on their personal life. Ashraf used to visit every guest he was in charge of to ask whether he and his staff were looked after properly, needed anything. One of the Rajputana princes answered : "I have every luxury, only the arrangement for the night is not sufficient." Ashraf thought that because of winter, fuel or electricity might not be sufficient. These arrangements were all right according to that prince. Yet he repeated : "Please, think of the night." Now Ashraf thought possibly he needed more wine or whisky. The prince again repeated the same demand. Then only did Ashraf realise that the prince needed a beautiful woman for the night and that it was a part of the duty of the organisers to arrange for this. Ashraf only replied, "Please, wait only two days more, then you will return to your own state." Ashraf also learnt that no member of the staff of the maharaja of Alwar could be served food unless the maharaja felt hungry.

Two weeks after the jubilee, Ashraf was appointed personal adviser to the maharaja and was put in charge of the official guest-

house, palaces and godowns. He was to supervise a staff of 500. One day he received a complaint that a servant in the guest-house had not come on duty. Ashraf summoned him—an 80-year-old man getting a mere Rs 10 as salary after 35 years of service. When he entered Ashraf's office, Ashraf against all protocol stood up from his chair. The man with white beard was trembling and weeping.

Ashraf could not bear this sight and made his decision to quit the job under the maharaja. He could no longer suppress the rebel in him. Loyalty to the ruler became too much for him to endure. A few days after this incident, the maharaja left for tiger hunting. Ashraf did not accompany him on the plea of illness and soon after the maharaja's departure he quietly left and returned to Aligarh never to go back to Alwar again except when he visited it years later to fight against the oppression of the maharaja in defence of the rights and dignity of the people of the state. Ashraf cared neither for the comfortable life, nor the poverty facing him at Aligarh, nor even whether he would be able to complete his education in London.

After quitting Alwar and a short stay at Jamia as a teacher, Ashraf went to Aligarh and joined his old friends, most dear of whom was Saiyed Mohammad Tonki who had started working in the university school. The year 1928 is memorable in the history of freedom struggle of India. The communal riots had subsided. The Central Legislative Assembly had adopted a resolution demanding dominion status. All Parties Conference had taken place. An All Parties Committee for constitutional reforms had been appointed, headed by Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru as secretary. It recommended the grant of dominion status as an immediate constitutional step. The report was under discussion all over the country. Jinnah had opposed some proposals of the report on the question of Muslim representation in the assemblies and formulated his own proposals in the form of fourteen points. It was a period when the Simon Commission was visiting India—an all-white commission appointed by the British government to study the political situation in India, examine the working of the constitutional reforms of 1919 and make recommendations for the further constitutional development in India.

The Simon Commission was boycotted by all sections of organised political opinion in the country except the loyalists and communalists. The Congress led the "Simon, Go Back!" movement—hartals, processions, protest meetings and demonstrations became the order of the day. The British government unleashed repression. All sections of the Indian people—Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, peasants and workers, young and old, men and women—participated in this movement and faced the lathis and guns of the imperialist rulers with courage. Aligarh was naturally a very active centre of such controversies particularly on Nehru Committee report and Jinnah's 14-points. Ashraf and his friends were involved in all these controversies and participated actively in the debates. They supported the nationalists and opposed the communalists among the Muslims.

Ashraf supported the Nehru Committee report. He along with Tonki and other friends challenged its opponents. However their activities were limited to debates and discussions. Even though they did not take part in active politics, they remained associated with the national movement and the movement to combat communalism.

Ashraf got a small scholarship which enabled him to go back to London at the end of 1929 to complete his thesis. He came back to India in 1932 with a Ph.D. degree. Ashraf describes his second stay in London as very happy even though he lived in poverty and hardship with a monthly allowance of Rs 100 as compared to the life of comfort when he had first gone there on a scholarship from the maharaja of Alwar. In the words of Ashraf, this was more than compensated because of greater mental satisfaction.

Ashraf had met Saklatvala, Sajjad and other Indian leaders in London earlier. He had taken part with Srinivasa Iyengar, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Saklatvala in the formation of London Congress Committee. He again reestablished contact with these friends and worked actively for Indian freedom even when studying.

The Indian political situation took another turn after the movement against Simon Commission and the rejection of the demand for dominion status by the British. The Congress under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru in December 1929 adopted the

resolution of complete independence and 26 January 1930 was observed as independence day throughout the country. The Bombay working class had conducted strikes on political issues. The Bharat Navjawan Sabha under the leadership of Bhagat Singh was at the peak of its activities. Terrorist groups were active in several parts of the country. Young elements in the Congress and outside were coming under influence of socialist ideas. Nehru had attended the conference of the Anti-Imperialist League at Brussels in 1927. The Communist Party and peasants' and workers' parties had already been formed. In the wake of the 1929 economic crisis there was wide discontent among the masses. Kisan conferences were taking place. Youth and students were on the move. Gandhiji was again leading satyagraha movement and the Dandi March in 1930. The British government played its political trick. It gathered together communalists, princes, landlords and loyalists along with British representatives in London at the first Round Table Conference to discuss the future constitution of India, even before the Simon Commission had finished its deliberations and made recommendations.

The governor-general nominated all these so-called representatives of India. The Agha Khan, who had been disowned even by the Muslim League in 1915, was leading the Indian delegation. The British could not have chosen a greater loyalist than the Agha Khan.

In 1931 Mahatma Gandhi withdrew the satyagraha leading to demoralisation and disillusionment in the ranks of the freedom fighters. The British government launched a counteroffensive. It unleashed a reign of terror against revolutionaries, trade-union leaders and communists in particular. Sardar Bhagat Singh was executed and the Meerut Conspiracy Case against communists and some others was launched.

Gandhiji was persuaded by the British to attend the Second Round Table Conference. The conference got bogged down in communal tangle instead of discussing the political demand or solution to the socioeconomic problems that India was facing. The Hindu and Muslim communalists were at their best. They vied with one another in playing the British game to "prove" Churchill's theory that Indians were not fit for independence or for parliamentary institutions. None of them talked of adult fran-

chise, removal of poverty and welfare of common man. Gandhiji also did not take up those questions except the general demand for independence. He also did not raise the question of adult franchise in spite of the Karachi Congress resolution. Gandhiji was arrested on his return to India.

Dr Ashraf came back to India disillusioned with Gandhiji. He had already become a communist in London. Ashraf has described how he accepted communism during his second visit to London in 1929. On one Sunday after a meeting at the residence of Saklatvala where Sajjad Zaheer and Mahmuduzzafar were also present, they went to Highgate Cemetery and Ashraf took an oath at the grave of his new murshid (teacher or guru), Karl Marx. He became a member of the first group of Indian communist students in London. Ashraf, in his own words, "entered a new period of my life which was in every respect different from the past".

After his return to India Ashraf joined the Aligarh Muslim University as a lecturer in 1934 and taught there for over a year. However, he was soon drawn into active politics as a wholetime worker and gave up his academic career. Since the Communist Party was illegal, he started working in the Congress Socialist Party which had been formed in 1934. Soon after Ashraf was elected a member of its National Executive. As a leader of the Congress Socialist Party he made a notable contribution in building and strengthening the left wing in the Indian National Congress.

Gandhiji had withdrawn his satyagraha by 1934. The main political controversy now revolved round the so-called Hindu-Muslim representation in the elected assemblies. After the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed the question was whether or not this act should be accepted and worked. The vested interests and communalists fell in line with British and wanted the act to be given a trial. However, the socialists, communists, left-revolutionaries and workers' and peasants' movements were for its total rejection. Inside the Congress leadership itself there were two groups, one led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose and the other led by Dr Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel. Ultimately a compromise was reached between them that the

Congress should contest the elections and go to the assemblies to defeat the act from inside.

The second issue before the national-liberation movement at that moment was how to meet the menace of fascism, as the question of fight against fascism was linked up with our own struggle against imperialism and for freedom. It was under these conditions that the Lucknow Congress met in 1936. Nehru presided over this session. He not only denounced fascism, but also talked of socialism, land reforms and other socioeconomic issues. He had also proposed that the future constitution of India be framed by a constituent assembly elected by Indian people on the basis of adult suffrage. Ashraf attended this historic session and acted as the spokesman of the communists and thereafter in the subsequent sessions also. His speeches at the Congress sessions at Tripuri, Ramgarh, and AICC sessions at Poona, Allahabad, Bombay, etc. were eagerly read by the public. On Nehru's request Ashraf joined the Congress secretariat at Allahabad, with Dr Z. A. Ahmad, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and Sajjad Zaheer.

Dr Ashraf was put in charge of West Asia and Muslim mass-contact programme. He did his work conscientiously and with enthusiasm. He began to work untiringly for ideological and organisational orientation in this work and giving it a distinctly anti-imperialist outlook. In the 1937 general election, he contested an assembly seat on a Congress ticket in the Mathura-Agra Mohammedan constituency. It was a tough election fight in view of the Muslim League's opposition to him. He got a majority vote in many tehsils but was defeated only by a small margin of 275 votes. However, participation in elections was only a small part of Dr Ashraf's revolutionary life. He was engaged in drawing the Muslim masses into the national-liberation struggle. One of the most important and significant contributions of Ashraf to the liberation struggle was his fight against the reactionary elements among the Muslims of India who, instigated by the British imperialists, were taking the Muslims towards the path of isolation from the national-liberation struggle. He opposed communalism and the politics of Muslim League tooth and nail. Dr Ashraf made a deep study of Muslim politics, Mus-

lim social and political movements and told the Muslim intelligentsia and the Muslim masses that their own liberation lay in joining the struggle with the rest of the Indian masses for independence and democracy. He also fought the reactionary Hindu communalists whose aim was to oppress the Muslim minority. He was elected a member of the Board of Azad Muslim Conference—a platform of Nationalist Muslims.

The outbreak of the second world war in September 1939 changed the political scene in India. Together with thousands of other patriots, Ashraf was thrown into prison in 1940 and released only two years later, after the Hitlerite attack on the Soviet Union which gave a new turn to the war. In the Dcoli concentration camp, as result of a prolonged hungerstrike for over thirty days, Ashraf's health suffered permanent injury. After his release in 1942 he shifted to the newly-setup headquarters of the CPI in Bombay and became permanent invitee to the Central Committee of the party which he continued to attend till 1948.

Ashraf came into contact with peasants in the 1930s. He played a very significant role in the struggle of Meo peasants against the ruler of Alwar in 1933-34. He actively participated and led the Meo peasant struggle against maharaja's oppression and exploitation of poor peasants on the demands for reduction of revenue and octroi, grazing and toll taxes. It is popularly known as Alwar gardi or Meo gardi. Armed battles took place between the armed forces of the maharaja and the peasants. Ashraf visited a large number of Meo villages during that struggle and directed the peasants in their movement and guided them in handling arms and ammunition against the maharaja's forces. The government of India sent its own troops to control the state and deprived the maharaja of his authority. The revenue was reduced by a quarter and some taxes were abolished and other measures were taken. Ashraf advised the young among the Meos to organise themselves in the Praja Mandal and join the fight for the country's independence.

Soon after the Praja Parishad movement started in neighbouring princely state of Bharatpur. The Bharatpur patriots consulted Ashraf. He took part in the conference of the Praja Parishad

held in Punhana in the district of Gurgaon adjoining Bharatpur. As a result of his advice the Meos and particularly their leaders, Syed Muttalabi, Chaudhry Abdul Hai and others, joined the movement and the satyagraha. This movement was by and large a movement of educated persons and Ashraf turned young men into political workers for life. In the days of Alwar and Bharatpur movements, he became very popular with the Meos who would often invite Ashraf to address their meetings and seek his advice in their troubles and problems. His help was also sought to settle disputes between different pals of Meos and their panchayats. The Meos of Gurgaon, Bharatpur and Alwar once became involved in a quarrel over Chaudhry Mohammad Ismail Khan of Khandeola in Bharatpur state living with Mussamat Nawaji of Rasa contrary to the customs of the brotherhood. It threatened to become an interstate quarrel between Alwar and Bharatpur. The princely administration of the two states entered the fray and wanted to use the opportunity to suppress the Meos in their respective states. Ashraf's advice prevailed. The matter was amicably settled and Meos were saved from mutual quarrel and selfdestruction. Besides Dr Ashraf, Dr Shaukatullah Ansari, Sajjad Zahcer, Sahibzada Mahmuduzzafar and his wife Dr Rashida Jehan also helped these movements and visited Mewat.

During 1946-47 there was a wave of communal riots all over the country. A riot was engineered in Hodal in Gurgaon district. But through the effective intervention of Dr Ashraf and his group it was prevented from spreading to neighbouring Meo areas. Meos always had the tradition of Hindu-Muslim unity. But maharaja of Bharatpur got a Muslim League unit organised in his state. The Muslim guards presented a guard of honour to Liaquat Ali Khan when he passed through Bharatpur on his way from Delhi to Bombay. The maharaja tried to divide Meos between the supporters and opponents of Muslim League. Ashraf saw the danger. He advised the Meos to organise themselves under the Praja Mandal and the Kisan Sabha. He further advised them to struggle for the freedom of India and democratic reforms in the state of Bharatpur. As a result a demand for popular government was adopted by Meos and their organisations including the Congress, Communist Party, Praja Parishad, Mus-



lim League and Kisan Sabha of Bharatpur state formed a joint committee. The maharaja's nefarious game of using the Muslim League to divide the Meos was defeated.

During 1946-47, as communal riots spread, from Bharatpur and Alwar to Rewari, Dr Ashraf plunged himself into the work of restoring Hindu-Muslim unity in this region. Peace was restored and relations between Hindus and Muslims soon improved. With his advice and Gandhiji's intervention the Meos were prevented from going over to Pakistan and those who had been uprooted were resettled. Many of them who had already left for Pakistan came back to Mewat.

The struggle against communalism was a special feature of Dr Ashraf's life and work. The Communist Party of India after the partition in August 1947 entrusted Ashraf with the work of combating communalism through an Urdu daily newspaper, *Naya Daur*. Ashraf became its editor with Tika Ram Sukhan as assistant editor. The *Naya Daur* played a significant and positive role in those turbulent days in combating the forces of communalism. It also helped in regrouping the forces of the Communist Party in Delhi and in the surrounding areas. *Naya Daur* specially concentrated in exposing the conspiracy of princes and communalists against our independence. Alwar and Bharatpur states specially had become the centres of RSS. Arms were being smuggled out of these states and handed over to communalist bands for organising riots. The paper brought to light the conspiracy of princes, landlords and communalists under the inspiration of the maharaja of Bharatpur to march with full military strength to Delhi under the slogan "On to Delhi!" This opened the eyes of Nehru and the government of India who decided to confront the feudal princes of Panjab and Rajasthan with military force. A detachment of feudal and communalist forces advancing from the direction of Mathura was actually stopped outside Delhi.

Soon after this *Naya Daur* ceased to be published due to financial difficulties, Ashraf was asked to go to Pakistan to help organise the Communist Party there. It was indeed a most difficult work, since the party was under a virtual ban and had been shattered by the postpartition developments. But as a loyal com-

munist Dr Ashraf accepted the assignment. Ashraf worked underground. But he was arrested after some time on charges of being an Indian and a communist. He fell seriously ill in Karachi jail and there seemed little hope of his survival. The Pakistan government ultimately agreed to release him on condition that he must leave Pakistan forthwith. Ashraf left Pakistan on his own terms and went to England because the government of India refused to take him.

In London he lived a very hard life; firstly he was ill and secondly he had no money. He stayed in England as a stateless person. During his stay there, in spite of these hardships, he worked in the British Museum, and collected material on the period of Indian history which was his special province, i.e. medieval India. He wanted to come to India but was refused permission. Later due to intervention of friends, he was granted a temporary visa for 6 months. He returned to India in 1955. He told Maulana Azad who was then minister of education in the Indian cabinet that he wanted to live in India with or without visa even after the expiry of 6 months. Maulana told him "My brother, first pass these six months. The government of India dare not cross you in what you want to do." Ashraf stayed in India till he left for Berlin in 1960 as guest-professor of Indian medieval history at Humboldt University.

On his return from London, he went to Srinagar and worked on the history of Kashmir. He was brought to Kirorimal College by Dr Sarup Singh (present vicechancellor of Delhi University) as head of the department of history. Kirorimal College became popular as Dr Ashraf's college and came to be known as Karl Marx college. He imparted a new academic tone to the college. It was a proud privilege for his younger colleagues to work with him. He was extremely kind, affectionate and loving to them. He took personal interest in their academic work as well as in their personal problems and gave his mature advice. Dr Sarup Singh describes him affectionate, warm and tender. He was very popular with his students. He became the centre of real creative movement for a scientific study of history. He loved Kirorimal College so much that he declined readership at Delhi University and professorship at Jaipur University. He went to

Berlin's Humboldt University to be able to continue his studies on medieval Indian history.

After spending about two years on his assignment Ashraf—the patriot, revolutionary and communist—passed away on 7 June 1962 peacefully, sitting on his chair.

During this period Dr Ashraf not only helped to reorganise the medieval Indian history section of the Humboldt University, while engaged in teaching, he imparted a new outlook on historical studies also. He collected a lot of material on medieval Indian history in Moscow and at the Academy of Sciences at Tashkent, particularly on the question of influence of nomadic peoples of Central Asia on the development of specific features of feudalism in India and the structure of the military patriarchal feudalism of Turks and the Moghuls. He even started learning Turkish to read the original manuscripts. Ashraf was honoured by the Indian History Congress by electing him the president of the medieval section of its session held in 1960. Ashraf raised pertinent questions in his address on the study of Indian history, particularly medieval history. Ashraf was not only a historian but also a man of letters. He wrote plays and features. One of these (the life of Mirza Ghalib) was so outstanding that it was broadcast by the BBC. Similarly the BBC broadcast his Urdu translation of *Macbeth*.

The mortal remains of Ashraf are buried in the "Cemetery of the Socialist" at Berlin—Friedrichfelde, GDR. There he lies in the company of well-known German revolutionaries.

