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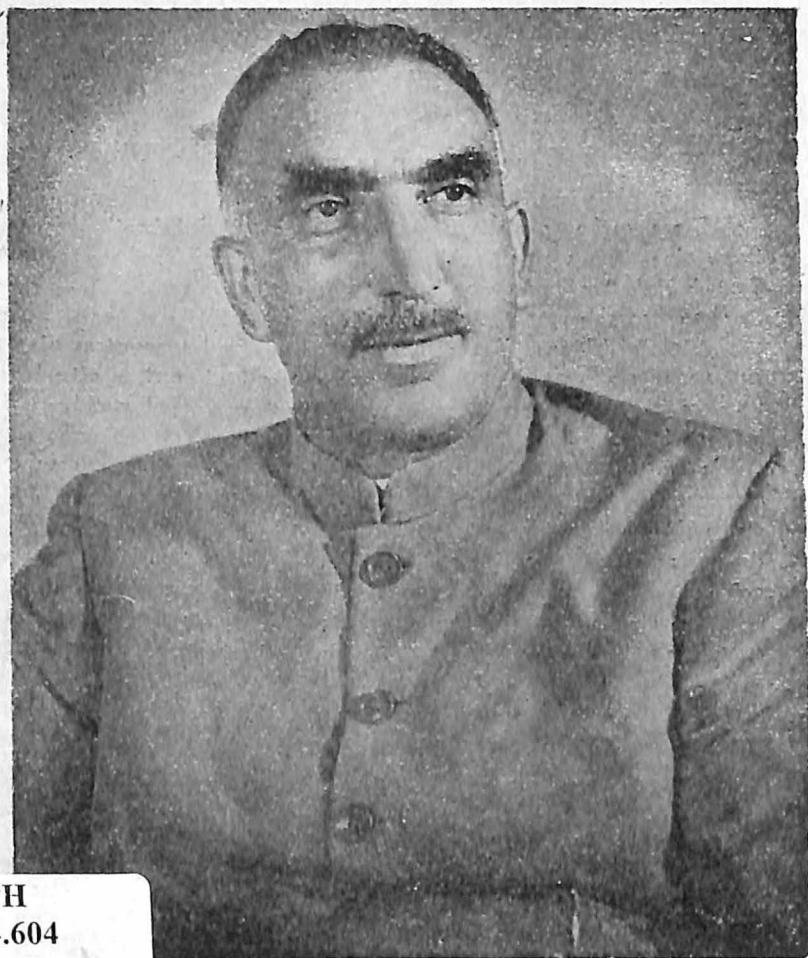


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KASHMIR TODAY

Travel Jottings Of A South Indian Journalist



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Sheikh Ghulam Mohammad, Prime Minister

11/10/83



INTRODUCTION

These are the stray jottings of a South Indian journalist about Kashmir and its people which were first published in Delhi Times under the title of "A South Indian's Diary" of a week's stay in that enchanting beauty. They have now been brought out in pamphlet form in response to the wishes of some readers of Delhi Times. The articles formed the casual impressions of the writer and since they were done in a hurry, as working journalists often have to, there are likely to be many lapses and shortcomings which may be kindly forgiven by those who have occasion to peruse the pamphlet. In these articles Prime Minister Bakhshi, comes in for very prominent repeated mention. The justification for this is that New Kashmir is very much of his own making and it is good to know something about the man whose dynamic personality has been making a deep impression on all those who come in contact with him. Undoubtedly he has a great and beneficent role to play in the coming years for Kashmir, for India---nay for resurgent Afro-Asia and it is the ardent hope of this writer that a kindly Providence will give him life, wisdom, strength and guidance in the pursuit of his mission of doing good to suffering humanity irrespective of caste, colour, clime or religion.

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CHAPTER ONE

September Festival Attractions

SEPTEMBER and October are probably the most glorious months for holidaying in Kashmir. The next best are April and May when the ice on mountaintops starts melting and people rush in to get away from the oppressive heat of the plains.

During September and October, the weather is exceedingly fine. The rains have stopped and the autumn flowers are in full bloom in all their radiance and variety which only Kashmir can boast of.

Fruits are also in abundance, especially the famous Kashmir apples which are a sight to see on small trees laden with them. The popular notion that apples are so cheap in Kashmir that one could pick them and eat from the fruit gardens no longer holds good today, for with a thriving export market, fruit gardens before they start ripening are taken on contract by businessmen or their agents and even in gardens where they are grown they are not so cheap today. But compared to Delhi or other far-off places like Madras, Coimbatore, Trichy, Trivandrum or Calicut in the south, they are very cheap and plenty and of course fresh.

Above everything there is the glorious sun shining out throughout the day from a clear sky and however much one roams about one never gets tired there. Probably this is peculiar to the climate of the place. The nights are chilly and comfortable.

With every passing year more and more facilities are provided to tourists like newer and better roads, transport facilities, etc. The Government transport service is very efficiently run and the buses are kept in good condition, unlike those of DTU in Delhi, and for uniform courtesy and helpfulness to passengers on the part of the bus conductors, here again the Union capital can take a leaf out of Srinagar.

Here in the Union capital — which is probably the worst in the whole of India from the point of transport service — there are exhortations to courtesy on sign boards stuck up on buses or public places but courtesy unfortunately remains confined to signboard exhortations only. In Srinagar or the places near about, it is the other way round : they do not preach courtesy but practise that virtue. Courtesy is in their blood and a stranger from the plains visiting Srinagar for the first time is happily impressed by these small things of great importance to common people.

After the birthpangs of freedom have been successfully got over and stability and security established throughout the state following the unfortunate developments of eight years ago, the Bakhshi Government hit upon the bright idea of a fortnight's Festival beginning from the third week of September when those in charge of the administration and the people join together in festivities of various kinds, including sports events, exhibitions, flower shows, boating pageantry, mushairas, poetic symposiums etc. It is a thoroughly enjoyable fortnight which ends up with a Reception by the Sadar-e-Riyasat to the citizens on Dusserah Day.

Last year the Festival had to be abandoned on account of the floods but this year it was conducted on a grand scale. Fortunately there has been no floods this year and the crops have been abundant and people generally very happy. This was reflected in the festivities. Sometimes there is a light shower or two in the September days but this year there were none and the festivities were participated in by large numbers of people not only from Srinagar and its adjoining places but from all over the state.

As years advance and the progress and prosperity of the people are being steadily stepped up by an energetic administration, the Festival also receives added enthusiasm from the people who by nature and tradition are happy and gay. It would even seem that the people have absorbed into their very being some of the beauty and majesty of the surrounding mountains and the smiling calm and equanimity of the people including the lowliest and humblest among them cannot but strike favourably even a casual visitor in their midst.

This year's Festival was on a much larger scale than any held upto now and there were a few additional welcome features including an All-India Urdu Journals Exhibition which was inaugurated by the Union Information Minister Dr. Keskar. The exhibition gave a vivid picture of the importance of Urdu journalism in the country and to many it was a revelation that Urdu dailies and weeklies are published in such large numbers practically from all the State capitals of India. Delhi of course was the seat of Urdu journalism and it still maintains its reputation.

At the inauguration welcoming Dr. Keskar and other guests, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, gave an interesting talk to the delight of the large audience collected together in the spacious hall of the Kashmir Tourist Centre buildings. He started with the beginning of Indian journalism by some of the Bengalee pioneers and how slowly and steadily it had expanded its scope and volume and usefulness from the popular welfare point of view. In this large Indian family Urdu held its own proud place and would continue to do so as long as the vitality of the language and the men engaged in it have something to give to the people for their cultural development and advancement in other fields. Going round the place, he said, he was struck with the diversity of the journals and their titles and technique of production and one was also struck by the freedom the journalists enjoyed not only in their writing but in their choice of some amusing titles for papers. For example, he said, there was even a journal entitled "Scandal" and such other funny titles and when he referred to this the audience burst out into amused laughter.

Another of the Central Ministers who came for the Festival was Humayun Kabir who inaugurated the Poetic Symposium in which both Hindi and Urdu poets from all over the country had participated.

On the last day of the Festival this year, Yuvaraj Karan Singh gave his Reception in the spacious grounds of the Kashmir Arts Emporium which was formerly the residence of the British Resident in Srinagar. Those were the days of frigid British officialdom when one could not even peep

into the grounds from outside but democracy has brought the people not only their freedom but the proud privilege of mixing with their leaders who are at the helm of affairs.

The Yuvaraj, very much unlike his father, dislikes any kind of ostentation and lives simply. He neither drinks nor smokes — the two qualities which alone probably would have been sufficient during the imperial days of British might in this country to disqualify him from ancestral inheritance.

In Prime Minister Bakhshi he has an elder brother in the true sense of the word. Bakhshi risen from the people to the present exalted position has not changed a bit. He is still the same old Bakhshi, liking and loving to live the hard life for his people and their welfare and happiness. He is undoubtedly the heart and soul of New Kashmir round whom the life of the people pulsates.

In the Yuvaraj he has a young companion and comrade and together they form a happy combination, the Chief Executive of the state enjoying his fullest sympathy and support to work out the new destiny of the state and its industrious people.

Bakhshi forms a fascinating study, as an individual and as an administrator. He is the human dynamo working usually 16 to 18 hours a day to bring to fruition the dream of his youthful days to create a New Kashmir. Like a giant he is working at it day in and day out. Much has already been achieved under his dynamic inspired leadership and much remains yet to be done. But achieve he will with reasonable good luck and good health both of which have always been with him. At 53 he possesses robust health but the real strength of Bakhshi, as is amply clear even to a casual visitor, is the strength derived from his people whose boundless love and affection for him serve as tonics in the achievement of his life mission — a happy and prosperous New Kashmir.

CHAPTER TWO

Thrilling Journey By Road

AIR travel to Srinagar is becoming more and more popular and the cost also is not very prohibitive but this mode of travel is still confined to senior officials of Government, diplomatic representatives, business executives or foreign or rich Indian tourists. Indian Airlines Corporation's Viscounts take only two hours from Delhi to Srinagar and they are comfortable. That much is also more or less the time taken by IAC's other service which though not so comfortable and cosy as the Viscounts is good enough for Indian conditions and pockets. Air travel in this country is still confined to the wealthy and the well-to-do with the result that the vast majority of the people must content themselves with train and bus journeys.

From Pathankot Kashmir Transport Service buses take passengers to Jammu in about three hours of straight run. The roads are good, so also the buses and there is not the usual tedium of the road journey when one reaches his or her destination.

The Kashmir Government Transport, unlike the detestable practice by DTU in Delhi, never allows overcrowding and it keeps to scheduled time. The Transport Service men are a disciplined lot, very courteous and very obliging and the first impression one forms on setting foot on Kashmir soil is one of relief.

Here in Delhi, in spite of continuous popular howling for years, nothing very much has yet been done in the improvement of the transport service. The men, generally speaking, are rude and very undisciplined and there seems to be no authority that could check them or their ways or improve their standards of behaviour. For the Capital city this is a disgrace but then that is not the only disgrace.

From Jammu to Srinagar the bus journey is thrilling and adventurous and one going for the first time will feel a tremendous relief when Srinagar is only about 20 miles ahead which is on level ground. Otherwise the whole journey is of mounting up and coming down and the winding roads built on the hill and mountain sides form something of a feat.

What is remarkable is the skill and efficiency of the drivers in whose two steady hands and cool heads the fate of the passengers lies. Any careless slip means a plunge into disaster and nothing could be of much avail if that happens. The drivers are carefully selected with clean records of efficient driving for several years. And they are splendid men, many of them Sikhs. They are an intrepid lot, hardy for this kind of arduous work and they seem to like the work so immensely.

Seldom are there any accidents and even on those rare occasions they are almost entirely due to the vagaries of nature when rain and storm bring down suddenly large pieces of rock and mud together with fallen trees on to these narrow roads not only blocking them but doing havoc to the transport service and passengers. But such unforeseen accidents are very few which is indeed a great credit both to the transport service and the expert drivers in their employ.

I am certain that if any of our top national leaders including the President were to travel by this route to Srinagar they would not hesitate to include one or two of the most outstanding bus drivers for the national awards given every year. If there is not already a suitable title one could be instituted for the purpose. These men and our armymen doing strenuous work on these routes are doing a splendid job for the nation but award or no award, they are high in the love and regard of their fellow countrymen. There is no doubt about it.

Starting from Jammu in the morning one reaches Srinagar in the evening. On the way there are busstops where one can get light refreshments or a full meal in the North Indian style. The enterprising Punjabi Sikh is here also with his Shere-e-Punjab restaurant, Food may

not be very clean but food in those remote parts is very welcome.

All the buses stop at the Government Tourist Centre in Srinagar and when the Capital is about to be reached there is such an amount of excitement and joy. It is something like the joy of the passengers on ships nearing ports. When one has been on water for days together without any sight of land anywhere, one's delight on nearing a port is tremendous. There is something of the delight of this nature when passengers after the strenuous road journey arrive at Srinagar.

The Government Tourist Centre at Srinagar is a large building built into blocks for the convenience of the tourist. During the tourist season, there is great rush for accommodation at the Centre, for here the rooms are large and well furnished and excellently situated with a well-run catering department where good, clean, nourishing food is served at reasonable price. The rooms are available for tourists for only 24 hours ordinarily but in special cases with prior consent of the authorities longer stays are also possible if thereby no inconvenience is caused to tourists, both Indian and foreign. Everything possible is done to see to the comfort and convenience of tourists and year by year the number of tourists is also steadily increasing.

The Srinagar Tourist Centre enjoys the reputation of being the largest and best in Asia. On the ground floor in one wing of the main building are situated the reception counters where tourists are attended to from early morning until late in the night. The staff is well trained and seldom is there any complaint of lack of attention or improper behaviour.

This is indeed very creditable when such large numbers of tourists practically from all over the world are daily attended to for their many needs. A tourist is naturally a curious person who wants all kinds of information about the state and the places of interest to visit, their accommodation facilities, etc. The men in charge of the Tourist Centre are always ready with their obliging answers and helpful hints which are uniformly satisfying.

By the side of the Tourist Reception Centre is a large and well laid-out ground with large and beautiful flowers of varied kinds and hues in full bloom on the fringes. There are benches and cane chairs for the use of tourists and in the September sun after your lunch it is pleasant to lounge about, watching the comings and goings of tourists in their various attires and apparent great hurry. Some of them have come only for a few days and they crowd into that short period all the sightseeing one could have.

The Valley is so beautiful and wherever one turns there is beauty and charm to attract the eye. It is no wonder that Sheikh Abdullah, the fallen and almost forgotten leader, used to compare the valley to a charming bride with her perennial attraction for Kashmiris as well as others.

What a tragedy that her great lover did her, may be unwittingly, the greatest possible harm and so soon after her harrowing experiences at the hands of the Pakistani raiders who like the Duryodhans and Dussasans of Kurukshetra memory tried to do her incalculable harm through dishonour and deceit. Timely rescue came to save her. A Krishna came on the scene. The last vestiges of those dark and dreary days are fast being washed away by energetic purposeful action of a Government which is determined to translate into action all the hopes and expectations built round the two magic words: NEW KASHMIR. It has taken birth, it is growing to strength and stability every year and the people are reaping the fruits.

CHAPTER THREE

P. M. And His People

THE Festival Week which spills over to nearly a fortnight nowadays because of the crowded programmes and popular enthusiasm keeping pace with them is some sort of a stocktaking of the Government's achievements as well as shortcomings for a year. The occasion is generally taken advantage of by people from outside Kashmir to have a good look at the New Kashmir in the process of building with energy and imagination by the present leaders.

The city functions are generally attended by the townsmen mostly although there is often a sprinkling of villagers coming from far away rural areas. A number of functions are also arranged in the rural side in order to give an opportunity to both leaders and the people to see one another at close quarters.

For the people particularly it is a great occasion to see their Prime Minister in their midst. Bakhshi has something of the Nehru touch about him. Both seem to revel in the midst of the common people. Indeed they are at their best and truest in the midst of the humblest and lowliest.

This brings them face to face with the real problems — poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. In the pathetic loving look of those innocent unsophisticated faces of men, women and children lie the irresistible promptings to action and achievement so that new life and cheer can be brought to these downtrodden of the humanity who had their dreary days under the feudal rulers.

Poverty is man created, so also man imposed suffering and the national leadership's mighty task is to remove the poverty and suffering of their people as far as lies in their power and resources. A sense of heavy responsibility weighs them down. It humbles them in spirit of course

but it hardens and toughens them also in a sense in order to better equip them for the tasks. In a way they are turned into men of steel. Whatever the exterior, the inner core is burning fire with a passion to sweep away the lingering vestiges of a wretched past.

About 15 miles from Srinagar is Hajin, a low-lying place which is generally flooded with the attendant suffering to the people. Their crops are washed away, even their little houses, and year after year this calamity has caused havoc to the people.

Bakhshi has seen these sufferings in his younger days. He was helpless then but with power in his hands one of his most urgent tasks was to control the floods and thus save the people.

Flood control measures are not easy in low-lying areas consisting of large tracts of land but with the co-operation of the Government of India considerable progress has been made and this year no damage was done by floods. The people are naturally very happy. They wanted to celebrate the event in a big way and large numbers of people had collected together to welcome Premier Bakhshi and others connected with the work of flood control.

All along the route for nearly 15 miles there had been arches of evergreens and flowers put up with flags flying from high poles. There had been small collections of people all along the route waiting to see Premier Bakhshi pass through so that they can give him their salaams.

The function took place at about 5 in the afternoon but from early morning people had started collecting on all sides along the route. They were singing songs in praise of the Bountiful Providence who had given them such a rich harvest and they were singing songs in praise of their Supreme National Leader and Prime Minister. All were cheerful and gay. I was a total stranger in their midst and did not know their language but in the midst of a joyous crowd there is an indescribable feeling of oneness and happiness along with the general mass of people.

The celebrations were in connection with the observance of "Sonawari Day" and they were held amidst popular rejoicing. Over 50,000 people gathered together here to parti-

icipate in the celebrations. There were a number of interesting items for both children and adults and the whole thing went off in the midst of almost uncontrollable popular enthusiasm. The masses in Kashmir or any other part of India are the same and their behaviour also is almost the same.

I have seen Nehru being mobbed and whatever cordons could be put up by volunteers people rush to be near their national idol to have a good look at him from close quarters. The scene at Hajin was similar to those huge gatherings addressed by Nehru both before and after he became the Prime Minister. The crowds go mad with joy and at Hajin also similar demonstrations of popular affection to their leader were seen.

It is true that sometimes these popular demonstrations cause some sort of annoyance and repeatedly Premier Bakhshi had to shout at them to keep order. Of course they listened to him and acted accordingly but within a short time they forgot about it all and started behaving as before.

Indian masses shower their affection on their chosen leaders. There is no calculation in such demonstrations which come out of boundless love for their chosen leaders. That is why they are so charming and endearing to those on whom they are bestowed.

Premier Bakhshi had a seat among the distinguished guests invited for the occasion but almost the whole time he was on his legs. The real food for popular leaders is popular affection and there is no doubt Premier Bakhshi must have been filled with joy.

He was constantly going from one side of the huge gathering to another exchanging greetings or some trite remarks shot at some whom he knew.

I am told he has an amazing memory and can remember faces in the crowds with an unerring eye. It is something of course unusual.

Gandhiji had that trait but not Nehru, but like Nehru he likes and loves to move about in the crowds like a boisterous youth.

When he had just started taking tea — the Kashmiri tea which is very appetising — the crowds are breaking

the orderly seating arrangements again and he rushes at them. He has a piece of rustic bread in his hand which he shares with not one but a few. He takes another and another and goes on eating a bit and sharing the rest with others. Both are overjoyed in this common sharing of the rustic bread.

Sonawari Day will live in the memory of those present there for long years. Here is a national leader in the midst of his people for whom he is working day and night to brighten their lives and give them and their children an assured future. The Leader and his people are thus merged into a mighty force working out a new destiny — the brightest in their history. That is the dream and seeing the Leader and his people at close quarters, a stranger in their midst comes away thrilled with the new life and hope pulsating the whole place and its people.

CHAPTER FOUR

People Have Become Plan - Minded

IF anyone who had visited Kashmir five years ago goes there now, he will find big changes all round. The entire face of the state is undergoing change for the better.

In Srinagar itself many new buildings have gone up and many more are springing up, there is increased trade with the rest of India, and a flourishing trade internally. People have much more money to buy their necessities now than before. New schools and playing fields are spotted about all over the city and hospitals and medical facilities are also steadily increasing both in numbers and efficiency.

New roads are linking up places which were neglected before and on the whole there is visible activity all round. The old lethargy born of feudal days has gone out of the people who now feel that they are active partners in the building up of the New Kashmir of their dreams.

In the bad old days of feudal autocracy, the people of Kashmir remained dormant and inactive. Like the rest of the princely states, there was utter misery on one side and cruel, callous extravagance on the other. A wide chasm divided the people from their rulers.

Kashmir was the paradise for the pleasure hunters, both native and foreign, and everything was done only for the satisfaction of this parasitical class who spent their days in luxury and licentiousness,

There were house boats to suit their moods and tastes for their extravagant living completely oblivious of surrounding misery of the common people. Nothing touched them. They had no heart to feel. Pleasure seekers had their golf courses for idle exercise and their exclusive clubs for their nightly revelry. Their entire attention was devoted to making this exclusive privileged class comfortable and happy during their stay in this paradise on earth which Kashmir verily is.

Along the Bund where house boats of varied kinds, dimensions and convenience are berthed, the idle rich of the former days used to promenade in their leisurely fashion. Even the track was meant for exclusive use and the commonalty was frowned upon if they also occasionally happened to stray unknowingly on to the path. The Srinagar Club, the exclusive preserve of the British and other Westerners, has now lost its exclusive character and the golf course in Srinagar wears a forlorn look, with only stray cattle moving about the place.

It is a new life altogether that is in evidence wherever one looks. The old barriers of the rulers and the ruled have gone for ever. The democratic leadership of the day completely identifies itself with the people and together they are marching to their goal of a peaceful prosperous Kashmir.

Right in the centre of this mighty change taking place stands Kashmir's Prime Minister Bakhshi working calmly and quietly but with the energy of a Titan. All the plans and schemes are largely the result of his intense devoted thinking, not for the last five or ten years but for many years of his adult life.

I am told that when he retires after his day's work which is never less than 12 to 14 hours, he does not straightaway go to bed unless he is tired out but in his bed, when everyone else is fast asleep, he ponders over large maps where each village is marked out with its peculiar problems and possibilities. His is a tiring job but he has tireless energy but this energy he gets from his people, their love, loyalty and boundless devotion.

CHAPTER FIVE

Parliamentary Delegation's Visit

TOWARDS the close of the Festival period a delegation of Members of Parliament from both Houses paid a visit to the state on the invitation of Premier Bakhshi. It was in a way a sight-seeing and fact-finding mission and they were in the state for about a fortnight.

They visited Jammu first and then Kashmir where they went round seeing the various constructive activities going on for the improvement of the living condition of the people. The delegation leader was Raghunath Singh and among the members was that Bihar Congress stalwart, Brajeshwar Prasad.

Some of the members had visited the state before and some more than once. They could therefore form an impression of the state as it was some years back and as it is under the Bakhshi regime. The members took the fullest advantage of the opportunity provided by the Government to see things for themselves.

Everyone of them was impressed with the remarkable progress made in many directions and they came away with the happy and unanimous impression that the National Conference and the Bakhshi regime have come to solid stay because of their work and achievement for the people. Mushroom political organisations like the Plebiscite Front are fast losing ground because of the Bakhshi regime's energetic action to bring about all-round improvement in the social and economic condition of the people.

After completing their itinerary and before their return to their respective places, Premier Bakhshi gave a dinner in their honour at his residence in Srinagar. Bakhshi's residence is the one which was occupied by the Assistant British Resident in former days. It is not much of an impressive building and has a small grassy plot in front where visitors are seated. He comes out to meet them all

and talks to them individually about their problems and needs and although he gives only a few minutes to each — he cannot give more because there are so many of them sometimes — none goes away from him without being satisfied.

By the side of his residence there is another small building where he gives his large public interviews on every Friday when hundreds of people from all over the state come to meet him and tell him their needs and difficulties. Premier Bakhshi enjoys being in their midst just like one of them although the process of continuous interviews running to several hours sometimes is very tiring.

The dinner was served in the spacious hall of this building which was beautifully illuminated. The dinner started at 8 but Bakhshi was there half an hour earlier looking to the arrangements. He had an extremely heavy programme that day and appeared slightly tired. He was resting on a chair with his feet and legs covered with a *pashmina* shawl. There were two musicians from India singing some *gazals* and he was enjoying the music and what was said in the *gazals*. Music is the real food of Bakhshi, young Ghulam Ali Bakhshi, Information Officer, was telling me.

Premier Bakhshi is a connoisseur of music but not many outside the music circles or his own intimate circle of friends know this. He is silent about this. He is naturally shy about himself and seldom talks about personal achievements or accomplishments, not even casually.

Guests started coming in and he sprang up from his seat and went about introducing the leader of the Parliamentary Delegation to the guests present. They all then sat for a lengthy programme of *ghazal* singing which was exceedingly well done and even a person who does not know Urdu could enjoy the music.

One of the *ghazals* was about the growing corruption among commercially-minded people especially who are polluting the pure life of the common unsophisticated people. Everything is adulterated these days and everything and even everyone is on the counter to be bought or sold. The singer sang that this is indeed a very sorry state of affairs and he put all his heart and soulful emotions

into the singing. He ended up by making a passionate appeal to God to remain hiding behind His curtain "for if You dare come out, even You will be offered for sale by the commercially-minded money-mad people of the present age." He sang it so well and the contents of his song also appealed to all that there was loud laughter from all sides of the hall. Bakhshi also joined in this general merriment.

This was followed by music and dance performed by two handsome Kashmiri young men who sang as they danced which was thoroughly enjoyed. The whole atmosphere was boisterously cheerful and lively and Premier Bakhshi pulled out two or three Members of Parliament to dance with the young men. They responded heartily and danced exceedingly well, especially Krishnan, the Andhra MP who almost outdid the young dancers in their vigorous performance. The Kashmiri dance is almost similar to the Punjabi dance and much more than the rhythm or grace it is the physical vigour that delights.

After the programme of music came the dinner. One or two were special Kashmiri dishes which are not available outside Kashmir. To those from the plains they were in the nature of delicacies. The food was excellent and thoroughly enjoyed by the guests. Bakhshi himself went round serving his MP friends and others.

Only after all the guests have left did Premier Bakhshi sit down to eat with some of his close assistants among whom were Information Director Zutshi, Private Secretary Dhar, Information Officer Ghulam Ali and Bamzai of the Central Information Ministry who before his present assignment was an active National Conference worker with the present leaders. They all sat at a small table in a corner of the big hall for their meal.

Bakhshi has the remarkable quality of mixing up with the people in the freest and happiest fashion. Only a man absolutely confident of himself can do this in that free and gay manner that he does. That adds to the charm and grace of an immensely charming man.

CHAPTER SIX

Abdullah Myth Is Over

NO State Government in India has been faced with the problems the Bakhshi Government has been called upon to tackle soon after assumption of office and it is something of a marvel that among all the Indian states today Jammu and Kashmir enjoys a degree of internal stability and progress which can be the envy of others. Let it be remembered that this has been achieved in the face of continuous propaganda barrages nearly 24 hours a day from Pakistan side and now from another quarter also.

Besides, the personal followers of Sheikh Abdullah did everything in their power to complicate matters by confusing the public mind on current issues. But all these tides of chaos and confusion were brought under control one after another and the one man responsible for this great achievement is undoubtedly Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad.

Of course his friends and admirers stood by him steadfastly which was a source of strength to him and indeed facilitated his work of retrieving a steadily deteriorating situation which at one time could have engulfed anyone less tough and less determined than Bakhshi.

Sheikh Abdullah and Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad were the national heroes of the Kashmiri people built up during two decades of hard struggle against the reactionary feudal rulers of the time who had the backing of the British Government. Of the two, the Sheikh was the elder and more glamorous before the public eye. He was the *Sher* (Lion) of the Kashmiris — a title they lovingly bestowed upon him.

Innocent, unsophisticated people are in the habit of giving their love and devotion to their chosen leaders in a boundless measure. Gandhiji enjoyed it and Nehru also and if they wanted it, they could have turned themselves into tyrants.

In a remarkable self-analysis which was in the nature of a self-criticism and self-check, Nehru when he was re-elected Congress President warned his people in an anonymous article in the *Modern Review* against the dangers of over-adulation of a popular leader which can easily turn his head and start doing things which might come to harm the people and their vital interests.

Sheikh Abdullah is a highly-strung, emotional type of man who could go hysterical in describing the misdeeds of the feudal rulers who had impoverished the people and made their life an unending saga of sorrow and suffering. In their abject poverty and helplessness they wanted someone to whom they could turn for some sort of a remote salvation from their plight and Sheikh Abdullah satisfied all the requirements of the situation. That was how the Indian people turned to Gandhiji and followed him almost in blind obedience.

Freedom came and with it new responsibilities which required new qualities, attitudes and approach. The days of mere haranguing to whip up the emotional anger of the people are gone and the days for solid patient work to reconstruct society have come. These required two kinds of qualities but in this test Sheikh Abdullah failed.

The Sheikh started getting impatient of old and tried friends who had worked together for long years in the freedom struggle and the emotionally unsteady man he is, he started building new castles of his imagination. He started lending his ears to powerful alien voices and started making mistake after mistake which landed him and his people in serious temporary difficulties and hardships.

It was at this crisis that Bakhshi came on the scene to shoulder the responsibilities. It was a baffling situation for anyone to undertake and only a very courageous man could have done it. How could a national hero whom the people have worshipped for nearly quarter of a century all of a sudden go wrong? They could not believe that a leader can make mistakes and sometimes terrible mistakes which might cost them their lives even. Common people are not made in that way. It takes a long time for them to unravel the tangled situation. But who could do it

successfully? On the face of it, it was a baffling, terrifying situation.

But an impossible situation had to be faced in the interest of the people and their progress and happiness. The people are greater than the greatest individual among them. They must be saved from disaster. It was a peremptory duty which must be discharged for the sake of the people.

It was thus that Bakhshi undertook the task with calm courage and a duty and devotion to his people which have enabled the people to enjoy a measure of peace, work and happiness which they have not enjoyed before. The Bakhshi Era which started seven years ago is going to be the brightest in the history of this enchanting state and its industrious people. The groundwork has been well and truly laid by Bakhshi himself and he is building up slowly and steadily.

It is not wrong to say that each day marks some progress in some direction and by the time the Third Plan period is over, the New Kashmir will start blooming forth with the beauty, colour and texture of the beautiful valleys and flowers for which Kashmir is world famous.

Talking to a Kashmiri friend casually, he compared the political twins, Sheikh and Bakhshi, to Balram and Krishna of Hindu mythology. Sheikh was the fiery and intemperate Balram who could run into a rage but Bakhshi like Krishna is calm, sagacious, profound in his understanding of human nature — its strength and its weaknesses. Like Krishna Bakhshi has become the friend, guide and philosopher to his people and together they are building their New Kashmir which may one day have its powerful impact on the rest of India.

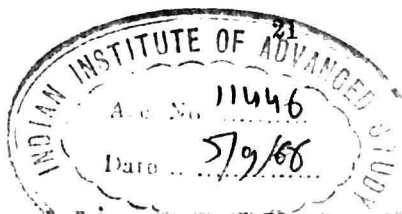
The Abdullah myth has been demolished and this in itself is one of the toughest things for anyone to accomplish. Only hard and unrelenting work and complete love and devotion to his people and their progress and welfare could do this. Information Minister Rajpuri waxed eloquent on this big achievement of his Chief for whom he has profound admiration.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Bakhshi Belongs To People

I do not think anyone who goes to Kashmir on a holiday will be in any great hurry to leave this beautiful land and its charming simple people. Anything simple is indeed charming and the chief characteristic of the people is their simplicity which makes them so charming and appealing to an outsider. It was not a mere holiday for me. I have had fleeting glimpses of Prime Minister Bakhshi when he makes his occasional official visits to the Union capital. He is a very fascinating personality, immensely charming and intensely dynamic. Such a man grips one's attention and admiration. My trip to Kashmir which came unasked, although I have been longing for it was so pleasing because I wanted to see Bakhshi in the midst of his people and in Kashmiri surroundings. I must say that I have been amply rewarded because of the kindness of the Prime Minister himself and the kindness and unfailing courtesy Director Zutshi of the Information Department and his principal assistants had shown to me which made the stay much more pleasant and happy. These stray jottings are in the nature of an offering of a grateful heart for the opportunities and facilities afforded to go round and have a good look at the surrounding natural beauty and the people and their life and living. Without their help and co-operation this would have been almost impossible for me.

In one of the rooms in the Kashmir House in New Delhi there is a good-sized picture of Bakhshi hanging on the mantelpiece which was taken some 20 years back when he was in his early thirties. It is one of the best pictures of the Kashmir Prime Minister and for me the best. In this pose he bears a close resemblance to Nehru when he was also in his early thirties.



Bakhshi in this picture has his chin in his hand, deeply pondering over something. I looked at this picture and went on thinking when I was having a cup of tea with the Prime Minister and some of the friends who have been with him then. I started questioning myself why this pose and why this moody deep thought on a young man of 30?

Something was troubling him apparently very deeply and that something was the condition of his people. That something was everything for him which shaped his life and the destiny of his people. From the fire gold comes out purer and truer still. Bakhshi's personality shaped itself also from the crucible of the burning patriotism of the times which kindled earlier received unconquerable might under Gandhiji's inspired leadership.

Under a feudal rule when the Maharaja had been wasting his people's money in cruel, callous, extravagant ways in foreign capitals like London and Paris, the people remained steeped in poverty, ignorance and misery. This is a grave injustice both in the eyes of man and God — an injustice that must be righted. His mind was troubled very much; that photo speaks it as no written word can so eloquently.

Here is a young man whose soul has been crying out for the redemption of his people from the man-made miseries peculiar to those times when British supremacy continued unquestioned in Princely states. The inner cry of a harassed soul cannot of course be heard but the poignancy of that silent suffering has been writ large on the face of the young man — his eyes, his looks and the pose. There is almost a similar pose of the Indian Prime Minister with his hand on his chin and his deep agonised eyes penetrating into futurity — of his own people and of humanity as a whole.

In many things there is so much in common between these two great men — Nehru and Bakhshi. One is already in the plenitude of his name and fame and the other is going up the ladder fast. He will reach there also because their thoughts and activities are motivated by same considerations and they have only aim — removal

of human degradation so that human dignity, pride and self-respect can be restored and preserved.

Bakhshi is undoubtedly the most loved and respected leader in Kashmir today. He is also the ablest. The progress and prosperity of Kashmir will largely depend on him because he is the greatest stabilising force in the state today. Round him all others move. Intellectually there may be others who may be rated higher than him but in bold planning and their speedy execution none can come near him. He has an inexhaustible reserve of energy which can stand upto any kind of strain, mental or physical, under very adverse circumstances. In his younger days he swam the whole length of Woolar Lake which is something like 14 miles — a feat not many can do !

In his early school days he had the advantage of coming under the loving care of Rev. Tyndale Biscoe, who had been running a school at that time and in whose memory there is a high school in Srinagar today. Biscoe is a prototype of Rev. C. F. Andrews of imperishable memory. They were the true followers of their Lord in whose footsteps they tried to follow. It was Bakhshi's great good luck that he came under the care of such a pious and good man whose favourite pupil he became. Biscoe made a lasting impression on young Bakhshi who was powerfully moved by his great teacher's deep piety.

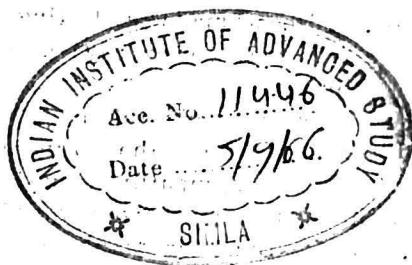
Bakhshi himself is a deeply religious man not in the conventional sense but in the fundamentals of human understanding, sympathy and kindness. No man or woman in distress goes away from him without help and succour. He is the poor man's greatest friend and helper. People crowd to him with their never-ending stories of suffering and need and he is never tired of listening to them to give relief where there is need. But no one can cheat him. That is very certain.

Even the strongest man gets an occasional feeling of tiredness and he goes "underground" for some time. His place of retreat is the tomb of a famous *fakir* a little away from Srinagar where he has his silent moments

in deep thoughts over human problems, especially of his own people. But he cannot get away for long from his people - and comes rushing back to them and their problems. He has earned the nickname of *Motu*, the *fakir* who has the uncanny way of knowing the right thing and doing the right thing at the right place and right time.

India's ancient *rishis* have said that *manava seva* is *Maadhava seva*. The philosophers of other countries have also said that service of man is service of God. In the *Gita* this truth is enshrined by enjoining on people to do their duty continuously without looking for results. Good thoughts must lead to good actions which inevitably bring forth good results.

Bakhshi's philosophy is one of continuous action on behalf of his people for their progress and welfare. But he makes the least noise about it. He has succeeded amazingly. His work and achievements have brought him a big name far outside the borders of his own native Kashmir. Men like him have a higher role to play for wider humanity and both Kashmir and India will need him very much in the coming years.



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