

**Eminent Parliamentarians
Monograph Series**

SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH

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Foreword

As a freedom fighter, as an eminent political leader, as Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir and later as Chief Minister of that State, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the Sher-e-Kashmir, has left an indelible imprint of his personality on the history of our subcontinent.

This Monograph is part of a series of Monographs being brought out by the Lok Sabha Secretariat under the auspices of the Indian Parliamentary Group to honour the memory of those eminent men and women who led us to freedom and laid the institutional foundations of our Republic. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, in his own right, is one of them to be honoured on his birth anniversary on 5 December, 1990.

This Monograph is a token of our gratitude for all the big and small things Sheikh Abdullah had accomplished in the service of the people. I am sure it will be found to be of interest by the common man, the scholar and leader alike, interested in having a glimpse into the life of the man who not only dominated the political life of his own State of Jammu & Kashmir for over fifty years but also played a vital role in shaping the destiny of the country in this century.

New Delhi
December, 1990

RABI RAY
Speaker, Lok Sabha

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PART ONE
His Life



Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Profile

Born on 5 December, 1905 in a middle class shawl-trading family at Savoura village on the outskirts of Srinagar, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, came to dominate the political scene of Jammu and Kashmir for more than half a century, before and after independence. Abdullah's father Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim had died two months before his birth, leaving behind a widow, five sons and a daughter. Being the youngest in the family, Sheikh Abdullah was brought up by his mother and elder brothers. Bright as he was, his brothers wanted to educate and equip him properly.

He had his early education in a local school. After passing out of the school he joined the Pratâp College, Srinagar and later was sent to Islamia College, Lahore, for graduation. After earning his Degree from the Punjab University in 1928, he enrolled himself in the Aligarh Muslim University from where he took his post-graduation in Physics in 1930.

It was his higher university education and the exposure that he earned outside his home state that equipped him for the future political role he was destined to play. Both the Islamia College and the Aligarh University were known for their anti-imperialist political fervour and national consciousness. In these Universities, Sheikh Abdullah had come across many prominent Muslim thinkers and public-men who influenced his thought to a great extent. It was there that he got the kind of inspiration to embark on a mission to liberate Kashmir from the age-old feudal order and of linking it with our national mainstream.

Abdullah's political activities began with his library 'Reading Room Party' co-founded by him mainly to discuss the problems of the poverty-stricken Muslim masses. Several young educated

Muslims who used to gather together in a Srinagar Library decided, in 1929, to approach the Maharaja's Government with a petition urging relaxation of recruitment procedure so as to enable the educated Muslims to enter the Government service. Even Sheikh Abdullah with his M.Sc. in Physics had to start his career as a teacher in a local school. When their genuine request was turned down, the young men's minds turned to agitation.

Sheikh Abdullah resigned his job as a school teacher to devote himself completely to the movement against the feudal and princely rule and for championing the cause of the ignored Muslim majority. He made the Reading Room Party his forum and drew to it a steadily increasing number of educated young Muslims. The entire State had by now begun to be stirred with dissatisfaction and discontentment against the despotic and feudal rule. Sheikh Abdullah with his masterly oratorical skill and spell-binding recitations from the Quran fired the imagination of the oppressed Muslims. The campaign waged by the All India Kashmir Muslim conference and the support received from influential men like Sir Mohammad Iqbal, the famous Urdu Poet, encouraged Abdullah's movement.

In 1931, when the Reading Room Party under the Leadership of Abdullah decided to hold a public meeting at the Jama Masjid, the authorities imposed a ban. The young organisers defied the ban and held the meeting. Thereafter, they organised a conference of Muslim notables. One of the Speakers in the Conference was arrested and tried for making inflammatory and derogatory speeches against the Government. The trial invited popular protest outside the jail gate on 13 July, 1931 leading to police firing resulting in the death of 26 persons. Sheikh Abdullah organised a massive protest against this and was subsequently arrested along with other leaders. Their arrest added fuel to the fire forcing the Government to release the leaders and to appoint a Commission to look into the grievances of Muslims. The Commission recommended several measures to pacify the Muslim community. One of the major recommendations was the provision for the entry of educated

Muslims into the Government service—a long-standing demand of Abdullah and other Reading Room Party leaders. The Commission also made certain recommendations relating to the freedom of speech and association hitherto denied to the people. These developments had made Sheikh Abdullah the undisputed leader of the Kashmiri Muslims and the Chief articulator and defender of their democratic aspirations.

Encouraged by all these, Abdullah brought together the leaders of the Muslim majority and established the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in 1932, with protection of Muslim rights as its main plank. Abdullah was elected its President.

Meanwhile, the Nationalist Movement sweeping the subcontinent had its impact on Sheikh Abdullah. He came into contact with national leaders, particularly Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. After his meeting with Nehru in early 1930s, he had felt himself drawn to him and the bonds of comradeship between them were strengthened by their magnetic personalities and shared values.

By now he had already earned the nickname Sher-e-Kashmir (The Lion of Kashmir). His followers all called themselves "sher". They were basically the Kashmiri nationalists, largely Muslims, owing allegiance to the national movement, swearing by secularism and having strong loyalties to other nationalist leaders. His opponents who styled themselves as 'bakras' (goats) were largely the supporters of Jinnah. The running feud between these two bitter factions characterised the political life of Kashmir in the thirties and forties when Sheikh Abdullah was emerging on the national scene.

Sheikh Abdullah started his political career as a champion of the Muslim cause. However, by late 1930s he realized that the feudal order that flourished in Kashmir did not know the bounds of religion. Only proteges of the Maharajah and people with vested interests were enjoying their lives in the entire State. He was aware of the fact that lower class Hindus and Sikhs were equally the victims of feudalism and that changing the feudal

order required the support and involvement of all its victims. He soon felt the need to broadbase his movement and to make it part of the larger movement going on in the rest of the country, by taking it out of its sectarian confines. Accordingly in 1939 he transformed the Muslim Conference into the National Conference, ignoring the disapproval of the Communalists who had begun to identify themselves with Jinnah in propagating Muslim separatism.

Later in 1981 in an interview Sheikh Abdullah reasoned out his action saying:

"...Keeping non-Muslims out of the movement which basically aimed at economic uplift of the people in general did not appear logical. Thus we converted the party into a secular forum and named it National Conference."

He also acknowledged that his action was influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru. He said:

"Jawaharlal a very sensitive man with a wide vision advised me to broadbase the National Conference and to keep the doors of the organisation open to non-Muslims in spite of sharp opposition from landlords".

Initially, like the Indian National Congress, the National Conference under Abdullah's leadership, set for itself the modest objective of responsible self-government for the people of Kashmir. A peaceful agitation launched by the National Conference in support of its demands was suppressed by the Maharajah and all the prominent leaders of the National Conference which included many non-Muslims and its President, Sheikh Abdullah, were jailed.

After his release under a general amnesty, Sheikh Abdullah along with his band of dedicated workers in the State drew up a charter of socio-economic emancipation called the 'Naya Kashmir' to rid the people of the State of feudal tyranny and exploitation. The archstone of the Charter was "land to the tiller". It was under this programme that when independence came, Kashmir straightaway abolished landlordism.

In 1945, Mohammad Ali Jinnah visited the State in a bid to

wan Sheikh Abdullah and his Kashmiri Muslim supporters away from the path of nationalism and secularism. He appealed to the Sheikh to throw in his lot with the Muslim League in return for the party's support to his struggle against the Maharajah. Not only did Sheikh Abdullah repudiate the suggestion but he organised a campaign against Jinnah forcing him to beat a hasty retreat from the State.

In his talk with Jinnah, Sheikh Abdullah asserted:

....religion could never become a cementing force even among Muslims. Our country is inter-woven, multilingual, multiracial and economically backward and each region has its own distinct cultural heritage. How can religion alone bind co-religionists together?

We have had the later experience of the birth of Bangladesh to support the Sheikh's contention. Religion alone could not hold two culturally distinct, linguistically different, geographically separated and economically disparate regions together for long.

Sheikh Abdullah went on to lead the secularists and the nationalists of Kashmir as he campaigned against the Maharajah and came out forcefully in favour of an undivided India. He played a key role in the formation of the All India States Peoples' Conference which brought together the nationalist forces in the Princely States and was its general secretary for many years before he succeeded Nehru as its President in 1946. This Organisation remained a close ally of the Congress throughout the freedom struggle.

In 1946 he organised the massive 'Quit Kashmir' movement against the Maharajah and was arrested and jailed. Nehru visited Kashmir to declare solidarity with the peoples' movement. However, the Maharajah was not receptive to the Indian leaders.

When freedom and partition came the Maharajah toyed with the idea of independence for the State. The Communalist Muslims, taking advantage of Sheikh Abdullah's absence from the scene, mounted pressure for Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. As the situation within the State deteriorated fast and

public pressure mounted, the Maharajah released the Sheikh as a concession to public opinion.

In an attempt to force the pace, Pakistan sent armed infiltrators across the border. Unable to withstand the onslaught of the marauding tribesmen the State administration collapsed and the Maharajah had to leave the capital. This offered the greatest challenge to Sheikh Abdullah and he acted quickly and decisively. He mobilised the people for the defence of their homeland against the Pakistani supported aggressors and prevailed upon the Maharajah to accede to India so that the Indian troops could come to their rescue. The Kashmiri people under the Sheikh's leadership held the ground in Srinagar against the invaders for several days until the Indian Army came to their rescue.

Deeply impressed by this great achievement of the people of the State Gandhiji, observed in his prayer speech on 1 November 1947 :

Sheikh Abdullah represents non-Muslims as well as Muslims. It is on the Kashmir soil that Islam and Hinduism are being weighed. If both pull their weight correctly and in the same direction the chief actors will cover themselves with glory. My sole hope and prayer is that Kashmir should become a beacon light to this benighted sub-continent.

The Sheikh could not have got a greater complement. It should be noted that Gandhiji's impressions were also shaped by the fact that when the rest of the country witnessed large-scale communal riots in the wake of partition, Kashmir remained mostly unaffected by it. During those critical days, Sheikh's followers went around shouting 'Shera-e-Kashmir Ka Kya Irshad—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh Ithad' (What is the message of the Shere-e-Kashmir-Hindu, Muslim Sikh unity). This was indeed a very timely message. The major part of the credit for maintaining communal harmony in the State in those critical years goes to Sheikh Abdullah.

As the Indian troops launched a heroic thrust to clear the state of the invaders, Sheikh Abdullah was sworn in as the

head of an emergency administration in October 1947. Nehru flew into Srinagar to address a massive rally at the historic Lal Chowk and there the Sheikh extended his hand to Nehru in symbolic pledge of identity and the everlasting bonds of the state with the rest of the country. At the meeting he told Nehru :

I want you to believe that Kashmir is yours. No power in the world can separate us. Every Kashmiri feels that he is an Indian and that India is his homeland.

In 1948, as a member of the Indian delegation he attended the United Nations Security Council meeting in Paris at which the future of Kashmir was discussed. He defended the legality of his Government and opposed the move for a neutral interim Government to conduct a plebiscite. Addressing the meeting, he said categorically :

We would prove before the Security Council that Kashmir and the people of Kashmir have lawfully and constitutionally acceded to the Dominion of India, and Pakistan has no right to question that accession...

On his return from Paris, he was formally sworn in as the Prime Minister of Kashmir in March, 1948. Assuming the Prime Ministership, the Sheikh launched a largescale reform programme for the State. Zamindari was abolished and the estates of the big landowners were taken over by the State to be distributed to the landless sections. The people were given debt relief. Hereditary rule was abolished and Yuvraj Karan Singh made Sadar-i-Riyasat, the titular head of the State.

In June 1949, he was made a Member of the Constituent Assembly of India and named an M.P. from Kashmir. As a Member of the Constituent Assembly he was a signatory to our Constitution which ushered in the Republic of India. The Sheikh and his associates saw to it that article 370, seeking to allay the fear of the dominant Muslim Community in the State that they would be swamped by Hindus in the rest of the country was incorporated in the draft. In July, 1952 he

negotiated an accord with Nehru which guaranteed a special status to the State of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union.

Sheikh Abdullah's five years in office as Prime Minister, from 1948 to 1953, had achieved much for the State. Termination of the Jagirdari/Zamindari system, abolition of big landed estates, fixation of land ceiling, liquidation of debts, transfer of land to the landless, reorganisation of educational institutions and establishment of Jammu and Kashmir University were some of his major achievements.

However, by early 1953 one could discern visible changes in Abdullah's perception of Kashmir's accession to India and its position within the Indian Union. Till 1953 nobody could doubt the intentions or the sincerity of his pronouncements on India, its leaders and its policy towards Kashmir. At a Press Conference in Bombay on 25 January, 1951, Sheikh Abdullah explained why his State opted to accede to India. He said :

The people of Kashmir know that they cannot develop unless they are under a secular democracy. They have moreover always received nothing but affection, sympathy and active help from the people of India.

Again speaking at Madras on 11 February, 1951 he had said :

There has been community of suffering and ideals between the people of India and the people of Kashmir in the past and today we tie our destiny with rest of India because of her belief in secularism, democracy and progress.

Unfortunately, from 1953 upto early 1964, period of almost a decade, the State did not have the benefit of his leadership due to his being imprisoned for certain actions which were considered to be neither in the interest of the State nor in the interest of the country.

It was his deep-rooted nationalist instincts that even his long imprisonment did not make Sheikh Abdullah a bitter person. Once again he placed himself at the service of the people of the State and undertook its stewardship. Abdullah also realized

that a lasting solution can be found only within the framework of a broader rapprochement between India and Pakistan. For him it was as important to preserve the Valley's linguistic and cultural identity as to assert their religious identity. And he believed that a predominantly Muslim Kashmir could retain its identity in a predominantly Hindu India rather than in a Muslim Pakistan. But at the same time leaving Pakistan with a sense of defeat would not have served either his cherished goal of a closer relationship between India and Pakistan as well as his desire for lasting peace for the people of Kashmir.

With this new perception over the issue, on his release in 1964, he met Nehru and other leaders in Delhi. Government of India authorised him to have a dialogue with Pakistani leaders and subsequently he visited Pakistan. He was able to arrange for a meeting between President Ayub Khan and Nehru for 16 June 1964. But the plans could not be carried owing to Nehru's sudden death in May 1964. Abdullah was still in Pakistan when he heard the news of Nehru's death and he wept bitterly, sobbing like a child, for hours over the loss of his much admired leader.

After Nehru's death Sheikh Abdullah went on a Pilgrimage to Mecca in 1965. On his return trip he also visited Jeddah, Baghdad, Cairo, London and Algiers. His utterances at all these places had a perceptible anti-Indian tinge in them. At Algiers he had a long meeting with the Chinese leader Chou-en-lai. Looked at in the context of the Chinese aggression on India in early sixties, this action on the part of the Sheikh outraged the Indian leaders and the Government impounded his passport and on his return to Delhi he was once again arrested and detained at Kohinoor Palace in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu. He was released in January 1968.

On his release, the Jammu and Kashmir State People's Convention, under Abdullah's leadership, after deliberations of over two years, resolved in June 1970 that the solution of the

* On his death, the Tamil Nadu Government named this palace after the late Sheikh.

Kashmir problem should keep in view the interests of all its regions, strengthen secular and democratic forces, and be in conformity with the values of the freedom movement. However, after the convention, in the wake of the Indo-Pak war of 1971, the Sheikh's utterances, once again compelled the Government of India to keep him away from his home State in January 1971.

After the war there was again a perceptible change for the better in his attitude towards India. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 having exploded the myth of the religious basis of Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah realized that Kashmir's interests are best served by identifying itself genuinely and completely with India. Taking cognizance of the new realities he declared in March 1972 that his quarrel with the Government of India was not on the issue of accession but on the extent of autonomy of the State within India. On the basis of this statement, prolonged discussions were held between the Sheikh and the Government of India culminating in the new Kashmir Accord between Sheikh Abdullah and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975.

Under the Agreement, Sheikh Abdullah accepted the finality of the accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian Union and the Government of India guaranteed the continuance of Article 370 of the Constitution giving a special status to the State. Both sides thus reverted to the position they held before the crisis of 1953. Sheikh Abdullah was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State in 1975 with the support of the Congress Legislature Party. In 1977 in the wake of the Congress defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, the Sheikh got the State Assembly dissolved and fought the election on his own under the banner of the National Conference and swept the polls thereby becoming the Chief Minister of the State once again in his own right. He continued in this post effectively till a few days before his death when he transferred the responsibilities of office to his eldest son Dr. Farooq Abdullah.

On 8 September 1982 the nation lost this great son of the soil of Kashmir who had the courage of conviction to tell the people of the State that Kashmir belonged to them and not to

the Maharajah, and to rebel against a well entrenched system that thrived of feudal linkages, and transform it into a socialistic mould.

He had resisted all attempts, all through his life, to submerge Kashmiri identity in the name of Islam. As a "Muslim first and Muslim last" his affinities transcended the bounds of geography. He believed that protection of minorities within his State was his sacred duty and at times of communal tension he often rose to meet the challenge impassionately.

Despite his long incarceration, he remained unembittered and his basic commitment to secularism and Kashmir's accession to India remained inviolate notwithstanding the occasional provocative postures he assumed partly in response to the specific domestic compulsions that emerged in that sensitive State.

Secularisation of State politics and wresting of the leadership of the popular movement from the hands of the obscurantist clergy will perhaps go down in history as the Sheikh's biggest political achievement. His powerful personality provided the much needed balance between divergent regional and communal aspirations within his State on one hand and in harmonising the aspirations of Kashmiri sub-nationalism with those of Indian nationalism on the other without damaging his own much acclaimed image of an ardent lover of Kashmir and its distinct identity. It was because he was against Kashmir losing its individuality and the people being deprived of the opportunity to better their lot that he kept insisting that its special status should be preserved. His secular credentials among other communities were also most authentic. He will also be remembered for his heroic role in organising unarmed Kashmiri Muslims against the Pakistani invaders in 1947 before the arrival of the Indian Army in Kashmir.

To the people of Jammu and Kashmir he was both a philosopher and a guide as well as a mentor with tremendous hold over the population. His personality was magnetic and had a charisma of its own. To our misfortune, the Lion of Kashmir died at a time when Jammu and Kashmir, like many other parts

of our country was faced with diverse social and political problems. He could act as a uniting factor and provide certain measure of political and social stability for the region. Far from seeing Article 370 as something that separates Jammu and Kashmir from India, Sheikh Abdullah believed this to be a strong bond and symbol of a free and dignified association.

Today, when the country is getting fragmented by communal, regional and factional groupings and any States including Jammu & Kashmir are being turned into a hunting ground for forces of destabilisation, the best tribute that we can pay to the memory of this great patriot who single-mindedly fought for the welfare and for the preservation of the distinct identity of the people of Kashmir for over five decades, while remaining an integral part of India, is by making concerted efforts to isolate the disruptionist and anti-national forces and thereby strengthening the linkages of the State with the national mainstream. He was undoubtedly a very bright star of Jammu and Kashmir nay of the country.

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PART TWO

**Sheikh Abdullah : As His Contemporaries See
Him**

Sheikh Abdullah—Sher-E-Kashmir

Dr. Sushila Nayar

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, popularly known as Sher-E-Kashmir (The Lion of Kashmir) was born in 1905 in a village near Srinagar. His family carried on a business in Shawls. Sheikh Saheb had lost his father few weeks before his birth and was brought up by his mother and elder brothers.

After schooling and early college education in Srinagar, Sheikh Abdullah was sent to Lahore and later to Aligarh for higher studies and it was from the Aligarh Muslim University that he secured an M.Sc. degree in 1930. He took up a teaching job, but his heart was not in it. He heard the call of public work. The Muslims of the valley, he observed, were tyrannized by the Dogra regime of Hari Singh and service opportunities to them were virtually non-existent. He had personal experience of it, when he himself had tried to look for a job with the state government. Higher posts in the civil administration were in effect reserved for the Punjabis, while the army was a preserve exclusively of the Dogras. There was no entry for the Kashmiris, whether Hindu or Muslim, or for the people of Ladakh, in the state services, civilian or military.

Sheikh Abdullah, along with a few other young men, who had, like him, been alumni of the Aligarh Muslim University, decided to challenge this scheme of things. It was not easy. The muslims of Kashmir, ground down by poverty, were a wholly uneducated mass and slow to receive or understand the message of mass struggle. The only people they understood

* President, Kasturba Health Society and Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Science; and Chairperson, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust.

and obeyed were the mullas (preceptors of religion), particularly, the two Meer Waizes of Srinagar. The Sheikh and his companions, therefore decided to use the Mullas and Islam in their campaign against the feudal regime. The call went out from the mosques that muslims should organize themselves against the Maharajah's government and the Hindus who were hand-in-glove with it.

Widespread communal rioting followed as a consequence. On 13 July, 1931 Sheikh Abdullah was arrested and imprisoned. But popular upsurge, which had become a communal upsurge, did not subside. Firing and lathi charges, in widely separated places, became the order of the day leading to the imposition of Martial Law.

When peace was restored towards the end of 1932, Government of India appointed a commission to enquire into the disturbances and their causes. The commission recommended returning of some religious buildings to the muslims, provision of primary school education to all and the lowering of minimum qualifications for entry into government services so that Muslims too might get the opportunity of entering them. It further recommended that a legislative assembly of 75 be set up in which 33 members would be elected members. The Maharajah readily accepted these recommendations.

2

Sheikh Abdullah and his comrades soon realized that they would have to carry the Hindu minority of the State with them in their struggle against the Maharajah. In 1938, the Muslim Conference decided to rechristen itself as the National Conference and opened its doors to the Hindus and other minorities. This organisation came into being on 11 June, 1939 and Sheikh Abdullah was its supreme leader. The Working Committee had Hindus and Sikhs also in it.

In October 1939, at its first session the National Conference,

under the Presidentship of Sheikh Abdullah, formulated its "national demand", which was "responsible government under the aegis of the Maharajah", with an executive responsible to the legislature. The legislature was to be entirely of elected members, elected on the basis of adult franchise and joint electorates.

During the War, Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference co-operated with the government since the Sheikh viewed the war as an anti-fascist struggle. He organized food committees to save the people of Kashmir from the ravages of hunger.

Gradually Sheikh Abdullah moved towards a socialist position. He was greatly impressed by the Russian revolution and the socialist experiment in that country. This influence was reinforced later by the Soviet victory against Nazi Germany. He had also become a close friend and admirer of Jawaharlal Nehru, who reciprocated the sentiment.

By the time the war ended the National Conference was demanding, not merely responsible government under the aegis of the Maharajah, but the Kashmiri people's "right to absolute freedom from the autocratic rule of the Dogra House." It asked for the annulment of the Treaty of Amritsar of 1846 by which the East India Company had transferred the sovereignty of Jammu and Kashmir to Maharajah Gulab Singh for a consideration of seventy five lakhs of rupees.

Sheikh Abdullah now saw the struggle of the Kashmiri people as part of the Indian people's struggle for freedom, which was at the final crucial stage at that time. The demand that the princely order should quit, was, he said, a logical extension of the demand that the British should quit India.

On 20 May 1946, while Sheikh Abdullah was on his way to Delhi at the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then engaged in negotiations with the "Cabinet Mission", he was arrested by the Maharajah's police. Jawaharlal Nehru condemned the arrest of Sher-e-Kashmir.

Jawaharlal Nehru was so much upset by this turn of events that he decided to pay a visit to Kashmir. He informed the

Maharajah that he would be arriving in Srinagar on 19 June. The State authorities refused to permit him to come. Nehru defied the ban and went. On 20 June the State police took him into custody. There was indignation and shock all over India at this high-handed action. Maulana Azad, the Congress President, could not afford to have Nehru away from Delhi at a time when negotiations with the British Government in regard to the country's future were at a delicate stage. Mountbatten too voiced concern at the arrest of the future Prime Minister of India. Nehru had to be set free the following day.

3

Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference stood for the democratic rights of the people of Kashmir. Most of the Kashmiri Mussalmans were converts from Kashmiri Pandits and other Hindus and had retained many of their Hindu customs. The fanaticism and aggressiveness seen among the Muslims of the Punjab was not to be seen among the Kashmiri Muslims. The influence of the Sufis was also there to foster friendly feelings between Hindus and Muslims. The result was that Hindus and Muslims lived as friends in Jammu and Kashmir and there were close relations between the two communities. The National Conference included both Hindus and Mussalmans.

There was continuous trouble between the National Conference, which stood for people's democratic rights and the Maharajah, who did not wish to part with power. As in other Indian states, it was a long drawn struggle for people's democratic rights.

In 1947, Sheikh Abdullah was again behind the bars. He was elected President of the State People's Conference while he was in jail. Jawaharlal, who had become Prime Minister and formed the Interim Government in September 1946, expressed a desire to go to Kashmir to meet Sher-e-Kashmir. The Maharajah was not willing to let him come. If Jawaharlal insisted on going and was put in prison by the Maharajah, it would create a very serious situation, it was feared. Mountbatten

and Gandhiji were worried. Gandhiji decided that he would go to Kashmir in Jawaharlal's place. Mountbatten would have liked neither of them to go. But Gandhiji was firm on going. The Maharajah agreed to receive Gandhiji.

Gandhiji reached Srinagar on 1 August, 1947 and met Sheikh Abdullah in Jail. He visited the Sheikh's house and met the Sheikh's family and friends and also the leaders and workers of the National Conference. He met the Maharajah and told him in private to take help from Sheikh Abdullah who could become a bridge between him and the people. He left Srinagar on 3 August.

4

At the time of the transfer of power in 1947, Pakistan tried to persuade the leadership in Kashmir to join Pakistan. Some of the Pakistani leaders of Kashmir origin settled in West Punjab, came to Srinagar and met Sheikh Abdullah. He was invited to come to Lahore to meet M.A. Jinnah. But he did not fall into the trap, he wrote in his autobiography later. He added that had he gone, he might have been put in prison and a statement issued in his name by Pakistan declaring Kashmir's accession to Pakistan.

The Pakistan Government then decided to use force and sent armed tribal hordes across the border into Kashmir. The Maharajah, in panic, asked for India's help. But that required the State's accession to India and so he agreed to sign the Instrument of Accession.

I was present when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came to Gandhiji to seek his advice. Gandhiji asked him whether the people of Kashmir had also agreed to the accession and asked for India's intervention. Nehru said, yes, the National Conference and Sheikh Abdullah, its leader, had also asked for India's help, and had accepted accession to India to get that help. Gandhiji was a believer in non-violence. He told Nehru, "you know my way of thinking. But that is not your way. As head of the Government, you must send the necessary help to Jammu and Kashmir." On 27 October, 1947 the Maharajah accordingly

signed the Instrument of Accession and on the same day Indian troops were air-lifted to Srinagar.

The raiders were devastating towns and villages as they advanced towards Srinagar. Baramulla, a prosperous town suffered terrible atrocities. The raiders butchered men and many women committed suicide to save their honour. The raiders were dazzled by the richness of the valley and indulged in indiscriminate looting and harassment. They lost much time in feasting and merry-making en route which delayed their arrival in Srinagar. This enabled the Indian army to land at Srinagar airport.

The Sheikh and his National Conference Razakars had organized resistance against the invaders and helped Indian army. The Kashmiris revolted because of the naked use of force by Pakistan to make them accede to it. They had been yearning for freedom from the princely rule and now when that freedom was within their reach, they had no wish to subjugate themselves to Pakistan and its aggressive Punjabi Mussalmans. The values and ideals followed by Nehru and Gandhiji were far more attractive to them. The Indian army and air force began rapidly clearing the land of Kashmir by pushing the raiders back towards Pakistan. General Thimayya told me many years later that they just needed another 48 hours and all the raiders would have been pushed beyond the international boundary. But Lord Mountbatten unfortunately succeeded in persuading Nehru to refer the dispute to the United Nations. Impulsive as Nehru was, without consulting the army or the leadership in Kashmir, immediate cease fire was ordered. Indian troops were made to withdraw from certain points which they had captured after heavy fighting and after suffering heavy losses. This was confirmed by the late Maharajah of Patiala in a conversation I had with him in the sixties.

5

The Maharajah, his Prime Minister and his family had fled to Jammu. The Government of India advised the Maharajah to hand over charge to his young heir Karan Singh and leave the

State. On 5 March, 1948, Sheikh Abdullah became the Prime Minister and constituted his own cabinet. Hindus and Muslims were included almost in equal proportion.

The new Government did good work in the form of land reforms, expansion of education, tourism, industry and improvement of medical facilities. Government of India gave generous financial assistance. But unfortunately corruption and nepotism crept into the administration.

A separate Constituent Assembly was set up to frame a new Constitution for Kashmir. The place of Kashmir in India with honour was assured by the special article 370 in the Constitution of India. The State Constitution provided for a *Sadr-e-Riyasat* (governor) to be elected by the State Legislators for a term of five years, who would act on the advice of the Prime Minister. Karan Singh was sworn in as the *Sadr-e-Riyasat* on 17 November 1952. He continued to occupy that post for 20 years.

Sheikh Abdullah by virtue of his supreme leadership of the National Conference and as the Prime Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir occupied the central position. He was later reported to have hobnobbed with all kinds of people, some of them suspect in Indian eyes. Government of India watched with growing concern and alarm as the role that Sheikh Abdullah intended to play became more and more uncertain. Kashmir had its own Constituent Assembly which had framed its Constitution. It had retained its own flag along with the National flag and its separate status under article 370 of the Indian Constitution and it had a Prime Minister. There were reports to the effect that Sheikh Abdullah, who was expected to strengthen the ties between India and Kashmir and the rest of the country now began to openly talk of an autonomous status for Kashmir, even of independence, on the lines of Switzerland, and a guarantee to that effect by the United Nations. It naturally worried the leaders in the country.

Resentment also grew in the National Conference circles, especially among Sheikh Abdullah's old colleagues, who had all

along fought with the Sheikh shoulder to shoulder and helped him formulate the framework of New Kashmir, which would be secular, socialist and fully united with India. Leaders like Bakshi Gulam Mohammed, G.M. Sadiq, Syed Mir Kasim and D.P. Dhar became uneasy as evidence accumulated, which made them suspect, that Sheikh Abdullah might be lured into announcing an independent status for Kashmir, of which he would be the supreme ruler and perhaps the founder of a new dynasty. They wanted Nehru to do something about it.

6

Action followed and on 9 August 1953, Sheikh Abdullah was dismissed as Prime Minister by the Sadr-e-Riyasat Karan Singh and jailed, at the advice of Bakshi Gulam Mohammed who took over the Prime Ministership at midnight on 8 August 1953. Nehru had the Sheikh released in 1958. He was given a hero's welcome on his release and it made those in power in Jammu and Kashmir apprehensive, he writes in *Atish-e-Chinar*. After three and a half months the Sheikh was again sent to jail on the charge of a criminal conspiracy. The conspiracy case dragged on for 6 years and was ultimately withdrawn. On 8 April, 1964, the Sheikh was again set free. He met Nehru and pleaded for talks with Pakistan in the interest of peace in the sub-continent. Nehru was in poor health at that time. He suggested that the Sheikh should ask Ayub Khan to come to Delhi as Nehru was not fit enough to go to Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah went to Rawalpindi where he was given a warm welcome. Ayub Khan agreed to come to Delhi. The Sheikh was still there when news of Nehru's death was received. The Sheikh was heart-broken and returned to Delhi to pay his last respects to his friend.

He then left for Haj and also visited some other countries as well as London and Paris. He was well received every where. Reports of some of his speeches led to his being detained again in 1965 for five years in his return to India. His activities outside India were considered by Government of India incompatible with the national interest. According to the

Sheikh it was due to wrong reports sent by the officers of the Indian Embassies in those countries.

On 2 January 1968 the Sheikh was released by Indira Gandhi. It was Id day. In his speech at Idgah on that day, he said that the aim of his life was to see that the common man lived without fear, in peace and freedom. For that the walls of hatred and suspicion between India and Pakistan had to be broken down.

After his release, the Sheikh called a convention at Jammu to which delegates came from different parts of the State. The convention was also addressed by Jai Prakash Narayan. In his speech he referred to Sheikh Abdullah and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan as symbols of secularism. They had never accepted the Two Nation Theory. He advised the people of Kashmir to find a solution of their problems within India. Their aspirations will be supported by all Indians, he said. He added that no solution for Kashmir was possible without the Sheikh's approval.

7

In the meanwhile, conditions in Pakistan had deteriorated. There was war in East Bengal which resulted in the separation of East Bengal from Pakistan. Pakistan was defeated by Indian troops in East Bengal (Bangla Desh) and in Kashmir also, with Indian troops occupying some parts of Azad Kashmir. Inside Kashmir discontent was on the increase. It worried Government of India.

Sheikh wrote to Smt. Indira Gandhi from his sick bed in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences where he was admitted for treatment. A number of meetings took place between them before the Kashmir accord was arrived at in early 1975. The Sheikh suggested fresh elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Smt. Gandhi was disinclined to hold elections in the surcharged atmosphere. She, in turn, suggested that the Sheikh should take over as the Chief Minister from Mir Quasim who was heading a Congress Government there at that time. Accordingly, on 24 February 1975, Sheikh Abdullah was unanimously elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, though he

was not a member of the Congress. The new cabinet that was sworn in under his leadership did their best to introduce efficiency and honesty in the administration.

On 25 June 1975, Smt. Gandhi introduced emergency in India. The Sheikh did not agree to political detentions and was against censorship of Newspapers in the State.

In July, 1977, in the wake of the Congress defeat and the emergence of the Janata Party to power, fresh elections were held in Jammu and Kashmir also. Despite his poor health and inability to go anywhere for electioneering. Sheikh and his party had a massive victory. His wife Begum Abdullah and his son Dr. Farooq Abdullah had done a good job. On 9 July 1977 the Sheikh took over as the Chief Minister for the last time. But alas he did not live long.

In his autobiography *Atish-e-Chinar* published in 1984, the Sheikh refers to a speech that he had made at the start of the Constituent Assembly of Kashmir, in which he had said that of the three options open before them, namely (1) accession to India, (2) accession to Pakistan and (3) independence, the only sound course was for the State to accept accession with India. The Sheikh in some of his speeches had earlier declared that the elections held in Kashmir were enough to confirm that the people of Kashmir had acceded to India on their free will. He adds in his autobiography that he and Kashmir had passed through a great deal of suffering in the intervening 30 years but that he was still convinced that the accession to India was the right advice.

As regards his arrest in 1953, Sheikh Abdullah in his autobiography, has stated categorically that he was the victim of a conspiracy. It is possible that but for his incarceration, the misunderstanding which arose between him and Government of India, might have been corrected at an early stage and much of the alienation of Kashmiris prevented. Certainly, his incarceration changed the course of history. Yet, he was a generous person and was willing to forget the past. His return to power gave a fresh opportunity to him and to India to strengthen

Kashmir's ties with the Indian Union. But his work was cut short with his death on 8 September, 1982.

Complex and controversial as he might have been, Sheikh Abdullah was a great Indian. His patriotism and his secularism cannot be questioned.

What Sheikh Abdullah meant in Indian Politics

Professor Rasheeduddin Khan 'E'*

Almost the entire generation of illustrious freedom-fighters is now no more. And it is distressing thought to entertain that even the epoch of gentleman-politicians—indeed of gentlemen in all walks of life—is also drawing to a close, so it seems, now that 'corruption' is being explained-away, and in all seriousness, as an in-put into the development process! A good man is tolerated as a dysfunctional adjunct to the system, a remnant of a bygone age.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, whose death in 1982 was mourned with irrepressible wail and tears by the millions in the Kashmir valley, and by million others throughout India, was, even in his life-time one such remnant of the bygone age—the age in which impulse of patriotism moved men and women to idealism, to sacrifice, to patient pursuit of social goals, to the studied development of an integrated personality. Epochs make men and women as much as men and women make epochs. The heroic mould which the freedom struggle provided to the vanguard of its patriotic elite, has now worn out. Sheikh Sahib, one of the last of the illustrious, reminded one of the poignant vacuum that the demise of these great leaders produced in our national polity, reminiscent of the pathos reflected in the celebrated couplet of Iqbal:

"Jo baada kash they puraney woh uththey jaatey hain,
Kahin say aab-e-baqaae-dawaam laa Saki.

*Director, Academy of third world studies; Former Member of Parliament.

(Procure from somewhere, O Saki, the elixir of eternal life.
For old men of the tavern, one by one depart).

In physical appearance, as in politics, Sheikh Abdullah was tall, rugged and handsome. If 'handsome is what handsome does' then Sheikh Sahib would be long remembered at least for two pioneering roles he played in the unfolding of national politics, during the transitional epoch spanning the last phase of the British Raj and the formative decades of independence. He restored the much impaired sense of dignity and pride among his people, the people of Kashmir, enfeebled and down-cast by centuries of deprivation, neglect and alienation. And he stood like a colossus for nearly half-a-century, on the cross-roads of national politics, on the side of secular, egalitarian forces, battling against communalism, feudal hegemony and social inequity.

It is not quite often realised in full measure that in a country of preponderant Hindu majority, where many aspects of Hindu communalism pass off as the hallmark of Indian nationalism, it requires more than simple courage and elementary clarity, for a person born in a minority community, to remain committed to secularism, and fight for its defence. The amorphousness of Hindu philosophy, projecting many paths to truth as a self-evident axiom of life, not only promotes toleration, but also sustains the ethos of secularism. On the other hand to Muslims particularly, adherence to secularism implies deviation from the orthodox doctrine enjoining complete conformity to the all-inclusive Islamic worldview. To be Muslim and secular then is an innovation, an exercise in creative tension. Yet it is a measure of their profundity in politics, and abiding faith in multi-religious, multi-ethnic nationalism, that produced so many front-rank Muslim leaders, who fought shoulder to shoulder with their non-Muslim compatriots, for integrated national independence. And among these stalwarts Badshah Khan (Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan) and Sheikh Abdullah stand-out, because despite being leaders of Muslim majority areas, where attachment to Muslim communalism would have paid heavy dividends at a time when politics of Muslim separatism was at its zenith, they

remained steadfast secularists by sheer conviction and larger national vision. Sheikh Sahib not only symbolised the nation's secular ethos, but articulated its relevance with a vigour and consistency that is rare. Only a leader of rare courage and conviction could have spoken to his people in the manner in which he did, at the critical moment when Kashmir's future was at stake. He said:

"I am addressing the Muslims of Kashmir. I am telling them that they have been thrust by Destiny to make the most important decision of their history and lives. Today there is not a single army man, not a single constable of the Maharajah to prevent them from doing what they want to do. Today the raiders from Pakistan are a few miles from Srinagar. They are raising the slogan of Islam. It is open to you to be with them or to be with me. If you opt to be with me you must know that you have to live for all times on the principle that Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are brothers. If that is the language of a Kafir you should raise your sword against me. If you want to raid or rape Kafirs, I am the first Kafir and you should start it from my place and my family".

It is a pity that the vicissitudes of life, left him not much time to vigorously translate some of his dreams, some of the slogans he raised, that moved the people of the Valley, into the reality of life. Even otherwise processes of History are not always in conformity with the perspectives and vision of the makers of History. There is an unavoidable variation between theory and practice, between an ideal and its realisation. In the context of the Kashmir situation, complexities were a shade more and different from those in other parts of the country.

The application of the otherwise exceptionable 'Two Nations Theory' (the bedrock of the Muslim League's political projection that sought to categorise Hindus and Muslims as two exclusive and parallel monoliths, mutually hostile to one another) for constituting the British Indian Provinces into two new dominions of India and Pakistan, greater mischievous confusion, when extended to the peculiar situation of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, whose predominantly Muslim population under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah and the National

Conference was fighting the three-pronged battle against British imperialism, Dogra feudalism presided over by the Hindu Maharajah, and Muslim communalism as propagated by the Muslim League. The ambiguity involved in the very concept of the lapse of British paramountcy vis-a-vis the Princely States, gave rise to a false situation in which Maharajah Hari Singh, with characteristic ambivalence, signed the Standstill Agreement with both the Dominions of India and Pakistan, at a time when Sheikh Abdullāh was under detention and the National Conference banned in the wake of the Quit Kashmir movement, which it may be added, was openly supported by the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru. Since the Maharajah of Jodhpur had already signed the Standstill Agreement only with Pakistan, preparatory to Jodhpur's accession to Pakistan, it was mentioned that Maharajāh of Kashmir likewise would not be averse to joining Pakistan in exchange for certain assurances about his position and privileges. The massive intrusion into the Valley by the Pakistani raiders—supported, as it is now well-known, by the regular Pakistani army authorities—foreclosed the Maharajah's options. Accession to India by the Maharajah was more an act of compulsion due to the belligerency shown by Pakistan, than an act reflecting either his conviction, patriotism or foresight. On the contrary it was Sheikh Sahib's consistent stand that British colonialism, Dogra feudal oppression and Muslim separatism from the national mainstream, are the three main and inter-linked enemies of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

How seminal and critical has been his role in the national liberation movement, especially as the successor President to Jawaharlal Nehru, of the All-India States People's Conference, and in the building of the federal-democratic edifice of India, as a member of the Constituent Assembly and a national leader shall undoubtedly be evaluated in more objective terms with a certain measure of detachment and clarity, as we recede in history, far from the little controversies surrounding his style of work and an occasional sting in his rhetoric. Colourful and egotistical as he was, there were occasions when he rubbed

important people on the wrong side and faced the repercussions of his moods and action.

For a life so full of public work and public attention, differences, controversies and political conflicts were inevitable. Indeed few leaders have suffered incarceration, and what may be called, 'political-isolation-under duress', a sort of a quarantine from the arena of active politics, for such a long spell of time in post-independence India, as Sheikh Sahib had done, and that too without much apparent rancour and malice. His deep affection for Jawaharlal Nehru (—"no one inspired me more than Jawaharlal Nehru"—) and fondness for Indira Gandhi (—"bechaari par bari zimmaydariaan hain"—) never left him, despite the realisation of his political differences with them.

This came out vividly in the summer of 1978 when I made him ruminare on the past and reflect on the continuing challenges to federal-building. He appeared singularly free of all bitterness, despite the memory of wasted years. In fact, his mind was focussed on the problems of the present and the prospects for the future. Neither age nor circumstances weakened his enduring commitment to basic national goals—to a polity (to paraphrase his own idiom) of 'Hindu-Muslim-Sikh fraternity'—of democratic-republicanism: of basic land-reforms (—the Naya Kashmir programme of the National Conference had some of the most radical objectives and aspects of land-reforms in India—) and removal of social and economic disabilities and inequities; of India's creative role in foreign affairs and for world peace; against politics of colonialism, racism and domination. Examined more closely, there are not many leaders whose life-perspective and world-view have been so closely attuned to the major premises of our national consensus, as those of Sheikh Abdullah.

But beyond the realm of politics, which undoubtedly he strode like a giant, he was a person of refinement, sensitivity and culture, a person who would smell a rose and enjoy its fragrance, admire beauty in all its forms, consume a hearty meal and willingly suffer thereafter, read a book of poetry with relish and participate eagerly in a *mushaira*. The profound

subtlety of the Urdu verse was never lost on him. I remember his telling me that what he most liked in my Rajya Sabha speech made on the occasion of the Indira Gandhi—Abdullah accord, was the couplet of Mir Taqi Mir that I had recited as a message for his consideration while dealing with the new intricacies of Kashmiri politics and with Centre-State relations. And this is the couplet:

Lo saans bhi ahesta ke nazuk hai bahut kaam,
Afaaq ke is kaargahey sheesha-gari ka

(Breathe gently lest you impair
the delicate glass-work of this fragile Universe).

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Legendary Leader

*Begum Sheikh Abdullah**

On the 85th birth anniversary of my husband, the late Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the best tribute that can be paid to his memory is to remind ourselves of the selfless service he rendered to the poor and deprived people of Kashmir over a period of a half a century. Sheikh Sahib was a leader of national stature whose contribution to the cause of democracy, socialism and secularism is a glorious part of history now. His political career was almost synonymous with the modern political history of the country. While Sheikh Sahib was main inspiration behind the people's movement in Jammu & Kashmir, he was very much in the vanguard of the national movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

An illustrious son of the soil, Sheikh Sahib was, verily, a symbol of Kashmir's composite culture. His personality was a happy blend of all that was splendid in our past tradition and culture of humanism and brotherhood. Sheikh Sahib appeared on the scene in the early thirties of the current century. The State of Jammu & Kashmir was then under feudal-cum-autocratic rule. Poverty, ignorance and squalor stalked the land. Literacy was at the lowesebb. Proper health care was unknown then. The people were reduced to the state of dumb driven cattle. Touched deeply by the object servitude and serfdom of the masses, Sheikh Sahib organised them under the banner of the All Jammu Kashmir National Conference and launched the

*Former Member of Parliament.

struggle for self-Government. The trials and tribulations suffered by the leader and his people in the course of their struggle against autocratic rule by themselves constitute a saga of heroism in the face of overwhelming odds. Political freedom, however, came to the people in 1947 and the first popular Government headed by Sheikh Sahib came into office in March, 1948. The Government in right earnest addressed itself to the task of implementing 'Naya Kashmir' (New Kashmir)—the blueprint of the National Conference Party which envisages a social order wherein all forms of economic exploitation would be done away with and social economic and political justice would inform all the institutions of the State. The State Government under Sheikh Sahib's stewardship abolished hereditary rule and the Jagirdari system. The land was transferred to the tiller under the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act.

Sheikh Sahib redeemed the down-trodden people of Jammu & Kashmir from the utter subjugation into which they had drifted during centuries of alien rule. In restoring to them their lost sense of identity and self-confidence lies his greatest achievement. He truly brought about a new awakening and injected a new life in the people of the State by making them conscious of their rights and privileges. What Gandhiji did for Indian self-respect in the rest of India, Sheikh Sahib did for the Kashmiris in the Valley. The psychological injuries and the consequent distortion in personality from which they suffered as a result of their past history, required special treatment, and he gave it to them in full measure. If the State is today on way to modernity from medieval darkness, it is because of the efforts of Sheikh Sahib.

While we pay homage to the memory of the departed leader, we should pledge afresh on his Birth anniversary we are celebrating to live up to the ideals he cherished all through his life.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah—the freedom fighter

*Renuka Ray**

I first met Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah with Gandhiji in Delhi and was very much impressed by his tall commanding personality and his complete devotion to Gandhiji. He was one of the leaders who strongly objected to the partition of India and when it came it was largely due to him that Kashmir remained part of India although a portion of it had already been captured by Pakistani troops. He and his followers of National Conference took a very strong view that Kashmir should be part and parcel of India. I may, however, point out that it was due to his advice as a member of the Constituent Assembly that Pandit Nehru agreed to one or two conditions which were introduced in the Constitution. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was one of those who had been jailed during the Quit India Movement. He was the leader of the National Conference of Kashmir and worked closely with Indian National Congress.

It was much later in 1953 when Panditji was abroad, he was suspected of being too closely linked with Pakistan and became a controversial figure. He was arrested and jailed in 1953. The suspicion was that his motive had changed to some extent and he was primarily concerned about bringing that portion of Kashmir which had been captured by Pakistan as part of Kashmir. While he wanted this from the start, it was suspected that he was willing to have a separate state if he could achieve

* Member of the Constituent Assembly and Former Member of Parliament.

this by that means. It was also said that he wanted to bring about an understanding between India and Pakistan as he had been very much against partition.

However, things took a bad turn when Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who was on a visit to Kashmir, protesting against the existence of Azad Kashmir, was arrested and later died in detention there. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in spite of his staunch contribution to the cause of India's independence remained in jail till 1964 although some of his old colleagues who worked closely with him during struggle for freedom under Gandhiji considered this very unfortunate. He was released because he explained that his intention was to unite the two parts of Kashmir but not to break with India. From his side it has been said that he never wanted complete severance of Kashmir from India but wanted a better status within the Indian Union.

Anyway there is no doubt that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah during the days of struggle for independence played a very major role and that his National Conference worked in close conjunction with the Indian National Congress during its struggle under Gandhiji's non-violent non-cooperation.

I last met Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in Calcutta at Raj Bhavan when he came there with his wife after his release. He was a much sobered man and although there were glimpses of the old stalwart fighter for freedom in Gandhiji's camp, he had somehow changed a lot perhaps due to his subsequent ordeal. He wanted above all that Kashmir should include the portion captured by Pakistan and be closely bound with India but strictly adhering to the conditions that had been laid down in the Constitution. He was certainly one of the national figures during the freedom days. Notwithstanding the minor aberrations he had shown in the later period, he deserves respectful homage from our countrymen.

As a Member of the Constituent Assembly I met him quite often and I was convinced that he was a firm believer in the Constitution. Members of the Constituent Assembly signed the

Constitution on 26 January, 1950 amongst whom Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was one of the prominent personalities.

I hope that men and women of the type of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and so many other patriots including Sarojini Naidu who worked for Gandhiji's stand of non-violence should be respected. In fact if the humanity is to survive it will not be through wars but non-violent means through which Gandhiji brought independence to India and later Martin Luther King was able to secure rights for the coloured people.

It must not be forgotten that whatever unfortunate incidents might have taken place at times, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was a firm believer in the secular nature of the Indian Constitution and fully endorsed its preamble.

Sheikh Abdullah: A Tribute

*Choudhary Randhir Singh**

Sheikh Abdullah was endowed with a multi faceted personality. Hailing from very humble origin, he rose to be a colossus with tremendous popular appeal dominating J&K political scenario for more than half a century. His relentless and persistent struggle against the Maharajah's rule made him a hero of national dimensions. Pt. Nehru was also drawn into the vortex and went to his succour and courted arrest.

Sheikh Sahib was a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity, and even M.A. Jinnah the founder of Pakistan discovered to his dismay that he was a hard nut to be assailed and subdued. His secular image was a rare acquisition. Even the fires of partition could not engulf and consume the structure which he had so assiduously built over the pedestal of Hindu-Muslim amity. One feels amazed that even today this sentiment is deeply entrenched all over the sub-continent. The credit for this goes to him entirely.

Sheikh Abdullah was dead set against the two nation theory of Muslim League and to concretise this mission he opted to cast the lot of the people of Jammu and Kashmir with India at the crucial juncture of independence. As a patriot he had to fight on three fronts for achievement of his goal viz., against the Maharajah, the British and the Communalism of the founder of Pakistan.

Sheikh Abdullah was a hard task master and an able administrator who gave a stable and efficient administration to

* Former Member of Parliament.

the State. He was popularly called 'Sher-e-Kashmir'. It is principally because of him that Jammu and Kashmir is a part and parcel of the Indian Union. He was one of the giants of freedom movement and the nation is legitimately proud of his sacrifices and achievements.

Homage to a Hero

*Azeez Sait**

Among India's freedom fighters and Nation Builders Sheikh Abdullah occupies a proud and high place. His sacrifices and services are a legend. A man of scholarly interests who was attracted to political work by the call of nationalism, Sheikh Abdullah was a courageous man, one of those few leaders who truly and amply represented the spirit of the age in which they lived.

Leaders of the type of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah are rare and will remain examples for generations to come. In the truest sense of the term Sheikh Sahib was a statesman. He was less a visionary and more a man of action. He surely has an honoured place in the history. Unfailingly, noble, dedicatedly human, he was a genius.

Sheikh Abdullah was born in Srinagar on 5 December 1905. His father Sheikh Mohammed Ibrahim died two months before Abdullah's birth. His mother devotedly and affectionately brought him up and took an earnest interest in educating him on proper lines. Sheikh Sahib had unusual regard for his mother and always described her as loving, wise and patronising. It was mainly because of her countenance that young and orphaned Abdullah could pursue his education and acquire a post-graduate degree in science.

His father was a merchant of Pashmina (silk). This business was hereditary. After the demise of his father, the family business was carried on with the help of close relatives and

* Minister for Transport, Works and Haj Committee, Government of Karnataka.

friends. Even while supervising the business, his mother kept herself under purdah (veil) without discarding the Islamic precept. Sheikh Sahib's elder brother Sheikh Maqbool was a Drawing Teacher at Sir Amar Singh Technical Institute, Srinagar.

Sheikh Abdullah was zealously interested in acquisition of knowledge from his early childhood. He never wasted his spare time in playgrounds. Instead, he spent his leisure in studying books on varied subjects. He was an ardent fan of Urdu poetry. His interest in the poetical messages of Allama Iqbal was proverbial. Obviously he had developed a deep fascination for the philosophy of Khudi (egoism or self-respect) as propounded and propagated by Sir Mohammed Iqbal. While facing all sorts of ordeals in his later life, he kept up the ideals of self-respect assiduously.

He had just passed his tenth class examination when his beloved mother passed away, leaving him shocked and mournful. It was too great a loss for him to bear. As a grateful son, he always paid glowing tributes to his affectionate mother. After his mother's demise he had to face many financial difficulties. Yet he somehow managed to complete his F.Sc (First in Science) course and moved to Lahore where he joined the renowned Islamia College for his B.Sc. degree.

As a young man he used to feel acutely sorry for the plight of poor Kashmiris. The trials and tribulations of his helpless Kashmiri brethren in Lahore, used to distress him. But he was unable to do anything to mitigate their sufferings at that stage of his life. He used to ponder in seclusion over the unhappy condition of illiterate, backward and depressed Kashmiris. Back home in Srinagar also he used to see the atrocities of officials on innocent men and women. It was rather difficult for him to bear the poverty and grievances of Kashmiris. In those days there was total exploitation of Kashmiri labourers in Lahore. Whenever he saw a young Kashmiri lifting mud baskets or long wooden logs or weighty cement bags, he used to cry in anguish. Because he was a Kashmiri, his class-fellows used to mock at him. Contemptuously, they used to call him as

"Huttoo". But he bore such insults and in the absence of supporters Abdullah used to feel oppressed.

Successfully completing his B.Sc., Sheikh Abdullah moved to Aligarh Muslim University to pursue his M.Sc. There also he felt that the Kashmiris were looked down upon. He used to feel sad and used to think over whether it was a sin to have taken birth in Kashmir. Disdainful attitude of people in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh always used to worry him. He was anxious to remove this hatred or contempt. He longed to seek Kashmiris also to be respected in all spheres of life. A deep desire was there in his mind and heart to do many admirable things to elevate the name and fame of Kashmir.

Though he was never communal and always hated parochialism, it was hard for him to tolerate the contempt of his Muslim brethren towards Kashmiri Muslims. Though it was rather difficult for him to assess the reasons for people having such a partisan attitude towards Kashmiris he was determined to do everything possible to remove these cobwebs of unjustified dislike.

He was still a student in Aligarh when there appeared in the Press an article on Kashmir by Albion Bannerjee, a former Minister of Kashmir. This was followed by a series of articles on Kashmir appearing in the contemporary Press. Sheikh Abdullah was pained to see that Kashmir issue was maliciously projected as a Hindu-Muslim issue in these articles. A few newspapers had hotly contested such communal interpretations of Albion Banerjee and others. Some Muslim writers also had come out explaining their plight and projecting their viewpoints. Young Abdullah was very enthusiastic about this debate and used to diligently analyse the facts and figures mentioned in such articles.

Obtaining his M.Sc., he happily returned to the serene valley of Kashmir in 1930, where he came across a few educated young Muslims in Srinagar. He requested them to extend their hands of friendly Cooperation to him in his

pursuits. He was successful in infusing patriotic ideas into the minds of these young men.

With his indefatigable energy, inspiring eloquence and outstanding organizing abilities he soon became popular in Kashmir valley. One of his earliest political activities was the submission of a powerful petition against the rules and regulations of the Civil Recruiting Board. A delegation also met the Cabinet. One of his closest associates Abdul Azeez was also a member of this delegation. Though the memorandum had clearly pointed out several obnoxious aspects of the recruitment rules the general attitude of the Cabinet was unconvincing, unsympathetic and grossly disappointing. This event infuriated the people and there was growing unrest in the placid valley. Educated Muslim Youths were gravely disheartened. They enlisted the support of leading Urdu daily of Punjab in order to explain their dismay and reasonable demands. When the Government noticed that newspapers published from Lahore and other important towns of Upper India were exposing the truths about the harsh policies of Kashmir, they soon resorted to a ban on newspapers in the valley. The entry of the SIASAT was already prohibited and now there were restrictions on the entry of all newspapers. Patriotic journals like the INQUILAB and the MUSLIM OUTLOOK were not allowed to be published. Ban on newspapers further enraged the people. Later, the Government ventured to deny the movement of public figures who were known to be unsympathetic to the wrong moves and undemocratic actions of Kashmir Government. Young men's appeal to the Government to come to proper lines was not heeded. Authorities were bent upon discouraging the growing influence of young and educated Muslims. It was in this turbulent period of confrontation with the Government that Sheikh Abdullah joined the service. He was appointed as a Science Teacher in the Government High School, Sringar. His basic salary was Rs. 60/- and Dearness Allowance was Rs. 22/- while some Hindu youngsters with lesser educational qualifications and doubtful abilities were offered higher and lucrative jobs in the bureaucratic set-up. Sheikh Abdullah was con-

strained to accept an average job with comparatively low salary. This was a clear indication that the then Government was cautious about not accommodating youngsters with patriotic leanings in crucial administrative jobs. Movements for the liberation of India were fast gaining ground in other parts of the country. Kashmir also was slowly influenced by the messages of freedom. During this period Muslims constituted about 95% of the population of Kashmir valley.

The Government also banned the Id sermon in the valley. Adding fuel to the fire there was another irritant occurrence wherein some disrespect was shown to the Holy Quran in Jammu. Both these blasphemous events disillusioned the entire Muslim population when the detailed reports reached Srinagar. A mammoth public meeting was immediately convened in the Jama Masjid and several powerful resolutions were adopted. The Maharajah of Kashmir was urged upon to desist all the attempts of hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims. The meeting also demanded the immediate apprehension and punishment of those mischievous elements responsible for damaging the communal harmony in the state. The Government did not like Sheikh Abudullah's presence in this protest meeting. A public notice was affixed at the doors of the mosque saying that no speech must be delivered without the prior permission of the Governor. This warning was taken as a direct interference in the religious affairs of Muslims. An instant reaction was the announcement of another public meeting to express anger over this anti-Muslim attitude. Fiery speeches were delivered in this meeting against the unreasonable behaviour of the Governor.

Sheikh Abdullah's participation in political activities was increasingly resented by the Government. In order to make him ineffective hurried orders were passed transferring him from Srinagar to Muzzaffurabad. Sheikh Sahib reacted by addressing a strong letter to the Government condemning his malicious transfer. Holding that the dictates of his conscience was more important to him than the salary he was receiving as a Government servant he refused to bow before the high handed-

ness of the authorities. He emphasised that it was the ethical duty of every human soul to strive for the moral, cultural and social welfare of his fellow-beings. To him serving the co-religionists was more important than submitting to official whims just for the sake of a few rupees. As the Government was adamant, Sheikh Abdulla tendered his resignation and openly entered the political arena. Here also the Government exhibited its anger. They passed an order that he was "dismissed" from the service. However, he was freed from the fetters of Governmental service.

Kashmir soon was in the grip of communal violence. Political developments took many shapes and dimensions. Sheikh Sahib was arrested and jailed a number of times. He spearheaded highly popular and persistent movements to liberate Kashmir from the autocracy of feudal lords. He was the undisputed leader and saviour of Kashmiri Muslims.

In 1946 he launched the "QUIT KASHMIR" (or KASHMIR CHHOD DO) movement to unseat the Dogra Maharajah. He was arrested and imprisoned. In the meanwhile India attained independence. And in the wake of the intrusions from across the border in 1947 Sheikh Abdullah was installed as the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir amidst great satisfaction and rejoicings. Later in August 1953, consequent to the peculiar political upheavals in the state he was removed and kept under house arrest at Ootacamund till 1964.

He loved Kashmiris from the depth of his heart and Kashmiris in turn showered warm respects and affections on him consistently, and very honestly.

Sheikh Sahib had the seed of literary talent right from his boyhood. An orator of rare brilliance he could also write in elegant Urdu. A good conversationalist, he quoted the verses of the Holy Quran, sayings of the Noble Prophet Mohammed and couplets of eminent poets appropriately.

Sher-e-kashmir (or the Lion of Kashmir), the popular title conferred on him is highly justified. He had really the heart of a lion and was a legend in his own life.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: A Champion of Secularism and Democracy

*Narayan Choubey**

In the context of present developments in India, Sheikh Abdullah's life, his ideology and his style of functioning have a special meaning for our people. It was no easy task that coming from a Muslim family in a State like Kashmir ruled by a Hindu feudal king, an ally of the British rulers in India, Sheikh Sahib could grow into a towering personality of India, the undisputed leader of all the people of Kashmir, committed to the values of secularism, socialism and democracy. The great Sheikh grew taller and got steeped into the struggle against the despotic rule of the Maharajah and his protector, the British rulers of India. Of course, the personal influence of Panditji, his commitment to secularism and democracy, Mahatma's struggle for Hindu-Muslim unity—all had their role in moulding the great Sheikh.

At a time when the whole country from Bengal to the Punjab was burning due to communal holocaust, Kashmir under the leadership of the Sheikh remained peaceful and the Kashmiri people unitedly continued their struggle against the Maharajah. When the country was divided on the basis of religion, Kashmir, inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Muslims, decided to join India. When Pakistan attacked Kashmir and wanted to overrun it and capture Srinagar, the volunteers of the National Conference led by this great stalwart played a glorious role in thwarting this move and resisted the Pakistani onslaught for a

*Former Member of Parliament.

few days before the jawans of the Indian Army could reach Kashmir. These volunteers of the National Conference arrested thousands of Pakistani soldiers and handed them over to the officials of the Indian Army.

It is a matter of regret that this great national hero and the lion of Kashmir had to be imprisoned by the Government of India for his activities perceived to be detrimental to the interest of the State. But all glory to the Sheikh, he did not falter in his conviction of secularism and democracy.

Today when the country is facing problems of destabilisation, disruption and disintegration particularly in Kashmir, life and teachings of the great Sheikh have special relevance. How is it that today secular Kashmir takes a communal posture? It is a matter of regret and shame for the nation that Kashmiri youth of today seek deliverance from Pakistan—an idea fought tooth and nail by their forefathers years back. We must learn from the life of the Great Sheikh and impress upon the Kashmiri youth on the relevance of secularism and warn against the forces of destabilisation. Kashmir is ours. It is a part of India. It has many typical Kashmiri problems. But such problems are not confined to Kashmir. Forces of communalism and destabilisation aided and abetted by Pakistan are very strong in Kashmir today. But one variety of communalism cannot be countered by another variety. Herein lies the relevance of the life, struggle and teachings of the great Sheikh in today's context.