SECURING KASHMIR

> Do we believe in a national state which includes people of all religions and shades of opinion and is essentially secular. . ., or do we believe in the religious, theocratic conception of a state which considers people of other faiths as something beyond the pale? This is an odd question to ask, for the idea of a religious or theocratic state was given up by the world some centuries ago and has no place in the mind of the modern man. And yet the question has to be put in India today, for many of us have tried to jump back to a past age.
>
> JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

I

THE REFORM OF PERSONAL laws was one test of Indian secularism. Another and greater test was with regard to the future of Kashmir. Could a Muslim majority state exist, without undue fuss or friction, in a Hindu-dominated but ostensibly 'secular' India?

As we have seen in Chapter 4, by 1949 Sheikh Abdullah was in firm control of the administration of Jammu and Kashmir. But the status of the territory was still under dispute. The United Nations had called for a plebiscite and was trying to get India and Pakistan to meet the conditions for holding it.

In February 1950 the UN Security Council asked both countries to withdraw their armies from the state. As before, both sides stalled. India asked for the Pakistanis to take their troops out first while Pakistan demanded that the National Conference government be removed from office. India had begun to regret taking the matter to the United Nations in the first place. By 1950 it was quite prepared to hold on to its part of the disputed state, and let Pakistan take the hindmost. The Indian Constitution, which came into effect in January 1950, treated Kashmir as part of the Indian Union. However, it guaranteed the state a certain autonomy; thus Article 370 specified that the president would consult the state government with regard to subjects other than defence, foreign affairs, and communications.[1]

As for Pakistan, politicians there held that their claim needed no certification from a popular vote. In September 1950 a former prime minister insisted that 'the liberation of Kashmir is a cardinal belief of every Pakistani . . . Pakistan would remain incomplete until the whole of Kashmir has been liberated'. Two weeks later, a serving prime minister observed that 'for Pakistan, Kashmir is a vital necessity; for India it is an imperialistic adventure'.[2]

On both sides of the border the governmental positions were echoed and amplified by the press. In the summer of 1950 the British broadcaster Lionel Fielden visited the subcontinent. As a former head of All-India Radio, Fielden had many friends in both India and Pakistan. Visiting them and speaking also to their friends, he found that on either side of the international boundary 'the visitor is assailed by arguments and harangues to prove that the other country is not only wrong but diabolically wrong, and mischievously to boot'. He observed that 'the tone of the Indian Press tends to be a little patronizing, sweetly reasonable but nevertheless obstinate, and rather consciously self-righteous'. On

the other hand, 'the tone of the Pakistan Press and Pakistan leaders tends to be resentful, arrogant and sometimes aggressive'. Pakistani hostility was compounded by the fear that powerful forces in India wanted to reconquer or reabsorb their land in a united Akhand Bharat.

Fielden summarized the respective points of view: 'In clinging to Kashmir, India wants to weaken Partition; in claiming it, Pakistan wants to make Partition safe.' On the issue of Kashmir both sides were absolutely rigid. Thus, 'to fight to the last ditch for [Kashmir] is the slogan of all Pakistanis; not to give way on it is rapidly becoming the fixed idea in India.'

Fielden ended his analysis with a warning. In the long run, he pointed out, 'the most important thing' about the Kashmir conflict was 'the expense in armaments in which both countries are getting involved. This means that social services in both countries are crippled, and since both countries, apart from their refugees, have millions of the poorest people in the world, it is easy to see how this can lead to disaster.'[3]

The United Nations had tried and failed to solve the dispute. Could another 'third party' succeed? In January 1951, at a meeting at 10 Downing Street, the Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies suggested that a plebiscite be held under Commonwealth auspices. The British prime minister, Clement Attlee, appeared to favour the idea, but Nehru said any settlement must have the concurrence of the state government of Sheikh Abdullah. The Pakistani prime minister dismissed that government as 'puppets appointed by Nehru [whom] he could change any time'. In reply, Nehru noted that 'the Pakistan press was full of this religious appeal and calls for Jehad. If this was the kind of thing that was going to take place during a plebiscite, then there would be no plebiscite but civil upheaval, not only in Kashmir, but elsewhere in India and Pakistan.'[4]

II

In 1950, the maps of the government of India claimed the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir as part of its territory. New Delhi's claim to the whole rested on the fact that in October 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh had signed a document acceding to India. Meanwhile, its claim to the part actually held by it rested on the secularist sentiments of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, by now often referred to as simply 'the Sheikh'.

Abdullah was anti-Pakistan, but was he for India? That was a question to which the man himself would not give a straight answer. His vacillation is captured in a series of frustrated letters written by Nehru to his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit:

> *10 May 1950*. I am sorry to say that Sheikh Abdullah is behaving in a most irresponsible manner. The most difficult thing in life is what to do with one's friends.
>
> *18 July 1950*. Meanwhile, Sheikh Abdullah has been behaving very badly in Kashmir in regard to domestic affairs and he appears to be bent on securing a conflict with us. He has gone to wrong hands there and is being misled.
>
> *10 August 1950*. Sheikh Abdullah has come round a little and is in a more amenable frame of mind. I wonder how long this will last, because there are too many forces at play in Kashmir, which pull him in different directions.[5]

The note of scepticism in this last letter was warranted. For very soon Abdullah had once more begun behaving in a 'most irresponsible manner'; that is to say, had begun thinking of ways to detach Kashmir from India. On 29 September 1950 he met the American ambassador, Loy Henderson. In discussing the future of Kashmir, Abdullah told Henderson that

> in his opinion it should be independent; that overwhelming majority of the population desired their independence; that he had reason to believe that some Azad Kashmir leaders desired independence and would be willing to cooperate with leaders of National Conference if there was reasonable chance such cooperation would result in independence. Kashmir people could not understand why UN consistently ignored independence as possible solution for Kashmir. Kashmir people had language and cultural background of their own. The Hindus by custom and tradition widely different from Hindus in India, and the background of Muslims quite different from Muslims in Pakistan. Fact was that population of Kashmir homogeneous in spite of presence of Hindu minority.[6]

Abdullah went on to ask the ambassador whether the US would support an independent Kashmir. Unfortunately, the published records of the State Department do not reveal the US response. Did the United States ever seriously contemplate propping up Kashmir as a client state, given that its location could be of immense value in the struggle against communism?

We still can't say, and it seems Abdullah was equally unsure at the time, for he now went back to the Indian government to negotiate with them the terms of Kashmir's autonomy. The state, it was decided, would have its own constituent assembly, where the terms by which it would associate with India would be finalized. In January 1951 Abdullah wrote to the minister of states that, as he understood it, the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly would discuss 'the question of accession of the State, the question of retention or abolition of the Ruler as the Constitutional Head of the State and the question of framing a Constitution for the State including the question of defining the sphere of Union jurisdiction over the State'. He added that the Assembly would 'take decisions on all issues specified above', decisions the government of India must treat as 'binding on all concerned'. This suggested that even Kashmir's accession to India was not final. As an alarmed minister of states noted in the margins of the letter, the Sheikh's interpretation was 'perhaps going beyond what we said'.[7]

The Sheikh, as ever, presumed to speak for the state of Jammu and Kashmir as a whole. In truth, while he was still revered in the Valley, he was becoming quite unpopular among the Hindu of the Jammu region, who were keen to merge their part of the state with the Indian Union as quickly as possible. In 1949 a Praja Parishad (Peoples' Party) was formed to represent the interests of the Jammu Hindus. It was led by a seventy-year-old veteran, Prem Nath Dogra. Characteristically, Sheikh Abdullah dismissed the opposition in Jammu as a bunch of 'reactionaries'.[8]

In October 1951 elections were held to the Kashmir Constituent Assembly. The Praja Parishad had decided to contest but, early on, the nomination papers of several of their candidates were found to be invalid. In protest they chose to boycott the election. All seventy-five seats were won by Abdullah's National Conference. All but three of their candidates were returned unopposed.[9]

Sheikh Abdullah's opening speech in the Constituent Assembly ran for a full ninety minutes. Reading from a printed English text, the Sheikh discussed, one by one, the options before the people of Kashmir. The first was to join Pakistan, that 'landlord-ridden' and 'feudal' theocracy. The second was to join India, with whom the state had a 'kinship of ideals' and whose government had 'never tried to interfere in our internal autonomy'. Admittedly, 'certain tendencies have been asserting

themselves in India which may in the future convert it into a religious State wherein the interests of the Muslims will be jeopardized'. On the other hand, 'the continued accession of Kashmir to India' would promote harmony between Hindus and Muslims, and marginalize the communalists. 'Gandhiji was not wrong', argued the Sheikh, 'when he uttered words before his death which [I] paraphrase: "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help".'

Abdullah came, finally, to 'the alternative of making ourselves an Eastern Switzerland, of keeping aloof from both States, but having friendly relations with them'. This was an attractive option, but it did not seem practical. How would a small, landlocked country safeguard its sovereignty? As the Sheikh reminded his audience, Kashmir had once been 'independent' of both India and Pakistan; between 15 August and 22 October 1947, when its independence had been destroyed by the tribal invasion. What was the guarantee that a sovereign Kashmir 'may not be victim of a similar aggression'?[10]

Thus, the Sheikh rejected the option of independence as impractical, and the option of joining Pakistan as immoral. They would join India, but on terms of their own choosing. Among these terms were the retention of the state flag and the designation of the head of government as prime minister. Neither was acceptable to the Praja Parishad of Jammu. Asking for the complete integration of Kashmir into India, they had adopted the slogan: 'Ek Vidhan, ek Pradhan, ek Nishan' (One Constitution, One Head of State, One Flag).

In January 1952, shortly before Abdullah was due to speak in Jammu town, Hindu students protested against the National Conference flag being flown alongside the Indian tricolour. They were arrested and later expelled from their college. This sparked a wave of sympathy protests culminating in a march on the Secretariat, where demonstrators entered the offices, broke furniture and burnt records. The police cracked down hard, imposing a seventy-two-hour curfew and arresting hundreds of Parishad members. Also jailed was their aged leader, Prem Nath Dogra, although he had not participated in the protests himself.

The government in Delhi, fearful of a countrywide Hindu backlash, persuaded the Kashmir government to release the Parishad leaders. Abdullah agreed, if reluctantly. On 10 April he made a speech in which he said his party would accept the Indian Constitution 'in its entirety once we are satisfied that the grave of communalism has been finally dug'. He darkly added: 'Of that we are not sure yet. The Sheikh said that the Kashmiris 'fear what will happen to them and their position if, for instance, something happens to Pandit Nehru'.[11]

Both the timing and venue of Abdullah's speech were significant. It was made in Ranbirsinghpura, a town only four miles from the border with Pakistan. And India had just come through a general election the result of which appeared to vindicate Jawaharlal Nehru and his policies. The speech was widely reported, and caused considerable alarm. Why was the man who had often issued chits complimenting India for its secularism suddenly turning so sceptical?

The Sheikh's change of mind coincided with a visit to Kashmir by the veteran British journalist Ian Stephens. Stephens, who had been editor of the Calcutta *Statesman* during the troubles of 1946–7, was known to be a strong supporter of Pakistan. He thought that the Kashmir Valley, with its majority Muslim population, properly belonged to that country. Still, he was sensitive to the dilemmas of its leader. He had long talks with Abdullah, whom he saw as 'a man of pluck and enlightenment, standing for principles good in their way; a victim, like so many of us, of the unique scope and speed and confusion of the changes in 1947, and now holding a perhaps uniquely lonely and perplexing post'. His was a regime upheld by 'Indian bayonets, which meant mainly Hindu bayonets'. Admittedly, 'in many ways it was a good regime: energetic, full of ideas, staunchly non-communal, very go-ahead in

agrarian reform'. But, concluded Stephens, 'to the eye of history it might prove an unnatural one'.[12]

III

Once, Abdullah had been Nehru's man in Kashmir. By the summer of 1952, however, it was more that Nehru was Abdullah's man in India. The Sheikh had made it known that, in his view, only the prime minister stood between India and the ultimate victory of Hindu communalism.

Meanwhile, discussions continued about the precise status of Kashmir vis-à-vis the Indian Union. In July the Sheikh met Nehru in Delhi and also had a round of meetings with other ministers. They hammered out a compromise known as the Delhi Agreement, whereby Kashmiris would become full citizens of India in exchange for an autonomy far greater than that enjoyed by other states of the Union. Thus the new state flag (devised by the National Conference) would for 'historical and other reasons' be flown alongside the national flag. Delhi could not send in forces to quell 'internal disturbances' without the consent of Srinagar. Where with regard to other states residuary powers rested with the centre, in the case of Kashmir these would remain with the state. Crucially, those from outside the state were prohibited from buying land or property within it. This measure was aimed at forestalling attempts to change the demographic profile of the Valley through large-scale immigration.[13]

These were major concessions, but the Sheikh pressed for greater powers still. In a truculent speech in the state's Constituent Assembly he said only the state could decide what powers to give away to the Union, or what jurisdiction the Supreme Court would have in Kashmir. Then he told Yuvraj Karan Singh, the formal head of state, that if he did not fall into line he would go the way of his father, the deposed Hari Singh. The young prince, said the Sheikh, must 'break up with the reactionary elements', and instead identify with the 'happiness and sorrow of the common man'. For 'if he is under the delusion that he can retain his office with the help of his few supporters, he is mistaken'.[14]

The 'reactionary elements' referred to here were the Hindus of Jammu. They had restarted their agitation, with an amended if equally catchy slogan: 'Ek Desh mein Do Vidhan, Do Pradhan, Do Nishan – nahin chalenge, nahin chalenge' (Two Constitutions, Two Heads of State, Two Flags – these in one State we shall not allow, not allow). Processions and marches, as well as clashes with police, became frequent. Once more the jails of Jammu began to fill with the volunteers of the Praja Parishad.

The Hindus of Jammu retained a deep attachment to the ruling family, and to Maharaja Hari Singh in particular. They resented his being deposed and were displeased with his son for being 'disloyal' by agreeing to replace him. But their apprehensions were also economic-namely, that the land reforms recently undertaken in the Kashmir Valley would be reproduced in Jammu. In the Valley, zamindars had been dispossessed of land in excess of the ceiling limit. Since this was fixed at twenty-two acres per family, their losses were substantial. The land seized by the state had been vested chiefly in the hands of the middle peasantry. The agricultural proletariat had not benefited to quite the same extent. Still, the land reforms had gone further and been more successful than anywhere else in India.[15]

As it happened, the large landlords in the Valley were almost all Hindu. This gave an unfortunate religious hue to what was essentially a project of socialist redistribution. This was perhaps inevitable; despite the sincerity of the Sheikh's secularist professions, they could not nullify the legacies of history. At one time the state had been controlled by the Dogras of Jammu, who

happened to be Hindu; now it was controlled by the National Conference, which was based in the Valley and whose leader and most of its members were Muslim.[16]

IV

Through the years 1950–2, as the rest of India became acquainted with its new constitution and had its first elections, Jammu and Kashmir was beset by uncertainty on two fronts. There were the unsettled relations between the state and the Union, and there was the growing conflict between the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley and the Hindu-dominated Jammu region. Here was a situation made to order for a politician in search of a cause. And it found one in Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who was to make the struggle of the Dogras of Jammu his own.

Dr Mookerjee had left Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet to become the founder-president of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. His new party fared poorly at the general election of 1952 – only three of its members were elected to Parliament. The troubles in Kashmir came at an opportune time for Dr Mookerjee and the Jana Sangh. Here was a chance to lift the dispirited cadres, to forget the disappointments of the election and reinvent the party on the national stage.

Dr Mookerjee began his charge with a series of blistering attacks on the government in Parliament. 'Who made Sheikh Abdullah the King of Kings in Kashmir?' he asked sarcastically. The Sheikh had apparently said that they would treat both the provincial and national flags 'equally'; this, said the Jana Sangh leader, showed a 'divided loyalty' unacceptable in a sovereign country. Even if the Valley wanted a limited accession, Jammu and the Buddhist region of Ladakh must be allowed to integrate fully if they so chose. But a better solution still would be to make the whole state a part of India, without any special concessions. This would bring it on par with all the other princely states, which – despite earlier promises made to them as regards autonomy – had finally to agree to be subject to the provisions of the constitution *in toto*. Abdullah himself had been a member of the Indian Constituent Assembly, yet 'he is asking for special treatment. Did he not agree to accept this Constitution in relation to the rest of India, including 497 States. If it is good enough for all of them, why should it not be good enough for him in Kashmir?'[17]

In the autumn of 1952 Dr Mookerjee visited Jammu and made several speeches in support of the Praja Parishad movement. Their demands, he said, were 'just and patriotic'. He promised to 'secure' the Constitution of India for them. He then went to Srinagar, where he had a most contentious meeting with Sheikh Abdullah.[18]

The support of a national party and a national leader had given much encouragement to the Dogras. In November 1952 the state government moved to Jammu for the winter. As head of state, Karan Singh arrived first. Years later he recalled the 'derisive and hostile slogans' and black flags with which he was received by the Praja Parishad. Although 'the National Conference had tried to lay on some kind of reception it was swamped by the deep hostility of the Dogra masses'. Writing to the government of India, he noted that 'an over-whelming majority of the Jammu province seem to me to be emphatically in sympathy with the agitation . . . I do not think it will be a correct appraisal to dismiss the whole affair as merely the creation of a reactionary clique.'[19]

Which, of course, is what Sheikh Abdullah was disposed to do. Through the winter of 1952/3 the Praja Parishad and the state government remained locked in conflict. Protesters would remove the state flag from government buildings and place Indian flags in their stead. They would be arrested, but others would soon arrive to replace them. The movement got a tremendous fillip when a Parishad

member, Mela Ram, was shot by police near the Pakistan border. In Jammu, at least, Abdullah's reputation was in tatters. He had made his name representing the people against an autocratic monarch. Now he had become a repressive ruler himself.[20]

In January Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee wrote a long letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in support of the Parishad and their 'highly patriotic and emotional struggle to 'merge completely with India'. He added a gratuitous challenge with regard to the 'recovery of the part of the erstwhile undivided state now in the possession of Pakistan. How was India 'going to get this [territory] back'? asked Mookerjee. 'You have always evaded this question. The time has come when we should know what exactly you propose to do about this matter. It will be nothing short of national disgrace and humiliation if we fail to regain this lost portion of our own territory.'

Nehru ignored the taunt. As for the Praja Parishad, he thought that they were 'trying to decide a very difficult and complicated constitutional question by methods of war'. Abdullah (to whom Mookerjee had written separately) was more blunt; as he saw it, 'the Praja Parishad is determined to force a solution of the entire Kashmir issue on communal lines'.

Mookerjee asked Nehru and Abdullah to release the Praja Parishad leaders and convene a conference to discuss the future of Kashmir. Mookerjee again challenged Nehru to go to war with Pakistan: 'Please do not sidetrack the issue and let the public of India know how and when, if at all, we are going to get back this portion of our cherished territory. [21]

Eventually the exchange ran a ground on a matter of pride. Nehru thought the Parishad should call off the movement as a precondition to talks with the government; Mookerjee wanted the government to offer talks as a precondition to the movement calling off the struggle. When the government refused to bend, Mookerjee decided to take the matter to the streets of Delhi. Beginning in the first week of March, Jana Sangh volunteers courted arrest in support of the demands of the Praja Parishad. The protesters would collect outside a police station and shout slogans against the government and against the prime minister, thereby violating Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.

The *satyagraha* was co-ordinated by Dr Mookerjee from his office in Parliament House. Participating were members of what the authorities were calling the 'Hindu communal parties': the Jana Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Ram Rajya Parishad. By the end of April 1953 1,300 people had been arrested. Intelligence reports suggest that they came from all parts of India, yet were overwhelmingly upper caste: Brahmins, Thakurs, Banias.[22]

It was now summer, tourist season in the Valley. Among the first visitors to arrive, in late April, was the American politician Adlai Stevenson. He had come to Kashmir to sail on the Dal lake and see the snows, but also to meet Sheikh Abdullah. They met twice, for upwards of two hours each time. The content of these conversations were not revealed by either side, but some Indians assumed it was all about independence. A Bombay journal otherwise known to be sympathetic to the United States claimed that Stevenson had assured Abdullah of much more than moral support. A loan of $15 million would be on hand once Kashmir became independent; besides, the US would ensure that 'the Valley would have a permanent population of at least 5,000 American families, that every houseboat and hotel would be filled to capacity, that Americans would buy up all the art and craft output of the dexterous Kashmiri artisans, that within three years every village in Kashmir would be electrified and so on and so forth'.[23]

Stevenson later denied that he had encouraged Abdullah. When the Sheikh offered the 'casual suggestion that independent status might be an alternative solution', Stevenson stayed silent; he did not, he claimed, give 'even unconscious encouragement regarding independence, which did not seem to me realistic . . . I was listening, not talking'.[24]

So the Sheikh was once more contemplating independence. But independence for what? Not, most likely, the whole of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. One part (the north) was in Pakistani hands; another part (Jammu) was in the grip of a prolonged agitation. Abdullah's own papers are closed to scholars and he is silent on the subject in his memoirs, but we can plausibly speculate that it must have been the Valley, and the Valley alone, for which he was seeking independence. Here he was in control, with the population largely behind him; and it was here that the tourists would come to nurture his dreams of an 'Eastern Switzerland'.[25]

V

Not long after Stevenson, another politician came seeking to fish in troubled waters. On 8 May Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee boarded a train to Jammu, en route to Srinagar. He had planned to take his *satyagraha* deep into enemy territory. Anticipating trouble, the state government issued orders prohibiting him from entering. Mookerjee disregarded the order and crossed the border on the morning of the 11th. The police requested him to return, and when he refused arrested him and took him to Srinagar jail.

Before the Praja Parishad movement, Dr Mookerjee had been a lifelong constitutionalist. A Bengali *bhadralok* of the old school, he was comfortable in a suit and tie, sipping a glass of whisky. During the entire nationalist movement he never resorted to *satyagraha* or spent a single night in jail. Indeed, he had long held, in the words of his biographer, that 'legislatures were the only forum for giving vent to diverse viewpoints on Government policies'. That belief sat oddly with Dr Mookerjee's support for the protests of the Praja Parishad. And now he was sanctioning and leading a street protest himself.

Why then did Dr Mookerjee resort to methods with which he was unfamiliar? He told his follower (and future biographer) Balraj Madhok that he was convinced that this was the only language the prime minister understood. 'As a man who had been [an] agitator all his life, Pandit Nehru, he felt, had developed a complex for agitational methods. He would bow before force and agitation but not before right or reason unless backed by might.'[26]

Now, in Srinagar jail, while charges were being compiled, Dr Mookerjee spent his time reading Hindu philosophy and writing to friends and relatives.[27] In early June he fell ill. Pain in one of his legs was accompanied by fever. The doctors diagnosed pleurisy. Then on 22 June he had a heart attack and died the following day.[28]

On 24 June an Indian air force plane flew Mookerjee's body back to his home town, Calcutta. Sheikh Abdullah had laid as hawl on the body, while his deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, helped load the stretcher onto the plane. In Calcutta huge crowds lined the thirteen-mile route from Dum Dum airport to the family home in Bhowanipur. Nehru wrote to a friend in Madras that 'we are having a great deal of trouble as a result of Dr Mookerjee's death. The atmosphere in Delhi is bad. It is worse in Calcutta.'[29]

And worse still in Jammu. When the news reached the town an angry mob attacked and looted a government Arts emporium and set fire to government offices.[30] In Delhi, meanwhile, a crowd gathered at Ajmeri Gate, wearing black badges, waving black flags and shouting, '*Khoon ka Badla Khoon sé laingé*' (Blood will be avenged by blood). The anger persisted for days. On 5July a portion of Dr Mookerjee's ashes arrived in the capital; these were carried in a massive procession by the Jana Sangh through the old City, with the marchers shouting slogans of revenge and insisting that

'*Kashmir hamarahai*' (Kashmir shall be ours).[31]

In late June posters appeared in parts of Delhi warning Sheikh Abdullah that he would be killed if he came to the capital. These calls could not be taken lightly, for it had been in a similarly surcharged atmosphere that Mahatma Gandhi had met his end. Now, again, it appeared that 'in Delhi the entire middle class is in the hands of the [Hindu] communalists'. It was feared that not just the Sheikh, but also 'Mr Nehrumaymeet the fate . . . of Gandhiji due to the intense propaganda of the communalists'. The police were instructed to look out for 'any propaganda of a serious nature, or any plans or designs these groups of parties may have against the Prime Minister'.[32]

VI

The popular movement led by Dr Mookerjee planted the seed of independence in Sheikh Abdullah''s mind; the outcry following his death seems only to have nurtured it. Sensing this, Nehru wrote two long emotional letters recalling their old friendship and India's ties to Kashmir. He asked Abdullah to come down to Delhi and meet him. The Sheikh did not oblige. Then Nehru sent Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (the most senior member of the Cabinet) to Srinagar, but that did not help either. The Sheikh now seemed convinced of two things: that he had the support of the United States and that 'even Nehru could not subdue [Hindu] communal forces in India'. On 10 July he addressed party workers at Mujahid Manzil, the headquarters of the National Conference in Srinagar. After outlining Kashmir's, and his own, grievances against the government of India, he said that 'a time will, therefore, come when I will bid them good-bye'.[33]

The Sheikh's turnabout greatly alarmed the prime minister. Writing to a colleague, Nehru said the developments in Kashmir were particularly unfortunate, for 'anything that happens there has larger and wider consequences'. For the 'problem of Kashmir [was] symbolic of many things, including our secular policy in India'.[34]

By now the government of Kashmir was divided within itself, its members (as Nehru observed), liable 'to pull in different directions and proclaim entirely different policies'. This was in good part the work of the government of India's Intelligence Bureau. Officers of the Bureau had been working within the National Conference, dividing the leadership and confusing the ranks. Some leaders, such as G. M. Sadiq, were left-wing anti-Americans; they disapproved of the Sheikh's talks with Stevenson. Others, like Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, had ambitions of ruling Kashmir themselves.[35]

There was now an open rift within the National Conference between the pro-India and pro-independence groups. The latter were led by the Sheikh's close associate Mirza Afzal Beg. The former were in close touch with the sadr-i-riyasat, Karan Singh. It was rumoured that Sheikh Abdullah would declare independence on 21 August – the day of the great Id festival – following which he would seek the protection of the United Nations against 'Indian aggression'.[36] Two weeks before that date Abdullah dismissed a member of his Cabinet. This gave the others in the pro-India faction an excuse to move against him. Led by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, they wrote the Sheikh a letter accusing him of encouraging sectarianism and corruption. A copy of the letter was also sent to Karan Singh. He, in turn, dismissed Abdullah and invited Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed to form a government in his place.

Abdullah was served his walking papers in the early hours of the morning. When he was woken up and handed the letter of dismissal, the Sheikh flew into a rage. 'Who is the sadr-i-riyasat to dismiss me?', he shouted. 'I made that chit of a boy sadr-i-riyasat.' The police then told him that he

had not just been dismissed, but also placed under arrest. He was given two hours to say his prayers and pack his belongings before being taken off to jail.

Why was Abdullah humiliated so? Did he have to be dismissed in the dead of night, and did he then have to be placed under detention? Karan Singh later recalled that this was done because 'Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed made it quite clear that he could not undertake to run the Government if the Sheikh and Beg were left free to propagate their views'. In other words, he was safe and quiet in jail, whereas as a free man, put out of office, he would quickly mobilize popular sentiment in hisfavour.[37]

Then, and later, it was widely believed that the arrest of Abdullah was masterminded by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai. Kidwai was a left-leaning member of the Cabinet, and a close friend of Nehru's. In Delhi it was thought that his desire to humiliate the Sheikh had its roots in the fact that Abdullah was currying favour with the Americans. In Kashmir, however, it was held that this was a plain, if misguided, act of revenge. Back in 1947 Kidwai's brother had been murdered by a Kashmiri in the hill station of Mussoorie. Deposing the Sheikh was away of settling accounts.[38]

Did Jawaharlal Nehru himself sanction the arrest of his friend Sheikh Abdullah? Nehru's biographer thinks he did not know beforehand, whereas his chief of intelligence suggests he did. One thing is clear, however: once the deed was done he did nothing to countermand it.[39]

Like his predecessor, the new prime minister of Kashmir was a larger-than-life figure. He was known commonly as the Bakshi, much as his predecessor was known as the Sheikh. Born in 1907 in modest circumstances, Ghulam Mohammed began his political career by organizing a union of carriage drivers in Srinagar. That, and four terms in Hari Singh's jails, gave him sterling nationalist credentials. However, by temperament and orientation he was quite different from the Sheikh. One was a man of ideas and idealism, the other a man of action and organization. When the raiders attacked in October 1947, it was Abdullah who gave the rousing speeches while the Bakshi placed volunteers in position and watched out for potential fifth-columnists. After 1947, while Abdullah dealt with Nehru and Delhi, the Bakshi 'kept the structure of the State intact, at a time when the whole Government had collapsed and was non-existent'. As two Kashmiri academics wrote in 1950, 'being a strict disciplinarian himself, he can brook no indiscipline and dilly-dallying tactics. He is no lover of formal government routine and red-tapism. He believes in quick but right action. The conclusion, in the India of the time, was inescapable: 'In fact, Bakshi is to Abdullah what Sardar [Patel] is to Nehru.[40]

The analogy, though attractive, was inexact. For Patel did not covet his boss's job. And having got that job, the Bakshi intended to keep it. This meant, as he well understood, keeping Delhi on his side. Ten days after he had assumed power he visited Jammu, where he spoke to a large crowd, assuring them that 'the ties between Kashmir and India are irrevocable. No power on earth can separate the two. Next, speaking in Srinagar to a meeting of National Conference workers, the Bakshi argued that 'Sheikh Abdullah played directly into the hands of foreign invaders by entertaining the idea of an independent Kashmir'. That, he said, was 'a dangerous game, pregnant with disastrous consequences for Kashmir, India, and Pakistan'. Since Kashmir lacked the resources to defend itself, independence was a 'crack-brained idea', calculated only to make the state a centre of superpower intrigue. It was an idea 'which can devastate the people'.[41]

As prime minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed adopted a populist style, holding a *darbar* (court) every Friday, where he heard the grievances of the public. An early move was to raise the procurement price of paddy. Next, he made school education free, sanctioned new engineering and medical colleges and abolished customs barriers between Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India.

In October 1954 the All-India Newspaper Editors Conference was held in Srinagar. The state government pulled out all the stops, placing the guests in the best hotels and throwing parties at which the finest Kashmiri delicacies were served. A grateful editor wrote that, although the new regime had been in place only for a year, 'it can be safely said that the Bakshi Government has in some fields, brought in more reforms than did Sheikh Abdullah's in its six years of existence'. After the public and the press it was the turn of the president. In October 1955 Dr Rajendra Prasad arrived in Srinagar amid 'carefully whipped-up mass enthusiasm – crowds lining the road from the airport, a procession of boats on the Jhelum. The president had come to inaugurate a hydroelectric project, one of several development schemes begun under the newdispensation.[42]

All the while Sheikh Abdullah was cooling his heels in detention. He was first housed in an old palace in Udhampur, in the plains, before being shifted to a cooler bungalow in the mountains, at Kot. He was raising poultry and reported to have become 'very anti-Indian'.[43]

Within and outside Kashmir the Bakshi was viewed as something of a usurper. Relevant here are the contents of two secret police reports on Friday prayers in Delhi's Jama Masjid. On 2 October 1953 the prayers were attended by two members of Parliament from Kashmir. When they were asked by a Muslim cleric to organize a meeting on the situation in Kashmir, the MPs answered that the time was not right, for they were working behind the scenes for the release of Sheikh Abdullah. The MPs said that 'all Kashmiris would remain with India and die for it', but if the Sheikh continued to be held in jail, the state might then, in anger, 'go to Pakistan, for which the responsibility would not be theirs'.

Three months later Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed himself attended prayers in the Jama Masjid. This was a way of claiming legitimacy, for the mosque, built by Shah Jehan in the seventeenth century, was the subcontinent's grandest and most revered. The keepers of the shrine, sensible of the Bakshi's proximity to the ruler of Delhi, received him respectfully enough. But, as a police report noted, 'the Muslims who had congregated there, including some Kashmiris, were talking against Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed in whispering tones. They said that he had become the Prime Minister of Kashmir after putting his "guru" – Sheikh Abdullah – behind bars.'[44]

VII

In the 1950s, as in the 1940s, the Valley of Kashmir was troubled and unsettled. Behind the troubles of the 1940s lay the indecision of the Maharaja – who refused to accede to either Pakistan or India while there was still time – and the greed and fervour of the tribal raiders who invaded the state. Behind the troubles of the 1950s were the ambitions of Sheikh Abdullah and S. P. Mookerjee. Neither was willing to play within the rules of constitutional democracy. Both raised the political stakes and both, tragically, paid for it.

The developments in Kashmir were worrisome not just to Indians. The British general who had been in charge of the Indian army in 1947 thought that they might very well 'result in a worsening of Indo-Pak relations'. In the defence of Kashmir he had come to know both the Sheikh and the Bakshi very well. The Sheikh, though 'never a great man', was nonetheless 'sincere, in my opinion, in his love for his own country'. On the other hand, the Bakshi was 'quite insincere'; he was 'an individual without calibre'.[45]

In fact, the Bakshi did have a certain talent for organization, and for feathering his nest. He used his closeness to Delhi to get a steady flow of central funds into his state. These were used to pay for dams, roads, hospitals, tunnels and hotels. Many new buildings rose up in Srinagar, including a new

Secretariat, a new sports stadium, and a new tourist complex. However, in the development projects undertaken by Bakshi's government there was always 'a percentage for family and friends'. His regime soon became known as the BBC, or the Bakshi Brothers Corporation.[46]

The developments of 1952–3 had raised sharp questions about India's moral claim to the Valley. Six years had elapsed since the invasion of 1947 – enough time for the world to forget it, and to remember only that the Valley was Muslim and so was Pakistan. Besides, the Kashmiri leader so long paraded as India's own had now been put into jail by the Indian government.

Could things have turned out otherwise? Perhaps if Sheikh Abdullah and Syama Prasad Mookerjee had acted with responsibility and restraint. And perhaps if Jawaharlal Nehru and the Indian government had listened to an obscure journalist of English extraction then editing a low-circulation liberal weekly out of Bangalore. In 1952–3, while Dr Mookerjee was demanding that Nehru should invade Pakistan and thus 'reclaim' northern Kashmir, Philip Spratt was proposing a radically different solution. India, he said, must abandon its claims to the Valley, and allow the Sheikh his dream of independence. It should withdraw its armies and write off its loans to the government of Jammu and Kashmir. 'Let Kashmir go ahead, alone and adventurously, in her explorations of a secular state', he wrote. 'We shall watch the act of faith with due sympathy but at a safe distance, our honour, our resources and our future free from the enervating entanglements which write a lie in our soul.'

Spratt's solution was tinged with morality, but more so with economy and prudence. Indian policy, he argued, was based on 'a mistaken belief in the one-nation theory and greed to own the beautiful and strategic valley of Srinagar'. The costs of this policy, present and future, were incalculable. Rather than give Kashmir special privileges and create resentment elsewhere in India, it was best to let the state go. As things stood, however, Kashmir 'was in the grip of two armies glaring at each other in a state of armed neutrality. It may suit a handful of people to see the indefinite continuance of this ghastly situation. But the Indian taxpayer is paying through the nose for the precarious privilege of claiming Kashmir as part of India on the basis of all the giving on India's side and all the taking on Kashmir's side.'[47]

That material interests should supersede ideological ones was an argument that came easily to a former Marxist (which Spratt was). It was not, however, an argument likely to win many adherents in the India of the 1950s.