

CHAPTER – 6

*ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF
NATIONAL CONFERENCE: ON THE
ERA OF POST INDEPENDENCE
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The period of 22 years from the arrest of S. M. Abdullah in 1953 to Indira-Abdullah accord in 1975 was a crucial phase in the history of National Conference as well as in the history of Kashmir. It was during this period that State was integrated firmly into the Indian Federation and various means and methods were used to achieve this goal. The dismissal of S. M. Abdullah and swearing of G. M. Bakshi as Prime Minister, erosion of State autonomy and even abolition of posts of Sadr-e-Riyasat and Prime Minister and use of force to crush dissidence marked this phase but at same time, the resistance by determined cadre of National Conference was shown in form of Plebiscite Front which was formed under the leadership of Mirza Afzal Beg. Though S. M. Abdullah and Plebiscite Front leadership were fighting for right of self-determination under U.N auspices but the crushing defeat of Pakistan in 1971 war led to change in their attitude and finally culminated in Indira-Sheikh accord in 1975. In this chapter, we will discuss the events during this period that had major impact on National Conference as well as strategies adopted by loyalists of S. M. Abdullah to continue their struggle against Centre-sponsored Governments.

4.1 Bakshi Regime and National Conference:

On 9 August 1953, S. M. Abdullah was dismissed from power and was deposed and arrested under Public Security Act and Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of the State was sworn as Prime Minister. In July 1953 when anti-Abdullah propaganda was on peak in Indian Press, Bakshi took the fullest advantage of it to make himself popular among the agitated Hindus and did not even hesitate to come to terms with the Hindu communalists and reactionaries¹ and told them that what S. M. Abdullah was reluctant to do, he would accomplish it without any hesitation. On July 29, 1953 in a public meeting at Kulgam, Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi declared:

“Since Kashmir voluntarily decided to become part of India, nothing has happened to alter our faith in the correctness of our decision. Large majority of our people continue to stand by that decision and I have no doubt that they will defend the

decision against any attacks that emanate from any quarter within or without the State.”²

Although S. M. Abdullah was advised by his close associates like Mirza Afzal Beig and Ashai to reshuffle the Cabinet and replace G. M. Bakshi, S.L.Saraf and D.P.Dhar but he chose to delay the action³. These circumstances finally led to dismissal of Sheikh Government and his arrest.

After assuming power, Bakshi used every method and weapon to gain public support and strengthen his position and strove to create a power structure conducive to his continuance and concentrated in himself the leadership of the Cabinet, legislature and party. He used money as well as offered suitable posts to win over leaders and those who rejected both money and posts were imprisoned⁴. He tried to dismantle the leadership of National Conference and those leaders who did not agree to side with him were imprisoned. Several party leaders⁵ and hundreds of workers were arrested and incarcerated. Demonstrations were held in every nook and corner of the Valley. The Government unleashed a wave of terror and demonstrators were fired by police at several places⁶. The Bakshi Government was run almost in conformity with the Centre’s decision⁷. He rebuilt the Cadre of National Conference with his loyal supporters and raised a private militia known as the” Peace Brigade”⁸ which was used to suppress rivals. This situation has been described in following words:

“Sheikh’s arrest was followed by the oppressive regime of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad between 1953 and 1963 during which all protest and dissension was put down by a strong hand, erstwhile National Conference cadres were put behind bars (those on the outside transformed themselves into the “Plebiscite Front” functioning underground for the most part) and the body politic was sought to be corrupted from the remotest village Panchayat halqa to the corridors of power in Srinagar.”⁹

Similar appraisal of the situation has been given by Mir Qasim who writes:

“The common man under Bakshi’s tyrannical rule was denied even basic civil liberties. Political dissent was sought to be crushed ruthlessly. The Government agents forced hot potatoes into the mouth of opponents, put heavy stones on their chest and branded them with red hot iron. The peace Brigade, which Bakshi Sahib

had set up, initially consisted of political workers, but later bad characters infiltrated into it, especially in Srinagar. They were free to harass the people and humiliate the women folk.”¹⁰

Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi used every method to break the organizational structure of erstwhile National Conference and even did not hesitate to use force to calm down dissidence and tried at all levels to dismantle, weaken and disorganize the Plebiscite Front which consisted of National Conference workers. During his regime, he managed to create a pro-Bakshi lobby in New Delhi comprising Congress leaders and influential members of Parliament who worked for Bakshi in New Delhi¹¹. He also patronized a special breed of bureaucrats and officers who were willing to toe his line to tighten his grip on the political and administrative machinery in the State¹². He also succeeded in keeping alive anti-Indian campaign in the State as he thought that existence of such elements was necessary otherwise New Delhi would do anything it liked¹³.

Though Bakshi was not a highly educated man, he had the political acumen and sagacity which is rarely found in politicians. It was due to his hard work, intelligence and acumen that he raised to the highest seat of power and managed to remain there for ten years with great confidence. He had the political skill to exploit the situation created by dismissal and arrest of S. M. Abdullah to secure large funds for economic development¹⁴. Bakshi did not confine himself to use of force but also focused on economic development to win support of people.

To improve educational scenario of the State, he established an engineering college, medical colleges, two agricultural colleges, two polytechnic colleges and host of such institutions¹⁵. Education was made free up to M.A and compulsory up to primary classes¹⁶. Primary schools were opened within the distance of two to three miles each and Middle or High Schools were opened within five miles. Seats for State students were secured in the technical colleges and universities all over India and State used to officially sponsor their education.

To improve the road communication in the State, Jawahar tunnel was constructed at Banihal Pass which connected Kashmir Valley with rest of country while important towns were linked by metalled roads and city roads were widened. Some heavy

industries were established particularly the cement factory at Wuyan, Srinagar. In this period, Bakshi Stadium, Tagore Hall and Nehru Park were also constructed.

In order to serve basic needs of common people, the Bakshi Government introduced permanent ration system in the towns. Rice and other food stuffs were imported and sold at subsidized rates. The number of hospitals and dispensaries were raised by about three times their number a decade ago. Several new departments such as the Social Welfare and Block development were formed. Salaries of all Government servants were substantially raised¹⁷. Wages of labourers and work-charge Government employees were also raised. These steps resulted in economic development and per capita income which was 188 rupees in 1950-51 went up to 234 rupees in 1958-59¹⁸. All these developmental works and concessions to a large extent mobilized public support in favour of Bakshi regime but majority of people were emotionally attached to S. M. Abdullah and Plebiscite Front.

4.2 Plebiscite Front:

As G. M. Bakshi deprived workers and colleagues who were loyal to S. M. Abdullah from membership of National Conference, so they thought of forming a new forum. When Mohammad Afzal Beg was released from jail, he decided to set up an underground war council for conducting political activities and mobilizing people¹⁹. Beg approached Socialistic Democratic Front, which was formed by a group of four dissident National Conference members of the State Constituent Assembly²⁰. He was elected its leader and the number of members under his leadership rose up to nine²¹. These members decided to make a new forum in order to mobilize people for the future struggle. He thought to create a separate regional party to counter the representative character of the Constituent Assembly, which ratified the accession of the State with India²². This all led to foundation of The All Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front which was laid by him on 10 August, 1955²³. Mirza Afzal Beg was elected the President of the Plebiscite Front in a special session in which large number of people participated and aims and objectives of Plebiscite Front were explained²⁴. The Front aimed to end era of turmoil and uncertainty in the State and to fight for right of self-determination of people of State under auspices of United Nations. It further aimed to bring communal harmony among different religious groups and to educate people about the objectives of the Front and mobilize masses for it. A written

constitution comprising of 26 Articles was adopted by Plebiscite Front which was subsequently amended in 1965. The basic membership of the Front was open to every citizen of the state irrespective of caste, creed and religion provided he believed State's accession to India was temporary and provisional as it had to be determined by the people through Plebiscite²⁵. The membership was not allowed for Government and semi-government employees while a member of political party had to resign from his parent party to become a member of Plebiscite Front and had to remain an ordinary member of Front for at least three years²⁶. Such provisions were made to safeguard party against infiltration and dominance of undesirable persons and elements having vested interests²⁷.

The organizational structure of Plebiscite Front started from grass root level and consisted of Mohalla or Village committees whose members were directly elected from these areas. Halqa committee confined to Mohalla, Patwari Halqa came next and its members were indirectly elected by all elected members of all the Mohallas and Villages within the Halqa²⁸. The members and office bearers of the Halqa committee were empowered to elect the delegates who then elected the Tehsil President, District and Provisional committees²⁹. The Front had one General Council whose members were elected delegates, one from each tehsil of State³⁰. The plebiscite Front had one President, two Vice Presidents, one General Secretary, two Secretaries, a Treasurer and an Accountant³¹ and finances were under control of the Executive Committee³².

The Plebiscite Front held its convention at Anantnag on September 10, 1955 and at Sopore on October 6, 1955 in which thousands of people participated. Mirza Afzal Beg reiterated that:

*"The Plebiscite Front is sure that world opinion can not be mislead for long. Those people who love freedom and democracy and struggle for human rights will stand by us and give moral support to forty hundred thousand people of Kashmir in the attainment of their objectives. The only crime of Kashmiris is that they demand the right to express their opinion."*³³

The Plebiscite Front worked on different fronts to mobilize the masses. It organized processions and public meetings in which it demanded withdrawal of Indian army from the State and holding of plebiscite under the auspices of United Nations

Organization³⁴. The Front made the people of Kashmir conscious of right of plebiscite through publication of posters, pasting of posters on walls and distribution of hand bills. The plebiscite Front took recourse to agitational politics from its beginning and a complete 18 days strike was observed by traders, students and transport workers against the Sheikh's arrest. The demonstration of women marked a special feature of the Plebiscite Front³⁵. The common slogans of the Front were "Ye Mulk Hamara Hai, Is Ka Faisla Ham Karein Gay" (*This country is ours, its future will be decided by us*); "Rai Shumari Forun Karoa" (*Hold Plebiscite immediately*). The Front also asserted the propaganda that State has done considerable economic development in Bakshi's rule was false and farce. The Front sent memorandums, letters and telegrams to international and regional forums making them aware about Kashmir problem and seeking their support in persuading Indian Government to agree to a plebiscite in Kashmir³⁶. In January 1958, the Front submitted a memorandum to Frank Graham, the special representative for Kashmir, on his visit to Indian subcontinent urging him to see that the UN Security Council's resolution on Kashmir for holding a plebiscite was implemented without any delay. Another memorandum was submitted to the President of U.S.A on his visit to India in 1959³⁷. The Front submitted a memorandum to the Common Wealth Prime Minister's Conference which was held in London in 1962. Similar appeals were made to UN Secretary General as well as Muslim countries to use their efforts so that Kashmir issue is solved in a peaceful manner³⁸.

The State Government used every method to suppress the Plebiscite movement. Peace Brigade of G. M. Bakshi along with workers of National Conference indulged in acts of hooliganism and lawlessness, such as arson, destruction of crops and laying siege to the houses of the Plebiscite workers³⁹. Within one year from 1955 to 1956, four of its Presidents were arrested and kept without trial⁴⁰. The Plebiscite Front had full support and blessing of S. M. Abdullah who was in prison. When Sheikh Abdullah was released in 1958, he gave his full support to the Front which increased its popularity among the masses. On April 30, 1958, S. M. Abdullah was rearrested as he made a number of fiery speeches against Bakshi Government as well as against Indian Government⁴¹ and was tried in Kashmir Conspiracy case⁴² along with Mirza Afzal Beg and 23 other persons. Mirza Afzal Beig was accused that he with Begum Abdullah were in contact with Pakistan which was assured that if Pakistan rendered

them aid, they would be able to overthrow the Bakshi Government and secure annexation of Kashmir with Pakistan⁴³. The front was accused of receiving financial aid from Pakistan, a large part through Begum Abdullah who used to pass it to various members of the Front⁴⁴. On this basis, a complaint was filed against 25 persons in court of Special Magistrate, Jammu on May 21, 1958⁴⁵. The prosecution opened its case in April, 1959 and closed it on 17th June, 1960 and in January 1962, the Special Magistrate gave orders of punishment to all accused under section 121-A with death or transportation for life⁴⁶. The Government was forced to withdraw this case in April, 1964 after the Holy Relic crisis in the State.

The Holy Relic was stolen from Hazratbal Shrine during night of December 26-27, 1963 and this event had a major effect on political atmosphere of the State. It appeared as if the volcano, which had been silenced by force, repression, tyranny and excesses, had erupted suddenly⁴⁷. The news about the loss of the Moe-e-Muqadas travelled like wild fire throughout the snow bounded Kashmir Valley. Large crowds started collecting at the mosque from early morning and by the afternoon, thousands of people were marching through the streets of Srinagar, protesting against the theft, demanding its immediate restoration and asking the Government to punish the perpetrators of the crime⁴⁸. The theft led to major political development in the State and provided Muslims with a rallying point against Central Government⁴⁹ and resulted in formation of common platform by bringing varying groups together. A Holy Relic Action Committee⁵⁰ under the Preisdentship of Molvi Farooq was formed by Muslim religious groups and separatist Political Parties. The Action Committee comprised of all separatist political groups namely Plebiscite Front, Peoples Conference and Jammat-i-islami etc. During days of Holy Relic agitation, the Action Committee ruled the Valley and regulated hours of daily business, periods when groceries and vegetable shops could be opened for the convenience of the people and timing and routes of processions etc⁵¹.

On 30th December 1963, the Holy Relic Committee took up demand for release of S. M. Abdullah⁵², holding of Plebiscite⁵³ and appointment of a Commission of inquiry consisting of Pakistan and other Muslim Countries to inquire into the theft of Holy Relic⁵⁴. The Holy Relic Committee was converted into Action Committee after the recovery of Holy Relic on 4th January, 1964⁵⁵ and in March 1965, The Action

Committee passed a resolution stating that it would strive to achieve the objective of Self-determination⁵⁶. Realizing that it would be difficult to manage the emerging political situation in State without involvement of S. M. Abdullah, the Centre released Sheikh and his colleagues and withdrew the conspiracy case against them⁵⁷. Sheikh held negotiations with Pandit Nehru at New Delhi but sudden death of Nehru on May 27, 1964 was a major setback to these efforts as future leadership at New Delhi was not prepared to continue these talks⁵⁸, so leadership of Plebiscite Front revitalized their party and refused to recognize Action Committee an independent platform for the achievement of the right of self-determination in Kashmir⁵⁹. This resulted in division of Action Committee and formation of Awami Action Committee by Molvi Farooq in June 1964. In December 1964, S. M. Abdullah and Molvi Farooq arrived at compromise and pledged to work together for attaining right of self-determination for the people of Kashmir⁶⁰.

The first annual convention of All Jammu and Kashmir plebiscite Front was held at Sopore on 14th November, 1964. In this convention, it was decided that Front should have written constitution. The convention passed many resolutions which focused on important issues like restoration of economic planning, scrapping of illegal laws and alteration of demography in state etc. The convention further reiterated its determination to achieve the objective of right of self-determination⁶¹. On 26 January, 1965, the ruling National Conference was transformed into Congress Party⁶² which was opposed both by Awami Action Committee and Plebiscite Front and a joint call of strike was given by them on 15 January, 1965. On the same day, S. M. Abdullah announced launching of social boycott movement against Congress party members at public meeting at Hazratbal⁶³. S. M. Abdullah also called for ostracisation of Congress leaders, the worst form being refusal to Congress supporters to bury their dead in Muslim graveyards⁶⁴. This boycott movement resulted in clashes between supporters of Congress party and Plebiscite Front but at the same time mobilized people in favour of Plebiscite movement. S. M. Abdullah accompanied by his wife and Afzal Beg left for Haj on February 5, 1965⁶⁵ and visited Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France and Algeria⁶⁶ and highlighted Kashmir issue at international level and tried to mobilize support for their demand of self-determination. When they returned to New Delhi on 8th of May 1965, they were arrested⁶⁷ and were labeled as anti-nationalists and secessionists⁶⁸. This resulted in agitation throughout Valley against Indian

Government⁶⁹. Sheikh was released on 2nd January 1968 and all restrictions were revoked⁷⁰. After his release, he on one hand talked about the right of self-determination and on other hand showed flexibility by having talks with the Central leadership⁷¹.

In March 1969, the working committee of Plebiscite Front decided to participate in forthcoming Panchayat and Assembly elections⁷² but the Front was denied participation in the parliamentary and assembly polls as Central Government suspected that it would wreck the constitution from within⁷³ and on 12 January 1971, Plebiscite Front was declared an unlawful organization by Central Government. The top leadership of Plebiscite Front was either exiled from the State or arrested. When in 1971, the Plebiscite Front was banned, a militant organization ALFATAH came to light and a spate of Bank dacoits took place in 1971. An Indian Airlines plane was hijacked on 30 January 1971 and hijackers demanded release of Alfatah Cadres which were lodged in Indian jails. This hijacking was the beginning of militancy in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

The defeat of Pakistan in 1971 Indo-Pak war and creation of Bangladesh resulted in demoralization of Plebiscite Front leaders and its workers⁷⁴. This left no option for Plebiscite Front but to adopt policy of reconciliation with New Delhi⁷⁵. The changing political scenario forced Mirza Afzal Beg, the architect of Plebiscite Front to declare at Press Conference in New Delhi on February 5, 1972:

*"We are prepared to hold talks with Government of India on the basis of internal autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir. We want durable links between Kashmir and India and the question of Kashmir's accession to India had become now irrelevant for us. I wish to make it clear that we have supported all aspects of the 1947 instrument of accession and we are prepared to hold talks any time for making this accession assured and permanent."*⁷⁶

This change of stand on Kashmir problem was the starting point of dialogue between S. M. Abdullah and Central Government led by Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Several meetings were held between representatives of the Government of India and S. M. Abdullah which resulted in agreement between the two parties which was called "Kashmir Accord" and was announced on February 24, 1975⁷⁷. The Kashmir Accord

was presented in the Indian Parliament which approved it⁷⁸. The accord resulted in the dismantling of Plebiscite Front and issue of self-determination was relegated to background. Thus on one hand it can be said that Plebiscite Front deviated from its aims and objectives but at the same time, it is also true that changing political scenario forced Plebiscite leadership to enter into an agreement with Central leadership.

4.3 Erosion of State Autonomy:

After dismissal of S. M. Abdullah Government, Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi was sworn as Prime Minister of State and he imprisoned all leaders of National Conference who were loyal to S. M. Abdullah and reshuffled various committees of National Conference. To win hearts of people, he partially restored free trade, eased food rations, abolished import duties on salt, raised Government wages and initiated reforms in education⁷⁹. He took drastic steps towards Kashmir's integration with India. By doing this, he on one side tried to get support from Central Government and on other hand increased his grip over Government of State. On 6 February 1954, The Constituent Assembly dominated by supporters of Bakshi ratified State's accession to India. In April 1954, the longstanding custom barrier between the two areas was eliminated. Kashmir's new position as part of the Indian Union was endorsed in an order issued by the President of India on May 4, observing the legalities of article 370. A State constitution was drafted and adopted on November 10, 1956. The constitution adopted on November, 1956 included new measures to strengthen ties between Central Government and State. These measures included application of fundamental rights, extension of Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India, extension of the authority of the Auditor General of India, approval by the Planning Commission, transfer of services to the Union list, financial allocation from the centre and abolition of the custom barrier. On 26 January 1960, a Presidential order promulgating the extension of the Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and Election Commission over the State came into effect. On 13 October 1963, Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi sent a memorandum to Dr. Karan Singh in which he demanded that designation of head of State and that of head of the Government shall be changed to Governor and Chief Minister respectively.

After the accession of the Jammu and Kashmir with India, the elections were held but they were manipulated at the behest of Central Government and ruling parties entirely

rigged these elections in their favour so that they could manage the political situation in the State. They always intimidated opposition parties and their leaders and workers⁸⁰. It is a fact that Kashmir is the only State in India where the fairness of elections has been questioned seriously. It is alleged that the official machinery was used for the advantage of ruling parties⁸¹. The Central Government used its influence to support the parties and candidates who were in favour of complete integration of State with India. The first election of the Legislative Assembly was held on October 15, 1951 in which ruling National Conference won all the 75 seats, out of which 73 were won unopposed as opposition in most cases was either forced to withdraw or their forms were rejected on one or other pretext⁸². Josef Korbel writes that 43 candidates were elected unopposed one week before the elections and two independent candidates withdrew under pressure later. Similarly Praja Parishad accused the Government of illegal practices and official interference and announced boycott of elections three days before the elections.

The elections of 1957 repeated the same history and National Conference led by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad won 68 out of 75 seats in which 43 seats were won unopposed⁸³. The parties like Plebiscite Front and Democratic National Conference boycotted the elections on grounds of partiality and use of official machinery by State⁸⁴ while opposition parties claimed that these elections were rigged and demanded fresh elections. The same strategy was adopted in 1962 elections and from the beginning the elections were engineered to record an overwhelming victory for National Conference which managed to win 70 seats out of total seventy five⁸⁵. To make opposition weak, public meetings and processions were banned in the Valley. The opposition candidates and their supporters were intimidated throughout State. The total nomination papers were 293 out of which 57 were rejected and 63 candidates withdrew from elections due to intimidation⁸⁶. Thus in elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962 which were held under State Government, the official machinery was used to favour candidates of ruling party.

In 1963, the Congress lost three important Parliamentary by-elections including a "prestige" contest in which a Union Minister was defeated. So AICC (All India Congress Committee) decided under the Kamraj Plan that some Congress Union Ministers and State Chief Ministers should resign and devote all their time in party

work⁸⁷. G. M. Bakshi was persuaded to offer just a token resignation by Nehru and although his close associates advised him not to resign, he left to New Delhi along with his resignation letter. His resignation was accepted, thus he was trapped in a clever ploy on part of Nehru to get rid of powerful but corrupt leader⁸⁸. After his exit, Khawaja Shams-ud-din was appointed Prime Minister on 12 October, 1963, who was replaced by Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq on 29 February, 1964. These two leaders Shams-ud-din and Sadiq followed the suit and took steps towards complete merger of State with India. In 1964-1965, Article 356 and 357 were extended to the State of Jammu and Kashmir which empowered Central Government to dismiss elected Government of the State and assume its legislative functions. Article 246 under which Central Government can legislate even in State list was also made applicable to the State. The designation of Sadr-i-Riyasat and Prime Minister were changed to Governor and Chief Minister respectively. Thus autonomy of State was eroded gradually and steps were taken to achieve complete integration of State with India.

In 1965, the ruling National Conference led by Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq transformed itself into a State unit of the Indian National Congress⁸⁹ which paved way for further integration of State into India and the designation of Sadr-i-Riyasat and Prime Minister were changed to Governor and Chief Minister respectively. Thus Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq was first Chief Minister of the State which further eroded State's autonomy. In 1967, the elections for the Legislative Assembly were conducted by Union Election Commission for the first time but this time ruling party fought elections as a state unit of Indian National Congress and won 61 out of 75 seats, out of which 22 were uncontested. National Conference contested in 37 seats but won only 8 seats under leadership of Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi. In these elections, the M.L.As were called "Khaliq made" as before the declaration from the Election Commission for the date of filling of nominations, Sadiq had taken Khaliq, then Deputy commissioner of Anantnag, into confidence and all the returning officers were selected on his advice⁹⁰. P.L.Kaul writes that when majority group of Assembly members met Mrs. Indira Gandhi at her residence to demand for dismissal of Sadiq Government, she replied:

*"You have no locus standi to speak for people because you are not elected representatives of the people. The officials of State Government and the Election Commission had to commit countless irregularities to get you elected. "*⁹¹

The elections for State Legislative Assembly were held for fifth time in March 1972. Several provincial parties like Jamat-e-Islami, Awami Action Committee and persons associated with Plebiscite Front and Shamem Ahmad's newly formed People's Party⁹² participated in these elections. The number of unopposed candidates came down heavily and was reduced to only five candidates⁹³. However, the credibility of the election remained controversial as Chief Minister Mir Qasim detained his opposite candidate before filling of his nomination papers. The nomination papers of Plebiscite Front activists were rejected as they were described anti-national⁹⁴. Awami Action Committee Chief Mirwaiz Moulvi Muhammad Farooq also decided to boycott the polls saying that the elections would not be fair and free due to arrest of number of people in Kashmir. The ruling Congress won fifty eight seats out of seventy five while for the first time, National Conference did not participate in the elections. Jamat-e-Islami secured five seats while independents got nine seats being second in the list.

Thus from time of accession, the Central Government tried to manage the political scenario of State so that integration of State with India could be achieved and whosoever tried to become a hurdle in this, he was either imprisoned or dislodged from power. When S. M. Abdullah tried to fight for autonomy of State, he was imprisoned and Bakshi was sworn as Prime Minister who ratified the accession through Constituent Assembly. He also took several measures to enforce Central laws in the State. This trend was followed by other Prime Ministers and Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq finally converted National Conference into State unit of Congress and abolished even titles of Prime Minister and Sadr-i-Riyasat. Thus the State autonomy was eroded and measures were taken to fully integrate State with India.

4.4 Indo-Pak Wars and National Conference:

The wars between India and Pakistan on issue of Jammu and Kashmir were basically fought as both the parties claimed that State should belong to them. Pakistan insisted that as State is a Muslim majority State so it should be part of Pakistan as division of

country was based on religious identity while India defended accession of State with India by saying that the request had come only from Maharaja and was supported by S.M.Abdullah on behalf of people of Kashmir. Tribal raiders invaded State in October, 1947 which forced Maharaja to flee Valley but S. M. Abdullah and his party mobilized people not only against the raiders but also for communal harmony and assured Hindus and Sikhs that as long as he was alive, their life and honour would be safe. After dismissal of Sheikh Government by Central Government due to his insistence on retaining autonomy of State, the Plebiscite Front was formed by workers and leaders loyal to S. M. Abdullah. The State Government tried leaders of Plebiscite Front in Kashmir Conspiracy case⁹⁵ and Mirza Afzal Beg was accused that he with Begum Abdullah were in contact with the Pakistan and were receiving aid from them to overthrow Bakshi Government and to secure annexation of State to Pakistan⁹⁶. This case was withdrawn by Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq in 1964 only after Holy Relic crisis. When S. M. Abdullah returned from Haj and his visit of some countries where he raised issue of Kashmir and talked about self-determination, he was arrested along with Begum Abdullah and Afzal Beg at Palam airport in Delhi. This news spread like fire in Valley and resulted in processions and demonstrations throughout Valley⁹⁷. At the same time, hardline faction of Plebiscite Front was in contact with the Pakistani agencies which felt that time was ideal for rebellion in Valley. In August 1965, about five thousand armed infiltrators were sent to Kashmir by Pakistan⁹⁸. The infiltrators had decided to join demonstrations organized by Action Committee on August 9, 1965 and convert them into violent rebellion⁹⁹ but this plan leaked and Indian army eliminated these infiltrators¹⁰⁰. Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, then President of Plebiscite Front resigned and alleged that Molvi Farooq and Maulana Massodi betrayed people by not allowing the procession to be taken out on the fixed day and thus lost a golden opportunity of liberating Kashmir¹⁰¹. Thus it is evident that Plebiscite Front actively supported Pakistan in 1965 war.

In 1971 war, the shameful surrender of Eastern command of Pakistan armed forces and creation of Bangladesh had a major effect on political scenario in State. S. M. Abdullah and leadership of Plebiscite Front was demoralized by this defeat and they felt that in changing scenario, there was no benefit in sticking to demand of self-determination as Pakistan had been defeated badly in 1971 war and was not in a position to help Kashmiris to achieve their right of self-determination. The Plebiscite

Front leadership came to conclusion that only option that was available to them was to get maximum autonomy from Government of India. This led to start of negotiations between representatives of Central Government and S. M. Abdullah in 1972 which extended up to almost three years and culminated in signing of Kashmir Accord in 1975.

4.5 S. M. Abdullah during 1953-1975 and Indra-Sheikh Accord:

In July 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah entered into an agreement on Centre-State relations popularly known as "Delhi Agreement" which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir but the deal was strongly opposed by Praja Party in Jammu province. This resulted in feeling of unhappiness in majority of Kashmiri Muslims¹⁰² and S. M. Abdullah expressed his doubts over the accession to India¹⁰³. Thus loyalty of S. M. Abdullah became doubtful and he was deposed and arrested. The supporters and leaders loyal to S. M. Abdullah formed plebiscite front to fight for rights of people and to mobilize people against Bakshi Government. When Sheikh Abdullah was released in 1958, he gave his full support to the Plebiscite Front and stated, "As a matter of policy, I cannot become a member of Plebiscite Front, but I will give this organization my whole hearted support"¹⁰⁴. In 1958, in a long statement, S. M. Abdullah advocated right of self-determination and emphasized that until the future of Kashmir is decided, the future of the State would be protected against uncertainty, economic degradation etc. He also emphasized that future relations of the State will be determined by the people of the State and self-determination under the auspices of United Nations was the only way to permit people to take such decision. In his statement, he further added that as long as the schism between India and Pakistan existed, not only Asia would be unstable but it would be even responsible for the annihilation of the State¹⁰⁵.

S. M. Abdullah was rearrested on April 30, 1958¹⁰⁶ and was tried in Kashmir conspiracy case¹⁰⁷ which was based on the War Council. The War Council was accused that it wanted to overthrow State Government¹⁰⁸ and issues pamphlets, slogans and wall writings in order to create anti-India sentiments among the people¹⁰⁹. Begum Abdullah was accused that she used to receive financial aid from Pakistan and used to pass it to various members of the Front^{110, 111}. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was included in the chargesheet through a supplementary complaint filed on October

23, 1958¹¹². Begum Abdullah's name was not included in the Conspiracy Case as Bakshi thought that dragging Begum Abdullah who was known as "Mader-e-Maharban" to the courts would give a wrong message in Muslim majority Valley¹¹³. On this basis, a complaint was filed against 25 persons in court of Special Magistrate, Jammu on May 21, 1958¹¹⁴. The Special Magistrate gave orders of punishment to all accused under section 121-A with death or transportation for life¹¹⁵. The *Observer*, London dated 16 September captioned its correspondent, O'Donovan's dispatch as "Sheikh on trial but India in the Dock"¹¹⁶. The Government was forced to withdraw this case after the Holy Relic crisis in the State. On 30th December 1963, the Holy Relic Committee took up demand for release of S. M. Abdullah¹¹⁷ along with other demands, so Centre released Sheikh and his colleagues and withdrew the conspiracy case against them on 5 April, 1964¹¹⁸ and announcement to this effect was made by Prime Minister of State, Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. The lingering of trial was itself proof that the case rested on no credible evidence¹¹⁹. This step of Centre was based on the political expediency, as it found that it could not in any other way cope with the political challenge of S. M. Abdullah¹²⁰. Also Sheikh's long incarceration having brought disrepute to the Indian democracy had convinced Nehru that no political settlement in the Valley could be thought of without bringing the Sheikh into the administrative set-up of the State¹²¹. On his release from Jail, he was given warm welcome everywhere.

After his release from jail, S. M. Abdullah was invited by Prime Minister of India, Pandit Nehru for talks on Kashmir issue so Sheikh along with Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg left for Delhi on April 29, 1964¹²². The talks continued for several days¹²³. He also received invitation from Pakistan and was given hero's reception in Pakistan¹²⁴. One important thing regarding his Pakistan visit was that this visit had full support and blessing of Pandit Nehru¹²⁵ but he had to cut short his visit due to death of Nehru on May 27, 1964¹²⁶. After Nehru's death, Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister of India but Sheikh felt dismayed after he had talks with Shastri on issue of Kashmir as he realized that new leadership was not willing to continue efforts which Pandit Nehru had made for settlement of Kashmir issue¹²⁷ and was stuck to the policy of complete constitutional and political merger of State with India¹²⁸. So Sheikh along with leaders of Plebiscite Front made efforts to revitalize the party and to counter the Action Committee which had captured the political platform during and

after Holy Relic Movement¹²⁹. This resulted in division of Action Committee and formation of Awami Action Committee by Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq^{130, 131}. However, in December 1964, there was a patch up between S. M. Abdullah and Molvi Farooq.

On 26 January, 1965, the ruling National Conference was transformed to State unit of Congress to accomplish the political integration of State with rest of India¹³². This resulted in a wave of anger throughout the Valley and both Plebiscite Front and Awami Action Committee gave a joint call to observe protest on 15 January, 1965 against the unconstitutional and undemocratic measures adopted by Centre to grab Kashmir completely. S. M. Abdullah opposed this vehemently and on the same day, announced launching of social boycott movement against Congress party members at a public meeting at Hazratbal¹³³. Sheikh called upon people not only to boycott the membership campaign launched by Congress party but also those members of National Conference who do not resign from State legislature¹³⁴. The Sheikh also warned that any Muslim who became a member of Congress Party would dig his own grave¹³⁵. S. M. Abdullah also called for ostracisation of Congress leaders, the worst form being refusal to Congress supporters to bury their dead in Muslim graveyards¹³⁶.

On February 5, 1965, S. M. Abdullah accompanied by his wife and Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg left for Haj and a visit of few countries¹³⁷. He highlighted Kashmir issue at international level and tried to mobilize World community to support their demand of self-determination¹³⁸. They visited Saudi Arabia, Algeria, France and Egypt¹³⁹. In Algeria, they met the visiting Chinese Premier, Chou-En-Lai and exchanged views on Kashmir¹⁴⁰. Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahdur Shastri was asked in Parliament that why Sheikh was given the opportunity to visit foreign countries to plan with enemies of India¹⁴¹. So Sheikh along with Begum Abdullah and Afzal beg were arrested on their arrival in India on May 8, 1965. Sheikh Abdullah was flown to Otacamund, a small hill station in South India to be interned there while Begum Abdullah was interned in Delhi and was neither allowed to meet her husband nor permitted to proceed to Kashmir¹⁴². This step resulted in agitations and strikes throughout Valley. Sheikh and his associates were labeled as secessionists and anti-national¹⁴³.

In 1965, there was clash between Indian army and Pakistani infiltrators in Valley. Sheikh believed that Pakistan would not have resorted to infiltration, if Indian Government had not closed door for negotiations¹⁴⁴.

Sheikh was released on 2nd January 1968 and all restrictions were revoked¹⁴⁵. Sheikh Abdullah stated that he still stood by his stand that there could be no peace in the sub-continent without the settlement of Kashmir issue and this could be solved by an agreement between India, Pakistan and people of Kashmir¹⁴⁶. Before Indo-Pak war of 1965, Sheikh was adamant on demand of plebiscite¹⁴⁷ but after the war, he started rethinking on entire issue and soon after his release, he initiated the process of sponsoring people's conventions for knowing the views of diverse groups and people to find out lasting solution to Kashmir issue¹⁴⁸. On 10th October, 1968, S. M. Abdullah organized the first session of Jammu and Kashmir People's Convention¹⁴⁹ which was inaugurated by Jayaprakash Narayan at Mujahid Manzil¹⁵⁰ and was attended by more than 260 delegates¹⁵¹. Mr. Narayan stressed that no Government in India can accept a solution that places Kashmir outside the Union of India¹⁵². Next day, he announced at a public meeting at Hazuribagh that demand for plebiscite had become obsolete and Kashmiri leaders should search for a new path¹⁵³. However, this led to demonstration against him and order was restored only when S. M. Abdullah declared that no power in the world could deprive people of Kashmir of their basic rights. Thus on one hand Sheikh talked about right of self-determination and on other hand showed flexibility by having talks with the Central leadership¹⁵⁴.

S. M. Abdullah strongly criticized the statement of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India that Plebiscite Front will not be allowed to participate in forthcoming Assembly and Parliament elections which she had made during her visit to Jammu in December 1970¹⁵⁵. Sheikh reciprocated by challenging the validity of accession of the State to India and even disputed his own Indian citizenship. In response to this, Centre declared Plebiscite Front an illegal organization and both Sheikh and Afzal Beg were declared as anti nationals and were exiled from the State¹⁵⁶. Begum Abdullah was also externed from the State in February 1972.

Creation of Bangladesh and defeat of Pakistan in 1971 had major impact on thought of S. M. Abdullah and his future strategy. S. M. Abdullah was demoralized by this defeat and he felt that in changing scenario, there was no benefit in sticking to

demand of self-determination as Pakistan had been defeated badly in 1971 war and was not in a position to help Kashmiris to achieve their right of self-determination. Sheikh Abdullah realized that the regional balance of power had swung decisively in favour of India leaving him no alternative but to adopt a policy of reconciliation with New Delhi¹⁵⁷. It was only after India's victory over Pakistan and latter's split in December 1971 war and signing of Shimla agreement that the Central Government began to negotiate with S. M. Abdullah and his party men. This change of thought as well as change in regional balance of power and intention to return to power made S. M. Abdullah to give up demand for self-determination. So he began to demand for autonomy for the State within Indian union. This change in his stand is reflected in his interview to correspondent of London Times on 10 March 1972 when he stated:

*“Our dispute with the Indian Government was not on accession but with regard to the quantum of internal autonomy. Nobody should forget that we were the people who brought Kashmir to India who otherwise could have never become part of India.”*¹⁵⁸

After prolonged talks which extended up to three years, an agreement was signed between G.Parthasarthy and Mirza Afzal Beg, representatives of then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah respectively on 13 November, 1974. This Accord is called “Kashmir Accord” and included six points. According to this accord, State of Jammu and Kashmir was to remain part of India and was to be governed by Article 370 of the Constitution of India continuously. This was possible after the restoration of pre-1953 autonomy of Kashmir about which Government made no mention but merely gave State Government the authority to review laws on Concurrent list extended to Jammu and Kashmir after 1953, and decide which of those might need amendment or repeal. The Kashmir Accord paved the way for resumption of power by S. M. Abdullah and Sayeed Mir Qasim of Congress, then Chief Minister of State voluntarily resigned in favour of S. M. Abdullah who assumed charge as Chief Minister on February 25, 1975. After assuming power, S. M. Abdullah dissolved the Plebiscite Front on July 5, 1975 and merged it into newly revived National Conference¹⁵⁹.

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