

CHAPTER - 8

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Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir popularly referred to as *Kashmir conflict* is complex and multi-dimensional and has historical, political, economic, religious and international dimensions.

The Kashmir conflict has emerged, persisted and flared-up due to various factors and scholars have broadly categorized these factors into two categories – exogenous and endogenous. Main exogenous sources of Kashmir conflict include unfriendly relations between India and Pakistan, ineffective role of United Nations Organization as well as Islamic linkage of Kashmir with outside world and the emergence of Islamic resurgence in the last three decades. The endogenous factors which appear to be responsible for the emergence and persistence of the conflict are related with politics in Kashmir since independence, ethnic differences, rampant corruption, unemployment and economic backwardness of people in the State.

Origin of Kashmir conflict can be traced back to the freedom of India from the British rule as well as the way in which India was partitioned. The source of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir lies in the nature of freedom struggles and the processes of nation building in both countries India and Pakistan. For Indian nationalists such as Nehru, the integration of Kashmir into India was critical because it would demonstrate that all faiths could live under the aegis of a secular State. By the same token, Pakistani nationalists such as Jinnah saw the inclusion of Kashmir into Pakistan as equally critical as a homeland for south Asian Muslims. The way in which India was partitioned by British appears to be more responsible for the creation of Kashmir conflict. Every princely State was given the right, either to go with India or with Pakistan and this was to be decided by people's will or referendum. Such kind of referendum could not take place in Jammu & Kashmir as hasty process of partition could not give enough time to the emergent States to make reasonable decisions for the effective control of their territories. Besides, it is a matter of fact that Maharaja was interested in independent Jammu and Kashmir so was not in favour of any referendum. But invasion from Pakistani tribesmen forced him to seek military assistance from India. Lord Mountbatten, the then Governor General of India,

suggested Nehru to get instrument of accession from Hari Singh before sending troops. Accordingly, on 26th of October 1947, the accession document was signed and was also subsequently ratified by Sheikh Abdullah. Mountbatten could have sent British Army to crush the rebellion but he suggested Nehru to get instrument of accession from Hari Singh and thus helped indirectly in the entry of Indian Army into Kashmir. Alaister Lamb argues that decision to retain Jammu and Kashmir as part of India was made by the British colonial administration under Mountbatten, as the departing British felt that Jammu and Kashmir was an important buffer to the north of India against the communist Soviet Union.

Maharaja's accession of the State to India legalized the entry of Indian army into the State on 27th of October 1947. This led to outbreak of war between Indian and Pakistani troops in November 1947. With no resolution in sight, at the suggestion of Mountbatten, the Indian cabinet decided to refer the case to United Nations Security Council. Accordingly, a complaint was lodged to the council on January 1, 1948 which led to the internationalization of the Kashmir conflict.

Pakistan joined the lobby of United States in 1953 and in response to it, India joined the lobby of Soviet Union. After this, Indian leadership went back on its promise of the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Nehru declared in 1956 that there was no need for a plebiscite because Kashmir was legally a part of India. The Kashmir conflict has resulted in two wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 respectively. In 1965 war after the cease-fire, then Soviet Union took the initiative and brought Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan ruler Ayub Khan together at Tashkent where a peace declaration was signed. This was the first-time that both India and Pakistan affirmed in writing "not to resort to force" and "to settle Kashmir dispute through peaceful negotiations". The same peaceful approach was underlined in the Shimla agreement in 1972. Under this agreement the two countries resolved to settle their differences by "peaceful means" and promised not to "unilaterally alter the situation". After the start of militancy in State since 1989, Pakistan now argues more vigorously that Kashmir is the core of its problems with India and Kashmiris should be given the right of self-determination (plebiscite), but all the major powers in the world are united in thinking that the solution has to be found by India and Pakistan bilaterally.

In case of Kashmir conflict like other conflicts, endogenous reasons are of greater importance than exogenous reasons, as external factors have a limited role and only contribute to the intensification of the conflict. Major internal factors responsible for Kashmir conflict are politics in the State after accession with India, economic backwardness, ethnic diversity and unemployment among educated youth.

Although the State has been multi-ethnic society, its culture was earlier defined in terms of what is called Kashmiriyat, which has declined gradually since independence due to unprincipled politics pursued by the central Government. As a result of many political developments, three different demands have come out from the ethnic groups who are dominant in respective provinces of the State. In Jammu, particularly from the Dogra dominant belt, the demand for "separate Jammu State" is being raised from time to time, while in Ladakh, Buddhists especially from Leh district are demanding the "Union territory status" and Muslims of Kashmir mostly seek "Independence" from India. Gautam Navlakha rightly says that the root of the crisis in Kashmir lies in Kashmir's fear of loss of the cultural identity in the face of the Hindu/ Hindu notion of nationalism.

Economic backwardness has also played role in the alienation of people of Jammu and Kashmir. Economic planning of State was relegated to the background by politicians of State as well as Centre. Absence of industrial growth coupled with non-availability of other resources and presence of widespread corruption in the State led to increase in unemployment and further alienation of new generation as a result of which many unemployed youth of the State joined militant organizations. Kashmir conflict has its religious dimension also which has played a major role in its sustenance. It is a matter of fact that Islam is being used for mobilizing people to fight against the Indian State and to internationalize the conflict. Economic backwardness, political corruption and alienation of people are no doubt potential factors of sustaining conflict but no conflict can be sustained without consciousness of people about the conflict and this has happened in Kashmir. Kashmir has witnessed growth in education and mass media rapidly, which played an important role in making people aware about the conflict. Growth of educated unemployed youth acted as a catalyst for conflict in Kashmir.

The most important internal factor which has led to emergence and persistence of Kashmir conflict has been the unscrupulous behaviour of the central Government and constant anti-democratic authoritarian policies of the successive New Delhi Governments. S. M. Abdullah had supported accession to India keeping in view the secular character of Indian constitution which was based on justice, freedom and equality for all without any distinction but what happened with him is reflected by his statement after twenty years when he said, "The fact remains that Indian democracy stops short at Pathankot (the last major town in Indian Punjab before the Jammu region). Between Pathankot and Banihal (mountain pass that connects Jammu region with Srinagar), you may have some measures of democracy, but beyond Banihal there is none. What we have in Kashmir bears some of the worst characteristics of colonial rule". The democratic institutions were never allowed to acquire roots in Kashmir and the institutional opposition was never allowed to grow in Kashmir. Balraj Puri writes that democracy in Kashmir was considered impossible option and the demand for democracy was censured as anti-national. He further adds that it seems as if in Kashmir, democracy and nationalism are incompatible, as if the importance of national integration allowed no possibility of any experiment in democracy. The vexing problem of Kashmir has not been burst upon the scene as a sudden phenomenon but is outcome of folly after folly committed by the Indian leadership which had a pathetic proclivity to ignore realities and then to seek refuge in clichés in face of trouble. Thus central Government through various measures and steps eroded the autonomy of State. First of all, S. M. Abdullah whose hold on the Valley was of a truly exceptional order was dislodged from power and replaced by Bakshi. Bakshi was followed by Sadiq and Mir Qasim. Bakshi, Sadiq and Mir Qasim are seen not so much at the time but in retrospect- as puppets of Delhi, who sold the State autonomy in return for being propped up in venal office. During this period from 1953 to 1975, twenty- eight constitutional orders (applicable to Jammu and Kashmir) were issued and out of 395 articles of Indian Constitution, 260 became applicable to State. Ninety four entries out of ninety seven entries in Union list and twenty six entries out of forty seven entries in the Concurrent list became operative in the State. Before 1953, only two articles (Article 1 and 370) and one schedule of the constitution (Schedule 1) were applicable to State and State Government dealt with all subjects except external affairs, defence and communications. Thus there was gradual erosion of State

autonomy from 1953 onwards. The sadar-i-Riyasat was re-designated as Governor and the Wazir-i-Azam as Chief Minister like in all other States. All these decisions were taken by the Government without any prior reference to the State Assembly. *The erosion of State autonomy may have been less unacceptable, if democratic accountability in governance and good administration had been ensured.* But this could not be done given the mutual connivance that developed between Delhi and the people at helm of affairs in State at the expense of the people. All the State Governments prior to Sheikh Government in 1975 were mere agents of Centre and they more worked for Central Government and its agenda rather than people of State. When S. M. Abdullah came back to power in 1975, the relations of State Government were not cordial with both Janta Party as well as Congress Government as he refused to act according to their wishes. This resulted in confrontation between Central and State Government and Central Government tried to create problems for State Government through various agencies and parties. In sharp contrast to mainstream India, National Conference could never govern when it had problems with the Centre. As years went on, it began to depend increasingly on Delhi and not on support of people. Rajiv-Farooq Accord of 1986 created a vacuum where the National Conference had existed and extremists stepped into the vacuum. In 1987 elections, there was large scale rigging and election results were manipulated to suit the National Conference – Congress alliance. This led to further alienation of people from the Central Government. It may be noted that many of the leading separatists who took over to arms in post election scenario in Kashmir, were candidates and agents who campaigned for Muslim United Front in 1987 Assembly Elections. *Had their confidence in the democratic process not been shattered by the massive rigging, they would have by now got co-opted the system and would have developed a vertical interest in its preservation.* This denial of democratic rights deepened the roots of alienation in the Kashmiri people and provided space for secessionist and militant forces.

The National Conference has played a vital role in the Kashmir conflict. It is the organisation which not only took major part in independence movement of Jammu and Kashmir but even after accession, fought for democratic values as well as Kashmiriyat. The organized struggle in Kashmir started late in 1931 under the guidance of S. M. Abdullah by formation of Reading Room Party by Muslim

educated youth who had returned from Indian universities. After the formation of Reading Room Party, some events took place which helped the party to mobilize masses against the Dogra Government and led to formation of Muslim Conference. Although on paper, the Muslim Conference was an organization aimed at safeguarding Muslim interests alone but practically it was secular political organization to safeguard the interests of the deprived sections of the society. Muslim Conference was changed to National Conference to broaden the sphere of movement and include non-Muslims. The change in nomenclature was done by S. M. Abdullah under influence of Congress leaders particularly Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who wanted that National Conference should broaden its base and clear doubts in the minds of Hindu population of the State that the aim of this organisation is not to fight for the rights of only Muslims of the State. No doubt Muslim Conference was secular in character but the constitution of the Conference did not allow the non-Muslims to become its members. In view of the same, leadership of the Conference made necessary amendments in its constitution while converting it into National Conference to accommodate non-Muslims in the freedom movement. Even in first annual session of the Muslim Conference and subsequent sessions, S. M. Abdullah affirmed that this movement is not directed against minorities and assured that this organization will redress the grievances of all sections of the society. Thus National Conference did not emerge as an organization but as a movement which played an important role in political awakening of masses during freedom struggle of Kashmir and helped in changing the pattern of Dogra rule. Another factor which influenced formation of National Conference was influence of socialist ideas on National leadership including Pandit Nehru and S. M. Abdullah. During 1930s, there was economic depression in U.S.A, Britain etc while economy of Soviet Union was flourishing and it increased its industrial production by four times so attention of people particularly youth was drawn towards Marxism, Socialism and economic planning. It was its ideological similarity and the all India character of the Indian National Congress which drew the Muslim Conference leadership closer to it and finally culminated in the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference.

The basic purpose behind formation of National Conference was to organise a common platform with a broad-based programme. The Dogra regime was sectarian and transferred Muslim Jagirs to co-religionists. Prem Nath Bazaz rightly states that

during Dogra regime, Muslims were dealt harshly in certain respects only because they were Muslims. The Dogra rulers followed the policy of communalization of State services and blamed Muslim backwardness for their poor representation in services but when there was good number of educated Muslims available, it came out with a new policy to discourage them. Peasant class was neglected one primarily due to confiscation of proprietary rights in land and oppression by Jagirdars and chakdars who were mostly Hindus. State industry mainly Shawl industry was also in pathetic condition. These factors provided a fertile ground to few educated youth who had realized that only a sustained struggle against the Dogra rule can ensure that the people of Kashmir get their genuine rights. Thus emergence of the National Conference was not just emergence of a new political party but was first organized movement by people of Kashmir to fight for their genuine demands and rights which forced Dogra Government to change its policies towards majority community of the State and played vital role in freedom struggle and afterwards.

National Conference played important role in freedom struggle of Jammu and Kashmir. It aimed to achieve responsible Government in the State under the aegis of the ruler. The National Conference was a secular organisation and did not believe in division of people on basis of religion which is evident from reply given by S. M. Abdullah to Mohammad Ali Jinnah during his visit of the State in 1943 that on basis of experience, he had reached the conclusion that the grievances of the people were rooted in economic rather than religious factor. The National Conference had a progressive social, political and economic programme for the welfare of the State. The Naya Kashmir Manifesto adopted by National Conference in 1944 was not only a constitutional blue-print of a sovereign independent State looking after its own defence and external affairs but also contained a radical socio-economic programme. No doubt the document to a large extent became a dream, but even after lapse of more than sixty years, the document has not lost its relevance if used for the reconstruction of socio-economic fabric of the State. Thus National Conference had a broad vision for development of the State.

Quit Kashmir Movement launched by S. M. Abdullah in 1946 was a landmark in the freedom struggle of the State as it developed volcanic fervour of enthusiasm among the masses. Most of Congress leaders including its President Acharya Kriplani

opposed the movement but Pandit Nehru and Jay Prakash Narayan supported it. Pandit Nehru should be credited with the wise decision to support S. M. Abdullah as it was in the interest of Congress to support S. M. Abdullah keeping in view the future political scenario.

On 15 August, the country was liberated after its division into India and Pakistan and princely States were advised to accede to either of the dominions keeping in view geographical location and communal composition. Maharaja Hari Singh had a dream of complete independence which was supported by some top Hindu leaders of the Jammu as well as revived Muslim Conference. Maharaja desired to maintain the relations with both India and Pakistan through a standstill agreement which was accepted by Pakistan but there was no response from India. Following pressure from Congress leaders, S. M. Abdullah was released on September 29, 1947 who opposed any unilateral act of accession by Maharaja. S. M. Abdullah declared that he had an open mind on this issue and invited claimants to convince him. On October 25, Maharaja left Kashmir after situation became out of control following tribal raid and appealed Government of India for help. The Instrument of Accession was signed on 26 October 1947 by which Maharaja handed over the three subjects of defence, foreign affairs and communications to the Government of India while State remained autonomous in all other respects. The instrument was signed by S. M. Abdullah on behalf of National Conference. S. M. Abdullah was appointed Chief Emergency Officer by the Maharaja to deal with law and order problem in the State. Thus the blame that Sheikh supported India wholeheartedly during partition is wrong as it was tribal invasion which forced Maharaja to seek support of India but it is also a fact that Sheikh Abdullah did not believe in two Nation theory and never supported it. Had Abdullah ever developed any understanding with Mohammad Ali Jinnah or had Ghulam Abbas or any other political figure taken Abdullah's place as a popular leader, the future of Kashmir could have been very different. Thus, the stand taken by National Conference was out of compulsion and not out of choice. National Conference leadership observed that tribal invaders were trying to capture State forcibly which was a threat to the secular fabric of the State and there was no option but to support demand of Maharaja by which he had sought military help from India. The subsequent events clearly show that National Conference was never in favour of complete merger of State with India and wanted a unique arrangement by which they

could retain secular character of State without compromising the special identity of the State. Thus it was difference of ideology which prevented National Conference from supporting Muslim League but at the same time, it wanted an honourable position for people of State irrespective of their religion, caste and creed. Thus one can definitely say that National Conference's policy of maintaining both secular credentials without compromising special position of State was also a reason which caused Kashmir Conflict. Had National Conference supported complete merger of State with India or Pakistan, Kashmir conflict would not have assumed such large dimensions.

S. M. Abdullah was sworn in as Prime Minister of interim Government of State on 5th March 1948. Although interim Government was blamed of suppressing opposition, it took certain bold steps that mobilised people in its favour which included abolition of Jagirdari system in 1948, enacting of the Jammu and Kashmir Distressed Debt Relief Act in 1949 and passing of Big Landed Estates Abolishing Act in 1950. It was only because of these Land Reforms that National Conference managed to consolidate its position in rural areas as end of landlordism was synonymous to freedom for these rural people and such was the impact of these Land Reforms that the rural people continued to support S.M. Abdullah even after he signed the accord in 1975.

During 1949, there were detailed discussions between Indian leaders and representatives of Jammu and Kashmir in the Constituent Assembly of India about the future constitutional arrangements between India and State of Jammu and Kashmir. The proposed draft of Ayyanger was rejected by S. M. Abdullah as it included applicability of citizenship, fundamental rights and directive principles of the Indian constitution to the Jammu and Kashmir which was opposed by leadership of National Conference on the ground that application of fundamental rights and citizenship provisions of Indian constitution would affect the State subject laws which prohibit the acquisition of property by other citizens of India in the State. Finally special provisions were included in the Constitution of India and State was given a special position by way of Article 370. By Article 370, Article 1 of the Indian Constitution was made applicable to State of Jammu and Kashmir and it was brought within the territorial jurisdiction of India. Article 370 further included provision that the Jammu and Kashmir State was to frame a constitution for its Government while the

legislative authority of the Indian parliament was confined to the subjects of foreign affairs, defence and communications. The elections for the Constituent Assembly were held in October 1951 in which National Conference managed to win all the 75 seats.

The President of India issued a constitutional order in 1950 for application of Indian Constitution to the State which was placed before the Constituent Assembly for its approval but members of the Constituent Assembly wanted some modifications and exceptions regarding applicability of provisions of citizenship, fundamental rights, Supreme Court, Election Commission etc. Nehru initiated a dialogue with S. M. Abdullah to overcome these differences which finally culminated in Delhi Agreement of 1952. According to Delhi Agreement, the decision to abolish Dogra Monarchy and Jagirdari system without any compensation was accepted by Central Government and residuary powers were kept with the State. Indian Citizenship Act was made applicable to State but State legislature was empowered to regulate the rights and *privileges of permanent residents especially with regard to acquisition of immovable property and appointment to services.* When the Delhi Agreement was placed before the Constituent Assembly, members expressed varied thoughts with most members alleging that the application of the Indian Constitution with regard to Indian citizenship, fundamental rights, Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India, Emergency powers etc would affect the Muslim majority character of the State. The institution of hereditary monarchy was abolished by the State Constituent Assembly immediately after Delhi Agreement and on 21 August 1952, a formal resolution was passed and the Head of the State was designated as the *Sadar-i-Riyasat* which was to be elected by the State Legislative Assembly for five years.

In Jammu, there was strong agitation led by Praja Parishad against granting of special status to the State of Jammu and Kashmir which was supported by communal forces throughout India. This agitation in Jammu which was supported throughout Country led to alienation of Kashmiri leadership from India and they began to feel that their entity, which they protected against Muslim invaders from Pakistan, seemed again in danger. National Conference leadership expressed their unhappiness over the agitational politics and resurgence of communalism in Hindu dominated regions and S. M. Abdullah told in a public meeting that if such things continue to happen, how

National Conference leadership could convince Muslims of Kashmir that India does not intend to swallow up Kashmir. Alarmed by this situation, National Conference leadership formed eight member committee headed by S. M. Abdullah to suggest proposals for peaceful solution of Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan and these proposals included options of overall plebiscite, independence of whole State, joint control of State by India and Pakistan and Dixon plan. There were also the rumours of United States support for independence of Kashmir and that Sheikh Abdullah had been encouraged for it by U.S ambassador during his visit of the State in May, 1948. Whether there was any truth in independence theory or not but it is a fact that these developments caused serious apprehensions in the minds of Indian leaders and resulted in next major political development in the State. This led to atmosphere of distrust, suspicion and doubt and scheme for dismissal of S. M. Abdullah was hatched both in New Delhi and Srinagar and he was deposed and arrested on August 9, 1953 and Ghulam Mohammad Bakshi was sworn in as Prime Minister of the State. These events clearly depict that S. M. Abdullah was not merely interested in assuming power but was more concerned about preserving the special identity of Jammu and Kashmir. He like his subsequent rulers of State could have succumbed easily to pressure from Central Government, if his only aim would have been to assume power but he preferred to go to Jail than to compromise with his conscience and commitment to people of Kashmir to give them special status within India.

When S. M. Abdullah felt that he has been betrayed by Central Government which wanted to merge State completely with India, he opposed it and his close lieutenant Mirza Afzal Beg formed Plebiscite Front in 1955 to demand for right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It is important to mention here that Plebiscite was one of the options which were put forward by eight member committee of National Conference headed by S. M. Abdullah in 1952 when he was the Prime Minister of the State.

The period of 22 years from the arrest of S. M. Abdullah in 1953 to Indira- Abdullah accord in 1975 was crucial phase in the history of National Conference as well as in the history of Kashmir. It was a period when State was integrated firmly into the Indian federation and various means and methods were used to achieve this goal.

From the 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 in 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 into India. The dismissal of S. M. Abdullah and swearing in 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 the same time, the resistance by determined cadre of National Conference was shown in the form of Plebiscite Front which was formed under leadership of Mirza Afzal Beg.

After assuming power, Bakshi used every method to gain public support and strengthen his position. He tried to dismantle the leadership of National Conference and those leaders who did not agree to side with him were imprisoned. He used money as well as offered suitable posts to win over leaders and those who rejected both money and posts were imprisoned. Several party leaders and hundreds of workers were arrested and incarcerated. 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. The Front aimed to end the era of turmoil and uncertainty in the State and to fight for right of self-determination of people of State under the auspices of United Nations. The Front believed that State's accession to India was temporary and provisional as it had to be determined by the people through Plebiscite. The important aspect of Plebiscite Front was that it was secular in nature and basic membership of the Front was open to every citizen of the State irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

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. 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 common slogans of the Front were *Ye Mulk Hamara Hai, Is Ka Faisla Ham Karein Gay* and *Rai Shumari Furan Karoa* etc. 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 Government and was tried in Kashmir Conspiracy case along with Mirza Afzal Beg and 23 other persons and was accused that he along with Begum Abdullah were in contact with Pakistan and were getting aid from Pakistan for subversive activities.

The theft of Holy Relic in 1963 had major effect on political atmosphere of the State and provided Muslims with a rallying point against Central Government. 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 them. 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, 1964 which continued for several days. He also received invitation from Pakistan and was given hero's reception in Pakistan but he had to cut short his visit due to death of Nehru on May 27, 1964. After Nehru's death, Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister of India but Sheikh felt dismayed after he talked with Shastri on issue of Kashmir as he realized that new leadership was not willing to continue efforts which Pandit Nehru had made for the settlement of Kashmir issue and was stuck to the policy of complete constitutional and political merger of State with India, so Sheikh along with leaders of Plebiscite Front made efforts to revitalize the party.

On February 5, 1965 S. M. Abdullah accompanied by his wife and Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg left for Haj and visit of a few countries. He highlighted Kashmir issue at international level and tried to mobilize world community to support their demand of

self-determination which led to their arrest on their arrival in India on May 8, 1965. Sheikh Abdullah was released in 1968 after three years of imprisonment. Before Indo-Pak war of 1965, Sheikh was adamant on the demand of plebiscite but after the war, he started rethinking on the 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 issue. On 10th October, 1968, S. M. Abdullah organised the first session of Jammu and Kashmir People's Convention which was inaugurated by Jayaprakash Narayan at Mujahid Manzil and was attended by more than 260 delegates. Mr. Narayan stressed that no Government in India could accept a solution that places Kashmir outside the Union of India. 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 their basic rights and on other hand showed flexibility by having talks with the central leadership.

In March 1969, the working committee of Plebiscite Front decided to participate in forthcoming Panchayat and Assembly Elections but the Front was denied participation in the Parliamentary polls. S. M. Abdullah strongly criticized this decision so Centre declared both Sheikh and Afzal Beg as anti nationals and exiled them from the State and declared Plebiscite Front an illegal organisation.

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 to self-determination. National Conference leadership realized that the regional balance of power had swung decisively in favour of India leaving them no alternative but to adopt a policy of reconciliation with New Delhi so they began to demand for autonomy for the State within Indian Union which led to signing of Kashmir Accord between S. M. Abdullah and Mrs. Indira Gandhi. After prolonged talks which extended up to three years, "Kashmir Accord" was signed on 13 November, 1974 between G.Parthasarthy and Mirza Afzal Beg, representatives of the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah respectively. 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 accord 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.

S. M. Abdullah after assuming power dissolved the Plebiscite Front on July 5, 1975 and merged it into newly revived National Conference. The relations between the Centre and Sheikh Abdullah were never cordial after his assuming power of State as Chief Minister as he did not act in conformity with central Government plans. The events that took place between 1953 and 1975 were a constant source of tension between Central and State Government. The National Conference leaders described the period between 1953-1975 as "Dark period of Kashmir history" which was rebutted by Congress Legislature and party. As per Kashmir Accord, The Union Government had committed to review some of not so important central laws and constitutional provisions which were applied to State after 1953 but Central Government did not honour this commitment and even the reminder of this pledge was dubbed as an undesirable act. S. M. Abdullah returned to office on 9 July, 1977 by winning thumping majority in 1977 Assembly Elections and his main issue in election was restoration of autonomy. The relations between S. M. Abdullah and Janata Party led Central Government remained stressed mainly due to Jan Sangh which was advocating abrogation of Article 370. The relations did not improve after the return of Mrs. Gandhi to power at Centre in 1980 mainly due to differences on issue of passing of Resettlement Bill of 1982. The bill passed by the State Assembly provided for return of the State subjects who migrated to Pakistan 40 years ago and had since become Pakistani nationals. S. M. Abdullah died in 1982 and was succeeded by his son, Farooq Abdullah. Thus Sheikh Abdullah up to end of his life fought for genuine rights of his people. He was neither power thirsty nor he became a puppet of Central Government after assuming power but he was a determined and charismatic leader of common masses who fought for their cause irrespective of whether he was in jail or was at helm of affairs.

Although Farooq Abdullah got the Resettlement Bill reconsidered and passed by the Assembly but confrontation with centre was avoided by agreeing to refer the Bill to Supreme Court. In Assembly Elections of 1983 in which National Conference got majority, Farooq made an alliance with Molvi Farooq and focused mainly on Muslim-centric issues while Congress raised issue of Resettlement Bill in Jammu thus these Elections further worsened the relations between Central Government and National Conference. Mrs. Indira Gandhi never forgave Farooq Abdullah for these acts against Central Government and a conspiracy was launched to dislodge Farooq Abdullah from the Government. G. M. Shah, Farooq's brother-in-law was encouraged to show dissidence and he claimed support of 13 legislatures. When Governor Brij Kumar Nehru refused to dismiss Farooq Government, he was transferred to Gujarat and was replaced by Jagmohan, a trusted agent of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who dismissed Farooq Government on July 2, 1984 and G .M .Shah was installed as Chief Minister of the State. People in the Valley felt very much cheated by this toppling and protests against this decision were held throughout the Valley and this event had the impact of renewing the memories of Sheikh's dismissal in 1953.

In 1986, The Congress (I) was faced with the prospect of losing control over the Valley so rapprochement was sought between Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah. This agreement was called Rajiv-Farooq Accord and coalition Government was formed under the Chief Ministership of Farooq Abdullah. Farooq was charged with betraying his father's fifty years legacy of pride. It created a vacuum where the National Conference had existed and extremists stepped into the vacuum. Farooq Abdullah later admitted openly that the 1986 accord with Congress (I) was his most serious political mistake.

In 1987, the ruling National Conference-Congress (I) alliance was opposed by newly formed amalgam of several parties which was called Muslim United Front. Though they did not stand a chance of winning majority, they counted on the prevalence of anti-India sentiment to hand them a substantial share of political power but elections were rigged and they were denied their due political space. It may be noted that many of the leading separatists who took over to arms in post Election Scenario in Kashmir, are the candidates and agents, who campaigned for Muslim United Front in 1987 Assembly Elections. If the 1987 Accord had blocked secular and nationalist outlets of

popular discontent, the Election blocked constitutional and democratic channels of protest as well. Although the militancy started in Kashmir in 1987, its roots are deep and it took four decades for what was only feeling of separateness, which the Valley had always felt towards mainstream India, to mutate first into alienation, then discontent and finally militancy. The militancy phase of Jammu and Kashmir has its roots in Plebiscite Front and Al-Fatah organisations. Though after 1975 Sheikh-Indira Accord, Plebiscite Front was disbanded but its bitter legacy remained. Plebiscite Front during its 22 years of long political existence pressed for demand of holding plebiscite thus mobilized people to fight against Central Government. In sharp contrast to mainstream India, National Conference could never govern when it had problems with the Centre. As years went on, it began to depend increasingly on Delhi and not on support of people. This led to further alienation of people from the Central Government. The dismissal of Farooq Abdullah in July 1984, the forced marriage of the National Conference and the Congress in November 1986 and finally the blatant rigging in March 1987 Elections contributed to alienation turning to violence. The prevalence of widespread corruption, unemployment, change in political mobilization, negative role of national Press and involvement of Pakistan are other factors which played vital role in the eruption of militancy in Kashmir. As National Conference was main pro-Indian political party in Valley which was also blamed for rigging the Elections, so all militant groups took very hard stand against them and many of their supporters and leaders were killed. Due to ideological differences with Jamat-i-islami backed Hizbul Mujahedden, many leaders and workers of National Conference were killed by militants.

Farooq Abdullah resigned from office of Chief Ministership in 1990 in protest against appointment of Jagmohan as Governor of the State. Legislative Assembly Elections were held in 1996 in which National Conference emerged as the single largest party in all three regions of the State and won 57 seats though the poll turnout was low in Kashmir due to boycott call. National Conference passed the State autonomy Bill in Assembly on June 26, 2000 which sought greater autonomy for the State but Centre rejected it outrightly. In 2002 Assembly Elections, National Conference won only 28 seats and PDP (People's Democratic Party) won 16 seats, all from Valley as it focused its election campaign on human rights violation. The most significant development of 2002 election was that it broke down the hegemonic rule of the

National Conference and for the first time in the last five decades, the National Conference was out of power.

In 2008 Elections, National Conference emerged as the single largest party and won 28 seats and formed coalition Government with Congress and Omar Abdullah became the youngest ever Chief Minister of the State at age of 38 on 5th January, 2009. In October 2010, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah stated in Legislative Assembly that Kashmir was an outstanding issue between India and Pakistan with international recognition and that Kashmir has acceded to India under certain agreements and unlike Hyderabad and Junagarh, Kashmir has not merged with India and demanded more autonomy. The report of committee of three interlocutors has also advocated more autonomy for State within Indian Constitution and has also recommended the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Disturbed Areas Act from the State.

Thus it is a matter of fact that National Conference has substantial mass following in the State and though there has been question on impartiality of elections in State since 1947, yet no one can deny that National Conference was and shall continue to remain voice of a substantial section of society in the State. Like every political party and organisation, its support base may increase or decrease depending upon its performance and adherence to Kashmiriyat, but it will always remain central to politics in Kashmir as well as Kashmir conflict.