INTRODUCTION

And will the blessed women rub the ashes together? Each fall they
Gather chinor leaves, singing what the hills have re-echoed for four
Hundred years, the songs of Habba Khatun, the peasant girl who
became the queen. When her husband was exiled from the Valley
by the Moghul king Akbar, she went among the people with her
sorrow. Her grief, alive to this day, in her own roused the people
into frenzied opposition to Moghul rule. And since then Kashmir
has never been free...........

And the night’s sun there in Srinagar? Guns shoot stars into the sky,
the storm of constellation night after night, the infinite that rages on......
...Srinagar was under curfew. The identity pass may or may not have
helped in the crackdown. Son after son- never to return from the
night of torture- was taken away.


Turning the pages of Kashmir history it becomes evident that the treatment
Kashmir has met from India was [is] not fair. Akbar, the Mughal ruler of India,
treacherously dismissed and imprisoned Yusuf Shah Chak, the last independent ruler
of Kashmir in 1585. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India repeated history
when in 1953; he dismissed and imprisoned Shaikh Abdullah. Ironically, both Akber
and Nehru are regarded as the secularist and broad minded rulers of India who
‘respected’ the freedom of others. While as Yusuf Shah did not make any
compromise, Shaikh did, which reduced his personality among the Kashmiris though
not during his life time.

Collected Poems, Penguin, New Delhi, 2010[ rearranged mine to set it in chronological order]
Thomas Carlyle’s view that history can be largely explained by the impact of “great men” and Herber Spencer’s counter argument that such great men are the products of their societies, although contradictory but have great relevance with the freedom struggle of Kashmir. Shaikh Abdullah was an undisputed leader of Kashmir, who ruled the hearts and minds of common Kashmiris. The man who was cherished by Kashmiris, his photograph saluted, he revered as Shaikh Sahib and adored as 

*bub*[father] itself speaks why he should be studied. He dominated the politics of Kashmir from 1930s until his death in 1982.

In 1930 when Shaikh returned to Kashmir after his higher studies he was like many educated youth concerned with his career. He had least interest in politics. But the subsequent events brought him to lime light. With the passage of time because of his height, oration and boldness, he got the sight of elite section of society and was recognised as the leader of Kashmir by Mir Waiz Yusuf Shah. The unfortunate incident of 13\textsuperscript{th} July raised the fortune of Shaikh Abdullah. He gave a good lead to the protests and processions from the front like a lion. He was rewarded for his boldness with the title of “Lion of Kashmir.” He started his political career as the speaker of Muslims through the platform of Muslim Conference founded in 1932. Towards the end of 1930s he converted Muslim Conference into National Conference to “accommodate non-Muslims” in the fight against autocratic Dogra rule. Shaikh who had successfully led battle against the Dogra State failed at the crucial time of partition “to act like a politician and made hurried attempts and hasty decisions.” But Shaikh himself was rendered helpless owing to the tribal invasion and the following
Indian intervention. Regarding accession Shaikh once said that “whatever happened was due to the force of circumstances.”

However his achievements as a politician do little match with his towering personality and popularity. Writing about the success and failure of Shaikh Abdullah, his biographer stated in 1980, when Shaikh was still alive and in power, “[F]rom the very start he spoke as a firm believer of Hindu- Muslim- Sikh Ithad, and found himself more closer to the views of National Congress. There can be no denying that he carried on with all courage his mission of Hindu- Muslim- Sikh Ithad., at a time when the whole of the sub-continent was in the grip of communal crisis. This is his success............The battle Shaikh Mohd Abdullah fought as a patriot and leader of masses, making his heroic appearance against the autocracy gave him many a things, but the battle he fought after partition could not establish him as a well-to-do politician. He in the outset rejected the scheme of separate homeland for Muslims. He time and again rejected two nation theory but after partition he could not link himself totally with the nationalists. This is his failure.”

He has remained an enigmatic figure because of his contradictory attitudes and statements. For example after his release on 29 September in 1947 regarding accession he, in an impartial tone, said, “Our first demand is complete transfer of power to the people in Kashmir. Representatives of the people in a democratic Kashmir will then decide whether the State should join India or Pakistan. If the forty lakhs of people living in Jammu and Kashmir are by passed and the state declares its

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2 Shaikh Abdullah's interview with Shabistan Urdu Digest, New Delhi, 1968. The interview has been translated into English in the Testament of Shaikh Abdullah, with a Monograph by Y. D. Gundevia, Palit and Palit, Dehradun, 1974, p. 36.

accession to India or Pakistan, I shall raise the banner of revolt." But within no time, he contradicted his previous statement. Speaking at a gathering of 100,000 people at Hazuribagh, in Srinagar, on 5 October, he declared: “Of course, we will naturally opt to that dominion [India] where our own demand for freedom receives recognition and support.... we cannot desire to join those [in Pakistan] who say that the people must have no voice in the matter. We shall be cut to pieces before we allow alliance between this State and people of this type.”

Speaking in New Delhi on 21st October 1947, Shaikh Abdullah declared, “we will never allow Pakistan to coerce us......the Government of Indian Dominion and the people appreciate our view. They are giving sympathetic consideration to our problems. But that has not been the case in Pakistan.”

Moreover and more importantly, while Shaikh Abdullah attested the ‘accession’ to India by remaining present in Delhi on the day the accession was signed; and also by his statements not only in Kashmir and India but also in Security Council. He also wanted to get passed a resolution in the State assembly to ratify the accession. But the same person during all this time though covertly developed an idea of an independent Kashmir, for which he had a controversial meeting with Loy Henderson the US ambassador to India in 1950.

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7 After the meeting Henderson in a message wrote to the US Secretary of State on 19 September 1950:

“I had two secret discussions with Shaikh Abdullah [at the request of Shaikh]............. He was vigorous in restating that in his opinion (Kashmir) should be independent, that overwhelming
he led for twenty years, for the right of self determination to decide the future of Kashmir. This is a typical example of the kind of confusion that has always surrounded this “paradoxical figure.”

Although Shaikh’s struggle was against an autocrat ruler, ironically, he himself both as a leader of freedom struggle and after he assumed power, acted not different from that of his predecessor. History bears witness that Shaikh used all his might of influence, muscle power and hooliganism to frighten his opponents. Particularly after taking over as the Prime Minister of the State in 1948, his attitude towards those who did not second his views was not different from the attitude of the Dogra rulers.

Towards the close of the first half of the twentieth century, Shaikh in India was regarded as a charismatic leader of Kashmiris; a passionate nationalist, a devoted secularist and a close friend of Pandit Nehru. The same person, however, within no time, hence after became ‘a pro-Pakistani intriguer, an agent of West and a communist agent. Because of his somersaults, Shaikh who had[has] his admirers and critics in the whole sub-continent, in general “is not liked in India, forgotten in Pakistan and criticised in Kashmir.”

It is mainly because of the lack of an independent research on him that he has remained a controversial and disputed leader. Although hundreds of works have been published on modern history of Kashmir that are directly or indirectly related to Shaikh Abdullah but barring few they can hardly be called scholarly works. The big lacuna in these works is that they have been written, either by admirers or critics of majority population desire this independence.” Foreign Relations of the United States 1948, Vol. V. Part I, Washington DC, 1975, PP. 1433-35. For details see chapter IV.
Shaikh Abdullah. In addition those whose works are research based have discussed Shaikh in isolation through the prism of their own ideologies and principles.

In 1980, when Shaikh Abdullah after the accord was serving as the Chief Minister, F. A. Abba, got published a biography of Shaikh Abdullah under the title, “Profiles of Abdullah.” The book serves a very useful source material. The book actually provides the details of Shaikh Abdullah’s life in biographical form. The book is not research based but an account of the events of the life of Shaikh Abdullah. As the author himself admits, “the details given in this book are mostly based on the first hand information collected from those who were in one or other capacity close to Shaikh Mohd. Abdullah[colleagues of Shaikh Abdullah].” Being adherents of Shaikh and also party to crucial decisions of Shaikh, it is certain that they could not have come clean with him.

In 1985, three years after the death of Shaikh Abdullah, his ‘autobiography,’ Aatish-i-Chinar in Urdu hit the streets. Voluminous as it is, the work was the first comprehensive account of Shaikh Abdullah’s long political career. The work, however, cannot be fully trusted as according to George Bernard Shah, “all autobiographies are lies.” Firstly the work was published three years after the death of its ‘author’ itself casts doubts on its authenticity. In 2012 in an article published in a State sponsored Urdu magazine, Sheeraz, Advocate Gowhar challenged the authenticity of Aatish-i-Chinar. The magazine was banned and the published copies destroyed. Mohammad Yusuf Tang, who has actually edited this book, in the introduction of the book candidly, admits that many of the sensitive matters were not included in the book. Secondly the narration of certain events is not substantiated by

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8 See F. A. Abba, Profiles of Abdullah, op. cit., preface of the book
the primary sources, thus are highly doubtful. For example, regarding the conversion of the Muslim Conference into National Conference, he claims that poet Iqbal advised him for it. It is highly doubtful that Iqbal, who is regarded as one of the ideologues of the ‘two nation theory’ might have suggested it. The available contemporary sources on the other hand make it clear that it was the suggestion of Pandit Nehru.

Among the other biographies, mention may be made of Ajit Bhattacharjea’s ‘Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir published in 2008.\(^9\) Besides the long political career of Shaikh Abdullah, the book also deals with the contemporary history of Kashmir. It is actually a journalistic account rather than a research based effort. He has portrayed Shaikh Abdullah as one of the Muslim leaders of Congress who were disappointed with the consent of Congress to the partition plan. At many places, it looks the English translation of Aatsh-i-Chinar. The whole aim of the book seems to clear the misconceptions among the Indians about Shaikh Abdullah by highlighting his commitment to secularism. Indeed it is a sympathetic biography of Shaikh Abdullah by an admirer of his.


Then there are comprehensive works on the freedom struggle of Kashmir. These include, Prem Nath Baza’s The History of the Struggle for the Freedom, Cultural and Political: From the Earlier Times to the Present Day, [Pamposh Publications, New Delhi, 1954], Mohammad Yusuf Saraf’s Kashmiris Fight for

Freedom, 2 Vols, Ferozoons Ltd., Lahore, 1977], Ab. Rashid Taseer’s, Tarikh-i-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir, 3 Vols, and F. M. Hassnain’s, Freedom Struggle in Kahmir, [Rimla Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988]. Among the aforesaid works, Bazaz’s and Saraf’s works provide detailed accounts in a very lucid language. While as Saraf adopts a middle path to reach to Shaikh Abdulla; Bazaz on the other hand adapts offensive path-because of his deep rooted rivalry with Shaikh. So, both suffer from objectivity. Taseer;s work is more or less a narration of political events. As Bazaz is offensive, so is Hassnain defensive- portrays Shaikh Abdullah as a divine entity.

Besides, the big problem which a researcher on modern history of Kashmir faces is lack of access to primary sources. There is nothing like selected works of Jawaharal Nehru, Jinnah papers, or Nehru Museum when one comes to study Shaikh Abdullah. Most of the documents, some too sensitive and crucial were never maintained or preserved and remain mysteriously missing or were deliberately destroyed to hide the truth. I personally visited the head office of National Conference in Srinagar to get material related to Shaikh, the founder of NC. During the interview, Shaikh Nazir, the General Secretary of National Conference, who is also nephew of Shaikh Abdullah, candidly, admitted that most of the material [read history] had been destroyed during the period 1953-75, when Shaikh was outside the power and leading the plebiscite movement. Today, National Conference which was the name of Kashmir movement has been reduced to a regional political party. Likewise in the State archives of Srinagar and Jammu, the valuable documents have been dumped in the basement only to feed the silver fishes. Ironically the department which was to preserve the past is wittingly or unwittingly annihilating the history and identity of Kashmir which is indispensable for any nation. In spite of these short comings and hard ships I tried my level best to get all available sources- conventional and
unconventional, to fill the gap and to put forward the real picture and contribution and legacy of Shaikh Abdullah. That is the main theme of this study.

The first chapter deals with the nature of the Dogra State and the socio-economic condition of Kashmir from 1846 to 1930. The autocratic and communal nature of the Dogra State and its discriminative attitude towards the Muslims, provided the ground for and shaped freedom struggle.

The second chapter deals with the events and activities that led to the foundation of Muslim Conference. It also examines the nature of freedom struggle under the Muslim Conference; the transformation of the Muslim Conference into National Conference.

The third chapter examines the role of National Conference under Shaikh Abdullah; activities of Congress and Muslim League in Kashmir. It also deals with the sensitive issue of accession.

The fourth chapter deals with the autonomy phase of Jammu and Kashmir under the premiership of Shaikh Abdullah. It also traces the reasons of backing off of Shaikh Abdullah and Pandit Nehru from their early promises; the dismissal and arrest of Shaikh Abdullah by his trusted friend, Nehru.

The fifth chapter discusses the twenty years long movement by Shaikh Abdullah for Plebiscite which embarrassed India at international level. Subsequently, Nehru’s admission that Kashmir issue could not be settled without Shaikh. This led to Shaikh’s visit to Pakistan, but Nehru’s death buried the last hope of a peaceful settlement of the issue. It also examines the circumstance that forced Shaikh to make compromise by signing the accord with Indira Gandhi.
The sixth and the final chapter discusses with the return of Shaikh Abdullah to power not as a Prime minister but a Chief Minister like chief minister of Punjab, Rajasthan etc. The Kashmiris, because of Shaikh's dismissal and arrest in 1953 had forgiven Shaikh for his accession stand, and was revered as *bub*, but by signing the accord which was soon discarded by Mrs Gandhi, Shaikh began to be deemed as a 'traitor.'

The study ends with a brief conclusion. It briefly describes the role and Legacy of Shaikh Abdullah. There is no denying the fact that the present movement in Kashmir has its roots in them.