PEACE IN OUR TIME

> Here we are having a grudging time, both with the weather and the problems which are arising; Kashmir, in particular, is giving us a severe headache.
>
> VALLABHBHAI PATEL to G.D.BIRLA, May 1949

I

APART FROM THE SEVERAL thousand Indian soldiers dead or injured, the casualties of the China war included the chief of army staff, General P. N. Thapar (who resigned, citing ill health), the failed strategic thinker Lieutenant General B. M. Kaul (who was retired prematurely) and the defence minister, V. K. Krishna Menon (who was sacked). A greater casualty still was the reputation of Jawaharlal Nehru. The border war was Nehru's most consequential failure in fifteen years as prime minister. The inability to bring about radical land reform affected the rural poor; the dismissal of the Kerala communists angered many people in that state; other sections likewise had their own grievances against the government. But the failure to protect the nation's territory was a different matter altogether. The humiliation that resulted was felt, as military defeats invariably are, by the nation as a whole.

Krishna Menon and the army brass had been sacrificed, yet the prime minister knew that deep down he was ultimately responsible for the disaster, in a general sense, as the head of government, and in a very specific sense, as one who had guided and determined India's attitudes and policies towards China.

Those attitudes and policies now had to be rethought. Nehru could at last see what Vallabhbhai Patel had sensed long ago: that communism in China was merely a more bellicose form of nationalism. The border war provoked a reluctant tilt towards the United States, who had come forth with arms while Soviet Russia stayed neutral. A key player in this shift was the American ambassador in New Delhi, John Kenneth Galbraith. A Harvard economics professor who was sceptical of the free market, a scholar of art history, a noted *bon vivant* and wit, Galbraith was, to Indian eyes, a very untypical American indeed. (In fact,

he was by birth Canadian.) Things were changing, back in Washington, where a new young president, John F. Kennedy, was seeking to reverse the American government's image as uncaring at home and arrogant abroad. It was these winds of liberalism that carried Galbraith along to India.

From the time he took charge in April 1961, the ambassador got on famously with Nehru. They discussed art and music and literature; this, on the Indian's part, a welcome diversion from the daily grind but on the American's a shrewd softening-up of a mind long prejudiced against his country. In March 1962 the First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, arrived for a trip through India, where she saw the Taj Mahal and Rajput forts and had extended conversations with the prime minister.

Nehru was charmed by Mrs Kennedy's beauty, as he had been by her envoy's brains. But the thaw would not have become a *tilt* had it not been for the war with China. On 9 November, after the first wave of attacks, Galbraith was called in to meet the prime minister. He found him 'deathly tired and I thought a little beaten'. (Earlier in the day, Nehru had made a speech in Parliament which was 'a good deal less than Churchillian'.) A request was made for arms from America. This came at a cost that could never be measured in money alone. For, as Galbraith wrote to President Kennedy, all his life Nehru had

> sought to avoid being dependent upon the United States and the United Kingdom – most of his personal reluctance to ask (or thank) for aid has been based on this pride ...Now nothing is so important to him, more personally than politically, than to maintain the semblance of this independence. His age no longer allows of readjustment. To a point we can, I feel, be generous on this.[1]

By late November the arms began arriving, carried in planes that also contained soldiers in uniform. As an American journalist wrote, this meant the 'collapse of his [Nehru's] non-alignment policy'; to many those dark blue uniforms carried 'a special meaning , contained in one single word: 'failure'.[2] For the American ambassador, however, those uniforms spelt the word 'opportunity'. This might be the beginnings of an entente to contain a communist power potentially more threatening than Soviet Russia itself. As Galbraith wrote to President Kennedy,

> the Chinese are not quarreling with the Soviets over some academic points of doctrine. They are, one must assume, serious about their revolu-

tion. The natural area of expansion is in their part of the world. The only Asian country which really stands in their way is India and *pari passu* the only Western country that is assuming responsibility is the United States. It seems obvious to me [that] there should be some understanding between the two countries. We should expect to make use of India's political position, geographical position, political power and manpower or anyhow ask.[3]

II

In response to the Indian request, President Kennedy sanctioned the supply of a million rounds for machine guns, 40,000 land mines and 100,000 mortar rounds.[4] This fell far short of the Grand Alliance that his ambassador was recommending; yet it was far in excess of what other Americans thought New Delhi deserved. A bitter opponent of arms supply to India was Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia, the long-serving chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee. A crusty old reactionary – doughtily opposed to desegregation and the like – Russell had previously termed India an 'unreliable friend' and called Nehru a 'demagogue and a hypocrite'. Now he told the Associated Press that he was 'against giving India any of our modern weapons for the principal reason that we would be just giving them to the Chinese Communists'. The Indians, said the senator, had 'put on a disgraceful exhibition in permitting themselves to be driven out of what should have been impregnable strongholds in the border mountains. They seem incapable of fighting and if we supply them with weapons they will just fall into the hands of the Communists'. While he was at present opposed to giving 'one dime of weapons to India', Russell said he might have a rethink if India's old rulers, the British, were prepared to 'take over the matter of re-organizing and retraining their militaryforces'.[5]

Russell s remarks were widely reported in the United States as well as in India. The storm of correspondence that it generated is a unique prism through which one can view US—India relations. One would expect the two countries to have been allies, if only because both were large and culturally diverse democracies. However, their relations had been clouded by suspicion on both sides suspicion of India's non-alignment on one side, and of American military aid to Pakistan on the other. It did not help that these were both preachy peoples, whose foreign policy and diplomacy were invariably accom-

panied by an unctuous self-righteousness. Where democratic ideals sought to bring the two countries closer together, pride and patriotism pulled them further apart.

Thus, while Kennedy and Galbraith might have deplored Senator Russell's stand, he received much support from across Middle America. A correspondent from Wichita, Kansas, thanked the senator for warning that it was 'very dangerous for the US to make a doormat of itself to a country whose leaders have shown little interest or support to the US except to take our money and aid and then vilify us at every turn'. A lady from Loomis, California, agreed that 'nothing should be sent to that pro-Communist hypocrite and political actor Nehru and his Communist ministers'. A man from Plantation, Florida, thought that India's troubles were 'of their own consequences and making'; namely, the 'Neutralist Policy' which they followed even while 'the Communists have swallowed millions of people' the world over. An 85-year-old Democrat from South San Gabriel endorsed Russell's 'objection to this country saddling its taxpayers with the upkeep of four hundred million ignorant, starving people of India, whose leaders including Nehru and others are strikingly procommunist and hostile to our form of government . . . Nehru s so-called neutralism . . . should teach this nation to let India stew in its own superstitious and ignorant juices.'

From his compatriots, Senator Russell received dozens of letters of congratulation, but only one of dissent. This was written by a Fulbright scholar based in Madras, who said it was time to undo the American policy of arming Pakistan while denying aid to India. India, said the scholar, was a 'popular democracy', whereas Pakistan was a military dictatorship which 'exists as a political entity solely on its emotional antagonism to India'. Besides, it was not true that the Indian troops had simply fled. They had fought hard in parts, and had they been better armed, could have held their own. Now, 'India is seeing to the recruitment of more troops; I should think that it would be in our best interests to see that they are properly armed'.

There were also letters by Indians to the senator, these naturally angry and hurt. A correspondent from Bombay agreed that Nehru 'used foggy thinking with regard to the Chinese intentions', but refused to accept Russell's insinuation that 'courage and defiance [were] a monopoly of white skins' alone. The Indian *jawan* matched the American GI in grit as well as guts, as manifest in his heroism in the crucial battles of the two world wars. But this time the 'War machinery was just not good enough (thanks to Mr Menon). Our boys did without the luxury of air cover, automatic rifles, ear muffs, K-Rations and Bob Hope to cheer them up on the frigid front lines.'

Russell's biliousness was answered in kind by the novelist and scriptwriter Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, one of India's most prominent fellow-travelling intellectuals. Abbas said that while there was along history of stupid remarks by Westerners about India, Russell's interview 'takes the cake for unwarranted slander and unmitigated mischief'. 'But surely, Senator Russell', wrote Abbas, 'if you are looking for "disgraceful exhibitions" of military debacles, you will find ample material nearer home' – in Pearl Harbor, in the early reverses in the Korean War, in the Bay of Pigs. He referred the American to General Eisenhower's praise for the Indian soldier, who had thwarted Rommel at El Alame in and, in other sectors across Europe and Africa, had fought 'to save Senator Russell and his "free world" from the menace of Hitler'.

Senator Russell's remarks brought to the fore the mutual misunderstandings between Indians and Americans as they had been up to 1962 – and beyond. Behind these lay different perceptions of foreign policy and national interest, and also a certain incompatibility of cultures. The two peoples ate, drank, sang, dressed and thought differently. As an admirer in Jacksonville wrote to the Senator: 'This Nehru, technically Caucasian, politically nothing of the sort . . . How can there be a "meeting of minds" with a man who stands on his head?' The reference was to Jawaharlal Nehru's love of yoga, a form of therapy then completely alien to the American way of life.[6]

III

The defeat by China caused the prime minister a certain loss of face in the international arena. It also undermined his position at home. Criticism of his leadership grew more strident. In the summer of 1963 the Congress lost a series of important by-elections, which put into Parliament three opposition stalwarts: Minoo Masani, J. B. Kripalani and Rammanohar Lohia.

In June 1963 Nehru held a press conference, his first in many months. The meeting lasted ninety minutes, and was notable for the anger the prime minister directed at the Chinese. He spoke of the 'dark spate of falsehoods emanating from Peking', and of their 'high record in vituperation'. Explaining the war, and India's defeat therein, Nehru claimed that 'the Chinese are a military-minded nation, always laying stress on military roads and preparedness . . . Right from the beginning of the present regime there, they have concentrated on the military apparatus being stronger. It is a continuation really of the past civil wars. So, they are normally strong.'[7]

Nehru also said that in attacking him personally, the Chinese 'have something in common with some of our opposition leaders here'. He then added, gratuitously: 'As for our opposition leaders, they have the habit of combining with anybody and everybody regardless of principle and a time may come when some of them may for the purpose combine with the Chinese'. Soon, the opposition leaders did formally combine among themselves to introduce a 'no-confidence' motion in Parliament, an act of daring that would have been inconceivable at any time between August 1947 and November 1962. The Congress had the numbers to easily defeat the vote, but the debate lasted all of four days, during which a series of telling points were made against the prime minister, his party, and his government.[8]

The criticisms in and out of Parliament prompted a serious rethink among the Congress leadership. Fifteen years in power had made the party complacent, somewhat out of touch with happenings on the ground – as evidenced in the recent by-election defeats and the growing strength of regional parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The chief minister of Madras, K. Kamaraj, was himself most threatened by the DMK; now, to check its rise and stem the rot within, he recommended that senior Congress ministers leave their posts to help rejuvenate the party. Under the 'Kamaraj Plan' six chief ministers resigned to work for the party – these included Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed of Kashmir and Kamaraj himself. Six senior Union ministers also resigned – among them Jagjivan Ram, Morarji Desai and Lal Bahadur Shastri.[9]

The prime minister stayed in his job. But he was noticeably weakened, in body as well as mind. In September 1963 the Socialist MP H. V. Kamath saw Nehru walking in to take his seat in Parliament: 'an old man, looking frail and fatigued, with a marked stoop in his gait, coming down the gangway opposite with slow, faltering steps, and clutching the backrests of benches for support as he descended'. Kamath's mind went back to his own early visions of a man he had once venerated: at a Congress session in Madras, where Nehru stood 'sprightly, slim and erect'; at his home in Allahabad, where Nehru 'jumped two steps at a time, with me emulating him, as I followed him upstairs'.[10]

Where Indians would not speculate openly about Nehru's death, Western observers were under no such inhibition. In 1963 the American journalist Wells Hangen published a book with the title *After Nehru, Who?* This listed eight possible successors, each of whom was allotted a separate chapter. Six were from the Congress Party: Morarji Desai, V. K. Krishna Menon, Y. B. Chavan, Lal Bahadur Shastri, S. K. Patil and the sole female candidate, Indira Gandhi. A seventh possibility was the social worker and sometime social-

ist revolutionary Jayaprakash Narayan. The last listed was a general – B. M. Kaul.[11]

The question now being asked was not just 'After Nehru, Who?' , but also 'After Nehru, What?' Shortly after the publication of Hangen's book, a reporter from the *Sunday Times* of London spent several weeks travelling through India. He met the prime minister, to find that 'old Nehru has gone downhill so fast recently'. The decay of the man mirrored the decay of his country. In contrast to the 'intensity and unfathomable ambition of a wild young China', India was a land of 'indescribable poverty' and a 'willless Government'. What would happen after Nehru passed on? The reporter thought that the battle 'will lie between the Communists and the new generation of political bandits emerging in the States. . .' . A third contender was the army; thus far, the generals had stayed aloof from politics, but would they 'stand aside while India collapsed into disorder or was swept into Communism'? Such were the prospects for the future; meanwhile, 'the free world must grow accustomed to its most populous member being without coherent leadership, swallowing aid and arms without significant effect, a tempting prey to the predatory-minded, an indictment of the free and democratic method of advancement in Afro-Asian eyes, where mature authority is so deeply needed'.[12]

Contemporary photographs confirm that Nehru was in physical Decline – sunken shoulders, a tired, even doped look on his face, an unfamiliar bulge around his waist. In the first week of September 1963 Indira Gandhi wrote to a friend that her father now had to have weekly readings taken of his blood pressure, weight and urine. 'The strain, physical, mental and emotional, is tremendous and he is bound to look tired', wrote Mrs Gandhi. 'The only medicine that can help is rest and relaxation.'[13]

Of which, of course, he got none. He had still to undertake the duties of prime minister and foreign minister, and to contribute his mite to the revival of the Congress. As the single recognizable face of party and government, Nehru continued to maintain a punishing schedule, going to the four corners of India to address public meetings, open schools and hospitals and speak to party workers. In the month of December 1963, for example, he visited Madras, Madurai, Chandigarh, Calcutta, Bihar and Bombay (twice).[14]

One place that the prime minister could have gone to, but chose not to, was Nagaland. For a state of that name had finally come into existence on 1 December 1963. In other circumstances Nehru would have been keen to inaugurate it himself. But the journey to Kohima was long and arduous, and perhaps he also remembered the hostile reception he had got there back in 1953. In the event, the honours were done by the new president of the Repub-

lic, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. However, the new chief minister and his fellow ministers were dismissed as ‘traitors’ by the underground, whose writ still ran across large parts of the state.[15]

In January 1964 Nehru crossed the country again, to attend the annual meeting of the Congress, held that year in the Orissa capital of Bhubaneshwar. He collapsed on the stage and had to be helped to his feet and rushed back to Delhi. The diagnosis was that he had suffered a mild stroke. As one headline putit: ‘Mr Nehru’ s Illness Casts Gloom over Bhubaneshwar Meet’.[16]

IV

The China war had weakened Nehru’s position not just in India or the world, but within the Congress Party itself. The locus of decision-making had now shifted from the prime minister’s home to the Congress Parliamentary Party. Unlike in the past, Nehru could no longer get the party to always do hisbidding in matters big and small.[17] For instance, he had not welcomed the Kamaraj plan, on the grounds that it would deplete his government of experience and talent.

After his illness, Nehru was able to persuade the party to return Lal Bahadur Shastri to the Cabinet. Shastri was officially called ‘minister without portfolio’, but in fact functioned as the *de facto* deputy to the prime minister. The two shared a language, a home state and a history of being in the same jails at around the same time. Nehru trusted and liked Shastri, whose own quiet, understated personality was in such marked contrast to his own.

The first assignment entrusted to Shastri pertained to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. On 27 December 1963 a major crisis had been sparked by the theft of a holy relic, a hair of the Prophet Mohammed, from the Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar. A week after it vanished, the relic mysteriously reappeared in the mosque. No one knew how it came back, just as no one knew how it had vanished in the first place. And no one knew whether the relic now in place was the genuine article, or a fake.

Through the month of January there were protests and demonstrations in the Valley. The ripples spread through the Muslim world. In distant East Pakistan there were religious riots aimed at the minority Hindu community, hundreds of thousands of whom fled to India. Now there was the danger of retaliatory riots targeting Muslims in India itself.

In the last week of January Nehru dispatched Lal Bahadur Shastri to Kashmir. After speaking to officials, and consulting local politicians, Shastri decided to hold a special showing, or *deedar,* to certify whether the returned relic was genuine. A panel of senior clerics was constituted to view the relic. They did so on 3 February, and to palpable relief all round decided that this was the real article. Calm returned to the Valley. To keep the peace going the government of India appointed, as chief minister, G. M. Sadiq, a politician known for his left-wing views, but also forhisintegrity.[18]

The Hazratbal incident brought home, once more, the fact that trouble in Kashmir had its repercussions on life in the subcontinent as a whole. The China fiasco had made Nehru more alert to the need to seek a final resolution of the Kashmir dispute. For India could not afford to have two hostile fronts. He was encouraged in this line of thinking by his old friend Lord Mountbatten. In April 1963 Mountbatten had told Nehru that 'if his glory had at one time, brought India credit' in the world, the country, and he, now had a 'tarnished image', principally owing to the failure to settle the question of Kashmir. The Englishman felt that this could be 'rectified' by a 'heroic gesture by India', such as the 'granting of independence to the [Kashmir] valley regardless of the Pakistani attitude'.[19]

In fact, during 1962 and 1963 there were several rounds of talks with Pakistan on the issues that divided the two countries. Here, the government of India was represented by the experienced Sardar Swaran Singh, while Pakistan was represented by the young and ambitious Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. At these talks no one represented Kashmir. But, as the Hazratbal incident showed, it was not prudent to neglect the feelings of the people at the centre of the dispute. And who better to take their pulse than Sheikh Abdullah? By the end of 1963 Nehru was already thinking of releasing the Sheikh, who by this time had been in jail for ten years. The stroke at Bhubaneshwar, with its intimations of mortality, made him think further in this regard. Why not release Abdullah and have a last shot at solving the Kashmir problem before he was gone?

V

Sheikh Abdullah, we may recall, had been arrested by the government of India in August 1953. No charges were brought against him, but in January 1958 he was suddenly released. He made his way to the Valley, where he met with

a spectacular reception. He addressed well-attended public meetings in Srinagar, including one at the Hazratbal mosque. This seems to have unnerved his enemies in the administration. Towards the end of April he was arrested once more. This time he was shifted to a jail in Jammu, and charged with plotting with Pakistan to break up India. He was accused, among other things, of attempting 'to facilitate wrongful annexation of the territories of the state by Pakistan; create communal ill-feeling and disharmony in the state and receive secret aid from Pakistan in the shape of money, bombs, etc.'.[20]

The charges were, to put it politely, trumped up. While the Sheikh contemplated independence, he never wanted to join Pakistan. And while the idea of being the ruler of a free Kashmir appealed to him, he saw as his subjects all the people of the state, regardless of religion. As even his political opponents conceded, he had not a communal bone in his body.

Speaking at his trial, the Sheikh said that he stood for a single objective: the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who, he insisted, were 'not a flock of sheep and goats to be driven by force one way or another'. Even so, he repeatedly underlined his commitment to secularism, his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and his once-strong friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru. He recalled that Nehru himself had conceded that 'the people of the state are the final arbiters of their fate' , significantly adding: 'He does not, I believe, deny this right to us even now.'[21]

Two months after the Sheikh's first arrest, in 1953, Nehru had written that 'the mere fact of his detention is of course a matter which troubles me greatly'.[22] The months turned into years, deepening the guilt. One way of sublimating the guilt was to take a close interest in the education of his friend's children (which, by some accounts, he even helped pay for). In July 1955 Nehru was visited by Abdullah's eldest son, Farooq, then studying in a medical college in Jaipur. Farooq told the prime minister that his classmates routinely referred to his father as a 'traitor'. This prompted Nehru to write to a minister in the Rajasthan state government, asking him to ensure that the boy had 'proper living quarters and some friendly companionship', so that he did not develop any 'complexes and the like' . As Nehru put it, 'Some people foolishly imagine that because we have had differences with Sheikh Abdullah, therefore we are not favourably inclined towards his son and his family. This, of course, is not only absurd but is just the reverse of how we feel. Personally, because Sheikh Abdullah is in prison, I feel rather a special responsibility that we should try to help his sons and family.'[23]

In 1964, woken up by the China war, and put on high alert by his own fading health, Nehru decided to put an end to the matter. He spoke to the chief

minister of Jammu and Kashmir, and after obtaining his consent, decided to release Sheikh Abdullah. The news was conveyed to the world by Nehru's confidant Lal Bahadur Shastri. Abdullah's detention, said Shastri, had been 'a matter of pain to the government, and particularly to the prime minister'.)[24]

On the morning of 8 April the Sheikh stepped out of Jammu jail, a free man once more. He drove in an open car through the streets of the town, accepting garlands and bouquets. The next day he gave his first public speech. According to a newspaper report, 'Sheikh Abdullah said the two pressing problems facing the subcontinent – communal strife and Kashmir – should be solved during Prime Minister Nehru's lifetime. He described Mr Nehru as the last of the stalwarts who had worked with Gandhiji and said that after him a solution of these problems would become difficult.'

Nehru had invited Abdullah to come and stay with him in New Delhi. The Sheikh said he would first go to the Valley, consult his friends and supporters, and meet the Prime Minister after the Id festival (which fell on 23 April). On the 11th he set off by car to Srinagar, a journey that normally would take a few hours. But the Sheikh travelled leisurely, stopping at towns and villages on the way. Wherever he halted, he also spoke. Thousands turned up to see and hear him, trudging miles from their own isolated hamlets. In these gatherings, women outnumbered men.

In his speeches, Abdullah described his state as a bride cherished by two husbands – India and Pakistan – neither of whom 'cared to ascertain what the Kashmiris wanted'. He said he would meet Jawaharlal Nehru with an open mind, and asked the Indians not to make up their minds beforehand either. As a journalist who interviewed him noted, the Sheikh had 'no personal bitterness, no rancour' – rather, he was imbued with 'a strong sense of mission', a compelling desire to seek a solution to Kashmir. At one meeting he was asked what he now felt about Nehru. Abdullah answered that he bore no ill will, for 'misunderstandings do occur even among brothers. I shall not forget the love Mr Nehru has showered on me in the past . . . I will meet him as an old friend and comrade.'

On 18 April a week after he had left Jammu the Sheikh drove in an open jeep from Anantnag to the Kashmiri capital Srinagar. The thirty-mile route was lined by a 'near-hysterical crowd' of half a million people. The road was covered with freshly plucked daisies and tulips and festooned with arches and bunting. When he finally entered the town, 'Srinagar's entire population . . . jammed the labyrinth of streets which were so richly decorated that even the sun did not penetrate the canopy of Kashmir silks, carpets and shawls'.

Meanwhile, back in Delhi, the prospect of talks between Nehru and Abdullah alarmed many members of the ruling Congress Party. Senior Cabinet ministers issued statements insisting that the question of Kashmir was 'closed'; the state was, and would stay, an integral part of India. More combative still were members of the Jana Sangh. The party's general secretary, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, deplored the Sheikh's recent speeches, where he seemed to have 'questioned even the axiomatic facts of the Kashmir question' (such as its final accession to India). 'Instead of stabilizing the political situation of the state', complained Upadhyaya, 'Sheikh Abdullah has tried to unsettle every issue.'

The opposition from the Hindu right was predictable. As it happens, the left was also suspicious of Abdullah and his intentions. The Communist Party thought he was in danger of falling into an 'imperialist trap', designed to detach Kashmir from India. Among the Indian political establishment, it seems, only Nehru's mind remained open. But he was to receive unexpected support from two old stalwarts who had also worked with Mahatma Gandhi. One was Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as 'JP', the former radical socialist who for the past decade had been a leading light of the Sarvodaya movement. JP was an old friend of the Sheikh; he had also been a vocal advocate of better relations with Pakistan. In 1962 he had set up an India—Pakistan Conciliation Group which, among other things, sought to find an 'equitable and honourable' solution to the Kashmir dispute.[25]

Now, welcoming Sheikh Abdullah's release in a signed article in the *Hindustan Times*, JP deplored the insinuations against Abdullah by politicians inside and outside the Congress. These had threatened that he would be put back in jail if he went 'too far'. 'It is remarkable', commented JP acidly, 'how the freedom fighters of yesterday begin so easily to imitate the language of the imperialists.'

What alarmed politicians in Delhi was the Sheikh's talk about ascertaining afresh the wishes of the Kashmiri people. JP thought this eminently reasonable, for the elections in Jammu and Kashmir in 1957 and 1962 were anything but free and fair. In any case, if India was 'so sure of the verdict of the people, why are we so opposed to giving them another opportunity to reiterate it? A satisfactory settlement of the Kashmir question would greatly improve relations between India and Pakistan. JP hoped that the leaders of India would display 'the vision and statesmanship that this historic moment demands'. He added, 'Happily, the one sane voice in the ruling party is that of the Prime Minister himself.'[26]

More unexpected perhaps was the endorsement received by Nehru from C. Rajagopalachari ('Rajaji'), the veteran statesman who had once been an intimate associate of the prime minister but had latterly become apolitical opponent. As the founder of the Swatantra Party, Rajaji had savaged the prime minister's economic policies. These criticisms sometimes had a sharp personal edge. Now, to the surprise of his followers, he came out strongly in favour of Nehru's initiative in releasing Abdullah. Like JP, he deplored the threats to put the Sheikh back in jail, thus to 'force him into silence and submission'. Fortunately, 'the Prime Minister may be ill but he preserves his balance, and has evidently refused to take any foolish step and degrade India'.

The freeing of Abdullah, argued Rajaji, should act as a prelude to allowing 'the people of Kashmir [to] exercise their human right to rule themselves as well as they can'. Indeed, solving the Kashmir tangle would pave the way for a larger resolution of the Indo-Pak dispute itself. Thus, Rajaji wrote of the need to

> try and think fundamentally in the present crisis. Are we to yield to the fanatical emotions of our anti-Pakistan groups? Is there any hope for India or for Pakistan, if we go on hating each other, suspecting each other, borrowing and building up armaments against each other – building our two houses, both of us on the sands of continued foreign aid against a future Kurukshetra? We shall surely ruin ourselves forever if we go on doing this . . . We shall be making all hopes of prosperity in the future a mere mirage if we continue this arms race based on an ancient grudge and the fears and suspicions flowing from it.[27]

VI

In Kashmir, meanwhile, Sheikh Abdullah was talking to his colleagues and associates. He discovered that while he had been in jail, he had come to be associated with the Pakistan party. At his trial Abdullah had insisted that he never expressed a desire for Kashmir to join Pakistan. India or independence – those were the only two options he had countenanced. But the trial proceedings never reached the common people of the Valley. They knew only that he was being tried for conspiracy against the Indian nation. Would not that make him, by default, a friend of Pakistan?

The common people were strengthened in their beliefs by the propaganda of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed's government, which had painted the Sheikh as an agitator for a plebiscite, and hence anti-Indian. Moreover, the chicanery and corruption of the Bakshi regime had greatly tarnished the image of India among the Kashmiris. Abdullah found that the pro-Pakistani elements were now perhaps in a majority. This did not please him. But, sensing the mood on the ground, he worked to gradually win over the people to his point of view. He met the influential priest Maulvi Farooqui and urged him to support a 'realistic' solution, rather than claim that Kashmir should accede to Pakistan in pursuance of the two-nation theory.[28]

On 23 April, two weeks after he was released, Sheikh Abdullah addressed a prayer meeting in Srinagar. A solution to the Kashmir dispute, he said, must take into account its likely consequences for the 50 million Muslims in India, and the 10 million Hindus in East Pakistan. Three days later, in his last speech before leaving for Delhi, he urged the Kashmiris to maintain communal peace, to thus set an example for both India and Pakistan. 'No Muslim in Kashmir will ever raise his hand against the minorities,' he proclaimed.

On 28 April, the day before Abdullah was due to arrive in Delhi, the Jana Sangh held a large procession in the capital. The marchers shouted anti-Abdullah and anti-Nehru slogans and demanded that the government of India abrogate Article 370 and declare Kashmir to be an 'integral and indivisible' part of India. At a public meeting held the same day, A. B. Vajpayee demanded that the prime minister tell Abdullah that Jammu and Kashmir had 'already been integrated with the Indian Union and that there was no scope for discussion on this matter'.

On the 29th Abdullah flew into Palam airport with his principal associates. The party drove on to Teen Murti House, where the prime minister was waiting to receive Abdullah. It was the first time the two men had seen one another since Nehru's government had locked up the Sheikh in August 1953. Now, as one eyewitness wrote, 'the two embraced each other warmly. They were meeting after 11 years, but the way they greeted each other reflected no traces of embarrassment, let aside bitterness over what happened in the intervening period'. The duo posed for the battery of press photographers before going inside.

This was a reconciliation between the leader of the nation and a man till recently regarded as a traitor to it. It anticipated, by some thirty years, the similarly portentous reconciliation between the South African president and his

most notorious political prisoner. But even F. W. De Klerk did not go so far as to ask Nelson Mandela to stay with him.

On this visit, Abdullah stayed five days with Nehru in Teen Murti House. They met at least once or twice a day, usually without aides. While the prime minister was otherwise occupied, the Sheikh canvassed a wide spectrum of Indian opinion. He spoke to Congress ministers, to leaders of the opposition and to prominent non-political figures such as Jayaprakash Narayan. He placed a wreath on Gandhi's tomb in Rajghat and addressed a prayer meeting at Delhi s greatest mosque, the Jama Masjid.

That Nehru was talking to Abdullah was not to the liking of the Jana Sangh. Notably, it also caused disquiet among members of his own Cabinet, who worried that the Kashmir question would now be 're-opened'. To preempt the possibility, a senior minister told Parliament that the 'maintenance of the status quo [in Kashmir] was in the best interests of the subcontinent' .And twenty-seven Congress MPs issued a statement arguing that 'you can no more talk of self-determination in the case of Kashmir than in the case of, say, Bombay or Bihar'.

Within his party, the only senior man who appeared sympathetic to Nehru's efforts was Lal Bahadur Shastri. There were, however, some opposition politicians who saw the point of speaking seriously with Abdullah. Thus the Swatantra Party leader Minoo Masani urgently wired Rajaji:

> Understand Nehru and Lal Bahadur endeavouring to find solution with Sheikh Abdullah but are up against confused thinking within Congress Party alongside of Jan Sangh communist combination. If you think telegram or letter to Jawaharlal from yourself encouraging him [to] do the right thing and assuring your personal support would help please move in the matter.[29]

Rajaji chose not to write to Nehru, perhaps because he was too proud or feared a rebuff, but he did write to Lal Bahadur Shastri urging that Kashmir be given some kind of autonomous status. As he saw it, 'self-determination for Kashmir is as far as we are concerned a lesser issue than the aim of reducing Indo-Pak jealousy'. He thought that 'the idea that if we "let Kashmir go", we shall be encouraging secessions everywhere is thoroughly baseless'. 'I hope you and Jawaharlalji', wrote Rajaji to Shastri, 'will be guided by Providence and bring this great opportunity to a good result.'[30]

Shortly after his release Abdullah had expressed his wish to 'pay my respects personally to Rajaji, and have the benefit of his mature advice'.[31] Now, after his conversations with Nehru, he setoff south to meet the prime minister's friend turned rival turned ally. He planned to stop at Wardha en route, to pay his respects to the Gandhian leader Vinoba Bhave. As he jokingly told a journalist, he would discuss 'spirituality with Vinoba and 'practical politics' with Rajaji.

On 4 May Lal Bahadur Shastri wrote to Rajaji urging him 'to suggest to Sheikh Saheb not to take any extreme line . . . Sheikh Saheb has just come out [of jail] and it would be good for him to give further thought to the different aspects of the Kashmir question and come to a judgement after full and mature introspection and deliberation. It will be most unfortunate if things are done in a hurry or precipitated'.[32]

This was an airmail letter, but one does not know whether it reached Madras before the 5th, on which day Abdullah finally met Rajaji. They spoke for a full three and a half hours, provoking this front page headline in the *Hindustan Times*: 'Abdullah, CR, Evolve Kashmir Formula: Proposal to Be Discussed with Prime Minister'. Rajaji did not say a word to the press, but Abdullah was slightly more forthcoming. Speaking to the wise old man, he said, 'had helped clear his mind about what would be the best solution which would remove this cancer from the body politic of India and Pakistan'. Pressed for details, the Sheikh said these would have to await further talks with the prime minister. He did let on, however, that Rajaji and he had worked out 'an honourable solution which would not give a sense of victory either to India or Pakistan and at the same time would ensure a place of honour to the people of Kashmir'.

While Abdullah was in Madras, word reached him that President Ayub Khan had invited him to visit Pakistan. On returning to Delhi on 6 May he went straight to Teen Murti House. He spent ninety minutes with Nehru, apprising him of what was being referred to, somewhat mysteriously, as 'the Rajaji formula'. The prime minister next directed Abdullah to an informal committee of advisers. This consisted of the foreign secretary, Y. D. Gundevia, the high commissioner to Pakistan, G. Parthasarathi, and the vice-chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, Badruddin Tyabji.

Over two long days, Abdullah and the prime minister's men discussed the Kashmir issue threadbare. All kinds of alternatives were mooted. These included a plebiscite for the entire, undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed before 1947; the maintenance of the status quo; and afresh division of the state, such that the Jammu and Ladakh regions went to India,

Azad or northern Kashmir went to Pakistan, with a plebiscite being held in the Valley alone to decide its future. Abdullah told the officials that while they could work out the specifics of the solution, it must (1) promote Indo-Pakistani friendship; (2) not weaken the secular ideal of the Indian Constitution; (3) not weaken the position of the minorities in either country. He asked them to give him more than one alternative, which he could take with him to Pakistan.

The Sheikh's conditions more or less ruled out a plebiscite, the result of which, whatever it might be, would leave one country dissatisfied and minorities on both sides more vulnerable. What about the Rajaji formula? This, it appears, was for a condominium over Kashmir between India and Pakistan, with defence and external affairs being the joint responsibility of the two governments. (The model here was Andorra, a tiny but autonomous enclave whose security was guaranteed by its two large neighbours, France and Spain.) Another possibility was of creating a confederation among India, PakistanandKashmir.[33]

The trinity advising Nehru were selected for their ability and knowledge; it is noteworthy nonetheless that they came from three different religious traditions. It is noteworthy too that all were officials. Recall that when there was a chance to settle the dispute with China, the jingoism of the politicians compelled Nehru to take positions more hardline than he otherwise might have done. Now, in seeking a settlement with Pakistan, Nehru sought to work with his officials, rather than his ministers. The wisdom of this approach was made clear in a letter written to Rajaji by the writer and parliamentarian B. Shiva Rao. This noted that

> There is a clear attempt both from within the Cabinet and in Parliament to prevent the Prime Minister from coming to terms with Sheikh Abdullah if it should mean the reopening of the issue of accession. Many of these Ministers have made public statements while the discussions between the two are going on. It's a sign of the diminishing prestige and influence of the PM that they can take such liberties.

This was interesting, but the reply was more interesting still. This gave more flesh to the 'Rajaji formula', while locating Nehru's predicament in proper perspective. Thus, wrote Rajaji,

Asking Ayub Khan to give a commitment in advance about Azad Kashmir now will break up the whole scheme. He will and cannot give it. He is in a worse situation than Nehru in regard to public pressures and emotional bondage . . . Any plan should therefore leave the prizes of war untouched . . . Probably the best procedure is for Sheikh to concentrate on the valley leaving Jammu as a counterpoise to Azad Kashmir, to be presumed to be integrated to India without question.

This reduced shape of the problem is good enough, if solved as we desire, to bring about an improvement in the Indo-Pakistan relationship. And being of reduced size, would be a fitting subject for UN trusteeship partial or complete.[34]

On the Indian side, the best hope for peace was Jawaharlal Nehru. Sheikh Abdullah appears to have thought that Nehru was also the *last* hope. On 11 May the Sheikh told reporters that 'I do not want to plead for Nehru but he is the symbol of India in spite of his weakness. You cannot find another man like him.' He added that 'after Nehru he did not see anyone else tackling [the problems] with the same breadth of vision'.

For his part, Nehru was also quite prepared to give his old comrade and sometime adversary a sterling certificate of character. Speaking to the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay on the 16th, the prime minister said that the Sheikh was wedded to the principles of secularism. Nor did he believe in the two-nation theory. Both Nehru and he hoped that 'it would be possible for India, holding on to her principles, to live in peace and friendship with Pakistan and thus incidentally to put an end to the question of Kashmir'. 'I cannot say if we will succeed in this', said the prime minister, 'but it is clear that unless we succeed India will carry the burden of conflict with Pakistan with all that this implies.'

VII

On 20 May, Sheikh Abdullah returned to Delhi, to stay at Teen Murti House and have a final round of talks with Nehru before travelling to Pakistan. At a press conference on the 22nd, Nehru declined to disclose the details, saying that he did not want to prejudice the Sheikh's mission. But he did indicate that his government was 'prepared to have an agreement with Pakistan on the basis of their holding on to that part of Kashmir occupied by them'.[35]

Nehru's own papers on this subject are closed to scholars, but a letter written by his foreign secretary gives a clue to his thinking at the time. The prime minister had apparently asked legal experts to explore the implications of a confederation between India, Pakistan and Kashmir, 'as a possible solution to our present troubles'. Such an arrangement would not imply an 'annulment' of Partition. India and Pakistan would remain separate, sovereign states. Kashmir would be part of the confederation, with its exact status to be determined by dialogue. There might be a customs union of the three units, some form of financial integration and special provisions for the protection of minorities.[36]

To keep the discussion going, India was prepared to concede Pakistan' s hold over Azad Kashmir and Gilgit, the two parts of the state that it had lost in the war of 1947-8. Would Pakistan concede anything in turn? As Abdullah prepared to depart for Rawalpindi, Minoo Masani wrote to A. K. Brohi, sometime Pakistani high commissioner to India and now a leading Karachi lawyer, a certified member of the Pakistani Establishment who had the ear of President Ayub Khan. 'The nature of the response which he [the Sheikh] is able to evoke from President Ayub', said Masani to Brohi, would 'have a decisive influence in strengthening or weakening the hands of those who stand for Indo-Pakistan amity here'. Nehru's Pakistan initiative was bitterly opposed from within his party and outside it. For it to make progress, for there to be a summit meeting between the prime minister and President Ayub Khan, it was 'of the highest moment that Sheikh Abdullah should come back with something on which future talks could be based'. Masani urged Brohi to use his influence with Ayub and other leaders, so that their talks with Abdullah might 'yield fruitful results in the interests of both countries'.[37]

Meanwhile, Abdullah proceeded to Pakistan. He hoped to spend two weeks in that country, beginning with the capital, Rawalpindi, moving on to Azad Kashmir and ending with East Pakistan, where he intended, among other things, to check on the feelings of the Hindu minority. On 24 May he touched down in Rawalpindi to a tumultuous reception. He drove in an open car from the airport to the town, the route lined by thousands of cheering Pakistanis. The welcome, said one reporter, 'surpassed in intensity and depth that given to Mr Chou En-lai in February'.[38]

Later, talking to newsmen, Abdullah called his visit 'a peace mission of an exploratory nature'. He appealed to the press to help cultivate friendship between India and Pakistan. 'He said he had come to the definite conclusion that the armed forces of both the countries facing each other on the ceasefire line must be disengaged and that the edifice of a happy and prosperous Kash-

mir could be built only on permanent friendship between India and Pakistan'. As in New Delhi, here too he emphasized that any solution to the dispute must not foster a sense of defeat for either India or Pakistan; must not weaken India's secularism or the future of its 60 million Muslims; and must satisfy the aspirations of the Kashmiris themselves.

The next day, the 25th, Abdullah and Ayub Khan held a three-hour meeting. The Sheikh would not touch on the details, saying only that he found in Rawalpindi 'the same encouraging response as in Delhi. There is an equal keenness on both sides to come to a real understanding'.

Later that day Abdullah addressed a mammoth public meeting in Rawalpindi. He was 'cheered repeatedly as he spoke for two hours, bluntly warning both Indians and Pakistanis from committing wrongs which would endanger the lives of the minorities in both countries'. The time had come, said Abdullah, for India and Pakistan to bury the hatchet. For if 'the present phase of tension, distrust and misunderstanding continued, both countries would suffer and their freedom be imperilled'.

On the 26th Abdullah met Ayub Khan again, for four hours this time, and came out beaming. The Pakistani president, he told a crowded news conference, had agreed to a meeting with Prime Minister Nehru in the middle of June. The meeting would take place in Delhi, and Abdullah would also be in the city, available for consultation. 'Of all the irritants that cause tension between India and Pakistan', said the Sheikh, 'Kashmir is the most important. Once this great irritant is removed, the solution of other problems would not present much difficulty.'

By this time the enchantment with the Sheikh was wearing thin among the Pakistani elite. Their representative voice, the *Dawn* newspaper, wrote of how Abdullah's statements, 'especially his references to India's so-called secularism, have caused a certain amount of disappointment among the public in general and the intelligentsia in particular'. *Dawn* thought that the Sheikh had been 'lured by the outward show of Indian secularism, obviously forgetting the inhumane treatment meted out to 60 million Muslims in the so-called secular state'. But the newspaper had amore fundamental complaint, that Abdullah had 'taken up the role of an apostle of peace and friendship between Pakistan and India, rather than that of the leader of Kashmir, whose *prime objective should be to seek their freedom from Indian bondage'*.[39]

On the 27th Abdullah proceeded to Muzaffarabad, a town he had not seen since Kashmir was divided in 1947. He had no idea of how the Kashmiris this side of the ceasefire line would react to his proposals. Before he could find out, news reached him that, back in New Delhi, Nehru had died. Abdullah at

once ‘broke into tears and sobbed’. In a muffled voice he told the reporters gathered around him, ‘he is dead, I can t meet him’. When asked for more reactions he retired to a room, to be alone with his grief.

Abdullah drove down to Rawalpindi and got on the first flight to Delhi. When he reached Teen Murti and saw the body of Nehru, ‘he cried like a child’. It took him some time to ‘compose himself and place the wreath on the body of his old friend and comrade’. To this account of a newsman on the spot we must add the witness of a diplomat who accompanied Nehru’s body to the cremation ground. As the fire was burning the body to ashes, buglers sounded ‘The Last Post’: ‘thus was symbolized the inextricability of India and England in Nehru’s life’. Then, before the fire finally died down, ’Sheikh Abdullah leapt on the platform and, weeping unrestrainedly, threw flowers onto the flames; thus was symbolized the inextricability of the Muslim world in Nehru’s life and the pathos of the Kashmir affair’.[40]

VIII

The events of April—May 1964 have unfortunately been neglected by scholars, whether biographers of Nehru or analysts of the Kashmir dispute.[41] If I have rehabilitated them here, it is because they provide fresh light on this most intractable of political problems – this ‘severe headache’ as Vallabhbhai Patel put it, this ‘cancer [in] the body politic of India and Pakistan’ in the words of Sheikh Abdullah – and because they provide a peculiarly poignant coda to the life and work of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The question remains how serious were the three campaigners for peace in April—May 1964? The one who did not reveal his mind at all, at least not in the public domain, was Field Marshal Ayub Khan. We know nothing about what he really thought at the time, whether he was indeed serious about a negotiated settlement on Kashmir, and whether he could then, so to say, ‘sell’ an agreement with India to his people. Sheikh Abdullah, on the other hand, was forthcoming with his views, expressing them to the press and in countless public meetings and orations. Some thought his words a mere mask for personal ambition. Writing in the *Economic Weekly*, one commentator claimed that ‘even a superficial study of his political behaviour convinces [one] that he is embarked on a most ramified plan to win an independent State by skilfully exploiting the hates and the prejudices, conscious and unconscious, and

the power political tangles which provide the background to Indo-Pakistan relations'.[42]

This seems to me to be too cynical by far. For Abdullah's words, and still more his actions, make manifest his commitment to secularism, his concern for the minorities in both India and Pakistan. He was ambitious, certainly, but while in 1953 he seems to have fancied himself as the uncrowned king of Kashmir, in 1964 he saw himself rather as an exalted peacemaker, the one man who could bring tranquillity and prosperity to a poor and divided subcontinent.

About Jawaharlal Nehru's motives there should be no doubt at all. He felt guilty about Abdullah's long incarceration, worried about the continuing disaffection in Kashmir, sensible of the long-term costs of the dispute to both India and Pakistan. The question was not then of his motives, but of his influence. Would his colleagues listen to him? Had he and Ayub Khan, with a little help from Abdullah, actually worked out a settlement, would it have passed muster with the Congress Party, or the Indian Parliament?

Possibly not. But even if it did, would it have worked in the long run? The legal expert consulted by Nehru's office on the idea of a confederation delicately pointed out that 'historically, confederations have been dominated by one member or united under stress'.[43] In sheer size India swamped both Pakistan and Kashmir. Would it then have behaved like Big Brother? Relevant here is a cartoon by Rajinder Puri that appeared in the *Hindustan Times* the day Abdullah met Ayub Khan. It showed the Field Marshal standing ruminatively, finger on chin, with the Sheikh expansively gesticulating, and saying: 'You're afraid Delhi will try to dominate Pindi? My dear chap, when Delhi can t dominate Lucknow or Chandigarh. . .' .[44]

Here then were a host of imponderables – Ayub's motives, Abdul-lah s beliefs, Nehru s strength, the viability of a condominium or a confederation. In the end it was Nehru's strength that gave way – literally. And, as a Pakistani newspaper noted, his passing away meant 'the end of a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir issue'. For whoever succeeded Nehru would not have 'the stature, courage and political support necessary to go against the highly emotional tide of public opinion in India favouring a status quoin Kashmir'.[45]