

The Economic Weekly

A Journal of Current Economic and Political Affairs

(Established January 1949)

February 13, 1954

Volume VI—No 7

Eight annas

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Kashmir

OPINION will differ whether the Kashmir Constituent Assembly's recent derision means only a delayed ratification of the Agreement concluded with India in July, 1952. This delay has had tragic consequences. It was Sheikh Abdullah's unwillingness to ratify the Delhi Agreement that created suspicions about his ulterior political motives. Sheikh Abdullah is an ingenuous politician. He fabricated the argument that he could not ratify the Agreement because of the Praja Parishad agitation. It would be futile to speculate whether New Delhi ever accepted this argument. But, for reasons which seem partly obscure and partly diplomatic. Pandit Nehru lent his support, directly or indirectly, to Sheikh Abdullah's stand.

Even those who never endorsed the Praja Parishad campaign for immediate and full integration of the State of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian Union, accepted the logic of some of the demands of the Parishad. Findings published later by official committees have confirmed the Parishad complaint about the economic grievances of the people of Jammu. Not only the Parishad, but even those without any communal complexion have always wondered Sheikh Abdullah's delaying tactics relating to the July 1952 Agreement.

Time and irrelevant arguments and counter-arguments have so obscured the Kashmir problem that it is necessary to assess the various issues-involved in their proper perspective. With timely ratification of the Delhi Agreement, the Praja Parishad agitation could have been settled promptly and satisfactorily. Non-ratification of the Agreement provided the late Dr Syama Prasad Mookherjee with an opportunity to gather support to his policy. His unfortunate death in detention in Kashmir was not only tragic in itself but also was a poignant reminder of the uncertain state of affairs in Kashmir then.

Belatedly, Pandit Nehru had to admit that the course of events in Kashmir was obscure. Facts and circumstances now available would seem to indicate that Sheikh Abdullah was not unprepared to play India and Pakistan against each other in his ambition to create an independent Kashmir. He was shrewd to foster the impression that, though he was a friend of India, he could not hasten the ratification of the Delhi Agreement as any such hasty action would be misinterpreted by the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Implication was that the people were suspicious of India's alleged designs on Kashmir, although Sheikh Abdullah pretended for a long time that he did not share these suspicions.

It was creditable of him to succeed in this diplomacy. At that time, there were many in India who honestly thought that the people of Jammu and Kashmir were hostile to association with the Indian Union. This was, perhaps, not a wrong impression, though later events proved that certain circumstances and personal motives of some politicians led to the gradual estrangement of the people of Jammu and Kashmir from India. Arrest of Sheikh Abdullah and subsequent political developments lend weight to this interpretation of the Kashmir situation.