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The Social and Political Life of a Relic: The Episode of the *Moi-e-Muqaddas* Theft in Kashmir, 1963-1964

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Idrees Kanth

The present article is focused on the relationship between a sacred object: the *moi-e-muqaddas* (the Prophet's hair), housed in the Hazratbal shrine in Kashmir, and the Kashmiri Muslim community. The relic, which was stolen from the shrine on 27 December 1963, led to a massive protest in the Kashmir valley and in other parts of the subcontinent, as people demanded its immediate recovery. Such thefts, which have been reported from across the world and across centuries, point to the extreme value of the relics, and the additional value they generate when they are stolen. Similarly, the Hazratbal relic theft became a vehicle for reifying certain Kashmiri Muslim social and political sentiments. The incident also catapulted the issue of Kashmir's political accession, which emerged in 1947 at the time of the partition of the subcontinent, to the forefront, alarming the Indian government.

The Hazratbal relic episode is also reflective of the role of religious ideas and symbols in political action in South Asia.

Keywords: Kashmir, shrine, relic, theft, politics.

Introduction

In an introductory note to a booklet: *'Moi-e-Muqaddas Nabwi Hazratbal Srinagar'* (The Sacred Hair of the Prophet in Hazratbal Srinagar), the veteran Kashmiri journalist Sufi Mohi-ud-din remarks that it was a spiritually enlightening moment for the Kashmiri community when the *'moi-e-muqaddas nabwi'* (The sacred hair of the Prophet) made its entrance into the Valley of Kashmir. The presence of the Prophet's hair in Kashmir is not only a *saadat* (blessing) for its people, as Sufi emphasises, it has almost elevated Kashmir to the status of Medina: *'Kashmir Medina ba-shud az moi-e-nabi'* (Bhat 1999: 1). The *moi-e-muqaddas*, and the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar, where it is preserved, has had an immense bearing on the social and political life of Kashmir. Over the centuries, the Hazratbal shrine has captivated the attention of Kashmir's rulers, who while they have duly acknowledged its spiritual munificence, have also realized the political authority that the shrine wields. Yet there have been a few occasions, as Sufi writes, when Kashmir's rulers have tried to undermine the prestige of the *moi-e-muqaddas*, including the Afghan governor of Kashmir, Azad Khan, who had to pay for his life after he tried to disgrace the relic by removing it from its glass seal. There is a popular belief that, whoever has tried to abuse the *moi-e-muqaddas*, has eventually met with a terrible fate (Bhat 1999: 2).

The presence of the *moi-e-muqaddas* in Hazratbal has bestowed it the status of the most important and spiritually elevated shrine in Kashmir. While the shrine has attracted hundreds of thousands across the Valley over the last two and a half centuries, it has also played a significant role in the social and political life of the people of Kashmir (Khan 1989: 173). When the relic, intensely venerated by the Kashmiri people, went missing from the shrine in the last week of December 1963, there was an immense outpour of emotion across the Valley of Kashmir, as people demanded its recovery, and punishment for those who were culpable of stealing it.

The disappearance of the relic created ruptures at multiple levels, fomenting a palpable sense of consciousness and unity in the otherwise internally divided Kashmiri Muslim community. It also became an instrument for people to articulate their sentiments related to the political future of Kashmir more pronouncedly. This essay seeks to make sense of these various sentiments that the relic invokes or invoked, especially following its disappearance from the shrine.

The emotion that the theft generated heightened the religious and regional consciousness of the Kashmiri Muslim community, affirming certain boundaries in the process.

The incident and its aftermath brought to the forefront the many relationships that have defined Kashmir's contemporary history and politics: the relationship between the Kashmiri Muslim community and the local state, the relationship between the Kashmir state and the Indian state, and also the relationship between India and Pakistan in the context of Kashmir. The relic issue not only unsettled New Delhi and particularly Nehru, it also produced reverberations in places as far off as Calcutta and even East Pakistan, where communal riots broke out. While Pakistan protested that the theft was committed on the orders of the Indian government, and used the incident to raise the Kashmir issue—the status and conflict over political sovereignty of the region that emerged from the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, which has since engaged India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiris on the question of the political accession of the state (Bose 2003)—in the Security Council, India complained that Pakistan exploited the situation to benefit its agenda in Kashmir.

The present article seeks to investigate the sacred, social and political relationships that tie the Kashmiri Muslim community with the relic, especially as these relationships come to fore and become more palpable following its theft in December 1963. While it discusses the relationship between the *moi-e-muqaddas* and the people, the article does not concern itself with finding out the perpetrators of the relic theft. Nor does it really seek to focus as much on the mode and specificity of the protests that followed the theft. It examines the relic as an object of reverence and celebrity and seeks to understand both why the relic has come to be regarded as sacred by its adherents, and the political sentiment that its theft precipitates (Walsham 2010: 10). The study of relics, as Patrick Geary rightly observes is not often about the object, but rather people (Geary 1990: 3). Material remains become relics as a consequence of the beliefs and practices that accumulate around them. They are the products and confections of the cultures that engender and reverence them. The making of them is thus both a social and a cognitive process (Walsham 2010: 14).

Relics: Objects of Veneration, Instruments of Power

A relic is a material object that relates to a particular individual or to events and places with which that individual was associated. Typically, it is the body or fragment of the body of a deceased person. Alongside corporeal relics such as skulls, bones, blood, teeth, hair, and fingernails, are non-corporeal items that were possessed by or came into direct contact with the individual in question. These may be articles of clothing: hats, girdles, capes, smocks, shoes, and sandals, or pieces of personal property like

cups, spectacles, handkerchiefs, weapons, staves, and bells (Walsham 2010: 11). In a fundamental sense, a relic is a metonymy for the person of a prophet, saint, or other holy person (Meri 2010: 103).

A relic is ontologically different from a representation or image. It is not a mere symbol or indicator of divine presence, but an actual physical embodiment of it, each particle encapsulating the essence of the departed person, in its entirety (Walsham 2010: 12). However, the relics themselves, physical remains of saints, are essentially passive and neutral. It is the individuals, the people, who come into contact with these objects, giving them value and assimilating them into their history, who are the proper subjects of historical inquiry (Geary 1990: 4). Nevertheless, there is no way that human and material agency can be disentangled. The agency of the relic is eventually a mediated activity between the human and the material object. It is the relational and emergent product of material engagement (Malafouris 2008: 34). In other words, the properties of the materials are relational and processual. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but are practically experienced (Ingold 2007: 14).

Relics have also functioned as political devices across a range of cultures (Walsham 2010: 27). While their veneration creates a ritually bounded community, they have often become sources and instruments of political legitimation (Schober 1997: 220). Muslim rulers and caliphs yoked themselves to the Prophet Muhammad through the ownership of his staff and mantle, by employing these objects in investiture ceremonies, and by carrying them into battle as powerful totems. Similarly the legitimacy of British colonial rule of Sri Lanka after 1815 in the eyes of its inhabitants was apparently sealed by its custodianship of the Buddha's tooth, possession of which was an ancient prerogative and attribute of kingship (Walsham 2010: 27).

Relics thus operate as vectors and embodiments of authority and legitimacy, but also as foci for political protest. The relic, as Alexandra Walsham writes, has the capacity to act as a form of symbolic capital (Walsham 2010: 25). Initially buried anonymously to hinder veneration, the body of Che Guevara, Castro's chief lieutenant in the Cuban Revolution executed in Bolivia in 1967, was later resurrected and revered as that of a martyr to his anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ideals (Walsham 2010: 27-28). Relics and other material objects often tend to have political afterlives and get invoked and manipulated as nationalist symbols by the state and by people across classes (Walsham 2010: 28).

In Kashmir, the hundreds of *ziarat* and *dargah* (shrines), spread across the Valley are endowed with relics, both corporeal and non-corporeal, of saints and holy men highly venerated by the people of the region. Of these, the Hazratbal *dargah* is recognised as the most sacred because it houses the *moi-e-muqaddas*. The shrine has also been a powerful political platform for the Kashmiri leaders to further their political objectives. The influx of devotees to the *dargah* from across the vast geographical area of the Valley reveals the significance of Hazratbal as a symbol of Kashmiri Muslim unity, both as a religious and a regional community (Khan 1989: 181).

The Hazratbal *Dargah* in the Life of the Community

Unlike the mosque where the formal, communitarian gatherings take place, the shrine or the *dargah* is the preferred place for individual or family outings, especially for the occasion of *urs* (festivities associated with the death anniversary of a saint) celebration. On this occasion a very large group gathers for prayers and for social celebration in the form of a *mela* (religious festival) (Jackson 1989: 110). The shrines thus encourage social participation, and serve as specialised loci within which the particular and relatively mundane problems of visitors may be alleviated (Kurin 1983: 312). Shrines are therefore, imbued with the idea of the sacred, and in turn manifest sacredness.¹

Shrines have been a central component of Kashmiri society in general, and Kashmiri Islam in particular. The position of the shrine in the religious, social and economic life of the Valley is legendary (Zutshi 2014: 121, 127). Kashmiri Muslims visit shrines for health, procreation, longevity, and relief from floods, famine or diseases, etc. (Khan 1989: 178). They believe that a visit to the shrines will secure the object of their wishes. Sick men will regain health, women will be vouchsafed children, and the litigant will win their case (Lawrence 1967: 289-290). Of the many shrines in Kashmir the Hazratbal *dargah* is the most revered one, because it houses the sacred hair or relic of the Prophet Muhammad, the *moi-e-muqaddas*, also called *moi-e-mubarak* or *moi-e-sharief* (Bhat 1999: 1-2).²

The display of relics and their veneration and adoration by people has a long tradition in Kashmir's history. Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese traveller who visited the Valley of Kashmir in 631 has written about the tooth of Buddha and its veneration by the Buddhist monks of the region (Khan 1989: 176; Kaul 2005: 160, 163-164). Similarly, the custodians of numerous shrines in Kashmir have preserved the relics and belongings of various saints, and they are displayed to the devotees on their anniversaries.

The preservation of some of these relics and their public exhibition on special occasions may speak of the assimilation of the local Hindu-Buddhist practices among the Muslims of Kashmir (Khan 1994: 82). A special characteristic of the devotees during such gatherings is their focus on the relic, the object of veneration, with folded hands. The devotees may also touch the grave and relics of the departed saint to seek benediction (Khan 1994: 82, 228).

Similarly, the *moi-e-muqaddas* represents for Kashmiri Muslims an object that can be approached with the hope of gaining spiritual and material benefits from the supernatural presence and powers that such an object is believed to inhabit or manifest (Jacobsen et al. 2015: 1). Such objects are defined as sacred and protected from private trespass by both prohibiting and prescribing certain types of behaviour in relation to them (Wheeler 2006: 10). The religious potency of such objects is not only apparent from the distinctive forms of behaviour that range from gestures and postures of veneration, but also through the construction of built environments within which these relics function (Trainor 2010: 271).

The Kashmir historian Ishaq Khan observes that for the devotees the shrine of Hazratbal, by virtue of being the repository of the Prophet's relic, is a place of interaction and communication between the Prophet, who is visualised as spiritually alive through his relic, and his followers. The practice of visiting the Hazratbal *dargah* has therefore been a marked feature in the religious life of Kashmiri Muslims (Khan 1989: 175, 177). Apart from the usual crowd that throngs the shrine everyday, and more so on Fridays, every year on the occasion of two festivals: *Milad-un-Nabi* (birthday of the Prophet) and *Mairaj-i-Alam* (the day commemorating the Prophet's heavenly journey), thousands of people flock to Hazratbal from all parts of the Kashmir valley (Khan 1989: 174).³ The Valley is supposedly the only region in the Muslim world where devotees observe an exceedingly long set of rituals beginning from the night proceeding the two important events (Khan 2007: 149-181).⁴ These are occasions among others ones in the year, all connected with some events in the Prophet's life, on which the holy relic is exposed to the people (Mullik 1971: 119).

From several folk songs and poems composed in Kashmiri in praise of the relic, it is evident that there has always been an endeavour to attribute the privileges of Medina to Hazratbal (Khan 1989: 175). Even today devotees are seen touching the hands, body or even the dress of the custodian exhibiting the relic in the hope of receiving a *baraka*⁵ (blessing) besides making vows and offering gifts

to the sacred shrine in return for granting of their desires. This reverence for the sacred hair and its custodians may be seen to have fostered what can almost be termed a patron-client relationship in a system of *pir-muridi*⁶ (the relationship between a spiritual master [pir] and his disciple [murid]) which has marked the life of the shrine in the past (Khan 1989: 179). Though reformists have at various points criticized the worship of the divine through material objects as idolatry in attempts to restore and emphasise the importance of religious teachings and doctrines (Jacobsen et al. 2015: 1), it has not stopped devotees from visiting the shrines, and holding them in deepest reverence. In Kashmir, while the *Ahl-e-Hadith*,⁷ and other orthodox sects have sought to diminish the importance of Hazratbal and generate doubts about the authenticity of the relic, such attempts at deprecating the sacredness and venerability of the shrine have seldom met with success (Khan 1989: 175).

The Hazratbal shrine also has an economic significance. Following prayers and worship especially during festivities, nearly everyone indulges in sales purchases and amusement, as the area around the shrine turns into a mart with shops of grocers, drapers, fruit sellers and confectioners (Lal 1913). Hazratbal has also offered economic opportunities to merchants and artisans who could do good business in the precincts and the neighbourhood of the shrine. To those businessmen who find it difficult to sell their goods all through the year, the six annual fairs, coupled with the regular Friday congregations at the shrine, offers a suitable outlet for their surplus products (Lal 1913).

The shrine has also stood as a political platform symbolising the regional consciousness of the Kashmiri people. Hazratbal is to the Kashmiri Muslims, as one journalist wrote in the context of a siege that the Indian army was laid on the shrine in the early nineties, what the Golden Temple represents to the Sikhs (Baweja 1993). Reporting on the siege, which lasted over fifteen days to remove forty odd militants housed inside the shrine premises, the journalist duly acknowledged, as did many others, that it not only hurt the sentiments of the Valley Muslims, but also made the Kashmir issue more visible on the international platform (Baweja 1993: 18-29). The episode offers one among many other examples of the power and authority that the shrine wields as a social and political space, and its overall significance in the life of the Kashmiri people.

Realizing the importance of the Hazratbal shrine, Sheikh Abdullah, the most prominent Kashmiri political leader, brought it under the control of the *Auqa*⁸ in 1943. Soon the

shrine became an important site for promoting the politics of National Conference that Abdullah espoused and which stood in stark opposition to that of the Muslim Conference, the organization that controlled the other important religious power center: the Jamia Masjid, in downtown Srinagar.⁹ After Abdullah's expulsion from the office of Prime Minister¹⁰ of Kashmir in 1953 on the orders of the central Indian government, the shrine became a platform for the Kashmiri Muslim leadership to further its political objectives and to seek the release of Abdullah (Khan 1989: 181). Later in the 1960s and onwards into 1970s, Abdullah focused his attention on the reconstruction of the shrine. He demolished the old historical Hazratbal mosque built in the seventeenth century, considered one of the best specimens of the wooden architecture of Kashmir, to rebuilt it on an Islamic pattern, to immortalise his political links with the *dargah*, and to gain further popularity among the local people. He toured various parts of the Valley and visited almost every house, particularly in Srinagar city, to raise funds for its reconstruction (Khan 1989: 186-187).

Given the immense significance that the Hazratbal shrine holds in the life of the Kashmiri Muslim community, the wave of resentment and anger that the theft of the relic generated is therefore, quite self-explanatory.

The *Moi-e-Muqaddas*

Unlike other prophets and holy persons, Prophet Muhammad became the object of veneration precisely because his teachings, sayings and silent affirmations were meticulously preserved by his companions and his family and transmitted to subsequent generations, who also preserved and employed his relics: hair, and sweat and water from prayer ablution as relics, seeking to derive *baraka* from them even after his death (Meri 2010: 102-104).

Islamic commentaries and reports indicate that the Prophet distributed his hair after shaving for ihlal (the desacralisation ritual) after his final and only pilgrimage to Mecca.¹¹ *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim* cite a report in which it is said that the Prophet cut his hair upon completing the pilgrimage, and instructed Abu Talhah to distribute one share of the hair to each of the *sahabah* (male companions of the Prophet), and to Abu Talhah's wife Umm Sulaym to distribute two shares to the women (Wheeler 2006: 72). According to another account, it was this distribution that established the tradition of *baraka* being associated with the hair of the Prophet. Other reports and accounts mention that the Prophet Muhammad made this distribution at the completion of his pilgrimage so that his followers could keep the objects as relics, and that there

was no hair that fell from his head that was not collected by his followers (Wheeler 2006: 72, 2010: 341-388). There are also multiple traditions and accounts associated with the further transportation of the Prophet's hair and other relics. The transportation of hair by the companions of the Prophet and farther distribution of this hair through conquest is evident from the records of burial, especially at sites of martyrdom or conquest, as Brannon Wheeler mentions in his book.

In the context of Kashmir, it is reported that a rich local merchant, Khwaja Nuruddin Ishbari purchased the holy relic for one hundred thousand rupees from Sayyid Abdullah of Bijapur, who had brought it to the Deccan from Medina (Khan 1989: 174). Ishbari died on his way home from Bijapur in 1699, and the relic was brought to Srinagar along with his dead body. As a mark of respect in response to popular sentiment, Fazil Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir ordered that the relic be housed at a mosque in Bagh-i-Sadiqabad, an area situated on the western bank of the Dal Lake. The place has since come to be known as Hazratbal, the abode of the Prophet Muhammad, while the shrine is referred to as *Asar-i-sharif* (relic shrine) (Khan 1989: 174). Gradually a village grew around the shrine (Mullik 1971: 117).

Since the sacred hair was kept at Hazratbal, the place became the center of pilgrimage for Kashmiri Muslims. As mentioned, Hazratbal signifies the Medina *thani* (second Medina) for its devotees in the Valley. This as Ishaq Khan informs us arose not only from the devotees' unbounded veneration of the Prophet but also from practical difficulties in performing the sacred duty of the *hajj* (Khan 1989: 177). *Hajj* was beyond their reach owing to the abject poverty in which they lived. Thus a visit to the shrine would, at least, have reduced in the devotees' religious consciousness the physical barriers between the *Arab* and the *Ajam* (non-Arab world). This sentiment is reflected in the following verses:

Whosoever has seen the sacred hair of Muhammad,
 He has seen the vision of the Prophet,
 [Although] he is entombed in Arabia,
 His sacred hair sanctifies the Ajam
 He reveals the eternal reality of his radiance only to
 those in Kashmir
 Who have an abiding faith and are spiritually illu-
 minated (Khan 1989: 177).

The local tradition goes that the *moi-e-muqaddas* had been stolen or surreptitiously removed on two occasions in the past, but on both these occasions it came back to Hazratbal by a miracle. The locals believe that the *moi-e-muqaddas* had by its own grace travelled from Arabia to the Hazratbal lake in Kashmir and would not allow itself to be removed for any considerable period from its place of rest and would always come back (Mullik 1971: 118-119).

Even when it was removed to the mosque, the relic remained under the control of Nuruddin Ishbari's descendants, and they were the only people who were entitled to exhibit the *moi-e-muqaddas* to the public (Mullik 1971: 117, 119). Every year on special occasions the relic with the large silver trapping is offered for *deedar* from the balcony of the Hazratbal mosque, to show it to thousands of pilgrims congregated in the huge yard in front. Despite the stray apprehensions that the relic was not well protected, the belief was that it protects itself. However, in the winter of 1963, towards the end of the December month, the Kashmiri people were in for a rude shock. The relic was stolen.

The Theft of the Relic

Oh zalimo, waapas karo

[Oh tyrants, return it back] (Gauhar 1998: 93).

On the intervening night of 26 and 27 December 1963, the *moi-e-muqaddas* was stolen from its repository at the shrine of Hazratbal in Srinagar. The wooden box containing the relic had been taken out from the small shelf in which it had been kept, after forcing the shelf open. The last time when a *deedar* had been given was on 20 December 1963. After the *deedar*, Abdul Rahim Bandy, the *mutawalli* (a senior custodian of the shrine), had put the relic back in its place (Mullik 1971: 119).

The news about the loss of the relic travelled like wild fire throughout the snowbound Kashmir valley. And even though weather conditions were not pleasant¹² large crowds started collecting at the shrine from early morning (Malhotra 2010). By the afternoon of 27 December, thousands of people were marching through the streets of Srinagar, protesting against the theft and demanding its immediate restoration. The town observed a spontaneous and complete *hartal* (strike). The sentiments of the people of the Valley "had been deeply hurt due to the sacrilege committed in respect of something, which they held to be highly sacred and dearer than even their lives" (Mullik 1971: 120).

The *hartal* continued over the next day on 28 December, paralysing the Srinagar city completely. All stores and offices were closed and taxis and horse-drawn carriages were taken off the roads.¹³ Processions from different parts of the city and adjoining areas started marching towards the city center, Lal Chowk, gathering into a great *jaloos* (procession), raising slogans and waving black flags. Women were also involved in the protests, occupying the other end of Lal Chowk. At the Residency road, near Lal Chowk, the *jaloos* was intercepted by Bakshi Abdul Rashid, the General Secretary of the ruling National Conference government, and the cousin of the former Prime Minister of the state, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, who arrived on the scene in his blue Chevrolet. Rashid told the crowd to disperse and not to create any trouble. His interception however, proved counter-productive and incited the crowd who started throwing *kangris* (portable fire pots used to keep warm in the Kashmiri winter) at him. His car was also overturned, and later burnt. While he escaped the scene, the incident galvanised the entire public opinion against Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and his family and blamed them for the theft. This triggered further rage in the crowd and they burnt down, two movie theatres, Amreesh and Regal, that were owned by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's brother, Bakshi Abdul Majeed (Bhat 1980: 104; Swami 2007: 42).¹⁴

On Residency Road, they even attempted to attack the All India Radio Station in Srinagar. However, the police intervened and saved the building from being damaged (Mullik 1971: 122). The attack on the station may have been spontaneous, but it could be suggestive of an emerging consciousness among the protestors that the local state at the behest of the powers in India may have carried out the theft. In the opinion of an officer, the excited crowd carried out the attack because, according to them, the station did not give a correct account of the previous evening's happenings (Mullik 1971: 122).

Others claimed that the Radio Station was generally an instrument of false propaganda, and thus an object of ire (Bhat 1980: 104). Meanwhile wave upon wave of people continued to pour in from across the Valley, converging at Hazratbal. En route to Hazratbal volunteers had organised free snacks, hot tea, lunches and dinners. The Pandits and Sikhs were also out on the roads to provide moral support to the Muslim protestors (Gauhar 1998: 94).¹⁵

While the crowd dispersed in the evening, the intensity of the public's anger unsettled the corridors of power in Delhi. Hours later in a special radio broadcast on All India Radio: 'Address to the Nation', usually delivered

on the Independence Day of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister appealed to the Kashmiri people “to exercise restraint at this hour of national tragedy” (Gauhar 1998: 95). He also assured them that the relic incident would be thoroughly investigated. However, Nehru’s speech made little impact on the protestors, even as he reiterated his commitment to investigate the matter in yet another radio broadcast on the next evening of 29 December. In fact, the situation became only more volatile, forcing the central government to send over an Indian Civil Services officer, V. Viswanathan, the Home Secretary, to Kashmir, to tackle the situation. A few officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), including its director B. N. Mullik, also reached Srinagar on 30 December to help with the investigation process. Earlier, arrangements had been made for moving a Punjab Armed Police and a Central Reserve Police battalion to Kashmir (Bhat 1980: 104-105).

People seemed unfazed by all these developments and the *hartal* continued unabated over the next few days. Multiple gatherings of protestors would as usual assemble around in the city demanding the recovery of the *moi-e-muqaddas*. On one occasion, the Armed Police reinforcements fired at protestors at three places around the Lal Chowk area, killing a few people and injuring a dozen more. Mullik noted that “the entire Kashmir valley was breaking up and something had to be done within a week, otherwise there was every danger of a conflagration with Pakistan over this.” He was particularly concerned that the Pakistan Radio was gloating over the incidents in Kashmir and loudly accusing the Indian government for having engineered the theft to suppress the Muslims of the valley, and that “there were people in Kashmir who were moved by this form of propaganda” (Mullik 1971: 123). Here is how Mullik describes a typical day during the course of the agitation:

Everything was closed: offices, schools, shops, cinemas, restaurants. *Langars* (eating places) had been set up at various places in the town. Large crowds were coming from villages carrying food, bedding and even fuel for warming their bodies. All the main roads were blocked by thousands of people. The smallest procession was at least a mile long covering the entire width of the road including the footpaths. The temperature was ranging at night to several degrees below the freezing point. The sun never came out and it was raining and snowing all the time. All play grounds and other places of meetings were frozen with several inches of solid ice on the surface, yet three public meetings had collected between fifty to seventy thousand people. The Ministers were virtual prisoners confined to their houses with police guards protecting them.

All public institutions and offices were guarded by armed police. A vehicle, to be able to come out on the public roads, had to carry a black flag. Most of the [government] staff were also amongst the [protesting] crowd. Small periods were regulated when groceries and vegetable shops could be opened for the convenience of the people. Every wall of the city was full of posters, and every house had a black flag (Mullik 1971: 129).

During this time, the printing presses across Kashmir remained closed due to the *hartal* and no newspapers could be published (Mullik 1971: 130, 134). With the government and the administration of Khwaja Shamas-ud-din, the local Prime Minister, appearing almost paralysed and unable to make any interventions to overcome the situation, the local officers of the state had started reporting to Mr. Viswanathan instead (Bhat 1980: 106). Amidst the breakdown of state machinery, a rumor surfaced on 30 December that the relic had been recovered, and that a couple of people from Kangan, in the outskirts of Srinagar, had been arrested for the theft. Sanaullah Bhat, the editor of the most popular Urdu newspaper of the Valley, *Aftab*, promptly sought a meeting to confirm the rumour with the Deputy Inspector General of Jammu & Kashmir Police, Ghulam Qadir Ganderbali, who had set up a special cell inside the Shergarhi Police Station, in Srinagar to probe into the theft.

Ganderbali looked somewhat anxious, and on being asked about the validity of the claim that the relic had been recovered, responded by posing a counter question to Bhat: “if the relic is recovered would people doubt its authenticity?” Bhat soon realized that the news of the recovered relic was a hoax floated by the government to anticipate public response (Bhat 1980: 107). The next day, another rumor that the relic had been recovered from a boat near the Hazratbal shrine gained ground. Supposedly, a person had wrapped the relic in a shawl and left it there. Though Bhat was convinced that it was only a rumour, he nevertheless sought to confirm the news. On being told by Ganderbali that it had indeed been recovered and that Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad had gone to Delhi to get the silver bottom of the relic cover repaired, he was absolutely stunned. When asked by Bhat why the news of the recovery was not shared with the public, Ganderbali’s cautious response was that unless they were convinced that nobody would challenge its genuineness, they could not risk a public disclosure (Bhat 1980: 107). Obviously, the government was not only aware of the implications of not being able to recover the relic, but also the authenticity of the recovered relic.

An Action Committee had also been formed to assist with the recovery of the relic, the *Jamiat Hasoole Moi-e-Muqaddas* (Bhat 1980: 108).¹⁶ The Committee was a union of otherwise oppositional figures: Farooq Abdullah and Maulana Masoodi, the supporters of Sheikh Abdullah, Mirwaiz Farooq, the eminent religious cleric and Ghulam Mohiuddin Karra who were pro-Pakistan, the Shia leader Abbas Ansari, and even Peer Saad-ud-din Tarbali, the state President of the Jamat-i-Islami, all of whom apparently advocated a popular referendum as a means to resolve the impending political issue of Kashmir. This rare demonstration of unity following the theft of the relic only reveals the significance of the relic and its authority to bring together different leaders and sections of the community, under a single platform (Lockwood 1967: 387).

Meanwhile, as the campaign for the recovery of the *moi-e-muqaddas* became stronger, the demand for Sheikh Abdullah's release from captivity became equally vociferous.¹⁷ Posters were also issued demanding the resolution of the Kashmir issue by the United Nations, while seeking the intervention of Muslim countries including Pakistan in the matter. Mullik felt that the propaganda was entirely fuelled by the Pakistan and the Azad Kashmir Radios, who blamed India for the disappearance of the *moi-e-muqaddas* with the purpose of breaking the morale of the Kashmiri Muslims. Nevertheless, he acknowledged, "that large numbers of people in the Valley started believing this slander" (Mullik 1971: 132-133). A copy of a letter alleged to have been sent by Abdullah to Nehru was circulated in the form of a poster. The poster stressed that the "Prime Minister [Nehru] should accede to people's demands and do the right thing before the situation went completely out of control" (Mullik 1971: 134, 139). In fact the protesting public had by now coined a new slogan:

Yeh mulk hamara hai

Iska faisla hum karenge

[This is our *mulk*; we shall decide its future]
(Gauhar 1998: 96)

The Indian government was not only concerned about the implications that the relic theft had brought about in Kashmir, but also the more serious repercussions it could have in the Muslim world. The government felt that "Pakistan would use this as a lever both to move the Security Council" and also meddle with the affairs of Kashmir in the Valley. Thus, only the recovery of *moi-e-muqaddas* could save the situation for them (Mullik 1971: 135).¹⁸

The Relic Returns

On 4 January around 6:15 pm an announcement from Radio Kashmir, Srinagar confirmed that the relic had been recovered. The announcement was very short and concise: "Today in the afternoon of 4 January, the *moe-i-mubarak* was found inside the Hazratbal mosque. Its authenticity has been attested by the concerned individuals. Further investigation is on in the matter." The All India Radio also made repeated announcements confirming that the relic had been recovered. However, agitation and protests continued as usual (Bhat 1980: 108-109).

On 5 January, which was a Sunday, Mr. Viswanathan called a press conference at the Guest House in Srinagar. He told the journalists that the relic would soon be restored inside the Hazratbal shrine. He also announced that the CBI would conduct further investigation into the matter, and the case would be taken up by a court. However, none of the local newspaper correspondents were invited for the press conference. And those who were invited were all non-Muslims who reported for newspapers outside the state (Bhat 1980: 109).

Meanwhile, the *Jamiat Hasoole Moi-e-Muqaddas* held a meeting at Lal Chowk, Srinagar and made following demands on the government:

- i. That the relic should not remain in the custody of the state authorities but promptly restored inside the Hazratbal shrine premises.
- ii. That the relic should be identified and authenticated by a joint committee consisting of representatives appointed by people, and officials from the government side.
- iii. That the relic incident should be thoroughly investigated by the CBI.
- iv. That the hearing of the case should be conducted under the auspices of a high court judge from outside of the State.
- v. That all those people arrested during the agitation should be released (Bhat 1980: 109-110).¹⁹

The Committee also made an appeal to the public to stop the ongoing *hartal* and not participate in any programs or protests without its permission. Despite the appeal the situation remained full of discontent, though the intensity of crisis decreased a bit (Bhat 1980: 110; Lamb 1991: 205).

Meanwhile on 6 January, the government issued a circular asking all the employees of the state to attend their offices punctually. The circular stated that "any government

servant or employee of a government undertaking found absenting himself from work will be immediately placed under suspension with a view to his dismissal from service.”²⁰ The reasoning behind the circular was that since the sacred relic had been recovered there was no longer any cause for mourning. The circular also declared “that full police protection would be provided for the shops doing business, and anybody molesting persons engaged in their normal avocations or obstructing or intimidating persons will be severely dealt with.”²¹ However, on the same day more than two hundred thousand people arrived in processions from across the city and far off villages and assembled in Lal chowk to hear Maulana Masoodi, who was due to address this gathering. When a volunteer unfurled an umbrella to shield him from the falling snow, he snatched it and threw it aside. Immediately, in a gesture of unity, thousands of umbrellas were similarly rolled shut, as Masoodi continued to speak to a rapt audience for more than an hour, as they raised occasional slogans saying: we want immediate recovery of *moe-i-sharief*, we want plebiscite (Gauhar 1998: 97).

On 8 January, Mr. Viswanathan convened a second press conference. Unlike previously, the local press reporters were also invited to attend. However, when Sanaullah Bhat drew his attention towards the popular demand for the identification of the holy relic, Viswanathan responded dismissively saying that whoever was demanding this was speaking the language of Pakistan (Bhat 1980: 110). Viswanathan was also unmoved to respond to any question related to the relic theft and the subsequent process that led to its recovery (Bhat 1980: 110). His diplomatic rejoinder, in conformity with a press-note issued by the Home Ministry, Government of India stated that whoever had stolen the relic fearing that he may be caught, had returned it back (Bhat 1980: 110). Eventually on 10 January the relic was reinstalled inside the Hazratbal shrine at 9:00 pm on the orders of the District Magistrate. Mullik says the restoration was done in the late evening to avoid undue excitement or crowding on the way (Mullik 1971: 148). The traditional custodians of the shrine carried the relic to its place of installation. As soon as the relic arrived at the shrine hundreds of people from around the Hazratbal area flocked to the place despite a bitter and terrible weather. A government statement claimed that “women burst into prayerful singing which lasted for some hours and all those inside and outside the shrine joined in the prayers. The sacred shrine was immediately illuminated.”²² Orders were also issued by the District Magistrate that the relic be kept in an iron safe, whose keys were to remain with the local Inspector General of Police for the time being.²³ On this occasion, Prime Minister Shams-ud-din issued a

press statement seeking appreciation for his government for standing up to its obligation of recovering the relic and redeeming its promise to the Kashmiri people. His administration, the Prime Minister claimed, had fully shared the grief and pain of the people at the loss of the sacred relic. Shams-ud-din also announced that all “government offices throughout the state will remain closed tomorrow” and that “there will be illuminations on all government buildings, offices and shops.” He also offered to spend one hundred thousand rupees on making Hazratbal shrine safe and secure, and to preserve what he described as the great “national relic for all times.”²⁴

Just before departing for Delhi, on 14 January, the Home Secretary called another press conference to reply to questions on the authenticity and the identification of the *moi-e-muqaddas*. He said the relic was genuine and he did not want to enter into any discussion on the question.²⁵ When asked whether a public viewing of the relic would be allowed, Viswanathan’s response was that it might be due for *deedar* on 6 February. However, popular resentment did not subside completely. Many people still carried black flags in their hands, and others still had them tied to their vehicles.²⁶

The Public Deedar

Asli mujrim ko pesh karo

[Produce the real culprit]

While a large section of people believed that it was Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad who had engineered the theft, there was no conclusive evidence to support the theory. There were others who thought Bakshi was by birth and family tradition a committed devotee of Hazratbal, and therefore, would not desecrate the *moi-e-muqaddas*. The First Information Report (FIR) lodged by the government included the pro-Pakistan leader Mohi-ud-din Karra, Sheikh Rashid, a nephew of Sheikh Abdullah, and one M.S. Qureshi as the offenders. Apparently, their objective was to destabilize Bakshi and eliminate his hold on Kashmir politics. Yet another section of people believed that Nehru had green signalled such steps to cause the political death of Bakshi, who by 1963 had lost his political utility for the Indian state (Gauhar 1998: 100-101). There was also an opinion that Sheikh Abdullah wanted to encourage the relic agitation for personal gain and may perhaps well have engineered the theft through some of his contacts in the Valley, while he was himself suffering in the jail. G.N. Gauhar, a local high court judge, who was witness to the entire incident, mentions that Sheikh was a dejected prisoner. While he felt wronged and humiliated by Nehru and

India and was bitter about it, he also felt that Pakistan had not come to his rescue and of Kashmir sufficiently enough. Gauhar writes that Abdullah felt dismayed by the fact that people in Kashmir had not reacted enough when he was accused and subsequently arrested the second time around in 1958, in the Kashmir Conspiracy Case [refer to endnote 17]. Thus, the relic theft, which the FIR claimed was plotted by Sheikh Rashid among others, was supposed to facilitate Abdullah's release to rejuvenate his political life, and to destabilise Bakshi, supposedly the main hurdle in their way (Gauhar 1998: 101-103). These conspiracy theories reveal the significance and the power of a religious symbol to intervene upon the political life of a community, and the different ways it could be used to make political gains.

However, before the relic had been 'recovered' or even installed inside the shrine, 1200 miles away in Khulna in East Pakistan, the news of the loss instigated communal riots, as rumor gained ground amongst Muslims of the subcontinent that the desecration was a deliberate Hindu act. President Ayub Khan's statement that Muslims of Kashmir were not responsible for the missing of the relic, and the Foreign Minister Z.A. Bhutto's exhortation that the Hindus must have stolen the relic and were jeopardizing the practice of Islam in India incited the workers in the industrial suburb of Khulna, who gathered into a procession of 20,000, setting fire to buildings and looting the shops run by the minorities (Ghosh 1998: 106-107; Das 2000: 287). While the Pakistan government stated that twenty nine- people were killed, the Indian government statements estimated the number of deaths at nearly 200.²⁷ Following these incidents, a million Hindu refugees left East Bengal to migrate into India (Chatterji 2007: 111). The relic incident also provoked riots in Calcutta in the second week of January 1964, and in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, as the communal undercurrent spread around (Das 2000: 287). Thus the relic affair, while it emerged in a local setting, also impinged on the broader Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent and with some serious impact.

Meanwhile, Pakistan raised the Kashmir issue in the United Nations Security Council, pressing for its immediate resolution, enough to ring a few alarms in the Indian camp. The Indian government, and its officers in the state: Viswanathan and Mullik in turn blamed Pakistan for inciting the Kashmiri Muslims and for convincing them that the restored *moi-e-muqaddas* was not the real one (Mullik 1971: 150; Bhat 1980: 112). While the *hartal* and agitation had diluted by this point, the demand for authentication of the relic did not end. In fact as a mark of protest the shopkeepers in Srinagar, would close their shops at 4:00 pm, before their stipulated time of closure

(Bhat 1980: 112). With the situation not improving and the demand for authentication of the relic growing louder, Mullik and Viswanathan returned back to the Valley on 25 January (Mullik 1971: 151). On 30 January Lal Bahadur Shastri, a Cabinet Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's government, was sent to Kashmir to assess the situation in the state. Having reached Kashmir, Shastri met with Maulana Masoodi, Mirwaiz Farooq, Farooq Abdullah, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Shams-ud-Din, and others in his effort to resolve the situation. Two days after his arrival, the government decided to allow a public *deedar* of the holy relic on 6 February.

Sanaullah Bhat had different apprehensions though. He felt that unless the relic was properly authenticated and people were convinced that it was genuine, the *deedar* might not be such a worthwhile exercise. In fact, there was every indication that it would complicate matters enormously. Bhat thought that if the genuineness of the relic could not be established at this moment, then doubts about its authenticity would linger on for generations. However, the authorities were not convinced. In their opinion seeking the authentication of the relic was a risk in itself, and they were not prepared to undertake it (Bhat 1980: 113). In fact both Viswanathan and Mullik were strongly against holding the identification. They were worried if the Action Committee gave a negative verdict of the relic, it might lead to riots in the Valley, which in turn might lead to riots in different parts of India as well. And if the identification of the relic was important, Mullik's opinion was that it must be confined to men of religion and no members of the Action Committee should be included in the team of identifiers. Eventually it was decided that the selection of the holy men who were to authenticate the relic, be left to the Action Committee, while the Kashmir government was to have no say in the matter (Mullik 1971:158-161).²⁸ The authentication, a special *deedar*, was to take place on 3 February.

On 3 February, the members of the Action Committee arrived at Hazratbal along with the would-be identifiers of the relic. Lal Bahadur Shastri, Prime Minister Shams-ud-Din, the Inspector General of Police, and many other high-ranking officers were already present there (Bhat 1980: 114). Though the main crowd had been kept away from the mosque, a large number of people had filtered through, and the yard in front of the shrine was full. The formal proceedings commenced at 1:30 pm, and were carried out by Masoodi. The atmosphere, as Mullik writes, was tense and electric, as Masoodi began delivering "a religious-cum-political lecture to the holy men" (Mullik 1971: 161). Then he gave each of the fourteen identifiers a

copy of the Holy Koran and asked them to swear by it that they would only give the correct verdict. The fourteen took the oath. After this, Noor Din Bandy, the *mutawalli* of the shrine appeared before the gathering holding a big box in his hands. The first to give verdict was *faqir* Meerak Shah Kashani, the most revered *pir* (saint) of Kashmir. While Mullik claims that Kashani uttered the single word, *haq* (right) (Mullik 1971: 162), Bhat is of the opinion that the *faqir* and others only cautiously remarked that “God wishing it may with all certainty be the same” (Bhat 1980: 114). Bhat further believes that the relic was not shown to anyone, and nobody verified its genuineness at that moment (Bhat 1980:114). How much of this is true is not easily ascertainable. But the intensity of the situation could be realised from the fact even after the matter had been settled, Nehru thoughtfully inquired of the diplomat and his Foreign Secretary, Y.D. Gundevia, “what would have happened if Masoodi had declared, at that moment, that the *bal* (hair) wasn’t genuine”? (Swami 2007: 42). But it did not come to that. Instead it was announced that the relic had been verified and that there would be a public *deedar* on 6 February. The crowd that gathered outside appeared to have maintained composure and silence, but their hearts as Bhat writes, were filled with *be-dili* (dismay), *tazazub* (apprehension), and *shak-o-shubah* (doubt) (Bhat 1980:114).

On 6 February on the occasion of the *urs char-yaar* (celebration to honour the first four caliphs of Islam), the reinstalled *moi-e-muqaddas* was displayed to the public from the Hazratbal shrine. A crowd of about 60, 000 people had collected to witness the *deedar* (Mullik 1971: 164). On the same day Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and the Indian representative, M.C. Chagala, were locked in an argument about Kashmir at the United Nations. Nevertheless, the enigma around the relic controversy did not die, and the demand to know the real culprit of the theft continued for months: *asli mujrim ko pesh karo* (Malhotra 2010).

On 12 February, the Indian Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda informed the Parliament that the investigation in the relic theft would be completed in a week and soon the case would be referred to a court. While he claimed that the culprits had been booked, he was not ready to divulge their names. However, on 17 February, Nanda told the Parliament that three people: Abdul Rahim Bandy, the head *mutawalli* of the Hazratbal shrine, Abdur Rashid, an agricultural officer from South Kashmir town of Tral and Qadir Bhat, a relatively unknown man had been arrested in the relic theft (Bhat 1980: 115). But nothing emerged out of these arrests. A couple of months later, Rashid

was released and reinstated to his former job. Rahim Bandy was also released on bail a few months later, but was banned from exhibiting the holy relic, until Sheikh Abdullah removed the ban in the late 1970s. As for Qadir Bhat, his whereabouts remained completely unknown. Thereafter, no other investigation, and no court cases were conducted, and no further action was taken in this regard. Apparently even the leaders of the Action Committee did not insist on the trial (Bhat 1980: 116).

However, in the meanwhile, a couple of changes were called for. Nehru, realised that the Shams-ud-din government could not function any more, and with Bakshi having lost his usefulness to India, and having been discredited recently, it was decided to hand over the reins of Kashmir to Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. Sadiq was seen in many quarters as a man of integrity, and his elevation was expected to usher a new phase in Kashmir’s politics (Bazaz 1964). Nehru, who was shaken by the relic experience, was apprehensive, as Mullik writes, that unless some things were done, another catastrophe might befall the Valley and the anger of people of Kashmir would ultimately turn against India (Mullik 1971: 167). Sadiq’s appointment was thus an attempt towards restructuring India’s Kashmir policy (Swami 2007: 42), which had come loose over the last few months, but more so through the Bakshi years, whose administration having served its purpose, was now claimed to have been corrupt. Through the change of the guard thus, Bakshi’s influence on the region’s politics was sought to be curtailed, and a supposedly new approach was to be adopted on Kashmir (Swami 2007: 42; Mullik 1971: 172).

There were also rumours that Sheikh Abdullah and his associates who were under detention in the Kashmir Conspiracy Case of 1958 would be released soon, which they eventually were on the morning of 8 April 1964. Perhaps this was another attempt on the part of Nehru and his administration towards changing their approach to Kashmir affairs, and to also assuage the feelings of its people. Mullik says that Nehru realised that Abdullah had a strong hold on the Kashmiri people and in the changed circumstances no political settlement in the Valley was possible without him (Mullik 1971: 172).²⁹ The local anger against Nehru along with the affirmation that his paralysis and eventually his death immediately after the relic incident was a direct result of him having desecrated the mosque: *kedes darghan tsend* (the shrine eliminated him), speaks of the reverence and power that the Kashmir people associate with the shrine, and the fury and pain they felt at the theft of the relic (Gauhar 1998: 104).

While some of these changes were on, what happened to the Action Committee and its unity? Did it sustain? Though its members stayed together for a while, and sought to perpetuate the group as a political force in the state, disagreements on basic issues, and other personal rivalries returned to prove to be a handicap to the group's effective functioning (Lockwood 1969: 387). Finally on 20 June 1964, Mirwaiz Farooq, the pro-Pakistan religious cleric, announced his decision to set up a separate political party in the state: the Awami Action Committee. This led to his removal from the previous Relic Action Committee, following which the traditional *sher-bakra rivalry*³⁰ between the supporters of Abdullah and Mirwaiz became alive again. Thus a unity forged by the theft of a sacred symbol thinned out after a while, as the sentiment over the symbol diluted following its recovery.

Conclusion

The protests following the relic episode while they initially appeared to be limited in seeking its recovery following its theft from the Hazratbal shrine, very soon came to influence many other aspects and processes that have shaped or have been associated with the Kashmir issue. Not only did the incident have implications inside the Valley, leading to a heightened regional consciousness and a strong anti-India sentiment among the Kashmiri Muslims, it also left its imprint outside Kashmir, influencing India Pakistan relationship, besides inciting communal riots across the subcontinent, in a number of places. But more importantly, the episode reveals how the displacement of a sacred relic: the *moi-e-muqaddas* from its sanctuary, the Hazratbal shrine, highly revered by Kashmiri Muslims, and a symbol of their sacral consciousness, provides an occasion that not only unites an otherwise internally divided Muslim community of the region, both socially and politically, particularly through the establishment of the Action Committee, also becomes an instrument to articulate their regional consciousness in the process, as they demand the resolution of the Kashmir issue according to their own wishes: *yeh mulk hamara hai, iska faisla hum karenge*. In general the relic theft and its aftermath exemplifies how the sacred and the political are deeply intertwined in Kashmir politics, and in South Asia at large.

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Endnotes

1. Sacred is not an easy concept to define. Muslims themselves compete over or debate different modes of sacredness. See Desplat and Schulz 2012: 23. Sacred can be a broad and a complicated category. In a more general sense, the term serves to describe objects, people, places, and superhuman agents charged with a power, a quality, or an essence set apart from its opposite, the profane. For example, sacred place might refer to a site associated with a revered person, a miraculous event, or superhuman power. See Cormack 2013: 4. Nevertheless, sacred objects and places or spaces do not necessarily reflect an accurate image of society but are symbols with which society identifies itself. See Wheeler 2006: 4.
2. Bhat offers a vernacular perspective, excerpted from various books mostly penned by local Kashmiris, on how the relic made it to Kashmir and the miracles associated with it.
3. On these occasions: *Milad-un-Nabi and Mairaj-i-Alam*, the relic is displayed to the public. The public display and procession of hairs at mosques and madrasas, especially on the occasion of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, is mentioned in a number of sources. See Wheeler 2006: 74.
4. Apparently during these occasions, around 100,000 people stay awake in the shrine through the whole night, involving themselves in prayers. This is called *shabkhwani*.
5. The flow of blessing and grace. *Baraka* can be found within physical objects, places, and people, as chosen by God. It flows from God to those that are closest to God, such as prophets and saints. Among other ways, one can attain *baraka* by visiting holy shrines.
6. The *pir-muridi* relationship is central to Sufism in the religious life of Islam.

7. An orthodox religious group among Muslims that denounces shrine worshipping and other social and cultural practices ordinarily associated with the practice of Islam as heretic.

8. A governing body/trust supposed to look after the management and the maintenance of shrines in Kashmir.

9. The Kashmiri Muslim community was divided in two camps. One camp espoused their support for National Conference headed by Sheikh Abdullah, while the other camp supported Muslim Conference headed by Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah, an influential religious cleric. The supporters of the two camps were known as *sher* (lions) and *bakra* (goats) respectively. While the National Conference claimed to be secular in its political outlook, the Muslim Conference appeared to advance the interests of the Kashmiri Muslims. The rivalry between the two groups, which emerged in the post 1930s, was quite legendary. The two groups and their supporters had their influence and control over specific mosques and neighbourhoods in the Srinagar city. While the Hazratbal shrine was under the control of the National Conference, the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar was a strong hold of the Muslim Conference, backed by the Mirwaiz family, who were very prominent.

10. Until 1965, the Jammu Kashmir state was headed by a *wazir-azam* (Prime Minister). However, the Indian government forced a change in the nomenclature to Chief Minister, in tune with other Indian states.

11. To remerge from the sacred state (*Ihram*) which a Muslim must enter in order to perform the major pilgrimage (*Hajj*) or the minor pilgrimage (*Umrah*). A pilgrim must enter into this state before crossing the pilgrimage boundary, known as *Miqat*, by performing the cleansing rituals and wearing the prescribed attire. Once he returns from this state, the pilgrim has to perform the desacralisation ritual (*Ihlat*), which includes shaving one's hair, cutting nails and removing the prescribed attire, the *Ihram* clothing.

12. December is very cold in Kashmir. At the time of the theft it had already snowed in the Valley. This is corroborated by Inder Malhotra, a well-known journalist from Delhi who was among the press-corps who visited Srinagar to report on the crisis.

13. Moslems Riot Over Theft of Sacred Relic. *Chicago Tribune*, December 29, 1963.

14. One popular version of events is that the disappearance was engineered by Bakshi himself. In October 1963 Congress had forced him to resign from the Prime Minister's office under the Kamraj Plan to be replaced by a relative lightweight, Khwaja Shamsuddin.

Thirty-eight charges of corruption were eventually brought against Bakshi by a judicial investigator, of which 15 were proven. Bakshi thus hoped to use the chaos to establish his indispensability to the Indian state. See Swami 2007: 42.

15. The Pandits and Sikhs constitute the minority community in Kashmir. The Pandits represent the Hindu Brahmin community in Kashmir, and are supposed to be very learned. While the Pandits claim to be the original inhabitants of the Valley, they have not been supportive of the political movement in Kashmir that seeks secession from India. See Dhar, 2006.

16. The Holy Relic Action Committee was to be spearheaded by Mirwaiz Farooq and Maulana Masoodi.

17. Sheikh Abdullah had been arrested in 1958 along with twenty-two of his companions in the famous Kashmir Conspiracy Case filed by the government of Kashmir and the government of India. The trail of the case began in 1959, but it was later withdrawn in 1964. He had previously been arrested in August 1953 by the Indian government while serving as the Prime Minister of Kashmir, but later released in 1958.

18. While replying to President Ayub Khan's letter, Dr. Radhakrishnan, the President of India communicated to him India's disappointment on his statement on "the unfortunate theft of the Holy Relic from the Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir, which was a matter of sorrow for the entire people of India, and was severely condemned by our Prime Minister and myself. Your Foreign Minister's statement in this context was particularly unfortunate. Without a shred of evidence the theft of the relic was attributed to Hindus and a communal turn to the Hazratbal incident was thus given in Pakistan from the beginning. The Pakistani Press started the most virulent tirade against India and did everything to rouse, communal passions to an uncontrollable pitch. While the emotions of the people in Pakistan over the theft of the sacred relic were understandable, I am constrained to observe that irresponsible and unrestrained statements and accusations against India and the false cry of Islam in danger had the inevitable effect of inciting the Muslim population of East Pakistan to take revenge on the Hindus still living in Pakistan." See *Foreign Affairs Record*. 1964. X (1).

19. Bhat 1980: 109-110.

20. Department of Information, Government of J&K. Srinagar: Government Press Archives, 6 Jan 1964.

21. *ibid*.

22. Department of Information, Government of J&K. Srinagar: Government Press Archives, 11 Jan 1964.

23. *ibid.*
24. *ibid.*
25. Department of Information, Government of J&K. Srinagar: Government Press Archives, 14 Jan 1964.
26. *ibid.*
27. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*. 18-25 July 1964, 20185.
28. Mullik claims that until the very day of the authentication, the administration did not know about the list of the identifiers.
29. Mullik seems to suggest that Sheikh Abdullah's release was decided by Sadiq himself. And while Nehru supported Sadiq's desire to do so, he felt unhappy that the decision had been taken by him unilaterally, and an announcement had been made without consulting the government of India.
30. See endnote number 9.

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