

Tribute to the Socialist Stalwart

He was truly, even literally, J&K state's socialist stalwart, a fearless freedom fighter, intellectual par excellence, state's top-most constitutional lawyer and, above all, a sincere Kashmiri Pandit whose selfless services to the people of J&K state and will be remembered for all times.

By G L Jalali

Shree Pyare Lal Koul (advocate) whom I regard as Valley's socialist stalwart, is no more with us. His sudden demise came as a rude shock to his comrades and friends who all praise for his scholastic attainments, leadership qualities and intellectual capacities. I have no words at my command to describe all those qualities with which the departed soul was gifted. My association with Mr. Koul began when I joined the Samachar Group of papers in mid seventies in Srinagar under the dynamic leadership of late Pt. Poshker Nath Koul Vakil. Apart from working as the legal editor (advisor) of the newspapers, late Pyare Lal Koul (advocate) contributed almost daily his write ups on varied topics, ranging from politics to philosophy to the newspapers edited by late Pandit Poshker Nath Koul Vakil. His acumen as veteran journalist can be gauged from the fact that his thought provoking articles were greatly appreciated by the readers and even rattled the power lobbies as far as constructive criticism, which is the benchmark of effective journalism, is concerned. He fearlessly wrote what he thought right and viewed the situation objectively. He continued this onerous task till his last breath. Perhaps he was Valley's first journalist who did his job in a highly professional manner, though he was trained as lawyer. In this domain he proved exceptionally successful.

Mr. Pyare Lal Koul (advocate) was the scion of the famous "Koul Family" of Kashmiri Pandits, Pandit Hargopal Koul alias *Khasta* and Pandit Saligram Koul alias *Saliq* were the two famous Kashmiri Pandit freedom fighters belonging to this historic Koul family. "They were the first freedom fighters who raised the standard of revolt against the Dogra rulers. Pandit Hargopal Koul suffered a long spell of imprisonment. So callous was the state administration in those days that this great revolutionary Pandit cast in the mould of Sardar Bhagat Singh was put in an iron cage. His younger brother Saligram Koul followed into the footsteps of his elder brother and was consequently imprisoned in Bahu Fort on the outskirts of Jammu city. He managed to give a slip to the prison wardens through a tunnel dug out by him and reappeared surprisingly in Delhi. Both the brothers were exiled twice from Kashmir. Whenever a true history of freedom movement in Kashmir will be written the names of Pandit Hargopal Koul and Pandit Saligram Koul will be written in letters of gold" (Jihad in Kashmir, page 158).

Late Pyarelal Koul's illustrious elder brother Pandit Poshker Nath Koul Vakil played an epic role in the 1967 agitation launched by the Kashmiri Pandit community over the kidnapping and later on converting a minor Kashmiri Pandit girl. He was a well known journalist, freedom-fighter and social activist. Late Pyarelal Koul's father Pandit Shamboo Nath Koul, who died in air crash in 1949, was the member of National Conference Working Committee and a noted journalist who is regarded as the father of Urdu journalism in the Valley. To be born in such an illustrious family was a great asset for late Pyarelal Koul who will always be

remembered as a person possessing multi-dimensional personality that flowered into a great humanist and a revolutionary par excellence.

Born in 1937, in Srinagar's downtown locality of Sehyar, Nawa Kadal, late Pyarelal Koul received his early schooling in a government school. Throughout his school and college career he remained a meritorious student whose aptitude, apart from reading books and newspapers, was largely hinged round extra-curricular activities. He actively participated in debates and essay competitions arranged in his school and college from time to time. He passed his graduation in arts from Sri Pratap College, obtaining first division which was a great honour for a Pandit student hailing from a middle-class Pandit family in those days of political turmoil. He wanted to be an advocate as also was the desire of his enlightened father who was very thick in the state politics. Mr. Koul did his L.L.B. (Bachelor of law) from Delhi University. He enrolled himself as Advocate and started his practice in Delhi. But he could not stay in Delhi for long as he had to go back to his native place for "Party work on the errand of some senior socialist leaders". Since his school days he had been associated with the socialist party which in those days, as I remember, acted in tandem with the leading political party Jammu and Kashmir National Conference led by Sheikh Abdullah. National Conference had adopted the "socialist programme" epitomised in the Naya Kashmir document. In those days the Socialist Party had no strong foothold in the valley, though a number of Kashmiri intellectuals were, by and large, associated with the Socialist Party. Mr. Pyarelal Koul was socialist by conviction and believed in the resurgence of the state by adopting socialist programme and the end of feudal order (was the main socialist plank). He was secular at heart and stood for ushering in a new social order that guaranteed equality in every sphere of human endeavour. He practised as successful lawyer in the valley (and was counted State's topmost constitutional lawyer). Besides working for the state Socialist Party, Mr. Pyarelal Koul was a voracious reader who had wide range of knowledge of all subjects. As stated above, he had multifarious activities and interests. But, above all he was a committed Socialist who fought throughout his seven-decade life span for the freedom of Press and Platform and other civil liberties in Kashmir. It was not an ordinary task, Mr. Koul had to undergo numerous trials and tribulations for this cause which was very sacred to his heart.

To his credit he served as the General Secretary of Janata Party and Janata Dal. His work as General Secretary of State Janata Party was appreciated by the Janta Party's Central leadership. Mr. Pyarelal Koul never cared (for personal ends) or was ever lured by the "crumbs of power and pelf." He turned down many times the offer of ministership made by prominent Central leaders including the Prime Minister of India. He was a man of conviction and never wanted to change his principles in lieu of "crumbs of power". (As we observe these days of political chaos). That decisively goes to the credit of the departed soul whose demise has caused a deep void that cannot be easily filled. Apart from being a politician, journalist and humanist par excellence, late Pyarelal Koul has carved a niche as author of numerous books. He has received numerous awards and public recognition "for his bold writings and making exposure of truth about Kashmir. Some of his prominent published books are "Kashmir War or peace", "Crisis in Kashmir", "Kashmir Trail and Travail" and, "Kashmir-Ke-Shab-e-Roz." His last two books "Twenty Years in Exile" and "Fire and fury" were about to be completed when he breathed his last. Perhaps his wife, Suman Koul who herself is a reputed author and social activist, would see that the books authored by her late husband hits the stand. One important thing to note about Koul's books on Kashmir is that the author has understood the genesis of the Kashmir problem. In his book crisis in Kashmir, which received great public acclamation and applause, late Pyarelal Koul has given a graphic picture of messy politics in Kashmir that led to the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandit community.

After displacement from Srinagar also in 1990 in the wake of terrorism and victimization, Shri Pyare Lal Kaul continued his politics of realism and other activities, least bothering for being the State General Secretary of the Ruling Party. He has argued many important case in different courts including "genocide of Kashmiri Pandits" before the national Human Rights Commission, New Delhi. The Commission observed that their conditions in Kashmir were "akin to genocide".

In his book titled Kashmir War or Peace late Koul has dealt with the Kashmir problem in the light of the constitution and law. He sums up, "In accordance with the law, late Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir executed Instrument of Accession in favour of India which was accepted by the Governor General of India. There is no provision for temporary or provisional Accession, nor it can be subject to ratification by the state subjects. The loud talk about Plebiscite in Kashmir is against the very law that Pakistan owes her birth to. Plebiscite has no relevance under law". Three years ago, late Pyarelal Koul filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court against J&K government praying for the scrapping of Article 370. But the Writ Petition was not entertained by the Apex Court. May be it was due to political considerations.

In Kashmir Trail and Travail, the author has portrayed the pen picture of the sufferings of Kashmiri Pandit migrants who have been driven out of their homeland by the Islamists at the behest of Pakistan. The very reading of the book is bound to melt the callous mind of any reader. It may take centuries for the Pandit community to produce an

author, journalist and scholar like Pyarelal Koul (Advocate). His passing away is a great loss for the Pandit community in particular and Kashmiris in general. He was truly, even literally, J&K state's socialist stalwart, a fearless freedom fighter, intellectual par excellence, state's top-most constitutional lawyer and, above all, a sincere Kashmiri Pandit whose selfless services to the people of J&K state and will be remembered for all times