



World Donkey Day: Honouring Humanity's Humble Helpers

Celebrated annually on May 8, World Donkey Day shines a spotlight on the enduring contributions of donkeys to human society. Established in 2018 by scientist Ark Raziq, the day acknowledges these resilient animals' roles in agriculture, transportation, and companionship, especially in rural communities. Despite their significance, donkeys often face neglect and exploitation. World Donkey Day aims to raise awareness about their welfare and promote better treatment globally. Join the celebration by learning about donkeys, supporting sanctuaries, or simply appreciating these steadfast companions who have quietly shaped human history.

#RESEARCH

AI to the Rescue:
Solving the Cocktail Party Problem in Hearing Aids

New algorithms harness brain signals and deep learning to help hearing aid users focus on voices in noisy environments.



For millions of people with hearing loss, navigating loud, crowded environments remains one of the biggest challenges. This difficulty, known as the 'cocktail party problem,' refers to the inability of hearing aids to distinguish and amplify one specific voice among a sea of background noise. Traditional hearing aids amplify all sounds indiscriminately, making it hard for users to focus on conversa-

What is the Cocktail Party Problem?

Coined in the 1950s, the term describes how the human brain is naturally able to focus on a single voice while filtering out distractions, like at a cocktail party.

Enter AI-Based Algorithms

Researchers have now turned to AI for a solution. One promising approach uses deep neural networks trained on thousands of audio samples to recognize and separate voices based on speech patterns, pitch, and direction. These systems can 'lock onto' a speaker's voice once the user identifies them, automatically trying to listen to, either through a voice command, gaze direction, or even brain signals.

One such innovation comes from a collaboration between MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) and Massachusetts Eye and Ear. Their algo-

Real-World Potential

While many of these technologies are still in the lab, some are moving towards commercial applications. Companies are now exploring ways to integrate these AI algorithms into

A Better Future for Hearing Loss

The development of algorithms to solve the cocktail party problem marks a significant leap in assistive technology. As these systems become more refined and accessible, they promise to dramatically improve the quality of life for those with hearing impairments, enabling clearer conversations, richer social interactions, and greater independence. In essence, AI is not just making machines smarter; it's helping people hear better in the noisiest corners of life.

They Fooled Him
But He Kept Kashmir With India

Both Dulat and Vir Sanghvi agree that selective portions from the book have been picked out, and used out of context. There seems to be a campaign now, to paint Farooq as a 'stooge' of Delhi and distance him from the people of Kashmir. The book has become a means, suggests Vir Sanghvi. Whether the Abdullah family or Omar understands it or not, is a different matter. This has put a lot of pressure on Farooq. Dulat quotes NSA MK Narayanan's book that "If Farooq had not been with us, Kashmir may not have stayed with us."

Ajay Singh
Raconteur Indica

Karan Thaper has been very systematic in his analysis of the book. He highlighted the four characteristics by which Dulat describes Dr. Farooq Abdullah. Firstly, that Farooq is, by far, the tallest and most prominent leader not just in Kashmir but the whole of India. Secondly, that Farooq Abdullah is NC, the National Conference party. He ascends further claiming that Farooq is Kashmir. Lastly, he says that Farooq is even a greater man than his father, the famously supportive of the abrogation.

Karan brings out some aspects which were hitherto unnoticed. In 1987, there were claims and press reports that the elections were rigged. It appears that these stories were not totally unfounded. The National Conference would have won in any case and there was no need for rigging. When rumors of rigging were around in the valley, the Kashmiris came to their own conclusion. They felt convinced that Farooq was a stooge of Delhi. Why else would the center rig the elections in his favor?

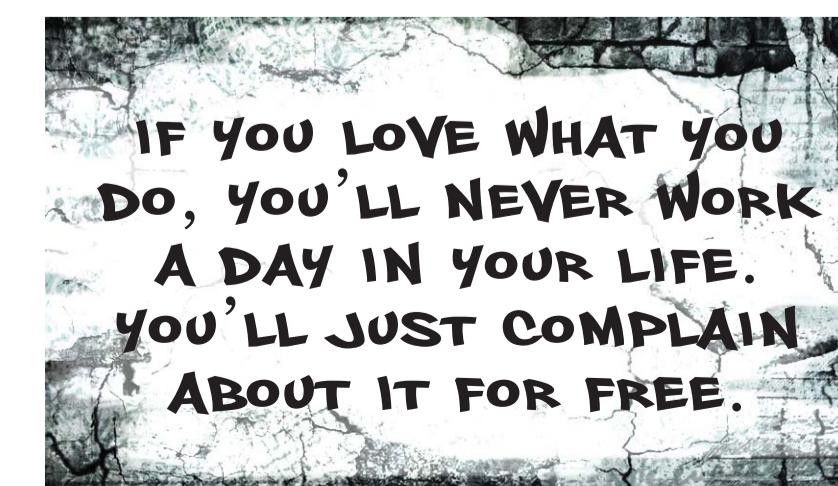
Karan points out the various instances when Farooq was let down by the Delhi establishment. Indira Gandhi got along with him initially and even praised him in front of his father, the old Sheikh Abdullah. She requested him to pass on the mantle of the National Conference to Farooq. Much later, she suddenly distanced herself from Farooq. Perhaps, because the National Conference refused to form an alliance with the Congress.

Another profile from the University of Washington involves training the hearing aid to detect and prioritize speech coming from a specific direction using beamforming technology, which digitally creates a directional microphone effect. Combined with AI-driven speech separation, this technique enhances clarity dramatically.



Indira Gandhi with Sheikh Abdullah and Farooq Abdullah.

THE WALL

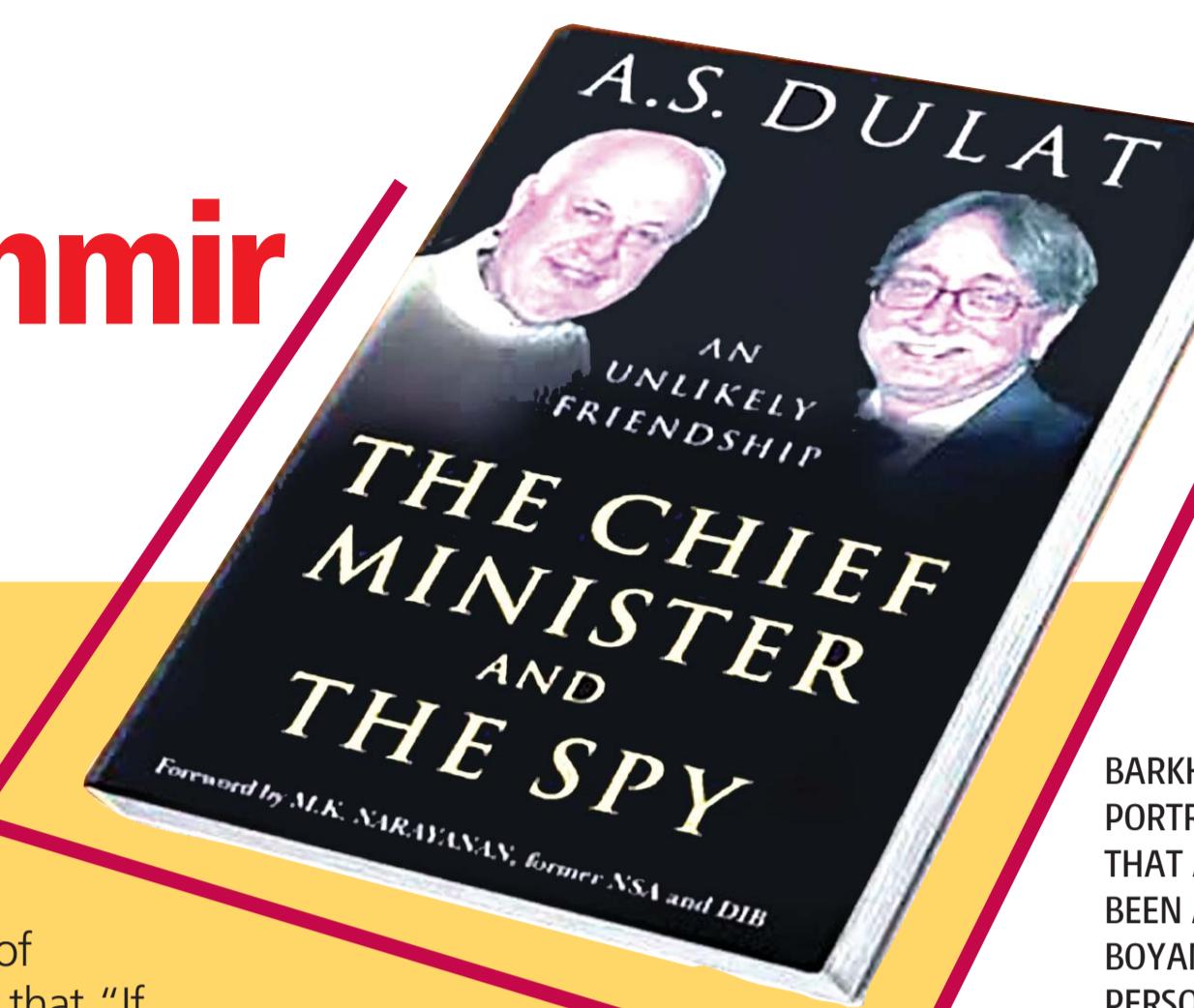


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

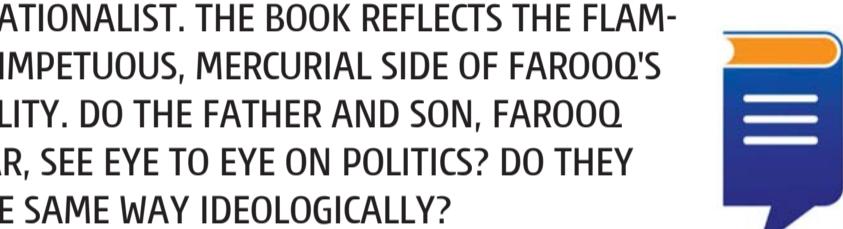
ZITS



PART:2



BARKHA DUTT CALLS THIS BOOK, A RACY INTIMATE PORTRAIT OF FAROOQ ABDULLAH. SHE EMPHASIS THAT ACCORDING TO DULAT, FAROOQ HAS ALWAYS BEEN A NATIONALIST. THE BOOK REFLECTS THE FLAMBOYANT, IMPETUOUS, MERCURIAL SIDE OF FAROOQ'S PERSONALITY. DO THE FATHER AND SON, FAROOQ AND OMAR, SEE EYE TO EYE ON POLITICS? DO THEY THINK THE SAME WAY IDEOLOGICALLY?



Deve Gowda and Farooq Abdullah.

the movement for restoring Statehood has not gathered enough momentum. Though Omar says he has been given assurances that it will be restored shortly.

Barkha Dutt calls this book, a racy intimate portrait of Farooq Abdullah. She emphasizes according to Dulat, Farooq has always been a nationalist. The book reflects the flamboyant, impetuous, mercurial side of Farooq's personality. Do the father and son, Farooq and Omar, see eye to eye on politics? Do they think the same way ideologically? Will the National Conference ever ally with the BJP?

What transpired in the Abdullah camp in the aftermath of the abrogation of article 370? These and many other questions, as emphasized by Barkha, are answered in Dulat's latest book.

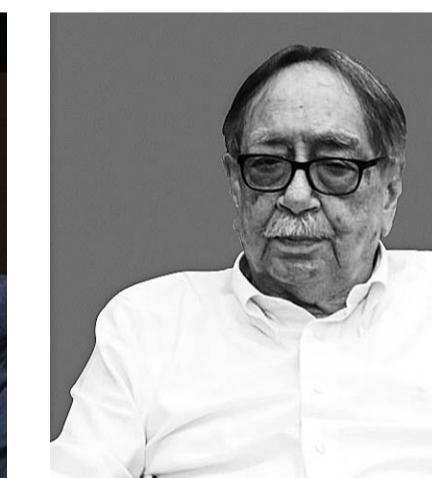
Dulat reveals that all the books that he has written have Kashmir as the center. This book is not a biography; it is a book about Farooq, as he knows him. He feels that Farooq has changed greatly after the abrogation of article 370. He is a very different person now, as compared to the past. He has mellowed down and become deeply religious. Reading the Quran every so often. Sixty years ago, he had agreed to write a book on him. Now, he realizes that time is getting over for everyone concerned. Barkha asks Dulat as to why and on whose behalf did he go to meet Farooq, when he was under house arrest. Around the time of the abrogation, Dulat takes her back to 1990 and says that back then, he asked Delhi if he should engage Farooq.

Surprisingly, Delhi and Islamabad both prefer Omar. Keeping Farooq out of Kashmir has many supporters. After all, Omar is simple to deal with while Farooq is most difficult to manage. Even Vajapey liked Omar and made him a minister. Dulat again mentions the repeated betrayals of Farooq by Delhi. Barkha concludes by asking, did Farooq make any political mistakes. Dulat answers, "Farooq apne baap ka bhi baap hai." He lived like Ulysses, but now he is mellowed down and become spiritual.

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#A.S. DULAT

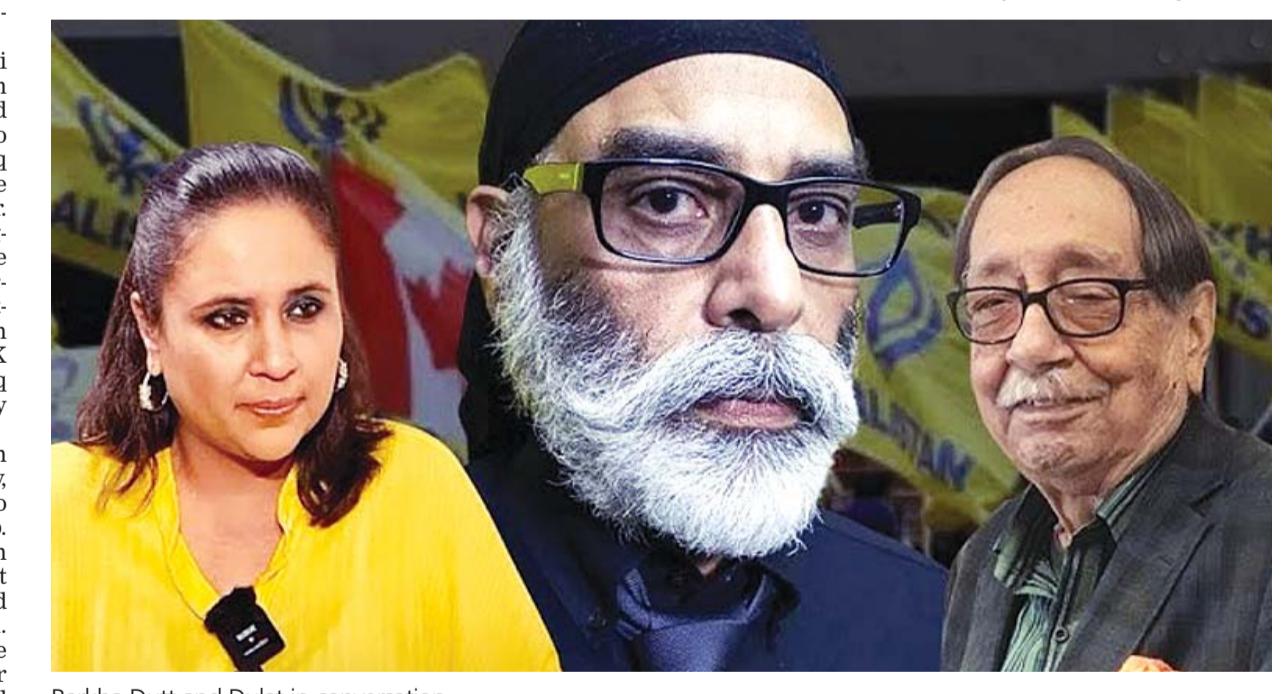


Vir Sanghvi in conversation with AS Dulat.

and Yaseen Malik mainstreamed himself.

Vir Sanghvi and Dulat discussed the infamous hijacking of the Indian Airlines incident, sharing lesser-known facts and instances of missed opportunities. Even on that front, Farooq comes out as a strong-willed nationalist leader, not ready to compromise with separatists.

Dulat regrets that as of today,



Barkha Dutt and Dulat in conversation.

In 1984, she went to the extent of dismissing him. He resigned, to save face.

In 2002, Farooq was promised the Vice Presidency of India by Vajapey and support by Advani. The promise was forgotten by Delhi, and once again, Farooq was let down. These latent desires remain unfulfilled and have never been revealed, except in this book. However, this time around, Farooq told Dulat that this offer of Vice Presidency was fake. For a change, Dulat got it right, as Farooq knew all along that nothing will come out of this, they were just playing games with him.

Vir Sanghvi in his discussion with Dulat goes a step further. He claims that Farooq, Omar and Prime Minister Modi had possibly met, but nothing about the abrogation was possibly shared with them. They didn't have an inkling that some such action would be executed so soon. Farooq, points out Vir Sanghvi, was upset, that instead of being taken into confidence, he was arrested. The Abdullahs felt betrayed for not being confined, because they always supported the Indian-ness of Kashmir.

There is a lot about father-son relationships in this book. The Sheikh, it seems, was a great man but never understood the political compulsions of Nehru. Farooq, on the other hand, was a visionary and managed to keep people in good humor for better part of his politi-

cal career. He was committed to Kashmiri progress along with India. Unlike his father, Farooq did not want to spend time in jail and chose to stay on the right side of Delhi. Farooq was happiest with Prime Minister Devi Gowda. Primarily, because Devi Gowda understood him and consented, that you keep peace in Kashmir and we will not interfere.

Omar was expected to win the Lok Sabha elections and enter the Indian Parliament. Farooq, on the other hand, would be the Chief Minister in Srinagar. Unfortunately, Omar lost the elections in Baramulla, so they had to re-draw their plans. Omar then contested the 2024 elections and became the Chief Minister.

Dulat points out to Vir Sanghvi that Farooq has changed vastly since abrogation of article 370. It hurt him deeply, and today, there is much more empathy for him in the

valley than in the past. Creation of the Peoples Alliance for the Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) is a major initiative of Farooq Abdullah. It seeks to bring the Kashmiri people together and he seems to have created his own little assembly.

Vir Sanghvi suggests that even in the days of Advani, Vajapey and Brajesh Mishra, they planned to keep Farooq out of Kashmir and promote Omar. Dulat agrees and goes on to mention that the lure of India's Vice Presidency was thrown, perhaps to mislead Farooq. He confesses that unwittingly, he became a party to this fraud against Farooq. It was at his house over dinner that the National Security Advisor, Brajesh Mishra told Farooq about their plans to offer him the Vice Presidency.

Vir Sanghvi and Dulat compare the father and the son and both agree that Farooq is accessible, open-minded and always seeking

outside views and opinions. Omar, on the other hand, is closed in his approach, keeps his own counsel and rarely reaches out to anyone on his own. Dulat mentions that Farooq may look accommodating but is not a push over; and if you're reasonable, then, he will be with you. There is a lot of skill beneath the laughter and bonhomie displayed by Farooq. Omar, on the other hand, is seen by Dulat as a straightforward, predictable, public school product.

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Dulat mentions how Yaseen Malik of JKLF supported militancy, thinking Pakistan will jump into Kashmir, once things got heated up. On the lines of what India did in Bangladesh. Nothing of that sort transpired, as Pakistan wanted these boys to continue on their own. Supporting them from across the border continued. Finally, their armed insurgency was abandoned

encouraged him to do this track two out.

Delhi never understands that Farooq can never be pushed. That aspect of him remains unchanged. Even Rajiv started understanding the person of Farooq very late in life. Though, they had a comfortable relationship, but when many things had made up his mind and Farooq left in 1990, Farooq resigned and refused to listen to even Rajiv.

Can the National Conference NC ever be in business with the BJP? After all, politics is the art of the possible, admits Barkha. India alliance became a viable option for NC after Rahul's pad yatra. Fortunately, NC got 42 seats in 2024 and it was a victory for Farooq. Today, Farooq is not prepared to do a deal with BJP, but as they say, never say never, added Dulat.

Barkha enquired if Dulat is hard on Omar as he admits that Omar is very correct, very straight, like the head boy of Sanawar, which he was. For Dulat, Farooq is, by far, the tallest of leaders in India. Though, he is sometimes torn between his love for Kashmir and the love for his son. If Omar had not lost his Baramulla parliamentary seat, then, Farooq would have been CM of Kashmir in 2004. The father changed his mind, sacrificed his desire to be CM. He has now become most protective of him, even glorifying him.

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