

of the Jamaat-e-Islami's youth wing, Jamiyati Tulaba. In his speech Tajamul lumped the US, the USSR, Israel and India together, accusing all of them of hatching conspiracies against the Muslims.

But the extremist parties are not solely to blame. The politicians of the two big parties of the state, the National Conference (NC) and the Congress(I) who are willing to stoop to any depths, to outmanoeuvre each other, are equally responsible for the growth

of extremist parties.

Says a ruling party MLA: "They (the Congress(I)) are trying to create a law and order problem to pave the way for the Centre's intervention. They do not want an impregnable Sheikh Abdullah any more and are eager to topple him."

Congress(I) workers on the other hand deny such allegations. Says one of the zonal secretaries of the party: "The Sheikh has entered into an axis with communal forces

like the Jamaat-e-Islami only to cash in upon predominant Muslim votes in the forthcoming Assembly elections."

This situation is all the more unfortunate since Kashmir has always had the reputation of being a state where the different communities have lived together in harmony. But as the events in the Valley show there can be no peace as long as there are power-hungry politicians.

—GHULAM NABI KHAYAL

## SCINDIAS

### FRIEND IN NEED

THE RASHTRIYA Swyamsewak Sangh (RSS) is everybody's favourite bugbear. So perhaps it was inevitable that it would be accused of having a hand in the feud between Mrs Gandhi and her rebellious daughter-in-law Maneka. But though the charges can never really be substantiated, there is a connection which leads credence to the charge—the friendship between Maneka and Vasundhara Raje Singh, 29, the daughter of Vijaya Raje Scindia, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader.

Vasundhara ('Vasu') became friendly with Sanjay and Maneka immediately after the 1980 general elections. This friendship has become the target of much attack, and Vasundhara is alleged to be responsible for arranging the sale of *Surya* to Sardar S.C. Angre, Vijaya Raje's private secretary, and then, through the lynx-eyed Akbar Ahmed, the political revolt that led to Maneka's outlawing. Reliable sources in Gwalior say the *Surya* deal was thrashed out at Ahmed's Nainital farm by Amteshwar, Maneka, Angre, Ahmed and Vasundhara.

**Controversial Friendship:** Vasundhara has avoided the press ever since the feud broke out, but she broke her silence last fortnight when she agreed to talk to INDIA TODAY. She is upset that her friendship with Maneka has been blown out of proportion. "I find Maneka extremely bright, down-to-earth, and I enjoy being with her," she says. She adds that she, "found Sanjay extremely soft-spoken, very gentle, and not rude and crude as his enemies labelled him".

A fast-talking woman who cannot conceal her satisfaction at the effects of Maneka's revolt, Vasundhara says she knew Rajiv and Sonia much before she ever met the younger Gandhis. This was when Amma (Vijaya Raje) was in the Janata," she says, "and I was obviously

important, so Rajiv and Sonia wined and dined me. Now they do not have the courage to admit that."

Vijaya Raje admits she has met Maneka "off and on". Says Vasundhara: "Maneka has met Amma as often as I've met Mrs Indira Gandhi—at the dining table at 1 Safdarjung Road. Does it mean Mrs Gandhi has links with the BJP?" Vijaya Raje adds that she has nothing whatsoever to do with Maneka's political ambitions. "My politics will harm her and her politics will harm me," she says.

The Maneka-Vasundhara friendship provoked anger in the prime minister's household in March 1981, when Maneka chose to celebrate son

ndship with Dumpy is like my relationship with Maneka. I married in 1972 and separated in 1974. I haven't got my divorce yet, haven't started proceedings, and don't intend to. If I wanted to marry Dumpy would I have remained single for eight years?"

Says Vijaya Raje: "My daughter's only crime has been to stand by a friend in need. I would not be surprised if Mrs Gandhi chose to hit back at me by egging my son Madhavrao on to embarrass me." Although that seems a convenient way of explaining the recent differences between Vijaya Raje and her son, insiders say the roots run deeper. After Madhavrao joined the Congress(I) in late 1979, his



Vasundhara with mother Vijaya Raje: the Maneka connection

Feroze Varun's first birthday at Vasundhara's, although the year-long mourning period for Sanjay hadn't ended then. Retorts Vasundhara: "We had a party at our clay mines in Mehrauli. It was so innocuous—it was my way of wishing mother and son well."

**Speculative Reports:** Spice was added to the Indira-Maneka imbroglio when reports speculated that Vasundhara might even marry Akbar Ahmed. Married to Hemant Singh, ex-Raja of Dholpur, Vasundhara underwent a stormy separation some years back. When asked about it, she flares up: "My frie-

mother is reported to have sworn revenge on the people who snatched her son from her party.

The Scindias have kept abreast of the growing tensions between the prime minister and her daughter-in-law. Vijaya Raje says: "I knew this was bound to happen sooner or later. I remember feeling shocked when Maneka was so badly treated when she was trying to release her book on Sanjay." She adds significantly: "If there was no rift between *saas* and *bahu*, do you think anyone could have stepped into the breach?"

—CHAITANYA KALBAG