

# Mainstream Weekly

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## Kashmir: letter written by late Jayaprakash Narayan to the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, on June 23, 1966

Friday 9 September 2016

*This is an abridged version of the letter written by late Jayaprakash Narayan to the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, on June 23, 1966. The letter has great relevance for students of Kashmir's politics and those concerned with peace in Jammu and Kashmir. It was sent to us by Prof Gull Wani, who teaches at the University of Kashmir.*

When I was in Delhi recently for a day, I learnt that you had asked Mr Sadiq and some of his colleagues to meet you on the 26th for a review of the Kashmir question. In view of the importance of that meeting, I am venturing to place before you some of my ideas in that connection.

The Kashmir question has plagued this country for 19 years. It has cost us a great deal materially and spiritually. We profess democracy but rule by force in Kashmir—unless we have auto-suggested ourselves into believing that the two general elections under Bakshi Sahib had expressed the will of the people or that the Sadiq Government is based on popular support, except for a minority of pro-Pakistan traitors. We profess secularism, but let Hindu nationalism stampede us into trying to establish it by repression.

Kashmir has distorted India's image for the world as nothing else has done. There is no nation in the world, not even Russia which appreciates our Kashmir policy, though some of them might, for their own reasons, give us their support. No matter how much loud and how long we shout that Kashmir is an inalienable part of India and that therefore there was no Kashmir problem, the fact remains that a very serious and urgent problem faces and will continue to face us in that part of the country. The people of India might be kept in the dark about the true state of affairs in the Valley, but every foreign chancery in New Delhi knows the truth and almost every foreign correspondent. We hope that someone—may be Sadiq Sahib or Mir Qasim Sahib—might one day perform some miracle that would bring about a psychological revolution in the Valley. I feel due to historical events any manner of de-

accession of any part of the State is now impracticable—no matter how just or fair according to the principles of democracy and secularism. Whatever be the solution, it has to be found within the limitations of the accession.

It is here that Sheikh Sahib's role may become decisive. It was not justice to have arrested him without giving him the chance to clear himself of the charges so wildly made against him. Nor do I think he is a traitor. Godse thought that Gandhiji was a traitor. The RSS thinks that Jayaprakash Narayan is a traitor. Nobody can be held to be a traitor by the Government of India unless it has been established in accordance with the due process of law. It was indiscreet of Sheikh Sahib to have met Chou-en-Lai. But that is all that can be said about it. No fair-minded person would consider that as a treasonable act. When the Chinese had attacked in 1962 had he not written to the Prime Minister expressing our deep anguish? Did he not, on May 25, 1964, publicly rebuke in Rawalpindi Chaudhari Ghulam Abbas for having sought Chinese intervention? In London did he not say at a press conference (*The Times*, March 19, 1965) that China's claims on Ladakh were inadmissible? About Sheikh Sahib's statements abroad I agree that it would have been better if the Sheikh had spoken less and more guardedly. But Sheikh Sahib cannot be expected to be anything but himself—he just cannot keep quiet. This is a common failing of us Indians. I would add one more quotation from the Sheikh and this is what he said before leaving for his trip abroad in 1965: 'We might have differences among ourselves. But after all India is the homeland of us all. If God forbid, India ceases to be India and goes down, how others can be saved? We have to look at problems from that angle.'

I have been pressing for the release of Sheikh Abdullah as I see it that if there is any chance of this matter being settled, it is with the help of Sheikh Abdullah. I am not hundred per cent sure of this—one can be. But the odds appear to me to be favourable enough to urge for Sheikh Abdullah's unconditional release. An element of risk may be there, but there is risk in every big political or military decision, in fact in most human decisions, as even when two persons decide to wed.

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Here may I digress a little? Nandaji seems to have told Shri R.K. Patil that Jayaprakash is 'completely out of touch with public sentiment' on the question of Kashmir and Sheikh Abdullah. I suspect that more of your colleagues are of that view. I therefore want to offer certain comments.

First, of all some people (mostly crypto-communists and Hindu nationalists of all hues) have created a certain image of JP—a silly idealist or a hidden traitor—and whatever that man says or does it is twisted to fit that image. For instance, I am supposed to have advocated the giving away of Nagaland to the Nagas, Kashmir to the Pakistanis. I have never even remotely made any such suggestion. But having created a false image it was easy for anyone to throw stones at it. But that did not alienate JP from the public sentiment. Without appearing to be vain, I make bold to say that except for you personally, there is no one in your government who is as constantly and widely in touch with the people as I. Almost daily I address public meetings and invariably my experience has been that I am heard in pin-drop silence and afterwards people come to assure me that they had been completely misled and if that was what I meant, they were for it. The only two of my meetings that were disturbed

were in Delhi at the time of my visit to West Pakistan and the trouble-makers were RSS boys whose minds were closed. I am not saying that everyone who listens is persuaded but I am saying that the views I propounded—with frankness and sincerity—are far from being out of touch with public sentiments.

Lastly (on this digressive count), the leaders of this country are not doing justice to the people. It is the job of the leaders to lead, but most of them are too timid and weak to speak out the truth, to propagate unpopular policies and, if the need arose, to face the wrath of the people. For my part, I have faith in our people—they are sound and intelligent. If they are given all the facts they can take the right decisions.

Returning to the main theme of this letter, why do I plead for Sheikh Sahib's release? Because that may give us the only chance we may have of solving the Kashmir problem. The Sheikh is the only leader who could swing Muslim opinion in the Valley towards his side about the future of Kashmir—which will have to be within the limits of accession.

Several questions arise at this point. Will Sheikh Sahib agree to any such status? If he did, would he succeed in persuading the Kashmiris to rally round him? Would not autonomous Kashmir, sooner or later, attempt to secede from the Union? Nandaji tries to cloud the whole issue by asking for proof that the Sheikh's thinking has changed. This appears puerile to me. Keeping people in jail is not the best way of inducing them to be more malleable. Nandaji should have learnt that much from his own experience in British Indian jails. Moreover, supposing the Sheikh were released in the fanfare of the official propaganda about the Sheikh having changed, would an iota be left of his political utility for India? On the contrary, I am sure that on his release Sheikh Sahib would again reiterate the right of the Kashmiris to decide their future and we should have the maturity enough to understand that and not to denounce him as a Pakistani agent. He can never hope to persuade the Kashmiris to accept an autonomous position within India if he did not make it clear that it was they and not anybody else who were to take that final decision.

The more important question is: how would Sheikh Abdullah want the Kashmiris to decide their future? I am sure not by plebiscite. The Sheikh can do that by fighting the 1967 elections on the basis of his agreement with the Government of India (as envisaged above). Could the Kashmiris people be enthused over autonomy within the Union? I think they could, with Sheikh Sehab frankly telling them that that was the only way they could save their territory becoming a battle-ground for India and Pakistan.

I may be asked: what grounds have I for believing that Sheikh Abdullah would accept autonomy within India? My reply to that is:

'It has been known these many years that Sheikh Sahib has been resolutely against Kashmir being merged with Pakistan. He did no doubt entertain ideas of some kind of an independent Kashmir but I believe he is realist enough to realise that (a) no solution of Kashmir could ever be accepted by India, after the last war with Pakistan that involved de-accession of the State, or any part of it, from the

Union, and (b) an independent state in that part of the world could have little chance of survival in the face of Pakistan's consuming hunger for the Valley of Kashmir and the emergence of the Chinese power in the region—a power that cannot be expected to exercise self-denial in relation to its weak neighbours.'

In addition, I have this to say: Sheikh Sahib had told Narayan and Radhakrishnan that he would be prepared even to accept full internal autonomy for Kashmir provided history were not allowed to repeat itself. By that he meant, provided the autonomy was not gradually whittled down and the Centre did not interfere in the State's internal affairs... To think that we will eventually wear down the people and force them to accept at least passively the Union is to delude ourselves. That might conceivably have happened had Kashmir not been geographically located where it is. In its present location and with seething discontent among the people, it would never be left in peace by Pakistan. China is bound sooner or later to take a hand in the sport of fishing in troubled waters. With the issue settled to the satisfaction of the great majority of the people, the external mischief-makers would not find a favourable soil for sowing their mischief. Internationally, India's prestige would soar. No reasonable government would then be able to point an accusing finger at us.

Another question may be asked: will Sheikh Sahib negotiate with the Government of India to the exclusion of Pakistan? Well, he told two sarvodaya friends that bilateral talks with India will be the "first stage" meaning thereby that later on Pakistan would have to be brought into the picture. Instead of resenting Sheikh Sahib's anxiety to secure Pakistan's acceptance of his compact with India, we should ourselves take the initiative and use his good offices in this behalf in the manner found feasible.

I am sorry to have inflicted on you such a long letter. But I felt it was my duty to my country to put these thoughts before you and your colleagues.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

*Jayaprakash Narayan*

Smt Indira Gandhi,

Prime Minister of India,

New Delhi

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