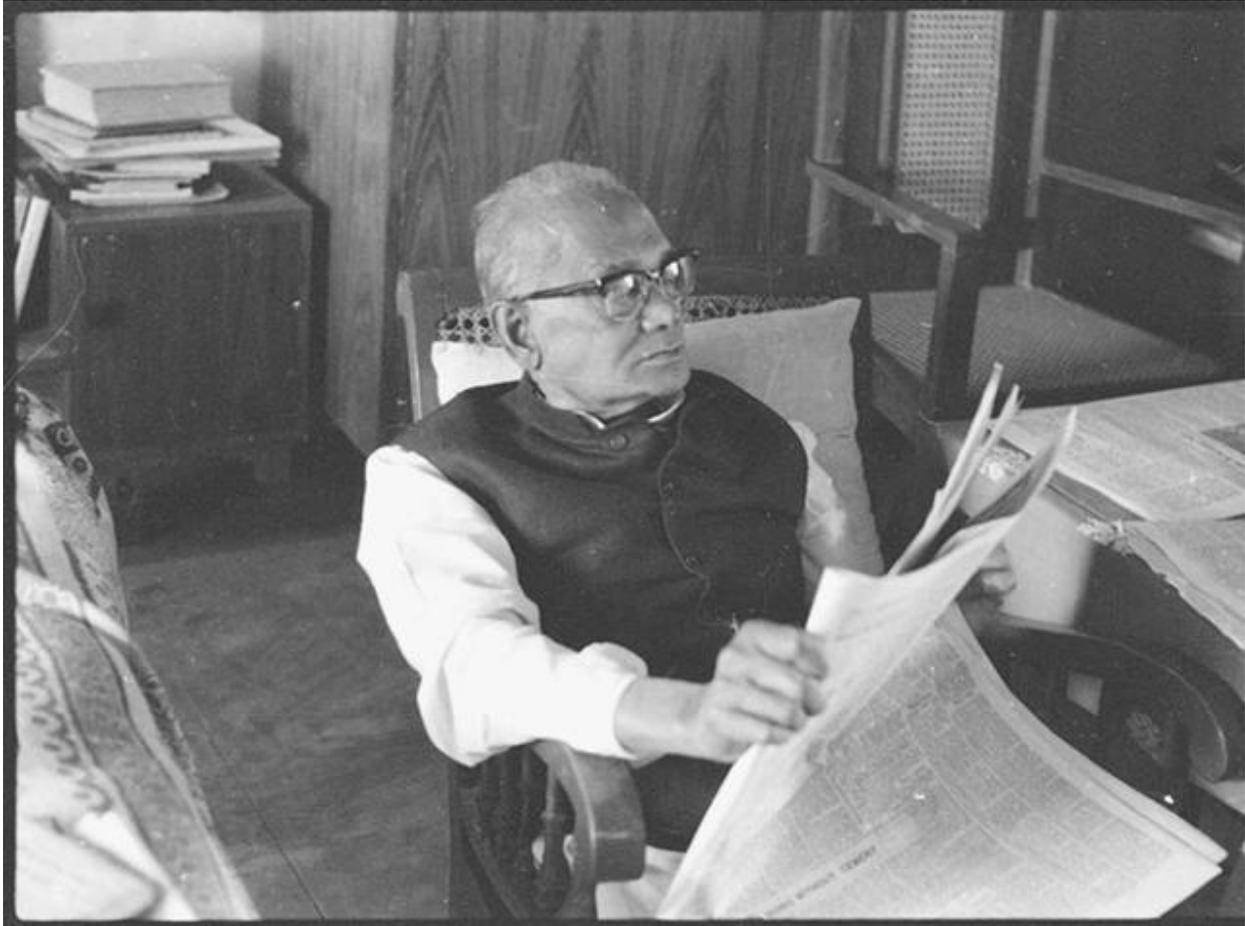


Why we must listen to Jayaprakash Narayan on Kashmir

JP pressed for justice in Kashmir continuously through the 1960s and 1970s. He did so when Nehru was prime minister, when Shastri was prime minister, when Indira Gandhi was prime minister

[Ramachandra Guha](#) – Hindustan Times



Jayaprakash Narayan: ‘Kashmir has cost us a great deal and it is time that everyone who is a patriot in this country thought seriously about a really good solution. I have already told you what I think is a really good solution’(HT)

On the 4th of October 1966 — almost exactly 50 years ago — the great Indian democrat Jayaprakash Narayan spoke at a seminar on Kashmir held in New Delhi. The Valley was in turmoil; the popular leader Sheikh Abdullah was under arrest, and the state government was widely believed to be both incompetent and corrupt. ‘JP’ began his talk by clearly stating that this was a dispute between ‘the government of India and the people of the state’. JP believed that Pakistan had no locus standi in Kashmir, because of its past, perfidious, actions. As he put it, ‘the real desire of the Government of Pakistan is to seize the valley. Twice they tried to capture it by force, but they failed’.

But even if one put Pakistan outside the equation, the problem remained. For, said JP in 1966, 'perhaps there is more discontent today amongst the people of the state than at any earlier time. There is more anti-India feeling among them than before'.

How should the government react to this discontent? JP was clear that 'it will be a suicide of the soul of India, if India tried to suppress the Kashmiri people by force'. Rather than rely on repression, what 'the Government of India can do is go back to the 1947-53 days, that is, go back to the time when the state had acceded to India only in three subjects [i.e. Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Communications]. This would mean providing for the fullest possible autonomy'.

Back in October 1966, Jayaprakash Narayan insisted that if, in Kashmir, 'we continue to rule by force and suppress these people and crush them or change the racial or religious character of their state by colonization, or by any other means, then I think that means politically a most obnoxious thing to do'. He continued: 'Kashmir has cost us a great deal and it is time that every one who is a patriot in this country thought seriously about a really good solution. I have already told you what I think is a really good solution' (i.e. fullest internal autonomy).

JP's concern for the dignity and well-being of Kashmiris was of long-standing. Many (but not all) of his statements on the subject are contained in JP on Jammu and Kashmir, a book edited in 2005 by the late Balraj Puri, himself a scholar and democrat of conspicuous integrity.

Two years before his talk in Delhi in 1966, JP wrote an essay on Kashmir in the Hindustan Times. There he remarked: 'No matter how aggressively we affirm that Kashmir's accession to India is final and irrevocable the world does not accept it, the "azad Kashmir" area remains under Pakistan, the cease-fire line remains, the two armies remain facing each other, the minorities in both India and Pakistan continue to live in fear, discontent in Kashmir simmers and might have to be put down by force'.

JP pressed for justice in Kashmir continuously through the 1960s and 1970s. He did so when Nehru was prime minister, when Shastri was prime minister, when Indira Gandhi was prime minister. In June 1966 he wrote Mrs Gandhi a remarkable letter about a problem that had (at that stage) 'plagued this country for 19 years'. JP believed 'the problem exists not because Pakistan wants to grab Kashmir, but because there is deep and widespread political discontent among the people. The people of India might be kept in the dark about the true state of affairs in the Valley, but every chancellery in New Delhi knows the truth, and almost every foreign correspondent'.

'Kashmir has distorted India's image for the world as nothing else has done,' said JP to the prime minister. The only way to get rid of this black mark on Indian democracy was to assure the Kashmiris 'full internal autonomy, i.e., a return to the original terms of the accession'.

JP's letter to Mrs Gandhi continued: '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.'

The prime minister wrote a brief note back, thanking JP 'for sharing your views on Kashmir'. But no action was taken on his letter. That was not surprising, because Indira Gandhi disliked JP. However, the ruling dispensation in New Delhi now, 50 years later, professes great respect for JP, not least because of his struggle against the authoritarian regime of Indira Gandhi. Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several of his Cabinet colleagues have spoken feelingly of their own baptism in the 'JP movement'.

Modi and his ministers say they admire JP. But can they, will they, listen to JP on Kashmir? The discontent in the Valley is wider and deeper now than in 1966. A major change since JP's day is the growing influence of radical Islam in the Valley. JP would have condemned this. But he would have been even more critical of the continuing repression by the Indian State. He would have noted, too, that in the world of the Internet no longer can the rest of India be kept in the dark about what is going on in Kashmir.

JP on Jammu and Kashmir is still in print. Perhaps the PM, the PMO, the NSA and the home minister should order copies, and study its contents carefully. For these words of JP are as relevant in 2016 as they were in 1966: 'It will be a suicide of the soul of India, if India tried to suppress the Kashmiri people by force.' And, further: 'Kashmir has distorted India's image for the world as nothing else has done.'

Twitter: @Ram_Guha

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/why-we-must-listen-to-jayaprakash-narayan-on-kashmir/story-1ESKtjC4GSm0kzrGumhcYO.html>