

Jayaprakash Narayan



Jayaprakash Narayan was a freedom fighter, political leader and social reformer of India. Popularly called JP, Narayan played a pivotal role in the Quit India movement and earned a lot of fame and respect for this. During the Quit India Movement too in 1942. Popularly called JP by his allies, Narayan is remembered for spearheading the opposition to Indira Gandhi during the 1970s era for whose overthrow he called a "total revolution". In 1999, he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in recognition of his social work.

Jayaprakash Narayan



Where & when born

Jayaprakash Narayan was born to Harsu Dayal Srivastava and Phul Rani Devi on 11 October 1902 in the village of *Sitabdiara* in Saran district of Bihar, India.

Brief life history of the person

His father Harsu Dayal was a junior official in the Canal Department of the State government and was often touring the region. When Narayan was 9 years old, he left his village to enroll in 7th class of the collegiate school at Patna. While in school, Jayaprakash read magazines like *Saraswati*, *Prabha* and *Pratap*, books like *Bharat-Bharati*, and poems by Maithilsharan Gupta and Bharatendu Harishchandra which described the courage and valour of the Rajput kings. Jayaprakash also read the *Bhagwad Gita*. His essay, "The present state of Hindi in Bihar" won a best essay award. He excelled in school and by 1918 completed school and undertook the 'State Public Matriculation Examination' and won a District merit scholarship to Patna college.

In October 1920, Narayan was married to Braj Kishore Prasad's daughter Prabhavati Devi, a freedom fighter in her own right. At the time of marriage, Jayaprakash was 18 years and Prabhavati was 14 years of age, which was a normal age for marriage in that period. After their wedding, since Narayan was working in Patna and it was difficult for his wife to stay with him, on the invitation of Gandhi, Prabhavati became an inmate at the Ashram of Gandhi.

Jayaprakash listened to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad speech about the Non-co-operation movement launched by Gandhi against the passing of the Rowlatt Act of 1919. The Maulana was a brilliant orator and his call to give up English education was "like leaves before a storm: Jayaprakash was swept away and momentarily lifted up to the skies. That brief experience of soaring up with the winds of a great idea left imprints on his inner being". Jayaprakash took the Maulana's words to heart and left Patna College with just 20 days remaining for his



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examinations. He joined the Bihar Vidyapeeth, a college run by the Congress.

At age 20, Jayaprakash sailed aboard the cargo ship *Janus to US for higher studies* while Prabhavati remained at Sabarmati. Jayaprakash reached California on 8 October 1922 and was admitted to Berkeley in January 1923. To pay for his education, Jayaprakash picked grapes, set them out to dry, packed fruits at a canning factory, washed dishes, worked as a mechanic at a garage and at a slaughter house, sold lotions and taught. All these jobs gave him an insight into the difficulties of the working class. Jayaprakash was forced to transfer to many universities when fees at Berkeley were doubled. He pursued his favourite subject, sociology, and received much help from Professor Edward Ross, the father of sociology.

He was really impressed by Marxism during his study at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The ideas and writings of M.N. Roy also equally impressed him. But financial problems and his mother's health caused him to give up his dreams of securing a PhD. It was while Narayan returning to India that he got the chance to meet revolutionaries like Rajani Palme Dutt in London on his way back to India. As such, he joined the Indian National Congress in 1929 upon receiving an invitation from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

JP was won over to Gandhi's position on nonviolence and advocated the use of satyagrahas to achieve the ideals of democratic socialism. Furthermore, he became deeply disillusioned with the practical experience of socialism in Nehru's India. Jayaprakash Narayan was real and substantial leader, who worked for the cause of his motherland in a sincere way. It was one of the rarest of rare moment in the Indian political landscape that a voice of leader stirred the souls of millions of people, bringing them on streets in a huge number.

During an address in the Convocation event of Delhi University on 1966 he said "The Hindu religion was a strange mixture of good and bad, sublime and low, the most emancipated thought and bigoted obscurantism. What happens to the future of Hindu society depends upon which of these strains are to be selected, nourished and propagated".

In March 1979, while he was in hospital, his death had been erroneously announced by the Indian prime minister, causing a brief wave of national mourning, including the suspension of parliament. When he was told about the gaffe a few weeks later, he smiled. Later Jayaprakash Narayan died in Patna, Bihar, on 8th October 1979, three days before his 77th birthday, due to effects of diabetes and heart ailments.



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Political Life

After Narayan discontinued his studies in US and returned to India in late 1929 as a Marxist. He joined the Indian National Congress on the invitation of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929; Mahatma Gandhi became his mentor in the Congress. He shared a house at Kadam Kuan in Patna with his close friend and nationalist Ganga Sharan Sinha with whom he shared the most cordial and lasting friendship.

During the Indian independence movement he was arrested, jailed, and tortured several times by the British. After being jailed in 1932 for civil disobedience against British rule, Narayan was imprisoned in Nasik Jail, where he met Ram Manohar Lohia, Minoo Masani, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, Yusuf Desai and other national leaders. After his release, the Congress Socialist Party, or (CSP), a left-wing group within the Congress, was formed with Acharya Narendra Deva as President and Narayan as General secretary.

When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement in August 1942, Jayaprakash Narayan won particular fame during this movement. Post-independence and death of Gandhiji, Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Basawon Singh directed the CSP out of Congress to create the first opposition Socialist Party. This unit later on took the title Praja Socialist Party. Basawon Singh became the first leader of the Opposition in the state and assembly of Bihar, whereas Acharya Narendra Deva became the first leader of opposition in the state and assembly of U.P.

Narayan returned to prominence in State politics in the late 1960s. 1974 ushered in a year of high inflation, unemployment and lack of supplies and essential commodities. Nav Nirman Andolan movement of Gujarat asked Jayaprakash to lead a peaceful agitation. On 8 April 1974, aged 72, he led a silent procession at Patna. The procession was lathi charged. On 5 June 1974, Jayaprakash addressed a large crowd at Gandhi Maidan in Patna. He declared, "This is a revolution, friends! We are not here merely to see the Vidhan Sabha dissolved. That is only one milestone on our journey. But we have a long way to go... After 27 years of freedom, people of this country are wracked by hunger, rising prices, corruption... oppressed by every kind of injustice... it is a Total Revolution we want, nothing less!"

In 1974, he led the students' movement in the state of Bihar which gradually developed into a popular people's movement known as the Bihar Movement. It was during this movement that JP gave a call for peaceful Total Revolution. Together with V. M. Tarkunde, he found the Citizens for Democracy in 1974 and the People's Union



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for Civil Liberties in 1976, both NGOs, to uphold and defend civil liberties.

The Janata Party, a vehicle for the broad spectrum of the opposition to Indira Gandhi, was formed under JP's guidance. The Janata Party was voted into power and became the first non-Congress party to form a government at the Centre. On the call of Narayan, many youngsters joined the JP movement

Critical moments in his life

Indira Gandhi was found guilty of violating electoral laws during the 1971 election by the Allahabad High Court on 12th June 1975. Narayan called for Indira and the CMs to resign and the military and police to disregard unconstitutional and immoral orders. He advocated a program of social transformation which he termed *Sampoorna kraanti*, "Total Revolution". Immediately afterwards the judgment, Gandhi proclaimed a national Emergency on the midnight of 25 June 1975. Narayan, opposition leaders, and dissenting members of her own party (the 'Young Turks') were arrested that day.

Jayaprakash Narayan attracted a gathering of 100,000 people at the Ramlila grounds and thunderously recited *Rashtrakavi* Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's wonderfully evocative poetry: *Singhasan Khaali Karo Ke Janata Aaati Hai*.

Narayan was kept as *detenu* at Chandigarh even after he asked for one month parole to mobilise relief in flooded parts of Bihar. His health suddenly deteriorated on 24 October, and he was released on 12 November; diagnosis at Jaslok Hospital, Bombay, revealed kidney failure; he would be on dialysis for the rest of his life.

In the UK, Surur Hoda launched the "Free JP" campaign chaired by Nobel Peace Prize winner Noel-Baker for the release of Jayaprakash Narayan.

Indira Gandhi revoked the emergency on 18 January 1977 and announced elections.

Awards & Achievements

- Bharat Ratna, 1999 (Posthumus)for Public Affairs
- Rashtrabhushan Award of FIE Foundation, Ichalkaranji
- Ramon Magsaysay Award, 1965 for Public Service.
- JP is sometimes referred to with the honorific title Lok nayak or 'guide of the people'.



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His Writings

- His paper on sociology, "Social Variation", was declared the best of the year during his studies at US
- Prison Diary - written by Jayaprakash Narayan, and A. B. Shah reviewed by Paul Wallace (1979)

Sources

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