

## **Politics Means Serve Disfranchised and Poor**

Written by Dr. Vijay K. Sazawal

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*Kashmir Images website interview with Dr. Vijay Sazawal, a past President and founding member of the Indo-American Kashmir Forum.*

### **What does politics mean to you?**

It means a passion to serve the disfranchised and the poor. In Kashmir, however, politics means "of the oligarchs, for the oligarchs, and by the oligarchs." "Local politics" means taking cheap potshots among the elected politicians, and "international politics" means taking cheap potshots among unelected politicians.

**Corruption is so rampant in the state. Just two years ago, Kashmir acquired the dubious distinction of being the second most corrupt state in the country. What is more, politicians in the state are generally regarded as part of the problem rather than the solution?**

It is not just politicians; it goes down to that SHO or Naib Tehsildar or a cooking gas seller. Other day we heard about orderlies insisting for cash before releasing babies born at the Lal Ded Hospital. Kashmir has acquired a malignancy in its DNA and that is corruption.

**Kashmiri politicians have traditionally displayed a dual personality. They have always tried to straddle the Valley's mainstream-separatist divide to get the support of people. When will Kashmiri politicians show political conviction?**

No, they will not. Kashmiris are emotional people who can be easily taken for a ride. There are disappointments, but strangely it reinforces public bond to politicians that promise the most and deliver the least. In the West it is called "the abused wife syndrome."

**Kashmir has no industry worth its name. In fact, the private sector is still to develop in the state. Is there any alternative development model for the state?**

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There will not be any major private investment in Kashmir until people accept some changes in the “pseudo-Marxist License Raj.” The investors need to feel confident that their money is welcome in the State and they will have absolute control over their assets and will be allowed to repatriate profits without hindrance.

**It is election year in Kashmir and the exercise has always been a controversial subject in the valley. Do you view elections as a vote for development or referendum on Kashmir?**

Both politicians and public are fooling themselves if they think there is a difference in the two. We all want to see robust Kashmir where everyone is free to express their views, where there is peace and harmony, where there is democracy, pluralism and political space for minorities. That is what the election politics should be all about.

**Kashmir is facing a leadership crisis. Sheikh Abdullah was the last mass leader who enjoyed a cult status. After him no one from the valley could gain acceptance? What factors do you attribute to it?**

Sheikh set in motion the forces that are a model for a Kashmiri politician today. Instead of telling Nehru upfront that Kashmir wants to be independent, he started the process of duplicity saying one thing in Delhi and the other in Srinagar. But he had an inner group of diverse advisors and would listen to it. That makes him legendary. Today, politicians are created either by sycophancy or by blood lines.

**Lack of leadership has militated against Kashmir and continues to mar the chances of its settlement. Who in your view represents the Kashmiri people?**

It has to be its elected representatives along with representatives from disfranchised communities that do not have enough political voice.

**What in your opinion could be the best possible solution to the long-pending Kashmir imbroglio?**

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Indo-Pak have realized that for Kashmir resolution they need to build trust. Kashmiris too have to build trust between each other. As India and Pakistan have realized the fallacy of the past, Kashmiris too have to realize it and recognize that any discussion has to be inclusive of all communities.

### **What is your vision about Kashmir?**

My dream is that Kashmir and Kashmiris restore the glory of this paradise – not only with pristine waters and deep woods, but also with brotherly love, religious harmony and pluralistic tolerance towards neighbors and visitors.