

My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir: Governance, Conflict and Policy in a Troubled Land

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ABSTRACT

Jagmohan's "My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" offers a comprehensive, first-person account of the political, social, and security crisis in Jammu and Kashmir during his two terms as Governor. Spanning nearly a thousand pages, the work combines memoir, historical survey, and policy critique to analyze the deep-rooted malaise that beset Kashmir in the late 20th century. Through vivid documentation and critical reflection, Jagmohan details the administrative challenges, rise of terrorism, genocide of Kashmiri Pandits, and the complex interplay between regional and central authorities. This article synthesizes the core themes, historical contexts, policy analyses, and the critical reception of the book, providing a detailed look at both the events it recounts and its enduring relevance to the Kashmir discourse.

Keywords: Kashmir, Conflict, Trouble, Killing, Kashmiri Hindus, Terrorism.

Introduction

"My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" occupies a unique place in the literature on contemporary Jammu and Kashmir. First published in 1991 and updated in several editions, the book is the product of Jagmohan's direct governance experience during two crucial periods: April 1984 to July 1989 and January to May 1990. These years saw the radicalization of the Valley, the eruption of violent insurgency, and a catastrophic breakdown of state mechanisms. As the senior-most constitutional authority at the time, Jagmohan was at the epicentre of these events. Not merely a memoir, the work is part historical testimony, part policy document, and part *cri de Coeur*. Its encyclopaedic scope incorporates hundreds of pages of primary documents, appendices, and historical analysis. Jagmohan's perspective is deeply informed by both administrative craft and emotional engagement, making it both analytical and suffused with personal bitterness at the scale of human suffering and bureaucratic inertia.

Historical and Political Context

The book's first chapters trace the ancient history and complex sociopolitical structure of Jammu and Kashmir. Jagmohan situates contemporary unrest within a legacy of marginalization, constitutional ambiguity, and communal tension. He emphasizes the region's cultural unity with the rest of India—citing centuries-old religious and civilizational links—while noting that the Valley is only one segment of a larger, multifaceted state, which also includes Jammu, Ladakh, and Kargil.

Jagmohan's narration begins with his appointment as Governor, preceding the 1986 turmoil, when communal riots erupted between Muslims and Hindus in Anantnag and Srinagar. He attributes these early warning signals to simmering grievances, political alienation, and administrative lapses—issues that only worsened in subsequent years.

The Indian government's responses, according to Jagmohan, were marked by a reluctance to face realities, instead choosing temporary accommodations and permissiveness toward extremist elements. He criticizes the central leadership for its failure to heed warning signals, arguing that policy "illusion" and lack of resolve fuelled the crisis.

Rise of Militancy and Administrative Breakdown

Jagmohan's description of the late 1980s and 1990 is a vivid study in the collapse of governance under mounting terrorist threats. He recounts specific moments where state authority disintegrated and militant factions seized control of large parts of the Valley. Administrative machinery, previously eroded by corruption and malpractice, fell into paralysis as government officials abandoned posts and police effectiveness disappeared.

Key passages detail the attack on Kashmiri Pandits in January 1990, resulting in mass migration and social trauma. This period is marked by explicit violence, forced exoduses, and what Jagmohan identifies as genocide or ethnic cleansing. The breakdown of law enforcement, lack of state protection, and inability to maintain social order are described in harrowing detail.

In retrospect, Jagmohan attributes this sequence of failures to several root causes:

- Soft and permissive policies from the central and local governments.
- Political duplicity, which allowed vested interests and opportunists to undermine reform.
- Administrative infirmities and public corruption, which alienated legitimate aspirations and fuelled discontent.

Jagmohan's attempts to reform governance—most notably, his anti-corruption drives, new civic infrastructure projects, and creation of transparent management systems (such as the Vaishno Devi Shrine Board)—are recounted as met with obstruction from both local bureaucrats and wider political actors. His efforts to bring justice and development during his first term, he claims, gave a glimpse of what effective administration could achieve, but these were systematically undermined by the "forces of militancy and subversion."

Polity, Society, and the Genocide of Kashmiri Pandits

A foundational theme in Jagmohan's account is the fate of the Kashmiri Pandits, a minority Hindu community whose forced migration from the Valley in 1990 remains a scar in the region's history. The book details the systematic targeting of this community—murders, intimidation, destruction of property—which resulted in an exodus that fundamentally changed the Valley's demographic landscape. Government responses were, in his view, grossly inadequate, and the central administration failed to either prevent the violence or facilitate a safe return for refugees.

Jagmohan frames this not just as a law-and-order problem, but as a deeper indicator of societal breakdown, communal alienation, and the catastrophic consequences of appeasement policies. He links the genocide of Pandits to wider failures in policy and administration, and criticizes both local and national politicians for their inability to enact or enforce effective measures.

The crisis of Kashmiri Pandits presents a microcosm of broader administrative problems:

- The impossibility of security provision in the face of collapsing authority.
- The limitations of constitutional structures under stress.
- The interplay between regional identity and nation-state integration.

Policy Analysis: Critique and Prescription

Jagmohan's policy analysis is both scathing and prescriptive. He bluntly criticizes the Indian state's tendency to "nurse illusions instead of facing stark realities." According to him, this failure to confront hard truths permitted the "dynamics of negative forces" to dominate Kashmir's politics and security.

The book advocates for a new paradigm in governance rooted in:

- Rejuvenated administrative discipline and accountability.
- Rooting out public corruption through legal and institutional means.
- An end to policy duplicity, characterized by clear-sightedness and a willingness to confront uncomfortable facts.

Jagmohan also stresses the importance of integrating Jammu, Ladakh, and Kargil into state policy, moving away from narrow Valley-centric approaches that overlook diverse local concerns. He is one of the rare Indian administrators to extend the critique beyond the Valley, arguing that marginalization of other regions is itself a source of instability.

In later editions, Jagmohan reflects on subsequent developments—the increasing assertiveness of Pakistan-backed militant networks, changes brought by the BJP government (post-2014), and the evolving responses to terrorist attacks such as those in Uri, and the new resolve articulated at national and international forums.

The Personality and Perspective of Jagmohan

The book is imprinted deeply with Jagmohan's own personality: energetic, determined, and often controversial. His voice is both that of an administrator and a reformer—unapologetic about controversial decisions, especially those enacted during President's Rule in Kashmir. While critics have accused him of defending his own record, even his strongest detractors grant the work's authenticity, depth, and documentary value.

His bitterness is palpable, emerging not only from personal slights but from the gravity of suffering and administrative paralysis he witnessed. This emotional tenor, though sometimes polemical, is rooted in lived experience and an exhaustive engagement with primary records.

Jagmohan's approach to policy blends hardheaded realism with a vision for national integration and renewal—a perspective marked by both idealism and an acceptance of hard truths. He advocates for a governance style that is practical, grounded, and transparent.

Reception and Critical Discussion

"My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" has been widely recognized as a masterpiece of political memoir, receiving praise for its depth, detail, and clarity. Reviewers from various backgrounds acknowledge its encyclopaedic documentation, careful analysis, and rare inside perspective—a combination few other works on Kashmir possess.

The book's reception, however, is not entirely uncritical. Some analysts highlight Jagmohan's tendency to justify or rationalize controversial actions taken under his authority, such as his support for the migration of Kashmiri Pandits and his hardline methods during President's Rule. Others find his approach to be overly bitter, focusing on the failures and duplicities of others while avoiding self-critique.

Nevertheless, most agree the book's historical coverage, policy insights, and rich appendices make it indispensable for serious study of Kashmir. It remains one of the most frequently cited primary sources for understanding the period.

The Structure and Content of the Book

The latest edition of "My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" spans 25 chapters and 30 appendices, blanketing the author's tenure as governor and significant earlier developmental events. There is a strong emphasis on historical background: prehistoric times, religious and civilizational influences, and modern political developments are all situated to frame current challenges.

Each chapter focuses on pivotal moments—communal violence, the breakdown of administration, key policy reforms, and responses to national and international crises. Appendices provide primary documentation: government orders, correspondence, press releases, and contemporary analyses.

Jagmohan's methodology marries narrative and evidence, using deeply researched statistics, testimonies, and official documents to ground each assertion. He does not shy away from naming individuals and parties responsible for failures or obstructive conduct.

Case Studies: Key Episodes in Governance

• Anti-Corruption and Development

Jagmohan's initial term as Governor saw remarkable civic improvements—infrastructure projects, urban development, and the establishment of transparent stewardship of religious institutions (notably the Vaishno Devi Shrine Board). These reforms were celebrated among beneficiaries but soon faced resistance from entrenched bureaucratic and political interests reluctant to accept accountability.

- **Breakdown in 1990 and Militant Ascendancy**

Jagmohan's second term, beginning in January 1990, was immediately marked by violence. His administration struggled to maintain order as police deserted, local authorities crumbled, and militant groups took control of large parts of the Valley. His efforts to reassert state authority were frequently frustrated; his appeals to the centre for decisive intervention met ambivalence or delay.

- **Response to National and International Pressure**

Jagmohan also details the complex web of regional, national, and international influences, including the interplay between Indian central officials, local politicians (such as Farooq Abdullah), and external actors from Pakistan. He recounts how these converges—sometimes at odds, sometimes inadvertently aligned—shaped crisis moments and contributed to both policy paralysis and escalation.

- **Subsequent Developments and Contemporary Relevance**

While initially focused on the late 1980s and 1990, later editions of the book have expanded coverage to evolving developments through the 2010s. Jagmohan reflects on the further spread of terrorism, the changing face of Pakistani-backed subversive activities, and the evolving stance of the Indian government, especially post-2014 under Prime Minister Modi.

The book's final chapters document policy innovations, diplomatic responses (such as India's exposure of Pakistan at UN forums, surgical strikes, and revocation of special status for Jammu and Kashmir), and the promise of new paradigms—less appeasement, more transparency, and a rededication to national service.

Jagmohan ends with a poignant appeal for reconciliation, national renewal, and a forward-looking approach that bridges Kashmir's social, economic, and cultural divides.

Criticism and Limitations

Despite its scope, the book is not free of criticism:

- Some reviewers find its perspective limited by Jagmohan's administrative lens, sometimes omitting the lived experiences of ordinary Kashmiris outside policy circles.
- Others challenge his characterization of specific events, suggesting that his defence of his own record is coloured by self-justification.
- The work's tone, suffused with bitterness and critique, can sometimes overtly focus on blame rather than acknowledging the complexities and multiple stakeholders involved.

Regardless, "My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" remains foundational—it is as much a product of its author's character as it is a documentary archive for future historians and policymakers.

Conclusion

Jagmohan's "My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir" is one of the most detailed, personal, and analytically rigorous contemporary accounts of Jammu and Kashmir's crisis period. It stands as a tapestry of history, administrative struggle, and policy debate—a work that is both cathartic and fundamentally documentarian.

Its legacy is both immediate and enduring. For scholars, policymakers, and citizens, the book offers a roadmap to understanding both the root causes of Kashmir's turmoil and the challenges of governance in a time of terrorism, communal breakdown, and national uncertainty. The lessons remain relevant—not simply as historical artifact, but as an invitation to reconstruct, reform, and reconcile in pursuit of a more secure, just, and integrated future.

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