

## Many Battles But A Single War

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In his preface, Saibal Gupta, Member Secretary of the Patna based Asian Development Research Institute, has spoken, in length, about the Paradigms of Bihar, and for that matter, Politics of the Hindi heartland, especially for the years of 70's and the 80's of the last century, "as the politics of ideology got relegated, the agenda of party building became a thing of the past. This also ushered a new phenomenon in Bihar politics, where criminals started calling the shots in the party affairs".

Was this, then, a factor that led an activist like Jagannath Sarkar\* relinquish his political wisdom, knowledge of society building and binding principles of Democracy and socialism, added to his deteriorating physical conditions, to a life of a recluse? One wonders why he, one of the most erudite scholars on the conditions of India from prehistoric times tried to find out a new Biswamitra who could teach with a new Gayatri Mantra Indians to integrate themselves with the so-called Adivasis. In fact, five of his articles on the Adivasi problems of Bihar seeks to find out not only how to seek a solution of the indigenous people with their unique social, economic and political ethos as also how to integrate them into the mainstream of the Indian social-polity without debasing their ethnic identity and all pervasive culture of pure but pristine sense of democracy including oral tradition of transference of accumulated inheritance of state-hood, culture and religion.

This is where, he turns to Nehru, like most of the communists of the 30's and the 40's who were justly enamoured by the latter's modernity and grasp of the history, and the social changes through which the uniqueness of Indian culture flowered and manifested itself and to draw political conclusions for its freedom from foreign rule as also indigenous social atrocities perpetrated to the ethnic tribals, lately termed as Scheduled castes and tribes.

When everyday people read, hear and talk of the Adivasi problem in the central heartland of the country, mass eviction and wanton killings of them in the name of planned development either by the ruling authority and by default by the corporate led Mafia and goons, Jagannathda, as he was popularly known, undauntedly prescribed Nehru's view, despite being a communist, that:

1. 'The tribal people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forests shall be respected....'

Utterly recalcitrant about his personal life, from reminiscences and fond remembrances by others what little one came to know about JS is that if he wished he could have become a doctor or an engineer or even a scientist of renown for not only he has been a brilliant student, his lineage is also a famous one. He is a direct nephew of no other than Historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar and a son of Dr A N Sarkar, not merely a famed doctor of Patna but also a renowned professor of Gynaecology at the Patna Medical College. In his youth he could sing beautifully Hindusthani classical vocals and Rabindranath's songs but also was a fine Sitarist. He chose, not to become any of those and instead became a Communist revolutionary, relinquishing his last examinations for the Post Gradation in Economics from the Calcutta University to through his life to fight against the British Colonial Imperialist power along with the down-trodden of this part of the earth, his homeland.

Gupta in his preface observed that "this volume on Jagannath Sarkar should have indeed been brought out at least two decades ago". But then the present reader, along with many others, would have missed quite a few of Sarkar's writings , more of non-political, non-polemical type but full of personal remembrances about his early life, his involvement in the then Bihar coal and mica mining trade unions which has helped him grow as the champion for establishment of Democracy, Socialism and peace. One has truly spoken of him as the 'Bihar Ke Garibon Ka Mashihaa'.

This early training in the trade union movement bestowed on him, over and above his already existing abilities to analyse a situation, the precision needed to place before his audience his analyses, and the mode of tackling the problem in its entirety. This sharpened his intellect and also geared him to take up more onerous duties as a communist which he has lived to the fullest with admiration even from his political adversaries and academicians alike.

His scalpel-sharp pen, within a short space of about 10 pages, recounted the gamut of the history of India's struggle for Independence depicting in a few words, almost chronologically, the various struggles and streams that ultimately brought about freedom from foreign yoke. Readable, almost like a novelette, this one piece rings to the minds of the reader, at the time of the centenary of the Indian National Congress, its tall claims that it was it which has won for the country her freedom, the distant thunders of the various tribal rebellions and peasant uprisings before and after Great Sepoy Mutiny and the bold and multi-pronged struggles of the workers, peasants and other organised and unorganised people against feudal system, the capital and the British Imperialists. While not denying the Congress Party's role, this small polemical article, without hurting feelings, has brought into limelight the exact role played by each stream which mingled into a turbulent sea of freedom movement. This reviewer has had the occasion to go through a few research works on the various streams of national movement. But such incisive logic and search for truth is extremely rare in such a short space. Incidentally, the book draws its name from that article : 'Freedom Struggle Several Streams'. Though a communist revolutionary of the old type (old type is not used in any derogatory manner, but to explain that most of the communists of the 30's and 40's of the last century were either an educated lot or not so educated ones but who pursued their chosen path through a process of self-education and mostly gaining experience by mingling totally with the people they were fighting for and with, learning a behavioural pattern so as to be able to communicate with them and then studying Marxism as a philosophical-ideological guide), JS never shunned any of the other paths to fight imperialism. This is best explained in his article 'Gandhi, Indian Freedom and Non-violence' and 'Dimitrov as Party Organiser'. While he has analysed the Gandhian content of freedom movement and paid glowing tribute to the latter's contribution to the world the non-violent means of revolution in the second article he has dealt in detail the work and contribution of a great leader to build a communist party organisation for the sole purpose of fighting imperialism, establishment of democracy, socialism and peace. The point is that he has the uncanny ability to give voice to the needs of his time and space.

The present volume is divided into two parts, the first belongs to articles, essays, speeches of Jagannath Sarkar and the second part of reminiscences of old comrades, co-workers, journalists, academicians et al. To come back to the introductory words where Saibal Gupta is quoted, this reviewer sees this book not merely as JS's contribution to the rise and development of the Communist Party of Bihar(both undivided and divided) but as a plain mirror. Today's political minds, of any hue, should see their reflections if they go through JS's writings and then stop to think for a moment where their images and Indian body polity have gone awry. □□□

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**\*Many Streams : Selected Essays**

by Jagannath Sarkar **And Reminiscing Sketches** Compiled by Gautam Sarkar Edited by : Mitali Sarkar