

LOOKING BACK

'LENIN OF BIHAR'

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THERE HAVE BEEN MANY communist leaders in this country but none could fire the imagination of the people so much that the people could call any of them 'Lenin'. Jagdeo Prasad was called 'Lenin of Bihar' even when he was alive. When he was killed BBC aired the news that 'Bihar Lenin' had been killed while a local Patna daily newspaper "Aryawart", since closed and then owned by a Brahmin big landlord, carried the news that 'the self-styled Lenin of Bihar killed'. Those were the stormy initial years of the Naxal movement. Jagdeo Prasad who never claimed himself a Communist, who openly branded Indian communist leaders as belonging to feudal class, who had conviction in parliamentary democracy, who rejected armed revolution, radicalized the politics of Bihar so much that the people began calling him 'Lenin of Bihar'.

While Naxalism saw feudalism in terms of mere land relations, Jagdeo Prasad saw it as primarily a casteist institution committed to social oppression and economic exploitation of the lower caste people. Though he did not approve Naxal politics, he had no ego to overcome to declare that he would repeat 'Sahar' (the hotbed of Naxal uprising in those times in Bhojpur district of Bihar) in the whole of Bihar. Master Jagdish, the hero of 'naxal' uprising in Sahar, was closely associated with Jagdeo Prasad. Unlike naxals, Jagdeo Prasad held big meetings all over Bihar that attracted thousands of poor people from dalit and backward castes which sent red signals in the feudal camps. He was tipped off by a freedom fighter belonging to Bhumihar caste three days before he was killed on September 05, 1974 that a conspiracy had been hatched by the feudal lords to kill him. The freedom fighter who had affection for revolutionary Jagdeo advised him not to visit Kurtha on September 05. His national President, Ram Swaroop Verma, too advised him to postpone his meeting at Kurtha. But fearless Jagdeo Prasad, the comet of social revolution that he was destined to be, did not heed any advice and visited Kurtha on the fateful day. All preparations had been done to finish him. The feudals had got one of their own posted as police officer of Kurtha. The agent provocateurs had arrived. Jagdeo Prasad submitted seven points charter of demands to the block officer, two of them were to provide collected works of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar in dalit hostels and all libraries of Bihar and to make available photo identity cards to all the voters. His program was to court arrest with his supporters after addressing the people.

Some twenty thousand people were waiting for him to come out of the block office and address the meeting. The trained agent provocateurs merged into the crowd and began pelting stones on the police. The situation became tense. Jagdeo Prasad came out of the block office to pacify the crowd. He was garlanded that made it easy for the rifle carrying policemen to recognize him. On order of the police officer on duty the policemen took an aim on him which hit a dalit boy named Lakshman Choudhary. The boy died on the spot. The second bullet

pierced the neck of Jagdeo Prasad. He fell on the ground. There was commotion everywhere. The police charged the public with baton. The wounded Jagdeo Prasad was carried by his followers to his jeep to take him to the hospital. However, the police snatched him from his men and took him to Kurtha police station. He asked for water. A dalit woman came with a glass of water from the neighborhood. The police chased her away. It was becoming late as there was still life in his body. The police crushed his chest first with boot and then with butt of the rifle. He died. In the independent India a leader who had previously been Cabinet Minister of a state government twice was killed by the police.

The story did not end there. Lest his dead body should become a rallying point of protest, his body was taken to Daltonganj to dump it somewhere in the dense forest there. Backward caste leaders B P Mandal, Ram Lekhan Singh Yadav, Bhola Prasad Singh and Daroga Prasad Rai met the then Chief Minister Abdul Ghafoor and warned him that if he did not order to bring the dead body to Patna Bihar would go up in flames. The pressure did work. In the morning of September six his dead body was brought to Patna. His last journey began on September 07 with lakhs of people thronging on the roads of Patna to express their solidarity as well as anger. In the evening of September 07 a condolence meeting was held in the historic Gandhi Maidan of Patna which was addressed among others by Jai Prakash Narain, Ram Swaroop Verma, Karpoori Thakur and Ramanand Tiwari.

Credit goes to Jagdeo Prasad for breaking the monopoly of upper castes on the post of Chief Minister of Bihar. Bihar saw first non-Congress government in 1967 under the leadership of Mahamaya Prasad Sinha. Sanyukta Socialist Party with sixty nine MLAs was the biggest alliance partner of this coalition government but its leader Karpoori Thakur, a prominent backward caste leader who later wrote a new chapter in the history of struggle for social justice, could become only Deputy Chief Minister. Jagdeo Prasad was an MLA of SSP from Kurtha constituency. He raised the banner of revolt against his own party and the national leader Ram Manohar Lohia. While Ram Manohar Lohia coined the slogan of ‘the backward must get sixty percent share’, Jagdeo Prasad went ahead and coined the slogan of “We the exploited are ninety, ninety is our share in land, wealth and power, the ninety will not allow the rule of the ten.” He split the SSP legislature party and formed his own party by the name of *Shoshit Dal* on 25 August, 1967. In this conference he gave a stirring speech which has not ceased to echo till now: “Today in this conference I am laying the foundation of a hundred years long battle. The first generation of activists will be martyred, the second will be imprisoned and the third will conquer the power... The upper caste people subjected our fathers and forefathers to forced labour. However, I am not born to do their political errands. I shall organize ninety percent exploited people of this country, who are defeated in education, wealth and dignity, who are derided as being beggars, boorish and low, who are oppressed and suppressed, black and blighted, emaciated and naked, divided in castes and different political parties, shall bring them under one party and one flag and through their votes shall capture the political power, shall redistribute land and wealth, shall do away casteism and communalism and guarantee them life and dignity.”

B P Mandal who later became Chairman of Second Backward Class Commission also famously known as Mandal Commission became the first backward caste Chief Minister of Bihar on 01 February, 1968. (As a time gap arrangement Satish Prasad Singh, Jagdeo Prasad installed another backward caste leader as CM for three days before B P Mandal took over.) As a master tactician and strategist Jagdeo Prasad took outside support of the Congress to pull down the government of Mahamaya Prasad Sinha which was supported by Jansangh as well as CPI. This government of Jagdeo Prasad and B P Mandal ran for forty five days before the Congress brought it down. In these forty five days the backward caste officers were posted at key positions, bad remarks in their confidential reports made by their superior officers due to caste considerations were deleted to pave the way for their promotions. Jagdeo Prasad called his government the ‘pure government of the Shoshit’ i.e. the exploited and the oppressed. After this first ‘pure’ ‘shoshit’ government, the socio-political dynamics of Bihar took a new turn. Before Jagdeo Prasad was killed in 1974 three leaders from ‘Shoshit Samaj’ viz. Daroga Prasad Rai, Karpoori Thakur and Bhola Paswan Shastri became the CMs of Bihar. The trend set by Jagdeo Prasad continues to this date when after fifteen years rule of Laloo, Nitish continues to be the CM into his second term. Of the forty two years since the first Shoshit Dal government of Jagdeo Prasad and B P Mandal, twenty seven years belong to the dalit-backward CMs. Of course, the role of ‘Mandal’ is there.

He was a political visionary and theorist. In the heydays of anti-Congress politics of Ram Manohar Lohia he preferred Congress to Jansangh. He was the first leader to blend social justice politics with secularism. When Mandal got locked in a war with Kamandal in 1990, the legacy of Jagdeo Prasad got vindicated.

In association with legendary Ram Swaroop Verma of Uttar Pradesh he blended political struggle for social justice with anti-Brahminism cultural movement. He merged his party ‘Shoshit Dal’ with the party of Ram Swaroop Verma and created a new party by the name of ‘Shoshit Samaj Dal’ on August 07, 1972. Years later Kanshi Ram designed his ‘Bahujan Samaj Party’ after ‘Shoshit Samaj Dal’ as ‘Bahujan’ and ‘Party’ are synonym of ‘Shoshit’ and ‘Dal’ respectively and ‘Samaj’ is common. Jagdeo Prasad adopted ‘Arjak Sangh’, the anti-brahminical cultural organization established by Ram Swaroop Verma and made it a cultural wing of ‘Shoshit Samaj Dal’. Ram Swaroop Verma and Jagdeo Prasad have been the only north Indian leaders to realize the importance of cultural struggle in the political struggle of the people. They were of the view that without getting rid of the mental slavery of brahminism, the ‘shoshit samaj’ cannot successfully fight political struggle. The crisis of present day dalit-bahujan politics is proving true the conviction of RSV and JP. If the dalit-bahujan politics has to overcome its crisis, it shall have to imbibe the legacy of RSV and JP of blending cultural struggle with political struggle. To instill the importance of Cultural Revolution in the minds of his supporters, Jagdeo Prasad told them, “Gather courage to attend an anti-brahminical meeting going on at a nearby place even if dead body of son is lying at home.”

He came in contact with the socialist leader Upendra Nath Verma. (He is still alive.) He entrusted JP the task of editing Socialist Party organ “Janata”. Thereafter his party sent him to

Hyderabad to edit English organ “Citizen.” Socialist Party made him a candidate from Bikramganj parliamentary constituency in the general election of 1957. He lost the election. He again contested Bihar assembly election of 1962 from Kurtha constituency. He again lost. However, in 1967 he won from Kurtha constituency. 1969 saw mid-term election of Bihar assembly. In this election his party ‘Shoshit Dal’ won six seats. He too handsomely won. However, in 1972 he lost the election.

He did not support Jai Prakash Narain led student movement of 1974. He was of the view that though the issues of the movement were good, the leadership was not good. He kept his organization separate from Jai Prakash led movement.

With every passing year the martyrdom of Jagdeo Prasad is becoming more and more solidified on the stone of time. His legacy of blending culture with politics and of uncompromising struggle against caste-based exploitation and oppression will continue to shine like lode star for the millions and millions of marginalized people of this country. ☽☽

(The above write-up is based on memoirs and articles on Jagdeo Prasad published in Hindi monthly *Mandal Vichar*, August, 2007)

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