

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DALIT NATION BUILDER - BABU JAGJIVAN RAM

Dr. S. Ramesh

*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics
Govt.s Degree College, Malkajgiri
Email:drrameshphdou@gmail.com*

Abstract

BabuJagjivan Ram occupies a distractive position in the history of modern India. He was a veteran freedom fighter, great organizer, brilliant orator, committed social and political activist, and an active train union leader. Champion of the depressed and oppressed classes distinguished Parliamentarian, true democrat, and an able administrator indeed he was a multi-faceted personality. BabuJagjivan Ram always espoused the cause of establishing a society based on social justice, political and economic equality. Throughout his life, he had fought for eradicating the evils of casteism and for mitigating the suffering and deprivation of the depressed classes. He was one of the titans, who symbolized the dawn of a new era of assertion, equality, and empowerment of the depressed classes. From the very beginning of his life, was a crusader for the crestfallen and crushed humanity. He became a national figure when he put the Dalit movement on the right path and connected it with the national struggle for freedom. His participation in the freedom movement as a congress leader greatly encouraged the national leaders to earnestly take up the cause of the Dalit uplift. He followed congress's ideals for building a prosperous democratic socialist society.

Keywords

Courage, Casteism, Democratic, Cultural, Untouchable, movement

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 26.11.2021

Approved: 16.12.2021

Dr. S. Ramesh

*AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
DALIT NATION BUILDER -
BABU JAGJIVAN RAM*

*RJPSSs 2021, Vol. XLVII,
No. 2, pp.182-188
Article No.24*

Online available at:

*<http://rjpss.anubooks.com>
[https://doi.org/10.31995/
rjpss.2020147i01.24](https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpss.2020147i01.24)*

Introduction

Babuji was born in a small village, “Chandra”, situated one and a half-mile west of Arrah, in Bihar on 5th April, 1908. His father Shobha Ram had to struggle hard to make both ends meet. The family lived in a small house which Shobhi Ram built after a long struggle in life. He observed pujas in his house and several persons assembled to attend. The religious functions. He was a hard-working person and always advised the younger generation to work hard in order to build up their careers. Jagjivan was put to a village primary school in January, 1914. The school was held in the Verandah of Kapil Muni Tiwari’s house, which was situated in the middle of the village in the Mohalla of ‘Brahmins’. At the age of eleven, he passed the Upper Primary Examination. In 1920, he was admitted to the Aggarwal school at Arrah while he was at school reading Gandhi’s Navjivan & Taran Bharat. Indeed he was influenced by these writings having a hearing on the Socioeconomic, cultural and political life of a Common man of India.

As a student, young Jagjivan never had any idea of inferiority when compared to his classmates belonging to the upper class. He always maintained self-respect by burning the midnight oil to achieve his academic goal. One incident that happened in his school days deserves mention. There were two water pots in the school – one pot for the Hindus and another for Muslims. Jagjivan took water from the pot for Hindus. A boy noticed it and reported it to the Headmaster observing that Jagjivan was untouchable. Jagjivan did not like the arrangement of the third pot and broke it twice. This was the first time he came face to face with the oppressive caste discrimination and bigotry of the upper castes that shackled his community for centuries and put abhorrent limits on him and his community’s life.

In 1925, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya visited Arrah, and Jagjivan, on the basis of his being the best student in the school, was asked to read the welcome address. Deeply impressed by the erudition and panache of Jagjivan, Malaviya invited Jagjivan to study at the Banaras Hindu University. He was to face

further caste-based prejudices and hostility at Banaras Hindu University. Servants would not serve him or were his plates in the students’ mess. But even as a new student, he commanded respect and loyalty that the entire student body stood up in his support and resolved that henceforth each student would wash his own plate. After passing the Inter-Science Examination from BHU, Jagjivan joined B.Sc. at Calcutta University and passed with distinction. Within six months of coming to Calcutta, he organized a Mazdoor rally at Wellington Square with about 35000 people. The huge success of this rally brought him into the limelight and leaders like Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose took notice of him. During this period he got acquainted with

Chandrasekhar Azad, ManmadhNath Gupta and other leading revolutionaries. He read Das Kapital, communist Manifesto and other Socialist literature that greatly influenced his ideology of casteless and classless society.

Since childhood Jagjivan had dreamt of being a Scientist. But as he grew up he no longer ignored the socio-politico situations enveloping the country and sacrificed his personal ambitions to answer the call of his motherland. Jagjivan soon came to know the Marwari money – Lords. JugalJishore Birla, SitaRamSaksaria etc. He also knew J.M.SenGupta, Dr. B.C. Roy, P.C. Ghosh and S.C. Bose. Before Jagjivan had known a single important congressman of his home state. Bihar, he became personally known as the rising leader of the ‘Achhut’ community of Calcutta to many of the top leaders of the Indian National Congress.

When Jagjivan attended the Calcutta session of the congress in December 1928 the restive mood of the country touched him. From his early days, he was very much interested in social reforms. The problems of untouchables attracted him. The inauguration of Anti – untouchability League on 30 September, 1932 took place in Bombay. The aid was to educate caste Hindus with a view to eradicating all vestiges of untouchability and to work for the uplift – educational, social and economic status of the untouchables. G.D. Birla was elected as the Provisional President of the league. When Gandhi evolved a new word, ‘Harijan’ for untouchables while in jail, the league was renamed as HaryanSevakSangh.

The Manatma’s epic of Yerawada fast which had started on 20 September, 1932 found Jagjivan engaged in his social reform, work, study and contemplation. He was not convinced by Gandhi’s logic that he had opposed the reservation of seats for Harijans at the Round Table Conferences because he considered any form of Separation bad for the Harijans as well as the Hindus. His reputation as a building ‘Harijan’ leader had traveled ahead of him and about this time the congress leaders of the district of Shahabad contacted him. His name was forwarded as one of the nationalist ‘Dalit’ leaders for participation in the leader’s conference which was being held in Bombay from 19 September, 1932.

The Bihar Provincial Anti-Untouchability conference was held at Patna in the AnjumanIslamiaHall under the of Raja Radhika Raman Singh of Surajpura. Jagjivan was one of the invitees.

Jagjivan became the Secretary of the Bihar Branch of the Anti – Untouchability League, later known as ‘HarijanSevakSangh.’ Thus began his public career in Bihar. The Depressed classes leaders unity conference met at Kanpur in May 1935. Quite on Large number of representative Dalit leaders participated. A well-knit united, all – India political movement of the Depressed classes conducted

from a common platform, was a historic necessity. At the same time, it was essential not to keep out adults from the main national current. The idea found a great response. The All India Depressed Classes League was formed. Rasiklal Biswal was elected as the President and P.N. Rajbhoj & Jagjivan Ram as the Secretaries of the new organization. In 1936, Jagjivan Ram was nominated a member of the Bihar Legislative council. His reputation as the leader of the Depressed Classes League was on the increase. About this time, Orissa was separated from Bihar and formed into a separate province. After this separation, there was left no depressed classes member in the council in Bihar; in the vacancy thus it was proposed to nominate a caste Hindu. Jagjivan announced his intention of starting province-wide agitation if it were not filled up by a Dalit from Bihar. The Government nominated him. Congratulatory messages poured in from all over India.

Development, Co-operatives, and Industries were the portfolios attached to Jagjivan Ram as a Parliamentary Secretary when the Congress assumed office in Bihar on 1 August, 1937. He sponsored the organization of the Rural Development Department and was responsible for setting up the mechanical and electrical committees in the Industries section. In 1938 he was elected delegate for the Haripura session of the congress and has been so elected a delegate ever since then. He had become the symbol of the 'Depressed Classes' hopes and aspirations. He thus quickly became an eminent and national congress personality. In 1940, Jagjivan Ram contested and was elected secretary of the Bihar provincial congress committee, which post he held till 1946, when he joined the Interim Government Cabinet at the center on 2 September, 1946. He was also elected a member of the All India Congress Committee in 1940. On 10 December, 1940 Jagjivan Ram offered Individual Satyagraha in the Shahabad district. He was arrested at Piru, brought to Arrah, sentenced to a year imprisonment, and transferred to Hazaribagh Jail. This was his first experience of jail life. By June 1942, India was anticipating the possible advent of the Japanese. The masses were so Exhibited that they were prepared to think of them as liberators. The All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on 7 August, 1942 and adopted a resolution assuring the British that an Indian Government would resist aggression with all the same as well as non-violent forces at its command and urged an immediate declaration of Independence. The whole of India was in revolt the next morning Gandhi had given only two slogans. He had given the declaration to the British : "Quit India". And to his countrymen : "Do or Die."

Jagjivan and Prof. Abdul Bari from Bihar who was staying in a hotel was informed in the early morning of the arrest of the national leaders. Gandhi had expressed

his desire to see both Jagjivan and Abdul Bari on the 9th morning. There was a complete 'Hartal' in Bombay city and no conveyance was available. Police and army men were seen everywhere in Bombay. Jagjivan left for Patna immediately. As secretary of the Bihar Congress, he would have much to do on reaching there. Satya Rain Sinha and others also left via meter gauge. JagatNarainLal left for the rural area and Singhes Prasad who was guiding the movement at Patna, was arrested. Unfortunately, while Jagjivan Ram was fighting for the nation's freedom and rights of the Depressed Classes, loyalist Dalit leaders were enjoying the favors of the Imperialists.

The August movement was ebbing away. There remained a pocket of resistance that continued to defy the might of the British and held the banner of freedom flying. Jagjivan Ram's 1942 movement had visualized thousands of such pockets in each province, resisting with all available means the imposition of British rule, springing into action simultaneously and making it possible for the depleted army units to cope with the situation. Jagjivan had been having indifferent health after release from jail, he spent a few months at Simla. After returning to Patna from Shimla in September 1944, he undertook an extensive tour of Central Provinces and Bombay both for congress and Depressed Classes league work. In September 1944, Gandhi and Jinnah met several times but the talks of partition ultimately broke down on the two-nation theory. Nehru was commissioned to form a Provisional Government on 12 August, 1946. Nehru to make Jinnah agree but, when he failed, he formed a Provisional Government.

By 1946, Jagjivan had emerged as the undisputed leader of the nationalist scheduled castes. On 16 June, 1946 Wavell addressed a letter to Jagjivan Ram and others enclosing the text of his statement issued the same day inviting him to become a member of the Interim Government. Jagjivan Ram entered the executive council as India's Labour Minister and was sworn in on 2 September, 1946 till May 1952. During this period he led the Indian delegation to the I.L.O. Conference at Geneva and was elected President of the Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. The most important legislative enactments during this period were, the Industrial Employment Act, 1948; etc. All these labor laws brought betterment and tremendous change in the service conditions of the working class.

Communication Ministry from May 1952 – December, 1956. During this period he proposed for the information of a statutory corporation, which was introduced vide Bill 1953 (27 of 1952) providing the establishment of two Air corporations –

- (a) Air India to operate international services

(b) Indian Airlines to operate domestic services within the country and neighboring countries.

A great deal of improvement was marked in the distribution of mail, telegrams, training to P & T Personnel of different cadres, etc. Telegrams in Hindi were introduced, a Hindi journal 'Daktar' was started, the P & T Guide was translated in Hindi, Public call offices and opening of new Telephone Exchanges are some of the noticeable improvements. Union Minister for Transport and Railways, 7 December, 1956 to 9 April 1962. Here too marked improvement was noticed in the form of great amenities to the III Class Passengers, remodeling of Coaches, the introduction of waiting rooms, and improved service conditions. For the second time, he took the Labour Ministry Portfolio, from 24 January, 1966 to 12 March, 1967. He appointed the National Labour Commission and the working conditions of scavengers for the first time were studied as a national problem.

On 13 March, 1967 he took over the challenging portfolio of food and agriculture, proved like a pillar to improve food production, proper distribution and the Green Revolution brought him immense praise. On 29 June, 1970, he was appointed Union Minister for Defense Declaring a war against India on 3 December 1971 by Pakistan, bringing the day of Surrender of about 93, 000 military and allied invaders under the command of A.K. Niazi, on 16 December, 1971 and also the existence of free Bangladesh. Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned from the Union Cabinet and the Congress Party on 2 February, 1977 which created panic in the ruling party. Millions of people silenced during the emergency 19 months (1975-77) got a new spirit. He formed his congress for Democracy (C.F.D) During the 1977 Lok Sabha general elections. Janata – CFO combined secured an absolute majority. He was given. Defense Portfolio in the Morarji Government, though he was very much sure to become the Prime Minister, which J.P. was in favor of, Charan Singh opposed him. He remained Defence Minister till 1979 but large-scale defections forced Morarji to resign. Though Charan Singh became Prime Minister, he could not face Lok Sabha and in the 1979 December elections, Indira Gandhi recaptured power.

Batruji played a great role in drafting many of the fundamental elements of the constitution, like the Directive Principles, and the Fundamental Rights. He was a harbinger of peace, equality and social justice. He served as a Minister in the Indian Parliament with Various Portfolios and also served as the Deputy Prime Minister of India in Morarji Desai Government. He served the country in various capacities as a nation builder.

References

1. Bakshi, S.R. (1992). *Jagjivan Ram*. Anmol Publications, New Delhi.
2. Chanchreek, K.L. (2006). *Babu Jagjivan Ram Family, Burth and Early life*, Vol – 1; Shree Publishers, New Delhi, **P-15**.
3. Bakshi, O.P. cit., P.P. – **3-4**.
4. (2005). A Commemorative volume, BabuJagjivan Ram in Parliament LokSabha Secretariat, New Delhi, PP **1-3**.
5. (2006). Sachi Rani Gurtu & Chanchreek, Calcutta : Education and Political Training, Shree Publishers, New Delhi, PP **34-80**.
6. Malik, Dr. Lokendra., Dr. KusumaLata. (2010). (ed.), Role of Jagjivan Ram in Promoting Social justice in India, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, June, P-**76**.