



Empowerment of the Backward Classes: Contribution of Babu Jagjivan Ram

Pragati Patel^a

^a*Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Rajeev Gandhi College, Madhya Pradesh, India*

ABSTRACT

We belong to only one community that is Humanity. God created the universe we carved out boundaries; we made religions, caste and customs. Social justice is the fair and just relation between the individual and society. We as human beings have never done justice with laws of nature which promotes oneness in spirit and soul of every being born on this Earth. We are born with a purpose and Babu Jagjivan is one such personality whose goal was ensuring justice for the oppressed classes. He was a true son of motherland. Through his works he enthralled, rejuvenated and energized the masses to work for their self-elevation. Contribution of Babuji in building up the morale of scheduled classes will be forever remembered. The under representation of socio economically deprived, discriminated backward caste and classes in different walks of life is the burning issue of today. He showed us the path following which we can ensure inclusive development of society.

Keywords: Babu Jagjivan Ram, benefactor of masses

1. Introduction

Indian word actually means to transform, to sublimate; mould to perfection and all these qualities are assimilated in our character. Our oneness promotes the message of peace and harmony in the world. Two contradictory features diversity and unity emerge here as one. However the age old caste system has been used as an instrument for discrimination in society. The overpowering of scheduled classes by upper class shows that we are not 'UNITED' then are we pretending to do so?

Untouchability is a Unique Hindu social institution which emerged in the remote past. The so called untouchables have been suffering the stigma of untouchability followed by servitude, illiteracy and grinding poverty. Due to its serious adverse effects on the Indian society in general and the untouchables in particular, it has been vehemently opposed by many sensible person including saints, social reformers and political leaders in the past. One such person was Babu Jagjivan Ram he was a magnificent personality, forward looking, young in mind and spirit, full of noble ideals allied with the constant endeavor to actualize them. His flaming patriotism and selfless character made him the savior of depressed and submerged classes. The founding fathers of the constitution of India provided for abolition of untouchability in the Constitution which came into force on 26th January 1950. It is stated categorically in the constitution under Article 17, that untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. But the downtrodden are ruthlessly suppressed till today. They are being identified, segregated, politicized and discriminated on feeble grounds of immortality. There is need of special consideration for safeguarding their interests.

Early life

One of the charismatic personalities Jagjivan Ram was born at Chandwa near Arrah in Bihar. His father Sobhi Ram was with the British Indian army, posted at Peshawar, but later resigned and bought farming land in his native village Chandwa and settled there. He had an elder brother and three sisters.

Young Jagjivan attended a local school. Upon the premature death of his father, Jagjivan and his mother Vasanti Devi were left in a harsh economic situation. He joined Aggrawal Middle School in Arrah in 1920, where the medium of instruction was English and joined Arrah Town School in here he faced caste discrimination for the first time, yet remained unfazed. An often cited incident occurred in school. There was a tradition of having two water pots in the school, one for Hindus and another for Muslims, so when Jagjivan drank water from the Hindu pot, while being from an untouchable class, the matter was reported to the Principal, who placed a third pot for "untouchables" in the school, but this pot was broken by him twice. Eventually, the Principal decided against placing the third pot. Turning point in his life came when Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya visited his school, and was impressed by his welcome speech also invited him to join the Banaras Hindu University for college education. He passed his matriculation and was awarded Birla scholarship. Organizing skills of Babuji was first shown up at B.H.U where he organized the scheduled caste to protest against oppression of scheduled caste community.

Jagjivan Ram passed his matriculation in the first division and joined the Banaras Hindu University, where he was awarded the Birla scholarship, and passed his Inter Science Examination; while at BHU, he organized the scheduled castes to protest against social discrimination. As a Dalit student, he would not be served meals in his hostel, denied haircut by local barbers, a Dalit barber would come occasionally to trim his hair, and eventually he left BHU and pursued graduation from Calcutta University. The incidents in BHU turned him an atheist. He received a B. Sc. degree from the University of Calcutta in 1931, here also he organized conferences to draw attention toward issues of discrimination, and also participated in the anti-untouchability movement started by Mahatma Gandhi.

Career

In 1928 he organized a Mazdoor Rally at Wellington Square, in which approximately 50,000 people participated. When the devastating 1934 Nepal–Bihar earthquake occurred he got actively involved in the relief work. When popular rule was introduced under the 1935 Act and the scheduled castes were given representation in the legislatures, both the nationalists and the British loyalists sought him because of his first-hand knowledge of the social and economic situation in Bihar, Jagjivan Ram was nominated to the Bihar Council. He chose to go with the nationalists and joined Congress.

He contributed to the establishment of the 'All-India Depressed Classes League', with the aim to attain equality for untouchables. He proposed a resolution in the 1935 session of the Hindu Mahasabha demanding that temples and drinking water wells be opened up to Dalits. He was imprisoned twice for his active participation in the Satyagraha and the Quit India Movements. He was among the leaders who publicly denounced India's participation in the World War.

He remained a Member of Parliament till his death. He was elected from Sasaram parliament constituency in Bihar. His uninterrupted representation in the Parliament from 1936 to 1986 is a world record. In the first Cabinet of free India his portfolio was of Labour Minister, where he is credited for laying the foundation for several labour welfare policies in India. He was a part of the prestigious high-profile Indian delegation that attended the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s International Labour Conference on 16 August 1947 in Geneva. Later, he held several ministerial posts in Nehru's Cabinet – Communications, Transport and Railways, and Transport and Communications. In Indira Gandhi's government, he worked as minister for Labour, Employment, and Rehabilitation, and Union Minister for Food and Agriculture, where he is best remembered for having successfully led the Green Revolution during his tenure. He worked as the Minister of Defense and Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation. It was during his tenure as the minister of Defence that the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 was fought, and Bangladesh gained independence.

In 1977 he along with five other politicians resigned from the Cabinet and formed the Congress for Democracy party, within the Janata coalition. He was the Deputy Prime Minister of India when Morarji Desai was the prime minister. Disillusioned with the Janata party he formed his own party, the Congress (J). He was truly democratic politician who worked for the people.

2. Role of Babuji

Organizing the youth from depressed class

Youth are very enthusiastic and are filled with energy which if directed in right direction could bring charismatic results. Babuji worked for organizing the youth. He always emphasized that youth can collectively work for betterment of scheduled caste community. He was an active member of All India Depressed Class League.

Religious conversion

According to Babuji conversion to another faith is not an appropriate way to get rid of malaise of casteism. Because discrimination on basis of caste have made deep rooted network and has affected all religions. So the only way to fight it is to reform Hindu faith. Dominance of upper caste over the low caste beings is an inhumane act of people. Changing to other religious faith would be a sign of a coward man. He had a great respect for all religious communities.

Opening of temple doors

All are equal in eyes of god

From ancient era the 'shudras' were untouchables and they were refrained from entering the temples. Many leaders felt that this was a wrong act of prohibition and should be altered. But the temple entry movement gained momentum in his leadership. His efforts brought fruitful results for the 'shudras'. Today's scenario has transformed and as of now Vishwanath Temple in kashi, Meenakshi temple Madurai and Jagannath temple at Puri and many more to count are open to all the devotees without any biasing. Really, this would never be possible without the struggle of Jagjivan ram.

Backward classes in governance

He popularized that backward caste of society should play active role in governments. They must be in cabinet so that they could come with problems of their classes. Also the hidden talents which were caught in caste boundaries will come up with innovative ideas and take Indians to zenith of success. In the 1946 under Babuji's leadership the All India Depressed Classes League members contested under the congress parties candidature and results were stupendous they earned convincing majority in election. As a result he was invited by the visiting Cabinet Mission to present his views on the depressed classes.

Literacy

Education makes a person capable of bringing any desired change and upliftment in human mind and society. Babuji was a firm believer of equality. According to him if equal opportunities given to all then only youth from all classes could come up with their natural abilities and shine bright like a star. As education is constructive tool, it would bring satisfying results in the task to transform the living status of depressed classes.

Reservation

Many leaders raised their voice and put forward their view point for providing reservations in public employment, also reservation of seats in Legislature for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Two eminent leaders Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Jagjivan ram played key role in providing the reservation rights to the 'harijans'.

Democratic decentralization

It covers a system of governance in which dispersing functions, powers away from central authority. This Democratic decentralization was the thought of Gandhiji. But Babuji also was under its influence. He advocated the idea of decentralization and dispersal of economic and political power. It is based on the idea that local representatives are better able to understand and respond to local needs.

Unity

He was the true follower and propagated this idea amongst the depressed classes. He thought that injustices on them would never end. So the only way was to get united which would strengthen the voice against the oppression of harijans. Also the idea is to work with the upper classes of society not against. Since the final motive is the upliftment of depressed classes and not to wage war with other classes.

Participatory democracy

India is a democratic country. But participatory democracy advocates more involved forms of citizen participation. Babuji believed that this strives to create opportunities for all members of population to make meaningful contribution to decision making and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Consequently the depressed class community can also grasp the opportunity to put forward their demands and ideas for their betterment also of society at large.

Protection of Civil Right Act -1955

He played a key role in the formulation of this act. Under this act Punishment for enforcing social disabilities on the grounds of untouchability was made a rule. The person who refuses admission of any person to hospital, hostel, public restaurant or other facilities which are open to general public should be provided to all irrespective of caste or creed. This Act is instrumental in safeguarding the basic human rights of Harijans. Babuji had a well defined purpose of life which was 'serving the depressed class community'.

Becoming Conscientious

Hard work is the most valuable possession of man. An idler depends on chance. All great men of the world achieved great things with rigorous work and patience. So, was Babuji, for him work was worship. He pleaded that scheduled caste ought to develop a spirit of self-reliance and self-respect through hard work thus averting the dependency syndrome. According to him organizing mass movements, sharing the thoughts with the law makers, working in equal positions as that of upper classes will develop confidence and will give momentum to harijan people to come up and showcase their innovative abilities. It will add to their growth as an individual and motivate them to carry out their task more efficiently that ultimately will lead to the empowerment of every member of scheduled caste.

3. Conclusion

"Truth always prevails" is an adage used for justifying the presence of truth, un-shattered and solid always, so was the believe of Babuji. His efforts were directed to establish special courts to deal with matters of atrocities on scheduled caste. It is the most significant step which is to be taken in more effective way. This would give much relief to these classes. People will not dare to do injustice or any sort of atrocities on them. Social transformation is the need of the hour; we must work for truly democratic India. We must pledge to abandon and abolish the barrier of castes. The great visionary and reformer Babu Jagjivan Ram whose relevance is felt even today and who will remain alive in our memory inspiring wise thoughts and absolute principles. After all we are human and we preach humanity.

"If untouchability lives Humanity must die"

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