



JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN'S IDEAS ON RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Jayaprakash Narayan famously known as “Loknayak” or “JP ” was an Indian independence movement activist, theorist, socialist, thinker and political leader. JP was a prominent figure in Indian National Congress and was one of the leaders of the Quit India Movement. Born on 11 October 1902 in Sitabdiyara, Bihar to Harsu Dayal and Phul Rani Devi. He was the proponent of Gandhian-style revolutionary action to fight against injustice. He participated in the civil disobedience movement, Quit India Movement. He is also known for the Sarvodaya movement and the JP movement. This paper is intended to enlighten the readers on Jayaprakash Narayan's ideas on “reconstruction of the socio-economic structure of Indian society”.

KEY WORDS: Reconstruction, Welfare Society, Participatory Democracy, Party less Democracy, Total Revolution.

Objectives of the Study

- to understand the significance of JP's concept of Party less democracy
- To know the relevance of JP's criticisms about Party politics.
- To understand JP's concept of People's Socialism.
- to know the relevance of Total Revolution

Introduction

A man of immense determination and moral uprightness, Jayaprakash Narayan possessed an illimitable capacity to influence people through a combination of intellectual integrity, fearlessness and matchless self-sacrifice. His life, spanning over almost eight decades during one of the most turbulent periods in Indian history, may be encapsulated as a quest for an egalitarian society. A profound concern for freedom and morality made him an impeccable revolutionary who never submitted to any authoritarian regime. A dedicated and benignly person, a man of the masses who incessantly worked for their welfare, he drew inspiration from the common man. While envisaging basic tenets of an ideal society for human uplift and overall socio-economic change, he was always open to any political ideology or system provided he could see in it a possibility of the attainment of the desired human values of liberty, equality, peace and brotherhood.

Born on 11 October, 1902 in a middle-class family in a village, namely Sitabdiara in Bihar, Jayaprakash, popularly known as J.P., was the son of Harshudayal and Phoolrani. Belonging to a progressive family, he was given the best of education as his father had high expectations from his son, centred around on a career

either in government service or legal practice. After his primary education in village primary school, he was sent to Patna for further education. Admitted in the seventh standard in Patna Collegiate School, he performed brilliantly and his teachers held high opinion about him. They considered him a gifted student, endowed with a phenomenal memory and a keen insight. They were hopeful that one day he would surely make his mark at the national level. On the basis of the result of his Matriculation examination in 1919, he was awarded a scholarship.

During his stay in Patna, he came into contact with the highly scholarly and nationalistic atmosphere at Saraswati Bhavan which was the centre of national and political activities in Patna. When Jayaprakash saw inmates of the Bhavan bubbling with the spirit of patriotism, he was extremely impressed. He would carefully and patiently listen to the discussions of his senior comrades. Gradually, political questions concerning national struggle for independence began to capture his attention. With growing interest in the Bhagwad Gita and other literature, his outlook broadened and he started formulating his own views about the issues confronting the nation. During these early years, Jayaprakash became a spirited nationalist and gradually leaned towards the revolutionary cult. But, before his revolutionary leanings could mature, Gandhi's non-violent and non-cooperative movement had swept India. Jayaprakash was also greatly influenced by Gandhi's non-violent weapon-satyagraha-against the oppressor. He soon realized that no one could withstand the force of non-violent way of opposing injustice. Highly impressed by Mahatma Gandhi, he shunned all luxuries and became a swadeshi in his attitude and action.

His marriage to Prabhavati, the daughter of prominent Congress leader and top lawyer Brijkishore Prasad, on 16 May, 1920, proved momentous for Jayaprakash in a sense that his family relations with some of the foremost political figures were established and that politics became almost a household affair in his life. Further, he also got an ideal and enlightened life-partner in Prabhavati who was a highly patriotic and sensible person. She extended moral support to him throughout his life. During the Non-cooperation Movement, he gave up his studies. As a staunch believer in self-reliance, he decided to go to the USA and continue his academic career there. So, leaving his young wife behind, he sailed for the USA with the meagre funds made available by his father.

An Encounter with Marxism during his stay in USA from October 1922 to 1929, he had an opportunity to pursue his studies at various important academic centres in California, Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio. From Ohio, he took the Master's Degree in Sociology in 1929. At Wisconsin, Jayaprakash came into contact with a group, which had students from various countries and nationalities. This company provided him an opportunity to understand Marxism as an ideology. Interestingly, it was in the land of capitalism that he looked to Marxism as an ideological answer to India's problems. Marxism further strengthened his belief in the universal principles of equality, freedom and brotherhood. His incessant passion for overall social and economic development found much wider expression in Marxism. At the same time, he was deeply influenced by the writings of the great nationalist writer, M.N. Roy.

On his return from America, he joined the Freedom Struggle and the activities of the Indian National Congress, which had been fighting for Independence since long. Jayaprakash was filled with a burning desire to serve the wider cause of the masses and his attraction for academic life to which he was greatly oriented went into insignificance. During this period, Gandhiji was preparing for the next phase of struggle for Freedom. Jayaprakash Narayan went to Wardha to see Gandhiji. He attended the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress in 1929.

J.P's ideas on reconstruction of the socio-economic structure of Indian society

His fundamental leaning towards Marxism as an ideology for universal betterment of the masses arose from his belief that a relentless passion for social and economic justice was its driving force and that Marxist ideology was more rooted in the objective facts by accepting that societal goods and wrongs are determined by economic conditions under which they live. Later, while exploring feasibility of implementation of the Marxist ideology in Indian conditions, Jayaprakash Narayan discovered that truth is a related thing and no single theory could hold true to all times and circumstances. This perception of ideology introduced a visible elasticity and flair to change his views regarding social problems and their solutions. He started re-examining his faith in Marxism in the light of conditions prevailing in India. This ultimately resulted in evolution of his ideas on Democratic Socialism and Sarvodaya. It was his unshakable faith in the basic ideals of freedom that prompted him to abhor centralization of political and economic power, which had become a dominant practice among communist countries. Even as a pro-Marxist, while advocating socialism for rooting out the vices of capitalism, he cherished the cause of individual liberty against authoritarianism. This socialism provided a

path to transform the entire structure of the society without endangering the precious human values of freedom, equality and fraternity.

As a Nationalist

Jayaprakash Narayan, however, escaped arrest and continued his underground activities. Now, the task of reorganizing the Party naturally fell on his shoulders. He secretly travelled throughout the country and worked ceaselessly to fulfil his job. His arrest in September 1932 was reported in the Free Press Journal with the banner lines-"Congress Brain Arrested". While serving the national cause as an ardent freedom fighter, he was arrested on several occasions. He was arrested on 7 September, 1932 and kept at Nasik Jail where his association with other socialist-minded leaders prompted him to form the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. In March 1939, he was arrested for leading a strong protest and making speech against British imperialism on 18 February, 1939. This time, he was kept at Hazaribagh Jail. He was released from there towards the end of 1940. After his release, he started his underground activities but could not escape arrest. He was again arrested and later on sent to the Deoli Camp Jail where he forced colonial administration to bow to his justifiable demands by remaining on hunger strike for many days. From Deoli Jail, he was transferred to Hazaribagh Jail. His famous escape from Hazaribagh Jail in November 1942 is remembered as an incident of unprecedented courage. His imprisonment at the Lahore Fort was a torturous experience as he was subjected to inhumane treatment. Having been arrested on 18 September, 1943, he was released from there on 11 April, 1946.

In spite of perpetual watch by the colonial administration and torture sustained during detention, Jayaprakash Narayan continued to work for the integration of various factions of national leaders to achieve the wider goal of Independence. He also attached great importance to the sufferings and rights of the labour class and did his best to awaken political consciousness among them. In 1947, he was chosen President of three important All-India Labour organizations, namely, the AllIndia Railwaymen's Federation, the All India Postmen and Telegraph Lower Grade Staff Union and the All India Ordnance Factories Workers' Union. For him, the real meaning of Swaraj was not simply the ending of the colonial rule, but the emancipation of the masses from exploitation and injustice. And since, in his view, the initial performance of the Congress governments offered very little hope of a radical economic programme, he broke away from the Congress in 1948 at the Nasik Conference. From 1948 to 1951, he along with Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, remained immersed in the task of rebuilding the Socialist Party. In 1952, he ceaselessly tried to create a joint platform for all democratic and socialist parties in opposition to Congress. In June 1952, he negotiated a merger between the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party and the Socialist Party and thus was born the Praja Socialist Party.

A True Democrat

Jayaprakash Narayan was a democrat par excellence. His socialism, which gradually developed into the philosophy of Total Revolution, was not only a system of social and economic reconstruction of the Indian society, but it was also a philosophy of the moral and spiritual rebirth of the Indian people. His unfulfilled task, which he left behind, remains: the achievement of a socio-economic revolution illumined by democratic standards. A system based on party less democracy, which he envisaged for India, involved greater political consciousness, social and economic equality, faith in purity of means, indirect election, nonviolent dispositions, etc. He also extended the idea of organization of the local bodies free from party-politics. He also advocated the 'right to recall' people's representatives in the event of their failure. In other words, if the people felt that their representatives had proved incompetent, they would have the right to ask for their explanation and recall them. It was a supreme democratic right, he believed. **Some of the moral qualities and mental attitudes needed for true democracy are:** (i) concern for truth; (ii) aversion to violence; (iii) love of liberty; (iv) spirit of cooperation; (v) preparedness to adjust self-interest to the larger interest; (vi) respect for others' opinion and tolerance; (vii) readiness to take responsibility; (viii) belief in the fundamental equality of man; and (ix) faith in the educability of human nature

According to JP, democracy meant more and more social and economic justice, equal opportunity, and above all industrial democracy apart from political rights and people's participation in government. At the same time, JP was very particular about moral principles and value systems. The idea of democratization was a prerequisite idea for JP's concept of a new society. JP was of the view that democracy in India must be built on the traditions of ancient India and the concept of dharma should be reinterpreted to suit contemporary needs

Passion for Honesty and Integrity

A true democrat, he was an outsider by choice who spurned office, as he did the power game. In this, one is reminded of Mahatma Gandhi who devoted himself to promoting the values essential to making the freedom meaningful. Like the Mahatma, he also believed in the character of a political system which was determined by social and cultural surroundings for qualitative improvement of the system. Understandably, he laid an overwhelming emphasis upon morality, not in a restrictive sense, but in terms of rugged personal integrity, a certain balance between thought and deed, and strong sense of public accountability.

Education

Recognising the social significance of education, he thought that education, the aim of which was to bring about Total Revolution, must not be restricted within the four walls of schools. The whole village must become a school, and then all the efficient artisans and cultivators of the village would become its teachers and villagers of all ages would become its students. This implied that education, besides concerning itself with regular education, must also take up adult or social education. As for social education, it is to be imparted through talks on the immediate problems of the villagers. The education system should have a rural orientation in the context of Indian conditions, so that the villages might prosper and the urban people might keep the interests of villages in their minds and cooperate with villagers. Education would provide a healthy and moral basis of relationship among various classes. By and large, it would pave the way for the attainment of self-reliant, self-regulated and state-free society, which was the main objective of his Total Revolution.

Welfare Society

Centralization of power, according to Jayaprakash Narayan, was the biggest opponent of democratic principles even when it takes the garb of a welfare state. He was in favour of replacing the powerful paternal State into a new type of society wherein people would plan and implement welfare activities for themselves. The State authority may continue to exist to inspire and encourage them to carry out their welfare activities but its regulatory and disabling character would cease to exist. Stressing upon self-help and hard work, he held the opinion that people needed to be educated regarding the need of self-reliance and trained to improve their lot by their initiative and endeavour.

Participatory Democracy

Jayaprakash Narayan's philosophy rested principally upon the establishment of self-government in the true sense of the term, which he often called as participatory democracy. The politics of party and power had, according to him, corrupted democracy and defeated its sublime values of human freedom, equality and cooperation. By renouncing the corrupting agents of democracy, i.e. party-politics and power-politics, he sought to realize the dream of withering away of the State, which both Marx and Gandhi had visualised long back. Western democracy, he felt, ignored the organic nature of the society. In this society, greed led to conflict and bureaucratic oligarchy. He advocated the case for his sarvodaya democracy based on non-violence, which would not need any police and army for protection, and would not consist merely of formal institutions. It would negate centralization of power, the majority principle, the existing party system and also all prevailing method of direct elections. This system would replace them by welfare society, decision by consensus of opinion, party less democracy, etc.

Transition to Democratic Socialism

Jayaprakash Narayan dreamt of an India in which the poor would be free from exploitation, economic or political. In this background, he formed the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934 along with Acharaya Narendra Dev, Minoo Masani and Achyut Patwardhan. By forming the CSP, he wanted to add a more revolutionary current in the Freedom Struggle and educate Indian masses to embrace socialist values. He endeavoured to convince the national leaders that the social base of the national Freedom Struggle needed to be broadened by the active participation of more workers and peasants. Simultaneously Indian masses were to be educated to learn that the Freedom Struggle was also meant to improve their working conditions and ensure better living conditions. He campaigned ceaselessly to spread this message. This approach is reflective of his unflinching faith in the development of all sections of the society.

His picture of a Socialist India was a picture of an economic and political democracy in which man would have to serve society which in turn would provide him with employment and the means of livelihood. He would be free to express his opinions and there would be opportunities for him to rise to his full moral stature. Outlining basic objectives of socialism, he presented programmes, like, elimination of exploitation and poverty, provision of equal opportunities to all for self-development, full development of material and moral

resources of society and utilization of these resources in accordance with the needs and wishes of the society and equitable apportionment of national wealth. A system of social organization that serves these ends would fit into true socialist society, he concluded.

Total Revolution

By the lapse of years, Jayaprakash Narayan's belief that for reconstruction of the socio-economic structure of Indian society, the practice of self-discipline and **the** establishment of self-government in the country which he often called a participating democracy were essential became more and more firm. It was towards the end of 1973 at Paunar ashram of Vinoba Bhave that he felt an inner urge to give such a call to the people. He finally arrived at the idea of Total Revolution and got an inspiration to proceed in that direction after having encouraging experiences of a peaceful revolution in Musehari sub-division of Muzzaffarpur, a stronghold of Naxalites in Bihar, and re-settlement of the Chambal Valley dacoits. His faith in the power of the people and through them in the philosophy and action of Total Revolution was further strengthened by the subsequent events in Gujarat, where a powerful student Movement to disband the State Legislature came up in 1974. On the basis of his vast knowledge and experience, he soon realized that it was the youth of the country who could take up the work of bringing about Total Revolution in India, as they had always acted as vanguard of every movement aiming at the people's movement. He wanted them to proceed towards the goal with courage and discipline, without resorting to violence at any stage, so that the Government could not find out any legitimate excuse for violently curbing their efforts.

On declaration of Emergency by the Government, Jayaprakash Narayan was arrested on 26 June, 1975 and later released on 12 November, 1975. Jayaprakash Narayan's call for Total Revolution was a kind of far-sighted effort to bring into existence the Gandhian-humanist version of an ideal society. He was anxious to bring about a total change in the existing state of Indian society and polity. The revolutionary strategy for achieving this goal consisted of seven revolutions—social, economic, political, cultural, ideological, educational and spiritual. It was for this reason that he first gave call for a revolutionary change of the political system, which to reiterate, was an integral part of the Total Revolution and, therefore, of the struggle.

His idea of Total revolution' is a "combination of seven revolutions – social, economic, political, cultural, ideological or intellectual, education and spiritual". This number, according to him, maybe decreased or increased. For instance, the Cultural Revolution may include education and ideological revolutions. Likewise, the social revolution in the Marxian context covers economic and political revolutions and even more than that. This is how we can reduce the number to less than seven. We can also add to this number by breaking up each of the seven revolutions into different categories. Economic revolution may be split up into industrial, agricultural, technological revolutions, etc. similarly, intellectual revolution may be split up into two – scientific and philosophical. The idea of 'total revolution' aims at bringing about a complete change in the present structure and system of Indian society. It may be regarded as a considerable development of the philosophy of Sarvodaya. Jayaprakash was a great humanitarian, and his socialism, gradually developed into the philosophy of 'total revolution' is not only a system of social and economic reconstruction of the Indian society, but it is also a philosophy of moral and spiritual rebirth of the Indian people.³⁸ JP's exceptional role in Indian politics was to turn student movement into a continuous Total Revolution to meet the challenges against the development of the country. JP was deeply concerned with the existing troubles of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and inefficiency of the bureaucracy. JP gave an interview that he would like to drastically change the system. As a result, he practiced the innovative ideas of the Total Revolution to reconstruct the nation after Independence.

Conclusion

With the help of a communitarian democratic system, Jayaprakash Narayan attempted to reconstruct the nation by the elimination of power centric party politics in the Government. He recognized the maladies of power centric party activities seriously to destroy people's rights. JP said that the total revolution would be permanent and continuous. It will keep on changing both the personal and social lives of the Indian People. JP explained how the total revolution would bring positive changes against all types of socio-economic evils. In the Post-Independence Phase, his political ideas brought a moral fabric, peoplecentric political culture, and a ray of hope to make people-centric democratic government. He devoted himself to the country to reconstruct the nation.

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